

BENGALI LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

A Resource Guide for
Public School Teachers in
New York City

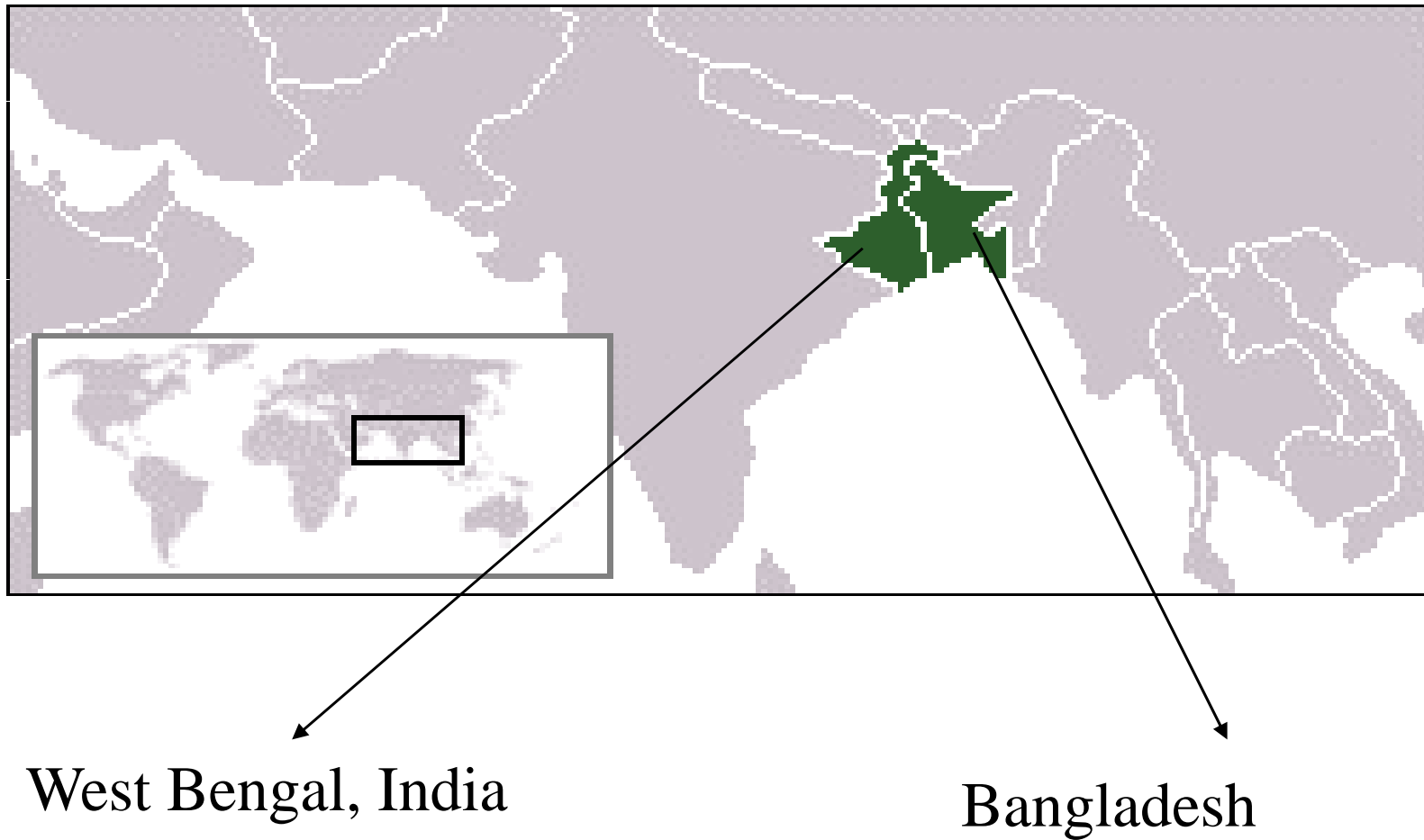
Section 1

The World of Bengali

The Bengali Language

- Bengali or *Bangla* is an Indo-Aryan language derived from Sanskrit
- It 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 popularly spoken languages in the world

The native geographic extent of Bengali



Section 2

Alphabets, Writing, and Grammar

Alphabets and Writing

This section is largely based on resources from “Omniglot”: <http://www.omniglot.com/writing/bengali.htm>

- Bengali language has a written history going back to 900 CE
- Bengali is written left-to-right, top-to-bottom of page (same as English)
- The Bengali alphabet is a syllabic alphabet in which consonants all have an inherent vowel

Alphabets and Writing (cont'd)

- Vowels can be written as independent letters, or written above, below, before or after the consonant they belong to by using a variety of diacritical marks
- When consonants occur together in clusters, special conjunct letters are used.

