

## **Muhammad Abdul Hai's Contribution to the Bangla Language and Linguistics: A Review**

**Dr. Monira Begam \***

**Abstract:** This paper offers a descriptive investigation of Professor Muhammad Abdul Hai's scholarly contributions to the Bangla language and linguistics. Employing a qualitative method, it examines Hai's innovative methodologies and interdisciplinary involvement through literature reviews, primary source analysis, and content analysis. The paper highlights Hai's influential works in phonetics, dialectical analysis, sociolinguistics, and Bangla orthography. Additionally, his contributions to literary discourse, cultural preservation, and the promotion of linguistic reforms illustrate his multidimensional scholarly legacy, which is also discussed. This paper provides an intricate insight into Hai's enduring impact on Bangla scholarship, establishing him as an inspiring figure in Bengali intellectual history whose contributions continue to motivate future generations of scholars and researchers.

**Keywords:** *Abdul Hai, Bangla, language, Linguistics, Phonetics, Language Planning*

### **1. Introduction**

Muhammad Abdul Hai (1919-1969), a prominent figure in linguistics within the Bengali-speaking region, was born in Murshidabad. Notably, Hai was the first Muslim student to enroll in the Bangla department after Dhaka University was established in 1921. He began his professional journey as a lecturer at Dhaka Islamic Intermediate College before moving to Dhaka University in 1949, where he continued to serve as a lecturer in the Bangla Department. His scholarly pursuits took him to England in 1950, where he began studying linguistics and conducting research at the esteemed School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London. During his time abroad, Hai immersed himself in the study

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\* Associate Professor & Chairperson, Department of Linguistics, University of Dhaka

of linguistics and phonology while exploring the opportunity to research English, Arabic, Sanskrit, and Dravidian languages (Moniruzzaman, 2000).

In the field of Bangla language and literature research, Professor Muhammad Abdul Hai was a remarkable figure. He took the role of a leading linguist to challenge some issues in literature and language teaching. Firstly, he broke down barriers by leading linguistic studies at Dhaka University. Additionally, he started a culture of scholarly passion among colleagues and former students, creating an environment conducive to research and literary exploration. Professor Hai's teaching method was a perfect blend of instruction and mentorship. He explained intricate phonetic concepts clearly and deeply, establishing himself as both a researcher and a phonetician. His commitment to the language reflected the essence of the Bangla term 'sadashiv,' symbolizing humility yet a relentless pursuit of excellence, like a constant source of generosity and fulfillment. His profound commitment to comprehending Bangla language, literature, and linguistics, coupled with his innovative application of scientific methods to phonetics, underscores his unparalleled contribution to the field. His renown transcended not only Bangladesh but the entire subcontinent (Shahed et al., 2023).

## **2. Research Methodology**

This research article provides a detailed review of scholarly articles and books written by Muhammad Abdul Hai on the Bangla language, linguistics, and literature. The study employs a qualitative methodology, specifically content analysis, to investigate Abdul Hai's contributions. The research begins with a review of existing literature about Muhammad Abdul Hai's academic works. This includes Hai's research papers, books, and essays as primary sources and secondary sources discussing his works.

## **3. Contributions of Muhammad Abdul Hai**

Professor Muhammad Abdul Hai distinguished himself by departing from traditional, comparative, and historical approaches to studying

language and adopting the descriptive method, particularly in analysing Bangla phonemes. He emphasized the significance of structural and constructive changes, thereby initiating a new direction in Bangla linguistics. We can categorize his contributions to Bangla language and literature into two significant stages: literary works and linguistic analysis. Notable literary works include "Literature and Culture" (1954), "Bangla Literature" (1956), "Language and Politics" (1959), and "Language and Literature" (1960). Furthermore, in Bangla phonetics, Professor Abdul Hai revolutionized the field by embracing a novel approach to the descriptive method, diverging from the prevailing traditional methods. His seminal works in this area include "Phonological Research on Bengali" (1952), "A Phonetic and Phonological Study of Nasals and Nasalization in Bengali" (1960), "The Sound Structures of English and Bengali" (1961), "Dhonibiggan o Bangla Dhonitatta" (1964), "Bengali Language Handbook" (1966), and "The Development of Bengali since the Establishment of Pakistan" (1971), along with "Toshamed o Rajnitir Bhasha" (1960), among others. Through these scholarly contributions, Professor Muhammad Abdul Hai enriched Bangla linguistics and significantly advanced the understanding of the Bangla language, literature, and linguistics.

### *3.1 A Phonetic and Phonological Study of Nasals and Nasalization in Bengali (1960)*

Muhammad Abdul Hai's seminal work, "A Phonetic and Phonological Study of Nasals and Nasalization in Bengali" (1960), serves as the foundational text in Bangla phonetics. In this work, Hai precisely examined the sound patterns, including nasalization of phonemes exist in the Bangla language. He systematically described various nasal and nasalization aspects of sounds, including their phonetic characteristics and morpheme modifications across monosyllabic and disyllabic structures. Drawing upon the acoustic theories and methods pioneered by British linguist J. R. Firth, Hai precisely applied Firth's prosodic theory to examine Bangla nasal sounds (Hai, 1952). However, he critically differed from Firth's prosodic method and adopted a phonemic approach, thereby

offering a new perspective on the analysis of Bangla nasal sounds and their structures. Hai's analysis extended beyond nasals to encompass the arrangement and identification of Bangla vowels. He presented a comprehensive view of Bangla vowel systems, for instance, delineating units, determining values, and organizing structures of verbs, stems, and roots. Additionally, he investigated the prosodic features of Bangla, observing juncture and sound combinations across various stem patterns.

