

## Women Empowerment and Domestic Violence: A Case Study of Hailakandi District in Assam

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**ABSTRACT:** Gender discrimination has been a universal phenomenon in human history from time immemorial. On account of her biological constitution, social taboos and scriptural sanction, the social position of the woman has always been considered as inferior and subordinate to man in society. In this regard, it has been accepted that feminism and women's movement are necessary spheres of social reform. The impact of movement can be clearly seen on the government, administration and politicians whereby a series of bodies have been set up specifically to deal with women's issues. Besides influencing legislation judiciary, media, education programmes and government strategies, the most important gain is that a woman who was earlier considered weak and need of welfare should be a participant in her own development. The movement has given in increasing number of women a voice and courage to speak. In spite of such strong women movement across the country the status of women in the Hailakandi district of Southern Assam, is not very satisfactory. Only small section of women among the urban, educated elites have been able to take advantage of new opportunities, the poor women are being increasingly impoverished and are becoming more vulnerable to violence. What seems to be imperative in this situation is enhancement of women's economic skills and to improve opportunities and providing necessary support structures for them to be free from the drudgery of domestic chores through the involvement of government effort along with other agencies and above all to do all our efforts through women movement which the district of Hailakandi is specifically in need of.

**Key words:** Gender discrimination, education elites, non-workers, economic skill, women empowerment, domestic violence, IPC Crime.

### INTRODUCTION :

The status of women in India has been subject to great many changes over the past few millennia. From a largely unknown status in ancient times through the low points of the medieval period, to the promotion of equal rights by many reformers, the history of women in India has been eventful. Social reformers all over the country showed their deep concern over women's issues such as Sati, child-marriage, female infanticide, widowhood, education and the like. Women have now certainly got a status in society. Although women have joined almost every profession in our country and most of them are doing excellent work but everything does not stop here. She has to fight hard to retain her position and make people realise the worth of her skills. No doubt, geographically, men and women share the same space, yet they are not treated equally in the world. In reality, there exists inequality in women's access to education, health care, physical and financial resources and opportunities in the political, economic, social & cultural field. Hailakandi district, located in the southern part of Assam, also shows the same picture. Women in this district though are coming forward in every field, yet it is found from the analysis that the status of women is comparatively lower particularly in

some selected indicators & are becoming more vulnerable to violence. In this study, an attempt has been made to examine the status of women in Hailakandi district of Assam which is necessary to have the right information for effective planning & implementation of Govt. policy for the upliftment of their position in the society.

### SURVEY OF LITERATURE :

A flood of literature on the issues concerning women's status in advanced as well as developing countries have come out, among them some of the literature reviews are presented for the present study. Kushwaha Saumya (2003) in her book had explored the linkages between women's development and disparities. Dwivedi Sharat (2008) in his book dealt with all the issues about the women and their role and status in the independent India. Desai et al (2001) in their book made an attempt to paint a picture of the changing perceptions of the status and role of women at the threshold of the new millennium. Gupta Mukta (2000) examined in her book to solve problems caused by development plans and policies which are detrimental to women. Das Ira (2013), in her study made an attempt to examine the status of women in the NER in comparison with all India average. Devi M. (2013) in her paper tried to look

into the different aspects that shape up the women status in Assam. Das Sanjay (2012) in his paper made comparative analysis on the quality and performance of the SHGs and the impact of SHGs on women members in Barak Valley. Though more or less all these studies have touched mainly on issues related to women yet it is observed that none of them focussed on the status of women, particularly, in Hailakandi district at present. The present paper thus made an attempt to highlight mainly on status of women in Hailakandi district, which is examined mainly on the basis of different indicators.

#### **AREA OF THE STUDY :**

For the present study the district of Hailakandi is selected which is situated in the southern most corner of Assam surrounded by river Barak in the North, Cachar in the East, Mizoram in the South and East and Karimganj in the West. The district headquarter is at Hailakandi town which is located 341 km away from the state capital Guwahati. As per census of India 2011, the district has a total population of 659296 out of which 6,11,156 lived in rural areas and 48,140 in urban areas. Geographically, the district has an area of 1327 sq. Km which constitutes only 1.69 per cent of the total state territory. Out of its total territory of 1327 sq. Km, 1316.47 sq. Km (99.95 percent) is rural territory while only 10.53 sq. Km (0.05 percent) is under urban settlement.

#### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY :**

Realising the significant role of women and their status in the society, the present study attempts to highlight the following objectives:

- 1) To make an overview of the status/position of women in Hailakandi district taking into account the various dimensions of their participation.
- 2) To highlight the domestic violence done against women in Hailakandi district by conducting a survey of 150 women respondents randomly selected from different groups like House-wives (WWs), Working Women (WW) and Wage Earners (WEs) respectively.
- 3) To look into the social working Groups in this district.

#### **METHODOLOGY :**

The study is based both on primary and secondary data. Primary data has been collected from a sample of 150 women respondents selected randomly from Hailakandi town. Purposive random sampling is being used for the collection of data. Secondary data has been collected from the Census Reports of the Govt., Directorates of Economics And Statistics, Hailakandi, different agencies, various books, journals, articles, etc. Data are

arranged in tabular form and simple statistical tools like percentage, diagrams have been used in the analysis, wherever necessary.

#### **ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION :**

It is sad, but true fact, that women, who constitute one half of humanity have always been treated as second class citizens and devoid even basic rights, in most cases. Men have always dominated women and considered them as inferior to them. Though 1975 was observed as the International Women Year, 1975-85 as the International Decade and March 8 is celebrated as the International Women's Day each year, precious little seems to have been done to uplift the status of women in general. In the present analysis, the status of women in Hailakandi district is examined on the basis of the following indicators:

##### **A) DEMOGRAPHIC STATUS :**

The demographic profile of the State of Assam (2011 census) shows that total population size in the state stood at 31205576 comprising 15939443 male numbers and 15266133 female numbers. However, in comparison to State Average, the total population of the Hailakandi district is 6,59,296 as per 2011 census comprising 337892 (51.25 percent) males and 321404 (48.75 percent) females. The population density is 496 per sq. Km and sex ratio is of 951 female per 1000 males.

##### **B) EDUCATION STATUS :**

Whether education is viewed as an asset in raising earning capacity, as a gateway to knowledge and information, or as spur to inculcate values of concern for social transformation and establishment of gender justice, women education is a primary necessity. The entry of women into the formal education system began in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, but it got wider acceptance only in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. The Government was slow to push policies promoting education but social reformers and women's organisations realised the significance of women's education at all levels. Elementary education empowers women by providing information and confidence about entering any field or profession not previously open to women. However, access to education does not depend upon will but on availability of educational institutions, familial support and quality of education. Thus Women literacy drives are a part of the Governmental effort to improve the quality of life of the people, taken up in the wake of globalisation. In Hailakandi district, however, the low female literacy rate is alarming which is shown in the following table and diagram:

Table 1: Female literacy rate (2001 and 2011)

|         | Census 2001 |             |            | Census 2011 |             |            |
|---------|-------------|-------------|------------|-------------|-------------|------------|
| Persons | Literates   | Illiterates | Literacy % | Literates   | Illiterates | Literacy % |
| Male    | 155674      | 124839      | 59.07      | 226836      | 111054      | 55.7       |
| Female  | 107873      | 154486      | 40.93      | 180530      | 140876      | 44.3       |
| Total   | 263547      | 279325      | 100        | 407366      | 251930      | 100        |

Source: Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Hailakandi.

