

## **Language Controversy: Impacts on National Politics and Secession of East Pakistan**

**Mussarat Jabeen**

*University of Sargodha, Sargodha*

**Amir Ali Chandio**

*Shah Abdul Latif University, Khairpur*

**Zarina Qasim**

*University of Sargodha, Sargodha*

### **ABSTRACT**

Politics like other fields is mute without language. Though graphics, pictures and movies play important role yet they are ineffective, if not mixed with words. It was Hearst, an American journalist, who sent a cartoonist to Cuba to furnish the picture of Cuban war but he himself used words to 'furnish the war.' The international politics is also worthless without appropriate choice of language. In politics, use of proper words is inevitable for achieving political objectives and avoiding controversies but sometime language itself becomes a political issue. Pakistan faced this problem in early years of its independence when language controversy exercised far-reaching effects on subsequent history of the country as a whole. Imposition of Urdu as state language was thought unjust by Bengali-speaking Eastern wing and they demanded that Bengali should be given equal status to that of Urdu. There was a sense of being ignored and exploited by West Pakistan and it was thought a rightful demand on part of East Pakistan to have its own language. Bengali written in Devanagari was not approved by the central leadership and this attitude was resented by the Bengalis who asserted that Bengali was as much language of Muslim as that of Urdu. This sense of exploitation resulted in division of country into Bangladesh and Pakistan. Language was the major factor that contributed and intensified the feeling of mistrust between the two wings. The paper is an effort to shed light on how language issue contributed in determining the fate of a nation with special reference to the creation of Bangladesh.

**KEY WORDS:** Language Controversy, Urdu, Hindu, Bengali, Punjabi, Elite, Military, Martial Law

## **Introduction**

Language is a crucial part of any culture. It is a dominant feature in determining the bases of nationalism or ethnicity, as it represents a nation's identity and preserves its heritage. Language is also the driving force behind the unity of the peoples and makes them distinct from other nations. Language is never imposed but adopted and once a language is adopted, it is difficult to eliminate it from the society until the society decides to change or adopt something different. The question about the State language of Pakistan was raised immediately after the independence in 1947. Imposition of Urdu as the national language of Pakistan created disastrous problems for the country in the coming years. This decision was resented in East Pakistan and strong opposition came from its masses when the central government of Pakistan started the unilateral use of Urdu in money order forms, postal stamps, currencies, coins, railway tickets and official letterheads even without formally adopting Urdu as state language of Pakistan (Zaheer, 1994: 21).

Neglecting Bengali in this process spawned the feeling of distrust and discontent among the students, intelligentsia and political parties of East Pakistan. Even the common people of East Bengal started speculating on the motives of the anti-Bengali ruling elite. The government argued that decision of making Urdu as the national language of Pakistan was just as Hindi was the state language of India (Language and movement., 2004). To counter this decision, students and intellectuals of East Pakistan resisted and demanded that Bengali should also be made as one of the State languages and the medium of instruction in East Pakistan along with Urdu. They pleaded that it was the language of majority as 54% people spoke it as compared to Urdu that was spoken by 7% in Pakistan. Bengalis referred it as cultural domination of one ethnic group on others and resented it (Pasha, 1995: 128).

## **Early Period of Urdu Language**

Urdu as a language evolved during the last days of Mughal rule in India. Persian (Farsi) was the official language, while Turkic and Arabic languages were also popular. Turkic language was the mother tongue of many among the rulers, and Arabic language was used for religious needs and scholarly purposes. At that time, Northern part of India was the centre of rule and knowledge, particularly Delhi and its surrounding areas. Due to the interaction of local population and the ruling Persian-Turkic-speaking Muslim elite, a new language evolved and was known as Hindustani. Its Persianized form was called Urdu. With the passage of time, this language became popular but remained limited to Northern India and never became the official language by Mughal rulers. Other local languages such as Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashto, Kashmiri, Seraiki and Baluchi were

also in use (Bailey, 2008). Contrary to Bengali, Urdu and Hindi languages are extremely similar to each other, mostly composed of native North Indian linguistic elements. Having a common origin, both languages are intelligible to each other. Urdu has a lot of Persian words and is written in the Persio-Arabic script, whereas Bengali and Hindi has Sanskrit words and is written in the Devanagari scripts (Afzal, 2001: 99). Written script does not matter much, as Azeri language of Azerbaijan has some Russian words and is written in the Cyrillic script, whereas Azeri language of Iran has some Persian words and is written in the Persio-Arabic script. Regardless of script, same language is spoken in both countries by the masses and same is case with Urdu and Hindi (Should Urdu..., 2004). Since North India was the base of Muslim rulers and British empires, Urdu-speaking Indians Muslims from North had an environmental advantage in getting better education and jobs as compared to other areas. This benefit brought domination of Urdu-speaking Indian Muslims of North in South Asia and they availed the opportunity and succeeded in bringing some other non-Urdu-speaking Muslims towards Urdu, who sought better education and status. In 1888, a government inquiry pointed out that a large number of Muslims even of the lower classes preferred Urdu to Bengali as the medium of instruction for their children (Afzal, 1998:164). So true and it is not just propaganda about Urdu as being, true Muslim language of South Asia. During Pakistan movement, it was further promoted due to majority of Urdu-speaking North Indian leaders. After independence, this leadership introduced Urdu to non-Urdu speaking people of Pakistan as state language, which was resented in East Pakistan. They argued that Bengali was equally developed language, which was widely spoken in East Bengal. This language had grown over a period of one thousand years. The Buddhist Charyapada contains the earlier specimen of Bengali literature. This language originated during the Buddhist Pala rule of 8<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> century. Muslim rulers promoted this language and gave it status of a state language. It was also cultivated beyond the boundaries of Bengal in Tippera Coach Bihar and Arakan. Though it was not an official language in Mughal and British rule yet its progress continued among upper strata of Muslim population (Mohsin, 2007: 7).

## **Language Controversy and Movement to Make Bengali as Lingua Franca**

People of East Pakistan, particularly the progressive forces were not prepared to accept Urdu as the only state language. They launched an effective Bengali language movement in 1948 to counter this decision, which reached its climax on 21<sup>st</sup> February 1952, when several people were killed by police. The movement ended after recognition of Bengali as one of the state languages of Pakistan. This movement succeeded in mobilizing mass support throughout the

## **South Asian Studies 25 (1)**

province. Bengali language activists and the progressive political forces remained vigilant against anti-Bengali political elite of the central government and pro-Urdu provincial government.

Bengali language movement was not launched by any single individual, pressure group or political party. Many student leaders spearheaded the movement throughout this period. However, the marginal roles of some of the participants have often been exaggerated through invented memories. This movement provided ample opportunity to many political leaders for participating in this decisive struggle for establishing Bengali as one of the state languages of Pakistan.

### **Language Controversy before Partition of the Sub-Continent**

Roots of language controversy can be traced back to the support of the non-Bengali leaders of All-India Muslim League (AIML), who wanted to make Urdu as the 'Lingua Franca' of Pakistan. History has preserved several events in this context. The Central Parliamentary Board of AIML prepared a 14-points Manifesto in June 1936 for the "protection and promotion of Urdu language and script." Another 25-points program was also designed for "setting out the special needs of Bengal" in 1936 by the same board. The board did not feel any need of adopting the Bengali language and script as Urdu-speaking leaders and their Bengali collaborators of Bengal Provincial Muslim League (BPML) supported the idea that "Urdu should be the official language of Bengali Muslims" (Manik, 2003, April). However, there were other Bengali scholars who resisted this idea.

