CHAPTER 1

The Problematic of IT Work- Culture

"Profit – the right type of profit and profit with integrity in business traits are indeed very important. 21st century businesses and enterprises have to be driven competitively, at the same time with business practice driven by integrity at all levels. All the more, the present century demands a new culture; the culture is profit with integrity."

Dr. A. P. J. Abdulkalam

Quoted here is the substance of the interrogation of this study which describes the excesses of a corporate-riddled present. Theorizing the nuances of the given quote would be tantamount to defining the plural space of the individual within the standardizing corporate space. Information Technology, a double edged mechanics which both pioneered the present brand of capitalism and is its brand ambassador, has been in the headlines of the economic columns in this era, and India is believed to be the best IT destination. The story of IT space in India runs thus: policy initiating software exports was actually brought in by Indira Gandhi just a few weeks before her
assassination. Her followers were also very keen in making India as an IT powerhouse.

It was taken for granted that the hundred percent literate Indian state of Kerala can provide a good percentage of IT workforce, if the education system is honed accordingly. Perceiving the IT potential for employment, Kerala has invested a lot of money in government sector and also in public-private partnership mode in developing IT industry enabling Keralites to work from Kerala. It is estimated that there are about 35000 IT professionals who work from Kerala. (The Financial Express, 11th Nov., 2010.)

The study leading to the present work began in January 2004 when the researcher started working as a technical recruiter. Since lateral recruitment is a process of picking a professional from one organization and placing him/her in one of the client organizations, a recruiter’s job involves continuous interactions with the HR managers of client organizations and with candidates looking for a change in job. This permitted the researcher to have a broad perspective on IT organization culture, view points and candidates’ interests, expectations and problems, and thereby giving her a more than cursory view of the significant issues existing in the IT labour space in Kerala,
which remains dormant and may never surface until the stakeholders actually decide to put it in perspective.

When the researcher joined as a faculty in social work at a teaching and research institution, she decided to conduct a study on the familial issues of IT professionals working in Kerala. Surprisingly no work of that nature had been done in Kerala till date even though it was always a hot point of discussion and speculation. This is so particularly because a major part of the Kerala economy is constituted by the IT sector. This study was occasioned by the researcher’s strong feeling that the IT sector and its work problems need a more than impressionistic analysis.

Carol Upadhya and A. R. Vasavi from the School of Social Sciences, National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore, conducted a study entitled *Work, Culture, and Sociality in the Indian IT Industry: A Sociological Study* which covered Indian IT professionals working in diverse locations such as Bangalore, Germany and The Netherlands. This very interesting study reveals that many IT employees would like to retire at an early age or change career due to stress, burnout, and dissatisfaction with work and family or personal problems. Women employees
expressing their interest in switching job were observed to be high in number.

1.1 Significance of the study

India is expected to become a global leader in manpower especially in the technology segment. In the developed countries like Australia, America and so on the government has already identified that the number of students opting for disciplines like ICT (Information and Communication Technology) has come down significantly. This, given the high stakes in IT sector, is due to the poor work-life balance in this sector. This sector, in practice has come to spell an “all work and no life” affair. Thus, this study is of cardinal importance in balancing the conflict of interests involved and giving this sector a more humane colour. Mandla et al (2005) observed that Australia has decided to implement in ICT industry a policy that facilitates work-life balance in IT industry and make the country a desirable on-shoring destination by bringing more human resources into IT. Work-life balance is a key issue across Europe especially in the UK. Even though the UK government hasn’t put in black and white many regulations in employment market, it is keen on ensuring the quality of life for working people. Family - friendly policy will help organizations in the retention of employees.
Netherlands has developed a framework for a care and work law to facilitate a balance between employment and care. France has proposed to scale down the working hours to 35 hrs per week (Pillinger, 2001). Redmond, Valiulis and Drew (2006) report that work-life balance has been adopted in Ireland as part of the economic partnership agreement set up to achieve economic goals and best practice in employment policies.

Further literature review reveals that companies in metros like Bangalore, Chennai and Hyderabad are very much aware of this problem and have already implemented schemes to alleviate these issues. For instance The Week, June 2007, in an interview with an HR manager, Shabari Madappa of Texas Instruments, an American based MNC (Multi National Company) in Bangalore, report that they have introduced a new scheme called DOSTI, an employee counselling help line. It offers trained counsellors for e-mail, telephonic or personal counselling which ensures complete confidentiality. They have a program called Friday at 5, an open discussion forum which discusses and suggests solutions on issues such as parenting, stress management etc. Several companies in Chennai, Bangalore and other metros are also implementing similar
policies. The present study is a critical investigation into the current scenario in Kerala IT work environment.

1.2 Rationale of the study

While there exist a large number of studies on Work-Life Balance related with ICT (Information and Communication Technology) industries in developed countries like US, UK and Australia, such studies are few and far between in India. Apparently no work has been done in this area in the state of Kerala. The hiatus in research on this topic is alarming because India is expecting to become an economic power with its human capital. It is expected that this research will throw light on an undisclosed area of job and family environment of IT professionals and help to improve the performance of mutually complementing systems of life and work.

1.3 Scope of the study

The researcher knows from her experience as a recruiter that family well-being programs are not common in companies in Kerala. The only logical reasons for this lacuna could be either 1) work–life problems do not exist in Kerala or 2) companies are reluctant to address them.
The present study is intended to take stock of the current situation in Kerala in the socio-cultural and familial space of IT professionals working in the state. The study has been conducted in three phases

Phase-1 study is to find out the merits and demerits of IT career vis-à-vis women especially during the pregnancy period.

Phase -2 this part of the study is qualitative in nature and it is an attempt to get an in-depth understanding of the job culture, work environment and family environment. The researcher conducted a study and obtained information from many key informants such as psychologist, sexologist, family court counsellors, judges, general physicians, Ayurvedic physicians etc. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 40 HR managers and 40 software engineers and their families. The information gathered in this way testifies to the fact that there are some crucial work-life balance issues existing in IT professionals working in Kerala.

In phase-3 a quantitative study to ascertain the findings of phase-2 was done. Data were collected from 270 families where, either the husband or the wife or both the partners work in IT. The data collected were statistically analyzed and
the hypotheses accepted or rejected on the basis of the study result.

1.4 Chapterisation

The entire study report is divided into eight chapters. The first chapter introduces the topic and states the problem. The second chapter deals with the available literature on this topic. It forms the theoretical basis of this study. The third chapter explains the research methodology. It presents the objectives, hypotheses, sampling techniques and data collection procedures. The fourth chapter presents the demands on career women in IT industry. It is the report of phase-1 study. The fifth chapter deals with the socio-economic space of IT work culture and its impact on the familial matrix. It is the report of phase-2 study. The sixth and seventh chapters deal with the analysis and interpretation of data collected in phase-3 study. All hypotheses formulated after phase-2 study have been evaluated and rejected or accepted on the basis of the evaluation. The final chapter provides a summary of study findings and puts forward a number of policy recommendations. It includes some pragmatic proposals to deal with the work-life issues and
also suggests a few policy changes to make Kerala an employee friendly destination for work. Bibliography is given after chapter 8

**Appendix** gives the tools used for data collection and provides additional information in support of the contents found in chapter four, six and seven