CHAPTER-III
NATURE, CAUSES AND EFFECTS
OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
Families do not live in isolation; they are a part of the larger social context. The external environment in which the family is embedded is referred to as the ‘ecosystem,’ according to social system theory. This ecosystem consists of historical, cultural, economic, genetic and developmental influence. Thus the families’ historical period depends on its cultural identifications, the economic conditions of society, its genetic stamina and resistance and its stage in the family life cycle.

Marriage in every society is a bond. In modern system it is considered as companionship. In Indian society, old values and convictions play a dominant role when a woman enters into marriage. Her loyalties are expected to shift from her parents and siblings to husband and in-laws. Marriage determines her social and economic status, which takes away her own identity. Marriage involves a transplant for a girl who is born and brought up in her natural family and has to leave her natural setting to settle in a new family. From the place of origin when a tender plant is shifted, great care is taken to ensure that there are not much of variations and congeniality is attempted to be provided. Similarly, in case of a girl with human emotions, it needs utmost care during the period of her transplantation from the natural setting of her parental home into an alien marital family. But unfortunately in most of the cases they are not given the congenial atmosphere to mingle in the new and strange surrounding and many of the brides immediately face hostile environment in their marital homes. They are treated as chattel rather than human beings who deserve emotional support, care, love and affection to feel at home in their new home. Violence, particularly at home, reduces almost everywhere the options and range of choices of married women in respect of their activities of life, both private and public. Violence badly disrupts the life of women, affects their health and activities very
badly, and indirectly erodes their self-esteem and self-confidence. The ultimate results of violence hinder women’s full participation in society.

Traditional society had seen a woman as a member of the family or group as daughters, wives and mothers and not as an individual with her own identity or rights of her own. Girls are treated as transitory members of the family. They do not belong to the family in which they are born and they remain outsider to the family in which they are married. This causes psychological strains and insecurity for many girls. Often women have been victimized by the institution of marriage. In some cases in the course of a marital relationship, women have been exploited physically, emotionally and sexually by their husbands. Domestic violence does not limit itself to wife battering only; it includes torture for dowry, sexual perversion and the forms which may range from minor burns to fractures, throwing of acid and sometimes to even murder.

There are five categories of domestic violence –
1. Domestic violence includes mental cruelty which includes verbal abuse, calling names, ridiculing (especially in front of other people), deprivation of money support, clothes and sleep, preventing the victim from going out, constant nagging, criticizing parents for no fault, blaming them for any mishap or problem in the family, calling them unchaste and characterless and taunting and misbehaviour by the spouse and in-laws.
2. Domestic violence includes being threatened with physical force or violence, even though no actual physical violence occurs.
3. Actual physical violence, which includes being grabbed or pushed or shaken, being punched or slapped, kicked, head butted, attempted strangulation, hit with weapon / object.
4. Physical injuries which include bruising or black eyes, scratches, cuts, bites, broken bones, being burned with cigarettes, scalded, knocked unconscious and experiencing miscarriages as a result of an assault.
5. Marital rape, defined as being made to have sex without consent.

Domestic violence is one of the leading causes of women's sufferings. The basic psyche of the woman and the identity of her own which was formed with great care from her childhood influenced by her cultural background and parents' constant effort to enlighten her with all human values get shattered when her life partner humiliates and torture her in the name of giving social prestige and status of a wife. The dream of building an ideal home and happy family is shattered completely. Their very survival remains at stake. It is beyond any description how much a woman suffers. It does not only threaten the life of a woman who comes to her husband's house with lots of dreams but the very social structure gets threatened equally. The children for their no fault suffer and cannot live a normal life and ultimately become the burden of the society. Maximum number of cases of adolescent delinquency is the result of broken homes.

This chapter mainly analyses the nature, causes and consequences of the cases of domestic violence registered with first information reports (FIRs) at police stations in Guwahati city. The study covers domestic violence over a period of 10 years from 1991 to 2000. There were 276 cruelty cases registered during the said 10 years period. The sample of the study is 208 cases of cruelty by husbands and in-laws (76.9%) out of a total number of 276 cases. Secondly, all the 44 cases of dowry death registered in the city (100%) during the 10 years period (1991-2000) were taken as sample of the study. This study concentrated on the city of Guwahati, particularly because the city has been experiencing fast transformation from an average district town to a metropolitan city. The increasing trend of domestic violence in the city is a matter of serious concern to all sections of people. There was a time when problems arising out of marital discord were less in Assam compared to other parts of the country. This was mainly because dowry, a curse for marriage, was a taboo among the Assamese. Even the birth of a girl child was not considered inauspicious as it was elsewhere. But that is not there anymore.
3.1 Cases of Cruelty:
According to this study, in 46.6% of domestic violence cases, husbands were solely responsible for the torture of and cruelty on their wives. In 53.3% cases husbands and in-laws jointly were involved in torturing women.

Nature of Domestic Violence - The study revealed that different methods were applied to torture a wife in marital violence and the society had usually turned a blind eye. The tortures were mainly perpetrated by husbands, parents-in-law, and siblings of the husbands and other relatives of the husbands against the brides in domestic violence cases. In the power relationship husband and in-laws are more dominant and powerful and aggressive. The FIRs gave a brief description on domestic violence cases, which were registered in police stations of Guwahati city by the victim’s families during the period from 1991 to 2000. The battered wives tried their level best and wanted to continue their marriages for the sake of privacy and security. But when the violence gets worse, they looked out for external aid to challenge the men’s use of violence and reported to the police.

The psychological violence or mental violence included threats, intimidation, manipulation, isolation, keeping the victim without money, locked in, deprived of food or using or abusing her children in front of her to frighten her or enforce compliance and also systematic and belittling comments. These affected her self confidence and self esteem.

Bound by the patriarchal notions about the privacy of the family matters and because of their assured weakness, brides were subjected to physical assaults. For a period often – days, months and even years – brides were caught into the web of violence, unable to predict when more violence would occur and when it would take a worse turn. In Case No-243, Jalukbari police station (P.S), beating of a wife lasted for three and a half hours. Evidence suggests that beating could last from a few minutes to several hours. Frequency of beating varied from person to person. In a few cases
wives were struck very frequently. Data suggests that most of the cases of domestic violence reported to the police were of serious nature. Only small fractions of it were of trivial nature.

As an excuse for violence, a man sometimes deliberately provokes arguments, which initially would appear trivial but husband turns it for a violent response, totally unrelated to the context in which it occurred. Poor wife is victimized for something for which she was not at all responsible. In Case No-17/98 of All Women Police Station (S.P.), husband and wife were both holding good status in the society and both were economically independent. Husband was abusing her on a slightest excuse. Day by day it was increasing beyond her tolerance and one day she was severely tortured physically by her husband. In Case No-165/2000, Jalukbari P.S, husband was looking for some excuse to get rid of her for not fulfilling his dowry demand. On June 5, 2000 husband picked up a quarrel with his wife and set fire on her.

21.6% brides suffered when husbands and in-laws tried to kill them. 14.4% brides were threatened to be killed at their marital home by their husbands and in-laws. 12.9% brides were victims of attempted murder by burning; 7.6% by strangulation; 0.96% were by poisoning. Husbands and in-laws applied all kinds of cruel methods to kill the brides. In violent families, women were very unsafe where husbands were supposed to be their protectors. Sometimes women tried to commit suicide out of despair and helplessness. 6.7% tried to commit suicide. In Case No-69/92, Latasil P.S, wife attempted committing suicide by setting fire on herself. The reason behind her suicidal attempt was inhuman torture and family problem. She was in critical condition and her survival chance was dim. In Case No-208/91, Jalukbari P.S, the never ending greed for more dowry left the bride and her family in despair. The poor parents tried their level best to fulfil their increasing demands for more and more dowry. But her husband and in-laws tried to burn her by pouring kerosene oil. In Case No-120/94 and Case No-58/94, Azara P.S. the women suffered extreme form of
marital violence for dowry. While expressing their helpless state they said they felt they could get rid of such agony only by committing suicide.

By applying different methods husbands and in-laws try to kill brides. The most popular among them was burning by pouring kerosene oil. Different cases such as Case No- 122/93, 162/200, Chndmari P.S, Case No-178/2000, Basistha P.S, and Case No-5/93, 26/94, 162/2000, All Women P.S, gave a vivid picture of such incidents. Second best method was strangulation. Even poisoning was done to kill the bride. In Case No- 325/92, Paltan Bazar P.S; evidence of throwing his wife in railway track, while train was coming, with the intention of killing her was also there. In that process she fractured herself very badly. He took another attempt to kill her by causing a road accident. In some cases husbands tried to choke wives by sitting on the chest and pressing the necks by hands. In case No-45/99, All Women P.S, a husband tried to kill his pregnant wife by a broken bottle. Slamming them against the wall and throwing them on the floor and injuring critically was another method of torturing wives. Knifing, cutting by machete and using a dagger to kill the wives were also resorted to in Case No-35/95 and 53/99, All Women P.S.

Most of the wives swallow their pride and plead with the husbands not to turn them out of the house or to desert them. Women by nature are affectionate and submissive. They love even their violent partners and feel guilty to complain against them. Many women believe that they can change their violent husband and can pacify the husband’s violent urges with love, care and sympathy. 49.3% wives were forced to leave their marital home. A large number of them requested the husbands to accept them on their own terms, however insulting and degrading those terms may be. As if physical violence on the brides was not enough, sometimes they were thrown out without their infants or young children who were very much dependent on their mothers. 4.1% wives were thrown out of the house without their children. In Case No-58/95, Jalukbari P.S, the woman was abused for dowry by her husband and in-laws and on February 18, 95 was thrown out keeping back her children for not fulfilling
their dowry demand. In Case No-74/96, Noonmati P.S, and in Case No-21/95, 9/99, 18/99, All Women P.S, wives were thrown out without their children from their marital homes.

