The significance of the family as a unit of socio-political analysis is evident from the number of studies on the family in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These range from sociological, anthropological, political theoretical, historical and economic studies. All the same, several overlapping characterizing features make the family a slippery category for analysis. The efforts in these studies have been not only to understand the structure and configuration of the family, the household and kinship relations, but to grasp the relation of the family to society and state formation, and the roles and functions of men and women. In the western context, there was an overt mode of thinking about the family that set it up as a universal and natural phenomenon, fundamental to the organization of society. This particular mode of thinking about the family also put in place normative behavioural traits for men and women that biologized gender. On the other hand, there were also attempts to analyze the relationship of the family as a social institution to the functioning of the State, the rise of capitalism and the ownership of property. The theories of the family, largely classified into two groups—those that looked at the family as a private institution where the needs of individuals are met, and those
that dealt with it as the minimal unit of societal interaction—divided the social lives of human beings into the private and the public. The rise of feminism as a social movement questioned many of the assumptions that went into this demarcation. Feminist scholars identified the private/public division as a critical factor in the marginalization and subjugation of women in liberal state formations.

This chapter provides a broad overview of major theorizations of the family and private space. Though I do not explicitly return to these theories, these provide a sort of backdrop for the discussion in the later chapters. In the first section, I examine three distinct theoretical and philosophical perspectives on the family. The first is that of functionalism and role theory which suggests that the family is a natural and universal phenomenon. The second examines the Hegelian notion of the family as an ethical relationship in the context of the State and civil society. The third perspective groups together three scholars who have historicized the family and explored the relationship between the family and the modern State. Frederick Engels’ work on the origin of the family and private ownership of property is among the earliest ones to disengage the theory of the family from the biological and naturalistic point of view and to open up the possibility of an analysis of the family that connects it to private property and the pre-history of the modern State. Christopher Lasch and Jacques Donzelot, writing in the 1970s, engage with the idea of family autonomy and the causes and consequences of State intervention in “family matters.” These three perspectives—of functionalism and role theory, the family as an ethical idea and the private/public divide that it puts in place, and the relationship between the family and the State—have been critically examined by western feminism. The second section of the chapter will therefore deal with some key feminist
positions. These two sections are intended as a background to the last section which takes forward some of the issues that I have discussed in the introduction concerning the study of the family and the domestic space in India. The theorization of the family in the Indian context, as I have already mentioned, lies embedded in the discourses of the formation of the nation, the nation-state and national identity. These discourses take shape in public engagements with issues concerning women and their emancipation and in representations in the popular media.

I

Sociological and anthropological interest in the family, mainly based on ethnographic surveys, dates back to the nineteenth century. One of the main fallouts of the vast scholarship in this area is the consolidation of the family as a homogeneous, universal and natural institution. In 1913, Bronislaw Malinowski published a study titled *The Family among the Australian Aborigines* in which he undertook to establish that even among the primitives who were hitherto considered to be sexually promiscuous there existed the idea of the family. This he accomplished by “proving” that the Australian aborigines had definitive rules about legal conjugal relationships. Malinowski’s study was crucial in the debate about the existence of families in all societies, since it established the difference between coitus and conjugal relationships. His central argument was that the family had to be a universal institution since it satisfied a universal human need—the nurturance of children. The crux of Malinowski’s argument was aimed at the establishment of The Family as a natural institution based on specific relations (husband, wife and children), specific space (the home) and specific bonds (love and caring).
Identifying the nurturance of children as central to the existence of the family was a major turning point in thinking about the family because, subsequently, the family came to be considered as the universal, ethical, human institution, flattening out all cultural and societal differences. Functionalist theories like that of Malinowski in anthropology, and Talcott Parsons (1955, 1970) in sociology, established the idea of the family as a biological given, with men and women fulfilling particular roles and specialized functions. Thus, the father had the "instrumental" role of interacting with the larger society. He was therefore rational. The mother had an "affective" role, mediating emotional relationships within the family. She was therefore sensitive. This union was considered biologically productive and enabled generational replacement.

The framework of functionalism and role theory gave legitimacy to the idea that heterosexual bonding is natural, and that "legitimate" sex gives rise to bonds of love and caring. These ideas were written into the social imaginary, and these relationships alone were considered authentic and desirable. Under the guise of universality, the heterosexual, serially monogamous family was set up as the norm. Variations were considered deviant and "correctable" through social policies.

By establishing, both institutionally and ideologically, what Michele Barrett and Mary McIntosh have termed "the familial character of society" (1982: 8), functionalist theories formed the foundations of the division of the social world into the public and the private. In political theory, this division carries resonances from Aristotle’s separation of the household from the polis. These resonances are fully worked out in Hegel’s formulation of the family as a natural ethical community (1973). Hegel discusses the nature of the public and the private in the context of the family, civil society and the state. The
family, for Hegel, is the inner indwelling principle of sociality operating in an unconscious way, and hence stands opposed to its own actuality when explicitly conscious; as the basis of the actuality of a notion, it stands in contrast to nation itself; as the immediate ethical existence, it stands over against the ethical order which shapes and preserves itself by work for universal ends; the penates of the family stands in contrast to the universal spirit (1967: 468).

There is, at the outset, an underlying contradiction in Hegel's contention. If the family's ethical importance derives from the relationship of the family to that universality embodied within the state, how would it then "stand in contrast to the universal spirit"? Hegel works this out by differentiating family members on the basis of their relationship to the familial and universal spheres, the public and the private. Public world predominates and gives meaning to the private. It is the public world that is the centre of all meaningful human actions.

It has to be kept in mind that Hegel does not provide a readily compartmentalized public-private division. The private nature of the family is established through the idea that it is non-contractual. The family finds its determinate existence as a right against externality and secession in the family property and the male head of the family—husband and father. Civil society is the sphere of contract, of particular interests based on particular needs, including also a residual category, for "contingencies" lurking in the system of needs and the administration of justice, comprising of the police and the corporation. The lower spheres of the family and of civil society are necessary foundations of the state. The family's external existence, its public significance, is gained through property.
as it "takes the form of capital . . . [becoming] the embodiment of the substantial personality of the family" (1973: 116). The three levels—the family, civil society and the state—are mediated by men in their roles as brothers, husbands, fathers and property owners.

The role of men and women, in this scheme, is pre-ordained. In the manner of Aristotle, Hegel excludes women from the public realm of the "good" society. The family is what defines woman as she is at the centre of the ethical idea that forms the family. It is her beginning and her end. Whereas, for the man, though the family is the ethical relationship that lies at the base of all other relationships, including citizenship, if he sinks back into the family, he becomes an "unreal insubstantial shadow" (1967: 470). A woman is connected to the universal through the man without whom she lacks ethical significance.

The family, then, is formulated as the private ethical idea and the state as a public ethical union mediated by civil society which is the realm of contracts. However, at the interface between the family and civil society, there is no objective line separating the private from the public. This separation is to be made contextually, determined by custom, the spirit of the rest of the constitution, contemporary conditions, the crisis of the hour and so forth.

