

SOME INFORMATION ABOUT OUR GREAT BANGLA LANGUAGE

Bengali or Bangla (Bengali: **বাংলা**, ['baŋla]) is an eastern Indo-Aryan language. It is native to the region of eastern South Asia known as Bengal, which comprises present day Bangladesh, the Indian state of West Bengal, and parts of the Indian states of Tripura and Assam. It is written with the Bengali script. With nearly 230 million total speakers, Bengali is one of the most spoken languages (ranking sixth in the world).

Along with other Eastern Indo-Aryan languages, Bengali evolved circa 1000-1200 AD from the Magadhi Prakrit, a declined, vernacular form of the ancient Sanskrit language. It is now the primary language spoken in Bangladesh and is the second most spoken language in India.

With a long and rich literary tradition, Bengali binds together a culturally diverse region and is an important contributor to Bengali nationalism. In Bangladesh, the strong linguistic consciousness led to the Bengali Language Movement, during which on 21 February 1952, several people were killed during protests to maintain the writing of Bengali in the Bengali script and to gain its recognition as a state language of the then Dominion of Pakistan. The day has since been observed as Language Movement Day in Bangladesh, and was proclaimed the International Mother Language Day by UNESCO on 17 November 1999.

Like other Eastern Indo-Aryan languages, Bengali arose from the eastern Middle Indic languages of the Indian subcontinent. Magadhi Prakrit and Pali, the earliest recorded spoken languages in the region and the language of the Buddha, evolved into Ardhamagadhi ("Half Magadhi") in the early part of the first millennium CE. Ardhamagadhi, as with all of the Prakrits of North India, began to give way to what are called Apabhramsa languages just before the turn of the first millennium.[9] The local Apabhramsa language of the eastern subcontinent, Purvi Apabhramsa or Apabhramsa Abahatta, eventually evolved into regional dialects, which in turn formed three groups: the Bihari languages, the Oriya languages, and the Bengali-Assamese languages. Some argue that the points of divergence occurred much earlier—going back to even 500 but the language was not static: different varieties coexisted and authors often wrote in multiple dialects. For example, Magadhi Prakrit is believed to have evolved into Apabhramsa Abahatta around the 6th century which competed with Bengali for a period of time.

Usually three periods are identified in the history of Bengali:

1. Old Bengali (900/1000–1400)—texts include *Charyapada*, devotional songs; emergence of pronouns *Ami*, *tumi*, etc.; verb inflections *-ila*, *-iba*, etc. Assamese branch out in this period and Oriya just before this period (8th century-1300).
2. Middle Bengali (1400–1800)—major texts of the period include Chandida's *Srikrishnakirtan*; elision of word-final *ô* sound; spread of compound verbs; Persian influence. Some scholars further divide this period into early and late middle periods.
3. New Bengali (since 1800)—shortening of verbs and pronouns, among other changes (e.g. *tahar* → *tar* "his"/"her"; *koriyachhilô* → *korechhilo* he/she had done).

Historically closer to Pali, Bengali saw an increase in Sanskrit influence during the Middle Bengali (Chaitanya era), and also during the Bengal Renaissance. Of the modern Indo-European languages in South Asia, Bengali and Marathi maintain a largely Pali/Sanskrit vocabulary base while Hindi and others such as Punjabi, Sindhi and Gujarati are more influenced by Arabic and Persian. Until the 18th century, there was no attempt to document Bengali

grammar. The first written Bengali dictionary/grammar, *Vocabolario em idioma Bengalla, e Portuguez dividido em duas partes*, was written by the Portuguese missionary Manoel da Assumpcam between 1734 and 1742 while he was serving in Bhawal. Nathaniel Brassey Halhed, a British grammarian, wrote a modern Bengali grammar (*A Grammar of the Bengal Language* (1778)) that used Bengali types in print for the first time. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the great Bengali reformer, also wrote a "Grammar of the Bengali Language" (1832).

During this period, the *Choltibhasha* form, using simplified inflections and other changes, was emerging from *Shadhubhasha* (older form) as the form of choice for written Bengali.

Bengali was the focus, in 1951–52, of the Bengali Language Movement (*Bhasha Andolon*) in what was then East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). Although the Bengali language was spoken by the majority of Bangladesh's population, Urdu was legislated as the sole national language. On February 21, 1952, protesting students and activists were fired upon by military and police in Dhaka University and three young students and several other people were killed. Later in 1999, UNESCO decided to celebrate every 21 February as International Mother Language Day in recognition of the deaths of the three students. In a separate event on May 19, 1961, police in Silchar, India, killed eleven people who were protesting legislation that mandated the use of the Assamese language.

Bengali is native to the region of eastern South Asia known as Bengal, which comprises Bangladesh, the Indian state of West Bengal and many parts of Assam. Besides this region it is also spoken by majority of the population in the Indian state of Tripura and in the union territory Andaman and Nicobar Islands. There are also significant Bengali-speaking communities in the

- Middle East
- Europe
- North America
- South-East Asia

Official status

See also: States of India by Bengali speakers

Bengali is the national and official language of Bangladesh and one of the 23 official languages recognised by the Republic of India. It is the official language of the states of West Bengal and Tripura. It is also a major language in the Indian union territory of Andaman and Nicobar Islands. It was made an official language of Sierra Leone in order to honour the Bangladeshi peacekeeping force from the United Nations stationed there. It is also the co-official language of Assam, which has three predominantly Sylheti-speaking districts of southern Assam:

- Cachar
- Karimganj
- Hailakandi

The national anthems of both India and Bangladesh were written by the Bengali Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore. In 2009, elected representatives in both Bangladesh and West Bengal called for Bengali to be made an official language of the United Nations.

Dialects

Main article: Bengali dialects

Regional variation in spoken Bengali constitutes a dialect continuum. Linguist Suniti Kumar Chatterjee grouped these dialects into four large clusters—Rarh, Banga, Kamarupa and Varendra; but many alternative grouping schemes have also been proposed. The south-western dialects (Rarh) form the basis of standard colloquial Bengali, while Bangali is the dominant dialect group in Bangladesh. In the dialects prevalent in much of eastern and south-eastern Bengal (Barisal, Chittagong, Dhaka and Sylhet divisions of Bangladesh), many of the stops and affricates heard in West Bengal are pronounced as fricatives. [citation needed] Western palato-alveolar affricates ট [tʃ], ঠ [tʃʰ], ড় [dʒ] correspond to eastern ট্ [ts], ঠ্ [s], ড়্ [dz]~[z]. The influence of Tibeto-Burman languages on the phonology of Eastern Bengali is seen through the lack of nasalized vowels. [citation needed] Some variants of Bengali, particularly Chittagonian and Chakma Bengali, have contrastive tone; differences in the pitch of the speaker's voice can distinguish words. Rajbangsi, Kharia Thar and Mal Paharia are closely related to Western Bengali dialects, but are typically classified as separate languages. Similarly, Hajong is considered a separate language, although it shares similarities to Northern Bengali dialects.

During the standardization of Bengali in the late 19th century and early 20th century, the cultural center of Bengal was in the city of Kolkata, then Calcutta, founded by the British. What is accepted as the standard form today in both West Bengal and Bangladesh is based on the West-Central dialect of Nadia, an Indian district located on the border of Bangladesh. [33] There are cases where speakers of Standard Bengali in West Bengal will use a different word than a speaker of Standard Bengali in Bangladesh, even though both words are of native Bengali descent. For example, *nun* (salt) in the west corresponds to *lôbon* in the east.

(Reference : Bangla language in Asiatic Society of Bangladesh)