

# BANA

More than 150,000 members of the Bana minority live in the south-central part of Vietnam, particularly in Kon Tum, Binh Dinh and Phu Yen provinces. Small numbers of Bana may also have migrated to neighboring Quang Nai and Khanh Hoa provinces.

The Bana minority consists of five tribes or subgroups, including the *Rengao*, *Golar*, *Krem* and *Tolo*. The Rengao language (spoken by 16,000 people) is considered distinct enough that missionaries have provided them with their own Scriptures, Gospel recordings and radio broadcasts.

Most Bana homes are constructed on stilts. When choosing a site for a village, the Bana first burn the land and clear it of rocks and other obstacles.

They continue to practice "slash and burn" agriculture, in addition to raising cattle, pigs, goats and poultry. Dogs are beloved by the Bana. They are never killed, and often when they die they are buried next to the grave of their master.

Although the Bana's homes are on stilts, in the past they lived in 'long houses' which contained several generations of the same family under the same roof. In each village there is a communal house called a *rong*. It is the center of the Bana community. All important cultural events take place there such as meetings of the village elders, marriages and rituals. It is also the place where Bana youth and widows are allowed to spend the night for sexual purposes.

In the distant past the Bana were known as the *Mada*. Cham inscriptions testify that the Bana first lived in coastal regions before most of them migrated west into the mountains. For centuries they did not use money, but used articles such as oxen, buffaloes, elephants, horses and gongs to trade with other groups.

The Bana used to keep slaves, but they were treated as equals by members of the family who owned them. They also kept *dich*, or prisoners of war, and *dam*, debtors forced to repay their debts by doing manual labor for their creditor's family.

After a Bana couple are married the woman continues to live with her family until after the birth of the first child. Only then is she allowed to live with her husband. Names are very important to the Bana. Bana children are given a name that rhymes with the name of their direct ancestor.

When a baby is one month old a ceremony called *hrom don* is held. The child's earlobes are pierced; only then is the child considered a fully-fledged member of the community. If this ceremony is not done, according to Bana folklore, the person will be driven away by evil monkey spirits.



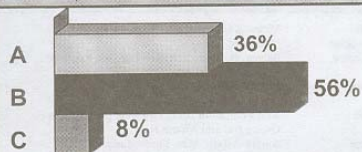
**Population:**  
136,859 (1989)  
169,980 (2000)  
207,300 (2010)

**Language:**  
Mon-Khmer

**Religion:**  
Animism

**Christians:**  
14,000

## Status of Evangelization (Awareness of Christ and the Gospel)



A = have never heard the Gospel or the name of Christ  
B = were evangelized but have not yet become Christians  
C = adherents to any form of Christianity

Bana men wear loin-cloths and leave their body naked above the waist. In the cooler months they wear a short vest to keep warm. Bana women's garments are made of cotton cloth that is dyed dark blue. They like to wear elaborate jewelry including earrings, necklaces, and copper or silver armbands.



The Bana bury their dead in coffins that are made in advance and kept under the floor of the house. In some places, the corpse is stood up and tied to a corner of house; but usually they lie the corpse on the floor and cover it with a blanket. Food and drink continue to be offered to the body for one or two days in a bid to nourish the soul in the after-life. To alleviate their grief, close relatives of the deceased intentionally cut themselves with knives or burn themselves with fire. They have been known to sometimes unintentionally kill themselves.

The Bana are animists. In their world-view the banyan tree and mango tree are the abode of spirits, while the *kapok* tree serves as the village guardian.

There are approximately 14,000 Christians among the Bana. The Gospel was first introduced to them in the mid-1800s. The Bana New Testament was translated in 1977. Although most Bana people have at least some surface knowledge of Christianity, many of the professing believers are nominal and have retained many of their former animistic ways. One Vietnam government publication unflatteringly says, "Exploiting tensions between the Bana and the *Sedang* and *Gia Rai*, the missionaries succeeded in converting up to 1,000 people. Even Bana myths were falsified in order to corroborate with the Bible. But the Bana Christians have in fact remained faithful to their animist beliefs to such an extent that Christianity has finally been more or less assimilated by the latter."<sup>3</sup>

## Pray for the Bana

- 1 Ask the Lord of Lords to strengthen the commitment of the Bana Christians. Pray God would raise up believers with the courage to totally forsake all animistic practices.
- 2 Pray the Bana would be a mission-minded church, and would have a burden to take the Gospel to other tribes less fortunate than them.
- 3 Pray the Name of Jesus Christ would be glorified among the Bana. Pray there would be numerous Bana around the throne of the Lamb in heaven.

## Overview of the Bana

Countries	: Vietnam, USA
Pronunciation	: "Bal-nar"
Other Names	: Bahnar, Bo-Nam, Roh, Koh Kde, Ala Kong, Ala-cong, Kpang Cong, Rengao
Population Source	: 136,859 (1989 census), also in USA
Location	: Kon Tum, Binh Dinh, Phu Yen; possibly a few in Quang Nai and Khanh Hoa
Language	: Austro-Asiatic, Mon-Khmer, Eastern Mon-Khmer, Bahnare, Central Bahnare
Dialects (7)	: Tolo, Golar, Alakong, Jolong, Bonom, Kontum, Krem
Literacy	: 50-75%

Subgroups (5)	: Tolo, Golar, Rengao, Krem, Gio-long
Religion	: Animism, Ancestor Worship, Christianity
Christians	: 14,000
Scripture	: Bana New Testament 1977; Portions 1952, NT, OT stories and hymnals are available in Bana; Rengao Portions 1977
	: Gospel of Mark and Joseph story are available in Rengao
Jesus film	: none
Gospel Recordings	: Bahnar #00763; Rengao #01933
Christian Radio	: available from FEBC in both Bana (30 minutes per week) and Rengao (15 minutes per week)
ROPAL code	: BDQ00 (Bahnar); REN00 (Rengao)