

CHAPTER-III

Saadulla's Ministry Making Efforts till the eve of the World War-II

The Third Round Table Conference, held at London during November-December 1932 to discuss the reports of the sub-committees appointed during the second Round Table Conference. This Conference came up with a concrete plan for a new Constitution of India. The Government published the White Paper on 15th March, 1933, containing the directives on which the new constitution of India was to be framed and devised. The White Paper embodied almost all the recommendations of the Simon Commission except that of a federal Government. As this White Paper failed to meet the expectation of the India public, it was thoroughly condemned by the Indian. A Joint Select Committee consisting of both Houses was appointed to review the White Paper. This Committee suggested certain modifications and on the basis of the report of the Committee a bill was prepared which, with slight alterations, finally became the Government of India Act 1935. The Act did not provide for a full-fledged responsible government. No absolute authority was provided by the Act in the provincial level or at the centre. In the provinces, the Governor enjoyed enormous powers. He was given the authority to take over the administration of the province to his own hands, whenever he thought that the Constitutional machinery of province failed.¹ In Assam the Congress Party under Bardoloi accepted the reforms introduced by the Act with a view to obstruct, paralyse, wreck and frustrate the operation of the new Constitution.² On the other hand, the attitude of the different political groups and

¹ Bhuyan, A. C. and De, S. (eds). *Political History of Assam, Vol.-II*, Government of Assam, Gauhati, 2008, p-325-326.

² Guha, Amalendu. *Planter Raj to Swaraj, Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam 1826 - 1947*, People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1977, p- 216. , also cited in Ibid. p-331.

parties was different. The Muslim League, though critical of the Act of 1935, accepted it on a trial basis. While criticising the Act, almost all political groups and parties, agreed to contest the elections to the Provincial Legislatures due in early 1937.

Saadulla as usual stood for office acceptance and from the beginning of 1936; he started hectic activities to participate in the provincial elections as provided in the Act. For contesting the election Saadulla formed the Assam Valley Muslim Party. Saadulla till 1935 was neither a member nor was affiliated to any political party or group. In absence of any party support in the Council Saadulla became well-aware of the fact that without requisite support of a party, it was ineffable to sustain and accrue any demands. So, it can well be perceived that his experience in the Council and the introduction of the parliamentary politics by the new Act bound Saadulla to form the Assam Valley Muslim Party. Under the new dispensation elections to eleven Provincial Legislatures in India were held in the early 1937.³ Saadulla contested the election from the South Kamrup constituency and was elected uncontested to the Assam Legislative Assembly.⁴ Saadulla before the declaration of elections result thought that the Congress Party would get less than 20 seats. But when the Congress Party under Gopinath Bardoloi had emerged from the polls with a convincing majority, capturing thirty three seats out of 108 in the Legislature, Saadulla was surprised. The number of seats occupied by the Congress Party was almost equal to the total number of seats occupied by the various Muslim parties in the province. The

³ Hazarika, Sanjoy. *Strangers of the Mist: War and Peace from India's Northeast*, Penguin Groups, New Delhi, 1994, p- 50.

⁴ Proceedings of the Assam Legislative Assembly, 1938, The Assam Gazette, Part, VI, A, 1938, Published by Authority, Shillong, 1938, p-11.

performance of the Muslim League as such was modest. It got only four seats, Surma Valley Muslim Party got five seats while Saadulla's own Assam Valley Muslim Party had secured five seats.⁵ Thus, the situation of Assam was unclear as no party had emerged with an absolute majority.

Political Condition of Assam after the election of 1937:

Being the largest single party with 33 seats out of 108 seats in the Assam Legislative Assembly, the Congress Party had fair prospect of forming a coalition Government by making alliance with other parties with similar principles and ideologies. But the Congress Party in Assam refused to form the Government and decided to play the role of an effective opposition as its Central leadership had already decided against acceptance of office in provinces where they did not have a clear majority. The Governor Michael Keane's was anxious to prevent Bardoloi from forming a coalition with support from the tribes and the Christian factions and put the Muslim bloc of 34 members in power with the help of nine European members in the Assembly. In the view of Michael Keane, they would be able to command 20 votes including theirs. These 54 members would be able to secure the support of few others for forming the government. But the problem for Keane was that there was no solidarity among the Muslim legislators of the Assam Legislative Assembly. The Muslims though elected on separate electorate, were not organized and divided among themselves into a number of small groups. Added to this there was no recognised leader. According to Michael Keane, Saadulla was the only person who could patch

⁵ Result of the 1937 Elections and strength of different parties emerged from the poll were as follows :
(i) Congress -33 (ii) Independent Hindus - 10 (iii) Muslim Praja Party -1 (iv) United Peoples Party- 3
(v) Assam Valley Muslims - 5 (vi) Surma Valley Muslims - 5 (vii) Europeans - 9 (viii) Backward Tribes - 4 (ix) Labour - 4 (x) Independents -14 (xi) Others -20.

up the differences of various Muslim groups and could bring them under a common platform.⁶ For this purpose, Michael Keane, sought the help of Saadulla and persuaded him to come to Assam in order to form a stable Government. To attract Saadulla, Michael Keane even offered him the Premiership of Assam in 1937. But Saadulla was hesitant to decide the consequence of the said proposal from Michael Keane. Consequently, he informed Keane that he required additional time to make up his mind regarding the proposal.⁷ This made the Governor very worried as the time was passing by and he was unable to change the situation in the legislature.

During that period of time Saadulla was in Calcutta where he had been practising law at the Calcutta High Court. As Saadulla was being considered for the Calcutta High Court judgeship, he was not in a hurry to accept the proposal of Keane and also hesitate to return to Assam in haste. But in the long run, he was not appointed as a Judge on the ground that he did not possess the requisite experience of ten years of continuous practice at the Bar; instead he was appointed as a junior Government Pleader with a pledge that he would be elevated to the Bench within a reasonable period.⁸ This decision of the court displeased him much as he was not willing to work as a junior Government Pleader. By this time, Sir Robert Reid succeeded Keane as the Governor of Assam on 4th March, 1937 and he sent a letter to Saadulla as thus:

⁶ Chopra, P. N. *Towards Freedom 1937-47 Vol. 1*, Indian Council Historical Research, Delhi, 1985, p-147.

⁷ Hazarika, Sanjoy. *Strangers of the Mist: War and Peace from India's Northeast*, Penguin Groups, New Delhi, 1994, p-51.

