

# **ENSLAVED OR EMPOWERED?**

A CRITIQUE OF CULTURE & CAREER  
IN DISCOURSES OF THE  
“EMPOWERMENT” OF BANGALORE  
WOMEN IN THE IT INDUSTRY

# Abstract

India is booming and new sectors that have the cutting edge internationally are mushrooming in size across the country. One such sector is the Information Technologies (IT) industry, but it has attracted international attention not solely for its large scope on the international market, but also because it is a pioneer ahead of its Western peers. As a percent of the total labour force Indian women are more represented in the IT sector in India than Western women in their home countries. Under the banner of “empowerment” this phenomena is being hailed as gender equality in full swing, but is it really swinging or just swaying?

The following research paper seeks to critically analyze the discourse that the IT sector is “empowering” women in India, specifically Bangalore.

**Key Words:** Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), empowerment, gender, women, Information Technology, India, Bangalore.

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# 1 Introduction

*“The Indian Woman of Today*

*Culturally rooted, globally oriented”*

(The National Commission for Women, India)

India is a country of vast contrasts. Economically India purports an economic growth rate that is the envy of the world, yet more than half the population languish in extreme poverty. Politically India is as diverse as the nations it shares its borders with. In the Southernmost state of Kerala a communist regime has ruled peacefully for decades, whereas in Assam a guerrilla war is threatening the peace and escalating into a localised civil war. Culturally India is an eclectic melting pot with a cultural diversity that is rich in over 100 languages, representing all the major faiths of the world and a variety regional traditions varying from North to South, East to West. It is a country of fascinating and often conflicting contrasts.

In the global North/West there is a widespread perception that women in developing countries such as India are in desperate need of emancipation and/or empowerment compared to women in western societies, especially in the formal employment sector. Traditional and cultural restraints are often cited as being variables responsible for this disparity, but in India a curious development that is defying the findings of such research has hit the global headlines. Indian women have in fact surpassed their Western sisters in the IT sector, despite the constraints of the prevalent traditional domestic-orientated culture that Indian women - especially in the South - are subjected to. NASSCOM, an IT giant in India, reported that 20-30 percent of the labour force in the IT sector in Bangalore were women ([www.nasscom.in](http://www.nasscom.in)). At the same time, Bangalore women remain loyal to their traditional culture and the number of arranged marriages remains high in Bangalore, whilst women still account for 90 percent of the informal sector (Tenth Five Year Plan, Women and Children, p.246).

It is this conundrum - how traditionally cultural women of conservative Bangalore are penetrating a male-dominated sector and becoming the polar stars of the IT sector – that I seek to answer in my research paper.

## 1.1 Research Question

As previously stated, my interest lay in analyzing an aspect of the phenomena of Bangalore women in the IT sector of India and how this married with their culturally ascertained position in society as the guardians of the domestic realm. As an advocate of critical theory, I wished to follow a line of questioning that would 1) bring to the forum an understanding of the ‘reality’ that is commonly transmitted which often hides a different reality by subtle oppressive social structures and 2) delve into the mechanisms at play in this transmitted ‘reality’ and demonstrate relevant alternatives to it. In other words, a line of questioning whereby I could investigate the reality as it is portrayed (“empowerment” of Bangalore women), whether this is real or imagined empowerment and if not, what are the alternatives.

Background research furnished me with some findings that suggested there is a commonly produced representation that the increase of women in the IT sector in India, especially Bangalore, demonstrates that IT in India is empowering these women and offering them the chance to live both culturally oriented and modern-westernized lives. This representation would be the focus of my research and the basis for my consequent line of questioning :

*Is the increased participation of Indian women in the IT sector in Bangalore empowering them or is it quasi-emancipation that maintains a well-established patriarchal system?*

The ‘reality’ as we know it purports that women are being empowered by entering the male-dominated IT sector, but what if increased female labour in the IT sector isn’t empowering them as we are led to believe? How can we then understand the existence of this ‘reality’? There are some interesting critical presuppositions that could explain this phenomenon. The first is that in the face of heightening globalisation India is facing increasing pressure to demonstrate gender equality in the workplace, and this can therefore be understood as being gender tokenism. We could indeed ask how many other booming sectors in India can boast such a high level of gender equality in the labour market? A second speculation is that it could be the case that demographically India may have a more equal gender balance of people educated in the sciences and maths subjects than its Western/Northern counterparts which would explain the high levels of women in the IT sector. A third conjecture is that which I embraced as my own at the start of this research. It is that the rapid boom in the Indian economy meant that more women have had to enter the labour market in order to maintain the steady economic growth. This,

however, was not to be at the cost of compromising the women's role in the informal labour market, i.e. at home, or to compromise traditional cultural restraints as the guardian of the house and family. She was not to be equal with man in the formal labour market, but to ease the strain of demand in the labour market. She and her peers were, however, to believe that this was in fact the case – that she was being empowered in the work place.

## 1.2 Investigative Aims of the Paper

Using the research question as a departure point, I decided to implement an interdisciplinary theoretical and methodological framework based around feminist CDA principles.

There are inherent general aims that feminist CDA researchers endeavour to accomplish. As a leaf on the branch of the critical theory school of thought, one of CDA's (most rudimentary) *raison d'être* is to critique oppressive social structures and highlight how they are detrimental to otherwise unknowing peoples, often the oppressed (Wodak, 2001: 10). In the case of feminist studies these social structures are patriarchal social structures that serve to oppress women (Lazar, 2005:5). One aim of this research was therefore to analyze and demonstrate how the contribution of women as labour in the IT sector was not empowerment on the scale that it is commonly portrayed as being - a victory for women entering a staunchly male dominated sector - but the preservation of an oppressive patriarchal structure that controlled the amount of empowerment that was to be given to women.

Feminist CDA concerns itself with analysing genderized oppression which is sustained by discourses and social practices (Lazar, 2005:1). A discourse will be further explained later in the research, but for the purpose of clarity here a discourse is a product of a certain use of language in various textual ways that collectively form a version of reality that sustain and maintain a circumscribed order. Discourse is the object of study in CDA and the rule of thumb ascribed by most critical discourse (CD) analysts is to analyze a dominant, often oppressive, discourse within a given field of inquiry and to offer a discursive alternative (Fairclough in Wodak, 2001:125). Based on this, a second aim of this research was to not only analyze the dominant discourse that the IT sector is empowering Bangalore women but also to map an opposing, emancipatory discourse.

Rudiment in all CDA research are concepts and issues of power, history and ideology (Wodak, 2001:3). DeFransisco makes a convincing argument for the utilization of power as the central focal point, and that social categories (such as gender) should be analyzed as a mechanism in the political scheme of oppression (DeFransisco in Wodak, 1997:39). This is one way of conducting feminist research, but for this research I used gender as the foundation and starting point for conceptualizing not only power, but also history and ideology. Gender was the central focal point of my research as gender cannot and should not be categorized

merely as a conceptual tool as DeFransisco argues (ibid.). Gender should be regarded as intrinsic in the concept of power in gender studies and therefore take a central role right from the start. A third aim of this paper was therefore to investigate issues surrounding gender ideology, the concept of power conceptualized in the term empowerment for women and the history of Bangalore women and their culture.

To summarize, this research has three main aims to fulfil:

- 1) To analysis the dominant discourse, i.e. that the IT sector is empowering Bangalore women using feminist critical discourse analysis methodology and theory.
- 2) To detail an alternative discourse harmonious with the beliefs of the critical theory school of thought to emancipate.
- 3) To use not only standard concepts of power, as is common practice in standard discourse analysis, but to use the conceptual toolbox of power, historical context and ideology interchangeably, with gender as the main uniting link.

