CHAPTER V

Educated housewives and household violence

O Lord, why have you not given women
the right to conquer the destiny?...........

Rabindra Nath Tagore

Violence against women is a phenomenon as old as history itself. Women have been victims of violence all through the ages, in all societies, regions or religious communities in the world. It is a pity that in India, where great apostles of peace and non-violence were born, women have been subjected to violence — domestic as well as public, physical as well as mental. The subject can be viewed in the historical perspective, for it is linked to her status in the society.

There are references that in the Vedic period, women enjoyed a relatively comfortable position in the society. Gradually, the curse of violence began to overshadow their status in the society. Their freedom of movement, dress, manners were curtailed and various obligations were imposed on them. On violation of the obligations, they were subjected to different punishments. Around the beginning of the Christian era, Manu laid down the Hindu code. He insisted that a woman must consider her husband a god; the ideal wife is the one who does not strive to break these bonds of control. Worse still, around the 6th century A.D. a widow's right to life began to be denied when the custom of 'Sati' was introduced. In the medieval period, oppression against women increased further with the introduction of customs like 'polygamy' and the 'purdah system'. The British government by and large remained indifferent to the violence against women. After Independence, with the progress in science and technology and with the growth of materialism, new forms of violence against women like female foeticide and dowry violence were introduced.
Today, violence against women in India has reached an alarming proportion. There are at least thirty specific forms of violence being committed against women from the prenatal stage to their death. The common among them include foeticide, infanticide, depriving them of sufficient and nutritious food, depriving them of proper medical care, curtailment of educational facilities, child marriages, sexual abuse of the girl child, forced marriages, sexual harassment, rapes, prostitution, wife-battering, pregnancies at small intervals, dowry related atrocities, neglect of the widows, neglect of the old women, witch hunting and so on.

Worthwhile to mention that violence against women is related to her position in the society. She is perceived as the 'weaker' sex, dependent on man. It is a human tendency to vent out one's anger and frustrations on those who are weak and submissive.

Violence against women is a matter of grave concern because it causes not only immediate harm, but it continues to haunt the society in the long run. A child who watches his mother violently treated by his father, is destined to develop violent reactions against the father or himself acquire a violent nature when he grows up. It seriously affects the mental development of the child.

In our survey on how educated housewives in Kamrup district have demonstrated a growing tendency of resisting household violence, the latest report on household violence by the Amnesty International in 2001 is worthwhile to mention –

(i) More than 40% housewives have been victims of many forms of household violence,

(ii) The reasons behind the incidents of household violence are minor by nature like inability to serve good food on time and to work properly.

A 40-year-old educated housewife reveals that her educated husband slaps her. In another instance a 79-year-old educated housewife confided how she has been mentally tortured by the ill-treatments of her husband during the last 50 years.

1. The statesman, Feb, 2002 (suplimentory page for women)
(iii) Even in England and the USA, the educated housewives in the age group of 15 to 45 years are by and large unhappy and are harassed by either their husbands, ex-husbands or boy friends.

(iv) In India, household violence and crime do not even spare the educated. It is interesting to note that the more educated they are, the more they are victimised.²

According to another report³ There have been numerous instances of male brutalities over the female and it is surprising to note that at times men are more cruel to women, than animals.⁴ Erich Fromn remarked insecurity is the price of consciousness and although the women in the millennium are much more at the helm of things compared to her 19th or 20th century counterparts, she has also been more punished, brutalised and stressed.

Violence against women around the world is common and has a long history which has passed through the ages.⁵ There are proverbs in different countries, which highlight the inherent notions of male dominance over the woman. A proverb in China goes like – 'Listen to the counsel of your wife, but act against it'. In Italy a proverb says – 'As a horse good or bad requires spurs, a wife whether good or bad requires thrashing'. In Assam also we have similar sayings – 'Sharpen your knife with a stone and teach your wife with a blow'. Even in developed countries like England, husbands were empowered to correct their wives in the same way that a man is allowed to correct his apprentice or children. There is a saying — 'A dog, a wife, a walnut tree the more your beat, the better

². Ibid, p. 12
3. by "Minakhi Das, Mamata Das & Amrita Patel":
   > Atrocities and violence in households occur among almost all sections e.g.—
   – upper class, upper-middle class, lower class and lower middle class women.
   > Economically independent housewives are also not free from physical atrocities.
   > In Bangladesh 47%, in Egypt 35% and in India 40% women were physically harassed by husbands.
5. Sonowal Suniti, violence against women, 1999, p. 16
they be'. It was only in 1890 that a common law i.e. right of husbands to chastise their wives, was abolished. It is evident that not only in Assam, in every nook and corner of the globe, housewives were either physically or mentally tortured.