⁸ Muhammed Saadulah - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muhammed_Saadulah (accessed on 20 December 2014)

“As far as I can judge with my extremely limited knowledge of Assam, it would appear that you are the only individual to whom best applies the wording of the Instrument of Instructions as one who is most likely to command a stable majority in the legislature. I write, therefore, to enquire whether you will be willing, at a very early date, to come and see me at Shillong with a view to assisting in forming a council of Ministers.”⁹

Saadulla was not only requested by the Governor of Assam but also by all shades of politicians and people of the state to come back to Assam and form a stable government. The politicians and the people who requested Saadulla to come back to Assam and take part in politics were no doubt against Congress Party's ideologies and principles. They preferred successful working of the new reforms introduced by the Act and more than all these they had full confidence on Saadulla's abilities and capacities. Being disgruntled at the court-decision and overwhelmed by such requests Saadulla finally gave consent to the proposal of forming a Government and decided to come back to Assam and took part in politics. Saadulla was a Muslim leader who enjoyed the confidence of the Muslims of the two valleys. He was an experienced parliamentarian with an unbroken administrative experience for a greater part of the past fifteen years since the introduction of Dyarchy in the province, first as a minister and later as an executive councillor.¹⁰ And lastly he was a non-Congress and was not under the Congress ideologies and principles of obstructing the administration of the province under the new reforms introduced by the Act. For these three reasons he was

⁹ Rao, V. Venkata. and Hazarika, Niru. *A Century of Government and Politics in North East India, Vol-I (Assam)*, S. Chand and Company Ltd., New Delhi, 1983, p - 59.

¹⁰ Guha, Amalendu. *Planter Raj to Swaraj, Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam, 1826 - 1947*, People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1977, p-219.

selected as the perfect candidate for the post of Premiership by the Governor and the people of Assam.

Saadulla's first ministry making efforts:

Saadulla met Robert Reid on 15th March, 1937 and discussed with him in details the political situation of Assam and the measures to be taken for the formation of a stable ministry. Saadulla was well aware of the fact that without co-ordination and co-operation of the various parties and groups of the Assembly it was not possible to form a Government. He was convinced that leaving the solid 33 members affiliated to the Congress and uniting the rest members of the Assembly he could form the Government and this was what the Governor wanted Saadulla to do. To turn his planning into practice, Saadulla engaged himself in corresponding with the different factional leaders willing to form a stable government. He even made an appeal to the different Muslim groups and parties of both the valleys to unite them under a common banner. Out of the 34 Muslim legislators elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly, 21 belonged to the Surma Valley while the rest belonged to the Brahmaputra Valley. The Muslim groups of the Brahmaputra Valley agreed to form a coalition with Saadulla selecting him as their leader. The United Peoples Party of R. K. Choudhuri, the European Group and the Tribal members also promised to render their support to Saadulla.¹¹ In response to an appeal for Muslim solidarity the various Muslim groups and parties in Surma Valley united themselves under the banner of Surma Valley United Muslim Party and consequently the strength of this party rose to 17. It is important to note that the Muslim League was founded in the Surma Valley by Abdul Matin Chaudhury, who had resigned from the Central Legislative Assembly to enter

¹¹ Rao, V. Venkata. and Hazarika, Niru. *A Century of Government and Politics in North East India, Vol-1 (Assam)*, S. Chand and Company Ltd., New Delhi, 1983, p - 60.

the Provincial Assembly. The small party of the Muslim League did not merge with the Surma Valley United Muslim Party; rather it retained its separate identity. The Surma Valley United Muslim Party agreed to form a coalition with Saadulla on the following conditions-two seats for the Surma Valley Muslims in the cabinet including the Speakership. Baidhyanath Mukherjee leader of the Independent Party and Akshay Kumar Das leader of the Constitutional Party demanded representation from their respective party in the ministry.¹²

In the third week of March Saadulla came out with a proposal of forming Government with Munawwar Ali¹³ and Abdul Matin Chaudhury of Muslim League, Rohini Kumar Choudhuri of the People's Party and J. J. Nicholas Roy from the hill areas. But Saadulla's ministry making attempt with these groups fell through when the Governor, Robert Reid refused to allow him to form Government with the Muslim Leaguers.¹⁴ This was because the Muslim League had won only four seats in the election and these negligible members could not help Saadulla to form a stable Government.

As a result, Saadulla was bound to re-start his ministry making effort. This time Saadulla made agreement with the Surma Valley United Muslim Party of Hyder Ali accepting the exorbitant demands, two seats for Surma Valley United Muslim Party in the cabinet and Speakership. Actually Saadulla accepted these demands only because the Surma Valley United Muslim Party was the largest single party next to

¹² Rao, V. Venkata. and Hazarika, Niru. *A Century of Government and Politics in North East India, Vol-1 (Assam)*, S. Chand and Company Ltd., New Delhi, 1983, p - 60.

¹³ Munawwar Ali (1884-1951): F. Sc. Presidency Cal. U. 1903, B. A. Meerat college Allahabad U. 1907, LL. B. Alligarh 1909; practice at Sylhet, from 1921 at Sunamganj; Pres. Assam ML (Shafi) 1928-35; joined ML (Jinnah) 1937; MLC 1921-3, MLA 1927-51; Minister 1938, 1939-41, 1942-46.

¹⁴ Rao, V. Venkata. and Hazarika, Niru. *A Century of Government and Politics in North East India, Vol-1 (Assam)*, S. Chand and Company Ltd., New Delhi, 1983, p - 60.

the Congress Party and the support of this party was necessary for the success of his ministry making efforts. As an acknowledgement of the support rendered by the Surma Valley United Muslim Party Saadulla had even gone all the way to Kulaura to meet the party leaders.¹⁵

After accomplishing this entire thing, Saadulla made negotiation with Rohini Kumar Choudhuri from United People's Party and J. J. Nicholas Roy from the Progressive Party giving one seat to each party in the cabinet. Saadulla also informed Reid that his ministry making process was going on smoothly and that he would meet him soon along with his ministers. On 31st March, 1937, Saadulla, Nicholas Roy, R. K. Choudhuri and Shamsul met the Governor in the morning and they finalised the ministry.¹⁶ The next day Saadulla took office as the head of the non-Congress coalition ministry.¹⁷ Saadulla got a period of about three months after the Legislative elections to cobble a majority and, finally, to take office. While forming the ministry Saadulla had drawn his supporters from heterogeneous groups and his government was based on diversified conditions and negotiations put forwarded by them. He knew it very well that any deviation or alterations from such bound norms could result in the fall of his Government. Such situations forced him to rely increasingly on the European bloc and their cohorts for succor in times of distress.¹⁸

¹⁵ Assam Legislative Assembly Debate, Vol.1, No. 4, 1938, p - 209-210.

¹⁶ Reid, Robert. *Years of Chang in Bengal and Assam*, Ernest Benn Limited, London, 1966, p-91.

¹⁷ Mohammad Saadulla- Premier, Finance, Home and Public works. 2) Rohini Kumar Chaudhury- Revenue, Justice, Legislation and General dept. 3) Muhammed Waheed- Education and Forest. 4) Ali Haidar Khan-Agriculture, Industry, Cooperative Societies and Registration 5) James Joy Mohan Nicholas Roy- Local Self Govt. Excise and Medicine.

¹⁸ Dutta, Anuradha. *Assam in the freedom Movement*, Darbari Prakashan, Calcutta, 1991, p-205-206.

