

# Khamiyang

Approximately one thousand Khamiyang people live in the north-east Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, inhabiting communities near the Khamtis in the Lohit and Tirap districts. They dwell in the plains drained by the Tengapani and Noa-Dihing rivers and within the vicinity of dense tropical moist and deciduous forests.<sup>1</sup> A small number of Khamiyang live in the Rowai Mukh village within Assam State. The total population of the Khamiyang was listed at 812 at the time of the 1981 census. Out of this number, just three individuals lived in an urban area and 809 were from rural areas.<sup>2</sup>

Few sources have ever mentioned the Khamiyang, although one described them as 'a small Buddhist peasant community with a close affinity with the Khamtis of Arunachal Pradesh and the Aiton and Tai Phake of Assam. They are also called Khamjang and use Shyam as their surname.'<sup>3</sup>

The name *Khamiyang* means 'a place where gold is available'. This name probably comes from their homeland. They are believed to have originally lived in the Patkai mountains, but they left because of oppression from the Singpho and moved to Assam between

1807 and 1814. 'Some of them recall that they subsequently migrated from the Jorhat and Dibrugarh districts of Assam during the great Assam earthquake in the year 1950 and settled down in the plains of the Lohit and Tirap districts of Arunachal Pradesh, where they are now distributed.'<sup>4</sup>

The Khamiyang originally spoke a Tai language, similar to Khamti. Over the centuries, however, the Khamiyang have gradually lost the use of their mother tongue and most have adopted Assamese, which is spoken by more than 15 million people in north-east India.<sup>5</sup> They also use

the Assamese script for reading and writing. Their original Tai script is now used only for Buddhist rituals. Despite losing their linguistic identity, the Khamiyang retain their cultural and ethnic distinctiveness, which qualifies them as a mission-significant people group.

Since they live in a place with abundant natural resources, the diet of the Khamiyang includes 'a large variety of wild and domestically grown vegetables, roots and tubers such as pumpkins, brinjals, ginger and onions; mustard leaves; chilies; flower of plantains; mushrooms; shoots of bamboo

and cane and many types of leaves. . . . They eat a variety of fish . . . fowls, pigs, goats, wild bears, deer and tigers, but abstain from taking beef.'<sup>6</sup>

Theravada Buddhism is the religious choice of an overwhelming number of Khami-

yang people. Each village has its own temple or monastery. The 1981 Indian census records 805 of the 812 Khamiyang as followers of Buddhism. Four individuals listed their religion as Hinduism, and three as followers of 'other religions'. The Khamiyang have been Buddhists since long before their migration from the Shan State area of northern Myanmar many centuries ago. Buddhism forms a major part of their identity and few seem open to change. Consequently, there are no known Christians among the Khamiyang people of India today.



**Population:**  
990 (2000)  
1,150 (2010)  
1,340 (2020)  
**Countries:** India  
**Buddhism:** Theravada  
**Christians:** none known



Dwayne Graybill

## Overview of the Khamiyang

**Other Names:** Khamjang, Shyam, Khamyang

**Population Sources:**  
812 in India (1981 census)

**Language:** Tai-Kadai, Kam-Tai, Be-Tai, Tai-Sek, Tai, Southwestern, East Central, Northwest

**Dialects:** 0

**Professing Buddhists:** 99%

**Practising Buddhists:** 80%

**Christians:** 0%

**Scripture:** none

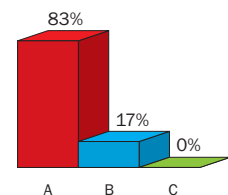
**Jesus film:** none

**Gospel Recordings:** none

**Christian Broadcasting:** none

**ROPAL code:** KSU

## Status of Evangelization



**A** = Have never heard the gospel  
**B** = Have heard the gospel but have not become Christians  
**C** = Are adherents to some form of Christianity