

Halbi



Population: 800,000 (8 Lakhs)

Literacy: 30% (urban), 10-15% (rural)

Scripture Status: New Testament to be published soon.

The Bastar district is sometimes described as the 'Kashmir of Chhatisgarh'. The area is rich in natural beauty, surrounded by dense forests, mountains, streams, waterfalls, natural caves, and natural parks. It is also home to some colourful tribes: the Halbas, the Bhatras and the Gonds. Among these, the Halba occupy a key position. This could be because

The Halba of Bastar revere and take special care of certain animals and plants which share their clan names. If a man accidentally kills his sacred animal (devak) the Halba perform the same rituals as for the death of a person in their household.

the friendly Halba are one of the most progressive and affluent land-owning tribal communities. Halba people maintain a good rapport with neighbouring tribes, and also take pride in their unique cultural elements such as their costumes, language, and lifestyle.

Though the Halba are primarily found in Chhattisgarh, they are also scattered through the neighbouring states of Maharashtra and Orissa. Their literacy level is very low owing to the poor infrastructure. Villages have primary schools, but these do not function regularly. Though there are some positive changes taking place in Halba society, poor health, malnutrition, infant mortality, child marriage, and child

labour are still major obstacles to significant progress. Over the past year, more than 350 people have been killed, and 50,000 have been moved into camps in the Dantewada district as a result of a Maoist uprising.

The Halba are largely Hindu, with a small percentage of Muslims and Christians. Different mission agencies are involved in evangelism, and churches are being established. God's Word is the first ever printed material in Halbi – the language of the Halba. In addition to Scripture portions, a film about Jesus, gospel tracts and audio-cassettes are also available in Halbi. However, people are hesitant to make a decision to follow the Lord, so missionaries are making inroads to the community through child-care programmes. Christians being viewed as low caste, illiteracy, and forced re-conversion are the main hindrances to the spread of the Gospel across this region.

Pray for:

1. The completion of the New Testament translation in Halbi.
2. More missionaries to go among this needy community to promote literacy, the use of Scripture in the mother tongue, church planting, and health awareness.

