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**GLASS CEILING FOR WOMEN IN THE IT SECTOR:  
DOES THE CEILING BEGIN AT THE FLOOR?  
A Sociological Study of Engineering  
Students in Mysore**

**Introduction**

The Information Revolution has transformed the world just like the Industrial Revolution of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. What we call the Information Revolution is actually a knowledge revolution. Through the application of knowledge and especially of systematic logical analysis, traditional work has been reorganized and processes routinized to ensure efficiency and predictability to a degree that would exemplify in full Max Weber's ideal typical formulation of bureaucracy. George Ritzer calls it McDonaldization, the paradigm of a wide ranging process by which the operational principles that were once considered unique to fast food restaurants are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society and through the American model of globalization, the rest of the world. It is dehumanised, ubiquitous, and unsurpassed in its coercive presence in today's society. This has permeated the economy, education, work, and virtually every aspect of social life. It offers efficiency, calculability, predictability, and scope for substitution of non-human for human technology (Ritzer, 2008).

**The Research Question**

It is against this backdrop that the present paper is based. The paper will focus on whether in a rapidly globalising world, with the marginalisation of space and distance, and as participants in a highly specialised field of education such as an engineering degree, women students can cross the threshold of discrimination layered through years of socialisation. It is argued that while cultural production amongst dominated groups of various kinds ensures indeed that a straightforward imprint of social requirements is left on actors, if disciplines like engineering and technology that base themselves on a more sharply focused 'scientific rationality' and propel their members into in a hyper-real world such as that of the IT Sector, would be governed by

the same laws of dominance and suppression that operate in the social structure of their everyday lives. Would then, engineering students also look at themselves through their engendered selves?

One might presume that the hyper-real world of cyberspace and its accompanying virtual reality would be logically speaking indicative of new social formations developing. The IT Sector being a knowledge based sector should, hypothetically speaking, afford equality of opportunity for its members. However literature across disciplines is replete with evidence of the existence of gender disparity in the workplace particularly as one nears the upper echelons of organizational power. The present study is meant as a point of departure in analyzing the whys and wherefores of this occurrence. Through a study of a group of over 100 engineering students in Mysore at the dawn of their careers, an attempt has been made to locate a possible locus in the genesis of the much discussed phenomenon of 'Glass Ceiling', a potent vestige of sexism and essentialism that apparently continues to prevail in the world of automation and technology. The paper asks whether men and women with the same level of educational attainment aspire for, and thereby would acquire similar levels of occupational reward in the workforce. One has tried to look at the effect of gender on the perceptions of education and employment in this most advanced industrial sector of modern society, the IT Sector. The study will also examine how the cultural identity of gender influences in shaping the long-term career aspirations of students.

### **Terms and Concepts**

'Glass Ceiling' refers to the unseen yet unbreakable barrier that prevents women from rising to the upper rungs of the corporate ladder. The barrier is not overt – like a transparent shield of glass it can often be misleadingly invisible and yet tough to crack. The term is used across disciplines – in politics, literature, sociology and social anthropology, psychology, economics and management. Glass ceiling is a metaphor which describes vertical sex segregation in an organization. Glass ceilings are usually a distinctively gender phenomenon; an artificial career barrier that prevents qualified women from advancing upward in their organization and from realising their full potential.

In this research paper I define the concept of glass ceiling in qualitative terms to refer to situations where the advancement of a capable person within the hierarchy of an organization would get thwarted, because of some form of gender consciousness emanating either from the workplace or the social environment. Many a time women feel that they are not worthy of or competent enough for higher positions, and neither they themselves nor their co-workers take them seriously. A woman often has to be proactively motivated to see herself in a top job that realizes her full potential.

The term glass ceiling was first used in a Wall Street Journal article in 1986. Later it was given credence by the US Department of Labour in 1991 after a study of nine Fortune 500 companies. The US Federal Glass Ceiling Commission confirmed that women and minorities encountered considerable glass ceiling barrier. In recent times Hillary Clinton's run for the Presidency was considered the highest glass ceiling barrier in America. It was also for the first time that a Black was elected president of America.

Also women are said to encounter what is known as the 'Glass Cliff'. In a study conducted by Yale University scientist, Victoria Brescoll, published in *Psychological Science* (2008), it was found that any mistake a woman makes in an organization tends to be magnified. It is as though women in positions of authority are atop a glass cliff from where fall is imminent. Another related concept is that of the 'Glass Wall'. A glass wall is an organizational divide based on gender into functionally different areas for men and women at work. Glass walls are the result of gender stereotyping that prevents lateral movement of women between types of jobs in an organization. There is occupational segregation by gender that reinforces gender typing. At the same time there are subtle mechanisms that enhance a man's position in a profession, collectively which are referred to as the 'glass escalator' effect (Williams 2003). In fact, men take their gender privileges with them even to 'female occupations' such as teaching or nursing, and experience not only acceptance but rapid upward mobility (See Table III). Certain professions like armed forces, civil services, engineering, architecture, accountancy, etc., are conventionally regarded as male bastions and even as women are gaining educational parity with men, the gender gap in engineering, especially in the more highly paid specialties is seen to be increasing.

