

# CHAPTER-I

## Introduction

Biography, as defined by the Oxford dictionary, is 'the story of a person's life written by somebody else'. Late in the seventeenth century, John Dryden, has defined biography neatly as 'the history of particular men's lives'. The name now connotes a relatively full account of a particular person's life, involving the attempt to set forth character, temperament, and milieu, as well as the subject's activities and experiences.

Both the ancient Greeks and Romans produced short, formal lives of individuals. The most famed surviving example is the 'Paralled Lives' of Greek and Roman notables by the Greek writer Plutarch, C. AD 46-120. In England, the fairly detailed secular biography appeared in the seventeenth century, the most distinguished instance is Izaak Walton's 'Lives' written between 1640 and 1678. More importantly, biographies focus on the nature and purpose of history. Man is proverbially the crown of creation and therefore the lives of important persons deserve to be recorded for future generations. A biography centres on an individual, his or her birth and death, activities and experiences which in turn serve as legacies and points of reference for the posterity. A political biography centered only on the political career and political ideology or principle of a political figure. There are many good biographies on Indian political figure. Among them mention may be made of S. Gopal's *Jawaharlal Nehru - A Biography*. A political biography not only reveals the political career and activities of a political figure but at the same time also reflects the prevailing socio-political and economic condition of the particular state or country. Likewise the political biography of Sir Syed Muhammad Saadulla has not only given

details of his exploits in life as a politician but also has given a vivid picture of the political scenario of Assam, during his period.

In Assam's political history, the role of Sir Syed Saadulla, the member of the Legislative Council and the Premier of pre-independence Assam was historical. The time-span selected for the study is 1912 to 1951. 1912 is opted as the starting point, because Saadulla started his political career as a member of the Legislative Council in 1912. 1951 is selected as the closing date, because it was in that year Saadulla withdrew from public life. Saadulla was an Assamese Muslim whose ancestors came to Assam during the medieval period. Muslims came to Assam in different manners and at different stages of history. The beginning of the appearance of Muslims in Assam can be traced from 1206 with the Muhammad Bin Bakhtyar Khilji's invasion of Kamrupa. This was followed by many occasional raids, mainly by the Muhammadan Rulers (Sultans) of Bengal till the end of the sixteenth century but they failed to establish a permanent rule in Assam. The Mughals after becoming the Masters of Bengal made several attempts to conquer Assam till 1682. It was during this period, Mir Jumla after becoming the Governor of Bengal made the best organised effort to conquer Assam in 1662. As a result of his invasion, the Mughals were able to occupy vast territories in Assam. However, in 1682, the Ahom king Gadadhar Singha recovered all the territories from the Mughals except Goalpara.<sup>1</sup> During those successive wars of medieval period many soldiers who were captured by the local kings settled permanently in Assam and got assimilated with the greater Assamese society after marrying local women. Even during the period of Muslim invasions a number of Muslim Saint-Preachers came to Assam and under their

---

<sup>1</sup> Kar, M. *Muslims in Assam Politics*, Omsons Publications, New Delhi, 1990, p-2-3.

influence a sizeable number of local Assamese converted into Islam.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, some Muslim experts of different professions who came to Assam on the invitation of the Ahom Kings for efficient administration of their kingdoms also settled permanently.<sup>3</sup> These early Muslim settlers opted for the path of total assimilation with the mainstream of the Assamese society and therefore, there is no instance of ethnic conflict in Assam during medieval period.

Immigration was also a significant phenomenon during the British rule in Assam. The foundation of the British rule in Assam was laid by the treaty of Yandaboo and by 1840 they consolidated their position in Assam by bringing the whole of Brahmaputra Valley<sup>4</sup> under their domination. The Surma Valley districts of Sylhet and Cachar along with Goalpara were carved out of the Bengal Presidency in 1874, and attached to Assam, the Muslim population of the then Assam increased from 5% to 28.3%.<sup>5</sup> The number also increased when the British imported Bengali Muslims mainly cultivators from Bengal and Hindi speaking Muslims mainly from Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa for their economic purpose. For their imperialist interests the British also imported Nepali, Marwari, Bihari and others from various parts of India. The British rule in Assam also started English schools and printing press to disseminate western education and ideas among the people of Assam. With the spread of western education under the patronage of the British, democratic ideas and democratic political institutions caught up the minds of the English educated

---

<sup>2</sup> Deb, B. J. (ed.). *Population and Development in North East India*, Concept Publishing Company Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 2010, p- 194.

