

Ideological, Cultural, Organisational and Economic Origins of Bengali Separatist Movement

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Abstract

Pakistan was bifurcated and Bangladesh emerged as a sovereign state in 1971 after the culmination of a separatist movement that was raised on the basis of Bengali nationalism claimed on ethnic and cultural grounds. Since the pronounced demand as well as well-defined goal of the movement changed from autonomy to the separation only after Pakistan Army's action on 25th March 1971 and also Awami League (AL) and Mujibur Rehman, the party and leader that spearheaded the separatist movement, got prominence as separatists after Agartala Conspiracy Case in 1966 the time and events of the origin of the Bengali Movement need to be looked for. This paper highlights the ideological origins of Bengali separatism even before the partition of India in 1947. It also finds out the early organisations which, when got matured in later decades, became instrumental in promotion of the Bengali separatist movement. The paper then examines the development which for the first time generated the cultural and lingual feelings as well as economic grievances that nurtured the Bengali separatist movement. Therefore main research question of the paper is when and how the Bengali Movement started.

Keywords: Nationalism, separatism, two-nation, agartala, identity

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Origins of Idea for Bengali Separatism

The idea of separatism in East Bengal originated in various proposals for different Muslim states in sub-continent, thus initiating a challenge of separatism even before the birth of Pakistan in 1947. Though it does not mean that the Bengalis were separatists in very start yet the broken threads of these preliminary proposals and ideas were later joined in order to make the ideological foundation of the separatism in Pakistan. The activists of the Bengali separatism afterwards took the points from such views in order to justify their claims for a separate Bengali identity. In the start these voices of the activists were weak and less important but with the passage of time they got momentum and gathered strong support of political parties as well as masses.

Various schemes of the partition of India in thirties and early forties could become sources of ideological foundations for any regional separatist tendency. It was this because the partition of India was not viewed by many as the division of India into only two Hindu and Muslim states but there were strong opinions that India must be partitioned into more than two states, even though the cause of the partition was definitely two-nation theory. Rahmat Ali, the famous originator of word Pakistan, referred to Bengal, Pakistan and Usmanistan as three independent states and suggested an alliance amongst them. Likewise, El Hamza, a Muslim writer, conceived of two predominantly Muslim areas in undivided India, one in the North-West and other in the North-East. Again Jamil-ud-Din Ahmed, a member of the All India Muslim League (AIML) and a lecturer in Aligarh University, considered the recognition and fulfilment of the Muslim demand for two independent Muslim states in the North-Western and North-Eastern regions of India (Ahmad J.-u.-D. , 1941, p. 88). Moreover there was proposal of two professors of Aligarh University Dr Syed Zafarul Hasan and Dr Afzal Qadri for division of British India into three independent sovereign states _ two Muslim states of north-west India and Bengal, and one Hindu state. Then in 1939, Nawab Shah Nawaz of Mamdot, President of the Punjab ML published his scheme for the division of India into five countries, linked in a confederation (Sayeed, 1960, p. 119).

These scholarly or individual ideas might not get substance for diversionist ideas in Pakistan if there were not strong voices and debates within the higher organs of All India Muslim League (AIML), the torch-bearer of demands of Muslims for separate homeland for them. In a committee, appointed by the Working committee of AIML on March 26, 1939 to make consensus on various schemes of partition of India already propounded, Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan envisaged an All-India federation of

seven zones while Sir Abdullah Haroon proposed a division of India into two separate federations. The Muslim federation was to comprise the north-western part of India and Kashmir only. None of the schemes which recommended separate Muslim Federation or Federations visualized a federation embracing both North-Western India and Bengal as Pakistan turned out to be. These proceedings could yet be meaningless to formulate an obvious ideological foundation for divisionism in Pakistan but the Lahore Resolution of 1940 provided a source which became a corner stone in ideological framework of separatism and regionalism in Pakistan later on. Its saying that the 'North Western and the Eastern Zones of India should be grouped to constitute Independent States in which the constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign' could be interpreted to mean that there was demand of two independent states for Muslims. (Pirzada, 1990, pp. 118-25)

