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# Profile

## Introduction

Nepal displays a range of dramatic contrasts, which appear not only in the country's various ethnicities and languages but also in its geography and climate. Historical accounts of the Nepalese people are limited mostly to the region known as Kathmandu Valley, spanning the millennia between palace insurrection and dynastic change to the modern era. The most recent momentous change in Nepal's political landscape is the implementation of democracy in the 20th century. Culturally, a common thread that appears throughout much of the nation's history is the synthesis of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. Nepal is one of the few countries where these religions have peacefully coexisted for centuries.



© Taylor Miles  
Nepal

The ethnic/caste groups, who are primarily native Nepali speakers, are relative newcomers to the area now called Nepal. The Nepali language originated with an Indo-Aryan group of people who migrated from northwest India in the first millennium B.C.E. They spread from the Tarai, or flat river plain, north to the Middle Hills and established many city-states and small kingdoms, including Gorkha. When the country was united under a Gorkha king, it was renamed Nepal and their language was later renamed Nepali.

## Geography

Nepal is a landlocked country, surrounded by China to the north and India to the south. In shape it is roughly a long rectangle with an area of 147,181 sq km (56,827 sq. mi.). It is comparable in size to the U.S. state of Arkansas. Nepal's border with India includes almost all of the east, south, and west sides of this rectangle, a distance of 1,690 km (1,050 mi). The northern border with China is 1,236 km (768 mi.) long.<sup>1</sup>



© Mathew Knott  
Western Tarai

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<sup>1</sup> Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Factbook*. Nepal. 6 October 2009. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/np.html>

## Geographic Divisions

Nepal is divided into three general geographic regions, running in lateral belts east to west across the country. In the south is a lowland region, which rises into hills that cover the central part of the country from east to west. They gradually merge into the extremely high mountains of the north.<sup>2</sup>

### *The Mountains*

Across Nepal's northern border stretch the highest mountains on earth, the Himalayas, or "the abode of snow." Eight of the world's ten highest mountains are in Nepal, some on the border with China or India. Only about 7% of the country's people live in the steep, mountainous valleys.<sup>3</sup>

### *The Lowlands*

In dramatic contrast to the mountains, the Tarai belt of lowlands lies along the southern border at elevations as low as 70 m (230 ft) above sea level. The change in elevation gives Nepal a vast range of altitudes, spanning some 8,778 m (28,800 ft).<sup>4</sup> The width of the Tarai varies from little more than 32 km (20 mi) wide to fewer than approximately 26 km (16 mi) wide.<sup>5</sup> At its southernmost tip, this belt of lowlands is productive agricultural land, but closer to the hills—where runoff percolates into the sandy soil—the land becomes marshy swamp. Today the Tarai is both Nepal's breadbasket and its rice bowl.<sup>6</sup> Approximately half of the country's population lives here on only 17% of Nepal's land.<sup>7,8</sup>



© Dey Alexander  
Annapurnas mountain range

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<sup>2</sup> Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Factbook*. Nepal. 6 October 2009. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/np.html>

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Nepal: Geography." January 2009. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5283.htm>

<sup>4</sup> Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Factbook*. Nepal. 6 October 2009. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/np.html>

<sup>5</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica. "The Land: Relief." 2009. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-23636>

<sup>6</sup> *Cultures of the World: Nepal*. Burbank, Jon. "Chapter 1: Geography [p.13]." 1991. New York.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Nepal: Geography." January 2009. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5283.htm>

<sup>8</sup> Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. D'Agnes, Leona, and Judy Oglethorpe, Sabita Thapa, Tara Prasad Gnyawali. "Forests for the Future: Farmers on the Front Line in Nepal's Terai Region." 2008. [http://www.wilsoncenter.org/topics/docs/ECSP\\_Nepal\\_Draft\\_Oct08.pdf](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/topics/docs/ECSP_Nepal_Draft_Oct08.pdf)2008.

## *The Hills*

Between these extremes, and accounting for up to 75% of Nepal's area, lie the Middle Hills. At elevations of 1,524 m to 3,658 m (5,000 ft to 12,000 ft), the Middle Hills are hills only in comparison to the towering Himalaya Mountains to the north.<sup>9</sup> Once densely covered in trees, these hills have gradually been deforested to provide firewood, building materials, and land on which to grow food. The people of the hills have built steep terraces for their homes.

## **Topographic Features**

### *Mount Everest*

Nepal's best-known topographic feature is the highest mountain on earth. *Sagarmatha*, known as Mount Everest in the English-speaking world, rises to an altitude of 8,850 m (29,035 ft.) above sea level.<sup>10</sup> This mountain lies across the border shared between Nepal and the Autonomous Region of Tibet, China.

### *Mahabharat Lekh*

The Himalayan system includes successive ranges of lower and geologically younger mountains. The Mahabharat Lekh of the Middle Hills is sometimes called the Lesser or Lower Himalayas. This range stretches across central Nepal from east to west. The peaks are so similar in height that the area is said to look as if it is a "dissected plateau."<sup>11</sup>



© Marina & Enrique / flickr.com  
Himalaya mountain range, Pokhara, Nepal

### *Kathmandu Valley*

Among the peaks—at elevations up to 1,324 m (4,344 ft) above sea level—lie several large, flat valleys, one of which is Kathmandu Valley.<sup>12</sup> This oval bowl is 1,166 square km (725 sq mi) in area, and includes two of Nepal's largest cities, three municipalities, and several smaller villages.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *Cultures of the World: Nepal*. Burbank, Jon. "Chapter 1: Geography [p.10]." 1991. New York.

<sup>10</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica. "Himalayas." 2009. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9110521>

<sup>11</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica. "Himalayas: Physical Features." 2009. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-47870>

<sup>12</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica. "Kathmandu." 2009. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9044840>

<sup>13</sup> *Cultures of the World: Nepal*. Burbank, Jon. "Chapter 1: Geography [p.10]." 1991. New York.

### *Siwalik Range*

South of the Mahabharat range, and separated by several inner valleys, is a lower range, the Siwaliks, which extend into India and Pakistan. This range, also called the Churia Hills (or Churia Range) in Nepal, runs east to west, parallel with Nepal's southern border. These lower peaks reach as high as 1,219 m (4,000 ft).<sup>14, 15</sup>

### *Inner Tarai*

Between the Mahabharat Lekh and the Siwaliks (Churia Hills) lie a disconnected series of low, flat valleys known as the Inner Tarai. These inner valleys are hot and humid, with swamps, grasslands, and forests. Despite being malaria-ridden, these valleys were long inhabited by indigenous peoples, including the Tharu, who developed a natural immunity to the disease.<sup>16, 17</sup>

### *Rara Lake*

In the northwest of the country, relatively close to the Himalayas, lies Nepal's largest lake, Rara Lake. This remote lake, which is now part of a national park, is sacred in Buddhist tradition.<sup>18</sup>

### *Annapurna*

The Annapurna Massif consists of four main peaks and another four lesser peaks.<sup>19</sup> This includes the twin peaks called Machapuchare, the Fishtail. Annapurna I, the main peak, is the 10th highest mountain in the world.<sup>20</sup>

### *Kali Gandaki Gorge*

This gorge cuts between the Dhaulagiri and Annapurna massifs, which are both over 8,000 m (26,247 ft). More than 6,000 m (19,685 ft) deep in some areas, Kali Gandaki is one of the world's deepest



© Erik Schmidt  
Kali Gandaki Gorge

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<sup>14</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica. "Churia Range: Nepal." 2009.

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/117356/Churia-Range>

<sup>15</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica. "Siwalik Range: Nepal." 2009.

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/546988/Siwalik-Range>

<sup>16</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica. "Churia Range: Nepal." 2009.

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/117356/Churia-Range>

<sup>17</sup> Forests Monitor. "The Terai Forests." 2006. <http://www.forestsmonitor.org/en/reports/549391/549398>

<sup>18</sup> GORP. Gelber, Ethan. "Top Ten Coolest Treks in the Nepalese Himalaya: Rara Lake." 1999–2009.

<http://gorp.away.com/gorp/location/asia/nepal/favpicks2.htm>

<sup>19</sup> Massifs consist of hardened elevated crust or mountainous regions where individual peaks are formed or separated from surrounding rocks by combined forces of uplift and erosion. The Middle East: A Physical, Social, and Regional Geography, Seventh Edition. Fisher, William Bayne. "Chapter 18: Libya: Tripolitania [p. 542]." 1978. London: Methuen & Co.

<sup>20</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica. "Annapurna." 2009. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9007679>

gorges. It is located in a region of mountain passes and glaciers, with the Gandaki River flowing swiftly through its base.<sup>21, 22</sup>

### *Kangchenjunga*

This mountain lies on Nepal's far eastern border with India. Once thought to be the highest mountain in the world, the massif includes five peaks. The highest among them (Kangchenjunga) is considered sacred in the Kirant religion, which reveres the natural environment because "ancestors are closely associated with the landscape."<sup>23</sup>



© John Town  
Kangchenjunga mountain range

Until recent years, most climbing expeditions have honored this belief by stopping short of the actual summit.<sup>24</sup>

### **Climate**<sup>25</sup>

Located approximately at the same latitude as Florida, it is not surprising that some of Nepal's climate is similarly temperate. However, because of its extreme elevations, Nepal also experiences climate extremes. In the north, at the high elevations of the Himalayas, the climate is arctic, with year round temperatures below freezing. In contrast, within a short distance south lies the plain of the Tarai, where monsoon weather patterns are part of a tropical climate.



© suzienewshoes/flickr.com  
Rain in Nepal

Rainfall in Nepal is dependent on the seasonal monsoons, which bring most of the country's annual precipitation from June through September. Just prior to these months, temperatures in the Tarai region may reach highs of nearly 40°C (104°F) during April and May. The large valleys of Kathmandu and Pokhara tend to enjoy a temperate climate, with mild winter and summer temperatures.

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<sup>21</sup> Learn NC. "Kali Gandaki Gorge." 2007. <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/multimedia/4708>

<sup>22</sup> World Reviewer. "Kali Gandaki Gorge." No date. <http://www.worldreviewer.com/travel-guides/canyon/kali-gandaki-gorge/10718/#>

<sup>23</sup> *Contemporary Society: Concept of Tribal Society*. Gaenszle, Martin. "Chapter 1: The Kiranti Groups of East Nepal. [pp. 52–53.]" 1997. [http://books.google.com/books?id=R--XMUsk7sIC&pg=PA52&lpg=PA52&dq=Kirant+religion&source=bl&ots=oG7odZj2-e&sig=gjXDuzD-EFDCxQoZXzNVPwlMsNg&hl=en&ei=ZgPeSp7zEJHEsQPG3ezcDw&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=6&ved=0CBUQ6AEwBTgK#v=onepage&q=&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=R--XMUsk7sIC&pg=PA52&lpg=PA52&dq=Kirant+religion&source=bl&ots=oG7odZj2-e&sig=gjXDuzD-EFDCxQoZXzNVPwlMsNg&hl=en&ei=ZgPeSp7zEJHEsQPG3ezcDw&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=6&ved=0CBUQ6AEwBTgK#v=onepage&q=&f=false)

<sup>24</sup> Everest News. "Kangchenjunga History." 1998–2003. <http://www.k2news.com/kanghistory.htm>

<sup>25</sup> About.com. Szczepanski, Kallie. "Asian History: Nepal." <http://asianhistory.about.com/od/nepal/p/nepalprofile.htm>

## Rivers<sup>26</sup>

Much of the western border of Nepal is defined by the Mahakali River. The Mahakali begins in northern India in the Himalayas, flows southwest and then out across the Ganges Basin. It eventually joins the Karnali where it becomes the Ghaghra River in India, which flows southeast until it meets the Ganges River.<sup>27</sup>



© Simon Taylor  
Karnali River

Three main rivers—the Karnali, the Narayani, and the Kosi—provide most of Nepal’s drainage, which eventually flows into India.<sup>28</sup> The Karnali River rises on the Tibetan Plateau northwest of Nepal and flows south through the country, forming Nepal’s longest river (507 km, 315 mi).<sup>29</sup> This river is the major western watershed. The Karnali basin is in one of the most remote regions of Nepal, with no large towns or cities on the river banks.

The Narayani (also called the Gandaki river system) drains into central Nepal and is formed by two other major rivers. One, the Kali Gandaki, is itself a confluence of the Mustang Khola and the Kakh Khola. The Kali Gandaki runs between the Dhaulageri and Annapurna Massifs, forming the Kali Gandaki Gorge. The Narayani’s other significant branch is the Trisuli River.



© Peter Voerman  
White water rafting in Nepal

This river originates north of central Nepal, flowing south and then west to join the Kali Gandaki. Because it is accessible by road from Kathmandu, it is a popular rafting river for tourists.

Originating in central Nepal, the Kathmandu Valley’s main river, the Bagmati, is not a major watershed. It is important as a holy river that washes the steps of the Pashupatinath Temple, a site in Kathmandu that draws devotees from India and the entire subcontinent.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, in eastern Nepal is the Kosi River. With headwaters arising in Tibet west of Mt. Everest, the Kosi (also known as Koshi) drains most of the eastern third of Nepal before

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<sup>26</sup> Thamel. “Rivers of Nepal.” No date. <http://www.thamel.com/htms/rivers.htm>

<sup>27</sup> *Managing Water Conflict: Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*. Swain, Ashok. “Chapter 2: South Asia and Its Large Rivers: The Indus, the Mahakali, and with Special Emphasis on the Ganges. [pp. 49–50.]” 2004. [http://books.google.com/books?id=E4TYQ3RDFC8C&pg=PA49&lpg=PA49&dq=mahakali+river+nepal&source=bl&ots=OQludZFkbY&sig=9USurQdLUrbTxamSAhjaH3BmlAU&hl=en&ei=4CLSp6vKIVIsAO6jb3iDw&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=5&ved=0CBkQ6AEwBA#v=onepage&q=mahakali%20river%20nepal&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=E4TYQ3RDFC8C&pg=PA49&lpg=PA49&dq=mahakali+river+nepal&source=bl&ots=OQludZFkbY&sig=9USurQdLUrbTxamSAhjaH3BmlAU&hl=en&ei=4CLSp6vKIVIsAO6jb3iDw&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=5&ved=0CBkQ6AEwBA#v=onepage&q=mahakali%20river%20nepal&f=false)

<sup>28</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica. “Nepal: The Land – Drainage.” 2009. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-23637>

<sup>29</sup> Wordpress. “Karnali River: The Longest River of Nepal.” 25 January 2009. <http://wildlifeneal.wordpress.com/2009/01/25/karnali-river-the-longest-river-of-nepal/>

<sup>30</sup> Nepal Visitors. “Kathmandu, Patan, Bhaktapur Tour.” 1999–2009. <http://nepalvisitors.com/tour/kathmandu-patan-bhaktapur-tour.htm#>

flowing into India. The Kosi River is fed by several major tributaries, including the Arun River, which flows into Nepal from the Tibetan Plateau in China. Once it reaches India's Bihar state, the Kosi becomes a major flood hazard, having changed its final course to the Ganges River many times.

## Major Cities

### *Kathmandu/Patan/Bhaktapur*

The three primary cities of Kathmandu Valley include Nepal's capital, Kathmandu.<sup>31, 32</sup> The name Kathmandu refers to a type of temple building said to have been constructed near the end of the 16th century from the wood of a single tree, using no nails or iron supports.



Courtesy of Wikipedia.org  
View of Kathmandu

The capital's Newar merchant families have played a significant part in making Kathmandu the country's most important commercial and business center. The Newar people are of diverse origins, speak the Newar language, and are long-time residents in the Kathmandu Valley.

Directly across the Bagmati River, south of Kathmandu, is the city of Patan. Officially designated Lalitpur Sub-Metropolitan City, Patan is one of Nepal's largest cities. It has many Buddhist *viharas*, structures that were once Buddhist monasteries but are now inhabited by descendants of the priests who used to occupy them. This city has become the center of Nepal's carpet manufacturing sector, which developed after an influx of Tibetan refugees arrived in the region after the Chinese invaded Tibet in 1959.<sup>33</sup>

Slightly southeast of these two cities is Bhaktapur. Most of its 17th century medieval architecture has been preserved, although some temples were rebuilt after a large earthquake in 1934 destroyed much of the Durbar Square. In 1979, Bhaktapur's Durbar Square was placed on the UNESCO World Heritage Monuments List.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Nepal Vista. "Kathmandu Nepal." 2001–2009. <http://www.nepalvista.com/travel/ktm.html>

<sup>32</sup> Independent Online. "Have a High Time on Hippy Trail in Kathmandu." 30 January 2001. <http://www.ioltravel.co.za/article/view/3549557>

<sup>33</sup> *The Power of Women's Informal Networks: Lessons in Social Change From South Asia and West Africa*. Gurung, Shobha Hamal. "Women Weavers in Nepal: Between Global Market and Local Craft Production [p. 92]." 2004. Lanham: Lexington Books. [http://books.google.com/books?id=Mq3hPUwpJIEC&pg=PA92&lpg=PA92&dq=Patan+carpet+manufacturing+Tibetan+refugees&source=bl&ots=ucU49\\_TSKQ&sig=mjR8Xz5o00KGAgJBtSx1WY-skps&hl=en&ei=Nv6eSqGYDZP-sQOXyeiQDg&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=5#v=onepage&q=Patan carpet manufacturing Tibetan refugees&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=Mq3hPUwpJIEC&pg=PA92&lpg=PA92&dq=Patan+carpet+manufacturing+Tibetan+refugees&source=bl&ots=ucU49_TSKQ&sig=mjR8Xz5o00KGAgJBtSx1WY-skps&hl=en&ei=Nv6eSqGYDZP-sQOXyeiQDg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=5#v=onepage&q=Patan%20carpet%20manufacturing%20Tibetan%20refugees&f=false)

<sup>34</sup> Nepal Visitors. "Kathmandu, Patan, Bhaktapur Tour." 1999–2009. <http://nepalvisitors.com/tour/kathmandu-patan-bhaktapur-tour.htm#>

### *Lumbini*

Located midway along Nepal's southern border, this city is significant as the birthplace of Siddhartha Gautama, known as Buddha. It has been a Buddhist pilgrimage site possibly since the 3rd century B.C.E., when the Buddhist Emperor Ashoka visited in 249 B.C.E. and built a stone pillar and four stupas honoring the Buddha. In 1997, Lumbini was named a World Heritage Site.<sup>35</sup>



© Mathew Knott  
Lumbini, Nepal

### *Biratnagar*

Biratnagar is the second largest city in Nepal.<sup>36</sup> It is one of the nation's leading manufacturing centers, with a large jute mill —“Nepal's first industrial endeavor” and “one of the country's largest single employers.”<sup>37</sup> Biratnagar is also Nepal's center of foreign trade.

### *Pokhara*

Pokhara lies in an upper valley in the mountains; it tends to have a slightly warmer climate than Kathmandu. Pokhara was once one of the 24 Kingdoms of Nepal ruled by the Shah dynasty. Originally an area of Magars and Gurungs, it lies on an important trade route between India and Tibet. From the city, the Dhaulagiri, Annapurna, and Manaslu ranges can be seen in a striking, panoramic view. After the first road to Pokhara was finished in 1968, it became a popular tourist destination. For centuries, the town has been a melting pot for people of different ethnicities, religions, and caste backgrounds. Its festivals, architecture, and cultural life reflect this diversity today.<sup>38</sup>

### *Birganj*

Birganj is a gateway to Nepal from India and an important port of entry to the entire country. It is located on the main highway linking northern India with the Kathmandu Valley. This city is an important marketing center and home to an internationally recognized medical center.<sup>39</sup>



Courtesy of Wikipedia.org  
Birganj gateway

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<sup>35</sup> Sacred Destinations. “Lumbini.” 2005–2009. <http://www.sacred-destinations.com/nepal/lumbini>

<sup>36</sup> Nepal Vista.com. “Biratnagar Nepal.” 2001–2009. <http://www.nepalvista.com/travel/biratnagar.html>

<sup>37</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica. “Biratnagar.” 2009. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/66355/Biratnagar>

<sup>38</sup> Colorful Nepal. “Pokhara History.” 2006. <http://colorfulnepal.com/pokhara-history.html>

<sup>39</sup> Nepal Vista. “Birgunj City.” 2001–2009. <http://www.nepalvista.com/travel/birgunj.html>

## History

The body of knowledge about Nepal's history is limited due to a number of factors. As late as 1951, the country was a closed kingdom, cut off from communication and isolated from outside influence. Existing written records, dating approximately 5th century B.C.E., concentrate on the area of the Kathmandu Valley. While the latter is an important center, it is somewhat unrepresentative of the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the country. Further, the historical records have been written from the narrow viewpoint of the upper caste.



© Ingmar Zahorsky  
King Gyanendra

## Ancient History

Historians believe that during the mid first millennium B.C.E., the Khasas, an Indo-Aryan group from northwest India, began migrating into western Nepal. As they migrated, their language spread, ultimately becoming the basis of modern-day Nepali. With the emergence of the Licchavi Dynasty in the Kathmandu Valley during the 5th century C.E., the valley became an important hub on the trade routes that linked India with Tibet. These routes also became the path by which Buddhism was introduced to Tibet.<sup>40, 41</sup>

## The Medieval Period

### *The Malla Era*<sup>42, 43</sup>

The early Malla period was a time of political upheaval in the Kathmandu Valley. Among periodic invaders were the Nepali-speaking Khasas, who established a large kingdom in the western hills.

During the early Malla era, the Valley towns of Kathmandu, Patan, and Bhaktapur steadily grew and vied for primacy. In 1382, Jayasthiti Malla, took control of the entire Kathmandu Valley and surrounding areas. During his reign, Malla developed the first Nepalese social and legal codes, which were based on Hindu religious texts.



© Iphiliip Milne  
Sir Edmund Hillary monument

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<sup>40</sup> Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Country Study: Nepal*. "Nepal: Historical Setting: Ancient Nepal, ca. 500 B.C.–A.D. 700: Early Influences on Nepal." September 1991. [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+np0014\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+np0014))

<sup>41</sup> *A History of Nepal*. Whelpton, John. "Chapter 1. Environment, State and Society in the Central Himalayas to 1743 [p. 19]." 2005. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>42</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica. "Nepal: History: Middle Period." 2009. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-23630>

<sup>43</sup> Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Country Study: Nepal*. "Nepal: Historical Setting: Medieval Nepal, 750–1750: The Malla Kings." September 1991. [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+np0017\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+np0017))

## *Developments Outside the Kathmandu Valley*

Over the next two centuries, lavish temples and palace complexes were built in the Kathmandu Valley. Beyond the valley to the west, the Khasa kingdom fragmented into a large number of small states in the far western and central hills that were collectively known as the *baisi* (“twenty two”) and *chaubisi* (“twenty four”), respectively. In the *baisi* and *chaubisi* regions, most of the Khasas acquired the upper caste designation of Chetri. The rulers of the *baisi* and *chaubisi* mini-states, however, were frequently members of the Thakuri caste, who, like the Chetris, were part of the Kshatriya *varna* (social order). The Thakuris were Rajputs, the ruling clans of the Rajasthan state in India, who immigrated to the Himalayan hills when Muslim armies began invading northern India.

### **The Modern Period**

#### *The Early Shah Dynasty*<sup>44</sup>

One of the small kingdoms to the west of the Kathmandu Valley was Gorkha, ruled by the Shah Dynasty. The Gorkha ruler, Prithvi Narayan, waged a campaign to conquer the city-states of the Kathmandu Valley in the 18th century, ending over 500 years of Malla rule.



© Clemensmarabu / wikipedia.org  
King Prithvi Narayan Shah

After Prithvi’s death, there followed many decades of disruptive political intrigue during which Nepal was often ruled by child sovereigns. Under these circumstances, power struggles erupted between the royal regents, who ruled in place of the underage kings, and competing noble factions. The position of prime minister often served as the seat of power, a pattern that would become even more pronounced during the second half of the 19th century.

#### *The Ranas*<sup>45</sup>

In 1837, the Nepalese king Rajendra Bikram Singh announced his intention to rule Nepal independent of regency influence. Court conspiracies and plots, however, continued to spiral in ever greater intrigues behind the scenes. After a massacre in 1846, Jang Bahadur Kunwar became prime minister. Believed to have been a conspirator both in the massacre and an assassination leading up to it, Jang Bahadur instituted a purge of friends and families of the dead, forcing over 6,000 people into exile. Among those banished were the king (Rajendra) and queen, whose son Sumendra remained in Nepal and



Courtesy of Wikipedia.org  
Jang Bahadur Rana

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<sup>44</sup> *A History of Nepal*. Whelpton, John. “Chapter 2. Unification and Sanskritisation, 1743–1885 [p. 23, 37].” 2005. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>45</sup> *A History of Nepal*. Whelpton, John. “Chapter 2. Unification and Sanskritisation, 1743–1885 [pp. 46–48].” 2005. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

became the new king after his father was officially dethroned.

Jang Bahadur further consolidated his power through the intermarriage of his children with those of Sumendra. In 1856 King Sumendra granted him the title of Maharaja of Kaski and Lamjung, giving Jang a kingdom within the larger kingdom. Two years later, the king added the honorific title Rana to Jang Bahadur's name—the title by which Jang's dynasty would be known.

### *Mounting Opposition and Revolt*<sup>46</sup>

During the time of Rana's rule, some social reforms were enacted in Nepal, including bans on slavery and *sati* (the practice in which a Hindu widow would throw herself on her husband's funeral pyre).<sup>47</sup> For the most part, however, Nepal remained a medieval kingdom, almost completely isolated from the advances of the outside world. Beyond Kathmandu Valley, illiteracy was almost universal (knowledge was transmitted mainly through oral tradition) and access to health care was nearly nonexistent.<sup>48</sup>



Courtesy of Wikipedia.org  
King Tribhuvan Bir Bikram Shah

The Shah monarchy, which was reduced to figurehead status during the entire Rana era, became relevant once again when King Tribhuvan Bir Bikram Shah escaped to the Indian embassy in Kathmandu. Tribhuvan had supported the anti-Rana movement and the goal of sovereignty for the king, which was shared by the Nepalese Congress. After intense negotiations with the Indian embassy, Mohan Rana allowed Tribhuvan and the royal family to flee the country, leaving behind the only male heir, three-year-old Gyanendra, whom Rana crowned as the new monarch of Nepal. The boy's reign was short; it ended scarcely a year later when his grandfather Tribhuvan was allowed to return to Nepal and resume the throne. Armed revolt began in earnest almost immediately and the Liberation Army of the Nepalese Congress gaining control over much of eastern Nepal by January 1951.

### *The Return of Shah Rule*<sup>49</sup>

For most of the 1950s, Nepal went through several short-lived, ineffective governments. The new regimes failed either to create a new constitution or to generate any true widespread support among the general population.

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<sup>46</sup> *A History of Nepal*. Whelpton, John. "Chapter 3: Nepal Under the Shamsheer Rana, 1885–1951 [p. 71]." 2005. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>47</sup> According to an article in the *Journal of South Asia Women Studies*, the practice of *sati* may not have been upheld or enforced during Nepal's Licchavi dynasty (300–879 C.E.). Source: *Journal of South Asia Women Studies*. Acharya, Jayaraj. "Sati Was Not Enforced in Ancient Nepal." 15 May 1996. [http://asiatica.org/jsaws/vol2\\_no2/sati-was-not-enforced-in-ancient-nepal/](http://asiatica.org/jsaws/vol2_no2/sati-was-not-enforced-in-ancient-nepal/)

<sup>48</sup> *Spectrum Guide to Nepal*. "History: The Rana Era [p. 58]." 2000. New York: Interlink Books.

