



## Journal of International Women's Studies

Volume 19 | Issue 2

Article 7

Jan-2018

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### Recommended Citation

Kaushik, Geetanjali and Pullen, Alison (2018). Study of Gender as Social Practice and Tokenism in an Indian IT Company. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 19(2), 104-122.

Available at: <http://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol19/iss2/7>

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## **Study of Gender as Social Practice and Tokenism in an Indian IT Company**

By Geetanjali Kaushik<sup>1</sup> & Alison Pullen<sup>2</sup>

### **Abstract**

This systematic study is focused on examining women's gendered identity work in an Indian IT company. The research builds a body of work that explores female tokenism at senior positions and highlights tension in practicing gender. Research was conducted through semi-structured interviews with twenty two women employees utilizing the case study approach. A patriarchal Indian society and social construction of IT as feminine and rewarding for women is responsible for an increase of women participation in it. However, there is evidence of exclusion at all levels of hierarchy in the firm on accounts of gendering and social practices. There is prevalence of gender based discrimination in the nature of work allocated and the compensation received especially at the middle level. Gender stereotyping is related to such workplace discrimination. Women tokens at the higher levels have been unable to influence policy directions in favor of women employees. Frustrated women employees chose passive coping mechanisms such as acceptance as part of work culture and social expectations. Clearly, there are tensions between gender and social practice in the chosen firm. Companies have a significant role to play in nurturing and supporting women employees through a strong support system. Strategies include avoidance of negative connotations, mentoring, provision of work-life balance support initiatives, tough action against harassment, concerns of discrimination, and tokenism. The most important issue is awareness in the society which is effective in changing socially constructed beliefs and attitudes related to gender which would go a long way in improving women's experience in the workplace. Studies critically analyzing IT's implications on India's overall social and economic development are scarce. Further, there have been few sociological studies of work focusing on this industry or on its workforce. This study addresses the gap existing in the literature. To the best of our knowledge, this study is the first of its kind in the Indian context as the few studies previously conducted on women in the IT workforce ignored theoretical perspectives.

*Keywords:* gender, social practice, Tokenism, India, IT, female workforce

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## **Introduction**

### *The Indian IT Industry and women*

In the 1990s globalization made deep inroads on the Indian scene. This development set off market liberalization and the emergence of Information Technology (IT) sector in the country (Bhattacharyya and Ghosh, 2012). In addition to boosting up export earnings for the country and creating a pool of new entrepreneurs, IT sector had an inherent spill over benefit of creating employment potential for a large pool of educated youth, including an attractive option for women. It is noteworthy that the IT industry captured about 51 per cent of the global market (Kumar, 2001). According to the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology the investment in ICT had the greatest multiplier effect in the economy (GoI-MCIT, 2003). The tremendous employment potential exhibited by IT encouraged greater women's participation. The Indian IT-BPO industry emerged as the leading private sector employer in the country with direct employment of about 2.23 million professionals. The NASSCOM-Mencher-Report 2009, revealed that over the years the proportion of women in the workforce at entry levels, as well as middle level management, increased considerably and achieved 36% at the junior level in 2008. The main factors which encouraged women to participate in the IT sector included attraction to white-collar jobs with high salaries; easy international mobility; a gender-neutral policy based on skills; a flexible work routine and less laborious work in a comfortable indoor environment. High employment in IT inspired a large number of girls and young women to opt for computer engineering courses. Statistics from the NASSCOM-Mencher, 2009 report indicated that the IT industry, during 1980s had only 5 to 8 per cent of female engineering graduates, while in 2012 this figure shot up drastically to 20 to 30 per cent. Therefore, from the above discussion it is evident that India underwent exponential growth with regard to technological development especially for those living in the urban domain and working in the IT sector. It is widely contented that technology has immense potential to bring about considerable social change that ranges from a redefinition of gender roles to equalizing job roles in the labor force (Kelkar and Nathan, 2002). Also the IT sector attracts India's smartest brains so it is reasonable to expect higher levels of gender integration in the engineering workforce. Besides, it is assumed that higher levels of education are associated with modernization. Therefore, India's best educated citizens should be the first to contribute to the breakdown of traditional gender roles (Patel and Parmentier, 2005). Therefore, it is crucial to examine whether these assumptions are correct, and whether technology has caused a redefinition of gender roles or deterministically enhanced women's socio-political power. This study addresses these questions via a case study approach.

