Chapter IV.

PROGRESS OF THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN ASSAM (1930-34)

At its Madras Session in 1927, the Indian National Congress declared as its goal the independence of India. Jawaharlal Nehru and others demanded a constitution based on complete independence and opposed the resolution of Dominion Status for India as recommended by Motilal Nehru Committee. The sentiment for complete independence was mounting throughout the country.

The Madras resolution was adopted in the absence of Gandhi. He was so long acting as a brake on the pressure for another Civil Disobedience movement aimed explicitly at complete independence. In order to soften the Madras decision, Gandhi succeeded in the Calcutta session of 1928 to push through a compromise formula. The formula accepted the Dominion Status objective of the Nehru Report. However, in the event of failure on the part of the British to concede, it within 1929, Gandhi proposed that Congress would go for Civil Disobedience and complete Swaraj. The resolution was adopted even in the face of opposition by Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Chandra Bose and other leaders.
On 31 December 1928, Congress gave an ultimatum to the Government in the following terms; "Subject to the exigencies of the political situation, this Congress will adopt the Constitution (Nehru Constitution) if it is accepted in its entirety by the British Parliament on or before 31st December 1929, but in the event of its non-acceptance by the date or its earlier rejection, the Congress will organize a campaign of non-violent non-cooperation by advising the country to refuse taxation and in such other manner as may be decided upon".

The British Government failed to honour the proposal and the Congress declared complete independence and not Dominion status as its goal in its Lahore session held in December 1929 under the Presidentship of Jawaharlal Nehru. On 31 December 1929, exactly after one year from the date of the Calcutta declaration, Gandhi, in the Lahore session of the Congress declared that "the word Swaraj in the first article of the Congress constitution shall mean complete independence". Exactly at the strike of the hour of expiry of the ultimatum given at Calcutta, the Congress tricolour was unfurled (at midnight of 31.12.1929). It was decided to observe henceforth 26 January as the Independence Day of India.

The Lahore session of the Congress directed the members to boycott the future elections and instructed
the sitting Congress members in the legislatures and committees to withdraw their membership from the respective bodies. The importance of the implementation of the Constructive Programme was reemphasised. The details of the action programme were left to be worked out by the AICC and in effect by Gandhi.5

There was a mixed reaction amongst the leaders of Assam Congress on the decision of the Lahore session of the Congress. With regard to the boycott or withdrawal from the Council, opinions of the leaders differed. All of them, however, unanimously welcomed the decision of the Congress to celebrate the first Independence Day on 26 January 1930. Accordingly, along with the rest of the country, Assam also celebrated the Day with much joy and enthusiasm. Twelve legislators of Assam also resigned from the Council before 26 January 1930, in spite of the disagreement prevailing among the leaders.6

The historic Dandi March was launched by Gandhiji on 12 March 1930. This March was the signal for a country-wide Civil Disobedience movement and it aroused great attention and enthusiasm among the people.7 In Assam, in the meantime, the older section of the leadership of the APCC resigned from Congress. This crisis was, however, overcome by the taking over of the leadership by Bishnuram Medhi along with important leader like Gopinath Bordoloi,
Ambikagiri Raichoudhuri, Siddhinath Sarma and Md. Tayyabulla. Thus, Assam got ready to launch mass Civil Disobedience along with the rest of the country.

At the beginning of the 1930 Civil Disobedience, the movement could make little headway in the Brahmaputra valley due to various reasons. One such important reason was that the people of Assam could not join the Dandi march directly and collectively as Dandi was very far from the province. On the other hand the province had no salt mine in it and, therefore, there was no salt law in force which could be violated locally as a part of the movement. However, the people of Assam in many places started to make salt by indigenous methods and gave up using Government supplied salt. The People of Goalpara district refused to pay the Choukidari tax in conformity with the Congress programme to refuse payment of taxes. In some other parts of Assam people violated the Government Forest Law.

In accordance with the all-India pattern the Civil Disobedience movement in Assam took up rigorously the programme of boycott of foreign goods and exciseable drugs. Public meetings, strikes and hartals were organized in different places in protest against the arrest of Gandhiji on 6 April 1930 and other leaders. The movement gained momentum in Assam from this time onward.
In the 1930-34 phase of the freedom movement, women all throughout India fought more vigorously than before. When all the important leaders, national and state as well, were arrested in the wake of the movement, women came to the forefront of the struggle. Jawaharlal Nehru wrote - "Most of us menfolk were in prison, and then a remarkable thing happened. Our women came to the front and took charge of the struggle. Women had always been there of course, but now there was a avalanche of them, which took not only the British Government but their own menfolk by surprise. Here were these women, women of upper or middle classes, leading sheltered lives in their homes, peasant women, working class women, rich women- pouring out in their tens of thousands in defiance of Government order and police lathi. It was not only that display of courage and daring, but what was even more surprising was the organizational power they showed." 12

When Gandhi launched the Dandi march he did not want to include any woman in the first batch of the marchers although a large number of applications were received from the women expressing their willingness to join the march. The reasons that Gandhi put forth were that the British would not touch women 'just as Hindus would not kill cows'. To be free from the criticism by anybody of being coward by taking women in the march, Gandhi preferred
not to include any of them in it. To quote Gandhi - "If we put the women in the front the Government may hesitate to inflict on us all the penalty that they might otherwise inflict. A delicate sense of chivalry is what decides me against including women in the first batch". But women throughout the country reacted critically to this decision of Gandhiji however convincing his grounds might be. They protested against their being treated as unequal to men and declined to accept any discrimination on sex ground and asserted - 'that no marches, no imprisonments, no demonstrations should take place without them'.

Gandhiji, however, comforted the agitated women mind with his magic words - "To call women the weaker sex is a libel; it is man's injustice to woman. If by strength is meant brute strength, then indeed is woman less brute than man. If by strength is meant moral power, then woman is immeasurably man's superior. Has she not great intuition, is she not more self-sacrificing, has she not greater powers of endurance, has she not greater courage? Without her man could not be. If non-violence is the law of our being, the future is with woman." When the women members of the ashram insisted on being taken with men in the march, Gandhi said 'they were destined to do greater work in this struggle than merely breaking salt laws'. By 'greater work' Gandhi meant picketing of the liquor shops and
foreign cloth shops. "Let the women of India take up these two activities, specialize in them; they would contribute more than man to national freedom. They would have an access of power and self confidence to which they have hitherto been strangers". Gandhiji believed that in the agitation against intoxicating liquor and drugs and also against selling and using foreign goods, women must have absolute control and men must be subordinate to them. He hoped that women from all sections of the society would identify themselves with the masses, and devote their energy and time to spinning and weaving. 

Gandhi left Sabarmati for Dandi on 12 March 1930 with a batch of seventynine marchers. He did not include any woman in the march. Mridula Sarabhai and Khurshedbehn, who could not agree with Gandhi, attempted to join the march at Ahmedabad where they were arrested on the same day. Sorojini Naidu who joined the marchers at Dandi was the first woman to be arrested for participating in the Salt Satyagraha. On 6 April 1930, the marchers reached Dandi and the Salt satyagraha was launched to last for 7 days, the national week of 'war against the Salt tax'. The number of women, officially chosen, was very few in number but thousands of women strode down to the sea like proud warriors.
Kamaladevi Chattapadhyay, Sorojini Naidu, Hansa Mehta, Jaishri Raiji, Menibehn, Jamnabehn, Ratnabehn, Durgabai, Mridula Sarabhai, Kasturba Gandhi, Indumati Seth, Vijay Laxmi Pandit, Kamala Nehru, were few of the important women who took active part in the Salt Satyagraha. About 17000 women were arrested in the whole of India during this Satyagraha. 22

The women of Assam irrespective of status and position came out in hundreds and thousands to participate in the programme of violation of Government order and laws as in other parts of the country. They took out processions, 'prabhat pheris' and picketed opium, liquor and foreign cloth shops, educational institutions and similar other organizations. Many of them were lathi charged and many courted arrest and went to jails. In other programmes of the movement also they were equally active. When the women of Assam saw that some of the legislators were hesitating to resign and few others were contemplating to contest elections in defiance of Congress decision they warned and reminded the members of their bounded duty to the nation at that hour. It was heartening to see that in conformity with the Congress programmes the women of Assam directed their actions and efforts towards achieving the goal of complete independence. One of the women leaders of Assam, e.g., Chandraprova Saikiani said
that even if the British Government volunteered to grant Dominion Status they should not go for it, nothing short of complete independence was acceptable to Indians.

