

Formative phase of the Language Movement

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and postures of the Central Government of Pakistan had hastened the formation of EPSL. It is fair to point out that soon after its spectacular emergence, the EPSL played a crucial role in all of the phases of the Bengali language movement.

The "Workers' Camp" of the dissident members of the Muslim League had also played a prominent role during the formative phase of the Bengali language movement. By December 1947, the progressive forces of then eastern province of Pakistan had enlisted enough support among the students and intelligentsia in Dhaka for protecting Bengali language. Aimed at building a resistance movement against the reactionary and anti-Bengali coterie of the provincial Muslim League, a group of disenfranchised dissidents of the ruling party organized a convention of the party workers. This convention of the break-away Muslim leaguers, popularly dubbed as "Workers' Camp," was held in January 1948 at 150 Mogoltoli, Dhaka, the old office of the provincial Muslim League. Although the main objective of the convention was to confront the reactionary Muslim League leadership of Khwaja Nazimuddin and Akram Khan coterie, the seven-day long Workers' Camp was very critical of various anti-Bengali policies of the ruling Muslim League. The Workers' Camp also deprived the provincial Muslim League of the services and support of the most progressive and dedicated party workers. The organizers of the Workers' Camp were very vocal in articulating the demand for Bengali to be one of the State languages of Pakistan. Most of those frustrated Muslim Leaguers were also instrumental in founding the East Pakistan Awami Muslim League (EPAML) in June 1949. Doubtless, the EPAML had played an admirable role in the 1952 phase of the Bengali language movement.

The 1948 Stage of the Formative of the Bengali Language Movement

Among those who were in the vanguard of the 1948 phase of the Bengali language movement, Dhirendranath Datta's (1886-1971) role was seminal in the process of jumpstarting or igniting an organized resistance against those forces who were engaged in repudiating the rudiments of Bengali culture and language through the imposition of Urdu as the only State languages of Pakistan. Dhirendranath Datta moved an amendment at the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan (CAP) on February 25, 1948 for adopting "Bengali" as one of the official languages of the CAP. His amendment was virulently criticized by the Muslim League members of the CAP. Since he was from Hindu community, his patriotism was being openly questioned. His fair and simple amendment was quickly misconstrued as an "anti-state" activity. Finally, his amendment was defeated on March 2, 1948. Doubtless, Dhirendranath Datta made history by articulating and demanding the full recognition and immediate adoption of Bengali as one of the State languages of Pakistan.

The rejection of the legitimate demand for adopting Bengali as one of the official languages of the Central Government fully exposed the hidden anti-Bengali design and communal agenda of the ruling coterie of Pakistan. There were protests throughout East Bengal on February 26, 1948 against the irresponsible utterances of Liaquat Ali Khan and Khwaja Nazimuddin on the CAP floor in favor of making Urdu as the only State language of Pakistan. The restive student community also condemned the Muslim League members of the CAP from East Bengal for their opposition to Dhirendranath

Datta's amendment. The protest movement which had initially started on February 26, 1948 in East Bengal under the leadership of the Dhaka University students, had gained new impetus after Dhirendranath Datta's amendment was formally rejected by the Muslim League legislators in the CAP on March 2, 1948. In response to such an anti-Bengali stand of the Punjabi-Mohajir dominated Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, the student community of East Bengal started to build up an organized resistant movement with the professed goal of establishing Bengali as one of the State languages of Pakistan. The second "All-Party Rastra Bhasha Shangram Parishad" (All-Party State Language Movement Action Committee) was quickly formed on March 2, 1948 under the leadership of the students and progressive intelligentsia of East Bengal. The All-Party Rastra Bhasha Sangram Parishad was much broader in scope, structure, and representation than the first Rastra Bhasha Sangram Parishad which was formed five months back in October 1947.

A province wide strike was organized and pro-Bengali language demonstrations were staged on March 11, 1948. Instead of conceding to the legitimate demands of the language protestors, Chief Minister Khwaja Nazimuddin had ordered the law enforcing authorities to take repressive measures against the demonstrators. For instance, a large demonstration was tear-gassed and stick-charged in Dhaka, and hundreds of protestors were arrested. Professional ruffians (goondas) were let loose on the leaders and participants of the demonstrations in Dhaka, and Mohamad Toha, one of the top organizers of the language demonstrations, was mercilessly beaten by those hired ruffians. Hoolias (warrants of arrest) were issued against the top leaders and activists of the language movement. The Government of East Bengal also started disseminating blatant falsehoods and slanderous distortions to the effect that the Bengali language movements and demonstrations were "motivated and guided by the enemies of Pakistan."

