## CHAPTER - III

SOCIAL WELFARE ACTIVITIES OF ASSAM PRADESHIK MAHILA SAMITY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Contents</th>
<th>Page No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Programmes / Activities</td>
<td>59-60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Educational Activities</td>
<td>60-71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Women Welfare Services of APMS</td>
<td>71-84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Other Activities</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.1</td>
<td>Samity’s Role in Preventing Smuggling and Corruption</td>
<td>85-86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.2</td>
<td>Relief Works</td>
<td>86-88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.3</td>
<td>Samity’s Role in Various Problems of the State</td>
<td>89-90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.4</td>
<td>Relationship with various Organizations and Institutions</td>
<td>90-92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.5</td>
<td>Samity’s Role in the upliftment of Children</td>
<td>92-97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER - III
CHAPTER-III

SOCIAL WELFARE ACTIVITIES OF
ASSAM PRADESHIK MAHILA SAMITY

This chapter discusses the welfare and reformatory works of Assam Pradeshik Mahila Samity. An attempt has been made to understand the motivational factors that promoted the Assam Pradeshik Mahila Samity to undertake welfare activities relating to women and children. Welfare activities of Assam Pradeshik Mahila Samity are more in the nature of social service. These include all such activities, which were directed towards fulfilling the basic and also some special needs of women and children. The activities carried out by APMS are diverse and directed to address and change gender biases and to create social change by empowering and educating women, by fostering awareness among them about their rights and duties. It endeavours to provide access to knowledge about reproductive health and choices, about laws regarding domestic and sexual violence against women and information on various financial schemes available. It also undertakes earthquake and flood relief work and other such activities for the socially handicapped, training programmes for women’s self employment schemes and projects for the aged and destitute women. These programmes are designed to reform the assumptions, attitudes and values that are embedded in social norms, rules and traditions for women. Thus, the welfare activities of APMS are supportive, preventive and creative in nature. In the study it was found that the APMS was motivated by a variety of factors to work in these areas. The status of women reflects the real picture of a society. Jawaharlal Nehru once remarked
“To awaken the people it is the women who must be awakened. Once she is on the move the family moves, the village moves, the nation moves.”

On the same note Swami Vivekananda had also commented: “that country and that nation which did not respect women have never become great nor will even be in future.”

The Assam Pradeshik Mahila Samity and its branches were very much aware of this and they initiated several measures for the well being of women. Poverty, lack of education and continuous discrimination were identified as the major barriers to the development of women resulting in huge cost to society at large.

We have seen that till 1926 there was no effective organization in Assam, which protected the interests of women or extended real concrete help to them. Even the government did not pay much attention to the problems of uplifting the status of women in society. Hence, APMS considered women welfare services as the best way to mitigate the various problems of women and society.

Very often the feeling of insecurity and lack of confidence keep women bogged down. APMS realised that economic independence creates confidence and provides social security. This was therefore an important factor which motivated the APMS to work towards providing employment opportunities to women. In the Indian joint family system, women were part of the greater household. Economically, emotionally and socially they depended on their parents, husbands or relatives. Quite often a married woman suffered from mental or physical harassment in her husband’s home but was unable to leave because she had no place to go. There were also instances of young girls lured into the flesh

trade by undesirable elements of society. To create a sense of social security, APMS decided to provide shelter to needy women of all categories. It was also perceived that proper counselling and guidance could solve many problems of women. Assamese women at that time were usually unaware of rules and regulations and ways of availing legal assistance. Even if a woman wanted to take a legal action against her husband or in laws or other relatives for their unpleasant behaviour, she could not do so due to lack of knowledge or money. Hence, APMS decided to provide legal aid to needy women.

The need to create awareness among the public in general and women in particular about the social evils was also felt. Unless the women themselves realised the need of reform, not much could be achieved through laws. APMS realised that only proper education could make women aware of their rights and duties. From the time of its inception therefore, this was high on the agenda of the APMS. To provide women with gainful employment, APMS started many vocational and technical training programmes. It was hoped that in this way women could supplement the family income and have a legitimate say in the family matters.

Social evils, like physical torture, murder, superstitious beliefs were also responsible for the misery of women. This prompted the APMS to take measures to prevent such evils of society.

Another important area of focus of the APMS was the welfare of children. As future citizens of the country and for the building of a strong nation, it was essential for all children to get opportunities to develop into physically and
mentally healthy individuals. Keeping in mind Milton’s observation that “Child shows the man, as morning shows the day,” APMS started certain programmes in order to support children.

3.1 Programmes/Activities:

Early voluntary organizations generally confined their activities to relief and welfare during times of calamities and in the sphere of social reform. However, in recent decades, there has been a qualitative and discernible shift towards the fields of employment generation, contemporary social issues and advocacy of reforms in different areas. From small beginning APMS has also progressed in this direction. Over the years the welfare activities of Assam Pradeshik Mahila Samity has encompassed all areas of work concerning the well being and advancement of women and children. As the APMS became the champion of women’s rights, appeals poured in from all directions of the state drawing its attention to the downtrodden state of women. The APMS was actually the path finder for various voluntary organizations in Assam and for the first time with greater concern, various welfare activities for women and children were taken under its aegis.

Data regarding programmes and activities undertaken by APMS were collected for the study. All types of activities during the period under the study, whether on regular or sporadic basis, either exclusively or largely for women were included for the purpose of analysis. It was observed that the APMS engaged

in a host of activities for women education and welfare. For the purpose of analysis, these activities have been categorized into educational, social welfare and others.

3.2 Educational Activities:

Educational activities constitute an important traditional area of voluntary work. The entry of Indian women into formal education system began in the mid 19th century, but it got wider acceptance only in the mid 20th century. Before independence and even after independence, government was slow in promoting female education. But social reformers and women organizations worked in promoting female education at all levels. Indian women organizations, such as the All India Women’s Conference pleaded for giving women access to education which they stressed helped women perform their roles better and become useful citizens. Stress on women’s education in Assam was laid nearly half a century after the movement in the same direction had been launched in Calcutta, one of the most important venues of Indian renaissance. Till then no strong public opinion had been found in favour of women’s education in Assam. In Bengal also, the women had to face a lot of obstacles on their way of acquiring the right of education. Not many educated males had much faith on women’s intelligence. In 1819 A.D., the missionaries had set up a women’s body named Female Juvenile Society with a view to attract women towards education. In 1921, a society named Lady’s Society for Native Female Education in Calcutta was formed. Girls’ schools were set up in various localities under the aegis of the society. Till then, however,

---
the so called educated and progressive families were not inclined to allow their women folk to obtain institutional education. It was after the Calcutta University had acknowledged equal educational rights for both sexes that women’s education received an impetus there. The deep and far reaching effect of the movement in Calcutta had affected the Assamese society as well. But the pathbearers of women’s education in Assam like Haliram Dhekial Phukan, Jagyaram Khargharia Phukan, Anandaram Dhekial Phukan and others had to toil much in this aspect.

