

Gender, Law, and Resistance in India, by Erin P. Moore. Tucson: University of Arizona Press (1998), x, 205 pp.

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Gender, Law, and Resistance in India is a welcome addition to the growing literature on the gendered experience of legal discourse in South Asia, specifically for Moore's analysis of "law's patriarchy" and one woman's experiences in defying the status quo by using various legal avenues generally unavailable to women. Spanning a decade, Moore's ethnographic analysis of one woman's experiences in defying social norms through her use of the legal system(s) is an intriguing account of the of the intricate legal avenues available to women, and in turn reveals the complexity of women's status in India. The protagonist of this ethnography is unusual in her long-term, indiscreet extra-marital affair and in her forthright challenge of social norms for female behavior. This may lead one to dismiss this case as a rare occurrence that is non-representative of women's experiences with justice and power. However, Moore argues, based on her research, that some village women do have affairs; it is the indiscreetness of this one case that is unusual. Many women use similar gendered forms of resistance including recruiting their natal families' help in disputes with in-laws. Furthermore, since the filing of lawsuits in the local courts by the protagonist, more women from the study's location have used the state legal system. Thus, this case is not anomalous.

This book is well written and provides a concise introduction to current theoretical understandings of legal discourse and ideology and women's position in Indian society. Moore does a commendable job in clearly presenting multifaceted webs of legal and social norms and the interconnectivity of gender with these norms. As such, it would be appropriate for use in an undergraduate class, as an introduction to the complexity of women's position in society, and as a challenge to stereotypes of passive and submissive Indian women.

This study is undertaken in a farming village called Nara, in Rajasthan. Moore introduces the study location, the primary individuals, and the objectives of the study in the first chapter. The main objective can best be summed as the examination of how the legal system propagates power relationships and the status quo. The primary purpose of this chapter though, is to introduce the reader to Moore's own position in Nara. Living with the family that is the focus of the book, Moore describes her evolving relationships over the decade of her field research with each family member. Most intriguing is the potential conflict that Moore copes with - between the family's anger and frustration with Hunni, the protagonist of this ethnography, and Moore's interest and ideological support of Hunni's struggles for legal recognition in a male-dominated society. Moore points out in various parts of the book that if Hunni were a man, her legal options would have been far greater and easier to attain.

A literature review is presented in the second chapter. This begins by placing this work in the context of literature on South Asian women. In recent years, there have been movements both challenging Orientalist perspectives and including gender in subaltern studies. Moore's ethnography contributes to these movements by critiquing passive, simplistic constructions of women's legal status, and by outlining the multidimensional nature of women's responses to law's patriarchy. Relatively little is yet known of women's modes of resistance within the family, specifically in their relationships as wives and daughter-in-laws. This is where Moore's work is particularly constructive, as she examines how one woman protects her own interests in familial disputes. Part of this behavior entails resisting their subordinate position, including suffering from illness, depression, and spirit possession, visiting (or fleeing to) her natal home, refusing work or sex, and even attempting suicide. The point is that women are active agents who in subtle and not so subtle ways oppose their position. In conjunction, it is important to recognize that women's relationships with others within the family are dynamic, consequently the modes of resistance will vary over time.

The third chapter continues contextualizing the study by placing the Nara villagers in a historical context. The focus of this chapter is on the Meos, the predominant caste in Nara. Meos are Muslims who autonomously governed their territory before the arrival of the British colonizers. Colonization influenced the state legal system, even after independence. Meos distrust state legislature and as a community, will prefer and preserve village justice (panchayats) in opposition to state courts. In fact, Moore reports that in order to protect panchayats and their decisions, villagers will perjure themselves in state courts. There is little trust that justice will be done inside state courts. Nevertheless, panchayats provide justice more readily for "big men", powerful men both monetarily and in terms of kin. A poor man, who does not have powerful connections, will have a more difficult time finding justice at

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a panchayat. Women are second-class citizens when it comes to finding legal restitution because panchayats are for men only - women are traditionally excluded from attending and participating in a panchayat. Instead, they must find a man to represent them. The ideology and reality of the panchayat is discussed throughout the following chapters.

Chapters 4 through 7 describe various aspects of village disputes, legal discourse and village panchayats. Through the description in these four chapters, the differences between panchayats and state legal systems are evident. Unlike state courts, panchayats are a process, not an event. The history of the situation and of the interrelationships between disputants is taken into account in panchayats. The aim of the panchayat is compromise, an acceptable, face-saving solution for both parties, rather than finding a winner based solely on the evidence pertaining to a particular case, as happens in state courts. Courts are further alienating in that most lawyers and judges are Hindus or Sikhs, compared with the predominance of Meos in the panchayat. These differences become evident as the reader is lead through various panchayats involving Hunni.

Although the panchayats are the preferred means of pursuing justice, legal pluralism abounds in India. Legal pluralisms are based on religion, caste and state, and justice is accorded by these categories. Moore concretely portrays this pluralism in her descriptions of how panchayats and state courts are played off one another in order to achieve desired legal outcome. Finally, it must also be noted that panchayats are not all identical, specifically in their discourses. Moore outlines a pattern of panchayat discourse that develops over time in a particular panchayat: 1) participants verbally battle to determine who's discourse will set the tone for the panchayat; 2) an elder takes control, hence discourses become more muted and controlled; 3) participants break into small groups to plan their next strategies; 4) groups re-coalesce and continue negotiations.

The final two chapters return to a concepts previously introduced, but are more thoroughly discussed. Chapter 8 examines the gendered experience of justice, how laws treat men and women differently, and how women and men view laws differently. Moore argues that the panchayat is male ideology codified as village law. On the other hand, women's speech does not have a level of community ideology and there is no institution that sanctifies and unifies their words. Chapter 9 returns to the concept of resistance. Here, Moore elaborates on illness as a form of resistance by investigating the role of the maulavi (spiritual healer) in dispute resolution. She argues that the usage of the maulavi by women and the poor indicates their exclusion from panchayats and courts. Moore does address the possibility that illness and attending a maulavi may in fact be compliance, especially because as part of their treatment, women are admonished to be "good" wives/daughter-in-laws/mothers. Although the use of maulavi for dispute resolution was not the focus of this book, its introduction in the last chapter left me wanting more details. How do women perceive their illnesses, and the treatments they receive from the maulavi? This warrants further investigation in order to strengthen arguments regarding resistance as a form of gendered justice.

In sum, I highly recommend this book as an introduction to the reality and complexity of women's legal and social position in North Indian society. There are many points raised by Moore that could foster discussion, and be pursued in further depth in the classroom. This book provides a fine introduction to individuals interested in South Asian ethnography, legal anthropology, and women's studies.

Myth and Reality in the Rain Forest: How Conservation Strategies are Failing in West Africa, by John F. Oates, Berkeley: University of California Press (1999), xxviii, 310 pp.

Reviewed by Jefferson S. Hall, School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, Yale University

Africa's tropical forest, wildlife populations, and especially his beloved primates are under extreme pressure and John Oates is mad. In fact, John Oates is so mad he decided to write a book to call attention to what he sees as misguided and failed conservation strategies by international conservation organizations and national governments.

Since before 1960, wildlife biologists have been calling attention to the fate of Africa's mammals in an attempt to raise awareness and secure protection for these mammals from extirpation. Out of these early efforts were born some of the first formal conservation efforts on the African continent and, to some degree, wildlife conservation organizations. John Oates' career as a primatologist coincides with the rise of well-known conservation organizations and high profile conservationists. It is therefore not surprising that Oates uses an autobiographical