Another related concept is that of 'Sticky Floor'. This is a term often used to refer to that small comfort zone from which women would rather not shift for personal reasons. A woman has to be strongly motivated to see herself in a top job. Researchers often ask whether women are not their own worst enemies. Women often 'choose' to remain stuck to low paying undemanding jobs that they are comfortable in. In fact, because of 'sticky floor' many women tend to experience neither glass wall nor ceiling!

The glass ceiling is a set of related concepts that represent some of the most compelling metaphors for analysing inequalities between men and women in the workplace. The Glass Ceiling hypothesis is a general hypothesis about the pattern of gender distribution in organizational hierarchies. The concept of the glass ceiling effect has become increasingly embedded in the discourse and praxis of sociology.

### **Career vs. Job**

Although all employed women have jobs they do not necessarily have meaningful careers. A career orientation requires and implies a degree of

commitment, personal sacrifice and a planned developmental sequence (Lindsey, 2011). Career orientation for married women is compromised when a wife's career is viewed as less important than her husband's. A woman's other family roles especially as mother, which are expressive in nature, are often viewed as a contrast to leadership qualities. Women have to accommodate their multiple competing and quite demanding social roles. Though the increase of women throughout professional and managerial jobs is impressive, they have to strike a balance between these roles in order to be able to move from the periphery to the centre of their professions. It is not entirely necessary that a woman may even want a career. Many a time a woman only aspires for a job for that extra income to support the household and families too aspire for just as much. The experiences however, of high level women, single or married, who do follow their career path as passionately, competitively and diligently as men, are that they are unable to crack the glass ceiling (Eagly and Carli, 2008). An ILO, Geneva, study of 2004, found evidence that occupational sex segregation based on firmly entrenched myths, sex stereotyping and a corporate culture restricting a woman's career development often forces women to prioritize family life over paid work.

### Case Studies

Research demonstrates that for women of all ranks, particularly women managers, barriers to upward mobility exist, including role conflict, gender stereotypes, bigotry, lack of mentors, insufficient feedback and training, and isolation. Sociologists have found that glass ceiling is a unique and identifiable form of discrimination, a gender difference that is not explained by job relevant characteristics. It is greater at higher levels of income. There are differences in chances of advancement that increase in the course of a woman's career. Gender specific mechanisms in the labour market hinder women from reaching the top of the wage distribution. Studies have found that the gender wage gap increases throughout the wage distribution with a sharp accentuation at the upper end of the distribution suggesting strong evidence of glass ceiling (Cotter, 2001). A comparative study of United States, Sweden and Australia, conducted by Janeen Baxter of the University of Tasmania and Erikolin Wright of the University of Wisconsin–Madison (2000), also confirmed that the glass ceiling metaphor, both in its literal narrow sense, as well as in a more general sense pertaining to a series of blockades to a woman's career growth '*because she is a woman*', is globally rampant and applicable.

In the United States of America where under Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, sexual harassment at the workplace is also illegal, women throughout corporate America report that it continues to be pervasive. Issues of double standards in defining competence and isolation from powerful networks continue to dog corporate women. High echelon professional women in many occupations are likely to be judged differently from men in terms of

their work performance, even when all characteristics except gender are the same (O'Connell *et al.*, 2008). Others report that they are denied access to informal networks that allow them to understand the intricacies of power structures that are the key to corporate survival (Schipani *et al.* 2009). Encouraged to specialise in a small area of the corporate enterprise women find themselves in networks that lack diversity and control and are removed from understanding the broader workings of the system. With job functions also specialised via gender a kind of a 'corporate purdah' emerges (Lindsey, 2011). Women globally continue to report gender discrimination as the most frequent barrier to their advancement. In the elite ranks of the most powerful companies, regardless of the law and the fact that women bring with them human capital comparable to men, traditional gender bias emerges that impedes a woman's move up the corporate ladder (Metz and Tharenou, 2001; Singh *et al.*, 2008).

Many of these patterns converge in a pattern now well known as the glass ceiling, describing a woman's failure to rise to senior level positions because of invisible and artificial barriers constructed by predominantly male management. Although lateral movement is possible, women are not able to advance hierarchically. It may be unintentional but executives tend to hire and promote according to a stereotypical masculine model barring a few exceptions, often categorizing men as more capable, commanding, aggressive and objective leaders than women. A woman's other family roles especially as mother, are viewed as detrimental to leadership qualities (Lindsey, 2011).

