CHAPTER-V
ROLE OF NGOs
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In the first changing world order, 'nation states' have been undergoing role-transition from 'provider' to 'policy maker' with global trends towards creation of powerful institutions and individualism. Non-government organizations (NGOs), which occupy a major space in the 'civil society', represent a 'third way' for collectivism and development. Their role is very important in developing countries like India. In India the desired results of traditional strategies of social and economic development based on large scale institutionalized methods and provisions have not yet been achieved. There is discrimination in every sphere of life as rightly pointed out by Dr. Amartya Sen. He said, "Penalties of discrimination and deprivation will catch up with all of us." In fact, these have already caught up in many fields involving women and their violations. These situations have opened floodgates. The responsibilities of NGOs have increased for such situations for protecting and promoting human rights - the rights of women to mention in particular.

In India, voluntary efforts and community participation are closely linked with eradication of many evils of society. NGOs have taken an activist role on various gender issues and have played an effective role in promoting the cause of women at both central and state levels. There are over 6,000 NGOs in the country who receive programme funding and support from government of India to support women’s development programmes including dealing with atrocities and crimes against women. International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement were among the pioneer NGOs to be established in modern times. Although, only after the establishment of the United Nations in 1945 the concept of non-governmental organization has gained currency, the International Committee of the Red Cross was founded as a non-official body as
far back as 1863. The concept of NGO gained ascendancy and became popular during the 20th century. NGOs are basically a heterogeneous group.

The NGOs in India are voluntary in nature, have a system of autonomous functioning and are self-governing. The people's participation in NGOs is voluntary in terms of services and collection of funds. As per this study in 2002, there were over 1.2 million NGOs in India but only about 50,000 genuine working NGOs could really be counted. Some of the NGOs are formed by unscrupulous elements to grab funds and grants given by international bodies and the local government. But the fact remains that there are many NGOs of international and national repute, who are rendering remarkable service in India. As per FCRA (Foreign Contribution Regulatory Act), only 26,000 NGOs were registered with them till 2002, and can collect foreign contributions. In India, the NGOs are provided with funds by the Central and the State Governments and numerous projects are implemented through Central Social Welfare Board, Women and Child Development Ministry, Social Justice Ministry and Health Ministry. For this sector, the Planning Commission has been designed as the nodal agency.

In pre-independence years, voluntary religious organizations have been active to a considerable extent in the field of social service in India. In 19th century the prominent names of all India organizations included Atmiya society, Brahm Samaj, Theosophical Society and Ramkrishna Mission. In the early part of 20th century some of the voluntary organizations operated at all India level like the Servants of India Society, Harijan Sevak Sangha, Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust. Even at the state and local levels, a large number of smaller organizations were in operation. But very few organizations catered exclusively to women as a target group in that period.

Social reformers made the first initiative in the 19th century to free women from the clutches of social evils. Since independence, the development of women has always
been the central focus in developmental planning of the government. In 1953, the Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) was set up to promote social welfare activities and implementing programmes for women, children and the handicapped through voluntary organizations. The CSWB was unique in the fact that for the first time in India in post independence era, it made a significant contribution in enlisting people’s participation through non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the implementation of welfare programmes for women and children. In 1999, more than 18,000 NGOs were receiving financial assistance and guidance from the CSWB. The major programmes which are implemented in the interest of needy / destitute women and children are socio-economic in nature. Condensed courses of general education and vocational training, awareness generation projects, family counselling centers / voluntary action bureaux etc for rural and poor women as well as hostels and creches for working women and their children were among the things that the Board has been organizing all these years. Some of the activities are assisting or running short stay homes for providing temporary shelter and rehabilitation to those girls and women who are in difficulty; rehabilitating destitute women and their dependent children through vocational training and residential care and undertaking income generating activities. NGOs provide facilities to women to protect themselves in violent relationships by offering counselling, short stay homes and legal aid. From the 1987 onwards, from the seventh Five-Year Plan, the government has envisaged a greater involvement of NGOs. The Human Right Commissions encourage the efforts of non-governmental organizations working in the field of human rights. For them, NGOs are natural allies, sterner critics and indispensable partners. They also call for participation of NGO in serious social issues and the investigations undertaken by them.

5.1 Role of NGOs in Family Court:
NGOs can play an effective role in solving family disputes that come up before family courts. It has been seen that in recent times the number of divorce and other
matrimonial litigations have been rising by leaps and bounds in all corners of the country. In order to actively make an attempt to achieve reconciliation between the litigant parties in such cases, the NGOs can put themselves up as a bridge between such parties and minimize the areas of conflict through negotiation so that eventually the parties could revert to a normal life.

The active role of NGOs can help create a congenial environment in Family Courts and ensure lesser amount of indirect interference by lawyers in cases under trial in Family Courts. NGOs can play as mediators, counsellors, watchdogs and as dispute resolving agencies for cases pending before a Family Court. The main aim behind the establishment of Family Courts was to protect the institution of marriage. The active involvement of NGOs as mediators, counsellors and as a moral booster for the victims is a sine qua non for those women litigants who are impoverished, shelterless and without any support of relations or friends.

5.2 Counselling:

In the globalized world of today, the need for counsellors is felt as and when tension brews, psychological problems burgeon and frustrations accumulate. Both in developed and underdeveloped countries, counselling is emerging as one of the most required professions and a part of day to day life. The importance of a counsellor is summarized through the quotation, “the counsellor’s vision is to: promote the holistic development of all persons who seek help for living productively and harmoniously in the technologically complex, culturally diverse and increasingly interdependent world of tomorrow” (Neiedlo, Arredondo, and Benjamin, 1985).