In India, dowry related cases in the households are common despite the implementation of the "Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961". For a widow, it is customary to undergo some social ordeal on the death of her husband. These rites of widowhood differs from group to group, country to country. For example, shaving of the widows hair, restrictions on food habits, spending the night with her deceased husband's body and so on. Sati is another custom by which a widow's right to live is denied, as she is burnt alive on the funeral pyre of her dead husband. Experts say that "Sati" practice was rampant in princely states ranging from Bombay presidency to Rajasthan, the Sikh and Hindu kingdoms, Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir. When Maharaja Ranjit Singh died in 1839, his wives burnt themselves in his pire. But "Sati" was even more practiced in Bengal, though it was the first to be blessed with the gifts of Western education. In West Bengal Presidency, a great number of women committed suicide by jumping on the funeral pyres of their husbands from 1815 to 1820."

This custom of "Sati" was banned during the British regime in 1829, by which it was made a crime to instigate a widow to immolate herself. Abolition of "Sati" was supported by the great social reformer Raja Rammohan Roy and the followers of the Brahma Samaj and various other progressive Hindu organisations. Since then it was believed that the traditional custom of the Hindu practice of "Sati" was really abolished. But the "Rup Kanwar episode", the brutal incident of burning a young widow in Rajasthan, which rocked the entire nation and resulted in many debates, discussions and ultimately the Commission of Sati Prevention Act, 1987, was legislated.

The Hindu women are not socially allowed to remarry. But a peep into the Indian and world history, makes it evident that there have been efforts when

6. ibid p. 8.
people tried to restore the losing status of the women and specially the widows in the society.  

**Assamese Women and History of Violence**

The Assamese women during the 600-year-long rule of the Ahoms, hardly experienced any sort of violence. Only during the invasion by the Burmese (Maan), that the Assamese women had the worst experience of violence. Sati Joymoti stands a glaring example of those housewives who sacrificed their lives for the sake of their husbands.

In 1835, with the coming of Rev. Nathan Brown, a radical change came to the status of women in the society. Establishment of educational institutions, publishing of magazines like Arunadoi, Ghar Guoti, Asomia, brought about a positive change in the society.

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7. A great social reformer Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar who fought to legalise widow's remarriage and the Hindu widow's Remarriage Act, 1856, was enacted. In Ghana also, the legislature banned the unpleasant cruel rites like spending the night by the widow with her deceased husband's dead body. In 1965, the Zambian High Court considered "The widowhood custom of "Lala" known as "Akhamutwe" which involves a purification ritual and obligatory payment to the natal family of the deceased hushand while not commenting on the ritual directly has commented repugnant to natural justice equity and good conscience. The circumcision of women and young girl including excision and infibulation is widely practised in a number of countries of Africa and South Asia. Women are to face health risks such haemorrhage Septicaemia, adverse sexual, gyanaecological and obstertical consequences and increased vulnerability to contraction of the Aquired Immune Deficiency Sundrome. Some countries including united Kingdom has legislated it was a Criminal offence punishable by fine or imprisonment or both. Also a number of strategies have been introduced to discourage female circumcision those women played a very submisive role around the globe.


9. ibid p. 17
During the pre-Independent era, customs like dowry and widow marriage were socially denounced. A letter, published in the Asomiya on 7th February, 1919, corroborates this:

Again Chandraprava in 1929. issue 'in July, has written against purdah.

She wrote—

In 1945, 5 May, a letter to the editor expressed that—

10. (Dowry in Assamese society)

27th edition of 1919, 7 Feb. Asomiya

“There are situations where people stealthily accepted dowry or expenses of marriage from the bride's party, but the custom of accepting dowry was not prevalent among the educated Assamese. Only the uneducated lower caste people accepted gifts from the bride's party. A graduate, engaged in a good government job and earning hundred rupees, has taken a loan of Rs. 1000 from a rich, influential man, and has decided to marry his daughter. We warn both the sides to resist themselves from their action, or else they will face social boycott.

11. "Purdah of women, is not an Assamese custom. It is clear that all these customs have come from outside and later gained grounds here.)

