

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Woman! Stand Up and Be Counted

I wish that every human life might be pure transparent freedom.

Simone de Beauvoir

What does the Research Reveal?

This research began with the primary objective of finding out what is glass ceiling and how it is distinct from other forms of job inequalities, whether it exists in the IT sector in India and what are the causes for its existence. The first step to examining this inequality would be to scrutinise the available evidence on the phenomenon. This has been done through an extensive review of literature and then through field work in Bangalore and Mysore. In order to clarify the nature of the phenomenon of glass ceiling, in this research a sociological definition for the glass ceiling as a social fact has been suggested. In this manner the concept of glass ceiling redefined has been rendered fit for analysis.

To examine for the presence of glass ceiling and the extent of its influence this research carries an extensive survey of a variety of literature on the theme. This survey of literature contained in chapter 2 of the thesis fulfilled manifold objectives. At the most basic level it revealed *prima facie* the existence of glass ceiling worldwide as a deeply entrenched and complex phenomenon that inhibits the occupational mobility of women in the workplace in all sectors of the economy, and paradoxically ever more so in the IT sector. At a higher level, the review pointed to significant lacunae in existing literature on the theme especially that with core sociological content. Further, the review showed the relative absence of significant literature in the Indian context except such as data emanating from international or national survey research agencies. Survey data however illuminating they may be, cannot constitute the body of any discipline. At a still higher level of abstraction the study of literature revealed that there is a void in the conceptual understanding of the phenomenon of the glass ceiling. For, to make common sense of a reality is one thing, and to actually articulate it in the form of a conceptual statement is quite the other. It

was found that there is as yet no clear sociological definition for the phenomenon of glass ceiling.

The literature review thus revealed crucial gaps in knowledge. These gaps in knowledge have given justification and impetus for this research. It is believed that through this research a fruitful attempt has been made to bridge these knowledge gaps. The review exposed the urgent need for building disciplinary knowledge to lay the foundations for the sociological understanding of the glass ceiling. In this research glass ceiling has been defined as a social fact that has been elucidated in chapter 5 along with the descriptive dimension of the primary data. In this manner the definition of glass ceiling that has been formulated was put to the test of empirical data.

Towards this end field work was conducted among employees in IT companies in Bangalore and Mysore. Chapter 3 contains a description of the state of Karnataka the site of the research. Karnataka enjoys a preeminent position in India where information technology is concerned. Bangalore is well known as the Silicon Valley of India. An overview of the state threw up a number of insightful observations including to do with matters of state policy that have been described in detail in the chapter. It is found that developments in information technology have not been able to adequately translate themselves into meaningful life indices for the poor, the women and the marginalised. IT if anything has generated greater inter-regional and social disparities.

Field work in Karnataka was conducted in two components. The industry data were collected through the method of network analysis using questionnaires and exhaustive in depth personal interviews. The survey sample comprised of 510 executives at various job positions from different organisations, 273 women and 237 men. The second segment of data collection was in the form of interview and questionnaire survey of 104 students (70 men and 34 women) of final semester computer engineering in a well-known engineering college in Mysore. In chapter 4 the details of the methodology have been provided and the methodological dilemmas have been addressed. Both surveys yielded rich findings in quantitative as well as qualitative terms. The subjective opinions of the respondents have contributed to the measure of analysis that this research has been able to provide.

In this thesis the concept of glass ceiling has been sociologically stated based on Durkheim's conception of the social fact. As a social fact a glass ceiling can be said to exist when there are progressively fewer women than men at each successive level in the organisational hierarchy given that women and men so considered have more or less similar levels of educational attainment; and when this gap between the number of women and men widens at each successive level; and when men experience greater occupational mobility and earn higher salaries than women at all levels of job. A glass ceiling may be inferred when any of the above conditions are brought into existence. It is a gender inequality that *increases over the job hierarchy (and not in the course of a person's career)* as dispersed in the various career levels as a social fact.

It is argued that though an individual's career path may or may not show glass ceiling to be in operation the inequality itself has an *a priori* existence over and above that of the individual and his or her career concerns. Incumbents at various jobs may change but glass ceiling as a social fact remains uniform throughout the organisation and by extension the entire sector of the industry. It is for this reason that statistics pertaining to glass ceiling have remained more or less consistent across organisations and when collected by different agencies including in the present survey. As a social fact the glass ceiling is external to the individual, it is general throughout the given structure; it exerts a coercive power over the individuals and has an existence beyond the professional tenures of individual men and women managers. It is not the product of the individual whim and whatever may be the liberal mindedness of an individual disposition, glass ceiling as a social fact is to be found in a uniform measure in any given career universe.

