

Chapter Four First Phase of Internal-Colonial Experience, 1948 to 1956

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The Language Movement

(*Moder Garab, moder asha, amori Bangla bhasha*)

Our Pride our Hope, O my sweet Bengali Language

-Atulprasad

The Language Movement was a political as well as a cultural movement of East Bengal advocating the recognition of the Bengali language as an official language of the then-dominion of Pakistan in order to allow its use in government affairs, the continuation of its use as a medium of education, its use in media, currency and stamps, and to maintain its writing in the Bengali script. The movement was originated immediate after the birth of Pakistan. Soon after its establishment, the Central Government took some steps to limit its importance as a provincial language. After a lot of controversy over the language issue, the final demand from East Pakistan was that Bangla must be the official language and the medium of instruction in East Pakistan and for the central government it would be one of the state languages along with Urdu. Tamaddun Majlis mobilized the movement issue first and step by step many other non-communal and progressive organizations joined the movement, which finally turned into a mass movement. The movement reached its climax in February 1952 and finally the demand of the state language was achieved in 1956.

The Language Controversy and Debate over State Language

Statistically Bengalis were the majority community of Pakistan. The Urdu-speaking Pakistanis were mostly immigrants from India. They were mainly concentrated in the city of Karachi and were not more than three percent of the total populations, though Urdu was widely understood and used in West Pakistan. The West Pakistani languages, such as Punjabi, Sindhi, and Pashto were written in Urdu or Arabic script. On the contrary, the Bengali (Bangla) language had its own script different from Arabic script.

The language controversy of Pakistan started even before the creation of Pakistan. Before Pakistan was created in August 1947 demand was made to make Bangla the state language of Pakistan. Dr. Ziauddin Ahmed, a former Vice-Chancellor of the Aligarh University of India had suggested that Urdu should be the state language of the future state of Pakistan. At the same time Dr. Md. Shahidullah, a noted Bengali linguist from Dacca University, deprecated and denounced this heinous attempt in strong terms and opposed the suggestion and put forth arguments in favor of Bengali as the future state language of Pakistan. He remarked as early as July 1947 that there was no reason why Bangla should not be accepted as the state language once English was discarded as a foreign language. Dr. Mohammad Shahidullah wrote:

"If Urdu or Hindi instead of Bengali is used in our law courts and universities that would be tantamount to political slavery."

Shahidullah's above comment was the beginning of the language controversy of Pakistan and the Bengali language movement.

When the state has only one language the problem is simple. When it has many, the question of preference arises. If the language spoken by the majority is also sufficiently developed and has a good literature it can without hesitation be accepted as the state language. If the linguistic minorities are clamorous we have several state languages. In the case of Pakistan the obvious choice is of course Bengali. It is the language of the majority (56% per cent of Pakistan's population are Bengali speaking) and it is the richest language not only of Pakistan but of the whole of Indo-Pakistan sub-continent. It has a history over thousand years old and it has a wonderful vitality to develop and absorb foreign influences. In the last hundred years its development has been phenomenal and it draws its nourishment from the sap of the soil. Not only that, it has its intricate roots of connection with Sanskrit, Hindustani, Urdu and Persian. It is also the language which has most completely absorbed the spirit of Western literature. Basically Eastern in origin, it is of all the languages of the sub-continent the most modern and Western in outlook.

Urdu had been favored by the Centre, perhaps because some of the important men in the ministry and in the Secretariat happened to be Urdu speaking, offered poor contrast to Bengali. It was not even the mother tongue of any of the provinces of Pakistan and was equally alien to Bengali, Panjabi, Sindhi, Baluch and Frontier men. Urdu was a symbol of saying culture. It had hardly any foothold and it was doubtful whether it could survive without princely patronages. Even Iqbal, the dreamer of Pakistan and the great Urdu poet of the century found it inadequate for his difficult thoughts. In writing his great philosophical poem 'Asrar-i-Khudi' he had to discard Urdu in favor of Persian and he frankly admits. Because of the loftiness of his thought Persian alone was suitable to them.

Such a language whose efficacy as the state language was very much doubted from political and linguistic points of view and which presented formidable obstacles in the way of printing cannot be the state language of Pakistan. Several points are urged in favor of Urdu-from interested quarters. It was claimed to be an Islamic language. This is confusing to believe that any language under heaven can be Islamic or Christian or Heathen. If Urdu is Islamic, Bengali is equally so. Nay, it is more Islamic as a larger number of Muslims speak Bengali.

Secondly Urdu was urged to be the uniting factor between the different provinces of Pakistan. If this is to mean that Urdu can serve as the lingua franca between the multilingual provinces then nothing could be more absurd as it is equally foreign to all the parts of Pakistan. A lingua franca is always a natural historical growth; it is never the artificial creation of a government. Thus neither as an Islamic language which was absurd nor as the lingua franca which was fictitious could Urdu claim to be the state language of Pakistan. In spite of all this if Urdu was accepted as the only state language, it was sure to give rise to serious problems.

