Chapter VI.

THE LAST PHASE: 1940-1947

The year 1939 led the world to a state of tension, chaos and confusion. With Germany's invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939, the world powers were gradually involved in the Second World War. By the end of 1941, Germany, Italy and Japan formed the Axis power to fight against the Allies (Britain and France). England declared war on Germany on 3 September 1939. India, as a part of the British empire, was dragged to the war without the consent of her people.

The Indian political sky, at that time, was covered with clouds of disputes and dissensions. The political parties were suffering from mutual distrust and misunderstanding. And, as such, they failed to provide a common platform to work for the greater interest of the nation. Communal and other petty interests dominated the political activities of the parties like the Muslim League, the Hindu Mahasabha and some others. The Muslim League, the Hindu Mahasabha, the National Liberal Federation and the rulers of the Indian states extended support to the British in their war efforts.
The Indian National Congress could not initially take a united stand on the attitude to be taken towards an imperialist war and for that matter, British war efforts. There emerged two groups within the Congress, one led by Gandhi and the other by Subhas Chandra Bose, holding diametrically opposite views on this issue. Gandhi and Nehru were sympathetic towards Britain in her troubled hours. They were not in favour of taking advantage on Britain's difficulties, while the Forward Bloc led by Subhas Chandra Bose, insisted on effective non-cooperation as decided by the 1927 Congress.

The Congress Working Committee (C.W.C) in its meeting of 15 September 1939 did not find itself in agreement with the views of Gandhi and Nehru and protested against Britain's action in dragging India to the British imperialistic war and refused to contribute to her war efforts unless India was declared an independant nation. "India cannot associate herself with a war said to be for democratic freedom, when that very freedom is denied to her".¹

The British Government instead of showing any interest in conceding the demands of the A.I.C.C. for the independence of India, reiterated, through the Viceregal statement of Lord Linlithgow of 17 October 1939, that its policy towards India was to grant her
the status of a Dominion only. Considering the Viceroy's statement as "an unequivocal reiteration of the old imperialist policy" the C.W.C. reaffirmed its stand to non-cooperate with the British.

Gandhi also found the Viceregal declaration "profoundly disappointing". "The Congress will be no party to it, nor can the India of Congress conception be a partner with Britain in her war with Herr Hitler". In reply to the criticism levelled against him for going back upon his assurance to give unconditional support to British war efforts, by the Anglo-Indian and British journals, Gandhi said, "Our independence is not to depend upon the British or any one else's mercy. It will come when the people are ready for it". He made it clear to the press that he never meant "India's support to the allies should be at the expense of her own freedom". He also reminded the Britishers that the Congress, according to its constitution was a non-violent body, hence it could supply neither soldiers nor money.²

The C.W.C. appealed to the people in general to give up all differences and called upon Congressmen to get prepared for all eventualities. The Congress Ministries in eight provinces were asked to resign. Accordingly, all the Congress ministries resigned including the Assam ministry, between 27 October and 15 November
The Congress demanded a clear policy of the British Government in favour of India's independence and appointment of a Constituent Assembly consisting of Indian members on the ground that Indian problems could only be solved by the Indians themselves.

Sir Samuel Hoare, the Secretary of State for India and Lord Linlithgow, Viceroy, made futile attempts to win over the Congress leaders. On 8 August 1940, the Viceroy proposed an immediate expansion of the Governor General's Executive Council and the appointment of a War Advisory Council. The demand to form the Constituent Assembly to frame the Indian Constitution would also be fulfilled on condition that it would meet only after the War was over. The proposal appeared to be motivated to sidetrack the main issue and so it failed to satisfy the leaders of the Congress.

The Forward Bloc, led by Subhas Chandra Bose, in the meantime, started propagating against India's cooperation in the War. It expressed its displeasure on the compromising attitude of the other group and wanted to commence a nationwide struggle for independence immediately. Meetings and demonstrations were held for focussing public attention on this issue. With the launching of the Civil Disobedience Movement, the Forward Bloc leaders were arrested and put in jails.
Subhas Chandra Bose appealed to Gandhi in June 1940 to launch his campaign of passive resistance. The A.I.C.C. in its annual session held at Ramgarh on 20 March 1940 resolved "nothing short of complete independence can be accepted by the people of India" and that the Civil Disobedience movement would be launched at an appropriate time. 4

Gandhi, who was reluctant at the beginning to launch the campaign of passive resistance changed his mind and, decided on 30 September 1940 to begin the same, calling upon the people "to refrain from assisting the British war efforts". 5

Gandhi began his programme of individual Satyagraha with Vinoba Bhave as the opening Satyagrahi on 17 October 1940, at Paunar, a village near Wardha. Satyagrahis were asked to go out to the street, shout anti-war slogans, hold street meetings and court arrest.

The individual Satyagraha programme was carried out in three phases. In the first phase commencing on 17 October 1940 only a few selected persons like Vinoba Bhave, Jawaharlal Nehru and Brahmadatta Nirmal were allowed to offer Satyagraha. For the second phase commencing from 17 November 1940, Satyagrahis were selected from amongst the prominent Congress leaders and legislators. The third phase commenced on 5 January 1941. Any person
holding primary membership of the Congress could offer Satyagraha in this phase. By the end of the month of January 1941 more than 20,000 satyagrahis were convicted all over India.\(^6\)

As per C.W.C's instruction the Assam Congress coalition ministry headed by Gopinath Bordoloi resigned on 15 November 1939. The reason for the delay in taking decision by the A.P.C.C. in this regard was that the Assam Congress was in a predicament at that time. The Muslim League under Saadullah's leadership was engaged in plans to make Assam a Muslim majority province and in that way to include her in the proposed state of Pakistan.\(^7\) It was assumed that in the event of Bordoloi Ministry's resignation Saadullah would surely form the ministry and adopt policies promoting the League's line. So there was a difference of opinion amongst the A.P.C.C. members. Even Subhas Chandra Bose and Mahatma Gandhi were aware of this problem. Considering Assam's case as an exceptional one, Gandhi said that Assam should not come out if it did not feel like that. Thus the matter was left to the discretion of the A.P.C.C.\(^8\) However, following the A.P.C.C.'s decision taken at its session at Sibsagar, the Assam Congress Coalition Ministry resigned on 15 November. With the acceptance of the resignation of the Bordoloi Ministry by the Governor
on 17 November 1939, the second Saadullah ministry was formed on the same day.

The AICC instructed its branches at all levels to celebrate the Independence Day of 1940 in a more impressive manner. Accordingly, the day was celebrated throughout the province and the people in their thousands, both male and female, gathered and participated in it. At Gauhati a procession was organized in which a large number of students, both boys and girls, participated. A good number of women, with tricolours in their hands, also participated. At Tezpur, not less than eight thousand people thronged in the central field. The number of women in this crowd was estimated to be more than one thousand. The Congress volunteers under the Becheria Primary Congress Committee led a procession to Tezpur town with about 300 women in it. All the way from Becheria to Tezpur, the women went on singing 'Swaraj Sangeet'. The women of Saikia Chuburi, a neighbourhood of Tezpur, organized on 'Spinning procession'. The procession, of about 200 women, came with everyone of them carrying spinning wheels in their hands and all spinning while moving.

At Golaghat the National Flag was hoisted by Lakhipriya Baruani. In the celebration of the Independence Day of 1940, women played a significant role throughout the province.
The Gauhati District National Conference was held on 11 and 12 February 1940 at Sanapara near Gauhati. The Conference was presided over by Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed and attended by more than 10,000 people of whom, at least, one-fifth were women. Amongst the speakers, Hemaprava Das, Girijabala Baruah and Bhanumati Bai, the important women speakers, appealed to the people to undertake constructive works and fight against opium and other intoxicants. The Conference declared "no one else other than the Indians have the right to frame the constitution of India". It demanded that the power to frame the constitution should be given to a democratically constituted Gana Parishad (the Constituent Assembly). 10

The participation of the women in the freedom movement was increasing day by day, more particularly after 1930. This fact was recognized by the APCC Report for 1932. Hence, by 1940, the necessity for opening a women's wing in the Congress to enable them to participate more effectively in the movement was felt by many leaders. Vijayalaxmi Pandit, Aruna Asaf Ali, Mridula Sarabhai and Sucheta Kriplani took the leadership in opening a Women's wing of the Congress, which, they thought, would lead to better organized cooperation of the womenfolk. 11
Mridula Sarabhai in her letter to the AICC of 12 February 1940, with a note from Vijayalaxmi Pandit, wrote - "In recent years women in greater number are taking interest in Congress activities and their number is ever increasing. Yet due to lack of co-ordination and also due to their having no experience in public life, women find it difficult to continue their active interest in the work of the Congress and so it is suggested that like the many other departments in the A.I.C. C., there should be a Women's Department". A scheme for the Women's Department with its aims, objects and method of work was also submitted to the AICC.¹²

The AICC accepted the suggestion and accordingly the C.W.C., in its special sitting held at Wardha on 15 April 1940, decided to open a women's wing to be known as Women's Department, as an integral part of the A.I. C.C.¹³ This department would be governed by the same rules and regulations regarding discipline, supervision, expenses etc., like other departments under the AICC.¹⁴

The object of the Department was to bring in more women into the Congress fold and the expansion of Congress activities in general. It aimed at popularising political as well as constructive programmes amongst women. Although some Congress women, both at the central as well as at other levels, were working for the
Congress yet they faced certain constraints with regard to organizational activities. The proposed opening of the women's departments in the centre and the provinces was supposed to remove such difficulties.

The work of the women's departments under the P.C.C.s were divided into two parts, i.e., (1) training of workers and (2) general work among women. For the effective implementation of the work of the departments, it was found necessary to have a body of trained workers. Very often it was found that women workers, in general, who were already in the field and were giving considerable time to Congress activities failed to make their work effective because of lack of training. It was, therefore, necessary to give these women facilities to improve their general and political education so that they might take a better and more active part in the Congress work. As constructive and reformatory works were important items in the Congress programme, the workers should receive adequate training in these areas also. For that purpose women's clubs and training classes were proposed to be opened at convenient places. A detailed syllabus for training of women Congress workers was also prepared.
Women Congress Workers of Assam welcomed this decision and took interest in the scheme of opening of women's department under the PCC. In fact, a group of 23 Women Congress workers sent a proposal to Rajendra Prasad as far back as 25 February 1940, to open a Women's Department under the AICC, which they thought would conduce to better organisational work by the women workers of the Congress.

On 17 June 1940, women Congress workers of Gauhati held a meeting in the premises of the Gauhati Spinners Association to discuss the organization of a women's department under the APCC. Soon thereafter, the APCC had opened a women's department and entrusted the task of organization to three women leaders, viz., Amalprava Das, Puspalata Saikia and Girijabala Barooah.

The Women's Department of the APCC was constituted on 19 September 1940 with Puspalata Saikia and Amalprava Das as its joint secretaries. Soon after its formation both of them toured the different districts of the province and addressed a large number of women meetings, particularly in the rural areas. They explained, in the meetings, the message of the Congress and the aims and objects of the Women's Department (W.D.) and appealed to the women to carry out the constructive programmes with greater devotion. The response received by the two
leaders from the village women was very encouraging.

Towards the end of 1940, when the Satyagraha movement began, many women workers of the W.D. joined the movement and courted arrest and imprisonment which affected the organization of the Department. But after the suspension of the Satyagraha, the Central Committee of the provincial W.D. undertook another tour of the province in 1941 to collect funds for opening a training centre for women workers under the department. The aim was to train a few women workers on the promotion of the constructive programmes in the training centre and then entrust them to take over the responsibility of pushing forward the programmes in the villages of their respective districts. However, the situation changed again due to the War situation and the W.D. had to work in complete cooperation with the PCC without any independent programmes.

During the second half of 1941 and in 1942, the Women's Department of the APCC worked for promotion of spinning and weaving, rendering of help to war evacuees and similar other works. The Department could not raise a volunteer corps of its own as it envisaged.\(^{19}\) The Congress Women workers of Assam rendered great help to the panic-striken people, particularly the women. They held meetings in those places and distributed periodicals.
In Upper Assam, Annaprava Barua and Subhalata Datta worked extensively by opening a strong organization under the Women's Department. After the Ramgarh decision to launch a Civil Disobedience Movement 'at an appropriate time' was taken, the process of preparation for the Satyagraha had begun. As a first step in this direction, Assam celebrated the National Week from 6 to 13 April 1940, along with the other parts of India. In accordance with the C.W.C. decision of 16 April 1940, as desired by Gandhi, the A.P.C.C. converted itself into a Satyagraha Committee and the District C.C.s. of the valley also followed the example. The APCC leaders also called upon the people of Assam, belonging to all sections, to get ready to offer Satyagraha.

For the first phase of Satyagraha started from 17 October 1940, only a few leaders were selected to join it. None from Assam was selected to join this phase. But, in the second phase of Satyagraha starting from 17 November, termed by Gandhiji as representative Satyagraha, the important national and provincial Congress leaders, C.W.C. members and the Congress legislators were selected to participate. The APCC prepared its list of 26 Satyagrahis and Gopinath Bordoloi went to Wardha to get it approved by Gandhiji. But Gandhi, at
first, advised that Assam leaders should give more importance in doing their legislative duties in order to check the activities of the Saadullah Ministry which might be detrimental to the interests of Assam. But at the insistence of Bordoloi, he approved the names of 22 persons out of 26 in the list, to offer Satyagraha in different places of Assam. Accordingly, this Satyagraha was launched in Assam on 11 December 1940 and continued till the programme was suspended by Gandhi on 23 December 1940. Gopinath Bordoloi, Bishnuram Medhi, Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, Gaurikanta Jalukdar, Siddhinath Sarma, Beliram Das were some of the important Satyagrahis. All the 22 Satyagrahis offered Satyagraha by shouting anti-War slogans in front of Government offices and all of them were arrested, imprisoned and fined.24

In the first and second phases of Individual Satyagraha women of Assam could not take part since there was no approved scheme for them to become Satyagrahis. The first one was highly selective while in the second phase only legislators were selected by the APCC.

The third phase of Satyagraha was scheduled to be started from 5 January 1941.25 This satyagraha was open to all the 4-anna, i.e., the primary members of the Congress in addition to the other leaders. Accordingly a list of 783 Satyagrahis was prepared by the APCC and taken
to Gandhiji by Tayyebulla for approval.\textsuperscript{26} Gandhiji approved the names of 757 Satyagrahis which included twentytwo women.\textsuperscript{27}

Gandhiji had prescribed certain norms to be fulfilled by the Satyagrahis. With regard to women, Gandhi instructed, on 31 December 1940 at Bombay, that no women with babies of 18 months of age and below, should participate in the Satyagraha.\textsuperscript{28}

The Government of Assam proposed to adopt all possible measures to discredit the Satyagraha movement. As a measure to do so the Chief Secretary, Dennehy instructed all the Deputy Commissioners of the province to refrain from arresting the Satyagrahis and thereby deprive them of the honour. Specific instructions were issued not to send women Satyagrahis to prison and to ignore their participation. This was an attempt to keep the number of Satyagrahis low in Government records.\textsuperscript{29}

Swarnalata Barua and Haripriya Datta of Golaghat were the first two women of the Brahmaputra valley to court arrest and undergo imprisonment for offering Satyagraha in 1941.\textsuperscript{30} Both of them offered Satyagraha on 8.1.1941 in front of the Golaghat Court.\textsuperscript{31} They were arrested and sentenced to one month's R.I. and released on 7.2.41.\textsuperscript{32} Pandupriya Devi of Goalpara was the first women Satyagrahi from the Goalpara District. She offered
Satyagraha on 18 January 1941. After shouting anti-War slogans for about 2 hours she led a procession to the Congress office in the evening. She was not arrested. Premalata Bharali of Jorhat announced her intention to offer Satyagraha on 17 January 1941. But before she could come out of her house, she was arrested and imprisoned for one day. After Premalata Bharali's arrest, 3 more women were arrested on the same day for offering Satyagraha. One of them was Sudhalata Saikia. A big crowd assembled in front of the Court to felicitate her. Devajani Baruah and Aideubala Barua offered Satyagraha at Teok Duliagaon and Bharaluagaon respectively. People hailed their arrests and felicitated them. They were convicted under DIR for one day. On 19 March 1941, Devajani Baruah offered Satyagraha for the second time and she was arrested and released on the same day.

Patali Sonowalani offered Satyagraha at Rajabahar in Jorhat and she was arrested and jailed for one day. On 28 January, Madhabi Sonowalani offered Satyagraha at Golaghat. On 6 March she offered Satyagraha for the second time and she was arrested and imprisoned for one day. Dobhagi Devi offered Satyagraha at Mongoldoi on 28 January. She was arrested at Menapara and taken to Routa Police Station and was released there on the same evening. In the month of January 1941, 17 women
offered Satyagraha in Assam of whom 7 were convicted, 7 were arrested and released on the same day and 3 were not arrested at all. 38

Dobhagi Devi of Mongoldoi offered Satyagraha again from 14 March 1941 to 19 March at Arang, Bezpara, Alagzari and Jaljali. Although she gave prior notice to the district authority, she was not arrested. Premeswari Devi who also offered Satyagraha for the second time, from 15 to 20 March at Dhula, Majgaon, Bezpara, Mogolbera and Gariapara was not arrested. 39

Seventytwo-year old Sundari Barkakatai of Charing, a 1921 Congress worker, offered Satyagraha on 5 February 1941. She was the first woman Satyagrahi from the Sibsagar sub-division. She was arrested at Charing and taken to the Amguri police station, about 14 kilometres from Charing, and let off there by police. 40 In places like Teok, Charigaon, Amguri, Khari-katia and other villages of Sibsagar district women offered Satyagraha in a very disciplined and organized way. 41

Amalprava Das offered Satyagraha on 19 February at Salmara and at Amtala on 1 March 1941. She was not arrested on these two occasions but she was arrested at Gauhati on March 4 and tried on 7 March 1941. She was sentenced to six weeks' S.I. and a fine of Rs. 25. She
was transferred to the Jorhat Jail and from that jail she was released on 17 April. After her release Amalprava Das again took herself to organizational work. She and Puspalata Das (former surname Saikia) attended on 4 August 1941, a public meeting held at Itakhola of Charigaon near Jorhat. The object of the meeting was to open a Satyagrahi camp there, with provision for residential accommodation, for training the Satyagrahis to propagate the Congress ideas amongst the people. Both Amalprava Das and Puspalata Das explained the necessity of the Satyagrahi camp and asked the people to join the freedom movement in greater number. On 7 August they attended one women meeting at Noapara held under the auspices of the local Mahila Samiti. They asked the women to be more organized and active than before in the matter of participation in the movement.

Puspalata Das offered Satyagraha on 20 February at Heremdoi near Palasbari, at Kukurmara on 21 February, at Boko on 22 February and at Gauhati on 23 and 25 February 1941. She was not arrested while offering Satyagraha on the above dates, but was arrested from her home on 28 February and was released on 21 March 1941.

Kusum Kumari Deka of Tihu, who also participated in the 1930 movement, offered Satyagraha on 21 February and 31 March 1941, at Tihu and Haridanga respectively.
She was not arrested. Guneswari Devi, one of the most active women freedom fighters of Nowgong, was not allowed by Gandhiji to offer Satyagraha due to her poor health.

II

The preparation for Satyagraha began in Assam in April 1940, i.e., soon after the Ramgarh decision. The APCC and the DCCs of Assam started enrolling Satyagrahis from the third week of April 1940. A list of 1576 Satyagrahis was made ready by the middle of June 1940. In an incomplete list published in the As-amiya by Deva Kanta Baruah, Assistant Secretary of the APCC, the number of women Satyagrahis was 15, till 15 June 1940.

In order to launch the Satyagraha more effectively and in an organized way, training camps were held at Hajo Nakachari, Goalpara, Barpeta, Gauhati, Tezpur, Jorhat, Sibsagar, Golaghat and Mongoldoi. All these camps trained the Satyagrahis in the method of Satyagraha. A large number of women also participated there.

The Sibsagar District Satyagraha Committee decided to form a group of 500 Satyagrahis with a separate wing for women and it established five training centres.
women's wing was opened in the first week of June 1940.\footnote{50}

A large number of women joined as Satyagrahis by signing the 'Satyagraha pledge'. In the first week of June 1940, Nanibala Das (Goalpara), Subhadra Devi (Barpeta), Bobhagi Devi (Mongoldoi), Promeswari Devi (Mongoldoi) signed the pledges of Satyagraha.\footnote{51} Jayadabala Duara of Dibrugarh signed the pledge in the first week of July 1940.\footnote{52} In the third week of July, 12 women of Charing enrolled themselves as active Congress volunteers and signed the Satyagraha pledge. They were Sundaribala Kakati, Bhadreswari Gogoi, Maniki Hazarika, Hiranya Bhuyan, Madhabilata Phukan, Hiranyaprava Phukan, Subarnalata Kakati, Makhanlata Kakati, Sadarilata Kakati, Kusum Gogoi, Ketekilata Hazarika and Jogeswari Kakati. In Sibsagar also 25 women enrolled as Satyagrahis.\footnote{53}

At Golaghat the women Satyagrahis did a lot of work for collection of Satyagraha fund and enrolment of volunteers. Jogoprava Devi and Swarnalata Barua, two leading women Satyagrahis, visited a large number of villages to collect money for the fund. The village women's response to the programme was very encouraging.\footnote{54}

In a Satyagrahi Sangha (club) meeting held at Dhekial near Golaghat town on 19 December 1940, under the presidentship of Sankar Chandra Baruah, a leading
freedom fighter, 7 male and 7 female Satyagrahis were selected. The list of women Satyagrahis included the names of Lokeswari Bora, Premalata Hazarika, Maheswari Devi, Deveswari Devi, Someswari Bora, Sumthira Bora and also Jogoprava Devi. A Satyagrahi training camp was also functioning at Dhekial and a number of women Satyagrahis were undergoing training.

