CHAPTER - V
BARDOLOI GOVERNMENT AND THE POLITICS OF EVICTION OF IMMIGRANTS

5.1. Beginning of the Process of Eviction and Initial League Reaction:

As already stated, after the general elections of 1946, a Congress Ministry with Gopinath Bardoloi as the Premier came to power in Assam. The new Ministry was formed on 11 February, 1946. The Bardoloi Ministry soon after assuming the office decided to deal with the issue of immigration, which by that time became a chronic issue of the provincial politics. The new Ministry proceeded to firmly deal with the immigrant encroachers in professional reserves under the Government Resolution of 13 July, 1945, passed during Saadulla's regime, which empowered the Government to maintain sanctity of the professional reserves by evicting the encroachers.1 The new Government set to implement it, which had the sanction of the Saadulla-Bardoloi-Rohini Kumar Choudhury Tripartite Agreement of 22 March, 1945.2 The instructions were issued, therefore, by the Government for the eviction of all unauthorized and unprotected encroachers from the professional reserves except those who had been in occupation of the land in the reserves since 1938 or earlier3.

The eviction operation started with the eviction of 54 families of Champapathar Pukuripar area near Guwahati. As soon as the eviction operation commenced, the Muslim League raised a hue and cry over the issue. Saadulla cited documents referring the judgement of the Commissioner, Assam valley in 1931 to show that these immigrants had been possessing land since 19314. The decision of the

Government to evict the so-called encroachers prompted the Assam Provincial Muslim League to form a Committee of Action headed by the Provincial League President Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, which directed the Muslim League workers and volunteers to agitate against the eviction policy of the Congress government all over the Province.

The first session of the newly elected Assembly was marked by lengthy acrimonious debates on the issue of eviction and also by severe criticism of the government's policy by the Muslim League legislators. The crux of the League criticism of the Government's eviction Policy was that, according to the League, eviction was carried out indiscriminately without even sparing the legitimate holders of land; that it was inhuman and ruthless in its operation and adopted at a time of extreme scarcity of food and famine condition; and finally from the communal viewpoint, it was stated that the eviction policy was directed against the Muslim immigrants only and therefore, was discriminatory and aimed at exterminating them in the name of an Agreement which was not ratified by the Muslim League which was said to be the only representative organization of the Muslims. The session of the Assembly was also marked by hot exchange of words from both sides, i.e., the Government side and the League. From the side of the League, even the cry of 'Pakistan Zindabad' was shouted by one of the members. On the other hand, it was asserted from the Government side that the Government was doing nothing new but following an agreement which was reached during the last Ministry of Saadulla which had five out of ten Ministers from the League. Besides, it was clarified that the eviction was carried out only against those encroachers who were...


not 'protected' under the agreement after thoroughly ascertaining their status through official enquiry. It was asserted further that the food crops and properties of even those immigrants who were not protected, were fully protected.

Most important developments, however, began to take place outside the Assembly. The issue of eviction had already attracted the attention of Jinnah, who during his visit of Assam in March, 1946 and in his statement issued from Guwahati on 6th March, 1946 had warned the government of Assam that if it did not immediately reverse its policy of mass eviction of Muslim Settlers "a situation will be created which will not be conducive to the wellbeing of the people of Assam". The Assam Provincial Muslim League, which had already taken up the cause of the landless immigrants, decided to mobilize Muslim opinion by displaying its sensitivity to the issue of eviction. Accordingly, the Working Committee of the Provincial League met at Guwahati on 8th March, 1946 to consider the situation arising out of the threat of "Mass eviction of a large number of immigrant peasants". The working committee viewed with serious concern the situation created by the Congress Government in Assam in ordering mass eviction of hundreds of families of settlers from the professional reserves and Government wasteland rendering them "destitute and homeless and destroying their crops". Besides, in view of the fact that hundreds and thousands of landless people within the province are debarred from earning their livelihood from land because of the operation of "oppressive" and "illegal" Line System, the Working Committee resolved to advise the landless and evicted persons "to spread out and cultivate all surplus cultivable government wastelands to produce food crops to save themselves and thousands of others from miseries of famine, starvation and
A committee was also appointed to take appropriate legal advice and to challenge the legality of the Line System in the Court of Law. It was further decided to raise a relief fund for those who might be thrown out of their holdings and to help the suffering and starving victims of this ruthless policy of eviction.

According to Mahmud Ali, the General Secretary of the Assam Provincial Muslim League, the above directive of the Working Committee came as a last resort since all other means of attracting the sympathy of the Government had failed. To him, the call was a call for "asserting one's inherent right to live and to own the land one cultivated." Later, he emphatically stated, "the Muslim League is prepared for all eventualities and shall not retrace an inch from the chosen path. They are determined to disregard any laws which are not based on moral force."

On 15th March, 1946, Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, President of the Assam Provincial Muslim League, issued a pamphlet, wherein he appealed to all the Muslims to "extend all help to One and a half Lakh of the helpless and Homeless Muslims" who were the victims of the eviction policy of the Congress Ministry headed by Gopinath Bardoloi. He complained that in course of eviction drives, the armed forces of the Government demolished houses of 54 families of Pukuripar area near Gauhati, who had to live in open air and whose paddy, rice, vegetables and other articles of daily use were being looted. He stated that as the notices for eviction had been served on several thousands, about 1,50,000 (one and half lakh) Muslim immigrants would be victims of eviction. He also complained of the
eviction of the old (protected) settlers who had settled 10 to 15 years back. As it was not possible for the Muslims of Assam alone to take charge of helping such a large number of evictees, he appealed to the Muslims of Bengal and of the whole of India, to come forward to their help and solicited that "every Muslim according to his capacity should come forward to help 1,50,000 Muslims" who were supposed to be the victims of eviction.

The Government of Assam strongly reacted to the appeal made through the Pamphlet and refuted the figure of evictees cited by Bhasani. According to Government's estimate the number of persons to be evicted was nearly 15 thousand. As a result, Bishnuram Medhi, the Revenue Minister wanted to initiate legal action against Bhasani for "spreading false news and rumours". Bhasani's appeal, however, got tremendous response from the Muslims, mainly of Assam and Bengal. In response to his appeal, many voluntary associations came forward to wholeheartedly extend their helping hand to the victims of eviction. A number of relief camps were opened in the affected areas of Darrang and Kamrup where food, clothing and medicines were supplied. A Medical Relief Squad was also organised by one Dr. S. Ali of Calcutta and a Medical Relief Team under the stewardship of Dr. Shams Uddin Ahmed visited the affected areas. Most importantly, a volunteer corps was raised who were regularly trained and drilled to perform two main duties- First, encouraging the immigrants to harvest their crops undaunted at the sight of the police ; and Second, going round the villages to assess their needs and advise the people. According to Mahmud Ali, the Provincial League Secretary, though the relief was not adequate in proportion to the number of affected people,

16. Please see Ibid p.111 (Foot Note. 78); A Leaflet (in Bengali) issued by Bhasani on 15th March, 1946 the heading of which was translated as "Extend Help to One and a Half Lakh of the Helpless and Homeless Muslims". The Heading of the leaflet was variously translated in varying terms, such as "Help the 1,50,000 destitute Muslims of Assam" or "Help to 1,50,000 Muhammedans who lost everything in Assam" (Please see Kar n.4 (p.88) and Kar (n.9) p.157;The leaflet is reproduced in Kar (n.9), p.157.
"the relief measures tremendously helped in keeping the morale of the people who were otherwise completely forlorn and frustrated." 20.