Harassment of Saadulla by the Congress Party in collaboration with the Muslim League:

The Congress Party in Assam, on the other hand, was not a silent spectator of Saadulla's move. After allowing Saadulla to form the ministry, the Congress leadership in Assam resorted to all possible means to ensure its downfall. From the very beginning, the Congress Party was making enormous effort to win the support of the members from the multiplicity of groups and parties. Shortly after forming the Government Saadulla recognised that his agreement of giving two seats in the cabinet and Speakership to the Muslims from Surma Valley provoked only distrust among the Muslims of the Brahmaputra Valley. Saadulla was even approached by the Muslim members of the Brahmaputra Valley to reconsider his decision. So, in order to satisfy the Muslim members of the Brahmaputra Valley, Saadulla broke his earlier agreement with Hyder Ali and set up Keramat Ali as the candidate for election of Speakership. The violation of the agreement by Saadulla was resented by several members of Surma Valley United Muslim Party and a few of them had shifted their allegiance from him to the Congress Party. In this context, it is important to cite that there existed a dichotomy of political interests of the Muslims of the two valleys and the Muslims of Assam had demanded their separate representation in the Indian Legislature as well as in the public services as distinct from that of the Surma Valley.¹⁹ Moreover, Saadulla's tactics of non inclusion of Abdul Matin Chaudhury of Muslim League in his ministry made Abdul Matin Chaudhury disappointed and frustrated.²⁰ The most prominent League leader, Abdul Matin Chaudhury, after being frustrated for not including in the Saadulla ministry, joined hands with the Congress

¹⁹ Kar, M. *Muslims in Assam Politics*, Omsons Publications, New Delhi, 1990, p-164.

²⁰ Shibly, Atful Hye. *Abdul Matin Chaudhury: Trusted Lieutenant of Md. Ali Jinnah*, Published by Juned. A. Chaudhury, Dhaka, 2011, p-87.

Party. Due to the alliance between the Muslim League and the Congress Party and Saadulla's violation of agreement with Hyder Ali of Surma Valley United Muslim Party his nominated candidates Khan Bahadur Maulavi Keramat Ali for Speaker and Kumar Ajit Narayan Deb for Deputy Speaker was defeated to the combine nominees of the Congress Party and the Muslim League.²¹ There was a straight fight between Khan Bahadur Maulavi Keramat Ali and Mr. Basanta Kumar Das on the voting paper for the post of Speaker. Mr Basant Kumar, the senior most and ablest parliamentarian of the Congress Party was elected as the Speaker. He had secured 56 votes against 51.²² On the other hand, the League got their own candidate Amir Uddin Ahmed elected as the Deputy Speaker with the support of the Congress and others. Amir Uddin was elected by a tremendous majority of 62 votes.²³

The result of the election for Speaker and Deputy Speaker made Saadulla to realise that his political status was not stable. Hardly could he reconcile to the defeat of his nominees for Speakership and Deputy Speakership, he was stuck by another embarrassing situation. As soon the election was over, Omeo Kumar Das of the Congress Party moved a no confidence motion against the cabinet. It was the first no confidence motion against Saadulla's government; but fortunately for Saadulla it was not moved and discussed as the Speaker ruled out the no confidence motion expressing the view that the structured business of the day was assigned for the election of the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker. He also declared that the House could move the resolution the next day. This one night's respite provided a golden

²¹ Bhuyan, A. C. and De, S. (eds). *Political History of Assam, Vol-III*, Govt. of Assam, Guwahati, 2008, p-254.

²² Proceedings of the Assam Legislative Assembly, 1937, The Assam Gazette, Part, VI, A, 1937, Published by Authority, Shillong, 1937, p-6.

²³ Proceedings of the Assam Legislative Assembly, 1937, The Assam Gazette, Part, VI, A, 1937, Published by Authority, Shillong, 1937, p-9.

opportunity to Saadulla to revive his political position. Within this extended time Saadulla gave his utmost efforts to win over the members who had deserted him and expressed their solidarity with the Congress on the issue of no confidence. It was alleged that in one night about Rs. 1000 was spent by Saadulla and his ministry.²⁴ Gopinath Bardoloi was aware of this fact and so apprehending defeat the motion was not tabled by him on the following day. So it is seen that the Congress Party under Bardoloi gave their utmost effort to remove Saadulla from power but failed and Saadulla, the experienced legislator on his part tried to retain his chair by hook or crook.

Again, when the budget session started Saadulla and his Government was heavily attacked by the Muslim League and the Congress Party. Due to Muslim League and the Congress Party's continuous propaganda against Saadulla, his Government had to sustain a series of heavy defeats-as many as eleven defeats in the Assembly in the form of cut motions and resolutions.²⁵ In reality, Saadulla suffered defeats mainly due to Abdul Matin Chaudhury. Abdul Matin Chaudhury, the President of the All India Muslim League, entered into Assam politics with the vowed objective of organising and establishing the Muslim League in Assam and to patch up the differences of the small Muslim groups and parties of Assam and to bring them under the banner of the Muslim League. Chaudhury was an experienced leader of the Muslim Leader who had already brought the Muslims of Western and Central India under the banner of the Muslim League²⁶ and thereby proved himself as a skilled

²⁴ Kar, M. *Muslims in Assam Politics*, Omsons Publications, New Delhi, 1990, p-11.

²⁵ IAR, July-December 1937, Vol.2, p-242-3; cited in Bhuyan, A. C. and De, S. (eds). *Political History of Assam, Vol-II*, Govt. of Assam, Guwahati, 2008, p-345.

²⁶ Shibly, Atful Hye. *Abdul Matin Chaudhury: Trusted Lieutenant of Md. Ali Jinnah*, Published by Juned. A. Chaudhury, Dhaka, 2011, p-84.

negotiator. Chaudhury had noticed that the politics in Assam centered round a very sensitive issue relating to the immigrants and Line System. As the issue was mainly connected with the Muslims of Assam in particular Chaudhury started to champion the immigration issue in order to mobilise the Muslim legislators and to bring them within the Muslim League camp.

