Chapter 1
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Introduction

The family is considered to be an abode of love, peace and security for its members. This is the commonly held belief of people across every culture and tradition. Unfortunately this belief turns out to be a 'myth' for most of the families. The noted family violence researcher Gelles had said that 'the family, with the exception of the military in times of war and the police is society's most violent institution' (Mooney, 2000). It is assumed that the family is a natural, biological or functional institution for society rather than a "social construction whose configurations vary historically and culturally" (Thorne, 1982). It is seen as an institution for the care of the children, for the preservation of the cult of the parents and ancestors. Some view it as having its origin in private property organised for the purpose of inheritance (Bosanquet, 2008). It is seen as a unique institution, both public and private at the same time, having a very visible and commonplace existence (Patel, 2005).

Thus, universal ideas regarding the family are based on a constructive outlook which considers it to be an institution which cooperates for a living by pooling resources, providing for each other and unified by blood ties. Sociologists (Wharton, 2005; Uberoi, 1993) maintain that people's 'uncritical faith' in the family and the intrusive fears that make the family too sensitive to critical enquiry is a cause of concern on the modern day world. "In examining the
family, we need to recognise that there is a profound difference between popular conceptions of what families are and the reality. Ideas of family are usually based on an ideology of caring and cooperation between family members. In fact, the reality of life within all families is often a paradoxical blend of love, companionship and support combined with friction, domination and even cruelty” (Sweetman, 1996). Sometimes the family turns out to be a place of terror and victimisation and becomes a scene of crime. Women and children are often in great danger in the place where they should be safest: within their families (Khan, 2000). Portraying the family as the most violent institution of society, the noted family violence researcher, Gelles, in his definition, tries to present this ‘myth of the family’, thus exposing the harsh reality characterizing many families of the world—the reality of domestic violence. Sen (1987) speaks of a second myth which accompanies the perception of the family as an institution free from conflicts. This is the myth of a senior male household head who holds everyone’s best interests at heart. The family is not a homogenous group where all members occupy equal positions and derive equal benefits in terms of resources, opportunities and entitlements. Inequalities based on gender are a reality in most families of the world, not only today but since ancient times. Women are controlled through the various norms surrounding marriage and fidelity. Changing one’s surname after marriage, travelling to live in the husband’s house leaving their natal family are some traditional norms defining women’s identity in the patriarchal
world through relationship to father’s and later to the husbands (Sweetman, 1996). Even in cases in which there are no overt signs of anti-female bias in, say, survival or son-preference or education, or even in promotion to higher executive positions, the family arrangements can be quite unequal in terms of sharing the burden of housework and child care. It is, for example, quite common in many societies to take it for granted that while men will naturally work outside the home, women could do it if and only if they could combine it with various inescapable and unequally shared household duties. This is sometimes called "division of labour," though women could be forgiven for seeing it as "accumulation of labour" (Sen, 2001). The family is thus the first institution where the famous observation of Simone De Beauvoir ‘one is not born, rather becomes a woman’ is operationalised (Desai, 2001).

The significance of the ‘home’ in a women’s life and the paradox that surrounds it is aptly reflected in the words-

*The “Home” is ideologically understood as a place of safety and refuge.  
Such an account cloaks violence against women.*

*The voices of battered women can disrupt  
That dominant construction of the space of the home,*

*A construction typified by the work of Gaston Bachelard.*

*The space that Bachelard presupposes and theorizes as*
*Given is in fact being-produced, cleaned, and organized by people who themselves may not find in it any solace or respite* (Price, 2002).

Joshua Price says that “this ideological scripting of the home, as intimate and safe, makes violence against women difficult to see. The desire for a home, the solace it seems to promise, makes it even more difficult, especially if one becomes invested in that desire. It might seem initially intolerable; it might signal a deep sort of failure or a collapse, to countenance violence, even if violence is at the core of the construction of the home” (ibid)

The socialization of members, especially girls, in the family leads to women themselves accepting their secondary role in the family. In this context, Leela Dubey observes—‘it should be kept in mind that gender differences that are culturally produced are, almost invariably, interpreted as being rooted in biology, as part of the natural order of things. However, gender roles are conceived, enacted and learnt within a complex of relationships’ (Desai, 2001). Inequalities between men and women and the consequent exploitation of women within their homes were considered a matter of the private sphere. The assumption that the home is safe not only obscures violence, it also obscures the labour that produces the home. The description of the home as a place of safety works in making violence against women in the home difficult to perceive in a sustained way (Price, 2002).
Domestic violence against women within the home is a serious problem facing society. Oppression upon women has continued since ages. In India, since the later Vedic times the position of women, both in the family and in the outside world has suffered a decline. The Indian women’s movement in the 1970’s brought the issue of domestic violence to the foreground. Initially identified only with dowry violence, the fight against domestic violence has gained momentum over the years. Unfortunately with an expansion in the meaning and definition of domestic violence to include physical, sexual, psychological and verbal abuse, a continuous increase in the incidence of domestic violence also seems to be visible in the society. ‘Domestic violence’, ‘family violence’ or ‘intimate partner violence’ as it is variously called may manifest itself in different forms like physical, sexual, emotional or financial abuse, stalking or intimidation. Although there is no particular profile of a victim of domestic violence it is generally seen that the victims are usually women. Studies have revealed that almost 95 percent of the victims of domestic violence constitute women. An estimated one in three women world-wide has been subjected to violence in an intimate relationship within the family.