Dr. Ziauddin Ahmed, Vice Chancellor of Aligarh University declared in a conference that "Only Urdu deserves to be the state language of a Muslim nation." Dr. Muhammad Shahidullah, a renowned Muslim linguistic researcher and a respected Bengali scholar, challenged his advocacy of Urdu. He rejected this discriminatory proposal and wrote an article titled "Pakistaner Bhasha Shamashya" (The Language Problem in Pakistan) in Daily Azad. He made his best to refute the irrelevant and unfair comments of Dr. Ziauddin Ahmed for imposing Urdu as the only lingua franca of Pakistan. He further wrote that "Bengali being the mother tongue of 55% of the total population of Pakistan deserves to be the state language of new nation. Once Bengali is being adopted as State language, we may then deliberately focus on the question whether or not Urdu can also be afforded the status of one of the State languages of Pakistan" (Language problem..., 1947; Bangla Pedia, 2003).

Dr. Shahidullah continued his efforts for protecting his mother tongue after independence and his principle stand on this issue added much confidence and legitimacy to language movement in both 1948 and 1952 phases. As the President of the East Pakistan Arabic Association, he also campaigned for Arabic as one of national language but never favoured for writing Bengali in

Arabic script (The Muslim World, 1948). He also opposed the plan of central government for Arabization of Bengali script and called it an external aggression against Bengali language and culture. His vocal support for adopting Bengali as one of the state languages of Pakistan was crucial at that critical time when rulers were making false assumptions about the supporters of Bengali language. His overt and bold support for Bengali made it clear to the public as well as to the government that this demand was not instigated by the so-called 'fifth columnists' or imaginary 'enemies of Pakistan' (Kabir, 1980: 25-26).

Before independence, the Role of *Gono Azadi League* (Peoples Freedom League) was important for mobilizing the public support to make Bengali as one of the state languages of new country. GAL was formed by a small group of workers including some discontented Muslim Leaguers at Dhaka in July 1947 under the leadership of Kamruddin Ahmed, a well-known Bengali leader. He was one of the pioneers of the first phase of the Bengali language movement of 1948. He stressed that "Bangla will be our State language. All necessary steps need to be taken immediately for making Bangla language suitable for all parts of Pakistan. Bangla shall be the only official language of East Pakistan" (Umar, 2004: 28). Though the group was small in size yet it aroused the sentiments of progressive workers who played important role in the coming years for political development in East Pakistan. However, GAL could not become a political organization because government restricted its activities. In 1950, this organization was renamed as Civil Liberties League (Ibid: 29).

*Gonotantiric Jubo League* (Democratic Youth League) was established in July 1947 at Dhaka by students, political workers and non-communal and secular elements of the society. This organization played an important role in setting stage for the language movement. It decided to call a conference and adopted a draft manifest on August 5, 1947 in Dhaka. 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> September, 1947 was the date fixed for conference. The purpose of the conference was to design future course of actions through deliberations towards the protection and integrity of Bengali language and culture. It also stated that "the manifesto of Youth Organization has been prepared on the basis of democratic principle of economic, social, political and cultural improvement and development of the youths" (Manik, 1999). The conference was held but not a single newspaper reported it due to intervention of government agencies.

The government bitterly opposed to this conference and thought it a conspiracy against it. One of the professed resolutions of the conference was to urge the government to recognize the distinctive features of languages, literatures and cultures of various regions of Pakistan. The issue of regional autonomy was also on agenda. The DYL provided leadership for forging unity among the various pro-Bengali forces to build up a resistance against the imposition of Urdu. Government made sporadic attacks on organization along with repressive measures against its members in the name of eradication of "communism," but the dedicated workers of the DYL remained as vanguards in

both phases of 1948 and 1952 of Bengali language movement. In spite of initial enthusiasm, the organization did not make much headway and became practically defunct (Zaheer, 1994: 21).

## **Language Controversy after Independence of Pakistan**

The dynamic process of national integration, generated by the enthusiasm of a separate homeland, was disrupted by the language controversy only after three months of independence. It started from Pakistan Educational Conference, which was held at Karachi on November 1947. Fazlur Rehman, Bengali Minister of Education called this conference for introducing reforms in educational system and promotion of Islamic ideology. The conference also decided that Bengali would be dropped from all government stationeries, including money order forms, envelopes and postcards, which would be printed only in Urdu and English. Non-Bengali leaders of West Pakistan declared that Urdu had to be the national language of Pakistan (CALD, 1950: 367-78). This decision was opposed by the members of Tamaddun Majlis as well as others belonging to East Pakistan as they were attending the conference. Tamaddun Majlis was organized by professors and students of Dhaka University under the leadership of Professor Abul Kashem in September 1947. Abul Kashem was the first person to convene a literary meeting to discuss the issue of national language. In the coming days, many other non-communal and liberal organizations supported this issue which finally turned into a mass movement. Meanwhile, provocative speeches and statements of Fazlur Rahman, for adopting Urdu as the only state language, forced Majlis to make serious preparation for countering him on various forums (Haq, 1956:7-9). Sainik, the weekly organ of the Tamaddun Majlis, Muslim League's President Akram Khan's daily paper Azad and many other newspapers came out to support Bengali in spite of central government's opposition. The only opposing newspaper was the Daily Morning News (Umer, 2004: 31).

At that time only Urdu was being used in postal stamps and coins while Bengali was excluded even from the subject list of Public Service Commission Examination. For Pakistan Navy, Urdu and English were the recruitment languages. All this was sufficient to arouse the anti-Urdu sentiments in East Pakistan and protests began, not only in Dhaka but also all over the East Pakistan against language policy of the government (CAD, 1948).

Tamuddun Majlis issued a pamphlet on September 15, 1947 entitled "*Pakistaner Rashtra Bhasha: Bangla Na Urdu?*" (Pakistan's national Language: Bangla or Urdu?). This booklet was strongly advocated that Bengali had all the qualities to become the language of instruction in offices and courts of East Bengal. The gist of that demand is listed as follows:

*Mussarat Jabeen, Amir Ali Chandio & Zarina Qazim* **Language Controversy:**

1. Bengali will be:
  - a) The medium of instruction in East Pakistan;
  - b) The court language of East Pakistan;
  - c) The official language of East Pakistan.
2. Urdu and Bengali will be the two official languages of Central Government of Pakistan.
3.
  - a) Bengali will be the first language for the purpose of imparting education in East Pakistan which will be learnt by 100 percent of people;
  - b) Urdu may be treated as second language or inter-wing language in East Pakistan which can be taught as a second language to those people who will be working in West Pakistan. It will be more than adequate, if Urdu is learnt only by 5% to 10% of population of East Pakistan. Urdu may be taught in higher classes at the secondary school level in East Pakistan;
  - c) English will be the third or international language of East Pakistan.
4. Both English and Bengali will be used for few years as official languages in East Pakistan (Manik, 1999: 14; Umer, 1970).

The leftist youths and the dissidents of the ruling Muslim League party organized the "Workers Camp" in January 1948 at Dhaka. Their aim was to build resistance against the reactionary and anti-Bengali policies of Muslim League government. This Camp continued for seven days and criticized various anti-Bengali policies of the government. The organizers of the Camp were also vocal in articulating their demand for making Bengali as one of the national languages of Pakistan (A brief..., 2008). Another organization known as East Pakistan Students' League was also established on January 4, 1948 by a group of pro-Suharwardy Muslim students of the defunct All Bengal Muslim Students' League (ABMSL) to achieve the same agenda. They protested against anti-Bengali policies and postures of the government. It was noted that soon after its creation, EPSL played a crucial role in 1948 and 1952 phases of the Bengali Language movement (Ibid).

The first *Rastrabhasa Sangram Parishad* (Language Action Committee) was formed in December 1947. This platform provided the required organizational structure and support for launching and managing the language movement in later months of 1947 and early months of 1948. This committee attracted a large number of students and teachers from Dhaka University and other educational institutions. It discussed various aspects of the language issue and vehemently protested the conspiracy that had been hatched out by the 'Punjabi-Mohajir dominated Pakistani ruling elite' against the Bengali language and culture. Finally, in its meeting, a resolution for adopting Bengali as one of the state languages of Pakistan was proposed by Farid Ahmed, Vice President of Dhaka University Students Union (DUCSU) and this historic resolution was

unanimously approved by all those attending that meeting. The meeting was followed by student processions and more agitation (Manik, 1999).

