Higher education and the reproductive life course
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Preface

‘I am different from my mother, but yet there are similarities between us’. The differences are vividly visible in today’s contemporary society but how we are similar is less apparent. Generational change between my mother and me was evident as I often heard my mother telling me ‘during our time we were not like this’. Those were the girlhood growing up years when I neither sought explanation from my mother on what she meant by those words nor argued about these things. I used to hear these words almost everyday from my mother for various reasons, the most important of which were the times when I was not being girlish in my behaviour or for the various things that I did not do and yet was supposed to do being a girl. In the later years this was the topic of discussion in my friend’s circle in school and that was the time when I got to know that I was not the only one who behaved distinctly different from her mother. However, by the time I was 14-15 years of age my mother and me shared many more things than just the ‘unexplained’ generational changes. She made me understand that some changes are necessary with the changing times while some changes can be compromised with. For example, she liked me riding a motor vehicle to college as it boosted my confidence levels and enabled me to be independent, while, on the other hand she disliked my wearing expensive clothes as it did not help in any way. During those times I could see how difficult it was for her to keep pace with the changing times as well as teach me values enabling me to be recognized as ‘my mother’s daughter’. She considered education to be the foundation that would enable most of the radical changes in my life. She wanted me to fulfill her cherished desire to pursue higher education as she could not pursue her higher studies in medicine because my grandmother did not allow her to stay away from home being unmarried. In contrast I left home for my further studies when I was 21 years of age. My mother completed her highest education at the age of 21 and began working as a school teacher. So at the age of 21 while my mother gained financial independence, I gained personal independence moving out of my parental home. My mother married at the age of 28 and gave birth to my elder brother at the age of 31 which was perceived as a very late age in the societal setup of those days. In the journey of my life, since I was 14 years, the close conversations that I have shared with my mother reveal to me that special bond between a mother and daughter coexisting alongside the generational changes. My inspiration for the topic of the doctoral research comes about from the tryst that I hold within myself about what ‘actually’ changes across generations and what ‘should’ change.

The genesis of this study began when I was working on my Masters Thesis here at the University of Groningen. Based on the preliminary results from the secondary data analysis, the research objectives of the PhD research were framed. The research questions attempted at understanding the universality of higher education in the changing lives of women. Universality was focused at through the cross-cultural study of Karnataka (India) and the Netherlands. This study could be accomplished by my PhD scholarship from the Ubbo Emnissfonds and my fieldwork was funded by HERA (HEalthy reproduction: Research for Action) programme a collaboration between PRC (Population Research Centre), University of Groningen and NIDI (Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute). I conducted a feasibility study in March 2003 and later my fieldwork in Bangalore from January 2004 to March 2004. During these trips I made extensive use of the libraries in JSS Institute of Economic Research, Dharwad, International Institute for Population Sciences (IIIPS), Mumbai and the Tata Institute of Social Sciences Mumbai. I am extremely grateful to the cooperative library staff in these libraries. In my visit to IIIPS, I had the opportunity to discuss my research with Prof. T.K.Roy. I benefited a lot from the nice academic discussions that we had as regards the use of National Family Health Survey data and how best can the data speak for itself. I am thankful to Dr. B.M.Ramesh and Dr. Rajaretnam for their critical view on the research topic. While at Dharwad I often visited the building that houses the International Diploma Course
on Reproductive Health Management. It was nice to meet Prof. Khan who is the coordinator of the programme and the students of the diploma course. I stayed at the University Guest House in Dharwad which has a mini forest beside it and the air smells so refreshing with the wafts from the eucalyptus trees. During the same time that I was in Dharwad, Monique Hennink from the University of Southampton was also in Dharwad for the workshop on Qualitative research methods. Sometimes Monique and I would together walk down to the guest house canteen for our breakfast. There on the breakfast table we would sometimes discuss about research while sometimes Monique would mention about her trip to the villages nearby Dharwad. I too had accompanied the Spandana workers one evening to a village nearby Dharwad to see how health workers were educating the village women about reproductive health issues with the use of flash cards. I liked talking to Sujata, Rajeswari and Jyothi and also saw the perseverance of their work. My Dharwad visit was also memorable as I met Bailey Aunty, Uncle and Arya. Sometimes in the evening Bailey Aunty would come and pick me up from near the bus stop inside the university campus and then she would take me around to show Dharwad town. Sometimes we ate chaat or dosa and every time Aunty would pay for it. I felt really very comfortable in Aunty’s company and her reassuring smile.