The impact of the Indian renaissance had affected Assam in the second half of the nineteenth century, but as far as women’s education was concerned, no notable progress was seen. Till then the male dominated society could not shake itself free from the age old consideration about women’s place in the society. Though the East India Company had initiated the measures of providing education in India, it was not before 1854 that the issue of women’s education was taken up. In the wake of the anti British struggle of 1857, however, the process slowed down considerably. In the second half of nineteenth century, a few primary schools for girls were set up in Assam at the initiative of the government. The Christian missionaries also took the initiative in the matter of providing education to the Assamese women. But even this failed to achieve the desired goals owing to a number of reasons. The common man, did not lay much stress on educating even the boys let alone, girls for they believed that work in the field was more important than time wasted at school. Such a belief was aided and abetted by superstitions, poverty and child marriage.
The arrival of Gandhi in the Indian political arena in the early part of twentieth century heralded a new era in the Indian life. Women’s education was also affected by this new surge. Gandhi called upon the people to arrange education for the women. At a time when the concept of women’s education was rather looked down upon by the dominant males, the APMS following the ideals of Gandhi, was able to establish the issue as a major social concern. The present study found that Assam Pradeshik Mahila Samity and its branches in towns and villages contributed considerably to the improvement of education and awareness levels of women through various measures.

Expansion of women’s education, opening girls hostels and providing scholarship to meritorious girls and free compulsory primary education for girls and adult education are included in the educational programmes of APMS. Recognizing the fact that low levels of education and illiteracy were crucial factors in the continued subordination of women, the Samity paid interest to the expansion of women’s education. In the first annual conference of the AMS held at Goalpara on 10th October, 1927, Durgaprova Bora, the President of the session, reminded women about their past glory and achievements in politics, warfare and in socio-religious activities.\(^5\) In her Presidential Address, Durgaprova Bora emphasized on the necessity of female education and said that education of the women received from their family members in the traditional pattern was not sufficient for them.

During 1928, AMS adopted a resolution to organize women’s meeting and establishing girls’ schools in different parts of the province. Through advertisement

in newspapers, the AMS called upon the people and its branch committees to provide the names and addresses of the villages that did not have any girls schools. Chandraprova Saikiani took keen personal interest in this respect.  

In fulfillment of its objectives, AMS organized women’s meetings in Dhubri, Shillong, Nowgong and other parts of the province. The main objective behind these meetings was to create awareness among the women about their rights and freedom. At the initiative of AMS, the first girl’s school was established at Tihu in Kamrup district on 6 July, 1928. In the establishment of this school, the AMS received financial aid from a school teacher named Kamala Kanta Choudhury, an inhabitant of Tihu area. Prior to the Mahila Samity’s laudable efforts, the missionaries had set up the first women’s school in Sadiya in 1839 A.D. itself. However, the school did not run for long. A major hurdle faced by the Mahila Samity in the expansion of women education was the inadequacy of suitable lady teachers. To encourage girls to enrol themselves in schools, AMS advocated the appointment of women faculty members in schools. AMS was instrumental in the appointment of Paniphuli Das as the lady teacher of the Tihu Girls’ School. The Deputy Inspector and Chairman of Barpeta Local Board encouraged the AMS to open such school in other parts of Kamrup district as well and promised to help the AMS in this direction. The AMS realized the importance of girl’s education and emphasis on girl’s education became a main agenda of their policy.

7. Ibid.
8. Ibid, 12 August, 1928.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
In the second session of AMS held on March 1928 at Jorhat, Prafulla Bala Choudhurani, wife of Nagendra Narayan Choudhury, (a Jamider and litterateur) in her Presidential Speech emphasized the importance of female education. She appealed to every educated girl of Assam to impart education voluntarily to women of her locality. She observed that without promotion of education the development of women in general would not be possible. In this session of AMS, Gourmuria Satradhikar Pitambar Deva Goswami asked the women leaders of AMS to devote their energies for the improvement of the education and health of women. In the same session, Ratnakumari Rajkhowa, the President of the Reception Committee in her speech also emphasized the need for expansion of women’s education with a view to bringing about improvement in her status. She raised voice against the age old purdah system that had gradually engulfed Assamese society and said that every educated person should oppose it. She observed that women had no separate identity in society. She was the “wife” of her husband and “mother” of her children. Ratna Kumari Rajkhowa strongly condemned the social arrangements in which women were completely dependent on the other sex. She opposed child marriage and early motherhood and viewed that women suffered from ill health both mentally and physically mainly due to these ill systems and social restrictions imposed upon her. To overcome all these evils, she emphasized on the formation of more branches of Mahila Samities under the banner of AMS. Ratna Kumari Rajkhowa demanded equality of men and women in all aspects of life and said that both men and women should equally get the

13.  Ibid, 13 April, 1929.
light of sun and moon. She reminded men and women alike that women’s education was the only way to strengthen the foundation of a society.  

To fulfill its educational objectives, AMS decided to award scholarships to intelligent but economically backward girls. In fulfillment of this object, AMS and its branches collected funds for giving financial aid to girls for pursuing their studies. In some places, the AMS constituted women’s welfare associations (Mahila Kalyan Samities) to help the village women. Under the AMS, these associations used to invite eminent social workers and reformers to speak on women’s issues so as to create an awareness among women. Articles written by the members on women’s education, social reforms, rights and responsibilities of women and on other related matters were read and discussed at these meetings. On 9 February, 1928, Gauhati Mahila Sangha, an associate branch of AMS, organized a meeting at Uzanbazar Theatre Hall in Gauhati under the presidentship of Rajabala Das. At this meeting, the President of AMS focused on the necessity of active involvement of women in society and requested women folk to work unitedly for their own development. The meeting took a resolution of imparting education voluntarily to economically backward students at the Gauhati Club Head Office of AMS.

The third session of AMS which was held at Golaghat in 1929, also focused on female education. Narayani Handique, in her Presidential Address, emphasized the importance of female education. She observed that female education and its

expansion were the best instruments for creating consciousness among women. In connection with women’s education, Narayani Handique said that a community having uneducated women is like a lame man and there is little hope for social and political emancipation of that community.  

