CHAPTER-VII

CONCLUSION

In the preceding pages we have discussed the factor of language in shaping national identities in South Asia and its transformation of linguistic patriotism into linguistic nationalism. Race, ethnicity and culture has always been the major marker of the modern concept of nationhood. But the emergence of language as the sole basis of national identity is relatively new phenomenon. It appeared as a force to wreck with only in the post-colonial period in South Asia. This is nowhere more prominent then the new nation of Bangladesh. In doing so Bangladesh has transcended the barrier of religion and used language as its unifying force. Bangladesh was the earliest East Pakistan of the state of Pakistan. As is known Pakistan was created to satisfy the political aspiration of the Muslim minorities of India. East Pakistan was an integral part of that Pakistan which was created on the basis of religion. But Bangladesh overcame that religious affiliation and unified the people of East Pakistan on the basis of language to start a liberation struggle which ultimately succeeded in the creation of the new nation state of Bangladesh. Although language has always been an integral part of national identity to marked the beginning of a new era of linguistic nationalism. But Bangladesh was not the single example of the emergence of linguistic nationalism. There were parallel instances where language manifested itself in terms of movement and martyrdom. The two cases we have cited here are of Cachar in Assam and Manbhum in Bihar.

During the nationalist struggle the pan-Indian sentiment and anti-colonial ideology played the major role in shaping the concept and idea of Indian nation. Simultaneously there was a parallel movement in the regions which was based on the
regional vernacular and resistance dominant nationality oppression. These were described as sub-national movements, regional movement or little nationality movements. Though this movement and their own momentum they remained subsidiary to the anti-colonial movement and never tried to challenge the concept of one nation. The only challenge to the concept of one Indian nation came from religious groups like the Muslims and Sikhs. In fact it was religion which eventually led to the partition of India into two sovereign nations. However, the dominant political organization of India – Indian National Congress did not fail to recognize the importance of language and religion. They promised that after independence Indian regions would be organized on the basis of its vernaculars.

Once India attained independence and the idea of Indian nation state have been implemented, the regions demanded attention to their regions and vernaculars. Various movements began to emerge in different parts of the country where different vernaculars were demanded to be recognized or the region be recognized on the basis of its vernaculars. The first movement of this type emerged in the Manbhum area of Chotangpur.

The language movement of Manbhum that began in 1948 had its root in the colonial period. The English East India Company got the ‘Dewani’ of Bengal, Bihar-Orissa from Mughal Emperor in 1765. Tax collection process was started by the Company in Jungle–Mahal area. This was followed by the ‘Chuar Mutiny’ started at Manbazar – Barabhum – Balarampur - Kuilapul in 1767 and the mutiny continued for long sixty six years i.e. from 1767-1832. There was a kingdom in the region called ‘Pachet’ which was auctioned by the British due to the non-payment of revenue. The subjects of ‘Panchakot Raj’ reveled against the Company and denied to pay revenue else except the Panchkot King. Due to the rebellion the auction process was stalled which was a rare incident in the history of this country. The Company intended to establish greater control over the area began to split it into several smaller districts. The district of Manbhum was the result of this divisions. This region witnessed the Santhal Rebellion in 1855 followed by the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857.
The movement against the partition of Bengal was started in 1905 and ended with the annulment of it in 1911 and the State of Bihar-Orissa was formed in 1912. Manbhum was ceded to the new state. There was large scale protest against the inclusion of Manbhum with Bihar-Orissa. This was the beginning of the language movement of Manbhum. The movement for inclusion to Bengal slowly gathered storm at Manbhum district. However, the scale of the national movement against the British restricted the popularity of the movement of Manbhum.

The District Congress of Manbhum was formed in 1921. After the independence of India in 1947 Manbhum was conceded to Bihar. The Bihar Government transferred all Bengali government officials to other districts of Bihar in 1948. The department of education started to issue circular to teach Hindi from primary classes. The Bengali department was closed in the district school and installation of school signboard in Hindi was compulsory. It became mandatory for the Bengali speaking people of Manbhum to show Domicile Certificate. Hindi was declared as the official language of Manbhum.

On 30th May, 1948 the proposal for Bengali as the district language of Manbhum was defeated by 43/55 votes at the District Congress Committee meeting. The language policy and the education policy of the AICC was neglected at Manbhum. The president and secretary along with some other members of the Manbhum DCC had resigned from Congress and formed a new party named ‘Lok Sebak Sangha’ on 14th June, 1948 to fight for Bengali language and to protest against the imposition of Hindi on the Bengali speaking people as state policy. The then Bihar Government had restricted the use of Bengali in Manbhum District mainly in education. The Bihar Government imposed restriction in organizing rallies, banned meetings etc. All these culminated in a fierce protest throughout the length and breadth of the district.