### 1.3 Outline

Feminist CDA is a multifaceted theoretical and methodological analytical framework that is complex both to understand and to utilize. An in-depth discussion of its theoretical and methodological underpinnings is therefore as important as detailing the application of feminist CDA in research. Some researchers within the CDA community fuse theory and method into one over-arching section as it is hard to distinguish CDA into the two categories of method and theory, but I have chosen to use two sections, theory and method, separately. Theory and method in all forms of social research are intertwined as we must as valid researchers apply theory to method and vice versa, but it is equally important to be clear and precise about how the research will be undertaken, which means a clear discussion of methodology *per se*. Writing both in the same section in my mind only serves to confuse an already complex subject. As such the paper opens with a section entitled Theory which seeks to explain the nature of feminist CDA with regards its critical theoretical roots; what the basic premises of feminist CDA are and how we define a discourse.

In the second section, I detail feminist CDA methodology and also ethnographic methodology, as I applied an interdisciplinary methodological approach. In the first part of the second section I discuss the benefits and disadvantages of an interdisciplinary approach, followed by discussing feminist CDA and ethnographic methods and how and why they have been applied in this research.

In the third section I discuss the material used in my research and how it was selected. In the fourth section I detail the analysis of my research. Here I discuss and analyze my material using my theoretical and methodological framework as detailed in sections one and two. In the fifth and final section I conclude my



research with three discussions: 1) the results of my analysis and 2) some suggestions for future research in this fascinating subject area that is the “empowerment” of Indian women in the male-dominated IT sector.

## 1.4 Previous Research

Within the field of International Political Economy (IPE) – and indeed within the realm of CDA studies - the majority of Western literature and research does not pertain to answering questions concerned with gender issues. Disconcertingly ‘man’ is the given norm in International Politics (Bengtsson *et al*, 2001:54). That social structures and institutions are often portrayed as gender neutral in IPE research is a cause for concern. Social practices and structures are rarely gender neutral (Lazar, 2005: 5) and therefore a gender perspective, especially in the andro-centric domain of IPE, is in not only my opinion desperately lacking.

Nearly none of the previous research that I had the opportunity to read concerning Indian women’s labour input in the IT sector was critical towards the concept that the IT sector was empowering women. Having said that, I do not doubt that there exists critical accounts of the IT sector in India as being empowering for women, but my overwhelming impression is that these must be few and far between.

Even more disconcerting was the amount of available literature on the subject of feminism and CDA which was written and produced with a purely western-centric focus, dealing with “modern societies” or “western women”. As Lazar points out, CDA “remains within the cosy white, straight male domain” (Lazar, 2005:4-5). Not only that, it appears to ignore the developing world as a whole.

# 2 Theory

## 2.1 Critical Theory as a Point of Departure for Feminist CDA

Critical Discourse Analysis and feminism are sub-divisions of critical theory which figure in research either as individual theories or combined as feminist CDA. As a critical theory, there are fundamental underpinnings that the researcher commits to when choosing feminist CDA as the framework within which the research object is to be scrutinized. Critical theory-based research essentially criticizes reality as it is perceived or portrayed. Reality in itself is a diffuse concept within the critical theory school of thought as epistemologically and ontologically there is a wide base from which critical theorists can launch their understanding of the world from, particularly within CDA (Wodak, 2005: 123). One form, and the form adhered to in my research, is critical realism, or the judgment that the reality we see is a distorted truth and not absolute but that a form of reality does exist. In other words, the 'reality' as we see it is not real for the real reality is obscured by this projection of it.

So if reality is not real, what *is* de facto reality? According to critical theorists, reality is subjective and we all live our own version of it. That is not to say that there is therefore no collective version of reality. Our perceived reality is also often one which is oppressive in nature and therefore detrimental. Critical theory is not only about demonstrating this negative nature of reality for there is a silver-lining on an otherwise dark cloud. Critical theory has emancipatory ambitions in so far as it not only maps the oppressive in the alleged reality, but also details alternatives that should lead to universal suffrage. To summarize, critical theory assumes two metaphysical statements 1) that our experience of reality is often a false mediated version which is oppressive in nature and 2) that we can uncover an alternative to this reality.

## 2.2 Defining the Term 'Discourse'

The assertion that reality as we know it is merely a mediated parallel to a de facto reality is the basis for understanding a discourse. A discourse *is* this 'mediated parallel reality'. This 'reality', or discourse, is the product of an array of textual mediums which build up, mediate and - through doing so - sustain a form of reality (Wodak in Wodak & Meyer, 2001:44). The ultimate purpose of a discourse is to uphold a specific doctored version of reality that sustains hegemonic power structures (Meyer, 2001: 34). Language is the central building blocks in discourse as

it is language and its' use that upholds a discourse. Language is our most powerful form of communication. Through the use of texts, social practices and what is called *discursive actions* a common picture of reality is created and becomes so common-place and accepted that this picture of reality infiltrates and subsequently moulds the norms and values of a given society with the societal members' often passive acceptance. If we apply this definition to the research then the discourse that I will investigate is the common-place understanding and mediated 'reality' that Bangalore women are empowered by entering the IT sector as labour.

This is a simplistic definition of a discourse, as a discourse is a highly complex concept. This however serves as a background to understanding the nature of what a discourse is as an in-depth analysis of the term discourse is discussed later in this section. There are many varying theoretical understandings of what a discourse is and how we can analyse one varying from a hermeneutic approach to a critical approach, and here it is important to understand how feminism and critical theory are utilized in analyzing a discourse.

## 2.3 Feminist Principles

Feminism, following in the spirit of critical theory's revelatory and emancipatory nature, seeks to highlight unjust social structures that are patriarchal and/or oppressive and also demonstrate how empowerment of women is and should be made possible. In simplistic terms it is a theory that critically scrutinizes "the arrangement between the sexes" (Cameron, 1997: 21). It is upon these foundations that feminism is united – to reveal genderized oppressive social structures and illustrate how gender equality is and should be possible.

There are many divisive points within feminism, but one of the most crucial is the sex/gender differential debate. It is crucial to discuss it, albeit briefly here, because it is a debate that permeates all forms of feminist analysis.

Nicole Claude Mathieu exemplifies in her three point conceptualization of sex and gender what different stances there are available to feminist scholars. In her opinion there are three main standpoints - *homology*, *analogy* and *heterogeneity*. (Nicole Claude Mathieu in Cameron, 1997: 23-24). These standpoints differentiate concepts of gender and sex which vary widely. I am of the school of thought that there are indeed anatomical differences that can be defined as 'sex', but that 'masculine' and 'feminine' are the conceptual products of our socialization, i.e. it is learned and not intrinsic to our nature. This is what Claude Mathieu describes as the category *homology* (ibid.).

IT, the sciences and mathematics are male-dominated subjects and fields of work, but why is this so? Following the above line of reasoning - that the only difference between 'man' and 'woman' is of a physical nature, but that we are socialized into being 'feminine' and 'masculine' - then we can formulate a theory about the IT

sector. It is a male-dominated domain because it has been given a ‘masculine’ profile. Therefore women have not been given the same access or encouragement into this sector. This makes a strong case for the idea that Bangalore women are now being encouraged into the IT sector as extra labour, because the IT sector is being made less ‘masculine’ in nature and more ‘gender-neutral’.

## 2.4 Critical Discourse Analysis – an Overview

CDA is, as the name states, the analysis of discourses from a critical theoretical standpoint. CDA is not the only form of discourse analysis, but in my opinion it is the most advanced as there are areas within CDA that the other discursive analytical frameworks lack. Firstly, in other forms there lacks the critical theoretical emancipatory dimension that is central in CDA. This is achieved in CDA by scrutinizing not only one dominant discourse which is essentially the nature of hermeneutic discourse analysis, but by also detailing a resistant discourse that opposes the dominant discourse, i.e. the object of research. Inter-discursive analysis, or the study of many discourses, is therefore a central component in CDA that often lacks in hermeneutic discourse analysis.