She said that excellence on all fronts by a nation is possible only when her women get all-round education. But she emphasised the fact that education was not only the pursuit of academic knowledge, but that which enlightens the mind and instills the humane values of mercy, modesty and patience in one. She also pointed out that spinning, weaving and rearing animals are segments of education for an Assamese woman which she learnt from her mother. To a large extent it was the mother who was responsible for the upbringing of her daughter. So she pleaded for imparting true education to the mothers as well.

The AMS requested all its branches to work for the improvement of female education and to invite important provincial leaders, educationists and social workers to their meetings with a view to arousing consciousness among women by their voices. In a meeting of Kamrup District Mahila Samity held on April, 1929 at Uzanbazar Theatre Hall, it was decided to invite guests in the Mahila Samity’s meetings to deliver lectures by them on women related issues. The aim behind their decision was to focus on the needs of female education and on women’s rights, needs and problems. Important leaders like Tarun Ram Phukan attended the 3rd annual conference of AMS held at Golaghat in 1929. At this

18. Ibid.
session, the AMS adopted a resolution for higher education of women and put
demands before the government to take necessary steps for its implementation.
In the subsequent years a number of primary schools were converted to high
schools.  

In the beginning of the twentieth century, the British government introduced
a new educational policy in India. In 1904, Lord Curzon allotted a bigger fund
for women’s education. During this time, demands for a changed educational
system were raised in Assam as well. At the initiative of Manik Chandra Baruah,
Cotton College was established in 1901. But till then women’s education was
still not a universally accepted concept. Moreover, the doors of Cotton College
were also closed for girls. Hemaprova Das, daughter of Amalprova Das, a
distinguished social worker had, after passing her matriculate examination, sought
admission into Cotton College in the I.Sc. course. Denied admission there, she
went to Calcutta University and earned the distinction of being the first Assamese
women to obtain on M.Sc degree.  

Thus, during that time few Assamese girls, who aspired to get the taste of
higher education, had to travel all the way to Calcutta and get admission in colleges
there. In the fourth annual session of AMS held in Gauhati in 1934, extensive
discussions were held on issues relating to women’s education. At this meeting a
resolution was taken to press the authority to open the Cotton College to the girl
students. Following the Samity’s demand, the Cotton College authority agreed
to enroll girl students.  

a resolution was mooted for enrollment of girl students in Cotton College. However, the decision was implemented only in 1934. Chandraprova Saikiani and Rajabala Das played laudable roles in this regard. Lila Devi and Usha Bhattacharya were the first two girl students of Cotton College. In later years, both became faculty members of Lady Keane Girls’ College in Shillong. Later Lila Devi joined Gauhati University. The Samity’s role in the academic achievement of the Assamese women is thus undeniable. At the initiative of AMS, secured boarding facilities were provided for the girls coming from various parts of Assam to study in the Cotton College. Durgaprova Bora, an active worker of AMS, set up a girls hostel in her residential complex and personally looked after the boarders.

The annual session of AMS was held in Nowgong in 1947 at the initiative of renowned social activist, Usha Borthakur and her colleagues. At this meeting an important resolution was taken on the abolition of illiteracy. About the same time, several primary branches of Mahila Samity were constituted at Jorhat at the initiative of Hemlata Bezbaruah, the President of Jorhat District Mahila Samity. The Jorhat District Mahila Samity started adult literacy centres through these branches. These centres achieved noteworthy progress in removing illiteracy in women. The AMS and its branches provided basic education to at least 50,000 women across Assam. In some places the AMS also took steps to teach Hindi to the women. In 1945, the APMS organized a training centre in Golaghat which

provided training to a 50 member women’s group. These trainees subsequently imparted training to several other women rendering them suitable for social services. In this way, the APMS had worked in the field of imparting education among the Assamese women and greatly helped them in taking the path of progress and advancement even before the independence. The Congress government of that time also laid stress on implementing the programmes taken up by the APMS. Steps were taken to give preference to lady teachers over her male counterparts in the matter of appointment of teachers in the primary schools. Selection of women members were made compulsory in the Gaon Panchayats.

In order to spread educational information among the women, the AMS published journals, leaflets and Annual reports. The publications were mostly in Assamese. In 1928 Sibsagar District Mahila Samity, a branch of APMS, published a monthly magazine *Ghar Jeuti* which became very popular among the women. *Ghar Jeuti* published discussions on women’s education, widow remarriage and child mortality and on other topics related to women and children. Moreover, it produced many women writers providing them a space in literary world. In 1947 APMS published its monthly magazine *Abhijatri* with Chandraprova Saikiani as its editor. It was originally titled *Abhiyan* but subsequently, renamed as *Abhijatri*. *Abhijatri* included varied issues relating to women. Various news about the activities of the Mahila Samity and of its branches were published in it. Moreover, stories, essays and poems highlighting the national issues were also regularly

---

29. Ibid. p-41.
published in *Abhijatri*. This included enlightening write-ups on issues relating to agriculture, industry, health, current affairs and book reviews. A number of women also had their creative writings published in this magazine. The magazine became very popular throughout the state including Cachar district and Manipur. After a glorious seven years, the magazine finally closed due to financial crisis. Besides this magazine, the APMS had Mahatma Gandhi’s treatise on ‘Ban on untouchability’ translated into Assamese and published the same in book form and distributed it free of cost among the people.

In 1946, the APMS had mooted a proposal for conducting a survey on women’s education. The main purpose behind the survey was to prepare a reliable statistics on the number of girls of various age groups, their educational status and number of schools imparting education to girls. However, it could not be ascertained how far the Samity was able to put into action this resolution. In the same year, the Assam Mahila Samity took resolutions of taking up some cardinal policies such as annual health check-up for the girls students, providing mid day meals to them and educating them in the arm of self defence. The APMS called upon its district units to celebrate the birth anniversaries of Jaymati, Kanaklata, Bhogeswari Phukanani and other prominent leaders. In the proposed resolution of 1946, the APMS also decided to set up a publicity wing, a monthly magazine and books for girls students. In fact, *Abhijatri* was the result of this resolution. It was also decided to organize talks by an eminent person once a week and a general discussion once a month on issues relating to women.
In 1975, the 50th session of APMS was held in Tezpur and in this session demands were raised by APMS to enroll more girl students in vocational courses, mid-wifery and in medical colleges irrespective of caste and creed. The APMS also stressed on providing free education to girls students upto higher secondary level and submitted several memoranda to the government in this regard.\textsuperscript{30}

The APMS carried on its educational activities through its library services also. With active co-operation from late Swarnalata Saikia, the Gauhati District Mahila Samity, a branch of the APMS, set up a library in the head office premises of Assam Pradeshik Mahila Samity. This library has been serving as a centre of excellence in imparting knowledge among the local women. The Samity’s library boasts of several thousand books, both fiction and non-fiction. It caters to over hundred members. The library has a regular membership card and register of members.

