URDU: AN ENDANGERED LANGUAGE OF BANGLADESH

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Abstract: *Bangladesh is more or less a monolingual country, even though the tribal people who are very few in comparison with the Bengali-speaking Bangladeshis have different tribal languages as their mother tongue. Besides the mother tongues the Bangladeshis also learn a few other languages like English, Arabic, Urdu and Persian. Among them Urdu which belongs to the Indo-European family of languages, and which originated in India was learnt and used by the Bangladeshi Muslims for a long time for its obvious connections with Islamic culture and tradition. After 1830 the Muslims in Bengal were disassociated from Arabic and Persian, but could not accept Urdu as their substitute like the Muslims in other provinces in India, even though Urdu kept up its status as the mother tongue of many aristocratic Muslim families of Bengali. Moreover, the common Bengali Muslims had high regard for Urdu because it was only through Urdu that they could be acquainted with Islamic history, and tradition. But gradually the position that Urdu had in the mind of the Bengali Muslims suffered a setback affecting the teaching and learning of Urdu in Bangladesh. The present article intends to examine and analyse the factors that have led to the rise of this hostile or indifferent attitude of the Bengali Muslims towards Urdu. We have identified two reasons for such a change. One of the two is cultural and linguistic, while the other which is more important is related largely to politics.*

Urdu: an Endangered Language of Bangladesh

Bangladesh is preeminently a monolingual country, even though there are several other languages that are usually spoken by the tribal people living in some areas of Chittagong Hill Tracts, Sylhet, Mymensing, Potuakhali, Bargona, Rajshahi, Bogra and Dinajpur. But the number of people speaking these tribal languages is so small that their languages have acquired very little national importance. The tribal war for autonomy in Chittagong Hill Tracts that started almost with the emergence of Bangladesh in 1972 is undoubtedly a protest against the attachment of too much importance to Bengali and Bengali culture in total disregard of the tribal languages and tribal cultures by the majority linguistic group, the Bengalis and the Govt. of Bangladesh. It is true that this has drawn the attention of the Govt. of Bangladesh to the linguistic and cultural problems of the tribal people, and

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we can safely hope that the Govt. of Bangladesh will find out a solution to the problems of tribal languages and cultures, allowing them to develop equally with the state language Bengali.

In addition to these language that are usually regarded as the mother tongues in Bangladesh, there are also some other languages that the Bangladeshis learn for various reasons. Of them English, Arabic, Urdu, Persian and Sanskrit are the most important. English has assumed undeniable international importance, and all educated Bangladeshis have to learn English at school and college. The other four languages -- Arabic, Urdo, Persian and Sanskrit- are related to the religions and cultures of Bangladesh. Arabic, Urdu and Persian are intimately associated with the religion and culture of the Bengali Muslims, while Sanskrit, though a dead language, is the sacred idiom of the Bengali Hindus and used in the temple of Bangladesh just as latin is used in the Roman Catholic Church.

Muslims constitute the largest religious community in Bangladesh. More than 85% of the total population belong to the Muslim community. They learn Arabic, Persian and Urdu for religious and cultural needs. A school student usually learns Arabic privately at home under the supervision of a Maulana Sahib (a Muslim learned in Islamic Theology), because the Bangladeshi schools do not take necessary care to teach the language on the ground that Arabic ceases to be a compulsory subject at the colleges and universities of Bangladesh. However, though Arabic is a compulsory subject up to class VIII, Persian and Urdu are not included as subjects in the syllabus of the school at present in Bangladesh. These two languages are taught at Madrasah (a religious school run by the Muslim clerics). Of them Persian is doubtless a foreign language, but the position of Urdu as a language is very curious. Persian came into existence and developed in Persia (Iran), and was brought to India (undivided India before 1947) by the Mughals (Pei, 1965, p. 358) and continued to be the official language during the Mughal era as well as a substantial part of the British rule. It was merely in the nineteenth century that English replaced Persian as the language of the administration, the judiciary and revenue proceedings by the dispatch of 1830 (Huque, 1917, P. 17) and Act XXIX of 1837. In spite of the fact that Persian had been in India as an important language for a long time, it was never a language of the common people.

