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## Review of Adjudication in Religious Family Laws: Cultural Accommodation, Legal Pluralism, and Gender Equality in India by Professor Gopika Solanki

Sylvia DeTar

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*Review of Adjudication in Religious Family  
Laws: Cultural Accommodation, Legal  
Pluralism, and Gender Equality in India* by  
Professor Gopika Solanki

By  
Sylvia DeTar\*

I.  
INTRODUCTION

A Muslim woman had filed for divorce under the Dissolution of Muslim Marriage Act 1939. Her husband fled to Mumbai with her dowry worth 900,000 rupees and some jewelry. He refused to accept a summons to the Family Court and did not attend the court date. While the woman might have applied for an ex parte divorce from the Family Court, the lawyer advised the family to “seek other means.” The woman’s brother managed to trace the husband and “recovered the dowry and jewelry by hiring local strongmen.”<sup>1</sup>

Contemporary India is multi-layered, diverse, complex, and undergoing rapid changes that implicate people of all faiths and social classes. The subcontinent of India hosts some of the world’s oldest anthropological sites; however, India achieved independence from England as recently as 1947. Since partition, the densely populated country has negotiated unifying and diversifying identities, histories, and modernity concerns. One element of India’s complexity and transience manifests itself in the legal pluralism elucidated in Professor Gopika Solanki’s book, which enables individuals to take advantage of varied forums in search of judicial remedies. The agency of subordinate actors works behind the scenes and in tandem with legal pluralism in India. These actors’ freedom to change, adopt new models of existence, and seek new strategies of relating to family, society, and the world, all contribute to Indian society’s pronounced mobility. Solanki’s work reflects Indian society’s particular legal

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\* U.C. Berkeley School of Law, J.D. Candidate, 2014.

1. Gopika Solanki, *ADJUDICATION IN FAMILY LAWS: CULTURAL ACCOMMODATION, LEGAL PLURALISM, AND GENDER EQUALITY IN INDIA* 274 n.21 (Cambridge University Press 2011) (quoting interview by Gopika Solanki with RA, Mumbai (July 11, 2003)).

pluralism with her “shared adjudication” model, in which she aims to engage with available legal forums, respect diversity, and make steps toward equality. The shared adjudication model recognizes unique paths, which Indian nationals may utilize to take advantage of the forum best suited for their needs.

The rapid pace of change in India must meet the challenges of accommodating a rich social history, and thereby contributes to a sometimes violent ambivalence between valuing cultural diversity and ensuring gender equality. In *Adjudication in Religious Family Laws: Cultural Accommodation, Legal Pluralism, and Gender Equality in India*, Solanki argues that India’s unique legal pluralism, in which adjudicative authority exists in the state as well as with religious groups and other societal organizations, provides diversity and a potential for equal justice in family law. These various sources of legal authority both communicate and construct the diversity of conceptions of gender roles, the conjugal family, and religious membership in Indian society. Individuals’ manipulation of the legal systems “creates fissures in ossified group boundaries,” fractures hierarchies, and provides a space for dialogue. Solanki contends such mobilization “spurs law reform and paves the way toward formal and substantive gender equality.”<sup>2</sup>

## II. SUMMARY

Solanki interviewed 120 respondents selected from state governed, family court judgments decided between June 2002 and January 2003, eighty-nine respondents from cases adjudicated under Muslim religious law, and sixty-five respondents from cases adjudicated in informal Hindu forums. She utilizes these interviews in addition to field research that she conducted during her Masters and Doctoral studies to tell the stories of families in Mumbai from the perspective of the shared adjudication model, with particular focus on the experiences of women. Solanki begins *Adjudication in Religious Family Laws* with an introduction to India and an explanation of her ethnographic methodology. She then expounds her theoretical framework and the scholarship influencing her shared adjudication model, including theories of state-society interactions, legal flexibility, women’s agency, and gender justice. Solanki next focuses on state law and the adjudication process in Hindu and Muslim family law, and she follows this analysis with chapters addressing informal law in Hindu and Muslim societies. She concludes with an effective summary of how the shared adjudication model may potentially facilitate gender equality while also promoting rich cultural diversity.