3.3 Women Welfare Services of APMS:

In the largely patriarchal society of Assam, the status of women has not been very satisfactory. Although, in the post independence period, constitutional provisions have been incorporated to remove gender inequalities, the position of women is still not satisfactory. Taking advantage of their various disadvantages of illiteracy, ignorance and poverty, illegalities and exploitation are being committed on them in an unmitigated manner. To achieve equality, peace and development, the United Nations observed Women’s Year in 1975 and

\textsuperscript{30} Annual Report. APMS, 1975.
subsequently, 1975-1985 as a women decade. Peace and development are impossible until the women folk are intimately involved in the welfare and development projects. It is true that there are laws to ensure security and protection of the women, but due to the loopholes in these laws, exploitation and atrocities on them are continuing unabated.

Lack of security, social justice and economic prosperity are the chief obstacles to the Indian women in achieving adequate dignity in a primarily male dominated society. The women get very little opportunity to work in a dignified position, leading to the loss of their self confidence. Women face certain challenges and obstacles in their working place that men do not. Often they face gender discrimination not only in working place but also at home. In fact, most of the problems that beset women are rooted in the social perspective of the position of women. Traditionally, men are seen as the bread winner and women as the house keepers, child bearers andrearers. This continues to put obstacles before the women.

The role of voluntary organizations is very important in ensuring their socio-economic status and self confidence. From its very inception the APMS has been working in ensuring women’s socio-economic status and self confidence. Realizing that government welfare schemes alone are not enough to bring all-round development of the women and that there must be an overall awareness among them about their needs, aspirations and goals, the APMS has endeavoured to instill this sense of awareness among the women through its relentless fights against social evils by ensuring women’s education. The APMS has been offering
an important forum for the women of Assam to improve their organizational skills in various spheres. In all the sessions of APMS, important issues related to women were discussed and resolutions were taken for the improvement of position and status of women.

Prafullabala Choudhurani, in her Presidential Address in the Jorhat Session of APMS, emphasized on equality and freedom of women. She demanded women’s right to be elected and reservation of seats for women in the Councils and in municipal bodies. Since the nineteenth century there has been opposition to child marriage and to the consummation of marriage of pre-puberty girls. But there was no popular movement or organization in Assam against the social evil. APMS was the first women organization in Assam to raise its voice and in its third session held at Golaghat in 1929 adopted resolution against child marriage. In this session, APMS offered full support to Sarda Bill and to the Age of Consent Bill. Under Sarda Bill, the minimum age of marriage for girl was raised to 14 and that of boy to 18 years. Under the auspices of Sarda bill, the Child Marriage Restraint Act was adopted in India in 1929. Under provisions of this Act, marrying off a girl child below fourteen years of age was considered illegal. The AMS took effective steps to implement Sarda Act in Assam. Under the AMS, its local branches organized campaigns against child marriage and worked towards the implementation of the Act in remote areas. When information about prospective marriages of minor girls with elderly grooms was received, the AMS issued

32. Ibid. 13th April, 1929.
notices to concerned families to prevent them.\footnote{Indira Miri, (ed.) \textit{Souvenir}, APMS, 1975, p-19.} If the families ignored such notices, the workers of the Mahila Samity used to go personally and prevented such marriages from taking place. Among conservative sections, Mahila Samities were referred to as “marriage breaking samity.”\footnote{Ibid, p-19.} In the Golaghat session, which held in 1929, an interesting argument took place between Mrinalini Devi Goswami, the chairperson of the Reception Committee and her married daughter Swarnalata Devi Goswami on the issue of child marriage. Swarnalata Devi Goswami termed child marriage a catastrophic system and demanded its abolition. But her mother strongly advocated in favour of the system. Of course, the mother had to accept defeat when the issue was put to vote. This goes on to see that the Samity was able to instil into the Assamese women the spirit of consciousness about the Child Marriage Restraint Act.

Along with child marriage, the \textit{purdah} system was regarded as another important social evil. The practice of \textit{purdah} was not prevalent in traditional Assamese society. During the British Rule, the \textit{purdah} in the form of \textit{orani} began to penetrate among the upper class Assamese families. From its inception, the APMS opposed \textit{purdah} system. The Tezpur Mahila Samity, founded in 1919, was the first women’s body to adopt resolution against the \textit{purdah} system.\footnote{Chandraprova Saikiani, (ed.) \textit{Mahila Samitir Itibritta}. 1961, p-3.} During that time, the women while going out, were compelled to move in a horse carriage with its doors and windows tightly closed. The Tezpur Mahila Samity members resolved to move about freely. This led to severe criticism from various quarters.
Narayani Handique, in her Presidential Address at the Golaghat session of APMS, commented on the fact that purdah was never a tradition in Assam and it was new to the Assamese society. She said it came to Assam with the migration of outsiders during the British rule. She appealed to the women of Assam to throw away the purdah and become free.

AMS also raised voice against untouchability, which had existed in India for centuries. Even humanitarian and religious movement started by Buddha, Ramanuja, Kabir, Tukaram, Ramanand, Chaitanya and others hardly affected the age long institution of untouchability. The leaders of Indian National movement like Gokhale, Gandhi and others argued that since their demands for independence from the British rule was a democratic demand, the Indians should also practice democracy in the social sphere and reconstruct social relations between individuals, castes and communities on the basis of democratic principles, the principles of equality, liberty and rights of man.\(^{37}\) Gandhi started an extensive work of social reform for the untouchables. In 1932, he founded the All India Harijan Sevak Sangh and he started a movement to spread education among them and to extend to them the freedom to use public wells, schools and roads and enter public temples. From 1935, AMS took initiative in the eradication of untouchability as set out by Mahatma Gandhi. In its fourth session held in Gauhati in 1934, AMS adopted a resolution for its eradication.\(^{38}\) The problem was also discussed at great length at its session which held in Gauhati in 1945.

---

37. A.R. Desai, Social Background of Indian Nationalism. 1994, p-266.
session the Samity members took a resolution to work steadfastly towards the elimination of ‘untouchability’ from the society. As a part of this resolution, the high caste women members at this session partook of tea and snacks prepared and distributed by their low caste counterparts. Following a request from the Samity, arrangements were made for a community feast involving all sections of the women irrespective of their castes during the wedding ceremony of the son and daughter respectively of Keshab Kanta Baruah and Jagendra Nath Baruah of Gauhati. 39 It was due to the untiring efforts of AMS that community feasts involving all sections of people was started. The women folk of Gauhati heartily welcomed this change, thereby hastening the obliteration of a great social crime forever. This was soon followed by the rural women of Assam. In banishing this great social evil, AMS followed the path of Mahatma Gandhi. With a view to obliterating untouchability, AMS instructed its district branches to work towards the elimination of this social evil and arranged community feasts and prayers in all the districts of the state.