Though there appeared a controversy, which still exists, on the claim that the resolution envisaged two separate independent states and had set out the extent of provincial autonomy within them (Chowdhury, 2005, p. 225) the activists for regionalism in East Pakistan succeeded to trace the elements from the Lahore Resolution to form a foundation for the framework of their ideas. Kamruddin Ahmad, whose book played an important role in propagation and formulation of Bengali separatism during sixties (Zaheer, 1994, p. 5) argued that Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy who was representing Bengal in the meeting of Subjects Committee, which was formed to draft Lahore Resolution, opposed any idea of a separate homeland but argued that each of the provinces in Muslim majority areas should be accepted as sovereign state and each province should be given the right to choose its future Constitution or enter into a commonwealth with a neighbouring province or provinces. (Ahmad K. , 1970, pp. 45-46) This view point of Suhrawardy and initial draft of Sikandar Hayat, which suggested the dominion status for provinces and defence, foreign relations and communications for the federal government thus proposing a confederation based on maximum provincial autonomy, influenced the wordings of Lahore Resolution so much that even after a number of modifications in initial draft made by the subject committee the resolution did not clearly demand one state for Muslims of Sub-continent. Sikandar mentioned this in his speech in Punjab Legislative Assembly on March 11, 1941 (Malik, 1985, p. 95).

The Bengali regionalist point of view got more support from the proceedings of the Madras Session of AIML held in April 1941, where the word 'states' was not corrected with the word 'state' and the word 'together' was added after the word 'grouped' in the Lahore Resolution that, after the amendment, read "the North-Western and Eastern zones of India shall be grouped together to constitute

‘Independent States’ (Pirzada, 1990, p. lxx). The concept of more than one states was so prevalent in the Muslim circles that the rules and constitution of AIML 1946 prescribed first of the aims of party as “the establishment of completely independent states” (Constitution and Rules of AIML 1946, 2007). Again the resolution passed by Sindh Legislative in support of Pakistan in March 1943 asked for the Muslims to have independent National States of their own, carved in the zones where they are in majority in the sub continent (Sayeed, 1960, pp. 118-25).

These somewhat vague concepts and ideas took concrete and material form in 1946 when Abul Hashim, a famous AIML leader from Bengal, in the Subjects Committee of Muslim Legislators Convention on 8 April 1946, made a passionate plea in favour of creating a separate Muslim state of East Bengal (Sayeed, 1960, pp. 118-25). Though Abul Hashim succeeded only in getting the words ‘one state’ changed into ‘a state’ in the resolution and apparently withdrew from this strong stand in the later proceedings (Dil, 2000, p. 288) he initiated an argument in support of Bengali state by saying that the demand of one state for Muslims of India looked like an amendment of the Lahore Resolution of 1940. He argued for a separate independent state in the north-eastern zone, as a state with two distant zones, separated by a hostile country, could not be viable proposition; its defense would be impossible and two such zones could never be integrated into a whole (Pirzada, 1990, p. xxxiii) (Ahmad K. , 1970, p. 73) (Sayeed, 1960, p. 116) (Zaheer, 1994, p. 9).

The Efforts for the United Bengal

Second side of Bengali ethnic ideology was the affiliation of East Bengalis with other part of Bengal, West Bengal, on the grounds of economy or region and not religion. This could prevent the division of Bengal and thus preserve the Bengali ethnicity. Dreaming for the united Bengal a certain group of the Bengal Muslim leaders, called by Calcutta District ML in a memorandum to Jinnah as the Unionists, led by Suhrawardy and Abul Hashim, wanted to keep Bengal united. (Zaheer, 1994, p. 11) Press Statement of H. S. Suhrawardy, Chief Minister of Bengal on 27 April 1947 in New Delhi mentions that in February to May 1947, Abul Hashim and Suhrawardy discussed with Sarat Chandra Bose, a Bengali Congress leader, plans for mobilizing a movement for Sovereign Bengal and frantically tried to work out an agreement with the Congress leaders, and Hindus for a united Bengal. During these days Suhrawardy had said, ‘that he had visualized Bengal all along as a sovereign Independent state and not a part of any Union.’ (Rahman H. H., 1982, p. 24)

The thoughts and assumptions for two or more Muslim states in India, the demand for autonomous, and in some cases separate, Bengali state and the efforts for establishment of united Bengal provided an ideological base for the Separatist Movement in East Pakistan. These elements founded a great and unique challenge for the founding leaders of Pakistan who wanted the unity of Muslim majority areas. The foundation of Pakistan had provided them a great chance to unite the Muslims of Sub-Continent in one nation state. However the seeds of separatism had taken birth even before the birth of Pakistan. Bengali elements were not as strong in the start as Muslims of Sub-Continent had achieved a great success against their opponents in form of Pakistan and public was jubilant on the success.

Early dissatisfaction of Bengalis from economic and administrative conditions in Pakistan was highlighted almost immediately after independence. As early as 9 September, 1947 *Dawn* reported disturbance in Bengal on the appointment of a young professor as the secretary of Public Service Commission (PSC), only because of being a non Bengali. Thenon Bengali authorities instead of doing something to remove the doubts of local people were increasing the sense of unfamiliarity of Bengalis by keeping themselves apart from them.