The liberal state celebrated by Hegel as an ethical community is criticized by Marx. The role of the state in serving the wealthy and the powerful is hidden under the ideology which calls for a split between the private sphere of business and commerce as well as the private sphere of the family and that of the public sphere. The assumption of equality—one citizen, one vote—brackets out all distinctions of wealth, sex, education.
religion, etc., matters which are considered social and private and hence not political.
are, according to Marx, the actual basis of the citizen's objective reality. Although
Marx attacks the bourgeois ideology of the family which reduces the proletarian family
into an organ for commerce and labour, and calls for the abolition of the family in *The
Communist Manifesto*, it is Frederich Engels who offers a materialist analysis of the
family.

Engels pointed to the evolution of the family as a strong social structure for the
accumulation of private property (1948). Earlier Engels had posited that the transition
from hetereism to monogamy was brought about by women, out of their longing for
"the right to chastity," to temporary or permanent marriage with one man only (53).
This spontaneous desire for chastity in women as the cause for the establishment of
monogamy was not found convincing enough and later Engels himself opened out the
possibility of a critique of the family based on economic structures. The origin of
monogamy and the need to establish families were traced back to "the concentration of
considerable wealth in the hands of one person—and that a man," and to "the desire to
bequeath this wealth to this man's children and to no one else's" (75).

Private property, then, in Engels' historical materialism, was definitely understood as
male dominated, and any effort to establish economic equality necessitated the dissolving
of private property, which, in effect, meant the dissolving of the family as an economic
institution. Engels did address the question of the existence of women within the family
developed from the need to safeguard private property. The shift in property ownership
from the community to the individual who is a man also changed the status of women
and their relation to their environment. Thus, the subjugation of women was explained
in terms of control of the modes of production. The question of sexuality, or of women's engagement with the family did not come into the purview of such a critique in any significant way.

The private nature of the family created a realm which assumed a right to autonomous existence. The appeal of the family lay in the promise of emotional security, care and love, and also in the structure of owning and using property. The family was seen as the last stronghold of private life and individualism and its interaction with the State as the public governing body assumed significance. Two main reasons can be pointed out for the increased scrutiny of this relationship. One was the questions raised by feminism, calling for an opening up of the private realm and demanding that the State acknowledge its responsibilities to all citizens within and outside the family. Alongside was the equally intense desire to monitor State intervention since the increasing power of the State and interventions following the consolidation of the welfare state both in America and Europe were seen as threats to the existence and autonomy of the family. Thus, in 1977, Christopher Lasch published an important and influential book defending the family, A Haven in a Heartless World. Lasch's work was important because in establishing the primacy of human ties and instinctual roots of individualism as opposed to the political interests of the welfare state, he rewrote the ideological power of the family in terms of human agency rather than the abstract ideas of roles and functions that Parsons or Malinowski had used. The welfare state's control over issues of hygiene, education, health, wages and so on was seen as the encroachment to a territory of private life which was hitherto left to the goodwill and judgement of the family. Coming after a decade of feminist, socialist and other critiques of the family, Lasch's work was widely read also
by those sections of the society who saw these critiques as a threat to the "natural" way of life of the society.

In his attempt to locate the welfare state as the enemy of the private realm that the family has a right over, Lasch downplays the conflict between women and the family, and the engagement of people from the working class and poorer sections of the society in the dialogue with the State for protective legislation in the form of reforms. Lasch could postulate a re-location of the family as a haven by ignoring the patriarchal structure that is intrinsic to both the family and the State and by not addressing the relationship of conflict and conformity that the family and the State are engaged in.

Lasch formulated a dichotomic opposition between the family and the State, and upheld one in favour of the other. The idea that the relationship between the State and the family is not a unilateral one, and that the family was a tool in the hands of the State in policing the behaviour of the society was put forward by Jacques Donzelot (1979). Donzelot argues that in eighteenth century France, under the *ancien regime*, the family was both the subject and object of government. There was an affirmed relationship between the patriarchal power of the State and that of the head of the family. The patriarch ensured the faithfulness to public order of the members of the family in exchange for State protection and recognition. He served the State in terms of supplying a fee in taxes, labour and men for the military (49). In exchange for this service, he was given discretionary powers over the members of the family.¹ What was in place was a

¹ In France, the most relevant example of this power was the *lettres de cachet de famille* which derived its significance from the regulated exchange of obligations and protections between the public agencies and the family. Donzelot writes that the *lettres de cachet* played alternately "on the menace to public order constituted by an individual who had broken with religion and morality, and on the threat to the family interest posed by the disobedient acts of one of its members. The petitions calling for the confinement of
government of the family by the State in exchange for a government of the family members by the patriarch.

The coding of societal morality in terms of the family, and of individual morality in terms of strict adherence to family values defined some sections as a threat to the proper functioning of the society. Thus beggars, vagabonds, other poor people, and individuals who would rebel against the family were all seen as misfits in the society. The symbiotic relationship of power between the head of the family and the State became progressively inadequate by the end of the eighteenth century. Donzelot sites two major reasons for the questioning of the collaboration between the administration and families. Firstly, as the barriers that kept individuals within organic groups were crumbling, the family found it difficult to contain individuals within an assurance of their upkeep. Secondly, the victims of the practice of the lettres de cachet started to question the authority of the family. Both together resulted in “a muted summons to the state, calling on it to take charge of its citizens, to become the agency responsible for the satisfaction of its needs,” and in the casting of the family into the most significant political debate (51).

The problem, then, says Donzelot, was dealt with by means of “philanthropy.” He goes on to explain that philanthropy in this case “is not to be understood as a naively apolitical term signifying a private intervention in the sphere of so-called social problems, but girls whose unseemly behaviour gave rise to the fear of public disorder and defamatory consequences for their families conformed to the same logic as those requesting the internment of a boy who had run away with a young lady of inferior rank to his. The disorders of the first threatened the family through the discredit they would bring upon it, since such behaviour would signify that it was unable to contain its members within the prescribed limits and hence would underscore the unreliability of the family in meeting its obligations. The escape of the second would cause just as much harm to the family by nullifying matrimonial plans. The mechanism was the same in both instances: to ensure public order, the state relied on the family for direct support, trading indiscriminately on its fear of discredit and its private ambitions.” See Jacques Donzelot, The Policing of Families (1979): 50.
must be considered as a deliberately depoliticizing strategy for establishing public services and facilities at a sensitive point midway between private initiative and the state" (55). Donzelot argues that through a process of assistance and advice, in terms of medical, hygienic and educative protection, which in one sense depleted the parental authority of the family but placed it under an economico-moral tutelage, there was "the transition from a government of families to a government through the family" (92).

