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## **Identity and Nation Building through Language Movement: The Role of Dhaka Medical College**

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### **Abstract**

The Language Movement holds immense significance in the history of Bangladesh, as it marked the beginning of a struggle for linguistic and cultural identity. It gained momentum in 1952 when students and members of other walks of life including working people and intellectuals took to the streets to demand that Bangla be recognized as an official language of the state. Dhaka Medical College played a pivotal role in leading and accelerating the movement; students from Dhaka Medical College actively participated in political events and doctors & health-workers provided essential healthcare services to the injured participants. They established blood bank and offered tireless support. The Medical Barracks which served as an accommodation facility for students, also acted as a control room for the movement. Moreover, the students made significant contributions towards the establishment of martyr's monument, honoring the sacrifices made during the struggle. Despite their significant contributions and leadership in the language movement, the role of Dhaka Medical College students & health-care professionals have almost been forgotten in public memory and has been largely overlooked in academic research. This article aims to address this gap by highlighting the contributions of the medical students, teachers, nurses and other employees during the period.

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## Introduction

Language is an important aspect of culture which gives people an identity. Language is connected with economy, thus an attack on language is an economic liability. The language debate started before the partition but got intensified after the foundation of Pakistani when her ruling class wanted to make Urdu the only State language of country which endangered people's cultural identity and their economic stability. Soon the agitation turned into a mass movement which took revolutionary form uniting the people of East Bengal in 1952. The protesters laid down their lives on the streets of Dhaka on February 21, 1952. The language movement created a sense of nationalism in the psyche of Bengali people. Students and teachers, doctors, politicians, cultural workers and even many day laborers joined it spontaneously. It is necessary to evaluate the contribution of various institutions involved in the language movement. In particular, the students-teachers and doctors of Dhaka Medical College made a significant contribution in this movement. They played an exemplary role in providing medical services, establishing blood banks, building the first Shaheed Minar. This article is an attempt to acknowledge the debt to those immortal language activists and highlight the role of Dhaka Medical College in the language movement to the future generations.

## Research Methodology

The first thing that comes to mind when reconstructing the history of the Language Movement, particularly for outside Dhaka, is the paucity of sources. To meet the gap, both the historical and sociological methods have been used focusing on the Qualitative methods. However, as an important primary source, the Oral History method has been used, though from among the many activist medical students, doctors, teachers, nurses and employees of Dhaka Medical College at that time have passed away and, consequently, we could only take a few interviews of those who are still alive.

Besides, newspapers of the time and documents preserved in the National Archives have also been used as primary sources. For this article, information has been collected and analyzed from relevant books, biographies, anthologies, and articles etc. as the secondary sources. Key Informant Interview (KII) and In-Depth Interviews (IDI) have been used as Sociological tools.

### Literature Review

Although numerous research books, essays and articles have been published on various aspects of the Language Movement, not many research books or articles have been written about the contribution of Dhaka Medical College. Badruddin Umar's *Purbabanglar Bhasha Andolan O Tathkalin Rajniti* (3 Volumes) contain some reflections on the role of Dhaka Medical College in the Language Movement, but not all important aspects like the construction of the first Shaheed Minar in Dhaka or the pivotal role of the Dhaka Medical College in the movement or the principal health service providers at the time of the crisis have not been covered. Mustafa Nurul Islam's *Samayikpatre Jiban O Janamat* and Bashir Al Helal's *Bhasa Andolaner Itihas* provide a detailed history of this movement, but the participation of Dhaka Medical College community is almost absent.

However, *Fifty Years of Language Movement*, edited by Ahmad Rafiq and Biswajit Ghosh, Ahmad Rafiq's *Memoirs of Dhaka Medical College*, M.R. Mahbub's *State Language Movement and Dhaka Medical College*, Sayed Haider's *Pichhu fire Dekha*, M.R. Mahbub's *Mirza Mazharul Islam, Language Movement and Liberation War*, Professor Dr. Monilal Aich Leetu and M. R. Mahbub's *Dhaka Medical College: Seva Sangram Oitijha*- these books contain interviews with a number of doctors, teachers, nurses and students of Dhaka Medical College who participated in the Language Movement, most of whom are no longer among us today. These books are very valuable sources but information has been randomly added to these books. Therefore, the present article tries to reconstruct the forgotten history of Dhaka Medical College in the Language Movement in an organized manner.

## Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this research article may be based on three concepts. Firstly, the 'Language' issue being essentially 'Cultural' in nature but turned into 'Political' in East Bengal when it emerged as a 'Movement'. Hence, Ted Robert Gurr's famous theory outlined in his *Why Man Rebel* becomes relevant: People Rebel When Cultural Aggression goes to the Core. When cultural aggression is in the cultural periphery, people do not rebel. Since Language is part of people's Cultural Core, and for Bengalis the first blow came from the Pakistani ruling elites on language, that prompted people initially to protest and, ultimately, to rebel. Hence, Ted Robert Gurr's famous theories outlined in his *Why Man Rebel* become relevant. His concepts of 'Rising Expectations', 'Relative Deprivation' and the importance of 'social psychological factors' and 'ideology' as root sources of political violence are also pertinent in the context of the Language Movement. (Gurr, 1970:92-93, 160-161, 194-197)

As the intelligentsia played an important role in the Language Movement, Antonio Gramsci's concept of 'Organic Intellectuals' is also very much relevant for understanding the role of the Dhaka Medical College, Dhaka University students and the activists from grass-roots. Gramsci, in his famous *Prison Notebooks*, defined intellectuals very broadly to take in 'all those who have an organizational function in the wide sense' and termed that unlike the Traditional Intellectuals, the Organic Intellectuals are needed for any new progressive class to build a new social order. According to Gramsci 'all human beings have rational or intellectual capacities although only some presently have an intellectual function in society.' (ed., Bottomore & others, 1983:194)

Antonio Gramsci's theory of 'Hegemony.' (ed., Bottomore & others, 1983:195) also becomes pertinent for the Theoretical Framework as Pakistan emerged as a Colonial Master following the footsteps of the British rule, and Language Movement served as the forbearer of the Nationalist Awakening in East Bengal. The reason behind the introduction of this political nationalism is

explained in the Nationalist theory: rule by outside forces, power or a different ethnic group and increased awareness gradually brought others into participating in nationalist movement.