<sup>3</sup> Kar, M. *Muslims in Assam Politics*, Omsons Publications, New Delhi, 1990, p-5.

<sup>4</sup> Before the British Conquest, Assam consisted of the Brahmaputra Valley districts of Darrang, Kamrup, Lakhimpur, Nowgong and Sivsagar.

<sup>5</sup> Singha, S. P. *Lost Opportunities: 50 Years of Isurgency in the North-east and India's Response*, Lancer Publishers, New Delhi, 2007, p-27.

Assamese. Growth of the political consciousness among the people of Assam led to the foundation of a number of political organisations in Assam. Though Congress Party was founded in 1885 and Muslim League in 1906 yet these two organisations had no branch in Assam till 1920's. The earliest political organisation of Assam was the Assam Association. This Association was mainly concerned with constitutional agitation. The first Assamese representative in the Legislative Council of the newly created province of Eastern Bengal and Assam in 1905 belonged to this Association. Later on, most of the acknowledged members of this organisation were also the members of the Council of the time and therefore they were in a position to divert the attention of the Government towards the demands and resolutions passed by the Association. Though Saadulla was not a member of this Association yet he was closely associated with it. Rather he was a member of the Muslim political organisation of Assam like Anjuman Islamia and the Assam Valley Muhammeden Association and as a leader of these organisations he was aware of the rights and grievances of the Muslims of Assam and accordingly he represented the Muslim point of view at various platforms. Saadulla at the initial stage of his political career involved himself in the matters of Municipal and Local Boards and later he entered the Council as its member in 1912.<sup>6</sup> As a member of the Council, Saadulla soon grew in stature and importance and subsequently held office as minister under the system of Dyarchy. It was during the years in Dyarchy, Saadulla's ideas regarding the regional problems and the policies of the colonial government developed. During the election of 1937, Saadulla formed the Assam Valley Muslim Party and contested from the South Kamrup constituency. He was an indigenous Assamese Muslim who took five times oath as the Premier of Assam during 1937 to 1946. The period in which

---

<sup>6</sup> Barpujari H. K.(ed.). *Political History of Assam (Vol-I)*, Govt. of Assam, Gauhati, 1999, p-207.

Saadulla dominated Assam politics as a Premier was very crucial. Though the process of the entry of Muslims in Assam began from the early part of the thirteen century yet Saadulla found that the socio-economic and educational condition of his community was not sound. The period was not only dominated by ethno-linguistic conflict but also there existed rivalry and jealousy between the Brahmaputra Valley and Surma Valley. In addition to this, there was no solidarity among the Muslims. The Muslims of Brahmaputra Valley thought themselves Assamese first and then Muslim while the Muslims of Surma Valley thought themselves Muslim first and then Sylhetis.<sup>7</sup>

When Saadulla formed his first ministry he had to depend on a number of groups and independent members. Saadulla's position in the Legislative Assembly was not save as the Muslim League in collaboration with the Congress caused considerable embarrassment to his ministry in many occasions and even inflicted as many as eleven defeat on it in the Assembly in the form of cut motions and resolutions.<sup>8</sup> It is curious that while forming his ministry Saadulla did not include any member of the Muslim League party. Later on, he not only joined the party but also reshuffled the ministry to include Muslim League ministers in his cabinet.

As the Premier of Assam, Saadulla inherited the problem of land settlement for the immigrants of East Bengal and this was the issue that dominated the entire tenure of his office. The issue was widely responsible for rise and fall of ministries during the decade of provincial autonomy.<sup>9</sup> Saadulla in order to provide solution to

---

<sup>7</sup> Shibly, Atful Hye. *Abdul Matin Chaudhury: Trusted Lieutenant of Md. Ali Jinnah*, Published by Juned. A. Chaudhury, Dhaka, 2011, p-5.

<sup>8</sup> Bhuyan, A.C. & De, S. (eds). *Political History of Assam*, Vol.-III, Govt of Assam, Gauhati , 2008, p-254.

<sup>9</sup> Dev, B. J. and Lahiri, D. K. (eds). *Assam Muslim Politics and Cohesion*, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 1985, p- 57.

the problem of immigration formulated or took many policies. But all the policies that were adopted by Saadulla from time to time satisfied neither the Congress nor the militant Muslim Leaguers led by Bhasani. The Congress accused him of opening the flood gates to immigrants in order to convert Assam into a Muslim majority province and thereby include it in the eastern wing of Pakistan. On the other hand Muslim League members felt that Saadulla was not following the ideologies and principles of the Muslim League.