It is clear from the above discussion that the overwhelming question that both Donzelot and Lasch are concerned with is the autonomy of the family. In fact, Donzelot addresses the dilemma that was to be confronted in the transition of the family-state relationship: the symbolic destruction of the power of the family also carried in itself the threat of a totalitarian State with complete control over all matters and all individuals. As for Lasch, the questioning of the family and its structures and ideologies simply pointed to the invasion of individuality and an invitation for State control over matters considered private. Any attempt to posit conflicts within this private realm was seen as an attempt to destabilize and threaten the very existence of the only "haven" left in this world. Of course, most of the responsibility of this threat was attributed to feminism, and its insistence on asking disturbing questions.

II

Evaluating more than a decade of feminist thinking and scholarship on the family, Renate Bridenthal writes that one of the major feminist contributions to family studies has been the effort to view women as "individuals within the family, rather than as mere components of it or anchors to it;" that is, to view them as "persons involved in familial
and non-familial activities, as men routinely have been perceived" (1982: 231). The view from the feminist room has indeed revealed the possibility of a different perspective in the study of the family, generating questions which were radically different from those routinely asked about the family. In Bridenthal's words, feminists have opened up a whole new vista by asking "not what do women do for the family (an older question), but what does the family do for women? What does it do to women?" (231-32).

Reframing the question in these terms made possible several things. Most significantly, the family was reclaimed for social and historical analysis which thematized the structure and functioning of relationships within and outside the family in terms of sex, gender, generation, authority, class and so on. This social and historical analysis questioned the assumptions of universality and naturality associated with the family, making it a monolithic institution. This was definitely not an easy task since The Family implied a firm, unchangeable entity despite differences in structure and configuration. The modern nuclear family, with its assumptions that adult women are usually dependent on their husbands economically and that women perceive motherhood as their central vocation, has been elevated to the position of being the only desirable form of the family. The fact that statistically very few people actually live in nuclear families has been pointed out by many critics (Barrett & McIntosh, 1982; Thorne, 1982). However, a more substantial effort in critiquing the primacy of the nuclear family has been to stress differences in actual lived circumstances of the family. Kate Ellis, for example, explains the need for assuming the existence of the family beyond cultural, sociological, historical and individual differences thus:

The question is: Is there anything we all want from the family, be we married or
single, straight or gay, male or female, "good" or "bad", right or left? I would answer: only in so far as "the family" is perceived not as any particular (and thus mutable) living arrangement but as the institution that can cure all our social and personal ills, a metaphor for some private and public paradise lost (Barrett & McIntosh, 1982: 34).

Further theorization thematized race, class, sexuality, etc. not only in the functioning and structure of the family, but in the ways in which each of these configurations satisfied what is seen as the need for the family. The concept of the family was regarded as "a socially necessary illusion," necessary for the smooth running of households engaged in production, reproduction and consumption—"relations that condition different kinds of household resource bases in different class sectors" (Rapp, 1982: 170).

Stressing differences and questioning norms led to a consolidated critique of "familial ideology." The institution of the family was seen as "the focal point of a set of ideologies that resonate throughout society" (Barrett & McIntosh, 1982: 29). The concept of familial ideology referred to the "imagery of ideal family life [that] permeates the fabric of social existence and provides a highly significant, dominant and unifying, complex of social meaning" (29). Conceptualizing this ideological work of the family made it possible to detach familial relationships and functions of men and women within it.

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from attributes of inevitability and timelessness. Instead, the focus was shifted to the historical contexts within which these relationships were formed in conjunction with the cultural, material and economic situations that perpetuated them. The resultant demystification of the family as the domestic haven was strengthened by the systematic "voicing" of how women experienced the family. The glorified concepts of reproduction, motherhood, sexuality, femininity, domesticity, etc., which formed the basis of the construction of women as mothers and wives, and essentially familial, came under scrutiny. The theorization of these experiences were invigorated by debates in public forums like the struggle for the control of reproduction, abortion rights, lesbianism, laws against sexual harassment and job segregation based on sex, domestic violence, etc., and academic endeavours like feminist literary criticism, anthologizing the works of women writers, and the writing of fiction and autobiography.

The critique of essentialized categories made possible by the articulation of familial ideology can be illustrated by the analysis of "domestic labour." Domestic labour referred to work within the realm of the household and the family which, logically speaking,

3. The retrieval of "gender" as an analytical category differentiated from "sex" was important in this context. In formulating the "sex/gender system", Gayle Rubin argued that sex—biological genital difference—is transformed by culture into gender and constructions of masculinity and femininity. A society's sex/gender system was defined as "a set of arrangements by which the biological raw material of human sex and procreation is shaped by human, social intervention and satisfied in a conventional manner." See "The Traffic in Women: Note on the 'Political Economy' of Sex" (1975: 165). Nancy Chodorow's analysis of the cyclical reproduction of mothering within a society, showing the empirical and structural links between the organization of reproduction and the organization of gender, is based on Rubin's formulations. See The Reproduction of Mothering (1978). Chodorow's work deflected attention from the Freudian Oedipal complex to the pre-Oedipal period, where she demonstrates how mothering relations reproduce the ideology of mothering and encourage the internalization of sexual role division in girls and boys. For other perspectives on motherhood and reproduction, see Dorothy Dinnerstein, The Mermaid and the Minotaur (1976); Adrienne Rich, Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution (1977).

Works by lesbian feminists drew attention to the acceptance of heterosexuality as the norm. They attempted to read difference in terms of sexuality, not just biological sex, and contested the homogeneous and universal images of women which served to make invisible female relationships that threaten the idea of the normal family. See Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (1980).
could be done by men or women, but has been, through tradition and social custom, assigned to women. Cooking, housekeeping, caring for children and other members of the household, nursing the sick, shopping, and work around the household like cultivating the land around the house, milking, collecting water and fuel—all these and more come under the category of domestic labour. It was pointed out that such a categorical assignment was based on a sexual division of labour, systematic devaluing of these kinds of work, and by the naturalization of women as the executors of this labour.

The gendering of domestic labour is effectuated by placing it within a framework of personal relationships, beyond evaluation in terms of time and money. The idealization of women as mothers and wives is directly connected to the idealization of emotions like love, altruism and selfless devotion which are considered to be the basic foundations of non-contractual personal relationships. It is not surprising to see that women themselves find it difficult to decipher the co-mingling of personal feelings to structural attributes. The existence of an institution like marriage rested on the constant reaffirmation of the personal and essential characters of these feelings.

