

# Thakali

The 1991 census in Nepal returned 13,731 members of the Thakali ethnic group, of which 7,113 (51.8%) were still able to speak the Thakali language. They primarily inhabit the Thak Sat Soe area in Thak Khola in the southern part of the Mustang District. Mustang is located within the Dhawalagiri Zone of north-central Nepal. Others have spread out into the 'Myagdi, Baglung, Parbat, Kaski, Gulmi, Syangja, Palpa and Rupendehi districts. The thirteen major Thakali villages are spread on the

western bank of the Kali Gandaki Gorge through which flows the Kali River.<sup>1</sup> The Thakali region is spectacular, flanked by the massive Annapurna Himal and the Dhawalagiri Himal, with peaks rising to 8,090 metres (26,535 ft.).

The Nepal government acknowledges the Thakali as one of the 61 ethnic groups

of their nation. They also officially acknowledge the Marphali, Thintan and Syangtan as separate groups, even though they 'resemble the Thakalis in every conceivable way'.<sup>2</sup> There are four major clan divisions among the Thakali: namely Chhyoki, Salki, Dhimchen and Bhurki.<sup>3</sup>

Thakali men traditionally obtain their brides by abducting a girl when she is gathering wood in the forest or fetching water from a stream. She is taken back to the boy's home for several days, after which notification is sent to the girl's parents, bidding them to agree to the marriage.

For centuries the Thakali dominated the salt trade of western and central Nepal, trading southward into India and northward into Tibet. This has made them one of the wealthiest groups in Nepal today. Although the Thakali language is

part of the Tibeto-Burman family, they are making a 'conscious effort to dilute their Bhotia [Tibetan] connection. The trend is towards identification with Hindu castes or better-known ethnic groups.'<sup>4</sup>

The present transition of the Thakali culture is also seen in their religion. 'Thak Khola is located in the zone where Tibetan cultural influences from the north come into contact with Hindu cultural influences from the south. Thus a mixture of native cultural

elements and elements brought in and assimilated from the outside can be witnessed. This syncretism is above all reflected in religion, which is here a combination of animistic, pre-Buddhistic elements joined with Buddhist and Hindu ones. Adherents of Catholicism are now found among the migrated

Thakalis and some Thakalis in Kathmandu call themselves atheists.'<sup>5</sup> One source notes, unflatteringly: 'Even the once proud tradition of becoming Buddhist monks is more or less extinct today, and only those old monks and nuns are upholding the traditional religion and beliefs, while the others consider these as the skeleton in their cupboards and wait for the death of these old monks and nuns so that once and for all they can bury the past.'<sup>6</sup>

Although the Thakali have been coming under many influences in recent years, Christianity has not been one of them. 'This group is still almost completely unreached with the gospel. A few have heard of and even accepted Christ, but there is still no Thakali speaking church and no Bible in their language.'<sup>7</sup>



International Mission Board



**Population:**  
16,600 (2000)  
20,600 (2010)  
25,500 (2020)  
**Countries:** Nepal  
**Buddhism:** Tibetan  
**Christians:** 70

## Overview of the Thakali

**Other Names:** Tapaang, Thaksya

**Population Sources:**  
13,731 in Nepal (1991 census)

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

**Dialects:** 3 (Tukche, Marpha, Syang)

**Professing Buddhists:** 50%

**Practising Buddhists:** 30%

**Christians:** 0.4%

**Scripture:** none

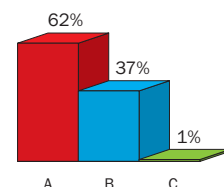
**Jesus film:** none

**Gospel Recordings:** Thakali; Thakali: Tingaun

**Christian Broadcasting:** none

**ROPAL code:** THS

## 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