

Domestic Violence and Women's Responses: A Study in Assam

A thesis submitted to the Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the thesis entitled “**Domestic Violence and Women’s Responses: A Study in Assam**” is the result of investigation carried out by me in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati, under the supervision of Dr. Sawmya Ray, Associate Professor (Sociology), Department of Humanities and Social sciences, IIT Guwahati.

This work has not been submitted either in whole or in part to any other University/ Institution for any research degree.

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Certificate

This is to certify that Sangita Bharati has prepared the thesis entitled “**Domestic Violence and Women’s Responses: A Study in Assam**” for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati. The work has been carried out under my supervision and in strict conformity with rules laid down for the purpose. It is the result of her investigation and has not been submitted either in whole or in part to any University/ Institution for any research degree.

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February

Supervisor

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor Dr. Sawmya Ray, Associate Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Guwahati for her continuous guidance and support to carry out my work; for her patience to correct, review and evaluate my work throughout the journey. Without her understanding and suggestions, this work would not have been possible.

I am extremely thankful to my doctoral committee members. I am thankful to Professor Liza Das, for her support, motivation and insightful comments to complete my work. I am thankful to Dr. Sambit Mallick for his invaluable suggestion and support. I thank Dr. Rajshree Bedamatta for her suggestions and help in writing my methodology part.

I am thankful to the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Guwahati and IIT Guwahati Administration, for providing me the opportunity to carry out my research work. I express my gratitude to IIT Guwahati Central Library and Indira Gandhi Memorial Library, Hyderabad Central University for providing me enough resources for my research.

I express my sincere gratitude to Assam Mahila Samata Society members from Darrang, Goalpara, Morigaon, North Lakhimpur and Sonitpur; and to all my respondents for their selfless cooperation, help and support during my field work.

“In anything and everything, we are with you”—this means everything for me. Thank You Ma-Deuta, Mr. Bidya Ram Nath and Mrs. Anjana Saharia, for being always there for me. Without your support, sacrifice and prayers, this work would have never been materialised.

I shall always remain indebted to my brother Dr Uday Bhaskar Bharati for his unconditional support. Thank you is not enough for the support and encouragement I got from my brother Madan Ch Nath, Sister-in-law MinuPrabha Nath, aunt Golapi Devi, my nieces—Gutuba, Oli, Poli, who have been there with me throughout my journey.

I am thankful to my teacher Sri Damodar Saharia for his never-ending encouragement and blessings. I am thankful to my brother Dr Chandan Kr Gautam for his help.

I sincerely express my thankfulness to Rosy and Minakshi, for being significant part of my life in IITG and beyond. I would also like to thank Ruth, Pallabi, Dhruvajyoti, Rakesh, Tulsi, Pankaj for their support and friendship during the course of my PhD.

Last but surely not the least, I acknowledge the support and motivation of Dr. Aswini Kalita.

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Chapter I

Introduction

1.1. Introduction

This study attempts to understand the issue of domestic violence in Assam, India. It looks at the ways in which domestic violence manifests itself in Assam – its nature, prevalence, causes and growth. The impact of such violence on the lives of women is studied as well as the ways in which women approached and negotiated with different service providers dealing with domestic violence and how organisations respond. Data is collected through interview, observation and case study methods. Interviews of women who have experienced domestic violence, their family members, legal personnel (i.e., lawyers and the police who have dealt with the cases of domestic violence) and Non-governmental organisation (NGO) personnel including shelter home staff and the members of the nari adalat are conducted. The functioning of the nari adalat and shelter homes was also observed in order to collect data for the study. A thematic analysis of data brings forth a high prevalence of domestic violence against women in Assam. This study negates the long-denied myth claiming non-existence of domestic violence in Assam and shows that domestic violence has affected women in Assam in manifold ways. Bringing forth the magnitude and extent of domestic violence, this study sheds light on the inherent patriarchal nature of the family and society in Assam and the various ways in which gender violence is inflicted on women within the domestic sphere. In trying to understand women's responses to domestic violence against them and their attempt at help seeking from various agencies, this study brings forth the gap between the needs of women and the responses of service providers. Various lacuna in providing effective support to survivors of domestic violence and the reasons behind such lacuna is also brought forth.

1. 2. Violence against Women

Violence against women is a major social problem. It is universal, occurring in all cultures and countries. It refers to violent acts that are primarily committed against women, affecting them physically, psychologically, sexually and economically. Such violence includes physical, psychological and sexual attacks and threats of such acts are meant to exercise control over the victim (Dutta: 1999). It is the result of a hierarchical

relation between a male and a female, and the secondary status of women in a patriarchal society contributes to various violent acts against them. Women are murdered, assaulted, sexually abused, threatened and humiliated, both in public and private spheres, and this behaviour 'does not seem to be considered unusual or uncommon' (Roberts:1990:55). This indicates existing cultural and societal sanctions behind such acts, which normalises violence against women. The gender of the person forms the basis upon which such violence is perpetrated. Violence against women pushes them into a subordinate status, and it violates their human rights by 'denying them equality, security, dignity, self-worth, and their right to enjoy fundamental freedom' (Kapoor: 2000: 2). Further factors such as caste, class, religion, ethnicity, etc., overlap with the victim's gender, making them doubly vulnerable (Makkonen: 2002). Therefore, violence against women not only acts as a tool of patriarchy but also maintains caste, class, religious and other social hierarchies (Rao: 1997).

Violence against women takes many forms and is perpetrated both in private as well as public spheres. Among the various forms it takes, one of the most prevalent is the violence that occurs within the domestic sphere, or the so-called private sphere. The domestic sphere is considered a sphere of safety, care and protection. Despite its long presence as a tool of patriarchy, it was only from the 1970s onwards that domestic violence has been questioned and explained in an organised manner (Dobash and Dobash: 1979). Domestic violence was not recognised as a serious problem till the long international campaign by women's rights groups to raise consciousness about women's issues (Thomas and Beasley: 1993). In India, too, the silence around the issue of domestic violence broke 'due to the activities of NGOs, women's movements and the police' (Karlekar: 1998: 1741). Protests by feminist groups and campaigns for women's rights brought the issue of domestic violence out of the purview of a private matter, and this led to the necessity to pay attention to the violence of everyday life (Khullar: 2005; Kumar: 2003; Kishwar: 2008).

Domestic violence is one of the most prevalent and hidden forms of violence against women and girls. It is a pervasive problem, cutting across racial, cultural, class, religious and regional boundaries (Kapoor: 2000). Anyone can be a victim of domestic violence at any time of life. Domestic violence refers to 'the violence that takes place in the domestic sphere and among the members related through blood, intimacy or law' (Misra: 2007: 62). Domestic violence occurs between partners who, by all accounts, share or

shared an intimate relationship. The occurrence of domestic violence reveals that the family is not the safest place as it is thought to be; rather it is also a site of violence and exploitation (Uberoi: 1995) and ‘the place of greatest risk where the victim is locked in with the danger’ (Brown: 1987: 6). Feminists have established a clear relationship between patriarchal domination and violence against women, such violence being reinforced by various forms of institutional support (Dobash and Dobash: 1981).

Studies have proved that domestic violence is not unusual or an exception to normal private family life. Majority of crime against women occur in home by spouse or relatives ‘in the form of murder, battery, or rape; and, domestic violence is endemic to all societies’ (Thomas and Beasley: 1993: 45). Domestic violence is a type of violence where the perpetrator is either intimate or familiar with the victim and related through blood, intimacy and law, and it occurs within the four walls of the home (Coomaraswamy: 1994). It is perpetrated by persons who are ‘in a position of trust, intimacy and power’ (Kapoor: 2000: 3). Women face domestic violence at every stage of life.

Various studies have found that the overwhelming victims of domestic violence are often women compared with the percentage of men being violated, especially by women (Tjaden and Thoennes: 2000; Smith et. al.: 2011). Malavika Karlekar (1998) writes, ‘at every stage there is discrimination and violence, particularly against girl children and later women within the household, either natal or conjugal’ (1741). The existence of domestic violence at every stage of life proves that a woman’s entire life cycle is affected by different kinds of domestic violence.

1.3. Domestic Violence as a Human Rights Violation

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 (UDHR) defines rights as ‘belonging to all human beings’, irrespective of gender. However, women’s rights were not considered human rights until the 1970s (Merry: 2002). The problem of gender violence being considered a private problem was kept outside the purview of the legal mechanism. With the efforts of women’s movements, the issue of domestic violence was made public and finally led to its inclusion in international agendas in the 1970s. The UN Decade for Women (1975-85) comprised three world conferences for women: Mexico (1975), Copenhagen (1980) and Nairobi (1985) (Bazilli: 2000). In the Mexico conference the issue of gender discrimination was addressed, but a clear mention of

domestic violence was made for the first time in the Copenhagen conference of 1980 (Nairobi report). Thus, with constant campaigns, women's groups placed gender violence in the UN agenda around 1985(*ibid*). Unfortunately none of these conferences addressed violence against women in its many forms in detail (Coomaraswamy: 1994). With the growing concern over gender violence as a human rights violation, in 1992 the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) defined gender-based violence as a form of 'discrimination, placing it squarely within the rubric of human rights and fundamental freedoms and making clear that states are obliged to eliminate violence perpetrated by public authority and by private person' (Merry: 2002: 87). With this, domestic violence came to be internationally recognised as a human rights violation and became a legal issue. For the overall development of a society in general and women in particular, and for the realisation of women's rights as human rights, it is essential that domestic violence be addressed and understood in its entirety. It is in this context that research on domestic violence becomes one of the key tools to deal with domestic violence, thereby helping in the realisation of women's full potential as a human being (UNIFEM: 2007).

'Domestic violence is a health, legal, economic, educational, developmental and, above all, human rights issue' (Rajani et. al.: 2011: 22). Many women face domestic violence in one form or another– physical, psychological, sexual and financial – in their lifetime. These acts, which are committed solely on the sole basis of the gender of the victim, constitute a violation of the human rights of women (Dutta: 1999). Discrimination between men and women, and also the discriminatory systems, beliefs and institutions perpetuate and emphasise the inequality between men and women, leading to dominance and exploitation. Domestic violence contributes to a low status of women, and there is a causal link between the two. In every society, domestic violence occurs and hampers women's human rights. However, society is reluctant to recognise violence against women as a human rights issue and tends to suppress these issues by labelling them as a private matter, and this has been the core concern of feminist movements all over the world (Kelly: 2003).

In 1993, the World Conference on Human Rights, held in Vienna, explicitly recognised a range of gender-specific human rights violations, including violence against women, through the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, known as DEVAW or the Vienna Declaration. States were charged with the duty to protect and

promote women's rights as human rights (Bazilli: 2000). The Vienna Declaration defined violence against women as 'any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life'(Bazilli: 2000: 8). It showed concern about the failure of protection and promotion of women's rights in relation to violence against women. It also attempted to provide a clear definition of violence against women (Coomaraswamy: 1994). With these efforts, the violation of women's rights was internationally recognised as a human rights violation. Violence against women as the result of a historically unequal power relation was recognised as the main hindrance towards achieving the goal of universal human rights (ibid). Thus the 'private' problem came to be publicly considered a serious violation against women.

However, even after gaining international legal recognition and adoption of various measures to curb it, violence against women has not disappeared. International legal as well as health arrangements have not been effective enough to stop injustice against women for being women (Charlesworth: 1994; Garcia-Moreno: 2005; Kaur and Garg: 2008). As mentioned earlier, human rights belong to all, irrespective of gender. Domestic violence being a criminal act based on the victim's gender directly contradicts the very principle of human rights. Committing domestic violence thus directly becomes an issue of violation of human rights. Women's rights have always been a central concern for feminist discourse worldwide. Studying domestic violence is therefore important as a violation of women's human rights. Rights are granted to all, but their successful enjoyment is often influenced by the socio-political structure within which the rights are granted and enjoyed. Domestic violence violates women's rights, since it is based and rooted in the structure of the society. Therefore, studying domestic violence both from a human rights perspective and as a gender-based social problem carries sociological importance. Understanding the issue of domestic violence, which disproportionately affects half of the population because of gender, needs to include the socio-political structural context in which it occurs and grows. Assam is a land of diverse socio-economic groups, with different identities: ethnic, language, regional, and so on. Studying domestic violence considering these diversities in the context of Assam would be surely innovative and will contribute towards the knowledge stock about Assam and its women. This study has been attempted to understand domestic violence in the context

of structural inequalities of Assam's society which has led to the violation of women's human rights.

1.4. Effects of Domestic Violence

Domestic violence affects its victims in many ways. It has both short and long term effects. Domestic violence affects all aspects of women's lives—physical, psychological, economic and others. It takes many forms starting from sex-selective abortion, infanticide, unequal access to food, medicine and education, incest, child marriage, wife battering, sexual harassment, dowry, marital rape to torture during widowhood and others (Karlekar:1998). It bluntly strips women of their most basic human rights, the right to safety in their homes and community and, if carried to the extreme it may kill' (Pillai: 2001:965). Due to the adverse effects on women's live as well as on their family members and society, domestic violence is considered as a serious social concern (Reilly and Gravdal: 2012).

Domestic violence, in its physical form, includes various types of attacks causing both minor and major harms to the victims often forcing them to seek medical help. The victims experience bruises, cuts, broken bones, head injuries, internal bleeding, damages to eyes and ears, stress related problems, chronic pains etc (Klein: 2004; Campbell: 2002.) Sometimes the victim develops posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after years of the attacks (Karlekar: 1998). Thus it carries threats to one's life and violates 'the absolute right to freedom from fear and want, and equal rights of men and women' (Thomas & Beasley: 1993:37).

The violence during pregnancy poses great threat to the health of the mother as well as to the life of the unborn child (Bacchus et al: 2004; Campbell: 2002). Battering in pregnancy may result in preterm labour, miscarriage, still-birth, abortion etc (Bacchus et al: 2004; Kishor et al: 2006). If the mother loses the baby because of violence during pregnancy, it will very badly affect her psychological health. 'The experience or the threat of domestic violence tends to limit women's ability to control when and whether to have sexual relationship or negotiate condom use' (Kishor and Johnson: 2006:295). Abusive men are more likely to indulge in high-risk behaviour associated with sexually transmitted infections (STI). Sometimes disclosure of an STI to the partner may lead to domestic violence (ibid: 2006). Lack of control over sexual relationship may result in an

unwanted pregnancy which in the long run may result in physical violence or abuse of the women. This will have effect both on women and the child, before and after the birth. Physical violence during pregnancy can cause deformity, anaemia, and others. Sometimes it results in miscarriage, induced abortion or stillbirth too (Jejeebhoy: 1998). Thus physical violence against women has a direct impact on both the women and the health of the child.

One important effect of domestic violence is that children witnessing or experiencing violence develops the tendency to either become violent or tolerate violence (Brown: 1987). Witnessing violence in childhood leaves an impact on the mind of the child. Children witness use of violence as tool to maintain control and getting things done by abusive parents and develop the tendency to use violence in the same way in their later life. This correlation of witnessing violence and becoming violent in future is further strengthened by the gender socialisation process. Gender role attribution makes men confined to aggressive mode while women to accept aggression silently and indirectly justifies and normalises the violent behaviour of men against women (Wagner: 2010). Due to this social sanction to violent behaviour, the children who witness violence develops strong tendency to become violent batterer in later life, especially the male child, and the female child develops a tendency to suffer in silence. The Social learning theory is very relevant here to explain the fact of transformation of various patterns of violence across generations. Children will learn violence either by observing or experiencing. They will turn into aggressive or delinquent personality in later life or will consider violence as a means to do things like maintaining control over their partners and others (Brown: 1987; Jackson: 2007). Domestic violence thus reflects the correlation between childhood experience of violence and adult experience of violence (Straus: 1983).

Domestic violence during young age hampers the education of girls and paves ways for further violence. It prevents women from taking up employment outside the home eventually forcing them to be economically dependent and making them more vulnerable to violence. Direct interference in woman's workplace by an abuser may increase the chances of being fired from work, loss of pay at work etc. Domestic violence hampers women's ability to work since stress of domestic violence results in loss of concentration in work that further decreases women's working hours (Lindhorst al: 2007; Riger et al:

2004). Domestic violence restricts women from fulfilling necessary requirements in work leading to either loss of job or deduction in wage (Tolman and Rosen: 2001). Domestic violence thus becomes a barrier 'to obtain and maintain employment because abusers may actively interfere with their partner's attempts to work' (ibid: 142). Homelessness, unavailability of food, shelter, childcare and others cause economic stresses due to domestic violence (Riger et al: 2004), which results in economic hardship for the women and entrap them in an abusive relationship. Their dependence increases their vulnerability and restricts them from contributing towards the overall progress of society (Tolman and Rosen: 2001).

Women suffer mainly due to their secondary status in the society. Domestic violence and its negative effects reinforce existing gender inequality and push women back to a more vulnerable condition.

1.5. Status of Women in Assam

Given the fact that Assam has a deep-rooted *Shakti* cult with Goddess Kamakhya at its centre, many, including academicians and researchers from the region, argue that women naturally have a higher status in this region and are given due respect. However, such beliefs need to be critically looked at. The existing literature on women in Assam, which is scant, argues that the society in Assam gives respect to its women. As Baruah (2009) writes, till the thirteenth century, women were known to be free from male domination. *Purdah* and the Sati system were absent, and widow re-marriage was a common practice. However, during that period, marriage and childbearing were given much importance. Married women were expected to be chaste and devoted towards their husbands. However, no rule had been made that prescribed men's loyalty towards their wives (Chaudhuri: 1959; Baruah: 2009). A high value was attached to feminine qualities, showing the division between men and women in the social set-up. Among Brahmins, women's lives were more complicated and problematic due to the practice of child marriage. A caste hierarchy dominated women's lives. Girls were married at an early age to men, and the age gap between them was huge. Early marriage resulted in early widowhood. Since no system of widow re-marriage was practiced, young widows had to spend a long and miserable widowhood (Baruah: 2009).

With the coming of the Ahom in the twelfth century and later with the Vaishnavite movement, the status of women degraded further. During the Ahom rule, women lost economic strength and mobility since the settled agricultural system was started which continues to hamper women's lives. The Ahom were known for wet-rice-cultivation, for which they needed permanent lands for residence and cultivation. This system of agriculture led to a transition from a pastoral to a settled agricultural community. This societal transition resulted in the loss of mobility and freedom for women that they used to enjoy (Fernandes and Barborá: 2002). During the Ahom rule, land was owned by the royal family. The growing profitability of this mode of cultivation and the increase in royal patronage given to it led to the accumulation of wealth in the hands of the *khels*. Khels were constituted by the male members of a particular clan (Misra: 1985). Accumulation of wealth in the hands of the khels took away economic strength from women and overthrew female supremacy in the Assamese society. It gave rise to a joint or extended family system, made women the possession of men and lowered their status to objects of enjoyment (Sengupta: 1992). Khels could sell girls who were left without parents or male relatives (Misra: 1985). Gifting girls to strengthen political relation during that time was a popular phenomenon symbolising the low and deplorable status of women (Baruah and Roychoudhury: 1999).

Another shift in the deterioration of women's status came with the Vaishnavite movement towards the closing decades of the fifteenth century. Shankardeva established the Vaishnava faith as the supreme religious order of the valley (Baruah and Roychoudhury: 1999). While establishing his Vaishnava faith he attacked the worshipping of many gods, and his effort was also directed against the worshipping of Goddess Kamakhya, which was widely prevalent in Assam (Mahanta: 1992). Shankardeva's Vaishnavism was egalitarian in its principles. It drew disciples from all classes and castes of the society, including tribals, the Ahom, Muslims and both men and women. However, in the case of women, Sankardeva had an intolerant and negative attitude. He allotted low and degrading positions to women. In Vaishnavism, women were considered the most immoral, sinful of all humans and addicted to constant sexual pleasure. According to Vaishnavism, women can destroy the devotion of men towards God, and for that Shankardeva strongly advised his followers to avoid the company of women (Misra: 1985; Sengupta: 1992). Shankardeva was not free from the influence of the caste system, which had accorded women status equal to a *sudra*, and he equalised

women with sudras or any people from a so-called low origin and even with birds or animals sometimes (Nath: 1992). Sankardeva gave women no place in the Vaishnavite religious, cultural set-up. Women were excluded from all aspects of religious and cultural life and were denied all and every religious duty or to hold any position (Misra: 1985). The Vaishnavite tradition kept women outside its *monikut*, the prayer place, considering women to be impure, sinful and addicted to sexual activities (Baruah and Roychoudhury: 1999). These negative and discriminatory attitudes towards women make the patriarchal base of Vaishnavism clearly visible. Women are still not allowed to enter many satras in Assam (Phadke, 2008). Concepts of ‘purity’ and ‘pollution’ still affect women’s lives in Assam as it did earlier. In the name of religion, women are not allowed to enter temples and satras during childbirth and menstruation. This reflects the patriarchal domination and control over women’s lives.

Towards the end of the seventeenth century, Rudra Singha introduced Bengali Brahminism. With it, strict hierarchical caste rigidity and practices like child marriage also came along. The phenomenon of *kulinism* got its space in Assamese culture with the introduction of Bengali Brahminism (Misra: 1985). Under Bengali influence, the status of women degraded even further. Women’s chastity and duty towards their husbands were highly desired at that time. This indicates the prevalent gender stereotype during the Vaishnavite period. Sati and purdah system were not prevalent. Dowry was also not practiced, but girls could claim gifts and presents. No right over the father’s property was given to girls (Baruah: 2009). However, during the Ahom rule women in the royal family enjoyed a higher status (Sengupta: 1992). During the Ahom reign, writing history in Assamese started for the first time and vernacular education developed in Assam. No particular attempt was taken, however, to impart education to women.

The closing century of the Ahom rule was tense with an internal civil crisis leading to the Burmese invasion and, finally, resulted in the inclusion of Assam in the British Empire in the first half of the nineteenth century. By the end of the Ahom regime women’s status started to degrade more and more. Incidents of selling wives and children started to occur during Burmese rule (Bose: 1989). Women’s education was far behind and considered harmful for society (Barpujari: 2004). As depicted in Lakshminath Bezbarua’s story *Kashibasi*, women who were abducted by Burmese soldiers were not accepted by their families. They were considered ‘polluted’ and had to leave their homes. Inclusion of

Assam in the British Empire brought about socio-political changes in the society as well as in women's lives. The most important positive impact of British rule was the attempt to spread female education in Assam. The evangelical mission of spreading Christianity by missionaries led to the establishment of education for boys and girls, and through them female education got a start (Lahakar: 1987). Education for women was considered a threat to the status and privileged position that men were occupying. Expertise and skills in feminine domestic works like weaving, cooking and husking paddy were considered greater qualities for girls than reading and writing. This attitude led the society to think of female education as unnecessary. Questions were put forward in newspapers in the 1980s as to why women need education or what they will do with education since their work, i.e., domestic work, does not require any educational qualification. Overall, a negative attitude was taken towards female education. It was considered more dangerous than the Burmese invasion, and education was supposed to be destroying the purity of women (Misra: 1985; Lahakar: 1987; Chakravarty: 1989; Phukon: 2009). Opposing the idea of women's higher education Baliram Bora, a writer, argued in *Mau* (1886), who would be ready to accept a woman as his wife if she sits with a male patient and checks his pulse and the lower portion of his body? Education was considered less important than the modesty of women in the male-dominated society of Assam at that time (Barpujari: 2004). Thus, the society's treatment of women till the last part of the nineteenth century was discriminatory, and the women's condition in Assam was pathetic. The orthodoxies of upper classes and castes were the main hindrance in girls receiving education. However, a few enlightened families valued and supported female education. Women from such enlightened families and also from lower classes availed educational facilities at that time. Anandaram Dhekial Phukan was one of the first Assamese individuals who not only supported women's education and widow re-marriage but also himself married a widow (Acharyya: 1990). Female education was considered harmful for the society (Borpujari: 2004). Behind the negligence of female education was the insecurity of men that educated women would take away their space and advantageous position in the society (Misra: 1985; Phukan: 2009; Lahakar: 1987). The lack of education further widened the gap between men and women in the society. Gendered role expectation and work division were also witnessed during the freedom movement, where women were allowed nurturing and feminine tasks, while men were allowed to join fights (Das: 2011). This reflects the way Assamese society viewed women and men and expected them to perform their roles. By the time independence

was achieved, many socio-political and economic changes took place in Assam. All these have greatly influenced the society and women's status, lifestyles and other aspects. As argued by Deka (2013), till the pre-independence period, women were not considered an important component of the patriarchal society, and writings on them were scant and almost negligible. Therefore, whatever is known so far about women is known from studies of various social phenomena like marriage, sati, the devadasi system, the economic system and folklore. Women started to be included in written works of colonial times in the context of social reforms (Misra: 2011). The colonial literature by women and on women from Assam revolved around mainly two issues, participation in the freedom movement and female education. These two were the issues that gave Assamese women some kind of visibility, too; otherwise, as written by Kanaklata Chaliha, 'women of Assam are very backward, very indifferent about their backward status compared to the women of other countries and that was due to absence of education' (Mahanta: 2008: 5). Women participated in the national movement, but it could not shape the feminist consciousness, and the goal of women's emancipation was side-lined as the national goal was given importance (Bora: 2013). The women's collective started with the formation of various *samities* in the early twentieth century. In pre-independence decades, these samities worked for female education, child marriage, purdah and widow remarriage. They got the name of *biya-bhanga samiti* (that which disrupt marriage), too, for their frequent interventions in marriage. It was only in 1975 that the declaration of the International Women's Year gave a boost to women's organisations such as All Assam Lekhika Santha and the All Assam Lekhika Samaroh to work for the self-realisation of women who were discriminated against in all areas of life (Mahanta: 1998). However, the emphasis on dowry, custodial rape etc as emphasised by metropolitan feminist movements, did not seem relevant in Assam due to its social structure. It was in 1980 that violence against women was discussed in a seminar organised by the All Assam Lekhika Samaroh in Nalbari and the cases of Mathura and Rameeza Bee were cited there. Thus the protest against social injustice was generated in Assam (Mahanta: 1998). Later during the Assam movement, the Bodoland demand movement, and lately during the militant ULFA (United Liberation Front, Assam) activities, the rape of tribal women and mainly rural women by army personnel gave an impetus to women's movements against violence against women (Mahanta: 1998). Yet, after many years, Assam is still lacking a strong women's movement with a distinct

identity. Incidents of violence would give the actual picture of women's status and also reflect the urgent need for a strong feminist movement for women's emancipation.

Like mainland India, the north-east region is also not free from gender bias. Gender-based inequalities are inherently deeply interwoven here and are often influenced by socio-political evolution. A variety of changes came in the post-independence period, yet past social systems as well as some age-old attitudes and mores are still hampering the lives of women (Barooah: 2003). Women's lives are not completely free from the impact of the old social order prevalent throughout the history of this land, as described before. Like in all other societies, in the Assamese society as well, the status of women is directly linked with the social, religious and cultural traditions, stages of economic development, level of education and political participation among other factors (NEN: 2005).

The Assamese society is patrilineal, and gives priority to the male line in regard to descent, inheritance and residence rule (Barooah: 2012). These norms show the discriminatory patriarchal practice towards women. The same system is prevalent at the present time, though of late, inheritance right is being given to daughters. But due to the influence of social teachings, women do not claim their share of inheritance (Barooah: 2012; Phadke: 2008). Eventually this property-less status contributes towards women's powerlessness and subsequent suppression. One important outcome is the increased dowry-related torture and bride-burnings. Studies by Buzarbaruah (2002), Borkataky (1992) and other researchers have also showed victimisation of women by men. Being part of a patriarchal society, women have to perform household tasks and working women have to carry the double burden of wage labour and housework. Girls do not get a warm welcome as boys do. During childhood girls get secondary treatment, and after marriage their situation worsens. In the economic sphere, whether in agricultural or in public sector, women are always discriminated. Salaried women enjoy a little higher status in family decision-making in rural areas (Phadke: 2008). Yet patriarchal norms allow men to take away women's salaries and push them down in the power hierarchy. The caste hierarchy influences the women's choice of work many times. Moreover, sexual violence in the workplace is a frequent incident hampering women in continuing their jobs.

Political participation is not healthy. Despite participating in the national movement, women are few in number in electoral politics. The women's role again went beyond the 'four walls of the home'. Even after constitutional guarantee, legal provisions through the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution, women are still far behind. Women's position is weak in regard to the decision-making process. Political participation of women in Assam is marginalised due to economic disempowerment, patriarchy and criminalised politics at all levels (NEN: 2005).

Assamese women's status is not free of this gender-based discrimination and inequality in regard to health. Health-related complexities and problems of women not only affect women but also their families and children. An imbalanced sexratio, i.e. 1000:954 (Census report of India: 2011), shows the status of women. A better status than the national level is seen in terms of marriage age. Forty percent of girls get married before 18years, whereas the all-India figure is 42.9 percent in 2007-08 (DLHS3). The maternal mortality rate is disappointing, and it was the highest in the country during 2007-08.

The most concern is the increasing rate of crimes against women. Crimes against women are manifestations of the historically unequal power relation between men and women. This unequal power hierarchy results in domination and control over women, and consequently gives rise to various crimes against women. From the 2011 census data, a total of 11,503 incidents of crimes against women have been recorded, which constitutes 5percent of the all-India total. Now-a-days domestic violence has become a critical area of concern in Assam. In Assam one out of every seven women faces one or other form of domestic violence (Sharma and Das: 2005). Data collected by the North East Network, however, suggests that violence against women, particularly domestic violence, is on the rise in the region (Chinnu: 2005:50). In Assam, 34percent of women aged 15-49 years have experienced physical violence, and 12percent have experienced sexual violence. In all, 37% of women have experienced physical or sexual violence including 42percent of ever-married women (NFHS3).The data available with the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) shows that Assam ranks second in the country in the category of crimes against women. Most of the cases are related to kidnapping, rape and domestic violence under Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). The number of rape cases increased from 1631 in 2009 to 1721 in 2010. Molestation cases increased from 1389 to 1611 in the same period. In addition, 5745 cases of cruelty by

husband and relatives were registered in Assam in 2011, and 2998 cases of kidnapping and 2011 cases of rape were registered in the same period (Crime in India: 2011). The ongoing armed conflict situation prevalent in the north-east of India has intensified the violence faced by women, which takes the form of sexual, mental or physical abuse, killings and clashes. The high rate of crimes against women depicts the poor social status of women and reveals that Assam has become a vulnerable place for women.

The above indicators reveal the real status of women in Assam. Each of the above indicators shows the low and weak status of women. Most importantly, the rising crime rate against women reflects the insecurity and violence that women are facing in Assam. Along with the existing crime rate, the occurrence of new forms of crimes, i.e., domestic violence and dowry deaths, are being seen in the crime records. This further indicates the continuously degrading status of women.

1.6. Statistics on Domestic Violence

- **Worldwide**

The World Health Organization (WHO), in a recent study carried out in 79 countries and 2 territories, has confirmed that up to 68percent of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime, and 30percent ever-partnered women have been found to face physical and/or sexual violence. However, the prevalence rate differs from country to country, and it is the highest among all in Asian countries (WHO: 2013).

- **In India**

Domestic violence as a worldwide phenomenon is also endemic to India. Domestic violence is included in the list of crimes against women and considered an indicator of the status of women. A 2014 World Bank study reveals that almost one-third of women in India experience physical spousal violence (Solotaroff and Pande: 2014). A recent G20 survey ranked India as the worst place to be a woman because of the presence of domestic violence in spite of the enactment of the Protection of Women against Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA) 2005 (Baldwin: 2012). According to UN Population Fund Report, 70percent of married women in India between the age group of 15-49 years are

victims of beating, rape or coerced sex. Even pregnant women are not spared from domestic violence. In India 22-48percent women face physical violence during pregnancy (Babu and Kar: 2012). The NCRB reported 3,09,546 cases of violence against women in 2013, of which 1,18,866 cases are related to domestic violence, followed by cases of molestation, kidnapping and rape, showing an increase of 11.6% in reported cases of cruelty by husbands and relatives over 2012 (NCRB: 2013; Oxfam: 2015). Indian women face sexual violence and according to the NCRB (2014), 86percent of rapes involve an attacker previously known to the victims. The Indian legal system does not recognise marital rape and continues to keep it outside the purview of rape law on the grounds that it has the potential to destroy the tradition of marriage and family system (Choudhary: 2015).

- **In Assam**

Assam stood third among the states in India with 36.6percent of all violent crimes against women. This rate is even higher than the national average of 21.2percent (NCRB: 2011). This kind of data negates the wide subscription about the high position of women in Assam and shows the seriousness of the issue. Available statistical accounts reveal the existence of domestic violence, the existing gender gap in various aspects of women's lives, and other such information, which shows the secondary status of the women in the Assamese society. However, the information is not uniform as the sources differ.

According to the Census of India (2011), Assam has a sex ratio of 1000:958. An imbalanced sex ratio always indicates the weaker position of females, poor health and non-desirability towards them (Census of India: 2011). The same census also shows quite a low female literacy rate (66.27%) in comparison to the male literacy rate (77.85%) in Assam which indicates the deprivation of girls from having proper education and their future economic dependence or joblessness when they grow up. The school dropout rate (6-11 years) of 59.94percent for boys is far lower than 62.55percent for girls, showing the uneven discrimination that girls face (Economic Survey, Assam: 2009-10). This discrimination in the educational sphere has further resulted in differences in the employment sector. According to the Census of India (2011), Assam has a total of 1,19,69,690 workers, of which 71percent are male and 29percent are female. This gap shows the weak financial status of women in Assam.

According to the Sample Registration Survey (2013), the infant mortality rate (IMR) in Assam is 54percent, whereas the national average is 40percent. The maternal mortality rate (MMR) is 328 against a national average of 178. These IMR and MMR values show a clear picture of the poor status of health care facilities available for women in Assam.

As per records from Statistical Handbook (2014), the numbers of various crimes committed against women during 2012 is as follows: rape, 1716; dowry deaths,14; cruelty by husbands,6407; molestation, 1840; and witch-hunting, 14. The NCRB (2013) showed a clear rise for each crime in the following year, 2013: rape, 1937; dowry deaths,170;cases of cruelty by husbands and in-laws,8336;and molestation, 2409 (NRCB: 2012: 2013). It may be also due to a rise in reporting. Information from the State Home Department revealed that 12,857 women were raped between 2005 and May 2013 and 59 of them were killed after the rape (NDTV News, 1 Aug. 2013). A year-wise breakup of the crimes against women registered with the police was presented in the parliament, which goes as follows: 3562(2005), 3907 (2006), 4547 (2007), 5021 (2008), 6209 (2009), 7326 (2010), 7075 (2011), 8268 (2012), 10,757 (2013) and 11,657 (2014) (New Indian Express: 24March 2015: 4). Apart from a slight dip in the year 2011, the numbers show an upward tendency, indicating a life-threatening situation for women.

1. 7. Selection and Importance of the Topic

Domestic violence is a complex and serious social problem often defined by terms such as ‘marital conflict’, ‘wife abuse’, ‘partner violence’ and many more are used to define it. Domestic violence refers to abusive acts of physical, sexual, psychological, emotional and economic nature that occur within the domestic sphere and by a known and related person (Coomaraswami: 1994). It affects almost every society of the world, and women constitute the overwhelming majority of its victims. Available statistical information and other data about domestic violence make domestic violence quite acknowledged and recognised in Assam today, whereas it was hidden earlier. As an important form of domestic violence, dowry is showing its adverse effects on the lives of women in Assam. Dowry is claimed to have come to Assam with the migration of different communities from other parts of India to Assam (Deka: 2013). For various other reasons, too, this evil of dowry is growing in Assam, making women vulnerable. A strong traditional value is attached to family sanctity and privacy, which discourages research on violence occurring in the family. As a result, research on domestic violence is considered

unimportant and is not encouraged. However, frequent occurrence of gender-based crimes, inequality and limitation on education for girls; socio-economic discrimination and marginalisation, and, most importantly, paucity of the literature in the context of Assam make this study important. Considering the fast growth in the rate of crimes against women in Assam, along with the emergence of new forms of violence, it becomes necessary to study the issue. Moreover, the issue of domestic violence has been studied widely in the context of the world and India, but few studies have been taken up in the context of Assam. It is in this context that this study is an attempt to understand domestic violence in Assam.

This work attempts to look at the prevalence, nature, forms and causes of domestic violence in Assam. The socio-cultural factors that sustain and perpetuate domestic violence as a tool of women's subordination are attempted to be understood. It also looks at the strategies employed by women to deal with violence against them, the various support systems they approach, the response of those institutions to women's need for support in combating domestic violence and the overall constructions of domestic violence in Assam.

1.8. Research Objectives and Research Questions

Objectives

1. To understand the prevalence and patterns of domestic violence in Assam.
2. To understand the relationship between various gender social norms and domestic violence in Assam.
3. To document the strategies women employ to deal with domestic violence and the various agencies they approach.

Research questions:

1. What is the nature and extent of domestic violence in Assam?
2. What are the socio-cultural and political-economic conditions that sustain and perpetuate domestic violence?
3. What strategies do women employ to fight domestic violence and what are the barriers they face?

