



Population:
 1,000 (2000)
 1,160 (2010)
 1,350 (2020)
Countries: India
Buddhism: Theravada
Christians: none known

Overview of the Turung

Other Names: Shyam, Tairong, Tairung

Population Sources:

1,000 in India (2000, P Hattaway)

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

Dialects: 0

Professing Buddhists: 100%

Practising Buddhists: 85%

Christians: 0%

Scripture: none

Jesus film: none

Gospel Recordings: none

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: TRY

Members of the little-known Turung ethnic group live in the Golaghat Subdivision of Jorhat District in Assam, north-east India. Small numbers also live in Karbi Aleng District.

Little or no research has ever been conducted on this small group. What is known about them is that they are a Tai-speaking people who migrated into north-east India from northern Burma (now Myanmar) in 1825. Despite the similar name, the Turung are not the same as the Derung tribe of northern Myanmar and south-west China. The Derung area is not far away from the Turung's habitation, but the Derung speak a completely different language belonging to the Tibeto-Burman family.

The *Ethnologue* notes that Turung is a 'nearly extinct' Northwest Tai language.¹ Out of the 70 Tai languages listed in the book, Turung is unique in that it is not closely related to any other variety and has been given its own category as the only group in the Northwest Tai branch. The Turung are also conversant in Assamese and Hindi.

The Turung have not been officially acknowledged as either a Scheduled Tribe or a Scheduled Caste in India. K S Singh notes, 'However, they enjoy the facilities extended to the Scheduled Tribes by introducing themselves as a Tai-speaking group. . . . The community has two sub-groups, namely Taioi / Durung and Drarai. These sub-groups are further segmented into several clans like Lungking, Namchog, Chaopu and Chewan. Shyam and Turung are used as surnames.'²

The Turung are allowed to intermarry with the members of just two other ethnic groups—the Aiton and the Khamiyang. These two groups share many similarities with the Turung as small Tai-speaking tribes living in the Brahmaputra Valley. They are not allowed to intermarry with other neighbouring groups such as the Nepali, Karbi and Kachari, even though the Turung maintain harmonious relationships with all three of these groups. Before a Turung

wedding is allowed to proceed, a suitable bride price must be agreed upon and paid. The price is dependent on a number of factors including the beauty of the bride and the economic and social status of the groom's family.

Rice cultivation is the main occupation of the Turung. They are not vegetarians and consume various kinds of meat. In recent years some Turung have obtained office and clerical jobs for the local government and private companies.

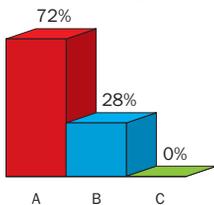


Dwayne Graybill

All Turung people profess Theravada Buddhism as their religion. They have their own monks and places of worship. Their faith is important to them, as it is the main link they still possess that ties them to their ancestors and culture. It is for this reason that they zealously retain relationships with other Tai Buddhist groups in the region.

Although Christianity has exerted a growing influence in Assam, and a massive number of Christians live nearby in Nagaland, no Turung people are known to have put their faith in Christ so far. For a person to do so would be considered disgraceful to the Turung. This pressure has hindered the introduction of the gospel to this precious group.

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