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CHAPTER 16

The Family and Its Representation:
From Indology to Market Research

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INTRODUCTION

The study of family and kinship has been central to the disciplines of sociology and social anthropology. Not surprisingly, therefore, there is a substantial body of scholarly works in this area. A comprehensive review of such a body of writings is well outside the scope of this paper, and also outside my area of expertise. It, therefore, becomes all the more important to clearly mark out what this paper purports to do, and what it does not. For I write as one with an interest in the study of culture and ideology, gender and media. This paper, thus, focuses on the Indian family in sociological and popular representations, and seeks to identify key themes in the dominant representations of the Indian family from the early Indological ones to more recent media representations and market research. The assumption from which this paper proceeds is that sociological and commonsensical representations mutually shape each other. This uneasy but inevitable relationship between common sense and sociology is a point that sociologists have often dealt with. Less dealt with have been the ideological nature of the common sense and the reflexive character of both modernity and sociology.

It is self-evident that the study of the family, unlike the study of kinship, is not thought to be a difficult, marginal, or esoteric branch of knowledge. Everyone has experience of family life, and everyone has opinions and feelings on it. It is very hard to pinpoint where common sense leaves off and academic sociology begins. However, this is not a problem exclusively confined to Indian sociology. It is most evident in the Parsonian writings which assumed that the nuclear family, typical of the white American middle class (father as breadwinner, mother as housekeeper) of the 1950s is both normatively the ideal and in evolutionary terms the most developed.¹ In the Indian context, however, the western colonial story had its own fallout in the emergence of the idea of the joint family as a cultural marker, as an epitome of civilizational ethos and national identity.
Intrinsic to this process was the engagement of the British colonial administration with the indigenous systems of kinship and marriage, notably with respect to the determination of rights in property and responsibility for revenue payment, and also its attempts at social reform. This was linked to the rise of the Indological approach and the salience of the book view of the ‘Indian’ family in sociology. Apart from the construction of the Indian family as a cultural marker, independent India also witnessed a focus on the changing nature of the family as a part of the modernization process.2

As already stated, a key argument that informs this paper is the significance of prising open the relationship between common sense and ideology in the idea of the Indian family. Part of my reason for this focus is pedagogic—the way in which common sense and sociological knowledge operate in the classroom. This ‘common sense’ perception, I argue, does not lie confined to the lay level, but often forms the bedrock of conventional sociological knowledge, state practices3 and, increasingly, of market research. This may appear to be a rather circumstantial route to approach a paper on the family. But it needs to be reiterated that increasingly one is struck in the classroom and outside by the depth and extent to which sociology has become part of the world of media, of market research, of non-governmental organizations, of advertisements, or even of just plain news. And significantly, the family is ubiquitously present in advertisements, in television serials,4 in news reports, shows on erring children, working mothers and their domestic workers—to mention but a few. In such a world, we can no longer operate with the Durkheimian view that sociology once divested of common sense will pave the way for a scientific sociology. Nor can we rest content with the ethnomethodological view that common sense is the stuff of sociological research, that the sociological task is to lay bare the rules of the self-evident. As is the case in the world of theory, there is much that is fruitful in both approaches. The central contention here is that modernity is characterized by a reflexive consciousness typical of the very discipline of sociology. And furthermore, sociological findings and reflections feed into common sense. The mode by which this is done has varied in different phases. In the colonial period, the state had an important and hegemonic role in the construction of a new common sense of the family. The discourse of the family in the middle-class nineteenth-century social reform movement, and later in the nationalist movement can only be understood in the context of the complex milieu of colonialism, cultural humiliation, exposure to the western ideas of liberalism and nationalism, the Victorian notions of domesticity and femininity, a simultaneous desire to be a modern nation and a search in the past for cultural reconstruction. Indeed, the social reform for women were in part directed towards the construction of a modern, desirable conjugal life.5 This enormous ideological task, not surprisingly, left its mark on the sociology of the family. In independent India, we find the evidence of the idea of the modern family becoming equivalent to the idea of a modern nation in the dominant developmental discourse. And in today’s liberalized India, we find an aggressive usage of the family in the media and in developmental discourse.6

Operating on the premise that common sense is ideological and that there is a reflexive relationship between academic knowledge and lay perceptions, I intend to examine the discourse on the Indian family from primarily two sources:7
(i) Conventional sociological knowledge as evident in high academic scholarship as well as in the truncated versions of the hugely popular notebooks used by college students and those appearing for the civil service examinations.8

(ii) Representations in the media. Here I primarily draw upon advertisements, and articles in newspapers and magazines.

But first I will deal briefly with the two issues of reflexivity and the ideological nature of common sense, which are the props of this paper.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF INSTITUTIONAL REFLEXIVITY AND IDEOLOGY IN MODERNITY

There is a fundamental sense in which reflexivity is a defining characteristic of all human action and not of modernity in particular. All human beings routinely ‘keep in touch’ with the grounds of what they do as an integral element of doing it. This is not the sense of reflexivity which is specifically connected with modernity, although it is the necessary basis of it. In the oral cultures, tradition is not known in the way it is known in modernity, even though these cultures are the most traditional of all. Understanding of tradition, as distinct from other modes of organizing action and experience, demands cutting into the time-space in ways which are only possible with the invention of writing. Writing expands the level of time-space distanciation and creates a perspective of past, present, and future, in which the reflexive appropriation of knowledge can be set off from designated tradition. It is useful to study the manner that the idea of the Indian joint family has been constructed as both a cultural marker from such an understanding of tradition.9

The reflexivity of modern social life consists in the fact that social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those very practices, thus constitutively altering their character. (The deliberate move of nineteenth-century social reformers and colonial officials towards refashioning the family is illustrative of this.) All forms of social life are partly constituted by actors’ knowledge of them. But only in the era of modernity is the revision of convention radicalized to all aspects of human life. It is often said that modernity is marked by an appetite for the new, but this is not perhaps completely accurate. What is characteristic of modernity is not an embracing of the new for its own sake, but the presumption of wholesale reflexivity—which of course includes reflection upon the nature of reflection itself. This is a deeply unsettling outlook. No knowledge under conditions of modernity is knowledge in the ‘old’ sense, where ‘to know’ is to be certain. This applies equally to the natural and the social sciences. In the case of social sciences, however, there are further considerations involved. The social sciences are actually more deeply implicated in modernity than are the natural sciences, since the chronic revision of social practices in the light of knowledge about those practices is part of the very tissue of modern institutions. Studies about changes in marriage, family relations, role of women all feed back into peoples’ lives.

The pivotal position of sociology in the reflexivity of modernity comes from its role as the most generalized type of reflection upon modern social life. Let us consider an
example at the 'hard edge' of naturalistic sociology. The official statistics published by
governments concerning for instance, population, marriage and divorce, crime and de-
linquency, and so forth, seem to provide a means of studying social life with precision.
To the pioneers of naturalistic sociology, such as Durkheim, these aspects of modern
societies can be analysed more accurately than where such figures are lacking. Yet the
official statistics are not just analytical characteristics of social activity, but again enter
constitutively into the social universe from which they are taken or counted up. From
its inception, the collation of official statistics has been constitutive of state power, and
of many other modes of social organization. The coordinated administrative control
achieved by modern governments is inseparable from the routine monitoring of 'offi-
cial data' in which all contemporary states engage. Most recently, we can take but two
examples, both pertaining to matters of family that illustrates how official statistics im-
pact upon society. The first was the anxiety generated by what appeared later to be a
wrong information,\(^\text{10}\) that the rate of growth of Muslims in India was more than that of
Hindus.\(^\text{11}\) Newspapers carried front-page reports. The popular magazine India Today fea-
tures an article titled 'Number Game' with the caption that read: ‘The first detailed
census of Indian citizens based on their faith gives invaluable insights into the religious
fabric of the country. But political parties are using the findings for vested interests.’\(^\text{12}\)
The other data has been of the shocking rate of decline in the sex ratio\(^\text{13}\) bringing to
the fore the fact that female foeticide other female discriminatory practices are rampant,
and ironically in some of the more prosperous areas of the country.\(^\text{14}\)

Since the first, though erroneous, information coincided with the dominant common
sense or ideology of the country, it was readily picked up by the political parties such
as the Bharatiya Janata Party to buttress their ideological theme on which they have al-
ways been campaigning upon.\(^\text{15}\) The other, though correct and socially alarming, has
mobilized various women's groups and non governmental organizations, who in turn have
been emphasizing its significance to the state, but it has not caught what in common
parlance could be called the popular imagination of the people. Both facts have a re-
flexive relationship to society, but the content of the findings has had differential re-
sponses. The alleged higher rate of growth of the Muslim population coincided with
the dominant common sense, while that of the gross decline in the sex ratio was one
that the middle class (the holders of the dominant commonsense) was complicit in, but
did not wish to address.

