



Being Chikim

Location: In Myanmar, an estimated 2,750 Bawm people live in a tiny area about 31 miles (50 km) from the juncture of Myanmar, India, and Bangladesh. Their main village is called Ban Hong Taung, which is part of Paletwa Township in Chin State’s Matupi District.¹ The Bawm area in Myanmar is bordered by the Khumi, Matu and Khongso tribes, with several other Chin groups located nearby. Most Bawm people live in the Chittagong area of southeast Bangladesh, where they numbered 13,193 in that country’s 2022 census. A Bangladesh source says: “The Bawm occupy 45 villages in the hilly area on both sides of the border along with other Chin groups. The Bawm are found in the hills, whereas Chakma and Marma occupy valleys.”² An additional 4,400 Bawm live in the three northeast India states of Mizoram, Assam, and Tripura where they are said to have migrated to around the year 1800.

Identity: The Bawm are believed to have originally been a clan or subgroup of the Zahau tribe,

but today they are considered a separate people group. Their autonym is Bawm Hawlh, although in India, where the 4,400 Bawm people are acknowledged as a Scheduled Tribe, they are considered part of the larger Mizo group and are labelled “Mizo Bawm.”

Language: Related to the Lai Chin language, the Bawm vernacular changes as it crosses the border into India and Bangladesh, with loanwords and influences from other languages. According to a linguistic survey in 2011, only 700 people in Myanmar were able to speak the Bawm language.³ Because of language differences and developments in various countries where they dwell, Bawm Christians in Myanmar may not be able to read the Bible, which was translated into Bawm in 1989.

History: According to Bawm legend, their tribe originated in a cave in China before traveling down the river systems into Myanmar. Many of the Chin groups share a legend that blames the deceitful Burmese

for causing their illiteracy: “The Chin were born from 101 eggs. As the last born they were the most loved, but the earth was already apportioned, and they were given the remaining mountains and its animals. The Burmese guardian appointed over them cheated them of elephants and showed them the blank back side of a writing slate so that they never learned even a single letter.”⁴

Customs: With as many as 18 clans among their modest population in India, the Bawm people continue to observe three important annual festivals, at which “they share folk tales and songs rendered with dance and music.”⁵ Since their conversion to Christ, the Bawm are viewed as a relatively happy people with a high level of educational attainment.

Religion: In the past, the Bawm were bound by fear of the spirit world. They were animists “who believed in the existence of both benevolent and malevolent spirits.”⁶ The Bawm in all three of the countries they inhabit were completely oblivious to the claims of Christ until Welsh missionary Edwin Rowlands and a colleague first visited them in today’s Bangladesh in December 1918. After traveling many days through thick jungle, they reached Vairelh village, where they showed Bible pictures and explained the meaning of them to the stunned villagers, who had never seen white men before. After some days spent sharing the Gospel, they moved on to several neighboring villages and the seed of salvation was sown, even though Rowlands soon left the area.

Christianity: The light of the Gospel continued to slowly spread among the Bawm until the first church service was held on Christmas Eve, 1928. Twelve new converts were baptized the next day. Today, all Bawm people say they believe in Jesus Christ. In Bangladesh, where the Bawm number 13,000, their churches are well served by 107 pastors and 98 evangelists.⁷ Although the full Bawm Bible was printed in Bangladesh in 1989, the Christians in Myanmar may not be able to read the script.



Population
in Myanmar:
2,750 (2024)

Location:
Chin State

Language Family:
Tibeto-Burman

Main Religion:
Christianity (100.0%)

Christians:
2,750 (100.0%)

OVERVIEW

Population:
2,750 in Myanmar
(2024 Asia Harvest)
2,500 (2011 Kim & Sanga)

Other Countries:
13,193 in Bangladesh
4,400 in India

Other Names:
Banjogi, Bawm Hawlh, Bawm Zo, Bawn, Bawng, Boam, Bom, Laisaw, Laizo, Langkay

Location:
Chin State: Paletwa Township in Matupi District

Language:
Chin, Bawm [bgr]

Dialects: 2

Scripture:
Bible 1989
New Testament 1977
Portions 1961

Jesus film:
None

Global Recordings:
Bawm #4333

People ID: 10741

