

## CHAPTER V

### THE MUSLIMS IN THE FREEDOM STRUGGLE

Influence of nationalism on the Anti-Partition agitation which led to then intense boycott and Swadeshi Movement all over India is now recognized. Confidential Reports of the Intelligence Branch of Bengal Government reveal that the movement had assumed an all India character towards the end of 1905 and spread over the different Provinces.<sup>1</sup> Through the echo of the happenings in Bengal reached the distant Nowgong and Sylhet districts of Assam, it appears that the factors prevailing in the Brahmaputra Valley did not favors a widespread movement there.<sup>2</sup>

Muslim population of the valley in 1901 was 5, 03,670 against 22, 82,646 Hindus in a total of 33, 72,114. By 1911 it rose to 634,101 and the Hindus increased to 26, 63,558. The Muslim farmer immigrants who outnumbered the earlier settlers were more interested in lands which they found in abundance and could occupy without let or hindrance. Their cause was espoused by their kith and kin at home who were staunch supporters of partition.<sup>3</sup>

So far as the Hindus of that Valley were concerned, three trends are traceable in relation to the partition and creation of the province of Eastern Bengal and Assam. Firstly, the Jorhat Sarvajanik Sabha, essentially a Hindu organization led by Jagannath Barua, supported Curzon's action if Assam's interests were specifically safeguarded. Secondly, Manik Chandra Barua, one of the founders and stalwarts of the Assam

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<sup>1</sup> R.C. Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol.II.pp.29-33, p. 88.

<sup>2</sup>K.N. Dutt, *Landmarks of the Freedom Struggle in Assam*, Lawyers Book Stall, Gauhati,1958, p.45.

<sup>3</sup>M.Kar, *Muslims in Assam Politics*, New Delhi, Vikas Publishing House, 1977,p 263.

Association which afforded political tutelage to the educated men of the Valley was opposed to amalgamation of Assam and Eastern Bengal. He considered this as annexation of Assam and recapitulated the early days of the British rule during which “our best interests were overlooked...” He apprehended that the Assamese would be elbowed out of all spheres of public life by the people of Bengal, the fear owing its origin to their being a minority.<sup>4</sup> The Association expressed satisfaction at the annulment of partition. A third trend was represented by a comparatively young section of Assamese like Ambika Giri Roy Choudhury, Bishnu Ram Medhi and some others who “seem to have come under the spell of anarchism for some time”. Ambika Giri is claimed to have suffered for the cause. No Muslim name is available.<sup>5</sup>

The picture in the Surma Valley was slightly different. Hindus and Muslims of Sylhet had been struggling unitedly for transfer to Bengal. But the creation of Eastern Bengal and Assam was more significant for the Muslims as it awakened in them a new sense of political importance derived from a numerical superiority to the Hindus. Through, therefore, the Anti-Partition agitation in its very initial stage was characterized by Hindu-Muslim unity, rift appeared soon and embittered their relation. The Muslims now considered the new province as a boon while the Hindus looked upon it as a vile conspiracy to strick at their newly aroused Bengali Nationalism.

As a result, the Surma Valley Conference which spearheaded the Swadeshi Movement led by great men like Bipin Chandra Pal and others failed to attract Muslim support and stirred the Hindu minds only and initiated the cult of Nationalism.

To work up the feeling all through the district to a high pitch of Swadeshi, self-help and national unity, the main emphasis was laid on *Rakhibandhan*, physical exercise, *lathi* and sword play, the teachings of Gita and the scheme of “Sanatan organization” as out lined in Bankimchandra’s *Anandamath* as a preparatory

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<sup>4</sup>*Ibid*, p.264.

<sup>5</sup>K.N.Dutt, *op.cit.*p.45.

programme providing the “inspiration for the younger section of the nation”.<sup>6</sup> Muslim reaction to the last two is too well known to require elaboration. The Muslim league did not rise to prominence in the Surma Valley till late twenties and under the influence of Muslim leaders of Bengal who were government title holders and rich zamindars the Muslims of Sylhet remained essentially pro-partition. None of the later Muslim leaders of the district has any record of participation in the movement.

