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STRUGGLE AND RESISTANCE

Punjabi Women In Birmingham

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A B S T R A C T

The thesis examines the relationship between race, gender and class and argues that any one of these aspects cannot be studied in isolation whilst examining the social position of Asian women.

The connection between these aspects is established by looking at the state, employment and the family. An examination of state legislation and practices shows that the impact of the state racism is mediated by both gender and class divisions.

The experience of Asian women's employment under capitalism emphasises the class oppression, but this study shows that this is specifically experienced in racist and sexist forms.

Asian women in the family experience patriarchal oppression but this too is mediated through race and class distinctions. Such factors have important implications for the political organisation and unity of all women in terms of their gender, race and class.

The research combines the use of interview techniques with participant observation and provides a historical examination of the impact of immigration legislation, Asian, and Black women's organisations, and campaigns on immigration and domestic violence.

The thesis provides ethnographical material and a theoretical analysis to demonstrate that though the triple oppression framework has been addressed elsewhere, the concept of class has not received adequate attention. This study makes a modest attempt towards addressing that inadequacy. It shows that class divisions amongst Asian women have a crucial bearing on the way in which their race and gender oppression is experienced. In so doing it thereby integrates the importance of class factors into the triple oppression and resistance of Asian women in Britain.

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

Western socialist feminists have sought to analyse the position of all women in terms of the specific forms of male domination based on particular social formations. Their main work has been concerned with looking at the position of women within capitalism. In doing so, they have elaborated upon the concepts of patriarchy, the family, culture, economic exploitation, etc. as forces that are responsible for the gender subordination of all women.

Asian and Afro-Caribbean feminists (and other non-white feminists) have argued that such concepts cannot be accepted uncritically, as explaining the oppression of non-white women. They develop the primacy of the triple oppression in terms of race, gender and class, to which the process of colonialism and imperialism form an integral part, for the understanding of the subordination of Third World women. They suggest that for Third World women, the racism, which has its origins in colonialism and imperialism, constructs their gender and class relations.

Our understanding of racial oppression and racism is that racism is the oppression and exploitation of any racial group, on the basis of race, colour, culture or physical appearance. What constitutes a 'racial group' may depend on the particular social and political context under consideration. Racism is a system of beliefs and practice whereby one racial group holds power and superiority over another group. As P. Fryer (1985) suggests, racism is to be distinguished from race prejudice which is

based on unsystematic and self-contradictory notions, transmitted largely by word of mouth.

Racism on the other hand is relatively systematic and internally consistent with a pseudo-scientific rationale and claims to intellectual respectability. (P. Fryer 1985 : 133)

Generally, it is transmitted through the printed word. Thus the prejudice which interprets Asian women as being passive, for example, acquires a more concrete meaning when 'scientific' research is conducted to prove this point. An important constituent of the definition of racism is the power one group has to discriminate against another, on the basis of racial prejudice. In this respect Black people are not primarily concerned about the negative prejudices that white people may hold against them per se. They are, however, very much concerned when such prejudices are used as a basis for discriminating against Blacks since this affects their livelihood.

Fryer points out that the functions of race prejudice are cultural and psychological, but racism has economic and political effects too.

In the lives of non-white people in this country, racism is the single most important feature. They see racism as being a continuum of colonialism and imperialism, to which all Third World people are subjected. Imperialism and colonialism are understood in the following way for the purpose of this study.

Imperialism signifies:

any relationship of dominance and subordination between nations, including the modern form using economic control. (H. Magdoff 1978 : 117, 139 cited in J. Liddle and R. Joshi 1986: 41).

and colonialism:

to indicate the specific historical form of imperialism which used direct military and political control. (Ibid).

On the basis of their common experience of colonialism and imperialism, Black has become a political expression for non-white people, representing their political resistance on the basis of race.

White is not a colour.
It is an attitude.
A certain behaviour.

Black is not a colour.
It is a statement of a shared past.
A present reality.
A future intent.
(Elean Thomas 1987 : 68).

Apart from the personal racialism of white people (exemplified by racial violence), institutional racism has a more profound impact on Black people. Institutionalised racism is practised by the institutions of the state when their policies, directly or indirectly, discriminate against Black people on the basis of race. Such policies have the power to control the lives of Black people in this country. Immigration legislation, educational policies etc, are cases in point, on which we will elaborate in Chapter One.

In understanding their experiences in the context of race, Black feminists have advocated the framework of the triple oppression in the context of race, gender and class. This framework is adopted in this study. It establishes the interconnections of race and gender by explaining how racism helps to construct notions of Black women's femininity and how such notions are consequently used in the concrete exploitation of their labour. For example, racism is seen to develop a theory that Asian women are passive, and then this passivity helps to locate women as a 'docile' labour force in the most unorganised sectors of the labour market.

One of the weaknesses of the triple oppression framework is that it tends to analyse the position of ALL Black women as that of working class. The reason being that like 'all' Black men, the women do not own the means of production, and are victimised by racism. This limits the access of Black people to capital and property, thus making the class divisions within the community irrelevant.

I differ from this standpoint.

One reason for the lack of class analysis in this context, is due to the intricacies and complications that racism presents for the position of Black people.

For the purpose of this thesis, the essence of one's class position is understood in terms of the relationship one has to the means of production, of wealth and other resources (such as education), which can be used as indices for this relationship.

The occupations of Black people can be used to illustrate their relationship to wealth in general. For example, the class position of the majority of the women in this study is that of working class, because they do not have access to wealth or good education and housing, etc. They have the minimum control over their lives. The respondents are mainly available for the most menial, degraded, lowest paid and the least organised sectors of the labour market, and as such do not have access to the more rewarding occupations. They may share this position with white working class women, but the essential cause of their position lies in the effects of racism to which Black women are subjected. Racism is the prime force of oppression in respect of Black people. The effects of imperialism and colonialism have been such that the exploitation of labour is constructed on a racial basis. In relation to the white working class, therefore, the Black working class is over-exploited. The white working classes materially benefit from this exploitation since it enables them to acquire a better living standard than would otherwise be possible.

Black capitalists who exploit labour for profit do also exist in Britain, and are beginning to consolidate their interests as a class, as the increase in the Black vote for the Conservative Party showed in 1987 (Asian Times 15.6.87). There are also Black people who by virtue of their high educational qualifications and professional occupations acquire a much better material existence (in terms of finance, job security and housing etc.), than is possible for the Black working class people. However, both the Black capitalists and the Black middle classes occupy lower positions (with regards to wealth, power and status etc.) within their class groupings, when compared to their white counterparts. The Blacks are still

subjected to racial discrimination within these classes. This was exemplified by a conference of Black lawyers, for which the major agenda for discussion was the racial discrimination within the legal profession. For these classes also, racism has been a predominant feature in defining their position.

The implications of this argument are that class divisions amongst the Black community exist, but race is of a paramount importance for understanding the class position of Black people. In practice, this has meant that the struggle of Black people has been based on racial grounds. The Asian Community, for example, has found it necessary to organise as Asians confronting racism, rather than showing unity as a particular class. Race and culture have provided aspects on which a strong unity can be developed, because the class position of Black people has been experienced on racial lines. Race and class, therefore become inseparable.

Apart from the complications and the intricacies presented by race and class, another reason for an inadequate analysis of class within the triple framework, is that the interests of the capitalists and the middle classes, amongst Black people in Britain, are only beginning to be consolidated.

In this context the position of Asian and other Black women can only be understood in terms of race, class and gender. The concern of this thesis is to show how working class Asian women experience their oppression and resistance within white British society in general, and within the family.

The study also shows that in neglecting the implications of class distinctions within the Black community, the triple oppression framework has failed to act adequately as an analytical tool, and requires further development if it is to be useful in understanding the position of Black women.

In this study, we use the term working class loosely, to incorporate people who are (or whose prospects only allow them to be) employed in manual (skilled or unskilled) occupations, where remunerations for employment and job security are low. The terms middle class is reserved for those who occupy (or will occupy) professional forms of employment e.g. medicine, law, teaching, social or community work and where both the remunerations and the job security are high.

In 1981 the study was carried out in the Handsworth area of Birmingham where there is a high population of Black people (58 percent compared with a national average of 11 percent in the West Midlands, and 4 percent in the U.K. as stated in the West Midlands County Council 1986 study) originating from the Indian sub-continent and the Afro-Caribbean countries. Handsworth is an inner-city area with an unemployment rate of 38 percent (West Midlands County Council: 1986), one of the highest in the city, and where the traditional manufacturing industries such as heavy metal and light-engineering, which previously employed a large Black labour force, have declined. Nearly eight thousand people are unemployed in the Soho and Handsworth ward in 1987. It is an area where the major Black political groups are active in both local and national Black politics. Black retail

and manufacturing businesses are on the increase, attracting a predominantly cheap Asian female labour force from the vicinity.

The sample consists of eighty-six Indian Punjabi women, mainly from Sikh families. Five were from Hindu families. Sixty-eight (79 percent) women were over the age of twenty-four years, and fifty-four (63 percent) of these were married and lived with their families. Fourteen (16 percent) were separated or divorced and lived alone. The number of unmarried girls, or women, amounted to eighteen (21 percent) of whom two (11 percent) lived alone.

The following table provides information on the waged and non-waged nature of the women in the sample.

	Working class, married and separated women	Working class girls of employable age	Middle class	Total
Unemployed (at the time of the interview)	21	3	0	24
Waged (outside the home)	26	11 (6 on Youth Opportunity Training)	7	44
Waged (within the home)	15	0	0	15
At school	0	3	0	3
	62	17	7	86

Seventy-nine (92 percent) of the women fell into working-class occupations by virtue of their current or previous employment. Seven middle-class feminists were interviewed, all of whom worked in professions such as teaching, social or community work, and ^{as} such brought them into close and regular contact with working-class women. They are not representative of middle-class women as such since their feminist consciousness and perspectives led them to lead a life-style that is distinct from non-middle-class women.

METHOD

The methodology combined the use of interview techniques, participant observation, and an indepth analysis of immigration legislation; its implementation and impact.

A historical examination and analysis of Asian organisations, and those of Black women was carried out together with the campaigns on immigration, and domestic violence. Data was also collected from work at the Asian Resource Centre (voluntary and then paid); by contacting women in factories; and by approaching the local Indian Workers Association.

The interview techniques were based on unstructured questionnaires, and on the whole lasted for two and a half hours. The women were allowed the maximum space to talk and express themselves in relation to their home and their working lives. The questionnaire served merely to write brief notes of the interviews (which were sometimes recorded on tape, when the

respondents allowed), and as a reminder for the direction of the interviews. The data was then written up almost immediately to prevent loss of details and memory.

The initial contact with the women was made through announcements about the research at some of the local temples; by volunteering at a local advice centre - the Asian Resource Centre (ARC), and by standing outside the factory gates where Asian women were known to be employed. In some cases, the respondents made further referrals to other women who were willing to be interviewed. These techniques, though not based on random sampling did provide a cross-section of women from the Indian Punjabi working-class women in the area. The middle-class women, cited in the sample are those with whom contact was established whilst they engaged with working-class women in their professional capacity, as community and social workers etc. At the time of the interviews they were not members of any Black women's organisations discussed in chapter two, though one of these women had been a member of an organisation previously, and another subsequently became a member of another organisation. The data presented in chapter six is from the interviews of these middle class women. An interview was also conducted with four Indian Workers Association male members (and two of their wives) because I was referred to these respondents through the organisation and they agreed to participate in the interview together.

One of the problems incurred during the interviewing stage of the research was based on my status as a single Indian women, living alone, away from my family. This had two effects. Firstly, the women themselves were curious as to why I was living alone, and if this had any connections with being a

'promiscuous' woman. They would have accepted and respected me more at the initial stages, if I had lived with my family. Therefore I had to explain that I was living away for educational reasons and this reinstated their acceptance of me. Secondly, the male and the older women members of the family, who usually held authority over the women's availability for interviews, were at first, sceptical about my interaction with the respondents. They feared that I may have an adverse, or 'bad' effects on the women in that I represented a concrete model of an 'independent' woman, which the respondents may later wish to emulate. To alleviate such fears, it was necessary in some cases to allow the authoritative figures to sit-in at the interviews, and then once trust and confidence had been developed, follow-up the respondents independently. This proved useful as it was possible, by this method, to also involve the views of the members of the household who had power over the respondents.

In 1982 I coincidentally found full-time and permanent employment at the ARC. This enabled me to follow-up many of the women in the study since I subsequently became a part of the Handsworth community as I both lived and worked there. The nature of this job was to advise, support and assist women in welfare and legal issues and to support the women in a refuge. Many women in the sample, have needed assistance with welfare rights, immigration and workplace matters. The job allowed the development of a long-term natural trust between most of the respondents who used the centre, and myself as a worker. The nature of this work, and the period of six years spent amongst the respondents, revealed some facts about the women that had not been talked about during the original interviews. Obviously, at the time they did not trust me as a researcher. This

suggests that interview techniques and participant observation for a short-time alone, can often be unreliable methods of research.

The 'participant observation' nature of the research, however, was not planned from the beginning. The coincidental opportunity of employment at the ARC, meant that I became a part of the community I was studying. The respondents no longer see me as a researcher, I am a resident of Handsworth, and they have witnessed many changes in my own life since 1981. I am no longer at ARC, I am now a lecturer, I have married and become a mother. However, I am not suggesting that I have become like the majority of the respondents. By virtue of my occupation I am a middle-class feminist and the respondents see me as such because our life-styles differ in fundamental ways. As such, the critiques presented in this thesis about middle class feminist issues, also include a critique of myself.

The analysis about the issues and events in some of the political groups is based on my role within the community as a political activist. As such the analysis is purely mine, it is NOT representative of other members and activists. The matters discussed are of a contentious nature within Black politics, and therefore I have not revealed the identity of the groups, except where public statements have been made. To identify the groups would be to encroach on their privacy and this may in turn have political implications.

The Punjabi respondents in this study have much in common with other women from the Indian subcontinent in terms of their experience in migration, labour market and the family. When developing these similarities I have

called them Asian. The word Asian is limited to refer to the women originating from the Indian subcontinent only, not those from other parts of Asia. I have no data on the latter. The experience of the respondents, in the political and social context of their lives in Britain, also have similarities with other non-white working-class women, and with Afro-caribbean women in particular. When such an unity is indicated to, I refer to them a Black women.

The chapters are designed to look at oppression and the experience of women of that oppression on the one hand, and then to look at how resistance is expressed within that field. Hence we look at the oppression of women in the general context of immigration, education, health, etc. in Chapter One, as forms of institutionalised racism and sexism. Then we look at the resistance of women and how this has been organised in Chapter Two. Chapter Three and Four look at the field of employment and resistance therein. Chapter Five and Six examine the oppression of women within the family and their resistance accordingly. Finally we draw the conclusions of the data in terms of the race, gender and class subordination of Asian women.

CHAPTER 1

THE CONTROL, SURVEILLANCE AND

THE SIEGE OF ASIAN WOMEN

Introduction

This chapter looks at the effect of institutional racism in the context of race, gender and class. The overall effects of racism have brought the various minority non-white communities together, to express the similarities of their experiences in this country. This is particularly so for Asian and Afro-Caribbean communities, who have begun to give a political dimension to their existence in terms of the 'Black' oppression. 'Black' does not refer to the pigmentation of the skin, it is a political expression of minority groups of the Third World, who have linked their struggles to one another and who see imperialism as the main and common force of their oppression today. Whilst there are internal differences amongst minority groups, this notion has been advanced theoretically and politically, by Black people.

In developing a specific understanding of Asian women, their position must be analysed in terms of a triple framework of race, gender and class. Thus we look at the various institutions of the state in this

chapter, to see the ways in which institutional practices affect Black women, and particularly Asian working class women. The Black presence in Britain has been controlled by both the needs of the economy and also by the economic and ideological circumstances of specific times. The immigration and the nationality laws of the country have shaped the flow of Black migrants and have brought together aspects of race, gender and class divisions. The prime purpose of the legislation has been to halt Black people's entry but it has worked through the status of Black women as we will show. External and internal controls have combined to control the Black presence and these have been widely practiced through all institutions of the State. The effects of this have been to put Black people under an economic, psychological and a physical siege. The subordination of women (in terms of their gender and class) has been used to mediate racist oppression.

Though this chapter highlights the effects of institutional racism, sexism and class oppression, the comments made about middle class Black people remain tentative and general in terms of the ethnography. However this is not to undermine the aspect of 'class' at a theoretical and a practical level. Class is an important tool for any realistic understanding of Black people, but at present it remains under-analysed. One of the reasons for this is that class formation within the Black community is in its incipient stages and is only beginning to be clearly demarcated. The nature of class struggle, for Black people is also such that race forms an important dimension of their class position.

The data in this work is drawn from other literature; activities throughout the country; from my experiences at ARC and from the interviews conducted for this thesis. This first part reviews the existing literature in this field. It is followed by a discussion of why Asian people came to Britain and how they settled in this country. With reference to this a brief outline is provided for the situation in Birmingham. We then describe in detail the manifestations of institutional racism and sexism on Black women and the ideologies used by successive governments, as a framework for their policies and practices. We show how minority communities are placed in a racist, sexist, physical and psychological assault from both official bodies and white people in general.

The differences between the Afro-Caribbean and Asian communities is touched upon here, but it will be developed further in the next chapter.

Review of the Literature

The early literature on migration, in the 1960s ignored the gender differences and concentrated on male migration (Sheiela Patterson 1963, C. Peach, 1968). Such a view was generated because sociology and other arenas of academia, were not yet substantially influenced by feminist analysis; and because migration was seen to be directly related to economically active persons. Since men were considered to be the 'prime earners', it ignored the economic purpose for which women had also sought to migrate. Although Davison (1962) had pointed out that West Indian women migrated to Britain to seek employment, they were still generally seen to be economically inactive.

The impact of feminist writings in sociology, during the late 1960s and early 1970s, brought the issue of women's oppression to the forefront of sociological categories and analysis (Morokvasic 1983). Questions pertaining to migrant women were raised primarily in connection with the family, rather than their position in the labour market (Khan 1976 and 1979). Barker and Allen (1976), set out to illustrate how the worlds of "home and work" were connected and how the "family must be viewed in terms of the economic and power relations" which play an important role in analysing the role of women. However, in their work, Khan failed to provide this interpretation by merely looking at the constraints of 'Purdah in the British situation' (1976). She concluded that the "majority of Pakistani women of rural origin do not go out to work because it is unacceptable for cultural/religious reasons" (quoted in Parmar 1982 : 257). In Khan's own work she stressed that Asian women are "fettered" by traditional customs which tie them to the home, and that they cling to "traditional" view about the world. This presents Asian women as being passive recipients of their culture and environment. Allen (1980) rejected these "simplistic notions" of cultural backgrounds in favour of "need of a close study of women's lives in the labour market" together with their social relationships within the family. In the 1980s, Black women (A. Wilson 1978, Bryan et al 1985, Parmar 1982;) began to provide their own interpretations of their presence in this country, to move away from the approach that blames the:

cultural, religious and communal factors
for the subordinate positions (Parmar
1982 : 238)

occupied by Black women in Britain.

Parmar points to the importance of establishing the inter relationship between race, gender and class to form an essential perspective for the understanding of Black women's subordination in this country. She argues against the "socio-cultural features of Asian communities" and the passivity of Asian women. She focusses on

the institutional power relations which oppress and exploit Asian women and not on the specific socio-cultural features of Asian communities. (Parmar 1982 : 239)

Emphasis is laid on the point that Asian women have a long history of expressing resistance and struggle, which has not been recognised in this country.

Parmar provided an excellent analysis of "the political economy of migration and gender" but falls short in her attempt to articulate the notions of race, class and gender in one respect. There is no discussion on the role of the class factor within the Asian community and no specific ethnographic details of the experiences of Asian women. For Parmar "Asian women" form " a specific class category". This assumes that 'Asian' women from all over Asia have no significant differences as regards to their class, culture or race. Such a generalisation neglects what Parmar wishes to achieve:

the articulation of race, class and gender solely at a theoretical level yields very generalised observations which would be undermined by a lack of reference to specific instances. It is

crucial that these observations are grounded in concrete and specific material situations. (Parmar, 1982 : 236).

Whilst she succeeds to look to immigration policies in a "concrete" and a "material" way, the same does not apply for the issue of class. To date, only one holistic work exists to my knowledge, which looks at the total experience of institutional racism by women and takes into account the aspect of class. A. Wilson (1978) related the personal experiences of women as regards immigration rules, employment, housing, police relations, and so on. Her analysis of class however, was only made relevant on the issue of employment (Wilson 1978 : 48) rather than it affecting all areas of life. One of the criticisms levelled against her, was that she gave credence to the white racist view that Asian women only 'progressed' to struggle at their arrival in this country and that Asian men are more oppressive than white men (M. Dhondy, 1979). Parmar (1982 : 252) also points out that Wilson failed to provide an "explicit economic and political framework" and this made the book a mere sensational account of the lives of Asian women.

In my view, the theoretical and the ethnographical literature on Asian women have remained fragmented and separate. Some recent literature on institutional racism relates to specific services (Ahemed et al, 1986) and does bring together the theoretical concerns and the practical experiences of Black people. However, since this deals with particular institutions only it lacks an overall holistic understanding of black women's position.

Such an analysis has been documented in relation to Afro-Caribbean women, in their historical struggles during slavery and colonialism (A. Davis, 1982; B. Hooks, 1982). I am not aware of any contemporary work of the same nature. In this Chapter, I adhere to the conceptualisation of race, gender and class, as a framework for understanding the impact of institutionalised racism and sexism, on the lives of Punjabi women.

My data on middle class women is scanty and leads to generalised comments which will point to the fact that there are differences amongst the lives of working class and middle class Asian women. The details will concentrate on working class Punjabi women.

The Need to Migrate

The migration of Asian and other Black people, into Britain, must be related directly to colonialism and imperialism. One Asian answered, when a white person asked why he had come to Britain, "Well, I think I am here because you were there" (Sivanandan 1982).

Colonialism destroyed the indigenous industries and crafts of the colonised countries. In the case of India some of these industries were cotton and textiles. As regards to textiles Chhachhi notes that:

Colonialism structured both the development of the Indian textile industry and the constitution of a textile working class. British rule led to the destruction of traditional handicrafts and handloom production as

India turned into a market for goods for Britain (Chhachhi 1983 : 39).

Liddle and Joshi (1986) give other ramifications of British rule. As a result of the taxation levied on Indians:

Many of the smaller landowning peasants were forced to grow cash crops to meet their increasing debts from the land revenue... The impact of the British device was that less food was grown for the village and more for raw materials for the manufacturing industries in Britain in the form of cotton, jute and indigo. (Liddle and Joshi 1986:25)

This had severe implications for the labour forces in the colonised countries which were left

with a large labour force and no capital with which to make that labour productive. And it is to these vast and cheap resources of labour that Britain turned in the 1950s. (Sivanandan 1982 : 102).

The legacy of this exploitation and destruction continues today in the form of imperialism, vis-a-vis transnational corporations and multi-nationals such as Union Carbide. The companies find it profitable to go to the workers and employ them without any restrictions of labour law. The ex-colonies have become neo-colonies.

Sivanandan suggests that by the 1960s, European post-war reconstruction was over and manufacturers experienced a decline in profits which forced them to look for external expansion into the peripheries.

Parmar points out that there is a:

tendency for both European and American capital to move from a policy of labour importation to one of capital export whereby labour - intensive industries are relocated in the periphery. The growth of free trade zones ... offer great opportunities for profit... tighter productivity is achieved through low wages; greater intensity of work; unfavourable work conditions; limited social security and fringe benefits; and a greater control over the workforce, which is usually made up of young women, through limited opportunities for trade union organisation often compounded by the existence of authoritarian regimes. (Parmar 1982 : 263).

In this way the workers in the peripheries provide the 'living dole' for the unemployed of the West (Sivanandan 1982 : 155).

Since the process of migration and the subsequent treatment of Black people in Britain, is a consequence of colonialism and imperialism, the notion of racism cannot exist in a vacuum. In fact neo-colonialism and imperialism is racism and it is in this context that we must understand the position of Blacks in Britain today - as a continuous process of these two forces. We now attempt to understand the impact of institutional and individual racism and sexism on Black women.

Post War Reconstruction

The 1948 Nationality Act had set the scenario for a 'laissez faire' migration flow - dictated by the free forces of supply and demand. In fact the decision on the part of the governments, to leave immigration to such forces, was a policy in itself. (Harris 1987).

Direct overseas recruitment was undertaken by companies such as the London Transport, Health Service, British Hotels and Restaurants Association. Even in the early part of this century, successive governments were involved in convincing the white population of the undesirability of Black people. It has been noted that at the time, the Nottingham police were keeping names and addresses of all Blacks in the locality. Questionnaires were sent to Labour Exchanges querying the nature of Black workers. Questions such as 'are they workshy?', 'do they learn quickly?' etc. were asked of officials. In 1944, the 'mixed' children of ex-servicemen were shipped to America (Harris, 1987). These were efforts to politicise the issue of Black people's presence, despite the needs of the economy and the 'laissez faire' policy. The private industrial sector, on the other hand saw Black people as 'good' and 'hard working' and was quite willing to employ them, since white workers were refusing to take on certain jobs after the war.

Parmar (1982 : 241) suggests that immigration policies did not directly correlate with the needs of the economy, because the 1962 Act

can be seen to act against the economic requirements of the country. The 1960s saw a fall in the demand for labour and in this sense, Parmar argues that the Act encouraged people to 'beat the ban' and this was not profitable for the country. However, I support Sivanandan (1976) in that the impetus for an increase and decrease in immigration was provided by periods of economic expansion and recession accordingly. In addition, the political and the ideological concerns of successive governments helped to politicise the issue of race and create specific images of Black people. After looking at the Black presence in Britain and the Asian pattern of migration in Birmingham we examine how the major institutions of the government helped to implement its policies both directly and indirectly.

The Black Presence in Britain

The presence of Asians and Afro-Caribbeans in Britain was not an invention of the post second World War period. Peter Fryer (1985) shows that as far back as the 1830s Asian people, mainly educated men, were present in Britain. They were in the main men of the upper stratas of Indian society engaged primarily in education in British universities but simultaneously waging an anti-colonial struggle for an independent India. Because of slavery, the Afro-Caribbean people have been here since the 17th Century. The 1930s show that a significant number of Asian men, primarily workers, must have been in Britain as the first Indian Workers Association was set up by Udham Singh in Coventry, who later gave his life for Indian independence at

Caxton Hall, London. An influx of working class Asian male migrants began in the post-war economic boom of the 1950s. Britain required a labour force for a major reconstruction after the war. Many Asian migrants, particularly from Pakistan, arrived here as 'stowaways' and no restrictions were imposed upon their legal status by the government of the day.

Birmingham

Birmingham has seen a long presence of Black people. Whilst at ARC, I met Asian people who had been in the country since the 1930s.

Employment in the heavy metal industries, foundries, and car manufacturing had attracted many working class Asian men to settle in the industrial regions of the locality. The transport industry and the Health Service were the major employers of Afro-Caribbean people. Sivanandan points out (1982 : 5) that Afro-Caribbean people were given work in the service industries which were organised with regards to trade unions and Asians were given the factory floor where labour was traditionally unorganised. The struggles of both the communities were therefore different and related to their material existence and divisions. Afro-Caribbeans were thus occupied with police harassment and educational issues and Asians with organisation on the factory floor and immigration concerns.

In the 1960s and early 1970s, many working class Asian women arrived in Birmingham for whom the light engineering sector offered

recruitment. This general pattern reflects the Asian settlement in the West Midlands. On the whole Black people settled where they were offered employment. All the women I spoke to, middle class and working class specified that their presence in this country was due to their desire to acquire a better livelihood than was possible for them in India. However, since the mid 1970s, the industries in which a large Asian work-force was employed have been on the decline and this has left a pool of middle-aged, unskilled, unemployed labour. The growth of popular garments manufacture in the form of 'sweatshops' have opened up new avenues for Asian women albeit with severe working conditions, as we shall see in Chapter Three. The various training schemes initiated by the government are using the young Asian people for a few years but the middle-aged unemployed, unskilled males have little prospect in the labour market in Birmingham. Some have tried to open up small businesses and failed, a few have seen success. There are others who do not have the resources even to contemplate a small business, and they remain the long term unemployed. This situation reflects the position of Black people in other major innercity areas nationally.

Birmingham, like other larger cities where Blacks have settled, has seen the struggles against deportations, police brutality and other forms of resistance against racial discrimination.

Immigration and Race Relations

The entry of Black people into Britain was to be controlled by the consecutive Immigration and Nationality Acts which sought to exclude Black people from gaining access to the mother country in subsequent years. The Acts used the features of race, gender and class in specific ways to suit the economic, political and ideological

conditions in Britain. Whilst immigration policies can be seen as an index of the intensity to which Black people are under the control of the government they were used in conjunction and collaboration with the practices of the police and other institutions.

I want to develop a historical understanding of how and why immigration developed as an issue. We take a cursory look at the pre 1960s period and then develop an in depth study of the major trends after the 1960s.

Pre 1960s

Before the 20th Century the Nationality Acts distinguished only British and Aliens. The latter were not British subjects but were, nevertheless, allowed to enter Britain. The Nationality Acts served merely to control the Aliens once in Britain - not at the point of entry. The Eastern European Pogrom which induced Jewish people to seek refuge in Britain created fears amongst the British population at the turn of the 20th Century. Fears akin to those expressed today in

relation to Black people prevailed. For instance the following passage is difficult to be place.

Not a day passes but English families are ruthlessly turned out to make room for foreign invaders. It is only a matter of time before the population becomes entirely foreign. The rates are burdened with the education of thousands of children of foreign parents. I should have thought we had enough criminals of our own. The working classes know that new buildings are erected not for them but for strangers from abroad, they see notices that no English need apply placarded on vacant rooms. A storm is brewing which if it be allowed to burst will have deplorable results. (King : 1983).

This is not Enoch Powell in the 1960s but Evans Gordon, a Tory M.P. for Stepney in an amendment to the Queens Speech in January 1902, expressing fears about the Jews. The Aliens Act 1905 followed, exerting control of aliens at the point of entry and eliminating 'undesirables' from Britain. The notion that migrants are a menace to British society was firmly introduced. The fact that the British in their own role as colonisers had threatened many countries, was conveniently seen as 'enlightening the colonies'. A mother teaching her children. For this 'motherhood' the peoples of the colonies were conferred the status of British subjects. No distinction was made for British subjects living in Britain from those living in the colonies.

The Commonwealth notion entailed that all British people in Britain and abroad, shared the commonwealth, at least on ideological grounds.

But successive Immigration and Nationality Acts were in fact measures impeding the entry of Black 'British' people living in the colonies, who in reality had no connections with Britain except that the latter had ruled their countries. With the advent of independent Commonwealth countries, e.g. Australia, Canada, etc. the 1948 British Nationality Act conferred British citizenship on all colonies that had not (yet) become independent. The old commonwealth, now independent, had to pass their own nationalities to their citizens. Those that remained British, were free to enter Britain without restrictions. The 'laissez faire' policies dictated their entry and exit. They were not deportable and had full rights to participate in the civil and political activities of the country. Anyone born in Britain or its colonies was known as a citizen of United Kingdom and colonies (CUKC) - a status which could be passed on by fathers. One could also acquire CUKC status by registration or naturalisation; one year's residence; and in case of women by marriage to a CUKC. The citizens of Independent Commonwealth countries retained their "right of abode" and exemption from deportation, right to British citizenship and other civil rights e.g. voting.

The Post 1960s: Immigration and Race Relations Policies

As the economic slump was beginning to hit Britain, and anti-Black feelings were expressed by politicians, the government reacted quickly.

It was caught in a desire to secure a cheap labour supply on the one hand, and control the 'racial' presence of Blacks on the other.

Powell's views were shared by the white working class generally, as the dockers march exemplified, protesting against lax immigration laws. In 1962, the Commonwealth Immigration Act was passed, effectively stating that the Commonwealth was no longer 'common', neither ideologically, economically nor legally. The philosophy of the control was that fewer Blacks warranted better race relations. A whole race relations industry was to emerge which would not only begin to differentiate and create a middle class amongst Black people but would also enhance and absorb any militant tendencies shown by the Black working classes (Sivanandan 1982). The 1962 Immigration Act stipulated control on entry for those 'British' people who obtained their passports from the governments of a colony and who were not born in the UK nor acquired their passports from the British High Commissions in the independent colonies. Thus 'British subjects' of independent colonies were set on par with the independent commonwealth countries. Both categories remained 'British' but were subject to control on entry. Once in Britain, they were eligible for the rights of all British subjects. As a control mechanism, the Act introduced three categories of vouchers. 'A' vouchers were for those who had specific jobs to fill, 'B' for the professionally qualified likely to be useful in this country and 'C' for the unskilled workers. Dependants, i.e. parents, wives and children were allowed in, and the age of dependant children was reduced from 18 to 16. The act of allowing dependants into the Country has been called the 're-

unification' period (Morokvasic 1983) as if the state had benignly allowed families to be together. This is far from the truth. Once sponsored, dependants were and are interrogated beyond imagination and often have to wait no less than a year.

Black migration to this country at this time was:

basically settlers not migrants.
(Parmar 1982 : 240).

The term 'migrant' implied that the worker is in transition, but Black people who came here before 1974 settled here as a community. When the term 'migrant' is used here it should be seen as:

a conceptual tool only and not as a
descriptive term for Black workers in
Britain. (Parmar 1982 : 240).

The 'mother' country could not be seen to abandon its children by enacting such legislation as the 1962 Act. On ideological grounds at least, the ruthlessness of abandoning the 'children' had to be swaddled in 'understanding' the problems of Black people and introducing race relations Acts. It was the marking of insitutionalised racism (a system) as distinct from racialism (actions) (Sivanandan 1976). The Commonwealth Immigration Advisory Service was set up to advise the Home Secretary on the welfare of immigrants - a nominal gesture towards integration. It was in the light of this understanding that Roy Hattersley, M.P. for Sparkbrook, reasoned:

without integration limitation is
inexcusable, without limitation,
integration is impossible.

In 1964 Peter Griffiths won the Tory elections in Smethwick by campaigning for the repatriation of coloureds, and in 1965 'C' vouchers were abolished. The stringency in immigration control was 'compensated' by the 1965 Race Relations Act which made racial discrimination in 'public resorts' illegal, and penalised 'incitement to racial hatred'. Public resorts did not include government officers or employment practices. State legislation was taking "racial discrimination" out of the market place to institutionalise it within the state apparatus. (Sivandandan 1982). The National Committee for Commonwealth Immigrants (NCCI) and the Race Relations Board (RRB) were to support the Act by conciliatory measures. The NCCI was to 'integrate' the immigrants and to develop linguistic, cultural and educational functions, whilst the RRB sought to conciliate discrimination in hotels, and other public places. On the one hand, a method of containing the 'Black' race problem, was seen to be in controlling their numbers and on the other, to integrate and assimilate those already here. This meant that Black people should pay more attention to the "mores of this country". The 1962 Commonwealth Immigration Act, brought fears to the minds of Black migrants who foresaw further restrictive legislation on entry in the future. Thus migrants who had originally come as sojourners, in a quick state of anxiety, sponsored their families, parents, wives and children. Prior to this period mainly young Asian men had come from rural backgrounds, to make some money and return to their homelands

for a better livelihood. With the new legislation and its constant fears, for the first time, Asian elderly and Asian women came in larger numbers than had previously been the case. For Africans this was also true, but African men and women had already held a presence in Britain since the 17th Century, due to slavery and also as migrant women who had come as workers in their own right, unlike mostly 'dependent' Asian women. Prior to the 1962 Immigration Act, mainly unskilled labourers had arrived from the Indian sub-continent, but in 1962 fears generated anxiety for the professionals also who then sought entry before the gates closed entirely. Hence a number of Asian doctors and teachers came during the 1960s.

Parmar (1982 : 241 cites) that:

Asian women were never drawn into the metropolis as wage labourers.

To my knowledge, I know of four Punjabi women who came on 'B' vouchers as nurses, and one as a teacher. Subsequently they sponsored their husbands or fiances to join them. It would seem, therefore, that some research in this area is required to find out exactly what proportion of Asian women came as wage labourers. At ARC, whilst many working class Asian men cited that they had come to Britain in the 1940s and 1950s, I am not aware of so many middle class people who came here in those periods. In Birmingham all the middle class Asians I have met, arrived in the 1960s.

Though the 1962 Act set some restrictions on Black people's entry, it did not distinguish between the 'old' and the 'new' commonwealth, i.e. the white and Black countries. The Africanisation policies of the new independent commonwealth allowed their citizens to retain British citizenship via the British High Commissions. This category of people, remained a 'red herring' as they were not subject to any form of control on entry. In the face of this, Powell was envisaging "rivers of blood" if the Kenyan Asians were going to be allowed in. Tories demanded tighter controls to cover the loopholes, in the form of a register of dependants, and repatriation grants. Amidst this pressure, the Labour Party, in a bid to secure political support passed the 1968 Commonwealth Immigration Act in a record time of three days. This established the "grandparent" clause to enable free entry to UK and colonies citizens who had ancestral connections. Those who had parents, grandparent, naturalised or registered, or born as British, were free to enter. The effect was aimed at East African Asians who were British by virtue of the colonial legacy, but who had no ancestral connections. For these people special vouchers, restricted to fifteen hundred per year, were allocated. Vouchers were issued to heads of households only, effectively men, unless a woman was divorced, single or widowed. In cases of couples where the husband had chosen the new 'African' citizenship and the wife the British, it was impossible for the women to enter Britain as their heads of household were not British. In many such cases, unnecessary divorce proceedings were processed for the wife to become the head of household, as a divorced woman; come to the UK as such, and then sponsor her ex-husband as a male fiance. The fiance then had to prove

that the 'primary purpose' of the marriage was to marry, not to seek employment. At ARC, I came across ten such cases. In a society where the husband is 'supposed' to maintain his wife, as a dependant, it seems impossible to draw a distinction between marriage and work, especially for men. The application of the primary purpose rule therefore questioned the fundamental basis of the division of labour in relation to Black men, by specifically alienating their role as husbands and 'providers'. Angela Davis (1982) supports this view that in the context of racism, the sexual division of labour need not necessarily be relevant to Black men and women.

In March 1968, Powell warned white people that they would not be able to obtain "hospital beds" and "school places" for their children, and that they would not recognise their own neighbourhoods. In May, Mr. Wilson promised to provide urban aid for local authorities in 'special need'. This was to make special provision for immigrants and their children from the commonwealth. The Race Relations Act 1968, extended the powers of the 1965 Act to cover housing, credit insurance facilities and public resorts. The law was still not enforceable except in extreme circumstances, where it could obtain an injunction to prevent the offender from practising further discrimination. For the most, the Board relied on its conciliatory role. In this sense, the "Act was not an act but an attitude" (Sivanandan 1982). The Board's failure to attract Black workers from the shop floor and its marked emphasis on conciliation meant that its control was in the hands of white, and some Black middle class people. Sivanandan

believes that the Board was used to justify the ways of the state to local and sectional interests - and to create in the process, "a class of coloured collaborators" (1982 : 119). The Board's interest therefore lay only in alleviating middle class discrimination.

The 1968 Act reformed the NCCI to CRC to 'promote harmonious community relations' and liaise and co-ordinate such activities on a national basis. The 1976 Race Relations Act provided wider coverage than in 1968, with new concepts of "direct" and "indirect" discrimination. It also permitted 'positive' discrimination but this could not be legally enforced.

In 1969 Callaghan had debarred the entry of male fiances on the grounds that all women, regardless of their origin, should settle where their husbands live. The impact was aimed at Commonwealth women as Merlyn Rees endorsed that "the immigrants should live in the man's country, not the woman's". Thus we had a self sufficient, yet contradictory notion enshrined in law to keep primary immigration out of Britain. When it suited the government to say that husbands had no right to support their wives vis-a-vis 'primary purpose', it did so. When it wished to maintain the dependency of women on men by deciding the abode of women, it did so. The 'prime purpose' of both was to keep Black people out. The restrictions placed on primary male migration have led to some 'marriages of convenience' to take place. In my data, I only came across one woman who had sponsored two male fiances and married them on two separate occasions for their entry into the UK. Her justification for doing so was in questioning the

concept of legality and illegality and the power of the government to define it:

If our people are not allowed to come here, they will find ways which the government does not permit. One day the government says this rule is legal, tomorrow you find that it is illegal. When white people went to India, who sponsored them?

In 1969 it was declared that the dependants of migrants should be subjected to entry clearance. As yet, illegal entry had not been defined.

The 1968 Immigration Act had the effect of making women who were legally unattached to men, but had children (i.e. Black unmarried mothers), show "sole responsibility" for their children. The European ethnocentric view that only the natural parents can look after children was applied to Black people. For Black people generally, both because of cultural factors and as a product of the colonial history, childrearing was not the sole responsibility of the natural parents. This did not however mean that the natural parents abandoned their children and their responsibility. For Afro-Caribbean women, who were sometimes unmarried mothers, settled in Britain as heads of households and workers in their own right, it meant that they had to prove "sole responsibility" for the sponsored children. Men did not have to show such responsibilities. The intransigency of the government to stipulate this as a condition and then in many cases to refuse to accept evidence of such proof, was an act of malice. Its

prime aim was to debar Black presence in Britain. In so far as such conditions were not attached to men the rules were sexist, but the aim was to keep Black men in particular, out of the country. In this sense, since most of the working class migration took place from the Black commonwealth countries, and subsequent legislation was aimed at excluding these countries, the legislation is racist. Sivanandan states, that:

the basic intention of the government, one might say, was to anchor in legislation an institutionalised system of discrimination against foreign

labour, but because the labour happened to be black, it ended up by institutionalising racism instead. (Sivanandan 1982 : 114).

By the late 1960s the need for labour was urgent, but the interstices in the labour market would be filled by primarily white workers from the EEC. Moreover, technological advances and automation looked increasingly to transnational capital. Capital was now able to move directly to labour to accumulate in the 'peripheries' rather than the centre. Phizacklea (1983) suggests that the increasing militancy of Black workers, throughout Europe, was also a decisive factor in limiting the number of Black immigrants. The large number of industrial strikes by Black workers in the South and the Midlands would certainly endorse this view. Whatever labour Britain now required would be in terms of contract labour, workers would come for specific jobs, and would return at the termination of their contract (Sivanandan 1982 : 143-161). The curtailment of Black workers as

migrants increased, and the control that was to be exercised at the point of entry was made more formidable. The internal control of Black workers was also to be excelled. The Labour Party lost in 1970, Tories won on the promise that they would ban all immigration of Black people. Powell's speeches had been in the context of 'stemming the tide' of Black people, reducing those 'within the gates' by calls to repatriation. Black people lived in fear of the teddy boys of the 1960s and the 'nigger hunting' by the police. The 1970s were to continue the siege on Black people in a much more structured way. In this political fervour the Tories thrust the 1971 Immigration Act which transformed the 1968 'ancestral' connection to a 'patrial' one. Patrials were those directly connected with the UK by birth, ancestorship, registration/naturalisation, adoption and marriage to a British man. Women married to British men were patrials themselves, but could not pass on their status to their children born abroad. Those born in Britain were automatically British. Patrials were free from immigration control.

The logical conclusion of 'patriality' was that white descendants, no matter where they lived, were patrials on the whole, and Black commonwealth citizens, who had no ancestral connections or other methods of becoming patrial, but lived in Britain, were non-patrials. At the same time, many UK citizens, with UK passports but no 'right of abode', were not considered patrial - namely the East Africans/Asians. Having formally established a racial basis for immigration, there was no longer the necessity for any pretence that the commonwealth had a

meaningful or a relevant relationship to Britain. The Act sought to reduce the number of dependants entering, by establishing the 'necessity' to join their sponsors. The burden of proof, as always, rested with the applicant. The Act strengthened the powers of removal and deportation. Deportation on the grounds of being "non-conducive to the public good" was made respectable, as was the deportation of wives and children of 'illegal immigrants'. The terms 'illegal immigrant' was defined and it included not only the disclosed facts at the point of entry but any relevant 'material' fact which may come to light in the future. It was to be the first instance where a person who had not been declared 'illegal' at the point of entry was subsequently to be declared 'illegal' after the event. The Act also established that commonwealth citizens who came after 1.1.73 would have to show "support and accommodation" for sponsoring their dependants, without "recourse to public funds". Those who came before 1.1.73 did not have to show this. (The new Immigration Bill withdraws this right). As Sivanandan suggests:

The message is clearly that unproductive additions to the working class black families are unwanted. If you want a family life, go home. (Sivanandan 1982 : 134).

In the 1971 Act the relationship of husbands, wives and children and parents, to the sponsor had to be proved. Anwar Ditta's campaign to bring her children here was based on the fact that the Home Office refused to believe that they were her children. In 1971 vouchers were only issued to skilled workers except in cases where severe shortages

of labour were evident, e.g. catering, residential domestic, and auxiliary nursing, etc. The Act limited the non-patrial, that is Black commonwealth immigrants only to do a specific job for a specific time and place with no "right of abode". It established a system of 'contract' labour on similiar European lines (Sivanandan 1982 : 143-161). For these workers work permits were issued, primarily to women from the Phillipines, which were to be renewed annually. After four years of work permits conditions could be removed by application. Many Filipino women later found that though on application of work permits, questions regarding their families had not been asked, when they wanted to regularise their status after four years, it was alleged that they were "illegal entrants". It was argued by the Home Office and the 'courts of justice' that the women had 'withdrawn' material facts and therefore entered by 'deception'.

The 1971 Act put an end to 'primary' migration and transferred its function to a more efficient and economic form of contract labour. In terms of migration from the Indian sub-continent, this meant that firstly there would be a predominance of men as contract labourers, and secondly, that primary male migration was to be minimal. The men and women that were to arrive would be mainly in the form of fiances, husbands, wives, parents and children, but these were also restricted. Their relationship had to be proved and scrutinised which increased the harassment of applicants and extended the waiting queues in the home country. The new conditions attached to entry, 'without recourse to public funds' was to have economic, political and psychological

effects on Black people. It created irreparable fears in Black people's minds, forced them to illegal employment and subjected them to institutional surveillance. The Act directly and indirectly enforced the economic and psychological dependency of Blacks upon the family.

The fact that wives and children were deportable with the husband, but not vice-versa, put many women's lives in jeopardy. Afia Begum, Nasira Begum, Halimat Babamba, Mumtaz Kiani, Jasvinder Kaur are only a few campaigns of the women who have been victims of immigration rules.

Mumtaz Kiani entered the UK in 1975 as a visitor and married. Later the Home Office alleged that her husband was 'illegal'. In 1981, he was deported and she too was asked to leave. She declined, as there was no deception on her part.

Jasvinder's husband was also found to be illegal and she too was therefore rendered 'illegal'. As such she was unable to claim supplementary benefit or child benefit for her British born child. She was not seen to be an individual in her own right, but as an appendage of her husband. Her survival depended on her own meagre earnings as a home-worker. She won her right to stay in 1981.

Nasira Begum faced deportation on the grounds that her marriage was not legal. She too won her case in 1981. Afia Begum's deportation was based on the fact that her husband died after he had sponsored her. This was after the Home Office had given her and her child

permission to enter the country. Afia was unsuccessful in her campaign and was deported.

Halimat Babamba, a Nigerian woman was given a deportation order because she refused to stay with her violent husband. Her husband asked the Home Office to have her sent back to Nigeria. In 1983 she won her right to stay.

In Birmingham, two Pakistani women were involved in anti-deportation campaigns. One, Zatul Begum, stood as a candidate for the local elections in 1987, as a strategy for gaining support within the community, and exposing the racism of both the major political parties with regards to immigration. Rehmat Jan, another elderly woman wished to stay here because all her family supporters were in this country. With the support of a campaign, she won her case in 1984. These are only a few of the cases brought to light, many more exist which are not brought to public attention. In my interview data, I did not find any women who talked of 'illegal' immigration as a personal experience. This does not mean that they did not know of such cases in their networks. It means that they were not willing to discuss such a sensitive and delicate issue with a stranger. At ARC I came across many cases of both men and women, who were victims of deportations.

The provision of deportation has enabled some Blacks to use this as a weapon for revenge against individuals they dislike. I dealt with many cases of families, husbands and wives who wished to help deport

individuals who had 'irregular' status as a means of resolving some domestic problem or just as 'teaching' the person a 'lesson'.

In 1973, the immigration rules denied entry to foreign husbands and fiances, as allowed by the 1969 legislation. A campaign against the sexist nature of this rule acquired a concession under the 1974 Labour government. It allowed the husbands and fiances of women settled in the UK to gain entry into the country.

Labour as the workers' party also made dubious rewards and granted amnesty to 'illegal' entrants who came before 1.1.73. The amnesty ended in 1978. In 1977 the rules amended that husbands of UK women enter a twelve month probationary period in which the government could assess whether the marriage was genuine. Gross intrusion into the privacy of Black families was thus legitimated, and many husbands whose marriages were genuinely broken, were removed. This was in the guise of avoiding marriages of convenience that the government alleged had been contracted extensively. In 1978 the dependency of the wife was again reiterated in Whitelaw's speech - that "the abode of the husband in the marriage should normally be viewed as the natural place of residence of the family. In 1977 the Labour Party's alliance on immigration with Tories was secured once again. Labour produced the Green Paper on Nationality, promising the end of sex discrimination but continued to distinguish Black from whites. This Paper became the basis on which the Tories enacted the Nationality Act of 1981.

In 1978, the Select Committee on Race Relations and Immigration concentrated not on race relations but on immigration - reflecting the general attitude that immigration caused race relations problems. The

Committee brought together the importance of both external and internal control of Black people. On the external front it called for an end to the East African Asian vouchers, a review of arranged marriages and low prioritisation of entry to fiances. In terms of internal controls, requests were made for increased resources for the police and Immigration Service Intelligent Unit; increased checks by DHSS and stringent persecution against illegal employment to consolidate the surveillance and siege on Black people. The Committee felt that those people who had settled here should have "greater regard to the mores of their country of adoption and indeed, also to their traditional pattern of the bride joining the husband's family. Thus, on the one hand the entry of fiances was being curtailed, because Black people 'should' adopt British culture, and on the other the 'traditional pattern' of the bride joining the husband's family was enforced because they 'should' observe their own customs. These measures went alongside the fears of being 'swamped' and the removal of "some of the possible sources of future immigration". In December 1979, Whitelaw announced that women who were not born here, or without ancestral connection no longer had the right to sponsor foreign born husbands which the 1974 Labour government had allowed.

In 1982 during my work at ARC, I encountered four women whose nationality was Indian. They had gone to India and married. On their

return to this country, they sponsored for their husbands to join them. When they came for advice to ARC, they realised that the rules had changed and that they were no longer eligible to sponsor their partners. This knowledge was only acquired accidentally since they came for advice regarding the non payment of their supplementary benefits. At the time of writing, October 1987, only one of those women has been able to have her husband join her, the other three, remained alone, one with a child.

Virginity tests were discovered in 1979 whereby Asian women from the Indian sub-continent, entering as fiances or wives, were given internal examinations by the immigration authorities, to establish if they were single or married.

From March 1980, the husbands and fiances of all British born women were not admitted if the Entry Clearance Officer 'had reason to believe' that the parties had not met. This was an attack on Asian marriage arrangements which had no such requirement.

Campaigns mounted against this rule argued that the rule was sexist and contravened the European Convention on Human Rights. A number of test cases were taken to the European Commission of Human Rights, on the basis that wives and female fiances were not admitted to UK, on the same basis as husbands and male fiances. Unlike women sponsors, male sponsors were not required to be British to sponsor fiances or wives. The court ruled in favour of the plaintiffs. Though this "victory" reduced the sexism in the rules, it did nothing for the prime force behind the rule - racism.

The stipulation for women sponsors to be British is now removed. The primary purpose rule, and that the couple should have met and be subject to entry clearance, is now applicable to both men and women. The overall effect of this is to reduce the number of both Black men and women who enter the country.

A further restriction on the entry of Black people was blatantly introduced in 1986. Without parliamentary debate, the government decided that visitors from the Indian sub-continent, Nigeria and Ghana were now required to have visas to visit the UK. The decision came at a time when the Immigration Service Union, threatened to strike against insufficient staff at terminals three and four, to deal with the traffic at Heathrow.

The rationale of the government was to provide a 'civilised' and 'sensible' measure to relieve pressure on Immigration Officers.

Some visitors who arrived, were kept under the same conditions as applicants who arrived without entry clearance, and were awaiting clearance under locked detention Centres. To add to this humiliating process, newspapers alleged that they were "The Liars", "Culture Vultures" ('Sun' 16.10.86). Descriptions were given of how bed sheets were burnt and the staff issued with rubber gloves, as a precaution against the transmission of disease. ('The Observer' 19.10.86). Moreover, in 1987, the government used a ship as a detention Centre for visitors. At the Harmondsworth Detention Centre, detainees are known to have been kept for over three months. In August 1987 the

detainees expressed their protest against these measures by going on hunger strike.

In 1986, Leicester University promoted genetics tests of finger prints and blood tests as scientific proof of biological relationships between people. Many families who were refused entry on the basis that they are 'not related as claimed', are using such tests. These cost up to £400 per person; the industry will therefore thrive as an increasing number of Black people will be forced to prove their relationships. The University reported that at present they were conducting up to 250 finger prints per week.

Nationality 1980s

Before the 1981 Nationality Act, CUCKs were considered to be British by virtue of their British passports, though they did not have the "right of abode" unless they were patrials. All Commonwealth citizens were able to acquire patriality by registration.

This legacy had to be abandoned if immigration and nationality laws were to be seen as a part of the same system. The Immigration law is now transcribed into Nationality law.

The term "British Citizen" replaced "patrial". British Citizens are now only those who were formerly patrials. It removed the automatic right of citizenship by virtue of birth and deprived divorced and widowed wives of UK citizens of the right to citizenship from 1.1.83. For the first time, stateless children are born since 1.1.83 to parents who are not settled in the UK. Theoretically, a possibility exists that a child who may be assumed to be British at present by virtue of the parents settlement, may find in years to come that he/she is stateless. This would be possible if at some future date the parents were found to be illegal.

Wives who could formerly be defined as patrial are no longer so. Wives and husbands must now be resident in the UK for at least three years, before they can acquire a citizenship. The CUCK citizen from East Africa who could not acquire any other citizenship have become 'British

Overseas Citizens' with no country, no rights and are unable to transfer their status to their children. On entry to Britain, they can register after five years of residence. The right to register is to be replaced by Naturalisation where permission to naturalise depends on the discretion of the Home Secretary, and on one's good behaviour, character and fluency in English.

The presence of the male is also an important factor. The Home Office in general refuses women residents citizenship where their husbands are living abroad. This situation is often precipitated by the Home Office in the first instance because husbands are refused entry to settle with their wives. The 1981 Nationality Act was launched and heralded as non-sexist for it gave British women the right to pass on their citizenship for the first time. Yet this was the same government which had enacted the 1971 Act, preventing women from bring in their husbands. The Act may be non-sexist, but it is first and foremost, racist.

The Siege By the State

The Select Committee's proposals in 1978 pointed to an increased surveillance of the Black community, internally and externally. The recommendations were extensive. The DHSS was asked to tighten up identity checks, and the police and Immigration Service Intelligence Units to clamp down on illegal immigrants. The search for illegal immigrants led to passport raids or 'fishing expeditions' where workplaces and homes were searched for people in breach of immigration laws. Immigration was used to criminalise the Asian community as "SUS"

laws had been used in the African community. Many Asian homes were raided and ransacked by the police and immigration authorities on such pretences. Such practices create an inbuilt fear and terror in the psychology of Asian people that by virtue of their skin, they can be suspected at anytime of being illegal immigrants. It has led many Asian and African men, women and children, literate and illiterate, to carry their passports with them at all times.

The attack on Black people has to be viewed in terms of the overall strengthening of right-wing political forces, and their general attempts to defeat oppressed groups from the 1970s.

The State Research Bulletin (No. 19) reported that "the turning point in the direction of policing occurred between 1968-1972". It noted that the British police could no longer allege to be an unarmed force with 12,000 riot-trained police, 'hidden' in the ranks of uniformed police. The Special Branch have been keeping 'subversives' under surveillance keeping records, and 'phone tapping etc. The Bulletin reported that:

The political background to police preparations for the 1980s comes at a time when the very nature of liberal democracy as we know it is under attack. The right to strike and to organise for political goals which took more than a hundred years to establish, is under direct attack. (The State Research Bulletin No. 19 : 147).

The priority given to law and order, and the result of recent pay awards to the police, is to have more police officers in the UK than ever before. The Report is of the view that "policing is not a question of protecting the community but of keeping it under control in inner city

areas such as Hackney, Lewisham and Lozells etc.". During the 1970s, more than 50% of the police forces in UK created Special Patrol Groups (SPGs) extending crowd control, riot and shield training of all rank and file police officers, excluding the SPGs. It was during the 1970s that the Special Branch was to provide 'intelligence' on demonstrations and strikes nationally. In the 1985 disturbances, the police used plastic bullets at the Broadwater Farm Estate for the first time in Britain, outside Ireland.

The extension of police powers have meant that Black people, and specifically Black women are two to three times more likely than whites, to be stopped and searched by the police (Runnymede Trust July 1983). The police also act as informants to the Home Office on illegal immigrants. In Birmingham, Mohinder Singh and Baba Bakhtaura (two cases of anti-deportation campaigns) were both served with deportation orders after the police had stopped them and taken information on their immigration status.

Furthermore, the Prevention of Terrorism Act (1974) which was previously used against Irish 'dissidents' was used against Kashmiri people in Britain in 1984 when they protested against the Pakistani rule of Kashmir. The same act was used against Sikhs in this country in their support for Khalistan (1986).

The Department of Health and Social Security (DHSS)

The DHSS has made an economic assault on working class Asian and Afro-Caribbean people. It is often alleged that Black people are 'scroungers' who like to 'sit back and be fed for nothing'. Investigation of the 'take-up' schemes within the West Midland have shown that this allegation is far from the truth. On the contrary not enough Black people take-up their claims and rights to benefits (West Midlands Welfare Rights Team (1984). At the ARC, I found that Asian women were not usually aware of their rights to the various benefits from the DHSS, and therefore did not claim until they were informed and supported to do so. The Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) was of the view that "black people were receiving second class treatment as a result of racism of the DHSS" (Runnymede Trust, February 1985). The rule of "without recourse to public funds" is used to deny Black people access to welfare benefits. Until recently, the term was not clearly defined. Successive Immigration and DHSS regulations have demarcated what does/does not constitute a 'public fund'. In essence, now, everything from supplementary benefits, medication and health care, schooling, and housing (under the Homeless Persons Act) is a recourse to public funds. This means that:

Black people or people with foreign sounding names and accents have found themselves questioned or refused treatment. (Bhaba 1982 : 4).

These conditions mainly affected women who came in as dependants of spouses who were to support and maintain them after 1973. But with the

European court decision that the rules were sexist, women now also have to support and accommodate men. Some women who are settled here and are British citizens have gone and married in the Indian sub-continent. On their return they awaited their husbands admittance but in the meantime their application to supplementary benefits failed as they were deemed to be dependants of their husbands.

Couples and families settled in this country were also victimised. If a woman's husband temporarily left her to attend to the needs of his extended family network abroad, she was refused both 'Urgent Needs' and supplementary benefit, often this was on the grounds that she should be financially supported by her extended family in Britain. Thus on the one hand immigration divided the extended family and on the other it was used to make women dependants and live in poverty. The DHSS failed to inform women, particularly Asian women, of their entitlement. Yet the social security system is allegedly the safety-net available to "every person in Great Britain of or over the age of 16 whose resources are insufficient to meet his requirements". Production of passports as a form of identity is constantly demanded. Such demands are made on the instruction of the internal document known as the 'S' manual from anyone "who appears to come from abroad" to verify the circumstances of their entry. Thus Black people who have been here for most of their lives are still asked for passports, birth certificates, etc. and are often told that medical cards and driving licences are not valid forms of identification.

