

## Arabic–Bengali Linguistic Relations in Post-1947 India: A Historical and Sociolinguistic Study

Dr. Joynul Hoque

Asstt. Prof

Deptt. Of Arabic, Patharkandi College

### Abstract

*The relationship between Arabic and Bengali is rooted in centuries of cultural, religious, and intellectual interaction. Although Arabic has never functioned as a native spoken language in Bengal, it has significantly enriched Bengali through the introduction of loanwords, religious terminology, literary expressions, and educational traditions. Following the independence of India in 1947, Arabic continued to influence Bengali, particularly through Islamic educational institutions, universities, translation activities, religious organizations, and increasing global connections with the Arab world. The migration of Indian workers to Gulf countries, the expansion of Arabic language education in higher educational institutions, and the growing availability of Arabic religious and literary texts in Bengali translation have further strengthened this linguistic relationship.*

*This paper explores the historical development and sociolinguistic dimensions of Arabic–Bengali linguistic relations in post-1947 India. It examines the major domains of Arabic influence, including vocabulary, education, religion, literature, media, and cultural communication. The study also discusses the challenges facing Arabic language studies in contemporary India and highlights opportunities for strengthening Arabic–Bengali linguistic and cultural cooperation. By analysing historical evidence and contemporary developments, the paper demonstrates that Arabic continues to play an important role in enriching the Bengali language and shaping the linguistic identity of many Bengali-speaking communities.*

**Keywords:** Arabic Language, Bengali Language, Language Contact, Loanwords, Sociolinguistics, Post-1947 India, Translation Studies, Arabic Education.

### 1. Introduction

Language contact has always been one of the most significant factors in the evolution of human languages. Whenever communities interact through trade, religion, education, migration, or cultural exchange, their languages influence one another. Bengali, one of the world's major languages, has developed through continuous interaction with several languages, including Sanskrit, Pali, Persian, Arabic, Portuguese, and English. Among these, Arabic occupies a unique position because its influence has been closely associated with the spread of Islam, religious scholarship, and intellectual traditions across the Indian subcontinent.

The interaction between Arabic and Bengali began long before India's independence through Arab merchants, Sufi saints, Islamic scholars, and educational institutions. However, the period after 1947 introduced new social, political, and educational circumstances that reshaped this relationship. The continuation of traditional madrasas, the establishment and expansion of Arabic departments in

|    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 10 | ISSN2277-3630(online), Published by International Journal of Social Sciences & Interdisciplinary Research., under Volume: 15 Issue:06 in July-2026<br><a href="https://www.gejournal.net/index.php/IJSSIR">https://www.gejournal.net/index.php/IJSSIR</a>                              |
|    | Copyright (c) 2026 Author (s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of Creative Commons Attribution License(CCBY). To view a copy of this license, visit <a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/">https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/</a> |

universities and colleges, and the increasing publication of Arabic texts translated into Bengali contributed to maintaining the relevance of Arabic in independent India.

The influence of Arabic is most visible in Bengali religious vocabulary, personal names, greetings, moral concepts, and expressions used in everyday communication, especially among Bengali-speaking Muslims. Words such as iman (faith), dua (supplication), zakat (obligatory charity), halal (lawful), and haram (unlawful) have become familiar components of Bengali speech and writing. In addition, Arabic expressions frequently appear in Bengali newspapers, Islamic literature, sermons, and digital media.

Globalization has further strengthened Arabic–Bengali linguistic interaction. The migration of thousands of Bengali-speaking workers to Gulf countries has increased exposure to spoken Arabic and encouraged the use of Arabic vocabulary in daily life. Modern communication technologies, online Islamic education, and digital translation platforms have also expanded access to Arabic learning among Bengali speakers.

Against this background, the present study investigates the historical continuity and contemporary significance of Arabic–Bengali linguistic relations in post-1947 India. It seeks to identify the major channels through which Arabic has influenced Bengali and to examine the sociolinguistic importance of this interaction in modern Indian society. The findings are expected to contribute to the fields of contact linguistics, translation studies, Arabic language education, and South Asian language studies.