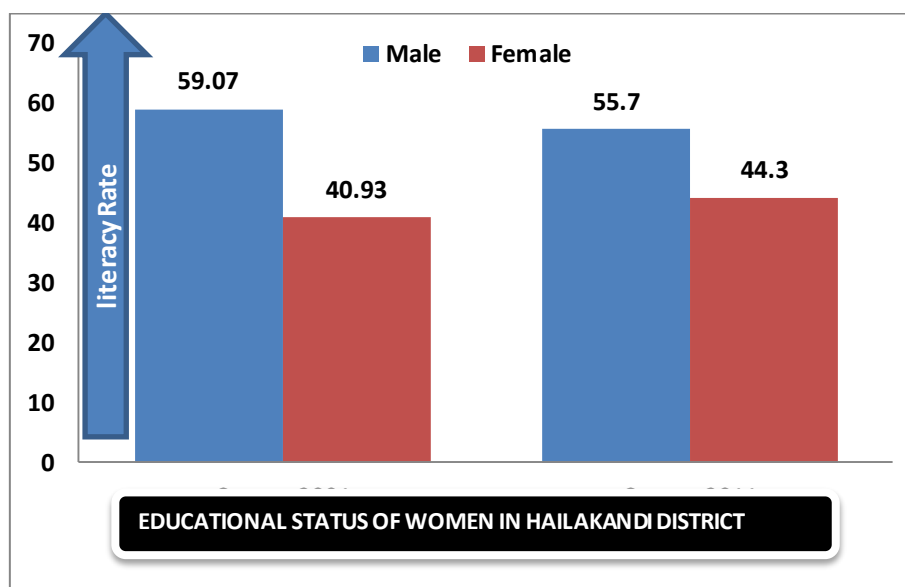


Fig 1: Female literacy rate (2001 and 2011)

The above table 1 and Fig-1 show that literacy percentage rate of women in the district is lower in comparison to male. Though the rate as per 2011 census has increased to 44.3 percent from 40.93 percent (2001 census), yet it is still below 50 percent.

### C) EMPLOYMENT STATUS :

Men and women both work, the main issue is the types of work they do, where it is done, how it is done and what rewards/remunerations are obtained. Women run households, rear children, care for the aged and the sick, toil on farms and in factories, and perform economic and non-economic activities within families. They are seen at work in offices, factories and farms, but most times, their working hands remain invisible. The complexity of the issue of women's work is such that even the census data does not capture the accurate rate of women's work participation. Women worker's experience is that the line between the organised and unorganised sectors is very thin. They are often pushed from the organised to the unorganised sector and oscillate between skilled and unskilled work according to the demand of the work situation. A significant number of women work in the informal sector for long hours, at low wages and without any legal protection against exploitation. In rural areas, women work in the sectors of agriculture, plantations, fisheries, poultry and dairy, in urban areas they work for manufacturing units, service sector and the like. Similar picture emerges in Hailakandi district. In Hailakandi district, Women's participation in the context of employment sector is reflected through the following table 2 and Fig. 2:

Table 2: Employment Status of Women

|              | Census 2001 |        |        | Census 2011 |        |        |
|--------------|-------------|--------|--------|-------------|--------|--------|
|              | Male        | Female | Total  | Male        | Female | Total  |
| Total Worker | 136510      | 45371  | 181881 | 141385      | 23808  | 165193 |
| Cultivator   | 52114       | 10633  | 62747  | 53679       | 2465   | 56144  |
| Agri.Labrs   | 18961       | 8729   | 27690  | 16035       | 1683   | 17718  |
| Hld.Ind      | 1938        | 3790   | 5728   | 1765        | 1499   | 3264   |
| Others       | 63497       | 22219  | 85716  | 69906       | 18161  | 88067  |
| Non-Worker   | 144003      | 218988 | 362991 | 167098      | 277958 | 445056 |
| Working (%)  | 75.05       | 24.95  | 100    | 85.59       | 14.41  | 100    |

Source: Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Hailakandi.

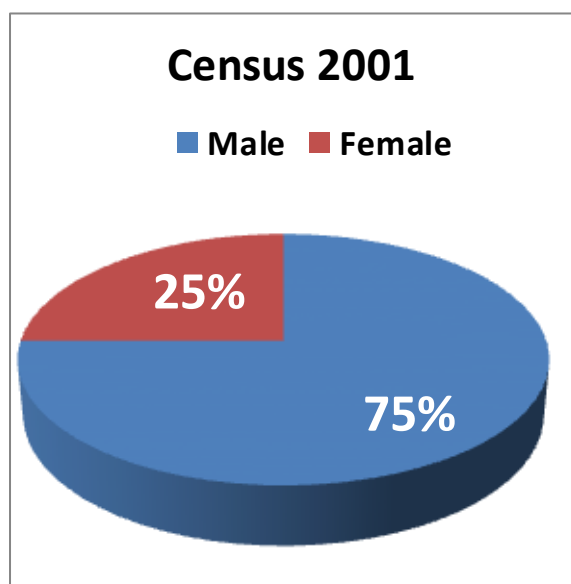
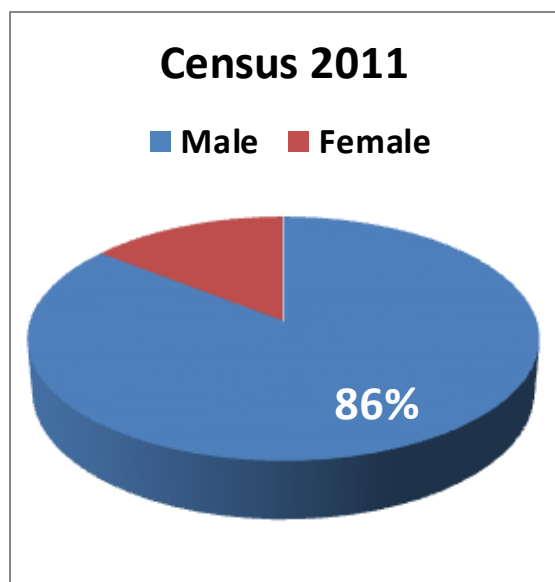