Thirdly the material and intellectual development which all go to enrich the national culture will be jeopardized. People must learn and think in their own language. To deny one's natural language is to deny everything. And to rob a people of its language is to render freedom a myth.

Lastly, if Pakistan was to have only one state language that must have been Bengali, if more than one, Bengali must be one of them. How this simple logic to fail to penetrate the brains of the leaders! There must be something wrong somewhere. Otherwise this unjust and step motherly attitude of the Centre towards the province of the golden fiber is difficult to explain.

Background of the Language Movement

The feeling of Muslims of Bengal that they had been let down by the Muslim League and Jinnah and betrayed by the Muslims of other provinces in getting their independent state in Eastern India on the basis of Lahore

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Resolution of 1940, showed itself in demanding recognition of Bengali as state language. With students and professors of Dhaka University a cultural organization named Tamaddun Majlis was founded on 1 September 1947. As soon as Pakistan came into being, a pamphlet came out in Dhaka, on 15 September 1947 entitled *Pakistaner Rashtra Bhasha, Bangla na Urdu* (Pakistan's state language Bengali or Urdu). In that publication it was proposed that:

1. Bengali language shall be:
 - a. Medium of Instruction in the East Pakistan
 - b. Medium of court communication
 - c. Medium of office communication
2. The languages of the Central Government will be both Urdu and Bangla.
3. Bengali shall be the first language of education department of East Pakistan. This shall be learnt by cent percent people of East Pakistan.
4. Urdu shall be the second language or inter provincial language
5. English shall be the third language or international language
6. For the present for the convenience of administration and scientific education, for some years administration in East Pakistan shall be carried on in both English and Bengali

The pamphlet also contained articles on the language issue by Kazi Motahar Hossain, the University of Dhaka teacher and Abul Mansoor Ahmed, the editor of the Daily Ittefaq. The above proposals were the manifestation of the aspirations of the Bengali-speaking people of Pakistan. Unfortunately, the central government of Pakistan failed to appreciate the depth of feelings of the majority community of the country and to allot the rightful place for the Bengali language in state affairs. As a consequence, the "Rashtra Bhasha Sangram Parishad" (the state language committee of action) was formed by different students and cultural organizations of Dhaka in the month of October 1947. The Committee vehemently protested the exclusion of the Bengali language from the newly-issued money, postal stamps, coins and office forms of the Government of Pakistan. On 5 December 1947 the teacher and the students of Dhaka University had their first street demonstration in favor of Bengali. On the following day, another protest meeting was held in Dhaka University against the government-sponsored Education Conference, held in Karachi, which recommended that Urdu should be the only state language of Pakistan.

In 1951, the area of East and West Pakistan consisted of 344,218 square miles, in which West Pakistan was 290,298 square mile (84% of total area), whereas the rest of was East Pakistan (16%). In that year, the total population of Pakistan was 74 million, of which 56% lived in East Pakistan and 44% was in West Pakistan. Although the area was smaller, more people

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lived in East Pakistan (today Bangladesh). India was divided based on religion. However, like India, Pakistan was also a multiethnic country, where Bangalee, Panjabi, Sindhi, Poshtu, Beluch and some other tribal groups were living. The percentage and distribution of the languages commonly spoken including mother tongue and number of persons speaking those languages in Pakistan as per Census of 1951 is as follows:

Table 4

Speaking Languages in Pakistan (Percentage) : 1951

Language	Persons	Percentage
Urdu	45,19,131	7.2
Bangali	412,91,989	54.6
Pushtu	35,89,626	7.1
Baluchi	10,75,999	1.4
Punjabi	214,66,815	28.4
Sindhi	43,59,287	5.8
English	13,77,567	1.8

Source: A.K. Choudhury, *The Independence of Bangladesh, a historical process* and Banglapedia

Pakistan Census of 1951 reports that in the Eastern Bengal total number of Bengali population was 4.13 crore and 98% of those people's mother tongue was Bengali whereas the Urdu spoken people was only 1.1%. Unfortunate enough, having this concrete statistics the ill-motivated ruling elites of Pakistan tried to impose an unjust decision to the Bengalis by making Urdu as the only state language. Out of the ill-calculated moves of the ruling elites was born a mass movement which had soon overtaken the concept of Pakistan itself and led the people of East Bengal to seek for a new identity—the Bengali nationalism. After Pakistan's "founding father" Muhammad Ali Jinnah and, later, fellow Bengali Khwaja Nazimuddin declared Urdu as the official state language, protest erupted throughout the Eastern wing. The valiant Bengalis started struggling for their mother tongue. Ultimately, in 1956, the people of East Bengal succeeded in achieving Bengali as one of the state languages under the 1956 Pakistan Constitution.

