



ALICE W. CLARK

VALUED DAUGHTERS

FIRST-GENERATION CAREER WOMEN

VALUED DAUGHTERS

FIRST-GENERATION CAREER WOMEN

 **SAGE** www.sagepublishing.com

Los Angeles | London | New Delhi | Singapore | Washington DC | Melbourne

Copyright © Alice W. Clark, 2016

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

First published in 2016 by



SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd

B1/I-1 Mohan Cooperative Industrial Area
Mathura Road, New Delhi 110 044, India
www.sagepub.in

SAGE Publications Inc

2455 Teller Road
Thousand Oaks, California 91320, USA

SAGE Publications Ltd

1 Oliver's Yard, 55 City Road
London EC1Y 1SP, United Kingdom

SAGE Publications Asia-Pacific Pte Ltd

3 Church Street
#10-04 Samsung Hub
Singapore 049483

Published by Vivek Mehra for SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd, typeset in 11/13 pts Garamond by PrePSol Enterprises Pvt Ltd and printed at Chaman Enterprises, New Delhi.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Clark, Alice Whitcomb, author.

Title: Valued daughters : first-generation career women / Alice W. Clark.

Description: New Delhi, India ; Thousand Oaks, California : SAGE, 2016. |

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2015049011 | ISBN 9789351508885 (hardback : alk. paper) |

ISBN 9789351508878 (epub) | ISBN 9789351508861 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Women in the professions—India. | Women employees—India. |

Women college graduates—Employment—India. | Young

women—Employment—India. | Career development—India.

Classification: LCC HD6054.2.I4 C53 2016 | DDC 331.40954—dc23 LC record available at <http://lcn.loc.gov/2015049011>

ISBN: 978-93-515-0888-5 (HB)

The SAGE Team: Aditi Chopra, Sandhya Gola and Vinitha Nair

VALUED
DAUGHTERS

*Dedicated to the women of India,
past, present, and future*

Thank you for choosing a SAGE product!
If you have any comment, observation or feedback,
I would like to personally hear from you.

*Please write to me at **contactceo@sagepub.in***

Vivek Mehra, Managing Director and CEO,
SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd, New Delhi

Bulk Sales

SAGE India offers special discounts
for purchase of books in bulk.

We also make available special imprints
and excerpts from our books on demand.

For orders and enquiries, write to us at

Marketing Department
SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd
B1/I-1, Mohan Cooperative Industrial Area
Mathura Road, Post Bag 7
New Delhi 110044, India

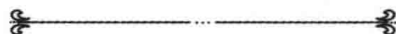
*E-mail us at **marketing@sagepub.in***

Get to know more about SAGE

Be invited to SAGE events, get on our mailing list.

*Write today to **marketing@sagepub.in***

This book is also available as an e-book.



Acknowledgments

This work could have never been imagined or carried out if it had not been for the long-standing friendship, intellectual engagement, and material support of Veena Poonacha and Vibhuti Patel in Mumbai; T. V. Sekher in Bengaluru and Mumbai; Tulsi Patel in Delhi; Sumita Parmar in Allahabad; and Pamela Price in many locations up to the present, starting in Madison during our graduate school years.

There are others to whom I am also grateful for their assistance: in Allahabad, Ruchika Varma and Satendra Kumar; in Mumbai, Kamala Ganesh, Madhushree Sekher, and Amrita Gupta; in Vadodara, Amita Pandya, Lancy Lobo, and Harendra Choksi; in Delhi, Shelly Tara, Manjeet Bhatia, Rajni Palriwala, Preet Rustagi, Pamela Philipose, and Sonalde Desai; and in Berkeley, Raka Ray, Cynthia Lloyd, and Lawrence Cohen. I thank Anil Inamdar of the American Institute of Indian Studies for his energetic assistance with research affiliation formalities. I thank the Indian Institute for Advanced Study and the Women's Studies and Development Centre at the University of Delhi, for inviting me to present part of this work at a seminar on "Locating Gender in the New Middle Class" in Shimla in March 2014, and the Research Centre for Women's Studies at SNDT Women's University, for the invitation to speak at "Feminist Historiography" seminar in Mumbai in February 2015. For thoughtful guidance, I appreciate the editorial team at the Delhi office of SAGE Publications. And, I salute the University of California Library for being the finest research library of my acquaintance in any part of the world.

I thank my family—Charles and our two daughters, their husbands, and our first grandson—for their companionship, care,

and lively interest over the years, including traveling to India for the 2013–2014 Christmas holidays to provide me a breather in the midst of my research stay. I look affectionately back into the past at the two generations of India-involved family before our own, and forward into the future at two emerging new ones.

