

# BOOK REVIEWS

FEMALE CRIMINALITY (1987). By Marisetty Bilmoria Rani, Eastern Book. Co., Kashmere Gate, Delhi-5. Price Rs. 50.

CRIMINOLOGY IS a distinct science embracing within its fold the study of the roots and the manifestations of criminality in the community. In this age, human existence is exposed to and circumscribed by stresses and strains. Environmental, emotional, biological, social and occupational stresses occasion a new class of crimes to which women fall easy prey. Worldwide statistics on the evidence of crime exhibit a general increase in the rate of female criminality in many countries although male criminality still far exceeds female criminality. Sociological analysis becomes all the more necessary to attack the malady at grassroot level.

Empirical studies would go a long way in revealing the causation of female criminality from the sociological and psychological points of view. In the book under review,<sup>1</sup> which has been divided into eight chapters, the author arrives at the finding that reliance on official records and analysis of data based on such records would not give a correct picture of the nature of crime, and, as such, a real understanding of the causes of crime necessitates painstaking field studies based on personal interviews and case histories.

Chapter I introduces the reader to a "Trend Analysis",<sup>2</sup> wherein the author refers to statistical reports concluding that magnitude of crime in India has assumed serious proportions. The author has shown increase in the rate of crime year after year between 1964 and 1974.<sup>3</sup> Boys' arrest for offences under the Indian Penal Code has gone up from 63,468 in 1964 to 1,32,125 in 1974 and girls' arrest has shown higher percentage increase from 2,690 in 1964 to 8,514 in 1974. Yet in India the overall criminality among females appears less than among males. The author has found significant variation between men and women convicts.<sup>4</sup> Table VI<sup>5</sup> furnishes figures reflecting a large involvement of males in criminal activities in comparison to the opposite sex. During 1971-74 women were involved in considerable numbers in "miscellaneous" offences, riots, thefts, burglary, murder, kidnapping and abduction while their proportion of involvement is low in offences such as rape, robbery, dacoity and the like which require force and courage<sup>6</sup> and which are men's domain. Pollak,<sup>7</sup> Barnes and Teeters<sup>8</sup>

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1. M. Bilmoria Rani, *Female Criminality* (1987).

2. *Id.* at 1.

3. *Id.* at 11-14.

4. *Id.* at 17.

5. *Id.* at 19.

6. *Ibid.*

7. Pollak, *The Criminality of Women*, 123 (1950).

8. Barnes and Teeters, *New Horizons in Criminology*, 62(1966).

and Smart<sup>9</sup> have been mentioned by the author to substantiate her viewpoint. While highlighting the fact that age plays a crucial role in the committing of different types of offences and their frequency, the author has, through a year-wise break-up of the figures, brought out that while men and women convicts in the age group of 16 to 21 years increase consistently, criminal participation of those in the age group of 21 to 40 years shows a declining trend.<sup>10</sup> The author opines that youth is getting more and more involved in crime.

Chapter II of the book relates to the methodology adopted by the author for the study of the problem. The research scope has been defined so as to cover only : (1) the nature and pattern of female criminality; (2) the causal and situational factors leading to criminal behaviour among females. The author has selected the state of Andhra Pradesh for the study. As this state has two central jails in two towns i.e. Rajahmundry and Hyderabad with women's wings, the author has selected these as centres for locating the female offenders. However, the author has not said anything about the tools used for the collection of the data.

Chapter III deals with the nature and pattern of female criminality. The author states that a majority of respondents were convicted of offences against the person and the remaining were convicted for property, excise and other offences. In the category of property offences women indulging in ordinary thefts constitute a major group while the rest were involved in house-breaking, theft, dishonestly receiving stolen property and in assisting the concealment of stolen property. Pollak,<sup>11</sup> Wolfgang<sup>12</sup> and Smith<sup>13</sup> have been referred to by the author who observed that female offenders have a restricted focus on victims. They concentrate on persons such as children, husbands, family members and lovers who are close to them.<sup>14</sup>

Regarding female involvement in immoral offences the author found that in a substantial majority of cases the occupation was prostitution, and only a few were not in the profession themselves but were found just in association with the prostitutes or residing in the locality.

