

Nationalities of Nepal

1. Kisans

The dwindling community of Kisans has only about 700 members left at present. They live in the villages of Dhulabari and Dhajjan of Jhapa District. Their language is Dravidian, and their script is Uraun. The traditional name of these people is Kuntam. At present, however, they are known by various other names, such as Kuda, Kora, Mirdha, Kola, Morbha, Birhor, and Nagesia. The men have the tradition of marrying their maternal cousins (maternal uncle's daughters). A widow may also be allowed to marry the younger brother (brother-in-law) of her deceased husband. The Kisans have their own king. Their ancestral deity is Samalai Mahaprobha. The Kisans both practice cremating or burying their dead. Animist and nature worshippers as they are, the Kisans had the infamous practice of killing their women accused of being witches. Though likely to be compared with the Uraun farmers of Orissa and Bihar in India, many characteristics of the Nepalese Kisans' ways of life, however, do not conform to them. The Kisans are farmers.

2. Kumals

Kumals are found in large numbers in the districts of Dolkha, Dhading, Sankhuwasabha, Palpa and Parbat. They are also found scattered in almost all the other districts of Nepal. They share physical characteristics and ways of life with the Tharus, Danuwars, Darais, Majhis and Botes. The main occupation of the Kumals is pottery. Their language is more accentuated to the Tibeto-Burman family. Their preferred inhabitation is on riverbanks, inner valleys and tropical areas. They relish pork and buffalo. The Kumals seek assistance from the Dhami and Jhankri shamans. They either bury their dead or consign them to the flow of the rivers.

3. Kushbadias (Kuhbadias)

Kushbadias are also known as Kuhbadias. They are found in Banke and Bardia districts. Their facial features subscribe to some lesser Mongoloid strains. They ascertain their origin in east Bhairahawa. Carving stone grinding slates and wheels and weaving ropes and making brooms are their major professions. They worship Masounia as their principal deity. They strongly resemble the Tharus in their ways of life, language and dress patterns. Kushbadias bury their dead. After the burial, they sit around the cemetery and drink potent moonshine.

4. Kusundas

Kusundas are probably the most endangered species of the aboriginal ethnic groups of Nepal. They prefer to live separately and alienated from other people. They select secluded forest areas for their inhabitation. Sparsely found in the districts of Gorkha, Kaski, Salyan, Pyuthatn, Dang, Dailekh and Surkhet, the Kusundas resemble the Chepangs in their observances. Kusundas are also known as Ban Manchhe (wild people) and Ban Raja (kings of the forests). They have their own language. Some Kusundas call themselves Chhatyals. Others do not address themselves by their ethnic surnames. The Kusunda language and culture are on the brink of extinction. Instead of making their livelihood from

agriculture, they prefer to forage for tubers for their food. They do not drink milk of bovines. Cow dung is almost taboo.

5. Gangais

Gangais are mostly concentrated in Jhapa and Morang districts of Nepal. They are also known as Ganesh or Mandal. Because of their flat nose, plain face, wheatish complexion and rough curly hair, anthropologists have compared them to the Lepchas. While the Gangais of Morang speak Maithili, the Gangais of Jhapa speak Rajbanshi. They also differ in their dress preferences. Mahabir and Thakur are their ancestral deities. They live in joint families. One group called Babu Gangais takes pork while the Besaram Gangais shun it. The Gangais are armers.

6. Gurungs

Middle in height and stout in build, the main habitats of the Gurungs are the districts of Kaski, Lamjung, Gorkha, Syangja, Manang and Tanahu in the Gandaki Zone while they are also scattered in Okhaldhunga, Sankhuwasabha and Taplejung in East Nepal. Animal husbandry is their main occupation. They speak languages related to the Mon-Khmer and Tibeto-Burma lineages. The Gurung history is ancient. Ghale is an address befitting high ruling class. Gurungs are predominantly Buddhist. Their institutions of Lhosar, Rodi Ghar and Rodi dance have high esteem in the Nepalese culture. They both practice cremation and burial of their dead. Gurungs call themselves Tamu. Their languages have no script.

7. Chimtans

Chimtans are the inhabitants of one of the Panch (five) Gaun or villages between Kagbeni and Tukucho in the district of Mustang. Their village is known as Chimada or Chimang. They call themselves Thakalis, and have affinity of language and culture with the Thakalis. Though Buddhists, they also practice shamanism. There are two branches of Chimangs-1) Bhamphobe and 2) Dhyalkipal Phobe. Commerce is their main profession with farming, horticulture and animal husbandry as side businesses.