At Mongoldoi, 83 women became members of the Congress during the year 1940. Altogether 23 persons took training in the Satyagraha camp there. Of them 4 were women.

In Barpeta, 3759 persons enrolled themselves as primary Congress members under the District Congress Committee, of whom 159 were women. Under the Barpeta D.C.C. 569 persons including 36 women enrolled themselves as Satyagrahis till the last week of November 1940. In a village named Baharigaon near Barpeta, 35 out of 42 Satyagrahis were women. This village could claim the highest position in Assam in respect of percentage of women Satyagrahis. The women Satyagrahis were Urmila Pathak, Radhapriya Rai, Darshanpriya Das, Soneswari Das, Maichana Rai, Podopriya Pathak, Pramila Das, Sobhepriya Pathak, Daibaki Patowary, Praneswary Thakuria, Kameswari Das, Rukmini Das, Uttarpriya Medhi, Uropriya Pathak, Mahimapriya Talukdar, Padmawati
By the end of 1940, the total number of Satyagrahis from Guwahati, Goalpara, Mongoldoi, Dibrugarh, Jorhat, Tezpur, Sibsagar, Goalghat and Nowgong rose to 33,082 including 1,192 women Satyagrahis among them.60

In the year 1940, the women organizers of Assam made extensive tours throughout the Brahmaputra valley to popularise among women, the programme of Satyagraha and to explain to them its significance and effectiveness and also to encourage them to undertake constructive works in a more planned and effective way. It was partly a programme of the Women's Department also.

Dobhagi Devi and Premeswari Devi of Mongoldoi attended the meetings organized by the Congress workers in the interior villages of Mongoldoi and Nalbari. In her presidential speech at Baraboi village of Mongoldoi on 30 May 1940, Dobhagi Devi spoke about the purpose of Satyagraha movement and the situation prevailing in the country as a result of the war. The women assembled in the meeting volunteered to dome out to work for the movement and to take the responsibility of raising fund for
the management of the Satyagraha camps. In another meeting held at a village near Nalbari, the women pledged to remove the habit of cigarette smoking in their village. Dobhagi Devi and Premeswari Devi did organizational work in the villages like Bengbari, Japrabari, Ghagra, Harisinga, Futukibari, Soibari, Patiamari, Bhalukbari, Gelabil, Fuhurabari, etc. near Mongoldoi. They spoke in the meetings held in the villages to propagate Congress policies. In every village they gave demonstration of spinning amongst village women.

A big women's meeting attended by about six thousand women was held at Rampur, in Kamrup district on 27 June 1940. Amalprava Das presided over this meeting. Important Congress leaders like Kuladhar Chaliha, Pishnuram Medhi, Dr. Bhubaneswar Barua, Md. Tayyebullah, Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, Liladhar Baruah, Lakhidhar Borah, Radhikaram Das and a few other leaders who attended the meeting spoke very highly about the enthusiasm of the women of Rampur. Prafullabala Choudhurani, Padmawati Kazumdar and Abhayawati Das took the leadership in organizing this meeting. Puspalata Das, who attended this meeting, also reminded the women of Assam, in general, about their duties under the prevailing situation. The President appealed to all the women of the meeting to become Congress members without any delay.
The Charing Women's meeting held on 23 July 1940 in the Premises of Charing Satyagrahi camp was attended by about 200 women of the villages. Many Congress leaders, workers and Satyagrahis were present in the meeting. Besides discussing the duty of the women, in general, and the women volunteers, in particular, the meeting resolved to request the Government to make spinning a compulsory subject in the girls' schools. Similar resolutions were also taken in the Charigaon women's conference held on 28 July 1940, under the presidency of Sudhalata Saikia. The Bahana Sipini Sangha (weavers' association) was established on the same day at the initiative of the local women viz. Swarnalata Devi, Rukuni Baruah, Kamaleswari Datta, Tilaka Baruah, Subarnalata Debi, Suwagi Hazarika, Prinda Bordoloi, Hemlata Devi, Dhanada Baruah and Liliful Devi as members of the association. The women's meeting held at Duliagaon near Jorhat, in October 1940, appealed to the women of the village to extend all cooperation to the Congress. It also resolved to fight illiteracy among women and requested all women above the age of 18 years to join the Congress.

In Dekapara village of Kamrup district, the women formed the primary women Congress Committee at their own initiative on 25 October 1940. A big women's meeting was
held for this purpose under the presidency of Girijabala Barua, the Organizing Secretary of the Assam Women's Congress Department. Many women of Dekapsna and Baihata became Congress members by paying 4 annas each.* Forty women being unable to pay in cash enrolled themselves as Congress members by giving one powa (about 250 gm.s) of self-spunned cotton yarn in lieu of money. This was a small but telling example of patriotism among the Assamese women. Their sincerity to work for the movement and loyalty to the Congress were displayed in various other ways. In many places women's prayer meetings for the well-being of the Congress, the Mahatma and for the success of the movement were held in Assam.69

In conformity with the objectives of the Women's Department of the Congress, the Women's Congress organization in Assam undertook works like reorganization of the spinners' associations, holding of spinning and weaving exhibitions to encourage women in these fields and also to popularise Swadeshi, giving physical training to girls and elderly women and imparting instruction to village women on health and hygiene. Women, irrespective of age, social status, caste and community participated in these activities.70
Five hundred persons were enrolled as trainees, during the month of June 1940 in the Baihata Training centre established by the Assam Khadi and Rural Reconstruction Association. Out of the total number of trainees 300 were women.

Amalprava Das, Fuspalata Das, Girijabala Baruah, Swarnalata Baruah, Guneswari Devi, Sundaribala Kakaty, Induprova Baruah, Bhubaneswari Baruah, Chandraprava Barua, Snehalata Devi, Jogapraya Devi, Madhabilata Phukan, Hema Kakati and Sukhalata Hazarika took active part in organizing the women under the banner of W.D. of APQC. They even visited remote areas in the villages to organize women. In some places, sub-centres of the Assam provincial Womens Congress Departments were also opened, viz. at Dhekial (near Golaghat), Azara (in Kamrup district), Pakamura (near Jorhat), Tepor Telial (near Sibsagar), Mahura (near Golaghat), Jogigaon (near Golaghat), Charing (near Sibsagar), Dekapara (near Gauhati), Duliagaon (near Jorhat) and many other places. In Balipukhuri village near Tezpur, a Women Sub-committee was formed under the Women's Department on 10 February 1941. For this purpose a big women's meeting was organized at the village with Amalprava Das as the president. She appealed to the women to come forward and join the Congress. She also urged upon them to devote themselves to spinning and weaving.
The contribution of the women of Assam in the field of spinning and weaving was remarkable during this period. In the second annual conference of the Assam Spinners' Association held in April 1940, the president of the conference Gauri Kanta Talukdar, a Congress M.L.A. said that amongst all the provinces of India, Assam possessed the biggest number of looms. The total number of looms in whole of India was estimated to be twenty lacs in 1940. In the year 1940 Assam had 4,21,000, looms i.e., about 20% of the total looms of the country, and the number of looms operated by women was 2,16,000 in both the valleys of Assam. More than 80% of the women weavers belonged to the Brahmaputra valley and Kamrup district alone had 99,000 women weavers. In spite of the fact that Assam had the largest number of looms and weavers, she could not produce sufficient quantity of Khadi to meet the needs of the people. The main reason for this was that the weavers in Assam were mostly women who were non-professional in the craft. Weaving, in fact, constituted a part of their day-to-day activity. Non-application of the up-to-date technology in weaving was also another cause for low production.

The Independence Day for 1941 was celebrated in Assam with greater enthusiasm than on earlier occasions. Congress flags were hoisted in public places and the Independence pledge was reaffirmed. Gandhiji observed —
"In view of the fact that the individual Civil Disobedience has already commenced and a large number of Congressmen have already been imprisoned all over India, it becomes the special duty of every Indian to concentrate with redoubled zeal on the Constructive Programme, without the fulfilment of which no Civil Disobedience, mass or individual, can help us to win and retain Swaraj". In response to this call of the Mahatma, people in different places of Assam celebrated the Independence Day of 1941 as the day of fraternization, abolition of untouchability, giving up of intoxicants, spinning and promotion of Swadeshi. Women leaders hoisted the National flags at different places and those taking active part in it included Labanyalata Baruah, President of the Golaghat Women's Department of Congress at Golaghat, Pandupriya Patgiri at Goalpara and Annadadevi Borkotoky, Secretary of the Baligaon Congress Committee at Jorhat Baligaon.

A big meeting attended by 4000 women was also held on 5 January 1941, at Pathsala under the auspices of the Bajali Mahila Sanmilan. This meeting was presided over by Miss P. Rasul. Puspalata Das took the initiative in organizing the meeting. Dr. H.K. Das, Puspalata Das, Mahendra Mohan Choudhuri, Dr. Bhubaneswar Barua, Nirmala Medhi and Golok Chandra Pathak spoke in the meeting. The meeting discussed the matter of participation in the Satyagraha and the role the women had to play in it. Another
meeting was held at Khutarguri village near Bajali on 22 January 1941 and it was presided over by Sadaribala Das, a leading woman of the area. Chandraprava Saikiani, speaking in the meeting, appealed to the women to fight against untouchability, illiteracy and intoxicants. She appealed to the older section of the women to be tolerant in respect caste differences and to keep their prayer halls open for all irrespective of caste or creed. For the purpose of educating themselves about the political developments of the country, Chandraprava Saikiani asked them to read the Assamese newspapers and asked the few educated girls to help the illiterate women in this regard. The women of that village decided in that meeting to spin regularly and to become Congress members by contributing one powa (250 grams) of self-spun cotton yarn to the Khadi fund. 81

The women’s wing of the Gauhati District Congress Committee resolved in its conference held on 27 January 1941 at the Bhaskar Natya Mandir to open a spinning department for women. It was propoed that women of the area would spin for 2 hours every Sunday in the centre opened at the Natya Mandir. Women speakers in the meeting, viz., Amalprava Das, Buspalata Das and Punyaprava Duara spoke about the importance of the Constructive work and the role women had to play in it. 82
Many other meetings of women were held in villages in Kamrup district and Amalprava Das and Chandraprava Sai-kiani were mostly associated with these meetings. At Sorbhog a women's meeting was held on 25 May 1941 and it was presided over by Amalprava Das. The meeting urged upon the women to take up spinning and weaving as a part of the movement. In a meeting held at Helona village near Patacharkuchi on 4 February 1941, the women pledged to spin and weave for themselves. The meeting also resolved to do away with the veil system (Orani) as a measure for upliftment of women.

Gandhiji appealed to the people of India to celebrate the week from 6 April to 13 April as a National Week. Assam also celebrated the week with the rest of the country. As instructed by Gandhi the Congressmen of the province observed fast on 6 and 13 April as a measure of self-purification. Importance of Constructive Programme, maintenance of communal harmony, eradication of untouchability and opium eating were the subjects discussed in meetings held during this week. Political conferences, industrial exhibitions, spinning competitions, seminars, etc., were also organized for that purpose. Women's meetings were held throughout the Brahmaputra valley to celebrate this week. The women belonging to the tribal community also responded enthusiastically to the constructive programmes. A meeting of the
Horo tribal women of Dokra (near Kokrajhar) village was held on 12 April 1941, under the presidentship of Puzati Brahma, a women leader. The meeting was organized by the local women workers, viz., Rupawati Brahma and Himanibala Brahma. The meeting resolved to popularize weaving and spinning among the local people and to start propaganda against untouchability and intoxicants. Another Boro women's meeting was held at Sidli on 24 October 1941 in which resolutions of a similar nature were adopted. In fact, through the popularization of the Constructive programmes more and more women were drawn to the fold of Congress. The establishment of the Women's Department under the APCC also helped in that regard.

In October 1941, Sadik Ali, the Secretary of the AICC visited Assam. During his stay from 20 to 27 October he visited many spinning centres and saw for himself the technique adopted by the women of Assam in spinning. An exhibition was also held in front of the Curzon Hall at Gauhati for giving demonstrations in spinning, in which about 100 women participated. While appreciating the dexterity of the women in spinning, Sadik Ali suggested that improvised and better spinning wheels should be provided to them.
The third Saadullah ministry stood committed to help the British Government in its war efforts. Immediately after its installation, the ministry took steps to collect men and materials in aid of the war efforts. In July 1941, the Saddullah Government contributed a sum of Rupees one lakh to the war fund. Further, in response to a call given by Robert Reid, the Governor of Assam, the local government authorities, Government officers and the Mouzadars (revenue collectors) started to collect money from the people to contribute to the war fund. Funds were collected even by pressurizing the people and using force at times.

The Congress Working Committee took immediate steps to stop such forceful collection of funds. The Congress workers appealed to the people not to contribute anything to the war fund. For this purpose bulletins and leaflets were distributed amongst the people. The All India Students Federation (AISF), Assam Branch, launched a campaign against war fund collection.

**Awakening among girl students:** By the time of these developments, the All Assam Girl Students' Committee (AAGSC) was also formed at Shillong (Shillong at that time was the capital of Assam). Aims and objectives of the AAGSC were
similar with those of the AISF and it was affiliated to the AISF. The AAGSC aimed at providing the girl students with a separate platform to take part along with others in the realization of the ideal of freedom, peace and progress of the country. Stating the objectives of the committee, Lila Barua, the President of the Reception Committee said - "it is nothing less than to make the women-folk conscious of their rights and responsibilities to the nation...... It is the time for us to wake and grasp the urgency of the situation, to realise the immediate need of adequate and equal cooperation and comradeship in guiding, moulding, sustaining and achieving those lofty and patriotic ideals that thrill the heart of every generation and in the fulfillment of which lies the noblest destiny of man".

The Secretary of AAGSC, Miss Anjali Das, criticizing the attitude towards the women in Indian society, said - "We are not only deprived of the political, social and economic rights, but even the elementary rights of the family are snatched away from us". She questioned - "Are we merely parasites in our society? Have we got no usefulness - nothing precious to offer to the society? .... Certainly we have! No state, no nation, no society can be said to enjoy liberty unless and until they recognize the socio-economic freedom for women.... Not to speak of
economic and political freedom which is still a 'utopia' for the womenfolk, even the most elementary demand of ours as human beings has not yet been fully conceded. She urged upon the women and the girls, in particular, to revive the glorious status of the women in society and contribute to the upliftment of the country.

Puspalata Das, in her presidential speech in the AAGSC meeting at Shillong on 12-14 Sept. 1941, called upon the girl students to sacrifice their personal interest for the sake of the nation. She pointed to the recent awakening of national consciousness amongst the students. Although the student community had an organization of their own to work in the interest of the nation and there was no bar for the female students to join the existing student organization, yet on account of some social disabilities student girls were forced to have a separate union for themselves. Puspalata Das also made it clear that the AAGSC was not an alien body as opposed to the Assam Chatra Sanmilan. She said that the AAGSC's aim was to coordinate and carry out the programmes of the Chatra Sanmilan. Speaking about the role the girls and women had to play in forging communal harmony, Puspalata Das said - "No matter what conflict might be raging between communities, the women of India will stand united as peace-makers. As peace-makers and preservers of life and civilization it
is your duty to kindle a great flame that what is evil
must die and what is good must live and your hands shall
pour the living water of fellowship between communities
and communities".

In the middle of the year 1940, a joint meeting of
the student bodies of Assam was held at Shillong. The
meeting vehemently opposed the enforcement of the Defence
of India Rules and the war funds. The meeting decided to
direct the students of both the valleys to prevent any
assistance to the British War efforts. Anjali Das,
accompanied by Pranesh Chandra Biswas and Bishnu Bora tou-
red the whole valley and carried on an anti-war propaganda.

The AISF gave a call to celebrate 26 January 1941
as the traditional Independence Day. The students of
Gauhati also celebrated the day by holding a meeting and
taking out a procession. The processionists carried pla-
cards with slogans like "down with Imperialism", "No help
to the Imperialist War" and they assembled in front of the
Federation's office and hoisted the federation flag.
Puspalata Das, who hoisted the flag, appealed to the
students to continue the struggle till independence was
attained.

A number of meetings were held in all the districts
to protest against the Saadullah Government's decision to
contribute to the war fund from the provincial exchequer.
All these meetings were attended by a sizeable number of women. The Government sponsored Charity Cinema shows. But the exhibitions held in aid of the war were obstructed by the students and the Satyagrahis. As a result the war fund collection declined. The students of Assam, in general, launched an anti-war propaganda campaign in the rural areas of the province. Boys and girls engaged themselves in circulating propaganda bulletins proscribed by the Government, amongst the rural masses. Meetings were held in protest against the war policy and collection of funds for the war efforts.

The provincial Government did not give up its efforts to raise money for the war fund in spite of resistance from practically all sections of people. In order to raise funds, a week-long exhibition was proposed to be held in the Science laboratory of Cotton College, Gauhati, under the supervision of Humphrey, the Deputy Commissioner, Kamrup, in the second week of December 1941. The students of Gauhati protested against the holding of such exhibition. But the authority paid no heed to these protests. Rajabala Das, the Headmistress of the Panbazar Girls' High School, who was formerly a Congress worker during 1920s, extended support to the Government for holding the exhibition. She and her husband Dr. J.C. Das maintained a good relation with Md. Saadullah and the Deputy Commissioner of Kamrup. Rajabala Das held the charge of the girls' hostel also.
On 5 December, she collected about 250 girls, mostly the hostel boarders, and led them in a procession to the exhibition venue. The girls were, at first, not aware of the real purpose of the procession and participated in it as instructed by the Headmistress. But as they came near the College, they found the students picketing in front of it and then only they came to know the intention behind the whole arrangement. The girls then refused to proceed further and dispersed.

There was a heated exchange of arguments between Rajabala Das and the picketers in front of the exhibition gate, and her attitude to the student picketers was considered to be so provocative that no scope was left for any compromise.

On the following day, i.e., 6 December 1941, a huge crowd collected in front of the Cotton College gate and shouted anti-war slogans and picketed in front of the exhibition hall. But Dr. Das and Rajabala Das accompanied by Humphrey entered the hall hurting public sentiment. This, together with the previous day's incident provoked the crowd and, the picketers shouted slogans like 'Shame to the Headmistress', 'Disgrace to the Headmistress', etc. At this Dr. Das and Humphrey came down from the car and manhandled some of the student picketers. One student was arrested in this connection.
The news of this incident spread in Gauhati like wild fire and immediately a big procession came out. Students including the girls of the Panbazar Girls High School came out to join the procession. The processionists paraded on the streets of Gauhati and shouted slogans like 'not a man, not a pie to the imperialist war'. The number of participants in the procession was about two thousand five hundred, a sufficiently big procession in those days. Necessary permission from the District authorities was also obtained for the procession. But when the procession came to a narrow road, the police appeared there and dispersed the procession by use of bayonets and by resorting to lathi charge. A large number of students, approximately 200, were injured with serious injuries to thirty students. Since the girls were in the front rows of the procession, a number of them including Girija Das and Kamrada Das were injured. A daughter of the District Superintendent of Police was also a victim of Police lathi charge. Many girls, frightened and terrified by the police bayonet and lathi charge ran to the Ghatribari Girls' hostel for shelter.

The news of police atrocities on the students of Gauhati spread to different parts of Assam. This sparked off a wave of protest meetings by students and hartals. On 7 December, the students of Gauhati observed a strike. In a meeting of the Shillong Girl Students' Committee held
under the presidency of Lila Barua, demands were made for institution of a non-official enquiry, transfer of Humphrey from Gauhati and removal of Rajabala Das from her services. Their demands included an assurance from the Government that the police would never use lathis and bayonets on the students in future. The All India Students Federation also called upon the students throughout the country to observe a 'Gauhati Day' in protest against the police atrocities on the students.

The women also raised their voice of protest against the police excesses. On 9 December 1941, a meeting of women was held at Gauhati presided over by Nalinibala Devi. Nirmala Das, one of the victims of the police lathi charge of 6 December, described the incident of that day and the atrocities committed on the students. The meeting strongly condemned the district administration and demanded a non-official enquiry. The meeting also demanded removal of Rajabala Das from her post immediately. At Jorhat, the women observed the 'Gauhati Day' on 22 December. A meeting was held under the presidency of Sashiprava Chaliha to condemn the incident. The Nowgong Mahila Samiti held a meeting on 15 December and condemned the incident and demanded the appointment of a non-official enquiry, removal of Humphrey from Kamrup and the police officers responsible for the crime. The meeting held Dr. J.C. Das and Rajabala Das responsible for the incident
and condemned their behaviour. 116

Similar protest meetings were held at Dibrugarh, Goalpara, Dhubri, Kaliabar, Raha, Hajo and many other places. In a student meeting held at Shillong in protest against the Gauhati incident, Gopinath Bordoloi promised that he would raise the matter in the Assembly immediately.

Accordingly, on 9 December, the issue of Gauhati incident was brought to the floor of the Assam Assembly, by Gopinath Bordoloi through an adjournment motion. This ultimately resulted in the fall of the Saadullah ministry and the Governor took the administration of the province into his hands on 25 December 1941. 117

IV

Quit India Movement and the role of Women:

By the end of 1941, the war suddenly took an alarming turn. Japan's rapid advance towards the eastern frontiers of British India caused serious anxiety amongst the Allied Powers. Both the U.S.A. and China were worried about the role that India would be playing in the war at that stage. They realised that in order to utilize the manpower of India in the Allied war efforts against the Axis powers, the British Government had no alternative but to change its policy towards India. It became clear to them that the Indians would no more help the British
The British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, on the other hand, had a rigid attitude in this regard. However, being pressurised not only by the friendly states, but also by his own Cabinet colleagues and the British public and having no other way out to enlist Indian's help, he had to place the matter before the British War Cabinet. The Cabinet deputed Stafford Cripps, the Lord Privy Seal to negotiate the matter with the Indian leaders.

