

From Language Movement to ... *(Continued from previous page)*

off the hair of a female student of Bangla Bazaar School in order to prevent her from joining a procession. But the girl came by covering her head with a scarf. In this way, the girls cooperated in accordance with their ability."

Two major features emerge from the reminiscences of Rawshan Ara Bachchu. One was the giving away of ornaments by women. The other was the participation in processions by ignoring the obstacles at home. In the first instance, the women were behind-the-scene workers. In the second instance, they participated directly. The boys faced lesser hindrances within the family. Going outside home was not a big hurdle for them. Even then, the stance taken by girls in the perspective of history was very important—from both social and political contexts. That was because girls had to advance by breaking their shackles. They did this out of a consideration for cultural values; from an intense urge to get relief from a crisis of existence. History moves forward in this fashion. Historic glories are achieved in this way through collective endeavours of men and women. No big achievement in history could materialise by keeping the womenfolk outside. Rather, the women had to bear the major brunt of sufferings while realizing big achievements.



I was recounting the participation of women in the language movement. By that time, four and a half years had elapsed since the partition of the subcontinent. The student community could sustain their movement for language at different junctures. The ruling coterie had retorted that only Urdu would be state language. The students then burst out in protests and resistance. The 'All-Party State Language Action Council' was constituted on 31 January 1952 at the library hall of Dhaka. The council announced meetings, strike, protest processions etc. all over East Pakistan on 21 February. The session of the constituent assembly was scheduled to be held at 3 pm in the afternoon of 21 February. There was also a programme to march towards the constituent assembly for submitting memorandum on making Bangla the state language. The government was troubled by such a programme of the student community. At that time, Nurul Amin was the chief minister of East Pakistan. His government tried to suppress the movement by clamping section 144 for one month with effect from 20 February.

The students started to assemble at Amtala of the university from the morning of 21 February. That was because they had taken a decision to break section 144. Reminiscing about the episode, one of the participants – Dr. Sufia Ahmad – narrated that she was given the responsibility of bringing girls from Anandamoyi and Banglabazaar Schools. She had performed her task. A decision was then taken that ten boys and four girls would advance after crossing the police barricade at a time. She also recalled, when the first two groups of boys went out, the police hauled them up on a truck after arresting them. The girls went out as the third group. When they advanced a distance, baton-charge by the police commenced. Tear gas was also thrown. She was slightly injured. Even then, they tried to move towards the constituent assembly. On one side there was the police assault, and on the other side the students were also throwing pieces of bricks at the police. She said that it appeared as if they were on a battle-ground. The next moment, the police fired bullets to bring the situation under control. Many participants in the peaceful procession including Salam, Rafiq, Barkat, Jabbar embraced martyrdom. They stayed in the university area up to evening. Then they returned home after the situation had calmed down at night.

It is clear from the reminiscences of Dr. Sufia Ahmad that they were not afraid as women to face the situation. They were steadfast in making the movement a success despite tear gases, baton-charges and bullets. The women were at the forefront of history with this resolute dedication.

Dr. Halima Khatun was one of the participants in the language movement. In her reminiscences, she recalled that they were greatly excited about breaking section 144. She was assigned the task of bringing girls to Amtala of the university from Muslim Girls' School and Banglabazaar Girls' School. In accordance with the decision to break section 144, her group was the first among the girls. When the police obstructed them, they moved forward while shouting slogans by pushing back the rifles. The police then baton-charged and threw tear gas shells. Without losing their heart the slightest, the girls returned to the roads after taking first-aid from the emergency ward of Dhaka Medical. They then proceeded towards the constituent assembly. But they could not advance very far. The police then started firing. Rafiq's skull was blown away by a bullet. On that night, a block was made carrying Rafiq's picture, which was kept at Salimullah Hall in the room of their friend former finance minister Late Shah Kibria. When the police launched a search operation, they all moved away from that place. The hall went under the control of the police. In this situation, she was sent to the hall to bring back the picture block of Rafiq. She recalled that she could recover the block at a great risk to her life. The picture that is now seen of Rafiq was made from that block.

This was another aspect of the participation of women in the language movement. There was no deficit in the efforts of womenfolk to add a different dimension to the movement. They took risks without caring for their lives. The picture of Shaheed Rafiq is today a historic document. It was a lady who held on to that important piece of history.