On entry fiances are subject to conditions of employment. They are prohibited from work for at least three months initially. After marriage their passports are sent to the Home Office for an extension of a year's leave. Until the passport is returned by the Home Office, with the leave granted, the fiance is prohibited from employment until the immigration status is cleared. Previously, the woman, as a wife, could not claim supplementary benefit. At the moment the Immigration rules hold that the husband and the wife should be able to support each other and their children. Anyone who undertakes to maintain the married couple, for the purposes of sponsorship, is open to prosecution if they fail in their undertaking. Previously it was possible for a close relative to undertake to support and accommodate the couple until, or after, marriage. If the guarantor subsequently failed in this maintenance, the couple were entitled to claim supplementary benefit. Now if such a failure is evident it can have dire consequences. The implication is that if at any time such support ceases, the dependent party - the applicant - can be deported, and the sponsor held for prosecution. In this way, one person's immigration status, affects a whole network of people and puts the community under surveillance. Another area of victimisation is pensions. When Asian couples apply for their retirement pensions not only their passports are required, but details of how, when and where, in what circumstances their marriage took place. Questions such as 'what gifts were exchanged?', 'who was present at the ceremony?' etc. are asked. For elderly people, this means a transition in time of up to 45 years. How is it possible to remember such minute details? It is usually a year's struggle to get the DHSS to accept Asian people's date(s) of birth. Many cases have

occurred in which two to three dates of birth have been recorded, perhaps based on the deception of the agents through whom the person arrived here; or as a way of gaining entry into the country and into employment; or as access to retirement pension. Many people in the Indian sub-continent did not have their dates of birth registered. This does not constitute a deception, but an indication of the lack of importance given to the matter. The point is not why people have so many dates of birth. The point is to ask why is it only at retirement age, that the DHSS insist on either. a) finding the 'correct' date, or b) allocating yet a new one?

It is only at the point where the state has to pay out, rather than collect, that the date is questioned.

There are cases where women who have been widowed and subsequently reached retirement age, and have no knowledge of the place and length of employment, or the national insurance number of their deceased husbands. One of the users at ARC, S. Kaur came to the UK in 1971, a year later her husband died. She never claimed widow's benefits but in 1972 acquired her claim to supplementary benefit. She is now reaching retirement age but will have little hope of getting earnings related retirement pension. Efforts to trace her husband's national insurance number by various sources have failed, and she cannot locate any other information necessary. There are many other such women in her predicament.

Another woman worked at a factory manufacturing spectacles. After fifteen years of work there, the firm retired her. She claimed retirement pension but was told she would not be sixty years of age until the end of the following year. The firm refused to take her back because they believed she had retired. The Unemployment Benefit Office, rejected her claim and also treated her as retired, following the firm's stipulation. They could not consider her as unemployed. The dispute was that the date on her medical card (which only gave the year of her birth) did not correspond to the full date stated on her passport. After tedious visits to various advice and law centres, the woman gave up hope of stating her case. She just waited to the end of the following year for her retirement. For the older generation of Asians, a system or custom for recording births, deaths and marriages did not exist in their home countries. For immigration purposes, the years of the birth alone is and was sufficient. Since the dates were approximate, people generally did not remember the whole date. These harassing practices have caused much anguish, anxiety and dependencies on other people. The delays in processing papers have often meant that claimants have had to depend on someone else which in turn can cause family tension and breakdowns.

In abolishing maternity grants and other grants for furnishing etc., the Thatcher governments have created a climate of increased unemployment, reduced employment rights and moved towards the individual as the provider rather than the state. It is an attack on working class people generally. Middle class people with secure employment and financial resources do not require the 'benefits' of the DHSS. The working class

Black people, particularly Black working class women, as the most underpaid, over-exploited workers do need access to such benefits. It is precisely these people on whom the Thatcherite policies have the most devastating affects.

Housing

When Black people arrived in the cities where they hoped to find work, they did not qualify for council accommodation. They did not fulfil the residence qualifications which required two years settlement in the area as a pre-requisite. Black people were therefore forced to the independent sector to purchase their own accommodation with communal savings or borrowing from within their communities. This was because mortgages were refused to them by building societies. As a result, Blacks charged extortionate rents, and lived in overcrowded conditions to survive and recover the capital. At the same time, they were blamed for creating ghettos and squalor.

Today also the search for housing presents working class migrants with problems. In Birmingham, the Housing Department was previously operating a card system for the dispersal of Black people. The letter 'C' was used for coloureds and 'N.C.' for non-coloureds. Such blatant practices are now abandoned but subtle differences remain. At present the city does not provide sufficiently large accommodation for the larger Asian families. They are put on waiting lists for a number of years and in the meantime are forced to live in overcrowded conditions.

Most of the working class Bengalis fall into this category, as their families are now beginning to join them in Britain after several years of waiting. The report on the 1985 Handsworth disturbances 'A Different Reality' (1986) found that Black people in the inner-cities suffered from bad housing conditions. This is particularly true for single homeless black mothers who are only made one offer by the Department which they must accept if they want to be rehoused. The accommodation offered is usually of poor condition and in need of re-decoration which the woman is expected to rectify. In my experience at ARC, the working class Asian women who were made such offers were sometimes forced to reconcile with their husbands and families to avoid the sole responsibility of making the place habitable. Some women were made to depend on other male friends who carried various tasks out in the home as personal 'favours' expecting sexual reciprocity.

The few middle class women who came as homeless persons to the ARC, were often not in need of sheltered accommodation, as they had access to accommodation either from their own resources or with the support of their family. I encountered one such case where the woman just purchased her own property in a suburban area with the help of her brother.

In Tower Hamlets, London, the Liberal Council is forcing Bengali people to live in overcrowded dilapidated housing conditions - one of the worst cases in Europe. At present it is being proposed that homeless immigrants be placed temporarily in a ship. The Bengalis live in ghettoised slums because the council will not give them housing in

communities in which they feel safe from racist attacks. "Recourse to public funds" means that some Bengalis cannot apply for accommodation as homeless people under the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977. Such an application would be rendered a failure on the basis of being "intentionally homeless" - because one has left a permanent accommodation in Bangladesh in order to come to this country. Housing benefits are also a recourse to public funds. This has meant that many Black men and women who are in low pay work and want to sponsor their partners for marriage, cannot apply for housing benefits to which they are legally entitled. This jeopardises their chances of sponsoring their partners to join them. The stipulation questions their basic rights to be with their families. Furthermore, the Policy Studies Institute Report (Smith 1984) stated that the housing conditions of Black people was 'extraordinary' and 'much worse' than the quality of British housing in general. In Tower Hamlets, East London the Bangladeshi Housing Action Group has been operating to improve the housing conditions of the community since the 1970s. Since its inception, it has related issues of bad housing to racial violence and the right of the community to defend itself, but the authorities do not accept such a connection.

During my work at the ARC, I encountered a case of a family which had been "terrorised" by the white neighbourhood, because they were placed in a council house in a predominantly white area, where they could not find any support from their own community. The family had made several complaints to the police and the Housing Department, but they were not offered alternative accommodation.

Whilst middle class Blacks cannot escape physical racist attacks with ease, they can nevertheless avoid the conditions of squalor and overcrowding that is indicative of working class Black communities. Also, with regards to immigration rules, which do not permit recourse to public funds, it is easier for middle class Blacks to show that they are capable of 'supporting' and 'accommodating' the sponsored person.

Health

Unequal treatment within the National Health Service (NHS) has been a major concern for Black people. Black health workers and political activists have drawn attention to the health problems that affect Black communities. For example, Afro-Caribbean groups have campaigned hard to bring to the attention of the authorities sickle cell anaemia, a condition which affects a disproportionate number of their members. Black women have stated the case that depo-provera and other dangerous contraceptives are tried on Black women without their consent.

Attention has also been drawn (Black Health Workers and Patients Group, September 1982) to the fact that there is a growing extent of 'depressive disorders' amongst Black people in Britain. It has been argued that such cases are a result of "the stresses of living with racism". Furthermore, during my work at the ARC, I found that inadequate resources existed to deal with patients suffering from such distress in Birmingham. Many a time I was asked by hospitals to come and interpret for 'depressed women' with whom the staff could not

otherwise communicate. Counselling services for these patients did not exist in their own language(s). A similar inadequacy existed for Asian patients suffering from alcoholism. Mistreatment of patients is also not uncommon for Black people. It was reported ('Luton News' 13.11.84) that an Asian woman went to the out-patients department for treatment of a skin complaint, but was given a "minor gynaecological operation instead".

A report by Brent Community Health Council saw the health problems of Black people as being caused by the inadequacies of Black cultures. The report also made unfounded assertions that "Asians could tolerate only half as much pain as white people". (P. Gordon and A. Newman 1986). The Runnymede Trust's 'Race and Immigration' bulletins have listed several cases of harassment in the NHS of patients who were asked to produce their passports.

In addition, people who do not have the 'right of abode' can be repatriated to their country of origin if they become in-patients in a mental hospital. Increasingly, the question of mental health and its relationship to racism is becoming a subject of concern to Black people. Issues of police involvement in the enforcement of mental health laws, the connection of immigration and mental health, and the question of racism as a factor inducing mental health problems have all been raised by Black health specialists (Runnymede Trust Bulletin August 1983). They note that an increasing number of Black people are put into mental health institutions.

In 1983 the government introduced charges for certain people from overseas using the NHS. The Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants argued that this was a racially discriminatory practice, because it applied mainly to people from the Third World. The result of this ruling has been that most Black people are asked about their immigration status before they are given treatment. For middle class Blacks, some of the constraints of the NHS can be alleviated by their access to private health care.

Black workers within the NHS have also continuously complained of the low status work they perform. Most Black people, particularly Afro-Caribbeans, within the NHS are auxiliary staff and are therefore found in the most underpaid and less prestigious jobs. For example, seventy-eight percent of the NHS ancillary and maintenance staff were born overseas, and seventy-one percent of the midwives and nurses were born overseas (P. Gordon and A. Newham 1986). Most Black nurses are found to be State Enrolled Nurses as opposed to being State Registered Nurses which is a higher status. They are also reported to be working as permanent agency nurses with poor pay and no security in their employment (Black Health Workers and Patients 1982).

Education

The low educational achievements of Afro-Caribbean and Asian children have been explained in terms of "under achievement" and "over-aspirations" respectively. The African and Asian communities however,

found that their children were given a second-class service. Issues of 'bussing' and 'Educationally sub-normal' children were raised in the 1970s by both the communities. Practices of 'sin-bins' were being operated where Black children were ghettoised into the lower streams within the educational establishments. Racial abuses from both teachers and pupils was widespread and groups of white 'gangs' brutalised Black pupils (Mehmood 1983). Such concerns were confirmed by the Swan Report in 1985 and other studies which found that West Indian children performed less well than white children as did some Asian children.

Sally Tomlinson showed that of the thirty-three studies of Black educational performance, twenty-six showed that Black pupils scored lower than whites on individual and group tests; or to be over represented in Educational Sub-Normal schools, and under represented in the higher academic streams of secondary schools (Troyna and Smith 1983 : 6). The Rampton Committee which was responsible for the Swan Report only made general hints about 'many causes, both within the educational system and outside it' which led to low performance. Factors such as the quality of schooling, attitude of teachers, pupil's home background and motivation were considered important.

Black people were able to give substance to the generalities. They pointed to the facts that "teachers are racists", "books are racist" because they denigrate Blacks, "pupils lack confidence" and that there are "financial problems at home" (R. Paul 1986:17). In Birmingham, students stressed that the curriculum in schools and colleagues was not made relevant to non-white people, and that the careers services often

pushed Black students into low level, underpaid manual occupations because they were stereotyped at being 'lazy', 'thick', and as being incapable of reaching 'high standards' in education (AFFOR: (1982). Teachers and careers officials, particularly encouraged Afro-Caribbean and Asian girls to join occupations such as nursing, shop assistants, and office receptionists. They were prevented (intentionally or unintentionally) from taking A 'Levels', which may have led them into high ranking occupations. 'Business studies' was described by teachers as being the most 'popular' course amongst Black girls.

Racist abuse is common to Black pupils.

To me, 'Paki', 'chocolate drop', 'shit face' were a part of everyday life. I learned to harden myself against these taunts. (Opcit).

In my study, all the girls who had received some school education in this country said that they had suffered racial abuse. Three girls stated that they had been physically attacked on a racial basis and the teachers had not taken any action.

In Birmingham, a reception school for immigrant children was based in a predominantly white area renowned for its racist propaganda. Teachers also complained of the conditions in which they had to teach, for example broken windows, cold classrooms and large teachers/pupil ratios, exemplified the conditions in the school. Whilst I was at the ARC a campaign developed to move the centre to another area as many physical attacks had taken place on the Bangladeshi children, who formed the

majority at the school, and were bussed in from different areas. After a year long struggle the school was moved to a different location. In London the Inner London Education Authority has committed itself to an equal opportunity policy and published 'Race, Sex and Class' as a result in 1983. However, the racial violence at the Daneford school that ensued and the subsequent inaction of the authority indicates that such a policy is mere lip-service.

In Bradford, Muslim parents have demanded single sex schools since the 1970s. As a result of the miseducation of their children, they are now setting up alternative Muslim schools in various areas of the country. The 1980s saw racism of a head-teacher Mr. Honeyford in a Bradford school. The Black community organised to oust him out but were prevented from doing so by the courts.

At the time of writing, white parents at a school in Yorkshire are arguing that they do not want their children to go to predominantly Asian school because the standard of education is low in that school. Presumably such a standard is acceptable for non-white children but not for their white counterparts. Unfortunately, many cases will follow since the new Education Bill allows this type of action to ensue where parents will be able to remove their children from "low standard" and "Asian schools".

Some problems that are of an essential nature for working class Black people, such as low educational performance are being overcome by the Black middle classes. A number of Black people in Birmingham, for

example, have placed their children in private schools. Black people who have moved away from the inner city areas into the richer suburbs are able to provide their children with a better education, than is possible in the poorer schools which have a large number of Black pupils.

Social Services

It has been noted that the Welfare Services have failed to deal with the problems of Black families. The cultures of Black people have been viewed as being 'pathological', giving rise to 'problems' inherent within the cultures (E. Lawrence 1982). Amos and Parmar (1982 : 132) quote the following comments from social workers about Afro-Caribbean and Indian women:

Most of my ethnic minority clients have child-care or mental health problems - because these are areas of conflict with our own culture.

They require more help with simple things like hygiene, childcare, health, more advice on family planning, more help for the women who are unhappy and isolated, more classes to learn English.

These types of feelings of white social workers were confirmed in my work at ARC. Almost once a week we received a telephone call from the Social Service offices throughout the city, where the problem was seen to be the 'lack of language', 'cultural conflict', 'oppression by husband', etc., rather than the inadequacies within the service itself.

This approach wrongly puts the emphasis on culture. A critique of the cultural approach does not imply that culture as such is not important. What is objectionable is that culture is seen to be a cause of the inequalities faced by Black people. Culture is viewed as being

something that is static and residual rather than as a way of life, which constantly changes with different sets of sociological, economic and political conditions, in which people find themselves. A Asian social worker that I interviewed in this study, stressed that the services offered by the Department, failed to reach Black people because they were not made relevant to suit their needs and were often not communicated to them.

Issues that have concerned Black people are raised. The day-care services offered to Black women is insufficient and of poor quality. Asian mothers have not been properly helped by ante-natal services. A disproportionate number of Black children are in care and have less chance than white children of reunion with their parents. A disproportionate number of young Blacks are offenders and held in youth custody. The care provided by local authorities is insensitive to the cultural needs of Black children. In fostering, only recently Black substitute parents have been recruited. At ARC I once experienced a case of a young Muslim mother whose two children were taken and placed with white foster parents, 30 miles away from her.

There is an inadequate provision of 'refuge' for Black women as most local authority hostels cater for predominantly white women (Guru 1986 : 155-166).

Asian women, for example cannot cook their own food, cannot watch their Asian films, etc. in these hostels. Furthermore, they are often subjected to racial hatred and discrimination at these venues. A Muslim women who came to ARC for help said that she wanted to be placed in a

hostel where there were more women of her own background. She pointed out that the white women who lived with her in the existing hostel did not let her cook at the same time as themselves. They also refused to let her bathe and she was forced to go to the local baths to cleanse herself. The management of the hostel had not taken her complaints seriously.

There are voluntary agencies which also provide support and accommodation for homeless women. Again, primarily these are white organisations such as Women's Aid and housing associations. They do not provide specific support for Asian or Afro-Caribbean women, and therefore suffer the same drawbacks as those of local authority hostels.

Another area omitted by the Social Services is the provision of sheltered accommodation for Black elderly people. In recent years there has been an increase in the number of Black elderly. When the need for the care of these people has been apparent, it has been assumed that the

family will look after them. Notions such as "they like to look after their own" are widespread. In cases where care has been provided it is often 'colour blind'. Thus Asian elderly, until recently were placed in white sheltered accommodation or homes. 'Meals on wheels' services provided English food and where Asian meals are made possible, the food is often cooked by white people who have no training to cook it correctly. In most cities, however, efforts are not made to meet the specific demands of Black people.

As an alternative, Black voluntary agencies throughout the country, have begun to cater for this specific demand for Black women and the elderly. Agencies such as the ARC, Sahara, Saheli, Carnigi, Rafiki are only a few examples in Birmingham which have taken on state funding to provide for the 'special' area.

At ARC, all of the users requiring welfare assistance were of working class origins. They lived in the inner city areas, and were either unemployed or worked in factories. This is not to say that middle class people do not require such services but the predominant clientele of Social Services is working class.

A Community Under Siege

We have looked at the institutional racism and sexism of state agencies. Now we look at the violent personal racism of white racists.

Since their presence in the 16th century, Black people in Britain have been under a continuous attacks from whites (Fryer P. 1985). In the

19th century, when the 'Empire Windrush' arrived at the Tilbury Docks, 8,000 Afro-Caribbeans were attacked by both the police and white civilians. Such attacks have formed a fundamental issue around which both Afro-Caribbean and Asian communities have organised. The Afro-Caribbean communities had organised when Kelso Cochrane had been stabbed in 1959 by white youth. Again they had organised mass protests in mid 1970s when the "Mangrove 9" had been arrested by the police on charges of 'riot' and 'affray' whilst demonstrating against police harassment. Clashes between white and Black youths were a national feature, predominantly manifested in the Merseyside area, the Midlands and London. Such clashes were interpreted by the police as 'teenage violence'. In Handsworth, the community workers complained about police brutality and the use of SPGs in the area. In Leicester 39 National Front (NF) candidates stood in the election as the Ugandan Asians came into the country. In Bradford whites feared that they would contract T.B. and leprosy from immigrants (Race Today, June 1973). In 1979 the N.F. electioneered in Southall and the police defended this on the basis of 'free speech'. In a protest organised by Asians and the Anti-Nazi League, three thousand police armed with riot shields were present. The event ended in thirty police casualties, three hundred and forty-two arrests and the death of a white activist Blair Peach. The defendants' cases were then heard out of Southall, away from the Asian community, by five stipendiary magistrates two of whom were police prosecuting lawyers. During the hearings, two witnesses were further arrested, on the grounds that they had formed a part of a 'hostile' crowd ('Race Today' November-December 1979).

'Paki-bashing', 'nigger-hunting' and arson attacks have been common experiences for Asian people in this country since their arrival. In the 1970s Tosir Ali was stabbed on his way to work by skinheads.

Mrs. Hassain and her three children died as a result of an arson attack on her house in Bradford. In 1983 the Hassain family suffered an arson attack in Lancashire. In 1985 Mrs. Kassam died with her three children due to an arson attack in London. In 1982 three Black women were found dead with a National Front insignia on the wall, "this is what we're going to do with all the niggers" (Runnymede Trust Bulletin March 1983).

In all the cases, complaints were made to the police who denied any 'racial undertones' in the events. The inaction of the police was, and is of a major concern to all Black communities and Black women bear the major brunt of both the attacks and the inaction of the police.

When the communities have organised to defend and protect themselves the police have turned on them rather than the perpetrators of the original violence. In the cases of the 'Bradford 12' and the 'Newham 8', both groups had been engaged in defending their communities during the violence inflicted upon Asian people in the disturbances of 1981. For this act, the groups were themselves charged by the police for 'conspiracy' in the case of the 'Bradford 12' and for 'threatening behaviour' and 'actual bodily harm' in the case of the 'Newham 8'. Campaigns were organised for both groups. The "Bradford 12" argued that they had acted in 'self-defence' and won their case. The 'Newham 8' were less fortunate and some of the defendants received heavy sentences.

The relationship between Black youth and the police has been a major concern for the Afro-Caribbean communities, and they have expressed this concern throughout the years. In 1973 the 'Villa Cross', a public house in Handsworth was raided, and thirty-one community workers, Black and white, wrote to the Chief Constable about the deteriorating relations between the Black community and the police. A raid on the same public house had triggered off the disturbances in 1985 in Handsworth and then throughout the country. Police inactivity encroached on the rights of Black people to be 'free' from racial attacks. However, in the interest of 'freedom' the National Front and the British National Party have been free to violate the persons and the property of Black people. Moreover it is not easy for Black people to allege that a racist attack has taken place. In 1979 a school teacher Noor, who was also the president of the IWA (Marxist), called the headmaster of a school, "racist", when a Sikh school boy was sent home for wearing a turban. In a libel case, the Judge found that Noor had acted "maliciously" to "further his own political career". The boy was allowed to wear a turban but the Judge awarded £5,000 damages.

It is not just the police inaction that has enraged the Black communities. The former have been active in exerting violence on Black people themselves. Many cases exist where the police have made arrests and held people in custody and have inflicted violence upon them.

Jackie Berkley, an Afro-Caribbean woman, is only one of such cases who decided to make public the treatment she had received. Whilst she was in custody she was physically beaten and raped on many occasions. In

her legal proceedings against the police, the court did not find in her favour. An Asian woman who had been present at a peaceful picket against racism in schools described the scene when a police officer took her in:

Next minute I felt a police officer grab me and start pulling me. My sari was ripped and pulled along the pavement and I was dragged into the police van. (R. Chakraborty, 1986 : 18).

In Birmingham in 1983, Margaret Parchment was arrested after having been beaten by the police, during the arrest of her son who was a Rastafarian. An Asian woman who was physically attacked by a white man, was arrested herself when she called the police. Whilst in the police car she was asked 'do Asians give a good fuck?', such comments bring together racist and sexist dimensions. Some Asian women protesting against the deportation of Afia Begum reported that they were taken into custody after they had chained themselves to the railings at the Home Office. They complained that they were strip-searched in the police cells - an experience that is similar to that of Irish women prisoners. This has led many Black women, e.g. Southall Black Sisters, to express solidarity with Irish women. Such experiences of police brutality are common for Black working class people living in inner-city areas. Where Black middle class people have been abused by the police, in my experience, it has often been in the process where the former have been in support of working class issues, such as picket lines at workplaces and demonstrations against deportations etc.

The above experiences suggest that although personal and institutional hostilities of white people are primarily directed at all Black people, the way in which they are inflicted upon working class Black women, and the way in which women experience them, is different from their male counterparts.

In my study, none of the respondents had incurred any personal experience of this nature from the police. They could not recall any 'significant' abuses from white people. All the women had been called 'Pakis', 'Wogs' and 'blackies', so much so that they did not usually consider it to be an important enough experience to relate to me without prompting. This was a level of racism that they took for 'granted' for their psychological stability. As Shiela put it:

You can't afford to pick fights on
little things like that.

The fact that they took this for granted did not mean that they were unaware of the issues. These were the precise issues that affected their families and relatives. Darshan pointed out that:

The police doesn't catch the whites when
Blacks are in trouble. They give us a
bad name.

Asha was also aware that:

...in Southall and Brixton the police
didn't turn up.... you just have to wait
to be killed.

In general, the women distinguished white racist people as the National Front who were physically violent towards Asians, and connected the organisation to the Conservative Party. Taro thought that:

The National Front kill innocent people. Thatcher does not like Blacks, so I suppose that's why they are popular. That's why they've stopped creating jobs - so that we'll go home. But I think our people should be allowed to live here.

Taro therefore also drew connections between the Tory Party and Class. She, like many other working class Asians voted Labour which she saw as the workers' party. However, that was the only knowledge she had of the Labour Party, and could not relate to it in any other way. This pointed to the inaccessibility of the Labour Party to Black women.

Dalip was conscious of the connection between colonialism and the practices of the white people at present:

I hate the English. They think they are so big ... because of their history - the countries they ruled. The police always blame Black people because they want to throw us out. Why should we go? White people live in India. They lived there for years.

Africans and Asians

On the issues of physical violence towards Asian people, thirteen percent of the women stated that they were afraid of Afro-Caribbean

people. This negative view of Afro-Caribbeans was also turned into a positive aspect in that they were not afraid of white people. Satya expressed that:

'Kale' (blacks) are vicious. I wouldn't like to live by them. Our people are afraid of 'Goarae' (whites) but 'Kale' are not. 'Goarae' are afraid of them.

The girls who were still at school showed that their experiences were closer to Afro-Caribbeans. A fifteen year old girl, Nina, had this to say:

White girls swear at us and tell us to go home. Blacks and Asians have similar problems 'cus people tell them to leave this country too. Blacks are stronger than us. They take revenge. I get on better with blacks than whites.

Many examples were cited of 'mugging', burglaries and physical violence by Afro-Caribbean men. Sixty percent of the women believed that Afro-Caribbeans were dirty. During my employment at ARC many women who were single parents, refused to live either next door to, or in a maisonette where Afro-Caribbean also lived. It is interesting that these are the same stereotypes of the latter that are promoted by the police. In addition, however, the Asian people have had a specific historical relationship to African people. East African Asians and South African Asians have been active participants in dominating, exploiting and oppressing the African people (J. Cock 1984). Such experiences have been reported back to other non-African Asians who in some instances have also materially benefited from this relationship.

Many East Africans for example have sent money to India to build properties and businesses from the profits accrued therein. In Britain too, the fact that the Asian business community dominates the Black inner-city areas was highlighted during the disturbances of 1985 in Handsworth. The Afro-Caribbeans pointed out that members of their community were always accused of shop lifting by Asian shop keeper and some of them who worked for Asian businessmen were highly exploited.

Feelings of hostility between the two groups are therefore not surprising. The extent of the contempt that some African and Afro-Caribbean may feel against Asians was brought home to me when a three year old Afro-Caribbean boy looked at me and said:

I hate Asians.

At the same time, however, political alliances are being built around issues of the common oppression shared by non-white people in Britain. The term 'Black' has become a political expression of the oppression non-whites share. The alliances between African and Asian people are discussed in the next chapter.

Ideologies in Race Relations

The racist hostilities towards Black people were expressed through the procedures of control and surveillance of their communities as the foregoing information has shown. On the other hand, the ideological perspective that encompassed such practices were swathed in kindness

and help towards a 'different' people. Thus in the 1960s the theoretical and ideological concerns of the time were to 'acculturate assimilate', 'adjust' and 'integrate' the Asian and African people, the 'dark strangers', into the wider white society. The aim was to achieve a state of affairs where:

the migrants exterior qualities become less distinguishable from the indigenous population, and where the migrant is willing to identify with the host culture and consider it proper. (Anwar 1979 : 8).

For this purpose, when Kelso Cochrane died at the hands of 'teddy boys' in 1958, the judge imposed a severe punishment for the youth responsible.

'Multiculturalism' and 'ethnic' diversity were the prime concerns of both politicians and practitioners. In 1966 Roy Jenkins expressed this philosophy as "integration based on equal opportunity accompanied by cultural diversity in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance". Within this context, the Section 11 of the 1966 Local Government Act, allowed authorities to reclaim salary costs from the Home Office in respect of:

Special provision in the exercise of any of their functions in consequence of the presence within their areas of substantial numbers of immigrants from the Commonwealth whose language or customs differ from those of the community.

Concepts of 'ethnicity' filtered through not only to education but to areas of social services, hospitals, police, etc. where efforts were

made to make 'special' provision for the cultural concerns of the Black communities. Subsequently, practitioners sought to 'learn' and 'teach' the cultures of Asian and Afro-Caribbean people. Such funding and ideology provided an outlet for some educated Afro-Caribbean and Asian people to establish a new Black middle class within the areas of the Community Relations Councils and the Race Relations Board.

In the mid 1970s, funding was already directed at Asian and Afro-Caribbean self-help projects in urban areas to control the insurgence of Black resistance. The Secretary of State felt it vital:

to tap the reservoirs of resilience, initiative and vigour in the racial minority groups and not to allow them to lie unused or to be deflected into negative protests on account of arbitrary and unfair discriminatory practices. (quoted in Sivanandan 1985 : 6).

George Young, a former Tory minister of Race Relations said in 1982:

It helps if there are more black councillors, JP's, solicitors, accountants and other professionals. We've got to back the good guys, the sensible, moderate, responsible leaders of ethnic groups. If they are seen to deliver, to get financial support from central government for urban projects, then that reinforces their standing and credibility in the community. If they don't deliver, people will turn to the militants ('Sunday Times' 10.10.82).

These sentiments expressed a fear of the development of Black militancy.

Towards the late 1970s and early 1980s, in the wake of the national disturbances of 1981, some Black activists (Sivanandan 1979 and 1982) had pointed out that concept of 'multiculturalism' and 'ethnicity' were defunct as far as Black communities were concerned.

Black activists were promoting an 'anti-racist' model instead, which would teach white people about their racism and automatically develop an understanding of different cultures. After the 1981 'disorder' Scarman had implicitly condoned such a perspective in advocating positive action to better the position of Black people. Nevertheless he also condoned the ethnicity approach in talking about the 'attitudes', 'beliefs' and the 'sense' of rejection that Blacks expressed. The solution was to train white practitioners to understand these 'attitude' and 'beliefs' by looking at the cultures of 'ethnic minorities'. Hence funds were pumped into Black urban areas and many Black educationists and practitioners set to teach whites to recognise their racism by racism awareness training (RAT).

Lately the trend has been to adopt another form of RAT where one does not plead to the guilt complex of white people but talk about equal opportunities and the implementation thereof in the context of the Race Relations Acts. In my view, this is still urging white people to change their attitudes as the Acts themselves do not have significant powers to change the practices of employers and practitioners. The limitations of the Acts were highlighted by the CRE's findings that the Home Office, immigration policies were racist. Nevertheless, it was not possible to

take the Home Office to court because, the CRE also falls within its domain.

The race relations industry has created a managerial middle class amongst Black people. There has also been an increase in the Asian entrepreneurs since the East African Asians arrived. The government's policies of providing grants and other financial assistance to Black businesses propels this process. Precisely because the resources are allocated on the grounds of 'special provision', Black people have been forced to use the distinctiveness of their communities. Thus 'Mukti' recognises that:

we have worked on the stereotypes of our communities in a big way to squeeze out state fundings - the notion of having

different or particular needs rather than the racism of the service delivering agencies. But this is the realism of being without economic power. (P.D. Kashyap 1987:9)

Sivanandan (1985) notes that the Black community is fragmenting into separate 'cultures' of Asians, Afro-Caribbean, youth, women and entrepreneurs etc., and that this has been the effect of the race relations industry.

The presence of the Black middle class was having its impact in the 1980s. In 1983 the 'Durbar Club' was founded by 30 members each paying a fee of £1,000 to build contacts with "echelons of business, political

and social structures". (Runnymede Trust, March 1983). This was crystallised in the 1987 elections where twenty-five percent of Black votes went to the Conservative Party and four Black MPs were elected, one of whom was from the Conservative Party.

Conclusion

We have examined the impact of changing racist immigration and nationality laws, and other policies, and their enforcement by state agencies. We have concentrated on the impact such laws and policies have on Asian women with regards to race, gender and class divisions.

We have seen that the early analysis of migration into Britain gave no importance to women as migrants in their own right. The male bias in sociology assumed the economic dependency of women upon men, and led to such an interpretation. The new literature has developed the importance and relevance of the migration of women, since feminism began to have an impact upon sociological research and findings. Within these writings, for Black women (who use 'Black' as a political statement) the analysis remains deficient because it brings 'culturalist' assumptions to the fore, and assumes the primacy of white culture.

Black women have begun to look at their concrete experiences and develop a theoretical perspective of their position in terms of race, gender and class. The first two dimensions of this triple oppression are sufficiently integrated within this analysis, but the notion of class has not been analysed in the same rigour. Moreover, the experiential

accounts of women fail to provide an adequate theoretical understanding, and the theoretical accounts do not give the actual experiences of women. Some of the writings related to specific institutions bring the aspects of theory and practice together but remain fragmented because they look at particular agencies only. More holistic, theoretical and experiential works exist for the historical position of Afro-Caribbean women, during the periods of slavery but not for the contemporary experiences of Asian women in this country.

The presence of Afro-Caribbeans in Britain can be traced to the 16th Century. Since this time white people have conveyed a sense of rejection towards Black people. The Asian presence dates back to the 19th Century though a greater proportion of Asian migrants came in the 1950s and 1960s for economic purposes. The existence of Black people in Britain is explained with regards to the rapacity of colonialism and imperialism, which plundered the Black countries of their economic resources. This forced many Black people to find an alternative means of livelihood in this country which required their labour. Black people were forced to be 'economic exiles'.

The Afro-Caribbeans found employment in the service sectors such as the NHS and Transport agencies which recruited directly from the colonial countries. Working class Asians were offered employment in the manual, manufacturing industries such as car manufacture, and metal foundries and light-engineering industries. The middle class Blacks were directed to the medical, educational and legal professions and to

entrepreneurship. Thus Black people fulfilled an economic function for Britain.

How, when and why Black people could exist in Britain was dictated by the immigration and nationality laws of successive governments. Such policies used the aspects of race, gender and class in particular ways, in accordance with the economic, political and ideological concerns of the time. The various governments used 'immigration' as a political weapon to attract the white electorate. The prime purpose of the policies was to eliminate the entry of Black people to this country, and at the same time control those here. External and internal control was inextricably linked and widely practiced by government institutions. Such controls formed an economic, physical and psychological assault on Black people and gave state officials the right to intrude into the homes and family lives of the Black community. Directly and indirectly the police, the DHSS, the education agencies, hospitals and social services all operated in conjunction with the Home Office to help implement the policies of deportations and provide a second-class service for Blacks.

Racism is of primary importance in terms of state policy. Other forms of oppression are subordinated to the main objective of excluding Black people from this country. However, class and gender subordination is used by the state to mediate racism. This is revealed by the contradictory rationalizations made in different policies which use the impact of gender and class oppression to implement racist measures. For example, the immigration rules give rise to the separation of Black

families whilst the DHSS advocate female dependency upon the family. The effect of both rules is to control the Black presence. The immigration legislation has used class distinctions when abolishing 'C' vouchers and by establishing the "without recourse to public funds" requirement, but the prime purpose of this also is to restrict the presence of Blacks. Whilst these policies and activities point to the rejection of Black people, the race relations industry appears to mitigate this rejection by 'integrating' and 'assimilating' Blacks into white culture. Again, the main objective is to CONTROL Black people in Britain.

The predominance of racism is illustrated by the way in which sexist legislation is maintained (when challenged) to include men in the immigration restrictions, rather than abolish such laws to free women from such restrictions. Despite the attacks on Black sexism, the state builds upon the existing gender divisions within the Black communities (e.g. the woman should reside in the husband's locality) and also recreates gender subordination in another form (e.g. when women cannot sponsor men for marriage). The main purpose of such practices, however, is to control Blacks. It can be argued that the state is more easily able to demonstrate sexist practices to bring about racist divisions because white society is already based on the gender subordination of women, and therefore minimal resistance can be expected from society in general.

In suffering and resisting the effects of racist policies and practices, various minority groups have expressed their political solidarity in the

term 'Black', to indicate the similarities of the oppression they face from the state. This unity, which we shall discuss in the next chapter, is not without contradictions. Factors of race, class and gender are also relevant here and they can lead to fragmentations in this unity. This Chapter has looked at the overall oppression of Black women in terms of institutionalised racism and sexism. In doing so we have touched upon the effects of this on working class Blacks as distinct from middle class Black people.

The next Chapter will examine the ways in which Black women, primarily Black feminists, have organised to express their political struggles against this racist, sexist and class oppression.

CHAPTER 2

BLACK WOMEN :

'A FORCE TO BE RECKONED'

Introduction

This chapter provides a historical examination of Black people's resistance against their various forms of oppression. It focuses on Asian women's activism within the temples, Workers Associations, youth movements and Black women's organisations.

We look at the way in which the organised political resistance of Black women, particularly Black feminists, has taken place.

We look at the theoretical and the practical concerns of Asian feminists organising in this country, and the context in which this has occurred. Aspects of race, gender and class, together with the social milieu in which these women find themselves, form an integral part of understanding how they have organised.

The resistances of such women have been expressed in terms of Black politics, as Black women, and it is in this framework that we analyse

their development. My specific data of Punjabi women is therefore encompassed in the broader analysis of 'Asian' and 'Black' women. A distinction of the origins of Black women is made where it is felt necessary; on the whole the wider term Black is used to indicate the solidarity between them. This thesis does not look at the organisations of Asian middle class women, and therefore the term Black women refers either to the women who form a part of my data, or to Black feminists discussed in the chapter.

We begin with a review of the literature on Asian women, and its critique by Black feminists. Then the backgrounds of the Punjabi women, who constitute the data for this thesis is given in terms of their geographical and educational origins. We trace the effects of the presence of Asian women in this country, and develop the nature and the context in which Asian and other Black feminists organise in Britain, and then look at the potentials and the difficulties of such organising.

Review of the Literature

The literature on Asian women in 1960s and 1970s was primarily concerned with the modernising effects of the industrial West, on passive Indian and Pakistani women (R. Desai, 1963; C. Ballard, 1979; V. Khan, 1979). The prime concern was to promote the 'ethnicity' of non-white women and to look at their cultures as "a source of both actual and potential weakness" (E. Lawrence 1982 : 118). Non-white cultures were seen to be in 'conflict' with the superior British culture, which had modernizing effects on the former. The CRC and the Commission for Racial Equality,

adopted the 'ethnic' approach and promoted literature which emphasised the lost identity, of Asian youngsters in the form of 'Between Two Cultures' (1970), 'The Second Generation - Punjabi or English?' (1974), 'The Half-Way Generation' (1976) and 'In Search of Identity' (1976).

Within some white feminist literature also, the assumption that Black people's culture is a 'problem' for 'progress' is evident. The west 'liberates' the Third World cultures.

There can be little doubt that on balance the position of women in imperialist, i.e. advanced capitalist societies is, for all its implications more advanced than in the less developed capitalist and non-capitalist societies. In this sense the changes brought by imperialism to Third World societies may, in some circumstances have been historically progressive. (Molyneux, 1981 : 4).

From 1976, both theoretically and politically, Black people began to define and articulate their own experience against such an analysis (A. Sivanandan, 1976; A. Wilson, 1978; E. Lawrence, 1982; P. Parmar, 1982). They argued that the 'ethnicity' approach ignored aspects of race, gender, class, age and caste etc. and promoted 'cultural pluralism' which ignored 'relations of power'. They asked why the Irish, Scottish and the Welsh had not been included as 'ethnic' groups:

more significantly, on what grounds - apart from the odd study on Cypriots and Italians - have the 'ethnicity studies' researchers singled out only the darker-skinned 'ethnic minorities' as fitting objects of study?. (E. Lawrence, 1982 : 136).

The critique of ethnicity does not suggest an irrelevance of culture. The former approach focuses on cultural aspects and interprets them as being causally linked to the problems faced by Blacks. The rejection of ethnicity as a starting point is based on the premise that the causes of inequality amongst Black people are not cultural, they are primarily racist and sexist.

Cultural factors are important for Blacks, as they are for any people. However, culture presents variations of a whole range of shared ideas and practices, within (or without) which people are able to choose, manipulate and create in accordance to their particular dispositions.

How a person may experience his/her culture will therefore depend on other factors such as social class, and the level of education, etc. Cultural forms may change because culture encompasses creativity; people make culture as they live it, it is not a static concept.

In the 1980s, Black socialist women have brought the issues of race, gender and class to the forefront of any serious discussion of their position in this country. The issues that are brought out in the theoretical and academic discussions, reflect the practice of Black feminist politics, and as such they will be discussed in more detail later.

Their aim is three fold:-

- a. To become visible within the political, theoretical and academic parameters.
- b. To develop a Black feminist unity.
- c. To develop Black feminist theory.

Black women argue that the white feminist movement, be it of radical or socialist feminist perspective, has failed to provide a realistic, if any, understanding of Black women's oppression. They state that this is because the white women's movement lacks an analysis of the complexities of race, gender and class, and wrongly assumes a non-contradictory sisterhood with Black women. Thus Amos and Parmar note that:

In describing the women's movements as oppressive we refer to the experiences of Black and working class women of the movement and the inability of feminist theory to speak to their experience in any meaningful way. (Amos and Parmar 1984 : 4).

The concern is not just the absence of Black women in white feminist theory and practice. Black women suggest that:

On the contrary we will have to argue that the process of accounting for their historical and contemporary position does, in itself, challenge the use of some of the central categories and assumptions of recent mainstream thought. (Ibid).

The contention is that whilst white feminists have been quick, to look critically at white male history, which failed to articulate class and gender oppression, the same sort of interpretation is rooted in imperial

history, when white women forget that they have also benefited from the oppression of Black people.

Race and sex are social realities which at particular historical moments structure class relations in as much as class relations structure them. (Lewis and Parmar, 1983).

White women on the whole have not concerned themselves with these aspects in their theoretical or practical concerns.

'Some of the central categories and assumptions' that are challenged are the concepts of the family, patriarchy, sexuality and nuclear power. It is pointed out that in a political climate where Black men and women are continuously under racist attack and abuse from state institutions, these concepts cannot be related to Black people in a universal fashion. In the case of patriarchy, for example, it is stressed that the radical feminist interpretation of the concept, is not appropriate to the situation of the Black women. If patriarchy is just about gender oppression then:

Racism ensures that black men do not have the same relation to patriarchal/capitalist hierarchies as white men. (H. Carby 1982 : 213).

Within the Black community, the effects of racism, are seen to structure gender and class relationships. Furthermore, Black women experience the oppression of patriarchy, class and 'race' simultaneously and they cannot therefore afford to marginalise any one aspect of this oppression (H. Carby, 1982) ✓ Within the family, there is general agreement that

this forms "one of the principle sites of oppression" for women, where their role as reproducers of the labour forces, and as domestic labourers, maintains their material and ideological dependency upon men. Black feminists recognise the concept of 'dependency' to be problematic however, since many Black women, particularly Afro-Caribbean women, are the heads of households either due to immigration legislation or through the high unemployment rates amongst Black males (H. Carby 1984 : 215).

The way in which white academics 'have sought to define the role of Black women in the family' is seriously challenged (Amos and Parmar 1984 : 9). The stereotypical images of the passivity of Asian women and the strength and dominance of Afro-Caribbean women, both of which white academics have interpreted as being exploited by Black men is questioned. It is advocated that "Black women look critically at the family, its strengths and weakness, its advantages and disadvantages, its importance for certain women in class and race terms ... in the broader context of state harassment and oppression of Black people". In doing so, for the Black family, the issues of immigration legislations separating family members, adoption and fostering practices, the lack of care for the elderly, etc. become crucially relevant. Hence, the family, as well as being a source of oppression also becomes a source of resistance for Black people.

The theme of sexuality has been similarly attacked by Black feminists. Firstly, it is argued that 'in the context of the intense racism of the British State, Black women have not had the 'luxury' of engaging in the primacy of sexuality. They point out that Black women, the world over,

are engaged in life and death issues, worrying about where the next meal will come from. In such circumstances, they cannot be concerned about whether they achieve an orgasm (N. Saadawi, 1980). Nevertheless as we shall see below, sexuality is and has been 'an essential element of Black feminist practice and theory (Amos and Parmar 1984 : 12). It is pointed out that abortion rights must be connected with reproductive rights if the experience of Black women's sexuality is to be acknowledged by white feminists. The question of forced sterilisation and the use of Depo Provera contraceptives on Black and working class women must be brought to the forefront of political demands, made by white feminists (Amos and Parmar Ibid).

The issues of anti-nuclear power is another area where Black feminists and theoreticians have expressed major dissension. It is felt that:

the women's peace movement is and continues to remain largely white and middle class because yet again their actions and demands have excluded any understanding or sensitivity to Black and Third World women's situations. (Amos and Parmar 1984 : 16).

They argue that in their blind support for nationalism, white feminists fail to see how Britain's role, in the "illegal mining of uranium in Namibia for Trident submarines; the British oppression of Northern Ireland and the struggle for land rights of people in the Pacific, promote violence and destruction amongst Black and oppressed people" (Ibid).

For Black feminists, the question of disarmament has other wide ranging connotations related specifically to Black people and Black women. As Madhu Kishwar stressed in a meeting with women for Life on Earth:

A movement for disarmament begins with a movement against the use of guns, the everyday weapon. Here (in Britain) you may have a fear of a nuclear holocaust and death and destruction - in India millions die of water pollution - that is a more deadly weapon for women in India. I think it is very important that nuclear piles be made targets for political action, but we have to begin with confronting the guns and the dandas (sticks) that is disarmament for us. (Kishwar, 1984 cited in Amos and Parmar 1984 : 17).

The question Black feminism then poses to white feminism is this:

How then, in view of all this, can it be argued that black male dominance exists in the same form as white male dominance?. (H. Carby 1982 : 215).

The answer lies in the articulation of race, gender and class. However, I argue that whilst the aspects of race and gender have been well articulated, described and explained, the same does not hold true for the concept of class. Both in theory and in practice, Black feminists have not yet come to terms with how class differences, amongst Black women, can present boundaries for Black and feminist unity.

In establishing a Black unity, the Organisation of Women from African and Asian Descent (OWAAD) argued that:

By working together, we have developed a common understanding of our oppression and from this basis we build our solidarity. This is because our joint historical experience as victims of colonialism, and our present experience as second class citizens in a racist society have created firm bonds between us which are more significant to us than any differences which may exist. (Black Women in Britain Speak Out, OWAAD 1979).

In the previous chapter, we saw how Afro-Caribbeans and Asians suffered the racism of state institutions in similar ways. Thus racism helps to develop solidarity based on 'race', amongst Black people. However, racism:

is not the only oppression a black woman faces. She is also oppressed in class terms, as part of the working class and in gender terms, because she is a woman. (Amos and Parmar, 1982 : 146).

This perspective assumes that all Black women are of a working class origin. This is clearly not the case as both in Third World countries and in Britain, Black communities do have class distinctions, which are structurally maintained, as Sivanandan has suggested (1976). Such divisions can have serious implications for Black unity. A. Wilson described her encounter with middle class women:

For middle class Asians their working class sisters do not really exist. At a recent meeting middle class Asian women gathered to organise a conference of Asian women in Britain, I mentioned the word working class. 'What does it mean?' one of these exquisitely sari'd ladies asked 'surely in this day and age we all work'. One tentative voice asked if I meant 'deprived women like

those of the East End', but this too was slapped down by others - 'in these days of inflation, aren't we all deprived?'. (A. Wilson 1978 : 48-49).

Such an experience goes against the notion that:

Because of the nature of the oppression, every Third World woman, she carries within her the seeds of a working class consciousness. (Saadawi 1980 : 181).

Class divisions amongst women form an integral part of analysing their sub-ordination, as the concept of the triple oppression acknowledges. These divisions continue to play an active role in Black women's politics and organisations as we shall see below. Here I merely want to suggest that it is an aspect which has not been thoroughly developed in Black feminist writings nor in Black feminism in practice.

We now go on to look at the impact of the arrival of Asian women into Britain, and attempt to analyse the context in which their political and organised expressions, as Blacks and as women, have taken place.

The Arrival of Asian Women in Britain

As we saw in the last Chapter, most of the Asian women came to this country in an effort to 'beat the ban' of immigration controls in the 1960s. Many arrived as dependants of male workers but some also arrived as workers in their own right, with 'A' and 'B' vouchers. Certainly in the 1970s, when the exodus of Ugandan Asians was made into Britain, many

women were forced to divorce, for immigration purposes to be able to enter as 'heads of households'. Thus Asian women, as descendants of the Indian sub-continent or of East Africa, cannot be seen to have a homogeneous background. There are variations in their geographical, social and class composition. For example, in my sample, of the seven middle class women activists interviewed, four came in the 1960s, one of whom arrived with a 'B' voucher as a teacher from South India. The working class Asian women came as dependants but they too had a variety

PLACES OF BIRTH

	BRITAIN	EAST AFRICA	INDIA	FIJI	TOTAL
Working Class	11	5	62	1	79
Middle Class	1	2	4	-	7
					86

of backgrounds. In this data, of the women from working class origins, the majority were born in India as the following table indicates. From the sixty-two women born in India 40% had come from cities in India. Eight had been educated and brought up in England. Four of the women born in Africa were brought up in this country. The following table shows the level of the educational achievement of the women in the sample, and the place in which it occurred, where relevant.

LEVEL AND ORIGIN OF EDUCATION

L I T E R A T E S

Illiterate	India	Africa	UK	Total
14	38	2	32	86
(16%)	(44%)	(2%)	(37%)	

The fourteen women who were illiterate came from India where they received no formal education. Of the thirty-eight women who had some education from India, fourteen had received elementary instructions up to the fifth class. Education to the level of Matriculation was achieved by nineteen whilst five had acquired degrees from India. Only one of these women who is now a community worker and a teacher, resumed further study in England, and one had gained employment working with

nursery children with her previous qualifications. The rest of the women who received Indian education were not able to make use of their attainments and were therefore effectively rendered as 'illiterate'. The women educated in Britain also ranged from those who had acquired some formal qualifications to those who had not. From the thirty-two women, nineteen had not been able to gain a qualification whilst at schools. They left at the age of fifteen or sixteen. Seven women did have between one to eight Certificates of Secondary Education or up to three Ordinary Levels. Only six women were able to acquire degrees, and these were the middle class women that were interviewed, all of them professionals in teaching or in community/social work. The period for which women were in the UK varied from three years to twenty-five years, but the majority came in the 1960s.

This information points to the fact that there are differences amongst Asian women as regards their social and class backgrounds; and also contradicts the common stereotypes employed by some white academics, who see all Asian women as being ignorant and illiterate. Such ignorance is often portrayed to contribute to the failure on the parts of Asian people to take up the 'services' of statutory agencies and to seek support amongst themselves, because they are seen to be:

unskilled in formal, matter of fact,
distance maintaining interaction
typical of urban and Western life
styles. (V. Khan, 1979 : 44).

However, Lawrence points out that this culturalist view ignores the most important aspect of Black people's lives - that of powerlessness.

It seems to us that there are POWER RELATIONS in operation here which limit the range of choices black people can make. They do not 'choose' to live in inadequate housing anymore than they 'choose' to do 'shit work'. (E. Lawrence 1982 : 116).

In the 1960s and the 1970s, the arrival of Asian women formed the foundation of a community. It allowed working class men to escape the factory-floor racism. As we shall see in chapter 4, Asian men had learnt that neither the employers nor the trade unions would come to their call, and recognise the racial exploitation to which they were subjected. The strike actions at Wolfe's (1968) and Imperial Typewriters (1974) etc. taught the Asian workers that white workers will not support them.

In the first instance, on material grounds, the presence of women enabled the introduction of two wages in the home. Asian women, in the 1970s began to be drawn into the labour market, as immigration legislation had restricted the entry of Black men. The government had introduced projects to prepare Asian women for factory production:

In the early 1970s the Government introduced a series of 'socialisation programmes' - language classes, child care education, health education, etc., all of which were geared to teaching Asian women English habits which would help them become 'more integrated into British society'. (P. Parmar, 1982 : 249).

However the 'programmes' were resourced with minimal funds, as in the case of English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. The teachers here were often not qualified and had no teaching equipment which is usually provided for other language courses. Furthermore 'teaching' is usually associated with qualifications which are recognised and promote progress for individuals. The ESL, etc. made no provision for formal qualifications which could be recognised in the labour market. Thus the women found such classes 'a waste of time' and of little use. In my sample, I only encountered two women who were attending English classes but it did not help them in any financial way, as they still remained unemployed or only found work in the local sweatshops. The women do not lose heart, however, they teach themselves the rudimentaries of the English language via their children. At ARC for example, women in their 70s and 80s, who were previously only able to make a thumb-print as a form of identity, are now able to sign their names in English. These are methods of survival, and a determination to hold on to dignity in the face of hostility.

In seeking employment, generally, the working class Asian women who found employment were placed in the manufacturing sector as opposed to the service sector in which Afro-Caribbean women were located. For the Asian community, the consequences were that savings could be accumulated at a faster rate than was previously possible. Families who could borrow from friends and relatives within the community took advantage of this and opened up small businesses. With the arrival of East African Asians the business community expanded from small clothing and grocery

retails, to every conceivable area, since they brought with them the experience of entrepreneurship as the middle classes of Africa. The traditional, peasant and rural labourers of India and Pakistan, who had arrived before them, did not have such expertise.

Women who could not find work, but who had enough capital accumulation in the family were also economically useful. Whilst the men worked in the factories, the women could look after the children, and simultaneously run the small businesses. When enough capital was accumulated, the man would leave the job and expand the business.

I went back to work in textiles for eighteen months until I opened a shop with my brothers. My sister-in-law ran the counter and I went back into textiles for a bit and then I got this pub. During this time in industry I felt what was right and what was wrong. I found out how management behaves differently to coloured workers than to whites. You can tell they're thinking we're inferior. ('Race Today' No. 4, 1974 : 102).

This shows that women were and are an active part of the petit - bourgeois class and as such have interests other than those of their working class counterparts. For example Asian women who work for the profits of their families as machinists, foreladies or managers, have interests akin to those of their capitalist husbands. Such women, like the men may have working class backgrounds, but they do not ally with the workers they now employ. Asian capitalists on the whole, however, tend to operate on a small-scale basis since they do not have access to

large amounts of capital. Hence their position, in relation to white capitalists is less prestigious in terms of capital and status.

Apart from the economic importance of women's presence, the other most crucial important aspect was the formation of a community. Previously Asian men had only made practical arrangements for living on a day-to-day basis because they saw themselves as sojourners. They had not yet become 'settlers' but the immigration legislation transformed this situation (Parmar 1982). Often, the men lived together sharing a house which one person owned in a ghetto. Sleeping arrangements were made in accordance with the shift times of work, and they survived on a diet mainly of lentils and chappaties. Men who had never cooked or cleaned in their home countries found themselves doing house work for mere survival.

As women and other dependents arrived, the sharing of facilities became impractical in terms of space and privacy. By borrowing from their kinship and friendship networks men bought houses. Systems of communal savings began to be devised from which individuals withdrew money as and when major expenditures on buying properties or visiting home, etc. occurred. Such a system was necessary because the banks and building societies refused loans and mortgages to Black people.

Within the Asian community, temples began to be set up with the arrival of women, and religious ceremonies and rituals which had not been practised by men, began to be performed. Marriages and other religious and cultural festivities functioned. For the Punjabi, the temples

formed a major venue for organising around the issues that were of concern to Asian people. With the presence of children, parents were recognising that miseducation was taking place in schools. Their children who could speak perfect Punjabi before they started school, refused to talk in their mother-tongue after they joined the institution. They were turned to "deaf and dumb" beings who knew nothing of their own culture and history, and suffered from a loss of self-esteem and pride. To combat this, educated Punjabi women, came to the forefront to provide an alternative system of education in the temples, which would not only provide educational skills but a pride in the children's history, dress, language and culture as a whole. At first the classes concentrated on religious education and the teaching of Punjabi. Later as the full effects of de-education were being realised, subject across the curricula were provided. The community also challenged the education authorities to raise the standards of subjects that were relevant to Asian children, such as Indian history, Punjabi, and Urdu. This has been a long and hard fought struggle, and only a few authorities succumbed to the demands to date.

Teerto, a Punjabi woman with a B.A. in history and economics from India now took up dressmaking at home. She taught Punjabi in the local Sikh temple in the evenings and at weekends, without pay:

It's important for our children to understand their mother tongue. The 'goarae' (whites) say that they should just learn English. How can our children understand their family properly, or even understand English properly, if they are not grounded in their mother tongue?

In Birmingham, only three schools make provision for two Asian languages, and none for specific Indian or Asian history.

In my own sample, the girls interviewed did not show discontent of their own cultural identity. Perhaps one explanation for this is that there is a strong Black community in Handsworth. Other studies (e.g. Amos and Parmar 1982) do show instances of Asian children losing their identity. In one study a woman recalls:

I wanted to go to disco. I went through stages of wishing I was white so I could have more freedom, to socialise ... it all made me wish I was something else. (Centerprise Trust Limited 1984).

Women were also important in structuring and changing community organisation upon their arrival. In 1964, the Tory candidate, Peter Griffiths, in Smethwick campaigned for the General Election on the basis of ending immigration, and called for the repatriation of coloureds. He won on the slogan:

If you want a nigger neighbour vote
Labour.

The Black community was outraged. Punjabi women, organised by the Indian Workers Associations in their own contingent marched the High Street in condemnation of this issue. In the 1970s, the Smethwick Sikh temple, the first of its kind in Britain, was attacked by skinheads. The male committee of the temple failed to take adequate action against this and were also found to be embezzling funds. The women took over

and ousted the male management committee for over two years. Also in this decade, Asian women throughout the country protested against their exploitation at the workplace and demanded unionisation.

During the 1981 uprisings in Coventry working class Asian women, Indian and Pakistani, formed the majority in a demonstration expressing anger at the murder of Satnam Singh Gill.

The temples therefore provided the early venues for women to express their political concerns within an environment of religiosity. This is still the case for many working class women. It enables the women to express their concerns for the welfare of their community, and the temples support them in this effort. The same support, however, is not forthcoming when women want to challenge or change their situation within the family. Religion stresses the subservience of women within the family and therefore does not openly condone rebellious action in this area of struggle. However, as we shall see in Chapter 6, women do turn to religion and 'sewa' (service) in the temples, in their hour of need.

These experiences contradict the notion that Asian women are passive recipients of their culture. They show that from their very presence in this country the women were engaged in both organised and spontaneous forms of resistance. This is not because of the progressive impact of the West. On the contrary, women in the Indian sub-continent have historically been a part and parcel of the anti-colonial movements.

If feminism is understood broadly as 'agitation on issues concerning women' (Jayawardena 1986 : 2) then defiant women have always been present in Indian Hindu and Sikh mythology and history. For example Rani of Jhansi led her troops into battle against the British, on horseback in 1857, Kalpana Dutt, a Bengali revolutionary, took part in the Chattagong Armoury raid in 1930, disguised as a man (Ibid 1986 : 13).

J. Liddle and R. Joshi stress that the Indian women's movement was not an importation of the West. It was rooted in the history and cultural heritage of India which provides a tradition of women as strong and powerful beings, within the social structure which offers them the possibility of an independent existence (J. Liddle and R. Joshi 1986 : 50). They point to the matrilineal descent systems of Kerala and the history of female power 'Shakti' as indication of women occupying better positions than prevalent in patrilineal societies.

Jayawardena argues that the feminism of Third World countries was set against the background of nationalist struggles led by local and petty bourgeoisie in their efforts to oppose imperialism, and as such retained a conservative bias since it was aimed at middle class women. This is because in India the national bourgeoisie in their opposition to imperialism aimed to assert a national identity and dismantle pre-capitalist structure such as ruling dynasties to modernise their societies.

The 'barbaric practices' of the 'savage' past such as the tolerant sexual mores, polyandry and divorce by mutual consent, of the Kandyan regions of Sri Lanka, were condemned by missionaries and the local bourgeoisie alike, in order to be attuned to Western Ways. In short she states that:

Faced with societies that were sufficiently developed and powerful to subjugate them, and with the need to modernise their own societies, many reformers of Asia seized on the apparent freedom of women in Western societies as the key to advancement of the West, and argued that 'oriental backwardness' was partly due to women's low status. (Jayawardena 1986 : 12).

Thus middle class Indian men advocated education and 'liberation' for their middle class women.

Whilst working class feminism has not been adequately documented, autonomous women's organisations have been linked to political groups throughout the 19th and 20th centuries in the context of the national struggle in the home countries:

In some cases, the women were merely involved in promoting handicrafts made by women (e.g. Sakhi Samiti in Bengal in 1886); in the colonial period, however, even such simple activities had political overtones since local products were encouraged in order to counteract the import of goods from Europe. (Jayawardena 1986 : 22).