The importance of counselling is increasing day by day as it has a definite stress relieving value and provides calmness and future directions. Maintaining complete secrecy is the key to success of a counsellor. The aim of the counsellor is to provide positive solution and any move to law court should be the last resort. In marital problems, maximum number of people prefers to go to counselling centers as they
avoid the complicated system of the police and the judiciary, which take such sensitive issues to no return points. Counselling can help a couple to understand their shortcomings and help start a fresh their marital life, which is not possible otherwise.

**Counselling Centres in Guwahati** - Guwahati city is expanding by leaps and bounds and its residents are gradually leading themselves to a ‘modern lifestyle’. Such trends are responsible for complex family conflicts. All the family counselling centres are finding it difficult to tackle such situations and are of the opinion that counselling has become tougher every day as modern lifestyle coupled with economic empowerment of the women are complicating the family conflicts. The city is witnessing a surge in the intra-family conflicts every year according to the family counselling centres. Counsellor Gujarat Deori said, “Family conflict in the highly educated and rich families is found more complicated”. According to Deori the majority of the conflicts were over extra marital relationships in the high-class families.9

5.3 NGOs in Assam:

**Assam Pradeshik Mahila Samity** – APMS was established in 1926 in Chandraprabha Saikiani Bhawan, Guwahati and it is one of the premier organizations in Assam. Being an umbrella organization, the APMS federates with all district mahila samities of Assam, which in turn has links with primary mahila samities. The organization mainly works to bring about various social reforms in society. It strives to upgrade socio-economic conditions of women and also tries to make them aware of their rights. It provides training to women and girls on typing, tailoring and embroidering on the basis of primary level of education of the girls. The organization works in co-ordination with various state agencies. Various awareness programmes are organized by it at both the grassroots and the state level. The Samity has a Family Counselling Centre and a Legal Aid Cell.

**Family Counselling Centre, Assam Pradeshik Mahila Samity** – The year of inception of the counselling centre in APMS was in 1992, in Guwahati. The Centre
provides counselling services free of charge with regard to family matters. Legal advice is also provided at times. The Centre also arranges awareness programmes on legal issues.

The recent past has witnessed an increase in the incidence of violence and crime against women, which has become a serious concern for all. Many of these atrocities originated from problem of maladjustment within the family. Total number of cases registered here from 1993 to February 2004 was 1163. During the period from March 2003 to February 2004, the number of domestic violence cases registered at this centre was 77.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Extra Marital/ bigamy</th>
<th>Dowry demand</th>
<th>Personality Difference</th>
<th>Alcoholism And drug abuse</th>
<th>Interference by In-laws</th>
<th>Economic crises / deprivation</th>
<th>Other Problem</th>
<th>Reconciled</th>
<th>Compromised</th>
<th>Pending</th>
<th>Drop out</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1999-2000</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>278</td>
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<td>2000-2001</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td>43</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001-2002</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>2002-2003</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above Table is showing the different causes of marital problems and their outcome. The Table shows that out of 1489 cases, the maximum number reported alcoholism and drug abuse (178); followed by extra marital relation and bigamy (120); interference of in-laws (112); economic crises and deprivation (58); dowry demand (65); and least of all personality difference (26). The marital problems for miscellaneous causes counted 903. Of the above, 27 cases were reconciled, 25 cases were compromised, 217 cases were referred to the police/ court/ legal cell and the rest were either pending or dropped or otherwise disposed of. The Counselling Centre tries its level best to have reconciliation and to compromise the feud so that the society is not affected with the ugly sight of broken families. When reconciliation becomes impossible, they help them to have a healthy separation.
Family Counselling Centre, CID: Headquarters: Assam – The Family Counselling Centre, CID Headquarters Guwahati Assam under Indian Council for Child Social Welfare, Assam state branch was established on October 2, 1997. The FCC unit works in association with the CID HQ, all the police stations, the Mahila Samities and various NGOs.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Physical/mental torture/ marital maladjustment</th>
<th>Interference of parents/ in-laws</th>
<th>Extra marital relationship</th>
<th>Alcohol/drug addiction</th>
<th>Economic crises</th>
<th>Dowry demand</th>
<th>Negligence</th>
<th>Sexual harassment/ immoral trafficking</th>
<th>Total No of cases registered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>21</td>
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<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>33</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>54</td>
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<tr>
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<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>42</td>
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<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>48</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentage 28.63% 13.31% 14.11% 15.73% 9.66% 9.24% 7.14% 3.36%


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Reconciliation</th>
<th>Separation</th>
<th>Referred to Family Court</th>
<th>Referred to police Dept.</th>
<th>Referred to drug de-addiction centre</th>
<th>Referred to short stay home</th>
<th>Pending</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>29</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentage 48.79% 1.6% 9.66% 7.45% 3.62% 1.29% 28.63%

Source: Family Counselling Centre, CID Headquarters.
The above Tables give a detailed description of the number of cases and nature of problems and the way the FCC handled them during the period from October 1997 (the time of its inception), to December 2003. It provides counselling assistance to clients suffering from problems, such as family disputes, atrocities on women, dowry related cases, physical and mental torture, interference of parents-in-law, extra marital relationship, alcohol and drug addiction, economic crises etc.

During the period from October 1997 to September 2004, the total number of marital violence cases reported at the counselling centre in the CID HQ Guwahati was 269. Out of 269 cases, 149 cases (55.3%) were taken as a sample for study. The family structure in these cases show 65.1% were from nuclear families and 32.2% from joint families. The age group of the complainants was between 17 years and 39 years and one odd case of maladjustment came from a 50-year-old lady. There were three cases of torture by alcoholic sons; whose mothers were 35, 65 and 75 years of age respectively. It showed that in maximum number of cases marital problems started at a young age.

