



Director of 'Action for Autism' Merry Barua speaking at a workshop in Bhubaneswar on Sunday. Also seen are co-ordinator of CAS in Psychology, Utkal University, Prof AK Mohanty, Barua's associates Sandra Dawcon and Sarah Thomson : Express

## Understanding autism through love

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

**Bhubaneswar, May 23:** Nearly 1.7 million children in India are afflicted with autism and one child in each 500 suffers from autism, says Merry Barua, director of 'Action For Autism' (AFA) a voluntary organisation working with the autistic children of the country. She was speaking at the two-day-long State level workshop on "Autism for parents and professionals," here on Sunday.

Autism is a disorder of the brain that causes a lifelong developmental disability, primarily affecting a person's communication and social abilities. However, most Autism was not a mental disability, Barua added.

The workshop was organised by Open Learning Systems (OLS), a City-based voluntary

organisation working for cerebral palsy and mentally retarded children.

The workshop was designed to create awareness among the teachers, doctors and professionals in the area about the basic difference between mental disability and autism and train the parents the basic norms of behaving with their autistic child.

**UNEVEN SKILL PROFILE :** "Unlike mental retardation in which there is global impairment, autism is characterised by an uneven skill profile and often severe sensory defensiveness, which can result in unusual behaviors and communication and social difficulties. Due to their ignorance about the disease and its symptoms, the doctors often refer to autism as mentally disability and assign them the same exercises meant for the mentally dis-

abled," Barua said. Even the medical text books were yet to include the word 'autism', she added.

**SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE :** "The best way to improve the condition of such children is by helping them express their feelings and giving them social love with intense therapy", Barua said.

Coordinator of Centre for Advanced Studies, Utkal University Prof AK Mohanty said the government should come forward to open specific institutions where the autistic children can develop the ability of self expression and try to communicate with the society.

President of OLS, Dr PK Rath, several members of United Nations Children's Emergency Fund and nearly 70 parents and professionals of the City are attending the two-day-long workshop.