

Chali

More than one thousand people belonging to the Chali ethnic group live in eastern Bhutan, the landlocked, mysterious Buddhist Himalayan kingdom. They inhabit a few villages in the Mongar (also spelled Monggar and Mongaa) District.

The linguist George van Driem has provided an extremely detailed description of where the Chali language is spoken. 'The Chali language is limited to a small area north of Mongar on the east bank of the Kurichu. At the southern end, the Chali speaking area proper begins north of Mongar at the Gangg'o La, which is just five kilometers [three miles] south of the village of Chali itself. The Chali speaking villages are Chali and neighboring Wangmakhar. The language is also spoken in the tiny hamlets surrounding these two villages. In the west, the Chali speaking area is bound by the Kurichu and in the north by the Threwenchu, a lateral tributary of the Kurichu. The easternmost Chali speaking hamlet is G'ortshom up on the ridge above Chali village. Outside of the Chali area proper, in the immediate vicinity of Tormazhong village in the Chocangacakha speaking area north of the Threwenchu, approximately one third of the households are also reported to be Chali speaking.'¹

Mongar is a small, nondescript town with a population of about 1,500 people. It sits on the top of a ridge and is protected from the wind by a row of large eucalyptus trees. Mongar proudly boasts one bank, a hospital and a post office. It also has a small Buddhist monastery, housing fifty or sixty monks, some of whom are young boys not yet in their teens. Although the town



itself is of minor interest to visitors, the area has strikingly beautiful scenery, as does most of Bhutan.

The Chali language is different from all other Eastern Tibetan varieties spoken in Bhutan. One source notes, 'The Chali area is bound to the north and west by the Chocangacakha speaking area, and to the south and east by the Tsangla speaking area. . . . Chali has a massive component of loan vocabulary resulting from its location at the crossroads of Tsangla and Chocangacakha speaking areas as well as from historical circumstances.'²

Tibetan Buddhism has been the dominant religion in Bhutan since its reported introduction in AD 746, when 'Sendha Gyab, the king of Bumthang, had a conflict with another Indian king in the south of Bhutan. As a result of this dispute, Sendha Gyab became possessed by a demon, and it required a powerful tantric master to exorcise it. The greatest

master was the teacher Padmasambhava, better known as Guru Rimpoche (precious master). . . . After an extended process involving trickery and magic dances, the guru captured the demon and converted it to Buddhism. For good measure, he also converted the king and his rival, restoring the country to peace. . . . The first visit of Guru Rimpoche to Bumthang is recognized as the true introduction of Buddhism to Bhutan.'³

There are no known Christians among the Chali people. Few have ever heard the gospel in a meaningful manner.



Population:
1,250 (2000)
1,600 (2010)
2,050 (2020)
Countries: Bhutan
Buddhism: Tibetan
Christians: none known

Overview of the Chali

Other Names: Chalikha, Tshali, Chalipkha, Tshalingpa

Population Sources:

1,000 in Bhutan (2001, G van Driem [1991 figure])

Language: Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Himalayish, Tibeto-Kanauri, Tibetic, Tibetan, Eastern

Dialects: 0

Professing Buddhists: 100%

Practising Buddhists: 45%

Christians: 0%

Scripture: none

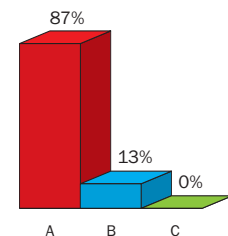
Jesus film: none

Gospel Recordings: none

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: TGF

Status of Evangelization



A = Have never heard the gospel
B = Have heard the gospel but have not become Christians
C = Are adherents to some form of Christianity