Lok Sebak Sangha started agitation against the imposition of Bengali as the court language of Manbhum at multilevel pattern. These were – Non-violent agitation, Hal Joal Andoloon and Tusu Satyagraha. In the movement Bengali speaking people of Manbhum District came down to street. Under the banner of Lok Sebak Sangha strike was observed throughout the district. A week long protest
movement was also observed followed by the ‘Tusu Satyagraha’ where the festival of ‘Tusu’ turned into a new form of protest. The administration became afraid of and started to suppress the movement by arresting the leaders and the volunteers of the Sangha. Thousands of Bengali people went to jail. Communist Party, Bar Association, Municipality also participated in the movement. Finally with the reorganization of the province the movement came to its end.

Behind the formation of State Reorganisation Commission in 1953 the language movement of Manbhum played a significant role along with the Andhra State Movement. The SRC held hearings at Manbhum District and submitted its report on 10th October, 1955. The Commission in its report proposed the formation as well as the accession of a new district ‘Purulia’ primarily dominated by the Bengali speaking people to West Bengal from erstwhile Manbhum District of Bihar. The new district comprised of nineteen police stations from the then Manbhum District. Bihar would had its share from Manbhum District with ten police stations from Dhanbad Sub-Division and two police station from Purulia Sub-division. The then Chief Minister of West Bengal Bidhan Chandra Roy, later on gave his consent for accession of three police stations to Bihar by a special request of Tata Iron and Steel Company, Jamshedpur.

The report provoked mixed reaction at Manbhum district. The supports of Bihar called strike and the supports of Bengal were also not happy with the proposed accession of Dhanbad to Bihar. In the meantime both the Chief Ministers of West Bengal and Bihar, Bidhan Chandra Roy and Shrikrishna Singh respectively, came forward with a unique proposal of unification of West Bengal with Bihar.

In protest against the said unification proposal, a non-violent march on foot to Calcutta from Manbhum was started by Lok Sebak Sangha. The procession reached Calcutta and the volunteers were arrested and sent to jail. Subsequently the unification proposal was withdrawn. The Bengal-Bihar Border Demarcation Bill was passed in the Parliament in 1956. Finally, with 16 police stations areas the new district ‘Purulia’ was acceded to West Bengal on 1st November, 1956. Give the extent of mass participation in anti-authoritarian social agitation Manbhum stands with countries like Bangladesh, Philippines, Haiti and many other on linguistic issue.
Manbhum movement though was the first of its kind did not receive enough economic or political attention. However, it was immortalized as the first language movement in independent India.

A similar movement emerged in East Pakistan in 1952 on the question of the official language of the state of Pakistan as well as the province.

During the British period the present nations of Pakistan and Bangladesh were part of undivided India. From the mid-nineteenth century, the Urdu language had been promoted as the lingua franca of the Muslims of India by political and religious leaders.

Bengali-speaking people in East Pakistan made up 44 million of the newly formed Dominion of Pakistan's 69 million people. The Dominion of Pakistan's government, civil services, and military, however, were dominated by the people from the western wing of the Dominion of Pakistan. In 1947, a key resolution at a national education summit advocated Urdu as the sole state language, and its exclusive use in the media and in schools. Opposition and protests immediately arose. Students from Dhaka rallied under the banner of 'Tamaddun Majlish', a Bengali Islamic cultural organization. The meeting stipulated Bengali as an official language of the Dominion of Pakistan and as a medium of education in East Pakistan. The central government of Pakistan made extensive preparations to make Urdu the only state language of the Dominion of Pakistan. Public outrage spread, and a large number of students met on the University of Dhaka campus on 8 December 1947 to formally demand that Bengali be made an official language. To promote their cause, Bengali students organized processions and rallies in Dhaka.

The Urdu-Bengali controversy was reignited when Jinnah's successor, Governor-General Khawaja Nazimuddin, staunchly defended the "Urdu-only" policy. On 31 January, the All-Party Central Language Action Committee was formed in a meeting at the Bar Library Hall of the University of Dhaka. The central government's proposal of writing the Bengali language in Arabian script was vehemently opposed at the meeting. The action committee called for an all out protest on 21 February, including strikes and rallies. Students of the Dhaka University and other institutions gathered on the university premises on 4 February
and warned the government to withdraw its proposal to write Bengali in Arabic script, and insisted on the recognition of Bengali. The government imposed Section 144 in Dhaka and thereby banned any gathering of more than four persons.