Secondly, CDA goes further in the analysis of a discourse than the other discourse analytical types. CD analysts not only study the discourse in the language that is used in texts and language, but also discursive practice which is the thinking and speaking of those within a discourse. In my research I have incorporated this element by informally interviewing a female Bangalore Indian employee in one of India’s foremost IT companies to analyze the extent to which the discourse has infiltrated the discursive practices of the people of the discourse.

Thirdly, the conceptualization of ideology, power and history is very much part and parcel of CDA but not necessarily perceived as relevant in other discourse analytical frameworks. The conceptualization of these is important as it deepens our understanding of discourses to another level that other discourse analysis fails to reach.

Within the CDA community there are scholars that are calling for a new breed of CDA to be implemented within research\*. Scholars such as Paul Chilton are calling for CDA to be focussed not only on language use and communication, but also on the psychological aspects of discursive practices. This is an interesting development within CDA, one which I unfortunately haven’t been able to expand upon within this research, but a development that bears proof to the dynamism within CDA research.

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\* For a comprehensive discussion on the subject, see for example Paul Chilton’s appeal for CDA to move into the domain of the human mind in order to explain speech within humans Paul Chilton and also Ron Scollon and Suzie Wong Scollon, 2005: chapters 2 & 5).

To briefly conclude, CDA lends itself to the analysis of discourses by analyzing not only language in a dominant discourse, but by inter-discursivity as seen in the analysis of the dominant discourse and a resistant discourse, and also through analyzing discursive practices that are prevalent in a discourse. Furthermore, CDA is concerned with analyzing a discourse on more levels than other forms of discourse analysis by applying concepts of ideology and power and placing a discourse in its historical context to better understand its current status.

## **2.5 Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis**

We now have a clear picture of what feminism entails and also CDA, so the final part of this section is to detail feminist CDA as a complete theory and why it is my theoretical framework of choice.

As Kendall and Tannen state “...the most fruitful theoretical framework for understanding how gender-related patterns interact with the influence of hierarchical relations, as well as other issues of gender and of workplace communication, is a framing approach.” (Kendall and Tannen, 1997:95). CDA is one such framing approach which endeavours, when coupled with feminism, to analyze “issues of gender” and “the influence of hierarchical relations” and as such is an apt approach for the aims of this research. According to Lazar feminist CDA “is especially pertinent in present times where issues of gender, power and ideology have become increasingly complex and subtle.” (Lazar, 2005:1). Therefore feminist CDA is not only an ideal theoretical framework for analyzing gender and hierarchal structures, but also subtle issues such as ideology and power that are not straight forward concepts to analyze.

From an epistemological and ontological position, feminism and CDA marry well as they are both critical theories with the underlying motivation to change oppressive structures. Furthermore, the arrival of feminist CDA into the largely male-dominated domain of CDA is a much celebrated one as it brings to the forum a gender perspective that has unfortunately been somewhat lacking within CDA.

## **2.6 Conceptualizing Ideology, Power and Historical Context**

According to Ruth Wodak, there are three concepts that must be acknowledged and evaluated in any discourse analyzed from a critical perspective – these are ideology; power and an historical context (Wodak in Wodak & Meyer, 2001:3). Here I wish to explore and define conceptualisations of ideology, concepts of power and historical background that are relevant to the “empowerment” discourse of Bangalore women

### **2.6.1 Ideology**

Ideology - the “science of ideas” – is, as Teun A. Van Dijk puts it, “the basis of the knowledge and attitudes of groups...ideologies feature the basic principles that organize the attitudes shared by members of a group” (Teun A. Van Dijk in Wodak & Meyer, 2001: 115). Ideology is therefore a collection of ideas and attitudes that permeate the collective thought within a given group. Ideology also denotes the dominant way of thinking in a given society through the forming and reproduction of certain norms and values, which is why it has a crucial place in CDA. CDA lends itself to critically investigating the norms and values of a given discourse, that is to say the foundations that a mediated reality is built upon, and therefore ideology. Feminist ideology - which derives from the basic premise that there exists gendered social structures which actively *prime* men and/or oppress women - therefore strives to uncover these gender inequalities that are inherent in the norms and values of a given society. In the case of discourse analysis it is a section of society, that which is a part of the discourse, which is the research matter. Ideology is therefore the basis of the reproduction of ideas, norms and values and as a concept it is entwined with the concept of power as it is ideology which upholds and creates norms and values which maintain a certain balance of power (Wodak in Wodak & Meyer, 2001: 10).

## 2.6.2 Encapsulating Power

Power as a general concept is problematic to pinpoint, but within a specific context such as the “empowerment” discourse of Bangalore women, we can clearly define and utilize some conceptualizations of power. Within this research, there are two forms of power that I was interested in exploring from a gender perspective – *empowerment* and *emancipation*. At first glance, these concepts are ostensibly peas in a pod as both ascertain to the liberation of women, but on closer inspection they differ considerably.

Empowerment as defined by the Indian government throughout *Tenth Five Year Plan, Women and Children* is increasing the power and decision-making capacity of women over their lives. Empowerment means giving women the necessary tools so that they themselves can change their lives (Tenth Five Year Plan, Women and Children). As a term it is widely used within the feminist school of thought, but once again it is a term that divides feminist scholars. The first widely accepted premise of the implication of this concept is the acknowledgement that women are less powerful than men and that they should be more powerful in the running of their lives than they are “allowed” to be. The second and more controversial implication is that empowering women by increasing their power and strength (economically in the case of the “empowerment” discourse of Bangalore women) does not necessarily mean making them equal. According to DeFrancisco feminists have often emphasized the resistance of oppression rather than the underlying control of exerting power over others that empowerment actually entails (DeFrancisco in Wodak 1997: 42). It is a cause for concern that some, predominantly liberal western feminists, are content with empowerment as defined here, whereby women have been given an increase in power in comparison to say

fifty years ago and therefore, according to the liberal, feminism is fast becoming a defunct theory in the west. This is problematic as women have not reached a point whereby they are equal with men in all walks of life, in all the world. Furthermore, it bears asking the question who is giving women the power if not largely men and does that not mean that they still de facto have the ultimate power?

Emancipation is a common concept within critical theory and central within feminism, but one that needs defining none the less (Lazar, 2005:15). Emancipation is quite different from empowerment. Emancipation is not a process whereby women are given more power as in empowerment which in my mind still denotes a form of control over women as to how much and when this power will be given and by who, but emancipation denotes rather the complete freedom of women from oppression and total equality with regards their standing *vis-à-vis* men.

### 2.6.3 An Historical Context

Ideology and power are concepts that are not isolated to the here and now but rooted and influenced by their history. If we take democracy as an ideological concept as the distribution of political power we see that it is derived from centuries old Greece and as a concept it hasn't changed much since this time in content and definition, if at all. Democracy is not, as many presidents of America and the Western world like to portray, a modern western concept but actually an ancient concept from antiquity. This example highlights the problem of ignoring the historical context of a given discourse, here a discourse of democracy. Without knowledge of the past and placing the research object in its historical context, i.e. what has shaped and formed it, we only reveal half of the picture. If we are to fully understand the implications of a discourse today then we must understand its roots in yesterday as these have influenced and shaped it (Wodak in Wodak & Meyer, 2001:3).

With regards the “empowerment” discourse of Bangalore women, it is vital to understand the historical concept of their road to “empowerment”. What can their history tell us about their current situation? Discourses rarely occur as spontaneous entities but rather are formed over time and therefore discursive elements exist from the past.

To conclude, ideology, power and history are three intertwined concepts that together form the basis of a discourse. Ideology is the backbone in the ‘reality’ that is mediated to us in a discourse as it is upon ideology that collective norms and values are formed. These in turn form and uphold structures of power, in the instance of this research gendered structures, which in turn are formed and influenced by their historical context.