With an appeal to the legislators and councillors who were hesitating to withdraw, Chandraprova said 'at this hour we need swordless soldiers and what is most looked for is an efficient General'. She called upon the old leaders particularly those who were in the legislatures to resign and undertake organizational works amongst the people. She had also reminded the provincial Congress leaders who had already resigned that their withdrawal would be meaningless if they did not devote themselves entirely to the movement. Chandraprova was trying to remove the indifference prevailing amongst a section of the old Congress leaders of Assam at that time.

Chandraprova was bold enough to say 'let not the old leaders come forward to lead us if they do not want to. In this critical hour of the nation all men and women young boys and girls should come forward to display their spirit of patriotism and nationalism and take the leadership by themselves'. She sent out an appeal to the old and young alike to go to the village with Charkha and Cotton to encourage the village women who were ready to replace foreign yarn and cloth by their own hand spun yarn and woven clothes.
In order to demonstrate their solidarity with the programme of Salt satyagraha, the women organized meetings in different places. The women of Goalpara held a meeting with Mohini Devi as the president, few days before the launching of the satyagraha, to extend whole hearted support to it and to rouse the women to participate in the different programmes of the movement. A group of police entered the meeting hall for the purpose of collecting reports of the meeting. But the women refused to give them any information and drove them out of the meeting hall.\textsuperscript{24}

On 12 March 1930, i.e., the day of launching the Dandi March by Gandhi, the people of Kaliabar, a village in the district of Nowgong, decided to symbolically join the march. Under the leadership of Thanuram Bhuyan and Tuwakanta Goswami, the people of Kaliabar also started a march from Kaliabar to Nowgong town, a distance of about 30 miles. The marchers took three days to reach Nowgong. Thousands of people joined the march and what was more important was the participation by women in large numbers. Sec. 144 Cr.P.C. was in force at that time and organization of procession or marches, holding of meetings, etc., were prohibited. The marchers were lathicharged at Nowgong for violation of the prohibitory orders on 14.3.1930.\textsuperscript{25}
As decided by the Lahore Congress, the Nowgong District Congress Committee also directed the Congress workers to celebrate the Independence Day on 26 January 1930. The women of Kaliabar also decided to participate in this celebration. Accordingly, more than 400 women of this village under the leadership of Guneswari Devi, Darbai Mech, Mohini Gohain and Kiranbala Bora came out in a procession to Nowgong town. The procession, on its way, had a tremendous impact on the wayside village between Kaliabar and Nowgong and a large number of women joined the procession. A huge crowd gathered in the Jubilee field of Nowgong town to celebrate the day on 26 January with people from the neighbouring areas joining it. When the National flag was about to be hoisted the police force under Rowtles arrived and started committing atrocities on the crowd. The women leaders like Guneswari Devi, Darbai Mech, Muktabala Baisnavi, Mohini Gohain, Kiranbala Bora and a few others were beaten up by the police and some of them were arrested. The police forcefully snatched away the National Flag from the hands of a group of women volunteers in the field and in the process there was a virtual tug-of-war between the women and the police.

The police also lathi charged a peaceful procession from Puranigudam, a village situated at about 7 miles east of Nowgong, when it entered the Jubilee field
to attend the flag hoisting ceremony. This procession also included a large number of women and girls and many of them were injured in the lathi charge. Similar processions were also organized in different places of the province. In Sibsagar town processions were taken out in support of the Salt satyagraha and many women joined such processions. In one such procession, Kamalabala Kakati, the elder sister of Bimala Prasad Chaliha, the ex-Chief Minister of Assam, was arrested and jailed for six months in 1930.

The first Round Table Conference (RTC) was opened on 12 November 1930. But at that time most of the important Congress leaders including Gandhiji were in prison. So, holding of the RTC in the absence of Gandhi and other leaders was opposed by the Congress and the people in general. Protests against the proposed Conference were voiced throughout the country but the Government took rigorous steps by implementing prohibitory orders against meetings and processions.

On the day of the commencement of the RTC, i.e., 12 Nov. 1930, Nowgong again came to the forefront, particularly the womenfolk. Thousands of people from the neighbouring villages of the Nowgong town started in a procession carrying black flags and shouting anti-R.T.C. slogans.
Police lathicharged the processionists and nine of them were arrested. The participants in the procession thronged there by coming in processions from different villages.29

One such procession consisting of men and women, and boys and girls was led by Guneswari Devi of Kaliabar. Since the walking needed two days time, the procession started from Kaliabar on 11 November. They reached the town at about 10 a.m. on the following day and joined the town processionists. They even did not take sufficient rest during the night hours. The size of the procession became bigger and bigger towards the evening as more and more people joined it. At nowgong, the leadership of the procession was taken by Kanpai Das, an advocate of Nowgong. At about 4 p.m. Das was arrested by Police and the responsibility of providing leadership to the procession fell upon Guneswari Devi. Then the Police obstructed the procession by cordoning it. Three Police Sub-inspectors came to arrest Guneswari Devi and in the act of catching hold of her she was manhandled by the Police in the procession. But undaunted Guneswari along with the other women in the procession broke off the Police cordon and entered the Jubilee field defying arrest and torture. In Guneswari's own words - "I obstructed them by catching
their lathis and proceeded along".\(^3^0\)

The procession terminated at about 5 p.m. in the Jubilee field where a meeting was held to protest against the R.T.C. The Police again lathicharged the crowd for about five minutes and injured a large number of them.\(^3^1\)

In protest against the police atrocities the people of Nowgong organized a hartal on 13 November 1930. It was a complete success. Twenty women including one with a baby in her arms picketed on the hartal day in front of the Nowgong High School gate. The leadership of the picketing was given by Guneswari. A large number of women picketers were also arrested and all but Guneswari and Muktabala Baishnabi were released on the same day. They were tried on the next day and were fined Rs. 10 each. Both of them refused to pay the fine\(^3^2\) with the result that they were sentenced to 15 days' imprisonment. Guneswari Devi and Muktabala Baishnabi were the first Assamese women of the Brahmaputra valley to undergo imprisonment for violation of Government order and for participating in the Civil Disobedience movement. They were treated as 'B' class prisoners.\(^3^3\) The APOC report for 1930 expressed gratitude to all and more particularly to the village women of Assam for their "wonderful response to the present India wide movement".\(^3^4\)
Soon after her release from jail, Guneswari organized many meetings in the villages to arouse the people in support of prohibition of the use of liquor, and foreign cloths, opium and enrolled Congress volunteers in large numbers. She was arrested for the second time at Nowgong on 26 January 1931. On that day a big public meeting was held to celebrate Independence day by hoisting the National flag. Guneswari Devi, Muktabala Baishnabi, Darbai Mech, Mohini Gohain and Kiranbala Bora took initiative in organising that meeting. All of them were arrested. They were sentenced to 4 months imprisonment and treated as 'B' class prisoners. However they were released after two and half months as a result of the Gandhi-Irwin pact. After coming out from jail Guneswari Devi participated in the organizational work of the Congress.

In April 1932, Guneswari was arrested for the third time in connection with participation in the non-cooperation movement. She was imprisoned for eighteen months with a fine of Rs. 100 in default of which four months' imprisonment was ordered. This time she was placed as a 'C' class prisoner in the beginning. But as a result of appeal from the public she was treated as 'B' class prisoner and reduced the period of four months imprisonment for default of payment of fine to two months.
As in the 1921 phase of freedom movement, the students of Assam took active part in the 1930 Civil Disobedience movement. The students played the most important role in organizing meetings, processions and picketing. Student involvement was noticeably high and the Government, in fact, viewed the movement as a student unrest and took steps to prevent them from participating in it by issuing certain orders. The infamous Cunningham Circular of 19.5.1930 ordered that the school and college authorities should take stern action against those students who took part in processions, strikes, hartals or any other demonstration against the Government. By this circular student participation in political activities was banned. Students and guardians were given to sign an undertaking to the effect that their wards would not participate in any political activity. The Circular further said that guardians unwilling to give this undertaking would be required to withdraw their wards from the schools or colleges.