Earlier feminist critiques of women's labour concentrated on exposing its exploitative nature in a patriarchal context, its evaluation through sacrificial ideologies which in turn devalued the labour content, the social meaning of its changing technologies, and its effect on women. Feminists like Christine Delphy used the Marxist theory of the

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4. Attention has been given to the time spent on housework by women who work outside and by those who do not, and by their husbands. The figures connoted a clear sense of injustice and were used to point out a "politics of housework." The repetitive nature of housework, and its meniality, the lesser visibility of it when compared to paid labour, the underlying inequality in this division of labour, and the connection of housework as a form of labour to the overall organization of market economy have all been brought under feminist scrutiny. See Joann Vanek, "Time spent in Housework" (1974); Pat Mainardi, "The Politics of Housework" (1970); Ann Oakley, Housewife (1974) and Woman's Work: The Housework, Past and Present (1974); Hannah Gavron, The Captive Wife: Conflicts of House-bound Mothers (1983); Christine Delphy, Close to Home: A Materialist Analysis of Women's Oppression (1984).
market to examine the relationship between the nature of domestic goods and services and their mode of production and consumption. Though all contemporary societies depend on women's unpaid labour for domestic services and child rearing, they are devalued by an exclusion from the exchange market. Delphy questions the two basic assumptions that are usually made to exclude domestic mode of production from market economy: 1) that women have no structural responsibility for the production of commodities, and 2) that women are restricted to activities which produce goods and services that have only "use value" and no "exchange value." She contends:

Far from it being the nature of the work performed by women which explains their relationship to production, it is their relations of production which explain why their work is excluded from the realm of value. It is women as economic agents who are excluded from the (exchange) market, not what they produce (1984: 60).

Delphy's contention is significant in understanding the increased demand for domestic services that can be "bought" in the market. Child-care, cooking, cleaning, nursing are all services that can be hired. Economic affluence of a certain class brought about a dichotomical division between work and leisure. Leisure, and an attendant spacial seclusion, was glamorized as symbol of status. Economic affluence is often asserted by withdrawing women from the field of waged labour, then employing other women to work within the household. What this situation precipitated was the increased demand for domestic labour in the exchange market. Women who work as nurses, governesses or domestic help perform these tasks under two systems of evaluation—one in the realm of exchange market, and the other in the realm of familial ideology.5 As more and more

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5. The consolidation of a binary opposition in the representations of gender in medical, legal, moral and literary narratives, and the subordination of one term to another is examined in detail by Mary Poovey in Uneven Developments (1988). Poovey analyzes different stereotypes of women in Victorian England—the governess, the nurse, the housewifely woman and so on. Poovey's work is helpful in understanding the familial ideology involved in the evaluation of careers and gender roles for women.
women entered the job market, a correspondence was noticed between the division of
labour at home and in the job market. This pattern is easily noticeable in schools and
hospitals, but is true of almost all public spheres and in the wage differential. Women
are invariably paid less for doing the same jobs as men. Barrett and McIntosh point this
out: “The dramatic victory of the Socialist Party in the French presidential and legislative
elections of 1981, for instance, has resulted in a government with more women in positions
of considerable power. They are to be found in the ministries of the family, of women’s
rights, and of consumption” (1982: 30).

The above observation points out how certain work was considered as suitable for women
even when they enter the public realm. Not only was there a segregation of jobs in
terms of gender, but the idea was that women have to work only when their earnings
were needed to support or add to the man’s income. The idea of family wage is relevant
here. The whole concept of family wage was based on the assumption that a man
should be able to earn not just enough to support himself but to sustain a family also.
There is a conflation of the individual and the family here. The familism that is
underwritten in this idea does not envisage a society where each individual is paid
according to the work that is done but according to the assumption of one individual
(the man) as the economic agent and the extent of his family’s need, consumer
preferences, income and expenditure. Further it does not address the issues of domestic
labour or of the fact that most families are sustained by two incomes. What it does
ultimately is to cast some individuals as better producers and make it possible for them
to claim better wages, and to exclude others like women, children and younger people
From the possibility of better paid jobs.

If acceptance of the value of women’s labour was one mode of problematizing the area of domestic labour, the demands of an increasingly technologized society expected a woman to reach higher levels of excellence. Early feminism also idealized the concept of the superwoman, who could manage the home and the world at the same time, which meant excellence in the private and public realms of society. Betty Freidan, in one of the most important works looking at women’s involvement in domestic life, urged women to cultivate this excellence by assuming the roles of housewife and professional at the same time (1963). Freidan’s position has been examined critically by black feminists, for it assumed that women had all the choices and all that was needed was the agency to act on those choices. Sara Evans says that it was easy for Freidan “to imagine a professional woman hiring a “professional housewife” to take her place in the home than to challenge the whole range of sex roles or the division of social life into home and work, private and public, female and male domains” (1980: 19).

The discussion of the politics of housework exposed much more than the apparent devaluing of women’s labour. It uncovered the extent to which the modern family is defined in terms of emotions and their sustenance. If the family was the realm of nurturance and personalized care, why were women, more often than not, the providers

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6. The idea of family wage was a significant development in the socialist struggle for better job opportunities and compensations. But the familial ideology embedded in the conceptualization of family wage was later critiqued by socialist feminists like Barrett and McIntosh. The tendency in British socialist thought to accept this kind of familism is, according to them, the result of the fact that “socialism has been fostered and shaped in a labour movement dominated by trade unions of the skilled male workers whose own interests lay in privileging those who could (or could claim they could) contribute a great deal to production and who could use the idea of the family wage to claim higher wages for themselves...” See The Anti-Social Family (1982): 49. Also see Heidi Hartmann, “Capitalism, Patriarchy and Job Segregation by Sex” (1979).
of such care and men the recipients? It was increasingly becoming clear that the family was not after all a haven, and the fissures within were being exposed as more and more women chose to assert their rights as individuals.

The retrieval of the family for social and historical analysis, focusing on the idea of difference than of universality, the voicing of women's experience of the family, the critique of familial ideology and the re-examination of essentialized categories that perpetuated the ideology—all these led to a refiguring of the family. It was no longer possible to talk about the uniqueness and indispensability of the family. The differences, struggles and conflicts within the family were out in the open. It has been unveiled to reveal not only the often repeated harmonious relationships but “a political arena in which individuals compete and form alliances, in which their bargaining power fluctuates, and also their gains and losses” (Bridenthal, 1982: 234). As Ellen Ross remarks, “Family harmony exists, but it is an achievement, not an omnipresent, given, natural condition” (1979).

The critical questions that feminism brought to the study of the family that I have traced so far was the result of theorizations formulated mainly from organized efforts to counter inequalities between men and women in society. A backward glance at the corpus of feminist writing in the area of representations of women reveals a similar systematic endeavour to understand the evocation and re-allocation of ideologies based on the binary opposition between men and women. The location and organization of differences based on this binary opposition and the changes that took place along with the subtler changes that were evident in the articulation of ideology itself influenced the idealization
of the home, moralization of women and the disciplining of society. I shall now briefly touch upon some of these insights which are relevant to our discussion of the family and domesticity.

The nineteenth century, marked by several historical circumstances like the industrial reformation and the consolidation of the middle-class following the large-scale movement of people from the countryside to the cities in search of jobs, was also the period when the English novel became a context for extended debates about the family and society. Writers like Catherine Gallagher and Nancy Armstrong have argued that there was a shift in the themes of novels from public issues to issues concerning the family and the private sphere (1985, 1987). The changes in the structure of the family and the household and the imminent fading of the boundary between the public and the private spheres were causative in this shift. More importantly, the examination of private conduct made available a realm for the prevalence of an individual will that the public realm, operating under material and psychological constraints brought about by the industrial reformation, could not offer. Analyzing the industrial novels of the 1850s, Gallagher argues that while making the connection between the family and society one of their main themes and organizing devices, these novels "simultaneously emphasize that the family must be isolated and protected from the larger social world" (1985: 114-115). In these novels, the family becomes the primary reforming institution:

It is portrayed either as a model or as a school of social reform. Bringing the public and private realms of life into greater proximity is thus crucial to the novels' reforming programs. However, if the family is to function as either a model or a school of social reform, it must, paradoxically, be separated from and purged of
the ills infecting the public realm. While trying to obliterate the separation of public and private life, therefore, these novels reinforce that separation (115).

