

## Formation of a New Nation and State through the Language Movement

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salutations for humans - as expressed by Ram Mohan Ray through his practice of Bangla language filtering the knowledge of the whole west is uttered simultaneously, we can realize that the Bangalee culture has got the strength of being deep rooted in the earth of the native land and at the same time bloomed in a sky-high stature in the world. But sorrowfully Bangla could not achieve the status of a state language even after all those. In 1952 on 21 February, for the first time it became essential that Bangla will attain the status of a state language. The strong native cultural base and international connections were the yields of Bangalee mind. Along with those, the obligation to the small nations and languages was also a moral base of the Bangalees' cultural thoughts. For this, it was possible for the theoretical leaders of the language movement to clearly declare, 'we demand the same status of all languages' (Ali Ashraf alias Khoka Roy, Ekushey February Shongkolon, edited by Hasan Hafizur Rahman). The above mentioned policy was so scientific, international conscience-oriented and foresightful that after forty eight years of language movement the Ekushey February has been recognized by the international community. It is a great honor for the Bangalee nation that all the nations and tribes and languages have welcomed the Ekushey February of Bangladesh as their motif to express their cultural development of languages. But will the Bangalees stop here? Don't we have the opportunity to heighten our powerful and international language in a broader perspective? Of course, we have. So, the Honorable Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina has tabled up strong demand to the United Nations for the declaration of Bangla as an UN language. And she gave speech in the UN in Bangla like that of Bangabandhu. The procedure of this demand is going on. The recognition will provide the Bangalee nation and the Bangla language a truly prestigious place across the world.



### Two

The power and possibility of the language movement was multifarious. Its base was not confined to only making it the state language of Pakistan. Its objective was to make the millennium-old progressive thinking of Bangalee life into a strong secular and unrestricted worldly cultural flow. If it were done, it could mediate with the highly scientific and modern cultures of the world. Resultantly, it is expected that the beauty and preciousness of our culture will be a part of the world culture. It was a distant destination. The powerful structure that was needed was also included in the thought of the leaders and participants - of course, it was in the shape of a seed. Its main objective was the exposition of the anthropological national identity. It could be achieved in the attainment of self control under a federal state of Pakistan. But the Pakistani autocrats preferred to national oppression than giving cultural liberty and sovereignty. As the big shots of Pakistan like Jinnah and Liaquat Ali mistried to impose Urdu on Bangladesh, the learned Bangalees explained the inevitability of Bangla. The statements of the Islamic scholars were time-befitting and logical that came from them even before the inception of Pakistan on the debate of what should be the mother tongue of the Bangalee Muslims or after the inception given as protest of imposing Urdu on Bangalees by the rulers. We will give only two citations from those people. Moulana Moniruzzaman Islamabadi, a truly secular and nationalistic leader stated that, "Bangla is the mother tongue of ninety five percents of Bangalees. There is no discrimination in this regard between the Hindus and Muslims. Although the mother tongue in Dhaka, Kolkata, Murshidabad and Chittagong has been deformed and has got a mixture, the people of these areas are habituated to express their thoughts of mind in both the language, rather they are more dependable to Bangla than Urdu in every stage of family life. All their books and khatas, documentations, letter



## Contribution of Women in the Language Movement

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Committee had called for meetings, strikes, demonstrations, processions on 21st of February all-over East Pakistan. East Pakistan Provincial Assembly was scheduled for session on that day at 3 pm. There had been arrangements too, to proceed towards the Provincial Assembly in order to hand over a memorandum claiming Bangla as the state language. The rulers had felt perturbed facing such agenda declared by the students. East Pakistan Chief Minister Nurul Amin's government had tried to restrain the agitation by enforcing the prohibitory order under Section 144 for one month with effect from 20th February.

Students had started assembling at the 'Aamtala' of Dhaka University from the morning of 21st February since they had decided to disregard the prohibitory order under section 144. Dr. Sufia Ahmed, an accomplice of the language movement had stated in a memoir that she was assigned to bring the girl students from Anandamoyee and Banglabazar Schools to Aamtala and she did it. Decision was that they will proceed crossing the police barricade in groups of 10 boys and 4 girls. She also mentioned that initially two groups of boys had opened a procession but police arrested them and loaded onto a truck. The third one consisted of a group of girls which had shortly faced thrashing by the police. Tear shells had been lobbed and she was hurt a little. Still then they were trying to proceed towards the Assembly building. Assault by the police was retaliated by throwing stones by the students. She also said that the situation had seemed to be a battle-field to her. After a while police opened fire to take control of the events. Salam, Rafique, Barkat, Jabber and many more embraced martyrdom in a peaceful procession. Dr. Ahmed and her companions had stayed back in the university campus till the evening and returned home after the situation settled down. It's evident from her reminiscence that, as women, they were not afraid of facing such consequences. Resolute commitments had inspired them to fight for the cause despite the threats of tear shell, battering and even firing. With this determination and devotion, women have occupied the forefront of our history.