While reminiscing about that day, Rawshan Ara Bachchu recalls that she saw two groups of boys advancing by jumping over the police barricade. Immediately after that, she stood in the front row along with others. Finding her before them, the police baton-charged on her body. She was hurt by this indiscriminate hitting. When the firing started, she hid inside an old rickshaw garage beside the road. She stayed there for a long time and then returned to the girls' hostel in the evening.

It is noticeable from these reminiscences by three women that they were present in the scene on that battle-ground of the road. The police did not view them differently on the basis of gender. They also did not behave with them courteously, and it is a cruel fact that one of them could have

become a martyr on that day. That they did not was pure luck. But they were at the forefront of the risks the situation posed.

The courageous lady Nadera Begum was then a university student. She led the students' front of the communist party. She inspired the girls to participate in the language movement, and was active in processions and meetings.

During the firing episode on the procession, a session of the constituent assembly was in progress. The news of firing reached the house during that session. Moulana Abdur Rashid Tarkabagish first placed the demand by saying, first there should be an enquiry on the firing, the session could continue only after that. Member of the constituent assembly Anwara Khatun spoke out in a strong language. After intense arguments and debates with the Speaker Abdul Karim, 35 members of the assembly including Anwara Khatun stormed out of the hall. The womenfolk did not give rise to any ignominy by lagging behind even in the constituent assembly on that day.

Rafiquddin was the first martyr of 21 February. His skull was blown away. Picture of that historic scene was taken by Amanul Haque and Kazi Idris immediately after that incident with the help of medical student Halima Khatun. On that day, the nurses of the hospital also burst out in rage while taking care of the injured at the medical college hospital. The place of resistance was thereby illuminated by their cooperation and support.

Strikes, processions and protests were observed throughout the land including Dhaka on 22 February 1952. The women who could not participate in the processions sprinkled flower petals on those from the rooftops. There is no reason why that should be rated as a small initiative. It was the womenfolk who took the decision to shower flowers on the processions to inspire the masses. People recall while reminiscing the episode that many girls including Nurunnahar Kabir drew and wrote posters throughout the night. Their names have been shelved by history. The badges were made by cutting the black sari of a woman. Nobody remembers her as well. The women did not crave for fame. They sought success of the movement. They wanted honour for their mother language.

Sayedra Khatun (mother of Professor Anisuzzaman) put her gold-chain on the altar of the first martyr's memorial built on Dhaka Medical College campus. It can be claimed without any doubt that it was a symbolic expression of reverence towards the language movement. On the one hand, it was a symbol for recalling the immortal martyrs, and on the other hand it was a symbol of providing financial support to continue the movement. This farsightedness of women always remains alive. This has been repeatedly proved in all big events of history. Even then, the male narratives of history have not evaluated the contributions of women properly. Nobody needs to articulate in unambiguous terms that history suffers from deficits because women's position is not evaluated on the basis of equality. But this unfortunate phenomenon continues to repeat itself against women.

I would like to mention two other subjects here. One is about the language movement of Assam. The Assam Language Act was passed in 1960. This law accorded recognition to Ahomia language as the state language of Assam. The Bangalis of Barak Valley became vocal in protest. On 19 May 1961, eleven persons embraced martyrdom due to police firing at Shilchar railway station. The police threw a dead-body into the pond for hiding it. The language movement workers ultimately recovered that body. Following this movement, the Assam government amended the language law and Bangla was reinstated as a state language for the Barak Valley. The language martyrs' day is observed in Barak Valley on 19 May. Among the 11 martyrs, one was a woman. Her name was Kamala Bhattacharya.

The next subject is 'International Mother Language Day'. Two expatriate Bangladeshis in Canada – Rafiqul Islam and Abdus Salam took the initiative to declare the immortal 21 February as 'International Mother Language Day'. The organization they formed with 10 individuals speaking diverse languages was called 'International Mother Language Lovers of the World'. Among these 10 people, 6 were females.

21 February was declared as the 'International Mother Language Day' on 17 November 1999 by UNESCO. A lady was working as the program specialist of UNESCO's language division at that time. Her name was Anna Maria Mailof. She took up the issue with utmost sincerity and dedication. She maintained constant communications with Rafiqul Islam and continued to respond to his telephonic calls and letters. Her patience, tolerance, considerate nature and sincerity acted in favour of the International Mother Language Day. Anna Maria even did not forget to inform Rafiqul Islam about the support extended by the Hungarian National Commission for UNESCO to the proposal.

