

MISSIONARY ATLAS PROJECT
ASIA
Bhutan

Snapshot Section

Country Name: Kingdom of Bhutan (*Druk-Yul*: Thunder Dragon Kingdom)

Country Founded in: Until the 17th century Bhutan was made up of many warring fiefdoms. It has been a monarchy since 1907.

Population: 2,279,723

note: other estimates range as low as 810,000 (July 2006 est.)

Government Type: Monarchy. The King appoints 35 members of the 150 seat National Assembly. There are 18 districts with governors appointed by the king.

Geography/location in the world: Bhutan is in Southern Asia, between the Tibet region of China and the West Bengal, Assam, and Sikkim states of India. It is about half the size of Indiana and lies in between 27 30 N latitudes and 90 30 E longitude.

Number of people groups: 27

Picture of flag:



Religion Snapshot

Lamaistic Buddhism 74%

Nepalese-influenced Hinduism 24%

Animism, Christianity, and Islam 2%

Government interaction with religion:

In the 1990's the government voted to ban Christianity from Bhutan. They feel that Christianity will be a divisive religion if it grows too strong. The government will tolerate Christian agencies that operate children's homes or hospitals. Christians are routinely deprived of jobs, education, and other rights. Police often raid churches and record the names of worshippers. No Christian religious publications are allowed in the country. Overall, Christianity is severely restricted.

Persecution reportedly grew in 2004 following a speech made by the king; he advised his people it would be better to only follow one religion: Buddhism. In the 2005 Open Doors World Watch List, Bhutan was listed as the eighth most restrictive country in the world.

Bhutan: the Country Profile

Basic Facts

Name:

Kingdom of Bhutan (*Druk-Yul*: Thunder Dragon Kingdom)

Country Founded in:

Until the 17th century Bhutan was made up of many warring fiefdoms. It has been a monarchy since 1907.

Demographics :

There are roughly 124 people per square mile in Bhutan. Only about four percent of the population is over the age of 65. In all age groupings, males slightly outnumber females. The latest estimated growth rate is just over two percent. There are approximately 34 births and 12 deaths per 1000 people each year. Infant mortality is ten percent. The estimated life expectancy is 54. Over ninety percent of the population lives in small towns or villages.

The majority of Bhutanese people make their living through farming.

About 42% of the population is literate.

Bhote 50%, ethnic Nepalese 35%, indigenous or migrant tribes 15% make up the people groups of Bhutan.

Roughly 95% of the Bhutanese that study abroad return home.

Language

Up to 24 languages are spoken throughout Bhutan. The official language is *Dzongkha*. About 40% of the population can read write and speak Dzongkha fluently. It is a Tibetan dialect

spoken mainly by the Ngalung and by the Bhoti people this language is spoken primarily in the west and the central regions of Bhutan.

The second most used language is Sharchagpakha, or Sarchop which is spoken in the east and the southeast.

Nepali is also widely used throughout the central and southern regions. Bumthangkha is a tribal language that is widely spoken by aboriginals in the central region of Bhutan. English is becoming more prominent as a language of government and business.

Society/Culture :

Bhutan is predominantly a rural, agrarian country with 90 percent of the people engaged in farming. The Tantric form of Mahayana Buddhism practiced by the majority of Bhutanese people plays a fundamental role in their lives, instilling deep respect and love for their land and for their cultural heritage. Many Bhutanese live in monasteries. Having never been colonized, Bhutanese people are fiercely independent and proud of their history and traditions.

Bhutan's society is made up of four major groupings:

- the Ngalop, the Sharchop,
- several aboriginal peoples,
- and Nepalese.

The Ngalop (a term thought to mean the earliest risen or first converted) are people of Tibetan origin who migrated to Bhutan as early as the ninth century. They are also referred to as Bhote, which means people of Tibet. The Bhote introduced Tibetan culture and Buddhism to Bhutan and comprise the dominant political and cultural element in modern Bhutan.

The Sharchop (the word means easterner), an Indo-Mongoloid people who are thought to have migrated from the Indian state of Assam or possibly Burma during the past millennium, comprise most of the population of eastern Bhutan. Although they are the largest ethnic group in Bhutan, the Sharchop have been largely assimilated into the Tibetan-Ngalop culture.

The third group consists of small indigenous tribal peoples living in scattered villages throughout Bhutan. Culturally and linguistically part of the populations of West Bengal or Assam, in India, they have a class structure similar, but less strict than Hindus. These groups include the *Drokpa*, *Lepcha*, and *Doya* tribes as well as the descendants of slaves brought to Bhutan from tribal areas in India.

Together, the Ngalop, Sharchop, and tribal groups are thought to constitute about 75 percent of the population.

In southern Bhutan there is a large minority of Nepalese (25-30 percent of the population) who practice Hinduism and speak various Nepalese dialects. The government has pressured the Nepalese to adopt Bhutanese dress, customs, religion, and language. Large numbers of ethnic

Nepalese have been expelled to Nepal since the late 1980s, and the resolution of the refugee problem continues to be a point of conflict in South Asia.

Bhutan also has a sizable modern Tibetan refugee population, up to 10,000 people in 1987.

Bhutan's traditional society is not patriarchal or matriarchal, instead, the member held in highest esteem serves as the family's head. Both men and women work in the fields and either may own small shops or businesses. Men participate in household management, often cook, and most often make and repair clothing (but do not weave the fabric). The more western pattern, where the husband brings the income and the wife is the homemaker, is beginning to emerge in the less rural areas. Both men and women may become monks, although in practice the number of female monks is relatively small. Marriages are at the will of either party and divorce is not uncommon. The wedding ceremony consists of an exchange of white scarves and the sharing of a cup.

In pre-modern times, there were three broad classes: the monastic community, headed by nobles; administrative and civil servants who ran the government; and farmers, the largest class, living in self-sufficient villages. In more modern times, society was organized around extended family units, and a class division developed based on occupation and social status. With the introduction of foreign practices in recent centuries and increasing job mobility outside the village, lately emphasis has been placed on the nuclear family.

There is no caste system, except among the Hindu Nepalese in southern Bhutan. Bhutanese have traditionally been endogamous, marrying only within their ethnic group; however, modern practices and even royal decrees encouraged ethnic integration in the late twentieth century. Inheritances used to go to the eldest son, although in some central areas the eldest daughter was the lawful successor. In contemporary Bhutan, inheritance has come to be equally distributed among all children of a family.

Except for the royal family and a few other noble families, Bhutanese do not have family names. Individuals normally have two names, but neither is considered a family name or a surname. Some people adopt their village name, occasionally in abbreviated form, as part of their name, using it before their given name. Wives keep their own names, and children frequently have names unconnected to either parent. However, some individuals whom have been educated abroad have taken their last name as a surname. There is a system of titles, depending on age, degree of familiarity, and social or official status, which denotes ranks and relationships among members of society.

Ema datshi, or chili pepper and cheese stew, is the national dish of Bhutan. Meat soups, rice or corn, and curries spiced with chilies comprise daily menus. Predominantly Buddhists, the Bhutanese are not vegetarians and occasionally eat beef especially in western Bhutan. Pork, poultry, yak, goat and fish are eaten on a limited scale. Wild vegetation is harvested for food. Beverages include buttered tea and beer made from wheat or barley.

All Bhutanese citizens are required to observe the national dress code, as declared in the *Drigam Namzha*, while in public during daylight hours. Women wear the *kira*, an ankle-length

dress made of a rectangular piece of cloth clipped onto the shoulders, with a woven belt at the waist, over a long-sleeved blouse. Social status is indicated by the amount of decorative details and colors in the *kira* and by the quality of the cloth used. Men wear the *gho*, a wraparound, coat-like, knee-length garment, with a narrow belt. Men and women sometimes wear earrings, and both sexes wear scarves or shawls, which also indicate rank by their color.

The *Drigam Namzha* also sets guidelines for behavior and public interaction. It was implemented in the time of Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyel. The *Drigam Namzha* was followed as a suggestion since the 17th century but in 1989 the king made the dress code mandatory.

