ON THE CATEGORY OF ASPECT IN BENGALI[1]

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Although in some languages the research of the category of aspect goes as far back as the end of 19th century,[2] for the new Indian languages this is a relatively new problem. Attention started to be paid to aspect only as late as in the middle of 20th century, and in this area up to now relatively little research has been done. This also applies for Bengali, where within investigating this verbal category several approaches have appeared. The aim of our article is to present a brief survey of the history of the research of aspect in Bengali as well as on the basis of existing findings and the analysis of Bengali texts to provide our own view of the means by which this semantic category is expressed in the Bengali language.

Key words: category of aspect, category of tense, perfectivity, imperfectivity, habituality, continuousness, perfectness, imperfectness

1. Introduction

1.1 In addition to the fact that the speaker locates the action or state expressed by the verb with regard to the moment of speech into the past, the present or the future (doing so usually with the help of grammatical tense) and comments on the mode of the course of action or state (describing it for instance as sudden, regressive or completed), the speaker also expresses his/her subjective view of the action in the sense that he/she views it as if from the outside[3] and then can

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[1] This study is published within the grant project VEGA 2/0153/09.

[2] E.g. HERBIG, G., 1896.

[3] COMRIE, B. *Aspect. An Introduction to the Study of Verbal Aspect and Related Problems,* p. 4.

view it 'as a single whole',[4] 'as a photograph',[5] as a 'complex, wholesome, complete event',[6] applying to it an 'integrative' attitude.[7] On the contrary, a person can view a situation from within,[8] as a series of parts,[9] 'as a film',[10] as 'being just carried out,'[11] hence applying with regard to it a 'fractionative attitude'.[12] It is from such a viewpoint of the 'internal temporal constituency'[13] that we speak about aspect.

Over the numerous years during which linguists have been dealing with the questions concerning the category of aspect, various approaches to researching it have been applied. Those who understand aspect from a wider perspective include into its definiton aktionsart, i.e. the mode of verbal action,[14] whereas others separate the mode of verbal action from aspect;[15] still others take into consideration not only the opposition perfectivity – imperfectivity, but they discuss three aspects, i.e. the perfective, imperfective and multiplied aspect,[16] or the perfective, imperfective and general aspect into which they include the simple present, simple past and habitual past.[17]

Such varying approaches can stem from the author's conception of this verbal category as well as from the fact of which particular language is analysed. While on the semantic level the opposition of perfectivity and imperfectivity could be understood in various languages in the same way, the varied system of verbal forms nevertheless leads to different linguistic means by which this opposition will be expressed and consequently also to various problems which will have to be resolved in connection with the category of aspect. This is evident already when comparing the research dealing with the category of aspect in Slavic and Germanic or Romance languages.

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[4] COMRIE, B. ibid., p. 18.
[5] SOKOLOVÁ, M. *Sémantika slovesa a aspektové formy* (Verbal Semantics and Aspect Forms), p. 28.
[6] *Encyklopédia jazykovedy* (Encyclopaedia of Linguistics), pp. 402–404.
[7] KENISTON, H. Verbal Aspect in Spanish, p. 164.
[8] COMRIE, B. ibid., p. 24.
[9] KENISTON, H., ibid., 164.
[10] SOKOLOVÁ, M., ibid., p. 28.
[11] *Encyklopédia jazykovedy* (Encyclopaedia of Linguistics), pp. 402–404.
[12] KENISTON, H., ibid., p. 164.
[13] COMRIE, B., ibid. p. 3.
[14] For instance Trudgill (from Štekauer 1995:36), Mathesius (from Štekauer 1995: 36).
[15] ISAČENKO, A. V., *Grammaticheskiy stroy russkogo yazyka v sopostavlenii s slovackim. Morfologiya* (Grammatical Structure of Russian in Contrast to Slovak. Morphology), p. 130.
[16] KOPEČNÝ, F. *Slovesný vid v češtině* (Verbal Aspect in Czech), 1962, p. 15 et seq.
[17] ZOGRAF, G. A. *Morfologicheskiy stroy novykh indoariyskikh jazykov* (Morphological Structure of New Indo-Aryan Languages), p. 305.

In Slavic languages, where the verb can be included among perfectives or imperfectives already on the basis of its infinitive (Slovak perf. *bodnúť* vs. imperf. *bodať* (stab), Rus. perf. *brosiť* vs. imperf. *brosať* (throw), etc.), linguists differ on various questions of viewing the aspect as has been shown in a survey undertaken by Sokolová.[18] This concerns for instance the question of whether frequentatives belong into the category of aspect or the category of aktionsart, and if they belong to the category of aspect, whether they should be included among imperfective verbs or whether they form a separate aspect or sub-aspect. The acknowledgment or non-acknowledgment of the existence of aspectual prefixes and so on is also discussed.

In Germanic or Romance languages aspect is not manifested within the infinitive, but the aspectual opposition is reflected on the finite verbal forms: in English the semantic distinction perfective – imperfective is reflected in the morphological opposition of simple past versus progressive past, in French in the morphological opposition passé simple versus imparfait. These languages deal with different problems than the Slavic languages: e.g. to what extent the perfect form belongs to the category of aspect, etc.

Of course, there can arise the need for a different approach in other languages with a different grammatical structure and different system of verbal forms, above all to the means with the help of which this verbal category is expressed. This also applies for Bengali, which constitutes the subject of our article.

2. History of the Research of Aspect in Bengali

2.1 In Indian languages the category of aspect does not traditionally rank among the number of central problems in describing their grammar, which is also the case of Bengali. This is also documented by the fact that aspect as a specific verbal category is not tackled even in the detailed description of the morphology of Bengali, The Origin and Development of the Bengali Language by S. K. Chatterji published in 1926.[19] Of course, Chatterji is familiar with aspect in other languages, as is evident from his statement on page 1050 where he discusses compound verbs which in modern Indo-Aryan speeches he considers as equally characteristic as aspect in Slavic languages.

