ABSTRACT

Title of the dissertation: **Women Software Engineers in Private Companies of Kolkata: A Sociological Study**

This research is undertaken to highlight the everyday realities of women software engineers. It has attempted to explore whether their experiences are gendered. There are three main objectives of this study. Firstly, it attempts to understand the changes brought about by their employment. I have tried to understand whether their economic independence has enabled them to challenge the dominant familial ideologies which constructs women primarily as self-sacrificing mothers, good wives and economic dependents. Secondly, it attempts to explore whether there is a gendered division of labour in software industry as a consequence of work being socially constructed as masculine and feminine. Thirdly, it attempts to explore the kind of gender issues that women encounter at work and whether these affect their career mobility, compared to men. The study has adopted a mixed-methods approach, where major weightage has been given on qualitative aspects. I have also used some quantitative data, in the form of percentages to denote the responses of women. For the purpose of study, fifty women software engineers from three renowned IT companies of Kolkata have been chosen, through purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Data has been collected through face-to-face interviews and these have been recorded and later transcribed for analysis and interpretation.

My findings have indicated that employment in the IT companies have made women, the consumers of the new economy. It has given them increased economic power and self-confidence as they decide in matters of marriage. Yet they have not challenged the dominant ideas of womanhood and uphold 'respectable femininity' in the course of navigation between work and home. This was evident in the 'gendered balances' which women undertook of prioritizing family over work. They were guided by familial norms and ideologies of a 'good wife' and 'good mother'. The study further highlighted that women are largely concentrated in lower-end software tasks (like: testing, debugging, quality assurance) while they are under-represented in higher-end software tasks (like: architecture, design or consultation). I have explored that skills and technical knowledge are socially constructed and the fact that high-end software work is marked by a masculine culture. The findings have also suggested the different kinds of gendered practices at work and how marriage and family stereotype women as

‘inflexible workers’ which affects their growth in companies and their recruitment. A major highlight of the study was that women software engineers had to adopt masculine style of work in order to survive or cope in the IT companies.