Alphabets and Writing (cont'd)

Bengali Consonants (starts from left, reads to right)

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----|----|---------|----|-----|--------|----|----|---------|---|-----|--------|---|----|------|
| ক | ka | [kɔ] | খ | kha | [kʰɔ] | গ | ga | [gɔ] | ঘ | gha | [gʱɔ] | ঙ | ṅa | [ŋɔ] |
| চ | ca | [tʃɔ] | ছ | cha | [tʃʰɔ] | জ | ja | [dʒɔ] | ঝ | jha | [dʒʱɔ] | ঞ | ña | [ɲɔ] |
| ট | ṭa | [ʈɔ] | ঠ | ṭha | [ʈʰɔ] | ড | ḍa | [ɖɔ] | ঢ | ḍha | [ɖʱɔ] | ণ | ṇa | [ɳɔ] |
| ত | ta | [tɔ] | থ | tha | [tʰɔ] | দ | da | [ɗɔ] | ধ | dha | [ɗʱɔ] | ন | na | [nɔ] |
| প | pa | [pɔ] | ফ | pha | [pʰɔ] | ব | ba | [bɔ] | ভ | bha | [bʱɔ] | ম | ma | [mɔ] |
| য | ya | [jɔ] | র | ra | [rɔ] | ল | la | [lɔ] | | | | | | |
| শ | śa | [ʃɔ/ʂɔ] | ষ | ṣa | [ʃɔ] | স | sa | [ʃɔ/ʂɔ] | হ | ha | [ɦɔ] | | | |
| য় | ya | [dʒɔ] | ড় | ṛa | [ɽɔ] | ঢ় | ṛa | [ɽɔ] | | | | | | |

Alphabets and Writing (cont'd)

Vowels and vowel diacritics with the 1st consonant: ক

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------|------|--------|-----|--------|-----|------|--------|------|-----|------|
| অ | আ | ই | ঈ | উ | ঊ | ঋ | এ | ঐ | ও | ঔ |
| a | ā | i | ī | u | ū | r̥ | e | ai | o | au |
| [ɔ, o] | [ɑ:] | [i, e] | [i] | [u, o] | [u] | [ri] | [e, æ] | [oj] | [o] | [ow] |
| ক | কা | কি | কী | কু | কূ | কৃ | কে | কৈ | কো | কৌ |
| ka | kā | ki | kī | ku | kū | kṛ | ke | kai | ko | kau |

Bengali Grammar

This section is largely borrowed from Bengali Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bengali_language

- Bengali nouns are not assigned gender, which leads to minimal changing of adjectives.
- However, nouns and pronouns are highly altered depending on their function in a sentence into four cases while verbs are heavily conjugated
- As a consequence, Bengali verbs do not change form depending on the gender of the nouns.

Bengali Grammar (cont'd)

- Bengali follows Subject-Object-Verb word order, although variations to this theme are common
- Bengali makes use of postpositions, as opposed to the prepositions used in English and other European languages.
- Determiners follow the noun, while numerals, adjectives, and possessors precede the noun

Literary Styles

This section is based on resources from “Omniglot”: <http://www.omniglot.com/writing/bengali.htm>

- Bengali has two literary styles: one is called *Sadhubhasa* (elegant language) and the other *Chaltibhasa* (current language) or *Cholit Bangla*.
- The former is the traditional literary style based on Middle Bengali of the sixteenth century, while the later is a 20th century creation and is modeled on the dialect spoken in the *Shantipur* region in West Bengal, India.
- The differences between the two styles are not huge and involve mainly forms of pronouns and verb conjugations

Literary Styles (cont'd)

Taken from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bengali_language

- While most writings are carried out in *Cholit Bangla*, spoken dialects exhibit a far greater variety.
- Areas of Bangladesh, particularly the Chittagong region, speak in a dialect that bears very little superficial resemblance to *Cholit Bangla*
- In spite of these variations, for Bengali speakers world-wide *Chloit Bhasha* remains the common bond for understanding and communication

Sample Text in Bengali

This is taken from “Omniglot”: <http://www.omniglot.com/writing/bengali.htm>

Sample text in standard *Cholit Bangla*

সমস্ত মানুষ স্বাধীনভাবে সমান মর্যাদা এবং অধিকার নিয়ে জন্মগ্রহণ করে ।
তাদের বিবেক এবং বুদ্ধি আছে ; সুতরাং সকলেরই একে অপরের প্রতি
ভ্রাতৃত্বসুলভ মনোভাব নিয়ে আচরণ করা উচিত ।

Transliteration

Samasta mānuṣ svādhīnbhābe samān maryādā ebaṁ adhikār niye janmagrahaṇ kare. Tñāder bibek ebaṁ buddhi āche; sutarām sakaleri eke aperer prati bhrātrīvasulabh manobhāb niye ācaraṇ karā ucit.

