CHAPTER – III

LANGUAGE MOVEMENT IN EAST PAKISTAN

The decolonization of South Asia witnessed the creation of three new nation
states: India, Pakistan and subsequently Bangladesh. The basis of the creation of
these nation states was their respective claim to a separate national identity, although
until 1947, they were part of a one national entity. The initial periods of the creation
of these states, therefore, were devoted to ‘Construct’ and ‘Consolidate’ the identity
on which their claim of secessionism was founded. In fact, this was one of the major
tasks of their nation-building process. The task was arduous and entailed, firstly, to
separate them from the previous identity and construct a fresh identity on the basis of
new cultural symbols, which were hitherto unchanged. Thus while an Indian identity,
in Pakistan, there was an emphasis on Islamic religion while Bangladesh focused on
its language (Bengali). In such construction, these discourses had to secede from
their history which depicted a common past. The act of succession was done in two
ways: (i) by demonstrating that even in the shared part, these collectivities always
existed as a separate nation, (ii) by depicting that their shared history was actually
‘oppressive’ against the ‘other’ and parting of ways was the logical conclusion.1

Political history of East Pakistan: Ancient Period

Bangladesh today including its surrounding territories, present day Indian
states of West Bengal, Orissa, Bihar etc. was historically known as Bangladesh.
From ancient time Bengal was divided into two parts namely ‘Gauda’ and ‘Vanga’
Gauda was the name applied to a people of Western and North Western Bengal as
well as to their country. The reference to Guada occur in ancient literature, notably in
the ‘Sutras’ of ‘Panini’, ‘Arthasastra’ of ‘Kautilya’ and some of the ‘Puranas’. The
sister realm of Vanga or Eastern and Central Bengal does not seem to be less ancient
as it is referred to in the “Dharmasutras” and the epic. It is thus evident that even
though the Bengali speaking people of Bangladesh shared a common past with their
counterparts in West Bengal in India, their separation on a national basis was
historically determined. The Guada region came early under Aryan colonization but
the Aryan influence could hardly penetrate the Mongoloid, Buddhist inhabitants of
the Vanga region. During the advancement of the Aryans into the north western
India (C 1500-800 B.C.) most of Vanga was covered by deep forest and was
inhabited by indigenous people. Thus, Vanga and its adjoining areas remained
outside the dominion of the Aryans because of its riverine terrain and forest covers.

The period of the Ramayana (7th to 6th century B.C.) the territorial area
identified with the colonial Bengal did not presently change much. In the age of the
Mahabharata (5th to 2nd Century B.C.) Vanga appeared more distinct in companion
to Anga and Pundra.

In the ages of the Mauryas and Gupta ascendancy the region of Bengal seems
to have formed part of the empire of Magadha. After the fall of the imperial Gupta
factions of the dynasty survived in Bengal where they later formed the Gauda
kingdom. Till 619 A.D. the power of the Guada Empire seems to have remained
unshaken. On the latter half of the 7th Century eastern India seems to have been
shared between the later Guptas of Magadha and the khadga dynasty of eastern
Bengal. Early on the 8th Century both Western and Eastern Bengal were invaded by
Yosovarman of Kanauj. There was anarchy in the region till as last the different
sections of the people raised to the throne a chief named Gopala, who brought the
situation of peace to the distracted lands.

With Gopala, the first independent king of Bengal, began the famous Pala
Dynasty, which lasted for four centuries (from 750 A.D. to 1120 A.D.) Under Pala
ruler Bengal was to enjoy a period of prosperity undreamt of in her early annals.
The earliest rulers of the dynasty were called ‘Vangapati’ and ‘Gaudesvara’ showed that they ruled over the twin kingdoms of Western and Eastern Bengal.

The Palas were followed by the Sena dynasty that brought Bengal under one ruler during the 12th Century. The empire covered, at its peak, much of the northeastern region in the Indian Sub-continent. After the Sena dynasty, the Deva dynasty ruled in eastern part of Bengal. This Deva dynasty was probably the last independent Hindu dynasty of Bengal.

**Medieval period**

Beginning in 1204 A. D., a military commander from Delhi Sultanate, Bakhtiar Khilji overran Bihar and Bengal as far east as Rongpur, Bogra and the Brahmaputra river. The defeated Laksman Sen and his sons moved to a place then called Vikrampur where their diminished dominion lasted until the 13th Century.

The period after 1207, Bhaktiar Khilji’s death, developed into infighting among the Khilji’s representative of a pattern of succession struggles and intra-empire intrigues during later Turkis periods. Giyasuddin Khilji prevailed and extended the Sultan’s domain South to Jessore and made the eastern Vanga province a tributary. The capital was made near the older Bengal capital of Gauda at Lakhnauti on the Ganges. He managed to make Kamrupa and Trihut to pay tribute to him. But subsequently he was defeated by Shams-ud-din Iltutmish.

The weak successors of Iltutmish encouraged the local governors to declare independence. From Delhi Bengal was sufficiently remote that its governors would declare independence on occasion, styling themselves as Sultans of Bengal. It was during this period that Bengal earned the name “Bulgapur” meaning land of the rebels. Two Turkis attempts to rush east of the broad Jamuna and Brahmaputra rivers were repulsed, but a third one led by Mughisuddin Tughral conquered the Sonargaon area South of Dhaka to Faridpur, bringing the Sena kingdom to an end by 1277 A. D.
Mughisuddin Tughral repulsed the massive attacks of the sultanate of Delhi before finally being defeated and killed by Ghiyas ud din Balban.⁹

Mahmud Shahi dynasty began when Narisuddin Bughrikhan declared independence in Bengal. Thus Bengal regained her independence in Bengal. Thus Bengal regained independence back. Narisuddin Bughra Khan and his successors ruled Bengal for about twenty three years finally being incorporated into Delhi Sultanate by Ghyiasuddin Tughlaq.¹⁰

Shamsuddin Illiyas Shah founded an independent dynasty that lasted from 1342 to 1487 A. D. The dynasty successfully repulsed attempts by Delhi to conquer them. They continued to real in the region of modern day Bengal, reading to Khulna in the South and Sylhet in the east. The dynasty was interrupted by an uprising by the Hindus under Raja Ganesha. However, the Illiyas Shahi dynasty was restored by Nasiruddin Mahmud Shah.¹¹

The rule of Habshi gave away to the Hussain Shahi dynasty that ruled from 1494 to 1538. Alauddin Hussain Shah, considered as the greatest of all the Sultans of Bengal for bringing cultural renaissance during his reign. He extended the dominion all the way to the part of Chittagong, which witnessed the arrival of the first Portuguese merchants. Nasiruddin Nasrat Shah gave refuge to the Afghan lords at the time of the invasion of Babur though he remained neutral. However, he made a treaty with Babur and saved Bengal from Mughal invasion. The last Sultan of the dynasty had to contend with rising Afghan activity on his north-western border. Eventually, the Afgan broke through and sacked the capital in 1538 where they remained for several years until the arrival of the Mughals.¹²