4. What are the various institutions that provide women support to fight domestic violence and in what ways?
5. How sensitive are these support systems to women's various needs and rights?

1. 9. Methodology

This study uses feminist methodology to understand domestic violence in Assam. Feminist research is based on the theoretical premise that 'women are oppressed' and intends to understand this oppression with an aim to end it (Kelly: 1990: 117). Feminist methodology believes in the need to do research from the women's standpoint (Harding: 1987). It emphasises on keeping the experiences of the most marginalised at the centre of the research, taking into account the intersectionality approach, which helps to describe the many-layered exploitation women face at intersections of their different identities (Lovell: 2015). Thus in my research the experiences of female survivors of domestic violence are placed at the centre of understanding domestic violence. Further, this research acknowledges that despite their common gender identity, women do not always experience domestic violence in exactly similar manners. Rather, their other identities, such as caste, class, ethnicity, etc., intersect with their gender identity, sometimes leading to differential experiences of domestic violence.

Feminist methodology also argues that research can claim to be relatively objective only when the subjectivities of the researchers are openly pronounced (Reinharz: 1992). It also needs to be mentioned that, on the basis of already existing research as well as my own experiences of patriarchy and gender violence, I conducted this study with the belief that given the patriarchal nature of any society, including that of Assam, it is women who are largely subordinate to men, both within the family structure and that of the society. Therefore, it is women who are largely victims of domestic violence as compared to men, keeping other identities constant. With this understanding in mind, an attempt is made to study the problem of domestic violence in Assam.

Further, feminist methodology supports the practices that will minimise the harm caused to women and encourage research that will value women, social change and action beneficial for women (DeVault: 1996). This study intends to contribute to the existing literature on domestic violence, bringing an in-depth understanding on domestic violence in Assam. It intends to disprove the myth that in Assam, domestic violence is either non-

existent or is present only in mild forms. The knowledge produced through this research may in the long run help state and non-state institutions and organisations to formulate policies and strategies to prevent and combat domestic violence and to create effective support strategies to the victims of domestic violence.

Qualitative research is about exploring, examining and describing people and their natural environment. In such research, while doing generalizations for the good of others, there arises the issue of privacy of the participants. So, protecting human subjects or participants is very important (Orb et al.: 2000). In research, ethics is related to doing good and avoiding harm. With the application of appropriate techniques and principles, harm can be reduced. There may arise dilemma regarding revealing the identity of the researcher or the purpose of research; or whether to continue collecting information if the participant gets distress during interviews. In addition, the issue of confidentiality and informed consent are important part of ethics in research (Richards and Schwartz: 2002; Sanjari et al.: 2014). Considering the challenges involved in research, the research design should be proper to avoid harm to both the participant and the researcher. Most importantly, the researcher must consider the principle of no harm to participants (Orb et al.: 2000). Research on abuse, being qualitative in nature, does have the potential to harm the victims or traumatize them (Sullivan and Cain: 2004). Therefore, considering the ethical issues involved, my study too tried to follow the principle of no-harm to participants. Similar to the study by Sullivan and Cain (2004), the confidentiality issue, conducting information in private and safe settings, the assurance to provide help if asked by participant, informed consent and willing participation, no force to participate, compensation for participation (gift or cash to them who have low income), contact participants without knowledge of the abuser were strictly followed during my data collection to ensure no harm to my respondents.

1.9.1. Overview of the field

The field sites for this study are five districts of Assam. Assam is situated in the north-east region of India, bordering seven states, viz., Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and West Bengal, and two countries, viz., Bangladesh and Bhutan. With a geographical area of 78,438 Sq km. (about 2.4percent of the country's total geographical area), Assam houses 2.57percent of the population of the country. For administrative and revenue purposes, the state has 27 districts with a

population of 3,11,69,272, of which 1,59,54,927 are males and 1,52,14,345 females (Census of India: 2011).

Assam's population consists of various ethnic groups, language groups and religious communities. Assam also houses various indigenous communities, living in both hill tracts and plains, like the Bodo, Mishing, Tiwa, Karbi, Matak, and so on. We can recognise different parameters of identity formation of Assam's population, i.e., tribe, caste, language, territory and religion. These often work in combination with one another. The emergence of tribal social formations, often with a demand for specified territories as politico-administrative units, is a character commonly found in Assam over the last few decades. The existence of different socio-politico-cultural groups makes the population of Assam a mixed one, with individual group identities (Das: 2010; Bose: 2003).

To represent women from all of these different sections, such as tribes, languages, territories and religious backgrounds, I took up five districts of Assam for data collection. I chose Goalpara, Morigaon, Darrang, Sonitpur and Kamrup (Metropolitan) to conduct my field work. Goalpara and Morigaon districts represent the tribal population of lower Assam. Darrang and Sonitpur are populated by caste Assamese groups, thus representing non-tribal Hindu women from the central part of Assam. The Kamrup district represents women from urban Assam. These districts are chosen to represent different women from different geographical divisions of Assam; however, there is still overlapping of data among these districts. I chose these districts to represent three geographical divisions of Assam. These districts include populations belonging to various socio-economic strata and communities and thus are inclusive of most communities present in Assam. I approached NGOs from various districts, and depending on their response, I finally narrowed down to these five districts. Given the time frame of the study, I chose these five districts so that an in-depth qualitative study could be taken up in these field sites.

1.9.2. Sources of data

Data was collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include interviews of victims of domestic violence, NGO workers, lawyers and the police dealing with the cases of domestic violence, academicians and researchers working on

gender issues in Assam, court records and first information reports (FIRs). Observations at shelter homes, old-age homes and women's organisations during 2013-15 in different phases were also taken up.

I undertook content analyses of 140 cases of domestic violence. Out of these, thirty five (35) court records I have collected from court journals, and the rest of the cases stories I have collected from lawyers, petitioners and their relatives, service provider NGOs and police stations. The cases collected were filed between 1992 and 2015, under Sections 498A IPC, 304B IPC, 125 IPC and PWDVA 2005. These sections are related to matters of violence against women, specifically in the domestic sphere. Additionally, these are the sections used by women frequently to seek justice from the legal system. Maximum of cases I could collect are related to cases of wife-beating and witchcraft accusation. Additionally, the cases collected from NGOs working as service providers and lawyers also happened to be mostly about wife-battering. I got a considerable number of cases on witchcraft accusation as I had conducted my field work with the Goalpara branch of the Assam Mahila Samata Society (AMSS), which has done extensive work among tribal people to stop witch hunting. Apart from these two types, the data includes cases of child marriage, early marriage and widow and elderly torture, but the numbers of these types are far less than wife-battering cases.

Secondary sources include books, journals, newspaper articles, the Internet, NGO documents, governmental records and other statistical reports.

1.9.3. Methods of data collection

Interviews of forty six (46) women, who have faced domestic violence, were taken up to gather information about their experiences of domestic violence – the nature and forms of violence, causes of domestic violence and other aspects related to it. I also gathered information from them about their help-seeking experiences from various agencies. Interviews of survivors thus provided me with information regarding the nature of the problem, various forms that domestic violence takes, the women's help-seeking approach towards the various formal and informal agencies and responses from those institutions. The interviews also gave me information about prevailing socio-political and economic conditions that perpetuate domestic violence. Interviews of lawyers and the police provided information about women's needs and expectations from the state legal

system in domestic violence situations and how these institutions respond to women seeking legal help. NGO workers gave me information about how informal agencies respond to domestic violence. Their interviews provided me with the information about existing non-formal institutions that support domestic violence victims, spread awareness and provide out-of-court solutions to domestic violence issues. Both legal and NGO personnel also provided information regarding the nature, forms, causes and other aspects of domestic violence in Assam and the larger gendered norms that support such violence.

1.9.4. Sampling

The purposive snowball sampling method was used to locate respondents for this study.

- **Survivor women**

I interviewed 46 women who have survived domestic violence. Open-ended interview guides were used for the interview process. I proceeded with the flow of the conversation and interrupted less to make them comfortable with revealing their experiences of domestic violence, their concept and understanding of the problem and the role and performance of help providers. The informal nature of the interviews helped me a lot to build up a connection with my respondents. A few of them were conscious during the conversations initially, but most of them were involved spontaneously and fully in the interactions.

For interviewing women I took help from lawyers, NGOs and my personal contacts. Through the organisations I developed a rapport with women who were related to and were taking help from the organisations. I approached them through the organisations they trust, and that made my access to them easier. They did not feel any hesitation in sharing information with me. I also took the help of lawyers to get access to their clients and take their interviews.

- **Women's organisations and other non-governmental organisations**

For selecting service provider NGOs I took the help of the Internet and obtain a list containing twenty one (21) service provider NGOs formally appointed by the government of Assam. I contacted many NGOs from the list. Some of them were not working as service providers, while others had closed down. Out of all the listed NGOs, I

could get only two (02) service provider NGOs, namely the Kawal Nirmal Kalsi Salutory Trust (KNKST) and the Human Rights Law Network (HRLN), working as domestic violence service providers providing legal assistance to victims. I contacted them and got their permission to conduct my field work with them. Apart from NGOs on the list, I contacted many other NGOs that listed women's issues as their activity area, through email, phone calls and personal visits. However, they were not directly concentrating on domestic violence but rather focused on skill development, self-help and self-employment, education for the poor and needy, awareness and the like. While looking for NGOs working for domestic violence victims, I came across another government programme, the AMSS. The AMSS is working actively on women's issues, including domestic violence. I asked for permission to work with them and to conduct my field work. The AMSS has branches in 12 different districts of Assam, which was another reason to choose the AMSS to work with. From another NGO named BROTHERS, I got some statistical information on witch-hunting in Assam and also held an interview with one of its personnel. A total of eighteen (18) NGO personnel were interviewed. I also collected a few case studies and interviews from Seneh, an old-age home.

- **Lawyers**

I interviewed eleven (11) lawyers. All of the lawyers were selected for interviews for the reason as they deal with cases of domestic violence. All of them except one are from Assam and practicing in Assam. Out of them six (6) were male and five (5) were female lawyers. All of them were married, except one (1) female lawyer, and another female lawyer was divorced. One (1) of them was a domestic violence survivor herself, who had divorced her husband recently. Nine (9) of them were from the Hindu community, one (1) from the Muslim community and one (1) from the Sikh community. The ages of the lawyers ranged from 35 to 55 years for men and 31 to 58 years for women.

- **Interviews of the police**

Through my personal contacts, I interviewed eight (8) police personnel. Six (6) were male and two (2) female. Seven (7) belonged to the Hindu community, and one (1) male police personnel was from the Bodo community. One female and one male police personnel were unmarried and aged between 28 and 30 years. Others were above 35 years in age.

- **Court records and case studies**

For collecting case studies on domestic violence, I used NGO reports, FIRs from police stations, records of government-sponsored women's organisations and also petition copies that I collected from lawyers. I got detailed descriptions of the cases from these records. I also collected cases from court journals. I approached Guwahati High Court's Law Research Centre to access its subscribed legal journals to collect adjudicated cases on domestic violence. I also used the personal library of one of the respondent lawyers to collect cases.

1.9.5. My approach to the sources

To conduct my field work, I first approached NGOs and took appointments to visit them. On my first visit, I explained to them the research topic and the purpose of my visit. I also assured them that the privacy of each respondent would be absolutely maintained, they would not be pressured by me to reveal any information, and the information collected from them would be used only for the purposes of this research and not anywhere else. On these grounds, the NGOs gave me permission to carry out data collection. During my visit to the NGOs and women's organisations, I took interviews of their workers with their permission. The workers of women's organisations preferred informal discussions instead of structured interviews. So, I gathered information through conversations with them while they worked. While conducting interviews of victims of witch-hunting in Goalpara, I was accompanied by an AMSS staff. The AMSS did not want to send me to the village alone to interview women about a sensitive matter such as witch-hunting. Witch-hunting is related to people's beliefs and religious orientation. An intervention of any kind into those matters is not welcomed by the villagers. It was for this reason—being an outsider and a stranger to the local people—that the AMSS did not want me to approach this area alone.

I got permission to conduct interviews of lawyers working with the two (2) service provider NGOs. From these two NGOs I collected contacts of lawyers as well as of their clients. I checked the Internet for lawyers from Assam and randomly contacted one of them. I called her up and asked for an appointment. On the fixed date, I met her and took her interview. She provided me with contacts of a few other lawyers. I contacted those lawyers over the phone and introduced myself, explaining the purpose of my study. Two (2) of them agreed, while the others denied, citing time constraints as the reason. Some

female respondents provided me with contacts of their lawyers, whom I contacted and asked for appointments. I got a positive response from a few. During this process many lawyers agreed to give me some time to conduct my work, but later they gave some excuse, denying my request. However, the lawyers whom I finally interviewed were helpful and provided elaborate data related to domestic violence in Assam. They showed me case notes, described their stories and gave their clients' contacts, whom I later interviewed. For interviews of academicians, I took appointments through email and visited them on the dates given to me. To interview police personnel, I mainly used my personal contacts.

1.9.6. Data sources and profile of respondents

Sources of case studies and personal information of my respondents have been offered in following Tables based on age, sex, religion, education, occupation, marital status of respondents.

Table 1.1. Sources of Case studies

Sources of Case Stories	20 Court journals
	13 NGO records
	18 Police Station
	68 court petition from lawyers
	21 through personal contacts

Table 1.2. Profile of respondents

1. Survivor women respondents (46)	
Religious profile: Hindu—31 Muslim—4 Others (Christian, Tribal religious group)—	Marital Status: Married—24 Unmarried—6 Divorced—3

11.	Widowed—12 Deserted/Living Separately—6
Occupational status: Employed—8 Unemployed—3	Educational status: Illiterate and educational status is not known—15 High school upto 10 th —21 College and above—10
Age in years: 0 to 20—2 Within 20-40—23 Within 40-50—11 Above 50—10	District wise division of respondents: Kamrup—14 Goalpara—11 Sonitpur—5 Darrand—13 Morigaon—3
2. Lawyers (11) 6 Males and 5 Females. 9 lawyers from Hindu Community, 1 from the Muslim community and 1 from Sikh community. Male lawyers belonged to the age group of 34-55 years and female belongs to 31-58 years.	
3. Police (8) 6 males and 2 females. 7 from the Hindu and 1 from the Bodo community. 2 belonged to the age group of 28-30 years and 6 belonged to 35-48 years.	
4. NGO workers (18) 3 Male and 15 Female workers from AMSS, Seneh and BROTHERS. All the respondents were above 30 years of age.	
5. Academician and Researcher (6) 3 female academicians teaching on gender. Academicians belonged to age group of 58-64 years and all belonged to the Hindu community. 1 female academician-cum-social worker aged 42 from the Hindu community also running an NGO for women. 1 male research scholar on women's studies aged 29 was from the Hindu community, and 1 female research scholar working on tribal women aged 28 was from the Tiwa Community.	

1. 9.7. Chapterisation

Chapter II, titled ‘Domestic Violence against Women’, consists of a detailed review of the existing literature on domestic violence. It includes various definitions of domestic violence, discusses the development of an understanding of domestic violence as a public issue, both in Indian and international contexts, and elaborates on the different theoretical approaches to understanding domestic violence.

Chapter III, titled ‘Nature and Forms of Domestic Violence in Assam’, deals with the analysis of data collected for the study. This chapter tries to throw light on the nature and various forms that domestic violence takes in Assam. It also shows how various forms affect women’s lives and what their consequences are. In this chapter, causal factors for the emergence and perpetration of various forms, normalisations and trivialisations of domestic violence and the acceptance of domestic violence are discussed in the context of gender socialisation and patriarchal ideology.

Chapter IV, titled ‘Domestic Violence Survivors’ Help-Seeking and Institutional Responses’, is based on data collected from the field. It contains victims’ responses to domestic violence in their lives and their experiences of help-seeking. Different responses to domestic violence and the factors forcing women to react in a particular way are taken up for discussion in this chapter. The coping stage and the adoption of different coping strategies are also included here. One section of this chapter deals with the role and performance of different help-seeking agencies. Women’s experiences with the formal and informal agencies are also discussed in this chapter.

Chapter V is the Conclusion chapter which summarises the findings of this study. A summary of all chapters is also included. I tried to write about the relevance and usefulness of this study in the context of Assam. I also tried to pen down the limitations of this study and the scope for further research.

Chapter II

Domestic Violence against Women

2.1. Introduction

This chapter documents the existing literature on domestic violence. It traces the history of women's movements in India and abroad and their engagement with the issue of domestic violence. It brings forth feminist theoretical explanations on domestic violence and explains how feminist efforts have contributed to understanding and criminalising domestic violence. Various definitions of domestic violence, forms that it takes in India, and a brief analysis of the theories on domestic violence are taken up in this chapter.

2.2. Definition of Domestic Violence

Domestic violence encompasses a wide range of behaviour that occurs within the domestic sphere or in the familial context. Domestic violence has been defined by United Nations as 'violence that occurs within the private sphere, generally between individuals who are related through intimacy, blood or law' (Coomaraswamy: 1996:5). Summers and Hoffman(2002) define domestic violence as 'the abuse by one person of another in an intimate relationship' (xii). In domestic violence, the victim shares some kind of relationship with the perpetrator. The definition provided by Denzin (1984) also stresses on the point that domestic violence victims and perpetrator share some kind of connection, either intimacy or ancestral; as domestic violence occurs within domestic spheres. Denzin (1984) defines domestic violence as 'negative symbolic interaction between intimates, usually in the family home' (484). Thus domestic violence is a phenomenon involving individuals sharing intimacy or some kind of close partnership and mostly perpetrated by persons known to the victim.

Initially, in common parlance, domestic violence was understood as 'men beating women' (Johnson and Ferraro: 2000:948). The focus at the beginning was around wife abuse (Dobash and Dobash: 1979). Studies such as Ferraro and Johnson (1983), Johnson and Ferraro (2000), Tierney (1982), Kocack (2007) have focussed on wife beating as the main form of domestic violence. Later on, with feminist groups' protest, other forms of domestic violence; apart from wife-beating came to be recognised. Most literature

focussing on wife beating viewed domestic violence as the outcome of men's efforts to control their partner using violence. Power hierarchy is an inevitable condition for continuation of patriarchy and 'domestic violence is about using brute force to establish power relation in family' (Kishwar: 2005:2). In the patriarchal power hierarchy, women are always subordinated and domestic violence ensures this subordination. This is why feminists described 'women's victimisation as the main component of domestic violence' (Merchant: 2000:250). Thus domestic violence ensures women's victimisation and subordination and at the same time it occurs due to their subordinated status in power hierarchy.

Domestic violence has been defined as the infliction of any bodily injury, harmful physical contact or the destruction of property or threat used as a tool to control or punish the intimate partner by abuser (Thomas and Beasley:1993). Only physical form of violence was given importance by early narrow understandings of domestic violence. Slowly with time other forms like psychological, verbal, sexual, economic came to be included into the purview of domestic violence. The broader definition includes different forms and considers domestic violence as combination of all these. International Council for Research on Women (ICRW) defines domestic violence as 'verbal, physical and emotional abuse against adult women in the family setting' (2000:60). In Women's Aid's view domestic violence is 'physical, sexual, psychological or financial violence that takes place within an intimate or family-type relationship and that forms a pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour' (Harne and Radford:2008:4). With inclusion of various different forms into the purview of domestic violence also included violence within other relationships apart from marital one. Thus domestic violence is a broad concept incorporating many forms of physical violence, sexual violence and a range of coercive, intimidating and controlling behaviours (Harne and Radford: 2008). It is not random episodes of specific physical, psychological and sexual violent acts, but rather 'a pattern of behaviours and experiences of violence and abuse within a relationship' (Vindhya: 2005:200).

Domestic violence is also described as 'intricately linked to real or perceived fulfilment of masculinities' (ICRW: 2002:2). Violence over women is considered as a sign of masculinity. Men try to show their maleness and also to gain social sanction to their violence through use of violence (Anderson and Umberson: 2001). Imposing one's will

and desire upon other through use of violence was the main purpose of perpetrating violence. Domestic violence arises from 'patriarchal notions of ownership over women's bodies, sexuality, labour, reproductive rights, mobility, and level of autonomy' and deep rooted sanction to male superiority enable men to exercise unlimited power over women (Subadra: 1999: ws 28).

United Nations General Assembly resolution on the Elimination of Domestic Violence against Women recognises economic deprivation and isolation as domestic violence as such conduct may cause imminent harm to the safety, health or well-being of women (General Assembly resolution 58/147:1993). This indicates that domestic violence is a major public health problem and is associated with serious injuries including wide range of physical and mental problems. Sooner domestic violence started to be looked into as a health and medical issue with incorporation of health issue. Along with health issue economic violence also came to be counted as constituent of domestic violence.

In India, domestic violence for a long time was equated with dowry violence. Since the women's movement took up dowry as the main issue for fighting for their rights against discrimination, dowry came to be equated and used as representing domestic violence. This understanding of domestic violence as dowry often undermines other widespread forms of sexual, physical, psychological violence independent of dowry (ICRW:1999). With enactments of laws after feminist demands domestic violence came to be understood as a problem broader than dowry related violence.

With legislative demands by feminist groups also developed the legal definition of domestic violence. Currently the act dealing with domestic violence in India, that is the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005, defines domestic violence as: 'For the purposes of this Act, any act, omission or commission or conduct of the respondent shall constitute domestic violence in case it -

(a) Harms or injures or endangers the health, safety, life, limb or well-being, whether mental or physical, of the aggrieved person or tends to do so and includes causing physical abuse, sexual abuse, verbal and emotional abuse and economic abuse; or

(b) Harasses, harms, injures or endangers the aggrieved person with a view to coerce her or any other person related to her to meet any unlawful demand for any dowry or other property or valuable security; or

(c) Has the effect of threatening the aggrieved person or any person related to her by any conduct mentioned in clause (a) or clause (b); or

(d) Otherwise injures or causes harm, whether physical or mental, to the aggrieved person' (Agrawala: 2005:2).

From above definitions it's been clear that domestic violence occurs between individuals who share blood, intimacy or legal relation. It occurs in many forms and patterns within home, resulting in minor injuries to death of the victim. With inclusion of different forms also included other members of a household, such as children, elderly relatives etc (Vindhya: 2005). Anyone might fall victimised regardless of race, age, sexual orientation, religion, gender, marital status, while it can occur in many forms, including physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional, economic, and psychological abuse (Naidu and Mkhazise:2005). A range of coercive, intimidating and controlling behaviours are employed in the perpetration of domestic violence.

2.3. Forms of Domestic Violence

Domestic violence can be overt and covert, active and passive, and can be physical, sexual and psychological in nature (Vindhya: 2005; Harne and Radford: 2008). Starting with minor abuse it can continue till the death of the victim, lasting for really long periods. Some of the various forms that domestic violence takes are discussed here:

2.3.1 Physical violence

Physical violence is the most recognised form of domestic abuse, though it is not the only and most rampant form that domestic violence can take. Physical attacks or aggression can range from simple slapping even to murder of the victim. Slapping, beating, pushing, hitting, kicking, and punching are some of the common physical forms domestic violence takes. Such violence directly threatens the life of its victim. It does not usually end up in a single episode-it is repetitive in nature and also increases in frequency and severity. Once the first physical violence incident takes place, there is the

anticipation of further violence which results in anxiety and uncertainty (Abrahams: 2007).

2.3.2. Sexual violence

Sexual violence is a wide term used to describe rape and humiliating range of unwanted, pressured and coerced sex. When such violence is experienced within the domestic sphere it is included in the scope of domestic violence. Sexual violence is the common and the hardest aspect of domestic violence for its victims to talk about (Harne and Radford: 2008). Sexual violence can be perpetrated on any member of the family and is used as a means of exploitation especially against the weaker members—largely women. Sexual harassment of widows by male relatives, child sexual abuse by family members commonly known as incest, sexual abuse of daughters in law, and sexual abuse of wives by husbands are some forms of sexual violence that occur within domestic sphere (Karlekar: 1998; Virani: 2000). These types of violence are often kept hidden for the sake of family honour, acutely affecting the psychology of its victims. Thus, sexual violence happens largely against all female members of family, from child to old and widow women, irrespective of age. However, sexual abuse against male children is common too, but largely under reported given the stigma attached to it.

2.3.3. Psychological violence

Psychological violence accompanies all forms of domestic violence, whether physical or sexual, and also is perpetrated independent of them. Psychological distress or emotional breakdown is the obvious consequence of domestic violence (Mullender: 1996). Psychological abuse is also used by the perpetrators to ensure subjugation of the victims along with physical and sexual violence. Psychological abuse does not always lead to physical abuse, but physical aggression is frequently accompanied by psychological violence (Follingstad et al: 1990). Physical and sexual violence are psychologically distressing and reflected in anxiety, depression, eating and sleeping disorder (Harne and Radford: 2008). The psychological toll of domestic violence is a heavy one and often occurs before physical violence and many times continues without physical violence resulting in permanent sense of inequality, threat, shock, and loss of trust and faith in relationship, tendency of self harm and others (Barnish:2004).

2.3.4. Forms of domestic violence across the world: Within physical, sexual and psychological categories mentioned above, domestic violence takes various forms across the world. Some of the major forms are discussed below that begins with birth and continues till death in women's lives.

- **Female foeticide and infanticide**

Female foeticide and infanticides occur even before and just after the birth of the girl child. Sex determination tests are used widely to eliminate a girl child in the womb itself. In societies where a higher value is placed on sons, discrimination towards female children takes extreme forms such as sex-selective abortions and female infanticide (Karlekar: 1998; Phadke: 2003). This act of violence is committed to get rid of the "burden" of the girl child. Technologies like amniocentesis and ultrasound were invented to detect the foetal abnormalities. But in India these technologies are used to determine the sex of the fetus and to eliminate girl child in the womb itself (Barot: 2012). Because of these forms of violence there is decline in the numbers of girls in the population statistics. According to the Census of India in 2011 there are average 914 girls against 1000 boys (Census of India: 2011). A large number of girls are missing every year. This type of violence violates the right to life of the baby and the right to body of the mother who is forced to abort her baby. The custom that son will carry the name of the family and look after the parents devaluates the girl because she will be going to another family (Rydstrom: 2002). Again the son in marriage will bring lot of dowry whereas in the marriage of the girl, parents will have to give huge amount of dowry. The tension of giving huge amount of dowry to the daughters also makes them unwanted in the family (Sekher and Hatti: 2010). Even after imposing legal ban on dowry in 1961, the persistence prevalence of dowry demands lead to perpetuation of female foeticide.

- **Neglect and unequal treatment in childhood**

In India tradition and social practices teach many parents to undervalue the female child and to prefer male child. Male are supposed to carry ancestry and serve old parents while girls, as soon as they attain the age when they can contribute to family income, get married off. This very fact makes male child preferable over female child. The female counterpart is neglected and considered liability to parents. Further dowry system, though banned long ago, also makes female children unwanted (Segal:1999; Sekher and

Hatti: 2010). Traditions, values and customs which are in practice for years have resulted in the stronger desire for sons. Sons are preferred over daughters for various economic, social and religious reasons including financial support, old age security, property inheritance, dowry, family lineage, prestige and power, birth and death rituals and beliefs about religious duties and salvation. As a consequence, women are accorded inferior status in Indian society, facing discrimination and negligence in all spheres of lives (Arokiasamy and Pradhan: 2006). Girls are always deprived of the minimum facilities for livelihood like food, health care, education etc. Discrimination begins with unequal distribution of food and continues with differential education. Reflecting such discrimination in various aspects of a girl's life, Sunita Kishor (1995) writes, 'a critical manifestation of discrimination against girl children is the under-allocation of medicine and food' (as cited in Karlekar: 1998:1745). The male child is often preferred in all aspects especially those involving financial exposure. Further, daughters are expected to assist in household work and education is not prioritised for her. It is believed that rather than providing education the same money can be saved to provide dowry for her. Given such discrimination rampant in Indian society, it would be apt to say that most of the female foetuses that survive, 'birth is the only equal opportunity they will ever get' (Segal: 1999: 220).

- **Child marriage**

A girl child is twice vulnerable for being a child and a girl. Discrimination, which starts before birth, continues as they grow up (Kapoor: 2000). Their psychological, economic and physical dependence on the family makes them vulnerable to violence. Girls are considered as a liability. Therefore parents supporting child marriage feel that it is better to marry their daughter off as soon as possible and get free of her responsibility. Early marriage is also seen as a means to place the girl under the male (husband) control and ensure safety and security. Early marriage also helps control the girl's sexuality so that the honour and purity of the family, caste and community are kept intact (Black: 2001). Child marriage results in unwanted and early pregnancies and affects health of the mother. Early widowhood is another serious consequence of child marriage. Child marriage is a violation of human rights because right to free and full consent to marriage is recognised in Universal Declaration of Human Right (UDHR) 1948. Early marriage violates the rights of the children for overall development. Early marriage restricts girls

from having education which affects their life opportunities and thereby hampering the overall development of the society.

- **Child Sexual abuse/ Incest**

Child sexual abuse is an evil practice which combines sexual, emotional and physical abuse (Virani: 2000). Incest or the sexual abuse of children and adolescents within the family is one of the invisible forms of violence. It is kept hidden because very often the perpetrator is a father, brother or other male relatives, and male acquaintances (Steven: 2004). The right of the child is sacrificed in order to protect the name of the family and that of the adult perpetrator. Incest often goes without punishment but it leaves both long and short term effects on the psycho-sexual orientation of the children. In India parents are believed to be the sole caretaker and children are to great extent dependant on them and for that maximum of the incidents of child sexual abuse go unreported and children don't generally reveal such incidents.

- **Honour killing**

Honour killing is perhaps the most brutal control of female sexuality at the same time violation of the rights of the women to control their own lives, liberty or freedom of expression, association and movement and bodily integrity and others (Coomaraswamy: 2005). Honour killing is a practice of killing of one member of family or community by the other members because of the belief that the victim has brought dishonour to the family or community. In society honour of individual, family and a community is considered to be based on the behaviour and morality of its female members (Deol: 2014). An increasingly visible form of violence against women in India is honour killing. Honour killing is murder in the name of "honour". In patriarchy, honour seems to be harbour in women's bodies and hence it is perceived that by regulating female sexuality honour of the family can be saved. Honour killing is the manifestation of violence against women and may occur when women transgress their appropriate boundaries or space, which are sanctioned and determined by patriarchal society (Welchman and Hossain: 2005).

Honour killing is not new in India. Research indicates that the majority of incidents of honour killings are observed happen in north Indian states of Punjab, Rajasthan,

Haryana, and Bihar. Usually, it takes place over an “inappropriate” relationship or marriage outside caste or religion (Sharell: 2010). If a girl marries her beloved of a different caste, her parents try to kill the new couple for bringing shame upon their families. It does not necessarily is perpetrated against couples from different castes but persons marrying within same caste but against the wishes of the family are also made victims of honour killing. In India, Punjab is ranked top with highest number of honour killing cases. According to data accumulated by the Punjab Police, thirty four (34) honour killings were reported in the state between 2008 and 2010; ten (10) in 2008, twenty (20), in 2009, and four (4) in 2010 (Samay Live, 23rd June, 2010, 09.51am). The practice of honour killing in India is justified by the caste-panchayat for protecting the family honour. The family feels proud after the killing, thinking that the honour of the family has been restored.

Killing of women in the name of honour must be considered as an obstacle to the enjoyment of human rights by the women. It is also necessary to rethink the concept of honour in connection with female chastity. This problem should be dealt with the right based perspective and measures should be taken in the areas of legislation, employment, education, sexual and reproductive health, and rights of women (Nayak: 2010).

- **Forced prostitution in India**

Women and children face forced prostitution and other kinds of commercial exploitation all over the world, including India. Some traditional practices exist in southern India where young women and girls (*devadasis*) are ‘donated’ to serve a temple and very often they end up being prostitutes (Kapoor: 2000). Among some tribes in India *i.e.* *Bedias*, prostitution by unmarried girls is the main income source for whole family. Patriarchal value exists upon the income of prostitute daughters of Bedia families where daughter-in-laws and wives held family purity symbols (Adhikari: 2011). Even in media, news about selling of young girls into the sex business or brothels by their own fathers and brothers and other family members are not rare. These incidents reflect direct exploitation of girls by family members. These type of exploitations are justified either in name of poverty or religion.

- **Dowry harassment and bride-burning**

Dowry is the practice of transfer of property from bride's family to that of the bridegroom at the time of marriage. It includes demand for huge property, money and other material gifts including luxury items. The family of the girl fulfils the demands of dowry made by the marital home to save the marriage of their daughter. However, every time it is not possible for everyone to fulfil the demand of extended dowry and when the parents of the bride fail to comply such demands the bride is tortured physically and psychologically. Dowry becomes one of the important factors that lead to negligence of female child and sex-selective abortion by the parents to avoid dowry demands (Phadke: 2003). Dowry, thus disinherits women from natal property and at the same time encourages violence against them in marital home. Dowry can be seen as central determinant of women's vulnerable status. It is so because women who get dowry are discriminated in terms of equal inheritance rights in natal property. Women get their share of property in the form of movable property and the amount of dowry women get never equate to their due share in natal property. Additionally, husbands are often seen enjoying control over those instead of the women themselves. Thus dowry, though considered as share of inheritance, women don't get or enjoy any inheritance rights over it (Teays: 1991). Moreover in absence of strict equal division of property, in-laws find clue to pressurise women to ask for more dowry from natal family. Thus lack of inheritance makes women vulnerable to domestic violence.

- **Wife-battering**

Wife-battering refers to the violent acts harming the wife physically, psychologically and sexually by her husband. Wife battering is aimed at maintaining control over the female partner by inducing pain and injury (Herbert: 1983). It occurs within the family and by the so-called loved ones preventing outside intervention. The notion of family sanctity and privacy restricts outside intervention in this violent incident between husband and wife and results in suffering and oppression of women (Dobash and Dobash: 1979). This form of domestic violence is most widely practised. It refers to act of abuse of a woman by her husband at home which is supposed to be the safest place to be with the most intimate person. Wife battering has impact on both physical and psychological health of the victim (Jackson: 2007).

'Cycle of Violence' theory by Lenore Walker (1979) explains the different stages of wife-battering and the behaviour of the batterer in each of the stages. According to Walker (1979), the cycle of violence is characterised by three distinct phases occur repeatedly in abusive relationship. The first stage in the cycle of violence is "tension building". During the tension-building stage, the victim is often subjected to less serious nonviolent forms of abuse, such as threats and insults. The second stage in the cycle of violence is 'acute battering'. The acute-battering stage is marked by uncontrolled physical aggression, which may be extremely violent in nature. It is during the acute battering stage that victims are most likely to sustain injuries ranging from bruises, cuts, broken bones, disfigurement, and miscarriage, to loss of life. This is the most violent stage. In the third stage called "the loving respite or remorse", the abuser is apologetic as well as attentive to the victim. The abuser may shower the victim with gifts, compliments, and sincere promises that it will never happen again. Because of this third stage women stays in an abusive relation. If after severe battering the wife wants to leave the husband he will do everything to convince her and assure her not to repeat all those. Husband's apology and promises make the wife believe that things will not happen again. However this does not last long. Again in very short time the husband starts abusing his wife for any reason and thus the cycle keeps going on (Jackson: 2007; Subadra: 1999; Agnes: 1984; Ferraro and Johnson: 1983).

The psycho-social theory of learned helplessness focuses on the factors which reinforce battered women's victimisation. It explains why the woman is passive and never tries to escape when it is possible, and why she goes on tolerating the abuse (Herbert: 1983). According to this theory, 'battered women operate from a premise of 'helplessness' which further serves to only aid passivity and a fatal acceptance of the exploitative situation' (Subadra:1999:ws-29). Walker used 'learned helplessness' to explain why battered women do not leave their abusers. According to him who are 'repeatedly exposed to painful stimuli over which they have no control and from which there is no apparent escape, respond with the classic symptoms of learned helplessness' (Ewing: 1990:582-83). When woman, after repeated beating could not escape that situation for various reasons develops a psychological problem for which she stops trying to escape and stays with the violent husband. Such reasons may be uncertainty of refuge, financial security, child care, and others. Lack of support from natal family and pressure to go back to marital family to continue marriage also make women stay in abusive

relationship with batterer partners. Flavia Agnes has said that the lack of support from her natal family hinders her from seeking viable options when commitment of suicide becomes the viable alternative. Women prefer to die in their marital home rather than return to their parental home and seek alternatives (Agnes: 2012)

Wife-battering is a serious social problem which is a 'reflection of the power relationship between a husband and wife which clarifies the secondary social status of women in society' (Karlekar: 1998:1747). Wife battering reveals power hierarchy between husband and wife where wife is always in lower stratum and husband enjoys superiority over her.

- **Marital rape**

Marital rape, a common form of domestic violence is often justified in the name of marriage. Serving sexual demands of husbands is considered to be the duty of wives (Hasday: 2000). She is not supposed to have her own decision whether to involve in sexual intimacy or not. It depends upon the will of the husband only. She is minimised to a sexual object. It is a combined form of sexual and physical violence in intimate relation. Marital rape rejects the myth that rape is committed by strangers and outsiders only. It occurs within the safest place and by the most intimate person. Marital rape can be said as combination of both physical and sexual abuse because very often rape of the wife is done after severe physical battering. However, fact is that sexual abuse and rape by intimate partner is not considered to be a crime. Forced-sex is not considered as crime if the woman is married to, or cohabiting with, the perpetrator (Frieze: 1983). The assumption is that once a woman enters into a contract of marriage, the husband has the right to unlimited sexual access to his wife. In India, despite demands from feminists to criminalise rape within marriage, there has yet been no amendment in law to include marital rape, except when the wife is 'below 16 years of age' (Karlekar: 2006:321). In Indian society where sex is considered a private matter and not discussed openly and this privacy indirectly encourage its practice without punishment.