Translation

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

(Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights)

Section 3

Society and Culture

The Historical Significance of Bengali Language for Bengali speakers

- For Bengali speaking people worldwide, the language itself is a big part of their history. **The very birth of today's Bangladesh is intimately linked with the Bengali language or Bangla**
- In 1951, when today's Bangladesh was part of Pakistan the Urdu language was legislated as the sole national language, although Bengali speakers were more numerous in the population of the entire country
- On February 21, 1952, protesting students and activists walked into military and police fire in Dhaka University and three young students were killed. **This was the spark in the Bengali Language Movement (Bhasha Andolan)**

Birth of Bangladesh

- The language movement that started on 21st February of 1952, subsequently led to a much larger political movement against the ruling of West Pakistan (what is today's Pakistan) and eventually led to the Bangladesh Liberation War
- India played a decisive role in the war against Pakistan in support of Bangladesh Liberation War
- A new country named “Bangladesh” was born in 1971. The word Bangladesh means literally the country (desh) of the Bengali language (Bangla).

Cultural Distinctions and Norms

- One of the more significant cultural difference between the Bengali people from India and Bangladesh is religion. The Bengali people in West Bengal are predominantly followers of Hindu religion, while those in Bangladesh are predominantly followers of Islam.
- Due to cultural and religious traditions, Hindus and Muslims might use, respectively, Sanskrit-derived (SD) and Perso-Arabic (PA) words.
- Hence, even in Standard Bengali, vocabulary items often divide along the split between the Muslim populace (mostly in Bangladesh) and the Hindu populace (mostly in India)

Cultural Variations in Language

- Some of the common cultural variations in Bengali spoken by Bangladeshis and Indians are given below:
- **hello:** *nômoshkar* (Sanskrit) for Hindus, while *assalamualaikum* or *slamalikum* (Arabic) for Muslims. Similarly, the departing **goodbye** "*Khoda hafez*" (God Bless you), is distinctive of Bangladesh
- **invitation:** *nimontron* (Sanskrit) for Hindus; while *daoat* (Arabic) for Muslims
- **water :** *jol* (Sanskrit-derived) for Hindus but *pani* (Persian) for Muslims
- The way of addressing family members is somewhat different also: "*ma*" (**mother**), "*baba*" (**father**) among Bengalis in India, while "*amma*" (mother) and "*abba*" (father) are used in Bangladesh. **Paternal uncle** is *kaka* for Hindus; while *chacha* for Muslims

A People of Traditions and Heritage

- Despite these differences, the Bengali speaking people of India, Bangladesh and the broader Diaspora share a deep-rooted admiration for their linguistic and cultural heritage.
- Indeed, Bangladeshi Americans are closely associated with the Indian American community, particularly with those of Bengali Indian descent
- The community as a whole is renowned for its hospitality, its political awareness and love for discussions (*adda*) and civic engagement, and for its demonstrated admiration for poetry (both reading and writing!)
- Among rest of South Asians, Bengalis are fondly mentioned for their love for fish and rice

Useful Words and Phrases

Weekday Names:

- Sunday - *Rabibaar*
- Monday - *Shombaar*
- Tuesday - *Mongolbaar*
- Wednesday - *Budhbaar*
- Thursday - *Brihospotibaar*
- Friday - *Shukrobaar*
- Saturday - *Shonibaar*

Useful Words and Phrases (cont'd)

- A 24 hour day is divided into five sections:
 - Morning - Sakaal
 - Noon - Dupur
 - Afternoon - Bikaal
 - Evening - Sandhya
 - Night - Ratri
- There is no equivalent term for AM/PM in Bangla.