Contents

| | |
|---|-----|
| <i>List of Tables</i> | ix |
| <i>Acknowledgments</i> | xi |
| 1 Intersecting Transitions | 1 |
| 2 A History of Women among Men | 15 |
| 3 Gender and Demography: Paradoxical Effects | 37 |
| 4 Professional Aspirations and Education in Cities | 56 |
| 5 Status-raising as a Father–Daughter Project | 79 |
| 6 Educated Elites in a New Gender Era | 97 |
| 7 Embedded Agency: Gains, Losses, and Unborn Hopes | 120 |
| 8 Social Reproduction and the Professional Imaginary | 143 |
| 9 Toward Gender Transformation | 170 |
| <i>Bibliography</i> | 187 |
| <i>Index</i> | 196 |
| <i>About the Author</i> | 200 |

List of Tables

| | | |
|-----|---|-----|
| 2.1 | Employment in the Organized Sector, India | 33 |
| 2.2 | Work Participation, Female Urban Population of India (Age 7+), Total and Tertiary | 33 |
| 2.3 | LFPRs in India for Urban Graduates and Above, by Sex | 34 |
| 3.1 | Historical Vital Rates for India | 38 |
| 3.2 | Overall and Child Sex Ratios, India, 1981–2011 | 45 |
| 3.3 | Girls and Women: Survival and Education, Census 2011 | 51 |
| 3.4 | School Attendance by State and Residence for Females Aged 11–14, in Percent | 52 |
| 3.5 | Percentages of Youth Being Educated, 2010 | 53 |
| 6.1 | LFPR by Education, Sex, and Residence, Age 15+ | 99 |
| 6.2 | Urban Female Workers in Selected Activities, 2009–2010 | 100 |
| 6.3 | Employment in the Organized Sector, India | 102 |
| 6.4 | Total Numbers of Girl Students in Higher Education | 107 |

1

Intersecting Transitions

The book sets out to trace a finite moment in a sweeping transition, the spread of ambitions among young graduate women for lifetime careers in urban India. The larger process is made up of several intersecting transitions—demographic, educational, economic, and social—each of which has its own history and trajectory. Yet there is another transition embedded within these—an emerging and changing sense of self among young women, one that is flexible, capacious, agreeable, and cooperative, yet firmly focused on freedom. The finite moment, occurring in various forms and in scattered urban locations across India in the early 21st century, is illustrated in multitude of stories, reflecting both a delicate balancing act and a surge of determination. These are stories motivated by well-laid plans, held by young women and their parents, to make a partial but powerful change in the gender expectations of the past. The transition is thus a historical one, bringing together the life plans of two or three generations of people, with roots reaching even further back into the past.

My project has been to understand the aspirations of a small subset of the current generation of college-going women, and to learn how and why their aspirations differ from those of earlier generations of their peers. These daughters appear to be valued by their natal families for a wider variety of reasons than similarly placed daughters previously were. This project, then, contributes to

2 Valued Daughters

a developing literature on where, and to what extent, gendered social change may be currently happening in India.

The book is based on research carried out in late 2013 and early 2014, when I collected interview data in three Indian cities from young women aged 17–25 who were studying in college or postgraduate programs and planning on lifetime careers, and whose mothers had never had one. This last qualification was an important filter, maintained across all those selected for interviews, for the purpose of understanding intergenerational changes in urban female aspirations. Each research subject was introduced to me by one of her professors. The university sites chosen for the research were in Allahabad, Mumbai, and Vadodara. Interviews collected in these cities are then placed in relation to others which were collected from some students and some young employees in an earlier research project in Bengaluru (previously Bangalore; Clark and Sekher 2007).

The total size of my sample is only an average of eight in each city, an infinitesimal amount, seemingly providing absolutely unrepresentative anecdotes. These are not full ethnographies; they can comprise only a sketch. Yet this examination of a small, focused, and nonrandom sample is meant to provide a useful approach to consider important issues in the study of social change. The idea of transitions that intersect with one another is somewhat different from the points of view taken by many other studies of Indian social phenomena, one which can be seen as an experiment in social history and social historical demography. This is meant to be a research effort in what I would call *qualitative social demography*. Supported by some secondary data analysis, it constitutes an exploration to see if qualitative and quantitative research methods can be better combined when trying to understand women's history and unfolding present circumstances. Such an experiment may prove to be important to consider because demographic research is so quantitative, while women's studies research tends to be intensely qualitative.

