Lap

Population:
10,000 (2000)
12,800 (2010)
16,500 (2020)
Countries: Bhutan
Buddhism: Tibetan
Christians: none known

Overview of the Lap

Other Names: Lakha, Tshangkha, Lakhapa

Population Sources:

8,000 in Bhutan (2001, G van Driem [1991 figure])

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

Dialects: 0

Professing Buddhists: 100%

Practising Buddhists: 75%

Christians: 0%

Scripture: none

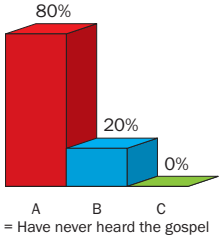
***Jesus* film:** none

Gospel Recordings: none

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: LKH

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

More than 10,000 people belonging to the Lap ethnic group inhabit central areas of the Himalayan Buddhist kingdom of Bhutan. Their language is called Lakha. Little is known about this group, except that they inhabit the eastern part of Wangdue Phodrang District (called Wangdi Phodra on some maps), spilling over into the northern areas of Trongsa District. This group is called Lap ('inhabitants of the mountain passes'), or Lakhapa ('people who speak the Lakha language').


Dwayne Graybill

One scholar has noted, 'The Brokpas of Saphu Geo speak a dialect which they call Lakha, literally the "language of the mountain passes" . . . Saphu Geo is situated in . . . the north of the Black Mountains, south of the lofty white peaks of Gangkar Kunzang which separate Bhutan from Tibet. Lakha speaking villages of Saphu include B'uso, Langbji, Brabrak, Dzeri, Darilo, Wangdigom, Rabu, Kumbu, Bati, Nakha, Sekta and Thanya. There are an estimated 1,250 Lakha speaking households in [Saphu] Geo with some 8,000 speakers.'[1] The imposing Gangkar Kunzang (also known as Gangkar Puensum) is a perennially snowcapped peak standing 7,541 metres (24,734 ft.) above sea level.

Tibetan Buddhism is the state religion of Bhutan, and all Lap families follow it. On a local level, spirit appeasement still holds great influence in the people's daily lives. Many 'believe that, when they appear for judgment in the period between death and rebirth, a chicken will put white pebbles onto a scale to represent their good deeds, while a pig shovels on black pebbles to signify evil one has done. Thus almost any Bhutanese will happily eat pork. . . . In this perilous time after death, pious Buddhists believe, one's spirit can influence its emergence into a higher life or bring on the disaster of rebirth on a lower plane.'[2]

There are no known Christians among the Lap people of Bhutan. The gospel has struggled to make an impact on this remarkable nation. Few Christian missiologists are aware that the 'father of modern missions', William Carey, visited Bhutan in March 1797, less than four years after his arrival and commencement of missionary work in India. 'In March of 1797, Carey and a friend visited Bhutan, probably with a view towards beginning mission work there. Though favorably received by local officials, Carey's hopes to begin a mission in Bhutan were not realized, and he was forced to remain in his already established work in Bengal.'[3] For the next 163 years, the doors to Christian witness in Bhutan remained firmly closed. In 1960, after Bhutan ended its isolationist policy, several mission groups entered the country. The Leprosy Mission and the Norwegian Santal Mission were invited to set up hospitals in the 1960s and 1970s. Both groups were asked to leave the country after a period of fruitful labour. A 2002 report on Bhutan said, 'In recent years, the growth of Christianity has been seen as a threat to social harmony, and many related debates have taken place in the National Assembly. The possibility of Christian agencies being able to work in Bhutan seems as remote as ever.'[4]