That Urdu enjoys a unique status as a language is very evident from the fact that though Urdu took its shape about 1200 A.D. (Namus, 1965, p. 72) and developed in northern India 'under the influence of Muslim culture and learning', it became the lingua franca of only the Muslim population (Pei, 1965, p.358). The Hindu population showed unprecedented opposition to Urdu which was very clearly expressed in the Hindi-Urdu debate during the second quarter of the twentieth century just before the independence of India. Though there is such rivalry between the Hindus and the Muslims regarding the superiority of Urdu as a language, linguists (e.g. Lehmann, 1973, p.22; Pei, 1965, P. 208) opine that there is no difference between Hindi and Urdu except in the script, and the fact that Hindi and Urdu are the same language is very clear from the intelligibility of Hindi by the Muslim Urdu speakers, and that of Urdu by the Hindu Hindi speakers (Pei, 1965, p.359). The difference that is exhibited by Urdu and Hindi in the script dissolves instantly if we look at the origin of their scripts. Hindi and Urdu use 'the ancient Devanagari of India' and Arabic script respectively, both of which are the results of the development of the original Semitic alphabet (Pei, 1965, p.93-94; Macdonell, 1927, p.2).

In fact, both Urdu and Hindi have the same grammatical structure, though the vocabulary of Urdu differs widely at present from that of Hindi, Urdu is extremely rich Arabic and Persian words, while Hindi is heavily loaded with Sanskrit and Sanskritised words. Urdu and Hindi have acquired this state very recently due to the malevolent preference of the ianatic Muslim and Hindu scholars for Perso-Arabic words and Sanskrit vocabulary respectively. The situation is like that of what Gune (1970, p.286) calls 'the Sanskrit-ridden dialect of Bengali of the educated classes' on which Grierson (1903-22, Vol.V, p.16) comments, 'each decade it is becoming more a slave of Sanskrit than before'. There are numerous example in which it can be explicitely shown that the communal Hindu scholars are at present discarding wholesale Arabic and Persian words in favour of Sanskrit and Sanskritized vocabulary, though the common people are indiscriminately using both Perso-Arabic and Sanskrit words. A very good example lies in the use of the words mith, 'friend' derived from Skt. mitra and Kintu, 'but', derived from Skt. Kim+tu instead of the Perso-Arabic elements dost and lekin respectively. However, Urdu seems to have developed first as a pidgin out of the urgency of communication between the Mughal and Pathan aristocrats who did not know Hindi at the beginning of their rule and the common people who did not know Persian.

The common people knew Hindi (Jaffar, 1972, p.218) and leart certain Persian words from the aristocrats, and they started simply using these Perso-Arabic words in Hindi structure, producing Urdu for necessary communication between the ruling aristocrats and the common people. Later on this pidgin became creolized and began to be used as the mother tongue in northern India. It is also possible that the educated Hindus who were well-versed in Persian began to insert Persian words in Hindi by way of switching (Jaffar, 1972, pp.218-219), laying the foundations of Urdu. But in course of time for various reasons Urdu and Hindi gradually took on communal colour-Urdu being used by Indian 'Moslems' and Hindi by 'people of Hindu religion' (Pei, 1965, p.359).

Though Urdu came into existence in northern India, Bengal under the British rule served as a very fertile ground for the development of Urdu. Urdu attracted the educated class of Bengal towards the end of the eighteenth century with the consolidation of British power in Bengal. The year 1800 A.D. is very important for Urdu because it was the year in which 'the foundation of Fort William College was laid' in Calcutta 'under Dr. John Gilcrist', (Namus, 1965, p.73). One of the important purpose of the College was to teach The European officers the local Hindustani language which is another name for Urdu (Lehmann, 1973, p.22), and many Urdu poets and writers took up the handsomely paid job of teaching Urdu in the College. Urdu developed so much under the patronage of the College that 'Urdu grammar, Urdu dictionaries, stories, drama' were published ' for the first time at this great seat of learning', forming 'the basis of Urdu language' (Namus, 1965, p.73). Moreover, Nawab Wazed Ali Shah, the last Nawab of Lucknow which was the home of Urdu-Islamic culture and civilization began to live in exile at Matia Burj in Calcutta along with all his retinue, with the result that the whole of Urdu cultural tradition was transferred from Lucknow to Calcutta, paving the way for the development of Urdu poetry 'all over Bengal', (Sobhan, 1993, pp.402-403). The development of a particular printer's font for Urdu known as 'the Calcutta font' proves conclusively enough how Urdu was cultivated and how it flourished in Bengal.