## 2. Historical Background

The relationship between the Arabic and Bengali languages has evolved over several centuries through religious, commercial, educational, and cultural interactions. Although Arabic was never a vernacular language in Bengal, its influence became deeply rooted because of the arrival of Arab traders, the spread of Islam, and the establishment of Islamic educational institutions. Understanding this historical background is essential for analysing the nature of Arabic–Bengali linguistic relations in post-1947 India.

Historical evidence suggests that Arab merchants visited the coastal regions of Bengal as early as the eighth century CE. Their primary objective was trade, particularly in spices, textiles, and other valuable commodities. Along with commercial activities, these merchants introduced elements of Arab culture and the Arabic language. While their linguistic influence during this period remained limited, these early contacts laid the foundation for future cultural and religious exchanges.

A more significant phase of Arabic influence began with the spread of Islam in Bengal between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries. Sufi saints, Islamic scholars, and missionaries played a crucial role in introducing Islamic teachings to the local population. Since the Qur'an and other primary Islamic texts are written in Arabic, learning the language became an important part of religious education. Although Bengali remained the language of everyday communication, Arabic gained prestige as the language of religion, scholarship, and intellectual life. As a result, many Arabic religious terms gradually entered Bengali vocabulary and became widely accepted among Bengali-speaking Muslims.

During the Sultanate and Mughal periods, Persian served as the official language of administration, while Arabic remained the principal language of Islamic theology, jurisprudence, and higher religious learning. This multilingual environment encouraged the incorporation of numerous Arabic words into Bengali, either directly or through Persian. Many of these words eventually became an integral part of everyday Bengali and continue to be used irrespective of educational background.

Following the independence of India in 1947, the socio-political environment changed considerably. Despite these changes, Arabic retained its importance within Muslim educational and religious institutions. Madrasas continued to teach Arabic as a core subject, while several universities and colleges established or expanded departments of Arabic language and literature. These institutions not only preserved classical Arabic learning but also encouraged research, translation, and comparative linguistic studies involving Arabic and Bengali.

The latter half of the twentieth century witnessed increasing publication of Bengali translations of the Qur'an, Hadith, and classical Arabic literature. These translations made Arabic knowledge more accessible to Bengali readers and enriched Bengali vocabulary with additional Arabic expressions and concepts. Religious magazines, newspapers, and publishing houses also contributed to familiarising Bengali speakers with Arabic terminology.

In recent decades, globalization has added a new dimension to Arabic–Bengali linguistic relations. Employment opportunities in Gulf countries have encouraged many Bengali-speaking Indians to acquire practical knowledge of Arabic. Digital media, satellite television, online learning platforms, and social networking sites have further increased exposure to Arabic language and culture. Consequently, the interaction between Arabic and Bengali has expanded beyond traditional religious settings into education, communication, and everyday social life.

Thus, the historical development of Arabic-Bengali linguistic relations reflects a continuous process of cultural adaptation and linguistic exchange. While the origins of this relationship lie in medieval history, its relevance has been sustained and transformed in post-1947 India through educational institutions, translation activities, migration, and global communication. This historical continuity provides the foundation for understanding the contemporary influence of Arabic on the Bengali language.

### **3. Arabic Influence on the Bengali Language in Post-1947 India**

Since India's independence in 1947, Arabic has continued to influence the Bengali language through education, religion, literature, media, and globalization. Although the number of native Arabic speakers in India is very small, Arabic remains an important language because of its religious significance and its role in international communication. The influence of Arabic on Bengali is most visible in vocabulary, expressions, naming practices, and translation activities.

One of the most significant areas of influence is religious vocabulary. Bengali-speaking Muslims regularly use numerous Arabic words in both spoken and written communication. Terms such as Allah (God), Iman (faith), Islam, Salah (prayer), Sawm (fasting), Zakat (obligatory charity), Hajj (Pilgrimage), Dua (supplication), Halal (lawful), Haram (unlawful), Akhirah (the Hereafter), and Rahmah (mercy) have become an inseparable part of Bengali religious discourse. These words are

often retained in their original Arabic form because they carry specific theological meanings that cannot always be translated accurately into Bengali.