The educational background of the victims of domestic violence who reported to the counselling centre was as follows: out of 149 cases 8 of them were illiterate, 37 were under-Matric, 30 were HSLC passed, 36 were Higher Secondary passed, 20 were Graduates, 5 were Master Degree holders and about 12 cases had not mentioned their educational background. It showed that the maximum number of victims was under-Matric and minimum number was Master degree holders.

The economic background of victims covered a wide range of economic conditions of their husbands from unemployment to affluent family background, which included government jobs, business including the jobs of clerk, peon, constable, auto rickshaw driver, bank employee, company employee, farmer, salesman, citybus driver, tailor, salesman at a shop, factory employee, school teacher, shop keeper, driver, rickshaw puller, labourer, forest ranger, carpenter, wage earner, electrician, vendor, LIC agent, employee in a computer
Among the seekers of counselling, 28 (25.9%) married women were jobholders and economically self-dependent.

5.1 Causes of Domestic Violence: FCC, CID HQ, Assam

According to the counselling centre, to a large extent alcoholism played an important role in marital discord and atrocities, which showed that out of 149 cases, 25 instances of atrocities were due to alcohol. Among the other causes of violence and marital discord, extra marital relations / bigamy contributed 28 cases, economic crises 17 cases, practice of uncalled for cruelty by husbands, in-laws and sons 22 cases, interference by parents and in-laws 9 cases, and dowry 17 cases. In 6 cases, husbands abandoned their wives, 8 cases involved negligence by husbands and in-laws, 2 cases were for murder by husbands and in-laws for dowry and in one case wife was sexually assaulted by the brother-in-law. One important cause of marital problem and violence was
maladjustment with husband and in-laws due to personality difference, suspicious nature of husband, lack of understanding etc.

The study revealed that counselling helped save 74.7% cases from being ruined. 19 cases were pending (at the time of writing) due to lack of co-operation from the concerned people. They referred 12 cases to courts (Family courts / District courts / High courts), 9 cases to the police, 2 cases to de-addiction centre, 3 cases to short stay home (Nirmal Ashray) and 6 cases preferred to go for separation as it was not possible for the couples to stay together reasons being life threat, boundless atrocities, total maladjustment and the like. In 3 cases complainant never remained in touch with the centre.

From the above data, it becomes clear how successfully the centre had helped the families to overcome the sufferings of broken homes. Sometimes such cases were handled on psychological basis, sometimes by instilling fear of the police, in some cases very softly trying to make them understand their mistakes and in some cases by handling the parties strongly and forcefully. The counselling was done on a scientific basis.

**Women's Legal Aid Cell** – Assam Pradeshik Mahila Samity started a women legal aid cell on November 14, 1989 in Chandrapabha Saikiani Bhavan in Guwahati. The cell tries to provide solution to cases of family dispute, including dowry, divorce and maintenance, guardianship of children and other related matters. Awareness programmes on legal literacy and various legal issues are organized by the organization at both the grassroots and state levels. Free legal aid is provided to women living below the poverty line.

This Legal Aid Cell of Assam Pradeshik Mahila Samity is doing an excellent job by helping the needy. Through them, many women who were separated from their husbands due to domestic violence are getting maintenance. Moreover, for many women, going to the police and the court becomes very difficult and complicated. It
becomes too much of a hassle for ordinary women to handle such situations as they are not knowledgeable about official procedures. During crises, non-official legal aid cells can help women to get justice. Most of the victims of domestic violence or marital problems are not resourceful enough to handle such situations; they neither have money, nor the knowledge of governmental and judicial functioning. A Legal Aid Cell can explain to distressed women all such complex things in simple language in their own mother tongue, which is very important so far as such victims are concerned.

5.4 Domestic violence cases in Women’s Legal Aid Cell (APMS), 1999-2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of complaints</th>
<th>Divorce</th>
<th>Maintenance</th>
<th>Referred to Police</th>
<th>Referred to Legal services Authority</th>
<th>Reunion</th>
<th>Stridhan</th>
<th>Custody of Children</th>
<th>Bigamy</th>
<th>Settled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>92</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>2003</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>338</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: APMS Legal Aid Cell*

The Legal Aid Cell of the Pradesik Mahila Samity came to the help of a victim of domestic violence, whose husband used to torture her physically as he had an extra marital relation with his sister-in-law (brother’s wife). The victim woman was even kept deprived of all economic support. Her elder daughter had become mentally deranged as she, since her very childhood, had continued to see her mother receiving inhuman physical assault and atrocities. The younger daughter was also deprived of educational facilities as her husband was not providing them proper maintenance. The woman was skinny and extreme poverty was showing on her physical appearance. Though her husband had enough means to give the family a normal life, the woman had to run from pillar to post for arranging a minimum monetary support for the treatment of her elder daughter and education of the younger one as well as for survival of the
family. Responding to her plight, the Legal Aid Cell arranged for the assistance of the Legal Services Authority to her, so that she could secure ‘maintenance’ through the court.

Nirmal Ashray – The Short Stay Home for Women Nirmal Ashray, was started in 1987, under a scheme of the Ministry of Social Welfare, Government of India, directly sponsored by the parent body ASHI, New Delhi. The Home, being first and only one of its kind in the state, has been able to provide shelter to women in distress and mortal danger, victims of exploitation and the destitute. The inmates of the Home are given various types of vocational training to enable them earn a decent living after they leave the Home. Some of them who are eligible for training in recognized vocations are admitted in such courses under government / non-government institutes. The children of the Home are sent to regular schools.

Awalamban - Training cum production centre named Awalamban, attached to Nirmal Ashray, was also started in 1987. The inmates of Nirmal Ashray after necessary training in handloom and handicrafts are engaged in the centre on work on wage basis. The earning of the inmates from the Production Centre is deposited in a Bank in individual accounts, which they can take back on their rehabilitation.