Fig. 2 : Employment Status of Women

The data reveals that working percentage for male in the district as per 2001 census is 75.05 percent as against 24.95 percent female participation. While the census report 2011 depicts the fact that 85.59 percent of male are total workers and only 14.41 percent are female workers, which is comparatively lower than 2001 report. The occupational distribution shows that though number of female workers are more as cultivators yet the number of non-workers at the same time has also increased from 218988 (2001 census) to 277958 (2011) census.

#### D) POLITICAL STATUS :

The concept of political participation of women is broader than the one covering women's participation only in the electoral administration processes. It includes the gamut of voluntary activities with a bearing on the political processes, including voting, support of political groups, communication with legislator, dissemination of political views and opinions among the electorate, and other related activities. However, political participation can be considered to include an involvement in any form of organized activity that effects, or seeks to affect, these power relationships. In Hailakandi district, the PRIs election reports of 1992, 2002 and 2008 highlights the fact that number of female voters as well as contestants are increasing in the present days, e.g., female candidates contested has increased from 333 in 1992 to 1251 in 2002 and finally in 2008 it raised to 2237 respectively. Similarly, they are coming in Municipal Boards also. Interestingly, it is found that most of the women leaders had decided to contest elections just before the filing up of the nomination papers as the seats in certain constituencies were declared reserved all on a sudden just before the date of filling up of nomination papers. As such they were not found to have been independent in making their decisions, instead their decisions were often influenced by a male counterpart like husband, brother, son or a colleague. However, numbers are not remarkable in case of MLA's and MP's election.

#### E) DOMESTIC STATUS :

Domestic violence is practically common. Even today, more than 90% women are not ready and mentally prepared to disclose that they have been subjected to suffer from different domestic violence against them by their husbands, in-laws and even by own sons and daughters. Due to various types of fear, such as the fear of public criticism, fear of losing support from their maternal home to fight against domestic violence the victims usually prefer to remain silent. In order to know the domestic status of women in Hailakandi, a sample of 150 women respondents were selected taking randomly 50 from groups of house-wives, 50 from working women and 50 from wage labourers. Purposive random sampling is being used for the collection of data. The primary data for the present study was collected with the help of questionnaires and personal interview with the respondents. The data collected so far on various issues relating to women has been represented in the following tabular form:

Table 3: Domestic Status of Women

| Response Options   | Total Number of Respondents |     |     | Total Number of Responses |     |     | Total Number of Percentage |     |     |
|--|-----------------------------|-----|-----|---------------------------|-----|-----|----------------------------|-----|-----|
|  | HWs                         | WWs | WEs | HWs                       | WWs | WEs | HWs                        | WWs | WEs |
| Scolds on beats you even at small mistakes   | 50                          | 50  | 50  | 39                        | 6   | 40  | 78                         | 12  | 80  |
| Forces you to work against your will   | 50                          | 50  | 50  | 48                        | 10  | 30  | 96                         | 20  | 60  |
| Husband along with his family's behaviour towards you as a servant   | 50                          | 50  | 50  | 38                        | 5   | 15  | 76                         | 10  | 30  |
| Becomes pleased when you bring something from your maternal home or he gets some share in your parent's property | 50                          | 50  | 50  | 40                        | 25  | 5   | 80                         | 50  | 10  |
| Your husband sends you to your parent's home when you are ill or pregnant  | 50                          | 50  | 50  | 35                        | 15  | 5   | 70                         | 30  | 10  |
| Aware of Medical facilities provided to women and girl child from Govt. Hospitals                                | 50                          | 50  | 50  | 32                        | 50  | 20  | 64                         | 100 | 40  |
| Aware of your legal rights   | 50                          | 50  | 50  | 10                        | 42  | 0   | 20                         | 84  | 0   |