Causes of the Language Movement

The movement was going to be pretty old and it was unfortunate to state that while our whole energy should be harnessed in nation building activities, the Central Government in refusing to accept Bengali as a prospective state language had created distrust and apprehension in the minds of the majority of Pakistani people. The movement had been caused on the ground of political, economic, social and cultural dimension.

Political Causes

Out of the Principle of self-determination came Pakistan and the young state was still struggling to achieve freedom in the real sense of the term. To be completely free, materially and intellectually, a long way had still to have been traversed and as one of its first obstacles the formidable weight of Bangla language was to be lifted to make room for languages of the people of East Pakistan. No free people can afford to neglect its mother tongue which alone is efficient to help develop the intellectual faculties inherent in every man. The domination of an alien language is the worst kind of domination and most efficient to keep a people servile; and the British knew this when they ousted Persian and introduced English in the early part of the nineteenth century. Although the movement was originated as a cultural one, gradually it got a political shape. Political figures from all corners of Eastern and Western part got involved. The apprehension was legitimate and until and unless it was removed it was sure to alienate a people without whose whole-hearted co-operation the dreams of unity and solidarity would never materialize. The Central Government was supposed to declare its policy clearly and categorically. It committed the greatest mistake at the very beginning of its journey as a state in selecting the state language; it went against the principles of democracy. In spite of being a cultural movement in its initial stage, finally it had been shaped with the political flavors. Both the political parties and political figures took the language as their main weapon to protest against the unjust activities of the Pakistani government.

Social and Cultural Causes

Language is a crucial part of any culture. It is important in building a democratic state and transcends the distinctions of class. It is the first tool for a child to express himself or herself. Language is a dominant feature in determining the bases of nationalism or ethnicity, as it represents a nation's identity and preserves its heritage. It is also the driving force behind the unity of the peoples and makes them distinct from other nations. Once a language is adopted into a society it is difficult to eliminate it until the society itself decides to change or adopt something different. Muslim scholars and leaders logically believed that Urdu should be the lingua franca because it had gained a reputation as the cultural symbol of sub continental Muslims. At the same time they should have been realized that aggression over any language means a lot. It meant to attack on the whole Bengali nation indeed. However, Eastern Pakistanis regarded Urdu as the language of the elite, not the language of the people in the Eastern province - who made up majority of Pakistan's population - where Bangla was the mother tongue. Various cultural organizations were established to protect the very aggression. Scholars and writers from Eastern part of Pakistan continued

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writing against the government decision. More than half of the total populations of Pakistan were Bangali which was not recognized by the elite ruling class of the West wing of Pakistan. Consequently the Bengal people had no other option other than the movement to secure their social and cultural rights.

Economic Causes

Besides cultural and political reasons, economic factors were also actively responsible to cause the movement. Leading Bengali scholars argued why only Urdu should not be the state language. The use of English and Urdu on money order forms, on postal stamps and coins with the exclusion of Bangla increased the apprehension of the educated section in East Pakistan which created an anti-government feeling among them. The linguist Dr. Muhammad Shahidullah pointed out that Urdu was not the native language of any part of Pakistan, and said, "If we have to choose a second state language, we should consider Urdu." The writer Abul Mansur Ahmed said if Urdu became the state language, the educated society of East Bengal would become 'illiterate' and 'ineligible' for government positions. As a result the economy was also a matter of concern for the people of East Bengal. Ironically the Pakistan Public Service Commission removed Bengali from the list of approved subjects, as well as from currency notes and stamps. The educated people felt threatened to lose their position in case of making Urdu as their state language. Bangla was the only language to most of the people of Eastern Bengal. Educated middle class of both East and West Bengal had their expectation to be employed. All of their hopes were shattered with the declaration Urdu as the state language of Pakistan. Most of the government officials and employees were the residence of the region adjacent to the Dhaka University area. As Dhaka University was the epicenter of the language movement, they could easily join the movement. From 1948 to 52 several numbers of strikes were observed by the professional classes in East Pakistan in the demand of Bangla as one of the state languages. Along with the above causes the grievances due to the famines of 1948, 49 and 51 fueled the anti government agitation which was culminated with the language movement.

First Phase: The Early Stage of the Movement

After the partition of India the political developments in East Bengal did not exactly follow the trends set out by pre-partition politics. The problems which were likely to come up in post-partition politics were - Hindu-Muslim tensions, intra-party factionalism, setting up political infrastructures and economic reconstruction of the new nation and so on. Interesting enough, East Bengal politics was characterized by none of these problems, on the contrary, it was dominated by a comparatively distant issue and it was the language. The language question for the state of Pakistan soon became the principal issue of Pakistan politics.