Help line- A new programme “Help line” has been started under a scheme of Ministry of HRD, Government of India, Women and Child Development Department funded through CSWB. The services are open for 24 hours to all women and girls in distress or who are destitute or homeless, or do not have any social security, or have been suffering from mental torture or are in forceful exploitation in flesh trade. They can ring up through the Toll Free Telephone Number 1091 and Help line will provide help / counselling immediately.

- It is an emergency out-reach service for women in distress.
- It has Toll Free Telephone for helping women in crises.
- It provides Emotional Support and Tele Counselling to the women.
Cases of Domestic Violence - The inmates abandoned by their husbands and staying in Nirmal Ashray were interviewed. Names are changed for their anonymity.

Runa Agarwal – She got married to Ratan agarwal on April 2, 2000. They had a son and they lived happily for 3 years. When her son was six months old, her husband left her (on December 3, 2003). For negotiation her husband and in-laws were called to the legal aid cell (APMS), but her husband never came, only her in-laws attended. Runa believes it was because of his parents’ influence he was not coming back to her. Later on she came to know that her husband had a wife and a daughter before her marriage with him. Still with tears, she hopes for his coming back. For 8 months preceding the present interview, she has been in Nirmal Ashray with her son.

Sikha Konwar – She took shelter in Nirmal Ashray on April 3, 2003. She got married in 1996 with an Assamese boy and now having a daughter. Her husband drinks a lot and beats her badly. She has become a mental patient. Her husband nearly broke her head once by beating her. Her daughter is with her husband studying in a school. She believes that her husband will take her back.

Moromi Das – Moromi Das is a 26-year-old cute looking young woman, mother of two children (son is five years old; daughter is three and a half years old). Her husband is a peon in the LIC. He is alcoholic. Moromi gets beating very badly when he drinks. She does not have any freedom to do anything of her own. Her husband dictates her always. She took shelter in Nirmal Ashray a few days prior to this interview. In 1997 she got married. Several times she had to leave her matrimonial home because of violent beating by her husband. But when he is not under the influence of alcohol, he becomes sober. Local people tried to help and even complained to the police. He was even detained in police station. After that he became more violent. Children are scared of their father. She does not want to go back to her husband.
Mina Lohar – She is an orphan girl from Nagaland. She had been given shelter in a house where the male folk of that house took advantage of her (she being an orphan) and sexually abused her. She had been cheated in the name of marriage. Now she is staying in the short stay home.

Minati Barua – She had taken shelter in the short stay home as she had been regularly assaulted by her alcoholic husband. She has a son. Through the legal aid cell (APMS), the reconciliation between her husband and herself was made possible within a month of her stay there.

Runjum Kakoty - Her son is handicapped due to the torture by her husband. She left the house and took shelter in Nirmal Ashray. When her husband came to know, he took them back home.

Benu Rabha – Benu was tortured by her husband and took shelter with her two daughters, one 10 and other 13 years old. Her husband was alcoholic. When her husband died, the Ashram helped her to get pension and all property.

Nafisa Begum – Her husband was alcoholic and used to torture her. With the help of the legal aid cell they reconciled and started living together.

Indira Kalita – She left her marital home with a six-month-old baby as her husband used to abuse her. She took shelter in the Ashram. Later on she got another life partner and got settled.

Shefali Bora – Shefali was cheated by a man, who had promised to marry her. She came to Ashram with a one-week-old son. She learnt tailoring and embroidery and became self-dependent.
Urmila Neog – Urmila took shelter with two sons as her husband used to abuse her badly. She fought the case against her husband with the help of the Ashram and her parents. Her husband got married again. She kept one son with her and another was given to her husband.

From the description of the tragic cases of domestic violence mentioned above, one can easily make out how Nirmal Ashray, the short stay home, has been helping the distressed women to stand on their own by getting secured shelter and vocational training. They are doing a noble job indeed. Moreover, through the legal aid cell they helped many families to avert getting ruined. They give destitute women a dignified life. The Ashram is having a serene and peaceful atmosphere. The women get all support and looked happy in Nirmal Ashray.

North East Network – North East Network, an NGO, was established in 1995 in Guwahati. The NEN (North East Network) in partnership with different Mahila Samities and various other women’s groups have documented some 200 cases of domestic violence in different districts of the state and this documentation gives an indication of the type of violence on women and the purported reasons behind it. According to the NGO, a considerable amount of confidence building is required to encourage victims to speak up and seek redress. As per their experience during interviews with the victim women, NEN has found that women have little or no knowledge of the support systems available to them in the case of domestic violence. The NEN therefore has brought out three directories on support services to help women in this regard in the states of Assam, Meghalaya and Manipur. Based on their experience it can be said that there is a high degree of family violence in all these states where affected women contact this network for succour.

Mitali Sangha – In the matter of protection of the rights of women, especially for the poor and helpless ones, Mitali sangha, an NGO, had been established in Guwahati by a few pioneering ladies in 1969. For the last 37 years or so, this NGO has been taking
initiative in a number of welfare work in respect of women. They have done a great deal for the development of literacy among illiterate women.

**Al-Ameen Welfare Society** – A leading Guwahati based NGO, Al-Ameen Welfare Society resolved to generate awareness about the legal rights of Muslim women. To achieve this, the society will co-ordinate with the ‘Mahila Samities’ of different localities in the city. In April 2004, the society formed a legal cell, headed by retired justice S.Haque, at the instance of academician Ashraf Ali. President of the society, K.Z.N.Ahmed said, “We will try to organize awareness camps in the remote villages of the state for the women. Ignorance about their own rights regarding marriage and property is one of the main reasons for their exploitation.”