<sup>49</sup> Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Country Study: Nepal*. "Nepal: Historical Setting: Rana Rule, Nepal: The Democratic Experiment." September 1991. [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+np0029\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+np0029))

In December 1957, an organized campaign of *satyagraha* (civil disobedience) pressured the king to call for legislative elections. When the Nepalese Congress won an overwhelming victory in these elections, its longtime leader B. P. Koirala became the new prime minister. With a clear mandate, the Koirala government enacted sweeping new reforms, including the elimination of the *birta* estates (tax-free landholdings issued by the government to Ranas and their supporters).

The new measures enacted by the Koirala government were not supported by the long entrenched power structure within Nepal. King Mahendra called a state of emergency in December 1960. As a result, absolute authority was returned to the monarchy. Political parties were banned, thus silencing any possible organized opposition.

### *Return of Democracy*

During the 1980s, discontent continued to grow. Public dissatisfaction with the government was no longer associated so much with political oppression, but rather with economic stagnation and high-level corruption. Ultimately, King Birendra (Mahendra's son) was forced to abdicate. A new constitution was written and the elections of 1991 gave the Nepalese Congress Party (NCP) the majority of seats. Giraja P. Koirala, the younger brother of Nepal's first elected prime minister B. P. Koirala (in 1959), was chosen by the NCP to lead the new government.<sup>50</sup>



### *The Communist Split*

In the 1991 elections, there was also competition among a number of communist or leftist organizations, one of which was the United People's Front alliance. This alliance-of-convenience would split apart after the election, leading to more turbulence. In 1996, the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN-M), a militant, Maoist political faction, launched an armed insurrection against the government. The insurrection was led by Pushpa Kumar Dahal, who is better known by his *nom de guerre*, Prachanda.

### *Nepalese Civil War*

The year 2001 would emerge as a turning point in the Nepalese civil war, declared the "Peoples' War" by the Maoists. In April, two attacks by the CPN-M resulted in the death of 70 policemen.<sup>51</sup>

Against this background of civil war, a bizarre and tragic event occurred at the royal palace. Tribhuvan's great-grandson, Crown Prince Dipendra, shot his father (King

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<sup>50</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica. "Nepal: History: Modern Period: Nepal Since 1950." 2009. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-23633>

<sup>51</sup> USAWC Strategy Research Project. Crane, Col. S.D. "The Maoist Insurgency in Nepal: 1996–2001." April 2002. <http://smallwarsjournal.com/documents/crane1.pdf>

Birendra) and mother, brother and sister, and several aunts, uncles, and other royal family members.<sup>52</sup> After the murders, Dipendra turned the gun on himself, leaving his uncle Gyanendra the sole surviving male heir of the royal family and next in line for succession to the throne.

### *Path to Peace*

In February 2005, King Gyanendra formally dissolved the Nepalese government, thereby severing Nepal's last connection to democratic rule. The king asserted that the Nepalese political establishment had proven itself corrupt and unable to turn the tide of the Maoist insurgency.<sup>53</sup>



© Pavel Novak  
Crowded streets in Kathmandu

Ironically, the king's decision to clamp down helped create the conditions by which a peace treaty would ultimately be reached. With the mainstream political parties and the Maoists now unified by their opposition to the king, representatives of several parties began secret discussions. Peace talks carried out through the summer and fall of 2006 led finally to an agreement signed by Nepalese Prime Minister Giraja Koirala and Maoist leader Prachanda in November of that year.

### *Recent Events*

An election for a Nepalese Constituent Assembly was held in April 2008, with the Maoists winning the most seats. The election marked the ending of the Nepalese monarchy as well. In addition, Prachanda stepped down from office in May 2009. His resignation followed a stand-off with the other Nepalese political parties and the nation's president concerning the Maoist leader's decision to relieve the Nepalese army chief of his duties.<sup>54</sup> Prachanda later vowed to launch a third "People's Movement."

## **Economy**

Nepal is one of the poorest countries in the world, with close to one third of its people living below the poverty line.<sup>55</sup> Before 1990, Nepal remained closed to the world in almost all respects, including its economy; most of its international trade was conducted with China and India. The government has since liberalized the economy, reducing its

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<sup>52</sup> *A History of Nepal*. Whelpton, John. "Chapter 7: Democracy and Disillusionment: Nepal Since 1991 [p. 211]." 2005. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

<sup>53</sup> BBC News. Sharma, Nagendar. "Nepal Opposition in Maoist Talks." 18 November 2009. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/4450438.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4450438.stm)

<sup>54</sup> VOA News. Pasricha, Anjana. "Nepal's Maoist Prime Minister Prachanda Resigns." 4 May 2009. <http://www.voanews.com/english/archive/2009-05/2009-05-04-voa8.cfm?CFID=301887598&CFTOKEN=87716198&jsessionid=6630fadd9d0db22cd4e6585c43375b394f24>

<sup>55</sup> Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Factbook*. "Nepal: Economy." 29 September 2009. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/np.html>

centralized planning and adopting some privatization and market reforms. Overall, however, such reforms have mostly benefited wealthier segments of the population, especially in urban areas.<sup>56, 57</sup>

Developing the country's economy presents a number of obstacles. Nepal remains predominantly rural, with most people tied to a subsistence agricultural economy. Financial infrastructure, banking and technological development, monetary reforms, and efficient transportation networks are needed to advance people's economic wellbeing. Nepal's vulnerability to natural disasters and the isolation of its people across an arduous terrain poses special challenges. In Nepal's service sector, the dramatic mountains and diverse terrain could lead to development of a stronger tourist industry by attracting visitors interested in white-water rafting, mountain climbing, and other activities. Hydroelectric development is also a possibility, given the country's powerful rivers, its many rapidly-rushing streams, and its potential energy market in India.<sup>58, 59</sup>

### *Agriculture*

Agriculture is the source of income for three fourths of Nepal's people, yet it provides only about one third of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Accounting for most of Nepal's value received from agriculture, the main crops harvested are primarily wheat and rice, and after that, beans, corn, sugarcane, and jute. Agricultural products also include milk and water buffalo meat.



© Ecoagriculture Partners / Flickr.com  
Rice harvest in Bhurchung Khola valley

Enough crops are grown in the Tarai lowlands to produce a surplus, which is used to provide supplies to people living in the higher areas where food deficiencies are the norm.<sup>60, 61</sup> Farmers who live in the Tarai have small land parcels, usually working no more than 1 hectare (2.5 acres) and customarily giving the landowner half of their harvest.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Nepal. Bhattarai, Krishna P. "Chapter 6: Nepal's Economy [pp. 76–90]." 2008. New York: Chelsea House.

<sup>57</sup> U.S. Library of Congress. "Country Profile: Nepal: Economy." November 2005.  
<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Nepal.pdf>

<sup>58</sup> Nepal. Bhattarai, Krishna P. "Chapter 8: Nepal Looks Ahead [pp. 107–108.]" 2008. New York: Chelsea House.

<sup>59</sup> Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Factbook*. "Nepal: Economy." 29 September 2009.  
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/np.html>

<sup>60</sup> Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Factbook*. "Nepal: Economy." 29 September 2009.  
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/np.html>

<sup>61</sup> U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Nepal: Economy." January 2009.  
<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5283.htm>

<sup>62</sup> *Culture Smart! Nepal*. Feller, Tessa. "Chapter 1: Land & People [p. 38]." 2008. London: Kuperard.

## Industry and Service Sectors

Industry in Nepal accounts for only 16.6% of the nation's GDP.<sup>63</sup> Most manufacturing plants are located in the Tarai region and in the Kathmandu Valley. They mainly process imported raw materials, textiles and carpets, and agricultural produce such as sugar cane and jute.<sup>64</sup>



© Dave Watts  
Signs in Kathmandu

Nepal's largest industry is tourism, with the total service industry contributing approximately 61% to the country's GDP. According to 2004 estimates, the service industry employs around 18% of the labor force. The tourism sector in particular grew in 2008, but is expected to slow or decrease in 2009 because of the world economy's general deterioration.<sup>65</sup>

Tourism did not actually start until 1953, when Sir Edmund Hillary, a mountaineer from New Zealand, and Tenzing Norgay, his Sherpa guide, scaled Mount Everest. Since then, many explorers have followed, attracted to Nepal's high mountains. Other tourist attractions in Nepal include white-water rafting, Himalayan treks, and jungle safaris in the tropical lowlands. Development of a tourism infrastructure (banking, transportation, lodging, etc.) and political stability will help strengthen this important economic sector.<sup>66</sup>

## Exports and Imports

Given its weak manufacturing infrastructure, Nepal relies on imported manufactured goods such as electrical and petroleum products, and equipment and machinery. Nepal also imports electricity and oil. Its primary business partner is India, from which almost 60% of all its imported goods come. Other partners are China (13%) and Singapore (1.8%).<sup>67</sup>

Clothing, textiles, and carpets dominate Nepal's exports.<sup>68, 69</sup> Other exports include leather goods, jute products, and agricultural commodities such as beans and grain.

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<sup>63</sup> Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Factbook*. "Nepal: Economy." 29 September 2009. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/np.html>

<sup>64</sup> *Culture Smart! Nepal*. Feller, Tessa. "Chapter 1: Land & People [p. 39]." 2008. London: Kuperard.

<sup>65</sup> Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Factbook*. "Nepal: Economy." 29 September 2009. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/np.html>

<sup>66</sup> *Nepal*. Bhattarai, Krishna P. "Chapter 6: Nepal's Economy [pp. 87–89]." 2008. New York: Chelsea House.

<sup>67</sup> Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Factbook*. "Nepal: Economy." 29 September 2009. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/np.html>

<sup>68</sup> Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Factbook*. "Nepal: Economy." 29 September 2009. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/np.html>

<sup>69</sup> *Nepal*. Bhattarai, Krishna P. "Chapter 6: Nepal's Economy [pp. 83–84]." 2008. New York: Chelsea House.

Approximately 67% of Nepal's exports go to India. The remainder goes mainly to the U.S. (7%) and Bangladesh (almost 7%).<sup>70</sup>

## Ethnic and Linguistic Groups<sup>71</sup>

Nepal is an ethnically diverse nation, with over 100 distinct castes and ethnicities identified in its most recent (2001) census. "The broadest classification of ethnicity is national origin, which includes three major groups: Indo-Nepalese, who originated in India; Tibeto-Nepalese, who are of Tibeto-Mongol origin; and indigenous Nepalese, whose habitation predates the other groups."<sup>72</sup>



© Patrick Seidler  
Tamang woman

Approximately half the country's people speak Nepali as their mother tongue, with more than 90 other native languages listed in the census.<sup>73</sup> However, no anthropological/linguistic survey of the entire population has ever been conducted.<sup>74</sup> In addition to the diversity in language and ethnicity, religion plays a key role in Nepalese cultural identity.

### *Parbatiya (Hill Castes)*

Native speakers of the language now called Nepali (previously Gorkhali), the Parbatiya are descendents of the Khasas, an Indo-Aryan group that invaded what is now western Nepal in the first millennium B.C.E.<sup>75</sup> As might be expected from their identification as "hill castes," the Parbatiya still live predominantly in the hill regions of far west Nepal. Those who identify themselves as part of this group make up more than 40% of the population of Nepal. They are primarily Brahmans (13%), Chetris (16%), and Kamis (5%).<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Factbook*. "Nepal: Economy." 29 September 2009.

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/np.html>

<sup>71</sup> Central Bureau of Statistics "Nepal: Statistical Yearbook: Area and Population." 2001.

[http://www.cbs.gov.np/statistical\\_year\\_book\\_content.php](http://www.cbs.gov.np/statistical_year_book_content.php)

<sup>72</sup> U. S. Library of Congress. "Country Profile: Nepal: Society: Ethnic Groups." 2005.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Nepal.pdf>

<sup>73</sup> U. S. Library of Congress. "Country Profile: Nepal: Society: Ethnic Groups." 2005.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Nepal.pdf>

<sup>74</sup> ANCSDAAP. Bastola, T.S. and Gharty Chhetry, R.K. "Changing Patterns of Utilization of Census Data in Nepal." 25–27 March 2009.

<http://www.ancsdaap.org/cencon2009/Papers/Nepal/Nepal.TS.Bastola.RK.Gharty.Chhetry.pdf>

<sup>75</sup> *A Foundation in Nepali Grammar*. Manders, Christopher Jay. "A Brief History of the Nepali Language [p. 24]." 2007.

[http://books.google.com/books?id=iZn9uuh34dQC&pg=PA23&lpg=PA23&dq=history+of+the+nepali+language&source=bl&ots=u4FUxyo4iX&sig=Wwr8daK5HQ1Enel1Qd4lkgxKyTU&hl=en&ei=OMjLStvjE430sQP1ssWKAQ&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=9#](http://books.google.com/books?id=iZn9uuh34dQC&pg=PA23&lpg=PA23&dq=history+of+the+nepali+language&source=bl&ots=u4FUxyo4iX&sig=Wwr8daK5HQ1Enel1Qd4lkgxKyTU&hl=en&ei=OMjLStvjE430sQP1ssWKAQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=9#)

<sup>76</sup> *A History of Nepal*. Whelpton, John. "Chapter 1: Environment, State, and Society in the Central Himalayas to 1743 [p. 9]." 2005. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

## *Newar*

People of this ethnic group comprise approximately 5.6% of the population of Nepal.<sup>77</sup> About two thirds of the Newar people speak Nepali as a first language, while others speak their native language, Nepali Bhasa, which is unrelated to Nepali. According to some sources, the Newars are indigenous to Kathmandu Valley though they live throughout the country. Their rich culture has made significant contributions to the art and literature of Nepal. Newar architecture can still be seen in Kathmandu and surrounding areas.<sup>78, 79</sup>



© Fernando Zarur  
Young nepali Newar girl  
attending Lhi

## *Magar*

Fewer than half of the Magar people speak Eastern or Western Magar (considered distinct linguistic varieties) as their mother tongue. They are the largest indigenous group in Nepal—approximately 7.2% of the total population—concentrated in the western hill region. The Magars, along with the Gurung and Rai peoples, are known for their participation as Gurkha soldiers of the British army.<sup>80, 81</sup>

## *Tamang*

The word *ta-mang* means something like “horse soldier.”<sup>82</sup> Tamang people are Buddhist and live in the hilly mountain region surrounding Kathmandu Valley.<sup>83</sup> According to Nepal’s 2001 census, they constitute 5.5% of the population.<sup>84</sup> Some sources claim they were the first to settle Kathmandu Valley but later forced into the hills by the Newars.

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<sup>77</sup> *A History of Nepal*. Whelpton, John. “Chapter 1: Environment, State, and Society in the Central Himalayas to 1743 [p. 9].” 2005. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>78</sup> Nepal Ethnographic Museum. “The Newar.” 2002. <http://www.asia-planet.net/nepal/museum.htm>

<sup>79</sup> Ethnologue. Languages of the World. “Languages of Nepal: Newar.” 2009. [http://www.ethnologue.com/show\\_country.asp?name=np](http://www.ethnologue.com/show_country.asp?name=np)

<sup>80</sup> *A History of Nepal*. Whelpton, John. “Chapter 1: Environment, State, and Society in the Central Himalayas to 1743 [p. 9].” 2005. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>81</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica. “Magar.” 2009. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9049967>

<sup>82</sup> Royal Nepalese Embassy. “People.” 2001–2004. [http://www.visi.com/~shah/cgi-bin/embassy/scripts/embassy\\_page\\_loader.cgi?page=people](http://www.visi.com/~shah/cgi-bin/embassy/scripts/embassy_page_loader.cgi?page=people)

<sup>83</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica. “Tamang.” 2009. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9071081>

<sup>84</sup> *A History of Nepal*. Whelpton, John. “Chapter 1: Environment, State, and Society in the Central Himalayas to 1743 [p. 9].” 2005. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

## *Kirati*

Together the Rai and Limbu people comprise 4.4% of Nepal's population.<sup>85</sup> These people, along with several smaller groups, are part of the Kirat Confederation (or Kirati people). Once the earliest inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley, they now live primarily in the eastern hill regions of the country and practice their traditional animist religion: Kirant. They were heavily recruited as Gurkha soldiers, with their curved knife becoming a distinctive part of the uniform.<sup>86, 87</sup>



© Dhillung Kirat  
Kirat women

## *Gurung*

The Gurung people live primarily around Pokhara, on the southern flank of the Annapurna massif. Almost half of them are native Nepali speakers. Many members of the Gurung ethnic group have served as foot soldiers in the British Gurkha regiment. Their internal society is patrilineal, with two clan groups marking different social strata.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> *A History of Nepal*. Whelpton, John. "Chapter 1: Environment, State, and Society in the Central Himalayas to 1743 [p. 9]." 2005. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>86</sup> Docstoc.com. *History and Culture of the Kirat People*. Chemjong, I. S. "Chapter 6: Sikkim-Gorkha War (1775–1815 AD). [pp. 239–243]." 2003. <http://www.docstoc.com/docs/2199990/HISTORY-OF-THE-KIRAT-PEOPLE>

<sup>87</sup> U.S. Department of State. "Nepal: International Religious Freedom Report 2007." 2007. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2007/90232.htm>

<sup>88</sup> Nepal Ethnographic Museum. "The Gurung." 2002. <http://www.asia-planet.net/nepal/museum.htm>

### *Madheshi (Tarai Castes)*

The Tarai region, also known as the Madhesh, is home to many different castes collectively known as the Madheshis. These people speak mostly north Indian dialects, with very few native Nepali speakers. Within the Madheshi, the Yadavs (“herdsmen”) are the most numerous and have a large enclave in southeastern Nepal.<sup>89</sup>

### *Tharu*

These people are indigenous to the Tarai region where, over time, they developed a natural immunity to mosquito-borne diseases like malaria. As such, they were able to inhabit the forest and marshy areas at the foot of the Siwaliks, where other peoples could not live. After the government instituted a malaria eradication program in the 1950s, however, the region became overrun with new inhabitants who quickly cleared forested land for agricultural use. The Tharu people became mostly bonded laborers—virtual slaves—although Nepal has outlawed this practice since 2000.<sup>90</sup>



© Wonderlane / flickr.com  
Unpaved road in the Himalayan

### *Muslim*

Although Muslims are not technically an ethnic group, the government of Nepal treats them as such. There are several pockets of Muslim peoples who have migrated to Nepal from India and remain along the shared border. A small community of Muslims has existed in Kathmandu since the late 15th century, when Kashmiri Muslim traders first arrived. Later, the Malla rulers invited other Muslims to work as courtiers, counselors, musicians, and perfume makers.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> *A History of Nepal*. Whelpton, John. “Chapter 1: Environment, State, and Society in the Central Himalayas to 1743 [p. 8, 9].” 2005. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>90</sup> *Nepal*. Bhattarai P., Krishna. “Chapter 4: People and Culture [p.60].” 2008. New York: Chelsea House.

<sup>91</sup> Nepali Times. “Nepali Muslims.” 10–16 September 2004.  
<http://www.nepalitimes.com.np/issue/213/Nation/2047>

## *Sherpa*

Originally from Tibet, these mountain people have settled to the east of Mount Everest. It is speculated that their climbing ability, highly valued in the mountaineering community, was brought about by genetic adaptations to living at high altitudes.<sup>92</sup> Although they are well-known outside Nepal because of their role as mountain guides, they constitute a very small percentage (0.6%) of Nepal's population.<sup>93</sup>



© Dhillung Kirat  
Sherpa porters

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<sup>92</sup> *WMS: Official Journal of the Wilderness Medical Society*, Vol. 19, No. 1. Droma, Yunden and Masayuki Hanaoka, Buddha Basnyat, Amit Arjyal, Pritam Neupane, Anil Pandit, Dependra Sharma, Michiko Ito, Naoyuki Miwa, Yoshihiko Katsuyama, Masao Ota, Keishi Kubo. "Adaptation to High Altitude in Sherpas: Association with the Insertion/Deletion Polymorphism in the Angiotensin-converting Enzyme Gene [pp. 22–29]." No date. <http://www.wemjournal.org/wmsonline/?request=get-document&issn=1080-6032&volume=019&issue=01&page=0022>

<sup>93</sup> *A History of Nepal*. Whelpton, John. "Chapter 1: Environment, State, and Society in the Central Himalayas to 1743 [p. 8, 9]." 2005. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

# Religion

## Overview

Several religions are practiced in Nepal, but the majority of the population (slightly over 80%) follows Hinduism.<sup>94</sup> This percentage has declined since the 1952–54 censuses, which counted the percentage of Hindus in Nepal as almost 90%. The country's second largest religious group is Buddhist, representing close to 11% of the population.



© Wonderlane / Flickr.com  
Buddhist lamas clapping hands

In contrast to the downward trend for Hinduism, this figure for Buddhism is up from the 1952–54 censuses, when only 8% (approximately) of the people in the country identified as Buddhist. The upward trend for Buddhism was particularly apparent after 1981, when an increase of Buddhists became substantial. The third-largest religious group in Nepal is Islamic (slightly over 4%), mostly members of the Sunni sect. The remainder of the Nepalese people identify with other faiths such as Kirant, Jain, Christian, and Sikh.<sup>95</sup> Of them, Kirant is the largest, approaching 4% of the population. An animist religion indigenous to the Nepali-speaking region, it was not counted as a separate religion until the 1991 census.<sup>96, 97</sup>

Various representations of Nepal's different religions are visible within the country, which the Interim Government officially declared a secular state in 2007. In most public schools, for instance, a statue of Saraswati, Hindu goddess of wisdom and the arts, stands on the property. Some students pray to the goddess, but worship is optional, and others do not, since religious education is not part of the public school curriculum. To incorporate and legitimize other faiths besides Hinduism, in December 2007 the interim government added six religious festivals to its official holiday list. The festivals include representations of Buddhism, Kirant, and Christianity.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> All population figures in this paragraph representing current population status are based on Nepal's 2001 Census. Source: Government of Nepal. Central Bureau of Statistics. Population Monograph of Nepal 2003. Dahal, Dr. Dilli Ram. "Chapter 3: Social Composition of the Population, Caste/Ethnicity and Religion in Nepal [p. 104]." [http://www.cbs.gov.np/population\\_1\\_contents.php](http://www.cbs.gov.np/population_1_contents.php)

<sup>95</sup> Central Bureau of Statistics, Government of Nepal. Central Bureau of Statistics, Population Monograph of Nepal 2003. Dahal, Dr. Dilli Ram. "Chapter 3: Social Composition of the Population, Caste/Ethnicity and Religion in Nepal [p. 104]." [http://www.cbs.gov.np/population\\_1\\_contents.php](http://www.cbs.gov.np/population_1_contents.php)

<sup>96</sup> Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. U.S. Department of State. International Religious Freedom Report 2007. "Nepal." 2007. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2007/90232.htm>

<sup>97</sup> Central Bureau of Statistics, Government of Nepal. Population Monograph of Nepal 2003. Dahal, Dr. Dilli Ram. "Chapter 3: Social Composition of the Population, Caste/Ethnicity and Religion in Nepal. [p. 104]." [http://www.cbs.gov.np/population\\_1\\_contents.php](http://www.cbs.gov.np/population_1_contents.php)

<sup>98</sup> UNHCR. The UN Refugee Agency. "2008 Report on International Religious Freedom - Nepal." 19 September 2008. <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,,USDOS,,NPL,4562d8cf2,48d5cbf82,0.html>

## The Synthesis of Hinduism and Buddhism in Nepal

Hinduism and Buddhism in Nepal have become syncretic, a fusion of the major religious streams and local folk beliefs. Though Buddhism originated in India, it entered Nepal with people who migrated into the area from the north (Tibet). Hinduism entered with those who came from the south (India). During the course of Nepal's history, the two religions and their cultural expressions have blended in many ways. They have influenced each



Courtesy of Wikipedia.org  
Buddha statue from Sarnath, 4th century CE

other, copied each other, and honored each other, even while also absorbing the indigenous religions they encountered. The Hindu religious population remains larger in the lowlands and southern hill regions, while the Tibetan Buddhist population is still the majority in the mountainous north. Still, most people's religious practices reflect both religions to some extent. They worship a number of gods and goddesses including the Hindu god Vishnu, preserver of the world's living creatures, and Buddha, considered by Hindus to be one among several of Vishnu's incarnations.<sup>99</sup> (The same Buddha is also the central symbol of the Buddhist religion.) Another example of blended religious practice can be seen in Tantrism, an offshoot of Buddhism that incorporates Hindu philosophies and indigenous folk religions. Tantrism may have arrived in the region in the 7th century and is associated with a number of deities. It is reflected in the distinctive art and sculptures of Nepal.<sup>100, 101</sup>

### Hinduism

Even in its more traditional form (seen in much of India), Hinduism is not a highly organized religion, in that it does not have a centralized authority or doctrine. A famous Hindu religious saying is, "Truth is one; sages call it by different names."<sup>102</sup> Hindus revere or worship more than one deity, including Brahma, the creator and supreme being who is present everywhere. Brahma has two other aspects (which receive more worship than the creator). They are Shiva (the destroyer) and Vishnu (the preserver). The gods Rama and Krishna are incarnations of Vishnu.<sup>103</sup> Even though these many gods exist in their



© Dey Alexander  
Candles at Swayambhunath

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<sup>99</sup> Nepal. Bhattarai, Krishna P. "Chapter 4: People and Culture [pp. 65–66]." c. 2008. New York: Chelsea House.

<sup>100</sup> Nepal in Pictures: Visual Geography Series. Geography Department, Lerner Publications Company. "Chapter 3: The People [p. 22]." c. 1989. Minneapolis: Lerner Publications Company.

<sup>101</sup> Nepal Visitors. "Nepal Religions." c. 1999–2008. <http://nepalvisitors.com/religion.htm#>

<sup>102</sup> Religion Facts. "Hindu Beliefs." 15 November 2006. <http://www.religionfacts.com/hinduism/beliefs.htm>

<sup>103</sup> Nepal Visitors. "Nepal Religions." c. 1999–2008. <http://nepalvisitors.com/religion.htm#>

religion, Hindus generally see all deities as representations of “ultimate reality,” which has various names. Thus, Hinduism is both monotheistic and polytheistic.<sup>104, 105</sup>

The beliefs and dogmas of Hinduism are based on the authority contained in India’s oldest sacred texts, the Vedas. The earliest text is the *Rigveda*, written sometime around 1500 B.C.E. by an unknown author.<sup>106</sup> In addition to the Vedas, Hindu priests (*Brahmans*) are sources of authority for Hindus.