## 2.7 The Resistant Discourse – Emancipation

Emancipation is a central theme in this research not only in the conceptualization of power, but also as a means of achieving social change. Feminist CDA research pertains to disrupting detrimental patriarchal realities that are present in dominant discourses by detailing an opposing, emancipatory discourse. Inter-discursive analysis, or the analysis of many discourses in the same research, is important because it demonstrates how discourses interact with one another and are intrinsically linked and also illuminates how far reaching the scope of a discourse can be. As Michelle M.Lazar states, feminist CDA is “A critical perspective on unequal social arrangements sustained through language use, with the goals of social transformation and emancipation.” (Lazar, 2005:1). As we have seen theoretical definitions of discourse within the school of critical theory are overwhelmingly disparaging so how then can a discourse be positive and emancipatory?



## 3 Methodology & the Analytical Framework

### 3.1 Feminist CDA as a Methodological Approach

As previously stated, feminist CDA is not only a theoretical framework, but also a methodological approach. As Cameron quite rightly states the methods one applies to a research object is based on theory (Cameron in Wodak, 1997:22) and therefore they are very much intertwined. As previously stated, many discourse analysts choose to fuse both theory and method, but here in my research I preferred to make a distinction between the two. This facilitates triangulation between theory, method and analysis which is a form of safe guarding that that which I aim to research is being researched according to my theoretical and methodological disposition.

Feminist CDA, and CDA in general, allow a plethora of methodologies to be applied to a research object (Wodak in Wodak & Meyer, 2001:3), as long as they fulfil criteria relevant to critical linguistics studies (Fowler, 1996:11). This proved problematic as the methodological approaches on offer necessitated a decision-making process that spanned the duration of the research. With the study of the language used in a discourse and the actual discourse per se being the research object and starting point of my research, I could however make some methodological choices. I framed the discourse surrounding the “empowerment” of Bangalore women so as to limit the scope of my research; I decided to informally interview a female Bangalore employee in an IT firm which brought to the research an inter-disciplinary aspect where a choice between ethnographic and conversation analytical methods was to be made and I decided to produce and use a reference chart of nodes and codes to analyze the language used in written and spoken texts. The first step into exploring my choice of method starts however with a debate surrounding the role of the researcher as an objective versus subjective being.

#### 3.1.1 Questioning ‘Objectivity’

As we have seen in the theoretical section, Feminist CDA is of the critical school of thought and therefore adheres to the notion that research is not objective and that

the researcher cannot distance themselves sufficiently from their research matter. In the case of Feminist CDA, DeFrancisco states the essence of undertaking feminist CDA research:

“None of us are ‘outsiders’ when it comes to social oppressions such as racism, classism, and sexism; that is, we either belong to the oppressed group(s), we oppress overtly, and/or we benefit from the oppressive system.”  
(DeFrancisco in Wodak, 1997:48).

Indeed, none of us are ‘outsiders’ in the realm of discourses. Discourses are prevalent in every social sphere and unavoidable. To attempt to research a discourse from an objective standpoint is therefore futile. In fact, to be within the researched discourse is very much recommended as this gives social and cultural context to the researcher gaining increased insight into the nature of the discourse (Teun A. Van Dijk in Wodak & Meyer, 2001:116). Having been in Bangalore and having had much contact with the indigenous people there, especially the Bangalore women, would have been ideal circumstances for this research piece, but as this was not possible I aimed at gathering both sufficient amounts of primary and secondary material in other forms (which will be described in the Material section of this paper) and had many meetings and informal interviews with one Bangalore woman in the IT sector which gave me a good insight into the situation and the discourse itself.

### 3.1.2 Framing *The “Empowerment”* Discourse

Framing a discourse is necessary in order to define the parameters of the research object. It is somewhat problematic defining where a discourse begins and ends as discourses often overlap and/or have similar traits. Normally it is the researcher who frames their discourse, but in my case the discourse presented itself to me more or less.

From the offset I had an idea about the research area I was interested in, and that I wanted to utilize feminist CDA as a means of theoretical and methodological framework. I was interested in analyzing a discourse concerning an aspect of Indian women’s participation in the country’s mushrooming economy and as I started some basic background research it appeared more and more that the “empowerment” discourse was so powerful and so strongly institutionalized that I floundered in outlining a resistant discourse. I found it to be a fascinating, powerful discourse that puzzled me as although I developed some preconceived ideas concerning the discourse and its true nature, they were many and in my mind some, all or none of them could have been in the result of my research.

The IT sector kept on appearing in my background research - the fantastic progress Indian women had made in this sector was cited in all the major journals, in newspapers and in discussions that I had with Indian people that already I could

narrow down my discourse to comprise the IT sector. This was and still is one of the major, if not the most pivotal, of all sectors in the Indian market that has embraced women participation in the formal labour market. Secondly, as I was interested in the cultural aspect of women's participation and how this has changed or remained the same, I wanted to focus on culturally conservative women and this meant focussing my attention on the cultural South. This served well as Bangalore is staunchly cultural at the same time it is the Silicon Valley of India and therefore the perfect place for conducting my research. Thirdly, there were some key words that already in my background research were transpiring as central to the discourse, such as "empowerment". This further aided in limiting the scope of the discourse.

To summarize, the discourse of "empowerment" of Bangalore women in the IT sector includes representations of Bangalore women in the IT sector in India with regards the widespread acceptance of women into this sector through texts produced by powerful institutions. Furthermore, the discourse accounts for the historical cultural role of Bangalore women – how she has been represented through time and is currently represented in cultural terms.

The resistant discourse, or the emancipatory discourse, has been hard to pin point, but as the research progressed this had transpired as a small marginalized discourse that questions both empowerment and cultural aspects of the dominant discourse. This is better explained within the framework of the analysis as it becomes apparent how and why this discourse has come into being only compared with the results of the "empowerment" discourse.

## 3.2 Feminist CDA as an Analytical Framework

As we have seen, feminist CDA (and CDA generally speaking) is a framework that is not easily defined as it can move fluidly between different methodological approaches as well as incorporate elements or whole other disciplines. According to Norman Fairclough, there is however a united analytical base from which CDA analysts depart (Fairclough, 2001:125).

According to Fairclough, there are 5 levels of analysis, of which some of the levels are multi-faceted:

“1 Focus upon a social problem which has a semiotic aspect.

2 Identify obstacles to it being tackled, through analysis of

a the network of practices it is located within

b the relationship of semiosis to other elements within the particular practice(s) concerned

c the discourse (the semiosis itself)

- structural analysis: the order of discourse
- interactional analysis
- interdiscursive analysis
- linguistic and semiotic analysis.

3 Consider whether the social order (network of practices) in a sense ‘needs’ the problem.

4 Identify possible ways past the obstacles.

5 Reflect critically on the analysis (1-4)”

(Fairclough in Wodak & Meyer, 2001:125).

Relating Fairclough’s five step analytical model to my own research is a valuable guideline for performing credible discourse analytical research. In the first step, the focus is upon the representation in semiotic, or linguistic, terms of the perceived “empowerment” of Bangalore women by entering into the IT sector as labour. It is a “social problem” because the empowerment may actually be impeding these women’s true emancipation. In the second step, identifying obstacles to uncovering this problem, by using the three subcategories this can be related to the research as follows: the network of practices is the correlation of discursive indicators formulated and upheld within a given societal framework that strive to achieve the same goals (Fairclough in Wodak & Meyer, 2001:129-130). In the case of this research, it is the correlation of governmental papers and the content of certain women’s NGOs websites as one network and academic papers that are to some extent contained in this network that are important. It is the existing network of exchange of discursive realities here that is in focus. The second category, the relationship of semiosis within practices, refers to the language that is used to uphold certain norms and values on a large scale, that is to say the gender ideology and the positive terminology given to “empowerment” in the discourse and the reoccurring use of language that builds a representation of “empowerment” of women. The third aspect, semiosis/discourse, is the analysis of the “empowerment” discourse itself and within this there are more layers of analysis – the analysis of the resistant discourse; the analysis of other discourses (I have however chosen simply the dominant “empowerment” discourse and the resistant discourses here, but many more could be analyzed) and an analysis of the language of the discourse. The last part of the analysis projects the idea of whether the network practices that are being analyzed need changing. In this case I would, based on my presuppositions that the dominant discourse is detrimental by upholding controlled empowerment as a form of emancipation, say yes.