It has already been mentioned that during the early colonial period, the British noticed that in Assam there was a large tracts of waste lands. The British administration in Assam encouraged immigration of Bengali Muslim cultivators from the over populated and congested districts of Bengal in order to increase land revenue by settling them in the fallow and waste lands of the Brahmaputra Valley. Since, the first decade of the 20th century, the number of immigrants from the East Bengal increased at a high rate. When the immigrants after occupying all the riverine areas threatened to occupy the permanent land belonging to the indigenous communities there developed a clash between the immigrants and the indigenous communities over all kinds of cultivable land. In the face of growing confrontation between the immigrants and the autochthonous communities the colonial government devised the Line System in 1920. The object of this system was to segregate the immigrants from the autochthonous communities of Assam.²⁷ As per this system villages were classified into four categories: those exclusively reserved for the autochthons, those exclusively reserved for the East Bengali immigrants, mixed villages, and villages where both autochthonous people and immigrants could settle but there was a

²⁷ Report of the Line System Committee, Govt. of Assam, Shillong, February 1938, Assam Sectt. Records.

physical line dividing them.²⁸ In practice however, the system was never strictly implemented and due to the dubious attitude and leniency of the government authority 'mixed' and the 'closed villages' were soon occupied by the immigrants. The continuous inflow of the immigrants and their settlement patterns soon attracted the attention of the Assamese intelligentsia. They raise the demand that the continuous inflow of the immigrants should be stopped. The Assamese public opinion was apprehensive that unchecked immigration might change the demographic composition of the province, reducing the ethnic Assamese to a minority in their homeland. This apprehension reached its apex when C.S. Mullan, the Census Superintendent of Assam, in his Census Report of 1931 observed:

The immigrant... has almost completed the conquest of Nowgong. The Barpeta subdivision of Kamrupa has also fallen to their attack and Darrang is being invaded. Sibsagar has so far escaped completely, but the few thousand Mymansinghias (immigrants from Mymansingh district of East Bengal) in North Lakhimpur are an outpost which may, during the next decade, prove to be a valuable basis of major operations.²⁹

The Muslim leaders of Assam did not object the inflow of Muslim immigrants in Assam. Although Assamese Muslims elites were not much enthusiastic for social intercourse with the immigrant Muslims yet they did not demanded for the abolition

²⁸ Dev, B. J. and Lahiri, D. K. (eds). *Assam Muslim Politics and Cohesion*, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 1985, p-23; Bhuyan, A. C. and De, S. (eds). *Political History of Assam, Vol-II*, Govt. of Assam, Guwahati, 2008, p-309-10.

²⁹ Guha, Amalendu. *Planter Raj to Swaraj, Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam, 1826 - 1947*, People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1977, p- 212.

of the Line System. They also showed enough enthusiasm to settle the immigrants in a planned manner in selected places because they hoped that the newcomers would opt for the path of total assimilation with the mainstream of the Assamese society like them and would numerically strengthen their case in the province. Even the immigrations did not like their segregation from the local people. Most of them already started the process of getting themselves assimilate with the mainstream of the Assamese society and demanded the abolition of the Line System. Whereas the immigrant leaders were stubbed by the sufferings and difficulties faced by the immigrants of East Bengal and they appealed to the Hindus and Muslims of Assam to show sympathy to the landless cultivators of Bengal taking into consideration their contribution to the development of the Assam economy which was in ruins when the British colonisers had first taken over. The Muslim leaders as well as the immigrant leaders united and condemned the Line System as being against the basic principle of humanity. They were angered by the theme that when there were ten lakhs of tea garden labour population and six lakhs of other foreigners in the valley districts, the Assamese Hindus were grudging the East Bengal Muslim immigrants only. So, finally because of their number and politicisation of the whole issue of immigration, it received a new colour and interpretation.

Chaudhury thought that, it was a ready-made tool to exploit and thereby bring the Muslims of Assam under one umbrella, which he did to the hilt. In order to bring the immigrant lobby within the fold of the Muslim League, Chaudhury expressed that he would work for rights and demands of the immigrants.³⁰ The immigrant Muslim legislators of the Assembly headed by Abdul Hamid Khan decided to accept his leadership and also agreed to join the Muslim League. Saadulla was defeated in the

³⁰ Press Statement of Abdul Hamid Khan, *Hindustan Standard*, 25 October, 1940.

Assembly mainly because the immigrant Muslim legislators of the Assembly under the influence of Abdul Matin Chaudhury shifted their allegiance from him and moved closer towards Muslim League and Congress Party. They later in co-ordination with Muslim League and Congress Party played a dominant role in inflicting repeated assaults on Saadulla ministry and this situation had led Gopinath Bardoloi to declare that “so long as such capable men like Abdul Matin Chaudhury were out of office, the chance of keeping the Muslims behind the Saadulla team is remote”.

Referring to Saadulla’s defeat in the Assembly due to the indiscipline among his supporters a mouthpiece of the British capital in eastern India, *The Statesman*, commented as follows: ‘A Government which cannot control its own supporters and is continually humiliated by defeats carries little authority and should either reassert its authority or resign’.³¹ The Governor of Assam, Robert Reid also wrote in his memoirs as under: ‘The Central Government was perturbed; but short of dismissing them, which could have caused a crisis we did not want to face, there was nothing that as a constitutional Governor I could do’.³² At this critical stage, Saadulla had two options at his hand-either to rally round the support of the groups which had departed him and supported the Congress or to surrender himself by resigning his office.³³ But Saadulla decided not to resign and give the *gaddi* of Premiership easily to the opposition party; rather he thought to cling on his office at any cost and improve his position. This decision of Saadulla proved to be really fruitful in the coming days.

³¹ *The Statesman*, Calcutta, 22 August 1937.

³² Reid, Robert. *Years of Chang in Bengal and Assam*, Ernest Benn Limited, London, 1966, p-92.

³³ Bhuyan, A. C. and De, S. (eds). *Political History of Assam, Vol-II*, Govt. of Assam, Guwahati, 2008, p-345.

Saadulla strengthened his political status:

The August, 1937 marked an important landmark for Saadulla and his ministry as the land Revenue Resolution put forward by the Congress Party provided him with a golden opportunity to embolden his ongoing precarious position thereby strengthening his political status. On August 27, Siddhi Nath Sarma, a member of the Congress Party moved a resolution where he proposed that land revenue should be reduced by fifty percent on Khiraj lands with effect from 1937-38.³⁴ But, against this proposal, Sayidur Rahman, a representative of the Ministerialist Party, moved an amendment which demanded thirty three percent reductions on land revenue.³⁵ The Congress expected an unflinching support from the members of the Muslim League and a section of the United Muslim Party since the spirit of co-operation of Muslims was still could be perceived. Thus, being confident of the supports of the Muslims, the opposition led by the Congress was sure of the defeat of the Ministerialist Party on this issue. Thus, they were ready for a showdown. As a result, the Congress Party wanted a division to be executed on that very day for all the supporting interested groups had spoken over it. 49 members out of total 90 expressed their willingness to put the question in the Assembly immediately without further delay. But the Speaker wanted two thirds supports in favour of the resolution unless which he was not prepared to permit closure on the proposed issue. For this reason, the debate was ultimately adjourned till 30th August providing Saadulla a much waited time period to manipulate the situation for his benefit. Saadulla was well aware of the ongoing precarious state of the ministry under his leadership. The delay ordered by the Speaker was totally to the interest of Saadulla and his sympathisers. Saadulla, being

³⁴ Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, 1937, p-1207-08.