Nor is the reflexivity of official statistics confined to the sphere of the state. Giddens
reminds that anyone in a western country who embarks upon marriage today, for in-
stance, knows that divorce rates are high (and may also, however imperfectly or partial-
ly, know a great deal more about the demography of marriage and the family). Knowl-
edge of the high rate of divorce might affect the very decision to marry, as well as de-
cisions about related considerations—provisions about property and so forth. Awareness
of levels of divorce, moreover, is normally much more than just consciousness of a brute
fact. It is theorized by the lay agent in ways pervaded by sociological thinking. Thus, in
the west, virtually everyone contemplating marriage has some idea of how family insti-
tutions have been changing, changes in the relative social position and power of men
and women, alteration in sexual mores, etc., all of which enter into the processes of
further change which they reflexively inform. Marriage and the family would not be what they are today were they not thoroughly 'sociologized' and 'psychologized'. If this is true of the West, the question could be correctly asked as to how true is this for India? What percentage of Indians read magazines?

My answer would be that reflexivity and sociological theorizing by lay agents do happen here, but differently. In sheer numbers, the size of a popular magazine-reading Indian population is phenomenal. But more importantly, television stories are consumed by a much larger number. And most importantly, two kinds of stories on the family circulate—manifestations of an uneven development, where feudal values are as strong as the consumer capitalist values are. We thus had a most horrifying story in what is called a reality TV show where the story of Guddi, a young Muslim woman in a village not so far from Delhi was televised. Her story was played out on prime time TV with viewers requested to SMS messages as to whether she should join her first husband who had been presumed dead in the Kargil War (he was found alive and returned) few years earlier, or remain with her second husband (whom Guddi married presuming death of her first husband), with whose child she had been pregnant for eight months. The local clergy decided that she should leave her present husband, even though he had expressed his unwillingness to keep the unborn child. For urban viewers, who sent their messages over their mobile phones, this was a sensational story, but quite outside their experiential reality. For Guddi, this was a lifetime decision. At the same time, we also have quite another kind of stories. Two issues of India Today in 2003 and 2004 carried a survey of sexual attitudes in India. The editorial of the 2004 issue comments:

Exactly a year ago, India Today conducted the first-ever survey of sexual attitudes among Indian women. And unleashed quite a storm. Letters from morally outraged readers, accusations that we were corrupting children, allegations that all the respondents were lying, even a legal challenge or two. India, we were told, was still a traditional country where sex should not be discussed. ...There is another side to the story. The issue was sold out...Yes, we know sex sells but our survey was not meant to titillate; it was intended to track the sexual attitudes of urban Indian women.16

Both stories are true. Just as the stories about village panchayats throwing out young couples from the village, imposing fines on family members or worse still killing the young girl and boy for having transgressed family norms of marriage are true.17 As are stories on singlehood, alternate sexualities and internet marriages. Simply put, modern, post-modern and traditional representations coexist. But what I think is more important is that the concepts of tradition and modernity are reflexively represented and deployed. The discourse of sociology and the concepts, theories, and findings of the other social sciences continually 'circulate in and out' of what it is that they are about. In doing so, they reflexively restructure their subject matter, which itself has to learn to think sociologically. Modernity is itself deeply and intrinsically sociological. Not surprisingly, the sociologist in the metros today finds a new space to air her views in the ever-proliferating range of popular magazines18 and television channels. And journalists turn sociologists.19 While students of sociology throughout the country are exposed to new themes
and issues in dealing with the family, the more widely circulating textbooks of sociology reveal a curious frozen in time approach. Students, therefore, are caught between a frozen (and often incompetent) textbook version of the family with a medley of media images and representations of the family. I will try to look at the themes that dominate textbooks on the one hand, and popular representations on the other. But only after the next section explores the relationship between ideology and common sense.

COMMON SENSE, IDEOLOGY AND SOCIOLOGY

I had mentioned in the introduction that classroom teaching brought home to me how important it is to interrogate common sense as being ideological. This cannot be more valid than in the case of the family, for here the belief is strongest that since everyone has an experience of the family, no special competence is required. In today's media mediated world, it is all the more important to emphasize that common sense is based on a limited range of experiences of particular people in particular places and times. Indeed, when journalists report opinion polls, one notices that increasingly the caveats that warn the survey is confined to a certain section and, therefore, is not reflective of a wider reality. Béteille suggests that a necessary way out of the pitfalls of commonsensical reasoning in sociology is to comparative studies conduct where the empirical world necessarily seems unfamiliar and therefore, demands academic training.

While the importance of the comparative method cannot be over-emphasized, it is interesting that Béteille suggests the French and the African systems of kinship, rather than the many diverse systems of family and kinship within India. The point that I am making is that the problem with common sense is not that it is true of just a society or part of a society, but that it is ideological, not just as a system of beliefs or symbolic forms and practices, but as ways in which meaning serves to establish and sustain relations of domination. I quote from Thompson to facilitate my task about what exactly this critical approach to ideology implies.

In studying the ways in which meaning serves to establish and sustain relations of domination, the meanings with which we are concerned is the meaning of symbolic forms which are embedded in social contexts and circulating in the social world. By 'symbolic forms' I understand a broad range of actions and utterances, images and texts, which are produced by subjects and recognized by them and others as meaningful constructs. Linguistic utterances and expressions, whether spoken or inscribed, are crucial in this regard, but symbolic forms can also be non-linguistic or quasi-linguistic in nature (e.g. a visual image, or a construct which combines images and words).

For our purpose in this paper the textbook treatment of the family as well as the popular media usage of the family can all be fruitfully understood as a symbolic construct which combines images and words. Thompson distinguishes five general modes through which ideology can operate: 'legitimation', 'dissimulation', 'unification', 'fragmentation', and 'reification'. Taking each function into account, we would be able to see how the dominant version of the norm of the male-headed joint family in India, or that of the nuclear family as being the desirable modern form are legitimated as ratio-
nal and universal, and are a central trope in all narratives—academic and popular. We would also see the function of dissimulation in the manner in which relations of domination are established and sustained by being concealed, denied or obscured. Therefore, the family is seen as being essentially harmonious and devoid of competitive values. Yet, we are all aware that the most violent crimes, the most heinous discrimination, may operate within the family. To take but an example that has seen some reportage in the media, we have the cases of honour killing. Young girls and boys are actually done away with by family members in the name of honour of the family. This could be seen as another strategy which facilitates the dissimulation of social relations, that is, euphemization: actions, institutions or social relations are described or redescribed in terms that elicit a positive valuation. The very term 'honour killing' both conceals the enormity of the crime and suggests an honourable rationale for it.

