



must be met / Bangla must be made state language). At this, other students also came out chanting slogans."

The police arrested 29 female students and hundreds of male students that day and took them first to the Lalbagh thana and then to the central jail.

"Hosne Ara, Laila Nur, Taleya Rahman were with us in jail. During that time, Ila Mitra and Momotaj Begum were also in the jail.

They sent us a message through other inmates that we should demand newspapers and better meals," recalls Protibha.

"There was a small yard in the jail where we would be brought in the morning and would be taken back to our cells in the evening. We used to sing and chant slogans all the time:

"Bicharpoti tomar bichar korbey jara/

Aaj jegechhey ei janata"

(Judge, the masses that will judge you have now risen)

"Jago onoshon bondi uthore joto/

Jogoter lanchhito, bhagyohoto"

(Rise, O those on hunger strike, rise all you oppressed and hapless)

"Karar oi louha kopat/ Bhenge phel korre lopat"

(Break the prison door, slam it to the ground)

Protibha was released from jail two weeks later.

During her university life, Protibha came in close contact with many legendary political and cultural personalities, including Sufia Kamal and Zahir Raihan. She also had the opportunity to meet Maulana Bhashani in person and take political lessons from him. Maulana Bhashani used to invite the student leaders to the Burdwan House (now Bangla Academy) and encourage them to unite against the oppression of the Pakistani regime and fight for Bangla language. "When Maulana Bhashani formed the National Awami Party (NAP) in 1957, we went to the Rupmahal Cinema Hall and listened to his speech."

Protibha, a Buddhist by religion, believes in the coexistence of all religions and always advocates for religious harmony and tolerance. In 1957, when she was invited by the British Council to give a speech on Hazrat Umar, one of the four caliphates of Islam, on the occasion Umar Day, she accepted the invitation without any hesitation. The criticism and opposition from her fellow comrades of Chhatra Union could not stop her. She spoke about Hazrat Umar's administrative skills, his love for his people, and how

he meted out justice to the oppressed population. She was widely praised for her speech.

In her early career, she worked as a teacher at some remote schools of the country and then joined Bharateswari Homes (established by Ranada Prashad Saha) in 1963 as a professor of economics. In 1965, she became the acting principal of the college and then worked as its principal from 1967 to 1999. She also worked as a director of the Kumudini Trust. She believes she could make at least some impact on the lives of the underprivileged girls and women through her work in the Bharateswari Homes and Kumudini Trust. Now, in her mid-80s, Protibha Mutsuddi is one of the directors of the Kumudini Trust and the local administrator of the Kumudini Trust in Mirzapur, Tangail.

Protibha is hopeful about the progress the country has made in terms of women's empowerment and girls' education. But being a language movement veteran, she laments, "Why is it that Bangla is still not used at all levels of the state? The language of the court is still English, our signs and signboards are in English, many of our textbooks at the advanced level are only available in English. So many countries prioritise their mother tongue—why, then, can we not do the same, when we have sacrificed lives for our language?"

ILLUSTRATION: NOOR US SAFA ANIK



The Women of 1952

FROM PAGE 2

A number of female college students and women in Chattogram including Tohfatunnesa Azim, Syeda Halima, Sultana Begum, Nurunnahar Jahur, Ainun Nahar, Anwara Mahfuz, Taleya Rahman and Pratibha Mutsuddi were involved with the movement. In Khulna, activists of Tamaddun Majlish including Anwara Begum and Sajeda Ali, and many female students of schools and colleges participated in various activities.

In Satkhira, Gul Ara Begum and Sultana Chowdhury actively took part in the movement. So did Nurunnahar Belly and Rowshan Ara Sharif in Tangail. Women in Rangpur including Nilufa Ahmed, Begum Maleka Ashraf and Aftabunnesa brought out a procession protesting the shooting incident. Dr Jahanara Begum Benu, Monowara Begum Benu, Dr Mohsina Begum, Firoza Begum Funu, Hafiza Begum Tuku, Hasina Begum



Women laying the foundation of the first Shaheed Minar at Eden College. PHOTO: COLLECTED

Doli, Rowshan Ara, Khurshida Banoo Khuku, Akhter Banu were some of the renowned figures who played a significant role in Rajshahi.

The story of three women—Rahela Khatun, Rahima Khatun, and Rokeya Begum—has been shrouded in history of the Language Movement. Working out of Azimpur No. 19, they never took part in any meetings or processions but were a source of inspiration for many rebellious youths of Tamaddun Majlish. Rahela was the wife of Abul Kashem's brother-in-law. She sacrificed her comfort throughout her life, honouring her husband's work and ideology. Rokeya used to help the former cook food for 20 to 30 people every day with a smile on her face, while Rahima joined them during the nights. These women barely had the opportunity to sleep before 2 am.

Despite the difficulties, these three women devoted themselves to the movement. They put aside their physical and mental peace to ensure uninterrupted service for the expatriate activists of the Majlish. I heard from Gafur bhai that many people were imprisoned on February 22-23 in a police crackdown. When the police came to the Azimpur house that night, Rahela gallantly faced them and kept them busy at the entrance allowing [Abdul] Gafur bhai and [Abul] Kashem bhai to escape through the backdoor. The women were the driving force of the Language Movement and set it in motion with their love, affection, and bravery.

Apart from the aforementioned women, we came to learn about the contribution of others from an interview of Ataur Rahman. Two or three days after

February 21, a few of them went to the Azimpur colony to collect contributions for the Language Movement. Many women donated their precious gold jewellery, including rings, earrings and necklaces. He was overwhelmed after seeing the women's love for the language at that time. This was when a sense of self and individuality among women began to take root; this awareness was part of a cultural and political awakening that laid the foundation of our independence.

Given all this sacrifice, the shabby state of Bangla now makes me disconsolate. The urge we felt to protect our independence, nationality, and culture cannot be seen in the practice of Bangla language today. The values that shaped the Language Movement are slowly eroding. The demand for Bangla at all levels of the state is relegated to sloganeering. Over the years, Bangla has been subjected to arbitrary inclusions from other languages, which served to corrupt its purity. In the process, the language has lost its melody. It was further plagued by whimsical usage of different spellings, which has made the language more ambiguous and subject to controversy. Therefore, it is my humble request to those receiving the Ekushey Padak that they take bold measures in an attempt to continue the perpetual flow of practical Bangla usage.

Chemon Ara was was a passionate advocate of the Language Movement as well as the women's rights movement. During the Language Movement of 1952, Chemon Ara was a second year student of Eden College and played an active part in it.

Translated from Bangla by Shahriar Sajib.

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