Section 4

Country Profiles

Bangladesh

Official Name: People's Republic of Bangladesh

National Flag:



Capital: Dhaka

Independence Day: 26 March, 1971

Currency: Taka (BDT)

Bangladesh is a country bordering the Bay of Bengal, between Myanmar and India, and size-wise it is slightly smaller than Iowa



Bangladesh – Quick Facts

Based upon CIA Factbook <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bg.html>

- **Population:** 150 million (2007)
- **Urban Population:** 26%
- **Major Ethnic and Linguistic Groups:** Bengali - 98%
- **Religions:** Muslim - 83%; Hindu - 16%
- **Population Growth Rate:** 2.06%
- **Life Expectancy:** 61.3 years
- **Infant Mortality:** 66 per 1,000 live births
- **Under Five Mortality:** 77 per 1,000 live births
- **Maternal Mortality Rate:** 400 per 100,000 live births
- **GNP Per Capita:** \$370
- **Population below Poverty Line:** 45% (2004 est.)
- **Adult Literacy:** Males: 54% Females: 32%
- **Population With Access to Drinking Water:** 97%


Bangladesh – also to note

- Most of Bangladesh is situated on deltas of large rivers and is prone to severe floods in monsoons
- Key exports from Bangladesh are garments, jute and jute goods, leather, frozen fish and seafood
- There is also an extensive export of Bangladeshi labor to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE, Oman, Qatar, and Malaysia
- Both Soccer and Cricket are very popular sports in Bangladesh

Education System in Bangladesh

- The education system is divided into 4 levels-- Primary (from grades 1 to 5), Secondary (from grades 6 to 10), Higher Secondary (from grades 11 to 12) and tertiary.
- Alongside national educating system in Bengali, English medium education is also provided by some private enterprises. They offer 'A' level and 'O' level courses.
- There are Non-Governmental Schools (NGO) and Non-Formal Education Centers (NFE) run by NGO-s; many of these are funded by the government. The largest NFE program is the much reputed BRAC program. These programs cater to the socio-economically disadvantaged population not served by the government schools. But rarely they extend beyond the Primary Level
- There is also a Madrasa system which emphasizes on Arabic medium Islam-based education.

India

- **Official name:** Republic of India
- **National Flag**
The national flag of India is a horizontal tricolor consisting of three equal bands of saffron, white, and green, with a navy blue wheel in the center of the white band.
- **Capital:** New Delhi
- **Independence Day:** August 15, 1947
- **Currency:** Indian Rupee (INR)

India is world's largest democracy



India Quick Facts

- **Population:** 1.05 billion
- **Urban Population:** 28%
- **Major Religions:** Hindu 81%, Muslim 12%, Christian 2%, Sikh 2%
- **Population Growth Rate:** 1.47%
- **Life Expectancy:** 63.6 years
- **Infant Mortality:** 60 per 1,000 live births
- **Under Five Mortality:** 93 per 1,000 live births
- **Maternal Mortality Rate:** 540 per 100,000 live births
- **GNP Per Capita:** \$460
- **Population below poverty line:** 25%
- **Adult Literacy:** Males 70%, Females 48%
- **Population With Access to Safe Drinking Water:** 84%
- **Main exports:** Agricultural products, textile goods, gems, software services and technology, engineering goods, chemicals, leather products

India – also to note

- With 1.1 Billion people and roughly third the territory of the US, India, the world's largest democracy and second most populous country has emerged as a major power
- However, communal, caste and regional tensions continue to haunt Indian politics, sometimes threatening its democratic and secular ethos
- India is a source, destination, and transit country for men, women, and children trafficked for the purposes of forced or bonded labor and commercial sexual exploitation
- Kolkata, formerly Calcutta is the capital of the Indian state of West Bengal that borders with Bangladesh.
- With 13.2 million people, Kolkata is India's second most populous city (after Mumbai) – and remains the center for Bengali culture in India

Education System in India

This synopsis is borrowed from Wikipedia and checked against UNESCO and World Bank statistics

- There are broadly four stages of school education in India, namely primary, upper primary, secondary and higher secondary (or high school). Overall, schooling lasts 12 years, following the "10+2 pattern". However, there are considerable differences between the various states of the federation
- Primary school includes children of ages six to eleven, organized into classes one through five. Upper Primary and Secondary school pupils aged eleven through fifteen are organized into classes six through ten, and higher secondary school students ages sixteen through seventeen are enrolled in classes eleven through twelve.
- In 2002/2003, an estimated 82% of children in the age group of 6-14 were enrolled in school. The Government of India aims to increase this to 100% by the end of the decade. To achieve this the Government launched a flagship program: Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
- While the education system has undoubtedly undergone significant progress, a lot still needs to be done to enhance the learning of children from scheduled caste (or Dalit) families, scheduled tribes and religious minorities.
- Girls' enrollment continues to lag behind that of boys. India also has world's highest absolute number of child laborers (estimated 40 millions)
- While India boasts some of the world's most renowned universities (IIT or Indian Institute of Technology foremost among them), the basic education system in India highly unequal and inequitable