The Cunningham Circular caused a serious resentment among the people in General and the students in particular throughout Assam. Instead of dissuading the people it boosted up their spirit of patriotism to a great height. Except in some places students and guardians refused to sign any undertaking as directed by the Circular. As a pro-
protest against the Circular it was decided to organize picketing in schools and college. Accordingly, immediately after the reopening of schools at the end of the summer vacation picketing commenced in the institutions on 21 July. The Cotton College reopened after summer vacation on 10 July 1930 and picketing commenced on that day and continued till 19 July. A few women regularly picketed in front of the main gate of the College. All these women belonged to some elite families of the town. They were Basantalata Hazarika, Kamala Devi, Ratnabala Bora, Muktaprava Agarwalla, Sumitrabala Bhattacharyya, Ratnaprava Bora, Anna Baruah, Durgaprava Bora, Ghanakanti Devi, Bhubaneswari Devi, among others. On the day of the commencement of the picketing a news spread that the police would lathi charge the picketers. But this could not frighten the women from going to picketing. Apprehending police attack on the women picketers, some of the Congress leaders made arrangements for medical aid for the injured. However nothing had happened as apprehended. The Principal of the College, for the purpose of avoiding untoward incidents, ordered suspension of the classes. As a result, the picketing became meaningless and it was withdrawn. The impact of the Cunningham circular was felt even in interior villages and village women in different places protested against it.
The movement against the Cunningham circular drew more students into the movement, and a number of them later on emerged as provincial leaders. On 27 July 1930 a meeting of the new executive of the APCC was held in the Curzon Hall at Gauhati. Many students including girls also attended the meeting. Puspalata Saikia (Das) a girl of 14 years who attended the meeting was very much encouraged by the speeches of the Congress leaders. She associated herself very closely with different action programmes of the movement in Assam during this period. Beginning with her effective association as a student worker she later on emerged as one of the important women leaders of Assam.

Puspalata's mother Swarnalata Saikia was a very active woman organizer. She was the Secretary of the Kamrup Mahila Samiti during the 1930-34 phase of the movement. As a Secretary of the Samiti, Swarnalata procured various publications published from the U.P. and Bengal including the Benu edited by Bhupendra Kishore Roy. Young Puspalata got the opportunity to read the literature on patriotism and nationalism from them. She derived her experience of participation in political life at an early age when she worked as a member 'Banarsena' at the age of six. The environment in which she grew up provided her with ample opportunities to become involved in the movement.
In 1930, Puspalata organized an association of girls named 'Mukti Sangha' to mobilize girls for the national movement. In this effort her other associates were Sarala Saxena, Jyotsna Mazumdar and Punyaprava Barua. Puspalata became the founder Secretary of the Sangha. She along with Sarala and Jyotsna took a pledge by writing it down with their own blood that the country's complete independence would be their only objective and that they were ready to sacrifice everything to achieve that goal. The Sangha succeeded in increasing its membership.

The activities of the Mukti Sangha and its leader Puspalata were closely watched by the Police. In 1930 Puspalata served as the Union Secretary of the Panbazar Girls High School. In the meantime Motilal Nehru died and Bhagat Singh was hanged. To mourn the death of Motilal Nehru a condolence meeting was held at the initiative of Puspalata. The death sentence on Bhagat Singh also caused serious resentment among the students and protest meetings were held in different schools. Puspalata was also one of the organizers of such meetings. As the Union Secretary of the school she gave a call for picketing in front of the school gate. It was a complete success. The Government took a serious view of Puspalata's activities and expelled her from the school. An option was,
however, given to her mother that her daughter would be allowed to continue her studies if she gave an undertaking promising that Puspalata would behave properly with the authorities and not join in any political activity. But Puspalata's mother refused to accept such conditions. On the other hand she advised Puspalata to do what she considered the best for the country through reasonable methods. In fact, Swarnalata indicated to Puspalata her disapproval of any violent activity on her part. Later Puspalata changed her mind and gave up her support to the violent means and took herself to the path of Gandhi's non-violence. When she went to join the Benaras Hindu University for higher studies she became a disciple of Durgabai Deshmukh from whom she received a lot of inspirations.

Chandraprova Saikiani, a participant in the 1921-22 movement and a very active women worker, made important contributions in the 1930-34 period particularly in the district of Nowgong. She did a lot of organizational work in this district and collected a large sum of money for the Congress fund in 1930-43. Chandraprova spent about a week in July 1930 for collection of funds and was able to collect more than twenty thousand rupees and considerable quantity of gold ornaments for the Congress fund. During her stay there she visited,
along with Purna Chandra Sarma and a few others, some interior villages in the east of Nowgong for collection of fund and other organizational work.

In a meeting held at Puranisatra, 3 miles away from Jakhalabandha, in July 1930, Chandraprova explaining to the people why they should help the Congress volunteers. She said "Congress volunteers are the soldiers of a battle which they are fighting to liberate our motherland under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi". She made an appeal to the effect that every household should send one of their grown-up boys or girls to enroll as volunteers of the Congress. She further said: "avail yourself of the opportunity of leaving something for your next generation. Let the freedom of the country be your gift to the future generations to come". Immediately after her speech more than one hundred boys and girls enrolled themselves as volunteers. In another meeting held at Kaliabar, Chandraprova gave a clarion call to the women of Assam to come out and join the movement. On 9 August 1930 she addressed a public meeting at Chaparmukh in Nowgong district with very fiery speech. Her speech had an electrifying effect on the audience and she was successful in rousing the patriotic and nationalistic spirit in the minds of the people. Men and women volunteered to donate whatever they could and even the wives
and daughters of Government officers also came out to help the volunteers with money and materials.\textsuperscript{46}

The district administration of Nowgong became alarmed at the activities of Chandraprova. It considered that her speeches were instigating the people against the Government. An order was issued by the Government under Sec. 144 directing Chandraprova to leave Nowgong within 24 hours. Chandraprova would have preferred to violate the order but, at the request of the Congress workers, she left for Barpeta to attend a Congress meeting.\textsuperscript{47} When she reached Barpeta, the S.D.C. there wanted to arrest Chandraprova as he felt that the situation there would worsen if she was allowed to mobilize the people as she did in Nowgong. But, Saadulla the judicial member of the then Council apprehended that her arrest might lead the situation beyond control and accordingly advised the S.D.C. to give up that idea.\textsuperscript{48}

The European officers stationed at Barpeta committed various kinds of atrocities on the public and the students during this period of the movement. Some Assamese high officials also helped them in this regard. Sarat Chandra Goswami, who was the Chief Inspector of Schools, publicly insulted Chandraprova at Barpeta 'for spoiling the young students'. But Chandraprova strongly retorted by saying that Goswami himself should
have led the students to fight for freedom instead of working as a British supporter. She also told him that he had earned nothing but hatred from the student community for his role in this regard. When Inspector Goswami threatened her with arrest, she said that she joined the movement being fully aware of the possibility of arrest or even worse consequences. Chandraprova was ordered to leave Barpeta within 12 hours and she left for Bajali and was compelled to spend a few days at her own home, as an internment order was enforced upon her. Her house was closely watched by police so that she could not attend any meeting. The Deputy Commissioner of Kamrup also issued an externment order against Chandraprova Saikiani on her arrival at Gauhati on 26 September 1930, apprehending that her activities might disturb "public peace and tranquility" at Gauhati. The Government Intelligence always followed her and recorded her speeches in different meetings.

The APCC in its meeting of 12.3.1930 decided to launch a programme of violation of Forest laws as a part of Civil Disobedience. Accordingly attempts were made to violate them in the districts of Kamrup and Goalpara in December 1930. Chandraprova also decided to participate in the Programme of violation of Forest Law in Goalpara district. She arrived at Darrangiri in the first half
of December 1930 and made necessary arrangements for cutting 500 Sal trees in the Government forest. Chandraprova asked the villagers to take up a two-fold programme i.e., (i) impose a fine of Rs. 40 on any person who gave evidence against the Congress and that (ii) no forest pass was to be taken out that year and cut the trees in the forests as a part of Civil Disobedience programme. But before she could commence the work, Sec. 144 was enforced and a warrant of arrest was issued against her. This time also she agreed to escape arrest at public request. However, she was arrested at Kukurmara near Gauhati in the second half of December 1930. An appeal made by Nabin Chandra Bordoloi to release her on bail was rejected by the Deputy Commissioner of Kamrup. She was prosecuted under Sec. 144 Cr. P.C. for seditious speeches delivered by her in Darrangiri reserve forest. In fact, her speeches had great influence on the Kachari villagers and the latter started to defy forest laws on an extensive scale. When she was in the custody of the Gauhati Jail for trial, the jail authority asked her to request for a conditional release by giving an undertaking that she would neither organize nor attend any meeting. Finally the Deputy Commissioner of Kamrup Mr. Princhard also asked her about her choice but she refused any conditional release. She was sentenced to 18 months simple imprisonment. From Gauhati she was sent
to the Jorhat Jail. She was released with all other political prisoners on 7 March 1931 as a result of the Gandhi-Irwin pact. After her release, she, with a group of representatives from Assam, went to attend the Congress session at Karachi on 29 March 1931.