The Mahila Samitis were precipitated during the Telangana uprisings and the Warli Adivasi peasant revolts. The Samitis concerned themselves

with the specific oppression suffered by peasant women in the 1940s (P. Trivedi 1984 : 42). These movements were crushed after independence by the Congress Party. Thus the historical and the current experience of Asian women in Britain is not a passive one. It is one of resistance and defiance, which has been continuously expressed in Britain since their presence.

Capitalist and Pre-Capitalist Relations

In conceptualising the dimensions of race, class and gender, it can be useful to look at the position of Black women the world-over in terms of conflict between different modes of production from which they come. There is much debate on exactly what the modes of production of the Third World countries are, and a range of notions have been adhered to by different people. Suffice it here to see them generally as pre-capitalist modes of production.

Nawal El Saadawi (1980) refers to the feudal modes of production in Third World countries where the system requires an integration of social relationships which can consolidate economic investments in land holdings. Within this, men have a high economic value and have control over women and children. The labour power of women is in direct control of the male members of the family. Capitalism demands a transfer of this control to the capitalist in factory production.

However these "feudal" modes of production of Third World countries have been tampered with by the forces of imperialism which inhibited the

natural independent social development of these countries. As such they could be considered to be semi-capitalist relations of production. Thus Liddle and Joshi note that the traditional "feudal" structure of India in which caste was a predominant feature was disturbed by the British conquest which thereafter helped to develop a capitalistic class structure. The British requiring private property, commodity production and wage labour

..... destroyed Indian industry and undermined the rising merchant class. They commercialised Indian agriculture so that it produced less food for immediate consumption and more raw materials for British industry... and created a surplus of pauperised 'free' labour (J. Liddle and R. Joshi, 1986 : 71).

A similar process has been evident throughout the plundering of the Third World by imperialist forces.

In developing the theory of conflicting modes of production Saadawi points out that:

When we look at the way women are exploited under feudalism and under capitalism, we find that the type of exploitation differs but it always fits in with the interests of the particular ruling class. The values and standards that govern her life alter, depending on whether she is needed to work in a factory to work in a sex shop, to commercialise her body, or, as in feudal society, to enable her to be a slave, to work as an agricultural labourer. Under feudalism, stress is laid on sexual purity. When feudalism and capitalism collide in one society then the changes in the way women are exploited and the contradictory

expectations made of them become very sharpened. There are two conflicts. Under a feudal system a woman's labour is under the control of the man. Under capitalism she is cheap labour under the control of the factory owner. Third World women are caught between these two oppressions and contradictions which are thrown up... (N. Saadawi 1980 : 180-181).

Thus we note that in India, for example, the effects of imperialist and capitalist development, are the emergence of the nuclear family and women on production lines etc. within the cities. The importance of this is not that Asians in Britain are suffering the antagonistic effects of two cultures (where one is assumed to be superior over the other), but that they are experiencing two equally valid ideologies, both based in their respective economic structures. The difference lies in that the Asians here came from a primarily rural background, and as migrants were merely transplanted from one mode of production to another, without having had the experience of the PROCESS of transformation. Hence in struggling between the two sets of ideologies, the Asians in Britain are building a new distinct ideology, a new culture of resistance of Black political awareness to combat both the pre-capitalist and the capitalist ideologies. This method of understanding Asian and other Black women's position seems more accurate than the culturalist view, which does not explain how particular practices within a culture developed, because it takes culture as given.

The Context in which Black Women's Struggles Take Place

We now go on to look at the nature of the politically organised activities of women, and the social and political context in which they take place in Britain. It is necessary to develop such an understanding for a realistic interpretation of Black feminist politics and its potentials and limitations. (We use the term 'Black' because much of the organising that has taken place amongst Punjabi and Asian women generally, is within this concept).

Women's movements do not occur in a vacuum but correspond to, and to some extent are determined by, the wider social movements of which they form a part. The general consciousness of society about itself, its future, its structure and the role of men and women entails limitations for the womens movements, its goals and its methods of struggle are generally determined by those limits. (Jayawardena 1986 : 10).

The ways in which Black women have been able to organise in Britain is related to both the overall racist structure of this country, and to the sexist nature of Black male organisations. We do not discuss the role of Labour Party and Black feminists because the former has not on the whole encapsulated the struggles of the latter, neither as Black people nor as women. Black feminist groups, on the whole, are very critical of the Labour Party and do not consider it as representing the interests of Black workers, since the immigration laws etc. that the Labour Governments have enacted, have been as racist as that of the Conervative Party. The lack of support by the Labour Party for Black Sections within it, has epitomised the racist nature of the former for Black feminists, and they therefore do not largely associate with it. Individual Black women may however consider the Labour Party as a viable

arena within which to work. On the other hand the Workers Associations in general have supported the Labour Party, as the working class party. The IWAs for example, whilst seeing the Labour Party as "reformist", still informally support it and actively canvass for it during local and general elections. The PWA(B) however, see little difference between the Labour and Conservative parties and therefore do not support either.

First we look at the nature and the failure of white women's organisation to take on the issues of their Black 'sisters'. Secondly we discuss the role of Black male organisations with specific reference to Asian men, and thirdly we analyse the nature and the limitations of Black women's organisations.

The White Feminist Movement

Historically, the white women's movements have not represented the demands of Black women. Angela Davis (1982) and Bell Hooks (1981) have noted that white middle class feminism was oblivious to the cause of working class women generally, and to Black women specifically. During slavery, some white feminists such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, were of the opinion that it was better to be white men's slave than to prioritise the vote for Black men:

I say no; I would not trust him with my rights; degraded, oppressed, himself, he would be more despotic ... than even our Saxon rulers are. (A. Davis 1982 : 75).

It was a question of who would walk into liberation first; the 'Sambo' or the suffragettes. It was against this vein that Sojourner Truth had spoken in 1851 as she endeavoured to expose both the racist oppression and sexist domination.

I have ploughed, and planted, and
gathered into barns and no man could
head me! And ain't I a woman? I could
work as much and eat as much as a man -
when I could get it - and bear the lash
as well! And ain't I a woman? I have
borne thirteen children and seen them
most all sold off to slavery, and when
I cried out with my mother's grief,
none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a
woman?. (A. Davis 1982 : 61).

Today, Black women also feel that the white women's movement has failed them. As we saw earlier, the issues of patriarchy, dependency within the family, women's sexuality, nuclear disarmament, etc. do not address the experiences of Black women the world-over. The contention of Black women is that Western feminism has propagated the view that women's emancipation is rooted in the West:

... there is a Eurocentric view that
the movement for women's liberation is
not indigenous to Asia or Africa, but
has been a purely West European and
North American phenomena, and that
where movements for women's
emancipation or feminist struggles have
arisen in the third world, they have
been merely imitative of Western
models. (Jayawardena 1986 : 2).

The role of Western feminism, as the assumed liberator of all women, has made it blind to the specificity and the complexities of Black women's oppression in terms of race, gender and class. Black women allege that

white feminists have portrayed the former, as being "traditionalist" and "politically immature", and have measured the "standards of feminism" by their own western rod (Amos and Parmar 1984 : 7). It is such a perspective, that led the demands of white feminists to 'reclaim the night', to be turned into fascists organising the protection of white women from the 'rampant' sexuality of Black men. When the immigration rules banned the entry of foreign husbands and fiances, the radical feminists acclaimed it as a good rule, as it prevented more men from entering the U.K. This failure of incorporating the struggles of Black women into the women's movement had led some Black feminists to question the notion of feminism itself. Kamlan, an Asian feminist and community worker, working with Asian girls in Birmingham has this to say:

Feminism is a white woman's term. The oppression of Black women has no relevance to feminism. I have something to do with Blacks. I have no term for myself, but I know why I don't want to be called a feminist. The prime oppression of women is patriarchy, women have little power, it is sexism. But furthermore, Black women have to deal with racism. Racism is the most acute problem we face, not just personal but institutional, both overt and covert racism. Racism is in the curriculum, dress, food and so on. ... Male oppression takes different forms in different cultures but white feminists have stereotypes - that Asian women walk three steps behind their husbands etc.... People who know us think we are the exceptions, as 'liberated' women. We can't all be exceptions to the rule.

In my view, in this statement, Kamlan is articulating the race and gender notions for Black women. What is the connection between racism

and sexism for Black women? Racism has witnessed the extermination of a whole race as in the case of American Indians and the Jews. Sexism too can kill women. These are two extremities of both forms of oppression. For white women, sexism will kill as the Yorkshire Ripper showed, but it will not exterminate all women, since that would result in the extermination of the white race. In the case of Black women, the white oppressors have shown historically, that they have no regard for the Black race itself. Thus the sexism of white racists can eliminate all Black women and hence the Black race(s), without affecting white men and women. Therefore there is no limits on the sexism practiced on Black women. I think that this is the connection between racism and sexism. Whilst I agree with the general sentiments of Kamlan's views, she seems to throw the baby out with the bath water. As Jayawardena (1986) and Liddle and Joshi (1986) have stressed, feminism is not a monopoly of the West. If feminism is understood as:

an awareness of women's oppression and exploitation within the family, at work and in society, and conscious action by women (and men) to change this situation. (Jayawardena 1986 : 2).

then Black women who have such an awareness, and act to change their positions in society, must be feminists. Nevertheless, feminism has a different meaning for Black women, because of the history of colonialism and imperialism. The racism from which Black people suffer in Britain is an extension of this history, as Black women have pointed out:

Coming to Britain from a village in India which has been impoverished by colonialism; having your family split up by immigration laws; being responsible for the whole household but

not being given credit for it by anybody, having your children bussed miles away from home; having to work all day in a sweatshop and then going home to wait on your family hand and foot; never knowing when your family will be beaten up by the police or civilian racists; having your self-image distorted by a racist culture - these are some of the experiences which are the genesis of our politics in Britain. These experiences have led us to believe that at present our political direction is very different from that of most white feminist groups. (Spare Rib No. 87 1979 : 43).

It is within these parameters that Black feminist politics and activities have sought to counteract the view that white people will liberate Blacks. Saranjana, an Asian social worker who had worked in schools with girls in Birmingham felt such contradictions in her work which brought together aspects of race and gender:

I did set up groups at schools for girls, as a social worker. But one has to be really so cautious that by talking of one's own potential as a woman, and questioning one's role at home, one falls foul with parents. There was always this threat of attack, that social workers were encouraging girls to rebel against the family traditions ... so it was really dicey ... working with young girls and constantly being aware that in the end they're got to do this themselves. I mean somehow not to encourage them to rebel against their parents ... If she did rebel, and leave home for instance, in fact, in my experience, she wouldn't

get anything. She might end up in a worse situation ... With a group of young men, who would exploit her even more than her parents ever would.

Saranjana, found that most white social workers tended to advise young girls to leave home as a solution for resolving all issues at home. They paid little attention to the difficulties that the girls would have to face once they had left. Their concern was usually to liberate the girls from the "fetters" of their cultures. Saranjana recognised the importance of the family for the girls and sought to operate in a different way.

the aim of the group was never as one of consciousness raising per se. It may have that as an ultimate aim, but could also have other aims of how to make Asian girls feel not to be ashamed of their Asianness. In schools they feel very ashamed of their language, their family systems. My aim was to change this.

Another community worker Annu, working with homeless Asian women at the ARC was of a similar view.

Asian men dominate - all men are oppressive. Having said that obviously they're different, I don't think one lot of men is better than another ... The women in the family set up are being oppressed at all fronts. They can see racism, how its hitting their husbands, then you look at the education system and its there too, because of the treatment their children get. Then you look at the cultural side e.g. arranged marriages, a lot of women might still want to sponsor husbands, but they're restricted from doing so ... its hitting at them in every angle ... if its a matrimonial breakdown, the DHSS support the woman financially because they have a legal obligation to. If it is a woman whose husband's just gone away, and she's facing hardship they don't support her ... with this regulation its not just

the woman who gets affected, its the whole family.

Jenny Bourne (1983) suggests that although white feminists originally drew parallels with the Black movements, they betrayed the very principles of this similarity. Like Black people, white feminists had pointed out that the personal was the political for them; that their struggle should not be subsumed to the formal spheres of government or the workplace; and that their demands were of a qualitative rather than a quantitative nature.

In practice, white feminists failed to apply these principles. They borrowed the analysis of the white left uncritically and only showed support for Black issues in so far as the left did generally. For example, Women Against Racism and Fascism only supported Black women at Grunwick when it became an 'official' concern for the Trade Union Movement and the broad left. Since the 1970s, the major thrust for the left has been against racism within the overall context of anti-fascism. However, fighting fascism rather than racism is subsuming racism to class. It is therefore a betrayal of a feminist principal, since feminists do not acknowledge the primacy of the class struggle. Bourne also points out that a part of white women's failure is to do with the adoption of male procedures of organising, and this impeded in the formulation of a feminist analysis. Where this method was rejected, a blanket 'male' label was applied to almost all phenomenon. Thus fascism and racism all became male problems, and this ignored the 'fundamental ways in which white women have benefited from the oppression of Black people' (Amos and Parmar 1984 : 5).

It was in this respect that Kamlan had stressed that:

white feminists are very ethno-centric with their own issues. They only see racism if a Black woman goes to them and tells them so... But when THEY need support they seek links of common oppression with blacks and they are surprised that they gain no support.

The Black Male Organisations

The predominantly Black organisations such as the Pan African Congress (1925); West African League of Coloured Peoples (1931); Asian and African-Subject Peoples Conference (1945); Indian Workers Association (1938) (IWA); Co-ordinating Committee Against Racial Discrimination (1965); Black Panther Movements of the 1960s, had all served to make theoretical and political links between the 'coolie' and the 'slave'. The members fought for the independence of their own countries within Britain and at the same time maintained a front in their struggles as Black people here. The need to connect the racism of Britain to the colonialism of the home countries was an imperative feature of setting an international scene for Black liberation. 'Black Power' was the unifying force for all oppressed Black people throughout the world, and constructive links were forged on an international basis by the visits of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X to Britain in the 1960s. This solidarity continues to be expressed by Black people today. In the 1987 General Elections, Black women in Birmingham canvassed for people to sign petitions that Blacks in South Africa should be enfranchised. It was within this international context that the IWAs operated.

The IWAs and other Asian Male Organisation

The IWAs were the first of the Asian organisations to emerge. They began as social welfare groups in 1938, and centralised as one, in 1958. They drew an Indian male membership from the factory floor. The demands of the membership transformed the organisation to a more political Association, which then also began to support the struggles of Workers from Pakistan. The leadership of the IWA, and other workers associations which were yet to be formed, has been linked to the movements on the Indian sub-continent. The IWAS was dominated by the left - the Communist Party of India (CPI). As a result, the divisions of the CPI (Marxist) and the CPI in India, were directly reflected in Britain between the IWA (Marxist) and the IWA (Marxist-Leninist) respectively. The members of the IWA quoted in this work are of the latter organisations.

As communists the tenets of the IWAs were derived from the workerist, trade unionist and anti-colonial traditions. The membership originated from the factory floor, and as such they had a working class base. As Indians they could only attract Indian people; but the organisations were primarily dominated by Indian Punjabi men, both in terms of the membership and the leadership. They therefore failed to attract non-Punjabi and non-Indian members. This gave rise to other Workers Associations, such as Pakistani Workers Association (PWA); Kashmiri Workers Association) (KWA) and the Bangladeshi Workers Association (BWA) all of which were formed in the 1960s. The PWA is now split into two; The PWA is a reactionary right-wing group whilst the PWA(B) formed

in 1982 has Marxist and maoist tendencies. The KWA and BWA though not actually split, have right wing and left wing camps within them. All these organisations are established in Birmingham, and some (IWAs, PWA(B) KWA and a faction of BWA) consciously strive to work on a Black unity, whilst retaining their specific national origins. The energies of these organisations in the 1960s and 1970s were taken up primarily with challenging immigration legislations and factory floor racism as these were the two most acute forces that affected the Asian communities.

For Asian women, the Workers Associations formed the only viable political arena for them to join. The Associations, with their political base on the industrial floor, were able to enhance the struggles of Asian women as workers. This is particularly the case with IWAs. However, their efforts failed on two major accounts. The IWAs recognised the racism of Trade Unions but continued to be faithful to the workerist trade unionist doctrine ('Race Today', No. 4 1974). Therefore, they could not express the reality of the Indian working class in any organised form. Secondly, the IWAs were not able to enhance feminist consciousness, and therefore Indian women, whose interest it was to put women's issues in the very definition and organisation of politics, were not attracted to it.

Furthermore, the older male membership of Workers' Associations, who usually hold the leading positions, have a different background from the younger women who are espousing the cause of feminism. The IWA men interviewed for this study were in their late thirties and over, and had spent a considerable part of their lives in India. Their views were

therefore related to the rural semi-capitalist or pre-capitalist economy, where men often see themselves as defenders of women. They therefore had patronising and paternalistic attitudes to the participation of women in organised politics. The IWA men relegated the situation of Asian women to feudalism, and liberation was only possible with socialism. One of the IWA men said:

They say here its democratic. But what sort of democracy? Until you understand this system of so-called democracy and feudalism, until there's revolution, women can't be liberated. Women will have to be involved, but you should ask them how?.

Another member pointed out that whilst women knew nothing of the organisation, they still participated within it. He was referring to the wives of the male members who mainly cooked for their meetings and sometimes went along to the IWA demonstrations:

Our women don't know the ABC, but they still participate in our organisations, e.g. Kartar Kaur, Manjit Kaur ... who said 'we can go where men can go'. I agree that women have to work hard at home according to our customs and ways ... but they should get involved.

Two of the wives of these members were also present at the interview, and they expressed the types of constraints that operated to limit any organised political activity on their part. The older of the two who was in her fifties said:

I can't go out because I have to look after the children, think about them and everything else. They have to go to school and want one thing or another.

The younger woman in her thirties agreed:

You know, women's fight is not outside. Men's is outside, and women's is at home. They have to fight inside the home, its very difficult. Outside, is okay. You fight and come home.... That's the thing. You work out and come home and work, and you haven't got the energy left ... you want to relax...

The men felt that the women would learn more if they attended their meetings which were usually held in public houses. To this the younger woman replied:

... if women started to go to pubs, and clubs, then we'll all be always drunk like they are.

This pointed to the fact that political activity for these women was associated with the alcohol, as men often came home drunk after reportedly being at a meeting. The men, in defence stated their open mindedness that they did not mind if women went into public houses. But the women showed agreement in that:

Its a rule that's well understood and settled in our psychology, in our minds. If we went there they'd probably start beating us, won't they?

The men tried to put this view in a broader theoretical context:

The question comes back to the same thing. In our organisation we believe in equality, in oneness - male and female. The rules you talk about are brought by a few people, the ruling

majority who want to enjoy themselves.
They only know of materialist gains.
It's a product of society, society is
produced by the ruling class; feudalism
is influenced by capitalism.
Capitalism what does it depend on? On
materialism. If this is not the
experience of women, the only way they
can learn is by going to the
meetings....

The women, not being able to relate to this 'political' plane were quite
emphatic that they could not go with the men.

... all the political parties to which
they go, its all men. There is no
place for women. Where you don't see
women with respect, where we feel
outcastes, at least I do. Therefore, I
don't want to go where men go ... So I
don't get involved with the issues they
call political.

This points to the gap between the ability of these women to crystallise
their experiences and the theoretical and political inability of the IWA
to incorporate those experiences. The PWA(B), another Asian
organisation to espouse the cause of women, saw the women's soul to be
the property of men. In relation to peasant women they believe that:

Wherever a peasant is politically
conscious, the whole family is
politically conscious. Wherever a
peasant rises up against the landlords,
his wife and children rise up also.
(Paikaar No. 1 : 8 1987).

About working class women, they state that:

in all these classes, women's
consciousness depends on the
consciousness of their men, because the
very idea that women can have their own
separate identity has been uprooted.
(Ibid).

The KWA and BWA have not attempted to include women in their organisations. Hence the Associations generally, do not recognise the specific oppression of women in practice.

Where efforts are made to involve women in the organisations, it is to fight against racism and class oppression, not gender subordination as well.

As we have noted the struggles of the Worker Associations have primarily concentrated on the shop floor and immigration legislations, which most affected Asian people. The Afro-Caribbeans have primarily fought against police brutality, the criminalisation of youth by SUS laws, and the miseducation of the children, as these were the issues that affected them most. The two communities therefore had distinct struggles related to their distinct forms of oppression (Sivanandan 1982).

With regard to the youth, the experiences and the mobilisation base of the Worker Associations did not reflect the position of Asian youth of the Indian sub-continent. Issues of immigration and shop-floor protests, although important are not the only concerns for the Asian community. In some senses, both these issues have lost momentum for a significant proportion of Asians present here. Most of the Indians, and a large proportion of Pakistanis, have settled in this country and therefore immigration no longer forms a prime difficulty for them, except in the arrangement of their children's marriages. For the Indians and Pakistanis, the restrictions on fiances is an issue, but the immediate separation of their families is not. Most of the Bengalis, on

the other hand, are only beginning to sponsor their wives and children. For this group, the 'divided families' aspect is of a crucial importance, as the campaign against Divided Families indicates. The majority of cases in this campaign are those of Bengali families who have been separated by immigration laws. Moreover, with the rates of unemployment at record levels, the aspect of shop-floor resistance has also become less important, particularly for Asian men. Since these two dimensions of struggle formed the basis of IWA, and other Workers Association organising, they have now lost their mobilising force in the Asian community. The Asian youth had a new relevance of being unemployed and being Black - British. "The sense of this Asian identity derived more from their cultural upbringing rather than a lived experience of the Indian sub-continent" ('Race Today' September/October 1978). Like the African youth they had suffered the miseducation of the educational institutions, and the police violence and harassment. In the face of increasing fascist activity during the 1970s and early 1980s, the Asian youth declared themselves as the defenders of the community. In 1976, they defended Southall and in 1981 they defended Bradford amongst other cities.

"Self Defence is no offence" was a motto that adhered more to Malcolm X's sentiment of defending the community by "any means necessary", than to the ideological workerist stance of the Worker Association. These sentiments of the youth were to produce the basis for the formation of PWA(B) in 1982 which was to actively fight on defense campaigns such as the "Bradford 12" and "Newham 8".

However, the Worker Associations were formed on a national basis. The younger people in the 1970s lacked the historical experience of Indian and Pakistani politics, and therefore were unable to identify with them. They were isolated; but this isolation was transformed into a political identity in the late 1970s with organisations such as Southall Asian Youth Movement and the Bradford Asian Youth Movement. In the 1980s, such Asian youth movements (AYMs) were to spring up in most cities which had large concentrations of Asian and Afro-Caribbean people. The youth (which on the whole meant male youth) were identifying themselves not as Indians, Pakistanis or Bangladeshis. They saw a unity in being Asian, and in some instances as Blacks. Thus in Birmingham the AYM which was formed in 1982 became Birmingham Youth Movement (BYM) in 1983, to incorporate the Afro-Caribbean members who had joined. The youth movements learnt lessons from the organisation of the Afro-Caribbean community. In 1970, the latter had organised in support of the "Mangrove 9" who were arrested whilst protesting against police harassment. They demanded an all Black jury. In 1982, the "Bradford 12" asked for the same, in order to get a fair trial based on the judgement of their 'peers'. The youth organised sit-down protests against the police (1976) in Southall, when Chaggar was murdered, whilst the leadership of the IWAs had congratulated the police for their 'patience'. These facts point to the interstices between the new experiences of the Asian youths and those of the older Punjabi people of the Indian Workers Associations.

As has been pointed out, the youth organisations were male. Also, they did not have a political line or programme. There was no programme for

study or political development. Their main form of organising was in the formation of various spontaneous defence campaigns around issues of anti-deportations, and the legal defence of victims arrested during skirmishes between the police and the youth. A few Asian women (who had otherwise organised separately) participated in the defence campaigns. The campaigns provided a trade in defendants for the Law Centres which were flourishing in the 1970s and into the 1980s. The legal profession made profits from the criminalisation of youth. The lawyers often reaffirmed the police interest by advising defendants to plead guilty, in order to reduce the severity of the sentences. The defense campaigns sought to counter this by supporting the defendants, financially and emotionally, to show up the practices of the police, and the immigration authorities. The campaigns produced leaflets, held public meetings, produced witnesses etc. to illuminate the discrepancies made in the statements of officials in court. In addition, the advent of defence campaigns meant that Law Centres were not used in isolation. The campaigns stressed their right, as community organisations for which the centres existed, to utilise their resources such as mailing facilities, photocopying and as venues for meetings.

The shortcomings of the Youth Movements has meant that today they seem to have disintegrated. Some of the members in Birmingham have found membership amongst the Worker Associations, such as IWAs, PWA(B) and KWA who have made attempts to incorporate the youth to provide a renewed impetus for their own organisations. In places where the latter organisations do not exist, some informal networks of the youth movements remain, but they are not consolidated and active as groups.

The defence campaigns continue to take the major thrust of political activity, though a certain amount of disillusionment is expressed about the 'ultimate' achievement of the campaigns.

Black Women Organise

We have noted that the male Asian organisations were not able to incorporate the political expressions of Asian women.

Afro-Caribbean women had also experienced the same from their political activities with men. Black political unity was beginning to be expressed based on the common oppression which all Third World people faced, and as such, Black women were finding this as a political point of strength. It was a political term which negated the terms 'ethnic minorities' or 'Third World' persons, as these lumped all non-whites together as 'an amorphous, homogeneously underdeveloped and oppressed mass' (A. Mama 1984 : 23). As such women from Africa, the Caribbean, India, Pakistan and South East Asian regions came together as Black women, as Black Sisters.

From the late 1970s, at the same time as Asian youth were organising, Asian and African women began to fight state racism and sexism in an organised manner - as women. They concentrated on general issues, and from that, related to the specificity of women. Thus, although immigration was an issue for all Black people in Britain, the specific

ways in which the policies related to women were distinct from how they related to men.

The early history of Asian women in organised politics is not well documented, apart from the shop-floor struggles. It would appear that since the early 1970s, some Asian women, perhaps mainly middle class, were members of organised political groups. For example, from the evidence of various 'Race Today' issues, we find that Mala Dhondy has been reporting for the journal since the early 1970s, and was a member of the United Black Women's Action Group which was formed in this period. It appears that research is necessary in this area.

In 1978, the Organisation of Women From African and Asian Descent (OWAAD) was formed. At first the majority of its membership consisted of Afro-Caribbeans, but later a significant proportion of Asian women also joined. OWAAD was essentially a link organisation drawing upon a national membership of Black women from different groups and campaigns. The women came "from different groups, areas, and backgrounds, to find out, discover and support other active women, throughout the country". It was the first organisation to demonstrate the principle of Black unity. The membership had some political experience in the politics of Ghana, Ethiopia, Eritrea, etc. and the local politics of defence campaigns, and other mixed (gender and race) political groups.

OWAAD first came together as an organisation in its first conference, and the members went away, committed to develop local groups within their own localities. It had no coherent political framework. From OWAAD culminated other Black women's groups in Hackney, East London,

West London, Southall and other areas of the country. An Asian women's group AWAAZ emerged campaigning against the virginity tests and acquiring the support of the IWAs. FOVAAD was launched to ensure that information and support was spread amongst Black women nationally. OVAAD as a whole campaigned against ESN and SUS laws, etc. 1982 saw the demise of OVAAD but it provided the impetus for other Black women to organise as women, throughout the country. Southall Black sisters was already in existence before OVAAD became defunct. The former had been active in the defence campaigns of the Southall and Bradford youths, arrested during the uprisings of 1981.

There followed a trail of similar groups set up by different women, with similar aims. From 1982 onwards, 'Black Sisters' or 'Black Women's groups sprang up in Leeds, Nottingham, Reading, Manchester and other cities. The adoption of the name 'Black Sisters' or 'Black Women', revealed a strength of the identity that they wanted to portray. They were 'a force to be reckoned with' (Black Sisters Newsletter No. 1 1982).

Nature of Black Women's Groups

We have seen that with OVAAD, the first time Black Women got together as such, was at its first conference. This was necessarily so, since no other organisation of its type had existed in this country where Black women could meet each other. Within OVAAD itself and the groups that were subsequently formed, women were attempting to get away from male methods of operating and male defined structures. They reacted against

the development of 'leadership' roles and promoted committees on newsletters, media, calendars etc. where all the women were responsible to one another. This had its problems also, as one Black Asian activist in OWAAD and AWAAZ pointed out to me. Suraksha a Punjabi Indian woman described her experience in the groups in which she had been involved:

The other problem which I was unable to articulate then was that there was a lot of conflict about the issue of leadership in our groups. It's only when I went on some realism, when I began to understand what my Marxist ideology was, that I began to understand that issue ... it hasn't been resolved ... I think that's where the conflict is ... because in feminist theory you don't have leaders or leadership. But on the other hand when we're actually involved in activity, we found that certain people always had to take responsibility and that it was very heavy on them. And then at the same time, they were open to attack ... so that you felt completely torn up. On the one hand things had to be done, on the other hand if the responsibility was taken, then you were criticised and so it was very confusing; because feminism dictated that there should be no leaders and yet our practical experience showed that there had to be leaders.

Other women in OWAAD also felt that whilst the co-operative forms of organising enabled individual women to develop their political consciousness in a supportive way, it nevertheless:

... left too much space for dissension - for political shifts ... It was open for any small group to attempt to take over the organisation and move it in a different direction. (Brixton Black Women's Group 1984 : 84).

Thus women had to learn from their own experiences of what methods of organising suited them most, in individual groups. There was no universal answer.

OWAAD and most other Black women's groups throughout the country have promoted study groups as a way of developing the political consciousness of the members. In line with the Youth Movements however, they have not been able to develop a political programme with which the groups and its members adhere. The groups picked up issues spontaneously and then dropped them without developing an analysis of their involvement and practice.

Suraksha pointed out the contradictions of having a primarily activist group which also attempts to develop theoretically:

There's been different phases. First the agitational phase where we organised demonstrations and all that sort of thing, where we were very very active. In a way that reflected our groups. All of us suddenly reached political anger and consciousness very quickly. We started as a study group. We read things and discussed them and then suddenly, I think it was about the time the thing about sexual examinations came up; and also a lot of us were personally affected by this. Some of us were beaten up by the police at a personal level; and also encountered racism in white groups in our personal lives. We were very angry, we wanted to do things, we suddenly felt totally impelled into action. That was the period when we were most active. In February I think we had this demonstration at Heathrow. Then in March and April we were involved in a strike, in June we had a big demonstration on police brutality and immigration laws. So this was in 1979.

What happened? One of the problems we found was that we were forgetting our studying and developing our ideology got left behind I don't think any of us felt equipped to develop our ideology at that time. We didn't know what books to read, we really didn't know what to do.

Thus Black women's groups on the whole, remained spontaneous bodies which get involved with issues as they arise, campaign on them, and then drop them. The lack of any coherent programme and analysis means that they are mainly REACTIVE groups, with a basic aim of "fighting against racism and sexism, in the context of colonialism and imperialism". One of the reasons for this may be that the groups attempt to allow the maximum participation of all Black women, and to refrain from defining streamlined aims and objectives, which may cause women to draw away from the groups. Thus Southall Black Sisters, Birmingham Black Sisters (B.B.S.), Leeds and Sheffield Black Women's Groups do not as yet have a constitution to work to, although they have all existed for some years. In my view, this is because no other arena exists for women to express their politics as yet, and therefore the groups remain open. This is validated by the reasons given by women about why their groups were set up. There is no uniformity in the formation of the groups, except that they have an all Black women membership.

The BBS were formed on a voluntary basis by a group of women who just felt that 'there was a need in Birmingham for Black women to be able to meet if they wanted to'. In Reading women first conducted a research to find out what the needs of Black women were before they became a Black Women's Group. The Liverpool Black Women's group was formed "by

accident in the process of setting up a centre of our own" when MSC funding was provided for the premises. The Manchester Black Women's Group began as a research group. (Report Back from Black Women's Gathering, Birmingham 19.10.85). Nevertheless there is general consensus amongst group members about the type of activities in which they are involved in terms of broad anti-racist and anti-sexist issues. Hence the BBS have campaigned on issues of police brutality in the case of Margaret Parchment : racism of the legal system in the case of Iqbal Begum, and supported numerous local and national anti-deportation campaigns of both men and women, together with organising for the defence of those arrested in the Handsworth uprisings of 1985.

Funding

The aspect of funding has caused much controversy within Black politics as a whole. As we saw in the previous chapter, the funding for 'special' projects has provided one of the channels with which Blacks have become middle class. This has been seen as diverting the issues of Black people. It has been pointed out that the "project industry" has diverted the priorities of Black people's demands from "self organisation" against racist manifestations of immigration laws, arson attacks etc. to state "self help" funding. This has meant that "self organisation has become confused with political organisation" which also fragments the Black community, as each group seeks separate funding. Such separate organising has "become fused with being separatist" (P. D. Kashyap 1987 : 9), and has prevented the development of unity amongst the various groups.

Some women's groups went in for funding because they felt that "some women desperately need jobs" and the finance has provided a source of salaries (Black Women's Gathering 1985). Black Women's groups such as Southall Black Sisters, Liverpool Black women's groups have acquired funding to provide resources and centres for women wanting places for refuge or as meeting places. These are services that the government itself should provide, but the effects of racism and sexism are such that particular groups within the Black community, have had to take the responsibility to make this provision. This has prevented the waging of a concerted attack on the racism of the state service delivery agencies as 'strings' are attached by funders, which inhibit the benefactors from making political statements. Because of this, certain independent and autonomous groups have refrained from state funds. Birmingham Black Sisters stated in the Black Women's Gathering (1985) that "funding takes away our autonomy as we are then accountable to the funding body ... and takes away the sharing of skills and leads to imitations". As the group grew a membership fee was introduced for employed members, to enable a search for premises and to sustain the group without financial dependency.

Thus Black women have no one effective way of organising against their oppression.

...the localities in which these groups are based, the composition of the local community, the political evolution of a specific group, as well as the perspectives that the individuals within the group adopt, all inform the political bases of organising.
(P.Trivedi 1984 : 44).

Essentially, Black women's groups cannot be seen as a Black Women's Movement, as Madhu Kishwar pointed out at a meeting in Handsworth in 1984. She was asked by an Asian feminist as to what she thought of the Black Women's movement in Britain. This was Madhu's reply:

One should be careful about the vocabulary one uses. A political 'movement' is a political body that takes the mass of people with it. The Black Women's groups in Britain... They are very disintegrated. One of the reasons is separatism... they appear to reject the white feminists on the same terms as the latter did with men ten years ago. The vocabulary is the same, and I'm not sure whether we need to use the same stick to beat white feminists as we do men.

Kishwar noted the disunity and the individualism amongst the women in the groups.

.... There are too many neurotic quarrels. There is not creative but destructive energy. Black women's groups do not have soil and roots; its like a hot air balloon, which is common to a lot of radical movements. We need greater attempts to link ourselves to human beings. Impatience and tolerance, individualism is common. The language used is 'I' or 'for me' etc. If 'I' and 'me' is all that is important, then why join a group or have an organisation? The use of the word 'movement' is wrong. There is as yet, in my view, no Black Women's movement.

The political activities of fighting institutionalised racism, as a priority, has meant that the struggles of Asian and Black women generally, have been encapsulated by the overall Black struggles in which Black men have led. This is not a unique experience. During the anti-colonial movements in Third World countries, the specific women's issues often subsumed their priority in the interest of national unity. Third World women have a history of holding back their demands for fear of racist allegations; that Black men are more oppressive than whites:

So in view of the contradiction in Britain's position over the women's question, the difficulties in implementing reforms through the British government, and the use to which both British reforms on women's issues and Indian criticism of male dominance were put by British colonialists, it is not surprising that the Indian women's movement was reluctant to define Indian men as the main enemy and judged that the primary target should be the removal of the foreign power. (J. Liddle and R. Joshi 1986 : 32).

In this context Indian women allied with Indian men on a national basis. Similarly in Britain Black women have held back from attacking their male counterparts for fear of racist repercussions. They have come to the defence of Black men in attacking the racist notions of Black male sexuality as being 'rampant' and 'aggressive', and have shown unity in fighting against racist oppression - sometimes at their own costs:

At a practical level, events such as the uprisings had an enormous effect on many women. Black women took a leading role in some defence campaigns. Women were arrested and involved on the street ... their homes being broken into and destroyed Despite this, the input of women - as women - somehow became

marginalised. (Brixton Black Women's Group 1984 : 88).

This is because in a racist society, the boundaries of particular forms of racist and sexist oppression are not clearly demarcated, and priorities cannot always be singled out. As Black people, Black women must prioritise the struggle for their 'race' as well as their specific oppression as women:

Although we are feminist and lesbians, we feel solidarity with progressive Black men and do not advocate the fractionalisation that white women demand. Our situation as Black people necessitates that we have solidarity around the fact of race, which white women of course do not need to have with white men, unless it is their negative solidarity as racial oppressors. We struggle together with Black men against racism, while we also struggle with Black men about sexism. (quoted in Carby 1982 : 213).

This is why, in the interest of unity against racial oppression, Black feminists hold that:

The struggle (for survival) against racism in this country has often assumed priority in our political work. (P. Trivedi 1984 : 44).

But as Black women gain in strength and experience, they are not afraid of voicing the contradictions in their political organising. They now point out that the marginalisation of the feminist issues

pointed to uncertainty about what we were struggling for - or more correctly, what our priorities were. Overt feminism, that is raising the

question of women's specific oppression seemed sometimes inconsequential, eclipsed by the larger Black struggle. These ideas went back to the hayday of the Black movement, when it was felt women's issues or 'the woman question' was a secondary matter that could divide the struggle". (Brixton Black women 1984 : 88).

The fact that Black women are now openly discussing their organisational problems means that they are ready and willing to confront the issues DESPITE the racist consequences. The autonomous emergence of Black women's groups that we have seen, bear witness to this fact.

The contradictions within the unity between men and women have led Asian and Afro-Caribbean women, to organise separately from their men. This did not imply 'separatism' in the sense of bringing about change at the exclusion of men and white people. They wanted autonomy to create a 'favourable' position for Black women, to participate, to develop an understanding and an evaluation, of the intricacies involved in their subordination. It was held that Black, working class women, in fighting against their oppression would advance the cause of all other groups since all three factors of race, gender and class were embedded in their experiences. (A. Davis 1982).

In this vein, Saranjana a social worker and an activist, narrated her involvement with Asian men and argued for the autonomy of women.

As Asian women here, we have needs, not problems. I as a Black woman have to deal with living in a patriarchal society, added to which is the devaluation of being Black. There's

certain kinds of pressures which men and women face, and then additional ones for women because in general, some of the struggles and resistances, we have to do on our own, because men would divert. We wouldn't have the support of our men in general. I mean there are progressive men. I don't think one should point a picture of Asian society in which there are no progressive men... I was a part of a struggle to set up a refuge for Asian women. The workers had been appointed, the management committee was there. The Asian men, Black men who go around questioning white people's leading role ... and pointing out that Blacks are never given the chance to formulate policies... went and found white women and placed them on prestigious positions on the management committee. They said that Black women did not have the experience... They were very good on Black men and on race issues, but they couldn't apply the same principle to Black women ... they can't see Asian women running the show. So you can't always rely on them. These were men from the progressive wing of the IWA ... One of them was attacking us for even talking about women's refuge, alleging that we were Westernised and encouraging other women to leave homes, and their husbands.

The Need to 'Go it Alone'

Black Afro-Caribbean women felt it necessary to organise alone, as women, because the men had not taken account of their issues seriously.

The men certainly didn't understand anything about women's oppression. In fact they didn't have the faintest clue about it. Nearly everyone of them was a die-hard sexist. Some women were badly mistreated, but the way the leadership tried to deal with it ... Brothers were hauled up and disciplined, when what they needed was political education ... No attempt was made to seriously take up

women's issues, they just weren't considered immediately pressing ... Certain things did refer to women in a way, like the all women picket of the Old Bailey during the Mongrove 9 trial. But this wasn't about recognising women as a force in their own right, it was more about raising publicity for the campaign. (Bryan et al 1985 : 144).

This was borne out by the experience of some members of a Black women's group in Birmingham when they were involved in an anti-deportation campaign of a local Asian man. A woman representing her group on the campaign, found that she was often the only woman in the campaign, and as such found it difficult to express her concern as regards the way in which the meetings were held, and dominated by one particular man. When the criticism was voiced, with the possible ways of resolving this, the woman was not listened to and was accused of being facetious. Later it was also discovered that the deportee had been violent to his wife. The Black women's group eventually decided to leave the campaign because their experience had shown that the men would not take their complaints seriously. The men that women worked with politically did not understand the effect of sexism, and were not actively willing to work against this. Instead allegations were often made by them in Birmingham, that Black women were towing the white feminist line, and dividing the Black movement.

In a context of anti-colonial, anti-imperialist and anti-racist struggle, where the issues of women's subordination has been subsumed to the wider issues, we have noted that such allegations are embedded in the histories of Asia, Africa and Black America.

It has variously been alleged by traditionalist, political conservatives and even certain leftists, that feminism is a product of 'decadent' western capitalism; that it is based on a foreign culture of no relevance to women in the third world; that it is the ideology of women of the local bourgeoisie, and that it alienates or diverts women from their culture, religion and family responsibilities on the one hand, and from revolutionary struggle for national liberation on the other. (Jayawardena 1986 : 2).

Bell Hooks suggests that the problem is more fundamental:

Black leaders, male and female, have been unwilling to acknowledge black male sexist oppression of black women because they do not want to acknowledge that racism is not the only oppressive force in our lives. Nor do they wish to complicate efforts to resist racism by acknowledging that black men can be victimised by racism but at the same time act as sexist oppressors of black women. Consequently there is little acknowledgement of sexist oppression in black male/female relationships as a serious problem. (B. Hooks 1981 : 88).

Hence the experiences of Black women in this country are not isolated, or new, they form a continuous part of the historical struggles of Black people. The effects of racism forces a people to prioritise their struggle, so that certain aspects of that struggle have been subsumed to others. In this case, sexism has been subsumed under racism, which has at times been considered the 'main' struggle as it affects the whole race.

Afro-Asian Unity

We have seen that one of the prime forces of Afro-Caribbeans and Asians left-wing groups has been to develop the political concept of 'Black' unity. The personal and institutional racism and the colonial experience from which all non-white minorities suffer, form the basis of this unity. It has been recognised that this is a crucial aspect in the fight against racism, as "to do otherwise would be suicidal" (P. Trivedi 1984 : 39). This unity, however, has not been without its problems. As the Black struggle strengthens in this country, the members feel more confident to address the internal divisions within the Black community. Traditionally Black referred to Afro-Caribbeans who developed the idea of Black pride and 'Black consciousness' as a positive identity of resistance against enslavement and colonialism. In Britain Black refers to Afro-Caribbean and Asians who have shared the history of British colonialism and racism.

Some Afro-Caribbean individuals and groups such as Pan-Africanists have felt that Asians who use the notion 'Black' are feeding off the Afro-Caribbean struggles. This they see as being indicative of Asians who have usually acted as the mediators of colonial oppression in Africa, for example, and who continue to exploit Afro-Caribbean people in this country.

The recent discussion of Asian women in 'Mukti' acknowledges this difference between Asians and Africans as:

the part we Asians have played and continue to play in perpetuating white dominated racism against African Black people and ultimately against ourselves ... we Asians have colluded with white people in perpetuating apartheid in southern Africa. (N. Kazi 1987 : 16).

In some of my involvements in anti-deportation campaigns, when we used the term 'Black' to refer to Asian individuals in leaflets, we sometimes got abusive letters from Afro-Caribbeans, telling us to stop "feeding off the credibility of African people".

The contradictions of an Afro-Asian unity has and continues to be of crucial importance when Black women are organising. It was also a factor that contributed towards the demise of OWAAD, and is a matter of on going discussions within other groups. For example, a Black women's group in Birmingham has had several deliberations on the issues that the group organises around. The Afro-Caribbean women, at one stage felt that they were 'dominated' in the group by a majority of Asian women, who pursued primarily Asian issues such as anti-deportations and women organising in sweatshops. The matter has not been resolved but continues to be debated when and as the need arises. This has been previously highlighted by OWAAD's experience since it affected

the way in which concrete political situations affect the specific kind of analysis developed by a group ... This became important in itself because, whilst we all recognised such unity as an objective reality, we were unprepared to deal with the kind of differences between us, which resulted from our concrete experiences. (Brixton Black Women 1984 : 86).

The problems involved in identifying as Black and as Asian has had further ramifications. Some efforts to look at differences within communities have resulted in questioning what is meant by Asian. Differences amongst communities are being drawn upon as points of strength.

We have to recognise the way we, as Asians, are perceived by others. At one and the same time, we have to ask ourselves what the term Asian means to us, just because we are seen as Asians (or South East Asians) does not mean we have a unified identity or common aims with other 'Asians'... We have to overcome our prejudices through accepting our differences and drawing strength from them. (P.D. Kashyap, 'Mukti' Issue No. 6 1987 : 7).

Such distinctions have been necessary because the racist structure of Britain forces Black people to question their presence in this country, and puts them in a DEFENSIVE position, so that they REACT by justifying their existence, which in turn requires the articulation of an identity, and the building of solidarity between groups. The complications are shown in an Asian woman trying to establish where her solidarity lies:

why do I call myself a Black British woman of Indian origin and not simply an Asian woman? The word Asian has I feel been misused and come to mean something that it isn't. Yet, just as I am Black, I am also Asian, but so too are the Chinese, Malaysians, Japanese and other people of Asia. How can I claim the term Asian for myself only when I come from a very small part of Asia... In the final analysis I feel that it is this racist society and its hostility to me and the existence of all Black people which forces us to constantly question who we are, where we belong and why. It never allows us the security to just sit

back and be simply who we are without
justifying our existence. (Mumtaz
Karimjee 1987 : 8).

Until recently such questioning has been held back by Black women,
because of fears of racist ramifications. It is important and
significant that the issues are beginning to be addressed openly, so
that other individuals and groups do not feel isolated in posing such
questions. This can only advance their struggles.

The working class Punjabi women I interviewed were not members of any
political group, and on the whole did not see themselves as Black as to
them this implied Afro-Caribbean origins. When they talked about
immigration issues however, they pointed out that the government wanted
all 'kale' (Blacks) out of this country, and they included themselves in
this. All of the women expressed that Afro-Caribbeans were stronger in
fighting racism than Asians and they recognised this as a positive
feature of the former.

Amrit Wilson (1978 : 95) also found this to be the case:

I have a Jamaican friend, she says there
should be no difference if someone is
West Indian, Indian or African, we are
all black. She says that we Indian's
are not 'strict' enough. She says, 'If
a coloured girl tells you off, you are
grown up, you should give it back'. I
say, 'I might be the only one, while she
has five friends'. That's the trouble.
Indians are just one on their own. But
coloured girls, they make a gang and
defend each other or beat others up...
If only we could be like that! Then
things would change....

Sexuality

Earlier we saw how the notion of sexuality formed a major part of dissension on the part of Black women against white feminists.

Saranjana pointed this out to me:

Some Western women are hung up on the sexual expression, sexuality the physical act; women spend a lot of time on that. I think in terms of priorities, those sort of things for Black women, for myself, I wouldn't want to talk about how to achieve orgasm. I find it the least important part of my struggle as a woman. Just how to lead an independent life, in which dependence on men is not an integral feature, is enough for me.

In 1980, at a conference in Copenhagen, Nawal El Saadawi had this to say to white feminists.

... come and visit me in Beirut to suffer from the war, where we are bombed everyday by Israeli planes, where we hear shooting everyday, where we are physically unsafe, where we might be killed at anytime. How can we, in this situation, bother about whether we have an orgasm or not?. (N. Sadaawi 1980 : 177).

So sexuality, in this form was not a priority for Black women. Though poverty for Black people in Britain is not of the same extent, or nature as the Third World countries, it is nevertheless a strenuous struggle to maintain oneself materially. In Britain it is the economic AND the cultural survival that is under attack for Black people.

Black feminists, however, did address the racist notions of 'rampant' 'poignant' Black male sexuality, and the passive and erotic sexuality of Black women that is portrayed by racist connotations.

Previously Black women had interpreted their sexuality in the context of race, gender and class, and that:

... imperialist relations structured and determined ... the emotional, sexual, and psychological aspects of Black women's lives. (Brixton Black Women 1984 : 87).

However, this did not question the individual sexual orientation of women and hid it in the complexities of race and gender issues. The dissension between heterosexual and lesbian women had contributed towards the destruction of OWAAD. Black lesbians had felt that the heterosexual feminists had been very 'unfeminist' and 'exclusive' in their approach and isolated lesbians. It was suggested that one of the reasons for this may have been that heterosexual women had felt threatened of their potential lesbian sexuality (Carmen et al 1984 : 63).

Another reason posed is "fears of how the black men would see and label the organisation" as consisting of 'frustrated' Black lesbians worthy of dismissal.

Black women later realised that this had been a mistake, and that they had become victims of the 'communities' homophobia. They realised "the irony" of the situation.

it was supremely illustrative of the dependence on men, which we argued was a part of women's sexuality and oppression. (Brixton Black Women 1984 : 88).

Black lesbians are increasingly 'coming out' and resisting any form of discrimination in society. The various Black lesbian groups that have been set up and down the country is indicative of their developing strength. In Birmingham, Black lesbians have at least two small groups of their own, and are also a part of other organisations in which their sexuality is openly stated.

The women in my data did not feel that they could talk about their sexual lives, with the exception of Simarjeet who was experiencing some difficulties at the time:

My husband wants sex everynight. I can't take it anymore. I have been to the clinic and my doctor, but the doctor says, "what else do you want. Your husband loves you". But this isn't love. If he loved me he would listen when I say no. A few times I have had to sleep at the neighbour's house but he has dragged me out and we fight. There must be something wrong with him.

This oppressive nature of sexuality is not something that Black feminists have addressed as an issue to organise around. Though this may not be a priority, it seems that some Black women, at least, need information and support in their sexual lives.

Class

One of the dimensions that is only beginning to be discussed in Black women's groups is the aspect of class. It is only in 1987, when discussion about 'differences as strengths' is beginning, that class divisions amongst Black women is being discussed. In talking of self-help, 'Mukti' acknowledges how self-help mobilisation in the Black community has been 'highlighted' by "new community leaders, some business men or women and some aspiring political figures - in mobilising the voting power of our communities".

The sensationalism of some of the issues taken up by these suddenly concerned members of the Black community bear witness to the class, caste and religious differences which still divide our communities rendering us disunited against racism. (P.D. Kashyap 1987 : 9).

Mama also recognises the class differences amongst Black people.

Among Asians, two subgroups are additionally of interest. East African Asians had a particular relationship both with colonials (for whom they performed petit-bourgeois functions) and with the Africans (who rejected this role with the departure of the colonial masters). This is relevant to the status of this group today, who like the African elites enjoy a class position here which is often facilitated by links with capital 'back home'. (A. Mama 1984 : 24).

In general however there is minimal discussion on the aspect of how class divides Black women. As we have pointed out earlier, there is an assumed unity of Black women as being working class or as carrying 'the seeds of a working class consciousness'. This perspective makes a mockery of the framework of race, gender and class which seeks to analyse the position of Black women with regards to the three specific forms of oppression. In arguing that "all three factors are intrinsic to the day-to-day experiences of Asian women" Parmar (1982 : 238 and 269) goes on to suggest that Asian women be seen as a specific class category. The importance of providing a class analysis was seen by Liddle and Joshi when they found that middle class women shared class privileges with the men of their class and they distinguished them from the women in lower-class positions, whilst at the same time sharing gender subordination with other women. They suggest that class privileges of professional women:

are indicative of the ways in which class divisions outweigh gender divisions.

although there are:

limits to these freedoms, which professional women suffer because of their sex, despite their class... and which highlight the precedence of gender subordination over class privileges. (Liddle and R. Joshi 1986 : 116).

Hence, although there are similarities in the gender subordination of all women, there are areas of social life in which these similarities are underplayed by the class differences that women have amongst themselves.

Class distinctions amongst Asian and African women are becoming a structural feature in this country. Saranjana, a social worker and a political activist pointed out that:

there is an Asian middle class alright. At one level, it doesn't really matter if you are a Black barrister or a Black painter, because when you go to buy bread the most important thing about you is that you are Black. So as far as outsiders are concerned, blackness is an all important feature. But in terms of our own experiences, clearly middle class Asians have privileges, have the styles of life that are distinct from those of working class Asians.

In 1983 two Asians and one Afro-Caribbean, campaigned for the general election on behalf of the Conservatives. Pramila Le Hunt an Indian/Italian woman, represented the Handsworth constituency. In March 1987, the Conservatives sponsored an Asian Women's Conference at the Empire Suite of the Cafe Royal in London (The Independent 25.3.87 : 2). The Conference was organised by a woman Tory activist, Jasleyn Singh, and several hundred women were reported to have attended. In the 1987 General Election, four Black MPs were elected, three for the Labour Party. One of whom was an Afro-Caribbean woman - Diana Abbot, and one a

Black man for the Tories. Although the majority of the Black MPs represent the Labour Party (traditionally the workers party), clearly the demarcation of the Black middle classes is being reflected by the Black membership in the Conservative Party.

In my data, all the women, with the exception of one who was a teacher voted Labour. They also saw class distinctions between the rich and the poor.

Bimla said:

The rich don't feel the effects of inflation and rising prices. They have good comfortable and well paid jobs.

Asha confirmed this:

People in high offices think they are gods. They have nothing to be worried about. They should join the unemployment ques to feel what it's really like for us.

On a national basis, the members of Black women's groups are English speaking, young women who have been brought up in this country. A significant proportion have received higher education in Britain and therefore occupy professional occupations ranging from doctors, teachers and community workers. This is contrary to the reflection in my data, in which most of the women are educated only to a minimum standard.

Some Black women's groups have a good number of young women from working class backgrounds who are not highly educated and have worked in factories or are the long-term unemployed. Within a Black women's group in Birmingham, this is reflected in the membership, though the majority of the unemployed women are of Afro-Caribbean origins. The Asian women, on the whole are not of this background. The types of activities that this group has been involved with are anti-deportation campaigns (primarily of Asian men and women who have not been able to speak English fluently), and shop-floor struggles and domestic struggles of Asian women in Birmingham. The Black women's groups throughout the country have had similar membership and involvements. In Birmingham, the Asian members of the group do not on the whole live with their families. Many have left home via the channels of education, professional commitment or rebellion. Therefore they do not have a mobilising base on the factory floor or the family homes as regards to Asian women. This is reflected in the venue and the time arranged for the meetings of the group. Neither are suitable for women who have restrictions on their movement from their families or because of children. Such women would find little justification in explaining to their families the need to travel a long distance at late hours.

Thus in my view, the group caters for middle class and unattached women; not for the women whom it seeks to mobilise. As it stands, the Black women's group fails to be sensitive to working class, Asian women who are unable to communicate in the English language, since the meetings are held in English. Thus attempts to involve these women, to attend the meetings, have failed.

This insensitivity to Asian working class women can be illustrated by a personal example that comes to mind when some Asian women feminists were invited to an Asian male activist's house for a meal. The man lived in an extended family. On arrival the interaction that took place between people, somehow divided the women who thought it best to stay in the 'women's room' with the women of the family, and those who joined the men in the other room. This had clear implications on how the women of the family saw us, as 'liberated' as men. They could not therefore identify with us. They were surprised that some of us chose to stay with them and help them in the kitchen. In their view, this was not expected of 'political' women. Whilst with the women in the kitchen, issues were raised about campaigns and demonstrations about which they had heard through the men in the family. Whilst these topics were only superficially raised, they could have formed the basis for further contact and involvement with them. However, since the group does not have a political programme, it became difficult to discuss such issues within it. This leaves unresolved the contradiction, that a women's group is not able to attract the mass of women whom it seeks to mobilise neither on the factory floor, nor within the family. We have seen for example how the wives of the IWA members showed that their involvement in organised politics was restricted by their role in the family. Black women's groups cannot therefore mobilise such women who are thereby forced then to express their concerns about their community either in the temples, e.g. teaching Punjabi, maths, music, etc., or to be incorporated into the Workers Association. These points were recognised by Suraksha, a middle class feminist and activist:

There is also the issue of how you function within a community if you're a group like that ... because when you're working within a community you're encountering women who are very feudal in their approach ... Now are you going to tell them that they are reactionary ... or are you going to, through struggling with them, change their approach. They are two very different things. Are we always going to talk in English? Are we going to demonstrate our feminism by smoking, or other things. Now what has happened over issues like that is that the black women who have been politically involved, all of whom spoke English, some were middle class, have split up and moved into different directions, mainly towards radical feminism.

Occurrences such as these have enabled Black male activists to allege that the women involved in Black feminist issues are 'dominant' and 'middle class' women, who are isolated from the 'women on the street'. Though such allegations have been made as derogatory remarks, by men who have little sympathy with womens issues per se, there is some grain of truth in their statements. However, most Black women have reacted against these notions defensively. Firstly they deny their middle classness. It is suggested by some women that though Black people may appear to benefit from 'middle class' positions, essentially their position remains the same as the majority of Black people, in terms of their vulnerability to racist attacks ('Mukti' Editorial Issue No.4 1986).

Secondly they argue that Black people have fought hard and long to gain better education and better employment, so "since when did access to education and the fact that we occupy 'middle class' jobs automatically lead to petty-bourgeois politics?" (Brixton Black Women 1984 : 88). They maintain that they may have middle class origins, but their politics is of working class issues. A counter-attack is made on the grounds that:

our opponents are guilty of conflating two issues in the attempt to absolve themselves of the responsibility to challenge women's oppression. (Ibid).

The essence of this counter-attack has some validity, as not all Black men making the allegations hold solidarity with Black feminist issues, as we have seen. In the past, however, such allegations have been made against the white women's movement also, and Black feminists, have expected more constructive answers.

Some of the above concerns are recognised by a few Black women's groups, but the solutions are not easy to find. The Sheffield, Liverpool and Manchester groups expressed that outsiders often saw them as being 'experts', 'organised' and 'articulate', 'educated and therefore patronising' ('Report Back from Black Women's Gathering' : Birmingham 19.10.85). It is clear that such fears arise from the non-participation of the mass of working class Black, and specifically Asian women in the groups. (I am not able to make the same observation for Afro-Caribbean women as more working class women of this origin are in these groups

than Asians. Perhaps one of the reasons for this is that their language does not differ from the one used in group meetings so that they are able to understand what is going on. Furthermore, the family restrictions on the movement of Afro-Caribbean women do not operate to the same extent or in the same way as for Asian women, and this may lead to facilitate a greater participation on the part of Afro-Caribbean women).

The lack of involvement by working class Black women has also been noted in Third World countries, and it is felt that adoption of Western methods of operating have contributed towards this:

Many young women from the Third World, having come to Europe or America to complete their studies, return to their countries and try to engage in the kind of feminist struggles they have witnessed in the west. Their concern to liberate themselves and their sisters is quite legitimate, but their ways of proceeding separates them from their own community; involuntarily, they see it only from the outside and cannot describe it in familiar or adequate terms. The result is that they are not understood by the women of their country; they have effectively become 'westernisers'. (J. Mincez 1980 : 13).

Asian feminists who have learnt about feminism from the west, and operate in 'westernised' ways, often neglect the histories of their own societies in which the struggle of women has also been waged through the centuries. In my view they need to make themselves more aware of their

own histories to be able to work with working class women whose politics they represent, and be able to relate this knowledge to them. In order to enable working class Asian women to express their own political demands, it is not sufficient for middle class westernised women to represent working class politics. They must mobilise working class women.

In observing that village women in India do not draw upon the same ideals of femininity as cityite or urban women, Madhu Kishwar points out that:

Those of us who wish to combat or reject these ideals have, however, been largely ineffective because we tend to do so from a 'Western modernist' standpoint. The tendency is to make people feel that they are backward and stupid to hold values that need to be rejected outright. We must learn to begin with more respect for traditions which people hold dear. We have to make the effort to develop an understanding of why these images of Indian women have such power over the minds and hearts of women themselves. We need to begin to separate the devastating aspects from the points of strengths within the cultural traditions, and start using the strengths to transform the traditions. (M. Kishwar 1984 : 46).