Moreover, Hai conducted a detailed analysis of verb forms containing oral vowels, particularly focusing on CVC and VC stem patterns. Applying tools such as the kymograph, he explored the positioning of consonants within verb roots, concluding with key findings regarding waveform characteristics observed in nasal tracing. Hai's work elucidated the distinctions between voiced plosives, liquids, and nasals in nasal tracings, highlighting amplitude variations and waveform patterns. He also cited Firth's "Sounds and Prosodies" to further contextualize his analysis within the broader framework of phonetic theory (Hai, 1960).

### *3.2 The Sound Structures of English and Bengali (1961)*

In his book *The Sound Structures of English and Bengali* (1961), Hai collaborated with W. J. Ball and provided a comparative analysis of the phonetic structures of Bangla and English.

This text not only elucidates the contrasting characteristics of these two languages but also serves as a practical resource for language learners, emphasizing the importance of understanding sound structures in language acquisition. In conclusion, Muhammad Abdul Hai's pioneering contributions to Bangla phonetics have significantly advanced the field, providing invaluable insights into the details of nasal sounds and phonological structures (Hai, 1960).

### *3.3 Dhonibiggan o Bangla Dhonitatta (1964)*

Muhammad Abdul Hai's book *Dhonibiggan o Bangla Dhonitatta* represents a comprehensive phonetic analysis of the standard spoken Bangla. While primarily focusing on the articulation of Bangla sounds concerning their pronunciation, he took the help of a

faux palate and a Kymograph device in his research. He extensively identified some isolated sounds and their changes in contact with other sounds at different positions in the speech stream and called that characteristic of sounds phonology. Abdul Hai pioneered in quantifying Bangla sound qualities within the language itself, establishing himself as the leading phonologist of Bangla sounds applying the prosodic method of J.R. Firth (Hai, 1964). His analysis is reflected in this book where he examined a significant number and wide range of examples before concluding Bangla phonetics stand as truly remarkable achievements. Abdul Hai has analysed,

- the number of Bangla vowels,
- Diphthongs and semi-vowel formation
- Phonological identity of consonant sounds,
- Sound repetition.
- Phonetic quality and vowel waves in a detailed and thorough manner.

### 3.3.1 Number of Bangla vowels

According to Abdul Hai, the number of Bangla vowels is 8, and he determined their place of articulation.

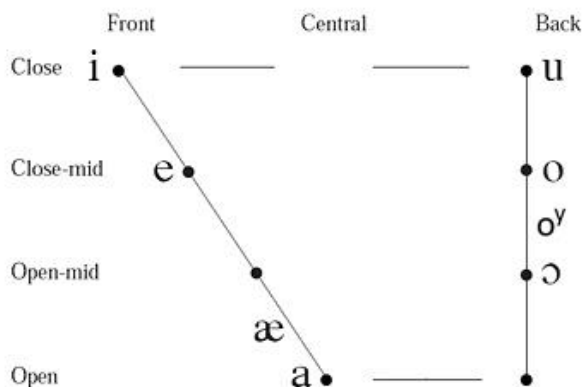


Figure 3.1: Bangla vowel chart (According to Abdul Hai, 1960)

Additionally, each vowel being nasalized in Bangla words is

exemplified, thereby introducing seven additional nasalized vowels. He added ‘yotized’ (o<sup>y</sup>) (অভিশ্রুত ও) in the Bangla vowel. Since the back of the tongue is not raised as high as in /o/, the part of the back of the tongue from which the /o<sup>y</sup>/ is pronounced moves forward a little faster.

He gave examples for differentiating /o/ and /o<sup>y</sup>/.

Bangla word	Gloss
কোনে	/kone/ — /o/
কনে	/ko <sup>y</sup> ne/ — /o <sup>y</sup> /

Table 3.1: Two Bangla words with /o/ and /o<sup>y</sup>/

### 3.3.2 Bangla Gliding

Abdul Hai identified three gildings in Bangla: /y/, /w/, /i /, For example,

Gloss	Bangla word
/ma <sup>y</sup> amar/	(মা আমার)
/meye/	(মেয়ে)
/no <sup>w</sup> a/	(নোয়া)
/dæ <sup>w</sup> a/	(দেওয়া)
/di <sup>i</sup> a/	(দিয়া)
/gi <sup>i</sup> a/	(গিয়া)

Table 3.2: A list of words with gliding sounds

### 3.3.3 Diphthong

According to Abdul Hai, in Bangla, there are two diphthong letters, ঐ/oi/ and ঔ/ou/. As described by Hai, there may be 31 diphthongs, with 19 classified as regular and 12 as irregular.

