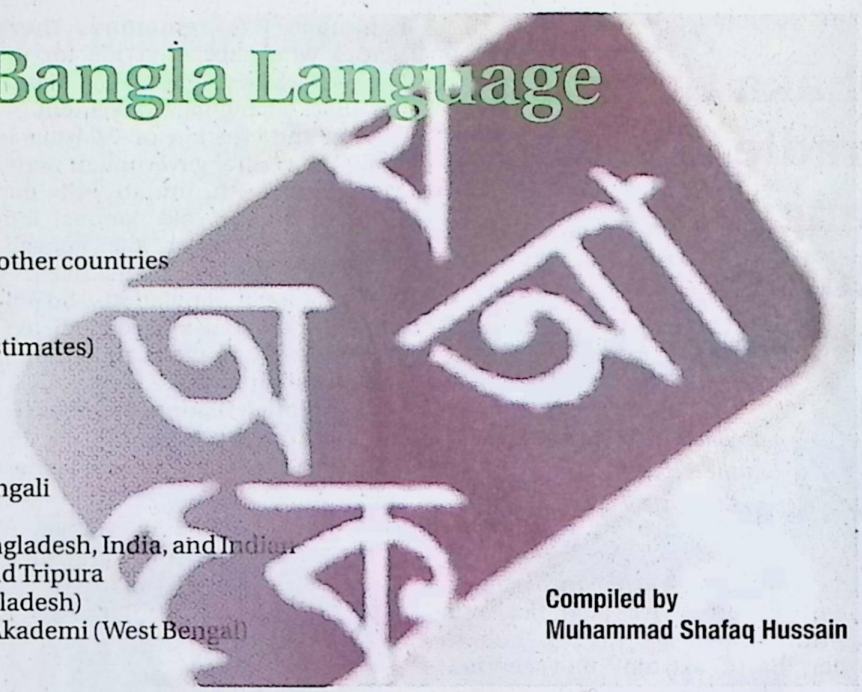
The Birth of Bangla Language



Bengali Language Status

Spoken in: Bangladesh, India and some other countries
Region: Eastern South Asia
Total speakers: 230 million (2006)
Ranking: 4-7 (native speakers; varying estimates)
Language family: Indo-European
Indo-Iranian
Indo-Aryan
Magadhi Family
Assamese Bengali & Bengali
Writing system: Bengali script
Official status: Official language of Bangladesh, India, and Indian states of West Bengal and Tripura
Regulated by: Bangla Academy (Bangladesh)
Paschimbanga Bangla Akademi (West Bengal)

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BENGALI or Bangla is an Indo-Aryan language of the eastern Indian subcontinent, evolved from Prakrit, Pâli and Sanskrit.

Bengali is native to the region of eastern South Asia known as Bengal, which comprises present day Bangladesh and the Indian state of West Bengal. With nearly 230 million native speakers, Bengali is one of the most widely spoken languages in the world (it is ranked 5th in the world). Bengali is the main language spoken in Bangladesh; in India, Bengali is ranked as the second most spoken language. Along with Assamese, it is geographically the most eastern of the Indo-European languages.

History

Like many other Eastern Indo-Aryan languages, Bengali arose from the Magadhi Apabhramsha melting pot of Middle Indic languages, around the turn of the first millennium CE. Some argue for much earlier points of divergence - going back to even 500 CE, but the language wasn't static; different varieties coexisted and authors often wrote in multiple dialects. For example, Magadhi Apabhramsha is believed to have evolved into Magadhi Abahatta around the 6th century which competed with Bengali for a period of time.

Usually 3 periods are identified in the history of Bengali:

Old Bengali (900/1000 CE1400 CE) texts include Charyapada, devotional songs; emergence of pronouns Ami, tumi, etc; verb inflections -ila, -iba, etc. Oriya and Assamese branch out in this period.

Middle Bengali (14001800 CE) - major texts of the period include Chandidas'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.

New Bengali (since 1800 CE) - 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 retain a largely Sanskrit vocabulary base while Hindi and others are more influenced by Arabic and Persian.

Until the 18th century, there was no attempt to document the grammar for Bengali. The first written Bengali dictionary *'Vocabolario em idioma Bengalla, e Portuguez dividido em duas partes'* was written by the Portuguese missionary **Manoel da Assumpcam** between 1734 and 1742. **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 Shadhu Bhasha (older form) as the form of choice for written Bengali.

Bengali was the focus, in 1951-52, of the **Language Movement** (Bhasha Andolon) in what was then East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). Although Bengali speakers were majorities in the population of Pakistan, Urdu was legislated as the sole national language. On February 21, 1952, protesting students and activists walked into military and police fire in DU and 3 young students and several others were killed. Subsequently, UNESCO has declared 21 February as **International Mother Language Day.**