CHAPTER 3

The Human Security-Gandhian *Satyagraha* paradigm on the ground with special reference to Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust (Assam Branch) or the Sarania Ashram; Tamulpur Anchalik Gramdan Sangh (TAGS); and Shanti Sadhana Ashram, Guwahati.*

As has been mentioned in the first chapter, the empirical investigation of my research work is based on three case studies involving certain initiatives, individual and otherwise, carried out on a very micro level even as they are driven by a spirit of Gandhian activism and social action. These include the Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust (Assam Branch) or the Sarania Ashram; Tamulpur Anchalik Gramdan Sangh (TAGS); and Shanti Sadhana Ashram, Guwahati. The empirical data with regard to each case study are discussed as below:

3.1 Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust

*(Assam Branch) or the Sarania Ashram*

3.1.1 Location

The Assam branch of the Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust or the Sarania Ashram is situated on a small hillock on the Sarania hills in the city of Guwahati in the Kamrup

* See Appendix 1 for location maps.
(Metro) District of the State of Assam. The Sarania Ashram is thus the provincial branch of the All India Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust headquartered at Indore in the State of Madhya Pradesh.

3.1.2 Genesis and Background

Before elaborating on the Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust (Assam Branch) or the Sarania Ashram, a brief discussion on the origin and background of the All India Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust at the national level is called for. Mahatma Gandhi's wife, Kasturba Gandhi, passed away on February 22, 1944. After her death, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya and a few other eminent persons like Thakkar Bapa mooted the idea of creating a Trust in memory of Kasturba Gandhi. Basically, the main idea behind the formation of the Trust was to launch efforts towards working for the uplift of women and children in India, aimed at removal of ignorance, illiteracy, disease, poverty and other ills, coupled by the inculcation of the qualities of fearlessness, steadfastness and self-confidence in the hearts of the womenfolk, so that they might be able to take their rightful place in the society.

On March 8, 1944, an appeal was issued for this purpose in the name of one hundred eminent personalities of the country. A Trust Board of fifteen members was formed for the purpose of collection of funds at the national level. Similarly, committees were formed at the provincial and district levels. These committees were able to evoke mass enthusiasm for collection work. Finally, on the occasion of Gandhi's birthday on
October 2, 1944, Sarojini Naidu formally presented to Gandhi a purse of over Rs. 80 lakhs on behalf of the trustees at a solemn function at Sevagram in the State of Maharashtra. Accordingly, on November 22, 1944, the Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust was born, modelled as it was on the basic idea of working for the all-round welfare and development of village women and children along Gandhian lines.

In Assam, the work of fund collection for formation of the Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust was earnestly taken up, among others, by Hema Prova Das, her daughter Amal Prova Das, and Gopinath Bordoloi, the first Chief Minister (Premier) of Assam after the independence of India. As a matter of fact, a fund collection committee was formed under Gopinath Bordoloi as its President and Amal Prova Das as its Secretary. To put things in perspective, Hema Prova Das was the wife of noted freedom fighter from Assam, Harikrishna Das. She was an active constructive worker and advanced the cause of women’s education. Inspired by the Gandhian scheme of constructive work, she went to Maganbari in Wardha District of Maharashtra in 1939 along with her daughter, Amal Prova and received a three-month training in such fields as oil pressing, beehiving and paper making, among others. After returning to Assam, Hema Prova Das, along with husband Harikrishna Das and daughter Amal Prova started all these three cottage industries on a tiny hillock on the Sarania Hills located in the city of Guwahati in Assam. Hema Prova Das and her husband were eager to start a permanent constructive work-centre there. So they chose some widows and started a weaving centre side by side with the aforesaid industries. Hema Prova Das wanted to make the institution self-reliant. Her idea
was to take up production of *endi* and *muga* (varieties of silk produced in Assam) for this purpose. However, before she could realise her dream, she died in January 1945. Subsequently, in the same year, Hema Prova Das' daughter Amal Prova went to Gandhi's Sevagram Ashram situated in the Wardha District of Maharashtra in 1945 and stayed there for several months receiving training in constructive work under the guidance of Asha Devi Aryanayakam.

Coming back to the issue of fund collection for the Trust, a sum of rupees one lakh and forty five thousand was collected by the fund collection committee in Assam. After the task of collecting fund for the Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust was over, Gopinath Bordoloi sent to Gandhi a draft scheme for setting up an educational institution and sought his approval for the same. Subsequently, Gandhi called Amol Prova Das for an interview. During the interview, Gandhi said to her that instead of a proposal for building a big institution, he would much rather want a scheme based on the idea of self-reliance through Basic Education and skill-based knowledge so that the trainees could generate their own income. He opined that rural work should be performed by organising the rural people themselves. When Amol Prova Das informed Gandhi that there were some traditional village crafts in Assam based on the silk products of *endi* and *muga* which could be adopted as a means of self-reliance, Gandhi replied that as these crafts were indigineous, she should prepare a new scheme in consultation with Asha Devi and submit the same to him.
Accordingly, Amol Prova Das with the assistance of Asha Devi and some Assamese students at Sevagram prepared a scheme and handed it over to Gandhi. After receiving the scheme, Gandhi recommended certain things to Amol Prova. The recommendations included basing all work in the proposed camp on the principle of self-reliance even if it necessitated extending the period of duration of the camp; spinning of cotton to be practised with due knowledge and understanding of the process; imparting training in some handicraft and instruction; making silk craft the basis of self-reliance; execution of every task by the camp inmates themselves as far as possible; restricting the use of labourers to the minimum; workers in the camp should be women as far as possible; the place of the camp should be in the village or adjacent to it so as that a good rapport could be established between the camp inmates and the villagers.

Subsequently, after receiving Gandhi’s instructions, it was decided that work should be started immediately based on Gandhi’s fundamental recommendations. As a corollary therefore, the Provincial Trust Office of the Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust in Assam and thereafter the Provincial Kasturba Gram Sevika Vidyalaya were formally set up in the small hillock on the Sarania Hills at Guwahati, the same place where Amol Prova Das’ parents had started some cottage industries as mentioned earlier. As a matter of fact, on his visit to Assam, Gandhi himself inaugurated the Assam Provincial Kasturba Gram Sevika Vidyalaya and the Provincial Trust Office at Guwahati in January 1946. Because of its location on the Sarania Hills, Kasturba Trust, Assam is popularly
known as the “Sarania Ashram”. Amol Prova Das became the first Pratinidhi (representative) of the Kasturba Trust in Assam.

Accordingly, it is seen that the basic foundation of the Sarania Ashram rests on Gandhi’s idea of satyagraha in its composite form, involving Constructive Programme and non-violent social mobilization aimed at socio-economic reconstruction based on a spirit of self-reliance. In this context, the emphasis is particularly on the uplift of women and children in rural and remote areas. At present Kasturba Trust, Assam has 21 Gram Seva Kendras (Village Service Centres) spread over Assam, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh. All centres are run entirely by women workers. Each centre serves a cluster of villages within a radius of 5-10 kilometers. The centres are established in only donated lands.

The Gram Sevika Vidyalaya

The Assam Provincial Kasturba Gram Sevika Vidyalaya (school cum training centre) constitutes the veritable backbone of the Sarania Ashram as this is where the would-be volunteers or sevikas (female social workers) of the Trust receive training before setting off to serve in the different Gram Sevika Kendras (Village Service Centres) of the Trust in different parts of the region. As already mentioned, Gandhi himself inaugurated the Assam Provincial Kasturba Gram Sevika Vidyalaya in 1946. The Vidyalaya initially started off with two teachers. Ghanakanti Phookan and Hema Prova Kakati (both of whom
participated in the Freedom Movement) were recruited as teachers. Besides the appointed teachers of the Vidyalaya, several prominent personalities who were sympathetic to the cause, themselves volunteered to take classes. In this context, the names of Hari Krishna Das, Bhubaneswar Barua, T.Roy Choudhury as well as Amal Prova Das, among others, could be mentioned. They all took regular classes. Significantly, since its inception in the 1940s till date, more than 2,500 women have undergone training at the Vidyalaya in welfare of women and children, pre-primary education, adult education, health and hygiene, cottage industries, cotton spinning, weaving, tailoring, bee-keeping, farming and peace work and intervention in situations of direct conflict.

A comprehensive syllabus approved by the Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust at the national level is adhered to in the Provincial Gram Sevika Vidyalaya. Among other things, the syllabus is intended to develop a holistic understanding of the region’s social history besides offering the required hands-on experience aimed at skill formation and capacity building. The prescribed syllabus is as follows:

1. Nai Talim - Pre-Basic, Basic, Post-Basic and Adult Education.
2. Child Psychology.
4. Mahatma Gandhi’s ideals and programme of constructive work.
5. Rural Problems.
6. History of Assam and India; History of the Freedom Movement in India.
7. Geography.
8. Dietetics.
13 Primary Science (related to cooking and other daily work).
15 Knowledge of main world religions.

During the period of training, each trainee receives a monthly stipend along with free food and accommodation. After undergoing hands-on training at the Vidyalaya for a period of one year, each sevika is sent to serve in a Gram Sevika Kendra (Village Service Centre) of the Trust for a period of three years. During this period, the sivikas are not allowed to marry. The sevikas are required to wear the traditional Assamese attire for women—the mehela chador made out of khadi during the period of training and thereafter.

3.1.3 Activities of the Sarania Ashram

Ever since its inception, the Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust (Assam Branch) or the Sarania Ashram has been rendering relentless service based on the Gandhian scheme of
Constructive Programme. As a matter of fact, it is one of the pioneering organizations which ventured to serve in some of the border areas of the region even as the sevikas of the Sarania Ashram endeavored to serve in the remote and isolated terrains of what was then the North East Frontier Province or NEFA (presently the State of Arunachal Pradesh) way back in the 1950s and 1960s. The work initiated by the Trust in the hills of the region and among some very marginalized sections like tea-garden workers, continues unabated to this date. The role of the Sarania Ashram during the Bhoodan Movement spearheaded by Acharya Vinoba Bhave, the “spiritual successor” of Mahatma Gandhi, is also particularly noteworthy. For the sake of convenience, the activities of the Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust, (Assam Branch) or the Sarania Ashram could be broadly categorized under the following heads:

(i) Work initiated by the first batch of trained sevikas or volunteers:

The first batch of sevikas completed a course of 1 year and 5 months in June 1947 at the Assam Provincial Kasturba Gram Sevika Vidyalaya, Guwahati. The provincial representative of the Assam branch consulted the Central Trust Advisory Committee and heads of district committees and jointly selected places of work in different districts of Assam. Each area selected was assigned to a single trained sevika or volunteer of the Trust. Most of these places happened to be in some very remote areas of rural Assam. The sevikas started operating from make shift camps, with some of them located in open fields near cremation-grounds. These sevikas initially had to face strong adverse criticism from the local people who were rather skeptical of the sevikas and their work. But the
persistence of the *sevikas* paid off, even as they braved all difficulties to be able to strike a chord with the local people. As a matter of fact, in some places, people even donated over 20 bighas of land for setting up permanent centers of the Trust, which would be self-reliant and self-sufficient. Accordingly, fourteen such centres could be built in different districts of Assam. These centres are called Gram Seva Kendras or Village Service Centres, which, to a great extent, could be said to be the outcome of the courage, determination and selfless sacrifice demonstrated by the *sevikas*. The work initiated by the first batch of trained *sevikas* continued to inspire subsequent batches of *sevikas* down the years.

At the level of the Gram Sevika Kendras, the schedule of work includes pre-Basic Education, Adult Education, health work, village cleanliness, midwifery and nursing, improved methods of cultivation, vegetable gardening, cottage industries like yarn-making, weaving of *endi* and *muga*, tending silk worm, spinning, sewing and organizing women on various issues.

It may be mentioned here that the executive committee of the All India Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust decided to observe “Ba-Bapu” week from January 30, 1949 to February 23, 1949 and accordingly sent some schemes of work to be carried out in the rural areas on an extensive scale. Accordingly, the Pratinidhi of the Assam branch of the Kasturba Trust, divided the trainees of the Gram Sevika Vidyalaya into five groups and deputed them to different Gram Seva Kendras of Assam, with each group under the guidance of a teacher of the Vidyalaya. They rendered services in the spheres of road
construction, construction of improved hygienic latrines, spinning, and generating awareness among the womenfolk regarding their potential for rendering service to the society. The area of their activities was confined to seven to eight villages.

A significant aspect in terms of the services rendered by the sevikas relates to midwifery. Most of the Gram Seva Kendras being situated in remote areas had little or no access to health care facilities. Under such circumstances, the sevikas had to undertake the work of midwifery. As they had some preliminary training at Gram Sevika Vidyalaya, they could render some assistance to the expectant mothers. But due to their partial knowledge, they had also to face a lot of difficulties. Those who experienced such difficulties expressed a desire to have full midwifery training. Accordingly, due to the earnest efforts of Hari Krishna Das and T. Roy Choudhury, it was arranged to impart midwifery training to the sevikas in the Gauhati Civil Hospital. Susequently, when midwifery training was introduced at Kasturba Gram, Indore (the central headquarters of the Trust), the sevikas began to be sent there to receive training.

It may be mentioned here that the Bharat Seva Mission, when it first started work in the Tirap Division of Arunachal Pradesh in 1968, faced the problem of non-availability of local volunteers to serve in the area. Accordingly it contacted the Sarania Ashram, which arranged to train up local girls from the Trirap Division by initiating a special six-month training course for them at the Ashram premises at Guwahati. Accordingly, six
girls completed their training in the month of September 1968 and another eleven in April 1969.

(ii) Work in Hill Areas:

In 1950, the Sarania Ashram started giving training to women from the hill areas with a view to opening service centres there. Omeo Kumar Das, who was a Cabinet Minister of the then Assam Government, helped the Trust in getting financial assistance from the government for the purpose. During the period of 1950-58, 64 girls from the Garo Hills, Khasi Hills, Jayantia Hills, Naga Hills and Lushai Hills (formerly all parts of Assam) were given training in village welfare work at the Provincial Kasturba Gram Sevika Vidyalaya at Sarania. At the same time, with the help of funds from the Government and co-operation from the local people, the necessary buildings for the service centres were also constructed in the hill districts. In 1952, for the first time ever, a Gram Sevika Kendra was established in the Garo Hills. Amal Prova Das herself went there for selection of the site. With the help of the then Deputy Commissioner of the district and leading men of the locality, land was procured for the centre and people came forward to build houses of their own accord. In the subsequent years, four other centres came up: Laitkroh in Khasi Hills, Mualvum in the Mizo Hills, Chuchuimlang in the Naga Hills and Tuber in the Jayantia Hills. Each centre was manned by one sevika from the plains and one or two sevikas from the locality itself.

Speaking of the Gram Seva Kendra in the village of Chuchuimlang in the erstwhile Naga Hills District, the centre was established on May 18, 1955. Lantina Ao of the Naga Hills and Kamaleswari Dutta and Dibya Dutta of the plains worked in this centre. Three local
girls were granted stipends and trained in this centre. The Pre-Basic School of the Kendra also ran smoothly. Parents themselves brought their children to get admitted to the school. *Sevika* Lantena Ao was trained in midwifery. So, the centre could offer services through her in the field of mid-wifery and general nursing when needed. Previously, there was no such institution in this area. Therefore, the Sevikas became extremely popular among the people. However, after successfully running the Kendra for a couple of months, activities virtually came to a halt because of political instability in the area. Even under such adverse circumstances, the *sevikas* continued their activities silently among the people, visiting local households, nursing the injured and dispensing medicines wherever needed. As normalcy returned gradually, work in the service centre resumed.

