

# RE-EXAMINING THE INDIAN FAMILY

A Report



Indian Association of Women's Studies

# RE-EXAMINING THE INDIAN FAMILY

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Report of a Workshop held in Calcutta,  
on July 7, 8, 9, 1995

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# RE-EXAMINING THE INDIAN FAMILY

This workshop was organised jointly by the  
Indian Association of Women's Studies,  
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## Preface

In addition to organising the large bi-annual National Conference on Women's Studies, the Indian Association of Women's Studies has always wanted to organise workshops in different regions of the country.

On the initiative of some of our members and in close collaboration with other organisations, the IAWS organised three workshops in 1994-95.

The first workshop was on "The State and the Women's Movement in India", held in Delhi in October 1994. The initiative for organising this workshop was taken by Kavita Srivastava, Abha Bhaiya, Nandita Gandhi, Nandita Shah and Amrita Chhachhi.

The second workshop was organised on "Feminist Approaches to Economic Theory" by Maithreyi Krishnaraj and Devaki Jain, at the Singamma Sreenivasan Foundation, Bangalore, in August 1995.

The third workshop, "Re-examining the Indian Family" was co-sponsored by IAWS, Jadavpur School of Women's Studies and Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, and held in Calcutta in July 1995. Nirmala Banerjee and Jasodhara Bagchi shouldered the entire responsibility of conceptualising and organising this workshop.

Working in close partnership with our members and their organisations has been an extremely valuable experience, and one that we hope will extend to other groups and institutions in the future.

We are happy to share with you the reports of the three workshops and we hope they will contribute to ongoing debates on these issues in the women's movement.

*December, 1995*

KAMLA BHASIN  
*General Secretary*

## Re-examining the Indian Family

In South Asian Societies, the family is usually presented as a protective space which provides social security, especially for women and children. However, a closer look at the history and present state of the institution unravels a very different story. From the colonial period, a major part of the social legislation in this region aimed at interrogating the status of women in their familial, primarily marital roles. But in practice the colonial as well as the post-colonial State have always worked hand in glove with patriarchy to allow families to keep their women invisible and subjugated. Although the institution of family has undergone many mutations, its major thrust even today is to control women's labour, sexuality and access to knowledge and productive resources. An elaborate system of socialisation has been evolved over the ages to make this process appear 'natural' and therefore non-incriminating.

The last twenty years' research and movements on women's issues in India have thrown much new light on the power structures in intra-family gender relations, as also on the differences between the reality and the ideology of the family. And yet most academics whether in the disciplines of economics, anthropology or sociology, continue to perceive that institution as a benign, altruistic arrangement made for the mutual benefit of all its members. In this workshop we tried to make a critical assessment of mainstream theories and of the stances of policy-makers *vis-a-vis* the family in India, against findings from field studies and our analysis of the logic of its organisation. Its focus was on more recent changes in the form of the family and factors contributing to those changes.

The tentative themes were :

1. Women's role in the family: perceptions, actuality and change.
2. Family as the support system of women.
3. The inter-relation between legal and social changes.
4. Different forms of the family and our vision for the future.
5. Family, sexuality and reproduction.

The workshop was organised as a joint activity of the IAWS, the ICSSR Eastern Regional Centre and the School of Women's Studies Jadavpur University and held in the University campus on 7-9 July 1995. It began with a brief inauguration where Dr. Neera Desai as the chairperson of the IAWS welcomed participants and explained the background of these efforts. The workshop was a preparatory activity for the seventh biennial conference of the IAWS on the

theme, "Looking Forward, Looking Back". As such it would review past trends as well as try to provide a vision for the future of this institution of the family as conceived by the participants. In the last few years a lot of research has gone into discovering the actual nature of relations within the family: it is because of the available evidence regarding the covert and overt oppression and inequities suffered by women within the family that feminists have begun this re-examination of and search for alternatives to conventional family forms.

Prof Amiya Bagchi, Hon. Director of the Eastern Regional Centre of the ICSSR, and Prof Amiya Deb, Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Jadavpur University both extended their good wishes for the success of the workshop; they emphasised the importance of the theme especially in the light of rapid changes taking place in Indian society and the economy.

Maitreyi Krishnaraj was then invited to deliver the keynote address. She began by pointing out that there is no *the* Indian family as claimed in the title of the workshop. There are varieties of forms and ideologies of the family in India and each has undergone major changes in the course of time. Furthermore, it is common in the Indian ethos to portray the family as a haven of comfort and support, but actually conflicts and hierarchical power relations are inherent to its design. It is difficult to protest or seek redress against the injustice and inequities perpetrated within the family because intra-family relations are informal, intimate and immediate; moreover they rest on bonds of affection and emotional dependence. Also, particularly in our society, a woman's status in society depends materially on her position within her own family: that is why women accept the inequities and also socialise their daughters to accept them.

In a quick review of past theorisation regarding the family, Krishnaraj noted that the Marxists had visualised a linear development of the family from a kinship/clan-based unit to a nuclear one – a development which was to take place alongside the development of a class-based industrial society. In their view, women's oppression arose as a part of that process and would disappear only in a socialist society when all women join the workforce and household services get socialised/ collectivised. This vision did not materialise in the professedly socialist economies where the demand for women's equality at home and in the economy went by default. Feminists too have not been able to sort out their position *vis-a-vis* the family: on the one hand they want to universalise the so-called women's family-based values of nurturance, support and care; on the other they realise that these are the symbols and consequence of women's continued subordination within the family.

Krishnaraj further discussed several of the more common misconceptions about the family. For example, who constitutes the family? The notion keeps changing from situation to situation. Similarly, the family is often depicted as a private space in contrast

to other institutions like the State or the community which are supposed to belong to the public domain. In fact the family's functions and framework, such as regulation of the reproductive activities within marriage or of property rights, derive their authority and legitimisation only because of the intervention of these public institutions.

Krishnaraj highlighted the many family-related questions which still await analysis and clarification through women's studies. For example, though much has been written about the role of the family under capitalism, it is as yet not clear how in the course of these multiple changes, the basic idea of the family as the ultimate support system, based essentially on women's household labour, is perpetuated. In recent years there has been a revival of this theme in the west wherever the State has begun to withdraw from its welfare-oriented activities. Similarly our tools for analysing particularly the psychological process of socialisation and reproduction of patriarchy in each generation, are not sufficiently refined. Nor have we formed a clear notion of the possible interactions between the State and the family and the motivations of either in this relation: the two institutions are often seen to support each other in perpetuating the family's existing controls over women even when this conflicts with women's fundamental rights. Lastly, she emphasised the need for clearly formulating our vision, as feminists, of alternative forms of the family which can lend support without demanding unequal sacrifices from men and women.