Anna also informed Rafiqul Islam that the proposal should come from that country whose citizens were proposing such a measure. In accordance with that, Rafiqul Islam contacted the National Commission for UNESCO in Bangladesh. At that time, Sheikh Hasina was the country's Prime Minister. She gave directives for implementing the matter by taking swift decision. The National Commission for UNESCO in Bangladesh submitted the proposal to the UNESCO Headquarters in due course after taking approval from the education minister and the Prime Minister. The proposal was placed at the meeting of UNESCO board. Twenty-eight member-states supported the proposal made by Bangladesh.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina could appreciate the importance of the subject due to her considerate alertness, and gave swift decision for adding an international dimension to the language martyrs' day. The Language Movement had happened during her childhood. Bangabandhu wrote in his 'Unfinished Memoir': "Holding my neck, Hasu uttered at the very outset, 'Abba, we want state language Bangla, we seek the freedom of political prisoners'. They were in Dhaka on 21 February, she only repeated what she had heard." It was through the initiative of that 5-year old child at a mature age, who had articulated those slogans, that the language day received international acclaim.

I want to say that the abodes-roads-constituent assembly were realities of triumph for the womenfolk. On the other hand, Vancouver, Paris and the office of the head of government in Bangladesh were also triumphant realities for them. Womenfolk planted their steps resolutely at all places.

Translation: **Dr. Helal Uddin Ahmed**

The Digital Journey... *(Continued from previous page)*

after our independence we have not been able to attain remarkable success in any other field except in writing Bangla in information technology. We have not possibly even tried earnestly either. The small attempts that have been made are also inadequate and improper. They also lacked co-ordination. The attempts that, we know, were not fruitful enough include the attempt to



develop a standard keyboard and font, the attempt to develop the Bangla OCR and the Bangla-related research activities in different educational institutions. As these attempts were not really successful, it is necessary to arrange something bigger. We are lucky that in the ECNEC meeting on 3 January 2017 presided over by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, a project of taka 159 crore and 2 lakh was undertaken. A big project like this was never approved in the history of Bangla language and its alphabet let alone in the post-liberation period.

Golden Days for the Bangla Language and its Alphabet: The most golden dream of the Bangla language that has come true is the fact that with the initiative of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina 21 February is celebrated all over the world as the International Mother Language Day. In the very hand of the Prime Minister we have had another achievement. She herself applied for Dot Bangla Domain and she opened it on 31 December 2016. This is a big achievement and milestone in the development of the Bangla language in information technology. On the other hand, the 159 crore and 2 lakh taka project approved by the Prime Minister will take the Bangla language and its alphabet to a new height.

There is a proposition for developing 16 tools in this project. Each tool is designed to make Bangla equal to any language of the world. We can be familiar with all these tools and their necessity. The objectives of the government-approved project are mentioned in its introduction. They are: (a) to establish Bangla as a leading language in the world in the field of computing; (b) to standardize the different aspects of Bangla in information technology and (c) to develop tools, technology and data for Bangla computing.

It is also said in the document that as a result of developing the 16 tools, the users of Bangla will be able to use the language in the international standard and Bangla CLDR, IPA, Corpus and font will be standardized.

(1) Corpus: There is a corpus among the 16 tools. As a result, the Bangla vocabulary will increase to a large extent. The project has proposed that following the international standard this corpus should be developed.

(2) Bangla OCR: Although some work has already been done on Bangla OCR, the reality in this field is that these developments are of no use to the Bangla users. In the project, a proposal has been made for further development of the OCR bought by the ICT division. If the OCR works properly the greatest development of the Bangla language will be that any writing on ancient or modern paper can be converted to digital data.

(3) From speech to writing and from writing to speech: This system is called "text to speech" and "speech to text" in English. This means that with the help of this tool we will be able to transform something written in Bangla into an articulated speech and something spoken into a digitally written form.

(4) Developing a national keyboard: The government standardized a national keyboard which was registered as BDS 1738:2004. In fact, there is no scientific method of writing all the letters of the Bangla alphabet on this keyboard. The project proposes a further development of this keyboard so that everyone can use it.

(5) Style Guide: It is said in the project document that different pronunciations of Bangla, its writing styles and regional pronunciations are expanding in many ways. In this situation, the crisis of Bangla will further deteriorate if the Bangla style guide is not standardized.