This definitional construct of the glass ceiling has been detailed in chapter 5 and field data has been analysed to test for the presence of glass ceiling for women in the IT sector through the parameters provided by this definition.

The findings from the field, summarized below are discussed in detail in chapters 5, 6 and 7.

Industry Survey

The findings reveal a sharp decline in the number of women from junior level to the senior level. Only about 2% of the women make it to senior positions in comparison to 17% of the men who do so. A male manager with a graduate degree has a 16 times greater chance to attain a senior management position as compared to a female engineering graduate. A male manager with a post-graduation degree has a 4 times higher chance of reaching senior manager's level than a woman post graduate. Men show at least 8 times greater probability of promotion to senior levels than women with similar qualifications. In the younger age groups as they are recruited women and men start with more or less similar salaries. The salary difference between women and men increases from 5.3% in junior levels to 38% at the senior, amounting to an increase of 32% in favour of the men.

All the criteria for identifying glass ceiling are conclusively met by the data beyond any reasonable doubt. This enables one to infer through this research, the primary existence of glass ceiling for women in the IT sector in India.

It is seen from the field research that the IT sector has grown tremendously and has generated employment in large measure. In spite of this development, jobs for women at higher levels have not improved. This led one to wonder at the reasons for this aberration. The question that emerged became twofold: *Why is this happening?* And, *what is to blame for this?* In chapter 6 a systematic attempt has been made to answer these questions. The prevailing explanations that were described in the literature review were laid out for testing through the copious primary data with a view to deduce with a level of certainty with regard to the causative aspects of the phenomenon of glass ceiling.

Effort was made to gauge the culture of organisations to explore whether IT organisations knowingly or unknowingly foster a culture of inequity, through employees' perceptions on various indices such as fairness in their work conditions, the degree to which their work potential has been developed, their levels of job satisfaction, the organisation's commitment to diversity, the importance of gender in work allocation and career growth, interaction among co-workers, and the sexual harassment strictures in place. Although the very presence of glass ceiling as revealed by objective indices such as salary and differential occupational mobility of men and

women abnegates the idea of fairness in workplace conditions, attempt was made to understand the subjective opinions of the employees on their perceptions of their work conditions and organisational culture.

The study shows that a majority of the women, 58% are unable to perceive any discrimination that may prevail at work. Behavioural scientists have alluded to this persistent denial of disadvantage among women in the workplace even though objective indices of reward all point to such disadvantage. Empirical literature on glass ceiling mentions that women do not get sufficient share of desirable assignments and competitive work experience. In terms of job satisfaction levels 71% of the women express a fair degree of job satisfaction. However, only 60% of the men have feelings of job satisfaction showing a fairly sizable gap of about 11% between the perceptions of men and women on job satisfaction.

The study shows that women enter their careers with appreciably lower expectations than men and are quite easily satisfied with whatever recompenses the job offers. Though in absolute terms and relative to the women the men are far better in the industry their satisfaction levels are noticeably lower. Most of the interviewed women reported feelings of being “fortunate” or “truly blessed” or plain “lucky” conveying an (erroneous) impression that they had received more than they rightly deserved. The men on the other hand made for more demanding employees and did not attribute their success mainly to good luck rather to their own hard work and ability. Psychologists have found that individuals with a strong internal “locus of control” (their extent of belief that they have control over their own lives) believe more that they are responsible for their successes while others attribute their success (or failure) to factors outside of themselves such as the environment or extra-natural factors like luck or fate. This qualitative difference in the mindsets of men and women has been a consistent strand throughout the survey regardless of the sphere of thinking involved.

Most IT organisations pride themselves on their gender and pro diversity policies. Often women are appointed heads of human resources and diversity related departments in organisations. There are efforts to provide a ‘women-friendly’ organisational culture. In fact all my interview respondents concurred unequivocally that their respective organisations were indeed serious about women related matters.

There is zero tolerance towards sexual harassment; and that is only one component of the initiatives taken for women. Therefore when it came to the question of actual incidence of having witnessed or experienced sexually undesirable behaviours it is noteworthy that 89% of the women categorically deny having observed or undergone any kind of sexual harassment.

Both, 76% of the women and 79% of the men agreed that indeed IT organisations have proactive diversity policy. At the same time women later in their careers start experiencing the disjunction between organisation policy and actual practice. While only 37% of the women in junior management find gender an important variable in career growth ultimately 100% of the women senior managers declare that their gender is a crucial variable that impedes their career mobility. Though more men at senior levels are willing to concede the importance of gender still there are 52% men who continue to believe that gender is not an important variable in career growth. This shows that perceptions on injustice vary depending upon which end of the situation one resides in. A woman especially a senior manager understands all too well and regrettably the meaning of being a woman.