**Women Power Connect (WPC)** – In 2005, in Assam, Women Power Connect had begun its operation by training members of about 40 women’s organizations from seven sisters on the art of lobbying for their cause. WPC President Ranjana Kumari said the organization is trying to create mass awareness and plans to co-ordinate among all NGOs and Women’s Organizations to highlight the problems and issues pertaining to women. The concept of WPC is a noble idea to promote the interests of women throughout the country. The unity of women groups and NGOs all over the nation will help strengthen the womenfolk to fight together the injustice against them. On January 19, 2007, a memorandum was submitted to Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi by WPC urging the state government to allocate funds in the next budget and set up a mechanism for implementation of the Domestic Violence Protection Act in the State. WPC has been trying to fight on women issues unitedly from grassroots level to the national level.

### 5.4 Societal Activism against Domestic Violence:

Social support is emerging as the single most important factor in mitigating the impact of highly stressful situations of domestic violence. A little over a decade ago the victim’s existing social network had been woefully inadequate in dealing with the
police and the judicial system. The emergence of social support systems has made it possible for bereaved families to take action beyond beating their chests in helplessness. The assistance has been emotional, informational and tangible in nature. It has taken the form of public demonstrations, protest marches, slogan raising, giving media coverage, distributing pamphlets, holding exhibition, enacting plays, assisting parents in filing cases in court, pressurizing the police, pressurizing authorities to amend existing laws and following up cases with the police and lawyers.

Perhaps the single most important function this kind of social support has accomplished is to create public awareness of the crime. Though the cult of violence against women in families has taken a deep root in the society and has been escalating, the conscience of the society does not always remain dormant. The indication of this situation becomes apparent when people in big numbers come out on to the streets to protest against a particularly atrocious incident of such violence occurring in an area. They raise strong voice of protest forcing the authorities to act or sometime even resort to some kind of counter violence against the family in which such an incident had taken place. It has also been seen that this spontaneous protest takes the form of processions, dharnas, gherao of police stations etc. Many a time protesters confine themselves to petitioning to the deputy commissioner or the superintendent of police of the district for redress. Sometimes when passions run high (depending on the intensity of the cruelty or inhuman nature of the incident), people are known to take the law into their own hands and beat up the offender or offenders in the case or ransack his house or even resort to arson of the offending family's house. Such forms of protests are no longer few and far between but have been taking place quite often with the rising index of family violence in Assam.

Some incidents of protest against domestic violence as reported in the media in recent times are noted below ---
On September 23, 2005, a newly wed bride Sushila in Muktapur village under Baihata PS (police station) of Kamrup District died after being under treatment for quite some time with severe burn injuries. Reports say that she became a victim of dowry demands and was put to various types of atrocities before she got burnt after mysterious circumstances. This incident of bride burning caused a high degree of tension in the area and later at night a big number agitated people ransacked the husband’s house and caused damage to the same. Later the police intervened.13

In Raghupara village under Kharua Bandha police outpost in Dhubri district one Yasmin Khatun died under mysterious circumstances on October 11, 2005. There was suspicion of foul play in the death of the woman but police failed take proper action as expected. This infuriated the local people and a mob of 5,000 persons set fire on and destroyed two houses of the homestead of her husband. Meanwhile the husband had managed to escape from the place to save himself from the anger of the people.14

This story is from Bokoliyaghat of Karbi Anglong district. Manisha Bora had love marriage. However, physical atrocities started on Manisha almost immediately after the marriage on demand for dowry. On September 10, 2005, Manisha was reported missing from her matrimonial home and police recovered her decomposed body from nearby. A case under section 302 IPC was lodged and the husband and other family members of his family were arrested. More than 2,000 ladies brought out protest march against this incident and demanded exemplary punishment for the perpetrators of this crime. The local Students Union also called for a Bandh at Bokoliaghat Bazar on the issue.15

A newly wed bride Jyoti Bora died of burn injuries on August 21, 2002, at village Deoghoria under Namti PS in Sibasagar district. Her husband reported that she committed suicide by setting fire on herself with kerosene. The people in the area refused to accept the story saying that the husband had committed a deliberate murder of her wife owing to his having illicit relation with another woman. The police was
very slow to act which enraged the local people. More than 300 women therefore took out a procession with banners and festoons demanding arrest of the culprits. The police then became active and arrested the victim's husband and the other woman. The processionists also submitted a memorandum to the S.D.O. Nazira for action.\textsuperscript{16}

The victim Himadri Das (25) was killed on August 15, 2005 at Hajo. The protesters even went to the extent of examining the evidences in the case and alleged that the husband Jatin Das who was a Junior Engineer of P.W.D. had ‘managed’ the police in his favour through some dubious means. Crowd followed the investigating officers in the case and kept watch on the conduct of the officers. Students, ladies and general people held meetings and even resorted to road blockade (there were as many as 3,000 people in the protest blockade). They warned that negligence in investigation would not be tolerated. In this connection Ramdia Students Union submitted a memorandum to the Deputy Commissioner Kamrup for strong action against the accused persons.\textsuperscript{17}

As late as on March 30, 2007, Karabi the wife of Puran Nath of Dolaipara village under Kolagaon P.S. in Darang district was set on fire by her husband by pouring petrol on her body. After a long fight for survival, Karabi succumbed to her injuries on April 4 at Guwahati medical college hospital. The deceased in her dying declaration had stated that while she was in kitchen doing cooking at about 7-30pm, her husband called her to the bedroom and gagging her with a piece of cloth set her on fire. In this connection a large group of (50) ladies consisting of members of different women’s organizations went in a procession to the office of the Deputy Commissioner seeking punishment for the wife killer Puran Nath.\textsuperscript{18}