### **Background of the Language Movement**

As Bengal has long been under control of migrant rulers coming from outside, often a hostile attitude prevailed among the hierarchy and under their influence among a section of local people against Bangla language in the region. A 17<sup>th</sup> century poet, Abdul Hakim, reprimanded those who preferred other language(s) than Bangla even though they were born in Bengal. (Sharif, 2008:125) In the year 1920, a meeting was held at Santiniketan on the debate of 'Lingua Franca in India' under the Chairmanship of Rabindranath Tagore and in that meeting Dr. Muhammad Shahidullah presented an article in which he placed Bangla, English and Urdu as the 'Lingua Franca.' (Shahidullah, 1994). In 1940s and subsequently, in the context of Pakistan, he strongly advocated for Bangla.

Every movement has two phases— theoretical preparation and organized actions. Essays written in favor of the Bangla as State Language published between June-July to November 1947 formed the theoretical basis of the Language Movement. Debate around language issues in Pakistan began as soon as the Mountbatten's plan of dividing India was announced. Discriminatory approach of the central rulers began to manifest through making Urdu the Only State Language of the country. A section of Bengalis including poet Gulam Mustafa and writer Mujibur Rahman Khan supported Urdu while Dr. Muhammad Shahidullah, Dr. Kazi Motahar Hossain, Abul Mansoor Ahmed, Prof. Abul Kashem and Dr. Muhammad Enamul Haque protested through numerous writings.

There was a popular notion among a section of Bengali Muslims in East Bengal that Bangla denigrated Muslims and insulted the ideals of Islam. So, they wanted to abandon Bangla and adopt Urdu as the lingua franca of the Muslims. Urdu speaking Bengal-based Muslims looked down upon the Bangla speaking people. A small section of Bengali Muslims began to detest speaking Bangla, even

denied to identify themselves as Bangalis and became desperate to prove how their ancestors came to this country from Middle East or Central Asia and that their mother tongue was Urdu.

On May 17, 1947, Chaudhry Khaliquzzaman, one of the leaders of the Muslim League stated at the Urdu Conference held in Hyderabad that, 'Urdu would be the State Language of Pakistan.' (Dainik Azad, 19 May, 1947; ed., Mahbub, 2017:50) In July 1947, Aligarh University's Vice-Chancellor Dr. Ziauddin Ahmad expressed his opinion in favor of making Urdu the State Language of Pakistan, following the recommendation of making Hindi the State Language of India. (Umar, 2012:19) Dr. Muhammad Shahidullah protested the proposal in an article titled 'The Language Problem of Pakistan' in Daily 'Azad' published on 29 July, 1947, he opined that, if Urdu would be made the State Language of Pakistan, it would mean 'political subjugation' for Bangalis and it would defy the 'Principle of the Provincial Autonomy and Self-Determination.' (Mahbub, 2017:64-66) In July 1947, *Gana Azadi League* was established under the initiative of Kamruddin Ahmad in Dhaka and demanded Bangla to be made the State Language of Pakistan in their Manifesto. (Helal, 1985:165-166) Professor Abul Kashem initiated the Language Movement by forming an organization called '*Tamaddun Majlis*' on September 2, 1947. (Rahman, 2011:49; Rafique & Ghosh, 2003:207)

The demand for Bengali as the state language was clearly raised in June, 1947 mainly by writers and journalists. During that time, Abdul Haque, Acting Editor of weekly periodical *Begum* and Monthly *Sawgat*, wrote four articles between June and August 1947 entitled 'Proposal on Bengali Language', 'Pakistan's State Language', 'If Urdu Becomes the State Language' and 'State Language of East Pakistan' which were published on 'Ittehad', daily 'Azad' and 'Begum'. The essays compared the merit of Bangla with Urdu as the State Language of Pakistan and made various arguments for the importance of Bangla. He said that 'Bangla has the highest qualification to be the State Language not only of East Pakistan, but also of East and West Pakistan' (Huq, 2014:12-26). In September-October 1947, poet Farrukh Ahmad expressed his opinion in favor

of the introduction of Bangla as the State Language of Pakistan in an article entitled 'Pakistan: State Language and Literature' in the issue of *Sawgat* and also wrote an Editorial in favor of Bangla in the weekly newspaper 'Millat' in which he stated:

Of all the weapons that the imperialists use to convert a country completely into slavery, the most hateful and deadly weapon is the establishment of a foreign language as the state language instead of the mother tongue. There can be no greater slavery than to adopt another language as the state language instead of the mother tongue. This hatred of East Pakistanis and desire for the discipline of slavery will be swept away by the strong storm of Bengali public opinion. (Shaptahik Millat, 27 June, 1947; Huq, 2014:36)

Other important articles published in favor of Bangla were written by Mahbub Jamal Zahedi titled 'State Language Proposal.' (Ittehad, July 20, 1947) and by AK Nurul Haque titled 'State Language of Pakistan' (Azad, July 27, 1947). The article 'State Language of Pakistan' strongly emphasized Bangla's singular qualification as the State Language (Helal, 1985:176-177). 'Begum, a women's weekly periodical, also played a positive role in this regard. In an article published in Monthly *Sawgat*, Kazi Motahar Hossain stated, 'If there is an attempt to force Urdu as the State Language on Bangali Hindus and Muslims, then that attempt would certainly fail as dissatisfaction couldn't be suppressed for long.' (Huq, 2014:38) Writings of Bengali intellectuals paved the way for organized actions in the Language Movement as mentioned in Gramsci's concept of 'Organic Intellectuals'.

