Understanding Selves and Identities of Information Technology Professionals:

A Case Study from India

Ph.D. Dissertation

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The research area of this study relates to understanding how Information Technology (IT) professionals employed in a Global Software Organization (GSO) located in Mumbai, India construct their identities. This dissertation is a collection of four papers as well as an introduction. The introduction consists of seven chapters that present the research questions, relevant literature, conceptual framework proposed, and methods used. Then, the findings from the case study are presented followed by the contributions of this study. Finally, some concluding remarks are presented. The individual papers, listed below, are included as appendixes:


3. D’Mello M. & Sahay, S. (forthcoming). "I am kind of a nomad where I have to go places and places".... Understanding Mobility, Place and Identity in Global Software Work from India. Revised version for the journal, Information & Organization.

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS USED

BATF  Bangalore Agenda Task Force
BPO  Business Process Outsourcing
GDP  Gross Domestic Product
GSO  Global Software Organization
GSW  Global Software Development
HR  Human Resources
IBM  International Business Machines
ICT  Information and Communication Technology
IT  Information Technology
IS  Information Systems
IIT  Indian Institute of Technology
ITES  Information Technology Enabled Services
NASSCOM  National Association of Software and Services Companies
NIIT  National Institute of Information Technology
NRI  Non-Resident Indian
ODC  Offshore Development Centre
OECD  Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
SEEPZ  Santacruz Electronics Export Processing Zone
STP  Software Technology Park
TCS  Tata Consultancy Services
WTO  World Trade Organization
ABSTRACT

This thesis presents an in-depth qualitative case study of IT knowledge workers (also known as information technology professionals) employed in a global software organization (GSO). In particular, this research focuses on the selves and identities of these workers who develop and implement software work undertaken by a GSO in the IT industry located in Mumbai, India. An effort has been made to understand the interaction of global events, market forces, social and national influences, organizational events, as well as processes in the individual experiences, and shaping of the selves and identities of IT workers who develop and implement software work.

This work is motivated by a need to understand the contextual and practical aspects of workers in a rapidly expanding industry where globalizing forces have created new forms of IT-enabled work, workplaces and categories of workers. Global shifts, as well as risks associated with flexibility, uncertainty, and unpredictability, pervade not only macro-level contextual conditions, but are also implicated in the everyday lives of organizations and software workers. An underlying assumption (in this thesis) is that, presumably, scientifically-rational and technology driven organizations, industries and marketplaces are milieus deeply imbued with personal, social and existential structures and processes which evoke a range of feelings and subjectivities, and influence workers’ senses of self and identity. I argue that, in global work contexts, workers construct their selves and identities from both global and local elements.

Structured around four journal papers, the following three research questions guided this study: How do GSOs create social and symbolic frameworks for their employees? How do these interact with the construction, expression and redefinitions of the individual identities of IT workers? What are some practical implications of the understanding of identity for GSOs, IT workers and the IT industry?

The research strategy, adopted has been based on an interpretive approach inspired by the ethnographic genre and carried out across four office locations of IN-SYNC (an IT applications outsourcing firm) in Mumbai, between 2002 and 2004. My prior association with the industry, and this firm (as a Human Resources professional for several years), provided me with access and facilitated a rich historical understanding of the context. Empirical material was collected from 69 individual interviews as well as corporate publications, company websites, team and company gatherings, participant observation and observations from previous work experience, as well as simply ‘hanging around’ the office.

The findings briefly are: 1) GSOs are spaces that richly enmesh the universal with the particular in interlocking patterns that represent ‘glocalization’ processes; 2) cultural discourses, in GSO collaborate (as well as collude) with global power relations and historical legacies, influencing identities of the GSO as well as those of IT workers; 3) GSOs are not a level playing field for men and women IT workers, but rather a site where traditional and stereotypical gendered norms and stereotypes are represented explicitly and implicitly; 4) careers are seen by IT workers as projects of the self, a means to
construct a sense of identity and secure a ‘psychic place’ in the organization, market and the various social groups of membership; 5) globalization processes do not impose a monolithic sameness or a cultural homogeneity in the institutions impacted by their flows; 6) mobilities of work, workers, GSOs and global markets contain a fleet of risks and opportunities that implicate identities and influence reflexive actions of individuals and the firm.

The contributions, from this research, are not specific only to GSOs or the context of India but have broader theoretical and practical implications. There are three key theoretical contributions to report. Firstly, a framework to analyze the relationship between the identities of individual workers engaged in ICT-mediated work contexts and the multiple interconnected levels of the self, the profession, the organization, the global market, and society has been proposed. This framework rests on three sets of relationships that were noted to contribute towards notions of self and identity in this group of workers: mobility-identity, gender-identity and culture-identity. Secondly, an ethnography of mobilities, seen to contribute to a ‘sociology of mobilities’ is described. Thirdly, some ways in which this project contributes to debates around ‘modernity’ and ‘Indianness,’ in the context of globalization processes, and the IT industry (in India) has been articulated.

Several practical recommendations relating to the management of IT workers, as well as the GSO that emerged from this study include: 1) Demonstrating how identity is drawn upon in interactions with HR (Human Resource) and project managers in ways that can link to enrolling commitment of IT workers; 2) suggestions for behavioral training interventions within GSOs, aimed at broad-basing the ‘soft’ skills of employees; 3) suggestions for how management, HR functionaries and trade associations can make the workplace of GSOs a more equitable setting in relation to issues of gender; 4) illustration of how workers mobilities and identities, (necessarily implicated in knowledge transfer processes, attrition issues, team-working across boundaries and balancing work-life demands) can be used as a lens to conceptualize policies and HR interventions in the organization and 5) suggestions for how IT workers can enhance their growth and re-definitions of their social identities.

Several possibilities for future research have also been suggested by this study.
CHAPTER 1
GLOBAL SOFTWARE WORK AND THE PLACE OF IDENTITY

1.1. Introduction

India only twenty years ago, before the triple convergence, was known as a country of snake charmers, poor people, and Mother Teresa. Today its image has been recalibrated. Now it is also seen as a country of brainy people and computer wizards. (Author, Thomas Friedman, 2005)

"Americans, who have long celebrated the sweetness of dynamic capitalism, must get used to the concept that it works for non-Americans, too. Programming jobs have delivered a nice upper-middle-class lifestyle to the people in this room. They own apartments. They drive new cars. They surf the Internet and watch American television and sip cappuccinos. Isn't the emergence of a vibrant middle class in an otherwise poor country a spectacular achievement, the very confirmation of the wonders of globalization - not to mention a new market for American goods and services?" (Author, Daniel Pink, 2004)

"IT's just not glamorous enough. The droves of engineering students, with an infotech career in mind, just can't see themselves getting into a job of technical support or product testing. Their dreams are to acquire software development skills and soon carve out a career in design or architecture." (Journalist, Sobha Menon, 2005)

An IT professional walks with a halo around his or her head. They are the Cool, Rich Gen Next. the Intelligentsia of the New World... they travel all over the world, vacation at exotic locations abroad, talk "american", are more familiar of the geography of the USA than that of India and yes of course, they are the hottest things in the Wedding Market!!! (IT Professional, Oak, 2005)

These quotes from diverse sources, such as newspaper articles, blogs and books, represent some views about software workers in the information technology (IT) industry in India. In this thesis, I present a qualitative case study of knowledge workers in a global software organization. In particular, this work focuses on selves and identities of these workers engaged in developing and implementing software work undertaken by a firm in the IT industry in the context of India. It is an effort to understand the interaction of global events, market forces, social and national influences,

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1 The ‘IT industry’ is engaged in the development, production and services related to information technology (IT) products and constitutes primarily three sectors: software, hardware and services. In this thesis the focus is on software work and workers.
2 The term ‘knowledge worker’ was coined by Peter Drucker (1959) to refer to workers who are formally educated and rely on knowledge rather than skill to perform their jobs.
3 Software work includes core technical tasks such as programming and testing, systems analysis, and software design. It also includes negotiations with users, problem solving and much cooperation within project teams (Scholarios & Marks, 2004).
organizational events and processes in the shaping of the individual selves and experiences of IT workers.

This chapter is organized as follows: First, I briefly describe the nature and importance of global software work (GSW) and global software organizations (GSOs). Then, I state the relevance and importance of identity in this work after which I outline the motivation for this study. Following this, I describe the conceptual framework for this study, the research questions, research approach and the expected contributions of this research.

1.2 Nature and Importance of GSW and GSOs

The forces of modern-day globalization have dramatically affected the world of work altering, among other events, the relation between capital, production and labor as well as flows of finance, labor and capital across national borders (Castells, 1996; Hutton and Giddens, 2001). Today, even while most corporations have an identifiable national origin, these global flows and fluxes (coupled with features of disembedding of work and time-space compression) are even more complex as they are increasingly de-territorialized (Giddens, 1990; Ohmae, 1990). Consequently, besides new forms of organizations, we witness diverse kinds of work arrangements and employment relationships, such as outsourcing, nearshoring, and distributed virtual teams, as well as new forms of independent workers with ‘boundaryless careers’ (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996). In this much talked about global ‘network’ or ‘knowledge’ society, particularly in global outsourcing work, software development specifically has, over the past two decades, assumed a critical place in the spectrum of increasingly ‘knowledge intensive’ work typical of service-based economies.

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4 Historically, globalization has been a long term process. Some authors (Pieterse, 2004) distinguish three stages of globalization—ancient (ancient movement of trade, religions, and peoples), modern (period from the Renaissance onward) and contemporary (current). In this thesis, globalization refers to the modern and contemporary condition.

5 Giddens (1991) refers to disembedding mechanisms such as symbolic tokens and expert systems that separate interactions across time and particularities of specific locales. Chapter 2 describes various features of globalization including time-space compression.

6 Outsourcing refers to the purchase of goods or services that were previously produced internally, from other firms (Lacity & Hirschheim, 1993). When organizations cross their national borders to obtain these goods/services it is referred to as global ‘offshore’ outsourcing. ‘Nearshoring’ is when work is sent to a firm, located geographically close to the client or customer. ‘Onsite’ refers to co-located working at the customer’s premises.
The phenomenon of the globalization of software development has interested researchers since the early 1990s (for example, Heeks, 1999; Jones, 1994; Press, 1993). For many years, the dominant exporters of high technology were the OECD\(^7\) countries with the US as the major exporter of software. With the flows of globalization, and the entry of other countries such as the ‘three I’s’ (India, Ireland and Israel) into this playing field during the 1990s, this hegemonic position was undermined. Soon, dozens of countries from Russia to the Philippines began exporting software products and services (Carmel, 2003; Pries-Heje et al., 2005). After the global economic downturn in 2002, firms in Western countries actively sought destinations for outsourcing, in Asian as well as in East European countries, in order to become more competitive with respect to both technologies and markets.

Developing and transitional economies saw the export of software and IT enabled services in this expanding global market as an engine of economic growth and a means to boost their economies in several ways (Carmel, 2003; Kambhampati, 2002). Firstly, such exports contribute, typically by an annual incremental percentage, to the respective country’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Secondly, through job creation, this industry directly benefits labor within this sector. In the software industry in India, for example, during the boom time in the 1990s, annual wage increments of software professionals was at least 20 percent for several years and several millionaires created in the country as well as in other countries. The story of the migration of thousands of highly qualified IT professionals from India and China to the Silicon Valley in the US, and other hi-tech regions during the 1970s and 1980s, is well known (Saxenian, 1999). Over time, this ‘brain drain’ has been transformed into a process of ‘brain circulation’ where skilled immigrants not only physically return, from the US to their home countries in Asia, but also develop transnational social and ‘ethnic networks,’ enabling bi-directional flows of labor, markets, technologies and capital across national borders (Saxenian, 1999).

Thirdly, the demand for software skills has spurred greater investments by the government and private sector, in general, and higher education and specialized training

\(^7\) An acronym for Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.
institutes, and in this way opened up more opportunities for employment as well as career possibilities in these countries (Murthy, 2000). Finally, this industry has impacted not only the forms and structures of software firms, but also other business operations in these countries (Murthy, 2000). For example, the flatter team-based structures, open and flexible work cultures, and professional human resource practices of software companies, are often emulated by manufacturing and financial services organizations, wanting to become more transnational.

Software firms, themselves, are structured in diverse organizational arrangements and ‘cross-border’ relationships such as joint ventures, partnership alliances, subsidiaries, broker companies or ‘hub’ models (Sahay et al., 2003). For example, older IT companies in India (such as Infosys or Wipro) were incorporated in India with overseas sales and marketing offices and many newer companies are incorporated in the US with Indian operations as their subsidiaries. Similar to an amoeba, these configurations constantly change and reshape in order to adapt to the volatile economic climate of the international marketplace and the pressure points of national and local\(^8\) financial imperatives. These arrangements are also related to the basis for pricing which varies from ‘fixed price’ to ‘time and materials’ or ‘turnkey.’ Similarly, there are spillover effects of the professionalism of this industry into non-IT industry arenas. For example, in Bangalore (India’s IT capital), also called the 'Silicon Valley' of India, the technical and managerial expertise of IT professionals, in leading IT companies, has been enrolled by the State Government of Karnataka to improve civic governance of the city. Here, the Bangalore Agenda Task Force (BATF) illustrates a unique private-public partnership and the first of its kind in India. The President, and Chief Operating Officer of Infosys, is the Chairman of this task force which has undertaken various initiatives such as the software accounting system of the Bangalore City Corporation (Nilekani and Ramanathan, 2001).

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\(^8\) In this thesis ‘local’ extends beyond a specific spatial or territorial entity. It is also a fluid and relational space that is constituted in and through its relation to the global. ‘Global’ refers to worldwide or international, across geographical locations.
Compared to traditional business arrangements, macro level contextual conditions introduce concerns about risks, shaping these transnational arrangements and organizational relationships (Sahay et al., 2003). For example, the worldwide economic downturn, after September 2001, particularly affected the global IT industry and drastically. Many programmers were repatriated to India which created a glut in the labor pool. The ‘dot.com bust,’ in 2000, resulted in the loss of thousands of jobs worldwide as well as the disappearance and morphing of many IT firms into new businesses. China’s entry, into the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, created new opportunities for outsourcing as well as new competition for countries like India. Supplier companies, in India and other countries, were prompted to expand their horizons beyond the dominant US customer base and search for new markets and business relationships in hitherto unexplored European countries such as in Scandinavia and Germany. Giant Indian software firms, such as Infosys, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), Wipro, Satyam and NIIT Technologies have responded to concerns about China proving a threat to India’s prowess by setting up offshore development and technology centers in China (itself) targeting the local market, as well as other East Asian markets like Japan and South Korea (Gupta, 2005). These changes and responses form part of a larger risk regime or “political economy of insecurity, uncertainty and loss of boundaries” (Beck, 2000a, p.73). Given this, the compelling metaphors of ‘risk society’ (Beck, 1992) and the ‘runaway world’ (Giddens, 1990) have been applied to conceptualize globalization processes that inevitably contribute to the turbulent environment of GSOs (Sahay et al., 2003). Here, GSOs are not only seen as attempting to distribute their own risks, but also carrying risks of the contexts that they occupy.

Against this backdrop, the spectrum of global software-related work covers a wide range of activities suited to different levels of achieving economies of scale (Sahay et al., 2003). At one end of the technology continuum are IT Enabled Services (ITES) (such as call centers, medical and legal transcription and data entry operations) requiring few skills such as a minimum level of English, and the ability to type and use a word processing program. While these activities are relatively amenable to scaling up, activities at the other extreme, such as development of algorithms and user interface
designs which require a high level of creative talent, cannot be scaled up in an automatic manner. In between these extremes, are a range of services and activities that demand different degrees of knowledge and skills and are also scalable in different degrees. GSW typically lies in the middle of this technology continuum as work ranges from maintaining legacy systems, testing of systems or implementing of tasks at various stages of the software development life cycle, to tasks such as designing and analysis of user requirements.

GSW is defined by Sahay et al. (2003) as knowledge work, where knowledge systems such as programming languages, software development and project management methodologies (as well as specialized domain knowledge) are applied to software development and maintenance activities within a global setting such as a global software firm. In such work, there is greater reliance on intellectual capabilities of workers rather than on physical inputs or natural resources. GSOs undertake such work, across national boundaries, through arrangements like alliances, outsourcing or subsidiaries. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are used to coordinate tasks which are separated and implemented at diverse geographical locations at various stages of the software life cycle. In this way, such work is considered intangible, heterogeneous and mobile as compared to traditional service or manufacturing activities, taking place in a highly volatile and dynamic global marketplace, populated by organizations from both developing and developed countries.

Worldwide outsourcing, of software services to remote locations and unfamiliar environments, is becoming a strategic necessity for global businesses where work is implemented by global virtual teams. ICTs have been attributed with a potential of fostering relations between ‘absent’ others’ (Giddens, 1990; Jarvenpaa and Leidner, 1999) and facilitating the extension of locally specific social relations across diverse space and time contexts (Walsham, 2001) within a virtual space. However, even in such situations, face to face interaction and communication are still critical as individuals may not necessarily transcend the social and interpersonal barriers imposed by lack of co-location and physical proximity (D'Mello et al., 2005; Imsland and Sahay, 2005). This suggests that success, in accomplishing these knowledge-intensive tasks, goes beyond
maintaining a mere economic or business relationship, relating to aspects of trust and interpersonal communication.

1.3. Relevance and Importance of Identity in GSW and GSOs

Self and identity are important to understand for we apprehend and experience other people, events, and the world through our filter of self and our individual frameworks of who we think we are and are not. Globalization has been recognized as an inevitable force or movement that impacts, among other things, our sense of self, personhood or our very identity. For example, Castells (1997) argues that as individuals and groups feel uprooted, they will respond to such forces through what he calls the ‘power of identity.’ The large-scale movements and flows of people, technologies, objects, capital, and information across the world,\(^9\) as well as more local processes of daily transportation or movement through public space, and the travel of material objects in daily life characterize global processes. Researchers have proposed notions of mobilities (Urry, 2000) nomadicity (Bradiotti, 1994) and globalization of biographies (Beck, 2000b) to refer to how such increasingly networked processes influence individuals to become jugglers or managers, of their own identities or biographies, within their respective networks or web of social relations.

While there are contentious debates around the universalization or homogenization of particular trends and perspectives as a result of globalization flows,\(^10\) several scholars agree that these flows impact our concrete everyday experiences, changing people’s work lives and questioning taken-for-granted notions of self and identity (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991; Hall, 1991). For example, the notion of flexibility, enhanced by the logic of capitalist networks and the capacities of ICT mediation, covers the gamut of employment contracts, skills, organizational structures, and business strategies (Webb, 2004). While flexibility opens up a realm of choices and options for individuals in the ‘new economy,’ it also decreases employment security (such as in no job for life, anymore), erodes long term loyalty and trust of employees in their organizations,

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\(^9\) Appadurai (1996) has described five dimensions of global flows moving along non-isomorphic paths. These are listed in Chapter 2.

\(^{10}\) Theorists who have made critical contributions to understandings of globalization and the debates around these issues include Held & McGrew (2002), Giddens (1991), Harvey (1990), Hannerz (1991), and Robertson (1992).
presenting them with less predictable or long-term career pathways. Giddens (1991) argues that, in this scenario, individuals revise their sense of self in a reflexive manner. Sennett (1998) posits that this experience weakens social bonds and personal meaning, resulting in a fragmented or ‘corroded’ self. While these may appear as contradictory positions, both would agree that ICT mediated modern conditions demand that individuals adapt their skills as well as selves to the changing ‘corporate ecology.’ This environment provides workers enhanced autonomy and opportunities, yet, with the price of a greater sense of insecurity where they often feel less valued and more disposable (Scott, 2000; Webb, 2004). In this way, the risks associated with flexibility, uncertainty and unpredictability pervade not only macro-level contextual conditions, but are also implicated in the everyday lives of organizations and their workers.

In the context of knowledge intensive firms, selves and identities of workers assume importance for several reasons. Firstly, knowledge intensive work is unique because, as compared to service or manufacturing work, it involves mainly cognitive and often creative involvement with knowledge and information, necessitating technical and theoretical know-how on the part of knowledge workers/professionals (Alvesson, 1993; Alvesson, 2001). In business contexts, in particular, knowledge and information gets rapidly outdated and workers have to constantly keep abreast of current developments, which creates additional workload pressure. Volatile and relatively unpredictable technology demands in global businesses can cause IT workers to fear their ‘extinction’ in the marketplace. Therefore, they are in a constant learning mode, re-skilling themselves in current or future technologies and methodologies to enable a ‘permanently marketable’ state of being, both within and outside organizations (D'Mello, 2005; Igbaria and Shayo, 2004). This is experienced as stressful and anxiety provoking, often resulting in a short-term focus on their career growth trajectories.

Secondly, knowledge-intensive workplaces are said to be imbued with greater ambiguity and contradictions in the firm’s problem solving process than traditional work (for example, manufacturing), since the ‘product’ is intangible and the distinction between ‘labor’ and ‘knowledge’ is merged (Alvesson, 2001). In such a context, in spite of extensive efforts at standardization, there is ample scope for varied individual
interpretations of work-related issues, requiring efforts at constant interpersonal and organizational communication, clarifying understandings and active negotiations among workers and with external customers. Particularly, GSW involves teams, organizations, and nations with varied social and cultural backgrounds. Local idiosyncrasies and particularities, asserted by managers or employees and coupled with individual styles of work, make the task of applying universal global solutions very complex, often requiring an understanding of the situation that goes beyond technical knowledge and skills. Given this, the following rings true: “…many knowledge-intensive workers must struggle more for the accomplishment, maintenance, and gradual change of self-identity, compared to workers whose competence and results are more materially grounded” (Alvesson, 2001, p. 877).

Thirdly, the extremely dynamic and mobile nature of this work, as well as the workforce, poses several human resources (HR) and management challenges for GSOs. HR professionals in these firms, mainly concerned about issues of attrition and retention, are constantly seeking new and creative ways to attract, train, motivate and retain its workers (Arora et al., 2001; D'Mello, 2005; Igbaria and Shayo, 2004). Developing and transitional economies (Cost Rica and Iran, for example) are attempting to enter the software arena and struggle with both quality and quantity of human resource issues (Nicholson and Sahay, 2005). In this way, GSOs emphasize the focus on the individual, as well as institutional contexts, as they are situated within a global configuration of highly interactive and dynamic relationships. Given this, selves and identities of individual knowledge workers are necessarily implicated at the various interconnected levels of the global market and the IT industry, as well as the local organization.

Fourthly, the world over, there are strong pressures for changes in knowledge intensive business environments. These range from embellishing the physical presentation of office premises to reconfiguring organizational cultures, structures and corporate images, in an attempt to appear more ‘global’, ‘multinational’, ‘international’ or ‘cosmopolitan,’ as well as enroll and align the ‘hearts and minds’ of individual workers
with their particular corporate ethos (D’Mello, 2005). Professionals of all levels, in these environments, are more and more exhorted to be ‘flexible,’ mature in their dealings, multicultural, team-oriented, emotionally intelligent with a business vision, accepting of ownership of work and solving work problems. This puts pressure on IT professionals and GSOs to examine themselves at inter and intra personal fundamental levels of self and being as the demands of these changes transcend transactional levels of skill or just external behaviors.

Finally, rather than an ‘out there’ objective inert presence, dynamics of the global market (coupled with some unique features of IT workers) implicate identity-related dynamics for both GSOs and workers. GSOs need to create a market niche and image to attract customers, as well as enroll, retain and develop a workforce of technologically savvy professionals – no small task for the management. Computer workers have been noted to be mobile, individualistic, lacking a strong attachment to three of the traditional bases of occupational identity: union identity; loyalty to management and the company, or solidarity with colleagues (Fidel and Garner, 1990; Rathi, 2003). This calls for creative and humanistic strategies on the part of GSOs to manage this unique workforce. Like other transnational organizations, GSOs are engaged in designing and cultivating organizational identities and images that relate to socio-cultural structures of the local context as well as the business strategy. For workers too, these elements and forces are ever-present within their daily lives and dialectically interacting with their project of the self (Giddens, 1991). In this way, changes at the multiple and interconnected levels of the global, organizational and individual are implicated in identity construction of the GSO, as well as the IT worker.

This study has been motivated by a need to understand contextual and practical aspects of workers in a rapidly growing industry. Broadly, it seeks to understand the influences of globalizing forces in new forms of work that have emerged in the ‘new economy’ such as the IT sector. The world over, rapid social changes and globalization processes are said to disrupt the temporal and spatial certainties offered by community, place, stable employment, class structures, and the institutions of religion, state, and the family
India, now recognized as a clear leader in the export of software work, as well as its workers, presents an engaging case of an economically developing country in the midst of globalization processes spurred by neo-liberal economic reforms with its attendant socio-cultural changes (D'Costa, 2004; Singh, 2000).

Two distinct features characterize the IT industry in India. Firstly, unlike many other Indian firms which were set up by large ‘old economy’ firms or links to traditional business families with relatively easy access to capital, most software firms have been founded by middle-class engineers with previous careers as software professionals or managers in large IT companies (Upadhya, 2004). This has influenced a distinctive culture and outlook to the industry. These companies, in turn, have contributed to the creation of a professional-managerial class of workers, with high levels of formal training, occupying a distinct position in the service economy as well as the social structure in India. Secondly, since the beginning, this industry has been closely intertwined with the global economy through contractual relationships with overseas companies, foreign direct investment by multinational companies and, later, in the 1990s (during the IT boom) through foreign venture capital (Upadhya, 2004). In this way, the IT industry and its workforces are necessarily embedded in a global network of economic, political, social and cultural trans-national linkages. The vagaries of capital flows, political and financial events, are coupled with caprices of technology turns (so ubiquitous in this industry that depends on innovation). The vicissitudes of immigration laws and visa systems of nation states (van der Veer, 2005) also necessitate different mobilities required on the part of IT workers. This, in turn, contributes to varied existential experiences for the individuals situated within this ebb and flows.

In this way, the IT industry in India, with its volatile and variegated flows of information, people, and technologies, can be seen as a microcosm of the diaspora of ICT mediated global processes. Unlike traditional occupations and professions of the Indian middle-class, such as teaching, banking or government positions, which are more grounded in local contexts of time, space and place, these workers encounter mercurial
swings in both global and local cycles and events, almost on a daily basis. These experiences often have a de-centering effect at an existential level as impacting as well their particular social positioning and identities in their social groups, demonstrating the interconnectedness of outer and inner lived worlds. Yet, as offshoring is becoming increasingly commonplace across the globe, even after recurrent waves of anti-outsourcing protests in the US and Europe (Bernstein, 2004; Prestowitz, 2005; Swann, 2004), the voices of these workers are rarely heard in the extensive media blitz (Upadhya, 2004). In some academic publications, on the meteoric growth of this industry in India, IT workers are referred to as a collective such as ‘human capital,’ ‘skilled workforce’ or ‘talent pool.’ In software firms, project managers and HR personnel are often seen to refer to workers as ‘resources’. A primary objective, of this thesis, is to give voice to this group and create micro-level as well as multiple understandings and perspectives of the dynamics of this people-intensive industry. This is, at present, missing in national and global discourses of such work that largely focuses on globalization and capital flows (Parayil, 2006).

A comprehensive understanding, of identity in this group of professionals, includes examining discourses related to their primordial moorings such as language, region, religion, and caste. These impact how globalization, liberalization, and modernization are received, interpreted and enacted in their lives and work and how these internationally mobile professionals reckon with these diasporas. With the expansion of the industry, and concomitant social changes in the metropolitan cities where IT companies are located, the younger generation of women and men in this workforce seem to be questioning traditional social rules while seeking new possibilities for handling the complexities of their rapid economic progress. As both producers of Indian economic success and consumers with purchasing power, IT workers are a group that are seen to paradoxically contest and reinforce traditional notions of Indian personhood\(^\text{11}\) and middle-classness.\(^\text{12}\) The consequent tension, between the traditional and the modern and shifting attitudes and perceptions, are important and relevant to

\(^{11}\) In the anthropological literature (e.g., Dumont, 1970; Marriott and Inden, 1974) there has been a tendency by influential scholars to see Indians as ‘sociocentric’ as opposed to ‘egocentric’ seen as prevalent in the ‘West’. This is discussed in Chapter 2.

\(^{12}\) The notion of middle-classness in India encompasses several layers and as a sociological term, is ambiguous and much debated. See Khilnani (1997) and Fernandes (2000) for useful discussions around globalization and the middle class in India.
study in the overall context of post-industrial global capitalism, Indian society, modernization processes and development-related goals of the nation (Singh, 2000).

1.4. Conceptual Framework for the Study

Self" and ‘identity’ are loaded terms that confront us at every turn of our modern lives in the 21st century. In the past two decades, the concept of identity has been widely discussed and is a central focus across a range of disciplines within the humanities and the social sciences. This focus is reflected in an array of published material, courses, and conferences, dedicated to the topic of identity, generally, as well as its intersections with other sources of individual and collective identity such as race, nationalism, religion, occupation, age, sexual orientation and gender. The increasing use of ICTs, freeing human interactions from the requirements of physical co-presence, have expanded the array of elements that contribute to the construction of the self and one’s identity (see for example, Turkle, 1984; Turkle, 1996). Subsequently, in recent years, the study of identity has emerged as a fledgling but crucial arena of study in the discipline of Information Systems as well (see Walsham, 1998, 2001).

The study of self and identity assumes importance at several levels. At the intrapersonal level (most often studied by psychologists) these concepts are crucial in making sense of the thoughts, feelings and behaviors of individuals. At the interpersonal level, they are important in explaining how individuals form, maintain and dissolve bonds both personal, and role related. At the group level, the concept of social identity/identities clarifies sets of social relations within which individuals are embedded with associated feelings of belongingness and inclusion/exclusion. At another level, these notions also figure in the production and reproduction of structures, societies and cultures (Ashmore and Jussim, 1997). In these ways, self and identity-related concepts are vital in studying individual, group, inter-group and firm level processes and relations.

As with globalization, the literature on identity is characterized by debates, ranging from ones that reflect identity as static, essential and unidimensional or fluid, to constructed, performed and multidimensional. In the first perspective, identity is seen as unitary,
fixed, stable and secured in a ‘center’ or inner core of the individual self (for example, Albert and Whetten, 1985). In this perspective, identity is also used like an independent variable to explain other phenomena or events like war, conflict, cooperation and migration. Constructivists or social constructionists (for example, Baldwin, 1986; Bruner, 1990; Czarniawska, 1997), on the other hand, who shun essentialist thinking, propose that identity is created as a reflexive two-way process thus constructed and re-constructed through interactions and relationship from the ‘outside’ as well as from the ‘inside.’ This view conceptualizes identity as an interactional accomplishment within the vast and varied landscape of institutional agents and processes, such as the family, educational systems (schools and universities), popular culture and media and the context of work and professions. Constructionists emphasize the malleability and multiplicity of identities for not only individuals, but also groups and whole societies.

The postmodernists’ perspective challenges constructionism’s agenda, arguing that globalization and de-territorialization have severed the construction of self in relation to place and location such as home, locality or community which previously served as a fundamental social basis of identity construction (Featherstone, 1995; Gergen, 1991; Harvey, 1989). Accordingly, postmodernists (Bauman, 2001; Gergen, 1991; Sarup, 1996) advocate a shift in analytic focus, attempting to ‘deconstruct’ established or stable categories of identity and their accompanying discourses, preferring to see contemporary humans and their identities as mobile, fluid and more free-floating, less tied to groups or stable loyalties.

In this thesis, social constructionism forms the basis for my epistemological stance (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Rather than delivering absolute truths or normative ideals, social constructivism assumes that all reality (personal, social and objective) is socially constructed. Also, individuals are assumed to be situated within a social and historical context and exploring their contextual webs of meaning are important (Geertz, 1973). Accordingly, identity is taken as negotiated, constructed, reproduced, threatened and mobilized in social interaction and situations, against the backdrop of reigning historical, social and cultural scripts. I explore subjective and inter-subjective
constructions and understandings of individuals’ selves and in a post-industrial global context, their sense of what it means to be a man or a woman worker in this profession and how processes and agents organize and interact with individual perceptions and experiences. While the focus is on contexts that shape professional identity construction, I argue that one’s multiple identities cannot be compartmentalized or boxed into watertight compartments, but rather are porous constructions where comparisons with other people and groups and power relations also contribute towards how identity is constituted.

I will argue, that in global work contexts, workers construct their selves and identities from both global and local elements. Rather than a strict a priori theory of identity construction, I have chosen to inductively evolve a set of themes through an ongoing process of engagement with the empirical material.

Prior to my enrollment as a doctoral student, I was associated, for several years, with several IT companies in India as an HR professional. I participated in many organizational processes that shaped the lives and organizational contexts of IT employees. I became intrigued by how these workers managed themselves and their professional and personal worlds as they navigated the ebb and flow of knowledge work, transcending boundaries of time, space and place. I decided to step back and satisfy my curiosity by writing a story about them and their worlds. From a vantage point, of an academic context within an international university, I returned back to their universe but in a more analytic mode. This process has been a journey for me, too, involving not only a change of roles, physical location or lifestyle, but a process of self-reflection of my own sense of self and identity.

In this project, I make a particular effort to explore feelings, dilemmas and strategies of the self - affected by the volatile work demands of a global environment. My objective is to describe and analyze the relationships between this work, the work setting and self and identity construction processes of workers, situated within broader globalization processes. I offer interpretations of the adaptive responses and actions of individual
workers in an analysis of features of the conditions of this global work and workplaces. In order to do this, a set of overall research questions was used to guide my project.

1.5. Research Questions

The following research questions are central to this thesis:

- **How do GSOs create social and symbolic frameworks for IT employees?**
- **How do these interact with the construction, expression and redefinitions of individual selves and identities of this group of workers?**
- **What are some practical implications of the understanding of identity for GSOs, IT workers or the IT industry?**

1.6. Research Approach

I use a multidisciplinary approach in my work, drawing from the fields of Sociology, Anthropology, Information Systems, Psychology, Gender Studies and Human Geography to unravel these interconnections. I make an assumption that understanding these macro to micro multilevel interconnections can provide rich and deep insights into the intimate nexus of the dialectics of the ‘global’ and the ‘local.’ Through the study of a specific group of people, IT professionals, working in a specific place (a GSO headquartered in the mega city of Mumbai) I attempt to delineate the otherwise vague dynamics of globalization and its strands that link to personal experiences in concrete daily lived experiences. My overall research approach can be characterized as interpretivist, assuming that our personal and social reality is relativistic and socially constructed. Further, I assume that there are multiple realities and it is important to understand different voices, perspectives and interpretations of individuals.

The method is inspired by the ethnographic genre, seeking to create ‘thick descriptions’ of the context, as well as the actors, while remaining close to ways people experience and make sense of themselves, as well as others. The case selected is IN-SYNC	extsuperscript{13}, a mid size software development company with a history of over twenty-two years in the industry and a relatively stable market reputation. I was also associated with this

\textsuperscript{13} A pseudonym, for reasons of confidentiality. The names of the informants in this study have also been changed for this reason.
company as an HR professional for several years and this provided me with access and facilitated a rich historical understanding of the context. I visited the site several times over a period of two years, from December 2002 to July 2004, collecting data through several means. Though interviews were the main source, I examined a range of other material such as corporate publications, the company intranet, website and local and national newspaper publications (both print and online versions). I used field notes and observations from ‘hanging around’ workstations, the cafeteria, the corridors, commuting in the company bus to the office and back home, and attending team and company gatherings. I have also drawn extensively on my experience in the various GSOs that I have been associated with during my career as an HR professional.

1.7. Expected Contributions

This thesis aims to contribute theoretically, primarily, to the disciplines Information Systems as well as Sociology, Anthropology and Human Geography and to develop practical implications for HR professionals working in GSOs in economically developing countries, specifically in the context of India.

- *Theoretical*
  Develop a theoretical perspective to analyze the relationship between the identities of individual workers engaged in ICT mediated work and the multiple interconnected levels of the self, the organization, the global market, and society.

- *Practical*
  Create a theoretically informed ground-level understanding of how individual workers experience the vicissitudes of globalization in an ICT mediated workspace.

Develop useful suggestions for HR professionals and line managers in GSOs for addressing issues and policies related to attracting, managing and developing their IT workforce.
1.8 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is organized in seven chapters. In this chapter, I have presented the research arena, the questions and the expected contributions of the thesis. In chapter two, I describe the theoretical basis that contributes to the analytic lens used in this thesis. In chapter three I present a theoretical framework that has been inductively derived from the empirical material to analyze the relationship between GSW work and self and identity. In chapter four, I describe the research approach adopted for the collection and analysis of empirical data. In chapter five, I provide an overview of the research findings from the four research papers included in this thesis. The papers themselves are included as appendixes. The contributions of this research, both theoretical and practical are presented in chapter six, followed by some concluding remarks about this research.
CHAPTER 2
THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

2.1. Introduction

This thesis aims to understand how IT workers employed in GSOs in India construct their identities. In this chapter, I discuss the underlying theoretical ideas that address the research questions posed in this thesis. These ideas frame the basis of the theoretical framework presented in the next chapter and also frame the contributions arising from this study that are presented in Chapter 6.

The following conceptual ideas form the theoretical basis of this thesis: globalization, work and identity, the dialectic of the local and the global, notions of gender, and culture and mobilities and how they intertwine with self and identity. Taken together, these ideas facilitate an understanding of the landscape of external socio-economic worlds, careers, business cycles and globalizing work contexts and their linkage to selves and identities of IT professionals. An underlying assumption is, that presumably, scientifically-rational technology driven organizations, industries and marketplaces are milieus that are deeply imbued with personal, social and existential structures and processes, evoking a range of feelings and subjectivities, thereby influencing workers’ sense of self and identity. I argue that understanding this landscape is critical, as it helps analyze the dynamic intertwining and osmotic relationships between the inner and outer worlds of individual workers in this profession and context. Individuals draw on both internal and external resources to create meaning and a sense of coherence in their experiences in these contexts. The aim of this chapter, therefore, is to discuss theoretical streams in the literature that contribute to the constructs of self and identity as elaborated on in this thesis. These streams and relevant conceptual ideas, noted in them, together contribute to the basis for a theoretical perspective inductively derived from the empirical material and described in the next chapter.

In the following section, I discuss the three theoretical streams separately. Then, in Section 2.3, the context of global software work, global software organizations and
software workers are described. I argue that these streams and the context together help provide insights into the selves and identities of IT workers in a globalizing workspace within the ‘new economy.’

2.2. Theoretical Streams Related To Identity

Self and identity are a complex set of phenomena that have been around a long time in spiritual, popular and scientific discourses and have undergone significant shifts over time in their theorizing. In ‘Eastern’\textsuperscript{14} cultures such as the Indian subcontinent, inquiry into the nature of self dates back to around 1500 to 500 B.C as outlined in the Upanishads and the Bhagavad-Gita, a set of spiritual and philosophical texts (Paranjpe, 1987). Similarly the philosophy of Gautama Buddha (circa 563-483 B.C.) and the Tao te Ching in China (circa 500 B.C.) dealt with issues of self, reflexive consciousness and identity (Leary and Tangney, 2003). In the ‘Western’ world, identity was seriously theorized from around 1800 (beyond theological debates) in the shadow of the Enlightenment, the industrial and democratic revolutions and the decline of feudalism and religious authority (Bendle, 2002). Since then, the study of the phenomena of self and identity has been intensely investigated particularly by behavioral and social scientists and debates around these are often trapped in a conceptual quagmire.

Broadly, self and identity processes relate to the set of beliefs or meanings that answer the questions, ‘Who am I?’ or ‘Who might I be?’ and by implication, ‘How should I be/act?’ Interestingly, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, the Latin root of the word identity is “idem” which means “the same” in terms of properties or qualities or nature in all circumstances. The idea of sameness in the definition of identity is an essential feature of the ‘identity of identity.’ However, the experiences of identity in our globalizing and ever changing world are seen more and more as multiple and heterogeneous, contradicting the Latin root. Influential writers such as Castells (1997) and Giddens (1991) have pointed to identity as a fundamental condition shaping social transformations in our rapidly globalizing world. Thus, as an object of knowledge,

\textsuperscript{14} The terms ‘Eastern’ and ‘Western’ broadly refer to ways of thought that are associated with a particular set of geographical locations. Western is most often Europe and North America while Eastern is most often Asia. These ways of thinking are not seen as essentialist or enduring distinctions between the cultures of these geographical regions but as broad-brush categories.
identity points to an amorphous and changing phenomena that defy hard and fast definitions.

Research on the conceptualization of self and identity can be broadly categorized as passing through three stages\(^\text{15}\) (Hall, 1992). In the first stage, from classical times till the Enlightenment in Europe, philosophical, theological and literary discourses of the self were predominant. When discussing concepts of the soul and mind, these approaches stressed the individual nature of subjective consciousness; the ontological separatedness of persons and things; and the tendency to locate identity as a fixed inner core or essence of the individual (Hall, 1992). After this period, as modernity\(^\text{16}\) advanced with the creation of an industrial society, the role of production and work in social organizations and in individual identity formation was increasingly privileged over traditional institutions linked to inherited or prevailing social structures such as clan or community belonging (Casey, 2002). With an increased ‘individualization’ of social life (Beck and Beck-Gersheim, 2002) self and identity were viewed more and more as constructs of individual choice arising from increasingly secularized, rationalized and de-traditionalized social processes resulting from globalization (Castells, 1997; Gergen, 1991; Giddens, 1991). While the notion of identity, during this period, still assumed an inner core, a greater emphasis was placed on how this core was shaped in a relational or interactive manner, as a result of the individual’s exchange with the environment (Hall, 1992). Finally, in late modern or ‘postmodern’ society (with further structural and cultural changes), identity is said to be undergoing a reconfiguration and transformation toward more fluidity, mobility and fragmentation (Bauman, 1993; Harvey, 1989; Sarup, 1996). Work in postmodern society appears to continue playing a critical role in how individuals define themselves as well as being socially identified.

While conceptualizations of identity have corresponded with historical changes in time across societies, within the social sciences, there are multiple levels to studying self and identity. At the intrapersonal level, it has mainly been the psychologists who have

\(^{15}\) This is a Western categorization.

\(^{16}\) This is Giddens (1991) notion of modernity to refer to the institutions and modes of behavior as a result of industrialization and capitalism which emerged first in Europe and now is present across the world. In this notion three features characterize modernity: The separation of time and space, disembedding mechanisms and institutional reflexivity.
investigated self and identity to make sense of a person’s thoughts, feelings and behaviors. Social psychologists, in both psychology and sociology, have primarily focused on constructs of self and identity at the interpersonal level in terms of relationships and roles. Sociologists and anthropologists tend to study self and identity in the production and reproduction of groups, cultures and societies. What follows is an overview of the relevant streams in the literature at these levels, that constitute the canvas for our analytic lens on self and identity. In the next section, three streams of theorizing around identity are discussed as follows:

2.2.1 Social Constructionism

2.2.2 Anthropological-Cross/Cultural

2.2.3 Globalization, Work and Identity

Given the dynamic and multi-level interconnections that relate to how we develop our sense of self, as well as the features of global software development work as a context for this study, a ‘mix’ of constructs was seen to be suitable to describe and analyze the empirical material. These three streams are seen to provide a set of relevant constructs that enable such a description and multi-level analysis in this particular context.

2.2.1 Social Constructionism

Social constructionism as a paradigm is well established in the social sciences. The classic book on this paradigm, by Berger & Luckmann (1966) was seen as a reaction to widely followed views of social reality as unquestionable ‘out there’ phenomenon which can be observed and captured using the right scientific method. The essence of this view is that all reality (personal, social and objective) is socially constructed. ‘Objective reality,’ which refers to the existence of institutions, social roles, customs, norms, symbols, etc., is constructed by processes of institutionalization and legitimacy (Berger and Luckmann 1966). I describe some ways by which self and identity has been conceptualized using this view.
In the past few decades, within the social sciences, the social constructivist perspective has been used to theorize notions of self and identity (Ashmore and Jussim, 1997). Shunning essentialist thinking, social constructivists propose that self and identity is created as a reflexive two-way process; constructed and re-constructed through interaction and relationship, dialectical processes, displays and self-narratives (for example, Bruner, 1990; Gergen, 1994; Goffman, 1959). The notion of a relational self is expressed in varied ways. For example, the notion of self-identity as a narrative (Giddens, 1991); the self as a story teller (Bruner, 1990); identity as a performance of autobiographical acts (Czarniawska, 1997); identity as negotiated and re-negotiated as members of multiple social groups (Wenger, 1998); identity as constructed through mediation of dominant discourses (for example, Phillips and Hardy, 1997; Potter, 1996) and identity as an effect of a network of relations (Bruni and Gheradi, 2002) suggests that this self is situated in actual enacted performances as well as discursive practices.

In psychological theory, it was Erikson (1968) who first gave ‘identity’ a central place bringing the (term) into common usage and emphasizing identity formation as an ongoing and adaptive process from infancy to old age. Within psychoanalytic theory (Freud, 1932), the self has been proposed as developing in interaction with others, and the formation of self-identity taking place through the means of identification. Stemming from the work of Cooley (1902), Mead (1934), and Berger and Luckmann (1966) and the dialogical philosophy of Martin Buber (1958), social constructivist perspectives emphasize the relational embeddedness of our identity construction and experience of self as opposed to an autonomous project. Cooley’s (1902) notion of the “looking-glass self” illustrated his point that the self recognizes itself through the responses of others, that function like a mirror, reflecting the self back to the person. Similarly, Mead (1934), to whom is attributed the genesis of symbolic-interactionist approaches, emphasized the role of the “generalized other” where an individual gains a sense of identity through seeing themselves through the eyes of others. Rather than something that is a given at birth, Mead argued that one’s identity is developed in the process of social experience and

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17 Identification, in the psychoanalytic sense, refers to a process (both conscious and unconscious) by which individuals attempt to modify aspects of him/herself after the attributes of persons who are psychologically salient so that these aspects of self correspond to the attributes of the emulated ‘object’ (Freud, 1932; Sandler, 1987).

18 According to Mead (1934), besides persons, physical/inanimate objects can also serve as elements of generalized others.
activity. The Meadian notion of reflexivity, which conceives of the person or self as an acting individual, capable of resisting forces of domination and control, that places the self as the center of one’s experience situated within a nexus of others, has gained much credence in the writings of modernist theorists such as Giddens (1991).

Another well-known constructionist approach to the exploration of identity has been that of Goffman (1959). He used a “dramaturgical approach” (p. 240) to demonstrate the manufacture of public persons or an interactionally produced person through the processes of arriving at a working consensus about certain identities that individuals claim through their roles, and those in their presence attribute to them. Focusing on work-related identities and social roles, Goffman proposed the self as a social strategist (1959) where people deploy the theatrical means of costume, personal appearance, settings and props to make the desired impression on an audience. Goffman (1956) noted that in this process, there is an interactional labor of person production varying according to institutional arrangements and organizational principles. Parallels have been noted between these mechanisms of person production and what Foucault (1979) later said about the methods of disciplinary power.

While the notion of the ‘relational self’ provided an rich analysis of friendship patterns and communication interactions, in the context of groups, it was found unable to conceptualize groups as categories nor did it explore the wider intergroup context of group behavior (Hogg, 2004). Framed within an approach to social psychology, that emphasized societal and intergroup aspects of social behavior, social identity theory attempts to integrate intergroup behavior and collective self/social identity (Hogg, 2004).

In the following subsections on social constructionism, notions of social identity, national identity, organizational identity and gender identity are described as these are seen as pertinent to this study. Following this is a brief assessment of social constructionism as an approach and how it has been used in the present study.

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19 To quote Mead (1934, p.134): “It is by means of reflexiveness, the turning-back of the experience of the individual upon himself – that the whole social process is thus brought into the experience of the individuals involved in it.”
### Social identity

Personal or individual identity is the individual’s self-knowledge that derives from his/her unique combination of personal attributes at a moment in time while social identity refers to the identity that people derive from their affiliation with, or membership in social groups, or collectives such as the family, nation, religious groups, professional bodies, organizations (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). In addition to membership in these diverse groups, this identity also includes the characteristics of an individual’s self-perception as a member of the social group. These authors describe social identity as a perception or knowledge of belonging to a certain group together with associated emotions and a sense of value as a result of the particular group membership. Social identity is acquired through processes of identification, defined as a feeling of oneness with the collective (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Like roles, social identity indicates our affiliation in a particular social group. More than roles, one’s multiple social identities are said to hold personal meaning for individuals through the process of social categorizations that define for an individual his/her place in society (Tajfel and Turner, 1986).

In brief, according to social identity theory, individuals have a repertoire of discrete social categories to which they belong (for example, students, teachers, parents, children, workers, managers, professionals, etc.). These social categories, each with its set of attributes that describe and prescribe its members feelings thoughts and behaviors, provide a self-definition to members as well as feelings of comfort and security as a result of belonging to a collective (Hogg and Terry, 2001). This is seen to form a part of one’s self-concept.

Social identity is not only descriptive and prescriptive but also evaluative as it provides an evaluation of a social category and of its members. Depending on the subjective importance to the individual’s sense of self, and its relevance to his or her goals, values and other attributes, the individual matches the social categories to the social context. He/she then actively brings into use (or makes salient) that identity which renders his/her place into it, subjectively, most meaningful (Hogg and Terry, 2001). This salient identity is drawn upon dynamically, making expectations manageable and also providing
direction to the individual (Hogg and Terry, 2000; Karreman and Alvesson, 2001). The identity that is drawn upon in this manner becomes salient in that context. The more salient an identity is to an individual, the more sensitive the individual is to opportunities for demonstrating behavior that positively confirms this identity (Hogg and Terry, 2001; Sheldon, 1987).

Social identity theory proposes, that in addition to being motivated by self-enhancement, individuals are also motivated by a need to reduce subjective uncertainty about their perceptions, attitudes, feelings and behavior in contexts perceived as self-conceptually relevant (Hogg and Terry, 2000). Social identity processes, then, serve to enhance oneself and to confirm one’s self-concept and place in the world. While a social identity increases the likelihood that certain norms, values and ideas associated with the group or organization are internalized, a person may adopt a social identity without adopting its distinctive ideas, norms and values (Turner, 1984). For example, a person may feel a member of a corporate firm or a professional association without internalizing all its typical values (Alvesson, 2000).

Identity, both individual and social, thus provides individuals with meaningful social psychological experiences such as belongingness, distinctiveness, respect or esteem, understanding or meaning, and agency (Maslow, 1970; Simon, 2004; Tajfel and Turner, 1986). Our personal and collective identities are interrelated and individuals derive personal meaning from both sets of identities since an individual’s self-image is shaped by the multiple networks in which he/she is embedded, particularly the social groups to which he/she belongs (Simon, 2004).

- National identity
Social constructionism also forms the basis of much literature on national identity (Bellah et al., 1985; Bloom, 1990). While criteria such as language, religion, and geography contribute to definitions of nations and national culture, national boundaries and national identity are also seen as ‘imagined’ social constructions -- one both spatially and temporally inclusive but both enabled and shaped by broader social forces (Anderson,
In this view, nation is constructed as a primordial and pure group or community with myths, traditions, symbols and rituals (Hall 1992). Belonging, to a nation, affects one's sense of self and identity as it provides access to a national culture which is a “way of constructing meanings which influences and organizes both our actions and our conception of ourselves” (Hall 1992, pp. 292-3). A national identity (which is necessarily multidimensional) provides a powerful means of defining and locating individual selves in the world, through the prism of the collective personality and its distinctive culture (Smith, 1991).

Organizational identity

Similarly, a constructionist approach views organizations as constructed in social interaction between those inside the organization and those outside the organization (Coupland and Brown, 2004). Accordingly, organizational identity is seen as emergent, continually constituted and reconstituted through social interactional processes. Illustrating the dynamic linkage between people and organizations, Knights and Murray (1994) posit, “People make organizations but organizations also make people” (p. 245). In this process, they say that we “internalize codes of behavior and identification through a range of discourses that have a powerful effect on identity. The sense of identity thus developed is a vital way in which subjects secure a psychic place within an organization. It is through our identity that we make ourselves known to others and ourselves in organizations. But, as we bind ourselves to that identity, organizations have a way of shifting and changing. A new boss arrives, the share price falls, new techniques and discourses emerge. Just when you think you are safe, home and dry, the world tilts – maybe only slightly, but enough to throw into question that sense of identity, of completeness, so laboriously achieved.” (p. 246).

Similarly within organizations, ‘identity work’ has been referred to as the process by which people being engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). While organizational practices and discourses have implications for workers identities, individuals, too, engage in stabilizing precarious
identities in times of transition or reflexively modifying them when faced with contradictions (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). In this way, identity work is an ongoing process for both individual workers and the organization.

- **Gender identity**
  Gender is a fundamental category for how we order and classify social relations in the world (Evans, 1994). In research in this area, the concept of gender has been taken as both a biological as well as a social and cultural construction. A social constructionist approach to gender views genders as constructed out of social differences between men and women, in the form of ascribed norms, roles and expectations framing the backdrop for one’s experiences as a man or woman (Fletcher and Ely, 2003). Gender is seen to be socially constructed in two ways - through material practices and ideological processes (Gladstone, 1998). Material practices include gender based division of labor, gender based mobility and gender based access to resources that maintain and shape roles, responsibilities qualities and behavior patterns of men and women in society. At the ideological level, gender differences are internalized through social institutions such as the family, state, community, media and market mechanisms that reflect, reinforce, shape and create particular ideological norms (Gladstone, 1998). These structural arrangements are seen to give meaning to the categories of male and female, and shape people’s experiences as members of these groups. Gender is seen to organize much of one’s beliefs, expectations and socially-prescribed scripts for relating, working, and living in the world.

Gender relations and gender identity are intertwined with other social relations, technology, workplaces and global flows. Race, class, nationality, religion and ethnicity as social relations or identities intersect with gender relations. For example, Indian feminists and scholars (Dube, 1988; Kakar, 1988) describe the cultural and social values in differing religious and social contexts that contribute to development of gender identities among urban, middle-class members in the context of India. Besides social relations, the relationship between gender, technology and identity has also been theorized (Oudshoorn et al., 2004; Turkle, 1996; Vehviläin, 2000; Wajcman, 2000). New technologies are seen to be embedded within (gendered) social, cultural and economic
systems and as individuals engage with these technologies, prevailing norms, roles and practices have to be re-negotiated or re-defined. Further, organizations as work contexts that often assume the notion of a ‘universal worker’ are hardly gender neutral and gender relations are seen as constitutive in the logic, symbols and signs and structures and daily practices of contemporary work organizations (Acker, 1990; Fletcher and Ely, 2003; Kanter, 1977). In this way, gender as linked to one’s self and identity is strongly implicated at the workplace (Evetts, 1996). Finally, gender relations are also intricately entwined with globalization flows where transnational circuits of labor mobilization and capital accumulation are gendered in multiple ways (Mills, 2003).

In these ways, gender identity exists within gender relations, interacting with other social and economic relations. Gender identity is deeply implicated in one’s self-identity, influencing personal conceptions of masculinity and femininity, womanhood and manhood as well as other contextual processes such as workplaces and globalization flows.

A social constructionist perspective, on identity effectively challenges essentialist notions of self and identity that claim properties of timelessness and immutability. By its emphasis on relationality (the reflexive, creative, conscious practices of identity construction) it demands that we try and free ourselves of habitual and unreflective modes of deliberation and behavior. It is this notion that resonates with the current study where the multiple, interconnected levels of global marketplaces, national agendas, GSOs (as well as IT workers) engage in constructions and reconstructions of different sorts. IT workers are seen to be reflexive in their daily actions.

However, social constructivism is critiqued for exaggerating voluntaristic accounts of subjectivity that underemphasizes the role of hierarchies of power, social arrangements and historical underpinnings in the identity construction process (for example, Calhoun, 1995; Collinson, 2003; Haraway, 1991). Postmodernists, particularly poststructuralists, reject the idea that there exists some “ontologically intact reflexivity to the subject” (Butler, 1992, p. 12) and emphasize instead, the instability, fluidity, fragmentary and processual character of identities. Also, the macro-social focus of constructionism
excludes a richer understanding of the complexity and micro-nature of the process of construction.

Social constructionism has found a place in Information Systems research in the form of the interpretivist research tradition (Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991; Walsham, 1993) and this study illustrates this tradition. Interpretivism is a collection of approaches with assumptions that our knowledge is socially constructed (Klein and Meyers, 1999; Walsham, 1993). It rejects any kind of deterministic thinking and emphasizes the subjective meanings that subjects ascribe to technology as well as the social processes by which intersubjectivity is achieved. The importance of both context and process dimensions, of the subject of study, are emphasized, particularly, at the interconnected or embedded levels of analysis (Pettigrew, 1990; Walsham, 1993).

In this thesis, I have employed an interpretivist approach to understanding self and identity processes among IT workers at various interconnected levels of analysis of the self, social group, organization, industry, national context and global marketplace. Drawing from social constructivism, self and identity are seen as constructed and relational. Constructs of national identity and organizational identity are drawn on to analyze how these are deployed with the GSO and how they interlink with individual identities of workers. Constructs of gender identity, national identity and organizational identity are used to analyze the empirical material. Gender identity emerged as salient, forming one of the three key bipolar relationships in the theoretical framework proposed in the next chapter.

I now describe the second stream of literature seen as relevant to this study.

2.2.2 Anthropological/Cross-Cultural

Anthropologists have long made the point that most, if not all interpretations of experience, are cultural as human beings are always situated within culture (Kapferer, 2000). The notion of culture is complex, primary and distinctive within the field of Cultural Anthropology. The first comprehensive definition of the term culture is claimed
to be provided by the anthropologist, Tylor (1871) who saw culture as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (p. 1). Culture has also been conceptualized in a variety of ways and contexts and deployed extensively in other fields such as Organization and Management Studies. So, for example, a popular definition of organizational or corporate culture is “…the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one organization from another” (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005, p. 282). While context has been viewed as the structure or environment within which social interaction takes place (Giddens, 1984), culture can be seen as the various meanings that are assigned to a particular context. In the following sub-sections, literature relating to cultural perspectives and self, identity, nation and organization and ICTs are described. How the notion of culture is understood in this study is subsequently delineated.

**Notions of self and identity across cultures**

A large amount of cross cultural and anthropological literature suggests that, rather than a universalistic notion of self, cultural discourses shape the self in profound ways. Descriptions of the self in South and East Asia (referred to as a non-western context), is often contrasted with notions of a Western self (for example, Johnson, 1985; Markus and Kitayama, 1991; Marsella, 1985; Spiro, 1993). In contemporary Western society, the sense of fragmented identity as well as cultures has been largely attributed to mobilities such as tourism, migrant labor, immigration and urban shifts (Strathern, 2004).

Indological scholars, such as Dumont (1970), Marriott and Inden (1974) and Ramanujan (Ramanujan, 1990), describe the self in the South and East Asian contexts as sociocentric, interdependent and context-dependent, ostensibly placing community and family interest at the center of their universe rather than the individual (Erikson, 1979; Kakar, 1981). In this context, identity is seen as an outcome of adjustment within and identification with multiple social groups such as the family, caste group, clan or class (Ramanujam, 1979). In contrast, the Western self is seen as autonomous egocentric, context-independent and reflexive (Johnson, 1985). Dumont, (1970) in his famous text,
Homo Hierarchicus states that holism characterizes non-Western societies where, “the stress is placed on the society as a whole, as collective Man,” whereas in the case of individualism “ontologically, the society no longer exists” (pg. 8).

Marriott (1990), an anthropologist, famously coined the word ‘dividual’ to describe Indians and other cultures who saw the person not as an indivisible entity (individual), but as the sum of his or her shifting relationships. Marriott’s concept of the ‘dividual’, which is often seen as being complementary to the Dumontian view, was open, more or less fluid and only temporarily cohesive; she/he is not a monad but owes his or her selfhood exclusively to interpersonal relationships. The Indian ‘dividual’ does not just have fleeting relationships with others, but also binding commitments and especially to family and kin. In this sense, the self is that of a transactional relational self.

These views are contested within and outside of India (see for example, Appadurai, 1986; Berreman, 1972, for severe critiques). Personal and individual goals are important for Indians and the changing social and economic context in India also casts doubt on these conceptualizations (for example, Gupta, 2000; Varma, 2004). Also, while cultural norms do call for compliance, Indians can be hardly seen as trapped within a hierarchical-collectivist framework without any sense of agency (Mines, 1988).

Another well-known, culturally influenced, notion has been the construct of the autonomous and relational self (Kagitcibasi, 1996). Citing cross-cultural evidence, Kagitcibasi (1996) proposed that each individual has a relational (interdependent) as well as autonomous (independent) self. Rather than pitting one against the other, Kagitcibasi proposed a ‘dialectic mutuality’ or coexistence of these opposites in the notion of the autonomous-relational self. The coexistence of these selves, within individuals, implies that individuals can demonstrate both agency and relatedness (Kagitcibasi, 1996). Of concern to us is, that in many Asian countries (including India) in gender identity, these selves’ are strongly and differently embedded within gender role definitions that were internalized during socialization practices from childhood. These impact lifelong construction and enactment of women’s and men’s identities, organizing behavior and
impacting self esteem (Kapadia, 1999; Sonpar and Kapur, 2001). In many countries in Asia, including India, many of these aspects are linked to gender role definitions, forming an important dynamic in the socialization patterns of children.

- **National, organizational cultures and identities**

Cross-cultural researchers have for decades studied the relationship between national and organizational cultures and people’s identities (Inkeles and Levinson, 1954; Mead, 1951). Individuals, in a particular culture, are noted as sharing attitudes and behaviors that provide them with certain capacities or incapacities for organizational behavior termed as a ‘basic’ or ‘modal’ personality (Levinson, 1968). For example, the modal Hindu personality has been proposed as one where personal initiative is replaced by obedience and conformity (Asthana, 1956; Carstairs, 1957). The term, ‘the Hindu rate of growth’ has been used disparagingly to refer to India's history of 2-3% annual growth in GDP during 1950-1991, implying that Hinduism fostered personality traits and behaviors that limited growth (Virmani, 2004). Similarly, the rise of the East Asian world has been attributed to the inherent qualities of a Confucian model that upholds values of duty and responsibility, as well as sanctioning the pursuit of material possessions (Ong, 1999).