During my fieldwork in Bangalore I stayed at the Guest house of Raman Research Institute (RRI). Though this institute specializes in astronomy and astrophysics, it helped me reach women working in the private sector as well as in governmental institutions. I am very grateful to RRI for offering me the place to stay for the whole of my fieldwork consisting of two months as well as the telephone and computer facility. I met many professors and lecturers there in the institute, who worked in a totally different field than me but were eager to discuss their personal experiences of what they perceived has changed in their lives. Special thanks and acknowledgement goes to Geetha madame, Andal and Sunitha and all others with whom I shared a cup of tea in the canteen and discussed about my research. It was in RRI that I met Prof. Joanna Rankin with whom I discussed the cultural differences and the cultural assimilation of the migrants in the Netherlands and heard from her how similar it is in Canada. I am also very grateful to Prof. Rajeswari Chatterjee with whom I spend much of my time in Bangalore. I will always remember the ‘khara bun’ and the ‘soppe bun’ which she used to give me because of its nutritional value. I enjoyed the discussions that we had and I gained much knowledge from these discussions about the history of Karnataka. I thank all my respondents who gave their valuable time to me and shared with me many of their personal experiences.

Doing in-depth interviews in Groningen was another wonderful experience. I at first had thought of conducting focus group discussions but very soon I found its unfeasibility as it was difficult for women to gather at one particular time. I am grateful to Marloes who was always there with a smile on her face. For the two focus group discussions that were conducted she was the one who took down notes during the discussions. The smile on her face would give a lot of encouragement during those stressful times. As the focus group discussions did not work I fixed individual appointments with the respondents and went to their house to interview them. All my respondents were cooperative and I enjoyed talking to them. I owe thanks to Idske who patiently and painstakingly typed out the interview transcripts for me. I like the promptness in her work. I want to thank all my Dutch respondents for their friendliness and cooperation. It was very nice of you all to give me some time amidst your busy time schedules of the day.

I have stayed here in Groningen for five and a half years. It seems a very long time to me. My stay here in Groningen has been etched with memories that I will always remember. My hearty thanks go to Kaya (Dahlia) in whose house I stayed when I came to Groningen. She taught me many things about the Dutch way of life and I will remain always indebted to her for it. I learnt my first Dutch words from Kaya’s daughter Nina. Some words were difficult for me to pronounce at first like ‘knuffel’ but Nina would teach
them to me very patiently. Later on I learnt a substantial amount of Dutch listening to Anushka. I am thankful to Anurupa and Dinesh Borkar for making me feel at home every time I felt homesick. I will always cherish the wonderful homemade Indian food in their house and the relaxation that I enjoyed playing with their daughter Anushka. I would also take this opportunity to pay my gratitude to Dhar Uncle and Aunty and the small group of Indian friends that I had. Martha, I am very much grateful to your supportive attitude and for the wonderful person that you are. I loved the discussions that we often share ranging from the very personal ones to the very mundane issues. Yes, India is big but don’t worry you will not get lost in the crowd. So I wish you will visit India very soon.