In spite of the stringent repressive measures of the anti-Bengali Muslim League Government of East Bengal, the participants of the language demonstrations and rallies had refused to be cowed down by brute forces. Nor were those dauntless defenders of Bengali language willing to be intimidated and blackmailed by the vilification campaign of the anti-Bengali Government of East Bengal. Indeed, the fearless language protestors kept on pressing for the unconditional release of those who were indiscriminately arrested on various concocted charges. They also demanded for immediate withdrawal of false cases of those who were deliberately implicated in numerous fictitious cases by the collusive law-enforcement authorities. The political situation was volatile and the pressure on the Government was so intense that the anti-Bengali Chief Minister Khwaja Nazimuddin was compelled to negotiate an agreement on the language issue with the mainstream leadership of the language movement.

On March 15, 1948, a meeting was held between the leaders of the All-Party Rastra Bhasha Shangram Parishad and Khwaja Nazimuddin, the Urdu-speaking Chief Minister of the then East Pakistan. Although Khwaja Nazimuddin was not yet willing or ready to lend his support to the basic demand of the language protestors by recognizing Bengali as one of the State languages of Pakistan, he had to concede in writing that "after my discussion with the principal leadership of the

All Party Language Action Committee, I am deeply convinced that the language movement for demanding Bengali to be one of the State languages of Pakistan is not instigated by the enemies of Pakistan." Pursuant to the stipulations of the agreement, most of the arrested language demonstrators were released from jails, and some of the warrants of arrests were either kept on hold or rescinded. In view of the prevalence of anti-Bengali policies and strategies of both the Central and Provincial Governments in the early years of Pakistan, these concessions from a non-Bengali Chief Minister of East Pakistan were not at all insignificant. This limited success of the student protests during mid-March 1948 against the anti-Bengali policy of the then Pakistan Government also generated a feeling of unity within East Bengal.

It was expected by the ruling party that the compromise between the Chief Minister of East Bengal and the leaders of the Bengali language movement would subside student protests and create a peaceful environment in Dhaka during the tour of the province in late March 1948 by Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the most powerful Governor General of Pakistan. However, the language issue got rekindled after Jinnah declared in a mammoth public meeting at the Race Course Maidan on March 21, 1948 that "the State language of Pakistan is going to be Urdu and no other language." He also left no doubt about his anti-

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Bengali language policy when he repeated almost the similar message in his infamous Convocation Address at the University of Dhaka on March 24, 1948. Among many other demeaning comments and insulting sermons, Jinnah said: "Make no mistake about it. There can be only One State language, if the component parts of the State are to march forward in unison, and that language, in my opinion, can only be Urdu." Jinnah's categorical assertion was instantly protested by some of the students in attendance of the Convocation ceremony. Fresh student rallies and protests had erupted immediately after Jinnah's a week-long visit to East Bengal in March, 1948.

The Muslim League Government of East Bengal was once again forced to enter into an agreement in April 1948 with the leaders of the All-Party Rastra Bhasha Shangram Parishad even though Khwaja Nazimuddin had broken most of his promises that he made in an earlier compromise on March 15, 1948. Aimed at digressing the attention of the student community from the State language issue, Chief Minister Khwaja Nazimuddin brought a proposal in the East Bengal Legislative Assembly (EBLA) on April 6, 1948 for making Bengali the official language and medium of instruction in East Bengal. However, more than two dozen (27) amendments to Khwaja Nazimuddin's lean proposal were submitted by the members of both

the treasury bench and opposition. Of those amendments, Dhirendranath Datta's multiple proposals were of great significance. He carefully crafted the language of those amendments in such a way so that the EBLA was at least convinced to recommend to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan (CAP) for adopting Bengali as one of the State languages of Pakistan. Yet, Khwaja Nazimuddin had refused to lend any support to such a pro-Bengali proposal. At the behest of the Urdu-speaking Prime Minister of the then East Bengal, most of the Muslim Leaguers in the EBLA had defeated Dhirendranath Datta's multiple amendments. Finally, Khwaja Nazimuddin's meager proposal on Bengali language with minor modification was adopted by the EBLA.

THE STATUS OF THE BENGALI LANGUAGE MOVEMENT DURING YEARS BETWEEN MID-1948 AND 1951

The controversy over language issue remained dormant between mid-1948 and 1951 due to the fact that the ruling elite of Pakistan was pre-occupied with other burning issues. Certain changes in the political leadership of the new nation also had impact on the language issue. The death of Mohammad Ali Jinnah on September 11, 1948 had delayed the full implementation of Urdu language policy throughout Pakistan. After Jinnah died, Khwaja Nazimuddin, the Urdu speaking

and other progressive forces of East Bengal when the so-called Basic Principles Committee Report (BPC) of 1950 "deliberately omitted" Bengali, the mother tongue of the majority of the people of Pakistan, as one of the State languages of Pakistan. The progressive forces including the concerned scholars and intelligentsia of East Bengal remained vigilant about the anti-Bengali policies and ploys of the Pakistani ruling coterie. For example, the Government sponsored evil proposal for Arabization of the Bengali script under the leadership of Fazlur Rahman, the Central Education Minister, was effectively resisted in early 1949 by the pro-Bengali forces of East Bengal. At the East Pakistan Literary Conference held in Dhaka on December 31, 1948, Dr. Mohammad Shahidullah, one of the most celebrated linguistics of the then Indo-Pak subcontinent, provided the most succinct rebuttal to the indecent proposal of Arabization of Bengali script. In its Final Report which was submitted on December 7, 1950, the East Bengal Language Committee (which was commissioned on March 9, 1949) under the Chairmanship of Maulana Muhahammad Akram Khan, clearly rejected the absurd proposal of introducing Arabic script for writing Bengali.