In a similar manner, efforts have been made to conceptualize the link between ‘basic Indian values’ (Sinha, 1988) suggestive of national character which might counter economic progress in India. Personality traits fostered by these values include mildness, passivity, dependency and a non-materialist orientation, among others which have been said to form part of the ‘Indian psyche’ (Narain, 1957; Sinha, 1988), often attributed to the hierarchical structure of Indian society (Dumont, 1970; Kakar, 1971). Strong hierarchical structuring, such as paternal authority relations and dependency on elders as a positive feature, was seen as a pre-industrial element which carries over into modern organizations where Indians have been noted to prefer to work in a superior-subordinate role rather than as equals (Kothari, 1970).

Another stream of cross-cultural studies, in the context of India, constitutes an ‘etic’ approach that compares cultures and personality traits on dimensions considered
universally applicable. For example, the poles of individualistic-collectivistic orientations have been used to examine differences in cultures, and among other indices their respective economic developments (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, 1995; Triandis, 2000). These studies propose that Indians are collectivists who view their self and life goals to be relational and interdependent with family and other ingroup members.

While these streams represent different attempts to conceptualize the relation between national and organizational cultures and identities, the concept of national character and modal personality, or even the etic approach, has limited value in explaining any ‘basic’ behavior for several reasons. Firstly, the diversity in India of languages, regions, religions, castes, tribes, economic levels and even climate and topography defies any homogenous or monolithic cultural or personality traits. Further, universally applied constructs, or personality traits, are often too static and essentialist as they carry multiple meanings across and within cultures. Secondly, individuals in technical and occupational groups, such as engineers, have been noted to construct and consolidate their identity needs around need for autonomy rather than authority relations (Kakar, 1971; Sinha and Misra, 1961). Lastly, while Indian firms (such as GSOs) draw on family and parental structures to refashion their internal cultures and external image, these ‘Indian’ structures are better viewed within a process of continual redefinition in response to external changes, rather than as a static trait (Sahay et al., 2003).

- **Culture, ICTs and identities**
Anthropologists have also investigated new technologies, computing, work, global workplaces, organizational cultures and social change framed within social cultural perspectives (for example, Baba, 2003; Garsten, 1994; Hakken, 1999; Pfaffenerger, 1988; Traweek, 1988). Anthropologists have described how cyberspace and computer mediated communication have also made the process of constructing manageable personal identities very complex (Hakken, 1999; Turkle, 1984; Turkle, 1996). These authors refer to ‘internet identity’ in terms of multiple selves and multiplicities of identity. These identities are described as disengaged from gender, ethnicity and other
categories, yet, are seen as social and cultural as they are based on comparisons with others as in previous social formations such as face to face groups and communities.

In a global, ICT mediated work environment, the dynamics and issues related to individuals and work are very distinctive and complex relating to the knowledge-intensive nature of technical language, multiple products, processes, tools and methodologies involved (Sahay et al., 2003). Coupled with different and rather complex ICTs, the task of unravelling cross-cultural issues, or an analysis of personality or identity in terms of fixed constructs, is a very complex matter. These issues have nuanced interpretations and are better comprehended in relation to shifting business, market, social and organizational contexts.

Accordingly, in this study, culture is seen as emergent, changing, and complex, a socially constructed process, rather than something static or an objective entity (Avison and Myers, 1995). Similarly, using a social constructionist perspective, identity is seen as something one becomes as an ongoing identity project where an individual draws on cultural and personal repertoires. The concept of relational-autonomous self from cross-cultural work is deployed to provide a richer understanding of the linkages between gender norms and selves and identities of Indian IT professionals in GSOs. I also examine whether standard anthropological conceptualizations of Indian self and identity (for example, Dumont, 1970; Marriott, 1990) can be applied in Indian GSOs. What might be ‘Indian’ as well as ‘modern’ about behaviors and practices of IT workers within the globally trading ICT based industry, and how these might relate to their identities as well as the identity of the workspaces they inhabit, is also explored. An assumption made is that culture is linked to national identity in a dynamic relationship set within socio-historical processes of the country, firm and individuals.

2.2.3 Globalization, Work & Identity

In this section, I focus on forces of globalization, particularly, it’s varied economic and social patterning that shape work, workplaces, workers subjectivities and identities. Similar to the two perspectives just described, this stream focuses on the relational
construction of identity while offering a more contemporary context within which this construction process takes place. First, I discuss the relation between globalization processes and formation of identity and the role of ICT as agents of globalization in the formation of identity. Then, I describe globalization, the global-local dialectic and identity and, finally, globalization, work, occupation and identity.

- **Globalization processes and identity formations**

Globalization is seen to include processes of cultural heterogenization as well as cultural homogenization, universalism and particularism, modernization and postmodernization (Friedman, 1994; King, 1990; King, 1991; Robertson, 1992). Discourses on globalization have focused on the economic, as it has been related to the broad western, industrial discourses of capitalism and progress, emerging as a world-wide phenomenon in the latter part of the last century. In this sense, globalization is hardly a property of individual actors or specific territories or locales. Some social scientists use the terms ‘networks’, ‘flows’, and ‘trans-nationalism’ to define, characterize, and theorize globalization as a seamless and also amorphous flow of goods, capital, services, people, ideas, technologies, cultural and organizational forms (Appadurai, 1996; Harvey, 1990; Sklair, 2001). For example, Appadurai (1996) proposed five interrelated ‘scapes’ conceptualized as fluid, flowing and amorphous such as flows of people, technologies, money, images and information and the spread of ideas such as democracy and freedom.20 Others see globalization as a ‘time-space compression’ and the intensification of interconnections between groups and individuals with institutions (Giddens, 1990; Harvey, 1989; Lash and Urry, 1996). Giddens (1990), in particular, highlights modernity, time space-distanciation and reflexivity. Others see globalization as a process of enhanced number and density of international or global interactions that are relative to local or national ones (Walby, 2003).

Globalization shapes our lives and identities in complex ways, often said to reorder the classical relationship between self and others, local and global, space and society (Beck,
Globalization processes are implicated in disrupting the temporal and spatial certainties offered by community, place, stable employment, class structures, and the institutions of religion, state, and the family (Castells, 1997; Eriksen, 2001). An increase in identity confusion has been recorded among adolescents and young adults experiencing a loss of meaning as a result of disruption of traditional practices and traditions (Arnett, 2002; Tomlinson, 1999). A wider range of oppositional identities have also been constructed to resist the forces of globalization. These are manifested in the growth of religious fundamentalism (Marty and Appleby, 1993), nationalist identity projects (Barber, 1996) and global protest movements where political groups contest exploitative effects of capitalism (Elkins, 1992).

A growing number of studies particularly from the field of Anthropology have investigated the intersections of gender, labor, and globalization (Mills, 2003; Ong, 1987; Wright, 1997). These studies point to how gendered ideologies and social relations create and maintain gender hierarchies in transnational circuits of labor mobilization and capital accumulation. They also point to the importance of understanding the many ways in which gendered meanings, practices, and identities mediate the intersections between international hegemonies and particular localities in a global labor force. Such an analysis is critical to understanding how individuals and communities confront the effects of globalizing labor practices and reworking their daily, lived experiences of gender in diverse and often unpredictable work contexts.

At the individual level, globalization challenges the construction of a stable identity. Giddens (1990), for example, discusses how interconnections, between the vulnerable nature of knowledge and the placeless logic of contemporary life, contribute to a feeling of ‘existential anxiety’ or ‘personal meaninglessness’ at the individual level. A response to these individual-level feelings of anxiety and insecurity comes through various expressions and redefinitions of identity. Rather than relying on prescribed social roles, identity is increasingly based more on individual choices, on decisions that each person makes about what values to embrace and what paths to pursue in their personal and professional lives (Arnett, 2002). In the presence of increased uncertainty, individuals
persistently construct and revise a story of their own self-identity to anchor their sense of self and to create ontological security in the vortex of a changing social life (Giddens 1991). In contemporary life, thus, self-identity is not a given, but “something that has to be routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual” (Giddens 1991, p. 52).

Global media culture and an increased rate of migration also provide individuals to a wider set of meanings to construct their identity manifested in varied notions of ‘global consciousness.’ For example, Giddens (1991), posited that children and adolescents have “phenomenal worlds [that are] for the most part truly global” (p. 187). Robertson (1992) proposed that children today gradually develop “the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole” (p. 8). Tomlinson (1999) stated that the world as a whole “increasingly exists as a cultural horizon within which we (to varying degrees) frame our existence” (p. 30). This ‘global identity’ is seen to simultaneously co-exist with one’s local identity that is based on the local geographical environment, practices, traditions and daily interactions of the place and people where they grew up (Arnett, 2002). The notion of bicultural identities (Arnett, 2002) and a hybrid identity (Hermans and Kempen, 1998) has also been proposed where local and global meanings are seen to exist in a multiple, dynamic and conflicted relationship.

**ICTs as agents of globalization**
ICTs and electronic media, both viewed as agents of globalization, have been implicated in constructionists’ approach to understanding self and identity. Freeing interaction from the requirements of physical co-presence, these technologies have expanded the possibilities of generalized others and ‘elsewheres’ (Meyrowitz, 1989) that contribute to the construction of individual selves and identities for individuals as well as building collectives (Altheide, 1995). Sherry Turkle (1984) referred to the computer as a ‘second self,’ wherein individuals could find themselves and engage in identity-transforming relationships. Later, she proposed that the internet was a major social laboratory for experimenting with constructions and reconstructions of oneself. Cyberspace, she maintained, eroded boundaries between the real and the virtual, the unitary and multiple
self, and the animate and inanimate and also changed, among other things, our very identity (Turkle, 1996). Haraway’s (1991) cyborg, as a hybrid representation of the biological and technological, has opened up new ways of viewing our identities and challenges the dichotomy between humans and non-humans. Beniger (1987) proposed diverse ways by which media-generated communities provided a “pseudo-gemeinschaft” experience. Lamb and Davidson (2005) illustrate how the use of ICT challenges and shapes professional identities of scientists. Researching IT-enabled modernization, Scott (2000) found that a group of retail bankers in the UK experienced ambivalent feelings that challenged their self-identity. While this technology potentially enabled them greater independence and opportunities at work, they also felt anxious and uncertain about their career trajectory, possibly harsh cost-reductions, their challenged taken-for-granted expertise, along with a loss of social status. Their responses and questions point to the fluidity of boundary between the self and societal changes and most certainly professional and personal identity. In these ways, ICTs have entered into various analyses of identity in contemporary research.

- **The global-local dialectic**
The problematization of the global and the local has been implicated in the debates on globalization and identity. Previously, this problem was seen in terms of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft (Tonnies, 1957) or mentalities of small town and the metropolis (Simmel, 1950) and Weber’s description of the market which transcended the boundaries of neighborhood, kinship and tribe (Weber, 1930). In the 20th century, these debates have continued and also emerged in other contexts such as notions of modernity, civilization and cosmopolitanism (for example, Appadurai, 1996; Robertson, 1992; Walby, 2003). Giddens (1991) proposed that transformations in self-identity and globalization are the two poles of the tension between the local\global conditions of modernity. Rather than a binary opposition of global and local processes or the universal and the particular, global tendencies are often seen in a dialectical relation with local phenomena. For example, the notion of glocalization has been proposed as an intertwining of the global and the local, a type of globalization that can accommodate situational characteristics while emphasizing the interconnections, collisions and tensions in the process (Robertson, 1992). Another
The global-local dialectic has also been implicated in changing notions of place and identity. Paradoxically, while globalization processes and ICTs build relationships between places and locales through processes of time and space compression, these very influences contribute to undermining a stable and unitary conception of place as well as to the dislocation of selves and identities. Giddens (1990), Friedland and Boden (1994) and Casey (1997) argue that the space-time compression in our contemporary world, coupled with new information and communication technologies (ICTs), have resulted in fragmentation, disorientation and a sense of placelessness. Massey (1998) challenges the idea of places as stable and fixed. She questions the notion that a ‘sense of place’ or rootededness can provide one with security and an unproblematic identity in a globalizing world. Similarly, individuals who move across national borders, hold ‘diasporic’ or hybridized and multiple identities as they are not bound by the notion of a stable place or ‘homeland’ and, in geographically fluid context, there is no longer the notion of a ‘one true national self’ or identity (Brah, 1996; Sheller and Urry, 2003; Urry, 2001). In such a scenario, it has been argued that, individuals search for stability through a sense of place attempting to “…salvage centered, bounded and coherent identities – placed identities for placeless times” (Robins, 1991, p. 41).

Finally, Massey (1998), contends that globalization phenomena and time-space compression changes the very form of social relations, consequently, implicating other places and bringing the ‘global’ into the very process of formation of the ‘local’ at each place. The peculiar mix of local as well as wider or global social relations produces distinctive effects in a place that cannot be reproduced elsewhere. Consequently, our awareness of the connections of local place to the wider world is positively enlarged and integrated, giving us a …“global sense of place.” (p. 156).

The word ‘cosmopolitan’ is an English version of the Greek word kosmo-polite, meaning a citizen (politis) of the world (cosmos) (Delanty, 2000). This is a notion emerging out of an ideology in 18th century Europe suggesting a transcending of boundaries of one’s culture and locale manifested in one’s attitudes and orientations and used as a new moral and ethnic standpoint for 21st century global life (Roudometof, 2005).
While the interconnections between the global and the local are a historical phenomenon, what is unique today is the reversibility of effects, referred to as ‘reverse colonization’ (Giddens, 1999). Unlike the previously described globalization effects from developed to developing countries, it is argued that GSOs also reflect such effects where events and processes in economically developing countries impact those in developed countries (Nicholson and Sahay, 2001). For example, a UK based company, Gowing, trained Indian software analysts in international software methodologies. Globalization involved the disembedding of methods from an Indian context and re-embedding of these methods into the UK context by these skilled analysts. Gowing employees responded negatively to this business-related process (Nicholson and Sahay, 2001). The recent backlash in the US and UK against outsourcing of programming and other IT enabled jobs and services to India (Pink, 2004) exemplifies how human emotions (anger, anxiety and insecurity, in these examples), are an inevitable component of such bi-directional globalization influences, interlacing the global and local levels, and directly implicating elements of self and identity.

In the next sub-section, I shift the focus from the global-local dialectic to globalization and its relation to work and identity particularly in contemporary organizations.

- **Globalization, work, occupation and identity**

  In contemporary society, work is a central activity of our daily being-in-the-world. Conceptualized as an instrumental productive human activity, constituted within a social relationship of an employment contract, work is said to form the basis for all economic systems (Barley and Orr, 1997; Orr, 1996). Human work activities are conceived in terms of jobs and roles performed by members of occupations and professions with careers\(^{22}\) and career trajectories that provide the basis for not only varied lifestyle options for individuals, but also their sense of meaning and sense of self or identity (Casey 1995; 

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\(^{22}\) Career has been seen as a process by which the sequence of an individual’s work experience unfolds over time. In its English origin, career meant a road for carriages and in the nineteenth century, this notion of career was applied to labor (Sennett, 1998). Like a road, the objective was to permit coherency in an individual’s life within a market based occupational structure that favored employment based on resources, such as knowledge, held by the person (Abbott, 1988). The discourse of career is said to link the past, present and future of an individual through a series of stages (Grey, 1994).
Indeed, increasingly, work roles and occupational membership shape and often dominate lives of individuals (Hochschild, 1997). Implying, among other things regulation, notions of order and structured activity, work has been conceptualized as part of the process through which individuals, social institutions and societies reproduce themselves as well as create and structure social identities (Billington et al., 1998; Giddens, 1984). One of the central ideas in the study of people at work is that peoples’ work experiences, and how they understand and interpret them, are essential and contribute to their sense of self and identity. In this context, it is worthwhile to explore if and in what form individual and social transformations, at the level of selves and identities, such as those described by Sennett (1998) and Beck (2000a) are also taking place.

In the past, social theorists have tried to analyze the institutional processes relating to modes of production and social organization. For example, while critiquing the historical development of capitalism, Marx argued that, as a result of the commodification of labor, workers were alienated, not only from production, but also from themselves. While Marx analyzed class interests and the capitalist enterprise of profit and exploitation, foundational thinkers like Durkheim ([1933]1984), Weber ([1908]1971) and Parsons (1964) theorized the division of labor and the effects of occupational classification and roles within the system of industrial society. For example, for Durkheim, the growth of industrialization and the expansion of the division of labor produced the phenomenon of individualism while altering in a very fundamental way, the forms of cohesion in society. Subsequently, this focus has been elaborated in the context of the sociology of work and studies of occupation and profession have grown out of this orientation from the mid-twentieth century till today (for example, Eriksen and Vallas 1990; Kanter 1989; Paradeise 2003).

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23 See Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century by H. Braverman (1974), Monthly Review Press, New York, for a compelling Marxist analysis of the labor process. This writing forms much of the basis for critical examinations of methods of managerial control, the relationship between technological innovation and social class, and of the eradication of skill from work.

24 Rather than some abstraction inherent in individuals, Marx (1846) argued that the self was the ensemble of social relations.
Economic work contexts have been increasingly associated with people’s identities. While in pre-industrial societies, people’s social identities were on the basis of social relationships such as a spouse, child, or neighbor, which had both relational and economic responsibilities, it was with modern industrial societies that people were identified with their place in the economic sphere (Casey, 1995). In modern western societies, social theorists and sociologists (for example, Mills, 1956; Parsons, 1964; Weber, [1908] 1971) have viewed occupation as a critical element in social organization, as well as an indicator of social status. During industrialism, occupation was seen as a primary focus of cohesion and solidarity in cities and factories. Today, identification with work and the organization is stronger through discourses of career and profession\textsuperscript{25} (Raelin, 1991). In the twentieth century, the small number of ‘classical’ professions, such as medicine, law, banking etc. have been expanded to include, among others, the group of knowledge workers or knowledge professionals. Further, it has been argued (Grey, 1994) that, as an individual rises up the corporate hierarchy, every facet of the individual’s life right from friendships, leisure and even marriage can become a conscious instrumental process directed towards career success (Grey, 1994). In fact, it becomes increasingly necessary, “to sublimate one’s whole life to the development of career” (Grey, 1994, p. 492). In this way, the divisions between the public and the private spheres, home and work are not only blurred, but work is seen to ‘colonize’ other areas of one’s life (Moore, 1963). In the ‘new economy,’ risk is a key feature in work organizations (Beck, 1992) and takes various forms, shaping selves and identities of workers. While processes of capitalist organizations aim at creating value, such as hiring labor as a commodity that is purchasable and disposable, they actually create job insecurities and economic, social, existential and/or psychological anxieties for workers (Collinson, 2003). As a result of ICTs, work is increasingly delocalized, transnationalized, globally dispersed and managed while labor is increasingly unstable, flexible and virtual (Beck, 2000a). Work contracts in this context that are often temporary or open making labor not only more

\textsuperscript{25} A profession has been defined as an occupation or vocation with a base of specialized knowledge, with a service orientation (rather than profit) and based on a common code of ethics (Løwendahl, 1997). The long training in a profession accompanied with formal and informal socialization practices is said to impart a sense of common identity, solidarity as well as technical skills to the members.
nomadic, casualized and contract based but also intensifying employee insecurities (Sennett, 1998). Globalization of markets means that labor which is necessarily local, individualized in its capacity and working conditions, is burdened with the risks of globalization (Beck, 2000a). For example, the Asian financial crisis with its bankruptcies and unemployment shook the region tremendously. The ‘psychological contract’ \(^{26}\) (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996; Rousseau, 1990) between employer and employee previously based upon loyalty and commitment to the organization in exchange for the rewards of increased authority, status, and financial remuneration has been significantly eroded, particularly, with unpredictable employer strategies of downsizing, delayering or rightsizing (Bocchino, 2003). It is proposed that the logic of the market now governs virtually all aspects of employment relationships (Cappelli, 2000; Sennett, 1998). In the past decade, in economically advanced economies in the West, there has been much social theorizing about globalization, modernity and the ‘corrosion of character’ wrought by flexibility and insecurity in the workplace (Sennett, 1998).

As competition, technological growth and customer demands have exploded, bureaucratic and command and control systems have given way to decentralized structures with less rigid rules of production, team working, and virtual work environments, emphasizing employee empowerment within flexible work arrangements (Ashforth and Johnson, 2001) with workers increasingly investing their sense of self at the job and work group levels (Stroh et al., 1994). Because speed to market is critical, in the new economy, success of the organization is dependent on long working hours as well as providing increased ‘value addition’ to its customers. So, workers spend the greatest part of their working hours in the organization with work-related activities (Gephart, 2002). This not only takes over and displaces non-work related interests and activities of the individual, but workers begin to believe that these long hours positively contribute to career success (Gephart, 2002; Perlow, 1997). The ethic of individualization drives workers, particularly professionals and technical labor to complete individual deliverables and doing highly visible work in order to accrue personal advancement (Perlow, 1997). In

\(^{26}\) Argyris (1960) first discussed this concept in the field of organizational psychology as the relationship between the employees and foremen. Morrison and Robinson (1997) noted that employers and employees exchange promised goods and services within a context of values, beliefs and norms.
the ever-present threat of being ‘left behind’ in a competitive and performance-oriented work context (Sennett 1998), both individuals and firms constantly seek advantage and edge. Branding, not only of the firm or service, but also of oneself has become a new mantra in the past few years (Peters, 1997).

Digitalization and computerization has enabled self-management as a key feature of the new work system, a diffusion of power and decision-making, and the use of cultural rather than structural methods to gain employee consent. Yet, it is these devices that closely monitor individual performance and control over the workers, and work processes are achieved through subjective or ‘normative’ means rather than coercive means of the Fordist model (Kunda, 1992). With a concern, to enroll the ‘hearts and minds’ of employees towards greater organizational goals, control strategies have even extended to shape bodies, appearances, demeanor, attitude and values as well as humor of employees (Burrell, 1992; Collinson, 2002). Formerly, loyalties and attachments to a community of closely knit people, as well as acquired skills and understandings in the performance of one’s responsibilities, made people feel valued. Today, with increasing instabilities in the workplace, as well as ruptures of place, space and attachment, the destabilizing of work routines and family life, and the preoccupation with consumption, coping with feelings of alienation and a struggle to maintain one’s well being is prevalent (Tapia, 2004). Yet, processes stressing relational skills, such as trust, team working, creating a family-like culture so that workplaces are more home-like places, have enmeshed the public and private spheres with lasting effects on male and female workers as well as their families (Hochschild, 1997). While some theorists raise concerns about this enmeshment of public and private time as subtracting from the quality of human life (for example, Hochschild, 1997) others speak of the colonization of private leisure time by the public world of work (Moore, 1963).

In these ways, contemporary organizations, encircled by the vicissitudes of globalization processes, are sites where workers, constantly confronted by an imperative to stay dynamic competitive and flexible, are forced to engage in new and inconstant kinds of discourses, social interactions and positionings. Ironically, while work roles and
occupational membership don’t only dominate large parts of people’ waking lives, they are becoming a larger part of life itself (Hochschild, 1997). Yet, people in contemporary organizations, now talk about trying to ‘get a life’ (Tapia, 2004). Alvesson and Willmott (2002) argue that power and discipline are used to regulate identities and subjectivities of workers in contemporary post-bureaucratic organizations. It can be said that the economic logic of flexibility in the garb and rhetoric of neo-liberal entrepreneurial individualism, while at an individual level, holds out a promise of a future that the worker can create as an autonomous self-directing decision making agent, obligated to enhance the quality of their lives parallely signifies increased anxiety and threat to a secure sense of self and identity (Fraser, 2003).

In summary, globalization is a not only an economic, social and cultural process, but also a gendered and political process whose meanings and consequences have not gone uncontested. The uneven circuits of movement, social and economic changes encompass, not only the external worlds we inhabit as men and women but our inner worlds as well, particularly, in the context of ICT mediated work and workspaces. Contemporary work and production processes form a new terrain and context where ‘identity work’ is an ongoing project by workers.

While there is much theorization around globalization at a macro-level, this theorizing has often neglected the subjectivities and agency of actors and how they make sense of these while being embedded in the milieu of global flows. Rather than a disembodied process of flows of information, capital and finance or the annihilation of geographic space, it is the reciprocal relation between actors and these flows and their sense-making processes that temper and shape the flows themselves (Gille and Riain, 2002). In ICT mediated work contexts, in particular, the global-local dialectic is much understudied, especially in economically developing countries in the throes of globalizing influences. Brah (2002) points out that “globalization does not exist in some rarefied stratosphere. It always touches ground.” (p. 26). GSOs, in India, are emblematic of the volatile and variegated globalization and liberalization flows, reflecting their characteristics and also shaping them in particular ways. In this way, they provide an opportunity to analyze how
macro-level social theories and concepts can be integrated with in-depth, micro-level and processual analysis. This thesis draws on various concepts and literature related to globalization and its interrelations, as described above, to view micro-level dynamics of particular organizational processes and IT workers subjectivities and identities.

In conclusion, this section has discussed relevant literature from social constructionism, anthropological, cross cultural and globalization studies that enable a focused understanding of selves and identities amidst globalization processes. The three literature streams contribute various constructs that form the conceptual basis for this thesis. These constructs also contribute to the foundation for the theoretical framework developed and described in the next chapter. In the next section, I describe the nature of globally distributed software work undertaken by GSOs. This globalized form of ‘knowledge-intensive’ work and organizational setups is a broad canvas framing the immediate context in this study of selves and identities of software or IT workers.

2.3. Global Software Work, Global Software Organizations and Software Workers

ICTs are heavily implicated in globalization processes as a result of the increased importance of information (or knowledge) in the global economy in recent years, as well as their impact on the spatial organization of economic and social activity (Castells, 1996; Harvey, 1989). Some of the economic shifts noted in recent years include increased movements in capital, intensified international competition, accessibility of new global markets, a shift towards service and knowledge-based economies and activities managed by transnational corporations (Hutton and Giddens, 2001; Davis and Meyer, 1998). Various terms used to describe the ‘new economy’ reflect its nature as well as the strong influence of ICTs: the ‘network society’ (Castells, 1996), the ‘knowledge economy’ (Hutton and Giddens, 2001), the ‘borderless economy’ (Ohmae, 1990) and the ‘connected economy’ (Davis and Meyer, 1998).

Given this shift, in economic focus from manufacturing to service-based economies, in the past few years there has been growing interest in knowledge work, knowledge-intensive companies, and knowledge workers. GSOs are firms engaged in knowledge-
intensive software development work, that are situated within a global configuration of outsourcing partners, emphasizing the focus on the individual as well as the institutional context (Nicholson and Sahay, 2004). While global software development (GSW) is a knowledge-based industry, it differs from other knowledge work such as consulting which relies primarily on expertise of individuals, making it hard to obtain economies of scale (Sahay, et al., 2003). Viewed as “both a model of and a model for globalization” (Sahay et al., 2003, p. 2), GSOs provide an interesting context to study aspects of identities as individuals in these organizations are intricately implicated in the structural and social shifts resulting from market changes (Sahay, et. al., 2003). In the context of economically developing countries, where ICT based work is viewed as a means for economic development, some doubts are raised about how the benefits of the software export trade may accrue to local markets in these countries (Heeks, 1999).

The key feature and differentiator of the context of GSW, undertaken by GSOs from other work and workers, is mobility which is often taken for granted. As a result of ICTs, software work is typically performed through the manipulation of symbols in computer systems rather than of material objects. In GSW, knowledge systems (such as programming languages, software development and project management methodologies and specialized domain knowledge) are applied to software development and maintenance activities within a global setting (Sahay, et. al. 2003). GSOs undertake such work across national boundaries through arrangements like alliances, outsourcing or subsidiaries. Offshore software development work is highly interactive, situated within broader social and organizational processes that shape and are shaped by human action (Nicholson and Sahay, 2004; Waterson et al., 1997). ICTs are used to coordinate tasks at various stages of the software life cycle which are separated and implemented at diverse geographical locations. In this way, such work is often intangible, heterogeneous and mobile as compared to traditional service or manufacturing activities.

GSW takes place in a highly volatile and dynamic global marketplace populated by organizations from both developing and developed countries. GSW, in particular, is unique in that it has enrolled a diversity of countries across the world into its global
network. Organizations, undertaking outsourced work, are located in a particular country (referred to as ‘offshore’) employing local employees. Most work, within GSOs, is done in ‘electronic spaces’ created by ICTs. The resultant disembodiment of production and services, developments and standardizations, in the software development processes and neo-liberal governmental policies, has enabled diverse economic entities such as customers and suppliers, workers and consumers to be located in geographically dispersed sites interlinked by ICTs. GSW also necessitates physical travel of personnel between vendors and the contracting or customer organization located overseas (referred to as ‘onsite’). With a rapidly expanding customer base, in new geographical territories, organizational boundaries increasingly merge necessitating shifting of actors between diverse, multiple, and evolving work, social and technological contexts (Sahay et al., 2003). In this way, such work is intangible, heterogeneous and mobile as compared to traditional service or manufacturing activities.

GSW involves individuals, teams, organizations and nations with diverse social and cultural backgrounds, and also idiosyncratic styles of work, interacting across temporal and spatial boundaries resulting in a variety of social and human issues that challenge the management of GSOs. Software workers have been referred to as knowledge workers as well as IT or computer professionals (Igbaria and Shayo, 2004). Knowledge work is described as producing and reproducing information and knowledge (Stehr, 1994), cerebral (Davis and Nauman, 1997), defying routinization unlike the scripting of ‘service work’ (Drucker, 1993), and requiring formal education i.e. technical and theoretical knowledge (Starbuck, 1992). Knowledge workers are well-educated and qualified professionals who produce creative objects and/or services and solutions by using their knowledge as a major resource (Alvesson, 1993; Starbuck, 1992). Knowledge-intensive companies such as management firms, computer consultancy firms and R&D units, are typically ICT mediated, employing knowledge workers and are imbued with ambiguity where the ‘product’ is intangible, uncertainty and contradictions abound, and the distinction between ‘labor’ and ‘knowledge’ is merged (Alvesson, 2001). Relationships with customers are infused with personal qualities of trust, faith and intimacy, and these are critical for business survival. Given this, Alvesson (2001) argues, ‘knowledge’ and
‘expertise’ to a large extent is a matter of belief, impression and negotiation of meaning. The high level of ambiguity and fluidity of the market and organization makes identity construction and regulation at the level of self and organization assume great significance (Alvesson, 2001).

Typically grouped in teams, GSW also involves negotiations with users or clients, problem-solving, negotiations and communication with the team itself. Volatile changes, in technologies and platforms in the global marketplace, demands on a constant basis the continuous updating of knowledge and skills by individual workers thus pressuring IT workers to be in a continuous learning mode to be ‘marketable,’ both within and outside the organization (D'Mello, 2005). Diverse time zones, and tight project schedules, necessitate IT workers to consistently work late hours often in a crisis mode, rapidly switching between projects, technologies and countries (Sahay, et. al., 2003). In some countries like India geographical separation from customers time zones requiring workers to take official telephone calls late at night cause an increased incursion of work into personal life resulting in blurred work-life boundaries (D'Mello and Eriksen, forthcoming). Affirming these shifts, Lee (1999) states: “Few professions in human history have seen such rapid changes in their knowledge base and work requirements as in the field of IS, today. These changes are driven not just by the unprecedented amount of new technical knowledge…but also by the changing business environment…and the changing role of IS within organizations.” (p.856). These mobilities and demands pressure individuals to respond through what Castells (1997) describes as the ‘power of identity’ or shifts in individual identity constructions.

Further, software workers are noted to have high mobility career trajectories reflecting their significant labor market power with a retention period for permanent employees typically between 18 and 36 months (D'Mello, 2005; Rathi, 2003; Scholarios and Marks, 2004). Often, they are headhunted as individuals, or as part of teams (Cappelli, 2000), raising management issues related to retention for employers. They are also noted to have strong and individualized professional attachments to managing their careers as projects in themselves and demonstrating high commitment to their work, but rarely extending
such commitment to organizational loyalty, particularly, in tight labor markets (D’Mello, 2005; Scholarios and Marks, 2004). IT workers are also seen to employ career as a critical site where the reflexive project of the self as described by Giddens (1991) is conducted (D’Mello and Sahay, forthcoming). Typically, this group is more likely to evaluate employers in terms of the kind of work offered and opportunities for professional development (Scholarios and Marks, 2004). Salary, status and other benefits may promote high commitment to the work and long working hours where necessary and also, in some cases, promote identification with the goals of the company (Kunda, 1992). Unlike traditional professions, software workers do not have a strong code of ethics nor is their entry to the profession via a single route. This facilitates them to derive a sense of identity from their work, motivating work performance and acting as a form of normative control (Kunda, 1992).

Also, while GSOs are seen as rational technology driven and meritocratic organizations, as compared to traditional industries, it is worthwhile to remember that this industry, and the marketplace in which it is embedded, are also milieus deeply imbued with personal, social and existential structures and processes. These often take a backseat, in the face of business pressure, even though the mantra of “employees as assets” is widely touted by these firms. Further, GSOs, like other global organizations, are locally situated and are sites that are embedded in “…relational hierarchies of gender, class, caste and other critical fault lines, which define identities and distribute power both symbolically and materially” (Rao and Kellner, 2003, p. 143)

In summary, the concepts of self and identity are variously theorized in the social science literature. Self and identity can be seen in terms of one’s subjective sense (or experience of self) and social identification processes that provide meaning and belonging as well as a sense of sameness and different-ness from others. Socio-cultural discourses also shape selves in different ways. Identity is also seen to be historically situated, shaped by economic events such as globalization and modernization processes, increasing prevalence of ICTs and electronic media as well as worldwide shifts towards knowledge-based economies. These changes have transformed the form and nature of economic work
and workplaces increasingly associated with people’s identities. GSW and GSOs represent a unique form of knowledge-based work and work settings, characterized by a multiplicity of mobilities at the multiple interconnected levels of the work, organization and the individual. IT workers, employed in these globalized work settings, represent a new group of professionals who straddle these multiple levels on a daily basis.

To conclude, the dynamics of identity processes within the context of a globalizing workspace such as GSW are complex and multidimensional. This raises challenges for researchers attempting to study these dynamics. In this thesis, concepts from the theoretical streams discussed in this chapter have been used discretely in the analysis of the empirical material in the various research papers. As a result of combining the various constructs used and the themes that emerged in the empirical material, a theoretical perspective has been evolved. Aiming to provide a more comprehensive understanding of identity processes in this particular work context, this framework is elaborated in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 3

A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK TO UNDERSTAND IDENTITY PROCESSES IN GSW

This chapter presents a theoretical framework that can be used to analyze identity processes within the context of GSW. This framework has been inductively derived from the empirical material as well as concepts, from the theoretical streams, discussed in the previous chapter. Each of the four research papers, of this thesis, has deployed a set of concepts (such as self and identity, globalization, culture, place, and mobilities), seen as relevant to the context of GSW, as theoretical lenses to analyze the empirical material. The process, for formulating this framework, has been an interactive ongoing dialogue between reading of the literature in various disciplines around this topic, engagement with the empirical material, and discussion and feedback from presentations at seminars and conferences. This has resulted, in a synthesis of the sets of concepts used in the research papers, in a manner that attempts to provide a coherent, interconnected, multi-level perspective to analyze the identity-related dynamics observed. The framework is elaborated in this chapter, along with interspersed field data to highlight its ‘ground level’ flavor. Before elaborating on this framework, I will describe the notion of self and identities of the IT worker as conceptualized in this thesis.

3.1. Conceptualization of the IT Worker’s Self and Identity

An assumption, in this thesis, is that work forms an important context for identity to be constructed and reconstructed. In the present project, the premise is that the software industry, itself, has been constructed out of the flows and fluxes of globalization processes in the past few decades, and is in a continuous state of reconstruction and evolution. To service this industry, a group of IT workers, that did not exist before or who would have been employed in the manufacturing industry prior to the birth of this industry, have emerged as a new social category of professionals in the country.

27 The concept of place has been theorized in contrast to that of space. While space is associated with the sense of an abstract and infinite expanse, through which people and ideas freely move, offering possibilities for newness and growth (Casey, 1997; Schultzze and Boland, 2000), place has been related with a person’s sense of boundedness and, particularity, of a sense of being and contented belonging or emotional attachment and where tradition holds sway (Giddens, 1990; Harvey, 1989; Tuan, 1977)
In this project, self is taken in a functional sense as a general ‘agent’ or motivational force underlying one’s activities and performing unifying or integrating functions (Baumeister, 2000). In this way, borrowing from Mead (1934), the ‘I’ is the experiencer, the agent acting out of self-consciousness, and while doing so, is unable to reflect and evaluate. The ‘I’ becomes ‘Me’ when the act has passed and one interprets it as a reflecting agent. Selves are created within contexts. Values and norms of others, in these contexts, are taken into account in its construction process which is social in nature. Identity refers to a sense of ‘who I am,’-- a definition or interpretation of the self. Identity lends coherence or meaning to oneself and to others within a particular social context. A sense of identity implies a dynamic and relational interpretive structure with a sense of personal sameness and continuity over time, as well as difference from others. Personal/self identity includes the domain of the self and refers to an individual’s private notion of ‘who they are.’ This notion is similar to that of Giddens (1991), who described self-identity as “the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography” (p. 53). The constructive aspect is further elaborated on in that self-identity is not a given but “something that has to be routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual” (Giddens, 1991, p. 52).

In addition to personal identity, the notion of social identity is also relevant as individuals are assumed to belong to various collectives. In this study, professional identity emerged as salient for several reasons. Members in this group were seen to identify themselves by their membership in this social category and frequently refer to themselves as ‘IT professionals.’ The empirical material also revealed that others identified them primarily by their ‘knowledge’ work as described earlier. Media reports, the HR function and IT workers (themselves) characterized members of this group as ‘individualistic and ‘self-driven.’ Deliberate organizational practices, such as differential or higher pay for ‘core staff’ (IT workers), as compared to ‘support staff’ (Administration and Human Resources) were seen to construct this group as valued professionals who bring in the ‘bread and butter’ for the organization. Besides defining themselves IT workers were seen to significantly value their professional attainments and exhibited awareness of their place in the existing Indian social structure. Much of their social and personal choices
were seen to revolve around their professional commitments which suggested that this social identity was salient for them.

Processes of identification were seen to be central, not only to construction, but also reflected a need for confirmation and desire to maintain a sense of distinctiveness in this construction. For example, in negotiations about policy issues, IT workers would often say, “After all, we are IT professionals, not just anybody!” This mode of referencing, as well as the nonverbal gestures that accompanied the statement, was seen to reflect their perception of a position as a special category that deserved a certain kind of preferential treatment. Yet, at other times, this category was taken as a starting point with several respondents saying that, “Now software is no longer special as there are so many people in this profession. Hence, the challenge is how to position oneself differently in this group.” When the company-wide performance management system (in the firm studied) was to be modified from an individual-based system to a team-based system, the first and primary question from IT employees was how they, as individual contributors, would be recognized for their “distinctive” contributions? Their biggest concern was how they would be differentiated from their team members’ performance (presumably mediocre)? Discussions, around these concerns, were often tinged with anxiety, some anger about seemingly subversive company agendas and requests for some quick and definite answers from HR.

In these ways, professional identity, in particular, was intertwined with individual selves of workers. Rather than viewing personal and social identities, as discrete categories or ways of belonging or identification, they are taken as intertwined -- informing each other and influencing and being influenced by internal and external events and happenings. The self and identity of the IT worker is seen as embedded at the multiple interconnected levels of the self, the profession, the organization, the nation and the society which are themselves situated in a global context that includes global markets. These multiple interconnected layers of identification surround the IT worker’s self and identity. The ‘reflexive project of the self’ (Grey, 1994; Giddens, 1991) has materialized in his/her career and the ceaseless pursuit of growth and challenging opportunities forms the core of
these layers. Personal and social identity category features are seen to be intermeshed. They are, necessarily, imbued with the individual’s feelings, aspirations, hopes and fears, reflecting his or her relational status in his/her inconstant economic and social spheres. Each layer reflects the dynamic interplay of the local–global dialectic.

In the present thesis, three bipolar relationships were derived in an inductive manner from the empirical material as a set of theoretical lenses to understand and elaborate the macro-micro dynamic linkages that contribute towards identity construction in this group of professionals. Each, of these relationships, has a key construct at one end and identity at the other. These relationships are as follows:

- **Mobility - Identity**
- **Gender - Identity**
- **Culture - Identity**

Taken together, these three lenses are proposed to serve as a theoretical framework to understand identity processes in GSW.

The nature of the relationships, between mobility, gender and culture with identity, can be characterized as a dialectical ‘to and froing’ between the global and the local, with reflexivity\(^{28}\) as its core. The three relations also mutually influence each other. They are seen as situated within the context of organizational and social changes taking place within globalization processes (which are uneven) and shaped by local particularities. In the next section, each of these relationships is described in detail, following which a synthesis of their intersections is presented.

### 3.2. Conceptual Lens to Study Identity

In this section the dynamics within each of the three sets of relationships seen as contributing towards notions of self and identity in this group of workers are outlined. These dynamics are viewed as reflecting the dialectical relationship, between the global

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\(^{28}\) Reflexivity, here, refers to conscious shifts that individuals and organizations make in order to adapt to perceived changes or ‘risks’ in the environment. In this way, it is similar to how Giddens (1991) describes it.
and the local poles, moderated by individual and institutional reflexivity processes. Field data is included to illustrate the empirical dynamics of each set of relationships.

3.2.1. Mobility-Identity

With the help of this lens, I describe the arrangements between diverse mobilities and the ways in which they have been seen to shape the selves and identities of workers. I will first discuss the nature of the mobility-identity relationship, situating it within processes of globalization and organizational changes. Following this, I will discuss the global-local dialectic in conjunction with mobilities, individual and institutional reflexivity and the linkages with identity.

As described, in the previous chapter, mobility is a key feature that differentiates the context of GSW undertaken by GSOs from other forms of work and workers. The lens of mobility-identity illustrates the nature and dynamics of various movements or mobilities implicated in GSW within GSO and its relation to the identities of workers.

Within GSOs, boundaries between the local and the global, seen as blurred in various ways, supported the view of Giddens (1991) that “localities are thoroughly penetrated by distanciated influences…” (p.188). In other words, individual workers in these institutions are necessarily drawn into fields that go beyond the local where self and society, the local and the global are interrelated. So while the local, national and global can be seen as spatial entities, their boundaries are permeable, producing, what Massey (1998) describes as distinctive effects in a place that cannot be reproduced elsewhere as a result of this unique mix. For example, the distinctive nature of the Indian IT worker (and the IT industry in India) is unique in the local Indian context, while simultaneously sharing common features with this industry and a set of workers in another geographical location in the globe. The notion of mobilities acts like a bridging construct to explain how social relations, resulting from movements of people, implicate other places and interconnects the global into the local.
Several recurrent mobilities or movements, identified in the empirical material, illustrate how mobilities interconnect the global into the local. These include (among others) spatial movements such as travel within the city (to and from) the workplace, social movements within the middle class as a result of increased affluence, movements across firms to enhance one’s career, and movement from an offshore location to the customer’s overseas office. For example, when comparing IT professionals with others like those in manufacturing, Romila, an HR manager noted that they were more affluent and occupied a place of pride in their ‘sasural’.\footnote{Term in Hindi to refer to extended family as a result of marriage.} “While family members did not really understand what exactly the ‘IT animal’ did, they felt proud that this member would travel overseas frequently and enjoy the material and professional benefits of such exposure.” Similarly, IT workers from smaller towns in India, working in Mumbai city, said they enjoyed the “modern” and “cosmopolitan” flavor of the city and the availability of international foods, commodities and brands. These shifts, across place and space, were seen to connect global and local influences thus supplying elements for identity construction in the group of workers.

GSOs are seen to create the context for IT workers to change jobs, technology platforms, seek newness, growth and the pursuit of an almost boundaryless career in work spaces, while they also have diverse cultural experiences in various countries. Yet some personal decisions of workers (for example, marriage choices) continue being rooted to region, place and associated social relations such as caste or community considerations. Related to selves and identities of individuals, these sets of relations were seen to form almost an ‘enclave’ where local continuities, deeply grounded in place, thrive as opposed to the increasingly ‘placeless logic’ of GSW. In this way, in mobility-identity, some sets of relations are mobilized while others are embedded and remain untouched by what Castells (1996) calls the space or ‘power of flows.’ Individual employees are seen to remain “historically and biographically place-dependent” (Sahay et al., 2003, p. 39), creating or reinforcing their own boundaries, internally. Mobility-identity in GSOs can be seen to be constructed from elements within socio-historical, relational and temporal contexts of space and place that exist along the global-local continuum.
The empirical material illustrates three kinds of cross-cutting mobilities – the geographical, existential and social. Each is situated on the nodes of global-local flows of GSOs, intersecting, mutually shaping and, sometimes, colliding in tension with each other. Geographical mobility implies physical shifts of various sorts across space and place -- ranging from moving to and from the office, across cities, projects, skills, technologies, organizations, and countries. For example, the high tech human capital that workers can accrue as a result of the IT industry significantly expands their possibilities for mobilities of various sorts. They can choose between ranges of skills, various career pathways and negotiate diverse work contracts with employers. Further, they can traverse easily across geographical locations and transcend the borders between economically rich and poor countries. They could choose to live in any part of the western world (the US or UK) and work as ‘respectable’ Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) (a much sought after category of belonging in India) while pursuing the ‘good life’ in contrast with other low-skilled migrant workers in these countries. In the case studied, it was common for individuals to almost brandish their citizenship in the UK or in the US during recruitment interviews (particularly, during location and salary negotiations), as a sign of the possibilities and terrains they could potentially move across.

Social mobility, the second kind of mobility, was manifested in moves across a network of social relations such as from a caste to a class hierarchy, shifts up and also down the corporate hierarchy, moves across groups such as work teams, peers and colleagues and onsite social spaces. IT workers, in this case, tended to view career progress based on individual skills and professional accomplishments, rather than kinship relations or social class. The ‘heroes,’ of not only the IT industry but also in the Indian imagination, include fabled figures such as N. R. Narayana Murthy of Infosys and Azim Premji of Wipro that were often discussed at lunch tables in IT companies. These gurus (mentors), from humble middle-class backgrounds who became millionaires almost overnight, are the icons of modern India in terms of their entrepreneurial spirit and their rise to wealth and

30When a laborer acquires knowledge, skills, and other assets useful to an employer or firm in the production and exchange processes, the value added to the laborer is termed human capital (Lin, 2001). Unlike physical capital, in human capital, the added value is embedded in the laborers themselves. Human capital is operationalized and measured by education, training and experience.
fame by highly respectable means. Extensively discussed, in media coverage, their stories illustrate a possible way for IT workers to accumulate economic and social capital\textsuperscript{31} to significantly enhance their middle-class status. In this way, they serve as role models, or ‘idealized others’ (Josselson, 1994), providing a local context for organizing imagined identities for IT workers. Another space (in the Indian context), offering a potential for upward social mobility, is the marriage market in India (van der Veer, 2005). In this space, an overseas working stint significantly contributes to the dowry that male workers can command in their local and social groups, often related to caste and community criteria and enhancing their sense of their ‘place in the world.’ These examples illustrate how social mobilities, in this context, are intricately tied with global features.

Existential mobility refers to the shifting internal processes related to the IT worker, such as fears and hopes, insecurities and successes experienced primarily in relation to career trajectories and work contexts. IT professionals were noted to have significantly more choices in their work opportunities as compared to other professions in India. Besides the numerous job opportunities, they also have a large number of career path options within the IT profession, itself. This group was courted by banks, and other financial institutions in Mumbai, that offered them special rebates on housing or vehicle-purchase loans.\textsuperscript{32} In this way, they have the option to exercise more discretion over what they want to do and where they want to be located. The world becomes the stage or arena on which IT workers can imagine their personal and professional trajectories -- a scenario which cannot be offered to any other industry worker in India. In the social context of family and immediate society, IT workers enjoy a privileged position as a direct outcome of the phenomenal success of the industry, both nationally and internationally. Given their plum salaries as earning potential, as well as their overseas travel opportunities and trans-national connections, IT professionals are much sought after in the Indian marriage

\textsuperscript{31} Bourdieu (1986, p. 243) described three forms of capital, seen as different kinds of resources that are mutually convertible: a) Economic capital , immediately and directly convertible into money, may be institutionalized in the form of property rights; b) Cultural capital (for example, educational qualifications), which could be converted into economic capital (wealth) or social capital (prestige in one’s country or another country); c) Social capital comprises one’s social connections which are convertible in certain conditions, into economic capital.

\textsuperscript{32} One of the first investments, an IT worker was seen to make, was either in a vehicle or a flat (a Mumbai city term to denote an apartment). The vehicle might be a motorbike (mainly purchased by trainees or developers) or a car. Purchasing a flat symbolized a means to secure a sense of security, particularly, in a city like Mumbai where housing is scarce and expensive.
market, even eclipsing doctors who previously were one of the most highly valued groups in this market (Biao, 2004).

These diverse mobilities, fraught with multiplicities and ambiguities, also intersect each other as well as mutually constitute each other, influencing the workers’ selves and identity constructions. Yet, on the other hand, where individuals are confronted with major changes or disruption in their own plans (a natural consequence of the global-local dialectic), these changes alter a seemingly smooth trajectory and positioning in a globalized space thereby influencing their identity constructions. The most well known example of a global change, effecting local shifts, is the subsequent economic downturn after September 11, 2001, that resulted in much anxiety and insecurity for these workers as well as GSOs vying for a piece of the international market share. All of a sudden, a carefully constructed universe of possibilities seemed to fall apart, shattering a dream of a secure future and resulting in anxious selves, and assaulting smug identity constructions that were necessarily interwoven with market fluctuations. The freedoms and choices enjoyed by workers in this profession has (as its’ underbelly) increased anxiety, stress, an uneasy sense of precariousness and uncertainty of one’s future in a fluid and mobile labor market. The fear of obsolescence in the market, in terms of skills and saleability, was seen to fuel the imperative towards the ever-present aspiration for seeking ‘challenging opportunities’ through work assignments and growth, and learning inputs through organizationally sponsored training or self-learning.

In a ‘risk society,’ the goal of greater control of a ‘runaway world’ often drives one’s search for new forms of institutional and individual reflexivity (Giddens, 1990), and this was exemplified in the case. The inter-subjective relationship between the IT worker (as an employee) and the GSO (as an employer) forms a site where the project of the self in it’s reflexive trajectory encounters in turn, the reflexivity of the institution. For example, in the case study several symbolic management practices, such as socialization processes, creating overarching goals and strategies, vision and mission statements, use of myths, stories, use of metaphors such as the organization as ‘family,’

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1 This is described in detail in the research paper in Appendix 1.
and invoking ‘values,’ were employed by the company. The most evocative was the slogan, “Once an IN-SYNCer, always an IN-SYNCer!” This slogan was oft-repeated in induction programs, company announcements and HR presentations to customers, when trying to provide them a ‘comfort feeling’ about staff turnover and employee productivity. Drawing on the personal selves of workers, by invoking their feelings and providing a successful collective to belong to, helped to create and preserve a positive organizational identity through a psychological state of affinity of employees with the organization thus enhancing member’s contribution and reducing turnover.

This institutional reflexivity, however, encountered another dynamic within the organization -- that of the fugitive IT professional who was seen to identify more with his/her career and profession, than with the organization, and switch organizations rapidly to improve their job prospects. In post-bureaucratic organizations, it has been suggested that the best hope is to assume identities of ‘portfolio workers’ possessing transferable skills which are context-independent (Grey and Garsten, 2001; Handy, 1989). IT workers were noted to seek knowledge and skills, that are both technical and relational, or interpersonal that are context-independent and which could be applied in endless locales, across companies, projects and countries. The curriculum vita\textsuperscript{34} (CV) was seen as a vector for the illustration of a successful narrative of professional identity trajectory. IT workers invested much effort towards ‘polishing’ the CV or ‘adding value’ to it across cyberspace through headhunters’ databases and e-mails to friends and contacts in other companies and countries. Also, as noted in previous work (for example, Arthur et al., 2005), workers were seen to orient themselves to relevant peer groups such as their batch-mates from college, or the trainee batch, with which they entered the organization to make sense of their earnings, market positioning and relative advancement in their careers.

IT workers also saw overseas education (particularly, an M.B.A. degree) as a means to enhance the value of their CV, give them a ‘business edge’ in the market, as well as a vehicle to acquire economic and social capital. The notion of the CV, as a vector for the

\textsuperscript{34} At the field site, internet access, which was first provided for all employees at their desktops, was quickly disabled when it was found that employees were using it mainly to post their CV on jobsites and applying for jobs.
project of the self, is applicable not only to the individual but also the organization seeking to ‘add value’ to their respective trajectories. For example, in a recruitment meeting, where project managers were discussing how to best present their ‘resources’ so that prospects would choose IN-SYNC as a preferred vendor, a recurrent term was “reusable CVs” and what processes needed to be in place to ensure that CVs could be quickly adapted to suit the prospects’ requirements.

In these ways, the IT industry, and the ensuing work contexts, supplies cultural and social elements that IT workers use to construct their professional and social identities and also revise their sense of self. These identities are not just social categories but relate to the individuals’ feelings, motivations, agency, and in this way implicate existential meanings and interpretations. These mobilities suggest that identities, personal and social, are now stretched out across time, space, and even place, rather than confined to a local geographical field such as an organization or a particular country in a reflexive as well as reflective manner.

Mobilities, then, fundamentally influence the place-identity relationship in two ways (Twigger-Ross and Uzzell, 1996). Firstly, it creates the potential for identification with a multiplicity of physical places for IT workers. Second, place in GSW also refers to electronic locations, as well as social, personal and existential domains such as career trajectories, inner selves and social relations. In these ways, place creates a context for varied experiences and relations including those related to identity constructions. So rather than an inert setting, in which identity develops, place was seen to interact dynamically with identity processes such as their self-esteem, self-efficacy, continuity and distinctiveness. In this way, mobilities in GSW seem to provide individuals with not only a social or existential ‘sense of place’ in the world but rather, what Massey (1998, p. 156) suggests, a “…global sense of place.”

Coupled with mobility-identity, the global-local dialectic influences selves and subjectivities of IT workers and their experience of agency. At one level, they have recognized that they are embedded in an uncertain and unpredictable labor market, in a
general manner. Their stories, and the organization of their daily lives, have suggested that they experience a sense of agency over their work trajectories. Barring serious economic downturns, such as post September 11th they have been seen as imagining their future in the local Indian industry landscape as autonomous, reflective and reflexive actors. There have been some blips in this perception. For example, the experience of being a ‘benchie’ (i.e., waiting for a project to arrive rather than actively working on a ‘live’ project), inevitable in this industry, has been generally seen, not only as an economically unproductive phase, but a personally devaluing experience as well. Time, on the bench, was something to be minimized and not discussed in contexts where it would be seen as non-value added time, such as on one’s resume or the next job interview outside the firm. The ways, in which IT workers managed the real possibility of obsolescence (through changing jobs, platforms, trainings by studying themselves or through company-mediated processes), was seen as another way to exercise agency. Yet, the global marketplace, with its caprices and shifts of technologies, markets and political influences, constantly framed their backdrop, moderating the degrees of freedom that IT workers could exercise.

In these ways, mobility-identity illustrates the ‘to and froing’ between cultural, technological, spatial and existential spaces and places, as well as the tension of movement and stasis between various social identities of IT workers situated in the technoscapes of GSW and organizational changes influenced by local particularities.

3.2.2. Gender Identity

While mobilities bridged spaces and places that were social, geographical and existential, gender emerged in the study as a social identity, that was salient in the subjective experiences of men and women workers, influencing constructions and enactments of this identity as well that of the GSO. A gendered perspective is seen as important in globalization processes, women’s participation in paid work and also ICT and technology work contexts (Arun and Arun, 2002; Koggel, 2003; Mills, 2003). Gender-identity is proposed as an analytic lens to investigate whether structurally and socially, GSOs, viewed as ‘modern institutions’ really constitute a ‘level playing field’ for both men and
women workers. With the help of this lens, I describe the nature and dynamics between gender-related features within GSOs and their relation to the selves and identities of workers. I will first discuss the nature of the gender-identity relationship, situating it within processes of globalization and organizational changes. Following this, I will discuss the global-local dialectic in conjunction with gender, individual and institutional reflexivity and the linkages with identity.

An assumption, made in gender-identity, is that cultural ideologies and social norms in various social groups pertaining to masculinity and feminity, men and women, and family and work, significantly shape identity constructions of male and female members of these groups. These norms and ideologies, as well as individual identity constructions, influence people’s working lives and also shape organizational settings, structures and policies. The lens of gender is conceptualized in two ways: Firstly, in terms of differential representation and experiences of men and women in the IT workforce. Secondly, as socially constructed, through material practices and ideological processes, within a social context such as family, organization and one’s social group. Both these features were seen to enable an analysis of how gender is linked, not only to one’s self and identity (both personal and social), but also to interpersonal and organizational-related issues at the workplace

Several particularities of gender-related processes were noted in the case study. These included the under-representation of women in the IT workforce, mobility restrictions that women IT professionals encounter and the gendering of the workplace of GSOs. Each is now briefly described in relation to the gender-identity lens.

The rise of ICT-mediated workplaces, across the globe, has not been accompanied by a significant rise in the number of women entering the IT profession or workplace in different countries. In the context of India, the trend is very different, where more women are enrolling in disciplines of engineering and computer science, attributed to the prestige of IT related degrees and jobs in the country. The combined forces of urbanization, industrialization, corporatization, globalization and increased education and employment
have created new possibilities and forms for social mobility for many Indians, in general, including women. These forces have replaced Sanskritization, the idiom for social mobility in India in the past. As a result of these forces, ‘social risks,’ for women associated with long-distance travel, living alone or working in office environments with others, have significantly decreased. For example, a female developer stated: “I was allowed to study as much as I wanted but when it came to working…I would have to select something that my parents were reasonably comfortable with. It sounded safe and respectable to sit at the computer in an office.” Further, in urban middle-class families, in particular, often aspiring for an upwardly mobile lifestyle there is an increased interest in having an ‘earning/working wife, daughter or daughter-in-law, and, particularly, in respectable and prestigious occupations like medicine and engineering.

These social changes have enabled more women in India to enter and create satisfying work and professional trajectories for themselves. Today, the image of an IT professional in India is hardly that of a nerd or computer geek and IT workers are labeled as the ‘cream of society,’ ‘moneyed’ and ‘well traveled.’ Ample job options are available for women in the IT industry which faces a perennial lack of skilled workers. Also, in India, software development as an employment option, is viewed as more professional and performance based with a less discriminatory daily work environment, as compared to several other employment options for young middle-class people. Further, within GSOs, women are perceived as more sincere, hardworking and stable in the organization (faced with high attrition rates), seen to make better project managers than their male colleagues.

The features, related to the IT industry listed above, signal positive shifts for women’s representation in the IT labor force and possibilities to generate feelings related directly to self-confidence, occupational worth and an increased sense of agency. Yet, the under-representation of women (in this industry), the gendering of GSOs as work settings (coupled with mobility restrictions) reveal how local particularities shape and interpellate the flows of globalization and implicate the local-global dialectical relation. For

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35 This term was introduced by Srinivas (1997), an Indian anthropologist, to refer to mobility processes of groups within the caste system. When a local endogamous unit of the caste system acquired political power or became wealthy, they moved up the caste system by sanskritizing themselves i.e., by imitating the customs, rituals and life-style of a higher caste. Over time, noble origins of the caste could be claimed.
example, while GSOs have opened up job options, and literally new worlds for this group of workers, women are only 24 percent of the IT workforce in India even though they are around 50 percent of the country’s population. Further, while India’s embarkation on the path of economic liberalization opens up channels with the world outside for both men and women, socio-economic conditions in the country, in general, are still weighted against women in terms of limited access to education, nutrition, equity at home, health facilities, employment opportunities, and even access to life itself (http://indianngos.com/issue/women/statistics/index.html). These features, make visible the extra-long road that women in India must travel to access the fruits of the ‘information revolution’ in their country.

Even though, there are many job options in the IT industry, women are seen to be over-represented in lower level jobs like programming and under-represented in higher level jobs like consulting and project management. Further, in the GSO study men and women IT workers spoke in different ‘voices’ that illustrated different gendered styles, different positioning of work in their identity constructions and how they saw themselves placed, as well as placing themselves in their respective social context. The breadwinner ideology was seen to predominate male workers’ identity constructs, while familial care occupied center stage in female workers identity constructs. This difference was seen to mirror the prevailing patterns in many sections of society in India.

This differential placing of ideologies was expressed in attitudes, behaviors and feelings in inter-subjective encounters at the workplace. For example, a male project manager said:

“As an Indian male, I am supposed to be the one earning the bread and butter. If I have to work for 12 hours a day, I have to work to earn the \textit{roti}.\footnote{Hindi word for ‘bread’.} If I am not able to come for your \textit{alama falama}\footnote{He is referring to social functions, mainly in the family circle.} stuff, I will not be apologetic about it or go..."
back to my family and say, “I am sorry I was not there, I was working.” In another instance, a female manager, describing her responsibilities in her family (comprising a husband in a senior job and young child) said, “That is life – work and family. There are certain things that just don’t bend. As an Indian, whoever’s wife you are, whether it be the President’s wife or peon’s wife, there are certain activities you do like cooking food for the family. You cannot put your feet up or buy food off the rack like the freedom that you have in western countries…”

These responses (among others) suggested that in their home, or private sphere, the breadwinner ideology was more salient for men while familial care was more salient for women, irrespective of their ‘equal’ professional roles as managers in a work context. They also indicate how the autonomous-relational self (Kagitcibasi, 1996), implicated in gender role-definitions, was operationalized among IT workers in ways that were more dichotomous than dialectically mutual. Individual responses, as well as the coping means used by women, suggested that the relational self occupied center stage in their identity construct, while for men, the autonomous self occupied a more central place.

