

Chapter 4

Gender Segregation and ICT: An Indo–British Comparison

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ABSTRACT

Gender segregation in science, engineering, construction, technology (SECT) is a common persistent feature, both in India and U.K. Even though culturally the two countries differ in various ways, under-representation of women in SECT is widespread and a cause for general apprehension and in recent years this has attracted centre stage in the study of gender, work and family. In this chapter we discuss our research findings of a comparative study undertaken between India and Britain in the ICT sector. With twenty seven interviews with ICT professionals in the two countries, we discuss their views on ICT education, recruitment and employment practices, work-life balance, changing gender relations, opportunities for progression and retention in the two countries taking into consideration women's role in power and politics in the both countries; how 'public' and 'private' patriarchy shapes women's position in the labour market, with an essential backdrop of 'patrifocality' in the Indian context.

INTRODUCTION

In the UK, historically, science, engineering and technology did not rank very highly as an occupation and there are several explanations. In the mid 1960's, scientists and engineers were ranked below dentists, university lecturers, company directors,

solicitors and only just above primary- school teachers, unlike in India where an engineering degree undoubtedly enhances social status and increases chances of employability. More recently, India's IT industry has been growing at a very fast pace with the adoption of economic liberalization policies and emerging as the 'most watched test of global capitalism'. Information communication technology (ICT) driven growth and development

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in India has been observed to have skipped the middle stages of traditional economic development models and ‘leapfrogged’ to technology driven stages of economic development. Yet, a gendered occupational structure in science, engineering, construction and technology (SECT) is very much predominant, like the UK. A gendered occupational structure is often assumed to exist due to social inequality and gender equality is measured by the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM). It is generally assumed or implied that greater empowerment of women would reduce gender segregation. But, there are exceptions; in countries where the degree of women’s empowerment is greater, the level of gender segregation is also greater. Interestingly, Sweden with a higher GEM also has higher gender segregation than Japan with a lower GEM.

In this chapter, we focus on the ‘universalistic theorisations’ and ‘particularistic explanations’ to study women’s position of employment in SECT, with a focus on the ICT sector. We look at the role of social and labour market policy in the two countries, how this shapes gender relations and the modification needed to develop an equitable gender division of labour in ICT. We explore the working practices and working cultures of IT companies as a factor in causing the under representation of women engineers in terms of recruitment, progression and retention.

Why India and UK?

The Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) takes into account the female share of parliamentary representation; proportions of legislators, senior officials, managers, professional and technical employees who are women; and the ratio of female to male earnings. It is generally assumed or implied that greater empowerment of women would reduce gender segregation. The Table 1 (GEM measure for UK and India) below shows the GEM for India and UK, highlights the breakdown of the components that make the GEM, i.e., the

percentage of seats held by the parliament, percentage of female legislators, senior officials, and managers, the percentage of female professional and technical workers, the ratio of estimated female to male earned income. This data is derived from the UNDP report, 2009, however, we must mention that the GEM for India was not available on the UNDP report. This was only available from the report developed by the Ministry of women and child development, Government of India, 2009. The GEM scores measured by UNDP HDR 1998, were very low, and this is the reason why the Govt of India calculated the GEM using the indicators as given in the Table 2 (GEM scores for India, 1996, and 2006.)

UK is already higher in the ranks with regards to the GEM score and India is not, but India’s annual GDP growth (ranging from 5-7%) has been very promising. This clearly means British women are more empowered than Indian women. As it is evident in the case of Sweden and Japan, a higher empowerment does not necessarily relate to less segregation. The aim of our research is to find out whether Britain’s ICT sector is more gendered than India’s and whether this leads to more segregation in ICT related jobs. The variables that are used in the research are education, recruitment practices, salary, work-life balance, employment practices, changing gender relations, opportunities for progression, retention rates.

The Table 2 below shows the GEM scores for India, 2006 and 1996. It is interesting to note that the scores are highest for PI at 0.573 and lowest for PoERI at 0.231 in 1996. The increase has been smallest for PI from 0.573 in 1996 to .625 in 2006 and the largest for EI from 0.443 in 1996 to 0.546 in 2006.

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Women’s theoretical engagement with western science has been philosophically varied ranging from

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