3.3% wives had no place to go and became shelter-less. In Case No-31/95, Geetanagar P.S, the lady of the house had been battered by her husband for 20 years and she was tolerating this only for her 3 daughters. On March 14, 95, he came in a drunken condition with prostitute girls and threw her out of the house with her 3 daughters. After 20 years of tolerance of her husband’s torture, she and her daughters became shelter-less. In Case No-44/95 and 31/98, All Women P.S, wives became shelter-less when they were thrown out of their marital homes. In Case No-10/96, All Women P.S, wife was maltreated and thrown out by the in-laws for her low caste though they had love marriage.

When women left home after violent attack, men by applying several strategies like apologies, tears, regrets and so on frequently expressed their desires to continue the relationship. Sometimes husbands called them back with the promise of not committing the same crime again. But very soon they had forgotten their promises and assaulted them cruelly, so much so that the victims were forced to leave their husbands’ places. In some occasions wives came back of their own to their marital place with the hope of seeing some change for the better. But unfortunately the scenario remained the same; and they were compelled to leave their marital homes again. In that process sometimes one time, sometimes two times, sometimes several times they were forced to leave their marital place. Sometimes while continuing violence they applied another strategy, like threat to the women’s personal security and to that of her children. In Case No-27/96, 23/97, All Women P.S, women were thrown out from their marital homes by applying this method.

The women who were compelled to come back from their marital homes were also haunted by their husbands’ right to their parents’ place and had to face verbal and
physical assaults and life threats. Even their parents and other family members had to suffer humiliation to the extent of physical abuse for marrying the girl to such an abusive person. Husbands even sometimes twisted the whole episode in such a way that he was justified to do what he did. In Case No-289/94, Jalukbari P.S, the woman was compelled to leave for parents’ place with a 1 year 6 months old son as she was victim of inhuman torture by her husband and in-laws for dowry. Her husband did not spare her even at her parents’ place and attacked her and her tender child. She was so helpless that she said she was left with no other choice but committing suicide.

In some cases, wives were deprived of their stridhan by being forced to leave in a very hostile situation; most of the time they had to leave their house in their wearing apparel. In 15.7% cases wives mentioned specifically about their stridhan, which they could not bring back and thus were deprived of their only economic possessions. They feared life threat if they would try to enter the house for getting back their jewellery and stridhan.

8.1% wives were deprived from economic support. They were not given money, food, clothes, medicine and other requirements. Sometimes they had to take help of their parents and other family members to get economic support. Most of the time, they suffered poverty for the cruel attitude of their husbands and in-laws. Case No-119/92, Panbazar P.S, and Case No-34/97, 40/99, 52/99, All Women P.S, had complaints of economic deprivation.

One of the methods of domestic violence was wrongful confinement of wives. They were locked in a room without food and were not allowed to meet anyone, especially their parents and relatives. 6.7% women suffered confinement. In most of the cases they were assaulted physically by being locked up in a room. On some occasions children were also kept in confinement with their mothers and mothers were assaulted in front of them. Isolation and lack of personal contacts with friends and family create further stress. A woman lodged complaint in All Women P.S, Case No-27/97, about
the cruelty of her husband who confined her in a room and beat her to the extent of fracturing her hand and leg. In another case (Case No-6/96, All Women P.S), a newly married bride was kept in confinement. Even she was not provided with food, clothes etc. Her husband was alcoholic and cruel. She became mentally depressed, isolated from the rest of the world. One day she fled from captivity. In Case No-38/97, All Women P.S, wife lodged complaint about her confinement by her husband in a room without food. In Case No-43/99, All Women P.S, wife was beaten mercilessly for dowry with fists and blows and it injured her nose and broke her spectacles. She suffered severe pain and head injury. She was kept in confinement with her minor daughter completely out of touch from the rest of the world. She was the only daughter of her parents. Her parents wanted to rescue her and feared possibility of her murder along with her child by her husband. In some cases women’s movements were restricted. They were not allowed to move out of the house without husband or any member of the family. In Case No-16/98, All Women P.S and Case No-54/98, Lataasil P.S, the wives suffered captivity. In Case No-217/91, Chandmari P.S and Case No-16/2000, All Women P.S, children were also kept in confinement and battered along with their mothers to frighten the victims.

Very often isolation was imposed by the husbands and the in-laws who confiscated and destroyed the victims’ clothes. In some cases wives’ going to shops was strictly restricted. Sometimes the isolation was self-imposed because of shame and unwillingness to reveal what had happened to them. The wives who were regularly tortured by husbands and in-laws and suffered injuries all over their bodies wanted to hide themselves from the society to avoid an awkward position in front of others. They would be given different reasons for such injuries as they were not willing to expose their helpless condition.

As per research finding, pregnant women are battered more. As a result the impact on children to be born becomes serious. During pregnancy 14.7% wives suffered domestic violence. It was a common tendency of the husbands and in-laws to hit with
punches and kicks the protruding stomach and private parts of the brides during pregnancy. Even during pregnancy and after delivery women were made to do all hard jobs, which their health was not permitting. They were not even given food, medicines, and clothes in such delicate condition and the husbands put all the burden of expenditure on wives' parental families. Many wives suffered abortions due to such cruel treatment. The extreme torture by husband and in-laws caused untimely delivery by operation on emergency basis, which cost their lives in some cases. It is not yet explained why batterers usually become more physically abusive to the women during pregnancy. The pre-natal child abuse, which escalated during pregnancy with repeated blows on the wife's protruding belly, resulted in abortions in many cases. In a number of cases some husbands felt jealous with the presence of infants or young children, as wife's attention got diverted to young one and she was unable to provide much time to her husband. The pregnant wives also suffered burn injury and the perpetrators were their husbands and in-laws. In most of the cases the cause of such torture was dowry. One barbaric act of domestic violence was registered in the Basistha P.S, Case No-178/2000; where husband and in-laws tried to kill a pregnant wife by setting her ablaze only for their greed for a plot of land and she was hanging between life and death in the hospital bed. In another case (All Women P.S, Case No 22/95) during 7 months pregnancy, wife was assaulted for dowry to such an extent that she became unconscious and on an emergency basis a premature baby was delivered by operation. Her condition deteriorated and she became very critical. A case was registered in All Women P.S, Case No 3/94 in which a woman was deprived by her husband and in-laws of food and medicine during her pregnancy and was made to do all household chores as a result of which her baby boy died in the womb and daughter was delivered by operation. Her widow mother had to bear all expenses of her delivery, medicines and food. After delivery also she was not spared from such cruelty and made to do all odd jobs without food and medicine. At last she was thrown out, as her mother could not fulfil their demand for a car as dowry. A bride had to face all kinds of inhuman torture by her husband for dowry (Case No-20/94, All Women P.S). The demand for a plot of land was the cause of all torture. She was assaulted by kicks, fists and blows
injuring every part of her body; endangering her life, limb and health. During 5 months' pregnancy he kicked her private parts and abdomen in presence of her in-laws. In drunken mood he used to treat her with hostility. On April 29, 94 she was thrown out when she was pregnant. Case No-119/92, Jalukbari P.S; Case No-73/99. Basistha P.S; and 13/95, All Women P.S; carried the heinous story of wife abuse during pregnancy. In case No-45/99, All Women P.S, a husband tried to kill his pregnant wife by a broken bottle. In one case, she was made to work whole day in a post caesarian condition with infant child on her arm and another child being a toddler. She used to get beating if she could not show efficiency in her work and was later thrown out without her minor children.

In 5.2% cases wives were forced by their husbands and in-laws to sign some documents or blank papers. In two cases wives were even killed after making life insurance (LIC) in their name. In Case No- 45/99, 53/99, 66/99, All Women P.S. brides were compelled to sign blank papers by their husbands and in-laws to gain some economic and other benefits.

Sometimes wives were treated like maidservants, making them work throughout the day for the whole family whereas others were ordering around. In Case No-13/2000, All Women P.S, a bride from a middle class family was treated like maid-servant. She was not allowed to sit at the dining table with other family members and was given food in a corner of the kitchen. She was not even allowed to sleep in her bedroom and was given a small room near kitchen to sleep. All kinds of odd jobs like drawing water from well, mopping the house at night, washing clothes, utensils, and cooking for whole family was assigned to her. The cruelty on her by her husband and in-laws compelled her to leave the house. One housewife in a joint family said, “They did not think anything of me and they never consider me as a part of the family. But like a servant, I have to do all day the cleaning work, washing of clothes, cooking, washing of utensils and running of everyone’s errands without taking any rest and no one is bothered about me”. In a number of cases husbands never hesitated to insult their
wives in presence of servants or other family members. In Case No-33/96, All women P.S, the wife was made to sleep on the floor while her husband was sleeping comfortably on the bed. He used to insult her in presence of servants and used to torture her for dowry. In Case No-18/95, All Women P.S, a wife was tortured in presence of her servant.

One peculiar method, which had been applied to torture a bride, was tearing up her dresses or removing dresses making her naked and throwing her out of the house. Extreme humiliation they had to face when they were driven out in naked or half naked condition. “The beating wasn’t as painful as the humiliation of being unclothed in front of others”, said Nirmala (name changed). 4.1% brides had to go through such cruelty and humiliation perpetrated by their husbands and in-laws. In Case No-220/95, Noonmati P.S, the woman was thrown out after removing her saree and making her almost naked by her mother-in-law for not fulfilling the demand for dowry. Even in Case No-16/95, All Women P.S, the woman had to go through same humiliation and inhuman treatment.