From October 1930, an intensive agitation was carried on in the Brahmaputra valley as a part of the Civil Disobedience movement. Shops dealing with foreign goods, liquor, hemp, opium, tobacco and other intoxicating drugs were picketed on an extensive scale. As mentioned earlier, the women of Assam had a very great contribution towards the success of this part of the movement. In the 1921 phase of movement the women appeared to participate in it just because their husbands participated in it. But in the 1930 involvement was more active in that their consciousness was roused as active fighters for freedom. The women power in Assam was strengthened by the organizational activities carried out during the preceding years of the movement and the formation of Mahila Samitis. During the period under review women came in hundreds and thousands to participate in programmes of C.D. movement and in places like Sibsagar, Nowgong, Naduar, North Lakhimpur, Gauhati and Golaghat they came in direct confrontation with the police. The role of the women of Nowgong district was of special
significance in the history of freedom movement in Assam.

In 1930, the women of Sibsagar and Charing and Baliaghan, the two nearby places of Sibsagar town, took up the campaign of popularising Swadeshi and organized women meetings in villages. They organized women for picketing the shops dealing with foreign cloths, opium etc. Kamalalaya Kakati and Sashiprova Chaliha were two of the important women organizers of Sibsagar. Sundaribala Kakati took the leadership of organizing the women of Charing. Upama Durani, Jogeswari Durani, Aiti Phukanani, Lilawati Hazarika, Kusumkumari Durani, Lilawati Durani, Gunadalata Phukanani and Khageswari Durani, all above the age of 70 years age, were some of the elderly ladies besides girls like Rahila, Pakhila, Ramanilata, Makhanlata, Hemaprova, Sadarilata and others who actively participated in the programmes of C.D. in Charing under the leadership of Sundaribala Kakati. Every Sunday i.e., on the day off from picketing, they used to go to the nearby villages and held meetings, enrolled women as Congress volunteers and explained why and how they should picket before the opium and liquor shops. For this purpose the women of Charing formed an organization among them known as 'Women Force' (Nari Bahini).
In a public meeting held in front of the Sibsagar Court in 1930, women audience sitting separately in the meeting took a pledge publicly, even in the presence of the Police nearby to disobey the Laws of the Government as a part of the C.D. movement. Such a bold step on the part of the women became a great source of inspiration and encouragement for all those present in the meeting. The assembled women many of whom were octogenarians were mostly from the nearby villages of Charing, Baliaghat, Kalugaon etc., and came to attend the meeting from distances of 12 to 20 miles on foot. The spirit of nationalism and patriotism was evident among them. Many women leaders addressed the meeting and the most notable of them was the address of Sabitribala Kakaty. It was her speech that inspired many men and women to volunteer themselves to get arrested. Thus, many women were arrested in Sibsagar and nearby areas for picketing. Kanaklata Kakati and Khiroda Chaliha of Baliaghat and Lakheswari Bhuyan of Kalugaon were arrested respectively on 12 and 19 August 1931 for picketing at opium shops at Gaurisagar about 5 miles away from Sibsagar. They were taken on foot to Amguri police station about 10 miles away from Gaurisagar. They were tried at Sibsagar court and sentenced to 6 months imprisonment. Lilawati Kakati Sundaribala Kakati and many other women were arrested.
during picketings but were released on the same day. Kana-
klata, Khiroda and Lakheswari were arrested again on
1 March 1932 soon after their release from jail. 53

The Gandhi-Irwin Pact signed on 5 March 1931 and
ratified by the Congress in the Karachi session on 29
March 1931 was accepted in Assam with a mixed reaction.
In the minds of the people of Assam there were understan-
dable misgivings about its implementation by the Govern-
ment. Subsequent to the signing of the Pact, the Governm-
et of Assam released the political prisoners on 7 March
1931.

The released leaders were given rousing receptions
in different parts of the province through public meetings.
On 29 April 1931, the women of Goalpara held a reception
meeting at Dhubri to felicitate the women participants in
the Civil Disobedience movement. The speakers of the
meeting while praising the released women for their
sacrifice, called upon the people to keep themselves
ready to join the movement as the Pact was of a temporary
nature only. The people were asked to work for popula-
rising Swadeshi in the meantime as usual. 54

After the signing of the Pact, Congress gave more
importance to the task of reorganising the party from
the grassroots level. In Assam also steps were taken
in that direction. R. yat Sabhas were organized to
mobilize the village people and through these Sabhas and other organization a call was given to all capable persons including women to become Congress volunteers. Women in large numbers participated in the Rayat Sabhas. The Naduar Rayat Sabha in Darrang district held on 18 April 1931 was attended by about 500 women. Two days later, i.e., on 20 April, the Naduar Women's Conference was held under the presidentship of Guneswari Devi of Nowgong. This meeting was attended by more than two thousand women. Women in groups of hundreds from distant villages thronged the Conference venue. They came in processions with the tricolour in their hands and singing patriotic songs composed by Jyotiprasad Agarwala. Narmada Kumari Devi inaugurated the meeting. Amalprova Das (Guwahati), Muktabala Baishnavi (Nowgong), Kironmoyee Agarwala (Tezpur) and Darbai Mech (Nagaon) were the other important speakers of the meeting. The meeting also resolved to popularise Khadi and take steps for expansion of women education. 55

The women of Chaiduar of Darrang district also held their conference on 14 June 1931, soon after the Rayat Sabha held before it. Chandraprova Saikiani presided over this Women's Conference. Muktabala Baishnavi was another women leader present at this meeting. From among the Congress leaders, Mahadev Sarma and Lakhidhar
Sarma also spoke at the meeting. In spite of heavy rains, a large number of women attended the meeting. The Satradhikar of Garamur Satra while appreciating the patriotism of the women of Assam, emphasised the need for equality of women with men in every respect. His suggestion to introduce spinning for everyone was accepted by giving 'Uruli' by the women. It was symbolic of the mass response by the women.

Over 3000 women assembled to attend the Women's Conference at Gauripur in Goalpara district on 20 April 1931. Hemaprova Mazumdar presided over the meeting. She appealed to the women to become united and work under the leadership of the Congress under the tricolour. She said that every housewife should indeed send her husband and children to the fight for freedom. The President of the Gauripur Conference Reception Committee asked the women to remain ready to serve the motherland forgetting all their supposedly feminine weaknesses. The meeting expressed its gratitude and thanks to the women sufferers of the C.D. movement. Most of the speakers laid emphasis on undertaking constructive work in an increasing number.

Nurjahan, a Muslim woman speaker in the meeting appealed to the Muslim women to give up their Purdah and send their girls out to work along with other girls from different communities.
The girl students of Goalpara district also organized a kind of training in Martial Art for the girls. The All Dhubri Girl Students’ Committee of Goalpara in its first annual conference held at Dhubri on 30 April 1931 resolved to appeal to the girl students of schools and colleges of the district and the province as well, to open similar committees and to organize physical training for the girls. The meeting also congratulated the girl students who suffered atrocities during the non-cooperation and the C.D. movement. It was made clear in the meeting that undergoing training in martial art by the girl students was nothing but a preparation to meet emergencies. The members of the Committee reaffirmed their faith in non-violence. In her presidential speech, Hemaprova Mazumdar appealed to the girl students to adhere to the non-violent method of Civil Disobedience and said "non-violence is not a weakness". Other women speakers of the meeting also spoke about non-violence and reminded the girls about the sacrifice and determination of Joymati.*67

Throughout the year 1931, women's meetings were held in different places. In the Teok Women's Conference held in the second week of August 1931, the President of the meeting Snehalata Barua appealed to the women to use and make Khadi with full vigour. Citing the examples of
women of other parts of India she appealed to the women to contribute according to their might to the nation as Gandhi had directed. The meeting of the Golaghat Women's Conference held on 14 August 1931 also urged upon the women to use khadi only.

In a women's meeting held on 27 April 1931 at Meleng, near Jorhat, under the presidency of Usha Devi, many women speakers like Jayanti Devi, Uma Devi and Satyabati Devi spoke about the role of women in the movement. Uma Devi who spoke about the importance of the constructive programme happened to be the wife of the Mouzadar (revenue collector) of Chowkhat. The presence of a Mouzadar's wife in the meeting was itself an inspiration for the village women present. This was because of the fact that in those days Mouzadars were considered by the people as supporters of the Government.

The Gandhi-Irwin Pact became a hollow promise. Gandhi returned from the R.T.C. in December 1931 practically without achieving anything. The Congress decided on 1st January 1932 to launch a "vigorous boycott of foreign cloth, whether British or of the other countries, picketing of the liquor shops and also disobedience of non-moral laws". The government immediately started repression. Gandhi and Patel were arrested on 4 January 1932 and the
second phase of the C.D. Movement began immediately after their arrest.  