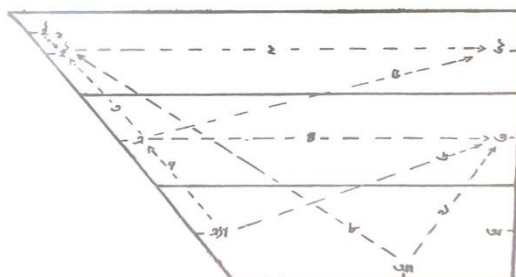


Figure 3.2 Analysis of Tongue Speed in Pronouncing Bangla Regular Diphthongs 1 to 10  
(Hai, 1964:34)

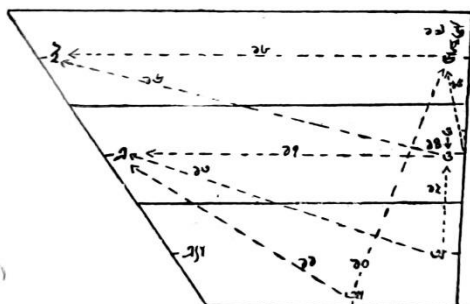


Figure 3.3 Analysis of Tongue Speed in Pronouncing Bangla Regular Diphthongs 11 to 18 (Hai, 1964:35)

Regular diphthongs are as follow:

- |         |          |          |
|---------|----------|----------|
| 1. /ii/ | 8. /aɪ/  | 15. /ou/ |
| 2. /iu/ | 9. /ao/  | 16. /oi/ |
| 3. /eɪ/ | 10. /au/ | 17. /oy/ |
| 4. /eo/ | 11. /ay/ | 18. /ui/ |
| 5. /eu/ | 12. /ɔo/ | 19. /uu/ |
| 6. /æo/ | 13. /ɔy/ |          |
| 7. /æy/ | 14. /oo/ |          |

Irregular diphthongs are listed below:

- |          |          |
|----------|----------|
| 1. /ia/  | 7. /ɔa/  |
| 2. /ie/  | 8. /oa/  |
| 3. /io / | 9. /oe/  |
| 4. /ea/  | 10. /ue/ |
| 5. /eo/  | 11. /ua/ |
| 6. /æa/  | 12. /uo/ |

Following Hai's further analysis, the breakdown of regular diphthongs reveals a range of vowel combinations, each characterized by specific tongue movements and speeds. Figures 3.2 and 3.3 show the tongue speed in pronouncing Bangla regular diphthongs, offering visual insights into the phonetic distinctions involved. For example, from /ii/ to /uu/, each diphthong presents a unique configuration of vowel sounds and articulatory processes, contributing to the intricate tapestry of Bangla phonology. Additionally, the presence of irregular diphthongs adds further complexity to the analysis. These diphthongs, such as /a/, /ie/, and /io/, deviate from the expected patterns observed in regular diphthongs, highlighting the variability characteristic in Bangla phonetics.

### 3.3.4 Short and long vowels

Hai showed there is no difference between short and long vowels in Bangla. For example, the sounds /i/ for 'set' and /i:/ for 'eat' or /u/ for 'dull' /u:/ for 'fool' don't exist in Bangla. The length difference between vowel sounds doesn't have any role in changing the literal meaning of the word in Bangla.

### 3.3.5 Consonants

Abdul Hai structured the consonant sounds of the Bangla language in the following manner:

	Velar	Dorso-alveolar	Post-alveolar	Alveolar-rectoflex	Alveolar	Dental	Labial	Labio-dental	Glottal
Plosive	ক /k/	চ /c/		ট /t/		ত /t̪/	প/p/,	-	



	খ/k <sup>h</sup> / গ/g/ ঘ/g <sup>h</sup> /	ছ/c <sup>h</sup> / জ/j/ ঝ/j <sup>h</sup> /		ট/t <sup>h</sup> / ড/d/ ঢ/d <sup>h</sup> /		থ/t <sup>h</sup> / দ/d/ ধ/d <sup>h</sup> /	ফ/p <sup>h</sup> / ব/b/ ভ/b <sup>h</sup> /		
Nasal	ঙ/n/				ন/n/		ম/m/		
Fricative			শ/j/		স/s/			*ফ/f/, *ভ/u/	হ/h/
Affricate:		*চ/tʃ/ *ছ/tʃ <sup>h</sup> / *জ/dʒ/ *ঝ/dʒ <sup>h</sup> /							
Lateral					ল/l/				
Trill					র/r/				
Flapped				ড়/t̪/, ঢ়/t̪ <sup>h</sup> /					

Table 3: Bangla consonants (Hai, 1964: 45-57)

Notably, Muhammad Abdul Hai identified the plosive dorso-alveolar phonemes চ /c/, ছ /c<sup>h</sup>/, জ /j/, and ঝ /j<sup>h</sup>/ as regional forms in various dialects. The phonemes identified have been regarded as different regional variations, specifically the affricate phonemes \*চ /tʃ/, \*ছ /tʃ<sup>h</sup>/, \*জ /dʒ/, and \*ঝ /dʒ<sup>h</sup>/. Hai also stated that in colloquial Bangla, the plosive phonemes \*ফ /p<sup>h</sup>/ and \*ভ /b<sup>h</sup>/ are pronounced as the fricative phonemes /f/ and /u/ respectively in certain regions (Hai, 1964:56). Muhammad Abdul Hai emphasized another significant phonetic feature Bangla language: the retroflex nasal ণ (ṇ) is only pronounced in certain contexts when it occurs with the alveolar-retroflex phonemes ট /ṭ/, ঠ /ṭ<sup>h</sup>/, ড /ḍ/, and ঢ /ḍ<sup>h</sup>/. Therefore, he considered the retroflex nasal ণ (ṇ) to be an allophone of the alveolar nasal ন /n/ (Hai, 90). Hai states that in the Bangla language, the three letters, শ /ʃ/, স /s/, and ষ /ʃ/ correspond to a single phoneme. He stated the alveolar স /s/ and the retroflex ষ /ʃ/ to be allophones of the post-alveolar fricative শ /ʃ/ (Hai, 1964:103-4).

