



Narayan Maharjan

**Location:** More than 300,000 Nepali-speaking people live scattered throughout a wide area of Myanmar, including in the country's two largest urban centers, Yangon and Mandalay. Others are found in northern Myanmar's Shan and Kachin states and in the Sagaing Region near the western border with India. More than 20 million Nepali-speaking people are distributed around the world in more than 50 countries. Apart from 13.8 million in their homeland, countries and regions with the largest Nepali populations are India (2.1 million), the Middle East (more than 2 million), Australia (332,000), and the United States (316,000), where they are primarily found in Texas, Ohio, New York, Pennsylvania, and California.<sup>1</sup>

**Identity:** The 1931 census of Burma returned 39,532 "Gorkha" people, who were courageous soldiers recruited from Nepal by the British army to fight and help subdue the ethnic groups of Burma. The terms Gurkha, Gorkha, and Gorkhali are synonymous with Nepali people. They originate from the Gorkha kingdom which was at the heart of the formation of the kingdom of Nepal in 1768. This profile covers all Nepali-speaking people in Myanmar today, who come from a variety of

tribes and people groups. Some are descended from the early Gurkha soldiers, while others are economic migrants who have arrived in recent decades seeking better lives.

**Language:** Nepali, which is part of the Indo-European language family, is related to major regional languages spoken by hundreds of millions of people, such as Hindi and Urdu. The original Gurkha soldiers who served in the British army were required to learn English, and that custom has carried through to today, as most Nepali people in Myanmar can speak Burmese and English.

**History:** During the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, Gurkha soldiers earned such a fearsome reputation as skilled and disciplined warriors that the British employed them throughout their empire, with troops stationed in Hong Kong, Singapore, India, and in Britain itself. The warriors were greatly respected for their bravery, and Queen Elizabeth II honored their service to the British Empire by attending the Gurkha bicentenary celebrations in 2015. When the British exited Burma in 1948, Gurkha troops acted as rear guard units to protect the British as the sun set on the colonial era. For a time, many Gurkha soldiers

served in the new Burma Army, but as the decades went by the situation changed dramatically for many Nepalis, as the socialist government increasingly despised their presence and viewed them as illegal foreigners.<sup>2</sup> Thousands left the country for Nepal and other parts of the world.

**Customs:** Gurkha soldiers famously use distinctive *khukuri* curved knives. It is said that if a Gurkha draws his knife in anger, he must draw blood before returning it to its sheath. Nepalis are renowned for being hard working and clever with money. They "place high importance on education, and they represent a disproportionately high share of those with advanced (medical, engineering, and doctorate) degrees in Myanmar."<sup>3</sup> In the 1950s and 1960s, Nepalis were seen as key contributors to society, with some rising to prominent positions. One of them, Suk Bahadur, is considered the greatest Myanmar football (soccer) player in history, having captained the national side from 1952 to 1970.

**Religion:** Most Nepali people in Myanmar have retained the Hindu religion of their homeland and have constructed Hindu temples in several states. Some Nepalis have either adopted Buddhism or blended it with their traditional faith, while a small number are Muslims. Very few members of the Nepali community in Myanmar have embraced Christianity.

**Christianity:** Little is known about Christianity among the Nepalis of Myanmar. Historically, almost nothing was mentioned of them in mission records, apart from fleeting mentions, such as by the Bible Churchmen's Missionary Society in 1931, who reported: "Eight adults were baptized at Mohnyin in Kachin State, belonging to five different races—Jingpo, Burmese, Gurkha, Shan, and Chinese."<sup>4</sup> The Nepali New Testament was first published in 1824 and the full Bible in 1914, but it is not available in Myanmar.



**Population in Myanmar:**  
316,000 (2025)

**Location:**  
Yangon Region, Mandalay Region, Sagaing Region, Shan State, Kachin State

**Language Family:**  
Indo-European

**Main Religion:**  
Hinduism (79.0%)

**Christians:**  
3,100 (1.0%)

OVERVIEW

**Population:**  
316,000 in Myanmar (2025 Asia Harvest)  
299,000 (2017 J. Leclerc)  
73,511 (1983 census)  
39,532 (1931 census)

**Other Countries:**  
13,855,000 in Nepal  
2,171,000 in India  
747,000 in Qatar  
655,000 in United Arab Emirates  
534,000 in Saudi Arabia  
332,000 in Australia  
282,000 in USA<sup>1</sup>

**Other Names:**  
Gorkha, Gorkhali, Gurkha, Gurkhali, Khaskura, Nepalese, Parbate

**Location:**  
Yangon Region; Mandalay Region; Pyin U Lwin, Thabeikkyin, Aungmyethazan, Maha Aungmye, and Amarapura districts; Sagaing Region: Tamu and Kalay districts; Shan State: Taunggyi District; Kachin State: Mohnyin and Myitkina districts

**Language:** Nepali [npt]

**Dialects:**

**Scripture:**  
Bible 1914  
New Testament 1821

**Jesus film:** Nepali

**Global Recordings:** Nepali #6428

**People ID:** 13317