The city that comes next to Calcutta in its contribution to the development of Urdu in the beginning of the nineteenth century in Dhaka. Urdu found a congenial atmosphere for its development in the affluent families of the

aristocrats and the courts of the nawabs who patronized the talented creative Urdu poets and writers. Among the important Urdu poets were Mirza Jan Tapish, Abdul Quadir Rangin, Mirza Golam Hossain Atish, Shaikh Ahmed Jan and Mir Ammer Ali Ashma. The khawja Ahsanullah family of Dhaka also produced a galary of Urdu poets and writers. But 'the most important of them all' was Abdul Gafur Nasakh who was 'generally known as the father of Urdu poetry' in Bengal (Sobhan, 1993, pp.403-404). He was born in Faridpur, and though he was a Begali Muslim he acquired 'unparalleled proficiency in Udru', and the contemporary Bengali journalist Shambhu Chandra Mukharjee called him appropriately 'the successful son of Islam'. In addition to Urdu poetry and writings journalism in vernaculars also started first 'on the soil of East Bengal' with pulication of Hakim Habibur Rahman's Urdu monthly The Mashrique (p.407) immediately after the partition of Bengal in 1905. Thus it is clear that Urdu flourished unabated all over Bengal, and the proof of this development is evident in the fact that 'there had always existed in some urban centers in Bengal such as Dacca and Murshidabad small Urdu-speaking pockets' (Husain 1995, p.81)

These two facts that Urdu had an uninterrupted development in Bengal, and that Bengal was overwhelmingly a Muslim majority province of pre-independent India exercised eventually very little influence upon the Bengali Muslims to persuade them to adopt Urdu as their mother tongue, even though they had deep love and respect for Urdu. The principal reason for the common people's love and respect for Urdu was its connection with Arabic, the language of the Quran and the Hadith. Moreover, Urdu was also taught and spoken as a mother tongue in many Muslim aristocratic families of Bangladesh. On different religions occasions like waez-mahfil (a religious gathering) or milad mahfil (a gathering in memory of Hazrat Mohammad (Sm.)) Urdu and Persian verses were and are still recited, and the Bengali Muslims listen to them with due respect and solemnity, even though they cannot clearly understand these verses.

Thus the influences of Arabic upon Urdu (Pei, 1965, p.207) made it a sacred language for the Bengali Muslims. That is way the Bengali Muslims did not find it unsuitable to establish matrimonial relationship with an Urdu-speaking family. Begum Rokeya, a famous Bengali writer and social reformer from the village Pairaband in the district of Rangpur in

Bangladesh, was married to an educated Urdu-speaking young man, Sakhawat Hossain of Bhagalpur in Bihar without taking into account the linguistic nationality of the bridegroom as a problem. Urdu was the mother tongue of the national leaders like Khawja Salimullah, Khawja Nazimuddin or Hossain Shahed Suhrawardy (Husain, 1995, pp.75, 81), but it created no problem for them to be accepted as national leaders by the common people of Bangladesh. Even in 1973 when the Awami League boasted that it had freed Bangladesh from the domination of the Urdu-speaking Pakistanis Khawja Khairuddin whose mother tongue was Urdu (Husain, 1995, p.75) was a leader 'popular enough to sway public opinion against the Awami League' (p.76). The same fact that Urdu is linked to Arabic is responsible for the presence of a large number of Perso-Arabic elements from Urdu in the dialects of the Bengali Muslims. The Dhaka dialect spoken by the original inhabitants of Dhaka is a good example in this regard.

The educated Bengali Muslims find it difficult to have access to the Quran and the Hadith without adequate knowledge of Urdu, because reliable translations of the Quran and the Hadith are not available in Bengali, though there are faithful translations of the Islamic lore in Urdu. Two Bengali translations or the Quran, Hakim and Hasan (n.d.) have admitted this fact in the preface to their translation as published by M. Nurul Islam, stating that for lack of good Bengali translations the Bengali Muslims have to depend on the inadequate translation of a non-Muslim fraught with international and unintentional mistakes. The reference is perhaps to Girish Chandra Ghosh who translated the Quran into Bengali (Nadvi, 1963, p.25). In another preface to the Bengali translation of the Quran by Rahman (n.d.), the publisher has acknowledge Urdu as rich in Islamic thoughts and ideology, and therefore, instead of attempting to publish a translation of the Quran from Arabic into Bengali, he has published a Bengali translation of Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi (R)'s Urdu translation of the Quran. That access to Islamic Knowledge and culture is largely dependent on Urdu has also been confessed by a leading Muslim intellectual of Bangladesh. Syed Sajjad Husain (1995, p75) who regrets his 'inadequate command of Urdu' for tackling Islamic theology and early history of Islam.

