CHAPTER - II
ROLE OF GOPINATH BORDOLOI IN THE POLITICS OF ASSAM
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The controversial Rowlatt Act of 1919 was a direct challenge to the self-respect of the Indian people creating a wave of anger and discontentment throughout the length and breadth of the country. The extraordinary repressive powers resulted in the Jalianwala Bagh massacre and subsequent martial law in Punjab. The dismemberment of the Turkish Empire at the same time, had offended the religious and historical sentiment of the Muslims thereby arousing in them an anti British aggressive attitude. The Ali Brothers, Muhammad Ali and Shaukat Ali, along with Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, organized the Khilafat Movement. In this movement Gandhi saw an opportunity of uniting the Hindus and Muslims and channelising public opinion for a mass movement. Thus, under his inspiration, at a special session of the Indian National Congress held in Calcutta in September 1920, the Congress adopted the famous non-violent Non Co-operation Resolution which was re-affirmed at the annual session of the Congress at Nagpur, in December, 1920.

The programme of non co-operation included “the surrender of titles and honours, boycott of government, affiliated schools and colleges, law courts, foreign cloth and could be extended to include resignation from government services and mass civil disobedience including the non payment of taxes”\(^1\) The object of the INC was now defined as the attainment of swarajya by all legitimate and peaceful means. Gandhi encouraged the non-co-operators to set up national schools and colleges, establish panchayats, popularise hand spinning and weaving, to maintain Hindu-Muslim unity and observe strict non-violence.\(^2\)

The Assam Association, the only political organization of Assam, supported Gandhi’s draft resolution on non-co-operation and the members resolved to spread the

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2. *ibid.*
propaganda for the movement throughout Assam.³ Gopinath Bordoloi, a young and promising lawyer in Guwahati, was well acquainted with the political and social movement in the country. He was greatly influenced by the leadership of Tarun Ram Phukan, who along with many other eminent lawyers, supported Gandhism and his Non Co-operation Movement. Gopinath Bordoloi suspended his legal practice on 2 May, 1921, and plunged into the freedom movement taking up organizational work with a spirit of great sincerity.⁴ The Assam Pradeshik Congress was born on 5 June 1921, with the merger of the Assam Association, covering the six districts of the Brahmaputra Valley with its head quarters at Guwahati.⁵ The APCC decided to set up District Congress Committees in each subdivision with village committees and mauza committees at the lower level.⁶ The Guwahati and Barpeta DCC’s were formed. Kamrup district was divided into 24 centres with each centre being placed under one or more leading non co-operators.⁷ Gopinath Bordoloi became the Joint Secretary of the Guwahati Congress Committee and became intensely involved with the activities of the Congress after the arrest of Nabin Ch. Bordoloi and Tarun Ram Phukan.⁸ A staunch non co-operator and an effective speaker, Bordoloi addressed several meetings in and around Guwahati, where he appealed to the people to boycott foreign goods and intoxicating drugs.⁹

Bordoloi’s acquaintance with Gandhi during his visit to Assam in August 1921, greatly influenced his political ideologies. Gandhi’s visit created a sensation and helped in greatly popularising the ideas of non-co-operation among all sections. People from different parts of Assam assembled at Guwahati to see the Mahatma who was accompanied by Muhammad Ali and his wife, Jamunalal Bajaj and others. Gandhi’s twelve day stay in his first ever visit to the province was a tremendous success. He addressed mammoth gatherings in different parts of the Province appealing to the

³. S. L. Barua, A Comprehensive History of Assam, New Delhi, 1985, p. 534
⁴. B.K. Bhattacharya, Builders of Modern India, Delhi, p. 10
⁵. S.L. Barua, op.cit., p. 540
⁶. APAI, Kamrup, 11 June 1921, Office of DIG Police (S.B), Guwahati.
⁷. PHA, Vol II, p. 41
⁸. B.K. Bhattacharya, op.cit., p. 10
people to boycott foreign clothes and use only *swadeshi* goods to help attain *swaraj*. 

Bordoloi became a completely changed person after he met Gandhi for the first time in the house of his mentor, Tarun Ram Phukan. Bordoloi was influenced so much by this leader that he wrote, “To me his appeal was a sort of call to the spirit in man which sometimes becomes irresistible. When therefore Gandhiji came to Assam, I, at any rate, had already accepted him as a political as well as a spiritual Guru, the latter having a stronger hold on me than the former.”

Gandhi’s visit to Assam gave additional encouragement to the Congress workers to spread the Non Co-operation Movement in a vigorous way. Immediately after his visit, the Gauhati Town Congress Committee was re-constituted on 2 September 1921 for better co-ordination of co-hesive action with the following office bearers:

- President : Tarun Ram Phukan
- Joint Secretary : Gopinath Bordoloi
  \( \text{Jogendranath Baruah} \)
- Assistant Secretary : Ambikagiri Ray Choudhury

During this period Gandhi toured the villages of South Kamrup and Goalpara propagating the message of boycotting foreign goods and spreading the message of *swadeshi* by spinning and using Khadi. He toured other parts of Assam like Golaghat, Siibsagar, Nagaon and Goalpara to carry on the Congress propaganda. After the arrest of Tarun Ram Phukan and Nabin Chandra Bordoloi on November 30, 1921, Gopinath Bordoloi became more active. He addressed a huge meeting at Guwahati in December 1921, along with other leaders and appealed to the people to join as volunteers for the newly constituted Assam National Volunteers Corps. Bordoloi was also associated with the plans to open National Schools as part of the Gandhian

10. PHA, Vol II, p. 41
13. APAI, Kamrup, APCC papers
constructive programme. Gopinath Bordoloi went to interior places of Garo hills to gather cotton for hand woven garments. He followed the Gandhian principles so religiously that he became an example for others.

The Non Co-operation Movement aroused tremendous political awakening among the students. Gandhi's message of swadeshi and boycott had tremendous appeal and many students of government schools and Cotton college became enthusiastic participants in the Movement. In a meeting held on 17 January 1921, some students decided to raise a national fund to provide for the maintenance and educational expenses of the striking students. Gopinath Bordoloi promised a donation of Rs. 250/- to the students. The boycott of educational institutions by students and the numerous public meetings had generated a feeling of antipathy towards foreign domination. Along with the boycott agitation by the students the need was felt for setting up national educational institutions in Assam. A number of such institutions were established outside Assam. Following an unsuccessful attempt to convert the Sonaram High School of Guwahati into a national school, a school was established in February 1921, in the compound of Rohini Kumar Choudhury's residence with Gopinath Bordoloi as its Headmaster. The school was later shifted to the 'Assam Club' and was named Tilak Memorial School.