To make this type of analysis, one needs to search into the annals of history and understanding the specific forms of ideals of femininity etc. that are used, and to provide alternative positive images for women. Afro-Caribbean and Black American women have begun and succeeded

in providing this information (Bryan et al 1985; A. Davis 1982; Bell Hooks 1981). Asian women in India are working on this, (K. Jayawardena 1986; J. Liddle and R. Joshi 1986; 'Manushi' since the early 1980s), but only minimal attempts have been made by Asian women in Britain (P. Trivedi 1984).

There are complications in looking at the concept of class with regards to Black people. Many young women (and men) who do occupy middle class positions actually originate from working class parents who still work in factories or constitute the long-term unemployed. Thus even within the family, there may be class divisions amongst the members. This should not, however, negate the fact that a middle class presence is evident.

Another relevant factor for class analysis is that the nature of class struggle amongst Black people is distinct from the white Western working class because of the effects of imperialism and racism. These effects promote a cultural expression of resistance amongst Black people, since capitalist domination is experienced in the form of racial oppression. For example, homework, which we discuss in Chapter four, is a process in production but it assumes a racially specific-form. High rates of unemployment produce a larger surplus of population in the Black communities. This implies that there is a racial aspect to class, that it is not shared by the majority of the white working class. The white working class has made material gains from the exploitation of Third World countries and Black people in this country. It has raised their living standards.

In countering the effects of colonialism, imperialism and racism, Black people have historically recognised their 'power to constitute themselves as an autonomous social force in politics' (P. Gilroy 1982 : 284). Moreover, as Gilroy points out, racist terms such as Coons, Pakis, Nig-nogs, Wogs are constructed IN CULTURE, and therefore require a cultural resistance. For Black people, this has historically been the case. Sivanandan contends that

.... it is cultural resistance which takes on new forms ... in order fully to contest foreign domination. But culture in the periphery is not equally developed in all sectors of society ... it does have a mass character at the economic level, different exploitation in the different modes confuse the formal lines of class struggle but the common denominators of political oppression make for a mass movement. Hence the revolution in these countries are not necessarily class, socialist revolutions - they do not begin as such anyway. They are not even nationalist revolutionaries as we know them. They are mass movements with national and revolutionary components - sometimes religious, sometimes secular, often both, but always against the repressive state and its imperial backers (Sivanandan 1982 : 158-159).

Black people in Britain have brought with them the legacies of their political, economic and ideological struggles of their countries of origin. Their experiences of colonism and imperialism continue to be backed-up by the effects of racism. Their struggles against the various forms of racist oppression have developed the community, rather than

class, as the axis of organisation, and thus has left the analysis of class differentiation within the community, at abeyance.

For Black consciousness, therefore, the race struggle and the class struggle cannot be empirically separated. Yet class dimensions are evident within the Black communities, and need to be discussed, analysed and tackled.

Impetus for Change

Despite the shortcomings of most Black women's groups, their existence has precipitated other mass organisations such as IWAs and PWA(B) to initiate a more rigorous effort to involve women (and the youth) in their organisations. In Birmingham, these two Workers Associations have recognised the need to draw into the organisations, the interests of the Asian youth and women. In doing so, they have indirectly acknowledged their previous failings, and are now in a process of developing their politics on the youth and women.

In Birmingham, the IWA and PWA(B) have set up their own women's sections where the latter meet separately and organise other women. In both these organisations the membership of the women's sections consists of professional educated women such as teachers, social workers etc., and sometimes they are the same women who constitute the Black women's groups. However, by the virtue of the organisation, they have a wider base in which to operate, and are able to work on a political programme, which has not been possible within the Black women's groups to date.

In my view there are advantages and disadvantages of this situation for women.

ADVANTAGES:

1. The women have a wider basis for contact with working class women, through the male members of the organisation.
2. By joining a specific organisation based on national origins, the women may be able to clarify particular cultural and other distinctions between Asians. Such distinctions can be a source of strength, by establishing identity, rather than a source of weakness and division.

DISADVANTAGES:

1. Women find that they have to work within the broader political framework and programme of the organisation which may limit their own development as women, if their issues are subsumed to the 'wider struggle'.
2. It is only possible to work directly with women from a particular national background, e.g. Indian, Punjabi or Pakistani etc. This conflicts with the notion of Black unity,

unless efforts are made to work with other women from other groups and organisations also.

The membership of women in IWA (1986) and PWA(B) (1984) has been a recent development in Birmingham. To date both organisations have held public meetings on male violence and attracted a few hundred working class Asian (Indian or Pakistani) women to the meetings. (Black women's groups per se, have not been able to attract so many women to their meetings over the years).

The women's sections of either organisations have not made any efforts to coalesce their activities, or work with other Black women's groups, or with other Workers Associations.

The Punjabi women of the IWA are professional women like their counterparts in the Birmingham Black women's group, but their social lives on the whole are of a different style. The Indian Punjabi women of the latter group are mainly single, living alone away from their parents. The women of the IWA are married, albeit unconventionally, and have children. They are therefore more respected by the Indian Punjabi community whereas the others are considered 'anomalies' as single women. Furthermore, the IWA women have access to the wives of the male members (and sympathisers' of the IWA) to attend their meetings and groups.

In April 1986, the IWA women's section held a meeting on domestic violence. Some two hundred women, and a hundred men attended, and women who had actually experienced violence in the home took the stage. They

read out their experiences and read poems that they had written on the subject. The women members of the IWA gave a history of women struggling in Britain.

The organisational and political differences between the Indian Punjabi women of Birmingham Black Sisters, for example, and those of the IWA are primarily ideological. The former see little point in working with white and male organisations because they believe that ultimately their issues will be subsumed to struggles against the class and racism. The latter women of the IWA are willing to work with both groups. The IWA women have concentrated on looking at the 'feudal practices' of the Indian family life. The women of the Black groups take offence at such terms since they imply underdevelopment, and have looked at the racism that Black families face in this country. The possibilities of the two working together seem remote, though both groups have constructive contributions to be made. The best mode of organising, for Black women, therefore remains unclear, and will depend on the politics of particular women in the groups and organisations and the context in which they are set.

To date, other branches of the PWA(B) have made attempts to recruit Pakistani women in other cities. They have some members in Manchester. The IWAs, elsewhere do not have other women members to my knowledge. It appears that where both Workers Associations and Black women's groups have a significant impact in local politics, the former show signs of recruiting the latter. The extent to which individual women join the Association depends on the particular politics of their groups and

themselves - that is whether there is a belief in Black politics and/or Asian/National politics. The local politics of the Workers Associations also play an important role in attracting or rejecting women.

The pointers to success will be the capabilities of the group(s) or the Associations to mobilize Asian working class women themselves.

Conclusion

This chapter provides a historical examination of Black people's resistance against the various forms of their oppression. We have focused on the temple activism of Asian women, the role of Workers Associations, youth movements and Black Women's organisations. It is argued that the struggles of Asian and other Black women have to be understood in terms of their race, gender and class subordination. We have seen that the political organising of Asian feminists has been integrated into the wider 'Black' feminist struggles. The Black feminist literature reflects the experiences of its attendant politics. Black feminists, as such, argue against the 'modernists' and the white feminists, who in promoting the passivity and the false sisterhood of Asian and other Black women, ignore the powerlessness of their position.

The data showed that Asian women are not a homogeneous category, they vary in geographical and class origins, and therefore the advancement of any stereotypical view is incorrect.

The impact of the arrival of Asian women into Britain was the formation of a community. Their presence developed the notion of settlement of the families as opposed to individual sojourners. It therefore allowed the development of Asian shops, temples, supplementary schools etc. around which the resistance of the Asian communities was formed. Asian women were at the forefront of resistances such as against racism within schools and immigration legislations. They were not passive women as the racist stereotypes have indicated. They have a history of resistance which traces back to the anti-colonial movement in their home countries.

The organised politics of Asian and other Black feminists were influenced both by the racism of white people, and by the sexism of Black men. Racism, which was built on imperialism, united Black people as a group in their struggle against racist subordination, from which white people of all classes benefited. Black unity was essential in the struggle against racism, but this unity obscured class and gender distinctions within the Black community. The priority allocated to anti-racist struggle inhibited the identification and the analysis of gender and class differences.

The experience of Black feminists had shown that the white feminist movement was unable to represent the experiences and the political demands of their Black 'sisters'. We have seen how Asian men were not able to encapsulate the demands of Asian feminists because they lacked 'Black' and feminist politics, and were primarily concerned with immigration and shopfloor issues.

Asian feminists therefore had to organise separately as Black women. However, Asian feminist organisations tended to be young, middle class and educated. They tended to adopt western methods of organising and had no mobilising base on the shopfloor. Furthermore, they could not relate to the working-class women in the family. This could be partly due to the different economic and social backgrounds of the two groups. The majority of the older working-class Asian women came from a precapitalist system of production, which was still heavily influenced by 'feudal' practices in crucial areas and where the traditional forms of female dependency were exercised in terms of deference to men in the family. Most of the middle-class feminists came from urban areas, with a predominantly capitalist mode of production which was based on a more individualistic approach. This has meant that working-class Asian women have not been incorporated into Asian feminist organisations. Working-class Asian women have therefore had to express their resistance against racism in the temples or Workers Associations - neither of which recognise the specific oppression of women.

Feminist struggle for Asian women is different from that of white women since racism and imperialism structure gender subordination. Concepts of patriarchy, family, dependency and sexuality, therefore, cannot be applied to Black and white women in the same way, since the family has become a source of resistance as well as oppression for Black women. For example, the effects of racism have meant that many Black women cannot practice their reproductive rights, and this means that a feminist struggle for abortion must include the struggle for reproductive rights also. Moreover, sexuality, though important in the

subordination of Black women in the family, does not present the same concerns as those expressed by white feminist groups. Black feminist organisations have not yet organised around this issue of the sexual subordination of women in the family because their prime concern has been to confront institutional racism.

Class struggle also differs for Asian women than for white women since racism and imperialism also structure class relations. For example, some of the ramifications of racism and imperialism are that Asian women have been differently subjected to the imperialist and pre-capitalist relations of rural India; the capitalist relations expressed through racist forms in Britain; and the predominantly middle-class relations of East African Asians developed in East Africa. All of these ramifications have produced different class experiences for Asian and other Black women which are distinct from the experiences of white women. Class struggle is an issue for Asian women, but it is minimally recognised or discussed in Black women's organisations, who fight racist and sexist issues, but are hampered by class divisions.

In organising as Black women, they tried to get away from male methods of proceeding, but the alternative collective or group methods were also problematic. The groups were also unable to develop a political framework as they organised spontaneously on issues in the form of campaigns, and dropped them as soon as the campaign was completed. They were DEFENSIVE and REACTIVE groups. In some ways, the absence of a political framework was a 'natural' failure in the groups, since the

groups formed the only available channels in which Black women were able to express themselves as such. The groups therefore allowed the maximum participation of Black women, and therefore found it necessary to remain 'open'. The politics of the groups defined their access to funding by authorities and therefore their dependent or independent nature accordingly, and meant that there is no one way of organising.

In building 'Black' unity, problems occurred in expressing the Afro-Asian unity. The formation of Black unity is politically necessary for Black people to counter racism as a united force. The practical expression of such unity has posed difficulties and has led to alternative means to arrive at this solidarity. It has led to the analysis of 'differences' within the Black communities as points of 'strengths' rather than divisions. In this context, the differences of class origins amongst Blacks is only beginning to be looked at, it has not yet received adequate attention.

The advent of the youth movements and the Black womens groups, as political forces in their own rights, have recently influenced some Workers Associations to recruit Asian youth and women. For Asian feminists this has opened up avenues and potentials to work with working class women, but there are also potential problems of being encapsulated in the wider anti-racist struggles at the expense of feminists issues. There is therefore a need for the women in Black women's groups and those in Workers Associations to work closely together. To date this has not been expressed in reality.

CHAPTER 3

EMPLOYMENT

This Chapter looks at the position of (Indian) Punjabi working class women in the labour market in Handsworth, Birmingham. We begin by critically examining the applicability of the concept of the 'reserve of labour', to explain the role of Punjabi women in employment. We then look at some of the considerations that women take into account when seeking employment, followed by the experiences of these women in the workplace. The work place experiences are divided in the following way:-

- a. Women working in white owned firms.
- b. Women working in Asian owned sweatshops.
- c. Women working in their own home as "homeworkers".

It is argued that aspects of race, gender and class define the forms of employment that are available to Asian women, and that racism constructs and makes use of particular aspects of Asian women's domesticity. The formal and informal spheres of production are converging in the case of some of the Punjabi women in this study. The evidence suggests that an increasing number of Asian women are being forced to take up employment

within their own communities, in Asian sweatshops, super-markets and as homeworkers. An emerging feature of this is that the relations of a predominantly pre-capitalist or semi-capitalist, economy are being adapted to suit the need of a highly industrialised and mechanised capitalist society. The dominant, capitalist mode of production is adapting to, and manipulating the semi-capitalist relationships. Asian women are at the centre of this manipulation. Furthermore, the lack of state legislation places Asian women in a particularly vulnerable position. This is contrary to much of the literature which suggests that the cultural restraints and peculiarities of Asian women prevent them from participating in the general production process.

The starting point in this study is to look at the role of Punjabi women in production, rather than the cultural features which are purported to hinder their participation in this process.

Women and the Industrial Reserve Army of Labour

One of the ways in which Western feminists have tried to explain the waged labour of women generally, is in terms of the industrial reserve army of labour (IRAL). This is based on the distinction and separation of domestic labour from wage labour. In this conceptual framework, gender divisions assign the role of domestic labour to women, within the home, and wage labour to men in the 'public' domain. Women's domestic labour in patriarchal capitalist society, is seen to produce use values in terms of cooking, cleaning, providing emotional support, etc. The use values are said to contribute towards the production and

reproduction of the "necessary labour power" required by capital in the production of commodities. This subsistence production of women is estimated to contribute 20 percent to 40 percent of the national income vital for production industries (Carby 1982). However married women as primarily domestic labourers, are assumed to be financially dependent upon the male wage. The production and reproduction of women, as women, is therefore not dependent on their OWN income. They are dependent on the male wage. It is argued that the state re-inforces this dependency by legislations, perpetuating policies such as Supplementary Benefits which entitle women to welfare benefits as secondary citizens. The dependency of women's cost of production and reproduction on the male is seen to be advantageous to capital because:-

1. By contributing towards the production and reproduction of the male labour power, the average value of all labour power is reduced. By depressing all wages it allows an increase in the rate of exploitation of workers.
2. It enables women's labour power to have a lower value than that of men because women are dependent, partly, on the male wage.
3. Women can, therefore be paid less than the value of average labour power in their wages.

The proponents of this concept (Beechey 1977) suggests that the primacy of women's domestic role in the home enables them to function as a disposable, flexible and competitive labour force. Thus they form an

industrial reserve army of labour, to be used or disposed of, as and when capital requires. During periods of rapid expansion capital needs an extra supply of cheap labour, and women are available for this. When capital does not require the services of women any more, they can be conveniently put back into the hub of the family. Women are therefore not dependent on the state as the unemployed and under-employed. When women's employment is terminated, they often do not register as unemployed and many do not know of this right.

In this study, when asked if women had registered at the Unemployment Benefit Office after leaving work, twelve commented to this effect:

What for? Women don't sign on. My son signs on and my daughter did when she left school. I look after the children.... I don't need to sign.

We do housework where do you go?
[to sign on].

Women who had never been employed, had never registered as unemployed. Thus the gender division of labour gives priority to women's domestic responsibilities. It implies that even when women are unemployed, they have 'other' work to do as carers, albeit of little financial value to them.

As a dependent, disposable, flexible, cheap labour force, women are placed in the least organised, least paid and most menial, monotonous, degrading and dirty jobs. The state sets the framework for the exploitation of Black women in legislation such as sex discrimination, Employment Protection Acts and Immigration Acts.

Migrants and the Industrial Reserve Army of Labour

Similarly, the rate of migrant labour has been encapsulated within the notion of IRAL. A migrant is also partially dependent on his or her production and reproduction in the home country. Castles and Kosack (1973) have argued that because capital does not bear the full costs of producing 'immigrant' labour, together with the effects of racism, it has helped to heighten the exploitation of migrant workers. Consecutive Immigration Acts since the 1960s have defined and controlled the relationship of immigrants to the labour market in Britain. The voucher system of the 1960s and the work permits of the 1970s have progressively reduced the number of immigrants available in the labour force. The 1971 Immigration Act formed the basis of contract labour whereby migrants would be placed in the country for a short period of time for the duration of specific employment. Sivanandan (1976) argued that the present position of Black migrants is akin to that of '... indentured labourers' used during colonialism in Africa and the Americas. Others (Phizacklea and Miles 1980) have argued that migrant labour has become a permanent feature of a cheap labour supply in Western Europe and Britain. It has also been argued that the 'racialization' of labour and racial discrimination assigns unskilled, low paid jobs to migrant and Black labour, allowing the skilled and less arduous tasks to be taken up by white workers. Reports show that more than thirty percent of the employers discriminate against Black youngster and that Black youth have to have three times as many interviews as whites for jobs for which they are qualified (U. Prashar. 1984:4-6)

Problem of the Industrial Reserve Army of Labour

Central to the notion of both the cheap supply of female labour and immigrant labour, is the concept of reproduction. This notion has been subjected to various criticisms. Anthias (1980) has pointed out that in taking an economic view, Beechey has neglected the "legal and ideological changes, state activity, changes in the family structure and so on that need to be taken into account", when analysing women's position in the labour market. Parmar (1982) suggests that Beechey's economic version "obscures and marginalizes the relative autonomy of the ideological and political structures that operate to determine when, where and how women workers will be employed". Both critics emphasise the need to "look at the wider historical and ideological structures" which define what "particular groups of human subjects, with certain characteristics (whether sex or race) fill particular places in society and specifically in the labour process". Burawoy (1980) challenges Castles and Kosack in arguing that in analysing the cheap supply of migrant labour, one must ask the question of "cheap for whom?". Furthermore, an examination is required into analysing exactly which aspects of the costs of reproduction are reduced, and what the economic and political costs of reproduction are of a system of migrant labour. It is not enough to merely point at the "excessive exploitation" of particular forms of labour". The role of migrant labour is "defined by the separation of the processes of maintenance from those of renewal" since they occur in geographically different locations.

I note the following shortcomings of the IRAL concept:

Since the discussion has centred around white western women and migrant male labour, the analysis of Black migrant women has been omitted. For example, Asian women came to Britain in their adult lives. Therefore they have been partially dependent on the home countries for their production and reproduction, as migrants, and are currently dependent upon their husbands, in some cases. How is this double reduction in costs of production and reproduction for capital, to be understood? As yet I am not aware of any discussion on this point.

Another problem left unresolved by the concept of IRAL is the returnability of women to the home. It is argued that the reserve army is only used in periods of capitalist expansion. This notion implies the existence of full-employment and assumes that women themselves do not need to find employment once returned to the domestic domain. Though the state may attempt to place women at home when the need arises, in reality many women do need to work for their mere survival. This is particularly the case for Asian women. The Unit of Manpower Studies findings show that women born overseas are more likely to be full-time workers than those born in the U.K. (Lomas 1973). In terms of unemployment however, the CRE has shown that unemployment rates amongst the Black community are twice as high as the white population in the inner city. The 1985/86 Inner Area Study of Handsworth shows that the local unemployment rate was 38 percent and 56 percent of those unemployed had been out of work for more than a year. It was noted that unemployment rates for non-whites was almost twice as high as those of white women in the area. In the West Midlands the Labour Force Survey 1985 found that 30 percent of non-whites were unemployed compared with

11 percent of whites. On a national scale, Blacks comprise 4.4 percent of the total population but unemployment amongst this group is twice as high as that of whites (Departments of Employment Gazette 1985). The unemployment rate for women on a national basis is 8.9 percent but for non-white women the rate is 15.8 percent. Pakistani and Bangladeshi women have an unemployment rate of 19 percent and for Indian women that rate is 17.7 percent. A study also noted that of all the working women in manufacturing industries, half of them worked in few major areas: food, drink, clothing, footwear, textiles and electrical engineering (quoted in Parmar 1982). Their jobs are concentrated in the low paid sector. Black women are also over-represented in this sector.

This chapter will show that in many cases the employment of Punjabi women is unrecorded. In this respect, the above studies under-estimate the real effects of waged work of women. On the one hand the state and ideological notions may replace women back into the home, but on the other, the lack of material resources may force women to take up whatever form of employment that is available - be it legal or illegal.

Bruegel (1979) suggests that the greater 'disposability' of women in the labour market, during periods of crisis must be questioned. She argues that part-time women workers have taken the major brunt of job losses. The expansion of the service sector, on the other hand, has very much relied on the cheapness of female labour and has 'protected' women in this sector from unemployment. This has been possible because the cheap supply of female labour has prevented a major recruitment of male workers into this area. Bruegel predicted, however, that with

increasing technological advances of microprocessors this 'protection' would be eroded because the advantages of women's cheap labour to capital would be rendered irrelevant.

Rubery (1980) draws upon the dual labour market theory and argues that the labour market is segmented and that women constitute only one group in the secondary sector. She builds on Braverman's (1974) theory of technological developments producing a deskilling process under capitalism. It is argued that deskilling threatens the displacement of some workers who are thereby faced with the necessity of strengthening their bargaining position over other workers. Rubery contends that workers in the past have sought to control the supply of labour both into specific industries and occupations. Such controls, she argues, can be exercised to the exclusion of certain groups such as migrants and women. This exclusion of specific groups can in turn intensify competition within the excluded sector and create segmentation in the labour market on "primary" and "secondary" lines. The argument provides a useful tool for the analysis of immigrant and female labour since it emphasises both the impact of capitalist expansion, and the role of the more powerful sections of the working class. It does not, however, explain why and how particular groups in the labour market come to be in particular positions.

Hartmann (1979) attempts to explain the specific position of women by referring to patriarchy (which pre-dates capitalism) and argues that this places women in a subordinate and segregated sphere because of a pre-established sexual division of labour. She contends that men of all

classes benefit from the maintenance of this segregation, in which women are given lower wages to promote dependency upon men, and which reinforces women's role as domestic labourers. The domestic division of labour limits the opportunities available for women in the labour market, and this in turn maintains their domesticity within the home. Hartmann illustrates that men of all classes benefit from the inferior position of women by showing how capitalists have manipulated women and men by providing distinct job opportunities for both at particular times when it was profitable for them to do so. She demonstrates that working class men have also benefited from the subordination of women when trade unions have attempted to limit and control the participation of women in the labour market. Again, this theory is helpful in showing that the working class itself can act as a divisive force, rather than the capitalist class alone. One of the pitfalls of this argument is that it does not endeavour to explain why race can also be used to segregate immigrant Black labour. Black male trade unionists have not had the same power within the trade union movement, or within the labour market, to enable us to make a fully fledged statement that they have actively maintained the subordination of Black women in the labour market. Nevertheless, in some instances, as we shall see in chapter 4, the indirect consequences of Asian trade unionists can have a similar effect of keeping Asian women in inferior sectors of the labour market.

Asian working class women are in my view in the most vulnerable position in the labour market. Joshi (1982) has argued that all women cannot be

seen as homogeneous and that a variety of reasons may exist for the fluctuations in women's employments.

Certainly, Asian women are aware of their extreme exploitation but as yet a conceptual framework for an analysis is lacking.

Obviously, the indication is that the position of Black women in the labour market cannot be explained in the same way as that of white women. Imperialism, race, gender and class must form an intergral part of the IRAL of Black women if it is to be at all useful for understanding their position.

Asian feminists have pointed out that the domesticity of Asian women is used by the forces of the labour market as a "cheap, passive and compliant" supply of workers.

The manual dexterity of the oriental female is famous the world over. Her hands are small and she works fast with extreme care; who, therefore, could be better qualified by nature and inheritance to contribute to the efficiency of a bench assembly production line than the oriental girl? (quoted in Parmar 1982 : 260).

Asian women are aware of the basis of this extreme exploitation:

As Asian women in this country our right to paid employment apart from being seen in terms of our domestic role, is also seen in terms of our position as 'immigrants', as non-indigenous women, with the resultant restrictions and denials of our rights with regard to paid employment. (Sarin 'Mukti' No. 4 : 14 1985).

In relation to white women Asian women recognise that their position in the labour market is defined by race, gender and class.

Whatever the inbuilt ideology, the hard facts of unemployment, affect us "black" women in this country, more seriously than they do white women since our labour is considered to have less value than theirs, and because our basic rights to employment are restricted (Ibid).

It has been argued (Davis A. 1982) that the notion that women's paid labour reflects the work that is carried out in the home, is not true of Black women. The data in this thesis suggests that for some Punjabi women (in the light engineering industries) their employment did not mirror their domestic labour. For others (in the sweatshops) however, the work performed for a wage was an extension of the work expected of women at home.

This suggests that with the continuing increase in the sweatshop sector, the nature of women's waged and unwaged labour will increasingly converge.

Another perspective states that the paid work that Asian women perform be seen in terms of the socio-cultural explanations - lack of skills and qualifications; language problems and patriarchy which culturally prevents women from participating in work outside the home (V. Khan 1979, Kaira 1980, R. Desai 1963).

Though these factors do hold some significance, as we shall see, the question one should ask is why and how the labour market is able to use Asian women in the paid productive activity.

Sheila Allen (1980) suggested that "factors other than culture" play some part in whether women work or not. She points to factors such as age and marriage but she does not question the position of Asian women's work from the stand point of the labour market.

Punjabis in Handsworth

Most of the migrants from the Indian sub-continent came to Handsworth in the late 1950s or in the 1960s during the post war boom period.

Smethwick, an area which is now in Sandwell, but in close proximity to Handsworth, attracted many Asian men into the heavy metal industries which have now declined. Public transport, British Rail and the West Midland Buses, were another major area into which Black (Asian and African) men were recruited.

The Indian Punjabis, were amongst the first men (followed by Pakistanis) to sponsor their dependants, their parents, wives and children. The light engineering industry in Birmingham, (locks, jewellery, kitchenware) absorbed the Punjabi women's labour from the late 1960s and early 1970, whilst the NHS took in more Afro-caribbean women.

The Labour Force Survey of 1981 (HMSO 1982) revealed that nationally 33.7 percent of working Indian women were employed in semi and unskilled

manual occupations, compared with 34.3 percent of Pakistani or Bangladeshi women.

Work and Women in Handsworth

Almost all the women, (approximately 93 percent) had experienced a productive role both in their homeland (Punjab) and in Britain. When asked if they had 'worked' in the Punjab, thirty-four women usually replied in the negative. One possible explanation of this is that 'work' in its present context implies wage labour and specific relationship between an employer and the employed - a capitalist relationship. Secondly the work that women performed for a wage there was an extension of the type of tasks they would carry out as a part of their housework. At the first questioning, the type of reply received was:

No, we don't work there. We stayed at home and looked after the house.

Further probing often revealed that women did make financial contributions to the household.

My husband was in Africa. He sent us money from there. Then in my spare time I used to spin cotton on the "Charraka" (spinning wheel) and then go and sell it to a nearby mill, every few month.

Seeso recalled:

The money we received from my husband and father-in-law (from Britain) wasn't sufficient to manage. We used to knit

sweaters and baskets and sell them in
the bazaar.

Most of the anthropological and sociological literature on Asian women in Britain stresses the incapacity of Asian women to earn a livelihood. Constraints and restraints of culture are generally emphasised, stipulating that Asian women are not allowed to go out to work due to patriarchal control of their husbands and families (Khan 1979). The productive experience of Asian women in Britain is often portrayed to be an innovation of the West.

Parmar (1982) points out that in the Third World countries themselves, 83 percent of the female labour force is employed in agriculture and that a majority of:

Asian women who originate from the
Indian subcontinent come from a rural
socio-economic background....

At some point in their lives, most of
them have played key roles in running
the family's subsistence (Parmar 1982 :
255).

She points out that women who work for the agricultural or the non-agricultural sector, like many women in the West find themselves in the low paid, non-unionised sectors of the economy, because their employment opportunities are more limited than for men. Official statistics from India indicate that in 1984 there was an increase of 25.2 percent in women working in non-agricultural sectors (Ibid).

In my view, however, on arrival in Britain, it is not being productive for economic gains that is new, for women, but the particular exploitative relationship between wage labour and the capitalist employer. This experience is only relevant to those who come from the villages of Punjab directly. Women who come from East Africa, though they may not have been waged workers, have nevertheless experienced a commercial and a waged society, by virtue of their middle class position in the middle ranges of the colonial economic set up in Africa. (Wilson A. 1978). I argue that with the advent of 'homework' as a major force of employment amongst Asian women, the distinction between production and reproduction is becoming very blurred.

We now go on to look at some of the factors that form important considerations for women seeking employment.

Work for Survival

Most working class Asian women within the West Midlands are to be found in four major areas of work.

1. Light engineering industry primarily controlled by white employers.
2. Clothing trade (sweatshops), and food supermarkets, and now footwear manufacture which is also increasingly Asian controlled within the inner city areas. Young school leaving-age girls are usually concentrated in the retails. Chrisna Seetha (1975) found this to be true in her study "Girls of Asian Origin in Britain".

3. Homeworkers - manufacture of garments within the home.
4. In the last few years women are also being employed as farm labourers e.g. strawberry picking etc. where transport is provided at the workers' cost.

The contention that women work primarily for 'pin money' was refuted in this data. Like Rajvinder, who has two children, and whose husband also worked said:

We couldn't manage financially, so I took the job. No one else will pay your bills for you.

Shanti has four children under the age of ten, her husband also works:

Before, the whole family could cope with just one person earning, but now we can't manage on that. Prices are so high.

Women did not have the choice to work for 'pin money'. Their earnings formed an integral part of the day-to-day management of the family. This is contrary to P. Werbner's suggestion (1985), that women's 'informal' work as machinists contributed significantly towards "incidental" and "non-recurrent" expenses. Bearing in mind that the women are migrants and economic exiles, the financial well-being of their families here and abroad are the most important aspects of their presence in this country.

As Chinti put it, her earnings helped her to survive:

It's alright for 'goarian', they just live a leisurely life, but we are here to work and pass our time.

One of Westwood's (1984 : 71) respondent's pointed out the class bias in the notion of 'pin money', and suggested that only middle class women could afford to consider their earnings to be superfluous. This would certainly be true for the respondents in this chapter.

Furthermore, when such "incidental" and "non-recurrent" expenses and activities as "house decorations, consumer goods, trips to Pakistan, weddings, ceremonial gifts" (Werbner 1985), are considered an essential part of one's culture and existence, it can be argued that they can no longer be "incidental". It is an essential part of Indian and Pakistani culture to exchange gifts and perform the wedding, not only of one's own sons and daughters, but also of those within the extended network of kinship relations. It is a collective experience as opposed to an individualistic one. One is happy and obliged to take-part (socially and financially) in 'brothers' and 'sisters' and their children's weddings. Thus rather than say "so and so are getting married", the experience is that "there is a weddingⁱⁿ the family". 'Trips home' cannot be considered "incidental". The Immigration Rules, in dividing families by preventing entry into the U.K., have made it necessary for Asian people to travel back and forth as a matter of survival. Asian people have responsibilities towards their families here, as they do for those that have had to stay in the countries of their origin. I am not suggesting here, that the income to women is distinctly spent on different activities from those of men. In cases where husband and wife

had reasonably amiable relations, of which there were at least twenty, the incomes of both partners were pooled and expenditures on all things were made jointly. However in cases where some form of disharmony existed, variations in expenditure ranged from the husband paying for nothing, to him paying for only essentials. In such circumstances the wife found it imperative to find some form of employment to maintain her day to day existence.

The 1971 Census figures showed that women born outside of Britain, were more likely to be found in employment. This indicates the specific need for migrant women to find waged work as we have noted above. Lomas (1973) found that 85 percent of Black mothers of children under five are at work in Leicester, 71 percent in Manchester, 44 percent in Bradford, and 42 percent in Wolverhampton (quoted in Parmar 1982). In pointing out that higher percentage of Black men are employed as unskilled labourers than white men, and therefore in lower income brackets; and that the average Black house-hold was larger than the white one; it pointed to a greater economic need for women from these households to contribute to the expenditure. This means that one in two of all Black women of working age goes to work in full time jobs.

Entry into Employment

In occupations where a large number of Asian women are found, it is common to find a workforce that is related via kinship and is characterised by close friendship networks. More than half of the women

who worked outside the home acquired their employment through relations and friends. Shiela commented:-

I started because my sister-in-law worked there before she had her baby. Then my sister lost her job and I told her to apply here, so she did.

In face of racial discrimination which prevented Asian people from taking employment, they found their own ways of recruitment into the labour force. However, the employer's actions in encouraging recruitment of Black women was not an anti-racist measure. This was a measure used to increase profits by employing a labour force which they found to be vulnerable, and thought that it would not threaten amicable relations in the production process.

These ties are also operating in the white population at each level of employment. The recent CRE reports, reported that Black people had three times more difficulty in getting jobs than whites (CRE 1980). The white workers had their own links for recruitment particularly in apprenticeships and for training jobs. For example, parents working in a particular firm would get their children recruited into the same firms, leaving Black people with little opportunity. The CRE's solution to this was that all jobs should be advertised in the Job Centre. However, this too can prove ineffective because companies can recruit through 'internal' procedures which also work through individual links. Thus these types of links are manipulated by both Black and white people. The difference is that for Black people on the whole, they are operatable in the lower, less well paid sector of the labour market.

For white people, on the whole the same is true at all levels of the labour market.

Westwood (1984 : 1) points out that recruitment which is mediated by the family is beneficial to the firm as it is one way of assuring "continuity between the present and the past". By establishing this connection she argues that the home and work become part of one entity, and therefore limits the potential resistance of workers.

Childcare

An important determinant of where and when women decide to work was based on their responsibility for childcare.

Two important patterns emerged:

1. Women who thought it essential to be with their children, or those who could not find alternative arrangements, had no choice but to stay at home. They could not take employment outside the home.
2. Alternative arrangements were made primarily within the family kinship network. This is contrary to some findings on migrant women in industrial society (A.M. Singh 1984 : 81-107) where women preferred to arrange childcare with neighbours, because they found that relatives imposed on their freedom.

On the whole, women did not trust strangers or "begane" to look after their children, because it was feared that the children would be neglected.

I used to leave my eldest (a girl) with this woman who charged £5.00 per week. I took in the food, nappies, change of clothes and whatever was needed. Once I came back from work. My daughter was crying out in the other room. When I came the woman was embarrassed and said that my girl had only just woken up. It didn't seem to me that she'd only just been crying. From the look of my daughter, God knows how long she had been in that state. So I thought it's better to stay home and be with one's kids.

Another woman had come to the same conclusion when her one and half year daughter fell from the staircase whilst with a minder.

Asian minders had not usually registered as childminders and therefore were not subjected to any conformity with particular standards. The authorities such as the Social Services, have not made themselves accessible to Asian women. At present efforts are being made to bring the authorities to recognise that there is a supply of Asian childminders and to incorporate them as a legitimate part of the provision of childminders. For example, in Birmingham and Southall, Asian social workers are attempting to gather lists of Asian women who are willing to become childminders.

Only one woman Minder, had previously left her child with a registered white woman and she felt that:

She was very good and kind, but after a few months my son was forgetting his language and he didn't want to eat Indian food. Before he was placed with the minder he was fine. He could speak good Punjabi and ate whatever we made. So my husband was a bit anxious ... he said Davinder (son) is going to learn all this English at school. He needs to keep his language. So I started working at home.

Women who had close family relations nearby were able to make use of their relationship.

Mindero lived with her mother-in-law:

I go to work, so she looks after the children.

and Pritam whose sister-in-law lived on the next road said:

I start work at 8.30 a.m. I get the baby ready and take him down to my sister-in-law (husband's brother's wife). I don't pay her. I used to look after her daughter last year - we don't do things like that.

Thirteen women had, at some stage, left their children with relatives when they worked. Three women had previously left their children with friends who they trusted. At the time of the interviews none of the women were leaving their children with friends. The local nurseries and daycare centres were not extensively used by women working outside the home. Perhaps one explanation is the high cost of placing children in nurseries. With the low level of wages that women accrued, they could not afford to place children in the nurseries. Like Satya:

I inquired about that (nurseries) and they charged £15.70 per week. By the time I'd pay that, I'd be left with £10.00 per week for myself. With bus fares it'd be £5.00, so where's the sense of working then.

Since nursery provisions held no relevance for the employed women in this sample, almost all of the women thought that childcare provisions were sufficient. A CRC report (1975) 'Who Minds?' (1975), on 'Working mothers and childminding in "ethnic" minority communities' confirmed that Asian and West Indian women faced particular disadvantages in this area since they often worked for longer hours than comparable white women. The study also revealed that Black women had less access to subsidised or free day nurseries or nursery schools, and that some white childminders refused to take Black children (quoted in Parmar 1982). The Low Pay Unit (1984 : 24) found that some women took their babies to work with them in the sweatshops, constituting a health hazard.

Conditions of Work

The following table provides the waged nature of the employment of respondents.

<u>WORK</u>	<u>PRODUCTION</u>	<u>NO. OF WOMEN</u>	<u>UNION</u>
A	Locks	9	A B U W
B	Screws	2	-
C	Sweatshop	13	-
D	Hospital (catering)	1	N U P E
	Interpreter	1	N U P E

<u>WORK</u>	<u>PRODUCTION</u>	<u>NO. OF WOMEN</u>	<u>UNION</u>
E	Foundry shop	1	T & G W U
	Paint shop	1	Not known
F	School (nursery nurse)	1	N U T
G	Electrical Utensils	1	A E U W
H	Chocolate factory	1	T & G W U
I	Sales Assistance		
	Supermarket	2	-
	Shopkeeper	2	-
	Professional	7	N A L G O
J	Home work	9	-
K	Youth Opportunity Programme	6	-
L	Telex Operator	1	-
M	Nursery Nurse	1	-
TOTAL		59	

Key

A E U W - Amalgamated Engineers Union of Workers
 N U P E - National Union of Public Employees
 T & G W U - Transport and General Workers Union
 N U T - National Union of Teachers
 N A L G O - National Association of Local and Government Officers

Women in White Owned Firms

This section aims to analyse the ways in which working class women evaluated their conditions of work. Ninety-three percent of all the women had some experience of waged employment at some stage of their lives.

Three girls were still at school and twenty-four of the women were unemployed. Only three women had no experience of wage work at all.

Ten percent of the employed women in this study worked at "A" a white owned firm making locks. It employed approximately one hundred women in total, mostly Asian and African, with about thirty white women. Others worked at smaller white firms, ranging from making screws, washers, utensils and chocolates. Others worked in what was described as a foundry shop and paint shop. The work that women performed in the light engineering industries did not reflect the type of labour they undertook at home. Contrary to some findings about white women's employment (S. Dex 1985 : 7), Punjabi women are not highly represented in service industries. The seven middle class professional women are not discussed in this chapter.

All of the factories employed more than twelve women and the labour force was predominantly Asian. In all six factories the foreperson and managers were white. Four working class women worked in non-manual skilled occupations. In all, seven of the manual firms were unionised. At "A", one shop steward had been an Asian woman but at the time of the interview she had resigned.

The women were aware that the income they derived from their work was lower than that of the men and white women they worked with. Asha an ex-shop steward who had been working at "A" for four years mentioned that:

In the polish workshop, there are all white women. None of us have ever been put there. The pay they get is higher and the work is lighter and cleaner. And you can sit down.

All the women interviewed from "A" confirmed this statement. Of the twenty-two women who had some type of experience of working with white people only two thought that it would make a difference if the foreperson was an Asian person. This was a typical statement:

We have a white foreman. He's quite good.

Debo, a twenty-seven year old woman who could not speak English too well said that it made little difference as to who was the foreperson.

Foreman will just tell you what to do. It's just work. He'll be just doing his work. No I don't see a woman, or an Asian woman at that, making any difference. It's just work.

Thus Debo clearly saw the role of the foreman in terms of class interests. The foreman would act in the interest of the employer. Therefore it did not make any difference as to the colour or sex of the foreperson.

Shiela on the other hand thought that the difference would be felt in so far as communication was concerned:

If he was Asian, he would be sure that all our women understood what was going on.

All of the women who had worked for a white employer stated that the working conditions in these factories were good. This was, I feel, in comparison to the alternative form of employment available to women in the form of sewing, cleaning etc.

In the white factories women worked shorter hours, generally from 8.00 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. or from 8.30 a.m. to 5.00 p.m.; Mondays to Friday. Overtime was over and above this. They were allowed to take time off to go to the doctor, hospital etc. but not without scorn from the management. The employees felt overworked in relation to the rewards received; as Parsini noted:

The conditions are OK but they work you too hard. With the previous owner the rates were good ... but now we have to work hell to earn the same amount. If you don't work hard, they take you into the office and give you three warnings. If you have to go to the toilet you have to hurry and they don't let you go in with another woman. It's one by one.

The wages women received in these firms were characteristically low. I found that the average net wage in 1981 for women in these firms was between £50-£60 per week. Some women generally brought home £45 and others £60. One woman's average pay ranged from £28-£30 per week. In 1983 26 percent of all women earned below £75.00 in the West Midlands, at a time when the average wage was £101.70 for women (LPU 1984).

Almost all the women in white firms saw the difficulties incurred at work as pertaining to their lack of the English language and racial discrimination in society. Shiela had been to school in this country since an early age and worked at "A" for three years. She saw the problem in the following way:

Some women can't even get their basic pay because of this. I think conditions are good for me because I can stand up for myself. Other can't. Some women get cheated, whilst their work is being

weighed. If you can speak English you can fight.

Amrit Wilson (1978) also stated similar findings:

The necessity for the English language, as a tool for struggle, was recognised but it was difficult for this to be translated into a demand for English classes at work. It was not seen to be a demand that could be made of the employer or the union. Women were perplexed by such a suggestion. They could not see the employers accepting such a demand. The following reactions of two women who had been schooled in this country and one of them an ex-shop steward, were all pervasive:

Asha reacted:

Oh I've never thought of that. What if they say this isn't a school. I don't like to create trouble.

Shiela said that the management would refuse the demand.

They'd moan if we asked for English Classes ... In their own time women can't learn. They have no time.

Workers saw the relationship of capital and labour clearly. The time they worked in the factory was the property of the employer. It was not therefore their prerogative to make such a demand, that would reduce the time purchased by the employer. Darshan a forty-four year old woman, had worked with the same firm for six years and thought it was up to those who want to learn to do it outside their working hours.

In an environment where basic demands such as a right to a living wage, good working conditions and so forth, are consistently denied to workers, demands for English would of course be seen as a "luxury". Asha the ex-shop steward thought that making such a demand would encroach on white people's rights:

Everybody should be treated the same.
Why should a coloured person have
special rights.

On the other hand, the demand that Asian workers should have the right to special arrangements for visiting their countries of origin, was overwhelmingly welcomed by all the women. Asha continued:

They don't give us holidays to go home.
They should. It's our motherland. I
haven't seen it. We have so many
relatives there who keep wanting to see
us now that we're older.

Rajvinder recalled:

My mother was desperately ill and she
kept writing to ask me to come. I
couldn't because it's not worth going
for two or three weeks. They said if I
didn't return after two weeks I'd get
the sack.

Chinti said:

Many women have telegrams sent and go
(telegrams stating someone is ill). One
woman did this and somebody in the
factory told on her - they sacked her.
People think we should be like the
English. We're not.

It was a demand that women felt should justifiably be supported because a cross section of workers (Asians and Afro-Caribbeans) could relate to it and they were aware that other workers in different firms were given special leave for this purpose. Thus they had concrete models to which they could relate. Demands of this type were also raised by the Asian women in Westwood's study (1984).

Racism at Work

Another problem brought out by women in the white firms was the racism they suffered at the work place both from the management and white workers. This constantly degraded and humiliated their dignity. Shiela was angry about the jobs Asian women were given:

The bloody whites don't have to do the jobs if they don't want to. Indians get stuck with it.

'Goarian' (white women) are moved from job to job, but as soon as their job is available, they're put back on it.

The white colleagues were also guilty of racist practice and in this sense it can be argued that they helped to maintain the inferior position of Asian women in the workplace.

Asha told of one case where:

This Indian woman who'd been here for four years was working as a presser, was sacked. These two English women had been calling her 'Paki', 'dirty', 'wog...' and things. They'd laugh at her all the time and she got fed up, you know? She got fed up and one day she just threw her cup of tea at one of the English women. The foreman came and

started warning the Indian woman. She tried to explain but she couldn't. So I went in for her and explained. But they just said she caused a menace and sacked her. The union never did nothing and so she was just sacked - you know.

Asha then went on to relate to her own experience:

When I first started, the English women who worked by my side used to be jealous or something of me. I couldn't put my finger on it. But you know something is wrong, you can feel it but you can't point at it. I knew that she talked about me with the other white women. I could see it in her. Everytime we faced each other, we felt uncomfortable. I used to come home and when I thought of that I'd get all tensed up and wished I didn't have to go back to work. I was depressed for ages. They moved to another section. But I couldn't complain because there was no proof. How do you prove a white person hates you 'cause you're Black.

Davinder and I met during my work at the ARC. In a letter to the management of a large chainstore, Davinder complained:

When the Sunday Trading Laws were passed he (Manager) had another go at me saying it was our shopkeepers fault for having the law passed because we want to stay open all hours. He said that the British people had fought very hard for a 37 hour week and us Asians had ruined it all.

Then during the riots (September 1985):

He also said that he was glad that the Darkies are doing the Pakis and Whites were right out of it. All afternoon he kept the news on, the look in his eye was obviously one of a delight. I felt sick inside.

This woman had been working at the store for a year and encountered similar experiences from the manager and the white workers. She wished to take her protest further to the tribunals and court. But her husband thought it was sufficient to write to the employers. He too had been made redundant and now had purchased his own retail business in which her services were required.

Shiela thought that both racism and gender relations were relevant to her work place experience:

Asian women complain, but the foreman just says 'don't argue with me'. Apnia (we Asian women) haven't got the tongue to speak. We can't speak out because that's the way we're brought up.

Women, therefore, realised the connection between their femininity which attempted to make them suffer in silence, and also that the white management and white workers were oppressive. Subsequently white workers could be seen to be allying with the management. Chinti had worked at "A" for several years. She thought:

Whites complain about the smell of our food, but we take no notice. It's our food so we eat it. They always taunt us, so we just don't talk to them.

For some women, the fact that they had so little control over the attitudes of white people, led them to adopt methods of survival which

'ignored' the daily racism. There is a level of racism which Black people have had to ignore to survive.

Thus what might be labelled as 'passive' can be a calculated, and conscious strategy to ensure that life itself continues.

Hence comments such as:

They don't discriminate against us, I haven't experienced any racism at work, we don't think of these things.

were essentially survivalist methods of making sense of the world, and included an acknowledgement that being Black meant having to face a certain amount of racism.

An elderly woman, of fifty years or so, had never worked out. She wanted to see Asian women continuing to wear their traditional "salwar kameez" but her response to women having the right to their own dress at work was a pragmatic one.

If you want to wear things like that, you shouldn't look for jobs in places where they (whites) don't allow you to wear them.

Another woman had previously worked at a large chain store and she felt:

I don't like it. But I had to wear tights and skirts there.

The analysis of these responses should not be taken to mean that racial discrimination is absent. More importantly, it indicates that Black

people have been forced to accept racism as an integral feature of life in Britain.

Sometimes racism is indistinguishable from kindness, paternalism and liberalism. . A case of Guddi whom I met at ARC, illustrates this point. Guddi worked in a firm that manufactures washers. She was receiving a lot of racial harassment from the white workers. She had been at the firm for three months. The management had not complained about her production rate and were seemingly satisfied. The white workers isolated her. They would not talk to her during break time and would make jokes about her dress and appearance. For two months she took this silently and then complained to the management who appeared surprised and supportive. She was assured that if she wished to pursue a case of racial harassment in court they would support her. Guddi thought that during her interviews with the management, the discussions always centred around her family life, her marriage problems, parental problem and the pressures she experienced within these areas of her life. The racism experienced at work was given a secondary importance. She did not follow a legal pursuit of racial harassment but continued to complain to the management. The foreman talked to the white workers twice (Guddi was the only Asian). Eventually, the management stressed that if her problems at home were resolved, her attitudes towards work would be more refreshing, which in turn would alleviate the harassment at work. They alleged that her strenuous life at home made her incompetent at work, keeping her production low, in comparison with other workers. This caused the workers to mock her. In this case the negative cultural stereotyping of the woman, was used to benefit

management in encouraging Guddi to produce more. (When in the course of my work at ARC, I inquired as to the production level of other workers, the management denied that Guddi's level was low). Guddie being the only Asian worker did not feel confident enough to take legal action. The racism that she was subjected to at the workplace was mediated by her gender and class subordination within the home.

The lack of available channels for Punjabi women to express and change their situation leads them in some cases to adopt pragmatic attitudes, But this does not imply that women take this demeaning treatment passively.

Shiela stressed that:

Asian women moan ... but we have no
proof.

Complaints of racial abuse have to be substantiated and the burden of proof rests with the victim - as another form of victimisation. When proof does exist the claim is rarely taken seriously. The Longbridge case confirmed this. A white foreman called a Black worker a "black bastard" and dismissed him. The T.G.W.U. called a two day official strike as primarily the result of pressure from the I.W.A. in Birmingham. However, lack of support from the workers and the lack of interest of the trade union bureaucracy meant that the action was called off, and the claimant pursued an unfair dismissal. In view of this, it is little wonder then that Shiela's view was that:

I don't think about these things ...
life must go on.

Phizacklea & Miles (1960) have argued that for white people racism cannot possibly "structure ALL situations". In the light of the preceding discussion, racism forms an integral feature of the women's lives. Racism is all pervasive. It structures and defines all aspects of Black people's lives, from where they eat, sleep, live to how they relate to other people.

As well as direct hostility, racism also takes the form of paternalism.

Gita who worked in a paintshop firm expressed that:

Most of us are Asians and there's about ten white women. Two of the white women really hate us. They say these wogs take our jobs away. They say we raid their factories.

But she went on:

One foreman says Asian women are good, because they work hard. And we do. That's why he thinks we are good.

This racism was used to exclude Punjabi women from some areas, and at the same time, it could be used to include them for exploitation.

We have seen that in the light engineering industries women's work did not reflect their domestic role. After 1978, with the increase in sweatshops, women's paid work began to show this reflection. We now look at the sweatshop labour of Punjabi women.

The Advent of Asian Sweatshops

Within the racist and capitalist society, Asian men had learnt that economically or socially, they did not have a secure position. Their fight against the system that victimised them was not successful. They had learnt to fight the state economically. There was little choice but to create their own economy. As second-class citizens, only one section of the population was available to them for oppression and exploitation - that was Asian women and children.

As men their experience had necessarily been a competitive one in the labour market since the 1950s and 1960s. With this experience behind them, they set to exploit Asian women, using the family, village, kinship and friendship ties that had developed both in India and in this country within their own communities. Some women, those in the families of these entrepreneurs, helped their men, in training and overseeing other women. The essential relationship, however, remained one of exploitation and oppression in terms of capital and labour as men built up their private businesses.

As is shown in Chapter 2 the institutions which women built up, gurdwaras, supplementary schools, etc. were not based on competition. They were based on the collectivity of the community in which all the members contributed financially and otherwise. These institutions could not be taken away they were monuments of Asian people in their collective form. Men provided the economic well being of the community in the form of sweatshops and homework employment. The Asian capitalist

is able to use women's domesticity and notions of femininity - subservience - to profitable advantage. The capitalist relies on the ties of kinship or friendship, built within the community, to control the women as a labour-force. The women at first do not relate to the capitalist only in terms of being workers, but also as kin or friends (of the family). As Black capitalists, Asian men do not have vast amounts of resources at their disposal, in relation to white capitalist. Banks and other money lending institutions have been known to refuse loans to Black entrepreneurs who subsequently have to over exploit the labour available to them.

Sweatshops

The women in the sweatshops are subjected to the most inhuman and degrading conditions of work. The rejection of Asian women by the mainstream labour market, places them in situation in which they can be lured into sweatshop labour, in the guise of working for one's own people.

The Handsworth Inner Area Study 1985-86 reported that sweatshops are on the increase and expressed concern that they were operating in breach of Government regulations with poor and unsafe working conditions and paying illegal wages.

The Low Pay Unit (LPU) contends that after the initial decline in 1978, the clothing industry has been expanding in the West Midlands. The West Midlands County Council (WMCC) consultation report observed that

"...since wage costs are lower in the UK than elsewhere in Europe, while productivity is increasing faster ... the industry is now in a position to become the leading European industry" (Low Pay Unit 1984 : 6).

Tighter imports controls, "Buy British" propoganda, increasing transport costs, etc. have increased the competitiveness of the industry. Asian employers are concentrated in the bottom level of the small scale sector of the industry. It makes use of labour intensive methods of production, demanding high skills from employees characteristic of craft industry. The WMCC reports estimate that from hundred firms in the West Midlands employs between eight to nine thousand people, mostly of Asian origin. 62 percent of the workforce is thought to be Asian. Eighty percent of the firms are Asian owned. Contrary to the high quality large clothing firms, the small Asian firms operate on low profit margins, short product run and flexible designs and a reliable supply to meet the popular fashion needs of working class people. Many high street chain stores acquire their cloths by contract with the small firms who may in their turn sub-contract the work. An outlet is also provided by Asian market stalls and later retail shops who may in turn sub-contract their work.

The recession, in the West Midlands has made cheap, in most cases dilapidated, unoccupied industrial premises for rent or sale available, in the area. Furthermore, the high rates of unemployment, particularly amongst the Asian and Black community has meant that a greater number of women have felt the pressure to work in the sweatshops - as an alternative method of survival. Brown (1984) noted that over 18 percent

of Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis were found to be in self-employment compared with 14 percent of whites.

The Asian employer is from the local Asian community and has relations and friends in the vicinity. Most of them have been workers in the local foundries that have now closed down. The report argues that with the financial support of their kinship and friendship networks, Asian employers have been able to set up small firms requiring little initial capital. In face of severe racism in the field of employment this was a method of setting up alternative employment. (Aldrich et al in Edward & Jenkins [1985] found that Asian businessmen did not rely heavily on relatives or friends to raise their capital). It is possible to set up a business with £2,500 which will purchase five machines capable of producing two thousand garments per week. The employers make use of the same network of kinship for labour, which helped them set up the business. Thus if one has been supportive to the employer financially or otherwise, his wife may be asked to come and work in the factory. Similarly, women who are related, or wives of friends, are brought into the production process.

Thus women have a relationship with the employer that is other than a strict capitalist and worker relation. Employers and workers see each other as "our own people" ('apne'), and relate to one another in terms of brothers and sisters. To this extent the employer uses his ethnicity to accrue profits in his enterprise. Implicit in these relationships is the assumption that because of the extra-capitalist relations, the employer will not exploit 'his own people' to the same extent as a capitalist person. A paternalistic and patriarchal structure operates

in the sweatshop. Patriarchy mediates the capital and labour relationship. The effect of this is that women do not have the courage to ask for their basic rights of a living wage and better working conditions. B. Hoel (1982) found in her study of Asian-owned sweatshops in Coventry, that this recruitment of the workforce through "personal" relations was advantageous for the owners in helping them to control the Asian female workforce.

Women are not just 'lured' into the sweatshops. A concrete reason for why they find themselves there is the lack of an alternative for a better form of employment. Chinti recalled an earlier experience of finding work and compared it to the present:

A whole group of four of us (women) went to Cashe's and they said 'You want work?'. We said 'Yes'. They told us to come back on Monday to start. But now you have to fill in forms. You have to stay in the office to fill them. Before, you could take the form home, and let the children or your husband complete it. Now they make sure you fill it.

One implication is that such practices are designed to keep certain type of workforce out of work - those illiterate in the English Language. In practice that applies predominantly to Asian women.

Given these circumstances, Asian women are caught up in the contradictions of paternalistic and capitalistic relations of production in the sweatshop. The Asian capitalist is able to use and manipulate the relationships arising from a pre-capitalist or semi-capitalist mode

of production, and the ideology of the passivity of women, to suit the needs of capitalist production. Hence making use of a volatile labour force. In this sense, the 'extended family' and the ideology of kinship - which formed the central units of production in a "semi-peasant" set up (Meillassoux 1972 : 102) - becomes an essential feature of capitalist organisation. This, together with the limited understanding women have of their rights as employees, and the circumscribed opportunities in the labour market, is exploited to the full by the employers. In a study of the Bengalis in the East End of London it was found that:

The informal structure of organisation made it possible to recruit at will, keep average costs to a minimum and allow the community to earn their livelihood in a racist society which made it difficult for them to find jobs in other areas. An efficient alternative organisational network was then set up which offered employment beyond the formal sector ... on the periphery of the formal sector. (Mitter 1984).

To this end, the LPU report (1984 : 12) noted the employers reliance on the community and the neighbourhood had led to the creation of "spatially and culturally confined labour markets in the inner City areas of the West Midlands". In my study 22 percent of the employed women were working in Sweatshops at the time of the interviews. Some of the other women had previously worked in this way.

The exploitation of women's vulnerability, maintains their dehumanising conditions in the sweatshops. Satya explained:

I was looking for an easy job. Not sewing. I wanted to work for an English

firm. They (employers) opened the factory two years ago and since they were friends of the family, they asked me to work there. We couldn't manage financially so I took the job ... We have no tea-time, no proper lunch-time. Its piece work so women decide themselves when they want to take their breaks. At the moment we're making girls dresses. I join the fronts and backs and work on the necklines. I get 30p per six dresses. We've asked for more money - up to 2p for each task performed on the garment. But they say they already pay us too much. But we ourselves feel it's not enough ... Not because other people are getting the same ... You can't fight with them, you have to say it politely, not fight. I shy away. It doesn't look nice to ask for more money. It looks bad. But you should insist for more.

Tara used to work in a sweatshop and she recalled:

Sometimes he never paid me for weeks. You can't ask. You feel embarrassed, humiliated. He'd probably think you only think of money. I used to work from 8.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m. and I used to get about £15.00 at the most for the whole week, (5½ days). In these places, the owners think you're there for fun.

Satya continued:

The place is ever so cold in the winter. There's just a paraffin heater. There's no adequate heating, no adequate eating place. We eat and drink at the machines. Our wages are never summed up

on the wage slips. If I work right through the week from Monday to Saturday, I can expect to get about £50.00 with overtime. I normally work from 8.30 a.m. to 6.30 p.m. Anytime after this is overtime. Overtime on Saturday and Sunday is paid double, but on weekdays it is the same rate. I don't like to say anything. It'd create a fuse and they'll tell my "sas" or "aadmi" (mother-in-law or husband).

Sheero had previously worked in an Indian firm in Coventry:

They forget to pay you. You couldn't create trouble. If you did, all the similar firms black-listed you and then no one would take you.

Asian women are concentrated in the lowest paid industries ^{Editorial} 'Mukti' No. 4 : 2). In 1983, 88 percent of women were in occupations characteristic of low pay (LPU : 1984 : 14). Average earnings for this year for women were £76.00, the LPU showed that many Asian women were getting £1.00 per hour for forty hour week. Barbara Hoel's study of sweatshops in Coventry in 1979 - 1980 found that £25.00 per week was the average wage for a forty hour week for most women. The legal minimum at the time was £47.60. It was further noted by the WMCC consultants that:

Methods of calculating pay are often unclear to workers. (LPU 1984 : 14).

Seventy percent of the firms advertising at the Job Centres did not provide details of wage rates although in some cases the figure shown was between £30-£50 per week - the actual pay was below this. The time rates varied between 62½p per hour to £1.35 per hour, but the legal

minimum wage level was £1.50 per hour. The WMCC study revealed that the average time worked in the firms was fifty hours per week and the longest was fifty-four hours.

Preeto who had three children had worked in an Asian supermarket and her husband in a sweatshop:

My husband used to work in an Indian factory and slog his guts out for £24 per week. When he asked for more he was sacked. I worked at the Supermarket for £20 per week for 50 hours a week. Whereas we got £60 for 40 hours at Asda. We moved to Birmingham because my husband couldn't get a job in Manchester.