The patriotic forces of East Bengal vociferously criticized the anti-Bengali policy of the Central Government of Pakistan when the same absurd proposal for the adoption of Arabic script for writing Bengali was re-introduced at the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan (CAP) in April 1950. On the CAP floor, Dhirendranath Datta vehemently opposed the most demeaning proposal of substituting Arabic script for Bengali script. It seems that Fazlur Rahman's love for using Arabic script for writing Bengali knew no bounds. His name lives on infamy for his anti-Bengali stance. He introduced the same issue once again on the CAP floor on March 27, 1951. Among others, Dhirendranath Datta and Mohammad Habibullah Bahar from East Bengal promptly criticized the nefarious design of transforming the people of East Bengal into an inferior class of illiterate citizens of Pakistan by introducing an alien script for writing Bengali. Dhirendranath Datta, an ardent defender of Bengali language, strongly demanded the outright rejection of the discriminatory decision for introducing Arabic script in lieu of Bengali alphabets. He also urged the Government of Pakistan for immediately adopting Bengali as one of the State languages.

The relentless students of Dhaka University had remained very active in garnering mass support for establishing Bengali as one of the State languages of Pakistan. At the initiative of the Youth League, a revamped the "Dacca University State Language Action Committee" (DUSLAC) was formed in early 1951. Instead of banishing in oblivion or waiting in limbo, the DUSLAC took a pro-active stand toward adopting Bengali as one of the State languages of Pakistan. Aimed at enlisting the support of the central legislature, a memorandum was circulated among the members of the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan (CAP). Unfortunately, the anti-Bengali leaderships of both the Government and legislature were unwilling to accept Bengali as one of the State languages of Pakistan. Khwaja Nazimuddin, the then Prime Minister of Pakistan (he stepped down from the position of Governor General to become the Prime Minister after the assassination of Liaquat Ali Khan in October 1951), was addressing a public meeting at Paltan Maidan on January 26, 1952 when he clearly echoed what Jinnah said in March 1948, "Urdu shall be the only State language of Pakistan," and that was the beginning of the 1952 phase of the Bengali Language Movement.

The patriotic people of East Bengal were outraged. There were

series of protests and demonstrations, and a new (third) All Parties State Language Action Committee was quickly formed on January 30, 1952 by the progressive forces to provide a cohesive leadership to the language movement. This Action Committee had much broad-based representation from political parties, students, and concerned organizations and individuals, and it was decided to observe protest rallies and a general strike throughout East Bengal on February 21, 1952. In response to this decision, the East Bengal Government banned all processions and rallies on February 21, 1952 through the imposition of the infamous section 144. Many political leaders were not willing to organize protest rallies through the violation of Government order. Yet the younger segments of language activists and students made a conscious determination for violating section 144 by bringing out the protest rallies in support of their demand for adopting Bengali as one of the State languages of Pakistan. During the observance of the general strike and protest rallies on 21st February, 1952, the language protestors were killed by the police. A reign of terror was unleashed on the participants and supporters of the Bengali language movement.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

It is evident from the preceding that the patriotic forces of East Bengal started mobilizing or enlisting support in favor of making "Bengali" as one of the State languages of Pakistan both immediately before and after August 14, 1947. Yet, that resistance movement against the imposition of Urdu as the only official language of Pakistan remained to be confined within the scope of limited number of rallies and demonstrations, speeches in the meetings, press statements, pamphlets, and articles. The Bengali language movement at this rudimentary stage was by no means a mass movement. Yet, the efforts of the language activists started enlisting mass support in favor of Bengali language movement. The language protestors also exposed the ulterior motives and anti-Bengali designs of the ruling elite of Pakistan. However, the demand for making Bengali as one of the State languages of Pakistan started taking more concrete and volatile shape in the early months of 1948.

Any credible appraisal or systematic assessment of the organized efforts toward establishing Bengali as a State language of Pakistan would add credence to the fact that the language protests and demonstrations in the early years of Pakistan had a clear bearing on the extent and magnitude of the historic Bengali language movement in 1952. Doubtless, the earlier phases of the language movement, especially the organized resistance of early 1948 by the student community and the progressive forces against the imposition of Urdu as the only State language of Pakistan, had prepared a ground for building up the historic Bengali language movement in early 1952. The formative phase of the Bengali language movement had also profound impact on the subsequent cultural movements and political developments in the eastern province of Pakistan. The dauntless Bengali language activists of the formative phase made history are still remembered for their stellar bravery, and those who had sacrificed their lives on 21st February, 1952 for defending their mother tongue are the immortal martyrs of the glorious Bengali language movement.

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