One of the highlights of Assam's participation in the movement was the complete hartal observed on 17 November 1921, at Guwahati and other towns as a mark of protest against the visit of the Prince of Wales. About 70,000 people signed the pledge of non-violence and enrolled themselves in the Assam Congress Volunteer Corps. Gopinath Bordoloi was elected a delegate to the INC in December, 1921. He

15. ibid
16. PHA Vol-II, p. 18
17. Mahadev Sharma, op. cit., p. 33
19. APAI, Gauhati, 12 February 1921, op. cit.
20. APAI Kamrup, 19 November, 1921, op. cit.
21. APCC General Secretary's Report for the year 1921-22
attended the Congress session at Ahmedabad as a member of the Assam delegation and got the opportunity to meet Gandhi for the second time.22

Bordoloi and his fellow delegates were deeply impressed by the way the Khadi work was being carried on in Gujrat. They realized that even Assam’s rural economy could be boosted through widespread use of Khadi.23 Commenting on the peculiarity of Assam’s economy, Gopinath Bordoloi wrote:24

"Assam’s economy is not similar to the economy in other parts of India. In our villages the people try to produce the necessary goods by their own labour. They do not work as daily labourers .... The current practice is to wear a fabric by interlacing mill yarn in the warp with handmade fillings. But Mahatma Gandhi refused to acknowledge these fabrics as Khadi. However even full use of handmade yarn in the fabric alone will not meet Assam’s needs. We need coloured, well designed and varied textile to attract consumers. Unless we do that the use of Khadi will be confined to a few Congressmen....."

He was arrested on 8 February 1922 and was sentenced to one year’s imprisonment for playing an active role in the Non Co-operation Movement.25 After being kept in Guwahati jail for two days, Bordoloi was sent to Jorhat jail. Gradually several other satyagrahis from various parts of Assam, like Bishnu Ram Medhi, Fakhuruddin Ali Ahmed, Gauri Kanta Talukdar and Lakheswar Baroah, also arrived in the jail.26

The suspension of the Non Co-operation Movement by Mahatma Gandhi at the height of its popularity following the Chauri Chowra incident dampened the spirit of the people. Dissatisfied with Gandhi’s politics, C. R. Das and Motilal Nehru founded the Swaraj party, which advocated the programme of council entry. At the Gaya session of

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22. M. Sharma, op. cit., p.38
23. B.K. Bhattacharya, op. cit., p.12
24. Ibid
25. Gopinath Bordoloi, Tarun Ram Phukan, Calcutta ,1940, p. 60
26. Mahadev Sharma,., op. cit., p. 88
the Congress the Assam delegation led by T. R. Phukan supported the council entry resolution.27 The Assam branch of the Party was formally constituted on 25 July 1923, with Phukan as President, Rohini Kumar Choudhury as Secretary and Gopinath Bordoloi as Assistant Secretary.28 At the Delhi session of the Congress of 15 September 1923, a compromise was brought about by which the Congress suspended all propaganda against councils. The Swarajists re-affirmed their adherence to the principle of non violence non-co-operation with the main object of offering continuous and consistent obstruction to the working of the Government.29

The Swarajya Party contested almost all the seats during the election to the Legislative Council held from 16 to 27 November 1923. Gopinath Bordoloi, along with Tarun Ram Phukan, campaigned vigorously for the candidates and all the eight contesting candidates won the election.30 The Government admitted that the increased interest indicated by the high percentage of voting was mainly due to the organized canvassing undertaken by the Swarajya Party.31 The Party failed to secure absolute majority in the council, but with the help of Independent members formed a strong opposition. They moved several resolutions demanding an enquiry into the repressive measures inflicted on non-co-operators, the Criminal Law Act, and special treatment to political prisoners in government. The Swarajyists viewed dyarchy as a total failure and demanded a full responsible Government in Assam. They were successful in reducing the land revenue by 75 percent.32 According to the Calcutta Pact of 6 November 1924, between Gandhi, Motilal Nehru and C. R. Das, the Swarajyists, pledged to work as an integral part of the Congress organization. But Motilal Nehru’s decision at Kanpur’s session for the withdrawal of the swarajists members from the legislative councils led to a split in the party.33 In Assam, the party did not face any split as from the

28. APAI, Kamrup 8 August, 1923, op. cit.
29. PHA, Vol-II, pp. 96-97
30. PHA Vol-II, p. 97
32. PHA Vol-I, pp. 99-102
33. R.C. Majumdar, History of Freedom Movements in India Vol-III, Calcutta, pp. 255-259
begining the Swarajya Party in Assam functioned as more or less as an integral part of the Congress. Both the parties actively participated in the constructive programme of the Congress such as prohibition of opium, development of khadi, endi and muga indigenous industries, reduction of land revenue and restriction of immigration of East Bengal Muslims into Assam.34

CONGRESS SESSION AT PANDU (1926):

Besides taking up constructive work, the idea of holding a Congress session in Assam had becomes popular among Congress workers. Thus, on behalf of the APCC, Rohinikanta Hati Barua, the General Secretary of the APCC, and Krishnath Sarma, Secretary of the Assam Branch of All India Spinner’s Association attending the Kamrup Session of the Congress, extended the invitation to hold the next session of the Congress at Guwahati. The invitation was accepted unanimously.35

It was decided to hold the 41st session of the INC at Pandu at the foot of the Kamakhya Hills near the old Pandu Railway Station. A Reception Committee for hoisting the session was formed with Tarun Ram Phukan as Chairman, Nabin Ch. Bardoloi as General Secretary and Gopinath Bordoloi, Rohini Kanta Hati Barua and Md. Tayebulla as Additional General Secretaries.36 The selected area was covered with jungles and was infested with wild animals but the land was cleared and made suitable for the session with the construction of roads, mud huts and provision of water supply. The site was named Pandav Nagar. It was primarily Gopinath Bordoloi's untiring efforts, that made the holding of such a grand event possible.37 The reception committee had worked very hard for the collection of funds, three fourths of which had been contributed by the peasants.38 The entire pandal with a capacity for 50,000 men was covered with Khadi cloth. There were three gates—the main gate was named Swaraj Duar, and the other gates were named Gandhi Duar and Ansari Duar.39

34. PHA Vol-II, p. 108
37. S.C. Kakati, *From Pandu nagar to Jawaharnagar*, Guwahati, 1976, pp. 16-17
38. ibid, p.18
39. ibid, pp.19-24
was presided over by Srinivas Ayengar and attended by Gandhi and other prominent leaders like Motilal Nehru, Vallabhai Patel, Rajendra Prasad, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Sarojini Naidu, Abul Kalam Azad and the Ali brothers, Muhammad Ali and Saukat Ali. Tarun Ram Phukan was elected as one of the 15 member Congress Working Committee for the term 1926-27. Phukan became the Chairman of APCC while Md. Tayebulla became the General Secretary. The Guwahati Congress decided not to acquiesce the Montford reforms. It was decided that congressmen would refuse to accept ministership or other offices. But the members were to move resolutions and support measures for advancing the "economic, agriculture, industrial and commercial interests of India" and "for the protection of the freedom of speech, press ...."