(iii) **Work among Tea Garden Workers:**

Generally speaking, a particularly marginalised section in the State of Assam, both socially and economically is that of tea garden workers. Accordingly, the Trust decided to extend its activities and gradually took up work in the tea garden areas. It started off with financial assistance from the Labour Welfare Department of the Government of Assam. To begin with, in the Boruasali garden of Sibsagar District, the Sarania Ashram opened a Labour Welfare Training Centre on a temporary basis in 1951, to impart training to the workers in livelihood skills and other aspects relating to their welfare. The first batch completed their training in 1952. Soon, the work of the Trust spread to other gardens as well. The managing authorities of the Daimukhia, Dikom, Teok and Harchura gardens agreed to have Kasturba Labour Welfare Centres and to provide the necessary physical infrastructure for
the purpose. During the period of 1952-53, new welfare centres were set up in the Daimukhia and Dikom gardens of Dibrugarh District, the Harchura garden of Tezpur situated in the present-day Sonitpur District and the Teok garden of Jorhat District. Even to this day, the managing authorities of these tea gardens have been extending their cooperation to the Trust in its work aimed at the uplift of the garden workers.

Meanwhile, steps were taken to transfer the temporary training centre at Baruasali garden to Mezenga tea garden of Sibsagar District. With financial assistance from the Government of Assam, the new training centre was set up at the Mezenga tea garden. Padma Das and Pritikana Das were entrusted with the management of the centre till March 1963.

The Mezenga training centre started off with the following aims and objectives:

- To generate awareness among the women workers in particular about the importance of nutrition, personal health and hygiene.
- To educate the women workers in the art of managing their households.
- Skill formation among the women workers. Towards this end, training was imparted in the art of weaving and sewing and vegetable gardening.
- To generate awareness against the evil of alcoholism and motivating the workers to give up intoxicating drinks.
In keeping with the above-mentioned aims and objectives, a six-month course with a definite syllabus was introduced at the training centre. Till March 1963, altogether 85 women received training at the centre. Some of them were subsequently employed by the tea gardens in their creches, hospitals and garden schools. The Trust ran this centre for a period of twelve years until it was finally handed over to the government in March 1963. The Government recognised the syllabus prepared by the Trust, and made it the basis of imparting future training.

(iv) Peace Workers’ Training Camp and setting up of Seva Kendras in border areas:
A peace workers’ training camp was started at the Sarania Ashram for six months from February 22, 1963 under Nirmala Despande. After completing two months’ training, 43 sevikas were sent to border areas in Kamrup and Darrang Districts (close to Bhutan border) and to those in Lakhimpur District (close to the boundary with the erstwhile North East Frontier Agency or NEFA, bordering China). During the Chinese invasion, the sevikas of the Sarania Ashram went from house to house in these border areas and appealed to the people to remain united and to resist foreign aggression fearlessly. The sevikas worked side by side with Gandhian peace workers like Ravindra Upadhyaya, Dhanada Kimari Barua and others. After four months of strenuous work in those areas, the sevikas or more appropriately, the shanti sevikas or peace workers, selected altogether 18 sites for setting up Gram Seva Kendras. Initially, the sevikas lived with individual families. Later on the people themselves came forward to donate lands needed for setting up Seva Kendras and were even prepared to build houses for the project. Accordingly, with local
help, a number of such Seva Kendras came up in areas such as North Kamrup, Darrang, Sivasagar and North Lakhimpur. Subsequently, the sevikas came back to Sarania and there they received training in spinning, handicraft and work relating to the management of pre-basic school for full three months. When their training was over, they were sent back to their respective Seva Kendras. After this, another two batches of sevikas numbering 23 in all were given training in peace work.

No account of the work of shanti sevikas would be complete without specific reference to the efforts towards reconciliation made by them in the border areas situated between what was then the North East Frontier Province or NEFA (present day Arunachal Pradesh) and the plains of North Lakhimpur in Assam in the wake of frequent skirmishes between the people from the two sides. Fear stricken people of the plains were on the verge of abandoning their farmlands. A Kasturba Gram Seva Kendra was established in this border area. The two shanti sevikas of the centre tried their utmost to bring about reconciliation between the two warring groups. They even visited the areas inhabited by the tribes on the NEFA side and reasoned with them with the result that the latter proposed holding a community prayer session or namkirtan in their village and invited plains people from the other side to take part in it as a gesture of reconciliation. The sevikas intimated this to the people in the plains. It was very difficult on the part of the sevikas, to make them agree to this, as they were apprehensive and suspicious of the "actual" motive of the people on the NEFA side. But ultimately, the sevikas were successful in persuading them to join in the prayer session. People of both the groups sat together, offered prayer and partook
prasad (food offered to God). In this way, mistrust and suspicion against one another ultimately gave way to a better level of mutual understanding between the two groups of people. In a way, what the two sevikas aimed for, and quite successfully so, was nothing short of “conflict transformation”, achieved through a process of constructive social communication furthering the principles of tolerance and rational thinking.

The sevikas of the Kasturba Trust, Assam have also served in the Indo-Bangladesh border as peace workers. In the wake of unabated infiltration from Bangladesh into Assam, Acharya Vinoba Bhave’s advice was sought for in this regard in the month of October 1981. Calling it a national problem, he advised the 31 shanti sainiks or peace workers from Kasturba Trust, Assam, who had gone to meet him, that they should actually go to the Indo-Bangladesh border to stop the infiltration. The group of shanti sainiks included both men and women.

In pursuance to Vinoba Bhave’s advice, three groups of shanti sainiks including that of Kasturba Trust, Assam, set out for the Indo-Bangladesh border on foot from three districts on 18th April, 1982. Prior to that, a training camp for a period of one and a half months was held for the purpose at Guwahati. As had been planned earlier, the shanti sainiks were to split into three groups. Accordingly they set out for the Indo-Bangladesh border on 18th April, 1982 from Jonai in Lakhimpur District, Kakopather in Dibrugarh District and Kasturba Trust, Assam. The group from Guwahati included four experienced sevikas of the Kasturba Trust, Assam. The thirty shanti sainiks of the three groups set up
Shanti Sena Kendras (peace centres) at Biskhowa, Satra-sal, Ranpagali, Sreerampur, Jinkata, Bidyardabri and Lakshimari with a view to offering services on a long term basis. Out of these, Biskhowa was a Kasturba Gram Seva Kendra. All of these areas were highly underdeveloped. Significantly, no worker of any other organisation had earlier visited these border areas. The shanti sainiks resolved that they would stay there for a year and take up various constructive work based on the Gandhian philosophy. Out of the seven Shanti Sena Kendras that were set up, three remained there permanently. Out of these three, the one at Biskhowa is successfully functioning till date.

Again in 1975, a Kasturba Gram Seva Kendra was established at Sreedurgapur in the Cachar District of Assam, bordering Bangladesh. Responding to the keen interest and wishes of the public, this centre was later shifted to Mirzapur village on the bank of Kushiara river on the border between India and Bangladesh. The two sevikas are still continuing their work there, against all odds. Both men and women of Mirzapur are given training in weaving by the sevikas in an effort to help them gain minimum gainful economic opportunities.

(v) Trust extends work to NEFA (Arunachal Pradesh):

In the wake of the Chinese aggression of 1962, a scheme was prepared by the Sarania Ashram to train 50 shanti sevikas (peace workers) and post them in border areas. It was sent to Acharya Vinoba Bhave and the Central Kasturba Trust Office for approval even as the former was requested to send Nirmala Deshpande for conducting the training camp in
Assam. At that time, she was working as the incharge of the Shanti Sena Training at Kasturba Gram (Indore). Vinoba Bhave responded favourably and Nirmala Despande was permitted by Vinobaji to come to Assam. After receiving training, the Shanti Seivkas were sent to Tezpur, North Lakhimpur and NEFA (North East Frontier Agency which is presently the State of Arunachal Pradesh) to carry out peace work based on Constructive Programme.

(vi) Hong Kasturba Centre in NEFA (Arunachal Pradesh) :

In December 1962, immediately after the Chinese aggression, Jayaprakash Narayan came to Assam and visited several places in N.E.F.A. He was accompanied by Amal Prova Das. Some villagers from the Subansiri Division informed Jayparaksh Narayan that there was an urgent need for a girls’ school in the area, with female teachers. Accordingly, Jayparaksh Narayan advised Amal Prova Das to start a Kasturba centre there.

The matter was taken up with the Central Trust and the N.E.F.A. authorities. Permission was obtained from both in due course and Amal Prova Das with two of her experienced colleagues, namely, Hiron Hazarika and Seuti Rava, started for Hapoli, the headquarters of the Subansiri Division in April 1963. Amal Prova Das discussed the matter thoroughly with the local Political Officer and selected a village called Hong, four miles away from Hapoli, for setting up the proposed centre. At present, the village is situated in the Lower Subansiri District of Arunachal Pradesh. Amal Prova Das discussed the matter also with the village headman or Gaonburha of Hong. He welcomed the proposal and
invited her to their village the very next day. Amal Prova Das spoke about the project at a meeting of the villagers. The villagers readily agreed to build houses for the centre and the school. As a matter of fact, the centre was ready within eight days. It may be noted here that the school attached to the centre was initially a night school. Within a very short period of time, the number of students in the night school rose to 85. Accordingly, with the active support and cooperation of the local people, the Hong Centre of the Kasturba Trust was established and with that Trust work was launched in NEFA, now Arunachal Pradesh.

The training course at the Hong Kasturba Centre consists of pre-basic, adult education, weaving and agricultural education. Now at the Hong Centre, besides the school, there is a well equipped weaving and spinning centre with hostel facilities. Every year a batch of ten women is imparted necessary training for self-employment, with stipend being paid to them during the training period. It is borne by the Government of Arunachal Pradesh. Furthermore, the volunteers of the centre are constantly engaged in generating awareness regarding health and hygiene and also impart training on the use and administration of first-aid. Agriculture related activities are also taken up within the campus. The vegetable garden in the campus, measuring a little under one-bigha, is known to produce healthy yields of organic vegetables.

Having discussed the work initiated by the Assam branch of the Kasturba Trust in different parts of Assam and indeed in different the North Eastern region as a whole, one
might consider certain specific efforts and initiatives undertaken by the Trust at different points in time in this part of the region. A brief account of the same is presented below:

**(vii) Kasturba Trust takes up Bhoodan and Gramdan work from 1952:**

To begin with, the Bhoodan Movement or Land-Gift Movement in India was started by Acharya Vinobha Bhave in 1951. Philosophically, Bhave was directly influenced by the *Sarvodaya* (Rise of All) movement of Gandhi of which he considered Bhoodan a natural extension. Accordingly, the Bhoodan Movement was a part of a comprehensive movement for the establishment of a *Sarvodaya* society (The Rise of All- socio-economic-political order) of universal relevance and significance. For Vinoba Bhave, the Bhoodan Movement is an instrument for achieving a non-violent and peaceful change of values aimed at the welfare of all.

The movement passed through several stages in regard to both momentum & allied programmes. Initially, it started strictly as a programme of land-gift whereby individual landlords and propertied people donated land for the landless. Acharya Bhave appealed to them to make a voluntary sacrifice of one-sixth of their total landholding.

In October 1951, Vinoba made an appeal asking for fifty million acres of land for the landless from the whole of India to be collected by 1957. Subsequently, the Bhoodan Movement transformed itself from a land-gift movement to a village-gift or Gramdan movement, in which the whole or a major part of a village land was to be donated by not
less than 75% of the villagers who were required to relinquish their right of ownership over their lands in favour of the entire village, with power to equitably redistribute the total land among the families of the villages with a provision for periodical revision. However, the programme of individual land-gifts also continued simultaneously.

Analysing the Gramdan Movement in the context of Assam, it could be argued that such an elaborate programme of land-gift and village-gift is potentially equipped to address the problem of unabated infiltration from across the Indo-Bangladesh border, even as the huge tracts of underutilized and often unmonitored land in the State, have been attracting increasing numbers of such infiltrators to settle in them as they face a problem of "living space" in their own country of origin. This is because gramdan aims at a conducive land management system whereby land in each village is equitably redistributed in favour of the landless with the active involvement of the people of the village as a whole, facilitating collective ownership and monitoring of land. At the same time, efforts are made to augment agricultural production in the collectively managed land through shramdan (labour-gift), jeevandan (life-long commitment to the movement by co-workers), shanti-sena (peace-brigade), sadhandan (gift of implements for agricultural operations). In this way, resources for sustained work for the development of the lands in the "gramdani" villages could be raised locally. Accordingly, building up a strong network of "gramdani" villages that sees the mobilization of communities for social action holds the key to tackling the issue of infiltration in the State by preventing lands falling into the hands of the infiltrators. Developing a strong network of gramdani villages based on the
principles of collective management, social awareness, and self-sustenance through constructive programme, especially in the border areas, could in itself go a long way in building up a strong defence mechanism against infiltration.

As a matter of fact, the Bhoodan Movement was adopted in Assam too in 1952, under the auspices of the Sarania Ashram. Amal Prova Das, the then Pratinidhi of the Kasturba Trust in Assam took active part in the movement. At Guwahati, Mahendra Mohan Lahiri donated 100 bighas of land on which Amal Prova Das started the work of Assam Go-Seva (cow welfare) Samiti. As a matter of fact, Vinoba Bhave himself came to Assam in March 1961 as part of the nationwide Bhoodan campaign. The responsibility of managing his Assam tour was jointly undertaken by the Assam Sarvodaya Mandal and the Sarania Ashram under the guidance of Amal Prova Das. Accordingly, Vinoba Bhave encamped for a day each in the nine kendras of the Kasturba Trust, Assam, during his visit. He stayed in Guwahati for four days and addressed a gathering of students, businessmen, women’s organisations and the public in general. Out of his four days’ sojourn in Guwahati, he stayed at the Sarania Ashram for two days. In a workers’ conference held at the premises of the Sarania Ashram, Vinoba Bhave personally interacted with the Trust workers about their work and gave them necessary advice. In collaboration with such leaders as Sri Sankar Rao Deo, Asha Devi Aryanayakam, Gopo Bandhu Choudhury, Sri Dhirendra Mazumdar, Roma Devi Choudhury and others, the Trust workers actively participated in all programmes of the movement. Significantly, it was in Assam, particularly in parts of Lakhimpur District (Dhakuakhana area) and Dhemaji District, that
the Bhoodan Movement took concrete shape of gramdan. The draft of the first Gramdan Act was prepared by the Kasturba Trust, Guwahati and presented to the Government of Assam. It was promptly made into a law at the untiring efforts of Amal Prova Das.

Related to the bhoodan and gramdan work undertaken by the Assam branch of the Kasturba Trust is the Blockdan campaign undertaken by the Trust. This was a novel initiative in its own right. The idea was initially conceived by three senior sevikas of the Kasturba Trust namely, Sarbasri Swarnalata Devi, Sumitra Huzuri and Gundada Bhuyan, workers of the Assam Sarvodaya Mandal who communicated the same to Amal Prova Das. The four of them had already started the Gramdan Movement in the Tezpur Sub-Division of erstwhile Darrang District in June 1966. Accordingly, it was decided that a Blockdan campaign be started in the Chaiduar Block of Tezpur, with preparatory work to be initiated by the Trust workers. Accordingly, a committee was formed consisting of the three sevikas. They started the groundwork for the campaign in the month of August. A two-day camp was held on September 9, 1966 in the Madhavchaiduar High School of Ghaigaon under the Chaiduar block. It was attended by 29 workers of the Trust including its Pratinidhi, senior workers of the Sarvodaya Mandal and Amal Prova Das. The deliberations and decisions taken in the camp and the campaign that followed were guided by Amal Prova Das. After the camp was over, the 29 workers of the Trust were divided into 7 groups and they undertook a padayatra (walking tour) for Gramdan campaign in 21 village panchayats under the Chaiduar Block. They were assisted by the Sarvodaya Mandal as well. A public meeting was held under the presidency of the then Chief Minister of
Assam, Bimala Prasad Chaliha, on April 7, 1967 where “Chaiduar Blockdan” was announced. This successful campaign boosted the self confidence and morale of the workers of the Trust. The environment created by this successful campaign attracted the local women, teachers and other educated persons towards the ‘Gramdan’ movement. The Gramdan movement was launched in the Barak Valley too.