The data indicates that among housewives, working women and wage earners, majority of housewives and wage earners have no positive attitude of self protection from domestic violence. The following findings have come up from this sample survey:

1. It is very unfortunate to find that 76% of HWs said that the husbands and their families treat them as servants without pay while percentage is low in case of WW against WEs.
2. It is found that regarding scolding and beating even at small mistakes WEs share the highest percentage (80%) followed by HWs (78%).
3. As much as 80% of HWs said that the husband gets pleased when they bring something from their parents home or gets share in their parents property, while in case of WW and WEs, it is 50 and 10 percent.
4. It is observed in the study that 70% of HWs are sent to their parents home when they become ill or pregnant which is comparatively low in case of WW (30%) & WEs (10%).
5. It is remarkable to find that regarding medical facilities provided to women & girl child from Govt. Hospitals, HWs stands for 62%, 40% for WEs while in case of WW it is 100%.

6. The study shows that 96% of HWs are forced to work against their will while it is 20% in case of WW & 60% in case of WEs.

7. Furthermore, it has come up from the study that awareness of legal rights needs more attention in the district as only 4% of WEs and 20% of HWs are aware of their legal rights as against 84% in case of WW.

#### F) CRIME STATUS :

Violence against women is an age old phenomenon. Women were always considered weak, vulnerable and in a position to be exploited. Violence has long been accepted as something that happens to a woman. The changing social structure in India has only perpetrated violence and crime against women. In modern days, there is a sharp rise in the crime against women like eve-teasing, rape, kidnapping, importation of girls and the like. Gender injustice, taking the shape of crimes against women without punishment of the criminal, is escalating the world over but in India it has ancient cultural roots and modern malignant manifestations are found to be culprits. To know the crime status in Hailakandi district, the National Crime Bureau's record on different incidents of crimes against women has been taken which is represented as follows:



Table 4: Crime Status of Women

| CRIME HEAD  | 2007       | 2008       | 2009        | 2010        | 2011        | 2012        |
|---|------------|------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Rape  | 160        | 199        | 244         | 316         | 377         | 433         |
| Kidnapping and Abduction                            | 247        | 299        | 343         | 397         | 460         | 525         |
| Dowry Deaths  | 12         | 15         | 23          | 26          | 30          | 36          |
| Assault On Women with Intent to Outrage her Modesty | 120        | 128        | 140         | 156         | 183         | 235         |
| Insult to Modesty of Women                          | 4          | 4          | 4           | 4           | 4           | 4           |
| Cruelty by Husband or His Relatives                 | 256        | 318        | 399         | 528         | 654         | 779         |
| Importation of Girls                                | 0          | 0          | 0           | 0           | 0           | 0           |
| <b>Total IPC Crime Against Women</b>                | <b>799</b> | <b>963</b> | <b>1153</b> | <b>1427</b> | <b>1708</b> | <b>2012</b> |