Market figures fluctuate but over the last decade, in the golden fortune 500, women represent only 1-2% of the CEOs, 16% of corporate offices and 15% of the Board of Directors. Out of 1000 Public Sector companies in the US with at least 1 billion dollars annual revenue only 30 have female CEOs; in the UK out of the FTSE 100 list only 3. Out of the 1112 directorship positions in the Bombay Stock Exchange 100 list companies, only 48 women have been appointed, i.e. only 4.3% of the positions.

Even in professions such as the media where women are more ubiquitous often turning into glamorous icons, a study conducted by the international women's media foundation over a two year period of research covering 170,000 people from 500 news media companies in 60 countries found that bulk of the 'real' jobs are held by men. Despite the high visibility of women in the media, 2 out of 3 reporting jobs belong to men. Only 27% of those making decisions are women. In Asia only 13% are in senior management.

Marilyn Davidson and Cary Cooper in their book entitled *Shattering the Glass Ceiling*, based on the situation in the United Kingdom bring out that the question of equal opportunities is no longer a fringe issue, but a pan-European one and a mainstream economic as well as a social concern. In the UK women constitute half the workforce but majority are stuck in low paid

low status gender segregated jobs. In America in spite of the government's Glass Ceiling initiative and Civil Rights Act far too women are trapped under the glass ceiling. Anne Morrison, White and VanVelsor in their book *Breaking the Glass Ceiling*, have raised this very question.

### **The IT Sector**

The IT Sector, being a knowledge sector by its very nature, should have opened up new possibilities for women. However, according to Amanda Haynes (2006), so far, it has been used to construct and maintain gender differences and to sustain male hierarchies. IT thus becomes a particularly enlightening field for the study of gender inequalities, such as the glass ceiling. While inequalities in more established industries might be considered a historical leftover of archaic gender stereotypes, the newness of computing along with its technological sophistication presents researchers with the chance to examine how gender relations develop in an industry apparently less fettered by tradition and considered an equal opportunity employer.

IT Sector thus presents an exemplar case study to examine whether the dynamics of disadvantage are indeed deep-rooted in today's employment settings. Furthermore there has to be some rationale due to which the glass ceiling metaphor persists and resonates worldwide. Research indicates that IT has developed to reflect precisely the same forms of gendered inequalities that have been documented in older industries. As per data from the National Association of Software and Services Companies, NASSCOM, in the Indian software industry, male-female ratio is 76:24 according to 2005 figures. Women appear to find IT industry more lucrative as there is little possibility of transfer to remote towns and field assignments. Also more women are doing well educationally and graduating from engineering colleges. Still, according to a study conducted by the executive search firm EMA Partners, only 11% of the 240 companies have women CEOs. Only 3% of the Fortune 500 companies have women CEOs. If half the work population is women, the gender is significantly underrepresented in Boards and at CEO levels. Harsh statistics indeed - the glass ceiling is as a matter of fact, appears to be equally applicable to IT!

### **Methodology**

Karnataka state has one of the largest concentrations of higher educational institutions like Medical and Engineering colleges in the country. Apart from Bengaluru, the state capital, places like Mysore, Davangere, Hassan, Shimoga, Belgaum, Mangalore, Hubli-Dharwad, and Tumkur, have been turning out professionals for the IT industry. Karnataka is leading in the Information Technology sector in India and its capital Bengaluru is popularly known as the 'Silicon Valley' of India.

Interview survey was conducted among students of computer science engineering in a well-known engineering college in Mysore, in order to understand the origins and implications of the phenomenon of glass ceiling at the educational nurturing ground of IT, the engineering college. Over a hundred enthusiastic young students participated in the survey. Students of the group were also individually interviewed, and along with which they answered a questionnaire devised for the purpose of eliciting more standardised data for cross-tabulation. In the ratio that they were present for the survey, 70 students were male and 34 were females. Recruitment of students for the survey was purely voluntary and care was taken to interact with them privately for the personal interviews so that they could speak their mind freely and not give in to peer-pressure in their responses. Further focused group discussions were also conducted in and outside the classroom which also proved to be very animated and informative. The data collected in this manner turned out to be quite insightful. For the purpose of this study all women have been regarded as one sociological category. That is by no means to say that they are considered to constitute a homogeneous or uniform grouping. Undoubtedly differences in religion, caste, social class and at times family pedigree would all account for their social and cultural capital and impact greatly their self-perceptions, life-chances and occupational mobility. At an existential level the angst that they share as women is common to all.

