Chapter 6
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Conclusion

This chapter is the concluding chapter of the study “Domestic Violence against Women: A Study in Kamrup District of Assam”. The discussion in this chapter is divided into two parts. The first part presents the summary and the main findings of the study. The present study observed the severity of the problem of domestic violence and also noticed the scope that exists for the lowering and possible eradication of the incidence of such crime from the society. Therefore the second part of the chapter consists of some recommendations that might be of use in the eradication of crimes of domestic violence by means of adequate agency.

The main aim of this research has been to find out the prevalence, nature and causes of domestic violence against women. For the purpose of the empirical research six villages in two blocks of Kamrup district had been selected. Data was collected through a semi-structured interview schedule delivered in the local Assamese language. The results of the research reveal some noteworthy findings which throw light on the situation of domestic violence against women and the interplay of various factors which lead to the perpetration of such violence upon the women.
A reflection into the main theme of this thesis and the study conducted thereafter makes it evident that domestic violence is a serious problem in most of the Assamese homes and society with a continuous increasing trend. The present study was done with the main aim of understanding the nature and causes of domestic violence in Assam and also to find out the prevalence of this form of violence against women.

Attempts at understanding the true meaning of the term domestic violence revealed that domestic violence is mostly a gendered crime which silently takes place within the homes. This erodes the often mistaken representation of the family as the most secure place for any human being. For a majority of women this is not so. Gender inequalities and strict patriarchal codes of conduct, traditional gender roles and archaic cultural practices have in turn made the lives of women miserable in many families across different societies. The very word 'violence' indicates that its use is intentional. The literature on domestic violence is exhaustive and shows that much work has been done to understand the complex nature of family relationships in different parts of the world. But research and literature relating to the degree, forms, nature and causes of domestic violence is conspicuous by its absence in Assam. Therefore the present study has thrown new light in the area and led to the construction of new knowledge in the context of the interplay of different factors that lead to the perpetration of violence acts within the home.
The theoretical explanations to domestic violence come from a multitude of disciplines and see domestic violence in different perspectives having different precipitating factors. While domination and control by men and the inherent fear, low levels of education, substance abuse like alcoholism, poverty in the women leads to the perpetration of violence, certain socio cultural practices which are founded in patriarchy add to the misery of women. Throughout the present study, one thing has become clear that though individual, structural factors make the position of women weak and lead to the perpetration of domestic violence, the patriarchal conditioning of society and its members contributes a lot to the oppression of women within the home.

Oppression of women seems to have occurred since times immemorial, both in India and in the outer world. The complexity of the problem is reflected in the multiple forms --- physical, psychological, economic and sexual --- that it can assume leading to disastrous and disappointing consequences on the women’s health, on their children’s mental development and consciousness building and on the development of society as a whole. Statistical figures demonstrate the severity of the problem and provide evidence that domestic violence occurs across divides of territory, culture, language, caste or religion.

While examining the status of women in Assam since ancient times it was found that women experienced different treatment in different ages of history.
While female deities were worshipped as embodiments of power in some ages, women also experienced oppression in some societies. Practices derogatory to the dignity of women have been observed at all times in history. This inferior position of women was manifested in some customs and inheritance rules of the ancient and medieval times and is evident in adverse sex ratios, low levels of literacy and work participation rates and lack of female decision making at different levels in the present times.

**Quantitative Findings**

The quantitative findings of the study in the nature of magnitude, forms, causes of domestic violence from the data gathered in the field survey conducted in six villages spread over two blocks of Kamrup district are presented here.

- **The overall prevalence of domestic violence in the study areas was found to be 59 per cent.** Domestic violence took many forms like physical, psychological, economic and sexual. It was found that 89.2 percent of the abused women suffered psychological violence, 67.2 percent experienced physical violence, 14.68 percent experienced economic violence and 2.8 percent experienced sexual violence. Thus, psychological violence was the predominant form of violence against women in the study areas. It was also found that 58.19 percent were subjected to both physical and psychological violence.
When the forms of physical violence were analysed it was found that 98.3 percent reported slapping as a form of physical violence, 68.9 percent reported beating with a stick, 44.5 percent reported hurling objects, 21.8 percent reported banging head against wall and 24.3 percent reported other forms like pulling hair, twisting ears and pinching. In the case of psychological violence, 81.64 percent of the respondents reported the use of abusive language, 71.51 percent reported reprimanding, 26.58 percent said that their husbands refused to talk to them and 18.98 percent reported that other factors caused them mental pain. Of the women who reported economic violence, 88.76 percent said that they were not given enough money to run the household and 19.23 percent reported scolding over the issue of spending of money. Forced sex was reported by all the women who reported sexual abuse.

