

## **CHAPTER-V**

### **SAADULLA'S POLITICAL ACTIVITIES IN ASSAM**

#### **FROM 1946 TILL HIS DEATH**

It has already been mentioned that after the termination of the Second World War and installation of Labour Party in United Kingdom, the Viceroy Lord Wavell on 21<sup>st</sup> August 1945 declared that the Central and Provincial elections in India would be held in the coming winter. After this historic declaration the Muslim League announced to fight the elections on the two clear-cut issues- issue of Pakistan and to establish the Muslim League as the sole representative organisation for the Muslims of India. When 9<sup>th</sup> January 1946 was fixed as the scheduled date for the election in Assam the electioneering campaign of the Muslim League gained momentum. Worst segment of communal politics was experienced in Assam during the election campaign of 1945-46 among Congress, Jamiat and Muslim League. The Congress Party leaders in association with the Jamiat leaders highlighted on the Hindu-Muslim unity and protracted the Pakistan scheme of the Muslim League as impractical while the leaders of the Muslim League insisted the Muslims to stand by the Muslim League for the greater interest of the Muslims. When such political situation was prevailing throughout the province, it could not be expected that Sir Saadulla, would retain an existence apart from Assam Provincial Muslim League and also from its parent organisation. Saadulla, then the President of the Assam Provincial Muslim League, openly supported the idea of Pakistan and engaged himself in election campaign for achieving Muslim League's aims and objectives. In an election meeting at Sylhet in October 1945 supporting the Pakistan issue Saadulla said,

“Pakistan is nothing but the administration of a country on principles enjoined in the Holy Quran. There cannot, therefore, be any Muslims who will not support Pakistan”.<sup>1</sup>

To accelerate the process of election campaign Saadulla along with other members of the Muslim League resolved to invite imminent national level leaders to Assam. At his initiative Liaquat Ali Khan<sup>2</sup> paid a visit to Assam and addressed an election meeting.<sup>3</sup> Saadulla, through his speeches during the election campaign tried to strengthen his position by increasing the number of his supporters before filing his nomination. Saadulla’s effort bore fruit and he won the election with overwhelming majority by defeating Akram Hussain Saikia of the Congress Party.<sup>4</sup> The election result reveals his tremendous influence in his constituency. There was jubilation in Guwahati at the success of Sir Md. Saadulla in the election. His success was celebrated with great pomp and show by his supporters and even the League flag was seen at housetops and shops.<sup>5</sup>

It is important to note here that the conclusion of the Tripartite Agreement with Congress Party without the permission of the Muslim League High Command and later the collapse of that Agreement after Lord Wavell announcement that the Central and Provincial elections in India would be held in the coming winter had

---

<sup>1</sup> Kar, M. *Muslims in Assam Politics*, Omsons Publications, New Delhi, 1990, p-313.

<sup>2</sup> Liaquat Ali Khan was elected to the Central Legislative Assembly, when he became the deputy leader of the Muslim League legislators. In 1937 he was made the general secretary of the All India Muslim League and in 1940 the leader of Muslim League party in the Central Legislature. In 1946 he was appointed as Finance minister in the Interim Government of India.

<sup>3</sup> Bhuyan, A. C. and De, S. (eds). *Political History of Assam, Vol-III*, Govt. of Assam, Guwahati, 2008, p-272.

<sup>4</sup> Nurur Rahim Majumdar, *The role of Akram Hussain Saikia in the freedom struggle of India* <http://www.sentinelassam.com/editorial/story> ( accessed on Dec 30, 2014)

<sup>5</sup> Political History of Assam, File No. 154, Weekly Police intelligence Report, 1946.

dragged Saadulla into a tight corner on the eve of the general elections. His relationship with both the Muslim League and the Congress Party had touched a nadir. In addition to all these Saadulla could see that Bhasani with tremendous mass contact and volatile leadership was working against him. In such situation, when the Provincial election was knocking at the door, Saadulla thought that he had two options at his hand - to leave the Muslim League and join other party or to remain in the Muslim League and give full effort to achieve the goal of the party. Saadulla opted for the latter and identified himself fully with League's objective and aims. Saadulla did this because of his awareness of the fact that there was no other strong party in Assam which he could lead and which could stand against the onslaught of the Congress and the Muslim League. So, Saadulla openly supported the Pakistan issue for his political benefit. Saadulla's advocacy of the Pakistan issue shocked the people of Assam. When the Pakistan issue was first aired by the Third Assam Provincial Muslims League conference at Barpeta under the Presidentship of Choudhury Khaliqzaman of U. P. Saadulla remained lukewarm toward the proposal. At that time Saadulla being the head of a coalition ministry perhaps was of the opinion that his advocacy of Pakistan might antagonise his cabinet colleagues who were not affiliated to Muslim League. By giving the decision in favour or against the Pakistan issue, he did not want to lose the support of his constituent parties which he had clobbered with great difficulties and thereby he did not want to hamper his political position. Saadulla's advocacy of Pakistan on the eve of the election of 1946 and his policy of remaining silent over the same issue in 1944 as the head of a government clearly vindicated the fact that he was a skilled politician.

