

Approximately 70,000 Mru people live near the point where the three nations of Myanmar, Bangladesh and India meet. The majority of Mru (more than 40,000) live within the Yoma District and the Arakan hills of Rakhine State in western Myanmar.<sup>1</sup> Population figures for tribes in Myanmar are notoriously difficult to gauge. There has been no official census taken in Myanmar since the British conducted one in 1931!<sup>2</sup> At that time there were 13,766 Mru.<sup>3</sup> A further 200 Mru villages—containing between 20,000 and 25,000 people—are located in the picturesque Chittagong Hills in south-east Bangladesh. There they live a semi-nomadic existence in a strategic border area that is off-limits to visitors.<sup>4</sup> Less than 2,000 Mru also reportedly live across the border in Tripura and in the Puruliya and Hugli (Hoogly) districts of West Bengal, India.<sup>5</sup>

The Mru practise a mixture of Buddhism and animism. In Myanmar the Buddhist influence is strong, with over 80 per cent adhering to Theravada Buddhism. Among the Mru in Bangladesh there is less Buddhist influence. They believe in *Torai* ('the Great Spirit'). The Mru explain that when *Torai* gave different tribes their written scripts he wrote the Mru script on a banana leaf, but an animal ate it before they could learn it.<sup>6</sup> Most Mru in India are Hindus.

A few years ago a tremendous power encounter took place, which resulted in several thousand Mru in Myanmar becoming Christians. In 1997 there were several Christian

Mru villages. The main Buddhist temple in the area could not make the Christians recant, so they decided to persecute them into submission. The monks hired a gang of rough men to visit the Christian villages, burn down the churches and pastors' homes and beat the Christians. A group of these brutal men was dispatched from the main town. As they crossed a mountain pass on their way to the first Mru village, a freak thunderstorm struck. A bolt of lightning hit the persecutors, killing them all instantly. Another lightning bolt hit the 300-year-old Buddhist temple, burning it to the ground.

A second team of thugs—armed with chains and clubs—was dispatched by raft to another Christian village located on the banks of the local river. As their raft floated downstream to their destination, a heavy, unseasonable fog settled on the river. The men couldn't see a thing in front of them, including a fast-moving barge that slammed into their raft, sinking it and causing many of the would-be persecutors to drown. When news of these events circulated, the Mru acknowledged that God had judged the monks and the hired men because of their plans to attack the Christians. Many Mru put their faith in Christ as a result.<sup>7</sup>

There are few Christian believers among the Mru in Bangladesh. One mission that recently built a school for the Mru reported, 'This semi-nomadic tribe could be considered the most primitive tribe of Bangladesh. Mru men wear G-strings. The women are topless and wear only 10-inch long hand woven black skirts wrapped around their hips.'<sup>8</sup> After hearing about plans for the new school, 'The Mru villagers were ecstatic and enthusiastic. They donated bamboo and lumber from their fields. One of the village leaders signed a document donating four acres of land for the use of the school.'<sup>9</sup>



Julian Hawken



**Population:**  
66,700 (2000)  
75,100 (2010)  
85,700 (2020)

**Countries:** Myanmar, Bangladesh, India  
**Buddhism:** Theravada  
**Christians:** 5,000

## Overview of the Mru

**Other Names:** Mro, Murung, Niopreng, Mrung, Mru Chin, Khammi, Khami

**Population Sources:** 43,139 in Myanmar (2002, Myanmar Faces and Places)  
17,811 in Bangladesh (1981 census)<sup>10</sup>  
1,547 in India (1991 census)

**Language:** Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Mru

**Dialects:** 0

**Professing Buddhists:** 55%

**Practising Buddhists:** 40%

**Christians:** 7.4%

**Scripture:** New Testament 1994; Portions 1934

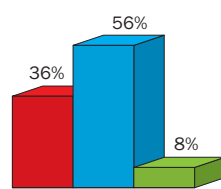
**Jesus film:** none

**Gospel Recordings:** Mru

**Christian Broadcasting:** none

**ROPAL code:** MRO

## 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