This book review first focuses on Solanki’s strong message of agency in a complex legal system. Second, it explores the strengths of Solanki’s

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2. *Id.* at back cover.

conceptualizations of power dynamics in India. Finally, it offers a critique of the book's accessibility, perhaps the most challenging aspect of an ambitious reconciliation of cultural accommodation and gender equality in such an elaborate context.

### III.

#### SOLANKI PROPOSES A FOCUS ON AGENCY

Solanki offers a message of agency unique to the majority of feminist Indian scholarship.<sup>3</sup> Rather than focusing on inequality, she chronicles a humanistic perspective, highlighting instances of empowerment and functionality.<sup>4</sup> Solanki provides strong voices of experience and examples that focus on the capacity of legal pluralism to facilitate positive change. For example, during her fieldwork, Solanki discovered that many women's organizations and lawyers were unaware of a Supreme Court ruling that required strict criteria to validate divorce under Muslim law.<sup>5</sup> After Solanki spoke with

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3. *Id.* at 6. *See, e.g.*, Abdullahi An-Na'im, CULTURAL TRANSFORMATIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN AFRICA (Zed Books 2002); HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN: NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES (Rebecca J. Cook ed., University of Pennsylvania Press 1994); Vasudha Dhagamwar, LAW, POWER AND JUSTICE: PROTECTION OF PERSONAL RIGHTS UNDER THE INDIAN PENAL CODE (M. N. Tripathy 1974); Vasudha Dhagamwar, LAW, POWER AND JUSTICE (Sage 1992); Niraja Gopal Jayal, DEMOCRACY AND THE STATE: WELFARE, SECULARISM AND DEVELOPMENT IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA (Oxford University Press 2001); Suad Joseph, *The Public/Private: The Imagined Boundary in the Imagined Nation/State/Community, The Lebanese Case*, 57(1) FEMINIST REVIEW 73-92 (1997); Chandran Kukathas, *Are There Any Cultural Rights?* 20(1) POLITICAL THEORY 105-139 (1992); Gurpreet Mahajan, *Can Intra-group Equality Co-exist With Cultural Diversity? Re-examining Multicultural Frameworks of Accommodation*, MINORITIES WITHIN MINORITIES: EQUALITY, RIGHTS AND DIVERSITY 90-113 (Avigail Eisenberg & Jeff Spinner-Halev, eds., Cambridge University Press 2005); IDENTITY POLITICS AND WOMEN: CULTURAL REASSERTIONS AND FEMINISM IN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE (Valentine M. Moghadam ed., Westview Press 1994); Martha C. Nussbaum, *Religion and Women's Human Rights*, RELIGION AND CONTEMPORARY LIBERALISM 93-137 (Paul J. Weithman, ed., University of Notre Dame Press 1995); Martha C. Nussbaum, SEX AND SOCIAL JUSTICE (Oxford University Press 2000); Susan Okin, *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?* 22(5) BOSTON REVIEW 25-28 (1997); Susan Okin, *Multiculturalism and Feminism: No Simple Questions, No Simple Answers*, Minorities Within Minorities: Equality, Rights and Diversity 67-89 (Avigail Eisenberg and Jeff Spinner-Halev, eds., Cambridge University Press 2005); Archana Parashar, WOMEN AND FAMILY LAW REFORM IN INDIA: UNIFORM CIVIL CODE AND GENDER EQUALITY (Sage 1992); Anne Phillips, *When Culture Means Gender: Issues of Cultural Defence in the English Courts*, 66(4) MODERN LAW REVIEW 510-531 (2003); Anne Phillips and Moira Dustin, *UK Initiatives on Forced Marriage: Regulation, Dialogue and Exit*, 52(3) POLITICAL STUDIES 531-551 (2004); Kumkum Sangari, *Politics of Diversity: Religious Community and Multiple Patriarchies*, 30(52) ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL WEEKLY 3381-3389 (1995); Kumkum Sangari, *Politics of Diversity: Religious Communities and Multiple Patriarchies*, COMMUNAL IDENTITY IN INDIA: ITS CONSTRUCTION AND ARTICULATION IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY 181-213 (Bidyut Chakrabarty, ed., Oxford University Press 2003); WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND ISLAMIC FAMILY LAW: PERSPECTIVES ON REFORM (Lynn Welchman ed., Zed Books 2004).