As Urdu is intimately related to Islamic history, culture, theology and philosophy, it has always been held in high esteem among the Bengali Muslims of Bangladesh. It was also the mother tongue of the muhajirs

(refugees) who migrated to Bangladesh (the then East Pakistan) immediately before or after the partition of India in 1947. Urdu was a very flourishing language prescribed in the school curriculum during the fifties and sixties in the then East Pakistan. Moreover, as Urdu was the mother tongue of the Indian immigrants, the Bengali Muslims frequently came into contact with this language, picking it up gradually. The present paper attempts to discover and analyse the forces that were and are still at work to threaten the very existence of Urdu, a language which was once so popular and flourishing in Bangladesh.

The factors that have triggered and adverse change in the attitude of the Bangladeshi Muslims towards Urdu are far more political than linguistic. The linguistic reason that may be attribute to the decadence of Urdu in Bangladesh is the neglect of Arabic and Persian learning at the hands of the British rulers after 1830, the year in which the dispatch of 29th September 'gave decided preference to the promotion of English' education sealing 'the chapter of Persian and Arabic supremacy in India', (Huque, 1917, pp.17-18). But before 1830 during the Muslim and the British rule Arabic and Persian were the important subjects that were taught even at the village schools in Bengali. Jaffar, (1972, p.150) referring to N.N. Law who has based his opinion on the authority of Khurshid-I-Jahan Numa, reiterates the same fact as he writes that 'there were small educational institutions at Silapur in Bengali' imparting courses in Arabic and Persian to both Hindu and Muslim students even 'towards the end of the eighteenth century'. Nadvi (1963, p.24) lends support to the same truth as he asserts that "Arabic and Persian studies' were a 'distinct accomplishment' that needed to be acquired by 'the Bengali nobels' of both the Hindu and Muslim families enjoying 'ancestral right for holding high official positions and jagirs' in the nineteenth century. This cultivation of Arabic and Persian led to the enrichment of the Bengali language with Arabic and Persian words, related, particularly, to 'the state adminstration and legal proceedings' (p.25). However, the dispatch of 1830 and Act XXIX of 1837 dealt a death blow to 'the indigenous system of Muslim culture and training' (Huque, 1917, p.18)

The dispatch of 1830 and Act XXIX of 1837 were actually the beginning of the havoc to be played with the culture of the Muslims in Bengal by the exclusion of Arabic and Persian from their education. The Islamic culture

of Bengal suffered a lot because of the dispatch and the Act that brought about a serious neglect of Islamic culture resulting in the repture of 'those bonds, subtle and invisible which sustain a people's sense of spiritual cohesion', and the eventual forfeiting of the feeling that they were 'part of larger cultural entity' throughout the world (Husain, 1995, p.177). In the context of the whole of India the non-Bengali Muslims took up Urdu as a compensation for the loss they suffered at the exclusion of Arabic and Persian from the academic courses, but the Muslims in Bengal, though many aristocratic families used Urdu as their mother tongue, could never adopt Urdu as a Muslim lingua franca, because they were mostly illiterate and had very little contact with the Muslims outside Bengal.

Urdu is actually an appropriate substitute for Arabic and Persian since Urdu owes its origin to 'the mingling of Persian, Arabic and Turkish words' (Qadir quoted by jafiar, 1972, p. 220) to such an extent that 'most of the nouns and adjectives were drawn from Arabic and Persian' (Husain, 1995, p.177) But the majority of the Bengali Muslims were too illiterate to learn Urdu as a lingua franca before 183, after 1837 the educated Muslim group that developed in Bengal could not learn Urdu because the languages – Arabic and Persian from which much of the Urdu vocabulary derived – were withdrawn from the academic curriculum of India. Moreover, the young generation after 1837 needed to learn English as a qualification for various government jobs, and thus Arabic and Persian, losing practical utility, could no longer attract their attention, and as a result they lost all connections with Islamic culture including Urdu. But Urdu still enjoyed deep love and respect of the Bengali Muslims for its obvious links with Persian and particularly, with Arabic which is the secred language of the Bengali as an optional subject, and many Bengali Muslims receiving their education at madrasahs are still learning Urdu as a second language. But after the creation of Bangladesh in December 1971, the need for learning Urdu to be acquainted with Islamic culture and tradition has diminished considerably since Islamic literature is being made available through Bengali translation under the direct and indirect patronage of the government of Bangladesh.