Linguists investigating Indian languages have manifested interest in aspect only as late as the second half of the 20th century thanks to Soviet Indologists,

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[18] SOKOLOVÁ, M. *Verbálny aspekt v slovenčine – bilancia doterajšieho výskumu* (Verbal Aspect in Slovak – A Survey of the Existing Research), p. 8.
[19] CHATTERJI, S. K. *The Origin and Development of the Bengali Language*. Calcutta 1926.

who in compiling dictionaries of new Indian languages searched for equivalents of Russian perfective verbs. In the Hindi-Russian Dictionary[20] Russian perfectives were translated with the help of Hindi compound verbs, which started the considerations that in Hindi it is the compound verbs with the help of which perfectivity of action is expressed.[21]

Similarly, in the Bengali-Russian Dictionary by E. M. Bykova et al.[22] Bengali compound verbs correspond to Russian perfective verbs, e. g. *rāgā* – 'serditsya' (be angry) as against *rāgiyā uṭhā* – 'rasserditsya' (become angry); *calā* – 'idti, dvigatsya, echat' (go, move, ride) as against *caliyā yāoyā* – 'uchodit, uyezžat' (depart), etc. Otherwise, only imperfective equivalents are given with simple verbs.

A Czech Indologist D. Zbavitel in the dictionary part of his textbook on Bengali[23] sometimes gives a compound verb as a perfective counterpart to the imperfective verb (*khũje pāoyā* – 'najít' (find), as against *khōjā* – 'hledat' (look for), *mārā yāoyā* – 'umřít' (die) as against *marā* – 'umírat' (be dying)). Sometimes with the same Bengali form he gives both a perfective and an imperfective Czech equivalent, e.g. *phelā* – 'házet' and also 'hodit' (throw). With the basic dictionary form he quite often gives a perfective Czech equivalent: *kholā* – 'otevřít' (open) (in contrast to the imperfective form in the B-R Dictionary 'otkryvát(sya)'), *mākhā* – 'pomazat' (coat) (in contrast to the B-R Dictionary 'mazat, natirat'), *ghaṭā* – 'přihodit se' (happen) (B-R 'sluchatsya, proischodit'), *nāmā* – 'sestoupit' (descend) (B-R 'snizhatsya, spuskatsya, opuskatsya'), *pālṭāna* – 'obrátit' (revoke) (B-R 'perevrachivat, perevertyvat'), etc. He obviously used equivalents corresponding to the text in the textbook.

This differing interpretation of the dictionary form – the verbal noun – is enabled by the fact that this form only carries the basic lexical meaning. This is specified only in the finite form of the verb, in its combination with auxiliary words and with the help of the context.[24]

The lexical meaning plays an important role in determining the aspect of the verbs which were formed by a nominal-verbal combination, i.e. by combining the substantive or the adjective with the verb.[25] For example, the verbs formed

[20] BESKROVNYY, V. M. *Khindi-russkiy slovar* (Hindi-Russian Dictionary).

[21] Cf. e.g. POŘÍZKA, V. *On the perfective verbal aspect in Hindi*, p. 35 – 37. Or HOOK, Peter Edwin, *The compound verb in Hindi*, 318 p.

[22] BYKOVA, E. M. et al., *Bengaľsko-russkij slovar* (Bengali-Russian Dictionary).

[23] ZBAVITEL, D. *Bengálština* (Bengali), 489 pp.

[24] In more detail see BYKOVA, E. M. *The Bengali Language*, p. 77.

[25] This is the way to supplement in Bengali a relatively small number of verbs which according to S. K. Chatterji are estimated to amount to 800 (cf. Bykova, op. cit., p. 75). Most often it is the verb *karā* – 'to do' (*jijñās* /question/ *karā* – 'to ask', *kāj* /work/ *karā* – 'to work', *guli* /bullet/ *karā* – 'to shoot', *phon* /telephone/ *karā* – 'to telephone',

from adjectives with the help of the verb *haoyā* – 'to be' often denote a change of state: *khārāp haoyā* – 'to go wrong', *pākā haoyā* – 'to ripen', *baṛa haoyā* – 'to grow', *chaṭa haoyā* – 'to become smaller'; i.e. they denote an action which is perceived as perfective.

2.2 Although in the Bengali-Russian dictionary, similarly to the Hindi-Russian dictionary, compound verbs are given as equivalents of Russian perfective verbs when describing the Bengali grammar, the Soviet authors do not search for the category of aspect in compound verbs, but they rather search for it in temporal forms which sometimes are referred to as aspectual-temporal ones.

2.2.1 According to the Russian Bengalist E. M. Bykova the derivational structure the Bengali verb "has no category of aspect"[26]. On the basis of comparing the system of the Bengali and Russian verb she comes to the consclusion that "in Russian, and in all Slavonic languages in general, suffixation and prefixation play the main role in creating pairs of verbs opposed in aspect: rasskazat – rasskazyvat (narrate), chistit – vychistit, pochistit, ottchistit (clean)". Of course, we cannot find such opposition in Bengali, but as Bykova states further on, "this does not mean that the category of aspect is absent from the Bengali grammatical system. It exists, but is expressed in a different way. The category of aspect (perfectness-imperfectness)[27] is reflected in the tense forms of the verb".[28] However, she does not mention all the tense forms, she only states the suffixes *–it-/-t-*[29] (i.e. the suffix of the past habitual tense), *-il-/-l-* (she considers its occurrence in the simple past tense only), and *-i(y)a-/-e-* (the suffix of perfect tenses)[30] which, as she stipulates,

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and *haoyā* – 'to be', but possible are also combinations with other verbs, e. g.: *deoyā* – 'to give' (*pāhārā* /guard/ *deoyā* – 'to guard", *lāph* /jump/ *deoyā* – 'to jump", *ghanda* /smell/ *deoyā* – 'to stink"), *pāoyā* – 'to get' (*kaṣṭa* /suffering/ *pāoyā* –'to suffer'), *paṛā* – 'to fall' (*asukhe paṛā* – 'to fall ill'); *phelā* – 'to throw' (*thuthu* /saliva/ *phelā* – 'to spit' etc.).

[26] BYKOVA, E. M. *Bengali language*, p. 77.

[27] In literature there often occur the terms perfectness, imperfectness in the meaning of aspect. We preserve such terms when quoting authors, otherwise we distinguish the terms perfectness and imperfectness in the case of tenses, and perfectivity and imperfectivity to denote the aspectual opposition.

[28] BYKOVA, E. M., ibid., p. 78.

[29] Here as well as in the whole article before the slant there are suffixes occurring in the literary language Sādhu Bhāṣā and after the slant the suffixes of the standard language Calit Bhāṣā.

[30] Here in contrast to the earlier Russian edition of this book, obviously by mistake, the suffix of imperfect tenses *-ite-* is dropped.

