CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

5.1 An Overview

An overall analysis of the Gandhian line of thinking and discourse vis-à-vis the scheme of non-violent socio-economic reconstruction with *satyagraha* as the means, would reveal that the praxis addresses some fundamental issues and concerns pertaining to human existence and the conditions thereof. At one level, it begs the vital question of the desirability of the very paradigm of development that has dictated policy and performance in the country over the years, in the post-independence period. It may be argued in this context that the process of socio-economic development largely became a state led enterprise at the expense of securing a more proactive involvement of the civil society. Towards this end, a heavily centralised monolithic politico-bureaucratic apparatus was roped in, lacking as it did the necessary transparency and operational accountability. Subsequently, rampant corruption, both at the individual and institutional levels, came to be witnessed at various strata of the polity, society and economy to be sustained by a nexus of vested interests, even as there began to occur large-scale concentration of wealth and resources in the hands of a few. At the same time, the process of development and modernization largely failed to incorporate the rural industries sector into the core of policy formulation, overlooking thereby the potential of the same in helping generate sustainable livelihood avenues to millions. A direct fallout of such a non-emphasis on a sector so relevant to the Indian reality has been witnessed in the form of large scale exodus of rural populations to urban areas resulting in the pauperism of the village
economy and degradation of the urban ecology. At the same time, the dominant ethos of
development at the level of the state has, for the most part, reflected itself in a propensity
to nurture a culture of dependence, given the fact, that a bottom-up approach centring on
the core elements of capacity building and skill formation has never really assumed
centre stage in the developmental paradigm. Meanwhile, certain ground realities in the
contemporary times need to be considered too. It is seen that of late, the forces of
globalization and liberalization have almost precipitated a race to “achieve greater and
cheaper access to scarce resources (mostly in the Third World), new markets, and cheap
labour, wherever they are”. This process has, at one level, encouraged a cult of excessive
greed and overproduction based on an unbridled consumer driven competitive economy
threatening to engulf traditional livelihood options centred on local community based
skills and crafts. Simultaneously, human beings are being increasingly viewed as merely
the means of production and material prosperity. The cumulative consequence of such an
experience has been to create a class of citizens that finds itself increasingly marginalized
even as they languish in conditions of abject poverty, underdevelopment and deprivation.
As a matter of fact, this ever-increasing gulf between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots,’ is a
stark reality that we are having to grapple with today.

Against such ground realities of human existence, the scheme of Gandhian non-
violence as executed through the technique of satyagraha bears ample significance and
relevance even as the latter aims at the “uplift of all”. In this context, it will not be out of
place to try and grasp the more philosophical undertones of Gandhi’s understanding of
the concept of non-violence itself. The “teachings” of Gandhi centre on his quest for
“truth”, which found concrete expression in the principle of non-violence as a tool for social action. He equated truth with God. According to to Gandhi, “The word *Satya* (Truth) is derived from the word *Sat*, which means ‘being.’ Nothing is or exists in reality except Truth. That is why *Sat* or Truth is perhaps the most important name of God. In fact, it is more correct to say that Truth is God, than to say God is Truth. ..........On deeper thinking, however, it will be realized that *Sat* or *Satya* is the only correct and fully significant name for God.”

Now Gandhi regarded God as an “indefinable and universal power that cannot be conceived apart from humanity or from the whole of nature.”

Writing in *Young India* in October 1928, Gandhi opined that each man is a ray or a part (*amsa*) of that divine Power that underlies all change, that is changeless, that holds all together, that creates, dissolves and re-creates all forms of life. Accordingly, if truth is equated with God, then truth becomes synonymous with humanity and non-violence as a quest for truth becomes a means to progress towards an end or goal wherein humanity takes the centre stage as the ultimate reality. Driven by the fundamental premise that Ahimsa is the means and Truth, the end, Gandhi said “I cannot practise *ahimsa* without the religion of service and I cannot find the Truth without practicing the religion of *ahimsa*.... For me the road to salvation lies through incessant toil in the service of my country and of my Humanity. I want to identify myself with everything that lives.”

This underscores the “relatedness of mankind.” Fundamentally therefore, in the Gandhian scheme of non-violence, the centrepiece of social regeneration and development is viewed to be the individual as a member of the community, thereby putting people at the centre of development. Now looking at the operational dynamics of non-violence, Gandhi advocated the technique of *satyagraha* as a means to implement the philosophy of non-
violence on the ground. Satyagraha is composed of two words, namely, “satya” which means “truth” and “graha” which stems from the root grah meaning “to seize or to grasp, to get hold of, to grapple with.” Satyagraha is therefore, “a relentless search for truth and a determination to reach truth.” (Young India, March 1925). Gandhi made Satyagraha, an instrument of social change and considered it to be a “law of universal application” even as its use could be extended to every other sphere beginning with the family. (Harijan, March 1946). Gandhi described satyagraha as a “force” that may be used by individuals as well as by communities, in political as in domestic affairs. Satyagraha is based on engaging the other and relates oneself to the other so that the community itself becomes an extension of the individual. In the process there prevails “peace with the other.” Altogether, Gandhi elaborated and employed a wide range of methods, from the most negative and limited to the most positive and comprehensive, in his various campaigns of satyagraha. While on the one hand, these included non-violent methods of direct agitation like non-cooperation and civil disobedience as well as purificatory devices (namely, pledges, prayer and fasts), on the other hand, satyagraha included a wide range of constructive programmes ranging from khadi and village industries to issues of village health and hygiene. Accordingly, it is seen that satyagraha is based on a double dynamics. As the voice of the conscience, satyagraha aims at the mobilization of groups and communities towards seeking the “Absolute Truth,” whereby the welfare of the individual is proportionally connected with the welfare of the society at large. Gandhi maintained that political freedom would not be meaningful to the individual citizen without the attainment of freedom at the moral, social and economic levels and towards this end, satyagraha becomes a most effective means.
In the ultimate analysis, the Gandhian scheme of a non-violent society realised through the technique of satyagraha is ever committed to sarvodaya - the growth or uplift of all its citizens, without any semblance of discrimination or exploitation at any level. Consequently, the Gandhian concept of development aims at a just and equitable society wherein all sections of the society can secure for themselves their basic survival needs, guided by the spirit of “bread labour” and democratic participation in a way that ensures replenishment of all forms of capital, be, be it physical, human or ecological. In the process, a substantial amount of social coordination is achieved at various levels which in turn becomes an asset in the overall process of human development. The primary concern is to create the social, economic and political environment in which people can expand their human capabilities and use them appropriately whereby humanity is treated as an end and never as a means only. Thus, in the Gandhian scheme of things, development becomes a people-centric process whereby “development is woven around people and not vice versa.” Such an arrangement would ensure the attainment of not merely political but also economic, social and moral freedom on the part of each and every citizen.