Hindu rituals in Nepal vary widely between villages and different regions, but they also share many features that are common to Hinduism in general. Such beliefs include a focus on the perceived differences between purity and pollution. This awareness underlies a need for practitioners to perform certain rites in order to reduce or eliminate spiritual pollution that may be attached to people or their surroundings. Water and fire are often used as purifying agents in Hindu religious ceremonies. Hindus also believe it is necessary to refrain from certain acts deemed unclean—such as killing animals—in order to avoid spiritual pollution. Another feature of Hinduism is a belief in the existence of an undying soul that reincarnates after death, and belief in *karma*, a law of cause and effect that guides one’s destiny through successive lifetimes.<sup>107, 108</sup>

Hinduism is practiced widely throughout Nepal. Even though the numbers of followers have been declining, most ethnic and caste groups practice Hindu religious traditions to various degrees. The major ethnic groups with large percentages of Hindu practitioners include the Parbitiyas (hill castes), Tharus, Magars, and Newars.<sup>109</sup>

### *The Caste System of Hinduism*

Since ancient times, Hinduism has been associated with a caste system that defines and limits a person’s class, rights, and status from the moment of birth. Caste sharply delineates society by hierarchical division and regulates the ways people interact and show respect to each other. In most instances, it determines a person’s way of life—their expectations, conduct, and duties—by prescribing their social position, profession, marriage options, and community



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<sup>104</sup> Religion Facts. “Hindu Beliefs.” 15 November 2006.

<http://www.religionfacts.com/hinduism/beliefs.htm>

<sup>105</sup> *Culture Smart! Nepal*. Feller, Tessa. “Chapter 3: Religion, Customs, & Tradition [p. 63].” c. 2008. London: Kuperard.

<sup>106</sup> Internet Sacred Text Archive. “Hinduism: The Vedas.” c. 2008. <http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/>

<sup>107</sup> U.S. Library of Congress. A Country Study: India. “Chapter 3 – Religious Life: The Ceremonies of Hinduism.” James Heitzman and Robert L. Worden, Eds. September 1995.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/intoc.html>

<sup>108</sup> Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. U.S. Department of State. International Religious Freedom Report 2007. “Nepal.” 2007. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2007/90232.htm>

<sup>109</sup> Central Bureau of Statistics, Government of Nepal. Population Monograph of Nepal 2003. Dahal, Dr. Dilli Ram. “3.4.1: Major Ethnic/Caste Groups Following Hinduism [pp. 105–06].”

[http://www.cbs.gov.np/population\\_1\\_1\\_contents.php](http://www.cbs.gov.np/population_1_1_contents.php)

interactions.<sup>110</sup> Fundamentally, castes form a ladder of religious purity and social prestige. The priestly Brahmins and the warrior Kshatriyas (also known as Chetris in Nepal) are at the top. The Dalits, or untouchables, so-called because they engage in occupations that are considered unclean, are at the bottom. Dozens of other castes fall between these categories.

Castes vary from one group and one region to the next. Brahmins are often priests, landlords, or peasant farmers. Landowning farmers, tenant cultivators and landlords may belong to Kshatriyas. Untouchables usually perform more degrading tasks such as scavenging, but can also conduct blacksmithing, carpentry, barbering, or farm labor.<sup>111, 112</sup>

According to centuries-old customs, the rules of caste status are inviolable and cannot be changed; caste attaches to a person for his or her lifetime. This traditional pattern is, however, changing because of modern influences introduced through cultural exchange, education, and global interactions. Discrimination based on caste has been illegal in Nepal since 1936, but it still occurs today due to its deep historical roots.<sup>113, 114</sup>

## Buddhism

The land that is now Nepal was a meeting point in its early history for Buddhists from both Tibet and India. Siddhartha Gautama (“the Buddha”) was born in the 6th century B.C.E in India (or in Lumbini, a town in southern Nepal). According to records, he was a Hindu prince of the Kshatriya warrior caste<sup>115</sup> who gave up his family life and luxuries to pursue an ascetic spiritual path. After many years, Siddhartha became aware of the cause of suffering. He also realized a way to overcome this state and dedicated the rest of his life to passing this knowledge on to others. The religio-philosophical doctrine he articulated became known as Buddhism.<sup>116, 117, 118</sup>



Courtesy of Wikipedia.org  
Kirat priest in Nakchong

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<sup>110</sup> *Nepal*. Bhattarai, Krishna P. “Chapter 4: People and Culture [pp. 60–61].” c. 2008. New York: Chelsea House.

<sup>111</sup> *Nepal in Pictures: Visual Geography Series*. Geography Department, Lerner Publications Company. “Chapter 3: The People [pp. 35–36].” c. 1989. Minneapolis: Lerner Publications Company.

<sup>112</sup> The term “untouchable” has been replaced in general current usage by “Dalit.”

<sup>113</sup> *Nepal*. Bhattarai, Krishna P. “Chapter 4: People and Culture [p. 65].” c. 2008. New York: Chelsea House.

<sup>114</sup> U.S. Department of State. International Religious Freedom Report 2007. “Nepal.” 2007. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2007/90232.htm>

<sup>115</sup> NationMaster.com. “Siddhartha Gautama.” <http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/Siddhartha-Gautama>

<sup>116</sup> U.S. Library of Congress. A Country Study: Nepal. “Chapter 2: The Society and Its Environment. Religion, Nepal: Buddhism.” Andrea Matles Savada, Ed. September 1991. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/nptoc.html>

In pursuing his purpose, Siddhartha Gautama was interested in restoring morality to what he interpreted as the prevailing religion's legalistic and highly ritualistic character. Thus, the tenets of Buddhism focused on humankind, rather than on a god or gods. The central premise of Buddhism is that humans can escape from life's pain only by ending their worldly attachments. The ultimate goal is enlightenment, known as *nirvana* (or *nibbana* according to Theravada texts). According to Buddhist scripture and belief, enlightenment is a state of mind that transcends all desire and therefore ends any sense of suffering<sup>119</sup>

The Buddha taught that people should avoid all extremes and attachment to passions in their lives and follow an ideal known as the Middle Way, which involves awareness of the Buddhist concept of the Four Noble Truths. According to Buddha, desire is the cause of suffering and the Four Noble Truths outline a way to be free from it by following the Eightfold Path. This route, which requires no intervention of priests, consists of the following ethical-moral choices: "right views, right intent, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort."<sup>120</sup> The remaining two moral choices, right mindfulness and right concentration, involve the quality of meditation that is necessary to gain higher awareness and sustain oneself on the Eightfold Path.<sup>121</sup>

## The Role of Religion in the Government

Under its Interim Constitution of January 2007, Nepal is a secular state that protects freedom of religious choice and prohibits all proselytizing (i.e., trying to convert someone to another religion). If foreign workers are discovered to be engaging in such activity, the Interim Government will expel them from the country. Under the previous (now invalid) constitution of 1990, Nepal was defined as a "Hindu Kingdom," yet Hinduism was not designated a state religion. The Interim Constitution follows its predecessor in defining religious tolerance broadly and outlawing discrimination based on caste. To further this cause, the National Dalit Commission actively promotes the rights of Dalits (untouchables). Despite these governmental protections, minority religions still face some restrictions on their practice in Nepal. In particular, Tibetan Buddhists report that authorities have curtailed their religious freedom by sometimes requiring that ceremonies be held on private property.<sup>122, 123</sup>



© symmetry\_mind / flickr.com  
Offerings for Saraswati

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<sup>117</sup> Buddhist Studies: Buddha Dharma Education Association and BuddhaNet. "Buddhism in Nepal." c. 2008. <http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/buddhistworld/nepal-txt.htm>

<sup>118</sup> Nepal Visitors. "Nepal Religions." c. 1999–2008. <http://nepalvisitors.com/religion.htm#>

<sup>119</sup> U.S. Library of Congress. A Country Study: Nepal. "Chapter 2: The Society and Its Environment. Religion, Nepal: Buddhism." Andrea Matles Savada, Ed. September 1991. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/nptoc.html>

<sup>120</sup> Nepal Visitors. "Nepal Religions." c. 1999–2008. <http://nepalvisitors.com/religion.htm#>

<sup>121</sup> Shippensburg University. Dr. C. George Boeree. "The Basics of Buddhist Wisdom." [no date.] <http://webspace.ship.edu/cgboer/buddhawise.html>

<sup>122</sup> UNHCR. The UN Refugee Agency. "2008 Report on International Religious Freedom - Nepal." 19 September 2008. <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,,USDOS,,NPL,4562d8cf2,48d5cbf82,0.html>

Despite such occasional incidents, the government generally favors tolerance toward minority religious groups and does not attempt to control Hindu activities. Religious groups are not required to register with the state unless they are non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Unregistered NGOs may not legally own land or establish houses of worship. Many missionary schools, religious welfare organizations, and faith-based hospitals operate freely in Nepal, observing the requirement that they not proselytize. An NGO known as the Interreligious Council of Nepal includes members of the Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, Muslim, and Baha'i faiths, which are joined together to promote peace.<sup>124</sup>

## Influence of Religion on Daily Life

Religion is present everywhere in the lives of the Nepalese. Throughout the country, people worship at both Buddhist shrines and Hindu temples, even though the majority of people are Hindus.<sup>125</sup> The two religions have become so enmeshed that they share many of the same gods or goddesses, although the names and other details may have changed. Nepalese who follow local folk traditions, including shamanism and the Kirant religion (which emphasizes ancestor worship and animist beliefs), do so freely. Their practices have colored and influenced the country's major religious traditions (Hinduism and Buddhism).<sup>126, 127, 128, 129</sup>



© Sam Judson  
Navaratri parade

To a great extent, people's religious practices depend on their caste, which governs all aspects of life. At home, for instance, Brahmans and other castes perform certain religious ceremonies involving meditation and ritual cleanliness. They operate from a very strong sense of obligation, rooted in centuries-old Hindu tradition. People of all castes share many practices in common, including a commitment to daily worship at shrines in their homes, identifying their houses by a religious symbol, and honoring family members by placing a red *tika* mark on their foreheads. This symbolic marking is used not only on special occasions to honor the gods, but can also be practiced on a daily

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<sup>123</sup> Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. U.S. Department of State. "Nepal: International Religious Freedom Report 2007." 2007. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2007/90232.htm>

<sup>124</sup> UNHCR. The UN Refugee Agency. "2008 Report on International Religious Freedom - Nepal." 19 September 2008. <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,,USDOS,,NPL,4562d8cf2,48d5cbf82,0.html>

<sup>125</sup> SAARC Tourism.org. "Nepal Religion: Nepalese Society & Religion." c. 2009. <http://nepal.saarctourism.org/nepal-religion.html>

<sup>126</sup> U.S. Library of Congress. A Country Study: Nepal. "Chapter 2: The Society and Its Environment. Religion, Nepal: Religion and Society." Andrea Matles Savada, Ed. September 1991. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/nptoc.html>

<sup>127</sup> Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State. International Religious Freedom Report 2007. "Nepal." 2007. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2007/90232.htm>

<sup>128</sup> Nepal Tourism Board. "About Nepal: Religion." c. 2006.

<http://www.welcomenepal.com/promotional/main.php?menuid=1&submenuid=288133485776>

<sup>129</sup> *Nepal in Pictures: Visual Geography Series*. Geography Department, Lerner Publications Company. "Chapter 3: The People [pp. 41–42, 44–45]." c. 1989. Minneapolis: Lerner Publications Company.

basis, such as before eating. During religious worship, people also typically greet the god(s) with a gesture of *namaste*, in which they place their palms together close to the heart and then raise them before bowing their heads. This gesture means they are reverently acknowledging the divine that exists both in them and in the god(s).<sup>130, 131</sup>

**Exchange 1:** When do you pray?

<b>Soldier:</b>	When do you pray?	tapaayharu kun bela puja gaarnu huncha?
<b>Local:</b>	Formal prayers are in the morning and at sunset.	veedeevat pojaaharu beehana raa suryaastaa pachee huncha.

The people of Nepal honor various gods and goddesses for different reasons. They may honor primary gods out of general devotion, and other gods for specific reasons. For instance, special forms of worship may be directed to Saraswati (goddess of wisdom and the arts), Lakshimi (goddess of wealth and good fortune), or to any of Vishnu’s various incarnations. A family may have a special deity or deities they worship during particular ceremonies held with family members. Often, they leave an offering of rice or colored powder at the shrine in their homes or they may leave an offering such as a gold coin in the local temple. Many people indicate they have been blessed by wearing the ceremonial red *tika* mark on their forehead.<sup>132, 133</sup>



**Exchange 2:** Should I leave an offering?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Should I leave an offering?	ke maayle kehee behet charaauu paarcha?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes, leaving a coin at the feet of the God is nice.	ho, dyotaa ko kuttaama modra chore ramro huncha.

<sup>130</sup> Nepal. Bhattarai, Krishna P. “Chapter 4: People and Culture [p. 63].” c. 2008. New York: Chelsea House.

<sup>131</sup> Culture Smart! Nepal. Feller, Tessa. “Chapter 3: Religion, Customs, & Tradition [pp. 65–66].” c. 2008. London: Kuperard.

<sup>132</sup> Nepal. Bhattarai, Krishna P. “Chapter 4: People and Culture [pp. 65–66].” c. 2008. New York: Chelsea House.

<sup>133</sup> Nepal in Pictures: Visual Geography Series. Geography Department, Lerner Publications Company. “Chapter 3: The People [p. 35].” c. 1989. Minneapolis: Lerner Publications Company.

Many Nepalese consult shamans (priests) to help them cure illnesses or influence events in fortuitous ways. It is customary to offer hospitality to shamans, *gurus* (spiritual guides), and spiritual ascetics who live on donations they receive.<sup>134, 135</sup>

### *Religious Conflict in Daily Life*

Occasionally, people who wish to convert to Islam or Christianity, which are minority religions in Nepal, may be criticized for doing so. Some have reportedly been forced to move away from their villages, and sometimes suffered violent acts of retaliation. While it is illegal to discriminate based on caste, Dalits (untouchables) and lower caste Hindus have been known to be turned away from Hindu religious festivals or prevented from entering Hindu temples.<sup>136, 137</sup>

## **Religious Holidays and Events**

Yearly festivals are associated with different gods and goddesses. Most of them are Hindu, and many of the holy days are national holidays. They include Mahashivaratri, Buddha Jayanti, Falgun Purnima, Krishna Asthami, Dasain, and Tihar. In 2007, six additional festivals were added to the list of official holidays. Lhosar is a Buddhist New Year celebration (the Gurung, Tamang, and Sherpa communities observed this holiday on different dates).



© Ellie Van Houtte  
Buddhists in meditation

The Hindu festivals of Maghi and Chhath are celebrated by the Tharu and Maithili communities respectively and Ughauli is a Kirant ethnic/religious festival celebrated by the Rai and Limbu peoples. Finally added to the list were Christmas and Eid (Eid-al-Fitr), celebrated by Christians and Muslims, respectively.<sup>138</sup>

The most prominent of these national holidays is Dasain (also spelled Dashain). Held in the autumn, it stretches for 15 days, celebrating the gods' triumph in their epic fight against demons. The celebration is broken into three periods of time, each representing an aspect of the ultimate victory over evil. During the first nine days, known as *Navaratri*, Hindus worship the gods and ask for their help in the struggle against demonic forces. This period is accompanied by a variety of ritual activities, including the sacrificial

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<sup>134</sup> *Culture Smart! Nepal*. Feller, Tessa. "Chapter 3: Religion, Customs, & Tradition [p. 66]." c. 2008. London: Kuperard.

<sup>135</sup> *Nepal in Pictures: Visual Geography Series*. Geography Department, Lerner Publications Company. "Chapter 3: The People [pp. 41–42, 44–45]." c. 1989. Minneapolis: Lerner Publications Company.

<sup>136</sup> U.S. Department of State. International Religious Freedom Report 2007. "Nepal: Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination." 2007. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2007/90232.htm>

<sup>137</sup> UNHCR. The UN Refugee Agency. "2008 Report on International Religious Freedom - Nepal." 19 September 2008. <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,,USDOS,,NPL,4562d8cf2,48d5cbf82,0.html>

<sup>138</sup> UNHCR. The UN Refugee Agency. "2008 Report on International Religious Freedom - Nepal." 19 September 2008. <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,,USDOS,,NPL,4562d8cf2,48d5cbf82,0.html>

slaughter of animals. The 10th day celebrates the gods for prevailing over evil. On this victorious day, a family elder applies a ceremonial red *tika* to the forehead of the other family members. After this blessing takes place, the family members exchange gifts. In the remaining five-day period of the ceremony, family members visit other relatives, who also bless them with *tikas*. The goddess Durga is associated with this festival.<sup>139, 140</sup>

Another festival and national holiday held in autumn (late October or early November) is Tihar, or the Festival of Lights. Tihar lasts for a period of five days. The third and most important day of the event is dedicated to the goddess of wealth, Laxmi, by welcoming her into the home. On other days of the holiday, people honor animals such as crows, dogs, and cows for divine qualities they are believed to symbolize on that day.<sup>141</sup>

One of the national holidays primarily Buddhist in origin is Buddha Jayanti, in April–May. This holiday honors Buddha’s birth, enlightenment, and death. Both Buddhists and Hindus celebrate this auspicious occasion, as Hindus believe that Buddha is an incarnation of Vishnu.<sup>142</sup>



Courtesy of Wikipedia.org  
Buddha statue from Sarnath,  
4th century CE

### **Buildings of Worship**<sup>143</sup>

Many temples and shrines, reflecting diverse architectural styles dot the countryside of Nepal. A famous temple in Kathmandu Valley, known as Kasthamandap, is built in the style of a pagoda with multiple roofs—each narrower than the one just below it—forming a triangular spire. This architectural style is also seen in China and other countries in Asia. Kasthamandap was built during the period of the Malla kings. Other pagoda-style structures include the temples of Pashupati, Changu Narayan, and Taleji. The Krishna temple in Patan reflects a different architectural style called *shikhara*. It is characterized by a tall pyramid- or cone-shaped tower, which may be built with five to nine vertical sections. A bell-shaped structure adorns its peak.



© Pablo Nicolas Taibi  
Visitors at Swayambunath stupa

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<sup>139</sup> Nepal. Bhattarai, Krishna P. “Chapter 4: People and Culture [pp. 66–67].” c. 2008. New York: Chelsea House.

<sup>140</sup> *Culture Smart! Nepal*. Feller, Tessa. “Chapter 3: Religion, Customs, & Tradition [pp. 79–80].” c. 2008. London: Kuperard.

<sup>141</sup> *Culture Smart! Nepal*. Feller, Tessa. “Chapter 3: Religion, Customs, & Tradition [pp. 79–80].” c. 2008. London: Kuperard.

<sup>142</sup> *Culture Smart! Nepal*. Feller, Tessa. “Chapter 3: Religion, Customs, & Tradition [pp. 79–80].” c. 2008. London: Kuperard.

<sup>143</sup> Nepal Visitors. “Architecture of Nepal.” c. 1999–2009.  
[http://nepalvisitors.com/arts\\_culture/architecture.htm](http://nepalvisitors.com/arts_culture/architecture.htm)

A Buddhist style of construction known as *stupa* is represented in the sacred temples of Swayambhu and Baudhanath. The Great Temple of Swayambhunath is considered by many to be the most sacred shrine in the entire Himalaya region.<sup>144, 145</sup> King Ashoka is said to have built the ancient *stupa* temples in Patan. They are designed to have 13 circular rings that sit on a square base, which in turn, rests on a hemispheric-shaped mound. On each side of the square base (the *harmika*) are paintings of pairs of mystical “all-seeing eyes.”<sup>146</sup>

Associated with certain deities and the miraculous powers they represent, many religious temples in Nepal are pilgrimage sites. Hundreds of such sites are located in Kathmandu Valley and neighboring areas. Tourists and religious pilgrims visit these places from all over the world. While earthquakes in 1355 and 1934 destroyed many ancient temples, there are important religious structures that still survive.<sup>147, 148</sup>



### Behavior in Places of Worship

Before entering a temple, visitors should ask permission.

#### Exchange 3: May I enter the temple?

<b>Soldier:</b>	May I enter the temple?	ke maa mandeer beetraa paasnaa saakchu?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	huncha

<sup>144</sup> Nepal Visitors. “Architecture of Nepal.” c. 1999–2009.

[http://nepalvisitors.com/arts\\_culture/architecture.htm](http://nepalvisitors.com/arts_culture/architecture.htm)

<sup>145</sup> Buddhist Studies. Buddhist Dharma Education Association and DharmaNet. “Buddhism in Nepal.” c. 2008. <http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/buddhistworld/nepal-txt.htm>

<sup>146</sup> Nepal Visitors. “Architecture of Nepal.” c. 1999–2009.

[http://nepalvisitors.com/arts\\_culture/architecture.htm](http://nepalvisitors.com/arts_culture/architecture.htm)

<sup>147</sup> Nepal Tourism Board. Naturally Nepal. “Religion: Religious Festivals.” c. 2006.

<http://www.welcomenepal.com/promotional/main.php?menuid=1&submenuid=288133485776>

<sup>148</sup> Buddhist Studies. Buddhist Dharma Education Association and DharmaNet. “Buddhism in Nepal.” c. 2008. <http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/buddhistworld/nepal-txt.htm>

Some temples are designated only for certain religions or groups of people.

**Exchange 4:** May I enter the temple?

<b>Soldier:</b>	May I enter the temple?	ke maa mandeer beetraa paasnaa saakchu?
<b>Local:</b>	No, people from other religions are not allowed inside some of the <i>mandirs</i> [temples].	hundaynaa, aaru daarma ka mancheyharu laaee kuney kuney mander beetraa praavesh neeshed cha

Before entering a temple or shrine in Nepal, it is necessary to remove one's shoes.

**Exchange 5:** Must I take off my shoes?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Must I take off my shoes before entering the temple?	ke mandeer beetraa pravesh garda jatta pukalnaa jarooree cha?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes, but leave them outside of the temple.	ho, taar teshlaaye mander baheeraa choree deenu hola.

If visitors are concerned about leaving valuable shoes outside in an unprotected place, they can ask children to watch them in exchange for a small payment.

**Exchange 6:** Where can I leave my shoes?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Where can I leave my shoes?	maayle afno jatta kahaa chornaa melcha?
<b>Local:</b>	The children will watch them for a few rupees.	kehee rupeeyama bachchaharule heree deenchan.

It is also important to dress conservatively when visiting temples or religious establishments. Clothing that is garish, untidy, or overly-revealing should not be worn. Clothing that is simple and does not call attention to itself or the wearer is better.

**Exchange 7:** What should I wear in the temple?

<b>Soldier:</b>	What should I wear in the temple?	mandeerma maa kashto luga lagaau?
<b>Local:</b>	Simple clothing is best.	saamaany lugaaharu saab baandaa ramro hunch.

Once inside the temple, visitors should observe silence and maintain a respectful attitude, with awareness that Nepal’s most sacred traditions are represented in its religious shrines. Visitors should refrain from touching paintings or statues and be careful not to interrupt those who are praying or meditating. They should also avoid taking photographs inside the building.



© Cheryl Marland  
 Monkey Temple in  
 Swayambunath, Nepal

## Traditions

### Traditional Economy

Nepal has traditionally been a farming society despite its lack of arable land. Most small farmers grow enough produce to consume (subsistence farming). Since early times, the main agricultural region has been the Tarai (southern lowlands), which lies south of the hills and mountains. Here, farmers have been able to produce a surplus to trade with people in the mountainous north of Nepal and India to the south. In the hills, farmers have less access to agricultural land and rely more on raising livestock. The traditional occupation of the Gurung community around the Annapurna Mountain Range in central Nepal, for instance, has been sheep herding and animal husbandry.<sup>149, 150</sup> In the mountains of northern Nepal, the people of other ethnic groups—such as the Chhairottans and the Tin Guanle Thakali, formerly identified as Chimtans—raise livestock, although the Tin Guanle Thakalis primarily engage in trade.<sup>151</sup>



© World Bank Photo Collection / Flickr.com  
Women farmers

Many of Nepal's various ethnic groups have traditionally supported themselves by producing handicrafts to trade or sell. These occupations have co-existed with subsistence agriculture. According to Hindu tradition, the Dalits (formerly, 'untouchables') of the Madheshi and Parbatiya could only work in certain positions. In one district of western Nepal, Dalits were broken into sub-castes, and each was restricted to a certain occupation, such as blacksmith, shoemaker, leather worker, or bamboo handicraft worker. In modern times, however, many Dalits do not practice their traditional occupations. Instead, they hire themselves out as day laborers or find income from selling firewood, cutting stone, or other forms of manual labor.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Nepal Ethnographic Museum. "The Gurung." 2002. <http://www.asia-planet.net/nepal/museum.htm>

<sup>150</sup> Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. "Nationalities of Nepal: Gurung." 2001.

[http://www.nepaldemocracy.org/ethnicity/nationalities\\_of\\_nepal.htm](http://www.nepaldemocracy.org/ethnicity/nationalities_of_nepal.htm)

<sup>151</sup> NEFIN. "Tin Gaule Thakali (Yhulkosompaimhi): Thintan." 3 January 2005.

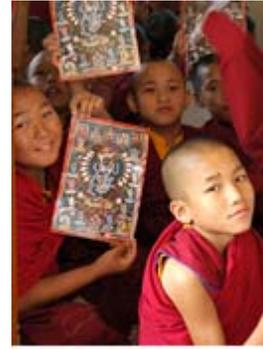
<http://www.nefin.org.np/indigenous-nationalities/himalayan-in/27>

<sup>152</sup> MS ActionAid Denmark. Madsen, Berit. "The Life of the Lower Castes in the Western Part of Nepal." 2 April 2002. <http://www.ms.dk/sw40142.asp#>

## Honor and Values

Among diverse ethnic and caste groups, the Nepali people share common values. These attitudes and beliefs are reinforced by Nepal's history as a Hindu kingdom from 1768–2006.<sup>153, 154</sup> The country has remained isolated and closed to foreign influence until recently.

Hindu religious values, such as a belief that *karma* (a chain of cause and effect) shapes their destinies, unite the Nepalese people. They are born into a certain social caste that determines their aspirations and relationships with others. Despite popular opposition and official illegal status, the caste system and beliefs continue to exist, exerting both conscious and unconscious influence over people's lives. Because this tradition is so deeply embedded in the social fabric, people do not rebel against their caste status.<sup>155</sup>



In Nepal, honor also resides in the family, close friends, and associates. Interdependence is a way of life for the Nepalese. For instance, in the rural areas that dominate Nepal, the concept of “parma,” or shared labor, still operates.<sup>156</sup> Even in cities, people rely on kinship networks for social advancement.

Family networks and links to trusted people outside the family also reflect and promote the patronage system. In this system, people advance or ensure their social and professional standing by showing loyalty to those higher in rank or authority. This benevolent system of patronage permeates society and business and saturates Nepal's political organization(s). Thus, advancement or promotion does not depend on ability or job performance. A government official bestows favors on those who cultivate connections, and will lose face if unable to fulfill these obligations for any reason. Therefore, the ruling elite is likely to promote people, extend favors, or create temporary

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<sup>153</sup> High Beam Research. “World Hindu Federation’ Activists in Nepal Demand Hindu Kingdom Status.” 17 February 2007. <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1P3-1218089791.html>

<sup>154</sup> BBC News. Haviland, Charles. “Hindu Fears over Secular Nepal.” 18 September 2006. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/5355816.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/5355816.stm)

<sup>155</sup> *Culture Smart! Nepal*. Feller, Tessa. “Chapter 2: Values & Attitudes. [pp. 40–41].” 2008. London: Kuperard.

