

According to the India Missions Association, 28,099 Zangskari people live in one of the most remote and harshest areas of the world, in the north Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir.¹ The Zangskaris dwell between the Himalayas and the Indus River Valley. The Zangskari homeland is located between the Ladakhi people and the Purik people. Another source gives a much lower figure of just 8,000 to 10,000 speakers of the Zangskari language.² A small number of Zangskaris may also live across the border into Tibet. This is almost impossible

to verify, due to the simple fact there is no set border between the two countries. Each claims significant tracts of territory as their own, and the inhabitants of the region wander about as they please without any restrictions.

The Zangskar area is a ruggedly attractive desert landscape with minimal rainfall

throughout the year. Farmers must water their crops from melted snow and river water. The winters are long and difficult, with temperatures plummeting to minus 30 degrees Celcius (-22 °F) for weeks on end, bringing a halt to all travel and communications.

Zangskar is virtually untouched by the modern world, isolated by a ring of high peaks. The lowest pass in the area is the Pensi La at 4,418 metres (14,500 ft.).

Many ethnolinguistic sources combine the Zangskari people together with the Ladakhi and do not acknowledge their distinctiveness. The Indian government has done this, not granting official status to the Zangskaris. Although culturally and

religiously the two groups are basically the same, in the areas of language and history the two are different. One source states, 'The Zangskari people are independent and proud and by their geographical situation quite separate from the rest of Ladakh, with their own royal family—the local King of Pandum and Zangla.'³

Linguistically the Zangskari language is closer to the Champa language than to Ladakhi.⁴ The Zangskaris use the Tibetan script for religious and secular purposes.

The original inhabitants of Zangskar were the Mon people, an Indo-European group who today only number in the hundreds. In the past they dominated Zangskar. When A H Francke visited Zangskar in the late 1800s he reported, 'Zangskar was once entirely in the hands of the Mons. The ruins of their old castles are still called "Mon-castles". Then the country was conquered by the Tibetans, and remained a Tibetan country until the Mons came back

about seventy years ago and reconquered it. . . . Among the ruins of the settlements of the ancient Mons of Zangskar I discovered imposing remains of ancient Buddhist art, and more and more the conviction grew upon me that the settlement must have had some connection with the pre-Lamaist Buddhism.'⁵

Today the Zangskari people remain overwhelmingly Buddhist.⁶ There are no known Christians among them. Portions of the Bible were translated into the Zangskari language in 1945, but these have been out of print since 1951. Little has changed over the centuries. Most Zangskari people are still waiting to hear the gospel for the first time.



Julian Hawken



Population:
28,099 (2000)
32,750 (2010)
38,200 (2020)
Countries: India, possibly China
Buddhism: Tibetan
Christians: none known

Overview of the Zangskari

Other Names: Zanskari, Zaskari

Population Sources:
28,099 in India (2001, India Missions Association)
possibly also in China

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

Dialects: 0

Professing Buddhists: 90%

Practising Buddhists: 70%

Christians: 0%

Scripture: Portions 1945

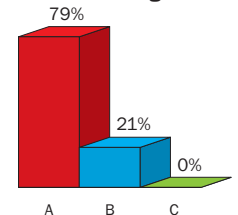
Jesus film: none

Gospel Recordings: none

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: ZAU

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