At one level, a closer analysis of much of what Gandhi talked of while preaching and practising the principle of non-violence at different stages of his life could be found to bear direct resemblance to the people-centred doctrine of human security which has been gaining ground in the realm of contemporary political discourse in recent times. Incidentally, attempts to theorize and implement the concept of human security has found expression in the form of two major schools of thought – The Narrow School
(Freedom from Fear) and the Broad School (Freedom from Want) centering around the scope of human security.

The Narrow School (Freedom from Fear) focuses on threats of direct violence, often called freedom form fear. It focuses on the threat of political violence including war and other forms of direct violence to individuals and communities, by the state or any other organized political actor.

The Broad School (Freedom from Want) goes beyond the threat of direct violence. Human Security is not only freedom from fear but also freedom from want. The broad school focuses on threats arising from underdevelopment and hence addresses the root causes of human insecurity. Such a broad interpretation of the concept of human security is traced to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)'s Human Development Report of 1994. Essentially, the Human Development Report of 1994 has urged that the concept of security must change in two ways -from an exclusive stress on territorial security to a much greater stress on people’s security and secondly, from security through armaments to security through sustainable human development.

The Report divided the threats to human security under seven broad categories. These include threats to economic security including lack of productive and remunerative employment and absence of publicly financed safety nets; threats to food security arising due to lack of an ‘entitlement’ to basic food resulting from insufficient access to assets, work and assured incomes; threats to health security involving diseases
on the one hand and lack of safe water, air pollution and lack of access to health care facilities on the other; threats to environmental security as evidenced by declining water availability, water pollution, declining arable land, deforestation, desertification, air pollution, natural disasters; threats to personal security as observed in the form of violent crime, drug trafficking, violence and abuse of children and women; threats to community security manifested in the form of breakdown of the family, collapse of traditional languages and cultures, ethnic discrimination and strife, genocide and ethnic cleansing; and finally threats to political security which include aspects like government repression, systematic human rights violations and militarization.

However, it is seen, that in both the approaches to human security as discussed above, namely, the "freedom from fear" and "freedom from want", the security referent could be found to be uniform in the sense that human security takes individuals and their communities as its point of reference, which is in contrast to the traditional conception of security where the referent of security is the state. As a matter of fact, human security addresses the issue of positive peace or broad peace which involves not only the absence of direct and manifest violence in the society but more importantly goes deeper to consider those structures in the society, polity and economy which perpetuate violence. At the same time, the human security paradigm advocates the prevalence of a situation in which access to basic survival needs by all individuals is assured in a way that ensures sustainable human development marked by an equitable distribution of benefits across generations. At the same time, human security also means empowering people by strengthening their abilities to act on their own behalf and on behalf of their communities.
so that they can become stakeholders in their own process of development. Thus, we find, that in terms of its referent and values, human security bears striking resemblance to the Gandhian notion of non-violence even as the latter focuses on the dynamics of "ideal" human existence both at the individual and collective levels, thereby addressing the concerns of both the narrow and broad schools of human security. As a matter of fact, Gandhi's was echoing similar sentiments when he visualised a peaceful, non-exploitative social system based on a federation of self-contained and self-sustaining village communities shaped along non-violent lines, wherein each individual becomes an able stakeholder in his or her own process of development as a member of the community as a whole.

At another level, while Gandhi's formulation of truth as something to be equated with the absolute entity of God whereby humanity is treated as a composite whole, with each individual being a part of the divine Power, is a principle in which every one must have faith in, Gandhi was aware of the fact that the concept of "Absolute Truth" can only be visualized in our imagination and is not tangible. Accordingly, every individual is likely to look at "the truth" in his own light. In the process, what actually exists in the world is relative truth involving only a partial understanding of a particular situation. According to Gandhi "Truth is one but we see it through a glass darkly, only in part, and each according to his own light. The result is naturally a multitude of viewpoints. Where there is honest effort, what appear to be different truths will be like different leaves of the same tree." As a result, given the existence of such multiple viewpoints, it is only too natural to expect differences of opinion on many an occasion.
But while trying to reconcile such differences, it is important for us to ensure that the
path chosen is one which is transformatory in nature, founded on empathy and shared
aims with a view to promoting tolerance and solidarity which in turn has the effect of
thereby bridging the gap between the “self” and the “other” to a great extent.
Accordingly, the overriding concern should be to ensure the absence of direct violence by
stressing on the “opportunity perspective” rather than on the “danger perspective” of
conflict, enabling us to arrive at more enlightened forms of human relationships and
structures. Analysing Gandhi’s acknowledgement of the concept of “relative truth” in the
context of the human security paradigm, one finds that, in a way, it addresses a key
human security concern- that of Community Security. As a matter of fact, the United
Nations Development Programme (UNDP)’s Human Development Report, 1994, has
expressed the concern that with about 40% of the world’s states having more than five
sizeable ethnic populations and with one or more of them facing discrimination, about
half of the world’s states have recently experienced some inter-ethnic strife. The report
mentions that traditional communities, particularly ethnic groups, are vulnerable to much
more direct attack from each other. Such developments are reflective of the growing
levels of intolerance that more and more societies are having to grapple with in recent
times. Equally important therefore is to comprehend and appreciate the inevitable
existence of “relative truths” in the world around us, even as satyagraha as a means of
reconciliation becomes a march towards the “Absolute Truth.”