An analysis of the causes of domestic violence showed that alcoholism was the first major cause of domestic violence reported by 61.58 percent of the women. The other causes of domestic violence were found to be cooking food (42.93 percent), economic constraints (41.80 percent), looking after children (27.68 percent), dowry (5.64 percent), misunderstanding (12.99 percent) and extra marital affairs
(2.82 percent). The lesser percentage of women reporting dowry inflicted domestic violence leads us to conclude that dowry and dowry related issues is responsible for much of the domestic violence in Assam.

When the women who had experienced domestic violence were compared with women who had not experienced domestic violence it was found that some significant differences existed between the two. The comparison revealed that education of respondent, education of husband, income of the family, drinking behaviour of the husband as well as the type of the family have a significant relationship with the perpetration of domestic violence. The findings of the survey reveal an inverse relationship between the level of education of both the husband and the wife and the perpetration of domestic violence. Women who have been suffering domestic violence are found to have a mean level of education which is lower than the mean education of respondents who have not reported suffering domestic violence. Similarly when the education levels of the husbands who inflicted abuse on their wives were studied it was shown that they have a mean lower than the mean education level of those who do not inflict any violence upon their wives.
A majority of the women did not protest violent behaviour inflicted upon them. 88.13 percent of the women did not protest while only 11.86 percent protested against violence. The women showed various reasons of not protesting. 60.89 per cent (95 out of 156) said that members of the society would not approve, 50.64 per cent (79 out of 156) of women said that they did not protest for the sake of their children, 24.35 per cent (38 out of 156) said that they did not protest due to economic reasons, 30.12 per cent (47 out of 156) said that they did not protest because they had no place to go. 98.87% of the women said that they did not report the domestic violence suffered by them to the police.

98.87 percent of the women who had experienced domestic violence in some form or the other had not ever heard of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005.

50.28 per cent of the women said that their husbands usually take decision in household matters.

An interesting finding of this study was that majority of the respondents who suffered domestic violence resided in joint families. According to this study the nuclear family is found to be a safer place
for women than the joint family as far as the question of domestic violence is concerned. This might be due to the fact that in a joint family, due to the presence of elders and in-laws, the women are made to conform to strict gender roles which sometimes lead to the loss of independence on the part of the women. Failure to conform to gender roles might lead to the inflicting of violence on the women. Sometimes the in-laws in the joint family might instigate the husband against the wife and this also leads to the possibility of violence being used against the wife.

**Qualitative Findings**

During the course of the survey and in the interviews and focus group discussions held among the groups of respondents certain important observation were made. While these cannot be quantified in numerical terms or tested for their statistical significance, they throw important light on the issues of women's position within the home and the suffering of domestic violence. Moreover, informal discussions with a number of respondents together revealed certain interesting facts which were not disclosed in the one to one interviews that were conducted with the respondents.

➤ An observation which surprised the researcher was that in a few cases, when the women were asked their name, they could not reply
immediately. They had to ‘recall’ their own names. As one respondent said, “my name is Parama...oh...no...Parama is the other one living in our village...actually my name is Parme”. She further said that she had got so used to being called as ‘Sailen’s* Mother’ that she has forgotten her name. This was the case with some other women who were interviewed. Women in the rural areas were usually identified as someone’s daughter, wife or mother. With time, they gradually forget their own identity and identify themselves with the other person (usually a male member) in the family. This in itself is a disheartening situation and which can have its effect on the identity, dignity and confidence of the women lead to their oppression in the family.

➢ While conducting the interviews with the respondent women of the study area who had suffered domestic violence and also those who had not, one thing which was observed and was found to be common in all women across caste differences was the use of the word *malik* and *swami* to refer to their husbands. *Malik* which means ‘owner’, when used in the context of their husbands itself conveys the image of a relation based on power and control. When the women were further questioned as to why they refer to their husbands in these terms they simply said that “they are indeed our masters”. This showed that the women had blatantly accepted domination and control by their
husbands and would obey them without any questions raised. This domination and control also result in most cases of domestic violence as found in the study. Patriarchy is thus deeply ingrained in the Assamese society and the women find it difficult to throw off its heavy yoke.

> On the question of ownership of land, very few women said that they owned a piece of land; the others said that they did not. Upon further questioning on whether they thought land rights were important, very few women replied in the affirmative. Patriarchy has also led these women to believe that it is enough if their husbands or male family members have total ownership over land, not realising that they (the women) would become helpless if they have to someday leave the house or are deserted by their husbands or if their husbands die an untimely death. They would have no place to go because their parental family would not welcome them as they are not given their due share of the parental property too, which goes to the sons.