4. *Id.*

5. SOLANKI, *supra* note 1, at 133; (Shamim Ara v. State of UP and Another, 2002 AIR SCW

lawyer Niloufer Akhtar about this judgment, he said, “until now, I had fewer tools to negotiate a written divorce if a *qazi* [an Islamic law judge] delivered a divorce to a woman who had signed that letter, proving divorce. But with this judgment, almost any divorce can be seen as invalid—women have been given unprecedented leverage.”<sup>6</sup> Akhtar’s epiphany exemplifies the potential power of Solanki’s agency message, which emphasizes possibilities for adjudicative justice in the current system that may empower women.

In contrast to Solanki’s work, much literature on law in India critiques chaos and inequality in the country and posits solutions which may prove prohibitively idealistic.<sup>7</sup> Solanki’s proposal offers a refreshing perspective of contemporary Indian law that lacks obvious bias, emphasizes methods and examples of women’s empowerment, and comprehends formidable requirements for change. For example, she illuminates how grassroots groups “trickle-up” and attack issues of gender justice from multiple standpoints. Most effectively, Solanki provides an important tool in facilitating change—an exposition of precedent on which to build.

### 1. Actors Worked Creatively and Extensively to Receive Judicial Remedies

In order to achieve reconciliation, separation, or maintenance such as alimony, arrears, or child support, judicial remedies required many of the women portrayed in *Adjudication in Religious Family Laws* to expend considerable effort by creatively traversing multiple systems. For example, many women engaged in forum shopping, such as selecting between a state family court, informal religious adjudication, or caste-based doorstep courts.<sup>8</sup> Women dealt with the historical residues of patriarchal and religious values that trump individual rights alongside competing desires for modernity, such as ambivalence surrounding the secondary status of women and *triple talak*, a husband’s three time repetition enabling divorce by written or spoken word.<sup>9</sup> Because of this patriarchy, the legal world often proved confusing and unfriendly. Women had to contend with different lawyers offering conflicting advice,<sup>10</sup> the challenge of self-adjudication with scarce financial resources or education,<sup>11</sup> and the Muslim Women’s Act 1986 requirement that women litigate under multiple courts for one case.

Both men and women faced extrajudicial coercion by families,

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4162).

6. *Id.* at 137 (quoting interview by Gopika Solanki with Niloufer Akhtar, Mumbai lawyer (June 23, 2003)).

7. *Id.* at 6; AN-NA’IM ET AL., *supra* note 3, at 3-4.

8. SOLANKI, *supra* note 1, at 53, 102, 218, 232, 313.

9. *Id.* at 70, 77, 244.

10. *Id.* at 148.

11. *Id.* at 157.

communities, strongmen, and women's organizations in order to reconcile, complete divorce, or negotiate maintenance.<sup>12</sup> While women's organizations often effectively assisted women's traversal of the complex legal world,<sup>13</sup> some women's organization proved destructive for women when men utilized them. For example, some men have taken advantage of the *Mahila Aghadi*, the Hindu right wing party's aggressive women's faction, in order to publicly shame women who attempted to assert their rights in family law.<sup>14</sup> In addition, Solanki exposes state law's affirmation of women as objects by, for instance, allowing a Meghwal woman to elope only if she left behind her savings and *stridhan*, or gifts given to a woman during her wedding and marriage.<sup>15</sup> Finally, Solanki illustrates how police frequently appeared unwilling to help women without the leverage of a women's organization.<sup>16</sup> The justice system occasionally pushed women to bargain for justice, such as foregoing filing criminal cases against abusive husbands in order to ensure maintenance for themselves and their children.<sup>17</sup>