In the light of the above analysis, it is seen that in terms of some fundamental
formulations, the concept of human security seem to reflect the essence and spirit of the
Gandhian concept of non-violence. Consequently, satyagraha as a means to implement the principle of non-violence itself simultaneously becomes a means to achieve human security. Based on this fundamental proposition, the research work undertaken carried out empirical investigations to find out the actual possibility of Gandhian satyagraha becoming a means towards realizing human security. In this context, some very micro-level experiments in the field of Gandhian activism were taken up as case studies for the purpose. These included, firstly, the Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust, Assam Branch, situated at the Sarania hillock at Guwahati in the Kamrup (Metro) District of Assam and popularly known as the ‘Sarania Ashram’; secondly, the Tamulpur Anchalik Gramdan Sangh (TAGS), a Gandhian voluntary organisation headed by veteran Gandhian activist, Ravindra Upadhyaya and located at Kumarikata in the Baksa District of Assam; and thirdly, the Shanti Sadhana Ashram, which is another Gandhian voluntary organisation headed by Hembhai and headquartered at Basistha, Guwahati in the Kamrup (Metro) District of Assam.

Accordingly, based on the data collected from empirical investigations, a brief account of the working of each organisation is given below:

- **Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust, Assam Branch or the Sarania Ashram**

  The Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust, Assam Branch or the Sarania Ashram is one of the pioneering organisations that has been serving in this region, even as it has undertaken a host of initiatives over the years, making multi-dimensional interventions in
the realm of human security. Operating from the heart of the city of Guwahati, the Sarania Ashram, is one institution which was started by a set of people who were directly associated with Mahatma Gandhi and Acharya Vinoba, driven as they were by the combined ideology of both. In a way, the nerve centre of the Sarania Ashram may be said to be the Assam Provincial Kasturba Gram Sevika Vidyalaya which has produced batches after batches of trained sevikas or volunteers hailing not only from Assam but also from places like erstwhile Garo Hills, Khasi Hills, Jayantia Hills, Naga Hills and Lushai Hills. Equipped with necessary skills in terms of capacity building, social coordination, village work and socio-economic reconstruction, the sevikas of the Sarania Ashram have found themselves rendering immense service to communities and groups, not only across Assam and its the border areas but also in the hills of Nagaland, Megalaya and Arunachal Pradesh. These initiatives have ranged from economic empowerment, literacy and education, health security, awareness generation, peace work and sensitization and gender justice. Significantly, the experience narrated by veteran Gandhian activist Hiran Chandra, who as a sevika of the Sarania Ashram went to serve in the remote hills of Arunachal Pradesh way back in the 1960s, stand out as a remarkable instance whereby the Gandhian “spirit” of self-sacrifice and selfless service is amply demonstrated, bearing strong human security undertones. Likewise, it goes to the credit of the Trust that it has undertaken a host of activities among tea garden workers of Assam who again have traditionally constituted a particularly marginalized section in Assam. Besides, the Sarania Ashram also stands out as being one of the pioneering organisations to initiate Acharya Vinoba Bhave’s bhoodan (land-gift) and gramdan (village-gift) campaign in Assam. Interestingly enough, the Sarania Ashram, in recent times, has been
playing a leading role in popularizing and strengthening the scheme of *sishu panchayats* or children’s assembles aimed at encouraging child participation and promoting child rights.

- **Tamulpur Anchalik Gramdan Sangh (TAGS)**

Committed to the cause of Gandhian non-violence based on *gramdan* for democarcy, khadi for development and *shanti-sena* (peace corps) for defence, the Tamulpur Anchalik Gramdan Sangh (TAGS), led by Ravindra Upadhyaya has come a long way since its humble beginnings in the 1960s contributing in its own way, towards ensuring human security to the marginalised and vulnerable sections of the society. On his arrival in the relatively underdeveloped area of Kumarikata near the Indo-Bhutan border in the 1960s, Upadhyaya realised that there was an urgent need to cater to the basic needs of the people in the area. TAGS was the direct outcome of that realization and zeal. As a matter of fact, the organisation has been endeavouring to realise a new economic development strategy based on self-reliance and empowerment at the grassroots.

An overall analysis of TAGS and its operation over the years up to the present shows that the organisation presents itself as a strong example whereby a sincere effort has been made to operationalise Gandhi’s concept of non-violence through the instrument of *satyagraha* in its holistic form, encompassing non-violent direct action as in the case of *Angarkata Satyagraha* coupled by a consistent programme of constructive work, ranging from rural health and sanitation to infrastructural development like common warehousing, irrigational projects, freeing mortgaged land etc. Significantly on the side
of production, a wide range of activities including khadi and silk production, carpentry, honey and mustard oil production have been undertaken involving labour-intensive production techniques.

In the process, Ravindra Upadhyaya, acting through his institution, has sincerely endeavoured to create minimum economic opportunities at the grassroot 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 TAGS. Besides, it has also undertaken a host of activities relating to health and relief work in the area under its purview. As a matter of fact, at the level of health security, TAGS has worked hard to cater to the basic health and medical needs of the people in its target-areas. It is actively engaged in malaria research activities working for its eradication. Drug distribution centres have been established for the supply of medicines. The supply of mosquito nets is also carried out by TAGS. TAGS also brings patients to Guwahati for eye operations periodically. Besides regular health check-up camps are held at Kumarikata and neighbouring areas. TAGS also provides inhouse training to its volunteers, both male and female, in the field of taking care of the sick.