- **Forced pregnancy and abortion**

These two forms can be clubbed under the heading of violence that occurs during pregnancy. Forced pregnancy as a form of domestic violence can be referred as reproductive coercion. It involves threats or acts of violence against a women's

reproductive health or reproductive decision-making, including forced sex, pressuring a woman to become pregnant against her will and interference with the use of birth control (Camp: 2015). Forced pregnancy and abortion are specific forms of domestic violence which directly violate physical or bodily integrity of woman. She neither has control over her body nor decision regarding birth of the unborn baby which is in her own womb. Forced pregnancy reflects men's control over women's reproductive capacity, which they use to make women more and more dependent upon them.

Forced abortion is another form of domestic violence that many women face during pregnancy. When a wife gets pregnant and husband does not want the baby, he tries to get the baby aborted. To compel his wife to abort the baby often pressure is imposed on her which violates her right to bodily integrity, right to a safe life and freedom of decision making on private matters. This may also compromise maternal as well as infant health (CFRR: 2011). Thus forced pregnancy can be both cause and effect of domestic violence. Domestic violence may increase with pregnancy (Stephenson et al.: 2008) or domestic violence may result in pregnancy due to forced and coerced sex.

- **Elderly abuse**

Women's movement questioned the patriarchal social structure by bringing out the issue of domestic violence to public notice. In the whole process issues taken up were mainly related to young women's lives. Elderly women's issues related to as well as elderly abuse in general were almost sidelined. Abuse of elderly women by children, care taker, spouses needs to be seriously emphasised as part and form of domestic violence (Misra: 2007). Abuse of elders occurs because of their dependence on the abuser. The elder abuse can be explained as the harm to an elder person caused by someone in a position of trust, who may have control over the victim. This abuse may include financial exploitation, physical assault, psychological abuse, refusal to provide necessary care and others. Elderly widowed women are more vulnerable. Sometimes they are forced into prostitution by the marital relatives or sexually violated (Karlekar: 1998). With increase in the number of population of the elderly, the probability of elderly abuse also increased leading to the need for taking care of them in terms of social, economic, health and shelter.

- **Widow torture**

Widowhood is a curse for women in India. During widowhood, in absence of husband; woman loses all kind of social status and dignities. Her life almost ends-up and she loses her social existence without husband and becomes even more vulnerable (Misra: 2007). Widowhood, child marriage and sati are very closely connected forms of violence that women face. Child marriage results in number of widows who are not allowed to remarry as widow-remarriage is not sanctioned by Hindu upper caste groups. Being widow they either have to sit in the funeral pyre and become sati or live a life full of misery abstaining from public ceremonies. Widows are generally economically dependent upon their relatives which make them vulnerable to violence by the family members. Sometimes they are forced into prostitution by the marital relatives or sexually violated by male members of family (Karlekar: 1998). ‘Widows are at high risk of sexual abuse; they are particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment and sexual violence from men and boys who are associated or related to their late husband’ (Foluso: 2011:140). If such sexual abuse results in pregnancy she is blamed for being of bad morals and abandoned. Young widows are sexually harassed for being female and being widow. Widows also have to face property related violence as they are considered as unwanted shareholder of the ancestral property. Verbal abuse, ill-treatment are common forms of emotional abuse of widows. Sometimes they are accused of being responsible for the death of the husband (Sandys: 2011). Apart from physical, sexual violence widows are also victims of property discrimination and sometimes have to face restriction in taking up employment or jobs. These acts result in increased economic dependence of widowed women upon family members and make them more susceptible to abuse in family (Chen and Dreze: 1995).

- **Sati**

Another very pervasive form of domestic violence against women is sati which is legally banned and almost disappearing. Sati is a customary rite whereby a widow burns herself in the funeral pyre of her husband (Sarma: 1988). It was an upper caste practice found mostly in Rajasthan and Bengal, which glorifies woman who becomes sati after death of husband. Sati is considered as something only good women can commit and one gradually becomes sati through good behaviour and acquisition of good virtues. This

glorification of sati throws light on the socialisation of women which inculcates patriarchal values in minds of women and teaches them to see their whole world in and around their husbands and to consider their lives as meaningless without their husband (Harlan: 1994). To ban this evil practice the Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987 was enacted in 1988. The last reported incident of sati in India occurred in 1987 and is known as the Roop Konwar sati. Sati has an underlined hidden materialistic aspect (Kumar: 1993). Getting control over the property and land of the late husband which otherwise will be inherited by the widow is the major motive behind the forcing of widows to perform sati. Further, the pressure from money hungry Brahmins involved in the occasions of sati also added to the practice (Lata Mani: 1987). These aspects of sati reflect the complex linkage between caste, materialistic gain and status of women in society which feminist groups tried to reveal in their agitation against sati (Kumar: 1993).

- **Female genital mutilation**

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is a practice of mutilating genital organ of young girls and sometimes widow women (Hayes: 1975). This process is defined by WHO as ‘the partial or total removal of the external genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs whether for cultural, religious or non-therapeutic reasons (Krantz and Garcia: 2005:819). This form is prevailing in many countries of the world. Among the FGM countries Africa is on the top followed by some Middle-East countries, Europe, North America, Australia and New-Zealand. India is also among those countries (WHO: 2011). This practice affects health and psychology of its victims. Many times the act of mutilation is performed by medically non-trained women or midwife not by doctors; hence it’s quite obvious to have adverse effects on health of the girls.

This practice has close link with religious and cultural gender norms of society. The ‘desire to control women’s sexuality is a motivating factor behind this practice’ (WHO: 2011). This desire of controlling women’s sexuality is linked with ideas of sexual modesty, chastity, proper sexual behaviour of women as prescribed by society. Another important type of FGM is ‘to close off the vaginal opening almost completely’ to restrict women from involving in sexual activities before marriage and that way ensuring ‘dignity and honour of her own and her husband’s patrilineages’ (Hayes: 1975:617). This

aspect reveals the way patriarchal norms and notions of purity and honour are imposed upon women resulting in violation of their human rights and subordination.

- **Witch hunting**

Witch hunting is the practice of killing someone based on superstitions. The killing is led by the belief that a particular person is the reason or cause of misfortunes and illness of others (Miguel: 2005). It is an age-old phenomenon. This practice prevails in many countries of the globe including North America, Sub-Saharan Africa, India and United Kingdom. Witches are projected as practitioner of black magic to harm people. Witch are considered as ‘mysterious creatures with power of killing people by eating their entrails and also of causing fevers, murrain in cattle and other kinds of evil’ (Man:1983 cited in Sinha: 2007:1674). It is believed that witches cast evil eye leading to misfortune and fatal diseases (Sinha: 2007). Such superstitions forced people to harm the person accused as witch, often resulting in death of the accused, sometimes even harm to her family and removal from village area. It has close link with religious beliefs and gender norms of communities. Daya Verma (2007) commented that ‘all over the world including India, witches were mostly poor working class women, old and widowed’ (2130). Ananya Baruya (2005) also emphasised that victims of witch hunting are mostly women. Men accuse women as witch to end the authority of women and establish male superiority and subjugate them. Therefore, gender hierarchy, poverty and widowhood increases women’s vulnerability to witch hunting. Sinha (2007) finds link of witch hunting to religious beliefs of community while Ata Mallick (2008) finds ‘personal enmity or material gain’ as motivating reasons behind the practice of witch hunting (118). One can easily capture property of widowed women by branding as witch and forcing her to leave the village for good. The tacit social sanction of such acts makes use of this technique successful.

2.4. Historical Understanding of Domestic Violence

2.4.1. Domestic violence in the western context

Existence of “different space- private and public” is the root cause of historically subordinated, dominated, discriminated position of women in patriarchal society. Due to the barrier of private and personal space, women face prolonged domination in hands of

men (Sultana: 2010). Though, outcomes of this division had been opposed and challenged by women's movements very early, its root has been discovered only during second wave of feminism (Freedman: 2002). Women's movement has a long history of fighting against their subordination till second wave and after that too. Understanding of domestic violence, as outcome of women's subordinated position in patriarchy needs a glimpse of women's rights movements across the world. Below is a brief description of the history of women's rights movements and their engagement with the issue of domestic violence.

- **Personal is political**

The radical wing of second wave feminism was mainly concentrating on issues of gender. They considered 'gender the most important aspect of all liberation struggles' (Freedman: 2002:103). They rejected this division of spaces. They hold that due to the private and personal nature, the injustice to women are neglected and not duly recognised. While questioning about women's space they attacked the power-structure and demanded its abolition to get equality for women. Sexuality was viewed 'in its political dimension as an aspect of the power relations between the sexes' and intimate aspects of male-female relations were analysed in context with women's private space and their subordination within the power-structure (Shulman: 1980:590). Issues of motherhood, birth-control, family and prostitution were there during first wave but they were never the central issue of the movement as it became during second wave (ibid). By 1967 various small women's groups were meeting and discussing on male supremacy over all aspects of their lives and many stories came out including rape, unwanted pregnancies, lesbian desires, illegal abortions, and the dilemmas of child care and housework (Freedman: 2002; Shulman: 1980). The taboo subject became an open topic for discussion.

With feminists' claim of "the personal is political" revealed the ways family, marriage, institutions ensure women's subordination by appropriating female behaviour as per male norms. With feminist movements, many such issues earlier kept hidden, came out as topic for discussion.

Breaking off the barriers of personal sphere shed light on various forms of violence. Identification of battered women and protecting them from various kinds of violence was an issue taken up by women's movement during 1960s and 1970s.

With the identification of problem of wife-battering in family, the problem of their shelter was disclosed. In incidents of wife-battering, women either had to leave home due to intolerable violence or made to leave home as form of violence. In such cases providing the victim with a safe shelter was the primary agenda. This led to the establishment of shelters for battered women. The first shelter for battered women was established by Erin Pizzey in Britain in 1971(Walker: 2009). The movement advocating shelter for battered women revealed the fact that women due to lack of shelter or for some other reasons had to stay in abusive relationship. It was only through the movement, the plight of battered women trapped in abusive relationship was disclosed in public, result being establishment of shelter for them (ibid).

Before feminist movement of 1960s and 1970s, 'wife-beating was called domestic disturbances and 'family maladjustments' (Schneider: 2000:20). Under those circumstances where its presence was acknowledged, for several reason it was considered as psychological/ medical problem rather than a sociological issue. Psychiatric framework explained wife beating from a psychological point of view. They explained that domestic violence is a psychological problem and it occurs due to psychological imbalance of the batterer. It explained that not all but persons with psychological problem abuse their wives. They also supported the idea that many women preferred getting battered and believed that women get beatings because they ask for it. Battered women were considered as 'masochist who provoked her husband into beating her' (ibid). This explanation of wife beating had put the blame on women for the violence and emphasised that only men with personality disorder abuse women, not all men.

The concept of nagging wife and psychological framework of explaining the problem of domestic violence had not focussed on the underlying power imbalance between men and women in society, which was identified by feminist in 1970s only (Dobash and Dobash:1981). Due to private nature of family and to protect the family honour, problems and victims were kept hidden, overlooked and inaccessible (Gelles:1985). It was with emergence of second wave feminism and their attempt to understand the

politics behind private matters affecting women's lives, the gendered nature of domestic violence came out. In their attempt they questioned the hierarchical power relation prevailing in patriarchy and wife abuse from a private matter became a public issue. After identification of wife beating and its base rooted in patriarchal power hierarchy, shelters were established for helping women to come out of the violent environment (Walker: 2009). First shelter was established in 1971 in Britain, then in America in 1974 and slowly in other places. These shelter were established to serve the need for safety, protection, refuge, and social and economic resources and that drove the battered women's movement (Schneider: 2000). Struggling for changes in lives of women by feminist groups changed people's attitude towards the issue of male violence against women and finally had broadened the framework for understanding domestic violence (Straus et al: 1980).

- **Legal activism**

Battered women's movement and Shelter movement in 1970s brought significant changes in recognising the problem of domestic violence and legal intervention to it (Summers and Hoffman: 2002). During this phase use of law as a tool for social change started. Demands were made for redefining traditional laws related to women (Schneider: 2000).

One of the earliest legal issues that came to the attention of women's movement was the problems women faced while dealing with police. The issue of 'failure of police to protect battered women from assault' was faced by women's groups and criticised (ibid). Police actions were criticised for not arresting the batterer. Police usually did not arrest the abuser in matters of domestic abuse. Police force was also criticised for not realising the depth and seriousness of crimes against women. This protest led many police forces to have Domestic Violence Unit within their force, mainly headed by women (Summers and Hoffman:2002). Even then problem was not solved. Complains and protests about 'police, almost always men, routinely ignored and rarely prosecuted cases of physical and sexual abuse of women and often blamed and harassed the victims' were registered (Nelson: 1996:131). During late 1970s sexist practice within police force in regards to cases of violence against women were seriously taken up by groups of feminists across countries. Most important structural change against discriminatory and non-sensible

practice of police occurred in Brazil in 1985. Brazilian government after consultation with feminist groups initiated institutional reforms leading to establishment of the first all women police station (Santos: 2004). It was anticipated that female police would have sensible, non-discriminatory approach towards battered victims and, being women, they will understand actual mental and physical status of victims. It was believed that women victims would feel free to report their incidents to police without hesitations and also female police will not be reluctant to help them.

Thus due to the women's struggles, domestic violence starting with wife-beating came to be considered as a gender specific legal issue from a private family matter. Link between patriarchy and women's subordination became clear. Legal reform/ civil remedy was seen as an important tool for ensuring equality between men and women and an upgraded women's status (Scheinder: 2000). Battered women's movement and shelter movement in 1970s brought significant changes in recognising the problem of domestic violence and its legal intervention. As attention was focused on domestic violence and the role of law, it brought significant pieces of legislation: the Domestic Violence & Matrimonial Proceedings Act 1976, the Domestic Proceedings & Magistrates' Courts Act 1978 and the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 in England and Wales. Before these there was the First Matrimonial Causes Act, in 1878 that offered a civil remedy to women. However using this law by woman was seen as taking advantage of the law to bring disgrace to husband (Summers and Hoffman: 2002). These acts tried to repair ineffectiveness of already existing laws. Thus in USA and UK, various legal measures were adopted to deal with domestic violence.

2.4.2. Domestic violence in the context of India

- **First phase: Social reform**

It was in 19th century that women's issues came to light and reform movements started. Male social reformers started working against social evils affecting women's lives and later women from educated family, mainly from reformer's families joined their movement (Khullar: 2005; Kumar: 1993). Reformers considered the condition of Indian women as one of the factors responsible for the degraded state of Indian society (Suguna: 2009) and for overall upliftment of society they started their movement with issues hampering women's status. Sati, property rights, forced seclusion, lack of education,

early marriage, condition of widows were the prime focus of reform movements aimed at improving women's status (Suguna: 2009). Thus 19th century upper caste male reformers constituted various organisations and associations for women and their issues. Later, women themselves formed their own organisation and worked for themselves (Gangoli: 2007).

Scholars have argued that improvements in women's status from nineteenth century onwards did not come as a product of 'conscious assertion on the part of Indian women, but through programmes of social reform devised and carried out by Indian men and the colonial state' (Anagol: 2005:3). It is important to note that the reform movements, though took up issues related to women, their primary aim was never for women's emancipation; rather to show Indian society as somewhat civilised and non-barbaric against the charges made by colonial rulers (Khullar: 2005). Making provisions for women's education by new elite class men was also aimed only at creating appropriate and presentable wives in front of the colonial society. Enhancing India's image as a modern and civilised society, education for women was used as a tool for desired change (ibid). Even though women's emancipation was not the primary goal, still the reform movements helped in rise of women's organisations formed by women and led to the growth of women's rights movements in later period (Suguna:2009).

Reform movements, though wanted to eradicate societal evils actually aimed at upgrading nation's image as civilised. Nationalist movement gave a setback to the reform movement. It becomes clear from the fact that the nationalist viewed campaigns against some social evils like sati, child marriage, purdah, widow remarriage as community matters to be decided within community and resisted colonial attempts of modernising the family, gender relation and marriage (Gangoli: 2007; Sen: 2000).

- **Nationalist phase**

Women struggling for social reforms and political rights entered new phase with freedom struggle. From the 1940s, 'women began broadening their scope far beyond women's organisations to the freedom struggle and peasant, worker, and trade union movements' (Sen: 2000:24). Freedom struggle gave women the scope to work equally with men. Women in huge number joined freedom struggle following the call of Mahatma Gandhi. Freedom movement, though gave women the chance to work for

nation, many times they were engaged in caring, nurturing works only although many women joined violent activities like bombing, picketing, protesting etc. However during nationalist struggle women's rights movement got a setback because women did think only about nation's freedom and contributed to that cause heavily keeping aside their own goals (Khullar: 2005).

- **Post 1970s**

1970s saw a new era of Indian feminism. Locally formed women's groups came with clear focus on women's issues. Various new social movements carrying women's voices on different issues emerged (Sen: 2000). It is only from 1970s onward the consciousness around domestic violence spread all over India and the issue got room in discourse of popular collective movements (Khullar: 2005). Women's movements during this period got influenced by 'western debates on violence against women, based on consciousness raising groups' (Gangoli: 2007:16). However, due to societal and historical differences influence of these debates was only partially accepted (Ibid). Emergence of new movements led to inclusion of new issues and also to breaking of silence around issues of private domain affecting women's lives (ibid).

First was in 1972-73 by landless labourers against their land lords known as Shahada movement in Dhulia district of Maharashtra which happened to be a site of protest against wife-beating (John: 2008; Sen:2000). The movement first started against the landlords for rape of a woman of Bhill tribe. Later on, the movement focused on the consumption of alcohol and its immediate result of wife beating. Women protested against alcohol vending and alcohol consumption which was the causal factor for wife beating. Women's groups publicly punished the husband who beat his wife and made him seek apology to the wife. Thus this movement also made the private issue a public (Suneetha and Nagaraj: 2006). This movement contributed towards recognition of domestic violence, but sadly it could not spread its influence nationwide.

Wife beating was an issue in Bodhgaya movement of 1978 too. The struggle was for land rights of women. Women, even after working in home and field didn't have the right to own lands in their names. In patriarchy, men consider their wives as property and have full right over them. Lands in their names add power to their already powerful position and pushes women to a more vulnerable status by denying land rights to them.

Lack of resource makes women victim of assault and beating by their husbands. Thus in Bodhgaya movement the link between patriarchy, women's powerlessness and oppression was shown and attempts were made to save women from wife-battering by giving them land rights (Gandhi and Shah: 1993; Manimala: 2008). Demonstrations, pamphleteering, dharna were used as means of protest against batterer.

Thus various campaigns by women's groups made the problem of wife-beating visible which hitherto existed in an invisible manner (Ray: 2006).

In 1980s women came out to break the silence around the issue of domestic violence. Women came forward to share their experiences with other women who were also victims of the same. This process of sharing of experiencing violence at home included women from all categories and established the fact that domestic violence is present in every stratum of society. Sharing experiences also made it clear that there exist various forms of violence that are not directly linked to dowry (Gangoli: 2007). Thus women's groups through their rigorous protests made private oppression a public issue (Kumar: 1993)

Starting with protest against dowry, women's group in India have posed challenges to established patriarchal institution of family, and to dominant social values and structures, most significantly in the arena of legal interventions in the areas of domestic violence against women (Gangoli: 2007). The 1980s were a period of intense struggle for revitalising the debate on women's issues in the public domain. Gandhi and Shah (1993) described the emerging phase of the movement as being concerned with 'rape and wife-battering; with marriage, but not widow or child marriage, rather divorce, maintenance and child custody; with legislative reforms, not the enactment of more laws but in amendments and with the implementation of the existing ones' (cited in John: 2008:6).

Dowry is a system of giving gifts to newly married couple at the time of marriage. With time, this custom got changed and became a tool for husband's family to extract more and more resources from the bride's side to enhance family status by inflicting torture and harassment upon the bride (Kishwar: 2008). Understanding of dowry and dowry related violence marked the starting of understanding domestic violence in India. Many times greed of the in-laws for more and more resources led to the murder of the bride or abated her to commit suicide. Deaths of daughters-in-law were seen as accidents only. It

was after the sustained campaign of women's groups in Delhi that the link between dowry-demands and deaths of daughters-in-law came to light. Thus the very fact of existence of violence within family became a public issue (Kumar: 1989). During 1970s many cases of death of were being reported. In Delhi the highest number of cases was reported. The important point was that all these cases were reported as either death by fire or suicide (Kumar: 1993). Police investigation failed to locate the linkage of these deaths with dowry harassment. Once the issue came to public eye feminists started demanding legal intervention on the matter. Success of the women's groups in their legal demands can be marked from the fact of incorporation of the articles related to "dowry and dowry murder" (498a & 304b) in Indian Penal Code (Kishwar: 2008). 'Before 1983, there were no specific provisions pertaining to violence within the home. Husbands could be convicted under the general provisions of murder, abetment to suicide, causing hurt and wrongful confinement' (Agnes: 1992:ws-25). The campaign by women's movements made everyone firmly believe that dowry is the main reason behind the vulnerability of Indian women and importance was laid on making anti-dowry law more stringent. This campaign failed to locate the problem of deprivation of women from natal property which is the real cause of powerlessness of women leading to prevalence of domestic violence (Kishwar: 2008). 'Domestic violence is about using brute force to establish power relations in the family whereby women are taught and conditioned to accept a subservient status for themselves' and propertyless-ness ensures women's powerless position and makes them vulnerable to domestic violence (Kishwar: 2005:2). This understanding failed to locate the patriarchal social system which gives men superior position and privileges over women (Vindhya: 2005). Till this time dowry was understood as the cause of all violence against women in family. Although important, dowry was not the only factor for violence within the family. Marital violence was clubbed under the heads of 'dowry' 'dowry deaths' and 'dowry violence'. All the other forms of violence in the familial context were hidden behind dowry (Karlekar: 2006). Dowry and its analysis dominated the conceptual understanding of domestic violence. Understandings of patriarchal power structure which dominates and exploits women were out of the understanding of domestic violence (Suneetha and Nagaraj: 2006). Feminist groups failed to locate the patriarchal social structure for the perpetuation of domestic violence.

Owing to continuous protests by women's groups, legal provisions were made to deal with and to protect women from marital violence. Sharing experiences of violence broke the silence around domestic violence and many new forms came out. Along with disclosure of many new forms of gender based violence at home, it was found that legal provisions were grossly inadequate to deal with such violence. Further, women complained that police and other authorities rejected registration of their complaints of violence which were not related to dowry (Kumar: 1993). Police, instead of registering complaints of assault advised women to concentrate on her role in home and duty towards her husband. It was due to the fact that police and other authorities were not free of the impact of patriarchal value system which places women in secondary position and confers husbands every right over their wives (Agnes:1992). Through constant agitation and intervention women's groups made it acceptable to include all kinds of domestic violence and cruelty against wives, independent of dowry under this Section 498 of IPC (Agnes:1992). Thus by the early 1990s the focus on 'dowry violence' gave way to the broader notion of 'wife-beating' and 'wife battering' as a result of the increasing realisation that women are subjected to numerous forms of abuse in families (Suneetha and Nagraj: 2006).

Legislative demands made by women's movement and campaigns for changes in law were important sites for articulating new shift in understanding scenario of domestic violence in India (ibid). As the understanding on domestic violence widened it was found that there were no legal provisions which could deal with all these forms. This led to feminists all over the country making a demand for a separate enactment on domestic violence (Gangoli: 2007; Kishwar: 2008). 'Generally, complaints can be registered only after an offence has been committed. But in a domestic situation a woman would need protection even before the crime, when she apprehends danger to her life, as she is living with and is dependent on her assaulter' (Agnes: 1992: ws-25). So a special law was needed to protect women within home from undisputed rights of husbands to beat their wives, and demands were made for more strict new law which will include all the physical, sexual, psychological forms of violence. With realisations of numerous forms of violence against female in family, demands were raised for 'special enactment' of law (ibid). Meanwhile, apart from dowry related violence faced by married women, various other forms of domestic violence were came to light that single women face at hands of other family member (Gangoli: 2007). This made the necessity of a new law that

encompasses all kinds of violence faced by women at different stages of life. Intensified campaigns by feminist groups demanding new law on domestic violence culminated in the form of Protection Of Women against Domestic Violence (PWDVA) 2005. A group called Lawyers Collective came up with a draft of a proposed bill on domestic violence which later was taken as blueprint by Government of India and the bill of PWADV Act 2001 was formulated. This bill came up with some technical and definitional problems and got rejected in parliament. Finally after many efforts in 2005 bill for domestic violence act passed in the parliament and came into effect from 2006 (Phadke: 2003). This act recognises different forms of violence—physical, sexual, psychological; gives woman right to stay in matrimonial home, child custody, compensation; and right to file complaint of domestic violence by any female member including mother-in-law/sister-in-law against any female member (Gangoli: 2007). Thus this act seeks to give a broad definition that constitutes domestic violence both in marital and natal home. The bill defined domestic violence as:

‘All acts of gender-based physical, psychological and sexual abuse by a family member against women in the family, ranging from simple assaults to aggravated physical battery, kidnapping, threats, intimidation, coercion, stalking, humiliating verbal abuse, forcible or unlawful entry, arson, destruction of property, sexual violence, marital rape, dowry or bride-price related violence, female genital mutilation, violence related to exploitation through prostitution, violence against household workers and attempts to commit such acts shall be termed domestic violence’ (Kothari: 2005:4844).

Continuous struggles of women’s groups made lawmakers understand that domestic violence has many other forms other than dowry. This act classified domestic violence into four categories and laid down strict rules against those whoever uses violence against women within home (Ghose and Chaudhary: 2011). Thus the understanding of domestic violence took various shifts from dowry to domestic violence.

2.5. Theories of Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is explained by various researchers from different perspectives. In last two decades, most literature on domestic violence mainly physical aggression between partners started to be associated with two distinctly opposite perspectives- one is “family violence perspective” supporting the possibility for both men and women becoming

victim and perpetrators, the other is “feminist perspectives” explaining female victimisation and male perpetrators of domestic violence (Archer:2006).

2.5.1. Family violence perspective

Violence against wives or wife assault got very less attention till 1970s. It was in 1970s that wife assault was first addressed. Before recognising wife-abuse child abuse was first recognised as a form of family violence (Gelles: 1985). Initially wife assault was addressed by family violence theorists from a psychological point of view (Gelles: 1980; 1985). Child abuse and wife abuse was initially studied by physiologists, psychologists, medical practitioners. Therefore was a tendency to look at such abuse as a psychiatric problem (Gelles: 1985; Vindhya: 2005). The psychiatric model put emphasis on pathology or deviant behaviour of the batterer and considered the problem of wife abuse as caused due to individual psychological problem. The psychological perspective focussed on the individual traits and personality disorder of individuals which leads to violence against wives (Vindhya: 2005). This model includes ‘theoretical approaches which link mental illness, alcohol and drug abuse, and other intra-individual phenomena to acts of family violence’ (Gelles: 1980:881). It was perceived that only people with psychiatric problems get involve in violence and violence was seen as gender neutral. The psychological perspective viewed wife-beating, child abuse and other forms of violence occurring in the family as the same (Wardell et al: 1983). Family violence theorists while looking at violence in family take all forms of violence together for analysis and while doing so the higher rate of wife abuse in comparison to low rate of husband abuse gets equalised. This trivialises the severity of wife abuse. In this process the point that ‘the preferential victims of violence in the family are women’ gets missed out (Gelles: 1985:352). Studying wife abuse as family violence also involves process of victim-blaming. ‘Violence is seen as an interpersonal incident where the victim had to share the blame and responsibility of occurrence of violence. Violence against women was understood as a multifaceted phenomenon grounded in interplay of psychological, situational and socio-cultural factors’ (Vindhya: 2005: 200). The social construction of male as strong, aggressive and violent; and the accepted notion of male violence over their personal property operating in the institutional setting of family, supported violence against women and also ‘blaming the women for provoking the male by their continuous nagging for battering’(Wardell et al: 1983: 72). The theory of victim blaming is

appropriate to describe this concept of nagging. By blaming the victim ‘the culpability for the crime is shifted from the perpetrator’s actions to the victim’s attributes or behavior’ (Jackson: 2007:717). Psychological perspective uses the concept of female masochism—the feeling of finding pleasure in pain; to blame women that they love to get violated and humiliated; and also to justify domestic violence against women (Houston: 2014).

The “social-structure model” of family violence approach to domestic violence tries to interpret domestic violence in context to the various stress factors. Stress factor can contribute to occurrence of higher degree of domestic violence if violence is accepted as normal and usual reaction to stress. This model emphasised on stress emerged from failure to perform according to sex-role expectation. The gender socialisation expects performance of certain acts by both sexes. Failure to perform those acts creates stress and men are seen resorting to violence to relief the stress (Houston: 2014). Stress due to various reasons like unemployment, illness, inequality or disadvantage position can lead to stress among people from different social groups and also to varying degree of domestic violence incidents. This model may reveal existence of greater levels of domestic violence among the lowest castes and tribes, poor and slum dwellers and socially outcast (Hackett: 2011). Such models stereotype perpetrators and victims and fail to explain the reality of domestic violence which is neither community specific nor a result of stress.

Theories of family violence using the psychiatric model and stress model viewed domestic violence caused by either psychological problem or stress, but failed to locate the patriarchal power-structure and gendered nature of it. On these points feminist perspective have criticised family violence perspective on domestic violence and rejected such explanations.

2. 5.2. Feminist perspective

As result of women’s movements, awareness increased about prevailing gender inequality. With demands for equality in professional arena, expectations were rose for the same in personal arena too. Feminist theory provides a framework to understand the origin of unequal status, hierarchy between men and women in domestic spheres, as well as the differential socialisation of male and female which perpetuated violence and abuse

in the home (Jackson: 2007). It is the feminist understanding of domestic violence that for the first time rooted its explanation of domestic violence from the standpoint of women who were almost always at the receiving end of this violence. For feminists 'issues of gender and power are the ultimate root of intimate violence' (Anderson: 1997:655). Feminist perspectives viewed domestic violence from a gender perspective and de-emphasised the importance of psychiatric explanations as explained by family violence theory. Feminist perspective is concerned about victim's and perpetrator's gender and the prevailing gender-hierarchy within which domestic violence occurs (Dutton: 1994). It intends to find out why men in general use physical force against women and what purposes does it serve? In the process of finding the answer feminist perspective focuses on patriarchy and link up patriarchy, power and control of men over women to domestic violence against women. They argue that it is the concentration of power in male hands and the patriarchal need to control women by men that results in wife abuse (Ibid). Feminist theory emphasises on sex role conditioning and impact of socio-cultural factors that leads to belief systems that justify sexism, male privilege, and gender socialisation (Healey, et al: 2009). They view domestic violence as part and tool to the process of maintaining coercive control and dominance over women. They explain domestic violence as rooted in the system of patriarchy. Feminist perspective centred their criticism of psychological perspective of domestic violence mainly around three points--ignoring the power and control aspect, focus on psychopathology absolves the abuser of responsibility of his action, and blame on the wife for violence (Vindhya: 2005). This was a clear deviation from some other theoretical perspectives on domestic violence that often ended up blaming the victim.

Feminist perspective also criticised family perspective for considering domestic violence as gender neutral and for equating male and female violence. It rejects this idea by pointing at the higher rate of female victimisation than male victimisation and the fact that maximum of female violence are done in self-defence (Walker: 1984; Brown: 1987). Feminist perspective viewed patriarchy and power-race as central to domestic violence perpetrated by men who believed in patriarchy and men's unlimited rights over wives. In patriarchal society socialisation process conceptualises and idealises male behaviour to be strong, aggressive, powerful, and superior to female and placed them in a higher position. In patriarchal system domestic violence occurs with the purpose of maintaining control and dominance over the female. In regard to use of domestic violence for the

purpose of power and control; Dobash and Dobash (1979) commented that ‘men who assault their wives are actually living up to a cultural prescription that are cherished in western society—aggressiveness, male dominance, female subordination- and they are using physical force as a means to enforce that domination (24). This is true in India also. In such culture violent behaviour by the male are not seen as something abnormal, rather gendered practices in a patriarchal set up normalises the male violence over female. Feminist perspective has also put emphasis on cultural construction of femininity and social structures while looking at the causes of women staying in abusive relationships (Walker: 1984). Feminist perspective thus criticised patriarchy and gendered-socialisation that creates conditions of cultural acceptance of domestic violence. It considers wife-beating not as a “deviant” or “pathological act”; rather as a form of behaviour desirable for and accepted by patriarchal system (Peterson: 1992). Thus, patriarchy becomes the main attacking point for feminist perspectives on domestic violence.

Some of the major feminist perspectives and their explanation of domestic violence are discussed below.

- **Liberal feminist theory**

Liberal feminist theory argues that gender socialisation contributes to women’s inequality because it is through learned customs that inequality is perpetuated (Anderson and Taylor: 2013:268). For them it is the traditional and customary norms that restrict women’s participation in public space and development. To bring out social change for upliftment of women’s status, liberal feminism supports legal changes to bring about equal opportunity, equal rights and education for men and women (ibid).

Liberal feminists are mainly concerned with women’s subordinate status in society and their absence in the public space. They focused on how women are denied their equal share by a male dominated legal system. According to liberal feminism, men and women are the same; therefore equal opportunities should be provided in all spheres to women as men. They argue that men and women are same and should be treated in the same way. Biological differences should not be counted while trying to achieve gender equality. According to liberal feminism because of gender-socialisation and allocation of works based on gender, women are excluded from having their equal and due status and

this discrimination is the root cause of domestic violence. They argue that societal construction of masculine and feminine ideas and division of works on that basis has ‘contributed to the subordinate position of women through its construction of women’s roles and identities as wives and mothers, passive and weak, as subordinate and in need of protection’ (Sathe: 1996: 2804). This ultimately leads to discrimination, economic inequality, domination of women; and to fight against these they gave importance to legal reforms. Liberal feminism stressed that women are not only to serve men and children; but they are equal to men and demands recognition to their freedom (Wendell: 1987). Liberal feminism is mostly concerned with equal opportunities and wage-payment. They believed that access to equal opportunities will help women to overcome their subordinate status and will free them from exploitation. Liberal feminists’ concern with equity in pay and employment led them to strive for legislative measures (Gilmore: 2003). ‘The irrational belief that women are less capable than men and rigid gender role conditioning’ is thought to be responsible for causing domestic violence (Enns and Sinacore: 2001:470). To solve these problems liberal feminists focused on reforming existing systems and redistribution of persons in power-structure irrespective of gender as tool to bring equality and to end domestic violence. They believe that gender neutral, non-traditional role in personal relationship is helpful in reducing domestic violence (Ibid).

- **Radical feminist theory**

Radical feminist theory mainly criticises the hierarchical power structure in the family. Radical feminist theory developed during the second wave feminist movement around 1960s. According to radical feminist theory the root cause of women’s oppression lies in the patriarchal structure of the society (Jackson: 2007). ‘Patriarchy, or the dominance of male privilege and entitlement, maintained through control of political, social, and economic institutions, is responsible for women’s systematic oppression and devaluation’ (Enns and Sinacore: 2001:431). Liberal feminists seek women’s emancipation through legal reform; likewise radical feminists seek it through the rearrangement of the society. According to them patriarchy is ‘a political structure that values men more than women’ and believed that complete eradication of patriarchy will make women free (West: 1988:4). Radical feminists are more attuned to power disparities between men and women (West: 1988).

Radical feminists argue that 'male dominance within families is part of wider system of male power, is neither neutral nor inevitable, and occurs at women's cost' (Yllo: 1993). They take into account the hierarchical gender relation in analysing domestic violence. They argue that if patriarchy is abolished gender hierarchy will be diminished and that will result in end of domestic violence. It is because patriarchy supports male domination over women and women's oppression. Radical feminism seeks total alteration of patriarchal power system. It considers patriarchy as the deepest source and strongest reason of domestic violence (Willis: 1989). Due to patriarchy, gender hierarchy exists and as men always want power, use domestic violence as a tool to maintain their dominance. So, to end domestic violence, removal of patriarchy seemed to be the only possible solution. Radical feminists focus on the male dominated social structure, and socialisation practices dictating men and women gender-specific roles. They focus on the uneven distribution of power that men enjoy over women in society (Renzetti et al: 2001). They consider domestic violence as the ultimate expression of male dominance and exploitation of women (Jackson: 2007).