8. Chepangs

One of the most backward ethnic groups of Nepal, the Chepangs inhabit in the remote and sparse contours, outback and rolling precipices of the districts of Makwanpur, Chitwan, Gorkha and Dhading. They have their own distinct language, which belongs to one of the Tibeto-Burman strains. Like the Kusundas, the Chepangs also shun farming and prefer to forage for tubers for their food. However, they are born hunters. Their clan priests are called Pandes. It is felt that their religion and culture are influenced by the Tamangs.

9. Chhantiyals

Scattered in the districts of Baglung and Myagdi, the Chhantiyals have their own language quite akin to the Thakali. Their population is about 20,000. As inhabitants of the Magrant region, the

Chhantyal culture and habits resemble those of the Magars. However, the Bhalanja section of Chhantyal considers the Kusundas as their ancestors. The Chhantyal are animists and profess shamanism. In religious practices, they are closer to the Magars. Previously believed to be employed in the Nepalese mines, Chhantyal are mostly concentrated in farming at present.

10. Chhairottans

Chhairottans are considered the inhabitants of the Chhairo village, one of the Panch Gaun villages of the Mustang district. They resemble Marphalis and Thakalis in facial features, language and dress codes. Chhairottans are Buddhists though they also practice shamanism. Farming and animal husbandry are their major professions. The original Chhairottans have migrated from their stronghold of Chhairo village, which is now occupied by a few Thakali households and some ten Tibetan refugee families.

11. Jirels

Jirels are mostly concentrated in the villages of Jiri and Jugu of the Dolkha district. Many Jirels also live in the sindupalchok district. They speak a particular Tibeto-Burman dialect, which is akin to Sharpa. Other Sherpa influences are also evident in the Jirels' lifestyle. Jirels call themselves Jiripas. They both profess Buddhism and shamanism. They address the Buddhist Lama as Pomba and the shaman as Phomba. Being farmers, they cultivate millet and live happily on the produce. Jirels either bury or cremate their dead on the recommendations of the Buddhist Lama.

12. Jhangads

Though they live in the wide expanse of Nausaya Bigha areas of the district of Dhanusha, Jhangads are also found spread from Sarlahi and Sunsari to Morang districts. The Dravidian Jhangads are a backward and minority group. They speak Kurukh Mundari. They are largely farmers and laborers. There are some differences between the Jhangads of Madhya Pradesh of India and those in Nepal. Jhangads of Nepal worship nature. They conclude their religious ceremonies by playing diga and feasting on pork and alcohol. Negroid or bury their dead. Pigs are their only domestic animals.

13. Thintans

Thintans are the inhabitants of Thini village situated between Tukucho and Kagbeni of the district of Mustang. Thintans are from among the larger Panch Gaunle or five-village confederation. Though they resemble Thakalis in many ways, thintans have closer linguistic and cultural affinities with Chimtans and Shyangtans. Thintans have six branches- Omthin, Tapothin, Chhothin, Chakithin, Dhangyangthin, and Langlangthin. The latter seem to have vanished now. Though some thintans have adopted Buddhism, the old still adhere to Bon-po. Thintans are inherently traders, and practice farming and horticulture on the side .

14. Dolpos

The inhabitants of Dolpa are Dolpos (though they do not call themselves as such). Dolpa is located at the head of the Bheri river to the north of the Dhaulagiri Range and to the south of the Tibetan Plateau. Dolpos live at the altitude of 13 - 14,000 feet, and they have 40 settlements in all. Their physical features and habits largely resemble those of the Lhopas, though the women have their own unique dress styles. They are farmers, but their chief occupation is also animal husbandry. They practice both Bon-po and Buddhism. They practice sky burial. Their dead are cut into pieces which are fed to the vultures. Dolpos practice polyandry, and their language and dress choices are similar to the Lhopas and Tibetans.

15. Tangbes

Tangbes, also called Tangbedanis, come from the village of Tangbe, which is a part of the Bahara Gaunle (12 villages) confederation in Mustang district. Like the Bahra Gaunle people, their ways of life are akin to the Lhopas. They are Buddhists. Tangbes were traditionally salt traders. Since the decline in this trade many years ago, most Tangbes are engaged in farming and other vocations. Some Tangbe families are also found in Pokhara.

