

GLOBAL PEOPLE PROFILES: Southern Bhil of India, Manchu of China, and Southern Thai of Thailand

—V. David Garrison

Southern Bhil of India

The more than 6.7 million Bhil people of India can be subdivided into three major distinct population segments: the Eastern Bhil (or Vil) with 2.1 million members, the Central Bhil with 3.5 million and the Southern Bhil with 1 million members. The primary location of the Bhil is the region connecting the states of Gujarat, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. According to the *Ethnologue*, some Bhil can also be found in Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Jammu, Kashmir, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Punjab, and Rajasthan.

The one million Southern Bhil live primarily in northern Maharashtra and southern Rajasthan in the rural hill country of Udaipur district. The Bhil are a small, dark skinned people with broad noses. Though they are regarded by government census as tribal and thus practitioners of traditional religion, many have adopted Hinduism. In terms of racial origin, the Bhil are believed to predate both the Dravidian and Aryan conquests of the Indian subcontinent. As such, they represent a pre-Aryan and pre-Dravidian people of Austro-Asiatic stock.

The Southern Bhil call their language *valvi bhili*. There is currently no radio broadcasting in the *valvi bhili* language. The New Testament, called *Bhili: Valvi*, was translated in 1930. Though *valvi bhili* remains the language of many Southern Bhil, others have adopted the dominant regional language of *wagdi*. There appear to be at least 4,000 Christians among the Southern Bhil, roughly four-tenths of one percent of their total population. Though there is some cross-cultural missionary activity among the Southern Bhil, their overall status of evangelization is extremely low at less than 23 percent. This means there are over 750,000 Southern Bhil who have never heard the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Manchu of China

The Manchu of China number over 4 million, and live in Heilongjiang, Jilin, and Liaoning Provinces (formerly Manchuria) as well as Beijing. Manchuria, in the northeast of China, is

formed of forested hills, mountains, fertile plains and semi-arid grasslands. Various district cultural patterns have emerged in these different environments, and its rich resources have attracted migrations from east Siberia, the Mongolian plateau, the Korean peninsula and China.

Modern research shows that the Juchen-Manchu are members of a widespread ethnic group known as the Tungus. The Manchu, like all the other Tungus peoples, are members of the Mongoloid race, but they have interbred widely with other peoples as there is wide variation in body type between different Manchu groups.

Manchurian tribes date back to 1000 B.C. For centuries the nomadic or semi-nomadic tribes waged constant war with the settled Chinese. These tribes were united in the 17th century, and with the help of dissident Chinese, established the Ching dynasty which survived until 1912. Because they ruled China for nearly 300 years, the Manchu have been the objects of contempt by many Han Chinese. Subsequently, the Manchu today are carefully maintained in a subjugated status. Efforts at publishing and promoting literature or communication in the Manchu language is general discouraged by the government.

Approximately half the Manchu population live in urban settings. In terms of occupation only 58 percent work in agriculture as compared to the national average of 73.66 percent. Over 20 percent work in production, transportation or related work, much higher than the national average of 11.83 percent. Even 8 percent work as scientific or technical staff while the national average is only .19 percent. Overall, the Manchu are a rather young people. The median age for males is 26, and 22 for females. Approximately 30 percent of the population are ages 0-14. The average life expectancy is 69 years old.

The Manchu practice traditional Chinese Buddhism and some Shamanism. Due to ethnic conflicts, the government dominated by Han Chinese, has discouraged publications or communications in the Manchu

language. A New Testament was published in Manchu in 1835. However, little literature is published and no broadcasting is being done either inside or outside China in the Manchu language. As many as 3.5 million Manchu have never had the opportunity to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That number represents approximately 86 percent of the Manchu people.

Southern Tai or Pak Thai of Thailand

The Pak Thai of southern Thailand, with a total population of more than 3.1 million are one of the largest unevangelized peoples in the world which are living in a country with relatively few restrictions on Christian witness. Due in part to their resistance to evangelization efforts, just over half of one percent, or 19,000, of the Pak Thai people are professing Christians. An important contributor to the paucity of Pak Thai believers is that they have had little gospel witness presented to them in their own language. Research indicates that as many as 1.6 million Pak Thai individuals have never heard the gospel of Jesus Christ. The predominant religions of the Pak Thai are Buddhism and Islam. Some Christians have avoided engaging in evangelism to the Pak Thai due to their Muslim faith and their frequent political uprisings in pursuit of closer links to their Malaysian Muslim neighbors to the south.

The Southern Tai people speak the *tai orkhon* (Southern) language, a language spoken by about 5.5 percent of the people of Thailand. The great majority of the *tai orkhon* speakers reside along the southern peninsular provinces adjoining Malaysia. In an effort to stem nationalist sentiments among the Pak Thai, the government has discouraged the development and use of the language. Thus, no secular or Christian radio or television programming is done in the *tai orkhon* language. Likewise, none of the Bible has been translated into this language. As a result, over half of the Pak Thai people have never heard the gospel message, despite the fact that more than a thousand missionaries and over 100 mission agencies currently labor in Thailand. ■