

According to one study, 'The Yakha are a tribal group of almost 26,000 people living in nearly 600 villages throughout the mountains of eastern Nepal. They are found throughout the Koshi Zone but are primarily just south of the city of Chainpur.'<sup>1</sup> Yakha communities are spread across the Tehrathum, Sankuwasawa and Dhankuta districts within Koshi Zone. From one end of their territory in Nepal to the other is a distance of approximately 80 kilometres (49 mi.). Other sources list between 8,000 and 10,000 speakers of the Yakha language in Nepal.<sup>2</sup>

because of their exposure to Nepalese and Indian culture.<sup>17</sup> Buddhist influence is strongest among the Yakha in the Sankhuwasaba District, but it is more diluted the further south they are found.

Not only are the different accounts of the Yakha's religion confusing, but also a great variety of opinion exists on the status of Christianity among them. One source claims, 'Many Yakhas have heard the name of Jesus, and received Christian literature, but have not yet understood the message of the cross and Christianity. There are about



**Population:**  
35,260 (2000)  
43,200 (2010)  
53,000 (2020)  
**Countries:** Nepal, India  
**Buddhism:** Tibetan  
**Christians:** 900



Nancy Sturrock

A migrant community of Yakha has moved to north-east India. Approximately 4,900 live in the Darjeeling District of West Bengal and 960 in Sikkim.<sup>3</sup> The majority of Yakha people in West Bengal believe in Hinduism, whereas almost all Yakha in Sikkim are Buddhists. One source says, 'There are a few of them scattered in all the districts of Sikkim. . . . Their natural environment is hilly terrain, moderately cold, humid, and without snowfall.'<sup>4</sup>

The Yakha language is one that fascinates scholars. It appears to be related to Rai and Limbu, yet it has features that are distinctive from both. Yakha is part of the Eastern Kiranti branch of the Tibeto-Burman family.<sup>5</sup> There are conflicting reports regarding the religious beliefs of the Yakha. One source says, 'They are traditionally animists, but have adopted many of the Hindu customs and beliefs.'<sup>6</sup> Another states, 'Most identify themselves as Buddhists. A few have embraced Hindu customs and beliefs

750 believers scattered throughout Yakha villages, which is about 3 per cent of the total Yakha population.'<sup>8</sup>

A second report gives a less enthusiastic appraisal of the gospel among this group. 'Christianity is considered a low-caste or foreign religion. As a result, many Yakha are very anti-Christian and would excommunicate from their communities any who become Christian. This kind of threatened separation from the tribe is a formidable barrier to most in the Yakha culture. . . .

One key to reaching the Yakha with the gospel, however, may be their desire and deep respect for traits such as honesty and kindness. Believers who have opportunities to live Christ-filled lives before the Yakha may be able to gain their respect and point them to the Author of Life.'<sup>9</sup> Among the Yakha in India, 'some have recently become Christianized. They are those who know the least about their language, culture and ethnic feelings.'<sup>10</sup>

## Overview of the Yakha

**Other Names:** Yakkha, Yakkhaba, Yakkhaba Cea, Yakkhaba Sala, Dewansala, Roi, Yakhomba

**Population Sources:**  
29,400 in Nepal (1997, Bethany World Prayer Center [2000 figure])

5,860 in India (2001, FMC South Asia)

**Language:** Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Himalayish, Mahakiranti, Kiranti, Eastern

**Dialects:** 3 (Northern Yakha, Southern Yakha, Eastern Yakha)

**Professing Buddhists:** 55%

**Practising Buddhists:** 20%

**Christians:** 3%

**Scripture:** none

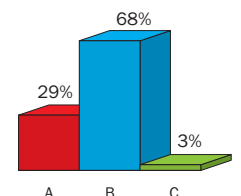
**Jesus film:** none

**Gospel Recordings:** Yakha

**Christian Broadcasting:** none

**ROPAL code:** YBH

## 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