

Book Review

Alice Clark, *Valued Daughters: First Generation Career Women*, Sage Publications India, 2016, pp. 199, Price ₹ 595/-.

Combination of the author's interest in gender and culture makes this work interesting. It assumes relevance in the background of son preference. It is the outcome of the study conducted in Mumbai, Vadodara, Bengaluru and Allahabad to explore the aspirations of college going women aged 17 years through 25 years. It seeks to know whether they differ from the earlier generation and if yes, how.

Although the book reveals some demographic issues, the focus is not on numbers. It fits well into the arena of women's studies and tries to explore about a much broader aspect of aspiration. Therefore, the approach is qualitative. Results of the study explain the pattern and process of transition in generations - from educated or non-educated non-earners to educated earners. This inter-generational shift elucidates the identity formation of young women as a part of their college education process. It also enquires into what kind of families support their daughters' career ideas and the reasons behind it.

India is witnessing a transition in different spheres of human life including social, demographic and epidemiological. This is thus the perfect time to think about the subject. Eight chapters of the book throw light on diverse aspects connected with career aspirations of young women.

Initially the book debates about long standing genealogy of female career ambitions. Female education has welcomed in urban India but not the work participation. Women hardly got rewards for their work in the past. Irrespective of less participation in work, urban women have had expectations that with increasing education their daughters and granddaughters would accomplish that which they themselves could not. All of them look forward to gender equality, more self-fulfillment, economic independence and absence of domestic violence.

Further the book highlights the past and present gender relations in the light of demographic change in India. A transition is round the corner with declining mortality and more so, sharply declining fertility. Gender differentials in mortality are diminishing and female life expectancy is on the rise although the share of girls in population vis-à-vis boys is going down. Female literacy is increasing so also school enrollment although drop-outs are female dominated. Writing poses questions on gender equality in education and career aspirations. The question is whether the changes that have surfaced are true and ultimately what could be an explanation for the same. To explore these issues further, the author has focused on the experiences of selected young college going women in four cities. It is worthwhile to look at the different geographical locations having certain peculiarities mainly because of the differentials in cultures in each of

them and how the mere residence in a particular city changes the grades of aspirations. Needless to add, some cities are conducive for certain specialized kinds of professional aspirations.

However, aspiration of a participant is a mix of outlooks of the community to which she belongs and outlooks do change with social hierarchy. Her place of origin also matters. Aspirations are linked to anticipated views of the in-laws. There exist some hidden strings that the author points out have emerged strongly during an in-depth discussion with the participants. The promising ones are role of fathers in shaping the career decisions of young girls. It is crucial, especially in terms of difficulties and emergencies. Girls can march ahead only if fathers understand their career aspirations. One more observation is a father's support suits best in the absence of son. In most of such cases, mothers are worried about the careers that have been set by their daughters because of the social reality whilst fathers are supportive. Their encouragement drives these young women towards their projected destination. When fathers are reassuring, mothers don't tend to lag behind.

Young educated women are getting more assertive which is all across, irrespective of economic status of the family. The other one is the birth order or the position of the participant which, in turn, portrays the family composition. Position of daughter in a family also impacts her career aspirations.

Many urban women are into higher education and aspiring for suitable career. However, the job market is not so responsive to it. Whether all of them are absorbed or only few who come from elite class get such opportunities is question facing them. Privileged young women grow better in professional roles and identities. Socio-cultural dominance plays its part. Some women may rise and meet the career challenges and would make an overall difference in thinking about women's work. Is the empowerment of young girls encouraging them to go for higher studies and aspire for better careers?

A part of the text includes an analysis of losses, gains and drawbacks in working towards career ambitions. Neoliberalism as a result of economic growth has created many opportunities for young aspirants entering the labour market. Participants have strong support by their parents to pursue their higher studies, followed by chosen careers. However in the future they can do so only if the in-laws are supportive to their ideas related to career. If women have to go ahead, they should ably negotiate about it with their in-laws. It is advantageous for the women whose careers support the family financially to maintain their life-style. This cannot be considered an irony but is actually a logical outcome. Sometimes women's career can be a life surviving strategy that brings in respect to them within the family as well as in the society.

The author further evaluates the differentials of participants and their mothers coming from old and new middle class and their respective ideas about these classes as well as the development of the classes. It eventually puts forth the theory of social reproduction. Young women, still in their higher education classes, seek self-identity that they did not seek before. Educated mothers in this

study did want to work which did not materialize because of their choice at that time. All the mothers, irrespective of their educational status, now strongly support their daughters to go ahead and establish in their career. It also might be self-realization in some way. In all probability present-day daughters would have better chances to fulfill their career aspirations than of the previous generation. In fact, aspiring for career probably is the effect of not imposing values giving rise to gender inequality.

Participants are aware of the potential problems in career building and receiving requisite support in the future. They express more traditional views on marriage and children, and accept their lesser role in decision-making. The author has not missed these themes while scripting about value of daughters.

The book concludes with the past and future issues around gender justice and how changes are taking place. It is not easy to predict whatever is hoped by these young college-going participants would come to pass. In Indian perspective daughters are looked at in two ways. One is no more than one daughter is desired so as to be able to bear the expenses associated with her. The other is more positive and contemporary. Daughters are potential objects of pride in themselves. It is not just their higher education and career but it is the family's intentions and changing viewpoint to look at them that is more significant. This perspective makes daughters valued.

This is a well-articulated research conducted among young Indian women which ascertains their value. It is a lucid presentation of their education and career aspirations even though their mothers did not set the pattern. In spite of a non-Indian researcher, the author has captured the nuances of a difficult-to-gauge issue. The book will prove to be a valuable piece of research to scholars working in the area of women and gender studies.

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