

INTRODUCTION

ABOUT THE COURSE

The Purpose of the Course

The exciting *okm* insert for February 1993 encouraged us to work hard in helping our Asian neighbours.

The ratio of publishers to population in Bangladesh and our language difficulties in the ministry in the U.K. both emphasize the scale of the urgent need for more Bengali-speaking witnesses. (Romans 10:13,14) A huge number of Bengali households in the U.K. have great difficulty in speaking any English. Indeed, it is said that they are the *largest* non-English speaking minority in the U.K.

This material is designed to help you deal with the complex challenges in this part of our service, and especially to teach you a form of Bengali suitable for this purpose.

Hopefully, you will be able to make good progress by using this course and offer your welcome service.

The Layout of the Course

If you follow through the preceding List of Contents, you will see set out there the steps in which the course provides some useful background information before starting to teach the language in earnest.

Introduction

The "**Introduction**" proceeds to describe the general background of the Bengali-speaking people: their **lands**, **history**, **religions** and forms of **language**. This includes the fact that most Bengali-speaking people you will meet in the U.K. are Muslims who speak a separate dialect called Sylheti. The sections on "**Witnessing**" and "**Ministry Experiences**" consider ways of dealing with the religions of Bengali people.

The detailed study of the language begins with "**Technique for Learning a Foreign Language**", giving hints on how to make it easier and more enjoyable.

Script

"**The Bengali Alphabet**" covers the logical ordering of Bengali script characters, and exercises to help you practice gradually their pronunciation and writing. "**Bengali Sounds Work Charts**" provide progressive practice in learning the ways in which consonants are combined with vowels to form syllables. "**Bengali Script Conjuncts**" sets out in detail the many ways to combine consonants into conjuncts, and how these can vary further when associated with a vowel.

Grammar Course

"**Study 1**", "**Study 2**", and so on is a sequence of sessions teaching the vocabulary and grammar in progressive steps up to Study 58. Their coverage is indicated in the **List of Contents** above.

Language Reference

There are several aids regarding the review of the languages course.

After the grammar course, a "**Main Vocabulary**" provides a wide range of words that are most likely to be in demand while in the ministry or during meetings. This vocabulary is available separately. "**Answers to Exercises**" enables students to check their own work, if necessary. "**Review Sheets 1, 2, and 3**" and "**Answers to Review Questions**" enable students regularly and quickly to review and refresh their proficiency. The student should run back over this condensed set of questions repeatedly as they touch on all the main features of the progressive language study programme.

Ministry Reference

Various aids for the ministry follow the "language" learning section.

"**The Bible Books**" is a sheet written in Bengali and Romanized phonetic script, which provides an index of books and page numbers for use with the only Bengali translation of the whole Bible available as at the start of 1996. This was the Calcutta (Serampore) translation by William Cary from nearly 200 years ago. This is identified as:

Pavitra Baaibel – Puraatan o Nuutan Niyam published by The Bangladesh Bible Society, Dhaka

Since then other translations have become available, including: and

“Holy Bible – Bangla Common Language Version ©2000 The Bangladesh Bible Society, Dhaka

“Holy Bible – Bengali Easy-to-Read Version” ©2005 World Bible Translation Center Inc.

Another translation known as the Mussalmaani Bible was published about 100 years ago. This is in a Romanized form of the Bengali

spoken by Muslims in Calcutta and environs at that time.

"Scripture Extracts" provides a selection of frequently used scriptures or ones which especially help to form a key structure when summarizing the events and directions to be learned in the Bible.

"Scripture Analyses" are related to the scripture extracts. They use mini-vocabularies and questions to help students to become well-acquainted with key scriptures used in the ministry when speaking to Bengali people.

Other ministry aids include **"Ministry Phrases"**, with interlinear versions of **"Good News For All Nations"** and various **"Presentations"** such as the tracts "Who Really Rules the World?" and "Will This World Survive?". Further progress is encouraged through comparison of English and Bengali copies of "You Can Live Forever...", the "Knowledge..." book, and other more recent publications.

What Form of Bengali This Course Covers, and Why

Most Bengalis in the U.K. are from the Sylhet region of Bangladesh. They speak their own Sylheti dialect which, especially in colloquial usage, is significantly different from the central form of Bengali.

This course will only teach central Bengali. This is the main, official form of Bengali, as used by the Governments of Bangladesh and of the West Bengal State of India. It is also used in the U.K. in official notices by local authorities and in newspapers, broadcasting, etc. Moreover, the Bible, Watch Tower publications and meetings of Jehovah's Witnesses are not available in any other form of Bengali.

The Sylheti dialect is difficult to understand for people who only speak the central form of Bengali. Conversely, however, a Sylheti speaker finds that he *has* to be able to understand central Bengali to a reasonable extent, for the reasons just stated.

On the assumption that you will currently only be learning central Bengali or be learning Sylheti,

The advantages of learning central Bengali are:-

- Ability to use the Bible in Bengali;
- Ability to use the Watch Tower publications in Bengali;
- Communicate with our Bengali brothers and sisters;
- Ability to be understood by all Bengali-speakers;
- Basis for comprehending all forms of Bengali.