In 1945, with a view to solving the burning issues of Assam on one hand and to place himself in a better political position on the other hand Saadulla made a settlement with Bardoloi and R. K. Choudhuri. Another aspect of this settlement was that it led to the dissolution of his fourth ministry and formation of an all party cabinet under the leadership of Saadulla. However, the agreement collapsed when Bardoloi withdrew his support. Thereafter Saadulla supported Jinnah's two-nation theory to which he was lukewarm and even supported Cabinet Mission Scheme of tagging Assam with Bengal. Though Saadulla gave full support to Jinnah's two-nation theory, he opted to stay in India during the partition of the country in between India and Pakistan.

Few leaders from the early days of Provincial Legislative Councils to the eve of Indian Independence had a more prominent place or a longer period in government and politics than Sir Syed Muhammad Saadulla in Assam. Yet curiously, Saadulla did not receive the much needed attention of the scholars and hence no comprehensive study is available on the same. For this reason the present study is therefore an attempt to fill up this gap and to find an elaborate and extensive information on Sir Syed Muhammad Saadulla's political career of forty years from a new and broad perspective and thereby to open the scope for further research works in the field.

## **Objective of the Research**

An attempt has been made here to study and analyses the role of Sir Syed Saadulla, the Premier of pre-independence Assam in the regional political activities. So, the chief objectives of the present study can be stated as follows:

- 1) To throw light on Saadulla's childhood, family background, educational career and social context that shaped his political career.
- 2) To study Saadulla's political aims, objectives and his political ideologies or principles.
- 3) To study his attitude and relation with the British in India.
- 4) To understand his views, thoughts, position and participation with regard to different national and regional political issues like Sylhet separation, immigration question etc. that emerged during his long political career.

## **Review of literature**

A number of books have been written on the politics of Assam, on individual political leaders or on specific political issues both by Muslim and Hindu scholars.

*Muslims in Assam Politics* by M. Kar is an account of Assam with special reference to the Muslims. This book contains a systematic and chronological history of settlement of Muslims in Assam, their socio-economic conditions and their political position since the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The book has also touched in details the causes and roots of intricate and complicated problems of Assam like the Bengali immigration, the Sylhet controversy and the language issue and also highlighted the role of the Muslims including Saadulla in those issues. But the book

has made very scanty references to the objectives and motives behind Saadulla's dealing with those issues.

*The Man Who Divided India* by Rafiq Zakaria is an analytical political biography of Jinnah. It is a pioneering and in depth study of the issue of Muslim Nationalism leading to the partition in 1947 with special reference to the role of Jinnah in it. The book has thrown light on various crucial themes which led to the transformation in Jinnah's political journey from "The Ambassador of Hindu-Muslim Unity" to the 'Creator of Pakistan'. But it has not focused any light on Jinnah's association with Saadulla or with Assam Provincial Muslim League.

Amalendu Guha's *Planter-Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam 1826-1947* is an account of the political development of Assam. In this book the author has discussed in detail the various aspects and issues of Assam during the colonial period. It has also touched the salient features of the evolution of the Provincial Legislature in the province. Causes and roots of complex and thorny problems of Assam like the Bengali immigration, the Sylhet controversy and the language issue are also highlighted in this book. But this book has not touched in detail the problems and difficulties faced by Saadulla in running and managing the administration of the province.

*Political History of Assam* Vol-I (ed.) by H. K Barpujari and Vol-II and III (ed.) by A. C. Bhuyan, contain glimpses of the political developments of Assam during British period. The intellectual developments and rising of several organisations under guidance of politicians and elite people in the 19<sup>th</sup> and first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century are focused in this series of books.

*Assam Muslim Politics and Cohesion* by B. J. Dev and D. K. Lahiri contains in details the information regarding Muslims and their role in politics in Assam. This book at the same time is the most meticulous and complete account of the social setting and sentiments of Assam Muslims. It has also touched some vital issues like Muslim League Politics and its consequence on Assam in the pre-independence period. The politics of immigration in Assam and its impact have also been touched in details by the writer in this book.

Sajal Nag in his book *Roots of Ethnic Conflict: Nationality Question in North East India* has particularly emphasised on Assamese nationality question and its development in pre colonial era onward. He has also touched the issues that led to conflict between Assamese and Bengali in second half of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Binayak Dutta's book *Religion in Politics: Eastern India 1905-1947* deals with the role of Ulemas in the Muslim League politics in Eastern India. There are scanty references to Saadulla in this work.

