

Primarily located along the southern border area between Tibet and the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, more than 5,000 Champa people live east and south-east of the city of Leh. One of the alternative names for the Champa is Changtang. The Nghari Tibetans in China are also called Changtang Tibetans, after the massive plain of the same name. More research needs to be done to determine if the Champa people of India are the same (having common origins and speaking the same language) as the Nghari Tibetans of China. The area inhabited by the Champa in Jammu and Kashmir is extremely cold. Living at an average altitude of 4,000 to 5,000 metres (13,000 to 16,000 ft.) above sea level, the Champa's homeland is ravaged by snowstorms during the long winter months.

In 1989 the Champa were granted official status in India as a Scheduled Tribe. Before then they were considered a sub-group of the Ladakhi, but their customs, language and ethnicity are different from those of the Ladakhi. They are also distinct from the Zangskari people, with whom the Champa barter to obtain grain.¹ The Champa come down to trade at the Changthang Nyoma market, where they have also sent some of their children to be educated in Tibetan schools. The diet of the Champa people consists of 'barley (*tsampa*) and the meat of yak and wild horses. Dried cheese and meat boiled with barley flour and seasoned with chillies are also eaten.'² The Champa language is closely related to Ladakhi, and



Julian Hawken

most Champa have no problem understanding Ladakhi when they travel outside their remote valleys for trade. Most Champa people are pastoralists. They raise sheep and goats, and they are particularly noted for the cashmere wool they produce. The Champa can be identified by their conical yak-skin tents called *reboo*. The Champa who

live nomadic lives are known as *Phalpa*, while those who have settled down in fixed locations are called *Fangpa*. The ruling aristocracy is known as the *Nono*. All Champa families profess Tibetan Buddhism as their religion. It 'occupies a central place in their culture. Each tent invariably accommodates the family deity, *Donaq*, and a picture of their spiritual head, the Dalai Lama. The family deity is worshipped on the fifteenth day of the seventh Buddhist month. . . . The Bon heritage is quite conspicuous in the Champa religion despite the efforts of the Buddhists to erase it.'³ Another source states, 'Buddhism rests quite lightly on them, as they have more faith in their traditional beliefs and practices. In this form of primitive religion, a carry over from the early bon religion, the *Iha* (spirits) and *Ihu* (serpents) are considered very important. . . . The world of *Ihas* and *Ihus* is believed to be complex and fearful. For every unwelcome event, be it harsh weather, or death, one of the *Ihas* or *Ihus* is responsible. The supreme *Iha* is known as Changmen, who is believed to control about 360 *Ihas* in the Changthang area.'⁴

The Champa could surely be ranked among the most unreached people groups in the world. Because of their remarkably isolated existence, very few have ever been exposed to the gospel, which has failed to penetrate this remote part of the world.



Population:
5,000 (2000)
5,830 (2010)
6,800 (2020)
Countries: India, possibly China
Buddhism: Tibetan
Christians: none known

Overview of the Champa

Other Names: Changpa, Champa Ladakhi, Changthang, Changtang, Changtang Ladakhi, Changs-skat, Byangskat, Byanskat, Rong, Rupshu, Stotpa, Upper Ladakhi, Fangpa, Phalpa

Population Sources:
5,000 in India (2000, P Hattaway)

Language: Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Himalayish, Tibeto-Kanauri, Tibetic, Tibetan, Western, Ladakhi

Dialects: 0

Professing Buddhists: 100%

Practising Buddhists: 75%

Christians: 0%

Scripture: none

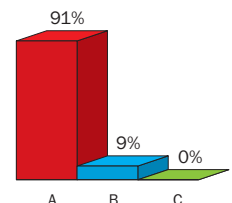
Jesus film: none

Gospel Recordings: none

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: CNA

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