5.2. **All India Muslim League Council Takes up the Issue of Eviction**:  

In the meantime, the All India Muslim League Legislators' Convention held in Delhi in April, 1946, demanded Assam's inclusion in the proposed state of Pakistan. The All India Muslim League Council which met after the Convention on 10th April, 1946 adopted a Resolution demanding immediate abolition of the 'invidious and illegal Line System' prevailing in Assam. The Council also recorded its strong protest and resentment against the eviction policy of the Government of Assam and demanded immediate revocation of eviction and settlement of the evictees. 21. In early May, 1946, some of the prominent members of the All India Muslim League Council like Liyaqat Ali Khan, Choudhury Khaliquzzaman and Siddique Ali Khan visited eviction-affected areas in order to investigate the Assam Government's eviction operation. Criticizing the Government stand on the matter, Liyaqat Ali Khan pointed out that it was rather 'brutal' and 'barbarous' on the part of the Government to evict the poor immigrants from their villages as they had spent time and labour to build their dwellings. He further observed that "This way the Congress Government in Assam serves the poor when they happen to be Muslims." 22 Condemning the Government action as cruel and inhuman, he stated, "Cruelty and inhumanity exceed all bounds in the Congress tyranny over the Muslim immigrants in Assam." 23.

The Government, however, denied any hardship having been caused to the immigrants as according to the Government, eviction had been carried on with

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20. Ibid. 
23. Star of India, 4 May, 1946, quoted in Ibid p.280; Also The Shillong times, 10 May, 1946, quoted in Dev and Lahiri, op.cit., p.49.
proper notices and it was made clear to the concerned persons that in case they evacuated their land peacefully they would get the right of harvesting their crops, if there was any 24. It was also clarified on behalf of the Assam Congress Parliamentary Party that "not a single protected trespasser according to the all party agreed resolution of the Government has been disturbed of their possession and no excess of any kind has been committed" 25.

But the Muslim League was not satisfied by such assurances from the side of the Government and the members of the League Council meeting at Barpeta deputed Syed Abdur Rouf, MLA, to report on evictions, who is said to have given "harrowing tales of police and military atrocities on evictees" in course of eviction operations 26. Whatever may be the controversy with regard to the scale of atrocities committed on the evictees, the Government was continuing with its stringent measures towards clearing the reserves from unprotected encroachers. Four reserves in Mongoldoi, three in Barpeta and two in Gauhati were taken up before 31st May, 1946 and eviction operations in other reserves were suspended due to early onset of rains with effect from 1st June, 1946. The policy adopted by the Government was to clear the more easily accessible reserves before the rains and concentrate on keeping them clear before tackling the more remote ones, in the cold weather 27. With regard to the atrocities, many incidents were reported. One such incident has been described in this manner, ". . . . . . on 14th May, 1946, a Magistrate with some 'Mandals' and a large number of armed forces from the railways and eight elephants demolished the dwellings of the immigrants. The police also fired six rounds on the immigrants, causing three deaths and injuring six others." 28 This incident was highly resented by the Assam Provincial Muslim League by organizing

25. Statement of the Secretary, Assam Congress Parliamentary Party, quoted in Ibid.
26. Kar (n.4) p.90.
27. Ibid; Also Dev and Lahiri, op.cit.,pp.79-80.
protest meetings, processions and 'hartals'\textsuperscript{29}.

5.3. Maulana Bhasani Leads the Provincial League Opposition to Eviction (Resorts to 'Fast Unto Death'):

Meanwhile, in the middle of May, 1946, Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, the Provincial League President, resorted to 'Fast unto Death' at a place called Chakirvita, an immigrant village adjacent to Barpeta town, in protest against the eviction of Immigrants of Kumolia Grazing Reserves of Tezpur where as many as 220 families were evicted successfully between 15 and 16 May. His 'Fast unto Death' was to continue unless the Government of Assam stopped the eviction of immigrants\textsuperscript{30}. The news of Bhasani's fast spread throughout India and innumerable messages urged him to break the fast. One such message sent through telegram by a Muslim lady from Calcutta, which is very often quoted, read:

"Only one Jinnah in Muslim India and one Abdul Hamid Khan in Muslim Assam. Your life is dearer than millions of ours. Break fast. Try other methods, sisters request."\textsuperscript{31}

The provincial League Working Committee and the conference of the District Presidents and Secretaries of the League made the same request but to no avail. Bhasani's health deteriorated as the days of fast increased\textsuperscript{32}. Ultimately he broke his fast after long 61 days when the eviction operations were stopped due to the onset of monsoon\textsuperscript{33}. According to an account, the Government had to yield before the 'Fast unto Death' resorted to by Bhasani and to temporarily suspend the evictions although the Government cited onset of rains as the reason for stopping the eviction operations\textsuperscript{34}.

\textsuperscript{29} PHA-III, p.280.
\textsuperscript{30} Kar (n-4),p.90; Dev and Lahiri, op. cit., pp. 79-80.
\textsuperscript{31} Star of India, 26th May, 1946, quoted in Dev and Lahiri, op .cit., p.80.
\textsuperscript{32} Kar (n.4),p.90.
\textsuperscript{33} Dev and Lahiri, op.cit, p.50.
\textsuperscript{34} Mahmud Ali, Resurgent Assam, Dacca, 1967, p.24, cited in Kar (n.4) p.90.
In the meanwhile, Bhasani advised the evictees to re-encroach the reserves defying Government Orders and gave a call to the Muslims of Assam to observe May 31 as a 'Pretest Day' against the alleged "Congress Atrocities" in Assam. He also arrived at Mongoldoi on 31st May, 1946 and as a result of an active propaganda by him and his followers, the evictees "immediately began to return to the reserves from which they had been evicted and hurriedly re-erected their skeleton huts on bamboo poles." It is further observed that Bhasani's fast and his advice had the desired result and "by 6 June, 1946 about one hundred and sixty persons, encouraged by their leader's advice, reoccupied their holdings and reconstructed their hovels overnight". This is said to have made the task of eviction difficult, mainly because of the interference of the Muslim League which extended whole-hearted support to the cause of the immigrants.

In the meantime, the Muslim League National Guards Organisation was formed in the provinces as per the All India Muslim League Working Committee's Resolution of 26th March, 1946, in order to counter the "set policy of the Congress and other Hindu Organizations to achieve Hindu supremacy and their persistence in resorting to coercive and subversive methods of Indian State." The National Guards Organization was placed under the district authority and supervision of the Presidents of the provincial branches of the League. Assam provided a suitable battle ground for the League as the eviction policy was being carried out by the so-called 'Hindu' Congress Government against the immigrants, an overwhelming majority of whom were the Muslims.

By July 1946, Bhasani made all out attempts at involving the All India Muslim League and ensuring the support of other provincial branches of the League.

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37. PHA-III, p.280.
38. Ibid., pp. 280-81.
40. Ibid.
and at utilizing the Muslim National Guards as show of his organizational strength behind the anti-eviction movement. It was reported on 2nd July, 1946 that the Provincial League in consultation with the Muslim National Guards Salar-e-Suba of Assam decided to hold a grand rally of one lakh men at Nowgong in early September, 1946 and Bhasani had invited the All India Muslim National Guards to attend the same. It was further reported that addressing a "mammoth gathering" at the Muhammad Ali Park, Calcutta on 7 July, Dr. M.A. Malik declared that the Congress Government's policy to evict immigrants from Assam was "a loathsome conspiracy against the Muslims" and was "inhuman and unlawful." He further appealed: "Be prepared to protect our helpless brothers against victimization. We must shed our last drop of blood to save every inch of land inhabited by our Muslim brothers from the aggression of Bardoloi Government." Abdur Rouf, a member of the Assam Assembly, also declared in the meeting: "The Government of Assam are lawlessly pursuing the policy of eviction and if they do not stop it within a month, we must resort to civil disobedience." The meeting adopted a lengthy resolution condemning the Line System and the Assam Government's policy of ruthless eviction of Bengali immigrants, warning the Assam Government that if it did not immediately stop eviction, the Bengal Muslims would be "compelled to take actions" which might be "to the detriment of relation between Assam and Bengal." The meeting also agreed upon the Bengal Provincial Muslim League to adopt without delay, a three-point plan of action - First, to organize a province-wise "All Assam Day" for raising a fund for relief of the evictees, Second, to organize a 'Volunteer Corps' to be sent immediately to Assam to resist eviction by "all possible lawful means", and Third, to set up a Legal Defence Committee to help the prosecuted immigrants.

