

## **BHUTAN**

In Bhutan there are 35 distinct people groups. Following are two of the groups.

### **Bhotia, Dzongkha**



Bhutan is not as closed to the outside world as it once was, but access is still limited. But the larger obstacle is the mindset of the prevailing religion.

#### **Outreach Ideas**

Sustained prayer is needed to prepare the hearts of the people of Bhutan to understand the message of Christ, and to believe.

#### **Pray for the followers of Christ**

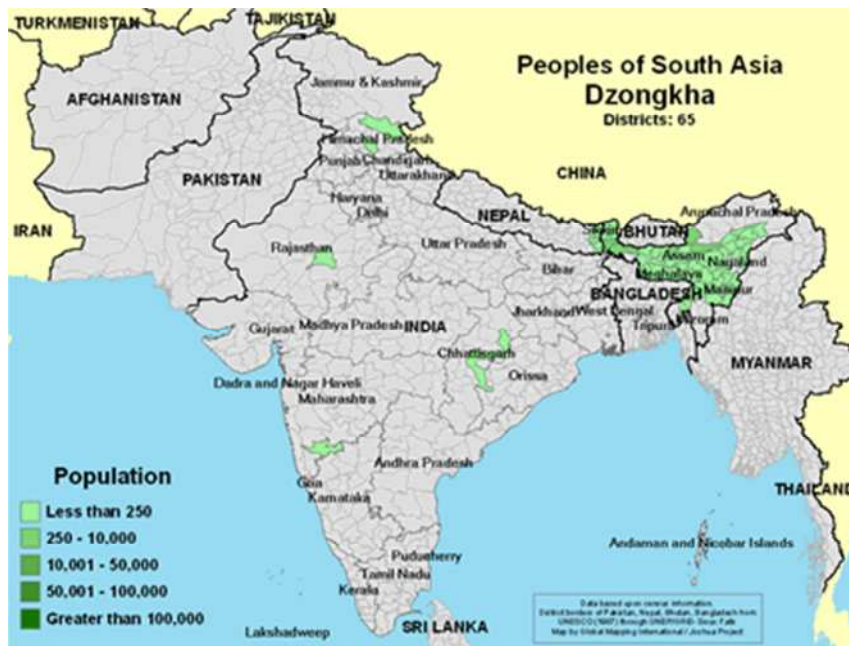
Pray for the followers of Jesus among the Bhotia community, that their faith in Christ will be strengthened by regular fellowship together. Pray for an accurate understanding of the grace offered by Christ, and that they will desire to be obedient to Christ's teachings.

#### **Pray for the entire people group**

Pray for the Bhotia to escape the bondage of their current religion. Pray for hunger to find a solution to their sin problem.

#### **Scripture Focus**

"Tell of His glory among the nations, His wonderful deeds among all the peoples. For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised." 1 Chronicles 16:24-25



Persecution Rank: 12 (Only top 50 ranked, 1 = highest persecution ranking)

People Name in Country: Bhotia, Dzongkha

People Name General: Dzongkha

Population in this Country: 118,000

Affinity Bloc: Tibetan / Himalayan Peoples

People Cluster: Bhutanese

People Name General: Dzongkha

Buddhism 99.90 % Christianity 0.10 % (Evangelical: 0.08 %)

**Sharchop**



Wedged between the Himalayas of India, Tibet, and China is the world's only Buddhist kingdom, the country of Bhutan. The Sharchop live in this tiny country, which is also known as the "Land of the Thunder Dragon," due to the violent Himalayan thunderstorms. The Sharchop live in southeastern Bhutan, south of Tashigang, in the thick forests where there is less rainfall.

The Sharchop are part of the Tibeto-Burman culture that influenced Bhutan from the East. They refer to themselves as Bhutanese and are racially Mongoloid, like the northern Bhutanese. However, their distinctive cultural traits clearly link them with the peoples of Tibet, Burma, and Yunnan, China. Their language is called Tsangla and is part of the Sino-Tibetan language family. Bhutan depends heavily on India for assistance and foreign trade. With new roads being built between Bhutan and India, many Sharchop are learning to speak Assamese and Hindi, as they come into closer contact with the people of India.

What are their lives like?

The Sharchop are part of an agricultural society and often use a "slash and burn" method of farming. Since dense plant growth limits the use of land for agricultural purposes, they clear the land by burning the vegetation. They grow dry rice on it for three or four years, then abandon it when the soil is exhausted. Some groups, however, have settled permanently in large clearings in the forests.

Sharchop houses are made of stone and wood, and are usually built on stilts in dispersed settlements along the mountain slopes. Larger settlements have monasteries called dzongs, where prayer flags and prayer wheels are a common sight.

A local variety of cattle known as mithun is a valued form of wealth and is sacrificed at religious ceremonies. Pigs and goats are also raised to sell and to use as sacrifices.

Water pollution is one of the most significant environmental problems in Bhutan, as most of the rural population does not have a pure water supply. If good water is scarce in a settlement, water from a nearby spring or stream is piped in through bamboo conduits. The majority of Bhutan's people live without electricity, since much of its power is exported over the hills to India. Because of the difficult mountainous terrain, many remote areas can expect a long wait for power. Rural citizens pay little or no taxes, but they are obligated to work without pay on government projects, such as building local schools and roads.

What are their beliefs?

Tibetan Buddhism exercises considerable influence in Bhutan, and Buddhist priests are often supported by the community. However, the Sharchop have also retained the popular beliefs and practices of their ethnic religion.

As in Tibet, sacred inscriptions are written on prayer flags and planted near each house, and prayer wheels containing sacred syllables are kept in continuous motion as the Sharchop walk or rest. Illness is always believed to be caused by the devil or spirits. Lamas (spiritual leaders) read from the Buddhist scriptures to expel them.

In addition, elements of shamanism (the belief that there is an unseen world of many gods, demons, and ancestral spirits) are reflected in magical ceremonies and superstitions. Omens and demons are believed to have direct influence on life. Every village has its shibdag, or "god of the soil," which must constantly be appeased, and each house has its god, tab-lha, who must not be offended.

What are their needs?

Bhutan did not open its doors to tourism until 1974 and still restricts the number of tourists that may visit each year. Although they recently allowed Pepsi Cola to enter the country, there is still a ban on satellite television in an attempt to protect what the monarchy calls a "fragile culture." This repressive government does not want exposure to Westerners and, especially, to other religions.

Prayer Points

- \* Pray that God will reveal Himself to these precious people through dreams and visions.
- \* Ask the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers into Bhutan. Ask God to raise up prayer teams who will break up the soil through worship and intercession.
- \* Pray for the speedy completion of evangelistic materials into the Tsangla language.
- \* Ask God to strengthen, encourage, and protect the small number of Sharchop Christians.

- \* Pray that God will open the hearts of Bhutan's governmental leaders to the Gospel.
- \* Ask the Lord to raise up strong local churches among the Sharchop.



Persecution Rank: 12 (Only top 50 ranked, 1 = highest persecution ranking)

Most live in the eastern Himalayan Range, and the largest numbers are located in eastern and south-eastern Bhutan, especially in Trashigang and Dungsam. A substantial number also live in neighboring parts of Arunachal Pradesh, India, especially in the Tawang and Kameng districts. Some also live in Chinese Tibet, particularly in Cona County.

Population in this Country: 151,000

Affinity Bloc: Tibetan / Himalayan Peoples

People Cluster: Bhutanese

People Name General: Sharchop

Primary Language: Tshangla (151,000 Speakers)

Buddhism 99.90 % Christianity 0.10 % (Evangelical: 0.01 %)