It was only in the 1960’s that domestic violence has become a major issue of concern and debate at the international level and this has gained greater momentum following the Battered Women’s Movement of the eighties. The World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993 and the 1995 Beijing
Conference raised this issue more stridently and highlighted the urgent need for systematic research and documentation of the multiple dimensions of domestic violence across countries and regions.

In India the issue of domestic violence came into sharp focus in the 1980’s following the growing incidence of torture of brides, of dowry deaths and of localized popular protests (Mitra, 2000). Parliament had enacted the Dowry Prohibition Act in 1961, which was amended in 1984 and 1986. The insertion of sections 498A and 304B in the Indian Penal Code and the consequential amendments in the criminal procedure code sought to strengthen the existing laws to curb the evil of dowry (Desai, 2001). However these provisions were not sufficiently sensitive to violence faced by a woman within the family-something that has been restricted to the private domain. The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 that came into effect from 26, Oct 2006 is a path breaking legislation seeking to provide women with the much-needed protection in cases of violence within the home. This act has broadened the understanding of what domestic violence is and defines domestic violence in terms of physical, verbal or emotional, sexual, economic abuse. However, like other crimes, domestic violence has little chances of being wiped out from the social fabric of the country unless a proper understanding of the social, economic and cultural causes that lead to the perpetration of such forms of torture on the women.
The Statement of the Problem

Domestic violence is a universal phenomenon that manifests itself in all strata of society, cutting across racial, cultural, economic, political and religious spectrums. Acts of violence and willful neglect within families have been occurring for as long as there have been human families (Ohlin & Tonry, 1989). This sort of antagonism has continued down the years right up to the present times leading to the perpetuation of domestic violence. A growing body of knowledge has thrown light on the magnitude of domestic violence as a cause of concern in the countries of the world. Worldwide one in three women is a victim of domestic violence. The WHO in its multi-country survey indicated that approximately 10% to 50% of women experience physical assault by their male partners at some point in their lives. The study also concluded that domestic violence in particular continues to be frighteningly common and is accepted as normal within many societies. Up to seventy percent of female murder victims are killed by their male partners (Making Violence against Women Count, 2004). Women suffer domestic assault in the developed as well as the developing and under-developed countries alike. Domestic violence occurs in one half of all American homes at least once a year (2003). In Britain, where attacks on partners account for a quarter of all violence crimes, one women is killed every three days and one in every four women experience domestic violence (Naravane). In 2002, 450 honour
killings were reported in Pakistan and 10 women a week are subject to acid attacks in Bangladesh. Violence against women in South Asia often begins before birth through sex selective abortions, female infanticide or female neglect (Coomaraswamy, 2005).

Although Indian women have made rapid advances in becoming self reliant, India still has a long way to go in ensuring gender equality and gender justice. The patriarchal power structure of society where the male members of the family are given a divine status, customs and traditions together with stressful living conditions have led to the subordination of women and has consigned them to the private sphere. A survey of women in Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu presented a rate of 40 percent of women interviewed stating they were victims of wife beating (Coomaraswamy, 2005). A study conducted in rural Gujarat indicated that 66 percent of the respondents reported that they were subjected to verbal or physical abuse (Visaria, 2000).

Assam situated in the North Eastern part of India is separated from the rest of the country except for a narrow corridor running through the foothills of the Himalayas that connects the state with West Bengal. The social structure of some of the tribes inhabiting the tribal belts surrounding the state is matrilineal in nature. Though the dowry system has crept up in recent times, the Assamese society is marked by the total absence of social evils like Sati. In a
society where women are supposedly given a higher position compared to those in other parts of the country, domestic violence is likely to be absent. But a large number of such cases are increasingly visible in recent years in the state. Assamese women are also subjects of subordination and oppression. Newspaper reports present a sordid picture on the nature of violence ranging from beating to burning to death. Moreover, since domestic violence is a matter of silent suffering, a majority of the cases go unreported. Therefore police records of such violence do not give a real picture of the situation. Data revealed in large sample surveys do not focus on the peculiarities of the situation. An empirical study with theoretical insights might present a fairly real picture on the issue. But no such studies were taken up in the state that would reflect the true nature of the problem in the state. The Kamrup district is situated almost in the middle of Assam and has the capital city of the state. Low sex ratio, high rates of crimes against women and gender inequity are some of the factors due to which the researcher felt the need to make an empirical study about the present situation of domestic violence in the district, its nature, forms and causative factors.

**Defining Violence**

In the context of defining violence, Judith Herman explains that “the methods that enable one human being to enslave another are remarkably consistent”, whether the victim is a hostage, a political prisoner, a sex slave or a subjugated
woman in an abusive relationship. Herman goes on to describe the pattern as follows: The methods of establishing control over another person are based upon the systematic, repetitive infliction of psychological trauma. They are the organized techniques of disempowerment and disconnection ... Although violence is a universal method of terror ... it is not necessary to use violence often to keep the victim in a constant state of fear ... Fear is also increased by inconsistent and unpredictable outbursts of violence and by capricious enforcement of petty rules. The ultimate effect of these techniques is to convince the victim that the perpetrator is omnipotent, that resistance is futile, and that her life depends upon winning his indulgence through absolute compliance ... In addition to inducing fear, the perpetrator seeks to destroy the victim’s sense of autonomy. This is achieved by scrutiny and control of the victim’s body and bodily functions ... what the victim eats, when she sleeps, when she goes to the toilet, and what she wears ... this assault on bodily anatomy shames and demoralizes her” (Herman, 1997).