42. Star of India, July 2, 1946, cited in Ibid.
43. Quoted in Kar (n.4), p.91.
44. Quoted in Ibid., p.91.
45. Quoted in Ibid., pp. 91-92.
46. Ibid., p. 92.
Meanwhile, the immigrants are said to have started becoming more adamant and aggressive in their approach under the banner of the Provincial League. On 26th June, 1946, they demonstrated the strength of the League when 15 thousand immigrants gathered in Mongoldoi and held a meeting at coronation field, which was presided over by Abdul Kalam Samsuddin, a Bengal MLA, and the editor of Azad (Calcutta), and attended by a number of Provincial League Stalwarts. In his speech, Bhasani, the principal speaker, condemned the eviction policy of the Bardoloi Ministry and declared, the immigrants "will never surrender an inch of land they have acquired" and advised them to occupy wasteland wherever available and also to reoccupy and rebuild houses after eviction under all circumstances. He further declared that the Muslims were fully prepared to defend their rights and warned the Bardoloi Government that unless brutality and illegal action of the Congress Government were stopped immediately law and order would be vanished from Assam. He condemned the provincial Government by saying, "it is a Government not of men but beasts, a Government that knows only to feed fat on the miseries of the people. Mass arrest will not debar the immigrants to do their duty. They will march on with their heads high and successfully fight against Congress tyranny".

Training of the Muslim League volunteers was also going on. They were said to have held regular rout marches and an atmosphere was said to have been set for a well disciplined movement in Assam. For the League, the proposed movement against the eviction policy of the Assam Government was seen, as a part of a broader objective, i.e. establishment of Pakistan in Assam. In fact, by that time the League demand for including Assam in Eastern Bengal as a part of the Eastern wing of the proposed separate Muslim State of Pakistan had already come into the picture in a big way. In early September, 1946, Mahmud Ali, the Assam Provincial League Secretary placed the matter of the proposed movement before

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the conference of the Provincial League Secretaries and Presidents all over India. The League Leaders after giving serious thought to the question encouraged him to go ahead. The movement against eviction and the Pakistan movement were linked together as they thought that the 'naked exposure' of the Congress Government's attitude in Assam towards Muslim immigrants would further strengthen the cause for a separate state. According to them, such an attitude would also prove that the idea of "Akhand Bharat was a myth" that could never be realized. On 25 September, 1946, the Muslim National Guards Salar-e-Suba held a rally at Shillong which was followed by a meeting presided over by Sayidur Rahman, an ex-Minister. The Assam Government maintained a studied silence since June, 1946 on these developments, except arresting a few Muslim National Guards whose strength in the province began to rise by an enormous proportion by that time. Under the circumstances communal clashes seemed imminent.

Such developments could not escape the Governor's notice who informed the Viceroy in November, 1946 that in spite of the warning from the Defence Department, Government of India, that the troops could not be spared to deal with communal disturbances, the Assam Government persisted with their policy of eviction of Bengal Muslim immigrants from Assam valley. G.E. Abel, Private Secretary to Viceroy, on receipt of Assam Government's telegram, wrote to Sardar Patel, the Central Home Minister, on 15th November, 1946 that there might be retaliatory attacks on the Suma Valley Hindus, and that the Viceroy might have to consider advising the Governor to overrule his Ministry. Patel replied that after his discussion with the Viceroy on 13th November, 1946, he had enquired into the matter. He asserted that even the Viceroy had admitted the illegal nature of immigrants' occupation of land. Patel, therefore, observed that the action of the Congress Ministry in Assam would be in defence of Government's lawful action and it would

49. Kar (n.4) p.93.
not be justifiable to over-rule the Ministry in such a lawful action. In fact, Gopinath Bardoloi, the Assam Primer was able to convince Patel that the eviction drive of the government became necessary in the interest of planned settlement of the indigenous people and the protected immigrants and also to prevent forcible occupation of vacant land by unprotected immigrants and fresh hordes of thousands of Muslim immigrants from Bengal. 50

The political situation in Assam became complicated further when the government of Assam decided to resume eviction towards the end of November, 1946. As a result, the Muslim League activities intensified. On 7th November, 1946, in a meeting of the District Presidents and Secretaries of the Muslim League in Assam, it was resolved that it was "high time that drastic action is taken in respect of tyranny, misrule and atrocities of the Congress Government unprecedented in the history of civilization." 51 Mahmud Ali, the Provincial League General Secretary also stated that the threat of ruthlessness would not deter the Muslims and declared, "Muslims in evicted areas will face annihilation with fortitude and strength." 52 Saadulla also condemned the proposed execution of the eviction plan as "an act of vendetta and entirely unbecoming of an enlightened Government in these times when shortage of food stuffs is causing havoc in various lands." 53 On the eve of resuming the eviction operations by the Government of Assam, the Muslims press threatened- "Muslims of Assam are stunned to see that in such a dangerous moment, the gallant Congress Ministers of Assam are out to prove their chivalry by torturing the helpless elements, thousands of whom had already been served with notices to quit. It may be that they would not leave their dear hearths

52. Mahmud Ali's Statement in the Morning News, 10 November, 1946, quoted in Ibid.
53. The Star of India, 12 November, 1946, quoted in Ibid.
and homes without resistance, and any amount of torture on these ill-fated people may lead to serious communal tensions all over the province” 54.

The communal situation in the province is said to have taken a further serious turn when Bengal Premier H.S. Suhrawardy sent a telegram to Gopinath Bardoloi to hold up resumption of evictions till he had an opportunity to discuss the matter with Bardoloi 55. The Provincial League also warned the Government that there might be serious communal clashes in the Province if the evictions were resumed. The Provincial League General Secretary threatened: "Assam has so far been immune from communal disturbances as prevalent in other parts of India. But the launching of evictions is bound to serve as a signal of troubles throughout the length and breadth of the province which none will be able to prevent” 56. Abdul Matin Choudhury, a Muslim League Stalwart of the Province and a member of the Committee of Action, All India Muslim League, declared that eviction "will disturb peace of Assam" 57.

Under the circumstances, the Bardoloi Ministry in Assam seemed to be in a tight corner. On the one hand, resumption of eviction was bound to have a bearing on the communal situation in the province, and on the other hand, the Assam Congress at that point of time, was confronted with another difficult task of resisting the Cabinet Mission Plan of Grouping Assam with Bengal, and convincing the High Command the desirability of upholding Assam’s distinctiveness. 58 In such a situation, the Congress Ministry seemed not averse to any solution of the eviction issue through negotiation. In fact, Bardoloi wrote a letter to Saadulla expressing his eagerness to negotiate provided the encroachers, who re-encroached upon the reserves wherefrom they were earlier evicted, evacuate

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55. Dev and Lahiri, op.cit., p.89.
56. Morning News, 15 November, 1946, quoted in Ibid.
57. Morning News, 13 November, 1946, quoted in Ibid.
voluntarily and peacefully. This stand of Bardoloi is said to have been endorsed by the Executive Committee of the Assam Congress Parliamentary Party.

On the other hand, the Working Committee of the Assam Provincial Muslim League met on 17th and 18th November, 1946 in order to review the situation arising out of the proposed resumption of eviction operations by the Provincial Government. The Working Committee recorded its 'emphatic protest' against the intention of the Bardoloi Government to carry out eviction of the immigrant cultivators and condemned the policy as "most inhuman and against all canons of justice". The Working Committee also felt that in view of the communal tension prevailing throughout the country on the issue of partition of the country, such ruthless policy of the Assam Government would bound to have serious repercussions. The Working Committee of the Provincial League also considered the offer of Bardoloi expressed to Saadulla for peaceful solution of the issue of eviction. Taking into account the serious communal situation prevailing throughout the Country, the Provincial League thought it proper not to reject the offer and expressed its preparedness to submit the issue to the arbitration of Liyaquat Ali representing League and Jawaharlal Nehru representing the Congress. The proposal for arbitration, however, was rejected by Bardoloi who stated that there could be no arbitration on the issue without any representation from the Government of Assam. He emphatically declared: "In dealing with the question of eviction, we are only dealing with lawbreakers and persons who have acted directly against constituted authority and against law and order."