Radical feminists see dominance in sexual or marital relationship too and link it to domestic violence. D'Unger (2005) commented that radical feminist researchers tend to focus on issues related to women's 'sexual oppression and victimisation, harassment, and pornography' (cited in Jackson: 2007:322). Some of the radical theorists hold that 'women's reproductive role and physical condition to nature in some sense as the cause of patriarchy' (West:1988: 29). They suggest that due to inequality in marriage and other such relationships, domestic violence occurs (Renzetti et al:2001). Radical feminists demand women's physical integrity and privacy. Pregnancy and sexual intercourse are criticised by radical feminists because both of these incidents violate women's bodily integrity and increases women's dependence on men. Firestone holds that since women are only capable of giving birth, her subordinated stay in private sphere to give birth to next generation is necessary. This compels the women to remain deprived of opportunities and remain dependent on men for economic and other matters.

Considering women as sex class and pregnancy as a reason that can cause women's oppression, Firestone has suggested doing away with biological reproduction as the solution to end subordination and violence upon women (Kelly: 2003). Radical feminists view marriage as supporting institution of both pregnancy and sexual intercourse, and a

key factor to women's violation (West: 1988). They saw women's sexuality as an important factor for their oppression. Therefore they rejected any form of relationships with men because such link with men is the root cause of women's subordination. For them relationship of women with men is the way through which men gain control over women's body, sexuality and thereby on their total self. They criticise patriarchy and other institutions like marriage etc that result in domestic violence and suggest its total abolitions. Thus, within radical feminism 'domestic violence is understood as a consequence of patriarchal power and assertion of male privilege within the family' (Nancarrow: 2003:4) and patriarchy is criticised as a root cause of domestic violence.

- **Social feminist theory**

Socialist feminism originated during second wave supporting the link between economic exploitation and patriarchy causing domestic violence. They emphasised on capitalistic economic inequality and the existence of patriarchy as main causal factors for women's oppression (Jackson: 2007). They focus on the complex relationship of capitalism, gender, patriarchy and women's oppression. In patriarchy women's works are not paid, they are not considered as productive workers inspite of working almost for whole day. The unpaid nature of their works renders them vulnerable making them economically dependent on their male partners. To make women free, it is necessary to abolish patriarchy and its economic base that is the capitalist system. They give importance on removal of capitalism as a necessary step for abolishing patriarchy. For them, both patriarchy and capitalism are mutually supportive. In capitalist system, gender based work division makes women get involved in un-waged works. Due to un-waged labour women remain economically dependent on men leading to their acceptance of subordination by men within household. This enforces the existing gender hierarchy in patriarchy (Jackson: 2007). They see patriarchy as a regime of exercise of power and male dominance. Thus socialist feminist theory stressed that domestic violence results from patriarchy as well as the class structure (Chafetz: 1997). For this reason they hold that eradicating patriarchy as an oppressive system for women it is necessary to remove capitalist system first (ibid). They also view the socialisation process that makes women "nurturer and caregiver". Due to such gender-role socialisation, women allow men to paid work and they themselves remain unemployed. This gender role performance affects women's overall status both in and outside home. Socialist feminists view gender

oppression as a central form of oppression, and they see transformation of educational and family system that prepares individuals for work and redistribution of power through the transformation of economic structures as essential to meeting their goal of making women free from domestic violence (Enns and Sinacore: 2001). Socialist feminists thus put emphasis on economic inequality and patriarchy for occurrence of domestic violence in society pushing women into subordinate status (Jackson: 2007).

- **Marxist feminism**

Marxists feminists use Marxian concepts to view exploitation of women. Marxist feminists argue that main cause of women's oppression in the family is not the men, but the capitalism. Women engaged in household and child care work without wage, allowing the men of homes to go for paid work. Their unpaid works actually benefit the capitalist class. If women were to pay for household and child caring work, that would have been a huge amount. But, since women are doing their work without wages, capitalist can run their market by paying only the men workers. Thus capitalist economy contributes towards oppression and exploitation of women at home (Jackson: 2007). Unpaid woman have to tolerate frustration and anger of working husband against their powerless position in work. While doing so women absorb the anger to make men ready for the next day's work. Women keep the capitalist system going by taking all kinds of care of men. Thus capitalism results in continuation of women's economic dependence and emergence of domestic violence. Men involved in paid work enjoys holding of private property which further increases men's power and women's dependence at home. To end this inequality and domestic abuse, engagement of women in paid work as well as paying women for housework and child care is necessary. Marxist feminists argued that end of capitalist system will remove gender bias from society and at the same time end women's abuse (Jackson: 2007).

- **Black feminism**

Black Feminism attempts to highlight the importance of race and ethnicity in context of understanding women's oppression (Collins: 1990). For them, women are not a homogeneous entity and their social location do matters in their victimisation. Black feminism emerged out of, and in response to, the Black liberation movement and the Women's Movement in USA. They felt a kind of exclusion during the movement as

experiences of white middle class women were described as universal women's problem. In doing so, black women's experiences due to their race and class got ignored. This fostered the need of having a different group to address the needs, issues and experiences of black women in context of their racial and class identity (Eisenstein: 1979). Black feminism describes the manifold oppression that women of color face- racial oppression within the Women's Movement, and sexually oppressed within the Black Liberation Movement, as well as within the patriarchal system of the Black community, which simply mimics the sexist ideas of the larger society (Charleswell: 2014: 2).

All white women face domestic violence in hands of men. But black women face violence for being women as well as being black women. They face different tiers of violence-in heterosexual relationship as well as racial domination. Black feminism thus tries to see abuse of black women in connection to their class, race, and ethnicity in western society. Black women of American slave society experienced patriarchal oppression, at the same time 'as labourer she was allowed no feminine "fragility", as a woman she was "raped" into submission and as a slave she endured a subhuman status' (Eisenstein: 1979: 47). They are more likely to be working parents and single mothers, being slaves black women lack political power and are economically exploited and tends to be subjected to multiple experiences of exclusion and discrimination (Enns and Sinacore: 2001). The life of a black woman thus incorporates violence in domestic setting based on her identities. Therefore black feminism, through an intersectionality approach emphasised on understanding black women's oppression in its socio-historical context, which are often different from white women (Tong: 2014).

- **Third world feminism**

Third world feminism concentrates on experiences of women from third world. This perspective emerge against the western feminism that generalises western white middle class women's issues as essential women's issue and argues that this essentialisation gives inadequate importance to concerns of women from third world (Narayan: 1998). For them third-world is not only about gender issues; national oppression, class, race and religion are all integral to its constitution (Jackson: 2007). Considering all these, third world feminism claims that it is impossible to understand life in third world without including their economic and historical context. Third world women face violence like

the western middle class women, but in a much more complicated manner. All these factors have influenced women's lives in third world countries which are different from the western world. So, third world feminism tries to see women's lives and oppression in third world with focus on these factors.

The assumption that "men are perpetrators and women are victims" and men use violence on women to remain in power has been the dominating feminist explanation of domestic violence. This classic feminist argument that battery represents a manifestation of patriarchal power has been challenged by different theoretical approaches (Currie: 1998; Anderson: 2005). The 'battered husband syndrome' posed a challenge and established sex-symmetry in husbands' and wives' partner assault (Steinmetz: 1977-78). Sex-symmetry findings have been used to challenge feminist construction of partner violence as a problem of gender and power (Currie: 1998). Feminist explanation has also been charged for being heterosexual and ignoring the experiences of battered gay and lesbians (Merril: 2013). Feminist theory has also been charged for being unable to answer clearly the question why some heterosexual man batter whereas other don't (Island and Letellier (1991). Feminists of Color have argued that this theory had failed to represent their experiences properly. For traditional feminist theorist, women and men are constructed as two binary- men as abuser having power and women as victim having no power. This binary structure ignores the historical and particular context of particular groups of women and also ignores that different groups of women have access to power in different lines of race, class, gender, sexual orientation (Canon et al: 2015). Intersection of all these identities in accessing and using power gives a broader understanding of abuse in domestic relation beyond gender and sexual lines. A queer perspective tried to show domestic violence as based on sexual identity. It tried to show the 'normativity' based on sexual identity. It criticises heteronormativity, a practice associated with heterosexuality is set as norm and those who differ from this is considered deviant. Associated with the 'normed identity' (being heterosexual) adds power and deviated from it reduces. Queer perspective shows the stress of those who are sexually marginalised and their use of violence/power just not as extension of patriarchy but as relationship tactics (Brown: 2008; Canon et al: 2015). This perspective shows the differences and similarities of heterosexual violence and same-sex couples' violence.

Chapter III

Forms and Nature of Domestic Violence in Assam

3.1. Introduction

Contrary to the popular claim that domestic violence is almost non-existent in Assam, this chapter shows the acute presence of domestic violence, taking varied forms across communities. It highlights that given the prevalence of gendered social norms and hierarchies in all communities of Assam, domestic violence is normalised in everyday discourse, making women's struggles to escape and rebuild their lives an impossible task. The familial, community and legal institutions, given their patriarchal nature, often act as barriers to women's attempts to escape domestic violence, rather than providing support, as believed. However, the efforts of women's and other rights-based groups have brought in awareness and sensitisation regarding domestic violence, providing much-needed space and support structures for women to deal with domestic violence.

On the basis of analysis of data collected through interviews and case studies, a detailed discussion of domestic violence in Assam is dealt with in Chapters 3 and 4. Among other aspects, elaboration on the forms and nature of domestic violence, socio-cultural factors within which such violence is perpetrated and sustained, various vulnerabilities that women face, leading to and due to domestic violence, strategies which women apply to survive and resist such violence, the support structures available for them, and the ideologies and functioning of such support structures are taken up in detail.

3.2. Nature of Domestic Violence

The nature and forms that domestic violence takes in Assam are explained here.

3.2.1. Domestic violence found across all stages of life

Incidents of violence are not isolated, and victimisation does not end in one episode. Victims are subjected to years of abuse (Dobash and Dobash: 1981). Respondents of this study stated that they have experienced violence at different points of time in their lives. This violence varied in its forms, nature and period of perpetration from one respondent to other. In my data it is found that abuse had lasted mostly for 2—4 years. The longest

suffering found in the study is of twenty-two (22) years. Women's accounts of victimisation have confirmed that they have faced violence at different stages of their lives. Furthermore, the age of the victims, the forms of domestic violence they faced and inclusion of infants, adolescents and elderly women in the group also confirm the occurrence of domestic violence at different stages. Through the life-cycle approach, Karlekar (1998) has explained the prevalence of domestic violence throughout women's lives.

The presence of domestic violence across the lifespan of women in Assam is brought forth in the data collected. The following responses and cases reflect the prevalence of violence at different stages of women's lives:

The youngest of my sample was a 14-year-old girl who was a victim of child marriage. I met her during a meeting in AMSS, Darrang. She returned to her natal home as she could not tolerate the abuse by her husband.

Tutumoni, 16 years old, said: I was physically tortured by my stepmother and was not allowed to have sufficient amount of food. My alcoholic father never tried to defend me from her abuse. I could not withstand this torture and ended up in a shelter home with the help of my aunt.

Dulu, aged 18, who was a victim of rape, later faced forced abortion and mental and physical torture by her husband and in-laws. She had faced demands of sexual intimacy from her husband's brother-in-law

Sangeeta, 27 years old, stated: I was married off to Pradip when I was in my early twenties. I had seen my alcoholic father abusing my mother and my mother had to take the responsibility of everything. My mother did not want to keep her grown-up eldest daughter at home for a long time without marriage as that would affect my sisters' prospects of getting marriage alliances. So I was forced to marry. In my married life I did not get anything except all kinds of violence from my husband.

Swapnali, aged 44 years, has reported being a victim of marital rape and physical abuse for resisting her husband's excessive sexual demands.

Brinda, 52 years, was pressured by her brother and sister-in-law to transfer the piece of land registered in her name over to them. When verbal abuse did not

work they inflicted physical torture upon her. To compel her to sign the papers they abused her daughter, too. She did not obey them and somehow escaped from their attacks with her daughter.

In the above accounts of women's victimisation, the fact that domestic violence can occur at any time or any stage of life becomes clear. The respondents are of different ages and have faced different forms of domestic violence. The women's accounts of domestic violence reflect their victimisation at different points of life, starting from infancy and going on to old age. Such data questions the notion of limiting domestic violence to the marital phase of women's lives and proves its prevalence all throughout the lives of women.

The data includes the occurrence of various forms of domestic violence, including forced abortion, abuse due to the birth of a girl child, negligence towards the female child, early marriage, wife-battering, dowry harassment, forced sex, marital rape, economic abuse, and so on. All these occur in different stages and affect women's lives in many ways. As found by Kaur and Garg (2008), and many other studies, this study, too, found the existence of domestic violence and its adverse effects across the lifespan of women. Occurrence of domestic violence cannot be restricted to a particular time or age, and 'at every stage in the life cycle, the female body is both the objects of desire and of control' (Karlekar: 1998: 1742).

3.2.2. Respondent's perceptions about domestic violence

One of the objectives of my study was to understand the types and forms of domestic violence and the extent up to which it affects the lives of women. While getting into the types and forms that domestic violence takes in Assam, I tried to understand how the issue of domestic violence is conceptualised by respondents. I tried to look into their perceptions and how they understand the problem that is affecting their and other women's lives in Assam.

- **As a normal part of life**

The data reveals a kind of tolerant attitude towards domestic violence and a silent acceptance of it among women who have faced domestic violence. It is seen that women have accepted domestic violence as a normal part of married life. For them the

occurrence of domestic violence is an integral aspect of domestic life and not much can be done about it. The following responses will demonstrate this:

Bhanita, a survivor, said: Couples do quarrel. It's not a big thing. What can we women do about it?

Mamon, another survivor, said: When you keep utensils together they make a noise. The same way, when people stay together differences are obvious or slapping once or twice is normal.

Not only victims of domestic violence, but also police personnel, too, perceive domestic violence as a normal part of marriage. Their reluctance to take up cases or convince victims to go for a compromise shows indirect support towards normalisation of domestic violence instead of criminalising it.

Adjusted to the idea of wife-battering, women largely normalise and accept domestic violence. Gender socialisation and moral teachings about marriage and femininity make women accept domestic violence and support its revelation only under critical circumstances which carry a threat to women's lives (Dave and Solanki: 2000). Due to the impact of socialisation, initially women are unable to see domestic violence as a violation and keep the family before themselves; when they understand it, they lack the courage to go against those social teachings or overthrow them. The impact of social teaching or the feminine values inculcated in the minds of women often influence their responses to violence. A few cases are given to show it:

Swapnali said: I thought that since I am married to him it's my duty to satisfy him, and so I tried to keep him satisfied.

Nirmala said: I tolerated all kinds of physical and mental abuse and stayed with him so that my marriage works. I did not want to break up my marriage and divorce him. But that day when I saw him with his sister-in-law in an objectionable condition, I left for home.

- **As misuse of power**

Domestic violence was also perceived as misuse of power by respondents. Respondents argued that domestic violence is clearly an act of misuse of power which is attempted by those who are in a powerful position and upon women who are generally powerless in

the society. A few responses are given below where respondents have claimed domestic violence as an issue of power abuse:

Trishna, a survivor, said: It's a clear misuse of power against women, and it affects every aspect of women's life. Domestic violence can ruin the whole life of women.

Kusum, a survivor, said: I have faced a lot of violence from my husband. So for me domestic violence is just a reflection of dominance of men over women. Men's need for power and domination results in domestic violence. Men think that they can do anything to their women and nobody can stop them. They consider that they have every right over their women. But it is not so. Nobody has the right to abuse anybody. Domestic violence thus is a clear act of misuse of power and violation of women's rights.

Ms Rita, a non-governmental organisation (NGO) staff, said: People tend to see domestic violence or wife-beating as normal clashes between married couples or family members. Domestic violence is not as simple as it is understood to be by people. It is an act of domination and abuse of power. We see that mostly women are victims and men are perpetrators. It happens because women are placed in a lower position to men in the social system, and so men misuse their power against women.

Mr. S. Saharia, a lawyer, said: Domestic violence mainly is the result of misuse of power by men allotted by patriarchy and also a means to ensure the power disparity. He also linked domestic violence as power abuse to show masculinity by men.

Mrs. R. Sarma, a police personnel, responded: Domestic violence refers to abuse of women at home. Violent and abusive behaviour towards women by family members can be termed as 'domestic violence'. All rules of the patriarchal system make women weaker and grant men the authority over them, which results in abuse over women.

From the responses, the gender power hierarchy in the society becomes apparent, where women are placed in a powerless position. Respondents blamed the social system for allotting more power and authority to men. Emphasising on this hierarchy, respondents

argued that abuse of power in the form of various violent acts serves certain goals. Mostly, it is to ensure domination of the powerful over the powerless. They also argued that domestic violence is also committed to show masculinity and male power. The prevailing gendered perception of violent-aggressive men and fragile-submissive women contributes to men's aggressive nature towards women and also justifies it.

- **As a violation of rights**

Against the prevailing acceptance of violence upon women by men, a section of women who are educated, aware and financially independent have considered domestic violence as a violation of one's rights. These respondents believe that a husband does not have any right to abuse his wife. They argue that domestic violence is not a husband's right and outright rejected domestic violence and approached the law. According to these respondents, domestic violence should not be tolerated by anyone.

Rita, a survivor, said: Domestic violence is clearly a violation of women's rights. It is a violation of rights in any form it occurs. My husband deprived me of sexual intimacy, which I must get being his wife. He concealed his sexual orientation, which is also a crime. Finally, he gave me wrong medicine that was harmful to my health and life. His actions have carried a threat to my life and violate my basic rights to a safe life.

This respondent faced sexual negligence from her husband, who later attempted to kill her by giving her incorrect medicines. She clearly mentioned these incidents as a violation of her right to life. Due to the threat to her life, she took the help of the law to save herself.

Alin Mahanta, a lawyer, said: Along with legal awareness, also necessary is to realise that domestic violence is a gendered issue. It is a violation of rights of women, and women must not tolerate it silently.

Rashmi Sarma, one NGO worker, termed domestic violence as a violation of women's rights and stressed on breaking the silence about it to save women from silent toleration of domestic violence. She opined that women must be taught to see it as a violation of their rights to realise that they are not getting anything by tolerating but encouraging violence.

Some survivor respondents responded to domestic violence as a violation of their rights and stressed on the need to fight back. Their responses indicated their rejection to tolerate domestic violence as men's privilege.

Nitu, a survivor respondent, said: Domestic violence is clearly an abuse of power and a violation of women's rights. Marriage should be an affair between two persons with equal rights and responsibilities. Nobody should be above and beneath. Both should equally contribute towards their conjugal life. Nobody has a right over anybody.

For them, a domestic relationship should not be about hierarchy, rather it must be a relationship based on equality. They believe in fighting for one's right and showed little tolerance to violence meted upon them. They do not believe that domestic violence is a private matter to be kept secret. These respondents informed that they protested against domestic violence and took legal help too.

- **As an advantage of being the breadwinner**

Contrary to the claim of financially independent women, another perception has also been put forward as domestic violence being men's privilege for being economically independent and providers of the family. Domestic violence is an outcome of stress that men take as providers. Their responses reveal that some women regard domestic violence as a result of the husbands' prerogative due to their financial contribution. A few responses are given here to show it.

Gita said: Due to the day's hard work he gets tired and angry. Out of anger sometimes he slaps me once or twice.

Urmila said: He is working hard to earn money for us. We are living on that money. Since we are living on his earnings, so if he slaps or abuses me I don't say anything.

Women argue that when a man is stressed, he commits violence against his wife. Violence is seen as an accepted way of releasing stress and therefore is tolerated by the wives. Their economic dependence adds to the vulnerability, and they accept abuse. Economic dependence is found to trap many women in a cycle of violence. Their

financial dependence gives their husbands the confidence to abuse their wives without being resisted.

Lack of financial resources and dependence upon the abuser curtail women's options to fight domestic violence (Basu and Famoye: 2010). In patriarchy, men are the breadwinners and women are the homemakers. Women do household tasks, which refers to those unpaid work done to maintain family members and/or a home (Coltran: 2000) and while men go out to paid jobs (Cohen: 2004). Men can go out and earn money because women perform all the unpaid household jobs. Women's involvement in unpaid work hampers their career upliftment and helps men to grow economically. The unpaid nature of women's work gets devalued compared to their husbands' waged/paid work and results in women's dependency upon men. Economic dependency allows women to be subject to all kinds of violence, and this gives husbands considerably more power and a bargaining advantage within the marriage (Sen: 1989). Thus the unpaid nature of women's work compels women to accept violence as the right of economically independent husbands or the breadwinners.

From the above discussions different perceptions about domestic violence among the respondents of this study are brought forth. Survivor respondents as well as legal and NGO staff constructed it as a crime rooted in a patriarchal system supporting gender inequality. They see the prevailing gender inequality and power hierarchy, which allots men a superior position, as the factors contributing towards domestic violence. However, many survivors see domestic violence in terms of its direct forms and causes. They consider only the visible manifestation of it but cannot see the underlying patterns of gender subordination as its real cause. They fail to recognise the hidden gendered nature of domestic violence.

3.2.3. Forms of wife-battering

Domestic violence takes different forms in Assam. As mentioned in 'Methodology' (Chapter I), the data is largely concentrated on wife-battering and witch-hunting. Next, within the larger scope of domestic violence, a discussion is taken up on the forms taken by wife-battering and the nature and causes of witch-hunting in Assam.

Similar to the research around the world, this study, too, brings forth that domestic violence is not just limited to physical violence and only to wife abuse. In Assam, it

takes physical, psychological, sexual and economic forms. Here is a narration of the various forms that domestic violence takes in Assam.

3.2.3.1. Physical violence

The data shows a high prevalence of physical violence in Assam. Respondents described their experiences of physical violence. Their accounts revealed various forms of domestic violence that are physical in nature.

The acts of physical violence include physical battering, setting on fire, attempt at drowning, attacking with a sharp weapon, forcing to do tough and laborious works, forcing to drink alcohol, slapping, pulling hair, punching, strangulating, banging the head on a wall, kicking in the stomach during pregnancy, throwing utensils on the victim, beating incessantly, burning on various parts of the body, and many more.

Respondents who experienced physical violence stated that they had often been beaten, punched, slapped, strangulated, kicked or hit with some objects by the abusers. Respondents also reported facing attempts to be burned alive as one of the severe forms of physical violence they experienced. Some of them responded as follows:

Niru said: My husband was not interested in me. After six or seven months of marriage, he started beating me after drinking.

Smriti said: My husband beat me with a wooden stick, slapped me, punched me in the stomach, strangled me and banged my head on the wall.

Pronoty said: I spent one year at my marital home. During that period one day my husband and his aunt tried to set me on fire.

Tutu said: My refusal and failure to bring money made my in-laws aggressive, and they tortured me continuously. Finally one day my husband severely attacked me and poured kerosene on me and lit me up. As I caught fire, I removed my clothes and ran to my parents' place and saved myself.

Physical violence towards women also includes imprisonment and isolation. The majority of women experiencing domestic violence reported isolation and restriction as two most frequent forms of physical violence. Two cases demonstrating the same are as follows:

Ranjit did not allow Anima to talk to anybody or keep any contact or communication with anybody. She was forced to withdraw all kinds of social connections. Anima could not continue her marriage with Ranjit because of his suspicious nature.

Dulu's mother-in-law never allowed her to do any work nor enter the kitchen, and no one spoke to her. She lived a lonely life within her marital home.

Isolation has been studied in two prominent works on domestic violence by Martin (1976) and Walker (1984), where they argued that actions to control and isolate women have a great impact on women's independence and coping capacity (Follingstad et. al.: 1990). Isolation reflects the treatment of a woman as a man's possession, and he will decide and control all her social behaviours and communications. Through isolation, the abuser keeps the woman away from all possible support systems so that he might not be able to end the abuse. The abuser isolates the woman from all her social and familial contacts, keeping her aloof. Lack of contacts and aloofness make the woman helpless and trap her in the abusive relationship. The abuser gains psychological control over the victim by isolating her. The victim's social isolation is one of the foundations of learned helplessness (Stark: 2007). To achieve the goal of isolating women, the abusers use the technique of threatening, blackmailing, restrictions, etc., to exert power over the victims. The following case will also show the use of restriction upon victims.

In the case of Rushna, Babul and his mother did not allow her to visit her parents' house. Whenever she wanted to go, they used to assault her.

Restricting a woman from visiting her natal family is a common form of domestic violence reported by the majority of women. The natal family is the first source of support for an abused woman, and men use restrictions upon their wives' visits to their natal homes. By restricting women from going to their natal families, men limit women's accessibility and strength to fight back against the abuse inflicted upon them. The following cases will demonstrate how:

Juli, one of the survivors, reported being restricted from attending her father's funeral and seeing him for the last time. Her husband and mother-in-law tried to lock her in a room to restrict her from going to her natal home to see her father's body.

Ruma said: Nobody was allowed to come to our house, and I wasn't allowed to go anywhere. He imprisoned me, and to convince me he told me that he loved me too much and does not want others to see me.

Men also justify their controlling acts of isolating women as loving and possessive behaviour towards the women. The abusers try to portray jealousy and controlling behaviour as a sign of love and concern for the women. Jealousy and a desire for control make men accuse women of acts that they have not done. These false accusations create stress and a complicated situation for women (Logan et al.: 2006).

- **Consequences of physical violence**

The data shows that apart from minor injuries, physical violence often results in serious injuries, necessitating intense medical care. Some such injuries mentioned by the respondents are as follows:

Jinu stated that immediately after their marriage her husband beat her on many occasions so severely that she had to take medical help. In one such violent incident he beat her, inflicting severe injury to one of her hands.

Asia stated that her husband had hit her with a wooden plank. She got a severe injury in her left hand due to his attacks.

Sahnaz, another survivor, reported about violence by her husband and in-laws over dowry, leading to a serious injury on one eye. She had to undergo an eye operation.

One male police sub-inspector said: Dowry-related cases are severe in nature and many victims come with physical injuries with need of medical attention.

Ms Deepa, an NGO staff, reported: When severe cases come, like murder or severe physical injury, we try to help the women get police and legal help.

A case reported in a newspaper: Laily was married to her husband, Sattar, who already had three wives. After marriage, due to clashes with the co-wives, Laily tried to leave her husband three times but could not succeed. Later, when again she sensed the same position is going to occur, she tried to flee but got caught.

Then her husband tied her hands and wrote his name on her forehead with a hot iron rod to mark his ownership (NiyomiyaBarta: 2 December, 2015).

The last case reflects the effects of the patriarchal belief that wives are possessions, leading to violent controlling tactics.

The data, thus shows that abuse often leads to injuries, both major and minor. While committing violence the abusers do not seem to consider the risk to the lives or health of women. The easy use of violence upon women reflects men's sense of ownership of women. Men consider women of the family as their property. Abusers do not care about the severity and probable consequences of the violent acts inflicted upon the victims, because they believe that they can do anything to them. This happens due to the superiority over women granted to men by the patriarchal system, which allows men to abuse women violently (Kumari: 1989). Men being in a higher position in the power hierarchy use violence to show their powerful position. They also use violence to control and dominate women to ensure their superiority both at the home and in the society (Tracy: 2007).

The data also shows that the consequences of domestic violence are not limited to injuries and that not all women can escape such violence. Many just accept it as their fate and find no way of escape. Other than sustaining physical injuries, there were women who were killed as a result of domestic violence. Some of such incidents collected from the field are discussed as follows:

As stated by Rehna's father: Her husband was demanding money and other items in the name of dowry after their marriage. Once, he demanded 20,000 rupees which I could not give. A few days later, he assaulted her and set her on fire. Her dead body was found with burn injuries.

Runu's parents stated: Runu's husband and in-laws were against their marriage as we expressed our inability to give gold jewellery in the marriage. However, after marriage there was verbal abuse for gold jewellery. Once, her husband brought her here and asked her not to return unless she brings jewellery. After two months, we took her back to her marital home. Her mother-in-law abused me for bringing her back without the fulfilment of their demand for jewellery. In a week we got the news of Runu's death due to severe burn injuries.

Anita's father stated: My daughter had informed me about the torture meted upon her. One night I heard my daughter's cry for help and went to her home. There I peeped through the closed door and saw her husband was trying to suppress her voice with a cloth. Then I kicked the door to open it and found my daughter in a half-burnt state, who later succumbed to her injuries.

Such severe violence is often considered a 'normal interaction among intimate couple' (Kumari: 1989: 59). However, the death of the victims disproves this popular notion of considering domestic violence as a normal part of daily life and shows its severity. Domestic violence should not be considered as a normal interaction between married couples or family members. Rather, it is a serious criminal act. The data shows that the demand for dowry is the prime cause among all nine (9) cases of the death of victims due to bride-burning. Out of these nine cases, in six (6) cases abusers were convicted, with 3—10 years of rigorous imprisonment along with a fine; in three cases accusations were not proved and there was no conviction. The prevalence of dowry as a form of domestic violence is taken up elaborately later in this chapter.

- **Physical violence related to pregnancy**

Respondents also affirmed experiencing physical violence during their pregnancy. The data revealed that women are harassed and threatened to fulfil certain demands by marital families during pregnancy. The families found it easy to put pressure on women, as pregnancy limits a woman's physical movement and also adds additional responsibility of the unborn child. Abusers are found to take advantage of women's helpless condition to torture them more. Pregnant women are forced to tolerate violence without much resistance. At times women are found to take shelter in some safe place to save their lives as well as the lives of the unborn babies. This is illustrated in the following case:

Sarbani stated that she was tortured by her husband and marital family members to bring dowry from her mother. She refused to ask for money from her mother, and that made them aggressive, and they assaulted her severely. At that time she was pregnant, and her husband and in-laws tortured her both physically and mentally. When informed, her mother and sister came to her marital home and fulfilled their demands.

In the above case the abusers took advantage of her pregnancy to get their demands fulfilled by her family. They could understand the concern of the victim's family members for her unborn baby and found it an easy way to put pressure on them. She was tortured, deprived of medicine and food and was left alone in the hospital for delivery for not fulfilling their repeated demands of money.

Sabita informed me that when she was pregnant with her second baby, her husband and mother-in-law demanded money from her and pressured her to bring money from her parents. When she refused to bring money they beat her mercilessly. To save her unborn child and herself she ran away to her parents' home. She informed her father and brother of everything.

Another survivor said: During the nine months of pregnancy, my husband threw something under the bed and asked me to clean it and that too not with a broom but with my hand. He forced me to go under the bed, which was difficult for a pregnant woman.

One woman said: During pregnancy my mother-in-law demanded money from my parents for my medical treatment or else threatened to burn me alive.

From the above cases it is seen that violence during pregnancy is often used as a convenient way to compel a woman to do what the abuser wants, or inflict abuse without much resistance. Women's delicate physical condition and immobility during pregnancy compel them to tolerate abuse. Pregnancy puts physical restrictions upon women, and men take advantage of their condition to exert their power and dominance. The question of paternity and future expenses also makes it difficult for women to leave abusive husbands. Pregnancy helps in reinforcing the patriarchal power hierarchy. Pregnancy increases physical barriers for women and burdens women with the responsibility of children.

Victims also have miscarriages or needed medical help due to severe physical violence during pregnancy. Health implications of domestic violence during pregnancy have been clear from existing research and the same is found from my data. Domestic violence limits women's ability to have control over sexual relations and results in unwanted, frequent pregnancies, STIs and other such hazards (Gupta: 2002; Kishor and Johnson: 2006). These in the long run affect the women's health very badly. Domestic violence

poses a great threat to safe continuation of pregnancy and the health of the mother and the unborn child: it can even result in the death of the two. Violence during pregnancy is found to be associated with pre-term labour, miscarriage, stillbirth, and abortion (Garcia et al.: 2006; Kishor and Johnson: 2006). Some of the cases are illustrated as follows:

Hemaprava was beaten up severely for dowry. In a violent episode during her pregnancy, her husband beat her and she had a miscarriage.

Asia said: One day he kicked me in my stomach during my fifth month of pregnancy, and I got severe stomach ache and I lost my baby.

Various studies confirmed the occurrence of physical as well as other forms of domestic violence, like sexual or verbal abuse of pregnant women in India (Babu and Kar: 2012; Sarkar: 2013). Studies also found pregnancy as a period for initiation of domestic violence (Babu and Kar: 2012). Similar was the experience with some of my survivor respondents, who stated that domestic violence against them began and increased when they got pregnant, as shown in the cases following cases:

Moumita informed that she was harassed by her husband and she was tolerating everything silently. Amidst all the tortures and harassment, she discovered her pregnancy. She thought that at least this news will change her husband's attitude towards her. However, his physical and verbal torture along with financial negligence increased suddenly with the news of her pregnancy. He started to live somewhere outside the home.

Samsun said: My husband was having an affair with another girl. He wanted to leave me and with that intention he used to abuse me. Village meetings were being held to solve issues between us, and he was asked not to torture me further. By the time I got pregnant, and I was happy thinking that coming of my baby would change the situation. But it did not happen as I thought. My pregnancy increased his tension that he would not be able to leave me. So he started to abuse me more during my pregnancy so that I lose the child.

Deepali stated that she was an unmarried girl who got pregnant as a result of rape by one of her neighbours. When she pressured him to marry her he went into hiding. Later during her seventh month of pregnancy, her brother threw her out of the house because of the stigma of an unwed pregnancy.

The above cases indicate that pregnancy can lead to initiation of violence in a marital home and by natal family members, too. Pregnancy is also found to be a convenient stage for abusers to send the women to natal families and thus indirectly pressuring the natal families to take the responsibility of their daughters and associated expenses during delivery and childcare.

Unintended pregnancies have been found to be a cause of domestic violence, as the next cases show:

Dulu was a victim of forced sex by her neighbour, who tried to leave her when she got pregnant. But later when she disclosed everything he was forced to marry her. But after marriage she had to face many violent incidents. Her baby was aborted trickily and after that her husband stopped staying with her. He used to keep her either in a relative's home or sometimes at his sister's place away from him. Finally he joined a job in the city and started to stay there. Later she had to take the help of the police when her in-laws' torture went beyond toleration.

Premada got pregnant due to a physical relationship with Dhiren. She then asked Dhiren to marry her. But he avoided her and kept away from marrying her. Later with the help of the village court she was married to him but had to face violence in the marital home.

In both cases, the concerned women had to face different forms of violence. The similarity in both cases is that the victims had suffered forced sex before marriage, leading to pregnancy. They compelled their abusers to marry them, who were not willing to marry them. After marriage these women were tortured by their partners as well as their in-laws. Similar findings were obtained from studies by Stephenson et. al. (2008), Sarkar (2013) and other researchers, showing that untimely, unintended pregnancies resulting from coerced and forced sex often lead to domestic violence.

The data also shows the practice of physical violence to force women to undergo abortions. Many of them had to undergo a forced abortion after severe violence, no matter how adversely it affected their health. Here's how some respondents put it:

Trishna said: I conceived three times, but my husband and mother-in-law forcefully aborted my pregnancy every time. They said that I am to serve them

only with my money and they don't want to continue their family by children from me.

Dipa informed me that during her stay at her marital home she conceived three times. But every time her husband forced her to abort her pregnancy.

In the above cases the women had been facing forced abortion as a part of domestic violence victimisation. Women are seen suffering in matters related to their reproductive capacity. Through pregnancy women are expected to carry the responsibility of the future heirs of the family. Under this reproductive responsibility, women's independence decreases and they are put under men's control. Many studies have been carried out on domestic violence during pregnancy, and many reasons of abuse have been found for violence during pregnancy. Unplanned pregnancies (Martin et. al.: 1999), sexual frustration of men due to pregnancy, defencelessness of wives (Gelles: 1975), resource issues like increased expenses (Goode: 1971), jealousy towards the unborn baby and the desire to regain power over the wife that the men feel they have lost due to excessive importance by the family to the pregnant wives (Stockl and Gardner: 2013) are some of the factors. The root cause of such violence, as Humphreys and Campbell (2011) point out, is the 'abuser's desire for power and control, and his belief that violence and coercion are legitimate means to achieve these ends' (158). Sex as a tool to oppress women has been explained by many feminists (West: 1988). Pregnancy creates conditions for women to surrender to male abuse and indirectly increases women's subordination in the society. In a patriarchal-gendered society men's sexual urges are recognised, whereas women's needs are denied. Women's bodies are controlled, and female sexuality is constructed to serve men's needs. Through this division of sexual roles, women are made objects for men's satisfaction and an instrument for reproduction purposes. Thus sexuality reduces women to objects available for men's satisfaction and consumption (Khosla: 2014).

- **Use of dangerous weapons in physical violence**

Respondents in their accounts of victimisation have revealed the use of dangerous weapons and other objects/instruments such as daggers, sticks, brooms, firewood, belts or guns as tools for violence. Some of the responses are as follows:

Premada reported that her husband and marital family members started assaulting her. They pulled her hair and pushed her to the ground. One of Tilak's sisters came and tore all her clothes. Then one of his brothers beat her up with a broom. One of Tilak's brothers attacked her with a sharp weapon.

Asia said: Majnur asked me to leave the house but I refused to do so. Then he hit me with a bamboo stick, and I got a severe injury in my left hand.

Brinda said: My brothers-in-law broke the door of my bedroom and forcefully entered my room at night and hit me with an iron rod in the lower abdomen, breasts, back and head. They even pulled my hair and attacked me with a sharp weapon.