However the sample, both boys and girls can also be considered homogeneous in that the respondents all categorised themselves as belonging to the middle-class ranging from lower to a few of upper middle class in terms of income. Moreover, they can also be considered similar in the sense that they are all members of a common social group as being brought together in time and space in their roles as students of the same disciplinary engagement in an educational institution.

## **The Findings**

### ***The Glass Ceiling: Denial? (Figs. 1a to 1c)***

In a sample size of 104 students, 34 women and 70 men, were asked simple questions that nonetheless provided much needed insights into their sense-making mechanisms. Some of the relevant findings have been tabulated below to understand their association with gender and as being an incipient cause of 'glass ceiling' like situation as they move onward in their careers. The evidence collected *prima facie* suggests that men and women in general share differing perceptions about themselves, their self-worth, their life goals and situations.

To a question posed to students if they had heard of the term 'glass ceiling', 44% of the girls said they had heard of it while only about 19% of the boys were even aware of the phrase; more than 81% boys admitted to never

having heard the phrase. Usually it has been found that those social groups which are discriminated upon tend to display greater awareness of a discriminatory practice than the group that is not likely to experience such discrimination. For instance, coloured Americans are more likely to acknowledge racism in American society than white populations of similar socioeconomic background. To another question, whether in their opinion women have to work harder than men in a similar situation, about 59% of the girls felt that women had to work harder to prove themselves. At the same time both boys and girls agreed that their college environment and grading system was uniform for both boys and girls. But in spite of this, somehow these girls even as students in an academic level playing field, felt that they had to put that much greater effort in order to be recognized for their merit. 41% of the boys also concurred with this. It can be argued that in the course of their future careers where rewards are not so tangible as examination results are, where hard work needs to be more sustained for it to translate into visible symbols such as enhanced output, sales or productivity targets, and where the ground may not be so fair or just, whether women will be able to put in that extra effort needed for them to succeed in their careers at parity with men.

With regard to the suitability of girls for the IT Sector vis-à-vis the boys, an overwhelming 97% of the girls felt that girls are equally suited for jobs in the IT Sector. Though about 83% of the boys did agree, yet there were 16% who felt that boys were better suited to IT industry. This validates the statistic that among professional faculties in India, the maximum percentage of women enrolment had been in the faculty of Engineering/Technology (11.06%) (UGC Annual Report 2011-12).

### **Glass Ceiling?**

Although these differences may not appear as noteworthy at this point, it must be borne in mind that this data has been collected through exhaustive interviewing and hence more significant than the numbers suggest. As one goes up the organizational ladder at each stage of career growth there is a sifting, with more women than men being the casualty. Empirical studies are replete with evidence that the wage and authority differential increases as career advances take place, culminating into the oft repeated cliché of the glass ceiling.

### ***Issues of Self-Esteem (Figs2a to 2d)***

On being asked to rate themselves on their leadership quality, 50% of the girls felt they had good leadership skills. About 18% even felt they were exceptionally good as leaders. From among the boys also 50% felt they made good leaders and about 19% thought of themselves as exceptional. When these students were asked about their ambitions, 77% of the boys wanted to be



Fig 1a

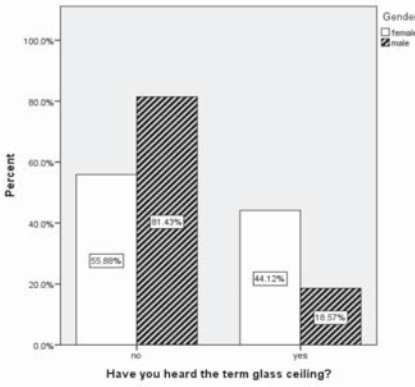


Fig 1b

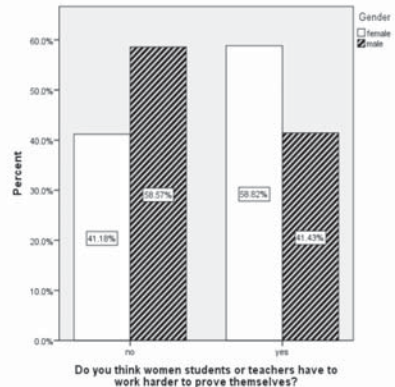
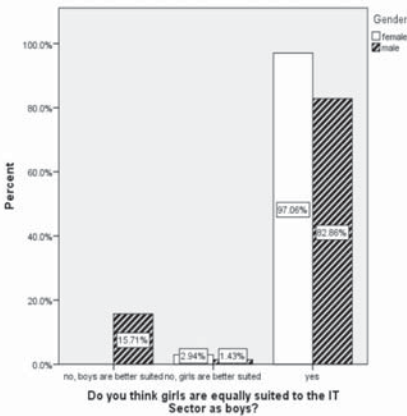