Thus, the Assam Government was found to be adamant to go ahead with

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60. APCC Papers, Packet No:- 12, cited in Ibid., p.90.
64. The Statesman, 4 December 1946, quoted in Ibid., p.51.
the policy of evicting the so-called encroachers. In order to counteract the strong opposition posed by the immigrants led by the League, and pursue with its eviction campaign, the Government introduced stringent measures by promulgating the Assam Maintenance of Public Order Ordinance on 18th November, 1946. Soon the Government resumed the eviction operations and in a press communiqué dated 19 December made its position clear by reiterating that its land settlement policy was governed by All Party Agreed July Resolution of 1945, and also by declaring that the Government had no intention to deviate from it. Although the eviction operations started in Darrang, Kamrup and Nowgong districts, Bhasani's plan of a direct action against the Government policy did not start until the beginning of 1947. Of course, the reaction of the Muslim League Leaders against the Government stand was immediate.

5.4. **Bhasani Chalks out Programme for a Civil Disobedience Movement against Government's Eviction Policy**

Towards the end of December, 1946, Bhasani along with Mahmud Ali, the Provincial League General Secretary, chalked out a programme of Civil Disobedience against the eviction policy of the Assam Government and the alleged repression of Muslims. In pursuance of the proposed programme, the General Secretary also sought permission of the Chairman, Committee of Action, All India Muslim League, to launch the movement. The scheme of the proposed civil Disobedience Movement envisaged 'courting of arrest' by 10,000 volunteers especially recruited for the purpose by defying the prohibitory orders of the Government under section-144 Cr.p.c. and the Maintenance of Public Order Ordinance. It is interesting to note

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65. PHA-III, p.281.
68. PHA-III, p.281.
that in devising the scheme of the Civil Disobedience Movement to fight against
the Congress government in Assam, Bhasani is said to have been influenced by
Gandhiji and had "Gandhiji's historic 'Salt March' in his mind as a model."70

The Bengal Provincial Muslim League decided to extend whole-hearted support
to the Assam Provincial Muslim League in its proposed movement against the
Assam Government and Bhasani was invited to attend the meeting of the Working
Committee of the Bengal Provincial League on 7th March. In the meeting Bhasani
expressed his plan for a Civil Disobedience Movement to stop the tyrannical policy
of eviction. The Bengal League Working Committee condemned the eviction policy
of the Assam Government and felt that it was against all canons of "ethics, fairplay
and humanity." A Joint Committee of Action was formed to "make the struggle of
the Bengalee immigrants in Assam effective and successful." The immigrants were
also advised to resist the process of eviction.71

Earlier, the Assam Provincial League observed 3 January, 1947 as a 'Black
Day' throughout the province by hoisting the black flags in protest against the
evictions and by offering prayers in mosques to save Muslims from the
'Congress Oppression'. The meetings were however, poorly attended as the
'indigenous' or the 'Assamese-speaking' Muslims took no interest in the programme
and the established or the protected immigrants were reluctant to jeopardize their
acquired position by active participation 72. The talk of the proposed Civil Disobedience
Movement continued but the programme received no encouragement from the
League High Command 73. Of course, the Working Committee of the All India
Muslim League, meeting at Karachi on 31st January and 1st February, 1947 urged
upon the Assam Government to halt its allegedly inhuman eviction policy74. The

70. Guha, op.cit., p.317.
71. Dev and Lahiri, op.cit., p.91.
72. Ibid, p.52; Guha Loc.cit.
73. Dev and Lahiri, op.cit., p.52.
74. Guha, Loc.cit; Kar (n.4), pp-96.
Working Committee strongly condemned "barbarous atrocities" committed by the Congress Government in Assam on thousands of immigrants "driving them to wilderness and rendering them homeless." The issue was also raised in the Bengal Legislative Council by a Muslim League Member Nuruddin Ahmed who moved a resolution on 7th February, 1947 demanding that a strong representation be made immediately to the Government of India to ask the Assam Government to stop the eviction operation. In moving the resolution, he stated that about three lakh immigrants had already been evicted and were suffering untold miseries along with their families.

The strong condemnation of the Assam Government's eviction policy by the All India Muslim League encouraged the Assam Provincial Muslim League to go ahead with its preparations for launching the proposed civil Disobedience Movement. The Working Committee of the Provincial League met at Maulavibazar, Sylhet on 9th February, 1947 and a Committee of Action with Abdul Hamid Khan as Chairman was formed to devise ways and means for future fight against the Government policy regarding the eviction. It was also decided to go ahead with the programme of the proposed Civil Disobedience Movement, and a detailed plan for conducting the same was drawn. It was further decided that the proposed movement would be a "non-communal" and "non-violent" one. In fact, it was proposed that the movement would be entirely directed against the Congress Government and its prohibitory orders, and not against any particular Community.

In the mean time, some preparatory measures had been undertaken for the purpose of successful launching of the movement. One such important measure was the holding of a joint Conference of the Working Committees of the Assam

75. Kar (n.4), pp. 96-97.
76. Nag, op.cit., p.151.
77. Dev and Lahiri, op.cit., pp.52 and 94.
78. PHA-III, p.281.
and Bengal Leagues convened and presided over by Bhasani on 30 January, 1947 at Bahadurabad Ghat, Islampur on the Assam-Bengal border, to discuss problems arising out of the so called "Ruthless Eviction Operation" by the Government of Assam.\textsuperscript{79} In his address, Bhasani compared the eviction policy of the Bardoloi Government with the 'tyrannical rule of the infidels of the ancient time' and characterized it as 'cruel', 'inhuman' and 'barbarous'. He further contended that in order to stop the tyrannical eviction operations, there was no alternative but to "recourse to revolution" \textsuperscript{80}. A committee of Action was also formed for launching movement against the Government policy. The Committee consisted of many prominent Muslim League leaders of Assam including Saadulla, Abdul Matin Choudhury and Badrul Hussain, Salar-e-Suba, Muslim National Guards. It was authorized to take all necessary steps to launch the movement as early as possible \textsuperscript{81}. However, Mahmud Ali, the Assam League General Secretary, pointed out that majority of the members of the committee were not prepared for a Civil Disobedience Movement at that point of time, for which the Committee of Action subsequently turned into a "Committee of Inaction" \textsuperscript{82}.

Besides, Bhasani was not satisfied with mere normal organizational activities and preparations for the success of the proposed movement and he was also not sure about the attitude of the moderates within the party with regard to the launching of the movement, many of whom, as already stated, were not wholeheartedly prepared for a Civil Disobedience Movement at that time. He, therefore, decided to move to Mankachar at the Assam- Bengal border in Goalpara where Abdul Kashem, a member of the Assam Assembly, also a former Headmaster, Mankachar English High School, initiated a significant though abortive plan to fight against the Assam Government. Just on other (Bengal) side of the Assam's border, he built a

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid; Kar (n.4) p.97; Dev and Lahiri, po.cit., pp.52 and 93.
\textsuperscript{80} Dev and Lahiri, Loc.cit.
\textsuperscript{81} Kar (n.4), p.97.
\textsuperscript{82} Mahmud Ali, Resurgent Assam, Dacca, 1967, pp.41-56, cited in Ibid.
thatched encampment and christened it "Purbo Pakistan Qilla" to provide training in military fashion to a large number of volunteers recruited for the purpose of achievement of Pakistan. It was also intended to be a centre for directing the struggle for land of the Bengalee immigrants in Assam. It was reported that as the 'Qilla' was situated on the borders of Bengal, it also encouraged meetings across the border to 'invade' Assam and to settle in the wastelands in increasing numbers. On 5 March, 1947 Bhasani held a secret meeting at the 'Purbo Pakistan Qilla' and urged the League Workers to observe 'Assam Day' on 10th March, 1947 and make themselves prepared to occupy all vacant lands in Assam and hoist the League flag wherever possible as a part of the observance of the same. The workers were also instructed to start the movement from all strategic points of Assam and all the party MLAs were instructed to lead the movement in their respective constituencies. An emergent meeting of the Provincial League Working Committee was also convened on 9th March at Nowgong. Thus, in course of time, the 'Purbo Pakistan Qilla' served the purpose of a base for launching the agitation programme of the Assam Provincial Muslim League.