Though 83% of women executives felt that they were given adequate opportunities for skill enhancement at work to develop as employees, 44% of the women and 47% of the men feel that gender becomes a basis when it comes to actual selection for assignments. All else being roughly the same men have better chances of being picked for crucial tasks. This attitude seems widespread among bosses across genders. Men and women admitted in the course of interviews that all things considered they would prefer a male over a female in the interest of the continuity of their team for executing projects. Such is the stranglehold of gender predispositions that even a woman boss will pick those persons (men) who she feels will lend stability to her team. She is reluctant to mentor a junior woman and help shape her career. Women despite being the victims themselves often unconsciously perpetrate the same discrimination driven by deleterious beliefs that shape their mindsets.

The undesirable consequence of this is the creation of **glass walls**, a surely but steadily executed measure of inter-gender occupational segregation. Over time the men gain a wealth of job related exposure that women lose out on. Since women are

deprived crucial work exposure they can ascend the job ladder only up to a certain level. A fall out of this is the inevitable glass ceiling.

This analysis also shows that in a highly competitive work sphere antagonisms and resentments among peers can happen but these are not specifically gender centric. Co-workers are not apparently hostile to women *because they are women*. Success inspires awe, envy and certain veiled animosity and this is common across genders. Admittedly ironically due to the glass ceiling women do not experience such success as to have the others resent them.

Further, the two genders do not socialise much within the workplace. As per the responses of the employees majority of those who claim to often interact socially with co-workers across genders belong to junior management levels. The access of opportunities to women at least cannot be said to be contingent in any measure upon their level of dialogic communication with colleagues. In most cases the universe of communication is a rather impersonal one and co-workers interact through cyber tools such as Instant Messaging, email, text messages etc. Moreover, men and women avoid personal intermingling at work due to the stringent sexual harassment legislation that organisations also zealously implement.

The research found that in terms of being able to devote to their careers when it comes to putting in hours at work both men and women put in a fair amount of time at work. Overall on an average a woman manager works 45 hours a week and the male manager works 47 hours in a week a difference of 2 hours or a very nominal difference of about 5%. Split into job levels, the average woman junior manager works 44 hours a week whereas her counterpart male manager works 47 hours, a difference of 3 hours weekly which is about half an hour extra per day in a five-day working week. It is argued that it is this extra half hour or more a day put in early on in the career that gives the vital head start to the male manager. At the start of their careers when employees ought to give their utmost to their professional lives women's time and preoccupations unfortunately get diversified between vital life concerns. Women also experience a stricter adherence to time constraints laid out by their families and usually cannot stay late at work, and as respondents revealed, office managers also avoid keeping women late at work. There are also labour laws to comply with and the general deterioration in urban safety conditions in big cities.

Hence, the little extra that men are able to put in at the onset gives them continued leverage. Finally by the time a woman does actually reach a senior management position she in fact works on average a gruelling 50 hours a week and the male manager continues in his trend working 49 hours a week. The woman has to in fact work harder to prove herself and to retain her high level position. This is in effect the **glass cliff** hypothesis that behavioural scientists have argued about.

Concerns about job security constitute an important element of career orientation. In the survey we find that 46% women are concerned about aspects of securing their jobs to a lesser or greater degree. In relation to this 43% of men have apprehensions about job security. The increasing desire in the women to secure their jobs illustrates that women have also started assuming crucial provider roles within the family. Married women in particular reveal deeper job related worries. This also shows that the conventional male bread winner paradigm is undergoing a shift in middle class corporate India. If we compare married women with single women, 22% of married women expect to continue in their jobs long term while only 16% of the single women are able speak about their long term career plans. Women especially in the younger age groups also forego career opportunities for personal events that may not have yet transpired like the prospect of marriage or starting a family. The men on the other hand seek to strategically change jobs to better their career prospects seeking positional jumps and salary hikes and get ahead faster in their careers in the long run.

The woman's career still remains a function of her familial and conjugal situation. Women's compliance with social expectations that leads to their aborted careers cannot be considered the offshoot of their own latent wishes to do so or as a matter of exercise of 'choice'. When the actual reasons for quitting were ascertained in terms of tangible reasons for wishing to quit 24% of women admit that they want to quit for better prospects, 13% for fulfilling family responsibilities, 15% on account of health reasons and a major 48% due to work pressures. When it comes to quitting for bettering their career prospects, at nearly 41% the number of men is far greater than that of women. Women are 34% more likely than men to quit their jobs on account of family responsibilities. Health becomes an important reason for the women to quit. Women are up to three times more likely to quit for health reasons than men. Their opting out in the interest of the larger good is not be construed as a sign of lack of career orientation.

