

# Mugali

A 1998 study listed a population of 3,557 Mugali people in north-west Nepal.<sup>1</sup> Their homeland, which can only be reached by foot, is one of the most remote of any Buddhist group in the world. The Mugali inhabit 13 villages in the Mugu Kara area of the Mugu District of Karnali Zone.<sup>2</sup> The main village of Mugu is located 3,400 metres (11,150 ft.) above sea level. The Mugali comprise only about one-tenth of the total population in their district, which is just 30 kilometres (19 mi.) from the Chinese border. To get to Mugu, visitors must 'climb out of the Karan valley and move along the base of a narrow gorge to the north-west of Mount Syanan. At an altitude of approximately 11,500 feet this gorge widens into a V-shaped, rock-strewn valley. It is a quarter mile wide at this point . . . with the east and west being hemmed in by rockslides which are joined to the steep sides of the mountains, which reach a height of almost 19,000 feet. Mugu village lies at the bottom of this valley

on the left hand side of the Mugu River.<sup>3</sup>

Small, scattered groups of Mugali people also live in the districts of Jumla, Dolpa, Surket, Baihang and Bajura.

Mugali homes are quite unique. They construct three-storey houses out of stone and wood. 'The flat roofs are made of wood, then covered with a mud mixture. Each storey consists of a single room with no windows. There is a door on each floor and there are small holes in the walls for ventilation. The ground floor, called the *goth*, is where livestock is kept. The next level, or *chhipra*, contains their store of grain and salt. The upper floor, or *koga*, is used as a living room and kitchen. A notched ladder provides access between floors.'<sup>4</sup>

There is a wide economic disparity between the Mugali people living in Mugu town and those in the small surrounding hamlets. Many Mugu residents are traders who sell and barter goods in the bazaars of north-west Nepal and across the border into Tibet. They live in relative comfort compared to the Mugali farmers, whose land is undeveloped and poor. The neighbours of the Mugali have a saying, "Mugali people prosper on trade; otherwise, they are paupers". . . . They used to maintain large herds of yak, sheep and goats but their numbers have declined after the access to Tibetan pastures was blocked.<sup>5</sup>

All Mugali people follow Tibetan Buddhism. They are closely tied culturally and ethnically to Tibet. 'Most village priests are married agriculturists, not the typical monks you would expect to see. They mainly worship the god named "Chomdendae" which is a four-legged creature holding a flower and a prayer rosary.'<sup>6</sup>



Gospel recordings are available in the Kham dialect of Mugali, but this resource has not been used much. There are no known Mugali Christians. One source laments, 'Only a very small percentage of Mugalis have ever heard the name of Jesus and the vast majority have had no exposure at all to the gospel message. They are very open and friendly to outsiders, but are also highly protective of their cultural and religious identity. . . . It is difficult to determine their receptivity because so little Christian work has been done amongst them.'<sup>7</sup>



**Population:**  
3,700 (2000)  
4,610 (2010)  
5,700 (2020)  
**Countries:** Nepal  
**Buddhism:** Tibetan  
**Christians:** none known

## Overview of the Mugali

**Other Names:** Mugu, Mug'um, Khan, Mugali Tamang

**Population Sources:**  
3,557 in Nepal (2000, B Grimes [1998 figure])

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

**Dialects:** 1 (Mugali Kham)

**Professing Buddhists:** 100%

**Practising Buddhists:** 75%

**Christians:** 0%

**Scripture:** none

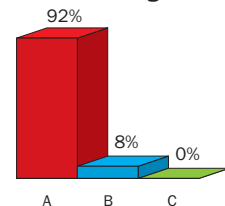
**Jesus film:** none

**Gospel Recordings:** Kham: Mugali

**Christian Broadcasting:** none

**ROPAL code:** MUK

## 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