



“The Origin And Growth Of Muslim Politics In Assam Under Assam Provincial Muslim League”

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The origin of the Muslim politics in Assam goes back to the initiatives of the Sir Sayed Ahmed Khan and the knowledge of institutional taxonomy that the colonial rule offered to the Muslims. Muslim politics in Assam originated as a consequence of the realities realized by the Muslims in term of educational facilities, public employment and representation in the self government bodies to enter into the Legislative Councils. The Muslims of India had long been feeling the need for a separate political organization for themselves. Muslim delegation under the leadership of Sir Agha Khan met the Viceroy at Simla on October, 1906 and desired to organize the Muslims politically to secure for themselves recognition from the government as a nation within a nation. It was in the wake of Simla Deputation, the All India Muslim League was formed on December 30, 1906. It was the first genuine effort of the Muslims in search of a distinct political identity for themselves. Gradually the All India Muslim League established its wings in all the major provinces and extended its activities under the banner of its provincial wings. In this process, Assam Provincial Muslim League was formed and became the first formal banner of the Muslim politics in Assam.

The British government separated Assam Division from Bengal in 1874 and upgraded as a Chief Commissioner's Province. The British authority also included three districts, namely, Sylhet, Goalpara and Cachar to Assam. In the process in the early 20th century, the Sylhet, a Muslim majority district, became the epicentre of Muslim politics in Assam. The Muslim immigration from East Bengal during this time led to the increase of Muslim population in Assam. The British took full advantage of the situation and encouraged large scale immigration into the wastelands of Assam mainly for their revenue gains.

There was a gradual development of political consciousness among the Muslims of Assam in the second half of the 19th century. The earliest political organization of the Muslims of Assam was established in 1888 and it was a branch of the Central National Mohammedan Association. Other important Muslim organizations of the period were the Shillong Islam Mission, Anjuman Islamias, Mohammedan Defense Association, Surma Valley Mohammedan Association and Assam Valley Mohammedan Association. In 1917, Syed Mohammad Saadulla represented the Muslims' point of view as the leader of the Assam Valley Mohammedan Association for inclusion in the proposed Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms. It was mainly due to the activities of the above mentioned organizations, the Muslims of Assam became politically conscious and articulated.

The increase in the Muslim population and its active participation in the politics provided the suitable platform for the rise Muslim League in Assam. On January 28, 1928 a branch of the Muslim League was formed in Assam with Munawar Ali as the President. In the initial years, this branch could not make much progress in Assam. Later branches of the Muslim League were established in Nowgong, Jorhat and other places. The important leaders of the Muslim League of the initial period were Abdul Matin Choudhury, Munawar Ali, Shaukhatul Ambia and others who tried to make the League popular among the Muslim masses.

The first election to the Assam Legislative Assembly was held in 1937 as per the provisions of the Government of India Act of 1935. This election provided an opportunity to the Muslim League to take part in the election and secured 4 seats from Surma Valley. The League could not leave any impact in the Brahmaputra Valley. Few Muslims like Sir Mohammad Saadulla, Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, Sayidur Rahman and Abdul Hamid won elections from the Brahmaputra Valley as independent candidates. But at that time, there was no unity among the Muslim MLAs of the two valleys. Meanwhile, some sensitive issues developed in the socio-political and religious life of the people of Assam which dominated the later politics of Assam.

The committee appointed by the All India Muslim League on March 28, 1938 under the presidentship of the Raja of Pirpur to study the conditions of the Muslims in the Congress governed provinces. The report of the committee was made public on November 15, 1938 and it contained several serious allegations against the Congress like the compulsion on the Muslims to show respect to the Congress flag, to sing Bande Mataram, introduction of Wardha Scheme of Education etc. Likewise the Sharif Report and the Fazl-ul-Haq Report also brought out the miserable condition of the Muslims of Bengal and Bihar respectively. In such a situation, the leaders of the Muslim League in Assam realized their future under the Congress rule. They felt the need of unity among the Muslims under the banner of the Muslim League to ensure good future for the Muslims in Assam.

In 1939, a tense situation arose in Cachar, Hailakandi and some divisions in Sylhet over the issue of playing of music in front of the mosques. Gopinath Bardoloi, the then Premier, issued a communiqué which fixed the hours when music was prohibited before the mosques. The Muslim MLAs strongly protested against the government order and opined that there could be no music at any time before the mosques as it hurt the sentiment of the Muslims. All these sensitive issues prepared ground for communal Muslim politics in Assam. Thereafter large number of Muslims came under the banner of the Muslim League.

The All India Muslim League gave much importance in the activities of its provincial organisations in the late 1930s. This was in line with the statement of M.A. Jinnah in his presidential address at the Lahore Session of the League as regards the establishment of the branches of the League in all the provinces after the Patna Session of December, 1938. The decision of the Patna Session of the League had a deep impact on the politics of the League in Assam. The establishment of the branch of All India Muslim League in Brahmaputra Valley was the result of this decision.

In December, 1938 another branch of Muslim League was established in the Brahmaputra Valley and it gave a remarkable impetus in the rise of the Muslim League in Assam. In this way, by 1938 branches of the Muslim League were established in both the Brahmaputra Valley and the Surma Valley.

In the provincial elections of 1937, the Congress emerged as the single largest party but it refused to form the government. As a result, Sir Muhammad Saadulla got an opportunity to materialize his political dreams. In the beginning Saadulla did not join the Muslim League. Saadulla formed his first ministry on April 1, 1937 with the support of the European Group and the Surma Valley United Muslim Party. But the non-inclusion of the Muslim League in the ministry was a tactical error of Sir Saadulla. The Muslim League joined hands with the Congress and the alliance candidates were elected as Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the Assembly. In the Budget Session, the alliance defeated Saadulla by eleven cut motions. Realizing his weak position, Saadulla decided to join the Muslim League and this was a remarkable event for the Muslim League politics in Assam. The Assam Muslim League was affiliated to the All India Muslim League in 1940. In this way, Assam Muslim League emerged at the helm of Muslim politics in Assam.

It can be concluded that the origin and the growth of the Muslim politics in Assam under Assam Provincial Muslim League had three phases. In the first phase, the nucleus of the Assam Provincial Muslim League was Sylhet in the late 1920s under the guidance and control of the Muslims of Surma Valley. The second phase was marked with the establishment of its branch in the Brahmaputra Valley. The development of various sensitive issues in the late 1930s increased the popularity of the Muslim League and finally all the branches of the Muslim League in Assam merged into one and came under the umbrella of the All India Muslim League in 1940.

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