However, in the election the Muslim League secured thirty one seats out of thirty four seats reserved for the Muslims in the Muslim constituencies, where as

Jamiat-ul-Ulema got three seats and the Congress not a single. The success of the Muslim League in the Muslim constituencies also confirmed that the Muslims of Assam were in favour of the establishment of Pakistan and that Muslim League was the sole representative organisation for the Muslims in Assam. The election result failed to give any satisfaction to Saadulla. Saadulla was demoralised to see that in spite of securing grand victory in the Muslim constituencies by advocating the cause of Pakistan he was unable to form the government. Whereas, the Congress while securing fifty seats in the general constituencies and emerging as the major party in Assam took the lead in forming the new ministry under the leadership of Bardoloi.<sup>6</sup> Bardoloi however found some difficulties in forming his cabinet. The Surma Valley Congressites made some absolutely untenable demands which Bardoloi found difficult to accept. Moreover, Bardoloi found that there was scarcity of eligible Muslim legislators to fill up the berth in the cabinet. In such a critical situation, Bardoloi made an attempt to select two Muslim legislators from Muslim League.<sup>7</sup> Saadulla welcomed the scheme as he thought that it was only way through which the League leaders could get an opportunity to have a share in the Provincial Government. Meanwhile, Maulana Azad paid a visit to Assam in order to assess the political situation. Saadulla expressed his willingness to meet Maulana Azad to discuss the possibility of a Congress League Government in Assam. Therefore, a meeting was arranged between them. While discussing on the vital topic of Congress-League Government in Assam Maulana Azad told Saadulla that Congress Party would have no objection to form a coalition with the League Party of Assam provided

---

<sup>6</sup> Bhuyan, A. C. and De, S. (eds). *Political History of Assam, Vol-III*, Govt. of Assam, Guwahati, 2008, p-275.

<sup>7</sup> Bhuyan, A. C. and De, S. (eds). *Political History of Assam, Vol-III*, Govt. of Assam, Guwahati, 2008, p-335.

that it was based on the Congress Parliamentary Programme. The terms and conditions provided by Maulana Azad for forming the alliance with the Congress Party left Saadulla in a state of confusion. Saadulla could realise that, in the given situation, he had only two alternatives open to him. One was to accept the proposal and participate in the legislature by accepting the Congress Parliamentary Programme. But such a course he knew that many League leaders would not welcome it and rather it would create a division in the Muslim League. The other alternative was to play the role of opposition and try to pull the Congress Government down. However, Saadulla found it difficult to give reply immediately so he told Maulana Azad that he wanted time for discussing the issue with the League Parliamentary Board. In such situation the process of the formation of the ministry was postponed till the next evening. Next evening, Sir Saadulla sent a letter stating that till then he had not been able to come to any decision and that the formation of the ministry should not be delayed.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, Azad instructed Bardoloi to submit a list of tentative ministers to the Governor. Further, he advised that the list should include the name of seven ministers leaving out two seats for Muslims. Subsequently Bardoloi submitted the list to the Governor and a new ministry headed by him was formed in Assam on 11<sup>th</sup> February.<sup>9</sup> Before leaving for Calcutta Azad left requisite instructions to Bardoloi to enact any due coalition with the Muslim League. A great hope arose among the moderates belonging to the Congress and the Muslim League in Shillong. They hoped that a coalition ministry would usher in the beginning of a real All-India Congress-League understanding. But the situation went in the opposite direction when

---

<sup>8</sup> Kumar, Ravindra. *Selected Works of Moulana Abul Kalam Azad Vol. 11 Vol.# 11*, Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi, 1992, p-112-113.

<sup>9</sup> Bhuyan, A. C. and De, S. (eds). *Political History of Assam, Vol-III*, Govt. of Assam, Guwahati, 2008, p-275; also cited in Dutta, Keshab Narayan. *Landmarks of the Freedom Struggle in Assam*, Lawyer's Book Stall, Guwahati, 1958, p-110.

Liquat Ali later declared that the Muslim League members would not take part or cooperate in any ministry headed by any non League members.