In discussing consonant sounds, Hai provided a detailed explanation which is mentioned in the following topics:

- Types of consonant sounds, which include plosive, lateral, fricative, tap or flap, nasal, and affricate.
- Detailed examination of place and manner of articulation, covering glottal, relaxed, dorsal, alveolar, post-alveolar, alveolar-retroflex, and labiodental articulations.
- Examination of compound consonants.
- Analysis of 36 consonant clusters, noting their consistent occurrence in the initial position of words. Additionally, specific mention was made of a few foreign words such as "dost," "gusto," and "card," where clusters are found in the final position of sentences.
- Discussion on phonotactic principles, encompassing the utilization of heterogenic plosives in word formation, impartial distribution, and the co-occurrence of initial consonants with other consonants.
- Examination of germination, focusing on the doubling of consonants.

### 3.4 *Bengali Language handbook* (1966)

Furthermore, Hai's scholarly endeavors extend beyond phonetics, as evidenced by his *Bengali Language handbook* (1966), co-authored with Punya Sloka Ray and Lila Ray. In this book, the authors explored the segmental phonemes of a language, focusing on oral and nasal vowels, semivowels, and consonants. They identified seven oral vowels, each with distinct articulatory features, and described how nasal vowels occur only in word-initial syllables. Additionally, they examined intonation patterns, demarcation by intonation, and information conveyed through intonation, detailing how different pitches of phonemes and vocal qualifiers affect meaning and emotional tone in speech. Their research on phonotactics explored linguistic stems where the minimal meaningful units are smaller than phonemes or phoneme sequences. These stems, mainly nouns and a few noun-derived verbs, convey aesthetic qualities that are hard to translate into

English. Unlike onomatopoeia, they provided general sensory experiences like interjections function as complete sentences or quoted nouns, conjunctions, emphasers, injunctives, invocatives, and modulators each add detailed expression and emotional context to speech, shaping sentence structure and meaning. (Hai & et al, 1966).

### 3.5 *Scholarly Articles (1963-1967)*

Muhammad Abdul Hai's academic pursuits extended beyond phonetics that added dialect analysis, focusing on the Dhaka, Chittagong, and Sylhet dialects. He authored essays written in both Bangla and English, employing a structural method to present linguistic features unique to each dialect. These essays include "A Study of Sylhet Dialect" (Shahidullah Presentation Volume, 1967), "A Study of Chittagong Dialect" (1963), and "A Study of Dacca Dialect" (1963). While Hai's contributions to dialect analysis are significant, his focus on Bangla phonology is notable. Unlike traditional dialectical studies, Hai's approach sheds light on the phonological distinctions of Bangla, enriching the field of phonetics.

### 3.6 *'Bhasha O Shomaj Jibons'* (Language and Social Life)

Abdul Hai was not only interested in phonetics, but his enthusiasm for socio-linguistics can be found in the scholarly article 'Bhasha O Shomaj Jibon' (Language and Social Life). In this context, he has also presented two well-known works— 'Rajnitir Bhasha' (Language of politics) and 'Toshameder Bhasha' (Language of flattery). The social significance of these two articles is very relevant. He was trained in sociolinguistics following the tradition established by Malinowski. He thoroughly understood the symbiotic relationship between society and language, acknowledging how language originates from and safeguards societal structures. However, he found himself constrained by the prevailing organizational paradigm. Muhammad Abdul Hai's article 'Rajnitir Bhasha' (1960) was published around that time. This article also described the political and linguistic experience of his time. In this paper, he explored the theoretical dimensions of sociolinguistics, asserting that while language

possesses a holistic form, people use context-specific language in various domains of social life.

As a field, the language of politics is also distinct. The is not created in a day, but those who rule the state develop new words in needs. It is the administration of a state that motivates the intrusion of foreign languages into a language. Muhammad Hai provided a list of all the indigenous foreign words that have been adopted into Bengla for political reasons. Regarding this, Abdul Hai stated that every political party comes to the people of the country with their ideals and programs to capture the state power, utilizing language as a potent tool for persuasion. Consequently, language becomes a mere instrument in the hands of politicians, the language with which they circulate their statements; they do not hesitate to misuse it to attack their opponents (Hai, 1960; b.).

‘Toshameder Bhasha’ (Language of flattery) is a very interesting topic discussed in sociolinguistics. Due to the dependence and interdependence between different classes of people in society, they want to influence each other through verbal communication. Flattery, as a linguistic tool, serves as the medium through which persons attempt to captivate hearts, as described in this paper by Abdul Hai (Hai, 1960b; Abdul Hai Rachnabali 2 1994: 304). Here, he explained the essence of flattery language through a vivid simile, likening it to a profound manipulation of the human psyche. However, the features of this language can range from overt to subtle, contingent upon individual preferences and usage patterns. According to Abdul Hai, the judicious application of flattery embodies a spectrum of expressions, encompassing admiration, commendation, or reverence — terminologies that vary based on personal predilections and the degree of emphasis. Such perceptive, emotionally resonant, and intellectually stimulating analyses of flattery's language are unique to Abdul Hai. Flattery can also be seen as an art through which the most intelligent class of society attains the highest level of achievement. It is not naturally developed in humans but is mastered through practice and applied with great discretion as the most effective means of subduing a man.