An approach that is both nuanced and yet broad is needed to gain perspective on the changing motivations of young women, the role of college education in impacting their career goals and their marital and reproductive plans, and the elements that make up

female autonomy and agency. Beyond what this book can attempt to fulfill, but can only suggest, is the need for ethnographies of educated women's social and economic behaviors, with their various and conflicting motivations, at highly disaggregated levels like neighborhoods, castes, villages, tribes, and religious groups. Different groups of women who are currently getting educated may have different levels of choice about their careers, marriages, and future. How are their choices shaped or constrained by the web of relationships in which they are embedded? How are changes in their choices being shaped by historical forces that are still unfolding? What effects do their choices have on the overall system of social reproduction, which may provide us with a more comprehensive picture of demographic and social change as it is occurring?

I approach these questions by interviewing young women in college, looking forward to having lifelong careers. In the effort to understand a generational shift in gender relations that is going on in some families regarding young women's professional aspirations, seen in light of the varied social locations these families inhabit, two basic focus areas have emerged. Understanding this generational shift seems to call for (a) a focus on new kinds of subject and identity formation taking place among young women as part of their college education process, and (b) an analysis of what kinds of families are now sponsoring their daughters' lifetime career ambitions, and why. An earlier notion that this generational shift as young women's career aspirations would be mainly an upper middle class phenomenon is not borne out by the research. Class enters into the framework along a wide spectrum, ranging from some class locations of relative privilege to others of urgent need. The research has also undermined an initial notion that upper-caste status would be nearly universal among career-oriented young women.

The one-hour interviews I had with female students took place one-on-one, often in a college classroom we had to ourselves. I pursued a list of questions with them about their education, career plans, parents' circumstances, family support, future marriage plans, desires for children, planned usage of money they earned, thoughts on work-family balance, and ideas about the nature of professionalism. For some interviewees, when it became possible, a home visit

followed with the daughter present to help translate and/or add to her parents' comments. I was not bound by my questionnaire and did not force a return to it if the conversation moved to other areas subjects wanted to share. In every case, the research subject was eager to participate. Research subjects and their families were informed that their names would be changed, and that some details would be omitted or altered to protect them from identification. The interview material was arranged into blocks of text that did not reflect the uneven way the conversations actually developed, but that stay true to the life narratives, which were shared.

Theoretically, a combination of the ideas of Sen and Bourdieu is of particular interest for this project. Both thinkers deal with the effects, benefits, and drawbacks of education, so that their works are appropriately applicable to a project where higher education plays a central role. Amartya Sen (1999, 2009; also see Agarwal 2005) is famously noted for stressing both personal and the overall social and economic effects of enhancing people's freedom and developing their capabilities and choices. Education is one of the most potentially enhancing factors in this theory. Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 2010; and with Passeron [2000]), by contrast, is known for his analysis of social props and barriers under the label of cultural capital, governed within the individual by a set of predilections that he labels as the *habitus*. These nearly unconscious usages lurk beneath the surface, either hobbling or helping in enabling the fulfillment of ambitions and social aspirations that people associate with becoming educated.

In Sen's *Development as Freedom* (1999), there is a chapter, "Women's Agency and Social Change," in which he sees women as "dynamic promoters of social transformations that can alter the lives of both women and men." Touching on key issues we are exploring in this study, he writes,

[t]he relative respect and regard for women's well-being is strongly influenced by such variables as women's ability to earn an independent income, to find employment outside the home, to have ownership rights and to have literacy and be educated participants in decisions within and outside the family.

Two important outcomes can result from having literate and educated women earning their own incomes, he believes—this can enhance “the social standing of a woman in the household and the society,” and “women’s agency and voice, influenced by education and employment, can in turn influence the nature of the public discussion.” More than 15 years after this influential work of Sen’s, in the present study we are in a position to form an impression of recent social transformations that have been motivated by young urban women gaining education in the hope of obtaining educated, professional level employment. We are able to ask in detail how these transformations have recently affected women’s standing within their households, and then to consider briefly how they may be influencing the public discussion on many issues.