"indicate the character of action from the point of view of aspect (perfectness – imperfectness) and mode of action (momentary – repeated, including habituality, frequency; continuity – non-continuity)".[31]

As is evident, Bykova does not differentiate between the aspect and the mode of verbal action.

Further on she claims that "compound forms[32] synthesize the grammatical meanings of the non-finite form, the lexical meaning of the auxiliary verb and the grammatical meanings of its finite forms. The synthesis of all these meanings makes it possible to express the resultativity of an action in the present and past (in forms with the conjunctive ending in –i(y)a-/-e-) plus its perfectivity (under certain conditions it expresses frequentation), or the non-resultance of an action in the present and the past (in patterns in –ite forms) plus continuousness, etc."[33]

E. M. Bykova comes to the conclusion that "on the basis of the interaction of the meanings of the stem and the auxiliary units in the structure of finite forms, the following groups of temporal meanings can be stated: 1. Perfectness, if there is a result in the present (perfect) or in the past, when the action belongs to the relatively remote past (pluperfect). 2. Imperfectness and continuousness in the present or in the past (present and past imperfect). 3. Habituality, frequency, reiteration (frequentative, present). 4. Momentary perfectness in the indefinite past (preterite). 5. Relegation of the action to the future without the distinction of perfect – imperfect (future tense)."[34]

As is evident above, Bykova delimits the morphemes by which aspect is expressed in a finite verbal form, but she perceives the whole verbal form rather synthetically and speaks about it as about a temporal form.

2.2.2 In her textbook of the Bengali language[35] another Russian Bengalist E. A. Alekseeva does not analyse the category of aspect, but the preterite, which she labels as a past narrative tense is denoted by her as a special aspectual-temporal form. However, she uses the terms perfective and imperfective participle (sovershennoe, nesovershennoe deeprichastiye (kare, karte). The perfective participle usually expresses a perfective, preceding action.[36] At the same time it can express the reason and the condition of the action expressed by the second

[31] BYKOVA, E. M., ibid., p. 86.

[32] Bykova has in mind perfect and imperfect tenses.

[33] BYKOVA, E. M., ibid., p. 86.

[34] BYKOVA, E. M., ibid., p. 86 – 87.

[35] ALEKSEEVA, E. A. Učebnik bengalskogo yazyka (Textbook of Bengali), Part I 1976, 270 p., Part II 1977, 272 p.

[36] ALEKSEEVA, E. A., ibid. I, p. 170.

verb.[37] Nevertheless, it can also express an imperfective action taking place simultaneously with another one.[38] She denotes the finite verbal forms as tenses and with regard to the present perfect tense she says that it denotes a completed action if its result continues to exist when the focus is not on the action but on its result. However, the perfect tense denotes also an activity started in the past but not yet finished.[39]

The forms of the future tense do not distinguish between perfectivity and imperfectivity. If the duration of the activity is to be stressed, it is expressed analytically: *likte thākba* – I shall be writing.[40]

2.2.3 More systematic attention to aspect is devoted by I. A. Svetovidova in her study Vremya, vid i sposob deystviya v bengali.[41] She understands aspect as expressing the completeness or non-completeness of the action. In her opinion only the present (*kari*), the present compound (*karchi*), the frequentative (*kartām*) and the imperfect (*karchilām*) unanimously express a non-completed action. The other four tense forms do not indicate completedness or non-completedness of the action if the particular form is assessed outside of any context. In her opinion, while the perfect (*karechi*), the preterite (*karlām*) and the plusquamperfect (*karechilām*) most often express a completed action, they can also express a non-completed action. Hence, with regard to the category of aspect she considers these tenses as being neutral.[42] The activity expressed by the future tense can be understood both as completed and non-completed.

Further on, Svetovidova shows that in Bengali aspect can be expressed by various means, both grammatical and lexico-grammatical.

Grammatical means expressing aspect can be either morphological (tense forms) or syntactic (joining the perfective participle with the verbs of existence resulting in complex predicate). As lexical-grammatical means she identifies the perfect participle with the verbs of motion, i.e. compound verbs which she calls 'složnointensivnye glagoly' (compound-intensive verbs).

She comes to the conclusion that aspectual meanings have to be investigated within their mutual interaction with the meanings of the mode of verbal action, while the mode of verbal action characterizes the action (state) from the point of view of its being carried out. It indicates the momentariness or the duration of the action, its one-time character or multiplicity, interruptedness

[37] ALEKSEEVA, E. A., ibid. I, p. 171.

[38] ALEKSEEVA, E. A., ibid. I, p. 170.

[39] ALEKSEEVA, E. A., ibid. Vol. I, p. 216.

[40] ALEKSEEVA, E. A., ibid. Vol. II, p. 29.

[41] SVETOVIDOVA, I. A. *Vremya, vid i sposob deystviya v bengali* (Tense, Aspect, and Mode of Verbal Action in Bengali), p. 218.

[42] SVETOVIDOVA, I. A., ibid., p. 219.

or uninterruptedness, usualness, unexpectedness, intensity, etc. The mode of verbal action is expressed by the same grammatical and syntactic means as aspect.

The participle ending in *–iyā* with the verbs of existence *āch-*, *thākā* and *rahā* in addition to the duration of action also expresses the manner of its duration, while with *āch-* it stresses the duration of the action at a particular moment in the present or in the past (*...tini cup kariyā basiyā āchen* – he/she is silently sitting), with *thākā* it expresses habituality/usualness (obychnost) of the given lasting state (*āmi sārādin ekhānei base thāki* – I have been sitting here for days, with *rahā* it expresses remaining in a state within a particular section of time (*anekṣaṇ dujane cup kare base rahila* – they have been silently sitting for long) (p. 219).[43]

2.2.4 The discussion about the category of aspect in new Indo-Aryan (NIA) languages has also been included in the work Morfologicheskiy stroy novykh indoariyskikh yazykov[44] by Russian linguist G. A. Zograf. He points out that many English-speaking researchers who deal with NIA languages do not differentiate the category of aspect from the category of tense. Even in the cases when the category of tense is acknowledged, it is by far not understood unanimously and is often interpreted very widely. He considers it indispensable to use all the accessible formal means to differentiate the category of aspect from that of mode of verbal action.[45]

On page 228 he introduces three aspect-tense bases of the verb: past habitual: *cal-it-*, simple past: *cal-il-* and future *cal-ib-*.

