

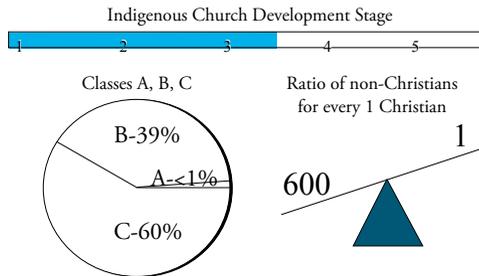
Muslim Bengali



Quick Facts

Population: 130,000,000
 Bangladesh: 115,000,000
 India: 15,000,000
 United Kingdom: 350,000
 UAE: 100,000

Religion: Islam (Sunni, Shiite)
Believers: 0.16%
Scriptures: NT, OT
Ministry Tools: JRGT
Church Status: 3
Mission Status: 4
MS Subgroups: 100+



Class A- Are members of a Culturally Relevant Church
 Class B- Have close access to a CRC, but have not yet joined
 Class C- Have no reasonable or close access to a CRC

these followers demonstrate that many have a genuine faith in Christ.

Opportunities for outreach to Muslim Bengalis abound, and NGOs are welcome almost everywhere. Muslim Bengalis are perhaps the most responsive and receptive Muslim population group in the world today.

How to Pray:

🙏 Ask God to direct the *Isahin* movement towards greater understanding of Jesus and the salvation which only He can bring.

🙏 Several Christian leaders have been martyred in Bangladesh recently. Pray for their families and for the protection of future leaders.

🙏 Pray for continued open doors to share the love of Christ through relief and development work.

🙏 At the same time, ask God to protect the Bengali church from becoming dependant on foreign aid.

🙏 Pray for effective outreach to the 500,000 Muslim Bengali college students, the future leaders of their people.

🙏 Pray that every sub-group among the Muslim Bengali might be reached.

Every year, 1.1 million Muslim Bengali die without Christ.

Identity: The Muslim Bengali are a cluster of hundreds of peoples united by the Bengali language and the religion of Islam. They are divided into three classes: *Ashraf* (upper castes), *Aljaf* (lower castes), and *Arzal* (untouchables).

Lifestyle: Devastated by floods in Bangladesh and underdevelopment in India, the Muslim Bengali are some of the poorest people in the world, with annual per capita income around \$360. Most Muslim Bengalis subsist from wet-rice farming and small-scale fishing. In rural areas, their homes are simple bamboo huts with grass roofs, elevated several feet off the ground.

Customs: Muslim Bengalis practice a form of social organization known as the *samaj*. The word literally means “going together” and refers to the council of elders which links various extended families. A subset is the *Khanna*, which refers to one’s eating group.

This important group links together families that depend on one another for their livelihood.

Religion: Islam was introduced to the Bengali in the 13th century through organized missionary effort. By the 16th century over 50% of the Bengal region had been converted. Next to the Punjabis, this is the second highest percentage of conversion to Islam from a major South Asian community. Missionary work was achieved primarily through *Sufi* missionaries, which is one of the reasons for the high degree of syncretism in Muslim Bengali belief and practice. Both *Sunni* and *Shiite* elements can be found in their version of Islam.

Christian Outreach: Given the high degree of syncretism among the Muslim Bengali, it is not surprising that contact with Christianity has also produced a syncretistic movement within Islam, whose followers call themselves *Isahin*-followers of Jesus. Recent surveys among

Muslim Bengali (cont.)

MAJOR BENGALI ETHNO-LINGUISTIC SUBGROUPS



Sub-Group	Country	Population
Chittagonian	Bangladesh	14,000,000
	United Kingdom	20,000
Sylhetti	Bangladesh	7,000,000
	India	3,000,000
	United Kingdom	100,000
Rohingya	Myanmar	900,000
	Saudi Arabia	400,000
	Bangladesh	100,000

SYLHETTI

The Sylhetti occupy the north-eastern region of Bangladesh known today as the Sylhet division. The British occupied Sylhet in the 18th century as part of their campaign against Burma. Large British-owned tea-estates were subsequently established. The profitability and involvement of the British in this area led to a large number (proportionately speaking) of Sylhetti eventually immigrating to the United Kingdom. The first communities were from merchant mariners who had joined the British fleet, performing vital service during WWII. Around these families grew a large community of immigrants, many of which prospered in the Indian restaurant business.

The conversion of the Sylhetti to Islam began in the 13th century, when a Yemeni Sufi missionary named Shah Jalal came to Sylhet with 360 followers. Many of the lower caste Hindu Sylhetti began to convert through their preaching. Eventually the vast majority of the Sylhetti become Muslim, and from there Islam began to spread all throughout the Bengali region. Shah Jalal's tomb in Sylhet is now a frequented pilgrimage center as well as the site of a famous mosque. Shah Jalal is considered by the Sylhet to be their "patron site" to whom prayers, petitions and offerings are directed for his benevolent intervention.

The Sylhetti dialect is different enough from standard Bengali (70% lexical similarity) to require a separate Bible translation. However, to date there are only a few Bible portions in the Sylhetti dialect. The few believers among the Sylhetti (who are proportionally a much smaller percentage than in the general Bengali population) must rely upon the Bengali translation, though only 10% of the Sylhetti are literate in Bengali.

CHITTAGONIAN

Chittagonian Bengali is spoken by at least 14 million Bengalis in the Chittagong region. The dialect is not inherently intelligible with standard Bengali. Chittagonian Muslims speak a dialect that is also distinct from Chittagonian Hindus, though the latter are a very small percentage, most having converted to Islam centuries ago. Though there are now around 2,500 Chittagonian speaking believers, the Bible has not yet been translated in their language, despite the great need. Reports indicate that even the educated are not comfortable speaking or using standard Bengali, and those in rural areas may not understand the national dialect at all. Chittagonian is the language of instruction in their mosques.

ROHINGYA

The Rohingya are an ethno-linguistic subgroup of Chittagonian, with a unique culture and dialect. They have lived in the Arakan region of modern-day Myanmar for centuries and claim to be the original inhabitants. In the 1970s the Burmese government initiated a military campaign against them, claiming they were all non-native illegal immigrants from Bangladesh, and denying them citizenship. Over 250,000 were forced to flee over the border, and hundreds of thousands more fled internationally. Recently the UNHCR has made an attempt to repatriate those in refugee camps in Bangladesh to Myanmar. Their plight has become the concern of many Western governments as part of an ongoing effort to curb human-rights abuses in Myanmar against minority peoples. An investigation by Great Britain found 400,000 Rohingya in Saudi Arabia and 80,000 in Pakistan.