

Chandra—location

Namaste, mero naam Chandra ho. I live in Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal. For Nepal, Kathmandu is a very large city with a population of over 3 million people. The whole country has 28.9 million people with a land area of 56,827 square miles or a little larger than the state of Arkansas in the United States. Since Nepal is such a small landlocked country, you may not know where it is. See if this helps you find it on a map: it is located between 26-30 degrees north and 80-88 degrees east, or between India, to the south, east and west; China, to the north with the Himalaya mountains as the dividing line. My country consists of mainly small villages, but there are some cities of importance. As I mentioned, Kathmandu is the capital, another larger city is Pokhara to the west. My cousins live there by Lake Phewa. Another important city where many people go for religious reasons is Lumbini. That is the town where Lord Buddha was born.

As I mentioned, one of the most important landforms in Nepal is the Himalaya Mountain Range. You've probably heard of them because the highest mountain peak in the world is Mt. Everest (Sagarmatha) at 29,028 feet above sea level. On a clear day you can see this peak from my home. Unfortunately it is now summer and since Nepal has a sub-tropical monsoon type of climate, it is usually cloudy or hazy, even on a hot, sunny day. We can also plan on having some rain almost every day. Some days it will last only an hour or two at night, other days it may rain 15 hours in a row. It makes seeing the mountain peaks hard to do, but when it is clear and sunny, it is really a magnificent sight.

Ram—statistics

Namaste, I am a subsistence farmer named Ram. I live in the hill region of Nepal, which is where 44.3 percent of the population lives. (7.3% live in mountain regions where farming is very difficult and 48.4% live in the Terai or plains region) Overall, in my country only 16% of the people live in cities, while the majority, 84%, live in rural areas or small villages like mine. On my farm I grow corn, rice and soybeans, have a couple of chickens for eggs and meat, goats for milk and meat and a water buffalo to help me with the plowing. I have bees for honey. Other farmers in my village also grow wheat, millet and barley as food crops. Everything I have on my farm is used to feed my family with little extra to sell in the marketplace. I live in a traditional Nepali house made of red clay and a thatched roof.

Even though life is hard in Nepal, we are fortunate to have important natural resources that our main trade partner, India, wants. The most important resource is our water. This is not only important for our lives and crops but hydroelectric power. Our biggest river systems are the Koshi, Gandaki (which eventually joins up with the Ganges River in India) and Karnali. We also have abundant forests and minerals such as iron, lead, copper, mica, zinc and magnesite. Unfortunately, we have not been very good stewards of these natural resources. Due to dumping of wastes in the rivers, our water is polluted and needs to be treated before drinking by boiling or adding chemicals. We have cut down trees inviting erosion of the land. Research is being done and farmers are learning from places like **ICIMOD** or the research center in Lumle to help us produce

more on the land that we have, and to prevent erosion that is filling up our lakes and rivers with silt.

Krishna—Government

Namaste, my name is Krishna and I am one of the 601 people on the National Constitutional Assembly. Our job is to write a new constitution for Nepal by June of 2010 and at the same time we serve as the Parliament along with the Prime Minister, President and Vice President. You see, Nepal was a Monarchy until 2008; now we are the newest Republic in the world, which is currently causing a lot of unrest in our country as we struggle to form the new government. We have many challenges ahead of us. One of the problems is that we are trying to include and represent everyone in our new constitution, which is very difficult. For example, the official language is Nepali, but only 48.6% of the people speak this, there are also over 100 indigenous languages. In addition we are trying to bring together 103 ethnic / caste groups (Brahman, Chhetry, Newar, Gurung, Sherpa, etc...) plus the geographic regions of our country (mountains, hills, terai / plains). Each group has their own specific needs that have to be considered. Our goal is to reach consensus on each part of the new document, but if that is not possible, we have a provision for a 2/3 majority for every section to pass.

