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place at that time. Even then the Muslim League government did not hesitate to open indiscriminate fire at the prisoners of Khapra Ward in Rajshahi. A horrible picture of torture and repression was given in the statement of Tebhaga movement leader Ila Mitra.

An article entitled "What will be the State Language of Pakistan-Bengali or Urdu?" was published on 15 September, 1947. In the point number four of its text, it was clearly spelled out that both Bangla and Urdu would be the state languages of the central government of Pakistan and the medium of instruction, official language of the provincial government offices and courts of East Pakistan will be only Bangla.

Following the failure in the efforts to write Bangla in Urdu alphabets the government publications like Mahe Nao and Radio Pakistan introduced a mixed peculiar Bangla language as quoted by Ataur Rahman Khan:

1. Radio Pakistan: "Pichle Etwar Khan Gaffar Khaner Larka greftar hoechen. Hukamate Hyderabad hukamate Hindustaner khelafe jang-o-jehader irada korechen". (Only the underlined parts of these sentences are Bengali, most of other words are Urdu). Meaning: the son of Khan Gaffar Khan was arrested on Sunday last. The Government of Hyderabad has decided to wage war and holy war against the Government of India.

2. Mahe Nao, a government publication: "Gojasta esha rate amra otite Bangla bhashar nana mor paribartaner katha moktasarbhabhe ullekk korechilam."

Sangkhagaristha Mosal-

mander Tahjib Tamuddun- er Tajalluk barjito Bangla bhasha Mashreki Pakisthaner matribhasha noy ebong hobe na, hote para na." (except the underlined words all are Bengali).

Ayub Khan, the military ruler of Pakistan said, "we want to introduce such a language in Pakistan, which is neither Urdu nor Bengali, rather that would be the Pakistani Language comprising all dialects of Pakistanis."

Leading educationist and philologist Dr Muhammad Shahidullah in his presidential speech at a convention of college and university teachers of East Bengal in Comilla on 16 March, 1951 said, "If Bengali language is neglected I'll personally start rebellion."

"The Dhaka University State Language Movement Committee at a meeting on 30 September, 1952 decided to observe general strike on 4 February. After the strike a large number of students assembled at the Dhaka University campus and held a meeting there with Gaziul Haq in the chair. The meeting held on 4th February adopted a resolution to observe general strike throughout East Bengal on 21 February with a demand for establishing 'Bangla' as the state language." (Badaruddin Omar).

Section 144 was imposed in Dhaka on 20 February for one month under which holding of public meetings, processions and demonstrations were declared illegal. Loudspeakers were used to announce the message throughout the city. How was the night of 20th February? Poet Ahmed Rafiq as an eye-witness says, "the night was full of tension, everybody was alert like a hunting leopard".

The 21 February, 1952, Thursday. Students started

Our Glorious Pride

assembling at the Dhaka University campus in groups comprising ten in each from 9 o'clock defying the Section 144. Former Chief Advisor of the caretaker government and Chief Justice Habibur Rahman Shelly led the first group. Police went on action with teargas, lathicharge and the entire university and adjoining areas turned into a battlefield. At 3.10 pm police opened fire on the demonstrators. Abul Barkat, a student of MA-Part II was the first one to embrace martyrdom. He was followed by Salahuddin and Abdul Jabbar. Hayat Mamud says, "the 22nd of February was more turbulent, and undaunted". Army was deployed and curfew was imposed in Dhaka for 7 hours on that day. There was a difference of opinion regarding the number of martyrs of 22 February as

all the dead bodies could not be traced. Members of Police and Army took away the bodies. However, according to Daily Sangbad, 4 were shot dead at Nawabpur, 2 at Carzon Hall and one in front of Railway Colony.

The construction of Shahid Minar began in the afternoon on the 23rd and completed overnight. The father of Shahid Shafiur Rahman opened this monument on the 24th. Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, a member of National Assembly inaugurated the Shahid Minar again on 26 February after resigning from Parliament. However, police destroyed the Minar on the same day.

The Dhaka University Teachers Association brought out a protest rally and held a condolence meeting. Police arrested

Abul Hashim, Khairat Hossain, Abdur Rashid Tarkabagish, Monaranjan Dhar, Gobindalal Banerjee, Prof Mozaffar Ahmed Choudhury, Prof Munir Choudhury and many others in a massive drive on 25-26 February. As a result, the Language Movement was getting momentum and spreading throughout the country. The University of Dhaka was closed since die on 27 February and the students were compelled to vacate the hostels.

All Party State Language Movement Council was holding a secret meeting at the residence of Dr Mutalib at Shantinagar on 7 March. Police raided the house and arrested Mohammad Toaha, Abdul Matin, Oli Ahad, Mirza Golam Hafiz, Mujibul Haq and Hedayet Hossain Choudhury. On the 15th of March a new committee

was constituted. The All Party State Language Movement Council was re-constituted with Ataur Rahman Khan as its convener, Kamruddin Ahmed and Syed Abdur Rahim as joint convenors. According to a gazette notification of 13 March, the judicial enquiry report said, the police action on 21 February was logical and justified.