Fig. 1c



CEOs of their organization at some point as 68% of the women who also expressed the same desire. The girls were much more circumspect when talking about their future career goals as their social conditioning has illustrated to them that they may have to sacrifice their career at some point in time. Of the same set of students, in the interviewed group, 47% of the girls are among the top 20 achievers in terms of grades while only 37% of the boys are so. In other words this gives the impression that at the same time girls are striving hard to reach the top position in their class. 60% of the boys claim that they do not care for grades, whereas only 53% of girls express a similar sentiment. Boys' perceptions of self-worth are thus not necessarily dependent on their scholastic aptitude. When asked to rank one another in terms of their calibre, for more than 85% girls who felt they were equal to the boys, there are some 9% who

think they are inferior to their male counterparts and 6% superior. 71% of the boys do feel that girls are equal to them while 19% express that girls are inferior to boys. 10% say girls are superior. Overall the study's statistics reveal that 76% of the respondents agree that both genders are equal in terms of academic calibre. But it must be noted that of these 76% who do so, 85% of women feel that they are equal to boys, as against 71% of the boys feeling the same about the girls.

This leads us to infer that men students display a tendency that they are superior to their female counterparts. They seem to have greater self-confidence and evaluate themselves more optimistically. These observations

**Self Esteem**

Fig. 2a

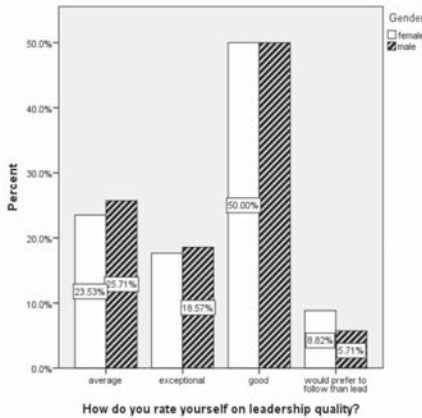


Fig. 2b

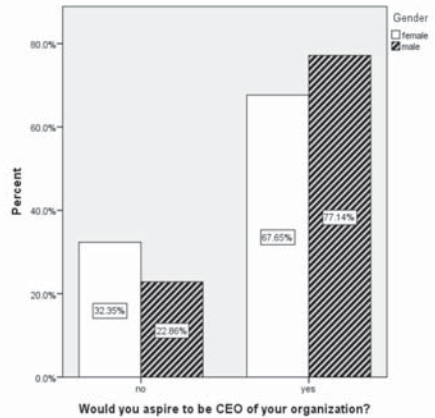


Fig. 2c

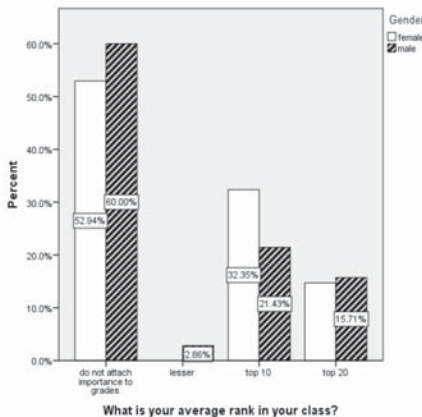
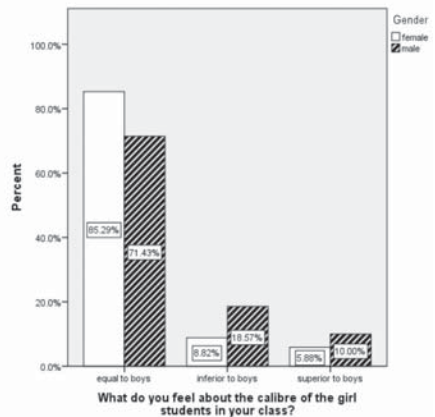


Fig. 2d



get strengthened when we look at the responses to some of the other questions in the study. It is these incipient thought processes that get translated into glass ceiling like manifestations more profoundly as one advances in age and organizational hierarchy. These revelations also confirm the findings of the vast body of work in the field. Sociologists have observed that women entering college do experience a small but nevertheless measurable drop in self-esteem (Lindsey, 2011). Furthermore several behavioural studies have confirmed that women tend to understate their achievements while men tend to judge their performance as better than it would in fact be (Sandberg 2013). Conventional stratification theory that relates occupational reward with objective evaluations of ability is not sufficient to explain these subtle disadvantages that women face. If one looks at education and its adjuvant stratification from the functionalist perspective, according to Talcott Parsons, for instance, education instils two major values:

- The value of achievement
- The value of equality of opportunity

These two values have important functions in society as a whole. Advanced industrial society requires a highly motivated achievement oriented workforce. This necessitates differential reward for differential achievement. Both the ‘winners’ – high achievers and the ‘losers’ – low achievers, are supposed to perceive the system as just, since status is achieved in a system where all have an equal chance. Davis and Moore have also suggested the relationship between academic credentials and occupational reward in industrial society. However, these generalizations appear to be rendered naïve and simplistic in the context of power relations among men and women in a result oriented industry. It is not necessary that high achievers academically are in fact highly rewarded occupationally. Women find more ready acceptance in expressive role stereotypes, those of mother, wife or nurse and instrumental functions in the economy are ‘better off’ handled by the men. These formulations strengthen the feminist viewpoint that mainstream functionalist sociological thought somehow justifies the disadvantaged position of women *vis-a-vis* men.