As a representative of the government, there are other things that I would like you to know. Even though our country is considered to be a “developing nation” with many of our farmers growing only enough food for their own family, we also have several important cash crops. These include sugarcane, jute, tea, potatoes, cardamon, ginger and we are working to include coffee and other products that can be sold to foreign lands. We do have some industries, although many of these are on a small scale compared to other nations of the world. Our textile and garment industries are first class. Have you ever heard of a Pashmina? Well we have factories that produce high quality scarves and shawls made of the finest goat’s wool. You can find these in the United States at some of the little boutiques in resort - towns like Traverse City, Michigan I am told. We also produce jute, cement, carpet, sugar, flour and our very important industry, ecotourism. Trekking to mountain base camps is a favorite past time for tourists who want a physical challenge plus a magnificent view of our glorious mountains. Something they will never forget.

Being a small country and landlocked, we do need to import over twice the amount in Nepali Rupees, than we export. To me, the saddest item that we export is our own people. Many of our healthy young workers leave Nepal to work as “cheap labor” in other countries. They earn enough money to live and send the rest to their families in Nepal. This money is called a remittance. Another form of “brawn drain” is in the form of military service. Some of Nepal’s national heroes have served in the United Kingdom’s Gurkha Army. This is a very competitive branch of military service with 28,000 Nepali applicants per year for 250 spots. They take the smartest and strongest as determined by strenuous physical and paper / pencil testing. We also lose our people to foreign universities. Our brightest students go overseas to further their education, and then remain in those countries once they have seen a life that is easier. I hope that as we

stabilize our new government, we will also move to keep our people here where they are needed.

Neha—Culture

Namaste / Hello. My name is Neha and I just finished taking the national examination at the end of my 10th grade school year. The results will come out in July and I'm hoping for at least a first division rating which means that I passed with 60-80% over all. Of course my parents would like to see a "distinguished" scholar designation, which means I was above 80% on my tests and I will hopefully have more higher education opportunities. I attend Little Angels School in Kathmandu, which is miles away from my home village. My parents sacrifice for me to go to this private secondary school which they not only have to pay the tuition for but also housing costs since it is too far for me to go home each night. They do this because right now, the quality of public schools is not as good, and my parents feel that the political indoctrination I would get there was a problem for them. They also like the fact that all of my classes, except for Nepali, are taught in English. I started at Little Angels in the first grade and progressed through the primary grades (1-5), lower secondary grades (6-8) and secondary grades (9-10). If I do well on my examination, I can continue in this private school's +2 program for grades 11-12 and potentially go on to the university which they are adding on. In Nepal there is a government-adopted curriculum, which we cover, but we do not use the government-adopted textbooks, Little Angles publishes their own.

You might wonder what my life is like as a young person in Nepal. Well, school takes up a good portion of my time. We have clubs here at school, but my favorite activity is dancing. Nepal has a rich tradition of regional dances which I began learning at a very young age. I love performing for guests that come to my school. We know dances from every part of the country and each one has a special, ornate costume. My school owns the costumes that we use for these performances. Boys sometimes dance as well and the guests really enjoy when they perform. I like watching cricket and football or soccer I think you call it in the United States.

Like 81% of my classmates, I am a Hindu. The other major religion in Nepal is Buddhism. If you tour my adopted city you will find many squares with Hindu temples and shrines as well as Buddhist Stupas and monasteries. My favorite foods? Of course I eat rice at almost every meal along with potatoes, lentils, spinach and curd or yogurt. I love roti, which is a form of flat bread, and nothing beats freshly baked naan, another type of bread. On occasion, our meal will include chicken and on very special occasions we will have goat. In the future, my parents will arrange a good marriage for me. If I am lucky, I will meet the boy before the actual ceremony. I've heard that some women are marrying for love rather than tradition; some are even marrying outside of their caste group. Imagine that.

Nepal is a very beautiful country. I hope you will come to visit some day. If you do, don't miss Chitawan National Park, a World Heritage Site. There you would be able to ride an elephant and might even see an animal that is only found in Nepal, the one horned rhino. Of course you would see monkeys running around everywhere; you can even see that in Kathmandu at the Swayambhunath Stupa, commonly called the Monkey Temple. Tigers would also be something to see there, they roam around in the wild, even

near my home village. Legend has it that the Abominable Snowman or Yeti wanders the Himalaya Mountains. I've never seen him but have heard many stories. No matter where you go or what you see, you will find the people of Nepal to be friendly and your friends for life. You will be greeted with prayer shawls, flower necklaces, bouquets and a little red tikka powder on your forehead. It will be a trip you will never forget.