Dr. Halima Khatun was one among the participants of the language movement. She narrated in her memoirs that they were thrilled in defiance of the order under Section 144. She had been entrusted with the task of bringing the students out from the Muslim Girls' School and the Banglabazar Girls' School to the Aamtala of the university. Her troupe was the first to disobey the order under Section 144. They chanted slogans and marched forward pushing obstacles and police rifles aside. Then the police started thrashing and charged tear shells. Instead of being restrained, they were gathered in the roads again just after receiving first aid from the emergency unit of the Dhaka Medical College and started proceeding towards the Assembly building. But police opened fire soon they advanced a little. Rafique's skull was blown away with the bullet. A bust resembling Rafique's photo was created in that night which was kept at former Finance Minister Late Shah Kibria's room in the Salmullah Hall. Facing police raid on the hall, everybody decamped and the police took over the bust's possession. Dr. Halima is the person who was sent to the hall to get hold of Rafique's bust. She narrated that she had recovered the bust defying a death threat. The image of Rafique we see now had been created from that bust.

This is a different aspect of our women's participation in the language movement. They tried hard to push the agitation to a different dimension. They did not even care for their lives. Rafique's photo is an important document of the history which was recovered and preserved by a woman.



correspondences had to make in Bangla. So there can be no doubt that Bangla is their mother tongue also.

It is an undisputed truth that no nation can mount the highest pick of development without enrichment of their mother tongue. If we go through the history of the civilized world, we will possibly not get any nation who has reached the pick of development without the help of their mother tongue. It is true that the Arabians got victory into the Parisian countries and ruled over them, but even after all these they could not introduce Arabic literature there other than their own literature. ... The Turks have been ruling over the three continents for six hundred years with their mother tongue Turkish. The example of India is brighter. For about one thousand years from the Arabian era through the Mogul period, the languages of the Muslim rulers were Arabic, Turkish and Persian; but those languages could not thrive over the local languages. Languages like Hindi, Gujrati, Telegu, Bangla, Assamese and Oriya are still sustaining in this land." (The President's speech at Bongyo Musolman Shahitya Sommelen, held in Basirhat in 1927).

The farcical statement of Maulana Akram Khan on the mother tongue of the Bangalee Muslims is also worth mentioning. He told, "There are many funny questions in the world. What is the language of the Bangalee Muslims? Is that Urdu or Bangla? This is the funniest of all questions. Certainly a coconut tree will produce coconuts, not any other fruit. So if anyone wants to make a debate with us on this question, we will not participate in the debate. Rather we will collect some money and try to purchase a ticket for Bahrapur for him. In Bengal, the Muslims have been using Bangla since the Muslim Era and they will be doing so in future" (President's Speech, third Bongyo Sahitya Shommelen, 1917, cited from Bongyo Musolman Sahitya Patrika, Baishakh).

On the other hand, Dr Muhammad Shahidullah tabled up the question of the mother tongue of the Bangalees from an anthropological point of view. He stated, "We the Hindus, Muslims and Christians are a single mixed nation" (Dr Muhammad Shahidullah Swarakgrantha, 1985, p. 403). He told the Muslim students, "Why do you forget that you are Bangalees? Your blood is a mixture of that of the Aryans, Mongolians, Dravidians, Arabians, Persians, Afghans and Turks" (ibid, Introduction, p. 16). The aim of Shahidullah was to make possible the formulation of 'a single nation' through equal participation of the Muslims in the development of Bangla language and culture. To create a 'single nation', that is, a combined Bangalee nation, he suggested the Muslims to take local names as well. He ascertained that there is no doubt at all that the base of this nation would be the Bangla language. So, the oppression of other languages over Bangla was one sort of massacre to him. He himself revolted against this view and asked his fellow educationists to revolt. "We educationist should, however, emphatically, protest and if necessary should revolt against the fresh imposition of any language other than Bangla as the medium of instruction for East Bengal students. This imposition will be tantamount to the genocide of East Bangalees."

