



Photo: Anal Students Forum

Location: The 2011 census of India listed 27,200 members of the Ahnal tribe. They inhabit many villages along the densely forested banks of the Chakpi River in the northeast Indian state of Manipur. The area is hilly and covered in pine and teak trees. A mere 70 Ahnal people in ten families live across the Myanmar border in the Sagaing Region's Tamu Township. Before 1948, members of the tribe freely walked across the hills to visit their relatives, but when political boundaries were drawn the people found themselves living in two separate countries, and only a few decided to remain on the Myanmar side of the border. In the decades since the change, the Ahnal in each country have gradually bifurcated due to a lack of interaction.

Identity: While in Myanmar the Ahnal people have never appeared on lists of the country's ethnic groups, in India they have been recognized as one of Manipur State's 33 Scheduled Tribes since 1951 under the name Anal. In 1963, their leaders declared themselves to be culturally Naga, which enabled them to also gain recognition as one of the 19 Naga tribes of Manipur.¹ The dominant

Meitei ethnic group in Manipur refer to the Ahnal as "Anan," while Pakan is another name often ascribed to them. In the past, it is believed their forefathers were part of a larger tribe that split during migration into the Ahnal, Lamkang, Monsang, and Moyon tribes.

Language: The Ahnal language divides into the two dialects of Laizo and Mulsom and is reportedly most similar to the Lamkang language in India, which is also known as Kuki Naga. Many Ahnal people are also able to speak and read English.

History: Because their language was unwritten, the history of the Ahnal people has been handed down through legends and songs. They say the tribe originated in a deep underground cave, but the entrance "was sealed with a huge stone and guarded by a tiger which killed any person who attempted to leave. Two brave boys, Hanshu and Hanta, devised a plan with a group of birds to distract the tiger and allow them to escape. Two divisions of the community are supposedly descended from these two heroes."² In 1912, the British colonel John Shakespear discovered that the Ahnal were first

mentioned in local chronicles in the mid-16th century, indicating they have been in the region for almost 500 years. They told him this story: "Once upon a time the whole world was flooded. All were drowned except one man and one woman, who ran to the highest peak, where they climbed up a high tree and hid themselves among its branches."³

Customs: The Ahnal use several traditional instruments, with one visitor noting: "They make a speciality of long bamboo trumpets, on which they perform with considerable skill, producing sounds indistinguishable from that of a bugle. The trumpets are from four to five feet long, and have bell-shaped mouths made of gourds."⁴ An anthropologist added that "their main musical instruments are the gong, the trumpet, the drum, the pipe, and a three-stringed instrument in the shape of a mandolin."⁵

Religion: Although over the last century the Ahnal people converted en masse to Christianity, for countless generations they were animists, observing many rituals designed to appease demons. Animal sacrifices were offered to spirits at festivals and major life events. The Ahnal also believed in a supreme being, Asa Pavan, the creator of the universe. This ancient belief helped the community embrace the Christian message, as much of it aligned with what they already believed.

Christianity: The arrival of Christianity in the early 20th century dramatically changed Ahnal society. Although initial progress was slow and by 1920 few people had become Christians, today practically the entire tribe on both sides of the border identify as followers of Jesus, with most attending Baptist or Catholic churches. The journey to produce the Bible in the Ahnal language was a long one. The first books of the Bible were printed in 1949, but 34 years elapsed until the New Testament appeared in 1983, and it took an additional 23 years before the full Bible was finally published for this blessed tribe in 2006.



Population in Myanmar: 70 (2025)

Location: Sagaing Region

Language Family: Tibeto-Burman

Main Religion: Christianity (100.0%)

Christians: 70 (100.0%)

OVERVIEW

Population: 70 in Myanmar (2025 Asia Harvest) 50 (2010 SIL)

Other Countries: 27,200 in India

Other Names: Anal, Anal Naga, Anan, Anun, Mulsom, Namfau

Location: Sagaing Region: Tamu Township in Tamu District

Language: Anal [anm]

Dialects: 5

Scripture: Bible 2006 New Testament 1983 Portions 1949

Jesus film: None

Global Recordings: Anal #861

People ID: 16211