Thus we see that the Boycott and Swadeshi Movement did not take root in the Brahmaputra Valley and only the Hindus of the Surma Valley were under its influence. Of course, “Bipin Chandra Pal’s stirring speeches before the Surma Valley Conference emitted burning flames of patriotism and their rays illumined the other valley too”.<sup>7</sup>

It was no wonder that Lord Minto, Viceroy of India assured the famous thirty-five men Muslim delegation led by Agha Khan that the community in Eastern Bengal and Assam could “rely as firmly as ever on British justice and fairplay for the appreciation of its loyalty and the safeguarding of its interests”.<sup>8</sup>

The earliest Muslim political organization of Assam was established about 1888 as a branch of the Central National Muhammadan Association but its activities are not known.<sup>9</sup> Some other Muslim organizations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were the Shillong Islam Mission, Shillong Muslim Institute, Anjuman Islamias, Muhammadan Defence Association, Surma Valley Muslim Federation, Assam Valley Muhammadan Association and others. By the time of the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, the Assam Valley Muhammadan Association appeared to be most representative amongst them. In 1917, Sayed Muhammadan Saadulla as its leader represented the Muslim point of view in respect of the proposed reforms. However, till the emergence of the Muslim League as the sole spokesman of the Muslim

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<sup>6</sup>R.N. Aditya, *Fight for Freedom in Sylhet*, Karimganj, 1964, pp.1-3.

<sup>7</sup>K.N.Dutt, *op.cit.*p.45.

<sup>8</sup>Ram Gopal, *The Indian Muslims*, Asia Publishing House, 1964, p. 337.

<sup>9</sup>Biman Behari Majumdar, *Indian Political Associations and Reforms of Legislature (1818-1917)*, Calcutta 1965, pp. 224-225.

masses, the Anjuman Islamias of various nomenclatures also continued to look after their interests. Till the Non-Co-operation Movement the Surma Valley Conference was the mouth piece of the people of Sylhet. Cachar had neither any separate organisation nor any voice of its own till late twenties.

The Assam Association and the Surma Valley Conference separately adopted the Non-Co-operation programme towards the end of 1920. But as it had to be worked under the Congress and the Khilafat Committees, the earlier organizations of the two Valleys ceased to function. Two Congress organizations of the two valleys under two different Provincial Congress Committees came to guide the movement side by side with Khilafat organisations. Tayyabulla was the first Muslim to court arrest in connection with the movement. However, a few more Muslims of the district Congress Committees of the valley were also leaders of the Khilafat Committees which consisted wholly of Muslim members. When the Assam Association adopted the Non-Co-operation programme it was dominated by young Hindu leaders like Tarun Ram Phukan and Nabin Chandra Bardalai and no Muslim name is available.<sup>10</sup>

Though the Surma Valley Conference as well as the Muslim Conference, adopted the resolutions, the extent and nature of Muslim partition is not clearly known. On Government evidence, the unanimity appears to have eroded immediately after the resolution was adopted. A.W. Botham Secretary to Government of Assam wrote to H.C. Mcpherson, Secretary to Government, of India, Home Department quoting a report from Deputy Commissioner, Sylhet, which maintained that the Hindus and the Muslims in the district regretted the holding of the Surma Valley and the Muslim Conferences and deplored Bipin Chandra Pal having been invited.<sup>11</sup>

The Anjuman Islamias the Sylhet Municipality and the North Sylhet and Habiganj Local Boards dominated by Muslims were opposed to the idea of boycott. The issue of Non-Co-operation was mixed up with the question of transfer of Sylhet to

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<sup>10</sup>M.Kar, *op,cit.* p. 269.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid*, p.270.

Bengal. Some of the Municipal Commissioners and Local Board Members who promised to resign did not do so.<sup>12</sup>

Again, in addition to the mutual valley jealousies the Assam Valley looked for guidance to Assamese leaders and the Surma Valley depended on Bengal. This absence of a single organisation and a common leadership even among the Hindus was certainly a hindrance to the operation of the programme. But there is no doubt that some of the Muslim leaders of Sylhet who later became prominent in Assam as well as all India Muslim politics, had taken part in it. They were Abdul Matin Chowdhury, a stalwart of the All India Muslim League, Muhammad Abdulla, Secretary Khilafat Committee, Sylhet and Khan Bahadur Mahmud All, a Minister in Bordoloi Cabinet.<sup>13</sup>

According to Government the Non-Co-operation Movement had two aspects: at bottom it was political and superficially it was educational. In Assam, it was the students took the initiative. The Assam Students Conference in its fourth Session held at Tezpur in 1919 under the presidency of Acharya Prafulla Chandra Roy adopted the resolution sponsoring the use of Swadeshi.<sup>14</sup>

C.R. Cunningham, D.P.I. studied the community-wise participation of students and gave the following interesting Table in respect of two “typical High Schools”, one in Sylhet and the other in Cachar in the Surma valley where the bulk of Assam Muslims lived.<sup>15</sup> Till that time, education had made little headway in the immigrants areas which were scattered over the Brahmaputra valley.

**Table 5.1: Number of Students in two “typical High Schools”**

| Year | Muslim Students | Hindu Students | Grand Total |
|------|-----------------|----------------|-------------|
| 1921 | 20              | 56             | 76          |
| 1922 | 02              | 15             | 17          |

**Source:** DPI’s Note, dated 28 June, 1922, para 8.

<sup>12</sup>Govt. of India, File No. 59 of December 1920 (Home Political).

