

Review

Reviewed Work(s): Women survivors of violence: Genesis and growth of a state support system by Anjali Dave

Review by: Sumit Saurabh Srivastava

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second, that men in poorer household use violence in response to 'failed masculinity' because they cannot afford to control their wives through seclusion; and third, how violent conflict over alcoholism and infidelity are in fact closely linked to the changing socio-economic circumstances (p. 162).

The cases of violence against women increase the moment the dalits try to equate themselves as social equals to the upper castes. This has also made way to a rise of instances of violence within the dalit households. Amongst the poorer families failed attempts at masculinity are countered through violence on women.

Chapter Eight revolves around the story of Kalyani who is a strong Madiga woman and has not only wielded her influence amongst the Madigas, but has also wielded her influence across the village. Being a member of the credit women's group in Napalli she has become an icon in the village. She comes up as a critique to the 'civilised' woman and emerges as an example of an empowered women in the neo-liberal, developmental discourse. There are two parallels while the developmental agenda wants women to be liberal and independent, the local discourse would want woman to be cultured and controlled.

The Ninth Chapter brings into focus the diverse ways in which both Dalit women and men challenge the dominant upper caste discourse and subvert it through their distinct identities. At this point it also becomes crucial to comprehend to what extent does the dalit woman pay the price for this new identity?

The book portrays a beautiful account of a dalit village. The strength of the book lies in its methods of enquiry which follows a rich ethnography and case histories of women in Namapalli, who are stuck in the binaries of honour and shame. However, the book fails to look beyond the stereotypes of a dalit household, its constant desire to ameliorate the upper caste models of honour and prestige. This is a caveat to the otherwise well illustrated village study.

Sarmistha Das

Department of Sociology, Tezpur University,
Napam, Tezpur
<sharmishtha.k@gmail.com>

Anjali Dave: *Women survivors of violence: Genesis and growth of a state support system.* New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2015, xiv + 208 pp. Price not mentioned (hb). ISBN 978-81-250-5915-8

The custodial rape of Mathura and subsequent acquittal of perpetrators of this heinous crime by the judiciary was and still is considered to be the

flashpoint in the women's movements in India in late 1970s as it shook those who were part and parcel of the women's movements and had trusted the State to safeguard and protect their rights to dignified life. It was during the protest of the same that it gradually dawned to the feminists that it is important to engage with the state and its apparatus (primarily the police system) in a more meaningful manner so as to make them gender sensitive and initiate legal changes in accordance with women's issues. Entangled with it was the issue of domestic violence and dowry deaths which appeared to be 'mystique' at that time due to their fluid 'definitions'. Thus emerged the demand by women's movements for establishing the Special Cell within the police system through which the aggrieved and wronged women could seek counsel and justice from the state.

It is in the above context that the book under review by Anjali Dave is a timely and significant contribution through the dual lenses of feminism and social work to the ever growing feminist literature. The use of first person perspective successfully engages the reader with the meticulous and passionate account of initiative taken by Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), which 'had initiated the Special Cell as a field action project (FAP) in July 1984' (p. 7) with an objective to act as 'liaison between the police and women's organizations'(p. 21) so as to engender the working of the police station.

The seamlessly woven book details out how the Special Cell matured overtime and grew stronger with each case filed and acted upon by the social workers associated with Special Cell visiting the homes of the abused or summoning both the partners for consultation and verification of the complaints. The women experiencing abuses and violence either in her natal or marital homes found their voice through Special Cell which was subsequently 'passed' on to the police machinery to act. Thus the issue of women's agency was central to the working of the Special Cell. It is important to note that in the process of assisting police personnel, the social workers of the Special Cell themselves became aware of the practical aspects of nitty-gritty of legislations. Thus, it was a two-way process benefitting both the Special Cell and the police system. The Special Cell became a place to seek where women came seeking "aid to prevent violence, legal and police intervention, and counselling for reconciliation" (p. 69). Most of the women who approached the Special Cell were victims of domestic abuse sometimes arising from the dowry issue. They viewed the Special Cell as the place where they hoped to resolve the violent marital discord and thus pined for a violence-free home to live in. However, most of the time, these battered women did not want their husbands to be imprisoned or jailed

for a long time, for it would have a negative consequence to the wife as well as the household as he was the prime bread earner.

In an important way, the author though views the police system as being patriarchal and thus harbouring typical biases and prejudices against the aggrieved victims, yet the author states that it is due to the wider patriarchal setup within which the police system is functioning. Thus, the task of the Special Cell was not an easy one as it had to stick to its mandate not only for sensitising the police system but also to carve out its independent and autonomous territory in terms of functioning and funding. The author has recounted several occasions wherein it was proving difficult for the Special Cell to manage 'internal' sources of funds. In addition to it, the initial times were marked by strong resistance to include the social workers within police force as they were considered to be 'outsiders'. However, owing to the passion and commitment displayed by the Special Cell volunteers, such an apprehension was gradually neutralised and in 2007 that this field action project was granted the status of state-funded programme by the Government of Maharashtra.

The author has on many accounts has highlighted the inherent philosophy of the TISS manifested in critical thinking which acted as the fountainhead of the Special Cell. The TISS not only sustained the latter financially rather it also viewed the same as a vibrant platform for training and capacity building and providing education of social work. Here it can be mentioned that the Project for Women in Distress initiated in July, 1984 at the Department of Family and Child Welfare can be seen as the seedbed of the Special Cell philosophy at the TISS. The setting up of the Resource Centre for Interventions on Violence against Women at school of social work provided another impetus to the activities of Special Cell. It is heartening to note that the Special Cell subsequently spread to Gujarat, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Andhra Pradesh addressing the needs of abused women. The appendices at the end of the book represent the overall working and rationale of the Special Cell.

Overall, the book under review is an important one as it provides a deep insight into the working together of an academic institution and state police system to achieve the shared goal of a violence-free society wherein the agency and autonomy of women remains unhindered. Such collaboration is of much significant value as it attempts to deflect the image of the state as that of being 'patriarchal'. However, one can point out that the use of the term 'prostitute' on page 34 could have been avoided as it has a negative connotation, rather the term 'sex worker' might be used as it is more dignified. Barring this, the book is helpful to

all those engaged in the issue of violence against women and the state across disciplines.

Sumit Saurabh Srivastava

Assistant Professor, Centre for Globalization &
Development Studies
University of Allahabad, Allahabad
<sumit.manjula@gmail.com>