### *Aurangabad*

Aurangabad, located in the Maharashtra state of India, is a popular tourist hub surrounded with renowned historical monuments such as Ajanta Caves and Ellora Caves which have been classified as UNESCO World Heritage Sites (Qureshi, 1999). The city was declared as the Tourism Capital of Maharashtra (Suryawanshi, 2013). This city also happens to be one of the fastest growing cities across the globe with a large base of Automotive and engineering companies (consumer durables) components and product manufacturing. Annually 1.25 million two and three wheelers and 1.5 million other consumer goods like washing machines, refrigerators, and kitchen appliances are produced here. From six engineering colleges, around 2500 students graduate every year. The place has easy connectivity to Mumbai and the rest of the world (<http://www.expertgs.com/about.php>).

### *Expert Global Solutions*

Expert Global was established in 1990, and since then it has provided IT and Engineering solutions to companies across the world in the fields of engineering design, information technology and software development. Expert Global's presence combined the cost advantages offered by an offshore outsourcing partner with the benefits of a local presence through strategically located offices in USA, Europe, South Africa, and India. The company's suitably equipped workforce has been providing quality service to the customers. With the help of long term engagement models through a partnering approach, the organization consistently delivered outstanding results. In addition to being a business partner to IBM, the firm also boasts of being a solution partner to Siemens, certified partner to Microsoft and Oracle (<http://www.expertgs.com/about.php>).

## **Literature Review**

### *The Indian IT Industry*

India accounted for 65 percent of the global market for offshore IT services and 46 percent of global business processes offshoring in 2005 (NASSCOM-McKinsey Report, 2005). The boom in the sector resulted in firms rapidly ramping up their staff strengths. IT hubs developed first in big cities such as Mumbai, Bangalore, NCR and Hyderabad due to the availability of qualified human resources and infrastructure. Gradually, smaller cities started emerging as IT centers. Studies concluded that the majority of software engineers belonged to the middle class and were mainly drawn from metros and urban areas due to their command over English and other social factors (Krishna & Brihmadessam 2006; Upadhya & Vasavi, 2006). A 'skewed' development of the ICT sector towards low value software services implied that the capacity for high-end work was not built up and the low cost of labor was vulnerable to competition from other low-cost countries (Kumar, 2001). Further, the dependence of the Indian software industry on global capital and markets ensured its vulnerability to recession (Saith & Vijayabaskar, 2005). While the large software companies focused on provision of 'generic' services i.e. software development, maintenance, testing etc., the Indian SMEs (small/medium enterprises) concentrated on the low end of the software development cycle (coding, testing, and maintenance) (Rothboeck et al,2001). Consequently, large firm employees were considered as the 'cream' of software, but those of small companies were often less well-paid and were quite insecure, owing to the high instability of such companies. The rapid growth of the IT industry made it the most sought after career option for young people. However, every year despite India churning out a sizeable number of engineering and computer science graduates in IT-related subjects, a considerable proportion of them have been appropriate for only low-level jobs.

IT firms in India followed the 'new age' management model developed in the U.S. which advocated an open and informal work culture, and flat, flexible organizational structures for enhanced employee productivity and satisfaction (Gephart, 2002). However, 44 per cent employees believed closed, rigid and hierarchical systems persisted despite the ideology of informality and openness (Upadhya & Vasavi, 2006). A notable feature of the IT work culture in contrast to old economy was the fact that promotions in the industry were performance-based and instead of being in a fixed, time bound manner were rapid (Barrett, 2001). With regard to issues of work stress and over work, the company's responses ranged from recognition and action to denial. However, rather than attempting to address the root causes of stress, most companies started stress or time management programmes (Upadhya & Vasavi, 2006).