The third modus operandi of ideology is unification. Relations of domination may be established and sustained by constructing, at the symbolic level, a form of unity which embraces individuals in a collective identity, irrespective of the differences and the divisions that may separate them. A typical strategy by means of which this mode is expressed in symbolic forms is the strategy of standardization, which involves the construction of symbols of unity, of collective identity and identification such as flags, national anthems, emblems and inscriptions. But what is observable from both popular textbooks and the media is that both the idea of the Indian joint family and that of the typical Indian woman are as much the archetypal symbols of the Indian culture as of its standardization.

A fourth mode through which ideology may operate is fragmentation. Relations of domination may be maintained, not by unifying individuals in a collectivity, but by fragmenting those individuals and groups seen as potential opposition—as evil, harmful or threatening. Another pertinent strategy may be described as the expurgation of the other. This involves the construction of an enemy, either within or without, which is portrayed as evil, harmful or threatening, and which individuals are called upon collectively to resist or expurgate. The earlier example of the wrong information about the rate of growth for Muslims will illustrate this process. Often, the marriage rules and customs of the tribals in popular textbooks are also presented in an insensitive language.

A fifth modus operandi of ideology is reification. Relations of domination may be established and sustained by representing a transitory, historical state of affairs as if it were permanent, natural, outside of time. Processes are portrayed as things or as events of a quasi-natural kind, in such a way that their social and historical character is eclipsed.... This mode may be expressed in symbolic forms by means of the strategy of naturalization, for example, that the socially instituted division of labour between men and women may be portrayed as the product of the physiological characteristics of and differences between the sexes. A similar strategy is what may be described as eternalization: social-historical phenomena are deprived of their historical character by being portrayed as permanent, unchanging and ever recurring, such as we witness in many textbook representations of the Hindu joint family.

As is evident by now, a key objective of the paper is to look afresh at studies of the family as key sites of common sense and ideological representations, particularly in the
contemporary context where sociology of the family is a common theme in the popular media. I quote from Bourdieu to focus on the importance of sociology today to ‘... include in its theory of the social world a theory of the theory effect which, by helping to impose a more or less authorized way of seeing the world, helps to construct the reality of that world’.24

While academic writings in the last two decades have extensively indulged in the text analysis of discourses, less attention has been given to the making of the discourses.25 The performative power of discourses is thereby highlighted rendering invisible the process by which discourses are actually made and constructed, quite often deliberately. The role of the state and market in self consciously formulating ideas is thereby sidelined. The state, whether the British colonial one or the Indian state following independence, has had a role to play. Market research, as we shall analyse later in this paper, takes an active interest in mapping changes and continuities in family life in order to make appropriate advertisements to target the right customer and in the right manner. The intentionality of the state and the market functionaries, the authors, media, the producers, all have to be brought into focus for any meaningful analysis of ideology and culture. Likewise, the sociological research has to also map the unintended consequences of social action, and also the manner in which the sociological concepts and theories travel into and from common sense, itself an ideological construct.

COLONIALISM, INDOLOGY, SOCIOLOGY AND THE IDEA OF FAMILY IN TEXTBOOKS

The most distinctive aspect of common sense is its taken-for-granted aspect. It appears natural and, therefore, eternal and unchanging. But, common sense, like all things social, is contingent on time, space and location. Both common sense and sociological perceptions of the Indian family had a very specific context within which it grew. The study of family has a long history and the delineation of these areas as a specialized field of study was the invention of legal scholars in the nineteenth century. Hence, the earliest concerns in kinship studies were about defining how biological relations were differently coded in different societies to define rights and duties, privileges and obligations. The earliest studies of kinship and marriage in India bore the mark of the political context of colonialism—translation of classical legal texts provided a framework for determining the ‘personal laws’ of the Hindus and Muslims. At the same time, recording of customary rules for determining such matters as systems of land tenure, rules of inheritance and types of marriages built an archive which came to be regarded by many as the foundation for the understanding of these institutions in India. They provided for an understanding of the formal structure of kinship and marriage in India. This paper does not enter this domain, which has already received the attention of a body of specialized scholarship. The only interest that this process of codification of family laws has for this paper is the manner in which the codified laws reflected what is considered to be the ‘book view’ in sociology and, therefore, how it completely bypasses the myriad body of diverse customary laws that a ‘field view’ of family may have brought into notice.27 That the book view would reflect the view of the dominant section of a society needs no emphasis.
Many of the early generation of Indian sociologists identified the patriarchal joint family of the Sanskrit legal and sacerdotal texts as the 'traditional' form of the family in India. In a discursive environment shaped by the force of 'cultural nationalism', they regarded the joint family as a unifying civilizational ideal that had been 'very widely held by all Hindus the rich as well as the poor, the learned as well as the lay, the city men as well as the village folk' (Prabhu [1940] 1955:5). This viewpoint was vigorously propounded in the writings of the Sanskritist/sociologist G. S. Ghurye who, in his erudite *Family and Kin in Indo-European Culture* (1955), claimed an Indo-European pedigree for the Indian joint family. By implication, of course, he also excluded from this venerable heritage the structurally quite different subcontinental culture of Dravidian kinship, the kinship practices of non-Hindu communities, and a wide range of non-Brahmanic usages.²⁸

The idea of the Hindu joint family was first given systematic shape in the writings of Sir Henry Maine, who believed that he had discovered in India a living example of the patriarchal family of ancient times. Correspondingly, Maine had also proposed a theory of social change, which linked stages of human progress with changing forms and functions of the family. This preoccupation with mapping the history of the human family was of course the common currency of the nineteenth-century sociology and anthropology, but it has been subtly carried over into contemporary theories of modernization which propose that modernization/urbanization/development, as the case may be, is accompanied everywhere by a change from joint to nuclear families. Though much empirical work on the history of the family in Europe and Asia has challenged this simplistic formulation it remains a popular conception, evident in textbooks and media representations.

Reflecting on this, A. M. Shah speculates:

It seems to me that this is due to the description of the Indian family according to the Indological view in the textbooks on such subjects of ancient Indian culture and civilization, civics and social studies in schools and colleges over a century. This popular conception of joint family owes its popularity not so much to its being a native category of thought but to its being popularized by Indologically oriented scholars, teachers and textbook writers, and also to lawyers and to the increasing popularity of lawsuits for the partition of joint family property.²⁹

This answer explains how a mode of knowledge regarding the Indian family has been persuasively reproduced over the last century, but not how or why such knowledge was produced in the first place. Shah does not seem to have appreciated that 'Indology'—the authorization of a canon of classical texts, the codification of Hindu law, the creation of a history of the past—was itself a product of the collaboration of western Orientalists and nationalist Indians within the socio-political context of colonial rule.³⁰ In accounting for the privileged place of the notion of the 'joint family' in the collective imagination of educated Indians, we need to investigate further the actual process of the 'invention' of an Indian tradition through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.³¹

In other words, it is important to map the manner in which the idea of the 'traditional Indian family' with its associative values in the broader context of colonialism arose. It is
also equally important to chart how this idea became part of dominant common sense and academic sociology, and further in much vulgarized forms into the hugely used 'notebooks' of sociology. I quote from one such book a question and model answer. The question is: 'Examine the ideals and characteristics of Hindu family.' The answer:

Some of the major characteristics of the Hindu Family are as follows:

1. **Hindu Family Is a Joint Family.** The most striking feature of Hindu family is that it is more or less, still a joint family. One roof shelter exists for wife and husband, their children, parents of the husband, his brothers and sisters and uncles and other relatives. The head of the family, i.e. the eldest male is the chief of the family and his orders are obeyed by the higher ranks as well as the lower ranks in the family organization. The chief of the family is not an earning hand in every case. The family property is joint and all members have equal rights inspite of the differences in their earning capacity. In one kitchen the food is cooked, and members have a common eating place.

2. **High Status of Women.** The women enjoy a respectable place in the Hindu family. Their presence at the religious celebrations is highly essential. They are treated as 'Laksmi' (the goddess of wealth) of the house.32

3. **Religious and Spiritual Affinity.** The members of the Hindu family enjoy an intimate religious and spiritual affinity. Duties are emphasised more than the rights. Status in the family determines the role of a member in his family. Hindu scriptures have got a long way in prescribing rights and duties for every member of the Hindu family.