Assam responded almost instantaneously to the call for Civil Disobedience and protested against the arrest of the national leaders. The Ordinance on Molestation and Boycott, Unlawful Association and Unlawful Instigation was extended to Assam in the first half of the January 1932. The Congress organization, the Assam Seva Dal, the Assam Yubak Sangha and similar other organizations were declared illegal by a special notification of the Government of Assam on 6 February 1932. With the promulgation of the above ordinances the entire province of Assam began to pulsate with the movement. Golaghat subdivision was, however, in the vanguard with women at the head.

Ignoring all kinds of prohibitory orders and repressive measures, processions, came out in defiance of section 144 Cr.P.C. in different places of Assam. The third Independence Day was observed on 26 January 1932 by hoisting the tricolour.

On 27 January the people of Golaghat defied the prohibitory orders and started picketing the shops dealing with foreign goods, liquor and intoxicating drugs. Women took a leading part in the picketing. At least one woman from every house at Golaghat joined the picketing. Twenty-four out of sixty arrested at Golaghat town on 2 February 1932,
were women. The following is an incomplete list of those arrested - Punya Kakati (Borbora), Guna Borbora (Bhuyan) Bina Das (Hazarika), Tagar Das (Choudhury) Devi Baruah, Aidhani, Makhani Duara (Baruah), Uma Baruah, Niku Hazarika, Profulla Datta, Bimala, Lakheswari Rajkhowa, and Basan Hazarika.

There were more other elderly women who participated in the picketing. Of the 116 persons arrested at Golaghat till 5 February 1932 on grounds of picketing, 35 were women.

Sarumai Gogoi, Dariki Gogoi, Rupahi Gogoi and Bhogeswari (popularly known as Nigani Burhi) were sentenced to 6 months R.I. and Someswari Gogoi to 4 months R.I. They were imprisoned in the Gauhati Jail. Some women picketers with babies were either released on the same day or detained for a night or so. Golapi Gogoi who was arrested along with her baby was released on the same day. Punyaprova Hazarika was kept in police custody for one night with an eighteen month old baby and released on the following day.

The other women of Golaghat arrested were Lathai Thengal (50). Debeswari Barmedhi, Aita Thengal, Madhabi Koch and Malati Koch. All the five women were arrested on 7 February 1932 and later on sentenced to R.I. for periods varying from 4 to 6 months. Debeswari was fined Rs. 30 in addition to the term of 4 months R.I. All of them were kept as 'C' class prisoners in the Gauhati Jail. Malati Koch left an eighteen month old baby at home.
On 15.2.1932, Sumitra Gogol (Barua), Saruti Gogol, Hayan Gogol and Thireswari Gogol were arrested for picketing and violation of sec. 144. On 22.2.1932, Malati Gogoi and Punyeswari Gogoi were arrested with their babies along with Golapi Sonowalani (No. 1) and Golapi Gogoioni. 77

Arrest of male members, in most cases, inspired their female counterparts to come out with greater courage and devotion. One Kokai Sonowal of Golaghat was convicted to six months R.I. in January 1932. His wife with an 18 month-old baby picketed for five consecutive days at Golaghat. She was arrested on every occasion but she was let off in the evening as she had the baby with her. On the sixth day she left the child in the Congress camp in charge of the Deshasevikas and joined the picketing. On that day she was arrested and later convicted for six months R.I. She was transferred to the Gauhati jail. After a month she was allowed to bring her baby to the jail. 78 This is a small but significant instance of the patriotism of women personified by the Sonowal woman.

On 23 February 1932, a group of women picketers was arrested in the weekly market of Golaghat for picketing in front of the shops selling foreign cloth, liquor and opium. They were Golapi Sonowalani (No. 1), Jahamali Gogoioni (with a baby), Purneswari Gogoioni (with 4 month old baby), Golapi Gogoioni (No. 2), Malati Gogoioni (with 4 year old daughter)
Balisari Gogoioni, Golapi Gogoioni (No. 1) and Labanya Gogoioni, and released on the same day. Jaha Sonowalani was arrested for the second time again on 26.2.32 with Purneswari Gogoioni, Puhita Gogoioni, Sabitri Gogoioni, Roseswari Phukanani and others. Two village women of 60 and 68 years age came from Marangi village from a distance of about 10 miles from Golaghat to picket in opium shops at Golaghat on 27.2.32. Both of them were arrested and detained in the police station. A group of men and women marched to the police station and protested against the arrest of the old women. None of the marchers was arrested and the two women were released in the evening. Two other women, e.g., Laliti and Saruti were arrested on 3 March 1932 and released on the same day. They were arrested again along with Chenehi, another woman picketer, on 6 March and all of them were later on sentenced to one month's R.I. Golapi Sonowalani (No. 2) who was arrested on 26.2.32 was jailed for 9 days' R.I. and released on 5.3.1932.

On 16 March 1932, a group of picketers, mostly women picketed in front of the Golaghat Court with Congress flags in their hands. Police tried to disperse the picketers and snatched away the flags. Rahila Patra Bora, a woman picketer used force to resist the police. Rahila was arrested along with Jahamali and another minor girl and all them were detained. Jahamali was released since she had a baby with her. Rahila Patra Bora was imprisoned for 6 months, and
she was sent to Silchar jail on 2.4.1932.  

Bidyawati Baishnav, Navami Sonowalani and Laviti Sonowalani were arrested on 19 March. Bidyawati and Navami were sentenced to two days' R.I. while Laviti was released on the same evening as she had a 7 month old baby with her. Bidyawati was arrested again on 30.3.32 and sent to Silchar jail on 2.4.32 for 6 weeks' imprisonment.  

Women picketers with babies, in some cases, took the advantage of not being imprisoned and they joined the picketing regularly. Laviti and Jahamali were two such picketers who picketed almost regularly. But the Police instead of allowing them to picket forced them to sit on isolated places during the day time and released them in the evening.  

At Dergaon, on 14 February, Funyaprova Hazarika, Fahita Hazarika, Bira-jabala Hazarika, Hemalata Dutta, Kanaklata Datta and Premalata Datta were the women picketers arrested for picketing. They were however released unconditionally on the same day.  

A young girl of Golaghat whose betrothal was about to be completed, jumped out of her ceremonial attire when she heard about other women being arrested and ran to the picketing spot and got arrested leaving her would-be-husband at the marriage venue. 'Such episodes read romance but they were nonetheless hard and settled'.  

Dariki Dasi Barua, a woman martyr of the 1932 movement in Golaghat, was arrested on 1.2.1932. At the time of
her arrest she was in the advanced stage of pregnancy of 5 months. She was sentenced to six months R.I. for violation of ordinances and was sent to Sibsagar jail. In the jail she suffered from blood dysentery in the early part of April 1932. She did not receive any medical treatment in the jail. On 25.4.1932, she had a miscarriage and was then transferred to Sibsagar jail hospital. On 26.4.1932 she died in the hospital. During the period of her ailment she was repeatedly asked by the jail authority to request for a conditional release. But she stubbornly refused to comply till the last hours of her life.85

News of Dariki's death cast a deep shadow of sorrow in Golaghat and Sibsagar. At Sibsagar a silent procession of several hundred people was taken out and it assembled in front of the hospital gate. The processionists demanded the handing over of the dead body of Dariki to them. But the jail authority refused to do so. The Police dispersed the procession and enforced prohibitory orders u/s. 144 Cr.P.C. for the day. Carrying of tricolours was also prohibited. Later, however, the dead body was handed over to the Congress volunteers and the procession was reorganized to take the dead body to the cremation ground. 18 students were arrested for violation of Sec. 144. Dariki was cremated in Sibsagar town by the Congress volunteers.86
During the period of 1932-33 police committed all kinds of atrocities on men and women in Golaghat. Sometimes arrested women were released at unearthly hours just to harass them. Sumitra Devi, who was arrested at Patia near Golaghat on 18.2.33 for discussing with the young boys of that locality to become Congress volunteers, was released in the small hours of the night.  

On 30 March 1933, the representatives of Assam were arrested at the Parbatipur Railway station on their way to the Calcutta special Congress. They were detained in the Dinajpur jail for 4 days and released on 3rd April. This group also included three old women from Golaghat, they being Pratima Sundari Devi, Dharmeswari Gogoi, and the wife of Kekai Sonowal.