### Three

Therefore, the debate of Bangalee Muslims' mother language, thought of the formation of a nation and the final phase of language movement (1948-52) are tied in a single string. The Bangalees of Bangladesh have dreamt of a nation of their own in combination of these issues. Through the phases of '52, '54, '62, '66, '69 the Bangalees fought for the dignity of the language, autonomy of the territory and their own rights. They sacrificed their lives. In 1971 they participated in the War of Liberation and through the sacrifice of lives of three million people, they made it possible to achieve an independent, a sovereign, secular and democratic nation state of Bangladesh.

During the middle ages the debate on languages started with Abdul Hakim, the great poet of Sandwip which was ideologically inherited by Dr. Muhammad Shahidullah and Dr. Muhammad Enamul Haque who set themselves in the formation of a nation. From a historical perspective that school of thought was observed by S Wazed Ali (Bangalees of the Future) and sociologist Nazmul Karim (Samakal 57). It was Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who - grasping the gist of their experiences and intermingling with it the dream of the ill-fated, wretched commoners of setting up a nation with Rabindranath's inspiration (in Amar Sonar Bangla), Nazrul's hilarious patriotism (in 'Nomo Nomo Nomo Bangladesh Momo' and 'Joy Bangla'), the heroic battles of Surja Sen and Titumir, the indomitable steadiness of the Bangalees' mythological hero Chand Swadagor, and combining the courage and heroism of Torap and Hanif of Bangla literature - established a liberal democratic and secular independent and sovereign country. The Bangalees became a nation from an ethnic community for the establishment of this state. There are big communities in the subcontinent such as the Punjabis, Sindhis, Poshtus, Gujratis, Tamils, Telegus, Marathas, and Bangalees. But none of them are a nation and none have their own state. Only the Bangalees do have their own state and nation. They have a nation and a state as well. The language, the movement for it, and the leadership of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman have made it possible.

Translation: Subrata Kumar Das

Rawshan Ara Bachhu mentioned in the earlier memoir that she saw two groups of boys had hopped police barriers and marched forward. She, along with her troupe, had followed them and had faced police beating since she was in the front. She was hurt by unrestrained beating of police. She took shelter in a roadside old Rickshaw garage in the cross fire. She had waited there for long and returned to the hostel in the evening.

It's remarkable from the memoirs of these three women that they were present at the battlefield in person in such a grave situation. They had been the victims of various assaults by the police. None was spared; neither had received courteous manners for being women. This is the fact that anyone of them could die that day. It's merely a miracle that such did not happen on that day though they were emphatically endangered.

Courageous lady Nadera Begum was then a university student. She had led the student front of Communist Party. She had motivated girl students for the cause of the language movement and was very active in demonstrations.

The Provincial Assembly was in session when there had been firing on the students. When the news reached there, Moulana Abdur Rashid Tarkabagish was the first to raise the demand in the house for an enquiry against police firing. He said that the session would continue only after the enquiry. MLA Anwara Khatun had delivered speech with strong arguments. 35 MLAs along with Anwara Khatun had walked-out from the house. With these bold steps of Anwara Khatun, it is proved that women did not commit any disrespectful act of keeping silence even in the Assembly.

The first martyrdom of the language movement was Rafiquddin. His skull was blown away. Immediate after the tragic incident, Amanul Haque had taken a photo of Rafiq with the help of Halima Khatun, a student of Kazi Idris Medical College. Nurses of the Dhaka Medical College Hospital had burst into fury while they were treating the injured. The protest turned to be a blazing fire with such support and cooperation from the women.

Strike (Hartal), processions and demonstrations against this were held all over the country including Dhaka on 22nd February. Women, who had failed to participate in the processions, had sprinkled flowers onto the processions from their rooftop. This endeavor cannot be treated as a meager one because it was an act of encouragement to the direct participants on behalf of the women. Many have mentioned in their memoirs that a number of girls including Nurunnahar Kabir had written posters throughout the night. Names of those had not been recorded in the history. Black badges were prepared from one's black saree. None had remembered her even. Women did not wait for their names; they just wanted the success of the language movement - the dignity of our mother tongue.

Professor Anissuzzaman's mother Syeda Khatun kept her gold necklace on the altar of the first memorial which was built in the premises of the Dhaka Medical

## Unarmed Courage of Alphabets

Belal Chaudhuri

We are now illumined by you -  
As the moon is by the sun, civilization by humanism,  
And Bangla language by the morning procession,  
Like freedom holding aloft your hands;  
Our struggle is alive in your unarmed alphabets,  
Like the sailing of democracy for the victory of Bangla  
And the ethos of a nation in the roots of motherland.

Courage, beauty and struggle  
Are like tides formed by small waves,  
Resolute determination emanating from small fists  
Of eternal Bengal, Bangalee and Bangla language.