A National Agreement between the employers and the N U T G W entitles workers to twenty days annual paid holidays. The Wages Council orders stipulate twenty days annual leave plus nine statutory days to which every full-time worker is entitled. The sweatshops give a few days for annual leave and five statutory days:

It is not uncommon for bank holidays to be worked. In one firm the employer was even deducting from the weekly wage the sum of £1.50 per week to pay for holidays. (LPU 1984 : 17-18).

In 1985 whilst at ARC, I found workers in the sweatshops who were allowed seven days unpaid holidays after working one full year. The only statutory holidays allowed were at Christmas which ranged between four-five days.

After the 1985 uprisings, employers were preventing women from coming to work (without officially laying them off) on the pretence that "it was

in their own interest to stay away as there was more 'trouble' expected". The women in one case did register for unemployment benefit at the time, but the U B O found it impossible to acquire information from the employer (who refused to answer telephone calls and letters) or his accountants.

In many cases the employers had failed to record tax-deductions for women who thought they were working legitimately. Their insurance contributions were not paid to the relevant authorities, even when the deductions had been made (LPU 1984). On leaving employment the women were put in a position whereby they had "insufficient contributions" to claim unemployment or sickness benefit when the need arose. Preet narrated her husband's experience:

He wasn't aware that the employers hadn't deducted any contributions. When he asked they said they had. When the U B O would not pay him unemployment benefit, he went back to the firm and they said he hadn't earned enough in that year to pay national insurance contributions.

The majority of women receiving low pay were not entitled to benefits as national insurance contributions are not deductible below a certain low earnings limit. Women were not on the whole aware of the distinction and assumed that because they worked, they would be entitled to sick pay etc.

Some women (five) brought their work home to complete. They took this in the following morning or after the weekend. The employer did not

check the safety standards of the women's home and he did not pay for the usage of the machine, thread and electricity.

Health and safety standards in the firms are non-existent. The industry's survival depends on low overhead costs and labour costs. Old factories disused buildings, back-garden garages are common places for sweatshop operations.

A firm employing less than five people need not register with the factories inspectorate; and the fire service only inspect factories employing more than twenty workers. The LPU (1984) study comments that:

On average the Health and Safety Executives visit factories once in every seven years.

Shindo worked in a sweatshop with eight other Asian women. She described:

There's no proper eating place, you have to eat your food where you work. The sinks are always dirty and the kitchen and toilet stink. You worry about going into them. The floors are sticky because people have spilt things which have never been cleaned. There's hardly any toilet paper in the toilets, and no ventilation. The factory is on top of the garage. There's a staircase tucked away on the left hand side - its wooden. It's an ordeal going up and down it. You feel scared you'll fall - it's insecure. There is hardly any light in the rooms. It gets stuffy and there's a lingering smell of food on the clothes.

B. Hoel in her study witnessed:

I saw women huddled up in their winter coats and shawls while working. In many factories the women themselves had had to buy paraffin heaters and paid for the daily running costs. These heaters constituted a fire hazard among all the cloth that was lying about on the floor ... workers had to supply their own toilet paper and rarely had access to wash basins and hot water ... (LPU 1984 : 23-24).

Shindo told me that once they called the Department of Environment but:

He only checked the toilet. We never heard anything afterwards and nothing changed, so everyone thought it was OK.

In terms of health, the LPU report mentions that women in this sector have complained of various skin diseases which are also connected with cancer, and have adverse effects on their reproduction system. Tension and muscular pain is a common complaint:

Many developed constant headaches, sick feelings, nervous tension and pain in their backs. The nervous tension was partly the result of abuse of the owner and the constant worry about output and threats of dismissal. In addition, some women had problems with eye-soreness. (LPU 1984 : 25).

The LPU recorded a tragic case of a fire in a small textile firm in London where five women died.

The explanations usually stipulated for why women endure these conditions is their lack of English, and an understanding of their

rights. The cultural peculiarities of Asian women have also been added to this explanation - that Asian women are either not allowed to work out and if they are it is only with other Asian employers. (Khan 1979).

Amrit Wilson states:

Asian women are the worst off of all the British workers. They are at the bottom of the heap. They come unprepared, easy victims to unscrupulous employer. They don't know the language so their choice of jobs is limited to the worst and least skilled; they don't know their rights so they can be intimidated, they don't have much information about other, better off workers so they can be paid poverty line wages. (Wilson 1978).

A more realistic understanding of the continuing endurance of this "unscrupulous" treatment is to be found not in the women themselves but on the perpetrators of this oppression. We have already looked at the way in which the Asian capitalist makes use of the relationship arising out of pre-capitalist, relations and the conditions which allow this to be perpetuated. The situation is further accentuated by the state's policies of encouraging low wages, attacking employment protection and trade union organisation, weakening collective-action and bargaining, abolishing Fair Wages Resolution and the Wage Council, all encouraging illegal practices by employers. In my work at the ARC I found that many women had actually attempted to fight the oppression in terms of industrial tribunals. In a majority of such cases the tribunals inevitably find in favour of the employers. The burden of proof, for unfair dismissal, or other illegal practices, is on the workers. Workers have to provide proof of the length of time worked, amount of

pay, pay slips, etc. In a situation in which records have not been kept by employers, such proof cannot easily be found. It usually means involving other fellow workers, unnecessarily, to provide evidence for the grievances. This proved to be difficult because women had too much to lose by standing by the aggrieved party as their own job would be put at stake.

In view of this Shindo's reaction was:

Women don't want to know. Each one works for oneself. We're too scared. Jobs are hard to find. Men can't get jobs, so we have to survive.

In so far as legal protection is concerned, the clothing industry was technically covered by the Wages Council which was abolished in 1985. 90 percent of all workers covered by Wages Councils were in catering, retailing, footwear and clothing industries. 70 percent of these being women.

The LPU pointed out that the minimum wage levels set by the council were not generous in comparison to the average wage levels of workers nationally. In 1985 the minimum level was £60 less than the average male manual earnings. It was suggested that the least efficient employer should be able to afford the minimal level. (LPU 1984 : 20).

The Department of Environment Wages Inspectorate's findings indicated that over one-third of the firms inspected were underpaying the workers. However many firms do not register, so it is difficult to estimate

either the number of firms or workers and the practices therein. The Department of Employment (DOE) findings also discovered that piece rates were set arbitrarily, usually based on the speed of the fastest worker (a supervisor or a relative) rather than a number of workers on average speed. The Wages Councils in their inspections also only spoke to one or two workers and if they received the minimum, no further action was taken. They did not check all the workers, which would have provided a more realistic position of most of the workers. The LPU concluded therefore that:

In practice, large numbers of clothing workers on piece rate systems have found that their wages are not protected by the Wages Council orders. (LPU 1984 : 20).

In view of this the abolition of the Wages Council had little effect on the work of Asian women in sweatshops. Furthermore, the sweatshops and supermarkets, provide a major source of employment for illegal labour. With increasing unemployment and the meagre rates of welfare benefits, families are forced to seek additional sources of income. Employers who are willing and able to take on women (who are in receipt of supplementary benefits, themselves or through their husband) in such desperation are provided with a ready supply of labour. The LPU seems to have done some work on the sweatshops and homeworkers, but this issue of "illegality" has not been identified as an important factor. The DHSS prosecutions would indicate that the practice is quite widespread - but this source would only relate to women who are claimants themselves, not those whose husbands are in employment.

Women were generally aware that the rates of pay between men and women differed. On the whole they were not asked to work on the same tasks as men. Men are generally to be seen ironing, cutting, counting items, carrying heavy loads, delivering and occasionally on thread cutting to finish the garment. The women are primarily employed to work on the machine and young girls may sometimes work on the ironing, thread cutting and counting.

A young sixteen year old girl was employed in a sweatshop and she was asked to do jobs that were usually performed by men:

Working conditions are abysmal and pay's awful. When I do a man's job - he's (employer) making pounds on that ... But he's always paid me a bit more (than other girls) so I don't feel I can ask for equal pay. I will now, that I'm gonna be paying my insurance contributions.

Young girls are being pushed into the sweatshops by YTS and YOPs courses.

Surinder said she had been sent to a sweatshop by her careers office as soon as she left school. This was when she had insisted that she wanted an office job or a white factory.

I don't like YOPs, you don't get a job afterwards. That's the problem. The careers teacher ... she said do you wanna work in an Asian place. I said I'd prefer a white firm. A few days later she said she'd made inquiries with this Asian factory ... All the managers were related and so was the forelady. So if we talked of any problem it got to them in no time. You know. You gotta

be happy when they are and sad when they are. It really mucks your mind up. If the machine breaks down he'd hit the roof and say it was our fault for wasting his time. He'd say 'I don't know why they send me these silly girls'. Even if you're on YOPs they'd still make you do overtime. If you didn't they'd threaten you with the sack.

The LPU in the West Midlands narrate many cases, where women have been sexually abused. When reported to the YOP and YTS supervisors, they have disregarded the information and the complaints. One girl was sent to an Asian firm and not informed that this was on a scheme. She told her supervisor about the conditions and the sexual abuse and was merely laughed at. Eventually when she asked the employer for wage slips she was sacked. Her family took the case to a solicitor and it was settled in the girl's favour out of court. (LPU 1984 : 10-11).

The Runnymede Trust Bulletin (201 3/78 : 10) found that white trainees were twice as likely to find jobs after YTS (Youth Training Scheme) than young Blacks. Black trainees were directed to schemes with poor quality training. The local authorities and major high street stores failed to take on Black trainees and the Man Power Services Commission (MSC) did not provide adequate assessment procedures for the trainees. The MSC granted 'Approved Training Organisation' status to racially discriminating employers, thereby failing to take a stand against racism. It was noted that the new two year YTS was still 'ghettoising' Black youths into firms with no good employment prospects.

Thus women's attempts to challenge their situation was circumscribed by the depth of their oppression not only by the employer, but by the state and state machinery also. As we shall see in Chapter 4 Trade Unions also play their role in preventing women from challenging their oppression in the work place.

Homeworkers

Much of the work previously produced at the sweatshops is now contracted or sub-contracted out to homeworkers to further reduce the overhead costs and increase profits. An increasing amount of transnational companies (TNCs) are adopting this method of sub-contracting to spread their risks. On an international scale the TNC relocate their labour intensive industrial investments to the Third World (Free Trade Zone) in which labour costs are kept to a minimum with little, if any trade union protection. The method of sub-contracting is beneficial (Mitter 1984) because:-

1. It is more mobile.
2. Avoids labour legislation concerning wages and working conditions.
3. The number of 'official' factory workers can be kept at a minimum.
4. Adjustments to the fluctuations in the labour market can be made quickly without leaving invested capital idle.
5. The organising capacity of workers is weakened.

Mechanisation in the clothing industry has produced deskilling of the labour force whilst technological advancement is centralised labour has

been decentralised (Mitter 1985). The designing, cutting and finishing are automated. The machinery - 'shell-making' remains labour intensive and it is this that is sub-contracted to women in their homes. This is known as the cut, make and trim method. Large retailers, who previously owned their own units of production, are now contracting work out to small independent manufacturing agents, who in turn supply this work to women in the home. The retailers supply their own cloth, cut to design, threads, buttons and other accessories and contract this for assembling.

Some retailers with previous contracts miss out the agent and approach women directly. The process has enabled 'unskilled' women to make parts of garments. The LPU (1984) recorded that approximately 100,000 garments are produced in this way. The cost of assembling is low in Birmingham. Swasti Mitter (1984) sees homeworkers as being a mirror image of women in the Free Trade Zone who are also integrated into the process of sub-contracting production. In this way, she sees the 'immigrant female homeworkers in Europe' as 'internal colonies of TNCs'. This work is particularly suited to women who have young children and to whom the formal spheres of production are unsuitable. One of the other reasons is to do with the effect of racism. Swasti Mitter (1985) notes that a rapid increase in sweated labour has taken place since the early 1980s and quotes one of her respondents in the following way:

When you live in Newham (London), you have little choice sister. Burning down of an Asian home does not even make news any longer. It is accepted as a regular happening in the East End of London. The police are no help; they would not admit that the attacks on Asian homes are from the racists. How can I look for jobs outside my home in such a

situation? I want to remain invisible, literally. Also sister, I am a widow and I really do not know what my legal status is. If I apply for cards and things, I may be asked to leave the country. At the moment, my uncle brings machining work to my home. It works out to be 50 pence per hour, not a treat! But I earn and I feed my children somehow. Most of all, I do not have to deal with the fear of racist abuse in this white world.

In my study, 13 percent of the waged women worked as homeworkers at the time of the interviews. Many others had done so at some stage in their lives.

Shiro has five children, her husband is unemployed, she lives with her parents-in-law both of whom work out. She said:

He's (employer) given me jackets for the last three weeks. I join the sleeves on to the jacket. I get 50p per dozen. It's hard. The jacket gets heavy and it creates such a mess. Threads all over the floor in all the rooms. After I finish we have to spend half an hour picking up threads, and they still don't all go. At the end of the week I get about £20-£25 after working everyday - 7 days.

These rates were for 1981. In 1983 the average rate was 20-30p per hour. In 1986 Banti who was separated, living with her two children told me:

I put the sleeves together, and gatherings on the sleeves, adjoin the collar, a belt at the bottom of the jacket, sew the cuffs. I get between 50-65p per jacket, depending on the scale. On a good day I make about 20 jackets but normally, if I have to go

shopping etc. I make about 10-15. It's awful work. Just now I was feeling dizzy and lay down here as you saw. I get headaches. It's no good. You have to work. I can't manage on social security. £42.00 per week with two children. What can you do with that? The gas bill was £150, there's electric to pay and the telephone. I'm still making payments on the machine. It's no life. They suck your blood. They don't care.

An often cited advantage of homeworkers is that it gives women autonomy. The evidence did not confirm this. The separation of housework and homework was very vague. Rani was also separated from her husband, she lived on her own with her three children. Her machine cost her £230, she had not yet recovered this amount after three months. She was sewing when I went to see her. The room was dark, warm and stuffy. Her two children played amidst the clothes and she had to get up to attend to their needs, to feed, clean, toilet them at short intervals. On the machine she was alert and attentive, continuing to play with the children and mind them.

My Raju is nice, isn't he? Raju's a good boy. Raju give your sister that car. You have this (she got hold of another toy). Here have this.

Women usually got up at 6.30 a.m. or 7.30 a.m.; get their husbands and/or children ready for work or school and then clean and cook for lunch time if possible. By the time one is on the machine it is between 9.30 a.m. - 10.00 a.m. If the children have to be fetched from school one works up to 11.45 a.m. The process of feeding, cleaning etc. begins again. The work starts again at approximately 2.00 p.m. up to 3.30 p.m.

or 4.00 p.m., depending on the children's arrival. From now until approximately 6.30 p.m. one is busy managing the family and preparing meals. At about 7.00 p.m. work on the machine will resume up to approximately 10.00 p.m. In total a woman may work 6½ hours on the machine, and about 7½ hours on domestic labour.

Trivedi B. in 'Mukti' (No. 4 1985), recorded a woman:

I can't even sit down - watch television. I feel guilty for sitting down. I feel I ought to be working to get some money and I find it difficult to make idle chat. At least if you are working outside, when you get home you can forget about the work, but now it's all mixed up - homework and housework.

Bachni had five children and her husband also worked for a wage:

If I ever tell him how tired I am he just says stop complaining. What do you do all day? He'd soon know if I stopped doing the work, he'd feel the pinch then.

One of the reasons the work was not seen as waged work was because the relationship between the wage and the employer was hidden. Isa Baud points to this relationship when she says:

One of the crucial aspects of this situation is that the wage labour aspects of homeworking is minimised and ignored. Nominally, the women are seen as self-employed; the dominant relationship of the supplier of raw materials and seller of the finish product to the homemaker is not mentioned. (Baud 1984 : 2).

The fact that women are classified as 'self-employed' by employers has implications for their rights to benefits such as sick pay, holiday pay, pensions, pay slips, unfair dismissals etc.

The work also isolates women in the home further. Women did not feel at liberty to visit the neighbours who would be working at home. Chatting was considered a waste of time. The wages women received took no account of the electricity spent at home, the capital investment on the machine(s) and the health risk to which women were exposed. The employers have no obligation to compensate for work hazards.

The extent of the exploitation which women suffer can be seen by figures provided by a London based study in 'Mukti'.

The machinists made blouses, skirts, dresses and jackets and were on piece-work rates that range between 32p for a sweatshirt which was sold for £7.99 in the shops, 50p for dresses which sold for £12.00 - £15.00 in the high street shops, £1.10 for jackets which cost up to £25.00 and £20.00 for sequined evening dresses which sold for £150 in the shops. (Trivedi B. 'Mukti' No. 4 1985 : 6).

Usually the whole family helped to make the garments in the home. Sons and daughters from the age of eight years onwards could be found to be involved in the production process. This is similar to Meillasoux's findings on agricultural societies which provide labour for Western Capitalism. This study observed that the agricultural societies provided profits for Western Capitalism because the:

Cheap cost of labour comes from the super-exploitation, not only of the labour from the wage-earner himself but also of the labour of his kin-group. (Meillasoux 1972 : 102).

In the Third World countries the children cannot afford the luxurious full-time education. They necessarily form a part of the production process to contribute towards the economy. Similarly, in the 'ghettoised' areas of the industrial west, children have to follow the footsteps of their peers in the Third World. This production and reproduction in these homes is not clearly demarcated. The LPU found that:

After school, and during school holidays, children of 12-16 years old are being employed to do general packaging, thread clipping, pressing, which can be dangerous as the steam irons are extremely hot. (LPU 1984 : 23).

In the home, the atmosphere where every member of the household is obligated to contribute towards production is full of frustration and anxious. Each member of the household would obviously rather engage in alternative activity. In one interview, I noted the Simro's daughter, a thirteen year old, came from school, got changed, helped give tea to her younger brothers and sisters. She was then asked by her mother to cut the threads off the garments. The young girl argued that she wanted to watch television. She 'tutted' a little and continued with the task at hand; at the same time watching her programme.

Thus for women who are homeworkers, the home is both a unit of production and reproduction although, its not recognised as such by the male and capitalist structure. Pauline Hunt (1980) makes a similar point about the household, but this is in relation to domestic labour and the production work which is done on consumption goods before they are consumed. For the homeworkers in this study, however, their role is productive both in terms of domestic and commodity production within capitalist relations, which are mediated through the home.

The traditional workers' movements or representations have not shown a great deal of interest in the plight of the homeworker. Isa Baud (1984) suggests that the 'free production' male white worker is a "historical and temporary phenomena". She foresees the traditional worker being replaced by women homeworkers. This issue was addressed by women at a conference in 1982 at the Transnational Institute, Amsterdam, to understand as a basis for production the global nature of the exploitation of textile workers. It was hoped that such an understanding may help to devise better methods of changing the predicament of women. (Chapkis W. & Enloe C. 1983).

In Birmingham (1987) a National Group of homeworkers was set up to identify the issues relating to homeworkers whilst 'AEKTA' was set up in 1985 to investigate low pay in the city. What work these two groups involve themselves with, remains to be seen.

An increasing use of the informal sector is constantly undermining the labour rights of the formal sector workers. Each time a strike took

place within the sweatshops, in Birmingham, the action was ineffective because employers were able to take the production to the domain of housewifery.

Trade Unions traditionally have not been able to transcend the barriers between 'formal' orientation of the workplace, and 'informal' or 'domestic' conditions that define women's work. The contradictions between women's wage labour and women's domestic role have not yet been resolved by the trade unions. The exploitations of Asian women's work express the contradictions of imperialism race, sex and class in their extreme form.

This group of isolated, low paid workers, outside the protective legislation makes it almost impossible for women to organise. Thus Anita expressed:

I would join a union if I could. Other women don't want to know about it. They're too scared. No one's interest.

and Simro:

Women don't tell one another about how much they are getting paid. They think it's private.

Amarjeet thought that:

We all have different employers and these also change from week to week, month to month, as and when the work is available. So it's difficult to talk to of unions and strikes.

An increasing use of the 'informal' sector production is constantly undermining the labour rights of the 'formal' sector. Each time labour unrest took place in Birmingham, the managers were able to take their production to the domain of housewifery. Hence industrial action had little effect in reducing profit levels of the entrepreneurs.

Swasti Mitter (1983) notes the importance of homework in that it subsidises capitalist accumulation in the formal sector. The deskilling of the labour force has enabled the dispersal of production in isolated homes. This in turn minimises chances of organised rebellion and enables employers to pay off one worker against another.

Fruit picking is another area that is opening up for the casual employment of Asian women. The women are picked up in the morning by Asian sub-contractors and left home in the evenings. Women pay for the transport costs. I understand that the rates paid to the workers range between 50p - 70p an hour with no employment protection provided. None of the women in this sample were employed as farm labourers but they did talk of it.

Conclusion

This chapter examined the position of Asian women in the labour market. We looked at the employment of Asian women in white-owned firms, in Asian-owned sweatshops and in homework which is often transmitted through multinationals to subcontractors.

The prevalent theories on female employment are on the whole inadequate since they do not take the specific subordination of Black women into account. The Industrial Reserve Army of Labour concept fails to recognise the double reduction of costs in the employment of migrant female labour. Migrant women have been partly dependent on their home countries (for their production and reproduction) and partly on the men. As such, capital can make extensive gains because they can be trebly exploited as migrant women. The feminist theories of a segregated, structured labour market also fail to account for the position of Asian women. It is true that certain powerful sections of the labour market can reinforce the divisions along race and gender lines in defending themselves from displacement. However, this does not explain why particular groups are more or less powerful than others, and how they originally came to be in such positions. Whilst the patriarchal theory goes some way in explaining women's subordination to men, it does not account for the subordination of Black male labour. What is required therefore, is a theory which takes on board the triple oppression of Black women in terms of their specific and simultaneous exploitation on the grounds of race, gender and class.

The employment of working class Asian women is structured by both race and gender subordination. The impact of racism not only defined the forms of employment open to Asian women (in the lowest paid jobs with the worst conditions), but also helped to construct specific notions of their femininity as a passive and docile labour force. Therefore, the position of Asian women in employment is not only based on race, gender

and class divisions, but such divisions are also reproduced by racist and sexist structures.

For the working class respondents who worked in white-owned firms, racism was a predominant factor for their low status in the workplace. Racist practices could be used to exclude women from certain types of work, and at the same time they could include women for exploitation in other tasks. Asian women often found that white workers and the trade unions allied with the management in their racist practices, and in such circumstances, they could not envisage making demands from the management which related specifically to them as Asian women. In dealing with racist incidents at work, it was necessary for Asian women to adopt a method of resistance which assumed that a certain amount of racism was to be taken for granted.

We discussed that the work in the light engineering industries did not mirror women's domestic labour performed within the home, but it was concluded that the nature of Asian women's waged and unwaged labour will converge if the present trend of sweatshops and homework industries remain on the increase.

The impact of racism in the labour market caused Asian men to seek alternative forms of livelihood by starting their own businesses. Racist measures also ensured that only Asian women (and their children) could be exploited by Asian men as they had the least advantageous positions in terms of employment. Asian capitalists were able to use kinship and village ties to recruit and control Asian women into the

sweatshops. Thus the relations of a predominantly pre-capitalist economy can be manipulated to accumulate surplus value by Asian capitalists.

The maintenance of pre-capitalist relations in the workplace, together with the lack of state legislation for employment protection, and the uncertain legal status of immigrant workers placed Asian women in a very vulnerable position. It subjected them to over exploitation in terms of their subordination under race, gender and class. The use of kinship ties by Asian capitalists enabled them to control their workforce, and these ties also prevented women from improving their wages and conditions of work. The situation for women is further strained by the lack of opportunity for them in the labour market; the state's discouragement of employment protection and trade union activity; together with racist immigration and work permit rules which render some immigrant labour as being illegal.

Under such conditions, the contracting and subcontracting of work (by multinationals) to immigrant homeworkers can flourish. Black women homeworkers can find homework as particularly useful because they do not have to face racist abuse from outside, and they do not have to regularise their legal employment status. By working from home they can also retain their domesticity so this specific form of exploitation can prove extremely useful for capitalist accumulation in the formal sector, because it is able to use class, race and gender subordination to its advantage.

The capitalist contractors also exploit the children of Asian homeworkers who often help with the work as they do in the pre-capitalist modes of production in the Third World. In this sense immigrant women homeworkers can be seen as internal colonies of transnational corporations as Mitter (1984) has suggested.

The position of Asian women in the labour market must therefore be analysed in terms of imperialism, race, gender and class subordination. Any resistance that women express against their oppression also must take into account the restraints imposed upon their rebellion in these terms, as we shall see in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

STRUGGLES AT THE WORKPLACE

In this Chapter we examine a wide range of workplace resistances that are expressed by Asian women, and the limitations within which these are enacted. After a brief summary of the general theories of trade unionism, we look at the way in which the experience of Asian men in trade unions influenced Asian women and their workplace struggles. In this study, the women were aware of the need to unite as workers and as women, but their capacity to express their protest was limited by external and internal factors. The solidarity of women as workers was undermined by notions of 'femininity'; fear; lack of confidence; the inability to find full expression in the English language; the racism of white workers and trade unions; and the state legislation which restricted trade union powers. The white left also failed to organise Black people's demands at the workplace. We look at some of the alternative attempts of women to articulate and organise their employment struggles.

The General Analysis of Trade Unions

A dearth of academic and political analysis review the functions of trade unions and workplace struggles in terms of the 'labour

aristocracy', 'oligarchy', 'corporatism', 'sectionalism' and 'economism'. The literature argues that the trade unions are basically reformist institutions which have been contained by the government to limit the expression of workplace conflict. Divisions within the working class; 'parochial' workplace struggles; 'economistic' demands which concentrate on wage levels and working conditions; and the incorporation of unions as legitimate bodies are all factors that contribute to the reformism of trade unions. It has been argued that trade unions are an integral tool for regularising (not challenging) the relationship between organised capital and organised labour. (Beynon 1975, Braverman 1974, Hyman 1975).

Asian Men's Workplace Struggles

As workers, the experiences of Asian men in trade unions were confined by similar limitations. As Black Asian workers their situation was further compounded by racism.

Since the late 1960s, the lack of support from existing trade unions structure had led Asian workers to burn their union cards, picket union officers (Wolfe 1968; Newby & Son 1969; Mansfield Hosiery 1972), and refuse the payment of union dues. Wrench (1986) has pointed out that the rate of union membership amongst Black employees is higher than that of whites and that Black workers are more willing to show their support to whites than vice-versa. The white workers were situated in better jobs than those of Blacks and therefore materially benefited from the

over exploitation of the latter. Consequently the white workers felt no need to show support to their Black colleagues.

Asian people are generally seen to be inactive in British politics, because it is said that they are sojourners or a 'target' workforce. (Phizacklea and Miles 1980). It is envisaged that after working for a specific time and money a return to the 'home' country would be anticipated. In view of the stringent immigration rules, however, such intentions have changed as the arrival of the female migrants established communities in this country. Asians in fact do participate in politics and have in some cases led on issues that they saw as being relevant to their existence here. In a sense, by making connections between nationalist struggles and colonialism and the metropolis with 'internal colonies'; they transcended the 'parochialism' of the traditional workerist consciousness of the white English working class.

Through the IWA's, the Indian and Pakistani men had learned to rely on their own communities for support in their workplace struggles. The IWA leadership had a tradition of involvement in anti-colonial and nationalist movements because of their role in the independence movements in India. Trade unionism itself, was not a new concept for Indian Workers Labour Organisations has existed in India since the 18th Century. The Planquine (chairs used as carriages) bearers, the Indigo Workers, the Printers Union, and the Bombay Postal Union had all expressed strike actions for higher wages and better working conditions, in the 18th, 19th and 20th Centuries. Many leaders in the struggle

against colonial rule were also involved in the trade union movement and the All India Trade Union Congress (TUC) was established in 1920 (Greater London Trade Union Resource Centre, 1986 : 4). Politically the IWAs therefore believed in internationalism. Ideologically they saw trade unions as a useful tool to express the contradictory interests of capital and labour. They believed this inspite of the fact that white workers and trade union showed little solidarity with them. There was also the notion that as a Black minority, they would have to conduct their struggles within the framework of the existing institutions such as the unions and the Labour Party. (Various issues of 'Race Today' have highlighted these ideas).

The Workers Associations have worked closely with the Labour Party as they see it as a workers' party. The Black feminist groups however, have no relationship with this or any other political party, since they see the Labour Party in particular, as being reformist, and 'buying' the Black vote by 'appearing' to be anti-racist.

Restraints on the Struggles of Punjabi Women

The shop floor struggles of Asian women in the 1970s were informed by the lessons Asian men had learnt in the 1960s. The latter believed that trade unionism was a legitimate way to organise on the shopfloor. Although it was accepted by the IWA leadership that some minor reforms, such as more accountability by trade union officials was required. Consequently the IWAs diffused the issue of racial exploitation with the

more generalised demand of white workers for unionisation. This was possible because the organisation and negotiation of industrial disputes were controlled by the white left and trade union white bureaucracy who allegedly professed to be anti-racist.

In this study, of the fifty-nine women who worked, only a small proportion (14 percent) said that they had been or were members of a union. It has been noted (Phizacklea & Miles 1980) that in terms of attendance at meetings the rate of participation amongst Black workers is particularly low and that women generally have not been active in trade unions. Parmar (1982 : 263) argues against this measurement of consciousness by trade union membership since it ignores "many instances where Black workers have drawn support from the Black community as a whole".

The majority of the women worked in non-unionised firms. This does not mean that they were unaware of the need to unite as workers. It meant that a realistic interpretation of their circumstances led to fear, isolation and the lack of unity. Fear was expressed by Bimla, a homemaker, when she talked about the intransigency of the employer:

He (employer) pays me 20o for a blouse.
I made it for 30p where I was working
before. When I asked for an increase he
refuses. They haven't paid me for the
last five weeks. I stick to one
(employer) because if you stick to one,
they're less likely to make mistakes in
your work.

Again Sheero who had worked in Coventry at a cleaners firm on a contract basis said:

The women are afraid of the supervisor. She pleases herself when she starts and finishes her work. When other women ask for time off for emergencies, she cuts our money. She can sack us. There's plenty of other women who want a job. In the Asian factories the women are afraid too. No one else will take black-listed labour.

These feelings were analogous to Gail Omvedt's (1980 : 14) findings. She noted a woman stating "If I don't work, someone else will. I will lose". Omvedt interprets this as an awareness of desperation which requires unity, but the circumstances do not allow the formation of unity.

Lack of Unity

In dire conditions of high unemployment and in circumstances where the state is continuously encouraging lower wages and making the unions ineffective, one had to protect one's own interest first. Both women who worked outside the home and as homeworkers, could see the benefits of unions but not the possibility of unity to form them. If a union existed, then on the whole women did not feel that they could fight on behalf of other workers because of the individualism and the lack of unity amongst workers.

Shiela's workplace had a union, the Amalgamated Engineering Union of Workers (AEUW) but she felt that woman on the whole thought that at this moment in time:

If you're OK with your job, why worry about others?

and that "women won't listen" was how Davinder saw it. Anita worked as a homemaker and on the question of unions she thought:

Unions are good, but women don't agree to form one.

Simro, a homemaker, had attempted to ask the other women homemakers in the neighbourhood to form a union, but:

Other women didn't want a union they said they were alright.

Bishton (1984 : 57) cites several cases where women were afraid to become union members for fear of reprisals from the management and because of the inadequacies of the unions. In particular, a case is mentioned where women became members of Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) and then denied that support for a colleague at an industrial tribunal.

One day all the union members who were still at work claimed that the union forms had been completed by Mrs. Kaur's husband, that they had not understood what they were signing and that they had no wish to join a trade union.

Some women were members of a union but did not know its name. 'Spare Rib' (No. 17 : 17) showed a similar tenency where Airport cleaners were

members of a union but had never seen any of the officials, nor knew its name because the dues were deducted from source.

Domesticity and Femininity

Domesticity, domestic labour and femininity as a women's preoccupation, to some extent defined what women should and should not do. This lay the basis for the interpretation that one was ignorant and incapable of actively participating in an organised struggle within the workplace. Moreover the double burden of housework and wage work has not seriously been acknowledged by unions. The participation of women in trade unions generally is therefore low.

Thus comments such as Gurdev's:

Indian women don't want to roam the streets. I have no interest.

or Giano's:

Unions should fight, but I have housework to do. I'm not interested.

were indicative of how women perceived their role in terms of femininity. Mindo worked at "A" and said that she did not feel she could participate. Her mother-in-law asked that 'If she took part, who'd do the cooking?'

Westwood (1984) points out that the workplace actively constructs ideas of femininity as it is at this venue where working women indulge in

celebrations of weddings, babies and birthdays. She suggests that in doing so the women express their resistance to work by making connections between the home and the work. This resistance, however, is a contradictory one as it reinforces the notions of femininity and dependency. Though the workplace may provide a venue for the construction of femininity, I do not have data to confirm or refute this evidence.

Other women did not feel that they had confidence because participation in union activity meant one had to be fluent in English. The inability to be fluent in the English language was often interpreted as 'illiteracy' even when women could read and write in their own language. This situation had been imposed upon them by the white racist structure which did not accept, and consider as inferior, the qualifications they had acquired in their countries of origin. Thus Bakshish who worked in the hospital kitchens had a B.A. in political sciences from India, but her non-participation in the union was explained as follows:

Language is the greatest difficulty for
us.

Minder had an elementary education, five classes in India and she felt:

I'don't take part because I can't speak
(English).

Seeso was fifty years of age, with no education and she expressed that she was just surviving:

Women are illiterate - the educated could fight for their rights. We're just going to pass our time.

Ranjit mentioned a place where she had previously worked - a sweatshop - and where women had not been able to organise.

You know our women. They are illiterate. They did as the employer asked.

Their role in domestic labour, together with the inhibitions women felt due to the lack of confidence and English language difficulties, resulted in many women just not knowing about what functions a union would fulfil. The trade unions had a role to play in this also, in that they did not make themselves accessible to women. (We shall discuss this below). Subsequently, it was common for women to feel that they were ignorant of union issues.

Shindo had previously worked for an employer:

I think there was a union, but I can't remember. I don't know about these things. I can't take part. I have no knowledge about it.

Other women's pragmatism led them to be more cynical about the existence of unions. They no longer had faith in the power of unions, Bakshish said:

Unions exist to improve workers' conditions, but nowadays they're nothing. When you work on shorttime, you lose jobs, or are underpaid, they can't do anything.

Darshan's factory had a union:

Unions can't do anything, even they do as the employers says. There's so much unemployment, if someone's in trouble, the can't do anything. They say be quiet and get on with your job.

The 1980 Employment Act aggravated this feeling as secondary picketing was made illegal. This took away the very base on which unions are able to mobilise - i.e. support of other workers. Secret ballots have been made mandatory and the right of workers to join unions has been withdrawn by the government as in the case of the Government Communication Head Quarters. Furthermore, the decline in the manufacturing industries and mass unemployment have contributed to a fall in trade union membership. Thus the Government attack on trade unionism has clearly had an effect in making unions virtually powerless and ineffective in the eyes of workers.

A Pragmatic Understanding

Sometimes the obstacles were overcome by women who were determined. Shanti, a fifty year old woman had come from East Africa and worked in a factory in London. She had struggled to form a union and said at a meeting about racism and trade unions in 1981:

Unity means strength, one voice in work - that's the meaning of a union. Desai showed women, we could do something. We who'd seen nothing are now working, need to understand the union system. Grunwick women learnt from joining a union, their rights. If we are going to work, why work in bad conditions - fight. In Africa I used to write stories and read them over the radio. I come here, and looked for a job and

found one as a garment machinist. I became an interpreter for other women. There was corruption amongst supervisors who allocated the work. Management was considered supreme. So I introduced the idea of a union. If your neighbour loses a job its recession, if you lose it, its depression.

Other women saw unions to be a necessary instrument for the betterment of working people in the workplace. Satya worked at an Indian sweatshop and saw the existence of a union in an economic way.

We should have union, we'd get more money then.

Darshan from the "A" factory thought that:

If conditions (of work) are no good, you've got to fight.

Davinder a homemaker saw no need for women to be reticent:

Why shouldn't we fight when the management exploit us.

Shiela at "A" said:

Conditions are good because the union has fought for them.

Another woman felt that the extent to which a union could successfully and effectively act on behalf of its members was dependent upon representation and leadership within the union. It is necessary to describe in detail the experiences of a woman who raised this and other points. Banso, the wife of an IWA member was a well educated woman with a BA from India. She worked in Cadbury's as a clerk and sometime ago an

issue of dismissals was raised by the management. She did not feel that the union had fully supported her in her endeavour to protect herself, as a Black Asian worker. This is how she narrated her experience:

If you have the right representation, unions are OK but if not, then its pointless, then you may as well go to the management directly on an individual basis. I'm not active in the union because the representatives that you go to don't want to know you. First of all because you're Black, secondly, because they're too busy. A lot of these unions "wallas" take bribes and some shopstewards are immediately made foremen. I worked at Cadbury's as a clerical worker. I had a job. They had surplus clerks. They said. 'You have to go on to production'. He (foreman) came, just like that. I asked why? I thought how did he calculate that? I've got more service. One girl (white) had only been there for six months, so I thought if anyone, she should go on production. So I went to him again, I asked 'how did you work this out?'. He answered 'because you got the least service'. I said no, the last one that came in should go first. He said no, she had more service than me to the factory as a whole. I said no, we're not going out of the factory, we're moving from one job to another job, within the same factory. He did not agree. He said if you don't agree with me go to the union. I had every intention to go. So I went to the shop steward. He agreed that the management was right, but he would still make enquiries. I came back to work on the following day and he maintained that they were right. I said why should I go to production. Then I went to the senior shop steward. He said you're right. First, the other woman who came in last has to go - last in, first out. Then he came an apologised. Then they didn't even send the other white woman to the production section. They changed their mind. The whole episode cost me so much emotionally, my eyes started

twitching and I had severe headaches for months afterwards. I had no faith in the management and no faith in the union. I learnt that I had to fight for myself and no one else will do it for me - not even those who collect my dues.

In this case Banso was unable to distinguish the role of the management from that of the union. The union at the first instance had sided with the management and the white worker (Westwood 1984), it was only Banso's persistence that made her successful in her struggle. The understanding that women had of unions was therefore related closely to the personal experiences that they had encountered at the work place.

Inaccessibility of the Unions

Most of the other unionised women expressed their disillusionment with unions who refused to support them in their demand for extended holidays for visits to their home countries. Women who had been involved in the union indicated that it was not interested in Black workers but used them as interpreters in the same way as management.

Bishton (1984 : 37) points to several firms where management used English speaking Asian workers as interpreters, which fulfilled the role of "Safety Officer, Personnel Management and Mediator - along with their 'real' work". For this mediatory role they were paid slightly higher than other workers.

Bishton (1984 : 50) also quotes a trade union official's view on what should be expected of Asian workers:

Don't get me wrong, I'm not a racist,
but I think everyone who enters this
country should be given a test to make
sure they can read and write English
properly. I don't blame employers being
selective about whom they employ.

As we saw in the Chapter on Employment it was little wonder then that
the demand for English lessons within working hours was seen to be
irrelevant by the women.

Birmingham Interpreting & Translating agency provides extensive
interpreting and translating services to translate literature for trade
unions free of costs. They received only one response (Bishton 1984 :
50). Thus the need for unions to communicate with their Asian women,
fee paying members, was not even on their list of consideration not to
mention priorities.

Furthermore, the GLC in their survey of "Racism within trade unions"
(1984) noted that the unions portrayed "strong words and rhetoric when
it comes to policy statement" about anti-racism, but their commitment
took low priority in terms of action (Runnymede Trust Bulletin January
1985). It must be noted that with the exception of the Union of
Communication workers and the National Union of Railwaymen, most unions
have not produced an anti-racist policy. Only the National Association
of Local Government Officials (NALGO) and the National Association of
Teachers in Further and Higher Education have an 'ethnic monitoring'
system and none of the unions have an officer to deal solely with
racism. In spite of their own practices, the unions demand equal

opportunities from employers. The decline in the manufacturing industries and mass unemployment has led the service unions to recruit and attract more Black members. In this respect NALGO for example have campaigned on race issues such as anti-deportation campaigns and in the course of doing this have printed leaflets in minority languages.

The women also had little trust in the shop steward acting on their behalf. It seemed to some people that the management decided who should stand for stewardship and then later buy them off by making them into foremen/ladies. These findings are analagous to Beynon's (1975) findings.

Asha had been an ex-shop steward but resigned her post, she stated that:

Shop stewards are no good, they always do as the management says. Management was sad to lose me, because they couldn't understand Asian women.

She went on:

Our union wants Asian women, but no one seems to volunteer. They wanted me because of English. Most of the women can't speak English. If they could they would become shop stewards - who doesn't want to be heard.

But Asha had resigned and the reason she gave was:

They wanted me to be shop steward, so I took it to see what the management was like. But I gave it up because they kept all the information to themselves. They would only tell me of the things that were happening in my part. All the other shop stewards knew everything else

that was going on in the factory. When I protested they said, sorry, we forget to tell you.

Westwood (1984) also found this to be the case in her study.

Racism of the White Workers and the Management

Shiela from the same place as Asha explained that:

White women get the same jobs as us, but there's one shop where all the women are white and they get higher wages than the rest of the shops. The 'team' chucked the Indian women out and the union didn't do anything about it.

Together with these hindrances, the white workers did not, on the whole show solidarity for the plight of Asian workers.

Ranjit described the conditons at a white- managed leather factory that she had worked in and the subsequent efforts on the part of the women to unionise:

All the Indian women were on piece-rates and the whites on day-rates. They (management) made us work so hard. When we didn't get a piece right, the daughter of the manager would come and throw the piece back at us. She wouldn't ask us to correct it and hand it to us, but she'd throw, it literally throw it. So I said, it didn't suit me to do so much work for such little money. The white workers didn't agree with us Asian women. Whatever we talked about they'd tell management and then the management would throw the pieces back at us - literally. All the white women were paid more, and only they were ever kept as cutters. Indian women who

had been there longer complained as to why they couldn't be used as cutters. We went on strike, joined a union. My husband filled the cards for us. The next day every Asian woman was sacked, but the women didn't want to take action after that. They left and found work elsewhere - mainly in Asian sweatshops.

This evidence would confirm Hartmann's (1979) and Rubery's (1980) suggestion that worker organisations can themselves play a part in placing certain sections of the labour force (in this case Asian women) at a disadvantaged position.

To a certain degree Asian women take racism for granted. Westwood (1984) : 233) points to an Asian woman who was cautious in recognising white women's kindness, which also had to be put in the context of racism, because she knew that the kindness also reflected racist connections. Black people are aware that racism forms an aspect of every part of their lives.

The management's differential treatment of Black and white workers led to divisions amongst the workforce on issues such as unionisation. The white women were workers, but in realistic terms they were closer to the management in both their material and ideological positions. Bishton (1984 : 43,57) describes white owned factories where Asian women had to eat at their machines and were given separate toilets from white women, where there was no toilet paper. He points out that the white workers, in receiving preferential treatment acted as potential spies in the opinions of Asian women, and therefore were seen as privileged workers.

We have noted that the role of women in the trade unions was structured by:

- a) their position as domestic labourers,
- b) their position as paid workers at the lowest levels of the labour market,
- c) the racism of white workers and the the trade unions, and
- d) the racism of the management.

This implied that the level of participation within the unions was low because the unions did not recognise the specific low position that these women occupied within the labour force. The unions did not act against the placement of Asian women at the bottom of the heirarchy and against the racism shown by white workers and the management towards Asian women. They used Asian women as interpreters and were inaccessible to them. The union mediated basically through the English language.

The majority of the women in this study had not been involved in any significant strike action. Some of the women had been, but could not recall when the action took place or its purpose.

The conclusion drawn from this must not be that these women never considered protesting; since the 1970s, numerous workplace struggles of Asian women have emerged, highlighting the relationship between women, Black workers and the trade union movement. Amongst these are Imperial Typewriters (1974), Grunwick (1977) Coventry sweatshop (1979).

We shall first look at the struggles at the workplace in the 1980s in Birmingham and then show how these reflected the experiences of the 1970s in which Asian women as a whole were participants.

Kewal Bros. a small clothing manufacturing sweatshop was located on a deserted street which formed an industrial estate in the heart of the old foundry works, between Smethwick and Handsworth. In total approximately twenty people were employed. The workforce was constituted mainly of Punjabi women and three Punjabi men. The owner was also of the same origin. Some of the women were related between themselves and to the employer. The working conditions mirrored those of sweatshops generally. The pay rates averaged less than £1.00 per hour, annual holidays totalled two weeks and heating in the factory during winter periods was minimal. The workers had in the past few months attempted to form a union, but the employer found out as the information leaked to him. He terminated the employment of those whom he thought had instigated the problem. In early 1984, Kewal Bros. sacked two women workers and one man. They had taken a leading role in unionising most of the workforce two months earlier. The rest of the workforce also came out in support of the three workers, except approximately four women who were close associates of the employer. The workers continued to pay their contributions without ever seeing their union official, except for the one time when they had originally joined. This dispute occurred and they came out on strike, apparently without union consultation. Since none of the workers knew the union structure and its constitutional arrangement and the union showed no sign of concern for this, it was inevitable that the workers should come out in

this way. One of the men, a shop steward, contacted the local IWA (GB), who supported the picket line and who became instrumental in the negotiations. This was because their General Secretary is also the TGWU branch secretary for the area.

The dispute came in the midst of the Miners Strike and the Longbridge case where a Black worker was sacked and abused by a white foreman. In general, the TGWU was busy organising and mobilising support on this issue. This seemed to be at the expense of the Kewal Bros. dispute. The wholehearted support given to the miners cause at this time, could not be compared with the neglect shown for the Kewal Bros. strike action. Unwillingly, the TGWU made the strike official after a week or so. For the first four weeks the strikers were told that the union official was on holiday and they could not therefore carry out any further action. The branch secretary was instrumental in drawing out negotiations with the employer who flatly refused to succumb. There was no discussion or attempt to investigate where the firms deliveries came from or where they went. A few attempts were made to talk to drivers making deliveries, who responded by saying that the matter was of no concern to them as they did not belong to a union. For the first four weeks, no strike pay was paid and the union quibbled over the short length of time that the workforce had been members. No leaflets, press statements, etc. were issued in the first four weeks. The strike picket consisted of the workers and a few men from IWA. In the second week a group of Black women from Birmingham Black Sisters (BBS) and some local youth of the Asian Youth Movement (AYM) got to know of the strike. A local trade union resource centre was making a video film on the strike.

A member of the BBS worked there when she discovered the strike action. The information spread and the picket began to be supported by them. It was pressure from these two groups that was actually responsible for the setting up of the Strike Support Group after four weeks into strike action. After some difficult deliberations the agreement for a support group was reached. The strike, which was virtually run by members of IWA was in their control. This was particularly the case because their member was also the branch secretary of TGWU and the General Secretary of IWA. During the discussions at the meetings the IWA's answer was never negative about the formation of a support group, but delaying tactics were used. Realistically, there was no need to have several meetings to form a support group, but meetings were called and then not attended. The supporters and workers who did attend were not able to progress because they had no experience of organising workerist struggles. Thus, with the absence of union officials and the lack of experience of other supporters, the action for further development actually centred around one person. He had all the knowledge of both the union and the employers reactions and therefore held the control. The workers, being aware that he was also the head of IWA as well as being well known to the area amongst Asian people, respected him and looked to him for leadership. He played elusive. Quite often he would not turn up to the picket lines or pass down information to anyone else who could relate to the strikers and supporters. Hence everyone was left to speculate as to the current situation. When challenged, primarily by women from BBS he reacted by saying "I'm not leading this strike, everybody is a part of it. We are doing all we can". Later on it transpired through the Trade Union

Resource Centre that the TGWU, had asked him to keep the picket at a 'low profile'. The reason for this was the abolition of secondary picketing.

A meeting of the local branch of TGWU was held in a pub in the evening at 7.30 p.m. The women strikers had been generally told of the meeting by the branch secretary, but were not persuaded to come. The male workers knew and had been encouraged to come. The women also felt that they could not attend a meeting in the pub and that therefore men should go. No child care had been arranged. The meeting was attended by the supporting Black women, and was held in English. The branch secretary did not attend as he was busy in London giving an interview on the Longbridge case. No body else had any information to disclose, therefore the meeting came to an abrupt end. This reflects the lessons learnt by many Black women (Bryan et al 1985) that "getting unions to support us is a struggle in itself".

The strike support group was formed. It consisted of the workers, represented by the men, the IWA, BBS, AYM and the white left. For the first few meetings the white left, represented by various 'centres' and one or two members of the trades council, dominated the presence. The actual support on the picket line remained the same as before and no funds were forthcoming from any organisation. The matter was mentioned at the Trades Council meeting but it collected little in terms of financial support. However, somebody there suggested that the miners from Stoke could come and support a one day action to uplift the morale of the strikers and call the Raindi workers for support. They had been

on strike in 1982. Thereafter there was to be a fixed mass picket one day a week. Two weeks later the mass picket day was called and it was launched by the miners and the Raindi women. The day was a morale booster. The TGWU, trades councils, the district organiser, branch secretary and everyone else was present and all pledged to make the strike a victory. A heavy police presence prevailed but no arrests occurred. The day ended peacefully and with a good sense of purpose and confidence for all who had been at the picket lines. After this however, the support on the picket line declined progressively. The mass picket days for each week were the same in number as those of any other day and nothing else was on the horizon. The branch secretary felt quite proud of 'his' organisation of the miners support and continued to be absent from the pickets. The women were faithfully seen outside the factory from 7.45 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. As ever, they hurled abuses at the employers and the scab women inside. As forms of abuse allegations were showered about the scabs sleeping with the employer and his sons. They wished for disaster on Kewal and his sons and his other relatives, and his lovers. They sang his funeral marches and urged him to challenge them:

Jo hum se tukrai ga. Choor choor hojai
ga

(whoever challenges us, will be smashed
to smithereens).

Hun bhaj kewala a union ayea, Bhaj jithe
bhajna, magari ayea

(run kewal run. Unions arrived, run
where you will. It's there behind).

All this to no avail. Although the women and men strikers were doing all they could to confront Kewal outside the factory, those in the leading positions of the strike upon whom the strikers were encouraged to rely, were not fulfilling their roles or promises.

Throughout the strike the police kept a constant surveillance of the site. They talked amiably with the women but arrested the men on charges of damaging the employer's vehicles. Court appearances of these men were pending, but the strike support group did not see this as an issue. When this was suggested it was seen to be "side stepping" the real issues of the strike - the workerist issue of the shopfloor. Hence police harassment was not seen to be a relevant issue for the strikers. As time crept on without action the strikers were further disillusioned. Another one day action was called in which women and workers were called from Raindi's. The time allocated was 4.30 p.m. when the workers from Raindi's finished and Kewal and his son would leave their factory also.

About sixty women and twenty men came to the picket from Raindi's. Some white and Black people from local centres were also present. It was a hot day and the mood was angry. Everybody was talking about stoning and damaging Kewals' vehicles. The picket was again powerful and vociferous. As 5.00 p.m. approached the picket crammed in front of the narrow gateway. Only three police men on motor bikes were present. The police knew of the picket as they had inquired from one of the women and also had a leaflet. Kewal emerged in the driveway and at seeing the gateway virtually blocked, he reversed back. The police escorted his vehicles to the front some ten minutes later. The gateway cleared as

requested by the police and as soon as Kewal's cars and vans appeared, a shower of stones and some scratches to the vehicles could be heard. Five people were arrested. Three male workers, one Asian woman from Raindi's and one woman from a local left-wing political theatre group. All supporters went home except for one IWA member, two women from Black Sisters and the relatives of the Asian woman who was arrested. The relatives followed to the police station and waited quietly for the arrested to be released. Later at the suggestion of one of the AYM members a spontaneous picket was arranged and mobilised, some fifty people, holding a vigil until all those arrested were released. Again little presence was apparent from the labour movement and the IWA, and again the issue of the police harassment was not connected with the strikers within the strike support group. The police had made arrests randomly without taking into account who had actually stoned the vehicles. At one stage a public meeting was called in support of the strike. Approximately sixty people attended. The women, nether the strikers nor the supporters were given any platform. Clare Short, M.P. for the area and Don Higgs from the union were invited but neither attended.

Throughout this period, the IWA and the union officials had kept a low-key profile. One of the reasons being the effect of the 1980 Employment Act - the effect of banning secondary picketing. There were continuous fears of legal action against the union for allowing secondary pickets. The police reinforced these fears by perpetually asking people on the picket their place of work and occupations.

These were the highpoints of the strike. In the course of eight weeks, little else took place. The workers, particularly women, were totally demoralised and basically at poverty. They sought other jobs, the employer continued his work, some scabs were brought into the factory and he also took work out to homeworkers.

R. Ahsan (LPU 1984) identified the tactics of giving redundancies as a method of making strikes ineffective. Workers were quick to take redundancies and this weakened unions stand. The Low Pay Unit noted that employers, on the whole threatened dismissal if women attempted to unionise. It suggested that unions could better serve its Asian women members by recruiting Asian women as officials. At Kewal Bros. the withdrawal of the workers labour had little effect on the employer. The strike was ineffective. The IWA by allying primarily with the white Labour Movement had not broadened its support from the community. The temples, other workers, the youth movement and other Black organisations were not mobilised. A part of the reason was also that at this time, a division amongst the Sikh community existed over the issues of Khalistan (separate religious state for Sikhs). The IWAs did not support this issue whilst for the most of the temples this was a prime demand. The two forces were therefore particularly antagonistic at this time, although some of the Workers did support the Khalistani issues, and could have mobilised the support of the temples if they had been allowed to take the lead. Black women supporters from Black Sisters felt angry. Being disillusioned they stated their views regarding the failure of the strike action. In their understanding the responsibility lay primarily with the white racist and sexist trade union and then on the sexism of

the men who dominated the strike support group - IWA. In the paper 'Outwrite' they stated:

The workers were members of the T&GWU, a typical white male dominated union which had made no attempts whatsoever to make itself accessible to the Black Women workers whose dues it collected. The IWA and the labour left immediately took control in the support group and not only failed to acknowledge the men's sexism that was a major factor in making these women's lives so exploitable, but perpetuated it in a desire to maintain their power as men and as members of the IWA (GB). The meetings of the support group failed to include the women strikers beyond sporadic appearances by one or two women. There are several reasons for this but one of the major ones was that the men dominated the strike implicitly and explicitly. Inside the meetings the atmosphere was one of such total male domination that we found it difficult to speak out. This was made worse by the fact that when we did speak the men did not debate with us or even openly disagree, they merely humoured us and carried on making decisions behind the scenes.

The final meeting was cancelled without women supporters including ourselves being informed let alone consulted. The women were made to believe that for them the most important thing was to be present on the picket line all the time. The meetings where important decisions regarding support for the strike could have been made were made to seem irrelevant - thereby enabling the men to retain control of the strike for themselves. Information went to the women strikers second-hand not only from the union but from the support group itself as well. The women strikers felt that we had nothing to offer them because we ourselves were women and so they presumed as powerless as themselves. This was true to some extent but the mobilisation of support that we could have carried out, we did

not, because the strength of the men's sexism silenced us and gradually wore us down. The particular affiliations of the IWA to the white labour left also meant that no attempts were made to broaden the base out to include Black organisations. The union refused in advance to pay any fines arising out of arrests on the picket line and requested that there should not be 'unnecessary arrests' as if supporters were inviting arrests. This was at the same time as the miners' struggle against the police as enemies of the workers was being recognised as being legitimate. We feel that sexism is a major force that prevents women organising. In the strikes that have been taken over by men, women have not learnt to organise themselves and so cannot pass on lessons to other women who may strike in the future. ('Outwrite' Issue 31 :1984:9).

It was hoped that both men and women would take the criticisms constructively. Though in view of the estranged relationship between the IWA and Black Sisters there was little likelihood of this. 'Outwrite' as a Women's paper was used as the most suitable outlet to express the grievances of Black women. After the publication of the statement, the IWA made severe criticism of the Black Sisters as middle class women, splitting up the Black struggle and being incapable of identifying with working class Asian women. Some of the youth argued that the statement should not have gone to 'Outwrite' and that meetings should have been held locally and nationally with Black men and women to raise the issues. Some of the problems had already been recognised by those stating the case in 'Outwrite'. In its introduction it was said that:

The strikers themselves have not been involved in the writing of this article because we recognise that owing to the

divisions in society the position we occupy is different to that occupied by the striking women. Nevertheless, as the position of the people who led the strike (all men) is so different as well and yet they presumed to lead, our criticism cannot be discussed as totally irrelevant. (Ibid).

The IWA did not discuss the criticisms, levelled on them and did not take it constructively. Instead they abused Black Sisters as middle class white feminists who are unable to identify with working class Asian women.

The IWA members in asserting control and their dominance by with-holding the information about the strike, did not want to have their position ->

questioned. On the other hand, during the meetings themselves the men attempted to avoid conflict with BBS members. When Black Sisters asserted that the men did not "debate" or "disagree" with them, Stacey's and Price's observation seems to hold true - that "dominants prefer to avoid conflict - that might question the whole situation". (Women Power and Politics 1981).

It was true that some women from Black Sisters had what can be described as middle class jobs, e.g. working at advice, law centres in the city etc. They were young, more knowledgeable of issues arising in struggles and more ready to question authority of the leading men. In some cases they had difficulty in communicating with the women on the strike and in their life styles they could not be identified with the striking women. Most lived in Birmingham alone without their families and were seen by the other women as independent - which to them meant the adoption of 'white' or 'middle class' ways. The IWA men, on the other hand were all locally known and identifiable as having working class origins. However, the Black Sisters allowed for these differences to a certain extent as the above passage shows. The important thing is that Black Sisters did not have the history of working-class workplace struggles behind them as did the IWA. The IWA controlled the information and showed no willingness to share it. The women therefore had little option but to play the role they did. The men were therefore able to dictate the level and the type of activity that was to take place, together with who should be involved. 'Race Today' continuously points to similar lessons which have been learnt from the Grunwick, Imperial

Typewriters and other workplace strikes where white trade unions have failed to show an interest and support for the exploitation of Black labour. 'Race Today' issues noted that the white workers support for Grunwick et al was based on the issue of the right for unionism, not on the moral wrongs of Black exploitation. It was in view of this that Black Sisters stated in their article that:

We hope that women will not feel disheartened by our experiences but realise how important it is to organise ourselves separately in order to have a stronger base from which to fight the exploitation in their lives. That they will continue to suffer until they organise themselves independently of trade unions and workers association who continually let them down. ('Outwrite' Issue 31 : 9).

History had taught similar lessons to Asian activists. In 1976 at Grunwick, APEX had provided widespread verbal support. The strike committee there too had been heavily dominated by the white left, caught in the "trap of unionism" fighting for the fundamental rights to belong to unions. When the miners and Tom Jackson's support from the postal workers union was effective, APEX sought to make mass pickets ineffective by agreeing to limit the numbers on the picket. On the picket line there was little Black support because the white dominated support committee had not mobilised Black people since racial exploitation was not the issue. The issue was unionisation. The leadership of the union and its bureaucracy undermined the rank and file membership. The workers at Grunwick for example demanded electricity supplies to be cut off, but these demands were ignored. When Desai went

on hunger strike, she was suspended by the union. Towards its culmination, the union appealed to Black people for support, by pressing the need for immigrants to be unionised. The issue still remained as one of unionisation, not exploitation. This was inspite of the fact that Mrs. Desai was saying:

That the leadership are not doing what they are supposed to do. If they did the history of the union movement would be different. Then nobody would have to stand outside the factory for fourteen months like we are doing. We have to do this. APEX is not really supporting us. ('Race Today' November/December 1979 : 106).