This, in a nutshell, is Fairclough’s outline for CDA analysis. Simply put, we are to analyze the language not merely on face value, but through a complex set of analytical stages in order to disclose what is hidden. To disclose what is hidden behind the words in the texts; to disclose the institutionalized networks present in the formulation and mediating of the language in texts; to disclose by contrasting and comparing the functions of this language not only in one context but in many and in every step to refer back through triangulation between theory and method, and between the different stages of analysis in order to get the most in depth analysis possible.

### 3.2.1 Codes

As language is the central proponent in CDA analysis, and indeed in a discourse as it is through language use that a discourse is sustained, the use of language in analyzing a discourse is central. Deciphering and analyzing language use is not straight forward, and in order to conduct both valid research and produce a research with a high inter-subjectivity value, it must have order and form. One of the best and most commonly used analytical toolboxes within CDA is the use of various codes or models<sup>†</sup>. There is however no standardized shape or format and CDA researchers are at the advantage (or at the mercy) of conceptualizing their own coding system based around some common focal points.

As all language has grammatical shape and form use of grammar is a central component (Kress in Caldas-Coulthard & Coulthard, 1996:18). The use of “I”, “They” or “We” for example automatically categorize discursively identities of social actors and groups within a discourse in negative or positive terms. “They” is represented as being alien, as being something foreign and hard to understand at times (Therefore the first category in my reference chart of codes is *grammatical references*. To what extent does there exist identities of Bangalore women in the IT sector as being “they” or “us” and what other grammatical indicators are there present in the discourse that uphold representations?

The second category is the representation of Bangalore women in the IT sector using *gender* as a code. How are Bangalore women in the IT sector differentiated using gender as a marker? The third category is how the textual components define and describe *empowerment* and, if at all, *emancipation*. The fourth is *references to culture* and the perceived role of Bangalore women within the IT sector within this category. The fifth category is *symbolism* – metaphors hidden within the texts, *double entendres*, implicit connotations etc. and finally the sixth category is *normative expressions and statements* concerning the role of Bangalore women in the IT sector and the cultural societal sphere in terms of “ought”, “should” etc.

### 3.3 Inter-disciplinarity – Marrying Feminist CDA with Ethnography

According to many well-established CDA analysts, a multi-disciplinary methodological approach is regarded favourably (see for example Defrancisco, in Wodak, 1997:39 & Lazar, 2005:13). Many different methodological approaches from other disciplines can be brought to the CDA arena and utilized successfully in research projects, and here it is a question of deciding upon the methods most suitable for a specific research piece. Wodak states that ethnographic research, which delves into the realm of interviewing indigenous peoples and in understanding the cultural aspects of a given research object for example, is a fruitful inter-disciplinary approach for CDA research (Wodak in Wodak & Meyer, 2001:3), whereas Lazar makes a good argument for the benefits of CDA coupled with conversation analysis (Lazar, 2005:13). Using an inter-disciplinary approach,

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<sup>†</sup> For an in depth account, see chapter five, Teun A Van.Dijk in Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis as detailed in the reference list

the researcher must decide to what extent the two or more disciplines are to be fused, and furthermore why the researcher has chosen an interdisciplinary approach.

Theo van Leeuwen details three interdisciplinary models which can be adhered to, namely centralist, pluralist and integrationist models (van Leeuwen in Wodak & Chilton, 2005:3-10). By basing the majority of my research around feminist CDA and using ethnography to a limited extent based on feminist CDA principles to further aid my CDA aims of research, I adhered to the centralist approach (van Leeuwen in Wodak & Chilton, 2005: 3-4). The ethnographic element is like an extension on a house that is feminist CDA – without the extension the house is ample enough, but the extension allows us to expand and develop. Van Leeuwen demonstrates in his research where CDA is limited and in need of ethnographic help in order to gain more in depth knowledge about social actions and discursive practices (van Leeuwen in Wodak & Chilton, 2005: 13).

As a part of my research, I wanted to use interactional material in the form of interviews which does not generally fall under the authority of CDA methodology and as a result I found myself debating between the use of conversation analysis and ethnographic methods.

Lazar is of the opinion that feminist CDA can be combined effectively with conversation analysis (ibid.). In my mind, there are too many discrepancies between conversation analysis and CDA for this to grant a smooth transition into the field of inter-disciplinary study. Conversation Analysis seeks to analyze at close hand the forms of organization that derive from social actions which are produced by actors (Psathas, 1995:2). From this point of view conversation analysis is highly relevant to CDA research. On the other hand where conversation analysis is concerned, Psathas argues that conversation analysis concentrates on being “led by the phenomena of study” (Psathas, 1995:2) and that there should be “an avoidance of pre-formulated theoretical or conceptual categories” (ibid.). This is intrinsic to CDA, as a conceptualization of ideology, power and history is essential, as too is the preconceived idea that the discourse one is studying is detrimental to a group within a given society, in my case Bangalore women.

Ethnographic analysis of interaction in the form of interviews is in my opinion more compatible with the aims and theoretical underpinnings of CDA than conversational analysis. According to Barbara Hall at Penn University, ethnographic analysis should start with a clear theoretical basis and one or some presuppositions surrounding the research object (see [www.sas.upenn.edu](http://www.sas.upenn.edu)). As outlined in the section *Research Question* I discuss pre-supposed ideas I had at the beginning of this research, which is in line with an ethnographic approach. A few other basics which make feminist CDA and ethnography compatible are that they are both typically qualitative methodological approaches, sharing a common subjective outlook that reality is a subjective truth and that research is and should be subjective and

reflexive. When ethnographers carry out interviews, they often use a set of codes and nodes in order to ‘translate’ their findings and to increase awareness about repetitive, symbolic and other specific modes of language use. This is a similar framework to that used by some CDA analysts, one which I myself have adopted in my research as detailed in the following section *Codes and Nodes*.

Ethnographic interviews are best carried out where questions are open-ended and the interviewee can talk openly and freely ([www.sas.upenn.edu](http://www.sas.upenn.edu)). By doing so the researcher allows the interviewee to behave and interact naturally, which is ideal for discourse analysis. What I want is a natural response, not one which is forced or tweaked by myself by asking leading questions, which is why I formulated an interview using open-ended questions with as little interaction from my part as possible.

## 3.2 Summary

To summarize there are six main points within the framework of this research that are central to understanding the methodological underpinnings and analytical framework that are adopted here. The first is that Feminist CDA is a school of thought that marries well with other disciplines, and as such I have incorporated ethnographic methodology as a complimentary aid in achieving my research aims. Secondly, we are to remember that feminist CDA and ethnography are not objective methodologies but subjective but that this by no means diminishes their inter-subjectivity. However, each researcher has their own version of reality and therefore this should be taken into account. Thirdly, by framing the dominant discourse – the “empowerment” of Bangalore women in the IT sector in India – I have limited the scope of the research for the analysis section. Lastly, with regards the analysis, Fairclough’s five levels of analysis act as a guideline for the following analysis together with my reference chart of codes that set the limitations of what and how is being studied.

## 4 Material

The choice of material in CDA is never a random one as the material must encapsulate the essentials of the discourse itself, however collection of data Rather is a process where the researcher chooses herself texts that have discursive relevance (Meyer in Wodak & Meyer 2001:23). That's not to say that the researcher chooses texts biased on a certain outcome she would like, but this is indeed a problem when choosing texts. Instead the researcher should choose based on relevance, validity and inter-subjectivity.