In 1975, a week-long Gramdan-Padayatra (walking tour) campaign was organised under the leadership of Amal Prova Das in some villages of Cachar District, like Udarband, Garheband, Lemband etc. Sevikas of the Kasturba Trust, Assam and workers of the Assam Sarvodaya Mandal participated in this campaign. Encouraged by the presence of Amal Prova Das, the local people also took part in this campaign with enthusiasm.

(viii) Specific instances of humanitarian intervention:

One of the key issues in the realm of human security is that of humanitarian intervention in the face of localized threats posed by natural calamities and natural disasters as well as riots and disturbances. In this context, the sevikas of the Kasturba Trust, Assam has intervened on many an occasion, extended its services to those affected by the same.

To begin with, during the devastating earthquake that hit parts of Assam on 15th August, 1950 and the unprecedented flood that followed in North Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh and Majuli (Jorhat District), 38 sevikas of the Kasturba Trust, Assam, under the guidance of Amol Prova Das, offered their services in the relief work in these areas. There
was no alternative to reach these areas other than on foot. Roads had turned extremely muddy to permit any other mode of communication. They had to carry their bags and baggages on their back while going from one place to another and could walk only with supporting sticks. At times they had to walk 17/18 miles to reach a human habitat while on other occasions, they had to get across rivers like the Brahmaputra and the Subansiri, risking their lives. Sometimes, they encountered wild animals while traversing these places. A medical team also accompanied the sevikas. As the situation returned to normal, nine sevikas camped at Baligaon and Pathalipam of Lakhimpur District and undertook training work in spinning in 14 villages. Altogether 300 hand spinning takuri or tops, 95 spinning wheels, 4 mounds & 10 sears (approximate 156 Kgs.) seed-free cotton were distributed in these two places. Also, more than 400 people were trained up in spinning. Thus relief work was backed up by rehabilitation in the true sense of the term.

These two camps in Pathalipam and Baligaon remained active till March 1951. Altogether, 34053 pounds (about 15,480 litters) of reconstituted milk were served to the people of Kamalabari, Kadam, Baligaon, Bardoiram and Majuli through the workers of the Trust. Simultaneously, distribution of food and clothes were also taken up. In this manner, the workers of the Trust took great pains to render services to the distressed people for 6 long months.

Similarly, during the flood havoc of 1980 in the Kamrup District, the sevikas took care of 350 sick people and gave them medicines. They kept contact with 300 families in 7
villages. There were both Hindus and Muslims in these villages. At that time two experienced sevikas of the Trust distributed *endi* cocoons (a species of silk worm which feeds on the leaves of castor oil plant) worth Rs. 23,000 among 325 families at Baniapara under the Mirza Circle. Then again in 1981, several villages were inundated in the unprecedented floods that hit Sivasagar District. Five villages were worst affected. The *sevikas* of the Bakata Kasturba Gram Seva Kendra and the Teok Tea Labour Welfare Centre distributed looms, khadi yams, clothes etc. worth Rs. 27,000 among the flood victims of these villages.

The flood of 1988 caused extensive damage in certain areas of Nagaon and Dhubri districts. Three experienced *sevikas* of the Kasturba Trust went to Jagiroad, formerly in the Nagaon District and to the Kedar area of Dhubri District situated on the border between India and Bangladesh. Besides rendering services among the flood affected people, they also distributed relief materials among them. The two *sevikas* of the Kasturba Trust, along with the *sevikas* of the Biskhoa Kasturba Gram Seva Kendra arrived at Bhogdanga village at Kedar. The sevikas offered their services in giving relief to the people there and also visited a number of camps at Gauripur.

Other than such specific instances of humanitarian assistance, the Kasturba Trust, Assam, has undertaken literacy campaigns among women. In 1985-86, sixty centres in East Nalbari under the management of Bahjani Kasturba Gram Seva Kendra and another forty in the border area of Dhubri District under the management of Biskhoa Kasturba
Gram Seva Kendra were set up for pursuing adult women's literacy programme. Besides imparting basic knowledge of reading and writing, they were also given practical training in simple handicrafts. Over and above such programmes are also being carried out through many other Kasturba Gram Seva Kendras. Moreover, the Kasturba Trust, Assam also is credited with having launched anti-liquor campaigns in the State. In 1987, Kasturba Trust, Assam, in association with members of the public initiated an extensive long-term movement against consumption of alcoholic drinks. The Trust also opposed the Bill for the amendment of the Assam Excise Act. As a matter of fact, the sevīkas of the Kasturba Gram Seva Kendras of Assam, in co-operation with the public, campaigned for mobilizing strong public opinion against the said Bill up to the month of February 1989. Resolutions were passed in different meetings demanding scrapping of the Bill. Public meetings were held and silent processions.

In the wake of the Language Movement of 1960, disturbances occurred in Guwahati. The inmates of the Sarania Ashram, divided into groups, visited households of the fear-stricken Bengali population as a confidence building measure. They exchanged views with them freely and frankly. This continued for nearly a month when Sarva Sewa Sangha deputed a batch of fifty experienced peace workers to work for restoring peace in Assam. At first they organised a three-day camp of the peace workers at the Sarania Ashram. Steps were taken to make the peace workers conversant with the geographical, physical, cultural and economical background of Assam in this camp. Then they were sent to twenty peace marchers' camps in Nagaon, Goalpara, Darrang and Lakhimpur districts.
for working towards maintaining peace and harmony in the affected areas. They worked under the guidance and direction of the peace marchers’ office at Sarania even as they worked for restoration of good will between the two conflicting groups.

Moreover, the sevikas of the Sarania Ashram rendered their services to the fleeing Tibetan refugees entering India in the wake of the Chinese aggression of Tibet in 1959. They were given shelter in the Keherukhanda Kasturba Gram Seva Kendra, Dhekiajuli, (formerly in Darrang District), for several days. They were given food and other assistance by the sevikas of the Kendra till the local people could organise and render relief work among the refugees. Likewise, the sevikas of the Kasturba Trust, Assam rendered their services to the refugees fleeing from East Pakistan (present-day Bangladesh) in 1971, distributing relief materials and nursed those who had fallen sick. A total of 18,358 refugees gathered at Charfangguri of Goalpara District. Nine sevikas of the Assam branch of the Kasturba Trust offered their services to these refugees from October 1971 to February 1972.

Besides, the Kasturba Trust, Assam has also facilitated the undertaking of extensive health care schemes by the government. For instance, at the initiative of the Kasturba Batakuchi Gram Seva Kendra in Kamrup District, construction of cheap sanitary latrines in 57 villages under the Boko Development Block of the Kamrup District was completed by the engineering section of the Public Health Department. For successful implementation of the programme, 12 public awareness camps were organised to arouse
awareness among the general public. With active co-operation and support of the public, the Batakuchi Kendra could get the programme implemented speedily. In the past two years, construction of as many as 350 such latrines has been completed in this area. Significantly, in March 2008, the Kasturba Trust, Assam, launched a health scheme for women and children under the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM), covering eleven villages at Lahoal in Dibrugarh District. Presently, eleven Trust workers are working there, helping organize periodical health camps, imparting training and generating awareness in matters of child care, nutrition and other issues relating to the health of the mother and child.

(ix) Padayatras as means of sensitization and mobilization:

A significant aspect with regard to the strategy adopted by the Kasturba Trust, Assam is that of padayatras or walking tours. The main purpose of these tours is to sensitise and mobilize people on the theme of peace and non-violence based on a process of constructive social communication. In this context, the Trust has undertaken several walking tours or padayatras from time to time, spanning across the State.

A group of twenty Sarvodaya workers set for Balia in Uttar Pradesh on foot from Tinipukhuri Kasturba Seva Kendra situated in the northern part of Kamrup District on January 30, 1966 to attend the Sarvodaya Sanmilan to be held there. Four sevikas of four Kasturba kendras on the border of North Kamrup also joined this journey on foot. Some other women also joined them when they passed through West Bengal and Bihar. They
reached their destination after covering a distance of about 1550 Kms. on foot. On way their way, they propagated the ideas of *gramdan, khadi* and *shanti sena*.

Acharya Vinoba Bhave proposed a countrywide *padayatra* or walking tour. He named this proposed walking tour, *Loka Yatra* and said that the tour would continue for 12 years. The aim of *Loka Yatra* would be to think and work for the welfare of the mass people, establish truth, love, and compassion and bring about a sense of unity and integrity in the country. In response to this call, Hema Prova Bharali, Lakshmi Prova Phukan of Assam, Nirmal Ved of Punjab and Devi Rijwani of Madhya Pradesh, set out for an all-India tour on foot on October 25, 1967. They toured India, Nepal and Sri Lanka before ending their twelve-year long *Loka Yatra* at the Brahma Vidya Mandir in the Wardha District of the State of Maharashtra.

When Acharya Vinoba Bhave mooted the idea of *Lok Yatra* for the first time, he also expressed his desire to see that such a *padayatra* be undertaken in Assam as well. Inspired by Vinoba's call, Swarnalata Devi, Dhanada Kumari Barua and Arati Devi, all having over twenty years of experience of working in the Kasturba Trust, came forward with firm determination to undertake such a *Lok Yatra* in Assam for a period of two years. They started from the Sarania Ashram on the occasion of the Kasturba Anniversary Day on February 22, 1968. They toured on foot across Guwahati and Lakhimpur and Dibrugarh districts for two years.
At the call of Achraya Vinoba Bhave, the first “Stree Sakti Jagaran” conference was held at the Brahma Vidya Mandir, Wardha in 1973. The conference was attended by representatives of various women’s organisations from all parts of the country. After detailed discussions with Vinoba Bhave, it was decided to undertake *padayatra* in 300 districts of the country simultaneously by women volunteers extending over a week with a view to imbibe spiritual awakening among the women. Accordingly, *padayatras* were undertaken by women volunteers across the country from October 2 to October 8, 1973, including those from the Sarania Ashram. During the Assam Movement launched by the All Assam Students’ Union or AASU, the Kasturba Trust exhorted the student leaders to have faith in Gandhi’s methods of non-violent agitation under all circumstances. Wherever and whenever any incidence of violence took place, a group of *sevikas* would visit such places and strive for bringing back peace and normalcy in such places. Incidence of violence and arson took place in North Kamrup between January 1 and January 9, 1980. Three experienced *sevikas* undertook *padayatra* in Barikadunga, Chengnaipar, Palkata, Santipur, Simlabari, Na-basti and some other villages. They worked hard to restore peace and harmony in these villages and also distributed relief materials. The *sevikas* offered their services at different *kendras* with great courage and determination. There were several instances of atrocities on women by the police during this period. The Sevikas, led by the Pratinidhi and ex-Pratinidhis of the Trust undertook a *padayatra* in the affected areas. They counseled with the people, urging them to keep their morale high.
After attending the All India "Stree Sakti Sammelan" held in November 1987 at Brahma Vidya Mandir, Wardha, the participants from Assam, on their way back to their respective places of work, assembled at the Sarania Ashram, Guwahati and organised a conference of the Provincial Stree-Sakti Jagaran Samiti. In pursuance of the decision taken at the All India Conference, it was decided in this conference to undertake a Maitri yatra (Friendship tour) in the month of January, 1988. Accordingly, preliminary preparations were made and the tour finally commenced from the Matri Ashram of the Kasturba Trust in Lakhimpur District on January 3, 1988. The purpose of the tour was to maintain unity and integrity among different ethnic groups and communities. The yatra continued for complete three months without break upto March 31, 1988. Six mouzas (units of district administration) of Lakhimpur Sub-Division were covered in the Maitri yatra. The yatrees (participants of the tour) used to set up camps in villages after every of 4 to 5 kms. and halt for the night. In this manner, people of about 450 villages attended meetings organised by the maitri yatrees (participants of the tour). Though most of them were women, men also attended the meetings. A total of about 7160 people attended these meetings.

In the wake of the movement spearheaded by the All Bodo Students’ Union (ABSU) in 1989, the Maitri yatra that was temporarily brought to an end at Lakhimpur was revived under the name of Shanti yatra and undertook a peace march in the affected places from September 24 to October 29, 1989. This peace march was organised jointly by Bharatiya Shanti Sena, Assam Branch. The three yatrees of this peace march were sevikas of the Sarania Ashram. The padayatrees covered a distance of more than 200 Kms. On
their way, they held a total of 17 seminars participated by 855 people. During the yatra they visited 11 refugee camps. They contacted people of 38 villages of Sonitpur and Lakhimpur districts. During the padayatra they went to the people who had suffered a lot in the conflict and offered their solace and sympathy to them. The peace march was carried out upto Salengi of Arunachal Pradesh. During this peace march, some people of certain localities suggested the peace marchers that they should establish some permanent shanti kendras (peace centers) in those areas. Though the Shanti Yatra was temporarily postponed, they felt that there was a necessity of working further towards maintaining peace and harmony among the different groups of people in conflict situations.

In November 1990, Assam came under President’s Rule and army offensive was launched against the ULFA in the form of “Operation Bajrang”. People were under the grip of a fear psychosis so much so that people of one village dared not to visit those of another. Against this background, the Kasturba Trust, Assam launched a Maitri Padayatra, which commenced on 18th April 1991 from Tinsukia on the occasion of the birth centenary of Acharya Vinoba Bhave, undertaken by four experienced sevikas of the Trust. The padayatra continued upto September 11, 1995. The padayatra advanced through Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sivsagar, Jorhat and Golaghat districts and came to an end after covering 18 districts of the State. The yatrees, while proceeding through different localities, made it a point to spread Gandhi-Vinoba’s message of peace, friendship, emotional integration and non-violence.
More recently, in the wake of the violence in the districts of Udalguri and Darrang in October 2008, sevikas of the Sarania Ashram along with members from Sarvodaya Trust and North East Society for the Promotion of Youth and Masses visited the strife-torn districts. The team called for a secular and non-sectarian approach to restore confidence and communal harmony amongst the people of the affected areas. It also conducted an on-the-spot study and stressed the need for providing food items to children and proper medical and nutrition care for pregnant women living in the relief camps among other things.

(x) Youth Camps:

The process of socialization is fundamental for sustenance of any set of values. Accordingly, the Kasturba Trust, Assam, has made certain efforts aimed at acquainting the youths of the region with the Gandhian philosophy of non-violence. Towards this end, a four-day long youth camp was held in the premises of the Assam Branch of the Kasturba Trust, from November 11, 1992. 52 students from 18 colleges of different districts of the State participated in the camp. The deliberations and other activities in the camp were held under the guidance of eminent personalities like Sushila Nayar, Chairperson of the All India Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust, its Secretary, Santosh Gowendee, among others. The theme of the camp was, “Need of non-violence under present day conditions and duties of the youths.” Again, a two-day camp was held from September 15-16, 1993. College students from Guwahati participated in the camp. There were 42 participants in the
Many college teachers, guardians of the participants and representatives of different women’s organisations also attended the camp.