During the year 1932 women's performance in the picketing programme was remarkable. Cases of Golaghat alone showed that the women, particularly the peasant girls were in the forefront of the boycott campaign. Large number of village women came out taking leave of their husbands, brothers, and sons and daughters. But such sacrifice of the Indian womanhood was ridiculed by the official propaganda machinery as a ploy on the part of the Congress leaders to save their skin in case of possible police action. It is understandable that an alien Government could not appreciate the ethos of the freedom movement.
In the year 1933 too, the women of Golaghat continued to exhibit their courage and determination. On 12 March, 1933, the 'Dandi day' was observed in many places of Assam. A big meeting with a large number of women was held at Golaghat. Although the police did not take any action in the beginning, towards the end of the meeting they used force in dispersing the meeting. In the process, they manhandled a group of women which included Malati Sonowal, Chandrawati Sonowal, Prabhawati Thengal, Bhagyaswari Gogoi, Malita Gogoi, Golapi Sonowal and Madhabi Sonowal for carrying Congress flags. The women were arrested and released on the same day.

In the district of Darrang also the participation of women, particularly from rural areas, was noteworthy. In Mangaldoi, Ratnamala Sarma and Tapaswini Sarma were arrested on 24.2.32 for picketing foreign goods shops and were sentenced to three months' R.I. Both of them were also imprisoned for 6 months in 1930 for participating in the Civil Disobedience movement. On 13.3.32, a women's procession was taken out in which large number of women of Mangaldai and nearby villages participated. Amba Devi/Golapi Sonowal and many other participants were arrested and later on released. Similar processions of women were taken out on 15.3.32 on the roads of Mangaldoi town with flags in their hands. The police dispersed the women's procession by using force.
A group of girls including Ghameswari Nath, Tarawati Nath, Himai Nath, Phuleswari Sut, Hareswari Sut, were arrested by the Police on 20.5.32 in front of the Tezpur Court for distributing handbills asking the people to participate in the movement. All except Ghameswari were released on the same day. But Ghameswari was detained in Police custody for 15 days.

On 22.5.32 a group of elderly women including Sukuli, Telei, Geli, Rangili, Mangali, Kaniki, Sumitra, Janoi, Chandika, Phaguni and Luhuri was arrested for picketing in the Bindukuri village near Tezpur. All these women were from the villages. They were made to walk five miles and were released there in the evening.

The women of the rural areas of Kamrup district also actively participated in the movement. They held meetings and organized processions in their respective areas. In 1931, the women of Rampur, about 15 miles away from Guwahati city, held their first annual conference with Nabin Chandra Bordoloi as President. About 500 women attending the meeting took a pledge to popularize Swadeshi and undertake constructive work. On 8 June 1931, a women's meeting was held at Sualkuchi village in Kamrup district at the initiative of Rajabala Das, the Secretary of Kamrup District Mahila Samiti. 25 women leaders from Gauhati went to attend the meeting. Durgaprova Bora of Gauhati presided over the meeting,
while Nalinibala Devi and Swarnalata Saikia were the main speakers. They spoke about the need for women's organization and their role in the movement. A sub-committee of the Mahila Samiti was formed with some local women of Sualkuchi for organizational work.  

In Dibrugarh, women were organized for participation in the movement by the local women. In the second week of July 1931, Chandraprova Saikiani addressed a women's meeting at Kumaranichiga of Dibrugarh. The meeting resolved to boycott foreign goods and to fight against the consumption of intoxicants. Monorama Dutta, Sadori Kakati alias Nagendra Bala Hazarika were the important women Congress workers of Dibrugarh in the 1931 movement.  

The women organization in North Lakhimpur district in 1931 functioned in both rural and urban areas. The women of Jamuguri organized a meeting on 12 May 1931 in their village prayer hall to discuss the implementation of the Congress programmes. The women assembled in the village meeting pledged to carry out the constructive programmes and to weave for themselves and also for their family members, relatives and friends and boycott foreign cloths. A group of 22 women volunteered to undertake the task of popularizing constructive work in the villages. For this purpose a permanent Women's Committee was formed with Damayantee Saikia and Nirmala Devi as President and Secretary respectively.
A Women's meeting was held at North Lakhimpur town in the third week of June 1931 under the presidentship of Ratneswari Phukanani for organizing women in North Lakhimpur to participate in the movement. Besides, her, the following is an incomplete list of participants from the area. Jugalswari Barua, Madhabilata Baruah, Hemiban Nissa, Sarifa Khatun, Ajalitara Neog, Rahina Begum, Ratnaprava Das, Ratnaprava Devi, Bimala Phukan, Khageswari Pathak, Hemalata Phukan and Snehalata Devi. 102

Another women's meeting was held in Maidamia village in North Lakhimpur on 30.6.1931 under the presidentship of Rebati Devi. The meeting was attended by a large number of village women. It resolved to popularize Swadeshi and boycott foreign goods and intoxicants. 103 Putali Dutta took the leadership of the women workers of Dhemaji, an interior village of North Lakhimpur. 104

Women in statewide campaign.

During period under review, the women of Nowgong district made notable contributions towards the cause of the country's freedom movement. They were known for massive participation, in processions, meetings and picketings whenever the call was given. Five women of Nowgong undertook extensive tours throughout the province of Assam for organization and publicity works. In the absence of transport facilities they travelled on foot to the interior-most villages to arouse amongst the people the spirit of patriotism.
and a sense of dedication in the service of the nation. Guneswari Devi, Mohini Gohain, Darbai Mech, Kiranbala Bora and Muktabala Baisnavi of Nowgong addressed meetings in the villages and towns of the Brahmaputra valley. They used to walk 10 to 20 miles a day to go from one place to another. They had to walk through paddy fields and jungles with great difficulty both in summer and winter and to places where there were no roads. Wherever they went they received warm welcome from the local village women and many accompanied them to different places. 

In a women's meeting held on 22 May 1931 at Baliaghat near Sibsagar under the presidency of Padmadhar Chaliha, Kiranbala Bora spoke about women's role in the freedom movement. She said: "women is the symbol of power. Actually man is guided by woman not woman by man".* She said that she preferred a life of a saint to that of comfort to work for arousing "the sleeping woman power" so that it could be used for the benefit of the nation. 

Another women's meeting held at Konwarpur near Sibsagar on 24 May 1931 was presided over by Kiranbala Darbai Mech and Mohini Gohain also spoke in the meeting. The speakers appealed to the women present to organize themselves and participate in the movement. 

Several meetings were held at Kalugaon near Sibsagar from 11 to 18 June 1931 to discuss the reorganization of the Congress Committees and Mahila Samitis. All these meetings were attended by Mohini
Gohain, Darbai Mech and Kironbala. In their speeches they emphasised the need for utilization of women power and popularization of spinning and weaving.108

Addressing a meeting at Chinatali village near Golaghat on 5 July 1931, these women leaders appealed to the people to devote themselves whole-heartedly in the prohibition work and in the development of cottage industries. The women in particular were asked to take up spinning and weaving as a part of their daily household work and to boycott all foreign materials. The women accordingly threw away their foreign ornaments and clothes and other items and promised to use Swadeshi. A women's committee was formed to organize village women for the movement. In a meeting held at Golaghat on 6 July 1931 Kiranbala, Mohini and Darbai addressing the women audience said that any negligence in respect of spinning and weaving and the habit of opium eating were bound to lead the people to great misery. The women were asked to take a pledge in front of the community prayer hall that they would work for the Congress and remove those social evils. 17 women enrolled their names as Congress volunteers.

Lakhipriya Baruah, Kamaleswari Duara, Swarnalata Baruah, Nagibala Handique, Labanyalata Barua, Bimala Baruah, Bhadreswari Baruah, Pratima Sundari Baruah and Amarawati Gogoi were the other local women speakers in the Golaghat meeting. 109
While the other members of the Nowgong team were addressing meetings in Sibsagar district, Guneswari and Muktabala were working in Kamrup and Nowgong districts. Guneswari Devi also attended the Jorhat National Conference held in the last week of June 1931 in which many women from the neighbouring villages of Jorhat also participated. In Kamrup and Nowgong, Guneswari and Muktabala worked with Chandraprova Saikiani. On 11 April 1932, Guneswari was arrested at her own residence at Kaliabar on the ground of propagating amongst the people the message of Congress and organizing meetings. On 19.4.32, she was sentenced to 18 months' R.I. and a fine of Rs. 100. Amalprava Das of Gauhati also undertook similar valleywide tours for organizational works.