To both of the litterateurs and the politicians even before Pakistan was created, language was a major issue of discussion. Provision for imparting education through mother-tongue was stressed in the draft manifesto prepared by Abul Hashim, the General Secretary of the Provincial Muslim League and placed before the Provincial Council. When Mountbatten, the last Governor General of India, declared the Partition Scheme on June 3, 1947, a handful of left-wing politicians formed the Peoples Freedom League in July 1947. Kamruddin Ahmed, Mohammad Toaha, Tazuddin Ahmed, Oli Ahad and others brought out a manifesto to make Bangla the medium of education. They demanded that since Bangla was their mother-tongue every effort should be made to make the language suitable for such purpose and that Bangla should be made the state language of East Pakistan. A conference in Dhaka held on September 6 and 7 in 1947 where a proposal was made to make Bangla the state language of Pakistan.

Pakistan government's every wing from civil services to defense was dominated by the West Pakistanis. A key resolution at a national education summit held in Karachi in early 1947 recommended Urdu as the sole state language, and its exclusive use in the media and in schools. With this the first phase of the language movement was started by opposing and protesting against the resolution. Students from Dhaka rallied under the leadership of Abul Kashem, the secretary of Tamaddun Majlish, a Bengali Islamic cultural organization. Tamaddun Majlish campaigned for making Bangla the medium of education and of legal proceedings. On September 15, 1947 they brought out a pamphlet and demanded Bangla to be made the medium of instructions in educational institutions, of legal matters and of all official works and also the language of the Central Government of Pakistan. It said that each unit of Pakistan should be independent and sovereign as has been declared by the Resolution at Lahore. Each province, therefore, had the right to choose its state language.

In the meeting of the working committee of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League held in Dhaka at the Burdwan House on December 5, 1947 it was decided that Urdu should not be made the state language of East Bengal. A large number of students and a few teachers were present and expressed their demand to make Bangla the state language in the meeting. In the mean time returning from the education conference had been held in Karachi Habibullah Bahar and Abdul Hamid, two ministers from East Pakistan informed that Urdu had been accepted as the state language of Pakistan. The Morning News already printed the news on December 5, 1947 before it published on December 6.

A meeting held by the students demanding Bangla as the state language took place at the Dhaka University campus on December 6, 1947 where the students of Dhaka University, Dhaka Intermediate College, Jagannath

Intermediate College (Presently Jagannath University, Dhaka) and of other institutions were present. Abul Kashem, editor of the Tamaddun Majlish, Munir Choudhury, Abdur Rahman Choudhury, Kalyan das Gupta, A.K.M. Ahsan and S. Ahmad spoke at this meeting. At the meeting Vice-President of the students union of Dhaka University Farid Ahmed put forward the following proposals which were accepted unanimously.

- a. Bangla to be given priority as the state language of the dominion of Pakistan as well as the official language and as the medium of instructions in East Pakistan.
- b. The confusion created in respect of the state language and the lingua franca was to conceal the real issue. The government's attitude was a betrayal to Bangla language and to the people of East Pakistan.
- c. Fazlur Rahman, a minister of Pakistan Government and Habibullah Bahar, a mister of the Provincial Government were criticized for supporting the resolution at the education conference in favor of Urdu language.
- d. The Morning News was criticized for printing anti-Bangla propaganda. It was warned not to defy the wishes of the people. Bengali students met on the University of Dhaka campus on 8 December 1947 to formally demand that Bengali be made an official language. To promote their cause, Bengali students organized processions and rallies in Dhaka.

Anti-government feeling as a result of the language issue was already manifested through resistance movement among the middle class and educated section in East Pakistan. To give an organizational structure to this anti-government feeling of the people the Tamaddun Majlish formed *Rastrabhasa Sangram Parishad* (the National Language Action Committee), the first ever organization formed on the language issue was formed towards the end of December 1947. This Action Committee was formed in the presence of a number of members of Tamaddun Majlish and Students Muslim League. Nurul Huq Bhuiyan was elected convener. Later, Parliament member Shamsul Huq convened a new committee to push for Bengali as a state language. This Action Committee in its early stage printed statements in journal and newspapers, arranged discussions, conducted interviews with government officials and continued its movement through associations.

Assembly member Dhirendranath Datta proposed legislation in the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan to allow members to speak in Bengali and authorize its use for official purposes. Datta's proposal was supported by legislators Prem Hari Burman, Bhupendra Kumar Datta and Sris Chandra Chattaopadhyaya of East Bengal, as well as the people from the region. Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan and the Muslim League denounced the proposal as an attempt to divide the Pakistani people, thus the legislation was defeated.

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Language Movement in 1948

The Constituent Assembly of Pakistan was in session from 23 February 1948. It was proposed that the members would have to speak either in Urdu or in English at the Assembly. Dhirendranath Datta a member of the Constituent Assembly brought a motion in the Assembly, demanding Bengali as one of the state languages of the country. He said: "The state language should be the language which is used by the majority of the people of the state, and for that, Sir, I consider that Bengali language is a lingua franca of our State. Promptly opposing the motion, Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan, brought a vague allegation that the member was trying to create misunderstanding between the different parts of Pakistan."