On 21\textsuperscript{st} February, students began gathering on the University of Dhaka premises in defiance of Section 144. The University Vice-Chancellor and other officials were present as armed police surrounded the campus. Students gathered at the university gate and attempted to break the police line. Police started firing tear gas shells towards the gate to warn the students. A section of students ran into the Dhaka Medical College while others rallied towards the university premises cordoned by the police. The Vice-Chancellor of the University asked police to stop firing and ordered the students to leave the area. However, the police arrested several students for violating section 144. Enraged by the arrests, the students gathered around the Legislative Assembly and blocked the legislators' way, asking them to present their insistence at the assembly. When a group of students sought to storm into the building, police opened fire and killed a number of students. As the news of the killings spread, disorder erupted across the city. Offices, Shops and public transport were shut down and a general strike began. Disorder spread across the province as large procession came out and condemned the actions of the police. More than 30,000 people congregated at Curzon Hall in Dhaka. During the prevailed protests, police actions led to the death of four more people. This prompted officers and clerks from different organizations, including banks, colleges and the radio station, to boycott offices and join the procession. Agitators burned the offices of two leading pro-government news agencies, the Jubilee Press and the Morning News. Police fired on a mourning rally, as it was passing through Nawabpur Road.

The 'Shorbodolio Kendrio Rashtrobhasha Kormi Porishod' decided to commemorate 21 February as Martyrs' Day. On 7 May 1954, the constituent assembly resolved, with the Muslim League's support, to grant official status to Bengali. Bengali was recognised as the second official language of Pakistan on 26\textsuperscript{st} February 1956. Although the question of official languages was settled by 1956, the military regime of Ayub Khan promoted the interests of the Western wing of Pakistan at the expense of East Pakistan. Despite forming the majority of the national population, the East Pakistani population continued to be under-represented in the
civil and military services, and received a minority of state funding and other
government help. Mainly due to regional economic imbalances sectional divisions
grew, and support for the Bengali ethnic nationalist Awami League, which invoked a
six point movement for greater provincial autonomy. One demand was that East
Pakistan be called Bangladesh, which subsequently led to liberation war of
Bangladesh and succeeded in carving out the sovereign state of Bangladesh in 1971.
Bangladesh officially sent a proposal to UNESCO to declare 21 February as
"International Mother Language Day." The proposal was supported unanimously at
the 30th General Conference of UNESCO held on 17 November 1999.

Another such movement broke out in Barak Valley of Assam on 19th May,
1961. Bengali-Assamese language conflict of Assam and then the Language
movement of 1961 in the Cacher district of south Assam which is known as Barak
Valley had its same root in the colonial period. Though Assam is a multilingual state
but there was a peaceful co-existence of all linguistic groups up to 1873. From
Nov.1838 to April 1873 Bengali was the official language of Assam. This decision
was definitely taken by the colonial ruler. In the field of education Bengalees were
far more advance then others and it was thus convenient to introduce Bengali as
medium of instruction. The divide and rule policy of the colonial government
ultimately succeeded in sowing the seed of separation amongst the different
linguistic groups. Assam gradually then became a hot bed of language politics. The
result was violent protest movement throughout the state, which ultimately led to the
death of eleven protesters in Silchar on 19th May, 1961.

Assam Official Language Act 1960 was passed by the Assam
government through which Assamese was declared as the official language of
Assam. All the members from the undivided Cacher district walked out from the
Legislative Assembly in protest against the introduction of Official Language Bill.
Non-Assamese members from different corners of the state also resented against the
Bill. Party foyalty could not stop Congress M.L.A. from Barak Valley to oppose the
Bill.
All possible democratic attempts inside the assembly to stop the process of passing language Bill were in vein. After that ‘Sangram Parisasad’ took its birth from the shadow of agitation. Anti-Congress attitude got a flaming turn in Barak Valley. On the other hand the Congress Party of the undivided Cacher decided to start language movement from the Valley. But the Congress leadership from the Valley failed to take any strong step to organize a mass movement in the Valley.

Under the banner of ‘Sangram Parisad’ people of Barak Valley gathered together and decided to launch a vigorous movement against the Official Language Bill of Assam. People of the entire Valley came down to street and taken the oath not to leave their demand of making Bengali as one of the official language of Assam.