The Finance Minister of Pakistan, Ghulam Muhammad, (1947)reported in December 1947 that judging from the reports, official and non-official, the attitude of Bengalis was not very friendly towards non Bengalis. Yet the feeling had not affected the general mass of population. There was still a gigantic reservoir of goodwill and friendliness among Muslim masses and intelligentsia towards their brethren from outside Bengal.(Chaudhry A. M., 1947)Because of this dissatisfaction and on the grounds of above mentioned ideology the Bengali nationalist elements, started to form different organisations, which in the later stages led the activities that turned into a movement for the separate state of Bangladesh. As happens in the formation of a movement, in start and in some cases even up to the end, any organised body is not essential. Therefore for a long period Bengali nationalist movement travelled on the vehicles of different organisations in place of one specific organisation.

Initial Bengali Organizations for Economic, Educational and Political Progress of East Bengal:

These organisations for Bengali Movement were not built under the auspices of two main political parties of newly born Pakistan; Pakistan Muslim League (PML) and Congress. The ruling PML, as was natural could not support any development in the political field which could change status quo while Congress, having changed into party of minority Hindus and having cut from the Indian Bengal Provincial Congress,

was limited to only within the East Pakistan Legislative Assembly and despite having ideological affiliation with Bengali Movement could not actively support it.

The third main political party, East Pakistan Communist Party (EPCP), despite having been stronger in United Bengal in the past, in 1947, faced a serious crisis owing to large-scale migration of party members and active workers to India, and very low membership of Muslims (only 5% of the total), (Umar, 2004, p. 47)(Zaheer, 1994, p. 16) which was majority community in East Pakistan now. Therefore EPCP pursued a policy of cooperation with the initial governments of Pakistan. Later activities like a publicity campaign in Dhaka against Pakistan's economic policy through leaflets urging Muslims and Hindus to unite in a campaign of open defiance,(UKHC K. , 1948) a police strike in July 48,(OPDOM No. 60 , 1948) organization of a peasant movement,(Polonskaya, 1964, pp. 143-45) armed conflicts with government in Sylhet and a railway strike on 9 March 1949 led the party and its organisations to be suppressed. Ultimately the EPCP devised the policy to work in other, non-Communist front organizations,(Umar, 2004, p. 60)(Jahan, 1972, p. 41) thus became unable to support the Bengali ethnic movement directly in spite of having strong links with it through common ideas like re-union of East and West Bengal, the emphasis on Bengali culture and the socialism.

Finding no suitable political party to represent the Bengali ethnic ideas, therefore, the former members of EPCP, the dissident PML workers and students organised themselves in organizations which embodied the Bengali ethnicity and later worked as the separatist movement's tools. The activities of these semi-political organisations posed initial challenge for Pakistani leadership and formed the first and initial period of the Bengali Movement.

The first of these organizations was East Pakistan's Freedom League (*Gono Azadi League*), which was formed in a meeting of dissident PML workers and intelligentsia in Dhaka in July 1947 with a programme of economic emancipation.(Zaheer, 1994, p. 14) The Freedom League, with the cooperation of other progressive student-workers like Mohammad Toaha, Oli Ahad, Najmul Karim, Aziz Ahmad, Tassadduq Ahmad and Tajuddin Ahmad,(Dil, 2000, p. 443)(Umar, 2004, p. 29) was expanded, at the end of a two-day workers conference on 7th September 1947, to form a Democratic Youth League. Its mission was to work for the economic, political and educational progress of East Bengal without any discrimination of creed.(Gupta, 1963, p. 29)(Chaudhry Z. , 2005, p. 32) The importance of the organisation can be assessed by looking at the names of its founder-workers who latter on became leaders of Bengali Movement.