Women taking the male-centric view of the world try to actualise themselves through their conjugal and motherhood roles rather than as individuals. Their sense of self-worth is to a great extent shaped by their score card in their feminine roles.

Ultimately any analysis of an inequality that is not supported or condoned by institutional structures has to be in some ways understood through these and other such imperceptible differences in the socio-psychological states of the participants themselves. These core beliefs internalised by both men and women at times even without conscious thought gnaw at the root of the careers of women. That and accompanied by the fact that a woman's work is supposed only for the benefit of extra income and little else creates the necessary cultural ambience that sustains inequalities in the workplace.

The research revealed that patriarchy also retains its covert stronghold in the domain of the family. 24% of the women and 25% of the men admitted that their households were male dominated. From the survey it was found that on an average a married woman manager devotes 13% more time to housework than her married male colleague. A single woman works 20% more than her single male colleague. This is in spite of the fact that household chores can be lessened by engaging readily available labour and enlisting support from bilateral kindred of the extended family network. Although 73% of the women feel that they are able to give the same priority to their careers as their spouses and 97% say that their spouses support them in their careers, still women are 110% more stressed than the men in the workplace.

Studies have shown that workaholism leads to reduced mental and physical well-being. People knowingly work more even though it takes a toll on their health and erodes their leisure. Organisations however do give flexible work hours especially for certain categories of assignments and many employees also avail of the option to work from home. But all said, flexible work from home options are not very popular and only 46% women say they have availed of flexible work options and 51% of the men also say so. When women carry their work home blurring the divide between family and work it only serves to compound their already over stressed work day.

It was found amongst the surveyed women that indeed there is in them a disjunction between the objective reality of discrimination and the subjective reality of admitting to that discrimination and recognising it as one's own state of being.

The above abridgement of the findings shows how a diverse set of social factors together conspire to create conditions for the poor representation of women in senior-level positions in the technology sector that manifests itself in the form of the glass ceiling.

Students' Survey

In the chapter 7 that followed an attempt has been made to look at the phenomenon from its very foundation by a study of students of computer engineering in Mysore to fathom the underlying causes for this glass ceiling. Research revealed that an overwhelming 97% of the girl students felt that women are equally suited for jobs in the IT Sector as boys and the remaining 3% felt that girls are in fact better suited for the IT sector leading thereby to a 100% affirmative response. Yet in practice only about a 30% of these actually enter the industry. At the level of entry into the workforce itself already one can see the circumstances for the formation of a glass ceiling inequality.

The evidence collected primarily suggests that men and women in general share differing perceptions about themselves, their self-worth, their life goals and situations. Nearly 81% men students admitted to never having even heard the phrase glass ceiling. This highlights the latent gender insensitivity of the male students. About 59% of the girls felt that women had to work harder to prove themselves all round. Though the academic performance of girls is far superior to that of boys, responses showed that the boys' perceptions of self-worth are not dependent on their scholastic aptitude. The majority of the boys claimed that they did not think their educational output was a very significant determinant of their future professional success. They continue to rate themselves highly despite occasional subpar performance. This leads us to infer that men students seem to have greater self-confidence and evaluate themselves more optimistically and this self-confidence is not necessarily linked to their actual achievements. Perhaps it is this attitude that procures greater rewards for men in the workplace in their future careers. This is an expression of the *hubris* which comes into sharper focus in the course of their careers fetching men rewards sometimes disproportionate with their intrinsic worth.

The girl students without hesitation agreed that as such they were treated with the same fairness by their parents, given similar educational opportunity and

encouragement as their brothers. Though in the beginning girls have aspirations similar as men to be CEOs in their future careers and are provided the same launching pad as the male students wherein they even outperform the boys, somewhere along the way in their careers an insurmountable often inexplicable gender gap results which eventually leads to the glass ceiling inequality at the workplace. Women seem to have a premonition of what is to follow. Although women have ambition it is an ambition moderated with caution. This gets crystallised in the **sticky floor** for women at the work.

The students exhibit a gendered mind-set with regard to choice of leader. Even in structural positions of authority within the institution such as those of teacher, the male students displayed a preference for male authority figures. If this is the mind-set among the youth at the very idea of a woman at the helm then it is small wonder that the glass ceiling is such a perniciously pervasive phenomenon in the industry. This reflects the imprint of years of social conditioning, wherein women without conscious thought mutely conform to the male world view.

The women hinged all their future plans on still non-existent potential spouses and in-laws. The restraints that women experience start from very early on in their lives – glass ceilings are a much farther point in this fettered journey for women.

