

= Language Movement =

The Language Movement (Bengali : ভাষা আন্দোলন Bhasha Andolôn) , was a political movement in former East Bengal (today Bangladesh) 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 .

When the Dominion of Pakistan was formed by the partition of India in 1947 , it was composed of various ethnic and linguistic groups , with the geographically non @-@ contiguous East Bengal province (that was renamed in 1956 as East Pakistan) having a mainly Bengali population . In 1948 , the Government of the Dominion of Pakistan ordained Urdu as the sole national language , sparking extensive protests among the Bengali @-@ speaking majority of East Bengal . Facing rising sectarian tensions and mass discontent with the new law , the government outlawed public meetings and rallies . The students of the University of Dhaka and other political activists defied the law and organised a protest on 21 February 1952 . The movement reached its climax when police killed student demonstrators on that day . The deaths provoked widespread civil unrest . After years of conflict , the central government relented and granted official status to the Bengali language in 1956 . In 1999 , UNESCO declared 21 February as International Mother Language Day , in tribute to the Language Movement and the ethno @-@ linguistic rights of people around the world .

The Language Movement catalysed the assertion of Bengali national identity in East Bengal and later East Pakistan , and became a forerunner to Bengali nationalist movements , including the 6 @-@ Point Movement and subsequently the Bangladesh Liberation War and Indo @-@ Pakistani War of 1971 . In Bangladesh , 21 February is observed as Language Movement Day , a national holiday . The Shaheed Minar monument was constructed near Dhaka Medical College in memory of the movement and its victims .

= = Background = =

The present nations of Pakistan and Bangladesh were part of undivided India during the British colonial rule . From the mid @-@ 19th century , the Urdu language had been promoted as the lingua franca of Indian Muslims by political and religious leaders , such as Sir Khwaja Salimullah , Sir Syed Ahmed Khan , Nawab Viqar @-@ ul @-@ Mulk and Maulvi Abdul Haq . Urdu is an Indo @-@ Aryan language of the Indo @-@ Iranian branch , belonging to the Indo @-@ European family of languages . It developed under Persian , Arabic and Turkic influence on apabhranshas (last linguistic stage of the medieval Indian Aryan language Pali @-@ Prakrit) in South Asia during the Delhi Sultanate and Mughal Empire . With its Perso @-@ Arabic script , the language was considered a vital element of the Islamic culture for Indian Muslims ; Hindi and the Devanagari script were seen as fundamentals of Hindu culture .

While the use of Urdu grew common with Muslims in northern India , the Muslims of Bengal (a province in the eastern part of British Indian sub @-@ continent) primarily used the Bengali language . Bengali is an Eastern Indo @-@ Aryan language that arose from the eastern Middle Indic languages around 1000 CE and developed considerably during the Bengal Renaissance . As early as the late 19th century , social activists such as the Muslim feminist Roquia Sakhawat Hussain were choosing to write in Bengali to reach out to the people and develop it as a modern literary language . Supporters of Bengali opposed Urdu even before the partition of India , when delegates from Bengal rejected the idea of making Urdu the lingua franca of Muslim India in the 1937 Lucknow session of the Muslim League . The Muslim League was a British Indian political party that became the driving force behind the creation of Pakistan as a Muslim state separate from British India .

= = Early stages of the movement = =

After the partition of India in 1947 , Bengali @-@ speaking people in East Bengal , the non @-@

contiguous eastern part of the Dominion of Pakistan , made up 44 million of the newly formed Dominion of Pakistan 's 69 million people . The Dominion of Pakistan 's government , civil services , and military , however , were dominated by personnel from the western wing of the Dominion of Pakistan . In 1947 , a key resolution at a national education summit in Karachi advocated Urdu as the sole state language , and its exclusive use in the media and in schools . Opposition and protests immediately arose . Students from Dhaka rallied under the leadership of Abul Kashem , the secretary of Tamaddun Majlish , a Bengali Islamic cultural organisation . The meeting stipulated Bengali as an official language of the Dominion of Pakistan and as a medium of education in East Bengal . However , the Pakistan Public Service Commission removed Bengali from the list of approved subjects , as well as from currency notes and stamps . The central education minister Fazlur Rahman made extensive preparations to make Urdu the only state language of the Dominion of Pakistan . Public outrage spread , and many 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 organised processions and rallies in Dhaka .

Leading Bengali scholars argued why only Urdu should not be the state language . 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 . The first Rastrabhasa Sangram Parishad (National Language Action Committee) , an organisation in favour of Bengali as a state language was formed towards the end of December 1947 . Professor Nurul Huq Bhuiyan of the Tamaddun Majlish convened the committee . Later , Parliament member Shamsul Huq convened a new committee to push for Bengali as a state language . Assembly member Dhirendranath Datta proposed legislation in the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan to allow members to speak in Bengali and authorise 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 .