Dhirendranath Datta further said: "Pakistan has been created because of the demand of a hundred million Muslims in the subcontinent and the language of a hundred million Muslims is Urdu and, therefore, it is wrong for him now to try and create the situation that as the majority of the people of Pakistan belongs to one part of Pakistan, therefore the language which is spoken there should become the state language of Pakistan. Pakistan is a Muslim nation."

The proposal came under severe criticism of Liaquat Ali Khan, the Prime Minister of Pakistan and Khwaja Nazimuddin, the Chief Minister of East Pakistan. Both of them strongly opposed the proposal and declared that the Assembly should disregard such an amendment bill and said that the majority of the people of East Pakistan agreed that only Urdu should be made the state language. Students expressed their resentments through strikes and rallies. The students of Dhaka University, Medical College and Engineering College and of various schools boycotted their classes on February 26, 1948 and brought out processions and slogans in favor of Bangla.

Tamaddun Majlis in associated with the students called for a meeting on March 2, 1948 for an organized movement against the decision of the Legislative Assembly. Kamruddin Ahmed presided over this meeting and many prominent leaders of e language movement including Ranesh Das Gupta, Aziz Ahmed, Ajit Guha, AbulKashem, Sardar Fazlul Karim, Shamsuddin Ahmed, Shamsul Huq, Mohammad Toaha, Naimuddin Ahmed, Tofazzal Ali, li Ahmed, Mohiuddin, Anwara Khatun, Samsul Alam, Shahidulla Kaiser, Tazuddin Ahmed, Lily Khan, Shaokat Ali, Awal, Wahed Choudhury, Nurul Alam, Kazi Golam Mahboob were there. Decisions were taken at this meeting to form a wider and more representative committee and an all-Party organization was formed namely the National Language Action Committee comprising members from the Democratic Freedom League, the Democratic Youth League, and the Tamaddun Majlis, two representatives from each of the residential halls of the Dhaka University and the East Pakistan Muslim Students League with Samsul Alam as the convener.

A general strike was observed on 11 March 1948 in the towns of East Pakistan in protest against the omission of Bangla from the languages of the Constituent Assembly, the absence of Bangla letters in Pakistani coins and stamps, and the use of only Urdu in recruitment tests for the navy. The earlier demand that Bangla be declared one of the state languages of Pakistan and the official language of East Pakistan were also reiterated. On the morning of March 11 the students were present at Topkhana and Abdul Ghani Road for picketing in front of the Secretariat. Shamsul Huq, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Oli Ahad and others were present at Abdul Ghani Road. At the Topkhana Road Kazi Golam Mahbub, Shawkat Ali, Barkat and others were present. While picketing was going on there was argument between the police and Shamsul Huq, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Oli Ahad, Shawkat Ali, Kazi Golam Mahbub and they were arrested and taken to Waiz Ghat Police Station. After long interrogation they were sent for detention in the Dhaka Central Jail.

Students arranged a meeting at the Dhaka University premise to protest the above misdeeds. The speakers at the meeting gave agitating speeches and made strong criticisms against police excesses on students and they demanded the resignation of those representatives from East Bengal Secretariat and Railway. The officers also joined the students strike. Strikes were also held outside Dhaka at the call of the National Language Action Committee on March 11, almost everywhere in East Bengal students participated in the strike where the number of injured and arrested students stood at 200.

On March 12 it was reported in the Association Press of Pakistan that in a student's meeting held at Jagannath College (Now Jagannath University) which was attacked by about a hundred outsiders who bombarded bricks and stones over there. Many were suspected of being communists and were hit by iron rod. Police was stationed in the Secretariat area and the road in front of the Secretariat was closed to the public. In spite of this students brought out processions in the University area and other places of the city protesting against police atrocities and anti-Bangla conspiracy.

A meeting was held on the Dhaka University premises. Mohammad Toaha was severely injured while trying to snatch away a rifle from a policeman and had to be admitted to hospital. Strikes were observed from 12 March to 15 March. During that time Government banned some newspapers- the Ittehad, Dainik Swadhinata, the Jugantar, Amrita Bazar and Ananda Bazar Patrika.

Under such circumstances Khwaja Nazimuddin signed an agreement with the student leaders. The eight point agreement signed between the Action Committee and Nazimuddin was as follows:

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1. Those arrested on February 29, 1948 associated with the language movement were to be released immediately.
2. After enquiring into the incidents of police atrocities the Chief Minister himself would give a report within a month.
3. A proposal would be made for an informal discussion at the East Bengal Legislative Assembly in the first week of April 1948 where a special proposal would be made to raise the language issue at the next session of the Pakistan National Assembly demanding an equal status for Bangla with Urdu.
4. A proposal would be made at the Legislative Assembly in April 1948 that as soon as English was abolished as official language Bangla would take its place as the state language. Medium of education would be Bangla but in schools and colleges the medium of instruction would depend on the mother tongue of the majority students.
5. No action would be taken against anybody who took part in the movement.
6. Banning of newspapers would be withdrawn.
7. Section 144 (Government banning of meetings and demonstrations etc.) in various areas of East Bengal would be withdrawn from February 29.
8. Nazimuddin agreed that after discussion with the Action Committee he was convinced that the movement was not inspired by anti-state people.