## **First Constituent Assembly and Language Issue**

The first session of the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan began at Karachi, the then capital of Pakistan, on February 23, 1948. It was proposed that the members would have to speak either in Urdu or English the Assembly. Dhirendrana Datta, a member from East Pakistan Congress Party, tabled an amendment motion to include Bengali as one of the languages of the Constituent Assembly along with Urdu and English. He pointed out that “out of 69 Millions population of Pakistan, 44 Millions were from East Pakistan with Bangla as their mother tongue.” The central leaders, including Liaquat Ali Khan, Prime Minister of Pakistan and Khawajw Nazimuddin, Chief Minister of East Bengal, Ghaznafar Ali Khan and others opposed the motion in strong words. Liaquat Ali Khan strictly stressed on one nation, one state and one language policy and criticized Dhirendra Datta's amendment and said: "The object of this amendment [moved by Mr. Dhirendranath Datta] is to create a rift between the people of Pakistan. The objective of this amendment is to take away from the Mussalmans that unifying force that brings them together." At this point, Dhirendranath Datta protested on Liaquat Ali Khan's comments by saying: “Certainly not that is not the intention” (Ibid; Afzal, 1967).

After speeches of several members, Khawaja Nazimuddin came on the CAP floor and claimed that “Most of the inhabitants of East Pakistan think that Urdu should be adopted as the only state language of Pakistan.” He also said: "Sir, I feel it my duty to let the House know what the opinion of the overwhelming majority of the people of Eastern Pakistan over this question of Bengali language is. I think, there will be no contradiction, if I say that as far as inter-communication between the provinces and the centre is concerned, they [people of East Bengal] feel that Urdu is the only language that can be adopted [as the State language of Pakistan]. But there is a strong feeling that the medium of instruction should be Bengali in educational institutions and as far as the administration of the province is concerned.” He also referred Liaquat Ali Khan's statement that “there is no question of ousting Bengali from the province” (CAD, 1948). It was natural on his part as he belonged to an Urdu-speaking feudal family of the Nawabs of Dhaka and was unlettered in Bengali. Liaquat Ali Khan and other anti-Bengali members were challenged on the CAP floor by Hindu members who fully supported Dhirendranath Datta's historic amendment and vehemently defended the rightful place of Bengali on February 25, 1948 (Kabir, 1980: 24).

The language controversy reached on its climax when the news came that Bengali language was ousted from the Constituent Assembly, currency notes,



coins, stamps and the recruitment tests. A general strike was observed against the rejection of Bengali on March 11, 1948. The students of different areas also joined the strike enthusiastically. About fifty demonstrators were injured in a police baton-charged and a large number of students and political leaders were arrested. The situation grew worse in coming days and strikes were observed from 12<sup>th</sup> March to 15<sup>th</sup> March. This situation forced the Chief Minister Nazimuddin to change his viewpoint about calling this issue as Hindu-inspired act and he signed a seven-point agreement including release of all arrested people. He also promised that provincial assembly would adopt a resolution for making Bengali as the official language and medium of instruction at all stages of education (Afzal, 2001; Pakistan Observer, 1948).

Muhammad Ghulam Kabir noted that "Since the demand for Bengali was articulated in CAP and EBLA by Hindu members, the ruling party [Muslim League] tried to create the impression in the public mind that the language movement had been inspired by the hostile Hindu leaders of India". Even Dawn alleged that it (language movement) was due to the machinations of fifth columnists, in other words the Hindus. This was not true and Hindu leaders had little connection with it as Dhirendranath Dutta declared during the session of CAP on April 10, 1952 that 'the movement was nurtured by the Muslims and it was carried on by the Muslim alone unaided by anyone from outside' (Kabir, 1980: 167; Afzal, 1998: 167).

### **Visits of Quaid-e-Azam to East Pakistan**

Khwaja Nazimuddin made agreement under pressure of widespread agitation and the expected visit of Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the Governor General of Pakistan. The demand for making Bengali as state language was accepted by a resolution in the provincial assembly in the later years but the Centre was not moved (Dawn, April 5, 1952). It was expected that compromise between Nazimuddin and the leaders of Bengali language movement would subside protests and strikes and helpful in creating conducive environment during Quaid's tour of East Pakistan.

The students' protest continued during and after Jinnah's a week long visit to East Bengal in March 1948. In fact, the language issue got rekindled right after Jinnah had declared Urdu to be adopted as the only State language of Pakistan. In a public meeting at the Race Course Maidan on March 21, 1948, he said: "The State language of Pakistan is going to be Urdu and no other language." He left no doubt about his language policy when he repeated almost the similar message in his famous convocation address at the University of Dhaka, on March 24, 1948. Among many other comments and sermons, Quaid said: "Make no mistake about it. There can be only one State language, if the

## South Asian Studies 25 (1)

component parts of the State are to march forward in unison and that language, in my opinion, can only be Urdu" ( Jafri: 586-92).

Jinnah's categorical assertion in favor of Urdu was instantly protested by some of the students attending the convocation ceremony. Jinnah delivered a similar speech at Curzon Hall of the University of Dhaka on 24th March. At both meetings, Jinnah was interrupted by the large segments of the audience. He later held a meeting with committee of action and tried to persuade them of the necessity of having one national language but students were not convinced and Quaid overruled the contract that was signed by Khawaja Nazimuddin with the student leaders.( Al Helal, 2003: 263-265). Before departure from Dhaka on 28th March, Jinnah delivered a speech on radio reasserting his "Urdu-only" policy. However student rallies and protests erupted immediately after Jinnah's week long visit.

In fact, the language movement received wider support throughout East Pakistan after Jinnah's categorical assertions in favor of imposing Urdu as the only state language of Pakistan. The controversy temporarily cooled down after the visit but the issue remained unresolved. It seemed that Quaid was given one-sided briefing on the issue and half-truth was presented to him. The picture presented to him depicted that the demand for Bengali as State language was nothing more than a conspiracy of disgruntled leaders of the Muslim League, the Hindus, the communists and anti-Pakistan elements (Umar, 2004: 34). Time did not allow Quaid to apply his political wisdom to explore and resolve the issue, as he did in 1937. During a session of the All India Muslim League at Lucknow, a proposal was tabled for making Urdu as official language of the Muslim League in 1937 but it was strongly opposed by the Bengali delegates. Quaid intervened and final version of resolution carried that wherever the Urdu language was the language of area, its unhampered use and development should be upheld, and where it is not the predominance language, adequate arrangements should be made for teaching it as an optional subject (Sayeed, 1948: 210).

After Jinnah's death, Khwaja Nazimuddin became the governor general of Pakistan. His assumption of this office and occupation of this position was due to his life long collaboration with non-Bengali group of the Muslim League. His tenure was characterized by failures, conspiracies and timidity. It was noted that he followed those policies that were to survive in the power structure of Pakistani politics at any cost. He himself dealt with the committed pro-Bengali language activists and demonstrators as the Chief Minister of East Pakistan in 1948. But he did not take any bold step either to resolve or revisit the language issue and his government introduced reforms through a six years educational program for making Urdu as the State language and educational system on basis of Islamic Ideology. In his speech at Dhaka on January 27, 1952, he repeated Quaid's views to make Urdu as the lingua franca of Pakistan (Afzal, 2001: 100;

CAD, 1952: 31-32). His speech had negative reaction among the students who responded with the slogan of demanding Bengali as the state language.