<sup>156</sup> Nepal and Bangladesh: a Global Studies Handbook. Shrestha, Nanda R. “Nepali Society and Contemporary Issues: Family and Kinship Networks [pp. 109–110].” 2002. [http://books.google.com/books?id=wMz0ZKWrQ8YC&pg=PA110&lpg=PA110&dq=parma+in+nepal+-Italy+-typhoon+-monsoon+-cyclone+-storm&source=bl&ots=O8YnUUppcC&sig=YU-DSDTzmpnHpJaolzaA\\_All9SQ&hl=en&ei=DLjwSsGIF42CswOFuNX0BQ&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=4&ved=0CBcQ6AEwAzgK#v=onepage&q=parma%20in%20nepal%20-Italy%20-typhoon%20-monsoon%20-cyclone%20-storm&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=wMz0ZKWrQ8YC&pg=PA110&lpg=PA110&dq=parma+in+nepal+-Italy+-typhoon+-monsoon+-cyclone+-storm&source=bl&ots=O8YnUUppcC&sig=YU-DSDTzmpnHpJaolzaA_All9SQ&hl=en&ei=DLjwSsGIF42CswOFuNX0BQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=4&ved=0CBcQ6AEwAzgK#v=onepage&q=parma%20in%20nepal%20-Italy%20-typhoon%20-monsoon%20-cyclone%20-storm&f=false)

jobs—regardless of the economic need for such actions. In Nepal, people who are part of favored patronage networks experience upward social and professional mobility.<sup>157</sup>

*Other Values*

Besides loyalty to family, Nepalese people value qualities such as humility and spiritual enlightenment. Many Hindus believe that kindness to strangers raises their status in successive lives. Most people also value education and wealth, while little value is placed on the individual or personal privacy.<sup>158</sup>

**Communication and Greetings**

Nepal has never been colonized and, in general, the Nepalese people trust foreigners. They are known to be courteous, hospitable, and open toward visitors. In some areas of Nepal, local people treat foreigners like a lower caste but still remain friendly and open.<sup>159</sup>



© Robbert Noordhoek  
Nepalese couple

**Exchange 8:** Good morning.

<b>Soldier:</b>	Good morning.	subaa probat
<b>Local:</b>	Good morning.	suvaav provat

Visitors to Nepal should always be polite and respectful. In addition, they should avoid interfering in Nepalese affairs. Remaining even-tempered and respectful in one’s approach is likely to lead to the most cooperation from local people.

Nepalese people often defer to others or give ambiguous messages, reflecting an unwillingness to criticize or say “no” directly. To be polite, people often say what they think you want to hear. Nepalese avoid being aggressive, assertive, or confrontational. To express negative attitudes or to contradict or disagree with another person causes them to lose face, that is, their personal social status. If foreigners communicate aggressively, Nepalese people may consider it rude and might, therefore, withdraw from the conversation. In Nepal, it is an affront to publicly criticize someone or to display impatience or anger. Yet in contrast to their politeness, Nepalese people ask foreigners

<sup>157</sup> *Culture Smart! Nepal*. Feller, Tessa. “Chapter 2: Values & Attitudes. [pp. 44–47].” 2008. London: Kuperard.

<sup>158</sup> Nepal. “People: General Attitude.” No date. <http://www.internationalymca.org/GoGlobal/Rojo1/placement/Countries/Nepal.pdf>

<sup>159</sup> *Culture Smart! Nepal*. Feller, Tessa. “Chapter 2: Values & Attitudes. [p. 55].” 2008. London: Kuperard.

overly personal questions. However, tourists should not ask equally personal questions.<sup>160, 161, 162</sup>

### Exchange 9: Hello!

<b>Soldier:</b>	Hi, Mr. Shrestha.	namasteya shereshtaajee
<b>Local:</b>	Hello!	namastey
<b>Soldier:</b>	Are you doing well?	tapaaylaay sanchey cha?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes and how about you?	cha, anee tapaaylaay nee?

Greetings and communication take their own unique form in Nepal. To greet another person, Nepalese people place their palms together (fingers pointing upward) in front of the chest and say, “*Namaste.*” This spoken greeting or its gesture is the equivalent of “hello,” “nice to meet you,” “have a good day,” and sometimes, “good bye” or “see you again soon.” *Namaste* (or *Namaskar* to superiors) always communicates respect. When meeting another person, it is common to use a title, such as “Doctor” or “Professor.” Respect is also shown by adding the suffix “ji” to the name.<sup>163</sup> In contrast to Western culture where conversational pauses might indicate discomfort, relatively long pauses in conversation are common in Nepal. Further, Nepalese people shake their heads from left to right to convey the meaning of “yes,” and nod the head up and down to mean “no.” This practice is potentially confusing for



© Giovanni Riccardi  
Greeting Nepalese man

<sup>160</sup> Culture Crossing. “Nepal: Communication Style.” No date.

[http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics\\_business\\_student\\_details.php?Id=8&CID=145](http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?Id=8&CID=145)

<sup>161</sup> Culture Crossing. “Nepal: Taboos.” No date.

[http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics\\_business\\_student\\_details.php?Id=14&CID=145](http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?Id=14&CID=145)

<sup>162</sup> *Culture Smart! Nepal*. Feller, Tessa. “Chapter 2: Values & Attitudes. [p. 49].” 2008. London: Kuperard.

<sup>163</sup> *The Rough Guide to Nepal*, 5th Ed. “B. Basics: Eating and Drinking [p. 75].” 2002. London: Rough Guides.

[http://books.google.com/books?id=1cbUIOTcE18C&pg=PA46&lpg=PA75&dq=Nepal+Tarai+cuisine&source=bl&ots=T5Q8BKwYPb&sig=3CEdVEV5iD6EVps5I05j01FO4LU&hl=en&ei=WRzWSrumG4jSsQO24pjaAg&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=7&ved=0CBgQ6AEwBg#v=onepage&q=Nepal+Tarai+cuisine&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=1cbUIOTcE18C&pg=PA46&lpg=PA75&dq=Nepal+Tarai+cuisine&source=bl&ots=T5Q8BKwYPb&sig=3CEdVEV5iD6EVps5I05j01FO4LU&hl=en&ei=WRzWSrumG4jSsQO24pjaAg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=7&ved=0CBgQ6AEwBg#v=onepage&q=Nepal+Tarai+cuisine&f=false)

Westerners accustomed to interpreting the same head movements with exactly opposite meanings. .<sup>164, 165, 166</sup>

An inquiry about the other person’s health and that of his family follows a *namaste* greeting.

**Exchange 10:** How is your family?

<b>Soldier:</b>	How is your family?	tapaayko pareevarlaay kashto cha?
<b>Local:</b>	They are fine, thank you.	daanyabad, teeneeharulaay saanchey cha

When men greet men or women greet women, they may follow their *namaste* greeting with a Western-style handshake. However, a man should not initiate a handshake with a woman. Instead, he should wait for her to initiate this form of greeting if it is to take place.<sup>167</sup> Also, eye contact between men and women should be indirect, in comparison to the direct gaze common when speaking with people of the same gender.<sup>168</sup> Although social interactions between men and women are more relaxed in the cities, extremely conservative norms prevail in the countryside.

Among the Nepalese, men refrain from touching women publicly, even their wives. Any affectionate gestures between men and women take place in private, in the home. This restriction especially holds true in rural areas. At the same time, members of the same sex often express friendship by touching each other affectionately in public, such as walking hand in hand.<sup>169, 170</sup>

Westerners tend to believe that a firm handshake is an expression of strong character. Many cultures, however, do not share this interpretation. In Nepal, as in many countries

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<sup>164</sup> Exotic Nepal. “Customs of Nepal 101: Do’s and Dont’s.” 2002–2009. [http://www.exotic-nepal.com/customs\\_and\\_traditions\\_101](http://www.exotic-nepal.com/customs_and_traditions_101)

<sup>165</sup> Culture Crossing. “Nepal: Gestures.” No date. [http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics\\_business\\_student\\_details.php?Id=13&CID=145](http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?Id=13&CID=145)

<sup>166</sup> Nepal Vista. “What is the Common Form of Greeting in Nepal?” 2001–2007. <http://www.nepalvista.com/nepalfaq/greet.html>

<sup>167</sup> Culture Crossing. “Nepal: Greetings.” No date. [http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics\\_business\\_student\\_details.php?Id=7&CID=145](http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?Id=7&CID=145)

<sup>168</sup> Culture Crossing. “Nepal: Eye Contact.” No date. [http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics\\_business\\_student\\_details.php?Id=10&CID=145](http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?Id=10&CID=145)

<sup>169</sup> Exotic Nepal. “Customs and Traditions: Socializing.” 2002–2009. <http://www.exotic-nepal.com/socializing>

<sup>170</sup> Culture Crossing. “Nepal: Personal Space & Touching.” No date. [http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics\\_business\\_student\\_details.php?Id=9&CID=145](http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?Id=9&CID=145)

of Asia, handshakes are gentle, with a light grip. Also, only the right hand is used to shake hands.<sup>171, 172</sup>

**Exchange 11:** Good afternoon.

<b>Soldier:</b>	Good afternoon.	subaa deen
<b>Local:</b>	Good afternoon.	subaa deen

When greeting children, foreign guests should recognize Nepalese customs when children interact with adults. Children have learned not to respond too quickly to adults' questions because such eagerness could indicate rudeness. In addition, children do not look directly at adults' faces during conversation. By their indirect gaze, they are expressing politeness. Yet in other situations, they may stare at foreigners out of curiosity. This is especially true in the countryside where few foreigners travel.<sup>173, 174</sup>



Adults do not use the *namaste* greeting with young children.<sup>175</sup> They speak to them informally and politely. If a child initiates a *namaste* greeting, however, the adult may respond in kind.

**Exchange 12:** How are you?

<b>Soldier:</b>	How are you?	tapaaylay saanchey cha?
<b>Local:</b>	I am fine, thank you.	danyabad, saanchey chu

<sup>171</sup> Nepal Vista. "Nepal Customs & Etiquette." 2001–2007.

<http://www.nepalvista.com/nepalfaq/customs.html>

<sup>172</sup> Culture Crossing. "Nepal: Greetings." No date.

[http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics\\_business\\_student\\_details.php?Id=7&CID=145](http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?Id=7&CID=145)

<sup>173</sup> Hampshire Ethnic Minority & Traveller Achievement Service. "Nepali Children in Hampshire Schools. Nepali Culture." No date. <http://www3.hants.gov.uk/nepali-children-in-hants.pdf>

<sup>174</sup> Exotic Nepal. "Customs and Traditions: Socializing." 2002–2009. <http://www.exotic-nepal.com/socializing>

<sup>175</sup> Exotic Nepal. "Customs and Traditions: Socializing." 2002–2009. <http://www.exotic-nepal.com/socializing>

A few other tips on communicating in Nepal: If a visitor is meeting others who arrive late, the delay should not be taken personally. Punctuality is not the norm in Nepal. Delays are also common when waiting for buses or negotiating or awaiting public services. In addition, visitors should take care not to use bad language or swear in front of Nepalese people. Such language is not common, even among close friends. Finally, when a Nepalese person leaves a group of people, he or she may show courtesy by first asking permission to leave.<sup>176, 177, 178</sup>

**Exchange 13:** Good evening!

<b>Soldier:</b>	Good evening!	subaa saj
<b>Local:</b>	Good evening!	subaa saj

Although many customs (particularly Hindu) are common throughout Nepal, they can still vary greatly between regions and groups. The most recent Nepal government census (2001) identifies over 100 distinct castes or ethnicities and over 90 languages spoken.<sup>179,180</sup> Amidst such diversity, different groups of people have different social behaviors. Keep this in mind when interacting with people throughout Nepal.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> *Culture Smart! Nepal*. Feller, Tessa. “Chapter 2: Values & Attitudes. [p. 57.]” London: Kuperard.

<sup>177</sup> Nepal Vista. “Nepal Customs & Etiquette.” 2001–2007.

<http://www.nepalvista.com/nepalfaq/customs.html>

<sup>178</sup> Exotic Nepal. “Customs and Traditions: Socializing.” 2002–2009. <http://www.exotic-nepal.com/socializing>

<sup>179</sup> Central Bureau of Statistics: Nepal. “Statistical Yearbook: Area and Population.” 2001. [http://www.cbs.gov.np/statistical\\_year\\_book\\_content.php](http://www.cbs.gov.np/statistical_year_book_content.php)

<sup>180</sup> U. S. Library of Congress Country Profile: Nepal. “Society: Ethnic Groups.” 2005. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Nepal.pdf>

<sup>181</sup> Central Bureau of Statistics: Nepal. “Statistical Yearbook: Area and Population.” 2001. [http://www.cbs.gov.np/statistical\\_year\\_book\\_content.php](http://www.cbs.gov.np/statistical_year_book_content.php)

## Hospitality and Gift-Giving<sup>182, 183, 184</sup>

When entering a Nepalese home, visitors should observe the customs and behavior of the host and follow their lead. Some customs can be learned about in advance. For instance, punctuality is not necessarily expected. Also, guests to a Nepalese home should always dress in clean, conservative clothing, and remove their shoes before they enter the house. Guests should always ask the host's permission before they smoke a cigarette anywhere on the premises, especially if elders of the household are present. Respect for elders is a very strong tradition in Nepal.



© Vera & Jean-Christophe  
Visitors drinking tea with the lama

After arriving, it is good to acknowledge the host and hostess for extending the invitation. It is a compliment for a foreigner to be invited into a Nepalese home to socialize and share a meal.

**Exchange 14:** Thank you for your hospitality.

<b>Soldier:</b>	Thank you for your hospitality.	tapaayko ateetee keeyasatkaarkolaagee daanyabad
<b>Local:</b>	Thanks for coming to my home. You are always welcome.	mero gaar aayekoma daanyabad.tapaayko saandey swagat cha

Guests are not compelled to bring a gift when attending a dinner or social event at the home of a local person, but customarily will do so. Appropriate gifts include a fine shawl (such as pashmina [silk/cashmere]) for the hostess, or a hat or cap for a child in the family. The guest should always use his or her right hand to offer the gift. Gifts to avoid include knives and any leather goods or other animal products, particularly any byproduct of a cow. Cows are



© suzienewshoes / flickr.com  
Pashminas

<sup>182</sup> Nepal Vista. "Nepal Customs & Etiquette." 2001–2007.

<http://www.nepalvista.com/nepalfaq/customs.html>

<sup>183</sup> Exotic Nepal. "Customs and Traditions: Socializing." 2002–2009. <http://www.exotic-nepal.com/socializing>

<sup>184</sup> Culture Crossing. "Nepal: Videos & Other Stuff." No date.

[http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics\\_business\\_student\\_details.php?Id=16&CID=145](http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?Id=16&CID=145)

considered sacred according to Hindu belief, and killing them for any reason is “one of the most serious of religious transgressions.”<sup>185</sup>

Another suitable gift is a box of fine chocolates. This is a gift that can be given either to the host and hostess or to the children. Most of the time, the recipient will not open a gift until later and may not say “thank you.” Nepalese people do not often say thank you but rather express thanks with their facial expressions.<sup>186</sup>

**Exchange 15:** These chocolates are for the children.

<b>Soldier:</b>	These chocolates are for the children.	yo chaaklet haru bachachaaharuko lagee ho
<b>Local:</b>	It is not so necessary, but thank you.	yo jororee ta teeyenaa taaraa daanyabad

Tea is typically served with milk, sugar, and spice, such as ginger, cardamom, or cinnamon.<sup>187</sup> Guests first decline the offer before accepting it, but they should ultimately accept; refusing is considered impolite. When drinking tea or other hot drinks that have been served at a dinner party, it is acceptable and customary to slurp the drink. This is true both in restaurants and in private homes.



© they call me Lily / flickr.com  
Tea

<sup>185</sup> *Culture Smart! Nepal*. Feller, Tessa. “Chapter 3: Religion, Customs, & Tradition. [p. 62].” 2008. London: Kuperard.

<sup>186</sup> Culture Crossing. “Nepal: Communication Style.” No date.

[http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics\\_business\\_student\\_details.php?Id=8&CID=145](http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?Id=8&CID=145)

<sup>187</sup> *The Rough Guide to Nepal*, 5th Ed. “B. Basics: Eating and Drinking [p. 49].” 2002. London: Rough Guides

[http://books.google.com/books?id=lcbUIOTcE18C&pg=PA46&lpg=PA49&dq=Nepal+Tarai+cuisine&source=bl&ots=T5Q8BKwYPb&sig=3CEdVEV5iD6EVps5I05j0lFO4LU&hl=en&ei=WRzWSrumG4jSsQO24pjaAg&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=7&ved=0CBgQ6AEwBg#v=onepage&q=Nepal+Tarai+cuisine&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=lcbUIOTcE18C&pg=PA46&lpg=PA49&dq=Nepal+Tarai+cuisine&source=bl&ots=T5Q8BKwYPb&sig=3CEdVEV5iD6EVps5I05j0lFO4LU&hl=en&ei=WRzWSrumG4jSsQO24pjaAg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=7&ved=0CBgQ6AEwBg#v=onepage&q=Nepal+Tarai+cuisine&f=false)

If curious about something you are drinking or eating, simply ask what it is. This is a good conversation starter and provides an opportunity to compliment the hostess.

**Exchange 16:** What is the name of this dish?

<b>Soldier:</b>	What is the name of this dish?	yo pareekaarko nam ke ho?
<b>Local:</b>	This is chicken curry.	yo kukurako tatkaaree ho

**Eating Customs**<sup>188, 189, 190</sup>

Guests should be aware that Hindus are very sensitive about food. If anyone outside their religion or caste touches the food, they believe ritual pollution has taken place. For this reason, guests should drink from separate glasses and wait to be served, rather than serve themselves or touch food, a dish, or drinking container in the process. This stricture applies to both food and drink. If a guest has taken a sip of a drink or a bite out of any food, that food or drink should not then be offered to anyone else.<sup>191</sup>

At the dinner table, a senior family member—almost always a woman—serves the food. She will circulate, repeatedly offering more food and making sure everyone has enough. Men and guests are served first, then children. Women of the household eat last. Guests should take as much as they like, and even if they are not hungry, take at least a small amount to show appreciation. It is best to avoid taking too much, as any uneaten food will be thrown away afterwards. When finished eating, leaving a small amount of food on one’s plate is acceptable. Last, a guest should not forget to say “thank you” to the person who is serving them.



© Oliver Whiteside  
Nepalese people eating dinner

<sup>188</sup> Nepal Vista. “Nepal Customs & Etiquette.” 2001–2007.

<http://www.nepalvista.com/nepalfaq/customs.html>

<sup>189</sup> Exotic Nepal. “Customs and Traditions - Eating.” 2002–2009. <http://www.exotic-nepal.com/eating>

<sup>190</sup> *Culture Smart! Nepal*. Feller, Tessa. “Chapter 4: Making Friends. [p. 87].” 2008. London: Kuperard.

<sup>191</sup> Culture Crossing. “Nepal: Taboos.” No date.

[http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics\\_business\\_student\\_details.php?Id=14&CID=145](http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?Id=14&CID=145)

**Exchange 17:** Thank you, I'm done now.

<b>Soldier:</b>	Thank you, I'm done now.	daanyabad,aabaa maalaay pugeyo
<b>Local:</b>	You have to eat more!	tapaay aaje kanos!
<b>Soldier:</b>	No, thank you, I'm done.	hoyno daanyabad, aabaa malaay pugeyo

A good time to show respect and good manners is at the dinner table, complimenting the host and hostess on the quality, and even the spiciness, of the food.

**Exchange 18:** This food is good.

<b>Soldier:</b>	This food is good, and very spicy.	yo kaana derey meeto raa masaladaar cha
<b>Local:</b>	Yes, thank you.	ho, daanyabad

People in Nepal traditionally eat with their hands. Guests not wishing to follow this custom may ask for a spoon, which is more readily available than a knife and fork. In some areas of the north, people eat with chopsticks.

The Hindu rules concerning ritual impurity regulate not only the manner in which food is consumed; they also extend to food preparation and people's behavior in the presence of food. For instance, if people are seated on the floor and a guest must get up and leave the meal, he should carefully avoid stepping over anyone or another person's plate. And when members of more than one caste are to be present at a meal, the food will be prepared by the highest caste. Rules concerning ritual impurity and etiquette always strictly apply.



© tvancort / flickr.com  
Men serving lunch

It is common in Nepal for people of higher castes to be vegetarian. Hindus in Nepal do not eat beef, although they do eat other kinds of meat. The most common meats are goat and chicken, often eaten by people of the middle castes. Some Nepalese also eat water buffalo. If people are Muslim, they do not eat pork. Most people in Nepal eat grains and legumes, such as rice, millet, maize, and lentils.

**Exchange 19:** What ingredients are used?

<b>Soldier:</b>	What ingredients are used to make lentil soup?	daal pokuno kun samagreeharu pryog gaarnu ba ho?
<b>Local:</b>	Lentils, water, salt, and turmeric.	daal paanee noon ra beesar

Guests should use only the right hand to hold utensils, pass food at the dinner table, or pick up finger-food. It is quite improper to use the left hand for these purposes.

Some Nepalese customs differ from those found in Western culture to the degree that violating them is extremely offensive. For instance, in Nepal it is considered exceedingly rude to lick one's fingers. Simply wipe them on a napkin instead. Also, if a guest seated at the table has to blow his nose, he should leave the table to do so and wash his hands before returning.

**Dress Codes**

In Nepal, a variety of dress codes prevail among the different ethnic and caste groups. In general, local people wear clothing that fits loosely and covers them completely. Everyday wear is casual and suited to the kind of work that people are engaged in.

**Exchange 20:** How should I dress?

<b>Soldier:</b>	How should I dress?	maa kashto luga lagaau?
<b>Local:</b>	Wear loose fitting clothes that cover your body.	afno jeeyulaae chopne kukulo luga lagaanu

Revealing clothing is never appropriate, especially for women. This includes tank tops, shorts, swimsuits (unless at a hotel pool), low-cut blouses or dresses, or tight garments. Any skimpy or form fitting clothing should be avoided. Instead, women should wear long skirts or loose slacks and blouses that cover their arms. Men should wear long pants and shirts. The local people appreciate visitors who respect their social norms concerning dress and conduct.<sup>192</sup>



© The Advocacy Project / flickr.com  
Nepalese women in traditional clothing

Nepali women often wear a blouse with a *sari* (a length of fabric, wrapped like a skirt), making sure to cover their shoulders and legs. Both men and women often wear a Nepalese outfit called *kurta surwal*, a long tunic worn with loose cotton trousers, similar in design to the *salwar kameez*, from northern India. At festivals and on special occasions (such as weddings), everyone may wear traditional costumes, which vary depending on the ethnic group celebrating. Women often wear gold trinkets or nose rings, and this kind of jewelry varies greatly in style and symbolic meaning according to ethnicity. For all occasions, Nepalese men often wear a cloth hat called a *topi*, which is the national hat of Nepal. A visitor can also wear it as a sign of respect and affection for Nepalese culture.<sup>193, 194, 195</sup>

If a visitor is uncertain as to what to wear, asking a local person is a good way to find out!

**Exchange 21:** Is this acceptable to wear?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is this acceptable to wear?	kee yo lagaun melcha?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	huncha

<sup>192</sup> Exotic Nepal. “Customs of Nepal 101: Do’s and Dont’s.” 2002–2009. [http://www.exotic-nepal.com/customs\\_and\\_traditions\\_101](http://www.exotic-nepal.com/customs_and_traditions_101)

<sup>193</sup> *Culture Smart! Nepal*. Feller, Tessa. “Chapter 4: Making Friends. [pp. 88–89].” 2008. London: Kuperard.

<sup>194</sup> Nepal Vista. “Nepal Customs & Etiquette.” 2001–2007. <http://www.nepalvista.com/nepalfaq/customs.html>

<sup>195</sup> Culture Crossing. “Nepal: Dress.” No date. [http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics\\_business\\_student\\_details.php?Id=19&CID=145](http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?Id=19&CID=145)

Nepalese people also dress in formal Western attire on some occasions. Men wear both formal and informal Western styles more often than women, or layer a Western suit jacket over the Nepali *kurta*. Both men and women wear Western-style suits for business meetings in urban areas. For work, men often wear casual shirts and slacks unless the corporate environment requires greater formality.<sup>196, 197</sup>

Fewer Western clothing styles are seen in rural areas, where local people wear traditional garb. Women both here and in urban areas often wear scarves draped over their head and shoulders. Hindu women who are married wear a *tika* (dot of red coloring) on their forehead. If widowed, women remain subdued in appearance. They do not wear the *tika*, colorful clothing, or gold jewelry.<sup>198</sup>

### Non-Religious Holidays<sup>199, 200</sup>

Although most public holidays in Nepal are associated with religion, there are a few non-religious holidays that may be celebrated differently according to region. These holidays include Sahid Diwas (Martyr's Day, in January), Prajatantra Diwas (Democracy Day, in February, celebrating the adoption of the 1952 constitution). Other holidays include New Year's Day (sometime in April) and Children's Day (a movable date in August).



Tihar, or Festival of Lights, (a national holiday in autumn) honors Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and good fortune, but it is also a non-religious holiday, since it is celebrated by virtually all ethnicities. On Tihar, which lasts for five days, people display rows of lights in their homes and offices to attract the goddess. On the third day, they welcome Laxmi into their homes, hoping she will influence and increase the wealth they receive throughout the year. On the other days of this holiday, however, people celebrate by honoring animals such as crows, dogs, and cows—and even themselves—for divine qualities they are believed to embody on that particular day.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Nepal. "People – Personal Appearance." No date.

<http://www.internationalymca.org/GoGlobal/Rojo1/placement/Countries/Nepal.pdf>

<sup>197</sup> Culture Crossing. "Nepal: Dress." No date.

[http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics\\_business\\_student\\_details.php?Id=19&CID=145](http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?Id=19&CID=145)

<sup>198</sup> Nepal. "People – Personal Appearance." No date.

<http://www.internationalymca.org/GoGlobal/Rojo1/placement/Countries/Nepal.pdf>

<sup>199</sup> Q++Studio. Public Holidays and Bank Holidays for Nepal. 1989–2009.

<http://www.qppstudio.net/publicolidays2009/nepal.htm>

<sup>200</sup> SAARC Tourism.org. "Public Holidays in Nepal." 2009. <http://nepal.saarctourism.org/national-holidays.html>

<sup>201</sup> *Culture Smart! Nepal*. Feller, Tessa. "Chapter 3: Religion, Customs, & Tradition. [pp. 79–80]." 2008. London: Kuperard.

**Exchange 22:** Will you be celebrating Tihar?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Will you be celebrating Tihar?	ke tapaayharu teehar manaudey hunuhuncha?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes!	ho!

The year in Nepal begins in mid-April and is broken into 12 months. Dates of festivals are based on the lunar calendar.

### Social Events

#### *Weddings*<sup>202</sup>

As with other traditions, wedding customs vary by caste and ethnicity in Nepal. In keeping with tradition, many parents still arrange their children's marriage, trying to match caste, educational level, and earning potential. At the same time (and more so in urban areas), prospective marriage partners have the right to reject an undesired union.



