

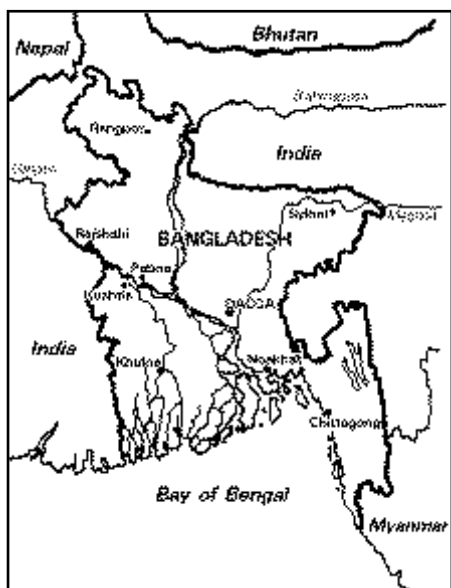


# কিশোর-কিশোরী সংঘ

## KISHORI-KISHORI SHANGHA

### THE BOYS' & GIRLS' BRIGADE IN BANGLADESH

The Boys' and Girls' Brigade was started in Bangladesh in 1978. There are now over 51 Companies with a total of 2,168 members. The organiser is Rev Ashish Mondal who works mainly in Kustia Diocese, liaising with his colleague, Rev Sudatta Boidya, in Dhaka Diocese.



A new local badge has been introduced and, although there is a variety of uniform, a simple scarf, similar to that used by JM in India, is proving practical and increasingly popular.

#### DEVELOPMENT

In Bangladesh Boys' and Girls' Brigade Companies operate under the name Kishor - Kishori Shangha which literally means the Boys' and Girls' Association. Work was initiated by Sudatta Boidya following a visit to Scotland and Matthew Bicket, a missionary of The Church of Scotland and a former officer of the 94th Glasgow, became the first organiser from 1979-83.

The work is well supported by the Church of Bangladesh and both Bishop Mondal and Bishop Baroi are committed to youth programmes within their churches.



#### ACTIVITIES

Company programmes include drama, games, bible stories, drawing and physical activities. In particular the boys greatly enjoy music but only 2 or 3 groups have a band, comprising locally made drums and a few bugles. The girls also enjoy music as well as making stuffed toys and paper flowers.

One problem faced by Companies is a shortage of materials and equipment as simple things like pencils, paper and crayons are too expensive for most to afford. Some groups, however, use low cost, local material such as coconut shells, river clay and bamboo to produce handicrafts.

Weekly meetings are held outside during the hours of daylight as most areas have either no electricity or, at best, an intermittent supply.

A feature of the Company programme are whole day rallies where boys and girls display activities and join together in sports before enjoying a picnic. These events also allow time for important health education programmes to be introduced. Simple first aid and knowledge of nutrition can be a matter of life

#### COUNTRY PROFILE

- BANGLADESH is the most densely populated country in the world with over 125 million people.
- BANGLADESH is vulnerable to natural disasters including devastating cyclones and tidal waves. In 1991, 140,000 people lost their lives and another 10 million were made homeless. 1998 saw even greater flooding resulting in more homelessness and crop damage which will result in food shortages in years to come.
- BANGLADESH's three major rivers converge into the world's largest delta. It is normal for one fifth of the country to be under water. Erosion is a major problem.
- BANGLADESH is undergoing development in some sectors. Electricity is being supplied to an increasing number of villages.
- BANGLADESH's is based on agriculture with 73% of people working on the land. Rice is the main food crop, followed by tea and cotton.
- BANGLADESH is one of the world's 10 poorest countries. 86% of its people live below the UN line of absolute poverty. Average income is only £100 per year. Some of the poorest people work on the tea estates, plucking and processing the leaves for our daily cuppa's.
- BANGLADESH is seeking to improve its rural health services and nearly 400 Health Centres have been established. Treatment is beyond the reach of the poorest and many children die each year from curable sickness such as diarrhoea. Diseases such as leprosy and TB are still present. 84% of people have access to safe water but there are problems of arsenic seepage in some areas.
- BANGLADESH has an adult literacy rate of about 26%. At present, 76% of children attend primary school but only one in five complete their primary education.



## THE FUTURE

Ashish writes, "Bangladesh is a very small country where Christians are in the minority. Most of them are very poor, but if united the poor can do many things". This statement is true when we realise that Bangladesh is officially an Islamic state and 87% of people are Muslims. Christians make up a tiny 0.4% of the population.

Not only, does the church outreach to Santal and Garu ethnic communities, who are often marginalised within society, but Kishor-Kishori Shangha actively promote the rights of children.

1998 saw the first "Children's Day" which placed great emphasis on letting young people know that "children are the future of the Church, the society and the nation."

In the north of the country there is new work starting through the Danish Santal Mission. Contacts have been established and it is hoped that greater sharing of experience, literature and training will take place in the years ahead.

or death in such poor areas. Simple agriculture techniques are important in the largely rural economy, including opportunities of improving crop production, the rearing of chickens, fish farming and tree planting.



## TRAVEL

Through support from the World Conference, a motorbike was purchased in 1997. This has greatly eased the travel situation for Ashish as he can now cover greater distances more effectively. However, many visits still involve a combination of travel by bus, river launch, rickshaw and rowing boat as motorbikes can't go everywhere! Travel plans can be severely disrupted by rain when rivers become swollen and impassable. Buses - and other vehicles and boats - frequently break down and it is always advisable to travel with plenty of time to spare.

## INVOLVEMENT

The involvement of young people in worship and other activities is always encouraged and they have no hesitation in bringing their own sense of dignity and expression to workshop. Dance - enjoyed by boys and girls - is often integrated in a unique and sensitive way.

## GROWTH

The World Conference grant, small that it is, enables the employment of Ashish Mondal to promote and develop work and programmes. Growth is so encouraging that the Church are looking at ways by which a further field officer can be employed to effectively reach the more remote areas.