Despite sometimes shocking stories, Solanki avoids emotional appeal. On one hand, the stories illustrate women's need for extreme craftiness, the subversive nature of their justice seeking, and the system's requirement that they expend a disproportionate amount of effort. On the other hand, these stories illustrate a method of success enabled by legal pluralism in India. Solanki's respondents managed to take advantage of the multiple resources available to them, including the family court, Hindu law, Muslim law, women's organizations, alternative dispute resolutions, doorstep organizations, and strongmen to secure restitution of maintenance, *stridhan*, and *mehar*, or dower.

Solanki does not palliate the process. In order for her shared adjudication model to enable justice, women must build connections to women's organizations or obtain access to knowledge permitting them to help themselves.<sup>18</sup> Further, their methods must not work against them. For example, just as women may shop for the forum best suited to them, so too may their husbands. Women may resort to strongmen or the *Mahila Aghadi* to pressure their husbands into accepting or denying a divorce or providing restitution but, as addressed above, men have also used these resources to coerce their wives to stay, leave, or waive payment.

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12. *Id.* at 52, 138.

13. *Id.* at 170, 257.

14. *Id.* at 276.

15. *Id.* at 208.

16. *Id.* at 257.

17. *Id.* at 118, 248.

18. *Id.* at 314.

2. *Downplaying Structural Disparities May Impede Goals of Future Equality*

Solanki implements her shared adjudication model to focus on the ways in which women have found the capacity to achieve legal remedies in decentralized family law, rather than lamenting disparities in formal law. She acknowledges various inequalities working against women in terms of economics, legal customs, and rules. For example, women may own nothing and thus require maintenance payments for living expenses, they may collect inadequate maintenance and therefore need to find paying work, or they may earn too much to receive maintenance. However, while Solanki's tendency to downplay structural disparity in light of practiced equality provides a fresh perspective, her focus may not offer an effective long-term solution, as inequalities in centralized structure may serve to impede a future trajectory toward fairness.<sup>19</sup>

For example, Solanki illustrates that, because polygyny remains legal for Muslims but criminalized for Hindus, many assume that a divorced, polygynous Muslim woman will more likely receive maintenance than a separated, polygynous Hindu woman.<sup>20</sup> However, in practice, state family courts frequently treat divorced or separated polygynous women in the same way. As a result of pressure from societal groups or extra-legal decisions made by progressive judges, the two women will receive the same maintenance. For example, despite the Hindu woman's lack of married status and, therefore, lack of legal standing, the "reformist judiciary has awarded them relief."<sup>21</sup> In another case, a Hindu woman did not file a criminal case against her husband although a local non-governmental organization gave evidence of the husband's second marriage, because "it was more important for her to strategize to secure her economic rights."<sup>22</sup> Still, divorced Hindu polygynous women may not receive the same long-term benefits as Muslim polygynous women because written formal law treats the two differently, criminalizing Hindu polygyny while honoring Muslim polygyny. Extra-legal decisions providing relief to polygynous Hindu women, while a welcome immediate solution, may lack lasting security. The case-by-case nature of family law in India may work against Hindu women in the future if their post-separation rights remain uncodified.

Solanki articulates that, despite the shared adjudication model's present insufficiency to quickly fix inequalities, it enables necessary first steps toward positive change in India. Her account demonstrates the pathways women may take today, providing hope for current judicial remedies as well as for future

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19. *Id.* at 6.

20. I say separated, polygynous Hindu woman here because the law does not recognize the polygynous Hindu marriage, and therefore members of polygynous, Hindu relationships cannot legally divorce.

21. SOLANKI, *supra* note 1, at 67.

22. *Id.* at 119.

change. In the process, Solanki respects the importance of cultural accommodation while applying her shared adjudication model, thereby subversively and gradually widening cracks in hierarchies. Such a posture may prove more effective than radical change for the sake of future gender equality.

