



## The Disintegration of Pakistan 1971: A Critical Study on The Role of Language Conflict In East and West Pakistan (1947- 1971)



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**Abstract:** Language is a crucial aspect of human communication and identity, and conflicts between different inhabitants of regional spoken languages can be detrimental to a nation's unity and integrity. Pakistan, created based on religious demand, disintegrated due to regional language issues, which provided a platform for separatists. The Bangladesh freedom war can be traced back to the historical background of East Pakistan, which was not only due to geographical and economic factors but also a lack of sightedness on the part of political parties and leadership. The government believed that the demand for the Bengali language was driven by Hindus and fifth columnists. The language movement, which began in 1947 and culminated in the separation of East and West Pakistan in 1971, provided a foundation for Bengali nationalism. The government's misinterpretation of ground realities allowed separatists to divert patriotism and anti-Pakistanism. The current paper highlights the linguistic controversy responsible for the disintegration of Pakistan.

**Key Words:** Language, Nationalism, Separatist

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### Introduction

When Mughals came to India in the 16th century, they started Persian as an official language in the sub-continent. In the meantime, a new language was developed which was called Urdu. Later on, this language became a symbol of unity of Muslims in the whole empire of Mughal-ruled India (Barzegar, K. N. 2013). After the downfall of the Mughal Empire, the British

replaced them as new rulers of the sub-continent. British imposed English as an official language in British India. The Muslims of India were reluctant to take English as their official language. India is a multilingual nation. The people of India speak about one thousand languages in India. The Hindus of India adopted English without any difficulty. It was the Muslims who were opposed to the foreigners and their foreign language. The force of language

always unites a nation. No one can impose language on a nation. It is a natural process that a nation adopts itself. The culture, traditions, and conventions of a society are decided by the language. Therefore, it is difficult to exclude the importance of a language (Mahboob, 2002).

The British and Hindus considered Urdu as the language of Muslims in India and it was true to a larger extent. In British India, the problem of the official language continued because Muslims were opposed to the British, and their language was English. The Hindus of British India were opposed to Urdu. In 1867 the Hindus of U.P started agitation for the implementation of Hindi instead of Urdu as an official language. Not only the Hindus but the Muslims of Bengal were also not ready to adopt Urdu instead of Bengali. The Bengali people objected to Urdu way before the partition. In 1937 during the session of the All-India Muslim League at Lucknow, the Bengali leaders of the Muslim League objected to the proposal of making Urdu as an official language of the Muslim League. But after the partition, it became very clear. When Pakistan came into being in 1947, Muhammad Ali Jinnah decided Urdu as the national language of Pakistan. Muhammad Ali Jinnah on many occasions defended his Urdu-only policy of the national language of Pakistan. The people of East Pakistan were not ready to accept Urdu as their national language, they wanted Bengali to be their national language (Zaheer, 1994, p. 78).

### Analysis And Discussion

Most of the writers have concluded that the cultural and economic differences caused the problem in East Pakistan. The geographical cause also contributed to the problem because both the wings, east and west Pakistan had a huge distance of one thousand miles. This geographical location of both wings also contributed to the problems in East Pakistan because there was a lake of

communication between the two wings. Another misfortune of the people of East Pakistan was that there was a military rule in the country. The military establishment started to target the Bengali intellectuals. The military started open attacks on Bengali intellectuals. The people were not ready to accept Urdu as the only official language of East Pakistan.

The Bengalis' main complaint was that they were in the majority, therefore it is their right to have the Bengali language as their official language. Such complaints build up the deprivations in the minds of Bengali people. When Jinnah visited East Pakistan in 1948 (Christiansen, S. 2019). In his famous speech that he delivered at Dhaka University. He clearly said that the official language of Pakistan shall be Urdu and no other language. When he was delivering this speech, some of the students interrupted and raised the slogans for the Bengali language to be the official language of East Pakistan..

Muhammad Ali Jinnah said:

I am very clear to announce that the official language of Pakistan shall be Urdu and no other language. (Mascarenhas, A. 1971). He further said that anyone who tries to mislead you is the enemy of Pakistan. He emphasized the one state one language policy. Perhaps for the very first time in his long political career, Quaid-e-Azam came face to face with a situation where he was not exactly looked upon as a respectful person. He also like the other Pakistani leaders smelled a conspiracy in the demand for Bengali language.

A local social organization named Tammdun Majlis issued a pamphlet on 15 September 1947 in which they discussed in detail the language, that which language East Pakistan shall be.

1. The official language of East Pakistan shall be Bengali
2. Urdu and Bengali will be the official languages of the country.

3. The medium of education will be Bengali in East Pakistan while Urdu shall be the co-official language. English will be the third international language
4. Both English and Bengali will be used for a few years as official languages in East Pakistan. (Badruddin, 1972, p. 9).