In *Distinction* (2010), Bourdieu draws a picture of the refinements that people lack if not brought up with them, such as a fine taste in classical music. This type of knowledge and formed taste are seen as distinguishing persons seeking positions, whether in employment or in society and politics, from one another, to the point where the more refined candidates may win these contests. These cultural distinctions may read as slightly archaic in relation to today’s societies. A taste for classical Indian music was richly cultivated in past decades in elite Indian families (Chaudhuri 2009), and their offspring’s social and employment advantages may have been partly connected with this refinement. But the sense of high culture versus low culture drawn by Bourdieu has faded in this current markedly neoliberal era, with its instant online global interconnections, fashions, and fads. Added to a picture of Bourdieu as the author of a complex theory of cultural capital in the construction and reproduction of class, I would also draw attention to a more colloquial notion that has burst these boundaries, lost or forgotten its roots in Bourdieu, and is used more widely. In writings connected with race and caste relations, particularly, without any citation, notions of cultural and social capital are widely and rather loosely used to reference traits and abilities inbred from childhood, based on advantages held and imparted by people’s natal families. Either in a close reading of Bourdieu or in a more colloquial use, the concept of cultural capital and its formation are very important and, in a wide variety of current literatures, quite inevitable.

In looking at the stories collected, I have also been reminded of “modernization theory,” a loose construct that has been used for many decades with the contents of the “modern” shifting across time frames. It is a framework of which I am quite critical, as will be detailed throughout the book. One of its abiding interests has been a notion called female autonomy, which is hard to pin down (as lucidly discussed by Basu 1996), but which has been seen as an instrumentalist variable, leading mainly to the accomplishment of goals outside itself. In its very instrumentality, it fits oddly but aptly into several other theoretical possibilities. To give an important example, one may fruitfully use postcolonial feminist theoretical constructs in disclosing the new forms of oppression and patriarchal hegemony that clearly still circumscribe the freedoms of the young subjects whose stories I am collecting. In the bulk of this book, however, I am interested in elucidating the liberatory potential of these stories, which appears richly to exist in some, though truncated in others. The limitations of the stories and the hopes they express, as well as their portents for the future, will be discussed as the narratives proceed.

Ideas elaborated in Sen and Nussbaum’s capabilities approach (Nussbaum 2001, 2011; Nussbaum and Sen 1993; Sen 1999, 2009) give rise to a term I have found it useful to coin in this work. Using their framework as a springboard, I identify an assertiveness capability, vividly demonstrated by the young women still in college whom I interviewed, and I view it as a realized source of moral force and personal identity creation in itself. I discuss the limitations that such a capability may contain. With reference to Bourdieu (1977, 2010), I address forms of social and cultural capital as they bear on a discussion of how gender relations can be changed or entrenched, and evaluate which of these tendencies I believe is the stronger. Toward the end of the book, I undertake to spell out my understanding of ways in which a long-standing system of social reproduction is now undergoing alteration, and to add my judgment of ways that this process is larger than may have been envisioned in other feminist work.

The narrative perspective is one closely focused on female career aspirations, parental support, and the future family formation strategies that young women believe would support them in maintaining a career. The aspirations that are now being fulfilled are those of the parents for their daughters to be educated and prepared for careers. The further

aspirations, whose fulfillment is as yet unpredictable, are those of the young women themselves to actualize and fulfill their goals of having careers for a lifetime. These two sets of aspirations, by the parents and by their daughters, are somewhat different, but they add together to create a structure that supports the valuing of the daughter as an agent. We will examine how in each case she also remains an embedded agent.

This is a book about young women who (so far) have been uniquely lucky. Their stories contrast most cruelly with those of girls, so much less privileged in residential location and family sensibility, who do not get to continue in school even to the secondary level, when they long to do so (Majumdar 2011: 212–236). The good luck of my research subjects is made up not only of their urban residence, with its broad exposure to multiple possibilities, and their families' support for them, based on particular family needs and hopes; these young women have also been very successful students, fortunate in the favor in which they are held by their professors and mentors. Additionally, they have all studied in English medium colleges, and that is the language in which this research was conducted.

The discrimination in my study against all the other kinds of female students who exist adds up to a kind of elitism of focus. I put this on the table forthrightly, so that critics may ask why these fortunate and rather exceptional girls are important to look at in considering societal change. My answer is that, even with all their luck so far, they represent, by way of the filter of mothers who never worked, a certain slice of ordinary urban middle class families or would-be middle class families as predominantly found in these same cities just a generation ago. Mothers who did not work were the standard in the vast majority of urban middle class families in previous years. The families of my subjects in the late 20th century were not ones in which the preponderance of members were either very highly educated or cosmopolitan. Some of the families I examine were elite in caste, class, or both, though others were not, but none had figured in the ranks of female professionalism in the past.

This book ultimately attempts to locate and to project forward some elements of a path toward greater gender equity for young women living in cities, loyal to their families of origin, hopeful of finding an appropriate fit within their families-to-be, and yet trying to become professionals. I foresee many daunting challenges that