S. L. Baruah's book *Comprehensive History of Assam* has provided information about socio political history of Assam under company rule. Political development with territorial expansion has also been depicted in this book by the writer.

Nirode Kumar Barooah's book *Gopinath Bordoloi, The Assam Problem and Nehru's Centre* has provided ample of information regarding Bordoloi's political life. It has thrown enough light on the earlier period (1920-1936) of Bardoloi's life during which he was engaged in mass movement for national independence and social reconstruction. The book also contains account of the politics of Assam during the freedom movement and the first three years of the post-independence era.

*Assam Attitude to Federalism* by Girin Phukon has given a lot of information regarding the role and participation of the Assamese elite in the Constituent Assembly Debates. This book has mainly focused light on the reasons why the Assamese elite debated for greater Provincial Autonomy and a relatively weak Central Government when the Constitution was being framed.

*A Century Of Government And Politics In North East India* by V. Venkata Rao and Niru Hazarika Vol.1(Assam) (1874-1980) has given detailed account of the government and politics of Assam and has also touched various aspects of state such as election of 1937, ministry formation, burning issues of the period such as Line System, Sylhet issues etc. But this book has not provided any detailed analysis of the policies that were undertaken by Saadulla.

A. H. Shibly's book "*Abdul Matin Chaudhary: Trusted Lieutenant of Md. Ali Jinnah*" is a biography on Abdul Matin Chaudhary. The book basically emphasised on his political ideologies and on his political activities particularly his role in defending the interests of immigrations from East Bengal in Assam along with the main motive of including Assam in the proposed eastern wing of Pakistan as a prominent figure of Muslim League in Assam. At the same time the book has also discussed the interaction between Abdul Matin Chaudhary and Jinnah and also Saadulla. But this book has made no references to the Council Politics in Assam and thereby has not focused light on Saadulla's political activities as a member of the Council.

Monirul Hussain's book entitled *Assam Movement, Class Ideology and Identity*, has touched in detail the genesis of immigration problem in Assam and the various aspects associated with it like regional nationalism, process of assimilation

among the Eastern Bengali Muslim with the greater Assamese society. The book has also highlighted in detail the various aspects and issues relating to the Assam Movement of late 1970's and early 80's. Monirul Hussain while highlighting the various aspects associated with the immigration problem made scanty reference to the policies adopted by Saadulla to deal with immigration issue under economic consideration and political compulsion.

Thus, the foregoing of available literature apparently reflects that there is no single volume that provides insight into the whole political career of Saadulla. It is felt that there is a genuine need for studying his work and contribution towards Assam and Muslim society with a view to helping the general mass as well as the student to give a vivid picture on his political career till his death.

### **Research Questions**

- How was Saadulla's relation with the British in India?
- What were the issues and difficulties faced by Saadulla as a minister under the system of Dyarchy?
- What was Saadulla's position in the legislature as well as in the party and how he dealt with other political parties and organisations?
- Why did Saadulla oppose the separation of Sylhet from Assam but support the tagging of Assam with Bengal?
- What were the policies or measures adopted by Saadulla to deal with the problem of land settlement and what were its consequences?

## **Methodology**

The methodologies adopted in this research work are empirical and analytical. In the process of historical enquiry of the research both primary and secondary sources has been used to a large extent. Many archives and libraries were visited for collecting the sources.

The State Archives of Assam; Assam Secretariat Library, Dispur and National Archive have been of great importance. Numerous Government letters, reports, gazetteers, debates related to the work were collected from the State Archive of Assam, Assam Secretariat Library and National Archive. The private papers of political figures of Assam have been generated from Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Delhi. From the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Guwahati various data of the colonial period have been collected from Assamese newspaper. The Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR), Guwahati helped gathering numerous articles published in various NEIHA sessions and in the journal entitled Economic and Political Weekly. Books related to history of pre independence Assam have been gathered in large numbers from ICHR. The District Library of Cachar and Cachar District Record Room, Assam University Library, Silchar helped with numerous materials related to history of colonial period. Various secondary sources like articles in magazines, journals and books and newspaper of selected issues preserved in the National Library, Kolkata were also consulted.

## **Organisation of the Research Study**

The outcome of the research has been organised into six chapters.