Marxism and conflict theory, however, represented for instance in the ideas of Althusser, argues that reproduction of labour power requires not only a reproduction of its skills but also at the same time reproduction of its submission to the ruling ideology. Education provides the necessary skills for production, the necessary graded ideologies for the social division of labour, and provides for the actual formation of subjectivities through the celebrated ‘imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence’. Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis who examine the relationship between educational credentials and occupational reward have argued, for example, that high qualifications in and of themselves do not lead directly to highly paid jobs. They find that the main factors accounting for

occupational reward are the individual's class, race and gender. Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's analysis marks a serious advance upon this perspective. There exists a 'cultural level' at least for the dominating class – which is distinct and autonomous from the economic. A coherent field of rules and sets of relationships proclaiming itself as separate and objective dignifies and makes 'official' a culture which is actually the property of the dominant class. Real capital becomes cultural capital. It is this cultural capital that augments the social position of an agent in her or his social space (Barton and Walker, 1983).

### ***Gendered Leadership (Fig. 3a to Fig. 3d)***

Feminist theory perhaps best deals with the question of a woman being in the midst of a certain set of circumstances only *because she is a woman*. In my study group, to a question, "Do you believe that men make better leaders than women?" it is heartening to note that 91% of the girls do not think so. Only 9% think men make better leaders. Of the boys however, 57% of boys feel that men are better leaders than women. However the women students articulated that they had to make compromises with personal choices to fulfil the expectations of society. However, when asked if given a choice between men and women, whom would they prefer to elect for leadership roles, 97% of the girls said that they would go by abilities regardless of gender. Not even one girl said that she would choose a woman leader *because she is a woman*. On the other hand 23% of the boys wished to go along with a male as leader *because he is a man*, and only about 76% think in terms of abilities. It bears mention that not even one male student selected the woman as a natural choice for leader. When students were asked if they would willingly accept a girl in a commanding position, 69% of the boys asserted that they would do so. And 77% of the girls were happy to accept a girl as leader. Nearly 31% (6% boys felt that they would refuse to accept a woman in authority and 26% had reservations about a woman leader's abilities), boys feel that they would be sceptical about a girl or outright refuse to accept her leadership. As the imprint of years of social conditioning, 24% of the women themselves confessed to their own scepticism with regard to a fellow woman's leadership skill. About 31% of the boy students confessed that even among teachers – a gender neutral role and usually conventionally a 'feminine occupation', they respected the men more than the ladies, whereas 91% of the girls respect both equally regardless of their gender.

### **Gendered Leadership?**

#### ***The Dilemma of Patriarchy (Fig. 4a to 4e)***

In addition to this, women students also expressed anxiety about the career-family conflict that may affect their future careers. The boys felt it was

