

Approximately 30,000 Sikkimese people inhabit all four districts of Sikkim, but they are concentrated in North Sikkim District near the Chinese border. 'They live in hilly terrain, of high altitude and cold climate, where there is high rainfall with medium snowfall and high humidity with dense forests.'<sup>1</sup> A migrant community of Sikkimese has moved down into the Darjeeling District of West Bengal. The 1981 census in India returned 22 Sikkimese Bhotia people living in Tripura State.

The Sikkimese are among the most complicated Buddhist groups profiled in this book. The Indian government has granted 'Scheduled Tribe' status to the 'Bhotia' tribe, but this is 'a generic term for several groups of people inhabiting the ranges along the snowy peaks of the Himalayas'.<sup>2</sup> The term Bhotia comes from *Bhot*, or *Bod*, the traditional name for people of Tibetan origin. The groups combined by the Indian authorities include many different ethnicities and languages, ranging from Jammu and Kashmir in north-west India all the way across to Arunachal Pradesh in north-east India.<sup>3</sup> In what follows here we are referring to people in the state of Sikkim who now have a sense of common identity and who speak the Sikkimese language.<sup>4</sup> These groups include 'the Chumipa (people from the Chumbi valley), Dhopthapa (inhabitants of Dhopta), Trompa or Do-mu-pa (inhabitants of Do-mu), Lachengpa (people of Lacheng valley) and Lachungpa (people of Lachung valley)'.<sup>5</sup> The Drukpa (people who originated in Bhutan) living in Sikkim are often considered part of this group, but



we have profiled the Drukpa separately in this book. The various ethnic segments of the Sikkimese migrated into the state at various times throughout history, including a recent influx of refugees from Tibet since the Chinese occupation in the 1950s. People from all different communities come together to celebrate Buddhist festivals and holidays, which creates good unity and relationships between them.

The Sikkimese language is part of the Tibeto-Burman family. It shares 65 per cent lexical similarity with Dzongkha of Bhutan and just 42 per cent with Tibetan.<sup>6</sup> Being of Tibetan origin, it is not surprising that the Sikkimese people strongly believe in Tibetan Buddhism. The 1981 census returned 98.21 per cent of Sikkimese Bhotia as followers of Buddhism, 1.42 per cent as Hindus, 0.34 per cent as Christians and the rest as Muslims.

Today approximately 200 Sikkimese have believed in Jesus Christ—just 0.7 per cent of their population. About 100 Sikkimese Christians live inside Sikkim, while others live in the heavily-evangelized Darjeeling area in West Bengal. Some of those who have decided to follow Christ have been excommunicated from their villages. One source states, 'The Sikkimese Bhotia have portions of the Bible available in their own language, and there are eight missions agencies currently targeting them. Intercession and increased missions efforts are still needed. The small number of believers (about 1 per cent) need discipleship materials to encourage and strengthen them in their Christian walk.'<sup>7</sup>



**Population:**  
28,600 (2000)  
33,300 (2010)  
38,900 (2020)

**Countries:** India  
**Buddhism:** Tibetan  
**Christians:** 200

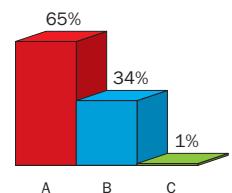
## Overview of the Sikkimese

**Other Names:** Sikkim Bhotia, Sikkimese Bhotia, Sikkim Bhotia, Dandzongka, Danjongka, Danyouka, Denjongb, Denjongkha, Denjongpa, Denjonke, Denjonka, Lachengpa, Lachungpa, Sikami, Bhotia, Bhutia, Lhori

**Population Sources:**  
28,600 in India (2000, B Grimes [1996 figure])  
**Language:** Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Himalayish, Tibeto-Kanauri, Tibetic, Tibetan, Southern

**Dialects:** 0  
**Professing Buddhists:** 98%  
**Practising Buddhists:** 85%  
**Christians:** 0.7%  
**Scripture:** none  
**Jesus film:** none  
**Gospel Recordings:** Sikkimese  
**Christian Broadcasting:** none  
**ROPAL code:** SIP

## 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