16. Tajpurias

Tajpurias are a minority group mainly found in the districts of Jhapa and Morang. Though their language and culture are almost akin to the Rajbanshis, Tajpuria women do not pierce their nose and use ornaments as Rajbanshi women do. No. Marrigae takes between these two communities. Tajpurias have their own religion. Alcohol is a must in all religions rituals. They are engaged in artistic craftsmanship different from the Rajbanshis. Farming is the major occupation of Tajpurias. Though Rabanshis and Tajpurias dress similarly, the latter are expert at hand stitching. they bury their dead.

17. Tamangs

Tamangs are mainly found in the districts of Rasuwa, Sundhupalchok, Kavrepalanchok, Makwanpur, Nuwakot, Dhading, Ramechhap, Dolkha and Sindhuli. The census of 1991 places their population at 4.9% of the national total. The Tamang language, culture and traditions are rich. They were already described as a powerful nation in historic inscriptions going as far back as the 3rd century, attesting to their ancient civilization. They are Buddhists, and their script originates from Tibetan. Their language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman family. The archives of Tamang religious scriptures are rich, varied and vast. Their intellectual hierarchy had categorizations of royal priests, raconteur of history and other scholastic divisions of labor. They celebrate with equal fervor such diverse religious occasions as Lhosar, Maghe Sankranti, Baisakh Purnima and Shraavan Purnima. They are fond of buckwheat delicacies. Their dance culture is equally rich and varied. There are many Tamang sub clans.

18. Topkegolas

They live in Topkegola situated at the top of the Mewa River to the west of Walung. But they are different from the Walungs. Locally, Topkegolas are called Dhhokpyas. Their major occupation is trade. They ply their trade between Dhankuta, Dharan and Chinapur of Sankhuwasabha in Nepal

and Sar in Tibet. Their language, religion, culture and dress styles are in essence similar to Tibet region of China as are those of the Shingsaba in the near west, Walungs in the east and the neighboring Thudams.

19. Thakalis

The stronghold of the Thakalis is Thak Khola in Mustang District. They have their own language, which belongs to the Tibeto-Burman family, and is similar to Gurung (Tamu) and Tamang languages. Thakalis have four major clans-Chhyoki (Gauchan), Salki (Tulachan), Dhimchen (Sherchan), and Bhurki (Bhattachan), Lha Phewa is a major festival of the Thakalis, which is renowned as a 12-year cyclic fair. Thakalis adhere both to Bon and Buddhism. Their Toranlha festival coincides with the Fagu Purnima. The Thakalis' estimated number is only some 8,000. They are renowned as a mercantile community.

20. Thamis

Thamis are mainly found in Susma, Chhamawati, Khepachagu, Alamyu, Bigu, Kalinchok, Lopilang and Lakuri Danda villages of Dolkha District. Numbering about 30,000 in all, the Buddhist Thamis are considered the original people of these places. The Thami language is similar to the language of the Sunuwars, which again conforms to the Rai language originating in the Tibeto-Burman family. Tamang influences are also quite prominent on the Thamis. Labor and farming are the Thamis' main occupations. In religious matters, Thamis are much closer to the Tamangs.

21. Tharus

Tharus pervade all along the east-west lowland Terai belt as well as in the inner Terai valleys of Chitwan, Dang, Surkhet and Udaipur. They are considered the first native people of that part of Nepal. According to the regions of their inhabitation, each respective Tharu clan has its own ethnic identity, dialect and culture. Tharus have their own languages but the respective Tharu languages are thus influenced by Awadhi, Bhojpuri and Maithili languages, depending on the regions of their inhabitation. Because of their facial and physical features, they are considered Mongoloid. They mainly practice Buddhism. The census of 1991 places the Tharus at 5.4% of the national total population of Nepal. Their main occupation is farming, and Tharus enjoy many similarities with the agro-based Jyapus of the Kathmandu Valley.

22. Thudams

Thudam, formerly in the district of Talpejung, is now incorporated in the district of Sankhuwasabha. The inhabitants of Thudam are locally known as Thudambas. They are quite akin to the Topkegolas. In fact, Thudams make their living by tenant-farming the lands of Shingsabas and Walungs and also by looking after their livestock. Additionally, they are also traditionally known as exporters of agro-produces, timber and incense to Tibet, Autonomous region of China. The religion, language, culture and dress patterns of the Thudams conform more to the Walungs, rather than the Shingsabas.