In some of the cases women were cheated in the name of marriage. In Case No-29/95, 30/97, 37/98, All Women P.S, all the women were cheated, humiliated and never got the status of wives as some of the husbands were already married or deserted them after making them pregnant. In Case No-30/97, All Women P.S, the woman was cheated with the false hope of marriage and later on deserted when she became pregnant. The girl came to know afterwards that he was already married. In Case No-30/97, All Women P.S, a girl was trapped with the false hope of marriage and when she became pregnant he deserted her. A son was born out of that relationship. Later on she came to know that he was already married.

In domestic violence cases, the sufferings of the some women became more as their husbands went untraced. In Case No- 24/2000, All Women P.S, the woman suffered burn injury caused by her husband as they had quarrel and after putting her in hospital
he went untraced. In Case No-121/91, Dispur P.S, wife suffered all kinds of abuses by her husband and in-laws for dowry and twice she had been driven out. During her pregnancy they did not provide her food and medicine as a modus operandi to get rid of her and finally her husband conspired with his parents to become untraced from his wife. In Case No-78/2000, Jalukbari P.S, the bride was never accepted by her in-laws as they had love marriage. On February 2000, her mother-in-law assaulted her severely in the absence of her husband and threatened her of dire consequences of giving another marriage of her husband. After that her husband was missing. Even in Case No-10/99, All Women P.S, husband went missing. This is nothing but a kind of cheating and domestic violence.

In some cases, child marriage brought lots of agony for the girls characterized by widespread rape and a life of servility and a range of negative health implications, which were causing untold number of pregnancies.

Some wives disclosed their sexual abuse. In Case No-4/99, All Women P.S, wife was sold for prostitution in Bengal. In Case No-252/92, Dispur P.S, husband tried to exploit his wife as a sex object for his seniors and other people. On denial she had been tortured more. Her health deteriorated for such cruel behaviour. She was tortured all along for dowry like a scooter; money etc. In Case No-3/93, All Women P.S, husband allowed his friends to outrage his wife’s modesty. He along with his brother humiliated her and indulged their friends to sexually abuse her. They had love marriage and were working in the same office. The cases of marital rape were also there in some of the cases. They were forced to become pregnant even if their health was not permitting. They were also forced to go for sex determination tests and then for abortions. Denial of contraceptive protection is also a form of sexual violence. In many cases fathers-in-law tried to rape the daughters-in-law. In Case No-54/93, Noonmati P.S, the woman was suffering physical and mental torture for dowry by her husband and in-laws. Moreover her father-in-law was an ill reputed person and tried to rape her. When she was 7 months pregnant her husband and in-laws tried to set fire on
her. A passer-by saved her life and she was thrown out of marital home. In Case No-995/98, Dispur P.S, the father-in-law tried to rape the daughter-in-law.

Some of the widows suffer ill treatment at the hands of their in-laws. Nila Das's (name changed) husband died after 4 years of marriage leaving a young son. Her in-laws started torturing her mentally and physically accusing her of being the cause of the death of her husband and bringing bad luck to the family. They kept Nila and her son starved. Nila said during interview “one day, I decided to go out in search of a job so that I could take care of myself and my son. On returning home, I found that my son was locked out of the house and was left standing in rain. When I protested, my brother-in-law threw me out of the house.” Nila now lives with her brother. Her sister-in-law (brother's wife) is unhappy about it. She said, “My sister-in-law often beats me and threatens to kick me out of the house in the absence of my brother. I always keep quiet and bear everything silently. I have no place to go. I know that life will be more difficult if I decide to leave my brother’s place.”

**Causes of domestic violence** - Different domestic violence cases showed the diverse causes of violence like dowry, alcoholism, poverty, machoism, psychosexual problems, unemployment, immaturity, illness, upbringing, high expectations and different levels of tolerance. The societal acceptance of violence and the household environment sometimes provoked domestic violence.

Family structure plays a major role in domestic violence. It was not very clear in the reports about the structures of families under this investigation whether they had joint or nuclear families. The concept of nuclear family excludes the close relatives of the husbands and makes it free from social control. Lack of this control creates conflicting situation in the family even on trivial matters. The newly married women find no scope to understand their husbands.
From the study it was found that 16.3% of women were newly married, so their families were apparently limited within husband and wife. 33.6% families had one child; 10.5% families had 2 children; 3.3% had 3 children and 36.05% cases did not mention about the children. Because of the violent attitude of husband and in-laws, the family could not blossom. The study showed that in maximum number of cases, the victims were newly married and were tortured and compelled to leave the marital home. Even during pregnancies they were brutally tortured, sometimes at the cost of the lives of the babies who were not even born and putting the life of the pregnant wives at risk. During the expansion of the families, the wives were tortured without considering the present and future of the children, completely ruining the normal growth of the families. One important trend was noticeable in the violent families that all the mishaps took place in early stage and with the age and time the intensity of violence became less. Of course in some cases, the violent husbands and in-laws were too aggressive to adjust and it was seen that the desperate attempts of the wives to save the marriage also failed. Many of the women with children reported that they were concerned about the effect that the violence had on the children. Several women said they were worried that their children would grow up believing violence to be an
acceptable part of a relationship. In Case No- 21/99, All Women P.S, within 2 months of marriage, bride had to leave the marital home for physical violence. To mention a few more, in All Women P.S, Case No-7/99, 10/99, 19/99, 50/99 marital life of the wives concerned lasted just a few months owing to domestic violence. The diagram shows that newly married wives are more vulnerable in marital violence.

The educational background of the victims was not clear from the reports as it was not mentioned in the FIRs. The findings show that 5% victims were illiterate (could know from their thumb impression in the reports) and rest were literate. The interviews showed that victims' educational background ranged from primary level to university level.

The economic backgrounds of the victims determine their social status and the role it was playing in the cause and effect system. The victims of domestic violence from the poor families were 8%; from lower middle class were 54%, from middle class were 37%; and from upper middle class were 1%. This trend showed that maximum numbers of violent families were in the lower middle class families and minimum were in upper middle class families. Women without independent access to land or housing are extremely vulnerable to domestic violence. Many women in these situations are forced into becoming homeless, in addition to the physical and mental trauma they and their children face due to such violence. In our society almost all men are owners of resources and active contributors to the economy and women were secluded from productive work and are confined to the dependent roles of wife and mother. The wives are sometimes too poor to leave the abusive husbands. Her dependency on him, which may have been feigned initially to gratify his ego, has probably become quite real as she has children and her ability to support herself diminishes when she really wants to escape an abusive relationship; she may find herself economically immobilized. Many women recalled that physical violence often occurred when they had become more dependent on their husbands. One woman said that her husband had begun 'to feel so safe in the relationship, that he could do
anything.' In the diagram it is seen that maximum number of lower middle class women suffered domestic violence.

3.2 Domestic Violence: The Economic Background of the Victims

One of the major causes of violence was dowry. During the period from 1991 to 2000, in Guwahati city, there were 126 dowry torture cases among 208 domestic violence cases, i.e. 60.5% of the total. Cruelty by husbands and in-laws were manifest in 39.5% (82) cases. Dowry system was not a part and parcel of Assamese culture. Dowry was introduced with the passage of time which has reduced a woman to a mere chattel. In recent years dowry system in Assam has spread both horizontally and vertically in the sense that it has spread to such regions and communities, which until recently, did not have it and which, in fact, had the bride price system. Vertically here is in the sense that there has been a sharp increase in the amount of dowry demanded and given. Some amount of wealth always changed hands in Assamese marriages. This may be bride price in the form of cash or kind, or gifts known as stridhan in form of cash, utensils, jewellery etc. It was willingly given and accordingly accepted as a part of stridhan. It was not extorted nor demanded.
Dowry system is the manifestation of male domination in the society as the system prevails even today. Greed for money and other material objects is a constant factor contributing to the escalating violence on women right at their homes. Dowry has been the driving force behind many crimes against women, for example sex-determination tests and sex selective abortions, child marriage, trafficking and domestic violence. Persistent demands for dowry on the bride and her parents led to the oppressive conduct of the spouse/in-laws resulting in harassment, death or in commission of suicide. Though dowry system was not there in Assam, the present trend showed a totally different picture.

Maximum number of dowry torture cases was reported by Hindu Assamese 34.9%, followed by Assamese Muslim and Bengali Hindu, 26.1% each. In the case of Hindi speaking people it was 7.1%; for Nepali Hindu 3.1%; for Nepali Christian, Oriya Hindu and Manipuri 0.7% each.

3.3 Cases of Dowry Torture Community wise

The institution of dowry is closely associated with the rise in industrial capitalism and commercialization of economy and consequent wealth based status competitions. The
dowry system has not only become a very rigid custom, which has been strongly adhered to, but also an avenue for some families to display and enhance their status and economic worth. Parents feel inescapable obligation to marry off their daughters because a grown up and unmarried daughter is still a matter of adverse social comment and thus they reluctantly succumb to demand for dowries. It ruins them economically and but demeans them socially if they fail to marry off the daughters properly. Conversely the parents of the grooms hope to extract maximum dowry during the marriage of their sons. Data available indicate that domestic violence and dowry problems are there more in lower middle class people. However, upper class families are also victims of this problem.

The modern idea of dowry is not confined to clothes, jewellery, utensils, furniture or other items of day-to-day use but is extended to arranging the boy’s trips abroad, investing in a business or building a house for him. The never-ending demand for dowry continues even after marriage in the name of gifts during festivals or other occasions with new pretexts. The study showed that the fathers of the brides were compelled to sell their property and to incur heavy debts just to meet the dowry demands. The very practice of dowry system practically cannot satisfy the never ending demand for dowry, which leads to constant nagging and bullying and can damage the human spirit. In short, the groom and his kins look upon the woman not as his life partner and a member of the family but a piece of property brought from bride’s parents which can be encashed in whatever way they please.