The IWA as the pioneers of shop-floor struggles for Asians did not support Grunwick, nor the Imperial strikers in 1974. They paid lip service and donated small amounts of finances. The workers involved in both these places were primarily of East African Asian origin. The IWA is not an Asian organisation. It is primarily a Punjabi Indian organisation. They therefore had little mobilising base in these communities and could not relate an 'Asian' experience to them. In addition, the IWA saw these workers as originating from a different class. Their attitude was expressed by one member:

They are mostly Gujarati's.
They have a shopkeepers mentality,
what's the point of helping them?
They'll take the money and set up
shops to sell expensive goods. (Ibid).

Community Based Struggles

These experiences highlighted above seem to confirm that the role of workers themselves (in this case white men and women, trade unions and Asian men) is important in analysing the positions of Asian women in the labour market. Whilst one can argue that the divisive practices of white workers and trade unions can be consciously pursued, to maintain a low position for Asian women in employment, the same cannot be said of Asian men. Black male workers have not had the same type of power as have white men and women, within the trade unions, and therefore they have had little opportunity to influence and direct the employment of Asian women. Nevertheless, their sexist practices can have an indirect affect on the employment of Asian women, such that their low position is maintained.

However, there were cases in Birminham where the IWAs had organised the community base for the support of women workers as the following incidents show.

Sandhar & Kang

In March 1982, Sandhar & Kang employed thirty-five workers in their cash and carry supermarket in central Birmingham. It also has branches in Coventry and Wolverhampton. Their suppliers are big firms like Beachams & Cadbury-Schweppes. The workers were being paid at 80p per hour for unskilled jobs and £1.15 for supervisors. As to the conditions of work

"there were no canteen facilities, the toilets were appalling, no First Aid was available and only two weeks holiday a year were allowed". Thirty workers joined the TGWU and the union officials asked for its recognition. This firm was co-owned by a member of an IWA faction renowned for the representation of workers interest. The firm identified a male worker as the militant who was responsible for the unionisation and alleged that he had been withdrawing company finances from the tills, and dismissed him. After abortive efforts to re-instate the worker, the union official threatened strike action which was successful. The whole Punjabi working class community was supportive of the workers, maintaining a continuous picket every day and stopping deliveries entering or departing. The local Gurdwaras assisted in providing food and drinks required to sustain the picket line. The IWA (GB) supported the workers and mobilised within their organisation. The strike was successful in so far as it increased the basic pay rate to £1.40 (less than the Wage Council recommendation of £1.60) and acquired four weeks holidays. The success rate was largely attributed to the TGWU hold on workers who supplied Sandhar & Kang. This enabled the suppliers to be cut off from the firm effectively, as the TGWU members did not cross the picket line Bishton (1984 : 55).

P.S. Raindi Textiles

In 1984, P.S. Raindi Textiles firm and its subsidiary supreme quilting in Smethwick, sacked two men for recruiting union membership (T&GWU). The women, three hundred machinists, came out in support and amongst the grievances were low wages, £30 for forty hours, long working hours, and

bad working conditions. The employer, an Asian and ex-foundry worker, alleged that he was providing the community with jobs that they could not otherwise find. The community organised against him. During the dispute, the local retailers buying from Raindis were leafleted, asked to cut off the black-list the garments and articles delivered by Raindis. To some extent this was successful. The local Gurdwaras supported the pickets in terms of food and drink suppliers. The IWAs mobilised to their fullest capacity.

The women were threatened and offered extra remunerations, (bribes) by the firm and blackmailed in terms of being related to the owners. The women, however, did not succumb to any of these threats. At a strike support meeting the women strikers were forceful and perceptive of the management tactics.

One of the strikers stood up and related a formidable message to her colleagues who may have felt any doubt about the employer:

He didn't consider us as relatives or as
his own people, when he was paying us!
Why should we consider him as ours now?

One of the women, a shop-steward, had been visited by a male member of the management who threatened her that if she did not stop making trouble, she was in danger. In response she stood up robustly and told the meeting of three hundred stiker supporters:

He (employer) should be ashamed of
himself. For a man to come to a woman's
house, unrelated, what does he mean?
I'm not afraid either. I too am a
daughter of a fighter (lion) and I too

will show I can fight. Wahe Guru Ji Ka
Khalsa, Wahe Guru ji ki fateh (victory
to the fighters).

She used the same values and morals that defined the relationship between men and women to her advantage. As is shown in Chapter 5, a woman's honour, reputation and standing in her society is represented by the way she conducts her life in relation to men. In working class families the more withdrawn she is from "strange" men, unconnected with her (i.e. not in her kin group or friendship network) the higher the level of her social standing and the more respect she commands. In this sense the woman quoted above used these axioms to attack the degrading, callous methods used by the employer to show up his black mailing tactics. The words "wahe Guru ji ka Khalsa ate wahe Guru ji ki fateh" in effect are used in the Gurdwaras at the beginning and end of each speech. The essential meaning is "victory to the Sikhs". In the above context, however, the meaning of the words remained constant but the context differed. The woman by getting up to speak, could by some men, have been considered lax. She protected herself against such scandal by using religion which legitimated her role as a speaker. Moreover, the meeting was held in the Meeting Room of the Gurdwara so even though other speakers did not use the terminology, her's was not placed totally out of context. At the picket or at meetings held elsewhere, she may not have had to use similar wording. There were over three hundred women at this meeting and about fifty men. The Gurdwara facilitated women to meet at a legitimate place where women felt at ease, and not open to abuse for attending meetings. The totality of the Guardwara, enhanced the struggle of the workplace as a part of life, in which

working class women could rightfully and respectfully engage, without threats of attack from men who may not see it as a woman's role to do so. So the Gurdwara in providing facilities and resources gave its seal of approval for women to protest, albeit in limited circumstances. The strikes were successful because the workers, in this case primarily women, were allowed to take, if not a leading role, then at least an equally predominant role in their struggle. The union backed the workers and the IWAs fully supported the workers and mobilised their spheres of influence - their membership and the Gurdwaras. This suggests that where the union itself gives full support to the strikers the IWAs also mobilise to their full capacity. The community support that the workers themselves mobilised in this case, was analogous to the Imperial Typewriters case of 1974.

We now look at some of the experiences of the shop-floor struggles in the 1970s and the role of women within them. They point to the need for women to assume leadership roles in their own struggles.

Workplace Resistance in 1970s

The workers at Imperial were striking against corruption, bribery and racial exploitation and working conditions. The workers, mainly East African Asians, expressed that they were "fighting the slavery of it all" ('Race Today' No: 4 1979). They complained of low pay, fiddling of bonuses, constant harassment for more productivity, different production

targets given to Black and whites, lack of washing time, tea breaks, lunch breaks and toilet breaks. The strike was not officially declared because the union local official, George Bromley, alleged that "the workers have not followed the proper procedure". In so doing, the weapon that unions usually used against employers (of not following 'proper procedures') was levelled against Black workers. Bromley went on, "they have no legitimate grievances and it is difficult to know what they want".

Furthermore the union denied that racial exploitation existed at Imperials. On the contrary Bromley openly stated that "I think there are racial tensions, but they are not between the whites and the coloureds. The tensions are between those Asians from the sub-continent and those from Africa". George Bromley also showed a total disregard for the complaints that the Asian workers stipulated. In a radio interview, Bromley portrayed and etched all the stereotypical notions that white people have of Asian as a backward people:

Let us take this question of the ladies' toilets. Now this is a reputable firm, there are plenty of Factory Acts. No company stops people from going to the toilet. This is so ludicrous, it's laughable in modern times. What happens here is that if a white lady wants to go to the toilet and she is working on a line, she doesn't ask anyone's permission - out she goes, powders her nose, has a cigarette, whatever they do - then comes back. Now some of these Asian ladies, I feel sorry for them, they are strangers, they don't know much about industrial life, they have led a sheltered life, you know, and when they go to the toilet they go together. If there are 38 of them on the line, 38 go together for ten minutes and then of

course the line stops. ('Race Today'
October 1974 : 274).

He then went on to warn Asian workers to with-hold their discontent.

You see, the bulk of the Asian population didn't act this way and neither did the British Resettlement Corps or the Jamaicans from the West Indies, these are just a few people from the sub-continent of Africa. Hard as it is, and I don't want to be a racist, I can feel sorry for people that are dumped into a civilisation such as ours, and they are taking the sticky end of the stick in these low rated factories. Because they are semi skilled, they are low rated but they have got to learn to fit in with our ways you know. We haven't got to learn to fit in with their's. (Ibid).

Bromley's statement showed his ignorance of the reality in which most Asian workers found themselves. He denied the reality and experience of these workers. In so doing, he placed the workers at the centre of all responsibilities, it was the workers' peculiarities of their background, their 'ignorance' that caused the disputes. In effect Bromley allied with the employers by denying the workers' experience. Under such circumstances the workers had no choice but to rely on themselves and their community for support. The Asian and the Black community as a whole was the only source of strength, the only group that could understand and support the workers fight against racial and capitalist exploitation. They therefore approached all their community groups nationally and laid the basis for victory. The strikers support committee which was primarily led by the strikers themselves, men and women, held concerts in the local community centres, organised coach

trips, discussion classes and attended other picket lines nationally. They collected funds from Birmingham Sikh Temples, IWAs, Birmingham Anti-Racists Committee, European Immigrant Workers Action Committee, Edinburgh Women's Conference. After the return to work was negotiated, Sharda Behn, a member of the strike committee explained her first days back:

The first day I got back to work, my foreman asked me what I had gained in the last twelve weeks. He was making fun of me I know. But I told him that I had lost a lot of money but I had gained a lot of other things. I told him I had learned how to fight against him for a start. I told him he couldn't push me anymore like a football from one job to another. I told him I now knew many things. I didn't know before. In the past when I used to get less money in my wage packet I used to start crying at once. I didn't know what else to do. I told the foreman, next time I won't cry, I'll make you cry. ('Race Today' September 1975 : 249).

The strikers did not let the white left or the state, via representation of the Race Relations Board, weaken its cause. They called the Race Relations Board a "toothless bulldog" and stated the lack of support from the union in their Strike Bulletin:

The actual problems of the strikers at this stage is that they do not have the backing of their union. For them it will be absolutely impossible for them to make any advance unless this is first settled. The strikers do not have the right to negotiate with management except through its union. The strikers feel orphaned without this union support. ('Race Today' August 1974 : 224).

Imperials was not the only strike that the trade unions failed to support. At Kenilworth Components (Leicester) in 1974, the women had

successive strike action due to low wages and long hours of work and differential allocation of work between white and Black workers. At one stage, the strike was made official but then the district organiser "warned those thirteen women that if they didn't accept the return to work the union could make the strike unofficial". ('Race Today' December 1974 : 320). The strike was led by the white left, international socialist and other strikers formed the support committee from Imperial Typewriter, Barrington Products and Walkers Crisps. One of the workers at Kenilworth Components had learnt from the strike that:

Too many people intervened and tried to dominate the struggle. The women themselves didn't speak much. They couldn't. There was a language problem because they only spoke Gujarati. As a result, other people began to dominate the meetings and in my view a lot of wrong decisions were taken. For example when we discovered that there was another factory in Manchester (a branch) where orders from Kenilworth could be sent we wanted to send a coach load of strikers to picket that factory. The majority of the workers are Black and I'm sure they would have been very sympathetic. But I.S. disagreed. They said we didn't have enough people to send there and that we should concentrate on the Leicester factory. Their plan was to try and stop production at Kenilworth by bringing out the white workers. We tried to tell them this wasn't possible. We pointed out that all white workers were either foremen, supervisors or scabs, but they kept arguing and in the end because people were lazy - or I don't know what they persuaded everyone and had their way. ('Race Today' December 1974 : 320).

As 'Race Today' contended, the white left, although they had the organisational and constitutional expediency of passing motions etc., had realistically failed to come to terms with the possible unity of other Black workers.

Generally the white women's movement has shown a lack of concern for the issues of Black women. Jenny Bourne makes the point that the women's movement did not support Black women's struggles because it betrayed its own anti-racist and feminist principles and followed the left generally. Like the left it saw blacks as a part of the working class and therefore as an economic issue rather than the workplace as the place of racist oppression and anti-racist struggle. Thus at Grunwick and other places where Black women fought against their employers, the women's movement did not show their support until the picket action was made 'official', i.e. when it became an 'official' left concern.

Bourne suggests that in fighting facism, like the left generally, the women's movement subsumed the struggle against racism to the struggle of class and thereby betrayed their feminist principles.

A New Trend

For most Asian women their experiences of workplace struggles are informed by those of working class Black Asian men who have exemplified the channels for resolving these struggles via trade unionism. Though there is an awareness of the lack of interest shown by unions for Asian workers, the belief that trade unions are an instrument of workplace

struggles continues as the most dominant mode of thought amongst Asian workers. Unions such as NALGO, predominantly catering for middle class employees have shown nominal interest in Black people's lives and have therefore campaigned, not on the exploitation of Black people's labour on the shop floor, but on racist legislation such as immigration laws. As an example of this effort, Mohammed Idrish's anti-deportation campaign was launched by NALGO. However, various unions are noted to have been involved in the 'Residents Domestic campaigns' against Home Office removals of Filipino domestic workers who are being removed because they allegedly failed to inform the Home Office about their dependent children. The campaign notes that "interestingly the campaign group also provided an informal mechanism for the four unions to work together which they would not otherwise have found so easily".

The state's expenditure on 'ethnic centres' has brought about a tiny proportion of Asian/Black workers into the race relations profession. Hence section 11 fundings and other ethnic voluntary projects have been set up to look into the racism in housing, education, recruitment, etc. These are usually headed by one Asian or African Afro-Caribbean person holding a key position, at mid-management level. They usually look into policy issues and are answerable to a few people hierarchically above them. Hence in Birmingham one has the "Ethnic Housing Asvisor", the "Race Relations Units", etc. In the voluntary sector, a few advice workers of "ethnic" origin have also been taken on as an effort to create a middle class amongst the population, which would be able to manage and contain the rebellion of its own working class.

These workers are aware of the minimal role that trade unions have played in the struggles of Black people. Some are now beginning to form separate 'Black workers' support groups' to support particularly Black workers in both voluntary and statutory bodies. This provides both emotional and practical support for the individual worker, but also enables each member of the group to learn from the collective experience of Black workers. At times of grievances either the group plays an assertive role itself, confronting the management with the workers, or takes the matter up for realistic representation by the union. In a recent case three Black, Afro-Caribbean, women worked in a women's workshop set up primarily for training Black women to acquire skills in computers etc. The project is headed by white women with an all white management committee. The three Black workers all resigned at different occasions because they felt that the white women co-ordinator gave the Black workers no credit for their work, patronised them; thought them to be ignorant and uncommitted towards the work. They articulated her relationship with them both on the basis of her class and her race, stating on their list of grievances that it was because of her white middle class attitude that she was able to treat them in this way. The Black workers were all on part-time and inferior jobs to all the whites at the project. Hence, though the Black workers were seen to be in middle class jobs, in comparison to the white workers, they were as victimised as Black working class people on the shop floor. The harassment by the white woman had been suffered to such an extent that all Black workers had felt they had to resign. All the Black women were on anti-depressant medication suffering from stress and anxiety. They were in a union, WALGO, but felt they could not approach it because they

had never seen any official. Their own shop steward was not trustworthy in their opinion.

One of the women, a member of Black Sisters approached the group with her work situation before they resigned. Then a Black woman approached BES to make representations to NALGO, as she was a member of the Black group in NALGO, consisting of herself and Mohammed Idrish. After a week no news was received from the union. The workers, totally disheartened decided to resign. Black Sisters called several meetings between themselves and the parties concerned but to no avail.

Black Sisters then decided to take the meeting to the white co-ordinator's house since she refused to come to the meeting. She maintained that she had not been racist, she liked Black women and could not see where the problem lay. After a further abortive meeting, which neither she nor her financiers attended, it was decided that a picket be held at the workshop. This took the white workers by total surprise and they panicked, calling in the financiers and the members of the management committee and representatives of the City Council. The new entrants, after listening to the Black women demanded a meeting 'around the table'. The Black women refused the table talk, which had been refused to them when they requested meetings with the same people. They demanded the resignation of the co-ordinator and a replacement by a Black worker so that the workshop would be more representative of the purpose for which it was set - the training of Black women. Those in authority then suggested an independent inquiry into the grievances. Black women refused to let such an inquiry take place, they saw this as

delaying tactics on the part of the management. A public meeting was then called, thus bringing Black people's exploitation at the workplace out of the parochial workplace to make it a public concern. The public meeting resolved little. It was attended by the local Labour Party politicians who demanded to chair the meeting. The Black Sisters rejected this proposal and maintained their right to lead the meeting. Eventually this demand was fulfilled, but apart from publicising the issue no concrete resolutions were reached about the workers in question. This group of middle class workers had articulated their contentions and demands well. They and their supporters were quite, experienced in 'campaigning' for issues and these skills were used rather than a reliance upon the trade unions. Expectations from the union was very low and this was dictated by the historical neglect of Black issues that the unions had shown in the past. Neither the workers, nor the supporters had any illusions about the role of the unions. Despite all the efforts, however, the rights and well-being of the workers could not be secured. In my understanding this was due to the following reasons:-

- a. The workers and the BBS could mobilise some women but this was not sufficient. They could not get the active support of Black men in the community and the management and the authorities were able to see that the resistance could be divided by mobilising Black men against the Black women, should the need arise.

- b. The fact that the union did not get involved meant that the politicians, funding authorities and the management did not have to take the grievances seriously.
- c. They could always allege that 'proper' grievance procedures were not followed.

Regardless of these shortcomings, Black women were demonstrating that they had the strength, ability and the know-how of organising and stating their discontents, on their terms.

Conclusion

We have looked at the constraints within which Punjabi and Black women's struggles generally took place within Birmingham. The Asian male methods of workplace protest also influenced the way in which Asian women expressed their grievances within employment. One aspect of this being the necessity of community support for any successful industrial action.

For many women in this Chapter, their role in trade unions was defined by their domesticity; their inferior position in the labour market; the racism of white workers and trade unions; and the racism of the management. On the whole the respondents showed an awareness that potentially, the union could look after their interests, but its practice did not relate to this awareness. In practice the racism of the unions and white workers put severe limits to the extent to which

women could participate. The trade unions and the white workers often colluded with the management on racist and sexist grounds and this collusion was to the exclusions of Asian women. These restraints were further compounded by fears of the management; the lack of unity amongst women; notions of domesticity and the inability to find full expression in the English language. The IWAs and the trade unions, as male dominated organisations, adopted a workerist perspective which promoted unionisation and failed to recognise the specificity of gender and race oppression. The fact that the white women's movement to a large extent ignored the racial oppression of Black women also meant that they could not provide support for Black women's resistance at the workplace. The effect of such racist and sexist domination of Black women's resistance was to keep them in inferior positions in the labour market.

Workerist organisations (trade unions and Black men) did follow divisive practices to exclude Black women from the better sections of the labour market. However, we cannot establish a direct link between the role of Asian men in the resistance of Asian women, and the inferior labour market position of the latter.

In the first instance, the very support given by Asian men to the workplace resistance of Asian women, indicates that they are not in themselves pursuing divisive tactics. Secondly, as Asian male trade unionists, they have no power in a white dominated structure. Therefore, they cannot directly place Asian women in inferior employment positions. However, the sexist practices of Asian men (during workerist protests which express workers solidarity) can have an indirect affect on the employment of Asian women, such that, their low position and

status is maintained and reinforced in the labour market. This is because the women are not allowed to define their own struggle on the basis of their race, gender and class subordination. Thus segregation in the labour market can be reinforced by the working class itself, and this segregation can be structured simultaneously along race and gender divisions.

In the cases where industrial action was led and supported by external male dominated organisations such as the IWAs, and the white left, the women workers (who were often of working class origin) found that they had little control over this action. They were not allowed to provide their own focus and direction as to how the protest was to be conducted. Moreover it was not easy for IWAs to express their solidarity with Asian women. Nationally, the IWAs and other Worker Associations, in recent years have been a spent force. Traditionally, the IWAs have represented the Indian Punjabi communities who now form only a part of the Asian workforce. Gujaratis, East African Asians, Pakistani and Bangladeshi workers now constitute a large part of the workforce, and unemployment has hit these groups severely. The traditional role of the IWAs as shopfloor organisers of Punjabi male workers has therefore diminished. Their inability to raise other issues of concern in the Asian community as a whole has meant that other organisations have emerged to represent the political "Asianness" or the "Blackness" of this community. The new organisations in the form of Black women's groups and the AYMs give prominence to their "Black" and "Asian" nature, and so form a basis for unity of Asians and Afro-Caribbeans and other minority groups here, rather than as Punjabi or Gujaratis etc.

In Birmingham one of the short comings of these new groups is that they do not have an experience of organising workplace protests and have little membership from the factory shopfloor. As such, they are unable to mobilise the workplace struggles independently of the IWAs and other Worker Associations. In London, Southall and Birmingham the new groups have existed since the early 1980s. In other cities of the Midlands, for example, Coventry, Leicester and Wolverhampton, the IWAs and other Worker Associations are still strong and the new groups have not emerged. The reasons for this seems unclear. In the northern cities of Bradford, Oldham and Manchester the Worker Associations have no hold and the AYMs have been in existence in these areas since the early years of this decade. The formation of Black Women's groups has only just begun in these cities. In these places the youth movements have been very active in the workplace struggles and in some cases have played successful leading roles. This would suggest that where the Workers Associations do not exist, or have little hold, the growth of new organisations and groupings is not fettered. It is interesting that male workplace protests have been successfully organised by the youth movements and that similar parallels cannot be drawn with the Black Women's groups in Birmingham. One of the reasons maybe that men can be easily contacted and are generally more accessible to one another in pubs and other social places. The isolation of women within the home and the concomitant attitudes that arise from this may contribute to the fact that they are more difficult to organise on any issue. The youth movements do have active members of working class origins, though they may not have workplace experience. Many unemployed youth can be

recruited from public houses etc. For women the same is not true, since their main domain is located within the home - a private area.

The Workers Associations and the new "Black" and "Asian" groups all have constructive and destructive aspects with regard to the political expression of the Asian community as a whole. It would seem sensible, therefore, to combine the experience and the articulation of the groups to form a united front in order to be more effective in their endeavours.

CHAPTER 5

OPPRESSION WITHIN THE FAMILY

Introduction

This section looks at the oppression of women within the family. The ideology of femininity affects the way in which women experience their oppression in this sphere, and we examine how this ideology affects the lives of the respondents.

The oppression of women in the family is not only mediated by men. Sometimes, women appear to oppress women. We examine how women become agents of oppression.

Subservience, inferiority and domesticity are central to the notion of femininity on the Indian sub-continent. It is important to see how women themselves relate to such notions. The argument stated here is that the consciousness of women is not confused or isolated, or 'false', it is a reflection of the realistic understanding of their position. We shall see that on the whole, the middle class feminists, and women who lived independently from their families, express a more independent style of life and views, than those who live with their families.

We review the available literature on this subject and present a Black feminist critique, and then look at ideology and how that informs the practice of women and vice-versa.

Review of Literature

Asian women, in the views of modernist and ethnicity schools, are seen to be passive and restricted by their culture.

Most Mirpuri women do not go out to work, because it is unacceptable in Islam and against the cultural tradition, and thus subject to severe criticism. (Khan 1979 : 38-39).

R. Ballard (1979 : 151) follows this theme of women's subordination in the Asian family and their inability to seek alternatives.

If an Indian or Pakistani woman is in conflict with her parents or husband, an outsider may assume that the subordinate role which south Asian women are expected to play towards their fathers and husbands, or the institution of the arranged marriage, is at the root of the problem. Such an interpretation might be partially correct, but the woman would be UNLIKELY to be seeking to ALTER her situation fundamentally. (my emphasis).

Within this framework some Asian writers have adopted an apologetic tone in explaining their cultures:

Arranged marriages are misunderstood by whites ... Gradual development of the western concept of the nuclear family may lead to the abandonment of arranged marriages and the dowry system... The development of a multicultural society

and awareness of the needs of the immigrant Sikh girls who have many problems of adjustment in a multi-racial society may demand even more assistance to integrate successfully. (Kalra, 1980 : 45-48).

Rashmi Desai, in her study of Asian families in Britain seemed surprised that:

The women from all the groups retain their dress ... have a conception of personal adornment different from that of the host society. (R. Desai 1963).

To her relief:

The children adopt the UK style of dress.

Such an analysis assumes that the western cultures are progressive and liberating for women, and fails to acknowledge the heterogeneity of Asian women in terms of their geographical, social, and class backgrounds. The ethnicity view also gives credence to some government policies as Lawrence (1982) suggests. Whitelaw claimed that he was on the side of Asian girls because he had received many letters from them regarding their tyrannical parents who were forcing them to sponsor male fiances.

The liberal and modernist sociologists have presented the Asian family in Britain as being a problem for British society. As Lawrence (1982) suggests, the Asian and the Black family in general, has been posed as being inadequate in the socialisation of children, who are prone to

'riot', and is set in the context of the 'culture of deprivation' within the inner city. Crime is seen to be 'internal to the community and it is reflected in the family. Lawrence points out that the large size of Black families is interpreted as a consequence of the rampant potent and aggressive sexuality of Black men and the exotic and erotic sexuality of Black women. The size of the Black families is then considered in the light of the problem of overcrowding and the inability of Black women to use contraceptives, . (E. Lawrence 1982 : 47-142). The 'oppressive nature of the Asian family is seen to promote the rebelliousness of Asian girls.

Brooks and Singh (1979) adopt this approach in arguing that the specific occupational structure in which Black people were located was not due to racism, but 'their own distinctive traditions and their ethnic identities... in turn influenced their occupational and industrial distribution' (quoted in E. Lawrence 1982 : 115). So Black people are blamed for the positions they held. Khan's (1979) observation that 'many migrants' arrive in Britain 'illegally' with false documents points to the idea that the Asian community in itself has a criminal nature (Lawrence 1982 : 119). Khan also poses the Asian family in a framework of 'integration' and 'assimilation' into British society. She views the Asians to be inward looking, and as presenting a barrier to integration:

Many migrants are not keen to accept or able fully to use 'outside' forms of support ... the village kin network, which has been re-established in Britain among some of the larger and more traditional of the Pakistani and Indian populations, provides support to the new

arrival in the form of housing, finding work and emotional and financial backing.... The passage of time does not inevitably mean change towards the minorities' acceptance of indigenous culture and access to equal opportunities, and will certainly not be as rapid (in one or two generations) as is often assumed. (Khan 1979 : 38 - 68).

Western Socialist Marxist feminists, in arguing against the radical feminist perspective of biological determinism with regards to male supremacy, have sought to encapsulate the oppression of all women in an overall concept of patriarchy and its ramifications in the family.

M. Barrett cites that:

It is difficult to argue that the present structure of the family household is anything other than oppression for women ... as a central site of women's oppression in contemporary society. The reason for this lie in the material structure of the household, by which women are by and large financially dependent on men, and in the ideology of the family, through which women are confined to a primary concern with domesticity and motherhood. (quoted in E. Lawrence H. Carby 1982 : 214).

Black feminists argue that this framework does not address the specific oppression of Black women for whom the family has also become a source of resistance to racist and sexist oppression administered by government institutions (see Chapter 1). Furthermore, they argue that the concept of patriarchy (as the subordination of women by men or through the power of the father) does not hold the same relevance for Black women because

the effect of racism 'ensures that black men do not have the same relations to patriarchal/capitalist hierarchies as white men' (H. Carby 1982 : 213).

For example, Carby advocates that even if we understand patriarchy in Barrett's terms, 'where male domination is expressed through the power of the father over the women and younger men', then the rule of the father during slavery does not fit in within this definition. Black fathers, during slavery and Black men in the colonial situation, did not enjoy the 'benefit of white patriarchy'. (in the case of the Asian father, for example, it can be said that under a racist society he does not hold the same traditional power over his right to marry his daughter to whom he pleases because immigration rules encroach upon his right to do so). She also questions the notion of dependency in that many Afro-Caribbean women have always been financially independent in supporting themselves, and that with increasing male unemployment amongst Blacks, Black women are forced to support their families.

In seeing the family as the centre of women's oppression, western feminists have taken the view that capitalism separated the spheres of factory (production) and the home (reproduction). They argue that women lost their role as producers (of goods and commodities) and primarily became reproducers (of labour power).

We saw in Chapter 3 that the versatility of capital has made it possible to exploit the home industries of the Third World countries, and to base capitalist production within the homes of the majority of Asian women in

Britain also. Here, the whole family, children included, are involved in the process of production. This suggests that not only the separation of the spheres of production and reproduction must be questioned, as it is not the reality for most of the working class Asian (and other Black) women, but the view that children have been excluded from the productive process must also be re-examined (Oakley 1972: 218).

Carby (1982 : 218) has also questioned the notion of reproduction in that some Black women not only reproduce Black labour power in their own families, but also that of white families by providing services as 'domestics'.

She contends that the historically specific forms of racism force us to question the concept of patriarchy in relation to Black men. She concludes that:

There are very dubious power structures
in both colonial and slave social
formations and they are predominantly
patriarchal.

Nevertheless:

Black women have been dominated
'patriarchally' but in different ways by
different men of different colours.
(Carby 1982 : 218).

Carby agrees with Barrett, that there is a need to use the concept of patriarchy in 'a more precise and specific' way rather than as a general 'expression of male domination'. She suggests the usefulness of 'sex/gender system' as proposed by G. Rubin. Carby agrees with Barrett

and Rubin that patriarchy as a concept distinguishing 'the forces maintaining sexism' generally, is not an explanatory theory and it 'obscures other distinctions'. Rubin states that the 'sex/gender' system is more precise. This refers to:

the human capacity and necessity to create a sexual world, and the empirically oppressive ways in which sexual worlds have been organised. Patriarchy subsumes both meanings into the same term. Sex/gender system, on the other hand, is a neutral term which refers to the domain and indicates that oppression is not inevitable in that domain, but is the product of the specific social relations which organise it. (quoted in Carby 1982 : 223).

Carby notes that such an analysis, in providing specificity and yet cross-cultural comparisons, would not be based on assumptions of the inferiority of Black cultures.

For the purpose of this thesis I use the term patriarchy to denote a particular "system of family organisation which includes patrilineal inheritance, the sons and daughters-in-law staying in the father's house, and the authority of the father over the women and the younger men, supported by a cultural tradition which emphasises the supremacy of the male power principle" (J. Liddle and R. Joshi 1986 : 52).

We have noted that Black feminists have been primarily occupied with resisting the racism and sexism of the State in British society (Chapters 2 and 3). In doing so, there has been little concern on analysing precisely what the particular patriarchal forms, or the

sex/gender systems are within the Black, and particularly Asian families.

Two major departures from this position are Wilson (1978) and Sharanjeet Shan (1985), who have attempted to describe and analyse the oppression of women within the Asian family. Both these works have been criticised by Black feminists on the grounds that they sensationalise the oppression of Asian women by portraying Asian men as being more oppressive than whites; and implying that Asian women only learnt to resist against their oppression on their arrival in Britain (P. Parmar, 1982; M. Dhondhi, 1979). However, if all attempts to analyse Asian women's oppression (or the oppression of other Black women) are to be met with similar criticism, I feel that it then it becomes difficult to begin such an endeavour in the first instance.

The Ideology of Femininity

Sikhism purports in theory, to advance the equality of the sexes, as opposed to Hinduism and Islam, but in practice it draws upon both the traditions.

Thus the ideals of a Sikh woman, as in Hinduism and Islam, is to be humble, meek, hard-working, quiet, self-sacrificing, passive, obedient and to be non-competitive with men. (This ideology is in opposition to the views of Hinduism about women's sexuality where women are seen to be dangerously powerful, irresponsible and destructive, and therefore in need of control).

This ideology represent the Indian sub-continent ideals of womanhood.

... woman as a selfless giver, someone who gives and gives endlessly, gracefully, smilingly, whatever the demand, however unreasonable and however harmful to herself. She gives not just love, affection and ungrudging service but also, if need be, her health and ultimately her life at the altar of her duty to her husband, children and the rest of the family.. (Kishwar and Vanita 1984 : 46).

Such ideals seem to be derived from pre-capitalist rural and agricultural modes of production in which a woman's worth is centred around her reproductive powers in societies where patrilineal descent is practised. In such a system, it becomes imperative to control the sexuality and the reproduction of women to help safeguard access to land rights which are handed down from father to the son(s). The family, as the basic unit of production is held to be of prime importance in such systems.

Though these are the IDEALS in Sikhism, Sikh history and religion portray women as strong and challenging. In Sikh temples, here and in India, women who fought for their religion are remembered for their acts of defiance. Mai Bhago, for example, is known to have reprimanded forty Sikhs and took up arms herself when they renounced their allegiance to Guru Tegh Bahadur in fear of the muslim rulers. The sacrifices of thousands of women receiving garlands of their butchered children (1748-1753) are honoured to the present.

Sikhism prides itself for advancing the education of women from the 15th century onwards (Sidhu 1977) and challenging the degradation of women.

Not only were the Sikhs prohibited from practising customs derogatory to women, they were directed not to even associate themselves with those who practised them. Some of these injunctions, as against purdah, found a place in the sacred book of Sikhs ... Bride price was banned as demeaning and girls were given freedom in their choice of their partners ... (K. Chattopadhyay 1983 : 24).

Generally however, the appraisal of women within Sikhism (and Islam and Hinduism) is very much in the context of family honour, pride, loyalty, self-respect and reputation and modesty - that is 'izzat'.

Amrit Wilson (1978) has elaborated upon this concept. She argues that izzat essentially controls the sexuality and the fertility of women and is symbolised in the specific forms of dress to which women adhere.

In covering most parts of the body, the women refrain from exposing their sexual parts, and their potential sexuality. The different ways in which the body is covered can vary, ranging from head to foot (as with burquas and veils) to just covering the major parts, such as the breasts and the legs. The specific form a woman may adopt may be indicative of her geographical, social, educational and class backgrounds.

In essence, izzat centres around the social and the physical control of women by men, epitomised in the defence of a woman's virginity. Wilson states that:

The most important and uncontrollable factor in this peasant society occurs then in a woman's body. The result is that religion and superstition centre their attention on the womb in an effort to explain away in terms of 'morality' what remains unexplained and unacceptable in terms of fact. Morality and religion open the door to oppression but in focusing so sharply on the woman's role they make her the central symbol of the culture. She is the link between economic survival and the meaning of life, between economic security and emotional security. Her role is at the heart, the core of the civilisation. That is why she is kept in her place ... If she rebels, the society itself may be overthrown. (A. Wilson 1978 : 4).

The izzat that a woman portrays actually belongs to the man. It is a symbol of how well the men of the family are able to control the women, and therefore points to the capabilities of men. The women, however, nurture this izzat, and teach their children to show respect to it.

Sharanjit Shan in this vein expresses that:

In the name of izzat, a girl is still taught by her mother to suffer silently, to walk at least two paces behind her husband, to cover part or whole of her face in the presence of all the males of her husband's household, and to put herself at the bottom of the list as regards family welfare. (Shan 1985 : 69).

She remembers the position of her mother.

My mother played a role of subservience and total obedience to my father. She would not even have dreamt of rebelling against him. This would have meant dishonouring her parents ... Mother always supported him in public though she shed countless tears in private. (Ibid 108-9).

Kalra (1980) confirms this view:

An Indian woman is generally expected to be very polite, respectful, deferential and formal to her husband in public.

Whilst a woman can bring disaster to herself and her family through her disapproved actions, men suffer no victimisation when they perpetuate activities that are not approved. Thus adultery, gambling and the performance of other such vices by men, are condoned (rather than condemned) in the name of manliness (Wilson 1978 : 35).

Wilson argues that in Britain, the racism of British society strengthens the notion of izzat since the whole culture of Asian people is under attack:

The contempt for Asian culture, the constant shadow of racial hostility and the disregard for family and group identity provide an atmosphere in which izzat is constantly at risk and therefore is constantly charged and recharged. (A. Wilson 1978 : 32).

Issues such as schools for girls only; the place(s) where girls should be brought up; the clothes girls should wear; whether they should stay

at home or go to work, all become crucial in assessing the effects on izzat.

Since women are placed as central figures in the continuation of culture, it is they who are made scapegoats when the activities of children dismantle the izzat of the family.

One of the other ways in which izzat affects the lives of women is controlling their physical movement. Fear sanctions the movement of women outside the family and implies segregation. This does not mean that they cannot move from one place to another, but their movement must have a purpose. Purposeless roaming about and enjoyment is not condoned as is the case with the excessive enjoyment of oneself. This is also the case within white culture where a woman who is too indulgent can be seen as being loose. Men have no such restrictions on their mobility. Asian women cannot be seen to establish too much contact with men not known to the family. In cases where segregation of women is promoted it is only where strange men are present. In the villages of the Indian subcontinent, women have a wide range of spatial movements and contacts with men, within the auspices of the family. They relate to the male members of the village as sisters, daughters, nieces etc. Segregation is seen to serve and maintain the purity of women (as virgins) and safeguard the family honour.

Much intellectualisation is evident on the strict observation of spatial separation between men and women in the Third World countries (U. Sharma 1980, P. Jeffry 1979, V. Khan 1976). U. Sharma suggests that we should

contextualise purdah in terms of the "physical and conceptual separation of practices" that limit the behaviour and appearances of women in public places. If this broad definition and context is correct, then it must be maintained that purdah is also relevant to the gender roles of the West. In this sense, concepts of 'public' and 'private', 'economic' and 'domestic' domains relate to purdah since they denote physical and conceptual separation. The debarring of women from certain occupations, and their concentration in others, in the West, constitute a form of segregation which help to maintain and reproduce gender roles. Notions of respectability attached to the forms of women's dress, etc. in the west are a way of secluding women from male spheres and constitute a part of the same continuum of purdah. Thus the form in which purdah is practised can vary from one group to another. Generalisation on the phenomena can lead to stereotypes.

Purdah, and the oppression of women in general, have variations of class, urban/rural background, education, standards of living, etc. For example, if all Moslem societies observed purdah to the same extent, then Benazir Bhutto could hardly have been a viable opposition to Zia Khan.

Similarly, in India, for the middle classes:

very few fields of education and professional employment are legally barred to women.. (Kishwar and Vanita 1984 : 26).

The four middle class women who had received education in India in my sample, did not experience any obstructions from their families on the extent of their education. Reena narrated:

I came from a middle class family, we were quite poor. Middle classes are quite poor in India. My parents paid for my education. I did M.A. in English and Bachelor of Teaching, then came here, and taught in a college. I didn't think that was anything special. There were millions of girls doing M.A.s. It was nothing extraordinary at all ... I like the continuation of study. I still think I'll do something. I like writing so I think I'll write. I think I grew up in a family where they said that you could achieve anything, boy or girl. Marriage wasn't a goal ... My husband believed that I should achieve more ... I never thought that I'd be just my husband's wife.

Kishwar and Vanita confirm this:

There has been no obvious discrimination against women in professions of pay and other facilities. Every time a woman finds her way into what are usually considered male citadels or into elite professions, she usually does so with much fanfare and general acclaim. The first few women police officers, judges, film makers, parliamentarians, far from facing visible discrimination have been given distinct encouragement. (Opcit : 26).

As we saw in Chapter 2, this was indicative of the fact that middle class men in following western models of 'modernity', saw the progress of women (middle class women), to be aligned with the progress of their country. In these terms it is noteworthy that much of the legislation to provide women equal treatment and political opportunities came as much

through the organising efforts of men as through the initiative and efforts of women leaders from elite families. There is a fairly powerful tradition of men actively espousing the women's cause in India. (Ibid : 26).

If middle class Indian women can live their lives in this 'exposed' manner, outside the purdah, by implication their relative ideals of femininity must differ from that of working class women, who clearly have a different practice. Kishwar (1984) notes that we must recognise that the western ideals of femininity to which cityite and middle class women are exposed are distinct from those of village women. It is with these variety of experiences of Indian, and other sub-continental women in mind, that Black feminists have argued against the passive stereotyping of the sexuality of Asian women which is often portrayed by the media etc. in Britain.

The femininity of Asian women is not experienced in a static way. The ways in which the notions of femininity are practised are related to class and other factors - there is no homogeneity.

With regards to the respondents in this study, we refer to the specific aspects of family life, class and other social phenomena which are relevant. We examine the degree of importance attached to boys and girls, their education and marriage. We discuss how the respondents relate to their roles as domestic labourers, notions of leisure and their relationship to the family income.

We will conclude that the women who have separated from their families, together with the middle class feminists, hold to less traditional ideas of femininity. They seek for more independence.

Socialisation and Education

Manu (the Hindu 'law giver') put the position of women succinctly:

A woman when young should be under the control of her father, when adult under the control of her husband, and when older under the control of her son.
(quoted in G. Omvedt, 1980 : 28).

Punjabi women are taught the same subservience, to be self sacrificing for the reward of pain and anguish which signifies woman-hood in perfection.

To maintain this subservience, subtle differences of how much a woman should eat, how she should walk, dress, laugh, talk and where and when she should go, are all maintained in the name of femininity. At the centre of this control rests the control of the reproductive power of women and its institutionalisation in the form of marriage. For women, marriage is a must. A woman's destiny is to marry; without marriage she is not a woman. In a patrilineal system, like that of north-west part of the sub-continent, daughters are given away for marriage. As such they become 'begane', 'alien wealth', and cannot be 'kept' at the paternal residence for life. A girl's real home is that of her-in-laws, and parents keep this wealth in trust until the time of departure. The idea that girls must marry is ingrained in them from childhood. While st

with her parents, a girl must be kept intact with her izzat secured, and savings must be made for her dowry, for her up keep when she is passed on. Parents must not take any form of financial support themselves from this 'alien wealth'.

The working class women of this sample, who lived with their families, and had not experienced any major upheavals as regards their roles therein, portrayed a consciousness of gender roles in which male dominance and female subordination was condoned. For women who had or were experiencing some form of strain due to the family set-up, the ideals portrayed for perfect womanhood were questioned. The middle class women with a feminist consciousness also expressed this questioning. This suggests that the consciousness, or the ideas that women hold, cannot be seen in isolation, but must be related to their material conditions.

The women with their families had not experienced situations in which they could question their position, and were not aware of other viable alternatives which may encourage such questioning. The 'independent' women, and middle class feminist women, did have access to realistic alternatives and had felt the need to attain them.

All the working class women who were living with their families expressed the sentiments of Bimla, who suggested that girls:

are not a thing to keep. Daughters are
a burden, they can't be kept at home.

Debo expressed that:

it's our 'reet' (custom) to get married.
There is no other way for a girl. She
can't stay at home. She hasn't a
choice. If she didn't marry, people
would say she had some sort of a defect.
Girls are 'beganea'.

The 'defect' implies a physical or mental disability, or a socially blemished character such as a loss of virginity. (The notion brings to mind the English woman's fear of being 'left on the shelf'). To protect this character, a girl cannot be seen to live alone, as Shiela suggests:

Girls have affairs and then have
problems. Only prostitutes live alone;
not an Indian girl. I'm proud to be
Indian. No one will have her if she's
been on her own. People will pester
her.

For this reason, if a girl's character is slightly blemished, she cannot be expected to marry into a 'good' family. Tara commented that:

... a boy can marry twelve times if he
likes, but a girl only once. If a girl
ran away she can't expect a good
respectable home. My sister-in-law ran
away; what do we want with her now?

There are instances, however, where women do respectably re-marry. Widows, or women whose marriages have failed, have been remarried with the full consent and participation of the family, where this agreement has been reached. Such women are often younger (late twenties to early thirties), and may be remarried to men who are 'second-hand' - divorced or widowed. It is an acknowledgement that women should not remain

single. It is when a woman wants to marry of her own accord, expressing her own independent will, that problems arise, because this contradicts the dependent nature of women promoted in the ideology. The girls, in the working class homes, also expressed that marriage was imperative. Thus Paramjeet felt that:

Women can't survive on their own.
People talk. A woman can't go out
alone, she has to have a man with her
'cus otherwise people say she's all over
the place, loafing around, y'know.

'People' refers not to everybody, but close friends and relatives who are the significant 'others' of the family.

Nina expressed, alarmingly:

My father said I got to get married,
because he can't keep me at home. He
says I don't respect him. I answer
back, see. He says my in laws will sort
me out. He says 'I won't be able to
keep you forever'.

For these girls and women, there were no other realistic alternative models which contravened this consciousness. In their experiences, women had not been able to survive on their own, with respect in the community, and therefore that respect for them depended on being married. Their livelihood depended on respect attained from conforming to notion of femininity. Even those women who had severed their relations with their families believed that ideally women should be married. This belief, however was not held in isolation. Their experience of leaving home, and setting up on their own showed that in a

system that believed in the dependence of women, their only chance of a respectful life was with a man.

The middle class feminist women, of whom all except two were married, did not think that women necessarily had to be married in life. They believed that it was quite possible for a woman to be well-educated, and be financially independent, and live alone. One of these women, Kamlan who was twenty-seven years of age had not yet married (and at the time of writing she is single at thirty-two) and saw no possibility of marriage. Another woman, Pinki was divorced at twenty-two, she is now twenty-eight and has not remarried. Hence the material experience of middle class women acknowledges their material independence and the respect they gain by virtue of their class and professions. This is reflected in their consciousness, as Annu point out:

Women can be independent from their husbands and families. Before my marriage I had kept quite an open mind as regards staying single.

After marriage, a woman must reproduce. An infertile woman has no value. Avtar, a working class woman, had been married for over twenty years and had not conceived. She contemplated her husband's remarriage:

I'm scared ... He's a good man. He's been good to me. I think he wouldn't mind remarrying, but he's just too kind to say it to me. But I'm never going to say it myself. I've suggested the test-tube method, or anything like that, but he says he wants his own child.

This woman had been ill many a times, with depression and was willing to adopt or try other methods of conceiving but her husband flatly refused to try for a test-tube baby because he wanted a 'natural' baby of his 'own'.

Debo had a pending fear:

I had a miscarriage when all the problems in the family started. I want a child now, because otherwise people say I'm barren. My husband's relatives would encourage him to remarry if I didn't have children.

Of the five married middle class feminist women in this sample, two had no children, and they did not express a desire to have any in the future.

Infertility is not the only cause for a woman's degradation and devaluation. In a patrilineal society where girls must be given away in marriage, with a dowry, the birth of daughters is a harrowing experience for women. It is women who take the blame, responsibility, shame and guilt for the birth of a female, who is received into the world with much scorn. When a girl is at her prime and most valuable in terms of her work and its economic value, she must be given away. She provides her parents with no protection in old age - she is a mere burden. A boy, on the other hand is a source of material support. A. Wilson points out that:

a woman's chief economic role is as a producer of labour power (her sons) she is not considered of any real economic value before she is married ... a woman's success or otherwise is not within her control. It is a matter of chance. She might not be able to produce the required number of sons or she might produce only daughters or she might even be childless. She is encouraged by religion, mythology and custom to produce sons. A new daughter-in-law is greeted by her mother-in-law with the blessing 'may you have seven sons' ... But what if she fails? Society responds with oppression....
(A. Wilson, 1978 : 4).

The sons, in a patrilineal and patriarchal structure, stay with parents and are a source of economical and emotional support. Thus parents stress the desire for sons in terms of this support and other connotations which man-hood carries. Satya had only one child, as yet a daughter, and she stressed:

I wish my daughter had been a son. Boys give parents confidence ... parents are afraid of girls losing their izzat ... A boy carries the family name forward. Parents only have boys to rely on in their old age.

Similarly, Shiela who had two daughters at the time expressed:

I'd like to have sons. There's no life for me without a son ... no one know how I suffer in my heart I'm looked down upon. My husband doesn't say anything, but I want it for him ... A girl always wants a brother for 'Rakhi'. If she had a brother she wouldn't be let down by anybody ... but nowadays, even brothers say they can't afford it".

The ultimate care and protection of a brother for his sister is symbolised through the 'Rakhi' ceremony where a sister reminds the brothers of his obligation by tying a piece of string to his wrist. Shiela expressed a contradiction of the ideal of the brother's care for a sister, and at the same time acknowledges the reality that in practice few brothers can afford it.

All the women in the sample, with the exception of the middle class feminists, expressed their dislike for daughters. 'Manushi' also found this to be the case in India. They record that many women thought that girls were "loveable and helpful and shared the good and bad fortunes of the mothers". However, they still preferred sons for the following reasons:-

1. Their own life as a woman, gave them an aversion to producing another sufferer like them.
2. Their own life is made more miserable and down graded in the family everytime a daughter is born.
3. Many of them do not see their daughters as having any better chance in life.
4. As distinct from the mother's own interests, the family as an economic unit sees these daughters as a burden on account of dowry and limited employment opportunities for women. (Kishwar and Vanita 1984 : 84).

Thus the beliefs that the women held, were grounded in their material and ideological settings, and not merely in the realm of ideology.

The differences in the socialisation of boys and girls were primarily maintained, in working class families, through distinct ideas and practices allocated to both sexes in terms of education, marriage arrangements and housework.

The daughters themselves, generally felt that their parents succumbed to the demands made by the sons more easily. Rita, a fourteen year old stated that in her family:

Boys get treated nicer than girls. The boys order you around. My brothers don't have to ask when they go out. They just go ... They don't have to plead about the fashionable clothes they want; they just say so and get them. If I want a new pair of trousers or a skirt, I have to think for weeks about how I'm gonna break the news, you know.

In terms of domesticity, of the seventy-nine working class women and girls interviewed 39 percent showed their attitudes to resemble that of Giano, a fifty six year old woman:

Girls should stay in and do the housework. Who else will do the cooking? I never went out to places myself and I didn't let my daughter either.

Bimla who had four daughters and one son explained why she didn't want a high education for them:

I don't want my daughters to do anything. 'Zamana' (times) are bad. When they go out, they get bad habits, even when they don't - people think differently. Don't they? I wouldn't let my daughters go to college, that's when they become bad.

Where the women had experienced some form of basic disagreement with their families, this had led them to question the stereotypes of gender roles.

Shindo had left her husband once and had reconciled again. She had begun to identify her predicament with other women, and therefore with gender definitions.

I'll teach my son to do the housework. I don't want his wife to suffer as I did. He comes home at 11.30 p.m. and demands his 'roti' (chappatis) to be freshly cooked.

Chinti, a thirty-nine year old woman, whose husband was an alcoholic and never supported her financially was wary of her daughters being adversely influenced by the external influences of the world, but she understood that:

If girls are going to get spoilt,
they'll do it anyway. Girls should be
'izzat-dar' (respectable), otherwise
they blemish the notion of daughterhood.

Balbir a thirty year old had left her husband and in-laws and now lived alone with her son and daughter. She did not want to repeat with her children the mistakes that her parents had made with her upbringing.

I want the kids to speak for themselves.
I used to shrink if I was ever asked to
make a decision. I never had the
confidence. I left school at fifteen,
my father was old fashioned. I want my
kids to be confident, I want them to
study as much as they both can.

Similarly Bakshish, in her thirties, did not get on with her husband. She was learning the value of being independent and was adamant to give her daughter, an only child, the best:

I want to send my daughter to a private
school, that's why I work part-time as a
cleaner at the hospital, and sew clothes
at home. ... I let her wear skirts ...
it's her thoughts that should not be
dirty ... I want her to be educated so
that she can stand up on her own two
feet.

Dhanti, a forty-nine year old woman from East Africa had four daughters and one son, all of marriageable age, and well educated.

We believe that daughters and sons should be well educated. It's a good asset ... There is no difference between girls and boys nowadays. My daughters are free to do as they like, within limits, as is my son. We have as much control over our son as over our daughters.

The girls in the sample felt that their educational achievements depended on parental consent, the economic conditions of the family and the education system.

Parminder was sixteen and had left school at fifteen.

I can't study, Mum won't let me. I have to work 'cus we can't manage, that's why I work.

Preet was seventeen and regretted that she was not able to achieve her educational aspirations:

I wanted to do nursing but I didn't because I thought I'm going to get married, so why bother, it's no use. My parents won't let me do it, because they say I'm getting too old. My father thinks it's good to be a doctor or a lawyer, but not for girls, he thinks I should just cook and sew.

Seeta was also eighteen and had left her parents. She felt bitter:

Our parents didn't let us study. They thought we'd learn too much about the outside world. Now I want to look for a job in Woolworths or something. I hate to stay in all day.

Leela and her sister had just left school at sixteen and seventeen respectively. She felt that:

Education is important, but our parents wouldn't let us stay on at school. I want to be a shop assistant now. Most of our friends have found jobs in shops.

Pammi now seventeen, came to the U.K. at thirteen years of age. The education she received was insufficient to enable her to reach the same standards as her classmates:

I felt funny when I couldn't speak English. I did two C.S.E.s. It took me months to learn to speak some English. If I could speak it properly, I'd like to have worked in an office. Now I wouldn't mind doing some capstan and milling work. I don't like sewing.

Though these are the familial restrictions on the educational achievement of girls, they must be considered in relation to the institutionalised racism of the education system that we have noted earlier, for example, the lack of adequate careers advice, perceptions of teachers, the type of curriculum etc. that are practised in the educational institutions as a whole.

Dowries

A greater part of why girls are considered to be burdens is associated with the giving of dowry (A. Wilson, 1978 and P. Bhachu 1985). A. Wilson argues that the dowry is a reflection of the status of the

bridegroom and the ability (and therefore the status) of the father to pay. Extortionate amounts have been spent on dowries by parents who are sometimes forced into debts. At the time of writing an average amount a family may spend on a dowry for a girl stands at £6,000 excluding the costs of entertainment and other arrangements such as food and travel during the wedding. I recently attended a girl's wedding where the jewellery and other items in the dowry added up to £12,000.

In my sample, 63 percent of the women agreed with the provision of dowries. Of all the sixty-four married women, sixty-two had received dowries at their weddings. The two exceptions were middle class women who had married of their own accord, with their parents' consent, and they had emphatically stated that they did not want a dowry. The other women and girls were generally in favour of dowries but expressed contradictions in their views. Shiela had two young daughters at the time, and her sister in law also had a majority of daughters:

I suppose dowries are a good thing.
Everybody gives them, so I suppose they
must be good. I don't really think of
it so much. My sister-in-law has seven
daughters, what's she gonna do?.

Asha who did not have any children as yet said:

Dowries are a good start in life for
when you get married. But it's an
obligation; what if parents can't afford
it? Only girls know what an obligation
it is. They care about parents.

Inderjit, the wife of an I.W.A. activist felt strongly:

I had a dowry, but I don't agree with it. If men have a value in themselves, so should we.

Preet expressed that:

dowries are not good, they are a burden on the parents, but I'll have to have one.

Bakshish who was experiencing difficulties with her husband, had settled the issue for her daughter.

Rather than give her a dowry, I want to give her education. I want her to stand on her own two feet.

Narinder who was training to be a nanny stated angrily that:

A woman shouldn't have to have a price of a dowry on her head. She should be taken for what she is. But I don't know if I'll have one.

With the exception of Bakshish, all other respondents here expressed a contradiction between their belief and their action. J. Liddle and R. Joshi (1986) also found a 'contradiction between women's own attitudes and experiences' in their study of middle class women in India. They suggest that:

the contradictions women express are not the result of inconsistent or illogical thought processes, but are real and rooted in the actual experience of their lives. (J. Liddle and R. Joshi 1986 : 175).

In this sense, the women actually knew that the obligation to provide a dowry was burdensome in practice and yet in practice also, they had to provide them. Failure to do so resulted in the downgrading of the bride and real possibilities of destroying the marriage. Thus their ideas were not 'maladjusted', they were a reflection of reality. Bakshish was a graduate from India, on her arrival to U.K., her education had no value; her experiences of conflict with her husband brought her to the realisation that unless she could have access to an independent source of income, she could not help her daughter. She had therefore taken a cleaning job in a hospital kitchen and also sewed clothes at home for a wage, to prepare for a private education of her daughter, which she hoped would be a greater asset than a dowry.

Marriage of Children

An area where parents expect to play a part in their children's lives is the arrangement of their marriage. The negotiations deciding how much power parents and children have in this process can be a source of conflict within the family. This is an area where caste plays an important role. Of the sixty-one married working class women in the sample, forty believed that the family would arrange the marriage of their children within their own castes. None of the seven middle class feminists believed that they would "arrange" the marriage of their children. Of the fourteen separated women, twelve expected that their children would choose their own partners.

From the eighteen girls interviewed, two had opted outside the 'arranged marriage' system by leaving their parents, and the rest stated that they

would marry of their parents accord. These findings are similar to A. Wilson's study (1978). The 'arranged marriage' system is not the tyrannical force that the racist white media portrays it to be. There are variations on how 'arrangements' are made between girls and boys and they relate to the social and class backgrounds of the families involved. Thus an 'arrangement' can vary from the parties not seeing each other at all, to them meeting on a regular basis before the marriage (A. Wilson 1978 : 105-7).

Shiela believed in the traditional set-up:

Castes are important. It's been happening all the time. If fifty people challenge it, it doesn't mean that it's going to change the whole culture.... I have friends from different castes, but for marriage I think I'll arrange my children's in the same caste.

Shindo confirmed:

We want the children to marry in their own caste so they will know their identity, they'll know who they are.

Narinder was not yet married, she stressed that:

my father doesn't mind who I marry. But I want to marry in my caste. It's the kids that suffer in inter-caste marriages.

Baljinder was also single:

My parents are not narrow minded, we discuss things. Who ever I marry will have to be within my caste and he must be an Indian. Why should I do what my

parents are against? They want the best
for me.

Three women had some experiences of inter-caste marriages within their families and they did not feel so strongly in favour of marriages within castes.

Debo felt that:

Castes are not important. They are man-made. It's a 'beham' (superstition). There's nothing in them. My brother married out of caste. The person should have izzat. Rivers and seas have no castes, why should we?.

Six women expressed that their children would not necessarily have to marry within their own castes. Their reasoning differed.

Jagdir felt:

castes are nothing to me. If my kids are going to marry of their own accord I'd like to be the first to know that's all.

Tara whose sister-in-law had eloped with a boy had resigned herself that:

the way children marry, and what they do depends on the time... then parents have to give in... people like you want to marry boys like yourself ... and parents have to say yes ... but all their wishes are washed out.

'Separated' or 'divorced' women learnt from their own experiences.

Balbir was separated from her husband (within her caste) and lived with her young son and daughter:

If they ever found themselves in a situation where they met someone, if that person's family had nothing against it, I'd accept it. Otherwise I'd leave it to them to decide. It's their life. You should have a family behind you. But God knows, I had mine and look what happened, it didn't help much. I don't want to force anything on the children.

Ranjit was separated from her husband and had brought up four children on her own. Already two of them were courting white people, and she herself had a relationship with a white man. She was afraid that the other son and daughter may choose to marry Indians and this would imply that she would have to provide a dowry for the girl, which she could not afford. She also feared that her own reputation (as a single woman) would be damaged in the community, if her children married Indians.

The unmarried girls on the whole expressed a preference for marriage of parents choice.

Usha was twenty-two and was waiting for her fiance to arrive from India.

My parents asked me first, and I said alright. I've been waiting three years for him now but the immigration keep turning him down. People say I'm getting too old. But I want to wait for him ... I love him.

Nina, seventeen years old stated:

In our family, they married, whether they like it or not. It's gonna be the same with me, ain't it?... They're happy so I suppose I will be.

Kirpal was waiting to be married in a few weeks time to a fiance from India. She was depressed because she didn't really want to be married in this manner.

I'd rather have married of my own choice. I didn't want to marry a man from India.

Later I discovered that she was extremely happy because contrary to her expectations, her husband had not imposed any restrictions upon her dress and appearance. She was wearing skirts and had cut her hair.

Tina had a boy friend, and had several others in the past, but she was not willing to risk these into long-term relationships (A. Wilson 1978).

Tina stated:

I wouldn't ask my parents to be married to him ... I don't really know what he's like. He says he love me ... but you don't really know what love really is, do yah? I only know him in an artificial world outside, not inside a home.

As Wilson suggests, Tina was 'playing at being free' and manoeuvring within the barriers around her (A. Wilson 1978 : 105).

Manjeet, sixteen years old, suspected that her father was arranging her marriage. She had a boyfriend but her parents did not know. She felt that he was unacceptable to the family because he was a Muslim. On the basis of her suspicion she left home with her boyfriend whose father was at the time in favour of their marriage. A few months later, her relationship with the boyfriend did not workout and she found that he also had other girlfriends. He was being violent towards her. Manjeet now lives alone and expresses grief that her parents do not wish to know her:

I was really close to me mum. She's nice. It's me brothers. They've come around here when me father died and threatened to kill me. They accused me of leading my father to his death. I suppose I was responsible in a way, but in a way I wasn't. But they won't have me back now... I do miss them all.