Kiranbala Bora was arrested at Kunwaritol in Nowgong district on 16.9.1932 when she was working in a volunteer camp. She was detained in Nowgong thana. Besides Guneswari, Chandraprova, Muktabala, Kiranbala, Mohiai and Amolprova Das, women of other parts of the Brahmaputra valley undertook organization and publicity work. Among them the names of Swarnalata Baruah, Pratima Sundari Devi and Dharmeswari Gogoi of Golaghat and Sashiprova Chaliha of Jorhat are worth mentioning.

In the second phase of the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1932, there were cases of many arrests of both
men and women in the Brahmaputra valley. Altogether 672 persons were arrested in the first half of October 1932 of whom 42 i.e., 6.3% were women. The condition of the jails in which the political prisoners were kept was also miserable. No medical help was given to the ailing prisoners and the treatment meted out to them was also humiliating. Col. Ritchie, the Superintendent of Tezpur jail told the prisoners that they were brought to the jail for punishment. All 'C' class prisoners, male or female, were made to do different types of hard work like oil-pressing, rice husking and the like. The food supplied to them was practically unfit for human consumption. Women political prisoners in the Tezpur jail were subjected to humiliation. The married women were asked to put off the 'Sakhas' i.e., the bangles which were regarded as a marriage symbol by the Hindu women. When the women refused to part with their 'Sakhas' Col. Ritchie tried to take away the same by himself with the help of soap solution. But he was unsuccessful. All these women were from respectable families. At their refusal to husk paddy Col. Ritchie even kicked some of them and threatened them with severe punishment.

Kiranbala Bora was kept alone in a small cabin meant for women prisoners in the Shillong jail in 1931. A senior Jail officer frequently visited her cabin against jail rules. Kiranbala felt that the officer used to come their with some bad motives. Then she sought transfer from that
jail which was granted.\textsuperscript{114}

\textbf{Gandhi week.} In 1931, the Gandhi week was celebrated from 2 to 8 October throughout the Brahmaputra valley. The purpose of the celebration was to express love and respect for Mahatma Gandhi and to offer community prayer for his long life. The celebration of the week provided a unique opportunity for accelerating the Swadeshi movement. Women throughout the valley were very enthusiastic about the celebrations. In every village women organized women's community prayers and spinning and weaving. The programme for the week included selling of spinning wheels, ginners and other tools necessary for spinning and weaving. Women also participated in selling and purchasing of Khadi. Many of them contributed their own hand-spun yarn and cloths to the Congress fund.\textsuperscript{115}

\textbf{Communal award.} The British Prime Minister MacDonald announced the provisional scheme of minority representation in August 1932. The scheme categorised the Depressed class as a minority community and allowed them a separate electorate and proposed to create reserved constituencies for them. Gandhi opposed the scheme and asked the British Government to revise their decision and withdraw their scheme. On 18 August Gandhi communicated to the Government that he would go on fast from 20 September 1932 if the decision was not revised.\textsuperscript{116} Gandhi preferred to start and
continue his fast in the jail. People's reaction to Gandhi's decision was wonderful. It bestired the people to action. Meetings were held and hartals were observed to demand a revision of the communal award. 20 September was observed as the day of prayer and fast throughout India.117

People in Assam also expressed their discontent and rejection of the MacDonald award by holding meetings and observing hartals. Community prayers for the Mahatma's health were organized mostly by women. On 19/20 September, i.e., on the day of the commencement of Gandhi's fast, the women of Gauhati, Sibsagar, Golaghat, Barpeta, Nowgong, etc. held community prayers for the Mahatma's long life. Women belonging to all communities joined the prayers.118

At Golaghat, old women of the town and from the neighbouring villages including some Nepali women observed a day-long token fast on 20 September coinciding with the commencement of Gandhi's fast and as a protest against the MacDonald award. They appealed to the people in general to stand united to save Gandhi's life and the people belonging to the Depressed classes were particularly requested not to go in for a separate electorate.

Chandraprova Saikiani, who also belonged to the Depressed class was disturbed with the situation created by the communal award. At that time she was ailing and undergoing treatment in the Calcutta Medical College
hospital. From her sick bed she appealed to the people of the depressed classes of India to save the life of Gandhi by rejecting the MacDonald award. She requested the people not to go in for any bargaining at the cost of Gandhi's life. She called upon the depressed classes to hold meetings to reject the communal award and intimate such decisions to the British Prime Minister telegraphically saying "We do not know Ambedkar. Mahatma Gandhi is the one and only representative of the Depressed community". \(^{119}\)

The women of Sibsagar held a meeting on 25.9.32 under the presidency of Kanaklata Hazarika to oppose the scheme of communal award. The meeting felt that the scheme was opposed to democracy. The meeting also pointed out that the decision of the Government to give the women of Assam only one representative and that too from Shillong was highly discriminatory and denial by the Government of the women's due. \(^{120}\)

Mazida Tayyabulla and Swarnalata Saikia in a joint statement, on behalf of the Kamrup Mahila Samiti, opposed the Government's decision on communal representation and also for making Shillong the only reserved constituency for women. \(^{121}\)

The Communal award scheme of the Government and Gandhi's fast unto death became a cause of grave anxiety for the people of India. Ambedkar, the leader of the
Depressed classes, was in favour of separate electorate in the beginning. But considering the gravity of the situation and the differences prevailing amongst the Depressed classes efforts were made to find out a solution. At the initiative of Madan Mohan Malavyya a conference was held at Poona to find out a solution. The Depressed class leaders agreed to accept a general electorate with certain conditions, on 25 September 1932.¹²²

In the meantime the third Round Table Conference was held in London from November 17 to December 24, 1932. The results of the R.T.C. came out in the form of a White Paper in March 1933.¹²³ The White Paper, in fact, was more or less the repetition of the recommendations of the Simon Commission which were once rejected earlier by the people of India. As such, people all over India were unhappy over the White Paper.¹²⁴

The 7th Annual Conference of the Ass am Mahila Samiti held at Gauhati on 15 and 16 April 1933, attended by the representatives of the Brahmaputra valley, resolved to oppose the White Paper. The Conference demanded 5 seats for women in the Assam Legislature. In one of the resolutions the Conference proposed to extend support to the Anti-Untouchability Bill, Temple Entry Bill and also to work for the implementation of these Bills.
Harijan issue. Gandhi broke his fast on 26 September 1932 after the Poona agreement was reached. Consequent to the Poona agreement the attention of the movement was diverted to the Harijan issue all over India and the people gave their full support to it. Although 'Purna Swaraj' headed the list of priority in the freedom movement, the Harijan issue gained prominence in the Civil Disobedience programmes undertaken in 1932-33. Gandhiji went on with his campaign against untouchability from inside the jail.

Throughout the country, the week from 27 September to 2 October 1932 was observed as 'Untouchability Abolition Week'.

In Assam both men and women observed the week by holding meetings and keeping temple doors open for all.
Ratnamala Devi explained before the public the meaning and necessity of abolishing untouchability. Similar meetings and prayers were held in other places of Assam.\textsuperscript{128} Untouchability, as such, was not a major problem in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam, because, the village prayer halls or \textit{Namqhars} \textsuperscript{128} in Assam, established under the influence of Sankardeva's Vaishnavism were open for all. Besides this, there was no humiliating status for the people of the Depressed class (as defined by the Government) in joining the prayers or other religious functions organized by the high caste Hindus. However, in some temples belonging to the orthodox Hindus, the so-called 'low caste people' such as Banias, Kaibarttas, Namasudras, etc., had limited access to them. But when the Harijan issue gained momentum throughout India, its wave had also touched the towns and villages of Assam.\textsuperscript{129}

Mahatma Gandhi, still in Yarvada jail, started his 21-days fast for self-purification on 8 May 1933. The Government considering the second fast of Gandhi as 'without any political bearing' released him on the same day. From the following day of Mahatma's release the C.D. Movement was suspended for six weeks. The Government, however, declined to accept Gandhi's suggestion to release all the civil resisters from prison unless the movement was unconditionally called off. Then Gandhi decided to under-
take a programme of individual Civil Disobedience. Congressmen throughout the country followed his example of offering individual satyagraha from August 1933 to March 1934.