The use of weapons increases the severity of domestic violence and makes it more lethal. Men use weapons to inflict more severe violence because they believe that 'they can and it is a form of behavior which has existed for centuries as an acceptable, and, indeed, a desirable part of a patriarchal family system' (Peterson: 1992: 98). The use of a weapon is often justified as an act of the moment. However, it is not an act out of anger or personal abnormality but 'rather has its roots in the very structure of society' that supports gender inequality (Straus, 1976). Thus, it can be argued that societal acceptance of violence by men against women has given men the 'licence' to use it whenever they want without much interference.

- **Physical violence accompanied by other forms of violence**

Further, data shows that physical violence may occur alone but is often accompanied by other forms of violence such as psychological, sexual and economic violence. Respondents have narrated overlapping of different forms of violence in one single episode. Various studies have also confirmed the association between physical and other forms of violence (Hyden: 1995; Karakurt and Silver: 2013). In many instances verbal aggression is the pre-history of physical abuse, which ends with physical aggression (Hyden: 1995). Similar findings are seen in this study, too, regarding association of different forms of domestic violence. A few respondents are quoted here:

Binita, a survivor, said: You can't think of physical violence alone. Verbal violence, sexual violence or some other kind of violence will definitely be associated with physical violence.

Nitu said: Chronic physical violence cannot occur suddenly without any kind of verbal or emotional abuse. Verbal abuse often ends up in physical attacks. Severe physical beating was always preceded by severe verbal abuse.

Anima said: My husband used to scold me using slang and used to abuse me, accusing me of being involved with other men, and after verbal abuse there was severe physical and sexual harassment.

The above responses make it clear that one violent episode includes more than one form of domestic violence. It is often one form of violence that leads to another, or many times different forms get associated together.

3.2.3.2. Psychological violence

The data shows a high prevalence of psychological violence in Assam. Women's descriptions reveal a variety of domestic violence types hampering their lives which are psychological in nature. It is found from the data that psychological violence is diverse in nature.

Some of the forms, as mentioned by the survivor respondents, that psychological violence takes includes scolding verbally, ignoring and avoiding the wife; accusing her of being of immoral character, casting doubts on her purity and disallowing her from kitchen and other sacred spaces of the house, shunning her and not speaking to her; branding her as careless, barren and a liar; questioning the legitimacy of her child; insulting and mocking her economic status, physical features, educational qualification and amount of dowry she brought; denying her access to her own child; not allowing her to wear vermilion, which is a sign of married status; threatening to throw acid on her, harm her family members and marry another girl; comparing her with ex-girlfriends and lovers; and making her feel sexually inadequate.

- **Diverse forms and more painful**

Women reported that more than physical violence, it is the psychological violence that hurt them the most. According to them, physical wounds get healed quickly, but psychological pain hurts for a longer time. They reported that apart from the pain caused by violence, the fact of being abused by someone intimate adds to the pain. Psychological violence harms the victims emotionally and affects their mental well-

being and self-worth. Like other studies, this study too brings forth that psychological abuse is amongst the most painful violence types experienced by women (Walker: 1984).

- **Preceding factor to other forms of violence**

The fact that different forms of violence are interrelated and are often perpetrated simultaneously is found to be widespread. Physical violence is often preceded by psychological violence. Similarly, physical violence, sexual violence and psychological violence are also perpetrated at the same time, overlapping each other in many instances (Hyden: 1995; Karakurt and Silver: 2013). Studies have concluded that in many instances, violence starts with verbal abuse and ends up in physical abuse (Stets: 1990; Hyden: 1995). Psychological abuse is likely to be much more prevalent, and it has the potential to pervasively affect a woman. Consequently, it may be that psychological abuse provides the context for violence and sexual aggression (Marshall: 1996).

Respondents' descriptions of victimisation provide information about overlapping of psychological violence with other forms of violence. The data shows that initiation of verbal abuse often leads to violent and severe physical or sexual attacks. Respondents confirmed that they have suffered emotional abuse before physical or other forms of violence. Verbal abuse has been found to be one main form of psychological violence experienced by women in Assam. A few cases are given to show the prevalence of verbal abuse.

Sangeeta said: Just after four months of our marriage, my husband insulted me for not getting pregnant. He used to drink often and abused me with slang and filthy words and blamed and accused me of having an affair with another man. After all kinds of verbal abuse, he used to harass me physically, which culminated in forced sexual intercourse.

In the case of Shibasmita, her husband and in-laws started to torture her for dowry after the birth of her daughter. Verbal abuse was an inseparable part of their treatment towards her. They scolded her for bringing low-quality things as dowry. They insulted her, saying that the furniture she brought and other things are not of good quality and are low-priced goods. Verbal abuse many times ended up with a severe physical beating.

Sarmata's husband was a gambler. He pressured her to bring money from her parents so that he could spend it on gambling. Her refusal often made him angry, which finally resulted in verbal abuse and physical battering.

The above cases show that verbal abuse has been a common and the most frequent form of domestic violence. The data also reveals that verbal abuse often causes severe psychological damage and injures the psychology of victims.

As one survivor respondent said, Verbal abuse does not leave scar marks on the body, but it can injure one's soul. One need not harm you physically; just bad words can kill you without actual physical touch.

The effect of verbal abuse upon the psychology of women is intense, and verbal abuse can have devastating effects on a woman's self. Abusers use verbal abuse to delimit women into 'nothing' and harm their self-worth (Hegarty et al.: 2004). Abusers treat victims as if they are not human. Through verbal abuse one is minimised to nothing – women's existence and worth are denied. Constant verbal abuse forces the victim to question her self-worth and existence, signifying decreased self-confidence, mental instability, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), etc (Pico-Alfonso: 2005). Women's low self-esteem makes it easier for men to have control over them. Women facing constant verbal attacks develop a kind of "worthlessness", which weakens their ability to deal with or resist abuse. Effects of psychological abuse entrap woman in the cycle of violence and increases chances of more violence with less resistance (Hyden: 1995). Psychological violence many times is associated with other forms of domestic violence, such as physical and sexual abuse; however, it may occur independent of other forms—women can be victims of only psychological violence.

The majority of survivor respondents stated that insult and humiliation, whether in private or in front of others, are the most common form of psychological violence that they faced. Insult of parents or natal families is another form of psychological violence reported by women. Some of their responses are as follows.

Shibasmita informed that she was insulted for belonging to a poor family. She was not allowed to use household items as she belonged to a poor family, and was told that she would not know how to use high-quality products.

Melin, a survivor, said: All my in-laws used to insult me for my hair, figure, dressing and looks and said that I am not worthy of becoming their daughter-in-law.

Sahada, another survivor, reported that she was insulted by her brother-in-law and mother-in-law for the low quality of her furniture. They also humiliated her by taunting her about her physical features. They insulted her as being black and ugly and physically assaulted her for not being beautiful.

In the case of Rashida, her husband secretly married another girl and brought her home. After that he started to neglect Rashida. He started to taunt her for her looks and tortured her for every small issue. His second wife, too, engaged in abusing her. Rashida lost her status in her own house to her co-wife. This finally resulted in more torture, and she had to leave her house with her kids.

A woman is particularly vulnerable to violence when she is married into a comparatively rich family compared to her natal family. In this study, often, women from a poor background were found to face a lot more complicated situation after their marriage because of their economic status. Their poor background creates conditions for their victimisation. Being poor itself is a weak aspect for women as they are financially dependent; attacks on this very point by someone intimate make things even more painful and reinforce self-doubt. Insult and humiliating behaviour may cause extreme damage to a woman's image and confidence. Women are affected badly when their husbands blame them for being sexually inadequate or not beautiful and accomplished enough. For example, in the case of Moumita, she was burdened with humiliation and self-doubt for her husband's behaviour.

Moumita said: My husband insulted me for my sexual performance and said that I could not satisfy him sexually, whereas the other lady with whom he shared an illegal relationship is good at satisfying him. I could not tell anybody that my husband is not sexually satisfied with me and wants to be with the other woman. I feel ashamed of my husband's behaviour and try my best to hide his affair as well as his dissatisfaction with me from other's knowledge. It's both insulting as well as depressing.

Women feel humiliated as well as helpless as they cannot share such acts with anyone due to the patriarchal society's attitude towards sexuality. In the patriarchal structure women are supposed to fulfil the marital demands and expectations of their husbands. Under such conditions if men commit sexual activities outside of marriage or with women other than their wives, the society does not blame the men for their adulterous behaviour; rather the society blames the women for not being able to satisfy their husbands. This victim-blaming attitude includes justification of men's sexual exploitations or digressions by turning them into a failure of the wives' sexual duty (Gracia and Herrero: 2006; Gracia: 2014). Victims feel abused, violated and humiliated but cannot do anything, and this gives a lot of pain, which rarely has any clear and immediate solution. Psychological violence may not seem abusive but has the potential to convey the damaging intention of the abuser to its victim (Follingstad et al.: 1990; Stets: 1990).

- **Psychological violence related to reproduction and sex of the child**

Respondents reported being harassed and violated in relation to matters of childbirth and sex of the child. Not having a male child or being infertile was the basis of severe scolding, humiliation and other forms of abuse. The following cases show this:

Lakhima informed me that she was mentally, physically and economically harassed by her husband and in-laws after five years of marriage. Her husband abandoned her for four months in the year 2012 and always insulted her for not bearing a male child.

Sunu was unable to conceive and it was the root cause of all the mental tortures inflicted upon her by her husband. Sunu was not sure whose physical incapability was mainly responsible for their failure to have children, but she was blamed and insulted as a 'barren woman'.

In the patriarchal society, motherhood is one of the most important determinants of womanhood. The most important function of a wife is to legitimately reproduce. In a society like India's, where a son is preferred intrinsically almost everywhere, violence against wives through humiliation, scolding, stigmatising and abandonment for not reproducing or not reproducing a son is seen quite normal (Robitaille and Chatterjee: 2013). A woman's identity, status and position are influenced by her status of

motherhood. Motherhood gives meaning to and upgrades a woman's position and life in the patriarchal society (Hollo et al: 2009). Women are socialised to find their existence worthy through childbirth. Gendered expectations of motherhood make it intrinsically linked to the very idea of femininity (Hammarberg and Kirkman: 2013). Failing to reproduce creates severe negative complexities for women as their identity, social status and security depend on the ability to produce offspring (Dyer et al.: 2002; Dhont et al.: 2010). Infertile women, who cannot become mothers, have to go through severe social stigmatisation. Women's infertility is linked with social stigma, relationship problems, diminishing well-being and domestic violence. Infertility becomes a source of stress, anxiety, depression and marital difficulties and results in psychological distress (Dyer et al.: 2002; Fledderjohann: 2013). Abuse in such a situation, when the woman is already under severe stress for infertility, increases her psychological suffering and vulnerability. The use of non-physical techniques including insult and scolding generate pressure and guilt in the minds of women (Hamby and Sugarman: 1999). The following cases will reflect the pain of infertility, combining how infertility results in domestic violence.

Trishna said: Baji (barren) is the word used to describe an infertile woman and her inability to reproduce. The single word is enough to cause harm, pain, worthlessness or feeling of being an outcaste.

Sumi said: My husband was involved with another woman after marriage. When I came to know, taking help from my mother-in-law I forced him to stop all contact with her. Till then things were OK. But off late another problem has emerged. We are trying to have our first baby, but I am unable to conceive till now. This becomes a problematic issue between me and my husband. He is abusing me mentally for not getting pregnant and also does not accompany me to the doctor. Above all he is again getting close to the other lady. I informed my mother-in-law, but this time she took a different stand. She is accusing me for not getting pregnant and trying to defend my husband's involvement with the other lady.

The above responses show how painful the situation is for infertile women, and infertility becomes a justification for inflicting violence upon them. Along with the psychological pain of not having children, women also have to deal with the blame for infertility (Dhont et al.: 2010; Hammarberg and Kirkman: 2013). Women are mostly blamed for being infertile, whereas men are rarely blamed for infertility (Upton: 2002).

Studies have found psychological stress as one of many other consequences of infertility (Dyer et al.: 2002). The cultural construction of femininity linked with motherhood and the feeling of failure, grief and the emotional impact of the inability to fulfil the expectations of motherhood make women vulnerable. Under such conditions violence by their partners or other marital family members increases their vulnerability and pain.

- **False accusations**

Respondents have reported false accusations to be of immense psychological torture. A few cases are given here:

Dipti's husband accused her of having an illicit relationship with his own father and began assaulting her physically. She wanted the matter to be discussed with other members of the family. But he did not allow her to disclose such an accusation to anyone.

Farida stated that her husband doubted her character. He thought that Farida was having an illegal relationship with some other man, and making that issue he used to beat her severely. He restricted her visits to her natal home and did not allow her parents to visit her, which caused mental pain.

Juli informed me about the suspicious character of her husband, which finally resulted in the end of their marriage. Her husband doubted her. After coming back from work he used to ask her about every small thing of the day. She initially mistook him to be a caring husband. However, she later realised that he was keeping track of her activities. Slowly he started accusing her of keeping contact with another man. She was hurt because she was not involved with anyone. His questioning soon reached physical torture, and to avoid physical and mental torture, she left for her natal home.

Anima was suspected by her husband of being involved with other men. Every day, he checked her clothes to find traces of other men after she returned from office. She found it tough to deal with his suspicious nature and decided to leave him.

In the above cases it is seen that a false accusation is used as a means to torture women. False accusations, or blaming wives for imaginary relations with other men, have been

used as a technique by abusers to make women feel morally guilty and to have psychological control over them. This technique of false accusations is not just limited to itself but often results in physical and other kinds of violence upon the victims.

Some women stated that their husbands refer frequently to their previous partners or ex-girlfriends in front of them to torture them emotionally. Keeping close contact with previous girlfriends has been reported as one form of psychological violence women underwent. The husbands' sexual involvement with other women has also been reported to hurt women emotionally.

Many women reported threats as a serious form of psychological violence. Abusers use threats of various kinds to make the women comply with their wishes. Threatening has been an effective weapon to exert control over women. Women reported having been threatened with divorce, separation from children, murder and burning. Threatening to set the house on fire and killing the woman's family members are other strategies that have been proved to be effective. A few women reported that husbands used self-beating or self-hurting as a way to create panic in their minds. This behaviour made the women extremely scared and worried.

Pari reported: He used to beat me, then say sorry and start hurting himself for beating me. After battering me he behaved like a possessed man, hurting himself and getting emotional. This scared me the most, and I had to put all efforts to stop him from hurting himself.

Women are vulnerable to different forms of psychological abuse across their lifespan. Mental torture harms women deeply and stops them from standing firmly against their abusers. It creates fear in their minds to leave their abusers and thus forces them to stay in abusive relationships and tolerate violence. Through the use of psychological violence men aim to break down the confidence of women and to minimise their strength to retaliate. Psychological harassment increases insecurity in the minds of women, and it becomes easy to dominate them. Psychological violence destroys the will power of the victim, and full control over victim is gained (Stark: 2007).

3.2.3.3. Sexual violence

The data collected reveals the prevalence of sexual violence in Assam.

The women reported a range of sexual violence that they have faced. Acts of sexual violence reported by women include rape, violence for refusing to have sex, forced sex with cousins, forced pre-marital sex, pressure to join prostitution and marital rape.

Sexual violence is one of the hardest aspects of domestic violence for its victims to talk about (Felson and Pare: 2005). ‘Sexual violence’ is a wide term used to describe rape and the humiliating range of unwanted, pressured and coerced sex that may be experienced in domestic violence contexts (Harne and Radford: 2008). Evidence of the presence of sexual violence has been put forward by various studies conducted all over the world (Finkelhor and Yllo: 1985; Fahmida and Doneys: 2013). In my study respondents reported their experiences of facing various forms of sexual violence.

- **Marital rape**

Marital rape by husbands has been the most common form of sexual violence perpetrated on women. The following cases show the presence of marital rape in the society.

Priyalata’s husband used to force her to have sex with him many times in a day. His family supported him in all his merciless acts. She got frequent infection in her vagina because of excessive forced sexual intercourse. This made her ill and weak.

Sangeeta said: Pradip did not listen to me when I reminded him about the doctor’s advice to not have sex for a few months after my operation. He did not listen to me and forcefully had sex just after the operation, and that affected my health badly.

Providing sex to a husband on demand is considered a key component of a woman’s role as a wife (Pandeet al.: 2011). This inevitably forces a woman to submit to her husband’s sexual demands. Women are compelled to have sex, even when they do not want to, as a result of marital obligations throughout their lives. Under such conditions, where women are bound to provide sexual pleasure to men following marital obligations, marriage can be called a “licence to rape” (Finkelhor and Yllo: 1985). Thus, under the shadow of wifely duties, women face rape, which in India is still not legally recognised as violence. Rather, it is suppressed by being labelled as a woman’s failure to perform her wifely duties. Two of my respondents are quoted here:

Swapnali said: Being a businessman my husband spends most of the time outside home. But whenever he is at home, it seems as if I have nothing else to do except sleep with him. As long as he stays at home, I have to be in bed. I was raped for 22 years as I kept on fulfilling his demands without protest. Apart from sexual violence, I did not face any other kind of violence.

Selima said: My husband often abuses me verbally. But sometimes when he becomes angry, especially at night, he forces me to have sex for a long time. He even forces me to have anal sex. I don't like it, and it is painful. I don't protest as he is my husband and I am afraid of him.

It is seen that women generally do not raise their voice against their husbands' sexual violence. The study also reflected that husbands use sex as a tool to show aggression and dominate women. Toleration of such abuse reflects the accepted norm of a husband's absolute right over his wife's sexuality and unlimited access to her, due to which women hesitate to protest.

Rape and other forms of sexual violence are often trivialised as being carried out only by strangers. However, in reality sexual assaults are often carried out by persons known to the victims. A woman who is raped by a stranger lives with a memory of a horrible attack, whereas a woman who is raped by her husband lives with her rapist (Mahoney and Williams: 1998). Rape in marriage is not a onetime event; rather, it occurs repeatedly. Studies by Finkelhor and Yllo (1985) and Russell (1990), on marital rape, have found that between 10percent and 14percent of ever-married or cohabitated women have been raped at least once by their partners. In addition Russell (1990) found that among ever-married women, husband or ex-husband-perpetrated rape was more common than stranger-perpetrated rape (cited in Mahoney and Williams: 1998). Painter (1991) has also found that once a woman has been raped by her husband, the rapes will continue to occur on a regular basis (cited in Fahmida and Doneys: 2013). The data from my field work shows that women have been raped by their husbands several times in their lives. Physical proximity between married couples makes married women easily accessible for sexual assault by their husbands. Also, the burden of socialisation makes women tolerate sexual abuse by their husbands, and marriage vows restrict women from saying no. It is also found that women find it hard to name marital rape as violence because of the socio-

cultural construction of ‘wifely duty to submit to sexual relations, regardless of their own desires’ (Mahoney and Williams: 1998: 124).

The fact that marital rape occurs within marriage makes it somewhat complicated for women to understand it as a form of violence. The nature of the relationship between victim and perpetrator actually blurs the line between violence and duty. Here’s how the following respondents put it:

Alin Mahanta, a lawyer, said: When a woman gets raped by her husband, it takes time to realise that she is being violated. The main reason behind this is that the crime is committed by her husband, and the wife cannot realise it easily that she has been forced. The obvious nature of a sexual relationship in marriage leads to normalisation of rape in marriage – the nature of the relationship blurs the line between normal conjugal behaviour and rape. Woman cannot differentiate consensual sexual activities and forced sexual acts because the person is the same, that is, the husband, and they are not supposed to refuse him.

In an awareness camp organised by AMSS, Darrang, Rubi, one NGO staff said: Women face severe sexual violence. But they don’t understand that sex against their will is a kind of violation. She further stated: Society does not welcome an open discussion on issues related to sex. Maximum rural women, who are illiterate and unaware, understand sex as a normal act between married couples. The issue of consent in a sexual relationship is far from them. That is why women suffering from marital rape, forced anal sex, etc., rarely come with complaints against their husbands.

Lawyer H Kalsi said: I often get cases of domestic violence. But women hardly lodge complaints against their husbands for marital rape. Since marital rape is not criminalised under law in India, this form of violence gets less importance than other physical forms while fighting a domestic violence case in court.

Marital rape occurs at a much higher rate than reported. Women are found to remain silent because of the fear that if they do not perform their sexual duties, their husbands may marry another woman. Legal non-recognition, marital insecurity and a conservative societal view on sex and marriage make the situation tough for women to come forward and reveal marital rape and take steps against it. Moreover, the victim’s ignorance to

identify a violation of wives' right to consent to sexual involvement and the considering of sex as a marital duty often normalise marital rape and hence force more and more women to suffer it.

- **Pre-marital sexual abuse**

The data shows that in some cases sexual violence in marriage has its initiation prior to marriage. Violence starts even before the marriage is solemnised. It is found that women face sexual violence before marriage, which continues into married life. Survivor respondents have reported experiences of pre-marital forced sex by their current husbands. To quote one:

Dulu said: I was repeatedly raped by my husband before marriage. He blackmailed me and forced me to have sex with him. I had to submit to his demands many times, before he started avoiding me after knowing about my pregnancy.

In this case, Dulu was blackmailed by her current husband to have sex with him. She could not avoid but had to follow his demands. Later, when she got pregnant and asked him to marry her, he started avoiding her. Then she went to his home and disclosed everything to his parents and forced him to accept her. A village meeting was called, and accordingly they were asked to get married. However, it was not enough as she had to face several other incidents of violence in her married life.

Premada informed me that before marriage, she and her current husband were in a relationship for some years. He asked her to get involved in physical intimacy before marriage. With the promise of marriage, he acquired her consent. She became pregnant but was not worried about her pregnancy as she believed that he would marry her. However, when he got news of her pregnancy, he started avoiding her.

The above cases show that due to non-acceptance of pre-marital sex in the society, women have to face a lot of complexities. Abusers want to get rid of the responsibility of pregnancies resulting from pre-marital sex. Pre-marital sex is considered a taboo across various societies in India, including most communities of Assam. Surprisingly, the societal attitude seemed to be somewhat considerate to this issue. What was found that instead of punishing the people involving in this socially banned act, the society tried to

recognise their relationship by arranging a marriage between them. This kind of arrangement is made to solve the problem of lost virginity, an illegitimate child and thus honour. Such a marriage can save the girl from public perceptions of complicity in her own downfall. This idea to 'domesticate rape' on the basis of a patriarchal-gendered norm supporting monogamous marriage makes it often socially acceptable and tolerable (Boesten: 2012). In these two cases, both women were forced to have sex with their abusers before marriage. They got pregnant, and the abusers avoided them instead of fulfilling their promise to marry them. These women were cheated by their abusers, as well as faced the stigma of an unwedded pregnancy. In that situation, after being cheated and rejected by their abusers, these women approached the village authority to help them to get married to their abusers. On request, the society arranged their marriages. However, violence does not end at that and continued after marriages, too, and these women fought a long legal battle against their abusers.

Pre-marital sex not only creates a stigmatic life for women but has other violent implications, too. It results in unwedded pregnancies and following complexities like abandonment by the family to save the family honour, loss of support, mental torture, etc.

One woman reported that she was sexually exploited and got pregnant by her neighbour, who fled after hearing her about her pregnancy. Later, due to the stigma of an unwed pregnancy, she was thrown out of her home by her family, and she ended up staying in a shelter home.

In the above case the victim needed family support to deal with her stigma. Instead of helping her, however, her family threw her out to save the family honour. She ended up landing in a shelter home with economic difficulties and other emotional traumas.

In the case of pre-marital sex and unwedded pregnancies, arranging a marriage between the victim and the abuser stands out as the most convenient and obvious solution by village courts. The intention behind this solution is to avoid social stigma and to keep the family name and honour intact. The stigma is so strong that it can snatch away all the rights of a woman. Therefore, the victims, too, want to get married to their abusers to avoid social stigma, and the men who impregnated them are demanded to legalise the pregnancies by marrying the women. Thus, societal sanctions and values attached to the legitimacy of a child, the stigma of an unwedded pregnancy, etc., have compelled

women to demand marriage with their abusers. While doing so they have to ignore their mental and physical pain and the trauma of rape. The society, too, finds it easy to uphold the values of marriage and family through marriage between the victim and the abuser. Thus, in matters of sexual violence against girls and unwedded pregnancies, women face multi-layered victimisation and deprivation. First, they are exploited and their rights are violated, and second to be accepted in the society, they have to marry their abusers, forgetting about the deception and the rejection that they faced. In this process, due to societal norms, honour gets priority over women's sufferings.

- **Sexual violence by another male member of the marital family**

The data also shows sexual abuse of women by male members of the marital family, other than the husbands. The following case will show how:

Dulu, a survivor woman, was staying in her sister-in-law's place. There, her sister-in-law's husband tried to exploit her sexually. He tried to force himself on her many times.

In such cases, reporting the violence becomes risky as the victim is not believed by the marital family, and often violence is inflicted upon her for trying to put a false blame upon a marital family member. A refusal to believe women who have faced sexual violence by family members indicates the importance of family solidarity at the cost of women. Suppression of women's sexual violence within the family to maintain family integrity and family reputation makes the women doubly vulnerable. Victims are often blamed for making false allegations against marital family members, instead of believing their sexual victimisation.

3.2.3.4. Economic violence

Domestic violence is a barrier to women's stability in jobs and employment maintenance. Financial abuse often begins quietly and grows over time. It gives the power and control to perpetrators over their partners. Financial abuse is aimed at limiting and controlling the partner's current and future opportunities to becoming more self-sufficient (Tolman and Rosen: 2001). Along with economic exploitation and hindrance to career development of women, such abuse also serves to trap women in abusive relationships (Stark: 2007).

Respondents described the financial abuse they experienced in matters of maintenance of the household, job and workplace, child and health care, and so on. The various forms of financial abuse reported by respondents include taking away the wife's money without her consent, restricting her to continue her job, not giving her money for daily expenses, and the like.

The majority of women reported forceful taking away of their money by husbands as the most common form of economic violence they have experienced. Women, both employed and unemployed, faced this type of violence many times in their lives. Following cases will demonstrate this:

One survivor respondent said that whenever she brought money from her natal family, her husband used to waste it on drinking instead of investing it in business.

Sarmata said that every evening, her husband drinks and asks her for money; and if she refuses to give him money, he tortures her. Beating and verbal abuse are regular incidents in her home.

Moumita reported that to run the household, her husband never provided her with any money. Rather he used to take away the money that she earned and spend it on drinking. Along with that he also used to torture her to bring money from her home, failing which, he inflicted physical torture upon her.

Husbands consider that they have full right over their wives' money. They find it justified to take the money from their wives force and violence. The data shows that abusive husbands are found to use the money forcefully taken away from their wives for gambling, drinking or personal pleasure. Not giving their wives money and taking away money from their wives indicate the non-cooperating attitude of husbands towards wives in matters of finance to carry out household responsibilities. Women are burdened with household responsibilities and childcare, which become extremely tough for them to manage under conditions of financial exploitation and non-support. By taking away money, men cut down their wives' economic independence and control their behaviour (Chin: 2007), eventually contributing towards their wives' powerlessness and vulnerability.

Women also reported that refusal to give their husbands the money often leads to physical violence. The relation between economic violence and physical violence becomes clear from their responses.

- **Restriction on doing jobs**

A few women reported that they were restricted from going out for jobs. Restricting wives from doing jobs keeps them dependent on the husbands and ensures the husbands' control over the wives. Husbands not only restricted their wives from doing jobs but also created trouble in their workplace. Being embarrassed, these women had to leave their jobs. Some example of which are given as follows:

Sunu informed me that she was not even provided with adequate financial assistance by her husband to bring up her child. She had to undergo tremendous economic hardship, which made her look for a job. She got herself engaged as an ASHA worker in her area. Though she got a job, her husband was the main barrier in doing her duties as he used to abuse her publicly on her way to work.

Rima informed me that she established a beauty parlour, but she could not work peacefully there. Her husband used to drink and go to her parlour and start fighting with her. He used to spoil the environment of her parlour and used to beat her if she earned less money.

Women's economic independence and financial self-sufficiency increase their decision-making power and strength. Economic independence gives women confidence to decide and do whatever is best for them. Greater financial independence empowers them with better outside options, lowering the barriers to leaving the abusers and not tolerating abusive marriage (Aizer: 2010).

Marital relationships are governed by socio-cultural gender roles in the society. As stated earlier, due to the paid nature of men's work, men have more bargaining power in the home. This unquestioned authority and privileged position of men is challenged when women become economically independent (Chin: 2007). A wife's independence 'signifies a challenge to a culturally prescribed norm of male dominance and female dependence' (Macmillan and Gartner: 1999:949). To stop women from challenging the sanctioned gender role by being economically independent, and to reinstate men's authority, violence is used as an important means. Gelles (1976), in a study done on

abused women's staying with their abusers, found that that women with fewer resources are less likely to leave an abusive relationship and to seek outside intervention for the ongoing violence. Their financial dependency restricts them from going out of the violent marriage. They remain entrapped in the violent relationship. A similar trend is visible in the data collected for this study, whereby abusers hamper women's economic activities with the aim to disturb their productivity and progress in the workplace. Neither providing any financial assistance nor allowing women to do jobs peacefully are men's attempts to curtail women's economic freedom as well as to maintain their economic domination over women (Tolman and Wang: 2005). Thus, data shows the negative impact of domestic violence on women's work and economic self-sufficiency.

- **Burden of the household on women**

Two women reported that they were forced to look after their marital families without financial help from their husbands. Both these women were unemployed, and the husband of one woman is a government employee. Without money it is difficult for women to run a home, and it puts them into hardships, making them vulnerable to violence. The cases below reflect trouble of women when they have to run home without money.

Rumi said: My husband did not provide money even for children's food. Moreover I have been forced to look after his ailing parents without any financial help from him.

Moumita informed me that she had to work and take the responsibility of their lives as her husband had no job. He neither worked nor supported her; instead he spent her money on alcohol. Later he got a job. But still he did not want to take the responsibility of the household. She had to fight to get financial help from him. Whenever he had to take some responsibility, he became violent and tortured her.

Economic violence against women forces them to live on a strict allowance or to beg for money for themselves. Economic violence results in deepening poverty because of women's diminished access to an independent means of livelihood (Bhatt: 1984; Tolman and Wang: 2005). The prevalent notion that good women and women from respected families restrict themselves to a 'private' sphere also prevents women from getting

employed. Furthermore, the traditional patriarchal norms attach a stigma to the married women who relinquish their primary identity as housewives and join the paid workforce (Folbre and Abel: 1989). These indirectly help men to restrict women from going out for jobs.

3.2.4. Witch-hunting

While looking into various forms of domestic violence, a few cases of witch-hunting came to the forefront. Witch-hunting, or witchcraft victimisation, is largely perpetrated on women by immediate families, relatives and community members, and therefore is dealt with under the scope of domestic violence. However, given the nature of witch-hunting, whereby it is not just a result of gendered familial ideologies but of larger gendered and superstitious communitarian structures, its understanding goes beyond just domestic violence. A separate law has come into force in different states of India to stop witch-hunting. In Assam, too, a law against witch-hunting is underway.

3.2.4.1. Accusation and Identification process of a ‘witch’

No one ever claims to be a witch; witchcraft accusations ‘are based on mere suspicion, rumour, or gossip’ that circulates within the community (Adinkrah: 2004: 337). Accusations always rumoured from family members, villagers or community members through which the process of identification of a so-called witch starts. After such accusations are ‘confirmed’, action against the accused is taken up immediately. They are ‘threatened, drugged, forced to submit to humiliating ordeals, or are coerced into confessing’ to her supposed evil powers; in extreme cases, the accused witches are even butchered to death because of an allegation of witchcraft (Quarmyne: 2011: 481).

The data shows that witchcraft accusation is done with some hidden intentions. The woman is treated as a witch from the moment the accusation is made, and various actions are taken to make her admit to her evil act. In witchcraft accusation, one person is blamed for causing suffering to others. The capacity to harm and cause suffering makes other people scared of the accused person if that person harms the entire village. This belief and fear encourage the community people to torture or kill the witch for the safety of the entire village. The cases here demonstrate the same:

Champa said that she was charged by villagers for causing illness to another woman. She was pressured to accept the blame of causing harm to the woman. Later she was taken to the ojha to clarify her evil practices.

Saguni said that she was branded as a witch for causing sufferings to Jayanti, who was suffering from frequent body pain but was not being given any medicine. Instead prayers and other rituals were performed by her family for her recovery. During her suffering Jayanti took Saguni's name for causing her suffering. Saguni was called thereafter and charged with causing Jayanti's illness. After that she was threatened to be killed for practicing evil acts and causing harm to people.

In the case of Raniswary, her stepdaughter blamed her for having control over snakes and having evil powers gained from Hindu gods. She also instigated the village people, saying that Raniswary would harm the entire village. They believed her to be a witch having the potential to harm the village. The people became ferocious and forced her to leave the village.

As soon as it is believed that a disease has been caused by some witch, people try to get rid of the witch through prayers and offerings. Boiled rice, together with a cock reduced to ashes, is taken in a banana leaf and kept on the middle of a road as an offering to the witch. People believe that without these prayers and offerings, the patient would die. Only after such offerings are made the doctor is approached depending on the availability of doctors in that region. Sometimes the patients die due to delay in appropriate treatment. If the patient dies, the belief of the existence of a witch becomes deeper and the identification of the witch starts. People having a strong belief on witchcraft find various ways of identifying witches. When somebody is branded as a witch or accused of practicing witchcraft, people usually consult with the witch doctor to confirm or reveal the identity of the offending witch. Witch doctors, popularly known as *ojha*, *shaman*, *guni*, *bez*, *deodhani* or something else are considered experts in identifying witches through their special knowledge supposedly gained via different difficult methods of devotion. On the basis of the detail provided by the witch doctor, a woman from the community is identified as a witch and is tortured in front of the entire community and nobody dares to save the victim or oppose the witch doctor's claims. The witch doctor follows a strict process to identify the witch. He covers the patient with a

net and beats the patient with thorny branches after chanting some hymns. Thereafter, he asks the patient to tell him who has caused the illness. The rationale for beating is to make the patient spill out the name of the witch who has caused this harm. To escape the pain caused by the beatings, the patient takes someone's name randomly. The person whose name is taken is treated as a witch. Taking the name of a particular person as a witch is sometimes motivated by the intention to take revenge, too.

Accusations of witchcraft are complex socio-cultural phenomenon, which involves various factors such as gender, class, etc. Accusation of a woman as a witch can be understood as a manifestation of gender hierarchy and the lower social status of women, whereby the male attitude of dominance and violence against women is legitimised by calling them witches (Chaudhuri: 2012). The fact that witch doctors are always male reveals the hidden gendered nature of witchcraft accusation.

3.2.4.2. Branded as a witch: Reasons that turn witchcraft accusation into domestic violence

From the data various reasons of witchcraft accusation have come to light including superstitions, unnatural deaths of community members, land and other property issues, conflicts of interest among family members, village and community health issues, aggression and revenge. A lack of education and awareness, a lack of medical facilities, interior and remote locations, a lack of exposure to new technologies, and so on add to the perpetuation of witch-hunting, even in current times. Some of these reasons are discussed next.

- **Superstitions**

Superstitions play an important role in witch-hunting. People believing in superstitions also strongly believe in witchcraft, and that belief leads to victimisation of the accused person. Whenever somebody is ill in the village for a long period and the patient does not get well after offering prayers and performing other rituals for the community God, people start believing that the illness is caused by some witch, and the identification process starts. This finally leads to the torture and death of some innocent person. Due to the people's belief on superstitions, they resort to the traditional system of performing rituals, offering cocks or goats to their community God and praying to cure the ill. Such practices make conditions critical, and the person dies due to medical negligence. Rather

than understanding the real cause of death, community members believe that some witch has killed the person. Unnatural and untimely deaths of community members due to some illness are considered to be caused by practice of witch craft. Such false assumptions lead to accusation of innocent victims. The following cases reflect the impact of superstitions on accusations:

Champa, a survivor of witch victimisation, explained that Rabha (a plain tribe of Assam) people believe in traditional rituals and pujas for curing illness. She said that pujas and other rituals have nothing to do with the cure, and when a patient does not get medicine the illness is bound to be prolonged. This belief in traditional ways of deciphering illness is the root cause of the continuing witch-hunting practice and victimisation of women.

Sironi was similarly branded as a witch for causing the death of a man from her village. The person was suffering from high blood pressure and was not given any medicine. Instead rituals were performed for his cure. During rituals after his death, his friend claimed that he had not died due to illness but rather due to evil effects of witchcraft practiced by Sironi.

Taking advantage of the people's belief on superstitions, a group of people misled the entire community against a woman whom they want to be branded as a witch. It is always easy to motivate people who believe in superstitions and fear their ill-effects. Conspirators thus fulfil their wishes by misleading community people without revealing their own cunning intentions.

- **Land and property issues**

Land and property issues reveal another aspect of witch-hunting. Accusations of witchcraft have also been made out of greed for the land and property of the accused women. People conspire against a woman and accordingly plan to brand her, or her entire family, as a witch and with the help of villagers drive out the accused and then capture her land and other property. It is a common way to capture another's property, because women who are branded as witches and driven out of the village are not allowed to come back to the village. The following cases will show this:

Raniswary was driven out of her village due to her stepdaughter's allegation of having control over snakes and having evil powers. In reality her stepchildren

did not want her to own any of her husband's land and property and accordingly threw her out of the village by branding her as a witch. Her stepdaughter spread rumours about her that she possesses evil powers. She was portrayed as a threat to the entire village. So to save their village, the villagers drove Raniswary out of the village.