#### IV.

##### SOLANKI DISCUSSES TRICKLE UP POWER AND MOBILITY OF MINORITY GROUPS

Solanki offers a compelling discussion of interpenetrations of various powers and mobility of minority groups. In part, this interpenetration exemplifies the strength of shared adjudication: the ability of minorities to move through political cracks available to them in order to meet their needs and secure otherwise unavailable rights. Solanki first recognizes contributing powers, such as customary, religious, state, local, national, and global laws. She then offers a conceptualization of the relationship between state law and societal law, recognizing a fiction or imagination of state autonomy to best analyze the simultaneous interpenetrations and independences of the two.<sup>23</sup>

Solanki provides a convincing summary of interpenetration:

[T]he trickle-down of judicial precedent is only a partial explanation for changes at lower courts. The presence of capable, sympathetic, and proactive judges, interlinkages and interactions between legal personnel and civil society in the adjudication process in state courts, legal innovation and the use of social legislation by lawyers in lower courts, and the individual and collective agency of women explain the gradual shift toward gender equality in lower courts. The different ideas of conjugal family trickle up and percolate in court through individual cases as well as due to interactions between ethnic groups, legal personnel, and civil society, and reformist judges are able to enforce change at local levels.<sup>24</sup>

Solanki highlights this trickle-up mobility with a remarkable story of members of the lower-caste Meghwals' process of facilitating change. Members wrote to Mahatma Gandhi in an attempt to change their deficiencies in schools, including educating women. Despite his distinguished status, Gandhi responded to this request from "below" by impelling volunteers from the Servants of India Society to begin teaching there, and intervening to secure students' eventual admission to high school; a true exposition of "trickle up."<sup>25</sup>

Further, Solanki indirectly reveals how a reputedly less-privileged group—such as women or Meghwals—may actually enjoy greater freedom and flexibility than an historically privileged strata. For example, she writes about the Meghwal democratic participatory justice system and how the caste laws

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23. *Id.* at 47. However, Solanki does not cite Dr. Benedict Anderson, the scholar who first developed the concept of imagined communities. Especially in the context of Indian post-colonialism and nation building through law, Anderson remains a key source.

24. *Id.* at 76.

25. *Id.* at 181, n. 16.

practiced within this group award more rights to women than do state courts and higher-tiered castes.<sup>26</sup> Later, Solanki illustrates how the Meghwal leaders have expressly included women and beggars in community politics, introducing new topics into the political dialogue: “[t]he women’s meetings prioritized the issue of women’s economic rights in the context of elopement and divorce.”<sup>27</sup> The committee “self-consciously” included women in order to ensure representation, voice, and participation in constitution building.<sup>28</sup> The committee saw women’s involvement as impacting the Meghwals’ overall education, capacity as mothers, and influence on new generations. Further, the committee saw women as sources of votes most likely to consent to changing patriarchal residues, since women held much to gain from modernization.<sup>29</sup> Although not mentioned in the book, the Meghwals may have expansively included women and beggars in group membership because society already viewed the caste as downtrodden; members therefore enjoyed fewer hierarchical concerns, and the group may have wished to bring up their marginalized members to better compete as a whole in the modern world.<sup>30</sup>

Historically lower-caste groups may therefore enjoy greater legal freedom than historically higher-caste groups, which self-impose more legal restrictions. For example, members of the Meghwal caste, previously relegated to menial labor, now hold a wide range of positions from cleaners to doctors, lawyers, and government officials.<sup>31</sup> Members have become relatively uninhibited with regard to divorce, marrying outside of the caste, and changing religions. This contrasts with Solanki’s representation of a higher caste, the Kuchi Visa Oswals (“KVO”), which frowns upon freedoms such as inter-caste marriage and divorce.<sup>32</sup> Once primarily employed in agricultural business, KVO members now tend to hold positions of traders and professionals or assistants in businesses owned by fellow caste members, and rarely work in government.<sup>33</sup> Solanki’s comparison between Meghwals and KVOs demonstrates greater freedom, choice, and the potential for ample power among a lower caste group.<sup>34</sup>

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26. *Id.* at 53.