### 3.7 Contributions to Language Planning

In the late 1950s, the concept of language planning emerged within the field of sociolinguistics, primarily originating in the United States. This framework posits that sovereign states possess the authority to manage both the status and structure of their languages, and that intellectuals within such states can actively shape language policy. Muhammad Abdul Hai's contributions must be understood within this broader paradigm, as his efforts were part of a systematic attempt to elevate the status of Bangla as the national language of East Pakistan.

One significant example of Hai's involvement in language planning was his organization of the week-long event titled *Language and Literature Week 1370 (Bengali calendar)*, held at the University of Dhaka in 1963. Hai explicitly stated two objectives for the program: first, to generate widespread interest in Bangla language and literature, and second, to promote the use of Bangla at all levels of society. The event included exhibitions on Bangla script, literature, and culture, forming part of a broader effort to solidify the language's symbolic and functional role in the nation's identity. This initiative reflected Hai's understanding of language planning as both a cultural and policy-driven effort.

In 1969, at the International Seminar on Language Planning and Policy in Hawaii, Hai presented a paper titled "*Development of Bangla: Establishment of Pakistan*," wherein he laid out the foundational principles of his vision for Bangla language policy. He highlighted the 1956 Constitution of Pakistan, which recognized both Bangla and Urdu as state languages, and emphasized Bangla's primacy in the eastern wing of the country. Hai detailed the initiatives of the Bangla Academy and the Central Bengal Development Board, portraying them as pivotal agents in expanding the functional domain of Bangla. He boldly predicted that by 1970, Bangla would replace English in official spheres, while also advocating for limiting English as the medium of academic instruction (Hai, 1971). However, his pragmatism was evident in his parallel efforts to improve English proficiency among students in

the Bangla Department at Dhaka University, showing that his vision of language planning did not reject multilingual competencies outright but sought to reposition Bangla at the core of national life.

Hai's resistance to proposed script reforms further underscores his commitment to linguistic continuity and cultural preservation. During the late 1940s and early 1950s, several attempts were made by pro-government factions to replace the Bengali script with Arabic, Urdu, or Roman scripts. Hai emerged as a key opponent of these proposals. His essay "*Roman vs. Bengali Script*" [রোমান বনাম বাংলা হরফ] (1994) presented a reasoned critique, arguing that such a shift would disconnect future generations from the literary heritage of the Bangla language and impose unnecessary barriers to cultural and educational continuity. His resistance was influential not only in East Bengal but also resonated with Bengali communities in West Bengal, reinforcing cross-border cultural solidarity. He argued that such a shift would risk severing the intergenerational continuity with the rich reservoir of literary heritage and traditions from the past, potentially disconnecting the new generation from these invaluable cultural resources (Hai, 1994, p. 70-71). In addition, it was so gladly accepted by the grammarians and linguists of the country that they started to arguably follow the propositions of Hai in shaping the steps of language planning in the micro sectors, especially adopting scripts and writing systems of other indigenous languages of this region.

Despite Hai's ambitious vision, the long-term realization of his language planning goals remains a contested issue. While Bangla has been institutionalized as the national and official language in post-independence Bangladesh, English continues to dominate in legal, administrative, and academic domains. Contemporary language policy reveals a pragmatic bilingualism rather than a full realization of Hai's monolingual aspirations. Further research is warranted to assess the extent to which his vision has shaped current policy, and to evaluate how language planning efforts have evolved in response to globalization, digital communication, and socioeconomic changes.

### 3.8 'Bangla Lipi and Spelling Problem' (Bangla Script and Spelling Problem)

The article titled 'Bangla Lipi and Spelling Problem' was published in the *Sahitya Patrika* in 1962, where he discussed his proposal for spelling reform in Bangla. Now, the changes observed in Bangla spelling policy in the second decade of the 21st century cannot be entirely unacceptable by Hai in this article. This is because many of his suggestions have gained acceptance over time, though some proposals of spelling reform process were not accepted well by the users of Bengali. For example, Abdul Hai recommended the use of only two letters for short vowels ই /i/ and উ/u/, instead of the long vowels ঐ/i:/ and উ:/u:/. He argued that long vowels ঐ/i:/ and উ:/u:/ do not exist as phonemes in Bangla. Again, he suggested that the long vowels ঐ/i:/ and উ:/u:/ letters should be eliminated first to reform vowels as rich transcriptions. These proposals can be critically observed. Although Abdul Hai's rationale was linguistically valid, the masses did not accept these very well. However, the inclusion of short vowel characters in the standard Bangla spelling rules was established by the Bangla Academy in 2012. To simplify Bangla orthography as much as possible, his proposal to eliminate ঐ /oi/ and উ/ou/ can be regarded as a significant reform. After all, Mohammad Abdul Hai's suggestions were implicitly followed in the adoption of alternative spellings, supported by a rational argument. He noted that there are two diphthongs, namely, ঐ/oi/ and উ/ou/ in the Bangla alphabet, whereas the regular number of diphthongs in Bengala is 19. He argued that there is no necessity to use these two distinct letters, questioning why only these two letters are used independently in Bangla style without employing any independent letters for the remaining 17 diphthongs. In Bangla writing, there is no separate letter for the phoneme /æ/, but he proposed the use of ঞ/ for this sound. He advocated to use /o'/ for his proposed 'yotized' (oʷ) (অভিশ্রুত ওʷ) vowel. Similarly, he suggested discarding ষ and স in favor of using শ /ʃ/ as a capital echo of Bangla orthographic reforms. Abdul Hai opposed keeping the graphemes of the phonemes in Bangla spelling that are not pronounced in Bangla. For