Next, Neera Desai presented her paper entitled "Perceiving Family: Myth and Reality". She began with a brief review of mainstream sociologists' treatment of the family where the latter is regarded as an unchangeable, supportive and monolithic institution, even when patriarchal in form (male controls over women are traditionally regarded as benign). These studies have mainly concentrated on the forms of the family but have rarely considered its functions or its internal dynamics. The few studies which brought in women's issues did so largely in the context of familial rituals. As a result, even the conflicts between women as daughters-in-law or sisters-in-law were treated as ritualistic without any regard for their person specific aspects. More importantly, women's household work was rarely considered a subject for analysis and the multiple burdens – especially on working women – became a topic of interest only since the late 1970s when women scholars took up the issue for study.

Feminists have critiqued mainstream sociological treatment of the family on several grounds: firstly, they object to its neglect of the gender issue. Secondly, they challenge the idea of the family as composed of individuals with identical rights and interests. Further, glorifying some images like motherhood or the insulating character of the family has led to a failure to perceive the violence and hierarchic power relations that are inherent in the institution. Feminists have also questioned the standard boundaries and dichotomies associated with the concept of the family, such as

between private and public space. Desai traced the history of these feminist arguments through the works of selected western feminists. She then went on to discuss the Indian work in this field: she particularly highlighted the UNU-sponsored project on women's work and family strategies. Other scholars too have contributed significantly to the promotion of a new gender-oriented perspective for family studies. Indian activists too, through their regular confrontations with instances of family- and State-sponsored injustice and violence against women, have come to repeatedly challenge traditional myths about the Indian family.

Desai also illustrated women's perceptions of the family on the basis of some of her own research as well as some popular literature. She described how women's perceptions and reactions were dictated mainly by their helplessness in the world outside the family. In her research among working class families, she encountered various anomalies regarding what constituted the family and how women managed to cope with them. Academics often ignore the differences, from a woman's perceptions, between the natal and the affinal family, although for women there is a crucial difference in the practice of patriarchy between the two. They also attribute women's submission to patriarchy largely to their socialisation when in reality, women are usually quite conscious of the injustice and accept it only after weighing available alternatives. Even uneducated, poor women, when forced to submit to sexual exploitation voiced their awareness of the distinction between their selves and their bodies.

To illustrate the perceptions of middle class women, Desai drew on a highly popular Gujarati novel, *Sat paglan Akashman*. She considered it important not only for its feminist content, but also because many women readers publicly claimed that they share the heroine's problem of loss of identity in marriage. The novel outlines a woman's utopia which absorbs the readers who themselves seem to be looking for one. Desai concluded by pointing out the importance for women to have alternatives, in the absence of which they continue to bear intra-family inequities without protest. By doing so, they help perpetuate ongoing myths about the family.

Kamini Adhikari commented that the dichotomies which sociologists associate with the family need to be examined in a new way — as a double production of reality. For example, the persistence of personal dependence in the family arises from the fact that even when women enter public domain, their handicaps within the family get extended there: the pattern of sexual division of labour is the same whether at home or in the market. Similarly, gendering of property relations inside the family largely determines women's access to money/finance-intensive activities independently of public policies.

Adhikari drew attention to the fact that in the non-domestic workplace, a knowledge-dependent hierarchy appeared to be growing; since families tend to put less premium on women's

education, this too will become a critical handicap for women in the public sphere. As an obverse of this process of familial values extending to the public sphere, the family itself absorbs and practises many values and ideas from other institutions like religious authorities, the media and literature. Adhikari emphasised that the formation of gender identity and the subsequent subordination and loss of autonomy occurs in both the public and private spaces. And this gendering process goes on throughout the life of women of all classes. However, at later stages women's confrontations could be with other patriarchal institutions such as the medical or legal authorities.

Touching on the gap between the myth and reality of the family, Adhikari pointed out that it widens particularly because other related institutions continue to emphasise the former's unchangeability. Actually, whenever this gap becomes too large, the myth gets rejected. But there is an inertia in the authority structures and in socially accepted stereotypes which continue to eat into the options available to the family, so that the *status quo* gets strengthened. Such inconsistencies between leading ideas and social reality are a sign of the growing disorder in the Indian society. It is worth remembering that recourse to ideological construction is most rampant whenever a society is facing disintegration.

The chairperson, Dr. Bharati Ray, invited questions from the floor. One participant raised the point that we should examine the trade-off that persuades women to accept the patriarchal design. Another questioned whether or not men also compromise to make the family work. Others, however, found it unacceptable to consider men's compromises on par with women's. A suggestion was made that the increasing age at marriage of girls and the longevity of family members bring many tensions into the family. Another point made was about the way male children preempt the mother's time and attention and reproduce patriarchal norms. In response to these comments, Krishnaraj said that we have to consider the fact that for most women – regardless of whether they are the oppressors or the oppressed – there are no options for preserving their status except to participate in the patriarchal system. What we have to provide them are these options so that they are no longer concerned about maintaining the goodwill of the familial powers. She also noted that men were increasingly using extra-marital relations as a relief from the stresses of modern life. For women, however, no such outlets were socially permitted or approved.

The chairperson of the next session, Prof. Pradip Bose invited Ilina Sen to present her paper entitled "Women of the Outmigrating Families of Chattisgarh". She began with a brief background of the region. Chattisgarh is a part of Madhya Pradesh and has the country's richest mineral deposits. However, its people are among the poorest. Over years, indiscriminate mining has degraded the environment making agriculture untenable. In addition, rapid industrialisation has taken away a lot of the land from the local people; but few of the new jobs created in the industrial sector have

gone to them. Therefore, migration which has long been a way of life here has now become imperative. There are some changes in the migration patterns: a large section now migrates to north and west India rather than to the east. Increasingly, migration is seasonal and most migrants regularly return home. In most cases, whole communities migrate to work through a highly organised system where agents of contractors go to distant villages in search of cheap labour. Even a public sector company like the Bhilai steel plant extensively uses contract labour, yet none of the laws applicable to contract labour are ever applied in these contracts.

Chattisgarh women have always enjoyed considerable freedom in comparison with the average Indian woman. There is no practice of purdah and almost all women are engaged in wage work. They also enjoy a high degree of sexual freedom – quite often marriages are broken at the initiative of either party mainly on grounds of incompatibility and the women can then informally marry again without any stigma. Property is shared by all. Nonetheless women do face gender-based oppression through the widespread practice of punishing and lynching women suspected of being witches. Of late these traditional prejudices and beliefs are being used with renewed force to deprive women of their property rights.

Sen put forward four main points: Firstly, that in all migrant families women are important economic agents and quite often the principal earners of the family. Secondly, migrant workers are denied all social and infrastructural facilities such as basic medical services. Women who have the primary responsibility for maintaining their family's health, have to rely on traditional herbal remedies. Their support system even in pregnancies, consists solely of help from other migrant women. Thirdly, in the migrants' camp too the traditional practices of witchcraft and women's persecution persist. However, away from their village communities, men are more openly supportive of their women. Sen finally stressed the fact that as migrants, families which survive the strain of the situation end up with better communication and regard between the husband and wife. Sen provided several examples to illustrate her points.