Definitions of violence depend not only on the specifics of any given situation, but generally on who has the power to define both group identity and social context (Collins, 1998). It is difficult to find a clear cut, precise definition of the term ‘violence’. Keeping in mind the multiplicity of connotations of the term, it has been defined variously from different points of view. The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines violence as unlawful exercise of physical force.
Olweus (1999), also confines violence to the use of physical force. He defines violence/violent behaviour as aggressive behaviour where the actor or perpetrator uses his or her own body as an object (including a weapon) to inflict (relatively serious) injury or discomfort upon an individual.

According to Marvin Wolfgang, “Violence is a generic term that may include many forms of overt and often noxious expressions, ranging from internal physiological changes in the organism to external behaviour that directly impinges upon the safety and security of other organisms. Hostility, psychological and physical aggression, anger and rage are all terms that have been associated with the meaning of violence. It is probably safe to assert however that violence is generally perceived as the display of behaviour which inflicts physical injury” (Wolfgang, 1996).

Calling it the most ‘inconsistently defined concepts found in social science literature’, it is also said to be a robust and overt form of behaviour (Torrence & Curtis, 1988). Collins takes into account the ubiquitous nature of the concept of violence and goes on to say that it ‘routinely supports hierarchies of race, gender, class, age, ethnicity, nation and sexuality’ in the American society. The differential treatment afforded African Americans and Latinos in the criminal justice system, defacement of Jewish cemeteries, and forced sterilization of Puerto Rican and Native American women illustrate how racial
hierarchies require violence. Wife battering, sexual extortion in the workplace, the pervasive pornographic portrayal of women in the media and rape constitute violence necessary for gender hierarchies. Capitalist development has long relied upon a broad array of violent actions such as wars in defense of business interests, laws that protect property before human life, and safeguards for middle- and upper-class individuals denied to working-class’ (Collins, 1998).

Goode has distinguished between legitimate acts of force and illegitimate acts of violence (Goode, 1971). Gelles and Strauss defined violence as an act carried out with the intention or perceived intention of physically hurting another person (Gelles & Strauss, 1979). This definition seems to put emphasis on the fact that violence is an intended and not an accidental act. While defining violence Gelles distinguishes between ‘violence’ and ‘aggression’ and opines that while violence refers to a physical act, aggression refers to any malevolent act intended to hurt another person and it may be in the nature of physical or emotional injury or even material deprivation (Gelles, 1985). Other operational definitions of violence view “child abuse and other forms of family violence as those instances in which the victim becomes publically known and labelled by an official agency (Gelles, 1985).
Declaring that 'violence accompanies power' Krishnaraj opines that “violence is committed to prove or feel a sense of power maintained as an instrument of coercion. Any individual or group facing the threat of coercion or being disciplined to act in a manner required by another individual or group is subject to violence” (Krishnaraj, 2007). The author further asserts that violence is always a coercive instrument to uphold cultural codes or for a show of resistance and the violation of such codes often leads to killings to preserve the family or caste honour.

Thus the term violence may be perceived differently in different circumstances. Needless to say that violence is used to secure different ends or purposes by using it in various ways. While sometimes it is used to inflict injury upon others, at other times it is used as a weapon to keep others in control and still at other times it is used to maintain prevailing hierarchies.

The different definitions, or rather, aims at defining 'violence' bring to notice the obvious inconsistency in the application and usage of the word. According to Torrence and Curtis (1988), such inconsistencies may be attributed to three reasons. One of the first reasons for the 'shadowy' meaning of violence is that academic and governmental interest in violence tends to rise and fall with the incidence of violence in the society. Much research consequently takes place in the midst of crises and seeks only to find practical solutions to current
problems. Empirical research is more concerned in finding answers to questions like 'Is there more violence now than then or here than there? Has the cycle peaked? Who are the violent?' In their urgency to come to grips with the problem, philosophical speculations on the meaning of violence are pushed to the sidelines (Torrence & Curtis, 1988). The second reason for the inconsistency in the meaning of violence is that of violence's location at 'theoretical crossroads' (Eckstein, 1988). Since the concept of violence is of interest to a number of disciplines and is 'illuminated by many theoretical approaches' like to mention a few, 'theories of social force, of political competition, of social deviance, of social instability and of war', it becomes difficult to find a common ground for conceptual clarification (Torrence & Curtis, 1988). Under such a condition inclusion of the concern of one discipline leads to the exclusion of the concerns of the other and prevents the concept of violence from attaining a complete, universal meaning. The partial understanding of the term violence is attributed to its development from within 'singular frameworks' (Collins, 1998).

**Gendered nature of violence**

Although violence is a phenomenon which is present in every society in some form or the other, may be inflicted by any person upon any other and many take various forms, research over the ages has proved and has given a gendered face to violent acts. A majority of violent crimes over the world are
committed my male members. Schwartz noted that it is imperative to recognize that violence is gendered and in most cases can best be understood in the context of gender inequality (Schwartz, 2005). As proven in various studies across the world, males commit the most acts of violence, and although females exhibit violence in some cases, it is far less prevalent and has different causes like self defense (Schwartz, 2005). According to Dobash and Dobash, "while the victims of domestic violence include all ages of both the sexes, acts of violence are primarily conducted by men" (Dobash & Dobash, 1998). Men are more likely than women to be victimized by a stranger or casual acquaintance. Women are more likely than men to be victimized by a family member or intimate partner (Crowell & Burgess, eds., 1996). But violence against women or gender-based violence may not always be violent as D Kilpatrick says that the definition of violence against women needs to be broadened to include not just violence acts, such as physical assault, sexual assault and threats of physical and sexual assault, but also nonviolent acts, such as stalking and psychological and emotional abuse (Kilpatrick, 2003). Crimes specifically directed against women may have different forms and may vary across cultures and settings but there is universality in the fact that male violence far exceeds female violence. "Women have been the victims of patriarchal sexual practices through exploitation by landlords during caste riots, in marital rape, in state policies concerning reproduction, and of course, through wife battering" (Krishnaraj, 2007)
The very word ‘gender’ is suggestive of socially and culturally created differences between men and women assigning a subordinate position to girls and women. Feminist scholars have seen gender to be the primary and only cause of domestic violence against women (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). These scholars draw conclusions from large victimisation surveys which show that violence is a system of coercive controls by men to keep women in control. In a subsequent work Dobash and Dobash identify ways in which gender, as a system that structures the authority and responsibilities assigned to women and men within intimate relationships, supports wife battery (Dobash & Dobash, 1998). They find that men use violence to punish female partners who fail to meet their unspoken physical, sexual, or emotional needs.