A vigorous language movement was started in the Valley against the imposition of Assamese as the only official language of Assam. The plains as well as the Hill Tribals were badly resented at the enactment of the Language Bill.

The people of the three sub-divisions of the Valley under the banner of ‘Sangram Parisad’ came down to street and protested against the imposition of Assamese as Official Language and demanded to accept Bengali as one of the official language of Assam. The volunteers of Sangram Parisad travelled all most all the places of the Valley, distributed pamphlets, arranged meetings to make people acquaint with the situation.

On 19th May, 1961 the entire Barak Valley observed total strike. Thounds of Bengali speaking people of all ages groups participated in the movement. In Silchar the picketers took control over the railway station and the railway authority and administration failed to run train in spite of ‘lathi’ charge and other atrocities. At about 2.30 P.M. the police started opening firing and eleven picketers were gunned down.

The bloodshed and acts of state repression only aggravated the situation. The eleven dead were started to be seen as language martyrs and the days has been observing as Language Martyres Day since then.

The language policy of the government of Assam gave the birth of ‘Sangram Parisad.’ The people of the Valley under the banner of the ‘Parisad’ came down to street and opposed the policy of the state government and the Language Bill in all
possible democratic manner. On the other hand the state government badly reacted on the peoples’ movement. In order to suppress the movement the state police took oppressive measures like ‘lathi’ charge, mass arrest, imposition 144, curfew and open fire etc.

The language movement which was started immediately after the independence of India culminated on 19th May 1961 resulted in the death of eleven protesters by police firing. The repressive measure of the state machinery could not stop the movement but aggravated the situation. There were continuous protest in the form of rally, blackout, non-cooking, strike etc. The first phase of the movement continued up to 29th May 1961 in which people participated voluntarily and expressed their discontent in all possible ways.

The Assam Government immediately after the movement appointed a judicial inquiry commission by appointing Mr. Meherotra, a justice of High Court, as the Chairman. It was instructed to the Commission to submit its report within 31st August 1961.

On the other hand a civil inquiry commission, under the chairmanship of N.C.Chatterjee, inquired the matter which published its report on 12th June 1961.

To control the situation Union Home Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri came to Silchar and met with local people and tried to bring solution but could not. On his way back to Shillong he met with the state leaders and gave formula, which is known as ‘Shastri Formula’, to mitigate the problem. But the formula was not accepted by the ‘Sangram Parisad’.

The Assam government on realising the situation decided to bring Language Bill in amended form in which Bengali would be accepted as the official language of Barak Valley, then Cacher. This attempt of the government was not accepted by the ‘Sangram Parisad’. The ‘Parisad’, on the other hand, decided to challenge the amended version of the Language Bill in the Guwahati High Court.

However, the movement ultimately failed to maintain its scale and with the passing of amended Language Bill the mass struggle, for the time being, came to its end.
The study of the language movement of Barak Valley will be an incomplete one without going through the movement of Hailakandi Sub-division of the Valley. Like the movement of Karimganj and Silchar, the members of the 'Sangram Parisad' of Hailakandi started agitation from 40th May, 1961.

The language activists travelled throughout the Sub-division organised meetings and discussion with the local people. In which they explained the situation of Assam after passing the Language Bill. Some speakers described the language riots where Bengali speaking people were attacked and killed that created intense atmosphere of fear in the minds of the people. They also explained the future plight of the Bengali speaking people and invited them to join in the movement. The lecturers delivered by speakers of the "Songram Parisad" made the situation volatile. The Bengali speaking people of the sub-division especially of the villages, who did not have any idea about the linguistic problem of the state, began to speak against the Assamese language. In this way the entire Hailakandi was bubbling with anger and was about to burst.

The administration of Hailakandi became afraid of watching the preparation of the movement by the Sangram Parisad of Hailakandi Sub-division. As the date of total strike throughout the Valley was decided on 19th May 1961, the administration thought it better to arrest all the leading personalities of Hailakandi Sangram Parisad before the commencement of the movement on 19th May. Accordingly on 18th May 1961 in the evening some important leaders were arrested.

On 19th May, the picketers, in the very early morning, started to gather at Hailakandi Town Hall and from there they reached to every government offices situated in different corners of the town. Hundreds of protesters were arrested and all most all of them were released in the evening but some leaders were detained for eight to ten days. All the central and state government officers could not open on that day and in every office picketers voiced against the language bill. The wave of the protest movement limited not only in Hailakandi town, it also reached in each and every places of the sub-division.
When the news of police firing and the death of protesters in Silchar reached to Hailakandi, the situation suddenly deteriorated and from the next day regular agitation continued in the form of procession, strike etc. till 29th May 1961.