Gandhi was full of admiration for Assam after the session:

"I felt that Assam was too far away, too unorganized and too poor to shoulder the heavy burden of holding a Congress session. Guwahati had a population of only 16,000. No place with such a small population, has before Guwahati, had the temerity to invite the Congress. Guwahati however beat all previous record and in an incredibly short space of time, created in the midst of surroundings of great natural beauty on the banks of the great Brahmaputra, a city under Khadi canvas."  

**CIVIL DISOBEEDIENCE MOVEMENT :**

The declining political activity and the decadence in public life were suddenly removed by the announcement of the appointment of the Simon Commission to enquire into the working of the reforms Act of 1919. As there was no Indian member there was wide resentment across the country and the Congress decided to boycott the Commission. But inspite of the protests made by the Congress, the Commission visited India in February 1928 and submitted its recommendations. When the Commission arrived at Shillong on 2 January, 1929, most of the Congress leaders were attending...
the Calcutta session of the Congress and thus boycott demonstrations could not be properly organized. The Commission received twenty-seven memoranda from various groups most of them representing sectional or communal interests.44

BORDOLOI AND CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE MOVEMENT IN ASSAM:

In the Lahore session of INC held from 29 to 31 December, 1929, resolutions were passed for the attainment of swarjya or complete independence and to boycott the Round Table Conference proposed by the Commission in London. It was also resolved to boycott the Central and Provincial Legislatures and Committees constituted by the Government and accordingly, Congress members of the legislatures and committees were asked to resign their seats.45 A total of eight leaders from Assam, including Gopinath Bordoloi and Tarun Ram Phukan, who attended the Lahore session were against the council boycott decision of AICC, as they opined that such an extreme policy was unfavorable during that time.46 But the Congress directive could not be ignored and Tarun Ram Phukan, along with fourteen Congress Swarajists resigned from the Council.47 Bordoloi did not support the Congress resolution of boycotting councils. He was of the opinion that in a province like Assam, with its manifold problems, boycott of legislatures would be disastrous.48 Immediately after the Lahore Congress, G. Bordoloi, along with Tarun Ram Phukan and Rohini Kumar Choudhury, asserted these points in a press release. They felt that a realistic approach was needed to tackle Assam's manifold problems.49 He along with Tarun Ram Phukan, planned to obstruct the Government's repression through the formation of a strong opposition in the Council.50 But other Congress leaders did not accept this proposal. Bordoloi resigned from the office of the President of Gauhati District Congress Committee along

44. P.H.A. Vol-II, pp.124-125
45. R.C. Majumdar, Ibid, pp. 464-467
46. Home Poll. File No 18/12/1929, F-R, December 1929, NAI
47. Asomiya, 12 June, 1930
48. Asomiya, 8 January, 1930
50. Asomiya, 7 April, 1930
with Tarun Ram Phukan, the President of APCC. 51 Under the latter’s leadership they formed a new party, called the Assam Swaraj Party, following the ideals of the old Swarajya Party of C. R. Das and decided to contest the by-election to the Council. Tarun Ram Phukan won the election and returned to the Central Legislature but AICC in retaliation asked him to resign from APCC and AICC. He complied with both. Gopinath Bordoloi had not contested the elections, yet he too resigned from the Congress. 52

The APCC joined the Civil Disobedience movement of Mahatma Gandhi under the guidance of the new General Secretary, Sidhinath Sarmah, and President, Bishnuram Medhi, who shouldered the burden of Congress leadership in the critical years 1930-32. 53 The participation of a large number of students in the Civil Disobedience Movement in Assam greatly alarmed the government. To discourage the students from playing an active role in politics, the Director of Public Instruction of Assam, Mr. I. R. Cunningham, issued a Circular in May 1930, requiring the students and their parents or guardians of government schools to give in writing that the students would refrain from participation in any kind of political activities. This circular provoked sharp reaction throughout the province among all sections of people. A large number of students refused to sign the bond and withdrew from government schools. Hectic efforts were made for the establishment of National Schools to accommodate these students in different parts of Assam. At the initiative of Gopinath Bordoloi and other Congress workers like Gaurikanta Talukdar and Raibahadur Kalicharan Sen, the first National School, Kamrup Academy, was established at Guwahati. 54

During the Civil Disobedience Movement, Gopinath Bordoloi followed the constructive programme of the Congress initiated by Mahatma Gandhi. In 1924 he had been elected member of the Municipality and Local Board and in 1934 was made the Chairman of Municipality. Remaining in this post till 1938, he undertook a number of

52. ibid, p.130
53. Harendranath Barua (ed), Assam in India’s Freedom Movement, Guwahati, 1972, p. 26
54. M. Sharma, Inspection Book of Kamrup Academy, pp. 44-45
schemes for the welfare of the downtrodden, like the development of roads, water supply and above all, establishment of a Harijan Colony.55

BORDOLOI JOINS ACTIVE POLITICS:

After the Third Round Table Conference the proposed reforms of the Indian Constitution were published in a White Paper, which was examined, by a Joint Committee and on the basis of which the Government of India Act 1935 was passed.56 The Act provided that Assam should have a bicameral Legislature, consisting of the Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly. The Council was to have 22 members, out of which 18 were to be elected by limited franchise and four were to be nominated. The Assembly was to have 108 seats as per the provision made in the Communal Award of 1932.57 But the Act did not provide for a full-fledged responsible government. The Congress accepted the reforms with the intention of wrecking the Constitution from within. Accordingly, general elections were held throughout the country in February 1937.58

On the eve of the election there was an uncertainty regarding who should be projected as the leader of the Congress Party in the Assam Assembly. Tarun Ram Phukan started a new party called Congress Nationalist Party. Nabin Bordoloi was elected to the Central Legislative Assembly and other veterans, like Bishnu Ram Medhi and Omeo Kumar Das, declined to join the contest. Consequently Gopinath Bordoloi was unanimously elected leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party. He thus contested in the 1937 election and was elected. Congress in Assam won 35 of the 41 seats that it contested.59 Although the largest party, it had no intention of forming a coalition government with other parties. Bordoloi commented: "It would be absurd for the Congress to think of any combination or coalition..... The Congress would therefore lose its genuine character if it forms any combination with such

56. S.L. Barua, op.cit., p. 578
58. ibid.
59. M.Sharma, op.cit., pp.45-46
reactionaries." In his opinion "the refusal to accept Ministry and forming a solid block of opposition would be more workable policy than acceptance of ministry."

Sir Saadullah, a supporter of the British and leader of the Muslim group, was invited to form the Ministry in Assam with the support of tribal and non tribal members and the European group. The first coalition Ministry was formed on 1 April 1937, headed by Sir Syed Saadullah, forming a Government without a programme. Basanta Kumar Das, a Congress member, was elected Speaker defeating the official candidate, Karamat Ali by 56 to 51 votes.