Zograf presents a scheme depicting the system of the personal verbal forms in Bengali (he presents similar schemes for other NIA languages, too).

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[43] In the book Reference Bengali Grammar on page 156, W. Smith says that *āch-* 'be' with stative verbs describes the present existence of a state and *chil-* 'was' with stative verbs describes the past existence of a state: *śuye āche* – is sleeping, *lukiye chila* – was hiding; *thākā* 'remain' with stative verbs describes continued existence of a state: *āmi cirkāl tomār path ceye base thākba* – I will be waiting for you a long time; *raoyā* 'remain' with stative verbs describes continued existence of a state: *āmi sandhye theke śobār ghare lukiye railum.* – I remained hiding in the bedroom since evening.

[44] ZOGRAF, G. A. *Morfologicheskiy stroy novykh indoariyjskikh yazykov* (Morphological Structure of New Indo-Aryan Languages), 368 p.

[45] ZOGRAF, G. A., ibid., p. 208.

		0	1	2
		0	*karitē* /kar[te]/	*kariyā* /kare/
0	0			
1	*-chē* /-c´e/	*karē* /kore/	*karitēchē* /korc´e/	*kariyāchē* /korec´e/
2	*-chila* /-c´ilo/	*karila* /korlo/	*karitēchila* /korc´ilo/	*kariyāchila* /korec´ilo/
3	*thākibē* /t´akbe/	*karibē* /korbe/	*karite thākibē* /korte t´akbe/	*kariyá thākibē* /kore t´akbe/
4	*thākē*		*karitē thākē*	*kariyā thākē* /kore t´ake/
5	*thākita*	*karita* /korto/	*karitē thākita*	*kariyā thākita*

Adapted from Zograf, p. 271.

He interprets the oppositions on the horizontal axis as aspectual ones and the oppositions on the vertical axis as temporal ones while stating that in Bengali the forms lying on the temporal axis in lines 4 and 5 can be explained as forms having the meaning of the mode of verbal action.

On the basis of the system of personal verbal forms in various NIA languages Zograf comes to the consclusion that 'the means for expressing the morphological category of aspect in NIA languages are constituted by a non-predicative element of a finite form'.

According to Zograf the forms of the imperfective aspect represent the action in the process of its progress as related to some moment of each of the time levels expressed by the other action or by other means. Of paramount importance for them is the meaning of non-completion, duration and simultaneity of action. The forms of perfective aspect show the action within its result and they entail the meanings of completion, resultativeness and precedence of verbal action.[46]

In the forms without a participial component the previous groups of meanings are not expressed. In Bengali these are represented by *kare* and *karila* which are usually labelled as the 'general present' and 'general past'. Added to them is also *karita* (Zograf labels it as the form of the conditional mood). All the three are labelled by him as forms of the 'general aspect' /obshchiy vid/, for which the meanings of non-completion or completion, simultaneity or precedence, duration, resultativeness and so on are irrelevant.

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[46] ZOGRAF, G. A., ibid., p. 283.

Zograf points out the fact that in many cases, above all in the column of the forms of 'general aspect', semantic dynamism occurs. For example, the simple form of the future tense is semantically close to the perfective aspect, which evokes the tendency that in the position of the imperfective aspect a secondary analytical form is used (*karba – karite thākba*).[47]

After his analysis Zograf comes to the conclusion that 'the aspectual opposition in northern Indian languages is relevant for the majority of predicative forms and such non-predicative forms as participles. The other non-predicative forms can be included into the general aspect. In personal forms the aspectual opposition is neutralized (in favour of the general aspect) in the imperative.'[48]

In conclusion, he claims that "in north-Indian languages, with the exception of the Assam language, the morphological category of aspect is represented by the opposition of three groups of forms connected with two types of participial formations and one type of non-participial formation which are interpreted as the perfective, imperfective and 'general' aspect".[49]

2.3 The problem of aspect has also been dealt with by the Czech Indologist Dušan Zbavitel in his book Non-finite Verbal Forms in Bengali.[50] Although in his work he deals with non-finite verbal forms, in the introductory chapter on the verbal system in Bengali he also touches upon the aspect of verbal action. He does not analyse how the aspect is expressed in Bengali, but from several of his notes included it seems that he is convinced that it is manifested on the finite verbal form. He does not indicate which morpheme in it expresses the aspect, but rather he understands the finite verbal form in its complexity similarly to Svetovidova.

He mentions 'ten different forms' of the verb: simple present, simple future, simple preterite, habitual past, present imperative, future imperative, present perfect, preterite perfect, present progressive and preterite progressive. He comes to a similar conclusion as Svetovidova had earlier: that 'these finite forms taken out of their content are incapable of expressing exactly delimited and mutually distinguished categories of tense, aspect and mood'[51] A bit further on he says: 'owing to certain features of the development of the Bengali verb, the individual finite forms have lost much of their unambiguity in respect of tense, mood and aspect.'[52]

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[47] ZOGRAF, G. A., ibid., p. 284.

[48] ZOGRAF, G. A., ibid., p. 285.

[49] ZOGRAF, G. A., ibid., p. 305.

[50] ZBAVITEL, D. *Non-FiniteVerbal Forms in Bengali*, 137 p.

[51] ZBAVITEL, D., ibid., p. 11.

[52] ZBAVITEL, D., ibid., p. 11.