The participating youths expressed their willingness to work under the guidance of the Kasturba Trust. Accordingly, an organisation named Gandhi-Kasturba Yuva-Maitri Samaj was formed with a view to establishing a rapport with the youth. Programmes like campaigns against use of liquor, narcotic drugs, sale of obscene literature and indecent advertisements etc., are undertaken through this organisation from time to time. Attempts are also made to create social awareness by organising street-plays on various social issues.

Moreover, with a view to acquainting the girl students, in particular, with the way of life of the ashramites (inmates) of the Sarania Ashram as also with the ideals of Gandhi-Vinobaji, three Summer Vacation camps were held at the head office of the Kasturba Trust at Sarania, Guwahati between 1985 and 1988 for high school girl students.

A batch of fourteen students in 1985, 29 in 1987 and 17 in 1988 participated in the camps. They represented different schools of Nalbari, Nibira, Saonkuchi, Batakuchi, Simlabari, Tinipukhuri, Rangia, Jagiroad, Sonapur and Guwahati city. Each of the camps was of seven days’ duration. The camps were conducted by Lakshmi Phukan of Maitri Ashram.
In the camps, introductory lectures on the teachings and ideals of Gandhi, Kasturba Gandhi and Vinoba Bhave were delivered. Besides, the invited resource persons delivered lectures on the relation between man and his ecological environment and the necessity and importance of preserving the latter and the means to do the same. The daily routine of the participants followed the usual agenda in the ashram and the students also took part in the various activities with the inmates of the ashram. The students came from both rural and urban areas.

(xi) Sishu Panchayats:

In order to promote the sense of public spirit among children, a training and capacity building workshop for the members of Sishu Panchayats (Children’s Assemblies) was organized from September 6 to September 7, 2008, by the Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust, Assam Branch, in association with Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti, New Delhi. Sishu panchayats are basically assemblies of children, which were launched under the auspices of the Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti, New Delhi and Kasturba Trust, Assam. Structurally, a sishu panchayat is composed of the students from four to five schools at the village level. Ten such sishu panchayats in turn constitute an anchalik panchayat (at the Block level). Until now, several such sishu panchayats have been constituted across Assam covering the districts of Sonitpur, Kamrup, Dhubri, Lakhimpur and Tinsukia to name a few. The aim of these panchayats is to foster child participation in civic matters so as to make them conscious of their moral and social responsibilities even
as they find a common platform to raise various issues concerning their own welfare and development.

About 150 children from different parts of Assam, Mehalaya and Manipur participated in the aforementioned workshop. The workshop focused on inspiring community action and team spirit on the part of the children through various activities. The workshop aimed at developing effective communication skill among the participants through various interactive inter-personal activities. Importantly, the members of the different sishu panchayats were given the opportunity to talk about the activities of their respective panchayats. Among those who attended the aforementioned workshop, Usha, a member of the Depanjali Sishu Panchayat, Sonapur (Kamrup District), explained their working procedure of her panchayat and talked about their initiative to create awareness among the children of the area on the issue of environmental pollution. She also dwelt on the activities undertaken by her panchayat on behalf of school dropouts. Another young participant named Prafulla belonging to the Baralimara Sishu Panchayat in the Sonitpur District, discussed how the members of his panchayat tries to create awareness among the people against alcoholism and deforestation in their area. He further informed that their panchayat was also involved in convincing parents to send their children to school. Siromoni, the representative from the Boko Sishu Panchayat (Kamrup District) talked about the various programmes organized by her panchayat in order to create awareness among the people about sanitation, pure drinking water, etc. They also campaigned against the use of plastics and deforestation. Several other sishu panchayats participated in the
interactions. The Keherukhnada Sishu Panchayat from the Sonitpur District presented an elaborate account of their activities. It was learnt that on every Sunday the panchayat held a meeting to discuss matters like health and hygiene, pollution, alcoholism, non-violence, etc. Significantly, the sishu panchayat conducted a survey of school dropouts in the village, consequent upon which such children were enabled to attend school back again by way of providing free education. The panchayat has also undertaken various campaigns against global warming through the medium of wallpapers, posters, etc. The panchayat has also set up dustbins at schools as well as in the villages to keep the school premises and the village surroundings clean. Prabir Pamjal, the representative from the Bokota Parijat Sishu Panchayat in the Sibsagar District, explained how his group was taking initiative for community action in terms of organizing campaigns for the spread of literacy and generating awareness about environmental pollution, deforestation, etc. A group from Manipur spoke of their plans to campaign against jhum cultivation as it destroys the fertility of the soil and to create awareness regarding the same. As part of the workshop on Sishu Panchayat, the Gandhi Smriti and Drashan Samiti, New Delhi in association with the Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust, Assam Branch organized a children’s conclave on Gandhi and Non-Violence Awakening at Pragjyoti ITA Hall, Machkhowa, Guwahati, on September 8, 2008. The children from different schools of Guwahati, as well those who participated in the workshop on sishu panchayat took part in this programme. On this occasion, the children form various sishu panchayats presented their future plans and activities to be performed in their areas, ranging from proposed community-building activities to holding awareness campaigns on different social and ecological issues.
Significantly, the director of Gandhi Smriti and Drashan Samiti, Sabita Singh delivered her speech on Gandhi’s philosophy of non-violence and satyagraha.

It may be mentioned here that a similar workshop was held earlier in March 2008 at Shilpgram, Guwahati, on the theme of “Children as Agents of Social Change,” jointly organized by Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti, Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust, Assam Branch and United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF).

In this context, in order that the issues brought up by the sishu panchayats are effectively addressed and looked into at the policy making level, the Sarania Ashram is exploring ways to establish a process of continuous dialogue between the sishu panchayats and the actual governmental panchayat machinery at the local level, along the lines of what is known as the “makkala panchayat” prevalent in the State of Karnataka, where such a collaboration or interface is noticed. It may be mentioned here that the concept of makkala panchayat (children’s assemblies) was evolved in collaboration with the local government and with the participation of children. It was conceived as a village-centred programme to address the problems faced by children by empowering them to participate at the local level. The objective is to provide children with experiential education in democratic values and practices, preparing the citizens of tomorrow. The electorate of the makkala panchayats consists of all working children (6-18 year old) in the village, with representation for all children including school-going children. Its office bearers include
the President, Vice President and Members (12-18 years old). Significantly, all the children of the village (0-18) are registered in the makkala panchayat roles. The forum is central to continuous dialogue and collaboration between children and the local structures of governance.

Moreover, the Kasturba Trust, Assam has also come up with a novel initiative in the form of its periodical called Mukta Akash dwelling on issues relating to children covering matters like child rights and child participation. It may also be mentioned here that a four day workshop on Child Rights was conducted by Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti from November 12-16, 2008 simultaneously at two schools of Guwahati, namely, Sonapur High School and Kaliram Baruah Girls High School. Significantly, Bina Bora, a sevika from the Sarania Ashram was among those who conducted the workshop. The workshop was conducted with a view to generate awareness regarding the rights of the child. Children from different socio-economic backgrounds participated in the workshop. Almost 90 students attended the workshop at Sonapur High School including the members of their sishu panchayat, Deependali while around 50 children participated in the workshop at the Kaliram Baruah Girls High School. On the first day of the workshop at each school, the students were made aware of their rights with a stress on the four most important rights: right to live; right to development; right to participate; right to protection. The children of both the schools expressed their views and opinions on issues concerning children. On the second day of the workshop, a range of programmes including drawing competition, essay competition, presentation of poems and skits, extempore speech, group discussion etc.,
were organized among the students in both the schools. Almost 80 students from both the schools participated in these competitions. Significantly, in this context, it may be mentioned that the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)'s *Human Development Report* of 1994 has specifically mentioned the issue of “threats directed against children based on their vulnerability and dependence” under the category of “Personal Security”.

From the above discussion regarding the activities of the Sarania Ashram, it is seen that the organisation has been engaged in meeting certain key human security parameters in the realms of economic security, education and health security even as it has undertaken a host of constructive programmes in different parts of Assam and the North East region, including border and hill areas, coupled by a scheme of constructive social mobilization demonstrated by the various walking tours and peace marches that the Trust has undertaken from time to time. It has intervened in humanitarian crisis situations at different points of time and worked for inter-community peace building activities. Operating from the heart of the city of Guwhati, the Kasturba Trust, Assam is one institution which was started by a set of people who were directly associated with Mahatma Gandhi and Acharya Vinoba. The Trust has all along believed in the full utilisation of women's creative potential for constructive work and helping them develop the necessary self-confidence to render selfless service towards human welfare. Even to this day, the *sevikas* of the Sarania Ashram find themselves rendering relentless service towards the people of Assam and the North East region, working towards the goal of human development and social
transformation along Gandhian lines. Thus, Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust (Assam Branch) or the Sarania Ashram, as a pioneering women-led Gandhian organization in the region, committed to the cause of Gandhian satyagraha, has proved to be a successful experiment vis-à-vis the Gandhian satyagraha-human security paradigm, over the years.

However, it is seen that at present, there seems to be a general lack of awareness and an atmosphere of ignorance, even regarding the very existence of the Sarania Ashram, especially among the younger generation. It is true that the Kasturba Trust, Assam, has been making certain initiatives to reach out to the youth from time to time as has been discussed earlier. Nevertheless, given its experience, expertise and wide network, the organization currently needs to do much more than merely restricting itself to bringing out peace rallies and processions on specific occasions and endeavour to reach out more vigorously to the mass people, thereby mobilizing an ever increasing number of people along the lines of Gandhian non-violence, in a more proactive and sustained way. It is hoped that the Kasturba Trust, Assam, as a pioneering organisation in the field of peace and non-violence, will play a frontal role in developing a line of younger leadership, firmly committed to the ideology of non-violence so as to carry the message forward. Non-action in this regard could further relegate this organization to the background of people's consciousness. As a matter of fact, the Sarania Ashram could rope in some of the organizations that it launched earlier, such as the Gandhi-Kasturba Yuva-Maitri Samaj and embark upon a more dynamic course of action on a consistent basis.
3.2 Tamulpur Anchalik Gramdan Sangh (TAGS)

3.2.1 Location

The Tamulpur Anchalik Gramdan Sangh (TAGS), the centre for Gandhian constructive work, is situated at Kumarikata in the Tamulpur Sub-Division of the Baksa District in the Bodoland Territorial Autonomous District (BTAD) area of the State of Assam. The target area for intensive work for TAGS covers the Tamulpur area and the Nagrijuli Block in the Nalbari District of Assam. The target population is a heterogenous one consisting of various ethnic and religious groups, including both tribal and non-tribal populations.

3.2.2 Genesis and Background

In the wake of the Chinese aggression in 1962, Acharya Vinoba Bhave recommended that the Gandhian sarvodaya workers of the country should dedicate themselves in preparing the people of North East India to face the aggression with non-violent means as part of their shanti sena (peace corps) campaign. It will not be out of place to give a brief background of the concept of shanti sena at this stage. After the assassination of Gandhi, a meeting was held in mid-march 1948. Five hundred people, including Jawaharlal Nehru, Vinoba Bhave, Jayaprakash Narayan, Kakasaheb Kalelka, Shankarrao Deo and J.B.Kriplani attended the conference which was presided over by Congress President Rajendra Prasad. In his summary of the proceedings Prasad observed: "Gandhiji had before a long time been considering the desirability and feasibility of raising a band of workers who would devote themselves more or less exclusively to the maintenance of
peace among the people. He had on more than one occasion suggested the organization of a ‘Shanti Sena’…..It was, therefore, decided at the conference that efforts should be made to organize ‘Shanti Seva Dals’. It should be understood clearly that the Shanti Seva Dal is nothing like a police force or a body of volunteers whose function may be to suppress riots and disturbances. The function of the ‘Shanti Dal’ will be, by constant work among the people, to create an atmosphere of peace and goodwill so that communal riots and disturbances may not occur at all, and if they unfortunately do occur, to throw itself between the fighting forces and thus prevent or at any rate reduce the intensity of the clashes. The Seva Dal being without any arms and throughout non-violent will be able to achieve this.” (Harijan, 4 April 1948)

Subsequently, on 24 September 1959 at Pathankhot in Punjab, Vinoba Bhave finally declared the formation of the Akhil Bharat Shanti Sena Mandal (All India Shanti Sena Mandal) with Ashadevi Aryanayakam as convenor and Mr. Jayprakash Narayan as President and Narayan Desai as Secretary. It comprised of thirteen members (nine men and four women). The programme of the Shanti Sena included constructive work of all kinds, the prevention of corruption and removal of economic inequality. By 1960 shanti sena activities were launched in several areas including the troubled Maharashtra/Karnataka border, Assam and the Chambal valley.

Accordingly under the umbrella of the All India Shanti Sena Mandal – “the brigade without arms”, Mr. Ravindra Upadhyaya along with nine other volunteers came to
Assam in 1962 at the age of about 39 years to organise shanti sena work in the region in the wake of the Chinese aggression which had left the people living in the border areas feeling highly insecure and vulnerable. The main purpose was to mobilise these communities along non-violent lines and to instil in them a sense of confidence to put up a “defence without arms”. Reporting to Amal Prova Das of the Sarania Ashram at Guwahati, they were further split into five pairs.

Ravindra Upadhyaya was teamed with Madhav Rao Chauhan and entrusted with the charge of forming shanti senas in Tamulpur and Tihu Blocks of the undivided Kamrup District. This strategic area lay in the Assam - Bhutan border. Initially, they stayed at the ashram of Dwarik Barua who had already been working in the area based on Gandhian principles. Since shanti sena activities were aimed at promoting friendship and co-operation among the people, the first task was to go village to village and house to house, trying to meet people and talk to them. Wherever Upadhyaya and his team went, they spoke of gram swaraj, non-violent resistance, national security and thus the need for gramdan. During Vinoba Bhave’s Bhoodan campaign in a number of villages in Assam, gramdan had taken place in certain places. In the Tamulpur Block itself, gramdan took place in eighty villages. Mr. Ravindra Upadhyaya therefore conceived of a Gramdan Sangh or organisation which would consist of all gramdani villages of the block and would be a viable unit for taking up the task of development. However, out of the total eighty villages, only ten villages were formally recognized as gramdani villages. Accordingly, these ten villages formed the Tamulpur Anchalik Gramdan Sangh (TAGS), which was
launched in 1962 by Ravindra Upadhyaya and was subsequently registered as a society in 1966. Kumarikata was chosen as the centre for TAGS and its activities. Kumarikata, near the Indo-Bhutan border is presently situated in the Baksa District of Assam. It may be noted here that initially, the activities of Ravindra Upadhyaya revolved around two objectives: *shanti sena* for defence and *gramdan* for democracy. However, he was aware of the situation of economic deprivation that the people in and around Kumarikata were faced with. He knew that all talk of *gramdani* villages and collective action for peace and of *gram swaraj* would fall on deaf ears unless the situation of poverty was tackled. Mr. Upadhyaya realized that it was imperative to take up modest poverty alleviation programmes aimed at improving the living conditions of the people. Accordingly, TAGS started with a three point programme of *gramdan* for democracy, *khadi* for development and *shanti sena* for defence. He felt that for the economic development of the area, he needed to bring in khadi and also village industries.

However, the initiatives taken up by TAGS in its early years were mainly non-productive in nature. Efforts were made to start a *gram kosh* or village fund, one of the bases of gramdan. An attempt was made to create *poonji* or common granary in every village from where one could draw when needed.