<sup>13</sup>M.Kar, *op.cit.* p. 270.

<sup>14</sup>K.N.Dutt, *op.cit.*p.47.

<sup>15</sup>DPI’s Note, dated 28 June, 1922, para 8.

It would appear that while in 1921, Muslim students numbered about one thirds of the Hindus and about one fourth of the total of the two, their number dwindled more or less to about one eighth of both in 1922. In this connection, Cunningham observed, “What I have called elsewhere the old guards, the Hindu Bhadralog, have stood fast through the lean years” and “the ground lost by the Muhammadans had in the main been gained by the Hindu Bhadralog”. He of course tried to minimize the importance of the influence of the movement on students by attributing the reduction in number to economic causes. In another school in Habiganj in Sylhet, the number of Muslim students fell from eighty one in 1918 to forty in 1921. The overall decrease in roll strength was to the extent of seventy seven point six percent.

Withdrawals from these schools as a part of Non-Co-operation were followed by establishment of National School as shown below:<sup>16</sup>

**Table 5.2: No of national schools and students’ enrolment**

|                    | No. of Schools | No. of Students | One school for girls with 122 students |
|--------------------|----------------|-----------------|--|
| Brahmaputra Valley | 22             | 679             |  |
| Barak-Surma Valley | 17             | 1229            |  |
| Total              | 39             | 1908            |  |

Source: DPI’s Note, 28<sup>th</sup> June, 1922

It is claimed that the visit of Gandhi and the Ali Brothers to Assam in August 1921 gave a fillip to the movement which had been “gathering momentum in both the valleys” and that both Hindus and Muslims joined the movement in large numbers. But in neither case the extent of Muslim participation is indicated though it is further emphasized that the gospel of non-co-operation had spread from one end of the province to the other. Thus though there was not much apparent antagonism between the two major communities. They remained apart in their attitude to the movement and Muslim participation was negligible.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid*, para 9.

<sup>17</sup>M.Kar, *op,cit* .p. 278.

Assam's reaction to the decisions of the Lahore Congress of December 1929 was not very clear at first. So far as the Congress was concerned, A.P.C.C appears to have maintained an outward unity at least till the celebration of the Independence Day on 26 January 1930. The old leaders resigned their offices on 27 January and the Congress came under the control of the younger section of leaders like Bishnu Ram Medhi who became the President of the Pradesh Congress. The only important Muslim among them was Tayyabulla who was its Secretary from 1926 to 1931.<sup>18</sup>

To the loyalist Hindus and Muslims of Assam Dominion Status seemed a proper solution of the Indian problem and they expressed eagerness in accepting the British Government's offer of a Round Table Conference. When such a Hindu leader, Pyari Mohon Das of Sylhet moved a resolution accepting the offer in the Assam Legislative Council in 1930, Muslim leaders from Nowgang, Goalpara and Sylhet strongly supported him. Munawar Ali himself had tabled a similar resolution which could not, however, be moved due to his absence.<sup>19</sup> But when another member, Brindaban Chandra Goswami of Kamrup brought a motion recommending suitable modification of the Simon Report to fulfill Indian aspirations, Munawar Ali, President of the Assam Provincial Muslim League condemned the report as totally unacceptable. He represented the view of the Muslims in general when he almost verbatim repeated the resolutions of the All India Muslim Conference held at Delhi on 1 January 1929. It had demanded the protection of Muslim interests and adequate provision of Muslim shares in all spheres of public life and opposed any unitary form of Constitution for all India.<sup>20</sup>

In spite of all these however, the extent of Congress success with particular reference to the Muslims is very much doubtful and uncertain. It may be of interest to note that all activities of the Congress were more or less limited to the predominantly Hindu areas. Moreover, Hindu-Muslim relation was badly mauled by a communal riot in Digboi Oil Refinery in May 1930 when the movement was launched. Saadulla,

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<sup>18</sup>K.N.Dutt, *op.cit.*p.67

<sup>19</sup>A.G.Part VIA, 1930.pp.49-52.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid*, pp.1051-1065

Executive Councilor in charge of law and order remained firmly neutral in the controversy through the Bengal Press and legislators raised a hue and cry. It is on record that even after the Congress started the Mass Contract Campaign in 1937, its support amongst the Muslim masses was less than anything. It may also be mentioned that no Muslim organization was banned in Assam and no prominent person was arrested till January 1932 when the movement was resumed.<sup>21</sup>

The elections of 1937 constituted a turning point in the history of both the League and the Congress. A study of the latter's influence over the Muslims in Assam will, therefore, facilitate a better understanding of the community's involvement in movements sponsored and guided by the Congress. After the elections, the League consolidated its position among the Muslims. In Assam the Provincial Muslim League soon became the sole spokesman of the community. The legislative wing of the party was of course under the leadership of Saadulla, the Premier of Assam.

