

WOMEN AND DIVORCE (1987). By Vasudha Dhagamwar. Somaiya Publications Pvt. Ltd., Bombay. Pp. xvii+132. Price Rs. 60.

THE STUDY¹ is an attempt to test the awareness of law amongst women. Knowledge that a legal provision exists only constitutes legal information and not legal awareness. Awareness states the author, "is a more complex phenomenon. It requires absorption of the information and connotes the total impact of the absorption on one's mode of thinking."²

The author has chosen an area which in the existing socio-economic structure integrally concerns women, namely, the law of marriage and divorce. She has with the aid of an open ended interview schedule gauged the knowledge of her respondents with regard to legal provisions on marriage and divorce.³ In assessing legal knowledge she has found that infringement of the law or existence of social facts which are contrary to law can cause misinformation on the legal provisions themselves. This is most interestingly brought out in the case of polygamy.⁴ A law which is confusedly understood can hardly be an instrument of social change.

Legal knowledge, states the author,⁵ is a prerequisite for legal awareness; however knowledge can become awareness only if social norms of behaviour further and foster the legal norms. She finds that both home and school advocate the model role of timid, obedient, subservient, submissive and unquestioning woman, who should accept every kind of treatment meted out to her with stoicism.⁶ As no norms of self-dignity, individuality are inculcated there is great trauma and guilt in activating the law of divorce. Nearly all the respondents interviewed by the author felt the need to state that she had suffered greatly and moved out only when the maltreatment had crossed all thresholds of tolerance.⁷

Special attention needs to be focussed on the author's finding that the school is only an extension of the home, providing no kind of countervailing influence to the family's role model of behaviour for women.⁸ This finding underscores the fact that without a close look at the content of education one to one correlation between education of women and their emancipation cannot be made.

In making her study the author has only interviewed 65 women in

1. Vasudha Dhagamwar, *Women and Divorce* (1987).

2. *Id.* at 13.

3. *Id.* at 7-12.

4. *Id.* at 16-19.

5. *Id.* at 5.

6. *Id.* at 86.

7. *Id.* at 95-98.

8. *Id.* at 106-108.

the Pune district of Maharashtra.⁹ The small number of respondents however cannot lessen relevance of the basic issue raised in her study that the norms of law cannot be judged independent of those of society. And if law is to be used as an instrument of social change then the education system should voice and foster the legal norms.

As Dhagamwar's study is only confined to a part of Maharashtra some of her findings may be culture specific. However the importance of this book which has had a long gestation period is not in the specific findings it makes with regard to the 65 interviewed respondents. The continued relevance of the study lies in the questions it raises. Questions which can be asked in other micro-level studies in other parts of the country. Questions which will need to be faced if the formal equality granted to women by the law and Constitution is to be converted into sub-stantive equality. In not providing ready answers, Dhagamwar has invited both thought and research on the phenomenon of legal awareness and the need to look at factors beyond the law to assess the effectiveness of law.

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9. *Id.* at 5-7.

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