Ideally, to best understand a discourse is to completely immerse oneself in it and become a part of the discourse. This would suggest that primary sources in the form of president's speeches, interviews, observation and the like would be ideal. However, from a discourse analytical point of view, the discourse permeates all forms of social interaction and everyday life, which includes the media and people inside the discourse, which is why I have tried to mix different types of material. Furthermore, as discourse analysis generally adheres to qualitative methodology few but carefully selected texts are paramount. As a discourse permeates everything, in theory it doesn't matter what type of text is extracted from a given discourse as the language will all be the same. Nonetheless, I believe a plethora of texts taken from different areas within a discourse is valuable to gaining an all round picture of the discourse, and also for widening the scope a little to see how far the discourse reaches.

In the form of primary material, I therefore chose two governmental documents taken from the *Tenth Five Year Paper* which is a paper written every five years with the aim of highlighting and discussing with clear objective and aims different sectors such as health, business etc. and how to progress in each of these. I chose two chapters of the report, the chapter concerning *Information Technology* and the chapter on *Women and Children*. The whole Paper is over 700 pages long which is why I narrowed down my material to include two chapters of roughly 50 pages each. This way I could carefully analyze the object many times. Furthermore as part of my analysis, I used an informal interview as material. This was in the form of a short telephone interview so I could gain more insight from someone right at the heart of the discourse, that is a Bangalore female working in the IT sector in Bangalore.

My secondary material comprised various academic studies on the subject, academic books, and the media in the form of newspaper articles and the internet. The media is central in discourse as this is one of the main bearers of discourses. The media facilitates and participates in the spreading of discursive practices and elements and therefore is central as an object of study.



## 5 Analysis

To ensure that the analysis is following in the path of my original aims and objectives at the same time adhering to the theoretical and methodological assumptions that have been made in the previous sections, I will begin by outlining my aims and the form of my analytical framework.

As outlined in the opening pages of this research I made three statements of purpose for this research, or three aims. 1) To analyze the dominant discourse 2) to detail an emancipatory discourse and 3) to use concepts of power, ideology and history as an analytical framework with gender in the forefront of analysis.

In order for the analysis to be as systematic as possible, I divided the analysis into each category according to the codes in the first part and aim at in every stage describing, interpreting then explaining the phenomena. Thereafter I interdiscursively analyze the dominant discourse of the “empowerment” of Bangalore women against the backdrop of the resistant discourse. The third layer of my analysis pertains to analyzing the structurally interconnected network practices, or those structures that collaborate linguistically and otherwise to uphold a certain discourse. Underlying throughout the analysis are the concepts of ideology, power as seen as empowerment and emancipation and the presence of an historical context. As many of the normative expressions of “should” and “ought to be” surrounding the representation of women and the definition of what their role is have been absorbed into the other codes, such as culture and gender, no individual chapter is dedicated to this code.

### 5.1 Analyzing the “Empowerment” Discourse Using Codes

#### 5.1.1 Grammar Code

Grammatical pronouns, such as the use of “us” and “them”, serves in creating boundaries between groups, in differentiating between what is familiar “us”, and what is different and even deviant in “them”. There was no clear affinity between the texts analyzed concerning the grammatical structure, although there were some interesting findings.

Firstly, in my interview with Govindappa<sup>‡</sup> she allocated the term “them” to specify Bangalore women in the IT sector. She herself in fact belongs to this group as she is

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<sup>‡</sup> See transcript of interview with Mohanamba Govindappa included in this research.

a Bangalore woman in the IT sector, but it seemed she wished to distance herself from the object of research, stating at one point “I pity them” when asked about the role of women in their work life and domestic life and also “they are doing very well indeed”. This use of women as another group of “them” was also present in one of the newspaper articles (*NRN’s Mantra for Women in IT*) as well as one of the official documents of the Indian government *Tenth Five Year Plan, Women and Children*.

At the same time in some of the texts analyzed Bangalore and Indian women in the broader spectrum were represented as being “women” and not in terms of “they” or “them” so from this I could conclude there was no clear affinity between the texts analyzed in forming women as a category of “them”, as being different or deviant.

## 5.1.2 Gender Code

Gender as a code is used to decipher how this ideology penetrates the essence of this discourse, and also how the actors within this discourse are themselves ‘genderized’. Govind Kelkar argues that changes within the technology sector in India, especially the influx of women into this sector, can “facilitate social change, turning patriarchy into a contested domain, rather than a sphere of reproduction, leading to redefinition of gender relations and social, cultural norms” (Kelkar: 2). Gender relations are, however, still very much patriarchal in the IT sector in Bangalore as both newspaper articles and the interview with Govindappa bear witness to.

In all of the texts analyzed there were elements of gender ideology. In the *Tenth Five Year Paper, Women and Children* already in the title there is the connotation that there is an explicit affinity between women and children as being a homogenous group. Further in categorizing women according to their age, the paper defines categories for women as 1) “the reproductive age group 15-44 years.... - special care and attention because of their reproductive needs” 2) ”women in the economically active age-group 15-59 years” and the third category “elderly women in the age group 60+” (p.217). Here we see the representation that women are divided between two categories, but that first and foremost their role is as reproducers. The turn of language here denotes that it is a “need” of women to reproduce, but no reference is made to it being a “need” to be economically active.

In stark contrast, in the *Tenth Five Year Paper, Information Technology* every effort is made to ensure that the IT sector has a gender neutral profile by not claiming gender specifics of the labour force within the IT sector anywhere in the paper, and almost to the point where the sector is represented as being an autonomous entity that the government and people have no control over:

“The Government’s hitherto hands-off policy with regard to the IT sector would [sic.] continue in the Tenth Plan.” (p.809).

This correlates well with the presupposition that I previously highlighted in the *Feminist Principles* section. The presupposition was such that by creating a gender-neutral sector, it is more appealing to women and therefore more women will participate in the sector, which is what all actors within the discourse seek to achieve.

The genderized role of women as the domestic guardian are evident within many of the texts, not only the official documents of the Indian government as we have seen in the first instance above. Govindappa claims in parts that gender is irrelevant, but then admits that at times she has played a subdued role in situations with her inferior male colleagues:

“Sometimes there is a man who is lower position, but I can’t tell him [off], I can’t be strict, I have to be nice, asking nicely...but you know, gender doesn’t really come into the picture...no way, not really”.

Despite Kelkar’s vision of female participation in the IT sector being a potential to change the existing gender roles, it seems that the role of women has stagnated. She may on the one hand have entered a prestigious sector, but at the same time she is stigmatized both by the Government and by her colleagues and the media as having to be a certain way, of having to have a family, of being humble towards male colleagues. According to Nira Yuval-Davis

“A lot of this scenario has to do with men’s fear of feminism, of losing control over their women and of generally having less collective power in the society where women would gain access to positions and roles which were previously the exclusive domain of men” (Nira Yuval-Davis, 1997:121-122).

This representation of women is further accentuated in the mapping of the cultural code.

### 5.1.3 Cultural Code

By defining culture, or practices, traditions and norms and values pertaining to a certain way of life, we can see how women in Bangalore are firmly rooted in a culture that premieres men by expecting women to carry out the domestic duties of a household and that women should have children. As Govindappa states “It is cultural you see? We’re taught in a certain way, that we have to survive, to get by, to look after yourself and family, that is the way it is here.” She explains that Bangalore women in the IT sector “play a dual role...they do take care of family, good house wife good daughter, good daughter-in-law plus a good employee”. Cultural identity is strong and there is clearly little leeway:

“When it comes to marriage though, we don’t have freedom, we have arranged marriages as I told you..... Yeah, we don’t have that much freedom with some culture things, our mindset is like that, you can’t change that, it’s us, it’s our culture,

“my friends who have got married, they work and they have family and life at home...she works, she does work and do house wife life, you have to do this, you cannot escape that because there is no-one else to do it, so you have to balance”

(Interview with Govindappa).

This traditional role as family-oriented as well as working career woman is reflected in the newspaper articles:

“On days when they [Indian women working in the IT sector] have pressing demands at home they can work from here. Take a three year break to take care of their children and during the period they can upgrade their knowledge sitting at home and then come back to work later”

(NRN’s Mantra for Women in IT).