### **Chapter – I**

#### **Introduction**

For the better understanding and for the sake of methodical work, the thesis begins with an introduction which is the first chapter. In this chapter the statement of the problem is discussed with the assistances of survey of literature, objectives of the present work, methodologies etc. The area and period of the research work is well stated in this chapter. The socio economic and political scenario of Assam at the time of Saadulla's entry into politics is also discussed in the chapter.

### **Chapter-II**

#### **Emergence of Saadulla in Assam politics**

This chapter has shed light on Saadulla's family history with special reference to Azan Pir and his academic and professional career. It has also touched the reasons that inspired him to take part in politics. During the Second Reformed Council election Saadulla contested the election as an independent candidate and was elected with Swarajist support. Though he was elected with Swarajist support yet he refused to work according to the principle and policy of the Sawarj Party and later accepted office under the Dyarchy system as the Minister of Education and Agriculture. In the third general elections to the Legislative Council Saadulla won the election by a large margin. The Governor retained Saadulla in the ministry on the ground that he was a Muslim leader who enjoyed the confidence of the Muslims of the two valleys and that he was a moderate in his political views and thereby against the ideologies and

principles of obstructing the administration of the province under the new reforms. This time he was given the portfolio of finance and laws and order. This chapter has discussed in detail the difficulties and issues which Saadulla had to face as a minister under the system of Dyarchy and also the policies and steps that he had adopted to solve those problems till 1935.

### **Chapter-III**

#### **Saadulla's Ministry making efforts till the eve of the World War II**

This chapter has highlighted Saadulla's political activities during his first and second ministry. Saadulla contested the election of 1937 from the South Kamrup constituency and was elected uncontested. At the request of the Governor, Saadulla formed his first ministry. At the time of forming the first ministry he was not a member of the Muslim League but later on he came under its fold. This chapter has laid emphasis on the reasons and circumstances that compelled him to do so and it has also focused light on the various ways and means adopted by him to resist the continuous machination of the Congress Party in order to remain in power during the period 1937-1938.

### **Chapter-IV**

#### **Saadulla's leadership in Assam during 1939-1945**

This chapter has laid emphasis on Saadulla's leadership during the Second World War. The devastating Second World War is generally said to have begun on 1<sup>st</sup> September, 1939 when the German army under Adolf Hitler invaded Poland. Hitler's unprovoked act of aggression on Poland subsequently drove France and Britain to declare war on Germany two days later. Since India was under the British rule, the

Viceroy immediately declared India's participation in the war against Germany and asked the Indian people to assist British in its war efforts. Saadulla as the Premier also co-operated the British Government in their war efforts. He contributed several lakhs of rupees to the war fund. This chapter has focused light on various ways and means adopted by him for raising fund for the British military campaign and its consequences. The chapter has also discussed Saadulla's attitude toward immigration, Line System and Pakistan issue as a Premier, politician and as a Muslim League leader. It has also examined his position in the legislature as well as within his party and his mutual understanding with other political parties especially with the Congress Party and its consequences.

## **Chapter-V**

### **Saadulla's political activities in Assam from 1946 till his death**

This chapter has discussed in detail the political situation of Assam on the eve of the Assam Provincial Legislative Assembly election with special reference to the role played by Saadulla. In the election, the Congress secured absolute majority of 55 members in a House of 108 and this reduced Saadulla to the position of the leader of opposition. As the leader of opposition party Saadulla opposed the eviction process resumed by Congress Party. Meanwhile, the Cabinet Mission arrived in India on 23<sup>rd</sup> March, 1946 to set up machinery for framing the Constitution of India. The Cabinet Mission divided the whole country into three sections and placed Assam in Group C along with Bengal. Saadulla welcomed the scheme. This chapter has discussed the reasons of supporting this scheme. It has also discussed the reasons behind supporting the Pakistan issue and also his half hearted support and poor response towards the Civil Disobedience started by Bhasani.

After the partition of the country in December 1947, the All India Muslim League was divided into two parts, one for those Muslims who remained in India and the other for those of the Pakistan area. On 30<sup>th</sup> June 1948, the Assam Provincial Muslim League was officially dissolved. After the dissolution of the Assam Provincial Muslim League Saadulla joined the Congress but soon he left the organisation. This chapter has focused in detail the differences that cropped between him and the Congress Party.

## **Chapter-VI**

### **Conclusion**

Conclusion is the summary of the whole thesis highlighting the main points of discussion. A “bibliography” has followed the conclusion. An “Appendix” has followed the “bibliography”.