Newar

Approximately 1.3 million Newar people live in Nepal, India and Bhutan. The 1991 Nepal census listed 1,041,090 Newar people living throughout Nepal, concentrated in the densely populated Kathmandu Valley. The Newari language was spoken by 690,000 people in Nepal in 1991, or 66.3 per cent of their population. An additional 117,000 Newar inhabit 17 states in India,[1] with smaller communities in Bhutan and Bangladesh.[2]

The Newar are believed to be the original inhabitants of Nepal. In fact, the name Nepal is derived from 'Newar'.[3] They founded the city of Kathmandu and have a written history going back 2,500 years, recording their rich and diverse culture.[4] Although numerous warring tribes and rulers have come and gone over the centuries, the Newar continued to establish their kingdom and civilization. Today the term 'Newar' is a broad term covering people with different physical appearances and who speak both the Tibeto-Burman Newar language and Indo-European Nepali.[5] Rather than being a tribe or cohesive ethnic group, the Newar are people belonging to a common civilization and identity.

Xayographix

Although the majority of Newar people are Hindus and only one-third of their population professes Buddhism, the Newar are included in this book because there are more than half a million Buddhist Newaris. Many scholars believe that the Newar were once predominantly Buddhists, but centuries of influence from the south has reversed this situation so that today Hinduism holds sway with the majority. Certain Newar castes are born Buddhist. These include the highest ranking Bajracharya, who are Buddhist priests by profession, Shakya (goldsmiths), Udas (weavers), Tamrakar (copper workers), Jyapu (farmers), Kumal (potters), Chitrakar (artisans), Salmi (oil pressers), Pode (eaters of dead animals) and Chyame (garbage collectors).[6]

The Newar are somewhat unique in that their religious observances are a mixture of Hinduism and Buddhism, so intricately interwoven that it is impossible to separate them. If anything, their faith could almost be called Hinduistic Buddhism. One source states, 'Ask a Newar whether he's Hindu or Buddhist, the saying goes, and he'll answer "yes". After fifteen centuries of continuous exposure to both faiths, the Newars of the Kathmandu Valley have concocted a unique synthesis of the two.'[7] Another says, 'Both parties [Hindus and Buddhists] visit and worship the same deities in Hindu and Buddhist temples. In fact, many of the temples and shrines in Kathmandu Valley have both Hindu and Buddhist deities often adjacent to each other.'[8] Such a blending of faiths 'is best illustrated by the attribution of Buddhist Avalokiteswara and Hindu Matsyendranath to a purely local deity, Bunga-dya'.[9]

There were very few Christians in Nepal until the 1980s. Between then and the present time there has been a tremendous explosion of Christian growth. Thousands of Newar have also believed in Christ for the first time. Still, less than two per cent of Newar today are Christians.

Overview of the Newar

Other Names: Newari, Nepal Bhasa, Newah

Population Sources:
1,041,090 in Nepal (1991 census)
117,000 in India (2004, FMC South Asia)
1,700 in Bangladesh (2004, FMC South Asia)
also in Bhutan

Language: Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Himalayish, Mahakiranti, Newari

Dialects: 7 (Dolkhali, Sindhupalchok Pahri, Totali, Citlang, Kathmandu-Pathan-Kirtipur, Baktapur, Baglung)

Professing Buddhists: 30%

Practising Buddhists: 15%

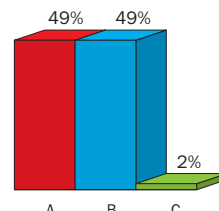**Christians:** 1.5%

Scripture: New Testament 1986

Jesus film: available

Gospel Recordings: Newari: Vaglung; Newari: Bhaktapur; Newari: Kathmandu; Newari: Patan; Newari: Pokhara; Newari: Porde

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: NEW

Population:
1,382,800 (2000)
1,736,200 (2010)
2,139,500 (2020)
Countries: Nepal, India, Bangladesh, Bhutan
Buddhism: Mahayana
Christians: 20,000

Status of Evangelization

49% 49%

2%

A   B   C

A = Have never heard the gospel
B = Have heard the gospel but have not become Christians
C = Are adherents to some form of Christianity