12. History of Assamese housewives in the indepent Assam sketches a glorified picture, a society with no incident of Sati, no rape, no dowry, no child molestation, no infanticide, no Debdasis. It was a perfect society that worshiped Goddess 'Kamakhya' as the source of power, housewives are then treated as Lakshmi and called Griha Lakhmi.
In the recent years, Assamese women have witnessed the changing faces of violence in the society. Earlier, the violence was generally physical. With the changes in customs and values, violence became more inherent and latent. Other types of violence like those that affect the housewives indirectly came to the forefront. Violence on other members of the family, especially the children, elders, rude and bullying nature of the husbands came to haunt the housewives. Women have been the sufferers of violence committed outside the households and crime incidents like rape, which is a brutal form of violence, came to threaten her position in the society. "There is a thin line separating violence and crime. Crime incidents like rape, child molestation, foeticide are instigated by an excessive violent temperament which lies imperceptible in human nature. It could also be called the animal instinct that exemplifies the worst nature of the human beings."\(^{13}\)

The face of Assam and the nature of violence against housewives change with the All Assam Students Union's movement against infiltrators. In Assam, from 1978 to August 15, 1985, a host of events touched the Assamese housewives. After Independence, for the first time, both educated and uneducated housewives came out and marched with the mainstream to evacuate the illegal infiltrators in Assam and took part in some significant events—\(^{14}\)


1978 – Mrityu-Sankalpa Divas,
1978 – Silent procession at Guwahati on the occasion of the Shraddha of Swahid Khargeswar Talukdar.
1980, 8th-16th Jan – Non violent protesters at 011 Blockade.
1980 was the year when for the 1st time in the history of Assam, Indian Army raped innocent women, even the teenagers not spared.
1980, 18th January – Assamese women protest against the brutality on women in Kamrup and other parts of Assam, the protest continued.
1981, Jan – A group of Assamese women join the protest march and non-cooperation against Central Government.
1981, April – Police lathicharged women and thousands of other people in Kamrup.
1982, 5 May – Housewives lodged peace protest against atrocities by the CRPF*
1982, 26th May – Indigenous people mostly housewives are battered in Nagaon.
1983 – There were more than 30 incidents of police firing from January 19 to Feb 29.
Villagers including women were hacked to death in almost all parts, worst sufferers were in the district of Kamrup. A total of 813 died in the sporadic incidents of violence and among them more than 200 were housewives. "Women and children were thus in the forefront and as a report in the Assam Tribune recorded:

"4,000 female picketers including old ladies outnumbered their male counterparts"15. The accusation was that--

Catching the mood of those who reside outside Assam since 1979 till today, the whole of North East witnessed insurgency related violence in the recent past. The year 2000 saw a total 800 persons killed in the conflicts as against 511 in 199916.

There are as many as 34 insurgent groups in the state, though the 'United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) remains the main player, Among the other terrorist outfits names of (NDFB) National Democratic Front of Bodoland, (UPDS) United People's Democratic Solidarity, (DHD) Dima Halam Daogah, and (MULTA) Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam can be mentioned.17

Thus in the wake of insurgency related violence, crimes committed both by the insurgent groups and human rights violations by the security forces, housewives in Assam have witnessed a dismal situation with the growing number of violent incidents against women. This gives a complex, and despressing picture of Assamese educated housewives. Besides, with the advent of westenization and industrialization, more and more Assamese women are becoming educated. Further, the added frustations of the husbands, owing to a sharp rise in the price level of commodities and insecurity in the work places, the nature of household violence in Assam has drastically changed. There reasons behind the justification of separting the problems of Assamese housewives with the rest of the country --

15. "The leader of the movement were cowards and were taking shelter behind women and children."
17. ibid, p 54
From a period of a healthy status in the society, women have descended to a situation where they have confronted problems like household violence. So, the nature of violence in the state depicts some unique trends.

Be it insurgency related, or security related crimes, normally housewives have been the worst sufferers during the last decade.

A new process of assimilation of different values and principles, the problem of corruption at all levels, the growing materialism have given rise to some new women related problems like dowry, rape, suicide, murder, forced prostitution, which were totally alien to Assamese culture till 1979.