Sher Shah Suri founded the Sur Dynasty in Bengal. After the Battle of Chausa he announced himself independent Sultan of Bengal and Bihar. Sher Shah was the sole Muslim Sultan of Bengal to establish an empire in northern India. The Delhi Sultan Islam Shah appointed Muhammed Khan Sur as the governor of Bengal. After the death of Islam Shah, Muhammed Khan Sur become an independent ruler.
He was followed by Ghyiasuddin Bahadur Shah and Ghyiasuddin Jalal Shah. The rule of Pushtun in Bengal remained for forty four years.\(^{13}\)

Thereafter came the Karrani dynasty. Sulaiman Khan Karrani annexed Orissa to the Sultanate permanently. Daoud Shah Karrani declared independent from Akbar which led to four years of bloody war between the Pashtun and the Mughals. The Mughal onslaught against the Pashtun Sultan ended with the battle of Rajmahal in 1576, led by Khan Jahan. However, the Pashtun and the local “Baro Bhuyeans” (Landlords) led by Isha Khan resisted the Mughal invasion.\(^{14}\)

Bengal again came under the contact of Delhi as the Mughals conquered it in 1576. At that time Dhaka became a Mughal provincial capital. But it remained remote and thus it was difficult to govern the region especially the region east of the Brahmaputra River and remained outside the mainstream of Mughal politics. The Bengali linguistic and ethnic identity further crystallized during this period, since the whole of Bengal was united under an able administration for a long time. Furthermore, its inhabitants were given enough autonomy to cultivate their own customs and literature.\(^{15}\)

During the reign of Emperor Jahangir in 1612, the defeat of Sylhet completed the Mughal conquest of Bengal with the exception of Chittagong. At this period Dhaka rose in prominence by becoming the provincial capital of Bengal. Chittagong was later annexed in order to stifle Burmese raids from the east.\(^{16}\)

**Modern Period: Bengal Under Nawabs (1717–1880)**

The nominal Mughal rule was ended by Murshid Quli Khan in 1717 when he declared Bengal’s independence from the Mughal empire. He immediately shifted the capital to Murshidabad ushering in a series of independent Bengal Nawabs.

From 1717 to 1880, the successive Islamic dynasty namely the Nasiri, Afshar and Najafi, all related by bloodlines, ruled Bengal.
The first dynasty, the Nasiri, ruled from 1717 until 1740. Murshid Quli Jafar Khan, the founder of the Nasiri Dynasty, who rose through the ranks before becoming Nazim of Bengal in 1717, a post he held until his death in 1727. He was succeeded by his grandson and son in law until his grand son was killed in a ballet and succeeded by Alivardi Khan of the Afsher Dynasty in 1740.17

The Afsar dynasty ruled from 1740 to 1757. They were succeeded by the third and last dynasty to rule Bengal, the Najafi, when Sirajuddaula (1756-1757) the last of the Afsar rulers was killed at the Battle of Plassey in 1757. The Najafi ruled till 1880.18

**Europeans in Bengal**

Portuguese traders and missionaries were the first Europeans to arrive in Bengal in the latter half of the 15th century. They were followed by representatives from Holland, France and the British East India Company. The Mughal Subahder of Bengal Kasim Khan Mashadi totally destroyed the Portuguese forces in the Battle of Hoogly (1632). In that battle about ten thousand Portuguese men and women and four thousand four hundred were sent captive at Delhi.19

During the reign of Aurangjib, the local Nawab sold three villages – Sutanuti, Govindapur and Calcutta – to the British. Calcutta was Britain’s first foothold in Bengal and remained a focal point of their economic activity. The British gradually expanded their commercial contacts and administrative control beyond Calcutta to the rest of Bengal. Job Charnock was one of the first dreamers of a British rule in Bengal. He waged war against the Mughal authority which led to the Anglo-Mughal war of Bengal from 1686 to 1690. In the Battle of Hoogly as well as Baleshwar Shaista Khan, the Nawab of Bengal, defeated the British and expelled them from Bengal. Captain William Heath with a naval fleet moved towards Chittagong but it was a failure and he had to retire to Madras.20
British Rule in Bengal

Following the Battle of Plassey in 1757, the British East India Company gained official control of Bengal. This was the first conquest, in a series of engagements that followed ultimately led to the expulsion of other European competitors. The defeat of the Mughals and the consolidation of the Indian Subcontinent under the role of a trading company was a unique event in imperialistic history.

The Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 prompted the British Government to intervene in the affairs of the East India Company. After the mutiny, i.e., in 1858, the Company’s rule came to an end and the Indian administration was transferred from the company to the Crown and the uprising was brutally suppressed. Under a Viceroy, the rule of India was organized and continued a pattern of economic exploitation. Famine racked the subcontinent many times, including two major famines in Bengal. The British rule was politically organized into seventeen provinces, of which Bengal was the most significant one. For a brief period in the beginning of the 20th Century, an abortive attempt was made to divide Bengal into two parts, West Bengal and East Bengal.

On the following years to come, a massive nationalist movement both in violent and non-violent forms against the colonial rule was started in the Subcontinent. Finally, the British decided to end their rule. India thus got its independence in 1947 by dividing the country into two parts—India and Pakistan. The creation of Pakistan was based on the assertion of a two nation theory. But religion failed as a binding force and language proved a stronger basis of identity in Pakistan. Within a few years of Pakistan’s birth, the people of East Pakistan had turned restive. Even though the Bengalees constituted 54 percent of the total population, the Urdu-speaking minority that concentrated in West Pakistan had dominated them. It was felt that seeds of internal colonialism were inherent in the very structure of the polity. On the question of state language, a movement popularly known as ‘Bhasa Andolan’ was started against the imposition of Urdu on the Bengali speaking people. The movement climaxed on 21st Feb 1952 when armed forces opened fire on unarmed students and civilians. Finally, the language movement took
the shape of a nationalist movement which resulted in the declaration of a war of liberation from the West Pakistani regime. The liberation Army Chief, Ziauddin Khan announced the formation of a new nation – Bangladesh. The Indian Army sided with the Liberation Army against Pakistan. The defeat of Pakistan in the war was followed by declaration of a sovereign, independent state of Bangladesh, which was provided official recognition by other nations. In this long process of History a new nation was born in 1971.

Partition of India and its effects on East Pakistan

Partition of India which was in fact partition of Bengal and Punjab, might have brought independence for the country as a whole but for Punjab and Bengal it also unleashed a set of forces leading to frustration and socio-political chaos. The separation of two Bengals, East Bengal and West Bengal, in the name of partition of India in 1941 was to some extent historically determined. In ancient time the whole of Bengal was divided into two parts namely “Gauda” and “Vanga”. It argued that from as early as the sixth century A.D the people of the regions, roughly corresponding to Bangladesh and West Bengal, maintained separate identities even when sharing common rules and a common name, culturally, the two regions different fundamentally even in ancient time.

Bengal in the beginning of 20th Century had an area of 1,89,000 miles and a population of about 8 crores. Eastern Bengal was almost isolated from the Western wing by geography and poor communication. In 1836, the upper provinces were placed under a Lieutenant Governor and in 1854 the Governor General in council was relieved of the direct administration of Bengal.

Partition of Bengal was first considered in 1903. There were also additional proposals to separate the district of Dhaka, Chittagong and Mymensing from Bengal and attaching them to the province of Assam.