Rashmi was branded as a witch by her own nephew, which resulted in forceful eviction of Rashmi and her daughter from her village. Her nephew seized all her property after the death of her husband. When Rashmi's married eldest daughter protested against this unjust treatment meted out to her mother and sibling, Rashmi's nephew threatened to pronounce her a witch, too. She did not dare to utter a word for her mother and had to keep quiet.

Confirming the motive of capturing property of women accused as witches, NGO activist Mr D. Saikia said: Behind the conspiracy to brand somebody as a witch is not a superstition or illiteracy. It is the plan of some cunning people, who use the simple and ignorant people and their belief on supernatural powers. They mislead the simple people against those who are accused in order to force them out of their property.

Women having property become easy targets of witchcraft accusation. Thus, the profit motive is also found to be associated with witchcraft accusation (Mishra: 2003). Witch doctors frame women in such a way that they are bound to leave their property and village, and those who conspire against the accused women later capture their property.

- **Settling personal scores**

Personal enmity is also settled by branding women of the opposite camp as witches. Sometimes, women are branded as witches just to take revenge on somebody or to vent old anger over some issues. Superstitious minds and a lack of awareness prevent community members from doubting such accusations. Once the accused is labelled, she can rarely be saved from collective attacks and from eviction from the village. Under such conditions, pronouncing a woman as a witch directly or indirectly is the easiest way to take revenge. The following cases will elaborate this:

Budulis's husband was upset and dissatisfied with everything she used to do. He never liked her, always scolded her and found faults with her to torture her

physically. After drinking he would beat her badly. Getting irritated with her husband's behaviour she complained against him to an NGO. The NGO called him up for further inquiry. This made him angry and he started instigating the villagers spreading rumours that she is a witch.

In the Udalguri district, an entire family was thrown out of the district as one female member of the family, Lakhyamati, was suspected of being a witch. She was branded as a witch by a woman named Chitra, who did not like her. Lakhyamati, along with her family, was driven out of the village by the villagers after severe attacks. Later with the help of the police and an NGO named BROTHERS, they were re-established in their village (Assomiya Pratidin: 10 Oct: 2014).

In the Kokrajhar district, a couple named Shom Murmoo and Fulmoni Mardi were killed by attacks with sharp knives and sticks by three villagers. When arrested the three accused people confessed that they have killed them for personal rivalry and suspected them to be witches (Assomiya Pratidin: 28Oct:2014).

In one incident in Majuli, a family was killed with the help of hired goons. Two daughters-in-law appeared in the Teachers Eligibility Test (TET) exam, and the younger one qualified and got the job. This made the other one jealous. Out of jealousy, with the help of some co-villagers, she branded the younger woman as a witch, got her raped and killed her husband and her son.

Regarding the cause of branding somebody as a witch, Birubala Rabha, who has been trying to end this evil and running a mission, said, personal jealousy is one of the main causes behind this heinous act. People's jealousy often forces them to make plans to harm the successful person. Witchcraft accusation is one frequently used tool to execute such plans.

Mr D. Saikia, an NGO activist, said: Unlike in the past, witch accusation is not an act of superstition now; rather it is an act of planned conspiracy and jealousy, which is carried out by educated people and often uneducated ignorant people are used to serve the purpose.

He also mentioned a case from the Udalguri district, where one woman was killed for witchcraft practice. But the reality was something else. The woman was beautiful and smart. She knew how to read and write. She was conscious about her own economic independence, and she had substantial savings. She used to advice other women of her village about savings and also taught them the procedures to save money in a bank. This act was not liked by some men, who tried to take undue sexual advantage of her. Rejection and jealousy made those villagers conspire against her, and finally they succeeded in killing her by branding her as a witch.

Ms Jyoti reported about a widowed woman who was accused of being a witch and killed. The accusation was led by a person who had tried to force the woman into sexual involvement and was rejected. Later, to take revenge for being refused, he conspired against the woman and got her killed by the villagers.

The above cases reflect the tendency to objectify women or treat women as a commodity for men's pleasure. These cases also reveal men's anger towards women who challenge the men's perceived role of wage-earner in the family. Women who earn equally as men are considered as a threat to men's privileged position and bargaining power for being earning members. Therefore, the financially independent woman who motivated other women to be financially independent was considered a transgressor to the prevailing norm of male supremacy and women's subordination. She was seen as posing a challenge to the masculinity by being independent, and that resulted in violence against her. Challenges to this perceived right of men often lead to violence against women. This can also be linked to men's fear of a strong female power, which they try to suppress by any means to ensure male supremacy (Deka: 2013). In patriarchy, when a woman becomes independent, earns money, which is supposed to be men's work, it is obvious that she would become a target of men to whom she posed a challenge. Hence, to keep women 'in their right place' and dependent on men, and to restrict them from challenging men's position in the society, witchcraft accusations are used.

Thus, it is seen that personal jealousy, property matters, intention to take revenge, family issues, and the like are found to be associated with witch-hunting cases. The involvement of such reasons turns witchcraft accusation into an act of domestic violence. Moreover,

the perpetrators are always people who are related to or known to the victim, which also makes this act look more like an act of domestic violence.

Thus, the fact that mostly women are victims of witchcraft accusation, the reasons and motives of making this accusation and the fact that the known perpetrators and witch doctors are mostly male turn witch-hunting into a form of domestic violence. Statistics also reveal that large numbers of women face this form of violence and it is increasing at a rapid pace.

The data reveals the adoption of various ways to torture women who are declared as witches. The ways include imposing a fine on the accused woman, ranging to several hundreds of rupees; making a collective physical attack and other kinds of torture on the accused woman to force her to accept the responsibility of performing the evil act and causing harm to the community people; murdering and torturing her family members; driving her out of the village and capturing her property; and socially boycotting her and restricting her from getting involving in social functions. The use of these methods compels the woman to accept and admit to all allegations made against her, following which the intention of the conspirator is achieved.

It is seen that in Assam, women face domestic violence to a large extent, irrespective of their educational, socio-economic-religious and other background. Though victims range from children to elderly women, married women are found to be more common victims of domestic violence. Physical violence and psychological violence have been found to be more common and diverse than sexual and financial violence. Perpetuation of violence often reflects the impact of the socialisation process and prevailing patriarchal notions, norms and values.

3.3. Causes of Domestic Violence

The data shows that domestic violence in Assam is perpetrated due to various factors. Some are discussed here.

3. 3.1. Extra-marital relationships

Seventeen respondents in my study reported extra-marital relationships of their husbands as one among the various factors that played a critical role in initiating domestic violence. The husbands' involvement in extra-marital relationships and their attempts at

preventing their wives from questioning and revealing such acts to others were the context in which violence was resorted to. The cases here demonstrate this:

Pranaty said that she was married just after her higher secondary course was over, and after she got married she found that her husband shared intimate relations with his maternal aunt. When she came to know about their relationship, he started to torture her.

Sumi said: My husband was involved in an extra-marital relationship. He used to stay away from home for work. When I came to know and confronted him, he became abusive. He blamed me for being suspicious and treated me aggressively.

Long-term disputes and arguments over husbands' extra-marital relationships are common occurrence between couples. Extra-marital relationships have a negative impact on marital relationships (Schensul et al.: 2006). Husbands perpetrate violence upon their wives when confronted about their affairs. Through violence, husbands try to suppress their wives, who have challenged 'their perceived "natural ability" to have continued access to multiple sexual partners and their perceived "natural need" for frequent sexual satisfaction' (Schensul et al.: 2006: 615). The following cases reflect this:

Moumita informed me that her husband had developed an intimacy with the mother of one of her students. When she charged him he became violent and beat her severely and then argued that he got involved with the other lady as Moumita could not satisfy him sexually.

Tirtha said that her daughter had discovered her husband's extra-marital affair with another woman and informed her regarding it. Later Tirtha caught him red-handed with his girlfriend in their jointly owned flat. On being caught he openly declared his relationship and children from the other woman. He even pushed her out of the bedroom and asked her not to disturb him as he would go to sleep with the other woman. The next day he changed the lock to prevent her from entering the flat, which Tirtha and he owned jointly. He further insulted her by saying that she had become old and was no more attractive, whereas his girlfriend was young and could sexually satisfy him more than Tirtha could.

One important observation in the cases of domestic violence against wives because of the husbands' extra-marital relationships is that extra-marital relationships are seen to be

frequently occurring between close relatives. In my data there are four (4) cases in which family members are involved in extra-marital affairs. Husbands are seen involved either with aunts or with sisters-in-laws. This fact challenges patriarchal values of family purity, which inherently is gendered. These values stress that the honour of the family goes through the female and place the burden of maintaining purity upon women. Such notions, coupled with gender roles, make men free to seek and acquire pleasure beyond the limits of marital relationships and put pressure on women to uphold family integrity by staying in the relationships, regardless of personal cost or danger (Vandello and Cohen: 2003).

3.3.2. Alcohol and domestic violence

Alcohol often acts as a facilitator and contributing factor of domestic violence (Carlson: 1984). It also plays a role in the escalation of aggressive behaviour from verbal threats to physical violence. In many cases in this study, it has been the sole reason behind domestic violence. The following cases illustrate this:

Majoni said: After marriage I came to know about my husband's drinking habit and asked him not to drink. My request made him angry, and he became violent.

Farida said: My husband used to beat me for no reason. After work he used to drink alcohol with his colleagues. I did not like him wasting money on alcohol and persuaded him not to drink. For this he used to beat me severely.

Shibasmita's husband was an alcoholic and used to beat her and keep her out of the house frequently.

Alcoholic husbands not only physically attack their wives but also disturb the entire surrounding, which affects different aspects of their lives. A few observations in this regard are given here:

In an AMSS meeting in Morigaon, a discussion was held focussing on alcohol and domestic violence. Women shared their experiences of sexual harassment, polygamy, extra-marital affairs, divorce, etc., resulting from their husbands' alcoholic habit. Some of them also shared how their husbands remain drunk all the time, and they have to be the sole earner for the family. They also shared that

they had to repay the loans or debts of their husbands. Men use money to consume alcohol and women have to repay debts.

Ms Bandana, one NGO staff, who works among the Tiwa community, said that alcohol is the main cause of domestic violence. Whenever any problem comes from Tiwa women about domestic violence, it is almost sure to be caused due to the issue of alcohol. She said that other causes like extra-marital affairs, dowry, etc., are not so prevalent among the Tiwa people in the Morigaon district.

Women expressed the view that if their husbands did not drink, they would not have abused them. Drinking had been found to be one of the triggering factors for domestic violence. Battering or being violent is a socially learnt behaviour. It is not a result of substance abuse or mental illness. Men who batter frequently use alcohol as an excuse for their violence. They attempt to rid themselves of the responsibility for the violence by blaming it on the effects of alcohol. It is natural that people want to find a reason to blame or justify their violent actions; in the case of domestic violence, the reason often is made to be alcohol or other drugs. However, research proves that people who are violent and abusive after drinking are also violent before it. A violent person will be violent whether he takes alcohol or does not (Galvani: 2006). Del Martin (1976) in her book *Battered Wives* found many women getting battered by husbands when the husbands were drunk. Aggressive behaviour is often justified, as a person is less inhibited while under the influence of alcohol and does things he might not do while sober (Friedman: 2006). Moreover, though drinking and drugs make people more aggressive, it is not the same with everyone in every case (Friedman et al: 2001). Therefore, it can be said that blaming alcohol for a husband's abusive behaviour is too simplistic and does not take the structural factors of violence into account. Blaming alcohol keeps the problem outside the power structure, which makes such violence possible. It absolves the man of his violent behaviour.

3.3.3. Suspicion about the wife's character

Sexual jealousy plays a role in domestic violence. Husbands with a suspicious nature inflict violence upon their wives. Many times, suspicion leads to the use of various techniques by suspicious husbands to control and limit the autonomy of their wives (Peters et al., 2002). The husbands' suspicious nature is one important cause of domestic violence, as reported by survivor respondents. The worst case of suspicion found in the

data was when a husband suspected his wife of having an affair with her father-in-law. Here's one response:

Anima informed me that she could not continue her marriage with her husband because of his suspicious nature. He did not allow her to talk to anybody or keep any contact or communication with anybody. She was forced to withdraw all kinds of social connections. When she returned from her office he used to search her clothes to look for any clues or signs of her being in relationships with other men. He used to physically torture her by choking her and beating her.

In the above case the high court allowed Anima to get a divorce from her abusive husband, considering his suspicious behaviour as cruelty, which was earlier rejected by the additional deputy commissioner, N. C.Hills, Halflong.

Similar to Leela Visaria (2008), this study, too, finds that husbands being angry with their wives for talking to other men results in the accusation of the wives of being unfaithful and having illicit relations with other men. Due to this suspicion, the husbands restrict their wives from going out of the house or talking to their male friends or relatives. They do so to control their wives' sexual involvement outside marriage. This can be linked to the prevailing patriarchal cultural notion that women are possessions of their husbands (Dutton: 1994), and the feeling of sexual proprietariness motivates the men to restrict women from having any kind of contact with other men (Peters et al.: 2002). A wife's infidelity and adultery represent not only an infringement of her husband's rights but the demonstration of failure in his duty that brought shame to his family. Hence, to keep the honour of the family intact, men surely need their wives' fidelity, and to ensure fidelity, violence can serve as a better tool (Vandello and Cohen: 2003).

3.3.4. Dowry

From the case studies collected from lawyers, NGOs and court records, dowry is found to be one of the important factors leading to domestic violence. In my data, most of the cases are related to dowry. Some of the cases are as follows:

Sarjida and her husband, Mojammil, have a son aged 2½ years. Till six or seven months after their marriage, things were going well, but slowly Mojammil and his parents started to torture her physically and mentally for dowry, demanding

30,000 rupees from her parents. Their torture increased with their demands for money.

Sangeeta has been married to Mukul for 13 years. At the time of her marriage, she took many things along with her to her marital home. In the second year of their marriage, they had a son, who he is now 12 years old. However, from the second year of their marriage itself, Mukul started beating her for small things. Six months ago, he threw her out of the house after severe physical beating and mental torture, with a demand for a huge amount of money. Sangeeta's mother gave the money, and Sangeeta went back to live with Mukul and his family.

Police personnel have also indicated the high prevalence of dowry-related violence in Assam:

Mr D. Bargayari, a police personnel from Barpeta, has informed me of getting dowry-related complaints in the highest number. He said that dowry-related cases are the most common type of complaint they get. He also opined that victims of dowry-related violence often come with visible physical injuries.

Responses from lawyers have also confirmed the high prevalence of dowry and violence upon women in relation to a demand for dowry:

Advocate Mr I. Deka said: To speak about a concrete reason of wife-battering, from my experience in the legal profession, I will name dowry as the main factor for its growth. People's craze for dowry has resulted in wife-battering. Physical, psychological and sexual tortures are inflicted upon women to put pressure to bring dowry or as a punishment for not bringing sufficient dowry.

From the above responses it is seen that dowry is one of the important and most frequently involved causes of domestic violence. Dowry, which is not a custom of Assam, has today become a part of Assam's marriage system. From data, various reasons have been found for its growth in the state and its adverse effects on the lives of women, leading to different kinds of violence. The reasons for its growth are as follows:

Prof. S. Bora, a retired professor, opined that dowry-related crimes are increasing because now-a-days, dowry is considered one option for upward-class

mobility. She said that earlier there was only the juroon¹ ceremony, where brides were given clothes and jewellery by the groom's side. But now the system of placing direct demands from the groom's side has started. This marks the pathetic situation and degrading status of women in Assam.

From case studies collected from NGOs, lawyers and law journals, the economic reason has been found to be the prime reason for the growth of dowry and related violence. The intention to extract money, furniture, jewellery, motor vehicles and other items is the reason behind torturing brides. This greed for money has been found as the main economic reason behind violence inflicted for dowry. Respondents have also stated the economic reason for the growth of dowry-related domestic violence. A few are quoted to show it:

Advocate Mr J.Deka said: If you slap your wife, and it gives you 2 lakh rupees, then why not? People like easy money and luxury. In competition to lead a hi-fi, luxurious life, dowry has become an easy option. People's greed for money, property and status is the root cause of dowry.

Linking dowry-related domestic violence to women's lack of inheritance rights, Sub-inspector Mrs. R.Sarma said: Women are not given property rights, which makes them powerless both in the natal home and in the marital home. If they were given an equal share in the parents' property, the concept of torturing for bringing property from the natal home would not have existed and no women would be tortured.

Along with people's greed for money, the tendency to display one's financial strength among the rich section of the society also encourages the practice of dowry. A few responses are given next:

Advocate I. Thakuriya said: The nature of our marriage system has changed. It is no more a simple system but rather has turned into a competition of showing off one's status and capability. There is a competition to show who can give more dowry, and in this race the amount of dowry goes on increasing. Due to this

¹The practice of giving dresses, jewelries and other necessary items to bride from groom's side. The bride wears everything given by groom on the day of marriage.

competition grooms' families generally expect a huge amount of dowry, and failure to do so leads to victimisation of women in the marital family.

Rupa, one NGO staff said: In our society a girl's family used to give a few essential things to her at the time of marriage. With time the nature has changed, and many luxurious things have entered in the list of essential things. This has happened because parents see others giving lots of things, and so they try to give the same to their daughters. A lot of parents have gone to the extent of taking loans to give dowry to their daughters.

The above responses show parents' intention to remain in competition in the matter of giving dowry to their daughters. A huge dowry is considered a symbol of status. This trend of a huge dowry is a status symbol for the rich section, but it creates problems for middle-class and poor parents and their daughters.

The data also shows the emergence of dowry related issues of as a reaction to some other problems. Here, it can be argued that for a section of people, dowry has become a justified punishment or a way to show dissatisfaction over the daughters-in-law. The following case is given to demonstrate this:

In the case of Dinomoni, she was married off with sufficient dowry. Later, the birth of her daughter offended her in-laws, and they started to torture her for dowry. She was deprived of food and was forced to do tough household jobs after a caesarean operation, causing deterioration of her health.

In the above case, the demand for dowry reflects the hidden sonpreference prevailing in the society. The birth of a girl child dissatisfied the family, and they chose to harass the victim by asking for dowry. Thus dowry and sonpreference are seen to be inter-related. Not only do the factors that lead to son preference cause daughters to be unwanted, but female children also are seen as having added disadvantages. In patriarchal societies, women have less economic input into the family and are therefore valued less. The following case demonstrates this:

In this case, Mafusa after her marriage discovered her husband's love affair with another girl, whom he married secretly. She protested against his second marriage, which led to physical assault upon her. After being assaulted, she took the help of her brother and got her husband's second marriage annulled. This

made her husband and in-laws aggressive, and they physically tortured her and demanded her to bring a scooter and money from her home.

The above case reflects the intention to take revenge as a reason behind imposing pressure to demand dowry. The wife's rejection and protest against her husband's secret second marriage are found to inflict the torture in the name of dowry. The below example shows it:

In the case of Chitra, 5 lakh rupees were demanded from her by her brother-in-law. When she failed to fulfil his demand, he tortured her and threw her out of the house.

In this case the woman is a widow, who lost her husband a few months after her marriage. Her brother-in-law tried to capture her share of property in the marital home. With that purpose in mind he tried to push her out of the house in the name of "failing to fulfil demands of money".

Thus, from the above description, it is seen that though violence is inflicted in the name of dowry, the intentions behind are often something else. The intention to take revenge or punish women for other reasons like giving birth to a girl child or protesting against the marital family for some issues that the abusers normally do not want to reveal are some reasons behind torture for dowry. Due to its frequent occurrence, violence for extracting dowry has turned to be a normal occurrence after marriage and perpetrators are found to be taking advantage of this normalisation.

Dowry has been found to be the reason leading to physical and mental violence upon women. It also causes mental and financial pressure as well as exploitation of women's natal families. Cases of torturing and harassing women physically and mentally for dowry, including women being set on fire by their husbands' families, are found in the data. The presence of such acts reflects the devalued status of women in society who are victims of consumerist dissatisfaction (Teays: 1991: 29). Such violence inflicted for acquiring dowry results in death, too. the following cases are given to demonstrate this:

Runu Begum was married to Samadul Ali. On 15 October 2002 at about 7.30 A.M. at Maroi, under the Sipajhar police station, Bhehua Sheikh, Halima Begum, Tahed Ali and Mazizul Haque set Runu on fire for dowry by pouring kerosene on

her. She got severe burn injuries and succumbed to her injuries on the same day (Cr appeal no 141 of 2008 decided on 2.12.2009).

Dipak married Anita, and in six years she was murdered for dowry. Since their marriage, Dipak used to demand dowry and physically assaulted her. He asked Anita to bring 5,000 rupees from her father. When she refused to bring the money, he poured kerosene on her and set her on fire in a closed room. Hearing her cry, her parents and neighbours came to her house, opened the door and rescued her. Anita was sent to hospital, but she succumbed to her burn injuries.

In the data it is found that dowry deaths have occurred mostly in the initial years of marriage. On the other hand, dowry demands and harassment for dowry continue for several years and are not limited to the initial years. Women have faced violence in matters of dowry just after a few days of marriage as well as after many years (e.g., in one case after 14 years).

Furthermore, it is also found from the data that dowry which has been considered as a higher-class and higher-caste custom (Dalmia and Lawrence: 2005; Anderson: 2007) is now rampant among other communities, including Muslims and Christians as well and is spreading among lower castes and tribes, too. Studies by Rajaraman (1983) and Rao (1993) found a switch to dowry from a bride price by many communities in India, and the same can be seen in Assam, too. Dowry is not a custom among tribal groups of Assam, but this evil is entering into their marriage process, too, as found in the data, as mentioned by one respondent from AMSS Morigaon:

Tiwa people are adopting the Assamese marriage system, leaving their specific system of marriage called gobhia² marriage. In this process, the women have lost their inheritance right as they have started to follow the patrilineal and patrilocal system, leaving their matrilineal system through the gobhia marriage system.

The Tiwa used to be a matrilineal group but are now in the process of transformation to a patrilineal group (Krishna: 2005). This transformation is leading to the entry of the dowry practice among the Tiwa people and curtailing women's rights as well. Tribes

²The marriage system of Tiwa Community. In this system, the boy stays in the girl's home and serves for a certain period to impress her to get married to him.

(such as Mishing and others) have the tradition of women taking their moveable assets with them when they go to their marital homes. However, now slowly, the parents of brides have begun to send more such assets with them to show their material strength. This can be considered due to the influence of giving huge dowry as a sign of high status. The people of the Tiwa tribe, living in the plain areas, are slowly adopting the norms and rituals of the Assamese society.

As mentioned earlier, historically, dowry has not been a practice prevalent in Assam. Instead of dowry, another system was prevalent where the bride was given clothes and jewellery at the time of *juroon* (a ceremony before marriage) (Baruah: 2009). However, this system has now taken a new shape with demands for luxury items, cash and property, along with clothes and jewellery, and there is rise in dowry-related incidents (Phadke: 2008). According to the state home department figures, in 2012 Assam recorded 446 dowry-related deaths (*The Times of India*: 8 June: 2013). Other studies also confirmed the presence and growth of dowry in Assam (Vauqueline: 2015). In 2013, 7362 cases of cruelty by husbands and 135 dowry deaths were reported (*Assam Tribune*: 4 January: 2014). The National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) data shows the record of dowry-related deaths as recorded by the Assam police in the last 10 years. The data shows a clear rise of the crime in the state.

Table.3.1. Dowry deaths from 2005 to 2015(Source: NCRB 2015)

Head of crime	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015 (upto October)
Dowry death	99	105	100	103	170	175	121	140	170	205	184

As mentioned earlier, parents have to take loans from banks to give dowry. This shows that giving and taking dowry has become almost an inevitable practice in Assam. None of the dowry given to the bride goes directly to her, and she remains as powerless as she was before marriage without dowry – the so-called share of property. This study thus negates claims about the absence of dowry in Assam (Ashokvardhana: 2002). Similar to Deka’s (2013) observation, this study also finds that dowry has become almost an integral part of marriage systems in Assam.

3.3.5. Son preference

Son preference refers to the fact that sons are considered more important and valued than daughters. The preference for a son is widely prevalent in a patriarchal society. In patriarchy, sons are born with certain values, which come from the functions they are to perform, like carry-forward the lineage and maintain the link between the deceased and the patrilineal living members (Rydstrom: 2002). Women are mostly seen as a means to an end, which in the context of patrilineality refers to their reproductive capacity and ensuring of the continuation of the lineage (Nussbaum: 2000). Producing a male progeny is so important that women get their status only when they can produce sons to ensure the continuation of the lineage (Rydstrom: 2002: 362). Considering the importance of sons, a failure to produce sons becomes a justified reason to inflict domestic violence upon women. The data includes cases where son preference directly causes domestic violence against women.

Son preference not only affects women but also adversely affects girls, leading to unequal treatment and negligent behaviour in matters of food, education, medical facilities, and so on, towards girls. Inflicting domestic violence for giving birth to a girl child actually reveals how unwanted and undesired girls are in the society. At the individual and family levels, the primary consequence of son preference is direct pressure placed on women to produce male children. In this process, one option is to simply allow a family to grow until a son is born, no matter what consequences it has on the health of the woman and several other (Barot: 2012). The following case illustrates this:

Asia was the second wife of her husband. He married her with the sole purpose of having sons. After one year of their marriage, she gave birth to a baby girl. The birth of a girl led to harassment and torture. One by one, she delivered three daughters. The birth of daughters led to aggression and torture by her husband, and finally he forced her out of the house.

3.3.6. Second marriage

The practice of or intention to practice polygamy by men has been found in my data, irrespective of religious background. This practice has often been found leading to domestic violence against wives. A few cases are given below, showing the impact of a polygamous practice that led to violence upon women:

Rashida has been married for 18 years and has two children. When the children were small and at the school-going stage, her husband suddenly married another girl and brought her home. This was shocking for Rashida because she did not have any clue about it. This second marriage of her husband brought an end to her own peaceful life because her husband started to neglect her and insult her. He started to taunt her for her looks and tortured her for every small issue. His second wife, too, engaged in abusing her. Rashida lost her status in her very own house to her co-wife. Their torture became severe, and finally she had to leave her house within six months of his second marriage.

Minoti, one survivor respondent, reported: The birth of daughter upset my husband and in-laws. They were expecting a son. After the birth of my daughter, I was not given rest and sufficient food. I had to do all household work and did not get time to feed my baby. I did not want to upset them anymore and used to do everything. Then, one day, my husband declared that he was going to marry another girl to have a son. I did not allow him to do so, and he abused me and threw me out of the house.

The desire for a male child is found to be one factor that encourages a polygamous marriage, and opposition to it often leads to violence against women. Polygamy and having wives in different places are found to cause domestic violence and other problems such as economic hardship, loneliness, mental pain, and the like. In my data, economic hardship has been found to be one of the most adverse consequences of second marriages. Sometimes revelation of a second marriage and the questions that follow also lead to a violent situation.

3.7. Early marriage

Early marriage has been reported to be a cause of domestic violence. In my data I have found a victim of domestic violence who was only fourteen (14) years old. In addition other respondents have reported early marriage to be one of the causes of domestic violence. As elaborated by one NGO worker:

Ms Jyoti opined: early marriage causes domestic violence. Early marriage is common among tea tribes. She stated that a lack of education, health consciousness and poverty fosters early marriage. This early marriage leads to

the maximum number of pregnancies, affecting the health of the mothers. The presence of more children increases expenses and leads to poverty. Economic stress leads men to resort to alcohol and finally release stress through abuse of their wives.

A similar view is found from police personnel. It is confirmed that early marriage is one of the causes of domestic violence, as the police get frequent complaints from young women.

3.4. Conclusion

To conclude, domestic violence against women in Assam follows similar trends as found all over the world. In this study, given the sources of data, the prevalence of domestic violence against wives comes forth significantly. Violence against women other than wives, including sisters and elderly women, is also found in a few cases. This does not in any way indicate that violence against other members of the family is not prevalent in Assam. The long-term engagement of women's movements on the issue of wife-battering as the only form of domestic violence has also created considerable awareness towards wife-battering rather than other forms of gender violence. This has led to emerging of wife-battering cases more than other family violence cases (Kumar: 1993; Khullar: 2005). Women's experience of physical violence ranged from minor slaps to life-threatening acts, as well as financial, sexual and psychological violence in domestic relationships. Among all forms, sexual violence has been found to be less reported. An open discussion of sex is not appreciated, and this makes women uncomfortable to divulge their experience of sexual violence. Along with other forms of violence, dowry-related violence is common in Assam and has showed rapid growth. Dowry, which hardly existed in Assam, has become a common occurrence and appears frequently in electronic media and newspapers. My data included a few cases of capturing of *stridhan*³ by in-laws and the recovery of it with legal help. Victims are found from all sections of the society, irrespective of economic, caste, ethnic, religious or educational background. Though this study concentrated on wife-battering, the perpetrators are not limited to husbands; rather, parents-in-laws, co-wives, brothers- and sisters-in-laws and

³Various valuable goods, including clothes and jewellery, are given to a bride at the time of marriage. These goods belong to the woman only. The husband or any male member is not supposed to have any control over her goods. She later gives away her belongings to her daughter. The chain of stridhan transfer continues from mother to daughter.

stepchildren are found to be equally involved and active. The consequences of domestic violence included numerous adversities related to health, economic status and social position of women, including victimisation of children. The reasons for domestic violence that this study brings forth are many. Among these, dowry and extra-marital affairs are the two most common reasons, followed by alcoholism. These reasons could easily initiate violent episodes because of the inherent patriarchal nature of the society, giving a base to violence through its rules, norms and values supporting discrimination of women. Thus, domestic violence in Assam is seen to be widely prevalent, affecting women from various angles with different consequences and being indirectly supported by the social system.

In the next chapter, women's reactions to domestic violence, coping strategies and help-seeking experiences are discussed.

Chapter IV

Domestic Violence Survivors' Help-Seeking and Institutional Responses

4.1. Introduction

This chapter elaborates women's reactions towards domestic violence. It includes how women react to the violence they face, factors influencing women's reactions, the strategies women adopt to cope with domestic violence and women's experiences of seeking help from various agencies. Analysis of the data brings forth these major themes or findings: how women react to domestic violence, what strategies they use to lessen domestic violence, what the reasons are for delayed help-seeking, what the turning points are to go for help-seeking and, finally, what kind of interactions they have with the different help-providing agencies. These themes reflect the psychological stages of the minds of victims and the impact of socio-cultural norms and values on their help-seeking behaviour.

4.2. Women's Reactions to Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is considered a private issue and often remains hidden as a result of which it is often referred as an 'invisible' crime. Only a small number of domestic violence cases are ever reported – most of the cases are unreported and thus remain invisible in the society (Gracia: 2004). Toleration of domestic violence by victims silently adds to its invisibility and increased victimisation. Also, over-emphasis on family sanctity and privacy produces unwillingness among authorities to intervene as well as among victims to ask for help for violence that occurs within the family (Myers: 1995). This also shields abusers from being punished (Bailey: 2012).

In this study, women were found to react to domestic violence mainly in two ways: either they tolerate violence, or they seek outside intervention or help to end the abuse. During the victimisation period, women employ various strategies to make the situation less severe. However, when toleration and the use of coping strategies do not solve their problem, they seek outside intervention. Women approach various agencies to seek help. Women's selection of agencies for help-seeking is based on their specific situations. The differences in women's situations and conditions add diversity to their experiences of

help-seeking. Also, on the basis of nature, structure, power and inherent ideological orientation of agencies, women get varied experiences in their help-seeking attempts. Help-seeking is one important step, and it shows that women are not mere victims but survivors too.

4.3. Factors influencing Women's Reactions

Various factors influence women's responses to abuse and decisions of help-seeking. Here, an attempt is made to describe the factors that influence the ways women react to domestic violence.

Silent toleration as part of domestic violence victimisation has been clear from my data. It is also found that women suffered silently for years before taking outside help. In my data, the period of suffering before help-seeking and protesting is found to vary from woman to woman, ranging between 3 or 4 months and 22 years. It is not that they are willing to suffer in silence always, but many times the situation forces them to become silent victims of violence for a certain period. Before raising their voice against their abusers, they have to consider various factors. Women's victimisation and their response to it are often influenced by their views on socially accepted women's subordination and male supremacy, the imposed burden of maintaining family peace and harmony, children's responsibility, dependency status in financial matters and a lack of authority in household matters. Moreover, the tacit sanction and non-interference from the society which considers domestic violence a private matter, also serve to silence women and keep them away from help-seeking. The data presents some reasons due to which women have tolerated domestic violence and not opted for help-seeking. As the following respondents reported:

Nimi said: I should not have tolerated his abusive acts. But what can I do. I was taught that I must take care of my marriage as well as fulfil my husband's wishes. I could not deny his physical need. I am his wife, and I must satisfy my marital duties. So I tolerated for some time to see if things can work. But he did not stop. With increased violence, I realised that my silence is not going to save me.

Nibedita said: I was told by other women, "For your own marriage, why can't you sacrifice a bit or tolerate a few slaps; after all it's your husband who has every right over you". Before taking help of the police, I thought over what

others would think of my decision of going out of this marriage. I was apprehensive of their reaction and of them blaming me for not saving my marriage. This stopped me from going to the police for a long time.

The above responses reveal the impact of socialisation on women's attitude due to which women find it difficult to cross the 'barrier' and protest to end abuse as soon as it starts. In the patriarchal society of India, women are conditioned to silently accept and tolerate violence as a part of life (Misra: 2007). Socialisation into gender roles normalises male domination and female subordination (Hamby: 2005). Due to normalisation of violence by the process of socialisation, women fail to realise the subtle forms of violence against them in the initial period and opt to tolerate. Further, women opt to suffer in silence rather than revealing their victimisation, because of the stigma and shame associated with family violence (Frias and Angel: 2007). Many times women express that silent toleration is not a solution to violence, and raising a voice against it is required. Yet, they remain silent, thinking about the society's reaction, along with considering several other factors.

Often the intention to save the marriage is found to influence a woman's reaction to violence. In my data six (06) women have reported that they tolerated violence at the hands of their abusers just to save their marriages. This is because women are often taught the value and importance of marriage and morally trained to save it at any cost. This decision is not free from the society's emphasis on the importance of marriage in women's lives, and women cannot ignore it easily. A few women reported that they had to save their marriages, thinking about their parents' reputation, and to protect their siblings' married lives from the stigma attached to a broken marriage. Women's financial dependency also forces them to stay in abusive marriages. Following responses reveal how women are taught the value of marriage:

Nibedita said: I was told by other women, "For your own marriage, why can't you sacrifice a bit or tolerate a few slaps; after all it's your husband who has every right over you". Before taking help of the police, I thought over what others would think of my decision of going out of this marriage. I was apprehensive of their reaction and of them blaming me for not saving my marriage. This stopped me from going to the police for a long time.

One survivor respondent said: I was taught that I must take care of my marriage as well as fulfil my husband's wishes. I could not deny his physical need. I am his wife, and I must satisfy my marital duties. If I leave my husband or divorce him, my parents will be disappointed. People will say many things to them and insult them. I did not want them to be humiliated by society.

Another factor associated with women's decision to tolerate violence and continuing a violent marriage is the choice of partners. In this study, violence in love marriage⁴ is seen to be quite frequent. My data includes sixteen (16) cases where violence occurs between married couples who had been in a love relationship prior to their marriage. In such cases, a woman initially finds it difficult to divulge the fact of being abused by the person whom she chose to marry. She feels ashamed to reveal the violence by her loved one. She has a kind of fear that she will not get any support from her natal family. She also anticipates humiliation and criticism for her wrong choice of partner and decides to remain in the marriage, tolerating the violence.

From the above description it is seen that the need to continue a marriage has a close association with toleration of violence. This link illustrates the effects of socialisation on women and the socio-cultural significance, value and importance of marriage in women's lives. Marriage is considered an acceptable means to upgrade women's value, status and worth, as well as protecting their parents' reputation by avoiding the shame and stigma of a broken marriage. These situations force women to save their marriages, even at the cost of severe suffering by remaining silent against abuse. While doing so, it can be seen that all the attempts to save the marriage do not enhance the status of a woman, rather, it devaluates them (Bhopal: 1997). In reality marriage does not ensure women's security but rather entraps them into violence.

Silent toleration does not bring about the desired outcome always. Many times violence reaches such a height that remaining silent becomes impossible and women go for help-seeking.

⁴The type of marriage where a person gets married to his /her partner of his or her own choice. The couple remains in a relationship prior to marriage, and after a certain period the marriage is solemnised.

- **Maintaining peace at home**

Women are found to remain silent to ensure peace at home. Protest or resistance to violence by women provokes the abusers to be more violent, which leads to a disturbance in the smooth running of the family. It may also disturb other members and cause tension at home. Silent suffering of domestic violence therefore seemed to be a better alternative for the sake of family peace to many survivor respondents than resisting violence. The following responses will show how:

Tripti said: I remained silent even after severe harassment. I did not protest because I did not want to spoil my family's reputation by bringing the issue to the public.