Zbavitel also claims that 'syntactic constructions are needed, instead of pure morphological means, wherever a more definite denotation of tense, aspect and mood is required'.[53]

He also uses the term aspect with regard to some compound verbs (according to A. Pal he calls them verbal compounds), but here he offers a wider understanding of aspect. He does not put into the opposition of perfectivity versus imperfectivity, but he speaks about 'the aspect of suddenness' ('the prevailing aspect of the suddenness of the verbal action' (*oṭhā*)),[54] or about 'the aspect of continuity' (e.g. the vector *yāoyā* v CV *baliyā gela* conveys the 'aspect of continuity' to the first verb).[55] He says for instance that 'the first verb is the bearer of the main action and the second only modifies its aspect'. (p. 82) Also, that 'all compound makers... may add more than one unambiguous aspect to the directing verb'.[56] Elsewhere in the same connection he does not use the term 'aspect' but he speaks about expressing 'the idea of suddenness or unexpectedness'.[57]

2.4 The authors of Bengali grammar writing in English sometimes make as if only a passing note of aspect without specifying in any detail by what linguistic means it is expressed. For instance, W. L. Smith writes: 'In Bengali aspect is as much stressed as tense; as a consequence tense usage is rather loose.'[58]

He then speaks about aspect in connection with compound verbs which he calls 'aspective compounds', i.e. such compounds which are formed with the help of perfective participle + an aspective auxiliary. However, as the following examples illustrate, the same vector can serve both as a perfective auxiliary and as an auxiliary expressing continuity. For example, the vector *yāoyā* as a perfective auxiliary indicates a completed action: *puliś ese geche, pālāo* – The police have come, flee. However, on the other hand, *yāoyā* describes a continuous action or process. In that case it is often in the form of the imperfect tense: *se cup kare śune yācchila.* – He silently listened.[59] Within such usage the compound maker (vector) *yāoyā* in all the cases is presented in imperfect tenses, i.e. the duration is indicated by the very usage of tense.

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[53] ZBAVITEL, D., ibid., p. 11.

[54] ZBAVITEL, D., ibid., p. 82.

[55] ZBAVITEL, D., ibid., p. 76.

[56] ZBAVITEL, D., ibid., p. 80.

[57] ZBAVITEL, D., ibid., p. 88.

[58] SMITH, W. L., *Bengali Reference Grammar*, p. 99.

[59] SMITH, W. L., ibid., p. 150.

2.5 A different understanding of aspect in New Indo-Aryan languages is provided by Colin P. Masica.[60] He considers it as a morphological category, and in contrast to the previous authors he asserts that aspect has to be differentiated from tense. He also refuses the search for aspectual functions in compound verbs; he relegates them to the domain of *aktionsart*. In his opinion, compound verbs belong more to the domain of derivation, that is, to lexicon, than to grammar. He does not agree with the opinion that vectors have an 'aspect'-marking role, and a perfective-marking role in particular, because 'they are not predictably the same for all verbs, they are governed by lexical semantics',[61] 'they do modify the meaning of the verb itself, however subtly and in many cases untranslatably, which pure grammatical elements should not do; moreover, there is already an aspect-marking *morphological* system in place in NIA, which is consequently ignored (or confused with tense, which is thereby also misconstrued)'.[62]

Masica also refuses the Slavic model for Indo-Aryan as misleading and unnecessary[63] and neither does he consider as appropriate any attempts at searching for analogy between Slavic verbal prefixes and Indo-Aryan vector verbs.[64] He comes to the conclusion that aspect has to be differentiated not only from time but also from aktionsart.

According to Masica aspect in NIA is 'embedded in the suffixal morphology'.[65] He claims that in NIA the basic aspectual system is created with the help of participles, the semantics of which already entails the basic distinction into perfective/imperfective/unspecified, while in some languages further differentiation takes place. Most common is the splitting of the imperfective into habitual and continuous. Within his description he also concentrates upon the languages in the eastern group, i.e. on Bengali as well, where for perfective marker he considers the sufix *-il-/-l-*; but he has in mind only the suffix of the finite verbal form which is already traditionally denoted as simple past or preterite. He considers this form as tense-unspecified in contrast to the tense-specified 'perfect'. The marker of the perfect is the suffix *-iyā-/-e-*.

As imperfective marker (or habitual, or continuous) he denotes the sufix

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[60] MASICA, C. P. *The Indo-Aryan Languages*, pp. 262–279.

[61] MASICA, C. P., ibid., p. 327.

[62] MASICA, C. P., ibid., p. 268.

[63] MASICA, C. P., ibid., p. 267.

[64] MASICA, C. P., ibid., p. 266.

[65] MASICA, C. P., ibid., p. 269.

-ite-/(H).[66] He points out that 'the available aspectual *markers* must not be confused with the aspectual distinctions themselves. The latter are sometimes marked in different ways in conjunction with different tenses'.[67]

This theory of his is clearly reflected in the finite verb paradigm of Bengali (Colloquial): simple present (he denotes it as General Unspecified > Present Habitual) and future considers for aspect-unspecified; the past habitual/contrafactual has an imperfective aspectual marker (-*y*-), while being time-unspecified; the present continuous and the past continuous have a continuous aspectual marker (H), the simple past (which he denotes as Unspecified Perfective) has a perfective aspectual marker (-*l*-) and it is time-unspecified; the present perfect and the past perfect have the perfective aspectual marker (-*e*-). Masica specifies perfect (or 'Resultative') under perfective. Here the conjunctive (i.e. perfective) participle (also implying 'completed' or 'preceding' action) + present/past auxiliary is employed for this purpose. According to him this is in compliance with the recent general studies of aspect which 'emphasize as the chief role of the perfective the chronological sequency of past events as against the provision of background and scene-setting for the imperfective.'[68] Hence, his considerations can be summed up in such a way that in NIA (i.e. also in Bengali) there exists a morphological opposition of the perfective aspect vs. the imperfective aspect, while the perfective aspect entails the 'non-perfect' and the 'perfect' and the imperfective entails the habitual and the continuous.

2.6 As far as we know, the most detailed attention to Bengali aspect has been undertaken by the Bengali linguist Ranjit Chatterji in his monograph Aspect and Meaning in Slavic and Indic.[69] Chatterji knows very well the Slavic literature on aspect and in his opinion it has inevitably influenced those few who have written on these problems in Indian languages. In describing the Indic aspect (in the book it is above all the Bengali aspect and in places also the Hindi aspect) his aim is not to be influenced by the knowledge of the Slavic aspect and to avoid Slavic aspectual terminology. In contrast to Masica he does not consider aspect as a morphological category, but he looks at it as a conceptual semantic

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[66] This (H) indicates that in Calit Bhāṣā the suffix *-ite-* is dropped, but in pronunciation it leaves behind a higher-vowel variant of the preceding stem as a token of its former presence. We accept this appropriate labelling from Masica and use it also in our explanations.

[67] MASICA, C. P., ibid., p. 272.

[68] MASICA, C. P., ibid., pp. 276 – 277.