### **Role of Dhaka Medical College in Language Movement in 1947**

In late 1940s and early 1950s, the Faculty of Arts of the Dhaka University and the Dhaka Medical College were located at the same building which is currently known as the Dhaka Medical College Hospital. Initially there was no separate hostel for medical students, they used to reside in different halls of Dhaka University. That is why the students of both the institutions simultaneously

and actively participated in the Language Movement (Interview with Prof. Dr. Liaquat Ali, 19-02-2020).

In November 1947, the first protest demonstration took place at Neelkhet Barracks. Because Bangla was not used in the newly published Postcards, Envelopes, Money Order Forms, the Naval Recruitment, Examination of the Public Service Commission etc., slogans were raised in their procession stating “We Want Bangla at All Levels”, “We Want Bangla as a State Language” etc. A number of students from Dhaka University and the Dhaka Medical College had also joined the procession (Interview with Dr. Ahmed Rafique, 18-09-2023). In December 1947, ‘*Rashtrabhasha Sangram Parishad*’ was formed (Hossain, 2000:6; Mahbub, 2019:45) and Mirza Mazharul Islam was the representative of Dhaka Medical College in the first ‘*Rashtrabhasha Sangram Parishad*’. He was a leading organizer of the Language Movement in his Medical College and also a member of Tamaddun Majlis. According to him, “19-Azimpur (Office of Tamaddun Majlish) was the principal focal point of the Language Movement, and I used to go there regularly.” (Mahbub, 2007:29, 30)

On December 12, 1947, the Urdu-speaking residents of old Dhaka attacked the temporary Palashi Barrack dormitory of Dhaka Medical College. When the affected students resisted, they were forced to flee (Daily Azad, 13-12-1947; Mahbub, 2017:84). Dr. Sayeed Haider, then a student of Dhaka Medical College who directly participated in that resistance, narrated the incident as follows:

On this day, a procession of around fifty people came from Nazirabazar and Moulvibazar chanting slogans in favor of making Urdu the State Language. ...They were promoted by the Dhaka’s Nawab family, and in their campaign about making Urdu the State Language they chanted anti-Bangla slogans with placards in their hands. But soon they faced resistance, medical students and others came out to block the progress of the procession and a skirmish began. They attacked the students with staves and rods hidden inside the bus belonging to Momin Company that accompanied the procession. The Medical



students retaliated by pelting stones that were laid beside the rail-line and whatever was available on hand. Nearby Engineering Hostel students also came out and joined them. That skirmish of a few minutes was probably the first direct scuffle over the question of language. Many of the medical students were injured that day, some of them had to be operated upon; but with strong morale they resisted the enemies of language and culture that day, fought back with fierce courage and deep affection for language (Haider, 1996:272).

Dr. Fazlul Matin, who also participated in that protest, said that they later went to meet Minister Afzal Hossain and Minister Abdul Hamid to protest and demand justice. Both of them agreed with their demands (Mahbub, 2019:47).

### **Participation of Medical College Students in Language Movement in 1948**

On 25 February, 1948, Dhirendranath Dutta demanded boldly at Pakistan Constituent Assembly that Bangla should be included in Rule No. 29 along with English and Urdu. (Rahman, 2011: 54-55; Reza, 2013:18) But this historic proposal was rejected due to the opposition of the Muslim League members. However, it created huge appeal among the educated masses in East Bengal. A protest meeting was held on February 26, 1948 under the Chairmanship of Prof. Abul Kashem on the premises of Dhaka University and Dhaka Medical College students joined the rally by skipping classes. (Mahbub, 2019:48; Anandabazar Patrika, 27-02-1948). On February 29, a student strike was held in all educational institutions in Dhaka including in Dhaka Medical College under Mirza Mazharul Islam's leadership. On February 28, a nationwide strike was called for March 11 in a meeting held jointly by *Rashtra Bhasha Sangram Parishad* and *East Pakistan Muslim Chhatra League* to demand Bangla as a State Language. Mirza Mazharul Islam participated in the meeting as the representative of Dhaka Medical College. (Mahbub, 2007:33)

On March 2, 1948, the '*Rashtrabhasha Sangram Parishad*' was reconstituted as '*Kendriya Sarbadalia Rashtrabhasha Sangram*

*Parishad*’ in a meeting held at Fazlul Haque Hall of Dhaka University. Mirza Mazharul Islam acted as the student representative of the Dhaka Medical College in this all party *Sangram Parishad* (Mahbub, 2007:31,33).

About the strike of March 11, 1948, (Dr.) Ahmad Rafiq wrote:

Students went out for picketing since morning to make the strike successful. Students of Fazlul Haque Hall, Dhaka Hall and Medical Barracks played an important role in this campaign. Some students of the University were responsible for picketing at the railway workshop along with militant student leaders of the medical college Amjad Hossain and Abdul Hai. On the other hand, some of their classmates including Fazlul Karim and Moniruzzaman were present in front of Palashi Barracks. Their purpose was to explain the issue and prevent the employees from going to their offices. On that day, along with Shamsul Haque, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Oli Ahad and other leaders, some medical college students participated in the protest. Among them, M. I. Chowdhury, Abu Siddique (General Secretary of the First Medical College Student Union), Md. Ali Azgar, Jasimul Haque and Faridul Huda were arrested. (Rafiq, 2019:128)

Dhaka Medical College students were not only imprisoned for joining the Language Movement, they also took action against those who campaigned for Urdu education. According to Ahmed Rafique, students of Dhaka Medical College organized a meeting to demand resignation of Dhaka University’s Urdu-speaking Professor, Dr. Sadani for his offensive speech against Bangla language on the radio. (Interview with Dr. Ahmed Rafique, 17.11.2023)