The impact of the Lahore Resolution of the All India Muslim League cannot be over emphasized and it was not unexpected that the Congress propaganda among the Muslims evoked little response. Of course, the Jamiat joined the Satyagraha early in 1941 but it did not improve Muslim participation to any noticeable degree as the vast majority of Assam Muslims owed allegiance to the League.

The Saadulla Cabinet of ten members included four prominent League leaders of the province. Saadulla was also a member of the National Defence Council of Assam whose function was to support war measures. His Government had made a contribution of several lakhs of rupees in case and kind to the British Exchequer for the War Fund in 1940 and 1941. This was severally criticized by Congress members when Government moved the Assembly for a supplementary grant. They held that such a contribution was not in any way benefit Assam apart from the legality of the expenditure incurred.

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<sup>21</sup>M.Kar, *op,cit.* p. 283.

It is well known that the All India Muslim League which enjoyed the confidence of the vast majority of the Muslims all over the country had asked them not to join the Congress movement of August 1942. Jinnah considered it a most dangerous mass movement which would result not only in violence but bloodshed and destruction of innocent lives.

The League Working Committee in which Assam Provincial Muslim League was represented by Abdul Matin Choudhury of Sylhet, quite expectedly decided not to co-operate with the Congress. 'Morning News' wrote on 8 September, 1942 that Jinnah had expressed satisfaction and congratulated the Muslims for keeping aloof from the movement.<sup>22</sup>

The bulk of the Muslims in Assam had gathered round the Assam Provincial Muslim League which was naturally bound to be guided by it. Already the Assam Muslim leader except a few Jamiat men who had no hold in legislature, had been co-operating with the British. As the Saadulla Cabinet of 1939 had resigned in December 1941, the province was placed under Section 93 of the Government of India Act 1935. As soon as the Congress launched the August Movement, the field was again open and the Governor found them ready to step in. The Assam United Party of Saadulla and his Cabinet ran the Government till the elections of 1946. This installation of the Muslim League to power was hailed by the Muslims. Of the eight Assam leaders arrested after the passing of the Bombay Resolution there were two Muslims, namely Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed and Md. Tayyabulla.<sup>23</sup>

The first voice of 'Muslim separatism' vis-à-vis Eastern Bengal and Assam was perhaps that of Lord Curzon. In a statement made at Dacca on 18 February 1904, he claimed that in partitioning Bengal he was curving out a Muslim Province though the significance of the statement was little understood excepted among a few educated men

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<sup>22</sup>*Ibid*, p.291.

<sup>23</sup>Bejan Mitra and Phani Chakravarty (ed), *Rebel India*, Calcutta 1946, p.1.

of that community.<sup>24</sup> He also asserted that this was investing the Muslims of East Bengal with a unity which they had not enjoyed since the days of the old Muslim viceroys and kings.<sup>25</sup>

After the experience of majority in Eastern Bengal and Assam, the creation of which was very enthusiastically hailed by large sections of educated Muslims, the annulment, very surprising that many prominent Bengali as well as Assamese Muslims worked hard for the creation of Pakistan. Indeed, it is not suggested here that there were no other causes at work also. The joint status of Eastern Bengal and Assam did not satisfy the political aspirations of Assam Muslims who had no proper representation in the legislature. Bengali Muslims of Eastern Bengal in the Council demanded separate representation of the Muslims of the province as a whole in all spheres of activities. Similarly, politicians of Assam like Saadulla, the first Muslim member in the Provincial Legislative Council demanded the extension of the communal principle to local Bodies.<sup>26</sup>

Assam Muslims were quite conscious of their position. For example Saadulla would never agree to the separation of Sylhet, the most populous district of the province with a predominant Muslim population. Between 1930 and 1947 many schemes were formulated by Hindu and Muslim politicians for constitutional reforms. A common feature of all such schemes was the division of India into Muslim and non-Muslim zones and the inclusion of Assam in the Muslim Zone of North Eastern India consisting of Assam and Bengal.

The All India Muslim League Annual Session held at Lucknow from 15 to 18 October 1937 under the president ship of Jinnah went a great step towards the inclusion of Assam within the scope of Muslim politics. Jinnah appealed to all that the Muslims for united action for their social, economic and political uplift by rallying round one

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<sup>24</sup>Khaliquzzaman Choudhury, *Pathway to Pakistan*, Bros Publishers, 2008, Dhaka, p.238.

<sup>25</sup>Parliamentary papers, 1903, p.222.