[69] *Current Issues in Linguistic Theory.*

category, while for the guiding principle in this conceptual semantic category of aspect he considers the linear : punctual division.[70]

As he states, he 'attempts to concentrate on the question of the *meanings* of *forms* that express aspect' and 'as far as possible to show meanings within sentential context, although at the same time ´inherent´ meanings will be given more attention than is usual in studies of aspect'.[71] He demonstrates how in Bengali this conceptual semantic category can be expressed by vectorless tenses as well as by pure verbal compounds. In the first case he speaks about a latent aspect and in the second case about a realized aspect.

Latent aspect signifies aspectual meanings that inhere in the use of regular tenses without addition of the vectors. Aspects reside in what are fundamentally tense expressions, the relation of the narrated event to the speech event. However, 'each of these aspectual values is acquired in context in these cases by the nature of the other lexical elements and/or the inherent aspectual qualities of the predicate. It is in this sense that aspect is latent in the vectorless tenses including the two perfects'.[72] Furthermore, 'in the latent aspect... the tense inflections are the exponents...'[73]

He considers as the realized aspect the aspect expressed with the help of pure verbal compounds. He focuses on the ten most frequent vectors which represent the centre or ´core´ of realized aspect in Bengali and which he considers as the realized aspect formants of Bengali. Bengali vectors are divided by him into those compatible with punctuality and those compatible with linearity. Seven of them (*lāg-*, *phal-*, *ne-*, *rākh-*, *thāk-*, *bas-*, *de-*) have realized punctuality in common as one function. The semantics of punctuality are quite differentiated. Nuances imparted by the vectors fall into five subcategories: *inception*, *subitaneity*, *version*, *ablation*, and *result*. Three less frequent vectors (*par-*, *tal-*, *oṭh-*) can be matched with the five semantic subcategories concomitant with punctuality.[74] He labels three of the vectors (*ās-*, *yā-*, *berā-/*) as incompatible with punctuality. They express linearity that is not as complex as punctuality being expressed by five vectors, all of which have the element of meaning *linear motion* in common.[75]

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[70] According to Masica, ibid., p. 267, punctuality rather belongs among 'the lexical properties of individual verbs – even though such lexical features clearly interact with grammatical categories such as Aspect'.

[71] CHATTERJI, R., ibid., p. 3.

[72] CHATTERJI, R., ibid., p. 83.

[73] CHATTERJI, R., ibid., p. 100.

[74] CHATTERJI, R., ibid., p. 86.

[75] CHATTERJI, R., ibid., p. 100.

As we saw above, it is namely this polysemanticity which leads Masica to refuse compound verbs as a means for expressing the aspect in Indian languages and he speaks about them as aktionsart.

According to R. Chatterji, 'in the realized aspect inflection plays no role, the only formal exponents being the verbs themselves, divisible into main verbs and vectors of deverbal origin. Here the basic process is the compounding of these two, with vectors bearing subcategorical nuances along with punctualizing and linearizing functions.'[76]

After all the analyses he arrives at the following conclusions: Firstly, aspect cannot be isolated and treated as a waterproof category unrelated to tense and mood. Secondly, data do not admit the completely predictable (automatic) interpretation of aspectual forms. Thirdly, aspect cannot be treated as existing in words alone as opposed to sentences or the larger frames of discourse. This point is to be emphasized... Problematic is the tendency to see aspect as confined to morphology. Fourthly, in the aspectual data there can be neither a pervasive, context-free principle of markedness, nor (contingently) a binary opposition that in some sense 'exists' in the 'structure'of the language and is not constructed by the linguist on the basis of particular data. Fifthly, the assignation of aspect to either morphology, or semantics, or pragmatics/discourse is not feasible, since it permeates all three levels.[77]

3. Conclusion

3.1 As is obvious from the brief survey of the history of the research of aspect in Bengali, the said authors considerably differ in their opinion upon this verbal category. According to some of them aspect cannot be separated from tense and from aktionsart (Svetovidova, Zbavitel, Chatterji). Others, on the contrary, claim that aspect as a morphological category indispensably has to be differentiated from anktionsart (Zograf) or from both aktionsart and tense (Masica). According to some linguists aspect is carried out also with the help of compound verbs (Chatterji, Svetovidova), whereas for others compound verbs do not express aspect, but rather aktionsart (Masica). Those who consider the Bengali aspect to be a morphological category search in verbal forms for concrete morphemes by which it is expressed, and they differ in their interpretation. For instance, the morpheme -il-/-l- is considered by Masica to be an aspect-marker expressing perfectivity, for Bykova it expresses momentuous perfectness in the indefinite past, and for Zograf this suffix expresses the 'general aspect'.

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[76] CHATTERJI, R., ibid., p. 100.
[77] CHATTERJI, R., ibid., pp. 96 – 97.

On the basis of the analysis of these views, their confrontation and our own analysis of selected Bengali texts we come to the conclusion that in Bengali it is more appropriate to consider aspect as a semantic category, while the semantic opposition of imperfectivity and perfectivity is expressed by finite verbal forms which are traditionally referred to as tenses.[78]

The system of Bengali tenses contains three present tenses (simple present, present imperfect, present perfect), four past tenses (simple past, past imperfect, past perfect, past habitual) and one future tense. The formal indicator of the fact that the tense is present, past or future is the tense-marker (zero in the present tenses, *-il/-l-* in the past tenses, *-it-/-t-* in the past habitual and *-ib-/-b-* in the future tense) and the particular set of personal endings (in the past habitual identical with the personal endings in other past tenses, with the exception of the 2nd person familiar).

Finite verbal forms (tenses) do not contain the grammatical morpheme of aspect. However, in the suffix of past habitual *-it-/-t-* the temporal meaning (past tense) merges with the aspectual meaning (imperfective habitual). Hence, this suffix is both a tense-marker and an aspect-marker. In addition, the suffix – *ite-/-/H/* in imperfect tenses always denotes imperfectivity (finite verbal forms with this suffix never express perfective action).

In the particular texts each finite verbal form denotes either imperfective or perfective action.

3.2 Present tenses

With regard to the fact that the present tense, as claimed by Comrie,[79] is essentially a descriptive tense, not a narrative tense, it can only be of imperfective meaning. In Bengali the present tenses, i.e. the simple present and the present imperfect (so far we leave aside the present perfect) also only express imperfective actions. These two tenses, however, stand in opposition within imperfectivity. The present imperfective has above all continuous (progressive) meaning, while the simple present has habitual meaning.