Arabic has also contributed significantly to Bengali literature and translation. Since 1947, numerous Bengali translations of the Qur'an, Hadith, biographies of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and classical Arabic literary works have been published in India. These translations have made Arabic knowledge accessible to a wider Bengali readership and have introduced many Arabic expressions into modern Bengali writing. Contemporary translators often preserve key Arabic terms while providing explanations in Bengali, thereby enriching the language without losing the original meaning.

Another important source of influence is Arabic language education. Traditional madrasas continue to teach Arabic grammar, literature, and Islamic sciences, while universities and colleges across India—including institutions in West Bengal and Assam—offer undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctoral programmes in Arabic. Students studying Arabic frequently use Arabic terminology in their academic writing and everyday communication, strengthening the connection between the two languages.

The expansion of digital media and communication technologies has further increased Arabic–Bengali linguistic interaction. Bengali speakers now access Arabic lectures, online courses, digital dictionaries, and Islamic educational content through websites, mobile applications, and social media platforms. As a result, many Arabic words and expressions have become familiar even to people who have not received formal Arabic education.

Global labour migration has also played a significant role. Thousands of Bengali-speaking workers from different parts of India, especially West Bengal and Assam, migrate to Gulf countries for employment. Their interaction with Arabic-speaking societies often leads to the adoption of practical Arabic vocabulary related to daily life, work, commerce, and social communication. On returning home, many of these expressions become part of everyday conversations within their families and communities.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, the use of Arabic words in Bengali often reflects religious identity, cultural heritage, and community affiliation. Greetings such as *As-salāmu ‘Alaikum*, responses like *Wa ‘Alaikumus Salām*, and expressions including *In-shā’ Allāh*, *Alhamdulillah*, *Subhānallāh*, and *Mā-shā’ Allāh* are commonly used in Bengali-speaking Muslim communities. These expressions not only convey religious values but also strengthen social bonds and cultural identity.

Despite the growing influence of English and other global languages, Arabic continues to occupy a respected position in the linguistic landscape of Bengali-speaking Muslims. Its contribution extends beyond vocabulary to the preservation of religious knowledge, ethical concepts, literary traditions, and intercultural communication. Therefore, the relationship between Arabic and Bengali in post-1947 India represents an ongoing process of linguistic enrichment and cultural interaction rather than a static historical legacy.

#### 4. Sociolinguistic Analysis

From a sociolinguistic perspective, the relationship between Arabic and Bengali extends beyond vocabulary and reflects issues of religion, identity, education, and culture. For many Bengali-

|    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 13 | ISSN2277-3630(online), Published by International Journal of Social Sciences & Interdisciplinary Research., under Volume: 15 Issue:06 in July-2026<br><a href="https://www.gejournal.net/index.php/IJSSIR">https://www.gejournal.net/index.php/IJSSIR</a>                              |
|    | Copyright (c) 2026 Author (s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of Creative Commons Attribution License(CCBY). To view a copy of this license, visit <a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/">https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/</a> |

speaking Muslims in India, Arabic is regarded as the language of the Qur'an and Islamic scholarship. Consequently, the use of Arabic expressions in daily communication serves not only a linguistic function but also expresses religious identity and cultural affiliation. Greetings, prayers, and religious phrases are frequently used alongside Bengali, creating a form of bilingual linguistic practice. Educational institutions have played a significant role in sustaining this relationship. Traditional madrasas preserve classical Arabic learning, while universities and colleges promote the academic study of Arabic language, literature, translation, and linguistics. These institutions have produced teachers, translators, researchers, and scholars who contribute to strengthening Arabic-Bengali linguistic relations through teaching, research, and publications.