Source: National Crime Bureau's Record

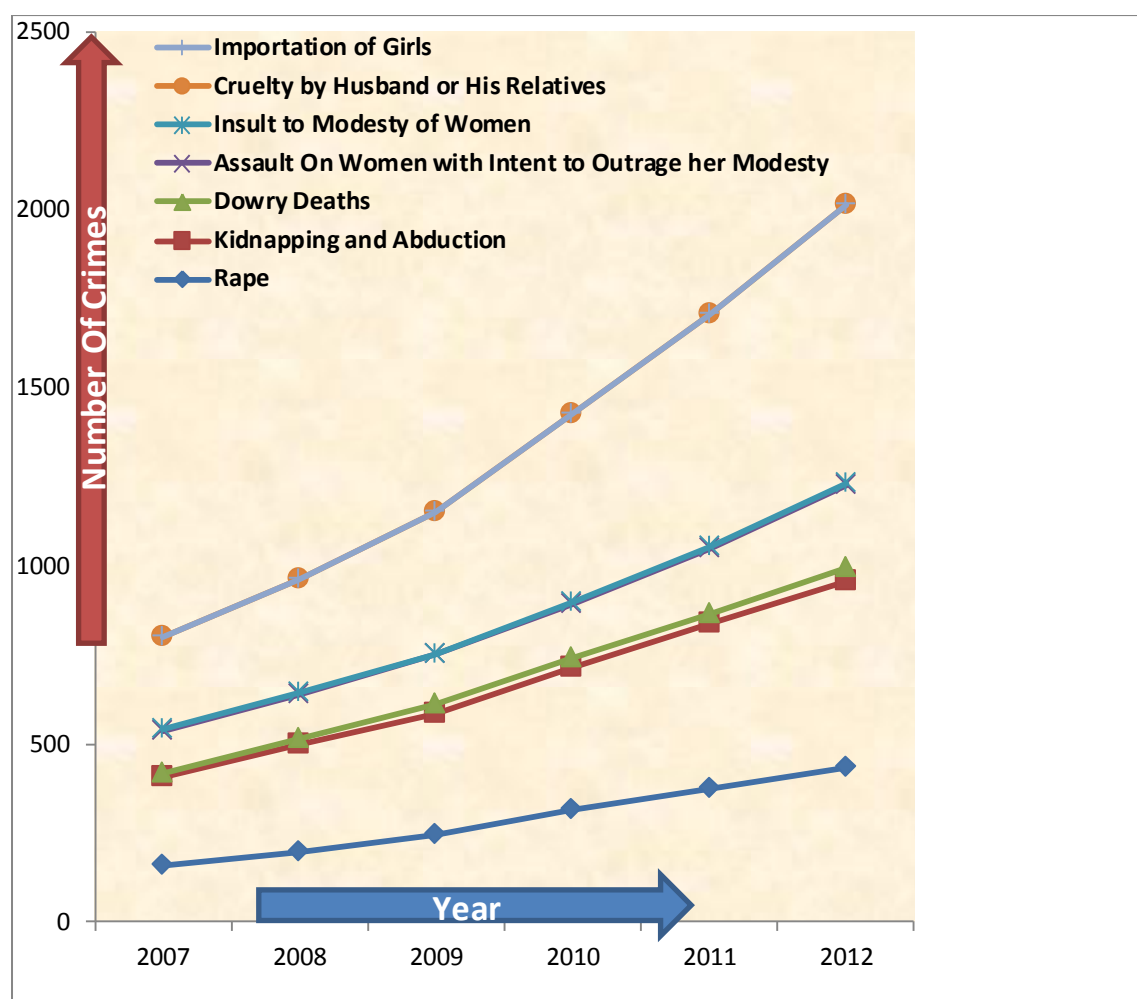


Fig. 3 : Crime Status of Women

The above table 3 and fig. 3 represents the fact that incidents of IPC Crime against women in Hailakandi district is increasing. Data (2007-2012) as obtained from the information recorded, indicates among the different crime heads, particularly, Rape, Kidnapping and cruelty by husband or his relatives shows more upward trend. Rape cases stands out to be 433 in 2012 as increased from 160 in 2007, Kidnapping 525 in 2012 which was 247 in 2007 and Cruelty by

Husband or his relatives from 256 in 2007 to 779 in 2012 respectively.

#### SOCIAL WORKING GROUPS IN HAILAKANDI :

The word 'Feminism' seems to refer to an intense awareness of identity as a woman and interest in feminine problems. The women's movement in India has been a changing kaleidoscope. Two decades after women took to the streets in quest of the equality accorded to them by the constitution, if

the people like her who epitomise the emancipated, empowered Indian women. With every turn, new issues, new dimensions to old issues, new people, new organizations, the ebb and flow of campaigns, have constantly added depth and dimension to women's questions. Added to these is the proliferation of castes, differences in the status of women in different ethnic communities and regions. The movement has evolved over the years resulting in changes in perspective. Thus dowry burnings, rape, wife-beating, and other forms of harassment and violence directed towards women cannot be prevented by law alone. It is the women's social organisations that can be of real help to women in distress. As such, we know that Feminist Groups at different levels, are struggling hard, across the country, for the betterment of women's status in the family and society.

In Hailakandi, as per information obtained from Nehru Yuva Kendra, Hailakandi branch, apart from Mahila Congress and BJP Mahila Morcha, only three numbers of Mahila Samities are working in the town namely,

- a) Pratiruti Mahila Kalyan Samiti (1999) with President Smt. Sukhada Sinha.
- b) Sangeeta Mahila Samiti (2005) with President Smt. Nilima Sharma.
- c) Paikan Mahila Samiti (2008) with President Smt. Anima Das.