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Arranged engagement

Upon learning a couple is engaged, it is appropriate to offer them good wishes.

**Exchange 23:** I wish you both happiness.

<b>Soldier:</b>	I wish you both happiness.	maa tapaay dubayko kusheeko kaamana gaardaachu
<b>Local:</b>	Thank you so much.	derey daanyabad

Wedding ceremonies often last as long as three days. The ceremony features both Hindu and Buddhist traditions. Among all groups of people, weddings involve celebrating with music, feasting, and elaborate rituals that signify the sacred event.

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<sup>202</sup> Nepal Channel. "Wedding Customs of Nepal." 1995–2009. <http://www.nepal.com/wedding-customs/>

One example of an intricate wedding ritual can be seen among the Newar people who live principally in Kathmandu Valley (but also throughout the country). In this culture, the father uses the services of an astrologer to help locate a bride of the same caste for his son. The two families appoint a mediator, who becomes part of the negotiation process. After a bride is chosen, the prospective groom’s family presents the bride’s family with a gift such as food and various condiments.

Rituals that take place shortly before the wedding include a feast at the bride’s house and a procession formed at the groom’s home, both attended by a large crowd of family and friends who wish them well. If invited to a wedding or any of the events that precede it, visitors should consider it an honor.

**Exchange 24:** Congratulations on your wedding!

<b>Soldier:</b>	Congratulations on your wedding!	tapaayko subaa beebahaako bad hay!
<b>Local:</b>	Thank you so much for attending our wedding.	hamro suvaa veevahmaa upasteet baayekoma derey daanyabad cha.

On the wedding day, a priest conducts the religious ceremony before the elaborately dressed bride, groom, and their families and guests. After the formalities, a feast is held in the evening and the bride and groom share a meal, using the same plate. A formal reception takes place for the bride the following morning in the kitchen, where everyone again shares a meal. On the next day, the bride visits the particular deity that the family reveres, and she participates with the groom in worship rituals. The couple then visits the bride’s family at their home before returning to the groom’s home to begin their married life.

*Funerals*<sup>203, 204</sup>

Buddhist and Hindu funerals differ in Nepal although they share some similarities. A priest will mediate with the gods so the soul will not be distracted in its journey to its next, higher destination. For Buddhists, *lamas* (monks) are an integral part of funerals. Buddhists believe that death is part of the general chain of suffering within life. Therefore, sadness is generally not expressed at a Buddhist funeral.



© Wonderlane / flickr.com  
Happy Death Mask

<sup>203</sup> Webhealing.com. Lama, Uday. “Funeral Rites of the Hindus and the Buddhists.” No date. <http://www.webhealing.com/articles/lama.html>

<sup>204</sup> Subject Matter Expert: Shruti, from interview on 9 October 2009 at Defense Language Institute, Monterey, CA.

The *lamas* chant *sutras* to help the deceased reincarnate into a new existence.

**Exchange 25:** Sorry for your loss.

<b>Soldier:</b>	Sorry for your loss.	tapaayko noksaanko laagee dukaa lageko cha
<b>Local:</b>	It's okay.	teekey cha

Buddhist theology teaches that acts of merit, performed throughout a person's life—including at the end, help the person in their next incarnation. Thus, when a person lies dying, *lamas* will assist, trying to get the dying person to focus on Buddhist scriptures and spiritual guidance. They believe that if someone dies this way, with his attention on Buddha or his teachings, it will be advantageous in their next lifetime.

Buddhists believe that after a person dies, the soul remains close to the body for three days. Thus, the family members keep a three-day vigil around the corpse. During this time, they keep oil lamps and incense burning. Visitors stop by to bring gifts and pray with the relatives. *Lamas* chant religious scriptures, offer prayers, and conduct rituals. The *lama* stays with the family, who provide for all his needs.

**Exchange 26:** It is okay, life goes on.

<b>Soldier:</b>	It is okay, life goes on.	teekey cha.jeendagee yaasar ney chaalcha
<b>Local:</b>	Thank you.	daanyabad

Hindu funerals take a different form. Because Hindus believe that the soul continues its karmic path after departing the body at death, they cremate the remains. As soon as family members have had time to view the body, the deceased undergoes cremation at a designated holy site, often a riverbank. Hindus believe it is better to die alongside a river, which is holy to them, than inside a house or institution. As such, many Hindus honor this tradition and have built shrines along the banks of rivers.

Buddhists in Nepal also cremate their dead, even though this is not a common Buddhist tradition elsewhere. The fusion of Hindu tradition with Buddhist funerals creates this difference in Nepal. Buddhists typically disperse the ashes over a river, whereas Hindus often collect them to store in a funeral urn.

## **Do's and Don'ts**<sup>205, 206, 207</sup>

**Do** show respect to all Hindu and Buddhist images and representatives.

**Do** ask permission before entering a Hindu temple.

**Do** remove your shoes before you enter a temple, *stupa*, or Nepalese home.

**Do** obtain permission before taking photographs of a Nepalese person.

**Do** use your right hand, not your left, to eat or drink or to give or receive objects.

**Do not** touch a Nepalese person on the head or shoulders.

**Do not** point to a Nepalese person using your forefinger. Instead, use your upturned hand.

**Do not** touch a Nepalese person or a Hindu or Buddhist religious symbol with your feet.

**Do not** wear leather inside a Hindu temple.

**Do not** take photographs inside a religious temple.

**Do not** point your foot or the sole of your foot at anyone, whether you are seated or standing.

**Do not** engage in public displays of affection with the opposite sex.

**Do not** touch other people's food, dishes, or cooking tools with your hand, spoon, etc.

**Do not** eat from other people's plates or drink from their cups, glasses, or bottles.

**Do not** lick your fingers after touching food.

**Do not** blow your nose in front of other people.

**Do not** place your shoes upside down after removing them. It is considered unlucky.

**Do not** walk on cooked rice that has been spilled. It is considered a religious offense to do so.

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<sup>205</sup> DHL. "Cultural Tips: Nepal." 2009. <http://www.dhl-usa.com/IntlSvcs/Cultural/CulturalTips.asp?nav=InternationalService/CultTips#Nepal>

<sup>206</sup> Exotic Nepal. "Customs of Nepal 101: Do's and Dont's." [sic] 2002–2009. [http://www.exotic-nepal.com/customs\\_and\\_traditions\\_101](http://www.exotic-nepal.com/customs_and_traditions_101)

<sup>207</sup> Culture Crossing. "Nepal: Taboos." No date. [http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics\\_business\\_student\\_details.php?Id=14&CID=145](http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?Id=14&CID=145)

**Do not** point upward with the middle finger. It is obscene in the U.S. and equally so in Nepal.

**Do not** use obscene language within earshot of Nepalese citizens. Many may be familiar with American slang. They consider this kind of language extremely offensive.

## Urban Life

### Urbanization

Historically, the majority of Nepal's population has lived in rural areas. Beginning in the 1970s, however, large numbers of people began migrating to cities. By 1981, slightly over 6% of the population was living in cities, making Nepal one of the world's least urbanized countries at that time.<sup>208</sup> The growth of cities has proceeded erratically, slowing in the 1980s and then increasing. Between 1991 and 2001, the percentage of urban growth stood at 6.65%—low compared to many developing countries.<sup>209</sup> Today, the urban population in Nepal is approximately 16%.<sup>210</sup>



© Marina & Enrique / flickr.com  
Himalaya mountain range, Kathmandu Valley

Although cities developed in the Tarai region, most of the growth occurred in Kathmandu Valley, the “traditional hub of Nepal's urbanization.”<sup>211</sup> The major growth center in the hill region, Kathmandu Valley boasted nearly one third of Nepal's urban population in 2001. While the growth rate in Kathmandu Valley declined precipitously from an 83% rate in 1952–1954, overcrowded living conditions prevail because the valley comprises less than 0.5% of the country's land area.<sup>212</sup> In Nepal's western hills and northern mountains, urbanization has been slight. In fact, until Bhimeswar and Khandbari became cities in 2001, there were none in the mountains.<sup>213</sup>

### Urban Labor Issues

Large numbers of people in Nepal have migrated to urban centers searching for seasonal work. They move to areas where construction is taking place or where they can find wage-earning jobs during the slack agricultural season. Many seek long-term

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<sup>208</sup> U.S. Library of Congress. “Chapter 2 – Nepal: The Society and Its Environment. Urbanization.”

September 1991. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/nptoc.html>

<sup>209</sup> Cbs.gov.np. Sharma, Dr. Pitamber. “Chapter 10: Urbanization and Development [p. 382].” No date. <http://www.cbs.gov.np/Population/Monograph/Chapter%2010%20%20Urbanization%20and%20Development.pdf>

<sup>210</sup> Nepal. Bhattarai, Krishna P. “Chapter 4: People and Culture. [p. 53.]” 2008. New York: Chelsea House.

<sup>211</sup> Cbs.gov.np. Sharma, Dr. Pitamber. “Chapter 10: Urbanization and Development [p. 384].” No date. <http://www.cbs.gov.np/Population/Monograph/Chapter%2010%20%20Urbanization%20and%20Development.pdf>

<sup>212</sup> Cbs.gov.np. Sharma, Dr. Pitamber. “Chapter 10: Urbanization and Development [p. 385].” No date. <http://www.cbs.gov.np/Population/Monograph/Chapter%2010%20%20Urbanization%20and%20Development.pdf>

<sup>213</sup> Note that these cities received municipal status even though their urban densities were slightly higher than the surrounding rural region. Source: Cbs.gov.np. Sharma, Dr. Pitamber. “Chapter 10: Urbanization and Development [p. 385, 396.]” No date. <http://www.cbs.gov.np/Population/Monograph/Chapter%2010%20%20Urbanization%20and%20Development.pdf>

employment, such as jobs in government, the army, or factories. Often, migrants to the cities and towns leave their families behind, returning periodically to visit.<sup>214</sup>

The urban poor continue to experience difficulty finding stable employment that pays livable wages. Few manufacturing jobs exist, and most companies are small. Some jobs are available in the service sector, which includes the health industry, sales, transportation, and communication. Although this sector has been expanding, it is hampered by an undeveloped banking system and transportation network. Consequently, the urban market for service jobs remains weak, and many people work in the informal sector, lacking job stability and benefits. The job market is also depressed by a low level of skills, training, and literacy in the workforce. For these reasons, a large percentage of people in Nepal live below the poverty line.<sup>215</sup>



Women, who make up much of the urban workforce, frequently suffer the most from poverty. Their destitution results from being denied equal pay, access to jobs, and promotions. Whether in the city or countryside, job opportunities for women remain limited by a patriarchal caste structure that has blocked or discouraged women from attaining basic education and tied them to their traditional role of family caregivers.<sup>216</sup> Such ingrained socio-cultural attitudes and customs hinder their prospects of employment, especially findings jobs with opportunities for advancement.

Nepal's carpet industry grew rapidly in the 1980s and significantly contributed to the nation's economy. Women's labor "laid the foundation" for this industry, which began with the handiwork of Tibetan refugees.<sup>217</sup> The Jawalakhel Handicraft Centre in Patan, founded by the International Red Cross in 1960, began utilizing the refugees' weaving skills. When an international market developed, women became the "preferred workers to produce the carpets."<sup>218</sup> Competition in global markets along with free market practices

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<sup>214</sup> U.S. Library of Congress. "Chapter 2 – Nepal: The Society and Its Environment. Migration." September 1991. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/nptoc.html>

<sup>215</sup> Nepal. Bhattarai, Krishna P. "Chapter 6: Nepal's Economy. [pp. 84–90.]" 2008. New York: Chelsea House.

<sup>216</sup> *A History of Nepal*. Whelpton, John. "Chapter 6: Lifestyles, Values, Identities: Changes in Nepalese Society, 1951–1991 [p. 164]." 2005. London: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>217</sup> *The Power of Women's Informal Networks: Lessons in Social Change from South Asia and West Africa*. Gurung, Shobha Hamal. "Chapter 7: Women Weavers in Nepal: Between Global Market and Local Craft Production. [p. 92]." 2004. [http://books.google.com/books?id=Mq3hPUwpJIEC&pg=PA92&lpg=PA92&dq=Patan+carpet+manufacturing+Tibetan+refugees&source=bl&ots=ucU49\\_TSKQ&sig=mjR8Xz5o00KGAGJBtSx1WY-skps&hl=en&ei=Nv6eSqGYDZP-sQOXyeiQDg&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=5#v=onepage&q=Patan%20carpet%20manufacturing%20Tibetan%20refugees&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=Mq3hPUwpJIEC&pg=PA92&lpg=PA92&dq=Patan+carpet+manufacturing+Tibetan+refugees&source=bl&ots=ucU49_TSKQ&sig=mjR8Xz5o00KGAGJBtSx1WY-skps&hl=en&ei=Nv6eSqGYDZP-sQOXyeiQDg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=5#v=onepage&q=Patan%20carpet%20manufacturing%20Tibetan%20refugees&f=false)

<sup>218</sup> *The Power of Women's Informal Networks: Lessons in Social Change from South Asia and West Africa*. Gurung, Shobha Hamal. "Chapter 7: Women Weavers in Nepal: Between Global Market and Local Craft Production. [p. 92]." 2004.

led not only to expansion, but also to deregulation and increased employment for contractors and subcontractors. This development, in turn, led to additional opportunities for both formal and informal work outside of factories, in small production centers and individual homes. Women working in this cottage industry balance their jobs with household responsibilities. They work long hours, and yet their wages fail to meet monthly household expenses unless there is additional income from a husband or other family members. Moreover, informal workers of the carpet industry lack benefits and job security.<sup>219</sup>

*Child Labor*<sup>220, 221</sup>

It is not only women and low-caste people who suffer from poor working conditions and low wages; child labor has been endemic in the carpet and other industries. According to UNICEF, as recently as 2008, 31% of Nepal’s children were employed—mainly in agriculture and carpet-making, but also in the garment industry and elsewhere—despite existing child labor laws.<sup>222</sup> A U.S. Department of Labor report referenced CWIN (Child Workers in Nepal) statistics and noted that the majority of child workers are between the ages of 11 and 17, with a smaller percentage under the age of 10 and some as young as 5.<sup>223</sup>



© Nimrod Bar  
Young farm workers

The working conditions for child laborers are demanding. They work long hours, from as early as 7 a.m. to as late as 10 p.m. or midnight. They work “in cramped and stuffy rooms or sheds which lack air and light,” and many are forced to pay for rent and food. Their

[http://books.google.com/books?id=Mq3hPUwpJIEC&pg=PA92&lpg=PA92&dq=Patan+carpet+manufacturing+Tibetan+refugees&source=bl&ots=ucU49\\_TSKQ&sig=mjR8Xz5o00KGAgJBtSx1WY-skps&hl=en&ei=Nv6eSqGYDZP-sQOXyeiQDg&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=5#v=onepage&q=Patan%20carpet%20manufacturing%20Tibetan%20refugees&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=Mq3hPUwpJIEC&pg=PA92&lpg=PA92&dq=Patan+carpet+manufacturing+Tibetan+refugees&source=bl&ots=ucU49_TSKQ&sig=mjR8Xz5o00KGAgJBtSx1WY-skps&hl=en&ei=Nv6eSqGYDZP-sQOXyeiQDg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=5#v=onepage&q=Patan%20carpet%20manufacturing%20Tibetan%20refugees&f=false)

<sup>219</sup> *The Power of Women’s Informal Networks: Lessons in Social Change from South Asia and West Africa*. Gurung, Shobha Hamal. “Chapter 7: Women Weavers in Nepal: Between Global Market and Local Craft Production [pp. 92–98].” 2004.

[http://books.google.com/books?id=Mq3hPUwpJIEC&pg=PA92&lpg=PA92&dq=Patan+carpet+manufacturing+Tibetan+refugees&source=bl&ots=ucU49\\_TSKQ&sig=mjR8Xz5o00KGAgJBtSx1WY-skps&hl=en&ei=Nv6eSqGYDZP-sQOXyeiQDg&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=5#v=onepage&q=Patan%20carpet%20manufacturing%20Tibetan%20refugees&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=Mq3hPUwpJIEC&pg=PA92&lpg=PA92&dq=Patan+carpet+manufacturing+Tibetan+refugees&source=bl&ots=ucU49_TSKQ&sig=mjR8Xz5o00KGAgJBtSx1WY-skps&hl=en&ei=Nv6eSqGYDZP-sQOXyeiQDg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=5#v=onepage&q=Patan%20carpet%20manufacturing%20Tibetan%20refugees&f=false)

<sup>220</sup> United States Department of Labor. “Nepal.” 1996–2005.

<http://www.dol.gov/ILAB/media/reports/iclp/sweat/nepal.htm>

<sup>221</sup> CWIN Nepal. “Domestic Child Labour in Nepal.” 2007.

[http://www.cwin.org.np/resources/papers\\_articles/domestic\\_childlabour.htm](http://www.cwin.org.np/resources/papers_articles/domestic_childlabour.htm)

<sup>222</sup> UNICEF. ChildInfo “Monitoring the Situation of Children and Women.” 2009.

[http://www.childinfo.org/labour\\_countrydata.php](http://www.childinfo.org/labour_countrydata.php)

<sup>223</sup> United States Department of Labor. “Nepal.” 1996–2005.

<http://www.dol.gov/ILAB/media/reports/iclp/sweat/nepal.htm>

wages equal approximately USD 7.95 to 17 per month and many of the children are bonded laborers, forced into service to settle their parents' debts.

According to CWIN reports cited by the U.S. Department of Labor, children working in the carpet industry suffer from health conditions, such as lung disease, arthritis, and eye strain. Sexual abuse has also been widely reported, with many young girls sold into prostitution. Most of them are taken away from the carpet factories where they work and exploited in India.

However, there are now programs in place to reduce these abuses. The RugMark Foundation, a global initiative, inspects 529 manufacturers—representing 65% of Nepal's carpet exports—for child labor law infringement. Since 1995, this initiative has been responsible for removing 1,739 children from exploitative situations.<sup>224</sup> Once removed, they attempt to reunite the children with their parents or find other suitable arrangements and enroll them in educational programs.<sup>225</sup>

### Daily Urban Living Conditions

Although the caste system permeates Nepalese life, social and cultural restrictions are more relaxed, less conservative in cities, such as Kathmandu, than in the more traditional countryside. Marriage, for example, is less likely to have been arranged in urban areas.<sup>226</sup> Many such customs have become less strictly observed over time due to greater social mixing and exposure to new cultural mores and viewpoints.

Although more jobs may be available in the cities, people still lack basic services. Most do not have access to running water (or it may be available for only 1 or 2 hours per day), refrigeration, or trash collection. Electricity is also unreliable, as power outages and rationing schedules are frequent. Inefficient kerosene stoves are usually the main means of cooking, even for people of means. Women of the household typically have to wash clothing, blankets, and dishes by hand at communal pumps or faucets. Few houses have bathrooms; so people customarily use public facilities. The poorest of the urban poor must resort to constructing shelters out of pieces of wood, debris, and plastic. Still, they have not formed the shantytowns commonly seen in large cities in other developing nations.<sup>227, 228</sup>



© Dey Alexander  
Washing clothes at  
the communal tap

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<sup>224</sup> RugMark Foundation Press Kit. 2007. <http://www.rugmark.org/uploads/Media/PressKit%202007.pdf>

<sup>225</sup> UNICEF. "Maya's story: One child laborer in Nepal gets a fresh start." Tayol, Sam and Sarah Crowe. 2009. <http://www.unicefusa.org/news/news-from-the-field/mayas-story-one-child.html>

<sup>226</sup> Nepal. Bhattarai, Krishna P. "Chapter 4: People and Culture. [p. 55]." 2008. New York: Chelsea House.

<sup>227</sup> *Cultures of the World: Nepal*. Burbank, Jon. "Lifestyle [p. 65]." 2002. New York: Marshall Cavendish Corporation.

<sup>228</sup> *Culture Smart! Nepal*. Feller, Tessa. "Chapter 5: The Nepalese at Home [pp. 92–95]." 2008. London: Kuperard.

Migrants to the city typically live in rented rooms while those with more income live in small houses. People employed as servants usually reside in the middle-class homes of their employers, where working conditions vary greatly. Some might be treated as family members while others (particularly children) are no more than indentured servants who work long hours.<sup>229</sup>

Many towns have internet cafes, but the service is both inefficient and unreliable. Most urban dwellers do not have access to telephones. While the wealthy subscribe to phone service, even for them, service is poor. Cell phones are more common and reliable than landlines, yet even so, only about 15 of every 100 residents of Nepal use either type of telephone.<sup>230</sup>

**Exchange 27:** What is your telephone number?

<b>Soldier:</b>	What is your telephone number?	tapaayko fon naambr kee ho?
<b>Local:</b>	My phone number is 7643821.	mero fon nambr sat cha char teen aat due ek ho.

When Nepalese people use the phone, it is customary to begin a conversation by directly addressing the subject at hand. Generally, they do not introduce or identify themselves before speaking.<sup>231</sup>

As of 2008, there were nearly 90 radio stations including community-run and 9 television stations.<sup>232</sup> Movies, mainly in Hindi from India, are popular among the urban population, especially in Kathmandu.<sup>233, 234</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> *A History of Nepal*. Whelpton, John. "Chapter 6: Lifestyles, Values, Identities: Changes in Nepalese Society, 1951–1991 [p. 161]." 2005. London: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>230</sup> CIA World Factbook. "Nepal: Communications." 28 October 2009.  
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/np.html>

<sup>231</sup> *Culture Smart! Nepal*. Feller, Tessa. "Chapter 9: Communicating. [pp. 163–164]." 2008. London: Kuperard.

<sup>232</sup> CIA World Fact Book. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/np.html>

<sup>233</sup> *A History of Nepal*. Whelpton, John. "Chapter 6: Lifestyles, Values, Identities: Changes in Nepalese Society, 1951–1991 [p. 171]." 2005. London: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>234</sup> BBC News. "Country Profile: Nepal." 19 August 2009.  
[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/country\\_profiles/1166502.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/country_profiles/1166502.stm)

## Education

In 1951, when Nepal is said to have “entered the modern era,” the country lacked a civil service infrastructure as well as “schools, hospitals, roads, telecommunications, electric power, [and] industry.”<sup>235</sup> At the time, approximately 5% of the Nepalese people over the age of six, mainly among wealthy people who could afford to send their children to school, were literate.<sup>236</sup> Since then, the nation has made progress in building a civil society (mainly in the cities where the wealthier people live) and strengthened its governance and economy. In particular, the government began instituting educational reforms in 1971, hiring teachers and building schools. By 2005, enrollment of students had increased, and Nepal’s literacy rate had expanded to 57%.<sup>237</sup> Literacy has remained considerably higher in urban, compared to rural, areas.<sup>238</sup>



© Maria Showfer  
School kids in Patan, Nepal

Despite improvements in education, progress is uneven and not shared equally across all groups. The negative impact of low caste, poverty, and gender discrimination persist throughout society, especially with regard to education. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) reports that schools in Nepal’s poorest communities receive the least funding, and lack adequately trained staff. The report notes that inequalities associated with caste, gender, and ethnicity increase as grade level increases. Further, the ADB estimates that around one fourth of all Nepalese children between the ages of 5 and 12 do not attend school, many having dropped out.<sup>239</sup> Last, although over half the population is literate (defined as those over the age of 15 with the ability to read and write) this percentage breaks down unevenly between males (70%) and females (44%).<sup>240</sup>

Primary and secondary schools educate children in grades 1–8 or 10, depending on the school mandate. Recently, some schools began offering higher secondary levels, grades 11 and 12. Several universities or linked campuses are located in the country, but they

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<sup>235</sup> U.S. Department of State. “Background Note: Nepal.” October 2009.

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5283.htm>

<sup>236</sup> *Nepal in Pictures*. Zuchora-Walske, Christine. “Chapter 3: The People. [p. 42.]” 2009.

<http://books.google.com/books?id=SYNV0G7ZGokC&pg=PT49&lpg=PT49&dq=earlie#v=onepage&q=&f=false>

<sup>237</sup> World Bank. “Education at a Glance: Nepal.” 2009.

<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTEDSTATS/Resources/3232763-1171296190619/3445877-1172014191219/NPL.pdf>

<sup>238</sup> Cbs.gov.np. Sharma, Dr. Pitamber. “Chapter 10: Urbanization and Development [p. 402].” No date.

<http://www.cbs.gov.np/Population/Monograph/Chapter%2010%20Urbanization%20and%20Development.pdf>

<sup>239</sup> Asian Development Bank (ADB). “ADB Provides \$95M to Support Quality Education for All Nepalese Children.” 22 September 2009. <http://www.adb.org/Media/Articles/2009/13000-nepalese-educational-developments/>

<sup>240</sup> World Bank. “Education at a Glance: Nepal.” 2009.

<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTEDSTATS/Resources/3232763-1171296190619/3445877-1172014191219/NPL.pdf>

serve less than 1% of Nepal’s population.<sup>241</sup> Along with academically-oriented educational institutions, vocational training is increasingly being promoted as a route to jobs that require targeted skills. All levels of education considered, the expected length of time that students will remain in school is 8 years for females and 10 years for males.<sup>242</sup> This 2003 statistic varies depending on the economic circumstances, caste, and ethnicity of a given student.

## Health Care and Health Issues

Regional inequalities exist in health care as well as education. For many years, quality health care has been available only in Nepal’s wealthier areas. Hospitals and clinics are located almost exclusively in the nation’s cities, mainly in Kathmandu or large towns in the Tarai region, where many doctors from India practice medicine.<sup>243</sup> Countrywide, the shortage of facilities and personnel is high. For every 10,000 people countrywide, Nepal reportedly has only 50 hospital beds and 2 doctors.<sup>244</sup>



© World Bank Photo Collection  
Pokhara Regional hospital, Nepal

**Exchange 28:** Is there a hospital nearby?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is there a hospital nearby?	ke najeeekma kuney aspaataal cha?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes, in the center of town.	cha,saahaarko beechma

Between 1951 and 1990, in response to inadequate healthcare, the government developed a vaccination program and educated people to better understand health care and sanitation practices. As a result of these efforts, the infant mortality rate was significantly lowered during this period.<sup>245</sup> This development led to a population boom, which prompted the government to launch a family planning program. However, this program served only

<sup>241</sup> *Nepal in Pictures*. Zuchora-Walske, Christine. “Chapter 3: The People. [p. 43].” 2009. <http://books.google.com/books?id=SYNV0G7ZGokC&pg=PT49&lpg=PT49&dq=earlie#v=onepage&q=&f=false>

<sup>242</sup> CIA World Factbook. “Nepal: People.” 28 October 2009. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/np.html>

<sup>243</sup> *Culture Smart! Nepal*. Feller, Tessa. “Chapter 7: Travel, Health, & Safety. [p. 137].” 2008. London: Kuperard.

<sup>244</sup> *Nepal in Pictures*. Zuchora-Walske, Christine. “Chapter 3: The People. [p. 42].” 2009. <http://books.google.com/books?id=SYNV0G7ZGokC&pg=PT49&lpg=PT49&dq=earlie#v=onepage&q=&f=false>

<sup>245</sup> *A History of Nepal*. Whelpton, John. “Chapter 5: The Quest for ‘Development’: Economy and Environment, 1951–1991. [p. 137].” 2005. Cambridge University Press.

cities and achieved modest success. In the countryside, a lack of health care facilities and a failure to disseminate necessary information limited the program’s impact.<sup>246</sup>

Even in the cities, people sometimes have to walk or travel long distances or otherwise experience inconveniences when trying to see a doctor.