Nazimuddin agreed to a few terms and conditions but did not comply with their demand that Bangla be made a state language. Muhammed Ali Jinnah, the Governor General of Pakistan, came to visit East Pakistan on 19 March. He addressed two meetings in Dhaka, in both of which he ignored the popular demand for Bangla. He reiterated that Urdu would be the only state language of Pakistan. The political bombshell in the demand for the recognition of Bengali as one of the state languages was exploded by Jinnah, when on 21 March, 1948, in a speech delivered by him at the Race Course in Dhaka.

Jinnah said: "... Let me make it very clear to you that state language of Pakistan is going to be Urdu and no other language. Anyone who tries to mislead you is really the enemy of Pakistan. Without one state language, no nation can remain tied up solidly together and function. Look at the history of other countries. Therefore, so far as the state language is concerned. Pakistan's language shall be Urdu. But, as I have said, it will come in time."

At Dhaka University in the morning of March 24 Jinnah repeated his same opinion regarding language issue he had expressed earlier at the Race Course Maidan (field) and at once the students shouted 'no', 'no' opposing Jinnah although Jinnah remained firm in his opinion relating to state language. This declaration was instantly protested and the Language Movement spreading throughout East Pakistan.

A meeting was held between Jinnah and the representatives of the National Language Action Committee in the evening of March 24 where Jinnah told them that he did not accept the terms agreed upon by Nazimuddin because the Chief Minister was placed in a tight corner and he was forced to accept those conditions. Jinnah told the Action Committee emphatically that Urdu alone would be the state language and he broke the meeting off a bit earlier. Before Jinnah left Dhaka on 28 March 1948, he delivered a speech on radio reasserting his "Urdu-only" policy.

After Jinnah had left the East Bengal Legislative Assembly was in session again from April 6, 1948. On this day Chief Minister Khwaja Nazimuddin broke off the conditions he had agreed upon earlier and advanced the following proposals: a) In East Bengal Bengali was to be accepted as the official language in place of English and b) The medium of education in East Bengal was to be Bangla or as applicable to the mother-tongue of the majority of the students at the respective institution. There was strong objection and tumult in the Assembly as Nazimuddin expressed such proposal but referring to Jinnah's speech Nazimuddin refused to withdraw his proposals.

In the year 1948 the officers employed at the central government called for a eighteen day strike starting from April 8, demanding financial and other benefits. Thirty-two medical students went on hunger strike from April 18. The students broke off their hunger strike on April 27 when the authority accepted to meet their demands. People and the shop-keepers of Dhaka and various places of East Bengal called a general strike on April 26 against imposing sales tax. The students of Dhaka University called a meeting on June 3, 1948 at the campus to discuss about the over-all situation in the province and the problem of the shortage of teachers. Another significant incident on 14 July 1948 was the strike called by the police force.

Jinnah was died on 11 September 1948. After his death the language movement had been a bit dejected. When Pakistan's Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan visited Dhaka once again the students raised their demands to him. In 27 November 1948, Ghulam Azam, the General Secretary of Dhaka University Students' Union on behalf of union gave a memorandum to Pakistan's Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan at Dhaka University asking that Bangla be the national language for Pakistan.

Language Movement from 1949 to 1951: a Preparative Stage

There was some letup in the language movement after 1948 and this period is known as the preparatory phase of the language movement. The Action Committee formed during the language movement in 1948 remained inactive for the next few years. Economic hardship and political repressions had created a new dimension which had a great impact on the language movement. A plot against Bangla language was the attempt to reform Bangla language. To organize demonstrations in protest against these oppressions the East Pakistan Students League Muslim called a nationwide Anti-Repression Day on January 8, 1949. The East Bengal Government formed the East Bengal Language Committee on March 9, 1949 making Maulana Akram Khan as the President of the committee to discuss the practicability of simplifying the Bangla language. Dhaka university students vehemently opposed this. Dr. Mohammad Shahidullah, the member of East Bengal Language Reform Committee issued a statement on October 4, 1950 against attempts to teach Bangla in Arabic script. Severe food shortage between the years 1947 and 1951 was the main reason for the spread of anti-government feeling in the interior villages during the language movement. During this time anti-government movements by the peasants were organized in many of districts like Mymensingh, Sylhet, Rajshahi, Jessore and Khulna. The Dhaka University Language Action Committee was formed on 11 March 1950 with Abdul Matin as its convener. Conspiracy against Bangla included attempt by the Central Government to introduce Arabic script for Bangla. Fazlur Rahman, a representative from East Bengal to the central government issued statements and argued at different meetings that in order to maintain integrity of Pakistan and to establish a strong and should be a similarity in the scripts of all languages of Pakistan. From April 18, 1950 the very conspiracy started to be executed and in this case also the Dhaka University students protested strongly.