The face of dowry violence has changed. There is a whole new lifestyle, particularly among the upper middle classes, which is continually encouraged by the media, the advertisers and by the whole array of consumer goods. Even the present generation girls believe that marriage would not have a good start without an ostentatious wedding accompanied with gifts—an idea which has spread to the less affluent classes and other communities also. The middle-class people at Guwahati especially those who have marriageable daughters at home are suffering. The expectations of status
conscious people of the modern generation are skyrocketing. Neeta Deka of Ulubari (Name changed) who had a marriageable daughter was experiencing sleepless nights thinking about how to procure such a huge amount of money for her daughter’s marriage. Many families are suffering the same manner like Neeta Deka.

The demands are usually settled during the marriage ceremony and at the time of marriage settlement. Sometimes the girls’ parents make false promises of part payment of dowry, fearing that the girl may remain unmarried, resulting in delayed payments or failure to pay the remaining part of dowry. A case was registered in All Women P.S, Guwahati, Case Number-22/95, where parents could not keep the promise of paying the remaining dowry demand of Rs.5000 after the marriage as her father had no capacity and believed that after marriage everything will be all right. The bride had to suffer all kinds of cruelty by her husband and in-laws for not fulfilling the promise. The demand continues after the marriage. If the parents and kin of the bride failed to fulfil the commitments, the poor girl is penalized. She is abused, beaten, driven out of the house or deserted by the husband and even divorced. At times she is forced to commit suicide or even killed by husband and in-laws. To pressurize a woman, even the children are tortured and she is threatened that her husband would get married again. The parents have to succumb to the demands to see that the daughter can have respite from the atrocities and may live a smooth life. At times the poor parents have to borrow the money, sell the land and the house or whatever property they owned, but the flow of demands continues. Sometimes the groom’s parents feel that they have spent money for qualifying their son, so they have every right to accept money in their son’s marriage.

In Case No-178/2000, Basistha P.S, the husband demanded share from the woman’s father’s landed property. On September 4, 2000, her husband set her on fire. She was pregnant and was hospitalized in a critical condition. In Case No-165/2000, Jalukbari P.S, wife was tortured mentally and physically all along, since her marriage, for dowry. On June 5, 2000 he picked up a quarrel with her and set her ablaze.
Neighbours saved her life by shifting her to hospital. In Case No-156/96, Jalukbari P.S, the dowry demand for Rs.20,000 made life of the wife hell and she was facing inhuman torture. On June 7, 996, her husband and in-laws tried to burn her. In Case No-325/92, Paltanbazar P.S, husband adopted torturous and cruel methods for extortion of money from his wife. When she expressed her inability to meet his growing demand of dowry, husband started torturing her mentally and physically and was planning to desert her. She was never given any economic support by her husband. On January 7, 92 he proposed to take her for a stroll and took her to the Bamunimaidan area by the side of the railway track and pushed her suddenly when train was coming. Somehow she could save her life but suffered multiple injuries. In Case No-29/98, All Women P.S, the torture for dowry started after 11 years of marriage. In Case Nos-23/94, 8/99, 20/99, 51/99, All Women P.S, the wives suffered domestic violence only for dowry. In Case No-105/99, Jalukbari P.S, the woman was tortured all along severely for dowry. All methods of cruelty were applied on her like slapping, beating by stick, boxing, kicking which made her grievously injured. They conspired to kill her by making her drunk and throwing her body in the river Brahmaputra. In Case No-28/97, All Women P.S, and Case No-366/97, Dispur P.S, the husbands and in-laws conspired to kill the brides by different methods.

In domestic violence cases, 7.2% had love marriage. But within a short period of their marriage they had to face the cruel reality of their husband’s violent attitude. In some cases men hooked up innocent young girls in their trap for extortion of money and show their true colour after their marriage when they start torturing with the intention of fleecing money from parents as dowry. The whole dream of having a ‘happy home’ gets shattered with a tragic end. A victim of domestic violence who had love marriage narrated her story that before marriage Ajay (name changed) said he could not live without her and promised the world to her. After marriage everyone said that she made the best choice as Ajay had the best credentials. But gradually, the autocrat within the loving husband surfaced. He narrowed down her world and ran her down every chance that he got, until her self-esteem was zero. Initially Diya (name changed) was in denial
and believed, she was responsible for all the beating she was getting and that she must be doing something wrong. Realization came much later when one day she was appreciated in her workplace and got promotion for that and her earnings became more than her husband's. She started getting beating from her husband after that and he became mad out of jealousy and inferiority complex. She decided to end her life, as no one, including her parents and friends would believe that her 'perfect' husband could be such a demon. Diya had changed her mind and rediscovered herself and decided to snap the relationship with such abusive husband who failed to provide her physical, emotional or any other security. She was one of the many victims of domestic violence and endless numbers of such victims are suffering from such torture from their husbands. For Diya, she had a plus point that she was a working lady and economically independent. But in case of the dependent wives, there was no escape route from such violent relationship and they remained trapped. In case, they were forced to leave marital home, they faced endless problems from identity crises to shelter problems and poverty.

In this study 4.1% working ladies suffered domestic violence and the reasons are varied. Among them one was a lecturer in a prestigious college, one schoolteacher, one gazetted officer in Deputy Commissioner's office, one working in the state secretariat, three were wage earners, one midwife and one a working woman who did not mention about her nature of job. Considering all variables of age, education, family composition, occupation and income etc. together, it could be discerned that wife battering was there across all class boundaries and has no relation with a particular socio economic background. The data proved that the percentage of violence against homemakers was much more than that against working women. Normally in our social set up, men are owners of resources and active contributors to the economy and women are confined to the dependent roles of wife and mother, as they don't have economic independence. It has been seen that professional women are less at risk than homemaker women. The professional women can get out of relationship because of their greater access to resources.
Study indicated that economically independent women were also at risk and suffered domestic violence. Their husbands and in-laws consider the earning as a kind of dowry in instalments. In the patriarchal society men folk expect their wives to remain completely submissive. Case No-17/98 and Case No-35/2000, All Women P.S, could be appropriate example of such cases. It was seen that if daughter-in-law was working, mother-in-law became jealous for the freedom of daughter-in-law, which she never could enjoy and the resultant frustration led her to behave violently with daughter-in-law. Indian sons are more loyal to their mothers and become agitated by the poisoning of ears by their mothers. In several cases these kinds of instances were available. One working woman said in the interview that how she suffered working hard in the office and also at home to please the husband and in-laws. But unfortunately all her hard work carried no meaning and was criticized always by husband and in-laws. In another case one woman said that with small kids she was struggling very hard to manage both home front and office job, but could not satisfy her family members. Her mother-in-law was after her to make her leave the job though she herself was not willing to leave an attractive bank job. The poor wives were always at fault for everything, for cooking unwanted dishes, for not keeping the house in proper shape and tidy, for not looking after children properly and for not playing housewife’s role efficiently. Dislike by husband and mother-in-law of anything done by the housewife gave the former right to beat her to set her right. Study indicated that percentage of victims who suffered from domestic violence was much less among working women (only 4.1%) than those who were not engaged in paid job outside their homes.

Men prefer subordinate women to equals. In one case where wife was working in a prestigious college in Guwahati and husband was in an inferior job, he always treated his wife violently. His inferiority complex and male ego instigated him against his wife. Wife could not bear the torture anymore and lodged a complaint to police to get respite from the violent husband. A young wife was studying L.L.B and her husband was only matriculate. Her husband tried to obstruct her from taking further education. For that reason he became violent to his wife and tried all possible ways to stop her
from acquiring further education. On some occasions husbands prefer to desert their wives for such ego problem. One wife was a gazetted officer and was holding a prestigious position but was deserted by her husband after a few years of marriage for no fault of her though they had love marriage. Some instances were there where wives were compelled to leave good jobs just to protect their marriages.

6.7% of cases of domestic violence owed to the birth of a girl child. Husbands and in-laws became hostile to the brides for delivering a girl child and torture started. Sometimes even the young girl child became the target of domestic violence. The demand for a male child is an important trigger for domestic violence with women bearing the brunt for their perceived ‘inability’ to provide a male child, and this is often used as an excuse for bigamy and desertion. The women are forced to undergo sex determination test to know the gender of the child and are compelled to get aborted if it is a girl. It showed that among the Assamese Hindus 5.7% cases of domestic violence were for giving birth of a girl child. 1.9% (4) in Assamese Muslim families and 0.48% in Nepali Hindu family suffered domestic violence for giving birth of a girl child. In Case Nos-36/95, 43/95, 11/96, 39/98, 41/98, 70/99, All Women P.S, the reason behind domestic violence was birth of a girl child. In Case No-5/93, All Women P.S, a Bengali Hindu woman was deserted by her husband as she was childless. Her husband got married again and became very cruel to her and she was compelled to leave the house. In Case No-19/96, All Women P.S, a woman was victim of violence as her child was handicapped.

27.4% were thrown out from their homes by their husbands and in-laws for different reasons like dowry, delivering girl child or not having any issue and for many other reasons. Case No-27/96, 23/97, All Women P.S, can be mentioned in this connection. 33.1% wives left their marital home when the torture became unbearable for them. In Case No-116/92, Bharalumukh P.S, the bride was thrown out as her parents could not fulfil the never ending dowry demand. Several times she was thrown out from the marital home with a new demand for dowry items and could come back after fulfilling
them. On March 1990, she was thrown out again as she could not bring a scooter. On January 1991, she came to know that her husband was again getting married. They turned the sacred meaning of marriage to a business deal and that business has no ethics.

