

TRADITIONAL CLOTHING

Our clothing is diverse. Nobody wears the full traditional costume these days, except hats which are popular among the elders and seniors. Some women of older generations wear a thin veil on their head without covering the face.



Most of the younger community members do not wear traditional clothing. Also, you may see our elders wearing nylon or woolen hats, often with a muffler wrapped around their necks, even in summer, not because they are feeling cold but because it's a habit!



LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

Though we are Bhutanese, we speak our ethnic language, Nepali. Bhutan has its own official language known as Dzongkha. We have a large pre-literate population, especially middle-aged to seniors, who can neither write nor read in our own ethnic Nepali language. These are the groups that our community organization, BCAP, attempts to educate in ESL and Civic Education classes.



We also work with libraries to introduce them to available resources and programs.

EMPLOYMENT AND JOBS

Although the majority of our community members are in entry-level jobs such as food packaging, house-keeping, commercial laundry, manufacturing and at nursing facilities, many have made their way up to supervisors, registered nurses, IT, teachers and non-profit human services workers. Many of our community members also work as care-givers for the aged or disabled members of their family. We are working hard and saving money to buy homes.



ASPIRATIONS AND DREAMS

As with any Americans, the Bhutanese have the aspiration of American dream! They lost citizenship and became stateless, which is a primary reason why the Bhutanese refugees have the highest rate of naturalization after resettlement. The community has been trying their best to integrate well by becoming citizens and buying homes. As a people who have lost both their citizenship and their homes in Bhutan, the aspirations are natural and ever high.

OUR PLEA

The Bhutanese are proud Americans and want to participate in a democratic society. We want to be good neighbors, and we are also proud of our culture and heritage.

For more information about the Bhutanese community, the work we do and our mission, please visit our website www.bcap.us and follow us on our **Facebook/bhutanesebcap**.

THE BHUTANESE COMMUNITY

LEARN ABOUT YOUR NEWEST NEIGHBORS

WRITTEN BY THE
BHUTANESE COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION
OF PITTSBURGH
(BCAP)



WHO ARE THE BHUTANESE AMERICANS IN ALLEGHENY COUNTY?

The Bhutanese community consists of approximately 5,000 in Allegheny County, who arrived in the U.S since the early 2008 as refugees and are basically concentrated in the South Hills in the borough of Baldwin, Whitehall, Bethel Park, Brentwood and some in the city of Pittsburgh. Though majority of the Bhutanese population came directly to Pittsburgh under the federal government's resettlement program for refugees, a sizable portion of the population consist of secondary migrants from other states and/or cities within Pennsylvania, who decided to move here due to family connections and for reasons of job and geography (reminds them of Bhutan!)

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Bhutanese Americans came here as refugees from Bhutan, a tiny Himalayan country between India and China. Bhutan is a traditional Buddhist kingdom ruled by an autocratic monarchy. They were forced out of their country in the early 1990s for their linguistic, cultural and religious differences through an ethnic cleansing policy of Bhutan and survived tortuous 17 years in the refugee camps of Nepal. After losing hope of returning to Bhutan, which they always fought for, they were finally given an opportunity to settle and start their new life in the West. The United States welcomed more than 90,000 of the Bhutanese refugees from Nepal and the rest went to other Western countries in Europe, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.



RESETTLEMENT

The United States, including Canada, Australia, New Zealand and some European countries gave us an opportunity to start fresh with a path towards citizenship. We were told that USA means U (You) Start Again! The United States ended-up taking majority of the refugees from Bhutan and we estimate that number to be over 90,000. The vetting process is very rigorous overseas with multiple checks to pass through before an individual refugee becomes eligible for resettlement in the West. For those of us who arrived in the U.S as refugees, we are expected to reimburse the State Department for the travel loans after six months of the arrival in the U.S, which in the case of refugees the delinquency rate is almost zero! Unlike other countries that accept refugees, the United States provide limited support to refugees and are expected to be on their own within 3 months! Once the refugees arrive in this country and placed by the government in different states and towns, they decide to move again on their own, which in the case of Bhutanese refugees have made Pittsburgh as their favorite home to move into.

RELIGION AND CULTURE

The Bhutanese refugees are overwhelmingly Hindus with a small percentage of Buddhists and Christians. The Bhutanese rulers suppressed religious minorities and no Church exists in Bhutan. We estimate a few thousands of Christians in Bhutan who practice their faith in secret. As Hindus, we share the worship places (temples) with the bigger Hindu community from India in this County but Hindus in general do not worship in the temple regularly. They perform religious worship mostly in their homes, and some family religious events and gatherings are so big that our neighbors might feel uncomfortable. That is normal!

Some popular festivals are Dashara/Dasain and Diwali (Festival of Light). During religious events and festivals, the priests and elders bless their younger ones and place bright colored teeka (grains such as rice or sesame seeds or sandalwood) on their forehead with flowers.



Weddings are traditionally preferred to be done at home, rather than in the temples. All relatives and neighbors are invited. Some families, due to reasons of finances or personal choice, would like to perform a simple wedding in the temples.

We bow down to the feet of the elders and grand-parents for blessings whenever we meet. Brothers are expected to bow down to their sisters and touch their feet. It's a sin to touch your parents, grand-parents and sisters with your feet!

Usually, Bhutanese Hindu families do not use meat (includes eggs and fish) during deaths and mourning period and some abstain from eating meat for a whole year and put on a white costume. The whole community is obligated to attend the funeral which can be a challenge for the funeral home. Both Hindus and Buddhists cremate the dead.

FAMILY

The Bhutanese prefer to live in large joint families though nuclear and single families are getting more common these days. You can see around that most of our homes have seniors, and members from three generations living together. The married sons have an obligation to take care of their aged parents in their own homes. However, due to changing times and environment, this tradition may change.