³⁵ Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, 1937, p-1213.

given the scope, utilised the three days' interval to the optimum in mobilising every Muslim League legislators hitherto the supporters of the Congress Party using his political aptness and craftsmanship so that maximum pressure could be exerted on the issue under question from the Muslim masses thereby enriching their strength in the Assembly as well as ascertain political mileage. In order to gain such unanimous support from the Muslim representatives, it was aired among the Muslim masses that their communal interests were hazardously at stake. Further, as a part of tactics to unite the scattered Muslim members, telegrams after telegrams were circulated among the members stating that the resolution fifty percent reduction on land revenue was actually nothing but a no-confidence motion against the ministry. Hence, it was high time for all the Muslim leaders to join hands assembling under one umbrella leaving aside all the discordant ideals and beliefs to safeguard the ministry by defeating the resolution put forward by the Congress Party thereby creating a safe platform for the entire Muslim community. Such dexterity on the part of Saadulla resulted in a magic in accumulating unflinching concord on the issue from the members. Further, with his remarkable convincing ability, he even succeeded in convincing the Muslim League High Command to stand beside him in this critical juncture of the ministry.

In order to stabilise the shaky ministry headed by Saadulla and to win over the Muslim legislators hitherto the supporters of the Congress on the issue of land Revenue Resolution, the Muslim League High Command immediately sent its emissary Mr. Ansari to Shillong. On 29th August, he addressed all the Muslim members of the House illustrating the pros and cons of the current prevalent situation for which an unconditional solidarity from all the members was the call of the critical situation. He fervently insisted on it under the banner of the Muslim League so that the ministry headed by a Muslim can be facilitated in power for the sake of the greater

Muslim community.³⁶ With the sole exception of Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, the Mohammedan supporters of the Congress Party, the rest Muslim leaders joined hands together to realise the tide in their complete favour. As a result of this dramatic co-ordination of the Muslim members a communal block was created in the House. On 30th August, the Congress resolution was lost by 43 votes to 60 and the amendment proposed by the Ministerialist Party was subsequently adopted in the Assembly. Since then defeat for the Congress led opposition party began and on 1st September, the Saadulla led government could defeat the opposition on every item of business. Thus, a last minute directive from the Muslim League High Command acted as a restraining factor and brought about remarkable solidarity among the Muslim members which ultimately pushed the League away from its suitors. On 1st September, it was observed that the government under Saadulla's leadership had about sixty six supporters consisting of thirty-three Muslims, thirteen Europeans and Labour Representatives, and about twenty members of the Assam Valley United People's Party and Hill Tribes whereas the Congress Party had only forty-two supporters. Thus, the attempt of the Congress Party to seek every legitimate occasion for defeating Saadulla and his government went in vain. At the same time, the efforts made by the Congress Party to be the only representatives of the mass people ultimately became futile. And Saadulla, with his inherent wit and political tactics, could easily consolidate the position of his ministry before the end of August.

Saadulla's decision to join the Muslim League:

By the end of August, there was a flow of opinion among the Muslim legislators that Saadulla was defeated in the Assembly because the Muslim League

³⁶ Kar, M. *Muslims in Assam Politics*, Omsons Publications, New Delhi, 1990, p- 215.

members headed by powerful and influential political figure of Surma Valley, Abdul Matin Chaudhury placed themselves in determined opposition to the ministry throughout the session. Most of Muslim legislators thought that the inefficient minister should be replaced by Muslim legislators from Abdul Matin's group in order to strengthen the ministry.³⁷

Stalwarts like Abdul Matin Chaudhury and Munawwar Ali were against Saadulla and this made it almost impossible for Saadulla to run the government. The nature of Muslim criticism on this matter also convinced Saadulla about this. Further Saadulla became clear that the support of the Muslim League was not only important for him to checkmate the Congress onslaught in the Assembly but also for the bare survival of his ministry since most of the Muslim legislators in the Assembly had decided to join the Muslim League. Under such prevalent circumstances Saadulla found that he had no other alternative but to join the Muslim League for political anchorage. As the first step he attended the Muslim League conference held at Lucknow in October 1937 in order to show his allegiance to the party.³⁸ In the session Saadulla along with other Muslim Premiers- A. K. Fazlul Haq of Bengal and Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan of Punjab committed that he would persuade and convince the members of his party to join the Muslim League. The Lucknow session was the final act of Muslim political unity of India under the All India Muslim League. So, it is evident that with the introduction of the provincial autonomy, party politics came into being and Saadulla and Gopinath Bardoloi though differ in their political principles and ideologies yet they were constantly engaged in wooing supporters for their

³⁷ Chaudhury to Jinnah, 2 Oct. 1937, QAP; cited in Shibly, Atful Hye. *Abdul Matin Chaudhury: Trusted Lieutenant of Md. Ali Jinnah*, Published by Juned. A. Chaudhury, Dhaka, 2011, p-87.

³⁸ Bhuyan, A. C. and De, S. (eds). *Political History of Assam, Vol-II*, Govt. of Assam, Guwahati, 2008, p-345.

respective party in their struggle for status and power. Saadulla also joined the Muslim League in order to enlighten and strengthen his political career. Before taking this major decision, he envisaged a bright political mileage in the coming days. But after joining the party, it is well realised that it was not a wise step on his part to join the party. Rather, it was a blunder. The dirty politics among the members of the party soon mutilated his aspirations and high ambitions behind joining the party. The successive events in his life substantiate the same. This is categorically visible in a number of political incidents associated with the life of Saadulla.

Accommodation of Muslim Leaguer in the cabinet of Saadulla's Ministry

After joining the Muslim League, Saadulla found himself confronted with another serious problem. The Muslim legislators claimed that the two Muslim ministers, Ali Hyder Khan and Shamsul Ulema Waheed,³⁹ both from Surma Valley were inefficient and that they should be replaced by members of Abdul Matin Chaudhury's group to strengthen the ministry. Even Abdul Matin Chaudhury held the opinion that two Muslim ministers whom Saadulla had incorporated in his cabinet were incapable and inefficient. Chaudhury criticised Ali Hyder Khan, who was considered the youngest member of the cabinet, as "innocent of all knowledge of politics and administration" and went on record that "his sole qualification for being included in the ministry is that he is a rich zaminder". Shamsul Ulema Waheed, supposed to be the oldest member, was considered, "absolutely out of touch with modern Indian politics and its problems".⁴⁰

³⁹ The Europeans regarded these two ministers as passengers.

⁴⁰ Chaudhury to Jinnah, 2 Oct. 1937, QAP; cited in Shibly, Atful Hye. *Abdul Matin Chaudhury: Trusted Lieutenant of Md. Ali Jinnah*, Published by Juned. A. Chaudhury, Dhaka, 2011, p-86.

