

Kumaoni



Population: 2,300,000 (23 lakhs)

Literacy: 58%

Scripture Status: Translation in progress

Bimla was busy running around, checking to see if everything was ready. The whole family was fasting and the priest was about to come. Every night they were hearing noises. Her father would wake up with the feeling that someone was trying to choke him.

During festivals, people are often possessed by spirits, usually attributed to a god or dead person

Hopefully, after the puja they would have no more trouble with the spirit that had been bothering their home for the last few weeks.

By evening, everyone had gathered around the little fire in the courtyard. The priest was beating his drum and singing. Aunt Kamla, possessed by a spirit, began chanting, "I am your uncle Dipu! Why did you take my field? I am very angry!" Bimla was frightened. So it was uncle Dipu's ghost that was bothering them all this time! Everyone bowed down to the doll representing uncle and asked for forgiveness. The pandit now started a different tune and slowly aunt Kamla came back to her usual self. This was the "Jaagar" ceremony, to appease the spirit that was troubling them. Now there would be no more troubles.

The eastern half of the state of Uttarakhand, bordering Nepal and China, has a beautiful landscape with green valleys, hills and snowy peaks – the home of the Kumaoni. They follow

a religion that is a mixture of animism and Hinduism. At most festivals and pujas, people are possessed by spirits, usually attributed to a god or goddess, or a dead person. They live a meagre lifestyle, supported through farming. Unemployment is rampant and many young men loiter around markets, with nothing else to do. Although Hindi is the language for wider communication, Kumaoni can be heard everywhere.

Bible translation is progressing, with the active participation of Kumaoni speakers. The Jesus film, a set of Bible stories and several portions of Scripture are now available. Although the Kumaoni are not against Christianity, only a small number have responded to the Gospel. Churches are found mostly in towns, but they use Hindi. Some missions, Christian NGOs and churches are involved in outreach. In spite of Kumaoni speakers coming to Christ every year, the church is not significantly growing. Much prayer is needed to start a movement among the Kumaoni.

Pray for:

1. The mother tongue translators to be diligent and systematic in their work, and to find joy and fulfilment in their task.
2. Published Scripture portions to reach the right hands.
3. The few Christians to be good witnesses, and God's Word to take root in people's hearts.