## **Language Phase of 1952 and its Consequences**

In the beginning of 1952, the language controversy took a serious turn. Both Jinnah and Liaquat Ali Khan were no more in this world to resolve the issue and Khawaja Nazimuddin, who succeeded Liaquat Ali Khan as Prime Minister of Pakistan, was not in position to handle the issue properly. People of East Bengal were critical about the anti-Bengali policy of Punjabi and Mohajir dominated ruling class. With the political crisis, the economic condition in East Pakistan also deteriorated. People of East Pakistan started losing faith in Muslim League and a new political party was formed known as, Awami Muslim League with Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani, as its leader in 1949. Party later dropped the word Muslim to accommodate the other minorities and became Awami League (Salik, 1977: 217). This party exploited the growing sense of deprivation and exploitation in East Pakistan and attributed all this as a new form of colonialism that had replaced British imperialism. Under these circumstances, the Language controversy got a new momentum in 1952.

On January 1952, the Basic Principles Committee of the Constitution Assembly of Pakistan submitted its recommendation for making Urdu as the only state language, which sparked off a wave of anger in East Pakistan and protests erupted. The representatives of various political and cultural organizations held a meeting on 31st January, which was chaired by Maulana Bhashani. An All-Party Central Language Action Committee was formed with Kazi Ghulam Mahboob as its convener and Maulana Bhashani as its chairman. The Language Action Committee decided to call a strike and hold demonstrations and processions on February 21st throughout East Pakistan (Ziring, 1967: 129-39; Mahmood: 46; Choudhary, 1967: 54).

As preparations for demonstrations were underway, the government imposed Section 144 in the city of Dhaka, banning all assemblies, processions and demonstrations. Central Language Action Committee held a meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> February under the chairmanship of Abul Hashim to decide the strategy about the strike but opinion was divided about the violation of Section 144. However, the students were determined to violate Section 144 and held a meeting in this connection on 21<sup>st</sup> February at the University campus. During the meeting, the Vice-Chancellor and a few university teachers came and requested the students not to violate the ban on assembly. But the student leaders gave a deaf ear to this request. Thousands of students from different schools and colleges of Dhaka assembled at Dhaka University Campus and raised slogans. The armed police that was alert and waiting outside the gate started baton charge and even the female students were not spared. (Ziring, 1967: 129-39). Students responded the

## **South Asian Studies 25 (1)**

police action by throwing brick bats that was retaliated with firing tear gas shells. The situation was out of control and the police fired upon the crowd of agitated students, who were proceeding towards the Assembly Hall (at present, part of Jagannath Hall, University of Dhaka). Vice Chancellor asked the police to stop firing and ordered the students to leave the area but no party headed him. Police arrested several students for violating section 144. Enraged by the arrests, the students assembled around the legislative assembly and blocked the legislators' way, insisting them to present their demand at the assembly. Meanwhile, a group of students sought to storm into the building. Police opened fire and three students and two other persons were killed (Ibid). As the news of the killings spread, disorder erupted across the city. Shops, offices and public transport were shut down and a general strike began. Inside the provincial assembly, some legislators requested the chief minister Nurul Amin to visit wounded students in hospital and to adjourn the session as a sign of mourning. But Nurul Amin refuted the request. Several other members went out and joined the students. Nurul Amin continued his stance for opposing the demand for Bengali in assembly (A Brief...).

Next day, on 22<sup>nd</sup> February, the prayer for language victims turned out in a mourning procession and once again, public was demonstrated and police and army responded. It resulted in several deaths, including that of a young man, named Shafiur Rahman while many others were injured and arrested (Ibid). On 23<sup>rd</sup> February, a memorial was erected, at the spot where students had been killed. In 1963, this temporary structure was replaced by a concrete memorial, the *Shaheed Minar* (martyrs' memorial). This monument was constructed near Dhaka Medical College in the memory of the movement and its victims. Later this Minar became a sacred place for foreign visitors and diplomats (Salik, 1977: 217; Arif, 1999: 96). Since 1952, 21<sup>st</sup> February has been observed every year to commemorate the martyrs of the language movement. The recent declaration by UNESCO for declaring 21<sup>st</sup> February as the International Mother Language Day, is a clear recognition of the inspiring universal message of language movement. UNESCO adopted a resolution on November 17, 1999 to declare 21<sup>st</sup> February as International Mother Language Day. It is an honour bestowed by the international community on the language movement of the then East Pakistan and present day Bangladesh (International Mother..., 2007; Hilal, 1998; Dawn, 1953, February 21; Arif, 1999: 96).

## **Adoption of Bengali as State Language of Pakistan**

In 1956, the language movement achieved its goal and forced the constituent assembly to adopt both Bengali and Urdu as the State languages of Pakistan. Political tensions came ahead of elections of provincial assembly of East Bengal in 1954. Government wanted to ease the tension and Prime Minister Muhammad

Ali Bogra resolved the issue and gave official recognition to Bengali in a meeting of Muslim League's members of parliament (Afzal, 1998: 175). This decision was followed by a major wave of unrest as other ethnic groups sought the recognition of other regional languages. Supporters of Urdu such as Maulvi Abdul Haq condemned any proposal to grant official status to Bengali. He led a large rally of people to protest against Muslim League's decision (Haq, 1956).

After election, United Front came to power and the anniversary of language martyrs was observed on 21<sup>st</sup> February 1954 for the first time in an honourable manner and in peaceful atmosphere. Government supported a major project to construct a new *Shaheed Minar*. The session of the constituent assembly was stopped for five minutes to express condolence for the students slain in the police shootings. Major rallies were organised by Bengali leaders while all public offices and businesses remained closed (Dawn, February 21, 1956). Bengali was recognised as the second official language of Pakistan on February 29, 1956, and article 214(1) of the constitution of Pakistan mentioned as: "The state language of Pakistan shall be Urdu and Bengali" (Pasha, 1995:101).

Although the question of official languages was settled by 1956 but the Bengali complained about the military regime of Ayub Khan for promoting the interests of the Punjabi, Muhjir and Pashtun communities at the expense of the Bengalis. Despite forming the majority of the national population, the Bengali community remained under-representation in the civil and military services, and received less funding than other wing (Arif, 1999: 104). Consequently, sectional divisions grew which subsequently led to the Bangladesh Liberation War.

## **Impacts on Future: Grievances of East Pakistan and Creation of Bangladesh**

The language controversy catalysed the assertion of Bengali national identity in Pakistan and became a forerunner to Bengali nationalism, which invoked Six-Point movement of Awami League for greater autonomy and democracy (Salik, 1977: 225). One demand was to rename East Pakistan as Bangladesh (Land of Bengal), which subsequently led to the Bangladesh Liberation War. Language issue was no more in East Pakistan in 1971, as the constitution resolved it fifteen years back. Despite that language movement was considered to have laid the foundations for nationalism in East Pakistan, it also heightened the cultural animosity between the two wings of Pakistan. The language issue generated a much deeper seeded sentiment of hatred within East Pakistan, which extended into other issues such as those concerning economic discrimination and the increasing concentration of political power in the western segment of the country. Primarily, the two wings of Pakistan were separated by a territory of thousand miles and this distance enhanced differences in social, cultural and even in religious attitudes. In early years, Bengalis believed that their economic,

social and cultural aims are fit within the framework of a united Pakistan, but that illusion was soon to be shattered.