In the meantime, India was showing signs of changing her attitude. The Congress Working Committee (CWC) resolved on 30 December, 1941 at Bardoli, to cooperate with the British Government in the war if Britain agreed to the independence of India. But the C.W.C. did not deviate from its earlier stand of non-cooperation with the British in the war unless independence of India was guaranteed.

The Cripps Mission failed to satisfy the people in India as it envisaged India's independence only after the termination of the war and that too if demanded by a Constituent Assembly. It contemplated no change in the constitution of 1935 during the War. The Congress could not accept the Cripps proposals as they showed no sign of any change in the British Government's attitude towards
India, rather it became clearer after Cripps' visit that the British control in India was in no way to be relaxed. Gandhi found nothing good in the proposals for Indians to cooperate in the war.\(^{121}\) Nehru looked upon the Cripps as "devil's advocate".\(^{122}\) Referring to the proposals as 'naked imperialism', Gandhi asked Cripps to go back home.\(^{123}\)

The Congress viewed the proposal as a blow to the concept of Indian unity. The proposal also envisaged the partitioning of India on communal basis. The C.W.C. stated in clear terms that no scheme with a provision of British control over India, in any kind, degree or form, would be acceptable to the Congress\(^{124}\) and it finally rejected Cripps proposals on 2nd April 1942.

In the meantime, Gandhi, after regaining his undisputed supremacy over the Congress, had written certain articles which later crystalized into the concept of the 'Quit India Movement'.\(^{125}\) The Congress Working Committee passed the 'Quit India' resolution on 14 July 1942 at Wardha, demanding immediate withdrawal of British rule over India. It also hinted the launching of a widespread struggle on non-violent lines under Gandhi's leadership in the event of British refusal to Quit India.\(^{126}\) Accordingly, the Congress organization at provincial and district levels were directed to take steps to prepare for the movement and enroll Congress
volunteers on a massive scale. The Congress president, Moulana Azad, in the course of his discussion with the Congress leaders of different parts of the country, told that although the C.W.C. had proposed to start a non-violent movement under Gandhi's leadership, yet, in the event of Gandhi's arrest and adoption of violent means by the Government, "the people would be free to adopt any method, violent or non-violent, to oppose the violence of the Government in every possible way". However, these instructions of the President were kept a secret.

The AICC in its Bombay session held on 7 and 8 August 1942, endorsed the Wardha decision on Quit India. It resolved to sanction the vindication of India's inalienable right to freedom and independence - the 'starting of a mass struggle on the widest possible scale so that the country might utilize all the non-violent strength it had gathered during the last twenty-two years of peaceful struggle'.

The Government was determined to crush any movement caused by the Congress action and it feverishly took certain measures consequent upon the adoption of the Quit India resolution by the AICC. The Governor General-in-Council empowered the Viceroy to take drastic action to suppress the movement. Congress organizations at all levels and places were declared illegal. Important
Congress leaders including Mahatma Gandhi, Kasturba Gandhi, Sarojini Naidu, Jawaharlal Nehru and many others were arrested on 9 August 1942. Arrests of leaders were on such a large scale that people were, in fact, left without leaders.

The news of leaders' arrests and imprisonment spread like wild-fire within a very short time. The measures adopted by the Government provoked an immediate reaction. Strikes, meetings, processions, etc. were organized to protest against the arrests. Before the arrests, the leaders did not get time to chalk out the detailed programme of the proposed mass struggle. The people, as such, on the basis of the three-word message of Gandhiji - 'Do or die' adopted their own course of action. In reality, this message became the motto for the millions in this phase of movement and a source of strength.

Gandhiji said - "We shall do or die. We shall either free India or die in the attempt.... This is open rebellion". However, by 'open rebellion' Gandhi never meant a rebellion of a violent nature. Just before leaving for jail Gandhi left the following message to the nation: "let every non-violent soldier of freedom write out the slogan 'Do or die' on a piece of paper or cloth, and stick it on his clothes, so that in case he died in the course of offering Satyagraha...."
he might be distinguished by that sign from other elements who do not subscribe to non-violence". Regardless of whether they adopted non-violent or violent means, this last message of Gandhiji was a great source of inspiration for the masses.

Following the Centre's instructions, the Government of Assam also arrested the APCC office-bearers and the leaders of the Congress on 9 August 1942. APCC President Md. Tayyebullah, Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, Liladhar Barua, Pishnuram Medhi, Dr. Harekrishna Das, Debeswar Sarma and many other Congress leaders were arrested. These arrests were followed by massive arrest of other leaders throughout Assam. Gopinath Bordoloi and Siddhinath Sarma were arrested on 15 August 1942, on their way back from the Bombay session of the AICC. The arrests of other leaders like, Cmeo Kumar Das, Mahadev Sarma and Pitambar Deva Goswami followed suit, the process lasting up to October.

Apart from the Congress organizations, other organizations subscribing to the Congress ideals were also declared unlawful by the Government. This was followed by repressive measures on the people. But these could not deter the patriotic zeal of the people. With stronger determination and boldness, the masses of Assam initiated a struggle of such dimensions that the functioning of the Provincial Government almost came to
For about four months after the arrests, the machinery of the Government ceased to function - "Magistrate's only duty was confined to the trial of men, women and boys".

Initially, the August Movement in Assam was conducted by the masses in the typical Gandhian non-violent methods. These included strikes, processions, peaceful demonstrations, and the hoisting of Congress flag on Government buildings to protest against the Government action. The processions and meetings were unbelievably huge. But as the Police violence grew and the Government resorted to more and more repressive measures, people in some places of the province adopted more drastic steps. They set fire to Government buildings, broke bridges, cut telephone lines and prevented the supply of men and materials to the war.

In the early part of 1942, the APCC had built up an efficient volunteer organization, e.g., the Santi Sena, consisting of about, 20,000 workers mostly drawn from the rural areas. The purpose of the Santi Sena was to carry out the constructive works and to maintain peace and order in the villages in times of war. The Santi Senas were trained to meet any emergency arising out of the war situation. The functions of the Santi Sena were (a) to organize night vigilance, (b) to give first aid in times of emergency, (c) to conduct campaigns for self-sufficiency
in food and clothing, (d) to look after Khadi productions.\textsuperscript{139}

The Santi Sena organization was not a direct challenge to the Government authority but they were neither to co-operate with the Government in its war efforts nor with the police against the freedom fighters. Gradually the Santi Sena organization became so popular that it posed a challenge to the existence of the parallel official bodies like the Village Defence Party, and proved to be a useful instrument of the Congress. This led the Government to declare the Santi Sena organization unlawful along with the Congress organization at all levels; the Government also seized many of the Santi Sena camps.\textsuperscript{140} R.K.L. Nandkeolyar, an AICC Inspector of Congress Committees and allied organizations, commenting on the Santi Sena of Assam said that it would be able to give a good account of itself in putting down the anti-social elements and dacoits.\textsuperscript{141} After seeing a Santi Sena rally at Boko in Kamrup district, Nehru said - "I was glad to see the spirit and enthusiasm of the people, the fire in the eyes of boys and girls. A grand rally of the Santi Sena at Boko was a sight I shall not forget for a long time. The Congress programme of self sufficiency and self protection was being carried out with energy and a fair measure of success".\textsuperscript{142}
The women of Assam played a memorable role in the Quit India movement. Women came out of their homes and took active part in processions, demonstrations and picketings. Many of them were enrolled as members of the Santi Sena. As the male leaders were put in jails, women organizers who were left outside, shouldered the responsibility of organizing the movement. The male workers, who were outside the jail, had to work underground since warrants of arrest were issued against many of them.

Amalprava Das, Puspalata Das, Chandraprava Saikiani and many other women took up organizational works amongst the people. They travelled extensively to arouse the masses.

Puspalata Das, along with her husband Omeo Kumar Das and Jyotiprasad Agarwalla undertook to organize the people in the district of Darrang. At that time, Omeo Kumar Das fell seriously ill and the responsibility of organizing the people and conducting the movement in the district fell on the shoulders of Puspalata Das and Jyotiprasad Agarwalla. Both of them planned to carry the struggle on purely non-violent lines as Gandhiji under no circumstances would compromise with violence.
Puspalata Das had been carrying on organizational work mainly among women in the district of Darrang. On 3 May 1942, a meeting was held at Tezpur under the presidentship of Kiranbala Barkakati to organize a women volunteer corps or Santi Sena at Tezpur. A large number of women had been enrolled in the corps later.

The movement in Darrang district was most thorough. In different places of the district the 1942 rising was spontaneous as also disciplined. Kolabari, Borongabari, Gohpur, Bihali, Charali, Sootea, Jumuguri, etc., were the places where the enthusiasm amongst the people was widespread.

In the early part of September 1942, a small group of the Tezpur leadership including, Puspalata Das, Jyotiprasad Agarwalla, Gahan Chandra Goswami, Biswadev Sarma and Bapuram Gogoi held a special sitting to take stock of the political situation then obtaining in Assam. At that time Japan had completely occupied Burmah and was advancing towards the eastern frontiers of Assam. While the Government deployed forces to fight the Japanese, military forces were also posted all over Assam to deal with the supporters of the movement. In spite of such a situation, the people, on their part, were determined to fight the 'last battle' for India's freedom. The Tezpur meeting decided that their plan of action would be based on non-violence, purity and simplicity.
the Police stations and the Court buildings were regarded as the symbols of British authority, the meeting decided to hoist the National flags on those buildings. Perhaps Darrang was the only district in Assam in which organized attempts to hoist the National flag in several police stations, Court, Government buildings were made. In these attempts "What is unique is that in these daring acts women took an active part and were always in the forefront".  

The Tezpur meeting observed - "we must prove before the world that we are capable of winning a victory through the application of the infallible weapon of non-violence and peace". The incidents that followed soon after amply proved that the Tezpur people were all out to wage a non-violent war on Gandhian lines.

After the mass arrest of the Congress workers, the Tezpur Congress leaders who were not yet arrested preferred to work underground except Puspalata Das. Puspalata Das wanted to work openly because she was convinced that secrecy had no place in Gandhiji's concept of non-violence. So she was entrusted with the work to hold meetings and explain before the people the decisions of the Tezpur unit of Congress. She visited different places of the Darrang district and held meetings for that purpose. On 12 September 1942, she presided over a public meeting held at Bargaon near Dhekiajuli. She explained
to the people the programmes of the Congress. Puspalata Das asked the people to go to the Police Station in hundreds in a procession peacefully and hoist the National flag there on 20 September 1942. She also appealed to the Government servants to resign from their posts and fight for the cause of the nation. In another meeting held at Baralimari village on 17 September, Puspalata Das asked the villagers to carry on the mass movement.\footnote{152}

Puspalata Das presided over a special meeting of the Congress workers held at Jahamari Congress camp on 16 September 1942. In her speech, she asked the Congress workers to be completely non-violent. She warned the Congress volunteers not to indulge in any kind of violence even on the face of extreme provocation from the Government. She said that Congress was not going to forgive any member who would resort to violence. She even asked those who were harbouring such ideas to leave the Congress.\footnote{153}

The Tezpur organizers divided the Satyagrahis into two groups, viz., the Santi Bahini and the Mrityu Bahini (Death squad).\footnote{154} All able-bodied and willing persons could join the Santi Bahini. But membership of Mrityu Bahini was conditional. Although the members of both the forces were wedded to the motto of 'Do or die', the members of the Mrityu Bahini were required to observe absolute secrecy and firmness. They were expected even
to court death, if necessary, in the discharge of their sacred duty. Persons below 18 years and above 50 years of age were barred from joining the Mrityu Bahini. There was no age limit in the case of the members of the Santi Sena. So, larger number of volunteers joined this group while the number of members in the Mrityu Bahini was comparatively smaller.\textsuperscript{155}

The volunteers of both the squads were given training in camps set up for that purpose. The trainees in these camps used to receive instruction through secret bulletins and circulars sent to them through the Mrityu Bahini members who were pledged to observe absolute secrecy about these matters. In Darrang district every area of a police station had a volunteer camp.\textsuperscript{156} In fact, the Darrang D.C.C. planned to have one camp at a distance of every five miles.\textsuperscript{157}

On 18 September 1942, Puspalata Das accompanied by Jogesh Mishra of Bihar, an active Congress worker addressed a meeting at Barangabari near Gohpur. The meeting was held at the local Namghar, i.e., the prayer hall of the Jaranial Satra and attended by a good number of people. A famed orator as she was, Puspalata Das explained the purpose of the programmes of the Congress in detail and called upon the womenfolk particularly to organize themselves more effectively for the country's freedom. Her speech had an electrifying effect on the people.\textsuperscript{158}
The Darrang D.C.C. had chosen 20 September as the day for hoisting the National flag on the Thana buildings in Darrang district, and the Satyagrahis were directed to come to the respective thanas in processions. This decision of the Darrang D.C.C. was announced by Puspalata Das in the meeting of Barangabari and she gave a clarion call to the people to join the marchers to the thana. She appealed to all to remain firm in their resolve to fly the flag on the thana and, at the same time, to remain peaceful and non-violent at all costs. 159

As per programme, one of the Mrityu Bahini volunteers was to lead the procession to the thana with the National flag in hand. The Senas were instructed not to look behind but to advance forward, ignoring all obstructions, to hoist the flag. In case the leader should fall down due to police beating or firing, the next in the row should take charge of the flag and advance. This was to be continued till the flag was hoisted. The flag should be held vertically and even under the worst circumstances it should be held aloft. The principles of peace and non-violence should be observed by all means. 160

Gohpur firing: Kanaklata, the maiden martyr.

The Jaranial Satra meeting of 18 September was an unscheduled meeting. Puspalata Das and other Congress workers holding meetings in the district did not include
this place in their programme. In spite of poor publicity, a good number of people gathered to listen to Puspalata Das. In the meeting a large number of men and women enrolled themselves as members of the 'Senas'. Kanaklata, a girl below the qualifying age of 18 years to be a member came forward with all determination to enrol herself as a member of the Mrityu Bahini. After listening to the speech of Puspalata Das, Kanaklata was thrilled by the spirit of patriotism and sacrifice. She could not resist her desire to serve the motherland even at the cost of her life. Puspalata Das and other Congress members were hesitating to enroll such a tender aged-girl in the Mrityu Bahini. She appeared to be too young to be accepted for a job that was meant only for the brave elders. But Kanaklata was determined and she succeeded in her effort. Thus, she won the distinction of becoming the first girl member of the Mrityu Bahini not only in her home district but also in the province of Assam.

According to the original plan, Puspalata Das was to lead the procession to Gohpur thana. But Kanaklata, the youngest Mrityu Bahini soldier, again prevailed upon Puspalata Das to have her way. Kanaklata requested Puspalata to entrust her with the charge of leading the procession to Gohpur thana and to hoist the flag there. She also asked Puspalata Das to lead the Dhekiajuli procession instead of the one at Gohpur. In spite of her
being senior by age and experience, Puspalata Das could not dishearten Kanaklata. Kanaklata’s sincerity, boldness and determination convinced her and she left for Dhekiajuli. But, unfortunately for Puspalata Das, (she grumbles even today) she could not lead Dhekiajuli procession as she was arrested on 20 September morning.¹⁶²

The Gohpur police station was at the easternmost boundary of the Tezpur subdivision. The volunteers and the people from the villages like Brahmajan, Hawajan, Halem, Kalabari, Gohpur, etc., falling within the jurisdiction of Gohpur thana were to participate in the procession of 20 September. From the preceding night people started to march towards Barangabari, the village where all the processions were directed to assemble, and thence to march to Gohpur under the leadership of Kanaklata.

Kanaklata left her house early in the morning on 20 September and reached the meeting place before time. She took her position in front of the female volunteers with the flag in her hands. The processionists were arranged into long files with a separate row for the women.¹⁶³ Someswari Bora, Debalata Barua, Bhugila Bora, Jonaki Gogoi, Punyaprova Barua and Maichena Barua were a few to stand in the row along with 500 odd women, behind Kanaklata.¹⁶⁴ All the women were in the forefront of the procession and they proceeded towards Gohpur thana at a distance of 7 miles from Barangabari. As the procession
proceeded, more and more volunteers from the villages like Balijan, Maguri, Brahmajan, Rangalial and others joined it and it became increasingly bigger. They shouted slogans like "Down with British Imperialism", "Swaraj is our Birth Right", "Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jai", etc., and were singing patriotic songs of Jyotiprasad Agarwalla. Instruments like drums, flutes, conch shells and brass-bells were also played as it marched on.

Before reaching Gohpur, the procession halted at Purub Bari village, a mile away from Gohpur. Some of the volunteers wanted to ascertain the mental strength of the Mrituy Bahini volunteers, particularly of the girls. They cautioned the girl volunteers against the possible danger and asked them to fall back to the rear or retire if they so chose. Kanaklata reacted sharply to this suggestion and said- "we the girls must not be dismissed so lightly. We are not timid. History is replete with heroic acts of women. Does anyone expect us to live and rule the country when our valiant young men have laid down their lives? Such an idea is repugnant. They (menfolk) have immense work to do for our dear motherland. We will not allow them to die alone. We will do or die together". This was an index to her determination, and patriotism. Kanaklata's reply moved the hearts of the volunteers, with courage and determinations.
At about 11 a.m., the procession led by Kanaklata and others from different directions, consisting of about 4000 people assembled in front of the police station peacefully. The Gohpur police station is about a furlong off from the main road and a tank intervenes between the two. By the eastern and western sides of the tank two lanes lead to the thana one of which was blocked on that day. This lane was considerably narrow.

Ignoring the police barricade, the processionists advanced slowly and the two front columns of men and women stood face to face with the armed police of the thana. Then, the officer-in-charge of the police thana, Rebati Mohon Shome, came out with a band of armed constables and warned the processionists not to advance a step forward. At this, Kanaklata, with the flag in her hands, stepped forward and appealed to him most politely, "Brother, please make way for us, for we are committed to perform a sacred duty. We are unarmed and wedded to non-violence. We bear no malice towards you. We are all brothers and sisters and have a common mission to fulfill. We shall do our duty peacefully and retire". Kanaklata's polite appeals could not soften the attitude of the police officer. Kanaklata requested him again - "At least you allow us, the womenfolk, to go in. We will not create any trouble. We will simply hoist the flag and come out". The police officer replied, "If you advance
one step more, we will fire.\textsuperscript{171} The processionists did not lose heart and they did not move a step backward. Then Kanaklata said again "You can slay our body not our soul. If you yet persist on preventing us we must proceed, come what may.\textsuperscript{172} Kanaklata reminded the police officer that they were the servants of the people and thana belonged to the people. She said, - "unless the thana officer and his men wanted to act as the servants of the people, they must clear out and allow the people to take possession of the place.\textsuperscript{173} Seeing no effect of appeals on the police officer, she said for the last time - "Brother, then you do your duty and let me do mine. One day the nation will say who is right and who is wrong.\textsuperscript{174}

Then police opened fire on the peaceful, unarmed and disciplined crowd without any warning or dispersal order.\textsuperscript{175} The first round of fire came from the gun of a constable named Bogai Koch, aimed at Kanaklata. It was a fatal shot and pierced through the heart of the young maiden as a reward for her love for the motherland. Kanaklata died instantly on the spot. Many more rounds were fired killing Mukunda Kakati who attempted to hoist the flag after Kanaklata. Indiscriminate firing was continued and many of processionists were injured.\textsuperscript{176} But at this stage, one Rampati Rajkhowa, took the flag and hoisted it on the thana building with the help of four other volunteer, the two being Rupeswar Bora and Kaneswar Bhuyan.\textsuperscript{177}
Kanaklata became the martyr and her sacrifice became a source of inspiration for the people of Assam and India as well. 'Kanak', or 'Koli' as she was called by her friends and relatives, became a popular name in every household in the Brahmaputra valley. Her name became a legend in the Assamese culture and many folk songs were composed on her. Hers was an example of the spirit of sacrifice and patriotism of Assamese womankind. On that day she was not the only girl in the Brahmaputra valley to face the armed police and the bullets. There were many more in the same procession and in other places of the district.

After leaving Kanaklata to lead the Gohpur procession, Puspalata left for Dhekiajuli via Bihali. From Bihali she proposed to leave for Dhekiajuli on the morning of 20 September to lead the procession there. The only taxi available at Tezpur was hired for that purpose. But on receiving a message about the deterioration of the health of her ailing husband (Omeo Kumar Das) she proposed to proceed to Dhekiajuli through Tezpur. On arriving at Tezpur she found her husband improving and she prepared to leave for Dhekiajuli. But at that moment the Officer-in-charge of Tezpur police station, Amarnath Dev, cordoned the house of Puspalata Das and arrested her under the D.I.R. In jail she was treated as a security prisoner. Since the security prisoners were not allowed to
asked Puspalata Das as to how she would like to spend her time. She asked for a spinning wheel and some cotton sli-
bers. That was granted and she started spinning in jail, after about 4 days of her confinement. One day she dis-
covered that the small pieces of papers inside the slibers were nothing but the messages sent to her by the Congress workers from outside the jail.\textsuperscript{179} She was then transferred from Tezpur to Jorhat jail on 30 September along with Omeo Kumar Das and Mahadev Sarma, the two other security prisoners from Tezpur. Since there was no separate cell for the female security prisoners, Puspalata Das was kept in a very temporarily constructed thatched house.\textsuperscript{180}

Puspalata Das fell ill while she was in Jorhat jail. She was then transferred to Gauhati jail in February 1943. It was suspected by the doctors that she was suffering from Tuberculosis and their advice was to release her immediately. But the Government was not willing to do that. The then Chief Secretary, Dennehy, the Inspector General of Police and the Deputy Commissioner of Kamrup, Durgeswar Sarma tried to persuade her to go out of jail on parole to undergo better treatment. But Puspalata Das refused to go on parole as she considered this proposal humiliating. The Government then released her unconditionally from her detention as security prisoner. As soon as she reached her home she was again served with an internment order within
Gauhati and for externment from Tezpur where she was charged with organizing the Mrityu Bahini.