Saadulla's role as the leader of the opposition party had not become easier. Now, he was confronted with more difficulties when the long standing immigration issue entered into a new phase with the formation of the full fledged Congress Government under Bardoloi. The new Government resumed the eviction process as per the All Party Agreement of 1945. No sooner had the Government started the eviction, the Muslim League raised a hue and cry over the issue. The League leaders called the action of the Government inhuman and ruthless because they had evicted the people when they had been severely affected by extreme scarcity of food crops and consequent famine. Moreover, the Government had maliciously evicted only the Muslim immigrants which are fully discriminatory. They further complained that the prime intention of the Government behind such stringent step is to exterminate the Muslim population in the name of the controversial agreement. They further substantiated their allegation that the said policy was rather the forerunner of the Hindu Congress' attitude which would result in 'Akhand Hindustan'. They further announced that the creation of Pakistan was the only remedy of 'all the evils'.<sup>10</sup>

Saadulla was horrified to see that while evicting the immigrants the legitimate holders of land were not spared by the Congress Government. To bring this to the notice of the Congress Government, Saadulla cited documents referring the judgment of Higgins, Commissioner of Assam Valley in 1931, to testify that the immigrants who were evicted from Champapathar Pukuripar area near Gauhati had been

---

<sup>10</sup> For details please see Debate on Budget and Eviction in the Assembly, in the Assam Gazette Part-VI-A, 1946 cited in Kar, M. *Muslims in Assam Politics*, Omsons Publications, New Delhi, 1990, p-86-87.

possessing land since 1931. Saadulla even warned Bardoloi and his Government “not to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs”. As because it was due to the labour of the immigrants from East Bengal the revenue of Assam had increased from 80 lakhs in 1914 to one crore and twenty five lakhs in 1944.<sup>11</sup> This clearly indicates that Saadulla’s sympathy towards the immigrants was only on the economic ground and that he supported legal settlement of the immigrants. However, when the Congress Government was busy in its eviction process, Saadulla found himself being attacked by both Muslim League members and Congress Party. The Muslim League members blamed Saadulla and his controversial agreement of 1945 for this pathetic condition of the immigrants. The Congress leaders regarded him as the main architect of encouraging Muslim immigrants from Bengal with the object of incorporating Assam in the proposed East Pakistan zone. In such a prevailing situation Saadulla found himself torn between the two groups of leaders and thus he was unable to deal with the eviction process whereas Bhasani with his volatile leadership took the lead in defending the interests of the immigrants. Lack of enthusiasm shown by Saadulla in dealing with the immigration issue confirmed the suspicion of the immigrant leaders that Saadulla being an indigenous Assamese had no sympathy for poor immigrants Bengali Muslims. The entire political situation made Saadulla upset and he felt that it was essential for him to take some step in his defense. So, against all the acquisitions that were levelled against him, Saadulla gave a very clear clarification in 1946 in the Assembly session.

As regard the charge of the planned invasion of other cultivable wastelands, Saadulla said on 31<sup>st</sup> March 1946 in the Legislative Assembly in the following manner:

---

<sup>11</sup> Dev, B. J., and Lahiri, D. K. *Assam Muslim Politics and Cohesion*, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 1985, p- 36.

Now let me remove few misconceptions. It has been stated by various friends opposite that it is a planned immigration. My honourable friend, the minister-in-charge, also have some misconceptions, for in his budget speech he makes an appeal to the Bengal government to dissuade these people to come Assam. Now every student of politics knows that Muslims are in majority in Bengal only about 56%. And you think that the Muslims of Bengal are so foolish as to jeopardise their meager majority by a planned drive to send Muslim people to Assam?<sup>12</sup>

Not a single member from the opposition side counteracted the above argument put forwarded by Saadulla. After this Saadulla rebut another charge levelled against him in the following manner:

Sir, there is this misconception in the minds of many in spite of the fact that the honourable finance minister has been charitable enough to admit that immigration has been going on for long 20 years. The insinuation has been that since the passing of Pakistan resolution ... We have started bringing these people... The bulk of the immigration has already been there from before and not after Pakistan resolution ... Absurdity cannot go further than this.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Proceedings of the Assam Legislative Assembly, 1946, The Assam Gazette, Part, VI, A, 1946, Published by Authority, Shillong, 1946, p-179; also quoted in Kar, M. *Muslims in Assam Politics*, Omsons Publications, New Delhi, 1990, p-78-79.

<sup>13</sup> Proceedings of the Assam Legislative Assembly, 1946, The Assam Gazette, Part, VI, A, 1946, Published by Authority, Shillong, 1946, p-179; also quoted in Kar, M. *Muslims in Assam Politics*, Omsons Publications, New Delhi, 1990, p-79.



In the Assembly focusing light on the fact that the agreement of 1945 was not his sole outcome and referring to the responsibility of other Muslim League and Congress members Saadulla said:

From the end of March 1945, I had the honour to work with 5 honourable ministers of my team all selected by my friend, the then opposition leader, Srijiut Gopinath Bardoloi ... It is said, 'if human memory is short, official memory is shorter still'. So everyone has forgotten that my cabinet was constituted on 50:50 basis, between five Muslim leaguers and five chosen representatives of the Congress. Yet, Sir, you could not trust the doing of that body.

The arguments which were put forward by Saadulla in his defense were said to have never been answered by the Muslim Leaguers who looked upon him with suspicion and Hindu representatives who levelled countless allegations against Saadulla.

