

Rakhine People

ရခိုင်လူမျိုး

Overview

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 are of mongloid decent whose 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.

History

Rakhine ruled as an independent kingdom, which at it's 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.



Location

Rakhine is a western state of Myanmar which lies along the Bay of Bengal and borders Bangladesh.

Rakhine Life

Food

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.

Work

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.

Family

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.

Population

700,000 ~ 1,800,000 *

Language

Rakhine for speaking
Burmese for reading and writing

Religion

Theravada Buddhism mixed with
Hinduism and spirit worship.

Regions

Rakhine state, Myanmar
Southern Bangladesh

* Accurate census data is not available for Myanmar.
Low est. is from 1983 census data for Rakhine language speakers (1.5% of pop) * (47,000,000 US population estimate from CIA)
High est is from 1901 British census data from Rakhine state. (405,000 pop in 1901) * (4.5 growth factor of country till 2007)

Rakhine Language

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.

Marriage

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.

Monastery

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.

Rakhine Customs