5.5. The Provincial League Launches the Civil Disobedience Movement (Arrest of Bhasani and Aftermath) :

The crucial meeting of the Assam Provincial Muslim League was held at Nowgong on 9th March, 1947 under the Presidentship of Bhasani. The meeting decided to launch the Civil Disobedience Movement even without any green signal from the League High Command and a list of 51 top-ranking League Leaders was

83. Dev and Lahiri, op.cit., p.95; Kar (n.4) p.102. For details on "Purba Pakistan Quilla" please see Kar (n.4) pp.102-104; Also see for details PHA-III, pp. 286-287.
86. Dev and Lahiri, op.cit., pp. 52-53 and 95.
87. Ibid., p.95.
88. Ibid., p.53.
prepared for defying section 144 Cr.P.C. in the District of Darrang. To set a good example, Bhasani decided to inaugurate the movement in Darrang District. In fact, he decided to court arrest on 10th March, 1947 at Tezpur and a five-member Emergency Council was also appointed to exercise all powers vested in him as the Provincial League President 89.

On the appointed day, i.e., on 10 March, 1947, Bhasani succeeded in evading all police arrangements and intelligence by the subtle means of disguising himself, entered Darrang District and reached the Tezpur Town Hall where he was to address his supporters who had gathered there. 90 While addressing a massive gathering of 3,000 supporters at the Tezpur Town Hall, who had gathered on the spot to celebrate the 'Assam Day,' Bhasani advised them to "prefer to go to jail and if necessary to die and be buried in the land where they are, rather than get evicted." 91 He also asked those who had already been evicted to settle in their former places. Significantly, however, he appealed to the workers to conduct the movement peacefully and non-violently maintaining its non-communal character and reminded them that the fight was not against any group or community but against the British Imperialism and the Congress Ministry. Later on, upon his refusal to quit the district of Darrang, Bhasani was arrested and subsequently detained under the Maintenance of Public Order Act. 92 Immediately before his arrest on 10th March, 1947, he said to have issued an appeal wherein he called upon the Muslims of the province to join the movement 'in defence of the poor

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89. Ibid., pp 53, 95.
90. Mahmud Ali, Resurgent Assam, Dacca, 1967, p.38 cited in Ibid., p.96; Kar (n.4) p.98. A nice account of Bhasani's intelligent move to evade the police arrangements and to reach Tezpur on 10th March, 1947 has been put forward as under -
"On the appointed day Bhasani crossed the mighty Brahmaputra on a country boat to escape the attention of the intelligence network. After crossing the river he managed to get a bullock cart but before reaching the town he wrapped himself in a piece of cloth and began to drive the cart himself right up to the Town Hall and proceeded to the rostrum incognito and revealed himself." - Dev and Lahiri, op.cit., p.96.
peasants' from Bengal by enlisting their names in the volunteer force. He characterized the movement as 'a struggle for existence', 'a fight for achieving basic necessities', an agitation against the British Imperialists and the reactionary policy of the Congress Government in Assam.

It is observed that the courting of arrest by Bhasani was a 'tactical error' as the League workers badly felt his absence, and the movement could not be launched and carried forward with same vigour and enthusiasm as it would have been done under his leadership had he not been arrested. In fact, the Working Committee had rather hastily decided to launch the movement and the plan to inaugurate the movement by 'courting of arrest' of Bhasani was also worked out without any co-ordination between the parliamentary wing of the Provincial League and the organizational wing of the same. Further, it is said that all the District Committees were not properly alerted for the development. Besides, the League High Command was yet to accord its sanction to the launching of the movement. Some members of the Parliamentary Wing of the Party also questioned the wisdom of launching the movement without prior approval of the High Command. As a result, the fight between the Parliamentary Wing led by Saadulla and Organizational wing of the party came into the forefront which adversely affected the successful launching of the movement.

However, the appeal made by Bhasani before his arrest and his plan to launch the movement got tremendous response in certain areas mainly inhabited by the immigrants and hectic activities were reported from such areas on the day of his arrest i.e., 10th March, and the days to flow. On 10th March, 1947, Mankachar became the focal point of attraction as gigantic demonstrations were held by the League supporters with their base at Purbo Pakistan Qilla and many displayed a

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93. A printed Leaflet titled "My Last Appeal to the Countrymen" dated 10 March, 1947, cited in Ibid.
great eagerness to carry their plan with ardent spirit. The leaders of the League demonstrated their capacity to generate mass excitement on an uncontrollable scale and Assam was forced with the threat of 'invasion' from the agitated followers of the League in Bengal. Abdul Kashem, the Commander-in-Chief of the East-Pakistan Qilla, was determined to bring about a showdown but due to the intervention of some of the so-called sobre elements of the District Muslim League, such over-enthusiasm of the extremist elements was restrained to avoid a possible communal clash or unfortunate incident. 95 On 12 March, 1947 also about 20,000 Muslims of Assam were reported to have met in an aggressive mood at Mankachar under the leadership of a League MLA and defied the prohibitory orders of the Government. The Muslim National Guards also, reportedly prepared themselves to cross over to Assam. 96 Becoming aware of these developments, Bardoloi wrote a letter to the Bengal Premier Suhrawardy apprising him of the developments in the Assam-Bengal Border and requesting him to dissuade the Bengal Muslim National Guards from entering Assam, although the Bengal Premier did not reply 97.

The seriousness of the situation compelled Bardoloi to ask for the help of the central Government to control the worsening situation. A telegram sent by him to Sardar Patel, the central Home Minister with copy to Viceroy Lord Wavell, read:

"Assam situation serious causing Government great anxiety. Assam Muslim League and Bengal Muslim League leaders planning invasion of Assam by organized volunteers from Bengal. Since 20 February large concentration of men in Bengal borders with spears and 'lathis' near Dhubri Sub-Division have erected sheds of training volunteers. Many predominantly Muslim areas

95. Ibid, pp.53, 97.
already infiltrated exciting people to violence and creating disaffection against Government. Assam Muslim League declared Civil Disobedience and is having frequent processions. Clash inevitable as tension continues. Assam Government's armed strength now posted (in) small danger areas quite inadequate meet situation. Pray post at least a brigade here immediately as originally intended and direct Provincial Government using them when required for emergency……“98.

Meanwhile, a joint meeting of the Muslim League Legislature Party and the Committee of Action was held on 16th March, 1947 in which it was decided to continue the movement "until full civil liberties were restored, evictions of Muslim immigrants stopped and evictees rehabilitated." For the purpose, a Committee of Action, was formed with Sir Saadulla, the opposition leader, as the chairman.99 Saadulla, however, could not generate that much of vigour in support of the movement as was intended and also could not provide the leadership which was expected of him in the absence of Bhasani. In fact, Saadulla is said to have been 'lukewarm' in his support to the movement and the parliamentary wing led by him had already questioned the reasonableness and wisdom of launching the movement so hastily by the Working Committee of the Provincial League. The movement also suffered a lot because of his moderate attitude or approach which is said to have 'neutralized' in the days to come, the enthusiasm and vigour which had been generated in support of the movement under the leadership of Bhasani. Later on, the moderate approach of Saadulla became traceable as he entered into a series of negotiations with the Government for solving the issue of eviction by means of arbitration100.