### **Muhammad Ali Jinnah’s Speech and Dhaka Medical College Students’ Protest**

Jinnah was invited to East Bengal and a felicitation for Jinnah was organized on March 21, 1948 at Dhaka’s Race Course Ground. Jinnah, in his speech, declared that Urdu would be the Only State Language of Pakistan. Dr. Mirza Mazharul Islam, one of those who protested after hearing Jinnah’s speech, said,

We all immediately protested this and left the meeting and came to the Medical College to discuss and exchange views on the next program. On the 22nd and 23rd, meetings were held in the Medical College to protest against Jinnah's speech. Medical students participated in those meetings. (Mahbub, 2019:54-55)

Dhaka University had organized a Special Convocation in Jinnah's honor in the morning of March 24. At the Convocation in Curzon Hall, Mr. Jinnah spoke in that old tone on the question of the State Language: 'Urdu and Urdu shall be the Only State Language of Pakistan', and there was a resounding 'No-No' from the students present. (Rahman, 2011:86-89; Matin & Rafiq, 2017:65) Among those who protested against him, names like Abdul Matin, A. K. M. Ahsan and others are noteworthy. Dhaka Medical College students Mahfuz Hossain, Mirza Mazharul Islam, Ahmad Fazlul Matin, Abu Siddique, Abdul Mannan and others protested along with students of other educational institutions. (Mahbub, 2019:54)

### **DMC in Language Movement between 1949 and 1951**

About the activities of the students of the medical college during 1949 to 1951, Muhammad Takiullah stated:

Dhaka Medical College students played a major role in observing the 'State Language Day' on March 11, 1949. The contribution of the Medical College students was very important in keeping the entire movement alive till March 11, 1951. At that time, all the movements would be strengthened with March 11 approaching. Most of the time in my hiding, I stayed in the Barracks. ... The Medical Barrack was the centre of all movements then. Shahidullah Kaiser and other communist leaders very frequently visited the Barracks. Sometime in 1950, I made 12 bombs and kept them in Mirazuddin's room in the Barrack. This initiative was taken to counter attack the police atrocities. During the agitation of 1949-51, students of the Medical College like Amjad, Abdul Hai and others, were arrested and expelled from the College. (Mahbub, 2019:62)

### **Staging of Urdu Drama ‘Najma-e-Noori’ Challenged**

In August 1951, the Principal of the Medical College, T. Ahmed (1948-1952) decided to stage an Urdu play called ‘Najma-e-Noori’ in the college. His decision angered the students participating in the language movement and ultimately, they prevented staging of the play. In this context, Brigadier (Retd.) Dr. Miraj Uddin, the then student of the Medical College, stated in his memoirs, “On the day of staging the play, we burst crackers behind the gallery. Boys from Engineering College also joined us with hockey sticks to squander this play.” (Mahbub, 2019:59) In this regard, Mirza Mazharul Islam recalled that a group of students cut power-lines and appeared in front of the stage chanting slogans. Eventually the whole arrangement went in vain and the authorities failed to stage the Urdu play ‘Najma-e-Noori.’ (Mahbub, 2019:59).

### **DMC’s Active Participation and Leadership in Language Movement of 1952**

On January 27, 1952, Pakistan’s Prime Minister Khawaja Nazimuddin announced Urdu as the sole state language of Pakistan at Dhaka’s Paltan Maidan. (Daily Azad, 28-01-1952; Rahman, 2011:228-229) On January 28, this declaration was protested in a student meeting held in Dhaka Medical College. (Bhasa Sainik Golam Mawla Smriti Sangshad, 2008:16)

On January 30, 1952, the students of Dhaka formed the “Dhaka University State Language Committee of Action” and the Convener was Abdul Matin. (Mahmud, 1985:95; Hossain, 2000:14) This Committee helped to lead the Language Movement in an organized form. They decided to observe ‘State Language Day’ on March 11. On the other hand, from a discussion meeting held on 31 January 1952 in Dhaka Bar Library under the Chairmanship of Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani “*Sarbadalia Kendrio Rashtrabhasha Karma Parishad*” was formed that included Kazi Ghulam Mahbub, Convener of earlier formed ‘*Sarbadalia Rastrabhasha Sangram Parishad*’. Among others, representatives of several political organizations & workers’ bodies and student leaders from many prominent educational institutions including

Dhaka Medical College were present. Sharfuddin Ahmed, Ahmed Rafique, Mohammad Ali Azgar, Mozammel, Abdus Salam and some others represented Dhaka Medical College. This “*Sarbadalia Rashtrabhasha Karma Parishad*” headed by Maulana Bhasani was formed with representatives from every political organization and educational institution participating in the Language Movement. Golam Mawla was nominated as the representative of the Dhaka Medical College. (Helal, 1985:277; Sayed, 1996:26-28)

On February 4, a nationwide strike, demonstration, meeting and march was called on February 21 from a student meeting held at the University premises where many students of Dhaka Medical College participated. Golam Mawla, the then Vice-President of Dhaka Medical College Student’s Union, realized that it would be difficult to make this movement worthwhile and successful if the Urdu speakers of old Dhaka could not be made involved in the Language Movement. Therefore, General Secretary of Dhaka Medical College Student’s Union, Sharfuddin Ahmed, along with some others, went to Quader Sardar’s residence on February 19 to seek support for the Language Movement and persuaded him. He later mentioned, ‘If the people of old Dhaka especially Quader Sardar had not taken this decision in favor of the Language Movement, then it would have been very difficult for them to proceed with the movement and make it successful.’ (Mahbub, 2019:66)

### **Role of Medical Barrack (Hostel) in the Language Movement**

Students of Dhaka Medical College initially lived in various halls of Dhaka University but later as the number of students increased, they were accommodated in an army camp-like accommodation known as Medical Barracks. The Medical Barracks became a major center for the movement around February 21, 1952, though this historic role of the Medical Barrack hasn’t been documented yet in the history of the Language Movement. The Dhaka Medical Barracks became a meeting place for politicians leading the movement. Sher-e-Bangla A. K. Fazlul Haque, Abul Hashim, Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, Shamsul Haque, Khalek

Nawaz, Qazi Ghulam Mahbub, Mohammad Toaha, Oli Ahad, Jahir Raihan and many others visited these barracks. The students of the Barrack had to write posters, collect subscriptions, had to go to the press to print manifestos and leaflets etc.