23. Danuwars

Quite akin to the Tharus in numerous ways, the ancestral strongholds of the Danuwars are Banke and Bardia districts. They belong to four clans - loincloth wearer, janai thread wearer, Rai and Adhikari. The loincloth-wearing Danuwars live between the Chure and Mahabharat Ranges while the thread wearing ones live in the Terai plains. Rai and Adhikari Danuwars prefer the riverbanks. In religious matters, Danuwars are much closer to the Tharu and Dhimal ethnic groups. Farming is their major occupations.

24. Darais

Darais are mainly found in Damauli of Tanahu District and on the banks of Madi River. Flat-nosed, short in stature and stout in build, Darais are prominently boatmen and fishermen. The Darai language is imbued with Bhojpuri, Maithili, Magar and Gurung languages. Darai women have high place in their society. Darais marry after having children. They profess Buddhism, and alcohol accentuates their religious ceremonies.

25. Duras

Duras live on hills of Dura Danda, Turlungkot and Kunchha Am Danda of Lamjung District. Their language is also called Dura. they practice both Buddhism and Hinduism. Round-faced, flat-nosed and short in stature, Duras have their own unique traditions and though their religious and cultural formalities are quite akin to Gurungs. Their sons are fitted with bows and arrows on the very day of their naming ceremonies, a fact that reflects on their martial heritage. They have no definite history of their origin. Farming is the chief occupation of Duras.

26. Dhanuks

Dhanuks live in the districts of Saptari and Dhanusha, and are spread along southern belt of the Chure Range. There are three clans of Dhanuks-Mandal Dhanuks, Sur Dhanuks, and Rajbanshi Dhanuks. Sur and Mandal Dhanuks, being Indo-Aryan Hindu untouchables, do not belong to the ethnic peoples of Nepal. Because of their facial and physical features, language and culture, the Rajbanshi Dhanuks are closer to the Tharus. Hence they are considered an ethnic group. However, scholars are presently challenging this claim, of Rajbanshi Dhanuks also of being an indigenous group. Farming and domestic labor are their chief occupations.

27. Dhimals

Dhimals live on the peripheries of the districts of Morang and Jhapa. Because of their facial features, language and religious practices, they are called the Limbus of the Nepalese plains. However, anthropologists place them next to the Meches. But, even if they are plainspeople, Dhimals have the characteristic habit of exhibiting the quick temper and unwarranted aggressiveness of the Limbus of the eastern hills. Dhimals have their own unique language, dress preferences and culture. They are fond of music, and in this there is a trace of the Rajbanshi ethnos. They bury their dead. Farming is their specialization.

28. Newars

The name of the county Nepal itself derives from the Newars. Newars are the indigenous peoples of the Kathmandu Valley. They are also found in the neighboring hill settlements as well as in the towns and cities of the Terai plains. Originally Buddhists, Newars have increasingly become syncretic, and now a days some Newars practice both Buddhism as well as Hinduism. They are prominent in business, agriculture and craftsmanship. Their population exceeds 1.3 million. Newars have their own language, called Nepal Bhasa, which belongs to the Tibeto-Burman family. The Newar language has incorporated the rich corpus of Newa literature from historical times. Newars are considered a highly developed nation state of many communities. They have a hierarchical clan system patterned after their respective occupations. The written history of the Newars is 2,500 years old during which they developed their impeccable culture and arts into a great civilization. Newars maintained their unique kingdom even during the various reigns of the Gopala, Kirat, Licchavi and Malla dynasties. The Shahs finally amalgamated the Newar nation state in their unification drives.

29. Paharis

The minority group of Paharis is mainly found in the villages of Khopasi, Saldhara and Palanchok of Kavrepalanchok District. However, they consider Dailekh District as their ancestral place. They are also scattered in Lalitpur of Kathmandu Valley and elsewhere. Paharis have their own Pahari language, which is quite akin to the Tamang and Newar languages. Paharis consider ginger and soybeans as delicious and supreme. They practice Buddhism. Traditionally weavers of bamboo trays and baskets. Paharis are increasingly drawn to farming and labor these days.

30. Fris

The strongholds of Fris are the districts of Sindhupalchok, Kavrepalanchok, Makwanpur and Lalitpur. In Lalitpur, they are found in the settlements and villages of Bhadikhel, Sikarpa, Fhade, Lele, Tomphel and Godawari. In Makwanpur, they live in Betani and Kulekhani. Their religious practices, language and culture are closer to the Newars and Paharis. According to their legends, the Fris were once chefs at the kitchen of the king of Bhaktapur. found filthy, they were exiled for 12 years during which they intermarried with Tamangs, and were thence called Fris. There is a strong foundation that because of similar legends and other factors, Fris are indeed Paharis.