Anjan Ghosh, commenting on the paper, said that the patterns of migration are changing fast and we need to reorient our ways of analysing the phenomenon. Observers have noted that increasingly, new groups from new areas were joining the stream; this made it difficult to organise them and often created ethnic and communal tensions. Similarly, Sen too had noted a new development where women migrate in all-women groups: some of them circulate between several sites in search of seasonal work. Although they are subjected to severe exploitation, including sexual harassment, they have devised ways of retaining and enhancing their position in their own villages. Ghosh found the story of Nirmala and Jhagru that Sen mentioned particularly interesting. Nirmala had been accused of witchcraft in the migrant camp and had managed to survive only because of strong support from Jhagru, her husband. Ghosh felt the incident underlined the increasing fluidity of the family in these

circumstances but it did not tell us which marriages could survive the travails of migrant life and why. His question was: did the loss of a community-based identity lead women towards greater individuality? And if so, how did it help them overcome the denial of their rights by the larger system?

Ghosh emphasised the changes in the general character of the working class due to changes in the pattern of employment. Few workers now get stable, life-long jobs; most have to keep moving between jobs and sites which makes it difficult to develop the traditional kind of workers' organisations and solidarity. How are sociologists to conceptualise this new society and family which requires new definitions?

Others also raised questions about Sen's interpretation of the Nirmala/Jhagru incident. One participant pointed out that standing up together against the outside world was, indeed, the traditional role of the family. Was there any reason to believe that migrants did this more than others? She also asked what happened to children of broken marriages in the Chattisgarhi tradition. Another participant asked Sen whether even migration as a family could make women more independent. Did it also change the intra-family power relations? She also wanted to know more about the Chattisgarhi women's highly successful anti-liquor and wage equalisation movements. There were more questions about the possibilities of migration changing the intra-family sexual division of labour, as also the egalitarian impact on men and women of working together to combat poverty. Another question raised was about the possible changes in the migrants' self-perception and its reflections in their cultural forms.

Sen further clarified some of her own points. While there was considerable liberty given to women in their personal lives they still lost their rights over their children when they divorced the children's father. In her opinion, one reason that the society so far had been more free was there were traditionally no pressure of hypergamy in marriages. These forces were now creeping into the society mainly through contacts with other communities and this had brought in customs like dowry. She further said that though the women had taken a leading role in several popular movements, they had not been able to persuade the leaders of the democratic movements to take up issues of intra-family violence. Migration did relax some of the traditions of sexual division of labour; but so did poverty. However, in no case would a man agree to fetch water for his wife. The process of removing gender-based hierarchies is slow even in these societies.

Prof. Malini Bhattacharya chaired the next session when Joyati Gupta presented her paper on "Land Rights for Women". Gupta's study was a continuation of her earlier researches on this topic in the Midnapore district of West Bengal. Currently she is examining the issue of equal rights to land for women from a methodological point of view, in the context of changing agrarian technologies and

shifts in the nature of dowry. She posed the problem as one of contrast between women's professed rights as citizens and their rights to land. The Indian Constitution had guaranteed equal rights to women in all spheres; it had also propounded the policy of bringing about rapid changes in land relations. But because of the variations between regions in the character of the existing land-related institutions and the nature of the barriers they posed for development, the subject of land reforms was kept in the directive principles of state policy and left to the state governments to implement. At the same time, the Constitution allowed different communities to continue the practice of their personal laws for matters related to marriage, property inheritance, etc. Later on too, mainstream laws continued to ignore women's independent existence; for many purposes of state policy – such as recognition of women as heads of households – the state continued to subsume women's interests within the family. Women had to seek *post facto* redress in individual cases.

West Bengal's land reform measures were by no means novel; but the state is still unique because it has unearthed and redistributed among the landless far more land than any other state. This involved a remarkable degree of cooperation between the judiciary, the politicians and the administrators. But at no time did their agenda include giving women equal land rights. The state also registered a very large number of "bargadars" or share-croppers. But in this entire exercise there were no instances of the patta or land title being given in the joint names of husband and wife. Single women were given patta in a few cases; but there were problems with this because the receiver in each case had to plough, sow, weed and harvest the land herself and traditionally, women are not allowed to plough. The local women's organisations protested about this but they were told that women's issues must wait till later. The women's organisations have now managed to get a law passed for joint pattas in future land distribution and Midnapore has given 2000 such pattas. The new Act, however, does not allow joint titles in the case of the earlier very large numbers of pattas and nor has it clarified the issue of inheritance by daughters.

In other cases of inheritance, women do have a right to their father's land but usually married daughters do not claim it for fear of vitiating relations with their brothers. Moreover, when a woman's marital home is not in the same village, the rights are difficult to exercise. Therefore, there is a growing practice to sell a piece of land to give as dowry in the daughter's marriage. Gupta concluded that though new laws appear to change the older practices, in reality the tradition continues unchanged. By stressing the family's unchallenged authority the politicians and legal experts have avoided changes favouring women.

From the chair Malini Bhattacharya made a couple of relevant points. She saw an interesting contradiction between women's property rights and the notion of a family. While property rights addressed the woman as an individual, the family completely

submerged her. One of the reasons why women's groups demanded joint-patta was perhaps the increasing numbers of deserted wives who were left without any assets of their own.

Bhattacharya welcomed as 'positive' the intra-familial tensions generated by extending land rights to women, as in the case of women's induction into Panchayati Raj.

Sarbani Goswami commented that the failure to give land rights to women was not so much due to administrative inefficiency as due to lack of political will to formulate appropriate laws. She pointed out that the whole issue of requirement for a bargadar to plough land raises the question of parity in personal laws. The state continuously changes laws relating to women depending on the requirements of other sections but continues to perpetuate patriarchy and male control over women. The question remains: how are we to create an independent legal space for women. Another commentator said that our demands of equal land rights without ensuring concomitant changes in the marriage/family/kinship patterns, are bound to be frustrated because as Gupta said, if there is village exogamy and patrilocal marriages, then women's land rights will remain inoperative. Sons have obligations which daughters cannot share. Another participant found it interesting that land was sold rather than given as dowry to the son-in-law. This meant an aversion to letting alien blood into the village. Another question concerned the demand of women's organisations for joint pattas. Why was it not realised that joint pattas reinforce the existing form of the family? What will be the outcome of a confrontation between family values and the women's movement? It was felt that the exercise showed that even now the basic social attitude is that a girl never belongs to the parental family; she is just a visitor there. However, if daughters' property rights are still not being claimed, we in the movement should continue our efforts to get them on the statute books in as unambiguous a form as possible. Only then can the movement hope to get them realised in the future.