As a matter of fact, Ravindra Upadhyaya started out in a most humble manner, assembling a group of people to work towards basic economic empowerment of the people of the area. In this endeavour of his, Upadhyaya himself would set out with a basket
collecting yarn. He along with his group of dedicated workers would go around on foot from village to village, home to home gathering people around and teaching them spinning of yarn on the wooden charkha which they used to carry with them. The villagers were provided the charkhas and encouraged to spin. The yarn collected was given to the weavers, even as communication was facilitated between between spinners and weavers. To further their skill and efficiency, weavers were sent for training outside Assam. Thus, the initial ground was prepared whereby a section of people was enabled to ensure their own economic security in terms of creation of minimum gainful economic opportunities at the grassroots.

TAGS has come a long way since its humble beginnings in the nineteen sixties. Today TAGS stands out as a rare success story in its own right. Ravindra Upadhaya started work in a relatively underdeveloped militancy ridden border area with a mixed population. His was not altogether a smooth sail as he had to face opposition from various quarters including militants who were skeptical of the array of activities undertaken by him in the area. Nevertheless, Ravindra Upadhaya continued to work steadfastly overcoming all odds, reflecting his consistently high degree of personal commitment to the Gandhian ideology. In the process he was able to involve and mobilise a fairly large group of people at a very local level, who all became an integral part of the novel experiment that TAGS came to symbolize in the realm of Gandhian satyagraha-human security.
3.2.3 Activities of Tamulpur Anchalik Gramdan Sangh

TAGS has declared that it is their mission to strengthen and uphold participatory democracy for good governance, so that people are empowered to assert and secure for themselves their basic rights among other things, by effectively acting as a watch dog with regard to the responsibilities and obligations of the state and work for the development of the weak and marginalised sections, promoting co-operation through non-violent constructive work activity by the people themselves. In pursuance of this spirit, TAGS has undertaken a host of activities over the years. These are discussed as follows:

(i) Training and Production Related Sector:

- Khadi Gramudyog Vidyalaya:

In 1971, under the auspices of the Khadi & Village Industries Commission (KVIC), TAGS started a training programme called the New Weavers Training Centre.

Towards the end of 1970s, the Khadi Commission decided to open a training institute in North East India to cater to the man-power requirements within the Khadi movement. A place called Roha, near Nagaon town was selected for this purpose. However, Roha had to be rejected at the last moment for technical reasons. Since Tamulpur was the only centre at that time having the necessary basic infrastructure, Ravindra Upadhyaya was requested to take up the task. The Khadi Gramudyog Vidyalaya
(training centre) was thus started at Kumarikata in 1981. It is catering to the training needs of the entire North East region in the *khadi* and village industry sector. Young men and women from Assam and other North-eastern States come here to receive training in spinning and weaving including design weaving. At present, the training centre has the capacity to accommodate around 50 students a year. Depending on the course taken the students are taught spinning, weaving and designing of cotton or silk. They are given a monthly stipend to cover their food expenses. Apart from the technical and artistic skills acquired in spinning, weaving, design weaving and processing, they learn to lead a disciplined corporate life during their period of training which range from three months to one year. All the trained are either employed in the institutions which deputed them or are self-employed.

The Vidyalaya is run on the basis of Gandhi's concept of *Nai Talim* or Basic Education guided by the principle of “earn as you learn”. Theory and practice go simultaneously. Full involvement of the learners is ensured. The trainees are also enabled to sell what they produce. Every trainee is assigned a specific responsibility from cleaning to cooking. The mess is completely managed by the trainees and accounts are kept meticulously. Thus, the trainees learn vital lessons in home economics, management and budgeting. The training process contributes to the all round development of the learners in terms of capacity building, personality development, empowerment and sensitisation on issues like gender equity, human rights and concern for others. So far more than 900 young
men and women have received training under TAGS since it started the “New Weavers Training Centre Programme” in 1971.

Many of the past trainees are now holding responsible positions in Khadi and Village Industries institutions. Several others have started their own enterprises to serve the community.

- **Weaving activities at TAGS:**
  
  Along with the expansion of the training institute, Ravindra Upadhyaya continued with his programme of offering employment opportunities to the local people. He maintained weavers in the main centre of TAGS in Kumarikata and also in six sub-centres nearby. In addition, some women were helped to acquire looms and they wove and supplied to the centre, operating from their own homes. Besides the weavers, spinners come from the villages on a contract basis to spin yarn. The spinners and weavers come from various communities. Presently, a total of almost three hundred people are employed full time with TAGS at Kumarikata and its sub-centres. Over 1500 work part time. Apart from that, many are gainfully employed in the NGOs in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh that Upadhyaya helped set up.

  The growth in the production and sales figures over the years are impressive. In terms of revenue earned and thus the employment opportunities that this spells out, *khadi* can definitely, be counted as an achievement by the organisation. TAGS has also adopted
the improved *charkha*, the silk *charkha*, jackard weaving etc. In fact, TAGS is in close touch with the Khadi Gramudyog Prayog Samiti in Ahmedabad and hopes for a further breakthrough in the field of *khadi* production. However, the key consideration is to have a labour intensive and non-exploitative production process.

It may be noted here that TAGS with the assistance of the Central Silk Board, have undertaken a grainage project in the field of sericulture with the aim of ensuring disease free eggs for silk production.

**Other production related activities of TAGS:**

TAGS is not involved with spinning and weaving of *khadi* alone. The institution has, for the purpose of self-reliance and poverty alleviation taken up production in the field of many other village industries such as oil crushing, honey production, processing and packaging of spices, carpentry and dehusking of rice.

*Bee Keeping*:

The centre in Kumarikata acts as a collection unit and sales counter for the honey that is produced by bee-keepers in the village. Almost four tonnes of honey worth over two lakhs are sold through TAGS annually. Efforts are made by the organisation to encourage the villagers to keep bee-boxes as it is a good source of income and one can earn up to fifty thousands rupees in a year. Already, 400 - 500 boxes have been distributed to the villagers.
The boxes are made in the carpentry unit of the organisation and supplied to the villagers at a subsidised rate.

**Oil Ghani:**

As part of the village industry activities listed by KVIC, TAGS started an oil press unit for crushing the oil seeds and extracting the oil. This was started in the 1970s and training about the process is also provided. Around 300 kgs of seeds get crushed in a day and the oil that is extracted is bottled and sold in the retail counters of TAGS. Villagers can also bring in their own seeds for crushing in return for a nominal amount of payment. The waste from the seeds after crushing is also sold as cattle feed to the villagers. Other oils such as coconut and *til* are also crushed but their quantity is very low. Over two and a half lakh rupees worth of oil is presently sold by TAGS.

**Carpentry:**

The carpentry unit was also started as a training centre but now it revolves only around production. Besides producing articles for use within the campus, the unit accepts orders from outside. It produces the bee-keeping boxes which the organisation supplies to the villagers at a subsidised rate. In the bee-keeping, oil ghani and carpentry units, casual labourers from the nearby villages are engaged. Besides, people are also engaged according to the requirements of projects received by TAGS from time to time.
It may be noted here that for the marketing of its products, TAGS is running three Khadi Gramudyog Bhawans (retail counters) at Kumarikata, Tamulpur and Guwahati.

(ii) Community Development and Infrastructure Development Programmes:

- **Balwadis (creche):**
  One of the first activities started by the organisation was *balwadi* (creche) programme for the children as a means to establish rapport with the people. The fee for attending the *balwadi* was food and water provided by the families in rotation. Some of Ravindra Upadhyaya’s earliest colleagues started off as *balwadi* workers. Initially, almost a dozen *balwadis* were being run by the organisation in different parts of the entire North East. But today, due to financial reasons there is only one that remains functional.

- **Women empowerment through Self Help Groups:**
  Upto 2003-2004, 281 Self Help Groups were found to be functioning in the area. The total bank deposits came to Rs. 25,02,764. Linkage of 41 groups with banks has been affected. The total amount of loans distributed to members came to Rs.27,44,200 as in 2003-2004, for various income generation programmes. Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI), Council for Advancement of People’s Action and Rural Technology (CAPART), Asha Foundation and the Tamulpur Sub-Division are also helping the groups with small grants for their functioning.
Regular monthly meetings and discussions are held by all groups. Members are given training in accounts and records maintenance. It is heartening to note that all these groups are active in peace activities also.

- **Child focussed community development programme:**
  With the help of the voluntary organisation, Action Aid, TAGS is implementing a child focused community development program with special emphasis on people’s initiative, capacity building and people’s participation in 30 villages of 3 clusters. A detailed survey has been completed and on the basis of the survey plans are formulated and implemented in the field of education, empowerment of women and rural poor, health, infrastructure development, gender equity and advocacy of peoples rights. Other social activities include sanitation, smokesless chulhas, biogas plants and provision of wells for drinking water.

- **Freeing Mortgaged land:**
  With financial support from BFW, a programme was undertaken to free mortgaged land of the poor villagers from the private money lenders and big landlords. The person whose land was mortgaged was given a loan so that he could get his land freed and be saved from the burden of having to pay high interest rates.

- **Granary Fund:**
  To create a strong self-sufficient village, a programme of granary fund was started in the villages. This was one of the first programmes initiated by TAGS. Villagers used to
deposit excess grain in this fund and in time of need they could borrow from this fund. For every quintal of grain borrowed from this fund, 6 Kilograms were to be returned as service charge. The goal was to create a pool of capital or poonji in every village.

- **Community Warehouse:**
  It was quite common for people of the area to sell paddy at throw away prices for immediate return during the harvest season. In order to help them store their food grains, warehouses were constructed by TAGS with financial support from BFW. A fee of four rupees annually was charged for the use of these warehouses. The amount collected thus was used to meet the maintenance cost of the warehouse. For every quintal of grain stored an amount of fifty rupees was paid to the farmer so that he could meet his immediate household running expenses. When the villager would be able to get a more favourable rate for his produce he could withdraw his share of grains and pay back the money given to him (fifty rupees) along with some service charge for maintenance of the warehouse. It remains one of the most useful programmes of TAGS even today.

TAGS had initiated a petty loan scheme whereby loans were given to persons wanting to start small livelihood sustaining trades. Subsequently, the economic needs of small individual farmers were sought to be met by the organisation through working closely with the banks.
• **Irrigation Project:**
In response to a basic problem of the nearby villages involving the non-availability of proper irrigation facilities, TAGS took up an irrigation project to make water available for the fields. Started in 1977 and completed in 1981, it was funded by the German organisation, Bread for the World.

• **Agriculture Extension Programme:**
In 1965, an agriculture extension programme was started by TAGS. In order to help increase productivity of the land, people were given fertilisers, seeds and implements. This helped boost agricultural output by a good margin. Its impact can be seen in Tamulpur and Kumarikata markets today which have a fairly large numbers of shops dealing in agricultural commodities.

• **Taking Science to Villages and villagers:**
In the field of agriculture and allied activities, TAGS is experimenting with sustainable farming through the technique of bio-farming, bio-fertilisers, bio-pesticides, etc.

With the assistance of the Department of Science and Technology, Government of India, the institution is implementing the following programmes since 2001:

• **Muga & Eri culture farming:**
For *Muga* silk production, the host trees - *som* (mulberry tree), are planted over one acre of land within the premises of the institution for rearing silk worms. The scientific method of
cocoon production is demonstrated, adapting it to local village conditions, so as encourage the villagers to adopt this practice for gainful employment. Training is also imparted to interested persons. The organisation has made remarkable progress in production enhancement and quality improvement by the use of improved implements developed by TAGS in *eri* yarn spinning and processing.

- **Preparation and propation of bio-fertilizers and bio-pesticides:**

  The continuous use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides results in soil depletion and environmental degradation. Accordingly, TAGS has prepared bio-pesticides using organic substances like *neem* leaves, tobacco and other plant wastes along with cow’s urine and has successfully used the same as an efficient substitute for chemical pesticides.

  Similarly, earthworm manure and compost manure preparation is also demonstrated and is used for cultivation of crops like cotton and vegetable. The local farmers are invited and trained in the above process of preparation of bio-fertilizers and pesticides.

- **Women’s Technology Park:**

  With the co-operation and assistance of Department of Science and Technology, Government of India and Centre for Science and Technology, a Women’s Technology Park has been put in place in the campus. It is intended to be a centre which will assist the small entrepreneurs to start their own units by providing technical assistances and service facilities. The identified units are oil processing (copra, sarsom), fruit preservation
processing of dehydrated areca nut, assembling and repairing of solar equipments. Support under this programme covers basic infrastructure, equipment/machinery for 4 - 5 technologies and running costs for the initial period of three years.

(iii) Health Programmes and Relief Work:

- Health Programmes:

From the very beginning, TAGS has been giving due importance to this field because the target area is highly prone to malaria and also has cases of other fatal diseases like T. B., Gastro enteritis, Acute respiratory illness, etc.

An ambitious programme for eradication of malaria in the area was launched by TAGS with the aid of Bread for the World, Bodoland Autonomous Council and Action Aid in 2000. The technique used was the S.E.T. Method (Survey Education and Treatment). Eighty drug distribution centres were established in the area for the speedy administration of medicine.

So far, 742 patients were treated at the centre. At present, the programme is run with the support of Sir Ratan Tata Trust. Since February 1996, TAGS has been running a malaria prevention and treatment programme in 7 villages of Bishnupur, Vinobapur, Kumarikata, Panbari, Bokajuli, Kauli and Paanitanki. Testing and treatment of malaria itself was
including under under this programme. As part of its effort, it has obtained blood test kits for diagnosis of malaria. The health workers are trained to handle, detect and treat malaria cases. Camps are held on malaria prevention measures.

The distribution of mosquito nets is a continuing health relief programme, financially supported by Bread for the World. It has been favourably received by the villagers. The Government of Assam, acknowledging the work done by the organisation has also extended its support by providing medicine in this context.

TAGS also brings patients to Guwahati for eye operations periodically. Besides, the organization also makes necessary arrangements for holding health check-up camps at Kumarikata and neighbouring areas. It may be noted here that TAGS also trains its workers, both male and female, in the matter of taking care of the sick.

- Relief Work:

TAGS has taken up relief operations during natural as well as man-made calamities. Its first experience of such direct humanitarian intervention was during the famine in the Dhubri District in 1974 when TAGS workers went there to assist in large numbers. TAGS provided relief to the affected people at Nelli (Morigaon District) and Gohpur, where there occurred large scale incidents of violence in the early 1980s. Similarly, relief operations were carried out by TAGS in the riot-hit Kokrajhar District in the late 1980s and early 1990s, even as it provided relief to the affected people across ethnic lines. Relief is
normally provided by TAGS in the form of utensils, clothes, mosquito nets and sometimes in the form of getting a spinning or weaving centre started for the victims. The financial assistance for TAGS’ relief operations has come from the German organisation, Bread for the World (BFW), Germany and Oxfam India Trust. During the severe flooding in 2004, which wreaked havoc across Assam, TAGS carried out relief operations in the flood-affected areas under its purview, distributing relief items such as mosquito nets, utensils etc.

(iv) Programmes Specifically Aimed At Sensitization And Mobilization:

- Peace Education, Training and Action Programmes:

Peace education, training and action programmes constitute an integral part of TAGS’s overall agenda. A new dimension has been brought about with the launching of the Mahila Shanti Sena (Women Peace Corps) since 2001 on an all-India basis under the leadership of Acharya Ramamurti and Ravindra Upadhyaya. Women activists of TAGS were sent for training in Patna and Vaishali in the State of Bihar. After their return, Mahila Shanti Sena units were organized in the target-areas of TAGS. In September 2003, a week-long training camp was organised where representatives from various States of North-East India took part. A rally was also organized in the area.