31 Bankariyas

The Bankariya ethnic group is found in the villages of Handi Khola, Chourabesi, Sunkhola and the Chure Range of Makwanpur District. Like Chepanges, Bankariyas are also nomadic, and forage for tubers for their food. Believed to be only about 400 even in the best of times, there are now only about five families huddled in sheds in the deep of jungles. They are close to Chepangs in religious practices and languages. They gather wild asparagus and barter it for cereals in nearby villages. They like to fry and eat wild red ants.

32. Baramos

Baramos are from Gorkha while they are also found in Dhading, Makwanpur and Lalitpur and Tanahu districts. They claim to be close to the Sunuwars of east Nepal, and seem to have close affinity with the Jirels also. The Baramo language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman family. In religious practices, they are close to the Magars. Many Baramos trace their language and culture to Burma (Myanmar) and the Burmese. They are mostly engaged in farming.

33. Bahra Gaunle

The inhabitants of the Bahra Gauns (12 villages) above the Thak Khola (river) and to the south of Lho Manthang in Mustang District are called the Bahara Gaunles. They resemble Lhopas in facial features, language and clothes. They also build their houses in the styles of the Lhopas of Lho Manthang. They practice both bon and Buddhism. There are 18 settlements in Bahra Gaun. Though they also work as indentured laborers, their main professions are farming and trade. The indigenous people found in and around the sacred Buddhist temple of Muktinath (the temple is popularly known as Chhume Gyatsa in the Tibetan speaking world) are also included among the Bahara Gaunles.

34. Botes

Botes inhabit the banks of the Madi, Seti and Kali Gandaki Rivers of the districts of Tanahu and Kaski. The Bote religious practices, language and cultures are quite close to those of Danuwars, Darais and Majhis. Their economic activities are similar to those of the Majhi community. Botes are of two kinds-Pani (water) Botes and Pakhe (land) Botes. While the former are engaged in boating and fishing, the land-based Botes are farmers and laborers. They have their own language. They are primarily animists and use alcohol in their religious rituals; hence their religion seems different from Hinduism.

35. Byasis

The villagers of Byas village to the north of Darchula and the foothills of the Byas Himal are called Byasis. Also called Souka, these Mongoloid animists call themselves Range. They have their own unique language and ways of life. Their 12th century scripts are found in the caves. Their dress is called chyungwala. The ancestral god of the Soukas of Rolpa is Namjung, who is a principal deity of Bon. Their major festival is called Dhhyoula. Byasis conduct the trade between Taklakot in Tibet and Darchula. They do not celebrate Hindu festivals. The Front of their houses are festooned with Buddhist prayer flags called dharchyo. According to linguists, the Souka language is somewhat close to the Magar language.

36. Bhujels/Ghartis

The Bhuji area in Baglung is considered as the ancestral place of the Bhujels. Nowadays they are scattered all over the Kingdom of Nepal. They are close to the Magars. The religion and culture of these backward people are close to extinction, and Hindu influences have been encroaching on their ways of life. In religious matters they have affinities with the Magars while in language they are closer to the Chepangs. They are known as either Bhujel or Gharti in one place or the other. They are engaged in farming and in domestic chores.

37. Bhutias

In Nepal, Bhutias are spread from Mahakali in the far west to the Kanchanjunga Range in the extreme east. They are found in Bajura and Darchula of the far western development region, and also in Humla, Dolpa, Surkhet and Mugu in the mid-Western region as well as in Mustang, Manag, Kaski and Tanahu of western region, and finally in the Himalayan heights of the middle regions and the east. They are also found in towns and large cities in the mid-ranges. In general, Bhutias are those people who do not belong to any of the particular or distinct stocks of indigenous people of the Nepal Himalaya. They resemble Tibetans in most of their ways of living. However, their statistics are not yet properly maintained. Trade and animal husbandry are the main occupations of the Bhutias.

38. Magars

Large numbers of Magars live in Palpa, Tanahu, Myagdi, Pyuthan and Rolpa. They are also found in Arghakhanchi, Syangja, Parbat, Baglung, Dolpa, Surkhet, Sindhuli and Udaypur. Research scholars opine that the Sen kings and Thakuris of the Magrant districts are also Magars. These facts make the Magars as one of the most pervasive ethnic groups of Nepal. Their language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman family, and they have their own unique dress codes and culture, which are doomed to extinction. They are Buddhist by religion. The Magar priest is called Bhusal. According to the census of 1991, the present Magar population stands at 7.2% of the national total.