Contribution to Disciplinary Knowledge

This research has been edifying in two senses. First at the conceptual level it has formulated, established and tested a sociological definition of glass ceiling through the Durkheimian classical framework of the social fact. In doing so it has also succeeded in its attempt to contribute in some measure to the growth of disciplinary knowledge; and then, at the empirical level the study has tested for the existence of the glass ceiling inequality for women in the IT sector through field research in Karnataka and analysis of the data so procured. By definition it has been able to establish the presence of glass ceiling inequality as a social fact through externally observable objective criteria – and that this glass ceiling exists in its severe form; further, it is an inequality which gets worse compounded when the sample is corrected to reflect the proportion of male and female employees in the IT industry. Second and equally significantly, the research tested the prevailing hypotheses on the reasons for the glass ceiling inequality in the workplace and has tried to offer causal explanation

pertaining to each discernable fragmentary manifestation of this vastly complex phenomenon both in the particular context of the IT sector and derivable as well to its more general meaning into other social institutions and wider society. At the level of scholarship this research has found a measure of success in accomplishing its pure research objectives.

What Happens to the Women?

The intellectual mission with which this research had commenced has been duly accomplished with the research questions having been adequately addressed, and yet, the eternal woman's question continues unabated. On the face of it there is opportunity, training, encouragement and reward – all in just measure. The question then emerges – what happens to the women? Not just the statistics contained in this thesis but statistical data worldwide show the decreasing presence of women in the upward stride in an organisation's ladder. This is also the question that feminist discourse is all too familiar with. All feminist theories try to answer the question '*and what about the women? Where are the women? And if they are not, why is this so?*' Women are no longer shut in and no longer shut out. Society is not polarised into overt symbols of hegemony and domination of the men at one end and servility and capitulation of the women at the other.

As the women's movement evolved and gender sensitivity became a societal maxim there have undoubtedly been path breaking strides in public policy. IT organisations have emulated this consciousness through genuine initiatives for workplace equity. An increasing number of women are graduating from engineering colleges and business schools. They do not need any protective reservation – they enter the industry purely on the strength of their merit credentials. They have promising careers and by their own admission as the primary data show, a hospitable, empathetic work environment. Then what happens? Why do women drift away and fritter their careers? Women are ubiquitous by their absence in the higher levels of IT companies.

When we delve deeper for the causes for the glass ceiling then begins the dilemma. It would have been so much easier for me as a woman and as a researcher had the data conclusively implicated the workplace to be the cause of the glass ceiling. If not, then the family. These were the initial premises perhaps that the

research had commenced from. At several moments on the field I would often find myself asking the question ‘*why*’ which while as a research question leads to the explanation for phenomena, at an existential level is laden with much poignant angst. However, when one comes to the end of the road looking back one must take a dispassionate view.

Who is to take the Blame?

It is therefore with a heavy heart that I pen these observations. The research is so overwhelmingly demonstrative of a glass ceiling. On all counts tangible and intangible women are the inheritors of disadvantage – a disadvantage that is perpetrated in a manner so subtle as to make it extremely challenging to be able to say on whose shoulders the blame must rest – the makers of policy, organisational hypocrisy, the woman’s biology, individual mindsets, pervasiveness of the patriarchal family form or on the very bedrock of society with its governing norms and values.

The Policy Makers

The millennium IT policy of the government of Karnataka had as an avowed goal the empowerment of women as also addressing other social causes like eradication of poverty and reduction in unemployment. As time passed we saw that with the ICT Policy of 2011 the focus of the government with regard to IT had undergone a complete paradigm shift. The social concerns that had been the highlight of the early policy have now become drowned under the drive for ‘branding Bangalore’ and ‘branding Karnataka’. There is not even one mention of women in the entire policy document. The haze of IT growth surely cannot obscure the grim picture of acute disparity that dwells at the root of society.

In terms of per capita income Bangalore undoubtedly has the highest per capita which is more than twice that of the smaller centres such as Belgaum and Gulbarga. Mysore too is not far behind with the second highest per capita income in the state. What however remains a matter of concern is the imbalanced pattern of inter-regional income distribution in the state. Another area of concern is whether this income is equitably apportioned among the rural and urban dwellers, the marginalised and diverse sections of the people.

These data show that although Karnataka is doing well in terms of its IT achievements, these achievements do not appear to be reflected in terms of overall development parameters in the state. Not only that the state is lagging behind even among the southern states but also that even within the state of Karnataka all regions have not received the benefit of the prosperity generated by the IT industry.