We are now in a position to consider the political factors that have prompted a hostile attitude towards Urdu affecting seriously the teaching and learning of Urdu in Bangladesh who qualified in the C.S.P (Civil Service

of Pakistan) examination had to learn Urdu if they were posted in West Pakistan, because Urdu was the only means of communication between the illiterate or half-educated people of West Pakistan who formed the vast majority of the population of West Pakistan before 1970 and Bengali C.S.P. officers. The lack of knowledge of Urdu might lead to considerable obstacles for a Bangladeshi Muslim in discharging his duties in West Pakistan. Thus, though Urdu was not a compulsory subject on the school syllabus in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), it was thought an important language in connection with the most prestigious jobs in Pakistan sought by the intellectually most brilliant young people of Bangladesh. Consequently, Urdu flourished in the then East Pakistan under the direct or indirect patronage of the Pakistani rulers.

Pakistan was carved out of India in 1947 on the ground of almost incorrigible educational and economic disparity between the Hindus and the Muslims. The Muslims complained that they were culturally different from the Hindus, and they would never be able to improve their lot, if they had to compete with the economically and educationally far more advanced Hindu community. Soon after the creation of Pakistan education received an impetus among the Muslims in Bangladesh, causing and increase in the literacy rate, because education and jobs were almost synonymous in the early days of Pakistan. In actual fact, the number of vacancies in Pakistan was far larger than the number of people qualified for those vacancies.

The cultural ground that contributed to the establishment of Pakistan led Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the father of the Pakistani nation, of asset in his address to the students of Dhaka University on 21 March 1984 that the Pakistanis were not 'Bengalis, or Sindhis, or Pathans or Punjabis' but they were 'Muslims' (Beg, quoted by Husain, 1995, pp. 236-237). It was perhaps the same awareness of cultural entity that induced Mr. Jinnah to declare, while addressing the Dhaka University Convocation, that 'Urdu alone could be the lingua franca of Pakistan' (Husain, 1995, p. 181). But the students at Dhaka University could not share the same cultural consciousness with Mr. Jinnah, and they protested against the declaration of Mr. Jinnah as regards the lingua franca of Pakistan, making it amply clear that an increase in the rate of literacy has also brought about a change in the attitude of the educated people towards the cultural identity associated with Urdu.

The newly educated section of the Muslims in Bangladesh which was totally divorced from the Islamic cultural heritage, and which, on the contrary, was nursed entirely on the Bengali classics produced by the Hindu writers came to believe that the Muslims in Bangladesh were Bengali Muslims who were actually viewed by the Bangladeshi Muslims as 'strangers' (Husain, 1995, p. 180). It was this change attitude towards their culture and traditions that Husain (p.180) identifies as responsible for the language movement in the fifties, initiated, to all intents and purposes, by the noisy protest of 'a handful of students' against the declaration of Mr. Jinnah in the Dhaka University Convocation in March 1948.

However, it was not the cultural gap but the shrewd political conspiracy about the state language that did the greatest harm to Urdu. The dirty political game that the 'conspirators' played on the state language issue was the argument that 'the adoption of Urdu' would result in 'the cultural and economic subjugation of the Bengali Muslims', causing them to lose all important jobs and positions of power that would ultimately 'go to those whose mother tongue was Urdu' (Husain, 1995, p.180). This fear of being deprived of important posts and positions seized the students community of Bangladesh and made it voice its support for establishing Bengali as the state language, forgetting completely that Urdu would put no Pakistani in an advantageous position, since it was nobody's mother tongue. Urdu was the mother tongue of only the Indian Muslim immigrants who were very few in number in comparison with the total population of Pakistan.