The proposal of the partition was officially published by the government in January 1904, and in February Lord Curzon made an official visit to eastern districts.
of Bengal to assess public opinion on the partition. He discussed with leading personalities and delivered speeches at Dhaka, Chittagong and Mymensingh explaining the government’s view on partition. The idea was opposed by Stedman Cotton, Chief Commissioner of Assam 1896-1902.  

The partition of Bengal was made on October 16, 1905 by Viceroy Lord Curzon. Partition was promoted for administrative convenience. Bengal was as large as France but with a significantly larger population. The then Viceroy Curzon decided the eastern region was neglected and under government. By dividing the province, an improved administration could be established in the east where subsequently, the population would benefit from new schools and employment opportunities. However, the other motives also behind the partition plan. Bengali Hindu was in the forefront of political agitation for greater participation in governance. Their position would be weakened as Muslims would now dominate in the East. Hindus tended to oppose participation, which was more popular among Muslims. Following the partition, however, stimulated an almost national anti-British movement that involved non-violent and violent protests, boycotts and even attempt was made to assassinate the Governor of the new province of West Bengal.

The new province would consist of the Divisions of Chittagong, the state of Hill Tripura, Dhaka and Rajshahi excluding Darjeeling and the district of Malda incorporation with Assam province. The newly formed province was named Eastern Bengal and Assam with Dhaka as its capital and subsidiary headquarters at Chittagong. Its geographical area would be 275940 square kilometer with a population of 31 million, where 13 million were Hindus and 18 million Muslims. The governor would deal with a legislative council and the jurisdiction of the Calcutta High Court would be left undisturbed. The government pointed out that Assam and Eastern Bengal would have a clearly demarcated western boundary and well defined geographical, ethnological, linguistic and social characteristic. The partition of Bengal took effect on October 16, 1905.
Partition of Bengal sparked a major political crisis along religious lines. Hindu resistance exploded as the Indian National Congress started the ‘Swadeshi’ movement that included boycotting British goods, terrorism and diplomatic pressure. The East Bengali Muslims hoped that a separate agitation would give them more control over for education and employment, but they instead lost ground. Because of these political protests the two parts of Bengal were reunited in 1911. The partition which divided the province on linguistic, rather than religious, grounds followed with the Hindi, Oriya and Assamese areas separated to form separate administrative units. The capital of British India was moved from Calcutta to New Delhi on 1911 as well.

In 1919, separate electorates were established for Hindus and Muslims. Before this, many members of both communities had advocated national solidarity of all Bengalis. As a result, distinctive communities developed, with their own political agendas. Muslims also dominated the Legislature, due to their overall numerical strength of roughly twenty eight to twenty two millions. Naturally, Muslims and Hindus began to demand the creation of two independent states, one to be formed in majority Muslim and one in majority Hindu areas with most Bengali Hindus now supporting partitioning Bengal on this basis.

The partition of Bengal in 1947, part of the partition in India was based on the two nation theory that divided the British Indian province of Bengal between India and Pakistan. Predominantly Muslim East Bengal became a province of Pakistan and Hindu West Bengal became a province of India.

The Partition with the power transferred to Pakistan and India on August 14th and 15th 1947, was done according to what has come to be known as the “Mountbatten Plan.” The liberation of India on August 15, 1947 ended over 150 years of British Rule in the Indian sub-continent.

East Bengal, which became a province of Pakistan according to the provisions set forth the Mountbatten plan, ultimately became the independent nation of Bangladesh after 1971.
On 20th June, 1947, as per the plan, the members of Legislative Assembly cast three separate votes on the proposal to portion of Bengal.

Firstly, in the joint session of the House, composed of all the members of the Assembly, the division of the joint session of the House stood at 126 votes against 90 votes for joining the existing constituent Assembly i.e. India.

Secondly, the number of the Muslim majority areas of Bengal in a separate session passed a motion by 106-35 votes against partitioning Bengal and instead joining a new constituent Assembly i.e. Pakistan as a whole.

Finally, in a separate meeting of the members of the non-Muslim majority areas of Bengal who by a division of 58-21 voted for partition of the province.

According to the Mountbatten Plan, a single majority vote in favour of partition by either nationally divided half of the Assembly would have decided the division of the province, and thus the house proceedings on 20th June resulted in the decision to partition Bengal. This created the stage for the birth of West Bengal as a province of the Union of India and East Bengal as a province of the new nation of Pakistan.

Also under the Mountbatten Plan, in a referendum held on 7th July, the electorate of Sylhet voted to join East Bengal. Further, the Boundary Commission, headed by Sir, Cyril Redcliffe, decided on the territorial demarcation between the two newly created provinces. Transfer of power had taken place on 14th August 1947 to Pakistan and on 15th August 1947 to India, under the Indian Independence Act 1947.

After it became apparent that the partitions of India on the basis of two nation theory will almost certainly resulted in the division of the Bengal province along religious lines, Bengal provincial Muslim league leader Suhrawardy came up with a radical plan to create an independent Bengal state that won’t join either India or Pakistan and remain un-partitioned. He realized that if Bengal is partitioned then it would be economically disastrous for east Bengal, as all coal mines, all jute mills and other industrial plants would certainly go to the western part since there were in an
overwhelmingly Hindu majority area. The most significant of all, Calcutta, then the largest part will too go to the western part. On 24th April, 1947, Suhrawardy floated his idea at a press conference in Delhi.

However, this plan directly ran counter to the Muslim League’s demand of the creation of a separate Muslim homeland on the basis of religion, popularly known as two nation theory. In the beginning, Bengal provincial Muslim League leadership opinion was divided. Abul Hashim, Bardhaman’s League leader supported it. On the other hand, Maulana Akram Khan and Nurul Amin initially opposed it. But Md. Ali Jinnah realized the validity of Suhrawardy’s argument and gave hislicit support to the plan. After Jinnah’s approval for his plan, Suhrawardy started gathering support in its forum.

On the Congress side, only a few leaders agreed to the plan. Among them was the influential Bengal provincial Congress Leader Sarat Chandra Bose, Kiron Shankar Roy. However, most other Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee (BPCC) leaders and central Congress leadership including Nehru and Patel rejected the plan. Hindu Mahasabha under the leadership of Shyama Prasad Mukharjee vehemently opposed it. They believed that the plan is nothing but a plan by Suhrawardy to stop the partition of the state so that the industrially developed western part including the city of Calcutta remains under League’s Control. They also opined that even though the plan asked for an independent Bengal State, in practice it will be a virtual Pakistan and the Hindu minority will be at the mercy of the Muslim majority forever.

Although the chances of the idea of an independent sovereign Bengal seeing daylight without congress central committee’s approval was slim, Suhrawardy and Bose continued talks to reach an agreement on the political structure of the proposed state. Like Suhrawardy, Bose also felt that the division will severely hamper the economy of Bengal and almost half of the Hindu population will be left stranded on the Pakistani side. On 24th May, 1947, the agreement was published. This was, however, largely a political argument. The proposal had hardly any support at grassroots level, especially among the Hindus. The continuous propaganda of Muslim League on the two nation theory for the last six years confined with the
marginalization of Hindus in the Suhrawardy and Bose on the question of the nature of the electorate separate or joint. Suhrawardy insisted upon maintaining the separate electorate for Muslims as well as non-Muslims. Bose was opposed to this. Due to the lack of any other significant support from the congress side he withdraws and the United Bengal plan was discarded. This relatively unknown episode marked the last attempt among Bengali Hindu and Muslim communities to void the partition and live together.