With the passing of time, the large scale eviction policy of the Congress Government, the League leaders lost confidence in Saadulla and as a result when the Executive Committee of the Party was reconstituted on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1946 Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani was selected as its President and Muhmud Ali as its Secretary and Saadulla was pushed to other less powerful wings of the party such as Member of the League Action Committee to deal with the issue of Eviction, spokesman of the League in its negotiations with the Government, and most importantly, he continued to lead the Parliamentary Wing of the party.<sup>14</sup> Despite the setback, Saadulla was

---

<sup>14</sup> Kar, op.cit., p-314-315.

determined to retrieve his political position by ingratiating himself with Central Muslim League's claim on Assam with more enthusiasm and spirit. So, when Saadulla was called to attend the Muslim League Legislators' Convention held in Delhi in April he openly declared for the first time that "the Muslims were the largest community in Assam" and at the same time he also stated that "apart from being a poor province Assam's physical situation is such that it leaves no alternative to Assam but to join Pakistan".

It has already been mentioned that on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1940, All India Muslim League passed a resolution declaring a separate homeland for the Muslims of India. But the Lahore resolution of 23<sup>rd</sup> March of 1940 did not clearly mention or distinguish the areas to be incorporated in Pakistan. The Resolution had only defined the principles of division. It was the Muslim League Legislators' Convention that clearly defined and demarcated the areas to be incorporated in Pakistan and thereby removed all the confusion that had been persisted since 1940 regarding the provinces to be included in the Pakistan zone. The Convention declared that "the zones comprising Bengal and Assam in the North-East, and Punjab, North-West Frontier Province, Sind and Baluchistan in the North-West of India, namely, Pakistan zones, where the Muslims are in a dominant majority, be constituted into a sovereign independent state".<sup>15</sup>

Saadulla since his assumption of office as Minister under the Dyarchy System had always upheld the cause of tagging Assam with Bengal on the ground that Assam in many aspects socially, politically and most important economically was linked with Bengal and if Assam was separated from Bengal then the economic life in Assam

---

<sup>15</sup> "Political Situation Report," Home Poll. File No. 51/2/46, NAI.

would be crippled. So, when the Muslim League Legislators' Convention of April declared Bengal and Assam in the North-East as a component part of the Pakistan zone, Saadulla did not hesitate to support the Pakistan issue rather he supported others in demanding inclusion of Assam in the Pakistan zone. Moreover, his awareness of the fact that inclusion of Assam in the Pakistan zone would place the Muslims of Assam particularly the Assamese Muslim in better position, Saadulla supported inclusion of Assam in the eastern wing of Pakistan. Considering his political obligation and his desire that Assam should not be separated from Bengal, it can be derived that Saadulla supported the Pakistan issue to revitalise his old political position and to generate the prosperity of Assam and its people exclusively the Muslims of the Brahmaputra Valley. Saadulla had linked up his personal interest with the interest of the province and its people and thereby like a skilled politician he led these aspects together.

### **Saadulla's role and participation in the Cabinet Mission and in the Eviction Agitation**

Simultaneously, in 1946 when the delegates of the Cabinet Mission<sup>16</sup> visited Assam, Saadulla placed the views and interests of the Muslims of the province before the delegates and also highlighted Assam connection with Bengal in many aspects. Saadulla opposed the idea of separating Sylhet from Assam as the Muslim population in the province would decrease enormously; rather he suggested that the whole province might be tagged to Bengal. Saadulla's opinion was that Assam's was

---

<sup>16</sup> The Cabinet Mission, comprising of three senior officials of the British Government Lord Pethick-Lawrence, the Secretary of State for India; Stafford Cripps, the President of the Board of Trade and A. V. Alexander, the First Lord of Admiralty, arrived in India on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1946 to set up a machinery for framing the Constitutional structure in India in consultation with the Viceroy and Indian political leaders.

dependent on Bengal on many aspects and therefore separation of Assam from Bengal was not possible.<sup>17</sup> The reason that Saadulla placed in favour of tagging Assam with Bengal reflects his concern for the interests of Assam. Saadulla's opposition to Sylhet as already mentioned was based on the fear that if Sylhet was separated from Assam then the Muslim population in Assam would sink into an inefficient minority and they would lose the proportionate share of representation in self-government institutions.

When the Cabinet Mission after three weeks of discussion with the Congress and League leaders failed to arrive at any agreed settlement, the Mission framed its own proposal and announced it on 16<sup>th</sup> May. The Cabinet Mission plan provided for a three-tier federal form of government with Central Union at the top. It was proposed that Indian Union would be assigned with power to deal with only three subjects: Defence, Foreign Relations and Communications. Below the Union there would be a sub-federation of three groups: Group-A consisting of Madras, Bombay, U.P., Bihar, the Central Provinces and Orissa; the Panjab, Sind, NWFP and British Baluchistan were placed in Group B. The Mission clubbed together Bengal and Assam in Group-C. Under the Cabinet Mission Plan, the representatives of the provinces in each group were mandated to meet separately to frame the constitution of the group. After that the members of the Legislative Assembly of all the provinces were to sit together with members of the Princely States in one body, the Constituent Assembly, to frame and devise the Constitution for India. Prior to the inauguration of the new Constitution the administration of the country would be looked after by an Interim Government consisting of the representatives of the Indian Political Parties. There was a provision

---

<sup>17</sup> Note of meeting between Wavell, Cabinet Delegation and Saadulla, 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1946. P Moon, ed, Wavell, The Viceroy's Journal, p-234.

that a province could opt out of its allotted group only after the new Constitution had been framed and inaugurated.