The political leaders of Pakistan were divided on the issue of the state language. The Muslim League directly or indirectly supported Urdu as the state language, while the other political parties heaued by Suhrawardi and Fazlul Haque spoke in favour of declaring Bengali as one of the state languages. Many of the leaders of the Muslim League in the then East Pakistan were chosen from the Ahsan Manzil family that used Urdu as the mother tongue and took no trouble of learning Bengali, though Bengali was the mother tongue of 'over ninety-five percent of the population' of the then East Pakistan (Husain, 1995, 81). The members of the Ahsan Manzil family knew only the Dhaka dialect that was not employed 'for written communication! It 'was this fact' writes Husain (1995, p.81) that gave the Awami League, headed by Shaikh Mujibur Rahman in 1970, an opportunity

to campaign 'against them and against the Muslim League' in 1970 elections.

These politicians lending support to the adoption of Bengali as a state language also exploited the thoughtlessness of non-Bengali officials in the East Pakistan Secretariat, (Husain, 1995, p.183). The behaviour of the non-Bengali officials towards Bengali and Urdu was marked by arrogance and naivete. Their arrogance regarding Urdu being declared as the state language of Pakistan was associated with their conviction that 'Urdu alone was and could be the true vehicle of Muslim culture, and they showed their naivete in 'their eagerness to share what they considered valuable with the Muslims of Bengali' (Husain, 1995, p. 183). But their too much enthusiasm about sharing the best with the Muslims of Bengal revealed the fact that Bengali Muslims were too backward to be equal to them in respect of education and culture, and like very unthoughtful, naïve, simple-minded people they came to view this 'backwardness of the local population' as 'a sign of their eithnic inferiority', 'lending colour' to the propaganda of the politicians that the imposition of Urdu as the state language of Pakistan would subjugate the Bengali Muslims both culturally and economically.

These shrewd politicians also made use of the hitches between the Bengali and non-Bengali Muslims arising out of 'business or professional rivalry' to prove that the Urdu-speaking classes had 'sinister designs' against the Bengali-speaking Muslims in Bangladesh. Thus the propaganda of the politicians started eroding seriously the love and respect that the educated Muslims in Bangladesh and for Urdu. Moreover, the propaganda set in motion by these politicians gained momentum on account of the fact that the Muslim League leaders of Bangladesh who championed the cause of Urdu were all Urdu-speaking, and it was easy for these Bengali-speaking leaders to stigmatise these Urdu-speaking Muslim League leaders as 'agents of Urdu-imperialism' (Husain, 1995, p.81), even though the Awami League Leader Suhrawardy himself spoke Urdu as his mother tongue and was perfectly ignorant of Bengali. But he overcame this defect by fanning the flames of regionalism in the name of state language issue. The other great leader Fazlul Haque who was vocal in awarding state language status to Bengali was 'thoroughtly steeped in classical Muslim scholarship' 'with its emphasis on Urdu and Persian' (Husanin, 1995, p.180), even though his mother tongue was Bengali. Thus this group of leaders upholding the cause

of Bengali seems to be suffering from self-contradiction, suggesting very clearly that their aims were political rather than linguistic or cultural. They, in fact, aspired after power, and exploited the language issue simply to gain control over Pakistani politics, phrhaps unconsciously breeding hostile attitude towards Urdu in the educated section of the Muslims in Bangladesh.

The most fateful event that virtually dried up all the sympathies of the educated Bengali Muslims for Urdu took place on 21 February 1952. On this day a mob gathered to stage a demonstration in front of the Provincial Assembly Building demanding Bengali to be declared as a state language of Pakistan. The mob created traffic disturbance by threatening to disobey traffic rules, and become violent, and the police opened fire upon the mob to bring it under control. The police firing resulted in the deaths of several people including some students. This thoughtless police action, even though Husain (1995, p.187) asserts that it had nothing to do with the intention of Khawja Nazimuddin's Government to suppress Bengali, created a tremendously adverse effect on the educated Muslims, particularly the students of Bangladesh.