100. Dev and Lahiri, Loc.cit.
The Committee of Action formed under Saadulla’s chairmanship to carry forward the movement, initially did not seem to be serving its purpose and marginalize the gap between the two wings of the party on the movement created in view of the launching of the movement by the Working Committee of the party without taking its parliamentary wing into confidence. The matter became further complicated when the newly formed Committee of Action under the leadership of Saadulla challenged the validity of the Working Committee’s decision to launch the movement and decided to lodge a formal complaint against the Working Committee to the Party High Command.\(^{101}\) In fact, majority of the members of the Parliamentary Party including its leader Saadulla and Deputy Leader Abdul Hamid did not have active support for the proposal of Civil Disobedience and they were shocked on hearing the news of the launch of the movement. Abdul Hamid, the Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Party is said to have almost lost his balance when he heard about the launch of the movement. However, this rift between the two wings of the Provincial League was marginalized to a great extent by Choudhury Khaliquzzaman and Habibullah Bahar, the two All India Leaders of the League.\(^{102}\)

Choudhury Khaliquzzaman and Habibullah Bahar met the Parliamentary and Organizational Wings separately, in order to bring out an agreed solution and to bridge the gap which had been created between the two wings. To bring the Parliamentary Wing around the Organisation Khaliquzzaman suggested the inclusion of a new motto, i.e., the overthrow of the Bardoloi Ministry, as an incentive to the Parliamentary Wing, and on his advice a joint meeting of the Working Committee and the Committee of Action led by Saadulla, was convened at Shillong on March 30, 1947.\(^{103}\) The presence of Khaliquzzaman and Bahar smoothened the process of arriving at an agreed solution. To provide incentive to the Parliamentary Wing, as

\(^{101}\) Kar (n.4), p. 101.
\(^{102}\) Ibid; Dev and Lahiri, op.cit., pp. 96-97, 99.
\(^{103}\) Kar (n.4), p.101.
already stated, overthrow of the Bardoloi Ministry was decided to be linked up with the movement. The understanding between the two is said to have been hastened up due to the killings of the twelve immigrants including an old woman of seventy in the police firing. An agreed formula drafted by Khaliquzzaman embodied in the form of a resolution recounted the high handed action of the Government in arresting some leaders of the League including Maulana Bhasani, the Provincial League President, and the firing on 'unarmed innocent Muslim immigrants" outside the Grazing reserves, resulting in the death of 12 immigrants including one woman of seventy, as already stated, and several injured. The Working Committee decided to direct every branch of the Muslim League, taking into account the prevailing situation, to start once again, the non-violent and non-communal Civil Disobedient Movement on a wide scale to break the Government which has not only been unjust and unfair to Muslims but had allegedly failed to relieve countless sufferings of the people in general. After the meeting Khaliquzzaman addressed a gathering outside the League office and declared: "The Civil Disobedience Movement has begun. Fill in the jails of Bardoloi Government."

However, successful launching of the movement still suffered as Saadulla seemed to be confused and far from convinced that the movement had the sanction of the League High Command. Thus, he declared on 9th April, 1947 in a public meeting at Gauhati that the Civil Disobedience Movement in Assam on the eviction issue had not begun as the League High Command was yet to give sanction to the same. This sort of confusion and hesitation and the expectation of getting formal approval from the High Command which never materialized, is said to have 'largely dampened enthusiasm' among many leaders and supporters of the League in the province. As a result, the movement, instead of being launched concertedly throughout

105. Quoted in Ibid.
the province at a given signal, is said to have "gone off like a damp squib" in parts
and awaited orders from the High Command at others. Besides, Choudhury
Khaliquzzaman's assertion that the Muslim League volunteers would fill the jails of the
Bardoloi Government, was frustrated by the shrewd action of the Government
which did not arrest every petty breaker of laws rather arrested and detained a few
of the leaders. 106

Despite this, the movement got tremendous response in many parts of the
province for which it is observed: "The civil disobedience movement was in fact a
major programme which the Muslim League in Assam successfully implemented.
The effect of the movement was felt almost all over the province, especially in the
areas inhabited by the immigrants".107 To inaugurate the movement in Barpeta,
Abdul Basit Choudhury, a League Leader, came to Barpeta on 2nd April, 1947,
and by holding public meeting at a number of places, he inspired the Muslims to
defy prohibitory orders of the Government and also to encroach upon the reserve
lands. The Government responded by putting the local Muslim leaders of Barpeta
under arrest in order to prevent them from intensifying the propaganda work initiated
by Abdul Basit Choudhury. During arrests, Muslims in hundreds gathered around
their leaders and shouted inspiring League slogans. In Nowgong, Mohammad
Rafique, a League leader, inaugurated the movement on 3 April, 1947. On 7th
April, 1947, the enthusiastic Muslim League Volunteers picketed in Goalpara
before the Post-office and other Government buildings and courted arrest. On 10
April, 1947, the Muslim League Workers in Cachar agitated in front of 'Oriental
Cinema Hall' at Silchar with the demand that the Congress flag on the Cinema Hall
should be replaced by the League Flag. On 18th April, 1947, the Muslim Students'
Federation and other Muslim League workers brought out a procession at Sylhet and

106. Ibid., pp. 99-100.
held a meeting at Govinda Park under the chairmanship of Hamid Khan. When the meeting was over, they removed the Union Jack from the premises of the DC's Court, Municipal and Jail Buildings and replaced the same with the League flags. In brief, by the middle of April, 1947, the repercussion of Muslim League activities in Assam were felt elsewhere in India.\textsuperscript{108}

The Government on the other hand, persisted with its firm policy to tackle the movement. Elsewhere in Assam the League demonstrators tried to implant the League flags on public buildings and on many occasions the Government responded by using force to stop the process. On 15 April, 1947 Moinul Hoque Choudhury, a member of the Committee of Action from the district of Cachar in the Surma Valley, while addressing a big gathering at Hailakandi in the district of Cachar, declared: "our fight is against tyrannical and corrupt Government. Bardoloi and all his caste Hindu benchmen cannot cultivate all the fallow tracts in Assam, yet they will not let the poor, famine striken landless people to do it. This dog in the manger policy is a crime against humanity" \textsuperscript{109}. The impact of the movement could be felt in both the valleys at that point of time. On 23rd and 24th April, 1947, the army personnel reportedly clashed with the agitating League demonstrators at Mankachar as well as in Sylhet respectively which resulted in a number of casualties.\textsuperscript{110}

5.6. \textbf{Saadulla and Akbar Hydari's Attempts at Peaceful Solution of Immigration and Eviction Issue}:

In the meantime, Saadulla, the Chairman of the Committee of Action, who was accused of adopting a moderate attitude towards the eviction issue, instead of providing a strong leadership to the Movement, attempted to bring about a peaceful solution to the issue by entering into a series of negotiations with the Bardoloi

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid, pp. 282-284.
\textsuperscript{110} Dev and Lahiri, Loc.cit.
Government. He is said to have thrown an offer to the Government that if Government gave some land to the immigrant of 1945, he would advise calling off of the Civil Disobedience Movement. Bardoloi, however, did not welcome the offer and informed Saadulla that there could be no question of granting any more land beyond the scope of agreement and that so long as the Civil Disobedience continued there could be no negotiation on any issue with the Muslim League. Curiously enough, Saadulla offered to call off the movement despite the fact that he himself declared in early April that the movement had not yet begun. He is said to have given concurrence to the movement only on 29th April, 1947.

Towards the end of April, 1947, a solution of the problem of eviction and settlement of the unprotected immigrants was attempted from two directions but it failed. First, Akbar Hydari, the first Indian Governor of Assam initiated a plan regarding the settlement of immigrants. He suggested that the settlement of immigrants in the North Bank of the Brahmaputra. According to another account, he is said to have suggested settlement of the immigrants in question, in the tribal areas. However, this plan was vehemently opposed by the Premier Bardoloi who was convinced that such an attempt would encourage the Muslim League to create more disorder and lawlessness in the province. Reacting to the suggestion he wrote, "We are already very much perturbed. We fear even if a scent of this idea gets out, the Muslim League will be strengthened in their attempt to create disorder in Assam by their Civil Disobedience which is already on." He apprehended that with the threat of Civil Disobedience of the Muslim League with the ultimate object of "Pakistanisation of Assam", the Ministry would become

111. Ibid., p.53.
114. Ibid p. 103; Kar (n.4) p.104.
117. Gopinath Bardoloi’s letter to Akbar Hydari, dated 27th April, 1947, quoted in Ibid.
"extremely unpopular and lose its hold on the people altogether" if the scheme even "contemplated to be put into action in near future."118 Two of his cabinet colleagues J.J.M. Nichols Roy and Basanta Kumar Das were also opposed to the plans. Ultimately, Hydari did not pursue the suggestion advanced by him119.