In the first budget session, Gopinath Bordoloi criticized the Government for placing a wretched budget which made provision for an army of occupation, an expensive bureaucracy, a state of acute economic exploitation and for keeping Assam economically backward and her people morally degraded. During this session, the Government suffered as many as eleven defeats in 20 days from 12 August 1937, till 31 August 1937. On 27 August, the Congress moved a resolution for reduction of fifty percent of land revenue with effect from 1937-38 but it lost the motion by 43 to 60. As the Ministry was on the verge of losing support of its benefactors, 'The Statesman' commented, "A government which cannot control its own supporters and is continually humiliated by defeats carries little authority and should either reassert its authority or resign." In order to consolidate his position, Saadullah sought the support of the Muslims of the Surma Valley, who along with the Muslim League were supporting the Congress. He joined the Muslim League and attended the All India Muslim League Conference at Lucknow in October 1937.

60. Letter of Bordoloi to P.C. Sharma, 24 February 1937, APCC papers, File Miscellaneoues.
61. ibid
62. PHA Vol-II, pp. 335-340
63. A. Guha, Planter Raj to Swaraj Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam 1826-1947, New Delhi, 1977, p.221
64. A.S.A., ALA Proceedings, 7 April 1937
65. A.S.A., G.N. Bordolois Speech, 10 August 1937, ALAP, pp. 512-17
67. Home Political File no. 18/8/37, Political, August, 1937, NAI
68. The Statesman, Calcutta, 22 August 1937
69. A. Guha, op.cit., p. 226
In order to accommodate Muslim League members in his tottering Ministry, Sadullah resigned on 4 February 1938. The next day he was invited by the Governor to form a Ministry. Saadullah’s second coalition Ministry consisted of himself and five other Ministers.\textsuperscript{70} The reconstituted government faced the next budget session on 15 February 1938, with regained confidence. The no confidence motion was defeated by 50 to 49 votes but this marginal win exposed the uncertain balance on which the Ministry survived. The communal policy of the Ministry in nominating members to the Local Boards was a mockery of Local Self Government and became a major issue of anti Saadullah agitation.\textsuperscript{71} The settlement of the Gauhati Shillong Motor Transport contract with the Commercial Carrying Company based outside Assam made the Saadullah Ministry unpopular within the Assembly as well as among the masses.\textsuperscript{72} Four no-confidence motions were moved on 12 September 1938, and thus on 13 September 1938, Saadullah resigned without facing the no-confidence motion in the Assembly. The Governor asked Saadullah to remain in office until the formation of a new Ministry.\textsuperscript{73} Congress, under Bordoloi’s leadership, entered into an agreement with the Tribal League to form a new coalition Government. But there were some differences in the Congress High Command in giving clearance to Bordoloi to form the Government. Maulana Azad had misgivings that the Congress party had not sufficient majority in the Assam Assembly to run the Government.\textsuperscript{74} Congress President, Subhas Chandra Bose, and Mahatma Gandhi desired that Bordoloi should form the Government. Infact Subhas Chandra Bose came to Shillong to settle the problems and place a Congress Coalition Ministry in Assam with immense support from Tarun Ram Phukan.\textsuperscript{75}

The formation of the Bordoloi Ministry was announced in a Gazette Extraordinary published on 19 September 1938. On the same day, even before the new

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{70} PHAVoll, pp. 345-46
\item \textsuperscript{71} A Guha, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 227
\item \textsuperscript{72} K.N. Dutta, \textit{Landmarks of the Freedom Struggle in Assam}, Guwahati, 1968, p. 90
\item \textsuperscript{73} IAR (July to December) 1938, Vol-II, pp. 181-182
\item \textsuperscript{74} AICC papers, File No P419, Assam 1938-39, NMML
\item \textsuperscript{75} K.N. Dutta, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 90
\end{itemize}
Ministers had taken their oaths, Saadullah tabled a no-confidence motion which was disallowed by the Speaker. Immediately after the announcement of the Ministry, the Speaker adjourned the house *sine-die*, but when the Ministers proceeded to take the oath they were informed that the ceremony was postponed thus creating an awkward situation. Subhas Chandra Bose criticized the action of the Governor in a strongly worded letter.\(^{76}\)

Thereafter on 20 September the Governor administered the oath of allegiance and secrecy to the Bordoloi Ministry constituting of the following members with their portfolios.\(^{77}\)

1. Gopinath Bordoloi (Congress) : Premier Home and Education
2. Akshay Kumar Das (Constitutionalist) : Excise and Agriculture
3. Ramnath Das (Independent) : Medical and Public Health
4. Kamini Kumar Sen (Independent) : Legislative, Local Self Government, Judicial and General Department
5. Rupnath Brahma (Independent) : Forest and Registration

By 20 October 1938, three muslim members were included as Ministers. They were —

6. Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed (Congress) : Financial and Revenue
7. Mamud Ali (Independent) : Co-operative Society and Industries Department

**FIRST BORDOLOI MINISTRY 19 SEPTEMBER TO 16 NOVEMBER 1939 :**

During his fourteen months in office Bordoloi proved to be a capable administrator and shrewd politician and did not have difficulty in getting majority support for his 33 member group in a House of 108 legislators "He could easily win the support of the

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76. M. Sharma, *op.cit.*, p. 54-57
77. IAR (July-December 1938) Vol 2, p.183

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tribal people and the progressive section of the Muslims and scheduled castes. His was the first popular government in Assam with a secular democratic outlook and deeply committed to the welfare of the people. The attitude of the Governor and the European group in the Assembly created some discomfort for the ministry. A no-confidence motion was moved by Maulavi Muhammad Maqbul Hussain Choudhury on the floor of the Assembly on 8 December 1938.

Hockenbull, the leader of the European group, took the initiative in criticizing the coalition government. But Gopinath Bordoloi by pointing out the various welfare activities launched by the Government within a short period could refute the changes so convincingly that the no-confidence motion was lost 54 to votes 50. Bordoloi knew the game of politics rather too well. Despite many shortcomings and contrary to Governor Reeds impression, he had enough gift of leadership to have his way at every critical stage and with popular support.