The language movement was not yet very popular among the rural students of Bangladesh, but this police action spread the movement even to the far-flung rural schools and colleges, strengthening the movement to such an extent that the people who died in the police firing were recognized as language martyrs, and shahid minars (altars) were erected by the students at every school and college in memory of these martyrs. The firing, as Husain (1995, p.181) writes, 'assumed the semblance of the frontal and brutal assault' on Bengali culture with a view to promoting Urdu. The 21st of February turned into Shahid Bivas (the day or the martyrs), and was commemorated every year by the students who took the vow to resist the promotion of Urdu and compel the Pakistani Government to grant to Bengali the status of a state language. The unfortunate police firing created such sympathies for Bengali and Bengali culture and such a sort of antipathy or indifference to Urdu and Islamic culture associated with Urdu that even an ultra-rightist group like Jamat-e-Islami whose policy was to defend Islam and Islamic values did not hesitate to champion the claims of Bengali as a state language of Pakistan, arguing that there was nothing wrong with the political demand of the Bengali Muslims that 'their mother

tongue must be given its rightful place in the political life of Pakistan' (Husain, 1995, p.185). The linguistic propaganda carried on by the politicians was so powerful that Bengali C.S.P. officers, administrators and different Bengali professional groups, particularly the teachers of Dhaka University were in favour of Bengali (Husain 1995, p.189), and Urdu came to be regarded by them as an enemy of Bengali.

However, there was still 'a considerable section' of the Bengalis who 'favoured Urdu for cultural reasons', but the arguments that 'Urdu would spell economic deprivation, unemployment, industrial backwardness and second class status in general for Bengali Muslims' could easily silence them (Husain, 1995, p. 181). From this condition Husain draws the conclusion that it was 'not love of Bengali among Muslims, but economic fear' that was the most powerful weapon in the armonry of the politicians favouring Bengali as a state language, and the could wield it very successfully to sway the opinion of the people in their favour (Husain, 1995, p.194). The elections that the candidates of the United Front swept only two years later in 1954, dealing a crushing blow to the political future of the Muslim League is a remarkable example of how successful these so-called Bengali-loving politicians were in exploiting the language issue.

Since 1952 the language and culture issue gathered so much force as to be the principal factor that virtually determined the course polities took in the eastern wing of Pakistan. Pakistan passed through a political crisis during the next six years till Ayub Khan emerged as a dictator in 1958. Ayub Khan, though notorious for unleashing forces of violence, 'was trying to give the country some semblance of political stability' (Husain, 1995, p.209). The period during which Ayub Khan was the President was more or less stable, even though the politicians grew gradually critical of him towards the end of his regime.

The most important event during the regime of Ayub Khan was the launching of the Six-Point Programme by the Awami League under the leadership of Shaikh Mujibur Rahman.The programme demanded autonomy for the Bengalis in the then East Pakistan on the basis of the argument that East Pakistan which was culturally, economically and militarily far weaker than West Pakistan could not be strengthened without autonomy. The next year in 1967 Shaikh Mujib was arrested in the Agartala

Conspiracy case. But the effect of the Six-Point Programme was so powerful upon both the politicians and the people of the then East Pakistan that Shaikh Mujib could not be tried and kept behind bars, and was ultimately released unconditionally in 1969 by Ayub Khan. The power that the Six-Point Programme had upon East Pakistan undoubtedly had its origin in the language issue which made the people of East Pakistan view Urdu and Urdu-speaking people as the enemies of the Bengalis in Bangladesh. Since Ayub Khan spoke Urdu and favoured Urdu as the state language, the East Pakistanis suspected and evil design against their leader Shaikh Mujibur Rahman in the Agartala Conspiracy Case. The most important point to note at this stage is how politics of the enemies of the Bengalis, even though Urdu as a language can harbour no such enmity or conspiracy against the political and economic interests of the Bengalis, and consequently, Urdu became a bywora for political, cultural and economic oppressions upon the Bengalis.

The upsurge of political unrest in 1969 threw General Ayub Khan out of power, and General Yahiya Khan took over, promising that the would hold general elections in a year , and the elections were actually held the following year in 1970. As a part of the election propaganda the Awami League spearheaded its attack on the people of West Pakistan, who favoured Urdu as the State Language of Pakistan, by bringing out a leaflet, 'Why is Golden Bengal a Cremation Ground?' The leaflet showed how the Urdu-speaking people exploited the Bengalis, by placing the statistics of the socio-economic and cultural conditions of East Pakistan against those of West Pakistan. The Bengalis were horrified to see the extent of their exploitation by the Urdu-loving West Pakistanis, and gave unequivocal mandate in favour of the Awami League with a view to getting redressed the acts of tyranny perpetrated upon them. But Mr. Bhutto's People's Party of Pakistan got majority of the seats in West Pakistan, and the political condition of Pakistan got extremely complicated. Mr. Bhutto who was an Urdu-speaking West Pakistani staked his claim to the prime ministership of Pakistan, though the Awami League obtained, in fact, the absolute majority in the whole of Pakistan.