It was in that time, a new situation had arisen in the valley and Hailakandi was its centre. To prevent the activities of Sangram Parisad, non-Bengalis in Barak Valley, which included the Muslims, the Manipuris and the indigenous Cacharis formed another organization known as Shanti Parisad. A number of minor clashes occurred between the Sangram Parisad and Shanti Parisad. Shanti Parisad in a memorandum to the Home Minister demanded that Assamese should be the only official language of Assam. Meetings, demonstrations etc. were organized in different places of Barak Valley by ‘Shanti Parisad.’

On the completion of one month of the unfortunate incident of 19th May 1961, the Songram Parisad organized rallies, condolences, meetings, etc. in Silchar.

In Hailakandi on that day the language movement took a violent turn when a group of people tried to enter the town through a procession and chanted slogan in favour of Assamese language. The situation became so hostile that police opened fire that killed five persons and fourteen got injury. Army was bought into control the situation. The disorder and panic of further trouble was so intensive that Barak Valley continued to be treated as a disturbed area till at least 21 Sept 1961.

After the incident of Hailakandi, ‘Sangram Parisad’ could not make any attempt to organize any mass movement in Barak Valley. The rise of anti-Bengali movement in the land of Bengali dominated area was a big blow in the rise of Bengali language movement. The leaders of ‘Sangram Parisad’ could not study the mind of the Bengali Muslims, Manipuri and indigenous Cacharis. They thought that the call for a movement for Bengali language would be as effective as it had happened in East Pakistan (Bangladesh), where the Bengali Muslims did not hesitate to fight against the imposition of Urdu, though their religion was same. But here in Barak Valley the situation was totally different. The partition of India and referendum was still alive in the minds of the people. A large number of people who did not like to be with India still remained in India and this number was much higher.
in Hailakandi Sub-division in comparison to Silchar and Karimganj. These people, though they were Bengali, did not come forward to support the Bengali language movement. The “Purbachal Plan” and “Purbachal Reconsidered” both had created a sense of apprehension in the minds of the Muslims, Manipuris and indigenous Cacharis that the success of Bengali language movement could ultimately led to the separation of Barak Valley from Assam. In such case the new state would be ruled and governed by the refuges and in such situation their position would be very much deplorable. Thus, it was naturally thought by the Muslims of the Barak Valley that the importance they were getting from the state leadership and government did not like to put it in a situation of uncertainty.

Such things had not been studied by the leaders of Barak Valley and as a result a large section of people remained and became delinked from the Bengali language movement in the heart land of Bengali populated area.

The confusion became very much clear in the minds of the Muslims, Manipuris and indigenous Cacharis when ‘Shastri Formula’ was discarded by the leaders of the valley. The dissatisfaction on Shastri Formula by the leaders sowed the seed of difference in the minds of the people who did not participate in the language movement and to protect their interest they founded a new organization named Shanti Parisad.

The language movement that broke out in all three areas was basically middle class movements. They were limited by the non-participation of lower classes and non-Bengali components of the populations. In Bangladesh the language movement transcended the religious polarization of the people but in Barak Valley religious polarization remained a potent threat. The Hailakandi episode demonstrated the religious cleavage within the Bengali speakers of the Barak Valley. In fact in opposing the language movement of Barak Valley Hailakandi lost half the numbers of youth that were killed in police firing in Silchar. The people killed in Silchar of Barak Valley given the status of language martyrs so was the case with East-Pakistan. Through martyrdom is defined as a voluntary embracement of death for political cause. In the language movement mentioned above the people killed were given the status of martyrs so was to immortalize the deaths. Such institutionalized
memorializing is a form of politics where by a community perpetuates its cause and continues to draw support and sustenance for the movements. It emerges as a tradition for the nation to re-invent. It emerges as a symbol of nationhood.

In the above mention cases martyrdom is make unique by calling it language martyrs. This is because martyrdom is associated generally with religion on political cause. Martyrdom for a cultural marker is less and infrequent hence language was associated with mother and thereby endowed with the necessary emotions that associated with mother. Fight for mother tongue is, therefore, not just a struggle for reinstatement of the respective vernacular but a resistance to persecution to a symbol (language) which is associated with the ‘mother’ of the community.