The cultural identity of women is tied in with the genderized perception of “woman” and what this entails. If we are to look at the social actions, or carriers of a discourse in forms of visuals and gestures amongst others, then there are strong social actions within this discourse. They bear the strong cultural identity that a working woman is still responsible for the domestic realm, for the family and having children. As Govindappa states, arranged marriages are still very much the norm in Bangalore. On most of the newspaper websites where I collected some of my data from, there were numerous pop up windows advertising not just online dating services but also matrimonial services, such as “Shaadi.com – The World’s Largest Matrimonial Service” which appeared on the Times of India website. Women are being signalled that they are allowed to progress, even encouraged, but not at the cost of a family life or deceiving their cultural roots. So how “empowered” are woman that are culturally bound?

#### **5.1.4 Emancipation and Empowerment Defining Codes**

Not surprisingly, emancipation was completely lacking in the texts, except some brief reference being made in *Tenth Five Year Plan, Women and Children*. The preferred key word was empowerment and it was bandied throughout all the texts on a regular basis. Empowerment was a rather diffuse hard-to-pin-down word within the texts and when I questioned Govindappa how she defined empowerment she remarked “women empowerment, everybody is talking about this....I have heard this word many time, oh god, may time, but I don’t know what it means....” Coming from one of the masses that is supposed to have been empowered, it makes for an interesting process of definition.

Earlier I had defined empowerment as increasing the power and decision-making capacity of women over their lives by giving women the necessary tools so that they themselves can change their lives and be in control. It was giving women power, but a measured amount that was still controlled by outside forces and structures, so how does this match up with the definitions of empowerment in the discourse?

*The Tenth Five Year Paper, Women and Children* defines empowerment and how it can be achieved in many different ways (p.218-245). Firstly, empowerment of women is achieved by “women’s equality in power sharing and active participation in decision-making” (p.239). Within the frame of the “Commitments of the Tenth Plan to Empower Women” the paper states that economic empowerment has “the ultimate goal of making all potential women economically independent and self-reliant” (p.241). Potential denotes a selection of women that can be economically independent and that it is not a necessary given for women to be independent economically. Agarwal<sup>§</sup> states that there are huge opportunities in the IT sector – provided you have an urban educational background in an English language school. This could be one form of “potential”.

Although reference is made to empowerment being that women should be on an equal basis with men, elsewhere in the text the language is more subtle and the meaning very different. There is a trickle down effect mechanism at play whereby the control is still elsewhere and not within the reach of the women themselves. As the paper states it is necessary

“To ensure that other general developmental sectors do not by-pass women and benefits from these sectors continue to flow to them”. (p.218)

It is described as benefits “flowing to them” but they are active participants within these other sectors and can only receive the benefits afforded to them by someone else. This is one instance where empowerment is not all what it seems, but generally in the texts, the definition of empowerment is often “equal to men” or “equality” and therefore likens the definition of emancipation rather than my definition of empowerment. However, the comparison between the written definition and the reality of empowerment is like comparing chalk and cheese.

### 5.1.5 Symbolic Code

The final of the codes, and the most difficult to decipher, is the code of symbolism. Here phrases and words have different connotations to what is presented to the reader. It can be in the form of metaphors, double meanings etc. and within the discourse there were a few phrases that had symbolic meanings.

When discussing the situation in Bangalore concerning women entering the IT sector in the interview, Govindappa stated “you see many Mona [Mona being her first name] like me!” Mona is an articulate 30 year old Bangalore woman from a

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<sup>§</sup> Agarwal, Ranjana. Online Paper, Digital Technology and Women Empowerment: Employment Dimensions in India, p.2

middle class background in India's sprawling Bangalore. Educated at one of India's top universities with a high standard of English and a strong cultural background where she strongly believes in arranged marriage, even though she questions it, merely because it is "cultural" and, according to comments she made in an informal conversation, "Bangalore women are firstly, and always in the first hand you know, very cultural". She is the epiphany of "potential" as stated in the *Tenth Five Year Plan, Women and Children* as well as being one of those fortunate to be able to access the huge opportunities in IT that Agarwal detailed. If it is true that many of the women have the same profile as Govindappa, which is what she claims here, then the profile of a stereotypical Bangalore woman in IT is a family-oriented, culturally bound career woman who seeks to appease her male colleagues at the same time as progressing her own development.

The second symbolic phrase was found in the *Tenth Five Year Plan, Women and Children*, where an appeal was made that it must be secured that "the rights and interests of women are taken care of" (p.242). That the rights and interests of women are to be "taken care of" denotes that women are still not independent, that they are not able to make provisions for themselves, and it is the other category of gender that is doing the taking care of these women.

The third symbolic code refers to a quote taken from Murphy's article *NRN's Mantra for Women in IT*. Here he states that women "can upgrade their knowledge sitting at home". Earlier in his article he states that the women are at home and looking after children and doing domestic work is replaced by sitting at home, which automatically diminishes the aspect of work and effort that is often a part of being a house wife. Being both a career woman and a domestic housewife is represented here as being something easy, comfortable, easily manageable, but as Govindappa stated it is in fact a "balancing act" between being a good wife and daughter and a good employee.

### **5.1.6 Conclusions Derived from Using the Codes**

To briefly summarize the findings so far we can see that there is a good level of coherency between the presuppositions proposed at the start of the research, but equally there are some gaping discrepancies.

Firstly, the analysis so far denotes that culturally, Bangalore woman have a strong sense of family, duty and household responsibility. Reproduction is not based on choice but is expected. It is a strongly institutionalized norm that has permeated categories as banal as age in even governmental documents. This is the first indicator of culture – women are child-bearers and this is one, if not the most, important cycle in their life. Secondly, "women" as described in this discourse are genderized according to the *homology* type casting that was detailed in the theory section. Much of what is "woman" in the discourse derives from cliché stereotypes of femininity – that women are "intrinsically suited to work within the IT-ITES industry as they are good communicators", according to NASSCOM for example. That women automatically have a desire to both work in the formal sector and in

the home is an unquestioned given which is why much of the discourse relates to “balancing” the two.

However, definitions of empowerment and emancipation converge within the discourse, and empowerment is here represented as women gaining equality to men in the IT sector, which is different to my conceptualization of empowerment. The discursive definition is, however, very much divorced from reality as women still have pressures of family life which are stronger than their desire to remain in the formal sector (as stated in...newspaper) and that their cultural obligations mean they don't have freedom to be independent in their career choices.

That is the first layer of analysis, where the codes have served to scratch the surface of the discourse. In this next part, I will place the discourse in an historical context; discuss and analyze the network practices present and finish by discussing the resistant discourse which renounces the IT sector as empowering Bangalore women.

## 5.2 The Discourse in an Historical Context

As previously stated, the historical context of a discourse is as important as the discourse's actuality. This gives us insight into where certain beliefs and practices originated from and can further explain why and how a discourse has come to be. Within the scope of the analysis, there were many references to both the immediate historical context and one as far back as since Indian independence in 1947, as was referenced in the *Tenth Five Year Plan, Women and Children*: “The principles of gender equality and gender justice and protection of women's rights have been the prime concern since Independence” (p.248). Indeed India had been progressive in ensuring both legislative rights for women, with regards the anti-dowry act and anti-*sati* (or widow burning) act, but these were only initiated long after independence and therefore whether one can argue that India has always had women's interests at heart is debatable. Where economic development for women is concerned, India has initiated some measures such as organizing camps and seminars for impoverished women in rural areas in order for them to gain skills necessary to being economically viable (SVats & S.Mudgal, 1998:71).