Mr. Bhutto's claim and conspiracy under the direct and indirect encouragement of General Yahiya Khan enraged the Bengalis to such and extent that their leader Shaikh Mujibur Rahman, the chief of the Awami

League, declared indirectly the Liberation War against Pakistan in his speech on March 7, 1971, and the war started to liberate Bangladesh from the tyranny of Urdu-loving Pakistan. Pakistan as a defensive mechanism, mounted propaganda on the basis of Islam in favour of the integrity of Pakistan. Their propaganda drew many East Pakistani Bengalis who formed the Razakar and Al Badar Militia in order to safeguard the unity of Pakistan. These milita people and the Pakistani Army committed the most heinous crimes against the Bengalis in the name of Islam and Pakistan's integrity, signaling a total extermination of the Bengalis. The Bengali intellectuals acted quite efficiently to counteract the propaganda of Pakistan, and succeded in tilting significantly the opinion of the Bengalis in favour of the Liberation War. They talked against the dragging of Islam into politics, making it clear that the Pakistanis were utilizing the sentiments of the Bengali Muslims for Islam in order to perpetuate the tyrrany of the Urdu-speaking Pakistanis upon the Bengalis.

The Bengalis ultimately won the War of Independence against Pakistan in December 1971 and were jubilant unprecedentedly with their achievement. At the same time the political parties supporting the War of Liberation came forward to safeguard their interests by creating an inveterate indifference to Islam and Islamic culture. The Bengalis were terribly angry with the Urdu-speaking Pakistani Army, and its henchmen, the members of the Razakar and Al Badar Militia. Thus the political parties, particularly the left-leaning parties and the Awami League, mistook the people's strong dislike of the Pakistani army and Pakistan's propaganda based on Islam and Islamic solidarity for an opportunity to speak against the use of Islam in politics and against the Urdu-speaking people in favour of a secularism which was, in fact, anti-Islamic, on the assumption that Islamic politics has certainly indisposed the Bengalis towards Islam. But this situation could not continue for a long time. The Bengalis were predominantly Muslims, and the anti-Islamic sentiments of the political parties or their apathy to Islam started hurting the feelings of the people and a great change came after the cruel killing of Shaikh Mujib and the members of his family on August 15, 1975.

One of the most important reasons that is considered responsible for the murder of Shaikh Mujib is his gradual drift away from Islam. The political parties that came to power after the death of Shaikh Mujib seized upon the pro-Islamic sentiments of the people, and started showing their love for Islam by amending the constitution in order to give it an Islamic character,

and finally President Erashad incorporated a clause in the constitution which recognized Islam as the state religion. Thus Islam has been politically rehabilitated, but Urdu still remains a neglected language, and its future is undoubtedly very bleak, since its patronage does not ensure political gains. The majority of the Urdu-speaking immigrants who live in Bangladesh fear to speak Urdu publicly, and consequently, have given it up in favour of Bengali which they can now read and write and can also speak without and accent and use confidently in the conversation with the Bengalis, even though they use Urdu as their mother tongue at home. Practically, there being only a few or no Urdu-speaking people in Bangladesh, the politicians show no interest in the cause of Urdu, as the development of Urdu will not increase their political support so much as to help them win the elections in Bangladesh.

The analysis clearly indicates that the politicians undermined the prospects of Urdu consciously or unconsciously in Bangladesh. The existence of the extremely thin population of Urdu speakers, being politically unimportant, has also told upon the future of Urdu. How politics influences the development of a language is clear from the way the politicians are treating Urdu in West Bengal. Though the Hindus are in the overwhelming majority in West Bengal, the number of Muslims speaking or respecting Urdu is also substantial enough to draw the attention of the West Bengal politicians to Urdu, and consequently, news in Urdu has been introduced on the Calcutta Doordarshan and Iqbal Chair has been created in the Department of Urdu in Calcutta University, undoubtedly with a view to propitiating the Urdu-speaking and Urdu-loving Muslim voters. But Urdu misses such a chance in Bangladesh only because the number of Urdu speakers in negligible, even though the need for Urdu in order to understand Islamic literature is still very significant.

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