39. Manangays

Manangays are those people residing in the upper regions of the Marsyangdi River in the Manang District. They are locally called Nesyangbas. Though resembling the Tibetans in language, culture as well as in physical features, they prefer to call themselves Gurungs. The occupations of the Nesyangbas of the Manang Valley are international trade in which they have earned much acclaim, cultivation of wheat, paddy, potato, and animal husbandry of sheep and goats. They practice Bon, Buddhism and shamanism. Lhosar is their major religious festival, and archery is their main cultural event of the year.

40. Majhis

Majhis are mostly found in the districts of Kavrepalanchok, Sindhupalchok, Ramechhap, Sindhuli, Dhankuta nad Okhaldhunga. They are also found living along large riverbanks. Like the Darai language, the Majhi language is a mixture of Tibeto-Burman strains as well as Bhojpuri and Maithili. They are engaged as boatmen. they also prospect for gold in the river sand. The river is their benevolent deity. The Majhis dance for three days in the memory of their recent dead. Many knowledgeable Majhi claim of Kipat ownership of riverbanks and the adjacent ghat-s.

41. Marphalis

Marphalis are the inhabitants of Marpha situated between Tukuche and Kagbeni in the district of Mustang. They are one of the Panch Gaunle confederations, and resemble the Thakalis in every conceivable way. In fact, they consider themselves Thakalis. Their clan names are Hirachan, Lalchan, Juharchan and Pannachan. Professing Buddhism, Marphalis are engaged in commerce, agriculture and horticulture.

42. Mugalis

The indigenous Mugalis are from the Mugu Karan area of the Mugu District of Karnali Zone. There are 12 Karan consisting of the 13 villages of Mugu, Dolphu, Maha, Chyute, Krimi, Mangri, Wongri, Katick and Daura and another village of Mugu where Mugalis live. They are Buddhist. They are similar in language, dress and culture to the Tibetans in the north. Lhosar is their principal festival. The Mugalis of 12 Karan are farmers whereas those Mugu are traders.

43. Meches

Being residents of the Mechi River banks and the neighborhoods in the district of Jhapa, they are aptly called the Meches. They are closer to the Botes in civilization. According to historians, Meches were nomadic until a few decades ago. They became settlers when the land range and forest frontiers of their free roaming became demarcated and restricted. Ai Bali Khungri and Batho Barau are their principal deities. They also worship the deities of the forest. Their language derives from the Tibeto-Burman family. Meches are also called Bodos. They are at present engaged in farming.

44. Rais

Rais belong to Kirant confederation. Since ancient times, Rais are living in the districts of Solukhumbu, Okhaldhunga, Khotang, Bhojpur and Udayapur. Rais speak many dialects of the Tibeto-Burman family. They have their own unique religion. Their principal scripture is Mundhum. Sitakhau Budo, Walmo Budi, Jalpa Devi and others are their local deities. Rich in culture, the Sakela (Chandi) Dance and the sharing of newly harvested foods in Nwagi are their principal festivals. Rais bury their dead. Pork is used for auspicious and holy occasions. They consider Sumnima and Paroohang as their primordial parents. There are many Rai clans. Their houses are scattered. Short in stature, round in face and stout in build, Rais are expert in farming and textile weaving. Following the unification of the Kingdom of Nepal Rais were given rights of kipat autonomy and ownership of land in the Majh (middle) Kirant. The Rai language, though it has no script, is rich in texture.

45. Rautes

The name Raute comes from the shed they fabricate. Such makeshift is called Rauti. Rautes are the most confirmed nomadic tribe of Nepal who forage for tubers and fruits and hunt animals for their living. They are indigenous of the dense forests in the districts of Dailekh, Jajarkot, Surkhet, Salyan, Achham, Jumla, Darchula and Baitadi. The national census figure show their number to be 2878, but most field researchers have estimated their number only about 900. They seldom live in one place for more than two months at the most. Therefore, they have not taken up farming yet.

The speak Khamchi language of the Tibeto-Burman family, and worship nature. They intermarry within their close clans.