> While analysing the causes for the low educational qualification of the respondents, it was found that a majority of the girls could not complete education due to the scarcity of money. Their parents could not send them to school or pay for their books. Also, most women could not
complete education because they got married while they were still studying. Thus age at marriage has its impact on the education of the women.

➢ It was also observed that a majority of the respondents answered in the negative when they were questioned as to whether it is justified for a husband to beat or physically harm his wife. But at the same time it has been found in the survey that very few women protested the ill treatment. They accepted beatings as a matter of destiny. A wide gap is observed between what the women actually believe and what they have to face in reality. This reflects the weak bargaining power of women within the home. Unable to actually get what they deserve as member of society and the family they have completely internalised patriarchy and patriarchal oppression or else they would be oppressed over and over again. As some women said that they would often remain quiet and not answer back when their husbands rebuked them verbally. If they answered back or tried to clarify their position they would be physically beaten with the general retort, “You are trying to answer me back?”.

➢ Discussions on the issue of safety of a woman inside the house revealed surprising responses. Some of the women said that they did not feel
safe inside the house. This in itself is an irony considering the fact that for them there is no place other than the marital home and they do a lot to preserve its sanctity, not even divulging household conflicts to others.

During the focus group discussions with the groups of women, certain issues were discussed which have a direct or indirect association with incidence of domestic violence. One such important issue was 'dowry'. While literature and past historical accounts prove that dowry as a system was never a part of Assamese society, increasing cases of dowry violence are seen. The elder women in the focus group discussions said that in their times there was no dowry prevalent. The discussions made one thing apparent that the practice of giving or receiving dowry emerged as a practice of the richer, propertied classes of the society and it also emerged because of outside influence. These classes, because of their affordability, were in a position to give gifts and cash to their daughters in marriage. Over time it became a sort of a norm in marriage and sometimes demands of dowry precede the actual marriage. Many marriages do not take place if the bride’s family are unable to accept the demand of the groom or of his family. In the rural areas, these demands range from payments in cash, furniture and jewellery or can even be in the nature of helping the groom to set up a small business (a
grocery or 'paan\textsuperscript{6}' shop) to sustain him and his family after the marriage. The demand for dowry does not end with marriage but sometimes continues and in these circumstances when the parents fail to satisfy the marital family of their daughters, violent incidents occur in the family, sometimes ending with divorce or separation. Thus the larger ramification of dowry in the context of domestic violence and son preference becomes evident.

\textbullet{} It has been found in the qualitative analysis that some women have said that they are engaged in agricultural activities. It is interesting to note that those who are engaged in work in the agricultural field mainly work in their own fields. If they hadn't helped in agricultural activities, the work had to be done by engaging labourers who would have to be paid on a daily or a monthly basis. Ironically, after the harvest of the crops, the male members are considered the sole owners and all the money that accrues from it are their own. The women have no voice and their opinion is no longer needed after the harvest. This shows that they have very less bargaining power in the family.

\textsuperscript{6} Betel leaf
In one focus group discussion, conducted in a tribal village of Chandrapur, a very constructive practice related to marriage was recounted. The women said that whenever there is a marriage of a daughter in the village the entire village community participates and helps the family of the bride by contributing the amount of money required for the purchase of fish or meat. Every house collects around Rs. 20 and offers it to the bride’s family. Such practices demonstrate the strong community feelings that are still preserved in some communities of Assam. While on the one hand this acts as a major help to the family of the girl, it also helps to remove the belief that a girl’s marriage is a burden on the family.

**Recommendations**

1. Education is directly linked to the status of women and also domestic violence. The present study has also highlighted that women with higher education suffer less domestic violence. Not only the women but men’s education levels also have a bearing on the perpetration of domestic violence. Therefore there should be stringent measures to make the people conscious of the need for education. Parents should be taught the necessity of sending their children to school and special drives should be initiated for the education of the girl child. It must also
be ensured that children, especially girls, do not drop out of school to look after the household chores.

2. Women’s employment generation is another sphere which needs immediate attention. Conflicts do occur in the homes because of lack of money. Adequate flow of income can be ensured only if both the male and female members contribute to the household. But the women in the rural areas, who are not educated, find themselves at a loss of income generating activities. Some tribal women have taken to the making of local liquor. No doubt they earn some money in this way, but after the consumption of this liquor by their husbands they get drunk. It is again the women who have to be the victims of verbal and physical abuse of the drunken husbands. Some women who weave clothes find it difficult to find a market for their products. Therefore to relieve them of this situation alternative opportunities should be searched by the government agencies or other non governmental agencies.