However, the Indian government took a long time warming to the notion of empowering women, and the first time this was incorporated into one of the Indian Government's five yearly plan's was in the *Ninth Five Year Plan* of 1997 (p.218, *Tenth Five year Plan, Women and Children*). Women entering the formal employment sector is a new phenomena for India, but thanks in part to some efforts of the Indian government in promoting women entrepreneurship and initiating (albeit it slowly) new laws and legislations that positively discriminate women, that adopt a quota system in the public sector and active encouragement of both informal and formal women's organisations, there were the foundations from which women could establish themselves in more diverse sectors.

## 5.3 Network Practices Present in the Discourse

Network practices is the collaboration between inter-linked entities and institutions which form a consistent discourse. One reason why the “empowerment” of

Bangalore women in the IT sector discourse is so strong is due to the network practices in the discourse. There is strong evidence that between the government, NASSCOM (National Association of Software and Service Companies) and academia there are strong discursive links. Between these three institutions of knowledge production there is a constant too-ing and fro-ing of reference to one another and also the same use and construct of language:

“In order to achieve sustained growth in the IT sector and maintain India’s competitive edge in the field, high quality professionals in adequate numbers are required. According to a McKinsey-NASSCOM study, India would require 2.2 million professionals by 2008”

(p.804, *Tenth Five Year Paper, Information Technology*).

NASSCOM emerges as being a powerful institution in the discourse, as it is referred to often and in many of the discursive texts. On the NASSCOM website there is a specific drop-down bar *Women and IT* which details success stories, often around successful female CEOs. It is partly because of this strong discourse, due to the strong network practices and sheer scope of the discourse that finding an emancipatory discourse that was resistant to this, in India, proved difficult.

## 5.4 The Resistant Discourse

Hard though it may have been to locate at first, there does exist a resistant discourse which opposes the “empowerment” discourse of Bangalore women in the IT sector, and more generally the rights of Indian women.

In the Hindu Times, Kalpan Kannabiran\*\* discusses the issue of women’s rights in India, and their empowerment. In her opinion, empowerment is merely a by-word that has come into fashion because feminist movements in India and women’s lobbyist groups have demanded that the Government start taking women’s rights seriously.

From her article, there is one major ‘fault’ inherent in the dominant “empowerment of women” paradigm. Kannabiran highlights the issue that in desperation to maintain cultural norms and values at the same affording women economic and employment empowerment, the paradigm has excluded all women outside the cultural norm of being family-oriented as a woman. She states that not until the nineties did public discourse start addressing the issue that not all women wish for domestic bliss. From what I have seen, this dimension of social inclusion for single or family-less women is still sorely lacking in the discourse. Kannabiran praises the efforts of the women’s organisations at a grassroots level and those lobbying for women’s rights in the parliament which in her opinion is the way forward to true emancipation of women and not through half-measures initiated by an “unwilling” government.

Another article by Shauvik Ghosh†† in the Financial Express highlights the fact that India is actually doing poorly on the gender equality front, languishing at 98<sup>th</sup> place out of 115. She questions the positive hype that NASSCOM, one of the main

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\*\* Kannabiran., Kalpana. *“Empowering Women”, the Hindu Times. Downloaded.*

†† Ghosh, Shauvik. *Women on Top. The Financial Express. Downloaded 28th December 2006.*



bearers of the dominant discourse, creates surrounding women in IT. Even within the IT sector where women make up between 20 and 30 percent of the labour force according to varying figures, only 7 percent according to Ghosh are represented in high positions, which is shockingly low given the current media storm surrounding the great progress that has been made within the IT sector concerning gender.

As the *Tenth Five Year Plan, IT* states “IT is an area where the country has a competitive edge and can establish global dominance” (p.801) but it is a sector with a huge human capital deficit so it is, according to

## 6 Conclusions

As detailed in my outline, I will finish my research with three discussions, the first being the result of my research, the second being a discussion about my methodology and the utility of using discourse analysis in this instance and the third some suggestions for future research in this subject area. As I have continuously contained mini-conclusions throughout the research, this section serves to investigate briefly the conclusions of the research.

### 6.1 Conclusive Results

At the start of my research I had some presuppositions about what was at the heart of the “empowerment” discourse. I theorized that women were being embraced in the IT sector because the booming economy had put a strain on labour and this therefore meant that there was a demand for labour that was not being met. Women’s entering the labour market was not to be at the cost of traditional male and female roles though and as such maintaining cultural identity and keeping women in the domestic realm, even if partially, was central.

Following each step of the analysis and using the results from coding and intertextuality between the dominant discourse and the resilient discourse, I believe that this was indeed the case. It seems that empowerment as a term meant a lot on paper but little in practice as, according to the resistant discourse, it was the result of a collective effort from women’s lobby groups and the like to motivate a sluggish reluctant government into extending the rights of women. Although the government had enacted many projects for the development of women, historically the government has been slow of the mark to react to atrocities committed against women and therefore, despite claims by the government otherwise, women’s empowerment was not a priority (as we can see by the late arrival of the term into the official papers of the government, as late as 1997).

Empowerment means gaining access into the IT sector, but by no account does it enable women to accomplish their true potential, as is stated in many discursive texts. Accomplishing her potential by climbing to the lofty heights of CEO has only been achieved by a mere 7 percent of women in the IT sector in India. Therefore, although the conceptualization of empowerment within the discourse ostensibly did not hold true to my own the de facto meaning of empowerment in the discourse was in line with my definition. It was often a diffuse concept, where sometimes it was explicitly constructed and other times ignored, or even not known. Empowerment in my mind here was the giving of a certain amount of power to women, by allowing them to enter the IT sector, by allowing them to feel empowered by having both a career and a cultural family and domestic life, but in actual fact the cultural element is restrictive in nature.

The very essence of ‘woman’ has been central throughout the research and so too has gender ideology. In this research I have uncovered the contrasting and often

conflicting definitions of 'woman' and what it is to be a woman. In the interviews being a woman was being strong, at the same time submissive to certain males. It was being free in your career, but culturally loyal even if this meant losing freedom. In the government documents it was having the right to govern your life, but having an outside force to "monitor" your governance. Women were ultimately portrayed as child-bearing, culturally sound and loyal beings who should be empowered, but not at the cost of the patriarchal structures that have been in place for decades (arguably centuries).

As the *Tenth Five Year Plan, IT* states "IT is an area where the country has a competitive edge and can establish global dominance" (p.801) but it is a sector with a huge human capital deficit and is in fact losing investment, around 6 billion in 2006, and therefore business opportunities due to the lack of human capital. Therefore women are being rallied into the IT sector to try and sustain the rocketing economic growth of this sector.

So how is this negative discourse being sustained? Quite simply through the powerful network structures. From the start of this research I had the feeling this was a deep-rooted discourse. It is a discourse that has reached as far as the West, as here there too is the common perception that the IT boom in India is empowering women. However could it not, we think. The fact that it had transcended continents gave me the impression that it would be a difficult discourse to unravel. The tightly knit network practices, held together by the almost mafia-like NASSCOM which seems to have a monopoly on the IT industry, has made any resilient discourse rare and unfortunately very marginal, but there were elements of resistant discourses that called for empowerment through the right channels, namely women's NGOs and grass roots organisations.

## 6.2 Suggestions for Future Research

I mentioned earlier that within the domain of CDA there are some new developments that I think would give rewarding research in this domain. Understanding the psychology using CDA, for example the psychology of Indian women in the IT sector, would give a whole new dimension to a research piece. A comparative study between the IT sector and another emerging sector in India, such as the pharmaceuticals industry and how these two compared with regards actively employing women would be of benefit. As was uncovered in the research, the IT sector is the only sector whereby women are flourishing as in the other sectors their labour participation is virtually non-existent. It would be interesting to find out why, despite there being many expanding sectors in the Indian economy, women have only been flocking into the IT sector.

Finally, and most importantly, despite what subject area is researched, it is crucial to continue feminist research that transcends south/north divides within the research community. This is desperately lacking as a greater understanding of women's lives in other parts of the world, an exchange of experiences between cultures and countries can only make the feminist movement stronger and larger in scope.

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