In the study it was found that 38.4% cases of domestic violence were caused by alcoholic husbands. In most of the cases husbands become more aggressive, cruel and hostile and abused their wives in the state of intoxication. The evil affects of alcohol resulted in susceptibility to crimes. Excessive drinking resulted in starvation for the family members, assaults, quarrel between husband and wife and desertion of wife by husband. Many families crumbled because of alcoholic husbands.

Alcoholism is one of the key reasons for domestic violence. Reena Kakoty, the OC of All Women police station commented that domestic violence cases are increasing in Guwahati. Alcohol incites husbands to become more violent with their wives she said. Kushal Saikia, who is incharge of counselling centre at CID office, stated that alcohol was playing a great role to increase violence on women. According to Saikia, 40% cases of violence took place under the influence of liquor and to curb the problem of violence against women, a public agitation is required. In Case No-125/98, Jalukbari P.S, an unemployed alcoholic husband for his incapability to provide food asked his wife to die with his children by consuming poison when wife asked for food. In most of the cases where husbands were unemployed, they were also alcoholic. Many women suffered poverty and torture that alcoholism brought upon their families. Alcoholic husbands had money for buying alcohol but not provisions for sustaining their families. Liquor and poverty were a clearly linked equation in most of the cases. One woman who was doing a petty job said that her hard earned money was snatched away by her alcoholic unemployed husband and it became a major cause of marital violence. To some extent it affects middle class and upper middle class people. In Case No-171/91, Latasil P.S, the husband was alcoholic and used to beat his wife in intoxicated condition. On September 19, her husband was beating her since morning
in drunken condition. In the afternoon when she was preparing tea for her husband, he poured kerosene and caused burns on her in presence of her daughter. She was hospitalized in a critical condition.

There is a big question mark about alcohol whether it induces violent behaviour directly or acts as a disinhibitor of pre-existing aggressive tendencies, because the drunkard husband battered only his wife, not the other members of the family. Moreover all people who take alcohol are not wife beater. Whatever was the reason, it was a fact that alcohol played havoc in families and tendencies of violence aggravated in intoxicated condition.

Drugs also played havoc in marital relationship. In Guwahati in 1997, a young girl got married to a drug addict, whereas her family was completely in dark about it. The newly wed bride had to suffer all kinds of physical and mental torture by her husband as he demanded more and more money from his wife to sustain his drug abuse. The marriage hardly could last for 4 months. In Case No-27/95, All Women P.S, a victim woman revealed that she had no problem during first 3 years of her marital life. But when her husband became addicted to alcohol and bhang, he started abusing her with the demand for money. Once she fainted for the merciless beating by her husband as the frequent demand for money could not be fulfilled.

6.7% women suffered domestic violence for bigamy. After marrying another woman, they become more cruel to their first wife. The study showed that in some of the cases the second wife was in dark at the time of her marriage about the fact that she was getting married with a married person. They too in some cases suffer ill treatment from their husbands. In Case Nos-5/93, 26/95, 40/97, 41/97, 1/00, 6/99, All Women P.S, the principal reason for domestic violence was bigamy.

Extra marital relations constituted 3.8% cases of domestic violence. Extra marital relations affected the peace and happiness of family life. If anyone suffered any kind
of indignity in this vicious maze, it was the wife. When her husband had left her for another woman, she felt humiliated and rejected. To feel that she was second best or the second choice was heartbreaking for the wife. For her, everything was at stake - her dignity, her husband, her love and her home. In Case No-114/92, Fatasil P.S. a woman was married for 15 years, suffered confinement with her 3 children in a room without food and water as her husband got involved with another woman. In Case Nos-25/95, 15/96, 24/96, 17/99, 41/99, All Women P.S, women suffered domestic violence for extra marital relation of their husbands.

In Case No-104/99, Bharalumukh P.S, a wife, mother of 3 children, was a victim of a strong dictatorial attitude of her husband. For no reason she used to get severe beating from her husband. Her grown up children used to rescue her from their cruel father.

In some cases sons wanted to ensure their parents’ dominance in relation to their wives. Indian husbands in most of the cases give more importance to their mothers’ briefing than to the wife’s protests. In Guwahati, a wife got beating because she verbally contradicted her mother-in-law. He said, whatever his mother said was always right and wife had no right to argue with his mother. In another case in a joint family, wife tried to become little strict to her son who was pampered and spoilt by his grandparents. When this was relayed to her husband by her mother-in-law, her husband became mad at her and assaulted her physically. In most of the cases married women had to put up with ridicule or even downright denigration mostly at the hands of mother-in-law. Mothers-in-law, who were non-working and under complete dominance of their husbands, are jealous of and frustrated at the independence of their daughters-in-law who were working and earning money. There are examples when brides who resisted rape by father-in-law, brother-in-law or uncle-in-law were beaten up and later deserted on some other grounds.

Marital maladjustment is a cause of domestic violence - physical and mental incompatibility, resenting her mothers-in-law’s domination and the wife wanting to
live separately, etc. This maladjustment may arise both because of the personality characteristics of the husband as well as that of the wife and the environment in which marriage functions. Temperamental incompatibility in ways of thinking, working, dressing up and behaviour go a long way in making the husband and wife maladjusted. Thus husband reacts by neglecting the wife. Sometimes they start going to prostitutes for satisfying their desires.

Sometimes husbands were violent because of their nature, their superiority or inferiority complex, wife's personality traits and economic conflict. Battered victims were treated with extreme harshness. In some occasions wives got savage beatings for the most trivial reasons. Frequent quarreling and arguments often got more violent. Even sometimes violence started from the complaints about the women’s housekeeping, meal preparation and childcare. In Case No-12/2000, All Women P.S, a wife got beating for not preparing tea properly. In another case a wife was treated cruelly and thrown out from the house on the pretext of making rice little more than required. In another case husband used to beat his wife for not keeping house properly and not looking after the children according to his liking.

The degree and nature of wife beating was determined by the situational factors and got affected by stressful situation in the family, such as social stress in families; experiencing violence in childhood, the socio economic status of family, poverty, unemployment, conflict between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. In Case No-50/97, Azara P.S, husband had no source of income and after marriage husband and in-laws targeted the bride as a source of income and tortured her asking for dowry from her parental place and threatened to kill her otherwise. In another case where husband was jobless and demanded arrangement for him of a loan from UCO Bank as her father was a 4th grade employee of that bank. She was assaulted even with a piece of burning firewood as her father declared his inability to do so. In Case No-8/96, 49/99, 8/96, and 49/99, All Women P.S, Case No-50/97 of Azara P.S, a similar story was narrated how husbands’ unemployment became the cause of wives’ beating.
Sexual jealousy is a common cause of a violent episode. The jealous and possessive husbands could not tolerate wife's family members and created problems, which shattered the harmony at home. Some husbands were sadist by nature. They enjoyed torturing their wives and showing muscle power on them. Unhappy upbringing played a very important role in domestic violent cases. In one case husband was very suspicious about his wife and jealously guarded her life, never gave any freedom to her. Wife was even debarred from mixing freely with her parental family members. All such abnormal behaviour developed because of his insecure past and lack of self-confidence. In another incident, the husband had never seen his father giving any respect to his mother. His mother was illiterate, unimpressive and backdated and mother had no role in decision making. In later period the son never counted his wife about decision-making and economic management about his family, and wife was ignored all along; though his wife was highly capable and educated and contributed a lot for the family.

Child marriage is one of the causes of domestic violence. Among the registered cases of domestic violence, 3 cases of cruelty by husbands and one dowry death did mention the age of girls who were less than 18 years. In a dowry death case, a school going girl was kidnapped and forced to get married; later she was killed for dowry. The victims of domestic violence who had early marriage said that they were inefficient in household work and were ridiculed and harassed by their in-laws and husbands for that. Some of the victims of domestic violence regretted missing educational opportunity for their early marriage. Husbands treated them as doormat. Lack of education took away their future opportunities for gainful employment, personality development and happiness in life. A young woman in family court, Kamrup, narrated her sufferings for early marriage. She was hardly 14 when she got married – suffered from marital rape, as her husband was 15 years older than her. Her husband deprived her of economic support and even neglected her two minor children. She did not have means or qualification to earn her livelihood. Her husband deserted her and her two minor children for another woman when she was just 19. She was going regularly to
the family court to get maintenance. In Case No. 115/92, Fatasil Ambari P.S, a young girl of 17 years eloped with an idea of making a dream home and got married without the consent of her parents. After marriage the harsh reality left her completely shattered when her partner started assaulting her physically and mentally with the demand for dowry. She had no face to ask anything from her parents and tried to commit suicide by hanging. At last her parents rescued her. She had to leave her marital home with only the wearing apparel, as she was not allowed by her husband to take whatever jewellery she was wearing.

Marital rape was a neglected topic. Marital rape is an extension of the historic domination and control of husbands over wives. The law gave males power over wives – an institutional legitimacy. Rape violated her bodily integrity, because of the patriarchal ownership of her sexuality; it was not possible for a man to rape his wife as she belonged to him. Another wife said that to cope with her husband’s physical demand was not possible, so she used to get beating regularly. In another case, wife’s health did not permit her to satisfy her husband’s sexual need everyday and this led her to suffer cruelty by her husband who finally deserted her. A wife expressed her frustration that her husband never could satisfy her physical requirement and to cover his inadequacy he became violent.

