

Why Christianity Is Exploding in Unlikely Muslim Nation

According to official estimates, the religious composition of Bangladesh is 89.1 percent Muslim, 10 percent Hindi, with less than one percent Christian in a nation of over 156 million people. But unofficially, Christianity is much larger and growing, especially in the rural areas. Is the fourth-largest Muslim nation in the world and place of many terrorist activities on the path to becoming a peaceful Christian nation? "Uncounted converts" believe so.

On a recent fact-finding trip to Bangladesh, Christian Freedom International President Jim Jacobson interviewed scores of indigenous Christian pastors, street evangelists, missionaries and converts to Christianity. According to them, Christianity is on the increase and the growth is a cause of concern for the Muslim majority. As a result, persecution is on the increase against the fast growing, mostly underground Christian church.

Official Reports Are Wrong

Official reports on religious composition only count "traditional Christians," i.e., people who are born into the Christian faith and attend government-approved churches. But "converts," those who change their religion from Islam to Christianity, are not counted and no surveys have been made.

The consensus among "converts" is that Christians in Bangladesh make up of at least 10 percent of the population and is growing more every day. Some indigenous evangelists tell CFI they believe that Bangladesh will become a Christian nation in their lifetimes. If the 10 percent number is correct, there are at least 15,600,000 Christians in this Muslim majority nation. Evidence seems to support the claims.

More Than 20,000 Converts

Pastor Khaleque, 60, a former Muslim and now a Christian street pastor who works among the hill tribes, in the northeast part of Bangladesh, told CFI, "In the last 12 months, more than 20,000 Muslims have converted to Christianity. More than 20,000 have converted, and this is becoming a real problem for the Muslims."

Khaleque faces many difficulties, has been beaten several times and must pay bribes to police to continue his work

More Than 700 Converts

Pastor Rafiqul Islam, who after converting to Christianity goes by the name Rafiqul, pastors a church of 25 converts in the village Bhadai Bangladesh. It meets in a house church.

Rafiqul converted in 2007. "I converted to get eternal life in Jesus Christ."

After Rafiqul converted, his rickshaw shop and tea business were taken away from him, and he was disowned by his family.

Shortly after converting to Christianity, in the village, he shared the gospel with friends. Two Imams caught him talking about Christianity in the market and attacked him. The Imams beat him and tied him with ropes in front of a nearby mosque. His sons ransomed him only after they agreed that they would force him to reconvert to Islam.

After his sons failed to bring him back to the Muslim religion, they beat their father nearly to death, took all his possessions and left him to die. Among pastoring a church for converts, he works as an evangelist, risking his life each day.

Rafiqul told CFI, "Many Muslims are converting. Mostly in the rural areas." In Rafiqul's rural village of Bhadai, he has seen more than 700 Muslims have convert to Christianity in the

past 24 months. He said to CFI, "More people are converting every day. Although persecuted, we are preaching the good news."

More Than 6,000 Converts

Pastor Harun-Or-Rashid, 36, a Muslim convert to Christianity, said he converted when in 2001. He now pastors a church for 36 converts in his village of Bahgobannagar.

He told CFI his church is growing. "More converts are coming to his church. In my district, more than 6,000 have converted from 1991 until now," he told CFI.

Pastor Rashid said he is targeted for assassination by IS. He told CFI, "Of course I am afraid, but when I think about my spiritual life, I am not afraid. We continue to preach no matter what."

Converted After Reading Leaflet

Lovelu-Sadik Lebio, 32, who converted to Christianity in 2004, said he became a Christian after reading a leaflet. The leaflet was titled, "Hope for the Hopeless," and included many verses from the Bible, including Acts 10:43.

Following his conversion his family disowned him, his wife left him and he lost his job. He said "I am dead to them." He met another convert who helped him, and he later became a pastor and street evangelist. Lebio has 52 converts in his main house church in the village of West Doiljur. He also pastors three other smaller house churches for converts.

Young People Are Converting

Babul, 22, a Muslim who converted Christianity on December 25, 2013, worked as a day laborer. He met some converts to Christianity and learned about Christ. As a result, he accepted Christ as his Savior. Following his conversion, Babul's life was threatened, and he was disowned by his

family. He had to go into hiding in the jungle to survive. After eight months of living in the jungle, some Christian converts helped him. He is now a “street preacher” and takes many risks to share the gospel. He has been beaten numerous times but sees it as a badge of honor.

Babul told CFI, “The young like me, are converting. Many more are interested. Especially young people, they are interested in Christ. But they think about the cost of converting and it is high because they have to leave everything. But many are interested in Christ.”

Christianity Offers Hope

Bakar, a Christian convert told CFI, “Christianity is really growing in Bangladesh. The next generation is becoming Christian. We believe that Bangladesh will become a Christian nation one day. Islam has no mercy, no compassion, no love. It has nothing to offer. Christianity offers the assurance of eternal life, it offers hope.”

Despite reports to the contrary, Christianity is growing around the world, especially in nations where Christians face persecution.

Christian Freedom International has worked in Bangladesh for many years and runs several missions in the country. Among other things, CFI supports a center for disabled converts to Christianity and supports indigenous Christian pastors, evangelists and missionaries throughout the Bangladesh.

Christian Freedom International is an organization dedicated to promoting religious liberty and helping persecuted Christians around the world. {eoa}

This article originally appeared on Christian Freedom International.