The other cause for concern is the poor representation of personnel from the castes placed lower in the social hierarchy, in the technology sector. When we talk of inequalities such as the glass ceiling in the workplace it cannot eclipse the asymmetrical pattern of composition of the workforce itself. These again are serious concerns that require thought at the level of policy. Even at the time of enrolment itself the percentage share of enrolment of disadvantaged groups and women is lower than their share in the population and lower than the state average. The predominant goal of a liberal higher education system is to ensure that education is available uniformly to all concerned without any bias. When this goal is not well achieved at the stage of entry to higher education, and further, in the context of this research, in terms of entry into technical education institutions this also creates conditions for glass ceilings to manifest resulting in poor ratio of representation of disadvantaged groups including women in the industry.

In some senses even the presence of glass ceiling inequality within the IT sector is a consequence of this apparent lack of foresight in public policy. In the ultimate analysis the real meaning of development is not to be understood through FDI or exports or even GDP or per capita income - the real meaning of development resides in its human worth. It is time perhaps for a refocusing of interest and re-evaluating the progress in terms that make development meaningful for the common man and woman and to reformulate policy with a human face and enforce it in all honesty. Somewhere the state and the civil society have to take responsibility for the existence of abstruse structures of inequality even within private organisations.

Tyranny of ‘Meritocracy’

The IT sector is a knowledge sector. It promotes merit and rewards merit and merit alone. And for an industry that prides itself on meritocracy, nothing but the best will do. These jobs require a constant push. Employees have to deliver on

performance on what are called aggressive deadlines. Managers, men and women routinely select those who they feel will best take the team forward. It is perceived by both genders that women who are usually at receiving end of various ‘pulls’ from their other social roles as wife, mother, daughter and daughter-in-law and cannot ‘push’ hard enough to overcome these pulls and sustain their onward momentum. This results in a complex of negative performance expectations from women. The organisation with all its lofty egalitarianism is something out there – on the field it’s a tough game – only the really fit can survive. And men make the star players.

What then has transpired is truly ironic. It is because IT is a meritocracy that people engage in a process of natural selection, to be able to survive they need to keep picking who will best serve their cause – there is both the subtle denial of opportunity and the unconscious denial of disadvantage. In the IT sector meritocracy gets transformed from the operative principle that it should be to the hegemonic doctrine that it has become with women as its prime casualty.

The Abyss of Knowledge Capitalism

Karl Marx had made the self-fulfilling prophecy for capitalism: it is capital and its self-perpetuation which is the beginning and end of capitalism. In the IT sector the human mind is the real capital. It gets accumulated and needs to be constantly reinvested in the vicious cycle of this knowledge capitalism. In the dialectic that emerges the men become the bourgeoisie. The women are like a capitalist working class without a rudder. The growth in knowledge in the IT field is immense indeed. Before long software and hardware are replaced with a new generation product. These generational changes are frequent and fast. Technology has to be truly *avant-garde* to sustain. The collective mind that creates them is like a mythical Prometheus¹ which is unable to keep pace with its own creations. The end result – while the bourgeoisie somehow manage to get by, the ‘proletariat’ fall by the wayside. Women with their enormous baggage of kinship and conjugal obligation are not able to match pace for pace in this demanding workplace. Few women are able to show the tenacity to

¹ In Greek mythology, Prometheus was the Titan god of forethought and crafty counsel who was entrusted with the task of moulding mankind out of clay. His attempts to better the lives of his creation brought him into direct conflict with Zeus. Prometheus shaped man out of mud, and Athena breathed life into his clay figure.

pursue this arduous climb. Women sadly become the victims of the very meritocracy they have been fighting for all their lives. While organisations purport to give women a level playing field clearly life does not.

The Precipice of ‘Choice’

When Virginia Woolf wrote her famous essay ‘*A Room of One’s Own*’ (1929) she espoused the cause of women thus:

Give her another hundred years, ... - give her a room of her own and five hundred a year, let her speak her mind and leave out half that she now puts in, and she will write a better book one of these days. She will be a poet.

—Woolf, 1929: 89

... that five hundred a year stands for the power to contemplate, that lock on the door means the power to think for oneself...

— ibid: 101

It is almost a hundred years gone, the woman has a room of her own with a lock on the door, she has that five hundred a year, and yet, few are able to write that better book or poetry. Women have the choice and yet many women are acquiescent to let others fill in the prose in the book of their lives.