In an incident of domestic violence in village Falangani in Golaghat district, bride Anjumoni Bharali was put to severe physical assault on March 28, 2007 by her husband, who later fled away from his home. This has created a terrible reaction among the people in the area. The inability of the police in nabbing the culprit even after 15 days of incident has further added fuel to the fire. The local people were
joined by organizations like Nagarik Manch Morongi Mauza, All India Youth Federation (local unit) and All India Student’s Federation (local unit) in demanding of the police administration appropriate action in the matter.19

A report dated April 12, 2007, says that one Prahlad Bashak of Tangla had set fire on his wife Shibani on January 13, 2007 with a view to murdering her. Shibani later succumbed to her injuries due to lack of timely care and treatment. In this connection the Darang Udalguri Unit of All India Democratic Women’s Association (AIDWA) has demanded the arrest and punishment of the culprit.20

In a spontaneous reaction to two separate incidents of alleged killing of brides in Bajali area of Barpeta district, the people came out on the roads as a mark of protest on April 5, 2007 at the locality of Nityananda. Similarly bride Barnali Barman also died on April 12, 2007, at Patsala town in the hands of her husband’s family. Nearly 15, 00 men and women gathered to protest against the killing of brides in the area and stalled the movement of the traffic on the national highway. They also asked lawyers not to take any brief of the accused persons. Among others, local units of ASSU, Yuba Chatra Parishad, BJP, DYFI and Mahila Samaj joined the protesters.21

A report dated April 18, 2007 from Golaghat said that a girl named Rupajyoti Das got married with one Muhammad Sariful Hussain on 18 October 2005 in Udaypur village in the district. The husband’s family started mental and physical atrocity for no reason. Rupajyoti filed an FIR at Merapani P.S. on this on 18 March 2007. But the police did not take any action. 17 local organizations including women’s organizations thereafter stepped in and submitted a memorandum for justice before the Chief Judicial Magistrate.22

Public consciousness and protests emanating therefrom sometimes come to the aid of hapless victims. In one such case, in Karimganj district, Assam, the neighbours raised a hue and cry when a 70-year-old man with five grown up children proceeded to marry
a ten-year-old girl. Enraged at this conduct of the old man, 25 residents of the village submitted a memorandum to the women’s cell of the office of DC Karimganj for taking action.23

In a story of domestic violence by a doctor on his wife, his mother was also a party to the atrocities, which were committed essentially to extort money from the bride’s mother in the form of dowry. When the atrocities became unbearable, an FIR was filed on June 23, 2006 at Geetanagar P.S. The ladies from nearby Narikolbari area demonstrated on 29 June at the police station demanding action against the accused. In the meantime the accused doctor obtained anticipatory bail from the High Court and came to the police station whereupon lady demonstrators made a blockade of the P.S. and kept the accused confined for several hours.24

Ms Pompy Kakoty, a married woman of Novety village under Jajuri police station of Nagaon district, died of burn injury on May 8, 2007. Mother of two children, she sustained burn injuries at 10 pm on May 6 under mysterious circumstances. Local people hospitalized her at Nagaon, but later sent her to GMC for better treatment. She succumbed to her injuries in Guwahati. On May 8, a crowd of more than 200 ladies held a protest meeting at the local library premises and submitted a memorandum to Jajuri police station for proper investigation in the incident.25

There has been prevailing a high degree of tension in Titabor police station area following the unnatural death of Usharani (21), wife of Pranab Dutta, a resident of Namchungi village. The local women’s organization, youth bodies and village defence party submitted memorandum to the District Administration for action in the matter. Her husband was arrested and mother-in-law detained for interrogation.26

A later report said that during investigation the husband made a confession of having killed the woman by assaulting and strangulating her in a fit of rage following a quarrel between his mother and wife. Here a pertinent point emerges that a
spontaneous protest by the people could help bring an offender to justice who otherwise could have got away after permeating an extreme kind of domestic violence on a hapless woman.27

The mysterious death of one Bulti Malakar (23) took place at about 8 pm on May 26, 2007. The police recovered her body with hundred percent burn injuries. She was pregnant. This incident created a wide repercussion in the entire area. Further, the police did not have any success in finding out the real cause of Bulti’s mysterious death. More than a hundred women staged a strong protest by raising slogans etc. and laying a siege to the police station on May 30, 2007.28

The story of the brutal killing of Sushila, mother of a seven-year-old boy, for dowry came to light on May 25, 2007 at Bamunbari village in Dibrugarh district. On May 24, a labourer engaged to work in the household got smell of the decomposed body and informed the neighbours of it. The local people took the matter to the police. The police acted promptly and detained the husband, father-in-law and son. Pressed by police interrogation, Pavan confessed having killed his wife and the police recovered the decomposed body of Sushila from the latrine. The cause of justice was pushed forward in this case by the conscientious neighbours, without whom the death of Sushila would never have been known.29

The above stories published in newspapers in recent times show how significant the role of the society is in bringing about justice for victims of domestic violence and upholding laws. A random survey of the local newspaper reports appearing in Assamese Dailies illustrated one vital point in the matter of the rising incidence of domestic violence in Assam. Almost everyday a story or two appears in the local newspapers giving the horrific details of domestic violence in families. There is increasing evidence of people quickly and spontaneously coming out to protest against incidence of domestic violence and pursue the matter till the police and other agencies of the criminal justice system satisfactorily do their job of bringing the offenders to
justice. Public awareness can only help bring justice to the victims of domestic violence.