example, these letters may be mentioned: ঙ, উ, ণ, ষ, স, ঙ, ঙ, ঙ. These letters are not pronounced in Bangla pronunciation but in the Bangla script. He encouraged maintaining a 1:1 symmetry between phonemes and graphemes to the greatest extent possible in the reformation of Bangla orthography.

### 3.9 *Bilete Share Shatsho Din* (Seven Hundred Days Abroad)

Muhammad Abdul Hai was a prominent figure in Bangla literature, celebrated for his significant contributions to travel literature. His literary works provide a rich foundation for stylistic analysis, offering a unique opportunity for insightful exploration and scholarly examination. One of his notable works *Bilete Share Shatsho Din* (Seven Hundred Days in Abroad), published in 1958, stands out as a classic exemplar of this genre, showcasing the author's personal experiences and reflections during his journeys.

Hai's narrative style captivates readers, immersing them in a fantastical realm where children and teenagers envision a fairy kingdom reminiscent of the author's cherished dreams. Furthermore, his travelogue reflects his life experiences, chronicling his evolution through encounters with Western civilisation and unfamiliar landscapes. Through his vivid prose and analytical descriptions, Hai provided valuable insights into the intricacies of exile and the resilience of the human spirit. At the same time, this travelogue by Abdul Hai always influences further travellers and readers and helps develop a mindset to show immense respect toward own linguistic and cultural traditions as Hai himself obeyed this. This is because, having experienced the form of cultural and linguistic affinity and patriotism by the English, Abdul Hai felt motivated to practice this in his country context. Thus, he successfully organized the memorable Bangla linguistic and cultural fair in 1963, already mentioned earlier, to inspire the masses to feel love and respect for their cultural aspects and language, and to elicit their hidden empathy to their old linguistic heritage and treasure.

His work *Bilete Share Shatsho Din* stands as a classic example of travel literature, offering insights into his personal experiences and



reflections while documenting cultural encounters.

### *3.10 Traditional Culture in East Pakistan (1963)*

In addition to his literary endeavors, Hai made significant contributions to the preservation of traditional culture in East Pakistan. His collaborative effort with Muhammad Shahidullah resulted in the publication of *Traditional Culture in East Pakistan* (1963), comprising essays including folk songs, literature, indigenous games, and sports. Hai's thorough documentation and analysis of Bangla folk music, in particular, demonstrate his deep appreciation of the cultural heritage of the region. Furthermore, Hai's social responsibility extended beyond literature to linguistics, where he boldly challenged the political status quo. Despite facing opposition and political pressure, Hai promoted linguistic reforms and transparency in language policies. His firm commitment to academic integrity and intellectual freedom earned him recognition as a pioneer in linguistic studies.

### *3.11 Articles on Different Genres*

Hai's twenty-two essays, published in various esteemed journals and volumes, further demonstrate his scholarly influence by addressing topics such as aspiration in Standard Bangla and the language of Rabindranath Tagore. These essays highlight Hai's significant contributions to linguistics, particularly regarding the Bangla language and linguistic analysis. In the article 'Kotha shekha' [learning to speak], Hai also emphasizes the practical importance of phonetics in speech therapy and the treatment of language impairments. He underscores the crucial role of phonetic knowledge in facilitating effective communication and addressing speech-related challenges. Additionally, in this essay, he stresses the importance of mastering pronunciation for individuals with language impairments, advocating for the contributions of phoneticians in this field. In summary, Muhammad Abdul Hai's scholarly efforts encompass a broad spectrum of linguistic inquiry, ranging from phonetic analysis to dialectology and sociolinguistics. His precise research and insightful observations have significantly

contributed to our understanding of language dynamics and phonetic principles within the Bangla language and the broader linguistic landscape. contexts.

#### 4 Discussion

Muhammad Abdul Hai was a significant figure in Bangla language and linguistics, his scholarly contributions make a persistent impact on the field. This discussion aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of Hai's scholarly works and seeks to highlight the multidimensional aspects of Hai's legacy. We have explored the dimensions of his influence, ranging from phonetics to sociolinguistics, literary studies, dialectical analysis, and cultural preservation. The analysis of his work and the impact provided in the excerpt highlight several key aspects of his scholarly activities.

One of the key strengths of Hai's contributions lies in his innovative approach to linguistic analysis, particularly in Bangla phonetics. One of Hai's distinguishing features is his departure from traditional methods in linguistic analysis. This departure is particularly evident in his seminal works on Bangla phonemes, where he emphasized structural and constructive changes, revolutionizing the field. His seminal works, including *A Phonetic and Phonological Study of Nasals and Nasalization in Bangla* and *The Sound Structures of English and Bangla* have significantly advanced our understanding of Bangla phonetics, providing invaluable insights into nasal sounds and phonological structures.