Before going in details about the rate of crime in Assam in general and Kamrup district in particular, it is worthwhile to note that in dacoity, kidnapping and robbery, Kamrup districts stands way above the rest. In murder and rape, Kamrup has the second highest number of cases registered during a year. But from the records, we cannot get a comprehensive picture of the crime rate in the state, because there have been other incidents of crime against women that went unrecorded.
## TABLE 1

### DISTRICT-WISE INCIDENT OF CRIME UNDER I.P.C. IN ASSAM, 1999.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of District</th>
<th>Murder Reported</th>
<th>Rape Convicted</th>
<th>Kindapping Convicted</th>
<th>Dacoity Reported</th>
<th>Robbery Convicted</th>
<th>Burglary Reported</th>
<th>Riot Reported</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Dhubn</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>4. Goalpara</td>
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<td>20</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>20. N C. Hills</td>
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Source–Statistical total book Assam 2001/Director of Ecrics and statics Govt of Assam
Household violence, a case study in Kamrup

A list of cases that touched the conscience of the Assamese people during 2000-03 gives a glaring example of how violence has affected normal functioning of life in the households in Assam and has brought a feeling of insecurity to the minds of the housewives.

- Bono Mita Bharali—An educated housewife, in 2002, 22 Oct, was burnt down by her in-laws and husband Madan Bora.
- 25, Oct. 2002 – Rupanti Dum of Kahilipara, was beaten by husband Lakshman Dum with a hot iron rod, and the body was confined inside the house for a few months.
- 24, Oct. 2003 – In Guwahati, Ganeshguri, a non-Assamese couple was slain by their servant.
- 11, Oct. 2003 – A couple, the Pators, murdered in the city.
- 28, Oct. 2002 – NDFB militants gunned down 22 in Kokrajhar; 10 of them were women.
- In the most heinous crime, during our survey, a 8-year-old child called Barnali was raped and killed in July, 2002 in the heart of Guwahati at Paltan Bazar. The minor was gangraped by four. The incident infuriated the conscious sections throughout the state and various women's organisations like Asom Nari Surakhya Samiti, Nari Sangram Samiti, human rights organisations and more than 200 other organisations brought out processions protesting the heinous crime.
- In the same manner other rape cases like that of Gitima, rape of Junu, and Pritikona, a housemaid, who was been brutally murdered and dumped wrapping in a jute bag under the city stadium flyover, raised the eyebrows of the citizens.
Other cases in the district of Kamrup during the last few years relating to women, reveals the dubious stand of the society, role of the Mahila Samities and the trauma of housewives both educated and uneducated. Few such cases are –

Death of Kiron Medhi in 1999: In Kharghuli, Guwahati, a matriculate housewife who's been under house captivity for not less than a month, was finally burnt down by her husband, mother in law, sister in law. Kharguli Mahila Samiti has brought out a protest march against the crime, observed the Adya Shradha of Kiron Medhi but the case is still pending in the court.

- Death of Gayatri Kondoli 1999, witnessed another crime of murder of a highly educated woman. Gayatri Kondoli, M.A. and a research scholar, brutally murdered by her husband, an official in the Department of Cultural Affairs. Mother of two children, the death of Gaytri Kondoli, a sober and educated wife, has raised the question of security of educated housewives.

- Korobi-Dubori murder, 1998: In another instance of brutality, a smart, educated housewife and a Life Insurance agent, Korobi and her daughter Dubori were murdered in the heart of the city in Ambari locality, near the AGP (Assam Gana Parishad) office.

- A rape in the household by a security personal was registered on Oct, 2, 1998 and accordingly a case no. 319/98 U/S 448/354/376 under IPC was registered. Maniki Bezbarua, wife of Upen Bezbaruah of village Karia, filed an FIR at the local police station. Maniki was raped by an Army jawan in her house18.

- Again two other women, Mrs. Rupali Das, Mrs. Anima Das filed an FIR against rape on the same day. There cases were forwarded by the MASS (Manab Adhikar Sangram Samiti)

- Another incident of rape of a woman by two Indian Army jawans at Paikarkuchi village in Nalbari district was recorded on June 16, 1998. There was widespread reaction against the incident in lower Assam and organisations such as Sanmilita Mahila Suraksha Parishad launched a fast-unto-death programme to protest the incident.

Moreover, the rape of a village girl in Kokrajar district by a sitting MLA, who later was compelled to marry the victim and accept the newborn child as his own, generated widespread reaction among the public. The incident was criticised by people of all sections throughout the state and the incident highlights the role of the society in ensuring justice to the victim.

Thus, Assam as a whole during the last ten years and specially the last 5 years, has been a breeding ground of the criminals and the spate of violence have affected the housewives most, because in some cases housewives have become widows whereas in some other cases they have lost their young sons.

During our survey, we talked to a few housewives, who have been cruelly affected by insurgency related violence and came to know about their sad plight.

In the order to check the increasing rate of violence on women and ensure quick attention to women related crimes, a special Cell on Crime against Women has been formed. During our survey, we talked to a few police officers who spoke about the importance of the Cell on Crime against Women and about the important measures it has taken to curb women related crimes and violence.