Fig. 3a

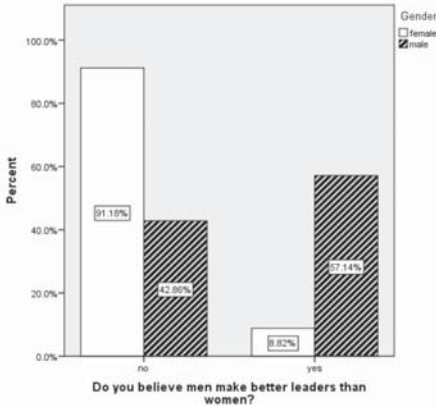


Fig. 3b

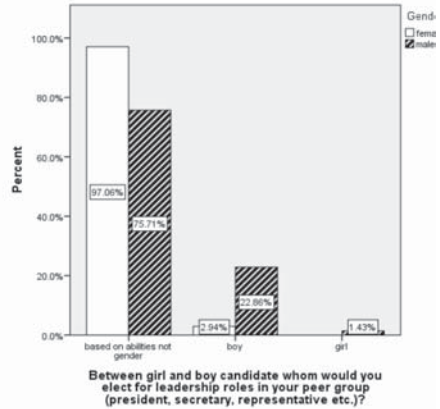


Fig. 3c

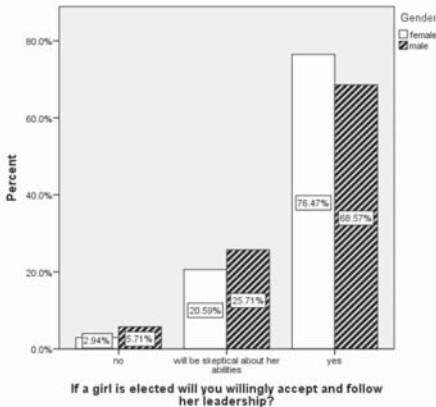
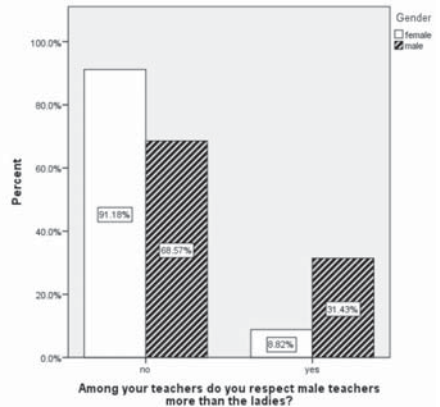


Fig. 3d



a natural progression from getting a degree to get a job and then settle down to married life. Women whom I spoke to on the other hand, conveyed a sense of trepidation and hinged all their future plans on still non-existent potential spouses and in-laws. While 91% of the women wistfully spoke of their desire to continue in their jobs after marriage, pragmatism dominated the response of the remaining 9% who admitted that they would seek the permission of their husband and in-laws. 6% of the women had already decided that after marriage they would prioritise the home and family over the workplace, and 91% would attempt to “balance both”, home and work. Only 3% were bold enough to assert they would like to give foremost attention to careers. On the other hand 99% of the men students were able to state with ease that they would pursue their careers and 94% of them also desired to balance both home and career.

Even in matters like helping with housework in their natal homes, 71% of the girls said they were required to participate in housework while only 59% of the boys were asked to do so. 64% of boys said ‘yes’ they liked to do housework whereas about 80% girls said they in fact enjoyed it. These are children from middle class homes whose parents have invested equally in education of their children, both boys and girls. 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. The fact that they are successful engineering graduates amply demonstrates this. But such is the hold of convention that simple things (like difference in allocation of housework) are regarded as a norm and not as any form of discriminatory child rearing.

About 83% of the boys claimed that they were ‘always’ or frequently taking their own decisions. In fact they averred that even the decision to study engineering including the sub-field of choice was primarily their own. Only 56% of the girls were able to make a similar assertion.

Ann Oakley has focused upon these areas, exploring and delineating the female experience of living in a patriarchal society where a woman’s contribution to overall production was and remains so often neglected. Oakley is concerned with the impact of gender barrier on the well-being of women. There is a consistency in Oakley’s work: housewife, motherhood, post-natal depression, menopause etc., her principal preoccupation is with woman in her various physiological predicaments that bind her varied roles. Ann Oakley could be called a socialist-feminist, using labour value as her key concept to analyse the previously ignored area of the labour value of domestic labour. Oakley’s socialist feminism links the inferior position of women to class based

