

Nupbi



Population:

2,000 (2000)
2,550 (2010)
3,250 (2020)

Countries: Bhutan

Buddhism: Tibetan

Christians: none known

More than 2,000 people belonging to the Nupbi ethnic group live in and around the town of Trongsá in central Bhutan. Trongsá is the capital of the district of the same name. One source describes Trongsá as ‘smack in the middle of the country, separated from both the east and the west by high mountain passes. The town has had a large influx of immigrants from Tibet, and Bhutanese of Tibetan descent run most shops here. The Tibetans are so well assimilated into Bhutanese society that there is almost no indication of Tibetan flavor in the town.’¹

2003, two young American travellers stumbled across a Tibetan sky burial ceremony. They reported, ‘We have witnessed a lot of wild stuff in the last week. We went to a sky burial, and it was the worst thing we have ever seen. As we came closer to a rock formation we started seeing the worst sight ever. Clothes were scattered all over the hillside then I spotted a human skull, then as we got near the rocks, dozens of skulls, spinal columns, rib cages, skull caps, legs, arms and every other body part. We were in the middle of hundreds of bones, with no one around. We looked at the hillside 100

The Nupbi people speak a language that is closely related to Bumthang. The Bumthang live further east than the Nupbi, with the western extent of their territory extending to Trongsá. A linguistic report states, ‘The dialect spoken in Trongsá, called



Dwayne Graybill

feet away and saw at least 80 vultures sitting and waiting. They were at least four feet high each one of them. We came back at daybreak. Two monks walked up the hill to the site and later a truck came with four men in it. They dumped a bag and out of it fell a dead naked old woman, shaved head, and frozen stiff. They tied her neck to a one-foot stake and cut into her back. The monks chanted mantras, and the other men screamed a horrible scream that I will never forget. The hillside of vultures began to stir as the men cut a piece from

Nupbikha, a descriptive term which essentially denotes no more than “language of the west”, is linguistically a dialect of Bumthang, although the speakers do not feel themselves to be Bumthangpas.² Nupbi is part of the Eastern Tibetan branch of the Tibeto-Burman family. Their language ‘appears to be archaic in that they preserve initial clusters which do not even occur in Classical Tibetan’.³

the woman’s back, threw it in the air and screamed like a vulture’s scream. Then in a fury like demons, 50 vultures swooped down from the hills screaming and yelling like Satan himself. They tore into the body and within seconds bowels, body parts, and blood were everywhere. It was horrible. The men smashed the spinal column with a hatchet and the brains were offered to the vultures like an offering. . . .⁴

Being Tibetan Buddhists, the Nupbi practise sky burial, in which the dead person’s corpse is taken to the top of a hill, brutally cut into pieces with an axe and left for the vultures and other birds of prey to devour. In

There has never been a Christian community among the Nupbi people. For centuries their ancestors have lived and died without the slightest knowledge of the gospel, their bodies devoured by birds of prey.

Overview of the Nupbi

Other Names: Nupbikha

Population Sources:

2,000 in Bhutan (2000, P Hattaway)

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

Dialects: 0

Professing Buddhists: 100%

Practising Buddhists: 65%

Christians: 0%

Scripture: none

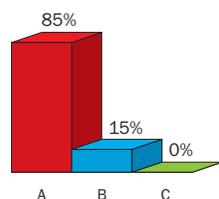
Jesus film: none

Gospel Recordings: none

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: NUB

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