A major problem faced by women in Assam was lack of economic independence. In the traditional Assamese society, women engaged in household duties and their was no scope for gainful and wage earning activities for them. In tribal villages and in cultivating castes and communities, women worked in the field particularly in transplantation, weeding and harvesting paddy. Though these economic activities contributed towards the family’s earning, they did not contribute to her economic self sufficiency, which increases self confidence and

moral courage besides ensuring social security. In fact, without economic freedom, social and political freedom become meaningless. The APMS has been working untiringly to ensure financial self sufficiency among the women through various welfare schemes. To create economic independence, the AMS paid serious attention to the promotion of spinning and weaving which have been the traditional skills of Assamese women since ages. Even today, many of the households in the villages have a loom on which the women folk weave clothes in their spare time. It is an additional source of income for some households. APMS and its district branches actively encouraged weaving and spinning as a socio-economic activity for women. The Samity opened many spinning and weaving centres in different places of the state. To facilitate a proper market for the products of women weavers, the Samity opened Sipini Bharals or ‘weavers’ stores in different places. For the same purpose, in 1928, Kamrup district Mahila Samity, a branch of AMS, opened a Sipini Bharal at Gauhati. On 27 May, 1928 the fifth session of Kamrup district Mahila Samity was held at Manik Barua Memorial Minor School, Uzan Bazar, and at this session Chandrakumar Agarwala, the noted poet donated a sum of Rs. 200 for opening an emporium for the handloom products of Assamese women.  

Under the instruction of AMS, some district Mahila Samities organized spinning and weaving competitions among young girls and women to encourage them in this skill. Exhibitions were also organised by the Samities where women of different ages participated to demonstrate their skill in spinning and weaving.

40.  Sadiniya Asomiya. 3rd June, 1928.
From 1945 onwards, the Assamese weavers experienced the dearth of cotton yarns for their looms and by 1946-47, almost 6/7 lakhs of looms were shut down. Taking advantage of the situation, the black marketers sold yarn at exorbitant prices. Failure on the part of the poor weavers to purchase yarn at exorbitant prices made them redundant. The Samity arranged supply of yarn to these women at a much lower price, directing the beneficiaries to deposit a particular quantity of hand woven thread to the Samity’s office. This led to a significant increase in the production of hand woven thread. Besides, the Samity demanded of the Assam government that the yarn at controlled rates should be distributed through the Samity. Because of this, a considerable quantity of yarn was received by the APMS which were passed on to the district committees for distribution among their members. The Samity taught the weavers of both plains and hills of the state to use yarn lengthwise and to spin the breathwise yarn in the heels. From then onwards, the Assamese women began making several articles through the cottage industry with the active assistance of APMS and of its district and primary units. Chandraprova Saikiani, Girija Baruah and other members of APMS worked very hard to stop black marketing of yarn.

In 1958, the Samity set up a shop named *Bandhabi* at Gauhati for the convenience of its members. Various essential commodities like cosmetics, wool, readymade garments and varieties of local snacks were available in this shop. Annapurna Baruah, a member of the Samity looked after the affairs of this

---

shop. With a view towards providing financial freedom to women, the APMS also started a weaver’s body, *Sipini Sangha* and arranged training in cottage industry such as bamboo and cane works, jute products, carpet weaving and embroidery. After receiving training, many women started making articles such as bamboo baskets and flower vases, bags with plastic pearls and thread, handkerchiefs and table cloths at home. Thereby they paved the way for self sustenance. In 1959, the APMS conducted a two year women’s training centre with financial aid from the Social Welfare Board. In 1961, from the women’s training centre, as many as 22 young widows and other women deserted by their husbands were imparted education upto ME level, thereby enabling them to qualify to work as primary school teachers or in the women and child development centres.  

Eighty percent Indians live in the villages scattered all over the country. It is, therefore, a foregone conclusion that development of the nation would be possible only when the condition of the village folks are improved. Keeping this in mind, the APMS choose villages as their centre of activity. The district branches of APMS offered all possible help to the people affected by drought, flood, erosion and fire. In the rural areas, the primary level committees took up such works as rearing of fish, sericulture, cultivation and repairing of roads. Of course, the Samity did not keep the urban areas out of the purview of its activities. It offered its services in all areas as and when need for such occasions arose. A resolution on financial empowerment of women was adopted in the 50th session of APMS held in Tezpur in October, 1975. Since a majority of women live in the villages

---

and since they depend on cottage industry for their survival, the Samity laid stress on the revival of cottage industry. The Samity called upon the concerned departments to provide materials required for Khadi, Endi, Muga, Jute items and to extend all possible help in this regard to the Assamese weavers. The district and primary committees were also asked to do the needful in this regard.

With a view to improving the status of Assamese women, the APMS patronized widow remarriage and resolved to take steps to popularise it. The 2nd session of AMS, which was held at Jorhat in 1928, addressed the issue of widow remarriage. Prafullabala Choudhurani, the President of the second session, pleaded for widow remarriage and she said that society had no right to force a widow to lead an ascetic life. She argued that a widow too had the right to lead own life without being pressurised by others. In fact, even before the formation of AMS, the Sibsagar Mahila Samity had adopted a resolution in 1924 to support child widow remarriage and also resolved to popularise it. AMS and its branches organized meetings in rural areas of the state and discussions were held on different progressive issues. In one such meeting held at Gandhia village in Kamrup district in 1928, a resolution was passed supporting widow remarriage in Assam. In this way APMS touched upon many important issues concerning women of Assam. However, during the early years of its formation, few outside Assam had heard of the APMS. The session of All India Women’s Conference which was held in Calcutta in 1928, selected a Bengali person as a representative of Assam, because the workers of the Calcutta session of All India Women Conference felt that

there was no qualified representative in Assam. When AMS came to know about this, it reacted sharply and all the executive members of AMS went to Calcutta to attend the session of AIWC. It was an attempt on the part of Assam Mahila Samity to demonstrate the organizational strength of AMS in the All India Women’s organizations and remove the misconception about Assamese women.\(^{48}\)

Since its inception, the APMS has been relentlessly striving to ensure social upliftment of the women. Women were barred from entering the Madhab Mandir at Hajo. The APMS strongly objected to this discrimination and in 1947, a delegation led by Chandraprova Saikiani threw ajar the Haigrib Madhab Mandir for all people irrespective caste, creed or sex.\(^{49}\) Such activities of the Samity generated considerable awareness among women and helped them to strengthen their own identity. The Samity’s role in ameliorating the condition of the women railway passengers was also equally noteworthy. The Goalpara session of AMS, which was held in 1927, took a resolution of obtaining special seating arrangements for women passengers in railway coaches. In this session, the Samity put demands before the Railway Advisory Committee for making separate seating arrangements and better waiting room facilities for women travellers. Bowing down to strong protests by the Samity, Bipin Chandra Ghosh, member of Eastern Bengal Railway Advisory Committee, gave an assurance that he would redress the various problems faced by the women passengers.\(^{50}\) Accordingly, women passengers were given facilities to travel Class-III Coaches. Waiting rooms and rest rooms were provided in big and small stations respectively for the women.