The kingdom of Bhutan may be the only country in the world that measures its well-being by Gross National Happiness (GNH) instead of Gross National Product (GNP). The king, who is immensely popular with his subjects, has led Bhutan on a cautious path of development and modernization, with the intent of maintaining Bhutan's environment, culture, and heritage. The GNH program was introduced by Bhutan's leaders as a way of placing their Buddhist principles at the heart of life. It encourages the Bhutanese to rethink what is truly important: the success of a nation should not be judged by its ability to produce and consume, but should be based on the quality of life in that country and the happiness of its people. Emotional and psychological wealth both are real concerns in Bhutan and happiness is counted as more important than monetary wealth. The accumulation of wealth and technological progress are not rejected or forbidden, but they should not be pursued to the detriment of the quality of life. Among the policies of the Gross National Happiness program are the restriction on the number of foreign tourists, and a steep per diem usage tax, access to the king by anyone with a grievance, a national ban on smoking and tobacco, and the only recent (1999) introduction of television, computers, and internet cafes.

Archery is the national sport of Bhutan. Every village has its own archery range. High-spirited competitions are a common part of all festive occasions. Every year each larger village or monastery holds a religious festival or *tsechhu*. Families from the surrounding district come for several days of visiting and religious observances. The central activity is a series of religious mask dances, or *cham*, held in a large courtyard. Each individual dance takes up to several hours to complete and the entire series may last up to four days. Bhutanese believe that the dances teach Tantric Buddhist principles and that they gain merit just by watching the performance. Some of the dances were introduced by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, the founder of Bhutan, and have been passed down without variation since the mid-1600s.

Government:

Bhutan is a hereditary monarchy. In 2001 the King commissioned the writing of a constitution, 2005 it was unveiled, but as of yet has not been ratified. The judicial system is based on the Indian and English common law. In December of 2005 King Jigme Singye Wangchuck announced his intention to abdicate his throne in 2008. The heir apparent is his first born son Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuck. Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuck was born on February 21, 1980. He has studied abroad at Wheaton College and Oxford University.

The king is assisted by two advisory councils. The national assembly was created in 1953; 35 of the members are appointed by the king, 10 are monastic representatives, and the rest are elected by the people. The assembly members serve three year terms, and they have to power to veto the king's legislation, remove the king from power, and select a new king. Political parties are banned. Bhutan is divided into 18 administrative districts. Bhutan is under a special treaty relationship with India. India has input in most foreign affairs and is involved in the development of Bhutan. Bhutan is very independent and protects its sovereignty fiercely. Access to Bhutan is limited. Foreigners must enter with a tourism agency and visas are quite costly. Bhutan is considered a Buddhist Kingdom and as such proselytizing is prohibited. Only in the past 40 years has the king begin to take steps to making Bhutan a more modern nation.

Economy:

The economy is one of the smallest and least developed in the world. The per capita GDP is about \$1,400 US, while the per capita income is near \$420. It is estimated that 32 percent of the population lives below the national poverty line. The rugged mountains, which cover much of Bhutan, make the building of roads and other infrastructure difficult and expensive. There is a vast shortage of skilled labor, so major development projects such as dams and roads require migrant labor from India. Bhutan's economy is also closely tied to India through strong monetary and trade links. There is a lack of emphasis on material gains; the king implemented the measure GNH to measure the success of Bhutan. The GNH is the Gross National Happiness measure.

Technology has contributed very little to the industrial sector, which consists mostly of crafts and clothing manufacturing, and makes up less than 10 percent of the economy. Subsistence farming, forestry and animal husbandry account for 45 percent of the economy and provide the livelihood for more than 90 percent of the population. Major crops include potatoes, mustard, grains, soybeans, vegetables and ginger. Plantation crops include apples, oranges and cardamom. Cattle, yak, sheep and pigs are raised primarily for meat.

Bhutan's hydropower potential and its attraction for tourists are important resources each economic program takes into account the government's desire to protect the country's environment and cultural traditions. Detailed controls and uncertain policies in areas like industrial licensing, trade, labor, and finance continue to hamper foreign investment. In rural areas subsistence farmers rely largely on crops. The larger families have a higher proportion of children and older people who cannot work (high dependency ratio). They have very little livestock. There is very little off-farm income. Bhutan has limited schooling, particularly in rural settings.

In urban areas there are a large number of people in migrant households living in hutments or shanties. Many large urban families also struggle with being able to support the children and older members of the family who are unable to work. Many urban dwellers are petty traders and casual or day laborers. While there seems to be no overt gender discrimination, social, economic, political or legal, gender gaps do exist, particularly in education, employment and decision-making. These gaps are decreasing. World Bank and UN development programs include road building, sanitation, education, and community health.

In 1989 when the *Drigam Namzha* (dress code) was made mandatory it created friction among the Nepali citizens who were living in the south. In 1990 many of the Nepali speaking Bhutanese were driven out of Bhutan. About 134,000 people were driven out of Bhutan which was almost 20% of the population.

Literacy

The overall literacy rate of Bhutan is about 42%. Bhutan hopes to eliminate illiteracy by 2012. A literate person will be functional in the national language of Dzongha. The government provides nine years of free education for all citizens.

Land/Geography:

Bhutan is about half the size of Indiana. India shares Bhutan's border on the west, south, and east. The northern border is shared with the Tibet region of China. Bhutan's land area is about 46,500 square kilometers. About 10% of the land area is covered with snow and glaciers all year and 70% of the land is heavily forested. Northern Bhutan is consumed by Himalayan peaks. The tallest of which is Kulha Gangri at 7,554 meters. The second tallest is Chomo Lhari which is 7,314, there are 19 other peaks that exceed 7,000 meters. The Duars Plain in the south (the area that is adjacent to the foothills of the Himalayas) is the most fertile soil in Bhutan.

Bhutan is home for a diverse collection of wildlife. There are elephants, golden langurs, and rhinos in the lower elevations; snow leopards, the Himalayan Black Bear, and yaks live in the higher elevations. There are many different types of birds and bird-watching draws many tourists.

Although Bhutan is rather small it has a broad range of climate. The south is tropical, the central region is temperate. The north, home of the Great Himalayas, is cold. The weather throughout the country can greatly vary. The Thimpu (the capital) valley can have winter daytime temperatures of 60 degrees; the temperature can drastically drop at night to well below freezing. Western Bhutan claims most of the monsoon rains that are common in many areas of Asia. June to September western Bhutan will receive rains that account for about 80 percent of its annual rainfall. Although monsoon rain obscures views of the Himalayas one can see many wild orchids and rhododendrons during this season. Monsoon rains often cause landslides and therefore make travel difficult during the rainy season. September through November tend to be the mildest months; spring and fall are the most popular times for tourists to visit Bhutan.

Bhutan's government is very concerned with conservation and has placed guidelines for farming in order to retain its natural beauty and resources. This has left Bhutan as one of the few remaining seemingly untouched Himalayan areas. The ecology is fairly intact.

History

The area of Bhutan, according to archeologists, was inhabited for several centuries before the time of Christ. There are references in Tibetan literature that refer to pre-Buddhist Bhutan

between 500 B.C. and 600 A.D. Before Buddhism came to Bhutan the people practiced an animistic religion referred to as Bon. Much of Bhutan's known history involves Buddhism.

Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal unified the small kingdoms of Bhutan under his rule in the 17th century. Shabdrung is the title given to the highest lama leaders of Bhutan. Their role was similar to that of the Dalai Lama in Tibet. Namgyal was the start of the tulku lineage (the Shabdrungs) in Bhutan, but was said to have come from a tulku lineage originating in Tibet.

Tulku is a Tibetan term that generally refers to people who are reborn, often many times, in order to continue on their spiritual path (the Dalai Lama is perhaps the most well know tulku lineage). The Shabdrung was held in high esteem, he was preceded in importance only by Buddha and Guru Rimpoche. Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal was from Tibet and established the Drukpa Kargyupa School of Buddhism in Bhutan which is a branch of Tantric Mahayana Buddhism.

Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal set up the dual system of government, which was called Chhoesid; it consisted of the Druk Desi who was the administrative leader, and the Je Khempo who was the religious leader. When Namgyal died in 1651, this proved to be an important move; instead of power passing to his son it was passed on to these two offices. Namgyal's death was kept secret for over fifty years to avoid a loss of power these individuals had attained. As a member of a tulku line it would be expected that the Shabdrung would be reincarnated shortly after his death.

