

Let's acknowledge Bangalis as leaders

SYED ASIF SHAHKAR

ONE of the reasons of making Urdu the sole national language, was that the British had forcefully imposed it in Punjab as the educational and, somehow as the official language, and Punjabis had accepted this. Now the question is why Quaid-e-Azam, who himself couldn't speak Urdu, wanted to make it the sole national language.

There were two major reasons. First, a large portion of the leaders in the Pakistan movement comprised of Urdu speaking people. Among them, Liaqat Ali Khan was in the forefront. They wanted to maintain their hegemony, but UP was the major obstacle in their way. Though the movement for Pakistan started from UP, it was not part of the State of Pakistan. It's for this reason that this group was quite small in terms of numbers because they would have been immigrants to Pakistan, and thus they couldn't have ruled Pakistan. To overcome the shortcoming of being fewer in numbers, they tried to make their language the most prominent. Quaid-e-Azam, while making compromises with this group, accepted their demand.

The second reason was to continue the legacy of the British system. To take control of Punjab and to strengthen this control, the British used Urdu as a new weapon. The British sidelined the languages of the Mughals and Punjabis (especially of Sikhs) that were Persian and Punjabi and replaced them with Urdu to ensure its influential status. In return, Urdu provided the British extremely loyal Punjabis while wiping out the educated lot from Punjab and promoted illiteracy all around. From 97 percent, the literacy rate dropped to only 2 percent and the once most educated part of the world was now pushed into the abyss of ignorance. Ruling through brain washed uneducated folks was easier for the British.

After Pakistan came into existence, the Muslim League and Quaid-e-Azam wanted to keep the British system intact as it was. Besides, they wanted to keep Punjabis under their domination. Urdu was an important pillar of the British system in this new state. Hence, it was turned into a sacred and holy legacy. Now, the rest of Pakistan had accepted Urdu as the pillar of Islam and Pakistan. But how the Bangalis reacted to this hegemony of Urdu is either kept hidden in the history of Pakistan or presented as a Pandora's box of lies. When it was decided officially in the year 1948 that the national language of Pakistan would be Urdu, the Bangalis became agitated and refused to accept this imposition.

It is a fact that the majority of the population of Pakistan comprised of Bangalis and in contrast to Punjab, Bangla was taught in their schools and colleges. Secondly, Bangalis were the most educated among the entire population of Pakistan. They did not know Urdu. Throwing Bangla out of their homes and replacing it with Urdu would not only have been a mockery of democracy but at same time it could have rendered millions of Bangalis