In order to understand the emergence of this contradiction in the industrial novels of the 1850s, Gallagher surveys the roles assigned to the family by social theorists and industrial reformers. Her reading of Sara Ellis’s Women of England (1839) and Arthur Help’s Claims of Labour (1844) illuminate the comparisons and differences between two main ideological developments during the mid-nineteenth century: “the idealization of domesticity and the popular revival of social and economic paternalism” (115). Sara Ellis’s book was primarily addressed to women and Arthur Help addressed men. Both books were similar in invoking family virtues, though the precise modes of achieving such virtues were quite different.

Gallagher points out that the publishing of such books as the above was rooted in the belief in a lost social harmony, resulting from the separation of the world into “two unrelated spheres, each with its own principle of human interaction: the family, based on the cohesive principle of cooperation, and the larger society, based on the disintegrative principle of competition” (116). Society denotes the world of commerce and production, whereas family denotes that realm where the virtues of benevolence, cooperation, and selflessness flourish. What is stressed is the antifamilial nature of the public realm, and the attempt then is to allot to the family the responsibility to reverse the tendencies of competition in modern society. In other words, society has to be recast as a large family. Gallagher argues that though the perceived need was to reduce the dissimilarity between the ethics of public and private life, the ideologies of familial idealization and social paternalism served not only to enhance that difference, but to hold the virtues of the
family over and above that of the public realm. In advocating the need for the maintenance of a strict separation of the domestic sphere from the social, and placing the full development of women’s moral superiority in their exclusion from the marketplace, domestic ideology reinforced the assumption of an opposition between the family and society. Gallagher writes:

The ideology of domesticity was thus somewhat paradoxical: it was a scheme of social reform, but it was also used to preach acceptance of public strife. The ideology must simply be accepted as a contradictory system, at once associating and dissociating the spheres of private and public life (119).

A similar paradox can be seen in the ideology of social paternalism also. Social paternalism rests on the idealization of the family as an isolated and harmonious enclave, the hierarchical order of which should be safeguarded. Hence, women, as those responsible for setting the tone of familial relations, should be kept away from the coarse encounters of the marketplace. The possible existence of disparate interests within the family also had to be removed, since the family would not be a model for countering the competitiveness of the society if it was marked by internal conflicts and differing interests. Hence, the family had to be that realm of life where women and children submitted voluntarily and lovingly to a benign patriarch. In effect, argues Gallagher, the ideology of social paternalism “in seeking to overcome the disjunction between the public and private spheres, reconstituted that very disjunction by insisting that the family be an ideal model, removed from social strife” (120). The rupture between the two realms will be healed only after the family completes its work of remaking the society.
The vast diversity in household structures, practices of marriage based on personal laws of different religions, differences in the laws regarding systems of inheritance, property rights and so on make the characterization of the family in India a challenging project. If, in the West, the nuclear family, consisting of the husband, wife and children, has come to denote what family is, such a definition is still problematic in an Indian context. Even urban Indians live in situations where, though the immediate structure of the family would be nuclear, a vast and often strong network of “family” is always operative. So also, it is difficult to define the workings of the private and the public in terms of western political theory.

More than anthropological or sociological treatises on the structure of the family and kinship relations, it is the consolidation of a national identity and the centrality given to women in this process that envelopes familial ideology and the demarcation of the private and the public in India. The sense of the private and the public is very strong, though a clear-cut distinction of the two is, I would argue, comparatively recent. There has been a substantial amount of anthropological investigation into the structure of the family and the institution of marriage. But a critique of the family and women’s role within is to be found not in the study of “the family” as such, but in 1) the corpus of writing which examines the colonial and nationalist history of India from a postcolonial situation, and 2) the interventions made by the women’s movement in the oppressive practices that women have been living under.

It is as a response to the colonizing efforts of the British that the separation of the two
spheres of the private and the public was formally consolidated. In his authoritative work, *The History of British India* (1817), James Mill declared that the most telling indicator of the nature and extent of civilization of any culture is the way in which that culture treats its women. "The condition of women" reflected "the most remarkable circumstances in the manners of nations" (309). Over the first half of the nineteenth century, the representation of India in western journalism, fiction, travel writing, history, etc. increasingly focused on practices such as sati, child marriage and the incarceration of widows as an index of barbarism. Opposing this were Indologists like Max Muller, who, by upholding the rituals and traditions of the Vedic period, spoke of a golden age of civilization where the caste system did not prevail and polygamy and child marriage did not exist. If, for Mill, Indian history did not undergo much change because of a succession of despotic regimes, for Muller and other Indologists India had steadily degenerated after the Vedic period. The thrust of the imperialist critique, anyhow, was clear: Indian culture and tradition were in need of urgent reform.

Recent studies of the nineteenth century have shown that social reform movements played an important role in setting up the discursive and institutional foundations of tradition, the private sphere, conjugality, domesticity and so on. For example, Lata Mani has shown how, despite their critique of the 'barbarity' in the practice, the British position on sati was embedded within religious discourse (1989). The central focus was whether sati was authenticated by religion, and the effort was to find ways to define sati and how it has to be practised. The enactment of the regulation which abolished sati started a storm of controversy about the culture and tradition of India. What was debated was not the fate of the widows, but the idea of tradition. Lata Mani argues that women
and brahmanic scripture became the interlocking grounds for the rearticulation of tradition during the colonial period. Women were neither the subject, nor the object in the debate about sati, but the ground, “the site on which tradition was debated and reformulated” (118).

The consolidation of attitudes that insisted on non-intervention in the sphere of what was seen as the private life of Indians took place in the context of the Age of Consent Bill. It was clear that the law itself had little power to eliminate the practice of child marriage. Nationalists considered the Bill as the first real breach of Indian autonomy since it interfered with marriage practices sanctioned by tradition. It was seen as part of an effort to legitimize British rule in India, under the pretext of legal reforms. At the heart of the controversy was also the fact that the Bill challenged the definition of conjugality itself, which was, argues Tanika Sarkar, at the centre of “the formative movement for militant nationalism in Bengal” (1993: 1869). The insistence on non-interference posited an “uncolonized” space, a space which was itself a product of the legal framework of colonial rule. What it, in effect, did was to mobilize political nationalism, which sought to redefine conjugality, the domestic sphere of the family, and to negotiate a new mode of private/public divide.