3. Awareness campaigns on the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 should be increased or rather started. It was found during the survey that a negligible number of women had some vague idea that the new Act could protect them from domestic violence. Women in the remote villages have not even heard the name of the act.
Ignorance is not bliss is such cases. The women should be informed of the different clauses of the act, how they are to use it and should be made aware of the fact that this act could act as a deterrent to the commission of violence by husbands or in laws or any member in the 'shared household' who inflicts violence or threat of violence upon them. NGO's, Government agencies working for women welfare, Mahila Samities should give a serious thought to this issue.

4. Domestic violence has a major impact on the physical, psychological and mental health of the sufferer. Keeping this in mind, medical professionals and other health workers have a major role to play in eradicating the pain of the sufferers of such violence. Counselling centres set up in the villages can do a lot to provide the much needed advice to such women to better their conditions. Counselling should not only be limited to women but should also include men who need to be enlightened on the effects of domestic violence and the important role of women. They should awake to the fact that men and women are equals in the society.

5. Organisations related to such activities should be provided more access to resources and necessary training. It has been observed that lack of
adequate funds is the primary cause due to which many promising organisations fail to continue providing their services to the people. Realising the importance of the problem of domestic violence and the urgent need to root out this evil from our homes, organisations focussed on this aspect should be provided all help through finances and other provisions by the government agencies.

6. It is seen that power, in most development organisations, is held by those for whom ‘women’s issues’ are marginal to development. Therefore, women’s participation in positions of authority becomes very important in the present context to formulate schemes and arrive at policy decisions aimed at alleviating the domestic condition of the victims.

7. The people in the rural areas can best be educated on sensitive issues like domestic violence through informal modes like street plays, kala jathas, posters, leaflets, etc which will make a better impression on the minds of the people. Through such measures the people should be made conscious of the evil effects of violence in the home which will affect
the women's health, children's mentality and thus affect the consciousness of the society.

8. Patriarchy and its institutions have permeated the psyche of men and women to such an extent that acts of violence perpetrated on the women appear to be a natural process. Patriarchal conditioning has resulted in male domination, female oppression and most unfortunately it has succeeded in securing the acceptance of female oppression by the male members, by the society and by the women themselves. Thus the women who are oppressed do not even attempt to question the violent abuse inflicted upon them accepting it to be natural for a man to hit his wife, to control her mobility and to be the decider of her fate. Steps have to be taken by organisations working in the field of women's rights, violence against women, etc., to change this entire mindset of the people regarding the social approval of female oppression.

9. The police should be taught to be sympathetic to women who come to report such violence. They should be sensitised to the fact that domestic violence is a gendered crime, for which the fault does not always lie with the women. They should not pass comments which affect the
dignity of the sufferers of domestic violence. Through proper measures faith in the agency of the police should be restored.

10. Local counselling centres should be set up in the different areas of the state which are easily reachable by the local people. Most of the time minor counselling by trained professionals can go a long way in creating 'better homes' for the women, free from violence and fear.

11. There should be strict monitoring measures to monitor cases of domestic violence and the perpetrators should be dealt with immediate punishment. Domestic violence largely goes unreported. With strict monitoring measures the silent crimes will surface and the perpetrators will get their desert.

12. In present times the media has the capacity to reach the remotest villages and provide entertainment, news and views to the people. In addition to this, the media can play a big role in educating the people on the importance of women's rights, education and their equality. Campaigns on domestic violence can be publicised through the media. Not only the print and visual media, but in this age of 'cell phone revolution' special educative messages can be transmitted to the people
living in the peripheries. This would go a long way in moulding societal attitudes to curb domestic violence and female oppression and would help in giving women the position that they deserve as human beings in the family and the society.

13. As has been observed in the study, in some extreme cases of suffering domestic violence, sometimes it becomes difficult for the women to continue staying in the same house. But due to lack of resources, like an alternative residence or adequate money, women continue to suffer and tolerate all the abuse. This has been found to be true during the field survey. Thus there arises the need of some shelter homes or places where women can stay, if needed for a longer duration, to get respite from the violence.

Unless these issues are addressed, women will not be able to realise their full potential and they will continue to face discrimination in the family by their own family members, not to speak of discrimination in the society. Therefore, there arises a responsibility on the part of every member of the society, the government and non-government agencies and the women themselves to realise the gravity of the problem of domestic violence experienced by many women and take serious steps to eradicate it. Above all, a total change in the mindset of the people is what is required to free the women from the clutches of patriarchy and give them a life free from oppression and violence.