Hai's research work, *A Phonetic and Phonological Study of Nasals and Nasalization in Bangla* (1960), serves as the cornerstone of Bangla phonetics. Through meticulous analysis, he explored intricate sound patterns and nasalization phenomena in Bangla, employing a phonemic approach that deviates from prevailing methods. Drawing on theories pioneered by J.R. Firth, Hai offered invaluable insights into Bangla nasal sounds and vowel structures. Hai's teaching methodology described a perfect blend of instruction and mentorship, emphasizing his role both as a researcher and an educator. His ability to explain intricate phonetic concepts clearly and deeply suggests a commitment to knowledge dissemination

and the cultivation of scholarly passion among colleagues and students. In *The Sound Structures of English and Bangla* (1961), Hai collaborated with W. J. Ball to offer a comparative analysis of Bangla and English phonetics. This comparative study highlighted the contrasting characteristics of both languages and served as a practical resource for language learners, underscoring the importance of understanding sound structures in language acquisition.

Hai's *Dhonibiggan o Bangla Dhonitatta* represents a groundbreaking phonetic analysis of standard Bangla speech. Through meticulous observation and analysis, he explored various aspects of Bangla phonetics, including vowel systems, diphthongs, and consonant structures. Abdul Hai's significant contribution lies in identifying phonemes in Bangla. However, opinions among researchers vary, particularly regarding the determination of vowel phonetics. The different viewpoints on the yotized' (oʷ) (অভিশ্রুত ওʷ) sound are particularly noteworthy. Furthermore, over time, the influx of various foreign words into Bangla has introduced the alveolar /s/ phoneme into the language, as demonstrated by the pronunciation variations observed in words like ফুল /pʰul/, ফল /pʰɔl/, ভয় /bʰɔey/ sometimes pronounced as ফুল /ful/, ফল /fɔl/, ভয় /vɔy/ (Hai, 1964:110). However, it should be noted that as an initial attempt, Abdul Hai's exclusion of certain letters such as ঞ (ɳ), ঙ (ŋ), ঙ (h), ঙ (s) from consideration as fundamental phonemes in Bangla may indicate a revolutionary change in Bangla phonetic research.

His particular attention to detail and adoption of the prosodic method by J.R. Firth solidify his status as a preeminent phonetician in Bangla linguistics. In comparison to renowned English phonetician Daniel Jones, Muhammad Abdul Hai's contribution to phonetics, particularly in the context of Bangla language analysis, stands out prominently. In his book *An Outline of English Phonetics* (), Jones extensively discussed organs of speech, vowels and consonants, English phonetic elements, and various aspects of the phonetic theory. In contrast, Hai's work, exemplified in *Dhonibiggan o Bangla Dhonitatta* (1964), explored Bangla phonetics deeply, covering topics such as Bangla Vowels, Bangla Consonants, sound location,

fluency and phonetic quality,

Abdul Hai's thorough exploration of Bangla vowels and semi-vowels provides a captivating glimpse into the phonetic intricacies of the language. In his research, Hai identifies eight primary vowels in Bangla, each characterized by distinct articulatory properties. These vowels are mentioned in Figure 3.1, offering a visual representation of their place of articulation within the vocal tract. Furthermore, Hai introduced an intriguing dimension to Bangla phonetics by illustrating the nasalization of vowels in Bangla words. He asserted that each vowel in Bangla can be nasalized, thereby expanding the vowel inventory to include seven additional nasalized variants. Additionally, Hai introduced the concept of 'yotized' (অভিশ্রুত ও) vowels, exemplified by the inclusion of /oy/ in the Bangla vowel chart. He elucidated the subtle articulatory differences between /o/ and /oy/, highlighting how the positioning of the tongue distinguishes between the two sounds. Examples such as কৌনে/Kone/ and কৌনে /Ko<sup>y</sup>ne/ Hai showcased the nuanced pronunciation of these vowels, underscoring the importance of articulatory accuracy in phonetic analysis. While Jones provided a comprehensive analysis of English phonetics, Hai focused specifically on Bangla phonology, offering extensive observations. Hai's book mirrors the structure of Jones's work, with the first four chapters resembling Jones's analysis of English phonetics, followed by discussions on Bangla phonetics based on sound and prosody, influenced by the theories of J.R. Firth. Hai's modern methodological approach solidifies his status as an esteemed phonetician in Bangla phonetics.

Abdul Hai's analysis of diphthongs in Bangla offers an engaging insight into the intricate phonetic structures of the language. In his exploration, Hai defined a diphthong as a syllable comprising a vowel, tongue movement, and subsequent overall processed semi-vowel. Hai's classification of Bangla diphthongs into regular and irregular categories adds depth to our understanding of the language's phonological system. The presence of two distinct diphthong letters, ঐ (oi) and ঔ (ou), sets the foundation for further analysis. According to Hai's research, there are a total of 31

diphthongs in Bangla, with 19 falling under the regular category and 12 classified as irregular. This extensive categorization suggests a rich diversity of diphthongal patterns within the language.