46. Rajbanshis

Rajbanshis live in the Nepal-India borderlands of the districts of Jhapa and Morang of east Nepal. Anthropologists opine that they are the kiths and kin of the peripheral Koch people of the adjacent states of West Bengal and Asom (Assam) in India. Though having Mongoloid features-they consider themselves as a branch of the Kirants-their language is akin to Bengali and Assamese. They wear clothes conforming to their climate and weather. They worship Thaku Brahmani and also practice shamanism. Consumption of alcohol is a must for worshipping the gods. They play with mud and water during their major festivals. The groom's side makes monetary payment to the bride's family during their marriage. This custom also prevails among some other ethnic groups of Nepal. Their principal occupation is agriculture. Rajbanshis were the indigenous people of Jhapa and Morang before the hill migrants of Nepal overwhelmed them. Most of the Rajbanshis bury their dead but now-a-days some of them have adopted cremation formalities.

47. Rajis

The districts of Dang and Surkhet are the native strongholds of the Rajis. Their numbers have dwindled. They speak a unique dialect of the Tibeto-Burman variant. They live in joint families. Farming is their newly embraced occupation, but have not given up their tradition of foraging for tuber and other forest products and fishing. They bury their dead. Marriages take place within their own clans. They practice shamanism, and worship such amorphous deities as Sunpal, Deopal and Rajuwali. Rajis use and consume alcohol and pork during their ceremonies and festivals.

48. Larkes (Nubribas)

Larkes live in Larke, which is in the north of Gorkha District and to the west of Siyar. Larkes are locally known as Nupribas. Their religion and culture are influenced by Tibet Autonomous Region of China in the north, and there is also much cultural commonality with the Sherpas of Solukhumbu. Traditionally traders with Tibet, they also occasionally do farming. Their language is Bhote. Some Larkes use Gurung as their clan surnames.

49. Limbus

The word limbu means an archer, or bearer of bow and arrows. The Limbu people belong to the Kirant confederation. Their ancestral and original stronghold spans from Arun River in Nepal to the Kingdom of Sikkim in the east. In Nepal, Limbus live and work in the districts of Sankhuwasabha, Tehrathum, Dhankuta, Taplejung, Panchthar and Ilam. Their scripture is called Mundhum. Fedangba, Shamba and Yewa-Yema are their priests. They celebrate the dance festivals of Kelangma popularly known Chyabrun (two-sided drum) and Yarakma (Paddy dance) as major events. Limbu have their own script called Sirijunga. There are many books written in the Limbu language. Their faith is onshrined in the evergreen Cynodondactylon (Dubo) grass the rocks. They bury their dead. The population of the Limbus, according to the census of 1991, is 2.4% of the nationla total.

50. Lepchas

The ancient Lepchas are believed to have originated from the foothills of Mount Kanchanjunga, which they revere as their deity. Lepchas presently live in the Ilam District of Nepal, and in Sikkim, Darjeeling and Kalimpong of India. They consider themselves of royal stock. Their language is a derivation from the Tibeto-Burman family. They have their own script, and their holy scripture is called Astachyo. Animist in origin, many Lepchas now adhere to Buddhism and Christianity. In Lepcha society, alcohol is considered "clean". There is no animosity and caste system among the Lepchas. The dead are taken out through the broken wall of the house and are buried. The Lepchas social council is called Rong Senungthi. Their dance is called Loknen. Commerce and agriculture are their major occupations.

51. Lhopas

Lhopas are found in Lho Manthang of the upper Kali Gandaki region of Mustang District. They produce wheat, paddy and potato, and raise sheep, yaks and horses. They carry out cross-border trade with Tibet Autonomous Region of China. Their language, dress codes and religion are all derived from Tibet with which they maintain social interactions. They are divided into three clans- Kutuk, Shelpa and Rigin. It is mandatory for the second son to be a monk. Polyandry is prevalent among Lhopas. The Mustang Raja Jigme Parbal belongs to the Lhopa people. A minor clan called Naka Dorje also has assimilated into the Lhopa ethnic community.

52. Lhomis (Shingsabas)

The Shingsa region is where the Arun River enters Nepal from Tibet, and is situated to the north of the district of Sankhuwasabha. The inhabitants of Shingsa are called Shingsabas or Karbhotes. They enjoy cultural and social affinity and geographical proximity with the Sherpas and other northerners. They adhere to Bon and Buddhism. The village headman is called Pombo. They migrate to the lower hills during winter. Most are engaged in farming and some are in trade. The Shingsaba society had already been formed in Darjeeling in India as far back as circa 1914. If a Shingsaba husband marries a second wife, he must leave the house.

