



Jane Sweeney

Location: Approximately 1,400 Asen people inhabit three remote villages and nearby towns in western Myanmar's Sagaing Region. At least 70 families live in the villages of Hansin and Muki in Lahe Township, with an additional 20 families in Kaungumu Village in neighboring Khamti ("place of gold") Township.¹ The area, which is dominated by the Chindwin River and its tributaries, is thickly forested and home to many wild animals, including tigers, leopards, bears and elephants. The jungle is almost impenetrable in places and hosts numerous snakes and other dangerous creatures.

Identity: The Asen are one of more than 60 distinct tribes that make up the Tangshang ethnicity in Myanmar, with another 30 tribes living across the border in India.² This collection of tiny tribes and sub-tribes, speaking dozens of distinct languages, makes this region one of the most ethnolinguistically diverse in the world. Until now, the Asen have never appeared on any Christian lists of the world's ethnic groups or languages. Although this tribe's autonym is Asen, other groups in the area often call them "Hansin" after the name of their main village. Neighboring tribes also call them "Raqsa," "Dasa," "Sangnok," "Raahaa" and "Raasapa" in their respective languages.

Language: The Asen language has never been studied but is believed to be closely related to Kotlum and Raqnu; however, it is mutually unintelligible with most other Tangshang varieties spoken in this part of Myanmar. None of these vernaculars, which are part of the so-called Tibeto-Burman language family, has been reduced to writing. Although efforts have been made to teach the Burmese national language in schools, only about half of Asen children attend school.

History: For centuries the Asen and other tribes conducted headhunting raids that wiped out entire villages and created a cycle of violence and revenge killings that lasted for generations. The practice largely ended when revival swept through Naga and Tangshang communities and multitudes of people became Christians from the 1950s to the 1980s.³ Naga insurgents fighting the Indian government have set up bases on the Myanmar side of the border. Subsequently, the Burmese army has launched attacks against their camps at the request of India, leaving the Asen area in a state of constant stress and financial ruin.

Customs: The Khamti area has many natural resources, which the government is keen to exploit. As a result, some Asen have found work in nearby gold and jade mines, while most villagers earn their

living from forestry, agriculture, and fishing. In 2003 the government mandated that the Naga New Year festival would be held in Lahe and Leshi townships on a rotating annual basis. Tourists flocked to the event from India and across the region, but the current turmoil in Myanmar has erased the economic gains of those years.

Religion: All of the Asen families living in Lahe Township are professing Baptists, while those in Khamti Township are Buddhists, having come under the influence of the strongly Buddhist Khamti people, who speak a language from the Tai linguistic family. The communities of Asen people seem entrenched in their faith, leaving few traces of the animistic rituals that ruled their society for countless generations.

Christianity: No written Scripture or any video or audio resources have ever been produced in the Asen language. As a result, believers among them have struggled to gain a firm foundation in the faith, as they need to rely on resources in languages that they do not understand. Although most Asen profess Christianity, many have never had a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and in recent years some have been tempted to adopt Buddhism to receive government benefits.



Population
in Myanmar:
1,400 (2024)

Location:
Sagaing Region

Language Family:
Tibeto-Burman

Main Religion:
Christianity (71.4%)

Christians:
1,000 (71.4%)

OVERVIEW

Population:
1,400 in Myanmar
(2024 Asia Harvest)

Other Countries:

Other Names:
Aasen, Asen Tangshang, Dasa, Hansin, Raahaa, Raasapa, Raqsa, Sangnok, Yaqsa, Yasa

Location:
Sagaing Region: Lahe Township in the Naga Self-Administered Zone; Khamti Township in Khamti District

Language:
Naga Tangsa, Asen
[unclassified]

Dialects: 0

Scripture:
None

Jesus film:
None

Global Recordings:
None

People ID: 22494