8. There was a clear attempt from the side of the colonial authorities to represent themselves as non-interfering. Tanika Sarkar argues that the legal framework of colonial rule demarcated a separate public sphere for criminal codes, land relations, contract laws, etc. which was under the jurisprudence of colonial law and a private sphere of family relationships, property rights and religion which came under the regulations of Hindu and Muslim laws (1993: 1871). But these Hindu and Muslim laws themselves were codified under colonial supervision. In positing the private as the sphere of non-interference, the colonial authorities were, says Mrinalini Sinha, “engaged in a much more self-conscious effort in the late nineteenth century to defer to the authority of indigenous interpretations and of customary practices in all matters designated ‘private.’” The colonial policy of non-interference, therefore, committed itself in no uncertain terms to the nurturing of orthodox indigenous practice” (1995: 141).
In *Century of Social Reform in India*, S. Natarajan writes that unlike the West where social reform meant changes affecting relations between economic classes also, in India it mainly involved changes in the structures of society and the family (1959: 5). This seems to be true if one examines the major issues that the reformists were concerned with: sati, kulin polygamy, child marriage, widow remarriage, the age of consent, etc. All these issues had direct implications in the lives of women (and especially middle-class women) in society and in the family. In the imagination of this period, the transformation of a traditional society into a modern one depended quite significantly on the redefinition of female subjectivities. Women were to be the subjects and the domestic sphere the site of this transformation.

There is now a vast body of literature which engages with the reform movements and the extension and re-articulation of some of these concerns during the nationalist period. Throughout the nineteenth century, the efforts to weed out the barbarous practices in Indian society were also part of a political process of reinforcing the need for, and establishing modes of, government by the British. Positing women as the focus of reforms also meant acquiring an inroad into the “private” life of the Indian people. The social reform movements and a whole series of codifications and regulations of personal and customary laws by the British can be read as attempts at regulating the private sphere.

9. Some of these works are Meredith Borthwick, *The Changing Roles of Women in Bengal, 1849-1905* (1984); Gulam Murshid, *Reluctant Debutante: Responses of Bengali Women to Modernization, 1849-1905* (1984); Sumit Sarkar, *A Critique of Colonial India* (1985); David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: The Dynamics of Indian Modernization* (1969). It has been pointed out that most of the research has centered around Bengal. Anitha Devasia writes: "... the Bengal centered scholarship on the nineteenth century has been so powerful that the history of India in the early modern period is invariably written as the history of public initiatives in Bengal. As a result extremely significant regional experiences have often been obscured and tended to be described as exceptions or anomalies in a national history that is based on the experience of Bengal or Bombay." See [A New Translation of Chandimone's *Indulekha*](https://example.com) (1999): iii.

The over-arching control of social life, especially in terms of legal regulations, by the British was seen as an encroachment upon the traditional way of life of the Indians. But at the same time, many of these legal reforms were seen as necessary since these were considered the best way of countering the degeneration critique of India. Hence legal regulation in the realm of social reform was marked by bitter contestations over the authenticity of Indian tradition.

The object of these reforms were a minor section of the population, namely upper caste Hindus. In more ways than one, the colonial articulation of gender was directly tied up with class formations, and the process changed the meanings of both gender and class. For example, the new zeal for educating women introduced ideas of respectability in line with Victorian ideals. This, in turn, led to the marginalization and exclusion of certain kinds of traditional practices of interaction between different classes of women. This process of class consolidation based on disciplining female subjectivities is analyzed by Sumanta Banerjee. He records how women's popular culture was marginalized in Bengal (1989). Vaishnavism had provided a legitimate space for women rejected by society, including widows, married or single women who were driven away or had left home, diseased or crippled women, and so on. These women travelled from place to place enjoying a right to learning and a freedom of movement sanctioned by religious norms. They were generally accepted in “proper” households. Many of them entered the antemahal and were employed as tutors for children in upper-class homes. Thus, there was a relatively unrestricted interaction between women in seclusion in the upper-class homes and these nomadic “gypsy” women, known for their realistic, tough and what was often termed “licentious” life-styles and compositions.
One of the agendas of the reform movement was the control of this "unbridled" interaction. Banerjee contends that there was a rigorous campaign, couched under "the concern for 'social discipline' and 'public order'" that effectively stopped the interaction between these Vaishnavite women poets and the middle-class Bengali housewife (147).

The rise of the middle-class housewife, the bhadramahila, was thus marked out in opposition to the "waywardness" and "licentiousness" of the lower class woman. The marginalization of this kind of popular culture as part of reform movement was one example of the ways in which the practices within the sphere of activity of women, the household, and the family, were conceptualized and a new idea of femininity and domesticity reinforced.

As in the West, there was a widespread debate on how women should be educated. Clearly, the goals of freedom and equality that education offered were to be distributed differentially to men and women. Education for women was designed less to bring them out of the secluded family space, more to make them better managers of those spaces. Women's journals, conduct books, pamphlets, etc. were pressed into servicing this transformation. The endeavour was to create an Indian woman who is, as Dipesh Chakrabarty puts it, "educated enough to appreciate the modern regulations of the body and the state but yet 'modest' enough to be unassertive and unselfish" (1992: 14). A full-blown modernity is not a fully desirable project for this Indian woman.

A number of commentators have pointed out that over the course of the century, the need to ensure that the modernized woman would "remain" Indian was increasingly

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voiced. The westernized woman was set up as a figure of ridicule. There was a constant suggestion in the literature of this period that the westernized woman was fond of useless luxury and cared very little for the family.\(^\text{11}\) The counterpoint to this was the fully modern yet also fully Indian figure best symbolized by Oyyarathu Chandumenon’s Nair heroine in *Indulekha* (1889), and the protagonist in Krupa Sattianadan’s *Saguna* (1889).

The concept of “freedom” that education was supposed to bring about was the subject of extended debates. Dipesh Chakrabarty discusses the nuances in the new meanings given to this concept. As opposed to the western notion which meant “to do as one pleased,” the Indian notion meant freedom from the ego, the capacity to serve and obey voluntarily. If earlier the idea of a “free” woman was confronted with ridicule, the “Indian” way of defining freedom endowed it with a virtue that was imperative for the ideal sphere of domesticity that nationalist discourse posited. The theory of “freedom-in-obedience” made a crucial distinction in terms of the “truly unfree.” The nationalists argued that the European point of view that Indian women are unfree is based on the inability to grasp the crucial distinction between the housewife and the domestic. The housewife was capable of freedom-in-obedience, whereas the domestic has no access to the very idea. Clearly, observes Chakrabarty, “the servants were not yet included in the India of the nationalist imagination” (1992: 14-15).