In the November 2004 group clashes between sections of the Assamese and Bihari communities, Mahila Shanti Sena cadres were active in organizing peace rallies in the
sensitive areas. Rallies were organized at Darranga (Baksa District), Kumarikata and Tamulpur. Monthly meetings of Mahila Shanti Sena units are held regularly. Mahila Shanti Sena cadres have also been actively participating in all developmental activities of TAGS, especially in terms of organising SHGs or Self Help Groups, awareness building campaigns, etc. A more detailed analysis of the Mahila Shanti Sena is made in the subsequent paragraphs.

(v) **Mahila Shanti Sena (Women Peace Corps):**

Before discussing the concept of Mahila Shanti Sena, one needs to examine some fundamental ideological underpinnings of Shanti Sena itself. The first committee for the Shanti Sena was formed in May of 1958. Vinoba Bhave believed that peace work was especially suitable for women, which is why the committee was composed entirely of females, with long-time Gandhi supporter Quaker Marjorie Sykes as convenor. Subsequently, even the All India Shanti Sena Mandal was formed with a female convenor, namely, Ashadevi Aryanayakam.\textsuperscript{vii}

As a matter of fact, Gandhian peace activists strongly believe that once women become aware of their potential, no one can stop them from being in the forefront of the decision making process. According to Shakuntakla Choudhury, former Pratinidhi, Kasturba Trust, Assam and at present a trustee of the Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust, “Acharya Vinobha Bhave, as a disciple of Gandhiji, had great faith in the principle of non-violence.
In a specific context, he once made a reference to women as *Sapta Shakti Jagrata*. This he said, while quoting a verse spoken by Lord Krishna to Arjuna appearing in Chapter Ten of *The Bhagwat Gita* where He says, ‘Among women I am fame, fortune, fine speech, memory, intelligence, steadfastness and patience.’ However, women are themselves not aware of their inherent potential, which is why it is imperative that they be made aware of the same.” In this context, Gandhi emphasized that nothing less than the total involvement of the entire population in the non-violent struggle for freedom would be adequate, and in this context he pointed out that it was imperative to involve women in the mass movement. As a votary of equal rights for women, Gandhi always insisted on the participation of women in public life. His non-violent *satyagraha* movement provided ample opportunities for the womenfolk to participate in the public sphere. In this context, Gandhi believed that women, by nature, held capacities for being effective agents for peace and non-violent social action. He was of the view that if *satyagraha* involved self-suffering, then women had a greater role to play, as inherently they are more resilient than men. According to Gandhi, “Women have to suffer more than men. Men and women are, of course, equal in authority- I myself believe in the idea-or rather, in the matter of suffering, women have a greater right than men. In this world, man has never suffered more than women, nor displayed the gentleness she has done.”

Indeed, of late, there has been a growing realization regarding the potential of women to become powerful actors for sustainable and just peace, as women are in the forefront of managing survival. As former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan points out, “Women, who know the price of conflict so well, are also better equipped than men to prevent or resolve it. For generations, women have served as
peace educators, both in their families and in their societies. They have proved instrumental in building bridges rather than walls.”

The U.N. Security Council Resolution 1325 on “Women, Peace and Security” reaffirms and assures that women assume their decision-making role in conflict prevention and resolution as well as peace building and calls for the adoption of a gender perspective and increasing the representation of women at all levels of decision making.

- **Mahila Shanti Sena and TAGS:**

  Drawing from the concept of the Shanti Sena, Mahila Shanti Senas (Women Peace Corps) have been organized in some parts of India including Bihar and Agratala in the State of Tripura. It reflects the above rationale of women as being naturally endowed with the potential to contribute towards peace building and peace making. Mahila Shanti Sena has been organized at Kumarikata under TAGS too. It aims at creating a violence free society starting from the level of the neighbourhood even as it preempts any outbreak of direct violence.

  The Mahila Shanti Sena under TAGS at Kumrikata was established in 2001 and its present strength is over seven hundred. Its activities are spread over the entire target area of TAGS. It has been formed as per the general guidelines regarding the formation of Women Peace Corps as discussed above and also has a Rapid Action Force or *Tatpor* Mahila Shanti Sena, to deal with emergency situations. Most members are drawn from Self Help Groups. However, the main criterion for becoming a member is one’s willingness to take
up peace work and contribute to the village and the society at large, whether or not one is associated with any Self Help Groups. According to Ravindra Upadhyaya, "We are organising women as non-violent social workers. That has gained ground. We have Self Help Groups. So for economic programmes and peace work we are counting on them; it is a women’s movement. The Mahila Shanti Sena is trying to create an atmosphere of peace in the neighbourhood at the village level." 

The Mahila Shanti Sena’s activities at Kumrikata and its neighbouring areas range from dispute settlement to caring for the sick as well as engaging in income generating constructive work. It is composed of members from both BPL and non-BPL families and is representative of all ethnic groups of the area. Its members range from students to housewives - any one who is willing to volunteer for peace work. According to Sabita Roy, a Mahila Shanti Sena cadre, being a part of the corps has helped her gain greater confidence in herself through interacting with many different people and engaging in public affairs. She now feels that she is better able to take decisions on her own. Besides, she admits to have learnt vital lessons in saving, household budgetting and personal hygiene. A similar tone is echoed by Ms. Dulu Rajbongshi, another cadre of the corps who admits to have become more conscious about the various happenings in her social surroundings through Mahila Shanti Sena work, thereby acquiring a new found courage to raise her voice against injustice. Besides, she has also been able to influence fellow villagers in a positive way. The Mahila Shanti Sena at Kumrikata has to its credit several cases of bringing about amicable solutions to domestic disputes between spouses. It has even been
able to withdraw cases from the police stations in this regard so as to find compromise solutions to such by intervening in a positive way. Besides, the Mahila Shanti Sena also takes up cases of acrocities on women perpetrated whether by the family or otherwise. It has also raised its voice against prostitution. Its cadres have also successfully put a stop to the consumption of illicit liquor in some parts of the locality. It may be noted here that during the clashes between sections of the Assamese and Bihari communities that rocked the State of Assam in 2004, the Mahila Shanti Sena at Kumarikata brought out peace rallies which saw as many as some eight hundred women taking part in them. The first rally was held on November 24, 2004 at Darranga Mela, the second one on November 27, 2004 at Kumarikata itself and the third one at Tamulpur on November 29, 2004. On each occasion the peace soldiers marched through the streets carrying banners and placards, driving home the message of peace and brotherhood among communities. Subsequently, no incidents of violence or hate could occur in the area.

The Mahila Shanti Sena holds regular monthly meetings of its units. They are actively participating in all the developmental activities of the institution especially in the field of Self Help Groups, awareness building campaigns etc. Periodical training programmes are also held. According to Mr. Ravindra Upadhyaya, Mahila Shanti Sena activities serve as an answer to the womenfolk of the village to their own suffering as also to the suffering of others.
Structure and functions of the Mahila Shanti Sena:

(a) Formation of Mahila Shanti Sena (Women Peace Corps):

The Mahila Santi Sena follows the decentralised model of structural arrangement. Peace workers will be formed in every village and quarter of a village. Ten peace workers from the neighbourhood will form a dasta (team of ten). Every dasta will have a leader or chief to be unanimously selected from among themselves. For selecting the chief a name will be unanimously selected from among the ten peace workers - one who can devote more time to peace work.

A woman of 18 years in age or more can become a member of the Mahila Shanti Sena (Women Peace Corps). The only condition is that she must be a believer in peace and non-violence and must be prepared to share responsibility in the campaign for creating a violence free neighbourhood and a violence free society.

The Mahila Shanti Sena will be formed with many dastas (team of ten) at the village panchayat level. The leader or chief of the panchayat Mahila Shanti Sena will be selected by the consent of all.
The Prakhand Mahila Shanti Sena (Block Women Peace Corps) will be formed with chiefs at the panchayat level and peace workers working at the block level. The leader will be selected from among these.

The chief of the block Mahila Shanti Sena and peace workers working at the district level will form the District Mahila Shanti Sena and this sena (army) will have a Nayak (Leader or Chief).

At the State level Mahila Shanti Sena, the leader or chief from every district and peace workers desirous of working at the state level will participate.

The State level Mahila Shanti Sena office will work for organisation and co-ordination.

In an emergency situation the lower unit will intimate the upper unit for proper action—e.g. the team at the village will communicate to the panchayat unit of the Mahila Shanti Sena, the unit at the panchayat to the block unit, the block to the district, and the district unit to the State Unit.

(b) Functions of the Mahila Shanti Sena:

The work of a cadre of any Mahila Shanti Sena begins from the level of the family. It is her duty to see that peace always prevails in her family. If there is difference of opinion on any
point or if a feud takes place, the peace soldier should see that all the members of the family sit face to face and talk the matter over, without having to approach the police or the court. Accordingly, the first area of action for a peace worker is the family itself. Girls in a family are discriminated against; daughters-in-law are abused and assaulted for dowry; to eradicate these tendencies, the peace soldier resorts to education and persuasion.

The neighbourhood is a bigger family. What is applicable to a small family is also true of the neighbourhood. It is the responsibility of the Mahila Shanti Sena cadre to ensure the existence of peace in the neighbourhood through generating consciousness about various ills in the society and to intervene in the event of any dispute breaking up in the neighbourhood, even as efforts are made for an amicable resolution of the dispute in hand.

Peace soldiers must see to it that no discrimination is carried out on the basis of caste, religion and gender. They must try to create an atmosphere where all artificial inequalities wither away.

For expansion of work, it is but essential that the peace soldiers reach out to the people and build up a rapport with the people. They are also required to hold regular meetings of their respective teams and strengthen their organisation.

Peace soldiers must ensure the participation of women in village and ward council meetings so that they can have their say. The Mahila Shanti Sena must pay special
attention to children, the old and widows. They also have to cater to the medical and sanitation needs of the people of the village and receive training in taking care of the sick in the village.

(c) Rapid Action Force of the Mahila Shanti Sena:
It is the responsibility of the Women Peace corps in every zone of peace to work for peace and unity in its area as ever alert and ever vigilant citizens. Accordingly, a rapid action force of a hundred cadres is created from the Mahila Shanti Sena itself. Its main aim is to work for preventive action. Wherever there is evidence of any tension on the basis caste, religion or ethnicity, the Rapid Action Force immediately takes steps to diffuse the tension. If a riot has already broken out, the Rapid Action Force will reach the site immediately and prevent it from spreading. For its purpose, the force takes the help of the local women. If the tension is severe a lower unit must immediately inform the upper unit.

(d) Training of Mahila Shanti Sena Cadres:
Training of women peace soldier is essential. Training is imparted through the camp method. The participatory and correlative method of training is also resorted to. Games and dramatics are also utilised for imparting training.

Stress is also laid on skill formation, household budgetting of income and expenditure, sanitation, tailoring, primary health care, taking care of the sick, food and nutrition, neighbourliness, etc, as part of the training programme.
TAGS, under the leadership of Ravindra Upadhyaya, is credited with having secured a more direct mobilization of people along non-violent lines in the form of what is known as the Angarkata Satyagraha. Angarkata is the name of a cluster of villages near Kumarikata spanning over an area of about 12,000 bighas. The area was home to certain groups of settlers. These included Hindu refugees fleeing from East Pakistan after the Partition of India in 1947, along with some families from certain ethnic communities from the plains of Assam like Bodo, Kachari, Uraon, Santhal and Hajong as well as some Gurkha grazers, who originally came from Nepal. As a matter of fact, all these settlers had been living in the area since the time of the partition of the country in 1947 even as they were surviving in conditions of abject poverty and deprivation. Incidentally, the land area in which they were residing happened to be a government reserve. Ravindra Upadhyaya came in contact with the above populations during the course of his gramdan work. It was when some of these villages of Angarkata showed willingness to join the gramdan campaign, that he discovered that they were legally encroachers on this land. Subsequently, the settlers were sought to be forcibly evicted by the government in a most merciless manner, using elephants to demolish their homes. On the tenth attempt of eviction, Ravindra Upadhyaya happened to be in Angarkata by co-incidence, when the notice for eviction arrived. He got
the people together and prepared them to put up a non-violent resistance to the attempt to remove them from the land. It was March 1967. Elephants were brought to demolish the huts. The people first surrounded the huts and then the elephants. The magistrate also tried to threaten the people by preparing to order firing on the resisting masses. However, the people who had gathered in their thousands were undeterred and were ready to face anything. The people showed remarkable courage in standing up to the might of the government machinery, ultimately forcing the government to withdraw, even though only for the time being. They had developed faith in the non-violent methods of struggle and resistance under the mature leadership of Ravindra Upadhayaya and had realized the strength of unity and organisation. They were absolutely fearless when facing the eviction party. The eleventh attempt of eviction followed in September 1967 when the Veterinary Department of the State government, which was allotted a portion of the reserve, brought tractors to plough the land and in the process destroy the standing crops of the settlers. The people resisted as before. Upadhyaya was arrested along with other people. The last attempt of eviction was made in December 1968. The eviction party this time came with armed police and elephants. On this occasion the women folk under the leadership of Upadhyaya’s wife, Shakuntala Upadhyaya, played a crucial role as they virtually immobilized the elephants, policemen and other members of the eviction party by way of putting up a virulent non-violent resistance to the eviction drive. The official in charge of the eviction operation had to abandon the same in the face of determined resistance put up by the settlers.
In a meeting of the Angarkata settlers held at TAGS, Kumarikata in the late 1990s, the settlers complained that although they were assured allocation of land by successive governments, yet no concrete step had been taken in that direction so far. However, it may be noted here that the people of Angarkata are now treated as defacto permanent settlers with no eviction attempt being carried out against them since 1968.

According to Ravindra Upadhyaya, the people of Angarkata have learnt to fight non-violently against injustice and government inaction, trained as they have been in non-violent techniques of social action to get their just demands fulfilled through a non-violent movement.

From the above discussion, it becomes clear that, committed as it is, to the cause of Gandhian non-violence based on *gramdan* for democracy *khadi* for development and *shanti-sena* (peace corps) for defence, the Tamulpur Anchalik Gramdan Sangh (TAGS), in its more than 40 years of existence, has been contributing in its own limited way towards building an environment promoting human security. With its multifarious activities in the field of livelihood and income generation, health, education, training and action programmes, women and child development programmes, peace education and women empowerment, among others, TAGS is serving as a beacon of hope in the face of increasing human insecurity, on a very micro level though. The organisation has been endeavouring to realise a new development strategy based on self-reliance and empowerment at the grassroots including youth and women within a broad framework of
environmental sustainability and sensible asset management. According to Mr. Upadhyaya, “income and employment generation is a regular feature of TAGS”.

The employment and income generation programmes of TAGS have been successful in extending social and economic support to the youths of the area to a great extent in the absence of which they are prone to becoming easy targets for recruitment into militant outfits. Accordingly, through its activities, TAGS has significantly contributed in weaning many a youth away from violence and insurgency.

Ravindra Upadhyaya's assessment of the socio-economic condition of the people of the area, upon his arrival in the border area of Kumarikata in the 1960s was a startling revelation for him. Their condition of marginalisation left him with a desire to work for their development and empowerment. The initial inception of TAGS in the 1960s therefore, could be said to be a reflection this sincere urge to provide and ensure human security to such a marginalized section of the society. Accordingly, Ravindra Upadhaya started his mission with the cooperation of a group of people over four decades ago. Today, he has managed to set up one of the most organised Khadi production centres in the country the form of TAGS. Using adapted modern labour-intensive technology, TAGS has been instrumental in providing employment to several generations of people not only in Assam but also across its sister centres in various parts of North-east India. By running a khadi training institute, TAGS has also catered to the manpower requirements of the khadi movement in this part of the country. Khadi, its production, training, sale and exchange, weaves the story of much of Tamulpur Anchalik Gramdan Sangha's life today. Besides,
other village industries such as bee keeping, oil crushing, rice dehusking and carpentry have also been nurtured by the organisation providing employment to many. Accordingly, Mr. Ravindra Upadhyaya has, through his institution, sincerely endeavoured to create minimum economic opportunities at the grassroots level for the welfare of the marginalised sections including youth and women, vis-a-vis a wide variety of training and employment generating programmes run by the institution.