Event of 1952: Final Stage of the Language Movement

By the beginning of 1952, the Language Movement took a serious turn. Within the last couple years since the birth of the nation, the people of East Pakistan lost their illusion over Pakistan and started losing faith in the Muslim League as well. With the emergence of new party, the Awami Muslim League the Language Movement got a new momentum in 1952.

Liaquat Ali Khan was assassinated at Rawalpindi on October 16, 1951 and Khwaja Nazimuddin was appointed the Prime Minister of Pakistan. He came to Dhaka by the end of January 1952 as Prime Minister and spoke at a public meeting at the Paltan maidan on January 27 where he declared that the people of East Bengal would decide what the language of the province would be but the state language of Pakistan would be Urdu and no other language. There was an instantaneous, negative reaction to this speech

among the students who responded with the slogan, 'Rashtrabhasha Bangla Chai' (We want Bangla as the state language). As a protest against Nazimuddin's speech the Dhaka University National Language Community put posters on walls in University area and called a token strike on January 30.

The representatives of various political and cultural organizations held a meeting on 31 January chaired by Moulana Bhasani. An All-Party Central Language Action Committee was formed with Kazi Golam Mahboob as its convener. At this time the government also proposed that Bangla be written in Arabic script. This proposal was also vehemently opposed. At this meeting protests were made against the comments made on the issue of state language by Khwaja Nazimuddin at the Paltan maidan and immediate withdrawal of such comments was demanded. The University National Language Committee decided to call a strike on February 4. The Committee also decided to call a *hartal* and organize demonstrations and processions on February 21 throughout East Pakistan.

Strike was observed at all educational institutions including Dhaka University on February 4 and after the strike students came in processions and gathered at the Dhaka University campus. A meeting was held presided by Gazi-ul-Huq, Abdul Matin, Kazi Golam Mahboob and other student leaders spoke at this meeting against Khwaja Nazimuddin's speech at the Paltanmaidan and demanded to materialize the agreement signed in 1948. An announcement was made by the government earlier that the session for East Bengal Assembly would be held on February 20. With that in mind the students at the meeting on February 4 took the decision to call for a province-wide general strike on February 21 demanding Bengali as the state language.

As preparations for demonstrations were underway, the government imposed Section 144 in the city of Dhaka, banning all assemblies and demonstrations. A meeting of the Central Language Action Committee was held at the Awami Muslim League office at 94 Nawabpur Road at 5 p.m. on 20 February under the chairmanship of Abul Hashim. While this meeting was going on announcement was made through the city streets that for thirty days from February 20 the District Magistrate of Dhaka had imposed Section 144 banning meetings, processions etc. This announcement was also made over radio. Imposition of government order brought a quick shift to the whole situation. Opinion was divided as to whether or not to violate Section 144.

The students were determined to violate Section 144 and held a student meeting at 11.00 am on 21 February on the Dhaka University campus, then

located close to the Medical College Hospital. When the meeting started, the Vice-Chancellor, along with a few university teachers, came to the spot and requested the students not to violate the ban on assembly. However, the students, under their leaders - Abdul Matin and Gaziul Haque - were adamant. Thousands of students from different schools and colleges of Dhaka assembled on the university campus while armed police waited outside the gate. When the students emerged in groups, shouting slogans, the police resorted to baton charge; even the female students were spared.

The students then started throwing brickbats at the police, who retaliated with tear gas. Unable to control the agitated students, the police fired upon the crowd of students, who were proceeding towards the Assembly Hall (at present, part of Jagannath Hall, University of Dhaka). Three young men, Rafiq Uddin Ahmed, Abdul Jabbar and Abul Barkat (an MA student of Political Science) were fatally wounded. Many injured persons were admitted to the hospital. Among them abdus salam, a peon at the Secretariat, subsequently succumbed to his wounds. A nine-year-old boy named Ohiullah was also killed.

At the Legislative Assembly building, the session was about to begin. Hearing the news of the shooting, some members of the Assembly, including Maulana Abdur Rashid Tarkabagish and some opposition members, went out and joined the students. In the Assembly, Nurul Amin, Chief Minister of East Pakistan, continued to oppose the demand for Bangla.

The next day, 22 February, was also a day of public demonstrations and police reprisals. The public performed a janaza (prayer service for the dead) and brought out a mourning procession, which was attacked by the police and the army resulting in several deaths, including that of a young man named Shafiur Rahman. Many were injured and arrested. On 23 February, at the spot where students had been killed, a memorial was erected. In 1963, the temporary structure was replaced by a concrete memorial, the shaheed minar (martyrs' memorial).