### *Gender Issues in IT Companies*

Gender is viewed in the contemporary literature as a social framework and relevant practices (Pullen & Simpson, 2009) in the form of behaviors, actions, identities expectations and discourses which are highly dynamic (Martin, 2003). The traits associated with masculinity include physical strength, assertiveness, dominance and leadership. In contrast emotional, supportive, nurturing, and submissive have been classified as feminine traits. Regardless of modernization and technological development, such traditional roles remain firmly entrenched at all levels of the society. IT is regarded as a new avenue of employment which, being 'knowledge work', does not leave any scope for discrimination on the basis of gender. The proportion of women in the software industry has been growing steadily over time (NASSCOM, 2004). This is in accordance with the data from 22 individual companies, whose gender ratios ranged from 15 to 30 per cent (Upadhyia & Vasavi, 2006). The gendering within the IT workforce is reflected by the fact that women tend to be concentrated in the lower level jobs such as programming and testing and are under-represented in higher level managerial jobs such as consulting and project management (Rothboeck et al, 2001). It is considered that the skills of majority of women workers are not suited for high-end jobs, and social restrictions on women's mobility reduce their participation (Basant & Rani, 2004). The inability of women to put in greater hours in job owing to family responsibilities produces resentment among male colleagues and a tendency to marginalize women. Further this also puts women at a disadvantage at the time of appraisal or work assignment as they are seen as being less dedicated. Another issue of concern is the belief that women are likely to quit after their marriage or having kids therefore, recruiters prefer male employees (Upadhyia & Vasavi, 2006). Another impediment to career growth for married women is the requirement for frequent travel abroad on short or long-term assignments. In addition social interaction in software companies is still gendered. This works against the women, who are unable to fit into male-dominated social groups which are built and strengthened after office hours over a beer mug or a cup of coffee. These factors also hinder the effective functioning of women managers (Upadhyia, 2006). On account of these reasons women tend to opt for jobs in quality assurance, maintenance or similar low-end functions. However, these jobs are usually paid less and offer fewer channels for growth, still women often prefer them. This form of self-selection pushes women towards the bottom of the ladder in terms of status and earning power, producing a pattern of gendering of work in the IT industry (Upadhyia & Vasavi, 2006).

### **Theoretical Perspectives on IT and Women**

#### *Macro Level Theories*

Generally three macro-level theories—namely neo-classical, labor market, and feminist have been used to explain the underrepresentation and related experiences of women in certain types of jobs (Anker, 1997). According to neoclassical/human capital theories lower training and experience are responsible for the sparse female representation in the workforce. Labor market theories imply that markets are segmented and that large numbers of women in certain occupations such as teaching, nursing etc. tend to drive the wages down, thus making them unattractive for men (Anker, 1997). Lastly the feminist theories ascribe the disadvantaged position of women in certain professions to patriarchy and women's subordinate social position. The societal expectations from homemakers and care providers explain the gender discrimination against women in the workforce.

### *Micro Level Perspectives*

Micro level perspectives may be classified in one of the three perspectives—essentialism, social constructivism, and individual differences (Trauth, 2002). According to essentialist paradigm there are vital, biological male and female traits which affect their willingness and ability to participate in IT careers. Differences in computer anxiety and aptitude have been explained as intrinsic gender characteristics (Venkatesh & Morris, 2000). Essentialism provides sociological explanations (Sayer, 1997) in contexts of gaming and entertainment, where males favor casino, arcade and sports games while women choose word games and puzzles. The theory of social constructivism suggests that socially constructed beliefs and attitudes might describe female participation and experiences in IT careers. The societal perception of IT as masculine and male dominated, may dissuade women from advancing in such professions (Beekhuyzen et al, 2003). The theory of individual differences (Trauth et al, 2004) concedes the resemblances between men and women as individuals and the disparities between them with regard to IT skills and inclination to participate in the sector (Trauth, 2002). This theory unequivocally recognizes the influence of culture which has been omitted in essentialism and of individual factors like personality which is absent from both essentialism and social constructivism. This theory has been applied to the study of female participation in engineering programs. The opponents of this theory propose that it ignores structural factors which provide an explanation for women's alienation from a field interpreted as masculine. A more balanced view might result when individual and social factors are viewed as dual elements of female representation in the IT workforce, where social drivers of IT are dealt with individual factors which encourage women to participate in such masculine careers (Henwood, 1998). With the above background on theoretical perspectives on IT, the dominant theoretical view emerges to be social construction theory (75.9%) which focuses on the social construction of IT as a male sphere of influence.

### *Social Practice*

Gender is viewed as social practice, which implies something realized through social interactions (Poggio, 2006). Giddens (1984). This view provides a broad conceptualization of gender by using social practices as the unit of analysis. This approach isolates the individual, segregates the components of social practices, which in Giddens' typology include the rules which govern human behaviour and the resources that make human activity possible. Giddens also notes that social identities (as defined by age and gender) are typically associated with guidelines for human conduct. According to West & Zimmerman (1987) executing gender reveals the interactional scaffolding of social structure.