Social customs force brides to live in a violent home. The family members, friends and relatives discourage her. They all want her to try and patch up as man’s ego is sensitive; he cannot bear humiliation and will never pardon her if she lodges a complaint with the police. Sometimes even parents remain silent. Case studies gave examples of such incidents. Even parents themselves ignore the complaints by daughters of their harassment and turn a deaf ear to their wanting to come back to the parental homes. They advise her, sometimes even pressurize her and often force her to stay and adjust and stick to their marital home. They are afraid of social stigma. Many women felt duty bound to parents not to bother the latter as marriages involve lots of expenditure and suffered extreme violence, even torturous deaths. The attitude of
husbands is typical. They are mostly not repentant and would convincingly throw the whole blame on the woman. She has no power to enforce her wishes the way the husband has. Everyone urges the woman to make the marriage work.

Several factors also encouraged discriminative behaviour with their wives – such as illicit relation with some women, nagging nature of wife, wife’s chronic illness, and wife’s paying more attention to her own parents and siblings, neglecting husband’s family members etc. Some husbands are unforgiving, gloomy, and sullen and find it more difficult to develop deep affection for their spouse.

**Effects of Domestic Violence** - 23.4% wives had to visit hospital and taken medical treatment for the grievous injury inflicted on them in marital violence – some of them with fractured bones, some with bleeding nose and mouth, some with dark eyes and injury all over the bodies. Wives normally preferred to avoid hospitalization unless it was very grievous, rather they preferred seeking medical treatment at home than being hospitalized. 4.8% victims were hospitalized in critical condition. 3.8% brides were in critical condition after the violent attack of husbands and in-laws and their chances of survival were very dim. Among the victims who were in critical condition, 1.9% suffered serious burn injuries. One of them was hospitalized with 95% burn injury. 0.96% wives were tortured severely during pregnancy and were in critical condition. 0.96% wives tried to commit suicide and their chances of survival were less.

“It is better to die in one go than a little everyday” said a victim and there are many more who have chosen death as the easy way out. Death relieves these hapless women from the untold misery of physical, emotional and economic abuse by their husbands and often by their in-laws. It is common enough for a wife to get battered and emotionally traumatized by the husband. More often than not they choose to suffer in silence. In India domestic violence often get mixed up with dowry violence and the society fails to give serious weight to domestic violence against women committed by
a male alcoholic or a sadist. Statistics reveal that at least 20% of Indian married women between the age of 15-49 experience domestic violence on a continual basis.²

8.6% wives suffer regular threat by violent husband and in-laws of remarriage of their husbands. In Case No-328/99, Jalukbari P.S, Case No-632/99, 763/2000, Dispur P.S, Case No-17/96, 65/99, All Women P.S, the victim wives suffered physical abuse along with the constant threat of remarriage of their husbands, sometimes for more dowry or some other reasons.

In 8.5% cases wives left their marital homes several times when the torture became unbearable for them. But violence was a strategy for the husbands about whether to retain or replace their wives.

Sometimes abused women interpreted this violence as an expression of care for them. Many women who were living in violent families suffered from a complex. They even felt discredited and suffered identity crises. Violence and constant criticism led those battered wives to a loss of self-esteem and confidence. Gradually they start believing that they were worthless in life as they were told repeatedly by their husbands and in-laws. When interviewed some abused women showed their lack of confidence and blamed their luck and destiny for whatever happened to them. Some of them blamed their inefficiency and manifested their inferiority complex and feeling of guilt.

Women abused by husbands face similar health problems whether they live in a modern city in the industrial world or a traditional village. Other than physical injuries the battered women develop somatic symptoms headache, backache, abdominal and pelvic pain, fatigue, recurrent vaginal infection, eating and sleeping disorder, sexual dysfunction and sometimes they suffer from moderate to severe depression, hypertension and heart problem. Victims of sexual abuse and domestic violence suffer from increased risk of suicide, depression, drug and alcohol abuse, hypertension, chronic pelvic pain, irritable bowel syndrome, asthma, gynecological problem and
variety of psychiatric disorders. Domestic violence has become a rising threat to the health of women by depriving them of food and forcing repetitive pregnancies for selective gender. These have taken their toll on women. An alarming 51.8% of married Indian women, between 15 and 49 years of age, suffer from anaemia. And nutritional anaemia contributes to 19% of maternal deaths. The problem is more acute among pregnant women. In Assam 69.7% women suffer from anaemia. The violence experienced by many wives is both prolonged and severe.

Most victims of violence first seek medical care for the secondary sequels of abuse rather than for initial abuse related trauma. The consequences of domestic violence are devastating, including life long emotional distress, mental health issues and reproductive health. The treatment of the wife as an inferior being is also counted as torture; self-esteem of the woman is badly damaged. They lose all meaning of life. When freedom is curbed to a married woman by her husband, she feels suffocated and leads a painful life. In Case No-995/98, Dispur police station a woman suffered from similar symptoms as her husband used to threaten her with knife and inhuman tortures were inflicted on her for dowry. In another case, her husband wanted to exploit her as a sex object for his seniors and other people and on denial she was tortured more. Slowly her health deteriorated as she was suffering from hypertension, depression, heart disease and so many other problems. The psychological effects of domestic violence include high rate of anxiety and depression among the victim women, as could be seen in different cases, which were registered in police stations. Women lived in constant fear months after months and year after year. They knew that when their husbands would return drunk from their night out, they would be beaten or raped and possibly both. Some of the victims expressed their constant fear of uncertainty and unpredictability: not knowing when the next attack would take place and which of their actions would be used as an excuse for violence. The women had to be constantly on their guard about what they would say and they would do to protect themselves from such violent and cruel husbands. Overall, the impact of domestic violence on
women is devastating. In the long run the victims developed permanent mental and physical disorders leading to disorganized personality and lost social contacts.

**Impact on Children** - Studies revealed that spousal violence equally affects the children and they become the victim of mental and physical violence and traumatic life experience. Everyday thousands of children witness cruelty behind closed doors. The children growing up in a violent home suffer from increased level of anxiety and sadness, psychosomatic illness such as headaches, abdominal complaints and asthma, and lower rating in social competence. The effects of domestic violence on children are irreversible and children from violent homes have higher risk of alcoholism, drug addiction and juvenile delinquency. In India, according to a study, among children who witness domestic violence, 60% of the boys eventually become batterers and 50% of the girls become victims. Litigation between the parents means misery for the children.

It is seen that most of the delinquent children come from broken homes. They either perpetrate the crimes that they have seen their father committing where they grew up or become delinquents even earlier. The exposures to violence as a child strongly influence the probability of his being generally violent as an adult. Pizzey (1974) argues that men who beat their wives do so as a result of disturbing childhood experiences in which they saw their fathers beat their mothers and they become upset and violent. Data available support the generalization of the theory. Our data support the “social learning” theory, Psycho-analytical theory of violence, where early socialization to violence teaches and reinforces violence as a method of conflict resolution or as a coping mechanism.

Normally women do not disclose domestic violence to anyone outside the family unless they are certain about the safety and security of the children. The lack of viable options keeps such women trapped in violent situations. The present study showed that 4.3% children were kept back with the father when mothers were thrown out.
Some of them were infants and some were very young. Such children were the worst victims of domestic violence, and were deprived of mothers' care and affection and normal family life at their tender age. Moreover the violent situation at home perturbed them beyond measure. In many cases fathers were alcoholic and ill reputed. In some cases father got married again after driving out the child's mother. Naturally new mothers would not be caring and sympathetic to the children. As a consequence, children face hard life and unhealthy grooming. In Case Nos-86/94, 58/95, Jalukbari P.S, Case No-74/96, Noonmati P.S, and Case Nos-2/95, 5/95, 21/95, 9/99, 18/99, All Women P.S, the women were thrown out from their marital home without their children.

Nearly one third of the women experiencing abuse have thought of running away but thinking about the welfare of the children, women tolerated and swallowed all the humiliation. Social and economic constraints further compound their sense of isolation. But their tolerance cannot spare the children from getting a badly damaged psyche. When children witnessed attacks of physical violence towards their mothers, they became shaky and insecure and started losing confidence. The findings confirmed from the studies the range of detrimental effects on children living with domestic violence. In some cases, even children suffered beating when mothers were abused. A child witnessed her mother being stabbed in the head, and another saw her father putting a knife to her mother's throat. Some children witnessed their mother being strangled whilst others witnessed the after effects of the violence in the form of their mother's black eyes and broken bones. A 9-year-old daughter witnessed violence on her mother by her father. She suffered from nightmare and was scared of darkness and frightened of loud noises.

During one of the visits to All Women police station, Guwahati, a young wife with fractured bone and black eyes, described how son pleaded for his mother's safety when his father had a knife on his mother's throat. Emotional abuse is a consequence of the child living with domestic violence. Unhappy upbringing was found to be a rule
among wife batterers in having seen their fathers ill-treating their mothers. The children get awakened at night by the screams and yelling of the mother attacked by abusive father and they are left with little or no sleep. The young kids lay in their beds listening, wishing to find some way to stop it. Often the father would come home drunk and would charge around the house yelling and breaking things. In some cases children were locked up in a room with their mother while father was beating mother and they watched helplessly. In an example of the above, two children aged 7 and 4 witnessed the violent acts of their father on the mother (as recorded in Case No 14/98, All Women P.S, on April 10, 90). As a result mother's cheekbone was fractured and she was bleeding profusely from nose and mouth. In another incident, in Case No 171/91, Latasil P.S, daughter was the only witness to how her alcoholic father had poured kerosene and set fire on her mother. She helped to shift the critically injured mother to hospital with the help of neighbours. The horrifying incident had taken place suddenly and too quickly before she could react. Can a daughter forgive her killer father?

The present study revealed that 6.6% domestic violence took place only because of birth of girl child. Even in some cases wives were thrown out from the house with their daughters. Experience showed that the girls who are brought up in such a violent atmosphere become submissive to their violent husbands in future.