Democratic Youth League brought out a few issues of a bulletin titled *Democratic Youth League* edited by Akhlaqur Rahman and Aatur Rahman. Though the decision to hold an enlarged conference after six months could not be implemented yet a public meeting was held on 23 September 1947 in Dhaka, which was attended by almost ten thousand youth. The gathering pledged to struggle against the traitors of the society who were responsible for the hunger, nakedness, illiteracy and diseases of the people.(Dawn, 1947)(Chaudhry Z. , 2005, p. 32) In next September, a youth conference under this organisation was held in Ishurdi in which along with a number of resolutions, a resolution for making Bengali the medium of instruction and official language was also adopted.(Umar, 2004, p. 31) Youth League, in order to increase Bengali cultural consciousness, organized functions on the occasions like Bengali New Year's Day, birth and death anniversaries of a famous Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore.(Maniruzzaman, 1975, p. 7)It remained active in a gitational politics in East Pakistan as a communist front organization until it was liquidated by the government.(Ahmad K. , 1970, pp. 106-07)(Zaheer, 1994, p. 14)

The second important organisation which started to work for the Bengali ethnic Movement was a student organization 'Muslim Students' League'. On January 4, 1948 its name was changed into a non communal the East Pakistan Students' League. Nazrul Islam and Umar call it the first student organization which afterwards led the Bengali language movement and started a movement demanding maximum provincial autonomy. They were the senior members of Muslim Students' League and the discontented factions of the ruling ML who later merged to a new political party afterwards named Awami Muslim League (AML) which carried on the banner of Bengali nationalism until the emergence of Bangladesh. The manifesto of the organization covered economic, educational and cultural issues of East Pakistan and made long references to government repression, imperialist wars, and political use of religion by the ruling class and the government.(Umar, 2004, pp. 176-83)(Islam, 1990, p. 120) Another 'Democratic Youth Federation' was formed in Mymensingh. It had to be closed down in six months as almost all who were connected with it were arrested and accused of subversive activities.(Gupta, 1963, p. 29)

In order to develop and preserve the Bengali cultural identity specially Bengali language through countering the activities of *Anjuman-i-Urdu*, that was functioning for the adoption of Urdu as state language, the professors and students of Dhaka University on the instigation of Professor Mutahir Hussain, Abul Mansur Ahmad and Professor Abul Kasem, founded on 1st September 1947, a militant cultural body called the 'Tamaddun Majlis'. On its initiative the first language action committee was organized at the end of 1947.The weekly organ of the Majlis, *Sainik*, along with weekly *Naobelal* (Sylhet), took a very firm stand in favour of Bengali language.(Chaudhry Z. , 2005, p. 31)(Umar, 2004, p. 31)(Afzal, 2002, p. 166)

The smaller youth, student and cultural organisations existed but they did not fill the gap in political field and the Bengali Movement still lacked a coherent political platform. In order to fill the political vacuum for the Bengali interests, on 23 June 1949, in a convention of political workers, attended by Bhashani, Fazlul Huq and other PML dissidents, a new party called East Pakistan AML was formed.(Zaheer, 1994, p. 19)K. K. Aziz (1976) writes that AL was founded on 17 June 1949, in a public meeting presided over by Allama Raghīb Ahsan, while M. Rafique Afzal,(2002)writes 'this party had been set up by former Muslim Leaguers in the course of a convention of political workers on June 24, 1949, attended by Bengal notables like Fazl-ul-Huq presided over by Ata-ur-Rehman. Maulana Bhashani was its founder-President, Ataur Rahman Khan, Absus Salam Khan, Abul Mansur Ahmed were elected Vice-Presidents, Shamsul Haq was elected General Secretary, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Rafiqul Ahsan and Khnadakar Mushtaque Ahmed were elected Joint Secretaries.(Bhuiyan, 1982, p. 22)

Next day the new party organized its first public meeting, at the Armanitola Maidan at Dhaka, attended by 4000 people.(Umar, 2004, p. 110) It was the first Muslim opposition party in East Pakistan which brought many dissatisfied and dissident factions from ruling PML under one platform.(Bhuiyan, 1982, p. 23)The EPCP also attempted to use the AML as a cover organisation for political activity as a part of its policy of supporting dissident movements.(UKHC D. D., 1951)

AML's 42 point manifesto covered all of the aspirations of Bengalis, including nationalization of the jute trade, the elevation of Bengali as one of the state language, the holding of general elections on the basis of adult franchise, and most of all provincial autonomy in accordance with the provisions of the Lahore Resolution leaving defence, foreign affairs, currency and coinage with the Federal Government. Initially the AML arranged demonstrations around issues such as food shortages, the restoration of civil liberties and economic crisis.(Afzal, 2002, p. 154) These issues gained quick support of the Bengali middle class and the AML's base of support began to spread throughout the villages of East Pakistan.(Islam, 1990, p. 120)Bhashani and other party leaders undertook mass contact tours, delivering inflammatory speeches against the government's policies.(Salamat, 1992, p. 116)

Since start AML bent towards secular ideology in opposition to religious outlook of PML. Though the word 'Muslim' was dropped from its name 'Awami Muslim League' in October 1955, yet in 1948 there was a strong group in AML consisted of a large number of mostly young and secular members like Mohammad Toaha and Oli Ahad who opposed 'communal nomenclature' and demanded a complete secular policy for party.(Bhuiyan, 1982, p. 23) The name was changed late because of the considerable presence of non-secular elements in party in start.