On the whole, TAGS has not only been able to equip a large number of youths with adequate skills to earn their livelihood but it also has 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 whereby they have been enabled to become active agents in their own process of development. Such an
effort on the part of TAGS has served the twin purpose of generating social capital by nurturing a network of trust and confidence across various communities and groups in the area even as the constructive programmes of TAGS have been successful in extending social and economic support to the youths of the area to a great extent, though on a limited scale. It could be argued that in the absence of such endeavours at a micro level, many a youth would have become an easy target for recruitment into militant outfits. Postively speaking, through its income generation and poverty mitigation schemes, TAGS could be said to have directly contributed towards weaning many a youth away from violent activities. According to Ravindra Upadhyaya, “Unemployment and absence of economic and social support is one of the reasons for insurgency. So, if you solve it and create opportunites for employment and income, insurgency to that extent will come down. TAGS is taking up economic activities and with developed technology.”

- **Shanti Sadhana Ashram**

Likewise, the Shanti Sadhana Ashram was started by Hem Bhai in the 1980s with the objective of equipping local communities with non-violent group-action techniques based on increased local self-reliance and sensitization. As a matter of fact, Hem Bhai’s commitment to the Gandhian principles of non-violent organisation dates back to his childhood days when he organized some of his friends against conscription in the wake of the 1962 Chinese aggression, to insist instead on humanitarian services and nonviolent direct action. Shanti Sadhana is founded on this strong conviction in non-violence as a means of social action and mobilisation. The Shanti Sadhana Ashram has now thirteen branches spread all over Assam with a significant urban presence in terms of its main
centre at Guwahati. It has to its credit a large team of dedicated full-time workers with scores of families dependent upon the Shanti Sadhana Ashram, directly or indirectly for its livelihood. The organisation, since its inception, 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.

In the production and 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. A special category of beneficiaries in this regard has been marginalized rural tribal womenfolk who were otherwise economically deprived without any source of regular income. The Ashram, through its training centre has imparted training to thousands of women in improved methods of spinning, weaving and designing in muga, endi and mulberry silk. Again, in the field of mushroom spawn production, the Ashram has imparted mushroom cultivation training to rural unemployed youths from all over North-East India. Significantly, The Ashram helps the trainees to start their own production centres. Another most crucial income generating activity of the Shanti Sadhana Ashram is food processing with the Ashram producing a host of food products even as it imparts regular training in the said field. Besides, the Ashram has laid emphasis on horticulture, floriculture and organic farming and production of ayurvedic medicinal products, each with the potential of absorbing a large work force.
The Shanti Sadhana Ashram has also contributed in the health sector with its single most important programme being the “Khoj” programme. 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. In the target-villages of the said programme, the organisation has also been able to put in place proper infrastructure in the matter of health and sanitation. Moreover, awareness campaigns were also held in the target-villages, sensitizing the people against approaching medical quacks to cure illnesses. Moreover, scientific training was imparted on midwifery to the local dhais or midwives under this project. Though the “Khoj” programme continued only up to August 2003, the Ashram still continues its health services in the target-areas in collaboration with a local nursing home from Guwahati, namely, the Dispur Polyclinic. As a matter of fact, the Ashram organizes 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 and is also working in the field of aryuvedic and traditional medicine. Significantly, the Voluntary Health Association of Assam, a pioneering NGO in the field of community health, was born in the premises of the Shanti Sadhana Ashram.

In the educational sector, the Shanti Sadhana 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. In this context, the initiative of the Ashram in the village of Paschim Killing is indeed noteworthy.
Steeped in acute poverty, the children of the village had no access to schooling until the Shanti Sadhana Ashram started a pre-primary school in the village with the help of the people of the village in 1999. Similarly, it goes to the credit of the Shanti Sadhana Ashram that it has established a school in the Robingaon No.2 village, mostly inhabited by ex-tea garden workers, the latter being a rather marginalized section in the State. Moreover, the two school libraries provided to the Ashram for the children of its own schools as well as for those of the adjoining schools is another step in the direction of helping children, who are otherwise deprived of such facilities, to have access to books for their self-development.

The Shanti Sadhana Ashram has from time to time undertaken walking tours or padyatras aimed at sensitization and mobilisation. As a matter of fact, the very, genesis of the Shanti Sadhana Ashram could be traced to the padayatra launched by Hembhai himself in 1982 which culminated in the Indo-Bangladesh border area. In the process, his interaction with various sections of the society at the grassroots left him with the conviction that one of the prominent contributory factors precipitating violence and disturbance is economic insecurity. The Shanti Sadhana Ashram could be said to have been borne out of this conviction whereby the message that had been generated was that of non-violence as a means of social action. Significantly, the Gram Swavalamban and Shanti Sadbhavna Padayatra launched by the organisation on the occasion of the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, has been another novel initiative on the part of the organisation.
Moreover, the Ashram, under the leadership of Hembhai, has a more direct experience of working in various conflict situations. In the aftermath of the violence in Nelli and Gohpur, Hembhai with a few of his colleagues, worked among the affected people even as they tried to heal their trauma. Besides, the organisation has also brought about peace rallies from time to time. As a matter of fact, the organisation acted as an effective pressure group in this context when it was able to secure the release of veteran Gandhian, Dwarika Baruah who was held hostage by militants in the 1990s.