Some of the popular measures undertaken by the Congress Coalition Ministry were prohibition of opium, reduction of land revenue, restoration of lands confiscated by government for failure to pay revenue due to poverty, release of all political prisoners, abolition of the commissioners, establishments and safeguarding the interest of the indigenous population. The most important measures adopted by the Ministry was related to taxation and the most contentious of the taxation measures was the Assam Agricultural Income Tax Bill. The new Ministry put before the Assembly in March an important legislative programme including a sale of Motor Spirit and Lubricants Taxation Bill, An Amusement and Betting Tax Bill, An Agricultural Income Tax Bill and a Prohibition Bill. The Bordoloi Government was committed to a programme and was capable of receiving proper support. The Congress accepted office, he said "with the definite object and purpose of easing the burden of taxation on the poor and of

78. B.K.Bhattacharya, *op.cit.*, p. 26
79. A.S.A., ALAP. 8 December 1938, p. 1021-1096
80. A. Guha, *op.cit.*, p. 232
82. Administrative Report of Assam, 1938-39, ASA
providing means for the uplift and betterment of the masses.83 Despite vehement opposition from the European members, the Agricultural Income Tax Bill, which envisaged a tax on the profits of the tea industry, was passed in a joint session of both houses of Assembly presided over by Heramba Prasad Barua by 65 to 56 on 5 August 1939. The rates of Agriculture income taxation were fixed by the Assam Finance Act on 10 August. The Act greatly benefited the exchequer during the extant financial year.84 Reduction of the salary of the Ministers to Rs. 500 per month raised some fund, to work for the upliftment of the tribal people.85

An event of considerable importance which drew the attention of Congress High Command causing embarrassment to the coalition ministry was the strike by the labourers of the Assam Oil Company at the Digboi Oil fields on 3 April 1939.86 The striking labourers were agitating against low wages, retrenchment of labourers and non-recognition of Bungalow servants as company's labourers. The strike entered into a initial phase on April 18, 1939 when three labourers were shot dead. The Ministry was severely criticized.87 The government ordered a magisterial enquiry but its report when published was considered to be incomplete and Bordoloi was criticized for being indifferent. The government appointed a Board of Conciliation with K.K. Hazra, as its Chairman which recommended the reinstatement of all striking workers who had been discharged. But the Digboi Oil Company's attitude was non co-operative from the very beginning.88

The attitude adopted by the European group in the Assam Legislative Assembly, when the Congress Coalition Ministry came to office gave encouragement to the labour agitation. The attitude of strict neutrality maintained by the government was subjected to criticism by some of the Congress members. Some Congress MLA urged the Premier to appoint a non official committee to enquire into the shooting incident and

84. A.Guha, op.cit., p. 233-34
85. IAR, Jan-June, 1939, Vol I, pp. 251-254, NAI
86. Administrative Report of Assam 1939-40, AS
87. Asamiya 20 April, 1939
remove the Assam Rifles from the Digboi area. On his refusal they demanded his resignation from the leadership of the Congress Party in the Assembly.89

Since the middle of July 1939, Bordoloi's leadership came under fire from the rank and file of the Congress and he was accused of being an 'indifferent Congressman', in whose hands the prestige of the Congress was not safe. While denying the charges, Bordoloi felt that his actions had always been guided by a strict adherence to what he considered to be right and proper under the circumstances.

"......Service and service alone had been the ideal which I am aspiring after. In following it I might not have been as strong a partyman as you think I should be. But even there I have believed Congress stands by just and impartial acts. The difference between a large number of our partyman and myself is fundamental and it would be unfair to you as well as to myself if you want to overlook it."90

The Bordoloi Ministry failed to give a bold and decisive stand on the question of the Line System introduced in 1920, to deal with the influx of immigrants from East Bengal. As the Government could not arrive at any concrete decision, it published a notification before relinquishing office in November 1939, embodying its decision on the Line Enquiry Report.91 It prohibited settlement of land to persons who came from outside the province after 1 January 1938.92

In September 1939, World War II broke out and the British Government in India, without consulting Indian public opinion declared India to be a belligerent country. The Congress refused to be a party to Britain's imperialistic war and contribute to the war efforts.93 Government of India wanted to know from Bordoloi

89. Secret Quarterly Survey No.8, May 1939 to July 1939, p. 18, A.S.A
90. Confidential letter Bordoloi to all members of Congress Parliamentary Party, 13 August 1939, APCC Papers, File-Assembly Party Proceedings and other important matters, Packet No-12
91. ALAP, Vol-I, 1945, pp. 519-32, A.S.A
92. Confidential File No. 20/44. 'Line System in Assam' Assam Secretariat, (political), AS
93. R.C Majumdar, op.cit, Vol-3, p. 598
94. Letter of Bordoloi to Denneby, 26 March, 1942, APCC Papers, Packet No. 4

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whether the Congress Party would give necessary support to the National War Front. Bordoloi replied:

"If we could venture to fight British Imperialism by this method, we feel we could fight the Japanese aggression with great success. Our programme has accordingly been confined to activities which would maintain the peace and morale of the people even in war times and keep us united in this troublesome period."

As the declared war aims did not include India’s independence, the Working Committee of the Congress, in its meetings held at Wardha on 22 October 1939, called upon all the Congress Ministries to resign. This gave rise to a difference of opinion among the Congress leaders in Assam. Because of Bordoloi’s capable leadership and popular measures, the general public were against the resignation of the Ministry. Bordoloi felt uneasy about continuing in office, although the majority of his party colleagues wanted the Congress Coalition Ministry to continue. But Bordoloi observed "........To me this is an intolerable position. How can I be co-operating with the Governor when other Congress Ministries are not cooperating with their Governors?"

Immediately after the declaration of war, Bordoloi wrote to Hem Chandra Barua, the President of APCC, “We as Congress members feel that unless avenues are explored and means adopted by which our prestige can be maintained, it would not be possible to carry on the responsibility with independence and honour.” Subhas Chandra Bose having an intimate knowledge of the region knew that Assam’s problems were different from that of others and thus opposed the resignation of the Ministry. Gandhi also supported the view of Bose. In the Congress Coalition party Executive Committee, Bordoloi pointed out that since the Ministry was pledged to carry out the Congress policy and programme it had no alternative but to resign, keeping in

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96. Confidential letter, Bordoloi to Patel, 2 November 1939, APCC Papers
97. Bordoloi’s letter to Hem Barua, 6 September 1939, APCC Papers, File Miscellaneous
conformity with CWC resolution, but members of cabinet decided not to resign till some measures in regard to immigration and some other important problems of Assam were taken.99 The APCC discussed the matter in a meeting held on 7 November 1939, and directed the Ministry to resign not later that 15 November 1939.100 The Bordoloi Ministry tendered its resignation on 15 November which the government accepted on 17 November 1939.101 Resignation of the Congress coalition ministry was an injudicious step. Gandhi himself admitted it when he said, "But Assam did come out. It was wrong."102 In a press statement Bordoloi explained that by declaring war and promulgating ordinances, the Governor would continually interfere in the working of the Ministry and so there was no alternative but to resign. 103 After the resignation of the Ministry, Gopinath Bordoloi spoke in a mammoth gathering on 24 January 1940, regarding the political situation, "The British Government failed to fulfill the national demands of the Congress and in protest to it the Ministry submitted resignation and adopted a non co-operation policy............."104 In the same meeting, to a query by a group of leftist youths he replied:

"Congress does not want a Constituent Assembly which will be subservient to the British government. The British government should at least give up the lust for colonialism in India and until it recognizes India to be an independent nation they should keep in mind that they should never hope to form any Constituent Assembly....."105

In the interest of a broader national struggle, and with deep respect and loyalty to the high command, Bordoloi, showed his moral strength to take such a step, not withstanding the regional problems of Assam106 "This was so because he was
always able to strike a balance between national and ‘narrow’ Assamese interests ..................."107

Immediately after the resignation of Bordoloi’s Ministry a coalition Ministry headed by Syed Saadullah was formed on 17 November 1939, which was announced through a Gazette Extra ordinary. 108 Provincial War Aid Committees were formed to support the British war activities but these were not supported by APCC. The government contributed Rs one lakh to the war fund in July 1940.