In some rooms of the Barracks, the work of writing posters in red letters went on abundantly. Hands of Kazi Zia Hasan, Nurul Islam, Badrul Alam, Fazle Rabbi, Zakir Hossain, Musharafur Rahman Khan and some others' hands got red-colored as they were writing posters. From February 4 to February 20, uninterrupted campaign preparations for the general strike continued. On the afternoon of February 20, 1952, the then government of Pakistan issued Section 144 to ban the demonstration on street. (Mahbub, 2019:67) In response to this announcement, students of the Medical Barracks protested against this ban. On this day, Abul Kashem, Alim Chowdhury, Manjur Hossain and other students gave speeches in a student assembly held at the front of Medical Barracks. Dr. Sayeed Haider said in this context, 'Student activists and the general students of the medical hostel were in favor of violating section 144 imposed by the government on the city from the night of 20th.' (Haider, 1996:277)

### **Role of DMC Students as Representatives of *Sarbadalia Sangram Parishad***

In the morning of February 20, the students of Dhaka University, Dhaka Medical College and Engineering College went to various educational institutions of Dhaka and carried out propaganda work for the students to join the general strike on February 21. On the night of February 20, 1952, after the promulgation of Section 144, a meeting of *Sarbadalia Sangram Parishad* was held under the Chairmanship of Abul Hashim at the office of Awami League to discuss the overall situation and the next program. Golam Mawla, Vice President of the DMC Students' Union, participated in the meeting. On the other hand, Ahmed Rafiq, a student of the Medical College, was given the responsibility of visiting different halls of Dhaka University to get the feedback from the general students and to communicate it with the *Sarbadalia Parishad*. (Rafiq, 2019:131)

Since the early morning of 21st February, the students of the Dhaka University began to arrive in front of Arts Building. Between 9.00 and 9:30, a large number of students gathered at Amtala. The students of Dhaka Medical College appeared in front of Amtala and Madhur Canteen. At that time, SP of Dhaka, Mahmud Idris strengthened the police position in front of the University Gate. (Umar, 1985:265-267) A decision was taken that they would go out in group of 10 persons chanting slogans and violating Article 144. The first squad to violate Article 144 was led by Habibur Rahman Shelley, a History Department student of Dhaka University. Ali Ajmal, a student of Dhaka Medical College, was in the first team violating Article 144. He was the first to be arrested from among the DMC students. Badrul Alam, Matiar Rahman, Sharfuddin Ahmed and many other students of Dhaka Medical College participated in the violation of Article 144 on that time. After a few minutes, students began going out like a wave instead of advancing in separate individual groups. (Umar, 1985:270; Mahbub, 2013:68)

Disobeying the ban, when the students broke through the police cordon and marched towards the Medical Barracks, police fired tear gas and began baton-charging. The premises of Medical Barracks were full. At that time, slogans continued in the Barrack premises and some students, who could reach the Assembly Building (then located in what is now Jagannath Hall of Dhaka University), tried to force the MLAs to accept Bangla as the State Language by surrounding it. In the meantime, a clash broke out between the unarmed students and the police who took position in front of the Barracks.

A tense situation arose with students throwing brickbats at the police who in turn did the same. Between 3:10 and 3:30 PM, the police fired twenty-seven rounds of gun shots in two phases at the students gathered in front of the Medical Barracks on the orders of the then non-Bengali District Commissioner AH Qureshi. Along with the students, the general public started joining the clash with the police supporting the students. During this clash, the police entered the Medical Barracks several times while firing teargas and charging batons indiscriminately on the students. In this situation,

the police suddenly opened fire on the crowd of students gathered in front of the medical college hostel gate and in the university playground. Daily Azad gave a report on the firing at this time,

...When a group of students tried to go towards the Assembly building, after the police again used tear gas on them, the students took shelter inside the hostel. Salahuddin, a university student, was found dead on the balcony of shed no. 12. A bullet pierced his forehead and blew off his skull. A wide area of the balcony of shed No. 12 was stained with lot of blood. Many students were found injured and unconscious, lying down on the balcony of shed no. 20 and in the hostel premises. (Daily Azad, 22.02.1952:6)

Two shootings took place in front of the Medical College gate but no one was seen hurt in the firing. As soon as the firing ended, some shouted that it was blank fire and the students came out in large numbers. A few students again moved towards the gate. That's when the second firing took place. This time many students were injured. Abul Barkat was injured and fell down in front of shed no.12. According to Daily Azad's report, four people who were martyred in police firing in the barrack premises were Salahuddin, Rafiq Uddin, Abul Barkat, and Abdul Jabbar. (Daily Azad, 22.02.1952:6; Umar, 1985:284-285)

### **Role of Medical College in Post-Shooting Situation**

Humayun Kabir, a 3rd year student of Dhaka Medical College, saw Martyr Rafiq Uddin being shot and took him to the emergency department of the hospital. (Mahbub, 2019:83)

Kazi Mohammad Idris, an activist, saw many prominent figures visiting the injured students who were lying on the hospital floor. A medical student named Halima gave him the news of Salahuddin's body in the hospital. The student's skull was blown off and his body was kept in a room at the back of the hospital with no one there but a sweeper. He photographed the dead body with the help of a photographer named Amanul. (Umar, 1985:298-299).