Building of Linguo-Cultural Movement

The BhashaOndolan, the movement which campaigned for the use of Bengali in the domain of power in East Bengal and fought to make it one of the official languages of the state, alongside Urdu, was not merely, or predominantly, a linguistic one, it was a political campaign of the greatest significance for the new state. It was in fact East Bengal's first challenge to the hegemony of the Urdu speaking Bengali aristocracy and West Pakistani ruling elite.(Rahman T. , 1996, p. 79)

First Bengali Language Agitation:

Often the incidents arose from language controversy are studied under the head of language movement. When we study Bengali Movement as a whole these incidents appear a minor part of a broader movement. Therefore we call them agitation and not movement. Bengali nationalist movement was originated from the attempts for preservation of a cultural element; the Bengali language. In the days when the Bengali organisations were formed the most burning issue that vexed the Bengali mind and created one of the first tests for Pakistani leadership in the context of East Pakistan was the question of national language of Pakistan. The discontent that it generated and the protest that followed over it were the first signs of Bengali Nationalism. It brought the various discontented groups together and contributed to bridging the gap between the nationalist intellectuals and the masses.(Das, 1981, p. 91)

Educational Conference as Cradle of Language Controversy

The first signs of the Bengali disapproval of Urdu as the only national language, which was supported by ruling PML leaders, appeared in the Pakistan Educational Conference called by the Central Minister of Education at Karachi in November 1947. The Bengali representatives opposed Urdu as the only national language. These signs of opposition to Urdu and support to Bengali did not take long to appear on the streets. Writers such as Hasan Zaheer conventionally link the language agitation to the 1948 demonstrations,(Zaheer, 1994, p. 21) notwithstanding Tariq Rahman, on the reference of Badruddin Umar, maintains that first meeting of the students for Bengali language was held on 6 December 1947.(Rahman T. , 1996, p. 85)

However the very first demonstrations supporting Bengali language started in fact on December 12, 1947 after some minor political leaders, one of whom was connected with National Guards of PML, in a fairly large gathering at Dhaka announced in the name of Government that a meeting would be held to support the adoption of Urdu as the State language for Pakistan. This announcement caused immediate resentment among the pro-Bengali elements and a fight started in which twenty persons were injured. Consequently a fairly large crowd of student-demonstrators proceeded to the Secretariat and eventually broke into its compound. On the intervention of two provincial ministers the demonstrators demanded them to resign and roughly handled them. Eventually after a harmless raid on the office of Finance Minister the crowd dispersed in the evening. This incident resulted in processions, demonstrations, smaller meetings and strikes in all educational institutions of Dhaka next day when troops were ordered out and section 144 was enforced for 15 days.(Officiating Deputy HC UK in Dhaka , 1947)

The next activity in support of Bengali language, which a number of writers also deem as the start of the language controversy,(Akanda, 1976) took place in reaction to the declaration of Urdu as the national language on 25 February 1948.(Government of Pakistan, 1998, p. 35) and the rejection of a motion of a Bengali Hindu member of CAP Dhirendranath Datta, in the first session of the CAP on 23 February 1948, to allow Bengali to be used in the Assembly along with Urdu.(Mahmood, 1989, p. 8) Speeches in the assembly revealed resentment at alleged step-motherly treatment of Eastern Bengal.(OPDOM No. 17, 26 February to 3 March, 1948) On 24th February a protest strike was organized in Dhaka. The students of Dhaka University, various other schools and colleges demonstrated and denounced the language policy of government. An all-party committee entitled the State Language Committee of Action (SLCA) was set up with the objective of achieving national status for Bengali. The committee representing all shades of opinion leftists, rightists, and centrists was constituted of two representatives each from the Gono Azadi League, Democratic Youth League, Tamaddun Majlis, Dhaka University Halls as well as the East Pakistan Muslim Students League. The SLCA resolved to protest a general strike, all over East Bengal on 11 March.(Zaheer, 1994, pp. 21-22)(Umar, 2004, p. 32)

From March 11 to March 15 the support of Bengali language invoked the disturbances in East Pakistan. Baton-charge on student demonstration on 11 March resulted into the injuries to prominent political and student leaders like Fazlul Huq, Shamsul Huq, O1i Ahad and Sheikh Mujib. In protest to the arrests, ban on papers *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, and *Swadhinata* and police repression, students all over East