5.5 NGOs in India:
Many NGOs have taken up a host of activities for the benefit of women. Some organizations like All India Women’s Conference, Sanjivani, Manasi Vasanthali organized campaigns on many social issues like dowry deaths, atrocities against women and so on. Some of the organizations provided legal assistance to distressed women. To empower women at the grassroots level, many organizations emerged to project women’s employment needs and even the need for their access to credit, developmental inputs and service.30

In Mumbai, a legal resource centre ‘Majlis’ helped many victim women, who were physically and emotionally abused, and rendered advice regarding their rights. Flavia Agnes was involved in Majlis for 15 years and handled several domestic violence cases and supported many women victims. Flavia Agnese, herself is a victim of domestic violence, narrated her own story how she suffered a violent relationship with her husband and was thrown out with three small kids from her matrimonial home. She said, “I had learnt my lesson the hard way, after repeatedly being thrown out of my husband’s home with three small children during 13 years of violent marriage. Every time I was thrown out, I had felt even more violated than when I was beaten. I strongly believed that the contract of marriage gave me a right to reside in the home since I was primarily a homemaker and knew of no other shelter except my matrimonial home. But no one else seemed to think so. At that time I had felt helpless and was extremely frustrated that I did not have the confidence to argue my own case. Later I felt I would be able to convince the judges and could secure a favourable court order securing for my children and myself the right of residence in the matrimonial home. But I found it very difficult to convince my lawyers then. Finally, left with no other option, I just relinquished my rights and started a new life for myself, devoid of the economic security that the marriage was supposed to provide for my children and
me. That was way back in 1980, when it was not fashionable to highlight dowry related violence and domestic violence per se had yet to become a campaign issue. Fortunately for me, with the help of a few friends, I was able to renegotiate the world and the courts on my own terms and move on in life without the aid of a protective order or even a formal divorce." Later on, after a decade, Flavia Agnes acquired a law degree and with other friends could set up ‘Majlis’ with primary concern to convince the courts and the women concerned that the right of residence in the matrimonial home is a basic and fundamental right, which need to be protected.31

‘Saheli’ and ‘Sathiyan’ are Delhi based NGOs working for women victims of domestic violence. Vimochana, the women activists from Bengalure, fighting daily battles with the police, the administration, the judiciary, the hospitals, and the doctors are in a constant state of alert, running from one battle field to another. Vimochana in Bengalore is today a force to contend with -- administration consults them regularly on women’s issues and treats them with respect. The problems the Vimochana is trying to tackle are many -- police inaction, dowry harassment, domestic violence, legal hurdles, court delays, increasing social acceptance of crimes against women, the rising graphs of atrocities and so on. The canvas is always vast for those who are fighting and splattered with many shades of violence against women.32

Swayam ia a Calcutta based organization committed to fighting violence against women. Swayam’s work encompasses a gamut of activities and was set up to provide holistic support. These include running a support centre which provides coulselling, helps facilitate support groups for women, helps women report cases of violence to the police as well as insists on follow ups, provides legal aid and health support and offers vocational training and employment opportunities. It also helps organize shelters for women in need and runs a public education and awareness generation programme. Sanhita, an organization in Calcutta, has also done commendable work in the area of domestic violence.33
In Ahmedabad, in a nondescript school in the border village of Therad in Banaskantha, around 70 girls, some married and some still studying in schools, trained themselves in karate, an art which they had never heard about till a couple of days back. The women in this region had for the first time been taking training in karate in self defence against physical violence, especially domestic violence. According to women activists, about 98% of women in this region suffer silently one or other kind of mental or physical violence.34

Over 1,000 minor girls in the district of Chattisgarh refused to get married and have turned against their elders, saying they are too young to be married off. Amita, a class VII student became the head of a band of girls, scampering around and collecting signatures for a petition against child marriage. They acted just in time, just days ahead of “teez” festival when hundreds of girls barely into puberty are dragged for marriage by their parents. Amita said, “My marriage was fixed to a boy from Mandla. I am in class VII only and want to continue my studies. Hence, I protested.” Some of the young rebels motivated other minors to resist the wedding plan on “teez” made by their parents. The girls have formed a “Kishori Bahini” by visiting different villagers to reject marriage proposals. They have also collected from minor girls over 1,000 ‘oath papers’ saying they will not marry till they are 18.35

**Helplines** – In urban India, women tend to go to helplines, which has become a quick way to sort out marital discord. Tripti Panchal, coordinator, special cell for women and children, at Mumbai’s Tata Institute of Social Service (TISS) says, “Urban women see the value of time and energy. Nobody wants to run around courts and police stations. They come to counselling centres to settle marital matters amicably and fast.” To domestic violence age is no bar. The ‘Janodaya helpline’ recently received a call from a 50 year old housewife who complained of repeated physical abuse for over a decade by her husband. Her husband was a surgeon at a leading Bangalore hospital, was a stickler for total comfort at home. “He felt that since he worked under immense pressure all day, he was entitled to complete comfort at home. He would beat his wife
even if the tea was a shade more milky than he liked it,” says Janodaya’s Dayanand. His wife saw much younger women putting an end to abusive marriages, which helped her to decide to walk out on him.

At Janodaya Public Trust Office in Bengalure, a state-government-funded NGO, a 35 year old software professional, who worked with a leading Bengalure based IT farm, Tanya Sharma desperately wanted to get out of an abusive marriage and turned to the NGO for help. Sharma’s professional success became the cause of a deep rift in her marriage. Sharma would often find her office papers lying torn in the kitchen dustbin and important documents deleted from the laptop. “She stuck to her three-year-old daughter. But when the situation became unbearable, she decided to walk out,” says Dayanand. Janodaya helped Sharma to get a smooth divorce and secure the custody of her child.