**Exchange 29:** Is the doctor in?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is Dr. Joshi in, sir?	maahaanubaav,ke daaktr joshee beetraa hunuhuncha?
<b>Local:</b>	No.	hununna

Since people have limited resources (including ability to travel), when immediate emergency care is required, those living in the cities often cannot find a doctor.

**Exchange 30:** Can you help me?

<b>Soldier:</b>	My arm is broken, can you help me?	mero haat baacheko cha, ke tapaay maddat gaarnaa saaknu huncha?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes, I can help you.	saakchu,maa maddat gaarnaa saakchu.

The risk of contracting a major infectious disease such as malaria, hepatitis, or bacterial diarrhea remains high in Nepal. The latter two diseases are spread partly through contaminated sources of food and water.<sup>247</sup> Health authorities have made some progress reducing infectious disease, especially malaria in the previously uninhabitable southern Tarai region.

For lack of access to western medical services, many Nepalese people depend on traditional faith healers, who use a combination of herbal and psychic healing methods. The latter, for example, might



© Sara Parker  
Traditional faith healer

<sup>246</sup> *A History of Nepal*. Whelpton, John. “Chapter 5: The Quest for ‘Development’: Economy and Environment, 1951–1991. [p. 138].” 2005. Cambridge University Press.

<sup>247</sup> CIA World Factbook. “Nepal: People.” 28 October 2009. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/np.html>

involve bringing a patient into a trance-like state, accompanied by music. Other people use Ayurvedic medicine, a traditional system that originated in India. Ayurvedic doctors use diet as a means of healing or preventing illness.<sup>248, 249</sup>

**Exchange 31:** Do you know what is wrong?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Do you know what is wrong?	ke tapaaylaay taha cha, ke betek cha?
<b>Local:</b>	No.	chaaynaa

**Transportation and Traffic**<sup>250</sup>

Even in the cities, Nepal’s transportation system is undeveloped because of the country’s late start in building a civil infrastructure. This delay, combined with the country’s extremely difficult terrain and the lack of start-up and maintenance funds, has blocked development. Few roads extend from Kathmandu into the countryside, and those that do require high costs to maintain them. Most of the roads throughout the country are unpaved, of poor quality, and often impassable due to heavy rains and landslides.<sup>251, 252</sup>



Air travel is more reliable and links the larger cities and towns. Still, flight cancellations frequently occur due to unpredictable weather.

Passengers can use limousine service to travel from major airports to hotels in the city. They will notice upon arriving in Kathmandu that traffic is heavy, chaotic, and characterized by lack of driving rules. Many drivers lack behind-the-wheel training, are unlicensed and uninsured.<sup>253, 254</sup>

<sup>248</sup> *Cultures of the World: Nepal*. Burbank, Jon. “Lifestyle. [p. 68].” 2002. New York: Marshall Cavendish Corporation.

<sup>249</sup> Everyculture.com. “Nepal: Medicine and Health Care.” 2009. <http://www.everyculture.com/Ma-Ni/Nepal.html>

<sup>250</sup> U.S. Library of Congress. “Country Profile: Nepal. Transportation and Telecommunications.” November 2005. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Nepal.pdf>

<sup>251</sup> *Nepal*. Bhattarai, Krishna P. “Chapter 6: Nepal’s Economy. [pp. 86–87].” 2008. New York: Chelsea House.

<sup>252</sup> CIA World Factbook. “Nepal: Transportation.” 28 October 2009. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/np.html>

<sup>253</sup> Exotic Nepal. “Nepal Travel Information: Airport Transportation [pp. 127–128].” 2002–2009. [http://www.exotic-nepal.com/travel\\_information\\_of\\_nepal](http://www.exotic-nepal.com/travel_information_of_nepal)

**Exchange 32:** Which road leads to the airport?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Which road leads to the airport?	erport jaane bato kun ho?
<b>Local:</b>	The road heading east.	purvaa teeraako bato

Trains are not an option for most travelers. The rough, mountainous terrain limits train passenger service mostly to the eastern Tarai region.<sup>255</sup> Altogether, Nepal has only 59 km (37 mi) of railway lines.<sup>256</sup>

**Exchange 33:** Is there a train station nearby?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is there a train station nearby?	ke yahaa najeekey trayn stayshen cha?
<b>Local:</b>	No. We don't have a railway facility here	chaaynaa .haamee kahaa relweyko subeedaa chaayno

Travelers can use bus service from various points on the border to the city of Kathmandu. As with other forms of ground transportation, delays are common with buses, and accidents are not unusual. Bus service is offered both by private companies and the Transport Corporation of Nepal.<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> *Culture Smart! Nepal*. Feller, Tessa. "Chapter 7: Travel, Health, & Safety. [pp. 139–40]." 2008. London: Kuperard.

<sup>255</sup> World Travel Guide. "Nepal Getting Around. Getting Around by Rail." 2009.

[http://www.worldtravelguide.net/country/186/internal\\_travel/Indian-Subcontinent/Nepal.html](http://www.worldtravelguide.net/country/186/internal_travel/Indian-Subcontinent/Nepal.html)

<sup>256</sup> *Nepal*. Bhattarai, Krishna P. "Chapter 6: Nepal's Economy. [pp. 86–87]." 2008. New York: Chelsea House.

<sup>257</sup> World Travel Guide. "Nepal Getting Around. Getting Around by Road." 2009.

[http://www.worldtravelguide.net/country/186/internal\\_travel/Indian-Subcontinent/Nepal.html](http://www.worldtravelguide.net/country/186/internal_travel/Indian-Subcontinent/Nepal.html)

**Exchange 34:** Will the bus be here soon?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Will the bus be here soon?	ke yhaa baas cheetey aaucha?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	aaucha.

Few Nepalese people own automobiles, because of the expense. Rental cars are seldom available for visitors to drive themselves; however, they can easily hire a driver who uses his own car.

**Exchange 35:** Can you take me there?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Can you take me there?	ke tapaay maalaay uta laagnaa saaknu hunch?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes, I can.	aa: saakchu

Passengers also have the option of using metered taxi service in Kathmandu, or they can rent metered, three-wheeled scooters called *tempo*s, which carry two to three passengers. Larger *tempo*s can carry 10 or more people.<sup>258, 259, 260</sup>

**Exchange 36:** Where can I get a cab?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Where can I get a cab?	maaley taksee kahaa paaun saakchu?
<b>Local:</b>	Over there.	utaa teeraa

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<sup>258</sup> Exotic Nepal. "Nepal Travel Information: Other Transport Arrangements." 2002–2009. [http://www.exotic-nepal.com/travel\\_information\\_of\\_nepal](http://www.exotic-nepal.com/travel_information_of_nepal)

<sup>259</sup> World Travel Guide. "Nepal Getting Around. Getting Around by Road." 2009. [http://www.worldtravelguide.net/country/186/internal\\_travel/Indian-Subcontinent/Nepal.html](http://www.worldtravelguide.net/country/186/internal_travel/Indian-Subcontinent/Nepal.html)

<sup>260</sup> *Culture Smart! Nepal*. Feller, Tessa. "Chapter 7: Travel, Health, & Safety. [p. 129]." 2008. London: Kuperard.

Motorcycles are available for rent, but the driver must have a special operator’s license. Many middle class Nepalese own motorcycles as their main mode of transportation. In both cities and rural areas, a large number of people also rely on non-mechanized forms of transportation. Bicycles can also be rented for a fixed rate, but a rider in the city should be prepared to wear a scarf around the face as protection from strong exhaust fumes. When renting a Rickshaw, passengers generally negotiate the fare.<sup>261, 262</sup>



© \_EatSleepRide / flickr.com  
Motorbikes in Nepal

## Restaurants

Congregating at restaurants and cafes to socialize is a common activity in urban Nepal. Many restaurants serve Indian food, which is quite popular. In Kathmandu, restaurants serve a variety of international food such as Japanese, Russian, Tibetan, French, Mexican, Chinese, and Italian.

If a diner is unfamiliar with the ingredients or preparation of a meal under consideration, he or she may want to question the waiter to gain more information. Non-Hindus should not, however, enter a kitchen to ask a question (or for any other purpose), whether in a restaurant or a home.

**Exchange 37:** What type of meat is this?

<b>Soldier:</b>	What type of meat is this?	yo ke ko masu ho?
<b>Local:</b>	Goat meat.	kossee ko masu

Caste rules apply in restaurants and strongly affect customs and appropriate behavior. High-caste Brahmans, for instance, will not eat in restaurants because they do not know the status of the person(s) cooking or handling the food in the kitchen.<sup>263</sup>



© Wonderlane / flickr.com  
Restaurant in Boudha, Nepal

A variety of beverages are available in restaurants, including traditional American and European drinks such

<sup>261</sup> Exotic Nepal. “Nepal Travel Information: Other Transport Arrangements.” 2002–2009.

[http://www.exotic-nepal.com/travel\\_information\\_of\\_nepal](http://www.exotic-nepal.com/travel_information_of_nepal)

<sup>262</sup> World Travel Guide. “Nepal Getting Around. Getting Around by Road.” 2009.

[http://www.worldtravelguide.net/country/186/internal\\_travel/Indian-Subcontinent/Nepal.html](http://www.worldtravelguide.net/country/186/internal_travel/Indian-Subcontinent/Nepal.html)

<sup>263</sup> Kwintessential. “Food in Nepal.” No date. <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/articles/article/Nepal/Food-in-Nepal/181>

as coffee, tea, and carbonated soda. Different kinds of locally produced beer are popular, too, along with a drink known as *lassi*, a kind of chilled yogurt smoothie (often spiced with cardamom and cumin).<sup>264</sup>

**Exchange 38:** I would like coffee or tea.

<b>Soldier:</b>	I would like coffee or tea.	maa kaafee ataawaa cheeya peuna chahanchu
<b>Local:</b>	Sure.	teek cha

Water is always available, but patrons should note that it may be unsafe to drink. Before ordering water, it is necessary first to confirm that the source is reliable and the water is safe to consume. One alternative to regular water is ordering bottled mineral water.

**Exchange 39:** May I have a bottle of mineral water?

<b>Soldier:</b>	May I have a bottle of mineral water?	ke maayle meeneral paanee peeyuna saakchu?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes, right away.	huncha turuntay

If a diner wants to know whether a particular kind of meal, such as breakfast, lunch, or dinner is being served, he or she should ask the waiter. Times will vary as to when the restaurants change their selection of courses.

**Exchange 40:** Are you still serving lunch?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Are you still serving the lunch menu?	ke tapaay deesoko kaanaako menu bataa aaylepaanee kaanaadeedey hunuhuncha?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	ho

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<sup>264</sup> Kwintessential. "Food in Nepal." No date. <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/articles/article/Nepal/Food-in-Nepal/181>

Many restaurants, including most of the finer ones, such as those at hotels, accept Visa and MasterCard as well as foreign currencies.<sup>265</sup> At lower-end establishments, cash is expected. ATMs are found in many places in the cities. Money changers are also available in urban areas, generally open up to 12 hours per day, and in Kathmandu, banks have counters for conveniently exchanging money. It is illegal in Nepal to exchange money except with licensed dealers or money changers.<sup>266</sup>



© Thor Muller  
Nepalese server

Tipping is the normal practice in Nepal. It is expected by everyone from waiters to luggage porters and service staff in hotels (but not taxi or rickshaw drivers). Also, it is not customary to tip in self-service restaurants.<sup>267</sup>

**Exchange 41:** Thank you for the service.

<b>Soldier:</b>	Thank you for the service. This is for you.	tapaay ko sewaako laagee daanyabad. yo tapaayko laagee ho
<b>Local:</b>	Thank you.	daanyabad

## Marketplace

Sidewalk vendors and food stalls are commonly found in Kathmandu. They are frequented by a wide range of customers. Patrons can buy snacks, tea, coffee, soups, and complete meals from these outdoor eateries. At specialty food stalls, more exotic items are available. The prices for food at such sidewalk establishments are fixed and local cash is usually required. Credit cards are accepted at more upscale shops.



© Cheryl Marland  
Fruit vendor

<sup>265</sup> Visit Nepal.com. "Money and Banking in Nepal." 1997-2008.

[http://www.visitnepal.com/travelers\\_guide/money\\_banking\\_in\\_nepal.php](http://www.visitnepal.com/travelers_guide/money_banking_in_nepal.php)

<sup>266</sup> World Travel Guide. "Nepal Money." 2009.

<http://www.worldtravelguide.net/country/186/money/Indian-Subcontinent/Nepal.html>

<sup>267</sup> *Culture Smart! Nepal*. Feller, Tessa. "Ch. 6: Time Out. [p. 113]." 2008. London: Kuperard.

Local bazaars are easy for visitors to find in Kathmandu.

**Exchange 42:** Is the bazaar nearby?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is the bazaar nearby?	ke baajaar najeekey cha?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes, over there on the right.	cha, uta daynee teeraa

At these marketplaces, tourists can buy a range of souvenir and hand-made products. Many such locally-made items are Tibetan in design. They include Tibetan dresses, brightly colored jackets, shawls, and tea bowls. Other popular, commonly-sold items include knitted socks and gloves, caps, pashmina blankets and shawls, musical instruments (including the Nepali *saranghi*, carved from a block of wood and played with a bow), Buddhist statues and paintings, and other folk objects.<sup>268</sup> Jewelry and handmade paper products are commonly sold in specialty stores. In Patan and Bhaktapur, skilled Newar craftsmen work in their shops, creating engraved brass, copper and bronze goods as well as wood carvings of traditional subjects. Traditional Nepalese Khukuri knives and custom embroidery are also easy to obtain.<sup>269</sup>



© World Bank Photo Collection / Flickr.com  
Market in Kaski, Nepal

**Exchange 43:** Do you sell shawls?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Do you sell shawls?	ke tapaay saalharu bechnu hunch?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	bechchu

<sup>268</sup> World Travel Guide. “Nepal Going Out: Shopping.” 2009.

<http://www.worldtravelguide.net/country/186/entertainment/Indian-Subcontinent/Nepal.html>

<sup>269</sup> *Culture Smart! Nepal*. Feller, Tessa. “Chapter 6: Time Out. [pp. 116–117].” 2008. London: Kuperard.

Note that antiques are illegal to export and are not usually sold. If a buyer does purchase an antique, however, a written receipt should be provided by the seller. The buyer should then obtain a permit from the Department of Archaeology (located in Kathmandu) in order to export the item.<sup>270</sup>



© Cheryl Marland  
Hat vendor in Kathmandu Valley

When buying goods from vendors who sell crafts or souvenirs, bargaining is expected and is often drawn out. Advertised prices are usually higher than the amount the seller expects to receive for the product, although the buyer can be perceived as insulting if he or she offers a price that is too low. The vendor often starts off the negotiations with an initial offer and expects the customer to bargain back and forth from that point.

**Exchange 44:** Can I buy a sari with this much money?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Can I buy a sari with this much money?	ke maa yaatee rupeeyama saaree keennaa saakchu?
<b>Local:</b>	No.	saagleeno

It is important to be very clear when negotiating, because Nepalese people, by and large, lose face when they fail to understand something. Also, once an agreement has been concluded, it is important to honor it since oral agreements are binding in Nepal.

**Exchange 45:** If you lower the price, I'll take it.

<b>Soldier:</b>	If you lower the price, I'll take it.	yadee tapaayle daam gaataunu bo baane, maa leenchu
<b>Local:</b>	Okay, if you want, I lower it 50 rupees.	teek cha, yadee tapaay chaahnu hunch baane pachas rupeeyaa daataay deenchu

<sup>270</sup> *Culture Smart! Nepal*. Feller, Tessa. "Chapter 6: Time Out. [p. 117]." 2008. London: Kuperard.

A buyer can feel free to examine an item carefully to be sure that the quality is equal to the price he or she is willing to pay. If the item is expensive, it's advisable to ask the shopkeeper's permission to pick it up.

**Exchange 46:** May I examine this close up?

<b>Soldier:</b>	May I examine this close up?	ke maa yaslaay najeekbata jachnaa saakchu?
<b>Local:</b>	Sure.	huncha

If a buyer wants to shop around before negotiating over particular items, it is acceptable to look over the goods and return later to the shop. In keeping with custom, it's far better to have comparison shopping finished by the time you agree to buy something, and honor any commitment you make to buy.

**Exchange 47:** How much longer will you be here?

<b>Soldier:</b>	How much longer will you be here?	tapaayharu aaru kaatee saamaaya saammaa yahaa baasnu huncha?
<b>Local:</b>	Three more hours.	arko teen gonta

If a vendor on the street is insistent on making an unwanted sale, the target of the sale should politely and firmly decline the offer.

**Exchange 48:** Please look at this,

<b>Local:</b>	Please look at this, only Rupees 200.	kreepaaya yaslaay hernus, yo matra duee say rupeeya ko ho
<b>Soldier:</b>	Sorry, I have no money left.	maaf garaa, maasangaa paaysa bankee chaaynaa

Certain preparations should be in place before traveling to the marketplace to shop and make purchases. Buyers should also learn what form of payment a seller is willing to accept before making a purchase.

**Exchange 49:** Do you accept US dollars?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Do you accept US dollars?	ke tapaay amereekan daalr leenu hunch?
<b>Local:</b>	No, we only accept rupees.	hoynaa, haamee rupeeyaa matra leenchau

Also, a buyer may have a currency denomination requiring that a large amount of change be given. In that case, asking in advance of the purchase whether the seller can give change is advisable. It is a good idea to get smaller change for any large denominations frequently. Most small shops do not carry small bills for giving out change, nor do taxi and rickshaw drivers.<sup>271</sup>

**Exchange 50:** Can you give me change for this?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Can you give me change for this?	ke tapaay maalaay yaasko chutta deenaa saaknuhuncha?
<b>Local:</b>	No.	nay

Nepalese rupees are the national form of currency and are available in several different denominations. Indian rupees are also widely accepted and easy to exchange.

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<sup>271</sup> Visit Nepal.com. "Money and Banking in Nepal." 1997–2008.  
[http://www.visitnepal.com/travelers\\_guide/money\\_banking\\_in\\_nepal.php](http://www.visitnepal.com/travelers_guide/money_banking_in_nepal.php)

## Street Crime and Solicitations

Travelers should beware of unscrupulous sellers and pickpockets in Kathmandu. Still, crime is relatively low in comparison to other cities of this size in developing countries. People occasionally demand money from foreigners, and robbery is not uncommon. Travelers should protect themselves by being alert and staying on main routes.<sup>272</sup>



© Thomas Lu  
Busy street in Nepal

Begging is common in Kathmandu, especially around religious sites or areas where tourists congregate.<sup>273</sup> When a visitor is confronted with someone begging, it is best to ignore the appeal if others are around. The alternative is to give money to a larger group of beggars, for if they see someone handing out money, they are likely to pursue the source more aggressively.

**Exchange 51:** I need money.

<b>Local:</b>	I need money.	malaay poysha chaheench.
<b>Soldier:</b>	I don't have any.	masanga chaaynaa.

Some people who beg are part of professional operations, but others are simply very poor, appealing for themselves or their family. If a visitor does choose to give money, it is advisable to give just a small amount when others are not around.

<sup>272</sup> *Culture Smart! Nepal*. Feller, Tessa. "Chapter 7: Travel, Health, & Safety. [pp. 139–140]." 2008. London: Kuperard.

<sup>273</sup> Photoshelter. "Nepal." 2005–2009. <http://www.photoshelter.com/gallery/Nepal/G0000T9FDppsiERk/>

## Rural Life

### Rural Land Distribution

Nepal's least urbanized areas are the hill and mountain regions. But even the Tarai is almost 88% rural, according to Nepal's last census (2001).<sup>274</sup> Kathmandu Valley, located in the Middle Hills, is the only primarily urban region.<sup>275</sup>



© World Bank Photo Collection / Flickr.com  
Ox plough

Because the land is fertile and accessible in the Tarai, most agricultural production takes place there. The majority of rural Nepalese, however, do not own their own land, whether in the Tarai or in the sparsely-populated mountains of the north. Under King Mahendra, the 1964 Land Reform Act imposed ceilings on the amount of land that could be owned. It also established a process for tenants to claim ownership of a portion of the land they worked. Although this successfully broke up some large holdings, many landowners evaded the law by transferring ownership to close family members or trusted associates. In this way, they retained control. Subsequent efforts have not led to genuine land reform. According to a World Bank study in 1991, 40% of the land in Nepal was owned by only 5% of the population.<sup>276</sup> Reported in 2009, 33% of the cultivated land is still owned by only 7.5% of the population, though about 77% do own some land.<sup>277</sup> Landlords own approximately 70% of the land in Nepal's Tarai belt, the southern lowland region where over half the country's population lives.<sup>278</sup>

#### Exchange 52: Do you own this land?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Do you own this land?	ke yo jaaggaako daanee tapaay hunuhuncha?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	ho

<sup>274</sup> Cbs.gov.np. Sharma, Dr. Pitamber. "Chapter 10: Urbanization and Development [p. 386]." No date. <http://www.cbs.gov.np/Population/Monograph/Chapter%2010%20%20Urbanization%20and%20Development.pdf>

<sup>275</sup> Cbs.gov.np. Sharma, Dr. Pitamber. "Chapter 10: Urbanization and Development [p. 387]." No date. <http://www.cbs.gov.np/Population/Monograph/Chapter%2010%20%20Urbanization%20and%20Development.pdf>

<sup>276</sup> *A History of Nepal*. Whelpton, John. "Chapter 5: The Quest for 'Development': Economy and Environment, 1951–1991 [pp. 141–142]." 2005. London: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>277</sup> Asian Development Bank. Country Diagnostics Studies "Highlights Nepal: Critical Development Constraints. [pp. 21–22]." 2009. <http://www.adb.org/Documents/Studies/Nepal-Critical-Development-Constraints/Highlights-Nepal-Critical-Development-Constraints.pdf>

<sup>278</sup> *Nepal*. Bhattarai, Krishna P. "Chapter 4: People and Culture. [p. 53]." 2008. New York: Chelsea House.

## Rural Economy and Migration

For centuries, agriculture has been the livelihood of most Nepalis and still supports them to this day, with regional differences in its practice. .

**Exchange 53:** Where do you work?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Where do you work, sir?	mahaasaya ,tapaay kahaa kam gaarnu huncha?
<b>Local:</b>	I am a farmer, sir.	maasey, maa ek keesaan hoo

Throughout Nepal, rural families practice subsistence farming, using the same labor-intensive methods of past centuries. Some farmers own small plots of land, which they cultivate or use to raise small herds of livestock. Tenant farmers pay rent to their landlords by surrendering the crops they grow, keeping scarcely enough for their own needs.<sup>279, 280</sup> In the Tarai region, farmers paid up to 80% of their crop in rent to their landlords during the 1950s and part of the 1960s.<sup>281</sup> Because they were unable to retain much profit, the peasants had little incentive to improve or develop the land.

Depending on ethnicity and caste, some rural peoples practice occupations other than agriculture. Tamangs have traditionally lived in central Nepal in the hills that surround the Kathmandu Valley.<sup>282</sup> They now work mainly as porters on trekking expeditions and trading circuits passing through to other regions. Many Tamangs still practice agriculture, but the amount they produce is not enough to sustain them.

In western Nepal, the Dalits (untouchables) work as laborers collecting firewood, cutting stone, and doing other manual work for people of higher castes. They are traditionally paid with grain or



© Robbert Noordhoek  
Tamang guide

<sup>279</sup> *Nepal*. Bhattarai, Krishna P. “Chapter 4: People and Culture [p. 53].” 2008. New York: Chelsea House.

<sup>280</sup> *Nepal*. Bhattarai, Krishna P. “Chapter 6: Nepal’s Economy [pp. 79–180].” 2008. New York: Chelsea House.

<sup>281</sup> *A History of Nepal*. Whelpton, John. “Chapter 5: The Quest for ‘Development’: Economy and Environment, 1951–1991 [p. 141].” 2005. London: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>282</sup> Nepal Makalu Trekking. “Nepal: People. Major Ethnic Groups: Tamangs.” 1997–2005. [http://www.makalutrekking.com/about\\_nepal.htm](http://www.makalutrekking.com/about_nepal.htm)

other foods. Because they need more to live on, however, they borrow money from their employers to purchase daily necessities. In this way, they enter into a relation of debt servitude to pay off the interest on their loans.<sup>283</sup>

**Exchange 54:** Did you grow up here?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Did you grow up here?	ke tapaay yaahee hurkanuba ho?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	ho

Waves of labor migration have rippled through Nepalese society for many years. In the past, Nepalese men migrated south to India from the hill regions to earn wages by joining the British army. Eventually forming the famous Gurkha regiment, these mercenaries have a long tradition of service to both the British and Indian armies. Nepal still reaps significant funds that soldiers send home in the form of salaries, pensions, or other payments.<sup>284</sup> In addition to this migration, a massive resettlement took place in the early 1900s, when people migrated from the hills in search of land in the south. In the mid 20th century (after the success of the malaria eradication program), thousands of people from different regions migrated to the Tarai region of southern Nepal. Their goal was to secure wage-paying jobs, sending earnings back to their rural households.



© Cheryl Marland  
Women with goats

**Exchange 55:** Are you the only person who has a job?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Are you the only person in your family who has a job?	ke tapaayko pareevaarma tapaayko matray jaageer cha?
<b>Local:</b>	No, my uncle also works.	hoynaa, mero kaakaale panee kam gaarnu hunch

<sup>283</sup> MS Actionaid Denmark. Madsen, Berit. “The Life of the Lower Castes in the Western Part of Nepal.” 2000–2002. <http://www.ms.dk/sw40142.asp#>

<sup>284</sup> Exotic Nepal. “General Info – Economy of Nepal: Services.” 2002–2009. [http://www.exotic-nepal.com/economy\\_of\\_nepal](http://www.exotic-nepal.com/economy_of_nepal)

For resource-poor households, seasonal migration continues to secure their economic survival. In the poor, western region of Nepal, laborers generally migrate after planting and before the harvest. These laborers generally travel in search of wage-paying jobs to India or cities and other rural areas in Nepal. At harvest time, the men return to their farms to manage the work and secure payment for their crops. Seasonal migration is common both among the lower- and upper-caste Nepalese who live in the Tarai, a relatively prosperous agricultural area of the country. Besides migrating to cities or to India in search of jobs, rural workers migrate to the mountains at different times of the year to collect and sell or trade timber products and medicinal herbs.<sup>285, 286</sup>

**Exchange 56:** Do you know this area?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Do you know this area very well?	ke tapaay yo chetraa saangaa ramraree pareecheet hunuhuncha?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	chu

Migration and trade in mountainous regions is less treacherous with the aid of herd animals. Those who conduct business in other parts of the country often use goats and sheep to transport produce and grain to communities in high altitudes that people rely on such shipments to sustain them through winter. Such isolated residents trade for other products from the lowlands as well.<sup>287</sup> It has been a traditional practice of herders to drive their animals to the hills and mountains for pasture in the summer, returning to lower regions in winter.