(6) Bangla Font Interoperability: It is noticed that the Bangla fonts in a computer use various codes and the documents in one font are not readable in another font. With the help of this tool, a different tool will be created so that without any complexity all fonts become readable.

(7) CLDR: The Unicode authority developed a common local data repository of all languages of the world. For this purpose, every language creates a CLDR and submits it to the Unicode authority. Nothing like this has been created in Bangla and submitted. The project proposes a creation of CLDR and submission of it to the Unicode authority.

(8) Correction of Bangla Grammar and Spelling: The computer helps the user enormously to present English words and sentences correctly. But we do not get this facility in Bangla. So a decision has been made in the project to develop the correction of grammar and spelling in Bangla.

(9) Mechanical Translation: The biggest problem in introducing Bangla everywhere is the problem of translation. The project has mentioned the development of a tool which will facilitate the multilateral task of translating any document from Bangla into any other world language and vice versa.

(10) Screen Reader: We, the common people, can read anything as we see it with our eyes. But to some people who are differently able, things have to be explained through sound and narration. Such a provision for reading the computer screen is available in English. The project proposes such a provision in Bangla too.

(11) There has been a decision in the project to develop some more softwares so that the handicapped people can use Bangla more easily in information technology.

(12) Development of emotion analysis software in Bangla: The project includes a proposition for a software in Bangla to analyze emotions.

(13) Multilingual Service Platform: Under this project a tool will be developed to use multilingual data with the help of a Bangla language processing tool.

(14) Site Translation: This widely used website will be translated into Bangla under the project.

(15) Tribal Keyboard: A standard keyboard for tribal languages will be developed under the project.

(16) Phonetic font: Following the world standard, a Bangla Phonetic font will be created under this project.

In fact, with the help of this project we will be able to overcome those technological limitations which are felt now in the use of Bangla in information technology. I firmly believe that Bangla, one of the best languages of the world, will be able to overcome the thousand years' limitations and become a sophisticated language with the help of the best technology of the world.

Translation: **Professor M Jahurul Islam**



Ekushey February
Mohammad Nurul Huda

This is the Ekushey day — recalling the 21st of February
The day when a stirred-up race erupted incandescently
And till now, that day in Bengali minds shines brilliantly.

It's a day for morning processions and bare-foot walks
For crimson-lined white saris and pinned black badges
For grieving people with bosoms bearing history's burdens.

The day is all about the mother tongue and mother earth's gifts
It is all about promoting harmony and humanity's happiness
And reminding people everywhere about loving languages.

This is the day when all mothers won—their children as well
A day of condolence meets, silence and of victory eternal
Ekushey is the day of victors and of champions one can tell.

Ekushey is the day when Bengalis witnessed a spring mutiny
It's the day when Barkat and Salam were killed cold-bloodedly
But the day when revolutionary hearts could take fire eternally.

Ekushey is all about fatherly affection and motherly love
It's the day when brothers wear shawls their sisters' think of
Ekushey is a spring day crimsoned in the blood-red of *Bhador*.*

Ekushey is when freedom came through a language for which blood was spilled
A day when independence came to a nation in whose people compassion flowed
It's the day when egalitarianism became in the hearts of all people the proper creed.

**Bhador* is the first month of autumn symbolizing the loneliness of a person who is missing his beloved.

Translation: **Fakrul Alam**



Mother Language
Kamal Chowdhury

The alphabets of my ancestors had emanated from my earliest cry
The alphabets emerged like a mother's breast-milk from my first cry
The echoes of vowels and consonants materialized from my first cry
O my Bangla language – you came out from my opening cry.

In your hands have I put the eager mass of water for bathing
In the waters, currents and confluences of rivers am I your tumult
In the colours of my flag, the dusty and rainy day tales
In the murmur of utterances about this amazing greenery
In your songs of praise
In the beaks of birds, the times of dawn fly to me every day.

Loving you have I flown aloft the blood-drenched costume
Soaring from the martyrs' monument that blood speaks in man's mother-tongue
The world speaks in the language of Barkat
The world articulates in Salam's dialect
The world talks in Rafiq's language
The world speaks in Jabbar's tongue.

The whole world is now a martyrs' monument
The whole world mingles with the morning procession.
O My mother language, you are deathless.

10/02/2017

Translation: **Dr. Helal Uddin Ahmed**