---

passengers. The waiting rooms were kept clean and tidy for the interclass women passengers.

Under the category of welfare activities, the APMS set up an Ashram known as *Anath Kalyan Kendra* in Gauhati for orphan children and homeless women. Contributions were collected from various quarters for running the Ashram. Further, due to the strenuous effort of the Samity, the Ashram received financial aid of Rs. 2000/- a year for two successive years - 1954-55 and 1955-56 from the Social Welfare Board. The female inmates of the Ashram were trained in weaving and sewing. Such training helped several inmates to become self sufficient in life and subsequently helped them in providing higher education to their children. Following the subsequent setting up of a shelter house at Jalukbari at the behest of the Social Welfare Board, *Anath Kalyan Kendra* premises was used as a training centre for the *Gram Sevikas*. Here young girls, destitute women and elderly widows were trained. After two years training programme, these women were engaged in the development centres run by the Mahila Samity in the rural areas.

In 1961, Acharya Vinoba, a close follower of Gandhi, visited Assam to spread the ideals of *Sarvodaya* and *Bhoodan-Gramdan*. Chandraprova travelled with Vinobaji across the nook and corner of Assam and appealed to the land holders to donate land to the landless and destitute. At his initiative a spiritual organization called *Stree Shakti Jagaran Samity* came up in India. In cooperation with this organization, the APMS and its branch committees worked relentlessly to revive the spiritual power of the Assamese women and build a new society. The APMS

---

also involved itself with Sarania Ashram, a social organization for women’s development. The regional centre of Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust is situated in this Ashram. During his second visit to Assam in January, 1946, Gandhi set up a *Gram-Sevika Vidyalaya* in this Ashram. As the aims and objectives of this two organizations are virtually the same, the Assam branch, the Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust and the APMS have been doing welfare works in Assam together. Both the organizations have been laying thrust mainly on the issue of development of women. Several women’s groups have come up in Assam on the line shown by the APMS, and these are working relentlessly for bringing about women’s empowerment.

Comprehensive well being of the women can never be achieved without equality and social justice. In consideration of this, demands were raised in the 50th session of APMS held in Tezpur in 1975, to ensure proportionate representation of women in the Public Service Commission, *Mahakuma Parisad* and other Government and semi-government organizations. The APMS also considered the aspect of creating political awareness among the women, because it was felt that women’s interests would be better secured only if they have enough representations in the administration and in the legislature. Feeling the necessity of the women extending their service to the process of nation building, the APMS had considered the option of getting women representatives elected through Congress. In the Jorhat session of AMS which was held in 1928, Prafullabala Choudhurani, the President, reiterated women’s right to be elected and reservation of seats for women in the Council and Municipal bodies.\(^5^3\) Referring to the status

\(^5^3\) *Sadiniya Asomiya*. Vol.-II, 48 issue, 1929.
and position of Assamese women, she said “we want only man’s sympathy and co-operation, what we really need is equality and freedom in serving the society and the country as well”. The APMS had also tried, albeit, unsuccessfaily, to send an Assamese woman representative to the Council formed immediately after the independence to initiate the process of administration. After the formal adoption of the constitution in 1950, India became a sovereign nation. In that year, the APMS demanded an Assamese woman representative in the Rajya Sabha. Chandraprova Saikiani, an active worker of APMS sent several telegrams to Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, reiterating the APMS’s demand for electing women representatives. The then Assam Chief Minister, Bishnu Ram Medhi, social worker Bhubaneswar Baruah and other extended their moral support to this demand of APMS. Consequent upon these concerted efforts, Puspalata Das got elected to the Rajya Sabha on that occasion. Subsequently, Rani Manjula Devi and Begam Mafida Ahmed were elected to the Lok Sabha while Bedabati Borgohain got elected to the Rajya Sabha. Usha Borthakur, first elected as a Legislative Assembly Member, was later elected to the Rajya Sabha. Padma Kumari Gohain, Lily Sengupta, Kamal Kumari Baruah were also elected as members of the Legislative Assembly. The local branches of the APMS played active roles in this matter.

3.4 Other Activities:

The APMS also worked in certain other areas touching the lives of the people of the state. The activities were generally related to issues like price rise, prohibition, smuggling, relief works, upliftment of neglected children and involvement in various problems of the state.

3.4.1 Samity’s role in preventing smuggling and corruption:

From 1967-68 onwards, Assam faced an acute shortage of food grains. Taking advantage of the crisis, a section of unscrupulous traders started adulteration of the essential commodities, such as rice, *dal*, *atta*, sugar and vegetable oil. About this time, the APMS in a appeal through the print media, asked its district committees, to initiate a week long stir against this adulteration and corruption. The office bearers of Gauhati district and city units of the APMS raided the business premises and rice and oil mills. They also met the officials of Food and Civil Supplies Department and discussed with them the issue of food scarcity. Food scarcity once again occurred in the early part of 1971. This time sugar disappeared from the market. The APMS protested against this by taking out a women’s rally in Gauhati. With the help of the Deputy Commissioner, the APMS was able to compel the hoarders to release the sugar in the open market. The rally was attended by all sections of people in Gauhati. In the following years also, the members of APMS maintained a keen vigil on issues like scarcity of food items, price rise and creating an awareness for the need of a nutritional diet. In 28 August

---

1947, an executive meeting was held at the head office of APMS under the presidency of Induprova Barua. At this meeting, the APMS raised demands to the government for prevention of price rise and food adulteration. It also raised issues like engaging more women supervisors to oversee the functionings of fair price and food distribution stores and to ensure exemplary punishment to smugglers, hoarders, adulterers and profiteer. The APMS also requested the newspaper owners to publish photographs of the culprits in their publications to serve as deterrents to the others.