<sup>26</sup>A.G. 1913, pp.80-81.

common platform and flag of the All India Muslim League. Three Muslim League Premiers, namely Saadulla of Assam, A.K. Fazlul Haq of Bengal and Sir Sikindar Hyat Khan of Punjab announced their intention to join the All India Muslim League along with Muslim legislators of their respective groups and provinces.<sup>27</sup>

The League Working Committee meeting at Meerut on 16<sup>th</sup> March 1939 appointed a Sub-Committee of nine members with Jinnah as President and including a representative from Assam, namely, Abdul Matin Choudhury. Its purpose was to examine the various draft schemes for constitutional reforms that had already been submitted to the League as well as those might follow.

It appears that Jinnah himself was not well informed of the population composition of the north-eastern parts of India. In his presidential address to the Lahore Session, he claimed that the “Eastern Section of Pakistan” had seventy five percent Muslims in its population without of course mentioning Assam. It is known that Bengal had a slender Muslim majority and Assam was a predominantly Hindu Majority province.

Jinnah was not a protagonist of Assam’s inclusion in the proposed Eastern Wing of Pakistan. He had said on 25<sup>th</sup> December 1945, in a preface to a book,

“There is one difficulty in including Assam as a whole. The proportion of the minority population will be raised from 30 to 38% or more if the Eastern Pakistan states included the whole of Assam....Moreover, it will not be possible to defend the inclusion of Assam in this state on the principle of self-determination”.<sup>28</sup>

However, he had asserted in 1940 that if a new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam was created, it would have a permanent majority of 80% in a population of 40 million. The same year again, before the Lahore Resolution was adopted, Jinnah claimed

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<sup>27</sup>E.W.R.Lumby, *The Transfer of Power in India (1945-47)* London, Allen & Unwin, 1954, p.121.

<sup>28</sup>.P.Hardy, *The Muslims of British India*, Cambridge University Press, 1972, p. 232.

Assam to be a Muslim province. But at least till the end of 1942 Jinnah was not an advocate for the inclusion of entire Assam in Pakistan.<sup>29</sup>

Jinnah visited Assam for the first time in March 1946 and at Shillong, studied the problem of the province with the help of former Muslim Ministers. Such late visit to a province which was to be included in Pakistan was unusual unless Jinnah was half-hearted about the demand. Apparently he was encouraged by the election results which had established the Muslim League's strength. After a tour of Sylhet he came to Shillong and in a meeting declared that the League claimed Assam as one of the provinces of Pakistan Zones. At Gauhati he congratulated the Assam Provincial Muslim League for its victories and simply asserted the claim for Assam's inclusion without showing any reason.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps he was not very sure of it till then. But in April 1948 a Convention of Muslim League legislators met at Delhi under Jinnah's Chairmanship and adopted a resolution asserting that "with a view to saving Muslim India from the domination of the Hindus...it is necessary to constitute a sovereign independent state comprising of Bengal and Assam in the North East zone...."<sup>31</sup>

In his memorandum dated 12 May 1946, Jinnah demanded that "the six Muslim provinces (Punjab, N.W.F.P., Baluchistan, Sind, Bengal and Assam) shall be grouped together...herein after named Pakistan group..."<sup>32</sup> The Cabinet Mission had given its thought to a similar Pakistan but the proposal was rejected by the League, one of its reasons being that it would mean the loss of almost the whole of Assam except Sylhet. To a deputation of Assam Provincial Muslim League led by its Secretary, Mahmud Ali in July 1946, Jinnah said, "I tell you young man, nothing short of Assam shall satisfy me".<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>*The Eastern Times*, 5 January, 1940

<sup>30</sup>*Star of India*, March 6 and 7, 1946

<sup>31</sup>G. Allana (ed), *Pakistan Movement*, University of Karachi, 1968, Karachi, p.26.

<sup>32</sup>J.P.Chander, *India Steps Forward*, Indian Printing Works, New Delhi, 1946, p.142.

<sup>33</sup>*Janasakti*, 31 October, 1945.

So far as the Assam Provincial Muslim League and its efforts for Assam's inclusion in Pakistan were concerned, no arguments were advanced by it. Third Session of the Assam Provincial Muslim League held at Barpeta in April 1944 under the President ship of Choudhury Khaliquzzaman of U.P. That Conference only reaffirmed its faith in Pakistan and resolved that the provinces of Bengal and Assam should be formed into an independent political unit as Eastern Pakistan.<sup>34</sup>

1928 Assam Provincial Muslim League was formed at Shillong under the guidance and control of Surma Valley Muslims and that there was a rival organization also. But they could not make much headway. League politics began in Assam following the All India Muslim League Session of 1937 and particularly after the establishment of the League in the Brahmaputra Valley. Since then till partition, the All India Muslim League remained the mentor and monitor, friend, philosopher and guide of the Assam Muslims under the banner of their provincial organization. By 1939, the splinter groups of Muslim members practically sank their differences and presented a united front against the Congress.<sup>35</sup>

The date of the inception of the League organisation in the Brahmaputra Valley is not clearly traceable. But according to Maulana Hurmat Ali Boralaskar, a veteran Nationalist Muslim leader of Cachar, it was started in December 1938 in a village named Alitangri in the district of Nowgong at the initiative of Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani who became its first President. Saadulla had joined the organization as by his own admission in 1940, he was a member since its inception. The same year he and Abdul Matin Choudhury of Sylhet became respectively its President and Secretary and thus the Assam Muslim League became a truly provincial one. This was affiliated to the All India Muslim League in 1940.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>. *Star of India*, 4 January, 1946

<sup>35</sup>M.Kar, *op,cit.* p. 310

<sup>36</sup>A.G.Part VIA, 1940. p.1640.