Further, the GSO was seen to reproduce traditional, gendered norms in some of their material practices such as policies, interpersonal relations and social practices at work. For example, during selection interviews, it was considered normal for interviewers to ask women candidates’ direct questions about their family responsibilities, rather than male candidates, and sometimes make selection decisions based on these. An HR manager once said, “In interviews we assume a guy will be available 100 percent for work, unlike a woman.” In another instance, reflecting on how she coped with office demands and family responsibilities, a woman manager said, “This company does not have policies to support women. Not at all. If you come 2 days late as per the so-called flexi-time policy, on the the 3rd day a half-day leave is deducted and you are informed through a computer generated e-mail. Women need flexi-time in the real sense if they are to grow in the company and it is easy for the company to give this. If your maid comes late, you are stuck. I was staying late till 8 p.m. all last week, but that did not matter to the
company.” In another instance, making an observation about what she saw that women brought to the workplace, a developer noted, “Team leaders, generally allocate jobs like arranging for a birthday celebration, arranging a baby gift, chart making for company competitions, articles for company magazine...In all, these women are actively encouraged.” So while GSOs are seen as a global worksite with the potential to contest traditional and stereotypical gendered norms and stereotypes, they simultaneously also reproduce these norms.

Mobility, in sociological inquiry, is viewed as a measure of gender relations and gender-identity was seen to intersect with mobility-identity in three ways. Firstly, mobility restrictions for women limited their physical and social participation in GSOs and this also influenced work outcomes in the GSO. For example, formal and informal information flows in GSOs would often bypass or exclude women as they were not always active in social networking practice which is critical in interaction-based work such as software development. Their limited participation was often related to physical and social mobility restrictions, such as the inability to socialize after office hours or on weekends due to family responsibilities or restrictions on socializing with male colleagues. Even while on the job, during office hours, a woman project manager said, “there are some things that I just cannot do with my male colleagues. For example, after some disagreement, one guy will come up to the next and slap him on the shoulder and say, “let us go for a smoke.” Jaise kandhe peh haath daal kar jaa sekte ho. It is amazing how many work-related matters are sorted out in chats in the ‘smoking zone’ and male banter. I can’t do that and feel excluded as I don’t smoke nor drink and I don’t have that many female colleagues at my level.” Secondly, the differential salience, given to marriage and domestic responsibilities for men and women, significantly influenced their abilities to generate economic and social capital for themselves as professionals. This differential weighting supplied socio-cultural elements for gendered identity constructions and also created markedly different psychological and existential responses for men and women, as members of the ‘IT professionals’ category.

39 This Hindi sentence means ‘to walk with another with your arm around that person’s shoulder’.
Thirdly, in addition to technical or ‘hard’ skills, relational or ‘soft skills’ are increasingly critical in distributed software development work where the actors are global, knowledge demands are quite distinctive and deeply embedded in a web of highly interactive trust-based relationships. Relational skills such as communication, interpersonal sensitivity and empathy are seen as tacit, resulting from socialization practices and generally associated more with women and the skills of the private home sphere. The shifting emphasis towards more relational ‘soft’ skills calls for more ‘to and froing’ between the ‘private, domestic, feminine sphere’ and the ‘public, masculine sphere’ (Harding, 1986; Rao and Kellner, 2003), typically associated with women’s and men’s places in the world. This shift in emphasis towards more relational skills, in the work of GSOs, calls forth (from the GSO) more institutional reflexivity in preserving and enhancing such skills of their workers. For the individual IT worker, also a greater interplay in the form of a ‘to and froing,’ between the two poles of the autonomous-relational self, in contrast to the present dichotomous relationship, is seen as more effective.

On the one hand, relational skills are viewed as an advantage that women bring to the workplace. On the other hand, mobility restrictions for women, nested within gendered societal norms (such as the higher importance given to the husband’s career and domestic issues) limit their physical participation in GSOs. Mobility-restrictions of women within the firm were perceived favorable by the GSO facing the issue of high attrition of employees. For example, after spelling out how committed, sincere and dependable women workers were, and how they made better project managers than men, a manager (male) said, “Since family is a major priority, women are focused on that and will not be keen on job hopping or asking for onsite assignments. So you will not have that worry.” While this immobility of women workers is seen to benefit the GSO, it is an impediment for women’s upward mobility, given that job-hopping is an important means of career advancement in the IT industry. In these ways, the intersections of gender-identity with mobility-identity creates different experiences and also career consequences for male and female workers.
To conclude, on the one hand, the inherently mobile nature of GSW, as well as the work context of GSOs requiring flexibility in crossing over boundaries of place, time and culture contests spatial as well as social injunctions on women’s mobility. Participation in GSW, as labor brings women the potential of new claims to spatial mobility, consumption possibilities and even assertions of new identities and shifts toward autonomy. In this way, the feature of GSW can expand the range of behaviors in which they can engage, challenging some gender barriers in Indian society. Yet, there are multiple ways in which gendered meanings and practices mediate the point of contact between global shifts in production and particular localities. For example, overseas travel and stay, while in customer facing roles, is an essential feature for professional growth as an IT worker. Many women workers, particularly those who were married, spoke of how their overseas stay (ranging from a few weeks to months) away from their family members would disrupt household arrangements. For many single women workers, this experience was seen as enabling, contributing to heightened feelings of self-worth and some questioning of traditional family expectations about marrying at a particular age. Women workers, in general, were seen to develop adaptive strategies and in-between solutions (rather than radical role transformations) to engage in GSW as respected members of their families as ‘good’ daughters, wives, or daughters-in-law. The salience of asymmetrical gender relations, among IT workers in their personal lives (even among those with IT professionals as spouses) as well as the workplace, suggests a continuity of these asymmetries across the private and public sphere.

To conclude, the gender-identity lens provides a means to analyze how GSOs, as ICT mediated globalized work settings embedded in local contexts, are not gender neutral entities but actively reproduce socio-cultural complexities of these contexts through their material practices and ideological constructions. The asymmetrical gender relations, that prevail more broadly in the middle class in India (reflected in the GSO), relate directly to individual workers’ feelings of self-worth and esteem, their coping strategies and participation in the workforce. The increasing stress, on relational capacities required for business success, implies a tilting of gendered norms towards ‘feminine’ and relational skills and implicates the import of greater inclusiveness of these features in such
workplaces. The bipolar relation of gender-identity, and its intersection with mobility-identity, illustrates the push-pull aspects of global and local socio-cultural norms that are enacted in the lived lives of workers in globalizing workspaces and their relation to individual workers experiences and identity constructions.

3.2.3. Culture-Identity

The case study suggested a third relationship, that of culture-identity which supplied elements for construction of both the identity of the organization, as well as identity of the IT worker. In this study, rather than a variable, culture was a socially constructed process seen as emergent, changing and complex as well as a work-in-progress. Culture-identity is proposed, as an analytic lens, to investigate the various forms of culture, their interpretations and their interrelations and how they intertwine with themselves and identities of workers.

The cultural context of GSOs was seen to emerge from the nexus of individual workers and the context of GSW. The globally distributed heterogeneous, intangible and mobile nature of GSW, implies a constant criss-crossing as well as overlays of national, geographical, economic, interpersonal, social and political boundaries of the firm and its workers. I refer to these as ‘identity boundaries’ that construct, include and also exclude cultural complexities. Traversing these boundaries requires individuals and GSOs to do ‘identity work’ (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002) as they engage in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising coherent and distinctive identity-related constructions. For example, for the IT worker, living overseas while working at the customer site, implies a set of issues related to ‘identity work.’ These range from conforming to visa regulations of the respective country, tackling issues of social and cultural adjustment in the new country (such as language and/or different food habits) and dealing with the existential issues of being a foreigner (alien) as well as an ‘ambassador’ of India while managing customer expectations and demands of the offshore team. This work implies conscious and reflexive monitoring by the individual as he/she makes adaptive choices and responses. Such responses may involve confronting deep rooted, place-based identities and modifying/rejecting/reinforcing these. Similarly GSOs, in their
alliances and relationships across boundaries, strive to maintain and strengthen their identity constructions also in a reflexive manner. In these ways, the interactions of GSW and the spaces and places it implicates, brings into play the dialectical features of the construct of culture-identity.

GSOs, as crucibles of globalization processes, are also a confluence of the interactions of cultural flows across identity boundaries. Situated in locales and places, they embody contextual influences of both place and space providing social and symbolic frameworks for IT workers. These workers are in turn influenced by multiple contextual influences as individuals and as members of collectives, such as their family, social group, work and national context. Rather than a blurred medley, this thesis delineates various strands of cultural influences, within the GSO, that dialectically interlink with selves and identities of IT workers. These strands are briefly described below and then discussed together:

- **Corporate culture**
  This represents a range of material and social practices by the firm that are emblematic of the perceived, or ‘aspired for,’ identity of the firm. Office buildings and workspaces are designed to reflect the company’s culture and to reinforce the corporate image. For example, the physical structures and layouts of the offices of GSOs (in the major Indian cities), are both externally and internally impressive and aesthetically designed, as well as plush and referred to as ‘world class’ by customers from around the world. These places are seen as proclaiming an identity that seeks to replace negative constructions of India that overseas customers might harbor, replacing them with positive images that signify a sense of globality or internationalism. In this way, GSOs aim to reconfigure a sense of place within a cultural locale to meet business goals. Inside the office, near workstations of employees, inspirational posters and slogans reproducing the company vision or customer’s positive feedback are seen, reinforcing the corporate culture.

GSOs were also seen to draw extensively on diverse repertoires to symbolically construct the organizational context as a cultural and social place for employees thus creating shared meaning in a mobile and transient workforce. Articulated through formal policies, vision and mission statements, as well as slogans, the circulation of stories and the
actions and words of the charismatic topmost leaders, such processes aimed to infuse employees with their cultures and work practices. Alongside ‘Indian’ notions of family togetherness, the nation’s history and values were deployed (albeit often in an essentialist manner) through social practices to create a feeling of belongingness, a ‘home at work’ environment, enhance employee commitment and alignment with organizational goals. Such events included the national flag hoisting ceremony, quizzes on India in employee meetings, prescription of national dress as the dress code during festival celebrations and seminars on ancient Indian culture. These events symbolized attempts at fusing (at least temporarily) various individual and social identities (national, professional, organizational) in the pursuit of business goals.

Further, various events and collective rituals such as induction programs, behavioral training programs, the corporate anthem, monthly meetings, company parties and gatherings were seen to constitute cultural spaces for socialization and enrollment of new employees, and sometimes even family members, into the corporate ‘family.’ In these ways, a strong sense of family was seen to be inscribed in a capitalist workplace as well as fulfilling organizational agenda required from a committed workforce.

While most GSOs, in India, are seen to have similar social practices sharing qualities of informality and youthfulness in their ‘employee-friendly’ or ‘people-oriented’ work cultures, each GSO was seen to engineer a mix of these cultural and social practices to forge a distinctive identity and image to attract potential employees. These policies and work cultures are also seen as a means to attract potential employees, stem the evergreen issue of attrition and add to their ‘global’ image in the international marketplace. Commenting on his experience of such cultures and the uncertainties of his profession, a project leader noted, “A company may say anything about its culture, but you are never sure of where you stand. It’s all a game.” Rather than pampering employees, these cultures aimed at enhancing performance and productivity of its employees, and served as a means of normative control. The project leader continued, “In IT, today, there is no job security as such unless you as an employee are performing and performing and performing. In spite of this, you can be shown the door as we saw in the company located
a floor below in our building. It is very insulting. You can literally feel the insecurity. The question mark is always there, like the sword of Damocles.”

- **Working across national and geographical boundaries**
  As IT workers are necessarily drawn into cross-border encounters, either virtually or physically, this strand highlights the contrast of ‘us’ versus ‘them’ identities that such encounters engender. Among IT workers, traveling overseas was seen as a rite of passage towards becoming a successful IT professional. The promises of overseas work, such as material and social success, opportunities to acquire capital, exposure to diverse cultures, were coupled with the feelings of vulnerability in a new country, social isolation and uncertainties of visa and work permit regulations of various countries. While overseas, notions of ‘Indianness’ were noted in terms of differences with ‘others’ in social practices, norms of relating, and also working styles and national cultures. These ranged from understandable, manageable cultural differences (for example, collection of money while at a Christmas dinner party in the UK) to differences in work cultures and social differences such as values while bringing up children. For example, a 33-year-old Project Leader, with a 2 year old child said:

  “I found it is very easy at 25-30 years to integrate into society there [UK]. But I have found problems with kids growing up there. No matter what, they are in a dilemma of being pulled in two directions. Even in India, you do grow up in two regions where culture is different and kids do manage to come out ok. I get the feeling, that in the UK, the cultures diverge too far. On the one hand one way says I will adopt the country’s culture which creates one set of problems. And there is another set of people who become ultraconservative and everyone, for example, learns Indian music and dance. Very few have a balance going around.”

While this quote illustrates how an IT worker thinks about negotiating cultural and social values (as a parent), the following quote exemplifies the difference seen by an IT worker in attitudes towards holidays and work by British customers:
“We say unke holidays pathar ke lakeer hai [their holidays are carved in stone]. …this [Britain] is a very soft country. It is 5:30 p.m., I have to go home. Our people feel what is so holy about a clock ticking 5:30? I get the feeling it is a pampered country. People disappearing on holiday when they have important things. That really grates on Indians. It is such an important delivery, and look, the lady is out to Spain to spend a weekend there.”

Vendor-customer relations posed challenges for IT workers, particularly, those with limited exposure or skills in comprehending and responding to subtle nuances embedded in professional interactions across cultural borders. Employees spoke of cultural differences in broad descriptive terms. For example, a technology manager said, “The business sense of US customers is strong. They will be innovative with technology and bet on new technology. Britshers and Europeans are very cautious. They look for established means. They tell you very politely, unlike Americans who are more demanding and tell you things bluntly. Asia Pacific customers are very multicultural and like us, they are very price conscious.” Customers’ (typically US and UK based) perceptions of Indian IT workers were constructed in cultural terms, which were rather simplistic, ignoring the broader structural relations of power within which vendor-supplier expectations were embedded. IT workers, while seen as “hard-working”, “intelligent” and “technically sound” were labelled as “not proactive enough,” “passive” and “not able to give bad news.” Handling these, within the GSO, was seen as a challenge, particularly, for HR personnel charged with the responsibility for enhancing the cultural awareness levels of IT workers as they travelled overseas.

**Primordial cultures**

The term ‘primordial’ is used in this study to refer to affinities or ties between those of similar kin and community. That is to say, within a particular locality (or ‘soil’), with continuity over time with such ties imbued with strong affect (Weinreich et al., 2003). In the context of India, such affinities include caste, region and religion. Some of these affinities were seen to ‘sit’ next to spiritual and secular practices in GSOs. For example, caste as an organizer of hierarchy and social ordering was noted as absent in the GSO,
given the demands of GSW as well as the constantly tight labor pool. However, ties, based on regional belonging, were expressed through shared language, sharing of food and socialization practices. While these included some members, through a sense of ‘we-ness’, these ties also excluded others. The GSO was also a space where religious beliefs could be expressed and it ‘officially’ celebrated festivals of the major religions in India such as Diwali, Holi, Christmas and Id. Secular events, such as cake cutting at the company’s ‘birthday’ celebration or Valentine’s day, coexisted with expressions of religious identities and belonging. Primordial cultures existed with the invoking of spiritual teachings of leaders such as Gandhi or Krishnamurthi and were also used in the promotional material of the firm. An example, that illustrated how evocative national sentiments were closely tied with individual and corporate identification, was seen in the opening lines of the quarterly message from the CEO to employees on the occasion of the festival of Diwali. He was on location in the US at that time and what follows is an excerpt from his message posted on the company-wide intranet:

“I miss India. I miss being in Mumbai. It is really cold here. As I sit here writing this, you guys are celebrating Diwali and I hope you are having a great time with your family and friends. Spare a thought for all of us abroad. We’re doing our best but it can never be the same. My best wishes for a happy Diwali!”

After the text that listed the company’s progress, the message ended with: “IN-SYNCers Zindabad.”

In these ways, multiple social identities of IT workers (employee, Indian national, family member) were seen as visibly fused through a collapse of boundaries with the organizational identity and primordial sentiment as predominant among these.

Each of the strands, described above, represents a blend of proximate (primordial) and distal (software work demands) influences that intertwine to create a confluence of multiple locally situated, as well as socially negotiated, global influences and dynamics. This confluence is not static but rather reflects reflexive adaptations of the GSO and its workers to shifting market demands, expectations of the labor pool and diverse locales.

40 Urdu word for ‘long live’ and often used as Inquilab Zindabad (Long live the revolution) the slogan of freedom fighters of India (http://www.urdupoetry.com/articles/art9.html; last accessed Jan. 10, 2006).
Rather than a monolithic corporate culture, in offices across the world, local adaptations of corporate culture were necessitated by particularities of place and social identities of its people. For example, in the case study the notion of family/community, as practiced at the Indian locations of the firm, was seen to conflict with the perception of a British employee at the company office in the UK. He said: “Why does this company talk about being a family and community? I have my family at home -- this is my workplace and I am here in a professional engagement!” Further, while employees were seen to enjoy the work environment, their professional aspirations took precedence over the feeling of belonging. For example, a developer noted: “A family culture is a good idea and gives us the chance to meet others informally and make friends…but if my project is not interesting enough, I will certainly leave this company!” Not surprisingly, IT workers did not automatically enroll in organizational processes or engineered efforts at inculcation of corporate culture. More often than not, they would subtly (and sometimes directly) resist organizational changes that appeared to conflict with the projects of their self. When workers perceived means of control and monitoring of their performance (such as stringent attendance requirements at meetings or in the office) as variant with corporate notions of ‘family’ and belonging, it also created a sense of cynicism and skepticism among them. In this way, proximate and distal cultural influences intersected with each other, the identity of the firm, as well as workers identities.

In these ways, the relationship of culture-identity illustrates the ‘to and froing’ between various social and cultural spaces and places that shape and are shaped by globalization processes, management strategies and social relations and individual subjectivities within them. In this process, tensions and contradictions exit along with adaptation efforts by individuals and the GSO.

3.2.4. A Synthesis

Taken together, the three relationships of mobility, gender and culture identity can be conceptualized as engaging with each other in various ways. For example, mobilities of work and workers enabled workers to shift across various cultures and terrains and accrue economic, social and cultural capital. However, this resulted in a loss of human capital to
the GSO. Further, the ‘gendered’ demands of software work cultures and the workplace of the GSO, as well as immobilizing features of the social contexts for women in India, often restricted reflexive choice-making to male IT workers. The flatter and meritocratic structures of GSOs that privilege individual performance over ties of kinship or primordial identities, create an aspirational space for IT professionals, both men and women. Yet, these primordial ties also excluded ‘others’ with different place-based belonging. Further, this aspirational space was experienced differently by male and female workers. The mobility-related demands of software work and mobility-restrictions experienced by women restrict their participation as equals in the workplace. The cultural terrain of GSW produces gendered meanings that were seen to be shaped by place-based local particularities (such as mobility requirements of GSW and mobility-related restrictions on women in middle class India). The tandem operations and intertwining of global and local events, dynamics and processes are seen as situated within processes of globalization and shaped by local particularities.

The empirical material also illustrated some examples where culture, gender and mobility were seen to accommodate contemporary changes while still preserving traditional primordial features. For example, at least two informants said that they met their spouse on an online matrimonial site and then after e-mailing over a period of time, followed this up with inquiries about the family through their kinship network. Another informant spoke of how web-camera technology enabled him to get engaged while his onsite stay in the US was unexpectedly extended. The engagement happened with his fiancée (also an IT professional) in India, with all the necessary rituals and presence of family members which he could witness and participate in, over the camera. In another instance, a woman project manager, whose spouse was also an IT manager, said that instead of cooking a full meal on her return from work (in addition to other household chores) she started ordering pizzas occasionally for dinner to reduce the workload of cooking. This practice, initially frowned upon in the joint family, was later accepted as it did not radically threaten the existing structure even though it was modified.
The combined working of three analytic lenses can be illustrated by considering the ‘life cycle’ of an IT worker within a GSO. Table 3.1 illustrates a summary of the shifts across the life-cycle of an IT worker in a GSO as suggested by some informants in the field and this is discussed further.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Career Stage</th>
<th>Stage-Related Expectations &amp; Actions</th>
<th>Links to Self</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freshers/Trainees</td>
<td>The first job. Assigned to training and closely monitored. Work environment created as an extension of college. Focuses on moving up the learning curve. Competition not yet experienced. Bursting with energy, enthusiasm, playful, creative. Actively participates in social and work related organizational activities. Colleagues become friends. Work is combined with after-office social events such as treks and movie outings. Sitting late at office is normal and fun. Limited responsibility in domestic matters especially for males.</td>
<td>First job seen as significant in career trajectory. Sense of pride of belonging to a ‘reputed’ company. Sense of achievement at finally becoming an ‘IT professional.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developer</td>
<td>Assigned to a ‘live’ project. Shifts from a learning to a delivering mode. Project team becomes unit of identification. Enthusiasm for social activities wanes. Workload suddenly increases. Job-hopping is common.</td>
<td>High anxiety about getting a ‘good’ project. Strong preference for software development rather than maintenance work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module Leaders</td>
<td>Work responsibility and accountability increased. Grooming others becomes suddenly important with limited tools on how to do this. Project pressures mount. Travels overseas on work. Decrease of fun and joy and no time for after office activities. Personal responsibilities become concerns (e.g., marriage, first child, buying a house). Social outings are limited but networks are actively maintained.</td>
<td>Fun and joy is significantly reduced. Anxiety about individual and team performance is high. Self-presentation to management is of concern.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Leader/Manager</td>
<td>Manages and handles larger groups and teams, often an offshore-onsite mix. Frequent interaction with customer and overseas travel. Significant increases in workload, as tasks become more administrative and less technical. Sandwiched between management expectations, team and customer. Family and financial responsibilities of school-going children and aging parents are high.</td>
<td>Confidence of management role mixed with anxiety about performance. Fears becoming deskilled in tension with pride of being a manager. Often does not feel acknowledged in role and does not acknowledge team members.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1: Shifts across career stages of an IT worker, associated expectations and links to self

Illustrated in the table, as the IT person moves across his/her typical professional ‘life cycle,’ stepping across various physical places and social spaces, the accompanying existential states of feelings and attitudes are described as dramatically shifting from passion and enthusiasm to pessimism and resignation. The climb up the corporate hierarchy is coupled with even more responsibilities, challenges, enhanced visibility in the market, social status and affluence, going hand in hand with higher levels of stress and pressures to perform. This climb is often more uneven for women workers who often
step out of the labor pool at the Developer or Module Leader career stage, when they generally marry to attend to domestic responsibilities. When these women step back into the labor force again (with responsibility for young children and sometimes parents-in-laws) they often opt for jobs in testing or quality assurance, rather than in software development itself. These jobs have more regular working hours, without the demands of overseas travel that are ubiquitous in GSW, and also seen as less important to software development. While there are women project managers, and senior managers in GSOs, the proportion steadily declines the higher one goes up the ladder, in this way creating a gendered pattern of role differences in the firm.

As you can see from the table, the fears about becoming technically deskillled is increased as general managerial responsibilities increase. The increasingly conflated boundaries, between personal and professional spheres as an outcome of this work, can have fatal personal consequences such as increased reports of health issues as well as problems in marriage relationships. These often go unnoticed or are labeled as insignificant by a relatively youthful workforce caught up in frenzied mobilities of all sorts. Referring to how their long working hours affected them, a manager in his mid-40s said,

“The IT person stops enjoying their life compared to the others, because of the extended working hours and odd timings... And anytime you can be called and you need to be working. It is not a regular job. Also you don’t develop any hobbies. You see, life IS beyond the office. That realization comes to you only at 40. Till such time you will run, busy climbing things...it is an early retirement job.”

Finally, the new flatter and meritocratic structures of work, within GSOs, were seen to provide IT workers with greater flexibility, possibilities for expressions of individuality and agency. Yet, as pointed out by others (Hochschild, 1997; Perlow, 1997; Gephart, 2002; Beck 1992, 2000a) these structures of the ‘new economy’ also provide job insecurity, an increased enmeshment of the public and private spheres with lasting effect, a changed employment contract and a sense of anxiety threatening a secure sense of self and identity. IT workers, particularly at developer levels, were seen as unstable in the organization by their managers and HR personnel, as they were always on the lookout for
enhancing their career or monetary possibilities. Yet, employees saw jobs in this industry as insecure as they could be moved, across locations, projects, platforms and even out of the company, based on downturns in the global economy or the loss of a customer. This created a fluid marketplace for jobs with employees looking out for jobs and companies competing with each other for skilled ‘resources.’ These features can be seen as constituting challenges and risks (Beck, 1992) of a new economic terrain shaped by globalization forces.

3.3. Summary and Conclusions

Global theorists have referred to the flows of globalization or the notion of the world as a single place. The construct of culture-identity challenge any notion of homogeneity of flows by highlighting the contradictions at the local interstices and interruptions, as well distribution of these flows across locales and places and their dynamic interaction with worker identities. Knowledge workers in India are seen to have a strong sense of self and identity that is anchored in their social structures and traditional value systems, their profession, as well as the hi-tech global work context. So while the Indian software industry is seen as a node in the ‘informational economy’ cultural discourses interpellate its seemingly despatialized flows across spaces. In addition, to being crucibles of globalization processes, GSOs are also crucibles of indentity processes and their intermeshing at the multiple interconnected levels of the global-local dialectic.

In this chapter, the theoretical framework inductively derived from the empirical material, has been presented. Comprising three bipolar analytic lens with the construct of mobility, gender and culture at one end and identity at the other, this framework mirrors the dynamic interrelation of selves and identities of IT workers with the multiple interconnected levels of self, social group, organization, national level and global marketplace. The three bipolar relationships are proposed as a means to understand the intersections of globalization flows and particular localities that extend beyond the immediate context of GSOs.
Globalization is not simply an even invariant force or project, changing the everyday realities of peoples’ lives, assumed to exist in a form that is simply reproduced worldwide. Rather it is irregular and paradoxical, and an open-ended process similar to that of one’s identity construction. The global-local intertwining is profoundly associated with relations between fixity and mobility, agency and resistance, space and place. The ‘to and froing,’ between the poles of the global local dialectic with the three relationships with reflexivity as its core, questions globalization discourses emphasizing the specter of a ‘runaway world,’ the destruction of distance or the ‘de-territorialization’ of the societal. Rather global tendencies and processes were seen to be related to and interconnected with local concentrations and particularities of ICT enabled work, knowledge, money, social systems and cultural resources and events of the firm. The high mobility trajectories of IT workers, as well as that of the GSO, calls for continuous, transcendent, reflexive monitoring and promises newness, growth and prosperity within a dromocentric world while simultaneously including a parallel search for belongingness and rootedness. In this context, glocalization (Robertson, 1992) is a ‘closer to home’ concept to describe the dialectics between globalization and localization processes in IT workers inner and outer worlds, as it draws on local as well as global material supplied by work, the organization, social and cultural contexts.

Finally, self and identity are constructed and modified from global and local material in a relational and reflexive engagement process by IT workers. Social identities do not operate as separate compartments or unified, collective and totalities, but rather were seen to engage with each other, and the outer world, in a reflexive manner. In particular, while we can name some of our identities (for example, professional or organizational), we cannot compartmentalize our personal and social identities as they draw on each other, forming an ‘existential soil’ for an individual’s inner and outer responses. The boundary crossing necessitated between different social identities, and its criss-crossing with one’s self, is seen to create an adaptive mosaic rather than a patchwork identity.
CHAPTER 4
CASE DESCRIPTION AND RESEARCH APPROACH

In this chapter, I present the motivation for the present research study as well as detail of the background, the research strategy adopted and the details of the setting, method of data collection and process of analysis. I also describe my reflections on how I saw my own individual self (my social, cultural and political context and positioning during this supposedly ‘intellectual’ journey) which affected my interactions with what I was researching. The process of reflexivity demands that we reflect consciously and critically on the self as researcher and, as both inquirer and respondent, on the ‘human as instrument’ (Guba and Lincoln, 1981). Writing myself into the methodology is based on the assumption that it is impossible to gather value-free data and, that while we are constructing objects ‘out there,’ we are also constructing ourselves socially (Holland, 1999; Steier, 1991). I subscribe to the idea that doing self-reflexivity is not narcissism, nor is it only a question of admitting to how what we perceive of the world is colored by our various positionings (Rosaldo, 1988). Rather, reflexivity also helps open up that world.

4.1. Personal Motivation

The development of the IT industry, in India, has spawned new and hybrid forms of organizations and management practices, providing researchers with unique opportunities to study the intermeshing of individual, group, organizational and global processes. My engagement with this research project emerged from my experiences during my employment relationship as an HR professional with several IT companies in Mumbai, India, during the mid 1990s when the industry was at its zenith. My roles ranged from personnel administrative functions to recruitment, training, compensation, employee appraisal, development and retrenchment. I was struck by the difference in the profile of employees, in this industry, who were more educated in terms of degrees and computer-science related diplomas and all that went with this education and profession. The high aspirations for career and a driving desire to improve their social position that existed along with a strong motivation to learn and develop their competence (mainly technical
and managerial), a traditional religious outlook, an impatience with the process of moving ahead and a burning desire to work overseas, at least for a few years. These characteristics worked as guidelines for HR professionals in IT companies who were constantly grappling with the challenges of developing and revising people-related systems and processes for the organization.

In interactions with software professionals, I was privy to their dreams, hopes, perplexities and frustrations relating to their work as well as personal lives. I became intrigued with how Indian IT professionals manage their inner worlds and also engage with various technology-mediated and socio-culturally diverse outer worlds. During the course of my work life, I was also disturbed by many issues – the complete dedication and more than 100 percent presence that private organizations required of me and others as an employee; how capitalist rhetoric and strategies were deployed by organizations in ways that I sometimes felt my freedoms violated; the possibility that IT work itself was perhaps a modern form of colonialism; and the fact that IT workers in this industry were referred to by operations, as well as HR personnel, as ‘resources.’ On the other hand, while this left me with many unanswered questions in this same environment, I experienced many personal and professional challenges which were fulfilling and meaningful and enjoyed friendships and also the social position of a ‘manager’ in a male dominated ‘global’ work setting. I debated these questions with another researcher who was collecting data from my company for his doctoral project. He suggested the possibility of an overseas doctorate to investigate these questions. Subsequently, I explored this possibility with Professor Sundeep Sahay at the University of Oslo. He informed me about the doctoral program and also introduced me to interpretive research within the discipline of Information Systems. The rest as they say is history!

With conducting research after a working life of almost nine years of professional activities in a business environment, I faced some dilemmas. I was initially ambivalent to quit a well-paid and relatively secure job in an environment that was ‘home’ as well as socially and culturally familiar. I wondered what implications it would have on my prospective future employer’s perception of a ‘career break’ in my employment history.
Particularly, since I would be a part of academia often viewed as too ‘ivory-towerish’ and ‘theoretical’ by working professionals that I knew in comparison to the ‘real world’ of industry and work.

Also, I had some fears and concerns about being ‘overtaken’ career-wise by those with less experience than me in terms of salary and role. I wondered how I would fit in socially with them later. Then I realized that much of this had to do more with my making peace with this issue internally through a readjustment process rather than concern about other peoples’ views or perceptions. The possibilities of facing rejection by future employers who might believe that an academic experience would not ‘value add’ to my ‘real’ working experience; the loss of a regular and excellent pay check in my bank account, the lack of any corporate perks and benefits and the reality of a completely diverse intellectual and social space loomed large in front of me. However, the desire for some answers, the intellectual challenges in a doctoral program, the prospect of living in a new country as a student (a role I associated with a certain kind of freedom, curiosity and youthfulness of ‘being’), along with the possibility of exploring new horizons, geographical, and social as well as existential, was too delicious to pass up.

After much reflection and conversations with my advisor, family and close friends, I accepted the Ph.D. candidacy and informed my manager with whom I had already discussed my interest in pursuing doctoral studies. I then began the process of handing over my responsibilities. During this period, I also visited Oslo to negotiate the administrative and social processes of starting life as a student at UIO for my first semester. This first visit significantly attenuated the pain of parting from my ex-organization, as well as eased the confusions and strangeness of transiting into an unfamiliar and climatically, very cold environment. At times, it felt far more difficult and personally unsettling to negotiate the maze of complexities of the Norwegian immigration authorities for a visa, medical checkups, the processes in opening a bank account, and other administrative formalities for a student status in Norway than straddling daily work challenges. Interpreting this occasional anxiety, as a reaction to stepping out of my comfort zone of working in a familiar context, facilitated my ability to see them as new.
challenges rather than some irritating roadblocks. This experience made me better empathize with IT workers who often had to travel abroad and navigate similar issues at their work sites, often with minimal support. I believe that these processes, which created opportunities for self-reflexivity, were also instrumental in accessing and opening up similar processes among my informants.

4.2. Research Approach: Case Study Design

Qualitative research methods, such as case study, ethnography and action research, have been developed within the social sciences to provide tools for studying social and cultural contexts through the eyes of the ‘inhabitants’. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) point out that a qualitative approach is a particularly effective strategy to capture views of individuals by examining the constraints of daily life and arriving at a rich description of the social world. Thus, qualitative approaches elicit perspectives on observer actions and reflect on the interactions during field research (Myers, 1997) enabling researchers to gain an understanding of the close relationship between context, content and process (Pettigrew, 1987).

Based on the ontological assumption that reality is socially constructed (Berger and Luckmann, 1967), built in and through meaningful interpretations. The research method adopted was a qualitative case study, based on an interpretive approach, and drawing on ethnographic approaches. In stark contrast to positivist methods, which are grounded in the principle of reductionism where an attempt is made to look for regularities and causal relationships (Burrell and Morgan, 1979), the interpretive paradigm assumes that the social world is relativistic and understood as a subjective and inter-subjective experience of those who are involved in its activities. Rather than seeking to capture some preexisting or ready-made world, presumed to be available out there, the researcher aims to understand the process of symbolic ‘worldmaking’ (Schwandt, 1994) through which individuals accomplish their social worlds in an ongoing manner. Qualitative researchers, who have made the ‘interpretative turn,’ criticize scientism and discard the notion of the researcher as a disengaged instrumental self and propose rather a sensemaking and learning role (Hiley et al., 1991; Taylor, 1991). For interpretivists and social
constructionists, there is no foundational fixed reality. Knowledge about others is mediated through beliefs, values, practices and other meanings. In other words, understanding is interpretation and subjective meaning is objective reality (Lee and Baskerville, 2003). This ontological and epistemological commitment is the cornerstone of interpretative research making positivistic questions about its reliability and generalizability redundant (Prasad and Prasad, 2002).

As context is crucial to my observations and analyses, methods that explore contextual webs of meaning such as ethnography (which developed out of Anthropology) are directly relevant. This distinctive methodology within anthropological research, now common across various disciplines both within and outside the social sciences, is research that attempts to reveal the multiplicity of ways that people make sense of and create an inter-subjectively meaningful world at certain times and in certain contexts (Karp, 1999). Thus, ethnography allows us to learn more about “how people actively continue to create and reconstruct their life worlds and places” (Escobar, 2001, p. 155). An ethnographic approach seems appropriate to the study of identity processes, since it remains close to the ways people experience and make sense of themselves and others (van Maanen, 1979).

The case study method (Stake, 1994; Yin, 1994) was employed to study a specific context in an in-depth manner, as well as the local actors. A case study approach has been considered useful for illuminating what is unique in a particular case, relating to its historical background, physical setting, relation to other economic and social contexts and to the people who are ‘living the case’ (Stake, 2005). Thus, the case study is the ‘study of the particular’ where various research methods and data collection techniques can be used in an in-depth manner (Walsham, 1993). Case studies typically rely on multiple sources of evidence such as interviews, documentation, participant and also direct observation. In interpretative case studies, it has been argued that in-depth interviews can be seen as the primary source of evidence “…since it is through this method that the researcher can best access the interpretations that participants have regarding the actions
and events which have or are taking place and the views and aspirations of themselves and other participants” (Walsham, 1995, p. 78).

The field site chosen was a single unit. Focusing on a single field site allows the researcher to observe the progress of “social dramas longitudinally (to) provide a transparent look at the growth, evolution, transformation, and conceivably, decay of an organization over time” (Pettigrew, 1990, p. 275). Also, choosing a research site, and gaining access to it, is a matter of ‘planned opportunism’ involving mobilizing one’s network of contacts so that one finds a site that fits in with the research strategy, topic and questions being asked (Pettigrew, 1990). To this, I add one more practical factor – relatively easy physical access. These practical considerations certainly do not imply that the researcher should neglect his/her epistemological position or modify the research objectives. It emphasizes the importance of thinking and acting strategically by ensuring alignment between the topic or research and the context (Pettigrew, 1990).

In contemporary interpretivism, researcher self-reflexivity has been increasingly emphasized (Prasad, 2002). In interpretative research, besides making decisions, the researcher is also the tool to extract information from various sources and make sense or make “interpretations of interpretations” (van Maanen, 1983, p. 40). In this way, the research process, involves social interactions and it is this very dimension that draws on self and identity related aspects of the researcher. Referring to the ‘principle of dialogical reasoning,’ Klein and Myers (1999) emphasize the need for researchers to be explicit about their own history and intellectual basis. Similarly, Alvesson (2003), while discussing the notion of reflexivity of the researcher, points to the need to be conscious of one’s background and how it enters the process of observation and interviewing. This implies challenging and reconsidering assumptions as well as taken-for-granted beliefs that privilege a particular angle over others.

There has been some debate about the notion of reflexivity, voice, self and subjectivity in how the researcher presents himself or herself, along with representing the accounts of the informants. In traditional social science research, the self has been “treated as
something to be separated out, neutralized, minimized, standardized and controlled” (Krieger, 1991, p. 1). Challenging such a view, the ethnographic imperative is that we use ourselves as a critical research instrument to understand others and their personal and social worlds. In contrast to positivists research, the ethnographic approach is a subjective, interpretive endeavor demanding from the researcher the ability to empathize with others as an important methodological prerequisite. Rather than an outsider who gazes from a distance into another’s world, ethnographers are “reflective insiders” who also negotiate their own roles and subjectivities during the work in the field thus producing social knowledge that is subjective (Behar, 1996; Coffey, 1999, p. 57). In a similar vein, the notion of anthropological “fieldwork” in which we look at other distant places as fields has been critiqued particularly by feminist and postmodernist scholars (for example, Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Haraway, 1988; Kondo, 1986; Visweswaran, 1997; Wolf, 1996) who have called for a return to “homework” where we examine ourselves from our own stance and lived experience. After all, one’s “biography, politics and relationships become part of the fabric of the field” (Bell, 1993, p. 41).

In this interpersonal process, the personal subjective embodied self or personhood of the researcher, or fieldworker, which includes dimensions of age, gender, history, class, ethnicity and sexuality, embedded in their selves as professional researchers intertwine with socio-political processes of the field. Our own selves and identities are constructed and shaped by complex social processes and juxtaposed with the selves and identities of those we wish to study. Thus, having consequences for how we understand and interpret data which calls for a self-conscious as well as a self-critical approach (Coffey, 1999). In this way, fieldwork, although set in a particularly disciplinary and methodological framework, is hard to separate from our sense of self. In the inter-subjective exchange, between the fieldworker and informant within the context of the interview, both are simultaneously involved in the project of construction and reconstruction of selves through talking about themselves. Also, while fieldwork is seen as a series of rational steps such as entering the field, making field notes, conducting interviews, extracting themes and doing analysis, it is also an emotional and personal journey, which makes it a site for identity work for the researcher (Coffey, 1999). Emphasizing this, Reinharz
(1997) argues that we not only “bring the self to the field...[we also] create the self in the field” (p. 3). She suggests three categories of selves that come into play in the research setting: research based selves, brought selves (created socially, personally and historically) and situationally created selves (p.5). Reflexivity then implies an interrogation of how our research efforts shape and are shaped by each of these selves as discovery of the subject is also discovery of the self (Guba and Lincoln, 2005). From this, it appears that attention to one’s self is not only interesting in its own right, but also productive in that it provides information about the researched object.

While all social researchers encounter issues related to subjectivity and inter-subjectivity they may or may not explicitly write these into their account. Writing oneself into the ethnography is seen as an autobiographical project and as a means to ‘give voice’ to not only others but also to the researcher as well as a search for greater authenticity (Coffey, 1999; Day, 2002). Currently, there are a variety of ways in which researchers write themselves into the texts of the field, ranging from ‘confessional tales’ (Schultze, 2000) or ‘vulnerable writing’ (Behar, 1996) interlacing the researcher’s experience with the actual ethnographic material (for example see Schultze, 2000) to writing parallel texts that are separate from the account of ethnographic research. In this chapter, I integrate practices of self-reflexivity as seen in anthropological and feminist work with my field data experiences in an IT organization. In this way, I write a parallel text providing glimpses into the subjectivity of my experience, both in and away from the field and my individual and idiosyncratic attempts to construct and reconstruct myself.

4.2.1. Self and Identity Processes in the Field

Unlike traditional anthropologists, I did not have to travel to markedly different countries or locations even though I needed to travel overseas from Oslo. For me, fieldwork was a process of going ‘back home’ rather than arriving at a new place and then returning to Oslo, which felt more foreign and alien than my actual site! Perhaps, like other researchers who study their occupational settings as members or ex-members, I held the assumption that I had some position of ‘knowing’ about the field and a seemingly apparent ‘place’ in it, and did not give much thought to my individual self and identity.
issues in my field role. I reflected more consciously on my new existential terrain – making meaning and explanations as an Indian, woman, student self in Oslo, while negotiating the intricacies of social and cultural encounters. I think that this ‘reversal’ of contrasting field sites provided me with immense possibilities to be more open and engaged in the field in Mumbai and more focused and objective while reflecting on my field experiences back in Oslo. However, with every field trip back home, and on my return, the stark contrasts of terrain - geographical, social and cultural differences between Oslo and Mumbai were inescapable and required an existential adjustment in order to feel at home in each place. The familiarity of my ex-organizational space, the warmth and friendliness of my previous colleagues and, of course, my family and friends, helped me to survive the occasional angst of homesickness and an occasional sense of ruptured place and space which I experienced in Oslo. In reverse, the intellectually stimulating environment of the University whetted my curiosity and desire to discover patterns and linkages in my data. The natural beauty of Norway and my daily experiences on campus literally opened my insides to a refreshingly different way of life.

In the ‘social’ field, as actors share lives and biographies, roles are negotiated and informants also assign roles they deem appropriate in the social order to the researcher (Coffey, 1999). Accepting the role or trying to redefine it opens and closes some doors for the researcher (Warren, 1982), and the knowledge that one produces is definitely filtered as a result of this process. My position, in the field, involved several interwoven identities as an ex-employee (HR Manager), researcher, woman and friend. As a result, I experienced a range of cognitive, emotional and ethical stances and these assumed varying significance as I went through fieldwork. In such an experience, the view of the utterly detached observer who looks down on high does not hold true. The researcher is a positioned subject where thoughts and feelings are tightly intertwined and the realities of power become intrinsic features of fieldwork relations (Rosaldo, 1988).

In the firm, as part of the HR practice, an email was sent to all employees informing them of my leaving the organization. Thus they were already informed of my study plans and several willingly volunteered themselves as ‘subjects’ for my work. During my last days
as an employee, I was able to negotiate my future fieldwork plan with the respective Departments. One gnawing question, I struggled with, was would there be something ‘big deal’ or very different that I was expected to come up with as an observer? And if so, would I be missing it because of the familiarity with the organization?

While in the field, I was free to come and go as I pleased -- to visit any of the offices in the city and to leave at any time of the day. Even with this sense of freedom, I knew I had a responsibility to myself and my project work. I could abandon thoughts of endless meetings with ‘actionables’ and ‘deliverables’ and time targets and I could leave the premises without having to answer to anyone, unlike as an employee being always available at my office or on my mobile phone. I felt free from all the technology-enabled surveillance mechanisms I was subject to (and also helped create) as an employee.

I also had a swipe (key) card which allowed me access as an employee to the office entrances, giving me an ‘insider’ status over that of a guest. I recognized that this was given to me on the basis of trust and an assumed level of familiarity and loyalty. I also realized how my professional reputation followed me around, like a silent shadow. I often signed into the office as a guest and explained to the security guard my previous and current role, while rarely leaving the office premises during the course of a day. In spite of this, I received some suspicious looks from a few extra vigilant security guards as I ‘hung around’ or wandered within the office corridors or just sat around in a seemingly unproductive manner. The company culture was overall friendly and open and I would frequently be stopped and asked by ex-colleagues about the progress of my work.

Since my exit from the company, as an HR Manager overlapped for a short duration with my role as a researcher, I saw it working in two ways and particularly during the overlapping duration. Firstly, while I did some interviews and chatted with a few employees (in the last few days of my notice period), some had already started seeing me as a researcher and would offer many topics for study prefaced by, “You would know better, but maybe you want to explore this.” Then, they would proceed to discuss their pet concerns on ‘people-related issues.’ There was some safety in the knowledge that I
listened intently and, in the process, they were also sorting out some issues with which they were grappling. Some managers commented that the interviews provided a reflective space for them since they were so involved in operations that they had little time to sit back and reflect from an ‘armchair distance.’ Others inquired as to who else I would be talking with in the ‘seniors group’ or which other companies I would be visiting. Some joked about the possibility of finding new jobs for themselves in other companies through my network of informants. As a novice researcher, it was initially difficult to maneuver through this political landscape but once people realized that I would not disclose specific information, they stopped asking. On the other hand, it was quite apparent as to who I was talking with since the rooms used for my interviews had wide glass panes.

The second way was a dilemma about speaking on behalf of HR or the management or myself. In many methodological accounts of fieldwork, the researcher is warned not to become too immersed with the informants or the setting in order to be more effective in doing his/her critical and analytical work (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). At times I would have the urge to contradict some of their statements and assumptions because of the prior knowledge I had from my earlier role, as well as wanting a position of an ‘insider’ authority -- a re-assertion of the power of my manager role. I realized that responding to such statements would reduce my analytic distance and even my own self-awareness, perhaps alienating them and putting them on guard. Therefore, in response to questions or statements about the company, and certain people or processes in the company, I would ask the informant what kind of a response they wanted, if any. This proved very facilitative for both me and the person and I think created a ‘psychic space’ of distance. In such encounters, I realized how hard it is to be a ‘fly on the wall’ and see things as they ‘really are’. At times, my informants could see my overlapping selves of ex-employee, HR person, researcher, and friend and tell me from what self they saw me as responding.

The role of a confidant was sometimes thrust upon me when some employees shared personal grievances and issues they had with their team members that ranged from
relationship issues to career plans to handling difficult bosses. I would consciously shift into a facilitator mode, focusing on their responses versus other’s responses in their stories.

During the course of my fieldwork, I met new entrants to the organization who I kept in touch with via email when I returned to Oslo. Several of the ex-employees, who I contacted, wrote detailed mails remembering with fondness their experiences in the company and some of our past interactions, both positive and negative. It was an emotionally satisfying experience for me to reconnect positively with those I had worked with both professionally and personally.

4.2.2. Fieldwork as an Embodied Process: My Construction Process

Fieldwork is an embodied activity where the setting is a social space and where our engagement is not only intellectual or methodological but also subjective, personal, and experienced through and by our body (Coffey, 1999). Our physical selves are very much present in the space of the field along with the physical and social selves of other co-present actors. Goffman’s (1959) notion of ‘self conscious’ presentation of self has been described as a consideration of the fieldworkers’ persona where the ethnographer consciously attends to the kind of clothing, adornment in the form of accessories or instruments and artifacts, personal demeanor, and kinds of talk or speech acts. All these bodily realities, relate to construction of identity and role during the process of negotiating an acceptable role in the field as well as during the process of being in the field (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Wolf, 1996). In conducting research, our physical bodies create impressions and affect our ability to conduct research, in terms of whether we are seen as intimidating or approachable, influencing the potential to promote trust and reciprocity even before the actual engagement (Coffey, 1999). To this end, the presence of a detached, scientific, and objective ethnographer is a myth. For women, in particular, the field has been found to pose challenges because of their gender (Wolf, 1996).
During my studies in Oslo, and also in my own fieldwork, I was very conscious of the need to present an acceptable ‘body’ and occupy spaces as per the normative codes. I did not want to conform to a particular stereotype in terms of dress code, but to physically appear in a way that was comfortable yet acceptable while not making me stand out. Given my past ‘insider’ status, in the organization as well as the locale of Mumbai, I felt glad for the familiar anchors that my past in the organization provided me. I knew the formal and informal rules relating to dress codes, proximity, gender norms and how to place myself in the organization vis-à-vis employees as well as within the hierarchical structures. This ranged from conforming to norms about seating in the company bus to with whom and where to hang out in company events or meetings. Of course, as a researcher I had considerable latitude and exercised this in varying degrees.

I also realized how much of the neo-liberal dogma I had internalized and manifested in the academic workspace. For example, I noticed that I not only mouthed concerns about ‘deliverables,’ ‘bottom line,’ ‘value addition,’ ‘being productive’ and getting on with the job but also embodied these terms. I would feel my impatience with reading what I would call ‘high-funda’ theories in a very bodily experience of irritation then assess (quite harshly) my daily performance at the University at the end of the day as if I were filling in a time-sheet. I noted how this ‘doing’ attitude interfered with my capacity to reflect (in an academic sense) about ideas and theories. These concerns decreased over time, as part of my unlearning and relearning process as a student, and on my last field trip I could easily see how my informants were very much enmeshed in this discourse.

I most often dressed in the ubiquitous salwar kameez in which I not only felt more comfortable (given the weather and social environment), but it also lent me an embodied sense of ‘Indianness’ and feeling ‘at home.’ I carried my notebook and pen in hand. This not only gave a sense of credibility to my newly embraced academic identity, but also was a more convenient way to note quickly appointments and phone numbers of people I met in the corridors or to make quick observations, and, especially, since I did not have an allocated seating place in the office. One place, that I felt uncomfortable hanging out, was the ‘smoking zone’ located just outside the office. It was typically male dominated,
smokey and also a site of much information exchange and decision making. When taking photographs of the office, I attempted to remain as unobtrusive as possible to avoid disturbing the rhythm of the working environment. Sometimes, individuals and teams would ask for a photograph of themselves, which I willingly did and posted the prints back to them.

I was often mistaken (by newcomers) as a customer from overseas, given my skin color and body language. I was often implicitly aware of what my social upbringing, educational ‘exposure’ and obvious westernization had provided me in terms of my bearing and social place. I realized, particularly, with new respondents (who were from smaller cities and towns), the importance of being more alert and sensitive to these dimensions which might intimidate or put them off. Attempting to avoid this, I tried to be aware of my demeanor while at the firm.

I found I could use ‘age’ to my advantage. My duration in the company of almost seven years (as well as my chronological age) gave me a certain credibility and easy acceptance by respondents. My graying hair, uncommon in this youthful industry, made me stand out in the workplace in mixed ways. Many informants assumed that I had much experience in life and the IT industry and I got the impression that they valued my opinion. Also, being single was a cultural anomaly that confused them and some would ask me very gingerly, yet politely, what had prevented me from getting married? As an Indian woman (already used to this question), my response would usually result in them sharing their concerns about marriage and family. My age and single status, particularly, resonated with female employees in their thirties with whom I discussed issues of marriage, relationships and work-life balance. In some cases, it strengthened our personal friendships.

As a female researcher, asking about ‘people’ issues, I was well accepted given that the HR function in the company was woman-dominated. A shared organizational history, with many informants, enabled me to gain their trust and build rapport relatively quickly so that early on (in the interview) they spoke willingly about their personal lives, work
and challenges that they were currently facing. During some conversations, I was very aware of moments of heightened sensitivity to responses on areas related to gender inequality, especially when some of their statements resonated with my own personal experiences as a woman. Often, women respondents would begin or end their response by saying, “You know how things are for women in Indian society…” and pause for a few seconds. This was often accompanied with a shoulder shrug or raised eyebrows, while they directly gazed at me in a manner suggesting that I shared their social position of gender, class and nationality and similar consciousness about social power arrangements. These were delicate and sometimes awkward moments where, resisting this fixed positionality, I probed further and ask them to be more explicit about their implicit assumptions. Trying to find a balance between expressing my own views and feelings and holding my silence; between a relational position versus a fixed one was often a struggle. Similar struggles while doing ethnography have been described by other researchers (for example, Sarikakis, 2003; Schultze, 2000; van Maanen, 1979).

The women’s washroom, which was quite spacious and sometimes included a sofa, was a very intimate place to chat with women employees, in particular, those whom I knew from the past and had shared cabins or rooms with while on company picnics. It was an ideal place to chat, first thing in the morning, as the company buses brought employees in and who needed to freshen up. While we washed our faces, combed our hair, and applied a dab of lipstick, we chattered away in an enthusiastic and light manner, sharing a lot of laughter while also commenting on each other’s dress or accessories. This intimacy carried into subsequent conversations with these women, though in a much more subdued manner in the official shared spaces of the office.

The crisscrossing of boundaries of space and place has also marked my existence in Oslo as I have attempted to re-construct myself with others, a process similar to what IT workers face when they work overseas. In Norway, since I lacked familiar templates (of shared history, language and shared interpretations of cultural codes), living had been a process of re-socialization fraught with some anxiety, confusion and joys of discovery. It has also been a learning opportunity to expand myself. Experiences of occasional
homesickness, feelings of estrangement and yearning for the intimacy of back-home relationships, as well as long processes for renewal of residence permits (the most tangible and formal reminder of my temporary status in this country), have sharply reminded me of my ‘foreigner’ status. I attempted to bridge the gap of being home and away with emails and telephone calls to friends and family, sometimes cooking familiar Indian food, listening to Indian music, and interacting with the few other Indian students while also making new friends. While I know in my mind that I am a foreign student, inside I am still me – a native to my self. The foreigner is the other...the other country, another land different from mine. Here in Oslo, it is the Norwegians who are ‘sons of the soil’ (native to Norway), feeling more foreign to me than I imagine I appeared to them. Throughout my fieldwork, as well as my stay in Oslo, I have carried with me a sense of being neither an “insider” nor an “outsider” in each of these places in the fullest sense of the terms. In Oslo, this feeling was primarily linked to not knowing the local language and also taking time to understand the nuances and signals of interpersonal communication. The most fruitful aspect of this process, of trying to feel at home (in Oslo) while away from home, has been how past memories and experiences related to my project and working life, which I had no access to while in the field, have bubbled up within me.

This brings me to the notion of ‘being home yet away’ from place and space of one’s location. In our contemporary world, there are powerful sets of dispositions and influences that impact us and these are local, and proximate as well as ‘global’. In the ‘global ecumene’ (Hannerz, 1989), characterized by multiple transnational interactions, movement, fluidity and syntheses, stable categories of being and belonging are seen as necessarily unstable. To ‘think travel’ Bauman (2000) wrote “..the trick is to be at home in many homes, but to be in each inside and outside at the same time, to combine intimacy with the critical look of an outsider, involvement with detachment” (p. 207). Perhaps, this is what we are called to do in the spaces of our ‘homework’ as we traverse our empirical fields and the multiple terrains and mobile subjectivities of our nomadic selves and identities.
Over the course of my field visits, I found myself slowly and effortlessly withdrawing from the daily work routines of the organization. I interpreted this as a healthy sign since the IN-SYNC organization was literally ‘under my skin,’ given my ‘previous life’ in the company and varied relationships with employees. This process of moving away reminds me of what Lawner (1981) says (from the context of psychotherapy), “I needed enough distance to get close to it” (p. 307). His statement reflects a relevant interpretive principle, emphasizing the challenge of stepping back from the participation process in research so that we create a space for another dimension of the ‘object of study’ to emerge. I was glad for the academic environment at my University; a distant enough space and place for reflection and distilling meaning from my data.

Finally, during the writing process, like other researchers, I wondered about my audience. The fact that I had quit the company and the funding for my PhD Program in Norway did not set any agendas for my research outcomes, provided me the freedom to be true to my intuition and interpretations as a researcher. In moments of darkness or confusion about my research project, I would ask my advisors, “So what is the big deal about my work? This is not something new!” As a hangover from my work in the corporate sector, this question would come to haunt me during my doctoral program. Another concern was about how the organization and, particularly, my informants would read my representation of them. Would they be convincing and valid to this group and industry as well as an academic audience? Fortunately, the further I immersed myself in my work and student life in Oslo, the further these questions receded.

Overall, the recasting of self and identity in my role in the field, as I left my ‘own’ and lived in the ‘other’s’ culture, has been a multi-dimensional challenge, emphasizing the reflective and relational nature of self and identity processes of my own as well as those of my informants. I identify strongly with the view of Richardson (2000): "Knowing the self and knowing about the subject are intertwined, partial, historical, local knowledges" (p. 929). Through the process of self-reflexivity, we stay engaged with experiences, feelings, dilemmas and conflicts of not only others but also our own (Russell and Kelly, 2002). Similar to Freire (1993) lessons about education, reflexivity in fieldwork enables
us to learn about ourselves, our informants and our understandings. We can also be transformed in and through our research efforts (Brydon-Miller and Tolman, 1997). As a researcher, I believe we don’t bracket off parts of ourselves, but keep these selves and identities semi-permeable. For me, this form of research has been more rich, inspiring and humane as compared to my training in positivist thinking and quantitative methodologies. The supposedly objective and value free researcher, as observer, denies us this rich possibility.

In the next section, I describe the details of my case and methods I used to gather empirical material.

4.3. Research Setting: The Case

This includes a description of the overall context of IT industry in India, its growth trajectory and profile, a brief description of the city of Mumbai and the organization that was selected for study.

4.3.1. Broad Context of the Indian IT Industry

The present expansion of IT in India can be set against a background of three broad eras of changes in the country’s economic thrust in post-independence India. The first period or the pre-liberalization period dated from the country’s Independence in 1947 until the mid 1980s. In this period, the government followed a structuralist approach in economic policy by concentrating on import substitution policies (Lal, 2001). The emphasis of economic development in these decades was on production in heavy industries seen critical to nation-building such as iron and steel, petroleum, banking, and insurance rather than production of consumer oriented commodities. In the Nehruvian vision, of modern India, large scale dams and steel and power plants “…were the spectacular facades, luxurious in their very austerity, upon which the nation watched expectantly as the image of its future was projected” (Khilnani, 1997, p. 62). Concomitantly with autarkic import-
substitution development policies, government-sponsored institutions of higher learning in science and technology were also instituted in the post-Independence era.41.

In the second phase, in 1985, under the leadership of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi the government realized that such ‘inward looking’ policies did not achieve rapid economic growth nor self-reliance. It changed its economic reform process from import substitution to export-oriented policies. During this time, the government actively encouraged the production of IT in India.42 However, these policies could not maintain its momentum due to a politically unstable climate in the country. It was only in 1991, with a relatively stable government in place, that the liberalization and deregulation policies were accelerated and major reforms in the electronics sector were introduced.

In stark contrast to the Nehruvian model of development, the period after 1991 was a phase marked by dismantling of state controls, privatization of state-owned enterprises and relaxation of rules relating to investment and ownership by multinational corporations. IT became a major ‘cause’ that the Indian government committed itself to endorse, as a global industry, given the considerable knowledge base as well as its pool of knowledge professionals in the country. Recognizing that both the software and hardware industry were two sides of the gold coin in the national agenda, the IT Task Force of 1998 set a vision of making India an IT superpower by 2008 (http://it-taskforce.nic.in/last visited on March 30, 2005). The market was opened up to foreign firms and, simultaneously, the Indian government augmented its export promotion policies in various ways such as creating software technology parks (STPs) and electronic hardware technology parks (EHTPs). With a campus like environment, these new industrial spaces have been referred to as ‘technopoles’ or ‘mines and foundaries of the information age’ (Castells and Hall, 1994, pp. 1-2). Built as high-technology zones or enclaves in and around metropolitan cities in India, they offer well-developed infrastructure, fiscal incentives and quick approvals and clearances to firms developing

41 Nehru’s strong belief in the superiority of science and technical knowledge as a tool for national development resulted in the establishment of the seven Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) in different cities since 1950. IIT graduates became a major source of skilled migrants at latter stages. IIT graduates, highly valued the world over as human capital played a significant role as Indian immigrant entrepreneurs in Silicon Valley (Biradavolu, 2005).

and exporting IT-related products and services. Figure 4.1 depicts the location of STPs in India.

Initially, similar to other sectors in the Indian economy, the IT industry was controlled by the government. In 1978, when government regulations demanded that IBM reduce its holdings of Indian operations, the company pulled out of India in protest (Lakha, 1994). Consequently, local players in the nascent Indian software industry received a fillip. Many Indian professionals, previously trained and employed by IBM, set up software businesses generating entrepreneurship in the local software industry. Several of the major Indian software service companies, such as HCL, Infosys, Wipro and Tata Consultancy Services, were set up during this period. Other small and medium software

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43 STPs in particular, were seen as a ‘single window solution provider’ for firms exporting IT software and services.
44 In 1999, Infosys was the first Indian company listed on NASDAQ, the stock exchange in the US. This listing and its rapid rise in valuation created a euphoric surge on the Bombay Stock Exchange of other IT stocks. Listing on overseas markets added to enhanced visibility and credibility of Indian firms in the technical services business.
firms also mushroomed during this time in metros such as Mumbai, Bangalore, New Delhi and Hyderabad. This start up trend reflected the earlier trend in Silicon Valley where the story of the spectacular success of Indian-owned IT firms during the 1970s and 1980s is well known (Saxenian, 1996; Saxenian, 2004). Some of these entrepreneurs, such as Sabeer Bhatia, Vinod Khosla and Kanwal Rekhi (to name just a few), became icons of the NRI community and also the Indian IT industry inspiring many others to start up companies both in the US and in India during the late 1990s.45

In 1995, changes in government fiscal regulations enabled substantial inflows from foreign venture capital funds (many from wealthy, non-resident Silicon Valley entrepreneurs) and institutional investors to be available to the Indian software industry for the first time, fueling the growth of start-ups in India (Upadhya, 2004). The subsequent reeling upward price trends of tech stock in the US as well as India, the explosion of the internet, the consequent dotcom craze of 1999-2000, and economic downturn following the dotcom bust in 2000-2001, inevitably impacted software firms in India, forcing several small and medium size companies to close operations while many managed to stay afloat (Lakha, 1994; Upadhya, 2004). Since then, the continued inflows of transnational capital, into this industry, have been seen as significant in influencing current the corporate structures, forms and culture of IT companies in India.46

4.3.2. Industry Growth Trends and Features of the Labor Pool

Historically, software exports from India have been largely in the form of software services such as customized software work rather than software products (Heeks, 1998). Initially, most of the software work from India was done through a practice, disparagingly referred to as ‘bodyshopping,’ where developers were exported to the US to the client location (onsite) for the duration of the project for a fee (Correa, 1996: Schware, 1992). Even the offshore work, done in India during this time, was mainly coding operations and maintenance characterized as requiring low level programming skills. With a trend towards using offshore work (particularly with Y2K and Euro

45 Between 1989 and 1999, it is estimated that some 200,000 Indians entered the USA on H1-B visas (Upadhya, 2004)
46 See Biradavolu (2005) for a discussion on capital flows, business networks and the role of Indian entrepreneurs in the global software industry.
conversion projects) as well as the introduction of e-commerce applications outsourcing, firms began using a mixture of onsite/offshore work (Sridharan, 2004). In 1990, almost 95 percent of the work was done onsite and 5 percent in India and in 2003, more than 70 percent of the project was developed in India (Sahay, et. al., 2003). Over time, most large IT players have transcended the software coding and maintenance barriers and are into higher-end IT consulting, R&D services, systems integration, infrastructure management, package implementation and product development realms such as embedded systems (Parthasarathy, 2006). Several of the new generation firms offer high-end work in specialized areas, in contrast to the first generation firms which offered low-end onsite services. In this way, the industry has moved up the value chain. The increased high end offshore work in India, is contributing to what some analysts call “reverse brain drain” where qualified expatriates, who had earlier migrated to the US in search of greener IT pastures, are returning to India to work in these realms.