The East Bengal Legislative Assembly adopted a resolution recommending the recognition of Bangla as one of the state languages of Pakistan. The language movement continued until 1956. The movement achieved its goal by forcing the Pakistan Constituent Assembly in adopting both Bangla and Urdu as the state languages of Pakistan. While the Assembly was debating on the language issue, Member Adel Uddin Ahmed (1913-1981; Faridpur) made an important amendment proposal, which was adopted unanimously by the Assembly (16 February 1956). Both Bangla and Urdu were thus enacted to be the state languages of Pakistan.

Women in the Language Movement

It was women - most of whom were only schoolgirls at the time - who first defied the curfew under Section 144, tore off the police barricade and assembled under the mango tree (Amtola) in the Dhaka University campus premises to join the movement. However, their contributions are not yet written in details nor properly documented.

There were a number of women including Dr Halima Khatun, Dr Sufia Khatun, Rawshan Ara Bachchu, Sufia Ibrahim, Fazilatunnessa, Rani Bhattachariya, Pratibha Mutsuddi, Sofia Khan, Zulekha, Nuri, Sara Taifur, Sufia Ahmed, Safia Khatun and others among them. Police charged batons brutally and around 8 schoolgirls including Sufia Ibrahim and Rawshan Ara Bachchu got injured. A good number of female students were also arrested.

Importance and Significance

2 February is being observed globally as the International Mother Language Day. The decision was proclaimed at the 30th General Conference of the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) held from 26 October to 17 November 1999 in Paris. UNESCO considered the threat to linguistic diversity posed by the globalization of communication and the tendency to use a single language, and thus recognized the importance of establishing an International Mother Language Day to promote linguistic and cultural diversity and multiculturalism. The day has been selected on the ground that on this day in 1952, people of Bangladesh sacrificed their lives for their mother tongue. Nowhere ever in the world, languages have been given such a respectable status.

Language is the prime carrier of a culture. It is also the most powerful instrument of preserving and developing our tangible and intangible heritage. During the course of world history, many cultures and civilizations have been shattered, devastated and crushed because of the demolition of their languages. Nations in the past have not only lost their freedom to the powerful, influential and predominant ones, their languages and identity have withered and been lost as well. It is estimated that around 6000 to 7000 languages are spoken in the world today. This initiative of celebrating a day specifically as Language Day will enable development of a fuller awareness of such linguistic and cultural traditions and will inspire solidarity based on understandings, tolerance and dialogue. The day reaffirms the commitment of UNESCO towards preserving language diversity and reflects the importance of increasing efforts to conserve languages as a shared heritage of humanity.

First Phase of Internal-Colonial Experience, 1948 to 1956

This movement ultimately ended in the adoption of Bangla as one of the state languages of Pakistan in 1956. However, the movement was not isolated to this as it sowed the seeds for the independence movement of the Bangladeshi people which resulted in the liberation of Bangladesh as an independent state in 1971. Language is not only the principal representative of a culture of one nation but it also creates sense of patriotism and nationalism in people's mind. Bengali and Bangla language is an appropriate example of that. Bengali people created one of the greatest political and cultural histories in the 20th century. The events of 21 February 1952 proved that a nation which is strong and powerful politically cannot destroy a spirited civilized nation if they have a unifying language like Bangla. Pakistani leaders forgot that Bengali people and Bangla have a history of thousands of years behind them. The Pakistani government wanted to deny the existence of a language like Bangla in the name of Islam. When they were not able to do that, they conspired in other ways against the Bangladeshis, such as, trying to replace Bangla alphabet with Arabic, banning 100 years birthday celebration of Rabindranath Tagore, prohibiting broadcast of *Rabindrasangeet* (songs of Rabindranath) in the government controlled media and so on.

But the occupied force did not realize the power of language. The power had been proved through the sacrifice of the people of Bangladesh. Thus it is logical that if world leaders want to select a day as a specific Mother Language Day, 21 February must be considered. This is because no other nation has ever sacrificed their lives in such a way as Bengali people did to defend their Mother language.

This small history also proves that Mother Tongue, for any nation in the world or minority groups within nations, is the most important part of their culture. It is also related to the existence of a nation. The liberty of Mother Language is the liberty of a nation. Bengali people have proved that and following the path of February 21 they liberated their country from the clutches of Pakistan.

The language movement was more than a fight to preserve a rich language dating back over 1,000 years. It was a fight for social and economic justice. It was a fight to maintain one's own identity at a time when official measures were taken to crush it. This fight had been taken up by ordinary people, who just wanted to establish their mother tongue. For Bengali speaking people worldwide, the language itself is a big part of their history. The very birth of today's Bangladesh is intimately linked with the Bengali language or Bangla. Today, Bangla is the 6th most spoken language in the world.