

Singhpo



Population:

3,940 (2000)
4,600 (2010)
5,360 (2020)

Countries: India

Buddhism: Theravada

Christians: 70

Overview of the Singhpo

Other Names: Sing-fo, Kachin, Jingpo, Jingpho, Kaku, Ka Khyen

Population Sources:

3,569 in India (1991 census)

Language: Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Jingpho-Konyak-Bodo, Jingpho-Luish, Jingpho

Dialects: 0

Professing Buddhists: 98%

Practising Buddhists: 90%

Christians: 1.8%

Scripture: Portions 1907

Jesus film: none

Gospel Recordings: none

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: SGP

The 4,000 members of the Singhpo tribe primarily live in the Changlang and Lohit districts of the north-east Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh. They 'inhabit the plain regions of these districts, and the area is drained by the Tengapani and Nao-Dihing rivers. Their habitat is surrounded by dense forests of the tropical moist deciduous type.'¹ In addition a small, unspecified number of Singhpo people live across the border in the Margherita Subdivision of Tinsuria District in Assam State, as well as in the Lakhimpur and Sibsagar districts.

The Singhpo have experienced strong population growth. The 1961 Indian census listed 982 Singhpo people. The population increased to 1,567 in 1971; to 2,353 in 1981; and to 3,569 in 1991. This group has an extremely high birth rate. The average number of children born to a Singhpo woman is 5.6, although only 3.95 survive past infancy.²

The Singhpo are one of the most intriguing tribes in India today.³ The name 'Singhpo' is a variation of 'Jingpo'. The Jingpo are a large ethnic group of more than 500,000 living in northern Myanmar and areas of western Yunnan Province in south-west China.⁴ The Jingpo in these two countries are predominantly Christians or animists, with very little Buddhist influence. Among the Singhpo of India, however, Buddhism is a stronghold and almost all people follow it. The Singhpo migrated into India about a century before the gospel was first introduced to their cousins in Myanmar and China, and they consequently have missed out on believing in Christianity to this

present time.

The forefathers of the Singhpo migrated from northern Myanmar in 1793, settling in the plains of Tirap District in Arunachal Pradesh.⁵ The reason for their migration is unclear, although one source says that 'They arrived at their present habitat when a reign of terror was let loose by the Ahom king, Gaurinath Singha.'⁶ Arriving in their present location, the Singhpo 'drove out the Khamtis from the lowlands under the Patkoi hills'.⁷

In more-than two centuries since their arrival, the Singhpo have lost connection with their counterparts in other nations, and they have gradually developed distinct linguistic, cultural and religious traits. Due to their close interaction with the Khamti tribe, who speak a language from the Tai family, the Singhpo language has changed markedly from its original Tibeto-Burman form.⁸ One source states that now Singhpo only shares a 50 per cent lexical similarity with Jingpo in Myanmar.⁹ This figure makes more sense when we compare English and German, which share a 60 per cent lexical similarity.¹⁰



Dwayne Graybill

The 1981 census of India records 98.51 per cent of Singhpo as followers of Theravada Buddhism, 0.72 per cent as Hindus and just three people as Christians. The 1991 census, however, returned 70 Christians. One source notes, 'The Singhpo religion is a peculiar blend of Buddhism and their traditional religion. Besides Lord Buddha, they worship some benevolent and malevolent spirits. Their traditional and Buddhist priests are known as *disamba* and *chowsra*, respectively.'¹¹ There are a very few Singhpo Christians today. One survey of Arunachal Pradesh concluded, 'They are more open to the gospel now than ever before.'¹²

