

The Deaf of Nepal

The Nepali Sign Language Community



The Deaf of Nepal comprise a larger than usual percentage of the population. In most countries of the world approximately 1-2 out of every 1,000 children is born Deaf while others become Deaf due to accident or disease. According to some medical researchers in Nepal as many as 15% of the population have some hearing loss, due to lack of medical help, poverty and difficulty of access to transportation.

The Deaf are found in every ethnic group and are more numerous in some groups than others due to cultural practices such as marriage between close relatives.

Most of the Deaf do not have the opportunity to hear or see the gospel as there are few or no interpreters, there are few schools for the Deaf and travel to those schools is difficult or not possible because of the distance, and lack of resources.

The major religion of Nepal is Hinduism with many Buddhists as well. Until recent years Christianity was banned, so most of the converts lived outside the country. For the past thirty or so years the numbers of believers in Nepal have increased dramatically. However there have been almost no interpreters for the Deaf and only a very small number have become Christians.

Most Nepalis are farmers who do not see the need of education for their hearing children, let alone the Deaf. As a result many of the Deaf have no language at all, so they have no concept of God or understanding of sin and other theological concepts.

Primarily the Deaf need to develop some form of communication so that they can interact meaningfully with others. Once they have a language, then they can be taught about the Lord

Primary Religion:

Hinduism

Disciples (Matt 28:19):

Less than 0.1%

Churches:

1

Scripture Status (Matt 28:20):

None

Population (date):

Potentially 500,000 (2005)



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Have They Heard The Gospel?

Number of Pastors/Evangelists	1 church worker
Who is Jesus Christ to Them? Comment	Unknown to most. Less than 1% call themselves Christians. In 2005 there was one known Christian, and apparently there are a few more now (2011)
Jesus as Their God and Only Savior	None or almost none
Believe Jesus Is a Prophet, A Good Man, But Not the Only Savior	Fewer than 10 - 25%
Believe In Local Traditional Religion	Some
Have Not Heard Who Jesus Is	99.99%
Literacy Rate	Small percentage
Hindrances to Scripture Use	There is nothing available in the language, and illiteracy is a problem.
Response to Gospel	There are no known believers
Bilingualism	It is possible that some of the Deaf know some Nepali Sign Language. Their signed language is over 50% similar to the Nepali Sign Language used in Pokhara which is the closest town.
Missionary Needs	Needed. Indigenous Christian workers are still rare, as Christianity is fairly new to Nepal
What Other Forms of Gospel Presentations are Available?	Recordings: no Literature: no Films/videos: 1 (done by a non-native signer)
Are Cross-Cultural Missionaries Needed?	Yes (trained Bible translator)

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Group Description

Language/Linguistics

Primary Language:	If a Deaf person has a language in Nepal, it will be a signed language.
Alternate Names	Nepali Sign Language
Attitude towards mother tongue:	Very receptive
Monolingual	Unknown
Second Languages	A few Deaf know how to read Nepali. There may be some who speak Nepali, but I did not meet any.
Neighbor Languages	Indian Sign Language is related to Nepali Sign Language, as they are just across the border. The relationship is not very close, maybe 60-70% similar depending on which Indian dialect one looks at.

Literacy

Percent Literate for Men:	Unknown
Percent Literate for Women:	Unknown
Active Program	None
Comments:	There is a dictionary in Nepali Sign Language, plus a supplement for technical terms for high school students.

Economics

Subsistence type:	agriculturalists and some pastoralists
Occupation	Farming
Income Sources	Farm products
Modernization/Utilities	Lights (for some), running water (for some)

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Community Development

Diet	Usually poor to fair – families usually do not want the Deaf around as deafness is a sign of bad karma, so some Deaf children are deprived of food and do not develop normally
Diet	
Comments:	Rice or potatoes vegetables
Water	Some may be good, other places it may not be good
Comments:	Some places have piped water, but other places rely on creek or river water
Shelter	Usually houses seem to be built of stone with corrugated iron roofs. I was seldom inside a home, so do not know much about the interiors of homes.
Electricity	Some homes have electricity, some places have solar panels
Clothing	Men usually wear Western style clothing. Women usually wear Indian style clothing with matching top and pants.
Transportation	In the cities there are buses and cars. In the country there are some buses, but mostly people walk from place to place.

Society

Family Structures	Varies with the language group of the family
Self Image	Threatened
Celebrations	Many religious holidays, depending on the religion
Recreations	Depends on the language group the Deaf person is born into.
Art Forms	Depends on the group of people the Deaf person is born into.

Education/Youth

Primary Schools	6-7
Secondary Schools	1 full classes, 1 with lower classes only
Secondary School Enrollment	Small number
Language of Instruction	Nepali Sign Language
Language of Textbooks	Nepali

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Status of Christianity

Church Growth

Reached Status A few individuals

History of Christianity

Year Began In 2000s

By Whom A Nepali church

Reason for Urgent Need For Translation Explained On-going translation project is being done by untrained, but eager people

Missions/Churches Working Among People Group

Organization #1 One church in Kathmandu

Main Ministry Evangelism and church planting

Responsiveness

Attitude to Christianity Mostly indifferent

Attitude to Religious Change: Mostly indifferent

Resistance/Receptivity Very little opportunity to hear/see the gospel

Recommended Approaches or Specific Ways to Reach Group Need to first learn their language. There is one expatriate working with the Deaf who should be contacted

Items for Prayers The current translators need training. They may be resistant to change.

The expatriate may need training also. She also may be resistant to change.

The Deaf need to be involved in the translation project at all levels.

The Deaf also should be trained for their specific roles in the translation project.

The handful of believing Deaf need to be taught the Bible in their own language.