Moreover, TAGS is contributing towards ensuring health security in a decentralised way. TAGS has worked hard to cater to the health and medical needs of the people in its target areas. As discussed above, it is actively engaged in malaria research activities working for its eradication. Drug distribution centers and periodical health check-up camps and imparting of training to the volunteers at TAGS in the art of taking care of the sick have significantly helped the people of the area in terms of some of their vital medical needs.

At the same time, TAGS has also been able to mobilize a section of people in the realm of non-violent direct action as amply demonstrated in the case of the Angarkata Satyagraha.

TAGS, Kumarikata has always believed in gender sensitivity and equal status for both men and women. In terms of its training and employment and income generation activities, young men and women alike are involved. The Women’s Technology Park
coming up at Kumarikata is another pointer to TAGS' concern for equipping women with necessary skills for employment in the field of horticulture, food preservation and the like.

TAGS has also started an innovative exercise in forming the Mahila Shanti Sena, the neighbourhood peace corps, composed of women. Although only over eight years old, the Mahila Shanti Sena at Kumarikata has already to its credit, a host of activities ranging from opposing injustice meted out to women both within and without the family to curbing the consumption of illicit liquor to organising peace marches to drive home the message of peace and neighbourliness. At the same time involvement in Mahila Shanti Sena activities has provided a window of opportunity to the womenfolk of the area in terms of enabling them to participate in the public sphere and become active agents in the process of decision making and social change at a local level, even as they could gain greater confidence in themselves with respect to managing their own lives. In this context, it is expected that the Mahila Shanti Sena activities would spread to several other parts of North-East India. Infact, Mahila Shanti Sena organisations across the country can coordinate their activities to act as a unified pressure group for resisting social evils and ensuring the prevalence of an atmosphere of peace and harmony across the country.

In the ultimate analysis, TAGS being the kind of innovative exercise that it is in the realm of ensuring human security, it would be appreciable if the organisation penetrated even deeper in terms of beneficiaries and territory, carrying forward the message of self-reliance, peace and non-violence. In fact one could be critical in terms of certain areas
involving its operational dynamics. For one, TAGS pays wages to its workers based on the
guidelines prescribed by the Khadi and Village Industries Commission. Given the present
inflationary trends, there is a need to adopt a more remunerative approach in this regard so
that the production process at TAGS consistently remains a gainful economic opportunity.
Secondly, TAGS would do well to be a bit more market savvy. In its long years of
existence, TAGS has not conducted any market survey to know the tastes of the
consumers, specially the younger ones. TAGS produces some very fine-quality khadi
products. It could go for innovations in terms of design or otherwise with regard to its
khadi wear in a way that strikes a fine balance between “rejuvenating” khadi while keeping
intact the “khadi mentality” meaning “decentralization of the production and distribution
of the necessaries of life”. At the same time, setting up more retail outlets on the part of
TAGS for the sale of its khadi and other products would also go a long way in popularizing
the same.

Moreover, TAGS has had a long and unbreakable tradition of people’s
involvement across several generations under the able leadership and guidance of Ravindra
Upadhyaya. The volunteers at TAGS view him as a motivational father figure whom they
address as “pitaji” or father. Nevertheless, it is hoped that an effort will be made at TAGS
to rope in the expertise and skills of the up-and-coming volunteers so as to groom a second
line of leadership, so to speak, to consistently carry forward the mantle of the organisation
through time, spreading the message of self-reliance, social harmony and non-violence in
the process.
3.3 SHANTI SADHANA ASHRAM

3.3.1 Location

The Shanti Sadhana Ashram is headquartered at the Basistha (Shantivan) area in the city of Guwahati in the Kamrup (Metro) District of the State of Assam.

3.3.2 Genesis

In order to know the genesis of the Shanti Sadhana Ashram, a brief account of Hembhai, the founder of the organization would be necessary. Hem Bhai was born as Hem Dutta in a village called Gayangaon in the District of Sibsagar in Assam. As early as thirteen years of age, he took a pledge to tread the path of non-violence as shown by Mahatma Gandhi, Acharya Vinobaji and the revered saints of India. As a matter of fact, at this tender age, he formed a society of non-violent people who vowed for vegetarianism and started constructive social work in and around his locality. In 1961, when Acharya Vinoba Bhave visited Hem Dutta's place during the Bhoomi campaign, the latter with his group of vegetarians joined Vinoba Bhave and became part of the Shanti Sena (lifelong missionaries of Peace and Non-violence). In the wake of the 1962 Chinese aggression, compulsory military training was decided to be imposed upon the youth in Assam. To this, Hem Dutta and his group, committed as they were to the principles of non-violence and
peace, opposed the decision tooth and nail, with the group insisting instead on humanitarian services and nonviolent direct action. The authorities even threatened Hem Dutta of dire consequences like expelling him and the fellow members of his group from college and keeping them in prison for opposing the decision. This tussle continued for 3 years and finally at the mediation of pacifists including Marjorie Sykes, Narayanbhai Desai, son of Mahadev Bhai Desai and other thinkers of India, the Government of India granted exemption to compulsory military training. This victory gave a strong fillip to Hem Dutta to work for non-violence, peace and human understanding. Subsequently, he organized *shanti sainiks* or peace soldiers in Assam for constructive work and national integration.

After graduation, Hem Dutta joined Acharya Vinoba Bhave in Madhubani, Bihar in 1967. Acharya Bhave sent Dutta to the his *ashram* called Brahma Vidya Mandir situated in the district of Wardha in Maharashtra. He lived there for 14 years, deeply studying the lores and wisdom of different religions, which made him a staunch supporter of equal reverence for all religions. From his years at the *ashram*, Hem Dutta came to be popularly known as Hembhai.

In 1980, Acharya Vinoba Bhave sent him back to Assam to work for peace and development in the wake of the Assam Movement. Accordingly, Hembhai and a team of his fellow *ashramites* arrived in Assam to work for the promotion of peace, harmony, amity and brotherhood among different religious, linguistic and ethnic groups of people.
On their arrival, they stated three long *padayatras* (foot marches or walking tours) throughout the length and breadth of Assam. After covering a distance 1800 kilometres, the tours finally culminated in Indo-Bangladesh border area, holding twenty peace camps and numerous peace meetings to check infiltration by peaceful means. In the course of this long march, it was strongly felt that without socio economic development in the border areas in particular, the problem of infiltration could not be addressed. Significantly, a group of youths from Assam joined the *padayatras* and dedicated themselves as lifelong missionaries of peace. However, there was a need to guide and train these youths appropriately so that they could successfully realise their goal. Accordingly, keeping this in view, the Shanti Sadhana Ashram came into being in 1982 under the leadership of Hem Bhai. Since then, the organisation has been offering its services in the fields of health, education, training and income generation on the one hand and in furthering the values of peace, harmony, human understanding, national integration and brotherhood and equal respect for all religions on the other. Today, the Shanti Sadhana Ashram is a team of 665 dedicated full-time workers. Another 5000 families are dependent upon Shanti Sadhana Ashram for its livelihood.

The Shanti Sadhana Ashram Ashram has in total thirteen branches covering six districts of Assam. The branches in Assam are located in the districts of Kamrup, Sibsagar, Jorhat, Lakhimpur, Dhemaji and Dhubri each carrying out various production related activities and training programmes inspired by the Gandhian concept of constructive work and
development. Of late, the organisation has extended its wings to other States as well, namely, Manipur, West Bengal, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh. As has already been mentioned in the first chapter, I have, for the purpose of my field research, covered the main centre of the Shanti Sadhana Ashram situated at the Basishta (Shantivan) area in the city of Guwahati. In terms of infrastructure, the total land area of the Basishta centre is 7.5 acres. It has a two-storied women’s training hall/centre cum hostel, one meeting hall/office, one male hostel (dormitory), one food preservation cum processing unit, one mushroom spawn production laboratory, one steel fabrication training cum production centre and 20 looms.

3.3.3 Activities of Shanti Sadhana Ashram

(I) Training and Production Related Sector:

- Income Generation Through Handloom, Handicraft and Mushroom Spawn:
In the income generation sector, the Ashram has been engaged in the task of generating gainful economic opportunities for marginalized sections by way of adopting a host of activities towards this end. One of the major activities in this sector is handloom and the single biggest segment of beneficiaries in this regard has been marginalized rural tribal womenfolk. The Ashram started this handloom activity with financial assistance from Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI), Rashtriya Gramin Vikas Nidhi (RGVN), Council for Advancement of People’s Action and Rural Technology (CAPART),
District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) and it is now spreading to different parts of the State through its branches in 5 districts. The North Eastern Council (NEC) has also extended support in the field of imparting training to the womenfolk in the handloom sector. The Ashram has a training centre in its premises where such training is imparted under the auspices of the NEC. The tribal womenfolk were economically deprived without any source of regular income. Some of them were engaged in producing unsafe local liquour. After receiving training from the Ashram, they have all given up the practice and instead taken up handloom as a means of their livelihood. As a whole, the Ashram has so far has trained more than 5000 women in improved methods of spinning, weaving and designing in muga, endi and mulberry silk. With help from the Ashram, many of the trainees have started their own enterprises while others have preferred to work directly under the Ashram. As full-time weavers, they are now earning anywhere between Rs. 1200/- to 3000/- per month through production of handloom items involving both mulberry and non-mulberry silk and cotton products. This earning among the rural weavers has proved to be a big support to their families in terms of educating their children and availing themselves of better health care facilities. The weavers have participated in different melas or exhibitions throughout the country. The Ashram receives high demand for silk and cotton products each year, thereby benefitting the weavers associated with the Ashram. As a matter of fact, the Ashram made a sale of Rs. 14.04 lakhs during the year 2006. The sales exceeded the previous figure by Rs. 5 lakhs. It may be mentioned here that the Shanti Sadhna Ashram has a retail outlet within its premises at Guwahati, selling its khadi produce and the same was found to be frequented by people from the vicinity.
In the handicraft sector the Ashram has provided training to many rural youths with assistance from the North Eastern Council and has facilitated groups of such trainees to exhibit their produce, most recently, in Sibsagar District of Assam.

In the field of mushroom spawn production, the Ashram has a tissue culture laboratory to produce spawn. This laboratory was assisted by Assam Science Technology and Environment Council (ASTEC), Child Rights and You (CRY), Regional Research Laboratory (RRL) and State Institute of Rural Development (SIRD). The spawn produced in the Ashram has a high demand not only in Assam but also in all North-Eastern States emanating from individual growers and governmental and non-governmental institutions. The spawn production laboratory of the Ashram has produced about 5000 packets of oyster mushroom spawn of 250 gm each and sold them to mushroom growers at reasonable rates. The Ashram imparts mushroom cultivation training to rural unemployed youths. So far it has imparted such training to more than 10,000 young men and women from all over the North-East. The Ashram helps the trainees to start their own production centres.

- **Food Processing and Food products:**

Food processing is also one of the most important income generating activities of Shanti Sadhana Ashram. The Ministry of Food Processing, Government of India, helped the Ashram to set up this unit. Now, the unit has become self-reliant, imparting regular training in food processing and production. The food products of the Ashram include
squashes of orange, pineapple, jackfruit, mango, blackberry, kordoi; pickles of mango, olive, amara, bamboo shoot, chilli, brinjal, mushroom, jackfruit, lemon and spices like powder-chilli, turmeric, black pepper, coriander, jeera etc. The Ashram also sells milk and milk products and honey. As a matter of fact, the food products of the Ashram are very popular with the people of the area. Significantly, the Shanti Sadhana Ashram has also won a prize for its brinjal pickles in Bengaluru, Karnataka. The North Eastern Regional Agricultural Marketing Corporation (NERAMAC) under the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) also purchases the Ashram’s products.

- **Ayurvedic Medicinal Products:**

The Ashram is engaged in the production of a host of ayurvedic medicinal products such as Brahmi Tone-S (brain tonic) Liv up-S (liver tonic) Kasanta Kalp (cough syrup) Panduharan (jaundice) and Bel powder, Triphala churna, blackberry powder, Aswagandha churna etc. The Ashram runs a big retail outlet at Beltola in Guwahati for the sale of its ayurvedic products.

- **Steel Fabrication:**

The training cum production unit of steel fabrication in the Ashram started in 2005. It has been able to train up to ten youths so far who have produced quality products of steel furniture.
Horticulture, Floriculture and Organic Farming:

Over the next 5 years expansion of its work in the fields of cane and bamboo, jute diversification, spinning and weaving, vermiculture, horticulture, nursery raising, food processing, raising medicinal garden and manufacturing of medicines, making and repairing of electronic devices, computer training and agriculture and animal husbandry. In the years ahead, the Ashram is working on a plan to start 10,000 in the backward villages of the region and creating proper outlets for these products inside and outside Assam. The Ashram has remained almost a regular place of exposure visits for different training programmes organized in NIPCCD (National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development), NIRD (National Institute of Rural Development), IIE (Indian Institute of Entrepreneurship), NEIBM (North-East Institute of Bank Management) and including many schools and colleges of the state. The CAPART (Council for Advancement of Peoples Action and Rural Technology) has selected this organization for six consecutive years for holding state and district level Gramshree Melas- an exhibition cum sale outlet of rural products. Agricultural Extension services in the district of Sibsagar was conducted under the Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India.

(ii) Health Programmes:

In the health sector, the single most important programme of the Shanti Sadhana Ashram has been the “Khoj” programme. The programme was launched in the year 1994 in 20 villages of Dimoria Development Block of Kamrup District, with financial help from the
EZE Germany (a voluntary organisation) through Voluntary Health Association of India (VHAI), New Delhi. It was an initiative of the Ashram in integrated development of health and income generation. It was first launched at Bamfor village. Under this programme, the Ashram started health and awareness activities in sanitation, safe-drinking water, malaria eradication, mother and child health care and general treatment of common ailments, with the active involvement of a dedicated team of doctors and health workers from the said block and district aided by a four-bedded hospital and an ambulance run by the Ashram. In the targeted villages of the said programme, the people had no recourse to proper means of sanitation and had to fall back on unsafe water from kuttcha wells. With the launch of the programme, UNICEF-model low cost pucca sanitary latrines and pucca wells for safe drinking water came up in the villages. Awareness campaigns were also held against approaching tantricks and medical quacks to cure illnesses, as was the practice among the people of the area. As a result of such awareness campaigns more and more people gradually stopped seeing such quacks. Moreover, scientific training was imparted on midwifery to the local dhais under this project. The “Khoj” programme continued till August 2003. However, the Ashram still continues its health services in the said areas in collaboration with a local nursing home from Guwahati, namely, the Dispur Polyclinic. The Ashram organises free medical check-up and treatment camps periodically in its hospital in collaboration with Dispur Polyclinic. Besides, the Ashram has taken up AIDS control programme, which is going on in the Bihubor area of Sibsagar District. The Ashram is also engaged in the task of producing aryuvedic medicine in its laboratory at Guwahati as mentioned earlier and has organised many camps on traditional medicine.
(iii)  **Education Sector:**

**Jeevan Sadhana Vidya Niketans:**

The Ashram has been running eight pre-primary, primary and middle schools in two districts of Assam namely- Kamrup and Lakhimpur. These schools are called the Jeevan Sadhana Vidya Niketans. Initially assisted by CRY, Kolkata, the schools are now run with assistance from ASHA for Education, Detroit Chapter, USA. Significantly, the Ashram has launched a total literacy programme in the Dimoria Development Block of Kamrup District covering 152 villages. As part of its efforts towards this end, special mention must be made of the school started by the Ashram in the village called Paschim Killing under the Dimoria Development Block of Kamrup District. The village is predominantly inhabited by people from the Karbi community (an indigenous tribe form Assam). This school was established in the year 1999. Though this village is situated at a distance of only 35 kms from Guwahati, it suffers from acute poverty with a sizeable section of Below Poverty Line (BPL) families. The main source of livelihood for many is daily wage earning. Most of the children of the village had no access to school education. Accordingly, it was against this background that the Shanti Sadhana Ashram started a pre-primary school in the village with the help of the people of the village. It started operating from a makeshift bamboo house. After a year, the school started Class-1 classes. In course of time, the people started sending their children to school regularly and also encouraged people form the nearby villages to send their children to school. Gradually, the school was upgraded to a primary school. With the help of the missionary agency called World Vision,
a concrete building was built for the school, which is where the school is housed at present. The agency extended help for development of other necessary infrastructure of the school as well. The DRDA (District Rural Development Agency), Government of Assam, and the local gram panchayat also helped in the development of concrete sanitary facilities for the school. It may be noted here that the schools run by the Ashram were first assisted by CRY, Kolkata and now ASHA for Education, Detroit Chapter, USA.