Hai explored sociolinguistic discussions, particularly the intersection of language and politics. *Toshamed o Rajnitir Bhasha* is evidence of his interest in sociolinguistics, where he explored how language serves as a tool for political propaganda and manipulation. Hai explained the elaborate relationship between language and societal values, emphasizing the diverse linguistic landscape and its implications for identity and political discourse. Hai's insightful analysis extends to the concept of flattery language, wherein he observed the social dynamics shaping linguistic preferences and expressions of praise. He provided detailed examples to demonstrate the different levels of flattery in language usage, thus revealing the subtleties of linguistic interaction within society. Furthermore, Hai's scholarly activities extend beyond phonetics that include Bangla dialect analysis and sociolinguistics. In articles such as "A Study of Sylhet Dialect" and "Language and Politics," his insights into flattery language and societal dynamics further enrich our understanding of linguistic interaction within Bengali society. Beyond his expertise in linguistics and phonetics, Hai's contributions to Bangla literature, travelogue writing, and the preservation of traditional culture underscore his interdisciplinary engagement.

Abdul Hai proposed various reforms in the spelling of Bangla orthography. He suggested the reduction of letters to ease spelling ambiguity and improve clarity. His proposal was revolutionary in this regard. Muhammad Abdul Hai proposed vowel phonemes-  $\text{ɔ̃}$  /o/ in written form at the end of certain words, such as গেলো /gel $\text{ɔ̃}$ /. Similarly, the spelling rules established by the Bangla Academy in 2012 acknowledge that the pronunciation of sounds in Bangla words often resembles "O" and can be consistently written using these distinctive vowels- $\text{ɔ̃}$  / in all contexts. Once again, Abdul Hai, in his proposal, suggested utilizing the /ঐ কার/ with diacritic marks / $\text{ɔ̃}$  /" instead of the character ঐ (hri) marker, a practice now commonly used in the spelling conventions of both Bangladesh and West Bengal. Hai encouraged the exclusion of graphemes that are

not pronounced in Bangla, promoting a balanced ratio between phonemes and graphemes in Bangla spelling reform. He aimed to achieve a 1:1 correspondence between phonemes and graphemes wherever feasible, demonstrating his meticulous approach to Bangla language corpus planning.

Muhammad Abdul Hai held steady confidence in the status of the Bangla language, regarding it as one of the finest languages globally. He demonstrated remarkable courage in pursuing measures necessary to uphold the dignity of Bangla, disregarding any hesitations. Hai's inspiration for linguistic reforms and transparency in language policies demonstrates his steady commitment to preserving the dignity of the Bangla language. Professor Hai's contributions extend beyond linguistic analysis to encompass literary discourse and cultural preservation. His seminal works, including "Literature and Culture" and "Language and Politics," highlight the interconnectedness of language, literature, and societal dynamics, offering valuable insights into the complexities of Bengali identity and political discourse. Furthermore, Hai's collaborative efforts in documenting traditional culture in East Pakistan demonstrate his deep appreciation for the cultural heritage of the region, thereby contributing to the preservation of indigenous knowledge and practices.

#### ***4.1 Critical Observations***

Muhammad Abdul Hai is considered the proponent of modern linguistics to explain Bangla, including its various linguistic structures and relevant underlying features. But the contribution he made in this regard with time could be evaluated critically. First of all, his proposition to reform Bangla spelling, especially to use two short vowel forms to pronounce the long ones, was ambitious. This proposal was not accepted well by the masses for several reasons. People realized it as the sudden shock of their daily linguistic practice that might create a huge cognitive load for them. This is because, instead of reducing their linguistic burden in the Bangla writing system, this reform proposal made an unhealthy environment of alternative sign load. At the same time, if it is

materialized, the further generation of Bengali might feel an unnecessary obstacle to read previous rich Bangla literature.

In the field of macro language planning and policy, that Muhammad Abdul Hai depicted in his several articles and book was overwhelmingly Bangla dominated. Somehow, he ignored the existence of other indigenous languages spoken from time immemorial in this region. This is one of the potential lackings of his proposed macro language policy. But this ignorance created huge dissatisfaction among the given linguistic communities in Bangladesh. In fact, the implicit language planning and policy done by the followers of Abdul Hai emphasize Bangla as the national language in Bangladesh. But it, unfortunately, has marginalized indigenous language rights, mirroring patterns in other postcolonial contexts (Rahman, 2010). Since in terms of the number of mother languages, Bangladesh is a multilingual country, multilingualism in postcolonial societies involves negotiating national identity and linguistic diversity. In Bangladesh, prioritizing Bangla has sometimes overshadowed indigenous linguistic rights, prompting calls for inclusive policies (Pennycook, 1998), which Muhammad Abdul Hai significantly failed to realize.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, Professor Muhammad Abdul Hai emerged as a seminal figure in Bangla language, literature, and linguistics, distinguished by his innovative methodologies, interdisciplinary engagement, and unwavering dedication to academic excellence. By emphasizing structural and constructive changes within Bangla, Hai initiated a new direction in linguistic analysis, aligning his work with renowned linguists such as Suniti Kumar Chatterjee and Muhammad Shahidullah. This paper investigates Professor Muhammad Abdul Hai's profound scholarly contributions to Bangla language and linguistics. Abdul Hai's assessment of Bangla vowels and semi-vowels represents a significant contribution to phonetics and linguistics. His analysis enriches our understanding of Bangla phonology and lays the foundation for continued exploration and discovery in the domain of phonetic research. His scholarly

contributions transcend disciplinary boundaries, encompassing phonetics, dialectical analysis, sociolinguistics, and cultural preservation. Hai's legacy continues to inspire future generations of scholars and researchers.

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