After his resignation, Bordoloi, concentrated on organizational and constructive work of the Congress. He also took the lead in building up an efficient Santi Sena organization. In the Ramgarh session of AICC, in March 1940, complete independence was resolved as the goal of AICC and the people were asked to prepare themselves for Civil Disobedience. Bordoloi tried to spread Gandhi’s message to work in the field of spinning, upliftment of the minority and Harijan communities and give publicity to the Congress programmes. 109 He appealed to the people to join the Congress and get ready to offer Satyagraha. Infact, he went to Wardha with a list of 26 Satyagrahis informing Gandhi of the willingness to offer Satyagraha. Bordoloi came back and offered Satyagraha on December 11, 1940, at the Deputy Commissioner’s Court in Guwahati before a crowd of more than 10,000 people uttering, “It is wrong to help the British war efforts with men and money. The only worthy effort is to resist all wars with non-violent resistance” 110 He was arrested and sentenced to one year imprisonment. But on health grounds he was released on 18 June, 1941 from Jorhat jail before the expiry of his term. 111

After the resignation of the Congress coalition Ministry, the Congress legislators stopped attending the Legislative Assembly. Taking advantage of this the Saadullah Government functioned in a way which was detrimental to the indigenous

107. A. Guha, op.cit., p. 232
108. PHA Vol-lll, p. 11
109. AICC Circular No 4, dated 29 March, 1940, APCC
110. Asamiya, 12 December 1940
111. Asamiya, 28 June 1941
population, specially on matters relating to three issues—new Land Development Scheme, the census of 1941 and the University Bill. The land development scheme envisaged opening up of fresh areas including reserved forests and waste lands to immigrants and illegal squatters. The census of 1941 was misleading and motivated.

The Assam University Bill was another dangerous work of the League. In a circular to all Congress Legislators dated 18 August 1941, Bordoloi was quick to point out that the proposed selection of teachers on the basis of communities would be detrimental to the growth and development of the province. As the leader of the opposition, Bordoloi felt he could not ignore his duties and responsibilities though he had full faith in satyagraha. On 15 November, 1941, he went to Wardha to discuss the issue with Gandhi and the Parliamentary Sub-committee. He returned and announced that the Assam Congress Legislators were permitted to attend the forthcoming session of the Assembly. Thus Bordoloi along with the Congress Legislators, attended the winter session of the Assembly from 1 December 1941. The students of Cotton College went on strike on 6 December 1941, to protest against the war fund raising schemes by holding a science exhibition in their laboratory. The Government ordered lathi charge on the processionists injuring about 40 students which created great public indignation and protest in different parts of Assam. Agitating students marched towards the Assembly on 8 December 1941, Gopinath Bordoloi promised to raise a discussion on the floor of the Assembly the following day.

Accordingly Bordoloi tabled an adjournment motion on 9 December 1941, to discuss the situation. Saadullah refused to accept the demand of the students and his stand satisfied neither the Congress nor non-Congress legislators and they tabled a no-confidence motion against the Ministry. On the same day Mr. R. K. Choudhury,

107. A. Guha, op.cit., p. 232
112. Asamiya, 22 November 1941, Home Political File No. 18/11/41. FR Assam, November 1941, NAI
113. Asamiya, 29 November 1941
114. APAI, Kamrup 13 December 1941, op.cit.
115. PHA Vol-II, p. 42
116. ibid.
Minister in charge of Education resigned.\textsuperscript{117} Because of these developments, Saadullah submitted his resignation on 12 December 1941.\textsuperscript{118} The British Government sent Sir Stafford Cripps on March 23, 1942 to arrive at a political understanding with the Indian people. With the rapid advance of the Japanese army in Malaya and Burma, Assam was virtually turned into a battlefield with war evacuees arriving in the most wretched conditions. Bordoloi along with other Congress workers became involved in serving the evacuees and organizing \textit{Santi Senas} for this purpose.\textsuperscript{119}

The failure of the Cripps Mission was followed by the famous 'Quit India Resolution on August 8, 1942', which called for immediate transfer of power to Indian hands. The Government did not wait for negotiations and struck hard at the Congress. Gandhi and prominent Congress leaders were arrested and the AICC, CWC and PCCs were declared unlawful associations. Bordoloi and Siddinath Nath Sarma who had gone to attend the AICC at Bombay, were immediately arrested on their return to Assam at Dhubri.\textsuperscript{120} Almost all the Congress leaders and workers were arrested. The Government followed a policy of repression but that could not dampen the spirit of the people. Immediately after the arrests of the Congress MLAs, the Governor of Assam, Sir Robert Reid called Saadullah back to power and installed the new Ministry on August 25, 1942.\textsuperscript{121}

The Congress Assembly party had officially absented itself from the Assam Legislative Assembly for about three years, though three or four members did attend some sessions on their own.\textsuperscript{122} Gopinath Bordoloi was released on 26 January 1944, on health grounds and was allowed to proceed to Calcutta for treatment. From there he kept himself informed of the atrocities in Assam through Mohendra Mohan Choudhury. Bordoloi could no longer tolerate the injustice to Assam and her people. In consultation

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{117} ALAP, Vol-II, p.1501-15
  \item \textsuperscript{118} Report of the working of the Assam Legislature Assembly 1937-45, December 1941, NAI
  \item \textsuperscript{119} Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya, \textit{Builders of Modern India}, Publication Division New Delhi, 1986
  \item \textsuperscript{120} Confident B File No C 351/42. Political, Assam Secretariat, PHA records ASA
  \item \textsuperscript{121} PHA Vol III, pp.268-269
  \item \textsuperscript{122} A Guha, \textit{op.sit.}, p. 283
\end{itemize}
with his colleagues, he immediately decided to revive constitutional politics and take up constructive work. "His strategy was flawless. He knew that communalism and imperialism could no longer be fought on the agitational front alone. The harassed people had to be spiritually revived through constructive work and the alliance between the communalism and the imperialists broken through vigorous legislative action." Bordoloi apprised Gandhi of Saadullah's antinational policy, but he was in a dilemma whether as a satyagrahi he should attend the Assembly or not. Gandhi's reply cleared his doubt, "On the whole my personal opinion is that if I am a member I should go and attend. Assam is a most peculiar case. What may apply to Bombay ought not to be made applicable to Assam, Hence I say quite seriously act as the dictate of your heart tells you." Gandhiji further said "....if you are a leader, act as a leader and not as a follower, ultimately you should do what appeals to you as right, even if the whole world is against you. That is satyagraha that is leadership." Bordoloi attended the Assembly with 13 of his colleagues on 14 November 1944 declaring that his party's outlook regarding parliamentary activities remained unchanged. He demanded a shift in the land settlement policy in favour of the landless indigenous people and the pre-1938 immigrants. On the same day he delivered a speech in the Assembly: "However thinned our ranks might be and however feeble our voice, it will continue to be raised against this evil, which has brought in its wake so much misery to us ……. We shall work for the enlargement of the elementary liberties on human beings, which in the name of the war have been practically nullified."