Violence against women and girls includes physical, sexual, psychological, and economic abuse. It is often known as “gender-based” violence because it evolves in part from women's subordinate status in society. Many cultures have beliefs, norms, and social institutions that legitimize and therefore perpetuate violence against women. The same acts that would be punished if directed at an employer, a neighbour, or an acquaintance often go unchallenged when men direct them at women, especially within the family (Heise, Ellsberg, & Gottemoeller, 1999). According to K. Shanthi, “the issue of violence against women cannot be analysed in a vacuum but only in the larger
context of changing values and norms emanating from modernization” (Shanthi, 2005). The country report of India presented at the fourth International Women’s Conference at Beijing also stated that “it is now widely accepted that violence against women is not an isolated phenomenon. Much of it is related to social changes accompanying the process of development and modernization”. The report further elaborates that “whereas violence against women often finds manifestation in individual cases of aggression, it is widely known that its roots lie in the subordination of women at the social level. The increase in such incidents is accompanied with the deterioration of the quality of life for women in India”.

In 1993 the United Nations offered the first official definition of such violence against women when the General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. According to Article 1 of the declaration, Violence against women includes: “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 deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life”.
Table 1.1

LOCUS AND MANIFESTATIONS OF GENDER VIOLENCE

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<tr>
<th>Locus and Agent</th>
<th>The Family</th>
<th>The Community</th>
<th>The State</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Forms of gender violence</strong></td>
<td>Physical Aggression</td>
<td>Social reference group (cultural, religious, etc)</td>
<td>POLITICAL VIOLENCE (political laws, policies, etc)</td>
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<td>Murder</td>
<td>Violence directed towards women within or outside the group</td>
<td>• Illegitimate detention</td>
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<td>Battering</td>
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<td>• Forced sterilisation</td>
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<td>Genital mutilation</td>
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<td>• Forced pregnancies</td>
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<td>Foeticide</td>
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<td>• Tolerating gender violence by non-state agents</td>
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<td>Female Infanticide</td>
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<td>Deprivation of food</td>
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<td>Deprivation of medical care</td>
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<td>Reproductive coercion/control</td>
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<td><strong>SEXUAL ABUSE</strong></td>
<td>Rape</td>
<td>PHYSICAL ABUSE</td>
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<td>Incest</td>
<td>• Battery</td>
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<td>• Sati</td>
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<td><strong>EMOTIONAL ABUSE</strong></td>
<td>Confinement</td>
<td>SEXUAL ABUSE</td>
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<td>Forced marriage</td>
<td>• Rape</td>
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<td>Threats/reprisals</td>
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<td><strong>EMOTIONAL ABUSE</strong></td>
<td>Confinement</td>
<td>WORKPLACE</td>
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<td>Forced marriage</td>
<td>• Sexual aggression</td>
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<td>Threats/reprisals</td>
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<td>• Intimidation</td>
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<td>• Commercialised violence</td>
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<td>• Trafficking</td>
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<td>• Forced prostitution</td>
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<td><strong>MEDIA</strong></td>
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<td>Forced marriage</td>
<td>• Pornography</td>
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<td>Threats/reprisals</td>
<td>• Commercialisation of women’s bodies</td>
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The Amnesty International in its report ‘Making Violence against Women Count’ says that violence against women “is a story of suffering, deprivation and discrimination”, its gravity and magnitude reflected in the incidence and prevalence of data and statistics worldwide. Considering the silent nature of the crime, the report also states that figures do not reveal the true extent of the problem since they are not comprehensive or fully accurate and most women still do not report instances of violence meted out to them (Making Violence against Women Count, 2004).

**Defining Domestic Violence:**

Since domestic violence occurs in a variety of structures and may be inflicted in a number of different ways, it becomes difficult to conclusively arrive at one universally accepted definition of the term. The definition may change according to changed circumstances, causes and ways of perpetration. It refers to any violence in an intimate relationship wherever and whenever the violence occurs. The violence may manifest itself in different forms like physical, sexual, emotional or financial. Although there is no particular profile of a victim of domestic violence, it is generally seen that the victims are usually women. Around the world at least one woman in every three has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime. Most often the abuser is a member of her own family. Increasingly, gender-based violence is
recognized as a major public health concern and a violation of human rights (Heise, Ellsberg, & Gottemoeller, 1999). The World Health Organisation defines domestic violence as "the range of physically, psychologically and sexually coercive acts used against adult or adolescent women by current or former male intimate partners (Violence against Women, 1998). The United Nation framework for model legislation on domestic violence states. "All acts of gender-based physical and psychological abuse by a family member against women in the family, ranging from simple assault to aggravated physical battery, kidnapping, threats, intimidation, coercion, stalking, humiliating verbal use, forcible on unlawful entry, arson, destruction of property, sexual violence, marital rape, dowry or 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'. An inclusive definition of domestic violence has been provided by Sue Peckover when she says "Domestic abuse is becoming a widely used term to describe a range of abuses, largely experienced by women, from their partners or former partners. This includes emotional, sexual and financial abuse, as well as physical abuse, intimidation and threats". Domestic violence is situated, inter-personal, emotional and cognitive activity involving negative symbolic interaction between intimates, usually in the family home (Denzin, 1984). Zimmerman observes that "domestic violence is a burden on numerous sectors of the social system and quietly yet
dramatically affects the development of a nation...batterers cost nations fortunes in terms of law enforcement, health care, lost labour and general progress in development. These costs do not only affect the present generation; what begins as an assault by one person on another reverberates through the family and the community into the future” (Zimmerman, 1994).