About 500 delegates from all over the country attended the Council at the Dhaka Bar Library on 27 April. Among others, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman took part in it as he was released on 27 February from Faridpur jail. During the elections after 21st February, the Jukta Front-headed the Sher-e-Bangla AK Fazlul Haq-Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani and Hossain Shahid Suhrawardy placed 21-point programme. They received popular mandate. As a result, the Muslim League, which led the Pakistan movement, won in only 9 constituencies whereas the Juktafront got 213 seats. Even then, the conspiracy was continuing and martial law was promulgated in 1958. The movement of 1962 and the mass upsurge of 1969 based on the 11-point programme were the follow up of language movement. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who was in jail in connection with the so-called Agartala conspiracy case was released in the face of violent upsurge in 1969. Student leader Tofail Ahmed announced that henceforth, Sheikh Mujib would be addressed as Bangabandhu. Bangabandhu's Party the

Awami League got absolute majority in the 1970 elections. But he was refused to form the government. The Pakistan's military regime staged the ugliest genocide of history in East Bengal on 25 March 1971. The war of liberation began with the proclamation of independence by the Bangabandhu on 26 March. And finally with the victory on 16 December 1971, 'Bangalee' nation and a language-based sovereign state, People's Republic of Bangladesh emerged on the Earth.

The history of language movement is our glorious pride, for which a large number of Bangladeshis, both known and unknown had to make supreme sacrifice. The 21st of February, popularly known as Ekushey February is celebrated in Bangladesh as a mark of respect to the mother tongue Bangla. The Ekushey February is now a global affair, the International Mother Language Day.

The Mother Language Lovers Association comprising two Bangalee-Canadians Abdus Salam and Rafique, and 8 other persons of different mother tongues took the initiative to make the day an international one. The United Nations advised the Association to put forward the proposal through a member country. It was the daughter of Bangabandhu Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina who ordered to place the proposal to the UN immediately. Education Minister ASHK Sadeque, Dr Shadat Hussain, Prof Saidur Rahman, Prof

Kafiluddin Ahmed, Ikhtiar Chowdhury, Tozammel Haq (Tony Haq) and Syed Maazem Ali played their due role to implement the order. As a result, the Commission no. 2 of UNESCO at its 30th General Conference announced the 21 February as International Mother Language Day.

Welcoming the decision, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in a message on 2 December, 1999 said, "the Bangalee nation will celebrate the recognition on 7 December. We'll also carefully bring up all the mother tongues of our country's ethnic minority groups".

The immortal ekushey is a rare example of turning grief into strength. The language movement has taught us that everybody has weakness for cherishing his own mother tongue. Other than English and Urdu there are many languages of minority ethnic communities like Chakma, Marma, Kuki, Tipra, Bome, Garo, Hazong, Khasia, Shantal, Manipuri, Rajbangshi, Rakhain in Bangladesh. The Prime Minister's liberal attitude to the mother tongues of these small ethnic groups was reflected in the statement.

At the UNESCO conference in Paris, among others the representative from Pakistan also supported the proposal of Bangladesh to declare International Mother Language Day on 21 February. Immortal Ekushey is our hard-earned glorious pride.

Translated by: Mahbulul Alam



Bangabandhu at Shaheed Minar

In Quest of the Identity of Ourselves

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towards, leaving almost no room for the Bangalee Muslims, while by the time they had come up with education and training, culture and political consciousness. Naturally they were out to achieve their right as well as their identical revelation. Moreover they realised the intensity of the conspiracy against Bangla language that would ultimately vanquish the Bangalee ethnically once for all. They took no time to protest strongly the moment Mr. Zinnah declared that 'Urdu and only Urdu would be the state language of Pakistan'. The developing enlightened class of Bengal soon realised that without Bangla as at least one of the state languages of Pakistan entire future of the Bangalees would be at stake, and they would only fail to keep pace with the other dominating regions of Pakistan.

The language movement was mainly initiated from here. Another fundamental issue added fuel to fire. Despite a common bondage of religious belief, majority people of this province of Pakistan was widely different from that of the other parts. There were seldom any similarity as far as language, life-style, tradition, culture or behaviour were concerned. Further, geographic distance between the two parts of the country was no less than a thousand miles. A fresh question began to rock the conscience of the younger generation whether a nation could really be founded on the basis of religious belief alone. A new quest came along for the original identity of their nation. Which to be considered first? Bangalee or Muslim or Pakistani? Which should have been the first criterion? The Bangalee Muslims fell in embarrassment in the newly raised question. This realization and quest, in fact established the story basis of the language movement that, in due course of time, turned to the struggle for emancipation and liberation.

