

ANOTHER 1952 a thousand years ago

February 21, 1952. The stage was set. The gathering had started in violation of section 144. This was a protest against undermining of the majority's demand in a free nation. However, the chaos for justice was silenced by bullets and boots. The supreme sacrifice of Salam, Rafiq, Barkat, Jabbar and others did not go in vain. Today, 64 years later, Ekushey February, is globally observed as International Mother Language Day.

However, very few of us know that the event of 1952 was actually a repetition of history. Meaning, our language was threatened with extinction once before, almost a thousand years ago.

The roots of our language go back as far as 600 B.C. during the Aryan empire, but the language began to flourish during the Pala dynasty that laid the foundations of Bengali literature. The Palas were scholarly people who invested much of their wealth on education. Paharpur and Nalanda Universities are two of the many relics of their legacy.

The Palas were also fond of literature. The oldest known Bangla literary work, 'Charyyapada', is from this era, which is also known as the classical period of Bengali literature.

In the middle of the 11th century, Hemonto Sen, an ambitious general, overthrew the Palas and established his own dynasty. With this establishment, a dark period began. Theologically the Senas were Hindus and culturally Brahmin. Sanskrit was equally sacred to them as their own caste. The Brahmins of that time believed that Sanskrit and only Sanskrit should be the language of the state. So a ban was imposed on the mass usage of local dialects including Bengali.

Needless to say, a national ban also covered all media for mass communication. When two Bengali authors, translated Ramayan in to Bengali, the Senas termed their work as 'sarbbneshe', meaning 'total destruction'.

Bangla literary activities had stopped. Sanskrit was the language of the elite, education and literature as English is today. Hence the literary works found from this era, for example 'Gita-Gouvindam', are all in Sanskrit. This is the era when Bangla truly became an endangered language. The difference between 1952 and then is simply the European ideology of nationalism.

Now a language survives through its speakers and is preserved through literature. When a language does not have any utility and its speakers are pressurised to speak a different tongue, gradually it loses its speakers. According to linguists, this is one of the reasons for language extinction. However, even extinct languages can find its way back to life if it is preserved

in literature.

During the Sen Administration, both the survival and preservation of Bangla was threatened. Fortunately the scenario did not continue. The Sen Dynasty had lasted for little more than a century and in the early 13th century the Turkish/Afghan invasion found its way to Bengal establishing the Shah Dynasty. Like the Palas, the Shahs had also established many educational institutes and sponsored literary works. Although the official language was Persian, Bangla was brought back into education. The children began to learn Bangla side by side with Persian and Arabic. The community developed into a tri-lingual society without any pressure from political, social or economic forces to concentrate/give up on a particular dialect. As a result Bangla became useful again and literary activities resumed.

This era is known as the medieval period of Bengali Literature.

Although, Wikipedia states that it was the Turkish invasion that had put the flourishing momentum of Bangla literature at halt, evidence shows that many important literary figures had emerged during this era with enormous contributions in Bengali literature. Not only had the literary activities resumed, historians like Danish Chandra Sen reported that the Turks had made significant tributes.

It was the Shah ruler, Sultan Nusrat Khan or Nasir Khan who sponsored the translation of Mahabharat in Bangla for the first time. Some of these Sultans are even known to have become students of Bangla literature. The most commonly known Bangla literary works from this era are: Yusuf Zulaikha and Laila Majnun .

Looking back at the annals of history, the Turkish rulers from the 13th century deserve due recognition in the long evolution that the Bangla language has been through. Without their contributions perhaps there would be no 'Bengali' people left to claim a distinctive identity let alone a nationality. More so, there would be no Gitanjali, Bidrohi or Himu.

By Mashruk Zaman Khan

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Bangladeshi handicrafts reach EUROPE AND AMERICA

Satkhira Bazaar - an extension of the parent company Emerson Manufacturing Company Inc. - was established in December 2014 for the purpose of selling exclusive Bangladeshi-made products in the United States, Australia and Europe. The endeavour is an extension of the philanthropic work of Emerson that started in May of 2014. With the help and expertise of QAF's founder Zakir Hossain, Satkhira Bazaar has been able to source products throughout Bangladesh. Working together, QAF and Satkhira Bazaar has focused on empowering the women in rural area around the country.

Satkhira Bazaar's primary focus is procuring household items and handicrafts directly from Bangladeshi villages through cooperatives and in some cases from specific individ-

uals. This method of procurement ensures that the money for the items does not pass through a series of middlemen and that the payments go directly to the artisans that produce the items.

Satkhira Bazaar selected suppliers from Rangpur, Jamalpur, Satkhira, Jessore, Khulna, Sylhet and the Chittagong Hill Tracts. These are areas where small entrepreneurs produce a variety of products, including rugs, embroidery, wood products, jute products and terracotta pottery. The total handicraft items available easily exceed one hundred. Through this process, Satkhira Bazaar provides jobs to over 5000 people out of which, approximately 80 percent of who are underprivileged rural women. Satkhira Bazaar then exports these products to global markets.

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