A gendered understanding of the phenomenon of domestic violence views it to be a ‘result of gender divisions in society. It is gendered through social and cultural practices that advantage men in violence conflicts with women’ (Anderson & Umberson, 2004). In the same context, Dobash and Dobash say that the economic and social processes operate directly and indirectly to support a patriarchal social order and family structure which in turn leads to the subordination of women and contributes to a historical pattern of systematic violence directed against wives [as cited in (Gelles R. J., 1980)].

Construction of domestic violence as a gendered crime challenges the sexual symmetry thesis in domestic or intimate partner violence propounded by Strauss in 1980. The ‘systematic and intentional nature’ of this form of violence is maintained by referring to it as ‘Patriarchal Terrorism’ which is defined as a form of terroristic control of wives by their husbands that involves the systematic use of not only violence but economic subordination, threats, isolation and other control tactics (Johnson, 1995). Thus there is no single accepted definition of domestic violence.
Feminist literature in India defines domestic violence against women as any form of coercion, power, or control perpetrated against a woman by her intimate partner or his extended kin and includes physical, sexual, verbal and mental abuse also including in its broader frame of reference actions such as sex-selective feticide, female infanticide and discrimination against women (Purkayastha et al., 2003). Rinki Bhattacharya defines it as a social problem that is known by other names like wife battery, family violence, spouse abuse, wife beating or the more discreet phrase-*silent crime*. This is a simplistic definition for an extremely complex global problem (Bhattacharya, 2004). A more comprehensive view of domestic violence can be found in the words of Del Martin said that ‘wife beating is a complex problem that involves much more than the act itself or the personal interaction between the husband and the wife. The roots of domestic violence lie in historical attitudes towards women, the institution of marriage. Violence of this nature is further sustained by the intricacies of criminal and civil law and delivery system of social service agencies (Martin, 2004). However, definitions of domestic violence had met with criticisms owing to the construction of domestic violence as a problem which was the result of cultural and structural system of gender discrimination-a patriarchal system. The ‘battered-women movements’ definition of domestic violence was thus the focus of local communities and government agencies who were not comfortable with the political argument
that wife beating was a result of patriarchal society. The main concern was of 'degendering the problem and gendering the blame' (Berns, 2001) as the dominant focus was on victims, not abusers, and experts gave reasons why battered women were willing to be beaten (Berns, 2001).

Where violence against women becomes an expression of violent social structures, domestic or 'couple' violence can best be understood by referring to its contexts. Thus Montoya says –

"Violence in couple relationships is a problem of power and control. ... It is maintained by the social structures of oppression in which we live—based, among others, on gender, class, age, and race inequalities. A national history of wars and a culture of settling conflict through force also maintain it.

Colonialism and imperialism have had a role in intensifying this violence. Both men and women learned and practice this logic of human relations based on power and control over others; however, for men the exercise of this power-over-others model becomes almost an obligatory criterion to our male gender identity."

(Montoya, 1999).

**Review of Related Literature**

Domestic violence is said to be the consequence of gender divisions in the society. Viewed from this perspective an understanding of the concept of gender and its dynamics is pertinent. Amy S. Wharton in *The Sociology of*
Gender: an Introduction to Theory and Research (2005) introduces the idea of gender as operating at the individual, interactional and institutional levels. ‘Gender is a multilevel system that cannot be understood by looking solely at individuals’. It has its impact on identities, social relations and institutions and is intricately connected to many social processes’. The author particularly feels that constructions of gender contribute most to the creation of social inequalities. The major focus of the work is an exploration of the ‘family’ and the ‘workplace’ to see how both of these are structured by gender distinctions and inequalities.

An understanding of the meanings, forms and trajectory of the Indian family is needed to know about its various problems. Tulsi Patel’s The Family in India: Structure and Practice (Patel, 2005) is an effort at understanding the family in its various forms which includes dealing with both patrilineal and matrilineal families of different regions of India. Divided into three sections the book is a lamentation of the fact that the study of the family is neglected in India and at the same time is an attempt at understanding the Indian family in its various dimensions. Khatri in the chapter ‘Some Neglected Approaches and Problems in the Study of the Family in India’ observes that “it is the micro-sociological analysis of interpersonal relationships within the family that has been comparatively neglected in our study of the family in India’. The traditional joint family system of India is also studied and it is found that ‘societies with
extended families are found to be on the average more severe in their socialisation of dependent, aggressive and sexual behaviour and the presence of grandparents tends to make for more stern imposition of these rules'. Kapadia in the chapter 'The Family in Transition' studies the family from two perspectives-first, the change in its structure and second, the change in the nature of interpersonal relations within the family. A coordinated effort by sociologists, anthropologists and psychologists within a multi-disciplinary framework is what is required to comprehend the various problems of the Indian family.

