

Tamang, Southwestern

Approximately 140,000 Southwestern Tamang people live in the *terai* (plains of southern Nepal), especially in the Chitwan area of Nayayani Zone, western Makwanpur District, as well as areas south and southeast of these districts. The Southwestern Tamang language also extends into the western part of Kathmandu District in Bagmati Zone. There is also a group of Tamang living across the border in the Dehra Dun area of the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. They say they came from Tamgalu-ijn in Nepal in the late 1700s. Today only the elderly Tamang in Uttar Pradesh can still speak their mother tongue—the rest use Nepali and Hindi.

The Southwestern Tamang in Nepal have been more exposed to outside influence than any other Tamang group. Consequently, they are in the process of assimilation to Hindu culture and religion and are losing many of their ancient and colourful traditions. One source notes: 'The Tamang language, culture and traditions are rich. They were already described as a powerful nation in historic inscriptions going as far back as the third century,



attesting to their ancient civilization. They are Buddhists, and their script originates from Tibetan. . . . The archives of Tamang religious scriptures are rich, varied and vast, [with their] categorizations of royal priests, raconteurs of history and other scholastic divisions of labor.¹

One of the primary locations of this group is the Chitwan District. The area is famous for the Royal Chitwan National Park, which is home to more than 400 rhinos and 80 tigers, as well as leopards, crocodiles, deer, monkeys, 50 other species of mammals and over 400 different types of birds. Chitwan is a precious refuge for these wild animals amidst an area of dense popula-

tion, searing heat and sickening pollution. In 1973 the rhino population had fallen to 100 and there were only 20 tigers left, but Nepali government intervention has since ensured that their numbers have increased, much to the delight of the thousands of tourists who visit Chitwan every year.

Although many Southwestern Tamang still profess Buddhism as their religion, Hinduism is making rapid inroads at its expense. Christianity has also experienced explosive growth in recent years. This growth is not without problems and lack of understanding, however. One evangelist was summoned to pray for a woman suffering from acute stomach pain. 'As he approached the house he heard what

sounded like someone beating on a drum. The village was essentially animist and he assumed the witch doctor, renowned for his drum-beating antics, had arrived ahead of him. Upon entering the house, however, he saw that it was not the witch doctor but the woman's husband, who was fervently beating her on the head with his Bible. "In the name of Jesus be healed," he chanted between the blows. After explaining correct Biblical doctrine for praying over the sick, he asked the woman how she felt. Though she had been in agony before her husband's unorthodox beating, she could now stand and said the pain was gone. "Are you alright?" the evangelist asked. "No," she replied. "I have a headache."²



Population:
132,400 (2000)
163,900 (2010)
202,900 (2020)
Countries: Nepal, India
Buddhism: Tibetan
Christians: 7,000

Overview of the Southwestern Tamang

Other Names: Murmi, Nishung, Lama, Tamanglama

Population Sources:
109,051 in Nepal (2000, B Grimes [based on 1991 census])
also in India

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

Dialects: 0

Professing Buddhists: 50%

Practising Buddhists: 20%

Christians: 5.3%

Scripture: none

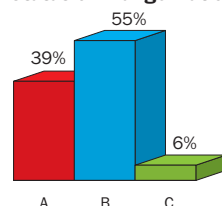
Jesus film: none

Gospel Recordings: none

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: TSF

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