It was pointed out that legal doctrines are based on social ethos; even if the Constitution aimed to give women more rights it still accepted that the family is the natural unit in our society. In its view, men's rights are given by nature whereas women have to obtain correctives. Lastly, one participant felt that if the women's movement looks for property rights much as in the patriarchal norms, then would their getting those rights alter patriarchy? Should not the women's movement look for group rights rather than individual rights?

Professor Amiya Bagchi presided over the session in which Dr. Prem Chowdhury presented her paper.

Dr. Prem Chowdhury presented her preliminary research on a female ascetic sect that was founded in Karachi among the Hindu population of Lohanas, specially from the rich merchant section known as Bhaiband.

Begun as one mandli, the sect quickly took the name of Brahma Kumaris. As the name suggests, the sect was grounded in the notion of female celibacy. Female sexuality was blamed for the fall from Satyayuga to Kaliyuga and the onus of redeeming the community fell on women ascetics who abjured sexual intercourse and procreation, the two most significant makers of heterosexual family.

However, the sect represented a family outside family, despite its emphasis on celibacy. For it was firmly under male control. The founder, Lala Lekhraj Kripalani, a rich jeweller by profession assumed the patriarchal role of Prajapita Brahma and assumed patriarchal control of the 'Virgins of Brahma' (Brahma Kumaris). The control of female sexuality was thus entirely consistent with the norms of a heterosexist patriarchal family.

In this connection the paper examines the claim made by some scholars that the autonomy of 'female space' that the sect produced, deserved to be termed feminist. Chowdhury refutes this argument convincingly by showing the limitedness of women's choice in the formation of the sect. The mistrust of female sexuality on which the sect was founded followed the patriarchal familial norms. This was reinforced by the fact that the women joined the sect after being expressly permitted by fathers, husbands or fathers-in-law.

In her characteristic manner Prem Chowdhury locates this ideological phenomenon in the socio-economic reality of Sindh in the 1930s. Because of the strict practice of hypergamy among certain communities of Lohanas, the demand for dowry had rocketed. Dowry also included pre-marriage and post-marriage exchange of gifts, and the burden on the parents was excruciating. This sect promised to create a safe haven for women and girls without the bind of marriage and its attendant problems. Problems of migration among the male members and the fact that Lohana women did not work outside the home made them specially vulnerable to the demands of procreation. This may have compounded the demand for an ascetic sect of this kind.

Politically, this was a moment fraught with social crisis. The rich syncretic tradition of Sindh, in which both Hindus and Muslims shared centuries of the worship of Pirs was threatened by communal strife.

The Brahma Kumaris had dress codes which, strangely enough, were modelled upon the Bengali Bhadramahila. The mythology they followed was a version of Hindu mythology, but heavily leaning towards the male Trinity – Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. The Lingam (phallic symbol) was the logo of the community. Autonomous goddesses like Durga and Kali with their sexual potency were absent. Instead, goddesses of containment such as Lakshmi and Saraswati were extolled.

However, in actual practice, the sect participated in singing and dancing orgies as were associated with Vaishnava Raslila. The title of the female leader as 'our Radhe' also smacked of this erotic

deviance. Their asceticism was mistrusted and the sect acquired an unsavoury reputation of sexual enjoyment that included an elaborate cuisine.

After the Partition in 1947 the sect moved its headquarters to Mt. Abu in Rajasthan. The Sindhi diaspora has also spread the sect internationally. With the help of three case studies, Chowdhury established the ambivalence of this family outside family.

Dr. Samita Sen discussed the point about dowry in Chowdhury's paper. She noted that there seemed to be a rise in the practice of dowry all over North India in the early part of this century. The 1888 report talks exactly in the same language about bride price as the 1929 report does about dowry. Sen asked that since the Brahma Kumaris took some form of 'dowry' (including jewellery) when they joined the sect, why were they not willing to pay dowry in marriage? Non-availability of grooms due to male migration and hypergamy were perhaps the reasons. Sen also commented on the parallels with the Catholic order in which we have the father/lover syndrome and the same practice of taking dowry to the church.

Sen also speculated on the kinds of conflict these sects might throw up with the mainstream heterosexual family, since the sect was described as anti-sex but not anti-marriage. Sen complimented Chowdhury for opening up alternative ways of thinking about the family.

Animated discussion on the paper followed in which several commentators from the floor joined. Discussion was held on the sexual orientation of the Brahma Kumaris, on whether or not they practised lesbianism. Ominous overtones were pointed out – that such control of female sexuality in the name of social cleansing, usually accompanied the share up of communal conflicts and the rise of the Right. It was asked if in contemporary India such a sect could contribute to the globalisation process by facilitating business and financial deals. Parallels with other all-female religious communities, such as Sarada Math were drawn. Maithreyi Krishnaraj talked about a sixteenth-century Chinese group who had formed a sisterhood network that provided mutual support.

Amiya Bagchi concluded by appreciating the richness of the paper but pointed out sources in which the economic status of the Lohanas at the time of the founding of the sect was characterised differently.

Prof. Saurin Bhattacharya chaired the session where Nirmala Banerjee presented her paper entitled "The Economist's Family" Banerjee's main argument was that though in recent years economists have shown an interest in intra-household relations and also in the related institutional factors, they still remain constrained by their positivist and individual oriented approach.

Banerjee briefly reviewed the recent theorisation in economics regarding the family. The neo-classical home-economics theories

provide models which profess to offer an efficient solution to the problem of allocation of labour time of each family member between market and non-market activities, as well as of distribution of the welfare-giving goods and services between family members. Feminists have objected to these models because they assume away the possibility of the existence of any kind of exploitative power relations and hierarchies within the family. Nor do they enquire into the reasons why women have a handicap in the public market-based economic activities.

An alternative approach is through the bargaining theory models. Relations between members of a family are of a kind that Amartya Sen calls cooperative conflicts – they find cooperation rewarding for maximising their family's pool of availabilities but are in conflict over the division between themselves of this pool. In this the position of each member is determined by the individual's bargaining strength within the family. According to Sen this, in turn, depends on several factors. In his assessment the most important of these, in the Indian context, is the visible contribution of a member to the family's pool of availabilities. His assessment was based on the observed close correlation between women's region-specific workforce participation rates and their proportion in the population (the earlier Bardhan/Miller argument).

Banerjee argued that whether or not to acknowledge women's work as productive is itself a matter of family mores. A deeper historical probe shows that the visibility of women's economic activities and their chances of better survival are not causally connected but both are statistical indicators of a better status for women in that society. That several economists, including Sen and Bardhan, continue to treat the correlation between them as a causal relation is because methodologically the woman is supposed to enter intra-family contracts as an individual and independent agent, no matter what the social or familial pressures. The bargaining theory does allow for the fact that within the family things are not all benevolent as the home-economists appear to believe and that some members can make better deals for themselves than others. But it ignores the fact that the woman's bargaining strength is limited most crucially not by external factors – such as her opportunities for wage work – but by the conditions set by other parties to the intra-family bargain. Banerjee concluded by pointing out that public policies in India so far have been guided by these mainstream theorisations. They, therefore, have concentrated on improving the woman's position in the public space but have left the private space to the jurisdiction of the families, i.e. of the patriarchal powers within.