This then brings us to the ageless existentialist dilemma of freedom and responsibility. There are times in life when life chooses for you and there are times when you make the choices in life. Choice, appealing as it may sound is not always easy. Each choice we make is endowed with the burden of consequence. The sovereignty of choice is also the hegemony of choice. Philosopher-sociologist Renata Salecl argues that “choice brings a sense of overwhelming responsibility into play, and this is bound up with a fear of failure, a feeling of guilt and an anxiety that regret will follow if we have made the wrong choice” (Salecl, 2011: 7). Freedom therefore is imbued with responsibility. When we get to choose we alone are accountable for our actions. Therefore though we as a society place such immense value on freedom there is really no such entity as absolute freedom. All our freedoms are accompanied by their baggage of consequences. Having to choose becomes like standing on a precipice – one does not know how to retain one’s balance, though as existentialist

philosopher Sartre once said that one does have the freedom to choose between falling off the cliff or staying one's ground!

That ironically is the predicament of a corporate woman. In patriarchal dispensations the men decided for the women – that was one kind of a tyranny, but today choice itself constitutes another form of tyranny – that of its own power – the power of retribution for the choice wrongly made. To choose torments you with its appeal and yet imperils you. Freedom thus generates a tremendous sense of anxiety. All human history represents the struggle towards perfection and women in their choices too strive to be perfect. It is this quest for perfection to make the right choice is what generates such deep seated anxiety in the multiselled woman professional. For existentialist philosopher Kierkegaard, anxiety and anguish (*angst*) stem directly from freedom – out of the ‘need to face possibility of possibility’ (*ibid.* 42). Though women get to choose they have to live with the fact that they shall be judged by others for the choices that they make.

The Clamp of Patriarchy

The thought of Durkheim teaches us that the language, institutions, culture and all collectivities that constitute our social world give meaning to our being. We reify this as the embodiment of shared perception and common understanding. This viewed in structural terms is the *conscience collective* of Durkheim or the value consensus of Parsons and becomes a social fact par excellence in the domain of individual freedom and choice. All our decisions are considered against the conscience collective any deviations even when not met with censure fill us with the burden of guilt. The degree to which one internalises the collectivity the lesser becomes our conviction for independent choice.

For women in particular this freedom to choose instils doubt in a group that had hitherto never been exposed to the element of choice in their lives. Women bound as they have been through generations of a culture of servitude do not find in themselves sufficient strength to break free of this tradition to make choices independent of the structured bounds of the conscience collective and get to experience that exhilaration of the real freedom to choose. Rational choices in order to be successful have to be informed choices. But when it comes to very life's decisions there are too many imponderables for the choice to assume the shape of a

product of reason. Choice leaves us with the possibility of what could have been if we had chosen differently. It gives us possibilities but also regret. Women in particular have no history of self will to fall back upon and guide them in their decisions. If we transpose women into the master-slave dialectic of Hegel, where the slave must facilitate the master's *jouissance*² through his work in producing objects for the master, women for generations have known no will other than the will of the patriarchal 'master'. The woman has to attain deliverance from this subconscious disposition. She needs to, through conscious effort, redeem herself of generations of value conditioning, for in the famous words of feminist activist Germaine Greer (1991), "Yet if a woman never lets herself go, how will she ever know how far she might have got?"

The Need for Organisational Sensitivity

The woman should not have to find that she is alone in this struggle. It becomes the duty of organisations to foster an environment of sensitivity towards women. No doubt organisations are coming forward with an affirmative commitment to diversity. In addition, they also have to work to alter the organisational mind and that of the individual actors, men and women. As John Rawls most famous for his ideas on justice has pointed out "Each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override" (Rawls, 1971/1999: 3). That emphasis on the needs of the individual is perhaps what then is missing in the modern organisation. What is lacking is the component of 'intersubjectivity' as a matter of central concern in the knowledge organisation. Intersubjectivity is that "ability to step into the shoes of the other, to develop the quality of empathy for the other" (ibid: 102).

² Jouissance, derived from the verb *jouir*, meaning to enjoy, delight in. It refers in a sense to an extreme pleasure. It is not possible to offer a precise English rendering of this French word. Sometimes it is translated as 'enjoyment', but enjoyment has a reference to pleasure, and jouissance is an enjoyment in a heady sense, a paradoxical pleasure, reaching an almost intolerable level of excitation. Due to the many shades of the French term, it is usually left untranslated. Lacan makes an important distinction between jouissance and *plaisir* (pleasure). Jouissance has a tantalising element of transgression associated with it, more like a sinful pleasure and, in that respect, it is beyond simple pleasure principle.

No doubt the Institutional structures do not support prejudice. But justice is not spelled in black and white and through formal structures – only the law is. Being human is always the grey area. Justice lies in the ability to transcend those shades of grey to go from human to being humane. While laws are firmly in place and not slack in their implementation what has been missing is perhaps the spirit of the law. For, if law is known by its letter justice is known by the spirit of that law.