In Case No-26/94, in All Women P.S, the father was an alcoholic and a gambler. He used to torture his wife to make her get money from her parents' place, which she was doing all along. But once when she was very sick and even unable to get up, the cruel father, in presence of his sons started torturing the very sick mother with kicks, blows, fists, pulling hair, slapping, using foul words and pushing her down from the bed till she became unconscious. She was bleeding profusely. Her parents hospitalized her. When she was at her parents' place her husband decided to get married again. Her husband never enquired about them, even for his sons. The two sons were speechless, insecure and helpless. In Case No-144/92, Fatasil Ambari P.S, a person locked his
wife and children in a room without food and water and assaulted them physically because of his extra marital relationship. In Case No-217/91, Chandmari P.S, the wife was all along tortured by her husband and sisters-in-law. On August 8, 91 they tried to kill her by strangulation. On September 3, 91 the children and their mother were thrown out after severe assault. In Case No-31/95, Gitanagar P.S, three daughters witnessed their mother’s suffering since they were born. On March 14, 95 their father came in a drunken condition with a prostitute and threw them out making them shelterless. In Case No-9/98, All Women P.S, two minor sons witnessed the cruel behaviour of their father with their mother. In Case No-14/2000, All Women P.S, when an abusive husband and mother-in-law were beating the wife on chest, back, and even tried to strangle her, her children raised hue and cry and fought for protecting their mother who was pregnant at that time. In Case No 19/98, All Women P.S, a lady who was victim of domestic violence and thrown out by her husband was worried for the sons as they were growing up by seeing their father spending nights with several women. In Case No-125/98, Jalukbari P.S, father was jobless and alcoholic. Once when mother asked for food for the children, father replied that they should die by taking poison. Such cruel and unsympathetic attitude of the father is likely to sow the seeds of possible anti-social behaviour by his children in later life. One 14-year-old girl discussed how powerless she felt to overhear the violence on her mother and at not being able to protect her from it. In a well to do family where wife was educated and well placed, children suffered from the beginning seeing their mother’s derogatory position in the family. Mother had no voice and the father was very proud, dominating, arrogant and short tempered. Her parental family was not allowed at her place though they gave their best to support her as and when it was required. Mother was tolerating all violence and ill treatment only for her children. Children have to bear the brunt when families break down. The children are worst affected by uncertainty when mother had to leave the violent home. Separation of the parents create more abusive situation, and they suffer from identity crises.
3.2 Death cases of Domestic Violence:
The study revealed an extreme aggravation of domestic violence and dowry crimes in Assam, but the society is not really aware of it. This social evil has taken a turn for the worse. It is not merely a woman issue and it has an impact on our social life. Bride price was devised centuries ago and was thought to be demeaning to human dignity. Dowry, a variant of the tradition of bride price, seems to be just another manifestation of the age of opportunism. Dowry is only a part of the over all humiliation and subjugation of women that is sanctioned by our society. “Any young man who makes dowry a condition for marriage discredits his education and his country and dishonours womanhood,” said Mahatma Gandhi.6

During the period from 1991 to 2000 i.e. in 10 years, 44 dowry death cases were registered in police stations in Guwahati city. Out of total 44 registered cases during 10 years period (1991-2000), all the 44 cases, (100%), were taken as sample of the study.

The diagram shows that maximum number of dowry death victims is Assamese women. All the death cases resulting from domestic violence were registered as dowry death under 304-B IPC. Out of these, 22 (50%) married women were killed for dowry. And another 22 cases (50%) women died due to cruelty by husbands and in-laws.

The data show that the maximum number of dowry death cases was from Assamese Hindu families, which is a disturbing trend. Cultural changes are noticeable in Assam with regard to the evil practice of dowry and sex determination test. In all the cases of brides’ murder; either husbands singularly or husbands and their families jointly were involved. In very rare cases, husbands were not involved with their families to kill their wives. Study indicates that in 45.4 % cases husbands and in-laws were jointly involved in killing brides. In 43.1 % cases husbands took the sole role to commit such crime, in 4.5% cases in-laws killed the brides and in 6.8 % cases the information was not available. It shows that husband and in-laws took maximum role to kill brides.
Though all the death cases of marital violence were reported as dowry death, actual dowry related crimes, which led to deaths, were 50%. The data on the basis of linguistic and religious basis of analysis will help to understand the cultural trend of the society in Assam. 27.2% of dowry death cases were reported from Assamese Hindu families, 9.09% from Assamese Muslim families, 31.8% from Hindi speaking Hindu families and again 31.8% from Bengali Hindu families.

Study revealed that 50% brides got killed due to cruelty by husbands and in-laws. Among them 54.5% were from Assamese Hindu families, 22.7% from Assamese Muslim families, 9.09% from Bengali Hindu families, 4.5% each from Bengali Muslim family, Hindi speaking Hindu family and Nepali Hindu family.

**Nature of crime in dowry death cases** - Most of the wives suffered cruelty before their unnatural deaths. Wherever victims of dowry murder cases narrated their problems and the nature of violence before their death to their parents and kin, it showed how demand for dowry and other forms of cruelty unfolded in the forms of
taunts, abuses, threats etc which escalated into battering and battering led to abetment to suicide or murder. Often a brutal and authoritarian type of husband is the killer of the wife and the personality of the offender betrays his maladjustment with humanitarian norms, a trait that can be termed as ‘abnormality’.

3.5 Nature of Dowry Death cases

Among the death cases 36.3% died by committing suicide. Among them 9 women committed suicide by hanging, 5 by burning and 2 by poisoning themselves. 40.9% women were murdered by husbands and in-laws. Among them burn cases were 14, hanging cases were 3, and poisoning case was 1. 22.7% died a mysterious death.

In cases of pure ‘murder’, different methods were applied by the husbands and in-laws - burning, strangulation, hanging and poisoning. Burns constituted the highest single cause of death and the most popular method of killing bride is by pouring kerosene oil, which can be done quickly and simply lighting a match stick does the rest. This method is very easy to pass as an accident because wives are mostly working in the kitchen and stoves are prone to explode and highly inflammable nylon saree easily catches fire and engulfs the wearer in flames. Signs of struggle simply remain hidden with 90% or more third degree burns. In other cases after strangulating the bride, she
is hung from the ceiling to make it look like suicide. Different cases such as Case No-122/93 and 162/200, Chandmari P.S, Case No-178/2000, Basistha P.S, Case No-162/2000, 5/93, and 26/94 of All Women P.S, gave a vivid picture of burns cases. Second best method was strangulation. Even poisoning was applied to kill the bride.

In some cases, brides were severely assaulted physically or mentally before they were killed in the form of dowry death. Study indicated that in 70.4% cases brides were physically tortured before they were killed. In most of the dowry death cases, the cause of death was fire. Out of the total death cases, 47.7% died by burning; 29.5% died by hanging and only 6.8% died by poisoning and the rest 15.9% died in other forms. It seems that the most common method applied for killing was burning by pouring kerosene oil.

Domestic violence led 36.3% women to commit suicide. Different methods were used for committing suicide - hanging, burning and poisoning. In regard to dowry related crises in a marriage, the tension would build up gradually by husband and in-laws by making persistent and determined demands for dowry on the woman. Ultimately suicide became the last resort for the woman. After a period of five to seven years, the marriages become less prone to such crises. It was found that in 11.3% cases husbands abetted wives to commit suicide. In 15.9% cases brides were abetted by their husbands and in-laws together to take such drastic step to end their lives. Altogether, in 27.2% cases, husbands and in-laws singularly and jointly abetted brides to commit suicide. The brides were completely cornered from all sides by the cruel attitudes and activities of husbands and in-laws. Even though the parents knew about the ill treatment, they always preferred to wait to see if time could set the matters right. As a result the poor wives took the easiest way to end their lives. The constant bullying, nagging, branding, emotional and physical torture left the brides with no other choice but to commit suicide. Suicides which are closely associated with dowry have taken a different turn nowadays, as very often dowry deaths are projected as accidental death. In dowry death cases, most of the wives had to put up with ridicule or even downright
denigration with all kinds of abuse, physical to mental, at the hands of their husbands or in-laws. In several cases mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law took a dominant role and husbands had joined them in castigating their brides and brides' parents. With all her miseries and humiliations, she had to continue with her matrimonial relationship highly frustrated and when completely devastated, took the fatal decision to end her life. The in-laws and husbands play a very harmful role to provoke her suicide urge, which finally proves to be the ultimate choice left for the battered and neglected bride. Almost in all the cases of suicide in domestic violence, husbands and in-laws were the abettors. Case No-151/92, Chandmari P.S, Case No-81/94 Bharalumukh P.S and Case No-92/99, Fatasil Ambari P.S, were all cases of suicide by hanging and abetted by husbands and in-laws.

Data revealed that 22.7% brides died under mysterious circumstances. Most of them reported to their parents and kin about the torture and threat of life. But our culture demands adjustment in marriage and parental advice for such adjustment led them to their deadly end. In some cases husbands and in-laws hurriedly cremated the victims before the parental families had even information about the incident.