## **Economic Grievances of East Pakistan**

There was a growing sense of deprivation and exploitation in East Pakistan and a feeling prevailed that a new form of colonialism had replaced British imperialism. Language issue made people of Eastern wing to think on social, economic and political deprivation at the hands of the central government. They complained about unequal growth and development between both wings and the criticism was mostly directed towards Punjab and Sindh. East Pakistan, which accounted for 55% of the population and generated the bulk of foreign exchange earnings, received a much smaller share of government revenues (Afzal, 2001:108-09; Arif, 1999: 96). Per capita income in the West grew at an annual rate of 0.6%, during the fifties and at a much higher rate of 3.8% in the sixties, while in East Pakistan, it grew at a much slower rate in both decades. “Consequently, its per capita income dropped from 75% of the West’s in 1960 to 62% in 1970” (Peiris, 1998, January:12). Ayub Khan celebrated his ten years tenure as a ‘Decade of Development’ in 1968. This celebration was a slap on the face of East Pakistan. Ayub’s successor increased the share of development expenditures from 37% in the third five-year Plan to 52.5% in the fourth five-year Plan. But there were still great disparities in terms of resource allocation and sector wise expenditure. The economic prospects were at high considerations in East Pakistan, with its substantially higher population density, greater vulnerability to natural disasters, lower levels of productivity, income and consumption, the almost total absence of an industrial base and extreme backwardness in economic infrastructure (Ibid).

This discrimination and exploitation was discussed and examined in detail in scholarly writings of that time, which not only strengthened the feeling of hatred among masses but also highlighted the adverse effects on economy. According to Sisson and Rose: “The absence of cohesive national leadership and a consensus on constitutional norms made the political system susceptible to incursions of administrative and military power in decision making and to governmental instability.” It added: “Fragmentation of the political body and provincialization became permanent features of Pakistani politics that divided East and West” (Sisson and Rose, 1990: 9-6). Sobhan, a teacher of Dhaka University discussed unequal economic growth and development between the two wings. He pointed out that central government’s trade policies caused a considerable drain of income from the Eastern to the Western wing of the country and also noted that East Pakistan was generating about 60% of the country’s export earnings and in turn receiving only about 30% of the national imports. In addition, it was estimated that East Pakistan had been suffering from

a constant deficit in trade between the two wings since independence, which increased from an annual average of Rs. 162 million, in the early 1950s to about Rs. 425 million in the 1960s. Total amount of foreign aid received from 1948-49 to 1968-69 was of value about Rs. 61.6 billion, and East Pakistan got 31.4% only. Over this period, East Pakistan received about 30% of the total governmental expenditure (Sobhan, 1993:100). During Ayub Khan regime (1958-69), wealth was concentrated in a small group of West Pakistani entrepreneurs who came to constitute a politically powerful elite class (Ibid: 333).

Throughout 1950s and the 1960s, the discriminatory policies and practices damaged the pace of economic progress in East Pakistan, which not only increased disparities but also widened the gap between the two wings. Sobhan advocated in a seminar organized by the Bureau of National Reconstruction that two separate economic program should be framed, in which each wing was to control all income from regional and foreign sources and contribute its share to center for making of foreign affairs, general administration and defense. The central government paid no attention to this demand of articulating separate framework for East Pakistan's development planning (Ibid: 226). By early 1960s, the agitation for economic autonomy of East Pakistan had taken the form of earlier demand of language and absence in representation at decision-making levels of the central government also led to the separation of two wings. Disaster relief in times of natural calamity was also insufficient. More generally, it became apparent with the passage of time that macro-economic policies of the central government were not only discriminatory but also exploitative due to negative impact on economy of East Pakistan. Table is given below to show the expenditures of budget in both parts.

Year	Spending on West Pakistan (in Crore Rupees)	Spending on East Pakistan (in Crore Rupees)	Amount Spent on East as Percentage of West
1950-55	1,129	524	46.4
1955-60	1,655	524	31.7
1960-65	3,355	1,404	41.8
1965-70	5,195	2,141	41.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>11,334</b>	<b>4,593</b>	<b>40.5</b>
<b>Source:</b> Reports of the Advisory Panels for the fourth five-year plan 1970-75, Vol. I, published by the Planning Commission of Pakistan (Quick Reference: crore = 10 <sup>7</sup> , or 10 million)			

## **Political Differences between Two Wings**

Feelings of political deprivation also prevailed among the people of East Pakistan who felt they were ruled by West Pakistan in general and Punjab in particular as the political power remained firmly in the hands of Punjabis and Muhajir elite of the West Pakistan. Despite the numerical superiority, East Pakistan was not given its share in government due to the domination of old landlords and religious leaders, mainly from Punjab and Sindh in Muslim League, the ruling party (Salik, 1977: 7).

Due to increased hatred in East Pakistan for the central government, main political parties made coalition under the banner of 'United Front' in which Awami League and the Krishak Siramic Party were the principal partners. Leaders of these parties collaborated due to their grievances against the central government and mainly on matters regarding the national level. In spite of the domination, the Muslim League lost support in East Pakistan during the election of 1954 (Afzal, 2001: 197). At that time, the politics of Pakistan was dominated by two groups of parties, each of which was largely confined to one or the other wing. The formation of One Unit, which converted the whole West Pakistan in one province, generated the feeling of distrust in East Pakistan. It was seemed as a formula to change the straight forward system of population-based representation that maintain numerical superiority and allowed concentration of political power in East Pakistan. The decision to merge four provinces in One Unit was made without much consideration and implemented without adequate preparations. One Unit was seen as to counterbalance the votes of East Pakistan (Arif, 1999: 104). Yayha Khan inherited this formula by which East and West had equal numbers of seats in national assembly despite numerical superiority of Eastern Wing. Ironically, after the breaking of Pakistan and creation of Bangladesh, the province of Punjab insisted that party position now be decided on the basis of a straight forward vote, since Punjabis were more in number than the other ethnic groups, such as Sindhis, Pashtuns and Baloch (Ibid).

The overthrow of civilian rule in 1958 and the adoption of a new constitution formulated of Ayub Khan in 1962 intensified the ongoing marginalization of East Pakistan. New constitution made provision for a highly centralized form of government, vesting all powers to the president in regard to all legislation. It also placed the civil service and the military under the direct control of the president and curtailing the powers and functions of the provincial legislative assemblies (Anjum, 2003: 12). By the time, Awami League gained strength and popular support by merging smaller parties of East Pakistan. After the death of Suharwardy in 1963, the leadership of Awami League passed into the hands of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who played a different but decisive role.

Another factor that contributed to the intensification of resentment in East Pakistan was the rejection of those Bengali leaders for political appointment who had mass support. It had been pointed out that all East Pakistanis who were



given cabinet appointments in the centre and governorship of the province during Ayub regime was civil servants, pro-government journalists or defeated candidates of Muslim League in the provincial elections of 1954. During the military regimes of Ayub Khan, Bengali Muslims were excluded from important decision-making levels of the government (Peiris, 1998: 12).

## **Imbalance in Military and Civil Bureaucracy**

After the death of Liaquat Ali Khan in 1951, the head of state applied practice of concentration of power in his office with the support of civil and military bureaucracy. This happened due to absence of cohesive national leadership and a consensus on constitutional norms. All this resulted in a weak political system and increased role of administrative and military power in decision-making. The majority of senior bureaucrats was from West Wing who opposed to the decentralization of authority for reasons of self-interest and desire to retain power with themselves. This led to the instability and fragmentation of the political structure which generated sectionalism and parochialism that became permanent features of politics and led to the end of unity and breaking of two wings into separate states.

Bengali representation in Pakistan military was less than 2%. In 1965, officers of Bengali origin in the different wings of the armed forces made up just 5% of overall force. Of these, only a few were in commanding positions, with the majority in technical or administrative seats (Jahan, 1972: 25-26). It was believed that the Bengalis were not suitable for military as compared to Pashtuns and Punjabis. Moreover, despite huge defence spending, East Pakistan received none of the benefits, such as contracts, purchasing and military support jobs. Central bureaucracy was more than 80% composed of West Pakistan mostly from Punjab and Sindh. By 1969, only 3 Bengalis were in bureaucracy (out of 20) that reached at the rank of secretary in a ministry, and in the army (in which the Bengalis accounted for only 6% of the total manpower) there was only 1 Bengali out of 25 in the general officer rank (Ibid). This gesture of the central government for restricting the elevation of Bengali Muslims to the higher ranks of civil and military services was seen by the Bengalis as a denial of opportunities for upward social mobility through education.