53. Walungs

The Walung stronghold is the Olangchungola area at the top of the Tamor River in the district of Taplejung. Olangchungola is locally known as Walung, which is comprised of the five major settlements of Olangchungola, Yangma, Ghunsa, Lungthung, Lelep and other six or seven minor habitations. Trade is the major occupation of Walungs. Their religion, language, dress and social patterns are Tibetan in derivation. Walung has a great monastery. The Futuk festival relives the scenes of the battle between the Gyabo of Muksum and the Gyabo of Thudam. Walungs celebrate with great fervor the social and religious festivals of Lhosar, Neso, Futuk, Sakadawa, Dhukpachhesi and Ngyungnay.

54. Sherpas

According to linguists, the word sherpa means easterner, and this word comes from the Tibetan language. The ancestral place of these famous mountaineers is northern side of the Solukhumbu district. The traditional habitat of the Sherpas also lies in the valley between the Dudh Koshi and Sun Koshi rivers. The Sherpa language and script are derived from Tibetan. Sherpas are Buddhist. Lhosar is their major festival. They cremate their dead. They greet their guests with khada scarfs, Chhewa is performed for the dead. Tourism, trade and farming are the major occupation of the Sherpas.

55. Satars

Satars are one of the most backward ethnic groups of Nepal. They live in the districts of Jhapa, Morang and Sunsari. The ancestral stronghold of the dark-skinned, curly-haired and stoutly built Australoid Satars or Santhals is the Nepalese Plain and the Santhal Pargana of West Bengal in India. Santhals also call themselves Hor. They have their own unique religion and culture. They are animist. Their ancestral deity is Thakurjiu and their paternal guardian deity is Maranburu. Bow and arrows are their traditional weapons. Their favorite meat is pork. Most Satars are engaged in farming and labor.

56. Siyars (Chumbas)

Siyars live in the northeastern parts of Gorkha District. They are called Siyars because they live on the banks of the Siyar River. They are locally known as Chumbas. Their main occupations are farming and trade with Tibet. Some of their habits resemble those of the Gurungs in the south. They are Buddhist, and they maintain equal footing with the Tibet-influenced Nubriba community.

57. Sunuwars

Sunuwars live in the land between the Likhu and Khimti rivers and in the districts of Okhaldhunga, Ramechhap and Dolkha. They have their own unique language and culture. They had their kipat rights on their ancestral lands. Because of their adherence to the Kirant religion, they are considered closer to the Rais. However, sociologists opine that they are more akin to the language and culture of the Magars with whom they also share similar physical resemblance. Sunuwars, Surels and Jirels are socially close-knit communities. Sunuwars are mostly engaged in farming.

58. Surels

The minority community of the Surels, numbering less than 200 at present, lives in the village of Bahuri situated on the banks of the Suri River in Dolkha District. Surels consider themselves Kirants, and their scriptures are also the Mundhum. Their language is a variant of the Tibeto-Bueman family. Their shaman is called Moyambo. Surels are mainly engaged in farming and labor.

59. Syangtans

The Buddhist Syangtans belong to the Panch Gaunle confederation. They live in the village of Syang situated in the middle of Tukuiche and Jomsom of Mustang District. They, like Thintans, are also similar to Thakalis. They are divided into the sub-clans of Sakar. Syangten, Pasing, San, Chi, Jhisin, Kya and Shren Phobe. Girls are eloped for marriage in this community. This arrangement is called Raholiboba. Mostly traders, Syangtans are also engaged in farming and horticulture.

60. Hayus

Hayus are another minuscule community of Nepal. They live along the neighborhoods of the Maryang River, and they are also found in the districts of Sindhuli and Ramechhap. However, the village of Ratanchura in Sindhuli is considered their ancestral home. Short in stature, flat-nosed and squinty-eyed, they have their own unique language and culture. In religious matters, Hayus are closer to Rais, but they do not perform Chandi Puja as Rais do. Hayus were nomadic until a few years ago; now they are mostly engaged in farming and labor.

61. Hyolmos

Hyolmos are from Helambu area which is situated in the North west of the Sindhupalchok District, and North East of Nuwakot district and they have much in common with Tamangs and Sherpas in linguistic, cultural and other ways of life. Hyolmos also have close cultural and linguistic affinities with the inhabitants of the Kerung and Rongsyar areas of Tibet Autonomous Region of China. Trade, tourism and farming are the major occupations of Hyolmos.

Source: Rastriya Janajati Bikas Samiti