

Ladakhi

According to the Indian Missions Association, more than 100,000 Ladakhi people live in the northern part of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. They inhabit more than 250 villages over a widespread area, radiating out from their historic capital city of Leh. In addition, a few thousand Ladakhi people reportedly live across the border in western Tibet.¹ Before the 1950s, all Ladakhi lived in India.

The Chinese invaded northern Ladakh in the 1950s and 1960s, annexing 38,000 square kilometres (14,820 sq. mi.) of the Aksai Chin region in remote Himalayan territory.² The Aksai Chin area is so remote that the Indian government did not discover that the Chinese had constructed a road there until two years after it was completed. Consequently, a number of Ladakhi suddenly found themselves living in China,

but the border is so porous that it makes little difference to the Ladakhi themselves, who come and go between one country and the other with ease.³

The Ladakhi are a Tibetan group but they differ significantly, both linguistically and historically, from their counterparts in Tibet. The Ladakhi language—which shares only 30 per cent to 40 per cent lexical similarity with Central Tibetan⁴—serves as the lingua franca among many people on the southern slopes of the Himalayas.

Life for the Ladakhi is hard. Hidden away in the highest mountains in the world, the region sees little rainfall—no more than three inches per year. Farmers rely on melted snow to water their crops. Not surprisingly for people who long for warm

weather, the Ladakhi believe that hell is a miserably cold place.

Leh, the capital of Ladakh, was the home of an independent Ladakhi monarchy for a thousand years.⁵ Today a Ladakhi royal family still exists, but their influence has been merely symbolic since the independence of India in 1947.⁶ The Ladakhi royal family trace their lineage back to the

legendary King Nya Tri Tsanpo, who ruled in the 3rd century BC.

The Ladakhi share the beliefs of their Tibetan neighbours. Tibetan Buddhism, mixed with belief in ferocious demons from the pre-Buddhist Bon religion, has been the stronghold in Ladakh for more than a thousand years. Traces of influence from the dark, distant past are found in the demonic masks and re-enactments of human sacrifices that make up their festivals.



The first Christian witness to the Ladakhi probably came from Nestorian traders in the 8th century. Georgian crosses have been found inscribed on boulders in Ladakh.⁷ In 1642 a Portuguese Catholic priest, Antonio de Andrade, established a base near present-day Zanda. The king of Ladakh tore the mission down soon afterwards. The Moravians commenced work in Ladakh in 1856, and by 1922 there were 158 converts.⁸ They reported, 'There is no very active opposition to Christian work. . . . The people are very willing to accept anything we can give them in the way of medicine, education, or even Scriptures and religious tracts.'⁹ The Moravians are still working among the Ladakhi, and in recent years several mission groups from other parts of India have joined them.¹⁰



Population:

109,700 (2000)
128,000 (2010)
149,500 (2020)

Countries: India, China

Buddhism: Tibetan

Christians: 220

Overview of the Ladakhi

Other Names: Lodokhi, Ladakh, Ladaphi, Ladhakhi, Lodak, Ladwags, Ladak

Population Sources:

102,000 in India (1997, India Missions Association)

2,445 in China (1995, Global Evangelization Movement)

Language: Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Himalayish, Tibeto-Kanauri, Tibetic, Tibetan, Western, Ladakhi

Dialects: 2 (Leh [Central Ladakhi], Shamma [Lower Ladakhi])

Professing Buddhists: 80%

Practising Buddhists: 70%

Christians: 0.2%

Scripture: Portions 1904

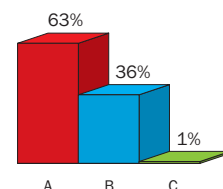
Jesus film: available

Gospel Recordings: Ladakhi

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: LBJ

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