Each of these Samities are working with about 11-21 volunteers with them. Though these Samities are helping women seeking redress either by offering them free legal aid or putting them in touch with lawyers concerned enough to offer their honest services, or, helping the police in investigations of dowry deaths, and other violences against women, or boosting them to become economically independent yet it is observed that most of these organisations are confined mainly to urban areas where small groups of educated middle and upper middle class professionals, housewives, teachers, students and social workers have taken the lead. While women should be prepared to form such organisations in villages where vast majority of women are not aware of their rights and pre-dominated by poverty, illiteracy, low caste and the like.

#### FINDINGS OF THE STUDY :

After analyzing the available data and information from the sources concerned relating to women's status in Hailakandi district, measured through various indicators, the following findings are found which are mentioned below as per the objectives of the study mentioned above :

- 1) Demographically, as per Census 2011, female number accounts for 48.75 percent only which is less in comparison to male numbers

comprising 51.25 percent of the total population in the district.

- 2) Literacy percentage rate of women in the district is lower in comparison to male. As per 2011 Census report it stands to 44.3 percent only against male literacy of 55.7 percentage.
- 3) In employment sector it is found that only 14.41 percent (2011 Census) of women are working which is very much shocking and alarming in the district.
- 4) Sample survey done among 150 women respondents brings the picture before the society that in Hailakandi town though working women are in better position in their respective domestic arena ofcourse, more or less in selected spheres, yet it is observed that the position of house-wives along with wage-earners are miserable. Large percentage of them are beaten, forced to work against their will, treated like servants, etc. It is remarkable to note that zero percent of wage-earner women have any awareness regarding their legal rights. So domestic violence also prevails there at its own different form for women. In other words, only small section of women among the urban, educated elites have been able to take advantage of new opportunities, the poor women are being increasingly impoverished and are becoming more vulnerable to violence.
- 5) Women's political participation no doubt is increasing in the district as has been highlighted through the election report data stated above but they were not found to have been independent in making their decisions, instead their decisions were often influenced by a male counterpart like husband, brother, son or a colleague.
- 6) Moreover it is found that incidents of total IPC Crime against women in the district is increasing day by day which needs more attention.
- 7) Though women's social organization are working, the number is very less and concentrated towards urban areas which needs to be formed in village areas more where vast majority of women are not aware of their rights and pre-dominated by poverty, illiteracy, low caste etc. thus having no positive attitude of self protection from domestic violence.

#### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Analysis of the problems faced by the group of women indicated that illiteracy, inadequate education/training, lack of knowledge about the existing facilities, violences against women etc. are some of the major problems that have hindered the progress of women in district of Hailakandi. Infact, the patriarchal nature of society, gender-based division of labour, discrimination in resource allocation and remuneration, the notion of women's income only as a subsidiary contribution, etc., have perpetuated male dominance and chauvinism in Hailakandi society too. There is,

therefore the need for accelerating the efforts in this regard with renewed vigour, in other words, a concerted effort appears to be essential to improve and uplift the status of women in the district. This requires a multipronged appr of morality, then ch, particularly in areas like-

- 1) Right from the early childhood, a girl child should be treated equally with the boy child. They should get equal opportunity in every sphere of life.
- 2) The male-female work division should be removed as far as possible. There should be more employment opportunities for poor, uneducated and less educated women with adequate skills.
- 3) A favourable atmosphere should be created to discourage violence against women of any kind. Women should take initiative in protesting against domestic violence in any household and in this respect female members in in-laws family, society can play a significant role.

- 4) Society should protect to those women who have become victims of domestic violence.
- 5) Different NGOs and women organizations should take steps especially in the reemote areas of the district to arrange some meetings and awareness programmes to make the women aware of their rights and different legal provisions against the violence happening to them.

Thus it appears that if both and women are governed by the principles of morality, then these discriminations and abnormalities will vanish. So long as one individual suppresses the other, the suppressed individual is bound to protest and rise in revolt. It is in conformity with the principle that every object resists pressure. It has to be observed that only those values which promote the progress of society sustain themselves. Therefore, it is desirable and necessary that we give the go-bye to old values that oppress woman. We have to inculcate modern values and cultivate the appropriate bent of mind. The people in general, and women in particular, have to get rid of mental slavery and moribund temperament.

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