The Druk Desi and the Jo Khempo devised a solution by which they could maintain the power that they were accustomed to. The solution was the Shabdrung was reincarnated into 3 separate beings. There was a body reincarnation, mind reincarnation, and a speech reincarnation. This continued until the 18th century, and then the body reincarnation died out. The mind and speech reincarnation continued until the 20th century.

The first hereditary king of Bhutan ascended the throne in 1907; this brought an end to the dual system of government. Ugyen Wanchuck the first hereditary king had the support of Britain. Ugyen Wanchuck brought about many changes in the small kingdom, including the introduction of western education. Several schools were opened during his reign.

The king is called the Druk Gyalpo which means Dragon King. The king usually becomes the governor of the Trongsa District in Bhutan before ascending the throne. Trongsa is a village on a high mountain pass. This village virtually controls all trade and traffic between the eastern and the western parts of Bhutan. Prior to the construction of the modern Lateral Road through Bhutan the road passed through the courtyard of the temple and the governor could order the massive gates be closed, thus the country would be divided in half.

Bhutan has struggled to remain a sovereign kingdom as all of its neighbors have slowly been annexed by the large powers of China and India. After Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal died and his death was known to the public there was a period of disorder. Tibet took advantage of the opportunity and attacked Bhutan in 1710, and then again with the help of the Mongols in 1730. Neither attempt was successful.

The Shabdrungs seemed to be opposed to the monarchy. In 1931 Jigme Dorji, who was the 6th Shabdrung, called on Mahatma Gandhi to oust the monarchy. Dorji was assassinated shortly after. The last Shabdrung incarnation was Jigme Nawang Namgyal he fled Bhutan to Kalimpong, India in 1962. He died in 2003, of cancer according to Indian media, although some Bhutanese still believe he was poisoned by supporters of the monarchy.

Bhutan's relations with Britain have been rocky. In 1772 Cooch Behar (at that time an independent kingdom) appealed to the British East India Company to help them remove the Bhutanese who had invaded and occupied their territory. A peace treaty was signed which bound Bhutan to its borders before 1730. There continued to be unrest until the Duar War in 1864-1865.

Britain tried to initiate a peace treaty with Bhutan after a civil war in Bhutan which displaced the legitimate *druk desi* with a rival from the district of Punakha. Due to the internal competition between rulers Britain was unable to establish peace. Bhutan rejected the attempts for peace and prompted Britain to declare war in November of 1864. Bhutan's army was made up of *dzong* (temple) guards and was equipped with minimal weaponry. Bhutan won some small battles but lost the war which ended five months later. The treaty of Sinchula was signed in November of 1865. Bhutan gave up land they had occupied in the Assam Duars, Bengal Duars (duar is a term referring to the savanna or grasslands of South Asia), and a portion of land in southeastern Bhutan called Dewangiri.

Bhutan was one of the first countries to recognize India as an independent nation. Upon India's independence in 1949 the Dewangiri which had been annexed by Britain was returned to Bhutan under the Indo-Bhutanese Treaty of Perpetual Peace and Friendship. India is also given a great deal of input on Bhutan's foreign affairs although they have no power in internal affairs.

In 1950, Chinese Communist forces occupied Tibet. Bhutan is a strategic point between China and India thus it has become a point of contest as well. The Chinese tried to claim Bhutan as an area of greater Tibet. In response, India built roads in Bhutan to carry Indian military vehicles. Then in 1959, Tibet was annexed by China and Bhutan accepted 4,000 Tibetan refugees. Bhutan improved bilateral relations with India and sealed its northern border to reduce the risk from China.

The activity in Tibet encouraged Bhutan to foster deeper ties with India. In 1952 King Jigme Dorji Wangchuk ascended the throne. He began to modernize the small kingdom with great help from India. In 1953 the 130 member National Assembly was established, in an effort to move toward a more democratic form of government. In 1965 the Royal advisory council was established and in 1968 the Cabinet was formed and the king gave up his right to veto. Also in 1968, the king gave the National Assembly the authority to choose and depose the king. Bhutan was admitted into the United Nations in 1971. Other changes that were brought about during Dorji Wangchuk's reign included emancipation of women, a secular educational system was started, abolition of slavery and the caste system. Then in 1972 Dorji Wangchuk died leaving 16 year old Jigme Singye Wangchuk the throne.

Since 1998, when King Jigme Singye Wangchuk began to give more power to the people of Bhutan by allowing there to be an elected government, he has been quietly working on a constitution. This constitution would allow freedom of thought and speech, a two party electoral system, and a mandatory retirement age of 65 for the monarch. The recent unrest in Nepal may have been a factor in motivating the king to make moves toward democracy before it would be forced on the small kingdom. The kingdom plans on following a path toward democracy but taking it slowly to avoid a situation similar to what Nepal has experienced in the recent past.

During the 1980's the government of Bhutan became aware of the large number of Nepali immigrants entering the southern districts. These immigrants did not adopt the national language and dress of Bhutan. In order to maintain unity the king adopted a policy to enforce a national dress code which was the traditional dress of the Buddhist Dzhongkha/Drukpa ethnic minority, which the king belonged to.

From the Bhutanese perspective this regulation was an attempt to maintain Himalayan Buddhist culture, but from a Nepali perspective it was seen as a personal attack. In 1990 the government went a step further by removing Nepali from schools as a subject (no other minority languages are taught). Immigrants that had documents pertaining to immigration prior to 1958 were deemed legal citizens. This edict was implemented while a great number of Nepalese were entering Bhutan through the southern border. It was a move to control the immigration but lead to unfair treatment of many longtime Nepali residents. In 1990 a group of Nepalese from the India organized protests. They resorted to kidnappings and murders. This led to unfair treatment of peaceful Nepali citizens.

This uprising by the Nepalese minority in 1989, a national policy of forcing non-ethnic Bhutanese to adopt Bhutanese Buddhist traditions, and the expulsion of thousand of ethnic Nepalese regarded by the government as illegal aliens were sources of tension within Bhutan, and with Nepal and India, in the 1990s. Also, Assamese and West Bengali separatist guerrillas established bases in Bhutan, from which they make attacks into India. These guerrillas are Maoists (communists). After attempts to negotiate the Assamese guerrillas' withdrawal failed, Bhutan mounted attacks in 2003 on their bases.

The known history of Bhutan is strongly interlaced with the rise of Buddhism. Many of the historic sites in Bhutan are *dzongs* or monasteries/fortresses high in the hills. The *dzongs* serve as religious, social, military, and administrative purposes in their district. The *dzongs* offer equal housing to both monks and administrator such as the *penlop* or governor. This type of architecture was at it's height in the 1600's and proved to be effective in preventing attackers from penetrating important areas of Bhutan.

Most *dzongs* are built in easily defensible places (such as hilltops, narrow valley, or areas surrounded by rivers). If defense was thought to be a problem a smaller dzong would be built farther up the slope in order to prevent attackers from using the height to fire down on the *dzong*. In 1998 the famous Taktsang Monastery in the mountains of West Bhutan, containing one of the finest collections of early Himalayan Buddhist art, was destroyed by fire. The government has since rebuilt the Takstang Monastery.

The biggest humanitarian need is in the refugee situation with ethnic Nepalese who remain in refugee camps in India and Nepal.

In December of 2006 King Jigme Singye Wangchuk abdicated the throne to his son. He had planned on doing so in 2008. No reason was given for his decision to step down sooner than planned. Bhutan is still planning to adopt a new constitution in 2008. One of the new king's first acts in office was to sign a new treaty with India. This was entitled the India Bhutan Friendship Treaty. King Jigme Kesar Namgyal was born on February 21, 1980, and at the age of 27 is now the ruling king of Bhutan as they head towards a democratic form of government.

Christian History

The government is cautious of outside influence especially from the west that may disrupt the delicate system of religion and government. Bhutan is determined to maintain their unique system of religion and government as the last Buddhist Kingdom. In order to do this they remaining fairly closed off from tourist as well as influence from the internet, television, and other outside influences. The isolationist mentality has made Bhutan one of the least evangelized nations in the world.