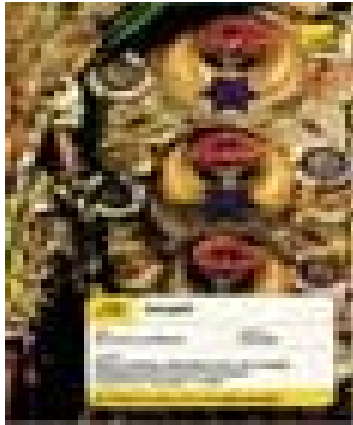
Section 5

Additional Information and Resources

Resources for Teachers

- Asia in the Curriculum is a project of Columbia University's Asia for Educators project. Its bulletin-board format allows educators and resource providers alike to share information on curriculum, pedagogy, and new resources (such as virtual museum exhibitions).
- <http://www.asiainthecurriculum.org>

Resources for Language Training

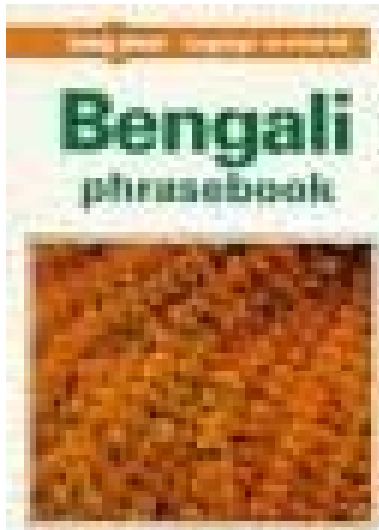


Teach Yourself Bengali: Complete Course

by William Radice. An introduction to spoken and written Bengali. Includes a course book containing dialogues, grammatical notes, exercises and cultural information, together CD-s with recordings of some of the dialogues and exercises.

Resources for Language Training

(cont'd)



Lonely Planet Bengali Phrasebook

by Bimal Maity a handy little phrasebook with Bengali script and English transcription throughout.

Relevant Information Resources

BBC Worldservice in Bengali

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/bengali/>

Online Bengali lessons

<http://www.bangla-online.info>

http://www.virtualbangladesh.com/bengali_index.html

Online Bengali Dictionaries

<http://www.virtualbangladesh.com/dictionary.html>

<http://dsal.uchicago.edu/dictionaries/biswas-bengali/>

Relevant Information Resources (cont'd)

- Wikipedia
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bengali_language
- Viswayan - information about Bengali language, literature, drama, video, etc.
<http://www.viswayan.com/>
- *Samsad Bengali-English dictionary*. 3rd ed. Calcutta, Sahitya Samsad, 2000. Copyright © 2000 by Shishu Sahitya Samsad
<http://dsal.uchicago.edu/dictionaries/biswas-bengali/>

Accessing Bengali Literature

The **Library of Congress New Delhi Office** maintains a South Asian Literary Recording Project website . The site hosts biographical information of a group of leading Bengali authors, both from India and Bangladesh, and audio recordings of their selected works

<http://www.loc.gov/acq/ovop/delhi/salrp/bengali.html>

Useful Resources in New York

- Consulate General of India in New York
<http://www.indiacgny.org/>
- Consulate General of Bangladesh in New York
<http://www.bdcgny.org/>
- Asia Society: <http://www.asiasociety.org/>
- Southern Asian Institute at Columbia University
<http://www.sipa.columbia.edu/REGIONAL/SAI/index.html>
- South Asian Youth Action <http://www.saya.org/>

Section 6

Did You Know?

Did you Know?

- Bengali was made an official language of Sierra Leone in 2002 in order to honor the Bangladeshi peacekeeping force from the United Nations stationed there
- The 2007 Nobel Peace Prize winner was Dr. Mohammed Yunus from Bangladesh – for his pioneering work in microfinance
- One of world's most renowned Nobel Laureate Economists is Dr. Amartya Sen, a Bengali Indian citizen whose book Development as Freedom has proven a paradigm shift in thinking about human development

Or, Did you know?

- UNESCO has declared 21 February, the official mark of the Bengali Language Movement in Bangladesh in 1952, as the International Mother Language Day.
- The first Asian to win a Noble Prize was the Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore in 1913.
- The national anthems of both India and Bangladesh are written in Bengali and by the same poet- Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore