

# LEARN BENGALI

at  
Columbia



Bangladesh & West Bengal, i.e., Bengal (under British India.)

Bengali or Bangla, the 7th largest language of the world, is spoken by over 265 million speakers of the South East Asian nation of Bangladesh, its neighboring Eastern Indian states of West Bengal, Tripura, parts of Assam, the Andaman & Nicobar Islands, and the highly vibrant diasporas in New Delhi, London, Michigan, and New York City. Bengali belongs to the Indo-Aryan sub-group of the Indo-Iranian branch of the Indo-European family of languages. It is an SVO (Subject x Verb x Object 'I you love.') language, which is written from left to right, like English. Bengali developed as a distinct language around the 10<sup>th</sup> century from the Middle Indo-Aryan dialect of Magadhi Prakrit, which had developed from a dialect or a group of dialects that were close, but not identical, to Vedic and Classical Sanskrit. The Bengali alphabet is derived from the ancient Indian Brahmi script, which was once closely related to the Devanagari script.

In English, the term *Bengali* refers to both the language and its native speakers; but, the native speakers of Bengali call the language *Bangla* and themselves *Bangalii*.

The geographical area called Bangladesh today and the Indian state of West Bengal were one state under British India, i. e. until 1947, and was called Bengal, with its eastern half

referred to as *East Bengal* and the western half as *West Bengal*. While the undivided Bengal's capital Kolkata (previously known as Calcutta) was the capital of British India for over one and a half centuries starting in 1773, the other important city of Bengal, Dhaka, rose to prominence as the provincial capital of East Bengal and commercial center of the Mughal Empire in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

As is well known, the eastern half of Bengal or East Bengal came to be known as *East Pakistan* in 1947, when India was partitioned. But, in 1971, East Pakistan seceded from Pakistan through a liberation war, emerging as a secular democratic nation called *Bangladesh*. Once known as a poor nation often devastated by natural calamities of cyclones and tornados, Bangladesh today is considered a model for miraculous economic growth, political & economic empowerment of women, women's educational progress, natural calamity & disaster control, child mortality prevention., etc.

Bengali literature, which earned international recognition when Rabindranath Tagore was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1913, can certainly boast of being the richest and most prolific in the Indian subcontinent and perhaps in South East Asia. Bengal's (Bangladesh and West Bengal) long, varied, and rich socio-political and cultural history makes it a treasure trove for researchers interested in development economics, micro-credit, women's economic & political empowerment, women's educational development, natural calamity control, child mortality control, effects of climate change, ancient & modern tea trade, garment industry, subaltern studies, colonial & post-colonial literature, comparative literature, Indic studies, ethnomusicology, etc.

Nobel Laureates Tagore(Literature), Amartya Sen (Economics), Mohammed Yunus (Peace but famous for Micro-credit) & Abhijit Banerjee (Economics), Lalan Fakir (Mystic bard), Kazi Nazrul Islam (National Poet of Bangladesh), Pundit Ravi Shankar (Music), Satyajit Ray (Film Director who won the Oscar for his life time achievements), Raja Ram Mohan Roy (Social reformer), Vidyasagar (Social Reformer), Begum Rokeya (Social Reformer, particularly for the Muslim women), Bose (Scientist), Swami Vivekananda (Mystic & Religious Thinker), Ramakrishna Paramahansa (Mystic & Religious Thinker), Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose (Revolutionary–Quit India Movement), Sri Aurobindo (Revolutionary – Quit India Movement who turned Mystic), and Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (Father of the nation of Bangladesh) are among the most famous Bengalis.

The Bengalis of Bangladesh had to sacrifice their lives on the streets of Dhaka on February 21, 1952 in order to establish Bengali as one of the official languages of Pakistan. February 21 has been recognized by the UNESCO as the International Mother Language Day.

### ***Why take Bengali?***

You can take Bengali:

- to fulfill your language requirement
- for academic research in one of the many areas listed above

- to learn your heritage language & culture
- if you intend to become a South Asia expert

### ***What classes are offered?***

Bengali Elementary -I (Fall semester only)  
 Bengali Elementary -II (Spring Semester only)  
 Bengali Intermediate -I (Fall semester only)  
 Bengali Intermediate -II (Spring semester only)  
 Advanced Bengali (Available – Remote Learning only)  
 A Survey of Bengali Literature (Offered occasionally)

### ***Textbooks & Dictionaries:***

A course packet that includes carefully graded materials culled from various classic textbooks used in Bangladesh and West Bengal, India, as well as other sources, is provided by the instructor.

### ***Recommended Materials:***

William Radiche (2010) *Complete Bengali*  
 Hanne-Ruth Thompson (2006) *Everyday Essential Bengali*  
 Sailendra Biswas (Latest available edition) *Samsad Bangla Abhidhan* (dictionary)

### ***Who is the Instructor?***

Dwijen Bhattacharya, Ph. D.  
*A Linguist and an LTI & ACTFL Certified Bengali Language Tester*  
[db174@columbia.edu](mailto:db174@columbia.edu)  
 Phone: 646. 256. 8006



The Language Martyrs' Monument in Dhaka, Bangladesh



**Victoria Memorial, Kolkata, India**



Tagore, Nobel Laureate for Literature



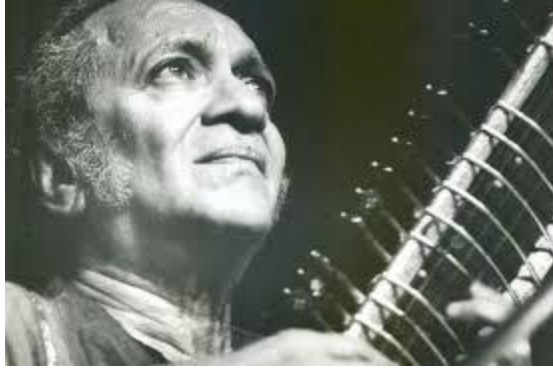
Lalan Fakir ( A mystic)



**Kazi Nazrul Islam, the National Poet of Bangladesh**



Bangabondhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman,  
Father of the Nation of Bangladesh



Pundit Ravi Shankar, Musician



**Satyajit Ray, Film Director**