### *Gender Practices*

Analysis of gender practices requires uncovering the 'structuring structure' and identifying the organized nexus of activity (Schatzki, 2001) rooted in the doing and saying of organizational actors. Organization scholars often refute claims that gender is irrelevant at work or that jobs are dis-embodied, gender-free 'empty slots' (Acker, 1998). However, in work settings, gender is reflexively practiced (Martin, 2003). Moreover, a concerted practicing of masculinities by men at work is more harmful for women rather than individual doing(s) of gender (Martin, 2001). Gender is practiced in almost all work settings, including boardrooms, insurance offices, restaurants, law firms, banks, construction sites, factories and even churches (Bird and Sokolofski, 2005). Gendering practices that become institutionalized are well known, widely used and practiced from

time after time. Gendering practices include widely known and accepted forms of dress, conduct, language, actions, and interests that are culturally available to and normatively associated with one or the other gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Organizations practice gender (both formally and informally) just like individuals, when creating policy, arranging meetings, evaluating subordinates, assigning tasks and devising plans (Martin, 1996). From the literature it is clear that the Indian IT industry has not been researched deeply for gender practices. Further, the concept of tokenism has been formulated in a way so as to allow the investigation of the work behavior of any minority group, but it has proved most useful for examining women in non-traditional jobs, where current trends have often placed them in highly skewed situations.

### *Tokenism*

Laws (1975) first popularized the concept through her analysis of the special problems faced by women entering a male-dominated setting. Laws emphasized a token's marginal status as a participant who is allowed to enter owing to possession of requirements for entrance into a group, but is not allowed to fully participate owing to lack of characteristics (sex, race, ethnicity) prerequisite for persons in that position. Tokens are never permitted to become complete members but may be evicted if expected behaviors are not displayed by them. This pressure restricts career advancement. A study by Williams (1992) concluded that men working in women dominated occupations such as nursing, teaching, and social work did not face discrimination as tokens; instead, they received structural advantages that enhanced their careers. Evidence has suggested that an increase in the number of minorities is associated with an enhanced resistance by Whites (Gustafson, 2008). Kanter's theory of tokenism has been widely tested across a range of gender inappropriate work settings. Studies have examined token female soldiers, cadets, scientists, physicians, executives, academic faculty and engineering students. Other studies have focused on token male nurses, elementary school teachers, flight attendants and child care and clerical workers (Cognard-Black, 2004; Young & James, 2001). Several authors have researched tokenism in the police force (Wertsch, 1998; Gustafson, 2008). It is an emerging global phenomenon that an increasing number of women are taking on responsibilities at a managerial level right up to the corporate boardrooms. While there are a large number of women at the entry level in organizations these numbers decline sharply as women climb the ladder. 2005 Catalyst Census of Women Board of Directors of the Fortune 500 companies revealed that while women comprised 46.4% of the labor force, 14.7% found way to boardrooms and only 1.6% reached on the top as CEOs. Over the years literature has shown the prevalence of token representation (Arfken et al, 2004).

IT has been regarded as a model for India's future economic growth and development. Reports exist which discuss the history (Lakha, 1994; Heeks, 1996; Heitzman, 1999; Kumar, 2000, 2001), growth (Millar, 2000; Parthasarathy, 2000; Patlibandla, et al, 2000) and structure of the Indian IT industry (Saxenian, 2000; Saith & Vijayabaskar, 2005). But studies critically analyzing its implications on India's overall social and economic development are scarce. Further, there have been few sociological studies of work focusing on this industry or on its workforce (Fuller & Narasimhan, 2005, 2007). In order to address this gap, it was considered necessary to focus on a systematic study to explore tokenism and gender practices prevalent in an Indian IT company using the social practice approach. This study, to the best of our knowledge, would be the first of its kind in the Indian context. Most studies conducted on women members of the IT workforce have ignored theoretical perspectives; therefore, despite being a case study, its contribution to the literature we believe is notable.

## Research Design

This study aimed to assess the influence of gender practices on the experiences of women employees and to explore women tokenism at senior positions. Such a study advocates for an in depth research method which is sensitive to situation and context. Case study is a flexible research design that offers experimental research within natural settings. It is particularly useful for conducting research on organizations and firms (Adya, 2008). When organizations are the subject of enquiry the case study becomes complex and involves too many actors to be addressed, such scenarios are appropriate for interviews. Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to deeply explore participant's experiences and opinions and collect data for explanation of observed behavior or attitudes (Matthews and Ross, 2010). In terms of participant selection for a semi-structured interview a purposive non-probability sampling is employed. Participants are chosen 'with purpose' because of their experience or opinions on the research topic which enables researcher to explore the research questions in depth or develop a theory (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). For the study a stratified purposive sampling was undertaken and women employees at lower, middle and upper levels of hierarchy were identified to compare for differences and similarities.

Semi-structured, open-ended interviews allowed the interviewees to express their personal views and discuss their individual experiences in the Indian IT company. The interview with each participant lasted about 45 minutes to an hour. The research questionnaire (Adya and Kaiser, 2005; Trauth et al, 2004) covered four main areas- including demographic information, work experience, general questions about gender and IT and recommendations concerning the manner in which society, the IT profession and educational institutions may address the gender imbalance in IT (von Hellens and Nielsen, 2001). During the course of interviews, participants were often prompted for more details, specific examples or beliefs to support or better explain their responses. If a participant was uncomfortable while responding to a particular topic, she was not further probed. Study volunteers were also questioned about their inspiration for taking up a career in IT, the role of family and friends in this decision and career role models.

