



The Bihari of Bangladesh

The so-called Biharis are Muslims who originated from different ethno-linguistic groups in Bihar and neighboring States of British India. Following communal riots during and after the partition of the Indian Subcontinent hundreds of thousands of Urdu-speaking Muslims migrated from Bihar and other Indian States to East Pakistan. When the nationalist movement of the Bengalis led to the War of Independence, the Biharis sided with Pakistan and shared in the war crimes against millions of Bengali civilians. After the war they became victims of revenge and were gathered by the Red Cross (ICCRC) into 66 Relief camps to await repatriation to Pakistan. Until 1982 approx. 200,000 "stranded Pakistanis" were repatriated until internal ethnic conflicts caused Pakistan to refuse to accept any more Bihari migrants. In spite of many promises by different Pakistani governments approximately 300 000 Biharis remained stateless in Bangladesh for 39 years. The 66 former relief camps have evolved into urban slum communities where each family occupies a 6x6 sq ft. room. The congested housing situation, lack of sanitation and potable water causes many health problems. Poverty, hopelessness and social deterioration have made the camps a breeding ground for crime.

Traditionally Biharis are respected as skilled, hard workers. Children are expected to learn a trade at a young age to contribute to the family income and to stay away from unsupervised play. Due to lack of employment opportunities, many Biharis run micro-enterprises. They operate small auto repair and electrical shops or work as metal workers, drivers, rickshaw pullers, weavers or barbers. Still bearing the stigma as traitors, the younger generation is slowly coming to the realization that they will have to stay in Bangladesh. In 2007 the interim government granted voting rights and citizenship to Biharis who were minors during the 71 war or born later. While this a positive change the future development of the Biharis camps remain uncertain.

Primary Religion:	Muslim
Disciples (Matt 28:19):	0%
Churches:	0%
Scripture Status (Matt 28:20):	Yes
Population (date):	600,000 (2006)



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Heard the Gospel?

Number of Pastors	0
Number of Missionaries Comment	Two foreign and six local Mostly local and bi-vocational
Call Themselves Christian Comment	0% Fewer than 10 believers
Believe In Jesus As God And Only Savior	0%; fewer than 10 baptized believers
Jesus A Prophet, Good Man Not The Only Savior Comment	100% In adherence with Islamic teaching, even though the knowledge of the Koran is often limited
Believe In The Local Traditional Religion Comment	100% Mostly Folk Islam, often identical to Bengali Folk Islam but some distinctive practices with heavy leanings towards Hinduism (i.e. way of celebrating Muharram, appeasement of rivers etc)
Have Not Heard Who Jesus Is Comment	100% May have heard that Isa is a prophet according to Islam but don't know he is the Messiah
Attitude to Christianity	Local Churches consist mostly of low cast Hindu converts that are culturally distant and not attractive to Muslims, perceived as foreign religion, have received dedicated relief and development aid from Christian NGO's since 1972.
Attitude to Religious Change	Not very open due to fear of being cast out from the community
How Have They Responded to The Gospel?	Very limited response in the past few years; very poor people and women seem to be more open
Number of Churches	0
Number of Communities Comment	66 former Relief Camps 66 Camps found in 17 towns and cities in Bangladesh with highest concentration in Dhaka/Mirpur, Dhaka/Mammedpur, Syedpur, Chittagong and Khulna
History of Christianity By Whom	No significant outreach to Muslims in Bangladesh/East Pakistan until 1970's; literature distribution and attempts for evangelistic outreach in the early 1980s by different groups with little results, Biharis labeled as unreceptive.

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History of Christianity:
Significant Events

Since 1971-72: relief and development efforts by Christian (and secular) NGO's early 80s: two or more educated Biharis came to faith and were baptized through a cross-cultural worker using traditional approach in connection to an NGO. After severe persecution by the community they became secret believers with no contact with other believers; since 1980s: the growing people group movement of the surrounding Bengali Muslims is bypassing the Bihari Muslims due to cultural, linguistic and social barriers. 1998: cross-cultural workers with the vision for a contextualized CP work among the Bihari Muslims in Bangladesh arrived 2003: first bi-vocational Bengali Muslim Background Believer (MBB) started outreach 2004: first Prayer Conference for Bihari Muslims held, more local Church Planters (CPers) join the team 2005: 3 Biharis come to faith, 1 receives baptism; 2009 several others come to faith and are baptized, only few of them stay active in their faith.

Comments

Today a number of Christian NGO's continue to be involved in poverty alleviation programs. The direct evangelistic impact of these programs is minimal, due to Government restrictions and other factors. Christian NGO's often employ Muslim field staff and the Traditional Christian staff are usually timid and not motivated to share their faith; receptivity to the Gospel needs to be tested again through abundant seed sowing and intentional effort; contextualized approach in evangelism is more promising than traditional approach; MBB's most effective for evangelistic outreach.

Is The Word Of God Translated?

Yes, mostly available from Pakistan and India: "Christian Urdu" in Urdu script "Christian Urdu" in Roman script "Muslim friendly Urdu" in Urdu script (in need of revision.)

Other Forms of Gospel

Presentations Available

Recordings "Christian Urdu" NT Audio recording "Muslim friendly Urdu" 150 Bible Stories God and Women 2007 Jesus Film in M friendly language "Christian Urdu" Jesus Film.

Video/Films

Video of contemporary "Prodigal Son" in "Muslim friendly Urdu"; Videos of several animated OT Characters (i.e. Abraham, Jonah, Ruth etc); Video explaining how a contextualized House-Church functions; Gozol type songs and "Christian Urdu" songs on Audio Tapes Audio tape narrating the story of the Good Samaritan and others.

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Any Hindrance to Scripture
Distribution?

Generally hostile environment in Muslim society and close community in Bihari Camps; lack of culturally relevant workers; lack of finances; complex situation concerning literacy: Urdu as a spoken language is alive in the Bihari Communities. Standard Urdu is well understood. Urdu medium education has not been generally available after 1971. Literacy is generally low in Bangladesh (40%, no separate figures for the Biharis are available). Literacy in Bangla (Bengali) language among Biharis is low due to discrimination of Bihari students in Government schools, poverty, emphasis on Arabic in Madrassa type schools, low enrolment rates for girls etc. This leaves a situation in which generally: Males over 50 years are illiterate or read Urdu only. Females over 50 years are mostly illiterate; Males under 30 years read Bangla only; Females under 30 years read Bangla only or are illiterate. Scripture distribution there fore must have an emphasis on orality/Audio materials in Urdu and M-Bangla Bible (not mother tongue)

Are Cross Cultural Missionaries
Needed?

Yes, cross-cultural workers are needed. Knowledge of Urdu language before arrival on the field helpful. Bangladesh is a creative access country so cross-cultural workers need to come with skills in the NGO or business sector or as students, Evangelists, CPers, CP-trainers, disciples, teachers, literacy, health and social workers are needed. Bangladeshis (preferably MBB's) need to work cross culturally as evangelists and CPers.