3.2.1 Present imperfect
3.2.1.1 Continuous (progressive) meaning
(1) *lāu calche ār buṛi tār bhitar theke balche*. The bottle-gourd is getting on and the old woman is talking from inside it.
 (2) *ei dekha, lej nārche*. Look there, the tail is wagging.

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[78] We leave aside secondary meanings of tenses such as historical present, present imperfect expressing immediate future or past habitual used in conditional sentences.
[79] COMRIE, B., ibid., p. 72.

(3) ...*rānīrā sāt jane mile sei pakhīṭāke dekchen*. All the seven queens are looking at the bird.

(4) *emni kare tārā du:kha karchen*. In this way they are grieving.

3.2.1.2 Imperfective forms are sometimes used only in opposition to habituality, for denoting the fact that the action is not habitual, but that it is going on at the moment of the act of speech.

(5) *tārpar ghare ḍhukei to dekhla kī rakam piṭhe hacche*! Then he entered the room and saw what cakes are (lit. are being) there!

(6) *tumi dekhchi baṛa dusṭa lok!* I see (lit. I am seeing /at this moment/) that you are a very bad person!

3.2.1.3 In such a meaning the modal verbs *pārā* – 'can' and *cāoyā* – 'want' can also be used in the present imperfect tense.

(7)...*āmār ekṭi sākṣī āche, kintu āpnār bāṛir kukurder bhaye se āste pārche nā*. I have a witness but he cannot (is not being able to /now/) come because he is afraid of your dogs.

(8) *Tumii cāicha, āmi jor kari.* It is you who wants (literally is wanting, i.e. now) me to insist.

3.2.2 Simple present

3.2.2.1 Habitual meaning

Comrie's thesis that habituals describe a situation that can be viewed as a characteristic feature of a whole period[80] applies also to Bengali habituals. Present habituality is expressed by the simple present:

(9) *āmi iskule yāi*. I go to school.

(10) *āmrā kalkātāy thāki*. We live in Calcutta.

Expressing the general truth also belongs to this category.

(11) *bhārate loke hāte khāy*. People eat with their hands in India.

3.2.2.2 Iterative meaning

Habituality may involve iterativity which can be established by the adverbial: e.g., *roj, pratidin* – 'every day', etc.

(12) *emni se roj āse, roj ṭunṭuni tāke pranām kare ār mahārānī bale, ār se khuśi haye cale yāy*. In this way she comes every day, every day the tailor-bird bows to her and calls her maharani and she goes away satisfied.

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[80] COMRIE, B., ibid., p. 28.

3.3 Past tenses

A wider scale of past tenses in Bengali indicates a wider scale of aspectual meanings which can be expressed by them. Past tenses are used to express perfective as well as imperfective actions.

3.3.1 Simple past

As is evident from the survey of the history of investigating the aspect in Bengali, most varied interpretations with regard to aspect are connected with the simple past. Various authors interpret it differently: according to S. K. Chatterji '-il- is *the* past base of Bengali'.[81] Also in our opinion it is the marker of the past tense (as such, it also occurs in the past imperfect and past perfect) which indicates the localization of the action into the past with regard to the moment of speech, but automatically not the perfectivity of the action (e.g. the forms *tākālām* – I looked, *baklām* – I scolded express imperfectivity). Alekseeva considers the simple past to be an aspectual-temporal form. Bykova says that the suffix *-il-/-l-* expresses momentaneous perfectness,[82] while according to Masica the suffix *-il-/-l-* is a perfective aspect-marker and he considers simple past as tense-unspecified. According to Zograf the simple past expresses the 'general aspect' and is in aspectual opposition to perfective perfect forms and imperfective imperfect forms. The texts testify to the fact that the simple past can have both a perfective and imperfective meaning.

3.3.1.1 Perfective meaning

In Bengali, similarly to many other languages, it applies that for preterite (in Bengali the simple past) it is most natural to have perfective meaning. The simple past is a narrative tense and as such usually denotes complete events.

(13) *emni kare tārā du-jane śiyāler garter kāche ela.* In this way the two came to the jackal's hole.

(14) *śune rājāmaśāi ho-ho kare hāslen, bichānāy garāgari dilen, nāpitke kichu ballen nā.* Having heard it the raja laughed very loudly, weltered on the bed and said nothing to the barber.

3.3.1.2 Imperfective meaning

However, not each verb in the form of the simple past expresses perfectivity. Depending on the lexical aspect of the particular verb it can also express imperfectivity.

(15) *subarṇā rāge phūste phūste edik odik tākāla.* Subarna, hissing in anger, looked (was looking) here and there.

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[81] CHATTERJI, S. K., ibid., p. 956.

[82] Bykova uses the term perfectness in the meaning of perfectivity.

(16) *rājār meye anek kāndlen, ār śiyālke baklen.* Raja's daughter weeped a lot and scolded the jackal.

(17) *āmrā kichukṣaṇ chelebelār kathā karlām.* We talked for a while about our childhood.

(18) *sei kathā bale hāslām khub.* Talking about it we smiled a lot.

Also the simple past of verbs of motion used in the function of a vector in a compound verb can have an imperfective meaning.

(19) *se bale gela.* He continued talking.

3.3.2 Past imperfect

3.3.2.1 Continuous (progressive) meaning

The past imperfect, similarly to the present imperfect, has a continuous (progressive) meaning.

(20) *śiyāl takhan tār garter bhitare base māch khācchila.* Sitting in his hole the jackal was eating the fish.

(21) *eman samay tinjan cāṣī seikhān diye yācchila.* At that time three farmers were going through that place.

The past imperfect is sometimes used also to denote the fact that the action is not habitual, but that the verbal process was going on at the moment referred to, which also applies for modal verbs.

(22) *āmār ye ṭhik ki hayeche, tā āmi nijei bujhte pārchilām nā.* I myself could not (literally was not being able to) understand what exactly has happened to me.

3.3.3 Past habitual

3.3.3.1 Habitual meaning

The past habitual expresses the habitual meaning of a past action.

(23) *yekhāne māṭher pāśe ban āche... seikhāne, ekṭā garter bhitare ekṭi chāgalchānā thākta. Sei takhana baṛa hayni, tāi garter bāire yete peta nā. Bāire yete cāilei tār mā balta, 'yāsne! Bhāluke dharbe... 'tā śune tār bhay hata, ār se cup kare garter bhitare base thākta...* Just there where there is a wood next to the field... a yeanling used to live in a hole. It was not big at that time, therefore it was not allowed (literally was not used to be allowed) to go out. If it wanted to go out, its mother used to tell him: 'Do not go! Bears will catch you...' Having heard that, it used to feel fear and sat silently in the hole...

