

# Gurung, Eastern

More than a quarter of a million Eastern Gurung people live in the Gandaki Zone of central Nepal. They primarily inhabit the Lamjung, Tanahu and western Gorkha districts and possibly also Manang District. The homeland of the Eastern Gurung consists of rolling hills and mountain slopes, averaging between 1,500 to 3,000 metres (4,920 to 9,840 ft.) above sea level. After the Gorkha conquest, Gurung people spread far from their homeland into southern Bhutan and north-east India.<sup>1</sup> A small number may also live in Bangladesh.<sup>2</sup>

The name *Gurung* is believed to come from *gu* ('nine') *rong* ('chiefs'), who formed a confederacy in Gandaki many centuries ago. However, 'The term Gurungs use for themselves is *Tamu*. It is a tonal variation of one used by their neighbours, the Tamang, and may be simply rendered as 'highlander' (*ta* = up, *mu* = people).'<sup>3</sup>

The Eastern Gurung were not counted separately in the 1991 Nepal census, but were part of an overall figure of 449,189 people in the Gurung ethnic group, which includes the Western Gurung, three Ghale language groups and possibly others.<sup>4</sup> Out of the 449,189 Gurung in 1991, there were

227,918 (slightly more than half) who could still speak a Gurung language. Gurung people of all ages are bilingual in Nepali. The Eastern and Western Gurung languages have diverged. Today, speakers of the two varieties are able to make simple conversation, but 'do not have adequate intelligibility to handle complex and abstract discourse'.<sup>5</sup>

There are conflicting reports regarding the origins of the Gurung. Some say their ancestors came from Tibet, which would explain why their language is part of the Tibeto-Burman family, while others say their ancestors came from India. Today, most Eastern Gurung are farmers, growing their crops on hillsides.<sup>6</sup> One source notes, 'Most of them are very poor. The meager amount of food that they are able to produce is barely enough to sustain them. Their main food sources are millet, maize and some rice. They also raise soybeans, grains and strong beans.'<sup>7</sup>

The religious belief systems of the Eastern Gurung are complicated. Originally they were shamanists, before being converted to Tibetan Buddhism. Since the encroachment of the Hindu world into their area in the 18th century, the Gurung have gradually become Hinduized. Their religious beliefs are therefore a mixture of Buddhism, Hinduism and shamanism. Generally speaking, those Gurung living in the lowlands and towns are more Hindu, while those in mountain communities are more Buddhist.

The gospel has encountered strong opposition from the Gurung people. The small numbers of Gurung Christians today have faced beatings and other persecution. 'The vast majority of Gurungs have little or no concept of who God is and have never even heard the name of

Jesus. In many Gurung villages they outwardly persecute and harass Christians. Often, however, Gurungs show an interest when the gospel is shared and many are open to listen and ask questions.'<sup>8</sup>



Nancy Sturrock



## Population:

251,200 (2000)  
311,000 (2010)  
385,100 (2020)

**Countries:** Nepal, India, Bhutan, possibly Bangladesh

**Buddhism:** Tibetan

**Christians:** 200

## Overview of the Eastern Gurung

**Other Names:** Gurung, Gurun, Tamu, Daduwa

**Population Sources:**  
207,000 in Nepal (1991, P Hattaway)

105,000 speakers in Nepal (1991 census)

also in India, Bhutan and possibly Bangladesh

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

**Dialects:** 3 (Lamjung Gurung, Gorkha Gurung, Tamu Kyi)

**Professing Buddhists:** 60%

**Practising Buddhists:** 15%

**Christians:** 0.1%

**Scripture:** none

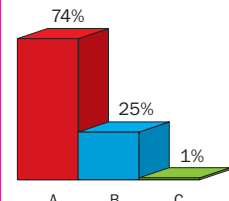
**Jesus film:** available (Gurung)

**Gospel Recordings:** Gurung: Eastern, Gurung: Gorkha, Gurung: Lamjung

**Christian Broadcasting:** none

**ROPAL code:** GGN

## 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