Puspalata Das again refused to abide by the externment and internment orders. She immediately wrote to the Additional District Magistrate of Kamrup, under whose signature the notice was served, that she would defy the said orders by proceeding to Calcutta. Accordingly she left for Calcutta and on reaching Calcutta she got a notice from Ballygunj police station of Calcutta that as she had violated the above order she was required to report to that police station everyday during her stay at Calcutta. She refused to report to the police station and returned to Gauhati after a month in order to proceed to Tezpur to violate the externment order.

All the Congress leaders of Assam, except Omeo Kumar Das and Deva Kanta Baruah, pleaded with Puspalata Das not to violate the order. Their contention was that a real Satyagrahi should not embarrass the Government. They also reminded her that Gandhiji would not approve of her decision. But her stand was that if Government was really concerned about her health she should have been released unconditionally without any prohibitory orders. As regards Gandhi's probable disapproval, she argued that she would try to convince Gandhiji about her decision. But before Puspalata Das wrote, Gandhiji himself wrote to Gopinath Bordoloi saying - "If I were you, I should allow
Puspalata to obey her own conscience''. But after the violation of the internment order, she was arrested and imprisoned for six months R.I.

Dhekiajuli firing: At about 11 a.m. a huge crowd assembled at Dhekiajuli, from the villages in the jurisdiction of Dhekiajuli police station. Under the leadership of Krityu Bahini member Kamalakanta Das, the crowd of about five thousand people formed into a procession and advanced towards the police station for the purpose of hoisting the national flag. The procession came face to face with the police in front of the police station gate.

The processionists stood quiet for some time and then shouted slogans like 'Bandemataram' while the leaders of the procession tried to persuade the police to allow them to hoist the flag. But, the police lathi-charged the peaceful assembly. Even then the people were determined to hoist the flag on the thana building. Kamalakanta appealed to the police for the second time and having failed to receive any response he asked the volunteers to enter the thana. The police immediately opened fire on the processionists trying to enter the thana. The firing instantly killed 6 persons within the thana compound and injured many. The procession then dispersed and men and women started running helter-skelter. But out of their ruthlessness the police "fired and fired even at the back of the fleeing crowd and aimlessly". The police even chased
the crowd by the road to a distance of about a mile.\footnote{185} In the process of this merciless killing 20 persons were left dead and more than 100 men, women, boys and girls injured. In the midst of the shooting, Manbar Nath, a participant in the procession, took the flag and hoisted it in the thana; but he was instantly shot dead.

In that procession, the women were in the front at the beginning but after the lathi charge they were asked to come behind. When the crowd started running some of the women being unable to flee from the police firing fell victim to it. Of the 20 victims of police firing who died instantly, 3 were women.\footnote{186} Sixtythree year old Kumali Devi, a volunteer in the procession was shot at when she tried to protect her son. She died embracing her wounded son Golok Nath. Another woman participant in the procession was Khahuli Nath who was in her advanced stage of pregnancy and was killed instantly.\footnote{187} She joined the procession that day with her husband leaving the two young daughters at their home. Another unfortunate victim was Tileswari, the youngest women martyr in the Dhekiajuli firing, who was only twelve years old. She accompanied her uncle in the procession. Tileswari received bullet wounds during the firing but she was beaten to death by the Mymensinghia hooligans while her uncle Nandiram Bhuyan was carrying her in an unconscious condition.\footnote{188} But Nandiram who had also severe injuries
on his body, being unable to carry the dead body any more
left it in the paddy fields. Later it was reported by
the eye witnesses that her body was taken away by a
military corpse carrier. The old father, who was not
convinced of his daughter's death, requested the Congress
leaders to make a search for his only daughter. Many
other women got bullet and bayonet injuries.

The district authorities made all preparations to
teach a lesson to the people of Dhekiajuli. Apprehending
that the armed forces would not be sufficient to commit
the atrocities as planned, the police also hired some pro-
fessional hooligans to help the authorities. These people
were professional criminals from the district of Mymensingh
of East Bengal (presently in Bangladesh).

A group of men and women who were running towards
the villages was trapped on the small bridge over the
road that connected the police station. When the crowd
was being fired at the thana, the said hooligans sealed
off the outer end of the bridge by tying ropes, and they
kept hiding under the bridge with lathis in their hands.
When the group of women, unaware of the nefarious plan,
tried to rush through the narrow bridge they found no
escape. At that moment the hooligans came out from under
the bridge and chased the people with their lathis. The
people were chased to a distance of about a mile and
belaboured mercilessly. Padumi Gogoi, Golapi Chutiani, Thunuki Das and Kon Chutiani succumbed to lathi injuries while many became invalid for life.

The Police fired about 29 rounds of bullet causing death and injuries to many men and women. They even chased the fleeing people and fired on them from behind. One fifty-year old man, Ratan Kachari was killed by the police when he was trying to protect the women from the Mymensinghia hooligans. The goondas were not satisfied merely by beating the women. What was more horrifying was that they stripped off the injured women and reportedly tried to molest them. Many of the women reached their homes almost in a naked condition. Muhila Devi, Sitoi, Devi, Someswari Devi and few others were a few of such victims. Jetuki Devi, Domili Devi, Dariki Devi, Madoi Kaharani, Bhogoi Devi, Daniki Devi, Tulai Devi, Bhogeswari Devi, Golapi Devi, Thato Kachariani were a few such women who received serious injuries as a result of the lathi charge. Jaluki Kachariani got bullet injuries on her left shoulder and died later. Padumi Gogoi was seriously injured as a result of the lathi attack on the bridge. She was arrested and jailed for six months. She came out of jail with a worn out health and died in a very short time. Lereli Devi received severe injuries in the firing and yet, she was arrested and imprisoned.
Kamaleswari Das, Gongeswari Devi, Jayanti Devi, Satyaa Devi, Indreswari Hazarika, Thaneswari Bhuyan, Dimbeswari Bhuyan, Moheswari Boro, Punyeswari Boro, Ratneswari Boro were some other active participants in the Dhekiajuli procession. The list of the dead and injured in the Dhekiajuli firing that was worked out by the Bordoloi Committee and local investigators was incomplete. It came to light later that many dead bodies were left unaccounted for by the police.

At Behali, a big crowd assembled in front of the police station on 20 September to hoist the national flag on the thana building. They came in processions from the neighbouring villages early in the morning shouting slogans. But the crowd came with a determination to 'do or die'. The police at Behali did not resort to firing but the procession was prevented from entering the thana premises by a lathi charge injuring a large number of men and women. In spite of that, Tileswari Mahanta, a daring women volunteer went straight to the thana building and successfully hoisted the flag. Thus Tileswari Mahanta added another feather of glory to the womanhood of Assam. Meneki Barua, Kolidoi Bora, Koli Duara, Hemaprava Barua, Toradoi Bora, Ghanakanti Gogoi were few of the women workers of Behali who participated in the procession. Meneki Bora and Hemaprava Barua were also members of the Mrityu Bahini.
The people of Sootea, a village in Darrang District, were surcharged with an agitating spirit from the day of Gandhiji's arrest, i.e., 9 August. Meetings and processions were organized and hundreds of men, women, boys and girls joined the Santi Sena and the Mrityu Bahini. A large number of women came out to join the movement. Under the leadership of Swarnaprava Mahanta a strong Mahila Mrityu Bahini consisting of about 350 girls and women was formed in Sootea.197

On 20 September, a large crowd assembled in front of the Sootea thana and hoisted the national flag in the thana building. Unlike Gohpur and Dhekiajuli there was no police resistance. It was reported that the Government officers and police were somewhat cooperative with the public on that day for which there was no report of any Government violence at Sootea. The five-thousand strong procession of men, women, boys and girls went round the thana building, after hoisting the flag, and shouted slogans like 'Quit India' and other anti-British slogans.198 It is claimed that the people of Sootea were the first in the country to hoist the national flag on any Government building. After hoisting the flag, the processionists also claimed to have declared independence of India.199
The participation of women in the Quit India movement at Sootea was remarkable. Golapi Bhuyan, an active woman worker, was arrested on 17.11.42 and later on interned at Tezpur for two months. Other important active women participants were Guneswari Bhuyan, Premada Bormudoi, Labanya Devi, Basumati Koch, Padumilata Barua, Daneswari Hazarika, Purnada Devi, Koseswari Devi and Padmini Barua. The women participated in activities like holding of meetings, organisation of processions, circulation and writing of secret bulletins, participation in secret meetings, organization of women Santi Sena and Mrityu Bahini etc. Basumati Koch, Padmawati Bora, Kamalalaya Barua, Golapi Bhuyan, Padumilata Barua were a few important women who worked for circulation and writing of secret Congress bulletin. Binduprova Bora, Tilottoma Barua, Keteki Hazarika, Aruna Barua, Kamalalaya Barua, Satani Kataki, Dineswari Hazarika and Maladoi Hazarika were some of the active women workers of Sootea during the 1942 movement. A day before the hoisting of the flag on the thana building, the women of Sootea under the auspices of the Sootea Mahila Samiti organized a procession in the village to rouse the people to join the following day's programme.

The incidents of Gohpur, Dhekiajuli and other places in the Darrang district on 20 September sent round a shudder of anger and hatred throughout the
province. On 21 September 1942, a meeting was held at Tezpur town to mourn the death of those who fell victim to police firing at Dhekiajuli and Gohpur. People from neighbouring villages of Tezpur marched to the town to attend the meeting. About 300 women also joined the procession and came to attend the meeting. When the processionists reached the venue of the meeting, they were surrounded from all sides by armed police with lathis and guns. The police asked the crowd to disperse within ten minutes. Hardly the people could start to move, the police force resorted to lathi charge injuring a large number of them.

Mongoldoi:

On 9 September 1942, a women's procession was taken out to protest against British rule and in support of the Quit India resolution. The processionists shouted anti-war slogans. A group of women picketed in front of the Mongoldoi subdivisional court building. The S.D.O. accompanied by police men misbehaved with the women picketers. Two young girls viz., Jonai and Urmila went inside the office and dragged the S.D.O. out of his office for misbehaving with the women.

As a part of non-cooperation in the British war efforts, the people of Mongoldoi decided not to allow the supply of rice from their villages to the Government.
stores. The Santi Senas of Mongoldoi kept twenty-four hours vigilance so that nothing moved out from there to the Government storehouses. The women of Mongoldoi took the responsibility of providing the Santi Senas with food and shelter in the period of their vigilance duties. Many women and girls worked untiringly day and night. Josoda Keotani was one such woman who was caught by the police while supplying food to the Santi Senas, and she was badly assaulted.  

In terms of sacrifice, the women of Darrang district made a significant contribution during the 1942 movement. Many women of Darrang were arrested during the course of the Quit India movement. Purnada Devi, Rasheswari Devi, Golapi Bhuyan and Padumilata Gohainbaruah were some of the women then arrested and sentenced to R.I. for various terms.

Nowgong:

The Quit India movement took a serious turn in Nowgong. Of all the districts of Assam the movement acquired its intensity in this district. Nowgong retained its earlier reputation of being the most active district in promoting the cause of the Nation. The Bordoloi Committee Report characterised Nowgong as the political laboratory of the people of Assam in 1942. All the tactics from non-violent non-cooperation to uprooting of railway lines, destroying of the bridges
and burning of the Government buildings, etc. were tried. Public meetings were held almost in every place for the purpose of explaining to the people the object and the true meaning of the Bombay resolution.\(^{209}\)

The administrative authority was forced to take the help of armed troops to deal with the situation in the district. The authority was empowered to detain anyone on the slightest suspicion. Some areas of the district were declared as disturbed areas. The Inspector General of Police reported that there was an atmosphere of mass rebellion in Nowgong district.\(^{210}\) Police opened fire on Satyagrahis in four different places, viz., Barhampur, Bebejia, Jongalbalahu and Barapuzia causing death to five persons and injury to a large number of participants in the movement.

Soon after the arrest of the national and provincial leaders on 9 August, the people of the district expressed their resentment and protested against the repressive measures through meetings and processions. But the situation in the district deteriorated from 24 August, on which day all the top ranking leaders of Nowgong were arrested. The masses took to their hands the charge of leadership of the movement and became determined not to be cowed down even by the gravest threat of combined army and police reprisals.
On 26 August 1942, on the ground of damage to the Bebejia bridge a military party raided Bebejia village near Nowgong and arrested about 400 persons including a large number of women. When the people of the nearby villages came to know about the arrest a group of them proceeded towards the town in an agitated mood to secure the release of the arrested people. A picket of military police was lying in a bush under the said bridge. When the people started crossing the bridge they opened fire on them killing two persons, viz., Kolai Koch and Hema Kanta Barua instantly and injuring about six persons seriously. The news of the brutal killing of innocent people at Bebejia spread like wild fire.  

In Jongalbalahugarh village, near Raha, people became panicky over a rumour that more police forces would be coming to Nowgong from Gauhati. A group of people of the village, apprehending police raid, started to cut the approach road to a bridge. Suddenly a military patrol party appeared from the eastern side and opened fire on them killing two persons, viz., Hemoram Pator and Gunabhiram Bordoloi.

Then came a most tragic killing of Tilak Deka, at Barapujia on 28 August 1942 when he, as a member of the Santi Sena, was guarding the entry to the village. At about 1 a.m. at night when a military raiding party was coming in the direction of the village Tilak Deka challenged them. Tilak Deka was shot dead on the spot.
After killing Tilak, the raiding party entered the village at dead of night and forcibly entered the houses by breaking open the doors and walls and committed unbelievable atrocities. They assaulted all the inmates of the houses and rounded up almost all the adult male population of the village and driven them towards the Raha police station. The women of the village were panicky in the beginning but soon they came forward to face the situation. The women volunteered themselves to be arrested first instead of the male members. This approach of the women compelled the police to release all except twenty-six persons.

Along with the arrests of the Congress workers and leaders, the police also either destroyed or occupied all camps set up for the volunteers in the district of Nowgong. By the middle of September 1942, the people of Barhampur, a village on the east of Nowgong town, recaptured the Santi Sena camp of the village. On 18th September 1942, they arranged a community feast to celebrate the occasion of the taking over of the camp. A public meeting was also convened after a community prayer and the feast. Men from twelve neighbouring villages joined the function. When the feast was in progress suddenly a military party appeared there and without giving any opportunity to the people to explain the purpose of their assembly or to disperse, the
military chased the people. The villagers started shouting slogans. On hearing the slogans the women-folk of the village could understand that some danger had come to the people assembled in the camp. Many women of the village in a group immediately rushed to the camp premises with tricolour in their hands. The military party blocked their way and attempted to snatch away the Congress flag from their hands. Ratnabala Phukan, a twelve year old girl, who was in front of the procession, had virtually a tug-of-war with a military man. She tried her utmost to save the flag and told Captain Finish that she would never allow the national flag to be dishonoured. Bhogeswari Phukanani, the old mother of Ratnabala, who was just a few metres behind Ratnabala rushed to interfere. Seeing her daughter endangering her life and the National flag going to be dishonoured she struck with all her might with a bamboo stick on the head of Cap. Finish causing minor injury on his head. Insulted and infuriated, Captain Finish drew out his revolver and shot at Bhogeswari. Bhogeswari Phukanani got serious injuries on her forehead and succumbed to the injuries three days later. Many more shots were fired killing 3 more persons, viz., Lakhi Hazarika, Thagiram Sut and Boloram Sut instantly.
The people of Barhampur displayed great courage and determination on that day. When asked in the course of the interview about her feeling and reaction on her mother's death, Ratnabala replied that she felt proud and fortunate of being the daughter of a brave and patriotic mother. She estimated the number of women processionists on that day to be between seven to eight thousand.219

The wife of Thagiram sut did not lose heart at the loss of her young husband, speaking to the people who gathered in her residence to console her, she said that she felt proud of him and at the same time fortunate of being one of those women who had washed with their tears the feet of their motherland, India, then "rendered dirty by the dross of slavery".220

Many other incidents took place in the district in the months of August and September 1942, when women in large numbers displayed great heroism. On 31 August 1942, the police raided the Kahikhari and Dharampur villages near Nowgong. Brutal atrocities were committed on the villagers of Dharmapur. A few women were reported to have been brutally ravished by the armymen. Some of them were chased, ravished and even left without clothes. The Dharmapur atrocities were said to have been committed on 31 August, on the basis of an allegation by a local market leasee that the people of Dharmapur had stopped payment of taxes.221
At Chatial village of Kaliabar in Nowgong district, a public meeting was held on 7 September to discuss the course of action of the Congress in which many women of the nearby villages participated. When the meeting was in progress a group of sixty armed police surrounded it and arrested some leaders including the President of the meeting. On being asked by the European officer, one Kanak Hazarika requested the crowd to disperse. When the crowd had started to move back shouting slogans, the police made lathi charge without any provocation whatsoever. A group of women who ran to take cover in the nearby village prayer hall to get rid of being assaulted, were forcefully taken out and beaten up mercilessly. One old lady was inhumanly kicked right and left and the fleeing women were chased to a long distance injuring a large number of them. 222

A series of incidents took place in the district during these two months. A train derailment in Kampur had led to causing havoc on the villagers by the army. In the frequent raids of the villages in the district, women were subjected to various types of atrocities. About 1200 persons of the district were imprisoned during the period for various terms while the number of arrests could not be ascertained. 223
Nowgong district can be proud of the contribution made by its womanhood to the freedom movement. Guneswari Devi of Koliabor was one such heroic women. She was a good organizer and guided the women of her locality to participate in the movement since the 1920s. She had equal influence on men and women throughout the district. She took extensive tours of the Brahmaputra valley districts along with other workers to organize the people. During the 1930-31 period she emerged as one of the most important women organizers of the province. Guneswari Devi was arrested and imprisoned twice before the Quit India movement. On 7 February 1931 she was arrested and sentenced to 3 months R.I. but was released on 7 March 1931 as a result of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. On 19 April 1932 she was arrested for the second time and sentenced to 18 months R.I. with a fine of Rs. 100.

The incidents that took place in a public meeting some time in the summer of 1942 at Kaliabor speaks volumes about Guneswari Devi's courage and determination. It has been gathered from Bidya Hazarika, a freedom fighter and a participant in the said meeting, that about ten thousand people attended the meeting with sizeable participation by women. Guneswari Devi was one of the main organizers of this meeting. Before the meeting could begin a party of armed police suddenly appeared there and
cordoned the whole area. The British commander ordered the people to disperse immediately with a threat of severe punishment. Almost immediately a counter announcement was made by Guneswari Devi asking the people not to disperse and to remain seated instead at the behest of the Congress. She reminded the people that people were agitating against the British Government and were not supposed to carry out the command of the Government nor to help the British in any way. The police started beating the people and the crowd being confused, started to leave the place. But at Guneswari Devi's command most of them came back and took their seats. Police then started ruthless beating of men and women whereupon they had to disperse under trying circumstances. Many women while running from the police had occasions to jump to the nearby river. When the police tried to take away the flags from the hands of Guneswari Devi and Sumitra Bhuyan, they did their utmost to save the flag. This incident involving Guneswari Devi is still remembered by those who participated in the meeting.226

Guneswari Devi had such a great influence upon the local people that even the administration became alarmed. In order to discredit her, some of the Government supporters of the area instigated the older section of the villages to blame her for spoiling the women of their area. However, such criticism had no impact on the women in any way, and Guneswari Devi was firm and determined.227
In 1942, Guneswari Devi was arrested at Nowgong for her anti-British activities. Along with four other girls she was arrested on the charges of picketing in the Nowgong Court, and Guneswari Devi was sentenced to one year's R.I. After her release from jail, she devoted again to the organizational works of the Congress.

There were hundreds of other courageous women of Nowgong who came forward to join the struggle under the able leadership of Guneswari Devi and among these were, Enamai Bora, Jyotimai Saikia, Maichena Saikia, Damayanti Bora, Daivaki Das, Hemakanti Saikia, Kamaleswari Bhuyan, Sumitra Bhuyan and many others drawn mainly from the rural areas.

North Lakhimpur:

In North Lakhimpur the Quit India movement took the form of a purely non-violent movement with peaceful procession, picketing of the Court, offices and schools and organization of panchayats. The processions were normally very large and the most striking feature was the spontaneous participation of a large number of women, both old and young. The women were usually at the forefront of the processions and meetings. Police atrocities could not deter them from joining processions and meetings. They were beaten with lathis, bayonetted and were at times assaulted by kicking.
On 24 August 1942, a peaceful procession was brought out in support of the Quit India resolution and in protest against the arrest of Congress leaders. This procession included a large number of women. When the procession reached the residence of the Sub-Divisional Officer, the police opened lathi charge injuring a large number of the participants including women. Thereafter began innumerable meetings and processions throughout the district against the Government measures. The police resorted to a severe lathi charge again on a peaceful procession organized at North Lakhimpur on 10 September. On this occasion also a large number of women were injured.

The police vandalism began in a severe form in the district from the day of the Dhalpur plane incident. On 8 September an American war plane crashed in the paddy fields near Dhalpur and a large number of innocent people came to see the plane. But the police falsely implicated the people as involved in looting the plane, although none of them even touched it. The police started raiding the village and committed atrocities. On the pretext of making searches in the villages, the police committed atrocities on women.

On 20 September 1942, an attempt was made by the Congress workers to hoist the Congress flag on the thana building of North Lakhimpur. In this assembly, a large
number of women participated under the leadership of Buddheshwari Hazarika, an important woman leader of Lakhimpur. But in their attempt the police used force and pushed them back by lathi charge. A large number of girls who were in front of the procession were injured in the lathi charge and the police also used very indecent language towards the girls. One Labanya Bora was severely injured and one of her hands became permanently invalid.

