

# Family Mystique

It's everything you wanted to know about the great Indian institution



**THE GREAT INDIAN FAMILY: NEW ROLES/OLD RESPONSIBILITIES**

by GITANJALI PRASAD

Penguin

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## ■ By Kaveree Bamzai

In a world gone mad with hip chick lit heroines and manic mommies, Gitanjali Prasad's discourse on the staple of Bollywood blockbusters and prime time soaps seems soothingly simple. There are no Jimmy Choos and diet charts cluttering up the environment here: just some charming insights into Indian society's great fixture. From the self-confident working woman in Kolkata who falls to pieces when talking about her mother-in-law who denies her favourite food (fish) to stories like patriarch B.K. Birla's, who had to sneak up the servant's staircase to wife Sarala's bedroom to see his first born Aditya Vikram because the "bari ma" did not approve of husbands going into their wives' rooms, *The Great Indian Family* is a handy compendium.

From 1829's Sati legislation to 1961's Dowry Prohibition Act, from cruelty to in-laws through torture of daughters-in-law to even a sympathetic look at the man in the middle, the book relies on surveys, interviews, and published articles to examine each aspect of the title. Nuclear or joint, working women or stay-at-home moms, childcare or not, long work-hours or flexi-time, every option is weighed, measured and stacked up.

It's not great literature. But it's informed journalism. Prasad is clearly passionate about her subject and is able to contextualise the changes in the family structure within the broader feminist movement. Just as well, because what is the family without the woman? And it is these women—some married, some divorced, some working, some not—whose life experiences, usually told in their words, illuminate this book, and it is for them alone that you need to read it. ■

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