Dhaka Medical College and the barrack premises became the heart of the movement. Under the leadership of Dhaka Medical College



Students' Union, the students completed the overall coordination of the movement including announcing the next program of the movement, managing the campaign, re-establishing mutual communication.

### **Role of Dhaka Medical in Providing Medical Support to the Victims**

After the firing on February 21, the number of injured continued to increase and the situation took a dire shape. The students of the medical barracks became busy with the wounded and dead. College teachers, doctors, nurses, even ward boys and all the officers and employees performed the duty of providing medical care to the injured. There is a report in Daily Azad about this incident saying,

Hundreds of gas-sick students have already been discharged from medical hospitals after first aid. While the doctors and nurses of the hospital were busy taking care of the injured from baton charge, students and passers-by who were injured, dead and unconscious from firing were being taken to the hospital. (Daily Azad, 22.02.1952:6)

Dr. Ellingson, an English doctor of Dhaka Medical College Hospital, who performed one operation after another is incomparable. His tireless efforts saved the lives of several students that day. Without him there is no doubt that the death toll would have increased. (Mahbub, 2019:82)

Professor Zohra Begum Kazi was the resident surgeon of the medical college at that time. After the shooting, she was engaged in hospital service all night without eating or drinking. After some time, a group of police tried to enter the hospital with the intention to arrest the injured. Dr. Zohra Begum Kazi stood to protest. She stopped the police. Due to her firm stand and bravery in dealing with the situation, the police were forced to leave the hospital. (Mahbub, 2019:84, 163; Merry,2001:70)

Usha Bepari, a nursing student of Dhaka Medical College at that time, served the injured students. She said,

...that day my duty was in ward no. 12. ..After being chased by the police, some students came to hide in ward no. 12. I was hiding some in the bathroom. I covered some with blankets, pretending they were patients. The police searched for the students. I dismissed the police saying that there are no students in ward no. 12 that day. (Mahbub, 2019:90-91; Weekly Bichitra, 20.02.1989)

### **Establishment of Blood Bank**

Lot of blood was needed for the injured in the language movement. Mirza Mazharul Islam said in this context,

... There was no system available to store blood then. Blood was taken from donors and used immediately for operations and treatment of the injured. It received a great response from students, teachers and the public. Everyone came forward to donate blood spontaneously. Doctors, students, nurses and other officers and employees of Dhaka Medical were very helpful in this regard. This process led to the idea of setting up the first blood bank and free blood donation. (Mahbub, 2019:104)

Students and the general public were invited to donate blood through the newspapers of 23rd February (Weekly Sainik, 23.02.1952; Weekly Nao-Belal, 23.02.1952; Mahbub, 2019:104)

### **Setting up of ‘Control Room’ in Medical College Hostel**

On February 21, 1952, a ‘control room’ was set up in the Medical College Hostel to protest the killing of students and to continue the movement. The campaign started on a microphone set up in shed number 20 of the medical college hostel. From there, student leaders and activists continued to make speeches on the microphone and instructed the people on various issues. (Mahbub, 2019:92) In this context, Abdul Matin, Convener of Dhaka University Rashtra Bhasha Sangram Committee of 1950-52, said, “...the method of announcing news by microphone was introduced in Fazlul Haque Hall, Salimullah Hall and some other places.” (Rafique, 2019:9-10)

Dr. Afjalunnessa, the then student of Dhaka Medical College, said, 'Girls also spoke in the control room set up in the barracks. One of them was Monowara Binte Rahman. She later served as Director General of the Department of Health' (Mahbub, 2019, p.93-94). The founder of the control room and GS Sharfuddin Ahmed said that he discussed the issue with VP Golam Mawla, Sayed Haider, Abul Hashim, Ahmad Rafiq and others. According to him,

...a 'control room' with microphone and other equipment was set up in room No. 1 of shed No. 20 of Parishad building. Chhatrabandhu Yahya finished the work within twelve o'clock. He had special skills in these technical works. The speaker was mounted on one of the mango trees standing at the north-west corner of the Hostel, quite high, right next to the Parishad building. (Mahbub, 2019:116)

When the news of the shooting was broadcast through the microphone of the medical college, common people rushed to the hostel and the emergency room. Meanwhile, thousands of people from different parts of the city were gathering inside the medical college and hostel. As a result, the language movement spread from the premises of the medical college to the hostel, Neelkhet, Palashi barracks, neighboring Narayanganj and the entire East Pakistan. At that time, the blood-stained clothes of the injured students were picked up and displayed in front of the crowd as evidence of police torture. (Umar, 1985:306-307)

### **Martyrs' *Ghaibi Janaza* Organized and Graves Marked**

The bodies of those who were killed in the firing on February 21 were later taken away from the medical college by the police and went missing. Khondkar Alamgir and Amir Ahsan, students of Dhaka Medical College at that time, ignoring the curfew they identified and marked the graves of the martyrs after the army left burying them in the Azimpur cemetery. (Mahbub, 2019:98, 143, 159; Mukul, 1392:31; Umar, 1985:323). As a result, the student community of Dhaka at that time was able to visit and pay respects to these graves at Azimpur Cemetery every year on February.

