

## ***Valued Daughters: First-Generation Career Women***

Alice W. Clark. Delhi: SAGE, 2016, 212 pages

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In a social system where it is difficult for women to enter school system, Alice Clark's recent book *Valued daughters: First-generation career women* (2016) can be seen as a study of the females who have defied all hardships to pave their way into university system. In the book, Professor Clark very rightly points out the good luck of the girls who enter the higher education in India, and that they are the fortunate ones. The luck, however, is not divine, but a product of the interaction between the social, demographic, political, and economic variables, which are discussed in detail in the book. Although the sample of the study is small only with the thirty-six young women, the methodology, which is referred to as the *social demography*, provides the firm base for the analysis.

The nine chapters of the book are based on the detailed interviews conducted in three universities in India. The author talks to the women students currently enrolled in different stages of university education, but also weaves on the career aspirations of their mothers and grandmothers. The data hence gathered is placed in a strong intersectional approach. The analysis is drawn from the concepts of social limit and freedom that education provides—given by Bourdieu and Sen—with the role of feminism in understanding university education of women in Indian context. Guided by the judicious choice, the author refrains herself from making any grand claims about the future of women's education and their careers because education as a system cannot be understood by referring to the institutional context alone.

The author makes extensive reference to the role of familial and social realms that shape up the educational experience of the women in the universities. The demographic analysis points that the decline in infant-mortality along with the increase in life expectancy after the 1950s has directly influenced the educational achievements of women in contemporary India. Also, due to the changed family structure, the opportunities of edu-

cation have opened up for the girls in a family. In the changing social constitution, where a girl child is rewarded for her education by good employment and better suitors for marriage, higher education is more of a necessity than a choice. She looks at these trends at a microcosm of a family that functions strictly around the social fabric. She also recognizes the urban location of the students as an influence on their aspirations.

Throughout the book, the respondents talk to the reader by their anecdotal stories, casing the theory in the social reality. It is shown that fathers, more than mothers, are the support system for women who choose to pursue higher education. The decisions which are closely associated with the initiation to a university like delaying marriage or migration to a different city can only be taken with the help of the male authority. The author, however, comments on the complex role of men that could be used to comment on the changing forms of patriarchy of various groups at particular time in history. These intricate systems of support from men must be recognized as an influential channel to dismantle old forms of patriarchy while the women assert themselves with education and employment.

Education for women is also seen as a pathway to better financial opportunities eventually raising the social status of a family. With the changing economic culture, women are seen as a potential earning member even in the small cities. Getting educated hence, the author points out does not essentially mean the development of a strong feminist position; rather, an economic event. She notes that education does not essentially make all women modern or critical, and this points out to the social realities in which the education system is embedded in India.

In the context of present research, where the respondents are purposely chosen from the families with no working women, the role of mother has been discussed as of a nurturer. The discussion on the role of father makes it clearer that educated or not, the mothers have limited decision making power regarding the choices that need challenging any societal norm.

The book portrays that the self-identity of the woman who is attending the university is a product of her middle class background, the historical transitions, the demography, and the social-economic needs. The women interviewed for the book move forward on the backs of their families, essentially fathers. The author reminds that this all cannot be construed as the end of the traditional role of women in Indian society. Marriage is a very essential factor that may bring these women back being the same as

their mothers in the current household. As the last chapter points out, the change, thus observed, is very slow—may be incomprehensible—but essential in many cases.

This book, apart from describing the value of higher education in a women's life, provides a very important methodological paradigm *dense contextual analysis* (p. 186) that the social science research needs. The amalgamation of relevant but varied and critical perspectives makes this book a pleasure to read. The book presents the larger picture in which women's higher education must be researched. A young woman entering a college must be studied as a testament to the conditions that allow her, yet restrict many into the university system. Prof. Clark has presented us with various scaffolds in which the data of women's enrollment in university system stand on. Constant punctuation of the narrative form of data with the demographical facts and theoretical underpinnings makes a strong case to locate every woman as a statement of socio-political and economic upheaval in Indian society.

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