From the late 1980’s and early 1990’s, the IT sector, in India, has been the fastest growing industry in the country with an impressive compound annual growth rate of around 50 per cent during the 1990s (NASSCOM, 2005). The industry’s contribution, to India’s GDP, has nearly tripled from 1.2 percent in 1998 to 3.5 percent in 2004 (NASSCOM, 2005). Currently, software services account for around 11 percent of India’s total exports and more than 65 percent of the industry revenues, making it a critical engine for economic growth of the economy. By the year 2008, software exports are projected to cross USD 50 billion, more than the entire value of the country’s current exports even though the sector contributes around 0.6 percent of the world IT market (Kambhampati, 2002). The challenges facing the Indian IT industry, today, include relevant industry-ready manpower, new competition (for example China), building expertise in new technologies (for example mobile telephony) cultivating new markets (in Europe and Asia) developing new pricing and profit-sharing models in contrast to past ‘time and material’ practices (Sahay, et al., 2003).

The industry in India comprises a diverse group of players, ranging from start-ups to near billion dollar global companies and multinationals, with varying growth rates. There are
currently more than 3,000 software export companies in India doing business in more
than 100 countries, although the US continues to be the primary export market
accounting for nearly 70 percent of the total software exports in 2003-04 (NASSCOM,
2005). While the offshore phenomenon started on cost, IT companies have focused on
building their quality orientation, project and process management expertise in order to
be internationally competitive. A majority of Indian software companies have
incorporated quality certifications such as ISO 9000 into their quality practices.

India’s leading position, in the world, as a preferred destination for offshore outsourcing
both in the IT and IT Enabled Services (ITES-BPO), is attributed to several factors. India
has been seen to have a unique mix of advantages such as a large pool of highly skilled
English speaking labor force, cost advantages, expatriate investment, a strong export
oriented focus with extensive government support, as well as excellent quality control
(Balasubramanyam and Balasubramanyam, 1997; Heeks, 1996). Other oft-quoted, and
peculiar socio-cultural advantages, include the strong base of mathematical skills of
Indians, the emphasis on science and technical education and the role of the Indian
diaspora, where expatriates have returned to India as entrepreneurs in the IT industry or
have contributed to its growth from abroad (Biradavolu, 2005).

The demand for IT professionals has also been on the rise. From 284,000 employees in
2000, the IT and IT enabled services industry now jointly hires over 1 million, as of 2005
(NASSCOM, 2005)\(^47\). Of this number, 345,000 professionals are currently employed in
the software export sector alone.\(^48\) Most of the recruits are fresh graduates, implying that
the workers are not shifting from other industries but emerging from a fresh pool.\(^49\)
Initially, the industry focused on recruiting computer science graduates, but over time
started recruiting engineers as tasks became more complex requiring higher value added
work for clients. To cater to the fast changing demand of this industry, private firms, such
as the National Institute for Information Technology (NIIT) and Aptech (formerly Apple

\(^47\) With the recent burgeoning of the ITES-BPO sector, the call center industry
NASSCOM has combined the figures for software service and ITES, even though they are different businesses.
\(^48\) Most of the recruits are fresh graduates, implying that
the workers are not shifting from other industries but emerging from a fresh pool.
\(^49\) Initialy, the industry focused on recruiting computer science graduates, but over time
started recruiting engineers as tasks became more complex requiring higher value added
work for clients.
Computers), took the initiative in the 1980’s to impart education in computer applications (Lal, 2001). Subsequently, state owned institutions and universities expanded their curriculum to include Bachelor’s, Master’s and Diploma level courses in computer applications. Over the last decade, engineering colleges have expanded their course offerings from the initial offering of the highly sought after mechanical engineering to the current offering of electronics and communication engineering, computer science and information technology. Today, there are a multitude of private and state run technology and training institutes offering courses ranging from six months to five years on computer applications (Lal, 2001). In 2004, NASSCOM reported 81 percent of all software professionals had a graduate degree or above while the rest were at least diploma holders. While the country produces about 280,000 engineers (the majority of whom enter the IT field) and 2.5 million graduates every year, the demand for IT professionals has been forecasted to exceed their supply by 2008 (NASSCOM, 2005).

The industry is dominated by younger workers with the median age of the software professional being 28 years and 70 percent of employees within the age group of 26-35 years. In the software industry, 76 percent of workers are men while in the ITES sector, 69 percent of workers are women (NASSCOM, 2005). By Indian standards, software professionals are among the highest paid, as compared to other industries. For example, a freshly graduated trainee, in a mid to large size company, has an average starting salary of around INR 15,000/- per month. Across companies, there are typically four roles within projects: developers, module leaders or analysts, project leaders and project managers. Senior managers and/or general managers typically oversee several projects or head a particular offshore development center. About 46 percent of software professionals have over three years of work experience while 28 percent possess over five years of work experience (NASSCOM, 2005). Given the people and knowledge intensive nature of this industry, attracting, developing and particularly retaining competent personnel are dominate concerns of Human Resource and operations managers in this industry. Table 4.1 gives the attrition rate of IT workers at varying levels in the industry.

50 Around 350 USD per month.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Attrition Rate (in percentage)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developer, Module Leader</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Leader/Manager</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior/General Manager</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Attrition</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4.1: Attrition Rate in the IT Industry for the period March 2003-April 2004**  
(Source: NASSCOM, 2005)

4.3.3. The City

The city of Mumbai, the economic and financial capital of India, was the center of the Indian software industry from the late 1970s until the mid-1980s (Heeks, 1998). A busy metropolis with almost 17 million people, Mumbai manifests, like other big cities across the world, the contradictions of global wealth and local poverty. While the industry started in Nariman Point, the business district of the city, rising prices and long commutes resulted in companies moving to the Santacruz Electronics Export Processing Zone (SEEPZ) in the north of the city. However, persistent issues such as high prices, infrastructure problems, limited labor availability due to the overseas brain drain and a history of labor strife-plagued software firms who, along with foreign investors and individual entrepreneurs, started comparing locations. Soon, Bangalore became a favored destination for new software companies due to better infrastructure such as power and water, more abundant availability of qualified labor, its climate and better social life than Mumbai. Today, Mumbai is still home to several of the large software companies, and seen as a relatively cosmopolitan city compared to other metropolises in India. While many software firms are located in other major cities like Delhi, Hyderabad, Chennai, Pune and Hyderabad, Bangalore, known as the Silicon Valley of India, is home to the largest number of software companies in the country.

4.3.4. The Company

IN-SYNC, a US $ 150 million publicly held IT applications outsourcing company, was established in 1980 by a team of IT entrepreneurs headquartered in SEEPZ, Mumbai. Employing over 2,500 professionals worldwide, IN-SYNC today has offices also in the US, UK, Germany, Austria, Japan, Singapore, and Malaysia, besides four offshore development centers (ODCs) in Mumbai. The company offers technical consulting,
product integration, customized application development and on-going applications management to globally distributed customers, many of which are Fortune 1000 companies. The company has acquired ISO 9001, SEI CMM\textsuperscript{51} Level 5 certification and over 90 percent of its revenues are from repeat business. IN-SYNC has several partnership arrangements with companies in the UK and US. It was one of the first Indian IT companies to offer its employees stock options and, till today, prides itself on its values nurtured over the years by the founding directors. Figure 4.2 and 4.3 illustrates one of the offshore development centers in Mumbai and a developer's workstation.

IT workers in IN-SYNC are a mix of fulltime employees, consultants and a few subcontractors who work for specific projects. For the purpose of this study, only full time employees were interviewed. The average age of IT workers is thirty. While in the company 80 percent of all employed staff are men, it is in software development, that men comprise 82 percent of the workforce. The company’s attrition rate has been around 20% in the past year. While attrition is typically higher at the lower levels such as the developer group, as compared to senior levels, it is higher for male employees. Almost 80% of those who resigned from the company in the past two years were men.

\textsuperscript{51} The Software Engineering Institute (SEI) in the USA has developed Capability Maturity Models as frameworks for improving quality of software development (as in SW-CMM) or people management processes (as in P-CMM). These internationally recognized standards are used by Indian companies to signal to customers that they follow well-defined and documented processes. These processes also enhance the firm’s ability to estimate and manage the time and resources required for a project (Arora and Asundi, 1999).
I selected this case for the following reasons:

1.) IN-SYNC is a midsize company with a lengthy history (more than 20 years) and a consistently profitable year-on-year performance. It is reputed to be a people-oriented organization and has restructured itself (several times) to match market changes. These aspects are related to its identity and image thus also impacting its employees.

2.) I was associated with the company as a Human Resource (HR) manager for several years and have a rich understanding of the context. This experience enabled me to have easier access to employees who were known to me both formally and informally in my past role.

4.4. Data Collection Method

I visited the research site for varied periods of one to two months each (between December 2002 and July 2004), for about a six month period in total. Rather than one office location, I moved across all four of the development centers of the company in Mumbai. Three centers were located in SEEPZ while one was in the STPI in Navi, Mumbai. Typically, I visited the offices from Monday to Friday during office hours, interspersing my visits according to my interview schedule or based on meetings or other company organized events. On some occasions, I attended the company-wide monthly meeting for all its Mumbai employees held at an auditorium for a half day on a Saturday. I also attended some office parties and visited, at personal invitation, the homes of some colleagues who were also my ‘office friends.’

During this time, I would commute to the office in the morning by the company-provided bus which had a pick-up stop near my home. This gave me a chance to chat with employees both at the bus stop and on the bus while reaching the office a few minutes ahead of the official starting time. Sometimes in the afternoon, I would travel in the specifically designated company van to another ODC where I had meetings set up along with other employees who were traveling for their own work. The multiple transport facilities provided by the company for its employees, to commute across office locations at various timings during the working day, facilitated my movement between the offices.
and also provided me with another chance to informally chat with different groups of employees.

I would chat with women employees in the washroom and then ‘hang out’ in the cafeteria or corridors and speak briefly with employees having snacks or tea before they started their day. In between interviews and meetings, I would ‘hang around’ workstations, the cafeteria, the reception area, library, some of the workstations and the corridors talking, observing, reflecting and also writing. I recorded my field notes and observations in a spiral notebook, using writing pads for only making notes during the interviews. I attended project team meetings and informal social gatherings such as cake cutting ceremonies, festival celebrations and birthday rituals. I ‘shadowed’ three developers for the full day, sitting silently next to them during their working day, observing their actions, making notes and accompanying them for lunch and coffee breaks. Typically, I would spend the full day in the office and return home by the company bus in the evening. This gave me additional opportunities to chat with employees. Sometimes, during the working day, I would go to the common cafeteria on the SEEPZ campus for a coffee and inevitably meet employees from my previous organizations.

Since the focus of my study was on understanding IT workers, most of the informants were drawn from this pool at varying levels of work experience. Other informants included employees from the Support functions in the organization, ex-employees, spouses, customers, placement consultants and industry experts so as to provide an ‘outside-in’ perspective and experience of this group.

Semi-structured interviews were the primary means by which I collected my data. In qualitative research, interviews provide a useful methodological tool for gathering specific and descriptive data about the everyday life worlds of informants (Kvale, 1996). In all, I conducted 50 such interviews at three different office locations in Mumbai with Developers, Module Leaders, Project Leaders, Project Managers, and ODC/Function Heads. Figure 4.4 depicts a sample reporting structure of an ODC at IN-SYNC.
The ODC Head was accountable for project execution and managing customers in a geography-based business unit such as the UK, US, Asia-Pacific, Germany etc. and reported to the CEO at the corporate level. The CEO reported to the Board of Directors. Functioning like a profit center, the ODC actively engaged with the onsite operations functions such as the Sales and Marketing and Account Managers. The number of projects, teams and employees, in a particular ODC, varied according to the number of projects and size of the business generated in that unit. Accordingly, Group Managers managed several projects of diverse sizes and complexity levels.

Depending on the size, each project is managed by a project leader who has one or more module leaders reporting to him/her. In turn, the Module Leader manages a group of developers and/or trainees. At the time of joining the company, employees are assigned to a particular ODC against a project requirement. However, they can be transferred across the ODCs depending primarily on business needs, such as a new project that requires their skills. While business needs mainly determine these moves, career aspirations for traveling onsite or working on a particular technology are also considered and negotiated. Those, who are unassigned and are on the ‘bench’ waiting for an assignment, are usually under some training in anticipation of a new project. The bench group constituted a general “pool of resources” that was shared across the ODCs.
The interviewees\textsuperscript{52} were a mix of those who were previous colleagues as well as those who were unknown to me. Their ages ranged between 24 and 42 years. I met up with several ex-employees personally or through e-mail. Some were in other companies in Mumbai, while most had moved to another city in India or overseas. I met a few spouses, a British customer visiting Mumbai for a few days, interviewed an opinion leader in the industry and conducted phone interviews with placement agents. Table 4.2 gives the breakdown of the interviewees.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role in the Company</th>
<th>Years of Previous IT Work Experience \textsuperscript{53}</th>
<th>Number of Interviewees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trainee</td>
<td>0 - 6 months</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developer</td>
<td>2 - 4 years</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module Leader</td>
<td>3 - 6 years</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Leader</td>
<td>5 - 8 years</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Manager</td>
<td>7 - 11 years</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit Head</td>
<td>12 - 16 years</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Functions (Public Relations, Human Resources, Quality, Technical Training)</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Employees Interviewed</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>50 (16 women &amp; 34 men)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Interviewees</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ex-employees</td>
<td>2-14 years</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spouses (wives)</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry expert</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placement Agent/Coordinator</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>69</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2 Interviewee profile

Sometimes I met informants after office hours, socially or accidentally at a shopping center or park. While these settings were more informal and interactions relatively brief, we still talked about our daily-lived realities of work and home. I also attended several sessions at the annual NASSCOM event in 2004 (annual gathering for the Indian IT industry leaders) and two meetings of a forum for HR professionals from IT companies in Mumbai. In addition, I scrutinized secondary data such as the company’s promotional materials, its intranet, websites, in-house magazine, notice boards and annual reports to obtain textual data.

\textsuperscript{52} Interviewees here refer to informants in a pre-planned interview or meeting. I met many other informants with whom I had informal discussions either on a one-on-one basis or with others present.

\textsuperscript{53} Employees may have all kinds of work experience. At IN-SYNC this is ‘converted’ into IT experience for fitment into the company’s existing structure for assigning position and compensation.
I obtained an employee list from HR in an attempt to have a representative mix of employees from the different geographical units. For practical reasons of access, most of my informants were drawn from the UK offshore unit. Many of them had moved across the different units and had varying levels of exposure to clients in different countries. I obtained consent from the respective Project Managers, as well as the Head of the Unit, as the majority of informants were on billable projects. Each interview was set up in advance via telephone. All the informants had mobile phones and that was the most convenient means to access them. On the scheduled day, I would contact them either on their phone extension or mobile and meet them either at their workstation, meeting room or unused manager’s cabin, away from the workstation. Some of the interviews were cancelled and rescheduled due to project pressures or a need to urgently attend to a customer’s request.

Each tape-recorded interview lasted around 60-80 minutes, depending on how the conversation progressed. The interviews usually began with them asking me about my project and “what was I trying to prove?” I shared the aims and expected outcome of my project and checked if they were comfortable with the conversation being tape-recorded. After a promise of anonymity, I described how the data would be used. In two instances the tape recorder developed a technical problem, so I took detailed notes about what I observed and also noted my own internal state. Even when the tape recorder was used, I made notes. In an attempt to keep the environment relaxed, I placed the recorder next to the phone apparatus for conference calls so that it would appear almost inconspicuous. Most of the informants said they were happy to contribute to research on their professional group and they were often eager to know more about my decision to make this life change and about ‘life in Norway.’ Some inquired about the ‘IT job scene’ in Norway while others readily talked about their experiences of living and working in Europe. Many were working late hours and under tight deadlines, yet, they said that they did not mind staying after office hours to make up for time spent in the interview.
Since asking direct questions about one’s ‘identity’ would be confusing, abstract and bound to hold multiple meanings, I asked informants about other related issues from which I could infer about identity processes. These issues related to concrete details of their everyday life of home, work, family, friends; the challenges they faced in their profession; their perceptions of the organization; its systems and processes; the roles they have held; clients they interacted with; and the countries where they lived and worked. Such questions offered a more tangible basis of understanding self-related processes. An initial question in the interview with employees asked for a description of how he/she became a software professional. Usually this elicited both a narration of personal and professional histories. I would interject at certain points in this narration to ask a question, make a comment or shift to another theme in an attempt to tie their individual narrations to organizational biographies, social perceptions, industry dynamics and globalization processes. The following excerpt from an interview with a trainee is an example of how a conversation might proceed:

**Question:** As an IT person working in this industry, what is it like when you meet friends from other companies or industries?

**Response:** One thing definitely is there is a difference when an IT person meets someone else from another industry. First thing that people ask is onsite kya gaya hai tuh [have you gone]? In India, at least, an IT company is equated with you going onsite as soon as possible. So if you have not gone outside there is some serious problem with you. That is the most common perception… If not then kabh jaa raha hai [when are you going]?

**Question:** Then what do you say?

**Response:** Till now I have not got a chance. I say dekhte hein [let me see] things are working out I might go in a short while. And then the topic slowly drifts to other things.

**Question:** Why do you think this question comes up?

**Response:** There is some perception that if you are in IT you have to go abroad and if you go abroad you earn a lot of money. See, that is the main attraction for people who join IT companies from engineering and all. Arre mein join karega phir yeh age mein paisa kamaonga [I will join and at my age I will earn money] and come back, retire whatever and stuff like that. It is a perception.

In Table 4.3, I have listed some of the broad themes outlined at the outset of the fieldwork and some sample questions for interviews with software employees. These questions were modified according to role and level and many more were asked, depending on the flow of the conversation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Broad Themes</strong></th>
<th><strong>Sample Questions Asked</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Choice of work</td>
<td>What made you enter this profession?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.3 Broad themes and sample questions for interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sample Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Managing professional growth</td>
<td>How do you take care of your professional growth?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry/Market influences</td>
<td>How do you see the role of the software market in your profession and your own career growth?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current role</td>
<td>What are some of the challenges you face in your current role?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendships and networks</td>
<td>How do you keep in touch with your friends?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work-life balance</td>
<td>How do you manage balancing work and your personal life?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspirations</td>
<td>How do you see yourself a few years down the line?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company culture</td>
<td>What is your experience of working in this company?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offshore-onsite working</td>
<td>What has it been like to live and work at the customer location?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In some instances, especially those I had earlier interacted with as a colleague, the tone of our conversations took on a very personal and reflective aura, particularly when they shared some personal details of their lives. I would switch off the tape recorder in these moments as it seemed to disrupt the smooth flow of their sharing. It felt as if we were on an equal footing rather than them as an object of study. It also felt quite different from our earlier interactions where we were locked into hierarchical and organizationally assigned positions on various work issues. The interaction felt lifted to another level, creating a reciprocal exchange of perspectives, memories, and emotions similar to Schutz’s (1967) ‘I-Thou’ relation. These experiences also seem to experientially validate the notion of the self as a process that is negotiated and accomplished in social interaction and the need for the researcher to demonstrate a certain kind of vulnerability of self. It was difficult translating these conversations into linear text in my field notebook as it felt impossible to capture the richness of narration and interaction.

During the interviews, many informants received and answered short calls on their mobile phones from family members or teammates in the office. I followed up some informants either in person or email to understand certain issues in more detail or to track the role changes they had spoken about.

I had also planned to visit one of the onsite client offices of the company for a ‘multi-sited’ case analysis and selected the UK for various reasons. I negotiated the details of my visit to the company location and several client locations in the UK with the Operations Head. However, a few hours prior to boarding the flight, I was told to call off my trip since a senior manager (who was not part of the negotiation process for this part
of the fieldwork) had said that I should not come as “further permissions would be needed.” While this turned out to be an ‘ego issue’ and I received an apology from the Operations Head in the UK, it was not possible to coordinate another trip given a clash between the schedules of my travel and company plans. I then decided to do the entire fieldwork in the various Mumbai ODCs.

4.5. Data Analysis

My analysis of data was informed by the interpretative approach adopted in this project and can be described as broadly inductive in nature.

I transcribed each tape-recorded interview verbatim while still at the field site. This was useful as I could immediately clarify ambiguities in the subsequent visit to the site. Each transcript included background data of the informant, the process by which the interview was set up, as well as follow-up notes from email communication or subsequent meetings. I employed color, bold format and italics in the transcripts to denote pitch and physical gestures of the informant. I read each transcript several times and also went over the field notes to categorize recurring themes and sub-themes. My supervisors also read some of the transcripts and we jointly discussed various kinds of recurrent and other themes and patterns observed in the data as well as our individual interpretations. In the interpretive tradition, data from interviews is seen as subjective interpretations of the informants and the researcher. Since the primary source of data was from interviews, I tried to link the identified themes with specific quotes from informants. Table 4.4 illustrates some examples of the categories used for analyzing the interview data.
**Table 4.4 Examples of categories from interviews**

I further described the broad categories of themes, then reassembled material from field notes, company material, media reports and my past experiences and observations under each of these categories so that they formed coherent patterns. To elucidate on these interpretations and themes, my supervisors and myself discussed theoretical concepts that seemed appropriate to understand and describe these aspects. Prior to doing fieldwork, I had some initial concepts from reading some literature on globalization studies and also identity in the discipline of psychology that served as a broad analytic guideline. Based on emergent themes from the data and from further reading the literature, I employed the following key ideas and concepts as lenses to structure the four articles:

- Self identity, reflexivity and the dialectic of the local and the global;
- Gender and it’s articulation in material practices and ideological processes;
- Culture and its contribution to the construction of social and cultural spaces;
- Various mobilities, their interrelations and intersections.
Together these concepts were seen to inform an understanding of self and identity processes in this particular workplace. Some of these ideas and concepts were presented with some of the empirical material at seminar and conferences and I incorporated the feedback and insights obtained into revising the quality of my analysis and writing. I discussed some of my interpretations with employees, mainly over e-mail, and incorporated their input. In an attempt to validate my interpretations, I sent drafts of two articles to a few friends who were employed in IN-SYNC and obtained their inputs.

Thus, rather than adopting an a priori theoretical framework, a set of themes was inductively evolved through an ongoing process of engagement with the data, discussion with supervisors, colleagues and others, as well as reading of relevant literature. This approach has been adopted in other interpretive studies (Nicholson and Sahay, 2001; Walsham and Sahay, 1999). After completing the four articles as part of the thesis, I synthesized the discrete lenses into a theoretical framework in a way that coherently illustrated the pertinent dynamics and interconnections of the processes analyzed. This framework has been described in Chapter 3. The substantive content of the framework provided a means to extend the implications of this study beyond the immediate case. It also provided a linkage to some relevant themes and concepts such as ‘Indianness’ and ‘true modernity’ that were discussed very briefly or differently in the papers. This linkage is discussed in the theoretical implications section in Chapter 6.

An ongoing issue in the adoption of a case study for research is that of generalizability of results (Walsham, 1993, 1995). In interpretive research, the purpose is to piece together data from various sources and multiple perceptions from informants to tell a story. This data and perceptions are necessarily filtered through the lens of the researcher’s own subjectivity. In this view, rather than the case being representative in any statistical manner, the validity of an extrapolation from an individual case or cases depends more on how plausibly and convincingly the argument describes the results from the case and the conclusions drawn from them. Rather than focusing on the representativeness of the case in a statistical sense, Walsham (1995) argues that interpretive case studies can produce four types of generalizations: generation of new theory, development of
concepts, drawing of specific implications in particular domains of action and contribution of rich insights. In this case, rather than testing or verifying theories, the objective has been to generalize from the empirical material in both, theoretical and practical terms. This includes developing a theoretical perspective to understand identity processes of IT workers, extending specific constructs, contributing rich insights and drawing specific implications. This is elaborated on in Chapter 6.

In conclusion, in this chapter I have presented details of my research including my personal motivation, the research approach, some features of my own self and identity processes in the field, the case, method of data collection and analysis. In the next chapter I present a summary of the findings described in my research papers.
CHAPTER 5

RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.1. Research Papers Included in the Thesis

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the findings of the research papers included in this thesis. The complete list of the papers included in the annex of this thesis is as follows:


3. “I am kind of a nomad where I have to go places and places”.... Understanding Mobility, Place and Identity in Global Software Work from India. D’Mello, M. & Sahay, S. Under revision for the journal, Information and Organization.


Each of these papers illustrates, separately, the various constructs derived from the empirical material and described in Chapter 3. These constructs were used as a discrete theoretical lens to describe and understand the construction of IT workers selves and identities at the multiple, interconnected levels of the self, the profession, the organization, the nation and society which were conceptualized as nested within a global context. After examining these constructs, and analyzing the empirical material, a theoretical framework was evolved to illustrate the dynamics seen to contribute towards

\(^{54}\) A semolina based traditional dessert from Maharashtra, India, often served on religious or auspicious occasions.
the construction of the workers selves and identity. This framework comprised of three bipolar relationships with a construct at one end and identity at the other. These were: Gender–Identity, Mobility-Identity and Culture-Identity. Situated within the context of globalization and organizational and social change, each relationship is seen as a dialectical ‘to and froing’ between the local and the global with reflexivity as the core of this continuum.

A brief summary of each of these papers follows in which I synthesize the findings and discuss how they contribute to the broader research questions posed by the thesis. In chapter 6, the research contributions will be discussed in further detail.

5.2. “Thinking Local, Acting Global:” Issues of Identity and Related Tensions in Global Software Organizations in India

This paper is situated within the broader debates of globalization processes that impact not only on economic and political institutions but personal and the professional lives and identities of ‘local’ workers employed in a global industry (for example, Castells, 1997; Sennett, 1998). It seeks to explicate Giddens’s (1991) argument that, in present-day society, issues related to self and identity are inseparable from the multiple interconnected levels that link the individual with the institutions impacted by globalization processes. In a counter to the normal cliché of “thinking global, acting local,” this paper describes the worlds of IT workers in GSOs as, “thinking local acting global.” Their worlds are described to be buffeted by the global waves of change in ICT-mediated work. GSOs are seen as subjected to and also reflecting globalization effects (Nicholson and Sahay, 2001). As these workers, in GSOs, struggle to make sense of and come to terms with these turbulent shifts, both existentially and as professionals, issues related to self and identity constructions are implicated in the local-global dialectic at multiple interconnected levels of the self, the profession, the organization, the global market, and society.

Employing an interpretivst perspective, this paper illustrates some tensions apparent in a single case of a mid-size GSO situated in Mumbai, India which was the empirical basis
for this study. I adopted Giddens’ (1991) concept of self-identity which describes self-identity as “the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography” (p. 53). I used the conscious and reflexive practices of identity construction as an analytical lens to understand how ‘knowledge workers,’ or IT professionals, appear to experience the contemporary ‘risk society.’

Two major tensions, standardization versus customization and family orientation versus individualism, depicting the global–local interplay, were noted from the empirical material and these were analyzed. Individual and institutional reflexivity (Giddens, 1991) emerged as key dynamics, characterizing responses to perceived risks and opportunities in the peaks and troughs of the global market. Individual workers were found to have made choices that resonated with their career and personal value systems aimed at preserving a sense of ‘ontological security’ and realizing their ‘project of the self.’ IT workers were seen to identify more with their career and profession than with the organization. Reflexivity, of the workers, predominated in the work domain where it was manifested in a focus on acquiring technical skills seen to directly enhance ‘value’ in a global marketplace, where the fear and risk of obsolescence was rampant. In some decisions, in their personal lives, IT workers demonstrated unquestioned conformity to traditional norms reinforcing the notion that while GSOs increasingly operate with a placeless logic, individual employees remain “historically and biographically place-dependent” (Sahay et al., 2003, p. 39).

GSOs were found to make reflexive choices relating to organizational arrangements directed towards ensuring its longevity and profitability. Organizational rhetoric, or enrollment into identification practices within GSOs, was not always fully embraced by IT professionals in the manner intended since these were found to be interpreted as linked to market fluctuations and logic, rather than a sense of an existentially meaningful event. For the IT worker, then, the global market was not ‘out there’ as an objective inert presence but one that was ever-present within his or her daily life, interacting with the individual’s ‘project of the self.’
This paper offers some ‘thick descriptions’ of how career as a project of the self is realized by workers within a globalizing ICT mediated context. It highlights the point, that exhorting employees to ‘think global but act local,’ is mere rhetoric when not substantiated by meaningful linkages to the IT person’s identity framework. The two tensions, discussed, provide a micro-level analysis of how issues related to self and identity are inseparable from the multiple interconnected levels linking the individual with the institutions impacted by globalization processes. In this way, this paper elucidates in detail, Giddens’ (1991) proposal emphasizing interlinkage of the global-local dialectic. It contributes to the literature by enlarging the lens of reflexivity and self-identity in a modern day ICT mediated work context. Further, it refutes the view that globalization processes impose a monolithic sameness or a cultural homogeneity in the institutions impacted by its flows. Finally, it points to the reversibility of effects, particularly in GSOs, as a sign of increasing bi-directional globalization influences from economically developing countries to developed countries.

5.3. Gendered Selves and Identities of IT Professionals in Global Software Organizations in India

This paper aims to illustrate specific instances of how gender is played out within a specific site of interaction, namely a GSO, as a work setting in India. Further, it also aims to interpret how these expressions relate to self and identity constructions of male and female IT professionals.

In this paper, the lens of gender is conceptualized in two ways: Firstly, in terms of differential representation and experiences of men and women in the IT workforce. Secondly, as socially constructed through material practices and ideological processes in a social context such as family, organization and one’s social group (Gladstone, 1998). Literature on the sociology of workers in similar work contexts was examined to see how gender linked not only to one’s self and identity (both personal and social) but also to both inter-personal and organizational-related issues at the workplace. A micro-level analysis of three dimensions: representation of women in the IT workforce, mobility restrictions for women IT professionals in GSOs, and gendering of GSO-related work
was found useful means to articulate gender-related dynamics within the global-local dialectic. The conceptualization, of the ‘autonomous-relational’ self (Kagitcibasi, 1996), was used as an analytic tool to deepen the understanding of the relationship between gender norms and the self.

The empirical basis for the analysis of gender is provided by my case study at IN-SYNC in Mumbai. Formal interviews were done with 34 male employees and 16 female employees and supplemented with informal conversations and participant observations. In response to the research questions, the interpretive analysis yielded the following insights:

- Acceptance of stereotypical and gendered norms was widespread in the GSO where the breadwinner ideology predominated for men while familial care predominated for women.
- The GSO reproduced traditional gendered norms in their limited ‘family-friendly’ policies, interpersonal relations and social practices at work.
- The autonomous-relational self (Kagitcibasi, 1996) was operationalized among IT workers in ways that were more dichotomous than dialectically mutual.
- Men and women IT workers spoke in different ‘voices’ demonstrating clearly different gendered styles, different positioning of work in their identity constructions, and how they are placed and place themselves in their respective social system.
- In addition to technical or ‘hard’ skills, relational or ‘soft skills’ are increasingly critical in distributed software development work. Associated more with women and the private home sphere, they require self-reflection, training and are difficult to disembend from the local context and re-articulate in global contexts across time and space.

In this way, the gender lens, as conceptualized in this study, provided a useful means to understand how gender was expressed at three inter-related levels in the organization:

1. **Structural**: The participation of women in this workforce.
ii). Ideological: Organizational and individual gendered assumptions about the public-private/hard-soft and masculine/feminine dichotomy.

iii). Intra and interpersonal: This level relates to how gender related to self and identity constructions of male and female IT workers in the GSO. The empirical material suggests different gendered styles of social relating, and different salience or positioning of work in identity constructions of men and women, are associated with different feelings and attitudes in men and women.

This paper challenges the assumption that global software organizations are rational, gender neutral entities that employ ‘disembodied’ information, knowledge and skills in their work environments. A key finding is that GSOs are not a ‘level playing field’ for men and women IT workers, but rather a site where traditional and stereotypical gendered norms and stereotypes are represented explicitly and implicitly. Local particularities of a specific social context (in this case, gender relations in the Indian context) intersect not only with global imperatives to influence work but influence, as well, the selves and identities of employees. In this way, the paper illustrates the spatial situatedness of global processes. The paper also proposes that given the unique global yet local intersection, GSOs have immense possibilities to weaken or strengthen the hegemonic status of local gendered ideological constructs. These findings have implications for individual workers, GSOs, the IT industry in India, as well as other Asian countries where global outsourcing work is increasing and which share similar socio-cultural contexts with India.

5.4. “I am kind of a nomad where I have to go places and places”…Understanding Mobility, Place and Identity in Global Software Work from India

This paper aims to understand the nature and kinds of mobilities that characterize IT workers and GSOs and how these mobilities interact with the articulation, expression and redefinitions of individual worker’s self and identities. Inspired by Urry’s (2000, 2001) call for developing a ‘sociology of mobilities’ organized around networks, mobility and fluidities’ this paper draws on research in Sociology, Psychology, Information Systems and Human Geography to inform the analysis. It employs the construct of mobility as an
analytic lens to understand the linkages between space, place, identity and mobility in GSW, GSOs and IT workers.

It is known that mobilities, which involve the interaction of different and sometimes conflicting linkages between people, technologies and practices across different time, space, and cultural conditions, are not always smooth. This paper illustrates how mobilities are fundamentally intertwined with the notions of self and identity and their redefinitions. In this way, in an ICT mediated global work context, studying mobilities provides us a unique arena for the study of the interrelation of self and identity with career, organization and business cycles.

The basis for this study was an intensive empirical analysis of the case, an Indian GSO, in the context of global capitalism, seen as a crucible embodying the fluidity of mobilities at the level of the work, the worker and the organization. The empirical material revealed three kinds of mobilities that cut across these levels. We categorized these as geographical, existential and social mobilities, viewing each as situated on the nodes of global-local flows of GSOs, intersecting, mutually shaping and sometimes colliding in tension with each other. Each mobility was found to be characterized by a constant ‘to and froing’ movement, intense, unpredictable, ever present, and producing an itinerant state of existence that we refer to as ‘permanent transience.’

Based on the features of these mobilities, we propose a relationship of ‘mobility-identity’ as a workplace identity that embodies the tension of movement and stasis inherent in the technoscpes of GSW. Rather than a permanent shift such as geographical migration, the movement in mobility-identity is a ‘to and froing’ between cultural, technological, spatial and existential spaces and places. The constructs of ‘career’ and ‘self management’ were identified as vectors that demonstrate the particularities of mobilities and their relationship to workers’ identities. Rather than something outside of him/herself, career was viewed by IT workers as a project of the self where the IT worker attempts to construct a sense of identity and secure a ‘psychic place’ (Knights and Murray, 1994) in the organization, market and the various social groups of membership. The curriculum
vitae and the bench were two places with different signifying meanings in the context of career related work mobilities. The notion of ‘self management,’ while embodying freedom, agency and choice, was seen to necessarily operate within limits of the economic context of the capitalist market, the particular social worlds of IT workers and its set of institutional and social constraints.

Further, we propose that the varied mobilities and their almost kaleidoscopic interactions mirror the dialectical relations of space and place in global work contexts, similar to the relation between the net and the self as proposed by Castells (1996). The micro-level analyses of mobilities suggest, that in this work context, places are not increasingly ‘phantasmagoric,’ as Giddens (1990) proposed and neither are people and things simultaneously ‘now here’ and ‘nowhere’ (Friedland and Boden, 1994). Modern day technologies were not found to free or ‘unglue’ selves, identities and relationships from geographical or spatial confines as proposed by Gergen (1991). Rather, in the ‘to and froing’, people are always ‘somewhere.’ Individuals use social networks of relationships as reflexive two-way processes, a context to mobilize narratives of place to maintain coherence and a sense of rootedness in their personal lives and identity constructions. The study reinforces Massey’s (1998) argument that places are more like processes or a particular assemblage of social relations that interact or meet at a particular location, rather than a fixed bounded area providing one with an unproblematic identity.

This paper contributes to globalization debates in the ‘new economy’ by illustrating the fleet of risks linked to mobilities of work, their relation to place-based identities and the relational and reflexive actions of individuals and the firm. It also suggests practical implications for GSOs, where mobilities are seen as key features differentiating the IT industry from other industries (such as manufacturing and financial services sector) including other co-located work. The various ways, in which mobilities were seen to influence GSOs, implies that people or ‘HR issues’ are tightly coupled with productivity, motivation, retention, work-life balance and the knowledge management issues of the firm.
5.5. Software, Sports Day and Sheera\textsuperscript{55}: Culture and Identity Processes in a Global Software Organization in India

The focus of this paper is on understanding how GSOs symbolically create social and cultural frameworks for their employees and how these interact with construction and articulation of identities of the GSO, as well as those of IT workers employed in them. The IT industry, in India, is framed within discourses of neoliberalism and global capitalism and employs the strategies of these discourses, while also situated within local contexts. This paper aims to understand how identities of IT workers, as well as the meritocratic, professional global workspace of the GSO, stand up to culturally constructed Indian notions of self and personhood as well as traditional hierarchy-based ascriptions such as caste, region and religion in a supposedly meritocratic, professional ‘global space.’

Applying the lens of ‘culture,’ this paper provides an empirical analysis of various forms of culture that were seen in the case -- a GSO in Mumbai, India. Rather than something static, such as a variable, common in ‘etic’ approaches using universally applicable dimensions to culture (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, 1995; Triandis, 2000), an interpretivist cultural framework was adopted in this study. This framework was seen as relevant, as it emphasizes a socio-historical context for the evolution of this form of organization and work. Standard anthropological conceptualizations of ‘Indian’ self and identity (for example, Dumont, 1970; Marriott & Inden, 1974) were also examined to see if they could be applied within an Indian GSO. Through a thick description of the case, we demonstrate how GSOs try and create a ‘mix’ of global, professional working cultures and Indian social practices in the workplace.

Themes from the empirical material were organized around four patterns referred to as ‘forms of culture.’ These were: corporate culture, cultures of work, primordial cultures and working across national cultures. Corporate cultures included both the physical and social practices and arrangements in the offices of the GSO. Cultures of work constituted

\textsuperscript{55} A semolina based traditional dessert from Maharashtra, India, often served on religious or auspicious occasions.
the particularities of software development work. Primordial cultures, deeply linked to a sense of history and community such as caste, region and religion were seen to co-exist with secular and professional practices in the GSO. Working across national cultures brought to the fore, perceptions, feelings and stereotypes relating to Indian and ‘other’ national groups. Taken together, these four forms were seen to constitute the cultures ‘of’ and cultures ‘in’ GSOs intersecting with and also in tension with each other.

An analysis of the empirical material suggested that ‘world class’ and ‘modern’ office structures of GSOs were physical ‘identity markers’ for GSOs striving to sustain and enhance their position in a turbulent and competitive market. Locality and community was manifested, not only physically in material artifacts, but also in workers daily social lives and organizational rituals as well as relations among employees. New economy values, such as ‘flexibility,’ 'quality,' and 'value-added,' that applied to workers and their work outputs (Gephart, 2002) were present in the GSO. This reinforced the notion that GSOs are situated on a node within an interconnected global capitalist economy, necessarily influenced by the values of this space. Simultaneously, ‘Indian’ values relating to family and cultural practices such as religious festivals were consciously co-opted and deployed by the GSO. In these ways, the global processes of the economic enterprise simultaneously interspersed with the local in various forms. Richly meshing the universal with the particular, these interlocking patterns suggested that GSOs are representative of ‘glocalization’ processes (Robertson, 1992).

For IT workers, GSOs were seen to provide plentiful opportunities for geographical, social and professional mobility and accumulation of wealth and social status, thereby positively influencing their identity constructions. There was little trace of a ‘sociocentrism’ seen as conducive to the creation of stable communities based on fixed hierarchies, neither was there a lack of, or ‘corrosion of character,’ as described by Sennett (1998). The very nature of software development work, and the IT business demanding a skill-based and socially agile workplace and workforce, was found to attenuate caste ascriptions, kinship ties and overly hierarchical structures. The GSO, as well as IT workers, was seen to employ strategies as conscious, reflexive processes in a
dialectical relation, similar to the global local dialectic (Giddens, 1991) as each entity strove to configure itself to changing global market demands, as well as satisfy individual goals. Cultural discourses, in GSO, were seen to collaborate as well as collude with global power relations and historical legacies, influencing identities of the GSO as well as of IT workers.

Through a micro-analysis, the interconnection of both proximate (primordial) and distal (global) forms of cultures, the tensions therein and its influence on workers identities was described. In this way, this study contributes to the literature on culture, in organizations, as well as literature on the anthropology of modern day organizations. It also has implications for managers and HR professionals in IT organizations, attempting to build ‘strong’ corporate cultures, broad-basing various behavioral skills of their employees and amalgamating cultures in an increasing incidence of joint ventures, takeovers and cross-border mergers on the IT horizon.

5.6. Synthesis of Findings

The papers included in this thesis, have employed the following key concepts: Gender-identity, mobility-identity and culture-identity. The continuum of the local-global dialectic, and processes of both individual and institutional reflexivity, was seen to forge a common link between the key concepts. Taken together, these concepts provide the theoretical basis to address the questions posed in this thesis:

i). How do GSOs create social and symbolic frameworks for their IT employees?

ii). How do these interact with the construction, expression and redefinitions of individual selves and identities of these workers?

iii). What are some practical implications of the understanding of identity for GSOs, IT workers or the IT industry?

The first research question relates to how GSOs create social and cultural spaces and places that frame the universe of work for IT professionals. The findings of this study suggest that ‘world class’ physical office buildings and workplaces, that have typified
GSOs, signal their status, credibility and an international ‘place in the world.’ Indian’ values, social and cultural practices (religious festivals) were consciously co-opted and deployed by the GSO. These were seen to create a homelike environment at work and also deployed by the GSO to create belongingness, stem attrition among workers and enhance the firm’s relations with its overseas customers. Features, of a globally distributed capitalist enterprise, simultaneously interspersed local elements in various forms, richly meshing the universal with the particular within a ‘glocalized’ workplace (Robertson, 1992). Mobilities of work, workers, technologies and contexts, unique to this industry, contributed to fostering youthful, open, informal and merit-based work cultures. GSOs are also seen as an aspirational space for young people to accumulate various forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1977). Rather than a gender-neutral context, GSOs were seen to reproduce, reinforce and also have the potential to materially and socially transform traditional gendered norms within Indian society. In these ways, the GSO mirrored a confluence of local and proximate cultures (region and religion) and global and distal cultures (software work and capitalist regimes). Finally, GSOs were also characterized as ‘greedy institutions’ (Coser, 1974) making huge demands on workers, blurring their work-life boundaries and instituting various forms of cultural or normative control. Alert to the volatile changes in a turbulent, global marketplace, GSOs reflexively adapted and redefined these frameworks to meet business goals and manage employees.

The second research question relates to the daily lived subjective and inter-subjective experiences of IT workers in the workplace of GSOs. This question assumes that frameworks created by GSOs are a link in a long chain of interconnected relations of proximate and distal influences that reach deep into the existential and behavioral realms of IT workers. Demands, for flexibility, mobility and employability, evoked a range of feelings in IT workers, influencing their choice-making processes. Rather than a corrosion of character (Sennett, 1998) or a holistic sociocentric Indian personality (Dumont, 1970), IT workers were seen to make personal and professional choices in a reflective manner within the perceived ‘degrees of freedom’ they experienced. Rather than just a job, career was experienced as a ‘project of the self,’ with strong associated feelings of vulnerability and anxiety as well as confidence and hope. The global market,
with its associated risks and possibilities, was not ‘out there’ as an objective inert presence but one that was ever-present within the daily life of workers, interacting with the individual’s ‘project of the self.’ Accordingly, a market orientation pervaded their professional as well as some aspects of their personal lives. High salaries, frequent overseas travel and the international flavor of this form of work offered elements for construction of positive social identities. Seen as a privileged group in Indian society, IT workers were able to accumulate and convert various forms of social, economic and cultural capital for themselves and facilitate their social mobility across the layers of the middle class in India. Work was positioned differently in the identity constructions of men and women in the GSO with the breadwinner ideology predominating for men and familial care predominating for women. Similarly, the construct of the autonomous-relational self (Kagitcibasi, 1996) was operationalized differently among male and female IT workers. Finally, while traversing various ‘identity boundaries’ (national, social, and cultural) IT workers were seen to preserve a sense of coherence and rootedness of belongingness to family, region, religion and country.

The third research question relates to practical consequences of these findings. This study suggests that taking identity seriously has significant business implications. Line managers and HR personnel in GSOs, charged with building commitment and alignment among workers, attracting, developing and retaining IT workers, are urged to consider identity features of IT workers not only in their policies and procedures but also in their daily lived interactions with employees. Organizational aims and identifications need to be consciously intersected with ‘local’ identity elements and ‘global’ aspirations of workers as managers seek to create meaningful and challenging work and cultural contexts. Behavioral training programs and inputs, focusing on how cultural understanding and relating is negotiated and ’achieved’ in particular circumstances rather than presented as given (as in stereotypes or generalizations), are expected to facilitate the adoption of desirable behaviors among IT workers. HR staff is urged to attend to material practices and assumptions by which gender subtly enters and shapes structures, policies, processes and ways of relating in GSOs. These influence not only individual subjectivities of workers but also the effective functioning of the firm. Understanding the
nature and kind of mobilities that characterizes this work, workers and the GSO and their link to workers identities (and that of the firm) has implications for addressing attrition issues, managing knowledge acquisition and transfer, enhancing team working across boundaries, and balancing work-life demands of workers. The findings of this study also have implications for perspectives, policies and actions of trade associations such as NASSCOM seeking “to enhance the supply of the world’s best knowledge workers” (NASSCOM Report 2005, p. 236). Table 5.1 presents a summary of the findings and their relationship to the research questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How do GSOs create social and symbolic frameworks for their employees?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- GSOs as a glocal workplace reflect the dynamics of the global-local dialectic, in their physical and corporate structures, policies and practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- GSOs mirror the fluidity of mobilities and reflexively respond to change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Four forms of culture constituted the cultures ‘of’ and cultures ‘in’ GSOs intersecting with and also in tension with each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Indian’ values, social and cultural practices coexisted with professional and secular practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Both materially and socially, GSOs reflect gendered ideologies and norms of Indian society with a potential to transform these.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- GSOs symbolized a space for workers to accumulate and convert various kinds of capital.</td>
</tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How do these frameworks interact with the construction, expression and redefinitions of individual selves and identities of IT workers?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- IT workers in GSOs reflexively aim to preserve a sense of ‘ontological security’ and realize their ‘project of the self.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- IT workers consciously honored professional growth and learning over organizational identification processes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Work was positioned differently in identity constructions of men and women. The breadwinner ideology predominated for men while familial care predominated for women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Mobilities in GSOs make construction of workers ‘achieved’ social identities, a fragile process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Risk and fear collide with hope and success within a capitalistic and consumerist framework.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Fear of obsolescence shapes workers efforts at constructing a distinctive and coherent identity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The aspirational space of GSOs supplied elements for positive constructions of identity and self confidence in workers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- In the ‘to and froing’ movement in the mobility-identity relationship IT workers are always ‘somewhere,’ mobilizing place-related narratives to maintain coherence and a sense of rootedness.</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What are some practical implications of the understanding of identity for GSOs or the IT industry?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Identity work in GSOs has business implications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Line and HR managers must consider identity features in policies as well as daily interactions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Local specificities, particularities and local identity elements within behavioral training inputs for IT workers are more effective than standardized and generalized inputs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Examining material practices and policies with a gender lens in GSOs enhances possibilities for working for both male and female workers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Managing issues of attrition, enabling knowledge transfer, working across geographical boundaries and balancing work-life demands are interrelated with managing workers identities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.1 Summary of findings vis-à-vis the research questions
In conclusion, GSOs create social and symbolic universes or frameworks that intertwine with subjective experiences of their IT workers. Analyzing these frameworks has both theoretical and practical implications which are described in detail in the next chapter. Derived from the empirical material, a theoretical framework has been proposed as a means to understand and analyze the micro and macro interlinkages of identities of individual IT workers within a globally trading industry.
CHAPTER 6
IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

The research presented in this thesis was aimed at exploring identity processes of knowledge workers in the context of an ICT enabled global workspace. In this chapter, I discuss how the research objectives, set out for this thesis, have been met and the contributions of this study. The theoretical and practical implications, that have arisen from this research, are not only specific to the context of India but have broader implications in the context of the globalization of software outsourcing work in economically developing countries.

This chapter is structured in three main sections: Firstly, the issue of generalization is briefly discussed since it directly implicates the various theoretical and practical contributions arising from the case study. Next, there is a discussion of the key theoretical contributions, with the last section following in which the practical contributions are discussed.

6.1. The Issue of Generalization

There are various debates about the issue of generalizing from a qualitative interpretive research project to larger populations, particularly, if the focus is a single case study or ‘only’ one organization (Baskerville and Lee, 1999). Some researchers (for example, Lincoln and Guba, 1985) argue for the need to develop a ‘working hypothesis’ representing tentative assertions of a situation that can be applied to other situations. This is similar to the notion of ‘thick descriptions’ of a particular phenomenon (Geertz, 1973). Similarly, Walsham (1995) views generalizations as ‘tendencies’ or explanations of particular phenomenon in a specific setting which can be used in other similar contexts. Integrating these approaches, Byrne and Sahay (2005) have developed a framework around ‘categories’ and ‘types’ of generalizations. In this framework, categories refer to the generalization from one domain to another, such as an empirical setting to other similar settings, beyond the one from which data was collected. Such generalizations
include development of concepts, development of rich insights and drawing specific implications in particular domains of action (Walsham, 1995). The second category of generalization, empirical to theoretical, refers to generalizing from the empirical base of the case study to a theoretical base in the form of generating or revising theory. Using this framework, the generalizations noted from this study are described in Table 6.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of Generalization</th>
<th>Type of Generalization</th>
<th>Generalizations from Case Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Empirical to empirical</td>
<td>Contributed rich insight</td>
<td>Dialectical and multi-level linkages of identity construction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Drew specific implications</td>
<td>From case study to other similar contexts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empirical to theoretical</td>
<td>Developed a theoretical perspective</td>
<td>An identity perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Extended specific constructs</td>
<td>Elaborated on an ethnography of mobilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Contributed to debates on ‘modernity’ and ‘Indianess’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.1: Generalizations from the empirical analysis of the case

In the current study, the empirical to empirical generalization relates to deepening our understanding in the form of rich insights about individual and organizational processes. For example, three types of mobilities (as well as their intersections) were observed among IT workers and described in detail, providing a rich insight into the notion of mobilities in this particular context. Similarly, the four forms of cultures, and their interrelations observed in GSOs, generated new and deeper understanding about organizational dynamics and their link to workers’ identities. These have the possibility of being noted in other similar work contexts. Also, specific practical implications such as suggestions for HR managers have been drawn from this study which could be used in other similar IT companies and contexts. These are described in section 6.3.

The empirical to theoretical generalization relates to the development of a theoretical perspective elaborated in Chapter 3, based on an interdisciplinary approach to understanding identity processes of IT workers. The implications of this generalization are discussed in section 6.2.1. Another type of generalization, an extension of specific constructs, is illustrated by the constructs of mobility which was articulated more extensively and where its forms have been extended. This contributes to previous theory on a ‘sociology of mobilities’ (Urry, 2000) and is discussed in section 6.2.2. A third kind
of empirical to theoretical generalization provides an analysis of the notions of ‘modernity’ and ‘Indianness’ and is described in section 6.2.3. These various types of generalizations are discussed in detail below in the form of implications and contributions.

6.2. Theoretical Contributions

The three key theoretical contributions, identified through this study, are as listed:

6.2.1. Developing a perspective to analyze identities, and their interrelations, of individual workers engaged in global software development work.

6.2.2. Elaborating on an ‘ethnography’ of mobilities by contributing to a ‘sociology of mobilities.’

6.2.3. Contributing to debates, around ‘modernity’ and ‘Indianness,’ in the context of globalization processes and the IT industry in India.

In the following sub-sections, each contribution is discussed in detail.

6.2.1. Developing a Perspective to Analyze how IT Workers Construct their Identities

This perspective is developed through an interdisciplinary effort drawing upon theoretical inputs from Information Systems, Psychology, Sociology, Human Geography and Anthropology. From the discipline of Anthropology, I have reviewed the notions of self and identity, particularly in the context of India, to understand their applicability and relevance to how IT workers construct their identities within an organizational context. Additionally, I have drawn on the construct of culture from Anthropology, and used it within an interpretivist framework to stress its dynamic nature, as suggested by some researchers in the field of Information Systems (Avison and Myers, 1995; Westrup et al., 2002). Anthropological inquiry, that interrogates how the ‘local’ is produced at the intersection of ‘translocal,’ regional as well as global cultural fields in ethnographies of communities, identities and space, have been referenced (for example, Ailon-Souday and Kunda, 2003; Buroway et al., 2000; O’Riain, 2000) to understand and explicate similar processes in the context of ICT mediated work in India.
The disciplines of Sociology and Human Geography are, together, concerned with changing global, national and local contexts as well as relationships of groups, structures and institutions in society. I borrowed various notions such as identity, modernity, reflexivity and the global-local dialectic (Giddens, 1991), globalization, space and place (Castells, 1997; Harvey, 1989; Massey, 1998), the risk society (Beck, 1992), kinds of capital (Bourdieu, 1986) and mobility (Urry, 2000) from these disciplines. By employing these as conceptual frameworks, they enabled a more dynamic and multi-level understanding of the nature of and shifts related to global software development work, workplaces and workers, and their complex interrelationship.

The literature on intercultural adjustment and cross-cultural effectiveness (Kealey, 1990; Mendenhall and Oddou, 1985; Parker and McEvoy, 1993) from the field of Cross-Cultural Psychology have provided a means to explicate, more clearly, the various skills and behaviors required for workers to function more effectively in a global environment. Gender Studies, Psychology, Organization Studies and Information Systems, together, have provided approaches to defining gender debates on the masculine-feminine dichotomy, and notions of gendered differences in selves and identities (for example, Chodorow, 1978; Fletcher, 1994; Kagitcibasi, 1996; Kakar, 1988; Trauth, 2002). These notions enabled a delineation of gender-related processes in the empirical findings, the place of these processes in a changing work environment and their linkage to selves and identities of workers, particularly, in the context of India.

From the fields of Sociology, Anthropology, Human Geography and Information Systems, I have drawn on the literatures studying ICT mediated work contexts and their link to employee identities. Such research (for example, Kunda, 1992; Hakken, 1999; Casey, 1995; Lamb & Davidson, 2005) has demonstrated different ways of formulating macro-micro dynamics in these contexts. I have used these as a reference to formulate, from the empirical material, an understanding of co-construction and reflexivity processes in the dialectical relations of identity construction among workers, the GSO and the IT industry. Further, from the discipline of Information Systems the notion of embeddedness of knowledge, their interconnections and nestedness in each other (Dacin
et al., 1999; Lam, 2000; Nicholson and Sahay, 2004) have facilitated an understanding of
the embedded nature of cultural norms and gender relations and their link to daily lives of
workers as well as the GSO.

In these ways, a range of disciplines have provided perspectives and concepts that are
drawn on and consolidated, to understand and analyze the empirical material. The focus
on workers’ identities, in a rapidly globalizing work context, was seen to necessitate an
inter-disciplinary approach to highlight the multiplicity of dimensions. The array of
diverse approaches to notion of self, and identity from these disciplines has been
foundational to the theoretical framework, proposed in Chapter 3, which attempts to
analyze the dynamics and interplay of identities of IT professionals at multiple
interconnected levels. For purposes of emphasis, this framework is briefly described.

In this project, self and identity of the IT worker is seen to be embedded at multiple
interconnected levels of the self, the profession, the organization, the market, the nation
and society which are themselves situated in a global context that includes global
markets. The framework helps to elaborate the various micro and macro conceptual
linkages within and across these levels. For analytical purposes, I have elaborated upon
three sets of relationships, and their interrelation with each other, in the theoretical
construction of self and identity. These three sets of relationships constitute the set of
theoretical lenses in this project: gender-identity, mobility-identity and culture-identity.
These three relationships are described as being shaped within the context of
organizational change taking place within globalization processes, and also influenced by
local particularities. The nature of the relationships can be characterized as a dialectical
‘to and froing’ between the global and the local, with individual and institutional
reflexivity as its core. This core emphasizes the dynamic adjustments made by both
individuals and the GSOs in their responses to market fluctuations. Each of these sets of
relationships is elucidated in the following sub-section.

- **Mobility-identity**

  Mobility-identity is proposed as a construct to describe the ‘to and froing’ movement of
the IT market, software work, the workplace and the worker. Rather than a permanent
shift from one place to the next, such as in geographical migration, mobility-identity is a ‘to and froing’ between physical, cultural, social, technological, and existential spaces and places. This construct builds upon earlier conceptualizations of place-identity relationships by investigating these relations within a relatively recent work context, that of globalizing ICT enabled work. It does this in two ways. Firstly, it situates the identities of the multiple interconnected levels of the worker, the firm, the industry and the market, within a set of mobilities, rather than as confined to a single place such as a specific geographical location. Resonating with Urry’s (2001) argument, that “people can indeed be said to ‘dwell’ in various mobilities” (p. 157), the three diverse yet intersecting mobilities (geographical, social and existential) were seen to create a networked pattern of relations between space and place -- the two central contours in the time-space configuration of modernity as proposed by Giddens (1990). These intersecting mobilities were directly influenced by local particularities such as class and position in the section of Indian society occupied by this group of workers. Secondly, the ‘to and froing’ between the global and the local, in this set of relations, highlights the dialectical relation of mobility-identity and refutes the argument that place is a fixed and bounded area providing a sense of rootedness and an unproblematic identity in a globalizing world. Rather, it reinforces Massey’s (1998) argument that places are more like processes, or a particular assemblage of social relations, that interact or meet at a particular location and also provide a detailed, micro-analysis of this process. By incorporating the sets of shifting processes, relations and the intersections of mobilities, the notion of mobility-identity suggests how shifting global workspaces and individual workers’ identities mutually constitute as well as construct each other.

- **Gender-identity**
  The gender-identity relationship reflects a relation situated within an ICT mediated work context that has often been premised on assumptions of professionalism, gender-neutrality and rationality. In this relation, the ‘to and froing’ is about the dichotomies between the realms of public-private/hard-soft or masculine/feminine, that were seen to get both conflated as well as distanced in GSOs, creating a variety of subjective experiences among IT workers. The construct of the ‘autonomous-relational’ self
(Kagitcibasi, 1996) illustrated a relationship of ‘dialectic mutuality’ between gender and the self. This was seen as shaped by the local particularities of the Indian social context, as well as by the regimes of software work cultures created out of cross-border flows of goods, services, money, people and information permeating the daily life within a GSO.

By providing a detailed analysis of gender nuances, within a globalizing context, the construct of gender-identity contributes to the literature in three ways. Firstly, it calls attention to the under-representation and marginalization of women in a high-tech and highly visible industry, unlike much of critical research which has focused on the negative impact of globalization on economically poor women in third world societies such as those employed in the garment industry (Ong, 1987; Wolf, 1992). It describes this issue not only in terms of numbers or demographic variables, but in terms of how this representation is experienced by IT workers within their inner, subjective and intersubjective worlds. Secondly, this construct enlarges our understanding of the contribution of gendered particularities within the intricate networking structure of offshore software development work and the tensions they present (Nicholson and Sahay, 2004; Waterson et al., 1997). These particularities have been largely neglected on studies of offshore software development in organizational contexts that examine the mix of ‘local’ features with ‘global’ imperatives and alternatives (Nicholson and Sahay, 2004; Sahay et al., 2003). Thirdly, the gender-identity relation highlights the necessity of questioning notions of straightforward ‘homogenizing’ effects of globalization forces in transnational workplaces. It instead, suggests the value of examining relational hierarchies, such as gender, that shape and give form to globalization flows. In these ways, this construct builds on the literature on globalization and gender relations in changing work contexts, particularly in a high-profile industry such as IT in India.

- **Culture-identity**
  Culture-identity is proposed as a construct to describe the ‘to and froing’ between the various forms of cultures that permeate the daily working of GSOs as well as selves and lives of IT workers. Drawing on anthropological understandings of culture applied within organizations, various forms of cultures were noted as symbolically constructing social
and cultural spaces for their employees. These were: corporate cultures, cultures of work, working across national cultures and primordial cultures. These were seen to represent a confluence of local and proximate (religion and region) and global and distal (software work demands) cultures, imbued with globalization influences as well as local particularities, interacting with and intersecting each other. Tensions, as well as adaptive processes, were noted among these. The notion of both culture and identity, as constructed, changing and complex, has contributed to various sets of literature in the following manner.