Gandhi was again arrested along with Kasturba and others on 1 August 1933 and sentenced to one year's imprisonment. Gandhi's request for some facilities in the jail was refused by the jail authority and as a result on 16 August 1933 he declared his intention to go on fast unto death. \(^{130}\) The Government had to release Gandhi in view of the rapid deterioration of his health. Gandhi felt embarrassed at the premature release and decided not to resume political activity till 3 August 1934. He preferred to devote this period for the upliftment of the Harijans. With this purpose he proposed to tour the different provinces of the country. \(^{131}\)

Gandhiji gave two weeks time for his Harijan tour in Assam which commenced from 10 April 1934. He visited all the important towns and villages and tea garden labour centres of Assam. \(^{132}\) In all places Gandhi was given a hearty welcome. Women in their hundreds and thousands came to see the Mahatma and attended meetings addressed by him. The Women of Dhubri, Golaghat, Gauhati, Jorhat, Dibrugarh and Barpeta welcomed the Mahatma with their Abhinandan patras (welcome addresses) pledging their commitment to his ideals. \(^{133}\)
Gandhiji attended the first meeting in Assam on Harijan issue on 11 April 1934 at Rupsi in Goalpara district. Collection of fund for Harijan Welfare was one of the purposes of his tour. The people of Assam donated generously to this fund. The women of Assam used to wear minimum quantity of jewellery; but even then, whatever they could they donated to the fund. Gandhi's collection in the districts of the Brahmaputra valley amounted to Rs. 19000 in cash and about Rs. 2000 worth of jewellery.

The collection of funds in the women's meetings was very encouraging. At Barpeta, a women's meeting was held in the evening on 11 April 1934. In that meeting an amount of Rs. 101 and some ornaments were collected from the women and handed over to Gandhi. Addressing a women's meeting at Jorhat on 18 April the Mahatma asked the women to donate liberally to the Harijan fund and give up the sense of differences between high and low castes and to teach the harijans about cleanliness and hygiene.

Gandhiji saw "a special untouchable in Assam. That was opium." He said "if the opium habit was not given up, it would extinguish the Assamese." In every meeting he asked the people in general to eradicate the habit of opium eating and the women, in particular, to earnestly devote their activities for this cause.
Harijan work in Goalghat subdivision achieved a remarkable progress during a very short time. 23 Harijan schools were opened in the subdivision. On the occasion of Gandhi's visit to Galaghat on 15 April 1934, a public prayer was organized in the premises of Rajendranath Barua's residence. People belonging to all castes and communities and the students of the Harijan schools also joined in the prayer. Soaked grams and fruits were distributed amongst the people attending the meeting. Gandhiji was very much pleased to see such progress in Harijan work in a small place like Galaghat. He admitted that he would not have believed that unless he had seen it with his own eyes. But what delighted Gandhiji more at Galaghat was the scene of 300 women spinning silently at the same time. The spinning exhibition was organized by Swarnalata Baruah of Galaghat.

During his stay at Jorhat the Mahatma opened the private temple belonging to Krishnanath Sarma, a Congress leader, for the Harijans. Sarma's mother, Giribala Devi, an orthodox Brahmin widow who was the real 'boss' of the family, approved of the programme and was herself present at the ceremony. Sarma's wife Swarnalata Devi also worked wholeheartedly in organizing the function. On 1 May 1934, prayers open to all were held in their prayer hall. In addition to some high caste Hindus and Congress leaders, Kaibarttas, Banias and Harijans of the neighbouring •
villages joined the prayers. No one in Jorhat could prevent the Sarma family to hold the prayers at their premises. But afterwards they were excommunicated for several years by the conservative section of the Hindus. It was very difficult, particularly for a housewife to remain excommunicated. But Swarnalata (popularly known as 'Mami') showed great courage and boldness in serving the cause for upliftment of the Harijans and she never felt unhappy over it. Rather she told the Congress volunteers "I feel stronger with you". She was so devoted to the Harijan work that later people used to call her as the "Kasturba of Assam".

Gandhiji also addressed women's meetings at Tezpur and Dibrugarh and other towns. In Tezpur he was very much impressed with the Khadi work and visited the 'Sipini Bhoral' i.e., the weavers' centre where he unveiled the portrait of Kiranmayee Agarwalla, a woman leader of Tezpur. Towards the conclusion of his tour of the Brahmaputra valley, in a meeting addressed at Dergaon in Sibsagar district Gandhi highly praised the generosity of Assamese women in donating to the Harijan Fund and the dedication of women for the cause of the movement.

In the Harijan programme in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam Swarnalata Devi, Swarnalata Barua, Annada Devi Borkotoky of Sibsagar district were some of the important women workers.
The Harijan programme gained so much importance during 1933-34 that other major items of the political programme lost their significance. At the national level the political enthusiasm to continue the Civil Disobedience movement had virtually waned. Consequently, the suspension of the movement was formally announced on 20 May 1934 by the Indian National Congress. 146

The Harijan programmes in Assam were no doubt very successful. It is worth mentioning here that two years before the Mahatma's Harijan tour of Assam, untouchability as a social evil was felt by the people of Assam including those belonging to highly orthodox families of the Satradhikars, i.e., religious heads. Women appeared to have taken more interest in this regard. Uttama Sundari Bidyabharati Devi, wife of Padmachandra Sarma of Kulbil Satra near Nalbari opened a 'Hindu Dharma Mahamandapa' for all Hindus to pray irrespective of their caste and class. In the last week of August 1932, a meeting was held at Kulbil. Uttama Sundari explained to the gathering how untouchability was a crime and that all Hindus belonged to one fold only. 147 In similar meetings at Mongoldoi held on 29 September 1932, Ratnamala Devi, a local women leader, appealed to the people to give up the concept of untouchability. She explained to them the hollowness of this concept. 148 In Mahura village in Golaghat subdivision in a m
in a meeting held on 17 July 1932, Mohini Rajkumari, a woman of an Ahom royal family, emphasised the need for abolition of untouchability from the society. Thus, in Assam, particularly in the Brahmaputra valley, the foundation for an anti-untouchability movement was laid before Gandhi came to launch a regular campaign.

**Popularization of Hindi.** Unity and integrity among the people of India belonging to different castes and communities was considered as the primary condition for the success of the freedom movement. By unity Gandhi meant that every Indian should "feel his identity with every one of the millions of the inhabitants of Hindustan". It was the linguistic unity that could forge the desired national unity. Gandhiji said- "For all-India intercourse we need, from Among the Indian stock, a language which the largest number of people already know and understand and which the other can easily pick up. This language is indisputably Hindi". A resolution was passed in the Cawnpore session of Congress in 1925 to make Hindi the Rashtra Bhasa (the national language). But the Congressmen who should have taken steps for implementation of the resolution appeared to be indifferent in that regard. In 1934, the issue of 'a national language' was reopened.
In Assam, the Congressmen took interest in popularizing of Hindi as Rashtrabhasa. Women of Assam were also very enthusiastic about it. The Asam Mahila Samiti had undertaken the task of popularizing Hindi in Assam. Raghaba Das, member of the Hindi Sahitya Sammilani, who accompanied Gandhi in his Assam tour in 1934 visited the Rashtrabhasa wing of the Asam Mahila Samiti and discussed with its members the measures to be taken for rapid implementation of the programme. In the course of the discussion with Raghaba Das, the women members informed the former about their decision to open a Hindi school and requested him for a grant of an amount to pay regularly the salary of the Hindi teacher. On 13.4.34, the members of the Mahila Samiti also met Gandhi at Gauhati and had a discussion with him about the Hindi teaching programme.

Durgaprova Bora, the Secretary of the Mahila Samiti, had direct correspondence with Mahatma Gandhi in this regard. Gandhi, in his letter to Durgaprova asked her to take urgent steps in popularizing Hindi and expressed the hope that as there was very little difference between Hindi and Assamese, the task could be accomplished without much difficulty if the women of Assam work for the cause.151
In March 1935, the 7-day Assam National Conference was held at Dhekiakhowa, near Jorhat. On the fifth day of the session, the Assam Hindi Prachar Sanmilani was held under the presidency of the Satradhikar of Garamur satra. On the sixth day, a women's conference was held under the presidency of Annada Devi Borkotoky. Amrit Kaur was also present in that meeting. In this meeting, popularization of Hindi was an important item for discussion.
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* Joymati was the wife of Gadadhar Singha (1681-1696). She died as a result of inhumane atrocities she suffered in the hands of the men of Sulikpha, the Lora Roja(Boy King). In order to remove all possible rivals, the Lora Roja maimed or killed several hundred of Scions of the Ahom royal family. Failing to catch his most formidable rival, Godadhar Singha along with his two minor sons, the King got hold of his wife Joymati and subjected her to indescribable inhumane torture. Joymati preferred to die in the midst of punishment than to reveal her husband whereabouts. Joymati is remembered as a symbol of sacrifice and tolerance in the Assamese Society.

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135. Asomiya, 12.4.34.
137. Asomiya, 21.4.34.
138. Ibid. 26.5.34.
140. Asomiya, 28.4.34; 5.5.34 and 26.5.34.
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149. Ibid. 12.8.32.
151. Asomiya, 26.5.34.
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