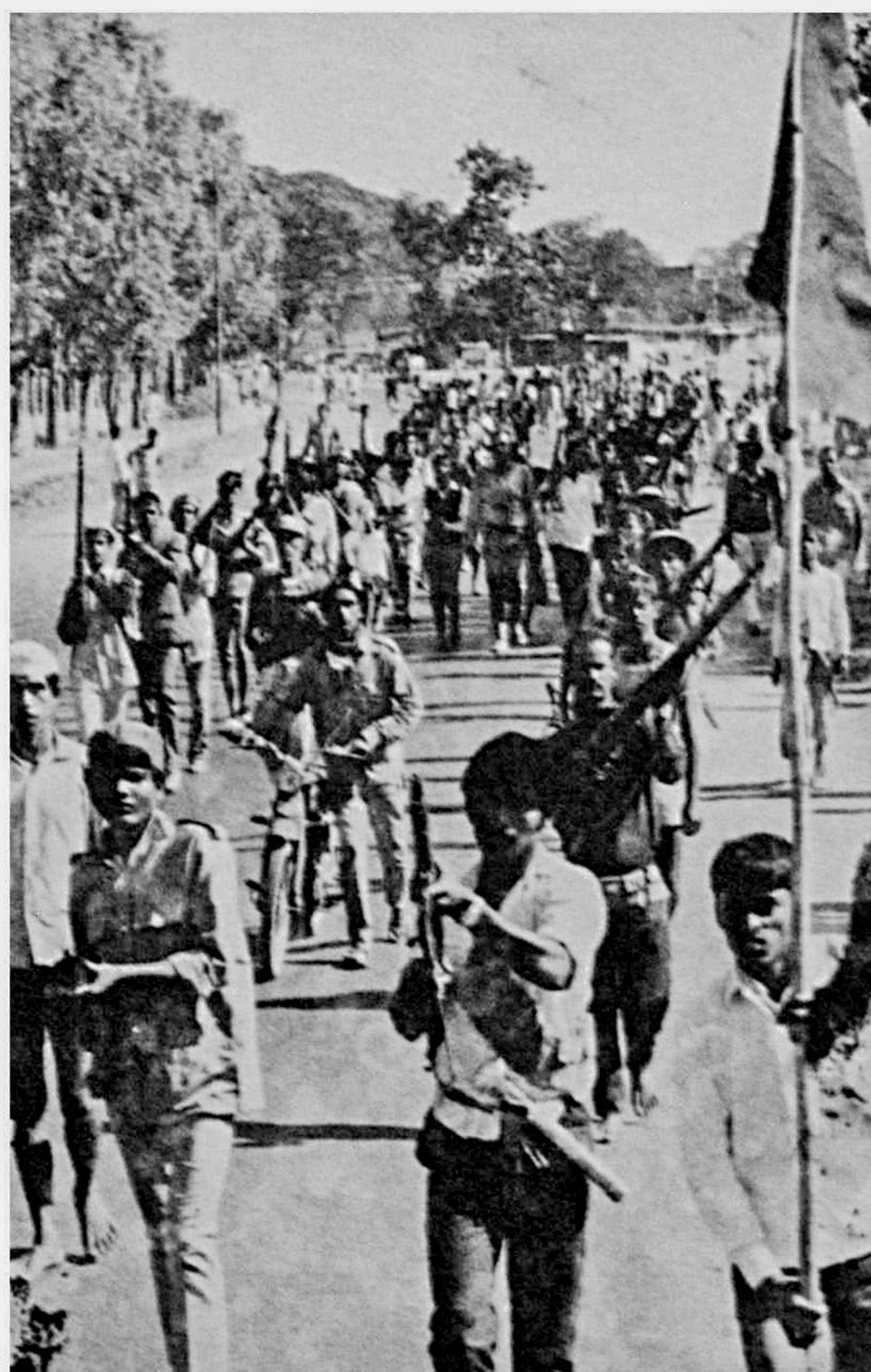
"uneducated". Moreover, in the year 1849, the Bengal Regiment had played a major role in defeating Sikhs and capturing Punjab. After this capture, Bangalis had also played a role in replacing Persian and Punjabi with Urdu in Punjab. They knew why the British were doing that and how, as a result of this hegemony, Punjab had changed altogether. Bangalis were aware of these facts.

The Pakistan government decided to use oppression against the Bangalis who resisting the hegemony of Urdu. Beating, tear gas and bullets were used and as a result, five students, Rafique, Jabbar, Salam, Barkat and Shafique lost their lives. They are remembered today as martyrs who died for the Bangla language. Special martyrs among the very first in the history of the world who gave their lives for their mother language. In their remembrance today, the International Mother Language Day is commemorated by the UN globally on the 21st February every year. Despite the oppression, Bangalis stood firm and finally the government of Pakistan caved in and accepted Bengali as the second national language and made it an official language as well.