Translation: Dr. Helal Uddin Ahmed

## Give Me the Garland of Your Choice

Nirmalendu Goon

I also shall be an immortal beneath your feet,  
Please give me the garland of your choice.

Please take my wedding gift, pledges of a chest full of blood.  
I have washed my restless soul with moonson water; I shall also be floods,  
Only brush my forehead with your sandal-pasted hand.  
I shall launch arrows over air-water-earth,  
And bring down a mountain beneath your feet.  
I shall also be an immortal, give me the garland of your choice.

I am constantly stuck as fingers in my feet,  
I live inside timber as the fragrance of sandalwood.  
What fears can I have?

Living beside a grave, I myself have become a tomb,  
Living beside a martyr, I myself have become deathless,  
Becoming numerous minarets of martyrs,  
My fingers have thrived in the hands of the masses.  
What fears can I have?

I shall also be an immortal beneath your feet,  
Please give me the garland of your choice.

Look, the inner soul is full with the pride of death,  
I remain on grass as the 'Shefali' flower of dawn.  
Not 'Akanda' or 'Dhundul', I am Rafiq-Salam-Barkat;  
See the firearms radiating from my soul,  
Cartridges on my waste, rebellion in my bones and marrow,  
There is this blood-red mark of victory on my proud forehead.

What fears can I have?  
I also shall be an immortal beneath your feet,  
Please give me the garland of your choice.

Translation: Dr. Helal Uddin Ahmed

College to commemorate the language martyrs. This was definitely a symbolic respect to the martyrs as well as a generous contribution to the cause symbolized by the support to fulfill the mission. This vision is always dormant with the women and is time tested in all major events. But men never rightly portrayed the contributions of women in the history. It's obvious that the history of any nation remain inaccurate if the position of women is not judged and honoured from the perspective of equality. Unfortunately this mal treatment remains existent with women.

I would like to mention more two instances. One is the language movement in Assam when the Assam Official Language Act, 1960 was enacted. Through this Act, Assamese (Asamiya) was made the state language of Assam. Bengalis of the Barak Valley had raised their voices in protest of this act. 11 persons were martyred in police firing at the Shilchar Rail Station on 19 May 1961. Police had tried to cover up one's dead body in a nearby pond but the activists had got hold of it. After this upheaval, the Assam government had amended the official language act and reinstated Bangla as official language for the Barak Valley. 19 May is now being observed as the Martyrs' Day in the Barak Valley. One amongst the 11 martyred was a woman and her name was Kamala Bhattacharyya.

The next one is the 'International Mother Language Day'. Bangladesh expatriates in Canada Rafiqul Islam and Abdul Salam had taken initiative to declare the illustrious 21 February as international mother language day. They had formed an organization named 'International Mother Language Lovers of the World' consisting of 10 individuals from various dialect groups. Six out of these 10 were women.

UNESCO declared 21st February as the 'International Mother Language Day' on 17 November 1999. Prior to this historic declaration, one lady named Anna Maria Mailof was working as Programme Specialist in the Language Department of the UNESCO. She took it up with utmost sincerity and devotion. She had maintained close contacts with Rafiqul Islam and replied to all communications made by him. Anna's considerations, willingness and patience were very passionate to materialize the declaration of a mother language day. She did not even forget to inform Mr. Islam that the UNESCO National Commission of Hungary was the first commission to endorse the proposition. Anna had also informed Rafiqul Islam that the proposition would have to be routed through the government of his country. Accordingly, Rafiqul Islam had contacted with the UNESCO Commission of Bangladesh.

Sheikh Hasina was the then Prime Minister of Bangladesh. She took a decision very promptly and instructed the concerned to materialize it. On approval of the Education Minister and the Prime Minister, the Bangladesh-UNESCO National Commission had duly placed the proposition to the UNESCO Headquarters. While placed before the UNESCO Board Meeting, 28 member-states had supported the proposition of Bangladesh.

With her vigilant mind, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina could comprehend the importance of the issue and had taken a swift decision. The time was her childhood when the language movement had taken place. In his autobiography entitled 'The Unfinished Memoirs', Bangabandhu did mention about this as:

"My daughter Hasina embraced me and said, "Abba, we want Bangla to be the national language; we want all political prisoners to be freed." She had picked up these slogans when she was in Dhaka on 21 February."

It is that toddler who had chanted the slogans of the language movement at the age of only five established the language martyrs' day in a glorified position worldwide in her matured age.

I just want to mention that the homes, streets or even the assembly were the tales of triumph for women. Besides, Vancouver, Paris and the Office of the Head of Government of Bangladesh are also the other success stories. Women had kept their firm footings everywhere.

Translation: A. T. M. Monemul Haque