5.2 Observations and Recommendations

A look at the overall framework of non-violence-satyagraha with special reference to the activities and working of the three organisations, namely, Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust, Assam Branch, or the Sarania Ashram; Tamulpur Anchalik Gramdan Sangh (TAGS); and Shanti Sadhana Ashram the following observations have been made, followed by necessary recommendations wherever necessary:

1. All three organisations, namely, Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust, Assam Branch, or the Sarania Ashram; Tamulpur Anchalik Gramdan Sangh (TAGS); and Shanti Sadhana Ashram are successful experiments in terms of implementation of Gandhian satyagraha in its holistic sense, whereby a judicious combination of Constructive Programme and Non-Violent direct action and social mobilisation has been attempted. In the process, much of their activities are geared towards addressing some vital human security concerns at a local level. For instance, through their host of production and income generating constructive programmes, the
three organisations, with available resources, have been able to realize a level of economic security on behalf of some of the most vulnerable and marginalised sections of the society.

Significantly, economic security stands at the top of the seven target areas for Human Security vis-à-vis countering the threat of economic deprivation and underdevelopment arising from gross deprivation of basic needs and entitlements. However, the concept of human security does not intend to turn people into merely passive recipients of "security," but on developing the potential of communities to take care of themselves: all people should have the opportunity to meet their most essential needs and to earn their own living. In other words, human security is not simply the challenge of "protecting" and "providing" but involves fostering the empowerment of the people and securing their participation in their own development. In this sense, it has been found with regard to each case study that a direct relationship has been sought to be established between an access to basic human needs of employment, health, education and soci-economic empowerment. Accordingly, the initiatives of the three organisations, particularly in the production related sector have always centered on capacity building and skill formation. As a matter of fact, the approach adopted could be said to have incorporated the principle "sustainable livelihood," which puts people at the centre of development, building upon people's strengths rather than their needs even as it seeks to integrate issues of development, ecology, sustainable resources management and poverty eradication in way that one's livelihood has net beneficial effects on other livelihoods across generations.
At the same time, the aforementioned organisations are found to be actively engaged in the realms of health security, be it the *sevikas* of the Sarania Ashram serving in remote areas or the volunteers at TAGS and the Shanti Sadhana Ashram. As a matter of fact, when even basic medical facilities at times are not available to the people, community-based health initiatives on the part of civil society organisations like the Sarania Ashram, TAGS and the Shanti Sadhana Ashram, could go a long way in supplementing the more formal efforts of the state in this regard. Moreover, all three organisations have on several occasions rendered humanitarian assistance in the form of relief and rehabilitation work in times of natural calamities and disasters like floods, earthquakes, landslides, epidemic outbreaks, etc and have also intervened in times of riots and violent conflicts. Such humanitarian intervention is a critical ingredient in the overall human security framework.

Furthermore, in terms of food and environmental security, both TAGS and the Shanti Sadhana Ashram are found to be 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, ayurvedic medicinal plants, fodder and livestock. Importantly, their efforts at sustainable intervention have meant soil nutrient conservation and productivity maintenance based on a judicious renewable and non-renewable energy usage.
Coupled with their multi-dimensional direct and pro-active intervention in the realm of human security involving dimensions like economic security, health security and food security vis-à-vis the participation and conscious involvement of local communities in a wide variety of constructive programmes and projects, all three organisations, namely, the Sarania Ashram, the Tamulpur Anchalik Gramdan Sangh (TAGS) and the Shanti Sadhana Ashram, have significantly 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 padyatras undertaken by these organisations from time to time could be said to have generated a certain degree of awareness regarding the broad principles of non-violence among different sections.

2. It is true that organisations like the Sarania Ashram, the Tamulpur Anchalik Gramdan Sangh (TAGS) and the Shanti Sadhana Ashram, have been carrying out what they tend to describe as “silent revolution.” But, at the same time, given today’s changed circumstances, these organisations would do well to be more proactive in this context, so that even lay people, especially the younger ones, who have otherwise had little or no real exposure to the Gandhian value system might atleast become aware of the manifold activities of these organisations, encouraging them to probe deeper into the realm of Gandhian thought and activism. It may be mentioned here that while interacting with the people in the vicinity of TAGS and Shanti Sadhana Ashram, it was observed that in each case, the respondents held the respective organisation in high esteem and admitted that
they would be delighted to work towards further strengthening their relations with the same

Speaking of the Sarania Ashram in this context, it must be mentioned that the organisation has a special responsibility, given its wealth of vast experience, extensive network and advantageous location. However, it is observed that although the organisation has been operating from the heart of the city of Guwahati, ironically enough, at present there seems to be a general lack of awareness and an atmosphere of ignorance, even regarding the very existence of these organisations especially among the general populace, especially the younger generation.

At one level, the Sarania Ashram is increasingly confining itself to undertaking only symbolic activities like peace marches and padyatras on specific occasions and is not doing enough to reach out to the people as vigorously as is expected of it. As such it is fast losing contact with the larger society so much so that it almost finds itself being reduced to a state of cocooned existence. As a matter of fact, certain conduct rules followed by the organisation could be said to have stood in the way of attracting younger people to serve in the same. For instance, the dress code followed by the organisation requires any volunteer or sevika to strictly wear only khadi mehala chaddars, which might not always find favour with today’s youth. As a matter of fact, the imposition of any strict dress code is often counter-productive. Realistically speaking, in today’s world, a certain permissible level of flexibility in the matter of dressing must be allowed so that those who are otherwise willing to serve in the organisation are not discouraged to do so.
At the same time, although it is true that the sevikas of the Sarania Ashram are inspired by a spirit of voluntarism of the highest order even as they find themselves rendering relentless service towards the people of the region to the present day, yet it must be mentioned that in today’s world, one has to be more practical and acknowledge the fact that sheer voluntarism is not enough of a factor to drive a person into undertaking social work. It is therefore important that the Sarania Ashram came to terms with the fact that in order to attract the youth to serve in the organisation, it would need to take a more practical approach in terms of enabling the youth to serve in the organisation and take up social work as a professional career option based on a proper remunerative policy. Moreover, for its own part, the Sarania Ashram has not really tried to involve younger people in its decision making processes so as to lend greater vibrancy and innovation in its functioning. Besides, it is observed that, more often than not, the organisation is found to be very dependent on its central leadership at the national level in the matter of decision-making. In this context, a more decentralized way of functioning is called for as it would contribute towards enhancing the creative spirit of the organisation by lending it greater flexibility and autonomy.

