



## **Ekushey February**

21st February is International Mother Language Day, a day to celebrate native languages. In 1952 the people of East Pakistan fought for their right to speak Bengali, their mother tongue. This story explores a small girls discovery of the importance of her mother language.





Ekushey February  
HerStory Foundation

---



# Let's Read



**The Asia Foundation**





“Asha, do you know what day it is tomorrow?” asked Ma. “Monday.” “Yes, it is Monday, February 21 st. This is the special day when we celebrate mother languages. In 19 52 ,the people of East Pakistan, which we know as Bangladesh today, fought for and won the right to speak Bangla. But it was not easy and some people lost their lives. Every year on this day we celebrate all the languages of the world and the freedom to speak them.”





The next morning Ma woke me up early, before the sunrise. She dressed me in a black and white sari. Then holding our shoes in our hands, we walked towards the Shaheed Minar, a big statue in Dhaka. Ma told me that all over Bangladesh there are thousands of little Shaheed Minars to remember the people who love their mother language, Bangla.





The sun was rising when we reached the Minar. There were many people, and together we sang and placed flowers at the foot of the statue. In the crowd, I heard people speaking in languages I did not know. Ma said that Bangladesh has many languages and all of them are beautiful.





When we walked home Ma was quiet. Then she said, "Asha, do you know that your name means "hope"? That is because we have so many hopes for you. That you will grow strong, brave, and smart. That you will go to many places and learn many things. And that you will always remember that you come from a land of rivers, where everything is always changing. But some things last forever - our language, our families, and our culture." I smiled big at my Ma. I am hope!





Today I learned to write the word Ma in Bangla. Now I write it everywhere. On the earth of the playground. On the gifts we give her. In the flour on the kitchen counter. In my notebook, over and over, I write my first Bangla word - Ma.





The 21 st of February is International Mother Language Day. This day celebrates everyone’s freedom to speak in their native language. On this day in 19 52 ,people were killed while protesting for the right to study in Bangla, the language of the land.



Shaheed Minar - a monument to the martyrs of the Bangla language movement.



---

Brought to you by

Let's Read is an initiative of The Asia Foundation's Books for Asia program that fosters young readers in Asia and the Pacific.

booksforasia.org To read more books like this and get further information, visit [letsreadasia.org](https://letsreadasia.org).

Original Story [एकुशेय फेब्रुअरी](#) (Ekushey February), Author: HerStory Foundation. Illustrator: [एकुशेय फेब्रुअरी](#). Published by The Asia Foundation - Let's Read, <https://www.letsreadasia.org> © The Asia Foundation - Let's Read. Released under CC-BY-NC-4.0.

This work is a modified version of the original story. © The Asia Foundation, 2021. Some rights reserved. Released under CC-BY-NC-4.0.

For full terms of use and attribution,

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

Contributing translators: Ritica Lacoul