The Ashram is also running an L.P. (Lower Primary) school at the Robingaon No.2 village in the Kamrup District located at a distance of 40 kilometers from Guwahati. The village is mostly inhabited by tea garden communities. The school was established in the year 1992. With assistance from World Vision, DRDA, the relevant Gaon Panchayat and the village community, proper infrastructure facilities could be provided to the school. Moreover, the AIRTEL Telcom Services has provided the Shanti Sadhana Ashram two school libraries in the year 2006 for the children of the schools run by the Ashram as well as for the near by schools. These libraries have been catering to the needs of the students from remote and backwrad areas. Besides, the Ashram is running two school libraries assisted by Bharti Foundation, New Delhi. The libraries are established at the Shanti Sadhana Ashram headquaters at Basistha, Guwahati and at the Robingaon L. P. School.

(iv) Projects:
The Ashram has executed the following on going projects:
(a) **Cluster Development Project:** This project was launched with financial assistance from North Eastern Council, Shillong. The project covered nearly 2000 beneficiaries under the training on weaving, handicrafts, food processing/preservation in the districts of Sibsagar, Jorhat, Lakhimpur and Kamrup.

(b) **Targeted Intervention of HIV/AIDS:** This project was launched in the Sibsagar District with migrant labourers as the target population. The first phase of the project was organized in the Bihubor area under the Sibsagar District.

(c) **Rapid Multiplication Unit (RMU):** An RMU of black pepper under the financial and technical support of the Spices Board, India, has been maintained by the Ashram. It produces quality rooted cuttings of improved varieties of black pepper.

(d) **Awareness Generation Project:** An Awareness Generation Project camp for 30 women representatives of organizations from Barpeta, Dhubri, Bongaigaon, Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi districts with the support of Assam State Social Welfare Board, was organized in the Ashram.

(iv) **Programmes Specifically aimed at Sensitization and Mobilization:**

**Gram Swavalamban / Shanti Sadbhavna Padayatra:**

The Shanti Sadhana Ashram has from time to time undertaken walking tours or *padayatras*. In 1982, Hembhai launched a *padayatra* covering 1800 kms. culminating in
the Indo-Bangladesh border area, making 20 camps to guard against illegal infiltration. Attributing economic insecurity as one of the prominent contributory factors precipitating violence and disturbance, Hem Bhai, during the course of his *padayatra* exhorted the youths to take up productive ventures based on self-reliance and non-violence, thereby motivating them to be part of the Shanti Sadhana project. More recently, on October 2, 2002, the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, Shanti Sadhana Ashram with the cooperation of other like-minded organizations started a *pada yatra* called the *Gram Swavalamban* and *Shanti Sadbhavna Padayatra* covering Dehmaji and Lakhimpur districts. Hembhai and his team undertook the *padayatra*. It is an ongoing project based on the theme of non-violence, peace, harmony, goodwill and self-reliance. The *padayatra* would continue till it would have covered all the districts of Assam. So far a distance of 5000 kms spanning over 10 districts has been covered, where the message of equality of all religions is spread. More than one lakh youths from schools, colleges and universities have come forward to take a pledge vowing to shun violence of all forms and not to indulge in tobacco, narcotics, drugs and other anti-social activities, but to work for peace and prosperity of the nation. People of different religious, linguistic and ethnic groups received the *padyatris* with open arms. During the course of the *padayatra*, Hem Bhai himself stopped over at families of different religions.

Significantly, a decision was taken to to start one thousand peace centres all over Assam for promotion of peace, love and understanding among different groups of people and to generate employment for the unemployed youths, women, Scheduled Castes and
Schedule Tribes and other backward sections of the region. In the process, four hundred and fifteen peace centres have been already organised with a thrust on income generating vocational and lifeskill training programmes and activities have started in a few of them. These primary target groups of these programmes constitute the vulnerable sections of the populace. Women's rights and issues relating to their empowerment, addressing gender discrimination and promotion of appropriate technology are some of the hallmarks of these efforts.

Besides, study centres are proposed to be started in various places to impart training in peace building activities in the specific context of inter-religious and inter-linguistic community relations, along with inter-cultural studies and national integration aimed at forging healthy relations and strengthening the sense of unity among various groups and communities.

Work on Communal Harmony:
In the early 1980s, Hembhai, with a few of his trusted colleagues started a peace mission at Nelli in the Morigaon District, a place which was witness to gory scenes of violence. Hembhai camped with the affected communities, trying to heal their trauma. Likewise, there was widespread violence in Gohpur in the District of Sonitpur. At this juncture, Hembhai started a peace mission *padayatra* in the 33 affected villages of Gohpur, spreading the message of love and brotherhood among the different communities. Significantly, the people of the area responded favourably to Hembhai's peace work so
much so that they appealed to him to start a Peace Centre in a plot of land where 53 persons had lost their lives as a result of inter-group clashes. Accepting this offer and challenge, Hembhai started the Shanti Ashram there, trying to build confidence among the warring groups even as people form across faultlines were sought to be involved in different cultural and income generating activities.

However, as fate would have it, miscreants attacked and plundered the Shanti Ashram, setting it on fire. Hembhai then convened a meeting of the leaders of all religions to actively work on communal harmony and inter-religious understanding. He organized an all-religion prayer meeting in a Hindu temple at Dikhowmukh in the Sibasagar District.

North East Peace Initiative:
A workshop on North East Peace Initiatives was held at Shanti Sadhana Ashram in association with Gandhi Peace Foundation, New Delhi. It was attended by representatives associated with peace related work from the North Eastern states. The programme highlighted the relevance of peace initiatives as a global issue.

Peace Rallies:
When in 1994 social activist Sanjoy Ghosh was abducted and brutally murdered, Hembhai with other friends organized protest rallies against this brutal killing. Perhaps this was the first rally of its kind against extremist activities. Secondly, when Dwarika Baruah, the septuagenarian Gandhian worker was abducted by militants, Hembhai and other peace
workers organized peace rallies in Guwahati city, offered prayer and fastings in the Bodoland areas, meeting the Bodo leaders to get Baruah released. Finally, bowing to popular pressure, Dwarika Baruah was released safely. This very act of peace protest inspired to start an organization called the Citizens' Forum Against Violence, Assam (CFAVA), where Hembhai was made Secretary General of the newly formed Organisation. This CFAVA collected the signatures of 3 lakh people pledging to work for peace, harmony and national integration. All religious leaders joined in this campaign.

It is worth mentioning here that the Shanti Sadhana Ashram has been the birthplace of several organizations. The Voluntary Health Association of Assam (VHAA) was born in the premises of the Shanti Sadhana Ashram at Basistha. The Confederation of NGOs of Rural India (CNRI) Assam chapter was also born in Shanti Sadhana Ashram. Besides, there have been a number of exposure visits to the Ashram on the part of the National Institute of Rural Development, the State Institute of Rural Development and other organisations and NGOs even as the visiting groups are acquainted with the activities of the Shanti Sadhana Ashram.

Analyzing the activities of both TAGS and Shanti Sadhana Ashram, it could be said that although both the two organizations have their own specific programmes, yet their activities converge on many important areas. Both organizations have, over the years, generated minimum gainful economic opportunities at the grassroots for the welfare of some very marginalized and vulnerable sections including youth, women and tribal
communities, vis-a-vis a wide variety of training and employment cum income-generating programmes run by the respective organisations.

In the process, they have not only been able to equip the target groups with adequate skills for self-employment but have also been able to build bridges across communities by fostering an atmosphere of co-operation and goodwill through non-violent constructive work undertaken by the people themselves. Significantly, economic security stands at the top of the seven target areas for Human Security to counter the threat of economic deprivation and underdevelopment arising from gross deprivation of basic needs and entitlements (food, safe drinking water, primary health care and sanitation, primary education) extreme poverty, unemployment, and inequality. However, this is not to say that the concept of human security intends to turn people into merely passive recipients of "security." As a matter of fact, the concept of human security stresses that people should be able to take care of themselves: all people should have the opportunity to meet their most essential needs and to earn their own living. This will set them free and help ensure that they can make a full contribution to development – their own development and that of their own communities, their countries and the world. Human security is critical ingredient of participatory development. In other words, human security is not simply the challenge of "protecting" and "providing" but involves fostering the empowerment of the people and their participation even as they contribute directly to identifying and implementing solutions to security problems. Specifically, focusing on individuals and communities, it emphasizes the necessity of protection and empowerment of individuals. The human
security paradigm establishes a direct relationship between an access to basic human needs of food, clothing, shelter, health, education and remunerative employment and socio-political and economic empowerment. Accordingly, more than anything, the initiatives centering on skill formation and income generation made by the two organizations are more in the realm of "sustainable livelihood." In this context, by stressing the adoption of "appropriate technology" based on a decentralized process of production and upholding the core value of "bread labour", both TAGS and Shanti Sadhana have endeavoured to secure sustainable livelihood options in a way that is conducive to the laws of ecology. With their focus on rural industrialization with market linkages, increased local self-reliance and implementation of self-help initiatives based on the cultivation of relevant skills and techniques and the use of renewable energy sources while being gentle on the use of scarce resources, both organizations have addressed the issue of economic security in a holistic manner with an eye on sustainability even as people are perceived as stakeholders in the overall process of development. In the context of the North East region, the issue of economic security holds special relevance. It is often felt that the absence of adequate social and economic support has accounted for many a youth becoming an easy target for recruitment into militant outfits. According to Ravindra Upadhyaya, who himself has been working in a relatively conflict-ridden area and therefore has a first hand experience with conflict situations, "Unemployment and absence of economic and social support is one of the reasons for insurgency. So, if you solve it and create opportunities for employment and income, insurgency to that extent will come down. TAGS is taking up economic activities
and with developed technology. In TAGS, we can see a concrete manifestation of the spirit of the Gandhian approach.\textsuperscript{xxvii}

At the same time, both organizations are found to be actively engaged in the realms of health and food security. Health security is at the vital core of human security. Health is not merely the absence of disease, but may be defined as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being. Good health is instrumental to human dignity and human security while illness, disability and avoidable death are "critical pervasive threats" to human security.\textsuperscript{xxv} The responsibility for health security today is a two-pronged strategy constituting of national-level initiatives coupled by civic engagement involving community-based health initiatives on the part of individuals, communities and civil society organizations. The role of organizations like TAGS and Shanti Sadhana Ashram becomes only two evident in this context.

As a matter of fact, many avoidable deaths due to such deseases like malaria and T.B., nutritional deprivations of children and maternity related risks of unsafe childbearing and childrearing could be prevented through efforts aimed at addressing the situation of people trapped in poverty or conflict. It is worth mentioning here that malaria is a public health problem in several parts of the country. About 95% population in the country resides in malaria endemic areas and 80% of malaria reported in the country is confined to areas consisting 20% of population residing in tribal, hilly, difficult and inaccessible areas.
It is seen that both TAGS and Shanti Sadhana are actively engaged in the realm of providing health security be it in terms of its endeavours to directly tackling diseases like malaria and T.B., health care emergencies including natural disasters and epidemics, providing access to clean drinking water, hygiene and sanitation, imparting training in midwifery and generating awareness, especially among women, on aspects of general health, even as by assuring the basic economic security of a sustainable livelihood for many, both organizations have indirectly enabled the beneficiaries to meet the basic requirements of food and nutrition and to have access to primary health care facilities.

Furthermore, in terms of food security, local communities today find themselves at the receiving end of the negative fallout of the emerging agrarian system as evident from factors such as escalating costs, dependence on external inputs such as fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, declining soil productivity, etc. Accordingly, organizations like TGAS and Shanti Sadhana - may be said to have launched a three-pronged strategy aimed at sustainable cropping and agrarian practices.

Firstly, they have made efforts at the level of biological intervention which would mean sustainable practices pertaining to conservation of local genetic resource, long-term pest, and parasite and disease control systems. In this context, in the field of agriculture and allied activities, both TAGS and Shanti Sadhana are engaged in experimenting with sustainable farming through the technique of bio-farming, bio-fertilisers, bio-pesticides,
weed and pest control etc. They have also undertaken activities in the fields of agro-forestry, aryuvedic medicinal plants, fodder and livestock.

Secondly, intervention has been on a physical level, meaning, soil and soil nutrient conservation and productivity maintenance, and judicious renewable and non-renewable energy usage. Gandhi himself paid great attention to the problem of soil fertility. Writing in the Harijan, dated August 25, 1946 he said, "Trading in soil fertility for the sake of quick returns would prove to be a disastrous, shortsighted policy. It would result in virtual depletion of the soil." Gandhi was an ardent supporter of organic manure, which enriched the soil and increased crop-yields.

Thirdly, intervention has taken place at the socio-economic level pertaining to equitable land and resource availability. This is evident particularly from TAGS’ granary fund, community warehousing and its efforts at freeing mortgaged land.

Accordingly, organizations like TAGS and Shanti Sadhana have made efforts towards achieving food security, though in a limited way. With their emphasis on organic agriculture, both organizations are committed to a production system that protects and sustains the health of soils and the ecosystem. Coupled with their multi-dimensional intervention in the realm of the human security paradigm which, in concrete terms have meant participation and conscious involvement of local communities in a wide variety of constructive programmes and projects including income generation schemes, health
projects, organic farming, educational and awareness generation programmes, etc., both TAGS and Shanti Sadhana have contributed to the social mobilisation of local communities by organizing them in techniques of non-violent direct action. The Angarkata Satyagraha launched by TAGS bear testimony to this fact. Besides, the walking tours or padayatras undertaken by the Shanti Sadhana Ashram could be said to have generated a certain degree of awareness regarding the broad principles of non-violence among different sections. Significantly, TAGS' Mahila Shanti Sena addresses one of the fundamental issues of political exclusion of women and structural violence even as the womenfolk has been sought to be mobilised to act as a change-agent in terms of neighbourhood peace building activities at a local level.

On the whole, both TAGS and the Shanti Sadhana Ashram have, within their own limits, executed the Gandhian technique of satyagraha in a way that has been able to secure protection with empowerment, based on building on the efforts and capabilities of groups and communities at a local level. In the words of Ravindra Upadhyaya, “The Gandhian way is the only way.”

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