

Loba

In 1998, 26,000 Loba people lived in the Dhawalagiri Zone of north-central Nepal. They inhabit the Mustang (Lo Manthang) and Dolpa districts in the northern part of the region, close to the Nepal-China border. Also known as the Mustang Tibetans and Lopa, the Loba inhabit the Kali Gandaki valley. Their villages sit at an altitude of between 3,400 and 4,000 metres (11,100 to 13,120 ft.) above sea level.¹ The Loba of Nepal are not the same as the Lhoba minority group of southern Tibet.

Until it was incorporated into the Nepali kingdom at the end of the 18th century, the Mustang area was under the control of the Nghari District of Tibet, which was part of the Guge Kingdom. Even today this part of Nepal on the map struts out into Tibet, breaking what is otherwise a fairly straight border between the two nations. This historical fact prompted the Chinese to try to re-establish the Kali Gandaki valley under their control, and several military clashes occurred along the border in the 1960s and 1970s.

The Loba have been the subject of much fantasy in the West. Because of their geographical remoteness, Mustang was viewed as a kind of Shangri-La. Until 1952 this small group had their own Buddhist kingdom and monarchy, which was established around 1380. In 1992 the upper Mustang valley was opened to foreign tourists, although permits are only granted to those who join organized treks at inflated prices.²

The Loba language is part of the Central

Tibetan branch of the Tibeto-Burman family, although it shares only 65 per cent lexical similarity with Lhasa Tibetan. Other languages spoken nearby include Bara-gaunle and Dolpo (78% lexical similarity), Helambu Sherpa (63%) and Jirel (62%).³

Some Loba practise polyandry, 'where a single woman is the common wife of a group of males . . . A single woman is selected and married to five or six brothers as a common wife, or the eldest brother's wife is also utilized as a wife by his other younger brothers.'⁴ This practice probably came about because of the high percent-

age of Loba men who join the Buddhist monastery for extended periods of time. By having multiple husbands, the women believed they had more chance of surviving and not being abandoned. Almost all Loba people are zealous believers in Tibetan Buddhism. There are numerous temples and monasteries throughout

their territory. A few minor cracks have appeared in the Buddhist stronghold in recent years, however, and today there are a few Loba Christians. A 1998 missions publication noted, 'A few years ago a series of huge floods devastated several Loba villages. Many people died and others lost all their possessions and means of livelihood. The government responded by relocating hundreds of Loba people outside the vast mountains that had separated them from contact with the world for centuries. Because of this God-given opportunity, some Loba have been exposed to the gospel of Jesus Christ for the first time.'⁵



International Mission Board



Population:

27,200 (2000)
33,700 (2010)
41,700 (2020)

Countries: Nepal

Buddhism: Tibetan

Christians: 10

Overview of the Loba

Other Names: Lopa, Loyu, Mustang, Lo Montang, Lo Manthang, Mustang Tibetans, Lhopas, Lowa, Mustang Bhote

Population Sources:

26,000 in Nepal (2000, B Grimes [1998 figure])

Language: Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Himalayish, Tibeto-Kanauri, Tibetic, Tibetan, Central

Dialects: 2 (Lo, Seke)

Professing Buddhists: 99%

Practising Buddhists: 85%

Christians: 0.1%

Scripture: none

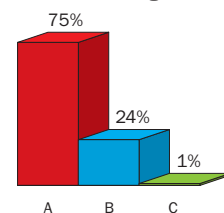
Jesus film: none

Gospel Recordings: Mustang

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: LOY

Status of Evangelization



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