Commenting on the paper, Mukul Mukherjee said that the new theories about intra-family behaviour had accomplished an important task in establishing that as an institution, the family served important economic functions as well. In doing so they provide one answer to the question as to why the family in some form or the other has survived as an identifiable social entity through many changes. Because it remains an important agency for production

of well-being and for allocation of the costs and benefits among the members in an acceptable way, it provides a motivation for its members to remain in a cohesive arena. The new home-economics theories link the happenings within the family to market-based changes and help to understand the nature and dynamics of the family. However, the idea of a head of the family who has perfect knowledge and is totally altruistic is as unrealistic as the image of the 'Karta' in the traditional joint Indian family. The assumption that the equilibrium is justified makes the theories unhelpful for analysing women's issues. As Banerjee has pointed out, society creates numerous devices to limit the bargaining power of women: not the least of these are the images, particularly in the visual media, which help to preserve the *status quo*.

The bargaining power approach stressing the dual reality of cooperation and conflicts are likely to provide an explanation for the disintegration and mutations of the family over time. They also suggest several explanations for the differences in the relative bargaining strengths of men and women. But it is not clear what bargaining power means; does it mean decision-making powers? In concentrating on women's visible work as an important consideration, Sen seems to have ignored how much women's income earning and spending opportunities were controlled by men.

Another participant felt that while the bargaining models were defective, they did have some possibilities which some recent writers have followed up: e.g., in a longer time-frame, one can show how a woman's bargaining strength deteriorates in the course of married life because her marketable skills degenerate. One can similarly bring in ideological parameters to explain decisions in marriage. The model can be used, if not for explaining subordination, at least to tell us what to do about it. It has provided women's issues an entry into mainstream economics which should not be rejected. About the Beckerian home-economics model, it was pointed out that its assumption that women took intra-family decisions as independent individuals was totally unrealistic. In general, there was a feeling that the economists' models were still male formulations but there were now openings that feminists need to follow up with greater awareness. Theoretical economics had too great a directive power over peoples' lives to be left out of women's studies.

Dr. Chanda Gupta chaired the session and invited Dr. Misra to present her paper.

Dr. Misra opened the veil on a rare species of family still prevalent in remote parts of India – the polyandrous family in the Jaunsar - Bawar region of Uttar Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh. This family is polyandrous but retains all other characteristics of a patriarchal family – it is patrilineal, patrilocal and patrifocal. Hence, polyandry in this community (as in the case of Draupadi in *Mahabharata*) is a fraternal polyandry. The brothers pay a bride price for the wife

whom they share. However, though it is the wife who has a bed to which she admits a husband, she is basically the property of the eldest brother.

These women are extremely hard-working and participate equally with men in economically productive activities. This, together with the sexual freedom enjoyed by the woman in choosing as many husbands as she likes, does not, however, reduce the burden of the family for her.

Misra brought out the incongruity and insecurity produced in the women who are free to take lovers and leave their husband's home at will. But under the patriarchal structure, children prefer to stay back in the father's house.

Dr. Shefali Moitra, who was the main discussant of the paper, wanted certain clarifications at the outset. What was the time-frame within which the survey was conducted? She also wanted to know in these various exchange of husbands and homes who set the 'routine' as it were, and worked out the leaves of absence. Moitra also joked that both Misra and herself being single women, the emphasis that Misra had given to the secondary (soothing?) function of the family, should make both of them feel very deprived. But, were they really deprived?

Dr. Arati Ganguli chaired the session where Dr. Rohini Gawankar presented her paper. The paper described the practice of auctioning women still prevalent among adivasi families in Maharashtra. It was a press report that drew women's rights activists to the area and they were shocked to find that this was a traditional practice among the family structure of those adivasis.

Gawankar used the analysis of Sureka who is an activist and who had stayed on in the area sharing the life of Thakars, an adivasi community.

Family disputes in this community are referred to the caste panchayats and Gawankar mentions the harsh patriarchal punitive measures that are meted out to adulterous women who are physically tortured.

The custom of auctioning women is presented by Gawankar as a way of providing a family to women and illegitimate children. Though the women themselves get no share in the money that passes hands in the auction, she still has the freedom to refuse to go with a man she does not like.

Far from being a description of bondage within an adivasi family Gawankar opens up the policy of cultural relations in order to understand the process.

Maitreyi Chatterjee, as the commentator, challenged Gawankar's interpretation of the events. She felt that far too often patriarchal injustices on women are allowed to pass muster by feminists if they

are presented as part of a community's culture. The evidence in the case quoted was that the woman had been forced against her will and we should take note of her personal will and rights rather than the community's traditions.

Although Leela Gulati had sent a paper "Women and Family in India – Change and Continuity" she could not attend the workshop. With Dr. Neera Desai in the chair, Himani Banerjee presented her paper and also gave the main comments on it. In her paper, Gulati concentrated on systematically providing some of the statistical information available about families and women in India. After a brief review of family studies in India she gave a list of the laws passed first by the colonial State and later in independent India for the protection and rights of women *vis-a-vis* the family. In part B of the paper, Gulati presented recent trends in the quantitative characteristics of several aspects. She covered age at marriage, fertility rates and spread of contraceptives, mortality and changes in expectation of life. She then went on to cover the available information about household characteristics as well as of family life cycle. She briefly touched on information about migration, aging and widowhood as well as rural/urban distribution of households. For rural households she provided some information about their dependence on land holdings and the close links between caste, tribe and poverty. She concluded by highlighting the major role played by the family in the Indian ethos and by marriage as its basis. She noted that within families, violence against women and girls was increasing; but she felt that the family was still the only social institution to provide support to its members and therefore, deserved to be strengthened.

Banerjee's comments on the paper were wide-ranging. While she gave Gulati much credit for putting together considerable data for the edification of other social scientists, she herself had some serious problems with the paper. The information provided had many social and political implications which Gulati had ignored. Banerjee felt this was partly the result of the discursive nature of economic analysis. When economists talk of bargaining or contracts between parties within a household, it makes no sense in the context of the kind of social relations that we encounter. According to Banerjee, these were the perils of reading social relations within a contractual model without allowing for such nuances as an earning wife trying to guard against hurting her husband's ego.

Banerjee further said that positivism in social sciences requires categorisation to free the data-base of the mess of the social/political unconscious. But categorisation, in however neutral terms, carries its load of historical/social hierarchies and hegemonies. When the paper talks of the Indian family, or the Indian woman, it is not clear who is and who is not included. Although Gulati does give the distribution of Indian households by religion, her entire paper shows no awareness of the specific influences or historical evolution of the Indian family by the interaction of different religions. There is not even a mention of the recent Muslim

Women's Protection Act which caused such a furore after the Shah Bano case.