The first Europeans recorded to have visited Bhutan were Jesuit priests from Portugal in 1629. They were on their way to Tibet. It is said that they met Zhabdrung Ngawang and gave him gifts of guns, gunpowder, and a telescope. It is thought that Zhabdrung offered the priests land to build a church if they would stay in Bhutan but they insisted on continuing to Tibet and never returned to Bhutan.

In 1797 William Carey traveled to the border of Bhutan. He states in a letter to the mission society to England that he was received with honor and was able to exchange gifts. He urged his society to send missionaries there; he even attempted to translate the scriptures into Bhutanese.

In 1808 William Robinson and William Carey Jr. tried again to go to Bhutan, they failed in their attempt. After this Robinson tried several times to settle in Bhutan or even in a border area. His first attempt was thwarted by civil war, his second he was not allowed beyond the border, and the third time his health failed to the point where he had to leave.

Later, Robinson returned with his wife and children and settled in Barbari on the border and preached. His wife who was 6 months pregnant with their third child passed away. So once again he was forced to abandon the work. Still very determined he returned in 1811 but they were attacked by robbers. Another attempt was made to settle in Chamurchi but he was denied permission. Robinson made great efforts for Bhutan none of which were met with any great success.

In 1895 Susanna Hansen and her 11 year old daughter settled in Baksaduar as the first missionaries to reside there. Baksaduar's main inhabitants are Ngalongs and it is a strategic location on the route between India and Bhutan. The mission center they lived in was a structure

that J.F. Fredericksson had built as a representative of the Scandinavian Alliance Mission. Hansen passed away after only four months of work in the area. Sigrud Gahmberg, a Finnish missionary, took care of Hansen's daughter and they returned to Baksaduar for evangelism. Pasang Tenzin an evangelist from North Sikkim joined them. He was one of the first converts from North Sikkim. Two years later Gahmberg died from malaria. There were no known converts from the efforts of the Scandinavian Alliance Missions during the period.

In 1929 three Finnish missionaries took up residence in Baksaduar. These three women ran a girl's school. At some point a clinic was opened and many Drukpa sought treatment there. According to Pastor Ishmael Tshering, his father, Kuchu, the very first convert from the Buddhists of Bhutan, through the efforts of the Finnish mission. He was the first person baptized by the little clinic in Baksaduar. He later married a Christian woman from Sikkim also working with the Finnish Mission. He and another evangelist named Enoch Rai traveled to Thimbu on foot for preaching. Kuchu went from village to village preaching until he died after a six month illness of, what was thought to have been poisoning from some villagers. His wife was pregnant at the time so he asked a Finnish Missionary, known as Hyttinen, whose leadership he had been under to take care of his family. There were no other Drukpa believers at the time of his death. His wife and children were considered foreigners for two reasons: she was from Sikkim and they did not believe in Buddhism. Hyttinen continued the efforts to reach Bhutan and learned Dzongkha and translated two gospels before he died in 1948.

In the 1950's Drukpa Christians were sent to Bible training school. Five students graduated and they then carried on the work started by foreign missionaries in Baksaduar.

There have been many Lepcha and Nepali missionaries. Many of these missionaries came from Kalimpong but worked primarily with the Lepcha and Nepali populations in the southwestern parts of Bhutan.

In the 1950's there was another important work started by the Scottish Universities Mission Institution and Charteris Hospital. Many Bhutanese were studying at these institutions and they were allowed to open a facility in Bumthang with staff sent by the Scottish Universities Mission Institution. The king was very pleased with the education provided by this institute.

It was not until the 1960's that any further Christian witness is recorded in Bhutan. For the next 25 years the government allowed Indian and other expatriate workers to minister through work with NGOs. These Christian workers developed much of the educational structure and health care systems that are still at work in Bhutan. One such worker, Father Mackey, a Jesuit from Canada was invited to Bhutan and due to his great contributions to the small country he was granted Bhutanese citizenship. In 1963 the government invited the Salesians of Don Bosco to start a technical school. Several of the students were believed to have become Christians and the Fathers were expelled from the country for proselytizing. Most of the educational institutes in Bhutan were started and run by Jesuits.

In 1988 all the Jesuits were asked to leave except for Father Mackey who was granted citizenship. He even taught the King Jigme Singye Wangchuk.

In the 1960's The Leprosy Mission was invited to Bhutan. Two other missions joined the medical ministry in the 1970's and worked alongside The Leprosy Mission, including the Norwegian Santal Mission. At a 20 year celebration a leading doctor of the mission, Dr. Riedel, was able to write a letter outlining some their achievements in the past years. He also took the opportunity to apologize for Western colonialism and explain that they were never done in the name of true Christianity. He then explained that he was there to serve and in humility to show them the love of Jesus Christ. They made great contributions to the field of medicine in Bhutan. The Leprosy Mission is now run by the government.

In September of 1965, Magnus and Edel Haugstad of the Norwegian Santal Mission went to Bhutan to start a Leprosy clinic. They had been working in border areas treating many Bhutanese patients. They were unable to provide the proper care because most of their patients lived to far away so after several years they sought permission to start a clinic inside Bhutan and it was granted. It was a longer ordeal to get permission from both the Indian and the Bhutanese government to be able to travel freely between the two countries. The Norwegian Santal Mission was the first foreign Christian mission allowed to purchase land in Bhutan. Of course the government restrictions were already in place and no one could preach, but these Christians did meet together to worship and were able to share with intimate friends. Another clinic, the Basic Health Unit, was inaugurated in 1974 under the direction of Asbjoerg Fiske at the request of the village leader in Kangpara. Following this Basic Health Units were built in several places and in 1985 the Norwegian Santal Mission was invited to help with several government hospitals. It is obvious that the Norwegian Santal Mission contributed greatly to the development of medicine and healthcare in the eastern region of the country. There was little measurable response to the gospel mostly due to the government's restrictions but also due in part to the social pressures of living in a staunch Buddhist community.

In 1947 Rinchen Lama who was perhaps the first Bhutanese Christian Missionaries seeking to reach his own people died of what was suspected to be poisoning. He was trained as a teacher and started a small school and clinic in 1943 in the town of Dewothang. Following his death an ethnic Nepali Christian took over the school. During this time there were three Sharchhokpa students who professed Christ and Lord. The school closed in 1957 due to financial problems.

One of these Sharchhokpa students continued to grow in his faith (it is reported the other two due to isolation and lack of Christian fellowship fell away) and is the first Christian from his people group. He stated that during the 1950's in the eastern parts of Bhutan, Christians were given a freedom to preach and share gospel tracts. People were free from persecution and could decide whether or not they would become Christian. There was not much work accomplished though due to failing of these early Christians in the areas of evangelism. He was trained as a healthcare worker through the Norwegian Santal Mission. He served in the Royal Bhutan Army as a health caretaker for three years. He worked in a Christian hospital in Riserboo for 23 years. He witnessed to many people during those years and translated and composed worship songs into Tshangla which are still sung today.

In 1973 a Swedish couple under Kvinnliga Misjonsarbetare (Women Mission Workers), started the Khaling School for the Blind. Although they were still unable to preach and

evangelize, Einar and Reidun Kippenes faithfully worked in Bhutan for 9 years. For the next five years the school was run by Philip and Ulla Holmberg, also from Sweden, until it was taken over by the Bhutanese government in the late 1980's. The school is now named The National Institute for the Disabled.

The success that was seen during this period was mostly among the Nepalese. Many of these believers have faced persecution and harassment for their faith. Indian believers in the regions that border Bhutan have taken the opportunity to witness to Bhutanese visitors while they are in India. Many Bhutanese Christians were converted in this manner. Proselytizing is not allowed in Bhutan. But there are some Christian witnesses in Bhutan, most are from India.

Although the beginnings of the first church in Bhutan were seen in 1895 there has been very little growth since then. There are many remote places that have yet to hear the gospel in Bhutan. The church that exists is very young and needs to grow and be taught. Persecution is a big factor in the slow growth of the church but also the churches not being indigenous to Bhutan and the reliance on outside support add to the problem.

Most of the information in this section was taken from a thesis written by a Bhutanese believer whose name is withheld for his protection.