3.3.3.2 Iterative meaning

Habituality may involve iterativity indicated also by the adverbial: e. g. *pratidin* – every day.

(24) *se āmāder kāche pratidin āsten.* He used to come to our house every day.

3.4 Future tense
The future tense can have a perfective as well as imperfective meaning. More often it denotes perfective actions.
(25) *se okhāne basbe.* He will sit (down)/ sit there.
(26) *eta sakále yete pārba nā.* I shall not be able to go so early.

3.5 Perfect tenses (perfect and pluperfect)
From the point of view of aspect, the perfect and pluperfect form a special group of Bengali tenses. They do not fully fit into the definition of aspect as a category which represents the internal temporal constituency of a situation just like the perfect in English as described by Comrie. The perfect tenses in Bengali 'express a relation between two time-points, the time of the state resulting from a prior situation and the time of that prior situation'.[83] In this way they represent the intersection of explicit, external time (or tense) with implicit, situation-internal time (or aspect). According to R. Chatterji 'the two perfect tenses of Bengali (past and present) inherently express punctuality, or the viewing of the action as a ´blob´ (Comrie 1976) or an unanalysable whole'.[84] They are formed from the perfect participle ending in *–iyā/-e* and it is namely this suffix which is considered by authors to be the suffix with the help of which perfectivity is expressed. However, the data indicate that although perfect tenses most often denote perfective actions, in certain syntactic constructions or depending on the lexical aspect of the verb they can also express an imperfective action.

3.5.1 Present perfect
The present perfect formally belongs to present tenses (it has a zero marker for tense and the personal endings of the present tense), and it expresses a relation between a present state and a past event. Most often it is used to denote a perfective action which can be resultative as well as non-resultative.
3.5.1.1 Perfective meaning – resultativeness
The actions described by the present perfect are often results of some activity.
(27) *gharer bhitar ghar kareche.* They have built a house inside the house.
(28) *er khānik bādei kumir eseche.* After a while the crocodile has come.
(29) *ei phalṭār bhitar pokā chila, tārāi āmāke kāmreche.* Inside of that fruit there were insects, it was they who have bitten me.

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[83] COMRIE, B., ibid., p. 52.
[84] CHATTERJI, R., ibid., p. 72.

3.5.1.2 Perfective meaning – non-resultativeness

The perfect can express a perfective but non-resultative action located in the past:

(30) *kumir to āgei baleche.* The crocodile has already said it before.

(31) *ghoṛā gācher chānā hay eman kathā ki kakhano śunechen?* Have you ever heard anything of the sort that a horse is an offspring of a tree?

(32) *bhebeche,... sab dhāni tule nebe.* He thought (lit. Has thought) ... that he would take all the unripened rice.

3.5.1.3 Imperfective meaning

The perfect can have an imperfective meaning when in this form there is the vector of a compound verb which expresses the continuity or prolongation of the verbal action (e. g. *raoyā* – to remain, *rākhā* – to keep, *āsā* – to come).

(33) pisimār ekṭā svabhāb āmrā ciradin laksya kariyā āsiyāchi. We have been observing, since ever, one characteristic quality of the aunt.

According to D. Zbavitel the perfect form in this example expresses that the 'action has been lasting for a long time and has not yet been finished'.[85]

(34) *sarbadāī ... tāhādigke asthir kariyā rākhiyāche.* He always kept agitating them.

In this example *rākhā* as CM expresses 'the prolongation or continuity of the verbal action.'[86]

The same applies also for the following example:

(35) *āmār garter bhitar nā jāni ogulo kī dhuke rayeche.* I do not know whether they have crawled into my hole (and are still there).

The perfect can have an imperfective meaning also in the case when it does not act as a vector:

(36) *bāgh takhano emni chuṭeche ye teman ār se kakhano choṭe ni.* The tiger also then ran as never before.

3.5.2 Past perfect

The past perfect is used relatively seldom. It expresses a relation between a past state and an earlier past action or only an action which took place in a more distant past.

3.5.2.1 Perfective meaning

(37) *śiyāl sabe tār sāmner du-pā ḍāṅgāy tulechila, śiyālnī tār āgei uṭhe giyechila.* Before this the jackal had drawn his two legs on the bank, the she-jackal had jumped up even before that.

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[85] ZBAVITEL, D., ibid., p. 109.
[86] ZBAVITEL, D., ibid., p. 108.

(38) *tārpar śeṣbār 1617 sāle mrityur ek bachar āge tini nijei ābār sei sandhāne giyechilen.* Then for the last time in 1617, one year before his death, he himself went (lit. had gone) for the search again.

3.5.2.2 Imperfective meaning
(39) *kāl sārā rāt jege māch kheyechilum, tāi āj baḍḍa ghum pācche.* Since I had kept eating fish the whole night yesterday, I am very sleepy today.
Of course, the first clause in this sentence could also be presented as a single complete whole, therefore as perfective, even in spite of the fact that it contains a temporal reference indicating that the action lasted for the whole night, i.e. that it took place in several phases.

4. Classification of finite verbal forms from the aspectual point of view
From the aspectual point of view the Bengali finite verbal forms (tenses) can be divided into the ones which only express imperfectivity, i.e. either continuousness (progressivity) (present imperfect, past imperfect) or habituality (simple present, past habitual), or ones in the case of which from their form only it is usually impossible to determine whether they express perfectivity or imperfectivity. Although they above all express perfectivity, in a certain context within a certain lexical aspect and in a certain syntactic construction they can also express imperfectivity. That is why we consider them for aspectually not strictly delimited. Belonging to these tenses are the simple past, the future tense, the present perfect (often referred to as the perfect) and the past perfect (pluperfect).

This classification of the finite verbal forms expressing aspect in Bengali can schematically be represented in the following way:

Imperfective				—	Aspectually strictly unspecified			
Continuous		Habitual						
PrIpf	PIpf	PrS	PH		PS	F	Pf	Plupf

In the formulas PrIpf = present imperfect, PIpf = past imperfect, PrS = present simple, PH = past habitual, PS = past simple, F = future, Pf = present perfect, Plupf = past perfect (pluperfect).

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