The frustration among the Bengalis was further promoted by removal of the leaders belonging to East Pakistan. They noticed that whenever one of them, such as Khawaja Nazimuddin, Muhammad Ali Bogra or Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy became the Prime Ministers of Pakistan, they were swiftly deposed by the establishment, which was mainly from West Pakistan (Bangladesh Liberation...; Niazi, 34). Military dictatorships of Ayub Khan, which occupied power on October 27, 1958 and ended on March 25, 1969 intensified the situation, which was further enhanced by Yahya Khan who succeeded Ayub

Khan and remained in power till the breaking of Pakistan and creation of Bangladesh on December 20, 1971.

## **The Secessionist Movement and External Role**

Rise of Bangla nationalism and birth of Bangladesh were largely the of Pakistan's political instability and irresponsible attitude of ruling outcome the elite. At the same time, Indian role and policy were equally responsible for generating crisis in East Pakistan and it not only involved directly but also supported secession movement indirectly and gave enormous military aid to rebel groups on all process.

In 1970, Soviet Union was interested in establishing military bases in India, so it supported India on all issues and disputes including crisis in East Pakistan while the US continued diplomatic relations with India and Pakistan. Russians support emboldened India and it interrupted in domestic affairs of Pakistan, as there was already political instability in East Pakistan at the end of 1970. Ayub was replaced by Yahya Khan who assumed power on March 25, 1969 as an army chief and shortly there after imposed Martial Law and declared himself as Martial Law Administrator in a broadcast on 26 March. He said that he had no ambitions other than the creation of conditions conducive to the establishment of constitutional government. But on March 30, he declared himself as president of the nation and outlined his plan for transfer of power in shape of Legal Framework Order under which election of national Assembly were held (Pasha, 1995: 130).

Through LFO, Yahya Khan pledged to re-establish civilian rule in the country, set about the task of formulating a guidelines for the new constitution. The constitution itself was expected to be drafted by a national assembly formed on the basis of a country-wide election. Though the constitutional guidelines were announced in March 1970, yet another nine months were there before the promised elections, The delay was being caused by a series of natural disasters in East Pakistan. The results of the National Assembly's elections of December 1970 were not an emphatic confirmation of the fact that Pakistan was a single political entity. Yayha Khan conducted elections of the national assembly on 5<sup>th</sup> October and provincial assemblies on October 22, 1970. Election results upset the political estimates of the ruling elite, as Awami League led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman won 160 out of the 162 seats, by securing 75% of the popular vote. In West Pakistan, the victory of Pakistan People's Party led by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was almost equally important. It won 81 out of the total 138 National Assembly's seats allocated to this part of the country, which included 60 seats from Punjab, 18 from Sindh and only one from North West Frontier Province, Punjab and Sindh were centers of economic and political power (Niazi :117).

The result of the Election opened path for Awami League to command with an absolute majority in the National Assembly.

National assembly never undertook the task of drafting a constitution and indeed, never met, due to the intransigence of the two main leaders of victorious parties. Awami League remained firm on its stance and insisted on the strict adherence to the principles enunciated in its 'Six-Points.' On the other side, Bhutto was equally adamant in the assertion that his party had received an overwhelming mandate from the people of West Pakistan. He was not ready either to perform the role of opposition in the National Assembly or agreed to a constitutional arrangement, which secured the principle of territorial integrity of Pakistan. Yahya Khan, failed to end the stalemate. At the end of February 1971, Yahya Khan, apparently with the approval of Bhutto, initiated military action towards suppressing the oppositional forces of East Pakistan. The army operations took the form of suspension of all civil rights and brought arrest and imprisonment of many leaders of Awami League and used excessive force not merely against those engaged in violence but even on those politically active but nonviolent groups that were believed to be the supporters of Awami League. In March 1971, situation in East Pakistan became worst as winning parties were not ready to compromise on their interests. Mujib was determined to announce a unilateral declaration of independence for Bengal. Yahya Khan went to Dhaka to decide the fate of the assembly but talks failed (Choudhary, 1974: 153; Salik, 1977: 51-52). He acknowledged that there were disparities in growth and distribution of social income between two wings. But Mujib had other designs in mind. It is reported that he declared, he would tear LFO to pieces after the elections. India was ready to support him and he conspired against Pakistan and arranged Indian assistance for secession movement. G. W. Choudhary, a Bengali writer, wrote in his book "*Pakistan Transition from Military to Civil Rule*" that he had lengthy discussion with Mujib, which revealed that he was not interested in becoming prime minister of Pakistan. He was ambitious to become founder of Bangladesh and India was on his back. He entered in secret pact with India for secession of East Pakistan (Pasha, 1995: 131).

After the failure of talks, Mujibur Rahman delivered a speech on March 7, 1971 and said that "The Awami League was now engaged in a struggle for independence from aggression of West Pakistan." He urged his people "To turn every house into a fort of resistance." He closed his speech saying: "Our struggle is for freedom, our struggle is for our independence" (The New York Times, March 8, 1971 & Salik, 1977: 53). This speech is considered the main event that inspired Bengali people to fight for their independence. He also launched a strike and a campaign of non-cooperation, which involved a total stoppage of work in urban areas. The protest and demonstrations started along with sporadic violence. He issued orders of controlling the money transfer from East to West Pakistan and payment of taxes to pay to the provincial government only. The enforcement of all his directives was so effective that banks did not

## South Asian Studies 25 (1)

transfer even a single payment to West Pakistan for goods sent to them (Zindgi, 1971, March 24-April 4:12). Those who were the targets of this violence were sympathetic to the united Pakistan and were identified as collaborators of West Pakistan.

As the intensity of the conflict heightened, it brought increased loss of lives and the army offensive became more brutal. Indian aid strengthened the position of dissent political groups. Thousands of youth, trade union activists, university students and unemployed community joined the ranks of the insurgents, which integrated themselves in a loosely organized force of a liberation army known as Mukthi Bahini. The core of which consisted of several units of Bengali troops, which were once regular part of Pakistan army (T J S, 1971, April 24: 63; Niazi: 69-72). About Mukthi Bahini, it was believed that India was providing it clandestine support, which was in the form of training and weapons. For several years, the period leading up to the crisis, India had been played leading role in promoting crisis and intensifying the situation (Niazi: 69-73). In the later part of 1971, power of central government was largely confined to some of principal urban areas in East Pakistan, over which the army had regained its control. People of East Pakistan were expecting Indian military intervention, which was delayed due to fear of international reaction (Afzal 2001: 431). Mujibur Rahman made an Indian-based 'provisional government in exile,' which declared him as the president of the state of Bangladesh (The New York Times, April 18, 1971 & Afzal, 2001: 430).