© Cheryl Marland  
Kathmandu Valley, Nepal

*Agriculture in Kathmandu Valley*

Kathmandu Valley is covered with fertile soil and was a rich agricultural area in the past. However, an increase in population density has led to the loss of arable land. Annual growth in the valley between 1984 and 2000 was 24.6%, resulting in a decline of

<sup>285</sup> Overseas Development Institute. Gill, Gerard J. “Seasonal Labour Migration in Rural Nepal: A Preliminary Overview [pp. 1].” May 2003. <http://www.odi.org.uk/resources/download/1783.pdf>

<sup>286</sup> U.S. Library of Congress. “Chapter 2 – Nepal: The Society and Its Environment. Migration.” September 1991. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/nptoc.html>

<sup>287</sup> Overseas Development Institute. Gill, Gerard J. “Seasonal Labour Migration in Rural Nepal: A Preliminary Overview [p. 1].” May 2003. <http://www.odi.org.uk/resources/download/1783.pdf>

agricultural land by over 2% each year.<sup>288</sup> Still, many people in this region live or work on small farms and are employed in the agricultural sector.

Many of the farmers who practice agriculture in the Kathmandu Valley are Newars. Concentrated in Kathmandu Valley but also scattered throughout the country, this ethnic group has contributed strongly to Nepal's economy as well as its social and political life.<sup>289</sup>

The rapid growth of the Kathmandu Valley has also changed its agricultural output from traditional crops of low value to those of mainly high value. New agricultural technology is an important factor that has made such crop changes possible in the valley.

### **Rural Transportation** <sup>290</sup>

Transportation conditions are so difficult in Nepal that they have hindered the growth of trade and the economy.<sup>291</sup> The rugged mountain terrain has made it impossible to build an effective transportation infrastructure in that area. Roads are extremely undeveloped and regularly damaged by landslides and storms. During the monsoon season between June and September, many roads in the hills and mountains are impassable.<sup>292</sup> Funds available for maintenance are scarce, which means the roads, especially in rural Nepal, stay in poor repair for years.



© Cheryl Marland  
Women carrying hay

While cargo animals are sometimes used to transport goods,<sup>293</sup> human portage is still the most common mode of transportation. Since many villages in the valleys and mountains are inaccessible by car or bus,<sup>294</sup> most people must travel by foot on trails. In these regions, Nepali porters can carry up to double their body weight, using a head strap (*namlo*) that supports a basket (*doko*) and distributes the weight of the burden evenly

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<sup>288</sup> *Nepal Journal of Science and Technology*. Shrestha, Raj Man. "Urbanization and Changes in Cropping Patterns at Kathmandu Valley." Vol. 7, 2006.

<http://www.nepjol.info/index.php/NJST/article/viewArticle/581>

<sup>289</sup> Nepal Makalu Trekking. "Nepal: People. Major Ethnic Groups: Newars." No date.

[http://www.makalutrekking.com/about\\_nepal.htm](http://www.makalutrekking.com/about_nepal.htm)

<sup>290</sup> U.S. Library of Congress. "Country Profile: Nepal. Transportation and Telecommunications."

November 2005. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Nepal.pdf>

<sup>291</sup> Encyclopedia.com. The Columbia Encyclopedia. "Nepal: Economy." 2008.

<http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Nepal.aspx>

<sup>292</sup> World Travel Guide: "Nepal: Getting Around by Road." 2009.

[http://www.worldtravelguide.net/country/186/internal\\_travel/Indian-Subcontinent/Nepal.html](http://www.worldtravelguide.net/country/186/internal_travel/Indian-Subcontinent/Nepal.html)

<sup>293</sup> Exotic Nepal. "General Info – Economy of Nepal: Transportation and Communications." 2002–2009.

[http://www.exotic-nepal.com/economy\\_of\\_nepal](http://www.exotic-nepal.com/economy_of_nepal)

<sup>294</sup> Learn NC. "A Female Porter in Jomsom." 2 October 1984. <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/multimedia/4746>

down the spine. Other forms of transport that hold promise for these steep mountainsides and valleys, are the gravity ropeways and *tuin*, or wire (cable) bridges.<sup>295</sup>

Most of the existing transportation infrastructure is located in eastern and central areas of the Tarai, the southern lowland region. West and north of the Tarai, few options exist outside of the cities. Railway service is almost nonexistent in the country.

Buses travel between points in the interior of the country. However, Nepal is known for its high incidence of traffic accidents due to dangerous driving conditions. Many people travel in long-distance vans that operate between cities.<sup>296</sup> People crossing Nepal by land suffer delays due to poor road conditions, the rugged landscape, and unpredictable weather. Passengers may be subject to unexpected layovers while traveling.

**Exchange 57:** Is there lodging nearby?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is there lodging nearby?	ke yahaa najeek kuney baas baasne taau cha?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	cha

Driving independently in rural areas can be very dangerous. Not only are the roads unreliable; they are also used by people walking, leading animals, driving in animal-pulled carts, or riding bicycles. People and animals frequently cross in front of traffic. Although few people have cars and traffic is generally slow-moving, it can also be unpredictably fast or erratic. At night, people may not use their lights to drive. Overall, driving is unreliable and risky and requires full concentration to avoid accidents.

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<sup>295</sup> Practical Action. "Technical Information Online: Aerial Ropeways in Nepal." 12 January 2009. [http://practicalaction.org/practicalanswers/product\\_info.php?products\\_id=393](http://practicalaction.org/practicalanswers/product_info.php?products_id=393)

<sup>296</sup> World Travel Guide: "Nepal: Getting Around by Road." 2009. [http://www.worldtravelguide.net/country/186/internal\\_travel/Indian-Subcontinent/Nepal.html](http://www.worldtravelguide.net/country/186/internal_travel/Indian-Subcontinent/Nepal.html)

## Rural Health <sup>297</sup>

Most ailments suffered by rural Nepalese cannot be treated for lack of health facilities and medical staff.<sup>298</sup> Nutrition and sanitation are poor among the general population, resulting in common health problems. The leading diseases are gastrointestinal disorders, intestinal parasites, tuberculosis, leprosy, and goiter. In the countryside, conditions such as asthma, diarrhea, and pneumonia are often deadly.<sup>299</sup> Malaria is still prevalent in many areas, but in the Tarai (where it was once widespread) malaria has been almost eliminated.<sup>300</sup>



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Women waiting for traveling clinic

The main medical treatment centers are small clinics in some towns. Mostly, they are inaccessible to rural inhabitants who live in more remote areas. .

### Exchange 58: Is there a medical clinic nearby?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is there a medical clinic nearby?	ke yahaa najeeekma kuney cheekeetsa kleeneek cha?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes, over there.	cha, utaa teeraa

Childhood mortality and hunger have remained high in Nepal, not only reducing children's ability to ward off illness but also stunting their cognitive development. Children remain vulnerable to measles, malaria, pneumonia, and diarrhea. Chronic maternal undernutrition is prevalent in Nepal. Pregnant women and young mothers are often both anemic and undernourished; thus, their babies are born underweight and many remain unable to make up the weight required for healthy development.<sup>301</sup> In 2007, the mortality rate of children under the age of five was approximately 55%, and has risen to 62% in 2009. The success of a rural family planning program, developed in Nepal in the

<sup>297</sup> U.S. Library of Congress. "Country Profile: Nepal. Society: Health." November 2005. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Nepal.pdf>

<sup>298</sup> *Culture Smart! Nepal*. Feller, Tessa. "Chapter 7: Travel, Health, & Safety [p. 137]." 2008. London: Kuperard.

<sup>299</sup> *Nepal in Pictures*. Zuchora-Walske, Christine. "Chapter 3: The People. Health [p. 42]." 2008. [http://books.google.com/books?id=SYNV0G7ZGokC&pg=PT49&lpg=PT49&dq=earliest+written+records+of+Nepal's+history&source=bl&ots=a3MSHBOD1D&sig=HA\\_k25iXKagM8kvKmwOT3LLOzgM&hl=en&ei=jTTfSu7AM5HysQPeg7zXDw&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=4&ved=0CBMQ6AEwAw#v=onepage&q=earliest%20written%20records%20of%20Nepal's%20history&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=SYNV0G7ZGokC&pg=PT49&lpg=PT49&dq=earliest+written+records+of+Nepal's+history&source=bl&ots=a3MSHBOD1D&sig=HA_k25iXKagM8kvKmwOT3LLOzgM&hl=en&ei=jTTfSu7AM5HysQPeg7zXDw&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=4&ved=0CBMQ6AEwAw#v=onepage&q=earliest%20written%20records%20of%20Nepal's%20history&f=false)

<sup>300</sup> *Nepal*. Bhattarai, Krishna P. "Chapter 2: Physical Landscapes [p. 18]." 2008. New York: Chelsea House.

<sup>301</sup> ReliefWeb. "South Asia Carries Bulk of Maternal and Child Undernutrition, Says UNICEF." 11 November 2009. <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900SID/EGUA-7XRS7L?OpenDocument>

mid and late 20th century, was hampered by the lack of a health care infrastructure. Lack of information and “a cultural gulf that often existed between the family planning staff and the villagers”<sup>302</sup> undercut the family planning effort. Historically, family life in rural Nepal has been guided by conservative tradition, including reliance on large families to help with the farm labor. In the most recent census (2001), the fertility rate in rural areas of Nepal was twice as high as that in urban areas of the country.<sup>303</sup>

In villages, the only people who can help with medical issues are likely to be volunteers who lack training. For these reasons and the lack of access, people rely on herbal medicine dispensed by healers who are untrained in mainstream methods and unlicensed. Other alternative treatments include some traditional Indian medical practices as well as shamanic folk systems.<sup>304</sup>

### Rural Education<sup>305, 306</sup>

Education in rural Nepal is adversely affected by the high rate of poverty. People keep their children home to help with work on the farm and in the household. Often children wait to enter school when they are older, but the dropout rate is high at all ages of childhood because of economic conditions and a weak rural school infrastructure.



© Felix Faassen  
School children in Nar, Nepal

#### Exchange 59: Do your children go to school?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Do your children go to school?	ke tapaaykaa bachchaaharu skool Janchan?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	jaanchan

<sup>302</sup> *A History of Nepal*. Whelpton, John. “Chapter 5: The Quest for ‘Development’: Economy and Environment, 1951–1991 [p. 140].” 2005. London: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>303</sup> Cbs.gov.np. Sharma, Dr. Pitamber. “Chapter 10: Urbanization and Development [p. 410].” No date. <http://www.cbs.gov.np/Population/Monograph/Chapter%2010%20Urbanization%20and%20Development.pdf>

<sup>304</sup> Everyculture.com. “Nepal: Medicine and Health Care.” ©2007. <http://www.everyculture.com/Ma-Ni/Nepal.html>

<sup>305</sup> *Nepal in Pictures*. Zuchora-Walske, Christine. “Chapter 3: The People. Education [pp. 42–43].” 2008. [http://books.google.com/books?id=SYNV0G7ZGokC&pg=PT49&lpg=PT49&dq=earliest+written+records+of+Nepal's+history&source=bl&ots=a3MSHBOD1D&sig=HA\\_k25iXKagM8kvKmwOT3LLozgM&hl=en&ei=jTTfSu7AM5HysQPeg7zXDw&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=4&ved=0CBMQ6AEwAw#v=onepage&q=earliest%20written%20records%20of%20Nepal's%20history&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=SYNV0G7ZGokC&pg=PT49&lpg=PT49&dq=earliest+written+records+of+Nepal's+history&source=bl&ots=a3MSHBOD1D&sig=HA_k25iXKagM8kvKmwOT3LLozgM&hl=en&ei=jTTfSu7AM5HysQPeg7zXDw&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=4&ved=0CBMQ6AEwAw#v=onepage&q=earliest%20written%20records%20of%20Nepal's%20history&f=false)

<sup>306</sup> U.S. Library of Congress. “Country Profile: Nepal. Society: Education and Literacy.” November 2005. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Nepal.pdf>

Another obstacle to rural education is the caste system, which is more deeply entrenched in the countryside. Hindu caste rules determine each person's place in the hierarchy, including the profession and status that individuals may attain. In past years, only certain people were allowed to practice business or to teach and counsel others. It was expected and widely believed that members of the lowest castes were limited to field work or manual labor. Although discrimination on grounds of caste has been illegal since 2001, strong caste divisions still exist in rural Nepal.<sup>307</sup> Among the Terai and Hill Dalits (untouchables), 76% and 43% respectively have never attended school compared to the national average of 44%. Though recent trends show a rise in Dalits attending school through grade 5, they still have the highest dropout rate, with Dalit girls leaving school more often than boys.<sup>308</sup>

In the mid 20th century, formal education was available only to wealthy Nepalese. The literacy rate was around 5% for people over the age of 6.<sup>309</sup> Educational conditions have since improved, however. In 1971, school enrollment began to increase after the government began building more schools and hiring teachers. By 2007, general literacy throughout the country was approximately 56.5% for the adult population (age 15 and over) with men at 70.3% and women at 43.6%. For youth under 15, the literacy rate was 79.3%, 85.3% for males and 73.0% for females.<sup>310</sup> A relatively wide gulf continues to exist between urban and rural literacy.<sup>311</sup> The difference is especially pronounced for rural women, who seldom have the advantage of attaining a formal education.



© Sara Parker  
Rural Nepalese students

<sup>307</sup> Nepal. Bhattarai, Krishna P. "Chapter 4: People and Culture [pp. 60–62]" 2008. New York: Chelsea House.

<sup>308</sup> UNICEF. "Dalits in India and Nepal: Policy Options for Improving Social Inclusion in Education." 2007.

[http://www.unicef.org/videoaudio/PDFs/Dalits\\_in\\_India\\_and\\_Nepal\\_Policy\\_Options\\_for\\_Improving\\_Social\\_Inclusion.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/videoaudio/PDFs/Dalits_in_India_and_Nepal_Policy_Options_for_Improving_Social_Inclusion.pdf)

<sup>309</sup> Nepal in Pictures. Zuchora-Walske, Christine. "Chapter 3: The People. Education. [p. 42]." 2008.

[http://books.google.com/books?id=SYNV0G7ZGokC&pg=PT49&lpg=PT49&dq=earliest+written+records+of+Nepal's+history&source=bl&ots=a3MSHBOD1D&sig=HA\\_k25iXKagM8kvKmwOT3LLozgM&hl=en&ei=jTfSu7AM5HysQPeg7zXDw&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=4&ved=0CBMQ6AEwAw#v=onepage&q=earliest%20written%20records%20of%20Nepal's%20history&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=SYNV0G7ZGokC&pg=PT49&lpg=PT49&dq=earliest+written+records+of+Nepal's+history&source=bl&ots=a3MSHBOD1D&sig=HA_k25iXKagM8kvKmwOT3LLozgM&hl=en&ei=jTfSu7AM5HysQPeg7zXDw&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=4&ved=0CBMQ6AEwAw#v=onepage&q=earliest%20written%20records%20of%20Nepal's%20history&f=false)

<sup>310</sup> UNESCO. UNESCO Institute of Statistics.

[http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/TableViewer/document.aspx?ReportId=136&IF\\_Language=eng&BR\\_ToPic=0](http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/TableViewer/document.aspx?ReportId=136&IF_Language=eng&BR_ToPic=0)

<sup>311</sup> Cbs.gov.np. Sharma, Dr. Pitamber. "Chapter 10: Urbanization and Development [p. 402]." No date.

<http://www.cbs.gov.np/Population/Monograph/Chapter%2010%20Urbanization%20and%20Development.pdf>

Nepal’s educational system is organized around four levels of schooling.

**Exchange 60:** Is there a school nearby?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is there a school nearby?	ke yahaa najeeek kuney skool cha?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	cha.

Primary school is for children in grades 1–5 and is followed by secondary school, which serves students through grade 8, and sometimes 9 and 10. A smaller number of higher-level secondary schools include grades 11 and 12. There are a few universities in Nepal, but the percentage of the population who can attend them is less than 1%.<sup>312</sup> Because of the difficult conditions, people who grow up in rural Nepal are unlikely to ever attend a university.



© Sara Parker  
Nepalese high school students

*Knowledge and the Media*

With such limitations on formal education, especially in rural areas, the radio has been an important method for informing people of world events. Although radio may have been their only way of receiving knowledge about global or nationwide events, this form of communication has had its limits. Prior to 1990, the only station that operated inside the country was Radio Nepal, which was controlled by the government. The effectiveness of these radio broadcasts was restricted because they used a literary style unfamiliar to most villagers and the messages were strictly censored.<sup>313</sup>

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<sup>312</sup> *Nepal in Pictures*. Zuchora-Walske, Christine. “Chapter 3: The People. Education [p. 43].” 2008. [http://books.google.com/books?id=SYNV0G7ZGokC&pg=PT49&lpg=PT49&dq=earliest+written+records+of+Nepal's+history&source=bl&ots=a3MSHBOD1D&sig=HA\\_k25iXKagM8kvKmwOT3LLLozgM&hl=en&ei=jTTfSu7AM5HysQPeg7zXDw&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=4&ved=0CBMQ6AEwAw#v=onepage&q=earliest%20written%20records%20of%20Nepal's%20history&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=SYNV0G7ZGokC&pg=PT49&lpg=PT49&dq=earliest+written+records+of+Nepal's+history&source=bl&ots=a3MSHBOD1D&sig=HA_k25iXKagM8kvKmwOT3LLLozgM&hl=en&ei=jTTfSu7AM5HysQPeg7zXDw&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=4&ved=0CBMQ6AEwAw#v=onepage&q=earliest%20written%20records%20of%20Nepal's%20history&f=false)

<sup>313</sup> *A History of Nepal*. Whelpton, John. “Chapter 6: Lifestyles, Values, Identities: Changes in Nepalese Society, 1951–1991 [pp. 169–170].” 2005. London: Cambridge University Press.

## Village Lifestyle and Gender Roles <sup>314</sup>

Living conditions are basic and challenging for rural families in Nepal. In general, most households rely on subsistence agriculture for their daily source of food. Many farmers own a small piece of land to till for lack of irrigation supplies, equipment, and farm machinery. Some rural families own livestock, such as chickens or goats. However, most do not earn or acquire enough money to save, and cannot obtain more than the most rudimentary household necessities. Trading is common between remote villages, and local populations tend to be self-sufficient. <sup>315</sup>



© Chris de Rham  
Woman cooking

In many regions, people's houses are constructed of stone. They typically vary in size from one to two rooms,—although wealthier villagers or those who have large, extended families have more spacious houses.

**Exchange 61:** How many people live in this house?

<b>Soldier:</b>	How many people live in this house?	yo gaarama katee jaana mancheyharu baaschan?
<b>Local:</b>	Eight.	aat

Generally, the cooking is done over a small stove or hearth and there are no services such as running (or even clean) water, electricity, or other sources of energy. Usually the female family members collect firewood for fuel. This practice has led to high levels of deforestation in the surrounding hills that in turn contributes to severe land erosion.

Rural households are organized around the husband's extended family, and women are responsible for domestic duties. Men usually do agricultural work in the fields, sometimes on their own small plot of land or lacking that resource, they contract their labor to farm owners. If men are forced to migrate to other areas to support the family, their wives typically stay behind doing virtually all the household and field work in their husbands' absence. .

<sup>314</sup> Encyclopedia of the Nations. "Nepal: The Lives of the Poor and Rich." 2009. <http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/economies/Asia-and-the-Pacific/Nepal.html>

<sup>315</sup> Nepal. Bhattarai, Krishna P. "Chapter 6: Nepal's Economy [p. 76]." 2008. New York: Chelsea House.

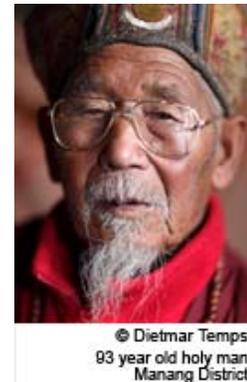
**Exchange 62:** Does your wife work?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Does your wife work?	ke tapaae ko sreematee kaam garcheen?
<b>Local:</b>	No, she takes care of the family.	gaardeenaa, uneepareevaarko dekbaal gaarchen

Whether men are absent or present in the household, women’s work includes raising children and caring for family members and farm animals. Women are also responsible for cooking, cleaning, sewing or weaving, and carrying water for cooking. In order to help with the demanding workload, children may be required to stay home from school. Children traditionally help their parents with all aspects of farm work and agricultural production.

*Village Hierarchy*

The hierarchical structure of villages varies among ethnic groups as well as caste structures within Hindu communities. Some groups have accepted and adopted Hindu customs, including caste differentiation. Others (such as Thakalis and Sherpas from the northern mountains, and Magars of the western hills) have resisted or ignored such customs to varying degrees.<sup>316</sup> The caste system has permeated most of the country—however unevenly—and influences the hierarchy of most communities (especially rural) in Nepal. In particular, the Dalits (untouchables) must remain apart from those of higher caste, avoiding any sort of physical or even social contact.<sup>317</sup> Throughout the country those of the lower castes are socially marginalized and hold little or no influence in the village hierarchy.



Beyond the village level hierarchies also exist within the immediate and extended family, where people are divided into different ranks or levels of status and authority. Regardless of circumstance, men have more authority than women, and this is true across the country. Rank within families generally follows age, sex, and wealth, in that order. As with many other groups, the Yolmo people who live in the Himalayas consider several factors in determining hierarchy among families in a village. Such considerations include inter-

<sup>316</sup> *Culture Smart! Nepal*. Feller, Tessa. “Chapter 1: Land & People [p. 26].” 2008. London: Kuperard.

<sup>317</sup> MS Actionaid Denmark. Madsen, Berit. “The Life of the Lower Castes in the Western Part of Nepal.” 2000–2002. <http://www.ms.dk/sw40142.asp#>

family alliances, clan lineage, involvement with the village temple, and property ownership.<sup>318</sup>

Government officials who live in villages and are in charge of administration are known as Chief District Officers (CDOs).

**Exchange 63:** Does your Chief District Officer live here?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Does your Chief District Officer live here?	ke tapaayko praamukha jellaa aadeekaaree yhaa baasnu huncha?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	baasnu huncha

At the administrative level, Nepal has 75 districts that are subdivided into approximately 4,000 Village Development Committees (VDCs). Districts are also divided into a number of cities with populations over 20,000. Both the VDCs and the cities (or municipalities) are divided into wards, but there are no locally elected governing bodies.<sup>319</sup>

**Exchange 64:** Can you take me to your CDO?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Can you take me to your CDO?	ke tapaay maalaay afno prajeeyaa kaahaa laagnaa saaknu huncha?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	saakchu

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<sup>318</sup> *Body and Emotion: The Aesthetics of Illness and Healing in the Nepal Himalayas*. Desjarlais, Robert R. "Chapter 2: Body, Speech, Mind [p. 49]." 1992. [http://books.google.com/books?id=NpNJWiFOLxAC&pg=PA49&lpg=PA49&dq=village+hierarchy+in+Nepal&source=bl&ots=HhpBfpWthb&sig=SUT41HqS\\_qwV9FmuxNqDSPzSb5A&hl=en&ei=UuoCS6HeCJL6sQP45YnGDg&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CAgQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=village%20hierarchy%20in%20Nepal&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=NpNJWiFOLxAC&pg=PA49&lpg=PA49&dq=village+hierarchy+in+Nepal&source=bl&ots=HhpBfpWthb&sig=SUT41HqS_qwV9FmuxNqDSPzSb5A&hl=en&ei=UuoCS6HeCJL6sQP45YnGDg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CAgQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=village%20hierarchy%20in%20Nepal&f=false)

<sup>319</sup> *Culture Smart! Nepal*. Feller, Tessa. "Chapter 1: Land & People [p. 35]." 2008. London: Kuperard.

If the CDO is not available to answer questions or assist with a problem, then government deputies or members of the police force would be appropriate contacts.

If travelers need help in a village and want to speak to the person in charge, they can ask to speak directly to the CDO. If they prefer, they can also make an appointment in advance.



© flickr.com/.Luke  
Elderly Nepali man

**Exchange 65:** I would like to make an appointment.

<b>Soldier:</b>	I would like to make an appointment with the CDO.	ma prajeeyaasaangaa apoyntment leenaa chahanchu
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	huncha

### Border Crossings and Checkpoints <sup>320</sup>

There are several roadway crossing points into Nepal. At the border with India, most drivers enter the country at Birganj (known as the Gateway to Nepal). Other points of entry are Kakarvitta, to the east, and Belahia. For visitors entering the country from Tibet, there is only one border crossing, which is located at Kodari in north-central Nepal.

**Exchange 66:** Where is the nearest border checkpoint?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Where is the nearest border checkpoint?	saab bandaa najeekako seema chukee kaahaa cha?
<b>Local:</b>	It's about 2 kilometers from here.	tyo kareeban, yhaa bataa duee keelomeetar hola

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<sup>320</sup> Bureau of Consular Affairs. U.S. Department of State. "Nepal: Entry/Exit Requirements." 17 November 2009. [http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_980.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_980.html)

Travelers have sometimes experienced problems trying to cross the border between Nepal and China. Chinese border guards have, reportedly, detained or deported people “for possessing items deemed to have incited anti-Chinese rhetoric.”<sup>321</sup>

**Exchange 67:** May I see your ID?

<b>Local:</b>	May I see your ID?	ke maa tapaayko pareechey paatraa herna saakchu?
<b>Soldier:</b>	Yes.	huncha

The U.S. Department of State maintains a travel warning for Nepal because of security issues, including occasional violent demonstrations in towns and cities. During strikes or general unrest, demonstrators may block traffic and throw rocks, creating danger to property and life. General strikes known as *bandhs* have been common in the past, often lasting for several weeks in the Tarai. These strikes have also taken place in Kathmandu and other areas of Nepal. When a *bandh* is in effect, shortages of food can occur and public transportation comes to a standstill.



© Marc van der Chijs  
Friendship bridge between Nepal and China

Police are likely to be present at these or other disruptive events, attempting to restore order.

**Exchange 68:** Did these people threaten you?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Did these people threaten you?	ke ee mancheyharule tapaaylaay daamkaaykaa teey?
<b>Local:</b>	No.	teeyenen

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<sup>321</sup> Bureau of Consular Affairs. U.S. Department of State. “Nepal: Entry/Exit Requirements.” 17 November 2009. [http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_980.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_980.html)

Even after the elections in April 2008, political groups pursuing differing agendas have continued to make their presence felt. Over 100 armed groups have been known to operate in the Tarai region, some pursuing independence from the central government and others whose objectives are less clear. They include Maoists who fought the government during the civil war, and various groups who oppose the Maoists. Vehicles and their passengers have sometimes been attacked for no apparent reason.



Because of the general (and often unpredictable) unrest in the Tarai, travel can be especially dangerous in this region.

**Exchange 69:** Please get out of the car.

<b>Local:</b>	Please get out of the car.	kreepeyaa kaar bataa bayraa neekleenus
<b>Soldier:</b>	OK.	huncha

Abductions, extortions, and killings of Nepalese and American citizens as well as Indian businessmen residing in the area have been reported. Due to such disturbances, military officials sometimes close the border between Nepal and India. Even though the violence has decreased in 2009, it can occur randomly with little or no warning.

