

Approximately 9,000 Lhomi people live in the three countries of Nepal, India and China (Tibet). The majority are found in Nepal, where they inhabit six villages 'on the steep slopes of the upper Arun above Hedanna in Sankhuva

Sabha district as far as the Tibetan border, e.g. in the villages of Cyamtan and Kimathanka'.<sup>1</sup> The Samkhuva Sabha (also spelled Sankhwasawa) District is within the Koshi Zone in eastern Nepal. In recent years some Lhomi men have moved down to Kathmandu, where they work as labourers and builders. In India, 1,000 Lhomi people 'live in the famous tea-growing and tourist region of Darjeeling'.<sup>2</sup>

In 1976 there were reportedly more than 4,000 Lhomi people living in Nepal.<sup>3</sup> No updated figure has been published since that time, as the Lhomi do not officially exist as a distinct entity in the view of all three governments in the countries where they live. In Nepal the Lhomi are officially considered part of the Sherpa ethnic group. In China, the more than 1,500 Lhomi have been included as part of the Tibetan nationality, while in India they have been combined with other Buddhists to form the Bhotia tribe.

The self-name of this group is *Shingsaba*. One linguist notes, 'The Shingsaba or Lhomi are a Himalayan Bodish group with a distinct language. Not much is known about the language, but judging by what little I have heard of Shingsaba, the language seems rather unlike a Tibetan dialect. In Tibetan the people go by the name Lhomi

'southerner', and in Nepali they are known by names such as *Kath Bhote* 'wood Tibetan' and *Lama Bhote*'.<sup>4</sup> The Lhomi language, which is part of the Central Bodic branch of Tibeto-Burman, is not closely related to any other

languages in this part of the Himalayas. Their nearest linguistic relatives are Baragaunle and Dolpo (with which they share 69% lexical similarity). They also share 68 per cent with Loba; 66 per cent with Walung; 65 per cent with Lhasa Tibetan and Kyerung; 64 per cent with Kutang Bhotia; 60 per cent with Helambu Sherpa; 58 per cent with Sherpa and 57 per cent with Jirel.<sup>5</sup>

Although most Lhomi claim to follow Tibetan Buddhism, their practices have been described as 'unrefined Buddhism . . . Their shamans (animistic priests) are as active as the Buddhist lamas. Although animal sacrifice is abhorrent to orthodox Buddhists, the Lhomis make several ritual animal sacrifices during the year.'<sup>6</sup> Before the millet is planted in September, the Lhomi kill three sheep to placate the patron deity of their village.

In recent years, approximately 300 Lhomi in Nepal have become Christians. They are now sending evangelists to

other tribes in the area. Faithful believers laboured for years to translate the Scriptures for the Lhomi. In 1976 Bible portions were first printed, and the entire New Testament became available in 1995—a rare occurrence in this part of the world for such a numerically small group. Due to the large Christian presence in Darjeeling, north-east India, 'many Lhomi there have some awareness of the gospel, and a few have believed in Christ. . . . Despite the existence of Lhomi Christians in Nepal and India, it has proven difficult for the gospel to spread to their counterparts in Tibet, due to the political situation there and the tightly controlled borders.'<sup>7</sup>



Gospel Recordings Nepal



**Population:**  
8,670 (2000)  
10,290 (2010)  
12,490 (2020)

**Countries:** Nepal, China, India

**Buddhism:** Tibetan

**Christians:** 300

## Overview of the Lhomi

**Other Names:** Lhoket, Shing Saapa, Kathe Bhote, Kar Bhote, Singsawa, Shingsaba

### Population Sources:

4,000 in Nepal (1976, O Vesalainen and M Vesalainen)  
1,000 in China (1992, B Grimes [1985 figure])  
1,000 in India (1992, B Grimes [1985 figure])

**Language:** Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Himalayish, Tibeto-Kanauri, Tibetic, Tibetan, Central

### Dialects:

**Professing Buddhists:** 80%

**Practising Buddhists:** 40%

**Christians:** 3.5%

**Scripture:** New Testament 1995; Portions 1976

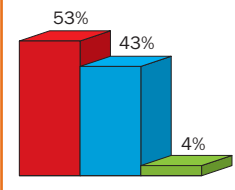
**Jesus film:** none

**Gospel Recordings:** Lhomi

**Christian Broadcasting:** none

**ROPAL code:** LHM

## 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