= = = Agitations of 1948 = = =

Students of the University of Dhaka and other colleges of the city organised a general strike on 11 March 1948 to protest the omission of Bengali language from official use , including coins , stamps and recruitment tests for the navy . The movement restated the demand that Bengali be declared an official language of the Dominion of Pakistan . Political leaders such as Shamsul Huq , Shawkat Ali , Kazi Golam Mahboob , Oli Ahad , Abdul Wahed and others were arrested during the rallies . Rally leader Mohammad Toaha was hospitalised after attempting to snatch a rifle from a police officer . Student leaders , including Abdul Matin and Abdul Malek Ukil took part in the procession .

In the afternoon of 11 March , a meeting was held to protest police brutality and arrests . A group of students marching towards the chief minister Khawaja Nazimuddin 's house was stopped in front of the Dhaka High Court . The rally changed its direction and moved in the direction of the Secretariat building . Police attacked the procession injuring several students and leaders , including A. K. Fazlul Huq . Continuing strikes were observed the following four days . Under such circumstances , the chief minister Nazimuddin signed an accord with the student leaders agreeing to some terms and conditions , without complying to the demand that Bengali be made a state language .

In the height of civic unrest , Governor @-@ General of Pakistan Muhammad Ali Jinnah arrived in Dhaka on 19 March 1948 . On 21 March , at a civic reception at Racecourse Ground , he claimed that the language issue was designed by a " fifth column " to divide Pakistani Muslims . Jinnah further declared that " Urdu , and only Urdu " embodied the spirit of Muslim nations and would remain as the state language , labelling those who disagreed with his views as " Enemies of Pakistan " . Jinnah delivered a similar speech at Curzon Hall of the University of Dhaka on 24 March . At both meetings , Jinnah was interrupted by large segments of the audience . He later called a meeting of a state language committee of action , and overruled the contract that was signed by Khawaja Nazimuddin with the student leaders . Before Jinnah left Dhaka on 28 March , he delivered a speech on radio reasserting his " Urdu @-@ only " policy .

Shortly thereafter , the East Bengal Language Committee , presided by Maulana Akram Khan , was formed by the East Bengal government to prepare a report on the language problem . The Committee completed its report on 6 December 1950 , but it was not published until 1958 . The government suggested that Bengali be written in Arabic script , as a potential solution to the language conflict .

= = Events of 1952 = =

The Urdu @-@ Bengali controversy was reignited when Jinnah 's successor , governor @-@ general Khawaja Nazimuddin , staunchly defended the " Urdu @-@ only " policy in a speech on 27 January 1952 . On 31 January , the Shorbodolio Kendrio Rashtrobhasha Kormi Porishod (All @-@ Party Central Language Action Committee) was formed in a meeting at the Bar Library Hall of the University of Dhaka , chaired by Maulana Bhashani . The central government 's proposal of writing the Bengali language in Arabic script was vehemently opposed at the meeting . The action committee called for an all out protest on 21 February , including strikes and rallies . In an attempt to prevent the demonstration , the government imposed Section 144 in Dhaka , thereby banning any gathering .

= = = 21 February = = =

At nine o 'clock in the morning , students began gathering on the University of Dhaka premises in defiance of Section 144 . The university vice @-@ chancellor and other officials were present as armed police surrounded the campus . By a quarter past eleven , students gathered at the university gate and attempted to break the police line . Police fired tear gas shells towards the gate to warn the students . A section of students ran into the Dhaka Medical College while others rallied towards the university premises cordoned by the police . The vice @-@ chancellor asked police to stop firing and ordered the students to leave the area . However , the police arrested several students for violating section 144 as they attempted to leave . Enraged by the arrests , the students met around the East Bengal Legislative Assembly and blocked the legislators ' way , asking them to present their insistence at the assembly . When a group of students sought to storm into the building , police opened fire and killed a number of students , including Abdus Salam , Rafiq Uddin Ahmed , Abul Barkat and Abdul Jabbar . As the news of the killings spread , disorder erupted across the city . Shops , offices and public transport were shut down and a general strike began . At the assembly , six legislators including Manoranjan Dhar , Boshontokumar Das , Shamsuddin Ahmed and Dhirendranath Datta requested that chief minister Nurul Amin visit wounded students in hospital and that the assembly be adjourned as a sign of mourning . This motion was supported by some treasury bench members including Maulana Abdur Rashid Tarkabagish , Shorfuddin Ahmed , Shamsuddin Ahmed Khondokar and Mosihuddin Ahmed . However , Nurul Amin refused the requests .