Saadulla's premiership and his land settlement policy complicated by the influx of Muslim farmer immigrants from Bengal along with the alleged Government Partisanship in the Census of 1941, the University Bill and the Agricultural Income Tax bill created serious controversies and stirred the Hindu public mind of Assam. As the demand for Pakistan gathered momentum, the divergences between Government and Opposition took a purely political character in every matter of public interest. By 1946, there was a thorough political post-mortem of the allegedly many acts of omission and commission of the successive Saadulla Government and antagonists of partition saw in all this a concerted plan of furthering the cause of inclusion of Assam in Eastern Pakistan. For a few years during his premiership, Saadulla and Abdul Matin Choudhury were President and Secretary respectively of the Provincial Muslim League. The former was also the leader of the Muslim League Legislature party since its inception till his election to the Constitution Assembly. As the most respected leader of the Muslims and occupying the most important position of the party and its parliamentary forum, Saadulla was considered as the main architect of the League's demand on Assam.

Saadulla was no doubt an advocate of Pakistan but his advocacy developed slowly without the venom and the fanatic ferocity of a propagandist.

By the time of Jinnah's first visit to Assam in March 1946, he clearly supported Assam's merger in the Eastern wing of the proposed Pakistan as consisting of six 'Muslim Provinces', Assam being one of them. Saadulla also spoke in this meeting in which addresses were presented to Jinnah by the Muslim public, students and women along with a purse of thirteen thousand rupees. Jinnah congratulated the Assam Provincial Muslim League headed by Saadulla for having captured ninety two percent of the Muslim seats.

The Executive Committee of the Party was reconstituted on 23 March 1946. Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani and Muhmud Ali became its President and Secretary respectively. But Saadulla continued in other important positions. He was made a member of the League Action Committee which had taken up the matter of eviction of

immigrants started by the Bardoloi Government. He was also the sole spokesman of the League in its negotiations with Government.

Saadulla attended the Muslim League Legislators' Convention held in Delhi in April 1946 which demanded Assam for Eastern Pakistan. There he said openly for the first time that the Muslims were the largest community in Assam. Apart from it's begin a poor province, Assam's physical situation is such that it leaves no alternative to Assam but to join Pakistan, he asserted. In the All India Muslim League Council meeting in July 1946, he supported the withdrawal of the League's acceptance of the Cabinet Mission Proposals for saving the self-respect of the Muslims. In the same meeting, Resolution No. 11 declaring the policy of 'Direct Action' was adopted and Saadulla renounced Knighthood in response to the League's directive.<sup>37</sup>

Abdul Matin Choudhury of Sylhet had started his political career as a non-co-operator. Some years later he joined the Muslim League. He was not only in the forefront of the Surma Valley League but also for long recognized as a Provincial leader by the All India Muslim League in absence of any organization in the other valley. More than that, he was a close associate and confidant of Jinnah during the latter's political exile. In 1933 Matin was elected one of the Vice-Presidents of the All India Muslim League representing Assam and congratulated by Jinnah from London. Again, he was one of the Leagues who implored Jinnah to come back.

In 1934, he represented Assam on Nine-Member Constitution Revision Committee of the All India Muslim League and was one of the twenty members of its Central Committee for Revision and Reorganization of the Provincial Muslim League branches. In 1936, he was a member of the Muslim League Central Parliamentary Board. As the Deputy Leader of the Assam Provincial Muslim League Legislature Party, at the Patna Session of the League in 1938 he supported its resolution declaring 'direct action' by Muslims against the alleged atrocities of Congress Ministries and claimed

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<sup>37</sup>.M.Kar, *op,cit* .p. 314.

that during the thirteen months of Congress rule in Assam from September 1938, the League had become popular. He was member of the Saadulla Cabinet.<sup>38</sup>

In 1942, Abdul Matin Choudhury said about the August Resolution of the Congress that it was not only against the British but also against the Muslims and pledged full support of the Assam Muslims to the All India Muslim League against any imposed constitution. In 1943, he was introduced to the League Session as one of the most prominent delegates representing Saadulla himself. In the League Session of 1943, at Delhi, he supported Choudhury Khaliqzaman's resolution demanding self-determination for Muslims. He participated in the League Legislators' Conference in 1946 which demanded the creation of Eastern Pakistan with Bengal and Assam.<sup>39</sup>

Syad Abdur Rouf, leader of immigrants Muslims in Barpeta as Chairman of the Borpeta Conference mentioned above had emphatically declared that the Muslims would "conquer Assam with ploughs and lathis". Jinnah's visit provided a further impetus to the Pakistan idea in Assam Complaining that the Congress Government wanted to kill lakhs of Muslims with the help of Jamiat-i-Ulema. One of the roads in Barpeta where he lived was named Pakistan Road.