A large number of scholars have worked upon the issue of domestic violence against women in different parts of the world. 'Gender, Violence and the Social Order' (2000) by Jayne Mooney addresses the question of domestic violence and analyses its nature against the backdrop of a large-scale victimization survey conducted in Britain. The book is an excellent combination of theory that is tested by research. A number of feminist theories dealing with domestic violence are explained. The most useful aspect of the book is that it explains the unique nature of the fieldwork and methodology that is typical in dealing with cases of domestic violence. Finally, the author addresses the ways in which domestic violence is to be tackled by implementing effective policies.
The *Sourcebook on Violence against Women* edited by Jeffrey Edelson is a collection of writings that provide theoretical explanations of violence against women in general. The book seeks to focus on the major causes of violence against women that are divided into biological, social, psychological, etc. Apart from this, the author underlines the nature of violence in different relationships and in the different forms of violence in different groups of people. Special topics like female genital mutilation and the challenges faced by men researching on violence against women are also covered in the different sections of the book.

A proper understanding of the problem of domestic violence is further made possible by an understanding of the role and interaction of women in the family. Hess and Sussmen's edited volume *Women and the Family: Two Decades of Changes* has very clearly depicted the changes inflicting women's lives in the decades of the 1960's and 70's and has sought to analyse how these changes influence women's relation in the family. The International Women's Movement has, at various stages of its history, succeeded in securing concessions and rights for the women. As Sussman opines "women's roles will change grudgingly and slowly as part of the evolutionary process, as current corporate paradigms modify to accommodate change induced by 'have not's' in the system. But the issue of family relations still remains outside the scope of the movement to a large extent. Within this broad movement, certain
schools of thought resist the feminist movement and defend the traditional values (Brown, 1984). Divorce rates for e.g., are seen as a healthy corrective to women’s traditional passivity and willingness to tolerate a bad marriage and increased incidence of drugs, teenage suicides are deplored by the ant-feminists which they seem to be the result of the mother’s going out of home and neglecting household chores.

‘Fleeing the House of Horrors’ (2002) by Aysan Sever - as the name suggests the book analyses the life of thirty-nine women who had been into abusive relationships. The author offers definitions of domestic violence, theories and methods of researching violence. The stories of the women which have been included in the book bring into light the advantages and disadvantages that women suffer in society. Through these case studies the author seeks to analyse the feminist, non-feminist and social-psychological theories of abuse. Of particular benefit to a researcher on domestic violence is the chapter on methods of study wherein the author enumerates the problems with methods and procedures of interviews.

The book ‘What is Patriarchy’ (1993) written by Kamla Bhasin explains the concept of patriarchy or male dominance which is seen by many as the root cause of women facing violence in the society and within their homes. The author explains the meaning of the term and also probes into the probable
causes of its origin. She also identifies the major pillars of the patriarchal power structure of the society.

Radha Kumar’s *The History of Doing* (1993) examines women in the light of their activities. It presents a history of the Women’s Movement in India. The author also examines the strength of women as seen in the various campaigns directed to save the environment, to reduce alcoholism, to save the people, etc.

*Behind Closed Doors: Domestic Violence in India* (2004) by Rinki Bhattacharya (ed.) uncovers the socio-economic dynamics affecting women’s development by presenting the narratives of seventeen women who suffered behind the closed doors of the family owing to the rubric of customs, traditions and values. Each of the heart-rending stories of the survivors of violence reveals a tale of pain, suffering, hurt and a deep sense of betrayal and disillusionment with life. A thorough reading of these renditions exposes certain myths like ‘domestic violence occurs only amongst the poor and the less educated’. Anwesha Arya in the chapter ‘Devi: The Disempowered Goddess’ says that although a strong goddess principle persists in the Hindu religious tradition, women at the ground level share no such glorified status. In the end the author analyses the role of some agencies like the police but believes that domestic violence cannot be wept out from the society unless ‘the mound of patriarchy’ is shoveled away.
Countering Gender Violence: Initiative towards Collective Action in Rajasthan (2004) by Kanchan Mathur presents an overview of violence and gender relations with a particular focus on the state of Rajasthan. “The institution of family, besides being a site of gender violence, is also an area where historical gender relations are often played out” is the observation of the author. Besides the family, other locations of violence against women, viz, the community, the workplace and finally the state are also examined to arrive at a structural and interpretative understanding of gender based violence in order to highlight the strategies for countering gender violence.

An analysis of the criminal justice responses to domestic violence has been covered by Eve S. Buzawa and Carl G. Buzawa in Domestic Violence: the Criminal Justice Response (2003). The authors have questioned the criminal justice system as an adequate mechanism of addressing the serious issue of domestic violence. Increased intervention strategies appear effective for certain types of offenders which, however, do not seem to greatly affect other types. By treating domestic violence as a criminal justice issue emphasis has largely been placed on the offenders who commit violence and what can deter future violence. The authors have resented this fact and says that ‘in doing this the victim assistance and victim-centered approaches to the problem have been relegated to incidental status often not considered important by significant policy-makers. A marked departure is seen in the definition of domestic
violence in this book. Taking a gender-neutral stance domestic violence has been defined as ‘violence between intimates living together or who have previously cohabited’. This is an acceptance of the fact that both genders engage in violence although in the later part of the book it has been pointed out that the seriousness of women inflicted violence is six times lesser than men inflicted violence. The book also includes a comprehensive discussion of the societal and historical factors of domestic violence and its risk factors.

‘Women in Indian Society’ (2001) by Neera Desai and Usha Thakkar presents a detailed work on the status of women in the light of social, economic, political and other challenges. The book focuses on the varied roles that women have to play in the society and also takes into account the legal measures that exist for their protection. Towards the end of the book the author seeks to identify the impact that recent events have on the status of women.