The use of an interpretivist framework to study culture (Avison & Myers, 1995) enabled a processual comprehension of the dialectical ‘to and froing’ between the forms of cultures at various levels — work, the organization, the social context, the global marketplace and the inner subjective experiences of IT workers. An interpretivist framework contrasts with approaches in some of the studies within Cross-Cultural Psychology, Organization Studies and Anthropology that consider culture as a variable (for example, Hofstede, 1980), a national trait or attitude (Hampden-Turner and Trompenars, 1993), or a set of basic assumptions (for example, Schein, 1984). Unlike these approaches, the culture-identity construct enables a more apt understanding of the dynamic reflexive processes undertaken by both individuals and GSOs as they each negotiate the shifting terrains of a globally turbulent industry. This framework suggests that various cultures, rather than easily nestling in familiar forms within formal organizations, are actually an ongoing negotiated process, sometimes contested, resisted and also conformed to by workers. By extending and applying the notion of culture from the literature in a dynamic manner within a globalizing work context, the construct of culture-identity offers rich insights into the multiple interconnected dynamics of culture, organizational processes and identities of IT workers. In this way it contributes to the sociology of work particularly in the context of India, where the focus on representations of caste, kinship, rituals, rather than labor (Parry, 1999), has neglected how strategies of global capitalism inflects social forms of labor, particularly, in ICT mediated contexts.
To summarize, this thesis proposes three sets of relationships as a framework to analyze the relationship between identities of individual workers engaged in ICT mediated work and diverse and shifting global contexts. They are seen to be shaped within the context of organization change taking place, influenced by both processes of globalization and local particularities. Each relationship, as well as the intersections between them, together constitute a perspective that provides rich insights into the distinctive dynamics of a global software development workplace. While the local particularities emanate from an Indian context, the proposed perspective can be applied to other similar contexts in different countries. In this way, the three sets of relations (constituting the theoretical perspective) was seen to contribute to both empirical to empirical as well as empirical to theoretical kinds of generalizations as listed in Table 6.1.

The framework, comprising the three sets of relationships described above, contributes to and extends various constructs in sets of literatures across disciplines. In particular, it contributes to research on embeddedness in the discipline of Information Systems. In this discipline, researchers (for example, Dacin et al., 1999; Lam, 2000; Nicholson and Sahay, 2004) have analyzed symbolic representations, specialized relationships and broader social institutions and structures, such as education and labor markets, as interconnected sources of embedded knowledge. However, particularities of self and identity have as yet, largely been unexplored as sources of embedded knowledge. This perspective directly contributes to this stream by emphasizing the linkage of particularities of social structures and relations that intertwine with identities of workers with distinctive knowledge demands in distributed software development work. For example, the knowledge demand of tacit skills such as ‘soft skills,’ or relational skills, are embedded in socialization practices relating to workers identities. This set of skills is strongly implicated in software development work interactions which increasingly exist in a web of highly interactive relationships (Waterson et al., 1997). Understanding and articulating such knowledge demands which are difficult to disembed from the local context and re-articulate in global contexts across time and space has practical implications as discussed in the next section.
In conclusion, the perspective developed to analyze how individual IT workers engaged in global software development work construct their identities, theoretically extends our understanding of labor-related processes, both generally within global workplaces and specifically within an economically developing context of India. Besides contributing to various sets of literatures that have been drawn upon, this perspective can also be employed and adapted to investigate dynamics within organizations undertaking similar work in similar contexts. An emerging trend is that of Indian firms offshoring work to cheaper destinations both within India and to countries like Vietnam (Carmel and Beulen, 2005). This perspective can be deployed to understand the multiple interconnected layers of relationships and dynamics within this emerging trend that is expected to grow in the future.

6.2.2 Elaborating on an Ethnography of Mobility: Contributing to a ‘Sociology of Mobilities’

Urry (2000) argues that mobilities and flows are the heart of many transformations in contemporary society and future sociological research should move, from the analysis of structures, to that of mobilities represented through ‘mixtures’ or forms such as heterogeneously composed networks, commodity chains, fluid social spaces and global institutional forms. These mobilities need to be analyzed, he says if we are to understand the nature of transformations within a global society. This thesis contributes to Urry’s (2000) call for a development of ‘sociology of mobilities’ through an empirically informed study of mobilities and individual worker experiences that constitute and are constituted by globally distributed software development work. By creating a ‘thick description’ of the context, as well as actors in GSW, and providing rich insights into various mobilities that characterize the IT industry and its people, this analysis contributes to the two categories of generalization outlined in Table 6.1 (empirical to empirical as well as empirical to theoretical).

In this study, GSOs were seen to constitute sites where multiple socio-spatial trajectories converged in the context of global capitalism. Massey’s (1998) notion of ‘nets of social relations’ were used to conceptualize these trajectories as inherently dynamic and changing, subject to diverse and sometimes contradictory temporal-spatial, as well as
cultural pressures and flows. Simultaneously encased within both, global business networks such as clients and competitive vendors, as well as local places, such as offices in India, these constantly co-evolving relations within GSOs and the external marketplace were seen to forge the everyday lifeworlds of IT workers.

The analysis revealed three kinds of mobilities that cut across levels of individual, work and organization. These were categorized as geographical, existential and social mobilities, each situated on the nodes of global-local flows of GSOs, intersecting, mutually shaping and sometimes colliding in tension with each other. These movements were characterized by a constant ‘to and fro’ in contrast to earlier one-way mobilities such as migrations or formations of diasporas. Each form of mobility across physical, social and existential terrains emerged as an uneven and unpredictable process, fraught with underlying tensions between feelings of hope and excitement, on the one hand, and fear and anxiety on the other. For example, for the IT worker, the challenge and excitement of traversing spaces and places such as social positions, new projects or successful career shifts and overseas locations, was counterbalanced by anxieties of newness, uncertainty of expectations and fear of obsolescence. This was seen to result in an itinerant state of existence referred to as ‘permanent transience’. Rife with multiplicities and ambiguities, these mobilities were also seen to intersect with each other and mutually constitute each other. This leads to the conceptualization of mobility-identity embodying the tension of movement and stasis.

While various kinds of mobilities in ICT mediated contexts have been earlier described by researchers, this ethnographic study demonstrated how these mobilities are implicated in this particular work context and workforce in the ‘new economy.’ Resonating with Urry (2001) we can say that a distinctive feature of this industry is that IT workers ‘dwell’ within various mobilities and this contributes to the networked pattern of economic and social life in the GSO. Further, while different kinds of mobility have been described in mobile, professional work (for example, Kakihara and Sørenson, 2003, from Information Systems) the larger social realms or inner existential domains of individuals that ground fluid notion of mobility are largely ignored, leaving a gap in a fuller
understanding of mobility. The research paper entitled “I am kind of a nomad where I have to go places and places”...Understanding Mobility, Place and Identity in Global Software Work from India, details various levels and kinds of mobilities, the global and local particularities of each mobility, the reflexivity of IT workers and GSOs and their linkage to identities of IT workers. The mobility-identity construct that emerged from this analysis enabled a micro-level formulation of rich insights in a relatively understudied work context and extended, as well, the construct of mobility.

An understanding of the sociology of mobilities and their linkage with place and identity processes has further theoretical contributions. Firstly, it contributes to the literature on knowledge management by pointing to the importance of the mobility-identity relationship as a source of embeddedness of knowledge within GSOs. Secondly, it contributes to globalization debates in the ‘new economy’ by illustrating the fleet of risks linked to mobilities of work, their relation to place-based identities and the relational and reflexive actions of individuals and the firm. Finally, it highlights mobilities as a source of ‘disjunctured flows’ (Appadurai, 1990) in a globalizing workplace. By doing so, it reinforces the view (Giddens, 1990, 1991) that globalization is an uneven and dialectical process with multiple forms, rather than a homogenous influence that creates a ‘borderless world’ (Ohmae, 1990).

In conclusion, the mobility-identity lens can be deployed in other similar work contexts or groups of professionals to understand mobile, global and virtual workforces that have altered debates on globalization, labor, and migration flows, and destabilized identities, or produced new kinds of transnational identities and networks.

6.2.3. Contributing to Debates around Modernity and Indianness

The distinctive features of the IT industry in India, such as its veritable trans-national flavor and intricate web of boundary-spanning social and economic networks, its middle class origins and mobile and entrepreneurial workforce, its scorching growth rate and international media spotlight, have contributed to several debates about globalization, modernity and notions of ‘Indianess.’ In this section, I describe the contribution of this
thesis to these debates in the context of globalization processes and the IT industry in India. The relations described below represent an empirical to theoretical form of generalization that seeks to extend insights from micro-level analysis of work to a ‘high-level’ concept and notions.

- **The predicament of modernity**

GSW and GSOs have also been characterized as ‘modern institutions’ (Sahay et. al., 2003). Yet, while India’s IT prowess is much publicized as an engine for economic growth, I argue that it does not represent a significant homogeneous move towards modernity.

To begin with, I clarify the notion of modernity. Firstly, notions of modernity have typically been used by theorists and also adopted (at times in this project) to represent the shifts arising from growth of industrialization and capitalism in Europe (Giddens, 1991). Many national projects in India have been based on Western notions of modernity embodying ideas of rationalism and progress (Chatterjee, 1993). European notions of the Enlightenment (describing the conflict between science and religion) have played a limited role in diverse societies like India (van der Veer, 2005). These are critiqued for ignoring the ways in which Asian experiences cannot neatly fit into Western historicism and the complex and interwoven strands of domination and subordination by global capital flows that blur the boundaries between ‘core’ and ‘peripheral’ countries (Ong, 1999). An alternative notion of ‘modernities’ (Featherstone, 1995) has been proposed to describe “national and civilizational” (p. 84) blends of modernity, linked to the particularities of South and East Asian economies, resulting from shifts in the global balance of power away from Western societies. Rather than formations, that are reactive to Western capitalism, multiple modernities (Eisenstadt, 2000) are seen to represent national and localization processes within which new relations to capital are negotiated (Ong, 1999). While this notion is able to separate the modernities of the West (and those of Asia) by conceding that there are culturally different ways to be modern, the idea of multiple modernities is itself debatable within the very spaces that it takes as its unit of analysis (Dirlik, forthcoming).
Alternately, ‘true’ modernity has been proposed as adhering to universal norms, ensuring the dignity of the individual, elevation of individual achievement over familial patronage, trust in institutions rather than people and accountability in public life (Gupta, 2000). Gupta notes that “modernity has to do with how people relate to one another each other” (p. 162). In this definition technological acquisition, rapid industrialization, urbanization and consumerism that constitute features of the current landscape of India, by themselves, do not constitute modernity. True modernity, in this view, is about how individuals relate to each other as equal citizens, and where one’s efforts are more important than family connections and privileges of caste and social status. I find this definition relevant (to this project) as it stays close to issues of self and identity, particularly, social identities which often get bypassed in our labeling of technological progress as modern. This definition suggests an understanding of globality which, in the true sense of the term, is an evolution of human consciousness rather than a set of technological or economic projects.

Applying this definition to the IT industry, in the context of India, the thesis reveals several paradoxical features. In many ways, the IT industry in India embodies some features of ‘true’ modernity. This industry has been a pioneer in India, in offering stock options and equity stakes for its employees, and, in this way, sharing the fruits of their success. Liberalization has morphed organizational forms and GSOs are seen as embedded in technological rationalism and norms of efficiency and responsibility. The flatter and flexible organizational structures of GSOs, informal but professional management styles and work cultures privileges individual competence and merit over paternalism and kinship and caste-based ties. Today, in their daily working, GSOs serve as exemplars in Indian business firms. Top managers, of the leading software companies, are admired by many Indians for their competence, wealth and success forged by hard work and efforts rather than family wealth or political patronage.

Further, mobility, of IT workers, functions like a ‘secular incentive system’ (Nandy, 1999) replacing Sanskritization (Srinivas, 1997), the idiom for social mobility in the past within India. Finally, as both producers of Indian economic success and consumers with
purchasing power, IT workers increasingly contribute to the formation of new status relations in the burgeoning middle class in Indian cities, where the valence of caste and kin categories are moderated by concerns of class and a desire to accumulate capital. Finally, this study revealed how GSOs emerged, as both a place and a space, with potential to challenge traditional Indian norms of gender relations and create lucrative and interesting work options (for both men and women). An increasing number of IT companies are engaged in social outreach activities, in their local community, as a means to ‘give back’ to society. In many ways, IT workers have caught the imagination of a nation looking for success stories, icons and heroes to secure and validate a place in a globalizing and perhaps modernizing world.

However, there have been some interruptions to the move toward true modernity in India. The reverberations of political developments in India, which seriously challenged the broad and absorbing notion of Indian identity that emerged during Independence, were noted in this project. For example, a shared language and region, while forging ties of belongingness, was also used to exclude others. The formation of Hindu and Muslim clubs by IT workers (for themselves at an overseas location), while also fostering belongingness, provides another example of the reinforcement of divisive religious differences as seen in India, today. While these examples may not equate with ‘technocratic fundamentalism,’ engaged in by several IT engineers and scientists in the Indian diaspora from Silicon Valley (van der Veer, 2005), it represents a milder form of this tendency. Along with a market orientation, in marriage alliances (such as steep dowry prices), these dynamics are seen as relating to the structural locations of IT workers in Indian society rather than the dignity of the individuals involved. Similarly, as highlighted by this thesis, the traditional gender relations, reproduced in GSOs, (and under-representation of women in the IT workforce) suggest that “modernity” has not yet fully arrived in the Indian IT industry. Perhaps like India, GSOs and IT workers within India can be seen as “between worlds” of what is modern and un-modern or traditional (Gupta, 2000; p.21).
• **Shifting notions of ‘Indianess’**

The notion of Indian identity (or ‘Indianess’) that emerged from the days of the Independence movement, and even the one that is popular today, is hardly monolithic and homogenous. There is also no national consensus on this.  

Broadly seen as assimilative, secular and spacious (Sen, 2005), this notion is taken as relating to shifts in events and dynamics that pertain to India as a nation state. I will now discuss this in relation to the IT industry in India.

ICTs (in general) and the IT industry, in the context of India, have been hailed as engines for economic development and as a means for the country to skip the industrial revolution and go straight into the Information Age (Das, 2002). National discourses, framing media reports on the IT industry, herald the IT revolution as an icon of a new form of development -- an engine to take India forward into the 21st Century, calling forth visions of a Modern India (van der Veer, 2005). Social and higher educational discourses, in India, are seen to actively promote IT as a tool for both individual and national success. A sense of optimism, among young people, in particular, pervades beliefs about the role of ICTs in India’s future (Ezer, 2005). IT parks are referred to as the ‘temples of modern India’ by the Government and Confederation of Indian Industry, in an aim to enhance economic perceptions of India (http://www.ibef.org/brandindia, 2005). This is not surprising, since, the Nehruvian vision (from the initial post Independent period), of a modernizing Indian nation, strongly reinforced the role of science and technology for India to not only gain parity with developed countries, but also, perhaps, a means to become a world leader (Chopra, 2003).

This approach also resonated with the formulation of Indian national identity, where a protected inner core of Indian culture and tradition could be retained, while the outer material context could be shifted and improved as it encounters Western notions of progress and development (Chatterjee, 1993). In this way, technological changes are explained, as embraced into the national identity, while allowing a simultaneous co-

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56 See Varma (2004) and Khilnani (1997) for interesting discussions on this notion. Furthermore, especially anthropological studies of identity indicate that group loyalty or identification with a group is not necessarily contingent on cultural similarity (Eriksen, 2002). A strongly integrated group may have a lot of cultural variation. Similarly, two groups which are culturally similar may have strong differences of identity.
existence of cultural and economic influences. A vivid depiction of this notion is in the following verse of a famous song by the actor, Raj Kapoor from the film Shree 420:\(^{57}\)

\[
\begin{align*}
Mera Joota hai Japani, \\
Yeh patloon Englishani, \\
Sar par lal topi Russi \\
Phir bhi dil hai Hindustani.
\end{align*}
\]

(Translation: My shoes are Japanese, these pants are English; on my head is a red Russian cap, yet, my heart remains Indian.). These words suggest an accommodative process of western material influences that do not undermine or radically change an assumed ‘core’ of Indianess\(^{58}\).

- **Cultural context of globalization processes and the IT industry in India**

In the context of the IT industry in India, while GSOs in India are said to be models of, and also models for, globalization processes, they also illustrate the phenomenon of “reverse colonization” (Giddens, 1999) where non-western countries influence events in the West, shaping global happenings. Offshoring of white collar jobs, particularly information-based jobs from the US to India, resulted in an unexpected loss of high-paying jobs across the US. This shook the American populace and also resulted in a political backlash, where protectionist measures were taken by several US states banning offshoring of government contracts (Gutman, 2004; Kumara, 2004). This interaction of the Indian and US economies is one of the most publicized issues in US politics, today. Migrant Indian IT entrepreneurs, having significantly contributed to innovation hubs in Silicon Valley and across the US, are seen to use their economic power to mediate political agendas between India and the US (Biradavolu, 2005; Saxenian, 2002). Similarly, the earlier ‘brain drain’ issue has now been transformed into ‘brain circulation’ with IT professionals of Indian origin (from the US) setting up businesses in India with trans-national links (Saxenian, 2002). Indian BPOs are now attracting workers from Europe, who find it increasingly hard to get work in their respective home countries due

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\(^{57}\) This song often sung by the CEO of IN-SYNC on stage at various company events was very popular and always received extended applause. An insightful analysis of how Bollywood films function as India’s cultural ambassador abroad, is provided by Madhu Kishwar (2004). The Idea of India, Manushi, Issue 139. [http://www.indiatogether.org/manushi/issue139/idea.htm](http://www.indiatogether.org/manushi/issue139/idea.htm). Last accessed: Feb. 12, 2006.

\(^{58}\) The notion of what is ‘quintessentially Indian’ in terms of values or a cultural core is one perspective. While used extensively in political campaigns such a notion is an essentialist one, similar to notions of ‘basic Indian values’ discussed in chapter 2.
to the outsourcing trends (Oberoi, 2006). India is fast becoming a hub for sophisticated research and development. Statistics, on foreign direct investment, regularly portray India as more attractive than even the US for global entrepreneurs (Kumara 2004; Prestowitz, 2005). These events can be seen as ‘glocalizing’ (Robertson, 1992) processes that mix local and global features along the technoscapes (Appadurai, 1996) of global flows.

These features illustrate the reverse flows of globalization that reconfigure power equations in global relations. Unlike colonial encounters, where the here and there and the center and periphery have been clearly visible, reverse globalization interrupts the fixity of boundaries of such territory and changes the structure of these encounters. In these ways, “center and periphery are no longer frozen geographies but have been rendered fluid by the protean nature of diasporic flows” (Visvanathan, 2005, p. 1). These shifts are seen to have re-configured India’s image, in the world media, earlier dominated by images and narratives of drought, famine and economic poverty. India, along with China, is seen as coming into its own (after nearly six hundred years of impoverishment and servitude) and riding the crest of the globalization wave with other ‘tigers’ of Asia.

Yet, co-existing with liberalization reforms, and a sense of pride about India’s success in IT, are the searing effects of the assertion of caste-based and religious identities and receding secularism with the growth of Hindu nationalism (Hindu nationalism propounded as Hindutva, Hindutva) and separationist tendencies in the country. The female to male sex ratio from the 1991 to the 2001 census has significantly declined in both rural and urban areas across India (Athreya, 2003), incidents of communal violence, as well as violence against women in ‘modern’ cosmopolitan cities (like Mumbai), are cause for alarm (Gupta, 2000). Most of the dowry deaths reported are from urban Indian settings (Gupta, 2000) and are now linked increasingly to market-driven legitimization of a highly consumerist ethic of social living. The hoopla about export of IT, has visibly dwarfed the growth in other sectors of the economy and even the domestic IT industry (Joseph,

60 In 2003, Nisha Sharma, a 21 year old student of computer engineering in New Delhi, the capital city, called the police to arrest her would-be husband for violation of the country’s largely ignored anti-dowry act. Her unusual and gutsy response attracted attention in the international as well as Indian media. http://www.courses.psu.edu/hd_fs/hd_fs315_rxj9/dowery.htm (last accessed on Jan 18, 2006)
Even the Indian language versions of main programs such as Windows, are being primarily developed by IBM and Microsoft rather than as Indian products by Indian companies (Sundaram, 2001). The small groups of IT companies, industry experts and educationists involved in IT projects for rural and literacy development are a miniscule (but hopeful) drop in the ocean of the spread of benefits of ICTs in the country.  

In the larger landscape, of India, some stark contrasts suggested that the ‘information revolution’ has visibly benefited only a small segment of the skilled population. While IT employs around 1 million of its 1.1 billion people, in 2004-’05, this sector contributed to less than 4 percent of India’s GDP (Sinha, 2005). The agricultural sector employs two thirds of India’s workers and accounts for 25 percent of its GDP (Sinha, 2005). Today, 70 percent of India’s population still lives in rural areas (Thomas, 2006). Further, 29 percent of the total population of India lives below the poverty line and 34.6 percent of Indians are illiterate (Thomas, 2006). These statistics are also gendered, where women are more disadvantaged, making it even harder for them to access a piece of the ‘information revolution’ pie. Post 1991 reforms, India’s march, towards a capitalist economy, has been mainly confined to industrial and urban sectors (especially services) while agriculture, infrastructure and the rural economy have been left behind. Power generation and roads are severely lacking across the country and urban experiences, even in cities like Mumbai and Bangalore, are reeling under the collapse of infrastructure, high pollution levels and inequalities of access.

Economic reform and trade liberalization in India is said to have resulted in a further decline in the standards of resources of millions of people, especially the rural poor (Kothari, 1997). The most graphic illustration, of this discontent, was manifested in the 2004 election results in the state of Andhra Pradesh, India. In recent years, the Chief Minister of this state, N. Chandrababu Naidu (who won accolades in the international media as an ‘IT guru’) had turned the state capital Hyderabad into an international IT destination by attracting significant investments in the IT industry. During the same time, Andhra Pradesh experienced considerable rural distress in the form of cases of starvation

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61 One such educational example by an Indian IT company is described here: http://prayatna.typepad.com/education/2004/09/kc_kohli_educa.html
deaths, suicides among farmers and handloom textile workers, and migration of landless agricultural workers (Thomas, 2006). This neglect of livelihood issues of the rural poor was the major cause of the fall of his government in 2004 (Farooq, 2004).

These paradoxes caution us against labeling the flows of global capital as merely Anglo-centric, while acknowledging how flows of global capitalism can reconfigure spatial, social and economic positions, creating differences of centre-periphery and ‘first’ and ‘third’ worlds within the territorial boundaries of a nation state. It also illustrates how the experience of visible injustice provokes people to resist and effect social change with the ideological apparatus they have at hand. In addition, enclave-type growth of the IT industry that benefits only a small part of the urban population and sets up parallel social and economic realities, without impacting the lives of the vast rural population is bound to create social tensions (D'Costa, 2003).

Further, while IT workers are seen as an economically and socially privileged group within India, abroad they are often seen as English speaking low wage techies, derogatorily labeled as ‘cyber-coolies’ doing ‘grunt’ work since much of the offshoring work is still at the low end of the value chain (Dasarathi, 2004; Varma, 2004). They are viewed as lacking the necessary cultural capital that would make them fully acceptable into Western society as equals (within and outside the workplace). Perhaps, they are merely serving their time out in a globally and nationally constructed niche that prevents them from occupying an even larger position. It is this aspect, that not only influences how IT workers construct their identities and subjectivities, but also how they are constructed by ‘others’ in a historically shaped (as well as socially and culturally constructed) global market space. Perhaps, over time, the relational identity of a ‘cyber-coolie’ can be reconstructed as a ‘new capitalist’ as US technology firms and venture capitalists are increasingly taking research and development and high end work to India (Prestowitz, 2005).

The theoretical framework proposed, in this thesis, with the three sets of relationships (culture-identity, mobility-identity and gender-identity) can be used as an analytic lens to
observe and analyze the shifts and tensions related to globalization, notions of Indianness and the predicament of modernity. For example, the mobility-identity construct describes arrangements between diverse mobilities emerging from globalization processes and their intersections, tensions and collusions. Culture-identity is a lens to delineate the different forms of culture that workers traverse and the adaptive responses required of them. Gender-identity is a lens to analyze how ICT mediated workspaces socially and structurally construct a ‘level playing field’ for male and female workers in India.

The metaphor of ‘to and froing’, along the dialectic of the global-local, is symbolic of the tensions and disjunctures of international flows of technology, labor, and capital. These uneven flows intertwine the cultural, political and the economic, which interact dynamically, and often contradictorily, halting moves towards true modernity and a consistent and even notion of Indianness. In this ‘to and froing’ of globalizing processes, identity issues are also slippery. The reflexive choice-making processes, of IT workers, denote that they are not passive pawns in these processes but do enact agency in their decisions.

To conclude, this thesis reinforces and illustrates the notion of ‘glocalization’ as a type of globalization, that can accommodate situational characteristics, while emphasizing the interconnections, collisions and tensions in the process. It extends our theoretical understanding of the regulatory relations of markets, national agendas, individual agency and the ‘cultural logics’ of global capitalism that shape identities of Indian IT workers and the Indian IT industry. Glocalization challenges fixities of boundaries between events, spaces and places and also defies fixed notions of ‘Indianess.’ The fluid, flowing and amorphous interrelated ‘scapes,’ such as flows of people, technologies, money, images and information and also ideas (Appadurai, 1996), suggest that people move in different symbolic fields influenced in varying degrees by globalization processes. These scapes are not smooth but, rather, fraught with tensions and paradoxes. Consequently, some aspects of culture may change while others hardly shift, and contradictions (as described above) may arise in the interstices.
The theoretical framework, developed in this thesis, can be used to analyze the intersecting effects and material consequences of globalization in a particular locale and enhance our understanding of these linkages to actors’ identities. That IT workers were seen to construct an enclave of rootedness to tradition and locality, as they embraced technological changes and Western influences, affirmed notions of how national identity has been described in a postcolonial context as a process that enabled both tradition and Western defined economic development to simultaneously thrive. This can be described as retaining a local identity, alongside a global one, enabling the individual to effectively straddle both worlds.

There are various practical implications of these processes, as well as this study, and these are discussed in the next section.

6.3. Practical Implications

Five key practical implications, based on the inductively-derived theoretical framework, are identified through this study. These, arguably, are also applicable to other similar IT outsourcing companies and work contexts in India or other parts of the world, particularly, non-IT firms organizations where risks associated with mobility are a key aspect of their work. These implications, which are written in a manner that emphasizes practical suggestions, are first summarized in Table 6.2 and then further elaborated on.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Understanding how identity is implicated in the daily interactions of GSOs has implications for <strong>building commitment and alignment</strong> of IT workers.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. <strong>Considering culture</strong> implies using local and global elements to shape organizational cultures that nurture identities and support business goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Customizing and contextualizing behavioral interventions in training programs aimed at <strong>broad-basing ‘soft’ skills</strong> of employees are recommended for greater effectiveness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. <strong>Questioning of ‘gender-neutrality’</strong> by GSOs, NASSCOM and the IT workforce can open diverse possibilities for working, relating and being among both male and female workers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. <strong>Understanding mobilities</strong> have implications for how attrition issues are handled, knowledge is managed, working across geographical boundaries is facilitated and work and personal life is balanced.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Table 6.2: Key practical implications**
6.3.1. Building ‘Commitment’ and ‘Alignment’ in IT Workers

The findings, of this thesis, reinforce the argument that identity is intimately intertwined with global software development work. Identity work is implicated in IT workers’ responses, to organizational interventions, aimed at securing their commitment and aligning their individual aspirations with organizational goals. These findings have implications for the daily actions of managers and HR personnel in GSOs, whose roles are to assess and reduce people-related risks in the company, as well as maintain and develop challenging and facilitative work contexts. Particularly, in the Indian context, employee commitment and alignment are found to be the lowest as compared to any other industry in the country (NASSCOM, 2005). This suggests that taking identity seriously has significant business implications.

The study revealed that, while the category of ‘IT professional’ carries many positive elements, these ‘achieved’ identities were seen to be fragile as they are tightly coupled with changes in the global and national economy. In addition, various mobilities inherent in this form of work, threatened to destabilize coherence in identity construction and re-construction processes of workers as well as those of the GSO. At the level of the GSO, managers and HR personnel aimed to engage the IT workers’ hearts and minds and secure their commitment through well-intentioned organizational interventions, such as people policies, software processes, and image or culture building exercises. However, at the level of the daily lived life, within the GSO, tensions such as between the espoused family culture of the GSO and individual aspirations of IT workers, as well as the normative control of employee behavior, were seen to disrupt the employee-organisation emotional link. Similarly, IT workers, who challenged company policies with their clever and sometimes irrefutable logic, were sometimes labeled ‘spoilt brats’ by HR personnel frustrated by the continuous pressure to be innovative with people policies. Also, managers sometimes spoke of ‘convincing’ (a euphemism for ‘forcing’) the employee in

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62 Commitment and alignment are from a study by Watson Wyatt covering over 9,500 employees across 54 employers in India in 2004 and reported in HR Best Practices Handbook, 2005, published by NASSCOM (2005). Commitment was defined as how much employees express pride in their company, describe it as a good place to work, demonstrate a desire to stay and had confidence in its future success. Alignment was defined as how much employees perceive they understand their company’s business strategy and goals and how they contribute to achieving these goals.
relation to a performance rating (often unacceptable), a project assignment or a company policy.

The study shows that these interactions of IT workers, with managers and HR personnel, constitute ‘critical conversations’ imbued with much affect and calling for sensitive, respectful and effective handling. These interactions influence the worker’s thoughts and feelings about the organization and his/her emotional engagement and commitment (much sought after by the GSO). This suggests that such conversations and interactions, about managing identity-related elements of the IT worker and the GSO, are often in tension with each other. In the rush, to complete projects and the daily work pressures, these small but significant considerations of respect and dignity, that form the building blocks for creating commitment and alignment, often get bypassed by managers and HR personnel seeking to fulfill organizational level goals.

Even at the time of leaving the firm, when commitment and alignment ties are almost formally severed, attending to relevant identity issues has payoffs for the GSO. For example, when an IT worker hands in his/her resignation letter, the employee often expects that someone from ‘the company’ (the respective manager or HR) will speak to him or her about this decision apart from the formal ‘exit interview’ process. This is often irrespective of the employee’s previous performance or how the decision to quit has been made. These interactions (such as the manager or HR speaking to the employee), as well as the subsequent rituals in parting of work handover, farewells, and exit formalities are reportedly experienced by the worker as an ‘identity-validating space.’ Here, company gestures, that acknowledge the employee as a performer as well as a person, symbolize care and validation thus providing a sense of completion which the employee remembers and recalls later when he/she moves on to the next firm. Even attending to how the ex-employee is treated and viewed, when he/she returns or contacts the company after quitting, is seen to shape feelings and memory for the employee despite their outwardly nonchalant attitudes. This treatment also has a business impact since workers can also be seen as knowledge-carriers whose ‘word of mouth’ in the meshed social networks, among
this group, affects the image of the GSO in the labor market thus influencing its ability to attract talent and even new customers.

This implies, that irrespective of the multiple mobilities inherent in this work, IT workers still seek ‘grounding’ in the firm that acts to confirm or disconfirm elements of their respective identity constructions. The findings of this thesis suggest that these interactions and actions represent ‘moments of truth’ (Carlzon, 1987) that emotionally align, however momentarily, individual and organizational identity constructions -- a relation that is eminently desired by the GSO. Specific role holders (in GSOs) such as HR personnel and project managers, are urged to view these interactions as opportunities to enrol commitment of IT workers who are typically individualistic and identify more with their career and profession than with the organization. This stance does not recommend handling employees with ‘kid gloves’ or overstressing the fragility of IT workers self–worth and identity. Rather, it highlights identity-affirming moments, as critical links in a chain of micro-events in a fluid and mobile environment, where commitment and alignment cannot be ‘bought’ from the market but have to be ‘made’ or built within the GSO whose choices are (unfortunately) bound by a constantly tight labor pool.

6.3.2. Considering Culture

This thesis described the forms of corporate and work cultures and various standards and means by which GSOs attempt to control and regulate the ‘being’ and ‘doing’ aspects of its employees’ behavior. It pointed to a variety of metaphors, events, norms and processes to secure employee identification, create belongingness, improve operational productivity, control and regulate workers’ behaviors – all driven by a supposedly, unique and company-defined way of working (for example, the IN-SYNC way). IT workers, on the other hand, were seen to primarily identify themselves with what they did in their career and profession (for example, techie, solutions expert, project lead) rather than with the firm. This study suggests that organizational attempts, that relate to ‘doing’ and ‘being’ aspects of employee behavior, are rarely unproblematic as tensions surface between competing organizational and individual goals. For example, organizational
attempts, at standardizing policies and practices across employees, geographical locations, teams and building a monolithic ‘family’ culture, encountered resistance as these attempts excluded local particularities and individualistic aspirations of workers. Also, while team-working is an integral structuring means in GSOs, reward and recognition systems need to build in opportunities for recognizing individual contributions.

These tensions strongly suggest that managers (in GSOs) seek to create meaningful and challenging work and cultural contexts by consciously intersecting organizational aims and identifications with ‘local’ identity elements and ‘global’ aspirations of workers. They reinforce the view that GSOs necessarily view culture as emergent, changing, and relational rather than a manipulatable variable or a monolithic entity that can be ‘rolled out’\(^{63}\) when the organization attempts a company-wide cultural shift. They highlight the fact that management strategies have varying interpretive possibilities which can be seen as ‘identity work,’ particularly, in an educated and individualistic workforce. They suggest, that being open to varied interpretations rather than labelling such interpretations as anti-management resistance, cynicism or disobedience, has significant implications for knowledge based organizations like GSOs that seek to foster cultures to “unleash creativity” and cultivate “innovative and breakthrough thinking” in their workforce. Innovation and creativity are qualities that are found to be correlated with an experiential sense of freedom, agency and empowerment among IT workers. These relations highlight the challenge that GSOs face in building a cultural context to support these desired behaviors on the one hand, and ensure effective control and management strategies for software development work on the other. In these ways, the ‘being’ and ‘doing’ of the GSO and the IT worker need to be seen as mutually constitutive of each other.

Further, understanding of identity work can contribute towards shaping cultures of belonging within the GSO and its competitive functioning in the marketplace. Using notions of ‘place’ to understand belonging and identification of workers, and notions of

\(^{63}\) ‘Roll out’ is a term frequently used by managers and HR functionaries in GSOs to denote company-wide implementation of new or changed plans.
‘space’ to understand market and technology related issues, is a possible lens to conceptualize management interventions and practices in the organization. Finally, an increasing incidence of joint ventures, takeovers and cross-border mergers on the IT horizon (both within and outside India today), raise challenges of cultural amalgamation and compatibility. Cultural issues are significantly implicated in the acquisition and integration process where people-related risks can make or break the new alliance. This puts the onus on HR functionaries, expected to have a close understanding of issues related to identity, to create an alchemy of global and situated elements in a processual and astute manner rather than apply a standard template to forge a new organizational culture that nurtures workers identities while supporting newly envisioned business goals.

6.3.3. **Broad-Basing Behavioral Skills**

This thesis highlights the fact that various mobilities, and the trans-national nature of IT work, require knowledge workers to negotiate not only work practices and the ‘rationale’ of technical applications, but also people, networks and cross-cultural interactions. While Indian IT workers may embody their situated styles, of being and doing in various ways including national, social, caste, regional and linguistic identities, the thesis suggests that these ways of interaction can clash with the ‘here and now’ demands particularly in cross-cultural encounters which require new tools and a shift in awareness for negotiation. The demands, of working with customers across the globe, necessitate IT workers to broaden their base of behavioral skills and competencies. These include the gamut of ‘soft skills’ or ‘relational skills such as interpersonal communication, active listening, negotiation, managing diversity and differences, among others. Typically anchored, in personal, social and cultural beliefs and norms, developing these skills are largely ignored in the formal education process, particularly, in engineering and computer science disciplines in India which forms the educational base of IT workers in India. Such (often tacit) skills implicate one’s self and social identities, evoking strong feelings, and requiring self-reflection and repeated customized feedback for effective learning.

The insights, from this thesis, suggest that over and above behavioral training programs, HR professionals who design and implement such programs need to include multiple
ways by which learning of ‘soft skills’ can be aligned closely to daily work situations. This can supplement (not replace) the one or two day cross-cultural training and interpersonal skills training programs that IT companies typically offer. Feedback from project leaders or operations role holders, who share the same social field, can supplement formal training programs through increased on-the-job learning. Positioning those employees, who demonstrate effective ‘soft skills’ as role models, is another means to facilitate such learning.

Further, HR professionals are urged to include local specificities or interpretations as training inputs. For example, the complaints about IT workers, as being too polite and unable to say no, are often interpreted in ‘Western’ terms as lack of assertiveness and confidence. IT workers are trained in workshops that aim to develop ‘assertiveness skills’ and build ‘confidence.’ While these skills are generally useful, such interventions need to include local, lived, contextually-embedded interpretations of such behaviors along with what is seen as culturally-competent behavior. Often, in these training programs, universal (typically Western) interpretations of such behaviors are taken as objective and normative, which tends to marginalize local specificities. It is also problematic as there is no universal standard template for relating or translating what is true from one local context to another. A customized versus a standardized approach, in the design of such programs that transcend simplistic, cultural and national stereotypes, is suggested as a platform to provide a broader base while GSOs exhort workers to ‘think global and act local.’

Besides formal training programs, on-the-job cross-cultural learning possibilities would potentially provide effective spaces for workers to reflect on experiences and informally share knowledge. Further, such training is often seen as one-way i.e., for supplier staff only. Recognizing that training needs are two-ways (when it comes to cultural understanding in cross-border work), customers from overseas could be sensitized to culturally different ways of being and doing that need of them an altered framework for interpretation. While emphasizing a customised approach, this study throws a cautionary flag for GSOs who strive to be more competitive by imitating ‘best practices,’ typically
of firms in the US which are seen as a global leader in innovative practices. It also urges
firms to scrutinize much of the psychometric and behavioral training products and
material, developed mainly from the US and UK, now easily purchasable with a local-
global lens to analyze the validity of the implied assumptions of behavior.

In these ways, HR interventions are urged to include contextually-related issues of
participants. Focusing on how cultural understanding and relating is negotiated and
‘achieved’ in particular circumstances, rather than assumed or given (as in stereotypes),
are expected to facilitate desirable behaviors to emerge in here and now situations. Such
an approach aims to eliminate cultural differences, create sameness and standardize (at
the individual level) through an assumed universal framework, ignores localized, place-
based social identities and individualistic particularities that constitute the daily world
within GSOs. It also sanctions and reproduces stereotypical notions of national identity
as a marker of distinction between the ‘us’ and ‘them.’

6.3.4. Questioning ‘Gender Neutral’ Terms

GSOs as a knowledge-based industry are often viewed as entities that are ‘professional’
and ‘neutral,’ providing equal opportunities for both men and women. Such a view is also
held even by women CEOs, in India, who attribute their success primarily to their
individual talent, skill and confidence (nasscom.org.). This thesis contests this view and
reveals several practical implications for GSOs and IT workers.

In this study, work and home realms were seen to be meshed for IT workers in a way that
sustains the patriarchal gender order. This points to the assumption that GSOs view
parenting and childhood as individual choice, rather than a social or workplace concern.
Consequently, parenting and caring are relegated to the realm of the private sphere i.e.,
the home where women take the primary responsibility for caregiving not only for their
own children but also for their extended family, such as in-laws. This causes women to
often ‘disappear’ or ‘drop off’ from the workforce, interrupting their individual sustained
career trajectory and also the work of the GSO. This thesis argues for a change of
emphasis in GSOs towards de-gendering the view of parenthood and childcaring
responsibilities and creating innovative flexible working opportunities such as job sharing and parental leave policies for employees with family responsibilities. While such a stance is useful, for organizations in general, GSOs could initiate a start as they are seen as being more progressive and ‘global.’ Also, their HR policies constitute a guide for ‘best practices’ and are referred to by other industries in India. Of course, overall attitudes will only change if male employees respond to the new opportunities offered to them with support from their managers and peers, and in this way, they too participate in facilitating a shift of gendered patterns of parenting.

As this thesis has indicated (see paper in Appendix 2) there are multiple benefits for GSOs who adopt this stance. Firstly, women will be able to start and sustain their career trajectory instead of disappearing or dropping off from the workforce. This will enable GSOs, in India, to reduce the skill shortage for competent workers. Secondly, it would reduce attrition rates as this group of women are noted to be less mobile and more loyal, sincere and committed, making better project managers as compared to men. Thirdly, GSOs would reap the benefits of various relational skills such as intuitiveness, interpersonal sensitivity, and the empathy that women workers were seen to bring to the job. These relate directly to the software development work that exists, more and more, in a web of highly interactive relationships.

Going beyond the ‘add women and stir’ remedy, the findings of this thesis suggest that HR staff attend to the material practices and assumptions by which gender subtly enters and shapes structures, policies, processes and ways of relating in GSOs. For example, attending to a seemingly trivial matter, such as language with a gender lens, is an example of how a domain (language in this case) is not only a representative tool, but also productive. Treating individual IT employees as ‘resources’ or referring to them as ‘manpower,’ tends to neutralize critical identity elements such as gender that organize workers behaviors and silences the individual and collective ‘voices’ of workers. Similarly, using both male and female images in corporate literature, having transport facilities for women to travel home late at night from the office, consciously creating opportunities for women to network, ensuring that women are not discriminated against
during the selection process, and having an effective sexual harassment policy in place are some suggestions for practical means to bring more gender parity into the firm.

Influential trade associations, like NASSCOM, can provide directives and support for GSOs to become more gender neutral workspaces. A positive step in this direction is already taken in the annual report of NASSCOM (2005) where for the first time, there is a section on gender equality that focuses on the role of ICTs for economically underprivileged women. Adding to the “next steps for the Government and NASSCOM” (see p. 235 of this report) to “enhance the supply of the world’s best knowledge workers” (p. 236) this thesis suggests that NASSCOM needs to work closely with GSOs in supporting them towards building more equitable workplaces with respect to gender. This would potentially benefit the industry, as a whole, in addressing its skill shortage issue, while (hopefully) simultaneously strengthening individual attachments to the firm.

At a societal level, inclusion of more women in these workplaces and creating more gender-neutral working environments, can also engender a vital ripple effect in Indian society where rampant sex determination and female feticide currently persists as girls are still viewed as an economic liability for their parents (http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2006/01/09/world/main1190138.shtml). Opening up, of job options in the IT sector for women, can be a significant step also in shifting their social and economic status in their families and society.

Formally instituted policies, that attempt to distribute responsibilities for care and family life between both parents, also aim to blur the distinction between the private and public domains. This blurring of distinctions is seen as necessary for emancipation of women, as it distributes power more equally between men and women. In comparison with Scandinavian countries, particularly, Norway where issues of gender equality have substantial State support, the measures proposed above are limited. In India, while the spirit of the Constitution favors equal participation of women in society, they are unable to participate as equals in social and economic affairs. Such measure, although provided to an elite and small group of women IT workers, signifies small but significant steps
towards enhanced equal participation of women in domestic and economic arenas and a hope for spreading economic opportunities between men and women professionals.

Finally, women IT workers, as members of a limited pool of knowledge workers, are urged to review the vast horizon of expanding possibilities that the profession, and the GSO, offers them. A high level of formal education, quick and plum economic benefits, a ‘respectable’ and often envied social position, and frequent overseas travel are springboards that can be used for growth and re-definitions of their social identities. Positioned in a supposedly 'gender-neutral' context, which by default articulates workers as men, they can ‘blow the whistle’ on policies and processes that are gendered, rather than taking these as given or making excuses on behalf of the organization. In this way, women IT workers can demonstrate both increased agency, as well as effective relatedness, while they question traditional entrenched gender discourses and ideologies and create diverse possibilities for working, relating and being for themselves as well as others within the GSO.

6.3.5. Understanding Mobilities

Understanding the nature and kinds of mobilities that characterise work, workers and GSOs and their link to workers identities and that of the firm has several implications. These relate to issues of attrition, managing knowledge, teamworking across boundaries, and balancing work-life demands, which are described below:

- **Addressing Attrition**
  Issues of attrition are interlinked with identity processes of IT workers who were seen to make choices in a reflexive manner. Moving across firms was typically a strategic choice in an upward direction rather than a lateral move, and aimed towards enhancing some identity-validating features of the worker. This study showed that attrition in GSOs is also a gendered process, linked to issues of social identity and relative immobilities of social structures. Attrition hinders the development of enduring and strong social ties in GSOs that are already limited as a result of ICT mediated interactions. A lot of energy is expended on constantly building new relationships and sharing various kinds of
knowledge (organizational and project-related) repeatedly with new staff and returnees from onsite assignments. Faced with stiff global competition, increasing compensation costs for employers (coupled with inevitable and unabated attrition of workers), GSOs are striving to focus on achieving productivity improvements among its workers. This is a desirable goal with several implications.

Firstly, in this form of immaterial labor, productivity issues are inherently bound with identity issues. This calls for a synergistic effort, by different functionaries in the company, to jointly address productivity and people issues. It necessitates a more strategic role for HR in the GSO, who are typically seen as responsible for ‘touchy-feely’ people issues. Visibly engaged in social activities, they cater to affiliation needs of employees rather than as an equal partner in boardroom decisions. Achieving ‘connectedness’ between HR and business strategies is critically important for ensuring that individual aspirations and organisational goals are harmonized. Secondly, assumptions, underlying organizational policies and practices for recruitment, training and development, can be examined or audited for unintended undertones, rigidity and inconsistencies that tend to demotivate competent people. Such undertones might cause ‘talent’ to quit the company, among other productivity-related consequences, or create barriers for some groups of workers, such as women employees to re-enter the firm or negotiate a flexible role for themselves. Like cultural and behavioural training inputs, this again suggests a customized approach to motivation issues linked to positively enhancing retention of employees rather than curbing attrition.

Further, popular and effective company practices or policies are linked, over time, to the company’s market image and its identity, where IT companies vie with each other to be a ‘preferred employer’ or ‘employer of choice’ as well as a preferred vendor for customers. This, in turn, serves as a means to ‘pull’ good candidates (from other companies) on the lookout for better options and to also reassure customers concerned about employee turnover issues affecting the business application. This aspect requires more highlighting since GSOs are expected to soon compete for attracting and retaining competent people from the reverse diaspora (Singh, 2003). This group comprises qualified Indian IT
individuals with overseas technical and managerial skills and experience, business ideas and trans-national links and connections which are valuable and vital in a human capital intensive global industry.

In these ways, attending to issues of attrition needs to be necessarily multi-pronged as well as flexible in their application.

- **Managing Knowledge**
  Managing knowledge at the level of the organization, project team and individual, is a key concern for GSOs given the various forms of knowledge and their embeddedness. We know that knowledge in software work, is hardly an objective tangible commodity and often resists codification, standardization and transfer. While explicit knowledge, that is codified and documented in the form of tools, languages or packages, is relatively easy to transfer from onsite to offshore, transfer of tacit knowledge is a challenging task and cited as an important reason for breakdowns in the initial period of an offshoring relationship (Carmel and Beulen, 2005). For example, in transfer of domain knowledge in application maintenance tasks, the code, data, business rules and the way they are used need to be understood clearly. These relations cannot always be explicitly specified in a document and require face-to-face interaction. Similarly, work and cultural norms of the respective organizations, ranging from language to cultural influencing cross-border collaboration and communication, exemplify tacit knowledge. Misunderstandings, arising from these, can also cause breakdowns in the relationship. The high rate of attrition in this industry, and the time taken to ‘ramp up’ new employees, poses challenges for transferring knowledge (particularly, tacit knowledge) and also makes distinctive demands on firms to retain and manage knowledge of their key people. Further, the fast changing technological and market expectations make demands on the GSOs, as well as workers, to quickly acquire and master the new forms of technical and market knowledge.

For the IT worker, mobilities inherent in this industry enable him/her to accrue human capital in a reflexive manner expanding, in turn, the possibilities for further mobilities and these are closely bound with workers identities. For the GSO, workers’ mobilities
make knowledge management issues problematic as they offset the spatially ‘sticky,’ localized and tacit nature of some forms of knowledge in this work. Issues unique to GSOs, such as the embedded nature of human capital skills (particularly, knowledge capital); issues of mobility along with geographical, temporal and cultural separation of teams often negatively affect (the status of and access to) knowledge in the firm. Further, issues of trust, power, social and cultural dynamics, as well as national and social identity, are seen to shape knowledge transfer.

The embedded nature of knowledge, individual reflexivity, identity of IT workers and varied mobilities has implications for the various strategies that GSOs deploy to manage knowledge issues. Viewing knowledge transfer processes as collaboration, negotiation and improvisation, rather than a utopian seamless transfer of documented information, is suggested as a holistic perspective that factors in social, cultural and identity elements. Such a perspective could also be applied to customize various incentives and other retention policies used by GSOs, particularly for their key workers.

Team-working across boundaries
Software development work, particularly, with geographically and culturally dispersed teams and virtual, is increasingly common in GSOs. This study shows that such work is necessarily across various identity boundaries – geographical, political, social, national, regional, linguistic, cultural and existential. The uncertainty, of working across national and other cultural boundaries and identities, becomes a challenge for the establishment of synergistic social relations and resilient trust that needs to be developed in the team. Various sub-cultures and diverse contexts embedded within the team, along with logistical issues of time and distance, often interfere with establishing meaningful connections. Behaviors that are inexplicable, in such contexts, often get attributed to ‘culture.’ Virtual work implies developing innovative processes for creating identification within the team, setting up multiple communication channels for the task across time, space and place and managing potential tensions and breakdowns. Local particularities or cultural features could be creatively co-opted as psychological ties to create a sense of, albeit, virtual ‘we-ness’ in the global team. In this way, understanding and using identity-
related processes, as a catalyst to negotiate commonalities in the team, tends to bridge heterogeneity of work styles and communication processes.

- **Balancing Work-Life demands**
  This thesis has highlighted that IT workers experience conflict and stress in balancing the work demands that compete with personal and family time. Various mobilities coupled with temporal and physical separation of work were seen to compound the blurring of boundaries between work and family spaces. The IT workforce in India is still relatively young (for example, no IT worker has retired as yet from the case studied). Issues of stress and burnout are often ignored by workers themselves and the GSO (on a daily basis) in the rush to meet aggressive deadlines. Work-family conflict is seen as an individual level responsibility. If we adopt the view of labor markets as social and cultural constructions and not simply economic, market transactions, then it is possible to see this form of work and workplace as an open communicative framework where such issues can be (and should be) subjected to dialogue. Enabling a better work-life balance could be more a joint responsibility (of GSOs with IT workers or professional and trade associations such as NASSCOM or the Computer Society of India) to create innovative spaces for regeneration and validate the existence of employees’ multiple social identities.

To conclude, this study has proposed several practical implications flowing from the inductively derived theoretical model described in Chapter 3. While these implications are focused on the Indian context, the learnings from these can be used for other countries, such as Romania, Russia, Argentina and Indonesia, who are keen on engaging in offshore outsourcing activity and learning the intricacies of institutional and individual interlinkages in this activity. Similar to Indian GSOs, firms in these countries also face issues of attracting and retaining skilled workers, enhancing their commitment and productivity, managing mobilities and sharing and transfer of knowledge. Managers and HR personnel, in these firms, also seek to adopt and adapt ‘global’ or ‘best’ policies and

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64 Sociologists of work and the economy see markets as social, as well as cultural constructs, as much as economic ones (e.g., Dobbin, 2004).
practices in their workplaces to manage their ‘human capital.’ While issues of culture, mobility and gender were seen as dynamically intertwined with workers identities in a specific context, these categories can be applied as a template in other GSOs (both within and outside India) to understand and articulate local interpretations and manage practical issues in these contexts. Particularly for GSOs (in other Asian contexts) referring to findings from case studies such as this one is recommended for a more compatible and relevant understanding of issues in global software development, rather than case studies developed in the West which may have a different set of issues and concerns. Further, other GSOs are urged to consider the various levels of the market, industry and the firm; the particular social and cultural context and the linkage of these levels; contexts with identity construction processes of individual workers in their design; and adaption of ‘global’ policies and ‘best practices.’ This implies that processes of continuous learning, reflexivity and knowledge-sharing are not limited to workers, but also apply to managers and HR personnel in GSOs across the world seeking to evolve more innovative and enabling policies and processes for this challenging workforce.

In summary, this study has both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretical implications broadly constitute possibilities for analytic understanding of issues related to ICT mediated work in globalizing contexts. Practical implications suggest means and possibilities for various actors especially managers and HR professionals to handle people and related issues in GSOs.
Knowledge, knowledge work and knowledge workers and important themes surround contemporary discussions of globalization and the digital divide. Similarly, in recent years, there has been great interest in the concept of identity and globalization processes (Hall, 1996). GSW work is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon and one must view this phenomenon with a dynamic framework. In this thesis, I have presented an in-depth, theoretically informed, empirical analysis of self and identity processes of knowledge workers engaged in GSW while employed within a GSO in India. Rather than focus on trade agreements, policies of the state or corporate structures, I have interpreted the stories and experiences of these workers by means of a thick description (Geertz, 1973). Straddling across several disciplines, the theoretical perspective developed and described in Chapter 3 has elucidated a conceptual linkage between the ‘macro’ and the ‘micro’ multiple interconnected levels of the global market, the IT industry, the GSO and the self and identity of the IT worker. In the midst of passionate debates over offshore outsourcing and its significant political implications, I have provided empirical substance to the ‘voice’ of this group of workers whose individual experiences are often taken for granted in discussions of India’s ‘talent pool,’ ‘skilled resources’ or ‘human capital’.

Giddens (1991) emphasizes the interlinking between institutional level dynamics and self–identity as a critical feature of globalization processes. Castells (1996) has described the power of identity as a feature that defines the network society. This study suggests that while the IT industry in India illustrates the intertwining and negotiations of spaces and practices that were earlier associated with capitalism in the West, the effects in terms of work regimes, organizational cultures and practices, consumption practices and selves and identities of workers, are organized and experienced culturally in very distinct ways. Rather than uni-directional, homogenous flows from powerful centers to less-powerful peripheries, GSOs embodied glocalization (Robertson, 1992) processes where incoming global influences were encountered and selectively internalized, or ’glocalised,’ at the local level to meet local needs and the local, as well, was also a source of outgoing flows.
Further, GSOs also illustrated the reverse effects of globalization (or ‘reverse colonization’ as suggested by Giddens in 1999) where events in non-western contexts influence and shape happenings in the west.

Consequently, rather than a ‘phantasmagoric’ (Giddens, 1990) experience, individuals were seen to be placed somewhere along the global-local dialectic. ‘Thinking global, acting local’ as well as ‘thinking local, acting global’ can then be seen as a sentiment that points to placing the local and the particular within the discontinuous spaces of GSW. In this space, virtuality and endless mobilities were seen to defer to forms of place, and the pull of primordial ties, a strong identity marker and fundamental for solidarity between individuals as well as workers and the organization. The notion of a locally transcendent work organization and a borderless world, resulting from the annihilation of geographical space (Ohmae, 1990), is rent asunder by the persistence of social relationships and cultural patterns within various spatial levels (regional, national, and cross-border) that were seen as intricately enmeshed in this workplace.

The IT industry in India, with its volatile and variegated flows of information, people, and technologies, is a microcosm of the fluctuations of ICT mediated global processes. Mobilities of the industry, work, workers and the GSO were seen as distinctive features of this industry with sets of tensions and possibilities. Gender-related constructions and cultural features, of both place and space, inflected the daily working lives and relations of people within the workplace of the GSO. We can say that individuals ‘make’ GSOs. The market and individuals were also seen to be ‘made’ by these influences through a range of means and discourses within and outside the firm. These means spanned the range of market-driven shifts in technology focus, international standardizing processes for work to performance management systems and existential issues, such as fear of obsolescence and possibilities for professional growth or stagnation. These influences were seen to have a powerful relational connection with workers selves and their identity constructions and the various reflexive and adaptive strategies individuals employed to secure a ‘psychic’ place for themselves within the GSO. Individual and institutional reflexivity were noted as parallel processes, each employing socially and culturally
situated ways of ‘being’ and ‘doing.’ Risks associated with flexibility, uncertainty and unpredictability were seen to pervade not only macro-level contextual conditions, but also implicated in the everyday lives of the GSO and its workers. In these ways, this thesis delineates how globalization flows ‘touch the ground’ in a particular setting.

In recent years, narratives, from the national and international media of the success of IT in India, are displacing the bad news of poverty, famine and economic stagnation of the country’s past. India is seen as the newest Asian tiger joining Singapore, Taiwan, South Korea and Hong Kong on the path to economic wealth (Prestowitz, 2005). At the World Economic Forum in Davos in January 2006, the ‘India Everywhere’ was launched as a massive campaign by the Indian delegation which included IT company leaders to promote the country as the world’s next economic superstar. Yet, would economic prosperity make for true modernity and further, does the IT industry make a better India or a more modern Indian? A detailed sociological analysis of modernity in India has already been provided by Gupta (2000). In the context of this project, perhaps IT workers can be imagined as the modernizers of the future given their youthfulness of age and energy, their educational qualifications and prestigious social positioning, their desire for growth and their exposure to diverse cultures and practices from around the world. As they experience the freedoms of open and team-based workplaces, and the unshackling of ties of caste, clan and kin in their working lives they might be able to take this modernist agenda forward through their individual actions and interactions and contribute to the carving of a truly modern identity that transcends the borders of the nation state. Perhaps, in the near future, it is this group who will ‘global professionals’ or ‘cosmopolitans’ in the true sense of the term.

This project has some limitations that offer some future research directions. Firstly, the context of India and further, a GSO (within the city of Mumbai) has been studied. While, this has provided depth and focus in analysis, it is limited in developing specific implications that could be relevant to other contexts.
Secondly, while this study has linked the macro to the micro levels in several ways, the case investigated could be broadened to make it more comprehensive. For example, while the field site covered several office locations of the same company, ethnographic material (of onsite experience of workers) could not be collected during the course of this project although this was initially planned. Perhaps a longitudinal case study, following a set of workers across roles, assignments, jobs and also other non-work contexts, would provide an extended perspective of identity-dynamics, space and place re-locations -- the linkages between these and organizational and market shifts.

Another extension of this project is a critical analysis of fast proliferating discourses of self-help, self-knowledge and personal growth, particularly those relating to management of work. In India, a profusion of books and lifestyle magazines, courses and programs offering techniques for self-enhancement and improving one’s social skills are part of a broader cultural phenomenon. Discourses pertaining to work suggest ‘how to’ become and manage oneself and maintain a coherent narrative of the self, as one traverses the constantly shifting and risky scenario of organizational and market changes. A critical and in-depth analysis of how individual workers, in globalizing workspaces, make sense of these discourses and particularly how managerial discourses and neo-liberal constructs such as ‘value addition,’ ‘flexibility’ and ‘deliverables’ (to name just a few) encroach into one’s personal life and relationships enabling us to understand the subjective impact of the ‘grip’ of these discourses. While this study has described this briefly, a critical analysis of this seepage can further enhance our understanding of management ideologies in daily, lived lives of employees engaged in their individual ‘project of the self’ and the contribution of these ideologies towards workers subjectivities and construction of identities.

Thirdly, an arena for further research is a comparison of how diverse regimes of work cultures, in firms along the IT work continuum in the new economy, influence identity construction processes of workers. For example, comparisons could be made with workplace settings in the IT Enabled Sector (ITES) also referred to as Business Process

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Outsourcing (BPO) sector and also firms engaged in high-end R&D outsourced work referred to as Knowledge Process Outsourcing (KPO). A comparison with virtual teams, that are challenged to overcome social, cultural and physical barriers and place based identifications and create trust, shared meaning for business outcomes, could be made to highlight contexts of place and space. Further, investigating the processes and practices of surveillance, control over work and workers and their implications for alienation and the possibilities of covert and overt resistance to these practices in detail, as referenced briefly in this work, is another possibility for future research. Such comparisons and investigations are expected to yield interesting and insightful findings with both theoretical and practical implications for social change.

Finally, the contribution of this thesis to a ‘sociology of mobilities’ could be extended to analyze, in much more detail, how circuits of globalization simultaneously internationalize and bypass or immobilize groups of people and specific places, shaping notions of modernity and economic progress. For example, the IT parks (or ‘temples of modern India’) usually stand in gleaming grandeur next to slums and shanties that lack basic amenities and are occupied by the poor and illiterate laborers who built these very parks and edifices. Consequently, some of the questions that this study raises are: 1) Do the fruits of the IT revolution accrue only to members of the middle class who have built on their cultural and social capital of higher education, knowledge and networks (acquired through professional career moves), or are there ways for it to trickle downwards? 2) What are the new hierarchical social structures and configurations of power that are created as a result of neo-liberal economic policies, and how do these contribute to already existing social polarizations and geographical and spatial inequalities in a country like India? 3) How do we understand (and justify) the disparities wrought by structures of mobile capitalisms that reconfigure economic and social arrangements? 4) Further, how do these disparities widen and even fix into specific positions existing economic, cultural and social distances within proximally situated locales such as in mega cities like Mumbai and Bangalore? Perhaps with the help of the lens of mobilities, future research can investigate these questions while unraveling the
project of economic development and modernity in India which like globalization is, undoubtedly, uneven and heterogeneous.

Despite its limitations, this thesis has hopefully succeeded in making a substantial contribution to a range of disciplines. The inductively derived theoretical model, and the practical implications flowing from this, can be applied as a lens to analyze other similar contexts within India or GSOs in other countries. The elaboration of an ethnography of mobilities, in particular, can be deployed in other similar geographical contexts developing their offshore outsourcing capabilities and seeking a place in the global economic order.

Finally, I conclude with a quote by Mahatma Gandhi which in my view, symbolizes the state of ‘being’ and ‘doing’ that would facilitate India, the IT industry, the GSO and the individual IT worker to mobilize their modernities as they confront (on a daily basis) the oscillations of globalizing processes:

“I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any.”
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APPENDIX 1

Marisa D'Mello (2005).