Bengal went on strike and demonstrations took place in Dhaka from 13 to 15 March while general strike call was called by the SLCA for 15 March. On 16 March the police opened fire, used tear gas and made lathi charges on student demonstrators at the gate of East Bengal Assembly. About 15 students were injured not having bullet injury. (Civil & Military Gazette, 1948)

The disturbance was eased and agitation for Bengali language was, to a large extent silenced due to a compromise between the SLCA and government of East Pakistan on 15 March. After this compromise, Language Agitation could not maintain its momentum and cooled down (Zaheer, 1994, p. 22) The sporadic protests made from among the crowd during Jinnah's speech in race course maidan Dhaka on 21 March as well as during his speech at the Dhaka University Special Convocation and demands for Bengali language during Jinnah's meeting with SLCA on 24 March (Umar, 2004, p. 34) buried down either under the weight of Jinnah's personality (Mirza, 1989, p. 5) or in the wait of the fruits of the agreement of 15 March. However, the agitation though was short-lived, showed for the first time the strength of the students, the main spokesmen for the Bengali interests. "It helped foster a kind of linguistic nationalism in East Pakistan. It made the students a potent political force and set the pattern of student-literati-professional alliance which was used successfully in all subsequent agitations. Above all, it supplied a universally popular issue, a cause under which all Bengalis could unite, a cause which helped bridge the elite-mass gap." (Jahan, 1972, p. 43)

The 2nd Language Agitation:

That is why after four years the language controversy stirred more vehemently the political and social life of East Pakistan and strengthened the Bengali Movement in unprecedented way during the second series of agitations on lingual grounds. On 28 January 1952, the day following PM Nazimuddin's statement in a public meeting against Bengali as the national language, the students of Dhaka University, in a protest meeting, attacked the PM, the Chief Minister (CM) and the provincial ministers as stooges of West Pakistan. They accused the PM of going back on the agreement of 1948, and the following day (Zaheer, 1994, pp. 24-25) a forty-member All-party National Language Action Committee, convened by Kazi Ghulam Mahmood comprising the political leaders, intellectuals and students representing Youth League, East Pakistan Muslim Students League, Dhaka University SLCA, EPAML, Tamaddun Majlis, All East Pakistan Students League, Islamic Brotherhood, East Pakistan Mohajir Society and various schools and colleges (Umar, 2004, pp. 192-93) was formed and urged the people to continue the agitation until their demand was

accepted.(Islam, 1990, p. 116) From 30 January, 1952 a series of strikes was called in the university and colleges and processions were taken out in Dhaka. The Urdu-speaking students did not join the boycott of classes which resulted in ethnic clashes on the campuses.

This time Bengali parties and leaders decided to give the lead to the agitation. According to intelligence reports, in a secret meeting called by the AML on 30 January, 1952 which was attended by a communist front as well as other organizations it was decided that the leadership of the movement should be assumed by the AML under Bhashani. An all-party convention was held in Dhaka on 31 January, 1952 presided over by Bhashani and attended by prominent leaders like Abul Hashim and Hamidul Huq Chowdhury.

Educational Institutions Strike for Bengali Language

The Committee of Action, in its meeting on 3 February, 1952 on the suggestion of Abul Hashim decided to call province-wide strike on 21 February (Ekushe). The entire province was in a state of uprising against the Central and East Pakistan governments. The intelligence agencies reported in full the militant build-up of the agitation.(Zaheer, 1994, pp. 24-26) On 4 February a strike was observed in educational institutions in various cities of East Pakistan and later a delegation of thirty members was despatched to Karachi to pursue the language issue. On 12 February *Pakistan Observer* was banned and its editor and owner were arrested following an editorial against the remarks of Nazimuddin but allegedly derogatory to Hazrat Osman.(Umar, 2004, p. 194)

On 21 February, 1952 the procession of the students violated Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code of Pakistan which imposed bans on public meetings and processions though the All-Parties Action Committee favoured obeying the government order. Hasan Zaheer (1994, p. 25) mistakenly observes that Action Committee had decided to defy the ban. The whole incident has also been narrated by Badruddin Umar (2004, pp. 199-207) who was among the members of Action Committee. The demonstrators, mostly students, breaking the police cordon, proceeded towards the Assembly building which was in session. The police used tear gas to stop the procession. About 100 persons were arrested. Having failed to stop procession, police fired a few rounds. In clashes with the police 60 students were injured. One student died on the spot, two later died in hospital. Kamruddin (1970) maintains that four persons died. According to Rounaq Jahan,(1972) of the four known fatalities three were students and one was a clerk of the East Bengal Secretariat. When the Provincial Assembly met that day, there was a highly

emotional atmosphere; the PML members were as much affected by the killing as the opposition; many of them joined the opposition in denouncing the government many PML members resigned from the Assembly.(Statesman, 1952)