The challenges faced by women are in multiple settings be it in health, education, work or at the home. All these have brought about changes in the status and position of women. Women, Challenges and Development by Digumurti Bhaskara Rao and Digumurti Pushpa Lata clearly outlines the status of women in the world with special reference to India. Divided into 21
chapters various dimensions of the struggles faced by women are analysed with adequate statistics in support of the theories presented.

Aruna Goel's *Organisation and Structure of Women Development and Empowerment* stresses upon the need of effective machinery and organisational structure to address the problems of development and progress of women and help them to meet the challenges of the contemporary society. The author calls for an adequate understanding of the concepts of women development and empowerment through an assessment of the problems faced by women in the path of empowerment. In doing this the author provides an account of the position of women in India, the constitutional status and the changes brought about by the forces of globalization. Lack of credit, wide difference between law and practice, lack of education and lack of good governance are some of the challenges of the 21st century women. In overcoming these challenges an active part needs to be taken by international organisations, various government departments, voluntary organisations and also local self governing institutions. But the underlying need in all the activities is to coordinate the existing structure of organisations for a proper redressal of the problems. The book is a good combination of theoretical concepts supplemented by institutional structures aimed at uplifting women from the evils of society.
The literature and study materials published so far have revealed that no commendable work on domestic violence has been taken in Assam, though instances have shown that even Assamese women are equal victims of violence like those of the other parts of the country. Moreover the literature has not taken into account the attitudes that women have towards such forms of violence. Therefore, the study will throw some light on the darker side of the problem and thus help in some way in minimizing the occurrence of such violence upon women in Assam.

**Significance of the Study**

There is a considerable change taking place in Assam with developmental activities being initiated in the fields of education, health and employment. On many occasions these policies specially target the womenfolk. But alongside these developments a simultaneous erosion of values is taking place in the society with regard to women’s rights. The family, which is the basic unit of the society, is losing much of its meaning as a safe haven for most of its members. Domestic violence is increasing by manifold in the Assamese society as shown in crime statistics. The above discussion and the literature review shows that much of the research on domestic violence had been taken up by researchers in the western countries mainly U.S.A., Canada and Europe. These studies are mostly in the nature of prevalence studies which has led to
the construction of new knowledge and theory building in the area of domestic violence against women. In India, the problem has been studied by a few scholars (Vindhya, 2000; Visaria, 2000; Rao, 1998; Jejeebhoy, 1997). The literature shows that research in the area of domestic violence is particularly lacking in Assam despite the worldwide concern for domestic violence. No research-based study was found which would analyse the nature, causes and effects of such violence in this part of the country and the attitudes prevailing therein. No study so far has provided theoretical explanations combined with empirical research of the phenomenon of domestic violence in Assam. With the paucity of literature and the lack of research on domestic violence in Assam, it seems pertinent to begin to get a clearer look at the overall phenomenon and factors relating to domestic violence and its changing nature in the state. The present study is an honest endeavor in this regard. The study focuses on the prevalence, nature and causes of domestic violence and also attempts to investigate the relationship between domestic violence and patriarchy, cultural factors and socio-economic conditions of the household in Assam. In addition it also tries to evaluate the type of support they are getting from the government and the NGO’S in alleviating their problems and this way my study will try to suggest remedial measures to reduce the increasing crime of domestic violence in the state.
Hypotheses:

Considering the above scenario relating to domestic violence in the state the hypotheses of the study has been framed as follows:

1. There is a significant relationship between patriarchal traditions in Assamese society and domestic violence on women.

2. The socio-economic condition of the household is a significant determinant of domestic violence against women.

3. A higher education level of women is associated with a lower incidence of domestic violence.

4. Dowry and dowry-related causes are responsible for violence perpetrated against women in Assam.

Objectives of the Study:

The study on ‘Domestic Violence against Women: A Study in Kamrup District of Assam’ has been undertaken with the following objectives in mind.
1. To study the prevalence and nature of domestic violence against women in the rural areas of Assam.

2. To understand the causative factors of domestic violence in Assam.

3. To present an idea on the attitudes and reactions to such forms of violence against women.

4. To contribute towards the development and implementation of awareness and intervention programmes as well as formulation of proper and effective policies in this regard.

5. To suggest remedial measures to eliminate instances of domestic violence in Assam.

Methodology

The present study seeks to understand the relevance, nature, attitudes and factors associated with domestic violence against women in the state of Assam. As the study is grounded in women’s experiences and is also intended to possibly improve their condition, the rules of feminist methodology are
primarily followed in the research. "Feminists have developed and experimented with qualitative, politically sensitive research styles and fieldwork relationship because these suits their purpose of making diverse women's voices and experiences heard. But they can also use a range of qualitative and other techniques" (Ramazangulu & Holland, 2002). The study is an empirical enquiry into the problem of domestic violence using both qualitative and quantitative analysis.

In the initial stages of the research, a number of books, journals, newspaper reports and data from national surveys have been analysed to gain knowledge of the position of women in India particularly Assam. It was found that a proper understanding of the problem required an in depth study based on field survey. Such a study would be able to identify the particular factors and processes associated with domestic violence in this part of the country.