Banerjee also strongly objected to the portrayal of social categories through the device of a statistical average. This leads to the erasure of specificities that have major political and intellectual implications. The average Indian woman is poor and deprived. But can the upper and middle income Indian woman – who herself participates in the former's exploitation – now appropriate those travails as her own? The statistical device allows this occlusive metaphysics of power by letting the more fortunate speak on behalf of the real victims.

Banerjee took exception to the fact that Gulati had brought in poverty as a household characteristic but failed to link this with the rural power structure or the class/ caste-based exploitation that is part of Indian society: yet her data had clearly indicated it. Isolating gender/patriarchy from a class/race conjunction creates a barren frame for analysis. If empirical facts of land distribution are considered outside the pale of feminist analysis, then no radical or effective policies can emerge from that analysis.

In response to Banerjee's comments, other participants said that Indian economists do deserve some credit for the fact that over the last 20 years they had tried to make the Indian data system sensitive to gender aspects along with other social categories. Also they had brought out several important problems related to gender based discrimination in its class/ region/ and community based specifics through the analysis of the available categories. Moreover, while statistical analysis always hides some specificities, it is difficult to see how one can at all understand the relative importance of different issues unless one assigns some weight to each. It is only by categorising the landless by their caste/ ethnic categories that we understand the sources of power in the rural society. Specifics can be highly misleading unless placed against a wider background. There were several categories that needed to be more clearly specified : e.g., households and families. The author had not done full justice to her own data so that the listeners were tempted to draw their own conclusions which the author might not have meant. How much mileage a researcher gets out of her data depends, of course, on her sensitivity to the issues. The methodology cannot be held responsible for individual failures.

Smt. Shanti Chakraborty chaired the session where Dr. Ratnabali Chatterjee presented her paper on a woman coming to a women's organisation for help, who has to make up her mind about moving from her private space to the public arena for battle. For those to whom she comes for help, her story opens up many questions of her identity and problem; but she is mainly the battered wife, a victim.

Looking through the diaries of Sachetana, there seemed to be no definite explanation as to why a particular group of people set about

to deliberately torture and even kill a woman and still maintain what they call 'social respectability'. No argument of specific cultural norm – as has been put forward in the case of bride burning and dowry deaths in India – serves to explain how and why wife-battering persists in some form or another, all over the world. This presentation emphasised the experience of activists working in different fields of women's studies, who may not have the researchers' apparatus when dealing with the victims of intra-familial violence and therefore grope for a methodology.

The victim's history is written in a system which seems inevitable. In noting down the details of physical and mental torture suffered by the women, we had to keep in mind the needs of the courtroom as the final scene of battle, since in most cases of battery the complaint had to be registered under the Indian Penal Code 498A. The second question was about her economic and class position. Did she work? Did she have an independent income from her husband? Did she own any property given to her by her father, brothers or any other relatives? Through these questions emerged a picture of the victim's family. Sometimes the relationship of the wronged woman with her husband's family depended both on the economic and social support she received from her parental family. In most cases, both the parents as well as the in-laws refused to take any responsibility for the woman if she was deserted by her husband – in these cases class identity played a vital role. Whereas a working class woman can and does often take up any work offered to her, a middle class woman has certain scruples which make it difficult for her to take up certain kinds of work. The apparatus of control which the average family retains, works as a coercive factor for most women.

The narratives in the diaries, despite their widely varying details, help us to perceive marriage as an institution with its peculiar apparatus of oppression that can slowly sap the individuality of women – so that even as a victim she is pushed into certain specific gender roles, as the battered, the deserted or the deprived wife.

Several cases were described from which it emerged that :

1. In a bourgeois liberal State like India, a fundamental commitment is made to protect the individual. In effect, the laws work in consonance with social processes to give the family inordinate importance. While the State purports to protect the family, the containment of women and in some cases children within it, is maintained through various legal and ideological means – the line between persuasion and coercion being predictably thin at all levels.
2. While the law is committed to protect the individual woman, its simultaneous acceptance of the familial definition of women – in matters of property inheritance and use, custody and maintenance – causes a peculiar blindness in cases of intra-familial violence. When it is, in fact, the husband who attacks

the integrity of an existing 'family', wishing to expel the wife from her marital home, her possible legal recourses to ensure her familial integrity are severely limited. The man, on the other hand, is able to take to extra-legal measures to attain his ends – means that are usually ignored by society.

What then is a normal family? In a normal family life parental control and the husband's authority are generally seen as marks of concern and affection if located within a patrilocal system. Moreover, a family occupies a private space and what constitutes a criminal act in the public sphere acquires a homogeneous toned-down look within the family space. This 'normalcy' suddenly disappears when the woman steps out of this private space of the family and walks to the local police station demanding to lodge an FIR against her husband.

3. A close look at our cases reveals how society's recognition of a woman as a 'wife' forms the basis of her social status. It is the rejection of this status which ultimately links up with her sexuality. The loss of her social status and the rejection of a woman as a person finally leads to a rejection of her sexuality.

Dr. Kavita Panjabi, the main discussant of the paper thanked Ratnabali for bringing up a problem that is normally very difficult for activists working with battered women to confront – i.e. the inability of a women's organisation to help in fully healing such a person. She mentioned the case of the woman who started visiting Jehovah's Witnesses because she received comfort and achieved a certain sense of wholeness with them. This points to the needs of battered women for sustained emotional and spiritual sustenance. Some women who have the privilege of a network of supportive friends can get this. But what about women who do not work outside the house and have also been prevented from interacting with neighbours or other women in the community, and hence have been denied the very possibility of developing nurturing friendships? Panjabi thought this was an important area for the women's movement to focus on and to develop support systems of nurturance for battered women.

The other point she wished to raise and emphasise was that we need to shift our focus of argument from the rhetoric of 'protection' for women to the demand for rights. As long as we keep talking about protection we place ourselves in a subservient position with appeals to kindness, justice, etc. – appeals which mostly go unheeded. It is time to demand what is our right, in terms of a basic non-violent living condition in this case, and demand it with dignity.

This of course, is also crucial for the identity, confidence and self-image of a battered woman for it makes a world of difference between whether she is appealing for protection, or demanding a right that is her due.

Professor Maithreyi Krishnaraj presided over the last session of the three-day seminar shared by two short papers, one by Jasodhara Bagchi, the other by Paramita Banerjee, reporting on her field experience from the work being done in the Khidirpur area in Calcutta.

Bagchi began by pointing out that family was not an easy concept to generalise about as it was a slippery one with many faces. Its simultaneously muturing and devouring role for women calls for a doing away with the separation of 'culture' and 'development' as exclusive categories for studying the family. The treatment of the family in mainstream narrative literature of the modern west is not just an exercise in bourgeois realism but also a way of understanding the process of State formation.

