

# KHMER

Approximately 1.1 million Khmer people live in southern Vietnam. The great majority of Khmer (about six million) live in their homeland, Cambodia. Others are found in Thailand, Laos, and in western nations throughout the world.

The Khmer civilization once ruled much of Southeast Asia. Between the 9th and 13th centuries their kingdom encompassed much of present-day Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and southern Vietnam. In the 1200s the Thais and Vietnamese gained control over the Khmer and pushed them into Cambodia, where most of them remain today. The main symbol testifying to the greatness of the Khmer's past is the world-famous *Angkor Wat* in Cambodia.

Today the Khmer in Vietnam are among the nation's poorest people. They try to eke out a living from fishing along the river systems of the Mekong Delta.

In early 1998 the lives of many impoverished Khmer was made intolerable when the devastating Typhoon Linda struck the area. It was considered the worst storm in living memory. Just in southern Vietnam alone more than 2,200 people were killed, 2,326 boats were sunk, and 64,516 houses collapsed.<sup>22</sup> In many cases Khmer women have been left with no husband, no source of income, and no way to feed their hungry children.

Although to an outsider the Khmer

appear to be almost indistinguishable from the majority Vietnamese, they do in fact retain their own set of customs, language and religious beliefs. The Khmer are still looked down on by many Vietnamese, even though they have been in Vietnam for many centuries.

The Khmer script is taught by Buddhist monks to the rest of the Khmer people. In return the monks receive a small payment or some food. In addition to fishing, the Khmer who live in areas with better soil grow vegetables, sweet potatoes, maize, sugar cane, onions, water melons and mangoes. The Mekong Delta area is very hot and humid most of the year.

In coastal regions some Khmer families have purchased boats and nets for ocean fishing. On the rivers, fishing is mostly carried out using nets, poles and harpoons, and even a locally-designed basket called *xa neng*, which is thrown into the water in a bid to trap fish and eels.

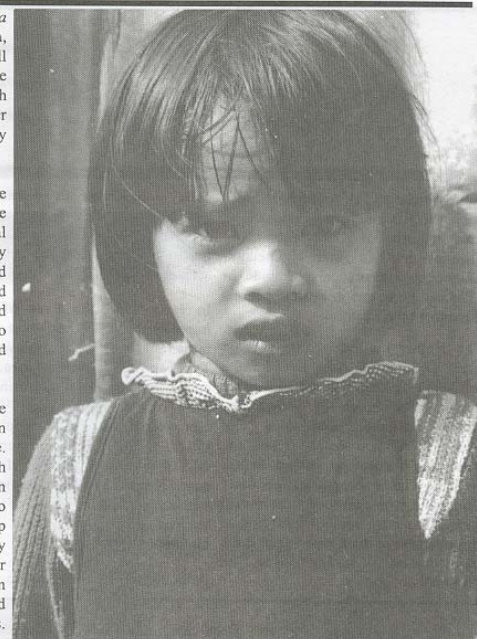
Religion plays a dominant role in the every-day lives of the Khmer. Theravada Buddhism was introduced to the area in the 13th century. It is also known as *Hinayana* ('lesser

vehicle') Buddhism, as opposed to *Mahayana* ('greater vehicle' Buddhism found in China, Japan, Tibet, etc.) The Khmer believe they will be reincarnated depending on how they have lived their lives. If they were a good person with many merits they may come back in a higher social position, but if they were evil they may come back as an animal.

When they bury their dead, the Khmer place the body in a coffin. Three years after the death if the Buddhist monks have given their approval through divination, the funeral is held. The body is dug up and cremated, and the ashes placed inside the local pagoda. The children and grandchildren of the deceased are then required to retire to the local monastery or temple to meditate on the good qualities of the dead person.

In the Mekong River Delta alone there are more than 400 Buddhist pagodas, which is more than one pagoda for every 1,600 people on average. The Khmer's Buddhist beliefs are mixed with elements from Hinduism, especially veneration of Siva, the king of Hindu gods. There are also many elements of animism and spirit worship remaining from the pre-Buddhist era. They worship *neak*, a heavenly dragon the Khmer believe is their ancestor. Carvings of this dragon can be found on the roofs of their homes and temples, and on coffins and the handles of tools. The Khmer worship the spirit of the rice and the spirits of animals.

Because of their strong religious beliefs, relatively few Khmer have turned to Christ in southern Vietnam, even though there are many Christians (primarily Catholic) in the area. Most Khmer remain completely unaware of the existence of Jesus Christ. Their belief in reincarnation deadens their consciences in regards to death and eternal matters. The Khmer Bible is not readily available in Vietnam.



## Pray for the Khmer

- 1 Pray the recent encouraging signs of Christian growth among the Khmer in Cambodia would extend across the border to Khmer communities inside Vietnam.
- 2 Ask the Lord to help those mission agencies who are doing community development work among the impoverished Khmer who have been devastated by Typhoon Linda.
- 3 Intercede against the powers of darkness that ensnare the Khmer, that thousands may soon receive the gift of eternal life.



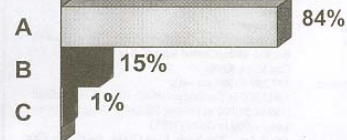
**Population:**  
895,299 (1989)  
1,111,900 (2000)  
1,356,600 (2010)

**Language:**  
Mon-Khmer

**Religion:**  
Buddhism

**Christians:**  
2,000

### 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 Khmer

Countries	: Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand, France, USA, Laos, China	Language	: Austro-Asiatic, Mon-Khmer, Eastern Mon-Khmer, Khmer
Pronunciation	: "Kh-meer"	Dialects	: 0
Other Names	: Khmer Krom, Cur, Cui, Cambodian, Tho, Khmer Nam Bo, Ku, Mien, Central Khmer, Kho Me, Cu Tho, Viet Goc Mien, Krom	Subgroups	: 0
Population Source	: 895,299 (1989 census); 5,932,300 in Cambodia (1990); 100,000 in Thailand (1993); 50,000 in France; 50,000 in USA; 10,400 in Laos; 1,000 in China (1993)	Religion	: Theravada Buddhism, Animism, Non-Religious, Caodaism, Christianity
Location	: Soc Trang, Tra Vinh, Kien Giang, An Giang, Can Tho, Dong Nai, Song Be, Tay Ninh, Ho Chi Minh City	Christians	: 2,000
		Scripture	: Bible 1954; New Testament 1929; Portions 1899
		Jesus Film	: available
		Gospel Recordings	: Khmer #00365
		Christian Radio	: available
		ROPAL code	: KMR00