4. **Guests Are Honoured.** Guests are treated as next to God and they are always welcomed. The host provides every facility to a guest without paying any attention to his economic condition. Dishonour of the guest is treated as a sin. One may not eat but one must feed the guest is the criteria prescribed in the scriptures.33

The answer furthers summarizes the ideals of the Hindu family as:

The Hindu family enjoys great ideals prescribed in various scriptures and preached by the saints, philosophers and seers. Indian village society is patrilocal and virilocal except for a few matrilocal groups, notably the Nayars of Kerala. The patrilineal principle defines those men who are expected to co-operate most clearly in a family and lineage group. The family ideal governs the relations between close male kin. It is a motif that holds consistent interest; villagers hear it told over and over again in tales from the Mahabharata and other classical sources. It is celebrated in popular song and is a common background of village gossip.34

Yet another book concludes on the chapter on the family with the following:

It is however, to be remembered that joint family system in India has not completely died out. The Indian people still keep intact the family attachment and live their traditional morality. The thinkers who criticise the system have not been able to appreciate it properly. Compromise and mutual adjustment are the keynotes of the Indian joint family system. ...In it we have a synthesis of individual and common interest; here are included social virtues which make man a good
citizen and teach him to live for all. What is needed today is to find out the ways by which the good points of the joint family can be retained. And this will require intelligent cooperation of rulers and social scientists aided by enlightened public opinion.  

FROM INDOLOGY TO POPULAR REPRESENTATIONS: CHANGES, CONTINUITIES AND REINVENTIONS

The ideal of the Indian joint family is an important ideological ingredient in the construction of the national self as the social institution that uniquely expresses and represents the valued aspects of Indian culture and tradition. In this ideological construction, certain values associated with the joint family are upheld as both distinctive of the Indian way of life and contrasting with the western individualistic culture. The very term joint family is used in both the descriptive and the ideological sense. Indeed, scholars have wondered how sociologists who knew better about hierarchies and discriminations within the joint family wrote nostalgically of life in joint families.

A joint family...is always an exciting group to live in...something of interest is happening there. Now it is the marriage of a girl or boy, now it is an initiation ceremony, the birth of a new baby, the puberty rites of a new bride, a particular family ritual, a fast, a feast and sometimes a death. The wide extent of the family always ensures the coming and going of guests. The brothers of the brides come to invite them to their mothers' houses, the daughters of the house are being brought home for a family feast or wedding. There is always bustle and expectations, laughter and quarrels, discussions and plans. Life may be complicated, sometimes full of bitterness, always full of quarrels and petty jealousies, but rarely dull, at least from the point of view of the children.

I personally would not read this evocative passage as condoning the inequities and injustices structural to the family, but as one that brings home the core point of why it is difficult to address gender injustice within the family. This, I contend, is precisely because affectual relations as they are constructed are part of selfhood. A patriarchal father’s notion of fatherhood, a young girl’s notion of malehood, a son’s idea of achievement and family obligations are intrinsically bound up with their notions of selves. It is equally true that:

Fundamentally, all families, joint, nuclear or otherwise, are characterised by hierarchy. There are three axes of hierarchy within the joint family that of age, lineage, and gender. Older people are decision-makers and judges of right and wrong behaviour within the family. Older men, particularly, are vested with the ultimate authority. This is true even within matrilineal communities where, though the lineage is traced through women, the means of production are still controlled by men, who, particularly the oldest uncle, are still given great importance and have control over major decisions. Secondly, those who belong to the lineage are considered true family members, part of the ‘inner circle’, and are given decision-making authority, as opposed to those who are married into the family. In patrilineal, patrilocality, this obviously works against women because women once married into the family can never be considered part of the ‘inner circle’.
of their 'sasural'. Thirdly, gender hierarchy characterises all family forms. The man is considered to be the 'head of the household', and the woman is seen as his 'adjunct' or 'his wife'.

But most importantly, ideas of selfhood themselves are democratically or hierarchically defined. Or with bits of both! Proceeding with the view that both Karve's image and Radhakrishnan's comments are valid, I first address the broader issue of the ideology of 'familism' as against 'individualism', 'hierarchy' as against 'democracy' before focusing first on representations and treatment of women, and then taking up the question of old age. The focus on women and the elderly will help draw attention to the difficulties involved in negotiating with questions of democracy and hierarchy, individualism and 'familism'.

The Ideology of Familism vs Individualism: Hierarchy vs Democracy

Traditional India has been seen as one marked by hierarchy at many levels including the family. Yogendra Singh observes how:

Tradition, by which we mean value-themes encompassing the entire social system of Indian society prior to the beginning of modernization, was organized on the principles of hierarchy, holism, continuity and transcendence. These four value-themes were deeply interlocked with other elements of Indian social structure. Hierarchy was engrained not only in the system of caste and sub-caste stratification but also in the Hindu concepts of human nature, occupational life cycles (ashramas), and moral duties (dharma). Holism implied a relationship between individual and group in which the former was encompassed by the latter in respect of duties and rights; what had precedence here was community or sangha and not the individual. This subsumption of individual by collectivity persisted all along the line of traditional social structure, e.g., family, village community, caste and political territory or nation.

The history of modernity has been one where the west has been projected as the enviable other. In sociology, both evolutionary and structural functional theories have buttressed the idea of the male headed nuclear family as functionally most suited to an industrial world. Yet, at the same time nationalist ideas, drawing upon binary oppositions between western materialism and eastern spiritualism, between western individualism and Indian community solidarity, have had their influence in privileging what many Black scholars have called relational ideas of selfhood. I quote at random below from many anthropological accounts of the kinship embeddedness of the Indian personhood.

That Indian people are more family oriented than, say, Americans is by now a truism (Roland 1988). Marriage and childbearing are for most Indian people absolute necessities. Few can imagine why anyone would choose not to marry, and many, especially women, consider the bearing and raising of children to be their sole purpose in life. Children are valued not only as future providers for their parents but also, in and of themselves, for what they are as children—beautiful, affectionate, mischievous sources of joy and constant surprise. Many Hindu gods and
saints are adored as children or for their childlike attributes. South Asian Christians and Muslims also regard children as central necessities of life.  

From the time they can talk, if not before, Indian children learn that they are part of a multiplex family network. People, whether kin or not, are more often addressed by kin terms than by name, and a babbling two year old can be heard reciting these terms and the possessive pronouns that properly accompany them. In Tamil, a major Indian language, there are over a dozen central kin terms (mother, father, mother’s older sister, mother’s younger sister, father’s older brother, father’s younger brother, older brother, younger brother, older sister, younger sister, grandfather, grandmother, mother’s brother, father’s sister, male cross-cousin, female cross-cousin, grandson, granddaughter). When one meets a person, one chooses what kin term to call them by, and with each kin term goes a complex set of ways to behave, so that as soon as you have decided what kin term to call a person by, you also know how to behave toward them, and what you can expect from them.

In many sections of South Asian society, a person is defined first and foremost by who s/he is kin to. The behaviour of each individual in a kin network reflects upon each of the others, in roughly direct proportion to how close the given kin people are. No matter what you do, unless you run away from your family entirely, you can never escape the shine or the shadow of your brothers and sisters, your aunts and uncles. Clearly, such kinship embeddedness has both positive and negative consequences for the individual. On the positive side, one is never really alone; there are many people to whom one can turn for help if one needs it. The emotional richness of South Asian lives is unmatched in the West, such that the horror of personal isolation is the first thing that hits many South Asians who emigrate to western countries.