Secondly, Saadulla's suggestion of solution of the problem of eviction and settlement through arbitration, as already stated, had appealed to Lord Mountbatten, and accordingly, Sir Benegal Narsing Rau, the Constitutional adviser to the Government of India took up the thread. At the latter's instance, a conference of the representatives of the Assam Government and the Committee of Action of the League represented solely by Saadulla was held in Shillong. Although the Committee of Action permitted Saadulla to carry on the talks on the basis of the demands of the League, the League activities were going on and were rather intensifying while the talks were going on. Khairat Hussain, a League Member of the Bengal Assembly, entered Assam through Mankachar, with his 17 followers, defying orders under section-144. By that time the Movement in the Surma Valley had became quite intense and defiance of prohibitory orders became widespread. The Government also retaliated by arresting a number of volunteers in the valley including Moinul Hoque Choudhury of Silchar, Cachar, A. Latif and Jalaluddin Ahmed Choudhury of Karimganj and many others from Sylhet. In Sylhet in an unfortunate incident a volunteer named Aklas was killed in police-firing, which worsened the situation120.

Against this background of tense atmosphere, the discussion and negotiations were bound to be futile as there seemed to be no 'change of heart' as claimed by the League, on the part of the 'Party in Power' and the incidents reported in course of negotiations somewhat bore witness to the allegations put forward by the League. In fact, incidents during the days of negotiations convinced the League that there

118. Ibid.
120. Ibid., pp. 105-106.
was no meaning in carrying on any negotiation under the prevailing circumstances. The League Committee of Action, therefore, met on 27th April, 1947 and came to the conclusion that there was no 'change of heart on the part of the party in power' and complained that during the two days' negotiations at Shillong, a member of the Committee of Action was arrested at Silchar, Cachar and 'police firing was resorted to without the slightest justification, causing deaths to innocent, unarmed and peaceful demonstrators at Mankachar and Sylhet,' and leaving a heavy number of them injured. The Committee further expressed that under the circumstances, it was 'reluctantly compelled' to inform the Government that there was no point in carrying on negotiations.121

5.7. Gradual Collapse of the Civil Disobedience Movement after Bhasani's Arrest:

Thus, the attempt to solve the problem of eviction and settlement through negotiations failed. Although the Movement was continued in the coming days, it gradually lost its vigour to a considerable extent and the Provincial League leadership found it extremely difficult to resist the sufficiently well-equipped Government machinery applied for suppressing the movement. In the meantime, Saadulla, as Chairman of the Committee of Action, issued a six point directive to the District Committees urging them to see that the movement was run peacefully and in a non-communal manner and as far as possible to avoid the extreme actions such as hoisting of League flags in Government premises, and to keep the movement absolutely non-violent.122 Such a directive was irrelevant in the context of the heavy coercive measures being applied by the Government which had, as already stated, adopted a tough line to deal with the movement by that time. The

adoption of the strongest possible measures by the Government to deal with the movement made the situation very difficult for the League volunteers to continue with their activities. The situation compelled Abdul Kashem, a League hardliner, and the organizer of the Purba Pakistan Qilla, to surrender on 4 May, 1947 who had absconded for quite a long time in Assam-Bengal borders, and was keenly wanted by the Government. Moreover, the situation was made much more difficult by the lack of funds for which the Secretary of Bengal and Assam Joint Committee of Action felt discouraged and is reported to have appealed to the All India Muslim League Committee of Action to issue definite instructions, under such a difficult situation, "as to what line of activity should now be followed by the Joint Committee".

The Civil Disobedience Movement also lost its force further due to lack of unity of direction and half-hearted support of many League leaders. To make the situation worse, an eminent Assamese Muslim leader of the Brahmaputra valley is said to have resigned the Presidentship of the Shillong Muslim League at a critical juncture and issued a statement declaring: "I can not support the influx of immigrants into Assam, nor do I support Pakistan in Assam. By itself the eviction policy of the present Government is a timely move to save Assamese culture and language from extinction." This may be said to be the first case of expressively stated support by a Muslim to the eviction policy of the Government since Bhasani took up the cause of eviction in 1946, although the response of the Assamese Muslims to the Movement was, as already stated, 'lukewarm' from the very beginning. Thus, an Assamese-Bengalee, Immigrant-Indigenous issue might also have played its role in creating the divide in the Muslim support for the Movement, the scent of something like that could clearly be gathered from the statement of

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125. The Assam Tribune, 27 April, 1947, quoted in Ibid., p. 104.
Sayidur Rahman, a veteran Assamese Muslim leader of the Brahmaputra valley. The background of the 'half hearted' support by some of the League leaders including some Assamese leaders like Saadulla and Sayidur Rahman, to the Anti-Eviction Movement after the arrest of Bhasani, may be traced back to the period before Bhasani's arrest when Bhasani is said to have relegated Saadulla, the most prominent Assamese Muslim leader, to the background and came to the forefront of the League organization as well as the Assam politics and dominated the Muslim politics till Independence and partition of India by virtue of his volatile personality and tremendous appeal and influence among the immigrant peasants who used to call him 'Krishak Bandhu' (Friend of peasants). Saadulla, on the other hand, although dominated the Muslim politics at the parliamentary level for a quite long time, did not have such mass-base and control over the grass-roots of the party organization, and rather had hold only over the middle and upper middle class Muslims. While Saadulla wanted to follow a soft line of action on the eviction issue in parity with the provincial interest(which was evident from his attitude in the days following Bhasani's arrest), Bhasani exclusively championed the cause of immigrant Muslims and seemed quite uncompromising and adamant in his approach on the issues concerning the interest of the immigrants. It is, therefore, no wonder that Bhasani was bound to be the most popular leader on the issues concerning eviction and Civil Disobedience Movement, amongst the affected persons.126 As a result, an unbridgeable gulf was created between the two and the outcome of it was that "a sizeable section of the Muslims hereafter did not support the movement launched by the Muslim League in Assam"127. The statement of Sayidur Rahman as quoted earlier, bears the proof of this assertion. This gap between the two which also created confusion among rank and file of the party adversely affected the concerted launching of the movement, which is already discussed.

However, the Provincial League continued with the programme of the Civil Disobedience Movement amidst serious limitations, as already stated. Up to the middle of May, 1947, the Provincial League, with the help of the volunteers from Bengal, was able to hold about 450 meetings, 180 processions, and 30 hartals effecting a total audience of 4 lakh Muslims in both the valleys of the province. But the attempts at planting the League flags by small parties of 17 volunteers on Government buildings, thanas and Court Premises, are reported to have often resulted in violence. The programme of the reoccupation of grazing reserves and waste lands also came to a halt after the police-firings at Barpeta and Tezpur where not less than 40 volunteers were killed. Under the circumstances, the Provincial League certainly needed inspiration and strong moral support as well as financial assistance from the League High Command, and is said to have waited for "the valued commands of the High Command and for financial assistance in vain" as the same was not forthcoming.

Side by side with the above described activities, a 'leafleteering campaign' is said to have been vigorously pursued by some leaders and supporters of the League during the month of May, 1947. In order to generate a larger volume of the active Muslim support and to draw more volunteers for the cause of the Anti-Eviction Movement started by the Assam Provincial Muslim League. In this connection, Asadulla Shiraji’s leaflet titled 'Assam Dakitechhe' (Assam Calling) deserves special mention, wherein an emotional appeal had been made to the Muslims to come to the rescue of the Immigrants in Assam and to join their fight against the allegedly 'inhuman acts' of the Bardoloi Government which had rendered countless immigrants and their families destitute and homeless. In another booklet published by Abdul Matin Choudhury, a veteran League leader of

the province, attempted to depict the alleged atrocities committed by the Government forces while implementing the eviction orders. The booklet is said to have contained certain photographs which were cited to prove the truth of all alleged atrocities. Another pamphlet titled 'Shaheed Aklas' was also published by one Bacchu Mia by depicting Aklas, who was killed in police-firing in Sylhet, as a 'Shaheed' (Martyr) for the cause of the Anti-Eviction Movement. The pamphlet is said to have intended to attract attention of the Muslims of Assam by touching the emotional strings of their minds.