## Data Analysis

The interviews with participants were conducted (with consent) and recorded in the field notes copy. The data has been organized according to strata or hierarchy in the company, with women employees at the lower, middle and upper levels (table 4.1) respectively. Four key themes identified were firstly the choice of IT career and role of family in its selection and secondly the work environment and the interaction with colleagues, supervisors and clients. Next and the most important theme, concerned discrimination faced in the nature of work allocated and the compensation received. The last theme was the future organizational role in which women would expect themselves to be seen over the next few years. These themes were compared across the three strata; consequently, similarities and dissimilarities were observed, which were then explained with theoretical evidence from literature.

**Table 1: Sampling approach**

Lower Level	Middle Level	Upper Level
Jayshree Deval (22), Sales Coordinator	Vishakha (36), Team leader	Mitali Mishra (28) HOD (Software Development & Sales)

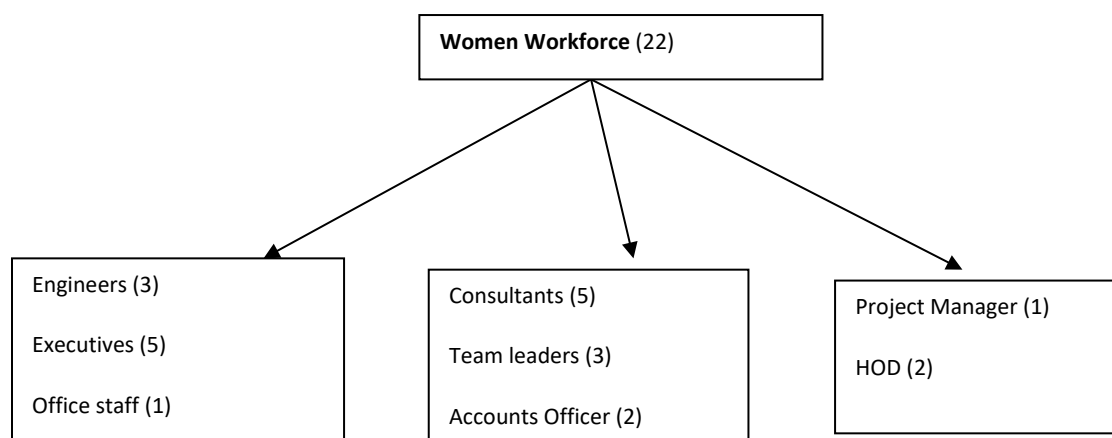


Shivani Sane (41), ISR (Insight Sales Representative)	Pradnya Katare (34), Team Leader	Neha Deshkar (42) HOD (Accounts & Finance Department)
Amruta Deshpande (26), HR Executive	Anagha Deshpande (29), CAD Consultant.	Janhavi Sohani (33), Project Manager
Muba Sshira Harihar (24), ISR	Pradnya Kulkarani (29), CAD Consultant	
Ambreen Qureshi, (25) Senior Developer.	Pradnya Dushing (25), CAD Consultant	
Neelima Shivram (29), IT Recruitment	Sukhada Kulkarni (31), CAD Consultant	
Sneha Kinkar (23), Senior Developer	Priyadarshini (22), Team leader	
Ragini Vishwamitr (23), Senior Developer	Chandana Mangolkar (24), Senior Software Engineer	
Madhuri Thigale (25), Front Office Executive	Deepali Joshi (40), Accounts Officer	
	Bhagyashree (27), Accounts Officer	

## Results and Discussion

### *Demographics*

The demographic profile of volunteers suggested that overall, the women IT workforce of Expert Global was comprised of young women who had readily taken IT as their careers. A NASSCOM (2004) survey revealed that the median age of the software professionals was 29 years and that 70 per cent of the work force was in the age group of 26-35. The participation of Muslim women, women from lower castes and married women in the IT workforce was encouraging. However, when the samples were closely examined (Figure 5.1) it was evident that only three women out of twenty-two reached the higher echelons in the hierarchy.



**Figure 1: Workforce Hierarchy**

The majority (85 percent) was still confined to the lower and middle levels and also there was no female Director in the company Board. This corroborated the presence of a prominent 'glass ceiling effect' in the Indian context (Kelkar et al, 2002; Upadhya, 2006). Despite being substantially present at the middle level positions, glass ceiling prevented women from reaching the top level. The study highlighted that female representation in managerial IT positions was disproportionately lower as compared to men (Igbaria and Baroudi, 1995) since women often encounter a glass ceiling effect in mid-level positions.