Women like Tanya Sharma take counselling and legal help to avert their suffering from domestic violence of different forms and when all’s not well on the home front. An increasing number of affluent women call in with problems ranging from domestic violence, emotional abuse at home to property disputes and custody of children. The Janodaya helpline claims to receive everyday 20 / 25 calls from upper middle class women. “There has been a 20% increase in the numbers since last year,” says Mendonsa. Similar statistics have been recorded in women NGOs across cities. The International Foundation for Crime Prevention and Victims Care (CPVC), Chennai, claims that 40 % women from upper middle class families seek help at the NGO.

Dilasa, a crises centre set up at the K.B. Bhaba Municipal General Hospital in Mumbai, has been doing some pioneering work in this sphere. Set up by the hospital in order to detect cases of violence and then help and provide protection, Dilasa has already detected 117 cases since its inception in November 2002. Dr Seema Malik, medical superintendent at Bhaba Hospital, says that being a gynaecologist she often comes across cases where the women would come to her with laceration and burns. At
Dilasa, a patient is screened for violence and the staff has been trained by counsellors on gender sensitization and detecting violence. Malik says, “We offer all kinds of support to the victim from legal to emotional.”

5.6 Southhall Black Sisters (SBS) and Manavi:
Kiranjit Ahluwalia, an Indian living in England, set fire on her husband Deepak Ahluwalia in May 1989 after suffering his brutality for ten years. She was charged with murder and imprisoned for life. Her term was 12 years. But with the support of a local women’s organization, Southhall Black Sisters, in September 1992, Regina Vs Kiranjit Ahluulia made English legal history when Kiranjit was released after her serving three-and-a-half years of sentence. Six Indian women living in United States founded in 1985 an NGO called ‘Manavi’ to support victims of domestic violence. It became the first South Asian women’s organization seeking to address this issue in the U.S. Based in New Jersey, Manavi (NGO) handles the cases of an average of 300 women victims of domestic violence annually.

5.7 Misuse of NGOs:
While some NGOs have been doing yeoman’s job, there are many who use NGOs in which they work, for their personal aggrandizement. There are several of them in Assam too, which seem to be using funds coming from government and international agencies for their own selfish interest, rather than for the interest of the people that they claim to be serving and remain confined to papers only. There is no dearth of examples of this situation among NGOs supposedly working for relief and welfare of women affected by domestic violence or immoral trafficking or things of this nature. An NGO which submits project reports for a shelter home for victims of atrocity at home or trafficking and obtain huge funds from even the Central government but does very little to help such women. There is fraud by subtle means in the implementation of the project sectioned. For example the shelter home is shown running with 30 inmates but it is only 2 / 3 inmates who are given shelter. The management of such
shelter homes for victims of violence is all but non-existent, with women being kept underfed in most unhygienic conditions. Since there is no law to regulate the working of NGOs, the office bearers of such NGOs make best of the opportunity to make financial gains.

The following newspaper reports highlight the situation in a different way. The government has been giving grants and subsidies to as many as 150 self-help groups through a local NGO in Darang district of Assam. These grants for the SHGs (self-help groups) were essentially meant for rural empowerment. An amount of Rs. 2.774 crore was disbursed to the above mentioned NGO to channelise the money to the individual SHGs. However, some of the office bearers of the NGO misappropriated the entire amount of the grants that came, resulting in an FIR being filed against the office bearers.

The Sadou Asom Rajyik Mahila Unnayan Manch (SARMUM) secretary Rupeswari Devi Datta (30) at head office Baihata Chariali was caught red handed by some women members of Bardangerikuchi Pragati Mahila SHG, Gashbari Mahila SGH in Patidarrang mouza at Baihata Chariali on December 23, 2005 while collecting money by fraud. State government authorities concerned turned a blind eye to this incident it was alleged.

5.8 Bottomline:
To sum up, NGOs, by and large, have been sentinels of women's rights in the country. As recounted hereinbefore, they have been making a formidable contribution to the preservation of the life, dignity and liberty of women who suffer from physical, economic and social abuses in many forms. Domestic violence is one of the worst crimes committed on women in our country. The nature and characteristics of the crime are such that when women fall victim to it, they land up in a worst type of predicament to get out of which becomes a near impossible proposition, given the existent social mores prevalent in our country. Thus, the role that is being played
NGOs now in respect of restoration of women’s rights and giving succour to women aggrieved by domestic violence is of highest importance *per se*. They not only give women the way out from difficult situations but also, most importantly, the will to live and get back to a dignified life. NGOs break the barriers of caste, creed, religion and social prejudices and build up for women a degree of confidence and self-esteem.

The government of Assam has urged that the voluntary sector or NGOs should come forward to work hand in hand with the government so that the burden of the government would be considerably reduced. The progress and development of the country is possible if the voluntary sector puts up its best efforts for the all round development in all spheres of life, particularly women’s issues like domestic violence as the nature of such crime is private and voluntary organizations can successfully settle matters without much uproar. It was in this perspective that the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005 has given a full legal recognition to the role of NGOs as service providers to victims of domestic violence. High expectations have been placed on these non-official public bodies in the matter of taking up the causes of battered women and ensuring delivery of justice to them. Work done by NGOs on incidents of domestic violence will now be legal acts and they even have protection for the same as public servants.

Where government machinery and government schemes fail to deliver up to the expected level, the voluntary sector has tremendous scope for work in the development of the society. However, the NGO movement in India has still to go a long way to become flawless. There is a lot of fraud and hypocrisy in the movement. What is needed is the highest degree of integrity in those who take up the work of an NGO. To avoid misuse of funds, government should make NGOs financially accountable. Volunteers can even make it a career option but the hallmark should be dedication and honesty by taking it as a mission.
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