On the following day, agitation turned into a full fledged mass agitation. It did not confine to urban middle class and drew wide sympathy and support from the rural areas as well.(Islam, 1990, p. 116) Certain processions were taken out in the districts though without untoward incident.(Governor East Pakistan to PM Pakistan, 1952) There the newspapers giving the government's point of view were not allowed by the students to be distributed. The government arranged to drop pamphlets from the air throughout the province. With shops, schools and colleges closed and all public vehicular traffic practically at a standstill, Normal life continued disrupted on 23 February. The students demonstrated in the University and curfew was declared for whole of the day.(Statesman, 1952)

Bengal politics, henceforth, became more and more regionalist. A *Shaheed Minar* (Martyr's Monument) was erected at the site of the firing as a symbol of Bengali resistance to West Pakistan domination, and, ever since, the day started to be commemorated every year.(Zaheer, 1994, p. 27) Thus the language agitation created "myths, symbols and slogans" for the Bengali Movement and gave the Bengalis "not only a popular common cause but also their first martyrs"(Mahmood, 1989, p. 11) Bhuiyan opines that, "the 1952 language agitation consolidated the Bengalis under one platform and imbued them with an ardent zeal to assert their rights."(Bhuiyan, 1982, p. 25) According to M. Nazrul Islam (1990, p. 116) this bitter struggle for Bengali language left a permanent scar on the process of integration between the two regions of Pakistan. Umar (2004, pp. 221-22) views that it turned the Bengali Muslims into Muslim Bengalis. This change in the sense of identity profoundly influenced the subsequent social, cultural and political developments of the people of East Bengal. The agitation also left its mark on other political parties and soon after these demonstrations; the East Pakistan Jamiat al-Ulama-i-Islam (JUI) also urged the adoption of Bengali.(Dawn, 1952)

Students Support Bengali Language

The student activists afterwards always remained attached with language issue and never spared any one putting any suggestion less than their demand. The speech of Sulaiman Nadvi in history conference at Dhaka University on February 27, 1953 in which he advised Bengalis to revert to writing Bengali language in the Arabic script led to subsequent violent demonstrations by the student of University. Next day a crowd of students broke into the hall. Nadvi was hustled out through a back door

and driven away but not before he was forced to sign a statement that he withdrew his remarks on the Bengali and the history conference ended prematurely.(UK Deputy HC Dhaka , 1953)

Gradually through the years the students and politicians, who supplied main driving force of language, succeeded to gain the support of peasants and labourers that became manifest in 1954 provincial elections(Bhuiyan, 1982, p. 25) that the 21 point manifesto for the provincial elections 1954 committed UF among other things to (a) make Bengali one of the state language of Pakistan (point 1) (b) erect a monument to commemorate the martyrs of 21 February 1952 (point 17) (c) declare 21st February as *Shaheed* Day and as a public holiday (point 18).(Akanda, 1976, p. 20)

Economic Grievances:

Economic issues were initial starter of the Bengali nationalism side by side with the cultural issues. Economic dissatisfaction is, in fact, only second to cultural problem. Before the assumption of discontent of political nature acrimonious criticism of the Central Government began to be heard in East Pakistan early in the period of 1950-1955, which revolved round purely economic issues: for example, the allegation that East Pakistan earns more foreign exchange for the country than does West Pakistan, but does not gather proportionate share of imports; that East Pakistan does not obtain a fair share of that portion of taxes imposed and collected by the Centre which is subsequently distributed among the Federal Capital and the provinces. Some went so far as to say that East Bengal was being exploited like a colony.(India, Pakistan & Burma Association (IPBA), 1955)

The first source of economic dissatisfaction appeared with adverse effect on the jute growers of non-devaluation of Pakistani currency in 1949. In latter developments this decision of devaluation was alleged as a deliberate effort of draining the sources of East Pakistan.(Zaheer, 1994, p. 53)About its impact on the Eastern Wing few scholars with the exception of Ayesha Jalal have written.(Talbot, 1999, p. 137) The jute growers were affected because their raw jute, which was mainly sold in India who refused to accept the official value of Pakistan's currency, could not get proper price and they were obliged to sell their jute at extremely low price for over a month. They were affected more because India also refused to provide any more export and banking facilities to them.(Afzal, 2002, pp. 181-83) The announcement of new jute policy presented in order to deal with the problem of low prices of jute, in the form of an ordinance giving government the power to fix minimum prices for jute and to appoint purchasing agents, was criticised by *Pakistan*