Religions

Non-Christian

Buddhist

Bhutan is the last sovereign Buddhist kingdom in the Himalayan region. Seventy-two percent of Bhutanese are Buddhist.

Hindu

Hindus in Bhutan make up twenty-three percent of the population. The Nepalese in the southern part of Bhutan make up the largest number of Hindus.

Islam

Bhutan is four percent Muslim.

Traditional (animism)

Half of one percent follows traditional or ethnic religion.

Catholic/Orthodox

A very small number of Catholics live in Bhutan. In 1995 there were about 540 members, they were all Indians and in Bhutan to work in schools or development. There are three schools in

Bhutan that are run by Catholics and enroll primarily Buddhist students. Bhutan falls under the Catholic diocese of Tezpur in India.

Evangelical Christian

Christianity accounts for 0.4% of the religious make up of Bhutan.

Protestant Church

Indians in Bhutan as workers make up the Protestant church. Most are not part of any organized church. Evangelistic work and proselytizing are not allowed in Bhutan so missionary organizations have tended to work with Bhutanese living outside the confines of the restrictive government.

The United Church of North India (CNI) also known as the Eastern Himalayan Church works in Bhutan. ethnic Nepali, is involved in evangelistic outreach in Bhutan, Nepal and India.

Christian Cults and Sects

None recorded.

People Groups

1218

Assamese (117,944)

The Assamese are from the Indian state of Assam. They speak Assamese and most are Hindu. The Bible, Jesus Film, gospel recordings, and radio broadcasts are available in Assamese. The Assamese originated in the northeast Indian state of Assam. Their native language is Assamese, which is of the Indo-Aryan group, and is closely related to Tibeto-Burman dialects.

The Assamese regularly migrated across the undefined frontier until the seventeenth century, when Assam's British colonizers established the border. Today, the Assamese of Bhutan live mostly in the south, where the climate is similar to that of their homeland. Since they live in the fertile, subtropical zone, the majority of Assamese are engaged in farming. They grow rice, corn, potatoes, wheat, and citrus fruits, as well as raise pigs, cattle, and chickens. Some Assamese also work in food, cement, or lumber production. Assamese generally live in small villages, in homes made of bamboo, mud, and thatch. The villages are usually self-sufficient, so there is little need for outside interaction.

Eighty percent of the Assamese in Bhutan are Hindus. As such, they believe in the existence of millions of gods. Animals as well as humans are believed to have souls. Cows are regarded to be especially sacred. Another important Hindu concept is reincarnation. Hindus must continuously engage in various rituals in order to ensure the next life will be better than the present one. Hindus are divided into very strict social classes called castes. Generally, those in the lower castes are poor, while those in the upper castes are more likely to be wealthy and

educated. In India, small numbers of Assamese are also Christians and Sikhs. The percentage of Muslims is approximately eighteen percent, but they are largely nominal.

1219

Central Bhutanese (497,389)

The Central Bhutanese are also known as the Drukpa and in India they are classified as Bhotia which is a more generic term given to several ethnic groups from Bhutan. They speak Dzongkha which is the national language of Bhutan. They are predominantly Buddhist, and many believe they have been Buddhist since the Guru Padmasambhava flew over the Himalayas on the back of a tiger in AD 746 to bring Buddhism to this area. There are between 500 and 600 Christians among this people group. These Christians are often ostracized from their families, face difficulties in advancing in education and job advancement. The New Testament, Jesus Film, gospel recordings, and radio broadcast are available in Dzongkha.

Bhutan's society has four main groups: the Bhotia of Tibet (which includes the Bhutanese); the Eastern Bhotia, or Sharchop; the Nepalese; and various other tribal groups, each of which speaks a different language. The Bhotia (Bhutanese) are the largest group and are concentrated in western and central Bhutan. Most of the social and political leaders come from this group. Many of the Bhutanese are farmers. Their diet consists mainly of rice, potatoes, and vegetables. They eat little meat, but use yaks to supply milk and to plow. Houses usually have two floors, but some have up to four. In traditional homes, livestock is kept on the first floor.

Marriages are typically monogamous. The women marry at about age 16, while the men wait until they are 21. Formal wedding ceremonies are not held. Newlyweds may live with the groom's family, the bride's family, or on their own, depending on where the need for farm labor is the greatest. The extended family is very important in Bhutanese culture, and grandparents often look after younger family members.

Most Bhutanese follow the Red Hat sect of Tibetan Buddhism. There are a few Bhutanese that practice shamanism. The shamanists believe in many gods, demons, and ancestral spirits, which require sacrifice in exchange for safety and health. Most families will have shrines in their homes.

The Central Bhutanese have remained conservative and value their ancient traditions. Their history of isolation has led them to mistrust foreigners and foreign influences. However, they are becoming more vulnerable to change due to their need for modern medicines and conveniences.

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Brokpa, Brokkat (300)

This small group of Brokkat Brokpa people are separated from the larger group of Brokpa also known as the Brokpake or Dakpa because their distinct Brokkat language. These groups are ethnically and culturally related but they cannot understand each others languages. These

Brokkat Brokpa did not assimilate the languages of Bumthang like their closely related Brokpa/Dakpa relatives due to their sedentary lifestyle.

The Brokpa/Dakpa traveled as yak herders and assimilated more of the surrounding languages separating themselves from the Brokkat Brokpa. The Brokkat Brokpa people live in the north central region of Bhutan in the Bumthang District. There are no known Christians among the Brokkat Brokpa people, all profess to be Buddhist. Neither the Jesus Film, nor gospel recordings, nor the Bible, nor Christian broadcasting are available in their language.

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Brokpa (7,000)

The Brokpa are often grouped with the Brokkat Brokpa and the Dakpa. But they speak a different language than both of these groups. They follow Tibetan Buddhism and ancient spirit worship; shamans are more prevalent than lamas. They are a nomadic people that live at high altitudes and are typically yak herders.

There are no known Christians among this group. There are no resources available in their language for them to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ such as: The Bible, The Jesus Film, gospel recordings, or Christian broadcasts.

1241

Chali (8,969)

Alternate names for the Chali people include: Chalikha, Tshali, Chalipkha, and Tshalingpa. The Chali speak Chalikha. Most Chali are Buddhist. There no known Christians among the Chali and no Bible translations, no gospel recordings, no radio broadcasts, and the Jesus Film is not available either.

All of the Chali profess to be Buddhist but only about half practice Buddhism. The Chali live primarily in the east, in the Mongar District. The Chalikha language shares much of its vocabulary with its neighbors who speak Chocangacakha and Tsangla.

1222

Dakpa (94,355)

This population number includes the Brokpa and Brokkat Brokpa numbers as PeopleGroups.Org classifies them together. Separating them from these groups the population is closer to 1,500)

The Dakpa are also known as the Dakpakha, Dagpa, Dap, and Takpa. They speak Dakpa and are Buddhists. They are often classified with the Brokpa people, but the language they speak is different. The Dakpa language is from the Eastern branch of Tibeto-Burman and the Brokpa is from the Southern Tibetan language. The Dakpa and Brokpa alike are itinerant yak herders and they wear unique hats with five spokes of twisted yak hair. But there are differences in the

native dress of the two people groups, such as the Dakpas wear *dorma* “trousers” and the *pishu* “leather leg guards” are worn by the Brokpa.

The Dakpas all profess to be Buddhists, but they follow the yellow hat order which is the dominant sect in Tibet because this district used to be part of Tawang, India, a former vassal state of Lhasa. Most of Bhutan’s Buddhists follow the red hat sect. There are no known Christians among the Dakpa and they have no translation of the Bible in Dakpa or any other access to the gospel in their language.

42389

Doya (1,651)

The Doya people speak Lhokpu. They practice Animism. There are no Bible translations, gospel, radio broadcasts in their language. The Jesus Film is not yet available in Lhokpu. The Doya are also called the Munda-Santal, Har, Hor, Mahili, Mahle, Paharia, Sandal, and Satar.

This people group is actually nine different but closely related groups. These are the groups that make up the Doya: the Santal, the Bhumji, the Koda, the Mahili, the Ho, the Juango, and the Gadaba. Most Doya are Hindu but many follow tribal religions. These people are also found in India and Nepal.