Being unhappy with the whole situation, Saadulla thought that perhaps by reshuffling his cabinet he would be able to solve the problem. At this time, on 12th December, Saadulla received a letter from 16 members of his group to drop the inefficient ministers from the ministry. It was in mid January 1938 that the Muslim League made a demand that Saadulla should reshuffle his ministry and accommodate Abdul Matin Chaudhury and his colleague Munawwar Ali in it. When he asked the two ministers to resign, Shamsul Ulema Waheed, refused to abide by the instruction of Saadulla in order to clear the way for the newcomers.⁴¹ He instigated 13 members of the legislature to pressurise Saadulla against dropping him from the ministry. Now, Saadulla could easily visualise the danger. It was evident from the ongoing political activities of the two targeted inefficient ministers that if he dropped them, 13 members would withdraw support resulting in the fall of his ministry. Saadulla therefore decided to increase the strength of the ministry in order to accommodate Akshay Kumar Das for enlisting the support of the four Surma Valley scheduled caste members.⁴² The reluctance of the Governor, principally on the account of the additional expenditure, was overcome when Saadulla told him that the need for expansion was more political than administrative. Further, he convinced the Governor that the sixth minister would be subscribed to by the other ministers. Finally, the Governor accorded his approval because he did not wish to lose the services of an outstanding personality like Saadulla, and the Congress to form the government.

Thus, the clever diplomacy of Saadulla resulted in acquiring the support of the members of the Surma Valley scheduled caste as well as that of the Muslim League.

⁴¹ Barooah, Nirode Kumar. *Gopinath Bordoloi, 'The Assam Problem' and Nehru's Centre*, Bhabani Print and Publications, Guwahati, 2010, p- 48.

⁴² Rao, V. Venkata. and Hazarika, Niru. *A Century of Government and Politics in North East India, Vol-1 (Assam)*, S. Chand and Company Ltd., New Delhi, 1983, p -61.

Realising his stable majority, he finally decided to execute his plan of dropping the two ministers in order to prove his loyalty to the Muslim League. Eventually, he proposed to the Governor to reconstitute his ministry with the motive of accommodating Abdul Matin Chaudhury and Munawwar Ali in it. Saadulla was well aware of the fact that the Governor would again call him to form ministry and he could easily prove his majority in the Assembly even if he dissolves his ministry on that pretext. So, in order to get rid of his two colleagues and to retain the support of the Muslim League, Saadulla and his 310 day ministry submitted resignation on 4th February 1938. And Sir Robert Reid after accepting the resignation invited Saadulla to form a new cabinet, as speculated by Saadulla beforehand. In this way, Saadulla's second coalition ministry with the Muslim League members in the cabinet was installed on 5th February and it managed to remain in office till 18th September, 1938.

Saadulla's Second Ministry: (1938-39)

Saadulla's formation of second ministry in succession within a year consisted of the Muslim League (24), Progressive Nationalist Party (1), Constitutionals (3), European Group (10) United Peoples' Party (8), and Independents (2).⁴³ After reshuffling the ministry, Saadulla felt secured by the belief that he could dislodge the influential Muslim Leaguers who were responsible for his defeat in the last session from the opposition party's embrace and that he could shake the position of the Congress Party under the leadership of Bardoloi with the support of the Muslim League members and Surma Valley Scheduled Caste members. One of the important features of his second ministry was that by incorporating a minister from the

⁴³ Composition of Saadulla's Second Coalition Ministry was as follows -Muhammad Saadulla from Muslim League(Premier), J. J. M. Nichols Roy from Progressive Nationalist Party, Rohini Kumar Chaudhuri from United Peoples' Party, Munawwar Ali from Muslim League, Abdul Matin Choudhury from Muslim League, Akshay Kumar Das from Constitutionals.

depressed class of the Surma Valley, he not only consolidated his position but also opened hitherto closed door to the corridor of political establishment and power to the Scheduled Caste of the Surma Valley in the province.⁴⁴ No doubt, arming with the support of the Muslims in general and also of the backward class, Saadulla faced the budget session which commenced on 15th February 1938 with full confidence. In that session Saadulla with the help of all the members of his group was able to pass all the demands excluding the provision for the Commissioner's staff.⁴⁵

Nevertheless, the problem continued for Saadulla and reshuffling of the ministry that he thought would solve some of his problems actually did not do so, rather that created more new problems. The expelled ministers with six others tried to foment opposition against Saadulla. In this juncture, taking the advantage of the happenings and with a view to exploiting the current situation to their benefit, such a move now received support from the Congress Party.⁴⁶ There is no reason to suppose that the Congress Party and the dissident Muslim members jointly hatched a plan to oust him from power was unknown to Saadulla.

At this stage Saadulla noticed that along with internal problems in the ministry, the situation outside the Assembly was also against him and his Government. There had been wide spread unrest which gripped the working class in the oil fields, collieries and tea gardens. In certain places the peasantry also agitated against the zamindars. Such law and order situations prevalent in his province degraded Saadulla's position

⁴⁴ Guha, Amalendu. *Planter Raj to Swaraj, Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam, 1826 - 1947*, People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1977, p-226.

⁴⁵ Bhuyan, A. C. and De, S. (eds). *Political History of Assam, Vol-II*, Govt. of Assam, Guwahati, 2008, p-346.

⁴⁶ Dev, B. J. and Lahiri, D. K. (eds). *Assam Muslim Politics and Cohesion*, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 1985, p-62.

and helped his opposition immensely to secure 65 % of the votes cast in the contest for general seats in the Local Board elections held in 1938. As a result of this the Congress Party expected to take control of the majority of the Boards. But Saadulla packed the Local Board with nominated pro Europeans members to increase the strength of the planters' group⁴⁷ and to check the Congress Party's hold over the Local Boards and thereby to strengthen his position.

Saadulla also gave carriage-contract to the Commercial Carrying Company of Calcutta on the Gauhati-Shillong road in order to satiate his personal vested interest. It can be easily formulated that monetary deal led Saadulla to undertake such a decision because it is evident that he used to collect money from powerful businessmen from Calcutta for which he had promised profitable government contracts in his province. It is vividly evident from a 'secret and strictly confidential' letter written by a person named Faiz, 'a businessman of influence' from Calcutta and 'one of Saadulla's financial benefactors'. In the letter, he reminded Saadulla of his obligation towards a Hindu businessman named Debi who 'had pumped money into the coffers of Saadulla and his party'. Further, he warned Saadulla that any violations of the promise made by him, i.e., failure or denial to make adequate return for what Debi had done for him, might force Debi to expose him and his party before the opponents.⁴⁸ Eventually, the allotment of the carriage-contract to a Calcutta based company against an indigenous one and the nomination of the pro Europeans members to the 86 seats reserved for the planters raised a storm of indignation throughout the province. In order to take full advantage of the situation and to expose Saadulla's dictatorship in matters related to the well-being of the province and its people, these two issues were quickly

⁴⁷ Dutta, Anuradha. *Assam in the Freedom Movement*, Darbari Prokashan, Calcutta, 1991, p-209.

⁴⁸ Hazarika, Sanjoy. *Strangers of the Mist: War and Peace from India's Northeast*, Penguin Groups, New Delhi, 1994, p-53-54.

politicalised by the Congress Party and campaign began in which charges of ‘intrigue’ and ‘corruption’ were levelled against Saadulla. Both these issues had a certain temporary effect on Saadulla’s popularity. As a result, a number of his supporters went over to the opposition party.

