

The Meitei of Bangladesh

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The Meitei live in the northeastern corner of Bangladesh—mostly in the Moulvibazar district of Sylhet division. The vast majority of their people live in Manipur State in India where Meitei is the official state language. A unique feature of the Meitei is that their community is made of one language, but two religions. A majority of them are Hindus and have Mongoloid features, while a minority of them are Muslims and have Bengali features. In spite of this, there exists good harmony between them and they are proud of the common heritage of their mother tongue.

Most Meiteis still earn a living by farming, though the younger generation would like to use their education to enter more modern fields. The Meitei are very resistant to change, particularly in the area of religion. Outsiders trying to spread the gospel are not well received, and individuals may resist the gospel for fear that they will lose their place in the Meitei society if they become Christians. Much work needs to be done to make them aware of their need for Christ. Currently, there are only two Meitei Christians in Bangladesh, and there is no church or active witness in their community.

Primary Religion:

Hinduism

Disciples (Matt 28.19):

0.001%

Churches:

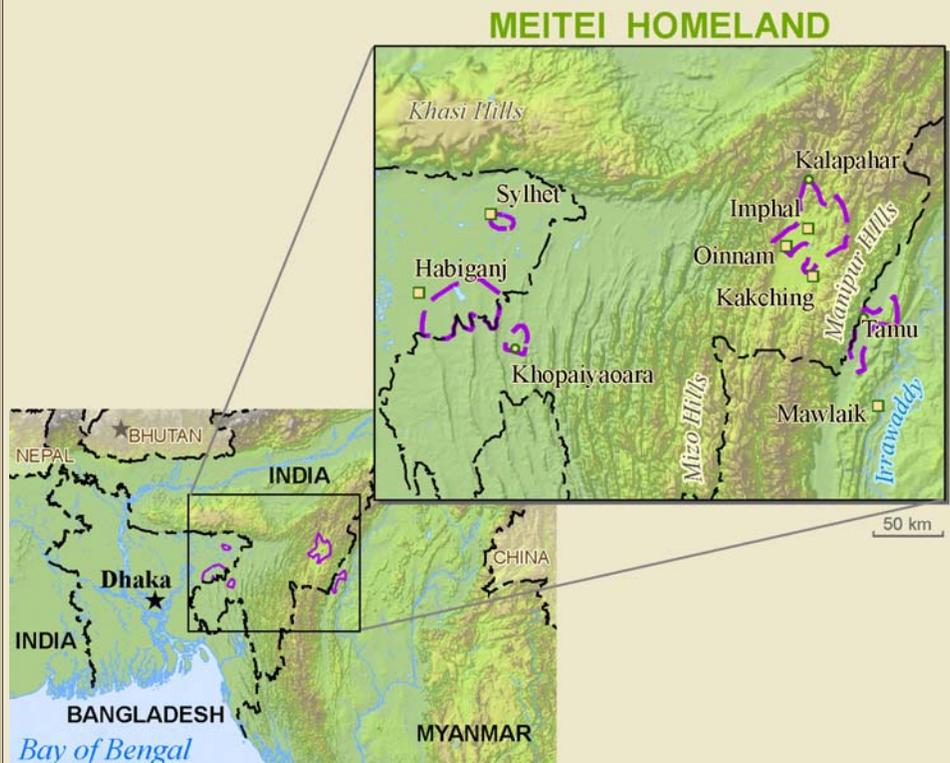
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Scripture Status (Matt 28.20):

Bible in Bengali script

Population (date):

15,000 (2004)



The Meitei of Bangladesh

Item Name	Item Note	
Have They Heard The Gospel?		Profile Summary
Comment (Call Themselves Christian)	0.001% would call themselves Christian.	
Believe In Jesus As God & Only Savior (%)	0.001%	
Believe In The Local Traditional Religion (%)	90% believe in their local, traditional religion, which is a mixture of Hinduism and 'Apokpa'.	
Have Not Heard Who Jesus is (%)	>95 % (almost all) have not heard who Jesus is.	
Number Of Pastors	0	
Comment (Pastors)	No known pastor or evangelist for the Meitei.	
Number Of Missionaries Working	0	
Response To The Gospel	I'm not sure how much of an effort has been made in the past to share the gospel with the Meitei in Bangladesh, but the response has been nearly non-existent. We are fairly sure that there are only two believers in the whole community, and these believers are young in their faith, as they have come to Christ in the past 1-3 years.	
Number Of Churches	0	
Is The Word Of God Translated?	In India, where there are many Meitei Christians, a full Bible has been translated in Bengali script.	
Translation Medium	Printed	
Any Hinderance To Scripture Distribution?	The literacy rate is reported to be 70-75% but the Meitei are very resistant to change, particularly in the area of religion. Outsiders trying to spread the gospel are not well received, and individuals may resist the gospel for fear that they will lose their place in the Meitei society if they become Christians.	
Forms Of Gospel Presentation Available (Summary)	We've heard that there is a Jesus film in the Meitei language.	
What Kind Of Missionaries Are Needed?	They need all sorts of contact with Christians, in order to prepare the way for any sort of Christian materials. However, direct and open preaching/evangelism will not be accepted or tolerated, as they are very resistant to change, particularly within the comforts and pressures of their community.	
Population All Countries		Group Description
World Population For This People	1,261,000	
World Population (Date)	1997	
Comment (World Population)	It is reported there are 1,240,000 in India, 15,000 in Bangladesh, and 6,000 in Myanmar.	
Countries Where People Group Lives		Group Description
Country Name	India	
Country Name	Myanmar	
Country Name	Bangladesh	
Geography & Environment		Group Description
Location	This people group is located in the northeastern corner of Bangladesh—mostly in the Moulvibazar district of Sylhet division near the areas bordering India.	
Longitude	24.5 E	
Latitude	92 N	
Climate	500cm rainfall per year, mostly during monsoon from mid-May through September; lows of about 5 degrees C in January; highs of about 35 degrees C in April and September.	
Map Features	The Meitei community is found in Sylhet division, in the northeast of Bangladesh. Within Sylhet division, they live mostly in Moulvibazar district, near the areas bordering India.	
Language & Linguistics		Group Description
Comment (Language)	Meitei and Manipuri are alternate names for the same language, and Meitei is the official language for this people group.	
Percent Monolingual (%)	1-2%	
Literacy		Group Description