My stay here in PRC has been eventful not only for research purposes but also meeting various people from different cultures. I enjoyed the time that I spent with my colleagues here in PRC. In these 5 and half years I have seen many people come and many people go. I enjoyed the company of Sabu, Salut, Ganesh, Hideko, Mamum, Moury, Maaïke, Karen, Tomáš, José, Samir, Nadja, Vanessa, Ajay, Elda, and Fanny. Biswamitra thanks a lot for taking printout of the chapters and posting them to Gina. I also enjoyed the short time that I spent with you here in Groningen. I also spent a very nice time laughing with Sandhya and Sharmila. Sharmila must have become a big girl now yet I will always remember her imitating the opera singer. I want to take this opportunity to thank my classmates in the MSc programme, Masud, Osama and Viktor for the various assignments that we did together. Viktor I thank you for helping me out with the SPSS syntax and the data analysis which I will always remember. I also am thankful to my office mates with whom I have shared the office as well as learnt many things about Netherlands, the Dutch way of living and Dutch culture. Thanks Jeanette, thanks Hendrik!!

Stiny, thank you very much for your patience in dealing with the numerous questions that I had and sorry for the times when I have knocked at your door when you were amidst a telephone conversation. It was nice to share with you your opinion about political issues at various points of time. In spite of the many work pressures that you had you have always cheerfully assisted in every administrative task, be it from sending the application to the Alien police of the residence permit to general questions about where to get a particular form in the secretariat. I also want to thank Mrs Gina Rozario for the English corrections that she did for this book. Thanks to Mr Auke van der Berg and his colleagues at the Dutch University Press for the support that you have given in the process of publishing this book.

I want to thank the members of my reading committee and the editorial board for their valuable and constructive comments, both general and specific. My sincere thanks to my promotores Prof. Inge Hutter and Prof. Frans Willekens for their guidance, patience, critical comments and support in my academic life in all these years. Your supportive attitude along with adequate room for critical discussions created a perfect environment to work together. I will strive to retain the style that I have imbibed so much from you, especially professionalism towards research, carefulness in analyzing and tactful formulation of research questions and objectives. Interactions with you have played an important role in my critical thinking. The several engrossing discussions about widely ranging issues will remain my fond memories of Groningen. In the initial period after Frans left Groningen for the Hague I did face slight problems as I was used to running to his office at the very indication of a problem in the data. But soon I got used to sending him my questions through email and there would be a prompt reply from him. The promptness in your reply gave me a lot of courage to wade through the troubled waters of data analysis. Inge I will always treasure the art of arguing out things tactfully and the logical presentation of ideas which I have learnt from you. Your expertise in qualitative research has been beneficial at several junctures in my thesis.
In the previous years the lunch table discussions and conversations has always been an interesting part of the day. It was a place where gossips were shared, research was discussed and new people in PRC were oriented to the group. Apart from this the various borrels that we had and parties at Frans’s and Inge’s house have always been very heart warming. Special thanks and regards to Maria for the several insightful discussions on various topics that I had with her and the warm home-made food at all the dinners at Kometenstraat.

Thankyou my friends Rajni, Renu, Shetal and Anubha in IIT Bombay with whom I have laughed and chatted in between the stressful time during completion of the chapters of the thesis. My little friends Suhani and Abhipsa playing with you has been a relaxation in itself. Chetan Solanki, thanks for being a helpful guide in making the layout of my thesis and nice time we have with you and your family.

I shower my heartfelt gratitude to my parents and my brothers from whom I had to be away for such a long time. It has been years since we all were at home together at the same time. My mother taught me to be tough in life and my father taught me to be calm. I have always put them into practice in my day to day life and particularly more often in the stressful days of completing the PhD. I also convey them my thanks for allowing me to come far, to let me achieve my dreams and attain the goals of my life. The trust they have in me makes me climb any rock of hardship with strong perseverance. Last year since my wedding, I have a new family which consists of my in-laws, Poornima, Ravi and Tejas. They have made many adjustments with my long stay away from them and have been liberal with my duties as a daughter-in-law. I am grateful to my parents-in-law for their encouragement and inspiration that were very much necessary during the last stage of my PhD.

Finally I thank my husband Madhu, the most precious part of my life with whom I have dreamt of walking many many miles of togetherness. I know it has been difficult for you all these days but thanks to the yahoo messenger, phone calls and frequent exchange of letters that kept the fire burning as lively as always. Very soon we will be together and yahoo messenger will be an obsolete thing of the past.

Thanking one and all who have been a part of the wonderful time that I had in Groningen.

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