

## EMB 101: Emergence of Bangladesh

### Lecture 6: Colonial Attacks on Language and Culture

#### Learning Objectives:

The lecture will let students---

- Get acquainted with the aspirations of Pakistan movement and reality.
- Have understanding on nationalism and its theoretical framework.
- Know how Bengali nationalism was created among the people of East Pakistan.
- Be able to explain repressive treatment of the West Pakistan over the East.
- Get how cultural frontier played pivotal role in creating political platform.
- Have a clear understanding on the establishment of Awami Muslim League.
- Know how Language Movement united the people of East Pakistan against the misrule of Muslim League.
- Comprehend the causes of the failure of national integrity.

#### Topic Points:

- Concept of Nationalism
- Language as a political tool
- Bengali Nationalism
- *Tamuddun Majlish*
- Awami Muslim League
- United Front
- 21 point demands
- Constitution of 1956

#### Summary of the Lecture

Key Words: Dissimilarity, Muslim nationalism, *Ashraf*, Language Movement, Bengali Nationalism, Awami Muslim League, United Front, Constitution of 1956

Concept of nationhood played the most crucial role to the partition of India and Pakistan. Religion determined identity of a nation as presented in the 'Two Nation Theory' of Muhammad Ali Jinnah. Pakistan was created on the concept of religious brotherhood to become the dream homeland for the Muslims. Muslim majority of 'North Western' zone and Eastern Bengal gave shape of two wings of Pakistan. Except religion very few things were common among the inhabitants of these two wings. From the very beginning the founders of Pakistan were concerned about the **dissimilarities** of the two wings and hence the unity of the Pakistan. The sense of **Muslim nationalism** needed to be felt more strongly. During his one and only visit to Dhaka in 1948 Muhammad Ali Jinnah declared the idea of introducing a state language which will be Urdu. This

was neither the language of the majority of Pakistan nor spoken by the Bengalis. Jinnah's speeches sparked a wave of resentment among the educated population of East Pakistan.

Bengali intellectuals, students started to allege that West Pakistanis wanted to impose the language of the ruling elites (the **Ashraf** class) on the majority Bengalis. This ignited the Language Movement which redefined the concept of nationalism among the Bengalis of East Bengal and **Bengali nationalism** started to emerge. Language became the core issue of politics. Amid this movement a new political party, **Awami Muslim League**, surfaced here in East Bengal with an aim to create a political platform against authoritarianism of Muslim League. *Tamuddun Majlish* played the key role to make people aware about the significance of language and national identity. In 21 February, 1952 we see the peak of the movement when students decided to violate section 144 during a procession and police fired on them. A nationwide protest followed after this killing and demand for Bangla as a state language caused the transformation of a separate Bengali ethnic identity into a political identity. In the election of 1954 Awami Muslim League lead an alliance of three other political parties to fight against Muslim League. The alliance, known as **United Front** put forward 21 point demands where 'the state language issue' and 'the demand for autonomy of east Bengal' were the two main planks along with economic disparity, poor representation of the Bengalis in the government and politico-cultural repression.

United Front scored a comprehensive victory and formed a coalition government which lasted only for 56 days. Despite its short duration this government took various steps to ensure economic and cultural freedom of the Bengalis. Later as a secular stance 'Muslim' term was erased from 'Awami Muslim League' in its third council meeting in 1955. Pakistan got her first constitution in 1956. Bengalis had to wait eight years to get official approval of Bangla as a state language through this constitution. Although the constitution came into effect no general election was held under this constitution. Hope for democracy was buried for more than a decade when the constitution was abrogated and Ayub Khan became the military ruler of Pakistan.

### **Suggested Readings:**

Jalal, Ayesha, *The Struggle for Pakistan: A Muslim Homeland and Global Politics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Harvard University Press, 2014), (Chapter 2)

Ahmed, Rafiuddin (ed.), *Understanding the Bengali Muslims Interpretative Essays* (Dhaka: The University Press Limited, 2001), (Chapter 1)

Umar, Badruddin, 'The Language Movement, in History of Bangladesh', in Sirajul Islam (ed.), *History of Bangladesh, 1704-1971 (Political History)*, (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2nd edition, 2000)

Schendel, Willem Van, *A History of Bangladesh* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), (Chapter 11)

Jahan, Rounaq, *Pakistan: Failure in National Integration* (Dhaka: The University Press Limited, 1994), (Chapter 1, 2)