The partition of India, the second partition of Bengal, left behind a legacy of violence which continuous to this day. As Bashabi Fraser put it, “There is the reality of continuous flow of ‘economic migrants/refugees/infiltrators/illegal immigrants’ who cross over the border and pan out across the sub-continent, looking for work and a new home, setting in metropolitan centers as far off as Delhi and Mumbai, keeping the question of the partition alive today.”

Immediately after the partition a massive population exchange began, millions of Bengali speaking Hindus migrated to India from East Bengal. The majority of them settled in West Bengal and Assam. A smaller number went to Tripura and other states. However, crisis of refugee was markedly different from Punjab at India’s Western border. Punjab saw widespread communal riots immediately before partition. As a result of it population transfer in Punjab happened almost immediately after the partition, as terrified people lost their homes from both sides. In a very short period the population exchange was largely completed between East and West Punjab. In case of Bengal, violence was limited only to Calcutta and Noakhali. And hence in Bengal the process of migration occurred in a much more gradual fashion and continued over the coming three decades following partition. Although riots were limited in pre-independence Bengal, the environment was communally changed. Both Muslims in West Bengal and Hindus in East Bengal felt unsafe and had to take a crucial decision that is whether to leave for an uncertain future in another country or to remain in subjugation under the other community. Among Hindus in East Bengal, those were economically better position, particularly upper caste Hindus, left first. The government employees were given a chance to swap their posts between Pakistan and India. The educated urban upper and middle
class people, the rural gentry, businessmen and artisans left for India soon after partition. They often had relatives and other connections in West Bengal and were able to settle there with less difficulty. Muslims also followed a similar pattern. The educated and urban upper and middle class left for East Bengal first.

However, backward Hindus in East Bengal, most of whom belong to lower caste like Namasudras found it much more difficult to migrate. Their only wealth was their land, which is immovable, and didn’t have any skills other than farming. As a result most of them decided to stay in East Bengal. The political climate in Pakistan, however, deteriorated soon after the partition and communal violence started to rise. In 1950 massive riots occurred in Barisal and other places in East Pakistan. It was after that poor lower caste Hindus started to flee. The situation was vividly stated by Jogendranath Mandal’s resignation letter to the Prime Minister of Pakistan Liaquat Ali Khan. He was a Namasudra leader and despite being a lower caste Hindu, supported Muslim League as a protest to the subjugation of lower caste Hindus by their higher caste co-religionists. But by early fifties he was disillusioned. He had to flee to India and resigned from his cabinet minister’s post. Throughout the next two decades Bengali Hindus left East Bengal whenever communal tensions flared up or relationship between India and Pakistan deteriorated, for example, in 1964. It ended in the terrible climax during the late sixties and the liberation war when West Pakistani force began systematic massacres in which Hindus suffered disproportionately to their numbers.

After the liberation of Bangladesh state sponsored discrimination largely came down. But like India, the relationship of the two communities remains tense and occasional communal violence occurred, such as in the aftermath of Babri Mosque demolition. Migration to India even continues to present day but now it’s mostly due to economic reasons and is not limited to Hindus alone.

Muslims in post independence West Bengal faced almost similar discriminations. However, unlike East Bengal no state sponsored discrimination of Muslims had taken place, they were shunned by the majority community. While Hindus had to flee from East Bengal, Muslims were able to remain in West Bengal. But over the years they became ghettoized and were socially and economically
segregated from the majority community. Throughout West Bengal, Muslims and Hindus live separately in clear-cut defined blocks in urban and rural areas. Muslims lag far behind other minorities like Sikhs and Christians in almost all social indicators like literacy and per capita income. 44

This, in brief, the result of the partition of India and its effects, the partition on the basis of two nation theory was not the solution of the emerging problem of that time but a temporary relief which was proved in the development of language movement in the eastern wing of Pakistan. The movement that ultimately resulted in the creation of a new nation called Bangladesh.

**Background of the movement**

After the partition of India in 1947, the political developments in East Pakistan did not exactly follow the trends set out by pre-partition politics. Hindu-Muslim tensions, setting up political infrastructure, intra-party factionalism and economic reconstruction of the new nation were the important problems which were likely to come up in post-partition politics. But curiously, East Pakistan politics was characterized by none of these factors. On the contrary, it was dominated by an unexpected issue – the language question. What ought to be the language for the state of Pakistan soon became a burning debated issue. Out of the ill-calculated moves of the ruling elite was born a mass agitation in East Pakistan which had soon overtaken the concept of Pakistan itself and led the people of this region to seek for a new identity. 45

From the middle of the 19th Century, the Urdu language had been promoted as the lingua franca of the Muslims of India by political and religious leaders such as Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, Sir Khuaja Salimullah, Nawab Viqar-ul-Mulk and Maulvi Abdul Haque. Urdu is an Indo-Aryan language of the Indo-Iranian branch, belonging to the Indo-European family of languages. It developed under Arabic, Persian and Turkish influence on ‘apabhramshas’ in South Asia during the Delhi Sultanate and Mughal Empire. With its Perso-Arabic script, the language was considered a vital element of the Islamic religion and culture for Indian Muslims. While the use of
Urdu grew common with the Muslims in northern India, the Muslims of Bengal primarily used the Bengali language. Bengali is an Eastern Indo-Aryan language that arose from the eastern Middle Indic languages around 1000 CE and developed considerably during the Bengal Renaissance. As early as the 19th century, social activists like Muslim feminist Roquia Sakhawat Hussain were choosing to write in Bengali to reach out to the people and develop it as a modern literary language.

Even before the creation of Pakistan there was a demand to make Bengali the state language. Dr. Mohammed Shahidullah, the famous educator and linguist, remarked in July 1947 that there was no question why Bengali should not be accepted as the state language once English was discarded as a foreign tongue.

While the newly formed state was beset with so many other vital problems, it was unexpectedly the peripheral language debate which was taken up by the leading leadership as a major policy line for the state. Mutually, it created a controversy not only among the political leaders but also litterateurs, students and academics. Provision for imparting education through mother tongue was stressed in the draft manifesto by Abul Hashim, the General Secretary of the provincial Muslim League and submitted before the provincial council before the birth of Pakistan. When Mountbatten, the last Governor General of India, announced the partition scheme on June 3, 1947, a handful of left wing politicians formed the People's Freedom League in July 1947. Mohammed Toha, Kamruddin Ahmed, Tazuddin Ahmed, Oli Ahed and others brought out a manifesto to make Bangla the medium of education. They demanded that since Bengali was their mother tongue conscious attempts should be made to make the language grow and that it should be made the state language of East Bengal. One possible explanation to such a parochial demand for making Bengali the state language was that the Muslim League was still uncertain about the future constitutional status of Bengal. The People's Freedom League most probably thought that the two parts of Pakistan would be enjoying self-governing status and thus East Pakistan would form an autonomy unit.
On September 6 and 7, 1947, the young political workers held a conference in Dhaka. In that conference a proposal was made to make Bengali the state language of Pakistan. The proposal made in the conference was that Bengali should be made the medium of instructions and of legal matters at courts. It was also proposed that the decision about the state language of Pakistan should be left to the people and people’s verdict should be considered as the ultimate decision.