Abdul MazidZiaosshams of Dhubri supported the demand of Pakistan and by way of criticizing the Congress Government for its policy towards the Muslims.

Muhammad Moyeenuddin Ahmed Choudhury of South Sylhet along with AbdurRab Choudhury, also from Sylhet asserted that the Congress was fighting the elections to capture ministries as well as for complete independence but the Muslim League was fighting to wreck the Government of India Act, 1935 and to establish Pakistan. He also complained of discriminatory actions of Government against Muslims.

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<sup>38</sup>A.S.F. No. Apptt. Pol. B. Nov.1921

<sup>39</sup>M.Kar, *op,cit.* p. 316.

Thus it is evident that the Assam Provincial Muslim League had no reason of its own in justification of the claim for Assam's inclusion in Pakistan. Assam being a Muslim minority province but being within the orbit of Muslim League politics a pretext had to be found. The League utilized the immigration question and Congress Government's allegedly partisan policy in this regard to rouse and consolidate the Muslim masses behind it.

We know that the bulk of Assam Muslims were supporters of the Muslim League and so were in favour of Pakistan which they openly demanded. The only dissentient voice was of the Jamiat-UI-Ulema-e-Hind which could not muster enough strength to resist the League. As soon as the Cabinet Mission Plan was published, voices of protests were raised against the provision of grouping of Assam with Bengal in Section 'C'. As many as forty public meetings were held in towns and mofossils of Cachar, Darang Kamrup, Lakhimpur, Nowgong and Shibsagar districts under the auspices of different organisations. But only two meetings, one in Silchar and the other in Lumding, were held under the chairmanship of Muslims and the number of Muslim attendants was very small. The Silchar meeting was presided over by a nationalist Muslim. Six out of the twenty seven prominent persons present belonged to the community. Lumding had a few Muslims among the population. The most repeated argument against grouping was the fear of "massacre" of the linguistic and cultural identity of the Assamese.<sup>40</sup>

After the acceptance of the Cabinet Mission Plan by the Indian National Congress and the All India Muslim League, Assam Legislative Assembly was summoned to meet on 16<sup>th</sup> July 1946, to elect three Muslim and seven non-Muslim members to the Constituent Assembly. GopinathBardoloi, Premier, supported by Basanta Kumar Das of Sylhet wanted to table a motion directing the Assam representatives to refrain from taking part in the proceedings of Section 'C' for constitution making as stipulated in the Plan. Muslim members of whom all but three belonged to the League, at once raised objection to such a motion as being out of the

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<sup>40</sup>*Ibid*, p. 319.

scope of the session which was summoned for the specific purpose of election only. Debeswar Sarma the speaker, however, allowed the motion.

Bardoloi's resolution consisted of two parts. The first part expressed the opinion (of the Congress) that.....the province of Assam has an undoubted claim to have the Constitution of the province framed and settled by its own representatives elected to the Constituent Assembly and that it will be detrimental to the interest of the province of Assam to form any Section or Sections or Group or Groups with any other province....

It also asserted that no Group Constitution should be set up for any group of provinces should be dealt with by such a group. The Second part of the motion, therefore, recommended that,

1. Assam's representatives alone would frame the provincial constitution.
2. They should not take part in any meeting of any group or section for purpose,
3. They should resist any attempt made to set up a Group Constitution for Assam and
4. They should take part only in the framing of the Union Constitution.

In supported of his motion Bardoloi claimed that one of the "Central Ideas" of the plan entitled Assam as a province to frame her Constitution through her own representatives. The other was that matters relating to her could not be governed or dictated by the majority of votes of the Group or Groups to which the province would be tagged.

Section 'C' consisted of seventy members of whom ten would represent Assam. Of the thirty four general seats twenty seven were allotted to Bengal and seven to Assam. Against that there would be thirty six Muslim members, thirty three from Bengal and three from Assam. Thus, the fear of the Assamese Hindus were based on the reality that not only the Muslims who were advocates of Pakistan would have a majority, however small, but also that Bengalees would dominate the proceedings of the Section. Bardoloi therefore said, "We must say that in a Joint Council, the decision of which is liable to

be decided by majority our interests will be completely subordinated to the interest of another Province...” He did not add that such a Group Council would only further the interests of Pakistan, but advised the House that....”We should not bring into our consideration any question communal in arriving at a decision over this motion...” In view of the wholly communal character of the Cabinet Mission Plan and the arraying of members on perfectly communal lines, any appeals to secularism was obviously a futile exercise though the fear of the Hindus was genuine.

