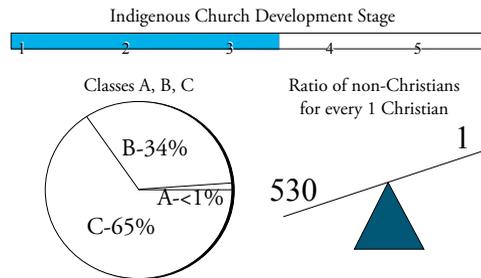


Bengali Caste Hindus



Quick Facts

Population: 80,000,000
 India: 65,000,000
 Bangladesh: 14,000,000
 United States: 140,000
 United Kingdom: 50,000
Religion: Hinduism
Believers: 0.18%
Scriptures: NT, OT
Ministry Tools: JRGT
Church Status: 3
Mission Status: 2
MS Subgroups: 200+



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

Identity: Around 200 Hindu peoples use the Bengali language as their mother tongue. They are concentrated in the northeastern Indian states of West Bengal and Bihar, and in Bangladesh. Major peoples that speak Bengali are the Mahishya (7.5m) and the Namasudra (8m). The Bengali language is of the Indo-Aryan family, related to Assamese.

Lifestyle: West Bengal was once the center of power for both the Mughal and British empires. Large rural immigration into the industrialized city of Calcutta has led to deteriorating conditions with millions living in slums or on the street. The humid climate is suitable for growing rice, which is the main agricultural product. However the region often suffers from seasonal flooding due to monsoons.

Customs: Bengali Brahmans perform the sacred rites associated with birth, marriage and death. Women

are considered unclean for as much as three weeks after giving birth, until the Sashthi worship ceremony takes place. Marriage is negotiated between families and the ceremony will often take place in the home of the bride or groom.

Religion: The city of Calcutta is named for Kali, the goddess of war, chaos and destruction. Devotion to Kali is associated with her counterpart Shiva, who is said to keep her in balance. This desire for energy balance forms an integral part of *Tantric* ceremonies which channel the power of Kali and Shiva. Temples devoted to these ceremonies have been regarded as little more than houses of prostitution and sources of child-abuse by outsiders.

Christian Outreach: William Carey was the first evangelical missionary to begin work among the Bengali in the late 18th century, and to pioneer a church among them. Today, the Hindu Bengali peoples have a higher percent-

age of believers than any other Indo-Aryan group in South Asia. However, there are still over 150 Bengali Hindu peoples that have yet to see a disciple-making movement established among them.

How to Pray:

🙏 Praise God for the growth of the Church among many Bengali Hindu peoples, especially in Bangladesh. Pray that these believers will be able to take the gospel to other unreached Bengali groups.

🙏 Pray for wisdom and grace for those reaching out to Calcutta's 5,500 slum communities, 98% of which are without a church.

🙏 Intercede for spiritual breakthrough in the influential University of Calcutta (est. 1857), and its 200 related colleges, encompassing 220,000 students.

🙏 Pray that William Carey's legacy as the father of the Bengali Renaissance would lead many intellectuals and scholars to faith in Christ.

🙏 Ask God to deliver the Bengali from centuries of curse associated with the strongholds of Kali and Tantrism.

Every year 720,000 Bengali Hindus die without Christ.

Bengali Caste Hindus (cont.)

30 Least-Evangelized Bengali Hindu Peoples

People, Population, % Evangelical, Caste Type

Mahishya	6,700,000	0.01%	SC	Kumhar	900,000	0.00%	SC
Brahman	6,600,000	0.01%	FC	Rajput	890,000	0.00%	FC
Namasudra	5,200,000	0.00%	SC	Tili	860,000	0.00%	BC
Ahir	5,100,000	0.00%	BC	Hadi	800,000	0.00%	SC
Rajbanshi	4,000,000	0.01%	SC	Bhuinhar	665,000	0.01%	BC
Bagdi	2,900,000	0.01%	SC	Dhobi	525,000	0.00%	SC
Kayastha	2,800,000	0.01%	FC	Aguri	490,000	0.00%	BC
Pod	2,700,000	0.00%	SC	Sunri	475,000	0.00%	SC
Jogi	1,700,000	0.00%	SC	Bhangi	430,000	0.03%	SC
Teli	1,500,000	0.00%	BC	Jhalo Malonma	425,000	0.00%	SC
Tanti	1,500,000	0.00%	BC	Tamboli	425,000	0.00%	BC
Kaibartta	1,500,000	0.00%	SC	Halwai	380,000	0.00%	BC
Bania	1,400,000	0.00%	FC	Raju	370,000	0.00%	BC
Bauri	1,300,000	0.00%	SC	Tamboli	375,000	0.00%	BC
Mochi	1,200,000	0.01%	BC	Chain	370,000	0.01%	BC
Nai	1,100,000	0.00%	BC	Dom	350,000	0.00%	SC

MAHISHYA

The Mahishya claim descent from a union between a Kshatriya male and a Vaisya female. They are believed to be closely related to the Kaibartta, and may have at some time been one group. Unlike other major castes in India which are spread out across the country, the Mahishya are exclusively a Bengali speaking group, and live primarily in West Bengal. Their traditional occupation was fishing but they have begun to transition mostly to subsistence agriculture. Their diet is mostly rice and fish, though many have begun raising poultry and goats, which is increasingly serving as a substitute for fish. They worship the Hindu gods Laxmi and Sonithakur, and employ Brahmins to conduct their sacred ceremonies.

NAMASUDRA

The Namasudras claim Brahmin descent and one historical account seems to confirm this. According to the account this Bengali Brahmin community was asked to perform the wedding ceremony of a king who was marrying outside his caste (to a Dom bride). The community refused to comply and the king ordered his soldiers to execute their leaders and reduce the community to Sudras (or manual laborers). Today the Namasudra earn their living as boatmen, fisherman and carpenters. They are not regarded as an occupational caste (with one particular occupation generally characterizing the group), but are essentially laborers-for-hire, capable of serving in a wide variety of capacities. Though a poor, uneducated community they exhibit a strong desire to improve themselves.

RAJBANSHI

The Rajbanshi claim to be the original inhabitants of the northern region of West Bengal. Like the Mahishya they are an exclusively Bengali speaking group. Linguistic studies indicate their dialect of Bengali may require its own translation, or at least an adaptation of the existing Bengali Bible. They claim to be Kshatriyas (the name Rajbanshi means royal descent), though they are regarded as a low-caste group in West Bengal. Their community was previously known as Kochh, but around 1890 they made a deliberate effort to change their self-identity. There are two major subgroups among them, Chhotobhag and Barahbhag. The latter is considered socially superior.