Early Stages of the movement:

Some students and teachers of the Dhaka University on 2nd September, 1947 formed the ‘Tamaddun Majlish’ a cultural organization. During the early stage of the language movement this organization campaign for making Bengali the medium of education and of legal proceedings. On September 15, 1947 they published a pamphlet titled “should Pakistan’s state language be Urdu or Bengali?” In that pamphlet they demanded Bengali to be made the medium of instructions in educational institutions, of legal matters and of all official works and also the language of the Union Government of Pakistan. It mentioned that each unit of Pakistan should be independent and sovereign as has been declared by the Resolution of Lahore. Each province had the right to choose its state language. Abul Kashem, leader of the ‘Tamaddun Majlish’ made this proposal. The pamphlet also had articles on the language issue by Kazi Motahar Hussain of the Department of Statistics at the University of Dhaka and Abul Mansoor Ahmed, the editor of the Daily ‘Ittehad.’

The working committee of the Bengal provincial Muslim League which was the provincial Muslim League of United Bengal held its last meeting in Dhaka on 5th December 1947. In that meeting it has decided that Urdu should not be the state language of East Pakistan. Maulana Akram Khan, Chairman of the committee, was authorized to circulate the resolution through a press release. This meeting of the League was held at the Burdwan House, the residence of Chief Minister Khoaja Nazimuddin, where huge number of students and a few teachers were present and placed their demand to make Bengali the state language.

In the meantime an education conference had been held in Karachi on a national level where Habibullah Bahar and Abdul Hamid, two ministers from East
Pakistan, were participants. The conference unanimously adopted the following resolutions:

“This conference recommends to the constituent Assembly that Urdu should be recognized as the lingua franca of Pakistan. Resolved that Urdu must be taught as a compulsory language in schools being left to the decision of the provincial and states Governments. The provincial and state Governments concerned will determine the medium or media of instruction at the school stage.”

After returning from the conference Habibullah Bahar and Abdul Hamid spoke at a press conference and informed that Urdu had been accepted as the state language of Pakistan. Before this news could be published on December 6, 1947 the ‘Morning News’ already published the news on December 5, 1947, that Urdu had been unanimously accepted as the lingua franca of Pakistan but no resolution had been adopted yet on the question of state language. That responsibility had been given to the constituent Assembly of Pakistan.

Opposition and protest immediately arose. Protesting against the decision of the education conference the first protest meeting was organized by the students demanding Bengali as the state language. The meeting took place at the Dhaka University campus on December 6, 1947. The students of Dhaka University, Jagannath Intermediate College, Dhaka Intermediate College and the other institutions were present at the meeting. The meeting was presided by Abul Kashem of the Department of Physics at the University of Dhaka and the Secretary of the ‘Tamaddun Majlis and the other speakers included Munir Choudhury, Abdur Rahman Choudhury, A. K. M. Ahsan, Kalyan Dasgupta and S. Ahmed. The Vice President of the Central students Union of Dhaka University, Farid Ahmed, put forward the following proposals which were accepted unanimously at this meeting.

Firstly, Bengali is to be given priority as the state language of the dominion of Pakistan as well as the official language and as the medium of instruction in East Pakistan. Secondly, the confusion created in respect of the state language and the lingua franca was to conceal the real issue. The government’s attitude was a betrayal to Bengali language and to the people of East Pakistan. Thirdly, Fazlur Rahman, a
minister of the Pakistan government and Habibullah Bahar a minister of the provincial Government were criticized for supporting the resolution at the education conference in favour of Urdu language. Fourthly, the 'Morning News' was criticized for printing anti Bengali propaganda. It was warned not to defy the wishes of the people.

Immediately after the meeting the students brought out a procession and after demonstrating through different roads they reached the Secretariat. From there they went to the houses of Minister Hamidul Haq Choudhury and Nurul Amin and demanded Bengali to be made the state language. Although provincial minister Mohammed Afjal and Nurul Amin had promised to accept the demand for Bengali language, Nazimuddin refused to meet the students on the plea of illness but sent a written message to them that he was unable to give a definite opinion on the language issue unless he knew the opinion of the Muslim League Working Committee and the parliamentary party. Habibullah Bahar gave a statement on December 11, 1947 that his interview at the Dhaka Airport had been misinterpreted and told that no decision had yet been taken in regard to state language.

As the demonstrations and protests were going on in and outside Dhaka city against the resolution of the education conference a group of people from Sylhet presented a memorandum in favour of Urdu language to Khaja Nazimuddin. They argued that a group of people who considered themselves famous litterateurs, scholars and artists were making strong campaign against Urdu and that they were certainly mistaken in their arguments in favour of Bengali. To them, Bengali could never be suitable as a state language for an Islamic state like Pakistan and their demand to reject the traditionally rich Urdu language was shameful, backward-looking, destructive and a challenge to Islamic brotherhood. In their memorandum it was stated that it would be a denial to national identity if they accepted Bengali language, which was influenced by the 'Ramayana', 'Mahabharata', the 'Vedas', and the 'Upanishadas'. The neglecting of Urdu, which had been influenced by the 'Holy Quran' and Islamic literature, as state language was to some extent the neglecting of Islam. It was also contended in the memorandum that those who were in favour of making Bengali the state language were out of touch with the general people.
respect they referred to the opinions expressed by the Muslim Youth Federation of Sylhet district, the Conference of the Bengal Provincial Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam at Sharshina, Dr Ziauddin, the weekly journal 'Jugaven' from Sylhet, the vice chancellor of the Aligarh University and Fazlur Rahman, the Minister at the Central Cabinet. Their view was that if Bengali was made the state language instead of Urdu, the unifying link between the two wings of Pakistan East and West would be lost and Pakistani nationalism would be weakened.

Immediately after the partition, which resulted in the creation of a new nation of Pakistan, an anti-government feeling on the question of language was manifested through various protest movements among the middle class people in East Pakistan. However, the Pakistan Public Service Commission removed Bengali from the list of approved subjects. The use of Urdu and English on money order forms, on coins and on postal stamps with the exclusion of Bengali increased the exasperation of the East Pakistanis against the Central Government.

It was after that 'Tamaddun Majlish' took the initiative to give a broader organizational structure to this anti-government feeling of the people in forming the National Language Action Committee, in October 1947. This committee was formed in presence of a number of members of Students Muslim League and Tamaddun Majlish. Nurul Huq of the University of Dhaka was elected as convener. In its early stage this 'Action Committee' printed statements in journals and newspapers, arranged discussions, took interviews with government officials and continued its protest movement in different forms and means.

In the first session of the Pakistan Legislative Assembly Dhirendranath Dutta, a representative from East Pakistan raised the demand for including Bengali alongside Urdu and English as a language of the legislative Assembly. He also proposed that in the constituent Assembly of Pakistan members should be allowed to speak in Bengali. Dutta’s proposal was supported by legislatures from Hari Burman, Bhupendra Kumar Dutta and Sris Chandra Chattopadhyaya of East Pakistan, as well as the people from the region. Dhirendranath’s proposal came under severe criticism. The Prime Minister of Pakistan, Liaquat Ali Khan, said that it was a mistake on the part of Dhirendranath Dutta to raise the issue of language at the Assembly. He stated
that the proposal had been raised to create disunity among the people from using a single language. The Chief Minister of East Pakistan, Khawaja Nazimuddin, opposed the proposal made by Dhirendranath Dutta said that the majority of the people of the East Pakistan agreed that only Urdu should be made the state language.