As soon as the statement was declared by the Cabinet Mission, the Assam Provincial Congress Committee reacted quickly and sharply by opposing and rejecting the grouping clause which had tagged the province with Bengal in Section C to frame the group and provincial constitutions. According to K. N. Dutt Assamese opposed the grouping scheme on the ground that "once Assam was grouped with Muslim majority Bengal to the interests mainly of the Muslim community, her fate was sealed. She would lose her identity and individuality in the political whirlpool of Muslim India, although she was not, and had never been a Muslim majority province". There was also anti-grouping meetings and demonstrations all over Assam throughout the months of May, June and July. Gopinath Bardoloi on the advice of Gandhi decided to pass a resolution expressing strong disapproval of the plan.<sup>18</sup>

But Saadulla on his part heaved a sigh of relieve when he saw that his views were ultimately given the award when the Cabinet Mission Plan was announced. At the same time he could view that the Assam Congress was the greatest obstacle in the path of the implementation of the grouping scheme. Regarding the Congress High Command's advice to the Assam Congress not to sit in Section C Saadulla opined that it would be detrimental to the interests of Assam as it was based on a misconception of the authentic situation prevailing in Assam.<sup>19</sup> In order to make the grouping scheme a success Saadulla sermonised the people of Assam about the advantages of grouping even sounded the Ahoms, the plains tribal people and the schedule castes with the promise of granting separate electorate in future.

---

<sup>18</sup> For details please see Bhuyan and De, op.cit., p- 351-371.

<sup>19</sup> Bhuyan and De, op.cit., p- 310.

Meanwhile, the Governor of Assam called upon the Assam Legislative Assembly on 16<sup>th</sup> July 1946 to select by ballot the ten members of the Assembly to the Constituent Assembly as per the terms and conditions of the Cabinet Mission's scheme.<sup>20</sup> But as soon as the session was opened Bardoloi declared that he wanted to move a motion. Saadulla and other members of the Muslim League objected to it. In spite of the opposition Bardoloi got the permission to move the resolution. According to Gopinath Bardoloi's resolution the ten representatives of Assam to the Constituent Assembly to be elected by the Assam Assembly would not sit in any section or sections, group or groups with any other province of British India for framing the Constitution of Assam; that the Assam's representatives alone would devise the provincial Constitution and that it would be detrimental to the interests of the province, if the representatives of Assam joined others in a section for the purpose of setting the Constitution for the province of Assam. The resolution also stated that the representatives of Assam would take part only in the framing of the Union Constitution.<sup>21</sup>

Saadulla put forward his apprehension by declaring that Bardoloi had set the resolution in such a manner that it was likely to mislead the unwary and that the wordings of the different sections of the motion did not "bear out simplicity which he has tried to impress upon the House". He stated that Bardoloi's claim to Assam's absolute right to frame her Constitution through her own representatives only to be "...entirely against the directives or suggestions made in the Cabinet Delegation Scheme".

---

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p-366.

<sup>21</sup> For details please see Debate on Grouping, in Assam Gazette, Part-VI-A, 1946, p-785-797.

Supporting the grouping of Assam with Bengal, Saadulla upheld the following arguments. The geographical position of Assam was such that it could not join any other section of the sub-continent India. In such a situation Assam had only two options either “she must submit to Group Constitution or she must remain alone as a single unit”. Saadulla expressed the views that if Assam refused to join Group C then Assam would suffer in the financial matters as the main body of the income tax payers came paid their income tax either in Calcutta or London as the their Managing Agencies were situated in those places only. Saadulla hoped that Assam by joining hands with Bengal could get a major portion of this income allotted to Assam. Saadulla laid stress on the fact that in Assam there were frequent raids from the hill tribes. For the tranquility, safety and security of the people of the province Assam had to maintain a strong police force and every year Assam had to pay a huge amount of rupees for keeping a suitable military organisation. So if refused to join Group C and remain alone then the entire burden of maintenance of law and order would fall on Assam and would be burden upon her revenue. Saadulla also emphasised that Assam had no Medical, Engineering, Veterinary, Agricultural college, University or a High Court of its own and for all types of higher and technical education, judiciary and health services, Assam was chiefly reliant on Bengal. If Assam became a self-governing unit then she had to spend enormous sum of money for establishing those institutions which was not possible for Assam to meet standing alone. Saadulla also argued that if the opposition of Assam to join the section with Bengal virtually alienate the feelings of Bengal then the latter could strangle the economic life of Assam in no time as all the things necessary for the daily diet of Assam, except rice were imported from outside and each item enter through Bengal.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> For details please see Debate on Grouping, in Assam Gazette, Part-VI-A, 1946, p -788-792.