### 5. Challenges

Despite its historical importance, Arabic language education in post-independence India faces several challenges. First, there is limited interdisciplinary research on Arabic–Bengali language contact, especially from linguistic and sociolinguistic perspectives. Second, English has become the dominant language in higher education and professional communication, reducing students' motivation to pursue advanced Arabic studies. Third, there is a shortage of modern Arabic-Bengali dictionaries, digital corpora, and language-learning resources. Finally, collaboration between Arabic departments and Bengali language scholars remains limited, restricting comparative linguistic research.

### 6. Future Prospects

The future of Arabic–Bengali linguistic relations remains promising. Universities and research institutions should encourage collaborative research in contact linguistics, translation studies, and comparative literature. More high-quality Arabic works should be translated into Bengali, while important Bengali literary works may also be translated into Arabic to promote cultural exchange. Digital technology provides new opportunities for strengthening Arabic language learning. Online courses, digital dictionaries, artificial intelligence-based translation tools, and multilingual educational platforms can make Arabic more accessible to Bengali learners. Government institutions, universities, and cultural organizations should also organize seminars, workshops, and exchange programmes to promote Arabic studies in India.

### 7. Conclusion

The relationship between Arabic and Bengali represents a long-standing tradition of linguistic and cultural interaction that has continued to evolve in post-1947 India. Through religion, education, translation, literature, migration, and digital communication, Arabic has continued to enrich Bengali vocabulary and cultural expression. Although challenges remain, the growing importance of international communication, technological advancement, and academic collaboration offers new opportunities for strengthening Arabic–Bengali linguistic relations.

The study concludes that Arabic should not be viewed merely as a religious language but also as an important source of linguistic enrichment, cultural dialogue, and academic research. Promoting Arabic–Bengali studies will contribute not only to language development but also to greater intercultural understanding and intellectual cooperation in contemporary India.

## References

1. Chatterji, S. K. (1926). *The Origin and Development of the Bengali Language*. University of Calcutta.
2. Shahidullah, M. (1965). *Bangla Bhashar Itibritta*. Dhaka: Mowla Brothers.
3. Ahmad, Zubaid, (1968): *The Contribution of Indo- Pakistan to Arabic Literature*, Lahore. Ashraf press.
4. Ahmad, Dr. Ashfaq : *Musahamatul- Hind Fi al- Nathr al- Arabi Khilala al- Qarn al-Ishreen*, New Delhi, Makoff printer, 2000.
5. Al-Bilgrami, Sayyed Ghulam Ali Azad, *Sabhat al-Marjan Fi Aathar Hindustan, Ma'hadud Dirasah*
6. Enamul Haq, M. (1975). *A History of Sufi Influence in Bengal*. Islamic Foundation.
7. Rahman, A. (1999). *Arabic Language and Literature*. Dhaka.
8. Versteegh, K. (2014). *The Arabic Language* (2nd ed.). Edinburgh University Press.
9. Ferguson, C. A. (1959). "Diglossia." *Word*, 15(2), 325–340.
10. Fishman, J. A. (1972). *The Sociology of Language*. Newbury House.
11. Haugen, E. (1950). "The Analysis of Linguistic Borrowing." *Language*, 26(2), 210–231.
12. Thomason, S. G., & Kaufman, T. (1988). *Language Contact, Creolization, and Genetic Linguistics*. University of California Press.
13. Weinreich, U. (1953). *Languages in Contact*. Mouton.
14. Crystal, D. (2003). *English as a Global Language*. Cambridge University Press.
15. Ahmed, S. (2010). *Studies on Arabic education in India*.
16. Government of India. Ministry of Education. *Reports on Higher Education*.
17. University Grants Commission (UGC). *Reports on Arabic Studies in Indian Universities*.
18. *Selected articles from the Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies and the Indian Journal of Applied Linguistics*.

End

|    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 15 | ISSN2277-3630(online), Published by International journal of Social Sciences & Interdisciplinary Research., under Volume: 15 Issue:06 in July-2026<br><a href="https://www.gejournal.net/index.php/IJSSIR">https://www.gejournal.net/index.php/IJSSIR</a>                              |
|    | Copyright (c) 2026 Author (s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of Creative Commons Attribution License(CCBY). To view a copy of this license, visit <a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/">https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/</a> |