= = = 22 February = = =

Disorder spread across the province as large processions ignored section 144 and condemned the actions of the police . More than 30 @,@ 000 people congregated at Curzon Hall in Dhaka . During the continued protests , police actions led to the death of four more people . This prompted officers and clerks from different organisations , including colleges , banks and the radio station , to boycott offices and join the procession . Protesters burned the offices of two leading pro @-@ government news agencies , the Jubilee Press and the Morning News . Police fired on a major janaza , or mourning rally , as it was passing through Nawabpur Road . The shooting killed several people including activist Sofiur Rahman and a nine @-@ year @-@ old boy named Ohiullah .

= = = Continued unrest = = =

Through the night of 23 February , students of Dhaka Medical College worked on the construction of a Shaheed Smritistombho , or Monument of Martyrs . Completed at dawn on 24 February , the monument had a handwritten note attached to it with the words " Shaheed Smritistombho " . Inaugurated by the father of the slain activist Sofiur Rahman , the monument was destroyed on 26 February by police . On 25 February , industrial workers in the town of Narayanganj observed a general strike . A protest followed on 29 February whose participants faced severe police beating .

The government censored news reports and withheld exact casualty figures during the protests . Most pro @-@ government media held Hindus and communists responsible for encouraging the disorder and student unrest . The families of Abul Barkat and Rafiq Uddin Ahmed tried to charge the police with murder , but the charges were dismissed by the police . On 8 April government report on the incidents failed to show any particular justification for police firings on the students . When the constituent assembly reconvened on 14 April , proceedings were stalled by members of the Muslim League when legislators from East Bengal sought to raise the language issue .

= = Events after 1952 = =

The Shorbodolio Kendrio Rashtrobhasha Kormi Porishod , with support from the Awami Muslim League , decided to commemorate 21 February as Shohid Dibosh (Martyrs ' Day) . On the first anniversary of the protests , people across East Bengal wore black badges in solidarity with the victims . Most offices , banks and educational institutions were closed to observe the occasion . Student groups made agreements with college and police officials to preserve law and order . More than 100 @,@ 000 people assembled at a public meeting held in Armanitola in Dhaka , where community leaders called for the immediate release of Maulana Bhashani and other political prisoners . However , West Pakistani politicians such as Fazlur Rahman aggravated sectional tensions by declaring that anyone who wanted Bengali to become an official language would be considered an " enemy of the state " . Bengali students and civilians disobeyed the restrictions to celebrate the anniversary of the protests . Demonstrations broke out on the night of 21 February 1954 with various halls of the University of Dhaka raising black flags in mourning .

= = = United Front in 1954 = = =

Political tensions came to a head as elections to the provincial assembly of East Bengal were held in 1954 . The ruling Muslim League denounced the opposition United Front coalition , which ? led by A. K. Fazlul Huq and the Awami League ? wanted greater provincial autonomy . Several United Front leaders and activists were arrested . A meeting of parliament 's Muslim League members , chaired by prime minister Muhammad Ali Bogra , resolved to give official recognition to Bengali . This decision was followed by a major wave of unrest as other ethnic groups sought recognition of other regional languages . Proponents of Urdu such as Maulvi Abdul Haq condemned any proposal to grant official status to Bengali . He led a rally of 100 @,@ 000 people to protest against the Muslim League 's decision . Consequently , the implementation failed and the United Front won a vast majority of seats in the legislative assembly , while the representation of the Muslim League was reduced to a historic low .

The United Front ministry ordered the creation of the Bangla Academy to promote , develop , and preserve Bengali language , literature , and heritage . However , the United Front rule was temporary , as Governor General Ghulam Muhammad cancelled the government and started Governor 's rule on 30 May 1954 @.@ the United Front again formed the ministry on 6 June 1955 after the governor 's regime ended . The Awami League did not participate in this ministry though .

Following the return of the United Front to power , the anniversary on 21 February 1956 was observed for the first time in a peaceful atmosphere . The Government supported a major project to construct a new Shaheed Minar . The session of the constituent assembly was stopped for five minutes to express condolence for the students slain in the police shootings . Major rallies were organised by Bengali leaders and all public offices and businesses remained closed .

= = = Constitution reform = = =

On 7 May 1954 , the constituent assembly resolved , with the Muslim League 's support , to grant official status to Bengali . Bengali was recognised as the second official language of Pakistan on 29 February 1956 , and article 214 (1) of the constitution of Pakistan was reworded to " The state language of Pakistan shall be Urdu and Bengali . "

However , the military government formed by Ayub Khan made attempts to re @-@ establish Urdu as the sole national language . On 6 January 1959 , the military regime issued an official statement and reinstated the official stance of supporting the 1956 constitution 's policy of two state languages .