In respect of Muslim majority in Group C, Saadulla expressed the view that there was only a margin of three per cent over the Hindus and this majority was so exiguous that the representatives of Assam had nothing to apprehend of being overwhelmed by the majority of the Muslim votes. “This bogey of majority votes need not deter us from taking cognisance of the fact that it will be greatly to the interest and benefit of this province of Assam to submit to the Group Constitution,” he affirmed. In respect of the projected direction to Assam’s representatives and making a reference to the fear, Saadulla expressed regret that the makers of the motion who expressed apprehension about the “tyranny of majority votes” had a desire to subject the minority party in the House to a similar tyranny. He raised a question mark on the competence of the House to deal with any business other than those relating to the specific purpose for which it was summoned. In addition, according to Saadulla, the House was not allowed to give any directive of this nature as the members were elected by separate voting of the Muslims and the non-Muslim groups. His further observation was that the motion was not a “free voice of the people of Assam” but it was “ordained” by the high Command for a specific purpose.

After placing these constitutional views Saadulla stated that the Muslims of the Assembly under his leadership would not participate any further in discussion or voting and with their withdrawal Bardoloi’s resolution was adopted without division.<sup>23</sup> After adopting Bardoloi’s resolution the election of members to the Constituent Assembly was held. The Muslim party of the Assembly elected Saadulla, Abdul Hamid, Abdul Matin Chaudhury to the Constituent Assembly, while the general part elected Gopinath Bardoloi, Rohinikumar Choudhuri, Basantakumar Das,

---

<sup>23</sup> For details please see Proceedings of Election to Constituent Assembly and Debate on Grouping, in Assam Gazette, Part-VI-A, 1946, p-770-801, cited in Kar, op.cit., p-319-23.



J. J. M. Nichols-Roy, Omeo Kumar Das, Dharanidhar Basumatari and Akshaykumar Das. Saadulla's desire that Assam should go with Bengal was not new. Saadulla's view that Assam should be tagged with Bengal was made public in 1920's long before the declaration of the Pakistan and Cabinet Mission Plan for the greater interest of Assam and also for the interests of the Muslims of Assam. So, in the light of these facts, it cannot be denied that Saadulla supported the Cabinet Plan not only from the economic point of view but also that the tagging of Assam with Bengal had made the Group C a Muslim majority one.

On the other hand, the political scenario at the national level took a dramatic turn over the Cabinet Mission proposal. The Congress stand on the Constituent Assembly on the issue of grouping resulted in a renewed confrontation between the All India Congress and the All India Muslim League. The League leaders interpreted that the Congress with its absolute majority of the members in the Constituent Assembly would manipulate and modify the Mission's scheme. They further expressed their unhappiness over the question of the interim Government. Their decision to prepare a programme of direct action to achieve Pakistan further deteriorated the situation. Regarding the steps taken by the Congress as violation of the fundamental terms of the Cabinet Mission's statement, they refused to join the interim Government and called for "the direct action day" on 16<sup>th</sup> August 1946. On that day it was declared: "...the time has come for the Muslims to resort to a direct action to achieve Pakistan and to get rid of the present slavery under the British and contemplated future caste Hindu domination... The council demands the Muslims to renounce all the titles given to them by the British..." this was no doubt the political scenario of the National level. In response to the call of the League, Saadulla also renounced the knighthood. This occasion was narrated by M. A. H. Ispahani in the

following manner, “I remember the scene when Sir Saadulla, the former Chief Minister of Assam, renounced his knighthood with such vehemence that his dentures parted from his gums and found a resting place in the palm of his right hand”.<sup>24</sup>

Saadulla’s response to the League’s call for the direct action to achieve Pakistan had emboldened his Muslim League colleagues particularly the immigrant leaders to become more aggressive in their approach under the leadership of Bhasani against the eviction policy of the Congress Government. It was under Bhasani’s leadership, the immigrant leaders of the Muslim League took the issue as a life and death problem. They thought that there were only two options before them – either to suffer starvation and silently succumb to extermination or to struggle manfully. Gradually the agitation against eviction policy of the Congress Government in the province became a part of the battle cry for Pakistan. But when the movement against eviction and the Pakistan movement were linked Saadulla became unrest and tensed. Rather when his Muslim League colleagues were making efforts to expose Congress Government’s attitude in Assam towards Muslim immigrants with a view to strengthening cause of Assam’s inclusion in Pakistan, Saadulla remained moderate. He did not fully endorse the action taken up by the militant Muslim Leaguers. He considered the declared ‘invasion plan’ of the League as misdirected. Rather, he advocated compromise on the question of eviction. Saadulla suggested constituting a committee taking one member each from the Muslim League, the Congress and the distinguished public servants to examine thoroughly the eviction issue and take an amicable decision. But Bhasani seemed quite uncompromising and adamant in his approach on the issue and therefore he categorically denounced such proposal and