By the first decades of the twentieth century the nationalist thesis shifts emphasis into the more confident “To be fully Indian is to be truly modern.” This is a theme elaborated in various forms well into the 1970s. In the nationalist discourse, woman became an

\(^{\text{11}}\) Partha Chatterjee suggests that this ridicule of the westernized woman was basically a criticism of manners. And contained in this criticism—"reproach mixed with envy"—was a criticism of “the wealth and luxury of the new social elite emerging around the institutions of colonial administration and trade.” *The Nation and its Fragments* (1993): 122.
important site around which an “Indian” identity was shaped and distinguished from that of the European. An emerging nationalism considered it unnecessary to learn from the West anything other than the material aspect of life. The individuality of the East was in the spiritual domain and that was to be kept intact. According to Partha Chatterjee, what the nation-builders thought necessary was to “cultivate the material technique of modern western civilization while retaining and strengthening the distinctive spiritual essence of the national culture” (1993: 120). What is of particular interest to this study is that the material/spiritual distinction was mapped onto the ideologically far more powerful dichotomy of outer and inner spaces. The material domain was what lay outside the personal and the familial and the principal sphere of influence by western ideals and modernization. The distinction of Indian culture, and the national genius, lay in the spiritual domain, the inner life of Indians. Consequently this inner space needed to be safeguarded. To quote Partha Chatterjee again, the discourse of nationalism seemed to suggest that “as long as India took care to retain the spiritual distinctiveness of its culture it could make all the compromises and adjustments necessary to adapt itself to the requirements of a modern material world without losing its true identity” (120). In concordance to the material/spiritual distinction, the day-to-day living space was divided into the world and the home. The home, the inner spiritual domain, was to represent tradition, essence of the Indian culture, and the subjectivity of the East.

The newly defined spirituality of the inner space needed a complementary womanhood.

Once again, modernity and tradition are counterposed in defining the home space. As a

12. Partha Chatterjee’s thesis is put forward in the context of the sudden “disappearance” of the women’s question in the nationalist period, discussed by Gulam Murshid and Sumit Sarkar. I do not want to enter the debate around the “resolution” of the women’s question. I only want to draw on the analysis of the division of the private and public domain during this period.

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number of scholars have shown, tradition, as it became accepted, was a reformed, reconstructed, classicized tradition, often more genuinely modern than the mimic modernity of the brown sahibs. The freedom and modernity that the western woman was supposed to be endowed with were seen as superficial and materialistic. The new Indian woman was to be educated, but her education and emancipation was to be distinguished from that of the western woman. She had to acquire the cultural refinements afforded by education without being a memsahib. As a wife, she was no more to be the submissive woman but the “companion” of the man. As a mother, she was to be able to nurture her son into becoming the real Indian man. She could indeed go into the world outside, but her essential femininity was marked out in culturally unambiguous signs—the way she dressed, her eating habits, social demeanour and spirituality. This new woman strikes a fine and ideologically controlled balance between tradition and modernity. The objectionable practices of an earlier era are wiped away, but she does not succumb to the vile materialism of western modernity.

The colonial and nationalist period can be seen as the period when the shift in female subjectivities were consolidated, and marriages and families rethought. This was a national project. Two significant examples that come to mind is the regulation of women’s sexuality that was written into the change in the structures of Nair matriliny and the Devadasi abolition campaign. Both instances point to a project of harnessing what

was seen as “aberrant” sexualities, in a context where women’s sexualities were defined in terms of a revived and purified tradition, and a claim to a past that had ‘Hindu’ as its overwhelming cultural content. The ideological reform of the family written into the reform of Nair matriliny or into the Devadasi abolition campaign demonstrates “emerging new divisions between licit and illicit sexual relationships” (John & Nair, 1998: 24).

Of critical importance to my thesis is the fact that the new woman of the nationalist project was defined in terms of difference. This difference was not only a definition of the essential difference of men and women and their roles in the material and spiritual domains, but also between women themselves in how they fulfill the requirements of the ideal. In fact the critical distinctions are those that operate between women in the world outside the home. The new woman is distinguished in terms of morality (as opposed to the “licentious” women), refinement (as opposed to an earlier uneducated, pre-modern generation), a real modernity (as opposed to the surface modernity of the “memsahibs”), spirituality (as opposed to western women), and class (as opposed to the “truly unfree” domestic). She is marked with a femininity which is configured not merely in counterpoint to masculinity. Over time, the space that this figure presides over is elaborated and consolidated as the “real.” The recasting of the domestic space in the nationalist imagination involves a sense of home and belongingness that is constituted not just in terms of the family and kinship relations, but in the broader terms of class, community and nation. The State was required to protect this private space,

16. In an article that discusses the “public narratives of the nature of social life in the family,” Dipesh Chakrabarty analyzes this idea of “different yet modern” in great detail. He argues that a series of distinctions made between Lakshmi/Alakshmi, the bhadratalik/memsahib, free will/destiny, pleasantness/unpleasantness and so on put in place “the ideology of the auspicious grihalakshmi, which is intimately tied to the concern for well-being of the kula” and always exceeds “a straightforward bourgeois project of domesticating women in order to allow them into the modern and male public sphere.” See “The Difference-Deferral of a Colonial Modernity: Public Debates on Domesticity in British Bengal” (1994): 86.
and the private self that occupies this space, from interference. This could be done, writes Partha Chatterjee, analyzing the liberal ideology that underlines the postcolonial national state, only by its "indifference to concrete differences between private selves—differences, that is, of race, language, religion, class, caste, etc." (1992: 67). 17

Chatterjee also posits an important disjuncture between the nationalist project of the private and the cultural project of the inner domain. The autonomy and sovereignty of the inner domain in some sense pre-exists the political battle with the colonial State. But this autonomy had to be established from a position of subordination and the process, he argues, was one of a cultural "normalization." The hegemonic project of cultural normalization could not, unlike the political project of the private, make the distinctions of language, religion, caste or class a matter of indifference. The cultural construction of the 'inner' identity of nationhood was not, therefore, restricted to the domain of the 'private'" (68). The fundamental difference between Europe and India then is that "the forms of encompassment of the family within civil society and of civil society within the state, effectively devaluing all other contending conceptions of community, could only be implanted in India in the domain of state processes (the field of the public/private) and not in that of cultural construction (the field of the inner/outer)" (68). This is evidenced, Chatterjee points out, by the simultaneous and often antagonistic existence even in the India of today "of a state which dominates without being hegemonic and of several hegemonic projects still in search of dominance" (68). The continuing projects

17. This is perhaps also the place to draw attention to the fact that from the beginning of the twentieth century the new woman is increasingly marked as Hindu, indeed as upper caste Hindu, and as not-Muslim. Thus the important work of Rokeya Hossein, much appreciated in its time, that feature the lives and problems of Muslim women in Bengal drops out of the canon of Bengali literature just as her reformist initiatives disappear from the archive of Bengal's history.
of this hegemony and in particular its response to the “hazard” of the women’s movement are the focus of my study.