27. *Id.* at 187-88.

28. *Id.*

29. *Id.*

30. See, e.g., Dirk van der Elst, *CULTURE AS GIVEN, CULTURE AS CHOICE passim* (Waveland Press 2003).

31. SOLANKI, *supra* note 1, at 193.

32. *Id.* at 237.

33. *Id.* at 239.

34. Solanki’s “Trickle up” further relates to anthropologist Dr. Clarke Speed’s reference to the greater ability of freedom and mobility in a subdominant group as “shadow hegemony.” Speed argues that women’s counter-hegemonies, even in resistance, generally imply cultural consent to patriarchal asymmetry. He calls women’s most powerful asset “shadow hegemony:” the underrepresented abilities of “second class” enhancing perceptions of reality and ability to

V.

A CRITIQUE: *ADJUDICATION IN RELIGIOUS FAMILY LAWS* MAY PROVE  
INACCESSIBLE TO THE UNINITIATED

Making a book called *Adjudication in Religious Family Laws: Cultural Accommodation, Legal Pluralism, and Gender Equality in India* accessible to readers is an undeniably difficult challenge. However, the book's analytical delineation and contextualization appears sparse, and Solanki often leaves terms undefined. An early and well-organized emphasis on context and defined terms would make Solanki's book much more accessible to a wider audience without specialized knowledge in the field.

1. *Adjudication in Religious Family Laws Provides Only Minimal Historical and Geographical Context*

Solanki begins her account with an adequate historical background of India, although she pays little attention to changing attitudes of the caste system and to women's history. She provides a brief summary of caste but fails to distinguish between *varna*, large scale caste organization, and *jati*, fine divisions of caste, and scarcely relates the caste system's historical condemnation despite continued practice. Further, it seems surprising that a book concerning gender equality in India does not mention Indira Gandhi, Indian Prime Minister from 1966-77 and 1980-84, and only the second woman to serve as head of state in the world. Although Prime Minister Gandhi has received strong criticism, she represents an important female role model. Nor does Solanki mention the historically important role of the "mother" in India and the fetishization of women's chastity. Including a broader vignette of caste would help those unfamiliar with the complicated power dynamics in India, and providing more women's history would enable a richer understanding of the paradoxes women face in their relationships, families, and society.

Further, the book offers limited geographical context. Solanki outlines India broadly and then focuses in on Mumbai, utilizing the city to represent the rest of the country. Her need to focus on a smaller area makes sense; however, Mumbai may not epitomize a convincing or accurate generalization of India. The city indeed receives influence and in turn impacts many regions in India. But Mumbai also embodies its own unique cosmopolitanism, urbanity, and Maharashtran culture. To overcome this complication, Solanki might simply change the book's title to *Adjudication in Religious Family Laws: Cultural Accommodation, Legal Pluralism, and Gender Equality in Mumbai*.

The book also lacks legal context. For example, Solanki does not actually

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sustainably transform their choices and capabilities (Speed, Clarke. "Cultural Anthropology." University of Washington. Seattle. June 4, 2009). Solanki's exposition of the often subversive mobility of women and untouchables in India reflects Speed's examinations of the greater freedom of lower-class individuals.

include the codes with which litigants must work, instead leaving legal requirements for marriage, divorce, and maintenance in these various systems up to the reader to research. In addition to more legal explanation, readers would benefit from a simple timeline of acts, laws, procedures, diverging customs, and changing perceptions.

Solanki offers minimal delineation of the structure of Indian law. When she refers to “state” law, at first it remains unclear whether she means Maharashtra, Indian, or formal governmental law. Further, a reader may not know whether India’s system as influenced by England includes both state (or provincial) and federal levels, such as those in the United States and Canada.