---

<sup>24</sup> Shibly, Atful Hye. *Abdul Matin Chaudhury: Trusted Lieutenant of Md. Ali Jinnah*, Published by Juned. A. Chaudhury, Dhaka, 2011, p-132.

instigated the mass people to start Civil Disobedience Movement. Though Saadulla was a member of the Committee of Action, he was not prepared for a Civil Disobedience Movement. At this stage, an unbridgeable gulf was created between these two League leaders and the internal conflict between the League's Parliamentary Wing headed by Saadulla and Organisation led Bhasani came to surface. Even when Bhasani was arrested and Saadulla came to be associated with every branch of the League he retained his moderate attitude and did not show requisite enthusiasm for the movement. Rather, Saadulla even went to the extent of questioning the reasonableness and wisdom of launching the Civil Disobedience Movement by the Working Committee of the Provincial League without any green signal from the High Command and also decided to lodge a formal complaint against the Working Committee of the Provincial League to the High Command of the party. On the contrary, he tried to solve the issue of eviction by entering into a series of negotiations with Government but all the attempts of Saadulla for an amicable settlement with Bardoloi proved futile. Saadulla's half hearted support and poor response towards the Civil Disobedience was mainly due to two reasons-firstly, the movement was apparently entwined with the Bengali Muslim immigrants and was controlled mostly by Bengali leaders who were often seen emphasising the Bengali identity of the immigrant class in order to draw the sympathy of the Bengali Muslims. Moreover, Saadulla being an indigenous Assamese was aware of the fact his wholehearted participation in the Civil Disobedience in favour of the immigrants would create more impediments to the Assamese identity. Secondly, the main guiding force behind the movement was Bhasani whose relation with Saadulla was not cordial. It was because of Bhasani, Saadulla's political position had suffered a great setback. At the same time it is very important to look into the fact that it was Saadulla

who advocated the cause of Pakistan at various platform of the Muslim League and even renounced the knighthood in response to League's call for achieving Pakistan. But now when his Muslim League colleagues were engaged in exposing Congress Government's attitude in Assam towards Muslim immigrants with a view to strengthen cause of Assam's inclusion in Pakistan Saadulla's support and contribution towards their effort was nil. This attitude of Saadulla's clearly vindicate the fact that he was not a true believer of Pakistan and that he supported and advocated the cause of Pakistan only to remain within the orbits of the Muslim League as well to revive his political position.

By the time, Assam was passing her days with grim uncertainties; while disquiet, uncertainty and unrest engulfed the entire country. Such critical socio-political scenario compelled the British Government to transfer power to the Indians early. Realising the precarious law and order situation prevailing in the country Prime Minister Clement Attlee announced on 20<sup>th</sup> February 1947: "The present state of uncertainty is fraught with danger and cannot be indefinitely prolonged. His Majesty's Government wish to make it clear that it is their definite intention to take necessary steps to effect the transference of power to responsible Indian hands by a date not later than June, 1948." Earl Mountbatten, the Viceroy of India fully realised that was not possible to be execute the Cabinet Mission Plan and hence he decided to pursue the Muslim League demand for a sovereign. Thus, the Cabinet Mission plan had been pushed to oblivion. After extensive discussion with political parties, he finally announced his plan of the division of the country into India and Pakistan. But in the case of Assam, he proposed a referendum to be held in Sylhet district under the aegis of the Governor-General and in consultation with the Assam Provincial Government to seek people's opinion whether it would remain in Assam or opt for inclusion with

the proposed new province of Bengal named Eastern Pakistan. During the partition of the country into India and Pakistan, Saadulla was offered the Governorship of East Pakistan, dominated mostly by the Bengali people. Expressing his desire to stay in Assam with the Assamese people and to cast in his lot with Assam politics, Saadulla rejected the offer.

### **Saadulla's political activities after the partition of India:**

After the partition of the country, Jinnah convened a consultative meeting of the All India Muslim League at Karachi on 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> December, 1947 to discuss the future of the Organisation. At the meeting Jinnah told his Indian devotees to sever their link with him and to form a separate Muslim League with those Muslims who remained in India.<sup>25</sup> As per the decision of the Karachi convention, a meeting of the Muslim League leaders was held at Madras in the second week of March, 1948 to discuss future programme of the party. In the convention some members argued to wind up the political activities of the Muslim League in India while others spoke in favour of the continuation of the political activities of the League in India. As the convention failed to thrash out a settlement, it allowed the Indian League members to join any other party having common principles and ideology and alternatively allowed any other party having common programme to join the Muslim League.<sup>26</sup> Saadulla also participated in the meeting as representative from Assam. Saadulla thought that since most of the prominent leaders of Muslim League had opted for Pakistan, the Assam Provincial Muslim League lost all its influences and the party had been reduced to minor party in the province. He could realise that the emergence of the Congress Party would always stand as an impediment in their political activities and

---

<sup>25</sup> Zakaria, Rafiq. *The Man Who Divided India*, Popular Prakashan, Mumbai, 2011, p-163.