**Cell on Crime against Women**

In order to tackle crime against women, a special cell for monitoring, coordinating and investigation of cases of crimes against women and immoral trafficking, has been functioning with the C.I.D. since 1994, under the direct supervision

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27.1.2002: A young, handsome Dy. SP (HQ) Kamrup, Debajit Pathak, became the victim of bombing while on duty. In an interview his wife Mrs. Bidyawati Roy Pathak revealed her trauma in the following manner –

"कालब घुमुहाइ आमाब सोर्नब संसाबখन चाबबखन कबिले।
মই সন্তসনবাদীসকলক সুনিজ্জু, আপেনালোকব উদ্দেশ্য কি ?

The cruel hands of destiny ruined our happy life. I ask the terrorists what they aim for?

She added that the future of Assam and the Assamese is at stake and for the sake of the future generation, the terrorists should surrender and join the mainsteam. The housewife deliberated on bringing up her only daughter, who is just a few months old."
Crime figures in Guwahati for the last 5 years

Source *

* WWW.Assam Police.O.R.G.
Crime figures in Kamrup for the last 5 years

Source:
of the DIG (CID), Assam, Guwahati. This cell has been doggedly supervising and constantly monitoring the progress of investigation of offences like dowry deaths, rapes, immoral trafficking of women. In the recent years, the C.I.D. has taken over investigation of 20 cases of physical violence against women and succeeded in each of them. Realising its commitment to the society, the cell is resolved to curb social menaces like prostitution and dowry deaths. The cell has also conducted raids in hotels, restaurants, private houses, beauty parlours and arrested many offenders. The cell has been instrumental in setting up a Family Counselling Centre at the C.I.D. HQ on 15 September, 1997 in consultation with the Social Welfare Department. This centre has a counsellor, who provides counselling to estranged couples after thorough case study. The main objective of the counselling Centre is to reduce family and marital disputes, atrocities on women and alcoholism and so on. So far, the counselling centre has taken up 91 cases of which it has been able to sort out marital discords in 60 cases.

* WWW.Assam Police.O.R.G.
All Women Police Station:

The Government of Assam by a notification on October 10, 1993 established a new wing of the city police of Guwahati called the All Women Police Station. It has two officers in the rank of Sub-Inspector one Assistant Sub-Inspector, a Havildar and 8 constables. Its jurisdiction is 216 km of the Guwahati Municipal Corporation area. The existence of the Police Station has instilled confidence in the minds of the women victims and its functioning is a step towards empowering women in the matter of their rights and delivering justice to the weaker sections of our society.

Some other forms of violence

Sexual harassment at work places faced by educated women, who are playing the dual role of running the household affairs and supporting the husband financially has become a nagging problem of late. The rate of sexual harassment at work places is ascending as against 20% in 1971 it reached 28% in 1991, revealed Mohini Giri, Chairperson, National Commission for Women (NCW).

Case studies in Kamrup about other forms of violence:

In Assam, though no case of harassment at work places has been registered so far, interactions with a large section of educated housewives in Kamrup brought the following revelations:

- Many housewives are facing an awkward situation at work places like resisting the immoral temptations offered by the bosses and helplessly bearing the jokes by the bosses, that carries sexual connotations.

- The lengthy procedure of judicial actions, lack of evidence, fear of losing their jobs, fear of losing their prestige in the family deter them to openly protest the actions of the offenders.

- Close interactions with some female domestic helps reveal that in urban Guwahati, a considerable number of them are facing sexual harassment at
work places. A few cases of physical harassment of female domestic helps in work places have been registered in police stations over the last 5 years.

- Various women's organisations like Mahila Suraksha Samiti, Women Legal Cell have been formed by educated housewives and they are doing their might to prevent incidents of crime and violence against women.

3. Suicide of housewives – A case study

Suicide in households has become a major public health problem, says R. Srinivasa Murthy, professor of psychiatry at the National Institute for Mental Health. 39% of suicide cases are dominantly related to household violence. The alarming rate of suicide by housewives depicts the untold stories of household traumas in modern life – Dr. S.N. Waghray, a Hyderabad based psychiatrist says – "It is because women increasingly are unwilling to conform to the traditional image of a doting wife devoted to bringing up the family while their conscience and education go against the role they are expected to play. The lack of quality time from their husbands, loneliness after marriage, rising marital discords, dowry demands by in-laws, latent carrier drive, pressure from the families of educated housewives are the causes of suicides over the last few years.