Thus, the language movement, in my opinion, changed the characteristic of an entire generation in the country including a positive development in socio-political view-point and thoughts. For example,

most of our predecessors—politically conscious—were involved in Muslim League politics and creation of Pakistan. But since defeat of Muslim League in the election in 1954 in the eastern province they have never recorded their position here, basically owing to the lack of their credibility and acceptability to the younger generation of Pakistan.

From my personal experience I can well cite an example. I was only a student in a school at Mymensingh when the movement for state language came up. Before that we had never experienced any strike or movement. But as soon as the news of our brothers' martyrdom at Dhaka in the movement for language broke out like wildfire throughout the country, our school in the far remote area went for strike too, for the first time, while we, the very teenagers ran off a couple of miles to join the procession of protest at the Thana headquarters. The most important of all was the fact that the young school boy like me, who had fled from the school for the first time in his life to join the movement and the one who came back to school the next day as usual, was never the same person. The radical change in his mind in a day was actually far reaching as well as stronger and more integrated in future.

And sure it was neither a matter of a person or a few. So to say, the entire generation turned away from the face of Pakistan. Apart from language question, another difference was made by the infamous martial law enforced by General Ayub Khan in 1958, that abominably refuted all the human values and democratic birth rights of the people. This is a law of jungle that the Bangalees could never stand and abide by. In any sort of democracy, majority must be one who will rule. But in their legitimate claim Pakistan rulers snatched their domination in an excuse of 'Parity' and thus settled their claim of equal share in the central Parliament. They also included this Act in 1956 Constitution.

Yet they were not assured and were always suspicious over a possible unity of the

Sindhi, the Pathans and the Baluch with the Bangalees only to face the Panjabis into a corner. That was the reason why they abolished the constitution and enforced martial law immediately before Parliament election. It was never a coincidental matter that in 1946 election Pakistan was founded as in the election in 1970 it dug its own grave. Both the elections were general elections and between the two there was none. Afraid of the result in 1954 election in East Pakistan, that is, total defeat of Muslim League in this province, they did not dare hold a general election. With the Passage of time it became crystal clear to our people that the then Pakistani rulers were out to refute all the rights of the Bangalees including their culture, tradition, language, daily way of life, social thinking and thus deprive them of their democratic right and economic emancipation.

If we take cultural field for another example, one can easily remember their attitude towards us. 1961 was the first birth centenary of Rabindranath Tagore—the Poet most beloved by the Bangalees. But the Pakistan rulers would not allow us to celebrate the occasion. The obstacles, of course, were resisted and a simple occasion like this was turned to a great crisis by the autocratic rulers of Pakistan. The birth centenary was observed ignoring all imprisonment, torture and threat. Bangalees formed the 'Srotar Aashor' (A gathering of the Audience) and then the 'Chhayana' (A musical mode, named after a famous book of verse composed by Tagore) to spread the culture of Bangla from the core of her heart. The first day of Baisakh (The Bengali calendar month) became a very popular festivity throughout the country. A number of cultural programmes were performed and so enthusiastically they were participated by the enlightened Bangalee people as if they were strong blows in the face of the Pakistani autocracy. Thus the cultural programmes created a wide resonance in the heart of the Bangalees for their emancipation, and finally, independence. They changed the mental horizon

of the people and amalgamated their struggle for their right with the culture. The Bangalees has always experienced that whenever a circle inimical to the people came to power they launched their first assault against the 'Shahid Minar' (Monument for the martyrs of the language movement). Time and again the movement was subject to damage. Finally it was damaged during the Liberation War in 1971.

We have also experienced that all those milestones like the Language Movement, the Movement for Democracy, 6-Point Movement, 11-Points Movement, the Shahid Minar are all crowned into the same wreath. The powers that attempted an ethnic cleaning against our nation always attacked the Shahid Minar. Then again the damaged Minar was rebuilt. Yet the Movement never destroyed and till now it attracts a huge rally of people of all ages and religions, of all professions and cultures—may be the largest gathering of people of the world around every year. Not only a formality, but it also symbolises our quest for identity of our own. The more the quest was obstructed the more we gained passionate enthusiasm and firm determination.

I have always wondered that since the rate of literacy here in Bangladesh at that time was not more than 15-20 per cent, how and why then the timid rural million including the peasants and factory workers waged the war against the cultural assault of the Pakistan rulers? What did the language really matter to them? What was their interest?