Saadulla, Leader of the Muslim League by observing that Bardoloi had put the resolution in such a way that it might mislead the unwary and that the wordings of the different sections of his motion did not bear out the simplicity which he has tried to impress upon the House. He asserted 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. According to him the Provincial Constitution is to be framed by representatives of the Sections together and the British Cabinet proposals stand as a whole. An interpretation of the League which was confirmed subsequently by the British Government. Again, if we defy the British proposals we have nothing to do with Section ‘C’. Then the question of grouping with the province of Bengal falls through and thereafter jeopardize the solution of those problems which are intimately connected with Bengal.

In support of grouping, he advanced a number of arguments. Firstly, if Assam stood out of Group ‘C’, her geographical position as a north eastern frontier with Bengal interposed between her and the rest of the country would make it unsuitable and impracticable to join any other section. Therefore she must submit to Group Constitution or remain alone as a single unit. Secondly, in financial matters Assam would suffer as her main income came from the European Planters who paid either in Calcutta or London. Thirdly, for law and order she would have to maintain a huge force of her own. Again, in respect of all types of higher dependent on Bengal and so refusal of Assam to join the Section with Bengal would alienate the latter’s feelings. He was also of opinion that Grouping and the subjects which the Group Constitution would take over, would be

a matter of mutual understanding and adjustment between the two provinces. It may be mentioned that the Assamese had demanded the inclusion of certain portions of Northern Bengal in Assam and this would obviate the difficulty to Assam's geographical isolation. As regards Assam's dependence on Bengal, Bardoloi agreed but said, "...that fact alone cannot make us submit these interests and this relationship to be determined by the majority votes of Bengal".<sup>41</sup>

Bardoloi was supported by Basanta Kumar Das the ex-Speaker and now Minister. Leader of the Indian Christians, P.M.Sarwan from Brahmaputra Valley was against grouping but opposed the motion as "binding the hands of our representatives". After election of representatives the motion was "adopted" by the House clearly by the Congress group and some other members. In this connection it may be of interest that the only Muslim member of the Bardoloi Cabinet, Abdul Matlib Majunder who belonged to the Jamiat-UI-UIema-e-Hind, did not speak. Muhammad Tayyabulla was the President of the Assam Provincial Congress Committee who obviously led Assam Congress opposition to the Grouping Plan. This fact very much projected the idea that the Congress in its stand against grouping had the support of the Assam Muslims though it could not gather Muslim public opinion in its favour. The Assam Provincial Congress Committee which spearheaded the movement had a few Muslim members of whom none except the President was included in the various delegations sent to the Congress authorities.<sup>42</sup>

So far as the Provincial Muslim League was concerned, we have seen that it was busy preparing for the Civil Disobedience Movement in connection with the Congress Government's immigrant policy and appears to have left the entire matter of grouping to its Parliamentary Wing as well as the All India Muslim League. Saadulla, leader of Muslim League Legislature Party and Opposition claimed that the overwhelming majority of Assam's population excepting the caste Hindus supported the Grouping Plan. His basis of calculation was the same as that on which the All India Muslim League

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<sup>41</sup>*Ibid*, p. 322.

<sup>42</sup>A.P.C. Record, packet No. 6, 1945

had been demanding Assam. The Star of India supported the contention and observed that in accepting the dictates of the “inner voice” of Gandhi, Assam would commit “harikari” by cutting herself from her moorings in Bengal.<sup>4343</sup> It is well known that the League policy was “Divide and Quit” instead of “Quit India”. The Cabinet Mission Plan foundered mainly on the rock of the Grouping Plan. The A.I.C.C. accepted it with its own interpretation which ran counter to that of the Cabinet Mission and the British Government. Opposition of the Assam Congress was one of the main causes of the failure of the Plan.

Thus, from the foregoing accounts and pages we find that, of the different phases and movements in our freedom struggle with particular reference to the participations and the role of the Muslims of the Assam province during the period. This exposes the complete divergence of attitude of the two major communities of the province in political field after the Khilafat and Non-co-operation movement. A study of their respective role reveals a total lack of a universal leadership based on the concepts of democracy and secularism. We also find the political alienation of the Muslim masses and intelligentsia with a few exceptions from the Hindus. These also explain how and why they drifted away from the main current of an all India Nationalism and subscribed to the demand for Pakistan which also aggravated the process of parting of the way between the two communities and the valleys.

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<sup>43</sup> *Star of India*, 27 and 31 December 1946.