The problem of housewives committing suicide has become a matter of grave concern in other countries around the world*. Emil Durkheim, a French jurist once observed that the cause of suicide in essentially social. Against 65 per lakh in Russia, 33 in Japan and 27 in USA, the rate of suicide in India is less. West Bengal with 12,389 recorded the highest number of suicide cases in 1994. The age below 30 has been identified as the suicide prone age and against a total of 52,752 cases, 36,443 women committed suicide in India upto 1994.22

22. Femina nov. 15, 1996 issue, p. 18
According to a report published in The India Today, Assam is also among the high risk states in the matter of suicide.

Causes of suicide in percentage proves that household disturbances as mentioned earlier, cause highest number of suicide deaths.*

In Assam, the rate of suicides and suicide prone mentally ill housewives are increasing, according to well known psychiatrist* and the first Assamese psychiatrist**

Forced prostitution of women in Assam

To talk about the impact of education in changing the profile of women, the problems of prostitution, forced prostitution need special mention as they are contradictory to her changing status in the society.

(Causes of suicide in percentage from 1994 to 2000)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cause</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Debilitating illness</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarrel with spouse</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failed affairs</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarrel with parents-in law</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insanity</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property-related disputes</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure in examination</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dowry dispute</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bankruptcy</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death of a dear person</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall in social reputation</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unclear causes</td>
<td>51.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

source— Ibid, 19

** Dr. Jayanta Das
*** Dr. Deepali Dutta.
In Assam, the problem of forced prostitution attained glaring attention* with the revelation of a shocking incident*. 

**Character assassination and status of widows, divorcees and single women in Assam.**

In Assam, the nature of household violence is latent and mental. Close interactions with a few women and housewives who are either widows, divorcees or educated housewives reveal that:

☑ Social hostility against divorcees, widows and spinsters is still prevalent in the society. In both the urban and rural areas in Kamrup, the plight of the widows and divorcees are miserable.

☑ Education and higher achievements in the creative fields, to some extent relieve the women of the social stigmas that they generally encounter during widowhood or single life after separation. *

☑ On August 27, 2002, a senior telecom officer and his wife were caught, with the serious accusation of forcing prostitution on a girl called Manaji Subedar.

☑ In 2002, raids in brothels revealed that many middle class women were forced to join flesh trade.

☑ Dr. Rajiv Sharma, Secretary of GOLD (Global Organization of Life Development), an NGO, informed that in 2000 with the help of then City S.P. Bhaskarjyoti Mahanta, the members of the NGO rehabilitated not less then 17 prostitutes from the red light areas of Beltola, Paltan Bazar, Fancy Bazar of Guwahati and took necessary steps to educate them and till date 35 such prostitutes are being provided educational facilities. They are also helped to earn livelihood by working as sales women in grocery shops and other different jobs.

* Chandhra Prabha Saikiani, during her relentless tenure of social work, was verbally abused by some mullahs of the society. A few people called her characterless and her son a bastard. Such was the outlook of society against single women. Even today, duality in society in the words of Gyanpeeth awardee Mamoni Raysom Goswami is prevalent in the Assamese society. In her autobiography 'Adha Likha Dastabez' she wrote – "In a social gathering, I was invited to take meal with the widows. I refused as I did not like the custom of discrimination. Another renowned woman litterateur Nirmal Prabha Bordoloi expresses – "I was branded a women with dubious identity because I was a divorcee. Normally middle class women crumble under social hostilities and compulsions, says Justice Mira Sharma, who after the demise of her husband successfully completed her studies and by dint of her excellence and confidence raised her two children and became a Chief Justice.
In the khaghuli area of Guwahati, a total 3 widows of upper middle class got married. During our survey covering ten constituencies of Kamrup and interactions with a number of widows and divorcees of Boko, Palasbari, Chaygaon, Kamalpur, Rangia, Jalukbari and Hajo we came to know that the society is still hostile towards them and has a lot of reservations for them. In trifle matters, they are accused and held responsible for mishaps. The financially sound are to some extent relieved of these anxieties and are better positioned to tackle the injustice against them. The educated and the working women also enjoy the same advantages.

Divorce in Kamrup District:

The increasing rate of divorce in the family courts in Kamrup we found during our survey, makes it explicit that more and more educated housewives coming out to fight for their rightful place in the household. The trend, which was literally alien to the Assamese society, reflects a new awareness of selfhood among the housewives and a tendency of resisting household violence. During the year 2002, from January 1 till November, a total 391 applications were filed for divorce under Section 125 before the Principal Judge, Family Court Guwahati. The applicants include housewives from all classes of society.