Simultaneously, with the publication of the report of Line System Enquiry Committee⁴⁹ Saadulla was confronted with another problem. This Line System Enquiry was appointed by Saadulla in the month of January 1938 to provide a permanent solution to the vexing problem of inflow of Bengali immigrants and their settlement pattern in Assam. The Line System and the land settlement with immigration was the most crucial and controversial issue which Saadulla had inherited as the Premier of Assam. The Report of Line System Committee favoured the continuation of the Line System in order to ensure effective administration and to avoid a collision course as well as to protect and preserve the interests of the indigenous population. However, the Report of the Committee failed to satisfy the immigrant group headed by Bhasani and Abdul Matin Chaudhury and they expressed that in the interests of the immigrant groups Line System should be abolished. The situation was too delicate for Saadulla for taking a decision on the matter. He was aware of the fact that if he take any action on the basis of the recommendation of the Line System Committee then immigrant group would be infuriated and they might withdrew their support. So, to satisfy the aspirations of the immigrant section of the population who extended their solid support that was essential for his political

⁴⁹ Members of the Line System Enquiry Committee were as follows - F. W. Hockenhull (Chairman) - European, Abdul Matin Choudhury – Surma Valley Muslim, Syed Abdur Rouf - Immigrant Muslim, Sayidur Rahman - Assamese Muslim, Mahendra Nath Saikia - Assamese Hindu, Saverswar Barnah - Assamese Hindu, Kameswar Das - Assamese Hindu, Rabi Chandra Kachari - Tribal Member, A.G. Patton - Revenue Secretary.

survival, he deviated himself from taking any action according to the guidelines given by the Line System Committee.⁵⁰ This clearly proves that Saadulla's decisions as a Premier were influenced by his political considerations and ambitions.

On the other hand, Saadulla's action infuriated the plain tribal representatives who had always wanted the continuation of the Line System because they were convinced that if the Line System was not enforced vigorously then the unrestrained flow of the immigrants would put a question mark to their economic survival and their culture.⁵¹ The corollary to this which occurred to tribal leaders' mind was that Saadulla was solely concerned for preserving the interests of the Muslim community and that Saadulla was not concerned for the welfare and upliftment of the tribal community. This attitude of the tribals disturbed Saadulla to a large extent and he feared that if the tribals withdrew their support then his stable Government would ruin in no time. So, he made up his mind to win over their confidence and with that view he proposed to concede to their prime demand i.e. a separate electorate for the tribals.

On the other hand, Saadulla noticed that Bardoloi was also engaged in the task of wooing the tribal leaders. Subsequently, there were serious efforts between Saadulla then in power, on one hand and Bardoloi, the leader of the opposition, on the other hand, to win over the tribal members to their folds and both of them even addressed the second session of the Assam Tribal League Conference held on 16th June at Kokrajhar in Goalpara. This was the first meeting of the principal leaders of the two political parties in a public platform since the inauguration of the new Constitution. To retain the support of the tribal representatives, Saadulla promised that he would

⁵⁰ Dev, B. J. and Lahiri, D. K.(eds). *Assam Muslims: Politics and Cohesion*, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 1985, p-32.

⁵¹ *Asamiya*, editorial, 23 March 1940; cited in Bhuyan, A. C. and De, S. (eds). *Political History of Assam, Vol-III*, Govt. of Assam, Guwahati, 2008, p-312.

plead for a separate electorate for the tribals as the case of the Muslims when the opportunity would come for review of the Constitution. But this assurance of Saadulla bore no fruit. On the other hand, Bardoloi's proposal to protect the interest of the tribal people against the immigrants worked magically.⁵² Consequently, the Congress and the Tribal League entered into an agreement to bring a new coalition Government by toppling the Saadulla ministry. Even on the eve of the September session of the Assembly the Congress Party had entered into an alliance with the Surma Valley United Muslim Party.⁵³ The members of this party promised to provide support to a motion of no-confidence against the existing ministry to be brought in the next session for toppling Saadulla from power. So it is evident that Saadulla and Bardoloi were basically engaged in a struggle for power where all sorts of temptations to induce floor-crossing were freely used by them. In order to retain his political stability Saadulla even championed the community interests. While trying to win the confidence of a particular community he affected the interests of the other community.

Saadulla had to face an adjournment moved by the opposition party on the issue of nominations to the Local Boards during the winter session that commenced on 5th September 1938. Saadulla and his government were castigated by the opposition on the issues of their immigration policy and the issue of the Gauhati-Shillong Motor Transport Contract. The opposition party wanted to show their strength by moving a no-confidence motion against the Saadulla Government. Four

⁵² Guha, Amalendu. *Planter Raj to Swaraj, Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam, 1826 - 1947*, People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1977, p-229.

⁵³ Barooah, Nirode Kumar. *Gopinath Bordoloi, 'The Assam Problem' and Nehru's Centre*, Bhabani Print and Publications, Guwahati, 2010, p-48.

no-confidence motions were moved against the ministry on 12th September.⁵⁴ Mubarak Ali of the United Muslim Party; Lalit Mohan Kar of the Surma Valley Independent Party; Rabi Chandra of the Assam Valley Tribal League and Arun Kumar Chandra, Deputy leader of the Congress Party were the members who moved the no-confidence motions against the ministry.⁵⁵

But before any discussion on the motions could take place on the following day, Saadulla surprised the House on 13th September by announcing that he had already submitted his resignation to the Governor. The sifting of his supporters to the opposition group due to public agitation outside and re-alignment of forces inside the Assembly made Saadulla aware of the fact that he no longer enjoyed the confidence of the majority of the House and in order to avoid the discussion on the no-confidence motions Saadulla submitted his resignation to the Governor. Saadulla then asked the Governor to invite Gopinath to form the Government and also greeted the opposition to enjoy the situation.⁵⁶

It is important to note that conflict or differences between Hyder Ali and Abdul Matin Chaudhury for ministership was to some extent responsible for this crisis of Saadulla. Prior to his resignation, no doubt, attempt had been made by Saadulla to bring the two blocs under him. At the instance of Saadulla, Hyder Ali and his group members agreed to join his camp on the ground that Saadulla would include members from his group in the ministry otherwise Hyder Ali expressed that as per the terms and condition of the alliance with the Congress Party they would provide support to a motion of no-confidence against him and his ministry. On the other hand, the

⁵⁴ IAR, July-December 1938, Vol. 2, p-181-2.

⁵⁵ Kar, M. *Muslims in Assam Politics*, Omsons Publications, New Delhi, 1990, p-220.