The Meitei of Bangladesh

Item Name

Item Note

Comment (Attitude to literacy)

It is reported this people group's attitude to literacy is very receptive.

Literacy Attitude

Very receptive

Active Literacy Program

Yes

Comment (Active Literacy Program)

SIL has done some MT literature development work, but more needs to be written before MT literacy classes for children can begin.

Publications In Vernacular

There are a lot of materials in Meitei, almost all of which are published in India. These include textbooks, a dictionary, books of poetry and history, etc. However, very little of this is available in Bangladesh. We have seen two primers used to teach the Meitei Mayek (traditional) script. Both of these were published in Imphal, India. Within Bangladesh we have seen two booklets of poems and short stories. One was compiled by the Bangladesh Manipuri Literature Committee in 2000, and the other was printed for the major Manipuri 'Raspuirima' (full moon) festival in 2002.

Economics

Group Description

Subsistence Type

Agriculturalists

Occupation

Rice farming, a number of small businesses such as dry good stores and pharmacies, teaching, and a few 'service' jobs.

Products / Crafts

The women are known for their handloom weaving, but until recently not many did this as an occupation.

Modernization / Utilities

TV and lights.

Community Development

Group Description

Health Care (Quality)

Fair

Comment (Health Care)

There are minimal care and/or family planning clinics in or very near most villages. Hospitals are fairly accessible by bus or rickshaw from most villages.

Diet (Quality)

Good

Water (Quality)

Good

Comment (Water)

There are tube wells for drinking water, and ponds and deep wells for household use.

Shelter Description

Some are brick houses, others are made of a combination of wood, bamboo and mud. Housing is above average when compared to rural Bengalis.

Electricity

Most have electricity.

Clothing

Men wear western clothes outside the village and traditional clothing (a short, hand-woven wrap-around skirt) in the village. Hindu women wear long hand-woven wrap-around skirts with a blouse and shawl almost all the time, though young women sometimes wear salwar kamize.

Transportation

Travel is by bus, cycle rickshaw, auto rickshaw, few motorcycles, bicycle, and walking.

Society & Culture

Group Description

Neighbor Relations

Good working relationship with neighbors within the people group.

Identification With National Culture

Distinct

Comment (Identification with National Culture)

The Hindu Meitei are distinct; the Pangan (Muslim) are similar in many ways to Muslim Bengali culture.

Celebrations

Ras Purnima is their biggest celebration of the year.

Recreations

Chewing betel nut.

Media

Radio; TV; newspaper

Comment (Local Language Broadcasting)

A few community leaders mentioned that they can sometimes receive programs in Meitei broadcast from India.

Youth

Group Description

Labor and tasks (6-12 year olds)

Household chores, caring for younger siblings, and helping with farmwork.

Comment (Youth)

They have good access to government schools and generally do better than the Bengalis. The Meitei Hindus tend to be more educated than the Pangan.

Education

Group Description

Comment (Primary Schools)

The report notes there is a primary school in almost every village.

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Item Name

Comment (Primary School Enrollment)

Comment (Education)

Item Note

It is reported that 'almost all' of primary school age are enrolled.

There are secondary schools within walking distance of many villages, and for those students who have easy access to secondary school, most complete class 10. Language of instruction in early primary years and middle years (7 and 8 years old) is in Bangla. As well, Bangla is the language of textbooks. It is reported there are 'nearly none' of unmixed schools.

It is also reported that this people group has good access to government schools and generally do better than the Bengalis. The Meitei Hindus tend to be more educated than the Pangan.

Church Growth

Status of Christianity

Reached Status

Verified

Reached Classification

Unreached

Total Baptized

2

Comment (Church Growth)

There are no churches or pastors for this people group. However, there are reportedly 5 missionaries.

Religion & Response

Status of Christianity

Attitude To Christianity

Very resistant

Attitude To Religious Change

Very resistant

Resistance / Receptivity

The Meitei are very resistant to change, particularly in the area of religion. Outsiders trying to spread the gospel are not well received, and individuals may resist the gospel for fear that they will lose their place in the Meitei society if they become Christians.

Recommended Approaches

Perhaps Meitei believers from India can come and evangelize among the Meitei in Bangladesh.

Items For Prayer

--A movement of the Holy Spirit to soften and open their hearts to the gospel, especially as there are such strong family and societal pressures not to turn away from their religion.

--A movement by expats and Meitei Christians from India to reach the Bangladeshi Meiteis.

--Encouragement, wisdom, and boldness for the two Meitei believers.

Scripture

Status of Christianity

Available Scripture

Bible

Form Of Scripture Available

Printed

Comment (Form of Scripture Available)

In India, where there are many Meitei Christians, a full Bible has been translated in Bengali script.

Scripture Use

Hardly at all

Other Forms Of Gospel Available: Film/Videos

Yes. It has been mentioned that there is a Jesus film in the Meitei language.