Chapter IV examines the antecedents of female offenders, their socio-economic and personal background. It is interesting to note from the data that a majority of the respondents were from the rural areas. It is also revealing to find that a majority of the respondents in rural areas were involved either in offences against the person or excise offences and a majority of the respondents from the urban areas were involved either in property offences, immoral traffic, smuggling or rioting. On the basis of these findings the author states that towns rather than villages provide more opportunities

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9 Carol Smart, *Women, Crime and Criminology : A Feminist Critique*, 24,25 (1976)

10. *Supra* note 5 at 23

11. *Supra* note 7 at 8-14.

12 Marvin E. Wolfgang, *Patterns in Criminal Homicide*, 207 (1958).

13. Ann D. Smith; *Women in Prison . A Study in Penal Methods*, 25(1952).

14. *Supra* note 2 at 42.

for stealing, immoral trafficking, smuggling and rioting. It is interesting to note that the single largest group of offenders consists of married women. The Karve Institute's study on female prisoners also noted that tendency to commit crime has correlation with marital status. In the married group, casual offenders are much more than habitual offenders. This augments the conviction that women, by and large, are not habitual criminals but sometimes the financial strain or stresses and strains of married life induces them to commit crime.<sup>15</sup> Considering the relationship between occupation and the nature of the offence, the author observes that the majority of offenders who were following the traditional occupation of the family were found to be situational or casual offenders.<sup>16</sup> Educationwise break-up relating to crime reveals that only few respondents were literate and a major bulk of respondents had education below seventh class. As such the study shows that criminality among the illiterates is higher than that of literates. This finding corroborates the studies conducted by Ahuja,<sup>17</sup> Karve Institute,<sup>18</sup> Ranga Rao and Raghavendra Rao.<sup>19</sup>

In Chapter V of the book the author has done an indepth analysis of causation of crime based on case histories highlighting the important situations and interaction patterns which culminate in different kinds of deviant behaviour. The author presents some outstanding theories advanced by sociologists--criminologists<sup>20</sup> relating to causal factors. On the basis of the data the author points out that while domestic causes play a major predisposing role largely in offences against the person, particularly in murder, property offences and immoral traffic offences, financial causes play major predisposing role in excise offences. This fact brings one to a very important dimension of female criminality in Andhra Pradesh, in that it highlights the domestic status of women today.

In Chapter VI the author pays special attention to the influence of household environment and friendship groups on the individual and her criminal behaviour. The data reveals that a majority had strained relations with their husbands and their kin. The majority of the recidivists were found to have friendships with deviant women at the time of first deviance.<sup>21</sup>

The author, in her words, takes a 'coherent look' at her findings in Chapter VII.<sup>22</sup> Chapter VIII of the book is the epilogue.

15. *Supra* note 10 at 77.

16. Research Notes, *Social Defence*, 37-38 (1981).

17. Ahuja Ram, *Female Offenders in India*, 25 (1969).

18. Karve Institute of Social Services, "A Study of Women Prisoners and their failures in Maharashtra", *Social Defence*, 33 (1976).

19. M. Ranga Rao and J.V. Raghavendra Rao, *The Prostitutes of Hyderabad : A Study of the Socio-Cultural Conditions of the Prostitutes of Hyderabad*, 44 (1962).

20. Albert K. Cohen, *Deviance and Control*, 65-66 (1970); Cloward and Ohlin, *Delinquency and Opportunity*, 86 (1961); Edwin H. Sutherland and Donald R. Cressey, *Principles of Criminology*, 17-19 (1968); Walter C. Reckless, *The Crime Problem*, 469-80 (1971); Matza David, *Delinquency and Drift*, 28 (1964).

21. *Supra* note 10 at 141-45.

22. *Id.* at 157.

Very scant material on this subject is available in India. The author has done yeoman service in disclosing the female criminality and its causation to the public. The work is interesting and thought-provoking and should stimulate research in female criminality. A few suggestions and guidelines for the prevention and cure, which the last chapter falls short of, would have added to the richness of the discourse. Further, the author has discussed the theories propounded by various sociologists--criminologists pertaining to the causation of female criminality in a nutshell. A detailed description of these theories would have added to the utility of the book. By and large the subject has been treated in a candid and analytical way. The systematic subject index and the list of tables add to the utility of the book. Criminological basis and sociological analysis form the hallmark of the book. There is no gainsaying that the book is bound to be well received and can be of great relevance to the students and researchers of sociology, law and criminology. The author's choice of an unexplored theme in India deserves appreciation.

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