This booklet advertised and promoted the idea of the protection of Bengali language, the dissident youth started agitation against the government. They formed different organizations for the promotion of their demands (Van Klinken, G., & Aung, S. M. T. (2017). The government of Pakistan decided to make Urdu the only national language of the country. The people of East Pakistan decided to go against this decision. They started protests especially the students of Dhaka University (Jabeen, M., Chandio, D. A. A., & Qasim, Z. 2020). They started rallies and public meetings to put pressure on government to reverse this decision. Their main demand was to include Bengali as a national language but government was not ready to do it. The government believed in one nation one language. The students of Dhaka University announced a public protest on 11 March 1948. The people of East Pakistan started their agitation and protest against the government policy (Christiansen, S. 2019).

In 1952, the agitation and strikes took a serious turn. The strikes were called by different student organizations. People of East Pakistan started to demand that Bengali should be made the national language of East Pakistan. This act of strikes and protests pressurized the government. The government imposed section 144 to restrict the students from protesting. The students of Dacca University held a meeting at the Dacca University campus on 21 February 1952 (Shahadat, M. J. (2011). Hundreds of students gathered from different parts of the city to register their protest. The students violated

the section 144. The police started baton charges. The students also started throwing bricks and bats at law enforcement personnel police started retaliation to stop the crowd but the students were so enraged that started gathering around the legislative assembly. Police arrested hundreds of students who violated section 144. In the process, two students and three other persons were killed. The killing of students adds to the fuel. People's enrage went to a high level. The news spread like wildfire in the city. Disorder and cost spread in the city. A general strike was called which affected the daily routine and livelihood very badly. On the 22nd of February 1952, the prayers of the skilled personnel were held which turned into be huge mourning procession. A general strike was held Police and army opened fire on innocent people killing several students including Abdus Salam, Rafiq Ahmad, Saif-ur-Rahman, Abdul Barakat, and Abdul Jabar. This news of killing innocent people spread like wildfire. The sympathy of the people was the innocent students. The students of Dacca Medical University started the construction of a monument which was inaugurated by Saif ur Rahman.

### **Constituent Assembly of Pakistan 1947 and Language Issue**

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The first session of the constituent assembly was held on 23rd February 1948. There arose the problem of language. The Bengali and Hindu members were protesting to allow the m to speak in Bengali. They were protesting on the plea that 44 million people belong to Bengal out of 69 million of the total population of the new born state of Pakistan (Tripathi, S. 2016). A Hindu member of the assembly Dharendra Nath moved a motion to allow them to speak in Bengali language but Liaquat Ali Khan who was the then prime minister of Pakistan and Khwaja Nizam ud Din who was the chief minister of Bengal strongly opposed this motion. Liaquat Ali Khan in his speech said that he strongly

believed in the Urdu-only policy. Liaquat Ali Khan further said that this motion is moved only to divide the unifying force of Pakistan. Dharendra Nath Datta protested against the comments of Liaquat Ali Khan. Replying to Liaquat's comments Dharendra Nath Datta said that it was not his intention. He wanted to safeguard the basic rights of Bengali people that they are in majority in the country and it was their right to speak in their mother language and that the state must give the official status to their language.

Khawaja Nazim ud Din who was the then chief minister of East Pakistan started his speech that it was his prime duty to inform this sacred house that most of the people are in favor of Urdu language and that it should be a source of communication between the center and provinces. However, people of the East Pakistan demanded that a medium of education and administration in East Pakistan should also be in Bengali. Khawaja Nazim ud Din clearly pointed out the central government's point of view on Urdu stance and he also brought the individual point of view of East Pakistan (Musa, M. 1985). In his speech he also given the reference of the Liaquat Ali Khan speech in which he categorically denied the fact that there is no question of Bengali language expulsion from provinces. He clears the ambiguity in the minds of people and members of the house. (Afzal 2001, p 55)

The movement which was started in 1952 was purely started by the Muslims of Bengal to defend their mother language. (Baxter, p 126 (done))

### Quaid-e-Azam and language issue

Quaid e Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah visited East Pakistan in March 1948. He strongly advocated the Urdu-only policy of the state of Pakistan. In his famous speech on the race course grounds that the national language of the newborn state should be Urdu and no other language (Rafiq, G. R. 2010). This

statement of Quaid made the students protest more fervently. The visit of Quaid e Azam and his categorical rejection of the Bengali language made this issue more controversial. The students started protesting after his speech. They demanded Bengali to be the national language of East Pakistan. In his last speech on 28 March 1948, before he departed from Dacca, he reaffirmed his Urdu-only policy, which made the situation worse. People especially the students started agitation. The irony was that Quaid e Azam overruled the agreement that was signed by Khawaja Nazim ud Din with the leaders of the students. This unilateral action of Quaid made the students and civil society protest with anger. Quaid in his speech said that all these elements are supported by a fifth columnist who wants to disintegrate the nation. He believed that one nation one language is essential for the solidarity and unity of the nation.