At long last I found out the answer. It was a film named 'The Train' where the intruder German people attempted to remove a number of invaluable pieces of painting from occupied France in an excuse of saving those rare collection of art from the havoc of the war. But the patriot Frenchman well realised that they had no alternative but to recover the paintings from the German intruders. They took a great risk and owing to many a heart gripping tactics they succeeded in their mission. The guard and the driver of the

train had to sacrifice their lives. But why did they do so? They had nothing to do with the paintings. But whatever they did was for their love—their motherland and assets of their nation. They finally decided that they would never allow the foreign intruders to take away a handful of the things of their own. It was same with our countrymen. The peasants and workers came to the aid of their fighting brothers. They would rather perish but never submit to the evil design of the foreign intruders that betrayed them in 1947 and time and again.

That was the reason all walks of life joined together the movement for their language, that glorified the movement and turned into a national one. It bridged the gap between the classes and groups. It added a unified national feeling, and finally stepped into the national war of independence. This struggle was unanimously led by our great leader, the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Every year the day 21 February remind the new generations of the great history we are proud of.

Translated by: Khandker Mazharul Karim

We remember language martyrs

Shaheed Shafiur, Rafiq, Barkat & Jabbar

The Significance of the International Mother Language Day

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dies, a part of humanity disappears. In her speech, the UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for Language and former President of Iceland, Madame Vigdis Finnbogadottir, had termed languages as "humanity's most precious and fragile treasures."

The concern about the fast disappearance of languages is both genuine and serious. Why do languages die? Experts point out that it is not a new phenomenon. Historically, languages have been born, have flourished and died with the societies that engendered them; since the beginning of human civilization, at least 30,000 (some say as many as half a

million) languages have disappeared, often without leaving any trace. Experts fear that a great majority of the 6000 languages that are spoken in the world today might disappear in the foreseeable future. Such an ominous development, they point out, will imperil linguistic diversity and thus a part of human heritage. The destruction of native languages in North and South America, Australia and Polynesia clearly highlight the phenomenon. But what is new, they say, is the speed at which languages are now dying out.

Skeptics may ask why, in this globalised world, we have to protect all mother languages. Well, a truly globalised world must be based on cultural diversity and linguistic pluralism. We must develop human resources collectively and not one at the cost of another. Languages are the modes of expression of human creativity in all its diversity. Once languages and modes of expression are lost, it will be impossible to recover them. Multilingualism is the most accurate reflection of multiculturalism. The destruction of the one will inevitably lead to the loss of the other. As has been noted, cultural diversity fulfils an "economic necessity and a political need as creators need to be allowed to express themselves."

Science and technology have made the world smaller and the linguistic divide, which had separated us in the past, has been considerably narrowed. We already have means to translate from one language to another instantly and with the passage of time, the techniques will be further perfected. But if we lose languages, we will surely lose a part of the heritage of mankind.

Experts surmise that no language can survive unless 100,000 people speak it. They point out that linguistic heritage is not evenly distributed and linguistic diversity does not match population density. For example, fewer than 10,000 people speak half of the 6000 languages in current use, and less than a thousand people speak a quarter. In this era of globalization, a handful of languages are dominant, and only about twenty languages are spoken by three-quarters of world population. Thirty-two per cent of present languages are spoken in Asia, 30% in Africa, 19% in Pacific, 15% in Americas and 3% in Europe. Although the figures vary according to the method of counting, reliable estimates indicate that the most widely spoken languages are: Chinese (1.2 billion speakers), English (478 million), Hindi (437 million), Spanish (392 million), Russian (248 million), Bangla (230 million), Arabic (225 million) and French (200 million). This imbalance leads specialists to forecast that 95 per cent of all living languages might

die during this century. Ten languages disappear every year somewhere in the world. How can this process of extinction be halted? How can this trend be reversed?

The phenomenon is challenging and daunting, and it must be faced globally, regionally, sub-regionally and nationally. The UN and UNESCO and prominent academic and research institutes in developed countries can play leading role in this vital area. Among the regional organizations, EU is playing an important role in preserving various European languages. Taking a lead from EU, other regional bodies, such as SAARC, ASEAN, OAU and OAS, can play an important role in preserving languages of their areas. At the national level each government is committed to preserving their respective linguistic and cultural diversity.

Before concluding, let me underline that a language disappears not only because it is dominated by another language, but also due to the fact that its main speakers decide to abandon it and do not pass it on to their children. No matter how much Governments and state apparatus continue in their efforts to protect the languages spoken in the country, in the final analysis the fate of a language is determined by its speakers. During recent years, both US and Australia have achieved positive results in protecting some of their native language. But it has been possible only due to strong support given by the speakers of those languages.

Our government has decided to establish a Mother Language Study and Research Center. The Center will undertake research on the languages of the world as well as the teaching of different languages in Bangladesh. Similar steps have also been taken for further enrichment and flourishing of our mother tongue Bangla and its use at all levels in our national life. We have saved our mother languages through bloodshed; we must foster it now through care and commitment. Let us then, on this historic day, take a vow to do whatever we can to preserve our languages and linguistic diversity. It is a pledge to our posterity that we cannot afford to forget.