Students of Dhaka University, Medical College, and the Engineering College and of various schools expressed their resentments by boycotting classes on February 26, 1948 and brought out processions ended at the university campus where a meeting was held. In that meeting Naimuddin Ahmed, the convener, and Mohammed Toaha, Vice President of Fazlul Huq Hall Union, along with other speakers spoke at the meeting. The meeting was presided over by Abul Kashem.

In order to start an organized movement against the decision of the Legislative Assembly and the anti-Bengali attitude of the Muslim League Government the students of all the residential halls of Dhaka University, the East Pakistan Muslim Students League, and the members of the "Tamaddun Majlish" called for a meeting on March 2, 1948. In the meeting it was decided to form a wider and more representative committee to give an organizational form to the language movement. An all party organization was formed and it was called the National Language Action Committee taking members from the Democratic Freedom League, the Democratic Youth League, the Tamaddun Majlish, two representatives from each of the residential halls of the Dhaka University and the East Pakistan Muslim Students League with Samsul Alom as the convener of the organization.

The National Language Action Committee organized a general strike in 11 March 1948 to protest the omission of Bengali language from official use, including coins, stamps and recruitment tests for the navy. The movement restated the demand that Bengali be declared to use at the Pakistan Legislative Assembly. Picketing started at the first and second gate of the Ramna Post Office, Nilkhet and Palashi Barracks, District Court, High Court and Railway Workshop. Police arrested some students while they were picketing in front of the Ramna Post Office. While picketing at the High Court gate and prevented the lawyers to enter into the court campus the police lathi-charged the students picketing in front of the High Court.
The lawyers decided to boycott courts. The students also picketed in front of the Secretariat and were also lathi charged there. Political leaders such as Shamsul Huq, Shawkat Ali, Kazi Golam Mahbob, Oli Ahad, Abdul Wahab and student leaders including Abdul Matin and Abdul Malik Ukil and others took part in the picketing.

The protest against the police brutality and arrests a meeting was arranged in the afternoon of 11 March 1948 at the Dhaka University premise. The meeting was presided by Naimuddin Ahmed, the convener of the East Pakistan Muslim Students League. Continuous strikes were observed in the following four days. Under such circumstances, the Chief Minister, Khawaja Nazimuddin, signed an accord with the student leaders agreeing to some of the term and conditions without complying the demand that Bengali be made a state language. He declared that the Provincial Government could not take this decision because it was a matter to be decided by the Central Government.

On March 13 the East Bengal Provincial Government banned the Amrit Bazar Patria, the Anada Bazar Patria published from Calcutta and the Communist Party organ the Dainik Swadhinita in East Bengal.

Amidst such civic unrest, Governor General of Pakistan, Muhammed Ali Jinnah arrived at Tejgaon Airport in the afternoon of March 19, 1948. The people of Dhaka gave Jinnah a formal reception at the Race Course Maidan on March 21. In this reception programme Jinnah claimed that the language issue was designed by a ‘fifth column’ to divide Pakistani Muslims. Speaking in favour of Urdu as the State language, Jinnah said,

“Let me tell you in the clearest language that there is no truth that your normal life is going to be touched as disturbed so far as your Bengali language is concerned. But ultimately it is for you, the people of this province, to decide what shall be the language of your province. But let me make it very clear to you that the state language of Pakistan is going to be Urdu and no other language. And one who tries to mislead you is really the enemy of Pakistan. Without one state language no nation can remain tied up solidly together and function. Look at the history of other
Therefore, so far as the state language is concerned, Pakistan's language shall be Urdu. But as I have said, it will come in time."

Jinnah delivered a similar speech at Curzon Hall of the Dhaka University on 24 March. At both the meetings, Jinnah was interrupted by some students. But he remained firm in his opinion regarding the state language. He later called a meeting of a State Language Committee of Action and overruled the agreement that was signed by Khawaja Nazimuddin with the student leaders. Before Jinnah left Dhaka on 28th March 1948, he delivered a speech on radio reasserting his 'Urdu-only' policy.

Shortly thereafter, the East Bengal Government to prepare a report on the language problem, the East Bengal Language Committee, provided by Maulana Akram Khan was formed. The committee completed its report on 6 December 1950, but it was not published until 1958. It was suggested by the government that Bengali be written in Arabic script, as a potential solution to the language conflict.

Although the students movement had taken a break for a short while but movements against the Muslim League Government for economic, cultural problems began to be organized. The reason for this interval of the language movement was economic hardship which affected the peasants, workers and the lower middle class. Above all political repression created a new dimension which had a great impact on the language movement.

**Events of 1952**

On October 16, 1951, Liaquat Ali Khan was assassinated at Rawalpindi and Khawaja Nazimuddin was appointed as the Prime Minister of Pakistan. Nazimuddin arrived at Dhaka by the end of January 1952 as Prime Minister and spoke at a public meeting on January 27. In his speech he made comments on provincialism and declared that the people of East Pakistan would decide what the language of the province would be, but the state language of Pakistan would be Urdu, and no other language.
The speech of Nazimuddin reignited the Urdu-Bengali controversy. Against this speech the Dhaka University National Language Committee put posters on walls in university area and called a token strike on January 30, 1952. The students gathered at the university campus and demanded that Khawaja Nazimuddin should keep his agreement which he had signed in 1948 with the National Language Action Committee. The meeting decided to organize and carry on the language movement in a renewed spirit.

Next day on January, 31 Kazi Golam Mahbub, on behalf of the East Pakistan Muslim Students League called for an all-party meeting at the Dhaka Bar Library Hall, and it was presided over by Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani. At this meeting protest were made against the comments of Khawaja Nazimuddin and demanded immediate withdrawal of such comments. It was also demanded to stop the plan to introduce Arabic script for Bengali language. At the Bar Library meeting an All-party National League Action Committee was formed with Kazi Salim Mahbub as convener and Maulana Bhasani and some other as members.