The rising trend of divorce cases filed in the Family Court are shown in the graph.

1995
1996
1997
1998
1999
2000
2001

Source*

Housewives, who are educated and self sufficient form 60%, applied dissolution of marriage. While housewives matriculate, or less educated from rural areas, appeal for maintainence by their spouse.

* Family Court, Guwahati, Kamrup
A few cases of violence by husbands have no proof but have a lasting affect on the minds of the housewives. According to the legal advisors of the Women's Legal Aid Cell, the number of cases filed in the Kamrup district are increasing –

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total No. of cases filed in Kamrup District</th>
<th>No. of Assamese person seeking divorce</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>51 cases</td>
<td>10 cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>52 cases</td>
<td>13 cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>73 cases</td>
<td>30 cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>87 cases</td>
<td>39 cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>99 cases</td>
<td>38 cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>216 cases</td>
<td>138 cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>156 cases</td>
<td>101 cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>259 cases</td>
<td>208 cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>391 cases</td>
<td>295 cases</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This chart is not the comprehensive report of the divorce cases of Assamese people as informations are collected on the basis of surnames and a few surnames like Nath, Das, Ray, Bhatta are found among other communities. During an interview, we had close interactions with the Principal Judge and the registrar of the Family Court.
Lok Adalats has been taking up a few cases from the court and have been successful in settling a few family disputes. Report from Women's Legal Aid Cell, Guwahati.

One of the active members of Women's Legal Aid Cell, established to conform various types of sexual violence and to take the legal recourse to those who are poor, Mrs. Soniti Sonowal express that.

Uneducated housewives from lower income groups have generally been the victims of household violence during the last few years. However, those who are not working and below 25, are more tortured by their spouse than those educated and working.

To get a true picture of how educated housewives are reacting to various types of household violence, a few questions were asked to housewives in and around Assam and extensively in the Kamrup district, touching all the constituencies and age groups. On course of the interview, we had direct interactions with various NGOs, social welfare organisations and social activists. The questions are –

(1) Do you think housewives are the worst victims of household violence ?
(2) Has education increased the moral strength of the housewives of all classes in the society to fight violence ?
(3) Do you belive that insurgency has effected the housewives most ?
(4) Do you think that other incidents like rape and dowry cases, and various laws related to them have a lasting impact on the minds of educated housewives in the mater of decision making ?
(5) Did you think that only cases registed in police stations do not give a true picture of the trauma of educated housewives.
(6) What are the possible remedies against this malady ?
A list of more than 5 NGO, more than 100, prominent male and female are agree with the following point.

- Educated women both in rural areas and urban areas in the district of Kamrup denote tolerate household violence.
- The number of household violence can't be determined only by case registered in police station as many cases are not registered due to pressure from influential group of person or from households inside and outside.
- Prior to insurgency the amount of atrocities on women in Assam were less while, during the period 1974 to 2000, housewives became the worst victim of insurgency related violence.
- Atrocities in household are not only the cases which are registered, in the police station but, mental agonies suffered by educated housewives and ego clashes of husbands and wives, unemployment are also damaging peace and tranquility of households.
- Both in urban and rural setup women are not aware of all the judicial remedies and rights given by the laws and the constitution.
- NGO and various women organisations are taking major steps to spread education which in turn become beneficial to the housewives to ward of their own right.
- Husbands are less hostile to educated and working wives.
- Many educated housewives prefer to keep atrocities mental and physical atrocities under wraps and apprehensive in disclosing such in fear of losing respect in society and facing hostility inside the family.

Final analysis and observation from the detailed study on the various aspects of crime and violence against women, a combinative study of Assamese housewives with the rest of India. It can be convincingly concluded that:

1. The Nature of violence against woman in households of Assam is specific in character and in certain aspects like, there is no system like sautee, infanticide while, a limited number of such crime are detected in the area of forced prostitution, dowry and suicide.
(2) Education is acting like a catalyst in household violence, while rising number of divorce and maintenance cases speak in volume about educated wives changing attitude towards male atrocities and domination.

(3) Women from upper class and upper middle class are apprehensive to reveal home truth, and consider it as a "Complete private matter.

(4) There are enough room for improvise the relation between public and police, for the lack of enough woman police, for the lack of woman police force, and for the fear of get raped in police detention, many women from different status refrain from reporting in police.