It is hoped that the Kasturba Gandhi Trust, Assam, as a pioneering organisation in the field of satyagraha, will look into the above mentioned areas and play a frontal role in developing a line of younger leadership, firmly committed to the ideology of non-violence and socio-economic reconstruction and carry the same forward.
3. The khadi and village industry sector has an enormous potential to create employment opportunities, especially in rural areas in terms of utilizing local resources and skills, thereby contributing towards a strong rural economy and poverty alleviation. However, it is observed that in the post-independence era, the development of khadi and village industries became less of a bottom up societal initiative involving the mass people and more of a top down statutory effort, evident from the setting up of the Khadi and Village Industries Commission figuring within the overall framework of the Five Year Plans. Although it is true that such governmental endeavours have, to a certain extent, contributed to addressing the socio-economic needs of certain sections of the rural poor, it is only through a far greater involvement of the people in general at the level of local communities that the “khadi spirit” in the true Gandhian sense of economic freedom and decentralization of the processes of production and distribution could be realized. In this context, the role of organizations like the Sarania Ashram, the Tamulpur Anchalik Gramdan Sangh (TAGS) and the Shanti Sadhana Ashram, become only two evident. As a matter of fact, a two-pronged strategy might be suggested-

At one level, there is a need for a strong and sustained governmental commitment towards strengthening the khadi and village industry sector in terms of extending necessary support to such voluntary organisations, committed as they are to the Gandhian concept of socio-economic reconstruction. This may take the form of extending necessary financial assistance, ensuring the availability and supply of necessary raw
material at subsidised rates, initiating "labour-intensive" technological upgradation and facilitating the marketing of the products of such organisations.

At another level, the onus is equally on the voluntary organisations themselves to try to generate the “khadi spirit” on a much larger scale, whereby the use of khadi products is not merely confined to only a limited circle including their own sevikas and volunteers alone but reaches out to a much larger audience across generations. It would most definitely call for bringing about changes in their finished products themselves. This might involve introducing designs and adding multiple colours to the khadi fabric so as to make khadi products appealing to the consumers, especially to the younger ones, who are generally more inclined towards opting for trendier and modern designs. As a matter of fact, traditional ethnic designs and motifs from the different ethnic communities of North-East India could also be experimented with. Such innovations in the matter of khadi should not be interpreted as giving in to the culture of consumerism but only indicate a strong resolve to live up to the khadi spirit in the changing times. Significantly, organisations like TAGS which has been in the forefront of producing some of the finest khadi products in the region has an enormous potential to capture the market in Guwahati and elsewhere. However, the lack of innovations in design as suggested above coupled by a rather low-key marketing strategy on behalf of such organisations have proved to be counter-productive for these organisations in this regard relegating the use of khadi products increasingly to the background. At best, the use of khadi products in the region is still largely confined to a traditional circle sans a vibrant mass appeal. In this context, these voluntary organisations must go in for a more vigorous marketing of their products,
be it khadi or any other of their products. Devising a proper marketing strategy like carrying out market surveys to assess the tastes of consumers in this regard is an urgent necessity. At the same time, they might consider opening up more retail outlets and build up a wider dispersal network for the sale and distribution of their products and may also resort to advertising through different channels.

4. Leaders like Ravindra Upadhyaya and Hem Bhai, acting through their respective organisations, have significantly contributed to fostering a culture of peace at a local level, driven as they are, by an unstinting commitment to the Gandhian ideology of peace and non-violence. **Over the years, they have provided a high standard of transformational and motivational leadership to their respective organisations, instilling people with the confidence to work with a sense of purpose and meaning.** They have shown as to how with limited and available resources people can successfully act as change agents ushering in a process of socio-economic reconstruction. However, the question that agitates one's mind at this stage is that of providing sustained leadership to these organisations. It would be appreciated if these organisations gave serious thought to the matter and worked out a rational strategy in this regard so that they continue to achieve ever higher strides in the realm of human development, thereby effectively carrying forward the message of self-reliance, peace and non-violence into the future. In fact, we would like to have many more Ravindra Upadhyayas and Hem Bhais in our midst from among the present generation, people who would commit themselves to the cause of peace and social harmony and provide leadership in the true sense of the term.
5. Speaking of the Bhoodan and Gramdan Movement, it is observed that the campaign of bhoodan and gramdan was initially well received in different parts of Assam thanks to the efforts of organisations like the Kasturba Trust and Sarvodaya Mandal which spearheaded the movement in the region. The Blockdan campaign launched by the Kasturba Trust, Assam, was another novel initiative. Significantly, even the Assam Government extended substantial cooperation in the early years of the campaign.

However, it has been observed that over the years, there has been a gradual erosion in the level of people's involvement and participation in the campaign of bhoodan and gramdan, reducing the latter to something of a phenomenon to be merely left to official patronage. It is true that the existence of formal institutional mechanisms such as the Assam Gramdan and Bhoodan Board is essential for ensuring coordination and management of the gramdan lands. Moreover, the board should also continue to receive financial aid from the government for the purpose. But what needs to be emphasized here is the fact that in order that the scheme of gramdan can truly be realized extensively, people's involvement and support is a must. In this context, organisations like the Sarania Ashram, the Tamulpur Anchalik Gramdan Sangh (TAGS) and the Shanti Sadhana Ashram, have an enormous role to play to create such a will on the part of the people at large. At the same time, the government also has to play the role of a facilitator in this regard.