Ultimately, that Solanki did not simply compare India’s procedural system with Canada’s or the United States’ positively reduces the danger of unintentionally feeding the fictions of North America as the center of the legal world and India as a country whose legal system does not stand on its own. Comparison also potentially implies a placeholder for India along some evolutionary trajectory of legal development, a conceptualization which could diminish India’s stand-alone strengths. However, more procedural explanation could help situate the reader. Clarifying comparisons may answer questions such as why one woman could not recover in the absence of her husband’s appearance in court and why another woman received a default judgment when her husband failed to attend.<sup>35</sup> At the very least, Solanki could provide a small civil procedure lesson to contextualize where family law lies in India.

Solanki does compare other post-colonial or quasi-post-colonial countries along a spectrum of centralization and decentralized legal pluralism. The uninitiated reader may wonder whether federalism constitutes legal pluralism as well. Solanki herself resides in Canada, she wrote the book in English and provides a glossary of Hindu and Urdu terms, and the University of Cambridge Press published the book. Therefore, some comparison to English, Canadian, or US law would help to provide some context to a presumably large portion of Solanki’s audience.

## 2. *Adjudication in Religious Family Laws Minimally Defines Terminology*

Solanki’s glossary of terms proves extremely helpful, but it remains noncomprehensive. Many terms do not appear in the glossary and stay undefined throughout the book.<sup>36</sup> More importantly, Solanki infrequently defines her particular utilization of terms. For example, she does not explain the difference between societal law and customary law or whether she uses the terms interchangeably. Furthermore, when Solanki compares state and society, it

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35. *Id.* at 169.

36. Undefined words include but are not limited to *Ulema*, *madrasa*, cultural pluralization, maintenance and how it contrasts from economic rights, alimony, arrears, and other remedies, caste, *Dalit*, *Harijan*, *Meghwal*, and communalism.

remains unclear whether she compares Maharashtra, India, or government with society. The term society could include everything, but Solanki seemed to utilize it in a narrower sense and never explains why.

Solanki probably does not diligently define her terms or provide extensive historical, geographic, and legal context because doing so would undoubtedly expand her book. However, more context and definition could appear concisely, and it would prove helpful enough to warrant the space. If required, Solanki could further condense some of the main text by, for instance, focusing on representative castes rather than mentioning many varied groups briefly, and avoiding repetition by eliminating the occasional duplication of rules in text and footnotes.<sup>37</sup>

Amelioration of these critiques would add muscle and accessibility to an already strong book. Solanki writes in an articulate, engaging fashion about complex topics many consider exceedingly challenging. She effectively presents a message which holds ample potential for positively affecting the future of litigation in India.

## VI. CONCLUSION

*Adjudication in Religious Family Laws* provides valuable inspiration to those concerned with the future of gender equality and justice in India. In particular, the sheer volume of work women's organizations accomplished in traversing the systems and enabling women's justice in India proved astonishing. Solanki briefly touches upon a few areas that have a lot of potential for further expansion. For example, media has a strong influence on the conversation between cultural accommodation and women's rights and equality.<sup>38</sup> Solanki quickly addresses the fiction that people actually know the law and questions to what extent police and courts really enforce it.<sup>39</sup> Further, she briefly alludes to the interplay between procedure and substantive laws between the various political bodies.<sup>40</sup>

*Adjudication in Religious Family Laws* sets out to apply the shared adjudication model to India's unique legal pluralism. It acknowledges the importance of cultural diversity, makes steps toward gender equality, and elucidates a path for positive change. The example of Mumbai may prove useful to the whole of India as well as to other legally pluralistic states. Solanki provides a strong theoretical framework in addition to her examinations of state-

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37. SOLANKI, *supra* note 1. at 108, 216 (such as in the case of Solanki's explanations of eloping regulations).

38. *Id.* at 204 (touched upon briefly).

39. *Id.* at 78.

40. *Id.* at 337.

society interactions, legal flexibility, agency, and gender justice. Her compelling stories of the interplay between state and societal law among Hindus and Muslims situate and engage her audience. Most of all, Solanki develops an impressive arsenal of strategies, such as religious, state, and street based methods available for marginalized groups in India, while maintaining a firm respect for cultural history.