#### *Choice of IT and Role of Family in Career Choice*

Most of the participants had an inclination towards computers and IT. Others studied allied branches of engineering (Mechanical, Electrical and Electronics) and specialized into computer aided designing to enter in IT. Father's support was the biggest motivation to join IT. India is a male dominated society, so patriarchal support (Jejeebhoy and Sathar, 2001) is the greatest factor for increasing women's participation in any field. In certain cases, the cooperation and support of a husband was also mentioned. It is important to note that support of fathers, husbands or of any other male figure was acknowledged not just for the initial breakthrough but also for help in getting firmly established in the career. The significant role of parents and family in the choice of IT careers was not surprising given the collectivist nature of South Asian countries where parental and spousal influence on career decisions is common (Adya, 2008). However such strong patriarchal influence was surprising given the fact India made huge technological advancements and women work in almost all the spheres of economy from teachers, doctors, lawyers, scientists and even as CEOs of MNCs.

IT as a career has been promoted for women, as the society considers IT to be 'feminine' as compared with civil or mechanical engineering which are highly 'masculine' streams. Therefore, there is a tendency to prefer an IT career for daughters or wives. On account of such societal perceptions, several participants openly revealed the opposition posed by relatives to the study of technical streams by girls as they involve considerable physical labour in the field.

*“When I was enrolling for a Diploma in Mechanical Engineering I faced stiff resistance from my relatives but my father encouraged me to join the course” – Pradnya Kulkarani (29), CAD Consultant.*

The volunteers mentioned that IT was chosen as it is considered safer compared to field jobs. In addition during early 2000 there was a significant boom in IT therefore a combination of these factors encouraged women to join IT. Few participants mentioned that logical and analytical skills required in IT along with the opportunity to create new things, were a great motivation for them.

#### *Work Environment: Relationship with Colleagues, Supervisors and Customers*

With regard to their current work environment most of the women felt that the environment was nice and words like friendly, cooperative, and comfortable were used to denote the workplace setting. However, the incidences reported by the employees suggested otherwise and there were instances of misbehaviour by male colleagues.

*“The male taster in my team was very critical of my work particularly in front of my boss. It resulted in severe tensions between us” – Pradnya Katare (34), Team Leader in Software solutions.*

This type of behaviour was not just restricted to junior staff even very senior staff; HOD expressed similar views of misconduct by male colleagues.

*“Several times I felt that men were uncomfortable in dealing with me”-Neha Deshkar (42), HOD (Accounts & Finance Department).*

Another issue which was highlighted in the course of deliberations concerned the harassment or eve teasing which happened during the shifts.

*“Being the only women in the shift I was targeted by all the men present in the shift” – Chandana Mangolkar (24), Senior Software Engineer.*

Majority of women believed that supervisors were supportive and cooperative but they were more comfortable with women supervisors as compared to male administrators. They felt that for them it is easy to share their problems with a lady boss than a male in charge.

*“While posted on a task in another department with my male colleagues, my boss badly behaved with me. It immensely hurt my self-esteem” – Pradnya Katare (34), Team Leader in Software solutions.*

The interaction with clients was also not immune to friction. Women who interacted with clients on a regular basis reported instances of impolite behaviour by customers.

*“An impolite customer once sent a harsh email for blaming me for the delay in assignment when he himself had not specified any deadline for the project” – Vishakha (36), Team leader.*

Women described their workplace as cooperative, friendly and comfortable environment and colleagues as nice people but these “good people” practice gender (Martin, 2001) in various ways which may or may not be intentional but are harmful for the women employees. As is quite evident from the study- aggressiveness, rudeness, misbehaviour and harassment amount to gender practices at work. On account of these practices women workers felt frustrated.

### **Discrimination at work**

IT companies often promote themselves as equal opportunities employer and claim that there is no discrimination in the allocation of work to men and women staff; segregation is done only on the basis of ability.

*“Allocation of work assignments is based entirely on ability however, the work requiring extensive travelling are delegated to men” – Vishakha (36), Team leader.*

However, quite contrary was the fact that some women employees believed that there was discrimination in nature of work allocated and the compensation received. Women considered that the work was allocated in a manner which made them feel as junior and incapable of dealing with difficult tasks.

*“Since I am young my supervisors do not have a high opinion about me therefore the work allocated to me is of junior level” – Jayshree Deval (22), Sales Coordinator.*

Further, when the work was needed urgently or job was more challenging the tendency was to avoid women and give it to male employees.