⁵⁶ Rao, V. Venkata. and Hazarika, Niru. *A Century of Government and Politics in North East India, Vol-1 (Assam)*, S. Chand and Company Ltd., New Delhi, 1983, p - 64.

members of the Assembly who supported Hyder Ali and opposed Abdul Matin Chaudhury demanded that Abdul Matin Chaudhury and Munawwar Ali should resign. The two ministers however agreed to resign on certain conditions. Firstly, all the no confidence motion which was moved against Saadulla's government should be withdrawn and all the Muslim members should unite themselves under Saadulla and secondly their replacement should be done by persons other than the two expelled ministers. Since the attitude of the two bloc seems uncompromising Saadulla preferred to resign in order to avoid an exhibition of split in Muslim unanimity in the face of critical situation. Moreover, it is important to notice that Saadulla never asked Abdul Matin Chaudhury and Munuwwar Ali to resign.⁵⁷ Rather, he preferred to sink or swim with them. This was mainly due for two reasons. Firstly, Saadulla had realised the indispensability of Abdul Matin Chaudhury in his first ministry who was an experienced national level leader with vast knowledge of politics and administration. Moreover, Abdul Matin Chaudhury was closely associated with Jinnah whereas Ali Hyder and Waheed were absolutely out of touch with politics. Secondly, it has already been mentioned that the majority of the Muslim members of the Assembly were in support of Abdul Matin Chaudhury who had pledged to fight for the right of the immigrants in the Brahmaputra Valley against the Line System. These are the two important factors for which Saadulla preferred to side with Abdul Matin Chaudhury and why he made no attempt to woo the disaffected United Muslim Party. However, Saadulla no doubt hoped that after his resignation the recalcitrant would support him subsequently and help him in coming back to power.

⁵⁷ Rao, V. Venkata. and Hazarika, Niru. *A Century of Government and Politics in North East India, Vol-1 (Assam)*, S. Chand and Company Ltd., New Delhi, 1983, p-63.

After allowing Bardoloi to form the Government, Saadulla resorted to all possible means to bring about a unity among the Muslim bloc in the Assembly. In order to gain such unanimous support from the Muslim representatives, it was aired among the Muslim masses by Saadulla and his colleagues that due to the activities of his defectors the Congress Party mainly dominated by caste Hindus was able to grab the power in the province. This propaganda worked magically and when the defectors saw the consequence of their action they were horrified and subsequently they expressed their willingness to return to Saadulla's camp.⁵⁸ This was a great triumph for Saadulla in his struggle for status and power. Saadulla then met the Governor and informed him that he had acquired the requisite majority of forming a stable and that he should be invited to form the Government but the Governor expressed his incapability of doing so on the ground that he had already given the permission to Bardoloi to form the Government. Failing to convince the Governor Saadulla and his colleagues then made up their mind to pass no confidence motion against Bardoloi in the Assembly. But unfortunately all the efforts of Saadulla and his colleagues to thrash the ministry making efforts of Bardoloi fell through when the Speaker adjourned the House.

Immediately, the group led by Saadulla in the Assembly consisting of the Muslim League Party (23), Progressive Nationalist Party (9), Constitutional Party of Akshay Kumar Das (3), United Peoples' Party (6), and United Muslim Party of Ali Hyder Khan (11) met and passed a resolution as follows:

⁵⁸ Kar, M. *Muslims in Assam Politics*, Omsons Publications, New Delhi, 1990, p-227.

Whereas the majority of the members of the Assam Legislative Assembly is willing to work under the leadership of Sir Muhammad Saadulla as Chief Minister, it is resolved that His Excellency may be requested to call upon Sir Muhammad Saadulla to form the new ministry.

Each party then in their capacity tried to convince and persuade the Governor to invite Saadulla to form the Government.⁵⁹ Gilbert Pitcairn Hogg, officiating for Reid though sympathetic towards Saadulla did not wish to dishonor the former's action in inviting Bardoloi to form the Government. But Bardoloi knew that he was short of the requisite number of members in the Assembly and so wrote to the Muslim members including Saadulla with promises of ministerial berths. Saadulla immediately refused to accept the proposal but at the same time he assured Bardoloi that he would place the offer at the group's meeting that night. The following day Saadulla informed Bardoloi through a letter that his proposal was rejected by the Muslim members of his group. Bearing in mind the Congress plan, Saadulla made sure to keep a rigid watch on the activities of his followers with a strong determination to thwart it.⁶⁰ Aimed at challenging Bardoloi's Congress-led coalition Government, Saadulla reorganised his strength under a new party named Assam United Party of fifty-six member. Hokenhull, the leader of the European group became the chairman and Saadulla the secretary of this party.⁶¹ Knowing well that Bardoloi till then was unable to command

⁵⁹ Rao, V. Venkata. and Hazarika, Niru. *A Century of Government and Politics in North East India, Vol-1 (Assam)*, S. Chand and Company Ltd., New Delhi, 1983, p- 65.

⁶⁰ Tayyebulla, M. *Karagaror Chithi*, Gauhati, 1962, p- 247-48; Kar, M. *Muslims in Assam Politics*, Omsons Publications, New Delhi, 1990, p-222.

⁶¹ R P C File No. 4 A/38 Coll No. 6, Political Pamphlet No. 7; Proceedings of the Assam Legislative Assembly, 1938, The Assam Gazette, Part, VI, A, 1938, Published by Authority, Shillong, 1938, p- 622-38.

a reliable majority, Saadulla moved a vote of no-confidence signed by 56 members in the Assembly on 19th September 1939. This time also Saadulla's efforts to thrash the ministry making efforts of Bardoloi fell through due to the partisan attitude of the Speaker who adjourned the House sine-die at the instance of the leader of the Congress Party. The partisan activities of the Speaker provoked Saadulla. Again the partisan attitude of the Hindu Congressite Speaker of postponing the session of the Assembly and providing the Congress leader the opportunity of securing adequate majority confirmed his and his colleagues' apprehension that the Congress Party mainly dominated by the caste Hindus would in no way let the Muslims to form and sustain a Government. Realising the pros and cons of the situation, Saadulla gave his best efforts to mobilise the Muslim members to regain power and position in the province. He urged the Muslim members of the Assembly to remain united under his leadership and assist him in his struggle for power. He even canvassed that by doing so only they can safeguard the sentiments and interests of the people of their community. In spite of good propaganda by Saadulla and his Muslim League colleague, Bardoloi was able to enlist the support of some Muslim members and thereby succeeded in forming a full-fledged ministry. Eventually, Bardoloi Ministry continued till November 1939 without any trifle. However, Saadulla continued his effort to come to power and the outbreak of the Second World War and the subsequent politics of India during the course of the War paved the way for Saadulla's return to power.

So, it is evident that since the introduction of the provincial autonomy Saadulla was engaged in resisting machinery of the Congress under Bardoloi. To check the continuous machination of the Congress Party he even joined the Muslim League and reshuffled his ministry to retain his political stability. Always imbued

with a very strong sense of retention of power Saadulla adopted many unfair means like packed the Local Board with nominated pro Europeans members to increase the strength of the planters' group and to check the Congress Party's hold over the Local Boards. He even took no action as per the instruction of the Line System Enquiry Committee and even promised the tribals that he would plead for a separate electorate for them when the opportunity would come for review of the Constitution. In spite of all these Saadulla failed to preempt his fall in 1938.