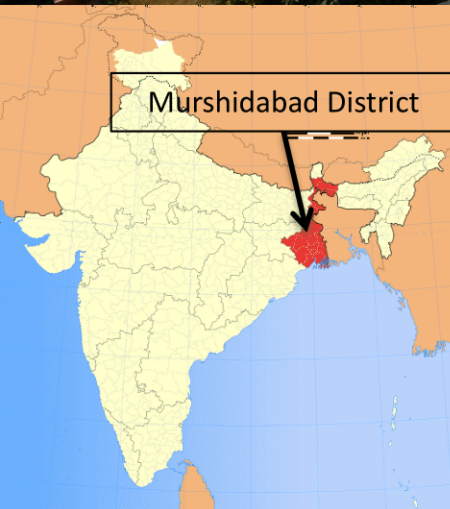


# Bengali Muslims in Murshidabad District, India



Hazratganj Palace, the "Palace of 1000" doors draws tourists.



Murshidabad district consists of village after village dotting lush agricultural land, next to the Ganges River and the Bay of Bengal. The villages surround the main city of Baharampore, where a long-term team could initially land and do business. An area rich with historical significance and long-ago British influence, now the area appears completely unengaged with no evidence of any field workers or locals intentionally engaging Muslims.

A recently discovered group of Muslim followers of Jesus in a southern village could potentially be catalyzed for a movement. A team already working five hours south could provide initial language learning and an internship to a team in preparation for long-term work in Murshidabad district.

## The Area

Located in the north part of West Bengal, the climate is sub-tropical, generally hot and humid during June and July before the intense rains, flooding and storms come August through October. November through March is fairly temperate weather with a cool breeze. Power is intermittent, often going out for hours during the day or night, but can be supplemented by battery invertors.

The small town of Murshidabad, called Lalbag, boasts a magnificent Palace and centuries-old masjids. These sites draw tourists to see the former capital of West Bengal, ruled long ago under the power of the Muslim Nawabs (a sort of King or Sultan), but rarely do tourists venture into the villages and heart of Murshidabad district. Really, Baharampore is the main working city, with village after rural village housing most of the Muslims in the district.



**Population**  
5,800,000+

**Muslim Population**  
3,800,000+

**State/Province**  
West Bengal

**Average Annual Income**  
**Per Capita: \$435**

*"There is a river whose streams make glad the city of our God, the sacred home of the Most High." Psalms 46:4.*



## Religion

The majority in Murshidabad district are Muslim by faith with 65% Muslim, 36% Hindu, and only 1/2% Christian. A people group of Iranian descent, from the Shia tradition, who speak Urdu, Persian and Bengali live around the Palace. Considered more strict, they have a reputation of keeping to themselves. Most Muslims there would consider themselves Bengali Muslims from the Sunni tradition, mixing in well with Bangla culture.

Baharampore only houses one evangelical church, sleeping for 150 years, but with about 70 families of true believers to catalyze. Several schools claim Christian names like "St. Stephen's School" but are Muslim-run and attended and only speak of a long-ago past movement where the word "mission" was synonymous with "seat of learning".

A small survey team by western field workers received extreme welcome in the mosques, madressas, with invitation into people's homes, and they left loving this place. While Hindu's are a minority and politically fight with Muslims, a recognition exists from the ground-level people that they would like to live in peace and be recognized as "human", not as Muslim or Hindu.



Boys from a village Madressa pose for photos "so you can show Americans that Muslims here are friendly and peacefull."

## Society

Murshidabad district is mainly made up of rural village life, simple, with families owning and working the land, with most speaking Bengali. One can buy most things to live, such as clothing, appliances, food and medicine in small-ish Baharampore. However, it has limited western conveniences, such as only one a/c theatre and only one 3-star hotel. The feel of a small city is quite welcoming however and feels livable. Kolkota's modern hospitals, western stores and restaurants and an international airport are a five-hour train ride south, or a six to eight-hour car ride south on one, long bumpy road.



## The Economy

Underlying an image of former wealth from the Palace rulers, and a thriving silk-weaving and trading business, lives an agricultural area designated as one of India's top 250 backward districts, currently receiving welfare funds. India labels this district the ninth most populous in India, as it groans under flooding from the Bay of Bengal, non-progressive infrastructure, with already over-populated farming as the primary option for job opportunity for its young people.

A desire by the people to speak English could allow a Language Center like Dynamic Services to do well and be accepted. The many home-based silk-weaving businesses and other crafting business could also provide a natural "in" for a distribution and jewelry-making business like Village Artisans

**Is God speaking to your heart about the Muslim people in India?** Murshidabad District offers a variety of opportunities to introduce followers of Islam to the Savior they have never known.