*“When the assignment deadlines are close, work is only assigned to male colleagues. Usually the salary and increments of female employees are lower than those of men” – Pradnya Kulkarani (29), CAD Consultant.*

The data provided strong evidence for sex specific labelling of jobs which implied identification of a job as ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’. The jobs that were challenging, urgent and required extensive travelling were preferred for male employees while administrative jobs were favoured for women. Women employees also acknowledged that they received lesser salary and fewer increments as compared even to those men who joined later than them.

Gender stereotyping has been related with workplace discrimination and unequal success of men and women at workplace (Eagly and Mladinic, 1994). These effects get exaggerated in environments that are perceived to be masculine (Heilman, 1995). The average Indian woman is believed to earn only 60% of that earned by men in the same job and women occupied only 3% of the management positions in the business sector (Patel and Parmentier, 2005). Similar views were expressed in studies on women in the U.S. (technology and engineering) workforce wherein women received lower salaries than their male counterparts with comparable education and qualifications (Gaudin, 2003; Sumner and Niederman, 2004). Further, these salaries showed a much slower growth as compared to those of men (Goldberg, et al, 2004). This form of bias in form of work and salary were considered to be a significant loss by women and this caused them immense depression. Still the women did not show any rebellious behaviour to discrimination rather chose to conform to it.

*“My male colleagues are paid more salary than me, however my sole consolation is that they have to work in shifts” – Muba Sshira Harihar (24), ISR.*

In a study on women in IT a comparison of US and Indian women it was observed that in response to workplace discrimination Indian women exhibited passive response such as acceptance as part of work culture and social expectations (Adya, 2008).

The elements of culture are often discernible through personal beliefs, nation’s value systems and artifacts that symbolize these beliefs and values (Schein, 1985). These cultural elements influence societal and organizational structures. According to Hofstede (1980) there are five main dimensions of national culture such as power distance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity, avoidance of uncertainty and a short term orientation versus long-term

orientation. A high power distance in Indian context implies the societal acceptance of inequalities. Further, Indian society is collectivist in nature where social and institutional structures take care of the individual in return for long term loyalty and commitment. Moreover, a long-term orientation allows women to comply with short-term challenges (i.e. bias and discrimination at workplace) for greater returns (career advancement) in the long run (Adya, 2008). However, it is important to note that such mannerisms have become grounded in daily social practices and behaviours to the extent that these ensure Indian women not only accept discrimination at work (Hofstede, 1980) but also exhibit a passive response to it (Morris et al, 1998).

### **Organizational Role in the Recent Future**

When the women were questioned about the future organizational role they would like to portray the majority (lower in hierarchy) responded as team leader, manager or head of department. The women were motivated by their respective women team leaders, managers and head of departments.

*“I am motivated by our lady HOD and wish to progress in the organizational hierarchy like her (Manager Level)” – Muba Sshira Harihar (24), ISR.*

However, the women failed to recognise the tokenism present at higher levels of hierarchy. Tokenism (Martin, 1996) is greatly relevant for examining women in this IT Company as despite the presence of two Head of Departments and a Project Manager these women were unable to influence policy directions in favour of women employees. Further their actions were limited to consoling the women staff in incidences of bias and misdemeanour. Despite lack of power in hands of token women in charge the employees at lower levels wished to be like them and the management would groom them as future tokens.

Some employees thought about a change in job or shifting the current job location whereas others wished to start a new business.

*“My job is quite hectic owing to which I am unable to devote time to my growing kids consequently I am shifting to teaching profession” – Sukhada Kulkarni (31), CAD Consultant.*

*“In future I intend to start my own organization” – Vishakha (36), Team leader.*

The ones occupying higher positions in hierarchy opined that Expert Global was a small organization so no more change in position would be expected only seniority with greater responsibilities would result in future.

*“Expert Global being a small organization would not offer more scope in terms of promotion, in the future only seniority with greater responsibilities would follow” – Neha Deshkar (42), HOD (Accounts & Finance Department).*

Although the majority was optimistic about progressing in the organizational ladder a select few believed that the barrier in their advancement was their inability to highlight the achievements in front of the management.

*“I am poor in showcasing my achievements in front of the management therefore, I do not feel I would be considered for a promotion even in the next 3-5 years” – Pradnya Kulkarani (29), CAD Consultant.*

Another significant barrier was the burden of domestic responsibilities which constrained the progress of women employees.