3.4.2 Relief Works:

Relief services in time of need has been a traditional area of voluntary service. APMS rendered its services to community in every natural or human disaster, both in the form of money and materials. The catalysmic earthquake of 15 August, 1950 caused a widespread devastation in Upper Assam. Several thousand of people and animals got swept away by the Brahmaputra. An extensive area of Lakhimpur district and Saikhowa and Sadiya turned into a sea of water. The miseries of people knew no bounds. Taking relief materials for distribution in these areas was a very challenging task. Since the surface communication system got destroyed, the members of APMS flew to those areas and served the distressed population. With active help from the Samity, Dr. Debendra Nath Changakakati rescued a number of families that got encircled by the swirling waters of the

Jayram Daulatram, the then Governor of Assam, extended a one time aid to the Samity and entrusted it with the task of distributing food materials and cloths among the affected people of Majuli and Sakhowa for the next two years. Under instruction of the central committee of APMS, the district and primary branches collected money, cloths and deposited the same with the central committee for distribution as relief materials. Manjula Devi, the President of APMS, Joint Secretaries Chandraprova Saikiani and Induprova Barua, Vice President P. Rasul and members Manurama Mehta, Lalita Phukan visited the affected areas and extended aid to the people. To render help the APMS established two relief camps, one at Majuli in Jorhat district and the another at Choikhowaghat in Dibrugarh district. The APMS had rendered its relief services to the quake hit people in co-operation with the Dibrugarh District Mahila Samity and Jorhat district Mahila Samity. Kalyani Dutta, a resident of Dhubri, with a nurse, ran the Samity’s Sakhowa relief camp for a long time. Women workers Sumati Talukdar, Swarnalata Das, Prabha Choudhury and others helped in running the Samity’s relief camps. Another lady named Lily Sengupta supervised the Samity’s relief works for a long period. This ultimately helped her in qualifying for membership of the Legislative Board. In this manner, the APMS brought to the limelight many a woman who would otherwise have remained unknown.

60. *Ibid*, p-16.
The members of APMS have been actively participating in all developmental programmes across the state. The activists of the APMS had realized one thing truly well that disintegration and violence always stand in the way of progress. Out of this realization, the APMS had extended all possible help to the Pakistani refugees who had lost their homes and hearths in the 1945 communal riot. The large scale migration of the refugees after the Partition created a grave problem in the state. Relief centres were set up in various parts of the state to provide food and shelter to these refugees. The APMS had set up such a relief centre at Gauhati for the destitute women and child refugees. The members of APMS collected contributions from households and business establishments to run the said centre. Renowned social activists Girija Barua, Punyalata Duwara, Usha Das and Samiran Das and others offered their invaluable services in running the relief centre. At the instance of APMS, its district branches also rendered their services to the refugees. Two other relief camps one at Rupsi and another at Silchar were also set up by the concerned district Mahila Samities. The inmates of the camps were given training in weaving and other skills that helped them to attain self sufficiency. Similarly after the Chinese aggression, a number of people from NEFA came to Assam in search of safe shelters. The government of Assam provided them shelters. The members of APMS and its branch committees provided various services to those refugees and also shared their pains and anguishes.

65. Ibid.
3.4.3 Samity’s role in various problems of the state:

Besides taking the various activities within its constitutional ambit, the APMS has also been steadfastly airing its view on numerous other burning issues troubling the state. The Samity has been working unswervingly in solving these issues in its capacity as a social organization. It played an active role throughout the state for maintenance of unity, integrity and peace during the language movement of 1960. The APMS received a one time financial aid of Rs. 5000/- from Fakaruddin Ali Ahmed, the then state Finance Minister of Assam. With this aid the Samity workers purchased cloths, utensils and other commodities and distributed these in over hundred villages across Goalpara, Kamrup and Nowgong districts. APMS itself also raised its voice for establishing Assamese as state language. A nineteen member delegation of APMS under Chandraprova Saikiani’s leadership attended the Pradesh Congress meeting at Shillong and raised the issue of state language. They demanded that the major language of each state should be declared the state language, stressing that developmental activities can be quickened through the language comprehended by the majority.

The Samity also played an active role during the Chinese aggression of 1962 which arose from border disputes over the Aksai Chin in Ladakh, Jammu & Kashmir and the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA). The Chinese army reached Balipara in Sonitpur District twenty miles from Tezpur. During that time, Tezpur District Mahila Samity, a branch of APMS offered its all possible help to the war effected people and TDMS office became the primary centre from which relief

---

work was undertaken. During that time, the then Home Minister, Lal Bahadur Shastri, visited Assam. A delegation of APMS comprising members from Shillong, Nowgong and Gauhati units met him and submitted a memorandum to him, demanding security for the children and mothers. The government acceded to the Samity’s demand of ensuring security to the elderly people and children. Of course, later the cease fire announced by China, saved Assam from an unmitigated disaster.

3.4.4 Relationship with various organizations and institutions:

The APMS has been offering opportunities to Assamese women to exchange their ideas with outside world. Since independence, it has been maintaining a very cordial relationship with various national and international organizations and institutions. It established a close relationship with Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW) in 1958 and continued to send representatives to its conference. With its help, the APMS in 1965, sent two girl students to Denmark to study Home Science and Agricultural Science under Lady Aberdeen scholarship. The general conference of this international body is held once in three years where various schemes for the benefit of women and children across the globe are taken. The organization aims to build up a society free of starvation, poverty and ignorance through international co-operation and integration. A number of backward women have benefitted from this organization. With financial aid from this organization, the APMS set up water supply and child development

centres in a number of districts of Assam. Child development centres were established at Diphu and in Gauhati at Ananda Nagar. Drinking water schemes were implemented in the rural areas of Golaghat and Nalbari under the aegis of the Samity with the grants received from A.C.W.W. Moreover, the members of APMS also represented India in the annual sessions of A.C.W.W. In 1967 the 4th Asiatic Conference of A.C.W.W. was held at Manila in Philippines and Manjula Devi (Dhubri), Usha Das, Lakhimi Choudhury (Gauhati) joined the Conference as representatives of India under APMS. The following year, an international seminar of A.C.W.W. was held at Karachi, Pakistan and Dipali Das (Gauhati) joined the seminar as the representative of APMS. Representatives of England, Australia, Iran, Nepal and Srilanka participated in this seminar, which provided a platform to the Assamese women to exchange views and ideas on several issues. In the same year, the triennial session of A.C.W.W. was held at Michigan of America and Usha Borthakur, the then Vice President of APMS, participated in the session. In 1971, the triennial session of A.C.W.W. held in Oslo, the capital of Norway and it was attended by APMS’s members Manjula Das, Kalyani Phukan, Noor Jahan Begum and Dolly Talukdar. In 1973, the Asiatic seminar of A.C.W.W. was held in Colombo and Priti Goswami, Lili Barua, Malati Barua, Subrata Barua and Renu Choudhury joined the seminar as delegates of APMS. The 1974 A.C.W.W. Conference held in Australia was attended by Lakhimi Choudhury (Gauhati), Khirada Buzar Baruah (Nalbari) and Mitali Bora (Nowgong). Through these participations, Assamese women got the opportunity

of identifying themselves with the outside world. The delegates of these international seminars and conferences were chosen from members selected for the purpose by the district units of APMS. That way the APMS offered opportunity to the women delegates to broaden their horizons and perspectives. It enabled Assamese women to join hands in a common fight against oppression and exploitation in an international platform.