Travelers who must cross police or military checkpoints should cooperate fully with the authorities.

**Exchange 70:** Show us the car registration.

<b>Local:</b>	Show us the car registration.	hameelaay karko panjeekaran deKhaaunus.
<b>Soldier:</b>	OK.	huncha

Sometimes the police set up checkpoints to determine if goods are being smuggled across the border to locations within the country. For this reason, they may also stop people randomly to question them.



Courtesy of Wikipedia.org  
Security checkpoints

**Exchange 71:** Are you carrying any weapons?

<b>Local:</b>	Are you carrying any weapons, food, or electronics?	ke tapaay kuney praakaarko haateeyaar,kaanaa aataavaa elektroneks haru bokdey hunuhunch?
<b>Soldier:</b>	No.	chaena

In general, travel in Kathmandu Valley is safer than some other areas of Nepal. It is advisable for travelers to contact the U.S. Embassy in Kathmandu before they finalize their plans and travel outside the valley.



© United Nations Photo  
Landmine clearance training

**Land Mines** <sup>322</sup>

During Nepal’s decade-long civil war, both the army and police force planted land mines in over 50 locations and IEDs (improvised explosive devices) in more than 300 fields.<sup>323</sup> Groups that opposed the government also planted unknown numbers of mines and explosives. As reported in late 2003, one third of those wounded by explosive devices were civilians.<sup>324</sup> The mines reportedly used by government forces were made in the former Soviet Union, India, and China, and those used by the Maoist rebels were either home-made or from India.<sup>325, 326</sup>

<sup>322</sup> Relief Web. UNICEF (United Nation’s Children’s Fund). Basnet, Ashma Shrestha and John Brittain. “Saving Lives and Limbs through Mine Clearance and Mine-Risk Education in Nepal.” 21 July 2009. <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900SID/EGUA-7U6SMB?OpenDocument>

<sup>323</sup> Relief Web. UNICEF (United Nation’s Children’s Fund). Basnet, Ashma Shrestha and John Brittain. “Saving Lives and Limbs through Mine Clearance and Mine-Risk Education in Nepal.” 21 July 2009. <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900SID/EGUA-7U6SMB?OpenDocument>

<sup>324</sup> BBC News. Khadka, Navin Singh. “ ‘Landmine Use Rising’ in Nepal.” 3 December 2003. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/3287529.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/3287529.stm)

<sup>325</sup> Landmine Monitor. “Nepal.” 1998–2009. <http://lm.icbl.org/index.php/publications/display?url=lm/2006/nepal.html>

Since the conflict ended in 2006, over 200 Nepalese children have been injured or killed by land mines and IEDs.<sup>327</sup> With one of the highest rates of child casualty from these sources in the world, the Nepal government and Maoist forces signed a cease-fire in May 2006. All parties agreed to cooperate in locating the explosive devices,<sup>328</sup> and then defusing and destroying them.<sup>329</sup>



© United Nations Photo  
Landmine explosion

Under the terms of the 2006 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, the government of Nepal in conjunction with the Nepalese Army has been working to accomplish this project by training de-miners, clearing several mine fields, and helping to educate civilians who live in mined areas. They continue to notify the public about the danger of land mines, using radio, TV, and leaflets.

**Exchange 72:** Are there landmines in this area?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Are there landmines in this area?	ke yo chetraama jameen munee beesfotak padarta rakeeyko cha?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	cha

Though it has yet to sign onto any international treaties, the Nepalese government is fulfilling some of the objectives of the Mine Ban Treaty (Ottawa Convention),<sup>330, 331</sup> and the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons.<sup>332</sup>

<sup>326</sup> BBC News. Khadka, Navin Singh. “‘Landmine Use Rising’ in Nepal.” 3 December 2003.

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/3287529.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/3287529.stm)

<sup>327</sup> Relief Web. UNICEF (United Nation’s Children’s Fund). Basnet, Ashma Shrestha and John Brittain.

“Saving Lives and Limbs through Mine Clearance and Mine-Risk Education in Nepal.” 21 July 2009.

<http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900SID/EGUA-7U6SMB?OpenDocument>

<sup>328</sup> Landmine Monitor. “Nepal.” 1998–2009.

<http://lm.icbl.org/index.php/publications/display?url=lm/2006/nepal.html>

<sup>329</sup> Relief Web. UNICEF (United Nation’s Children’s Fund). Basnet, Ashma Shrestha and John Brittain.

“Saving Lives and Limbs through Mine Clearance and Mine-Risk Education in Nepal.” 21 July 2009.

<http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900SID/EGUA-7U6SMB?OpenDocument>

<sup>330</sup> Relief Web. UNICEF (United Nation’s Children’s Fund). Basnet, Ashma Shrestha and John Brittain.

“Saving Lives and Limbs through Mine Clearance and Mine-Risk Education in Nepal.” 21 July 2009.

<http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900SID/EGUA-7U6SMB?OpenDocument>

<sup>331</sup> Landmine Monitor. “Nepal.” 1998–2009.

<http://lm.icbl.org/index.php/publications/display?url=lm/2006/nepal.html>

<sup>332</sup> Relief Web. UNICEF (United Nation’s Children’s Fund). Basnet, Ashma Shrestha and John Brittain.

“Saving Lives and Limbs through Mine Clearance and Mine-Risk Education in Nepal.” 21 July 2009.

<http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900SID/EGUA-7U6SMB?OpenDocument>

## Family Life

### Typical Household and Family Structure

Life in rural Nepal, where most Nepalese live, centers around the extended family. Parents, grandparents, children, and other family members live under the same roof. When sons marry, they bring their wives to live with them in their parents' household. As the number of family members increase, they add rooms to the house, if they have the means to do so.



© Bob Huberman  
Nepalese family

**Exchange 73:** Are these people part of your family?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Are these people part of your family?	ke yeeneeharu tapaaykaa pareevaarkaa sadasyaa hun?
<b>Local:</b>	No, they are our neighbors.	hoena teeneeharu hamraa cheemekee hun

Family members may live in separate houses grouped together in one area of a village or neighborhood. In this setting, children interact daily with a number of different relatives. Whether living in a large, extended household or smaller individual homes, family members interact closely. By living and growing up with family members of all ages, children learn to live intergenerationally and maintain family ties as adults.

Because of the close quarters, there is a general lack of privacy. Yet, because it is not expected, this absence of individual privacy is not an issue for Nepalese. The American cultural concept of protecting “one’s own space” does not exist, per se, in Nepal.<sup>333</sup>

**Exchange 74:** Does your family live here?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Does your family live here?	ke tapaayko pareevaar yhaa baascha?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	baascha

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<sup>333</sup> *Culture Smart! Nepal*. Feller, Tessa. “Chapter 6: Time Out [p. 114].” 2008. London: Kuperard.

In Nepal’s cities, family ties are less structured, and the caste system is not as strictly upheld. The growth of cities has led many to relocate and identify more with modern urban culture and relaxed customs. Fewer extended families populate the cities because young urban adults who marry often set up their own separate household and live a more modern lifestyle. Still, urban families are from rural backgrounds or have relatives living in the countryside, and they maintain close connections to them.



© Global.finnland.fi / flickr.com  
Carrying a small child

Through all phases of life, the family is central to the Nepalese people. Kinship ties, which may extend to neighboring villages, remain in place throughout people’s lives.

**Exchange 75:** Is this your entire family?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is this your entire family?	ke yo tapaayko samasta pareevaar ho?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	ho

Some areas of family responsibility are clearly delineated between family members. Nepalese families are patriarchal, with the male head of the household presiding over all members and taking responsibility for their wellbeing. Wives are expected to bear children, take the lead in raising them, and oversee the domestic work. Children learn to take on shifting roles, as needed, in helping the family.

### Male and Female Roles in the Family<sup>334</sup>

In rural areas, wives usually live in their husband’s household, which may include his parents, brothers, sisters, and their families. The wife must create a cooperative relationship with all of her in-laws in order to serve her husband and his relatives. This is not necessarily an easy task, but it is an unspoken agreement, and the husband expects his wife to adapt to its requirements.



© The Advocacy Project / flickr.com  
Washing dishes in a Tarai Village

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<sup>334</sup> Encyclopedia of the Nations. “Nepal: The Lives of the Poor and Rich.” 2009.  
<http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/economies/Asia-and-the-Pacific/Nepal.html>

In a household, the youngest daughter-in-law holds the lowest rank. She is expected to get up first in the morning to cook breakfast for the others. Compared to the rest of the family, she maintains a heavier workload.<sup>335</sup>

**Exchange 76:** Is this your wife?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is this your wife?	ke vaahaa tapaayko sreematee ho?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	ho

Although women hold fairly high status in some Nepalese subcultures, they rank lower in status than the men in a family. Exceptions exist, such as in Bhote families (of Tibetan origin) or in other ethnic groups in the mountains. Here women exercise more domestic power because the men are often away on trading ventures. In contrast, it is a prevalent pattern for women in Hindu households to wield virtually no power over decisions within the family. <sup>336</sup> In Nepalese tradition, wives are expected to be deferential when talking with their husbands or in-laws. Expectations are markedly different when a married daughter visits her own parents’ home. Here, she receives great respect from her mother and other family members, especially when she has married into one of the higher castes. Married women of a lower caste than their husband’s families, garner contempt because they are seen as a source of pollution in the household.<sup>337</sup>

Families organize their lives around the tradition that wives and daughters are responsible primarily for domestic work while husbands and brothers work in the fields or take jobs. Women take responsibility for cleaning, sewing or weaving, feeding farm animals, carrying water, and collecting firewood for fuel.

Men who do not own their own property sometimes hold wage-paying jobs located far from their homes. If husbands migrate to other rural areas or to the cities to secure work, women manage the house, and any farm labor that needs to be done falls on their shoulders. Men who migrate return home periodically to visit their families, and they send money to help support the family.



© Nir Nussbaum  
Family in Kathmandu, Nepal

<sup>335</sup> *Culture Smart! Nepal*. Feller, Tessa. “Chapter 5: The Nepalese at Home [p. 96].” 2008. London: Kuperard.

<sup>336</sup> *Cultures of the World: Nepal*. Burbank, Jon. “Lifestyle [p. 66].” 1990. Tarrytown: Marshall Cavendish Corporation.

<sup>337</sup> *A History of Nepal*. Whelpton, John. “Chapter 6: Lifestyles, Values, Identities: Changes in Nepalese Society, 1951–1991 [p. 163].” 2005. London: Cambridge University Press.

According to statistics for 2001, more males than females worked in nonagricultural jobs, regardless of whether they lived in cities or the countryside. That same year, approximately 40% of females in urban areas were reportedly employed in agriculture and related occupations.<sup>338</sup> Some women have also worked in other sectors of the economy a pattern that is increasing as more women receive education.

**Exchange 77:** Does your wife have a job?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Does your wife have a job?	ke tapaayko sreemateeko jaager cha?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes, she works at the bank.	cha,unee benkma kam gorchen

Women’s roles require them to ensure the wellbeing of family members, especially with respect to feeding and clothing them. Women convey family and social traditions to their children by teaching them what their roles are.

**Exchange 78:** Are these your children?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Are these your children?	ke yeeneeharu tapaayka santan hun?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	ho

## Status of the Elderly, Children, and Adolescents

### *The Elderly*

Elderly family members in Nepal traditionally live in extended families and remain an active part of the social unit. Advanced age accompanies elevated status within the family hierarchy, and younger family members display deference and respect to their elders. The family patriarch (the father or eldest son/brother) remains the head of the extended family as he ages.



© Sara Parker  
Grandma and grandchild

<sup>338</sup> Cbs.gov.np. Sharma, Dr. Pitamber. “Chapter 10: Urbanization and Development [p. 405].” No date. <http://www.cbs.gov.np/Population/Monograph/Chapter%2010%20%20Urbanization%20and%20Developm ent.pdf>

The cultural norm of caring for one's parents or grandparents is inculcated in the Nepalese from childhood. Their strong tradition of kinship extends first to the most vulnerable members of the family: the old and the very young. Family members tend to the needs of parents and grandparents and include them in the family's social life, relying upon them for the knowledge and wisdom they can share. The family functions to ensure that those who are most vulnerable are not left alone.

### *Children and Adolescents*

Nepalese children enjoy the love and indulgence of their parents, grandparents, siblings, and other relatives which in a custom that leads to reciprocal lifetime social ties. Older family members often care for the younger children while their parents work. They are treated permissively while at the same time taught to respect their elders, including teachers, social superiors, and guests in the family. Growing up within the family structure, children learn not only about general cultural expectations, but also their particular roles and obligations within the hierarchy.



© Dhillung Kirat  
Nepalese children

Nepalese children's roles differ according to their age, gender, and economic status. Children of poor families quickly learn they are expected to help with all aspects of work in the house and field. As they grow older, they often seek employment to help the family, working in hotel kitchens, assisting tailors, selling goods, or working as servants. Such jobs offer opportunities rather than the peril usually associated with child labor. In exchange for their work, young people may receive room and board, and their employers may provide them clothing or send them to school. In contrast, children in wealthier families are not expected to contribute as much toward household work or help the family by taking jobs; they are more likely to attend school.

When children approach adolescence, different rituals may take place, depending on caste, ethnicity, and gender. To mark their high caste, Brahman and Chetri males follow a tradition in which they receive a special garment, which they wear over the shoulder and replace yearly with a new one. Following in Buddha's footsteps, boys may also go through a ceremony around age 12 in which they dress in saffron-colored robes and carry alms bowls to the homes of their relatives in a symbolic act of begging.

Newar girls undergo a ceremony in which they symbolically marry a god. This ritual gives, at least to those of lower caste, the freedom to divorce and remarry in the future.<sup>339, 340</sup> The idea is that they can never become impure through widowhood, because their first “husband” can never die.



© Fernando Zarur  
Lhi newari ritual

In the Gurung culture, in the Annapurna area, adolescent girls gather and move in with one family whose home becomes an informal “dormitory.” This group of girls may come from several villages. Boys are invited to join the group both for work parties and for evenings of singing and dancing. The group association provides a setting in which the young people learn to become adults and find marriage partners.<sup>341,</sup>  
342

In Nepalese culture, sons are favored over daughters because they are seen as more likely to provide security in the parents’ later years. They also represent and extend the family lineage. Male offspring also perform a religious role when their parents die. It is they who must “prepare their parents for the next life during special cremation rites.”<sup>343</sup> The ritual obligations of the eldest son include releasing his parents’ ashes into a holy river and then honoring his parents with an annual ceremony. According to tradition, the eldest son performs these duties because his observance assists the deceased father’s soul in becoming reborn. For all these reasons, giving birth to a son provides status to the mother and solidifies her role in the family.

<sup>339</sup> *Cultures of the World: Nepal*. Burbank, Jon. “Lifestyle [p. 60].” 1990. Tarrytown: Marshall Cavendish Corporation.

<sup>340</sup> *On the Edge of the Auspicious: Gender and Caste in Nepal*. Cameron, Mary M. “Chapter 1: Situating Low Caste Women [p. 53].” 1998. Champaign: University of Illinois Press.  
[http://books.google.com/books?id=KhWk793cY68C&pg=PA53&lpg=PA53&dq=Newar+widows+may+remarry&source=bl&ots=v6SpdbFTWW&sig=o3i6kFmGjQUzjy2VKA\\_LoLUiJHA&hl=en&ei=D1IMS7\\_MN47-sQPBoIWuAw&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=3&ved=0CA0Q6AEwAg#v=onepage&q=Newar%20widows%20may%20remarry&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=KhWk793cY68C&pg=PA53&lpg=PA53&dq=Newar+widows+may+remarry&source=bl&ots=v6SpdbFTWW&sig=o3i6kFmGjQUzjy2VKA_LoLUiJHA&hl=en&ei=D1IMS7_MN47-sQPBoIWuAw&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=3&ved=0CA0Q6AEwAg#v=onepage&q=Newar%20widows%20may%20remarry&f=false)

<sup>341</sup> YetiZone. “Annapurna Circuit and Sanctuary: The Gurungs.” November 2005.  
[http://74.125.155.132/search?q=cache:nk5wWXu34NgJ:www.yetizone.com/the\\_gurungs.htm+a+daughter+of+Rodi+age&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us&lr=lang\\_en](http://74.125.155.132/search?q=cache:nk5wWXu34NgJ:www.yetizone.com/the_gurungs.htm+a+daughter+of+Rodi+age&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us&lr=lang_en)

<sup>342</sup> Tamusamaj. “The Gurungs of Nepal – Dr. Om Gurung.” 27 October 2007.  
[http://74.125.155.132/search?q=cache:Blw3tWBVYzsj:www.tamusamaj.com/article.php%3Fcid%3D31+femal+rodi+communal+houses&hl=en&lr=lang\\_en&gl=us&strip=1](http://74.125.155.132/search?q=cache:Blw3tWBVYzsj:www.tamusamaj.com/article.php%3Fcid%3D31+femal+rodi+communal+houses&hl=en&lr=lang_en&gl=us&strip=1)

<sup>343</sup> *Culture Smart! Nepal*. Feller, Tessa. “Chapter 2: Values & Attitudes [p. 45].” 2008. London: Kuperard.

**Exchange 79:** Do you have any brothers?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Do you have any brothers?	ke tapaaykaa daaju – bahayharu chan?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes, I have one brother.	cha, mero eyk daaju cha

Since daughters are less favored than sons, the family must pay a dowry when their daughter marries and leaves the family home. (Dowry traditions vary among regions of the country.) Furthermore, daughters bring less status to the family than a son does, although this varies according to caste, ethnicity, and religion. Overall, girls receive less social investment and are less likely than boys to attend school, although the nonattendance rate for both is high in rural Nepal.<sup>344</sup>

### **Marriage, Divorce, and Birth**

#### *Marriage*

Marriages in Nepal are considered sacred and divine, linking two families for a lifetime. Following longstanding tradition, they are carefully planned to take place between members of the same ethnic group and caste. If members of different castes marry, both the husband and wife may be disowned by their respective families, with no future social contact allowed between them.



**Exchange 80:** Are you married?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Are you married?	tapaay beebaheet hunuhuncha?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	chu

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<sup>344</sup> *A History of Nepal*. Whelpton, John. "Chapter 6: Lifestyles, Values, Identities: Changes in Nepalese Society, 1951–1991 [p. 164]." 2005. London: Cambridge University Press.

Arranged marriage, an old custom, remains a common practice in some groups, such as Newars and Hindus. Women in high-caste Hindu communities enjoy less freedom than women of lower castes or ethnic groups outside the caste system.<sup>345</sup> Consequently, high-caste Hindu women have been more likely to enter into arranged marriages. The practice of arranging marriages has abated somewhat in the cities; where sons and daughters often have a large voice in determining whom they will marry. In modern arranged marriages, a young person decides on his or her future spouse (if that person agrees) and the parents then participate in making the arrangements.<sup>346</sup> In the countryside, however, traditional arranged marriages (including parents choosing the bride or groom) have withstood the test of time and remain the prevailing custom. Such tradition cements social ties and provides a social safety net for both families.



### *Divorce*

Divorce is uncommon in Nepal and particularly difficult for women who may find herself disconnected from nearly all social networks. Not only will her husband's family expel her, but her birth family may not allow her to return home. If she has children, they can stay with her only until the age of six, after which they are required to live with their father.<sup>347</sup>

As with marriage customs, divorce customs may also be stricter for high-caste Hindu women than for women of lower castes or those of ethnic groups outside the caste system. Some ethnic groups have not adopted the strict Hindu codes of caste and social interaction. Women in the Tamang community (part of the Tibeto-Burman hill groups), for instance, or in the mountain villages, have more freedom and may divorce if they choose to do so.<sup>348</sup>



Women who are widowed may face even more dire prospects than those brought about by divorce. They are likely to be expelled by their husband's family, seen as nothing more than a burden on a family struggling to survive. In many cases, the family may even blame the widow for her husband's death. She is less likely to be rejected, however, if she contributes to the family's income.<sup>349</sup>

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<sup>345</sup> *A History of Nepal*. Whelpton, John. "Chapter 6: Lifestyles, Values, Identities: Changes in Nepalese Society, 1951–1991 [p. 164]." 2005. London: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>346</sup> *A History of Nepal*. Whelpton, John. "Chapter 6: Lifestyles, Values, Identities: Changes in Nepalese Society, 1951–1991 [p. 158]." 2005. London: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>347</sup> *Culture Smart! Nepal*. Feller, Tessa. "Chapter 2: Values & Attitudes [p. 53]." 2008. London: Kuperard.

<sup>348</sup> *A History of Nepal*. Whelpton, John. "Chapter 6: Lifestyles, Values, Identities: Changes in Nepalese Society, 1951–1991 [p. 164]." 2005. London: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>349</sup> *Culture Smart! Nepal*. Feller, Tessa. "Chapter 2: Values & Attitudes [p. 53]." 2008. London: Kuperard.

## *Birth and Birth Ceremonies*

Children are highly desired in a marriage, and Nepalese newlyweds anticipate the birth of their first child within a year of their wedding. Large families with many children are the norm in Nepalese culture. Failure to produce children in a marriage can be grounds for divorce. In poor villages and households, children perform valuable work. They can help the family with farm work, housework, and caring for younger brothers and sisters. Children represent a social security network, ensuring the parents will be cared for in their old age.

The birth of a child inspires great celebration. Among Hindus, a blessing and naming ceremony takes place at birth. An astrologer assists in determining a name for the child, basing it on the exact time the child was born. Around the age of six months, the parents host a rice-feeding ceremony known as *apausni*. They invite a large number of guests, many of whom offer the child some boiled rice in a spoon. Guests may also give gifts of money for the child's future. In the Newar culture, a traditional activity associated with the *pausni* is a kind of game in which guests place different items in front of a male child, such as toys, a pen, a brick, rice, or other objects. According to tradition, whichever object the child first reaches for predicts his future occupation.<sup>350, 351</sup>



© World Bank Photo Collection / Flickr.com  
Nepalese infant

At the age of five, Brahman and Chetri males participate in a head-shaving ceremony. Traditionally, a small tuft of hair known as a *tupi* is left unshaved at the back of the child's head. The shaved head and *tupi* identify the child as a Hindu.

## **Naming Conventions**

Nepalese family names or surnames reveal people's caste, occupation, and region of origin. Among Nepalese and Indian ruling dynasties, it has been common to use names to identify the entire dynasty and establish a distinct historical identity. The Nepalese Rana rulers, for instance, attached the tag of "Vikram" or "Veer Vikaram" as an indicator of their ruling-family status.<sup>352</sup> This coding of family background information in surnames serves the Hindu caste system. Knowing another person's surname lets people understand how to relate according to complex caste rules and restrictions concerning

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<sup>350</sup> *Cultures of the World: Nepal*. Burbank, Jon. "Lifestyle [p. 59]." 1990. Tarrytown: Marshall Cavendish Corporation.

<sup>351</sup> *Culture Smart! Nepal*. Feller, Tessa. "Chapter 3: Religion, Customs, & Tradition [p. 67]." 2008. London: Kuperard.

<sup>352</sup> *Panorama of Indian Anthroponomy: An Historical, Socio-Cultural, & Linguistic Analysis of Indian Personal Names*. Sharma, Dhruv Dev. "Introduction [pp. 27–28]." 2005. New Delhi: Mittal Publications. [http://books.google.com/books?id=\\_5UW9Krt\\_NEC&pg=PA28&lpg=PA28&dq=personal+names+in+Nepal&source=bl&ots=6fK9X3Rcnt&sig=endQ09lePqh52DHq9MC98O-oUGw&hl=en&ei=PYvCSozUCo\\_gsQPQqOXuAg&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=2#v=onepage&q=personal%20names%20in%20Nepal&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=_5UW9Krt_NEC&pg=PA28&lpg=PA28&dq=personal+names+in+Nepal&source=bl&ots=6fK9X3Rcnt&sig=endQ09lePqh52DHq9MC98O-oUGw&hl=en&ei=PYvCSozUCo_gsQPQqOXuAg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=2#v=onepage&q=personal%20names%20in%20Nepal&f=false)

social and even family interactions. For instance, they know whether they can visit and enter the home of another person (as opposed to waiting outside the door) or accept and eat the food that another prepares. Although such customs have diminished in cities, possibly aided by the 2001 government ban on discrimination against Dalits, caste rules are based upon such deep and longstanding tradition that they endure in practice.<sup>353</sup>

Because of the rigid caste divides, people have often tried to escape from lower castes by changing their names. This practice becomes possible when someone moves to a new location. By adopting a high-caste surname, the family or individual can reduce the stigma associated with being a member of a lower caste.<sup>354</sup>

According to tradition, a Brahman priest assigns a religious name for a child by first creating a horoscope. However, the name can be overridden by the family. In modern practice, the family often makes the final choice on a name.

Nepalese people customarily receive three names: a first and second given name, followed by a surname (family name) indicating the person's caste or ethnic group. Although it is common for women to use their husband's surname for official matters, they often keep their birth family name as a middle name.<sup>355</sup> The given names are for use by family members and close friends.<sup>356</sup> Given names can also indicate a person's religious and caste affiliation. Names may be taken from epic stories or mythology to associate a child with qualities of heroism, bravery, or religious dedication. When taken from Sanskrit sources, they indicate association with the upper ranks of society.<sup>357</sup> Children do not address their friends' parents by their names but instead use honorific forms.



© Sarah Boyd  
Namaste greeting from little girl

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<sup>353</sup> *Nepal*. Bhattarai, Krishna P. "Chapter 4: People and Culture [p. 61, 65]." 2008. New York: Chelsea House.

<sup>354</sup> *A History of Nepal*. Whelpton, John. "Chapter 6: Lifestyles, Values, Identities: Changes in Nepalese Society, 1951–1991 [p. 156]." 2005. London: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>355</sup> Hampshire Ethnic Minority & Traveller [sic] Achievement Service. Hampshire County Council. "Nepali Children in Hampshire Schools." No date. <http://www3.hants.gov.uk/nepali-children-in-hants.pdf>

<sup>356</sup> *Customs & Etiquette of Nepal*. Jha, Sunil Kumar. "Chapter 3: The People & Their Languages [p. 29]." 2007. London: Bravo, Ltd.

<sup>357</sup> *Panorama of Indian Anthroponomy: An Historical, Socio-Cultural, & Linguistic Analysis of Indian Personal Names*. Sharma, Dhruv Dev. "Introduction. [pp. 28–29.]" 2005. New Delhi: Mittal Publications. [http://books.google.com/books?id=\\_5UW9Krt\\_NEC&pg=PA28&lpg=PA28&dq=personal+names+in+Nepal&source=bl&ots=6fK9X3Rcnt&sig=endQ09lePqh52DHq9MC98O-oUGw&hl=en&ei=PYvCSozUCo\\_gsQPQqOXuAg&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=2#v=onepage&q=personal%20names%20in%20Nepal&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=_5UW9Krt_NEC&pg=PA28&lpg=PA28&dq=personal+names+in+Nepal&source=bl&ots=6fK9X3Rcnt&sig=endQ09lePqh52DHq9MC98O-oUGw&hl=en&ei=PYvCSozUCo_gsQPQqOXuAg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=2#v=onepage&q=personal%20names%20in%20Nepal&f=false)