On 7 October 1942, a huge procession was organized in North Lakhimpur town. Several thousands of people including a large number of women from the neighbouring villages came to the town. In all the processions, the women were in the forefront with flags in their hands. The crowd was so big on that day that the roads of the town were filled with the processionists. This assembly of the people were lathi-charged by the police in an inhuman manner. Mostly, the women and the old persons were the victims of the police brutalities. Buddheshwari Hazarika, Hemeswari Phukan and Nandeswari were some of the women volunteers in the front part of the procession who were maltreated by the police. A group of women volunteers under the leadership of Buddheshwari Hazarika rendered services in giving first aid to the victims of the lathi charge. Lakheswari Chutia, a woman flag bearer of the procession was
assaulted and knocked down by the police by rifle butt. The flag was also forcefully snatched away from her hands. Leela Neogoni, another women volunteer from Kachikota village was severely injured by police and she died after two months as a result of this beating. Sumala Handique, a woman participant of the Dhalpur procession was also assaulted by kicks and blows by the police.

On 7 October, inhuman atrocities were committed on the people throughout the district, and such atrocities were repeated on all processions and meetings that were organized in the villages and urban areas of North Lakhimpur district.\footnote{241}

Buddheswari Hazarika was one of the most important women Congress workers of North Lakhimpur district. She enrolled herself as a Congress volunteer and became a Mrityu Bahini member in 1942 after leaving her job of a school teacher. She led the procession from Basagaon village to North Lakhimpur town on 7 October. When the procession reached the outskirts of the town the police started beating the processionists and many of the women participants were injured. After the incidents in North Lakhimpur town, Buddheswari decided not to go back to her village for fear of arrest and instead she, along with Hemeswari Phukan, went to the interior villages of the district for organizational work among
the women. Later, some girls and boys joined her. They gave publicity to the Congress programmes among the villagers, held secret nocturnal meetings in the villages and taught the villagers, particularly the women, to defend themselves even by adopting violent measures. Buddheswari and her associates worked in villages with people with whom they did not have any contact before and in very unfamiliar situations.

In every village, Buddheswari Hazarika used to collect local girls to assist her. In no case they stayed with one family for more than four or five days for fear of police arrest. While staying in the families they used to help the housewives in their household works like husking paddy, washing clothes and utensils, looking after the babies and helping in auxiliary works in the kitchen. This they did in order to win over the women and to enable them to participate in the meetings etc. Whatever that might be the village women's participation, in general, was spontaneous even in the most interior villages and the girls of their age seemed to be very much enthusiastic in assisting volunteers in their work.

Buddheswari and her group had to work during the night hours and travel through jungles while moving from village to village. Once, on being chased by the police, Buddheswari Hazarika and her group had to cross the turbulent Ranganadi river at the dead of night in a
very small boat rowed by themselves (a group of fourteen) because of refusal by the boatman to help them. After working under such situations for a few months as Congress volunteers, the girls gathered all courage to face any eventuality. Buddheswari Hazarika escaped police arrest more than once.

On 15 June 1943, on the day of the execution of Kushal Konwar's death sentence, a silent procession was brought out in North Lakhimpur town and a protest-cum-condolence meeting was organized. A large number of people including those who were not earlier drawn to the movement also joined the procession and went to attend the meeting. Buddheswari Hazarika took the leadership in the procession. Soon after the meeting had begun, a police party surrounded it with the preparation to deal with any situation. At the appearance of the police, the people became agitated and shouted anti-British Government slogans. But, in spite of the presence of the police, the meeting continued. In her speech Buddheswari Hazarika said that the people might adopt violent means in case the non-violent method failed to prevent the atrocities on them. She was arrested in the meeting after she had finished her speech.²⁴²

Moladoi Hazarika, Hiranya Bora, Chandika Bhuyan, Akoman Bora, Snehalata Majumdar, Gunada Bora, Konaiti Saikia, were a few of the prominent workers of North
Lakhimpur during the 1942 movement.

Teok:

On 27 September 1942 a procession of about two thousand people including about two hundred women marched to the Teok police station for hoisting the national flag on the thana building. The participants in the procession were mostly the men and women from nearby villages. Here also, the women were in the forefront of the procession. On its way to the police station the Sub-Inspector of Police with a group of armed police force prevented the procession from entering the thana. But the people defied the police order and tried to advance towards the thana. The police then resorted to lathi and bayonet charge on the procession. A large number of participants, including women, were injured, some of them very seriously. Among the women victims were Maibala Baruah, Aideu Bala Baruah, Aishani Saikia, Ratneswari Devi, Nanibala Saikia, Ratnakanti Raibaruah, Purbeswari Doloi, Devajani Baruah, Aiti Barua, Umakanti Raibaruah and few others were seriously injured. The mother of Nila Sarma, a freedom fighter, became unconscious as a result of severe beating by police. Ratneswari Devi was seriously injured on the chest as a result of bayonet charge by a constable named Johora. Maibala Barua's blouse was torn by bayonet charge. However, she escaped grievous injury.
A few days after the above procession, another procession organized solely by women, was taken out to the Teok police station. About one thousand women, including a large number of them from nearby Chowkhat, participated in the procession. The women of Teok, simultaneously, also demonstrated their faith in non-violence. A group of twenty women marched to the Teok police station in the first week of October. This time they did not go to the thana for flag hoisting but for garlanding the lathis and guns of the police. This novel approach was a kind of token appeal to the gunmen and lathiwallas (wielders of lathis) not to use them against the peaceful agitators. A similar proposal for garlanding, kissing and putting of Tilaks (vermilion spots) on guns and lathis, was also suggested by Jyotiprasad Agarwalla at Darrang. But, in view of the situation prevailing there he considered it impracticable and withdrew the idea. So far as the Teok women were concerned, it was their own decision. But the subsequent actions of the police in dealing with the processions and meetings show that this effort had little or no impact on them.

On 15 October 1942, a group of about 80 women made an abortive attempt to attack the Teok police station. In all the processions of Teok, the women were always in the forefront and faced the military and armed police with courage and determination. They also actively took part in other programmes of the movement, like, no-tax campaigns,
holding of meetings, etc. Maikan Baruah, Nanibala Saikia, Aidhan Saikia, Kusum Kumari Malia Barua and others held meetings at Places like Karanga, Dhekial, Hatigarh, Majgaon and other villages. They also wrote and distributed Congress bulletins and leaflets, in which act they were caught red-handed by the police. 251

During the 1942 upsurge, the women of Teok contributed in a significant way. Of the hundreds of active women of this area, Rebati Lahon was one who did a lot of organizational work in the area as well as at Jorhat, Golaghat and other parts of the district. She was a woman of indomitable courage and energy. In her devotion to work she even surpassed men. She could walk 30 miles a day which she did on a number of occasions in connection with the organizational work. 252

In October 1943, the women of Teok organized the Celebration of Gandhī Week with a view to reviving the movement. 5 October 1943 was to be observed as the 'Women's Day' as per the APCC directions. The celebration of the day included the programme of picketing of Government offices, police stations, cantonment areas, etc., by the women. 253 For the purpose of celebrating the day in Teok, a women's committee was formed with Bimala Bhuyan and Dhanalata Bhuyan as the president and secretary respectively and Chitri Lahon, Lilawati Lahon, Jonaki Hazasika,
Pranalata Bhuyan, Jonaki Barhoi, Aideu Rajkhowa, Aikhud Bhuyan, Subhadra Hazarika, Hemada Saikia, Aitila Bora, Golapi Bora, Sarbeswari Neog, Pheni Bhuyan, Premada Saikia, Bimala Barhoi, Senduri Bora and Gunada Hazarika as members. They observed the day by taking out processions, etc.

At Sibsagar also women participated in procession and meetings regularly during the 1942 movement. On 8 September, a big procession was organized with a large number of women from the nearby villages and the town itself. The police resorted to lathi charge on the processionists and injured a large number of women. The women were the first victims of the police action as they were in the forefront of the procession. Makhani Bordoloi and Sabitri Nath were amongst a few of those women who received severe injuries. A similar procession was taken out on 20 September with people from nearby villages of Sibsagar town. They shouted slogans and were completely peaceful. The procession was attacked by the police at two different places, once near the Polytechni­cal school and then near the Joysagar tank. Many women were also injured in the police lathi charge.

Beginning from the month of August 1942, the men and women of the villages near Sibsagar organized regular meetings and processions. On 15 September, a procession of about 400 men and women from the villages of Namti,
Kalugaon, Salaguri and Sensowa came to Sibsagar town with flags in their hands and shouting slogans. The police attacked the procession in the outskirts of the town and severely beaten the participants. The women participants were also not spared. They were subjected to severe beating.257

A few women were arrested during this movement for participation in meetings and processions. Sorojbala Kakati and Renuprava Saikia were two of the women workers arrested at Sibsagar.258

Golaghat:

At Golaghat, processions, meetings and picketings were the initial forms of the 1942 movement. Besides this, being very near to the war fields in the eastern front, the main activities consisted of putting embargo on all sorts of military supplies passing through Golaghat. This was a part of the programme of non-cooperation with the war efforts. For that purpose a number of volunteers resorted to acts like breaking of bridges, removing of rail tracks, etc.

The Golaghat sub-division also raised a strong Santi Sena contingent. The Santi Senas were given training in archery for the purpose of self-defence against the possible invasion by the Axis forces. But
the Government took a serious view of it and any one found to be in possession of those crude weapons were either arrested or harassed. Thus the people of Golaghat acted on two fronts - one against the atrocities committed by the Government for participation in the non-violent movement and the other against the Japanese invasion. As Golaghat was on the highway of army movement, the holding of meetings and processions was ruthlessly dealt with by the police. This led to commission of incendiary acts by Congress volunteers, which included derailment of trains, burning of Government buildings used by Europeans, mob attacks, etc.

The women also participated in different types of activities and a few of them worked underground. Annaprava Barua, wife of the underground worker Sankar Chandra Barua, was one of the most important women workers. She helped the Santi Senas by keeping the archery materials in her custody. She was also in overall charge of one of the Congress volunteer camps at Golaghat. From morning till late night hours she kept herself busy in looking after the management of the volunteers camps. On her free days she went out for collection of funds. Her husband Sankar Chandra Barua who remained underground could not come to his family for months together and she was left to tend for herself with three minor children.
Police harassment was a regular part of her life during that period. Her old mother Haripriya Dutta who was also a freedom fighter relieved Annaprava Barua to work for the Congress by helping her in the household work.

Annaprava Barua carried on organizational activities mostly in the interior villages. She was accompanied by Buddheswari Hazarika of North Lakhimpur in her tours. Annaprava Barua and Buddheswari Hazarika and their colleagues were under strict watch of the police. Besides this, they had also to be careful from the European tea planters who were spying on Congress activities and helping the police. In order to avoid the risk of being caught by the police and detected by the European tea planters they had to take long roads to move from one village to another, sometimes walking a distance of 15 to 20 miles at a stretch. Annaprava Barua also used to take her young baby with her when she was out for the whole day.

They were constantly followed by Government spies and the police while going to the villages. Sometimes they were forced to escape in the midst of their meals or at deadly hours of night and take shelter in safe places to avoid police arrest and atrocities. Once Buddheswari Hazarika, Annaprava Barua and a group of other women had to spend a stormy summer night under the shed of a lonely graveyard.
In their work in the villages Annaprava Barua and Buddheswari Hazarika got unstinted co-operation and help from the local girls and women. In each village, they could at least enroll one volunteer from each house in spite of the constant threat of police arrest and atrocities. Punyaprava Das of Garamur and Hemeswari Phukanani of North Lakhimpur also accompanied Annaprava Barua and Buddheswari Hazarika to the villages of Golaghat.

Annaprava Barua was neither imprisoned nor arrested. But she contributed to the movement in a great way by sacrificing the comforts and family obligations. There were, of course, scores of Annaprava's in the villages of Assam who never came to the focus. She had to tolerate extreme police harassment. When the police came to ask her about her absconding husband, Sankar Ghandra Barua, she boldly replied to the police that it was their duty to find out an alleged offender and that she was not obliged to help the police and the Government in the matter.

During the 1942 movement about one thousand people including three hundred women marched to Golaghat town to garland the guns, as in Teok, but to no avail. All these marchers were Mrityu Bahini members. Annaprava Barua took the initiative in organizing the Mrityu Bahini members in villages, particularly among the women.
On 8 September 1942, a group of about 500 men and women collected from Dergaon and nearby villages (near Golaghat) and made an attempt to hoist the Congress flag on the thana building. Punyaprava Hazarika, one of the women volunteers in the forefront of the procession succeeded in planting the flag in the thana compound of Dergaon.

Bajali:

Bajali, a centre of activities for a large number of villages near Barpeta of Kamrup district, retaliated the mass arrest of Congress workers by complete hartals and peaceful processions in August and September 1942.

On 25 September, the people of Bajali held meetings in four different villages, viz., Nityananda, Choukhuti, Bamunkuchi and Jalah, to observe the 'Nowgong Martyrs Day'. In each of these meetings, the men and women of the villages turned up in thousands. Since the police force of the Patacharkuchi police station was insufficient to tackle all the meetings simultaneously, they concentrated on committing inhuman atrocities at the Jalah meeting. The Jalah meeting was attended by a large number of women. As soon as the meeting was over the police arrested the president of the meeting Girin Chandra Choudhury and two other volunteers. The people
gathered in the meeting requested the police officer to let off the volunteers and the president. The Officer-in-Charge instead of obliging the peaceful assembly, opened fire inflicting many. When the crowd started running due to the police firing some Congress volunteers persuaded them not to flee. Janakibala Baishnavi, a woman leader and three other male Congress volunteers came forward and asked the police not to kill the people and instead bared their chests in front of police bullets.

The police party along with the arrested persons left the Jalah meeting and proceeded towards Patachar-kuchi. On its way the party confronted a crowd in Rehabari village near Nityananda. The people assembled there to welcome the arrested leaders. But the police officer taking it to be a group of attackers, opened fire and killed instantly two persons, viz., Madan Chandra Barman and Rauta Ram Boro. Three other persons were seriously injured in this firing.

This incident stirred the women of Bajali in a great way. On 7 October 1942, about ten thousand women from different villages of Bajali marched in a procession to the Patacharkuchi police station and attacked it. Sundaribala Das, her teen-aged daughter Ambika and Guneswari Patgiri were some of the women leaders who took initiative in organizing the procession. The women
with the national flags in their hands and shouting slogans and singing patriotic songs advanced towards the thana. The police, at first tried to stop them but later withdrew their resistance. As a result the women entered the thana compound and hoisted the national flag on the thana building. Emboldened by their achievement, the women asked the Police Officers to resign from their services as a duty to the nation. The Officer-in-Charge, Toolaram Keot, who had earned the reputation of being the most notorious officer of that area, was infuriated at this advice. But he lost all the courage to misbehave with the women in such a large crowd. He then asked them to give him time to consider about his resignation. Chandraprava Saikiani, who was at that time organizing the Durgata Sahayya Samiti* (Distressed Relief Committee) at Gauhati, was greatly hurt by the Bajali incidents and the police atrocities committed there. She rushed to Bajali where she came to know about the excesses of the Patacharkuchi police officer. She went to Toolaram Keot at his residence and by a brief conversation with him she could obtain a promise from a notorious officer like him not to repeat such atrocities again. This action of Chandraprava Saikiani was hailed by one and all at Bajali.
On 12 October 1942, another procession was organized by the women of Patacharkuchi. About 2000 women joined the procession. They attempted again to enter the thana to hoist the National flag but the police pushed them back.273

The organizational activities in Barpeta subdivision were carried on by the local women leaders and Chandraprava Saikiani. They held several secret meetings. One such secret women's meeting was addressed by Hemaprava Das and Chandraprava Saikiani at the Barpeta Kirtanghar (prayer hall).274 However, they escaped police arrest.275

On 25 January 1943, about three hundred elderly women of Barpeta town came out in a procession at about 11 a.m. with National flags in their hands and shouting slogans. However, the police intervened and the women dispersed peacefully.276 Such processions by women hailing from urban and rural areas were organized regularly in spite of the prohibitory orders and police interventions.

At Pathsala, a memorable meeting was held on 26 January 1943. About one thousand women of Pathsala assembled to celebrate the Independence Day of the year. Since the holding of public meeting was prohibited, the women's meeting was held within the Namghar (community prayer hall) under the cover of a religious gathering. Chandraprava Saikiani was the president of the meeting. When she was
about to commence speaking in the meeting, the Officer-in-Charge of Pathsala police station, Samiruddin, appeared there with a group of armed police. He entered the meeting place and caught hold of Chandraprava Saikiani's hand and tried to pull her out of the hall showing the warrant of arrest against her. Chandraprava objected to the use of physical force. But the police officer paid no heed to it. The behaviour of the police officer went beyond the tolerance of the assembled women and immediately there was a tussle between the police and the women with the result that Chandraprava Saikiani's dress got loose and she fell down leaving her only with her under-garments. The police overpowered the women and took away Chandraprava Saikiani in a semi-dressed condition to the police station. She was even abused and slapped by the police.

On that day the women of Pathsala virtually had a fight with the police. They hit the police with blows and kicks and smashed and threw away the caps and hats of the police while trying to release Chandraprava Saikiani. After taking away Chandraprava Saikiani, the police went back to the Namghar and beat the women and threw away the 'Frasad' (eatables offered to the deity). Many women, including Bhubaneswari Devi, received from minor to serious injuries. Guneswari Nath and a few other women were also arrested.
The people of Pathsala reacted against the police misbehaviour on women. They filed a petition to the sub-divisional officer, Barpeta, against the officer-in-charge of Pathsala stating that he assaulted females at Pathsala on 26.1.43 and arrested Chandraprava Saikiani from a religious meeting and forcibly took her to the police station in a semi-dressed condition.  

Chandraprava Saikiani was sent to Barpeta jail after her arrest at Pathsala. She was transferred to Gauhati jail on 28 December and there she was detained as an under-trial prisoner for three months. In the Barpeta jail, Chandraprava Saikiani complained of the unhygienic condition that prevailed there and sought transfer from there. She threatened the jail authority to go on fast in case they did not listen to her request. The Barpeta jail authority found her difficult to deal with. A government report wrote - "C.P. Saikiani is a bad lot and she was always after her importance in the movement. On 27.1.43, she was about to refuse her meal in the hazat here, but with approval of the S.D.O. her transfer to Gauhati was arranged. On the next day on hearing her transfer she took meals with other arrested persons and the situation is carefully maved. She requires to be under close watch in Gauhati Hazat as well as she might agitate others any moment she gets a chance."
Chandraprava Saikiani was the sole guiding force behind the great women upheavals in Bajali and Barpeta areas. Like many other Congress leaders, she also decided to work underground. In 1942-43, there sprang up thirty-two underground volunteer camps at Bajali alone. Besides that a voluntary corps of women was formed at Patacharkuchi under the supervision of Chandraprava Saikiani.

On 26 April 1944, a public meeting was held at Patacharkuchi in which Chandraprava Saikiani and Dharanidhar Das, another Congress leader delivered speeches. According to the Government report they were alleged to have instigated the people to hold up the salt carried by unlicensed blackmarketeers for sale in the interior places at high prices. Subsequently, two dacoity cases were reported from that locality during the last part of April, 1944. The intention of the police linking up the dacoity cases with the meeting was to implicate Chandraprava Saikiani with the alleged dacoity cases. Chandraprava was constantly facing police harassment in all her activities.

To draw more women to the Congress, she edited one periodical named 'Abhijatri' and published the same at her own expense. She also jointly edited another periodical, viz., the 'Abhijan' with Dharanidhar Das.
Saikiani was also connected with the publication of another book entitled 'Paradhina

Other content...

In the programme of stoppage of supplies to the army, the women of Barpeta, Pathsala, Sarthebari, and other places took active part. A group of women volunteers of Sarthebari, under the leadership of Manikbala Bhuyan, a woman congress worker, held up cartloads of rice reportedly carried for military supply. The women volunteers also overturned cartfull of rice taken to the Lal Gudam of Tihu. On 7 October 1942, twelve loaded carts were held up by the women volunteers alone at Pathsala. The carts contained foodstuff meant for the army camps. The police, however, released the carts after dispersing the women volunteers. Puspalata Das of Gauhati was alleged to have been behind these activities in Pathsala. According to Government reports, Puspalata Das formed a party of women volunteers there and deputed them for picketing and obstructing the movement of goods to military stores.
Like the Barpeta sub-division, in other parts of Kamrup district also the upsurge went on unabated in the months of August, September and October. Holding of meetings and processions was banned in the town of Gauhati and the whole township was honeycombed with police and military spies. The town people could not do much openly but most of the directions and instructions regarding the underground activities were issued from Gauhati,\textsuperscript{293} and the movement attained its peak in the nearby villages. In most places of Kamrup the programmes of the movement consisted of the stoppage of supplies to the military, formation of village panchayats to punish the miscreants and the formation of parallel governments to run the administration of the respective areas.\textsuperscript{294}

On 28 December 1942, a meeting was scheduled to be held at Choukhuti near Bajali, at the initiative of Chandraprava Saikiani. Amalprava Das and Saruplata Choudhury were the appointed speakers of the meeting. But due to police obstruction the meeting could not be held. However, after their failure to hold the meeting, Chandraprava Saikiani, Amalprava Das and Saruplata Choudhury toured the whole of the Barpeta sub-division for several days thereafter. The purpose of their tour was to primarily organize the women and to observed the 'Anti-Imperialist Day' on 4, 5, and 6 January 1943. With
large scale participation of women these days were observed according to their plan. On 4 and 5 January, strikes were observed at Barpeta and Pathsala at the initiative of the women of the respective areas.  