In his famous speech on racecourse grounds, he made it clear that the problem of language will be solved by the elected representatives of this province to use any language in this province but as far as the state of Pakistan's official language is concerned it should be Urdu and no other language. This pronouncement in the large gathering made the people of Bengal very upset, they started chanting na na na. The students of Dacca University and other educated people objected to Quaid's pronouncement (Bangash, Y. K. 2018). One of the eye witness, Taj ud Din said that the students started agitation and broke down a gate and destroyed the picture of Quaid e Azam. The people and especially the students were very much disappointed by the pronouncement of Quaid e Azam. A few days later Quaid spoke to the convocation of Dacca University in which he reiterated his Urdu-only policy. This made the students chant in favour of the Bengali language. Quaid for the first witnessed an agitation, that he never noticed in his life. All this

happened because of a language dispute. The people of Bengal were disappointed and betrayed by this language issue. The language issue draws a line between East Pakistan and West Pakistan. It sowed the germs of separation way before the separation of East Pakistan. The process of national integration was badly disrupted by this incident. Quaid e Azam, who was a symbol of unity and integration was objected to for the first time in his entire career. When Pakistan came into being in 1947, an educational conference was held under the chairmanship of a Bengali minister, Fazlur Rehman in which Urdu was made the source of communication and suggested as the official language for the new state of Pakistan (Kokab, R. U. 2011). At that time the Bengali representatives objected to the plea that Bengali should also be made as equal official language of the state (Palmer, 1968). The people of Bengal were so possessive of their language that they even objected it in 1937 when the core committee of Muslim League announced that Urdu should be the official language of the all-India Muslim league. The Bengali representatives objected that Bengali should also be given the same status. But courtesy to Quaid whose intervention subsided the issue. But here in Dacca Quaid did not show any foresightedness. He categorically denied and firmly reiterated his Urdu-only policy.

## **Conclusion**

The language movement was a defining movement in Pakistan's history. The people of East Pakistan were very much possessive regarding their language. Quaid e Azam who was the greatest leader of Muslims in the subcontinent, had never faced any agitation of Muslims in meetings and convocations. But in this language issue, Quaid e Azam faced a protest in his speech at the Dacca convocation. He also faced a similar protest on race-course grounds when he announced his Urdu-only policy. Quaid e Azam must have given serious attention to the problem.

In 1937, the Bengali delegation opposed Urdu to be the official language of the Muslim league. Quaid e Azam intervened and solved the problem. He must have shown foresightedness to overcome the issue but ironically, he warned the Bengali people that this issue was raised by the fifth columnist. He was so firm on his Urdu-only policy that he could not realize the cracks that were drawn by this policy. The people of Bengal were not ready to accept anything less than their native language. When Quaid e Azam was delivering his speech on resources ground, people started chanting na na na. They were not ready to accept the argument of Quaid e Azam that it was conspired by the fifth columnist or Hindus and communists of East Pakistan.

After the demise of Quaid e Azam, Khwaja Nazim ud Din became the governor-general of Pakistan. The new governor-general tried to overcome the situation but he failed to do it. When Khwaja Nazim ud Din was the chief minister of East Pakistan, He was a staunch supporter of the Urdu-only policy of Quaid e Azam. When he signed an agreement with the students of Dacca University, Quaid e Azam overruled it. This act of cancellation created mistrust in the minds of Bengali people. This act also created a poor image of Khwaja Nazim ud Din. On the other hand, Liaquat Ali Khan who was the first prime minister of Pakistan, was also a staunch supporter of Urdu-only policy. The people of Bengal believed that imposing Urdu as a national language would destroy the culture and traditions of Bengali people that were overshadowed by the Bengali language. The people of Bengal considered their native language second to religion. In other countries, people are connected by their language but in Pakistan ironically the language problem led to the separation of East Pakistan. The mistrust between the two wings led to the separation. The politicians of West Pakistan had not realized the fact of resentment on the eastern wing. The

untimely murder of Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan also worsened the situation. The role of the Muslim league was very disappointing. Muslim League was a founding party of the country. Its role was very crucial. Congress on the other side integrated and united the political fibres of Indian politics but the Muslim league had a disappointing performance in this regard. The leaders of the Muslim League did not show any sightedness. On the other side, Indian National Congress which was led by Nehru, had given the status of official language to many local languages. In 19 67 they gave given the official status to the Sindhi language which was a local language in India. In Pakistan, they were not accepting the demands of the majority. This lack of political sightedness brought a downfall to the political carrier of the Muslim League in East Pakistan. The Muslim League Party was struggling with its poor image in East Pakistan. The incompetent political will of the Muslim league brought a sense of

deprivation and frustration to the Bengali people. A party that was the founder of Pakistan had a political setback in the provincial election of East Pakistan. Pakistan Muslim League won only nine seats out of a total of 309 in the provincial elections in 1954. The culture and geographical factors also contributed to the bad scenario. There was a thousand-mile distance between east and west Pakistan. These geographical and cultural differences enhanced the problems further. One of the silent intellectual groups believed in the time of partition that the cultural and geographical differences between the two wings were so high that this federation would soon disintegrate. The Hindu intellectuals had a firm belief that the united Pakistan of Jinnah would soon disintegrate which did in 1971. The martial law of Ayub Khan and Yahya Khan also contributed to the deprivation and frustration of East Pakistan's people.

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