At this stage, one might also refer to certain functional complexities in the institutional arrangement of the scheme of bhoodan in the State. For instance, under the Assam
Bhoodan Act, 1960, the title of ownership over the land received by way of Bhoodan rests not with the individual farmer or cultivator but with the Bhoodan and Gramdan Board. Accordingly, the farmer cannot apply for loans even for cultivation purposes. Importantly, gramdan lands are considered as special category lands which is why gramdani villages have always been ignored when it comes to the various poverty eradication schemes of the government. Again, in today’s world, there is a need to bring about a certain level of flexibility too in the Bhoodan Act, so that, besides strictly cultivation and household industries, the gifted land could be used for other economically gainful purposes as well but in conformity to the basic ideal of collective welfare. Accordingly, there is an urgent need to revive and strengthen the Bhoodan and Gramdan movement which most definitely calls for the active cooperation of both the civil society and those at the helm of affairs, consistently guided by a strong resolve to remove the inherent impediments standing in the way of carrying out the campaign in a sustained and effective manner.

6. An area of concern with regard to workers associated with the khadi and village industry sector is that of the wage structure prescribed for them. As a matter of fact, organisations such as TAGS follow the wage structure followed by the Khadi and Village Industries Commission which in turn is based on the norms prescribed under the Minimum Wage Act, 1948. In pursuance of the said Act, the Government of Assam has, through its notification No.GL.R.318/90/210,¹⁵ laid out the the minimum wages payable to the workers in the khadi and village industries sector among others with effect from July 1, 2009. The monthly wage prescribed for unskilled workers is Rs.2500.50, for semi-
skilled workers it is Rs. 2630.00 and for skilled worker/clerical work the wage recommended is Rs. 2857.50. Now, in view of the rapid inflationary trends marked by unprecedented rise in prices of essential commodities at present, the prescribed minimum wages could be said to be far from remunerative. Accordingly, there is an urgent need to address the situation of rather low wage payment to the workers associated with the khadi and village industry sector. In this context, an increased emphasis on the khadi and village industries sector should be immediately considered at the level of policy formulation if the said sector is to be developed into a strong and vibrant one.

7. While advocating his scheme of *Nai Talim* or Basic Education, Gandhi hinted at the holistic development of the individual based on a harmonious combination of the body, mind and spirit. In other words, basic education is but a “well balanced, all-round education in which the body and the spirit have all full play and develop together into a natural, harmonious whole.” According to Gandhi, the medium to achieve such a harmonious balance between the physical, intellectual and moral development of the children is that of craft work. Gandhi was of the view that book learning and literacy in itself was no education. Gandhi was highly critical of the increasing tendency to look down upon manula labour. He said, “……Indeed I hold that as the larger part of our time is devoted to labour for earning our bread, our children must from their infancy be taught the dignity of such labour. Our children should not be so taught as to despise labour……It is a sad thing that our school boys look upon manual labour with disfavour, if not contempt.” Gandhi further held that mere intellectual training made a child individualistic. Gandhi opined that under the conventional education, the “‘faculties of
the heart' are simply allowed to ‘run to seed or to grow anyhow in a wild undisciplined manner’.” xviii As a matter of fact, looking at the present situation, we find that the scheme of formal education that obtains in the country today is still largely literary and academic in nature based on an elaborate marks centric system of examinations. This has only gone to encourage a spirit of cutthroat competition among the students at the expense of fostering a spirit of solidarity and cooperation among them. Against this background, basic education goes beyond mere pedagogic literary education to emphasise upon skill based vocational education based on the medium of craft work aimed at “socially useful manual labour”xxix even as it seeks to relate the learner’s activity to his or her environment and the society in which he or she lives.xx According to Gandhi, “Basic education links the children, whether of the cities or the villages, to all that is best and lasting in India. It develops both the body and the mind, and keeps the child rooted to the soil with a glorious vision of the future, in the realization of which he or she begins to take his or her share from the very commencement of his or her career in school.”xxx Thus, the scheme of basic education is potentially equipped to effectively shape the process of cultivating core citizenship values and ideals among the students or learners. Apart from addressing the socialization process of the students, the scheme of basic education has direct economic implications. On an individual level, pupils would leave school with vocational skills enabling them to find adequate employment. At another level, adherence to the scheme of basic education would also translate into a steady endeavour to strengthen and revive village industries and crafts thereby restoring the balance of the rural economy based on a just and rational distribution of productive
8. **The Mahila Shanti Sena** (Women Peace Corps)- the neighbourhood peace corps, composed of women, can be said to be an innovative exercise on the part TAGS in the direction of utilizing women's capacity for leadership, thereby addressing at one level, the fundamental issue of exclusion of women in general from decision making structures and processes. Over eight years old, the Mahila Shanti Sena at Kumarikata has already to its credit, a host of activities. These have ranged from opposing the injustice and discrimination meted out to women both within and without the family, to efforts at curbing alcoholism and organising peace marches and rallies to spread sensitization with regard to the broad theme of peace and non-violence. The Mahila Shanti Sena activities have provided a window of opportunity to the womenfolk of the area in terms of enabling them to actively participate in public affairs at a local level. In the process, they have learnt to act as active agents in the overall process of social transformation and gender justice, even as they have gained greater confidence in themselves to conduct their lives as able organisers, be it with respect to their own families, the neighbourhood or the village at large.

It is hoped that the Mahila Shanti Sena would be able to widen its base in the years ahead, to spread its activities to several other parts of North-East India. As a matter of fact, Mahila Shanti Sena organisations across the country can coordinate their activities to act as a unified pressure group and intervene effectively wherever necessary at the
local, regional and national levels in the direction of gender justice and personal security.