Niru reported that she kept her mouth shut and carried on her wifely duties. She never enjoyed forced physical intimacy by her husband, but she tried to satisfy him so that peace at home is maintained.

The gender role expectation that women will preserve and maintain the family (Kanagaratnam et al.: 2012) often forces women to sacrifice their own safety and security and become silent sufferers of violence. Patriarchy burdens women with the responsibility to uplift the family name, and often daughters-in-law are the keepers of the tradition and honour of the home. They cannot reveal the domestic violence and bring dishonour to the family or turbulence in the normal flow of life at home. In patriarchy, self-sacrifice is one significant quality that an ideal woman should possess. Women's self-sacrifice rather than self-expression is valued in patriarchy (Goel: 2005). Being aggressive or raising a voice against the husband's control is considered a transgression of the gendered role, which threatens the honour of the family (Welchman and Hussain: 2005), and women do not dare to transgress that limit easily by revealing violence and seeking outside help. Educated, employed and independent women are also not free from such dilemmas and are found to end up being silent sufferers instead of going for help-seeking.

- **Patri-local norms and early initiation of violence**

In Assam, patri-locality is the norm. In this form of marriage, a bride leaves her natal home and goes to live with her husband and his family. Patri-locality discourages investing in female education as the daughter is not going to stay with her parents, and

gives the son a more important position as the future care-taker by the parents. In such a weak situation, the occurrence of domestic violence in the initial days of marriage contributes to more vulnerability and forces the woman to remain silent. Consider the following case:

In the case of Malti, she was tortured and harassed for dowry by her in-laws just after 15 days of her marriage. She tolerated silently for a few months, but later she took outside help. She approached the village court, but its decision was not obeyed by the abusers. Later she was brought back to her natal home when her sister discovered her in a bad condition.

Coupled with helplessness due to patri-local norms, early initiation of domestic violence leaves women in shock, unable to decide how to react to violence. In my study, early initiation of domestic violence is found. In six (6) cases women faced violence within a few days of marriage. None of these women dared to take any step against their abusers in the new homes as soon as the violence began. To adjust and start a new life in a new home, a woman needs cooperation from the members of the marital home (Medhi: 2002). In a situation when violence starts almost right after marriage, the victim feels supportless, frightened and nervous. She develops a kind of fear and hence normally stays silent about her victimisation.

- **Concern for children and their future**

The data shows that children and their future are of prime concern for women facing domestic violence. Women's fear that their protests will lead to violence upon their children makes them suffer violence. Women often sacrifice their own safety to ensure their children's safety. Abusers often blackmail women with the threat to torture their children and separate their children from them, which forces them to stay away from outside help-seeking. The following case clarifies it:

Buli, a survivor respondent, reported that she was being abused by her husband for small issues, and day by day his abuse was increasing. Once, after a severe incident, she went to her natal home with the decision to not go back. But she had to go back for her children because her husband went to her natal home and started abusing her children till she agreed to go back.

The data also reveals that worries about children also encourage women to take outside help to ensure their children's security. Women disclose domestic violence incidents and ask for help from outside sources when they see their children being harmed by their abusers.

One respondent informed me that she was trying to adjust in her marriage with her abusive husband. She tolerated abuse as she wanted to save her marriage so that she won't have to go back to her poor parents to be a burden, neither did she want to hamper the marriage alliances of her sisters. But she could not stick to her decision of staying in her abusive relationship when she noticed her husband molesting her daughter. The next day, she left her husband, lodged a complaint with the police and went to a shelter home.

Concern for children's safety plays an important role in women's lives while dealing with domestic violence. Women were found to seek outside help or decide to leave when they see their children are experiencing violence or getting affected by violence. On the other hand, in many instances women refrained from taking any outside help in order to just ensure the security of their children. The negative impact of domestic violence upon children has been found by research long ago (Fantuzzo and Mohr: 1999; Holden: 2003; Evans et al.: 2008). Therefore, to protect their children from any direct and indirect effects of violence, women are found to choose a strategy to react to domestic violence.

- **Inability of the natal family to meet demands**

As described in the previous chapter, there is a close link between dowry and domestic violence. In the majority of my cases, dowry was the most frequent cause of domestic violence. In the context of domestic violence occurring following the demands of dowry, women's silent suffering can be linked to parental economic weakness. Women are found to tolerate violence silently because of the inability of their natal families to fulfil the dowry demands. The responses here bring forth such constraints:

Rekha stated that she was harassed for more dowry by her in-laws, but she knew well that her widowed mother couldn't pay any more dowry to her in-laws. So she had to tolerate violence silently without protesting against her abusers.

Tutu stated that she was married for 10 years and had two children. She was harassed for dowry by her husband, mother-in-law and brother-in-law. Her

widowed mother's economic condition was not so sound to be able to fulfil their demands. So she never discussed with her mother the demands made and the abuse she faced, silently tolerating violence.

It is also seen that some women do not convey such demands to their parents, because they think that once they are married, they do not have any right to trouble their parents for money and other material things. Thus, they choose to tolerate abuse silently without giving any trouble to their natal families.

Women tolerate violence instead of pressuring their families to pay more dowries or to entertain repeated demands. This vulnerable situation of women can be related to a lack of inheritance rights for women. If they were granted equal rights to the parental property or inheritance rights equal to sons, they would not have to tolerate violence; rather, the property would add power to women and there will be some solution to violence. A lack of property rights and economic independence, coupled with the poor financial condition of parents, makes silent toleration the only viable option for many victims of domestic violence.

- **Financial dependence**

Financial dependence plays an important role in women's decision to tolerate violence or take outside help, as the following respondent put:

Nur, a victim respondent, stated: I don't have money to fight a legal battle. So I did not file any complaint against my in-laws for abusing me.

Lack of economic independence of women allows their abusers to exert violence upon them. Women who are financially dependent on their abusers generally do not want to take outside help for domestic violence. They fear the possible loss of economic support, along with other personal belongings, if outside help is sought. Therefore, it can be said that anticipating curtailment of financial assistance, women often tolerate violence, as the following respondent says:

Nurjahan reported: My husband is the owner of cultivable land in Marigaon. While on the other hand, I, along with two sons, have nothing to survive in life and continue my days in great economic hardship. Therefore, I have applied for

financial assistance from my husband for myself and my children through the legal process.

Thus, the data also revealed that, at times, a lack of economical means to support one's own self as well as children is one of the reasons that motivates women to take legal and other help. This factor is applicable particularly to those who have been deserted by their husbands and are living away from the marital homes along with their children. In my data, the maximum of legal interventions are sought for grants of financial assistance or maintenance.

With marriage, women lose the right of residence in their natal homes, and their property right after marriage is not strong (Agnes: 2002). In addition, the patriarchal norms make men the breadwinners and women dependent on them. Therefore, once a marriage is broken, the woman is left with no options. Under such condition, shelter and economic reasons often influence a woman's decision to stay in an abusive marriage or seek legal assistance for maintenance. Due to gender socialisation, women often go for financial help instead of ending the marriage.

- **Fear**

Fear of reprisal plays an important role in deciding women's response to domestic violence. Incidents of increased violence for raising their voice against violence are common, as found in this study. In my data twenty two (22) women, some of them with children, were thrown out of their homes at different stages of their victimisation. Homelessness adds more complexity to their victimisation, and women are often found being troubled by the issue of shelter. As they do not want to be homeless, they are often found to remain tolerant, as the following case revealed:

One respondent informed me that her husband used to beat her after drinking and was involved in an extra-marital affair with another girl. Once she had protested against his extra-marital relationship, and she was thrown out of the house after severe assault. After that, she stopped protesting as she was scared of being thrown out of the house permanently.

The data also reveals that revealing the violence often results in more abuse to the women. Hence, they restrict themselves from divulging the violence and remain quiet. The fear of more and increased violence restricts women from taking outside help and

traps them into abusive relationships, because they think that turning to sources of support may worsen their situation (Frias: 2013). Many times women's lack of information about available helping resources, along with illiteracy, a lack of outside contacts, a lack of awareness drives, and the like, forces them to silently accept violence.

- **Increased violence**

The data reveals that increased violence often motivates women's decision to opt for outside help-seeking. As stated earlier, women often tolerate violence for a certain period, and many of them decide to seek help when violence increases rapidly and becomes intolerable. Certain factors trigger them to seek help from outside sources. The following cases will reflect the impact of increased violence on women's decision to respond to violence:

Minu's story: Her husband used to beat her severely and used abusive language. He used to ask her to bring money from her parents. She never agreed to bring money, and that frequently led to torture and harassment. One day, when he demanded that she go to her parents and bring money, she refused. This made him angry, and he beat her badly and drove her out of the house. She then directly went to the police station and filed a complaint against him.

Sahar Banu, a mother of two sons, was forced to bring money from her parents. Her husband started to drink and abuse her verbally and physically to bring money. His parents used to support him. One day, her husband bit her severely and then holding her hair threw her out with a threat that if she came back, she would be killed. They also kept one son with them. This made her go to the police and lodge a complaint against her husband.

As argued by Sabina and Tindale (2008), as the severity and amount of abuse increase, the frequency of help-seeking also increases. Likewise, in my data, it is found that extreme and increased violence has encouraged women who earlier tolerated violence to seek help. The realisation of increased violence and perceived danger for life due to increased violence acts as a decisive factor for women to take outside help. Women tolerate violence till they can, but after some point, they take outside help when they regard their own resources and alternatives have depleted and when they lost hope in their own ability to stop the violence (Liang et al.: 2005).

Thus, the above-described factors are seen to influence women's reactions to the violence they face.

4.4. Coping with Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is often associated with a culture of silence, and women prefer to remain silent for various reasons such as stigma and shame, children's safety, family peace, fear of worsening the situation due to protest and many more (Frias and Angel: 2007; Frias: 2013). However, when it becomes intolerable, women attempt to stop the violence and its severity (Goodman et al.: 2003). To stop, prevent or escape from the violence, abused women use various strategies (Yoshihama: 2002). Thus, women pass through various stages of domestic violence, either being helpless victims or actively resisting such violence and emerging as survivors of violence. During all these stages they are constantly negotiating, strategising and adopting various ways to tolerate, cope with and resist such violence. Women have experienced the consequences of violence and used techniques to lessen the severity of violence and reduce its frequency. Before going for help-seeking to end abuse or leaving the abusers, women employ various techniques to make their stay in a violent relationship less painful.

Coping has been defined as the use of cognitive and/or behavioural techniques to manage stress. Coping can occur in anticipation of a negative event or can be used as a tool to manage emotional responses to negative experiences (Randa: 2005). By coping one understands the things that people do to avoid being harmed in events that carry a danger to life. 'Coping is a shifting, not static, process in that individuals employ varying strategies according to the nature of the stressors, appraisal of the available coping resources, and other situational factors' (Yoshihama:2002: 430).

4.4.1. Coping strategies adopted by women

The following are the descriptions of the strategies adopted by women in Assam to cope with violence.

- **Hiding violence from the family**

One of the most used coping strategies adopted by women is to hide the violence from other members of family, friends or neighbours. Domestic violence between partners is largely considered a private matter between the partners, and they themselves must solve

it. Following this prevailing notion of marital privacy, men abuse women if they reveal the abuse to somebody else. Therefore, being afraid of further abuse due to revealing it, women opt to remain silent. That way they try to limit the occurrence of violence or stop increased aggression from their partners. In the following case, the women have hidden the abuse not because they consider it a private matter but because they want to prevent further episodes of violence. The following response is given to show it:

Taru, a survivor respondent, stated: My husband beat me for a small reason. I was so shocked with the incident that my behaviour revealed the wrong with me. On being asked, I shared with my sister-in-law, who was quite supportive towards me. She made me feel comfortable and helped me to come out of my shock. She suggested to me that I sort out things by discussing them with my husband. But before I could talk to him, he started accusing me for making it public. After that incident, I used to keep things secret from others to avoid such violence.

The belief that the second episode of violence occurred because she had revealed her victimisation made her keep the violence to herself to avoid further violence. Victims often think that secrecy may stop at least one or two episodes of violence. This thought forces them to remain silent about violence, as the respondent below:

Minu, a survivor respondent, stated: I never revealed the violence to anybody. I tried to talk to him to know the reason for the violence. I was scared that if he comes to know from others about his violent activities, he would be angry. So I zipped my lips and did not tell anything to anybody.

Hiding violence in many cases, as respondents informed me, has helped to put a limit on the occurrence of a few more incidents or prolonged the time before the next episode of violence. However, such maintenance of secrecy has not helped to stop violence against them.

- **Being submissive and obedient to the abuser**

The women in this study were found to use the technique of being submissive and obedient towards men to restrict the occurrence of future violence. Women do so just to lessen the aggression of their abusers. The responses mentioned next will show the use of this strategy by the victims:

Swapnali, a survivor respondent, said: My husband did not want me to go out of the house whenever he was at home, because he wanted physical involvement with me all the time. For that pleasure, he did not allow me to go out and strictly asked me to follow his words. I did not dare to make him angry and took it as my duty to satisfy him, but later I realised my mistake.

Minu, a survivor, informed me that she was harassed physically and mentally by her husband. After all kinds of torture, she agreed to stay the way he wanted. He used to throw things at her without reason and keep her locked in the storeroom. But she did not raise her voice, anticipating more aggressive attacks from his side. She feared that if she opposed him, he would be more aggressive.

These two women are educated and belong to families with sound economic background. They acted and behaved submissive so that their husbands would not become aggressive. They used this strategy in the early period of their victimisation. Later, they took steps against their abusers. The following response is given to show it:

Kusum, a survivor respondent, stated: My husband was an alcoholic, and I did not like his behaviour. Initially, I used to ask him not to drink. He used to ignore my words. Slowly, he started scolding me whenever I said something against his drinking. One day he invited his friends to their home for drinking. I was asked to arrange all the items they needed to eat with alcohol, and I refused to do so. I asked him to take his friends out and drink somewhere else. This made him mad, and he beat me black and blue. From that day, I don't say even a single word to him regarding his drinking. I can't afford another violent incident.

In this case, the woman stopped restricting her husband from drinking at home and obeyed him only to avoid the violence and not because she agreed with him.

The aim of inflicting violence is to maintain power and control. The abuser wants to get control over the victim by the use of various types of violence or threats of violence (Chhikara et al.:2013). When women behave in a submissive way, they just try to give abusers the sense that the abusers have been able to establish control over them. Women let the abusers feel that they are being obeyed and respected by not arguing and doing whatever they say. Obedience and submission from women have psychological effects on the minds of men. They temporarily relieve men of the fear of losing control, and

rather and for a certain period de-motivate men from using violence (Rigeret al.: 1982). By allowing men to feel that they are in a superior and controlling position, women technically try to restrict their violent moves.

- **Avoiding the thought of being abused and keeping busy in work**

Abused women try not to think about abuse, and that lessens their agony slightly. The thought of being abused makes them feel sad and helpless. To make life look normal, women thus use the strategy of avoiding the thought of abuse. These cases will show the use of this technique:

Rima, one survivor respondent, said: I was harassed and tortured for money. I was pressured to do sex work to earn money. However, amidst all the violence, I could finish my beautician training and joined a beauty parlour. I used to give him all the money, which he spent on drinking. This reduced violence for a few days. I stopped thinking about his violence and was working hard to earn some more money so that I could spend some money on myself after giving some to him. Whenever I remember the violence and financial exploitation, it makes me angry.

Dipti, a survivor woman, said: After coming back from her aunt's place, where she was taking shelter, she realised that she had no option other than living with her husband. So she stopped thinking about violent incidents and concentrated on her daughter's upbringing. She cantered her thoughts around her daughter, forgetting everything to make her life somewhat normal.

These women thus adopted the strategy of trying to be indifferent about past violent incidents to lessen mental stress. Not thinking about violence helped them live their lives rather calmly as compared to being constantly in pain over past violence, which led to apprehension of future possibilities of such violence. Thinking about the victimisation increases their pain, and the inability to stop it even worsens the situation. Although, they knew that living without a husband or leaving the husband would be problematic, they adopted this technique to lessen their mental stress. They also used the strategy of keeping themselves busy with both household and other works so that it distracted them from thinking about the violence inflicted on them.

- **Temporarily leaving the abuser and the abusive environment**

Temporarily leaving the abuser and the abusive environment and taking shelter in a safe place have been one of the commonly used coping strategies. To avoid serious harm, women often leave their abusers and are found taking shelter in safe places. A few cases to show this follow:

Renu, a survivor woman, informed me that one night her husband attacked her in a closed room from where she could neither run away nor shout for help. On the previous night, too, there was a severe physical attack upon her. The next day, when the same incident happened, unable to bear the torture, she left him and went to her natal home.

Anu, a survivor woman, said: I discovered that my husband was giving me medicine for depression and mental illness instead of medicine given post-delivery. I came to know his plan and so decided to leave him. I have filed a case for divorce and the procedure is going on.

The above responses thus, show that the threat to life forces women to leave their abusers. It can be argued that by leaving abusive husbands and an abusive environment, women try to save themselves from further abuse for some time.

Women are found to come back once the situation becomes normal. It is because women do not have support to stay for a longer period anywhere away from the marital home, and so they have to come back. They do not leave their marital home permanently but as a sign of protest against their husbands' aggressive behaviour. During this stage the husbands are found to do anything to bring them back home. They behave politely, try to convince the wives, make promises to stop violence, use blackmailing and do whatever possible, as seen in the following case:

Binita, a survivor woman, stated: After 10-15 days of the violence, her husband, along with the village head and a few senior persons, went to her home and took her with him, with a promise not to torture her again. But this time, the level of torture increased.

It is also found that leaving the abusers does not always guarantee the end of violence or reformation of the abusers. Rather, violence is found to continue even after the women

move out of the abusive environment. Four women disclosed facing violence at their friends' houses and natal homes where they were taking shelter after leaving their abusers. The following case will reflect the impact of women's decision to leave the abuser:

Buli, a survivor woman, informed me that she is taking shelter at her sister's place. She has no income source, and her husband does not provide any financial help. He has threatened to take her son away by force. He frequently visits her at her current residence and physically assaults her and her son.

A temporary-leaving strategy was adopted to get quick relief as well as to threaten the abuser about permanent leaving if violence continues. Temporary leaving definitely serves women with immediate safety but does not guarantee the end of abuse. Permanent leaving though helped to end abuse, but often left women with other complex situations such as economic hardship, lengthy court procedures, complexities in child custody, social stigma and vulnerability to other forms of violence and exploitation, among others. In addition, leaving abusive partners is not always a feasible option due to the dishonour and stigma attached to broken marital relationships. Therefore, it is often a tough choice for women to leave an abusive partner to escape violence.

Thus, women are seen adopting the above-described strategies to cope with domestic violence situations. When these strategies fail to reduce the effects of violence and women anticipate threats to their lives, they decide to go for help-seeking or permanently leave the abuser.

4. 5. Help-Seeking

As discussed earlier, women are not silent sufferers always, and they do try to escape violence. For that they often seek outside help to end abuse in their lives. Violence at times acts as a precipitating factor and motivates women to seek help. Help-seeking has been found to be one of the ways women respond to domestic violence. Victims use different sources for help at different times and in different situations. Both formal and informal sources are used for help-seeking to escape, resist and fight domestic violence. Women have approached the police, legal services, natal families, relatives, village courts and women's organisations, seeking help to survive in violent situations. The outcome and experience of help-seeking also vary from woman to woman.

4.5.1. Help-seeking from informal agencies

After a prolonged campaign for criminal and civil laws to stop domestic violence, the Protection of Women against Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA) 2005 was enacted. This legislation is inclusive in its definition of domestic violence, whereby many forms which were earlier not accepted as domestic violence are now criminalised (Agnes: 2002; Agnes and D'Mello: 2015). It is generally understood that state institutions are the only mechanism to address domestic violence. However, often the state cannot or does not address the various needs of women suffering domestic violence as expected (Worner: 2009; Agnes and D'Mello: 2015). Women get dissatisfied, and their dissatisfaction with the formal system led them to look for alternatives to deal with domestic violence. Strict procedures, high cost and ceaseless postponements and delays, all these have been closely associated with the formal judiciary of India. In situations where most women are not financially independent and also are not legally educated, access to formal law becomes a complicated task. Under such circumstances they look forward to informal mechanisms or institutions to solve their problems. The expectation is that their cases will be addressed in lesser time and with lesser financial costs, in a situation of informality, unlike the formal/state legal spaces, where they are completely dependent on lawyers to comprehend the procedures of law and the status of their cases.

Informal justice mechanisms are a valid alternative for numerous women (Pande: 2009). The data collected in the study brings forth the existence of various informal sources of help-seeking and dispute resolution mechanisms that are often used by victims of domestic violence in Assam, especially in rural areas. Informal sources of help-seeking include natal families, friends, relatives, village courts and women's groups. As found in the data, natal families, friends and relatives are approached mostly for the purpose of a safe shelter. Village courts and women's groups are approached for solving the issue of violence and seeking justice.

4.5.1.1. Help-seeking from the natal family

In the process of help-seeking by women or resisting of domestic violence, it is found that turning to the natal family is often the initial step. Similar to Meyer (2010), this study, too, found that most women did not contact the police or other services as the first

source of help to deal with domestic violence. Victims were found to approach the informal agencies first and then go to other formal agencies.

In my study, twenty nine (29) women have been found to share their violent experiences with somebody from natal families or friends or relatives. Natal families are often found to intervene and try to solve the problem through mutual discussions or other mild approaches first. Later, when their moderate approaches fail, they support their daughters using legal steps. It is important to mention that natal family members have also been abused while trying to solve domestic violence issues of their daughters or sisters. It needs to be mentioned that not all women who have approached natal family members have got the desired support and help.

Women's experiences with the natal families have been found to influence their subsequent help-seeking process from the formal agencies. Women who have approached and obtained support from natal families have been found to continue their subsequent battle for justice through the formal agencies without much difficulty. On the other hand, women without their natal families' help and support had to face more difficulties in their fight against domestic violence.

The natal family is often seen giving safe shelter to a domestic violence victim. In many cases the natal family is the first place a woman goes after leaving her abusive partner. Since the natal family has been a source of support to the victim, the abuser often tries to restrict the woman from visiting the natal family to curtail her support system. The natal family supports the woman in fighting a legal battle and provides economic support, emotional support and a safe shelter. A few examples are given here to show women getting support from natal families:

In the case of Pronoty, she was married at a young age. Just after her marriage, she was tortured by her husband and her aunt-in-law. They attempted to burn her alive, but she somehow escaped and went home. At home her parents and uncles supported her to get justice and did not force her to go back to her husband's home. Later her parents supported her wish to continue her education, which she had left to get married.

In the case of Nirmala, she left her marital home when her husband abused her physically and tried to kill her. She was saved by some other man, and her

brother brought her back home. Later, her brother helped her to fight her case in court, which she won.

In these two cases, the support of the natal family is seen clearly. One important point about these two cases is that both victims were young and economically dependent. They could only fight their battles with the help of their natal families. Without their support, it would not have been possible for them to fight their legal battles.

As soon as the natal families come to know about violence, they try to intervene in the issue and attempt to solve it. The natal families have either approached the formal or informal agencies for solving cases or intervened by themselves. It is found that many times the natal family members have faced ill-treatment or verbal abuse while trying to intervene or offer help to victims. A few examples are given here to show the approach by natal family members to help victims:

In the case of Dulu, when she was tortured by her in-laws and they tried to hang her, her parents called a village meeting to decide this issue. Her parents explained everything and requested the villagers to help her. In the village meeting, her in-laws were questioned about their acts. The village meeting ended with a strict warning to her in-laws to not abuse her anymore or else other options would be considered.

In the matter of Lakshmi, when she came back to her natal home after facing violence, her family tried to solve the issue with the help of the village court, but her husband did not comply. Later, they took the help of the legal system. But due to the lengthy process, she lost interest and stopped going to court.

The data also includes cases where the natal family members helped victims to contact the police, as in the following case:

In the case of Mani, she was frequently pressured to bring dowry from her parents. After the birth of their daughter, her husband's demands turned into severe physical abuse. When his torture reached its maximum level, she informed her parents about his abusive behaviour. And with the help of her brother-in-law, she took help from the police and got her husband arrested. In the police station, he signed an agreement to not torture her again.

A safe shelter is one of the primary needs of domestic violence victims. A natal family has been the source of safe shelter in the nine (9) cases studied.

However, it cannot be claimed that natal families are always willing to help their daughters to fight against domestic abuse. A few cases are given here where the daughters' pleas for help were rejected by their natal families:

In the case of Shanta, she got married to her husband secretly without her parents' approval. Later, she discovered that her husband had lied to her of being a government employee. In reality, he did not have any job. She wanted to leave him, but he was not ready to let her go. He started to abuse her. She contacted her parents for help. Her parents did not help her and avoided her. They refused to help because she had married against their wish.

In the case of Tina, she was married to a person from a different religious community. She had to live a secluded life from her parents and relatives for marrying into a different community. After a few years of her marriage, her husband started to abuse her. Being worried for her children, she wanted to leave him. She requested her brother to help her to leave her husband. Her brother wanted to help her, but he could not because of the pressure of their kin members. Since she had married into a different community and had brought disgrace to the family, the kin members did not allow her brother to help her.

Smriti informed me that she belonged to a rich family and fell in love with a boy from a poor background. As a result of their relationship, she got pregnant, and she eloped with her boyfriend. In her new home, she had to suffer mental torture from her mother-in-law because she did not know any household work. Slowly, her husband started to join his mother and abuse Smriti physically. In between, she delivered a baby girl, and her father came to see her. Her father saw her doing household work, wearing very old clothes. He felt sad seeing her condition, and at night he died of a heart attack. Her family blamed her for her father's death. With time, her husband's torture increased. Once or twice, she asked her brother for help, but he refused because he considered her to be the reason for their father's death.

Thus, for many reasons, women do not get support from their natal families on time. The natal families are seen not supporting victims in cases where family reputation is at stake. The data also shows that the natal families refuse to support victims to fight their battle and also encourage them to go back to their marital homes. Such refusal often reflects the value attached to a daughter's marriage. A few cases to show this are given as follows:

In the case of Himakshi, her husband and in-laws used to torture her for dowry and send her to her natal home. Every time she was sent to her natal family, her family members used to take her back to her husband so that their marriage continues. They knew about the tortures she faced but ignored it. Later, when her husband tried to set her on fire, she escaped and approached the legal system for help.

As Bhanita reported, her husband was an alcoholic and used to torture her. Just after marriage, she wanted to leave him and had gone back to her natal home. But her father did not support her coming back home. For him girls once married are to stay at their marital homes in any situation.

Rejection to help is often associated with advices to girls to compromise or tolerate violence. It is done because the parents do not want to destroy their daughter's marriage. The over-emphasis on the importance of marriage and dependence of women upon men influence the parents' decision to not support their daughters. Discouraging victims to fight and forcing them to go for a compromise are also found to be influenced by economic factors. With the intention of saving the marriage, the parents do not think that they are pushing their daughters into violence homes.

Women also face a deplorable situation in the natal homes. All women taking shelter in their natal homes are not welcomed, and all of them do not get treated well. The following case reflects the negative behaviour of natal families towards victims:

Dipa reported that after leaving her marital home, she went to stay with her natal family. But her stepmother forced her to live a pathetic life. She was given a small hut-type house and had to manage her own food and other things. Her father was also not worried about her. She worked in other people's homes to manage her food.

The natal family has been found to be one of the primary informal sources of help-seeking. It is found that the victims get much benefit from the natal families in matters of safe shelter, along with emotional, financial and other kind of support. However, it is also found that the natal family is not always supportive towards women. The natal families refuse to support women under certain circumstances. Rejection by the natal family is often found to be influenced by the patriarchal social norms and values attached to the family name, marriage and economic insecurity. It is also found that the natal families do not want to support women for long, and it leads to ill-treatment of the victims. Women's apprehension about such rejection many times discourages them from approaching their natal families for help. Here, we can conclude that though the natal family is one of the most approached sources of help, its response towards women is not always positive, and women have a mixed experience in matters of help-seeking.

4.5.1.2. Help-seeking from relatives, friends and marital family members

Unlike the natal family, other informal sources like relatives and friends are used less for help-seeking. Only a few victims have taken help from their relatives and friends. Friends have been a source of information about available options to seek help, contacts of legal or NGO professionals, etc. Friends are also found to provide emotional support to victims by sharing their pain.

In two cases, victims have taken help from marital family members, too. In one case the brother-in-law helped the woman to end abuse by her husband. The brother-in-law went against his own brother and supported his wife to fight. In the other case, the woman asked help from her parents-in-law to end abuse by her husband.

4.5.2. Nari-adalat: Help-seeking from nari-adalats

Nari-adalats, or women's courts, work under the guidance of the Mahila Samikhya (MS) programme. This programme was initiated under the New Education Policy (1986), aiming at education and empowerment of women from socially and economically marginalised groups. It aimed to create an environment where women will get knowledge and information to empower themselves and play an important role in the development of the society and their own development as well (Pandey: 2014). Nari-adalats have emerged as an outcome to serve the purpose of legal awareness to empower rural women by the MS programme. They have emerged as a grass-roots response to

increased violence against women. A nari-adalat is an alternative justice system for women and it operates as an ‘informal, conciliatory, non-adversarial social network to carry constitutional rights to the poor and in particular, victims of violence’ (Purushothaman: 2010: 53). The nari-adalats aim at providing justice to women at less expense and in less time, and also aim at providing women with a platform to raise their voice to safeguard their rights in a patriarchal society. Thus, following its informal character, a nari-adalats are working in various states of India, including Assam, and helping women to deal with domestic violence along with several other issues. The nari-adalats deal with various legal matters in a non-judicial manner, using various techniques like mediation, discussion, moral teaching, negotiation, intervention, and the like to resolve disputes between parties (Basu: 2011).

4.5.2.1 Formation and authority structure

In Assam, Morigaon and Darrang districts were the two districts to have nari-adalats in 2000-01. Till 2011, a total of 11 nari-adalats were working in Assam (Assam Mahila Samata Society [AMSS] report: 2011-12). As the name ‘nari-adalat’ shows, it is a group constituted by women only. Only women who are sensitive towards women’s issues, have experience of working on women’s issues, particularly violence against women and women’s rights violation, have knowledge of gender issues and have won the respect and confidence of local communities due to their services can formulate a nari-adalat. Members of a nari-adalat are selected by a legal committee constituted at the block level (Purushothaman: 2010). The MS, presently known as the AMSS, has various organisational units at the block level, panchayat level and village level (*sangha*, or federation). The organisational set-up is envisaged in a three-tier structure with the federations, or sanghas, at the first level, a cluster of 10 villages at the second level, and blocks at the third level. Once a nari-adalat is formed, it works for a cluster of villages. The number of villages constituting the cluster is not fixed. Women who are members of the nari-adalat are trained in legal matters. They are provided training by legal experts hired by their organisations. The nari-adalats maintain a connection between various other neighbouring nari-adalats and also with the government and NGOs or institutions to create a strong support system for themselves, get information about schemes, get economic and social support from the government, have infrastructural facilities, and build up a helpful network. Regular monthly meetings and training sessions are conducted to strengthen nari-adalats. The nari-adalats have been seen to solve problems

of women and become an integral part of women's lives as well as of the village communities. The nari-adalats do not offer membership to men, however, while dealing with cases they involve the village heads, who generally tend to be men, and other men and women who are not members of the nari-adalats. Such men and women are brought in as elders or wise members of the community to help in the negotiation process to resolve the case at hand. A nari-adalat's decision cannot bind the parties legally but binds them morally and socially. A nari-adalat cannot punish anybody for not obeying its decision as any formal agencies can.

4.5.2.2. Connecting and mobilising women

As a nari-adalat works for women, it needs to connect to the women in its working area. To connect to the women and draw them towards its organisation, the organisation first gathers basic information about women in the area and holds a meeting with the villagers regarding forming village-level units known as sanghas. To build up a rapport with the villagers, regular visits are made by the members of the organisation. Women who are already associated with the organisation help in gathering and bringing women from the new area to the meetings. In these regular meetings general women are invited along with already associated sangha members belonging to that particular village, and discussions are held about local issues on education, gender, legal issues, natural resources, and so on. Success with such issues enhances the status of the organisation and paves the way for more controversial and complex issues, such as violence (Bhatla and Rajan: 2003). Thus, through various meetings, discussions and work done on different issues of concern, the organisation gains its authority and acceptance from the village community to carry on its intervention in issues like violence against women and other women's issues.

4.5.2.3. Working procedure

A nari-adalat solves cases in a direct and clear manner. Once a complaint is received, the nari-adalat members talk to the wife and husband separately and then together. By doing this the nari-adalat members try to bridge the gap between the two to resolve the issue without going to formal meetings. This step is more like a counselling session. If the problem is not solved in this step, then arrangements for formal meetings are made. Such meetings are conducted in open houses and can be attended by anyone from the village or outside, thus offering an amount of transparency to the nari-adalat's work. Cases are

heard and solved through public meetings using various techniques, and decision-making is always in the hands of the nari-adalat members. A maximum of three notices are served to the opposite party to call for meetings. If the opposite party ignores the notices, then the nari-adalat takes help from the police. Prior to public meetings, nari-adalat members gather relevant information about the complainant, the opposite party, the incident, etc. Members discuss the information gathered among themselves, along with the views, wishes and demands of the two parties. They discuss the entire case prior to the meetings. After studying the case properly, it becomes easier for the nari-adalat members to judge the case in the right manner. Once the matter is discussed and a solution is arrived at, both parties have to sign a paper, along with the witnesses accepting the solution, and consent to obey it. After the case is solved and the decision is accepted by both parties, the nari-adalat monitors the development of the situation between the parties for the subsequent six (6) months. This monitoring ensures obedience to the solution and non-occurrence of further violence. The nari-adalat keeps a record of each case and complaint it has handled by it in detail for future reference. The nari-adalat members are not legal professionals to handle cases, and their decisions are not indisputable. What they are trying to do is give a mutually acceptable arrangement or solution to stop the occurrence of violence. They possess compassion for other women and are genuinely concerned about bringing about a healthy and violence-free society. With these qualities, they try to help women to fight against abuse, thus reducing the burden of formal courts (Pande: 2009).

4.5.2.4. Techniques of resolving cases

Being informal agencies, the nari-adalats cannot use strict techniques to solve cases or punish guilty parties. They need to use moderate techniques to solve cases. This is because if they use extreme techniques, people might not obey them, considering their informal character. In addition, they lack constitutional authority to use strict methods. Therefore, they choose milder methods to arrive at mutually acceptable solutions. The techniques they use are negotiation, mediation, discussion, threats of social boycott and public shame, imposition of a fine, and the like.

The data collected in this study reveals that women have frequently used nari-adalats in spite of the existence of various formal agencies. The data includes information about seventeen (17) survivor women who approached an informal agency to seek help.

Women's reliance on informal agencies in matters of domestic violence despite the existence of formal justice mechanisms marks the importance of informal agencies. It also indicates that, though informal, the role and contribution of informal justice mechanisms cannot be ignored as they are being used by a large section of women in matters of domestic violence and other issues to get their needs served in an easier and hassle-free manner.

4.5.2.5. Reasons for approaching nari-adalats: women's experiences with nari-adalats

The data brings forth various factors that have attracted women to the nari-adalats. The following are some of the reasons:

- **Fee factor and quick process**

The nari-adalats have low fees to handle cases is a reason for being approached by poor sections of women. In addition, the nari-adalats provide solutions within a short period. A low fee and quick decisions, these two factors have attracted women to the nari-adalats than the formal system, which is blamed for being expensive and taking a long time. The following responses will show this:

One victim woman said: I have no money to fight a legal battle against my husband. So I thought of taking help of a nari-adalat as they don't need any money.

Jyoti, a worker of the AMSS, North Lakhimpur, said: Quick, direct and a simple way of handling cases is one reason that women prefer to approach the nari-adalats instead of formal courts.

- **Familiar, sensitive set-up and less complicated execution**

As mentioned earlier, the nari-adalats decide cases in public meetings, which are attended by people mainly from the village of the clients, who are known to them. The familiar environment makes women comfortable to openly express their problems, unlike the formal courtroom environment. The working process of the nari-adalats is transparent. They hear both parties, check and crosscheck evidence, talk to the witnesses in public and decide their judgments. Decision is taken by the nari-adalat members. However, the presence of the village head and other people has an influence on the

process of working. Because of their presence, in spite of being a women's court, a nari-adalat cannot take every decision in favour of women and the decisions need to be acceptable to all. The following response will show this:

One worker of a nari-adalat said: We try to solve those problems that women face within a familiar context. Women feel free and less inhibited to share their stories among known people.

