

Bengali Language Movement Leads To International Mother Language Day

Moshfiqur Rahman*

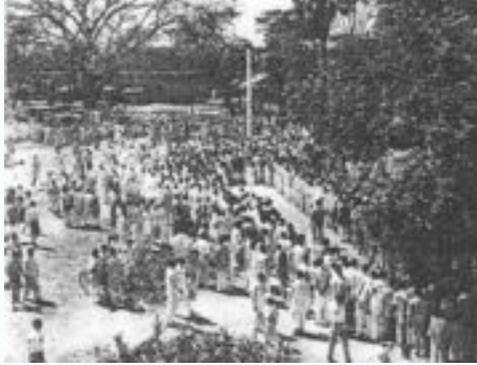
Dear reader, as you know that we are celebrating certain days of every year by remembering some important incidents, like International Women's Day, Valentine Day, May Day, Labor Day, International Children's day, World no Tobacco day, World Environmental day, Human Rights Day and many more. Each of these days has a significant importance and obviously has some kind of very important reasons for recognizing these days by United Nation and/or by some other well known organizations.

I would like to give you a very brief idea about a very important day called "**International Mother Language Day**". Each and every child in this world at a certain stage start to learn his mother language and then it becomes his/her right to speak or to express himself or herself in that language. If somebody imposes a different language to these people by making a law that from now on your official and educational language would be different than that what you are using now, then it becomes a major and drastic changes to a whole nation.

This is what happened in **Bangladesh** and lots of people gave their lives for their mother language **Bengali**. This movement was called **Bengali Language Movement**, also known as the **Language Movement of 1952**. It was a political effort in **Bangladesh** (Former East Pakistan), advocating the recognition of the Bengali language as an official language of Pakistan. Such recognition would allow Bengali to be taught in schools and used in government affairs.

In August 14, 1947 Indian subcontinent was divided into two parts and formed Pakistan and India. Pakistan had its two regions, East Pakistan (present Bangladesh) and West Pakistan (present Pakistan), were split along cultural, geographical, and in linguistic lines.

March 21, 1948, at a public meeting Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the Governor General of Pakistan, declared that "Urdu and Urdu will be the only national language for both West and East Pakistan". The people of East Pakistan (Bengali-speaking majority of East Pakistan), started to protest against this law as well as all the students of the University of Dhaka, Dhaka Medical College and other political activists defied the law and organised rallies showing protest against this law.



Rallies at the University of Dhaka

At the same time different Student Organization called for a province-wide strike and meeting on February 21, 1952. But the government invoked Section 144 on February 20 so that students should not be able to gather on that meeting. But the student community at a meeting on the morning of February 21, agreed to continue peaceful rallies with their protest without breaking the law of Section 144. Even though the police opened fire and killed lots of students including **Abdus Salam, Abul Barkat, Rafiq Uddin Ahmed and Abdul Jabbar** and many more. The news of the killings spread, disorder erupted across the city shops, offices and public transport were shut down and then general strikes began all over the country.



Rally after the death of the students at Dhaka Medical College

The language movement reached its climax when police killed student demonstrators on that day. The deaths provoked widespread civil unrest led by the Awami Muslim League. After years of conflict, the central government relented and granted official status to the Bengali language in 1956.

Later on November 17, 1999, UNESCO declared **February 21** as the **International Mother Language Day**, in tribute to the Language Movement and the ethno-linguistic rights of people around the world.



☞ **Central Shaheed Minar, Bangladesh**
Constructed in front of Dhaka Medical College in Memory of the Language Martyrs of 1952

This Language Movement had a major cultural impact on Bengali society and in Bangladesh, **February 21** is observed as **Language Movement Day**, a national holiday. This day is also called “**Aumor Ekushey**” (unforgettable 21) and this month of February is called the month of Language Movement. Every year Bangladeshi people celebrate this day and pay their respect to the people who gave their lives to established **Bengali** as their **Mother Language**.

Early in the morning every year at **12:01 AM on February 21** all peoples of the country pay their utmost respect to these dedicated people by placing flower on the base of the **Shaheed Minar** as well as by singing a famous song (official song of language movement) written by **Abdul Gaffar Choudhury**.

“ Amar bhaier rokte rangano ekushey February,
Amiki bhulite pari
Chelay hara shoto mayer ausru goraaey February
Amiki bhulite pari..... “ and so on.....

Literal meaning of those verses are as follows,

“February 21 is painted with the blood of my brothers
how can I forgot this day
February 21 formed by the tears of hundreds of mother who lost their sons
how can I forgot this day.....” and so on.....

The people who fought for their mother language are also known as “**Bhasha Shoinik**” (soldier of the language movement). Their dedication to establish **Bengali** as a mother language will never be forgotten. Now a days, people around the world remembering those courageous golden boys by celebrating **International Mother Language Day** on **February 21**.

* Moshfiqur Rahman, Born in Bangladesh, Completed my B.Sc. (honours) and M.Sc. in Chemistry from Jahangirnagar University, Bangladesh and later on completed Ph.D. from University of Central Lancashire, UK. Currently working at University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB. My wife Shahnaz Begum, Ph.D., she is also from Bangladesh, currently working at University of Alberta. We are blessed by two boys, Mokarrom Rahman, Gr-9 and Asif Iqbal, Gr.-7, Vernon Barford Jr. High School, Edmonton, AB.

** More detailed about International Mother Language Day can be obtained from the following web links:

1. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Mother_Language_Day
2. <http://www.un.org/depts/dhl/language/index.html>
3. <http://banglapedia.org/>
4. http://banglapedia.org/HT/C_0392.HTM