

The Bishnupriya of Bangladesh



The Bishnupriya (Manipuri) are a 100% Hindu community living in the northeastern corner of Bangladesh mostly in the Moulvibazar district of Sylhet division. They point to Manipur state of India as their homeland, and they still have a majority of their people in various northeastern states of India. They are mostly farmers, though their younger generations are becoming increasingly more educated and looking for other opportunities. They are very proud of their culture/religion, and are well-known in Bangladesh for their dances; their identity is very much tied to their Hindu culture/religion. Largely because of this, there is still not a single known Christian among the Bishnupriya in Bangladesh. Missionary activity among them has been and is limited because of their belief that to be Bishnupriya is to be Hindu. Outsiders trying to spread the gospel are not tolerated, and individuals may resist the gospel for fear that they will lose their place in the Bishnupriya society if they become Christians. Still, because of the Bishnupriya community's desire for development and aid, missionaries can easily gain access to the community by engaging them in the social, economic, and health sectors. Going beyond merely providing aid may prove difficult, however.

Primary Religion:	Hinduism
Disciples (Matt 28:19):	0%
Churches:	0%
Scripture Status (Matt 28:20):	In Progress
Population (date):	20,000—40,000 (2004)



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Have They Heard The Gospel?

Call Themselves Christian	0%
Believe In Jesus As God And Only Savior	0%
Prophet/Good Man, But Not God's Son	0.1%
Believe In The Local Traditional Religion	100%
Have Not Heard Who Jesus is	95+%
Number Of Pastors	0
Number Of Missionaries Working	5
Response To The Gospel	They have not responded positively. They pride themselves on being 100% Hindu. Any attempts to convert them may mean an end to a relationship with them.
Number Of Churches	0
Is The Word Of God Translated?	It is in progress in India by Bibles International.
Forms Of Gospel Presentation Available	Gospel Recordings has some basic Bible stories recorded in Bishnupriya.
What Kind Of Missionaries Are Needed?	They are eager for various types of social or economic development and aid. However, as stated above, overt attempts to evangelize may bring about an end to any sort of program or relationship, though they desperately need to hear the Gospel.

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Group Description

Population All Countries

Urban Percent 2-5%

Countries Where People Live

Country Name Bangladesh, India

Geography & Environment

Location Mostly within Moulvibazar district of Sylhet division
Country Bangladesh
Ecosystem Type Gallery forest
Geological Type Plains
Longitude 24 degrees 30'E
Latitude 92 degrees N
Climate 500 cm rainfall per year, mostly during monsoon season from mid-May through September; lows of about 5 degrees C in January; highs of about 35 degrees C in April and September

Language & Linguistics

Primary Language Bishnupriya
Alternate Language Names Bishnupria Manipuri
Dialects Rajar Gang
Dialects Madoi Gang
Attitude Towards Mother Tongue Very receptive
Percent Monolingual 1%
Comment Even old women know some Bangla

Literacy

Adult Literacy 75%
Literacy Attitude Very receptive
Active Literacy Program 2
Comment Two pilot mother tongue after-school literacy classes for children may start by 2005.

Publications In Vernacular

In Bangladesh, a few magazines are published in Bishnupriya, though they usually have some Bengali articles as well. There are also several books of poetry, a booklet of biographies of "Four Great Men of the Manipuri Bishnupriya Society," "A Collection of Essay and Radio Talks in Manipuri Bishnupriya Language," and three one-act plays, all of which are written by Ranjit Singha and published by the Bangladesh Manipuri Shahytto Samity in the 1980s and 1990s. In India there are textbooks for grades 1-5 for teaching social science, math, Bangla, reading (in Bishnupriya), and science. These are published by the Education Department of Tripura in the 1990s. There may also be a Bishnupriya-Bengali dictionary.

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Comment Approximately 75% are literate in Bangla; A large percentage are also able to read Bishnupriya, though not as fluently because they have not had much practice at doing so

Comment The literacy percent for men and women does not differ significantly, especially for those 40-50 years old or less.

Economics

Subsistence Type Agriculturalists

Occupation Rice farming, small businesses such as dry goods stores and pharmacies, and teaching

Products / Crafts Traditional clothing and cloths

Modernization / Utilities TV, electricity, a few computers with CD players

Community Development

Health Care Fair

Comment 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 Good

Water Good

Comment Tubewells for drinking water and ponds and deep wells for household use

Shelter Description Some made of brick; others of a combination of wood, bamboo, and mud; housing is above average for rural Bangladesh.

Electricity Most have electricity.

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

Transportation Bus, cycle rickshaw, auto-rickshaw, few motorcycles, bicycle, walking

Society & Culture

Neighbor Relations Good working relationship with neighbors in the people group.

Identification With National Culture Distinct

Self Image A combination of prestigious and threatened

Celebrations Ras Purnima is their biggest celebration of the year

Recreations Chew betel nut

Media Radio, TV, newspaper, magazine

Comment There may be a weekly Bishnupriya radio program broadcast from India.

Attitude To Outsiders Somewhat receptive

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Youth

Labor and tasks (6-12 year olds)

Household chores, caring for younger siblings, helping with farm work

Comment

They have good access to government schools and generally do better than the Bengalis.

Education

Comment

There is a primary school in nearly every village.

Comment (Enrollment)

Very nearly all

Language Of Instruction Early Years

Bengali

Language Of Textbooks Early Years

Bengali

Language Of Instruction Later Years

Bengali

Language Of Textbooks Later Years

Bengali

Number Of Schools

Greater than 90%

Homogeneous

Nearly none

Comment

There are secondary schools within walking distance of many villages. Most students complete class 10.

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Status of Christianity

Church Growth

Comment No or almost no Christians
Total Baptized 0

Religion & Response

Attitude To Christianity Very resistant
Attitude To Religious Change Very resistant
Resistance / Receptivity Very resistant
Recommended Approaches If there are Christian Bishnupriyas living in India, they could come to Bangladesh and share the gospel with their brothers and sisters.
Items For Prayer 1) As Bishnupriya youth accept change through higher education (university degrees) and modernization, pray that they would also become open to hearing and accepting the gospel of salvation.
2) Pray that Bishnupriya believers in India would be burdened for their Bishnupriya brothers and sisters in Bangladesh who do not know Jesus.
3) Pray that Bishnupriya literacy classes that may start in 2005 would be successful in teaching children to read and write in their mother tongue. Pray, too, that the Bishnupriya would see Christ in those helping with the literacy classes and that they would desire to have Him in their lives, too.

Scripture

Translation Status In Progress
Available Scripture None
Comment Even though they do not have Bishnupriya scriptures, almost every literate person in the community would be able to use Bengali scriptures.

Other Forms Of Gospel Available:

Literature No
Recordings Yes
Film/Videos No
Radio No