“THINKING LOCAL, ACTING GLOBAL”: ISSUES OF IDENTITY AND RELATED TENSIONS IN GLOBAL SOFTWARE ORGANIZATIONS IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT
This article highlights the view that in contemporary society issues related to self and identity are inseparable from the multiple interconnected levels that link the individual with institutions impacted by globalization. Global software organizations (GSOs) are one of the institutions impacted by volatile changes in the global market. IT professionals employed in these institutions and engaged in knowledge-intensive work are exhorted to ‘think global - act local’. However, the lived local experience of employees is often the reverse. Drawing on an interpretative analysis of empirical data from a case study of a GSO in India, this article uses two tensions to illustrate the dynamics of the global-local interplay. These are family orientation versus individualism and standardization versus customization. Using the analytic lens of reflexivity, macro-level dynamics of globalizing influences emerge as linked to micro-level dynamics of personal dispositions. Thus, in response to market fluctuations, IT workers and GSOs construct and mobilize identity-related elements in a conscious, capable, and reflexive manner. It is suggested that local particularities and identity-related constructions cannot be seen as excluded from organizational or global identities, as they both mutually influence each other.

Keywords
Global, local, self, identity, knowledge worker, and reflexivity

1. INTRODUCTION

Year: 2000
Place: Mumbai, India

B. Ramsubramaniam1 (called Rams by his customer in the USA) is 28 years old and works as a Module Leader in a software export company. This is his second job in three years. He heads a team of three developers, on a financial application project for a customer in the USA and reports to the Project Leader. He works hard, is very knowledgeable about various programming languages, and can troubleshoot issues quickly. So far, he has been able to deliver his modules, as per the project plan, and now wants an overseas assignment.

Rams comes from a family of four children with two younger sisters and an older brother. He lives with his parents and sisters in a small apartment in Mumbai city. His father has recently retired and his mother is a schoolteacher. Rams’ aim is to buy both a house and car, as well as to marry and settle down before he is 30 years old. However, the expenses for these will be huge. A long overseas working stint, preferably in the USA, where the saving

1 B. Ramsubramaniam corresponds to a real life individual encountered by the author. His actual name is kept confidential, as well as all other names of respondents in this study.

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potential is high, would significantly increase his economic, social, and professional status. The dowry (bridegroom price) he could command in the marriage market from his native place, Tamil Nadu, would be much more. After all, his parents went through much hardship to put him through Engineering college. He would need to contribute towards their maintenance as well as to the marriages of his sisters.

The technology platform Rams is currently working on is slightly dated. His aim is to become a Project Manager by the time he is 32 years old and have considerable overseas exposure under his belt. However, neither the Manager nor the customer wants to release him just yet. He is clearly an asset to the project. They are, therefore, not willing to commit to a release date for him. He is getting restless and afraid his technical skills will soon become obsolete.

Rams starts the process of searching for a job in the USA. By scanning the Internet, the local newspapers, and also tapping into his social network, he soon finds a job with a start up company in the USA on the same platform he is working on. The net salary is high and they are willing to process his green card. However, they want him to start work at the customer site within two weeks. He is confident of doing well in the USA, once he has a foothold there. His father is worried about what he interprets as a lack of stability in this decision, but he is happy for his son. Rams hands in his resignation and asks to be relieved within one week. His Manager and the HR person try negotiating with him and even the customer asks him to stay on for a while, but he does not budge— he pays up the notice period and hands over his responsibilities to his boss, since they have not been able to find a suitable replacement quickly. He quits, without qualms, proud of his jump to follow his dreams...

Year: 2002
Place: Mumbai, India
Rams is back in Mumbai. September 11th events (and the subsequent global dip) have had a disastrous impact on his company in the USA. He was retrenched overnight. He had tried to find another job but nothing materialized. He liked the USA and early on decided to stay for a couple of years and purchased a house and a car. Unwilling to give in to the new realities, he tried hard but, after living on his savings for four months, he finally decided he would have to return home. It was depressing, as his friends were in a similar state. The market did not show any signs of improving despite news reports of a potential upswing. He e-mailed his previous company in India for a job, confident of being re-hired. However, his earlier unprofessional departure had created a feeling of distrust and they did not want him back even though he was a good technical lead. He experienced a pang of regret about how he had chosen to exit, but pacified himself by thinking that he had no way of knowing then that he would ever be in the current situation. Dispirited, he returned home and started the job hunt in companies within and outside the city.

It was often hard to get an interview and even harder to get through the questions with his previous self-confidence. Answering the question, “What made you leave your job in the USA?” was tough and his response became “family commitments.” He noticed that the interviewers were now focusing more on communication and ‘soft skills’ rather than hardcore platform knowledge. Even though the reasons were completely market-related, he felt ashamed and considered himself a failure. His feelings began to show through his body language and stilted communication. His only aim, at present, was to get a job no matter what role, geographical location/platform, or salary. All his personal plans had been put on hold...

In this narrative Rams is our quintessential ‘knowledge worker’ based in India buffeted by

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the global waves of change in the world of information technology (IT). His story gives us an insight into the construct of identity of the IT professional in India and the local-global dialectic at multiple interconnected levels of the self, the profession, the organization, the global market, and society. In this paper, I use the narrative of Rams as a backdrop to understand the self and identity-related dynamics of IT professionals employed in GSOs in India.

In the past few decades, the political and social implications of globalization and identity have been much debated. For example, Castells (1997) argues that in our globalizing world, individuals and groups feeling uprooted will respond to this pressure through what he calls the ‘power of identity’. Sennett (1998) makes a case that in the place of traditional meanings of work, people now participate in IT mediated activities like a ‘project’, ‘mission’, or ‘task force’ which are volatile and temporary. This, he posits, affects the character of people and poses a major existential question, ‘How do I know who I am?’ Technology and electronic media, both viewed as agents of globalization, have also been linked to self and identity. For example, Turkle (1984, 1996) referred to the computer as a ‘second self’ while saying that cyberspace eroded boundaries between the real and the virtual, the unitary and multiple self, and also changed our very identity, among other things.

Within IS research, the study of the relationship of globalization with individual and organizational identities framed in global business settings has been limited. This is despite the recent studies on organizational image and identity in Indian software firms (Sahay et al., 2003) and shifts in personal and professional identity linked to information and communication technologies (ICTs) in different contexts (Walsham, 1998, 2002). These studies are too few given the rapid changes in IT mediated work, the modified organizational arrangements of global businesses, and the increasing number of people who are employed in ICT dependent industries across continents. Also, as firms globalize and add clients from new geographical markets, the boundaries between networked institutions become fused even more, thus straining individuals who need to constantly shift between work, social, and technical contexts. Changes in identity are closely interlaced with these shifts (Sahay et al., 2003). This paper is a response to Walsham’s (1998) call for more micro-level studies on these linkages in order to enhance our understanding of ICTs and individual and social changes, especially related to understanding the dynamics of self and identity in the context of global work arrangements.

The two questions that this paper attempts to answer are: What are the dynamics that influence self and identity constructions among IT professionals employed in GSOs? How do IT professionals and GSOs engage with these dynamics to maintain or revise their identity constructions? By elucidating these dynamics at multiple interrelated levels of self, organization, and market, this paper seeks to provide deeper insights into the interplay of the local and global, as well as how the self is implicated in this interplay. Two relevant tensions are described from the case to illustrate the dynamics of globalization processes and market fluctuations, reflexivity, along with their linkage to self and identity. The case exemplifies Giddens’s (1991) argument that, in present-day society, issues related to self and identity are inseparable from the multiple interconnected levels that link the individual with the institutions impacted by globalization.

This paper has been organized as follows: In this introduction the notions of self and identity have been described. In Section 2, their significance in knowledge intensive work within GSOs is elucidated. In Section 3, the changes in the Indian IT industry, which frames the context for my case, have been outlined. In section 4, the methodology adopted is described. In Section 5, two tensions in my case reflecting the interplay of identity within the global–local contexts of GSOs in India are discussed. In Section 6, I have described the
theoretical and practical implications of this research and, finally, in Section 7, state my conclusions.

2. SELF AND IDENTITY AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE IN KNOWLEDGE INTENSIVE WORK WITHIN GSOs

Self and identity are important for we apprehend and experience the world (e.g., other people, things we read or see, etc.) through our filter of self and our individual frameworks of who we are and are not. Conceptualizations of self and identity have been studied using approaches ranging from the traditional view of identity as unitary and stable and residing within an inner ‘core’ of the individual (e.g., Albert and Whetten, 1985; Freud, 1961) to post-modern notions of self and identity as being mobile and fragmented (e.g., Featherstone, 1990; Gergen, 1991).

In this paper, I have adopted Giddens’s (1991) concept of self-identity as a middle ground. Giddens (1991) describes self-identity as “the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography” (p. 53). A person integrates the events in the world within his or her ongoing narrative or story about himself/herself. Self-identity, he says, is a feeling of biographical continuity across time and space that can also be communicated to others. Furthermore, he states, it includes an acceptance of integrity as being worthwhile, a filter that protects the person from dangers threatening the integrity of the self, and a feeling of oneself as alive with a sense of reflexive control. The central feature of the self in modern society, he argues, is its reflexivity which involves a constant questioning and reconstruction of the self, as a lifetime project. In other words, we reconstruct our selves by constantly constructing and revising our personal stories.

Contemporary society is characterized by an increase in uncertainty about changing traditions, values and relationships, as well as changes mediated by technology (Calhoun, 1995; Giddens, 1991). Rapid social changes and globalization processes disrupt the temporal and spatial certainties offered by community, place, stable employment, class structures, and the institutions of religion, state, and the family. The uncertainty, thus inherent in modern society, has sometimes led to it being referred to as the ‘risk society’ (Beck, 1992). With increased uncertainty, Giddens (1991) argues, individuals persistently construct and revise a story of their own self-identity to anchor their sense of self in order to feel a sense of ontological security. Furthermore, he states that the “integral relation between modernity and radical doubt,” (p.183), implied by the constant monitoring and utilization of new knowledge, creates existential anxiety or even a sense of personal meaninglessness in the individual. Thus, in modern society, self-identity is not a given but “something that has to be routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual” (Giddens, 1991, p. 52).

Giddens’s emphasis on the active, conscious, and reflexive practices of identity construction provides an analytical lens to understand how ‘knowledge workers,’ like Rams, appear to experience the contemporary ‘risk society’ characterized by the turbulent and complex environment of GSOs. Rams’ case exemplifies the consequence of living in a global and risk society on the self and identity at a very fundamental level of being. His narrative reflects Giddens’s (1991) argument, that “transformations in self-identity and globalization are the two poles of the dialectics of the local and the global” (p.32). In contemporary society, identity needs to be examined at the multiple interconnected levels of the local self and the various social, economic, and political institutions impacted by globalization. For example, changes in the global configurations, such as those due to the USA dotcom bust or the perceived risk of an Indo-Pakistan war after September 9/11, and related consequences, influences both institutional arrangements along with the individual’s sense of identification or self worth.
Examining these interconnections is especially relevant in the context of GSOs. Engaged in knowledge-intensive software development work (Nicholson and Sahay, 2004), GSOs emphasize the focus on the individual as well as the institutional context situated within a global configuration of outsourcing partners. Knowledge work is described as producing and reproducing information and knowledge (Stehr, 1994), cerebral (Davis and Nauman, 1997), defying routinization unlike the scripting of ‘service work’ (Drucker, 1993), and requiring formal education i.e. technical and theoretical knowledge (Starbuck, 1992). Knowledge workers are well-educated and qualified professionals who produce creative objects and/or services and solutions by using their knowledge as a major resource (Alvesson, 1993; Starbuck, 1992). Knowledge-intensive companies such as management firms, computer consultancy firms, R&D units, as well as GSOs, employ knowledge workers and are imbued with ambiguity where the ‘product’ is intangible, uncertainty and contradictions abound, and the distinction between ‘labor’ and ‘knowledge’ is merged (Alvesson, 2001).

Knowledge workers in GSOs include programmers, designers, analysts, and managers (also referred to as IT professionals/workers) engaged in design, development, testing, and implementation of software. In software development the knowledge work or mental activity is intangible in the sense that while it cannot be touched by human hands, it can be accessed through optical or magnetic devices. The traditional distinction between service and product work is also unclear as software development involves characteristics of both, in varying blends, depending on the nature of the projects (Sahay et al., 2003). Tasks at various stages of the software life cycle are often separated and implemented at diverse geographic locations and coordinated using ICTs. Qualities of intangibility, heterogeneity, scalability and mobility are implicated in software work, differentiating such work from manufacturing or other ICT services (Sahay et al., 2003). In order to deal with the complexity of knowledge, and also to homogenize operations between the outsourcing and outsourced firms, GSOs often seek to standardize software development processes and methodologies (Bartlett and Ghoshal, 2000). Similarly, management processes, such as company policies across their development centres located in different parts of the globe, are also often standardized. However, standardization attempts are rarely unproblematic as local idiosyncrasies and particularities asserted by managers or employees, especially in smaller software firms, make the task of applying universal global solutions, very complex. Thus, software work is quite unique and complex and, as Alvesson (2001) further states, “...many knowledge-intensive workers must struggle more for the accomplishment, maintenance, and gradual change of self-identity, compared to workers whose competence and results are more materially grounded” (p. 877).

Identity also tends to be employed by GSOs, both externally and internally, in an instrumental manner. In a fiercely competitive and dynamic global environment, GSOs vie with each other to maintain and enhance their market image and identity. Internally, they struggle with issues of high attrition and IT staff shortages. To respond to the expanding and urgent career development needs of their staff, HR management efforts in GSOs typically focus on creating corporate cultures and identification structures, that not only aim to attract and retain skilled IT professionals, but also engage their ‘hearts and minds’ while at work (Igbaria and Shayo, 2004). IT workers, the world over, are said to be more strongly attached to their profession than the organization, valuing creativity and challenge in work, self-expression in the workplace and managing their careers as projects in themselves (Pittinsky and Shih, 2004; Rathi, 2003; Saxenian, 1996). To manage these expectations and issues, GSOs need to reflexively monitor and modify their internal and external processes in a continuous manner.

Software work also involves a range of social and human issues that are related directly to the knowledge worker’s self and identity. For example, relationships of people, teams, organizations, and nations with diverse social and cultural backgrounds, coupled with
individual styles of work, are inevitable facets of software work carried out in a global setting (Sahay et al., 2003). Working across temporal and spatial separation magnifies the complexity of such work. Besides the required formal education for the job, this work also demands, on a constant basis, different degrees of knowledge and skills that need continuous updating as it reflects the volatile changes in technologies and platforms in the global marketplace. This puts pressure on IT workers to be in a constant learning mode to make themselves ‘marketable’ both within and outside the organization.

The changes necessitated for IT professionals employed in GSOs are varied, requiring them to be able to rapidly switch between projects, technologies and countries. IT professionals work under demands of tight project schedules and travel to overseas customer locations, while simultaneously juggling differences in time zones, cultures, and work styles. Adding to this, the pressures of getting updated on ‘leading edge technologies’ or acquiring ‘hot’ and current skills, can generate emotions ranging from anxiety and insecurity to confidence and hope (Igbaria and Shayo, 2004). These feelings relate to self-esteem and impact the IT professional at an existential level. Affirming this at a broader level, Lee (1999) states: ‘Few professions in human history have seen such rapid changes in their knowledge base and work requirements as in the field of IS today. These changes are driven not just by the unprecedented amount of new technical knowledge…but also by the changing business environment…and the changing role of IS within organizations.’ (p.856). These changes suggest two things: First, they highlight the interconnectedness of the local and global levels, affirming Giddens’s (1991) argument that while globalization can be understood at an institutional level, the resultant changes directly impact at an individual level. Second, they point to the very direct impact of this interconnection on self-esteem and identity. Worldwide job stress and early burnout are commonly reported in this group (Igbaria and Shayo, 2004). We saw how Rams’ self-esteem was profoundly impacted by the ambiguity and volatility of the global market.

Finally, while the interconnection between the global and the local has been around for some time, what is unique today is the reversibility of effects, particularly in GSOs (Sahay et al., 2003). Unlike the traditional globalization effects from developed to developing countries, it is argued that GSOs ‘reflect globalization’ effects where events and processes in developing countries impact those in the developed countries (Nicholson and Sahay, 2001). For example, a UK based company, Gowing, trained Indian software analysts in international software methodologies. Globalization involved the disembedding of methods from an Indian context and re-embedding of these methods into the UK context by the analysts. Gowing employees responded negatively to this business-related process (Nicholson and Sahay, 2001). The recent backlash in the USA and UK against outsourcing of programming and other IT enabled jobs and services to India (The Times of India, 2003; Pink, 2004) exemplifies how human emotions (anger, anxiety and insecurity, in these examples), are an inevitable component of the now bi-directional globalization influences, interlacing the global and local levels, directly implicating elements of self and identity.

To summarize, that Giddens (1991) and Castells (1996) have argued that the increased interconnection between globalizing influences and personal dispositions are a distinctive feature of contemporary life or risk society. In response to a turbulent global marketplace, individuals such as Rams, as well as GSOs, need to continuously create and revise their identity in a reflexive and capable manner. As a result of the intensification of interconnections of processes over space and time, as well as an increase in reversibility of effects, software work which involves a variety of human, technical, and managerial issues, has become complex. GSOs’ attempt to deal with this complexity through various processes that include standardization, or the reworking of corporate cultures towards engaging the ‘whole being’ of the knowledge worker. However, as discussed further on, these attempts are

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often in tension with the local peculiarities and individual idiosyncrasies of the IT professional. Examining these tensions, and their interrelatedness with identity processes, gives us a deeper insight into the dynamics of the interplay of macro and micro level processes at multiple levels within the global-local dialectic. These insights also help develop management implications, related to recruitment and retention strategies.

3. Case Study Context
I now describe the context of the Indian IT industry, highlighting the changes involved in the industry as well as within GSOs.

India presents an interesting case of a developing country in the midst of globalization processes such as liberal economic reforms and changes in the mass media, among other dynamics (Singh, 2000). It is also described as a preferred destination for American clients for outsourcing software due to the highly skilled English speaking labor force, cost advantages, government support, and excellent quality control (Mehta, 2004). The Indian IT industry, as well as GSOs, can be seen as a microcosm of the diaspora of technologically mediated global processes, and presents an apt setting to examine issues of self and identity in the global-local dialectic.

From the late 1980’s and early 1990’s, the IT sector in India has been the fastest growing industry in the country. The total number of IT and IT enabled Services (ITES) professionals employed in the sector has grown from 284,000 in 1999-2000 to 813,500 in 2003-2004 (Mehta, 2004). IT exports, expected to reach 12.2 billion USD by 2004, have been mainly to North American businesses. Today, such relationships are common and involve many organizations within Europe and other countries. GSOs usually make significant investments, in infrastructure and people, in the hopes of continued future projects with existing and new customers.

The IT industry in India has gone through many phases, beginning with the ‘body-shopping’ era of the early 1990s when the IT worker was seen purely as a bundle of technical skills and as skilled and inexpensive ‘bodies’ to be ‘shipped’ or ‘dispatched’ overseas at competitive rates. Technical qualifications of individuals were emphasized over behavioral competencies such as communication or interpersonal skills, thus tending to reduce the individual largely to the status of a ‘commodity’. Sky-high salaries compared to other industries, fancy designations, and quick promotions all contributed to an aggrandized sense of self for the IT professional, as in the case of Rams. Some matrimonial advertisements in the local newspapers specified that the groom should be a Software Engineer, and preferably in the USA! The professional identity and market value has apparently dominated the projection of himself or herself to the outer world. Rams’ case exemplifies this process of identification.

The global economic downturn after September 11th, 2001, which resulted in a worldwide slowdown in the demand for IT services, changed all this dramatically for GSOs and IT professionals. Confronted with the unanticipated crisis, Rams frantically hunted for a job. It was a ‘boom time’ for the GSO management who no longer felt held to ransom by this new and ‘special’ breed of individuals. They had a larger pool of people to choose from, as the attrition rates, around 35% in the 1990s, plummeted to almost 15%. Companies could actually ‘grow’ qualities of loyalty, commitment, and professionalism while neutralizing the monetary benefits that acted as the ‘golden handcuffs’ of yesteryears. As in Rams’ case, there was significantly less negotiation regarding salary and benefits; fewer requests for role change or overseas postings; and fewer concerns about becoming obsolete in the market as a result of lacking company-sponsored training. HR people breathed a sigh of relief with this change.

Since the global economy has rapidly begun to pick up, there are new dimensions to
this wave. Software exports from India to new territories in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East have opened up. These territories pose different challenges and call for competencies in ‘soft skills’ (Gilleard and Gilleard, 2002) such as knowledge of foreign languages; cultural curiosity; managing diversity; flexibility across a range of operational practices, business and social environments; credibility; and interpersonal communication. Customers are now much more mature than before and demand value that goes beyond technical skills. The phrase, ‘think global, act local’ emerged within the contexts of business corporations working across national borders (Toffler, 1982; van Houten, 1989). However, in separate conversations with customers associated with Dataex Ltd., I was told that though the economic impact of the work of the Indian developers is global, the outlook of the engineers is often, parochial. They say, instead of ‘thinking globally and acting locally’, what they find more commonly is ‘thinking locally and acting globally.’ Customers refer to this kind of thinking as ‘mindset issues’. These include lack of understanding of culture and workplace habits, communication and politeness styles (for example, when is a ‘yes’ a real ‘yes’?), reluctance to mix socially, problems with accountability and punctuality, and hierarchical interactions with superiors and subordinates. These, they say, now create a business strain. It appears that self-knowledge, in terms of understanding one’s own cultural values and how they affect one’s attitudes and behaviors, coupled with international awareness, has become a new backdrop against which technical expertise gets expressed. Unlike technical skills, such competencies call for self-reflection and are directly linked to self-identity and self-worth, both personally and professionally. This, indeed, is the change that Rams experienced during the interviews he went for on his return to India. Thus, issues, related to self and identity, consistently interplay with the ups and downs with GSOs in the Indian context.

My case, Dataex Ltd., is a medium sized GSO, headquartered in Mumbai, India, with offices in six different countries across the globe. Dataex Ltd. employs around 2300 IT professionals and offers offshore outsourcing solutions to overseas clients. It has been assessed at Level 5 on the Capability Maturity Model for its Software Processes (SW-CMM) and at Level 3 for its People Processes (P-CMM). These internationally recognized quality standards have been developed by the US based Software Engineering Institute (Mehta, 2004). Dataex Ltd. has a joint venture with one of the Big Five Consulting companies and partnership arrangements with companies in the UK and USA.

4. METHODOLOGY
In this section, I outline the method employed for the empirical research. In my role as a Human Resource (HR) Manager in the Indian IT industry for nine years, I worked closely with employees like Rams. In this role, I had the opportunity to be privy to their personal lives and felt intrigued with how Indian IT professionals manage their inner worlds while also engaging with various technology mediated and socio-culturally diverse outer worlds. Generally, they appear to do so, in a ‘successful’ manner. These experiences and observations prompted me to leave my profession and adopt a new identity, that of a researcher.

The empirical material that I present in this paper is drawn from a larger research project on understanding identity-related processes of IT professionals employed in GSOs in India. I use a case study method approach, based on an interpretative, ethnographic approach to IS research (Walsham, 1993). An ethnographic approach seems appropriate to the study of identity processes since it remains close to the ways people experience and make sense of themselves and others (Van Maanen, 1979). My fieldwork has meant a shift from my previous ‘insider’ manager-employee role in the organization, to that of an ‘outsider’ researcher role who has returned to the organization attempting to look at people, situations,

2 The name of the company is kept confidential.
and events through a fresh lens. Balancing an ex-insider/employee and an outsider/researcher identity has also been reported in anthropological fieldwork in institutional contexts of this nature (Garsten, 1994; Moore, 1986). It has, indeed, been a challenging experience for me.

I conducted in-depth and semi-structured interviews of around 35 employees, between December 2003 and March 2004. The respondents included Developers, Module Leaders, Project Leaders, Project Managers, and Unit/Function Heads. Each interview typically lasted around 60-80 minutes. The interviews usually began with my sharing the aim of the research project, a promise of anonymity, and a request for the interview to be tape-recorded. Respondents most often said they were happy to contribute to research involving their professional group as it was expected to have ‘some future benefits’ which they were unable to often specify. Besides interview data, I have also used field notes and observations from ‘hanging around’ workstations, the cafeteria, commuting in the company bus to the office and back home, attending team and company gatherings, and reviewing some of the company’s promotional materials. I have also drawn extensively on my experience in the various GSOs that I have been associated with during my career as an HR professional. The themes that consistently emerged from the data reflected several paradoxes and conflicts. Two such paradoxes were predominant in the themes and also resonated with my experiences and interpretations. These were formulated as tensions and are described below.

5. TENSIONS IN GSOs
In this section, I describe the two tensions between the global and local. The poles of the tensions reflect the extremes of what Giddens (1991) terms extensionality and intentionality: globalizing influences, on the one hand, and individual dispositions on the other.

5.1. Family Orientation versus Individualism
The idea of family culture is a concept that is said to be inherently appealing to the Indian psyche (Kanungo, 1995). Many Indian organizations, particularly GSOs, mobilize this strong identification structure within their workplace culture and enrolment practices so that employees feel a sense of rootedness and belonging (Sahay and Walsham, 1997; Sahay et al., 2003; Sinha and Sinha, 1987). Given typically high attrition rates in GSOs, as compared to other industries, management in these companies aims to enrol the hearts and minds of their workers in the corporate values and ethos to keep employees engaged. Some of these processes aim to fuse or interlace the identity of the individual to that of the organization. For example, the company name may be used to address employees. So ‘Mastekeers’ are employees working at Mastek Ltd., and ‘Infoscions’ are employees of Infosys Ltd. At Dataex Ltd., social identification practices exemplifying family culture, include encouraging friendships at work; having family friendly policies; holding social events for employees and their families; celebrating religious festivals in the office; inviting family members to contribute to the company magazine; and encouraging spouses’ involvement in company activities. The intention is to merge ‘global’ work, technology, and quality of services offered by the organization with ‘local’ practices and meaning so as to meet the demands of customers as well as create a satisfying workplace for the employees.

While the IT person is inside the organization, a family or community culture is not experienced as completely antithetical to his/her individualism. Belongingness is a deep human need as well as affirming an individual’s social identity. For example, Disha, a Senior Project Manager at Dataex Ltd. stated, “Because of inevitable long hours at work and long commutes to the office in Bombay city, IT people build up strong social networks within the company. Outside of the office, apart from family members, there is little time and energy to socialize with others.” So employees do develop friendships with other colleagues and also enjoy the company-organized family-related events and practices.

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However, these attempts at creating social and family-based bonding are often in tension with the IT worker’s constant attempts to assess how marketable he/she is and see growth in terms of learning and ‘adding value’ through individual work. Such internal processes are supported by organizational systems of job roles, training and development plans, individual performance appraisals, and promotion policies etc., which are directed at each employee. The IT person stays engaged to the extent that these systems match the needs of ‘adding value’ to him or her. When they do not, the choice is often to quit, further emphasizing individual needs over family conceptions. So, for example, Roy, a Developer, who had already changed jobs three times in four years said, “See, ultimately all IT companies are almost the same. They are young, they have open cultures, and there are lots of celebrations and events in the company for the families of employees. So the main thing is to get what adds value to me. And if in the process, I can also enjoy the other things, then that is what I call a good working environment.” Echoing a similar sentiment, Asha, a Module Leader at Dataex Ltd. stated, “It is all a learning process, adding more skills. There is never any end. I can never say I am a master or expert. And if I feel I need to grow more and this organization cannot take care of this need, I will quit. It is all about adding value to myself.” These responses suggest very conscious, reflexive, choice-making processes among IT employees, where greater weight is given to the processes of learning new skills and ‘adding value’ to oneself, so that one is constantly marketable over just being satisfied with organizational processes that are appealing to their social affiliation needs.

The job recession confronting Rams, that happened in 2002 - 2003, also challenged the family culture notion in many Indian GSOs. Employees were often retrenched in large numbers and in impersonal ways, such as one day dismissals or a dismissal communicated via e-mail. An employee lamented about the associated uncertainties, “A company may say anything about its culture, but you are never sure of where you stand. It’s all a game.” At Dataex Ltd., despite no explicit retrenchment of people in any way, performance norms were made more stringent which may have caused some people to exit the company. Despite various assurances by senior management, employees were still skeptical. For example, Arvind, a Project Leader at Dataex Ltd. commented, “In IT, today, there is no job security as such unless you as an employee are performing and performing and performing. In spite of this, you can be shown the door as we saw in the company located a floor below in our building. It is very insulting. You can literally feel the insecurity. The question mark is always there, like the sword of Damocles.”

At the individual level, employees had their own strategies to cope with these tensions. For example, Ganesh, a Module Leader at Dataex Ltd. stated: “It does feel good to work for a company in which you feel you are at home and which has a caring culture. I, and my family too, can enjoy the festivals and events that are organized in the company. But I keep my eye on the bottom line in the market and if I am not learning and growing all this is icing on the cake. After all, in this profession, I am responsible for my career progression.” Similar responses were also echoed in various informal conversations with other employees, emphasizing the salience of the global marketplace in the IT worker’s construction of his/her professional trajectory in the organization.

In personal choice-making processes, family values seem to predominate. Indian IT professionals are often seen to put the interest of their family members before their own career growth. For example, attachment to one’s family, particularly with aging or sick parents, and a strong sense of family responsibility stood out as a value when IT people would request relocation from onsite assignments or time off from work, often with adverse financial implications. In selecting a spouse for marriage, many respondents expressed a preference for a traditional ‘arranged’ marriage for themselves, as opposed to ‘falling in love’ or finding a partner on their own. This preference is quite common in most parts of India,
including big cities (Singer, 1972). In such marriage traditions, the individual person leaves most of the negotiation process to the family elders, and although he/she is involved in the choice of a spouse, the social context forms the prime backdrop. “When I have to get married, I will leave the final choice of the girl to my parents. Of course I will meet her a few times to see if we can talk together, but the rest will be taken care of by my parents,” said Anand, a 24 year old Developer. This apparent respect for elders, and their decisions, seemed in contradiction to the individual-based trajectories followed in the case of professional growth.

5.2. Standardization versus Customization

In global software work, standardization of methodologies, software development processes, and programming languages is considered critical. The primary reason for this is that, in such work, these are often disembedded and fragmented across geographical, temporal, and spatial boundaries (Sahay et al., 2003). Standardization is a strategy to enable these complex processes to be smoothly coordinated. Indian GSOs employ the US-centric paradigms of ISO, CMM, and now Six Sigma as international quality standards to gain customer confidence. India is said to have the highest number of software organizations in the world at CMM Level 5 (Mehta, 2004) and globally has a reputation as a supplier of not only low-cost but also high-quality software.

On the one hand, such global benchmarking labels seek to create and maintain universalization of standards and credibility with customers while, on the other hand, they often create discord in those responsible for implementing the standardization. For example, the developer has to complete reams of documentation as part of the quality processes implementation. Due to time pressures, this work is often given lower priority than the technical development. Developers complain, “I know we are CMM Level 5, etc. However, these administrative activities are such a pain and so boring. They don’t do anything for my job or career and take up so much time.” This comment ties in with the popular notion of knowledge work, being cerebral and non-routine, and reflects the Developers’ needs to identify with their career and profession rather than with organizational requirements that are not seen to ‘add value’. Paradoxically, this dichotomy leads to a questioning of key elements of software work processes, ironically contributing positively to the global image of this industry, the organization, and the profession.

The company, too, is expected to demonstrate process compliance. Several quality initiatives such as suggestion schemes, competitions, and awards for quality-related activities were introduced at Dataex Ltd. so that employees could feel more enthused about their tasks. These were partially successful. What was more successful was when the links were consistently made to their individual role. So for example, in sessions held by one of the company Directors and subsequently by the respective Project Manager, examples and data were used to relate the Developer’s activities to the ‘big picture’ of the business. It was communicated that such tasks added value to the end result delivered to the customer; that these activities contributed to the shaping of their roles; and also how the developer him/herself could also exercise creativity in process improvements in their local projects. The observed positive responses of developers to these efforts suggest the importance of creating a meaningful context by intersecting organizational task requirements with professional identity constructions. It also demonstrates the reflexivity of the organization in its attempt to reduce the organization—individual tension.

Issues of standardization versus customization also arise with respect to the extent to which employee-related organizational policies should be localized and standardized across employees, geographical locations, and teams. An example, from Dataex Ltd., illustrates this point. In the recruitment process, the candidate commits to joining the company on a
particular date per a contractual arrangement. When the hiring process takes place in India, candidates sometimes will call back and request a change of this date since it is not an ‘auspicious day’ to join the new job, according to his/her astrological chart which is believed to influence future events. The change may cause a disruption in the project plans schedule, for example, or orientation and training programs. Project Managers need to grapple with these individual preferences and social beliefs, on the one hand, and project deadlines and customer expectations, on the other. The tension in dealing with this was expressed in the following way by one irate Manager, who desperately needed a candidate to join quickly: “What can I tell my customer in the US? That I am delayed because the planets are not in place for me? We will be out of business! This is completely unprofessional.” Listening to this, another (Indian) Manager who had worked for several years in the US subsidiary of Dataex Ltd. was very surprised that ‘such things’ were ‘tolerated’ in the Indian location. In such a situation, a standard rule ‘to join only on agreed dates’ by the organization that downplays local particularities like this example, with no room for negotiation, most often fails. Also, notions of professionalism vary across individuals and across organizations. Here again, a normative stance by the organization may boomerang. For example, the individual may buy time with this reason, while waiting for another more lucrative offer.

Sometimes IT companies try and standardize care and consideration too, such as practices of gift giving on employees’ birthdays or anniversaries, celebrating special ‘days’ like Friendship Day or Rose Day and other events where spouses are invited to feel a part of the ‘family’. At Dataex Ltd., Anita, Head of HR narrated the following: “I wanted to recognize my team members on their birthdays with flowers. So I started the practice of sending a basket of roses to each of them on their birthdays. Initially, I would order the roses, and write the card myself but after some time I delegated my secretary to do it and I began to just sign the card. One day X (one reportee) came into my office, looking very happy and thanked me profusely for the roses she received the day before. I had a blank look on my face. She immediately understood and looked very crestfallen. I instantly realized that this practice had become a ritual. If that was so, my team members would also experience the same and it would not achieve what I really want to communicate. I have stopped it and want to rethink this one. It is a good thing we have not introduced it as yet in the project teams!”

From this it appears that standard processes, even though relating to care and concern run the danger of becoming ritualistic over time, degenerating into a mechanical act, opposing the very notion of care it wished to cultivate. “Caring or the personal touch can only come through individuals. It cannot come through standardization”, as stated by Anita. Such well-intentioned attempts by the organization to inculcate a sense of local identity and belongingness only seemed to boomerang resulting in more resistance among employees.
Table 1. Summary of key characteristics of tensions in GSOs

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<th>Tension</th>
<th>Some Key Characteristics</th>
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<td>1. Family vs. Individual</td>
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- Organizational attempts at family bonding are often at variance with individual’s need to grow and develop.  
- Individuals identify more with their career and profession than with the organization.  
- Family values are prominent in decisions made by IT professionals. |
| 2. Standardization vs. Customization |  
- Developers give a lower priority to implementation of standardization processes than to technical development.  
- Global benchmarking standards are seen as tedious and not ‘adding value’ to developers immediate job or career.  
- Company wide HR policies or normative stances that exclude local beliefs and particularities may often boomerang. |

Standardization has also been attempted at Dataex Ltd. with common career-related policies implemented company-wide, which is sometimes in conflict with the need for individual and specific policies related to career planning. Implementation was considered successful if the plan was in place for each and every employee. While the aim of standard plans was to increase efficiency of the process, there were several issues involved. Firstly, the concept of career itself has undergone a radical change. Today, particularly for IT professionals, career is no longer seen as a progression up a pre-determined hierarchical ladder judged by ‘time served’ (Scott, 2000). Rather, it is often a negotiation about the next steps to take, which means juggling between project needs and individual aspirations. Employees at Dataex Ltd. were encouraged to ‘take charge’ of their own careers with organizational support in the form of training or role changes. In many cases, urgent business needs often overthrew the plan and expectations were jilted. As in the case of Rams, a sense of insecurity about a lack of control over one’s immediate future was created. “As per my career plan, I am supposed to be groomed for a Module Leader role. However, for the past year and a half, in spite of my good performance, I am stuck in this project just doing coding. How and when will I ever grow? I better start making my own plans,” lamented Tejas, a Developer. Finally, assignments, which are the stepping-stones for career progression, varied from geographical territory to territory and from unit to unit and needed to be customized. This created a strain with the organizational policy of a standard company-wide plan.

6. DISCUSSION & IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Dynamics Influencing Identity Constructions
From the data, both individual and institutional reflexivity (Giddens, 1991) emerge as key dynamics characterizing the response to the peaks and troughs in the global market of GSOs, as well as individual employees. Within GSOs, reflexive actions include a spectrum of technological, organizational, and business changes. For example, GSOs might recruit huge batches of trainees or retrench them, introduce new awards or discontinue incentive schemes, forge business alliances with overseas companies to leverage their respective strengths, or adopt new standardization processes in response to market fluctuations. Externally, GSOs

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may revamp their corporate colors, create new vision and mission statements, or sponsor local and international community and trade events, to stay afloat or increase their market standings. Irrespective of the market image, GSOs strive to build employee identification within the company through corporate values, cultures, rituals and software processes. Such reflexive alterations, of the institution, imply conscious incorporation of new knowledge into an environment of action. These actions result in a reconstitution or reorganization of the story or narrative that the GSO wishes to revise about itself whether externally or internally.

However, within the organization, the reflexivity of the GSO encounters another dynamic; the reflexivity of the IT worker. The way that IT workers were seen to construct a story about their career, resonates with Grey’s (1994) notion of career as a critical site and where the reflexive project of the self as described by Giddens (1991) is conducted. In both tensions described in the earlier section, knowledge workers identify more with their career and profession than with the organization. Similarly, IT professionals, the world over, feel a greater sense of belonging and commitment to their own career and project rather than their organization (Pittinsky and Shih, 2004; Saxenian, 1994). At the Developer and Analysts’ levels in India the tenure of an IT professional is reported to be around two years (Rathi, 2003). This ‘fugitive’ nature of the IT professional, embedded within a global network, creates tension between the family feeling the organization strives to create and the individual’s own career as a project. Individuals demonstrate reflexivity by staying on in the company or leaving it, requesting new assignments or training opportunities, and engaging more or less with the organization depending on what would ‘add value’ to their career in the global market. Qualities of trust, loyalty, along with relationships take time to grow and ripen, requiring investment and repeated interpersonal transactions. The employee is typically not in the organization long enough to feel rooted and bonded. Organizations may try and ‘lock in’ employees through mechanisms such as service bonds and offering low interest housing loans or stock options. But, by the time a base is established, the IT person is ‘on the road’ again, like Rams, looking for the next promising jump. Not surprisingly, IT workers do not automatically enrol in organizational processes and more often than not, directly or subtly, resist organizational changes that appear to conflict with the projects of their selves. A ‘buy in’ from such a workforce, particularly where such changes directly relate to their roles, career growth, or actual software development work, becomes imperative.

These dynamics call for a sensitive monitoring by the GSO to attend to these subtler processes as well. For example, at Dataex Ltd. HR role holders were exhorted to always be tuned into the ‘pulse of the people’ and to keep their ‘ear to the ground’ for any signs of resistance when new changes requiring their cooperation were implemented. In meetings with Line Managers at Dataex Ltd. where such organizational changes were discussed before implementation, a common statement made by them was, “IT people are an intelligent group. They will always question these changes. If we want their full enrolment, we need to be ready with the answers, especially as to how this will benefit them.” This implies that GSOs need to constantly monitor the climate for possible risks that would have an adverse impact, both externally and internally. Also, it reinforces the view that standardization of imported globalized practices across business units dispersed around the globe can marginalize local knowledge, practices, or norms (Cross et al., 2002).

GSOs are subject to, and also reflect globalization effects (Nicholson and Sahay, 2001). For the IT worker then, the global market is not ‘out there’ as an objective inert presence but one that is ever-present within his or her daily life, interacting with the individual’s project of the self. This suggests that the reflexivity of the GSOs, as well as the employees, includes conscious choice making and negotiation processes that filter dangers threatening their respective integrity. GSOs make reflexive choices relating to organizational arrangements while individual workers make choices relating to their career and personal

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value systems. Organizational choices are aimed at preserving the life of the GSO in the global market space and ensuring its continuity and profitability. Individuals’ choices are aimed at a sense of ontological security and realizing their project of the self. This reinforces Giddens’ (1990) and Castells (1996) argument that globalization is intricately interconnected with revisions or reconstructions made by both institutions and individuals to secure themselves in a turbulent world or risk society. It also refutes the view that globalization processes impose a monolithic sameness or a cultural homogeneity in the institutions impacted by its flows (i.e. Barber, 1995; Ritzer, 1998).

6.2 Linkage of Dynamics to Identity Constructions
The reflexivity of IT professionals has several features that link it to self and identity. First, it is mainly technically focused, as ‘value addition’ is perceived as directly linked to acquiring ‘hot skills or leading edge technologies’ which are in current demand in a volatile marketplace. However, while technical skills will always be in demand, self-knowledge and international awareness now provides the new backdrop for the expression of these skills. For example, at Dataex Ltd., there were several instances where intellectually bright ‘techies’ were unsuccessful at the customer sites in Europe and had to be sent back prematurely, because of their limited competencies in communicating effectively and relating socially with the customer. Their decreased self-confidence, bewilderment, and disappointment were apparent to all. Much effort needs to be invested by HR and their managers to restore this situation. Their performance also adversely impacted the image of the Indian company with the customer. Referred to as ‘soft skills,’ these are harder to acquire as they are more intangible, subtle, and directly relate to feelings of self-worth which is typically anchored in a psychologically meaningful existential place (Godkin, 1980).

Unlike the technical aspects of global software work that can be relatively easily disembodied and re-embodied across space and place (Sahay et al., 2003), such skills and competencies are anchored in social and cultural beliefs and norms and take time along with self-reflection to emerge. IT workers are constantly subject to changes and work pressures leaving them stressed and exhausted (Moore, 2000; Igbaria and Shayo, 2004) with little time for such reflection and introspection. This issue has direct implications for HR training and development strategies in GSOs striving to make their employees ‘think global and act local.’

The second feature of reflexivity, noted among Indian IT professionals, is its predominance in the work domain. In critical choice-making processes, related to family issues or spouse selection, often Indian IT professionals demonstrate unquestioned conformity to traditional norms. At first sight, such conformity appears discordant with the IT professional’s market-focused reflexivity and fugitive nature. Singer (1972), an anthropologist, observed that it was common among Indians to compartmentalize home and work spheres. This, he argued, was an adaptive process that enabled individuals to combine different modes in the two spheres without a direct collision. The data suggests, that while IT professionals who are very much a part of the global order and continuously revise their stories in line with new knowledge from global fluctuations, they also seek to simultaneously preserve a sense of coherence and the rootedness of belonging to a continuous place (Godkin, 1980). Family is one such place. This process resonates with the view that, while GSOs increasingly operate with a placeless logic, individual employees remain “historically and biographically place-dependent” (Sahay et al., 2003, p. 39). The organizational rhetoric of family orientation, or enrolment into identification practices within GSOs, is not fully

[3] I adopt the notion of place from Godkin (1980, p.73) as a “discrete, temporally and perceptually bounded unit of psychologically meaningful material space.” Godkin asserts that we anchor or root our being to places where we experience belongingness and other positive feelings. A sense rootedness he says is directly related to our feeling of self worth, which is an integral part of self-identity.

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embraced by IT professionals in the manner intended by the GSO. Since it is interpreted as linked to market fluctuations and logic rather than a sense of existentially meaningful place, employees may see themselves playing a game and express ambivalence and resistance (Kunda, 1992).

This work resonates with ethnographic studies indicating that, rather than being homogenous, the ‘locals’ of global organizations actively construct their own global reality and resist the global regime of work (Graham, 1995; Raz, 1997; Souday and Kunda, 2003). Thus, it has been said that while work processes might be globally integrated, labor still tends to remain local (Castells, 2000). The narrative of Rams, as well as responses of IT professionals in the case, illustrates that life in the organization is lived at a very personal, local level and that these self-processes constitute an important element in the global—local tension. Knowledge workers have a strong sense of self and identity that is anchored in their social structures and traditional value systems, their profession, and the hi-tech global work context. Their career constitutes a key site for the realization of the project of their self. Given this, exhorting employees to ‘think global but act local’ is mere rhetoric when it is not substantiated by meaningful linkages to the IT person’s identity framework. The opposite, ‘think local but act global’ ends up being produced instead. Rather than dismissing global universal standards or celebrating local particularities, a ‘pragmatic balance’ (Rolland and Monteiro, 2002; Sahay, 2003) of blending the universal with the local might be more relevant and meaningful for GSOs and employees.

Thus, in response to the research questions, we can say that IT workers are intricately intertwined in the global-local dialectic. The dynamics that influence self and identity constructions among IT professionals employed in GSOs include changes in the global marketplace, reflexivity of GSOs, and individual reflexivity relating to personal dispositions such as beliefs, thoughts, and feelings. These dynamics influence both GSOs and IT professionals to engage in active, conscious, and reflexive processes to maintain or revise identity constructions.

6.3 Theoretical and Practical Implications

There are both theoretical and practical implications of this work. While macro-level concepts of globalization, modernity, reflexivity, and identity provide us with relevant conceptual frameworks to understand events and processes, they are limited in explaining how these dynamics are actually implemented in practice. A contribution of this work to IS research is the elucidation and analysis of these ‘socio-psychological’ concepts in an ICT mediated work context. Another contribution is enlarging the scope of some concepts. For example, the data suggests that, while IT professionals in India do experience anxiety and insecurity brought about by globalization influences, they also are very reflexive, thereby creating possibilities for themselves, making meaning and finding coherence in their work and personal life. The term for this process might be ‘ontological reflexivity’4. Secondly, while Giddens demonstrates the conditions of ‘high modernity’ and its association with new ways of self-identity and reflexivity, he offers limited insight into the relationship of the ‘project of the self’ to work (Grey, 1994). Nor does he explicate the role of ICTs, an inescapable feature of contemporary life, in social changes (Walsham, 1998). This work contributes to enlarging the lens of reflexivity, self-identity and modernity, by offering some ‘thick descriptions’ of career as a project of the self to be realized within a globalizing ICT mediated context.

A concept, which resonates with the ‘pragmatic balance’ between the local and the global, called ‘glocalization’ (Robertson, 1992) represents the ‘interpenetration of the

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4 Own term.
universalization of particularism and the particularization of universalism’ (p. 100). Given that the macro and micro levels are ever present in the context of GSOs, this concept could be employed by IS researchers as a useful lens to study social changes by individuals and ICT mediated organizations. For example, empirical data has revealed that one arena of struggle, for both the individual and the GSO, is the balancing of work and family demands. These two realms are increasingly yoked in ICT mediated environments like GSOs, and are reported to cause much internal conflict for IT workers. Glocalization might provide a framework to understand the adaptive processes of both individuals and organizations in their quest to create and deliver ‘value’ to themselves and their customers.

Practical implications for GSOs and HR role holders include addressing ‘evergreen’ issues of attracting skilled workers, offering creative work possibilities and company cultures along with retaining staff. Creating customized HR policies, and processes for IT staff, is more of a necessity than a standard ‘one size fits all’ approach. Other areas, where HR management are called on to be reflexive, include employee motivation, training, and development. The following quote from Sujaya, a Strategic Marketing Consultant with Dataex Ltd., illustrates this implication: “The IT professional today has evolved as a much broader professional than a mind laborer. The management, the HR, and Marketing function, has to grapple with reconstructing the identity and image of the company, and that of the employee in the minds of today’s customers. The HR function has to be engaged in the business, not of whipping up waves of fun and excitement but in making people feel that they have divine fire so that the individual employee, especially the IT worker, feels truly valued. In this process he/she begins to value himself/herself more and brings out the best when working with a customer, especially across time and space and this goes beyond any cost advantage proposition”.

This idea of ‘divine fire,’ as stated by Sujaya, is akin to the Vedic Indian belief that God is essentially within everyone and we need to tap into that spark to enable growth. It reinforces the need to include the local, self-experiences of IT workers, at a very existential level in HR interventions in GSOs. Given the speed of change and volatile market, such localities, run the danger of being silenced or marginalized in organizational discourses and rhetoric of professionalism and globalism. The Indian IT professional is no longer a ‘commodity’ in the global market. Moving up the value chain for IT professionals implies, among other things, working on ‘mindset’ issues that are a new business strain. This suggests that HR professionals in IT companies, who typically implement US influenced ‘soft skill’ training programs, need to include local experiences of participants such as their social beliefs and values and feelings of self-esteem if they wish to train IT people to truly ‘think global’. These processes, as we have seen, are very core to self-identity in this group of knowledge workers and are also expressed in the organization.

7. Conclusion
Self and identity are implicated at multiple interconnected levels of the global-local dialectic. GSOs and individual IT professionals engage in changes in the turbulent global marketplace in a conscious, capable, and reflexive manner to maintain and revise their identity constructions. For the individual IT worker, career is a key site where the project of the self is realized. The narrative of Rams, and analysis of tensions in GSOs, has linked macro-level dynamics of globalizing influences with micro-level dynamics of personal dispositions, as well as, providing deeper insights into their intricate interconnection with self and identity. The analytic lens of reflexivity, both individual and institutional, has revealed the changes needed to meet the business demands that exhort IT employees to ‘think globally-act locally’. Such a lens is proposed as useful for IS researchers engaged in similar studies.

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APPENDIX 2

Marisa D'Mello (2006).


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Gendered Selves and Identities of Information Technology Professionals in Global Software Organizations in India

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ABSTRACT

Global software organization (GSOs) are a recent form of work settings where Information Technology (IT) professionals engage in information and communication technology (ICT) mediated software development work for businesses across the globe. Issues of self, identity, and gender are linked to particularities of GSOs as a work setting. Using an interpretative, ethnographic approach, empirical data from a case study in India was analyzed to understand how gender was expressed in GSOs and linked to the concepts of self and identity of IT workers. Data suggests that GSOs are a global work setting where local issues of gender reflect social arrangements in Indian society. These arrangements have implications for GSOs as a work setting, for software development work, as well as for the selves and identities of IT workers. © 2006 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

Keywords: self; identity; gender relations; mobility; global software organizations

1. INTRODUCTION

The increased interconnection between globalizing influences and “personal dispositions” or identity-related aspects of individuals such as their beliefs, thoughts, and feelings is a distinctive feature of contemporary life (Castells, 1996; Giddens, 1991). In today’s society, globalized work contexts, such as global software organizations (GSOs) are on the rise (Sahay, Nicholson, & Krishna, 2003). Engaged in knowledge/intensive software development work across boundaries of time, space, and place, GSOs employ programmers, designers, analysts, and managers, who are also called IT (information technology) professionals/knowledge workers who design, develop, test, and implement software (Nicholson & Sahay, 2004). In this way, GSOs include local “actors” as well as global elements and exemplify the interconnection between selves and identities of IT workers within volatile, turbulent technological and business market contexts (D’Mello, 2005; Sahay et al., 2003). (The term local broadly refers to the immediate context of one’s sociocultural milieu within a particular geographical boundary. The term global refers to that which spans across diverse geographical boundaries as well as boundaries of time, space, and place. See D’Mello, 2005, for an elaboration of these concepts).

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Viewed as “both a model of and a model for globalization” (Sahay et al., 2003, p. 2), the ever-changing “corporate ecology” of such contexts challenges traditional and stable self and identity constructs as well as, sociocultural gendered norms and relations, influencing behavior of people in these settings. These aspects are important to analyze for several reasons.

First, while IT work is on the rise across the globe, there is an IT staff shortage, worldwide (Igbaria & Shayo, 2004). Global software organizations, for example, struggle daily with issues of attracting and retaining IT professionals. Second, women, in particular, while constituting 50% of the global population, constitute about 25% of the global IT workforce despite government- and industry-backed efforts to attract them into these fields (Klawe & Levenson, 1995; Panteli, Stack, & Ramsay, 1999; Trauth, Nielsen, & Von Hellens, 2003). These skewed percentages suggest that in terms of women’s participation, the IT workforce is missing a significant number of potentially valuable human resources for the information age. Third, “feminine” or “relational” strengths such as intuition, empathy, relationship building, and collaboration skills are now assets in instrumental, “masculine” organizational contexts such as IT companies, for gaining a competitive edge in the global economy (Fletcher, 1994; Fletcher, 1998; D’Mello, 2005; Olsson & Walker, 2004). Such skills are particularly valuable in ICT-mediated distributed work teams or virtual teams involving “boundaryless collaboration” where work is increasingly coordinated through trust-based relationships (Sahay et al., 2003).

Finally, GSOs, like other global organizations, are locally situated and are sites that are embedded in “... relational hierarchies of gender, class, caste and other critical fault lines, which define identities and distribute power both symbolically and materially” (Rao & Kellner, 2003, p. 143). Offshore software development work is highly interactive, situated within broader social and organizational processes that shape and are shaped by human action (Nicholson & Sahay, 2004; Waterson, Clegg, & Axtell, 1997). Studying these processes within GSOs enables us to understand how local characteristics of a specific social context (e.g., gender relations) intersect with global imperatives to influence work as well as employees’ sense of self and identity.

In the context of the IT industry in India, some studies (Arun & Arun, 2002; Kelkar, Shrestha, & Veena, 2002; Suriya, 2003) have investigated gender relations and the nature of women’s agency. While they raise relevant social and economic issues related to unequal participation of women in this industry, they are limited and quite broad in scope, excluding their relationship to personal, existential level of employees. Global software organizations in India are situated within a global capitalist economy, representing new forms of work contexts, while simultaneously incorporating local social structures and meanings. A micro-level analysis of how individual workers make personal interpretations in relation to social structures such as gender enables a deeper articulation of the global–local dialectic. There is a need for more micro-level analysis into local meanings and interpretations of larger social structures related to gender, and their interrelation with selves and identities of IT workers, within new and emerging work contexts like GSOs.

Using a “gender lens,” two questions in the context of GSOs are addressed in this article:  

- How is gender expressed or played out in GSOs in India as a work setting?
- How do these expressions relate to self and identity constructions of male and female IT professionals employed in the GSO?
In section 2 of this article, I will provide some theoretical notions of identity and gender, and their significance within GSOs. In section 3, the methodology is outlined. In section 4, the themes reflecting gendered differences among IT employees within GSO work setting are described. In section 5, the research questions are discussed and some theoretical and practical implications emerging from this study are outlined. Conclusions from this study are stated in section 6.

2. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES: SELF, IDENTITY, AND GENDER IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBAL SOFTWARE ORGANIZATIONS

The notion of gender is best understood within a network of concepts such as self and identity as well as our distinctive sociocultural contexts. These constructs frame the backdrop for choices we make in our daily lives, roles we adhere to, and our thoughts and feelings, which express our implicitly held gendered notions of our selves (Gladstone, 1998).

The following subsections are organized as follows: first, self, identity, and gender constructs are described; second, particularities of gender-related or gendering processes within the context of GSOs are delineated, and finally, the sociocultural context of IT professionals in the Indian context is elaborated.

2.1 Self, Identity, and Gender

Self and identity are the means by which we encounter and make sense of the world, both, outside of us (for e.g., other people, events) and inside of us (for e.g., our beliefs, thoughts, and feelings). The shifts we experience within us of sameness and distinctiveness gives us a sense of identity that defines who we are and are not for ourselves and others (Craib, 1998). Recent psychological and sociological literature reveals interesting conceptualizations of the different facets of self (e.g., Bruner, 1990; Gergen, 1991; Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

In research studies, the concept of gender has been used differently by different scholars. Gender here is taken as social differences between men and women, in the form of ascribed norms, roles, and expectations framing the backdrop for one’s experiences as a man or woman (Fletcher & Ely, 2003). Organizing much of one’s beliefs, expectations, and socially prescribed scripts for relating, working, and living in the world, gender is linked to one’s self and identity and is implicated in the workplace (Evetts, 1996).

Gender is socially constructed through material practices and ideological processes (Gladstone, 1998). Material practices include gender-based division of labor, gender-based mobility, and gender-based access to resources that maintain and shape roles, responsibilities, qualities, and behavior patterns of men and women in society. At the ideological level, gender differences are internalized through social institutions such as the family, state, community, media, and market mechanisms that reflect, reinforce, shape, and create patriarchal ideological norms (Gladstone, 1998). Some of these institutions are seen to collude with each other to subordinate women (Arun, Arun, & Borooah, 2004). For example, motherhood acts as a labor market disadvantage as marriage and family are associated with interrupted careers for working women. Here, the structural arrangements of global market influences collude with patriarchal family structures and ideologies, keeping the traditional gender order in place.

Career and occupation is a vital aspect of self and work/occupation identity is considered a critical element in an individual’s feelings of self-worth and satisfaction (Evetts, 1996).
Cultural ideologies behind dimensions of femininity and family, masculinity and career are said to control women’s and men’s working lives (Sharpe, 1976). For men, marriage and fatherhood typically do not contradict work and career expectations, while women often experience contradiction between these two realms. As girls grow up, it is assumed that motherhood will feature in their future and being a “good” mother is important for women’s sense of satisfaction and feeling of self-worth (Chodorow, 1974). While paid employment and professional membership offers women an opportunity to develop and retain a work identity that is separate from their home and family, their self and work identities can often be fraught with feelings of ambivalence (Evett, 1996).

In this article, self and identity is taken as constructed, influenced by sociocultural norms, power relations, and social institutions such as the family. These influences are inherently gendered; they intertwine, both explicitly and implicitly, with individual worker’s experiences and feeling of self-worth in organizations. They also relate to how organizations configure their structures, policies, and settings.

2.2 Particularities of Gender-Related Processes in the Context of Global Software Organizations

Examining gender-related identity constructions is relevant in the context of GSOs as work settings for several reasons. These are discussed below in terms of underrepresentation of women in the IT workforce, mobility restrictions for women IT professionals in GSOs, and gendering of GSO-related work.

2.2.1 Underrepresentation of women in the IT workforce. Women account for 25% of technology workers in the European workforce and about 20% in the U.S. technology workforce—and these percentages are shrinking (Ahuja, 2002; Maitland, 2001; Nierderman & Mandviwalla, 2004). In India, within GSOs in the IT industry, women comprise 24% of the workforce (NASSCOM, 2005). Information technology professionals are typically drawn from engineering and computer science disciplines that are “masculine” or male-dominated (Von Hellens, Nielsen, & Trauth, 2001). In the US and UK, the proportion of women in university computer studies courses is declining and this pattern carries over into organizations recruiting staff from these institutions (Ahuja, 2002; Von Hellens, Nielsen, & Beekhuyzen, 2004). Educational and training institutions in these disciplines exert a strong influence on gender-related constructions by gender segregation of courses, presence of role models or mentors for women, messages about IT as a “male domain” (DiDio, 1996; Trauth, 2002; Turkle, 1988). Even in Norway and Finland which are relatively egalitarian societies, there is a declining intake of young women into the field of Computer Science as girls rejects the “nerd” image of the computer hacker (Hapnes & Rasmussen, 1991; Turkle, 1984). These influences and images, along with family and cultural messages reinforce, support, or resist the choice of IT as a career choice for women. They affect feelings of inclusion and exclusion, self-confidence or alienation among women as IT professionals, shaping their identities and impacting their participation in the industry (Ahuja, 2002; Trauth, 2002; Von Hellens et al., 2004).

2.2.2 Mobility of GSO work and mobility restrictions on women. A critical feature of GSOs as a work setting is its mobility. Individuals, teams, organizations, and
nations with diverse social and cultural backgrounds and idiosyncratic styles of work, interact in a global setting across temporal and spatial boundaries (Sahay et al., 2003). Information technology employees are required to consistently work late hours because of diverse time zones, tight project schedules often in a crisis mode, rapidly switching between projects, technologies, and countries. Promotional and growth paths require experience in customer facing roles, relating to working and living overseas. Reflecting the volatile changes in technologies and platforms in the global marketplace, this work demands, on a constant basis, continuous updating of knowledge and skills, besides a formal education in engineering or IT fields. This puts pressure on IT workers to be in a continuous learning mode all the time to be “marketable,” both within and outside the organization. These features are enormously stressful for all employees, often resulting in burnout and feelings of insecurity and anxiety (Igbaria & Shayo, 2004; Moore, 2000), impacting IT professionals at deep, existential levels (D’Mello, 2005).

The mobile nature of GSO work influences the participation of men and women differently (Kelkar et al., 2002; Suriya, 2003). Mobility restrictions for women are expressed in their inability to continuously work long hours, travel overseas on assignments, participate in informal networks that are important in career advancement or have a sustained career trajectory (Ahuja, 2002; Ragins & Cotton, 1991). In this profession, shifting between companies especially at lower levels is a means to progress ones’ career but women tend to stay longer in each job compared to men because of domestic responsibilities (Kelkar et al., 2002). While this is an advantage for them at the time of recruitment, it delays their promotion and their capacity to negotiate for a higher salary or benefits and stock options. The dominant model of career growth require linearity and continuity in work (Papanek, 1973) and career interruptions because of childcare commitments are found to disadvantage women (Sirianni & Negrey, 2000). Not surprisingly, internationally, the majority of women are employed in routine and specialist work while men are engaged in analytical and managerial activities (Ahuja, 2002).

Mobility in sociological inquiry is viewed as a measure of gender relations. Feminist anthropologists highlighting the association of space with gender, state that women who cross spatial boundaries face problems. For example, Moore (1988) states, “Rapid social change apparently raises fears about controlling women, fears which are often expressed through a concern with controlling women’s morality and sexual behavior. Women, who are, or seek to be, economically independent run the risk of being characterized as sexually or morally loose” (p. 95). Anthropological studies demonstrate that women’s mobility is restricted because of the patriarchal order, where women’s bodies and their sexuality are given meaning within the cultural ideologies of purity, pollution, shame, and honor (Chakravarthy, 1998; Mandelbaum, 1988; Sonpar & Kapur, 2001). Restrictions on women’s mobility serve familial and social ends, reinforce notions of good women as being mothers and wives, acting as powerful organizers of behavior (Guzder & Krishna, 1991).