This confirms Saranjana's view (Chapter 2) that Asian girls who leave home often find little outside support, rendering them in a more exploitative situation than their home.

Reena, a middle class community worker, showed how unaware she had been of the impact of caste within her network of relations. Though this position is not a reflection of middle class families generally, it indicates how middle class people can escape the traditions that bind working class people:

The caste system was very much hidden from me. I didn't understand castes at all. I just know there were rich people, poor people, educated and intelligent people. I used to say castes didn't matter. My husband and I

are Brahmins, but we are different kind of Brahmins. My sister has married outside our caste. For my two sons, I don't know. They will definitely marry outside the caste, and most probably from a different race.

Women's Perceptions of their role in the Home

Here we look at the ways in which women themselves see their own lives in terms of the ideology of femininity which promotes the notions of subservience, inferiority and domesticity.

Subservience implies that women should be "submissive and restrained in respect of their own desires, are dependent creatures and deferent to males. Women are not dominant, assertive, independent or self-confident" (J. Liddle and R. Joshi 1986). Inferiority indicates to the lesser physical and mental abilities of women to learn and do certain kinds of work. Domesticity points to the needs of women being centralised within the home, i.e. marriage, reproduction and domestic labour. We have looked how these notions affect the socialisation of girls, now we see how the adult women relate to them. From the sample, 70 percent of the women believed that they should be subservient to the wishes of the men and the elders within the family. They portrayed the respected ideology that within marriage women are the unifying (rather than a destructive) force. One of the ways in which this is actually expressed is that in a quarrel or disagreement with men, women should not 'answer back' unless absolutely necessary. This does not imply total silence on the part of women, they do argue out their points and reasons in disputes, but they believed that women should prevent the

situation from exploding. Most women exercised this control over themselves until the matter(s) reached unacceptable levels for them.

Bimla said:

We'd be quarrelling everyday if I answered back. Sometimes I do, he always does. Why should men stay under women's control? If a woman is not under a man's control he leaves you.

Bachan agreed with her:

If we answer back, they'd throw us out. He tells me off, but I never answer back.

Channan was also of the same view:

A woman should be a good wife. I never answer him back ... Not unless he is totally unreasonable.

These women knew that if they did not conform to these standards, their husbands would 'throw them out', thus their beliefs were grounded in their real material situation. They did not really have an alternative in which they could find a different life.

The notion that men were superior to women was similarly expressed.

A mother-in-law of Amar stressed that for a woman her man is God.

Dhanti expressed that:

the cock crows, a chicken does not.

She thought that men were 'naturally' superior and aggressive.

Baljinder put this naturalness in the context of the social norm that for men:

its their job to look after women. No matter how hard a woman tries to be like a man, she will fail ... Men are always leaders ... Women are not as brave ... not as strong.

In Baljinder's family, however, all the women (four sisters and a mother) supported the two males (father and son) in the family both as wage earners and by running a retail shop. This contradiction in ideology and practice is also related to the actual experience of women. As Liddle and Joshi (1986 : 180) suggest there are cases where women 'are rewarded for maintaining the illusions of female weakness' . In the case of these women they portrayed the respected ideology, because their positions in the family are made easier, for they get respect for their subservience. The men of the families and other relatives respect the women as 'good' izzat-dar' (respectable) people, which in turn helps the women to perpetuate the myths about male superiority.

The subservience of women also isolates them into the privacy of the family. This implies that they cannot be seen to 'share' and 'publicise' their problems with other people outside the immediate family networks, and this prevents them from developing long-term links with the outside world and independent members. Thirty-one percent of the women said they did not talk to ANYBODY about their problems. This

did not include any of the middle class women or women who had separated. Shiela point out:

I don't talk to anybody ... the biggest mistake a girl can make is to talk to her mother ... we should try to keep it in the family.

Asha agreed that:

Asian women don't talk to anyone because they believe they should keep their problems to themselves and outsiders shouldn't intrude.

Malkit stressed that as a matter of survival:

One passes time. It's 'kismet' (fate). You need to have hope. My father taught me not to talk back to my husband ... I never talk to anyone about my problems.

Yet these statements could not be taken at their face value. I knew, during my fieldwork, that the 'problems' these women had, were known to some other respondents in this sample. Furthermore, the women did talk to me (to an extent) about what they were suffering. Thus the term that 'we don't talk to anybody' expressed what was expected of women and it stressed the isolation that they suffered due to such expectations. Some women who had come to the U.K. for marriage (twenty) often found themselves in a situation where their closest relatives were not in this country. They may have a distant uncle or a cousin in another area with whom they could not discuss their problems for fear of being a burden. They are often completely isolated and without support. Thus Gita suggested that:

Women are not free. We can't fight.
Our parents had so many wishes for us to
come to this country, but there is so
much misery here. I have no relatives
of my own here.

There were three cases where women had talked about their problems with others, to relatives, friends or organisations, and their families had reacted by keeping them in. Rani said when she had approached an advice centre, her husband:

wouldn't let me have visitors. He'd
lock the phone so I couldn't talk to my
relatives.

Since disputes should be kept within the family, some women, (forty percent) thought that they would never leave the marital home, although they thought that if things got extremely bad they would have to rethink their position. They thought that if they did leave, they would go to their parents or other relatives, not to organisation or friends outside the family. Shiela did go to an organisation once but returned because she felt insecure there:

We should try and keep it in the family,
not leave. Places like ... should teach
women to sort problems out, not leave.
Some of these women who leave and live
in hostels, they drink and dance, its
not nice. You have to look at what went
wrong, and try to sort it out. If my
husband was a problem, I'd do my best to
resolve it. I wouldn't go to any
Centres, not Indian places. I'd pack my
things and go to my brother's or get a
council house.

Tara's husband had a white girl friend who also had his children. Tara had suffered in silence and intended to carry on this way:

Women should not leave home. They should be quiet and suffer. In the long term it's good. My husband married an English woman, and has other children. My parents were worried about it ... I never told them ... someone else did.... but my-in-laws thought that I did. Now I go with him to see his other wife and children ... I never talk about it to anyone.

At marriage a woman's family is her in-laws. It is this family that she should keep her problems and secrets with, and this implies that very often, a woman's own parents and family are not aware of her situation until some time.

There is not always a place for women to go, if they should choose to do so, socially the woman's reputation is put at risk. Thus A. Wilson (1978 : 125) quotes Shahida as pointing out her dilemma".

I was twenty when I married, now I am forty. Twenty years have passed, I have nothing to show for it. Sometimes I am filled with pain. I long to run away, escape, but where? And then there are my children, how can I leave them ... We women, we are so alone, our family, our parents, so, so, far away.

Giano, in my study stressed that if a woman left her home:

where could she go? No man will have her then.

At ARC, a woman who was helping to interpret Santokh's separation case in court advised her to return home:

white people deal with our cases in their own ways. If you leave, people will point their finger at you ... your daughter will roam the streets ... men never bow to women ... English people are different.

Such statements acknowledged the practical dependency of women upon men, and found ways to avoid risking the perils of 'independence'.

The isolation of women within the privacy of the family also has repercussions of how working class women see the concept of leisure. The question of 'going-out' for the purposes of pleasure and relaxation often received a negative reply. Going out to do something constructive like to work, to visit relatives or to shop etc. are not prohibited. Going out to random parties, or to acquaintances etc. is not condoned. Women must have a purpose in the things they do, they must be seen to be busy. For women, leisure is mixed with duty and responsibility to fit in with the notion of domesticity. The ideal of subservience denotes that women must seek permission for their actions from their elders and from the man in the family. Such restrictions are not imposed upon men. I have noted many instances both during the field work and elsewhere that men often say nothing to anybody in the home before they leave. It is generally regarded as being rude to ask a man where he is going. Hence a fourteen year old girl remarked:

My brothers don't have to ask when they go out. They just go. You don't know it, until you're calling them and you get no reply.

When asked if women went out for leisure purposes alone, 85 percent replied in the same way as Shiela and Giano respectively.

I don't go out. I haven't the time. My friends are far away.

We don't go out much. We're not used to it. We're not accustomed to it.

These replies did not include the visits that women made to close friends, relatives, temples, shops etc. Seventy five percent of the women felt that they had to seek permission from either their husbands or other elders in the family, before any visit they made.

Mindero, who lived with her in-laws knew exactly why it was necessary for women to seek permission.

If I didn't tell them, or let them know where I was going, they'd throw me out. Its always been like that. Women should do as the men and their families ask. If they don't, they must take the consequences, and they are not very good women.

Debo was also perceptive in analysing her position with regard to her husband.

I can go out to see my friends alone, but not without asking his permission first. If he doesn't agree, I wouldn't go. What can I do then? Nothing! Men have it their way. They can do what they like. They dictate. We're not equal.

In Satyas's case, it was the mother-in-law whom she saw as the oppressive force in the family.

My husband and I have never been out together ourselves. We always go with mother. I'd like to go alone with him too, but it's up to her to say. She should know, she should tell us to go. If he wanted to he could be a little more forceful, but he's not like that.

Having a car, and being able to drive it has meant that women are not just dependent upon men for their mobility. It has enabled some women to be more mobile and in some instances has made qualitative changes to where they go. For example if women wanted to go and see a musical group at night some ten miles out, previously the family members would have to consider the mode of travel and things such as rape etc. The availability of a car and the increase in the number of women drivers, has to some extent alleviated such fears.

The 16 percent of the women who were separated from their families, and the 8 percent middle class women stressed no restrictions from their families in their leisure activities. Balbir pointed out that

I'm more independent now. When I was with my family and my husband's family, I couldn't go out when and where I wanted. When my friends came to see me, I felt guilty - that they shouldn't be there. Now I can go where I like and entertain as I like.

Baljit has suffered confinement whilst with her in-laws.

They wouldn't take me out. They said I wasn't pretty enough. I go out now. No

one says anything about my looks. It was an excuse to stop me meeting other people. I was just left to do all the work at home, like a slave.

Shindo had separated once from her husband but had now reconciled.

I only go shopping ... He won't let me go out with friends ... He doesn't like me going to my mother's. Why should he make trouble when I go out? A man can go out without shame, without stigma. A woman, she can't even go to her mother's without feeling guilty.

Financial Control

Although financial necessity and the availability of work defined whether women should work, the idea of subservience and obedience plays a part in this decision also. In this respect, 65 percent of the working class women said that their husbands, parents or in-laws directly decided whether or not they found employment. Thus Debo expressed:

My husband says I can't work now. But I've tried to find some employment but there is no work.

Tejo recalled:

When I left school nine years ago, I wanted to go to work and my parents said no.

Women can also be forced to work by the family. In times of rising unemployment, this is particularly the case, and women are forced to

take up work in the most menial, unorganised and illegal areas. To this end Balbir pointed out:

I didn't want to work, but I had to because my husband wouldn't do anything. I did it to keep the peace because my mother-in-law was always going on about how she was feeding us.

What difference did taking up employment make in the role and position of women in the family, and how much control did they have over their income?

Seventy percent of the women said that it made little difference primarily because they had no control over their wage.

Satya's mother-in-law controlled the home:

My husband never considers my opinion. He always asks me to ask her. I've never bought anything without asking my mother-in-law. If I kept my wage packet, there'd be trouble. Why should I? They give me everything. If I asked her to buy me something she would. I'm just shy to ask. She might mind. I've never asked for anything. If I wanted clothes, I'd tell my husband, he'd tell her, and she would get it... You know how people treat other people's daughters. It's OK. You can only do as they ask of you. It's my 'kismet' (fate).

In Balbir's case, it was also her mother-in-law who controlled the income, when she lived with her:

I used to give my wage packet to my mother-in-law. I dare not open it. Now

I never ask my father for money. I cope on social security.

Baljit was outraged:

You ask me if working women are more independent? Some can't even open their wage packets. They end up with £2.00 in the pockets.

At a more mundane level, Narinder put the position succinctly:

A woman's income is good in that no one can allege that she's useless. But it doesn't give her independence, because it boils down to paying bills, etc. There's very little left for the woman herself.

This reinforces G. Omvedt's view (1980 : 26) that:

it turns out that the fate of these working women is highly linked to their family position. Working may give them some independence, but socially, male domination still prevails.

Some women disapproved of the idea that women should change their femininity because they found employment.

Bimla thought:

I don't think that if you earn, it makes any difference to what say or control you have in the home. I don't decide what to do with the money, I just help him. Some women might think in that way, but I don't.

Tara expressed that the employment of women brought about negative changes in their femininity:

When I was working my wage packet went to my in-laws ... Some women may feel that they have more 'robve' (arrogance or authority) when they work. I don't feel such things.

Similiarly Malkit expressed that:

Working women are so rough ... they speak as they like, with no respect for men ... they have money in their hand ... so they answer back ... they are too full of confidence.

Hence these women felt that they would not get the social approval if they appeared to be confident and independent.

Women who could have some form of control over their income, felt that this 'arrogance' or 'authority' was to the credit of women.

Debo used to work but was now unemployed. She remembered:

If I want something now and he refuses, I can't have it. When I was working, I would consult him, but I could go ahead even if he refused. Women who work are more confident ... When you work you feel that should the need arise, you could be independent and make a good life for yourself.

Sonia who was separated said:

Whilst I was with my husband, work never gave me any independence. I only got £2.00 per week to spend. Now I'm free, I go to work, we have none of his drink

problem at night. The children wear good clothes, and its my life.

Davinder worked part-time:

Work makes a lot of difference to women. Look at their dress, the way they carry themselves, the way they walk and talk and express themselves. They are full of confidence and surely that's a good thing.

Chinti whose husband was an unemployed alcoholic, saw the contradictions of women's double role:

Since women found employment, men have left their jobs and started drinking and playing aloof. Women's health deteriorates because there is no rest. A woman has no rest.

Inderjit also expressed that for working women,

friction has increased ... because a woman brings in income and THINKS she is becoming independent, but in reality ... the male still dominates ... so her work actually doubles ... she gets frustrated because housework has no value.

Income to Parents

Since a woman is born to be given away to a family in marriage, she cannot defy 'the marriage bond which compels a young wife to forget the family of her birth and give all her attention, toil and earnings to her husband's family' (G. Omvedt 1980 : 28).

In my sample, 69 percent of women were against supporting their own parents financially. Bimla whose husband worked, and she herself made clothes at home said:

A woman hasn't the right to give to her family ... but you can still feel sorry for them. It's nothing to do with earning one's self. Our people don't think that girls should look after their parents. It's a burden on the parents if they do.

Satya, in fear of her mother-in-law said,

If I gave to my parents, my mother-in-law wouldn't support me. Don't ask me this in front of her. A son can give because it's his home. That's why I want a son.

Tara who had worked in the past stated:

My husband gives to his parents. My parents are poor but I don't think they'd accept my money. The in-laws would mind, they'd think I was holding my parents in a higher esteem than them. My cousin got married, I wanted to send a gift, but I didn't because they'd think I was doing it all the time, and then they'd complain.

Simarjeet worked full-time at a large factory:

I think I should be able to support my family as he does my in-laws. But it's not in our 'samaj' ... a woman ... she has to think of her in-laws. It's not fair.

Simro who at the time sewed at home expressed with some concern:

Trouble with girls here, who bring their fiance's from India is that they don't want to support the boy's parents but want to look after their own.

Mothers themselves held to the same ideals that they in turn would not take any form of support from their own daughters.

Shiela had two daughters and no sons.

You shouldn't accept money from your daughters. We're brought up that way.

But she admitted that if she had no sons in the future she may consider taking money from her daughters.

Again women who had not had very amicable relationships with husbands, or had separated, seemed more liberated from this ideology because they had nothing to lose. They had perhaps come to terms with the fact that no matter what they did or how much they sacrificed, their husbands were not going to support them.

Chinti whose husband often beat her said:

I pay the bills, and for rations, with my money. I send money to my mother. It's my right. It's my money. I don't owe him anything.

Ranjit had previously worked but was now on supplementary benefit since her separation from her husband. After separating her mother had joined her from India and was living with her.

Women should have the right to support their parents. Their parents educate them, bring them up, love them, so why shouldn't they?

Women in these situations could also foresee the day they may have to call upon their own daughters to support them.

Like Shiela:

I'd send my girls to university, if I don't have any sons, we'd have to rely on them.

Three years after this interview, Shiela became pregnant, and gave birth to twins, a boy and girl. The boy died and the girl survived. The same day, her husband died in a car crash. She now has three daughters and no husband. Realistically she will now have to rely on support from her daughters.

Chinti also stressed:

I'd take money from my daughters. My husband is a drunk. I have to cope somehow.

Dhanti had four daughters of marriageable age:

If parents are in need of money and it's the daughter's money, they should take it. We have had to. The way we came from Africa, with nothing, so we have all worked very hard and managed as well. There is no difference between girls and boys nowadays.

Some girls did support their parents.

Pammi, a seventeen year old said:

I help my mum with the bills. That's
why I'm really working

She had two brothers living with her, one of whom would not give any form of support to the mother who was a widow.

One of the girls who also supported her mother, a widow insisted she would continue her support after her marriage.

If he (husband) doesn't let me help, its
his tough luck. If my mother was really
desperate, I'd give her my money. I'd
play it my way.

Domestic Labour

The family, is where the reproduction of the future labour power, and maintenance and sustenance of existing labour power, takes place.

Central to this notion is the debate of domestic labour - the question of whether domestic labour contributes to the value of labour power and therefore indirectly to surplus-value. The importance of this unpaid domestic labour of women brings to the fore crucial areas of women's subordination and oppression within the family.

Black feminists have argued that the notion of domestic labour, as espoused by Western feminists does not take into account the unpaid agricultural labour of women in Third World countries which forms a part of their domestic labour. In the Third World, women grind wheat, churn milk etc. which play a key role in the subsistence of the family in

these countries. Thus Black feminists argue that in analysing the advantages of migrant labour to the metropolis, it is important to assess the role women and children play in maintaining and renewing the migrants family.

Similarly, we saw in Chapter 3 that the nature of some Black women's employment was such that it forced them to carry out wage labour within the confines of the family in which all family members were often involved. Within this set up, young girls particularly become important in performing a significant part of the domestic labour which otherwise is seen to be the responsibility of mothers. I propose, therefore, that the debate on this topic should take these facts into account.

In my study, 34 percent of the working class women allocated housework to be the sole duty of women, and the rest did not believe that it should be the responsibility of one gender only. The middle class women (except one) and those separated from their husbands and families belonged to the latter category.

Most of the married employed women, or those whose male family members were engaged in waged labour, woke up around 5.00 a.m., to do their prayers, prepare breakfasts and lunches for the waged and for the children. After working hours, once the women finished cooking and cleaning, the time was generally 10.30 p.m. when they went to sleep at night.

Jito had been employed before, and was now a housewife. She saw the role of the man to be the breadwinner.

He earns and supports us, his sisters
and brothers. That's enough.

In Surinder's case, she said that when doing the housework

I never ask people.

Yet her sister and mother, whom she lived with, helped her. "People" in this case meant men.

Domestic labour was one area where a contradiction between the consciousness of women and their practices, was evident. Liddle and Joshi (1986) suggest that this contradiction acts as a "stimulus for change" since "attitudes and values ... affect external reality" as much as external reality affects consciousness. They follow Ann Foreman and espouse that:

Ideology is real experience arising from different levels of reality, some of which is at a level deeper than conscious thought, and is therefore only partially understood. (J. Liddle and R. Joshi, 1986 : 175).

This partial independence of the role of ideology

allows for women to be unconscious of aspects of their oppression, and for conflicts and contradictions to exist between the different levels of their multidimensional reality. (Ibid).

As we have noted earlier, these contradictions are not illogical or maladjusted, they arise out of the real experience of women.

Thus Debo who was now a housewife thought on the one hand that Asian women in Britain were attempting to imitate white women, by not devoting themselves to housework.

I do all the housework. It only takes two hours. Some women are too lazy. Housework is not for men, it's a woman's duty. Our women want to be like 'goarian' (white women). Men work so they need a rest .. in the pub.

On the other hand however, she was not wholly satisfied or comfortable with this role, for she went on:

Women can't get a rest, not even on the week-ends. It's seven days a week.

Minder had five very young children and her husband often came in late at night after work and drink. Her views expressed the fear she had of her husband if she did not fulfil her role as a 'good' wife.

My husband goes to work; what housework is he going to do?... If the 'roti' (chappati) gets cold for when he comes back, he'll make sure I get hot. I have to cook them when he comes home.

This expresses that housework has no value, anyone who works does not have to do housework, but the rule is only applicable to men. Women who work would still have to do the work in the house.

Mindero, who worked in a factory recognised that if the material conditions were right, e.g. if she and her husband live separately from the in-laws, the situation may be different from the present.

I cook when I come back from work. My mother-in-law helps a bit. The men don't. It's not in our 'samaj' (culture). If we lived alone he might help, and I might ask him to help. But my mother-in-law would throw me out if I asked him to help me here.

Mindero, in an extended family, of her in-laws, did not have the necessary authority to bring her practice in line with her thoughts. But she knew and felt that housework could be differently allocated and this contradiction between her practice and her ideology could provide change potentially if the material conditions were in line with her needs.

Gita also had similar sentiments:

I do all the housework because I'm not working now. My sister-in-law helps too... The men should help with housework but we never ask ... we know they are tired. My husband and father-in-law work from 6.00 a.m. to 9.00 p.m. They are extremely tired when they come back - they go straight to the pub. We get tired too, housework is more tiring than working outside. It seems that this work has no value ... if we lived separately, perhaps my husband may help, but it's a woman's duty. It's our 'rawaz' (custom) that women do housework.

Satya narrated:

I do most of the housework. Before I go to work I feed my little girl, cook something for the night and eat out breakfasts. After work, I cook and clean. At night I'm already worried about the morning of the same routine. Work at home, and then the factory. It has to be done. Someone has to do it. People should at least take back their dishes, but I'll have to pick them up. We'd never ask the men to help us. It's not nice. Women look nice doing the housework ... I work out but no one takes notice of that ... I should get some respect for it in the family. That's why I try to earn so much, so they'll appreciate me.

Bakshish knew that:

It's difficult for women to manage two types of work. Women suffer more in this country because in India, there are many other women in the family to help ... I asked my husband to go to the shop and bring some vegetables back once. He replied 'Am I your servant?'

Where a woman is seen to be performing the male duties, it does not necessarily imply that the division of labour is shared out in a more egalitarian fashion. Preeto's husband refused to do any of the traditionally male defined roles such as arranging accommodation, or painting and decorating the house etc. Preeto was frustrated at her situation:

I do all the work. The husband's and the wife's. He just THINKS he's the head. The man of the house. He never helps. Wherever I go I have to drag my three children with me. If there's something wrong with the house, I have to see it can be fixed. I have to go to the social security. Honestly sometimes I get so tired I just wish I could be a

normal woman and do my part. He gambles his money and never does anything around the house, and then he gets jealous when I get things done.

For Preeto, the work created a treble burden since not only did she have to attend to these duties, but also relate to the male ego of her husband.

In cases when men totally take over the domestic role in the home, that also cannot be always regarded as enlightenment or consideration for women. Rani's husband did all the domestic chores of the family, and she was confined to the house. She had now separated but recalled that:

If I went shopping, he'd be afraid that I would learn something new - that people would teach me something of which he would not approve. He thought I'd poison him, so he did all the cooking.

Jagdir had worked out the arrangements in a different way in the home and she thought that it related to her position as a waged earner, and her husband as being unemployed.

Men should help in the housework.
Especially if the husband is unemployed.
My husband washes clothes, cooks for the kids; I don't feel guilty like some women. I make him do the shopping.
Mind you, if I wasn't working I don't think he'd do all this then.

Inderjit who was employed and the wife of an IWA member, recognised that the fact that housework had no value, and because it was allocated to women, made it difficult for women to do anything else.

I do all the housework in our house. Men cook one meal and they don't stop talking about it. Men should help in the house. Housework has no value. Men should help so that women have the energy to do other things. So that a woman is not exhausted. A woman's work is never ending and never appreciated.

Her husband believed that women were naturally suited to housework and childcare. Inderjit left him a few months later. Ranjit had separated from her husband and now lived with her sons and daughters. She was of the opinion that ONLY Asian men were unhelpful in the home.

Our people will never learn. We come here and we want to keep our ways. It doesn't matter where you take out people, they will never change. Our men think that they shouldn't help the women in the home. A woman comes from work, tired, exhausted, does all the cooking, cleaning and looking after the children. Are a man's hands broken? Can't he do it? A man thinks of his woman as a slave. Our women are not strong, nor educated. They don't know their rights. All they know is how to cook, clean and serve their husbands and children. See, then our daughters learn to do the same - to follow in the mother's footsteps.

With her own sons, however, Ranjit did not make any efforts to teach them the housework. Her daughters took up the responsibility of all the work at home, and employment. This would seem to reinforce the traditional division of labour which Ranjit is against. However, her predicament may be explained by the fact that she primarily relied upon her sons for her financial support (although she also accepted help from her daughters).

Only one middle class woman followed a strict division of labour in the home, and she questioned her role. Reena said of her husband:

I tend to do everything. He doesn't do everything - he used to a lot. He doesn't share everything - he doesn't think it's his duty you see. He'll do it now and then, he doesn't mind if I don't cook for weeks, sometimes I don't. He likes to think he shares the housework with me ... We are a part of that struggle .. working with small children. Society makes it difficult for women to work with small children. They make you feel terribly guilty all the time ... I sort of, I'm not afraid of him, but I think gosh, I wish you would take more responsibility. Why is it always my responsibility whether something is finished, or when we run out of something, or some people come. He says 'you forget I'm a man, I wasn't brought up to do this'. So I say 'was I brought up to do this? why have I to do all the household things and earn as well?'.

When practice and ideology are able to come into line, and when male roles and male domination is questioned in practice and in ideology, women find no limitations in their potential. As Sharanjeet Shan found:

As time went by, the need to survive taught me skills which as a teenager I was led to believe were a man's domain. I now believe that most jobs around the house can be done with considerable accuracy provided one is prepared to have a go and persevere ... Now I put it down to male chauvinism and arrogance. I have taught myself to produce quite impressive results with all kinds of decorating and maintenance jobs. (Shan 1985 : 73).

Women Oppress Women

We have noted that in some instances, especially where women live in extended families with their in-laws, the mother-in-law appears to be the domineering agent rather than the husband. Feminists have attempted to analyse this in terms of women acquiring power from men to exercise it on other women, and/or, recompensing for the oppression they have suffered.

Very often women suffer cruel treatment at the hands of other women ... yet when a woman maltreats another woman, she does not enhance her own power as a woman, she enhances the total power of men as a group within the patriarchal family. Women can get power only as agents of domination and oppression within the male dominated family structure. (Kishwar and Vanita 1984 : 16).

The views of P. Freire (1972) are also of interest here, as regards to the nature of the oppressed mentality, to see how working class women may become agents of oppression. He argues that due to the economic, social and the political domination of the dispossessed, the oppressed people are gripped into a 'culture of silence'. This does not mean that the oppressed are not aware of their oppression. We have seen above that the women know that they are oppressed, but because of the individual and isolated nature in which they experience that oppression, they find it difficult to step outside it. Hence in cases where there is no alternative, the oppressed may aspire to and reflect the behaviour of the oppressor, since that is the behaviour that is rewarded by prestige, and it is the only model available for the oppressed.

The very structure of their thought has been conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete, existential situation by which they were shaped. Their ideal is to be men; but for them, to be a 'man' is to be an oppressor Under these circumstances they cannot 'consider' him sufficiently clearly to objectify him to discover him 'outside' themselves. (P. Freire 1972 : 10).

It may be argued that when women, in the Asian family, reach old age and are given authority as elders, they see themselves in the light of the oppressors (men) rather than the oppressed (women),

... their perception of themselves as oppressed is impaired by their submersion in the reality of oppression. (Ibid : 22).

The 'reality of oppression' is an individualistic one. For the oppressed, at this stage

Their vision of the new man is individualistic, they have no consciousness of themselves as persons or as members of an oppressed class. (Ibid : 23).

They therefore see 'freedom' as the right to rule, to oppress.

Fanon, in talking about the psyche of the colonised stresses that

The colonised man will first manifest this aggressiveness which has been deposited in his bones against his own people (Fanon 1967 : 41) This is evident when ... niggers beat each other up ... for the last resort of the native is to defend his personality vis-a-vis his brother. (Ibid)

Thus I suggest that when a woman oppresses another woman (not necessarily in order of age), she is seeking to "defend" herself "vis-a-vis" her sister, by enhancing the "total power of men as a group".

Thus Baljit's mother-in-law had often started the quarrels when they lived together. Baljit remembered that

They never called me by my name. My mother-in-law always addressed me by swearing at me first, and then pointed out to the whole family how I hadn't cooked the food right, or served her sons in a correct manner and so on, and so on.

Avtar, who had no children and who feared that her husband may remarry, also tried to resign to the situation by seeking the possibility of oppressing the potential second wife.

Some people are lucky. The second-wife respects the first. I know this woman who was in my position, and agreed for her husband's remarriage. They are all very happy now. The second wife is so good! She doesn't do anything without first asking the first-wife, nor buy any clothes of her own accord. The second-wife works and gives all her wage packet to the first. Anything she does is with her permission. I won't be so lucky, if it happens to me.

Hence Avtar sought to resolve the matter by ultimately agreeing to her husband's remarriage, if the necessity arose, preferably by oppressing the next wife. She saw her own individual oppression, not the collective oppression of both the women, and therefore would become the

agent of oppression for the second wife. Hence the individualised and privatised way in which women experience their own oppression prevents the development of a collective consciousness of the oppressed. As we saw in Chapter 2, it is this experience of isolation and individualism that Black people, and Black feminists, have been attempting to get away from, by developing their unity in terms of the political 'Black' entity. It is hoped that when the articulation between race, class and gender has been significantly analysed, a similar unity will be developed for the oppression of women within the home.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the oppression of Asian women within the family and the impact of gender ideology. We have focused on the control of women by men and on how that control can be mediated through the female hierarchy.

The ethnicity school and the modernist literature portrays Asian women as being passive recipients of their culture. It locates Black families within the framework of integration and assimilation, and generally poses Black families to be problematic in British society. Western Marxist feminists have promoted the general concept of patriarchy, to embrace the oppression of Black women in the same way as the white women's oppression. Black feminists have criticised this approach and questioned the main conceptual notions of patriarchy, dependency and reproduction, and have argued for a more specific analysis that will

take into account the oppression of Black women by men of different colours. They argue that the family cannot be seen as the major site of oppression for Black women, because under slavery and under racism the Black and the Asian family has become a source of resistance (as well as oppression) in which Black women have found the strength to fight against racism and sexism.

Since Black feminists have been preoccupied with the struggle against state institutionalised forms of racism and sexism, little time has been devoted to analysing and describing the specific oppression of Asian women within the family.

The ideals of femininity for women from the Indian sub-continent are derived from pre-capitalist and patrilineal forms of society and point to their being humble, self-sacrificing and obedient. It is imperative to control female sexuality for the patrilineal inheritance of land and wealth, and the notions of izzat and purdah form an essential part of the ideology that helps to sustain such a system. Such notions are indicative of men's ability to control women.

The forms of male control over the women in the family were identified as sexual control, financial control, control over physical movement, social interaction, and control over the domestic labour performed by women in the home. Despite this control and ideology, however, defiant and challenging women have emerged within the Asian culture throughout history.

The impact of imperialism in the colonies, and the effect of racism in Britain place Asian culture and the honour of the Asian people under attack. The consequences of this is to intensify the oppression of women in the family because the concept of izzat, and the need to control women, is strengthened by men in defence of their culture.

The impact of institutional racism has reinforced and intensified sexism within the Asian community and this has inhibited the development of an analysis of sexism within the Asian family. The suggestion that Asian and Afro-Caribbean men are more oppressive than white men (rather than in a different way) has meant that Black people have reacted defensively to protect the Black family, and thereby prevent further exploration of its oppressive nature for women.

We argued that the way in which the ideology of femininity is expressed and practised must be related to the specific social and class backgrounds of the women in question. Middle class feminists, on the whole projected a more independent life style, and actively questioned the ideals of femininity since they had little to lose by doing so. The traditional gender ideology was no longer essential to their survival in a capitalist society. The working class women who separated from their husbands and families could also reject this ideology to an extent because they could live independently. This does not imply that capitalist society is not sexist in its gender ideology - it merely means that it takes a different form as we have demonstrated in the previous chapters.

We noted that the views, or the consciousness that women held was not confused or isolated, they reflected the material reality of their situation as they lived it. On occasions their consciousness and their practice appeared to be in contradiction. In the first instance some women held traditional beliefs as regards their subservience and inferiority in relation to men; but their lifestyles did not coincide with their beliefs. In practice they materially supported the male members of the family. Such beliefs however, had material implications because they helped to provide and sustain the respectability of women within the family and its networks. Secondly, there were women who in practice maintained a traditional role of subservience to men, but did not believe that such a role was an inherent feature of being a woman. This particular contradiction, could in my view, provide a potential impetus for change, if and when the material conditions of the respondents coincided with their consciousness. It indicated that they were aware of another type of existence, given another set of circumstances. In some cases the oppression within the home was mediated via women, and we saw how women became agents of this oppression by relating to the oppressors, because of the individualised aspects of their own oppression.

CHAPTER 6

RESISTANCE WITHIN THE FAMILY

Introduction

Having looked at the forms of oppression within the family, we now look at how women try to struggle against this oppression in terms of race, gender and class, both on an individual basis and on a collective organised basis.

We look at the respondents who have actually made such protests and the methods they have used. This also entails an understanding of the aspects that limit the expression of resistance, and inhibit some women from realising their full potential. We also examine factors that are important for providing women with positive measures in the expression of their protests within the family.

After reviewing the relevant literature in this field we go on to analyse the experience of the respondents within the framework outlined above, and look at the examples of women struggling as individuals, and those struggling with the support of other women.

We conclude that the most radicalising effects on individual working class women come through their involvement in campaigns or their

domestic issues, with other Asian feminists. Hence there is a need for the feminists themselves to create more viable channels to involve more working class women in their struggles.

Review of the Literature

We have noted how Asian women have been perceived as being passive by the modernist and ethnicity schools. The media also reinforces and perpetuates such an approach for the analysis of Asian women. For example, Channel 4 showed a programme on Asian women leaving their families, entitled "A fearful silence". The title emphasised the notions of fear and silence, although the programme itself showed Asian women's campaigns of resistance against violence in the home.

To counteract this perception, Asian feminists and writers have sought to present positive and strong images of Asian women, both culturally and historically. Hence we noted in Chapter 2, the leading role of women in the uprisings of Telangana, the Warli Adivasi revolts and the Independence struggles. For example, the Punjabi revolutionary Bhagat Singh, had several women collaborators including Sushila Devi, who was imprisoned several times, and Durga Devi who shot a policeman in Bombay. (P. Trivedi 1984 : 44). Liddle and Joshi noted that the resistance of Indian women did not begin or end with the intervention of the British women, it is rooted "in the Indian social structure and cultural heritage" itself. They point to the matrilineal form of family organisation in Kerala and the matriarchal religious traditions in India, which represent women as strong and powerful beings, symbolising

the principle of female power such as the Shakti and the Kali cults with female goddesses (Liddle and Joshi 1986 : 49-73).

Sharanjeet Shan notes that:

'Most mothers play a very passive, a very submissive role', so the experts in sociology would have us believe about Indian women. If I was asked to single out one person whose life most influenced the shaping of my personality, it would be my mother. Passive and submissive she may have been, but a staunch and stern personality who never lost her radiant dignity and self-respect for a moment, certainly never in public (Shan 1985 : 107).

In recent years, attempts to refute the passivity of Asian women, have led some people to romanticise the strength that these women possess. It has been stressed that women who are oppressed by factors of race, gender and class, cannot be weak and passive, they are strong and resourceful because they can endure such oppression. Hence there is a move from exoticism and passivity to romanticism. For example, in my field work, I met some Asian feminists who asked me to focus on describing the oppression of women and to point out how strong they were to be able to live with it. Some Black women have pointed out that such a perspective is derived from the analysis of Black men and white women in their efforts to patronise Black women's position.

Inspired by their respective experiences of racism and sexism, Black men and white women have often made well-intentioned attempts to analyse ours. They have tended, however, to portray Black women in a somewhat romantic light, emphasising our 'innate capacity'

to cope with brutality and deprivation and perpetuating the myth that we are somehow better equipped than others for suffering (Bryan et al, 1985 : 2).

I do not dispute that women are strong in suffering their oppression, but they cannot be seen to acquire this strength just because they appear to express a 'willingness' to suffer. Their strength lies in their acknowledgement about the necessity to survive, an acknowledgement that no other realistic and viable alternative exists, but to undergo the pain and misery at hand, and hope for better conditions in the future.

Bearing in mind this aspect of women's oppression, it may be more fruitful to unearth the ways in which women strive to change their situation. Bryan et al endorsed this view:

But what matters to us is the way Black women have challenged this triple stage of bondage. Black women in Britain today are faced with few positive self-images and little knowledge of our true potential. If we are to gain anything from our history and our lives in this country which can be of practical use to us today, we must take stock of our experiences, assess our responses - and learn from them. (Ibid : 2).

The extent to which women have or have not acted to liberate themselves to this point, is an ongoing concern within feminist literature generally. As Stacey and Price suggests (1981) it is perhaps worthwhile asking the alternative question. Given the constraints within which women have to live, how is it that they have progressed so far?

Silent Questioning

We now go on to analyse how the respondents in this study seek to change their positions within the sphere of the family.

Arriving at a juncture at which one begins to question and challenge one's situation, involves a process of change in the way in which one perceives life. The concept of 'human agency', espoused by E.P. Thompson (1978) is useful for understanding this process. He contends that human beings are not just passive recipients of their social relations of production and reproduction. They are active agents, capable of coming to terms with their social worlds. (This is analagous to Marx's contention that people make their own history). Thompson maintains that changes in the social structure cannot be solely analysed by an understanding of public movements, political consciousness and action. This would result in a mere record of social revolutions. Central to 'human agency' is the human being; the private and domestic lives of individuals under the existing social and power relations, together with the ideology within which they are sustained. This brings to the fore aspects of private questioning of individuals as a part of their continuing thought processes.

... 'private' protests and popular 'gossips' may not be politically expressed, yet the language and the forms of such ways remains a private 'questioning' of the dominant power (E.P. Thompson, 1978).

Thompson is emphatic on the point that in the minds of people, the distinction between the 'private' and the 'public', is not a concrete one, and individuals cross both boundaries, consciously and unconsciously. Historians and other analysts have concentrated on the 'public' domain and have consequently neglected the role of women from history. The 'private' and the 'personal' aspects of individuals are as important in determining the process in which human beings live out their lives, as are 'economics' and organised 'politics'.

The study of critical consciousness among actors is to prepare for excursion into the case histories, individual episodes and concrete social situations and the symbolic meaning attached to these situations. These social situations may involve as much 'public' as 'private' lives of men and women. These excursions into the social structure are not a withdrawal from historical materialism and analysis of society, they are a necessary step to arrive there safely. (Ibid).

It is in this context of 'private questioning' in the individual episodes and concrete social situations of women, that we analyse the process of how they achieve changes for themselves. This is not an attempt to discard the importance of the 'objective' conditions in which women find themselves; on the contrary, it is an attempt to establish the interconnectedness, and the contradictions between the 'objective' and the 'subjective' conditions, to show that the consciousness of women is very much related to their material being.

Liddle and Joshi (1986) have suggested that the resistance of women within the family can be analysed in terms of two mechanisms of

resistance - self-sacrifice and negotiation. We use both of these notions, in describing and discussing the resistance expressed by the respondents in this Chapter.

Self-sacrifice is a form of resistance that is borrowed from the subservient notion of femininity itself - characterising the ideal woman in a male-dominated society - the negation of the self. It is used in situations of complete powerlessness.

.... sacrifice can also contain resistance, by depriving the other as well as the self of something that both value, or by raising a reciprocal sacrifice from the other. Where total submission is the only alternative, it is a form of resistance which can be disguised as acceptable to the oppressor. In this form it is used by individuals in a powerless position without allies and with no possibility of organising the support of others (J. Liddle and R. Joshi 1986 (225)).

The hunger strikes during the national Independence period of India demonstrated this method of protest.

Negotiation of compromises is another method used by women protesting within the family. Liddle and Joshi suggest that for this method to be effective, it is necessary for women to have a material power base; to be aware of it; and to be able to use this power. On this basis women can negotiate compromises within the home, or explicitly reject an oppressive situation and take power by defiance. The first condition for this strategy was, they found, for women to have the material power base. The second most important aspect was:

the women's subjective consciousness, that is, how aware they were of the power structure, of the way it could constrain them, and of their own potential power and how it could be used to achieve what they wanted. (J. Liddle and R. Joshi 1986 : 199).

The authors rightly point out that in resisting male domination, women did not exclusively choose one form only, their responses changed according to the relevant issues, so that in different situations they adopted different strategies.

In showing how women changed their positions, the respondents included in this Chapter are mostly those who had actually transformed their situations. They form 25 percent of the total sample of working class women. A few were in the process of bringing change. No doubt there were others who will have not even discussed the matter with me (as a stranger and a researcher) and hence are not represented here.

Factors Necessary for Women to Struggle

Liddle and Joshi point to four main factors that come into play when analysing women's resistance:

1. the women's own courage and determination in the struggle against oppression, deriving from their view of themselves as strong and powerful people

2. the influence of radicalising personal experiences of the system of male domination, and of reformist or revolutionary social movements of opposition to the social structure.
3. the contradiction between women's experience and male constructions of that experience
4. the existence of waged work and the possibility of individual women earning an independent wage providing the material basis for a change in the power relations between men and women in the family. (Liddle and Joshi 1986 : 109).

We discuss the resistances of the respondents by relating the importance of these factors to their experiences.

The passivity model of Asian women as mere recipients of their culture propagates that they are not aware of their oppression and that they are unable to change their situation independently. By implication then, they must be helped by white people and Black men. We have seen that the respondents in this study are aware of their oppression in society, but they have a realistic understanding about the constraints operating upon them, which dictate how far they are able to question and change those oppressive circumstances.

In my view, Asian working class women generally are in a similar position to the Arab women that Nawal Saadawi talks about:

.... majority of women have to struggle everyday even for their existence. But they are not organised, they are aware of oppression but cannot express it ... The majority of Arab women don't as yet know how to fight back politically. But if they really organised they could do so much, not only against patriarchy but against class system too. They are in fact more conscious of economic exploitation than of patriarchy. They feel the man, the husband, the father dominates, but still the major issue is the economic struggle. (N. Saadawi, 1980 : 176).

Economic independence was a major factor for the respondents in deciding how far they were able to fight against their oppression within the family. Waged work, however, as we saw in Chapter 5, did not necessarily lead to independence if the women did not have control over their earnings. We saw in Chapter 3, that the types of employment women gained, failed to provide them with an adequate living wage and it was often supplemented by supplementary benefits. Nevertheless, welfare supplementary benefits did provide some women with a minimal independence to begin their independent lives, although this was a struggle in itself. The benefit provided women with a safety-net to leave their family and therefore prevented them from being financial burdens on other relatives, and enabled them to seek their own food and shelter, via refuges.

Women Have an Awareness - They Have No Value

The respondents (all in their late twenties and early thirties) did acknowledge that they were oppressed and found it necessary to change

their situation. Their relationship with their family heads (men or women) was a strenuous one, which led them to question their positions. Only Simarjeet and Inderjeet worked. The rest were on supplementary benefits.

Simarjeet expressed that she had sexual problems with her husband as he made persistent sexual demands on her. In this respect she said:

No one stops him! Women always have to listen to men. Women are not given the right to make decisions.

Shindo had divorced her husband because he already had a first wife, and because of problems with her mother-in-law. She felt that:

If a man is no good, a woman must speak up. How much 'zulum' (tyranny or oppression) can a woman take? A woman couldn't do the things he did to me, why should he be allowed to?

Shinder had once left her husband because he would not allow her to visit her mother who lived within a distance of a mile:

Our women go through so much, but they have no value.

Banti was soon to separate from her husband because he did not maintain her financially:

Parents don't think about us ... that we're young ... about our feelings ...you can't talk to anybody, they just want to marry you off and then keep quiet after that.

Fateh had left her husband two years earlier and lived with her two young sons. Her husband, in an attempt to reconcile, insisted that he live in the property that she had acquired through the Housing Association as a homeless person. She said sarcastically.

He complains that I don't respect him as a husband ... I didn't ask him to come and live with me. What shall I do with him now? Crown him on my head?

Inderjit also left soon after this interview:

Marriage is of two people. It takes two to make it or break it ... Our society doesn't accept separation or divorce ... There is a limit to everything ... A woman should leave her family if necessary.

Although women may be aware of their oppression, there are factors that may act against them, to prevent them from totally rejecting their situation. Within the context of self-sacrifice and negotiation of compromises, we look at the notions of fate, self-depreciation and isolation as factors limiting women's attempts to change their positions. These factors restrict women from expressing the full extent of their resistance.

Kismet

In my total sample, 87 percent of the working class women, expressed a belief in 'kismet', (fate and destiny), that it was the will of God that defined their lives. This provided women with justification with whatever action they decided to take, whether it was one of tolerance of

rebellion, but on the whole it served to maintain their position in terms of subservience and self-depreciation.

Freire argues that this delegation of all responsibility to God is a characteristic of the oppressed mentality, the culture of silence:

fatalism, ... interpreted as a docility.
Fatalism in the guise of docility ...
It is almost always related to the power
of destiny or fate or fortune -
inevitable forces - or to a distorted
view of God. Under the sway of magic or
myth, the oppressed ... see their
suffering, the fruit of exploitation, as
the will of God - as if God were the
creator of this 'organised disorder'
(Freire, 1972 : 37).

A. Wilson in her study (1978 : 7) also found women to believe that:

Men have authority over women because
Allah has made one superior to the other
...

Chinti in my sample, had a husband who was an alcoholic and never supported her financially. She had brought her children up through her own endeavours of working for a wage, and she hated her husband for what he was. Her comfort in life, however, lay in her trust in God.

Men rule, women have no izzat or value,
I try hard to find happiness in God.
The Baba (holy man) says suffer your
fate and complete your 'faraz' (duty).

Sharanjeet Shan (1985) questioned this fate in terms of religion itself.

Once I wrote a long letter to my father
congratulating him on the length of the
punishment that he had designed for me.
Time and again they both (parents) wrote

back to say that it was 'parmatma ka hukam (God's will), 'mere karam', (my fate) and 'Karmon' ke khel (the games of destiny).

Then Sharanjeet learnt by turning to her mother's advice to read Guru

Nanak's work:

'Aapne hathein aape he kaj savariay'.
Roughly translated, it means that you must take destiny in your own hands and put right what is wrong. These lines have stayed with me all my life (Shan 1985 : 63).

Kirpal was nineteen years of age and her parents had arranged her marriage to a boy from India, contrary to her wishes. She thought that an Indian boy could not give her the freedom she required to appear and dress in her own manner. She came to terms with herself by calling upon God.

God says obey your parents.

This belief did not completely stop her from resisting. She wrote to the Home Office expressing her feelings about the marriage, hoping that this might prevent her fiances entry. But it did not. Kirpal was unaware of the contradictory nature of her actions. As we saw in Chapter 1, the authorities do not allow the entry of some fiances on the grounds of the 'primary purpose' rule. This is a racist measure. For Kirpal, however, as a woman, it was the only option open for her after pointing out her views to her parents. They did not take her views into account and so she was forced to use this option, since she had neither the support nor the material basis to reject the family outright. She

did eventually marry the man and was subsequently very happy as he allowed her to dress to her preference.

The authorities by enabling Asian men and women to use the immigration rules in this way, are limiting and confining the resistance of Asian people, by presenting external channels to express this conflict. It is an expression that is EXTERNAL to the issues that are INTERNAL to the community, and it prevents direct confrontation and challenge within the community itself, thereby hindering the development of any fundamental change in the structure and the values on which the community is based. In short it has lethargic effects on the community.

Self-depreciation

Self-depreciation was another character that some women portrayed when I first approached them for questioning for this study. Both waged and non-waged, young and old women would first react by saying:

What do we know? We are not educated.

This was Asha, an ex-shop steward, who continued:

My husband knows more about these things.

Sometimes this feeling of women was condoned by the men in the family (fathers or husbands) who were more forthcoming to answer my questions,

even when they were addressed to the women. A. Wilson also found the same in her study:

I visited couples in their homes to ask about local events, my conversations with women would often be interrupted by their husbands holding up their hands in the direction of their wives and saying in the most matter of fact way 'be quiet', and then turning to me and saying 'there is no point in asking my wife. She does not know. She is not educated'. In most cases these wives were literate and well informed, but they would smile politely and agree with their husbands. When I spoke to some of these women alone much later I asked them why Asian women often reacted like this; their answers were that it was good for a man's izzat. At the same time the wife's role was to serve, and this modest withdrawal was as it were a part of the service (A. Wilson 1978 : 46).

Within the 'culture of silence', Freire considers self-depreciation as another characteristic of the oppressed

.... which derives from the internalisation of the opinion the oppressors hold of them. So often do they hear that they are good for nothing and are incapable of learning anything ... that in the end they become convinced of their own unfitness (Freire 1972 : 38-39).

This self-fulfilling prophecy degrades and devalues women's own self-conception, in relation to men and other women whom they may see as being strong. In this sense, Reena a middle class community worker observed that the working class women with whom she had worked often portrayed:

... poor images of themselves. They have convention-bound self images.

and these prevented women from realising their own full social potential to be independent. Poor self-images in this sense did not mean that women did not have good self-images of themselves in other areas of their lives. They realised, for example, that they were strong and hard working in carrying out the double role as waged - labourers and domestic labourers, and/or they had respect in the community.

Isolation in Struggle

Women are economically and ideologically dependent upon men and this serves to maintain their isolation within the family. Characteristic of this dependence is the control over women's social and physical movements. In the West too, the isolation and privatisation of women within the home have been topical themes for Western feminists, in analysing the dependency of women upon men (A. Oakley 1985, P. Hunt, 1980).

Kishwar and Vanita point out that for Indian women, restriction and respectability ensure ignorance and isolation in struggle. They write:

Strict restriction on women's freedom of movement and on them forming independent associations have become integral features of the peasant patrilocal household in most parts of India, especially in the rural North Indian plains ... Since these restrictions are made a mark of higher social status and respectability, women themselves are made to feel that they have a stake in secluding themselves from the outside world as far as possible. Such exclusion from community life ensures a

woman's isolation from and ignorance of possible sources of support in her struggle to make a viable less subordination place for herself in her husband's family... (Kishwar and Vanita 1984 : 11).

In Chapter 5, we saw how some women adhered to this notion of respectability and condoned their own isolation for the reward of respectability.

This isolation means that women find little support in other women.

Debo's next door neighbour, in a block of high-rise flats amidst a white community, had left. Like so many others, she expressed:

I have no one else here. I sit bored at home. I'm locked in all the time.

She was not physically 'locked' in the flat, she could go and visit friends, as she was separated from her in-laws, and her own family lived in India. She and her husband had lived in the flat for over a year and did not know of any other Asians, with the exception of this friend who had left. They had applied for a transfer from the Council but acquired only a few points since their case was not considered a priority.

Reena, a community worker saw the isolation of Asian women in this country as follows:

Women in India are supported by their families and their communities. You don't need 'mother and baby clubs' there. But here, women are made to be dependent on men because you are with a man all the time. In India you don't

see your husband all the time, you relate to other people, particularly women most of the day.

A. Wilson also relates to the isolation of Asian women in this country, and refers to the support of the other women in their countries of origin.

But even in the most oppressive family and community women do have consolation - each other's company and affection. The warmth which sisters and sisters-in-law may show for one another can cushion a woman against the harshness of her life. The importance of this love and its physical demonstration is acknowledged in ceremonies and rituals all over the Indian sub-continent. (A. Wilson 1978 : 7).

This concentration on women supporting each other has been criticised for portraying an exotic view, free of contradictions and sufferings of poverty and the struggle for survival that women have to surmount in the course of their lives. (M. Dhondy, 1979).

Here it is merely used to point out that in this country women do not have access to any structural support systems which can help them in times of need. Guddi's case, highlights her oppression in terms of race, gender and class, and her sheer determination to succeed in the assertion of her will, despite her isolation. I encountered Guddi during my work at ARC. Guddi (in her mid twenties) was divorced and lived with her parents who wanted her to remarry. She consistently refused, and the whole family, parents, brothers and sisters, were against her. Several times her negotiations failed and she compromised to sponsor a fiance from India. Once she wrote to the Home Office and

expressed her wish against the sponsorship. She sought the advice(s) of community workers and Members of Parliament. Her father discovered that she had asserted herself in this way and again unpleasantness began from relatives and friends, in the form of taunts and degradation; that she was insolent, impertinent, and incapable of keeping a husband, that she was stubborn and difficult to get on with. She was persecuted because she refused to repeat her previous experience of an unsuccessful marriage. She repeatedly stressed:

I don't want to get married. It'll be only the same thing again. I'll be used again. My fiance wants to come here, he'll have his stay and then won't even give any thought for me ... And they say I'm being difficult. I know I'm quite a strong person... but I don't know how long I can put up with them, you know? All I want is to be left alone My sisters can get married, but they keep saying I'm in the way... so it seems that I'm gonna have to call him here.

Guddi's sisters feared that the implications of her not getting married would be to devalue their prospects of marriage whereby they will be seen as 'unworthy' because of Guddi's divorced status. As a single woman Guddi was not seen to be respectable even though she lived with her own family; she was still 'alien wealth', and her unrespectable status reflected the status of the whole family and brought disrepute to it.

Amidst all the pressures, Guddi clearly saw that the father was the real oppressor:

If I can handle him, the others will follow him, you see. It's him. He wants to get rid of me. I can understand his point of view, but its not what I want. I did it once and it failed; I don't want to give it another try. I'm happy on my own.

She identified her predicament with her late mother, and recalled how her mother had suffered at the hands of her father when he would beat her and refuse to give her money, and have affairs with other women.

He killed her, and now he wants to show me what he can do.

At work, of course Guddi's problems were also with her. She worked at an English firm and the employers knew of her situation. She was constantly ill and depressed so everybody at work knew there was something wrong in her life. Before her mother's death, she took a lot of sick leave to nurse her. The employers sacked her. She then found employment with another firm in 1983, and found that her white workmates were being racist towards her. She approached a community worker for advice who contacted her workplace. The employers saw the behaviour of the white workers as arising from Guddi's personality, appearance and her home situation. That she was too withdrawn, did not keep a happy appearance and outlook was why the other workers (white) laughed at Guddi's dress. At my last encounter (March 1986) Guddi was continuing to argue that her home, though obviously affecting her work, was not the cause of racial harassment at work. The employers insisted that she sort out her problem at home first. One of the women in the management was willing to concede to the possibility of racial harassment and advised Guddi to take legal proceedings against the other workers. But

Guddi felt that such an action would only aggravate the situation further as she was the only Asian and had no support from other workers, or the management. Thus isolated, she was caught up in her struggle at work and at home, but she continues to fight on.

Banti was contemplating to leave her husband who refused to provide financial support for her. She had come from India for marriage and now had two sons. It was her husband's second marriage. In her isolation, she was unaware of her legal status. She later left the martial home.

He never gives me any money, so I don't give him mine ... He really wants me to go back home (India). So I keep my own and children's passports with me all the time. He can't send me home can he?

This fear was instilled in many women, not only by threats made by men who had married women from abroad, but endorsed by the immigration regulations which allow deportation of a spouse if the marriage is unsuccessful. Many working class women do not get the correct and necessary information about their rights in this regard, and a number are sent back to their places of origin by husbands or in-laws.

Another woman who did not form a part of my interview sample, but whom I met at ARC, had been confined to the house for many years by her husband. She had only one outlet to express her grievance - the nursery where she took her children. She was pregnant with her sixth child and her husband was beating her. She had reached a level where she could not take much more and made inquiries at the nursery as to the type of help she would receive if she left the home. She had decided to leave in a few days time and I spoke to her.

Tensions are high ... I am eight months pregnant and he still beats me. I can't take anymore of these beatings.

For some unexplained reason she did not, or could not leave.

Gurdev had arrived in the UK at the age of sixteen for marriage and was now twenty-eight years old. She had two children, but her husband had

only slept with her twice, at the request of the relatives to reproduce children. Otherwise, for twelve years he had taken no interest in his wife and had never spoken to her. He lived as he pleased, sometimes with her, but mostly with his brother.

Gurdev had attempted several negotiations through relatives of the husband to reach some form of agreement or understanding but no results were forthcoming. She then reached a point where she recognised that the relatives merely wanted to retain the status-quo of the husband and did not have her interests at heart. As her husband refused to work, Gurdev had managed the household and the upkeep of her children by working. Her husband suffered from depression. Gurdev had never written to her mother regarding her situation because she did not want to cause her worry. But she continued to challenge her husband and his family in the home, and though she loved her mother she felt bitter.

I answer back to him and his family.
What have they ever given me? I left
home once, but I didn't want to become a
burden on anybody. I work and keep the
children happy. I want to tell my
mother, but everytime I think of writing
it in the letters, I hold back. It'll
only give her pain and anxiety ... but
why did she send me here ... all this
way to suffer. Why shouldn't I tell
her?

Another form of oppression and isolation is the type of swaddled with love, as was the case with Simarjeet. Sex was the main feature of her oppression:

He wants sex everynight. It's a disease
... Doctors say I'm lucky, that he loves
me. That's not love, that's burning me

out. He's jealous, and taunts me when I dress up. If we go to stay with relatives he always wants to sleep with me, no matter what arrangements the host is capable of making. He doesn't care. If I somehow escape him for one night, he fights ... He doesn't care about the pain I go through ... He doesn't want to see a doctor ... I want him to leave, or leave myself. But I'm afraid of what people might say. This burden of reputation prevents women from fighting back - its the home - its too great a burden. The wife is a 'ghulam' (a slave). Women fear people ...

'People' referred to her significant others, the close neighbours, friends and relatives. Simarjeet was in the process of negotiating compromises by seeing if the doctors could do or suggest anything for her husband's treatment. By ultimately sleeping with her husband everynight she was also sacrificing her own comfort by pointing out to her husband how painful the procedure was for her, in the hope that he may learn from her pain.

Bakshish too had had enough. She was at the brink of separation proceedings, but she did not want to leave the home. For three years she had been attempting to challenge, question and resolve the predicament that faced her, and now the only method she had not tried was separation. She had tried to involve community members, 'panchayats' to resolve her situation but it had not worked. Bakshish came from a relatively middle class family from India where she was educated to a degree level. Her strongest anxieties were for her only child - a daughter for whom she wanted to provide a private education. The daughter, an eleven year old, was the closest person to Bakshish and

had become a type of mediator between the parents. All Bakshish's fears and expectations seemed to be expressed through her daughter, who in a sense, formed all her support and gave her a sense of destination, and purpose.

I want the best for my daughter. I want to make her something. She will have the best education.

She wanted her husband to leave the house and was making enquiries with a solicitor:

I can't believe we are separating. I've asked my brother to contact a solicitor. I don't want to move, I'd rather he goes. He (husband) hasn't talked to me for two years. He keeps saying he's going to leave me. I ask him to go, not to just threaten it ... My daughter talked to him last night ... I've had a panchayat (committee of people) from the temple and relatives who come to try and talk to him. He used to ask me to put up a front for him in front of others so that seemingly all was well. I said "why should I? I can't accept the fact that you should go and sit on juries, and yet set fire in your own home ... I want to expose you". He took my passport and stranded me in India. I came back with the help of relatives ... I think the house is mine ... it should be ... I've worked too! ... I wonder where I went wrong. I want to learn to drive so that my daughter and I can go out.