There is a great deal of problem with a dichotomous understanding of the West and the non-West. Perhaps a better comparison would be traditional versus modern societies. Was the traditional west so different after all? But the fact of the matter is that today there is in a sense a difference in both the understanding of selfhood and the values accorded to it. Bhiku Parekh observes how:

...in many Western societies, traditional communities have largely disappeared, and almost all social relations including the family are cast in the mould of civil society. This has brought both gains and losses. While individualism, the adventure of self-creation and civil society have flourished, communities have declined. Civil society is based on reciprocity, distance, respect for rules, loyalty to institutions, and so on; community on intimacy, affection, warmth and mutual concern.

While we have noticed the privileging of the value of familism in most sociology textbooks, we also discern stronger voices for more space to the individual today. I would like to distinguish between individualism in itself and critiques of injustice and oppression which violate against individual rights including gender rights. For instance, both feminist and Dalit interrogations of sociology have highlighted the issue of domination and hierarchy in and between families. This critique of injustice and disparity, I argue,
cannot be equated with the kind of assertion of free choices as dominantly defined today. The latter has been more evident in India of the 1990s. Accompanying the new economic policies of the Indian state ushered in the tail end of the 1980s has been a veritable chorus in the public discourse about questions of choice, personal space, and new visions of freedom.46 An issue of the popular magazine Outlook (31 January 2005) carried a cover story on the choice to be single exercised by many Indians—men and women—in urban centres. I quote:

It’s a party for one out there. Look for it in any Indian city, you’ll find it easily. Welcome to the growing world of the single. We’ve come a long way from hushed discussion about bachelor uncles, spinster aunts, and all the associated negative imagery. Today’s singles aren’t sociophobic or unmarriageable; they are smart, educated and involved with their lives, loved ones and work. They have chosen to be so-for them it is a superior option to any other. Singlehood has not been thrust upon them (p. 64, emphasis mine).’

And further:

The things that matter to quirkyaloness—self respect, confidence, creativity—are not necessarily connected with their relationship status at all. This is very different from a couple-centric social order, where so much is defined by relationships and their formalisations, like matrimony, child rearing, inheritance, taxation and the law, ... (p. 67)

Marriages and Weddings

Such ideas of singlehood should not suggest that marriages are on the decline. The media, more than academic sociology, periodically focuses on the persistence of child marriages. The voluminous newspaper pages on matrimonial advertisements also suggest otherwise. But what is also more evident in public discourse is the glamour of ‘traditional’ Indian weddings.47 The popular magazine National Geographic focuses on the concrete jungles of Bollywood and its elaborate ‘wedding rituals that have changed the face of ceremonies’ (The Hindu, 11 February 2005). And there is more.

Estimated to be a $1 billion (Rs. 45,000 crore) business worldwide, the Internet marriage industry has remarkably changed the way marriages are arranged in India. Couples no longer have to rely on chaperoned meetings with protective parents in tow. They now get to know each other through chat and e-mail, a form of communication parents are comfortable with. But chat and e-mail are a small pie of the transformation. Websites like Shaadi.com, BharatMatrimo.com and a host of others, which cater to roughly 30 million net users in the country, have added a whole new dimension to the search for a spouse. Portals do more than play pandit. Wedding Sutra.com, for instance, advises couple on all they need to know about planning a wedding, from picking and engagement ring to bridal hairstyles. The business will only get bigger as the reach of the Net increases. A decade or 20 years from now, traditional routes of finding a life partner through marriage bureaus and classifieds (advertisements) may just become redundant.48 The wedding
industry, like a typical wedding website, is being constantly updated. There were rhapsodies about it being 'new and changing' some years back with the advent of event managers, trousseau shoppers, florists, musicians and New Age pandits. Now with pre-marital sex therapists, legal advisors and care counsellors, the support system of the market has widened.  

Reporting on an Institute of Human Behaviour, the journalist writes:

The package offers premarital counselling, a battery of compatibility tests and follow up advice, all for Rs 6,950. A team of experts, including a doctor and a psychologist, oversee four tests—medical fitness and history, behaviour, attitudes and astrological matching. The medical tests include an HIV test and haemoglobin and blood group test. 'As a follow-up, a 10 hour interaction is given to every applicant'... 'Tactful dealing with mothers-in-law, honesty about expectations in marriage and the need to be flexible yet individualistic are part of the guidelines.'

The same article summarizes 'the new pairing equations' as sociological findings:

1. caste is less relevant;
2. more inter-religion arranged marriages;
3. Internet is the most successful pandit;
4. candid accounts of medical history, past alliances and financial liabilities;
5. parental sanction for dating before formal commitment;
6. widows and widowers getting married to never married people;
7. increasing participation of girls in fixing their own marriages;
8. working, 'broad-minded' girls sought instead of 'homely' God-fearing ones;
9. US Green card holders are no longer the most wanted;
10. personalized ads;
11. computerized compatibility matching;
12. lavish celebration of second marriages;
13. more emphasis on social influence;
14. legal advice on ownership of expensive dowry items.

I find the last particularly revealing for the issue is not of equal gender rights to property but on 'legal advice on ownership of expensive dowry items'. It legitimates a new idea of women power that strengthens what are essentially patriarchal structures and values. The discourse shifts from property rights to control over dowry. This could be seen as a strategy which facilitates the dissimulation of social relations, i.e., euphemization: the idea of 'dowry' is redescribed in terms which elicit a positive valuation. The centrality of property in the family structure is simply bypassed.

One of the central tropes that codes Indian women's discontentment to property on the grounds of customs and ancient loyalties is the spectre of the uncaring and greedy sister who claims family property. She is an overreaching woman grabbing at undeserved resources, so intent on pursuing the privileges enshrined in the letter of the law that she ignores emotional ties and destroys family harmony. This trope is not only reiterated in various forms by women explaining their voluntary
forfeiture of family property but also appears in other contexts such as in legal judgments or in marital negotiations.\textsuperscript{52}

The argument here is not to contend that media representations depicting that ‘Girls are no longer paraded in the marriage bazaar as extremely beautiful and chaste’,\textsuperscript{53} are false, but that ideologically such reports often create an impression that this change is both unproblematic and valid across Indian society. It is not unproblematic as the discussion on dowry above shows. And it is not valid across Indian society, as the shocking sex ratio would suggest. The ‘other’ India is not missing in the media, but depictions such as the television reports on a young girl being made to walk through fire to prove her chastity (NDTV 12 February 2005), or the Guddi case mentioned earlier appear either as barbaric vestiges or exotic pictorals, much like Orientalist depiction of the ‘natives’. We thus have a standardization of urban middle-class Indian family, and an expurgation of the Guddis.

\textit{Gender in the Family}

Depictions of the joint family discussed in earlier pages on Indology and textbooks have a great deal to say normatively about women but rarely ever about the experience of women in the family. Popular media on the other hand is good at picking up the essences of experiential relationships. That family life for women may have been very hard given the practice of patrilocality and patrilineality evaded the dominant body of sociological writings. Yet experientially everyone in such societies is aware of the sentimentality and powerlessness that the family (including the patrilineal head) feels as wife-givers. Indeed, advertisements addressing the father who has to bid adieu to his daughter are common. Visuals depicting the ritual of \textit{kanyādān} accompanied by the evocative tunes of the \textit{shenai}, are able to capture the mixed emotions of joy and sadness typical of a girl’s wedding in patrilineal families. Mainstream academic sociology has for the most part operated from the perspective of the male ego. Caught in debates around the persistence or decline of the joint family, distinguishing between the household and family, the experiential aspect of family life has been much less researched. Writings on the domestic cycle also ignored women.\textsuperscript{54} Leela Dube’s writings offer a welcome difference:

...entire complex of wedding rituals which dramatize the transfer of the bride from one family to another is, in fact, a poignant experience and a revelation to girls in their childhood. Many girls vividly remember their first experience of the wedding of a girl in the family/kin group. This is not surprising since the message of the inescapability from marriage and of separation from the parents are a necessary consequence of marriage is first put across lullabies and nursery rhymes:

\begin{quote}
Rock-a-bye-baby, combs in your pretty hair,
The bridegroom will come soon and take you away
The drums beat loudly,
The \textit{shenai} is playing softly A stranger’s son has come to fetch me
Come my playmates, come with our toys
\end{quote}
Let us play, for I shall never play again
When I go off to the stranger's house.55

It is not surprising that 'kanyādān'56 and visuals depicting the bride leaving her natal home are so popular in advertisements and serials. Ironically, because the media (more than academic sociology) is more tied to the market, they feel the need to engage with people and their desires. A comment by the consumer insights director, McCann-Erickson, brings home the point:

Advertisers and market researchers tend to look at consumption patterns and accordingly stratify women as traditionalists or hedonists or sophisticates. They're missing the basic point. Women are human beings first, then consumers, you must know how they think, feel, respond and react in real life situations.57

Market researchers have reasons to study the sociology of the changing family if marketer has to know 'where the heart of the “new” woman lies'.58 One reason why the marketer is failing is sociologically explained by a creative director:

New sensibilities are emerging from the collapse of the traditional role of mother and the emerging social structure. In a nuclear structure, for instance, the relationship of the mother with her children is changing drastically. It's much more playful, light, casual and friendly. Ditto the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship...Some ads have captured the nuances of these changes, but the majority are bypassing it.59

Responding to the need to know more about women's sensibilities, Ogilvy & Mather, the 8.8 billion advertising agency conducted a comprehensive study on Asian mothers spread across 12 markets. According to this study, there are perhaps eight acceptable portrayals that could strike a chord with her:

1. organized, resourceful homebody;
2. willing acceptor of help so long as it doesn't seem like she is neglecting her duties;
3. a successful woman, not necessarily a powerful one;
4. manager-mediator-mate, not just a maid-mother
5. devoted to others but appreciated for it;
6. snatching a few moments of solitude;
7. wanting to look and feel good for her own sake and not others.60

A live relationship exists between market sociology and people because the market defines it. I would argue that academic sociology needs to engage with it. Yet, it needs to be reiterated time and again that while market sociology operates within ground rules of common sense—because that is the plane of sensibilities with which they need to function—academic sociology has to engage with a critical ideological approach. Sociological study of media representations also need to be wary of theories of free floating ideas and images, of the volition of the reader/customer to chose or reject or re-inscribe meanings to dominant representations, for it is imperative to bring in the self-conscious agential mode by which market researchers operate, as my example of
O & M study seeks to show. For instance, not only are there overt advertisements but sponsored features, news, editorials to buttress products in specific or more general aspects of lifestyles. For instance, we have an article titled ‘Like Daughter, like Mother’ which begins with the caption ‘With the anti-ageing fad kicked off, mothers and daughters can pass off as sisters’. Ruchika Mehta delves deeper into this trend:

...mothers want to look more and more like their daughters, behave like them and compete as far as looks and figure is concerned. And try to pass off as sisters. India is definitely well on its way to a youth obsessed society. It’s now common to see mothers and daughters sharing outfits and make up, going to same gyms, following the same fad diet, shopping at the same places, hanging off at the same bars. Like daughters, moms too are doing their girlie, oops ladies’, nights outs. It’s more of a ‘Look young, think young’ kind of a fad. And the market has been a catalyst, catering to all their needs. Anti-ageing capsules and creams, anti-cellulite oils, diet supplements, spas and rejuvenation centres, health foods, are easily available. Mothers, with all their diets, gyms, YSL concealers, personal trainers, yoga classes, Ayurvedic skin care, and plastic surgeons, look years younger. While the daughters, with early maturity, loads of make up, and a hard party life, look much older.61

If the topic of discussion in one is mothers and daughters, another focuses on the changing role of children in the family. The caption of another research piece titled ‘Crowning the Kid King’ reads: ‘With many players on the pitch, 2004 has seen the biggest surge in children’s entertainment through television. Sangeeta Barooah Pisharoty examines the magic of the tube.’ A sub section titled ‘Localisation’ begins:

Localisation being the buzz word, the channels not only in Hindi and even in Hinglish (Pogo has Telegu audio too) but also beam home-grown animation shows based on the Ramayan, Panchtantra, Mahabharat and Sinbad, etc. Then there are the publicity stunts with a local slant. Like popular cartoon characters on a tour of Indian cities, a talent hunt for TV anchors, signing up popular Indian personalities among kids for channel promotion-like Irfan Habib for Animax—besides having child experts in India endorse their kid’s programming, or latching up with occasions like Children’s Day, Diwali, etc. to telecast special shows.62

Another sub-section titled ‘Multiple factors’ writes:

Delving into the causes behind the sudden surge in this sector, both Bose and Hejmadi name factors like multiple TV sets in homes growing number of nuclear families in urban India, shrinking of playground space, lack of good children’s films, opinion of kids taken seriously in the house, etc. Thus circumstances combine to make an Indian child spend hours staring at television. A study conducted by the Delhi Academy of Paediatrics two years ago says an average Indian child spends more hours in front of TV in a week than in school. This leads to many a health risk, like obesity, behavioural problems, sleep disorders and affected brain development, including even nipping in the bud a child’s sense of creativity.
But then, who would dare tell this to the kids? Television? Are you kidding?

If obsession with youth and space for children is new to traditional age-centric India, we also have a reinvention of tradition in a range of write-ups and advertisements on traditional festivals like Karwa Chauth which celebrate traditional notions of wifehood. The heading here is 'It's a matter of faith' and it begins:

Little girls and, perhaps little boys too remember one special day in the life of their mother when, after a tough fast, sans a morsel or a sip of water, she'd break it bedecked in all her finery and the moon in her eyes! Yes, we are talking of Karwa Chauth, when most married women in North India seek the power of God in their husband's life for his greatest good and long blessed years. According to Upendra Kumar Sharma, MD, Suryavansh Diamonds Pvt Ltd. 'Karwa Chauth substantiates the inner strength of the woman in our society. It is a reflection of the faith and devotion that our religion is endowed with. Nowhere in the world do women keep a fast wishing long life for their husband. This makes this Indian festival all the more special and unique.'

According to Vijay Gupta, director, OTM Jewellery Pvt. Ltd., 'Karwa Chauth is a unique and beautiful festival being celebrated in most parts of India where married women keep fast for long life of their husbands and dress themselves up as newly weds. It is only after offering water to the moon in the evening that they open their fast'. To celebrate this occasion, the showroom has organised a bangle festival, where at least one lucky woman would be able to feel like Cinderella. All she has to do is to correctly guess the number of diamonds on a specially made pair of bangles.

Another reinvention of tradition can be seen in the growing popularity of Vastushastra:

in present-day India, Vastushastra is literally and figuratively shaping both public and private spaces, the home and the world. It is especially marketed at women through websites such as 'smartbahu.com' (the smart daughter-in-law) as ways in which to fulfill their roles as good Indian/Hindu wives, mothers and women.

Further observations on changing gender roles are evident in a report that states 'there's a new trend: Divorce lawyers are seeing an increasing number of high-earning women facing claims on their assets from lower-income husbands' and wrote in tongue-in-cheek fashion what family life could be like in 2050.