1223

Dzalakha (75,248)

The Dzalakha speak Dzalakha. Alternate names for the Dzalakha are: Dzala, Dzalamat, and Yangtsebikha. They are primarily Buddhist. There is not a Bible translation and there are no Christian resources available in Dzalakha.

The Dzalakha inhabit the Yangtse district which is in the far north east corner. It is considered the poorest district in Bhutan. The largest town is rather minimal. One-hundred percent of the Dzalakha profess to be Tibetan Buddhists.

The Dzalakha see their heritage as very strongly intertwined with Buddhism. The Dzalakha living in Duxsom believe that by climbing the face of a rock that overlooks the temple their sins will be forgiven. There are no known Christians among the Dzalakha and no known churches in this district of Bhutan.

1225

Eastern Bhutanese (263,248)

The Eastern Bhutanese are also called the Sharchop, Bhotia, Central Monba, Couna Monba, Memba, Monba, Sarchapkha, Southern Monba, Tshalingpa, Eastern Bhotia, Mompa, Sangla, Sharchagpakha, and Tsangla. They speak Sharchagpakha, Tshangla or Tsangla which is from the Sino-Tibetan language family.

Most Sharchop are Buddhists.

The Bible, Jesus Film, gospel recordings, and radio broadcasts are all available in their language. The Sharchop are from the Tibeto-Burman peoples and came to Bhutan from the east. Their cultural links tie them closely to the peoples of Tibet, Burma and Yunnan Province of China.

Most of the Sharchop live in eastern and southeastern Bhutan. There are many Sharchop who live in geographically difficult to reach areas. The gospel has not yet penetrated these far away places. Bhutan's dependence on India has increased the roads and traffic through the southern part of Bhutan. As a result of the increased contact many Sharchop are learning to speak Assamese and Hindi.

There is confusion on the classification of the Sharchop. The Monba in China are considered a part of the Sharchop but they speak a very different language. The Couna Monba people are distinct linguistically also. The Monpa people are a part of the Sharchop group living in Arunchal Pradesh. There are also a number of Sharchops living in Tibet.

The Sharchop are an agricultural society and often use the "slash and burn" method, so a large number of them will stay in an area for 4-5 years until the soil is depleted and then move on. But there are some who have settled in one area. Their houses are often built on stilts. As with most Bhutanese people their communities often revolve around the dzong. They also raise a type of cattle that is used in sacrificial ceremonies.

The Sharchop officially follow Buddhism but a large number of them practice many of their traditional beliefs. In addition to traditional Tibetan Buddhist practices, there is an emphasis placed on the unseen spiritual world. There are many magical ceremonies and superstitions. There are gods for the soil and for each household there are many sacrifices necessary to appease these gods. All diseases are believed to be caused by demons. Many Sharchop "bury" their dead in the river. They will cut the corpse into 108 parts and toss them into the river to be buried.

1230

Gurtu (150,967)

Alternate names for the Gurtu people include: Kurtop, Kurtopa, Kutokha, Kurtopakha, Kurthopka, Kurteopkha, Kurthopkha, Kurtobikha, and Kutobi Zhake. They speak Kurtop which is a language of the Lhuntse District. One-hundred percent of the Gurtu profess to be Tibetan Buddhist but only about 75% actually practice Buddhism. There are no Scriptures translated into their language. The Jesus Film, gospel recordings, and gospel broadcasts are not available in Kurtop.

The Gurtu live primarily in the Lhuntse District of Bhutan. It is very isolated. It is the ancestral home of the royal family and was formerly known as Kurtoe. Most of the income of this district comes from weaving done in families' homes. The kushuthara, which is a woman's dress, is the main article that the women of the district weave. It is woven using silk and involves a process in which the silk is dyed and then woven over a period of months with the progress of two inches per day. The weaving is done primarily in the winter months when the

women cannot work in the field. The women may continue the weaving in the growing season during the evening after a day of working in the field. The women are able to earn more income by learning the traditional weaving then by completing their education and getting a job.

Although Buddhism seems to be a very peaceful religion this district has seen a fair amount of death and destruction as Tibet mounted several attacks against this district. The 5th Dalai Lama was jealous of the Drukpas influence and thus attacked them around the middle of the 17th century. Families feel it is a great honor to send their sons to the monastery. There are no known Christians among the Gurtu.

1226

Gurung (pop. 47,177)

The Gurung of Bhutan speak Gurung. Some researchers separate Eastern and Western Gurung. Eastern Gurung are the predominate group in Bhutan. The New Testament and Jesus Film are available in Gurung but there is no Christian Radio Broadcasting in Gurung. They are considered unreached/least reached. There are more Gurung living in India, Nepal, and perhaps Bangladesh and Myanmar. Many times they are counted as Nepalese in censuses. It is difficult to clearly define the predominate religion of the Gurung.

They traditionally practiced shamanistic religion which has been highly influenced by Hinduism but many also follow Buddhist practices. As a general rule Gurung living in the valleys are predominantly Hindu, Gurung living in the higher regions tend to follow Buddhism. Between fifty and sixty percent profess to be Buddhist. The Gurung have been very resistant to the Gospel and those who have become Christian often face persecution.

The Gurung are a migrant community from the hills of central Nepal. In fact, 325,230 Gurung still live in Nepal. Their main occupation is terrace cultivation. They also do skilled and non-skilled labor in tea gardens, business, government service, and mining. Further, they are well known for their service in the British and Indian Gurka regiments. Soldiers send money home making many Gurung economically well off. Also, Gurung are “experts in playing musical instruments like the flute and *nagara*, and have rich oral traditions in the form of folktales with regard to the origin of man, the earth, moon, etc.” (Singh, 1153)

The Gurung living in Bhutan do not have access to enough good farm land as immigrants from Nepal are not allowed to live in the central inner Himalayan region. This has added to conflict between the ethnic Nepalis and the other people of Bhutan.

Their origin myth explains that “a king of the Surya (solar) dynasty broke with tradition by crowning his favorite younger son as his successor. As a result, the elder son, Lochan, left the kingdom to seek the life of an ascetic in the Himalayas. He took his wife, Kali, his priest, a slave, and their wives with him. On their journey their group was forced to seek shelter for a night in the company of two prostitutes. During the night, the prostitutes broke Lochan’s and the priest’s sacred threads, poured wine on the sleeping men’s lips and then fled. On waking, Lochan and the priest thought they had become drunk and had sexual relations with the prostitutes. Ashamed at their behavior, they continued on to the mountains where they

abandoned the usual customs of their upper-caste status. Over time, Lochan's wife gave birth to three sons named Ghale Mahan Gurung, Ghodane Mahan Gurung, and Lama Mahan Gurung, and a daughter. The priest fathered two sons-Lamechane Mahan Gurung and Plone Lamechane Gurung- and 3 daughters. The children of Lochan and the priest intermarried and their descendants form one of the two sub tribes of Gurungs, the *Char Jat* or "Four Clans" group. These clans are the Ghal, Ghodane, Lama, and Lamechane, in order of rank. The slave and his wife had 16 sons and 10 daughters. These married among themselves and were forerunners of the *Solah Jat* or "Sixteen clans" sub tribe. The Char Jat considers themselves superior to the Solah Jat" (Gall, 235).

The Gurung mix Buddhism and local animistic beliefs in their practice of Hinduism. They celebrate the Hindu festivals Tihar, Dasain (the Nepali form of Dasahara), and Baisakh (Vaisakh) Purnima. Also, they celebrate *Losar*, or Gurung New Year. "The Hindu Saraswati puja, which falls in early February, marks the beginning of the dance called *ghantu* which is unique to the Gurungs and the neighboring Magar tribe. Ghantu, which has both religious and social aspects, continues to be performed until the full moon that occurs in late April or early May, which marks the Baisakh Purnima festival" (Gall, 236).

The ghantu is a dance performed by virgin girls (the ghantu) who abstain from eating garlic and drinking alcohol during the period of the dance. The girls are believed to become possessed by ancestor spirits. The sati ghantu can only be performed between Saraswati Puja and Baisakh Purnima as described above. However, there is another form of the ghantu that can be performed at any time of the year. The sati ghantu tells the story of a "legendary king and queen of Gorkha, of the death of the king, and of the *sati* (burning on the funeral pyre) and resurrection of the queen" (Gall, 238). Another Gurung dance is called the *Sorathi*. This dance tells the story of a king with seven wives and no children. The youngest queen has a daughter, but the other queens are jealous and throw the baby girl into the river. The baby was rescued and raised by a fisherman and is reunited with her true family at the end of the dance.

