

GIA RAI

The Gia Rai (also commonly spelt *Jarai*) ethnic group are one of the largest of Vietnam's 53 official minority groups. They are primarily located in Gia Lai and Kon Tum provinces, with a small number in Dac Lac, Phu Yen and Khanh Hoa provinces.

It is believed the Gia Rai formerly lived in coastal areas before they migrated on to the central plateau around the beginning of the Christian era. Historical records from the 7th century contain references to the King of Fire and the King of Water, shamans who still hold a significant place in Gia Rai culture today.

Today's Gia Rai language shows similarities with other Malayo-Polynesian

languages in central Vietnam such as E-De, Raglai, Churu and Cham, suggesting these different ethnic components were formerly part of one great race.

Gia Rai villages, called *ploi* or *bon*, are usually about 50 houses in size. The village names are often related to the names of nearby streams, rivers, mountains, or ancient Gia Rai chiefs.

Gia Rai men are skilled at making baskets and handicrafts. Women are renowned as good weavers. Hunting, gathering food from the forest and fishing are other incomes that help the Gia Rai generate their livelihood. In the more remote mountains the Gia Rai are still able to catch big game such as tigers, panthers, elephants and

rhinoceros. Such animals are rare these days, however, and most hunting expeditions target wild boars and bulls.

In the past the Gia Rai maintained a large number of horses, which they used when hunting. Today elephants, oxen and horses are primarily used as draught animals.

Marriage is only permitted between people from different family clans. The newlyweds move in with the wife's family and any children that are born take the family name of the mother.

The Gia Rai puncture their earlobes at the age of one or two. When they are older the earlobe may have stretched down as far as the shoulder. At the onset of puberty when the Gia Rai are considered adults and free to marry, the youngsters file down their front teeth. This is considered a mark of beauty among the people.

Young girls are expected to take the initiative in finding a marriage partner. After a marriage has been arranged between the respective families, three rituals take place to confirm the marriage. First, bracelets

are exchanged between the young man and young woman in the presence of their families. The bracelet represents the unbroken commitment between the two.

Secondly, the youngsters wait until one of them has a dream. They go to a shaman and ask him to interpret the dream for them. This ritual is called *Chua hpieu*. This is a significant step in predicting the future course of the couple's life. If the shaman predicts a bad omen, the marriage may be broken off.

Finally, the ritual of *Vit sang ami*, or "return to the mother's house" is held. The groom and his immediate family is welcomed by the wife's family. This represents a break from the past life and the start of a new one.

The Gia Rai in some locations still have a King of the Fire and a King of the Water. In Ploi Mang, the Gia Rai have a King of the Wind. These kings are shamans who were previously believed to be able to control the elements by their diabolical arts. The Communist authorities have tried hard to eliminate the influence of these shamans among the Gia Rai, but they are still held in great esteem by many of the people.

The majority of Gia Rai are animists. They worship and appease a great host of invisible spirits, such as the spirits of the village, water, mountains, war, ancestors, etc. Water buffaloes, goats, pigs and chickens are raised in some areas solely for the purpose of being sacrificed to the spirits.

Today there are approximately 68,000 Protestants and 12,000 Catholics among the Gia Rai. The Gospel was first brought to them by workers with the Christian & Missionary Alliance in 1950. In 1974, just one year before missionaries were expelled from Vietnam, the Gia Rai New Testament was completed.



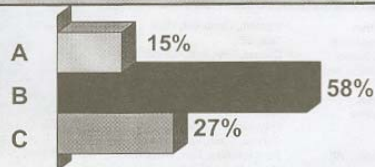
Pray for the Gia Rai

- 1 Praise God for the inroads He has made into the Gia Rai darkness. Today more than 25% of Gia Rai profess to be Christians. Pray the light of the Gospel would spread to all Gia Rai communities.
- 2 Ask God to make the Gia Rai church an outward-looking church. Pray they would not ignore those tribes in Vietnam who have never heard the Gospel.
- 3 Pray for a steady supply of Bibles and evangelistic material to be made available to assist the Gia Rai church.



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| Population: | 242,291 (1989) |
| | 300,900 (2000) |
| | 367,100 (2010) |
| Language: | Malayo-Polynesian |
| Religion: | Animism |
| Christians: | 80,000 |

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

Overview of the Gia Rai

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| Countries | Vietnam, Cambodia, USA |
| Pronunciation | "Jah-rah" |
| Other Names | Cho-rai, Jarai, Jrai, Gio-rai, Moi, Jorai |
| Population Source | 242,291 (1989 census); 3,000 in Cambodia; also in USA |
| Location | Gia Lai, Kon Tum, Dac Lac, Phu Yen, Khanh Hoa |
| Language | Austronesian, Malayo-Polynesian, Western Malayo-Polynesian, Sundic, Malayic, Acheinese-Chamic, Chamic, South, Plateau |
| Dialects (9) | Puan, Hdrung, Juue, Arap, Habau, To-Buan, Sesan, Chuaty, Ploeki, Golar |

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| Literacy | 50-75% |
| Subgroups (5) | Chor, Hdrung, Arap, Mdthur, Thuan |
| Religion | Animism, Christianity |
| Christians | 80,000 |
| Scripture | New Testament 1974; Portions 1950; NT, Psalms and hymnals are available |
| Jesus film | none |
| Gospel Recordings | Jarai #00765 |
| Christian Radio | available (FEBEC) 30 minutes per week |
| ROPAL code | JRA00 |