In the changed position, the US did not take any posture and in this background, there was very little common stance between India and America about the crisis in East Pakistan. India continued to insist on a negotiated-agreement acceptable to the elected representative of East Bengal whereas US insisted on the idea of compromise between two wings within the existing political framework of Pakistan. India had no formula in its possession to place before Yahya Khan on the behalf of Mujib's party. Its spokesman categorically stated: "If the Sheik and his party wanted any political solution with the military authority of Pakistan, we will be happy. But the fact was that Sheikh and his party would not accept anything short of full political independent for their country." It was also noted that Bengali leaders rebuffed secret American efforts to encourage talks with Pakistan (The Times of India, November 9, 1971). US wanted to explore for something less than complete independent and asked to settle the issue with mutual consent of both the sides. The unfortunate part of crisis, were those refugees that were caught up in across fire between the gorillas and army and were unsecured. India wanted US to say something about the crimes of Pakistan military such as the looting and rape and other atrocities as well as rigging of the election that was aimed at deprivation of Awami League from its majority in assembly. Indian design was to absorb 10 million to its 500 million people. Some American sources observed that India was refusing to permit the refugees to return owing to the international aid that was coming due

to their presence (The Hindustan Times, October 20, 1971; Singh, 1985: 80). On Indian insistence, Mujib brought matter to the UN. US was not happy with Bengalis as they sent delegates to the UN and America refused to meet any member of the delegates. US informed India that Sheikh's safety could not be ensured unless Bengali leaders functioning from India's territory came to some settlement with Yahya Khan. Suggestion of a confederation or loose federation of both wings of Pakistan was also discussed but India considered it an attempt of blackmailing on American part and rejected this offer. US intelligence was sending reports that Indian Prime Minister was intended to launch a lightning Israeli-type attack but it was reported that Indian military leaders were against such vulture as they thought it too risky. They feared Chinese intervention, Iran's military aid to Pakistan and uncertainty of Soviet weapons supply. It was also reported that Indian commanders wanted to wait until November when weather in Himalaya would make the likely Chinese intervention more difficult (Singh, 1985: 83).

India was major actor in instigating and exploiting the internal situation of Eastern Wing. In the beginning, conflict was confined to a series of preliminary border, skirmishes between Indian and Pakistani troops. American President Nixon tried to work out a solution and talks were in progress for a political solution when Indian army attacked East Pakistan on 21<sup>st</sup> November and with the support of the Mukti Bahini, it made rapid headway against largely ineffective resistance of Pakistan; military. General Niazi, the Eastern Commander, went to US Consulate General on December 14 to send a message from the Consulate to Indian Army Chief, General Maneckshah for cease-fire to save innocent lives. Instead of sending this message to India, Consulate General sent it to Washington. General Niazi surrendered and Pakistan was broken away on December 16, 1971. Pakistan: military ultimately surrendered to Indian army on December 19, 1971 (Niazi: 223; Salik, 1977:106; Pasha, 1995: 132).

From the very beginning, India was in pursuit of leaders like Mujib Rehman, who appeared on the scene when Maulana Bhashani organized Awami League in 1949. He launched an attack against the concentration of power in a few West Pakistani elites and demanded nationalization of banks, insurance companies and jute trade. He was inclined towards India and was of the opinion that Pakistan belligerence had contributed to the difficulty of reaching an accommodation with India. Mujib felt that Kashmir issue had been unnecessary inflated in order to assist the army control on the political system (Pasha, 1995: 129). India extended all help to Mujib to turn the 'usurpers' out. On Indian realization, Bengalis thought that West Pakistanis were neo-colonists that were there only to loot and plunder and have no sympathy for the Bengalis. India played abominable role and made a mountain of mole hill, a self aggrandizement that destroyed unity. India never reconciled to the idea of partition and supported riots and demonstrations which became a regular feature. Bengali culture was close to Hindu culture and was antithesis of

## **South Asian Studies 25 (1)**

everything that could be called Pakistan. During Indo-Pakistan war of 1965, India deliberately kept itself away from East Pakistan and that part was not involved in war except a few dog-fights where India was the looser but East Pakistanis felt insecure about army doctrine that the defense of that wing was never put to test. This sense of insecurity was promoted by India and added another disparity in the long list Hindus were spreading disinformation and the Bengalis believed them. The Bengalis were parochial in their outlook and behaviour and this was further strengthened by India. A structural change was required to retain unity of the wings particularly during the time of Yahya Khan. This foundation was placed on rocks and there was need to re-seed and re-organize the ground. But this thought was not implemented as no one had the vision and courage to do so. Hindus took the opportunity and there were intrigues and conspiracies sponsored and added by them and the people like Mujib became willing tool in the hands of these conspirators (Pasha, 1995: 130). Withdrawal of the Indian army from Bangladesh had been completed by the end of March 1972. The landslide victory recorded by Awami League in national elections held in early 1973, winning 305 out of the total of 315 parliamentary seats, provided confirmation of the massive popular support which Mujibur Rahman and his party enjoyed.

### **End of National Consolidation**

Major-General Hakeem Qureshi (retired) has written in his book about the events of 1971 that “Pakistan could have been saved if the ruling elite had transferred power to the Awami League, which had won 160 of the 300 seats. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto whose People’s Party had won half as many seats as the Awami League, came up with the absurd proposal that power should be handed over to him in the Western Wing and to the Awami League in Eastern Wing.” Qureshi has also mentioned that over a tea party on March 23, 1971, the generals took a decision to launch a military operation that would “bring Awami League to its senses” (Bangladesh pedia). Operation launched in East Pakistan was designed to “restore the writ of the government” over 75 million Bengalis. Infact, Bhutto was the person who persuaded Yayha Khan to postpone the convening of the National Assembly. He also convinced the army that its budgetary authority and corporate interests would be compromised if Mujib come to power. Apparently Yayha Khan attempted to resolve the issue and made a visit to Dhaka on January 11, 1971 to persuade Mujib for making relaxation on Six Points. During the discussion, he raised no objection to any of the point rather just told him about the strong opposition of West Pakistan against Six Points. On returning from Dhaka, he conducted a meeting with Bhutto at his hometown, Larkana but it was fruitless too (Afzal, 2001: 409-10). The government tried to take all prominent Awami Leaguers into custody but

majority of them flee to India. However, army succeeded in capturing Mujib who was brought to West Pakistan (Ibid: 430). The conflict between East and West entered into decisive process and reached to final destination.

At the completion of the 'war of liberation,' Yahya Khan was deposed and the government in West Pakistan was taken over by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto who released Mujibur Rahman from prison and facilitated his return to Bangladesh. Mujibur arrived at Dhaka on January 10, 1972 and became Prime Minister of the newly created state (Dawn 1993, December 27; Niazi: 230-31). He began to work on constitution through the assembly, which consisted of persons who had won their respective constituencies in the elections of December 1970. Withdrawal of the Indian army from Bangladesh had been completed by the end of March 1972 (Khan, 2005: 59-69). In February 1974, Pakistan gave formal recognition to the independent status of Bangladesh and seven months later Bangladesh was admitted to membership of the United Nations (Ibid: 81).

## **Conclusion**

National language is supposed to unite a country but in Pakistan, the imposition of Urdu as national language has caused division and resentment between the two wings of the country. It is widely recognized that historic Bengali language movement in all its phases was, one of the most defining moments of Pakistan's history that led to the foundation of the language-based nationalism, which ultimately resulted in the emergence of today's independent Bangladesh. Two Nation Theory was the binding force between two parts where nothing was common in culture, except the religion and Muslim identity that was shared by the bulk of population in two wings. The oppressed people of East Bengal had joined Pakistan movement with the hope of achieving a better standard of living consequent upon the establishment of an independent state.

Pakistan was beset with significant inter-regional rivalries from the very beginning and the imposition of Urdu enhanced differences and people of East Pakistan became the language-activists and language-martyrs. This movement led them to think about the liberation from the subjugation of West Pakistan and laid down the foundation of separate homeland. Bengali was adopted as a national language in 1954 after inflicting a lot of damage. The worst on the government's part was to degrade and destroy the local languages and cultures in the name of national language. No doubt, language alone neither separates nor integrates a nation but lasting legacies of the Bengali language movement and the language martyrs have transcended the test of time.