Papa doesn't preach. All mothers do have 'em 24x7 schedules. No kidding, the name's Bond, Family Bond. The Great Indian Parivar is stirring enough to shake you. Ready? After a gruelling 29 hour day, Meta Woman has no time for 'it'. But the Earth has to be populated, no? It is here that the petri dish takes over. Start with a culture, add just the right gene pool and lo, you have the next model citizen. ...The child goes from designer school to a designer college. ...the gender bender happened 40 years ago after the Government felt that it had to set right the wrongs done by the saas-bahu serials. Women took to the 24x7 schedule, with Saturday meant for the kiddies and Sunday for the hubby, eating out, weekly
outings and a day long vacation. Both man and woman are allowed three extramarital affairs. But a fourth can lead to serious trouble. It can even break your family! The old guard takes care of the moral values of society. The elders stay in an idyllic farm and youngsters have to attend classes for two hours every weekend over there. This system started by the Delhi government has been a real hit all around. Get the values and enjoy grandma’s cooking too.\footnote{68}

**Old Age and the Family**

Since the 1970s, gerontological writings in India have been dominated by a powerful and seldom challenged narrative of the decline of the Indian joint family, and the consequent emergence of old age as a time of difficulty. The narrative runs as follows: (1) Indian families once lived in multigenerational ‘joint’ households; (2) in such households, old people had all their needs taken care of, were listened to and respected, and had few complaints; (3) with the advent of westernization, industrialization, and urbanization— in a word, modernization—families began to break up and social support and respect for the elderly declined, along with their quality of life.

Despite its ubiquity, this version of the social history of old age is inaccurate. Evidence that most households were joint in the past is lacking,\footnote{69} as is evidence that most old people in the past had their economic or emotional needs met. Definitional criteria for ‘old’ tend to conflate chronological, biological and social ageing. The very terms of the narrative presume that the history of old age only begins with an axiomatic Fall into unhappy modernity; such terms render historical inquiry all but meaningless. Discussion of ‘the old’ as a uniform group diverts attention from these bodily and social assaults of old age, which correlates with distinctions of class, community, and gender, particularly the assaults of undernutrition,\footnote{70} and what we might term the ‘respectful neglect’ of family members.

Significantly, advertisements with elderly people are very visible today. Many of them relate to pension planning, a fact that can be related to the lowering of interest rates that have affected small savers. Others depict the fun that grandparents have with children in families. Advertisements showing grandmothers and grandparents in the family are also many whether it is about the popularity of bigger cars (Verso) or about traditional knowledge of grandparents that are in tune with current market research, like an advertisement of the medicinal properties of neem. Or about the touching advertisement where a very old gentleman slips on a diamond ring on his very old wife’s finger, brushing away her refusal on grounds of age asking what does the diamond know about her age. Or about grandparents and grandchildren hiding their favourite toffees. Or of the elderly retired school principal attending an old student’s wedding reception. The list could extend to draw upon the various serials on television focussing on tyrannical or harassed older fathers as the case may be, the scheming mother-in-law or the scheming daughter-in-law (there is more of the latter today), again drawing upon archetypical images of the joint family. It is, of course quite outside the purview of advertisements or of hugely popular serials to question whether joint family was indeed the typical Indian norm. The strength of popular media is precisely that they draw upon the common sense, the taken-for-granted and package it in a fashion so seductive that the ideological nature of the representations, even if obvious, gets sidelined.
The quote brings to the fore the fact that the family really spells out different things to different members, depending upon gender, age, relationships to the 'ego', usually understood in kinship terminology as the male head. What is important for this paper is that while popular representations often capture the nuances of these different locations within the family, academic sociology, particularly its bowdlerized versions like textbooks such as Das's,\(^{71}\) completely miss it. Nothing could perhaps dramatize this more than the fact that widows\(^{72}\) (and many widows are old) find no space in narratives about women or about the aged in the family. I have come across only one advertisement of an insurance firm on a widow, who stands before the framed picture of her husband to thank him for insuring for the future.

CONCLUSION

Changes in Indian society have been both rapid and uneven in the last decade or more. The dominant discourse has been that of India’s phenomenal economic growth. The point is not to either rebut or herald this but perhaps scrutinize more carefully to what extent this is true and how. Academic sociology has to engage with market sociology today, but critically. Unfortunately, while the popularly used sociology textbooks persist with a static and crude idea of the Indian joint family, market research to the extent that it is reported or visible in the media is actively involved in mapping the changes\(^{73}\) in the urban family. But market research is driven by the intention to sell. And issues beyond that methodologically fall outside that framework. In that sense, the ideology of market common sense is easier to discern. However, serious academic sociology of the family in India has also operated within given frames of reference, be the persistence or decline of the joint family, or the prescriptive framework of the Indian family as a cultural marker. The latter have perforce meant that ideologically, the norm of the dominant sections have been, projected and others, practices whether of regions or of other castes and classes have been rendered marginal, exotic or remnants of an evolutionary backlog. Distinct to the family as a cultural marker has been a depiction of the Indian woman not as a real embodied entity, but as an emblem of cultural distinction.

Studies over the last two decades has explored the construction of the normative and homogeneous Indian woman in the colonial period, and linked it to both the cultural humiliation of a colonial people, to Orientalism and the obverse Occidentalism, to the specific growth of Indology and its influence on Indian sociology. This had also led to a dichotomous construction of the west and east. The very process of individualization that marks modernity has been seen as western, and values of familism distinctive of Indian society. Such ideas form part of staple common sense and that textbooks carry them are not accidental, for common sense is ideologically constructed. Sociologists have engaged with this contentious problem of equating the west with the modern. As mentioned earlier, we need to ask how different was traditional west was both in terms of hierarchies within the family or in terms of familial defined social roles and obligations. We need also to ask whether individualization and democratic norms are necessarily coterminous. This I think is particularly pertinent today, when the media projects market hedonism as the true path to selfhood. And conservative reactions defend heinous customs as distinctive of Indian womanhood and culture.\(^{74}\)
The question that arises is, how do we understand tradition in today's modernity. The paper has argued that tradition in modernity is not the tradition of traditional societies. Not surprisingly then, though a key cultural marker of India, the term 'joint family' itself is not a native category. As I.P. Desai observes: 'The expression "joint family" is not the translation of any Indian word like that. It is interesting to note that the words used for joint family in most of the Indian languages are the equivalents of translations of the English word 'joint family'.' This brings us back to the earlier contentions of the paper—that tradition in modernity is reflexive, self-consciously articulated, and that modernity is deeply and intrinsically sociological.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. See Bell and Vogel, *A Modern Introduction to Family*.
3. I do not discuss this here. But a useful discussion will be found in Uberoi, 'The Family in Official Discourse'. See also Shah, 'Changes in the Indian Family: An Examination of Some Assumptions', Ch. 3.
4. Kasum, to mention but one of the top-of-the-charts serials revolves around the sanctity of the grandparents and of keeping the family together.
5. An audience of educated men was asked, 'Do you not feel in your daily life that your wives and mothers are great impediments, sometimes unseparable objects, in the way of your own intellectual and moral improvement?' (Keshab Chandra Sen cited in Chandhuri, *The Indian Women's Movement*, fn. 127. And

...(India's) need is to devise such a system of education for Hindu females as will make her an agreeable companion, a good mother, an intelligent and loving wife, and an excellent housewife. We want her to possess those mental accomplishments which enable the wife to serve as a solace to her husband in his bright and dark moments, the mothers to undertake, or at least to superintend the early instruction of her child, and the lady of the house to provide those sweet social comfort, idealized in the English world home. (V. Krishmanachari in ibid. fn. 128.

The 2005 calendar produced by the Centre for Women's Development Studies, titled 'Framing Conjugality', carries very interesting photographs of Indian couples in the early part of the twentieth century, and sheds light on the changing emphasis on the importance of the husband-wife relationship vis-a-vis inter-generational relationships.
6. With the retreat of the state from many social welfare functions, the family is increasingly being lauded as the institution that can provide as the coping mechanism for people.
7. I am not dealing with official representations of the family here.
8. Every year around seven lakhs students appeared for the civil service examinations and most of them are from rural areas. *The Hindu*, 17 February 2005).
9. Giddens, 'Institutional Reflexivity and Modernity'.
10. The 1991 census didn't include J&K; the 1981 census excluded Assam. Both have a high Muslim population.
11. Even as I write, the *Economic and Political Weekly* has carried a special feature titled 'Does Religion Matter: Fertility Behaviour Among Hindus and Muslims', 40(5).
13. An interesting finding by sociologists has been the rise of inter-regional marriages in the villages of Haryana and Punjab because of the non-availability of brides as a fall-out of missing females. See Kaur, 'Across Region Marriages: Poverty, Female Migration and Sex Ratio'.