The Gurung live in two-story houses of stone, cemented with mud. The second story is for storage and the bottom floor is for living. They do not have much furniture and squat on the floor. The roof is thatched or made of tile. There are usually 150 to 200 houses in a village. Most Gurung have a few sheep and some will hire a shepherd to tend them. Both men and women drink homemade and market-bought alcoholic drinks.

The Gurung observe the following rituals related to children: *nahuran* (bathing ceremony), *pasni* (rice feeding ceremony), and *chhaewar* (first hair cutting). The *nahuran* is celebrated on the 7th day after birth for a girl or the ninth day after birth for a boy. It involves the announcement of the baby's name and purification of the mother. The *pasni* is held five to six months after birth and is when the baby begins to eat solid food. The *chhaewar* is usually done when the child is 5 or 6 years old by the boy's maternal uncle with a lama or Brahman priest present. Following the *chhaewar* the boy can take part in all religious and social activities of the tribe.

Divorce, remarriage, polygamy, and junior levirate are allowed. *Pai* or *Arghun* (funeral ritual) is the most important ritual observed in Gurung society. "Immediately after death, a white

banner is raised on the roof of the house to inform the community of the death. Before rigor mortis (stiffening of the muscles) sets in, the body is placed into a seated posture in a box or a copper vessel. Both Lamas and the animist priests are called on to perform various funeral rites. The *klihbri* sacrifices a goat so that the blood offering may be made to buy passage of the deceased to heaven.

When the rites have been completed and family, relatives, and neighbors have paid their last respects to the deceased, the body is carried in procession to its last resting place. Corpses are disposed of by cremation, burial, or water burial. On their return journey, members of the funeral procession have to step over a fire burning in the road to prevent evil spirits from following them home. The funeral ritual is completed by an elaborate, and expensive, ceremony held one year later.

Astrologers determine an auspicious time for the ceremony, which lasts for 3 days and 2 nights. Activities include singing and dancing, the chasing away of devils with weapons such as *khukhris* (curved Gurka knives), and sacrifice of animals. An effigy (*pla*) of the deceased is made and dressed in clothes and ornaments. On the last day of the ceremony, the effigy is taken to the edge of the jungle, where the deceased is told that he or she should leave the living and depart to the land of his or her ancestors. The effigy is broken up and thrown away in the jungle. A purification ceremony and a feast mark the end of the funeral rites” (Gall, 237).

Education is highly valued among the Gurung and is seen as a “means to a desirable military career” (Gall, 238). As a result, their literacy rate is around 72% for males. However, the literacy rate for females is only 16%.

In addition to the usual sources this was used; Gall, Timothy L., ed. “Gurung” In *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life Volume 3 Asia and Oceania*. p 235-239

1231

Lepcha (40,219)

The Lepcha speak Lepcha and are considered to be predominately Animist. The Bible, *Jesus* Film, gospel recordings, and radio broadcasts are available. Fifty percent of the Lepchas in Bhutan follow Mun their traditional animistic religion, forty-five percent are Buddhist, and four percent are non-religious. Only one percent of the Lepcha in Bhutan profess to be Christians.

The Lepcha are originally from Sikkim a formerly independent kingdom which became a part of India in 1975. The Lepchas are often considered the original inhabitants of Sikkim. They call themselves Rong and their language they call Rongring, Lepcha is the name given them by their Nepali neighbors. Their language is very simple but expressive. The Lepcha script was derived from Tibetan script by King Chador of Sikkim.

The Lepcha believe their ancestors came from the area near Mt. Kanchenjunga called Mayel by the Lepchas. They have a story of creation and a story of a great flood in their traditions. They traditionally practiced an Animistic religion they called Mun. The religious

leaders are Boonthings and Muns. Mun involves worship to a family spirit and animal sacrifices. About three hundred years ago the Bhutia from Tibet came to Sikkim and introduced the Lepchas to Buddhism. They follow the "Red Hat" sect. Now many Lepchas practice an eclectic mix of Animism and Buddhism. These two practices are often contradictory, for example: Mun practices often demand animal sacrifice and Buddhism finds that practice a great sin, yet the two faiths are practiced together by the Lepchas.

The Lepcha are not allowed as immigrants to live in the central regions of Bhutan. Though the Lepchas have citizenship in Bhutan discrimination such as this has led to resentment. Most Lepcha living outside of Dzongu (an area in Sikkim that only allows Lepchas to own land within its borders) have adopted the language and lifestyle of their Nepalese neighbors. Illiteracy is a common problem among the Lepcha. A greater percentage of the Lepchas living in areas such as West Bengal, India profess to Christian than those living in Dzongu and Bhutan.

Most Lepchas are farmers and may also practice carpentry, spinning and weaving, but there is no division of labor between genders. Lepchas are very gentle and generally very quiet and shy people. There is virtually no murder or theft in Lepcha communities but alcoholism is a big problem in most Lepcha communities.

42388

Nepalese (Paharia) (283,063)

The primary language of the Nepalese living in Bhutan is Nepali. Most practice Hinduism. Buddhism and Hinduism in Nepal have affected each other immensely. The Bible, *Jesus* Film, gospel recordings, and radio broadcasts are all available in Nepali. Most Christians in Bhutan are among the ethnic Nepalese.

Most Nepalese are agriculturalists. They are the large minority group in Bhutan and many of them make up the Bhutanese refugees that are now living in India and Nepal. Some important festivals for many Nepalis include Dasain, in which the goddess Durga is worshipped for slaying the buffalo-demon Mahisha. This festival lasts ten days. Another important festival celebrated by many of the Buddhist Nepalis is Mani Rimdu, which is the masked dance.

00000

Nupbi (2,000)

The Nupbi are also known as Nupbhika. The Nupbi live in and near the town of Trongsa. It is in central Bhutan between two high mountain passes on the east and the west. The Nubphika language is closely related, maybe even a dialect of the Bumthang language. Despite the close relation linguistically the Nupbi do not consider themselves to part of the Bumthang people group.

The Nupbi profess to be 100% Tibetan Buddhists although probably only a little over half of them practice Tibetan Buddhism. They do follow the Tibetan ritual of sky burial in which a corpse is cut up and given to birds of prey. There is no portion of the scriptures available in

Nupbhikha. Neither the *Jesus Film*, nor gospel recordings, nor Christian broadcasting is available in Nupbhikha.

1235

Oraon (4,718)

The language of the Oraons is Kurukh although most are bilingual, they typically speak the local language as well as their traditional language. The Bible, Jesus Film, Gospel recordings, and radio broadcast are available in the language of the Oraon people.

Oraons follow a mixture of their traditional religion as well as Hinduism. Their traditional worship heavily involves elements of magic and traditional animistic beliefs. There have been practices of human sacrifice. It is thought that some human sacrifices still occur occasionally. There are some Christian Oraons but they only make up one-fifth of the total Oraon population throughout South Asia.

The Oraon people are one of the largest tribal groups in South Asia. Most live in the eastern-central part of India.

(Worldmark Encyclopedia)

42387

Rai (21,286)

Rai-Kura is their mother tongue. Most Rai will speak Nepali or Bhutanese, whatever the local language is. The Rai do not have the Bible, gospel recordings, the Jesus Film or radio broadcasts available in their traditional language, but most could understand a Nepali translation. Rai can be either Hindu or Buddhist but the majority of Bhutanese Rai practice Hinduism.

Rai tend to be of fairly short stature as are most people groups in this area. Most are non-vegetarian but avoid beef. Traditionally it is thought that Rai were hunters and gatherers in the past but many now own land and are engaged in terrace farming. Some have even begun pig-rearing and animal husbandry.