3.4.5 Samity’s role in the upliftment of children:

Besides taking up several developmental activities for women, APMS also aimed at ensuring physical, mental and moral excellence of children. In the initial stage no significant progress could be achieved in this regard. However, since 1948, the Samity engaged itself in this field with renewed zeal. The Samity and its district branches took steps to organize children’s meet during their annual general meetings. In these meetings discussions were held on the schemes to be adopted for ensuring development of the children. The Jorhat session of APMS which held in 1951, took a resolution for the establishment of a provincial children’s organization named Maina Parijat. No other organization for children was initiated by APMS but at the initiative of APMS, several district and primary Maina Parijat were formed in different parts of the state. Members of APMS took active part in the functioning of the district and primary Maina Parijat units and offered their valuable advice.

The APMS paid interest in the development of neglected children of the state. In 1952, the Samity took the responsibility of imparting education of the neglected children at the Ambari Harijan Colony under its Child Welfare Scheme. The initial work in this regard was taken up by the workers and staff of the Kasturba Seva Kendra, an organization personally formed by Mahatma Gandhi. The prominent workers of Kasturba Seva Kendra were Amalprova Das, Shakuntala Choudhury, Hem Kakati, Saroja Choudhury and others. Induprova Barua, Chandraprova Saikiani, Girija Barua and Bhubaneswari Devi of APMS offered active assistance in this regard. In 1945, Saroja Choudhury of Kasturba Seva Kendra volunteered to educate the Harijan children. She visited every household in the Harijan colony and ensured attendance of all children in the school. She also counselled the guardians to send their wards to schools regularly. The school which was started with a handful of students was later transformed into a full fledged school with financial aid from government. Late Sureswar Gohain, the then head of the department of Basic Education and staunch follower of Gandhi offered active suggestions and advice for the smooth running of the school. It was because of his untiring efforts that the teachers got their salaries regularly and the school managing committee received government grant in aid.

The APMS also received some assistance from the Harijan Development Department for its Child Welfare Scheme. Upon requests from APMS the then GMC Chairman, Golap Chandra Choudhury, allotted a plot of land for the school.

74. Ibid, p-38.
at Ulubari Harijan Colony and installed a tube well for drinking water for use by the students. The members of APMS collected contributions from different sources and used the same to beautify the school premises. The members of Kasturba Seva Kendra also offered active help in this regard. Besides the Harijan children, children from other communities are also receiving pre-primary and primary education in this school.

In 1954, APMS started the first English medium nursery school in Gauhati. At that time APMS received a one time grant of 15,000 from the government which they decided to spend on the development of education. On that consideration, the nursery school was established. Besides that, a training centre was also set up with a view to spreading the fruits of education among the poor and backward women of the Harijan Colony and to train them in weaving, sewing and making handicrafts. APMS entrusted the charge of the nursery school to social worker, Neera Dogra. At that time she was a member of the Social Welfare Board. It was due to her effort that the Samity received financial grants from the Board. A few more schools were set up by the Samity with that grant.

The Samity founded another school in its office premises. The school was started with a few students of Hedayatpur area of Gauhati. At that time, majority of the residents of Hedayatpur area were extremely backward and illiterate. Hence, APMS started the school with a view to spreading education among the children

of that locality. Besides, arrangements were made for imparting education to the children of the helpless widows and women deserted by their husbands in this school. The charge of running the school was entrusted with the Gauhati City Mahila Samity. Lalita Phukan and Debabala Baruah, the Joint Secretaries of the Samity worked splendidly for the development of the school. The admission fee for the students was fixed at Rs. 3 while the rest of the expenses were met with subscriptions and contributions from the people.82 Students belonging to lower income group were provided with study materials and midday meals. The school is running till today. The school which began at the pre-primary level has been elevated to the primary level.

In 1957, the APMS founded another school for young children at Ulubari.83 The school was started in an Anath Kendra (shelter house) which was run by the APMS at Ulubari. In this school the children of petty businessmen, rickshaw and thela pullers were given education. Chandraprova Saikiani, Induprova Baruah, Girija Das, Usha Das and other members of the Samity collected contributions from the people. With that money they arranged payment of salary to the teachers. Necessary articles required for the school were also provided by the APMS. In 1969, the school was rebuilt and extended with the financial aid received from the Gandhi Birth Centenary Committee. The school was named as Ba Bapu Buniadi Vidyalaya. After the Samity members ran the school for a long period of twenty two years the Department of Education of the Government of Assam took over its management.

83. Ibid, p-40.
From the years 1947-48, the district and primary branches of APMS have been offering valuable services to the society by setting up several schools in their respective localities. The APMS set up schools, child development centres, health centres and nutritious food centres at the remote and neglected areas and arranged education for the children. In the 50th session of the APMS which held in Tezpur in 1975, resolutions were adopted to take up works for the benefit of the under privileged children. It was felt that children who were mentally and physically retarded or were suffering from malnutrition or children who had lost their parents were actually hampering the progress of the society. In view of that, the APMS resolved to take up effective work schemes in this regard with counselling and financial aid from National Children Council, Central Social Welfare Board and Central Children’s Council. The branch committees were also instructed to take up necessary steps in this regard.

It is thus, becomes evident that since its very inception, this women’s organization, whose branches were spread all over the state, had put up an all round effort to ensure welfare of the women of the state. Besides taking effective steps in ensuring women’s education, removal of untouchability, child welfare, prevention of corruption and offering assistance to the people affected by natural disasters, the Samity has all along been endeavouring to ensure an all round development of the society as well. Moreover, by organizing art exhibitions, poet’s meets, seminars, literary discourses and cultural functions on the occasions of its conferences held at intervals, the Samity has played a crucial role in

broadening the horizons of the Assamese women. In the post independence period many social and voluntary organizations were formed. But most of these are urban based and a very few are working in rural India. But the APMS was not created for rendering services to a particular class of women. Its basic purpose was to serve all classes of women in both urban and rural areas, a task it has performed with great ebullience.