Domestic violence, in other words violence that takes place within the four walls of a household affecting married women in particular, is a world wide phenomenon. It is not that women in India only suffer from this social evil but the weaker sex all over the world, in both developed and developing countries, cutting across social, economic and educational strata have been falling victim to this scourge without being properly noticed.

However, North-East India and particularly the state of Assam were not deemed to suffer from this evil, thanks to a good degree of freedom historically enjoyed by women in this region. With increasing mobility of people from different cultures coming to Assam and those from Assam visiting other parts of the country, a trend has been noticed of a rising incidence of dowry related crimes and violence in this part of the country. During the last two decades local newspapers have been carrying horrifying stories of domestic violence on married women with even a large number of deaths following from dowry demands, alcoholism, marital maladjustments and other similar reasons. This development is being seen in both urban and rural areas of the state. However, the city of Guwahati being in a sense an epitome of the state has been reporting cases of domestic violence in varied forms. This situation caused to develop interest to find out the nature, causes and consequences of domestic violence and the state’s response to them in Assam with a special focus on the expanding metropolis of Guwahati. Now that a special law called “Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005” has been passed by Parliament, the subject has become an important object of public attention and scrutiny.
Domestic violence has always been a secretive affair, kept a secret both by the perpetrator and the victim. The society also has always maintained an indifferent attitude on the crime though it is the only crime that keeps recurring in families with short intervals but with grave consequences. Even with present day modernization and increased literacy among women, victims of domestic violence are essentially wary of making their ordeal public. Lots of difficulties were there in the investigation to collect information on individual family violence especially because women generally maintain silence on any query made on it. The study is based on registered cases relating to domestic violence in Guwahati city and therefore the incidence recorded is only a part of the totality; a vast majority of the same remains unreported. A study of the registered cases therefore reflects more or less a sample survey of the extent of domestic violence endured by married women in the city.

As regards the response of the state to the matter, greater difficulties were encountered owing to bad record keeping in offices and courts concerned, ambivalent attitude of officials and non-co-operation of victims. As a matter of fact it is a Herculean task to dig out the stories in full owing to the lackadaisical response of the officials of different organs of the state. However, all efforts have been made to fill in the missing links in the collection of data and relevant information for the purpose of building up a broad and coherent picture of the state of affairs in respect of the subject of study.