In this way, socially prescribed and deeply internalized “ideologies” of gender relations characterizing a culture, influence behavior and regulate self-worth of both men and women. Gender relations are intricately woven in a web of hierarchical positions and prescribed codes of conduct. Conformity provides a sense of security, power, and belonging to the individual while a failure to conform to them results in social disapproval and perhaps feelings of guilt, shame, and self-doubt (Sonpar & Kapur, 2001). In global work settings such as GSOs, educated, women workers have to find means to continuously negotiate such spaces in ways that balance their professional roles as well as social relations.
2.2.3 Gendering of GSO-related work. Business organizations, which historically, have been male-dominated, perpetuate the work–family divide in many ways where men hold the “public” role and women hold the “private” role (Harding, 1986; Massey & Jess, 1995; Rao & Kellner, 2003). In this scenario, the public, masculine role is associated with competition while the private, domestic, feminine sphere is primarily responsible for relationship maintenance (Jacques, 1996). In debates on work–family divide, the family has been seen as a competitor with the organization for the time and attention of the employee, rather than a supplier of the worker’s physical and mental well-being and his or her interactional and relational skills (Jacques, 1996). Discourses about human relations, organization theories, and scientific management have assumed the notion of a “universal worker” and managerial function in the public sphere as gender-free (Rees & Garnsey, 2003). However, we know for sure, that gender is constitutive in the logic, symbols, signs, and structures and daily practices of contemporary work organizations (Acker, 1990; Fletcher & Ely, 2003; Kanter, 1977).

Software development lies within a project-based competitive environment which is said to breed and reproduce a “masculine culture” (Knights & Murray, 1994). Similarly, citing evidence, Panteli et al. (1999) propose that the IT industry is not neutral and does little to promote or retain its female workforce. They highlight the following issues in IT companies: While women were underrepresented at managerial and technical levels, they predominated in support function roles; women were often assigned routine and monotonous tasks while their male colleagues engaged in more abstract and challenging computing work; women’s earnings differential in relation to men increased with age; companies treated IT staff as homogenous with similar needs and career aspirations; gender stereotypes about men’s and women’s qualities persisted and home working and flexi-time arrangements for women were talked about but not implemented. They stated that women who may dislike masculine, ”lad” or computing, ”engineering” type of cultures, may decide to leave a company or exclude themselves from a technical field. Given this, fears about “ghettoization” of women in this industry have been expressed (Arun & Arun, 2001; Panteli et al., 1999).

Such experiences and barriers generate feelings relating directly to self-confidence, occupational worth, and self-esteem (Evett, 1996). They marginalize not only women, but also reinforce entrenched gendered stereotypes about masculinity and femininity, even going against business interests. More and more, theories of organizational learning and management stress the value of affective and relational capacities such as empathy, sensitivity to emotional contexts, collaboration, also called “soft skills” to organizational productivity and efficiency (Gilleard & Gilleard, 2002; Senge, 1990). Research in intercultural adjustment and cross-cultural effectiveness (Kealey, 1990; Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985; Parker & McEvoy, 1993) support the view that empathy, relational and communication skills, associated with women and enacted in the private, home sphere, facilitate adjustment and interaction with host country nationals, the global actors in GSOs. Such skills are also increasingly critical in distributed software development work where knowledge demands are quite distinctive and embedded in social structures and relations (Kealey, 1990; Nicholson & Sahay, 2004; Sahay et al., 2003). In this way, the inclusion of women and the creation of gender-sensitive workspaces not only impact individual workers but also add value to the effectiveness of “faceless” teams.

In summary, GSOs, as ICT-mediated global work settings, embedded in local contexts, are not gender-neutral entities but actively reproduce sociocultural complexities of these contexts through their material practices and ideological constructions. These relate directly to individual workers feelings of self-worth and esteem, their conceptions of masculine and
feminine and their participation in the workforce. Women’s underrepresentation and relative immobility as compared to male IT workers, point to masculinity and patriarchal norms underlying these settings. The increasing stress on relational capacities required for business success implies that GSOs need to tilt the gendered norms towards feminine and relational skills in addition to their focus on technical skills, to be competitive and productive in a global marketplace.

2.3 Sociocultural Context of Information Technology Professionals in India

India presents a valuable case of an economically developing country in the midst of globalization processes such as liberal economic reforms and changes in the mass media, among other dynamics, which has affected primarily the middle class (Singh, 2000). Globally considered a force to reckon with in the field of IT, this sector is the fastest growing industry within the country. The industry’s contribution to India’s gross domestic product (GDP) has nearly tripled, from 1.2% in 1998 to 3.5% in 2004 (NASSCOM, 2005). While there are over 1 million workers in the IT and IT-enabled services (ITES) industry today, 345,000 IT professionals are employed in the software export sector (NASSCOM, 2005), which constitutes the work context for GSOs.

As in other countries, women are underrepresented in the IT industry in India (24% are women). Furthermore, most women in the Indian IT workforce are reported to be less than 30 years of age, overrepresented in lower-level jobs like programming and underrepresented in higher-level jobs like consulting and project management (Kelkar et al., 2002; Suriya, 2003). Reinforcing this pattern, the ratio of men to women dramatically shifts to 31:69 in the ITES, considered more “low-end” work in terms of skills and competence (NASSCOM, 2005).

Physical and career-related mobility restrictions exist for educated, women workers typically hailing from middle class families in India. Historically, education in India for girls was viewed as a potential liability in the marriage market as an agent that could “spoil a girl’s character” (Chanana, 1994). While there are shifts, fears persist particularly in the field of science and engineering. For women particularly, marriage potential and social risks form key elements in family decisions about education as parents focus primarily on getting their daughters well-settled in a good marriage alliance (Mukhopadhyay, 1994). Social risks include traveling or living alone in hostels in urban areas and exposure to predominantly male peers where a girl’s chastity may be jeopardized. Education, particularly in science and engineering, associated with critical and independent thinking and willingness to abandon outmoded traditions are the antithesis of the preferred stereotype of a “home-loving” patriarchal ideology for women (Mukhopadhyay, 1994). Family resources are invested more in the son’s education as they are considered structurally and economically more central to the well-being of the family than daughters, who leave their natal family after marriage. Given these fears, bright and scientifically inclined daughters are encouraged to pursue medicine and pure sciences rather than engineering, reinforcing male dominance in these areas. In urban work settings, while desk jobs are considered more reputable for women, their physical and social mobility is restricted (Arun & Arun, 2001). For example, in Mumbai city, a major base for software outsourcing, several IT companies are located

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1With the recent burgeoning of the ITES industry which includes business process outsourcing and the call center industry NASSCOM, the apex body as well as the Chamber of Commerce for the IT industry in India, has combined the figures for software service and ITES, even though they are different businesses.
at Santacruz Electronics Exports Processing Zone (SEEPZ\textsuperscript{2}), in the north of the city. Here, transport connections are infrequent after office hours and the surrounding industrial area is considered unsafe for women after dark. The location of the office and commute time is a high priority for women in selecting a job who have domestic responsibilities; hence, the location restricts their options, unlike men. Finding it hard to juggle a myriad of job expectations and familial commitments, women often quit working, as part-time employment or telecommuting facilities in this industry are rare in Mumbai.

Typically, for Indian women, marriage and motherhood is most often assumed to have direct implications for their jobs and career (Aziz, 2004). A strong belief in India is that marriage and family forms the second stage of human existence in society, grihasthashram\textsuperscript{3} (Chakraborty, 2000). Marriage rites symbolize the union of man and woman, two bodies in one soul, as opposed to the idea of a civil contract (Cormack, 1974). A married woman is expected to deeply identify with her husband and family. In Indian thought, wifehood and motherhood are seen as inseparable, sacred, and conferring social status and psychological security to women (Coomaraswamy, 1924). Some traditional terms for women such as grihalaskhmi,\textsuperscript{4} dharmapatni\textsuperscript{5} are directly connected to the stage of grihasthashram. In the process of growth and development, the quality and meaning of relationships becomes a dominant anchor of the life-role of Indian women particularly when they take on prescriptive roles of daughter, wife, daughter-in-law, and mother (Parikh & Garg, 1989). For males, on the other hand, while marriage is important in grihasthashram, it is an event that typically does not effect a major shift in their domestic responsibilities, change of residence or location or job.

Indian feminists and scholars show how cultural and social values emphasizing female submissiveness and role-specific identities keep contemporary middle class, urban India families anchored in traditional patriarchal structures (Bagchi, 1995; Dube, 1988; Kakar, 1988). Studies also indicate that women experience the achievements of others such as their husband’s good job or children’s school success as their own (Kapadia, 1999), highlighting that for Indian women, the family and relationships with significant others are a critical source of self-worth and identity. The strong influence of family identity, where the “breadwinner” position of the man predominates and commands respect, makes it difficult for women to formulate a clear notion of her individual position or welfare (Sen, 1990, 2000).

Software development has been reported to offer a more relaxed and less discriminatory environment as compared to several other employment options in India (Heeks, 1998). Other jobs, such as mechanical or civil engineering involve outdoor, physical labor or commutes to relatively uninhabited localities are viewed as relatively unsuitable and unsafe for women, both physically and socially. Currently, working in the IT industry in India presents a possibility that lies at the intersection of the masculinized discipline of engineering and the “high-flying” world of global, international assignments similar, in some instances to knowledge-based work of the consulting service industry. Some structural changes are

\textsuperscript{2}This is a special area in Mumbai set up by the government, offering a well-developed infrastructure, fiscal incentives, and quick approvals and clearances to firms developing and exporting IT-related products and services.

\textsuperscript{3}In Indian/Hindu thought, it is proposed that there are four stages of life. Grihasthashram is the second stage, that of a householder.

\textsuperscript{4}In Hindu thought, Lakshmi is the goddess of happiness and prosperity. The wife is the Lakshmi of the griha, i.e., the household.

\textsuperscript{5}This is similar to the above meaning. Dharma is duty and patni is wife.
evident. Women’s enrollment in undergraduate courses in engineering and technology has increased from 0.09% in 1971 to 10% in 1991 (Chanana, 2000). Unlike the figures in developed countries, the percentage of women’s enrollment in science subjects in colleges and universities in India has increased from about 7% in 1950–1951 to about 34% in 1996–1997, and subsequently to 39.4% in 2001 (Chanana, 2000; Indian National Science Academy, 2004). This increase has been attributed to the prestige of science and engineering degrees and jobs in the country. The image of an IT person in India is very different from the “nerdy” image or fears of “gender inauthenticity” as mentioned in the literature. The risks of higher education are balanced by the social status associated with this profession. In social gatherings and family groups, IT people are often labeled as “smart,” the “cream of society,” “moneyed,” and “well traveled.” Also, spurred by rising housing costs in urban areas and middle class aspirations for an upward mobile lifestyle, there is an increased interest in having an earning–working woman as a wife. For urban middle class families in particular having an earning daughter or daughter-in-law doing a respectable job are seen as a positive asset. These shifts coexist with traditional norms such as fears about women’s safety and sexuality, which are reportedly common in patriarchal societies like India (Sonpar & Kapur, 2001). Rather than a complete break with traditional restrictions on women’s mobility, these changes can be seen as a midpoint on a continuum ranging from extreme tradition to modern, Westernized notions of equality.

To summarize, gender relations are framed within distinctive sociocultural contexts, constituting integral elements of individuals’ selves and identities. These relations and ideologies directly influence the participation of men and women IT professionals within work contexts of GSOs. Global software organization work is mobile and fluid, yet women experience many restrictions on their mobility in this workspace. While software work in the IT industry reflects a masculine culture, increasingly, the skills emphasized for business success in such global contexts, are feminine. In the Indian context, while traditional gendered norms still hold sway among the middle classes, globalization influences have triggered shifts not only in lifestyles but also challenged these norms and structures. Given the peculiar nature of social relations in the Indian context, we adopt the conceptualization of the “autonomous-relational” self (Kagitcibasi, 1996) as an analytic tool, to deepen our understanding of the relationship between gender and the self.

Kagitcibasi (1996) proposed that each individual has a relational (interdependent) as well as autonomous (independent) self in a “dialectic mutuality” or coexistence of opposites. These “selves” are embedded within gender role definitions internalized during socialization practices from childhood, impacting lifelong construction and enactment of women’s and men’s identities and organizing behavior and affecting self-esteem (Kapadia, 1999; Sonpar & Kapur, 2001). In most societies, women learn to define themselves in relation to and connection with others, in specific contexts, whereas men, socialized towards separation and individuation are encouraged to be rational, strong, and self-reliant (Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982; Miller, 1986). An emphasis on the role of mothering for women, places an “ethics of care” and nurturance deep in their “relational self” serving familial as well as social ends (Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982; Guzder & Krishna, 1991). For men, an emphasis on the provider role embeds an instrumental orientation and the “ethics of justice” in their “autonomous self.” The coexistence of these selves within individuals implies that individuals can demonstrate both agency and relatedness (Kagitcibasi, 1996). In this article, I use the relational-autonomous self concept within the context of GSOs as a structuring device (Walsham, 2001) to provide a richer understanding of the linkages between gender norms and selves and identities of Indian IT professionals in GSOs.
3. METHODOLOGY

In this section, the method employed for the empirical research is described.

The case, InSync Ltd. is a medium-sized GSO, headquartered in Mumbai, India, with offices in six different countries across the globe. InSync offers offshore software application outsourcing solutions and services to overseas clients. It has been accredited internationally at Level 5 for software processes as per the Capability Maturity Model (CMM). It employs around 2500 IT professionals. The men to women ratio among software staff is 82:18. Support functions, except for human relations (HR) and public relations (PR) are primarily staffed by male employees. The secretarial staff is 100% female.

The empirical material in this article is drawn from a larger research project on understanding identity-related processes of IT professionals employed in GSOs in India. A case study method, based on an interpretative, ethnographic approach to information science (IS) research is used (Walsham, 1993). In stark contrast to positivist methods that look for regularities and causal relationships (Burrell & Morgan, 1979) the interpretive paradigm assumes that the social world is constructed and relativistic, understood as a subjective experience of those who are involved in its activities. An ethnographic approach seems appropriate to the study of identity processes because it remains close to ways people experience and make sense of themselves and others (Van Maanen, 1979). My fieldwork has meant a shift from a previous “insider” HR employee role in various IT companies to that of an “outsider” researcher role, trying to see people, situations, and events with a fresh approach. Balancing an ex-insider–employee and an outsider–researcher identity has also been reported in anthropological field work in institutional contexts of this nature (e.g., Garsten, 1994; Moore, 1986) and was found to be a challenging experience.

In-depth and semistructured interviews of 50 employees, between December 2002 and July 2004 were conducted. The respondents included 16 female and 34 males across the developer, module leader, project leader, project manager, and unit/function head job levels. Each interview typically lasted around 60–80 minutes. The interviews usually began with a sharing of the aim of the research project, a promise of anonymity, and a request for the interview to be tape-recorded. Respondents most often said they were happy to contribute to research on their professional group. Rather than a set interview protocol, a set of broad, open-ended questions relating to their career trajectory and their personal experiences at work and outside the work setting was used. Besides interview data, field notes, and observations from “hanging around” workstations, the cafeteria, commuting in the company bus to the office and back home, attending team and company gatherings, I reviewed some of the company’s promotional material, Web site, intranet, in-house publication magazine, and annual reports. I also drew extensively on my experience in the various GSOs during my career as an HR professional for several years.

Respondents generally spoke openly and willingly about their personal lives, work, and challenges they currently faced. During some conversations, I was very aware of moments of heightened sensitivity to responses on areas related to gender inequality, especially when some of their statements resonated with my own personal experiences as a woman in my social system. Often, women respondents would begin or end their response by saying, “You know how things are for women in Indian society. . .” and leave a lot unsaid! These were delicate moments where they were asked to be more explicit about these implicit, supposedly shared assumptions. Concerning the issue of subjectivity and objectivity, it was

The name of the company as well as respondents is kept confidential.
sometimes a struggle to find a balance between the expression of my personal views and keeping silent. Similar struggles while doing ethnography have been described by Sarikakis (2003), Schultze (2000), and Van Maanen (1979).

Tape-recorded interviews were all transcribed verbatim. The empirical material, along with other data was read, reread, and analyzed for themes, subthemes, and patterns. Rather than some preconceived categorization, themes that emerged from the material were identified and data was manually sorted under these. Multiple perspectives from advisors, faculty, and interactions with others engaged in gender research, were solicited. Some of the interpretations were also informally discussed with select respondents. Relevant literature was also examined. Feedback obtained in these processes was used to clarify interpretations of the data and refine the categories. In this way, the analysis was an iterative process. The major themes were selected and are reported in the following section.

### 4. EMPIRICAL DATA AND ANALYSIS

In this section, the four themes that emerged from the empirical material are presented. Table 1 presents an overview of these themes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender-related theme</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Links to self &amp; identity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Roles &amp; Responsibilities: The marriage mandate</td>
<td>Breadwinner ideology predominates for men, familial care predominates for women; husband’s support essential for women’s career success; equality at work but not at home; different interpretations of kinship support by men and women; GSOs reflect this division in HR policies.</td>
<td>Gendered norms of roles are internalized by both men and women. Relational self is an integral part of gender identity for women. Work is central to male identity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 Gender &amp; Mobility: A woman’s Place</td>
<td>Mobility restrictions related to late-night local travel, onsite working, office socializing, prevail for women but not men. Safety and sexual protection of women is a concern.</td>
<td>Norms of purity and sexuality are deep rooted, impacting gendered self constructions and expressions. Single women seek valid excuse of family to legitimate personal needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3 GSOs as Gendered Work Settings: The ‘female touch’</td>
<td>GSOs reproduce gendered norms in their limited “family-friendly” policies, interpersonal relations and social practices at work implicate men and women differently, gendered stereotypical roles and attributes are prevalent.</td>
<td>Women feel burdened and excluded. They constantly negotiate bounded male–female selves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4 Gender &amp; Time: Overtime</td>
<td>Career breaks related to family reasons predominate for women. Family talk enters workplace conversations differently for men and women. Women take on less-demanding roles as family demands increase; no such shift for men. Women find ways to cope.</td>
<td>Acceptance of prescribed, gendered norms is widespread. Modernity shifts gendered identity constructions.</td>
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*Note. GSO = global software organization; HR = human resources.*
4.1 The Marriage Mandate

The first theme relates to internalized norms and views on roles and responsibilities, particularly for married employees. Marriage is a critical event; it is a turning point in the lives of both Indian men and women but their salience differs. Echoing this, Soumya, a 26-year-old software developer, who quit InSync to join her husband who has a prestigious IT job in Europe, said in an e-mail interview:

I was a girl from a moderately modern family. I never asked the question “Will I get married?” I realize that this point was certain. I WAS GOING TO GET MARRIED. I never saw anybody in my family/friend circle NOT MARRY except perhaps due to financial difficulty. As I grew up, I saw around me how important a man was, in order to live peacefully, to have certain “respectability” and social “acceptability” unlike a single woman. A single woman simply did not have enough means/outlets to go out and enjoy. So I got married. Similarly, I know I will have children some day.

Having been married for a year, and living in Europe, Soumya said,

Initially, we were both very confident of me finding a job here. But jobs for foreigners are limited and I had to resign myself to be unemployed. Of course, it hurts . . . to have worked so hard at education, reading, practicing, and updating knowledge all for cooking and cleaning? I now have to reconcile myself that I will never have the highflying career I dreamed of . . . Whatever I do will be a supplement to my daily house keeping and the demands of my husband’s job. Right now, I have not totally reconciled myself to this idea. But as things stand that is the only possibility.

Soumya’s response suggests that marriage was experienced as culturally mandated. While it gave her social respectability and acceptability, the shifts it entailed generated strong emotions and a reconstruction of her professional identity to fit this relational choice.

Like Soumya there are other women in GSOs, often in their late 20s, from typically middle class backgrounds with computer science or engineering degrees or diplomas who marry and stop working partially or completely. During this time, they are fully immersed in household and family-related activities. When couples marry within the same company, the wife usually quits her job to join her husband at his location or shoulder family and childcare responsibilities, rather than the reverse. Their responses reflected ambivalence in these decisions, reflecting their dilemmas about domestic “bliss” that they aspired to as well as their compromise in relation to their professional achievement. Affirming this, Disha, one of the few senior women project managers in InSync said,

I have seen many young girls give up their career for marriage and babies. It is tough for women to manage both in this industry. One has to sacrifice a lot. I used to hold my baby in my hand and cry, thinking, how I will leave this baby and go to work after only 3 months maternity leave. It is a big challenge to manage because work pressures are tremendous. That is why many women fall back at senior levels. You can’t be worrying about your babies when the customer is waiting at the other end for the system to be running.
While sharing about her responsibilities in her family comprising a husband in a senior job and young child, Leena, an assistant manager in the quality department said,

That is life—work and family. There are certain things that just don’t bend. As an Indian, whoever’s wife you are, whether it be the President’s wife or peon’s wife, there are certain activities you do like cooking food for the family. You cannot put your feet up or buy food off the rack like the freedom that you have in Western countries.

Organizing meals occupied a large share of domestic responsibilities of women respondents. Even though labor-saving devices and paid domestic help was available, it was still a time-consuming task. Several lunch table conversations with women employees often centered on issues of food preparation in the family. If men were present, they were silent on these matters as they said their wife or mother typically prepared their meals. Some women spoke about the help they received from their in-laws at home which enabled them to also have a career while married. Others spoke about the added responsibilities they had because they lived with their in-laws.

Having a spouse in the same company is common in GSOs. Maya, a project leader married to another project leader, Ramesh, in InSync, has two children. Living with his parents and unmarried brother, they were considering buying their own house. Responding to a question on managing household responsibility, Maya said,

We have the same educational qualifications and now are both project leaders. At one time, my salary was more than his. However, this does not change things at home, where I am responsible. Equality is somewhere in the air. I told my in-laws, that you have not trained your son to take up responsibility at home. It is the man’s ego... if I expect him to serve food, for example, he will not do it everyday. Only when I say I am very much tired. They have grown up to think it is the woman. So even in the night he used to not get up to change the nappies of our son even though we both had similar work pressures. I used to feel bad and frustrated. I am now reconciled to dropping my expectations.

When responding to the same question, her husband, Ramesh said, “Yes, the mother surely has to take more responsibilities. I don’t experience any conflict as the support of my parents and brother is always there.” Several other respondents talked about their parents, unmarried siblings or in-laws as being available or willing to care for their children suggesting that while kinship support for family care is present, the primary responsibility is still with the wife.

From male respondents, and from conversations with IT employees, it appeared that men and women perceive work, marriage, and domestic responsibility differently. For many male respondents, the “breadwinner ideology” seemed to predominate, associated with a sense of certainty as reflected in the response of a project manager, Rakesh:

As an Indian male I am supposed to be the one earning the bread and butter. If I have to work for 12 hours a day I have to work, to earn the roti, I have to work. If I am not able to come for your alana falana stuff, I will not be apologetic about it or go back to my family and say, I am sorry I was not there, I was working.

7Hindi word for bread.
8He is referring to social functions, mainly in the family circle.
The response of Isha, an unmarried woman in her late 20s and a module leader suggests that this provider role was seen as exclusive to males. Isha said,

In the UK, when I wanted to go bowling or play badminton which meant some expenditure, my male team members would say, “It is okay for you, you are a girl. You can spend money. You don’t have to save for a family.” This was upsetting. How do they know the real financial condition of my house? Luckily my dad is still working but I could well be the sole earning member.

When deeply internalized, the provider role can also be a source of stress among men. During the post September 11th period, when many lost their jobs in the US and returned back to India, feelings of low confidence and decreased self-worth were often clearly visible in the body language and limited salary negotiation of male candidates who interviewed with InSync suggesting the salience of work in the identity construction of males.

Field interviews, interviews of candidates, and informal conversations also revealed that while most men talked at length about their job responsibilities and their career aspirations, they were relatively silent on the organization of their domestic lives or duties. They would refer to “wanting to spend time playing with children or taking the family members out.” Most women, on the other hand, spoke explicitly and at length about their husbands, children, and family responsibilities. The men’s omission was not an effort to conceal their family life; it appears to reflect some taken-for-granted assumptions about domestic arrangements. The workspace also appeared to be a space for expressing their masculinity. For example, Roshni, a software developer said,

In my project the initial period was very stressful. During this period, three teammates became fathers. On the face of it, they always complained about not being there for their wives. But I think, secretly they were very proud of the hard work they were doing. They wanted the fact recognized that they had put the project first, and were committed to on-time delivery of the project and were sitting night outs when their heavily pregnant wives waited at home. The team often boasted that we had tremendous difficulties during the delivery, and how the teammates put work first, etc. As a woman, I was often very troubled by this display because sometime in the vague future it could happen to me, i.e., my husband not being there for me.

Finally, presence of a supporting spouse is reported crucial for success and moving up the career ladder. Mohini, a senior project manager said, “Of course, the husband has to be supportive for women to succeed in this field. If both are running in different directions for their work, who is going to look after the family? One person’s career would need to have more importance than the other.”

4.2 A Woman’s Place

This theme considers the relationship of gender with issues related to diverse mobilities and immobilities. One of the concerns of middle class parents was about job prospects for educated and particularly marriageable daughters. Soumya, a software developer stated, “I was allowed to study as much as I wanted but when it came to working . . . I would have to select something that my parents were reasonably comfortable with. It sounded safe and respectable to sit at the computer in an office.” The concern with physical and social safety
has been repeatedly mentioned by several respondents as why global, IT companies are preferred as work settings for women. When I mentioned to respondents that I was also interested in men’s and women’s experiences, most female respondents would immediately say that “sexual harassment” and “sexual discrimination” were “absent” in the workplace because GSOs are inhabited by an “educated and professional” workforce. Male respondents would shrug their shoulders and wait for the next question. The women’s responses suggest a strict categorization in their mind of any male–female issue as either “discrimination” or normality, a mythical idea of professional or educated workforces as gender neutral, denying the possibility that they themselves might be co-opted, albeit insidiously, into a system that oppresses them. In the rare instances of subtle sexual transgression that I have been exposed to as a HR manager, it was the educated women, who found it very hard to believe that what they experienced was a form of harassment. Their fear of what others in the company would think about them (rather than the male culprit) if the incident was publicized in any way, was a cause of much anxiety and guilt and feelings of low self-worth. These feelings reflect how deeply sociocultural norms around purity and sexuality are internally ingrained, impacting one’s self-construction in a very profound manner.

Working late hours, often until midnight, as well as working on weekends, inevitable in this industry, emerged as very stressful for employees, especially given long commutes, humid weather, high pollution, bad roads, frequent traffic jams, and crowded public transport in Mumbai city. Commenting on this, Vanessa, a HR manager, said,

With women, the issue is magnified because of security and managing the home. Seniors, like project managers are generally protective and do not want women to sit late. In the project, the guys ensure the girls who are sitting late reach home safely. Some girls don’t mind traveling alone. Facilities for transport for women working late, is pathetic. Only a few big companies provide it.

Sociocultural barriers to overseas travel are normal and, in the case of Zeenat, who is a Muslim, recently married, 26-year-old software developer, religious beliefs enter parental mandates. She said,

Nowadays many Muslim girls do go to colleges and schools so my parents were not too bothered about my late hours. But they raised a concern about me going onsite before marriage. It was not a personal concern. They were more concerned about what society would say. That if someone came with a proposal and came to know that I was onsite alone, they might object and that might be a problem to get married . . . My in-laws only concern is that I should not stay there alone if I am going long term. If I go, I must go with my husband. I don’t want that he leaves a job for my sake and then he cannot find a job.

Zeenat expressed satisfaction with her current situation and said that she would tackle the issue about onsite postings when it came up.

In another instance, a male supervisor’s personal beliefs about a single woman’s place and safety entered a work conversation as in the case of Usha, an unmarried module leader, the only woman employee in a team of 30 males at a UK customer site. She wanted to return home earlier from her assignment, as her house was burgled and the residential locality was rather unsafe. In a meeting with her manager, she asked him what he would have done if his daughter were in her situation. Her manager responded by saying that he would have got his daughter married before sending her alone onsite. Usha was extremely angry and
upset and felt that not only her but also her father was insulted in that comment. She said she has now learned to confront such situations though such comments were still hurtful.

Single women, who typically live with their parents, also report having domestic responsibilities, though they may not shoulder responsibilities of spouse and children. This can sometimes be experienced as a dilemma. For example, Deepali, an unmarried project manager in her mid-30s reported that she was seen by others as “footloose and fancy free” and available for work-related travels, as she was single. Although she had domestic responsibilities, it was hard to refuse onsite assignments that she did not want, as she did not have a valid excuse such as a spouse or children or in-law responsibilities, which many women her age have. Experiencing some feelings of guilt her responses suggest how strongly marriage and family is legitimized at the workplace.

Changes were also noted by respondents. Anita, a human resource manager at InSync said,

Earlier, women could not travel abroad because of their parents’, husband’s, or in-laws’ disapproval. Now, I see women wanting to go abroad, to make money, to be on par. This is more so in the younger generation and more so in single women. Those in their early 20s are now more go-getters, more trendy and westernized in their dress and behavior. And the money, opportunities, and success in this industry gives them a certain confidence.

4.3 The “Female Touch” at Work

This dimension relates to GSOs as a work setting, both socially and in terms of its family-related policies. Global software organizations reflect the gendered division of labor in some of their HR policies and practices. For example, maternity leave in GSOs in India is usually given only for 3 months as per statutory requirements. Human resource professionals report that GSOs with policies where such leave is officially longer are rare. In informal conversations, women stated that 3 months is too short and they usually seek an extension. The granting of such requests is handled on a case-to-case basis, depending upon the manager’s discretion and the human resources department. This can be quite anxiety provoking for the woman employee who is then in a dilemma over losing her job versus not being available for her baby. Global software organizations typically do not have any official policy on paternity leave. Human resource personnel often receive appeals from new fathers to mandate paternity leave of some sort. They wanted to spend more time at home with their newborn but were unable to do so because of project pressures. One of the employees was upset because he was unable to witness the birth of his first child since he had been working in the office for a project “delivery.” Policies like these (or lack of them) and such responses reinforce differential valuing by organizations of emotional and childcare labor and male instrumental labor. When there is less flexibility in policy implementation, the women employees are the most affected. Human resource functionalists, on the other hand, say that such policies are a luxury in GSOs as skill shortage of people and tight deadlines on projects make it difficult to sanction such time off.

Similarly, child-care facilities on or near office premises are most often absent, resulting in women quitting their jobs or take extended leave or depending on family support to tend to their children. Lata, a HR head in another GSO said, “We don’t have a ‘critical mass’ for things like day care, crèches, etc. It is a good idea to have one in an IT park where the companies get together and pool in. But IT companies hardly collaborate on sharing
resources why will they collaborate for this one?” Some married women employees said that taking care of their children is their individual responsibility and they did not expect the company to provide these facilities or make exceptions, especially in a city like Mumbai where real estate prices are sky high. Such responses make it hard to enable any sort of positive shift both at the individual level as well as at the company level.

Gender differences are also related to socialization and networking practices at InSync. In conversations with married women employees, they reported that while networking and socialization outside and within the office enhanced their career, they rarely did so as there was never enough time. Maya, a project leader said, “I don’t network. I don’t have time. My husband does it. I don’t have a friends’ group of my own. Sometimes, I don’t call my mummy too. I get so focused on my work at home.” Even while on the job, “there are some things that I just cannot do with my male colleagues,” said Chitra, a project manager.

For example, after some disagreement, one guy will come up to the next and slap him on the shoulder and say, ‘let us go for a smoke.’ Jaise kandhe peh haath daal kar jaa sekte ho.9 It is amazing how many work-related matters are sorted out in chats in the ‘smoking zone’ and male banter. I can’t do that and feel excluded as I don’t smoke nor drink and I don’t have that many female colleagues.

Affirming this another developer, Naina, who quit InSync and is now working in an IT company in Australia, said, “There is a disadvantage in terms of personal bonding with others since most of the men go out for Friday evening drinks here too, whereas women typically don’t.”

Managers, both male and female, said that overall, women software professionals are more committed, loyal, and sincere in their work. Women, they said, viewed things holistically “from all the stakeholders’ perspectives.” Furthermore, they made excellent project managers, even if their technical knowledge were lagging, as their interpersonal and team management skills were commendable. Because family was their major priority, they were not keen on job hopping or asking for onsite assignments. Also, they said that women employees added a “female touch” to the work environment, as women were more personal in their dealings as compared to men, who were seen as more professional. Another female manager while sharing her experience of this female touch working with an all-male team said, “While many interactions are easy, as a female boss I have to be careful about touch. With women, it is fine. With my male reportees, I feel awkward and hesitant and am very cautious not to give the wrong signal . . . like just wanting to put my hand on the arm of a team member who is feeling very low.” Women have to negotiate these boundaries all the time. For example, jokes and humor is another arena where sexuality and masculinity can be expressed. Indu, a project leader said, “In teams ‘non-veg’ jokes [‘dirty’ jokes, derogatory to women] do get cracked but people see to it that you are not around especially if you are the boss. I get some of these jokes which are forwarded but just delete them. It is easier to tell your junior about not talking about these jokes.”

Making an observation about the different qualities women brought to her team, Sunaina, a developer said: “Women tend to behave a little gentler and often relax an atmosphere of stress. . . . Generally, during the end of a serious discussion, women often are instrumental in easing the tension a bit by cracking jokes or maybe just lightening up the mood. Men generally prefer discussing upcoming events with them. Team leaders generally allocate

9This Hindi sentence means “to walk with another with your arm around that person’s shoulder.”

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jobs like arranging for a birthday celebration, arranging a baby gift, chart-making for company competitions, articles for company magazine. . . . In all these women are actively encouraged.” Her observation points to how the femininity of women is expressed and also reinforced by both men and women in work teams within the GSO.

At InSync, it was noted that male managers who were understanding and demonstrated good relational or “soft” skills were upheld as role models. Female managers, on the other hand, were expected to be automatically adept at this, suggesting that gender was produced by viewing these behaviors as intrinsic to female personhood. However, when these skills were not seen as embedded and appeared in a structured, quantifiable “hard” format within a competency framework for all employees, they were legitimized as neutral and made uniformly applicable, similar to technical skills. Similarly, in my former role as an HR manager, I was reminded by line managers to link the values of the company in customer presentations to tangible, demonstrable business results so that they were seen to “add value” to the company’s bottom line. The aim was to align “soft” HR interventions with “hard” business data to secure credibility and legitimacy of the company’s image and identity in the mind of the customer.

Finally, another example where the female touch was obviously missing was a book entitled *Good Business Communicates Across Cultures* (publication details are confidential). Targeted for InSync’s overseas customers, it described the Indian IT worker within the sociocultural context of India but paradoxically included images of only (White) men in suits holding briefcases walking across global highways. Gendered and racist images like these are rather common in the Web sites of Indian GSOs, suggesting a preference for a masculinized way to represent the company to global customers under the semblance of professionalism.

### 4.4 Overtime

This dimension related to how gender-related concerns shifted over the lifecycle of the individual worker. Emphasizing the different changes that marriage brings to male and female IT workers, Indu, a manager says,

In IT, women concentrate on their work well especially in the first few years, in the 22 to 25 age range. After around 25, they get married. Then, the men start getting serious about work and women start getting serious about their household responsibilities and this can cause some unrest for women. Women are not free birds like men. As you grow in your career there are fewer options available for women because of the time constraints put on them.

The difference in perception of marriage and family, and their respective salience in social identity were reflected in how women and men talk in informal conversations at the workplace. For example, Rani, a 33-year-old unmarried project manager says, “Typically 90% of women at my level are married and their topics are around children, school, and studies. With males, these topics are rare. They speak of sports, politics, and what is happening in IT. I am more comfortable with these topics. On a one to one individual level, one male member might tell me “I applied for my daughter’s passport today, let me see,” etc. As a group, men discuss things differently.”

In selection interviews, primarily women candidates were noted as specifically stating marriage, child-rearing and husband’s job mobility as a cause of their career breaks.
Interviewers in GSOs considered it normal to ask women candidates’ direct questions about their family responsibilities, rather than male candidates. In a conversation with Kalpana, a HR manager, she said, “In interviews we assume a guy will be available 100% for work unlike a woman.” Human resource managers were told to “keep their antennae up” if a female candidate was newly married and to check if she would follow her husband on his job posting. Interview notes were made of candidates’ responses to such questions. These constitute some material practices by which gender issues are produced or expressed.

In selection interviews with male candidates, references to family were made in passing. If a male candidate made a city location shift, it was mostly because of his own planned career move or, in some instances, to responsibilities associated with his aging parents (who often relocated to where the son lived rather than vice versa). Caring for in-laws was stated as the prime responsibility of the wife. Women reported that this often took the form of medical support, ensuring that dietary regulations were maintained, observing duties related to religious rituals and festivals in the home. In salary discussions and promotion decisions women typically negotiated or bargained less than men and when asked, said they preferred to compromise on these aspects and negotiate on issues such as time off or long leave from the company, for domestic responsibilities. These responses and observations reinforce the differential salience of marriage and family responsibilities for men and women in the Indian context and these gendered notions are reproduced in the organization in the form of availability for work.

Anticipating the future changes that her marital status would entail, and also preparing for them in advance, Meena, a 23-year-old trainee, fresh from the IIT (Indian Institute of Technology, the most prestigious engineering college in India) said,

I want to learn more and more since this is my first year. Maybe after 3 to 4 years when I am married I will look for stability. When you are getting married, you see, for a girl, it depends on your husband so one may relocate cities. . . . Before marriage is the main time to learn.

Women found different ways to find a balance and cope with the workload. For example, Tara, a module leader who was passionate about doing technical coding had this to say when asked how she kept up with these demands:

I don’t go out of my way to make friends at work. I do my work. Even while on maternity leave I bought books, I made sure I would spend 2 hours reading when my daughter was sleeping. It is lot of effort. Mornings, I packing tiffins [lunch packs], get my daughter ready for school. At night I just sit for my work.

When women found it hard to manage sustained work pressures, especially when their children were in school, they balanced both worlds by opting for less-demanding roles such as in quality control or training functions. At InSync for example, 82% of employees in software development were males and 18% females. In the quality control department, the ratios were slightly different with 60% men and 40%, women. While speaking with women in the quality control function at InSync, they acknowledged that this role enabled them to combine their work aspirations with family demands better than in a project role though it did not have the same “market currency” as working on “live” projects.

Employing cheap, paid domestic help or enrolling family members like in-laws or parents in child-care responsibilities were seen to be common strategies employed by women to manage the home front. One of the female managers at InSync reported that she had
employed three maids to complete the household chores and this arrangement worked very well with her husband’s erratic travel schedule and her long working hours. However, the responsibility for the supervision of the maids and the care of the household remained with her. So while she maintained equilibrium and avoided conflict, her response maintains the traditional gender order as the work just shifts to paid labor.

Recently, there have been some changes. Mohini said,

> Today in IT, the balance is tilting. Women in the age group 26 to 27 are prepared to leave everything at home to come to work. I find that men who are newly married or have small kids say, ‘Oh my wife is saying this I need to go home, or I can’t travel onsite my wife is alone, she has to look after the kids and my parents.’ These were women’s worries earlier, and now are men’s worries.

One can attribute these changes in India as related to globalization, a decline in the availability of reliable domestic help in India particularly in Mumbai city, a shift towards couples preferring to live independently, and an exposure to mass media and overseas travel that promotes a shift towards “modern ideologies” of living and relating. Affirming this, Amrita says, “Women today are taking a lot of challenges. They forego marriages; they delay families. Especially in IT they rise faster, the money is good, they see the world much earlier in life and their expectations rise. Money gives women a lot of independence and is too good to be put aside. Part-time work is also coming to India which will benefit women.”

To summarize, four themes emerged from the empirical data. They point to a preponderance of gendered beliefs, norms, and ideologies held by both individuals and GSOs. These are enacted or expressed in the material practices within GSOs as well as in the ideological constructions of GSO management and IT professionals. Issues related to these categories are directly linked to individuals’ thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, implicating, in this way, their self and identity constructions.

5. DISCUSSION

In this section, the two research questions posed in the Introduction are addressed.

5.1 Gender and Global Software Organizations

Like other organizations, GSOs are sites where gender divisions of labor prevail in the boundaries between public and private, production and reproduction, family and work. Both socially and structurally, GSOs are not a “level playing field” for men and women IT workers but rather a site where traditional and stereotypical gendered norms and stereotypes are represented, explicitly and implicitly. However, unlike other organizations, they present a dialectic of the local and the global, not only geographically in terms of markets or in terms of locations but also socially and culturally. Global software organizations are a unique global work context, with immense possibilities to weaken or strengthen the division of labor and hegemonic status of local gendered ideological constructs. For example, the shifting market requirements of technical knowledge and skills, project-based work, diverse domain knowledge requirements and geographical customer locations, typical in GSO work make it a more flexible work setting, both structurally and socially than others like manufacturing or even global consulting firms. This quality of flexibility has the potential to weaken or
eliminate mobility related restrictions and barriers for women. It also challenges the (male) dominant, linear trajectory of career growth by creating new and varied work possibilities for both men and women. GSOs provide an opportunity for skills to flow between the public and the private, giving them a competitive edge in global software work that is increasingly trust- and knowledge-based in the “Information Age” (Nicholson & Sahay, 2001; Sahay et al., 2003).

The issue of relational skills directly relates to GSO work. While software development is defined as knowledge work, it exists in a web of highly interactive relationships (Waterson et al., 1997). Furthermore, offshore software development, the focus of GSOs, differs from colocated development in three ways: the nature of work, the diversity of cultures and organizations in the development process, and the processual nature of the offshore relationship (Nicholson & Sahay, 2004). In such contexts, embeddedness of knowledge has been discussed at cognitive, organizational, and societal levels and their interconnections and “nestedness” in each other have been analyzed (Dacin, Mark, Ventresca, & Beal, 1999; Lam, 2000; Nicholson & Sahay, 2004). While such research has included symbolic representations, specialized relationships and broader social institutions and structures such as education and labor markets as sources of embeddedness of knowledge, they exclude local gender norms and relations, which, this empirical material indicates also exists at these levels in GSOs. For example, the marriage mandate where women quit their jobs and engage in domestic and child care responsibilities deprives GSOs of not only potential, skilled employees but also the female advantage in terms of relational or soft skills such as intuitiveness, interpersonal sensitivity, and empathy. These are often tacit, resulting from years of socialization practices, primarily embedded in women’s attributes and their “being,” and exhibited in interactions with others. Unlike hard technical skills or knowledge, they call for self-reflection, and training involving demonstration and repetition; these soft skills are very difficult to disembed from the local context and rearticulate in global contexts across time and space (D’Mello, 2005). While it is true that GSOs often operate with a placeless logic, individual employees remain “historically and biographically place-dependent” (Sahay et al., p. 39) suggesting that such qualities are context-dependent or “spatially sticky” (Gertler, 2001).

Going beyond cognitive reasoning, relational skills constitute elements of “emotional intelligence” (Dulewicz & Higgs, 2004; Goleman, 1996) with particular relevance for the unique context of offshore software development. Mobility restrictions for women, nested within gendered societal norms, limit not only their physical participation in GSOs but also the effectiveness and productivity of GSOs. For example, social networking practices, critical in interaction-based work, limit women’s influence in decision making because formal and informal information flows in GSOs often bypass or exclude them because of their mobility restrictions. Given the longevity of women employees in the company, and the flexible and mobile nature of its work, GSOs are in a unique position to harvest these qualities to enhance their competitive edge.

5.2 Gender, Self, and Identity

The data suggests beliefs in the sociocultural dimensions of femininity and family, masculinity, and career are powerful controlling forces in the working lives of both men and women in GSOs. These ideologies affect how they enter the IT profession, balance their paid and unpaid work roles, and their sense of satisfaction or ambivalence with themselves.
as professionals, parents, or single individuals. Resonating with the work of Gilligan (1982) women’s voices spoke of an “ethics of care” that emerged from their social experience while men spoke of an “ethics of justice” in talking about their priorities and relationships. These different voices clearly demonstrate different gendered styles and different positioning of work in identity constructions of men and women. They also suggest how individuals are placed and place themselves in the Indian social system.

The empirical data suggests that the autonomous-relational self (Kagitcibasi, 1996) is operationalized among IT workers, in ways that are more dichotomous than dialectically mutual. The breadwinner ideology predominated as a central aspect of masculine identity constructs, while the relational self occupied center stage in feminine identity constructs. Individual responses as well as the coping means used by women, reinforces the view that the relational self was the predominant pathway of self-development (Kapadia, 1999), tied to the woman’s sense of self. Such a self, legitimizing care giving by women and care receiving by men, binds women to this order even at the cost of their well-being (Kapadia, 1999; Sen, 2000). Negotiating for power and equality in the family system is a challenging task, threatening disintegration of family relationships impacting one’s self-esteem, and many women in this study, found in-between solutions or compromised their own career aspirations.

The recent changes among younger women reflect new reality-defining social structures effected by flows of globalization and modernity in India. In addition to macro changes, these women also appear to assume a critical perspective on the present social relations, seeking self-fulfillment and success, and in this way, bringing in new elements into old contexts. At a self level, this implies a conscious kindling of their autonomous self to become successful, confident actors in a global work context where the nature of work offers abundant opportunities for personal and social accomplishment. Particularly, transnational opportunities for travel and living in such global work provides an opportunity for IT professionals to review traditional entrenched gender discourses and ideologies and be exposed to diverse possibilities of relating and being. The changes in the younger generation of IT professionals suggest a positive shift where both men and women seek to accommodate the influences of modernity in their gender-related identity constructions without threatening gender inauthenticity or increasing ghettoization for women, as earlier feared (Arun & Arun, 2001; Panteli et al., 1999). It appears that slowly but surely, there is a greater convergence of the relational and autonomous aspects of selves among IT professionals rather than a reinforcement of the existing dichotomy. Factors unique to the IT profession in GSOs such as high social status, high incomes, quick possibilities for success, and frequent overseas travel opportunities intersect with boundaries of gender and class to create possibilities for varied identity constructions and arenas where individuals can demonstrate increased agency as well as relatedness.

5.3 Theoretical and Practical Implications

Insights from such studies have implications for both researchers studying gender relations in global work contexts, as well as HR practitioners in Indian GSOs.

Theoretically, while macro-level concepts of globalization, modernity, gender, and identity provide us with relevant conceptual frameworks to understand people and processes, they often fail to explain how these dynamics are actually lived in the day-to-day life and experiences of people. It is only through micro-ethnographic studies like these that we can
identify the push–pull aspects of sociocultural traditions that are enacted in the context of global workspaces and their source in local anchors. In IS, while the domain of offshore software development in increasingly important in this community, to date there has been limited, intensive empirical analysis of the organizational context of such work. The issue of gender relations has been largely ignored in the few studies on offshore software development (e.g., Nicholson & Sahay, 2004; Sahay et al., 2003). This work contributes to IS research by illustrating the local, micro-level social dynamics and moorings of a social and cultural place as related to gender, within a complex and global organizational context. It also highlights the necessity of questioning notions of the homogenizing effects of globalization forces in transnational workplaces.

There are several practical implications. Women workers themselves can play a key role in bringing about changes in their workplace environments. They can pressure their organizations to establish day care centers near the organization or lobby for part-time work possibilities or working-from-home options. These options will provide them flexibility and enable a more sustained career trajectory even when their household responsibilities increase, preventing their disappearance or dropping out of the workforce. Given their relatively privileged social position in India, and as members of a limited pool of knowledge workers so critical for such work that is high on the national agenda, they can use this bargaining power to create such enabling possibilities for themselves.

Besides workers, GSOs would greatly benefit by the continued participation of women in the internal labor market pool and their work contributions with the added dimension of their female touch. Even though the gender ratios in GSOs are skewed, and women workers experience all kinds of mobility-related restrictions, their contributions have been noted as significant to organizational performance in this knowledge-work industry. Wider debates on female and male styles of relating or the feminine advantage (e.g., Fletcher, 1998; Kealey, 1990) have particular relevance for GSOs. This feature warrants serious consideration by GSOs to attend to gender issues that hinder their business which itself, as stated earlier, is so deeply embedded in a web of highly interactive relationships. Management of GSOs may consider reviewing their policies and HR systems and processes in terms of gender, to relax the work–family boundary, and challenge organizational gendered assumptions about the public–private/hard–soft, or masculine/feminine dichotomy. Creating processes for enhancing networking and socialization options for women employees can enhance their visibility and continued presence in both the internal as well as external labor markets (Evetts, 1996).

Going beyond the “add women and stir” remedy, HR staff could attend to how gender subtly enters and shapes structures, processes, and ways of relating in GSOs. Treating individual IT employees as resources or referring to them as manpower, commonly used parlance by HR professionals, neutralize critical identity elements such as gender that organize behaviors and impact the organization. Business pressures in a volatile marketplace are now the driver for these changes. In the context of gender relations, it calls for a reconfiguring of the GSO workplace into one that is perhaps more androgynous, overall. Such a reconfiguration is expected to contribute towards a more effective holistic balance, making the workplace a social milieu that accommodates such transformations.

This work also has implications for the IT export business in India, given its scorching growth rate. At one level, creating enabling opportunities for inclusion of more women into the IT workforce would contribute to increasing the overall labor pool of professionals in the country, where competent workers are always in short supply. These opportunities will also reduce attrition rates, so endemic to this volatile industry and so detrimental to the
GSO (D’Mello, 2005). By participating in the IT sector, women can also actively contribute to technological development of the country. To this end, equal opportunity’ task forces and their recommendations typically focus on increasing the number count of women in this industry (Suriya, 2003). However, structural transformations are certainly necessary but not sufficient to foster true empowerment and engagement of this group of knowledge workers. What is needed is a greater acceptance of the complicities between social norms and organizational practices that primarily constrain women’s mobility and any attempts towards changing these mobility constraints. Recently, NASSCOM, the prestigious, apex body of the IT industry in India, claiming to be the “authentic voice” of this industry and “the single point reference for all information on the IT industry in India” (p. 2), has, in its 2005 Annual Report, dedicated for the first time, a full chapter to the socio-economic impact of the growth of IT in India. Referring to the United Nation’s Millennium Declaration, the section on gender equality focuses on the role of ICTs for underprivileged women. While this may not be directly relevant to GSOs in particular, it is a positive first step at an industry level, in acknowledging the gender divide in India in the context of ICTs. NASSCOM can leverage this national report to disseminate findings from studies on gender disparities to create awareness and an impetus for change, on gender-related issues specifically within GSOs.

The notions of empowerment of both women and men or development as empowerment are also practically relevant (Sen, 2000). For women, where the relational self predominates, empowerment would mean kindling their autonomous self to enable them to question the patriarchal order and create a space for themselves. For men, empowerment would imply enabling them to develop and to express comfortably more relational qualities of nurturance, empathy, and care. For GSOs, it implies celebrating rather than stereotyping differences and finding holistic and creative settings for its employees to contribute and add value not only in terms of technical knowledge but also through a range of personal attributes.

Finally, other Asian countries where global outsourcing work is increasing and which share similar sociocultural contexts with India, could benefit from learnings or practices from this context in their design and implementation of gender-sensitive policies and processes. Understanding the nature of social structures and consciously committing to positively influencing them are critical at the national, political, industry-wide, and organizational levels; it directly relates to issues of participation of women in the IT workforce as well as the effectiveness of the industry and the particular GSO itself.

6. CONCLUSION

Gender is implicated in the daily working lives of IT professionals in GSOs in India. Contrary to beliefs about neutrality and professionalism, GSOs like other organizations, constitute a local as well as a global site where gender is enacted in its material practices and ideological constructions. Gender-related norms and beliefs frame selves and identities of IT workers, influencing their self-esteem and participation in the workforce. They also regulate behaviors of employees through their formal and informal processes. Particularities of GSO work make it a potential site for educated women in India to increase their agency and participation in the public sphere and disrupt traditional, mobility-related, and other restrictions. The persistence of the gender divide in GSOs has ramifications for not only the selves and identities of individual workers but also for the country’s growth and development, given that IT is seen as a pivotal engine for national growth.
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APPENDIX 3

Marisa D'Mello and Sundeep Sahay (forthcoming).

"I am kind of a nomad where I have to go places and places".... Understanding Mobility, Place and Identity in Global Software Work from India.

Revised version for the journal, Information & Organization.
“I am kind of a nomad where I have to go places and places”....Understanding Mobility, Place and Identity in Global Software Work from India

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**Abstract**

Mobilities, encompassing the movements and ‘flows’ of people, objects, capital, images and information across the world are strongly implicated in the context of present day globalization processes. Globally distributed software development work across boundaries of time, space and place undertaken by global software organizations (GSOs), metaphorically represents ‘models-of’ and ‘models-for’ globalization processes. Such work, workplaces and workers reflect a multiplicity of mobilities. An in depth interpretative case study of a GSO located in Mumbai, India, was used in order to understand the nature and kinds of mobilities and their interactions with place, space, selves, and identities of knowledge workers within the firm. Several sets of interrelated mobilities were noted in the empirical material with each displaying a set of tensions as well as possibilities. The different kinds and features of mobilities are discussed and the notion of mobility identity is proposed for analyzing the dynamic interplay between mobilities, place, selves, and identities of the workers. Theoretical and practical implications of this study have also been suggested.

Keywords: mobilities, identities, place, space, software, IT worker

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Human history began with movement. The earliest known text, “The Epic of Gilgamesh,” is a narration of the travels and travails of a man. Today, many social scientists are expressing a renewed interest in the rich experiences of peoples’ travels and travails.

In the millennium issue of the British Journal of Sociology, prominent sociologists provided their position statements regarding the new contours of sociological research in this century. In this issue, Urry (2000) proposed the agenda of a ‘postsocietal sociology’ which would seek to elaborate upon how contemporary flows and mobilities undermine traditional forms of stability associated with endogenous social structures that have “historically provided the intellectual and context for sociology” (p. 186). Some of these flows and mobilities that Urry describes as being at the heart of these transformations...
include imaginative travel, movements of images and information, and virtual, object, and corporeal travels. He believes that in the process of thinking ‘beyond society,’ sociological analysis is required to recast its subject material by focusing on ‘mixtures’ or forms of heterogeneously composed networks, commodity chains, fluid social spaces and global institutional forms.

In this paper, we contribute to the development of Urry’s agenda of a sociology of mobilities through an empirically informed analysis of mobilities that constitute and are constituted by globally distributed software development work. Such work has been described by Sahay, Nicholson, and Krishna (2003) as metaphorically representing ‘models-of” and ‘models-for’ globalization implying that they are made possible by globalization processes. They also indicate, in the conduct of such work, that globalization processes are understood and engaged with in particular situated contexts. Mobility is inherent in processes of globalization, whether it concerns the movement of money from one part of the globe to another, people traveling, the spread of terrorist activities, or the movement of information in service oriented work. Lash and Urry (1996) describe such movements to be shaped as the ‘economies of signs and space’. In the contemporary reflexive world, the economies are increasingly ones of signs (information, symbols, images, and desire) and of space where both signs and social subjects (refugees, financiers, tourists and citizens) are mobile over ever greater distances. They argue that an analysis of these mobilities contributes to an understanding of changes in social relations, from the organization of work to the working of culture industries, and to the formation of new forms of citizenship.

An analysis of mobilities inherent in the technoscape¹ of global software development work is appropriate and urgently called for due to a variety of reasons. Such work is inherently distributed, where some parts of a software are developed in one location, and other parts in other locations typically in different countries. The coordination of these activities involves the movement of pieces of code, developers, methodologies, technologies, and documentation of different types. These movements are by no means seamless and unproblematic since they involve the interaction of different and sometimes conflicting linkages between people, technologies and practices across different time, space, and cultural conditions. Such interactions are fundamentally intertwined with the notions of self and identity. Their redefinitions, provide a unique arena for the study of the interrelation of self and identity with career, organization and business cycles in such work contexts.

Prominent authors like Giddens (1990) and Castells (1997) have argued for a central role of identity in understanding social transformations in contemporary society. They argue that globalization needs to be interpreted in the context of the interconnection between groups and individuals with institutions. Giddens (1990) discusses how interconnections between the vulnerable nature of knowledge and the placeless logic of contemporary life contribute to a feeling of ‘existential anxiety’ or ‘personal meaninglessness’ at the

¹Appadurai (1996) used this term to refer to the “…global configuration, also ever fluid, of technology and the fact that technology, both high and low, both mechanical and informational, now moves at high speed across various kinds of previously impervious boundaries.” (p.34).
individual level. A response to these individual-level feelings of anxiety and insecurity comes through various expressions and redefinitions of identity. In the context of technology, Walsham (1998) has argued that an analysis of identity helps to improve our understandings of the relationship between information technology (IT) and social transformation. These arguments have been further developed by Sahay et al., (2003) in the context of globally distributed software development work who write that:

GSAs (Global Software Alliances) provide an interesting context to study aspects of identities, since they involve new forms of organizational boundaries as compared to traditional firms where strict demarcations existed between external and internal relations…As firms globalize, and new clients and geographical markets are addressed, the different boundaries are further conflated and actors continuously need to shift between continuously evolving work, technological and social contexts. The shift places pressure on individuals and changes in identity are intricately intertwined with these movements (p. 89).

In this paper, our focus is on understanding the conceptual relationship between mobility and changes in identity in the context of globally distributed software development work. Since mobilities of people, technologies and practices inherently redefine the relationships between various forms of external and internal boundaries of the software firms, they are significantly implicated in the transformations of identity. The paper thus focuses on two key questions:

1. What is the nature of mobilities that characterize people and organizations engaged in global software development activities?
2. How do these mobilities interact with the articulation, expression and redefinitions of individual selves and identities?

These two questions are analyzed through an intensive empirical analysis that draws upon semi-structured in-depth interviews of 50 IT employees (of a firm in Mumbai, India,) undertaking software work in a number of different countries. In addition to the members of this firm, further interviews have been carried out with other consultants and opinion leaders of the industry. These interviews have been supplemented with extensive participant observation as well as analysis of secondary data related to company policies, recruitment guidelines and other publicity material.

With the objectives of answering the two research questions as the backdrop, the rest of the paper is organized as follows: In the next section, we present the theoretical framework which seeks to outline the relationship between mobility and identity. In section 3, we first briefly present the research approach adopted for the study. In the following section 4, we present the case study, including details of the context of the IT industry in India and excerpts from the interviews conducted. In section 5, we present the case analysis to answer the two research questions posed in this paper drawing upon the theoretical framework developed in section 2. Finally in Section 6, some theoretical and practical implications are suggested with conclusions in Section 7.
2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Place, Identity and Mobility
The theoretical basis developed for our analysis rests on three foundational concepts of place, identity and mobility and their inter-relationships. While the concept of place helps to understand how social meanings and existential significance are related to places (physical, social and electronic) the notion of identity draws our attention to how these sources of meanings and identifications contribute and are constituted by an individual’s sense of identity. The notion of mobility and its forms are discussed with a view to analyzing how such movement is redefining the identity-place relationship and its implications for understanding identity. Within the backdrop of this conceptual argument, this section has three main subsections.

In the first subsection, titled ‘Place,’ we discuss the notion of place and its significance in the context of global software work. In the second, titled ‘Place and Identity,’ the interrelationships between the concepts of place and identity are described. In the third, titled ‘Mobility and Identity,’ the interaction of mobility with the place-identity relationship is analyzed. In this way, the theoretical basis for our analysis is developed.

2.1 Place
The notion of place has been, over the years, a focus of theoretical attention for researchers from various domains including sociologists, human geographers, social psychologists and, more recently, even the discipline of Information Systems (IS). Dirlik (1998), discussing how recent sociological research has seen an explosion of a “place consciousness,” writes:

The last decade has fortunately seen the eruption of place consciousness into social and political analysis. Place consciousness is closely linked to and appears as the radical ‘Other’ of globalization (p. 8).

Place and space have been viewed as the two central contours in the time-space configuration of modernity (Giddens 1990). The concept of place has typically been theorized in contrast to that of space. While space is associated with the sense of an abstract and infinite expanse through which people and ideas freely move offering possibilities for newness and growth (Casey, 1997; Schultze and Boland, 2000), place has been related with a person’s sense of boundedness and particularity, of a sense of being and contented belonging or emotional attachment and where tradition holds sway (Giddens, 1990; Harvey, 1989; Tuan, 1977). Mutually constituting each other, place is associated with security, subjectivity and situatedness whereas space is associated with movement, freedom and expansiveness of possibilities (Schultze and Boland, 2000; Tuan, 1977). In a similar vein, Godkin (1980, p. 73) describes a place as a ‘discrete, temporally and perceptually bounded unit of psychologically meaningful material space’. He asserts that in contrast to space, we anchor or root our being to places where we experience belongingness and a sense of meaningful existential significance. The difference between a house and a home illustrates this point.
The notion of place has become especially relevant in the context of globalization debates where the implicit assumptions being made by the proponents of globalization is that place is no longer relevant, and social transactions, including work-related, can now be carried out in spaces. Harvey (1989) argued that because of globalization, novel technologies of transportation and communication increasingly ‘compress’ time and space. In this way, he argues, many characteristics of place are abstracted or eliminated while space is increasingly unified. Giddens (1990) describes a key mechanism for globalization as the manner in which space is separated from place, and social practices are ‘disembedded’ from local contexts and rearticulated across indefinite spans of global spaces (and time). In the same vein, Castells (1996) puts forth the notion of ‘placeless space’ to emphasize the assumption that organizations make about the increasing irrelevance of the ‘local’. Castells (1996) argues that in contemporary capitalism, while organizations are located in places, their components, people and processes are place dependent. He thus argues for a dialectical relation between the “net and the self” metaphorically representing space and place respectively.

Rejecting geographical essentialism and emphasizing the social, Massey (1998) views space as constructed out of multiple social relations ranging from trans-global trade, finance and telecommunications, through geographically located national reigns and powers to social relations within workplaces of all sorts, cities, settlements and the intimate relations within a household. These nets of social relations which are inherently dynamic and changing are constructed, laid down, decayed and renewed and either contained within a particular place or stretched out beyond a specific locality. Given the nature of social relations and place, Massey (1998) argues that they are more like processes as they cannot be fixed and bounded areas with some long internalized history. Rather, she posits that “places are a construction of a particular assemblage of social relations interacting or meeting at a particular location”…imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings…” (p.154). Further, given that locations are geographically differentiated, and globalization does not have homogenous influences, places retain their uniqueness through a peculiar mix of wider and local social relations. In a similar vein, the notion of ‘space of flows’ (Soja, 1989) with global cities as nodal points has been proposed to highlight the increased interconnectivity between places and large global flows of people, money and information.

