

The Bihari Of India:

A People

*Still Unreached
with
the Gospel*

Prayer Profile Supplied by the AAPC

“I had a vision that the spirit of darkness sits on a throne and waits to see your weakness,” a missionary writes about Bihar. “This is different from anywhere in India. This spirit is shrewd and cunning. You can’t tell when it will hit or where it may come from.”

A Religious Past

The home of the Bihari people is bisected by the famous Ganges river and is the birth place of enumerable tribal beliefs and three world religions. Pilgrims of Jainism, Buddhism and Hinduism flock to Bihar in Eastern India to worship at numerous shrines and holy sites. *Jainists*, an offshoot of Hinduism, claim Pavapuri as their center, while Hindu’s worship at Gaya as a holy place. *Sikh’s* revere Patna City as the birthplace of the 10th and final *Sikh* guru, Gobind Singh and Bodhgaya is the holiest site for *Buddhists* – where Buddha allegedly gained enlightenment under a Bo tree.

Bihar became the center for the spread of Buddhism throughout Asia when King Ashoka (269-232 B.C.) ruled over all of the Indian subcontinent. In the 1850’s Bihar was a hub for mutiny against the British. Mahatma Gandhi launched his passive resistance movement, *satyagraha* from Champaran in Northern Bihar.

A Hopeless Present

Bihar has a proud and powerful history and her capital city of Patna (2 million) is the third oldest in India. The state is one of the most densely populated in India; it has seen empires rise and fall; has spawned major religions, yet Bihar is regarded as the backward and depressed stepchild of India. (90% of Bihari’s are rural, with only 26% adult literacy). Bihar is long ceased to be an advanced culture or center of power.

The Muslim Majority/Minority

Some 50% of Bihari’s are Muslim. Although the majority live in the state of Bihar you will find them scattered all over India as well as in Nepal and Bangladesh. There are three main groups: Wealthy Sunnis, the middle class and poor Sunnis and Shiites.

One million Bihari Muslims fled India to East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) when it was set up as a Muslim State in 1947. They sided with Pakistan during the civil war which gained Bangladesh its freedom and are now considered traitors to Bangladesh. They live in refugee camps and have waited in vain for 20 years for help from Pakistan. Today only 20% of Patna and 12% of the state of Bihar are Muslim so they have little power to unite as a people. A dominant 85% of the state of Bihar are Hindu.

A Confusion of Languages

The Bihari speak three major languages: Bhojpuri (46 million), Mithili (25 million) and Magahi (12 million). The majority also speak Urdu or Hindi. Mixed with the languages are countless religions. Bihar and Patna are strongholds of the “god obsession” of India.

Little remains of their past glory – all that is left are broken down buildings, while their children play in littered streets. The lowest female literacy rate and the highest infant mortality rate in India reveals a picture of a people in spiritual darkness, deep bondage and enslaved by poverty.

Bihari Unreached with Christianity

The introduction of Christianity has been nearly impossible – the price is too high. Bihari believers write:

“My family disowns me and neighbors persecute me,” “My grandfather refers to me as his dead son,” “I cry and cry because I am all alone!” A Christian faces the loss of social solidarity and oneness with his people. Seemingly the small church and nominal Christianity cannot make up for the loss of support provided by the extended family. It is not surprising that 9 out of 10 Muslim converts revert back to Islam.

The church is scattered, weak and fragmented. (Less than 20,000 or 0.02% of Bihari’s are Christian) Bihari’s reputation as a *graveyard* of missions is well earned.

Bible Status

Only the Magahi language has a portion of the Bible. But it was translated in 1826 and is now out of print. There are translations currently in progress for the other two major languages: Bhojpuri and Mithili. Very few Scriptures are available in Urdu or other Indian languages.

The Bihari of India

For Further Study

R.R. Diwakar (ed), *Bihar Through The Ages*, 1959,

Caleb Project, *That They May Know Him*—Prayer Booklet For Muslims in Patna, India, 1989,

Sir John Houlton, *Bihar: The Heart of India*, 1949,

Church Growth Research Center, *A Portrait of India*— Study Material for Lausanne II, 1989,

William S. Ellis, “Bangladesh Hope Nourishes a New Nation,” *National Geographic*, Sept. 1972, p. 295-333.

The State of Bihar

- * Area: 173,877 Sq Km— a little smaller than Sweden.
- * Capital: Patna.
- * Average Rainfall – 40-60 inches.
- * Bihar is divided by the Ganges River.
- * Bihar is a leading industrial area of India.
- * Bihar accounts for 40% of the mineral production of India.
- * Cash crop are chili, sugar and tobacco.

The Bihari People

Population:

- * 83 million.
- * Besides the three major languages, 90% speak Urdu (the official Muslim language) and 44% speak Hindi (the official language of India).
- * Literacy – 26%.
- * Minority populations include: Muslims, Jains, Sikhs, Christians, and numerous tribal peoples.

Life in Bihar:

- * 10% urban, 90% rural.
- * Bihari have voting rights, though Muslims and other minorities lack

power.

- * Muslims rarely have white collar jobs or good pay.

Religion:

- * 56% Muslim.
- * 40% Hindus.
- * 4-12% Tribal.
- * Less than 0,02% Christians.

Pray for the Bihari

- * Pray that the power of *principalities* (the gods of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam) keeping the people in spiritual bondage will be broken. (Read Dan. 9:11-19; 10:10-14; 2 Cor. 10:4-5)
- * Pray that the churches in Patna will be *strengthened and revived* so they will reach out and become evangelists and missionaries to their own people. (Eph. 6:10-20)
- * Pray for *unity* among the churches of Bihar. Pray that the Bihar church can be the source of peace between Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists. (John 17:6-23)

- * Pray that as Bihar has been seedbed for other world religions it will in the last days become a *fountain* of Christian awakening in India and a sign to Hindus everywhere. (2 Samuel 7:18-26; Neh. 6:15-16)
- * Pray for *Christian workers* in Bihar by name, that they will not grow weary in the spiritual war they wage. (Isa. 62:1-9)
- * Pray that the religious Bihari will see that *salvation* does not come by law or works, but only through the Lord Jesus Christ and faith in him. (Gal. 2:16)
- * Pray for *new missionaries* who would bring the gospel in its fulness to the poor and needy in Bihar, as well as to the poor in other Indian states and in Bangladesh.

“After this I beheld a great multitude, which no man could number from all nations, and kindreds, and peoples and tongues.” (Revelation 7:9)