

# The Danuwar Rai of Nepal

*A people in Eastern Nepal without the Scriptures, without the Gospel, and currently without any mission activity—an unreached people waiting for the Gospel.*

by Bethany World Prayer Center

Nepal is a small mountainous kingdom lying sheltered at the foot of the Himalayan mountains, sandwiched between India to the South and Tibet to the north. It is home to approximately 110 different ethnic groups who speak many different languages and dialects, and have many different religious beliefs.

The Danuwar Rai are part of a cluster of people known as the Rais—the largest group in eastern Nepal. The numerous groups in the cluster all speak various dialects (from which most take their name), of the same language family. Though they have pronounced Mongoloid features they claim their origin to Marema, the daughter of Nina (who was the daughter of the earth); and Mahadeva—a wanderer in the jungle of Simrangarh and Tehrathum.

Nepal is predominantly an agricultural country with more than 90% of the population dependent on agriculture for their livelihood, yet it is poor and undeveloped. The Danuwar Rai subsist primarily as rice agriculturists, but many of the men do migrate to the cities for work.

## What are their lives like?

As agriculturists, the Danuwar Rai have been limited by insufficient knowledge of technology. While they grow rice in the low lying areas and potatoes, maize, wheat and barley at higher altitudes, they have poor lev-

els of productivity. It is the men's job to plow the fields, while the women plant the seeds. Harvesting is done by both, and often families will unite to help each other at this special time.

Most farms produce barely enough to support one family. Farmers trade any surplus crops they may have for such important items as kerosene and salt. Others supplement their income through craftwork and tailoring. A beverage is made from barley and potato, and this is used on festive occasions and marriage ceremonies.

Like other Rai groups, the Danuwar Rai live in one or two storied wooden or stone houses with thatched gabled roofs. The houses usually have wooden verandas

Traditionally, the men wear a *daura* (cloak) and a *surrwal* (a kind of pajama). Women wear a *fariya* (a type of sari), and a *cholo* (blouse).

Collectively, the Rai are known as very brave, courageous, daring and fearless people. In recent history they have won worldwide reputation for their bravery as Gurkhas in the Royal Nepalese army. Joining the army is often a way out

of enduring economic hardship, and it also brings respect and honor especially for those of high military rank.

Marriages are facilitated by *kongpi* (middlemen) who are used by the families to work out the details of the marriage. Gifts are presented and if accepted, a marriage date will be set. Some marriages are still facilitated by the pre-arranged kidnapping of the girl of one's choice, as it is believed that these bring about good results. Gifts are still presented to the respective families. The sacrifice of an animal (usually a pig or rooster) is

often performed at this time. Marriages are very festive occasions and meat and drinks are served in abundance. Gifts are made to the parents of the bride and groom as well as to a long line of family members and village elders. Often the whole night is spent in singing and celebration.

### **What are their beliefs?**

Although the royal family of Nepal is Hindu (as is about 90% of the population of Nepal), Hinduism and Buddhism exist side by side and are intermingled. The majority of Danuwar Rai are Hindu's but there are a number of Buddhists and some animistic worshipers. As a result, there is a wide variety of deities and worship practices among the people, most evident at celebrations of birth, marriage and death. While they worship the various Hindu gods, they also follow a Buddhist way of life and obey the teachings of the Lamas. However, at the same time they have faith in the various local spirits and supernatural forces. Due to Hindu influence many of the dead are being cremated instead of being buried.

### **What are their needs?**

Nepal has long been hidden away and forgotten by most of the world. Fiercely opposed to any form of evangelism (proselytism), government restrictions and subsequent penalties on Christian witness have been harsh. Many believers have spent significant periods in prison for their beliefs.

The Danuwar Rai do not have the Scriptures or the "Jesus Film" in their own language. Currently no missions agencies are working among them. There is a small number of

believers, but they still need the support of mission efforts from the outside. For information on Unreached Peoples Prayer Profiles please contact:

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