= = = Independence of Bangladesh = = =

Although the question of official languages was settled by 1956 , the military regime of Ayub Khan promoted the interests of West Pakistan at the expense of East Pakistan . Despite forming the majority of the national population , the East Pakistani population continued to be under @-@ represented in the civil and military services , and received a minority of state funding and other government help . This was mainly due to lack of representative government in the fledgling state . Mainly due to regional economic imbalances sectional divisions grew , and support for the Bengali ethnic nationalist Awami League , which invoked the 6 @-@ point movement for greater provincial autonomy . One demand was that East Pakistan be called Bangladesh (Land / Country of Bengal) , which subsequently led to the Bangladesh Liberation War .

= = Legacy = =

The Language Movement had a major cultural impact on Bengali society . It has inspired the development and celebration of the Bengali language , literature and culture . 21 February , celebrated as Language Movement Day or Shohid Dibosh (Martyrs ' Day) , is a major national holiday in Bangladesh . A month @-@ long event called the Ekushey Book Fair is held every year to commemorate the movement . Ekushey Padak , one of the highest civilian awards in Bangladesh , is awarded annually in memory of the sacrifices of the movement . Songs such as Abdul Gaffar Choudhury 's Amar Bhaier Rokte Rangano , set to music by Shaheed Altaf Mahmud , as well as plays , works of art and poetry played a considerable role in rousing the people 's emotions during the movement . Since the events of February 1952 , poems , songs , novels , plays , films , cartoons and paintings were created to capture the movement from varied point of views . Notable artistic depictions include the poems Bornomala , Amar Dukhini Bornomala and February 1969 by Shamsur Rahman , the film Jibon Theke Neya by Zahir Raihan , the stage play Kobor by Munier Chowdhury and the novels Ekushey February by Raihan and Artonaad by Shawkat Osman . Bangladesh officially sent a proposal to UNESCO to declare 21 February as " International Mother Language Day " . The proposal was supported unanimously at the 30th General Conference of UNESCO held on 17 November 1999 .

Two years after the first monument was destroyed by the police , a new Shaheed Minar (Monument of Martyrs) was constructed in 1954 to commemorate the protesters who lost their lives . Work on a larger monument designed by the architect Hamidur Rahman began in 1957 with the support of the United Front ministry . Hamidur Rahman 's model consisted of a large complex in the yard of the Dhaka Medical College Hostel . The design included a half @-@ circular column symbolizing a mother with her martyred sons standing at the dais in the center of the monument . Although the imposition of martial law in 1958 interrupted the work , the monument was completed and inaugurated on 21 February 1963 by Abul Barkat 's mother , Hasina Begum . Pakistani forces demolished the monument during the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971 , but the Bangladeshi government reconstructed it in 1973 .

Outside East Bengal , movement for equal status of Bengali also took place in the Indian state of Assam . On May 19 , 1961 , 11 Bengalis were killed in Police firing in Silchar Railway Station ,

Assam , while demanding state recognition of Bengali language . Subsequently , Bengali was given co @-@ official status in the three Bengali @-@ majority districts of Assam .

= = Reaction in West Pakistan = =

Although the Language Movement is considered to have laid the foundations for ethnic nationalism in many of the Bengalis of East Bengal and later East Pakistan , it also heightened the cultural animosity between the authorities of the two wings of Pakistan . In the western wing of the Dominion of Pakistan , the movement was seen as a sectional uprising against Pakistani national interests . The rejection of the " Urdu @-@ only " policy was seen as a contravention of the Perso @-@ Arabic culture of Muslims and the founding ideology of Pakistan , the two @-@ nation theory . Some of the most powerful politicians from the western wing of Pakistan considered Urdu a product of Indian Islamic culture , but saw Bengali as a part of " Hinduized " Bengali culture . Most stood by the " Urdu only " policy because they believed that only a single language , one that was not indigenous to Pakistan , should serve as the national language . This kind of thinking also provoked considerable opposition in the western wing , wherein there existed several linguistic groups . As late as in 1967 , military dictator Ayub Khan said , " East Bengal is ... still under considerable Hindu culture and influence . "

The Awami Muslim League turned over to Bengali nationalism after the Movement , and shed the word " Muslim " from its name . The Language Movement inspired similar discontent in the western wing of Pakistan and provided momentum to ethnic nationalist parties . The political unrest in East Pakistan and rivalry between the central government and the United Front @-@ led provincial government was one of the main factors culminating in the 1958 military coup by Ayub Khan .