In the second week of January 1943, the Deputy Commissioner of Kamrup issued an internment order against four women leaders, viz., Hemaprava Das, Amalprava Das, Saruplata Choudhury and Chandraprava Saikiani, in order to prevent them from carrying on the organizational work of the Congress. The notice was served on Hemaprava Das on 17 January 1943. Amalprava Das was arrested on 27 January under D.I.R. for refusal to accept the internment order. Chandraprava Saikiani, who could not be served with the notice was arrested on 26 January at Pathsala as mentioned before.  

Amalprava Das was suspected by the police to be having some connection with acts of sabotage in collaboration with Jyotiprasad Agarwalla, Rabin Nabis and Lakshidar Bora. In fact, Jyotiprasad brought some sabotage proposals to Puspalata Das and Amalprava Das which both of them declined to accept. However, Amalprava Das gave shelter to Jyotiprasad Agarwalla when the latter was absconding.
At Nalbari, the men and women, in thousands, protested against the arrest of the Congress leaders on 14 August 1942. A large crowd including women with flags in their hands collected in front of the Nalbari police station, on the same day the leaders were arrested, and shouted slogans protesting against the arrests. The European police officer present there threatened the people with resorting to firing. At this an old woman, Ratanpriya by name, came forward with the National flag in her hands and bared chest and challenged the police officer to "Fire, if you dare to". The police officer was taken aback and took to his heels. Ratanpriya was an example of the courage born of patriotism in an Assamese village woman. This woman of Nalbari earned her livelihood by selling vegetables in the market.

Apart from participation in processions and meetings, women contributed to the movement in other ways also. During 1942-44, all letters were censored. Practically the Government Postal Department kept itself off from service to the people. The underground movement communication network could be operated only through trusted couriers. Thus there came into being a parallel postal system. In every place of Assam some selected girls were entrusted with this job. Sudhalata Datta and Rebati Lahon were entrusted with the task of carrying
top secret letters from one place to the other.

They also worked as inter-district postal bearers. Once they had to cover a distance of twentyone miles on foot carrying some very urgent information from Bokata village of Sibsagar to Tingkhong village of Dibrugarh. At a time when girls and married women dared not to move out of their houses, these two girls braved all risks for the cause of the nation. Rebati Lahon was caught while doing her secret duty at Golaghat in the first week of June 1943 and was arrested along with Hemeswari Phukan of North Lakhimpur. Rebati Lahon was sentenced to 3 months' R.I. She suffered from pneumonia while she was in the jail, and came out of the jail in the last week of August 1943 with a broken health. This woman of indomitable courage and determination could not recover her health and died after a few weeks of the same ailment.

Again, the giving of shelter to the underground or absconding Congress workers was another great risk that the women all throughout Assam had undertaken even during the indiscriminate searches by police. Besides this, many women had to abscond to avoid arrest and police brutality. The wives of many government officers also helped the underground leaders by providing them with shelter and money.
In order to help the underground activities some women worked in disguise also. One such example was Dineswari Hazarika of Jorhat. She worked as a secret messenger of Congress in the disguise of a mad woman during the day time by roaming about on the roads. She collected information about the Government and spying activities and reported the same in the nocturnal secret meetings of Congress volunteers. She was arrested twice and suffered imprisonment for 3 months in 1942.  

Extremist activities and women of the Brahmaputra Valley:

The adoption of repressive measures by the Government on the non-violent Satyagrahis, indiscriminate arrest of Congress leaders, absence of any specific programme of the movement except Gandhi's message of 'Do or die', and the uncertainty and insecurity of life increasing with the progress of the war coupled with acute hatred towards the British, dragged a section of the Indian people towards violent activities. There emerged an underground revolutionary group drawn from the Congress Socialist Party, Forward Bloc and other militant wings within the Congress. People found in this group persons like Jayaprakash Narayan, Sadiq Ali, Sucheta Kriplani and Aruna Asraf Ali and others to lead them in that line. The attitude of some of the Congress leaders towards the violent activities was not as rigid as it was in the
earlier phases. Sardar Patel is quoted to have said at Ahmedabad on 25 July 1942, -"The Congress would not interfere if some people lost their temper and took dangerous and drastic steps against the Government during this struggle, nor would Gandhi show his disapproval in that connection. Congressmen would certainly observe non-violence during the struggle, but others were not bound by that rule".307

Thus, under the prevailing situation this group found a favourable atmosphere to carry on the underground revolutionary activities. While the spontaneous 1942 rebellion lacked plan, programmes and organizational net-work, the underground faction was, well planned and disciplined. For organizational purposes it co-ordinated with the different parts of the country by despatching secret circulars and bulletins.308

In Assam, many Congress leaders went underground in August and September 1942, to organize a resistance movement and established contact with the central leaders of the revolutionary group. Underground activities were carried out in the districts of Kamrup, Nowgong, Darrang and Sibsagar through secret cells formed for the purpose. Although, decisions regarding these activities were taken centrally at Gauhati under the guidance of Hemchandra
Barua and others, yet the actual implementing unit were the local cells.  

The prime objectives of the underground revolutionary movement in Assam were paralysing the communication net-work viz., railways, roadways, airways, and post and telegraph, obstructing the administration and frustrating the war efforts, etc. For that purpose railway tracks were uprooted, bridges on the roads were burnt or demolished and post and telegraph offices, police stations and railway stations were attacked and burnt and also Government buildings including schools, residential buildings of Government officers and supporters were burnt. Incidents of killing of government officers and supporters were also reported. In fact, there was a determined attempt throughout the Brahmaputra valley to dislocate military supply lines and movements and to disrupt the administration in all possible ways.

The women of Assam were generally engaged in participating in the movement on non-violent Gandhian lines and in constructive works. But a few of them, however, felt disappointed and were drawn to the violent activities. That small section of women had their involvement in violent activities of both direct and indirect ways.
On 26 August 1942, large scale underground violent activities were carried out at Barpeta sub-division under the leadership of Brajanath Sarma of Bajali. On that night, the army aerodrome on the bank of the Beki river was attacked and the war materials collected there were destroyed and simultaneously the inspection bungalow, police station and post office of Sorbhog were set on fire. In this major underground activity, the women of that area, particularly Brajanath Sarma's wives Gunawati Devi and Rakshada Devi helped in the supply of money and material to the underground workers. They also provided the underground workers with shelter and food and maintained utmost secrecy in that regard. Wives of Bhabani Chakravorty of Panchagaon and Deven Chakravorty of Garialbeta deserves special mention.

In Nowgong district extensive sabotage activities were reported from different places. On the night of 25/26 August 1942, a group of people burnt the Bebejia road bridge. Jaimoti Saikia of Chakalaghat village near Nowgong accompanied by her husband Pitram Saikia took active part in that incident. Enamai Bora, a 17-year old girl of Petbora village took part in bridge burning. She along with her friends, viz., Kali Saikia, Punimai Saikia and Dagali Bora were in charge of giving patrol duty during night hours for the security of the underground workers.
During night hours they kept vigilance and supplied information to the underground workers about the movements of police and spies.  

Daibaki Das, Panilata Saikia, Padmawati Saikia and Bakuli Bora were some other women who were directly involved in train derailment, bridge demolition and house burning incidents in Nowgong district in the months of August and September 1942.

Towards the later part of 1942, the leadership of Nowgong Congress passed into the hands of radical leaders like Mohendra Hazarika, Lakhmiprasad Goswami and others. At that time there were 1600 members in the Nowgong Santi Sena organization. Mohendra Hazarika who was regarded by the Nowgong district administration as Enemy No. 1, formed a Mrityu Bahini with the most daring members of the Santi Sena in order to carry out the subversive activities in a more effective manner than before. Ratnabala Phukan, Damayanti Bora and few others were the female members of that death squad. Damayanti Bora took part in destruction of bridges and burning of Government buildings.

The underground workers of Nowgong under Mohendra Hazarika's leadership started a gun stealing drive for the underground activities. Ratnabala Phukan
was actively associated with this activity. Ratnabala Phukan, in accomplishing her duty to collect guns, stole the gun belonging to her own brother-in-law, Bapan Bora, a senior officer of Segunbari Tea Estate, in collaboration with her brother Uma Phukan. Ratnabala Phukan also associated herself with the youths of Barhampur area in destroying the bridge on the Nonoi river and the railway tracks near Nowgong. Even after her mother, Bhogeswari Phukanani's death she allowed her house to be used as a centre of underground workers in spite of her knowledge that the Government spies were all around their village.318

Bebejia and Kaliabar turned out to be the most active centres of underground activities in the Nowgong district. Mohendra Hazarika and Lakhmiprasad Goswami attended many meetings in these places to discuss the planning of subversive activities. To elude police, they had to change their hideouts every day and night. They even used to move about during the day time in disguise, mostly dressed as women. The women of these areas helped them immensely in this regard. They gave them shelter at nights319 and used to keep women's dresses ready according to sizes for wearing by Hazarika and Goswami. Some women even used to carry such dresses with them to the meetings attended by these
Sumitra Bhuyan of Kalibar, who was subjected to police atrocities, also helped the underground activities in different ways. She gave shelter to Mohendra Hazarika on a number of occasions when the latter was absconding.

Mohendra Hazarika's group, also known as the 'Black Party', operated in Kamrup district as well. On 24 November 1942, a special train carrying troops was derailed near Panikhaiti in Kamrup district. The sabotage group held a secret meeting at the cottage of a local Nepali woman. That woman was informed about the plan and she, in fact, became an accomplice in that activity. But when she was interrogated after the occurrence of the incident, she pretended to be ignorant about anybody coming that side and the police finding her useless in identifying the culprits let her off.

In the Hatichong area of Nowgong, a police informer was killed by some people. In that incident, some of the women were even related to the victim and they supplied the executioners with necessary information. But none of the women could be caught by the police.

In Darrang district, Jyotiprasad Agarwalla, Gahan Chandra Goswami and a few others went underground in August 1942 and organized the revolutionary resistance movement throughout the district. Circulation of
information and transmitting of instructions to the underground workers were done through secret circular and bulleting. Educated girls in the group were entrusted with the work of writing and copying out of such bulletins and circulars on underground activities. In order to disrupt the military supplies, the cargo boats carrying such supplies were also sunk in different places. Four such boats were sunk on the Brahmaputra river near North Lakhimpur. Buddheswari Hazarika took part in one such act of sinking cargo boats. She openly instigated the people to commit sabotage activities when found necessary. Just before her arrest in 1942, Buddheswari Hazarika, in a fiery speech at North Lakhimpur, asked the people not to forgive and spare the Government informers.

In Upper Assam, the underground activists were fully active under the leadership of Sankar Chandra Barua of Golaghat and Pitambar Deva Goswami. Trains were derailed, Government buildings including schools, residences and offices of Mouzadars were burnt throughout the districts of Upper Assam.

Aikan Bhuyan of Mudoijan near Teok, played an active role in setting fire to the Amguri High School. She encouraged the local Congress youths to damage Government property and bridges in secret meetings.
Aikan Bhuyan along with some other girls did patrol duty while the male workers carried out such demolition works. Another woman who helped the underground workers in different activities, was Kunjalata Gogoi of Cherekapar near Sibsagar. Basanti Bordoloi of Jorhat helped her extremist husband Sarbeswar Bordoloi in all his missions in every possible way. She states - "My husband was involved in such serious violent activities that had he been caught at that time his punishment would not have been other than a death sentence".

The underground revolutionary leaders asked the rural people to keep themselves prepared by collecting lathis, spears, bows and arrows and other indigenous weapons for use against the enemy. At Jorhat and Goghat bows and arrows were distributed among the boys and daggers among the girls Akani Baruah of Kaloighogora village, near Sibsagar, was a supplier of arrows to the underground workers.

Annaprava Barua of Golaghat undertook underground activities as directed by her husband Sankar Chandra Baruah. She devoted herself mainly to underground organization among the women in the interior villages, organizing among the women the Mrityu Bahini and training them in carrying out subversive activities.
She even used to be the custodian of various weapons collected by the underground workers of Golaghat. Annaprava Baruah was a great source of inspiration for these workers.

Padmawati Rajkumari of Pankial village of Daigrong near Golaghat was one of the chief advisers of the violent underground workers of her area. Night meetings of the extremists were held at her residence to discuss the plans and programmes of the violent activities.

Many more women either directly and indirectly helped the extremist activities of the underground workers in different ways. Mostly they provided such workers with food and shelter and made arrangements for their escape even at the cost of their own risks at the time of police searches. Such examples are numerous.

Towards the end of the year 1942, there arose a difference of opinion amongst the underground workers. A section of them showed its inclination to give up the path of violence due to the changing political situation. A secret meeting was accordingly held in the last week of December at Panigaon in Nowgong under the presidency of Amalprava Das. The meeting urged upon the workers to stop all kinds of violence and condemned the theft of guns, arson, killing and other violent
activity. But a faction, led by Mohendra Hazarika of Nowgong was still in a mood to adopt any method violent or non-violent for the attainment of independence. However, Mohendra Hazarika was arrested on 15 February 1943 and with his arrest the violent underground activities collapsed.337

At the all-India level Gandhi's epic fast in February 1943 and his total disapproval of any work of violence caused rift amongst the underground workers. A group led by Sucheta Kriplani changed over to Constructive works while the underground activists like Jayaprasak Narayan, Aruna Asraf Ali and others remained firm on their stand. As a result of such differences of opinion among the workers at the centre as well as in the province, the underground resistance movement in Assam lost its momentum.338 A majority of the Congress workers in Assam favoured the taking up of Constructive programmes as desired by Gandhiji.

V

Atrocities on Women:

During the year 1942, a complete police Raj was instituted in the province of Assam. The people were subjected to untold sufferings. The police force was given unlimited power of repression. They worked havoc
on the innocent people mainly in the rural areas. The worst types of police atrocities were committed in the name of collection of collective fines. All possible coercive measures were adopted. Soldiers and military police were sent to the villages and they forcefully entered the houses of the poor villagers, insulted the womenfolk and decamped with whatever treasure they could collect from the poor people. Physical assault and harassment of people in numerous ways became a regular feature of the administration in Assam in the early years of 1940s. Women were subjected to diverse kinds of repressions for taking part in the movement and also for encouraging their relatives for taking part in it. While Kanaklata, Bhogeswari, Kahanli, Kumali and Tila wari became martyrs, some others also succumbed to the injuries caused by beating and kicking and maltreatment in the jails. Further, Buddheshwari Hazarika, Nandeswari Phukan, Hemeshwari Phukan and Leela Neogoni of North Lakhimpur, Rohini Devi and Tankeswari Bora from Nowgong, Ratneswari, Nanibala Saikia and Umakanti Rai Baruah from Tezpur, Balia Chutia, Smti Tanuram Saikia, Smti Darjeeram, Someswari Kuchuni and Smti Benudhar Hazarika of Tezpur, and Chandraprava Saikiani and Bhubaneswari Devi of Bajali were some of the women who suffered injuries in police beating, slapping, kicking and bayonet charges during the period of the 'Quit India' movement.
About eighty women were victims of heinous police outrages in the Brahmaputra valley districts.\textsuperscript{340} Assault on Someswari Kachari, and the women belonging to the families of Tanuram, Darjiram and Benu-dhar Hazarika of Jamuguri in Darrang district was committed in a very planned and deliberate manner. They were dragged out of their homes in their night dresses insulted and abused in filthy language by the police officers in the third week of September 1942.\textsuperscript{341}

The Dhekiajuli firing of 20 September 1942 that took away the life of Kanaklata and injuring many, was also pre-planned. Anticipating mass casualty in the planned firing, the medical staff of the Dhekiajuli Government hospital was asked by the District authority to get ready with first aid material and arrive at the police station before 11 a.m. The crowd in the procession reached the spot at 10.50 a.m. But after the firing the medical staff was not allowed to give any aid to the wounded people.\textsuperscript{342} On the days proceeding and following the Dhekiajuli firing, the men and women of Dhekiajuli were subjected to all sorts of harassment.\textsuperscript{343}

While raiding the villages the women in their period of their menstrual seclusion were also dragged out and assaulted.\textsuperscript{344} At North Lakhimpur, the sister-in-law of Congressman Niren Bhuyan, was kicked by some
police officer while looking for the Congress workers at her residence. This woman was in the advanced stage of pregnancy of eight months. As a result of this brutal treatment she had a miscarriage and she died a few weeks later due to this accident. Sumala Handique, another women worker who joined the 7 October procession at North Lakhimpur was also mercilessly kicked by the police. She was also in the advanced stage of pregnancy and as a result of this assault she gave birth to a dead child.

The police vandalism was of such a vile nature that the innocent people had to take shelter in forests. Women were never safe. The army and police committed atrocities on them whenever they found the opportunity. In the month of September 1942, a young women was molested on the road near Dhalpur in North Lakhimpur and she was also robbed of her ornaments.

On 25 August night some people had burnt down a few planks of the Bebejia bridge on the Assam Trunk Road. On the following day the police marched to the nearest villages, without any clue of the persons involved in that act, and began to raid the houses of innocent villages from one end to the other. In the course of the raid, about 200 houses were badly damaged and the inmates of the houses, irrespective of age and sex, were
mercilessly assaulted. About four hundred persons including some women were arrested and herded along the road to Nowgong. Rohini Devi, the mother of a 3-day old baby and two other women in an advanced stage of pregnancy, were also amongst the arrested persons. Rohini Devi's baby died on the same day on the road and she lost her health for ever. One of the pregnant women delivered a baby on the road and it died then and there. The other pregnant woman, wife of Boloram Sarma of Bebejia, was made to march along with the others to Nowgong, which caused her great embarrassment. However she was later left on the road along with others about 5 miles away from the village.

At Kaliabar, on 7 September 1942, a group of women was severely assaulted by the police in a Namghar (prayer hall) causing serious injuries to an old woman of sixty years of age.

On 31 August, police committed indescribable atrocities on the people of Kahikhari village of Kaliabor. Women of the village were so terrified that they had to leave their homes and take shelter in the nearby jungles to avoid molestation. The wife and one of the sisters of Fatik Chandra Bhuyan were ravished by the army and police raiders. Smti Bhuyan who was in an advanced stage of pregnancy was ravished by three military men. Later,
she gave birth to a dead child and suffered from various ailments and died after sometime.350

On the same night at about 1 a.m., the military raided many houses of Dharampur village. The villagers, irrespective of sex and age, were dragged out of their houses and beaten up severely. The military also took advantage of the night and ravished a number of women of the village and left them naked. Rojon Bhuyani, daughter of Jogai Bhuyan of Dharampur, was dragged out of her bed while she was sleeping with her mother. Although she managed to run away from the grip of the police, she was chased by them and ravished by police and military in the dark night. Kolimai Gayanani of the same village was raped by the armymen on the same night during the period of menstruation causing great physical harm to her.351

Mohini Hazarika of Pubthoria village of Koliabar was another victim of police atrocities. On the night of 31 August some police came to her house for realization of collective fines. They arrested her husband Niran Chandra Hazarika and took him to the police camp. A group of policemen came back to her house and finding no one there his wife was ravished by them

Saloi Bora, a fifty-five year old woman, of Dharampur village was pulled out of her bed on the night
of 31 August by the police and she was severely beaten while searching for Congress workers. She was robbed of an amount of Rs. 500. In most cases older women were subjected to police beating and kicking.  

Sumitra Bhuyan, wife of Thaneswar Bhuyan, a freedom fighter of Koliabor, was another victim of police atrocities. A few days after the arrest of her husband on 14 August 1942, an armed constable of Nowgong police force ravished her at her house at Koliabor.  

Soon after the arrest of the leaders in August, a big meeting was held at Kaliabor in which Sumitra Bhuyan openly condemned the arrests and the atrocities committed on the people. Since then the police was always after her. On 15 November 1942, a group of six police personnel entered her house at about 9 p.m. Her husband was at that time in the prison. The police forcefully opened the door of her house on the pretext of searching for Mohendra Hazarika and some other Congress workers. While asking about the whereabouts of the above persons, the police also gave her some indecent indications and used filthy languages. A young girl, staying with her, was also subjected to misbehaviour by the police. The police also robbed Sumitra Bhuyan of her jwelleries. At this she shouted for help
but before anyone could reach there the raiding party fled with the valuables. Again, after Guneswari Devi's arrest, Sumitra Bhuyan had to take charge of the presidency of the Kaliabor Women's Congress. During that period she was taken into police custody and interned in a solitary house at Kuthari, about twentyeight miles from Kaliabor. There she was subjected to all sorts of humiliation including molestation which she declined to reveal.  

At Potani Village, near Nowgong, a group of young girls while working in the paddy fields were attacked by a few police constables. They were asked whether they saw the Congress workers who were supposed to have come to attend the Potani Congress meeting held in the village. When the girls expressed their ignorance about what they were asked, they were severely beaten by the police. The girls in a state of confusion and terror went back to their homes. But there also they found their houses surrounded by the police and hence, they fled to nearby villages to escape police atrocities and spent the night there. Many women had to spend their nights in the jungles for fear of police atrocities. Some women even set up secret camps in the deep jungles. Rameswari Rajkhowa of Chalchali of Nowgong, was one who had such a camp along with her friends.
The police committed barbarous atrocities on women and men in different forms. Kicking, giving of blows and slapping were some of the most humiliating treatment given to innocent and peaceful participants in the movement. On 10 September 1942, the women of Jagi village, in Nowgong district, were subjected to a very uncivilized treatment. On that day the police arrested a large number of men and women of that area. The police ordered the arrested persons to pass through two rows of army standing nearby. When they passed through the rows, each one of army man gave them kicks and slaps as a result of which many were injured. The arrested women were also treated in a similar humiliating way. This incident was condemned by different section of people and the Nowgong Lawyers Association condemned it by a resolution in its meeting and urged upon the Government of Assam to stop such atrocities by the police.\textsuperscript{357}

The police also raided the Jagi village on 12 October 1942 night and committed various acts of atrocities on women. The wife of Kanakeswar Barua of Jagi was subjected to severe beating by the police when she tried to prevent them from arresting her husband. At that time she was at the advanced stage of pregnancy of nine months. On 2 October, while raiding the village of Nawkata of Nowgong, the police raped a large number of
women and robbed them of their ornaments. In Kamasera, Bhakatgaon and Sonaguri villages of Nowgong district, police conducted indiscriminate search for the Congress workers. In September 1942, in the course of search for Rupram Sut, a student worker, the police raided his house and not finding Rupram at home, his elder brother was severely beaten by the police. The police officer of the party instigated the other police men to molest the sister and sister-in-law of Rupram Sut, but they managed to escape such humiliation. In the same village, the police raided the house of Kolising Deka at night. After arresting him they demanded money from him. When his sister Praneswari went to bring the money from inside the house, few policemen caught her in the darkness and used force to molest her. However, she managed to escape from them somehow.