On February 4, 1952, strike was observed at all educational institutions and after the strike students came in processions and gathered at the Dhaka University Campus. A meeting was held under the presidency of Gazi-ul-Huq, Kazi Golam Mahbub, Abdul Matin and other student leaders spoke at this meeting against Khawaja Nazimuddin’s speech and demanded to materialize the agreement made in 1948. At this meeting the Dhaka University National Language Committee was officially made a branch of the All Party National Language Action Committee. Earlier an announcement was made by the government that the session for East Bengal Assembly would be held on February 20. Taking this in mind the students at the meeting on February 4, took the decision to call for a province wide general strike on February 21, demanding Bengali as the state language. The All Party National Language Action Committee on that day also decided to call for a province wide general strike on February 21, 1952. It was resolved in the meeting to continue the struggle until Bengali was recognized as the state language of Pakistan. The Pakistan Communist Party in East Pakistan brought out a cyclostyled pamphlet on February 20, with the messages appealing the people to respond to the call of the All
Party National Language Action Committee and to support the call for province wide strike, meetings and processions on February 21 demanding an equal status for Bengali with other languages and to make Bengali the only state language of Pakistan.78

On 21st February 1952, at nine O clock in the morning students from all over the city assembled at the university and their number increased rapidly. A large number of police was stationed at the University Arts Building and tension mounted as the students got agitated at the sight of the police force. The university campus, around 10 a.m was almost packed and a meeting took place at the ‘Amtala’ (a place under a mango tree) presided over by Gazi-ul-Huq. As per the decision of the All Party National Language Action Committee taken earlier when kazi-Salim Mahbub and Shamsul Huq started to explain the reasons for not violating the government order banning processions and meetings etc. the students expressed anger and made clear that they were not ready to accept the decision of the All Party National Language Action Committee and were firm in their resolve to violate the government order.79 Abdul Matin declared that in order to make the movement successful it was essential to violate the government order. After that the president of the meeting, Gazi-ul-Huq, declared the decision to violate the government order. The student started shouting slogans in favour of violating section 144 and demanding Bengali as the state language of Pakistan. The students and others divided themselves into small groups of ten each to avoid a chaotic situation. According to the decision of the meeting the first group under the leadership of Habibur Rahman Shelly left the university campus to violate the government order.80 After a little while police fired tear gas shells at the students in the University campus. As the student came out on the road and violated the government order the police arrested them and drove them away from the city. Police closed the gate of the University but from 12 p.m the students crossed the gate and began moving towards the Medical College Hostel. The Hostel was then situated close to the Legislative Assembly building. As numbers of students increased at the Medical College hostel police was also reinforced there. On both sides tension was mounted. A pitched battle took place between the police and the students. At one stage police fired tear gas shells at the students and moved inside the
hostel to ‘lathi-charge’ them. The students also began to throw brickbats at the police. The situation deteriorated at around 3 a.m. along with the District Magistrate, the Deputy Inspector General of Police, the Police Superintendent and several high officials of the police were present at the spot. As the students denied to move back and instead moved forward towards the Legislative Assembly building the police got tensed. The police had warned the students a few times before but as the situation became the same they made a few rounds of blank fires. The students took shelter in different places on hearing the gun-shots. At this time some students shouted that the police was making blank fires. The students then came out and scattered inside the hostel area. A number of students proceeded towards the gate. Police fired another round of bullets but this time they aimed at the students and protesters and as a result a number of them were injured and a few were killed.

According to the government Press Release about the firing of 21 February 1952, “..... Some rumors place the figure of the deed at more than 150 most of whom are alleged to be students including many girls. It is further alleged that the bodies were burnt by petrol. These rumors are spread not only by mouth to mouth propaganda but also placards etc. This shows that mischief mongers are still assiduously trying to inflame public opinion and create widespread disaffection. That those rumors are palpably false will appear from the following particulars which have been collected after careful enquiries and are published for public information. It will be found that only four persons died as a result of bullet injuries during the two days of the disturbances and of them only one was a student. The dead bodies were buried with due religious rites. The particulars of the deceased persons, according to the government press note was as follows:
1. Name of deceased: Abdul Barkat
   Age: 25 years
   Profession: Student
   Date and place of firing: 21-02-1952 at Medical College Hospital Dacca
   Cause of death: Bullet injury

2. Name of deceased: Rafiquddin
   Age: 25 years
   Profession: Assisted his father in running a printing press
   Date and place of firing: 21-02-1952 at Babu Lane
   Cause of death: Bullet injury

3. Name of deceased: Abdul Jabbar
   Age: 30 years
   Profession: Petty Shop keeper
   Date and place of firing: 21-02-1952 at Babu Lane
   Cause of death: Bullet injury

4. Name of deceased: Shafiqur Rahman
   Age: 20 years
   Profession: Employee Dhaka High Court
   Date and place of firing: 21-02-1952 at Nawabpur Road
   Cause of death: Bullet injury
Apart from the above mentioned killed, about sixty agitators were injured. Most of them were released from hospital after first aid.\textsuperscript{84}

Instead of sending the dead bodies of the people to their relatives the police buried them under their supervision. The funeral prayer (Janaza) was held on the morning of February 22 at the Dhaka Medical College Hostel premise. The prayer was attended not only by students and the other people present there took out a procession in the city. When the procession reached the High Court police ‘lathi charged’ on it but could disperse the people only temporarily. When the procession attempted to move forward police fired on them. As a result of this many were injured. Police opened fire on processions at different places. A boy of eight and five others were killed and more than fifty were injured as a result of police firing on February 22.\textsuperscript{85}

As the news of these killings spread, disorder erupted across the city, shop, offices and public transport were shut down and a general strike began. The ‘Morning News’ an English daily, printed fabricated news of the incidents and made comments against the movement. A groups of people attacked the office of the newspaper. The press was ransacked and the furniture and equipment of the press were set ablaze with petrol. The ‘Morning News’ press and its office were thus completely destroyed.\textsuperscript{86} After the funeral prayer on 22 February, the situation in Dhaka was beyond the control of any of the organizations. There had been various incidents at different areas of the city. Although the Government declaration of ban on meetings, demonstration etc. was imposed people were moving around in groups and there were sporadic clashes with the police and administration. A similar incident occurred at the university area and police ‘lathi-charged’ the people. It was not possible to ascertain how many died or was injured in these clashes in Dhaka on February 22.\textsuperscript{87}

The East Pakistan Government by a press not in the evening of 21\textsuperscript{st} February stated, “Apprehending a serious branch of the peace, as a result of an attempt planned to bring the normal life of Dacca city to a standstill on February 22, 1952, the District Magistrate promulgated on February 22 an order under section 144 Cr. P. C. prohibiting the assembly of more than five persons, the holdings of meetings and
the taking out of processions without his permission." The note stated on firing, "... since the warning went unheeded and the crowd tried to advance towards the police party in a menacing attitude, under the orders of the District Magistrate a few rounds were fired ... which brought the situation under control."\(^8\)

The Press note said, "The Government regret to state that one person died on the spot and out of the nine other persons with bullet injuries who were admitted into the Medical College Hospital, the other succumbed late to their injuries at about 8 p. m. ... Information in possession of the Government so far shows that a number of persons unconnected with the University or any of the educational institutions have been the chief instigators of his lawlessness, resulting in the most unfortunate incident of today. This matter is under the close investigation."\(^9\)

A general strike was observed in Dhaka on February 25. In the morning of that day Khairat Hussain, Abul Hashim, Abdur Rashid Tarkabagish, Monoranjan Dhar and Gobinda Benerjee were arrested.\(^\) In the early morning of February 26, police arrested three professors of the Dhaka University, Muzaffar Ahmed Choudhury, Munier Choudhury and P. C. Chakraborty. Others who were arrested on that day were Satin Sen, a member of the Legislative Assembly, and Ajit Guha of Jagannath College.\(^1\)

On 27 February, 1952, an emergent meeting of the Dhaka University Executive Council was held under the presidency of Vice-chancellor Dr. Syed Moazzam Hussain. It was decided in the meeting to close the university sine die. Of the total number of students, which stood at two thousand three hundred, nine hundred students stayed in different residential halls. They were asked to quit their respective halls immediately.\(^2\)