Operational Definitions for the present study

i) **Domestic Violence**: in the present study 'domestic violence has been defines according to the definition given in the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 which defines domestic violence in terms of physical, verbal or emotional, sexual and economic abuse. (Annexure A)

ii) **Educations Levels:**

   Lower primary- class 1 to 4
Upper primary- class 5 to 7
Secondary- class 8 to 10
Higher secondary – class 10 to 12

Sources of Data Collection:

i) *Primary Source* - the respondents, i.e., adult ever married women comprised the primary source of the survey.

ii) *Secondary Source* – The reports like National Family Health Surveys, National Crime Records Bureau data, Census Data, various reports and documents of the Government of India and Assam, newspaper reports, articles, survey-based studies in different parts of the world and India and other related publications and literature on domestic violence comprised the secondary source for this research.

Sampling

The empirical study has been done in Kamrup district of Assam. Accordingly, the population of two development blocks of Kamrup district has been selected which have a predominant rural population. The study is cross-sectional and exploratory in nature. The sample size has been fixed at 300 keeping various factors in mind.
A multi-stage sampling procedure has been developed. The first stage involves the selection of the blocks, which have been selected in such a way, that the population composition of these blocks reflects, to a certain extent, the population of the state, though not in exact proportion. These blocks are the Chaygaon Development block in the Western part of the district and the Chandrapur Development block towards the Eastern part of the district. The second stage involves the identification of the villages in these blocks. Three villages from each block with dominant scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe and General Population have been taken up for the study. The final stage is the selection of the respondents in each village. 50 samples are drawn from each village on the basis of simple random sampling. If a woman did not meet the eligibility criteria she was left out and the next is selected until the required sample is obtained.

**Eligibility Criteria:**

The respondent women were selected on the basis of the following criteria-

a) Sex  
b) Age  
c) Marital Status

Accordingly adult, ever-married women of the study area constituted the universe and geography of the study.
Feminist methodology is based on ‘methodological multiplicity’ (Reinharz, 1992). A combination of different methods like observation, interview, focus group discussion and case studies has been employed in this research. The respondents were informed of the objective of the research and utmost confidentiality was assured. This was done keeping in mind the fact that domestic violence is still a ‘silent crime’ which goes on in the homes and the respondents might feel uncomfortable or fear in speaking about some issues related to it.

Tools and techniques of Data Collection:

The Interview Schedule-
For the purpose of collecting primary data a semi-structured interview schedule was used. The schedule was developed after a proper understanding of the phenomenon of domestic violence. It was pre-tested on a small population in a pilot survey conducted prior to the actual study. This was done to avoid any overlooking of a particular situation. Moreover the pretesting helped in adding some more alternative choices to the answer range in the structured questions. The interview schedule is meant to be a guide to the researcher in gathering data on quantifiable variables like age, sex, educational qualifications and other demographic details. Questions on the economic condition and other matters pertaining to the household like source of light, drinking water, etc., were also asked. Since the primary objective of the
research is also to get an idea on the attitudes and nature of domestic violence, a major section of the data collection will be based on open-ended questions and informal communication with the respondent.

After translating the schedule into Assamese, the interviews were administered in the local Assamese language which is spoken by the majority of the population. The respondents were duly informed of the purpose of conducting the interviews and were given the choice to participate in the process. After the interviews were conducted, the responses were again translated into English for data analysis. The interviews were also recorded in a voice recorder after obtaining the due permission of the respondent.

**Focus Group Discussions (FGD's)**

Altogether six focus group discussions (one in each village) were held among the respondents. Each group consisted of about eight to ten women.

Focus group discussions were conducted to engage the respondents in a conversation with each other as well as with the researcher. Such discussions are also meant to make the researcher an equal participant in the interview process. Data was inferred by using the observation method.
Ethical considerations

As domestic violence is a problem which is often called a silent crime speaking out about such an issue is an extremely sensitive matter. It is also possible that the women might be surprised, uncomfortable or unwilling to speak about this problem due to various reasons. Hence while researching and collecting information certain ethical issues were kept in mind and the participants were dealt with great care and sensitivity. Their confidentiality was ensured in the research. If the women became uncomfortable or became emotional while asking a particular question, care was taken to change the topic and divert to another question in which she was most comfortable to avoid causing any distress. Utmost care was taken to interpret the findings in a proper way to present correct information on the prevalence of domestic violence.

Chapters

The study is divided into the following six chapters-

Chapter I entitled “Introduction” is a general introduction to the problem of domestic violence against women, its definitions and also includes a description of the main objectives and hypotheses. The methodology behind the fieldwork is also explained which will be a combination of qualitative and
quantitative research. A review of related literature is also included in the chapter.

In chapter II that is entitled "Theoretical Constructions of Domestic Violence", some of the theoretical explanations of men's violence against women are examined. Through an understanding of the various theoretical constructives of domestic violence an attempt is made to understand it in different perspectives which have also helped in formulating the theoretical groundings of the present study.

Chapter III entitled "Domestic Violence: the Problem under Study" in an enquiry into a history of the problem identifying the major causes and forms of the phenomenon. It also looks into the problem as occurring at the international, national and regional level.

Chapter IV entitled 'Women in Assamese Family and Society' presents an analysis of the status of women in Assam. The focus of this chapter is on the changing status of Assamese women from the ancient, medieval to the modern times and the challenges they face in achieving equality in the society.

Chapter V entitled "Domestic Violence against Women in Kamrup District- Prevalence, Nature and Forms" deals with the empirical case of the areas
under study. It will include a geographical profile of the study area as well as
the field survey in the two blocks of Kamrup district. This chapter also
presents some narratives of the respondents.

Chapter VI entitled “Conclusion” is the concluding chapter which will present
the major findings of the study and offer some recommendations to ameliorate
the conditions of the survivors of domestic violence as well as to influence
effective policy changes to root out the problem of domestic violence from the
society.
References