On February 22, Ghaibi Janaza was held at Dhaka Medical to pray for the souls of language martyrs. Badruddin Umar said about that,

Since morning, students from Salimullah Hall, Fazlul Haque Hall, Medical College Hostel have been calling everyone on the microphone to participate in Ghaibi Janaza. ... However, many of the leading political figures, including Fazlul Haque and Abul Hashim were present at Ghaibi Janaza on 22nd February. Thousands of people attended the janaza in the medical college hostel premises, surrounding streets and near the engineering college hostel premises. A large majority of them were workers employed in various jobs, government employees and local people. (Mahbub, 2019:100-101)

### **T. H. Ellis Commission Report**

The Government of East Bengal formed an inquiry committee on March 13, 1952. The report of the Enquiry Committee was published in the extraordinary issue of 'Dhaka Gazette'. The said Gazette notification empowered the Chief Justice of Dhaka High Court to appoint an Enquiry Judge. The Chief Justice nominated T. H. Ellis, one of the then judges of the Dhaka High Court, to investigate the incident and on March 17, the Governor of East Bengal appointed Justice Ellis as the investigating authority (Dacca Gazette, 13 March, 1952). In the process of inquiry, this Commission published an 'Emergency Notice' in various newspapers and radio. In this notice, it is stated that the public of East Bengal, members and students of Dhaka University, student organizations and other parties involved in the incident apart from the provincial government are requested to give written statements by 31 March, 1952 regarding the eyewitness information of the firing by the police in Dhaka on 21 February, 1952. The report of the Ellis Commission provided a detailed account of the condition of Dhaka city before the police firing on February 21, 1952; the activities of *Kendriya Sarbadalia Rashtra Bhasha Sangram Parishad*; the background of the issuance of Section 144 by the district administration on February 20; the role of the student crowd on the day of the incident; and police activities including arrests.

On May 27, 1952, Justice T. H. Ellis submitted its report to Aziz Ahmed, Chief Secretary of East Bengal. This report was published on 31 May, 1952. (Government of East Bengal Home (Police), Department Resolution, 3 June, 1952; Rahman, 2011:269). Chief Secretary of East Bengal, Aziz Ahmed sent this report to the government on 3 June to take necessary steps on incident of shooting on the road of Dhaka. The Ellis Commission report stated that, 1. The police firing was necessary; 2. In essence of the incident, the police firing was reasonable. (Umar, 1985:485) Both the statements described the incident as such that if the police had not opened fire in front of the Medical College Hostel, the students and the public would have turned on the police aggressively and massacre them widely and then they would have attacked the Cabinet of ministers on the Assembly building. But in reality, that was not the case. It is true that the students throwing brickbats at the police and the police throwing tear gas, charging batons and fired twenty-seven rounds at them. But it is true that the students were trying to force their way towards the Assembly building.

Most of the political parties and student organizations of East Bengal rejected the inquiry report given by Justice Ellis. The demand by Sarbadalia Rashtra Bhasha Karma Parishad to have two trustworthy representatives from the public was not kept. On the other hand, the inquiry commission's proceedings were limited to the 21st firing; the incident of 22nd was not included in the inquiry. The inquiry was conducted in secret instead of publicly and for the sake of inquiry, the issues of release of MLAs, members of the State Language Committee, and other arrestees is neglected. The report has been adversely criticized in the contemporary press.

### **Construction of Shaheed Minar**

The planning, site selection and initial initiatives for the construction of the first Shaheed Minar were all a concentrated effort by the students of Dhaka Medical College. VP Golam Mawla said, 'On the night of the 23rd, some of us along with GS Sharfuddin of the student union were sitting in the barrack premises and discussing the next program. At such a time, someone said that there should

be a Shaheed Minar to keep the memory of the martyrs.’ (Mahbub, 2016:54)

All the students, irrespective of party affiliation, accepted the plan to build the Shaheed Minar. Badrul Alam designed the first Shaheed Minar. Sayed Haider said that the students of Dhaka Medical College worked hand in hand all night to bring the construction materials from the warehouse of Piyaru Sardar which were stacked nearby for the construction of Medical College buildings. (Haider, 1996:282)

All the activities including finding mason, collection of materials are the result of single labor and effort of Dhaka Medical College students. Almost all the students staying in the barracks of Dhaka Medical College participated in the construction work. Badrul Alamsaid that ‘bricks, sand, cement and mason were collected at the night of 23rd. By five o’clock in the morning, 10 feet high and 6 feet wide Shaheed Minar was built.. Nothing would have been possible without everyone’s collective efforts.’ (Nessa, Mahbub, 2013:68) In this context, Syed Haider wrote,

...all the achievements from the planning of the construction of this Minar to the completion of it, all achievements belong to the medical students alone. No other organization, political party or university employee or students were associated with this work. The first Shaheed Minar was an expression of the spontaneous thoughts of the medical students, the product of their collective labour. (Haider, 1996:282-283)

The Shaheed Minar was inaugurated twice in total. Martyr Shafiur Rahman’s father Mahbubur Rahman was the first to inaugurate the Shaheed Minar on 24 February, 1952. On the 26th, the first Shaheed Minar was officially inaugurated again by Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, editor of Daily Azad newspaper, who resigned from the first Legislative Council in protest against killing on 21st. The government demolished the first Shaheed Minar on the evening of February 26. GS Sharfuddin was in the barracks when armed police surrounded the barracks. He saw the police encircling the hostel and entering with three trucks armed with rifles to demolish the

Shaheed Minar. Azad newspaper reported this incident such, “The monument built in the memory of the martyrs was inaugurated in the premises of the Medical College Hostel yesterday. The police demolished it in the evening.” (Rafiq, 2019:161)

Shishir Majumdar, the then student of Dhaka Medical College, said, “After that every year the Shaheed Minar was built and the police took it away.” (Interview with Dr. Shishir Majumdar, 27-11-2022) The reaction to the demolition of the first Shaheed Minar led to anti-government sentiment among the common people and 21st February became the Martyr’s Day. In the context of Martyrs’ Day, Shaheed Minar has gradually become the focal point of all democratic struggles at the state level. It is a matter of pride for the students of Medical Barracks that they have gifted the nation with a symbol of struggle like Shaheed Minar.

During this time Medical College Hostel and Salimullah Muslim Hall were actually two active centers of agitation. On February 28, an arrest warrant was issued against prominent members of the Language Movement. Later, they went into hiding and during that period, some medical college students accompanied the leaders participating in the language movement in various discussion meetings.

