

Bengali

Approximately 120 million Muslim-Bengalis live in South Asia in Bangladesh and India's West Bengal State. Despite close cultural ties to the other inhabitants of India, this group is set apart by their Islamic faith, with its wide-ranging implications in all aspects of life. Their language is a Muslim dialect of Bengali, the sixth largest language group in the world. Bengalis have a thriving entrepreneurial spirit. About spiritual matters they are articulate, sensitive and respectful.



Location

The Bengali people live in both Bangladesh and in the state of West Bengal in India. Bangladesh is ethnically almost homogenous; 98% of the population is ethnic Bengali, and most of these are Muslim. Bangladesh is located in south central Asia where it borders India, Burma and the Bay of Bengal.

Topography and Climate

Bengalis live in one of the wettest geographical areas on earth: a huge delta created by the mighty rivers flowing down from the Himalayan Mountains to the north. The area is immensely fertile, permitting three lush crops a year. As a result, the area sustains the highest population density of any rural-based country in the world. However, the tropical monsoon climate also makes Bangladesh very susceptible to frequent natural disasters from cyclones and floods, which take a huge toll in human lives.

Culture

Rabindranath Tagore, winner of the 1913 Nobel Peace Prize for literature, wrote many poems and short stories about the breathtaking Bengali countryside. His song, "Our Golden Bengal," is the national anthem of Bangladesh. Another Bengali, Musharrag Husain, wrote the play, "The Landlord Exposed," which is thought to be the first drama of social consciousness written by a Muslim.

Soccer is the primary sport during the winter months. In urban areas, badminton, cricket, and tennis are also popular. A board game called *carrons* is played everywhere. Bengalis also enjoy folk songs, folk dancing, patriotic songs, drama, weaving, painting, drawing, and calligraphy.

Bengali clothing is western-style dress or traditional *punjabi pyjama*. The married women generally wear a *sari* and unmarried young girls wear a *salwar camise*. The men wear a *lungi*. There is a strong emphasis on inter-family relations. Bengali society is patrilineal. The men enjoy walking and socializing on the roads and in tea shops but the women visit each other at home. Islamic celebrations include *Ramadan* and *Korbanin*. Birthdays are great celebrations, especially for young boys from well-to-do families.

The majority of Muslim Bengali make their living as wet rice cultivators in the Bengal Delta. Others work in industries as businessmen, weavers and fishermen.

Generally, rural Bengali homes are made of bamboo or mud with corrugated iron or straw roofs. Many cities and towns have considerable brick housing with cement overlay. Medical care is government socialized and often inadequate. Immunizations are widely available.

History

Bangladesh originally was a part of India. In 1949 it became the eastern wing of Pakistan, but in 1971 the Bengali fought for their independence from Pakistan. Bangladesh became an Islamic state in 1988. Today there are occasional eruptions of political activism and tribal fighting for independence.

Religion

Muslim Bengalis comprise about 88% of the population of Bangladesh and 21% of West Bengal. Islam in Bangladesh is a combination of both orthodox and folk beliefs, with the Sufi sect influencing 75% of all Muslims. This sect encourages mystical practices and experiences.

Bangladeshis are very interested and articulate about spiritual matters. People are generally pious and keen to observe their respective religious rites and festivities. Although Islam is the state religion, Bangladesh enjoys religious freedom and tolerance.



SIM Involvement

SIM entered Bangladesh in 1957 at Sirajganj and Manikganj in the Dhaka district. We expanded to Dhaka, and in Jhenidah, Ishurdi, and Kushtia. SIM reaches out to the Bengalis through literature production, media, agricultural development, discipling, technical training, and a Bible correspondence school. We serve as Christian professionals.

Scripture Availability

The Bible has been translated since 1809 using the minority Hindu Bengali terminology. However, the scriptures are now translated in the Muslim-Bengali dialect as well. Christian literature and coursework is available in this dialect. Braille Bible portions are available and Braille scripture is in progress.

Urgent Prayer Need

Bingham Academy in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, urgently needs a [French teacher](#) to join their staff team in August. Pray that God will provide the right person to meet this need.