We presume that the workplace is a pure meritocracy. But even in a meritocracy the actual working may not be quite as equitable. Nitin Nohria, Dean of Harvard Business School some time back admitted that there is a certain lack of mindfulness towards the needs of women. He talks of creating a ‘level of mindfulness’ (Sandberg, 2013:158). Men have to play a proactive role in encouraging women of talent and help them reach their full potential.

Work culture within the organisation not only means the working environment and lack of overt discrimination, it also includes even the physical ambience of the place. Sometimes an office space may just not be woman friendly. Sheryl Sandberg COO of Facebook recalls an incident when in one meeting she attended they took a few minutes break, she asked for the women’s restroom, only to discover to her astonishment and that of those around her, there was no woman’s room in the venue (Sandberg, 2013). This is an incident from well into the first decade of the 21st century. Offices have to provide physical structures like women’s rooms, child care area, even something as simple as the décor of the interior could be perceived as masculine or feminine. These visible structures are ultimately an extension of the organisational mind and go to show how much an organisation really cares. In the ultimate analysis women do not have to be patronised or humoured they need to be treated with respect and dignity.

Career itself needs to be reconceptualised in the feminine mode providing for in its fold those situations in the life of a woman which impact her very life and may cause interruptions in her career. Ultimately all this calls for the need for a paradigm shift and to devise definitions and understandings for career that make way for those life impacting situations such as marriage and childbirth that may cause temporary breaks and setbacks in their careers. Nature has uniquely endowed the woman alone with certain biological capacities and that should be held with esteem and not scorn.

Value Transformation

The degree to which women are able to internalise the values pertaining to career goals determines their desire and ability to accord primacy to their careers and thereby to succeed. The essential incompatibility between the women's various social roles is due to the inconsonance in the values governing those roles. This is the reason for the conflicts that women's multiple roles across domains are accompanied with. Further, the more integrated the society in terms of its value consensus the less will be the likelihood of individuals being subject to the strain of incompatible social roles. This requires a transformation in the value consensus to take into its fold the value components of women's roles in the achieved, affectively neutral, universalistic domains. These changes are structural in nature and cannot be effected by mere legislative or executional measures at the workplace or in the wider society.

Finding Oneself as an Individual

Ultimately all instruments of domination are meaningful only to the extent that they can secure compliance of their subjects. Glass ceiling as an inequality exists because in some way it is the women that have empowered it to exist. Existentialism teaches us that only the individual can give meaning to his life. It is up to the women to uphold themselves as individuals and give their own meanings to their lives and by doing so be able to 'live' life meaningfully with passion and completeness surmounting all obstacles to existence such as 'despair', 'angst', 'absurdity', 'alienation' and 'boredom'. Through the 'free' choices they make, women have to give meaning to and define the nature of their existence and by extension their vocation.

This research has brought into focus these existentialist problems of freedom and responsibility. Women in the IT industry poignantly as the present research shows fall the victims of their illusions of choice. Each one of us in our lives has to grapple with the existentialist dilemma between absolute freedom and the constraints of circumstance. In *The Second Sex* Simone de Beauvoir made her famous statement, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman." For Beauvoir, what is to do with women is essentially to do with the social construction of women. In the same way what is to do with men is to do with the social construction of male hood; to be masculine is to be aggressive, competitive. This is a patriarchal construct of

masculinity that not all men can always live up to. This construct also denies men the chance to perceive of themselves as who they really are; it limits their life choices, their sexuality and their ability to connect emotionally with women and other men. When the woman is defined through the male standpoint the woman becomes the indescribable “other” she is not what she is but what she is made out to be.

The hierarchically superior group builds stereotypes about groups placed lower in hierarchy and ascribes characteristic traits to it. This is what happens to women in the world of technology - the domain of the men. Women have to excel in this domain owned by men and by the rules authored by men. In such a world view the woman becomes the other who has to live up to the standards set by the men. It is little wonder that the woman in an attempt to emulate the man sometimes falls short. The woman has to liberate herself from this state of being. If a woman has to be true to herself she has to first find herself as an individual. The existentialist question therefore is whether the woman can actualise herself from the state of other, liberate herself and attain subjectivity. In the ultimate analysis that essentially is the path to scale the glass ceiling.

Epilogue

Usually researchers come up with a string of quick fix solutions that constitute the conclusion of any thesis. But, the glass ceiling is a complex reality whose roots go to deeper sociological concerns. It is not a problem that can be addressed by simplistic suggestions that at best can help round off a thesis volume.

The latest gender gap report 2014 of the world economic forum prophetically tagged “*2095: The Year of Gender Equality in the Workplace, Maybe*”, perhaps says it all. True, we are still miles away from chipping that glass ceiling.

In the final analysis it is the woman who has to stand up for herself.

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