In March 1945, Bordoloi participated in the budget session and the Congress strength was increased to 18. Sir Saadullah's Government became unstable because of dissension within the ruling party. On 17 March, a no confidence motion got equal

125. M.M. Choudhury, op.cit., pp. 132-133
126. A. Guha, op.cit., p. 284
127. ALAP, Vol II, 1944, pp. 852-855
number of votes (39-39). Sir Saadullah decided to change his tactics to keep himself in power. Gopinath Bordoloi decided he should take this opportunity of arriving at an understanding with the Government on important issues. Accordingly, on 22 March a tripartite agreement was arrived at between Syed Muhammad Saadullah, Rohini Kumar Choudhury and Gopinath Bordoloi on the following terms:

(a) The restoration of civil liberties and the gradual release of political prisoners;
(b) Implementation of a suitable policy regarding the supply of essential commodities to the public and removal of corruption;
(c) A Revision of the land settlement policy with a view to accommodate claims of the sons of the soil;
(d) Reconstitution of the new ministry on all party basis;
(e) Reconsideration of the distribution of seats in the Local Boards.

This agreement was a great victory for Bordoloi, because it would restore civil liberties in Assam, which was necessary for carrying out constructive work and for gathering public support for the elections. The most significant outcome was the concerted response to a compromise formula for the reconstitution of a ministry enjoying the confidence of all parties in the Assam Legislative Assembly. Saadullah had agreed to the reconstitution of his ministry on an all party basis and accordingly he resigned on 23 March 1945, only to resume office again with Congress support on May 1 1945. The government lifted the ban on Assam Congress. But Saadullah Government's half hearted attitude in implementing the agreement, specially the land policy, compelled Bordoloi to withdraw his support.

The Government of India announced its decision to hold general election on August 21, 1945. The AICC decided to contest the election. Bordoloi was a special...
invitee to the CWC held in June which took this decision. On October 1, 1945, the Assam Assembly was dissolved and the general election was held on January 6, 1945.\textsuperscript{131} The Congress Parliamentary Sub-committee was formed on 8 October at Guwahati with Gopinath Bordoloi as Chairman.\textsuperscript{132} The Congress, under his leadership won a big victory winning 58 seats in house of 108, the final party position was:\textsuperscript{133}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Seats</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim League</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamiat-ul-ulema</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>7</td>
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On 11\textsuperscript{th} February, 1946 Gopinath Bordoli formed his Cabinet compromising of the following seven members:\textsuperscript{134}

1. Gopinath Bordoloi : Appointments, Education and Publicity
2. Basanta Kumar Das : Home, Judicial, Legislation, Registration and General department.
3. Bishnuram Medhi : Finance & Revenue
5. Ramnath Das : Excise, medical, Public Health and Labour
6. Baidynath Mukherjee : Supply, Reconstruction, Jail
7. Abdul Mahil Majumdar : Local Self Government, Agriculture and Veterinaries

Later in September 1946, Bhimbar Deuri from the Tribal league and Abdul Rashid from the Surma Valley were included in the Cabinet.

The assumption of power by the Labour Party in England after the defeat of the

\textsuperscript{131} PHA Vol- III, pp. 270-271
\textsuperscript{132} Assam Tribune, 26 October 1945
\textsuperscript{133} 'Political Situation Reports'. Home Political File No. 51/2/46,NAI
\textsuperscript{134} Assam Gazette Part-vi A, April-June, 1946
Conservative Party in the British General Elections of 1945, was a turning point in the history of Indo-British relations. Despite India’s relentless struggle for independence, Britain had shown no intention of transfer of power to the Indians till 1945. The new Labour Party Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, announced a proposal to solve the issue of Indian Independence. He also announced that a delegation on behalf of the Cabinet was going to India to negotiate with the leaders on the question of transfer of power to the Indians. The mission headed by Strafford Cripps, and comprising Pathic Lawrence and A.V. Alexander reached India on March 23, 1946 to explore the possibilities of drafting the future constitution of India in consultation with Viceroy and Indian political leaders.135

Bordoloi got an opportunity to express his views on the future constitution of India and the status of Assam within it when the Mission invited him for a discussion on 1 April 1946. Bordoloi opined that every province should be constituted on linguistic and cultural basis and stressed on provincial autonomy. He focussed on Assam’s distinctive identity and the need for awarding her full provincial status in the future constitution of India.136 In a reply to Stafford Cripps, Bordoloi said that the Congress would not object to the transfer of Sylhet to Bengal, as its people and culture were predominantly Bengali. Bordoloi dismissed Jinnah’s claim to include Assam in Pakistan before the Cabinet Mission as absolutely impossible and preposterous. Thus Bordoloi stated “…….. He (Jinnah) might as well expect the moon to come down to him, but he could never have Assam in his Pakistan,”137 He again stated “ Of all the provinces of India, Assam, with Sylhet excluded, was the only territory which had never come under the subjection of any power from outside.”138

On 16 May 1946, the Mission recommended a two tiered Federal Government,

137. S.C. Kakati, Discovery of Assam, Calcutta 1964, Pp87-100; APCC papers, File Grouping, 1946-47 Packet No. 33
138. Ibid
one at the Centre dealing with foreign affairs, defense and communication and the other in the provinces and states dealing with the remaining subjects. The Plan divided the provinces or the Units of India into three sections – A, B and C and Bengal and Assam were included in section C. The grouping of Assam with Bengal was received with spontaneous annoyance and outbursts in Assam. Bordoloi's leadership during this moment of grave crisis revealed a persistent realistic approach. On 19 May, Gopinath Bodoloi met the CWC and submitted a memorandum forcefully pleading the case of Assam. While affirming that Assam's history, culture, economy and morals would be jeopardized by the sinister proposal of the Cabinet Mission, "he boldly stated that the failure of CWC to safeguard Assam will not be taken lightly and it will not be a surprise if many in Assam will consider it to be a great betrayal." He feared that by joining Group C, Assam, the smaller province, might be compelled to accept the disposition determined by the majority of another province. Bordoloi thus stated, "I cannot think of a worse case in which democratic principles are given a go bye in a case like this.

