

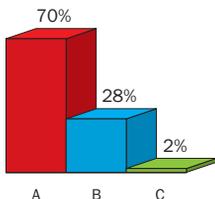


Population:
 23,900 (2000)
 29,600 (2010)
 36,700 (2020)
Countries: Nepal, China, India
Buddhism: Tibetan
Christians: 300

Overview of the Thami

Other Names: Thangmi
Population Sources:
 19,103 in Nepal (1991 census)
 460 in China (2000, P Hattaway)
 280 in India (2001, FMC South Asia)
Language: Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Himalayish, Tibeto-Kanauri, Western Himalayish, Eastern
Dialects: 2 (Eastern Thami, Western Thami)
Professing Buddhists: 55%
Practising Buddhists: 20%
Christians: 1.3%
Scripture: none
Jesus film: none
Gospel Recordings: Thami
Christian Broadcasting: none
ROPAL code: THF

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

The 1991 Nepal census listed 19,103 Thami people,¹ living in the Dolakha District of Janakpur Zone and the Sindhu Palchok District of Bagmati Zone in Nepal.² More than 100 Thami villages are dispersed over a distance of three days' walk, or approximately 40 miles, in the hills of east-central Nepal.³ Several hundred Thami also live across the border in Zhangmu County, Tibet. The Thami were originally a nomadic tribe who settled east of Kathmandu. Their legends state that the first Thami couple gave birth to seven sons and seven daughters. In order to find suitable marriage partners, they were allowed to marry each other.⁴ In recent years some Thami have migrated to the state of Sikkim in India in search of jobs.⁵

were not allowed to possess any land before 1995. In recent years many Thami families have stopped work as stonecutters and carriers, after they came to see that families engaged in this occupation slowly became extinct, as the family members died prematurely from the work.⁷ Many Thami women wear large gold earrings and nose rings. Some still wear traditional *labaedas*—clothing made from plants that are beaten and woven together.⁸ The main diet of the Thami is fish and a porridge made with maize flour.

The religious adherence of the Thami is 'not purely Hindu or Buddhist. They worship deities which are not at all in any of the major religions. They tend towards Buddhism though they use the rituals of



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the Hindu religion in their marriage ceremonies.⁹ Three days after the birth of a child, 'the house is cleaned with cow dung and water. The people are sprinkled

The Thami language is one of the few from the so-called Eastern Himalayish branch of Tibeto-Burman. Linguist Mark Turin has recently written many excellent linguistic and ethnographic studies on the Thami.⁶ Thami is related to the Baraamu language of Nepal, a group of approximately 7,000 people—mostly animists and Hindus—who live in Nepal's Gandaki Zone. Thami, which does not have its own script, is still spoken in all Thami homes in Nepal, while Nepali is used for communication with outsiders.

Many Thami men in Nepal are employed as stonecutters. Their work is backbreaking and poorly paid. Neighbouring groups have taken advantage of the Thami for centuries, oppressing them and forcing them to live a hand-to-mouth existence. The Thami

with cow urine to purify them. The baby is then named in accordance with the day of birth.¹⁰

Between 20 and 30 Thami people in Nepal received Christ in 1993 after listening to gospel recordings in their language.¹¹ Christian workers reported an 'open heaven' as the Thami in Nepal eagerly received the message of salvation. The believers meet in a small church building. In 1997, when a missionary visited an elderly Thami Buddhist monk, the former found that his arrival was expected. The monk explained to the surprised visitor: 'I had a vision two years ago that a foreigner would come and give me a little golden book about the truth. I have been praying and watching each day. I know you are that man.'¹²