**Aftermath of the Movement**

As Narayanganj was the strong center for the language movement, the government imposed several repressive measures on the people of this area. An example of such repression was police firing on the procession of February 29 and arrest of several people. Mumtaz Begum, the Principal of Narayanganj Morgan School, was arrested on that day. On the same day the police also arrested, an
Assembly member elected from Narayanganj, Osman Ali. In another incident in this area on 1st March, a police constable was killed. The government immediately announced compensation money of ten thousand taka for his family. The government also stated that the incident was committed by the Communists and Indian agents.91

There was large scale arrest all over the province at this stage of the movement. After the killings on February 21 and 22, people of East Pakistan brought out protest rallies and demonstrations against police repression and government rigidity on the language issue. All the leaders and workers of the opposition parties actively participated in these demonstrations. When the language movement showed its momentum the government made several arrests of political leaders and protesters in Dhaka and other district of the province.94

The National League Action Committee declared March 5, the "Martyrs' Day" and called for a province wide strike. Except Dhaka the strike was successful almost everywhere. A meeting of the Action Committee was called on March 7 at the residence of a physician. When the meeting was going on in the evening police arrested almost all the members of the Action Committee present there. Warrants have been issued for arrest of all the members of the Action Committee in the Dhaka Gazette on February 28.

With the arrest of most of its members the National Language Action Committee became inactive. Later on March 14, at a meeting the Action Committee was formed again with Ataur Rahman and Kamruddin Ahmed as joint conveners.95

Government by a notification96 stated that with regard to the firing that took place at Dhaka on the 21st February 1952, an enquiry should be held by a judge of the Dacca High Court, to be nominated by the Hon’ble the Chief Justice to ascertain whether

(a) The firing by the police was necessary and
(b) The force used by the police was justified in the circumstances of the case.
Accordingly Hon'ble Justice T. S. Ellis, who was nominated by the Hon'ble Chief Justice and appointed by the Government to hold the enquiry. The Justice Mr. T. S. Ellis, High Court of Judicature, Dhaka, submitted its report to the Chief Secretary, to the government of East Pakistan, Dhaka on 27th May 1952. The report of the enquiry was satisfactory so far as the government of West Pakistan was concerned. The government was pleased to accept the findings of the enquiry judge that –

(a) the firing by the police was necessary;

(b) the force was used by the police was justified in the circumstances of the case.

It was written in the report '... a mammoth demonstration would be staged in Dacca on the 21st of February 1952 and called for a complete hartal on the date. The East Bengal Legislative Assembly would be in session on the 21st of February 1952, and the provincial Muslim League Council had also arranged to hold a meeting on that date. In these circumstances the District Magistrate of Dacca apprehended that there might be a breach of the peace and disturbance of public tranquility in the city; accordingly at about 5 O’ clock in the afternoon of the previous day, the 20th February 1952, he duly promulgated an order under section 144 of the code of criminal procedure prohibiting procession, demonstration and the Assembly of 5 more persons ... police arrangements were made to meet the expected emergency and by 7-30 a. m. on the 21st February 1952, the Control Room was manned and disposition were made of the police forces in accordance with these arrangements .... Throughout the day the situation deteriorated and ultimately the police opened fire at 2-30 p. m. at Medical College gate with the result that one person was killed on the spot and three other subsequently succumbed to the injuries they received. One of the persons killed was a student named Abul Barkat.'

However, the National Language Action Committee boycotted the Elli's commission because it did not include any non-government person and the scope of enquiry was limited to a very narrow area. They demanded that this enquiry should take place openly.
The Deputy Secretary to the Government of East Pakistan in a letter to the District Magistrate Dacca ordered to pay compensation to the families of persons killed as a result of police firing in 1952 during language movement. The Deputy Secretary directed to convey the sanction of Government to an ex-gratis grant of a sum of Rupees two thousand each of the family that lost one of their family members.

A martyr’s column (Sahid Minar) was immediately raised on the spot where the first student was killed. From 1952 onwards the Bengali speaking people of Pakistan drew their inspiration from the incident of 21st February in their entire subsequent struggle. As a matter of fact, the 21st February has shaped the future destiny of the people of East Pakistan. Now it is considered that the liberation movement of Bangladesh owed its genesis from that date. This language movement was thus another blow to the already strained relationship between the two wings of Pakistan.

The ruling elite in West Pakistan persistently overlooked the demand for a representative government in East Pakistan as it would paved for Bengali rule who were a majority in combined Pakistan. The defense and civil officials were in alliance with the landed business interests who resisted the idea of a Bengali dominance in the power structure. Constitution making was thus delayed to prevent it and national election was perpetually postponed.

The undermining of representative political institutions and hindering the development of democratic polity facilitated the rise of military-democratic nexus. The assassination of Liaquat Ali Khan, the first Prime Minister, in 1951 who was followed by a succession of military-bureaucratic officers to capture power culminated in a coup d’état in October 1958 by which Ayub Khan assumed the office of President in Pakistan. Ayub Khan experimented with all kinds of political gimmicks to remain in power but eventually was compelled to hand over power to General Yahya Khan in March 1969. The period of his rule accentuated the unrest in East Pakistan. The demand for restoration of democratic order, autonomy and the counter repression by the military regime only enhanced the distance between the two Pakistan. In a desperate move to retrieve lost ground the Government of
Pakistan accused Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, leader of the Awami League, of conspiring with India. Convicted in what was known as the Agartala Conspiracy Case, Sheikh Mujib’s trial and imprisonment further enraged Bengali sentiments.

The Awami League mobilized the hurt psyche of the Bengali speaking people of East Pakistan and submitted a six-point charter that included the demand of provincial autonomy and the representation of Bengali in adequate measures in the service sector. Under such circumstances the first general election in 22 years was held in 1970, which saw the Awami League win by a thumping majority, obtaining 160 seats out of 162 in East Pakistan and 290 out of 300 in West Pakistan Assembly. But the army régime was in no mood to hand over power to a Bengali civilian government, and it evaded the formation of an elected government on one pretext or the other. The Awami League led by Mujibur Rahman launched a civil disobedience movement from March 8, 1971, to press for their constitutional rights. In that movement along with students, the government servants joined the movement. On March 9, 1971 the judges refused to swear Lieutenant General Tikka Khan as the Governor of East Pakistan. It created the situation to army to resort to military reinforcement to tackle the unrest. An inhuman militancy campaign was launched wherein men, women and even children were indiscriminately slaughtered. The genocide provoked East Pakistan to declare a war of liberation from West Pakistani rule. On March 28, the Liberation Army Chief Ziauddin Khan declared the formation of a new nation – Bangladesh. The Indian Army sided with the Liberation Army to fight against Pakistan. In the war that followed the Pakistani army was defeated. The instrument of surrender was signed by Lieutenant General Jagjit Singh Aurora and Lieutenant General Niazi on behalf of their respective forces at Ramna Race course at twenty five minutes past 5 p. m. on 16 December 1971. With the signing of this instrument of surrender, Bangladesh became free from Pakistani occupation. It emerged as an independent country on the map of the world. Thus what began as movement for language subsequently became a full scale war of liberation.

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66 The Naubelal, 4 March, 1948

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