On March 7, a meeting of the *Sarbadalia Rashtra Bhasha Sangram Committee* was convened at Dr. Muttalib’s 82, Shanti Nagar House. After some time, the place of the meeting was surrounded by police, and the members of *Rashtrabhasha Sangram Committee* were arrested. The members of the Committee who had not been arrested so far met in a meeting on 14 March and reconstituted the *Sarbadalia Committee*. Convenor Aatur Rahman Khan appealed to the countrymen to observe a nationwide general strike, conduct meetings & processions, construct martyrs’ memorials, and to pay tribute to the martyrs who sacrificed their lives to make Bangla one of the state languages of the country, and to press the demand for the unconditional release of all political prisoners. (Umar, 1985:443-451)

On February 1, 1953, an exact replica of the defunct First Shaheed Minar was made out of black cloth and red paper. Zia Hasan, Nurul

Islam, Badrul Alam and other Medical students were involved in the reconstruction. On the same day, many newspapers published special Martyrs' Day issues.

In 1953-54, this movement became fierce. The government tried to suppress all activities of the Language Movement and tried to prevent any Martyr's Day Observations on February 21, 1955. Before the dawn of February 21, voices rose from all the hostels – 'We want Bangla as the State Language', 'May the martyrs' memory be immortal'. Black flags symbolizing the sacrifice of language martyrs were flown at the top of the dormitories. On the instructions of *Sangram Parishad*, the students of various educational institutions appeared in the university premises at ten o'clock wearing black badges. A black flag was raised and the students gathered at Amtala. They gave slogans such as 'We want Bengali as the State Language', 'May the martyr's memory be immortal', 'We want the release of the political prisoners', 'Stop police brutality'. Hundreds of police immediately surrounded the university. Soon they entered the university premises and recklessly charged batons on the unarmed students. Many injured students were arrested and taken to Lalbagh Police Station by the police. The remaining students of the university who were hiding in different places came out wearing black badges and were caught in groups. The premises of Lalbagh police station were filled with arrested students.

About the *Shaheed Dibas* observation in 1955, Dr. Shishir Majumdar stated in his interview that on the night preceding 21 February he and a few others were called to construct Shaheed Minar again. Bricks and sand were already brought and the Shaheed Minar was rebuilt in that night. When the students went to Amtala in the morning, they were chased by the police. He along with Arvind Barua and many others of the DMC were arrested. Farida Bari, Kamrun Nahar Laili, Feroza Begum, Zohra Taha, two other female students of DMC and some others were among the arrested female students. (Interview with Dr. Shishir Majumdar, 27-11-2022)



The government of Pakistan understood that the Language Movement could not be stopped any longer. Not only they have to accept the demand for a State Language, but they also have to come to terms with the democratic movement. As a result, Bangla was accepted as one of the State Languages in Article 214 in the first Constitution of Pakistan which was adopted on February 29, 1956. (The Constitution of The Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1956:64)

### **Significance**

The language movement of 1952 was a cultural movement of the Bengali middle class. The ruling society of Pakistan denied the Bengali people the right of speaking in their mother tongue. The movement began amid various discussions and criticisms from the beginning of the language debate. The educated intellectual class came forward and took part in the movement through their writings. They understood that if the state language of Pakistan is Urdu then the Bengalis and the common people of East Bengal will be left behind in terms of education and government and private jobs. When the common people of Bengal joined the language movement of 1952, the ruling class brutally attacked and shot at the protestors. A few fresh lives were lost and many injured as well. From the beginning of the language movement of '52, the students of Dhaka Medical College were very active. Dhaka Medical College played an exemplary role in providing medical services to those injured and killed in police firing on February 21, 1952. Realizing the need of blood that day, the first blood bank was established in Bangladesh. From that idea, many blood donating organizations have been formed. Bengali nationalist ideas were born out of the impetus of the language movement of 1952 and Bengalis began to dream of independence.

### **Conclusion**

Language Movement wasn't just a cultural movement. Rather, it was a national confluence for autonomy. The despotic Pakistani government exploited and oppressed all in East Bengal -- from the peasantry at the bottom up to the highest officials. Regional

oppression together with the class-based economic exploitation played a very important role in uniting the population across creed and class barriers. If Urdu would be made the sole state language in Pakistan, East Bengal society would fall further behind as they wouldn't be able to qualify for military or civil, government or private jobs; a large section of Bengalis would become ineligible for jobs which would bring financial uncertainty to the lives of the people. Making only Urdu the State Language would mean that the various professional groups (particularly Doctors, Teachers, Nurses, Lawyers, and Employees) of East Bengal wouldn't be considered suitable for their work. On the other hand, Bengali sense of self-identity also served as an important force.

Analyzing the political trends, it is observed that the progressive middle class, peasantry and the working class -- all participated in the Language Movement. So, there was also an economic aspect. At that stage, the soaring prices of commodities had also acted as an important and direct factor behind mass participation in the Language Movement. Contemporary newspapers like 'Pakistan Observer' and 'Morning News' revealed the discontent non-abolition of the Zamindari system and the rising prices of essential commodities (salt, rice, pulses and daily necessities) in East Bengal.

Participants from Dhaka Medical College in the language movement (Doctors, Nurses, and Officials) were fairly educated whereas many of the grass-root participants were not so. But, when the Pakistani central rulers hit the 'cultural core' of the mass people, East Bengal became agitated that took the form of an active movement in 1948 and, subsequently, in 1952. The question of language was not only limited to culture, it also had bearings upon people's livelihood. As a result, though the awareness began in the literary and academic circles, the cultural movement soon turned into an economic movement of the people of East Bengal. Gradually the Language Movement evolved from a cultural struggle of 1947-48 to a broader ethno-linguistic nationalism in 1952 and onwards against Pakistani colonialism. The theories of Ted Robert Gurr and Antonio Gramsci are relevant in this context.

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