The private/public dichotomy within which the family operates received an enormous ideological fillip in the colonial period when it was seen as the only institution that the native male elite could control. The three major legislations that occurred between 1829 and 1929 strengthened the ideological hold of the concept of the family. The injunction of Manu was invoked in order to make the family the emblem of Brahmanical patriarchy. The class and caste division entered into active collusion with gender formation within the family.

The continued presence of this oppressive potentiality of the family is illustrated from the recent field data of surveys conducted among girl children and the women and child homebased workers in the beedi industry of West Bengal.

While Professor Jasodhara Bagchi in her discussion highlighted the dual role of family as protector/devourer, Banerjee highlighted how within this duality women manage to find for themselves a space for self-expression beyond the dimensions allowed by patriarchy.

The very notion of empowerment presupposes powerlessness and thereby accepts a powerful/powerless dichotomy. As a result, what is often lost in discourses on empowerment are the myriad forms through which power functions – not necessarily through the recognised negativity of subjugation and prohibition, but through various productive tactics of creating miniscule and varying centres of power that cut across the strict binary opposition of powerful/powerless. The survey in Khidirpore, combined with other levels of interaction with locality-based NGOs and local women have brought to light various such shifting and often unnoticed sources of power that women have created for themselves within the tight folds of traditional family control. It is, of course, true that family has traditionally been, and still continues to be, the perpetuator-cum-breeding ground of patriarchal values and control, and a powerful device in shaping women's subjectivities as dependents. But simultaneously, it is also true that even within the fetters of patriarchal family control, women have shown fabulous creativity and innovativeness in creating for themselves sources of self-

empowerment. What is remarkable is that, these seats of power have been created not necessarily within the much glorified roles of women as all-enduring home-makers, but also in spheres of space-management, intelligent budgeting, far-sighted career planning for children etc. — all of which are supposed to be better conceived by worldly wise men and quite beyond the reach of 'ignorant', 'unexposed' women.

As home-makers women work on multiple roles including being a good mother to any number of children — the decision for whose birth is not in her hands. This is the portrayal that many noted litterateurs and social reformers have pointed out. In this same portrayal, women are also depicted as the supreme queens of the inner sanctum, where they excel in the 'feminine' skills of house keeping including cooking savoury meals.

In most of the families scanned in Khidirpore ranging from middle poor to middle class, women tackle cooking as nothing more than a necessary evil and the mentality is the same from 16 to 60. This provides a definite contrast to what we find in Raibari, referred to earlier in Professor Bagchi's discussion. This change in attitude is a subtle subversion of the patriarchal ploy to keep women chained to domestic chores.

This change in attitude towards the basic chore of cooking can be viewed as a positive step towards viewing the question of women's status *vis-a-vis* something other than efficient house-keeping. That such optimism is not unfounded is testified to by the change of attitude towards income-earning by women. While many elderly women still look at women's employment as detrimental to the needs of the family, most younger women take it as an asset both for the women themselves as well as for the family. While it is true that income earning by itself falls far short of the needs of complete empowerment, it is equally true that with one's own cash in hand, women gradually earn a voice in the decision-making process of the family. Here we find another interesting case of subversion : financial distress in the family usurp women's labour for relief; but through that process of devouring, women gain for themselves some power of decision-making.

The Khidirpore survey has brought to light another interesting challenge to the traditional gender-based division of labour. Girl children's education today has become very important, as pointed out by the mothers, both for making them more viable for the marriage market and for equipping them to cope with financial needs in future either positively through earning an income, or negatively through saving the cost of hiring private tutors for their children. With this importance, the customary delegation of the mothers' duties upon their daughters' shoulders has had to be changed — again forcing men in the family to share some burden of household chores.

As presaged earlier, budgeting has traditionally not been included within the concept of home-making. However, the irregular patterns

of male employment, combined with the inadequacy of funds even for those with regular employment has created a space for women in showing their skills in planning and executing household expenditure. The intelligence with which they manage to save some money to buy clothes from time to time, to give just one example, could put the predominantly male-dominated world of chartered accountants and economists to shame. These poor to middle income families spend quite a lot in buying clothes once a year on the occasion of their respective major festivals, but that is possible because the women in the family keep saving small amounts throughout the year. The real skill becomes evident if it is kept in mind that most of these women either have no control on the pursestrings, or have to make do without cutting on basic needs with whatever the men in the family hand them over for the upkeep of the family.

The same skill is shown by the slum-dwelling women in space-management. One small room varying in size from 8 feet x 10 feet to 14 feet x 16 feet houses as many as 24 persons.

There were some examples of women manipulating the prevalent customs to create sources of power for themselves. Without much ado they devised for themselves avenues of self-expression. Beyond cooking and cleaning and mending they have also started questioning the security of marriage.

The chief commentator was Dr. Indira Chowdhury Sengupta. While Bagchi's presentation took up the ideology of the Indian family using literary examples from 19th data about the girl child, Banerjee [from her experience in the project] had looked at the ways in which women create spaces for themselves within the domestic realm and how this required particular skills of organisation and management. The presentations had a number of related dimensions. Both the family and the community within which the women function seemed to be represented by two territories upon which deference to authority – the authority of the male, the head of the family – depended. The ideology of domesticity increased the traditional authority of the head of the family, identifying the husband's authority over wife and children and subsequently of the son's over the mother. Banerjee's paper tried to take up the ways in which women negotiate a space rather than how they actually subvert the given hierarchy.

Underlying the nineteenth century domestic ideology one finds that the theme of the 'home' is sharply differentiated from the outside world. The male head occupied the uppermost rung of this natural hierarchy and 'protected' his dependents. His dependents in turn responded to him with respect, obedience, service and loyalty. Ideally speaking, market forces were deliberately not allowed to that respect/obedience/service/ relationships within the domestic domain. The members of the household, even when one looks at Giribala Devi's book *Rai bari* (which Bagchi had also referred to) were sharply differentiated by task, sex and age. Wives, servants

and children were never to leave the precincts of the domestic domain except under closest scrutiny and control. The special task allotted to women was the creation of order in her household. Indeed, in 19th century literature and even later the image of the mistress of the house often merges with the symbol of the house itself. If the husband strayed – or looked for action, adventure, amusement away from the home – then (here once again women were to blame) it was the flawed domestic atmosphere and it was the wife's responsibility to try to win him back by making the home more attractive, better organized, more comfortable. Quotes an article from the *Bamabodhini* (1873) (vol.8 No.117) ('The behaviour of the wife towards the husband in this country')

Who can curb a man from his  
own sinful indulgences when he  
does not realize that he has become  
an evil drunkard incapable of  
reforming himself? The wife who  
auspiciously adorns the home.

This, I think, has to be contextualized within 19th century Bengal and the dynamics of the Hindu which Bagchi has shown as the family. Within the colonial parameters, the function the community of the 'andarmahal' was to uphold a moral order in the face of a chaotic external world. Women were supposed to create this order by being good themselves. They could do very little to actively change their men – it was rather their general example and passive influence that could ultimately better the situation.