Marriages are usually arranged but other means are also practiced such as courtship or love marriages, and eloping. Married women will wear a necklace and also place vermilion powder in the part of their hair. Divorce and remarriage are generally acceptable and either party can initiate these. Cremation is generally practiced when one dies but if a child under the age of five dies they will be buried. Rai tend to have a favorable attitude toward education and therefore many girls and boys from Rai communities are educated through a college level.

1236

Sangla (167,715)

Alternate names of the Sangla people are: Tsangla, Tshangla, Cona Monba, and Monba, Moinba, Menba, Monpa, Mompā, Momba, Menpa, Membā, Southern Monba, Sarchagpakha, Sarchapkkha, Shachopkha, and Shachobiikha. Their primary language in Bhutan is Tshangla.

Eighty-percent of the Sangla people profess to be Buddhists. They follow Tibetan Buddhism but practice many shamanistic rituals. There are only portions of the Bible available in Tshangla, there are gospel recordings, the Jesus Film, and radio broadcasts available in Tshangla. Only .01% is known to be Christian among the Sangla.

The Sangla people are found in India, China and also Bhutan. The classification of the Sangla has caused confusion especially in China where they are known as the Monba. There are two very different groups that have been grouped together.

The Sangla people migrated from the southeast part of Tibet nearly 300 years ago. Those living in India say they have migrated from Bhutan. There are about 50,000 who now live in Arunchal Pradesh, India and 35,000 who live in Southern Tibet. In Bhutan, they are concentrated especially in the eastern and south-eastern portions of the country.

Many Sangla practice river burial in which a corpse is cut into and auspicious 108 pieces and thrown into a river. They practice many shamanistic rituals and believe that disease is caused by demons. They will sacrifice cattle and horses to pacify the demons. They believe that humans can be the demons that cause illness and some families may be demon families. By marrying into a demon family one becomes a demon thus demon families are only allowed to marry with other demon families. Each Sangla village has a 'god of the soil' and each home has god. These gods must not be offended.

The Sangla live in very remote places. Due to geographic reason most Sangla are virtually unreachable with the gospel. There are a few Sangla who have heard the gospel through gospel recordings and also the Jesus Film but only a very small percentage are known to be followers of Christ.

1237

Santal (16,512)

Santal people may also be known as the Munda- Santal which is a cluster of nine closely related groups. They are spread throughout India, Nepal and Bhutan. These groups are the Bhumij, Koda, Mahili, Ho, Agariya, Juango and the Gadaba. The first seven groups are those found further north in areas of Nepal, India, and Bhutan. The final two are found living closer to the Bay of Bengal.

The primary language spoken in Bhutan among the Santal people is Santali. The Bible, gospel recording, Jesus film and radio broadcasts are all available in Santali. The Santal people are primarily Hindu although many follow traditional religions.

Like most tribal groups in South Asia the Santal people have experienced a great deal of change over the past several years. The tribal culture is quickly changing as there is more emphasis on industrialization. Another thing that has greatly impacted many tribal groups is communication through the internet, satellite television, and radio.

Many Santal groups are Hindu while others follow animistic practices. It is interesting to note what Don Richardson wrote regarding the Munda-Santal people in his book *Eternity in Their Hearts*, they followed an ancient god, whom they referred to as “Genuine God.” They believed that he forgot them when they made an oath with the Maran Buru. Today many perform rituals to appease the spirits as well as worship Hindu deities.

Only a few of the Santal communities are being targeted by mission agencies. Those who have heard tend to be very responsive to the Gospel.

1238

Sherdukpen (4,718)

The Sherdukpa are also known as the Ngonk and speak a Tibeto-Burmese language, Sherdukpen. There are not yet any translations of the Bible, *Jesus* film, gospel recordings, or radio broadcasts in their language. Most Sherdukpen live in the Arunchal Pradesh state of Northeast India. Ninety-eight of them profess to Buddhists. In 1991 a census in Arunchal Pradesh showed that only about 13 claimed to be Christians at that time. About 80% of the Sherdukpen have never heard the gospel.

The Buddhist Lamas act as shaman priests for the Sherdukpen. They perform weddings and funerals. Arranged marriages are still common and the groom’s family traditionally paid a bride price to compensate the family for having raised a girl. Buddhist lamas are consulted to find the best time to be married.

42386

Sikkimese Bhotia (11,794)

The Sikkimese Bhotia people are of Tibetan descent. Their language, Sikkimese is of the Tibeto- Burman family. It shares 65% lexical similarity with Dzongkha and 42% with Tibetan. Most Sikkimese Bhotia people are Tibetan Buddhists. The majority of Sikkimese Bhotias claim to be Buddhists. The Bible, *Jesus* film, and radio broadcasts are not available in Sikkimese but there are gospel recordings available in Sikkimese.

The large majority of Sikkimese Bhotia people live in Sikkim, the northeast state of India that borders Nepal, Tibet, and Bhutan. They tend to live in high elevations. Many have migrated to Darjeeling and the surrounding areas in West Bengal which is a highly evangelized area of India. Still only about 200 are known to be Christian. Several Sikkimese Bhotia individuals who have decided to convert to Christianity have been excommunicated from their communities and families.

1239

Tibetan (5,190)

The Tibetans living in Bhutan are considered to be Central Tibetans. They speak Central Tibetan. Almost all are Tibetan Buddhists. There is a translation of the Bible, *Jesus* film, gospel recordings, and radio broadcasts available to them. There are only about 200 Christians among

the total population of Central Tibetans (1,044,500 approx. throughout China, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Switzerland, Taiwan, USA, Norway, France, Australia, UK, and New Zealand). Tibetans have long proven to be very resistant to the gospel. The Chinese invasion of Tibet led to stronger nationalistic feelings and stronger clinging to their traditional beliefs.

1240

Tseku (7,077)

Tseku is a language of Tibetan origin and most Tseku people may be classified under Tibetan groups. There are no translations of the Bible available in Tseku, no gospel recordings, no radio broadcasts, and no translation of the *Jesus* film.

Missiological Implications

1. Evangelical Christians should accept the fact that Bhutan is a Buddhist country and that evangelism will be in the face of strong governmental and social resistance. Foreigners are very restricted both in living and in visiting Bhutan. Evangelicals should maintain a strong commitment to pray for the bondage and oppression of Buddhism to be lifted in order for the people of Bhutan to hear and respond to the truth of the gospel. If the democratic form of government gives more power to the Buddhist religious leaders there could be an increased persecution of Christians.
2. Evangelical Christians and Churches should seek an indigenous approach to the peoples of Bhutan. So far the majority of Christians in Bhutan are ethnically Nepali and they have had a difficult time crossing the cultural barriers in order to share their faith.
3. Evangelicals should develop training centers to guide believers into the better ways of evangelizing followers of Buddhism and Hinduism. Pray that the few Bhutanese who know Christ will be disciplined in a manner that teaches them the importance of sharing the hope of salvation with their countrymen whether they are from a different tribal group or not.
4. Evangelical Christians and Churches should increase evangelistic efforts in the areas on the borders. India allows more religious freedom so work may be done among Bhutanese who are free to cross the border regularly.
5. Evangelical Christians and Churches should develop strategies and support plans to evangelize the many who practice traditional religion (animism). The Tesku (7000) Santal (16000), Sangla (170000), Oraon (5000), Dova (1600), Lepcha (40,000), Gurung (47,000) all are to some degree involved in Traditional Religion.
6. Evangelical Christians and Churches should continue serving through the openings provided by educational and healthcare services. Many of these organizations have since been taken over by the Bhutanese government but their Christian heritage will hopefully remain. The work of these Christian service groups has been closely watched in order to prevent conversions. Pray that in spite of the close government control on these institutions that the Bhutanese people would see the loving service of Christians and be attracted to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
7. Evangelical Christians and Churches should increase evangelistic efforts among those Bhutanese who live outside Bhutan, especially in the areas bordering India. Greater

freedom to evangelize exists in these areas and converts can carry the Message back into their land.

8. Evangelical Christians and Churches should come to the aid of Nepali populations who face persecution and stress and should seek to aid the growth of house churches and other small groups among this population. Signs of receptiveness have arisen in recent years.

few opportunities for foreigners to live in Bhutan and many of those opportunities are still in the areas of healthcare and education. Pray for the opportunities to be more abundant and for Christians to join in reaching these isolated people of the Himalayas.