Infact, the imposition of Urdu without much consideration was resented among many people of Pakistan and it was the biggest mistake to choose it as the national language of Pakistan with long-term negative consequences. Ignoring this issue with falsehoods and illusions brought the worst result. The

## **South Asian Studies 25 (1)**

language issue was one of the major causes for the loss of East Pakistan. There were language riots in Sindh during 1970s and it was argued that learning of Urdu is simply for social and economic communicational necessities under Urdu-dominated system of the country. Urdu has no basis in Pakistan prior to 1947 when it was declared as national language. The British colonialists applied this instrument to keep Indian Muslims away from the Muslim culture of Afghanistan, Iran or Central Asia. Persian was the language of the Muslim rulers and the British's recommendation of Urdu as the Court Vernacular was a conspiracy against Persian, that was official language of the Muslim rule and was the source of the union among the Muslim tribes of the adjoining areas.

The need of time is to give proper status and respect to all languages of Pakistan with a respect for Urdu and people should be given freedom to learn or speak it. Promotion of native languages is essential in their respective regions and it is the best solution to the problem. All native languages of Pakistan should be given liberty to flourish and this will ensure the preservation of our languages, culture, unity and pride by ensuring respect among the various ethnic and distinctive groups of Pakistani nationhood. Ethnicity has already divided the country. India got freedom at the same time and is an independent single nation state for nearly six decades having a dozen of developed languages and their own literature in separate regions that make the one Indian Union. Switzerland is a multi-lingual country and has a successful multi-linguistic system. There are other similar examples. If Pakistani leaders would have managed the conflicts without suppressing the public demand, the break up of the country could have been averted.

We need to introduce local languages through our educational system and younger generation should be taught at primary levels. For example, Sindhi's do not know Balochi and vice versa. However, it would take time but a positive change can be brought by applying this strategy. The hatred among different ethnic groups such as Urdu-speaking, Punjabis, Pathans, Balochis and Sindhis can be eliminated. Only language that stays forever is the language that masses adopt with their free will. In the countries like UK, USA or Canada, people speak and learn English without even going to school. Thus, knowing English in these countries does not make anyone elite. However, if language issue was not generated, India would have never got the opportunity to highlight other grievances and they would never come to the surface and there was nothing inevitable about the breakup of Pakistan. If it had not occurred, Pakistan would have been the world's largest Muslim democracy today and may be a big economic power of Asia.

## **References**

A brief history of the Bangladesh Language Movement. (2006). Retrieved on July 18, 2008, [www.virtualbangladesh.com](http://www.virtualbangladesh.com)



*Mussarat Jabeen, Amir Ali Chandio & Zarina Qazim Language Controversy:*

- Abdal-Haq, Maulvi. (1956). *Pakistan mein Urdu ka alamiyya*. Karachi.
- Afzal, M. Rafique. (1967). *Speeches and statements of Quaid-I-Millat Liaquat Ali Khan (1941-1951)*, Lahore.
- Afzal, M. Rafique. (1998). *Political parties in Pakistan 1947-1958*. Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research.
- Afzal, M. Rafique. (2001). *Pakistan: history and politics 1947-1971*. Karachi: Oxford University Press.
- Anjum, Wakeel. (2003). *Jamuriat, aamriat our Madry-e-Milat*. Lahore: Nazria Pakistan Foundation.
- Arif, K. M. *Khaki shadow: Pakistan*. Karachi: Oxford University Press.
- Bailey, T. Grahame. (2008). *A history of Urdu literature*. Karachi: Oxford University Press.
- Bangladesh Liberation War. (2006). Retrieved on July 18, 2008. [www.virtualbangladesh.com](http://www.virtualbangladesh.com)
- Bashir, Al-Hilal. (1998). *History of the Language Movement*. Dhaka.
- CAD*, (1952), Vol. 11, no. 3.
- CAD*. ( 1948, February 25). Vol., 2, no.2.
- CALD*. (1950, March 25). Vol, 1, No. 10.
- Choudhury, G. W. (1974). *The last days of united Pakistan*. London.
- Choudhury, G.W. (1967). *Documents and speeches on the constitution of Pakistan*, Dhaka.
- Dawn*, 1952, April 5.
- Dawn*, 1953, February 21.
- Dawn*, 1956, February 21.
- Dawn*, 1993, December 27.
- International Mother Language Day: background and adoption of the resolution. (2005). *Government of Bangladesh*. Retrieved on June 21, 2007. [www.virtualbangladesh.com](http://www.virtualbangladesh.com)
- Jafri, Rais Ahmed. (1967). *Khutbath-e-Quaid*. Lahore.
- Jahan, Ronaq. (1972). *Pakistan: failure in national integration*. New York: Colombia University Press.
- Kabir, Ghulam Muhammad. (1980). *Minority politics in Bangladesh (1947-71)*. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House.
- Khan, Asghar. (2005). *We've learn nothing from history: Pakistan, politics and military power*. Karachi: Oxford University Press.
- Language and Movement. (2004). *Bangla Pedia: The National Encyclopedia of Bangladesh, Asiatic Society of Bangladesh*. Retrieved on September 5, 2008. [www.bangladeshinc.com](http://www.bangladeshinc.com)
- Language problem in Pakistan, (2003). *Daily Azad*, 1947, July 29. *Bangla Pedia*, [www.bangladeshinc.com](http://www.bangladeshinc.com)
- Mahmood, Safdar. *A political study of Pakistan*. Lahore: Educational Book Company.
- Manik, M. Waheeduzzaman. (2003, April 4-6). "Martyr Dhirendranath Datta: My tribute to the forgotten Harbinger of the Bengali Language Movement," paper was presented at the 36<sup>th</sup> Bengal Studies Conference, Irving, Texas, Retrieved on September 12, 2008. [www.bangladeshinc.com](http://www.bangladeshinc.com)
- Mohsin, K. M. (2007). The language issue during the initial years of Pakistan, 1947-1956 in Bughio, M Q.(ed.). *Shaik Ayaz International conference on Language and literature*. Jamshoro: University of Sindh.
- New York Time*, 1971, March 8.
- Pasha, Ahmed Shuja. (1995). *Pakistan: A political studies*. Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications.
- Peiris, G. H. (1998). Political conflict in Bangladesh, *Ethnic Studies Report*, Vol. 16, No.1.

## South Asian Studies 25 (1)

- Quaid-i-Azam Mohamed Ali Jinnah: Speeches as Governor General of Pakistan, 1947-48, Karachi.
- Salik, Siddiq. (1997). *Witness to surrender*. Karachi: Oxford University Press.
- Sayeed, Khalid Bin. (1968). *Pakistan: the formative phase* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Karachi.
- Should Urdu continue as our national language, (2004). *Bangla Pedia*, www.bangladeshinc.com.
- Singh, Rajvir. (1985). *US-Pakistan and India: strategic relations*. New Delhi.
- Sisson, Richard and Rose, Leo E. (1990). *Pakistan, India and the creation of Bangladesh*. New Delhi: Vikas Publishers.
- Sobhan, Rehman. (1993). *Bangladesh: Problems of Governance*. New Delhi: Konark Publishers.
- T. J. S. 1971, April 24. "The cross of Bengal." *FEER*.  
*The Hindustan Times*, October 20, 1971  
*The Muslim World*, 1948, January 1, Vol. 38.
- Umar, Badruddin. (2004). *The emergence of Bangladesh: Class struggle in East Pakistan*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Umer, Badruddin. (1972). *Purba Banglar bhasha*. (Bengali version of pamphlet) Dhaka: Mowla Brothers.
- Zaheer, Hassan. (1994). *The separation of East Pakistan: The rise and realization of Bengali Muslim nationalism*. Karachi: Oxford University Press.
- Zindgi*, 1971, March 29 to April 4.
- Ziring, Lawrence. (1971). *The Ayub Khan era: Politics of Pakistan, 1958-1969*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.

## Biographical Notes

**Mussarat Jabeen** is working as Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science & International Relations, University of Sargodha, Sargodha.

**Dr. Amir Ali Chandio** is working as Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Shah Abdul Latif University, Khairpur, Sindh.

**Zarina Qasim** is Lecturer in the Department of English, University of Sargodha, Sargodha.

---