<sup>26</sup> Speech of Saadulla in the Assam Legislative Assembly on 20<sup>th</sup> March 1948.

that their minor party could not counter and resist the onslaught of the Congress Party. So, he agreed to dissolve the Assam Provincial Muslim League. The Provincial Muslim League was officially dissolved by its acting president on 30<sup>th</sup> June 1948. It was only when the country was divided Saadulla could understand that he in particular, the Muslims of Assam in general and his province had gained nothing by the partition. The partition had shattered the economy of Assam, which was already in a poor condition by scrapping the direct transport link between Assam and the rest of India. Beside this, the partition had exposed Assam to some peculiar geographical, social and political problems. Saadulla believed that the damage which the partition had inflicted on Assam could be recovered and its problems could be solved only if Assam was bestowed with powerful provincial government with sufficient financial resources. After the partition when the Constituent Assembly reassembled to frame the Constitution of India he as a member of Assembly and also as a member of the Drafting Committee<sup>27</sup> uphold the various social, political and economic aspects of Assam with a view to drawing more and more benefits for Assam. In the Constituent Assembly, while upholding the interests of Muslims and pleading reserved seats for the Muslims, he said, "... let us take the vote of the Muslim Members here... personally I am not in favour of reservation, but the Muslims want it." On 8<sup>th</sup> August 1949, while pleading for a "better deal" for Assam in the financial provisions of free India's Constitution Saadulla told the Constituent Assembly: "Assam is now the poorest province in the dominion of India, poor not in resources, but poor in numbers, poor in the financial position and poor in the economic position condition of her population". But this poverty, he went to say, "has been forced upon her by man-

---

<sup>27</sup> On 29<sup>th</sup> August 1947 Saadulla was appointed as the member of the Drafting Committee of the Constitution. He was the only Muslim on that Committee.

made laws and the inequity of the Central Government.” He prefaced his arguments with words that ring true sixty years later in today’s context:

75 percent of our total revenue goes to pay our salary bill. If as much as very nearly three-fourths of the provincial revenues go towards the payment of salaries of its public servants, no wonder, Sir, that Assam is so backward in providing all the amenities that go with an efficient and full-fledged autonomous government.

Saadulla and other members of Constituent Assembly took almost two years to frame and devise the new Constitution of India. On the basis of the new Constitution, general elections were declared to be held in India. Saadulla started hectic activities to participate in the Provincial legislature elections due in early 1952. Now, when the Provincial Muslim League was officially dissolved and other Muslim organisation had not taken its place, Saadulla expressed his desire to work with the Congress Party. He thought that the support to the Congress Party would be beneficial for the Muslims of Assam. The support would give the Muslims of Assam greater safeguards, would project them as secular and lastly it would give them an opportunity to share power with the Congress. Throughout July-August 1951 he made efforts to win the confidence of the Muslim of Assam in favour of the Congress Party. It was only after getting consent of the Muslims of Assam; Saadulla started negotiations with Provincial Pradesh Congress Chief Siddhinath Sarma and Chief Minister Bishnu Ram Medhi. Thereafter he joined the Congress Election Committee in meetings held from 17<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> September for discussing the distribution of seats. Saadulla asserted that in twelve constituencies Muslims were in majority and in eleven thirty five to forty five per cent were Muslim voters and on the basis of that adequate seats should be given to the Muslims. Again, he demanded two seats for the Muslims of Assam in the Rajya

Sabha and the Lok Sabha each out of six and twelve respectively and also a seat for himself in the Assam Assembly.

The Provincial Election Committee offered Saadulla a seat in the Lok Sabha while rejecting a seat in the State Assembly. The Congress refused to give more than fourteen seats to Muslims in the Assembly. These decisions of the Congress annoyed Saadulla so much that he resigned the Congress Party in November 1951.<sup>28</sup> Disgruntled Saadulla then filed his nomination as an Independent candidate from South Salmara Constituency in Goalpara District, but his papers were rejected on technical grounds. Saadulla thereafter withdrew from public life. Thus, the political career of a chequered political figure of Assam came to an end. After taking retirement from politics, he practised in the Calcutta High Court for a few days. After that he came back to his residence in Shillong. But he could not stay in Shillong for a long time because of old age and extreme unfavourable cold weather condition. Finally, he took resort in his residence at Lakhtokia, Guwahati. He died at his Gauhati residence on 8<sup>th</sup> January 1955 at the age of 70 years.

---

<sup>28</sup> Dev, B. J., and Lahiri, D. K. *Assam Muslim Politics and Cohesion*, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 1985, p-165.