Central Bengali will be covered in its two styles:-

- the full, "saadhu" or literary style;
- and the shortened "chalito" (sounds like *chollito*) colloquial style.

These are referred to herein in English as “Sadhu Style” and “Chalito Style”.

Arrangements For Learning To Speak Bengali In The U.K.

Most books and evening classes available "outside" are for learning central Bengali rather than Sylheti. A few brothers are starting to learn Bengali through evening classes. Some are using this Bengali language course written especially for witnesses.

Our brothers and sisters can progress to a useful standard in learning Bengali for the ministry with the help of Jehovah's spirit, purposeful effort and practice in the field.

We can hope that the provision of follow-up requests, increasing ability, wider organisation and liaison with the dispersed calls and studies may soon be able to be boosted further by unified Bengali-language arrangements.

There is much appreciation for your voluntary response to this great need in locating and helping people in our area who need this special help.

Again, this course does *not* deal with the Sylheti dialect, only with central Bengali.

Further Assistance

If you need any points in the course clarified, please seek assistance from the course conductor.

A progressive phrasebook for the ministry along with a cassette tape is also available.

Student: _____

Teaching Truth in Bengali

BACKGROUND

Geography of Bengal

River Bhramaputra
= *River Jamuna*

• Sylhet

River
Meghna

Dhaka

•

River Ganges
River Padma

River
Hooghly

•

Calcutta

Barisal •

Chittagong •

The Bay of Bengal

WEST BENGAL

(Population in 1993, say
80 million)

BANGLADESH

(Population in 1993, say
120 million)

Can you pencil in the national boundaries and rivers?

The History of Bengal

Bengal has a long record of culture and language, the inhabitants are proud of this. Bengal was a part of British India from the end of the 18th century. Bengal was very powerful with its capital as Calcutta. Indian independence from Britain was gained in 1947. West Bengal was to become part of India, East Bengal was to become part of Pakistan.

Because of religion and violent turmoil, most Hindus who were living in the area of Pakistan tried fleeing from Pakistan to India; similarly, many Muslims fled from India to Pakistan. This led to chaos and to tremendous bloodshed. Gradually the people of East Pakistan grew disgruntled with their fellow Muslims of West Pakistan, where the capital was and whose language of Urdu was increasingly imposed everywhere. There were economic issues, too. The use of Urdu in East Pakistan became hated. In 1971 Muslims slaughtered Muslims in a war for independence. This also involved Indian forces. East Pakistan then became Bangladesh, the land of Bengal with its capital at Dhaka, as it is known today.

The People and Their Religions

The people of West Bengal and Bangladesh speak various forms of Bengali language, as described later. In West Bengal most people are Hindus, a large minority are Muslims and a small minority are Buddhists and "Christians". Calcutta is very cosmopolitan and the people have various other languages and religions. Most people in Bangladesh are Muslims. Around 1990 a 15% minority were mainly Hindus and Buddhists, but a tiny number were "Christians".

The Congregations in Bengal

Most of the Bengali people in the U.K. are Bangladeshis from the Sylhet area. Many speak very little English, read neither English nor Bengali, and are restricted in their range of Bengali.

Many congregations are busy in West Bengal. In Bangladesh congregations are located in Dhaka and Chittagong. These are made up almost entirely of former Baptists and former Catholics. The meetings there are held in Bengali now, but previously they were in English.

LANGUAGE CONTEXT

Problems With Dialects and Illiteracy

Most Bengalis in the U.K. are Muslims from the Sylhet district of Bangladesh. Many of these speak little or no English, but are also illiterate in Bengali and have as their spoken language the Sylheti dialect. (This is as remote from central Bengali as Geordie or Scottish appear to be from the Queen's English.) There are at least four forms of what is loosely called "Bengali".

The society's publications in Bengali and the Bible that we use generally, are in the central form which ranges from the full classical Bengali, "Sadhu Style" (1), as was well-established a hundred years ago, through to a common shortened form of this used colloquially called "Chalito Style" (2), as is used today in mainly Hindu West Bengal.

Our brothers in Bangladesh are in the central capital, Dhaka, and in the port of Chittagong. They speak a slightly different style (3) of common "Chalito Style" Bengali which has grown away from the "Chalito Style" still used West Bengal. This is largely because their environment has become increasingly Islamic and Arabicised, since the land became independent from India. However, our brothers come from Baptist or Catholic families who are well acquainted with the same old classical Bengali Bible referred to above. These progressed spiritually using the Bengali Truth book, although they found its wording difficult at times; they sometimes found the same was true with the language of the Watchtower study articles, because of the divergence of language that is taking place. However, since the mid 1990s the translation style has been transformed and become much more 'every-day' Dhaka/Calcutta language.

The Sylhet District (like other districts to some extent) of Bangladesh has its own dialect (4) which is significantly different from the other forms of Bengali just mentioned.

To reiterate the content of "*What Form of Bengali This Course Covers, and Why*", as given earlier, this course teaches you central Bengali, which most Bengali-speaking people will be able to understand sufficiently, with the help of your Bible and publications. However, you will continue to have difficulty in understanding some of a person's comments, if he is speaking the Sylheti dialect quickly.