However, to continue the movement successfully and to counter the stringent measures adopted by the Government, the Provincial League urgently needed strong support and financial assistance, as already stated, from the All India Muslim League. But such assistance was sought in vain as the League High Command did not come forward with anything like that. Under the circumstances, although the movement was continued but it lost much of its vigour and began to look like a 'failed endeavour' in the absence of Bhasani's strong and enthusiastic leadership and also owing to various other factors as already discussed. In fine, the factors such as "the chastening effect of the police-firings on the immigrants, non-receipt of adequate financial assistance from the League High Command and indifference of the Assamese Muslims and their lack of confidence in Bhasani's leadership" are said to have contributed towards the 'general collapse' of the movement.

133. Dev and Lahiri, Loc.cit.
5.8. Withdrawal of the of the Movement in view of the Declaration of Mountbatten (Partition) Plan:

It is to be noted that apart from the issue of eviction, the League had another ulterior motive i.e. inclusion of Assam in the Eastern Wing of Pakistan, which is referred elsewhere. By that time the issue of partition which was already gathering storm throughout India seemed to become a reality, especially since Lord Mountbatten took over as the Viceroy of India on 24 March, 1947.\textsuperscript{135} The issue was finally resolved by a scheme of partition, also known as the Mountbatten Plan, which was announced on 3rd June, 1947.\textsuperscript{136} The Plan while rejecting the claim of including the whole of Assam in Pakistan provided for holding of a referendum for deciding the fate of the district of Sylhet.\textsuperscript{137}

Thus, the Mountbatten Plan frustrated the hope of the League of including the whole of Assam in Pakistan and is said to have forced the Provincial League to accept the 'fait accompli.'\textsuperscript{138} Of course, the district of Sylhet was subsequently transferred to Pakistan by a Referendum, which will be elaborately discussed in the next chapter. On 11 June, 1947, the Civil Disobedience Movement was officially withdrawn by the Assam Provincial Muslim League.\textsuperscript{139} This was followed by the release of Bhasani from Jorhat jail on 20 June, 1947, who subsequently left for East Bengal\textsuperscript{140}. Thus, ended the Civil Disobedience Movement against the Eviction policy of the Government of Assam spearheaded by the Assam Provincial Muslim League under the leadership of its President Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani.

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\item \textsuperscript{135} Guha, op.cit., p.318.
\item \textsuperscript{136} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{137} For details please see Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, India Wins Freedom, New Delhi, Orient Longman, 1988, pp. 273-274. (Appendix-5).
\item \textsuperscript{138} Dev and Lahiri, Loc.cit.
\item \textsuperscript{139} PHA-III, p. 289.
\item \textsuperscript{140} Dev and Lahiri, op.cit., p.53.
\end{itemize}
5.9. **Assessment:**

The foregoing analysis of the Muslim League's reaction to the Eviction policy of the Government of Assam and especially, the Civil Disobedience Movement launched by the Provincial League, which was certainly a follow-up action on the part of the Provincial League, leaves one with certain important observations to be made about the Movement. First, the response of the Assamese Muslims to the Movement was 'lukewarm' and this got reflected from the surprising behaviour of Saadulla, the most able representative of the Assamese Muslims. After the arrest of Bhasani, when Saadulla himself was associated with every branch of the League including its Council of Action and the League itself had decided on a province-wide movement which was followed by violation of prohibitory orders by the League leaders and volunteers, why did Saadulla declare that the Movement had not started? It is alleged that as leader of the Parliamentary Wing, he did not show much enthusiasm for the movement. It is difficult to explain with documentary evidence the reason behind the poor response of the Assamese Muslims or of the surprising behavior of Saadulla. However, some questions may be raised such as - Was it because of the fact that the movement was mainly concerned with the interests of the immigrant Bengalee Muslims and was led mostly by the Bengalee leaders who very often emphasized the Bengalee identity of the immigrants to draw attention of the Bengal Muslims? Or, Was it because of the rift between Saadulla and Bhasani who was the main guiding force behind the movement that alienated the Assamese Muslims including Saadulla from the Movement?

Second, the response of the Surma Valley Muslims, was not very warm at the beginning when the movement was mainly restricted within immigrant belts although many leaders and General Secretary of the Provincial League hailed from the Valley. It was only towards the end that the Movement got a very enthusiastic response from the Surma Valley. Perhaps at the initial stages, the Movement might
have been seen as purely an immigrant affair, but subsequently the stringent measures adopted by the Government to suppress the movement and the police-action on the immigrants, most of whom were Muslims, might have made it a sentimental issue of the Muslims everywhere and could have touched the hearts of the Surma Valley Muslims as well, so as to draw them in increasing numbers to actively support the movement at a later stage.

Third, regarding the nature of the movement, it has been observed that it was "avowedly non-violent". In fact, the movement was conducted, with pre-set objectives guided by well-defined directives, the main purpose of which was to court arrest by violating prohibitory orders. It was also instructed to keep it non-violent and non-communal. In course of the movement no serious violation of the directives and crossing of limits was reported from anywhere. Of course, there were some references of the so-called 'planned armed-conflict' in the guerilla fashion by the volunteers trained in the 'Purba Pakistan Qilla', and invasion of Assam. Such plans, however, came to nothing as they were never materialized. Besides, the authenticity of the reports of such 'Guerrilla Plan' is also challenged as it is observed: "Documentary evidence either way is lacking and it is no use relying on press notes on the matter."

4th, another vital aspect of the movement was that although it started as a movement against the eviction policy of the Bardoloi Government, it gradually became a part of the Muslim League's battle cry for Pakistan. In course of demonstrations during the Anti-Eviction Movement, the League volunteers very often shouted slogans like 'Marke Lenge Pakistan, larke Lenge Pakistan' etc., which bore evidence to the fact that the Civil Disobedience Movement got linked up with the League's propaganda for achieving Pakistan. In fact, when the

142. Ibid.
143. Quoted in Ibid.
Anti- Eviction Movement was started by Bhasani, the battle for Pakistan had already been started, and therefore, the two movements were being conducted simultaneously, and it was not possible for the Provincial League to separate one from the other, rather the Anti-Eviction move provided an opportunity to the Provincial League to utilize the support generated for the Anti-Eviction Movement, for achievement of its other objective i.e., Pakistan. That is why, it is observed: "The economic demands for land transformed itself into a cry for Pakistan".  

Finally, the Movement resulted in further alienation of the Hindus from the Muslims in general. Although the Assamese Muslims whose numerical proportion in the overall Muslim population of the province was very small, generally remained aloof from the Anti-Eviction Movement, the amount of support it got from the remaining Muslim population of the Province including the Surma Valley (at a later stage), despite the fact of it being clearly linked to the battle for Pakistan, strengthened the general Hindu impression that the Muslims in general, were the supporters of Pakistan. On the other hand, the movement is said to have created a deep impression in the minds of Muslim masses 'that the life, honour and property of the Muslims were not safe at the hands of the Congress' and such an impression is said to have "turned the tide of the entire Muslim masses in support of Sylhet joining the province of East-Bengal". In fact, When a Referendum was held in Sylhet, as already stated, to decide the fate of the district as per the Mountbatten Plan of Partition, a vast Majority of the Muslims in the district supported its amalgamation with the East Bengal which was to form part of the Muslim State of Pakistan. The Sylhet Referendum as well as the Pakistan Movement in Assam, as already referred, will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

144. Ibid.