

Tamang, Northwestern

Estimates based on the 1991 census have found that there were at least 55,000 Northwestern Tamang people living in Nepal's Bagmati Zone. They are concentrated in Nuwakot District, along a mountainous strip. Some Northwestern Tamang have migrated out of the mountains and onto the sun-drenched plains in southern Nepal. The Nepal census gave an overall figure of more than one million Tamang people and did not differentiate between different language groups.

There are several conflicting reports about the origins of the Tamang people. According to a legend prevalent among the Hindu Tamang, it is said they were created from Lord Siva or, in other words, that their ancestor is Lord Siva.

Others say that their ancestors were members of the Tibetan King Songtsen Gampo's cavalry, who came across the Himalayas and settled in the hills of Nepal long ago. 'The Tamangs of Nuwakot believe that almost a thousand years ago, there lived an anti-Buddhist king in Tibet called Galang Marma or Gyalbo Lunder. He was victorious over the Buddhists and set fire to many *gompas*. He then forced the lamas to marry and become civilians. Many icons and statues of the Buddha were destroyed too, but not all the lamas were subdued. Some managed to escape with their lives . . . In this way, those lamas settled down in what are now Rasuwa and Nuwakot districts located north of the Kathmandu valley.'¹ These conflicting stories indicate that the Tamang people are not from one ethnic root, but from a collection of different tribes scattered across Nepal.

Northwestern Tamang women can easily be identified by their striking appearance.



Gospel Recordings: Nepal

They 'wear ornaments such as gold or silver earrings called *bhuntil* or *biru*, gold or silver bangles called *singikarmu mugs* (semi-precious stone) and gold ornaments called *gahu*. . . Gold or silver *jantar* (square amulets hung on the chest on a string or a necklace) are also worn by both sexes.'²

The religious beliefs of the Northwestern Tamang are a combination of shamanism, Tibetan Buddhism and Hinduism. Those living in higher altitudes are generally more inclined towards Buddhism, while those

at lower altitudes have come under more Hindu influence. For both groups, however, traditional spirit-worship dominates. One source notes that 'The Tamangs of the northern regions, while making or constructing houses make a statue of *ratilila* and keep it at a place where the people can see it while walking to and fro on the village paths. This is done because the Tamangs believe that this ensures warding off of evil spirits, no chance for lightning or *vajra* to strike their houses, and the wife of the house will not have to remain barren.'³ Tamang lamas usually marry the daughters of other lamas and teach their sons to succeed them as lamas. Fuerer-Haimendorf notes, 'In this way a class of lamas has grown up and though neither strictly endogamous nor formally privileged, this class now forms an upper stratum distinct from the ordinary cultivators.'⁴ In recent years, 'quite a number of Tamang have become Christians, and they are actively reaching out to their own people'.⁵



Population:
66,700 (2000)
82,600 (2010)
102,300 (2020)
Countries: Nepal
Buddhism: Tibetan
Christians: 2,000

Overview of the Northwestern Tamang

Other Names: Murmi, Nishung, Lama, Tamanglama

Population Sources:
55,000 or more in Nepal (2000, B Grimes [based on 1991 census])

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

Dialects: 1 (Dhading)

Professing Buddhists: 65%

Practising Buddhists: 30%

Christians: 3%

Scripture: none

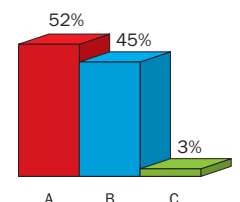
Jesus film: none

Gospel Recordings: Tamang: Dhading; Tamang: Rasua

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: TMK

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