9. A laudable initiative on the part of the Sarania Ashram has been that of mobilizing and sensitising children in terms of generating awareness among them regarding their rights, facilitating child participation and instilling confidence among them. As a matter of fact, Gandhi was particularly concerned about the welfare of the children of the country. While dwelling on the scheme of Basic Education, Gandhi said “Congressmen who want to build up the structure of swaraj from its very foundation dare not neglect the children.” The scheme of *sishu panchayat* or children’s assemblies as has been launched under the auspices of the the Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust, Assam Branch, in association with Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti, New Delhi, can go a long way in addressing some of the vital issues concerning the welfare and protection of children based on the active involvement and participation of the children themselves. On the one hand, the *sishu* panchyats have given a platform to the children to assemble and organise, helping them to become conscious of their rights so that are able to assert for themselves that their basic needs in terms of personal security, protection and welfare are not only assured to them but are actually taken care of, accounting for their healthy physical, psychological and intellectual development. On the other hand, through their involvement in *sishu* panchyat activities, more and more children are becoming conscious of their civic and moral responsibilities even as they have been able to receive experiential education in democratic values and practices. It could be argued in this context that such active involvement and participation of the children in democratic practices at the local level would help foster public spirit and mature leadership qualities.
in them, paving the way for them to become model citizens of tomorrow. Against this background, it is expected of the policy makers that they would offer necessary patronage to the sishu panchyats in the years ahead, so that the latter could evolve to become a continuous channel of communication and interface between the children and local structures of governance. This would help accommodate the voice of the children at the level of policy formulation so that the problems faced by children could be effectively addressed.

10. It is observed that in most cases, the curricula at the school and college levels fail to make any meaningful reference to the Gandhian philosophy of non-violence. In this context, it is important that efforts be made in this regard to incorporate some of the basic elements of Gandhian non-violence at various levels of formal education, but not in the form of an extra subject in which to excel in examinations but in a way that links up academic interest with Gandhian activism whereby students learn to imbibe and internalize the spirit of Gandhian non-violence in the true sense of the term. The motivating factor should be to steer the socialization process in away that individuals develop the conviction for a peaceful existence on the basis of nonviolence, tolerance, equality, respect for differences and social justice even as they learn how to enjoy their own rights without endangering the rights of others, and especially how to advocate for the rights of others when such rights are threatened. As a matter of fact, vibrant student’s organisations like the All Assam Students’ Union (AASU) could play a leading role in this regard and take up the issue in all earnest.
11. The technique of Satyagraha based on the double dynamics of non-violent direct action on the one hand and constructive programme on the other, bears special relevance in the context of a conflict-ridden region such as North East India where we have a situation of increasing fratricidal violence, very often fuelled by factors like distortion of facts and misrepresentation based on an adherence to extreme and rigid viewpoints leading to mutual exclusivity. As pointed out earlier in the chapter, the UNDP’s Human Development Report of 1994 has listed the rise of ethnic tensions as a threat to community security. Acknowledging that human beings can, at best, only grasp the “relative truth”, the technique of satyagraha is based on an open dialogue process where in conflict is seen as a component of a dynamic process of social change, providing an opportunity to arrive at newer and more mature levels of human relationships. Satyagraha as a means of conflict transformation aims at tolerance and mutual understanding based on an empathetic and rational assessment of the views and goals of the opponent so as to try and find enough common ground to move forward in a constructive way even as the chances of direct violence are radically minimised. At the same time satyagraha eliminates the possibility of any misrepresentation and distortion of facts. Accordingly, satyagraha addresses a key human security concern -“freedom from fear.” At the same time, by aiming at socio-economic reconstruction based on constructive programmes, satyagraha addresses the “freedom from want” element of human security involving basic survival and well being needs with a stress on empowerment. Going back to the UNDP report, it is noticed that the report has categorically mentioned limited access to opportunities as a cause of ethnic tensions. This is often true in the context of our region where certain groups and communities tend to
feel that they have, in more ways than one, not stood to gain from the overall process of “development.” Satyagraha as a means to secure the “uplift of all” bears special relevance in this context of ensuring community security. As a matter of fact civil society organisations such as the Sarania Ashram, the Tamulpur Anchalik Gramdan Sangh (TAGS) and the Shanti Sadhana Ashram, could be seen to be spearheading a process of inclusive constructive social communication based on Gandhian Saytagraha, mobilizing people along non-violent lines and generating social capital across different groups and communities at a micro level.

Gandhian constructive programmes essentially necessitates cooperation among all sections. In this sense, the community-based strategies adopted by these organisations have successfully promoted a certain level of social coordination and trust among the people in their respective areas of operation, cutting across ethnic, religious, class or professional backgrounds. At this stage it may also be argued that the idea of shanti sena—“the brigade without arms” as envisaged over fifty years back, is all the more relevant today than ever, calling for its revival through sustained civil society efforts based on a strong commitment in the efficacy and superiority of “non-violent defence” aimed at building up of a culture of peace that seeks both “freedom from fear” and “freedom from want”. At the same time, the State as the guardian of all citizenry is expected to play a more proactive and positive role in terms of drawing from different experiments of Gandhian activism while incorporating the essential spirit of satyagraha, as a means to secure the “uplift of all”, at all levels of policy formulation.
References:


iv Ibid., p. 94.


vii Ibid., p. 270.

viii Ibid., p. 295.

ix Ibid.

x Ibid.


xiv As stated in an interview conducted on May 14, 2005 at TAGS Guest House, Guwahati (interview tape recorded).

See Appendix VIII


Ibid. p.11.

Ibid. p.15.

Ibid.

Ibid.