Biraja Deka, the sister of Hemaram Patar, a martyr, and another 13 year old girl, Silen Rai, were sought to be subjected to molestation by some drunk military men by forcibly entering into their house.

For the purpose of realising collective fines from the villagers, the police set up a camp at Pubthoria village near Kaliabor. From that camp they raided the village at nights mostly. In course of the
raids the police beat the innocent villagers and molested a number of women. The victims of rape were left naked. Abali Kuchuni of Morigaon in Nowgong district, died as a result of inhuman beating by the police. She was alleged to have been associated with the incident of setting fire to the Monoha Inspection bunglow. Abali Kuchuni also deserves a place amongst the martyrs.

In Nowgong district police created havoc amongst the women. The women were always afraid of falling prey to the atrocities of the army and the police. On 26 August 1942, a few girls of Petbora village of Nowgong, while coming back after attending a meeting at Dakhinpat village were chased by a group of armymen. In order to save themselves from the pursuers, the girls had to jump into a river, nearby and crossed over. The group of girls included Enamai Bora, Pasan Bania, Phulmai Hazarika, Rihadoi Das, Monomoti Bora, Bhogeswari Bora and few others.

At Sibsagar, women were insulted by police even in social and religious gatherings like pujas and marriages. On 27 September a group of two hundred women who participated in the march to the Teok police station was badly assaulted by the police
on the Assam Truhk road. Police resorted to lathi and bayonet charges. The women who were in the front part of the procession were the worst victims. Besides Ratneswari, who was charged with bayonet, Nanibala Saikia and 50 year-old Umakanti Rai Baruah were kicked and injured by bayonet charge. The old mother of Nila Sarma of Teok was badly assaulted while she was pouring water on the head of her injured son. She became unconscious as a result of kicking by the police. A sixteen-year old girl, Renu Prava Baruah was beaten so badly that she became invalid for life and she had to remain unmarried. In some cases, in Jorhat and Teok, women sleeping inside their rooms were dragged out by police at night while searching for Congress workers and were subjected to assault.

In the name of realising collective fines women's jewelleries were also seized. The wife of Malghog Saikia of Teok was one such victim from whom police had seized all her jewelleries. In the course of raids, some girls in Teok, Aikan Bhuyan and others were tied up together with ropes and beaten severely. They were made to walk 3/4 miles and left in the midst of jungle.

Bela Chutia, daughter of Bahmai of Deopani near Sibsagar, was taken away by some army men allegedly for evil purposes. She was, however, rescued afterwards by
the villagers. Sabitri Nath of Charing Telialgaon village, was dragged by her hair by a military man near Sibsagar town for participating in a procession in August 1942 and was beaten severely. One of her legs became invalid as a result of bayonet wounds. She remained unmarried.

In Barpathar, near Golaghat, women were subjected to brutal treatment by some military men. Every night, in the name of either realization of fines or in search of Congress workers, the houses of the villagers were raided by police and military and the women inmates were assaulted. One night some military men entered the house of Maghiram Bora and tried to molest his unmarried daughter and the daughter-in-law in the absence of the male members in the house. As both the women started screaming the villagers came to their rescue and the military fled away from there. This was a common scene in many villages in Assam in those days.

The women had also to suffer for helping the Congress volunteers. Josoda Keotoni of Mongoldoi who was in her monthly period was dragged out of her house and badly assaulted by police on the charge of supplying food to the Congress volunteers.
Saraswati Kamarani of Saru Thekerabari village near Mongoldoi was severely beaten by the police in Mongoldoi court for participating in a procession in September 1942. She had to abscond for three months for fear of police arrest and atrocities. All her belongings were also taken away by police.373

In Goalpara district also police committed various kinds of atrocities on the innocent men and women. In 1942, a police force consisting of about twentyone sepoys entered the Dhadra village of Goalpara district and started atrocities on the people in the name of collecting fines. Thirty persons, including two women, viz., mother of Janaki and the wife of Mayacharan, were arrested and kept in the police lock-up along with the others for the whole night. The police of North Salmara police station harassed the family of Lalit Mohan Das in a very inhuman manner. They insulted the wife of Lalit Mohan Das and attached all the paddies they harvested and those kept in the fields and took away all the chattels in three cart loads. The house was then locked by the police and it remained in that condition for six months. The woman and the children were reduced to a state of starvation and the two kids died due to lack of proper food and care in a few months time. Another women victim of that area was the wife of Bisweswar Das of
In August 1943, a group of women was beaten by police officers at South Salmara for obstructing the passing of several boats full of paddy and other items alleged to have been supplied for military consumption. Rifle butts and bayonets were used against the women as a result of which they suffered serious injuries.

It was evident that raping of women was a part of police plan of action against the people. On 16 October night when the police party of Dudhnoi went to take action against Nidhanu Rajbongshi, the police officer while rounding up the villagers threatened that if the latter did not help them in catching Nidhanu all of them would be arrested and their young girls would be deflowered by the army. Cases of young girls being molested by army and men belonging to the ranks of police were numerous. Young girls had to remain within the house and stop going outside. Annada Datta of Meteka near Sibsagar had to stop going to school for fear of such atrocities. In that locality four school going girls were raped by the police on the road and left in an unconscious condition on the roadside bushes.
In many places in Kamrup district, the army and police committed atrocities on the women at the time of realising collective fines and search for Congress workers. At Barpeta, many persons were beaten and harassed at the time of collection of fines. Brajanath Sarma's wives, viz., Gunawati Devi and Rakshyada Devi were victims of inhuman treatment meted out to them. When Brajanath Sarma went underground, the police having failed to arrest him took vengeance on them. Their house was searched several times during days and nights and all their valuables and even utensils were taken away by the police. Both the women were thus forced to leave their house and take refuge elsewhere. The families of Brajanath Sarma's relatives and neighbours were also not spared by police. Assuming that Brajanath Sarma might be hiding in one of his neighbour's house a police party went there and surrounded the house. The women of the neighbours houses who gathered there to assist the woman of the house who was having delivery pain at that time, were forced to come out of the house by the police to make the search for Brajanath Sarma. Even the woman in delivery pain was also not spared.

In Jorhat, during 1942-43, the military forces posted at Rowriah air field committed atrocities on the people in the neighbouring villages. Grown-up girls
or young women constantly faced the danger of falling victim to the police and army misdeeds. In fact, the women of younger ages had to leave the villages near the airfield and took refuge in safer places. Girls and women even stopped coming out in the open and school-going by the girls was out of question. Sankar Chandra Baruah, the under-ground leader and the President of Upper Assam Congress advised the girls to arm themselves with daggers for protection of their honour and for self defence. This was also approved by Gandhi. Padmeswar Chiring Phukan of Karanja near Jorhat made thousands of daggers to be distributed among the girls.

The women taking the initiative in organizing meetings or processions were the targets of police atrocities and harassment. Aidhan Saikia of Kakojan and Makan Bora of Teok were repeatedly harassed by the police for participation in the procession of 27 September and 5 October 1942. Similarly, Renuprava Saikia of Gargaon near Sibsagar, was misbehaved by the police regularly. Renuprava Barua of Khonamukh, near Sibsagar, was beaten severely by the police for participating in a procession. When her father was in jail her house was raided by the police and they took away all their belongings like bicycle, clothes, spinning wheel, utensils, etc. Similar harassment was faced by Devajani Baruah of Teok also.
In jails the arrested women were also subjected to humiliating treatment. Kiran Bala Chetia of Bakata Kahargaon near Sibsagar was seriously injured in a police lathi charge in 1942 and when she was confined to Sibsagar jail she was given boiled paddy husk for eating. On 15 September 1942, when participating in a procession, Mukheswari Chetia with her baby was beaten by police and the baby was thrown into a nearby ditch. A large number of other women were injured in that attack by the police.

In 1942, Makhani Bordoloi, a woman Congress worker of Sonarigaon of Kakojan was subjected to severe beating and assault by pulling of hair by police for which she had to be hospitalized for 15 days in October 1942. Her offence was supply of food to the Congress volunteers. She was also beaten by military police while picketing in Sibsagar Court. Aikan Bhuyan of Nudoijan of Teok was arrested by the police in October 1942 and taken to the thana on foot by tying her with a rope like a criminal.

Annaprava Barua, wife of Sankar Chandra Barua, the underground leader in Upper Assam, was one of the worst victims of police atrocities. Having failed to arrest her husband, Annaprava Baruah was harassed by the police to extract information about her husband.
All her possessions and belongings, even the idol for worship were taken away by the police. Even utensils of all kinds were seized and she was left with nothing to cook food or to drink water with. Police used to come to her place at any time during the day or night. Even in the midst of cooking food, police would come and throw away half-cooked food and take away or break the utensils. Mostly the police used to come to their house at night hours for arresting Sankar Chandra Baruah. While making the search, they used indecent language to her. Annaprava Barua had a big banana garden with more than hundred plants. One day the police came and cut down all the plants to make sure that Sankar Chandara Baruah or any other Congress worker might not hide there. Their house was broken and the C.I. sheets of the roof were also taken away. Even the clothes of her two young children were seized. Annaprava Baruah was in her third term of pregnancy during these days of police atrocities.

Arrested women when kept in police custody were made to spend days and nights in small unhygienic cells and were not allowed to come outside even to respond to the call of nature. In the course of their detention in police custody, women were tortured both physically and mentally in various ways. When Buddheswari Hazarika was in detention she was asked to give an undertaking that
she would not join the movement again. On her refusal to give such an undertaking her fingertips were pricked with needles. She was also confined to a filthy unusable latrine for one night.\textsuperscript{391}

During this period, atrocities of various kinds were perpetrated on the women practically all throughout Assam. Gandhi apprehended the danger of women being molested by the army on a large scale as early as March 1942. He advised the women to be fearless and self-reliant to defend themselves in such contingencies.\textsuperscript{392} The AICC by a circular to the APCC asked the women to be brave and self-reliant by fully participating in the programmes of the Congress and in the works of the Women's Department. The circular said that whenever there was danger to women's honour, the tendency in the country was to segregate them or to remove them to places of safety. But, it said that, segregation was no remedy rather it was bound to make the women more timid and helpless. So it was suggested that auxiliary forces or voluntary forces among women should be created for self-protection.\textsuperscript{393} This instruction from the AICC, in fact, gave an encouragement to the women of Assam to consolidate their strength for organization of forces, for their self protection, such as the women Santi Senas etc.
Gandhi's disapproval of the "secret methods and activities involving violence" led to a split in the camp of the underground leaders at the all-India level. Sucheta Kriplani and Sadiq Ali, the two central underground leaders, met Gandhiji in the jail and after their meeting they considered it as a disservice to the Congress to continue with violent activities. Accordingly, they changed over to taking up constructive programmes as a part of the non-violent movement and give up connections with the underground activities. On the other hand, Jayprakash Narayan, Aruna Asraf Ali and others remained firm on their ground. As a result of this split in the central leadership, the underground movement lost its momentum. The Congress leaders and workers including a number of those working underground favoured taking up the constructive programmes as desired by Gandhiji.394

Gandhiji regarded constructive programme as the only tool to achieve independence through non-violence. He said - "for my handling of Civil Disobedience without the constructive programme will be like a paralysed hand attempting to lift a spoon".395 After his release from jail in May 1944, Gandhi had to face set-backs and rebuffs from various quarters on issues like dealing with the Muslim League. Gandhiji, then, directed his activities
towards constructive programmes and await till the British made a move with regard to granting self-government to India.  

The constructive programme included items like communal unity, removal of untouchability, prohibition, improvement of village industries, sanitation, basic education, adult education, upliftment of women, Kisans, labourers, Adibasis, students and children, upliftment of national and provincial languages and welfare of the lepers, in addition to promotion of Khadi. Assamese women made a significant contribution towards the Khadi campaign from the very beginning. As regards prohibition and untouchability, their role had been discussed in an earlier chapter. Maintenance of a harmonious relationship among the Hindus and Muslims was considered to be of urgent necessity. Women contributed much in that direction. Kalyani Datta, a woman worker of Goalpara district went to Noakhali to work for Hindu-Muslim unity as instructed by Gandhi. Amalprava Das also went there in 1946 and worked for three months for the cause of this unity.

On 22 February 1944, Kasturba Gandhi died while in detention in the Aga Khan Palace. That caused countrywide grief and mourning. People all throughout the country observed hartal as a token of their love and respect to
Kasturba and also to protest against the British policy. A group of Congress workers decided to organize a fund after the name of Kasturba Gandhi to be utilized for the welfare of women and children. The main sponsors of the memorial fund were Narandas Gandhi, G.D. Birla, Thakkar Bapa, V.L. Mehta, Devdas Gandhi and others. An appeal signed by one hundred Congress workers of the country headed by Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya was issued on 8 March 1944 for collection of a memorial fund of Rs. 75 (seventyfive) lacs. Provincial and district committees were formed in the whole country for the purpose of collection of fund. The collection exceeded the targeted amount on 2 October 1944 the 75th birthday of Mahatma Gandhi, and an amount of Rs. 80 lacs was handed over to him by Sorojini Naidu on behalf of the trustees. Gandhi was made the head of the trust. Even after 2nd October people continued to donate to the fund and by the end of December 1945 it had exceeded twelve million six lacs rupees.

At the time of the commencement of the Kasturba fund collection drive in Assam, almost all the Congress leaders and workers were in jail. Amalprava Das and Gopinath Bordoloi, who were just released took up seriously the collection work in Assam. A fund collection committee was formed in which both Amalprava Das and Gopinath Bordoloi acted as joint secretaries. The
Committee collected an amount of Rs. 144,053 by the first half of 1945.  

In order to revive people's enthusiasm towards constructive works, meetings were held throughout the Brahmaputra valley districts at the initiative of the Congress leaders and workers. On 27 March 1945, a Congress workers' Conference was held at Goalpara under the presidency of Gopinath Bordoloi. The Conference resolved to undertake constructive programmes more vigorously in order to help the people to compensate the war loss and to recoup from the damages of the '42 atrocities. It also resolved to form committees at the district level for that purpose. A seven-member committee known as Pradeshik Congress Gaon Seva Sangha (Provincial Congress Village Service Association) was formed at the provincial level to aid and advise the district level committees. This committee consisted of Gopinath Bordoloi, Dr. H.K. Das, Krishnanath Sarma, Bimala Prasad Chaliha, Omeo Kumar Das, Puspalata Das and Mohendra Mohan Choudhury.  

The Goalpara Conference brought about a new dimension to the popularization of constructive works in Assam. After the conference many meetings were held and committees were formed in different parts of Assam. The women throughout the valley held meetings to organize
constructive works. The women of Nowgong in a meeting held on 7 April 1945 under the presidentship of Padmawati Hazarika, decided to establish an ideal educational institution for women in memory of Kasturba Gandhi.405

The Upper Assam Women's Association held a convention at Kamarbandha near Golaghat on 9 May 1945 with Sudhalata Datta as president. The meeting resolved to undertake constructive work including expansion of women's education in coordination with the Provincial Kasturba Memorial Trust.406 This association held a special meeting at Charigaon, Jorhat on 10 October 1945 to protest against the long term internment of Rani Guidinliu of Naga hills and the prohibitory orders on Aruna Asraf Ali and other leaders. It demanded the immediate withdrawal of warrant notice against Sankar Chandra Baruah and other Congress workers and also the release of all political prisoners. The meeting also proposed to form 50-member women volunteer groups in every district to work for the promotion of constructive works. The district women's committees were instructed to send a greater number of women to their respective Congress committees. The urgency of the need for organization of the women of the backward communities was also discussed. The meeting also resolved to form a committee to enquire into the cases of military and police atrocities on the people during the 1942-43 period.407
Amongst the items of constructive programme greater importance was given to the expansion of women's education in all spheres with emphasis on spinning and weaving. The women of Dibrugarh at a meeting held on 3 September 1945 proposed that spinning and weaving should be made a compulsory subject for girls in all schools. A similar resolution was also adopted in a women's meeting held at Lakhimpur on 28 October 1945. The Dibrugarh women's meeting proposed to request the Dibrugarh Local Board to open Middle-vernacular schools for girls in every Mouza and make necessary arrangements to provide educational facilities to the elderly illiterate women of the villages.

During the collection of fund for the Kasturba Memorial Fund women contributed to this fund generously in all the districts. Besides donating in cash, some women donated in kind because of their inability to pay in cash. For example, Jontora Hazarika and Kusumbala Konwar of Dibrugarh donated two milching cows to the fund and Lilawati Gogoi donated one golden ring and a pair of geese. In reality, the women's power was regenerated once again in the years 1945 and 1946 towards fulfilling the objective of Gandhiji's idea of constructive programme in Assam and women took the challenge very effectively. The special session of the executive
committee of the Asam Mahila Samiti held on 4 May 1945, decided to donate ten million yards of cotton yarn to the Congress fund on account of Gandhi Jayanti of 1945. The committee expressed its concern about the deterioration of the weaving industry in Assam and decided to take appropriate measures immediately to revitalize the same.  

Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust (KGNMT):  

In conformity with the constructive programme, the objective of the KGNMT was the welfare and education of women and children in the rural areas. Gandhi desired that all workers for the services to women should be women and that they should be properly trained. By training Gandhi meant training in all kinds of activities that could be done by women for the upliftment of women including training in maternity works and treatment of diseases. He also desired that all money for this purpose should be spent through the agency of women workers.  

According to Gandhi's suggestion the Executive Committee of the KGNMT Fund passed a resolution to appoint to each province an authorised woman representative who might have an advisory committee to assist her if she preferred to have one. It was also decided by the Committee that only women should be appointed to run the Trust
centres in the provinces.\textsuperscript{417} Gandhiji had great confidence on women's capacity to achieve their goals by peaceful and non-violent ways. The KGNMT had come up "as another instrument in the armoury of non-violence, its function being to release the power of non-violence latent in Indian womanhood."\textsuperscript{418}

After the completion of the KGNMT fund collection, Gopinath Bordoloi prepared a scheme in 1945 for the province of Assam. In the scheme he proposed to start an educational institution to be managed out of the Trust money. Gandhiji considered the scheme not in conformity with the objectives of the Trust and so it failed to get his approval. Since there was no further communication from Gandhi in this regard, Amalprava Das then took up the matter and she herself went to Sevaqram in 1945. She proposed to take a training on constructive programme so that she could prepare a scheme appropriate to Assam and acceptable to Gandhi. After a month's training under Asha Devi in Sevaqram, Amalprava Das was called by Gandhiji for an interview. From Gandhiji she learnt that the earlier scheme submitted by Bordoloi, was not approved because it was not likely to produce results proportionate to the expenditure intended to be incurred in the scheme. Gandhi said that he wanted a scheme based on the idea of self-reliance. By self-reliance he meant one's
ability to depend upon himself or herself for his or her own bread. Such a person should be trained to be competent to take up all kinds of domestic works. The villagers were also to be taught by the trained women to become self-reliant. On the basis of Gandhiji's guidelines, Amalprava Das prepared another scheme with the help of Asha Devi and the Assamese students in Sevagram.

In the scheme for Assam, Amalprava Das included some proposals for the upliftment of indigenous industries of Assam like Endi, Nuca and Silk. In the course of her discussion with Gandhi, she convinced him of the prospects and potentialities of these industries in Assam. The scheme received his approval. After her return to Gauhati with the scheme she received further instructions with regard to its implementation. By her sincere efforts, Amalprava Das got the clue to start the KGNI Trust work in Assam.419

The Kasturba work in Assam was formally started from 9 January 1946, with the inauguration of the Gram Sevika Vidyalaya at Sarania by Gandhiji. Sarania is a part of the present day Gauhati city. Situated at the top of the Sarania hill, the Gram Sevika Vidyalaya, popularly known as the Sarania Ashram, was started with only seven girl students. On 11 January 1946, Gandhiji
addressed a women's meeting at Sarania Ashram attended by a large number of girls and members of the Ila\hila Samiti and others. While explaining the objectives of the Kasturba Gandhi Memorial Trust, Gandhi advised the women to be self-supporting and not to lag behind men. 

"When a man can do - a woman also should do. In order to make the women self-supporting, to teach them self-reliance, this organization has been started", Gandhi said. He asked the people, in general, not to mistake the improvement in women's status in the society as the lowering down of men's position. He assured the men-folk that upliftment of women's position would help in improving their own status. He also said that if women could utilise their time for constructive work they could improve Assam in many ways, and they become self-supporting and self-reliant.

On 12 January 1946, a delegates' meeting, with more than three hundred delegates from different parts of Assam, was held at Sarania Ashram. Gandhiji addressed this meeting also.

On 11 and 12 January, big prayer meetings were held in Gauhati attended by Gandhiji. More than forty thousand people joined the prayers on each day. Gandhiji was impressed to see the large number of women attending these meetings freely unlike their sisters in Midnapur.
A similar prayer meeting was held at Sualkuchi on 9 January 1946, attended by about twentyfive thousand people including women. \[422\]

The **Gram Sevika Vidyalaya** was started with two women teachers, viz., Hemaprava Kakati and Ghanakanti Phukanani. Ghanakanti Phukanani attended the first all-India Provincial Training Camp that was held at Borivoli near Bombay in April 1945. Altogether eighty trainees from different parts of the country attended the camp, of whom three were from Assam.