Bagchi's paper looks up those aspects of domestic symbolism. One thing appeared to be missing. Since within the domestic ideology the mother-wife was the guide and an example in protection of morality, what was denied or not granted space at all was women's sexuality. Chowdhury's reading of this absence would be in material terms. Sexual passion was cast out of the domestic terrain partly because it could well become the basis of an alliance with subordinates and go against the legitimate bonds of authority and disturb the hierarchy. Therefore, only a limited form of sexual behaviour could be formally admitted within this 'cult of domesticity' – sexuality was to be contained within married love. This was obviously an impossible task and within this ideology sexual activity by household subordinates had to be ignored and sexual exploitation of widowed women by their male cousins, uncles, etc. was not recognised whenever possible. This attitude to sexual conduct of course rested firmly on the operation of a certain rule of segregation between 'the pure' and 'the fallen' – as Ratnabali Chatterjee has dealt with in her work. Ideally, the two faces of women must never encounter each other. This again was related to the growing emphasis on the degrading effects of work outside the home on women with any pretensions of being a bhadramahila. Work within the home which she organised assisted by her servants was not recognised as work as such. The griha or home was the 'pure' habitat of the bhadramahila and the streets the haunts of the 'fallen' prostitute. The women who worked outside the home, were

within the domestic ideology equated with the latter category. What were the power relations within the home, domestic space, it is difficult to get a picture of this from a study of ideology alone. The way in which domestic ideology defined its own space, permitted sexual exploitation within the household without admitting it as such. The shame and secrecy that surrounded, and still surrounds, sexual matters functioned as a useful screen which superior men could use to protect themselves.

Apart from this, more broadly speaking, how does one deal with the contradiction at the very base of this cult of domesticity – the standard of living of the household depended on income. How could it sustain itself as a stable, organised unit in a situation where there were sudden shifts and drops in income? Even in 19th century Bengal among upper caste/class the home as something stable was often subjected to official intrusion in cases of insolvency, which happened quite frequently.

Related to this was the question on Banerjee's paper – are there limits to manipulating the system that are imposed by the system itself? In other words, what is the kind of control those women have gained within their own families; what is the politics of their domain? Are their attempts at renegotiating a space for themselves, actually a manipulation of elements within the given structure of family relationships? Secondly, does male participation in housework necessarily mean that housework is perceived as equivalent to work for gain or work outside the home? Finally, does the position that women occupy within the structure of family relationships not imply that there is an actual denial of resources to them which make the manipulation of house-keeping money, organizing space for themselves, etc. a necessary weapon of survival?

## Conclusion

In a concluding 'wrap-up' session Maithreyi Krishnaraj touched on the many different aspects of families in India that were dealt with. First there were many observations and attempts at understanding how families operate. In trying to do this, a great deal of variations were observed across time spaces, cultures and class. The family was a major agent for reproducing class consciousness. It was also necessary to see how macro changes impact on the family. If families are the sites of women's oppression, why is it that women still need families? This dual nature of the family remains unresolved.

Even in State interventions in trying to give greater assets to the poor, the ideology of the family persists without a 'critical factor' it was noticed throughout the seminar; 'alternatives' could not really reduce the quantum of oppression of women.

The short film *Memories of Fear* was screened as a part of the main workshop. It brought alive in a nuanced form, what was discussed in a more abstract form — the question of socialization and the incipient pressure of the family. They was an animated discussion after the show.

## Appendix I

## PROGRAMME

Re-examining the Indian Family :  
a pre-conference workshop

*Institute of Chemical Engineers  
Jadavpur University*

JULY 7, 8 AND 9, 1995

<b>Friday 7 July, 1995</b>	10.00-10.30 a.m.		Welcome address.
	10.30 a.m.		Coffee Break.
		<i>Chairperson</i> :	Professor Bharati Ray
	11.0-11.30 a.m.		Keynote address Maithreyi Krishnaraj
	11.30 a.m.-12.30 p.m.	<i>Paper</i> :	Prof. Neera Desai
	<i>Discussant</i> :	Prof. Kamini Adhikary	
	12.30 p.m.-1.30 p.m.		LUNCH BREAK
	1.30p.m. - 2.30p.m.	<i>Chairperson</i> :	Prof. Pradip Bose
		<i>Paper</i> :	Dr. Ilina Sen
		<i>Discussant</i> :	Sri Anjan Ghosh
	2.30 p.m.-3.30p.m.	<i>Chairperson</i> :	Prof. Malini Bhattacharya
		<i>Paper</i> :	Dr. Jayati Gupta
		<i>Discussant</i> :	Smt. Sarbani Goswami
	3.30 p.m. - 4.00 p.m.		TEA BREAK
<b>Saturday 8 July, 1995</b>	10.00 a.m. - 11.00 a.m.	<i>Chairperson</i> :	Prof. Amiya Bagchi
		<i>Paper</i> :	Dr. Prem Chowdhury
		<i>Discussant</i> :	Dr. Samita Sen
	11.00 a.m. - 11.30 a.m.		COFFEE BREAK
	11.30 a.m. - 12.30 p.m.	<i>Chairperson</i> :	Prof. Sourin Bhattacharya
	<i>Paper</i> :	Prof. Nirmala Banerjee	
	<i>Discussant</i> :	Dr. Mukul Mukherjee	
	12.30 p.m. - 1.30 p.m.		LUNCH BREAK
	1.30 a.m. - 2.30 p.m.	<i>Chairperson</i> :	Dr. Chanda Gupta
		<i>Paper</i> :	Dr. Pushpa Misra
		<i>Discussant</i> :	Shefali Moitra
	2.30 p.m. - 3.30 p.m.	<i>Chairperson</i> :	Dr. Arati Ganguly
		<i>Paper</i> :	Rohini Gawankar
		<i>Discussant</i> :	Maitreyee Chatterji
	5.30 p.m.	<i>Nandan III</i> :	Screening of Madhusree Dutta's Film 'Memories of Fear'

This is to be followed by discussion.

**Sunday  
9 July, 1995**

(N.B. Because of the Municipal elections we will start late).

10.30 a.m.		COFFEE
11.00 a.m. - 12 noon	<i>Chairperson</i>	: Prof. Neera Desai
	<i>Paper</i>	: Prof. Leela Gulati
	<i>Discussant</i>	: Prof. Himani Banerjee
12 noon - 1.00 p.m.	<i>Chairperson</i>	: Sm. Santi Chakraborty
	<i>Paper</i>	: Ratnabali Chattopadhyay
	<i>Discussant</i>	: Kavita Panjabi
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1.00 p.m. - 2.00 p.m.		LUNCH BREAK
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2.00 p.m. - 3.00 p.m.	<i>Chairperson</i>	: Prof. Maithreyi Krishnaraj
	<i>Paper</i>	: Jasodhara Bagchi and Paramita Banerjee
	<i>Discussant</i>	: Indira Chowdhury
		Valedictory Session