Observer as "a smack of amateurishness" that did not safeguard genuine interests of East Bengal. The PML, besides proposing the scheme for provincial administration of jute, considered its minimum price too low.(UK DeputyHC, 1949)

The provincialism got strength when resentment in East Pakistan was felt on the Central Government's assumption of control of jute industry and high handed operation of jute board. (L. Grafftey Smith to Secretary Commonwealth Relations Office (CRO), 1950) The local ML and Press manifested uneasiness with the jute policy in general and with the jute board in particular.(UK Deputy HC Dhaka, 1950) The composition and working of the Jute Board satisfied neither EPAML nor the provincial ML. In 1950, forty members of the East Pakistan Assembly demanded inquiry into the Jute Board, followed by a resolution of the provincial ML urging "immediate revision and consideration of the jute policy."(Constituent Assembly Pakistan Debates (CAPD), 1950)It was joint secretary of the provincial ML who issued a statement that the jute growers of East Pakistan were "greatly shocked" by the announcement of Jute Board, and that the people had reasonable misgiving that the central government intended to reduce the province into a colony. (UK Deputy HC Dhaka, 1949) A large meeting of jute growers was held on 6th November 1949 at Naraynganj which urged the government to reshuffle the board and the PML to call the emergent session of its council to consider the (UK Deputy HC Dhaka, 1949) issue of representation in Jute Board.

The Bengali interests in the jute trade made AML and PML united on the demand of its nationalization. In July 1951, the working committee of the provincial PML, pointed out the "growing discontent" amongst jute growers at being "exploited by the well-organized jute traders," and asked for an inquiry commission, preceded by a reconstitution of the Jute Board to include representatives of the jute growers and exclude the special interests of jute traders. After an unsuccessful mission to the central government, the PML party working committee, censuring the jute policy, demanded the abolition of the Jute Board and the nationalization of the jute trade.(CAPD, no. 3 , 1951)

Secondly on the issue of the administration and allocation of certain taxes to East Pakistan, the Bengalis grieved due to the decision of the Central Government, in 1948, to take over for two years: (i) the provinces' share of income tax; and (ii) the administration of the sales tax, with 50 per cent revenue under this head going to the provinces.(CAPD, no. 4, 1952)This decision of taking over the taxes was borne in any way but when the Centre during March 1951extended the period for another two years there was a highly acrimonious debate in the CA. The provincial case was

strongly presented by CM Nurul Amin, with near unanimous support from all Bengali members of the Assembly. On the question of financial assistance, the provincial PML leadership had to demand full provincial autonomy as a solution to the problem. This demand was made at a time when no opposition party AL had yet been organized.(Afzal, 2002, pp. 182-88)

Third economic issue that fuelled the separatism during 1947-1958 was the transfer of resources from East Pakistan to West through the diversion of foreign exchange earnings. The greatest criticism was reserved for this transfer that became evidence for internal colonialism and was to feed into demands for political autonomy and, ultimately, separatism.(Talbot, 1999, p. 138) There was a belief that the money spent in Pakistan was drawn from East Pakistan and there was a growing certainty that if East Bengal gained control of these resources it could spend them to better purpose in meeting the province's real requirements.(HC Dhaka to Dalton, 1954)

Conclusion

The Bengali Separatist Movement acquired its ideological foundations from the discussions and schemes deliberated for the partition of India during thirties and forties. The initial political, cultural and social organisations of the movement which later on developed and became the paraphernalia of the separatist movement were founded soon after the creation of Pakistan. The lingual aspect namely the dissatisfaction for the status of Bengali language in the state of Pakistan provided first opportunity for political and organisational activities for the workers of Bengali Movement. Likewise in early years of Pakistan the economic grievances created the discontent. The existence of two major dissatisfactions, lingual and economic, is evident of the start of Bengali Movement soon in early days of emergence of Pakistan.

The movement that ultimately ended with the separation of East Pakistan was very weak in the initial years. Even small but timely prudent actions could appease the movement at that time. The delayed and immature response to the initial demands for the right place of Bengali language strengthened the movement. Likewise the steps to lessen the economic disparity could be taken at initial stage which could satisfy the masses and also the disparity would not become tremendous later. The separation could be avoided if in start the direction of events towards disaster would be understood and proper remedies would have been adopted.

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