Chapter 75

# Gender Gaps and Information and Communication Technology:
## A Case Study of India

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## ABSTRACT

*The present chapter attempts to look at the digital divide and the constraints related to Information Technology, which women share by gender. Along with major subdivisions on region, ethnic group, class, and caste, a major digital divide based on gender is emerging in India. Poverty is the main constraint that many women face along with men, in addition to their lower status in Indian society. Women face challenges in pursuing education at all ages because of lack of time to attend school, familial and household duties, and socio-cultural norms that give a low priority to education. The gender gap, especially the gap between men and women and how they benefit from Information Technology, has widened, because women are less likely than men to receive technical education or be employed in technology intensive work. Globalization has further complicated this issue, leading to increasing feminization.*

## INTRODUCTION

Information Technology has the potential for transforming social, economic and political life globally. In the present era of Globalization with the world becoming one large village Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is seen as the engine of the new economy. It is being perceived as the magical wand and the harbinger of prosperity, as it can guarantee access to global markets; enable direct foreign investment and e- commerce. Accordingly, several projects aim at bringing information technologies (IT) to India with a belief in transforming potential of

IT. However these technologies have created a digital and gender divide. In this paper, attempts have been made to look into the gender gaps and the constraints which women share by gender specifically in India.

Globalization can be defined as a process of interaction and integration among the people, companies and governments of different nations, a process driven by international trade and investment and aided by information technology (Singh, 2006, p. 71). As nation states open their borders to global capital, the resulting political and economic transformations leads to the reorganisation of national economy and ideology to assert compliance, control and sovereignty (Oza, 2006, pp.7-8). Globalization involved the spatial reorganization of production, movement of industries across borders and spread of financial markets that resulted in flexible production methods and integration of production into global commodity and production chains. Business could treat the world as their field of operation redeploying their capital and move the location of their production at will.

India is a multilateral, multilingual and multireligious society with many subdivides based on region, ethnic groups, class, and caste. The digital divide and gender has become yet another component of this diversity. In India women comprise 14% of the IT industry and 26% of the business processing outsourcing (BPO) work force. The total workforce of IT and BPO is approximately 70 million (http://www.ciol.com). At lowerexperience level (~ 3 years) about 19% of the workforce comprises women. At senior levels, women constitute less than 6% of the workforce (http://www.dqqindia.com). This indicates that few could manage to reach the top level and majority of them remain at lower level as computer or data entry operators.

The gender gap in the digital divide is of great concern as it is directly linked to socio- economic development. A major developmental issue of the coming decades will be the access and use of IT (OECD, 1989, p. 11). Policy makers of both industrial and developing countries have agreed that IT is one of the fastest growing and likely to be the largest industry by the turn of the century (Kraemer, 1994). Hence if women are not actively present at all levels in this growing industry then one would see marginalization that could undermine the advances made by women in other fields in the 20th century.

## BACKGROUND

Colonial rule had deprived India of an Industrial revolution. After independence in 1947, India had adopted an economic policy which largely favored public sector expansion. In this strategy, private and foreign capitals were strictly controlled by the government. India's opting for a mixed economy also reflected the country's approach to high technology industries (Harindranath, 1999, p. 53). During this period multinationals such as International Business Machine (IBM) and International Computer Limited (ICL) leased obsolete technology to India. Though the State owned firm Electronics Corporation of India Ltd. (ECIL) entered into the indigenous manufacturing of computers in 1971, it could neither fully embrace the technology nor satisfy the growing demand of the country (Subramanian, 1992). In 1978 private sector entrepreneurs entered the computer manufacturing industry which was supported by the national computer policy of 1984 (GOI, 1984).

This above mentioned policy was totally reversed in 1991, when the Government of India (GOI) adopted the New Economic Policy (NEP) which was further refined with stabilization and structural adjustment measures as advocated by the World Bank and International Monitory Fund (IMF). In 1998, GOI constituted a national task force on IT and software. The recommendations of this task force provided the directives, incentives and concessions for the establishment and

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