Chatterjee’s characterization of the difference between the way in which the idea of the private is deployed in the western and Indian contexts helps us to track the history/genealogy of the private domain in the post-independence India. The idea of a cultural inner space which is simultaneous with a political private space continues to hold the imagination of post-independence India. Madhava Prasad’s discussion of the prohibition of kissing in Indian cinema (1998: 89-94) illustrates this in relation to the cinema of the 1950s and 60s. The G.D. Khosla report (1969) on film censorship pointed out that the rule that prohibited the representation of kissing on the Indian screen was an unwritten one. The most frequent justification offered for this ban is that “it corresponds to the need to maintain the Indianness of Indian culture” (88), since kissing was part of western culture and alien to ours. The recommendation of the Khosla committee that the ban be lifted did not meet with the kind of welcome that was expected. In fact, there was quite an opposition to the lifting of the ban.

How might this be explained? “Vulgarity” is no stranger in Indian cinema. Sexual permissiveness, and the female body presented as spectacle is one of its staple ingredients. The display of women’s bodies in song and dance sequences, the representation of sexual violence and so on are commonplace in Indian cinema. Despite organized protests and the so-called sexual conservatism of the Indian censorship, such display has not been

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18. Cinema is the best example because as Madhava Prasad says it has been the “central national cultural institution because mass illiteracy poses obstacles to literature playing a similar role.” Ideology of the Hindi Film (1998): 100.
So what is it that make kissing so objectionable? Prasad asks. He also points out that the informal nature of the ban raises questions about who thought up the idea, how it came to be accepted by a group licensed by the State to exercise moral authority and who gave sanction to this at the level of the government. Viewed thus, argues Prasad, the issue “explodes into questions about the nature of informal authority in a democratic society, the nexus between the state (which is understood to be functioning according to written and legislated codes) and other sources of authority which function on the strength of less systematized but no less effective modes of power” (92).

The popular explanation about the resistance to the representation of kissing on the screen, Prasad points out, involves a confusion of the categories of the private and the public. The argument “we Indians don’t kiss in public” and so kissing should not be represented involves an error in equating cinematic representation with the representation of the public sphere. There is no recognition of the possibility that “while the representation circulates in public spaces, it need not necessarily be of the public” (93).

This ideology of the public sphere also explains the contradictory attitudes towards the representation of kissing on the one hand and of female bodies on the other. Prasad continues:

The female body as spectacle is a public representation, a putting before the public, of an imagery that does not violate the code that prohibits the representation of the private. This is because (1) such spectacle occurs in song-and-dance sequences which are conventionally coded as contracted voyeurism, rather than an unauthorized view of a private world; and (2) where they are not so coded, they

serve, as Mulvey has pointed out, as points of narrative arrest. Kissing on the other hand, and by extension the details of a sexual relation between two people, belong to the realm of the private” (93).

According to Prasad, what the prohibition actually targets, then, is the representation of the private. This private is put in place by the “invention of the couple.”20 The cinema is committed to the endless reproduction of the couple who is ruled by the compound authority of a feudal and a modern patriarchy. The kiss is seen as that which inaugurates the zone of privacy of the couple and of what he calls total subsumption into the ideology of a bourgeois modernity. This private sphere dissolves all other authority except that of the state. In fact, argues Prasad, the private “is only invented in and through this relationship of the family to the state” (96). The attribution of the prohibition to the need to upkeep the integrity of the culture is “the basis of the consensual formation that ensures the stability of the community’s identity” (97).21 Quoting Prasad again, to summarize, “the prohibition of kissing is a symptomatic cultural protocol whose origins lie in the need to prevent the dissolution of pre-capitalist patriarchal enclaves” (100). It is a “meaningless” prohibition which “regulates the public circulation of images as an obligation of the contract between new and traditional elites” and its tangible result, in cinema, is “a blocking of the representation of the private” (100).

One implication of this line of argument is that the post-independence decades are marked by a disavowal of a “full” modernity simultaneous with a drive for modernization. A

20. The actual configurations of the invention of the couple and its ramifications are discussed in the last chapter of this thesis.
21. Prasad refers to Zizek’s description of the “Big Other,” “the agency that decides instead of us, in our place.” Zizek, For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor (1991): 77. In the case of cinematic representation of kissing, this Other takes the form of Culture.
critical picture of the effects of modernization on women emerged in *Towards Equality: Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India* in 1974. The Report recorded that “[w]hile granting equality of rights to men and women in the polity, Indian society implicitly accepts a sharp distinction between men’s spheres and women’s spheres and between masculine roles and feminine roles” (83). While there was a premium on boys’ education, girls were educated, in many cases, only as a security measure for unforeseen eventualities. Career option for girls was still not accepted as a right. It was pointed out that the spheres of men and women were more sharply defined in the middle class. The Report drew attention to the fact that “[n]otions of distinctiveness between the spheres of men and women, patterns of division of labour, and expectations of differential behaviour between the sexes have a direct bearing on the process of socialization, on opportunities provided for the education and training of girls, on the kinds of ideals projected before them, on the kinds of expectations they come to have from life, and on the way they conduct their lives” (85).

The Report showed that even after twenty five years of independence, women had unequal access to education, health, legal status, economic participation and so on. Modernization and development often reversed the status of women. Rape laws (and subsequent assumptions about sexual harassment) put into place by a colonial government continued to be upheld a hundred years later by a free India; incidents of domestic violence and dowry murders were rampant.

The publication of the Report was a turning point in the engagement with women’s issues. A whole new generation of engagement with the question of the family comes into the public sphere in the 1970s and early 80s when issues raised by the women’s
movement once again brought into focus the sphere of the family and the assumptions about the status of women within it. Though also inspired by movements in Europe and the US, and the engagement with the women’s question in China, the Indian women’s movement was part of a series of social processes that resulted from the general dissatisfaction with the post-independence trajectory of the nation-state. Most commentators point to the early 70s and the widespread protests and agitations against the inadequacies and injustices of the modernizing, “Nehruvian” period. The Emergency of 1975 was another crucial turning point. The questions that the women’s movement addressed were part of a radical new awareness among the people, both politically and culturally.

Rather than embracing the “tradition” node in the tradition-modernity couple, the women’s movement pointed to a critical relation of women and the women’s question to the modernizing efforts of the State. It set up a critique of national modernity that charged the State with partiality. The very “impartiality” of the State in its modernizing efforts, they argued, had resulted in a partiality in favour of patriarchal powers.

As I have mentioned in the introduction, the women’s movement in its initial phase addressed these questions using a strategy that was issue-specific. Looking back from the nineties, it is possible to trace a critique of the family in the modes in which issues like rape, domestic violence, dowry, sexual harassment, and so on were dealt with. For example, the critique of the practice of giving and taking dowry addresses, in a direct mode, the effects of a capitalist economy in a semi-feudal society. But it is possible to read into the attempts made by the women’s movement to hold the State responsible in the continuing subjection of women as daughters and wives, a critique of the institution
of marriage and the situation of women within it. In the following chapters, I will be analyzing some of the campaigns of the women's movement, for example, rape and domestic violence, to critically examine three major concepts in the consolidation of domestic ideology in India—domesticity, conjugality and privacy. The next chapter makes a reading of some narratives about rape to look at how the privatization of woman's body and the issue of privacy affect the construction of female subjectivities in contemporary India.