The K.G.N.H.T. Executive Committee appointed Amalprava Das as the **Protinidhi** for the Assam Branch. She went to attend the provincial representative conference held in Uruli Kanchan on 27 and 28 March 1946. \[423\] In Uruli Kanchan, Amalprava Das personally met Mahatma Gandhi and received from him further guidelines to run the centre at Sarania. \[424\]

The idea of opening a training centre for girls in Assam, struck the mind of some Congress workers long before the death of Kasturba Gandhi. Dr. Harekrishna Das and Hemaprava Das, the parents of Amalprava Das were greatly attracted towards the constructive programme of the Congress. Hemaprava Das who was an active and dynamic constructive worker took great interest in the advancement of women's education in Assam. She was
herself a school teacher.

Hemaprava Das decided as far back as 1939 to do some constructive work on Gandhian lines, particularly for the upliftment of women. She went to Naganbari in Wardha with her daughter Amalprava in 1939. There, they had undergone three months' training in oil pressing, bee keeping, paper-making, etc. After returning to Assam, Hemaprava Das seriously thought about opening a permanent centre for constructive works in Assam. A big plot of land on the top of the Sarania hill that belonged to the Das family was selected by Hemaprava Das and her husband for that purpose. Accordingly, the institution came up on the Sarania hill, by the early part of 1940. The institution provided for training to the women on bee keeping, oil pressing and paper making in the beginning. Hemaprava Das wanted to take up indigenous Assamese crafts like cultivation, spinning and weaving of Muga, Endi and Silk in the Centre. Her desire was to make the institution self-sufficient. Thus the idea of opening a self-reliant women's training centre struck the mind of Assamese women long before it was thought about as a national venture. However, due to the 1942 upheaval, the institution could not make satisfactory progress. The Gram Sevika Vidyalaya at Sarania, opened by Gandhiji was...
nothing but a change-over from the women's training institute started at Sarania by Hemaprava Das in 1940.

The Sarania Ashram or the Gram Sevika Vidyalaya later came to be known as Kasturba Ashram. At present it has twenty-five branches in different interior villages in Assam. The first batch of trainees consisting of 22 girls, drawn from different communities of Assam, had completed their 16 months training in May 1947. Puspalata Das who presided over the meeting held on 17 May 1947 to felicitate the trainees, asked them to devote and utilize their knowledge to build self-reliant villages as desired by Gandhiji and prove the capabilities of women in the field of constructive work. The girls were given theoretical training on constructive works, fundamentals of physics, chemistry, hygiene and domestic science and also lessons on Hindi. They were given necessary physical training also.

VIII.

With the close of the Second World War the hope of some concrete achievement regarding the independence of India brightened. The British Government showed its willingness to convene a constitution-making body for India at an early date. As a first step in that direction, the election to the central as well as the pro-
provincial legislatures was proposed to be held towards the end of 1945. The AICC, in spite of its apprehen-
sions about the rigidity in British policy towards India, decided to take a chance to demonstrate the indomitable desire of the people to have their own independent Government, by contesting the proposed election. The Congress and other contesting parties viz., the Muslim League, Hindu Kasabha, Jamiat-ul-Ulema and others started electioneering from September 1945.

Assam with the rest of India was once again drawn into the massive political activities involved in the elections. Election meetings were held throughout the province. The women of the Brahmaputra valley mostly participated in electioneering in favour of the Congress party. Women's meetings in different places resolved to help the Congress in the election. Puspalata Das, in her speech as the Chief guest in the Tezpur Mahila Samiti meeting held on 15 November 1945 at Tezpur, appealed to the women of Assam to help and cooperate with the Congress party in its election campaign. The meeting opined that bringing of the Congress party to power was a duty of the women of Assam. The Tezpur women's meeting as well as the Upper Assam Women's conference held in October, proposed
to reorganize the defunct women's volunteer corps at all levels and utilize them in the prevailing political situation. 430

The women of the Brahmaputra were alive to the ensuing electoral campaign. In this context, the resolutions adopted by the special session of the Executive Committee of the Asam Mahila Samiti on 4 May 1945, were significant. The meeting resolved: (a) to reorganize and project the women of Assam as a united force; (b) to demand women's right to participate in local government institutions; (c) to send women's representatives to all municipal boards of Assam in the next municipal election and (d) to demand inclusion of the names of all qualified women in the voters' list.

This meeting also decided to form one women's front i.e., Mahila Dal, to fight the ensuing Assembly elections and send the names of at least one woman candidate from each district. All the district committees were instructed to take necessary action in this regard. 431 The Golaghat Women's Conference held on 22 September 1945, under the presidentship of Mrinalini Devi Goswami extended full support to the Asam Mahila Samiti Executive Committee's resolutions and demanded that at least six women from the Brahmaputra valley should be nominated by the Congress party in the ensuing
Assembly elections. The Golaghat meeting did not resolve upon a separate Mahila Dal as such. However, in the nomination of candidates by the Congress party it appeared that the Mahila Dal did not figure as a separate entity. The women of the Brahmaputra valley districts extended all cooperation and help to the Congress party.

In the provincial Assembly election, the Congress won fifty seats out of a total of 108 seats. With the support of eight Independent members, the Congress formed the Government in Assam on 10 February 1946 with Bordoloi as the Prime minister. One woman was nominated by the Congress to the Assembly.

Grouping and the women of the Brahmaputra valley:

In order to promote the early realization of full self government in India in conjunction with the leaders of the major Indian political parties, a three-member British Cabinet Committee headed by Sir Stafford Cripps was sent to India by the British Government in March 1946. The Mission found in India a tense political atmosphere. There prevailed great tension and suspicion among the major political parties over the Hindu-Muslim question. In spite of the Assam Congress Ministry's sincere efforts to prevent any
communal flare-up in the province, the situation was grave, with the Muslim League's move of "Larke Lange Pakistan" in parts of Barpeta, Mongoldoi, Nowgong, Goalpara and Sylhet. 435

The Cabinet Mission members, in the course of their various interviews, came to the conclusion that the Muslim League was in favour of an independent Pakistan, separate from India with the areas predominantly inhabited by Muslims, while the Congress desired a united independent India. 436

In that Hindu-Muslim tug-of-war, Assam's position became very complicated. Md. Saadullah, the former Premier of Assam and leader of the Muslim League in Assam, who had been trying to make Assam a Muslim-dominated state for more than a decade by importing Muslims from East Bengal in the name of 'grow more good' campaign 437 supported Jinnah's claim for inclusion of Assam in Pakistan. Gopinath Bordoloi rejected Jinnah's proposal as "absolutely impossible and advocated separation of the Muslim-majority districts from the rest of Assam. 438
The Mission, in order to avoid the problem of creating two independent states and also to satisfy both the Hindus and the Muslims at the same time, proposed the introduction of a grouping system. It proposed to create a predominantly Muslim zone in Eastern India including Assam, like the one proposed to be set up in Western India consisting of parts of the Punjab and Sindh. By that scheme Assam was proposed to be tagged to the Muslim-dominated Bengal to form the section C provinces thereby denying a separate provincial status for Assam. The grouping arrangement was tantamount to completely wiping out of the religious, cultural and linguistic identity of the people of Assam and their political personality.

There was a sharp reaction in Assam in the Hindu dominated Assamese speaking Brahmaputra valley against the grouping proposal. On the very day of its announcement by the Cabinet Mission, i.e., on 16 May 1946, the APCC lodged an emphatic protest with the Congress Working Committee against it. Gopinath Bordoloi, the Assam Premier, called on the Congress President and the CWC members to apprise them of the grave consequences of the grouping proposal and Assam's stern opposition to it. However, to the utter disappointment of the people of Assam and the
Congress leaders of the province as well, the CWC members showed no sympathy to Assam. The National Congress leaders did not want to obstruct the way of India's independence which was on the verge of coming, by pleading for a small state like Assam. Mahatma Gandhi was the only exception in this regard. In his reply to Gopinath Bordoloi, Gandhi wrote that if the people of Assam are men and not manikins, they must fight against the grouping scheme. Gandhi's view on grouping gave great encouragement to the Congress leaders and people of Assam.

In May 1946, the APCC sent a 9-member delegation, including Puspalata Das, to Delhi to register Assam's protest against grouping before the CWC. After meeting the central leaders, the delegation was disappointed at their unsympathetic attitude towards Assam. Vijaylaxmi Pandit's remark on the Assam question surpassed all other comments. She held that Assam was holding an adament attitude, which was no less obstructing than that of the Muslim League, in the way of attaining independence. She said - "The petition and appeals from Assam deserve a place in the waste paper basket only".
However, after receiving a memorandum from the delegation, the CWC had approached the Cabinet Mission to reconsider the grouping clause. But the request was rejected straight away. The CWC then took a firm stand to work on the grouping clause according to its own interpretation and instructed the APCC to formulate its own proposal. Accordingly, the APCC asked its members of the Constituent Assembly from Assam not to join the section under any circumstances. But, just at the time of Assam’s position showing some improvement, the situation took a dramatic turn with Jinnah’s disapproval of Congress interpretation of the grouping clause and Muslim League’s challenge of the authority of the Assam Legislative Assembly to direct its representatives in the C.A. not to join the section. The Muslim League observed the ‘Direct Action Day’ on 16 August 1946 which resulted in large-scale violence, particularly, in Calcutta.

Another blow came to Assam when Jawaharlal Nehru as the head of the Interim Government, gave his support to the Mission’s grouping proposal and also to the CWC’s decision to abide by the verdict of the Federal Court on the grouping question. Added to the anxiety of the people and the leaders of Assam, was the British Government’s declaration of 6 December 1946 which said that
the formation of the sections was a "precondition for convening of the Assembly for the purpose of preparing provincial and group constitutions" and that the Federal Court would decide the disputed matter on section by a simple majority. Gopinath Bordoloi and the representatives of Assam then submitted a memorandum to the Congress President stating Assam's inability to sit in the section.

Gandhiji, who did not move from his earlier view on the grouping issue, said on 15 December-

"... Assam should not go into the sections. It should lodge its protest and retire from the constituent assembly. It will be a kind of satyagraha against the Congress for the good of the Congress".

Referring to the CWC's decision to stand by the decision of the Federal Court, he said - "The Federal Court is the creation of the British. It is a packed court". This stand of Gandhiji on grouping issue, had not only an electrifying effect on the people of Assam but also worked upon the minds of the Congress leaders at the centre to change their attitude on that issue.

In the meantime a valley-wide stir against grouping proposal had begun. In response to APCC's call to observe an anti-grouping week from 1 to 7
June, protest meetings, processions and demonstrations were held throughout the valley. Reacting sharply to the grouping proposal, the women of Assam came out with renewed vigour to stand unitedly against any attempt to sell out Assam to Pakistan. They held separate women's meetings, processions and demonstrations and organized women volunteer corps as instructed by the APMS.

On 19 May 1946, a women's meeting was held at Tinsukia, attended by thousands of Assamese and non-Assamese women, to discuss the danger posed by the grouping scheme being imposed upon Assam. Women leaders like Amalprava Das, Puspalata Das and Padmini Gohain addressed the meeting and appealed to the people to stand united under the Congress banner to fight against the grouping plan. Another largely attended protest meeting of women was held at Dibrugarh on 24 May. Ira Datta, one of the women speakers said that the cultural, religious and linguistic identity of Assam was threatened by the grouping scheme. The meeting demanded of the CWC to reject the scheme. In a student meeting held at the Panbazar Girls' High School, Labanyaprava Das and Hemarekha Das appealed to the people, irrespective of caste and community, to stand united to fight against the grouping arrangement.
The women of Nowgong held a similar meeting on 5 June 1946. All the district and subdivisional branches of the APMS in the Brahmaputra valley held protest meetings, and organized processions and demonstrations. Each of these meetings was attended by thousands of women.\(^{453}\) The meetings adopted anti-grouping resolutions and sent copies of the same to the members of the APCC, the members of the CWC, members of the Cabinet Mission, Mahatma Gandhi and the Viceroy of India.\(^{454}\)

The executive committee of the APMS sent telegraphic message to Rajendra Prasad, Jawaharlal Nehru Acharyya Kripalani and Sardar Patel on 13 December intimating their strong protest against the grouping clause and their decision not to abide by the verdict of the Federal Court. The Constituent Assembly (CA) members from Assam were requested to withdraw from the C.A. if the situation so demanded. The Committee also asked Puspalata Das, the women representative, to make efforts to influence the members of the CWC about Assam's stand and to inform the APMS about the developments in that regard. The Samiti also requested national women leaders like, Hansa Mehta, Durgabai Deshmukh, Purnima Banerjee and Sucheta Kripalani to help Assam in her dire crisis.\(^{456}\)
A public meeting was held at Gauhati on 19 December, at the initiative of the APMS, the All Assam Students Union and the APCC. The meeting resolved to fight against the grouping proposal at all cost. The meeting held that the 'life and death question' of the Assamese race could not be subjected to the Federal Court's decision. It appealed to the people of Assam to prepare themselves for a greater battle and for the attainment of India's independence. The meeting was attended by several thousands of women.457

This genuine fear of the people of Assam of losing their identity in the grip of grouping did not get sufficient publicity outside Assam. The national newspapers did not take much interest to focus that issue. The Calcutta papers openly refused to publish any anti-grouping news against the public opinion of Bengal.458 Under such a situation, some Assamese people residing at Calcutta, including some students, formed an association named 'Asom Sangha' with Nalinibala Devi as President and Jogesh Saikia, Dulal Chandra Barkataky, Kamal Chandra Gohain, Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya, Haliram Deka, Harendranath Kalita and others as members,459 for conducting an anti-grouping campaign outside Assam, particularly, in Bengal. In its meeting held on 3 August 1946, it was resolved to request the represen-
tatives from Bengal to the C.A. not to take any decision in favour of grouping. A committee consisting of Nalinibala Devi, Haliram Deka, Harendra Nath Kalita, Hareswar Goswami and Jogen Saikia was formed for the purpose of publicity over the grouping issue vis-a-vis Assam. The committee approached most of the Congress leaders at Calcutta and apprised them of the exact problem that Assam was facing. The Sangha also submitted a memorandum to the Bengal Legislative Council requesting it not to support the grouping proposal.

Two booklets, viz., "Immigrants of Assam" and "Tribals of Assam" were published by the Assam Sangha. Copies of the booklets were distributed in and outside India in order to bring to light the crisis that Assam was facing. Nalinibala Devi, the president of the Sangha, was very active in organizational and publicity work against grouping.

Most of the delegates from Assam visited the Assam Sangha on their way to Delhi. In a meeting of the Sangha held at Calcutta and attended by Gopinath Bordoloi also, Nalinibala Devi appealed to the people of Assam to remain united and determined to save Assam from the grip of grouping at all costs. On behalf of the Sangha, she requested Bordoloi not to sit in the section. She further said that if the situation demanded the women of
Assam would fight to the last to prevent Assam from falling into the trap of the grouping scheme.

Nalinibala Devi met Mahatma Gandhi at Sodepur Ashram in Calcutta in 1946 and told him about the fear of the people of Assam. Gandhi assured his support and told that he would come to Assam if necessary.\footnote{461} Besides organizing meetings and doing publicity work, Nalinibala Devi also contributed greatly, as a litterateur, in arousing patriotism among the Assamese-speaking people through per poems.

The CWC proposed to hold a camera meeting to discuss the grouping scheme on 4 January 1947. Puspalata Das was entrusted with the responsibility of moving the anti-grouping resolution in the meeting on behalf of the Assam delegation.\footnote{462} She opposed Nehru's proposal to accept in general the terms of the British statement of 6 December and expressed regret on the attitude of betrayal on the part of the CWC.\footnote{463} Her speech worked on the minds of the central leaders and the members of the CWC,\footnote{464} and the latter's stand on the grouping was revised on the following day, i.e. 5 January. Nehru moved the revised resolution stating that no province or a part of it could be compelled to join any group without the consent of its people. In case of such an attempt to compel any province in
anyway to join any group, the province concerned would have the right to take such action as might be deemed appropriate by it. In order to make an improvement of the situation, Purushottam Das Tandon moved an amendment for the rejection of the British Government's statement altogether. All the members from Assam except Tayebullah, voted for the amendment. But the resolution was lost by 54 to 102 votes.

The revision made by Nehru in the original resolution, in fact, could not satisfy the Assam delegation nor the people of Assam. The province was again drawn into a state of tension and confusion. Then followed a spate of protest meetings throughout the valley. The executive committee of the APHS held an emergent meeting on 19 January 1947 at Gauhati. This was attended by almost all the secretaries of the district and subdivisional branches. This meeting reiterated its earlier stand on the grouping scheme. The Samiti expressed its deep resentment for the injustice done to Assam by the CWC and asked the representatives of Assam to withdraw from the C.A. It held the view that a separate constitution should be formulated for Assam. The Samiti appealed to all the women of the plains and hills of Assam to prepare for further struggles.
The executive committee of the APMS, by another resolution, demanded that the boundary between Bengal and Assam should be permanently determined. It also protested against the proposal to include some parts of old Kamrup in Bengal as the people of those areas still had linguistic and cultural affinities with that of the people of the rest of Assam. Hence the Samiti proposed to launch a campaign to collect opinion of the people living in those areas to ascertain whether they would like to remain with Bengal or join Assam. In order to carry out a thorough investigation in this regard, a 5-member Women's Committee with the Queen of Sidli and the Princess of Gauripur was formed.

The Samiti also decided to observe 7 February 1947 as the "Women's anti-grouping Day". A sub-committee, with Bimala Goswami, Sailabala Devi, Sarada Das and Bhubaneswari Devi was formed for organizational work in the Dibrugarh subdivision particularly in the tea garden areas.

The branches of the APMS observed the Women's anti-grouping Day by holding meetings, hoisting national flags and organizing processions. The Sibsagar Mahila Samiti brought out a large procession with the participation of hundreds of women, the Sevadal workers and the local Congress leaders. The protest meeting held
after the procession passed resolutions opposing the grouping scheme and copies of the resolution were sent to Jawaharlal Nehru, Acharyya Kripalani, Gopinath Bordoloi, APCC President and the President of the APIS. The women of Goalpara organized a procession on that day and a large number of them, irrespective of age and status, came out to the streets of the town with tricolour in their hands and shouted slogans like 'Down with imperialists', 'Boycott section', etc. Later a protest meeting was held under the presidency of Smti Soudamini Choudhury. Girijabala Rai, Giribala Medhi, Bonolota Talukdar, Nanibala Sen were some of the women who spoke in the meeting. The meeting adopted resolutions opposing the grouping proposal and the copies of resolution were sent to the provincial and the national leaders. Similar women's meetings were held in places like Dibrugarh, Mongoldoi, Barpeta, Jorhat, Raha, Doomdooma, North Gauhati and many other places. All the meetings adopted anti-grouping resolutions.

When Assam was passing the days amidst tension and confusion under such a situation, important developments had taken place in Indian politics. The rift between the Congress and the Muslim League went on widening and the latter refused to join the Constituent Assembly. Thus the Cabinet Mission scheme proved useless to solve the Indian problem.
On 20 February 1947, the British Government announced that the transfer of power to the hands of responsible Indians would be completed before 30 June 1948. With that end in view, the British Government made a change in the Indian administration by replacing Viceroy Wavell by Earl Mountbatten in March 1947. For Mountbatten worked out the plan to divide India on communal basis. The Congress and the Muslim League being the two major political parties accepted it. The Mountbatten Plan was officially announced on 3 June 1947 and it proposed division of the Punjab and Bengal. Regarding Assam, a referendum was proposed to be held in the Muslim-dominated Sylhet district. The Sylhet referendum was, accordingly, held on 6 and 7 July 1947, and it went in favour of East Pakistan. In fact, various organizations demanded separation of Sylhet from Assam. Before the referendum was held, the Dibrugarh and Jezpur branches of the APMS demanded the separation of Sylhet from Assam on the grounds of cultural, linguistic and ethnic differences with the Assamese people.

With the announcement of the Mountbatten Plan, the anti-grouping movement in Assam naturally came to an end. The people of the valley as well as the APCC welcomed such a situation.
Immediately after the Sylhet referendum, a Boundary Commission under the Chairmanship of Cyril Redcliffe was constituted to demarcate the boundaries of Assam and East Pakistan on the basis of the indications given in the Mountbatten Plan. The Muslim League claimed a large area from the Khasi and Jayantia Hills, Cachar and Goalpara districts, inhabited mostly by Muslims. But the APCC and the people took steps to stop it.

The APMS held an emergent meeting on 22 July 1947 to caution the Government emphatically against any attempt to disturb the integration of Assam by giving away parts of it to East Pakistan. Chandraprava Saikiani and Induprava Baruah, the joint secretaries of the APMS, sent a telegram on the same day to Cyril Redcliffe, communicating its strong opposition to the Muslim League's claim over the areas of Assam. The telegram read: "Present Assam without Sylhet stands a cultural, linguistic and traditional unit. Any attempt to disintegrate this unity will be opposed by the APMS".473

By a tenacious opposition given by the people of Assam with a significant contribution by her women, the grouping scheme was defeated and the attempt to disintegrate Assam's cultural and linguistic identity, by imperialist and communal forces was foiled.
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157. Statement of Tezpur D.C.C. President of 23.4.42(HFM).
162. Interview, with Puspalata Das.
164. P.S. of Someswari Bora, Someswari Bora stood next to Kanaklata in the procession.
165. Bordoloi Committee Report.
166. P.S. of Someswari Bora.
168. P.S. of Rampati Rajkhowa; also Bordoloi Committee Report.

169. Ibid. About 4000 people for Kalabari side and about 3 to 4 thousand from Barangabari side assembled there.


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180. Interview with Puspalata Das

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240. Interview with Buddheshwari Hazarika.
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323. Interview with Mohendra Hazarika, Nowgong.
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