Victims' narrations informed about the easy and open environment provided by the nari-adalats to voice out one's story, which is totally opposite to that of formal courtrooms. Above all, the nari-adalat members, being insiders to the village, know the actual conditions of the women in the village and accordingly can provide solutions best suited for the victims. One important aspect of dealing with disputes through the nari-adalats is that there is a 'greater understanding of the exact nature of the compulsions of both parties and a closer view of the complexities through which relationships are established and broken' (Gupta: 2005: 202). It becomes easier for the nari-adalats to locate and realise the actual circumstances under which disputes occurs. Moreover, being insiders to the same villages of either or both parties, the nari-adalats can actually pinpoint the cause and resolve the disputes. Similarity of the socio-economic location between a nari-adalat and the parties puts women at ease to express their grievances openly among familiar faces without hesitation. The easiness of the situation also helps in formulation of a solution by blending legal provisions to social actuality in an acceptable manner (Pandey: 2014). Sometimes this familiar situation also troubles women. Women are socialised to obey all social values and norms and are expected to behave in feminine ways. This socialisation many times restricts women to speak aloud in front of senior male members, to reveal secrets of their married life in public, and so on. A familiar set-up and people have both positive and negative impacts on women's help-seeking behaviour during the hearing of cases.

- **Considering women's wish to save the marriage**

In the matter of help-seeking or lodging a complaint against the abuser, women often face a dilemma. They want to end abuse but do not want their abusive husbands to be behind bars; sometimes after lodging a complaint they feel guilty and want to go back to the marital home; or sometimes they want to end abuse but do not want to take the family issue to the courtroom. With informal agencies such as nari-adalats, women are

free from such dilemmas because nari-adalats try to frame the solution as the women want. The Nari-adalats always keep their women at the centre. This also increases the acceptability of the decisions taken by the nari-adalats.

Rita, a nari-adalat member, stated: We try to find a solution according to the wishes of the women. We try to provide women with solutions that they find suitable for them.

Normally, women do not want to end abuse at the cost of their marriage. They want the end of abuse but not of their marriage. The nari-adalats try to solve the problem in such situations by arriving at reconciliation between the two parties. While dealing with such cases and trying to save marriages, chances are there that women's rights may get compromised. This further makes the nari-adalats suitable for handling less severe cases only. Delivering justice through decisions formulated as per women's choices may not be possible in cases of domestic violence involving deaths of the victims or other severe consequences. The acceptability of a decision may also decrease if it goes against the woman's wishes. Therefore it can be said that the nari-adalats' decisions formulated as per women's choices are acceptable and suitable in cases that can be solved through discussion or mediation and not in cases where victims suffer fatal attacks.

The above-mentioned reasons are found to attract women to nari-adalats in matters of domestic violence.

4.5.2.6. Collaborating with the police and helping women to approach formal agencies

Looking at the nature of cases collected during my field work and the responses, it has been found that the nari-adalats get cases of all kinds. They get cases that are less severe as well as the cases that involve lethal attacks upon victims. In cases where criminal aggression is seen on the part of abusers, the nari-adalats are seen to take help from the police. They directly hand over these cases to the police and support the victims in the following period. They accompany the victims to the police station, collect evidence, puts pressure on the police to fasten the process, and many more. They never withdraw their support towards the victims, even after the cases have gone to the police. It is also found from the respondents that the police also seek nari-adalats' intervention in domestic violence cases and sometimes hand over the complaints to the nari-adalats.

There seems to be a two-way relationship between the nari-adalats and the police while handling the cases of domestic violence. Reliance of the police upon the nari-adalats reflects the efficiency of the nari-adalats and the faith they have gained from women and the police. On the other hand, transferring cases to the nari-adalats actually reflects the reluctant attitude of the police to consider domestic violence as a criminal act.

The nari-adalats have also been doing various awareness-raising activities to help women to know about violence and use preventive measures to end abuse in their lives. Their activities have taken them closer to women, and women have started to use them as an initial platform to start their fight against domestic abuse. Thus, the nari-adalats have given an option to women who prefer to remain silent and hesitate to approach a formal agency to raise their voice. Their efforts in matters of crimes against women have made the men folk of villages to give space to women collectives.

4.5.2.7. Weaknesses of nari-adalats

The data reveals a few negative and weak aspects of nari-adalats. They are given in the following.

- **Acceptance of patriarchal norms while giving solutions**

Nari-adalats, though acting as a forum by women for women, yet are not free from the patriarchal influence. They formulate their decisions in such a way that they fit into the social format and are accepted by all. They cannot overthrow social norms to give justice to women. From that point it seems that they do not give importance to the gendered nature of domestic violence and try to somehow stop violence to control the situation only.

- **Powerlessness**

The nari-adalats are powerless. They cannot force their decisions upon the guilty party and cannot take strict action in case their decisions are disobeyed. They can put moral pressure or adopt means such as social boycott, public shaming, and the like, to compel abusers to obey their decisions, but they lack the legitimate authority to punish abusers for being abusive or disobeying their decisions. This shows the reformatory character of the informal agencies compared to being a full-fledged justice mechanism.

- **Approach towards domestic violence is not strong**

Last, in spite of considering the power hierarchy, patriarchal mind-set and gender inequality as root causes of domestic violence by many (nine) workers of the informal agencies, it is seen that their approach towards domestic violence is not strong. This reduces their significance as a forum for gender justice. As a result, the victims of domestic violence feel the need to go to a formal agency to get justice.

4.5.3. Help-seeking from formal agencies

As discussed earlier, the data shows that a formal agency is not the first choice for many victims. Women are found to approach a formal agency directly and also after not getting a proper response or help through the use of the informal agencies. The informal justice mechanisms can help women to get justice, and they do solve the problem of domestic violence. However, considering their process of solving cases and the nature and legitimacy of the solutions, it can be said that they are not able to play an efficient role of the justice mechanism well. This can also be assumed from the fact that after employing the informal agencies, many women have approached formal agencies. In my data, twenty two (22) respondents have approached formal agencies for help-seeking. Also, most of my case studies are collected from lawyers, police stations and court journals, showing women using the legal system. Therefore, the importance of the formal agencies in matters of help-seeking in domestic violence over the informal agencies can easily be assumed.

4.3.3.1. Reason for not approaching the formal system: women's experiences with the police and the legal system

In this study, the police are found to be the most frequently approached formal source for help-seeking. The formal agencies have legitimate power, which makes them more important than the informal agencies in matters of help-seeking. Despite having a high usage and being a legitimate agency to help, women experienced hurdles and difficulties with the formal system. Due to the difficulties, women refrain from using the formal system for as long as they can. The reasons that prevent women from using the formal system are given as follows:

- **Non-cooperative behaviour and corrupt nature of the police**

While dealing with the police service, women have faced a non-cooperative attitude of the police, a corrupt nature and bonding with abusers. Women have also reported that

they were refused help by the police as the police share a special bonding with the abusers. Abusers bribe police officers, and those corrupt officers do not take action against them or impose minimal punishment. Instead of helping the victims or taking up their complaints, the police try to suggest to the women to go for a compromise and indirectly let the abusers roam freely. The police often discourage women from fighting against abuse and send them back without registering their complaints and motivate them to 'solve their private matters at home' instead of irritating and pulling the police into their not-so-important matters.

- **Lack of visible injury**

Women have also informed that due to the absence of a visible physical injury, the police many times refuse to register complaints. This shows the tendency to consider physical violence as the only form of domestic violence, ignoring other forms of violence, namely psychological, and the like. In the absence of a physical injury, women have to convince the police, who are expected to help women instead of doubting them, to register their complaints. This is reflected in the following response:

Kusum, a survivor woman, said: In the police station I had to convince the police to register my complaint, because they did not want to believe me as I had no visible injuries on my body.

This attitude minimises the psychological and other forms of violence that do not leave scars but in reality constitute a large part of women's overall victimisation.

- **Issues with legal provisions under PWDVA 2005**

While approaching the formal legal system for help-seeking in matters of domestic violence, women have faced difficulties due to infrastructural lacunas and inappropriate functioning of available legal provisions.

Non-appointment and the absence of protection officers and service providers are the most important lacunas of PWDVA 2005. In the absence of protection officers and service providers, women have to directly file their cases through hired lawyers. This lacuna deprives women of the free legal assistance they are entitled to under this act. Being deprived of free legal assistance, financially weak women often stay away from using the services as they cannot afford the huge expenses involved in legal battles. The

legal process has been criticised for being lengthy and costly by respondents. Deprivation of free legal assistance makes this lengthy period more critical by placing the burden upon the victims, who continue their fights through hired advocates by paying a regular fee. Moreover, as long as the legal process continues, women remain in a dwelling condition. They have neither financial or emotional security nor any certainty of getting all those once the decision is taken. They have to fight the battle under stress and uncertainty. It is also found that due to financial stress, women withdraw their cases midway and remain without justice, as in the following case:

Lakhi said: I am living with my parents and don't have own earnings. My case continued for more than three years. By then I lost interest in fighting the legal battle and just dropped the case. Since I dropped the case, I am not getting any kind of assistance.

The data also reveals the professional attitude of lawyers and their money-making trick. Lawyers are found to encourage and convince women to lodge complaints. The good part is that lawyers are helping women who have less knowledge about legal provisions. However, lawyers are hardly found to ask or help women to get free assistance through protection officers, where they exist. In my data, only one victim has reported that she was asked by her lawyer to approach the protection officer, and the lawyer took up her case later when she was rejected by the protection officer. It is also reported by respondents that in the absence of free legal assistance, women have to depend on hired lawyers, who intentionally lengthen their cases for high fees. It is also found that after taking bribes from opposite parties, lawyers deliberately lose cases. The following responses will demonstrate this:

Trishna said: I lost my first case because my lawyer was not on my side. He took money from my husband and let my husband win the case. The lawyer had written the petition draft in such a way that I was bound to lose the case. Later I filed another case to get divorce from my husband. My second lawyer explained to me the earlier draft, and I could understand why I did not win the case.

In another case, the respondent reported being cheated by the public prosecutor for money. She took help from a service provider NGO and was provided free legal service. Later the lawyer who was fighting her case started to demand money from her. When she refused, he kept on postponing her case, and finally

she had to approach another female lawyer, who knowing her condition fought her case and charged her less money.

Another important problem with the formal system reported by women is that they do not get their maintenance money on time. For the release of the money they often have to seek legal help. Even after fighting a legal battle for getting maintenance money, women have to go through another round of fight to get a decision followed by their abusers.

PWDVA 2005 ensures that women can lead a life free from domestic violence. It takes a multi-agency response system for supporting women to fight against domestic violence. This act includes provisions to appoint NGOs as service providers and protection officers to provide assistance to victims in regard to legal assistance, medical care, and shelter facilities (Misra: 2007). This act aims at providing immediate relief to women facing domestic violence, instead of penalising the abuser. However, as found in my data, there is a lack of service providers and protection officers functioning actively, depriving women of legal assistance. It is also found that most of the victims use this law for getting maintenance or economic assistance from husbands or sons. Other services such as free legal aid, protection orders, shared household facilities, counselling, shelters or medical facilities are rarely wanted by women using this act. It shows the problems with this act, which need to be taken care of. The data also reveals other negative experiences of women with the formal system. Considering the difficulties faced by women it can be argued that this act has not been able to check domestic violence and provide necessary and timely help to victims. Some modification and reformation on the part of the act's implementation and up-gradation of infrastructure can prove fruitful for the effective implementation of this act to serve women.

4.6. Conclusion

Women's reactions to domestic violence range from toleration to active protest and help-seeking. Their behaviour, choice of techniques and sources vary depending on their situations and circumstances. Traditionally, the legal practice in India, as in the rest of the world, has been a male-dominated sphere, and women were excluded from it. Men are always the deciding body in all matters. In such a situation it is obvious that women's issues are also looked into from a male point of view. While doing so women's real experience gets lost and the problem remains unaddressed. The victims approach different agencies for help to end abuse, but some remain tolerant. For a section of

women who are always silent, sidelined and unheard, the nari-adalats have played an important role. The nari-adalats have challenged this traditional practice and provided women with the scope of speaking openly in front of the public. The informal agencies, especially the nari-adalats, have provided women with the space and platform to raise their voice, as well as the power to decide about women's problems. The nari-adalats have encouraged women to get involved in the legal process and decision-making. This can be marked as an attempt to bring about a change in the patriarchal mode of decision-making (Iyengar: 2007). Nari-adalats have used the strategies of pressure and persuasion to find out a solution in order to bring small changes at the grass-roots level. Importantly, by involving both men and women in the process of hearing cases, the nari-adalats try to sensitise men towards women's issues. Nari-adalats, being informal agencies, are thus playing an important role in helping women to deal with domestic violence. However, in spite of the important role played by the informal agencies, the formal agencies are found to be stronger as they have constitutional legitimacy. The formal agencies are found to be approached more by victims, irrespective of some problems that limit their scope to help women. Considering the legitimacy and supremacy of law, it can be argued that if the required modifications are made, the formal agencies can address the issue of domestic violence to a great extent.

Considering the experiences of women, it can be concluded that women who received unconditional and empathetic institutional and/or social support in response to their help-seeking efforts felt empowered to resist the abusive behaviour. On the other hand, those whose abuse had been ignored when they reached out for help often felt being blamed for their victimisation. Social norms, relations and gender ideologies often influence the patriarchal domination of women and its maintenance. The response of the community and legal system response is also not free from its influence. Therefore, it is necessary to remove the impact as much as possible while addressing the issue of domestic violence, as well as the social barriers that contribute to abused women's failed help-seeking attempts.

Chapter V

Conclusion

5.1. Abstract

This study explores the problem of domestic violence—its nature, prevalence, causes and growth in Assam. It looks into how intense the domestic violence is and its effects on the lives of women, along with various socio-economic and cultural factors behind perpetration of the act. The ways in which women deal with domestic violence and their experiences with different agencies that provide help to victims of domestic violence are also studied. Both primary and secondary data were collected using interview, observation and case-study methods. Domestic violence victims, witch-hunting victims, lawyers and police handling domestic violence cases, women organisation's and shelter home residents were approached for collecting interviews and case studies. Victim's narratives of victimisations, other respondents' opinions on experiences of handling and dealing with domestic violence cases have shed light on the perpetuation of domestic violence against women in the patriarchal set-up without much resistance, and how various social-cultural norms, values, and institutions have conveniently justified domestic violence and contributed towards its perpetuation. Interviews of academicians and researchers involved in academic work on gender and women in Assam have thrown light on women's position in the social set-up. Interviews with NGO workers, police and legal personnel and victims and observation with women's organisations have given information about the women's help-seeking and the various socio-economic and structural factors influencing their help-seeking moves.

The analysis of data showed rapid growth and occurrence of numerous forms of domestic violence causing severe adversity to women. This Study reveals the hitherto hidden magnitude of domestic violence and the various causal factors initiating it. It also reveals that women, at whose cost the patriarchy continues, are conditioned to tolerate violence by patriarchal socialisation. Women do try to resist and survive violence with the help of different agencies instead of being mere victims. However, their resistance and experience are also not free from the influence of patriarchy and patriarchal biased attitude of the society and agencies.

The basic argument of my work is that, patriarchy, being a system of rule of male, always makes arrangements for female subordination. This argument is further corroborated by revelation of how social norms, values, traditions and institutions are always instrumental in female suppression upholding of male dominance. Through socialisation ‘gender-roles’ are shaped and assigned; aggressive males and submissive females are created; and finally the patriarchal structure that justifies female oppression is established. My study, therefore, tried to show domestic violence as the outcome of patriarchal system—a system that influences, shapes, controls women’s lives from all sides and places women in subordinate position. This study also shows domestic violence and women’s victimisation as a result of men’s attempt to remain in power and dominant position, and how patriarchal values encourage domestic violence and restrict women’s resistance to it.

My study supports the feminist debate against the family violence perspective that considered domestic violence as outcome of individual pathological disorder and a gender neutral act. It supports the feminist’s emphasis on the “gender and power inequality” in heterosexual relationship and societal dictation towards men to be aggressive while socialising women to be non-violent (Martin: 1976; Pence and Paymar: 1993). This study supports the understanding of “gender” in association with socio-economic structure and institutions (i.e., marriage, family and economy) that affect victims’ role, resources, and support system to cope and escape domestic violence, and also in association with the social norms that are gendered and rooted in patriarchy supporting male’s superiority over female and often influence emergence of domestic violence (Dobash and Dobash 1979: 1992; Yllo and Bogard: 1988; Houston: 2014). As described above, my study too, seconds that through these institutions, mechanisms, norms and values, men’s authority is maintained in patriarchy and perpetuation of domestic violence is normalised.

The issue of domestic violence has been one of the major campaigns for feminists in India. There have been numerous studies on domestic violence in India. But Northeast India including Assam is still virgin in regard to research on this specific topic/area (Deka: 2013). Society of Assam is inherently patriarchal and women’s suppression in it is clearly reflected in myths, folklore, religious practices, functioning of family system and other socio-economic institutions. Considering socio-political structures and nature of Assam’s society, one cannot *essentialise* conclusions drawn for mainland Indian

societies for Assam (Gangoli: 2007). Using feminist and sociological methodology, this study intends to contribute to the understanding of the issue of women's lives in Assam in general and domestic violence as a manifestation of women's status and gender relations in particular.

5.2. Chapter summary

Chapter I titled *Introduction* gives a broader view of the concept of domestic violence as a form of violence against women and human rights violation of women. This also gives a brief account of women's status in Assam, and existing gender-gap with the help of various status indicators like health, education, employment and crime rate. Relevant statistical information on the issue is included to show how domestic violence is affecting women throughout the world, in India as well as in Assam. The importance of the study, objectives of the study, research questions, methodology used for the study, description of the fields of data collection and categories of respondents selected and used in the study are included in this chapter.

Chapter II titled *Domestic Violence against Women* traces the evolution of the understanding of domestic violence both around the world and in India. It shows the development of understanding of domestic violence from a hidden, gender neutral act to a gender-based criminal act resulting from patriarchal power hierarchy. Women's movements throughout the world have contributed greatly towards the recognition of this crime, but it was the radical feminist movements during the second wave that successfully established it as a gender based criminal act (Freedman: 2002). Feminist theories on domestic violence are also discussed.

In western context the understanding of domestic violence evolved with the recognition of 'public and private space division'. The radical wing of second wave feminism has attacked the public-private division of spaces. They stressed that due to the public-private division, subordination, oppression and other issues of women in private space are neglected as they are out of the purview of legal domain. Therefore, emphasis was given on abolition of this demarcation of spaces to make visible the crimes committed against women in private space. Through consciousness rising they politicised the dilemmas of women's private life. After recognition of the problem, legal intervention was demanded by to bring changes to women's lives.

In India, it was in the 1970s that various small localised groups raised the issue of wife battering. Movement against dowry in the 1980s raised the issue in broad level and led to legal measure to control it. However, these struggles did not locate domestic violence in the family structure and the gender and power-hierarchy ingrained in it. Later, the legal measures and police responses were criticised for not being sensitive and sympathetic and willing to take up complaints. Women's groups also came up with the issue of non-visibility of victimisation of women from Muslim or other minority groups as the movement was mainly dominated by Hindu upper caste activists (Gangoli: 2007). Studies have argued that domestic violence is closely connected with the caste system, economic status and class discrimination. Women's status is influenced by their different identities and intersections of all these contribute to unique experiences of oppression to women from different groups (Bush: 1992). Therefore, the legal arrangement that does not consider these differences has been criticised for being unable to address women's issues properly.

Domestic violence came to be recognised as a gender-based legal issue. Earlier to this, the psychological perspective viewed it as an outcome of individual psychological disorder and excused that "normal man" does not abuse women. This framework was further supported by the concept of "finding pleasure in pain" and "women's masochism". It holds that, women cause men to 'accumulate guilt and accept the abuse masochistically which gives them erotic pleasure' (Goodmark: 2013: 55). For that pleasure, women nag or ask for violence. However, research later has saved women from this blame. Theory of learned helplessness popularised by Leonor Walker emerged to describe why women do not leave abusive relationship. This theory elaborated that being unable to exercise control and escape violence, abused women assume that they are powerless, and become passive and demotivated to make attempts to escape. Abuse takes away victim's ability to predict result and to believe that they will be able to escape violence ever (Walker: 1976; 1987). The "socio-structural model" explained domestic violence as result of multiple stress factors. It viewed domestic violence caused due to stress emerged for failure to perform expected gender-roles. 'Structural-stress and socialisation experiences' were two conditions resulting in domestic violence, as explained by family violence perspective (Anderson: 1997; Houston: 2014).

Refuting the psychiatric and stress model, feminist perspective explained domestic violence from gender and power perspective. They argued that violence is not the result

of pathological disorder and stress, neither it is mutual; rather, it is caused due the concentration of power in male hands and the patriarchal need to control women. Domestic violence is a part of the system of coercive control through which men maintain societal dominance over women (Dutton: 1994; Anderson: 1997; Healey et al.: 2009). The feminist theory explains the actual nature of domestic violence being rooted in the patriarchal power inequality. Different feminist theories described different causal factors and offered different solutions to it.

Chapter III titled *Forms and Nature of Domestic violence in Assam*, deals with the nature and forms of domestic violence in Assam. This chapter shows the acute presence of domestic violence affecting the lives of women in countless ways. Domestic violence has been understood as misuse of power, violation of rights and accepted as normal part of life as well. Gender socialisation plays a crucial role in shaping women's perceptions about domestic violence along with a few other factors including victims' socio-economic status, education level, legal awareness and so on.

Physical, psychological, sexual and economic violence are present in Assam. All these categories are discussed in detail including various forms, intensity and outcomes. Gender social norms and values are taken into account in explaining perpetuation of domestic violence in its myriad forms. Witch-craft accusation is discussed as a form of domestic violence. Various reasons and motives that turn this act into domestic violence are explored with the help of data. The factors leading to domestic violence or initiate violence are also discussed.

The description and explanation of different types, forms and causes of domestic violence are done in regard to women's position in the patriarchal social set-up of Assam. The descriptions reflect various gender social norms prevailing in the society and how they are tacitly encouraging violence, and sometimes though not encouraging are at least justifying or normalising violence. In brief, domestic violence is looked into as an outcome of patriarchal power hierarchy perpetuated by social norms, traditions and beliefs that support male superiority and female subordination. Gender socialisation inculcates socio-religious values, teaches norms, and upholds gender role expectations to maintain the hierarchy between men and women. Various critical causes including dowry practices, extra-marital affairs, son preferences, polygamous marriage are found

leading to domestic violence. All these factors are described with their linkage to patriarchal values and practices that leads to the perpetuation of domestic violence.

Chapter IV titled *Domestic Violence Survivors' Help-seeking and Institutional Responses*, analyses the ways women respond to violence, coping attempts and help-seeking experiences in domestic violence. Women often tolerate violence, rather than going out for help. Toleration of violence is rarely their choice, but a result of several situational factors. Various factors including family, marriage, reputation of parents, children's safety, financial dependency and lack of awareness are found to influence women's decision to tolerate violence or resist it. Women's attempt to cope in domestic violence situation using various strategies is also discussed.

Being unable to tolerate or cope with violence, women choose to seek outside help from different agencies such as natal family, relatives and friends, police, legal system and nari-adalat (women's court). In case of domestic violence, safety is the main concern, yet women's experiences of violence and help-seeking differ from woman to woman based on their need, sources, approached agency's response, resources, familial support and other aspects.

5.3. Findings of the Study

The main findings of the study are listed as follows:

- High prevalence of domestic violence is found in all forms—physical, psychological, sexual and economic. It takes many forms and affects women in all stages of life starting from childhood to old age. The problem of domestic violence has been perceived as a normal part of women's lives, husband's privilege for financial contribution and also misuse of power. Gender-socialisation, social norms and values shape these different perceptions.
- Physical violence is the most common, and wifebattering is found to be extremely frequent. Pregnancy period is found to be one most convenient period for abusers to establish control over victims due to the lack of physical mobility and paternity issue of the unborn child.
- Psychological violence is far rampant than physical violence. Psychological violence is found to affect women in an invisible manner, cuts down their self-

confidence, lower their resistance capacity and makes easy target of control and domination.

- Sexual violence is highly prevalent but less reported. Marital rape is one of the common forms of sexual violence. Due to the nature of relationship with abuser and socialisation about wifely duties, women are found to fail to realise being victimised of marital rape.
- Economic violence takes many forms. It widens the gap between earning men and dependent women. Economic violence is imposed to keep women dependent and powerless. Through economic violence men try to tie women to the idealised role of house-wife and curtail women's power that threatens men's advantageous position.
- Witchcraft is found to be one important form of violence against women in Assam.
- Power disparity is the root cause of domestic violence. Apart from that, some other factors including extra-marital affairs of husbands, alcoholism, dowry, son preference, polygamous marriage are found to be initiating episodes of domestic violence. Extra-marital affair often leads to domestic violence when husband is questioned by wife since he takes her question as challenge to his masculinity. Alcoholism is found to lead to violence and financial stress for the family. However, women could not see that husbands used alcohol as an excuse to be violent without getting punished.
- A tremendous growth of dowry is found. The intention to show off one's status and financial strength and greed for money are the reasons that contributed towards the growth of this criminal practice. Deaths of victims for dowry are found to occur in initial years, whereas demands and torture for dowry can occur at any point of married life.
- Toleration of violence and help-seeking are found to be the two broad ways to respond to violence. Silent suffering for certain period is evident before victims seek outside help. Silent toleration is not victims' choice, but it is due to

circumstantial compulsions. Various factors are found to force women to remain silent or to motivate women to go for help-seeking.

- Importance of marriage for women and the burden of maintaining family honour and prestige force women to remain in marriage even though they have to tolerate violence. Financial security in marital relationship, performance of genderrole and maintaining family peace often motivate women to tolerate violence. Lack of awareness about legal provisions and available sources drive women to tolerate violence.
- Children's safety often influences women's decision to seek help. Increased and accelerated violence leading to lethal consequences often result in help-seeking attempts by women. The threat to life compels women to tolerate silently. Need of financial help for child care is a motivating factor that drives women to court.
- Between silent suffering and help-seeking is an important stage—the coping stage. Women employ different strategies to minimise the effects of violence and reduce occurrences. The use of coping strategies makes situation slightly normal and violence-free for some time, however it does not end abuse for good.
- Women approach both the formal and informal agencies to seek help. Natal family is the foremost source approached by women for safe shelter, emotional and financial support. The natal families try to solve issues through mutual ways and also extend support if their daughters decide to fight legal battle. However, the natal families also deny support to their daughters advising them to compromise, tolerate and adjust with abusers. Natal family's rejection is influenced by factors like social attitude towards marriage, issue of family honour, lack of financial resources and others. Women staying in the natal home are not treated well always; they face negligence too. Friends and relatives are also used for help-seeking by women.
- Nari-adalat has been one important and highly used source. The advantages such as quick decision of cases, less expensive, transparent process and familiar environment attract women towards the nari-adalats. These are found to be handling almost all kinds of cases that are without lethal attacks. They share a good rapport with police and often take help from police to solve cases. Being an

informal agency, the nari-adalats do not possess any legitimate power, which marks their weakness as an efficient justice-giving mechanism.

- Formal system, including the police and legal system, is the ultimate source for help-seeking in domestic violence matters. The use of the formal system is found to be higher and more effective than the informal system. However, it is also found that women have to face certain inherent bias while approaching the formal system. Reluctance to take up complaint, suggestion to compromise, demanding bribe and also supporting abusers after being bribed by them, refusing to believe the occurrence of violence in the absence of visible physical injuries and others make women's approach towards the formal agency tough and complicated. Many times abusers inflict violence on women due to the very fact that she had approached police for help. In such situations lack of prompt and timely action by police increases the chances of violence on women. Lengthy and expensive process further discourages women to approach the legal system. Lack of proper implementation of provisions under PWDVA 2005 act regarding service providers, protection officers, shelter facility also further complicate women's help-seeking from the formal system.

Domestic violence is a serious social problem growing rapidly in Assam. Supporting the larger literature and works on domestic violence all around, this study confirms the acute presence of domestic violence in the lives of women. This study reveals the existing gender hierarchy and power imbalance in the society, and maintenance of control and dominance on women through use of violence. Normalisation and minimisation of domestic violence reveal the patriarchal base of the problem. This study supports the feminist argument that, gender and power hierarchy are the ultimate root of domestic violence (Dobash and Dobash: 1979; Bogard: 1990; Karlekar: 1998). Gender socialisation and socio-cultural norms play pivotal role in perpetuation of domestic violence, shaping women's reaction and institutional responses. From gender-socialisation perspective, this study argues that gender role socialisation legitimises men's violence, and encourages men to use violence to ensure their domination and put women in the receiving end (Marin and Russo: 1999; Vauquiline: 2015). Domestic violence is also embedded in various cultural practices. Emphasising the cultural embeddedness, this study argues that due to the influence of prevailing culture, woman cannot resist and reveal domestic violence by being deviated from the expected role and

place herself, her partner, her family, outside the margins of honour and stigma. The prevailing culture justifies and legitimises violence, as well as influences women's perceptions and available options for them to reach out for help (Amirthalingam: 2005; Galtung: 2005; Yoshika: 2008). In a few cases, Muslim religious sanction of polygamy is found to cause humiliation for the first wife, and other kind of violence including marrying the wife's sister, unequal treatment of the wives, and forcing a wife to participate in the marriage ceremony as a co-wife etc. Women generally cannot avoid such cultural and religious norms that facilitate domestic violence. This study believes that considerations of family, culture, or religion prevail over women's interests, and violence is accepted and justified for the sake of relationships within the family and between the family and larger societal environment (Dutton: 1994). In hetero-normative relationships, men are assigned the role of breadwinner, protector and financial contributor for the whole family. Further, age and gender play important roles in power relations, which open up doors for violence by extended older family members, both male and female. The stress to perform these roles, the attempts to maintain the existing superior position and resisting the challenges to their position are found to result in violence. Here, it can be argued that the structural inequalities often contribute towards smooth sustaining of domestic violence.

Despite the increase in domestic violence and its forms, certain forms of violence such as sex selective abortions, infanticide, honour killing and some other such violence are hardly found in Assam. However, one is making such argument on the basis of the data collected from this study, the claims made by the respondents as well as based on the reported cases of gender violence. The fact remains that many forms of gender violence goes unreported and acts such as female foeticide and others may not be done or may be committed in a manner of utter secrecy also given that it is declared illegal by the state of India. Women are defined as weak and inferior; men are allotted power and authority over women; cultural and social norms have created a situation where violence does not look wrong; gender role-performance and family relationships are weighted more over women's personal costs; and all these have provided the base for sustaining domestic violence.

5.4. Limitations of the Study

This study attempted to look into the issue of women's victimisation of domestic violence. Hence, data was collected with the intention to represent women from all sections of the society. Data included respondents from different categories, based on education, age, employment and religion. However, considering the society of Assam, data could have been more inclusive of respondents from other groups based on ethnic identities, class and caste identities. The understanding of women's victimisation could have been deeper with the inclusion of more respondents with varied identities.

This study focused or depended mainly on women and their experiences. Inclusion of responses from local, customary and traditional level organisation or mechanism for dispute solution would have given a better understanding of women's experiences of violence and resistance to it. Women, who are still far from using the formal system and nari-adalat or any women groups, whose issues are decided by male-dominated traditional, village- or community-based systems, could have been included in this study.

5.5. Future Scope

An in-depth study on domestic violence helps to add visibility to women's victimisation and to formulate remedial measures to solve the issue. This study tried to give an overview of the issue of domestic violence in Assam; however, much scope has been left for further work on this area. It studied the problem of domestic violence from victim's perspective; hence, one can see the issue from the other end—from the perspective of the service-providing agencies or authorities, and how they comprehend the issue. In addition, considering the increased rate of domestic violence in the state, the functioning of formal and state-sponsored agencies needs to be studied as they are the most powerful arrangements to end domestic violence. Moreover, further studies can be taken up on this issue with intersection of gender and different social locations of women, may be with specific focus and concentration on any particular group.

5.6. Policy Recommendations

The following are some recommendations:

- Lack of proper implementation of various provisions under the PWDVA 2005 is found in the study, and effective implementation of those is very important to

provide help to women. To make the act work better for women, proper appointment of protection officers, service providers, facilities for counselling and establishment of shelter homes for domestic violence victims are very essential. Establishment of 'women cell' in all police stations can also be regarded necessary as maximum police stations lack their women cell.

- To maintain the trust of women on the legal system, the state can make provision to solve cases of domestic dispute within a stipulated time instead of allowing it to continue for many years. Also, women could be saved from exploitation of the legal professionals if provision is made to legally register domestic violence cases that come through protection officers only. This will help women to get benefit of all the facilities offered by the act as well as in efficient implementation of the act.
- Even after almost a decade of enactment of PWDVA 2005, women are still not aware of it. They are also unaware of the various provisions of this act that offer different kinds of help. Therefore, the state authority may take up awareness drives on this act to attract women to use it more to fight against abuse in their lives. State may tie up with NGOs in awareness drives as it will help in proliferation of the drive and to draw more women including those from the grass-roots level. Including men in the awareness drives may be beneficial to build up an environment where men start treating women equal and become more sensitive towards the issue. It is also essential to sensitise the police through some gender-sensitive programmes and workshops.

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Annexure I

Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences

Interview guide used to interview Women respondents

1. Please inform me about yourself—your age, education, place of living, family.
2. Would you tell me about your marital status? When did you get married? Do you have children?
3. What do your parents' do? And what is your husband?
4. When did the problem started and how? When did you first experience domestic violence?
5. Did you share it with anybody or took help from? How did your parents' react? Were they supportive?
6. Why didn't you share your experience with anybody? What were the reasons and how did you managed to cope with that situation?
7. How was your experience with the agencies you asked help from? Did you get expected response?
8. If you have taken help from police and legal system, kindly elaborate about your experiences with them? The complexities as well as positive points.
9. If you have taken help from women's organisation, nari-adalat or any such informal agency, please kindly elaborate about your experiences with them? The complexities as well as positive points.
10. Would you please tell me the reason of choosing a particular agency for help seeking? What attracted you towards it? Are you satisfied with the agency's response?
11. Why didn't you think of taking help earlier? What was the point of tolerating all these for so long? Do you think silent toleration to be a solution to domestic violence?
12. What are the reasons of not approaching any agency for fighting against the abuse in your life?

13. Are you aware about the PWDVA 2005 act and its benefits? Have you used those?
14. How is your case going on? What have you demanded from the legal system?
15. After facing all the negative incidents, what is your idea about domestic violence? What are the causes for its occurrence according to you?
16. After going through all the violent experiences, what is your suggestion for other women to deal with domestic violence?
17. What may be the best solution to domestic violence according to you?



Annexure II

Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences

Interview guide used to interview Lawyers

1. Would you please tell me about your idea on domestic violence? What is your view on it?
2. What causes domestic violence according to you?
3. Please tell me about your clients and what type of cases you get? What are demands put forward by women?
4. Currently, we have seen there is an increase in incidents of DV in Assam? What is your opinion about it? What may be the reason?
5. Most of the time husband is the abuser. Do you think this has a gender angle?
6. What is the reason of its fast growth? How it is affecting women?
7. Since you are dealing with cases of domestic violence, what is your view on how law is helping women?
8. Justice delayed is justice denied. What is your opinion in relation to cases of domestic violence that continue for many years?
9. How successful is DV2005 in giving justice to women? It's functioning in Assam.
10. How well is the act being used by women?
11. In case of growing incidents of domestic violence in Assam what is your view? What may be the possible causes?
12. Can you tell me what may be the causes of increased number of dowry related violence?
13. What is your view on the blame that women misuse legal system to harass husbands?
14. Being a legal professional, do you think law has been successful in serving women? How effective is law to fight against domestic violence?
15. Are there any problems/lacunas in the act or legal system?
16. How to end this issue from society? What is your suggestion?

Annexure III

Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences

Interview guide used to interview Police personnel

1. What kinds of cases come generally?
2. How frequently is domestic violence reported? What is the most common one?
3. Who are the frequent complainants?
4. Please explain to me about your views of domestic violence?
5. What are the reasons that domestic violence is rising so high?
6. How frequent is dowry related complaints? What do you think to be the reason for its growth?
7. What is your opinion about women misusing the law or filing false complaint?
8. What do you first do when a complaint comes?
9. It is often said by women that police don't help them. What is your comment?
10. Police are often said to help the abusers instead of the victims because they get bribe. What is your opinion?
11. What may be the cause of choosing other options and not approaching police?
12. Do you face any kind of difficulty while dealing with cases of domestic violence? Any lacuna with the available legal provisions under PWDVA 2005?
13. Have you ever get any complaint from neighbours of victim?
14. How to end this issue from society? What is your suggestion?

Annexure IV

Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences

Interview guide used to interview NGO worker

1. Would you kindly explain to me about your organisation's work and activity for women, particularly regarding domestic violence?
2. The problem of domestic violence is increasing day by day. What do you think are the reasons?
3. What kind of cases you get from women?
4. How you solve cases of domestic violence and other issues which are quite legal in nature requiring strict legal procedure? What are your techniques?
5. How does your organisation reach out to the women?
6. What do you think the reasons that women are taking help from you instead of going to other agencies?
7. What do you think why the offender obey your decisions? Without legitimate power like police/legal system, how do you ensure obedience of your decisions?
8. What type of solutions you offer to end abuse from women's lives?
9. How do you handle non-cooperation from any party?
10. Do you take help from police or other formal agencies? If so how frequently you take help of police?
11. What do you do when you cannot solve a case?
12. Do women always come with genuine complaint? Or have you been used to harass opposite party by women without any offence?
13. What is the solution to end this problem according to you?