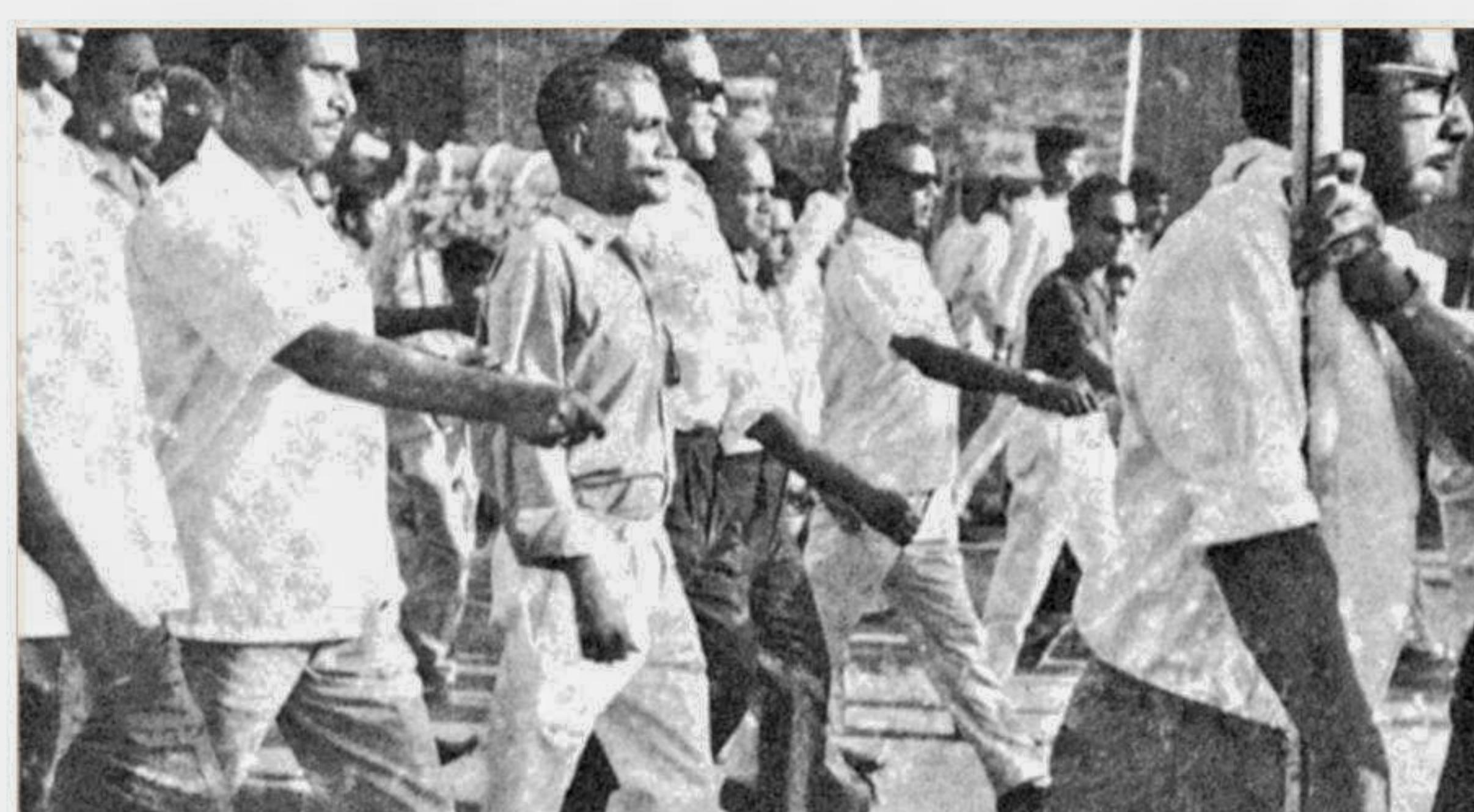
This rebellion of Bangalis is the first dent in the state of Pakistan, the day when the first brick of salvation was laid. In the year 1971, when Bangladesh was created, Bangalis had little besides many thousands of graves, raped and impregnated women, and a country ruined by war. But they had had two things. One was their education and second, their nationalism. These two things were given to Bangalis by the Bengali language. On the basis of these two things, today Bangladesh is making progress and being ranked among the economic tigers of Asia.

Even today when Punjabis talk about Bangladesh, they cannot hide their hatred towards Bangalis. They call Bangalis traitors, infidels and Indian agents. Why is that? The first crime of Bangalis was they were larger in numbers. Secondly, they were well educated. Thirdly, in the elections of 1970, they won 160 seats out of 300 in total. Fourth, they demanded their right to rule.

It's unfortunate that in the "history" of Pakistan, even today Bangalis are "infidels, traitors, Indian agents as well as cowards and impoverished. The right and left wings of the media ride on the same band wagon. For me, the time has come when Punjabis should come out of this false pride and ignorance and change their thinking about the Bangalis. They should teach true history of the Bangalis to their children. They should honour the martyrs of the Bengali language movement and erect their statues in Lahore. They should learn nationalism and the love for mother language from Bangalis. For Punjabis to become a great nation, they should learn to respect others.



17 December 1971: War heroes entering Dhaka just after surrender of Pakistani troops



The retired soldiers led by Col. Osmany demonstrate, vowing "We are also ready to join the movement of freedom": 23 March 1971.