Bakshish did not have any support of friends or relatives, but in her case, her education provided her with the impetus to enable her to assert her will. Although this education had no value in this country,

(she worked in a hospital canteen as a cleaner) she held on to the educational value she had acquired in India, and was determined to show that she was not helpless. Bakshish had reached a point where she felt it necessary to reject her oppression.

Sharanjeet Shan describes how she endured her suffering in total isolation when she found, on her arrival in the UK, that her husband was not an accountant as she was led to believe:

I also became aware of the desperate need for me to find a job, as money was owed to the rationwala, as we called the grocer, to the milkman and the landlady. When the television company came and took the television away as at least eight months rent was outstanding, we had the first of many ugly rows that were to follow. I had begun to resent bitterly the lies that had been told. Darshan reminded me constantly that I was a rejected girl and that no one would have married me. He had supposedly rescued me from a fate worse than death. I was supposed to be grateful to him for the rest of my life, and not shame my father any more. Later in the day he came home drunk and demanded quite forcibly that I should give him all my ornaments. I had no choice but to do so. I was allowed to keep a ring and a chain which my parents had given me. The ornaments were sold in order to pay off the 'pool' money for the rest of the year ... We lived in Slough for eighteen months. Everyday that passed I heard many stories of women in similar circumstances as me. A lot of them had been brought to England under false pretences. As long as a marriage could be arranged, it did not matter how many lives could be ruined. Everyday, I met my sisters who were living embodiments of the Indian woman's philosophy of 'tolerance, acceptance, hope and devotion'. In the agony of the realisation of what my future held I often cried myself to sleep. (Shan 1985 : 60).

However, despite this suffering and isolation, Sharanjeet was determined to assert herself, and find support in her children.

It was sometime during those harsh, insecure days that I became aware of a number of attitudes. It was so easy for me to find expansion and expression in Khushwant's childhood. Perhaps, to a certain extent, all parents seek fulfilment of their unconsummated aims and aspirations in their children. For an Indian mother, it is made even easier by the basic philosophy of a son being the provider in one's old age. I could see now how, in the absence of the very basic tool of economic independence, the majority of Indian women drift into a submissive state of fatalism. The burden of dependency is cumbersome. The tentacles cling so tenaciously that escape is unthinkable. A son then becomes a mother's complete world. But I was determined to become self-reliant ... struggling alone in my isolated circumstances had changed my personality. I looked only to myself for hope and help. (Ibid : 70-112).

Sharanjeet came out of her struggle as a strong expressive and rebellious woman. She received help and support from mostly white women friends and was thus able to open up her life to the world to expose its injustice. The book however was criticised for having overtones of Black men as being more oppressive and the European culture as being a liberating one. The criticisms were primarily levelled by Black women who foresaw that some white people would deduce that the former were more oppressed than white European women. At a meeting in which Sharanjeet promoted her book, she still saw Black men as being more oppressive, but made this plea on behalf of Asian women:

For Indian women, patriarchy is more important than racism. There is no question of political awareness, it is a system where ideologies are built and there is no room to fight from within ... Unless we fight and get rid of sexism we can't fight racism. But, as regards the passivity of Asian women, look for how I survived, how I delivered myself without any support, and I mean without any support. Read that, not the stereotypes of Asian women. My strength came from being a mother, the greatest joy I have. Liberated women talk of 'freedom', I don't want to be liberated from this joy ... Look for the positive aspects of how I survived.

Leaving Home a Political Action

Sharanjeet's contention that 'there is no question of political awareness' is a debatable one. There is no formula to define when it is that people begin to challenge their oppressive conditions. But the process of arriving at such a decision is a painful, emotional and a draining ordeal. Many women are involved in this day to day struggle of building the strength within themselves, gathering support and searching for avenues out of their predicament. The level of success obviously depends on a variation of factors such as the viable, available alternatives; level of confidence, amount of support etc. When they have taken concrete steps to change their own situation, women may not see this act in itself as political. If we are to accept the notion that the personal is political, then the process of acquiring that personal strength to challenge the oppression, is political, it is a rejection of one's oppressive conditions.

This is what one of the community workers, Annu, working with homeless women in a refuge had to say:

Shelter is not an end in itself ... the ultimate solution is not to leave home ... it is to fight within the community. In white establishments, women are ostracised from the community. The aim of the refuge is to provide shelter, self-confidence and information as to legal rights. A battered woman, when she leaves home leaves by spontaneous action, but I think it's political because it has taken something to realise exactly what position she is in.

Questioning of Male Authority

Thus on the question of ideology and awareness, not all women (as we have seen above) were caught up in the ideology of servitude to one's husband and the family. Many were of the opinion that there are limits and boundaries beyond which women should not be oppressed, and that there is need to question male authority.

Some women had left home because these limits and boundaries for them had been crossed, they searched for an independent life. But this independence, had a double-bind. They gained individual expression in their lives but very often, for working class women, their respectability had diminished in the eyes of their significant others - relatives, friends and families.

Balbir had spent most of her life in Britain. Before marriage she had struggled against her father, and at marriage against her husband whom

she had left. She lived alone, near her father, with her two children. She described her situation as follows:

I didn't say anything to anybody. My husband never supported me. I used to give my wage packet to my mother-in-law. I daren't open it ... Holidays came, and I came to visit my father, and I never went back. I was never my husband's partner, he looked at me as a toy. He expected me to act as a slave to his family to serve them, they were my elders. I was used to that, but not to slavery ... I wanted children because I thought like all Indian families, when a woman doesn't have children, she loses her respect. So I thought by having kids I might gain a place in the family, and be regarded as a member ... He'd beat me and I'd keep out of his way ... He'd beat me when I didn't want sex. So I left.

Balbir's struggle continued after she left:

People on his side think I was wrong. My own family have become hard to get on with, since I left him. They think I've lost my respect. When I was with my husband they would ask my opinion on everything. Now nothing. Anything I say, I have to think twice, that I shouldn't offend them. I mean, my parents are suppose to help me. They think I'm a burden on them. But I'm not. They don't support me financially. Like my Dad says, he's going to buy this place for me. Really, its for his son, it'll be in his name, so it'll be his.

Thus Balbir had tried sacrificing her wages, her labour and her individuality. Since she had no power in her husband 's household this was the only way to operate. With her own father she had subsequently negotiated her ultimate position as a 'separated' woman, but she did not get the respect that she wanted. She resolved to keep her self to her

self, as a method of survival but at the same time she did this on her own terms. The fact that she was in receipt of supplementary benefit did give her and her children an independent income which did not make her a financial burden on her father, though socially she was still a burden because she was still 'alien wealth'.

Balbir continued to elaborate on other facts of her 'independent life' and the implications and contradictions it had for her day to day existence.

If I wear make-up, people would say who are you doing it for. If I don't, they pity me.

But she had no regrets as regards her actions.

I took the right steps in leaving that family. I knew family life is good. But there's a family life you can do without. I never thought I'd leave. Even the day I left, I didn't think I could ... Nothing took me by surprise except for the reaction of my own family. They think if anything went wrong, it's my fault. I found it difficult to survive, and used to wonder, if it would all ever end. It's not quite as bad now. If tensions build up now between my family and I, I just quietly leave, so that I can return there when feelings are calmer.

But it was not easy to be single parent:

I just want to be independent not remarry. I feel strongly against that. For women it's difficult to live alone. People talk about you more easily if you're alone. A man on his own only has to think of himself. Women have a lower position in society, we're not

considered as equals. Only in our society it's like this. They're backward and they don't change, and stick to old beliefs and customs. Men are always telling women what to do. Women haven't the moral support to fight.

Thus Balbir's reaction against her own community was similar to that of Sharanjeet. In their views the oppression of women in the community was more acute compared to white women specifically. This reaction was also expressed by Ranjit who felt:

Our people don't learn. They don't change.

This view is difficult to explain. The women who expressed this feeling had met other women, Black and white, at refuges, but still felt that Asian women were more oppressed because they were 'reticent'. Yet they themselves were far from being reticent. Perhaps this was because they understood that the ideology of womanhood for them was to be tolerant, and that since they had lost their respect by challenging this notion, they had become exceptional, or deviant and therefore representative of other women. However, in the case of Balbir, she later (1986) joined the I.W.A. women's group and she presented poems that she had written, for the occasion of a public meeting on domestic violence. No doubt in this group, she would be involved in explicitly analysing her position and her life in a more radical way, which may include questioning of male domination in all societies rather than Asian per-se.

Shindo was glad that she had made the decision to leave her family, but this decision was in some ways imposed upon her:

I'd give all my money to my mother-in-law. Buy all the food for all the family. Then she wanted me to pay her rent. THEN I said, I'd EITHER pay rent OR the bills. I never thought I'd leave home. I never WANTED to leave ... It's difficult for women to live alone, economically and morally. There is always the fear of being attacked by men when you live alone. But my mother-in-law threw me out one night and I had to spend the night in the cellar with my little girl. I used to have to go without food somedays. I'm happy now at least we eat properly.

Thus Shindo's rejection of her oppression was forced upon her by her mother-in-law, which inadvertently had acted in her favour.

Santokh was cynical, at the hyprocrisy of her family:

My father-in-law settled so many disputes outside, but he ruined my life. I earned for 10 years, worked like a slave for 14 years ... to satisfy them. All they gave me in return was violence and abuse. I left four or five times and lived with my uncle. They would come and fetch me with a 'panchayat' ... so one day, I was goint to sign on and I left ... My father was ill with T.B., he was dying, but they didn't let me go and see him ... I'd only go back if my husband left his parents. Our men beat us up for anything. If you don't cook to their taste they beat you. I want to do O'Levels if I can now. If a woman is educated, she can stand on her own feet otherwise people point their finger at you.

Thus her self-sacrifices led her ultimately to reject her situation, and then start negotiations. Santokh had savings and her husband wanted a

reconciliation and was going to open a post office. He made no commitment to leave his parents, and Santokh understood his motives.

He wanted the £6,000 of me now. There's no way I'm going to sign the papers.

When her husband asked her to sign she replied:

I've wanted you for 14 years, and now I don't trust you anymore. You told me to leave, I left. We don't need you now. I'm not going to sign until I see my solicitor.

A woman who was accompanying Santokh's husband, a relative, pressurised Santokh to:

'To basan vali gal kar' (act like a wife, be reasonable).

To this Santokh replied later, in the light of these contradictions:

When I fight for my RIGHTS, they say its my fault, when we live at home they don't let us live. When we leave they don't let us be.

After ten months of separation, Santokh returned to live with her husband, 'lured' by the fact that she and her daughter had no male support, and that this would present problems when her daughter would be of marriageable age in some fifteen years time. Her husband left his parents, and thus they reached a compromise.

Resham described how she learnt to confront her husband, and would not adhere to his wishes to have a child:

He would come home in the middle of the night and ask me to cook for him and his drunken friends. He'd be jealous when I went out and he was against me learning anything. He locked me up and would not give any money. I found that his letters came to different addresses. He wanted me to have a baby. I did not, because I wanted him to correct himself first. Then I started answering him back when he not only swore at me but also at my parents. Eventually I left. I'm now studying English. He still pesters me and I'm afraid of going out in case he get me.

Attempts at negotiations had not worked for Resham and she left home with the support of her sister and brother-in-law.

Jasvir was tormented by her family and her husband due to her alleged barrenness. She divorced him, and subsequently discovered that it was he who could not have children. Throughout her marriage negotiations were attempted, but to no avail. She now lived alone and used her legal power to defy her husband by denying him a divorce for as long as possible.

I didn't have a baby ... he'd beat me ... I'm deaf now. He never used to let me cook for him and always asked his mother to serve him. He wanted to remarry and I wouldn't sign the divorce papers. Then he sent me to India and left me there. I came back with the help of my father. They claimed that I stole £200 and called the 'panchayat'. The 'panchayat' asked me to sign the divorce papers in return for £200. I refused. The family beat me and threw me out. I was so badly beaten, my case was in the papers... They locked me in one time, and starved me, threatened me with a hot 'tava' (grill). For three years, I was with different relatives and six months in hospital .. There were

times when they didn't allow me to bathe. They would switch off the hot water and when I asked for 20p to use the public baths they refused. If I said I would just take it from their pocket they'd beat me. I want him to suffer now. I'm going to make him wait as long as possible for a divorce. I will never sign. If he wants an automatic divorce he'll have to wait five years. I never thought all this would happen. I was afraid of what people will say "his wife", "his daughter", always wandering the streets. Our 'samaj' (society) says women shouldn't leave home, but what does 'samaj' say when women are thrown out?

Jasvir also withdrew something that her husband valued (signature on the divorce papers) and in this way resisted some of the oppression levelled against her.

The only section of the Asian population that has had its struggle 'recognised' are Asian girls, seeking to resolve the 'conflict of the two cultures'. Credence to such a view (primarily by white social workers and teachers) has given rise to many state financed Asian girls refuges, because of the view that Asian girls experience problems in their cultures. Asian community workers expressed their discontent at the way in which the Asian girls were used, and the solutions found for them by white people.

Reena, a community worker running girls groups learnt from the girls and women she worked with, and did not agree with the western analysis of Asian culture.

They couldn't come to the youth clubs, etc. but they needed to talk to

verbalise some of the things they were thinking about. Talk about boys families, work, art, etc. It was very good. I learnt a great deal more. I began to see that value-systems are very much man-made and to break a set of conventions shouldn't be the end of your life. And this thing about the honour of your family and all this, I began to think for whose sake? Whose happiness? Okay you want to keep the family, but what price do you want to pay for that? ... your family can cut you off, batter you, and still say 'I'm a good Indian'. On the other hand the values and support offered by the British system, I'm not a supporter of that ... Lots of people want to help Asian girls, its a help in a very neurotic form. It seems to be that there's a score of people trying to save Asian girls from their families. They say 'Oh poor girl'. I say, "Okay what are you offering them? You've taken them away from their families because they feel oppressed. But what have you got in its place?". They'll say "nothing, she'll live on her own and she'll make her own life, won't she?". Birmingham is full of single mothers of 17-18 years of age, living 1-2 bedroom flats who are part time prostitutes, because they can't live on the money social security gives them. I mean, is this what they mean by 'she'll get by'. You see this concept of freedom... they all want this abstract illusive thing called freedom ... They think freedom is sleeping around and drinking.

Saranjana, a social worker expressed that:

If you do talk too much about how the traditional system oppresses women, and suppresses them, one has to be careful at that age, that it doesn't mean you have to run away. So the position one tries to work towards is helping girls to fight the struggle within the family, rather than by leaving the family. That can mean that people can say well look, you're taking a very conservative stance.

Saranjana felt that in schools, "Asian girls feel ashamed of their language, their family system, ... discussing issues ... in a way that one is necessarily ashamed of an institution". Thus the aim of social worker should be to "make Asian girls feel not to be ashamed of their Asianness".

The girls I talked to did not want the 'freedom' and 'independence' of white culture. Asian women find that throughout the most significant parts of their lives the major decisions are made for them, not by them (Omvedt 1980 : 33). It is the freedom to express one's independence, freedom from control; not just to be able to go out with men, and dress in a certain manner, but being able to assert one's thoughts, and it is this independence the women we have talked about, were striving to achieve.

Seeta was bitter that her:

parents were too strict, they didn't allow us out at all. They didn't want us to study and learn too much. I left and lived in a hostel for three months. I wish I hadn't left now. It's not that much freedom.

Narinder had managed to exert some of her wishes on to her family:

I'm the rebel of the family ... being the youngest. I had a free hand. I became a nanny and had to live out. No one wanted me to do it, but they agreed in the end. A woman should have her own personality.

Nina wished to have more control over her life but realised the limits within which she could operate:

Boys are spoilt and girls are kept under hand. We can't go out ... I cut my hair but my mother don't like it, you know. I still go along with Asian culture ... but they should respect you too.

Preet thought that if she did not challenge some aspects of her parents wishes about her employment, she would be following her mother's footsteps:

I can accept certain things... but fight others. I know it's difficult for her (mother) to explain to relatives why I cut my hair, but I have. She's stopped saying anything now. My father just gives me this look, straight in my face. I just look back. I don't want to be like my mother. I ain't gonna be ruled by no one. I've suffered. My father, he didn't let me study. But I got my sisters to go to college. I think I'll start next year too... He knows he can't say too much to me now.

Thus by agreeing not to go to college herself, Preet had been fighting for her sister to complete her 'A' Levels, and hoped that this in turn may also lead her to do so in the future.

Forms of support in struggle

As Balbir said "women haven't the moral support to fight". This isolation in struggle was felt to be an important factor in explaining

the 'tolerance' women had to show in the atrocities they faced. There were some women who had some form of support which strengthened their resolve to change their circumstances. The support of religion, the family and external agencies (statutory and voluntary) and of political groups or campaigns, were what the women here outlined.

Religion

Baljit, after leaving her husband had found tremendous support in the form of religion; this brought some religious community members close to her so that she had a network of people who sympathised only with her, not her family, and gave her the respect that she needed. She had arrived from India to marry, and subsequently had two children. Her mother-in-law was very severe and she could elicit little support from her husband. It was his third marriage:

There were too many of them against me in that house. I have no relatives here of my own. They never used to let me out, I didn't even know what the street outside looked like. It was a big house and I did all the work ... if I was ever ill, they never took me to the doctor. They would all beat me. Once my sister-in-law's husband came to beat me, but he had no right, so I said 'just you try' ... It wasn't that I couldn't protect myself physically, I could. But when the young kids like my young brother-in-law, though they were only children, beat me, I feared my mother-in-law and husband, in case of retaliation. My husband said he couldn't help me, and asked me to return to India ... I was like a slave and had no right to say anything. I took the holy water and now I live in God's name. I couldn't go back, no more beatings for me. I'm glad I left. I have many friends now from

the temples I visit, they come and see me and I go to see them.

Baljit's devotion to religion provided her with the respect of her significant others - friends, and this gave her support. Many women who had left their families found support in the religious community. It not only provided them with some type of explanation of their predicament, but social company as well. They did not have to sit alone at home all day but could visit the temples and friends made there. Women who came to the ARC for refuge, often found such support and respect (therefore dignity) in religion. Some women turned to a refuge in religion during their desperate state. Though the temples do not openly condone any form of women's revolt against the family, at the same time, they do not reject people who want to do 'sewa' (service) in the temples. In performing 'sewa', women not only acquire a 'peace of mind' in religion, they also acquire respectability which is otherwise susceptible because of their rebellious actions. Religion therefore gives women a sense of identity and purpose, both of which are easily lost when they seek to be independent.

Family

In some cases the family was another form of support from which courage could be found, to continue in one's struggle. This assistance was usually more forthcoming from families who could see that the in-laws of

their daughters were clearly exploitative, and where parents could themselves financially support their daughters.

Shiela had in the past received some expression of solidarity from her younger brother. When she was experiencing problems with her husband because he was an alcoholic and having an affair with a white woman, her brother assured her that she would be looked after if she were to separate. This did not just mean financial support, (for this would be little as Shiela was employed and could apply for supplementary benefit if she had not been) but also practical and moral backup. After Shiela's husband died, and she had given birth to another daughter, Shiela was able to survive with enormous strength due to the assistance received from her family. She quickly learnt to drive and moved towards self-sufficiency as she did not want to become a burden. The moral support of the family gave her the strength to survive.

Sonia came to the UK at the age of fifteen for marriage and on her arrival found that her husband was a forty year old widower, with five children. After she had two daughters he left her in India, having taken her there on the pretence of a holiday. Whilst there, Sonia's parents supported her and helped her to return to England.

In bringing up her step children, Sonia established tremendous rapport with them, and they showed loyalty and support to her rather than their father. She was now divorced and lived with her two daughters and a son. She recalled:

He'd let me visit older friends, not young ones. I had to wear second-hand clothes... He'd have sex with me whilst I was unconscious ... He'd beat me ... he didn't want any daughters, he never even came to see me in hospital when they were born. I was so hurt. Then I had a son. He was happy but it didn't mean so much to me. If he didn't want my daughters, why should he want my son. Then I wanted an abortion, but doctors refused. I decided to get sterilised. He left me in India with my two daughters, he said he was sending me on holiday ... but he left me there. I eventually came back alone, leaving my children with my mother, they came back when things settled. My mother said it was my 'kismet' (fate).

The nature of Sonia's relationship with her step children showed when she returned to England:

I came back, and stayed with some relatives in London. He came with the children. His children all came running, embracing me and crying "mummy, mummy, where have you been?". I was quite embarrassed in front of my relatives who may have thought that I was cruel to have left them behind. Kaka (her stepson) came and told me later that their father had told them to put this act on. They weren't really crying.

She recalled other incidents when she and her step children had acted in solidarity:

He used to count every penny we had. I'd work and give him my wage packet. We'd go shopping (the kids and I) and have 'samosas' (Indian savoury) on the way. We'd spend a few shillings on the snacks. What we'd do was, we'd come home and add a few pennies to each item that wasn't priced by a tag, to bring it to the extra amount we had spent. But

before we did it, we'd have to train ourselves to stick to the same story. One day, I can't remember what we'd bought but he'd bought the same thing from the same shop, the same day. So in our accounting, he asked where and when we had got it. We all told him the same thing. He knew we were all lying. He said 'I bloody got it from the same shop today. it cost me less and you more. How can that be?'. So I quickly changed the story and said we got it yesterday. But he insisted that I return to the shop with him there and then. See he always knew we were all on the same side. The kids were always with me even though in name they were my step children. Then, when he was sober, he'd tell everybody to sleep at 8.00 p.m. Everybody had to be in bed. My stepson Kaka wanted to watch football, so he'd creep downstairs at 10.00 p.m. My husband would send me down to see if anyone was there. I'd come back and report that there was nobody. Then if he was drunk, he'd come and shout at me. "Have you been sleeping?. You can't sleep. How dare you sleep?". If we knew he was going to be drunk, we'd sleep off a little before he came and then sit up as though we'd been awake all the time. It seems funny now, but at the time we would all cry ...

Once he beat me. I screamed, pleaded, shouted, he wouldn't let me go. Kaka was upstairs. He jumped out of the back bedroom window and went and phoned the police. The police came and my husband was shocked. "Who called the police", he asked all the children, and everyone said nothing. When the cops told him that it was his son, Kaka got a beating.

Even after separation, all the step children related to Sonia and continue to see her regularly.

Kulvinder pointed to the period she had a similar experience to that of Sonia's.

My husband was always drunk. My brothers were rich and they supported me when he left me in India, stranded. I nearly went mad, I didn't leave the house for six months, because I was unable to face the outside world. If it wasn't for my family I can't even begin to think what I would have done.

Refuge Agencies

Women's refuges offer many women the only realistic and viable alternative and an avenue out of their oppression within the family. Apart from providing the practical support, the refuges that are run for and by Asian women provide the emotional assistance required. The greatest source of this encouragement is derived from the women using the refuge themselves, rather than the workers. ~

It is evident that once a woman had made up her mind to take on more of the atrocities, and was informed of her rights and how to practice them, she had no inhibitions to remove herself from amidst the oppression. These external agencies sometimes acted as factors bringing about a material and an ideological change in women's situation.

Ranjit described her life with her husband, and the types of information and support she received:

My husband was a drunkard. He'd get drunk and throw us (Ranjit and her four children) out or terrorise me in the house. Once he filled a bath of water and said he was going to drown me. My youngest daughter was nine then, she was locked in the other room. I screamed, begged and pleaded, but nobody heard me.

I used to go and stay with my brother. He suggested I should leave my husband permanently. Eventually I did and stayed at my brother's. But my husband got a marriage counsellor to write to me. I didn't know what the implications of that were. She said I should give him another chance. But I had given him many chances previously, and they hadn't served any purpose. But I thought if I refused to give him a chance again, I would be the one to be blamed for the separation. So unwillingly I went back to him. My brother had warned me not to reconcile again. He broke off all relationship with me. I had tried many tactics with my husband to keep out of his way when he was drunk. Obviously he continued. Then I adopted another strategy. Before he became drunk, I'd tell him that I would leave. But often there was no where to go and I didn't wish to become a liability on anyone. Whilst he was drunk, I would roam the streets, town and parks. The children suffered from anxiety, cold and malnutrition. I used to keep some milk, tea, sugar, quilts and sheets at a friend's house nearby. I'd feed the children with chips and take them to the friends and then return home in the morning. After some years a cousin of mine told me of an Asian advice centre where women could be helped. I went there with her and they put me into a hostel. The hostel was for Asian women only and that was good. I had someone to talk to, and we all kept each other company. All of us are very good friends to this day.

Though this did not get rid of the fundamental psychological effects which caused depression, loneliness and fear of the future, the Asian women's refuge did provide identification with other women facing the same predicament. In this sense Asian women began to establish an Asian identity by meeting women who were not only of their own background, but

also from other religions and parts of India, Pakistan and Africa. Stereotypes held by one group of women about another, were eradicated as they lived communally and built respect for each other's way of life and suffering. It brought together the notion of the common suffering of women. Women also provided one another with practical support; a new woman at a refuge looked to the well established ones to find out arrangements about social security, legal and housing matters. They often accompanied each other to solicitors, courts, etc. and looked after each others children whilst one was absent. Another distinct feature of the refuge was that it was set in the centre of an Asian community. Many white women's hostels are at the periphery in areas occupied by white people. Black women often find themselves isolated from the community and subjected to racial abuse and attack from both white women occupying the refuges, and also from people in white residential areas generally. In the course of my work at ARC, a few Asian women reported that in the white refuges they had no body to talk to, were not provided the right equipment and utensils to make their own food. White women often refused to allow them to bathe in the same bathrooms, and they were under considerable pressure to dress in a westernised manner because of the racial abuse they received when wearing their own forms of dress.

By staying in an Asian refuge in an Asian area, the women were not subjected to racial abuse to add to their strenuous circumstances. It also provided them with an opportunity to struggle within their own community, to find friends (and enemies) within it, so that they are able to be a part of it rather than anomalies or external or deviant

features. In this manner their struggle becomes an INTERNAL aspect of the community.

Also once women were introduced to such advice centres, they were at the same time introduced to women's groups, to which they became parties. They developed their powers of expression and identification in these spheres relating to the common experiences they shared as women. In this way they acted as external forces influencing other women amongst them, and were influenced in turn, to re-examine their own worlds.

Yet the availability of women's refuge is not always a positive solution for women seeking refuge. In one way it merely takes women out of one oppressive system only to place them in another. Vast amount of changes remain to be made in the legal, housing and social services available to women.

On a legal stance, women seeking injunctions against male violence are placed in an ambivalent position. They are protected by the state from male violence, and yet have to prove that such violence has taken place before they are provided protection. Male violence towards women may be publicly applauded by some men, but is actually performed in privacy. As Resham put it:

When he beats me, he beats me in
private. So who will witness it?

The need to prove violence against oneself takes long laborious court proceedings. Women have been known to suffer continuous risk and actual

infliction of violence even whilst court proceedings are being taken
(Guru 1986).

I illustrated this in 1986 in relation to a woman called Banso. Banso
had come from a white refuge to ARC expressing:

They are all "gorian" (white women)
there. I can talk to them for a bit but
they have a different life. They don't
know what I'm talking about. Before I
was strong I'm too weak now, I can't
take any more. He'll (husband) kill me
one day.

Before Banso came to the ARC she had a solicitor who acted for her for
almost a year. She was advised by him to return to the marital home and
continue legal proceedings from there to secure the marital property.
She was also advised to contact the police immediately if her husband
was violent. When Banso went home, her husband opened the door, slapped
her face, threatened her with a knife, and again threw her out. She
went to the police to make a report and returned to the refuge. An
injunction was served against her husband to restrain from violent
behaviour. She wished to take out legal proceedings to get her marital
home from her husband but this could not be done until she could prove
that her husband had been violent towards her. The police confirmed
that she
reported incidents to them on several occasions but stated that her
husband had also made such reports. They maintained they had no proof
that Banso was beaten by her husband or that he was responsible for the
marital disharmony. The doctor's statement said that the wife had
'alleged' she was beaten, but he could not 'conclusively' say that she

was injured as a result of any violence inflicted by him. So Banso could not prove that her husband had been violent. He had never beaten her in public; no one was willing to testify that they had seen violence being inflicted upon her; her children who had witnessed the violence refused to appear in court. Banso could not therefore acquire her property. When she tried to collect her belongings, her local police escorted her home, but made it clear to the husband that he did not have to give them to her. Their presence was merely to ensure that no violence took place. Her husband refused her entry to the home. The police then advised her to go to court to secure any belongings she might have. She, however, could never prove that some of the belongings were hers. She had no receipt to verify her claim. (Guru 1986 : 158-159).

Housing is another area in which women are offered the least service. Homeless women are prioritised as needing urgent housing action, but the types of properties offered to them hardly 'priorities' their need. Most houses and flats are so dilapidated and in such bad condition that women, particularly single mothers, are quite incapable of repairing and decorating these properties. This need to settle down in a new property sometimes re-establishes dependency upon men (Guru 1986).

In Tara's case, she had:

... made her own application for re-housing and was re-housed within the local community where she had the necessary support network. The property was very dilapidated. The frustrations of not having things done as and when required, eventually led Tara to seek

reconciliation with her husband (Guru
1986 : 161).

"But now that time has gone"

The 1980s saw a coherent and organised way in which women have expressed their discontent, anger and frustrations at the atrocities they face within the family. Again, this has reflected their triple struggle of race, gender and class.

The protests are taking place in the form of campaigns exposing not only the violence and the oppression women face within the family, but also the racism and sexism that they are exposed to outside the family. The effects of court procedures and the legal system in general, and the role of the police have both racist and sexist implications for the women involved.

The origins of the campaigns have varied from one case to another, but they are headed primarily by women who have had some organisational experience from other campaigns such as anti-deportation, and young women (both middle and working class), who have become aware of the need to take over action. The actual cases have been of working class older women who have not been in the UK too long, or cannot speak English too well. In some of the campaigns, white women have been central to the initiation and have continued to participate when Black women have taken control. In other cases, white women have not been involved.

CAMPAIGNS

Krishna Sharma - 1984

Krishna, a woman in her 30s worked at a launderette. She had suffered years of violence from her husband. To her workmates she would often explain her bruises as having occurred from rushing into doors, or her child inadvertently hitting her. Everytime the police were called, they refused to get involved. As a result of this Krishna was found hanged with bruises. A verdict of suicide was returned. At the trial of her husband, the facts that Krishna was bruised and that neighbours had heard noises on the day were not produced as evidence.

A campaign was formed by women who were previously involved in Southall Black Sisters. The issue was not one of murder or suicide. It was that whatever the verdict, the husband had provoked the death of Krishna. The campaign also wished at the time to negate the myth of stereotyping Asian culture. The media gave sensational horror stories of Asian life as being barbaric and backward. Thus the campaign had two aspects of the struggle, against racism and sexism. The campaign realised that to keep quiet, in face of the media's representation of Asian culture, may be convenient for both whites and Black Asian males, but it would negate the issues affecting women.

The strategies adopted by the campaign were learnt from the experiences of women's protests in India. For the first time in Britain, Asian women formed 'gherao' (picket) outside Krishna's family residence and led a march through the centre of Southall. The public protest had two effects. It exposed the family in the community, thereby challenging the community from within; Krishna's neighbours did not even know what atrocities were being committed against her. It also exploded the stereotypical myths of Asian women as being docile, demure and passive. The march did not consist of young women. Older women formed a significant part of the march and 'gherao'. Male support was minimal. The dilemma of racism presented itself again when Krishna's husband received a heavy sentence of twenty-five years for manslaughter. Black people wondered if such a severe sentence could have been imposed for a similar crime committed by a white man.

The IWA disowned the campaign and the family's male members were very hostile, to the point of physically attacking women members of the campaign. One of the campaign members, a young Asian woman, said:

It's not enough for women to escape their reality. We are now thinking of collective action. We find that women from outside a community are willing to show solidarity in a protest, but those from within the community are not.

Yet the older and the younger women from within the community were present at the demonstration thus making it an internal issue within the community itself, even though these women did not actively participate in the campaign.

Rabina

Rabina's husband had also been extremely violent toward's her for many years. She had no relatives of her own in this country and her husband's relatives had not listened to her pleas. Rabina's ultimate point was reached when her husband almost killed her, splitting her head open and causing brain damage. She was eventually helped by some white women to move into a refuge. The police had never taken serious interest in her complaints, in fact her husband Akram was so familiar with harmless police visits that after being violent he would ask Rabina to "go call the police". Akram had breached many injunctions to keep away from Rabina, but he was not effectively punished for these breaches. His court case came to a halt when all other charges were dropped, except that of grievous bodily harm. Rabina received little support from her community. Rabina expressed publicly:

When I saw the opportunity to get out, I did. Police say the dispute is between husband and wife, they do nothing. I don't even trust the police. We women are restrained from fighting, there are reasons ... we learn from birth to obey our husbands, so we do we worry about our children, relatives and therefore do little to fight ... When I didn't tolerate the violence they said I was bad. (Channel 4 'Fearful Silence' : 1986).

In Rabina's case, external radicalising influences had affected her which enabled her not only to physically move away from her husband, but to actually fight back against him with the help and support of a campaign in which there were both Asian and white women activists.

Iqbal Begum

Iqbal was in her mid-thirties, and was imprisoned for life for the murder of her husband in 1981. Her husband had been violent towards her most of their married life, and in an incident in which an argument took place between them, she struck him with a metal-bar to his head, and he died. Iqbal was illiterate in English and in her own language. She was taken to her local police station where a duty solicitor attended to her defence. None of the husband's family came to see her and she did not have any member of her own family in the UK. Iqbal had four sons ranging between the ages of three to eleven and one step daughter, and none of these were taken to see her after she went into the police station.

During her hearing, the defence solicitor did not collect any independent evidence, but relied on the 'facts' of the prosecution case. Iqbal's hearing lasted between fifteen to twenty minutes in which it was decided that she should be sentenced to life imprisonment. An interpreter was provided in court, but he did not speak the same language or dialect as Iqbal. He spoke Gujarati and Hindi, but Iqbal only spoke Mirpuri Punjabi. When asked how she pleaded, she replied 'Gulti', the interpreter took this to mean 'guilty', and on this basis she was given her sentence. 'Gulti' in Hindi and Punjabi means a mistake, not guilty.

No appeal was filed against this judgement, or any other concern shown by her solicitors. A group of white women, from Women's Aid, expressed

their disgust at the length of time the trial had taken and attempted to get in touch with Black women in Birmingham, but their efforts proved unproductive. They handed the information they had gathered on Iqbal's case to a group of women in Liverpool, the nearest place to where Iqbal was imprisoned.

Then in 1983, through contacts, Birmingham Black Sisters were given the case details and a campaign began. After a struggle lasting a year and a half, Iqbal was freed. The campaign raised many issues other than domestic violence, and the members learnt a few lessons from this experience of organising. We now look at what these were.

Treatment in Prison

The prison officers refused to accept that Iqbal could not speak English and that she was illiterate. The bureaucracy required forms and requests to be completed in writing. As Iqbal could not do this, many of her rights were with-held such as prison visits and new clothing. Iqbal's diet consisted of potatoes and other boiled vegetables for the four years that she was in prison; she was not provided any 'halal' meat, nor given any space or room for prayers. Being the only Asian woman in the institution, Iqbal had nobody to communicate with, except for the periods when one or two other Asian women inmates were present.

Legal Treatment

Iqbal's solicitors had shown no regard for her rights. Their failure to make an independent research into the case meant that they did not have the necessary facts to plead for manslaughter or self-defence. The solicitors failed to explain and give Iqbal an informed understanding of the implications of the charges and her plea.

During the campaign, a re-trial was granted out of time, and between this period, Iqbal had to spend six months in prison before her case could be heard. At the re-trial, Iqbal's counsel emphasised the fact that her predicament had been caused because she did not receive adequate interpretation. For the campaign, this was disappointing as the members had continuously and emphatically pointed out that this inadequacy was not the responsibility of the interpreter. It was the solicitor's job to see that the interpreter spoke the correct language and dialect. Failure to do so, the campaign felt, showed up both the racism and the sexism of the relevant solicitors in that they showed a lack of concern for a Black woman. This issue was of a central importance to the campaign, but it was not taken up by the legal profession or the media. Both concentrated on the lack of a proper interpreter and Iqbal's inability to speak English.

At the re-trial, the prosecution did not contest the case, and the judges found the trial of 1981 to be null and void. Nevertheless, they adjourned the case for another four days without granting Iqbal bail. No reason was provided for this. Iqbal was thus led to spend another

three days in Holloway where the authorities had no clear idea of her status. She was not seen as a remand prisoner and was not allowed any long open visits. Food could not be taken to her by her visitors. Visiting orders were still enforced as though she was a convicted prisoner and allowed for only half an hour. After four days Iqbal was re-tried and found guilty of manslaughter for which a six year sentence was seen to be fit. The judge held that since she had already served four years she should be immediately released. The campaign held that by finding Iqbal guilty of manslaughter, it made it impossible for her to claim any compensation for her previous solicitors' negligence.

Probation Service

Iqbal's probation officer, who is supposed to have the interest of her client at heart, only took Iqbal's children to see their mother once or twice in the four years of her imprisoned life. The officer claimed to understand all the demands that Iqbal made even though she had no interpreter available when she visited her. The probation officer saw it in the best interest of the children to stay with their paternal uncle and not visit their mother.

This caused great stress to both Iqbal and the campaign members.

Iqbal's first wish, after leaving prison, was that she wanted to see the children. When she was taken to the uncle's house, the door was slammed in her face. The campaign members did not feel that the probation officer had acted in the best interest of Iqbal, she had not made any

effort to convince the uncle or the children that they should keep in touch with Iqbal.

Subsequently, the campaign did manage to secure a weekly visit for Iqbal to see her children at the uncle's home. Iqbal took court action to gain custody of her children (through legally the children had never been taken from her), but this further strained her relationship with them and the uncle. Iqbal had no support from her own community since she has been out of prison. She lives amongst her own community, but is ostracised. Thus in a way, she left one prison to enter another. The support she received from the campaign was inadequate because the campaign consisted of young Asian and Afro-Caribbean women who could not relate to Iqbal or her experiences and way of life.

The campaign itself received a lot of help from Black groups such as Birmingham Black Sisters, and other white groups. Little support came from the community, however, particularly the Asian activist men who saw the women activists as propagating 'husband-killing'. The men of the IWA and PWA(B) saw these women as middle-class 'white' feminists, unable to relate to working class Asian women. Throughout the campaign efforts were made to involve other Black men and working class Asian women, but only one white man consistently attended all the meetings and actively participated in the campaign. Black men from the BYM attended sporadically to begin with, but then lost interest and stopped. The public meetings that the campaign organised were not well attended. The first had primarily white women present and the second saw the attendance of approximately forty other Asian women activists coming

from various cities. No working class Asian women, or men attended, but it was a useful meeting for building national links.

The campaign, again, highlighted the complexity of Black women's oppression in terms of race, gender and class. Although Iqbal's original oppression was experienced at the hands of her husband, the campaign did not feel that they could raise this as a major issue, since it would lose support in doing so. As it happened, the very nature of Iqbal's circumstances, that she had killed her husband, was enough to prevent Asian male support for the campaign. Furthermore, the fact that the campaign was headed by predominantly middle class and young Asian women, the working class women could not identify with the women of the campaign, and the fear of their husbands and other male members prevented the working class women from showing support in Iqbal's plight. Hence essentially, the campaign fought against one aspect of oppression (racism) at the expense of another (sexism).

Surinder Kaur

Surinder, a young bride arrived from India for marriage. Due to dowry problems, she was found dead in the garage of her home. Her husband claimed that she committed suicide, but he was found guilty of murder. The IWA women's section (Birmingham) and its offshoot 'Women Today' campaigned for this case, exposing the myth of the husband's innocence. They picketed the courts and arranged public meetings. The IWA paper, 'Lalkar' noted the achievements of the campaign:-

As well as meetings, the IWA women's section, as well as Women Today and the IWA general body, organised a campaign on domestic violence, prompted by the murder of several Asian girls. The campaign involved producing leaflets, printing ... public meeting. This meeting was very successful and was attended by over 200 people, most of whom were women ... As to the future activities, meetings that have already been arranged include ones on fostering, sexual harassment and hostel accommodation for women... There is a feeling of great confidence among the IWA (Birmingham Branch's) Women's Sections. We have a group of stongly committed and very active members.

We have no doubt that our work for the IWA will go from strength to strength and that we shall be able to play our full part and involve many other women as well as in advancing the struggle against racism and imperialism and for socialism. (Lalkar November 1986 : 4).

Notably, racism, imperialism and socialism was on the agenda, but sexism was not.

The "very active members" were again the educated, professional young women in their early thirites. Their distinction from the type of women in Birmingham Black Sisters, for example, were that the former were now married with children, and by virtue of being in the IWA women's section, had contacts with working class women, which the Black Sisters found difficult to attract. The life-styles of both group members, however, were predominantly of the middle classes.

In the public meeting of the IWA on domestic violence, the attendance consisted of working class women and men, both women who were single parents and those who were living with their families. As we saw

earlier, Balbir had joined this group and at the public meeting she read some of her poetry, regarding the life she had led whilst with her in-laws. She urged people to listen to her plight; how her mother-in-law and other members of the family had beaten her, considering her as a non-person, a non-entity. Why? Because she was the daughter-in-law.

B.B.S. and P.W.A. (B).

In this case, a dispute took place between a member of BBS and a member of the PWA(B). Previously both were very good friends and comrades in struggle. The PWA(B) member, a leading figure in the organisation, and of the 'Bradford 12' campaign, was at a social gathering with other members of BBS and PWA(B). The dispute occurred late at night, in a merry-making atmosphere. The PWA(B) member, Akhter saw himself as a 'lady's man' who courted and sexually exploited some Asian girls. In Black Asian politics he was considered as indispensable. He and another woman were chatting about Akhter's present girl friend and he was telling her how sorry he felt for the oppression that his girl friend was placed under in her family. Another member of BBS took offence at his patronising attempts, and began to question him as to how he knew what oppression his girl friend suffered. She questioned him about the oppression and exploitation that he was exercising over his friend. The majority of the men and women, to this point were listening, and nodding in agreement with the woman. This discussion got heated, and Akhter accused the woman of being a 'white', bourgeoisie feminist, at which she was offended. She lightly threw a glass from a distance of two feet and it hit Akhter's forehead, slightly scratching it. Akhter began to

dramatise the episode as a way of gaining support. Realising that this was Akhter's strategy, the woman and a friend of hers began to laugh. At this, Akhter got even more angry and struck a blow to the woman's face with whom he had the argument. After a few minutes, he was removed from the room by his male friends. Another prominent member of PWA(B) expressed his sympathy with the woman, and asked to change the subject and defer it to the following morning. After this nothing happened. The woman and her friend waited for some members of PWA(B) to approach them to discuss the matter but it was to no avail.

In a state of frustration they complained to the PWA(B) for the behaviour of their member and his sexism, and asked for an apology and for the disciplinary measures against Akhter, as the organisation overtly alleged to be anti-sexist. The complaint went from BBS, as one organisation to another. The letter pointed out that BBS were adopting the principle of self-defence, (as the 'Bradford 12' had done), and it was wrong for Akhter to strike a blow to the woman. BBS argued that their member had acted in self-defence because Akhter was antagonising and provoking her on a sexist basis. This was analogous to a white person provoking a Black person on the basis of racism. Thus for Akhter to strike a blow in return for an action based on the self-defence of a victim was contradicting the very principle he had adopted during the "Bradford 12" case.

The PWA(B), however, refused to take any action, and the rift of this matter still exists to date, having many repercussions on the various anti-racist activities within the city.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the struggle of women against the family in terms of race, gender and class. We have looked at the methods used by the respondents, individually and collectively, and the constraints within which their resistance was expressed. The methods of individual protest included self-sacrifice, negotiation, rejection of marriage and leaving home. The limitations upon their resistance came from their isolation as migrant women and through concepts of fate and self-depreciation, but this did not stop women from engaging in the 'private questioning' of their position. The support that women acquired was usually from the regions of religion, the natal family, refuge agencies and Black feminist political groups. The achievement of 'independence' for women often had a double bind as it implied a loss of respectability from one's own community. These support mechanisms provided women with the support, confidence, courage and the self-respect that they required, and enabled them to develop their own identity as individuals and as women. In this way the women were able to overcome some of the difficulties they faced.

Black feminists, have reacted against the notion of Asian women's passivity, and have presented alternative images in which the latter appear to be strong with a history of resistance. An argument was presented against the romanticised notion of Black women's strength and it was suggested that it is important to look at the ways in which women struggle, rather than to merely point out that women are strong because they suffer.

Asian women in the family do experience sexist oppression (as do white women) but this oppression is mediated by racism, which reduces the possibility of change taking place within the Asian community. For example, Asian women used the racist immigration rules to help them oppose the sexism experienced in the selection of a marriage partner, and this limited their resistance because it presented external channels for the expression of internal conflict. This prevents direct confrontation and change within the community itself.

The effects of racism also promote the view that Asian and other Black families are more oppressive than white families, rather than in a different way. We saw that the racist and the sexist structure of the white society implied that Asian women who left home were unable to find adequate support in white helping agencies such as the DHSS, housing, refuges, social services and the courts. Racist practices also implied that Asian men and women convicted of domestic violence were treated more harshly than whites and this often prevented women from confronting the sexism of the Asian family. Racism therefore supports and sustains gender oppression within the Asian family because it inhibits change from within.

The collective organised action in the form of campaigns also highlighted the complex nature of women's oppression in terms of their race, gender and class. The campaigns, which seemed to deal with 'domestic' issues, also raised issues to do with racism and class. Aspects of class were important in analysing how far Asian middle class feminists and activists were able to draw upon the working class women,

on whose behalf they struggled. Their access to working class Asian women was restricted and this gave the Workers Associations such as the IWAs the chance to dismiss concerns with gender oppression on class grounds. By alleging that feminism was a middle class issue, the working class organisations did not have to support feminist concerns. When the IWA did support one of the campaigns, they stressed the issues of racism, imperialism and socialism, but not sexism.

However, it appears that the most radicalised effects on women in struggle are made by the political campaigns (conducted within the community), as Rabina's experience suggests:

For the sake of honour women tolerate violence. The honour of the family and the community. I don't even know what izzat is, you should ask men. If they think that women are their izzat, then why do they throw us out? If they want their izzat, they shouldn't hit women... Parents teach daughters that parents-in-law are their real parents, and we shouldn't answer them back ... White society is not for Asian women. With that a woman not only has to leave her family, but also her community.

How long will an individual suffer? Oppression is not only to oppress. To be oppressed and to do nothing about it is also oppression. Women must not fear or think that they can't live without a man. There is life without men also. The men in the community will not support women's issues, because they themselves are men. They want to oppress us, but now that time is gone. We know what to do about it. (A Fearful Silence' Channel 4 August 1986).

Hence Asian and Black feminist campaigns are having a radical affect on the working class Asian women they involve in their struggle. But this involvement is limited as we have seen here in Chapter 2. Problems of unity are also evident amongst feminists themselves which remain to be resolved.

C O N C L U S I O N

The thesis has examined the oppression, exploitation, responses and the resistance of Indian Punjabi working class women in Handsworth.

In looking at their social, economic and political circumstances it was proposed that their position be analysed in terms of the triple oppression they face, in the framework of race, class and gender. In using this triple dimension of oppression and resistance, it was necessary to contextualise the position of the respondents as Asian and Blacks, by virtue of the similarities they face in their oppression. Black, is the political way in which non-white oppressed people have linked their common oppression of colonialism, imperialism and racism, as being a part of the same continuum.

The racist institutional and non-institutional forces, such as immigration controls, physical racist attacks, exploitation in employment, etc. have been aimed to oppress and exploit all non-white people, and working class non-white people in particular. The way in which they have affected Asian and Afro-Caribbean women, however, is specific and distinct from their male counterparts. Racism was mediated by gender and class divisions.

Who, why, when and where non-white people could enter Britain was defined by the context of race, gender and class. The effects of

institutional racism, in this country is to control the lives of Asian and other non-white people on the one hand, and to reject and deny their existence on the other. We have seen that the policies of immigration legislation, social security and the police, have very much controlled the presence of Black people here. At the same time notions of repatriation, deportation, physical racist attacks, and the lack of provision for non-white people, gives credence to the idea that their presence is not desired.

For the respondents in this study, their triple oppression entailed that they came here primarily as dependents, and were then exploited in the worst and the most unorganised sectors of the labour market, where their position was indicative of other non-white working class women. The respondents were very conscious of their oppression; their consciousness was not confused or 'false', it was based on a realistic interpretation of their situation, of their potentials and their limitations.

Racial discrimination was the single most important factor in the working lives of the respondents. On the one hand it prevented them from getting better jobs and forced them to take up employment in the most exploitative sectors of the job market, such as sweatshops and homework. On the other hand, it subjected women to the racism of shop-floor from all fronts - the employers, white workers and the trade unions. This racism together with the notions of domesticity and the lack of expression in the English language, helped to circumscribe the participation of the respondents in the trade unions. In face of this

racism and exploitation the women did not feel that they could make such 'elaborate' demands as the provision of English language teaching, childcare facilities etc., during working hours at the workplace. They knew that in circumstances where they found it difficult to negotiate for better wages and for better working conditions, it was unlikely that the employers or white workers would support these demands.

Nevertheless a higher rate of Black workers were members of trade unions than white workers. This brings into question the notion of working class unity.

The experiences of Asian and Afro-Caribbean workers have shown that white workers and the unions have not supported them against the racial exploitation as Black workers. The support has come only insofar as trade unionism was an issue for white workers, not for the struggle against the racist over-exploitation of non-white labour. The labour movement of this country has not allied itself with non-white workers because white workers have nothing to lose, and everything to gain by the exploitation of non-white people. The effects of colonialism and imperialism have enabled the British bourgeoisie to buy off the better paid strata of its working class and raise its living standards, thus providing it material gains at the expense of the non-white workers. Therefore the white labour movement on the whole expresses little to show solidarity with the struggles and interests of non-white people, except when the issues at stake have implications for white workers also. The widespread support for Grunwick was a case in point where the labour movement mobilised support in defending trade unionism rather than attacking racial exploitation of non-white workers per se.

The white feminist movement also followed in the footsteps of the labour movement and therefore failed to show solidarity with Black women.

Bearing these points in mind, Asian workers have historically found it necessary to mobilise support within their own communities, when engaged in workplace protests. Such experiences were important in transforming the Worker Associations (primarily consisting of male members) from being cultural and welfare groups to turn into political associations. They became the most important channels available for Asians to express their workplace struggles. As such, the Associations also led the workplace struggles of Asian women. The Associations were predominantly male and therefore the women in the struggles were subjected to male domination as men often prevented them from active involvement in their own protests, by assuming leadership roles, and this indirectly reinforced the inferior position of Asian women in terms of their employment. Other groups, such as Youth Movements and Black Women's groups attempted to engage in these struggles but on the whole failed since they did not have the necessary experience of organising shop-floor resistances. Their impact was limited by the presence of the Worker Associations. In areas where the latter did not have a stronghold, the Youth Movements were able to mobilise Asian male workers with some measure of success.

The development of feminist Black Women's groups emerged from the complexities of the race, gender and class oppression. Black Women's groups and Youth Movements emerged as a necessity. Young Asian men and women could not find political expression in the Worker Associations

which were primarily concerned with workers' and immigration issues, as these had affected the older generation of Asians who came from the Indian subcontinent. The younger men and women who had grown up here, had lived with the racist inequalities of the education system, the police brutality, etc. and these issues were similar to those experienced by the Afro-Caribbean communities. The younger Asians sought to build stronger links with the Afro-Caribbean communities on the basis of a Black political unity, than was practised by the Worker Associations. Some of the latter Associations had a theoretical understanding of such unity but did not practise it since they were still organised more on nationalistic lines of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The Associations were losing control over their strongholds because the older Asian population was no longer employed to the extent it had been earlier and therefore their role as organisers of workers was diminished. Immigration was the only issue that the Associations had previously campaigned on and even this was losing momentum since most of the families of Indian and Pakistani people, were already here. Bangladeshi men were the main section of the Asian population whose families had still remained separated. Thus for the young, it was more relevant to see themselves as Asians and Blacks than Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi.

Black women and Asian youth, in organising as such, found that although there were differences amongst them in terms of their geographical and colour origins, they were all non-white, and had been subjected to imperialist domination which accounted for their presence in this country. Racism was a continuum of colonialism and imperialism.

Moreover, Asian and Afro-Caribbean women had experienced the racism of the white feminist movement and the male domination of Black men, as neither raised the issues of Black women in their political perspectives and activities. Black feminists have consistently argued against the conceptual frameworks of white feminists and the ethnicity schools, which have attempted to analyse the position of Black women. They have constantly questioned the concepts of the IRAL, patriarchy, dependency and sexuality as advocated by white feminists, and rejected the notions of Asian women's passivity as propagated by the ethnicity schools. It has been proposed that the framework of race, gender and class be used as a tool to analyse Black women's position as they experience this triple oppression simultaneously. Black feminists have pointed out that the history and the experience of Black women is one of resistance and strength. They suggest that we look at the ways in which the latter express their struggle, and bear in mind the different modes of production from which they originate.

The failure of the white feminist movement to encapsulate Black women's experiences, had led some Black feminists to wrongly deny the whole relevance of feminism to their struggles. Other Black feminists have attempted to embark on the reinterpretation of Western feminists concepts, rather than their total rejection.

In advancing the race, gender and class dimension of oppression and resistance, Black feminists have not adequately analysed the concept of class. They have on the whole tended to talk about Black women in a homogeneous way and in some instances have categorised them as a class

in itself. The data presented in this study has shown that Asian women are not a homogenous category; they have a variety of experiences on the grounds of their age, geographical, economic and social origins. The failure of Black feminists to analyse and develop further the analysis of class, is partly due to the fact that class formations within the Asian and Afro-Caribbean communities are only just emerging in Britain. Furthermore, the nature of class struggle, for Black people is such that race and class are inseparable, because class oppression is experienced in a racial way. This has given rise to cultural forms of resistance rather than class resistance. There is a need, however, to develop an analysis of class oppression within the Black community, as such differentiations are an important aspect of Black working class subordination.

Stressing the simultaneous oppression in terms of race, gender and class, Asian and Afro-Caribbean feminists have been pre-occupied in the struggle against the institutionalised forms of racism and sexism. Their political activities on the whole, have been spontaneous, reactive and defensive, without an explicit political framework. Partly, this has emerged from the political inexperience of the members, and partly from the very intrinsic nature of the groups. Although some women have had earlier involvement in politics, for example, in campaigns and political groups, they have not been extensively engaged in the building of political programmes. In addition, the Black women's groups are the only available channels in which Afro-Caribbean and Asian women have been able to find political expression. As such the openness of the

groups, without an explicit policy, helps to involve a wide range of women activists who may otherwise not be attracted.

Problems have also been evident in the expression of Black unity whereby members of Black women's groups found that one section of the membership dominated issues at the expense of another. Afro-Caribbean members usually felt that the groups were more active in issues concerning Asian people, than those that affected Afro-Caribbeans. Such difficulties led to a different type of analysis which emphasised that 'differences' amongst people could be seen as sources of strength, rather than weakness or division. Within this debate differences of age, culture, geographical origins of Asians and Afro-Caribbeans, and class, are beginning to be discussed. This has not led to the abandonment of 'Black' unity; on the contrary it is hoped that such a unity is strengthened by discussing such differences.

The political activities of Black women's groups expressed Black working class issues e.g. anti-deportation campaigns, workplace and domestic violence struggles. However, the Asian activists operated around the periphery of the working class women they sought to represent. They could not mobilise working-class Asian women although their politics expressed working class interests. This was because the membership of the groups consisted primarily of young middle class women with whom the working class, older Asian women, could not identify. The former had no access to the latter. Hence the class aspect of the triple framework could not be adequately developed.

The implications of this were that the older Asian women of the working classes could not express themselves in the Black women's groups. In the case of Punjabi Sikh women, their expression was given content in the religious sphere of temples, or in joining in the activities of the IWAs, which have lately been eager to enrol women and the youth into their organisations. Since the Black women's groups have been preoccupied with the struggle against institutional racism and sexism have had limited access to working class women; their impact on the family lives of working class Asian women has been negligible. The women's sections of the Worker Associations have only emerged in the last year or so and as such have not had a significant effect as yet.

Women in the family experience their oppression in an isolated and private way. Their struggles therefore are also carried out in an individual, private and isolated manner. The notion of 'private questioning' becomes important in looking at the struggles within the family. The ideology of femininity requires that women be humble, self-sacrificing, subservient and domestic. Izzat and purdah constituted important aspects of this ideology, and this helped to control the reproduction powers of women. Concepts of fate and destiny (kismet) were also important as these sometimes prevented the women from questioning their positions. These ideologies developed from particular pre-capitalist modes of production. The individualised experience and resistance of women's oppression, without the alternative images of independence helped to explain why women at times exercised oppression over other women in the family, when they were able to mediate the power of the male members.

Despite the ideology, women emerged as strong and defiant beings. The way in which they expressed their resistance was based on how much power they could exercise within the family, and the practical resources available at their disposal. Women in totally powerless positions sometimes adopted the very tools of the ideology that oppressed them - self-sacrifice - as an expression of resistance. Others found points on which they could negotiate compromises on issues, and in some cases totally reject and challenge their oppression. Both forms were used in conjunction with each other, depending on the types of issue that arose.

To express their resistance within the family, women required an independent economic base as a priority. This did not necessarily mean an independent income from employment, over which the women had to have control. As meagre as it was, state welfare benefits could also form the basis of an independent resource. In addition it was important for women to have courage and strength within themselves, and to have the moral and practical support of other individuals and/or organisations. This helped to determine the level of women's resistance.

However, independence did not always bring liberation in the lives of the respondents. In many cases, for working class women, the notion of independence had a double-bind. In finding independent expression in their individual lives, women often lost the respect that they had gained before showing their resistance. This meant that respect itself was used a mechanism of control over women, which made it difficult for them to break from their traditional oppressed roles, to find

independence. Moreover, the racism of the white community meant that the support from white people was inadequate. The complexities of race, gender and class oppression also put women into a position where they found themselves fighting against one aspect of their oppression at the expense of another.

The sources of support and strength for women seeking independent assertion within the family, came from religion, family members, e.g. children, refuge agencies and/or political groups or activists. These sources provided the moral and practical support required to make assertive demands in the lives of respondents. Within these areas of support, we noted that the most radicalising effects on women came when the feminist groups or activists were involved in their struggle. This helped to provide realistic alternative images for the women which they could strive to achieve. However, as we have noted, the nature of the political groups in which Asian feminists were involved was such that it was difficult for working class Asian women, and the predominantly middle class Asian feminists, to come together, for reasons due both to class differences and male domination. The race, gender and class forms of oppression have meant that feminists also tended to fight against one aspect at the expense of another.

Some Worker Associations, with their working class base, attempted and succeeded to attract Asian feminists into their movements. Though these feminists can mobilise working class Asian women, there is a danger that their struggle may be dominated, as in the past, by race issues. This

would defeat the object for which the feminists joined - to advance the struggles of Asian working class women. If this is to be avoided, there is a need to co-ordinate the activities and the politics of Black women's groups, and those of women from the Worker Associations. Under Thatcherism, however, when different oppressed groups are under attack, the forging of unity amongst them becomes increasingly difficult. It remains to be seen how well Black women will survive as a political force within this context.

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G L O S S A R Y

<i>apne</i>	-	one's own
<i>baba</i>	-	holy man
<i>begane</i>	-	alien wealth or strangers
<i>charraka</i>	-	spinning wheel
<i>faraz</i>	-	duty
<i>gherao</i>	-	picket
<i>ghulam</i>	-	slave
<i>goarae</i>	-	white people
<i>goarian</i>	-	white women
<i>izzat</i>	-	respect, loyalty, modesty, virginity
<i>izzat-dar</i>	-	respectful
<i>kale</i>	-	blacks
<i>kismet</i>	-	fate, destiny
<i>panchayat</i>	-	a dispute resolving committee
<i>rakhi</i>	-	a ceremony confirming a bond between brother and sister
<i>reet</i>	-	custom
<i>samaj</i>	-	custom, society
<i>samosa</i>	-	an Indian savoury snack
<i>sewa</i>	-	service
<i>zulum</i>	-	tyranny, oppression

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