Study indicated that 4.5% women were forced to leave for paternal house and 4.5% were thrown out by husbands and in-laws. When they tried to reconcile they were killed at marital home by husbands and in-laws. In most of the cases victimization started immediately after marriage. But in some cases victimization starts even after several years of marriage. In Case No-38/99, All Women P.S, the newly married bride of two months of marriage died by hanging for domestic violence. In Case No-344/2000, All Women P.S, a wife committed suicide by pouring kerosene oil and setting fire on herself after 10 years of marriage. She was the mother of 3 children and the torture started after a few years of marriage. In Case No-38/99, All Women P.S, the couple eloped and got married to live happily ever after, but within two months of marriage she became victim of cruelty by her husband. In her dying declaration she spoke of how her husband poured kerosene to burn her to death.
Causes of Dowry death - Dowry murder has definitely a psycho-sociological basis. As seen from the above, so many factors are dominant in the commission of dowry death. The role of brides sometimes contributed to such crimes. For her meek, mild, unresisting and resourceless personality, she suffered torture silently. On the other hand, a husband who wanted to fulfill his material dreams through his wife acts as a contributory factor of such crimes. And last of all, the mother-in-law feels insecure after the arrival of the daughter-in-law in the fear of losing hold on her son as the daughter-in-law would attract him physically and socially. The son would no more be dependent on her and stop seeking advice and guidance from her as he used to do before his marriage. Sometimes mother-in-law expects dowry money from her son’s marriage in order to marry off her daughter. So all these factors contribute and the situation arises in terms of extreme stress, provocation, temptation and opportunity.

3.6 Family Structure in Dowry Death cases

The above family structure shows that newly married wives are most vulnerable.

Evidence suggests that dowry death cases are more rampant in lower income group than the upper income group. In dowry death cases two factors are important, one is family income and other is the occupation of the wife.
In 2.2% cases, the cause of death of the wife and daughter was birth of a girl child. The craving for a male child had led to a mother and her daughter being poisoned to death in Guwahati by her husband.

Forced marriages are rampant in Assam and the rest of India. In Case No-57/2000, Latasil P.S, a teenage school going girl was kidnapped by a constable from her school and forced to marry him. Soon after marriage, her husband and in-laws started torturing her for dowry and she had to die in mysterious circumstances.

In dowry death cases, 11.3% girls had love marriage. The dream of having a ‘happy home’ was shattered and sometimes the husband became the cause of their death. Even in love marriages, husband conspired with his family members to end the life of his bride only for dowry. They converted the wife to a money-making machine, forgetting their human worth. In Case No-98/99 of Chandmari P.S, the couple eloped and got married. But after marriage she had to go through all kinds of torture for dowry. She brought money several times from her parents to meet the rising greed for more dowries with the hope of bringing peace and normalcy in her life. She got killed
from burn injuries and her father suspected that her husband and in-laws burnt her to death. In Case No-39/97 of All Women P.S, the bride committed suicide though they had love marriage. That fateful day, husband tortured her physically and mentally and abetted her to commit suicide. She was a mother of a one year four month old daughter.

In many cases parents try to settle the matter by giving in to the never ending dowry demand, as a result women suffer from worst consequences of a painful and horrifying untimely death. In the Case No-36/98 of Fatasil Ambari police station, such an incident of dowry death took place. She was a young bride of 1 year and 3 months of her marital life. She had been tortured by her in-laws and husband for dowry and when it became unbearable for her, she used to go to her parents’ place and parents used to settle the matter by giving more dowry. But the reconciliation proved very temporary and it was repeated several times. Once she stayed for 15 days at her parents’ place because of the brutal torture. Again her brother settled the matter and she returned to her husband’s place. Next day her body was found hanging in the kitchen. Her brother did not find any evidence of suicide and was firmly convinced that after murder, she was kept hung. In another case, Case No-20/95 of All Women police station, the bride of just 3 months was killed for dowry. She was physically tortured by her husband and in-laws. Before killing her, an LIC policy was made in her name to get economic benefit. A young helpless woman of 18 years watched her own violent end. She was consistently pestered by her husband and in-laws for the dowry of Rs.25, 000. Her poor widow mother was running from pillar to post to collect the money. One day her mother came to know about her ‘accidental death by fire’.

After marriage a young bride is expected to adjust with her new surroundings as soon as possible by changing her own needs, her behaviour, her personality and her entire self and identity. The adjustment problems create a conflicting situation with her husband and in-laws. A little conflict sometimes makes the situation worse as the husband does not know when and where to side with his wife. The bride gets
automatically inclined to her parents with the expectation of getting sympathy. But parents normally want her to go back and adjust in her marital home, which might cause her tremendous frustration. Unable to cope with the harsh realities of married life and getting no emotional support from their husbands or the parental side, the brides seek to end their lives by committing suicide. Between the age group of 18-30 years, women are more excitable, depressive and vulnerable. So if they feel that they are deprived from love and sympathy, they take their lives. The data proved such cases of death of brides. Some of the cases of dowry deaths are in fact cases of impulsive suicide.

25 year old Gitika (name changed) had a dream of a perfect marriage and a happy home. Within a week of her marriage, she found that her husband was having an illicit relation with his middle aged sister-in-law. When she tried to protest, she was abused and assaulted. She returned to her parents only to be told that “girls must learn to adjust” and “it would be difficult to find a match for her younger sister if the news of her broken marriage spread.” In a bid to preserve her family honour, Gitika kept silent. Her charred body bearing strangulation marks was found four months later. Arun (name changed) was never happy with his wife Luna (name changed) as he used to feel that she was not up to his expectation and started having an extra marital affair. And one day just to get rid of her, he killed her. In another case, wife Reena (name changed) was conservative;; traditional and not educated enough to match her husband Biju’s (name changed) social life. Biju used to express his frustration by becoming violent at her. One day out of rage after a bitter quarrel, Biju attacked Reena physically and she died though he never intended to kill her. The conflict between modern and traditional life style cost the lives of the brides.

The problem of dowry murder is also explained from the feminist view that the root cause of dowry torture and aggression against a wife has its origin in a patriarchal society and male socialization. The most popular myth that women are women’s enemies closes all the discussion on power relations and it hardly visualizes women as
agents of patriarchy. The problem of dowry death is not a uni-causal problem; it is the product of a complex multi-dimensional process. It depends on the murderer's and victim's personality traits as well as the situation in which the murder was caused. The motive in bride killing therefore depends on the background of the situations in which brides are killed.

3.3 Recent trends in Marriage:
The Family Court in Guwahati city is experiencing rising number of divorce cases. The institution of marriage has come under severe strain with the number of divorce suits on the rise in Assam, because the couples in most cases have failed to make adjustment to keep up the sacred tie of marriage. Records at the family court in the state showed that in 1992, when the Kamrup family court was established. 365 divorce cases were transferred to it from the Court of the District Judge. 156 cases were registered in the family court in 1993, followed by 181 in 1994, 171 in 1995, 200 in 1996, 193 in 1997, 208 in 1998, 214 in 1999, and 189 in 2000. The institution of marriage is breaking down due to ego clash and emotional incompatibility. Most divorce suits flooding the courts are filed on grounds of mental and physical torture, sexual incompatibility, adultery and to a lesser degree on dowry demands. Statistics show over 1 crore couples get married each year in India. The divorce rates are up from 5% in 1980 to 14% till 2006. 5 crore women suffer violence at homes, only 0.1% report it. 2 out of 100 accused are convicted under existing dowry laws. 80% women try to reconcile with their husband, his family. Urban professional women now marry between ages 26-30.

Engagement of both men and women in earning money has become a compelling necessity. The social realities of life have changed drastically but the old thinking about the submissive and dependent role of women has not changed. Women's traditional role as housewife and mother is institutionalized. Women are still trained and socialized for this role from childhood; the new role of working women creates
confusion and ambivalence. The woman is in a dilemma, whether to adhere to her traditional gender norms or to the emergent norms of the occupational roles. The husband expects her to play the role of a traditional wife at home and merge her identity in her man; but outside he expects her to act like a modern woman. Problems arise due to the conflicting demands put on her as a good housewife and an efficient employee.

Women have started having an improved self-image. They are not satisfied with being confined to the home and playing only the traditional role of a dutiful wife, an ideal mother and a submissive daughter-in-law. They have come to realize their potentials and want self-expression. They want to prove themselves and show that they are equally capable and can compete with men on an equal footing. When men fail to prove their superiority at the workplace, home is the place where their writ still runs unchallenged. Men do not hesitate to use brute force to keep the women pinned down to prove their superiority.

Influence of audio-visual media, dissemination of knowledge and education have also contributed to bring about drastic changes in the situation. Moreover, because of family planning, the families are restricted to one or two children and the children are a great deal pampered. Most of them lack tolerance and adjustment capacity. In some cases, economic independence of wives make them become less caring and less respectful to the members of their newly formed families and it causes deterioration of marital relationship ultimately leading to marital violence.

The institution of marriage is going through dramatic changes. Novelist Manju Kapoor says, “The reasons why people marry – love, companionship, stability, and children – have largely remained same. What has changed is the focus or sense of what a marriage should be and the expectations from it”. That is reflected in the divorce rates, which have risen from 5% in the 1980s to 14% in 2001 according to 2001 census. The percentage is certainly higher now. As the women are educated and financially
independent, their threshold of tolerance to the husband's attitude has come down. They are redefining relationships, by overturning male dominance.

3.4 Marriage cannot be a licence for maltreating a woman:

Millions of Indian women remain terrorized by their families in their own homes. Many die in infamous "stove burnings" in which in-laws set them ablaze and then say it was a kitchen accident. Often when women manage to get enough courage to complain to the police, they are thrown out of their homes and into the streets with no place to go.

A wife who feels 'suffocated' can never make a happy marriage. There are women who hold it throughout their lives, only to realize it finally when they are dead. A talented woman, who had a bright career all of a sudden decided to back out of a potentially huge career. The reasons cited were "marriage problems". Her husband happened to be a high profile person. The question naturally comes whether her husband would abandon his career if she thought his commitment to his career was eroding their marriage. It is astonishing to find that even in these days wife's career becomes an issue in marriage.

It is a big question how a husband gets licence for maltreating a woman only by marrying her. For rearing a child, parents take so much care and they sacrifice a lot. With all love and affection they provide them best of everything. But the institution of marriage in so many cases make the life of women so cheap and husbands and in-laws play with their lives and kill them at their whims and fancy.
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