14. The bias against the girl child seems to have intensified in the 1990s evident by the fact that the sex ratio in the 0–6 years age group has come down to 786.


17. Ravinder Kaur’s study on inter-regional marriages throws up very significant sociological issues:

The development of north Indian society shows conflicting and contradictory attitudes towards gender and caste. While the importance of non-marriage interactions is being progressively reduced due to changes in the direction of ‘modern’ values, newspapers are reporting increasing violence towards rural couples who fall in love and enter inter-caste marriages. These marriages are rejected with vehemence and the ‘culprits’ treated brutally. Yet, the same society is willing to accept marriages in which women are brought from ‘outside’ whose caste and social background is extremely difficult to ascertain. Kaur, ‘Across Region Marriages’, p. 2602).

18. I cite just one from the 18 October 2004 issue of India Today on ‘Rearranged Marriages’ which quotes a sociologist from the Family Studies Unit of the Tata Institute of Social Science, Mumbai, on the increase of democracy in the family. Her quote is followed a few lines later by a quote from a wedding consultant on how ‘even second marriages are celebrated lavishly’. (pp. 44-45)

19. A very recent case of a maid abducting a baby in the city of Delhi was widely reported in the media. The baby was retrieved by the police within a week but the period witnessed a spate of writings and programmes on the importance of maids in the nuclear working couple family. I mention just two. One focussing on the need for proper verification of domestic help writes:

In a cosmopolitan city like Delhi where the social fabric is gradually disintegrating due to proliferation of nuclear families, the role of domestic helps in a family has assumed enormous importance. But with the migration of thousands of job aspirants in the recent past—mostly from the eastern parts of the country—full-time domestic helps have become easily available. Pandey, ‘Need for Proper Verification of Domestic Help’, p. 3.

It is in a real sense a sociological observation. The point about migration is correct, and academic sociologists have already been engaged in studying the proliferation of migrant domestic workers.

Commenting on the same story of the missing maid and child, Bacha Karkaria writes:

No one who has had to balance home, career, social life and Atkins diet will accuse me of exaggeration. They know that the trained help is the nuclear family’s single largest cause of fusion and fission. Domestic equilibrium is maid-dependent. And, like all addictions, it leads to substantial abuse and withdrawal symptoms both pathological and pathetic. (Karkaria, ‘Marriages are Maid in Heaven’).

20. See the daily opinion polls on various themes in The Times of India, New Delhi.


23. The situation is compounded by the fact that familial concern with propriety, honour (izzat), and reputation makes it difficult for those researchers interested in investigating violence within the home to gain access to those perceived as victims.


30. While being wary of dichotomies, it has to be recognized that ideological constructions of the family have been dichotomous, all good as against all bad. It has been seen as an evil institution, as the source of Indian social backwardness and economic stagnation, creating psychological dependence, stifling the initiative of individuals, militating against capital accumulation and rational economic decision-making and in general blocking the course of economic development (for an account and critique of these formulations, see Madan, 'The Hindu Family and Development'.
31. Chakravarti, 'Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dari?'
32. The textbook representations on women neither reflect the more overt changes in gender relations reported in media stories, nor do they reflect the serious feminist interrogations of the institutions of the family. For instance, the question of sexuality is completely silent. Yet, because of AIDS there is a debate on introducing sex education in school. See John and Nair (eds) A Questio of Silence? The Sexual Economics of Modern India.
34. Ibid., pp. 90–91.
36. The three social institutions commonly held to characterize 'traditional' Indian society are the caste system, the village community, and the joint family. See Kapadia, Marriage and Family in India, 233; Karve, 'Introduction Kinship Organization in India', Of the three, it is the family which has been viewed most positively in both public and sociological discourse Andre Beteille, 'The Reproduction of Inequality: See Occupation, Caste and Family'. Attitudes to the caste system and village community have been more ambiguous, indeed often hostile.
37. This idea is distinctive of diasporic Indians. Bollywood has zeroed in on this theme and so interestingly has BBC, which carries a hugely popular talk show on the Kumar family run by a British Indian who is accompanied by his parents and grandmother on the show. Also see Uheroi, 'The Diaspora comes home: Disciplining desire in DDLJ'.
39. Radakrishnan, 'Feminism, Family and Social Change: Myths and Models'.
40. Most importantly, the self itself is socially constituted, as are identities. For instance liberalisation in India has accompanied new notions of personhood. See Chaudhuri, 'Gender and Advertisements: Rhetoric of Globalization'.
41. Singh, Modernization of Indian Tradition, p. 191.
43. Das, 'Masks and Faces: An Essay in Punjabi Kinship."
44. Trawick, 'The Person Beyond the Family', p. 115.
46. See Chaudhuri, 'Feminism in the Priat Media', and Chaudhuri (ed.), 'Introduction' in Feminism in India.
47. The week-long celebration of steel tycoon Mittal in Paris had been reported and commented upon for months in 2004.
48. Doshi, 'Marriage by Mouse: Matrimonial Websites', p. 49.
49. Doshi et al., 'Rearranging Marriage', p. 50.
50. Ibid., p. 48. Emphasis mine.
51. The media has focused on inter-region marriages of a mobile middle class. In sharp contrast are Ravinder Kaur's study on the impact of the low sex ratio on marriage practices. She observes how unconventional marriages are uniting rural, illiterate Indians across boundaries of region, language, religion and even caste. Marriages are increasingly coming to note in which men from UP, Haryana, Punjab and Rajasthan are marrying women from West Bengal, Assam, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu (Kaur, 'Across Region Marriages', p. 2595).
53. India Today, 18 October 2004, p. 49.
54. Freed and Freed, 'The Domestic Cycle in India', p. 91.
55. Dube, Anthropological Explorations in Gender, p. 94.
56. In large parts of North India, even within their natal families, women are considered 'pariah'—(belonging to the other family, which they will surely marry into). The woman therefore has no rights either in her natal home or in her marital home. Neither 'home' can the woman rightfully consider 'hers'. Both homes, her 'maika' and her 'sasural', belong to someone else, usually a man or a group of men and women where the men dominate. For the majority of women, marriage means going from the control of one family to another, and this is reflected quite openly in marriage rituals, such as the practice of 'kanyadan' (Radhakrishnan 'Feminism, Family and Social Charge', p. 37).
57. Jetley, 'More Than Just Mothers'.
58. Ibid., p. 46.
59. Ibid.
60. Ibid., p. 47.
61. Mehta, 'Like Daughters, Like Mothers'.
62. Pisaroty, 'Crowning the Kid King'.
63. Ibid.
64. The Times of India, 30 October 2004.
65. Ibid.
67. The title of the report is 'Split Wide Open' and is covered in a regular feature of The Times of India, 7 November 2004, titled 'Gender Games'.
68. Sharma, 'Peti Dish Population'.
72. The total number of widows in India was more than 33 million at the time of the 1991 census. The proportion of widows in the total female population is about eight per cent. Among widows over 50, the proportion of widows is as high as 50 per cent. Chen, Widows in India p. 19.
73. See Business Today, 22 February–6 March 1999, on 'Nucleus Marketing'.
74. A shocking revelation was by a very senior woman minister of the Bharatiya Janata Party, Sushma Swaraj (who herself wears signs of a married woman like the sindur very obviously), when she swore on prime-time television to shave her head, wear white and sleep on the floor (reminiscent of Hindu upper caste widows of some regions) if Sonia Gandhi, an Italian born and a widow herself became the Prime Minister of India.

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