Fig. 4a

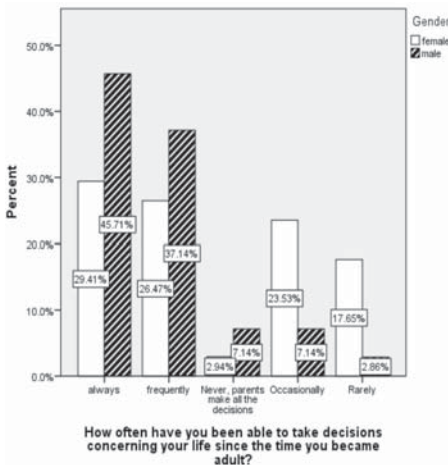


Fig. 4b

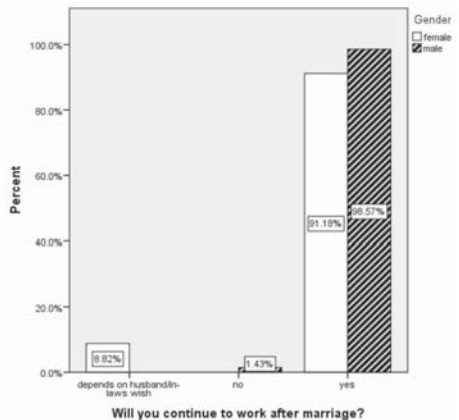


Fig. 4c

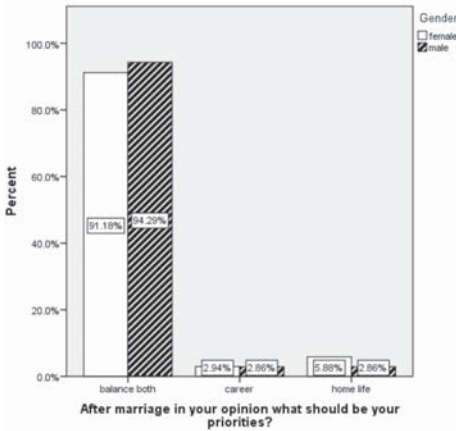


Fig. 4d

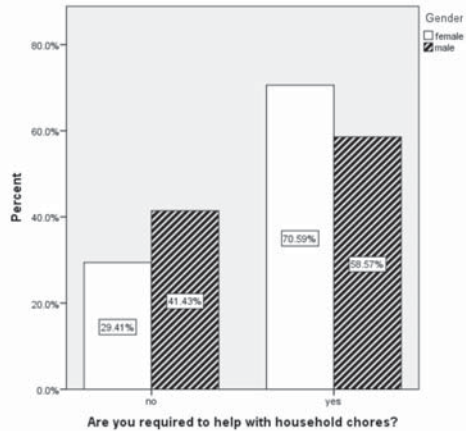
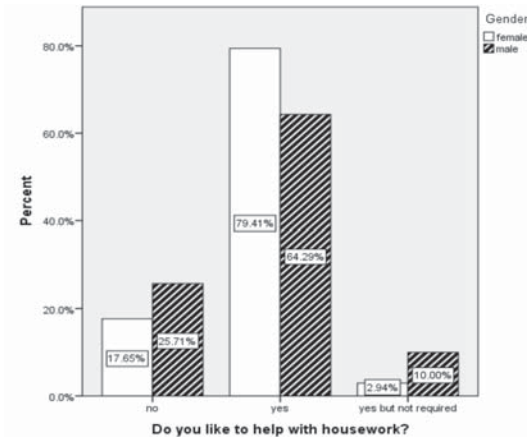


Fig. 4e



capitalism and its alignment with the patriarchal family in capitalist societies. The unpaid labour at home and the paid labour at work serve the patriarchal capitalism.

### Conclusion

Theoretical perspectives on feminism are borne out in the context of this study. The Feminist Movement has given a large body of theory which attempts to explain gender inequalities and set forth agendas for overcoming those inequalities. Competing schools of feminism have sought to explain gender inequalities through a variety of deeply embedded social processes, such as sexism, patriarchy and capitalism. Glass ceilings are considered as

being the result of barriers to a woman's career growth. What organizational barriers and obstacles a woman experiences in the workplace have been and can be re-assessed through research. However the present study substantiates that there are certain hidden internal barriers, some of them self-imposed through social conditioning and upbringing that women unconsciously take with them to their domain of work.

The Existentialist Feminist framework is useful in analysing this core issue. According to existentialist philosophy, the individual is solely responsible for giving her or his life meaning and for living that life passionately and sincerely in spite of many existential obstacles and distractions including despair, angst, absurdity, alienation and boredom. Existence precedes essence. First of all man exists, encounters himself and then surges up in the world. The role of free choices is so that 'men' can define the nature of their existence. Simone de Beauvoir has provided a Marxist-Existentialist standpoint that represents the woman's perspective. In her path breaking text *The Second Sex* (1949) she expresses the feminists' sense of injustice. Beauvoir confronts the existentialist dilemma of absolute freedom vs. the constraints of circumstance. The problem is not to do with women but the social construction of women. The problem is also not do with men but the social construction of masculinity; men are seen to be aggressive, competitive. The patriarchal construct of masculinity is also harmful to men narrowing their life choices, limiting their sexuality and blocking full emotional connection with women and other men.

The hierarchically superior group stereotypes the group placed lower in hierarchy and ascribes characteristic traits to it. It is a perception that women are a deviation from the normal that they must move forward away from. In such a world view the woman becomes the other in society. Women consider men to be the ideal which they must emulate. We inhabit a world that consists of a culture created by men. The male is the subject, the standpoint from which the world is to be seen and defined. And the woman becomes the other, the object. The question therefore is whether the woman can actualise herself from the state of other, liberate herself and attain subjectivity.

In the women's voices, even as privileged students of engineering, there is a dull acceptance, trained to echo the male-centric view of the world. There is little rancour or discontent. It is as though at the time when women enter their careers, they are already as it were, resigned to their fate as marginal players in the world of work. The glass ceiling manifests only when women reach high enough to encounter it. But incipient is the slippery slope that they have to tenuously climb before they can ever aspire to the ceiling. Still more overpowering is the underlying clamp of patriarchal norms and socialisation whose vice like grip women have to release themselves from before they can learn to stay afloat in the corporate quagmire.



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