



Ekushey: Looking back in time

FAKHRUZZAMAN CHOWDHURY

ONE are the days like a gypsy girl as fancied by a poet! It happened as if yesterday. But so many years have gone by and next year (2012) will be the Golden Jubilee Year of the eventful day, immortal Ekushey, that shook the very existence of state called Pakistan within 5 years of its founding.

Standing on the threshold of a momentous occasion of commemorating 50th anniversary of immortal Ekushey, I can clearly visualize the scenario we experienced in those tumultuous days in a quiet mufassil town.

Air was rife with rumours of happenings in Dhaka, a place only 50 miles away from Dhaka by river route yet so remote in those of scanty communication network! People coming from Dhaka by launch or paddle steamers would narrate to eager listeners of things happening in Dhaka, capital of East Pakistan. Police and students are at logger-head and anything could happen any time, they would whisper!

And the inevitable did happen!
From the very beginning the rulers of Pakistan were bent upon exploiting and

usurping the majority population of the newly created state. People of erstwhile East Pakistan, resented this. Their resentment triggered off when the issue of state language was brought to the fore prematurely. From the very beginning the clandestine desire of imposing Urdu, a language without any ethnic root, on the people under the garb of *lingua franca* was there. It was the brain child of Professor Dr. Sir Syed Ziauddin Ahmed, Vice-Chancellor, Aligarh Muslim University and the idea was floated as such with the ulterior motive of giving final shape of state language. With that motive in mind on his only visit to Dhaka, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder father of Pakistan made the erroneous and disastrous announcement of making Urdu, and Urdu alone the state language of Pakistan. In reply the thunderous shout of 'no' shook the very foundation of Pakistan and within four years it was evident that on the basis of lingual differences, this state is bound to crumble. And within months of his impetuous utterance died its author a dejected death.

The beginning of the end of Pakistan started when shots were fired in Dhaka on the unarmed students in Dhaka on the

afternoon of February 21, 1952. Shots were fired at the very existence of Pakistan.

This was evident to me, a student of school at time, when I saw my father returning home from morning walk fuming with rage. My father, a man with his Arabic and Persian education once fought for Pakistan thinking that this new homeland for the Muslims will augur well for them. But now he saw his dreams were shattered. He returned home with a piece of black ribbon pinned on his white Punjab! It was his way of protesting the massacre in Dhaka. He said, as a Muslim his duty is to oppose the aggressors and be with the aggressed. He was telling us how the police unleashed barbaric attack on the unarmed students and the metallic black coloured streets of Dhaka were smeared with opulent red blood! In the afternoon again my father went out, this time for Gayebana Janaja, farewell prayer for the dead in absentia at the Aziz Ahmed Maidan. In the prayer special munajat was offered invoking divine mercy for the martyrs and doom for the oppressors!

Yet the rituals were not complete until a make-shift Shaheed Minar in bricks was built in the Maidan by the students and

youths in about a week's time following the one built in Dhaka on Feb. 23. Barring a few belonging to the ruling clichés, people from all walks of life joined hand in hand to carve out programmes that would give vent to the anguish and anger with which the nation was raging.

A few years later as I moved to Dhaka for higher education, because of the situational position of the University of Dhaka, as its intake my first feelings in the campus are difficult to describe. I was standing on the main gate of the campus through which was the students went out on the streets defying the prohibitory orders of the autocratic Government. They paraded the metallic Road under the canopy of Krishnachura trees strewn with brick-red colour.

In our leisure period we would rest in the thatched barracks used as Dhaka Medical College Students' Hostel situated at the university district.

One friend of mine had his seat in a barrack within the whispering distance of the Shaheed Minar. The road leading from Jagannath Hall to Bakshi Bazar had rows of book shops and restaurants on both sides. One of the book shops was Punthipatra of Mohammad Sultan who is credited with

publication of the first compilation of writings on Ehushey February. The compilation immortalized poet Hasan Hafizur Rahman as its Editor.

The Azimpur Graveyard, permanent resting place of the martyrs is about less than half a mile away from the theater of massacre of Ekushey February, come to live every year with the chanting of the Probbhat Ferry- which is a unique way of paying homage.

As I look down the memory lane, I remember the poem on the Martyrs of Ekushey by Cressida Lindsey, an American poetess which as far is known is the first literary work by a foreigner on Ekushey. It was published in the English quarterly The Republic, published in the sixties and was edited by Poet Abdul Ghani Hazari and Novelist Sardar Jainuddin.

The journal is lost in the oblivion, so is the poem.

Ekushey and subsequent events in history have amply proved that Voux populi-vox dei :voice of the people is the voice of the God.

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PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

International Mother Language Day is our moment

NARGIS SULTANA

21st February the International Mother Language Day is iconic Bangladesh. Bengali is the language of a vast population living in Bangladesh as well as West Bengal, Assam and Tripura of India. But 21st February has been recognized as the landmark of a country called Bangladesh.

Back in 1999 on November 17 in Paris, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on the proposal of the Bangladesh government

unanimously took the decision to observe 21st February as International Mother Language Day every year throughout the world. It should be noted that 188 member countries of the UN were present at the meeting which gave Bangladesh a glowing dimension to her glorious history. Now Bengali as a mother tongue has become a symbol of respect, reverence and fidelity --- be it in Bangladesh or elsewhere all over the world. The incidents that happened on 21st February 1952, in which some gallant youths laid down their lives on the streets of Dhaka

as a protest to uphold the dignity of their mother language, will be commemorated at home and abroad in the same way as another historical event of the world: on 1st May 1886 a number of workers sacrificed their lives in Chicago city to demand an eight hourly work day. Thus the history of Bangladesh has become part and parcel of the world's history. Therefore we see today the Shaheed Minar is also visited by many foreign nationals alongside our people on 21st February to commemorate 1952.

Language is the medium of literature and

culture and of course a social construction of a large group of people who convey the same roots of origin and speak the same language as their identity across the globe. This chain of identity can never be broken but can be relaxed, though. This fact becomes clear when we see people tend to return to their native land to live out the last phase of their lives after spending a long period of time abroad. The Pakistani intelligentsia failed to understand this fact and did a blunder by disregarding the mother tongue of a greater population and

proclaiming that Urdu would be the only language of Pakistan, thereby not considering what would happen to the feelings of the East Pakistani people and why they would learn Urdu as citizens of the country. Such whims of the then ruling party led to a bloody protest against the eccentric decision and to the embryo of a new sovereign country that was begotten on 16 December 1971.

Through the mother tongue a nation's lifestyle, social and cultural customs, **SEE PAGE**