Later, in his press statement, he unequivocally made it known, that "no power on earth" could deprive Assam of her status and individuality. In the same statement he made an earnest appeal to all in Assam to resist the Grouping Plan and to stand united in this grave hour in the country's destiny. A special session of the Assam Legislative Assembly was held on 16 July 1946, to elect the members to the Constituent Assembly. The motion emphasized the claim of Assam to have the Constitution of the province framed and settled by its representatives elected to the Constituent Assembly and considered it "detrimental to the interest of the province of Assam to form any section or sections or group with any other Province of British India." The motion was vehemently opposed by the leader of the European group.

139. Memorandum submitted by Bordoloi to the CWC, APCC Papers, Packet No. 33
140. ibid.
141. Hindustan Standard, 21 May 1946
142. Assam Gazette, Part A, No 10, 21 August 1946, p. 785
Bordoloi remained firm and was least influenced by the views expressed by the opposition who were out to surrender the legitimate interest of Assam at the altar of Bengal. In his reply Bordoloi stated “We cannot surely sell our birthright for the small facilities which the leaders of the Muslim league party finds and which may or may not come.”

The discontent in Assam was based on genuine fears because once Assam was grouped with Muslim majority Bengal her fate would be sealed. She would lose her identity and individuality. The Congress Working Committee took time in giving a clear and bold lead to Assam on this vital issue. The Working Committee of the APCC wrote a letter to Nehru, telling him that his statement, conceding that the provincial constitution would be settled by the section, was contrary to the position taken by the Congress. Nehru replied to Bordoloi that, while accepting the 16 May statement the Congress had to agree to going into sections. He added that provincial autonomy would he upheld at all cost. He further assured Bordoloi that although the Congress accepted the Federal Court’s decision in regard to interpretation, a province like Assam would not be forced to the grouping.

Bardololi sent two of his emissaries, Mahendra Mohan Choudhury and Bijoy Chandra Bhagawati, to meet Gandhi at Srirampur and seek his intervention in the matter. Gandhi read Bordoloi’s letter and made a very forceful statement in support of Assam:

“.....Rightly or wrongly the Congress has come to the decision that it will stand by the judgment of the Federal Court. The dice are heavily loaded. The decision of the Federal Court will go against the Congress

143. Assam Gazette, ibid, p. 800
144. Letters from the Members of the APCC to Nehru, 16 September 1946, APCC papers
145. Letter of Nehru to Bordoloi; A Note on Assam’s Stand vis a vis British Government Statement of 6 December 1946, APCC, ASA
146. Gandhi’s advice to Assam, APCC Papers
interpretation of Grouping as far as I can make out, for the simple reason that the Cabinet has legal advice which upholds their decision ................. If Assam keeps quite, it is finished. No one can force Assam to do what it does not want to do. It is autonomous to a large extent today .........As soon as the time comes for Constituent Assembly to go into section, you will say, ‘Gentlemen Assam retires.’ For the independence of India it is the only condition. Each unit must be able to decide and act for itself. I am only hoping that in this Assam will lead the way....."

Gandhi further added : \textsuperscript{147}

"If you do not act correctly now, Assam will be finished. Tell Bordoloi I do not feel the least uneasiness, my mind is made up, Assam must not lose its soul. It must uphold it against the whole world, else I will say that Assam has only manikins and no men. It is an impertinent suggestion that Bengal should dominate Assam in any way."

The blessing of Gandhi was a great morale booster for Bordoloi and the people of Assam who got more inspiration to fight vehemently against the proposal to group Assam with Bengal.

Meanwhile at the AICC session, the Nehru Resolution was approved on 6 January 1947. This accepted the British statement of 6 December 1946 which had given a unilateral verdict on the Grouping Clause, declaring that provinces must sit in sections and decide issues by a simple majority vote in the absence of an agreement. All that Assam’s opposition succeeded in achieving was a mention in the resolution opposing compulsion of any province or part of a province by another in framing the constitution.\textsuperscript{148} On 7 January 1947, Bordoloi issued a statement saying that though Assam was prepared to sit in the section in the Constituent Assembly,

\textsuperscript{147} ibid.

\textsuperscript{148} N.K. Barua \textit{op. cit.}, Vol-IX, No. 17, 1-15 August, 1990
it would stick to the July mandate of the Assam Legislative Assembly. He expressed genuine fears that the Muslim League might try to impose its majority view on the minority of Assam's members.\textsuperscript{149}

On 20 February 1947, Clement Attlee, the British Prime Minister, made a statement, where the British Government expressed their intention to transfer power to responsible Indian hands by a date not later than June 1948. Lord Mountbatten replaced Lord Wavell as the new Viceroy and soon after his arrival, he was convinced that the Cabinet Mission Plan would not bring any solution. He envisaged a new plan for the partition of the country. The new plan left Assam untouched except for the Sylhet district whose future was to be settled through a referendum. Thus, with the abandonment of the Cabinet Mission Plan, the problem of Assam grouping with Bengal also vanished.

After the anti grouping movement subsided, the focus on political activity was shifted to the Sylhet referendum, to be held on 6 and 7 July 1947, which would decide whether that district should remain a part of the province of Assam in India or should go to East Bengal in Pakistan.\textsuperscript{150} The question of separation of Sylhet as well as the land settlement questions in Assam had assumed the bitterest dimensions since, after the Muslim League had declared its intention to include Assam with the eastern zone of Pakistan.\textsuperscript{151} The people of the Brahmaputra Valley welcomed the decision, as it would settle a long pending problem. The referendum of Sylhet took place on 6 and 7 July. On 14 July the results were declared with 2, 39,619 votes going for Pakistan and 1,84,041 votes for maintaining status quo.\textsuperscript{152} The bulk of the Sylhet district went to East Pakistan but the Radcliff Boundary Commision later ruled that the four Hindu majority thanas of Patharkandi, Ratabari, Badarpur and half of Karimganj should be included in India.

\textsuperscript{149} Statesman, 8 January, 1947
\textsuperscript{150} Home Poll File No.18/8/47, F.R., June 1947, NAI
\textsuperscript{151} Bordoloi's talks with Cabinet Mission, APC materials on Grouping of Assam with Bengal, PHA, File no.8, 1946
\textsuperscript{152} PHA Vol-III, p. 391
The Sylhet referendum had caused great psychological worry to Bordoloi. "In this province the aftermath of Sylhet transfer and attendant evils of transfer of poor clerks rendered the political situation bitter" wrote Bordoloi in a note in moments of deep agony.\textsuperscript{153} Gandhi was also in a mood of deep spiritual agony during those days. Bordoloi knew that independence not only brought communal riots, hatred and partition of the country but also moral degradation.\textsuperscript{154}

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\textsuperscript{153} Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 55 \\
\textsuperscript{154} ibid
\end{flushright}