

## MYANMAR

In Myanmar there are 142 distinct people groups. Following are two of the groups.

### Shan



The Burmese Shan are a large group of civilized people who migrated south from China in the twelfth century and established three small states in Myanmar (Burma). The Shan language belongs to the southwestern group of tonal languages. The people refer to themselves as the "Great Tai."

Myanmar has a long history of coups, wars, and rebellions. Ethnic divisions and political unrest have been common since the first Burman kingdom in the eleventh century. Today, the Shan have their own army who fight against the current Burmese military regime. The Burmese military forcibly maintains control over the country's various ethnic groups, especially the Shan, who wish to have equal importance in government and commerce. As civil war divides families, many sons have died fighting against the Burmese government or have joined the secessionist Shan State Army.

What are their lives like?

Agriculture is the driving force in the Shan economy. Rice is the major cash and family crop. Other crops include tea, soybeans, peanuts, coffee, and cotton. People living near larger villages or towns grow vegetables to sell in the market. Shan farmers grow one other crop-it is estimated that as much as fifty percent of the world's illegal opium is produced in the Shan State.

Traditionally, rice is grown in irrigated fields, especially along the Salween River. However, farmers sometimes resort to "slash and burn" cultivation to grow hill rice.

Farmers raise cattle and buffalo, not for meat, but to draw heavy wooden plows since farming is not mechanized. Because many of their sons have lost their lives in the ongoing civil war, farmers are finding it necessary to hire outside labor.

Shan farmers live in villages of ten to five hundred or more households clustered or lined among trees along roads or riverbanks. The Shan have neither clans nor family lines. Marriages are monogamous, based on the couple's mutual consent. Newlyweds usually live with the bride's parents for the first two or three years or until they can set up their own home. Gossip and reputation are important social restraints.

Shan social culture is a hierarchy based on age, gender, and wealth. The Myanmar constitution dictates the political organization—an unbroken line of administrative authority from the Prime Minister to the village headman. The community, which elects a single headman, is accounted for in the national census as a territorial unit and assessed taxes. For the common citizen, the government is one of five traditional enemies along with fire, famine, flood, and plague.

Shan are wholesalers who move trade goods through northwestern Thailand and eastern Myanmar. As a result of improved transportation, women have become retailers of domestic goods sold in village markets instead of individually trading with one another. The people are good silversmiths who make beautiful buttons and daggers. They also market bamboo products and paper.

What are their beliefs?

Buddhism was introduced into Myanmar in the fifth century and the majority of the Shan are Buddhists. The Buddhist's goal is to seek the middle path to nirvana, or ultimate peace. The Shan view of the world centers on the idea of 'power protection,' which protects people from the consequences of their actions, allowing them to do as they please. Buddha and Buddhist monks are the most powerful beings, followed by spirits of the village, spirits associated with fields, households, and the forest. For the Buddhist, death is not a threat if one has done good deeds; it is simply passing from one life to another.

What are their needs?

The tiny Shan Church needs more leadership and the opportunity to train their leaders within Myanmar. The Bible is available in the Shan language, as are the Jesus film and Christian radio broadcasts.

Prayer Points

- \* Ask God to strengthen, encourage, and protect the Shan Christians.

- \* Ask the Holy Spirit to complete the work of adequate discipleship begun in the hearts of the Burmese Shan.

- \* Pray for the effectiveness of the Jesus film among the Burmese Shan.
- \* Pray that God will raise up prayer teams to break up the soil through worship and intercession.
- \* Ask God to grant wisdom and favor to the missions agency that is focusing on the Burmese Shan.
- \* Pray for opportunities to train Shan leaders within their country.
- \* Ask God to anoint the Gospel as it goes forth via radio to the Burmese Shan.
- \* Ask the Lord to raise up strong local churches among the Burmese Shan.



They are concentrated throughout Shan State, in north-east Myanmar. In Thailand, they inhabit the provinces of Chiang Rai, Chiang Mai and Mae Hong Son. A small group lives on the other side of Thailand in Mukdahan Province.

Persecution Rank: 23 (Only top 50 ranked, 1 = highest persecution ranking)

Population in this Country: 4,267,000

People Cluster: Shan

Primary Language: Shan (4,267,000 Speakers)

Buddhism: 99.10 %

Christianity 0.90 % (Evangelical: 0.70 %)

**Rakhine, Arakanese**



### Introduction / History

The Rakhine people of Myanmar are also known as Arakanese to the British, Yakine to the Burmese, and Mohg (which means Pirate) to Muslims living along the Rakhine border of Bangladesh. Rakhine ancestors may have migrated from the direction of Nepal. They are an ancient people who have mixed with other ethnicities but still retain a distinctive national identity through their language and culture. Rakhine is the primary language. Theravada Buddhism is the main religion. There exists a large amount of evidence that Rakhine was more religiously diverse in the past as well as more connected to the outside world.

Rakhine ruled as an independent kingdom, which at its zenith stretched from Chittagong to Rangoon. After years of decline and internal turmoil, the Burmese conquered Rakhine in 1784. At that time, many Rakhine fled to the northwest, which is modern day Bangladesh. In 1825, the British arrived and established a foothold in Myanmar by taking over Rakhine state. Then in 1886 the British captured the whole of Myanmar. In 1948, the British handed the rule of Myanmar back to the Burmese.

Meals consist of primarily rice with vegetables, meat when available, such as fish, chicken or pork. Chillies are used for seasoning. Meals are eaten late morning and before dark.

The Rakhine culture as well as calendar revolves around the planting and harvesting of rice. Fresh as well as saltwater fishing are major industries. However the working class is severely underpaid due to high unemployment.

The whole extended family lives together under one roof. The men and oldest members have the most respect, however women play an active role in family

decision making. Women cook and serve food to the men, who eat first. It is very important to Rakhine people that their family and community approve of their choices and actions.

Structurally very similar to Burmese, with profound pronunciation and vocabulary differences. Rakhine shares the same alphabet with Burmese, however using this alphabet to communicate specifically in Rakhine is very very uncommon. Effectively, this causes Rakhine people to speak in their mother tongue, while they read and write in the language of the Burmese, their oppressors. There is within Rakhine quite a large disparity in regard to language. Due most likely to geography and governing forces, pockets of language exist where the pronunciation and vocabulary within Rakhine differs from itself almost as much as Rakhine differs from Burmese.

Arranged marriages are common, however 'love' marriages do also happen. Traditionally, when a couple marries, they move in with the wife's family. This is supposed to keep the culture from deteriorating by discouraging cross-cultural marriages. Rakhine people who marry those from the surrounding people groups are openly despised if not shunned from the community. Monogamy is normal practice for Rakhine culture.

Rakhine boys undergo a ceremony, enter the monastery and stay for a few months. Later, around 20 years of age many Rakhine men stay at the Monastery for a longer period (usually not more than a year.) Elderly men also spend time at the monastery. The monks who stay at a Monastery permanently are almost guaranteed a high position in the community. Monks are treated with the utmost respect in Rakhine culture.



Region: Southeast Asia

Persecution Rank: 23 (Only top 50 ranked, 1 = highest persecution ranking)

Population in this Country: 1,964,000

Affinity Bloc: Tibetan / Himalayan Peoples

People Cluster: Burmese

People Name General: Arakanese

Primary Language: Rakhine

Buddhism 82.50 %

Christianity 0.10 % (Evangelical: 0.04 %)

Ethnic Religions 15.00 %