*“I do not wish to climb the hierarchy ladder because that would involve greater responsibilities at work leading to neglect of my home” – Shivani Sane (41), ISR.*

A very important issue that came to the fore from the discussion was that owing to certain personal beliefs some women themselves did not wish to progress further in their career. Such behaviours amounted to personal barriers.

*“I am comfortable being a Team Leader and would not like to progress further in the hierarchy as I would not be able to tackle behavioural issues of others” – Vishakha (36), Team leader.*

Similarly in a study on Indian IT workforce 54 per cent wished to continue in IT, 5 per cent responded in negative and 35 per cent believed in staying in the industry for some time and then trying a different job such as media or finance or teaching. Women expressed greater desire to leave the industry as compared to men (Upadhya and Vasavi, 2006).

During interviews women suggested the pressures of work life balance. Despite this majority of woman did not express a desire to leave their workplace or IT careers. A social, economic and educational structure that permits few digressions from the chosen careers might be accountable for this phenomenon (Adya, 2008). In addition a long term orientation and growth plans also motivated women to stay focused on a single career. While these factors explained the greater career entrenchment among the IT women, they were also responsible for greater alienation and frustration when the women did not find satisfactory work environments. This was observed to be true as two women did express dissatisfaction from their workplace prompting them to express a desire to shift to other career or location.

### Summary

Table 6.1 summarizes findings from the study; results are summed to the group level, though individual differences caused by personality, work experiences, socioeconomic status and family structure did exist in each group. In order to highlight these individual differences the narrations of personal experiences have been interspersed throughout the study.

**Table 2: Study findings**

Key themes	Findings	Explanation
Choice of IT and Role of Family in Career choice	Significant role of parents (father) and family in choice of IT careers	Patriarchal support Collectivist nature of South Asian countries
Duration in IT, types of positions and organizations	For younger participants (Executives) - Expert Global is the first company after their	Long term orientation Social construction of loyalty towards company

	studies. The middle level (Consultants) has worked in the company for a considerable duration (7-8 years). Senior most (>38 years) employees have a wide array of experience.	
Awareness about support partner of IBM	Participants aware of Expert Global's business partnership with IBM but unaware of IBM's practices regarding women at work. According to them celebration of Sports day Women's day, National festivals, health related camps and monthly meetings with HR were for the benefit of women employees.	Partnership with global companies only for increasing their reach so only the best practices in sales are followed. <i>Corporate Hypocrisy</i> and <i>Eye washing</i> of multinationals
Current Work Environment with regard to relationship with fellow workers, supervisors and customers	Junior staff even very senior staff; expressed views of misconduct by male colleagues Harassment or eve teasing reported during shifts	Gender practices Culture Social practices
Perception of Discrimination	Majority chose to ignore discrimination few feel bias in nature of work allocated and compensation received Passive coping mechanism such as acceptance as part of work culture and social expectations	Gender stereotyping Power distance Long-term orientation Collectivism
IT as a rewarding career	IT job in a comfortable environment, develops logic, trains in new techniques; remuneration is high and offers choice in projects. Enhances personality and decision making power of employees.	Social construction of IT feminine and rewarding for women
Challenges in IT	Long working hours, working in shifts, long travelling times strict timings, fewer holidays, high work load, and constant skill up gradation to stay in the job market are stressful especially for women.	Social pressure of work life balance is commonly cited challenge of IT work
Organizational role in the recent future	Majority is optimistic about progressing in the organizational ladder and staying in IT	Social, economic and educational structure Long term orientation

## **Conclusion**

Indian society is collectivist in nature with a prominent patriarchy; therefore, there is a significant role of parents and family in the choice of careers for women. The social construction of IT as feminine and rewarding for women is responsible for an increase in women's participation in IT. However, there was evidence of exclusion in the chosen Indian IT company. Women across all levels in the hierarchy expressed views of misconduct by male colleagues in the form of rudeness and aggressiveness. Young women reported teasing especially during the shifts. Such behaviours provided evidence in favour of gender practices that were explained by culture and social practice. Further, there was sex specific labelling of jobs which implied identification of jobs as 'masculine' or 'feminine'. Women tokens at the higher levels were unable to influence policy directions in favour of women employees. Although a majority of women chose to ignore discrimination; nonetheless, a few felt biases in the nature of work allocated and the compensation received which resulted in stress and frustration. Gender stereotyping was related to workplace discrimination. Women chose passive coping mechanisms such as acceptance as part of work culture and social expectations. Hence, it is clearly evident that there were tensions between gender and social practice in an Indian IT company. This research posed a critical question as to why in the Indian context this IT organization with a high gender ratio reproduced the same conclusions as those in case of a male dominated setting such as an Engineering firm.



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