(5) Earlier superstition in Assam on housewives daughter's last resort is husband* has changed because, educated parents are now seem to escort their daughters against household violence and providing them with moral support when needed.

(6) Almost all educated housewives in Assam has expressed their dissatisfaction on the growing rate of killing by insurgent groups and the atrocities meted by security force, especially in rural areas. Women who are not tortured in households has a chance to get tortured at the hands of either terrorist or the security force, therefore last few years through various organisation educated housewives are showing their displeasure to all forms of violence.

(7) Education has supplied the amount of self confidence needed to determine ones own future in both home and outside, and educated housewives are more respected by the husbands and chances of hostility in household become less slowly.

(8) Uneducated and illiterate women in rural areas due to there financial dependency on their husbands are lagging behind and become a frequent victim of violence.

* "যমে নিলেও নিয়া জোরায়ে নিলেও নিয়া"
(9) The growing number of divorce rate demand the need for few other family courts in the blocks. The revitalisation of gaon panchayats in handling the cases relating to household violence is need of an hour.

(10) Duality of Assamese males and society, regarding widows, divorcees are still there.

Possible remedies to the household violence against housewives are:

The central government should therefore effect an appropriate amendment in the Constitution and shift all subjects related to the welfare of women from the state list of the concurrent list. By doing so, a single legislation would make the law applicable in all parts of the country and the state governments would simply be required to implement it.

The next step should be define cruelty in a clear manner both for criminal and civil laws and also bring in the necessary amendments in the Evidence Act to make it less technical and more result-oriented. The legislation must also provide quick relief, not just punishment, as endless delay often leads to a negligible number of convictions.

Three decades ago, an amendment in the Hindu Succession Act made the daughter a primary shareholder in her father's self-acquired property and the wife in the property of her husband. This made the daughter as must of a rightful shareholder as the son. In case of joint family property, the daughter as much of rightful shareholder as the son. In case of joint family property, the daughter also has the right of inheritance.

The women and Child Department of the Human Resource Ministry is required to co-ordinate with the state governments on the corresponding amendments to be carried out in Section 6 of the Hindu Succession Act to facilitate the daughter getting her due share in the joint family property. However, many states are yet to incorporate the necessary amendment. Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh,
Tamil Nadu and Karnataka are some of the states which have carried out the amendment.

The Central Government has also taken to policy-level decision of allocating joint titles, whereby cultivation and other property-related rights are to be jointly held by both husband and wife. However, many states are yet to wake up to the need for such decisions and the implementation of these policies. The next move should be to pass a law on the 'community of property', to show appreciation for the work put in by the woman at home and for her family. The family should not take her services for granted. This law would ensure that all assets acquired by the husband after marriage are jointly owned by husband and wife. It would effectively reduce domestic violence and generate respect for women within the family. Moreover, this is bound to strengthen the institution of family, which has crumbled in the West under pressures of modernity and demands of individualism. Authority should be instructed

> To ensure that inheritance rights are made.

> To arrange more income generating vocational training to make them financially independent.

> To provide shelter when wives are deserted by their husbands if they donot find a place to stand on.

> To provide counselling centres so that both wife and husband can be reminded about their responsibilities and not to fight for a trifle matter.

> To set up centres for legal aid when such women are in need of legal help.

> There are demand for more family courts and women's courts before the Government. Where family matter may be tried.

> Some experts also suggests that mobile court is also essential to accommodate cases from remote areas,
Govt. has various programmes like non-formal adult education, vocational training programme, and there are many NGO who are working for such scheme. There are state destitute homes run by the Govt. for such distressed women. In Guwahati there are two more such short stay home with vocational training facilities—one is "Admin Juti Matri Newas" and the other is "Nirmal Asray" run by the Association of Social Health in India. Family counselling centres are run by different voluntary organisation and more organisations to come forward to set up such centres.

Correspondence to few assamese housewive NRI and few residing in USA and England give us the impression that 40% of Indian male in USA and London are jailed due to their violence against housewives, there are more then 400 Assamese families reside in London and more then 200 are from the district Kamrup. Assamese American Society in USA express that Divorce among Assamese couple is a common phenomena A growing number of infiltrator influx, a pseudo culture resulted in few inter state, intercast marriage, welcoming few complex problems to the assamese households there, therefore enough room left for more intensive study on the role of housewives in the family, setup and about various dimensions related to the eradication of such problems which is possible through a meaningful reflection of the concept of empowerment of women. A politically and socially aware housewives are the essence of our social edifice.