Many have argued that the space-time compression in our contemporary world coupled with new information and communication technologies (ICTs) have resulted in fragmentation, disorientation and a sense of placelessness. For example, Giddens (1990) claims that global flows create an unsettling change whereby places become increasingly ‘phantasmagoric’: places or locales are “thoroughly penetrated by and shaped in terms of social influences quite distant from them” (p.18-19). In a phantasmagoric place, people and things are simultaneously ‘now here’ and ‘nowhere’ (Friedland and Boden, 1994). Similarly, Casey (1993, 1997) applies the idea of ‘dromocentricity’ to describe the speeded up time-space compressed world or placeless place characterized by an intertwining of the local and the global - of being somewhere and being nowhere.
According to Harvey (1989), the disorientation of present times results in a search for stability through a sense of place. Robins (1991) writes that “the driving imperative is to salvage centered, bounded and coherent identities – placed identities for placeless times” (p. 41). Massey (1998), on the other hand has a more positive view. She contends that globalization phenomena and time-space compression changes the very form of social relations consequently, implicating other places and bringing the ‘global’ into the very process of formation of the ‘local’ at each place. The peculiar mix of local as well as wider or global social relations produce distinctive effects in a place that cannot be reproduced elsewhere. Consequently, our awareness of the connections of local place to the wider world is positively enlarged and integrated, giving us a … “global sense of place” (p. 156).

The historical shift in social values from ‘ascription’ in traditional social settings to ‘achievement’ in modern, meritocratic, and capitalistic society values that have valued individual success and achievement, upward mobility and material accumulation have place related implications (Zijderveld, 1973). These shifts, requiring a constant pressure to prove oneself and confirmation of significant others, have been linked to aspects of one’s social place in the world, individual autonomy and self-respect (Palm, 1977; Walter, 1979). Furthermore, power asymmetries, within capitalist organizations tending to treat labor as a purchasable and disposable commodity, crucially reconfigure the relationship of labor to place in the firms thus shaping selves and identities of workers (Burchell et al., 1999).

Drawing upon research in sociology and human geography, Sahay et al., (2003) have analyzed the role of place in the conduct of global software work. They argue that places (both physical and social), far from being irrelevant, are very much emphasized at the levels of the individual organization and also the inter-organizational relationship. This emphasis comes from various reasons including the individual’s ‘compulsions for proximity’ (Boden and Molotch, 1994) and an organization’s need to project an image of its local rootedness (i.e., an Indian IT company invoking family and community values to address the attrition problem), and the need to have trust and comfort with each other in activities that are geographically and temporally separated. Sahay et. al., (2003), however, go on to argue that these needs for place are in constant dialectical tensions with the outsourcing organization’s imperatives for space-based work, arising primarily from considerations of obtaining cost and time-based efficiency through the conduct of space-based work.

Table I summarizes key characteristics of the concept of place and its significance in the context of global software work.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Place</strong></th>
<th><strong>Space</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bounded</td>
<td>Abstract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grounded by tradition</td>
<td>Governed by modernity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychologically meaningful</td>
<td>Offers growth possibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situated and subjective</td>
<td>Expansive and objective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.g., Home</td>
<td>e.g., House</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Globalization Influences on Place & Space**

| Eliminated or abstracted | Increasingly unified |
| Local places             | Global spaces         |
| Unique assemblage of social relations at a location | Social relations range across geographical scale |
| Global sense of place    | Space of flows        |
| Individual’s compulsion for proximity | Outsourcing imperative for space-based work |

**Table 1: Place and Space: Characteristics and Globalization Influences**

We now turn our attention to the place-identity relationship.

### 2.2 Place and Identity

The place-identity relationship has been an important theoretical concern for researchers, especially within the domains of human geography, social and environmental psychology. In the late 1970s, the study of place, rootedness and ‘home’ were the focus of a number of humanist geographers, psychologists and phenomenologists who located ‘home’ in a physical, social and cultural context (e.g., Hayward, 1975; Seamon, 1979; Tuan, 1977). They argued that besides physical and social needs, home as a place, also provided psychological comfort as well as a sense of identity. Researchers from the field of environmental psychology have related place to identity in two ways (Twigger-Ross and Uzzell, 1996):

“The first is what we call place identification. This refers to a person’s expressed identification with a place, e.g. a person from London may refer to themselves as a Londoner…The second way in which place has been related to identity is through the term place identity2 …is another aspect of identity that describes the person’s socialization with the physical world…there is the assumption that the processes operating between place and identity are the same as between groups and identity”

(p. 205-206).

These two ways differ in terms of what is emphasized – the social or the place in identity construction. In the case of place identification, within social identity theory (Hogg and Abrams, 1988) place serves as a social category, and place identification is one more addition to the existing repertoire of one’s identifications.

While suggesting that the social identity approach only partially accounts for the self and place relationship, Twigger-Ross and Uzzell (1996) argue that all aspects of identity

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2 Place identity concept was proposed by Proshansky et al. (1983) to explain the notion that place formed part of the individual’s self-identity through bonds developed between people and places. They consider home as “the ‘place’ of greatest personal significance (p. 60).
have, to differing extents, place-related implications. In other words, they argue that place does not serve as an inert setting in which identity develops but rather interacts dynamically with identity processes, such as one’s self esteem, self efficacy and a sense of continuity. In this way, place forms part of all our identifications rather than just one category (Twigger-Ross and Uzzell, 1996). Similarly, Sarup (1996, p.3) argues that as we are born into relationships which are always place-based, a sense of place and the concept of home are tied to the notion of identity, creating an important form of primary bonding. It is not surprising, that paralleling the growth in global instability and transnational flows in the past few decades with the loosening of geographical boundaries, people’s increased preoccupation with identity and their personal and collective roots or moorings have grown (Harvey 1989). Manifested in the form of going back to places such as the village, the country or the continent from where people believed they came from, this search suggests that roots are in a certain place, linked to feelings of being ‘at home’ and where the past is seen as the foundation for individual and collective identity (Sarup, 1996). In this way, knowing the past or where one has been then lays the basis for identity as well as where one might want to move towards, particularly in a world that feels increasingly fragmented and insecure as a result of the pressures of time-space compression (Harvey 1989; Sarup, 1996).

Massey (1998) challenges the idea of places as stable and fixed and questions the notion that a ‘sense of place’ or rootedness can provide one with security and an unproblematic identity in a globalizing world. Similarly, others (e.g., Usher, 2002) have called for more malleable notions of place, meaning and identity as globalization, with its unbounded de-territorialized flows and fluxes of goods, technologies, capital and people is ‘homeless,’ resulting in conditions of mobility, disembedding and time space compression. These authors argue that the dynamic network of social relations, place (or home for that matter) does not have a single, essential, coherent identity nor is there a single sense of place shared by all who are related to it. For example, while communities\(^3\) can exist without being in the same place (e.g., networks of like-minded friends, religious, political groups etc.) a place can also have multiple meanings (e.g., a home can be a place of repose or conflict for different family members). Similarly, individuals who move across national borders, hold ‘diasporic’ or hybridized and multiple identities as they are not bound by the notion of a stable place or ‘homeland’ and, in geographically fluid context, there is no longer the notion of a ‘one true national self’ or identity (Brah, 1996; Sheller and Urry, 2003; Urry, 2003).

The positions discussed above relate directly to notions of self and identity processes. In traditional societies, where life revolved around pre-defined social roles and norms and each one (literally) knew one’s place in the world, the notion of the ‘bounded’ self or stable identity with an ‘essential’ unchanging inner core was very much tied to bounded notions of place and community (Kellner, 1992). Like the literature on place-identity demonstrates--places, rather than a mere background for social life, were meaningful landscapes within which individuals and groups established rich interpersonal connections (Dixon and Durrheim, 2000). Communication technologies of the 20th century, both electronically and geographically, have functioned to undermine this stable

\(^3\) Most often, a community is associated with place (Massey, 1998).
and unitary conception of place as well as identity by enabling links and relations across regions and continents. Technologies are seen to free or ‘unglue’ selves, identities and relationships from geographical or spatial confines providing possibilities for varied alterations to emerge (Gergen, 1991). Thus, in contemporary society, identity is construed as fluid and flexible, shifting in a chameleon-like way from one social context to another, giving way to a multiplicity of selves, that “swim in ever-shifting, concatenating, and contentious currents of being” (Gergen, 1991, p.80). In this way, the self is redefined as relational, constructed within social networks of relationships as a reflexive two-way process, through interaction and relationship, as opposed to just emerging from within an individual (Baldwin, 1986; Bruner, 1990; Gergen, 1994). Self and identity is thus an ongoing process constructed in different practices and various sites of experience (Sarup, 1996).

So paradoxically, while globalization processes and ICTs build relationships between places and locales through processes of time and space compression, these very influences contribute to undermining a stable and unitary conception of place as well as to the dislocation of selves and identities. This aspect is especially relevant in the context of global software work whose landscape is inherently characterized by ICT mediated mobilities of time, space and place and shifting social, geographical and organizational contexts. These mobilities call for a re-conceptualization of place-identity relationships in the context of ICT enabled work in globalization and the potential implications on place, identity and their interrelationship. In the next section, we elaborate upon this.

2.3 Our Theoretical Lens: Place, Identity and Mobility

Debates around mobility are numerous and mobility is used in markedly diverse ways. In this section we first set up an understanding of different perspectives of mobilities, more generally, and then in GSW in particular.

The field of research on mobilities is exploding both in the social sciences as well as in Information Systems research. A common understanding of mobility is the movement of a body between locations in primarily geographical space. Referring to the ‘mobility turn’ in the social sciences, Úrry (2003) connects developments in transportation and communications infrastructure with new social and cultural practices of mobility. He writes that with the growth of urban places, mobility was primarily seen in terms of travel and the use of technologies of transportation and telecommunication devices, with the intention of collapsing distance and time (Úrry, 2003). Organizations and work relations are also seen as mobile wherein work is assumed to be liberated from fixed spaces as evident in practices of virtual teams/organizations, distributed work arrangements across space, time and place boundaries of organizations (Jarvenpaa and Leidner, 1999; Lipnack and Stamps, 1997) as well as nation states (Dahles and Stobbe, 2004; Sklair, 2001). Mobility as fluidity and flexibility has created a new breed of independent workers symbolically depicted as ‘e-lancers’ (Malone and Laubacher, 1998) or ‘self programmeable workers’ (Castells, 2001) who, unconstrained by organizational boundaries or traditional employment contracts, can seek a ‘boundaryless career’ (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996).
In this ‘mobility turn’, “route” metaphors emphasizing diaspora and movement across places and spaces have replaced “root” metaphors, challenging notions of fixed identities and biographies (Pile and Thrift, 1995 p. 10). For example, the ‘nomad’ of Bradiotti (1994) and the ‘traveler’ (Clifford, 1986). Other contemporary metaphors include ‘flows’, ‘liquid’ and ‘networks’. For example, Urry (2001) refers to flows or waves of people, objects, information, money, images and risks as ‘global fluids’ that move across regions in uneven and diverse shapes and forms. Giddens (2002) used the term ‘Runaway World’, to represent the ‘mobility’ of our contemporary social world in terms of both social and geographical movement and the out of control nature of this movement.

Another set of mobility-related concepts relate to the context of globalization. For example, Appadurai (1990) proposed five interrelated ‘scapes’ conceptualized as fluid, flowing and amorphous, as an alternative spatial rendering of the traditional global order. Similarly, Urry (2001) using the metaphor of ‘travel’ as a journey crossing process. Rather than a single place, Urry (2002) argues that “people can indeed be said to ‘dwell’ in various mobilities” (p. 157). These diverse yet intersecting mobilities, he says creates a ‘networked’ pattern of economic and social life.

In IS research, the focus has been primarily on the technologies that enable mobility, such as ICTs in general and mobile communication technologies like mobile phones and Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs), rather than the processes of mobility itself. Aiming to enlarge the notion of mobility beyond human corporeal movement, (Kakihara and Sørenson, 2002) have proposed three interrelated dimensions of human interaction. These include the spatial, temporal and contextual that are mobilized by the use of ICTs especially mobile technologies creating fluid interactions in work environments. In addition to emphasizing the role of place or physical location in facilitating work interactions, Kakihara and Sørenson (2003) also describe locational, operational and interactional mobility of mobile professional work. However, the larger social realms or inner existential domains of individuals that ground fluid notion of mobility are largely ignored in these studies, leaving a gap in a fuller understanding of mobility.

The context of global software work, undertaken by global software organizations (GSOs), is about mobility which is often taken for granted. This mobility happens at least three interconnected levels of the work, the organization and the individual. Global software work (GSW) is defined by Sahay et. al., (2003) as ‘knowledge work’, where knowledge systems such as programming languages, software development, project management methodologies, and specialized domain knowledge are applied to software development and maintenance activities within a global setting. GSOs undertake such work across national boundaries through arrangements like alliances, outsourcing or subsidiaries. ICTs are used to coordinate tasks, at various stages of the software life cycle, which are separated and implemented at diverse geographical locations. In this way, the authors argue that such work is intangible, heterogeneous and mobile as compared to traditional service or manufacturing activities.

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4These include flows of people, technologies, money, images and information and the spread of ideas such as democracy and freedom.
GSW takes place in a highly volatile and dynamic global marketplace populated by organizations from both developing and developed countries. Organizations, undertaking outsourced work, are located in a particular country (referred to as ‘offshore’) employing local employees called ‘knowledge workers’. While most work is done in electronic spaces created by ICTs, GSW also necessitates physical travel of personnel between vendors and the contracting organization located overseas (referred to as ‘onsite’). With rapidly expanding customer bases in new geographical territories, organizational boundaries increasingly merge, necessitating shifting of actors between diverse, multiple, evolving work, social and technological contexts (Sahay et al., 2003).

GSW involves individuals, teams, organizations and nations with diverse social and cultural backgrounds. There are also idiosyncratic styles of work, interacting across temporal and spatial boundaries, resulting in a variety of social and human issues that pose a challenge for GSOs. GSW is typified by high mobility career trajectories of knowledge or IT workers observed to have strong and individualized professional attachments (Sahay et al., 2003). Volatile changes, in technologies and platforms in the global marketplace, demand on a constant basis the continuous updating of knowledge and skills by individual workers and pressures IT workers to be in a continuous learning mode to be ‘marketable’ (both within and outside the organization). Diverse time zones and tight project schedules necessitate IT workers to consistently work late hours, often in a crisis mode, and rapidly switch between projects, technologies and countries. These demands and shifts pressurize individuals to respond through what Castells (2001) describes as the ‘power of identity,’ or shifts in individual identity constructions.

In this paper, we argue that, in the context of GSW, mobility fundamentally influences the place-identity relationship in at least three ways. First, as people constantly move back and forth across different locations, they can experience what Beck (2000) calls a “place-polygamy” (p. 72) implying potential identification with a multiplicity of places as contrasted to the unitary place identified in the earlier literature. Secondly, in the above work context, place (or work) occurs in ‘electronic places’ as well as in social, national and existential domains such as their career trajectories, inner selves and social relations. Both of the above reasons (place multiplicity and electronic and existential places) bring into play very different forms of experiences and relations including those related to identity constructions. Finally, besides the spatial, temporal and contextual mobility in this kind of work, social and personal or existential mobility also influences the place-identity relationship. GSOs are thus sites embodying the fluidity of mobilities, both of place and selves of the various actors. In this way, a GSO is not just one location in a social or geographic field, but also includes the multiple paths and socio-spatial trajectories by which individuals and collectives arrive at their positions.

To conclude, place and space are socially constructed configurations in the time-space continuum whose meanings and importance has shifted over the years. In a highly mobile and volatile work environment, within a dromocentric world, the construction of identity by both individuals and organizations becomes a challenging project. Our theoretical lens thus seeks to understand firstly the nature of mobility in the context of GSW, and
secondly examine how this shapes the place-identity relationship. Table 2 outlines the three mobilities in GSW and their possible implications for worker identities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kinds of Mobilities</th>
<th>The Nature of these Mobilities</th>
<th>Implication for Identity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Influenced by local place and global flows, ‘marketability’ mode drives career and social moves.</td>
<td>Identities are necessarily ‘under construction’, modified and influenced by outer contexts of world, market, social relations as well as internal individual choice making processes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work</td>
<td>Global orders significantly shape nature and practice of work, freeing it from geographical and temporal constraints. GSW creates a web ‘of’ and ‘for’ mobilities within which individuals navigate selves.</td>
<td>Socio-economic places and relations within networks are reorganized and redefined; multiple meanings of place and space are possible; travel of all sorts are fraught with hopes and possibilities as well as fears and insecurities, calls for reflexive monitoring of actions by individual workers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>ICT mediation in GSOs creates fluidity in organizational structures, GSW as well as IT workers by dissolving boundaries yet also reinforcing them. Local and global elements are integrated in GSOs. GSOs link a ‘global sense’ of local places to transnational global flows.</td>
<td>Organizations like GSOs with multiple spaces create tensions in socially and historically situated identity elements of workers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Mobilities within GSW and Implications for Identity

3. RESEARCH APPROACH
Our research approach was aimed at developing an in-depth understanding of identity related processes among software professionals in the situated context of GSOs in India. Such a research approach is broadly classified as ‘interpretive case studies’ (Walsham, 1995) as it seeks to develop subjective understandings of individuals. An ethnographic approach is appropriate to the study of identity and mobility processes since it remains close to ways people experience and make sense of themselves and others (van Maanen, 1979). The case study method (Stake, 1994; Yin, 1994) was used to create ‘thick descriptions’ of the context as well as the actors. The case was selected for the following reasons:

1. It is a mid-sized company with a lengthy history and has restructured itself several times to match market changes. This dynamic aspect is related to its identity and image and also impacts its employees.
2. One of the researchers was associated with the company as a Human Resource (HR) professional for several years and had a rich understanding of the context. This role also facilitated access to people within the company. The second researcher also had contact with the company from previous work.
Data was collected mainly through semi-structured interviews. In all, 50 interviews with Developers, Module Leaders, Project Leaders, Project Managers, and Unit/Function Heads were conducted between December 2002 and July 2004. This was not a continuous period of interviewing and the research site was visited several times during this period. Each tape-recorded interview lasted around 60-80 minutes. Some informants were followed up either in person or by e-mail to understand certain issues in more detail. The interviews usually began with sharing the aim of the research project, a promise of anonymity, and a request for the interview to be tape-recorded. Informants most often said they were happy to contribute to research involving their professional group as it was expected to have ‘some’ future benefits. The questions usually began with asking the informant to describe how he/she became a software professional. Other questions related to their work and personal commitments, their views on industry and company-related shifts, their professional growth trajectory and career-related aspirations. Questions more directly related to mobility themes were around their travel schedules to and from work in the city, traveling and living overseas, professional and person growth milestones, their thoughts, feelings and experiences around shifting job, platforms, projects and age related changes.

Other sources of data included, notes and observations from ‘hanging around’ workstations, the cafeteria, commuting in the company bus to the office and back home, attending team meetings and company gatherings, and reviewing some of the company’s promotional materials and its website. Several ex-employees were also contacted and met either personally or through e-mail, as most of them had moved to another city in India or overseas. The researchers have also drawn extensively on their prior experience with various GSOs that they were associated with either as in the HR function or as a researcher. One of the researchers attended the NASSCOM\(^5\) 2004 annual meeting, an event hosted and attended by IT industry leaders as well as representatives from research companies and government representatives from different countries. Some interviews were done with opinion leaders in the industry and also spouses of employees.

Tape-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. Subsequently, the researchers independently analyzed the transcripts and identified recurrent themes and sub-themes in the data. The authors discussed, with each other and with colleagues, various kinds of mobilities observed in the empirical material, their relationship and differences and formed broad categorizes in an attempt to order them. To elucidate these, we drew on theoretical concepts that were appropriate to understand and describe these aspects. Our analysis drew on theoretical concepts from the work of Urry (2000, 2003) from sociology, Massey (1998) from human geography and Kakihara and Sørenson (2002, 2003) from the field of information systems. The multiplicity of mobilities observed ranged from physical, social, organizational and existential movements of and by software people within and across contexts of GSW. These were arranged under five categories that related to place, space and the shifts by workers, necessitated by the distinctive nature of this industry. These categories also illustrated diverse contexts of IT workers:

\(^{5}\) An acronym for the National Association of Software and Service Companies, the apex body as well as chamber of commerce of the IT industry in India.
a. from small town to big city illustrating mobilities towards modernity;
b. shifting sense of place illustrating mobilities related to place and space;
c. movements signifying growth and career mobility;
d. traveling across borders such as offshore-onsite shifts, and
e. changes over time and the life cycle of an IT worker.

Under each category, characteristics of mobilities observed were identified and possible linkages to identity were also articulated. The empirical material was then further sifted for mobilities that seemed most directly related to each category and selected according to how well it illustrated the mobility category. Thus, rather than adopting an a priori theoretical framework, a set of themes was inductively evolved through an ongoing process of engagement with the data, discussion with each other and with others, and also reading of relevant literature. This approach has been adopted in other interpretive studies as well (Nicholson and Sahay, 2001; Walsham and Sahay, 1999).

4. CASE DESCRIPTION

4.1 Context: The Industry
The IT industry in India is characterized by a myriad of interconnected technological, geographical, demographic and socio-cultural shifts and movements. India’s centuries old history of scholarship and tradition of educational institutions provided a fertile ground for the burgeoning of the software industry. In the early 1980s, under the dynamic leadership of the Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, globalization unfolded in the context of ‘new economic policies’ of liberalization which encouraged imports, while promoting an ‘export orientation’ in science and technology arenas as a critical means to become self-reliant (Heeks, 1996). Nehruvian icons of a modernizing Indian nation such as dams, steel and power plants and the rhetoric of poverty reduction of the poor, was replaced by images of goods and commodities available through multinational and Indian corporations directed towards the middle classes (Fernandes, 2000, 2004). Post 1991 liberalization reforms meant an unprecedented opening of Indian consumer markets to foreign ‘global’ brands resulting in the flooding of shops, with imported brands, new launches of satellite television channels, the media offering a mélange of desires, new forms of entertainment and ‘lifestyle’ products (Mazzarella, 2003). While in the country, issues of increased liberalism versus increased economic poverty and enhanced disparities, increased caste politics at the central and state governments, the rise of Hindutva (Hindu nationalism), the significant decline of the female to male sex ratio from the 1991 to the 2001 census particularly in a few states in India (Athreya, 2003) were and still are widely debated. The software industry picked up momentum, in parallel, and today, India is a major destination for global industries sourcing software and IT-enabled services.

In the early years, almost 75 percent of the export-related work was carried out at the client’s location overseas while 25 percent was done in India (Heeks 1996). Today, these percentages are reversed (Sahay, et. al., 2003). The global economic downturn which lasted for three years (2000-02), and brought in its wake, pink slips and massive
retrenchment, is now over and the Indian IT industry is seen to be back on track (www.nasscom.org,.Oct 20, 2004). Highlighting its importance to the Indian economy and IT, NASSCOM reports that the industry’s contribution to the country’s GDP is steadily increasing, with software exports currently accounting for 62 percent of the IT industry (NASSCOM, 2005). Up from 770,000 employees in March, 2004, the IT and IT-Enabled Services Industry now hires over 1 million people (NASSCOM, 2005). Over time, most large IT players have transcended the software coding and maintenance barriers and moved up the ‘value chain’ into higher-end IT consulting, systems integration, infrastructure management, package implementation and product development realms (www.nasscom.org,.Oct 20, 2004) . The challenges facing the Indian IT industry today include relevant, industry-ready manpower, new competition (e.g. China), building expertise in new technologies (e.g. mobile telephony) cultivating new markets (in Europe and Asia) developing new pricing and profit-sharing models in contrast to the currently dominant ‘time and material’ practices (Sahay, et al., 2003).

4.2 The Company
IN-Sync, a mid-size IT software applications outsourcing company, was established in 1980 and headquartered in Mumbai, India. It offers business solutions in insurance, financial services and government as well as application management outsourcing services. In two decades, IN-Sync has grown from three individuals to over 2300 professionals, worldwide. IN-Sync’s annual revenue is US $120M (2003/04). Initially, catering to only domestic customers, IN-Sync has since moved into the export market. Initially housed in the living room of one of the directors, IN-Sync now has offices in the US, UK, Germany, Austria, Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, along with several offices in Mumbai city and its customers are distributed globally. It is assessed at Level 5 on the Capability Maturity Model6 for its software as well as its people processes and has several partnership arrangements with companies in the UK and USA. Currently, over 90 percent of its revenues are from repeat business. Over the years, IN-Sync has restructured itself several times, changed its vision and mission, merged functions, and shut down units in response to market changes. The one constant at IN-Sync has been the leadership of the founder directors and the IN-Sync values inculcated by them. The company takes pride in inculcating these values as part of the workplace culture and also links them to the way they conduct business.

4.3 Case Study: Multiplicity of Mobilities
We identified five recurrent kinds of mobilities or movements in the empirical material. These are illustrated below, sometimes in terms of metaphors or statements and/or the process of ‘from’ and ‘towards’ movement. We focus on the physical, social, career mobilities of IT workers as well as shifts in feelings, attitudes and values that we refer to as existential mobility. These shifts form elements in the mosaic of change so characteristic of this industry and its people.

6 Capability Maturity Models are frameworks for improving software development (as in SW-CMM) or people management processes (as in PCMM) developed by the Software Engineering Institute (SEI) in the USA (NASSCOM, 2005). Internationally recognized as standards for quality, companies use these enhance their efficiency as well as their market image in the international marketplace.
4.3.1. From Small Town to Big City: Mobilities towards Modernity

We used the metaphors of ‘town’ and ‘city’ to illustrate the mobility across the trajectory of modernity that emerged in our material. IT people constitute a large section of the professional middle classes in India in ‘new economy’ jobs such as IT and the service sector. In the pre-liberalization days, public sector jobs were considered ‘good’ jobs. Today young professionals aspire to work in private companies or multinationals. In these ways, town and city hold diverse meanings for people, ranging from literal spatial movements to aspirations of social and professional mobility, increased affluence and consumption as well as shifts towards meritocracy and skill based performance.

The City: Mumbai city, the economic and financial capital of India and also viewed as the most ‘cosmopolitan’ city in India, is ‘home’ to around 60 percent of IN-Sync employees who are Maharastrians. From a site of embarkation for native traders, laborers and soldiers in the service of the Empire in the colonial era, Mumbai later was a significant site for the textile industry and now is seen as India’s prime conduit for the international flow of people ideas and commerce (Menning, 1999). A teeming metropolis of around 18 million people, Mumbai, became the hub for software activities in India until the mid-1980s, attracting IT job seekers from all over the country. It is a city that has grown necessarily by migration and even today, hundreds migrate to Mumbai every day in search of jobs, creating a heavy burden on the already strained resources.

Mumbai is also a city of paradoxes. Renaissance-styled skyscrapers stand cheek by jowl with sprawling slums, in an urban landscape dotted by billboard advertisements, multistoreyed matchbox like residential buildings, newly constructed controversial flyovers, ‘heritage’ monuments, opulent shopping malls, multiplex theatres, and innumerable bustling cybercafés. All seemingly illustrate the blatant contrasts in housing and forms of consumption while adding to the acute urban crisis of the city. Celebrated as ‘a metaphor of Indian modernity’ (Patel, 1995) city planners and state agencies have desired to transform Mumbai into a global city like Singapore or Hong Kong (D’Monte, 2002). Any movement within the city, beyond the immediate neighborhood, involves considerable effort as distances are vast between residences and workplaces and parts of the city are often uneven and difficult for citizens to traverse. Its peninsular geography has limited its expansion, creating a shortage of commercial, residential, public and private space (D’Monte, 2002). Laxman, a 33 year old project leader, who had come from a small town near Mysore to Mumbai for a job had this to say, “Coming to Bombay was a culture change. It was a fast moving life and I was not used to it. I used to come in Hawai (bathroom) slippers to my first job. I never thought a shoe was a pre-requisite for a job. But Bombay has changed me!”

Increasing affluence: Prior to liberalization, goods from “abroad” were accessible to only those who had the financial means to travel or who had relatives living in more industrialized countries. The wider range of goods available after liberalization enables many middle class Indians to satisfy their aspirations for consumption without overseas travel or connections. IT people, as the direct beneficiaries of the liberalization policies in

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7 A city in the state of Karnataka in Southern India. Mysore is much slower paced and culturally, relatively insular as compared to the bustling ambience of Mumbai.
the IT industry, could easily consume those items earlier deemed as luxuries but now, indicators of social mobility: households appliances, packaged foods, branded and ‘imported’ goods, as well as vehicles and apartments. Today, in Mumbai city, besides the giddy range of television channels and flood of ‘Bollywood’ movies, there are American and European styled cafes, fusion food and ethnic restaurants, as well as upmarket shopping malls selling global brands that dot the urban landscape.

Several employees at IN-Sync from outside the city spoke of Mumbai as a ‘happening’ city, enjoying the freedom and entertainment opportunities it provided. They also spoke of how ‘clubbing’ and partying and seeking new forms of entertainment options were increasing in their peer group. Purchase of a vehicle, especially two-wheelers like motorbikes for the males and a car perhaps a few years later, was referred to as promising mobility and comfort. These were seen by many as immediately affordable, given the profusion of low-interest loans offered by banks. One informant, a 23 year old developer, proudly stated that while his retired father could never afford a vehicle in his career, he could own a motorbike so early on in life. Informal conversations suggested brand and price consciousness of vehicles in the Indian market and their performance on Mumbai crowded and pathetic roads. While the purchase of a flat8 was certainly an objective, in the context of Mumbai where housing is very expensive, this decision was often related to long term questions of domicile, city preferences and proximity to parents.

Attitude towards dress were seen as having shifted over time. In the early years of the industry, IT people were referred to as ‘geek’s, or nerds and dressing for work, for both men and women, was incompatible with the social image of this ‘intellectual’, ‘high tech’ profession. This has dramatically changed today. Several informants in their early 20s, said that in a ‘global’ city like Mumbai “image and branding oneself is part of the work scene today”. They also emphatically stated, “Appearances are an important part of the job scene today and IT work is very international. Dressing up smartly does not mean anymore that we are flighty or not serious software engineers. That era is gone”. Mirroring the upsurge in fashion events in the country and Mumbai city in recent years, company celebration events at IN-Sync, now feature a much enjoyed, professionally choreographed fashion shows with IT employees as participants which was earlier unheard of or labeled as frivolous!

An IT industry opinion leader attributed what he called, the “nomadic” and “opportunistic nature of the Indian IT professional to the large number of ‘tempting’ job opportunities in this industry in India as well as media-influences. He said, “There is the consumerist ‘have it now’ mentality of the US…And so there is a feeling ‘why do I have to wait for anything?’ Whether it is the next job, the higher position, a house to live in, a car or whatever. It is this instant “I need-it-now” mentality which has now pervaded the youth. They were in their teens and their college days when this started and now they are in the workforce.” Emphasizing this, Arnaz, a quality manager at IN-Sync, noted, “People come to the software industry because of the money involved and travels abroad. For that he is willing to sacrifice things like staying away from the family, going to remote corners, staying in different places…This is a place where if you are successful

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8 In Mumbai, this term is used to refer to an apartment.
you can just rise to any limit... You see the success immediately. You don’t have to wait.” When comparing IT professionals with others like those in manufacturing, Romila, a HR manager, noted that they were more affluent and occupied a place of pride in their ‘sasural’9. While family members did not really understand what exactly the ‘IT animal’ did, she said, they felt proud that this member would travel overseas frequently and enjoy the material and professional benefits of such ‘exposure.’ Several IT employees echoed Romila’s view, suggesting the pride and shifting social status engendered by this industry. Commenting on these aspects, Aman, a project manager said, “Despite higher salaries, IT people are not really satisfied. The urge to earn more is unsatiated. Twenty years back one would feel grateful to God if one could have one’s own flat in Mumbai at the time of retirement. Now, at the age of 35, unless you have a fancy car and a nice house, you are not arrived.”

Shifts were noted in attitudes too. Romila commented, “I would say IT people are a lot more liberal in their views. If they see their colleagues working late night and if their wife is in IT they understand much better. Also, husbands, parents and in-laws did not want women to go abroad. Now women want to go abroad they want to make money… There is a change, especially in the younger group coming in now.”

Caste to class: The IT industry was described by one of the CEOs at IN-Sync as an ‘aspirational’ space for engineers “…who are drawn from the lower middle class and the middle, middle class, the solid doing community rather than the Kshatriya10 caste”. On the one hand, the context of GSW and the social and physical geography of Mumbai city was seen as neutralizing or transforming the Indian caste system, previously related to occupational groups into a merit and skill-based system. While kinship still operated at the entry level where qualified relatives could be recommended, this factor was seen as diluted or altogether mitigated along the work trajectory on software projects where demonstrated technical/managerial competence was required for continued employment. At IN-Sync it was anathema to speak of caste in public in the organization even though tacitly, it could be inferred from Hindu surnames. Ashok, a project manager and also on the interview panel, emphatically stated: “You end up reading the caste and religion from a resume and beyond that it is just a data point among others, of no consequence. See in this industry I am in desperate need of a good person. And it just doesn’t matter if he is Hindu or Muslim or male of female.” This is in contrast to the pre-liberalization days of licenses and quotas, where people would ply their caste-related network ties to secure employment or business licenses. In selecting a spouse for marriage, however, many informants expressed a preference for a traditional ‘arranged’ marriage, where caste, kinship belonging and religion were implicitly factored in, as opposed to ‘falling in love’ which was seen as a matter of individual choice.

The influence of small town backgrounds of workers was seen to enter relations with customers. While referring to these social origins and their link to customer interactions, Atul, an account manager from the USA, said, “The customer does not care what your internal issues in India were etc. The customer wants...the ideal person the best of both

9 Term in Hindi to refer to extended family as a result of marriage.
10 The second highest in the caste order, traditionally, the warrior caste.
worlds, the right someone who is savvy, engages in water cooler talk and at the same time is hard working, dependable, does not lift her head, you know, conscientious…obviously some of that is impossible to achieve.” Similarly, the Head of HR, Nandini shared her observations of how those from vernacular backgrounds and small towns were more ‘doers’ and ‘order takers’. She said that their feelings of inadequateness came in the way of being firm with American or European customers. In this way, these backgrounds were seen to impede the distinctive communication processes and business relations in this industry. In contrast, the younger generation (those in their early 20’s) at IN-Sync was commented on as being aggressive and outspoken in such interactions as well as more westernized as a result of mass media influences.

4.3.2 An Every Day Shifting Sense of Place and Space: From Home to Work and Back Again
This mobility illustrates the different places and spaces, physical, emotional and social inhabited by IT professionals during the course of their workday and work lives. Shifting between these or straddling these is not unproblematic and this is true for both male and female workers.

City travel: One of the repeated concerns expressed by interviewees was the juggling of professional priorities with family demands. In Mumbai city for example, IT workers often leave home by around 8 a.m. and return home by around 9 p.m. on a daily basis, including Saturdays. With imminent software deliveries, these timings are stretched even more and Sundays too are often spent at the office. Working in an IT exports company in Mumbai usually implies traveling to software export parks or campus-like zones, housing a large number of companies. IT workers in Mumbai spend hours commuting on poorly maintained and polluted roads in humid weather to the Santacruz Electronics Exports Processing Zone (SEEPZ)11 in the north of Mumbai. While SEEPZ has a calm and relaxing ambience with wide roads, lush greenery and even a lake, after office hours transport connection, either public or company provided, is not very reliable.

Office places and spaces: IT office spaces in Mumbai are centrally airconditioned and aesthetically designed, housed in large buildings whose facades vary from plain whitewash to polished gleaming glass. At one IN-Sync location, each floor of the building has a theme such as sports, nature, play where the colors, furniture and wall hangings all mirror the theme. Granite and marble are generously used in the construction, both inside and outside the office, kept shiny and clean by outsourced cleaning staff. Security ‘guards’ with pin striped uniforms are positioned usually at the office entrance to sign in visitors, ensure employees display their identity cards and assist in reception and other administrative tasks. In the elevators, an American accented voice announces the floor. The language of most corridor and elevator conversations among employees is Hindi, English or Marathi. Employee seating is open, to maximize space,

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11 This is an acronym for Santacruz Electronics Export Processing Zone. Export Processing Zones (EPZs) were created by the Government of India to provide an internationally competitive, duty free environment at low cost for export production. These zones provide infrastructure facilities like developed land, factory buildings, roads, uninterrupted power, optic fiber lines for high speed worldwide communication facilities, water supply as well as fiscal incentives by way of customs, excise and tax exemptions (D’Costa, 2004).
reduce hierarchy and increase opportunities for social exchange. IT employees (typically at developer levels) show little territorialism manifested in little need to ask for permission to use a seat, desktop, rarely decorating their workstation with pictures or personal photographs and minimally using their storage space. If employees from other companies in the campus take a ride on the company bus (without explicit permission) IN-Sync employees rarely object. In wider workstations, managers sit along with the developers but with more phones on the table and more corporate or personal memorabilia adorning the space. The Head of the unit sits in a spacious cabin with a semi-transparent glass door. From the windows, cloudy hills in the far background are juxtaposed with views of the road outside the secured complex which is dotted with shanties, piles of uncleared garbage, large cement pipes, children running around, family members near their dwellings and sleeping stray dogs.

On each floor, there are self-service cafeteria facilities, with plentiful supplies of (free) tea and coffee. The building also houses training rooms, a library meeting rooms (mostly equipped with phones) computers and white boards or projector screens. Conference rooms are equipped with state-of-the-art videoconference facilities. Inside the office, it is easy to lose one’s sense of time. However, the work pressures are enormous and time is always a constraint.

**Juggling the personal and the professional:** Employees speak of how stressful it is to juggle family and work, coupled with the pressure of commuting in Mumbai. Pursuing hobbies is also adversely impacted. For example, Mohan a project manager in his mid 30s, with a one-year-old child said, “I feel torn... I am not adept at balancing these. People outside Bombay are luckier as they don’t spend time and energy in traveling…Presently, I don’t have any projects so I don’t get calls at home... I have started taking some meditation classes once a week. But as software professionals, we are very bad at managing our time. If someone can do a good job of it he is an exception. Work takes a priority.” Later on Mohan says, “There is a thin line between professional and personal life. In personal life I sing, I deal with my family. When I come here I am a business person. This keeps pushing that line. The area occupied by family and others keeps reducing. I measure my own importance based on my value on the other side. As an Indian male I am supposed to be the one earning bread and butter… If I have to work for 12 hours a day I have to work, to earn the roti. If you are working and not able to come for your alana falana staff, you will not be apologetic about it. You will not go back to your family and say, I am sorry I was not there, I was working.”

Echoing a similar view, Rajan, a senior manager in his mid 40’s said, “The IT person stops enjoying their life compared to the others, because of the extended working hours and odd timings. Sometimes you start at 8 and then finish at 10-11 pm 5 days a week. And anytime you can be called ... Also you don’t develop any hobbies. You see, life IS beyond the office. That realization comes to you only at 40. Till such time you will run, busy climbing things…it is an early retirement job”.

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12 Hindi word for bread.
13 Social events, usually family related.
An article circulated among some employees at IN-Sync entitled ‘Stress Kills 6 IT Geeks’ (Srinivas, 2005) reported the results of a study showing that the number of suicides, divorces, heart ailments, blood pressure, diabetes and mental depression were the highest in the software industry. The article cited lack of routine, constant deadlines, weekend working, lack of physical exercise and new food habits such as the ‘pizza culture’ as factors causing stress in this group. Aman, a manager who read it and was asked for his response, said in an e-mail conversation: “When some incident takes place, people are stunned and shocked but life flows on. I think the community is still young and these incidents are isolated. Many people think it is a matter of individual’s choice and how much risk they take. Besides, I think the need to earn more and more and pursue new lifestyles is what is driving people mad. Where do you have time to think about health and peace of mind?”

Marriage, as a commitment, alters how IT people straddle their work-home spaces. Laxman, a recently married Project Leader, said, “Before marriage, I would come to the office on Saturday or Sunday and work late. Now I can’t do that...So I make it a point to leave at 7:30 pm nowadays. Before, only when I was tired I would leave. Now I have to think that she is waiting for me.” Ritika, a 26 year old developer, when asked how she balances her work and family demands in a joint family, reported, “After marriage, I have to be more focused because I have to go earlier to do household work. Yes that mentality has automatically come. But still I never compromised on work. When I come to the office, I can’t think of my family. There are different places and so definitely they have to be separate. They intersect in terms of money...you need money to buy things.”

**Home at work:** The Company tries to create a home-like environment in the office in various ways to make employees feel comfortable. Use of the family metaphor is often invoked by the CEO of the company in his address to employees. Employees are free to express their religious beliefs through screensavers of deities, tiny idols placed on the monitor or hard disk and pictures pinned on the soft board in the workstation. New offices are inaugurated with a traditional *puja* ceremony. Prayers or religious mails are freely circulated among some employees. Among some of the men in the workplace, *tikas* on foreheads, red threads around a wrist or tonsured head signify religious ceremonies they have attended. Socialization practices and events organized by the company also bridge relations between home and work. Major religious festivals in India such as Holi, Diwali, Ganesh Chathurthi, Christmas and Id are celebrated in the office by decorating the office, distributing sweets, wearing specified dress codes and exchanging greetings. Cake cutting, lighting *diyas*, singing Christmas carols and reciting *shlokas* are regular ceremonies and practices in the office space. Valentine’s Day is also celebrated with red balloons and a reimbursement for single employees for a treat with their Valentine. Major company events include the annual company sponsored 3 day picnic at an outdoor location for employees and their families, monthly meeting gathering, celebration of the company’s anniversary as a birthday ‘bash’. Employees and

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14 A Hindu religious ritual  
15 A vermilion or red dot, usually put a on the forehead, after a puja  
16 Earthen or brass lamps with oil and a cotton wick, lit at Diwali or auspicious occasions.  
17 Sacred Sanskrit verses to invoke protection, abundance and prosperity.
their family members mingle and participate enthusiastically at these events as they ‘mix business with pleasure’.

While these practices are organizationally sanctioned, employees also form religious-based affiliation ties, informally. For example, at one of the customer sites in the UK, a large global corporation, one of the Indian employees started an unofficial ‘Hindu’ club while another started a ‘Muslim’ club. These clubs were reported to organize informal social gatherings and philanthropic activities among its members as well as collective visits to temples or mosques.

**Social networks:** Socialization, for IT people, was closely intertwined with work demands. Shakuntala, a senior manager, with two teenage children expressed this view, “Because of inevitable long hours at work, IT people build up strong social networks within the company. Outside the office, apart from family members, there is little time and energy to socialize. This phenomenon, along with overseas travel impacts family relationships. International travel or long stays abroad are common now. On the one hand, my family can be with me overseas for short vacations which are great. However, my family seems to have found other support systems in my absence, and sometimes I wonder about my place in the home!”

### 4.3.3 “People Just Want to Move” – Movement Signifying Growth

This kind of mobility encompasses a range of instability and change characterizes software professionals, the industry and the GSO. We describe here changes in expectations by companies, candidates and notion of career-mobility and aspirations of IT workers.

**The changed employment contract:** One of the striking differences of the current market that informants noted was the absence of a ‘job for life.’ They said that today while there were many jobs and many careers, none of them were for life unlike in the previous generation. As one developer said, “In the IT industry, secured employment is extinct.” Expressing his anxiety about the pervasive sense of uncertainty, Arvind, a project leader, said, “In IT today, there is no job security as such unless you as an employee are performing and performing and performing. In spite of this you can be shown the door, as we saw in the company located a floor below in our building. It is very insulting. You can literally feel the insecurity. The question mark is always there, like the sword of Damocles.” In an attempt to decrease the high salary cost-to-company, and improve productivity, IN-Sync had fine-tuned and made more stringent, its performance monitoring and competency assessment systems and also reviewed its existing reward and recognition system. GSOs have also expanded their range of employments contracts with employees to reflect the ‘flexible’ and dynamic market conditions.

**From ‘hard’ to ‘soft’ skills:** While technology was a major driver of the industry in earlier years, today, weightage is given more to what is called ‘soft skills’. Rajan, while stating his views on what these skills are, said: “Earlier if the IT professional knew COBOL or any specific technology, they could survive. If they were technically brilliant
they could shine. Today, now softer skills like socializing, communication, learning ability and cultural adaptation to the country is required... Nowadays adapting to a culture is not an issue as you watch a lot of TV...Youngsters nowadays are more tuned into the culture than 15-20 years back."

Notions of professional growth: The ‘growth imperative’ was a common thread running though responses of employees at all levels as a response to the constant threat of obsolescence as posed by the very nature of GSW. For developers, shifting jobs and technologies was a sign of growth. Alma, a 23 year old developer, (who had been with the company for 16 months) spoke about this trend. Suddenly gesticulating very strongly with her hands and shoulders, she said, “People just want to move. One is technology. If the person does not have work for a month or so he starts looking for another job. You get frustrated, not enhancing skills. What is my value in the market after 3 years? Software people get frustrated very fast. It is different from manufacturing... So you see people are just moving.” Alma expressed her fear of being laid off by the company, and how that propelled her to keep on learning, moving and growing, relating it to the industry by saying, “The more skills you have the more valuable you are in software...even within the same company.” Reinforcing this view, a project manager, unhappy that two of his team members quit to join another company (with a hint of pride in his voice) said, “I believe that I have grown because I have moved organizations. This is my ninth organization. My smallest stint is 1 day, the longest is 5.6 years.”

A few module leaders expressed career growth in terms of moving up the projects chain into project management. A solution architect spoke of assignments becoming bigger, more complex or time critical and shortening the learning curve for himself. Yet another spoke of the “challenges of influencing business growth and profitability by technology,” while others took pride in being a ‘techie’ rather than a project manager.

While career growth conjured up different meanings for individuals, IN-Sync also has re-defined its notion of career. From a paternalistic notion of ‘taking care’ of employees careers, ‘employability’ where individuals are ‘responsible’ for their own careers and the company supports rather than actively enables their aspirations, has in the past two years replaced the rhetoric of ‘employment security.’ This shift has propelled individuals to actively chart their career paths and training inputs and seek support from the company in the form of training programs or sponsored certifications. Employees, as well as recruitment agents, use the term ‘value addition’ and ‘deliverables’ to refer to tangible contributions they can make or that can be made to them via a program, job, role or individual on their team.

4.3.4. Traveling Across Borders: Offshore –Onsite
This mobility focuses on shifts between physically working offshore and onsite and also its financial and social implications. We noted trends in the craze for overseas travel, experiences and dilemmas of living in different cultures, and how attitudes and values shifted or stayed the same. Shifts across the ‘life cycle’ of the IT person are also included.

18 Kanter (1995) has described this concept in her book ‘World Class: Thriving Locally in the Global Economy’.
**Working overseas:** Although, today, travel abroad does not carry the high prestige and value that it did some years ago, IT people report pressures to travel overseas from family, peers and friends when they join an IT company. Amit, a developer, said: “When an IT person meets someone else from another industry, people ask is onsite kya gaya hai tuh [have you gone onsite]? In India, an IT company is equated with you going onsite as soon as possible. So if you have not gone outside there is some serious problem with you. If not then kabh jaa raha hai onsite [when are you going onsite]?” Earlier, saving potential was a major factor in travel abroad but now the salaries are very high and annual increments are also significant, making employees more choosy about the kind of assignment they prefer when onsite as well as the duration of stay onsite. However, the act of going overseas was widely seen as a critical rite of passage for IT workers and many said they are not comfortable unless their “ghost of going abroad was exorcised.”

We wondered about what changes employees experienced and how they managed themselves. Responding to questions around this, Ramesh, a 33 year old Project Leader with a two year old child, said: “I found it is very easy at 25-30 years to integrate into society there [UK]. But I have found problems with kids growing up there. No matter what, they are in a dilemma of being pulled in two directions. Even in India, you do grow up in two regions where culture is different and kids do manage to come out okay. I get the feeling that in the UK the cultures diverge too far. On the one hand, one may say ‘I will adopt the country’s culture’ which creates one set of problems. Then, there is another set of people who become ultraconservative and everyone, for example, learns Indian music and dance. Very few have a balance going around.”

Sometimes what changes may be more superficial. Rajan, the senior manager with two children, said: “Having lived abroad and traveled quite a bit my standard of living has changed because of earnings. My value system has not changed. A certain amount of quality, professionalism has improved…Values in terms of relationships, family…nowhere that is changed.”

Overseas work, particularly in the West, held the promise of material success and a yearning to inhabit, even for a short while, the ‘developed’ world, an opportunity to gain ‘exposure’ in terms of more ‘professional’ work styles and holiday travel. Yet, it also held a threat of loneliness--feelings of vulnerability associated with living in a new country, particularly in cold and dark winter conditions where one does not speak the local language. Several mentioned that while they enjoyed professional relations at the customer site, it was difficult to make friends while overseas. Also, since most often a project team would be at one location, they would share the same house and socialize with each other which was seen to facilitate better relations at work. Few would venture to join any local interest groups which resulted in them mixing with only their colleagues or other Indians whom they knew locally or from a neighboring company. Spouses (mainly females) of employees who came to live onsite would make friends with each other since they were generally unable to work due to their visa status. Their husbands would be relieved because, otherwise, they would be bored with the limited household tasks (as compared to India) and the absence of relatives. An ex-employee, now a resident in the UK, noted how this group enjoyed “doing potlucks and playing
“antakshari” among themselves. Another employee stated that watching Bollywood movies on Zee television helped to reduce his homesickness and “longing for India”.

We saw some differences in how men and women experienced their onsite stint. Sulochana, a module leader, was the only woman in a UK location in a team of 35 males, and she often felt alone and marginalized. Very independent and outspoken, she was labeled by them (rather disparagingly) as a *Jhansi ki rani*. She had wanted to return home earlier from her assignment. Her house had been burgled and she felt unsafe to continue living in that locality. Her request to return back home was not immediately granted as a replacement was hard to find on such short notice. She then asked her manager what he would have done if his daughter were in her place. Her manager said that he would have gotten his daughter married before sending her alone onsite – a response that shocked and angered Sulochana since it was a strong scathing remark on her parents values in her upbringing as a daughter. She did manage to return back home, but now is quite sensitive about possible recurrence of such issues as she is still single and would inevitably have to travel overseas for work.

**Returning back home:** Living overseas also created another lens by which practices in the home country were viewed. Ramesh, a module leader who had recently returned from a year long posting in the UK, said, “...After being abroad we become generally more intolerant to sloppiness. We say, how long do I have to stand in this queue? The positive part is that the more the intolerance, the more the service provider is going to improve. If you look at the whole country, as a proportion, IT people are a small number. But IT opens up the path and now we have BPO... Look at the way the banks deal with you now compared to even ten years ago. There is a big difference. Rather than asking you to do 30 forms in triplicate, they now fill in the forms themselves... No more of a *chalta hai* mentality.”

There are also instances of IT professionals returning back from ‘greener pastures’ like the USA, after a stint of several years of work. A manager in his late 30’s, who had relocated to India and held a challenging assignment in another IT company, cited ‘family values’, the positive economic changes in India, and a sense of belonging as significant reasons to return. Describing the “comfortable lifestyle” he now enjoyed in India, he mentioned his “nice” apartment close to his parents’ home as well as a good car, a healthy bank balance (as a result of his savings in the USA) and an annual overseas vacation with his family members. We came across other such returnees, informally, with similar views.

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19 Antakshari is a musical game based on songs from Hindi films. This game is immensely popular in India and is also played at company events or social gatherings at IN-Sync.

20 Zee TV, a channel of one of India's satellite broadcast network, provides ‘Indian’ entertainment specifically catering to the Indians abroad market in the form of drama series, television movies, Bollywood films, children's programs, game shows to millions of overseas viewers across the world.

21 A well-known courageous, rebel Indian queen.

22 Easy going, let it be attitude.
Changes in life cycle of the IT person: Shifts were also seen across the life cycle of the IT person, referred to partly in jest as the “IT animal.” Nandini, Head HR, described it as: “I see 2-3 layers of IT people. The first layer is those who have just come out of schools, bursting with energy and excitement, full of self-confidence and creative ideas, willing to work all hours and have fun at work even when they are slogging. They go out for movies in gangs, trekking, like an extension of college. Then they move to the Module Leader [ML] level and suddenly there is a change in their personality...they start thinking about getting married or having a baby or buying a car or house and so on. They are also suddenly expected to look after other youngsters who are out of college and most organizations do not provide them any tools or training, or any idea of how to handle others. So as ML, the pressure increases and all the fun and joy comes down... And then he goes up to the PM or PL Level and it steadily gets worse...The tensions and stress increase... By then they have kids who are going to school. So there is additional expenditure and there is worry about how will I make more money? Will it be enough? So those things, which they did not have to worry about, get aggravated...”

Neeta, a project leader, reflecting on her work and the family-related adjustments she had made, summarized her work experiences over a 14 year career which we felt was an apt metaphor for the IT workers that we had met. Shrugging her shoulders and shaking her head while speaking in a resigned tone she said, “Somehow I feel I never settle down. I am kind of a nomad where I have to go places and places.”

5. DISCUSSION

First, we discuss the various mobilities emerging from the empirical material and then discuss their relationship to place, space and identity. An overview of this is presented in Table 3.
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<tr>
<th><strong>Mobility Type</strong></th>
<th><strong>Features</strong></th>
<th><strong>Implications for Identity</strong></th>
</tr>
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| Geographical     | - ‘To and fro’ frequent movement across physical places e.g., within & from city, across firms, places and national borders.  
|                  | - The place that is left or, local meaning is recreated at workplace and onsite (e.g. through vernacular language, celebration of religious festivals).  
|                  | - Onsite travel seen as a *rite of passage*.  
|                  | - Material aspects of abroad are preferred and more easily acquired, rather than social or cultural ways of being.  
|                  | - Placed locality provides sense of rootedness and socio-historical continuity.  
|                  | - Creates states of uncertainty, anxiety; also hope and excitement.  
|                  | - Living onsite fraught with existential issues while providing more ‘exposure’.  
|                  | - Some deeply held beliefs & values are immobile across borders. |
| Social           | - Affluence, education and travel influence one’s social place.  
|                  | - Social networks at workplace.  
|                  | - Sankritization replaced by meritocracy.  
|                  | - Shades of secularism & also religious mobilizations.  
|                  | - For individuals and groups, consumerism replaces socialistic concerns.  
|                  | - Anxiety of not ‘making it’ or ‘losing place’ prevails.  
|                  | - Movement (across social places) is possible but risks may interject.  
|                  | - A felt need to secure sense of self, create belongingness through familiar means such as food and social relations. |
| Existential      | - In between a ‘home at work’ place and meritocratic performance-based system.  
|                  | - Individuals straddle cycles of professional ‘success’ and ‘failure’.  
|                  | - Fears and concerns exist about sustaining increased affluence.  
|                  | - Notions of employability, marketability, and value addition to one’s own ‘brand’ and ‘bottom line’ prevail.  
|                  | - Pervasive precariousness associated with a marketable, learning mode.  
|                  | - Career trajectories become projects of the self to secure a ‘psychic place’.  
|                  | - Being a particular kind of IT specialist is valued e.g. ‘techie’.  
|                  | - Risk and fear collide with hope and success within a capitalistic and consumerist framework.  
|                  | - A permanently transient state of being. |

**Table 3: Mobilities, their Characteristics and Relation to Identity**

**5.1 Nature of Mobilities**
From the data, we note that GSOs are sites where multiple socio-spatial trajectories converge in the context of global capitalism. We conceptualize these trajectories in terms of Massey’s (1998) notion of ‘nets of social relations’ that are inherently dynamic and changing, subject to diverse and sometimes contradictory temporal-spatial as well as cultural pressures and flows. On the one hand these social relations are encased within worldwide business networks, exposed to intense competition with other vendors, both global and local embedding GSW within the ‘space of flows.’ At the same time, they are local places where people and influences assemble and continuously shift within social networks across time and space. In this way, we can conceptualize GSW as increasingly
locked into complex and co-evolving cycles of continuous interaction with, as well as reacting to the global and in this way, increasingly forging the everyday lifeworlds of IT workers.

The five kinds of mobilities that emerged from the empirical material were seen to cut across levels of individual, work and organizations. We further distilled these and categorized them as geographical, existential and social mobilities. Each of these mobilities is seen as situated on the nodes of global-local flows of GSOs intersecting, mutually shaping and sometimes, colliding in tension with each other.

By geographical mobility, we refer to physical shifts of various sorts across space and place. The business conditions in India (for IT) have improved dramatically in India in the past decade. The 1991 policy changes significantly improved the climate for economic reforms for IT production by jumpstarting the mobility of the IT industry, resulting in rapid expansion in outsourcing firms while simultaneously posing new challenges for the industry. Software Technology Parks (STPs) scheme now provides software companies to be located in tax-exempt, designated zones with guaranteed access to high-speed satellite links and reliable electricity (D’Costa, 2004). These reforms also resulted in a sharp increase of IT educational institutes and skill-oriented training centers in India, contributing to large numbers of young people from big cities as well as small towns ‘migrating’ into this career stream.

For individual workers, geographical mobility is represented in moving to and from the office, across cities, projects, technologies, organizations, and countries--in other words, very diverse places. The physical layout of the SEEPZ location, with common cafeterias located strategically, crowded with people from various IT companies during lunch hours, illustrates a place that functions like a node in the network of flows. Serving both ‘Jain pizzas’ as well as ‘American burgers,’ informational and social flows are apparent through conversations and face to face interactions. Here, apart from job possibilities, ‘inside’ stories about companies and teams circulate freely and are used strategically to make career moves. Firms, in fear of losing staff, have responded to the threat by providing their own cafeterias on their own premises.

In a city like Mumbai, the physical travel required by an IT worker in a given workday, is enormous, transcending home and family contexts and an urban landscape which literally assaults one’s senses. The physical (or corporeal) experience of the journey to the office is juxtaposed with the experience within the workplace which seeks to mimic an American office and also practices where an individual needs to constantly perform, ‘add value’ and ensure ‘deliverables.’ Simultaneously, the global nature of this workplace is punctuated by local meanings in material form such as religious celebrations, conversations and sometimes formal meetings conducted in the vernacular language. The organization strives to create an existential sense of home at work, providing employees with a sense of rootedness, in what we might call ‘placed’ locality and socio-historical continuity for ultimate business benefit.
Geographical mobility also encompasses the job-hopping trend between companies. Within a company, tasks and responsibilities change on a regular basis and shifts across country locations are frequent and increasingly for short durations. This puts a stress on traditional structures of support. For example, accommodation is expensive and hard to find in Mumbai city, often making it difficult for aging parents to live with their children as is often common in India. Frequently, the onsite posting duration is not known and this uncertainty affects family life with interruption of children’s schooling or the spouse’s job as well as housing contract extension decisions. Such uncertainties are inherent and inextricably tied up with the mobility of the individual.

Some IT professionals may eventually choose to become residents in another country (typically the UK and US) as a means to settle down and ‘enjoy’ a stable family life. This stability comes with its own set of destabilization forces such as the weather, the limited or complete absence of family or social nets, unfamiliar schooling system and the experience of higher living conditions. Often this destabilization is dealt with in various ways—subscriptions to Indian TV channels such as Zee TV, conscious consumption of goods and food from ‘home’, potlucks and social gatherings with people from one’s country. Some IT workers may return back from overseas postings, to settle down in their homeland where they can now combine a comfortable lifestyle with a sense of belonging. However, this return often based on a nostalgic yearning for the past, turns out to be problematic as people find that ‘things have changed’. They are more intolerant of dirt and sloppiness and continuously now compare the present ‘here’ with their more efficient and physically more comfortable life experienced ‘there,’ abroad.

In summary, geographical mobility experience can be characterized by a constant ‘to and fro’ movement, intense, unpredictable and ever present. People try and deal with the pressures this creates, by trying and recreating what they have left behind, whether it is creating their home in the office or vice versa or their homeland in the foreign country and vice versa. Such movements can be contrasted to earlier mobilities such as migrations or formations of diasporas where it was more one way and predictable.

We use the term social mobility to refer to moves across a network of social relations such as from a caste to a class hierarchy, shifts up and also down the corporate hierarchy, moves across groups such as work teams, peers and colleagues and onsite social spaces. In cities like Mumbai, the influence of the traditional caste system, where one’s place is ascribed and determined at birth and kinship, is increasingly eroded by forces of secularization, urbanism, and consumerism. While Sanskritization is a means for groups to move up the caste hierarchy, individual agency, acquired knowledge and competence are now the means for individuals to move up skill-based meritocratic hierarchies, typical in the private sector and especially so in global organizations. While this new system holds out a promise for individuals to carve new social spaces for themselves, the fact remains that caste is still inferred indirectly from Hindu surnames.

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23 This term was introduced by Srinivas (1997), an Indian anthropologist to refer to mobility processes of groups within the caste system. When a local, endogamous unit of the caste system acquired political power or became wealthy, they moved up the caste system by Sanskritizing themselves i.e., by imitating the customs, rituals and life-style of a higher caste. Over time, noble origins of the caste could be claimed.
This may tacitly reinforce existing negative attitudes or beliefs about individuals and groups. Also, the influence of small town origins reflected in the demeanor and behaviors of several IT workers in interpersonal relations with customers in ways that caused some friction in communication. This contrasts with the more outspoken and confident behaviors of the younger generation of IT workers, reflecting societal shifts in India resulting from globalizing influences in the big cities. These influences themselves are uneven in the Indian context, where mobilities towards modernity run parallel to increasingly fundamentalist religious and social processes, reflecting the inherent tensions between stasis and mobility and space and place.

For the IT person, economic affluence, a higher standard of living and increased consumption choices, is coupled with an ever-present array of job opportunities, dotting the landscape of software outsourcing work which is on the rise, globally. However, this landscape has some inherent risks for the IT worker. The volatile nature of the industry, the increasingly temporary and 'flexible' nature of employment contracts, the demise of job security, the stringent performance measures and surveillance systems in IT companies, and visa and other regulatory regimes for Indian workers in Western countries questions and also disrupts a seemingly smooth trajectory of a upwardly mobile secured position for this worker, both socially as well as internationally. IT workers express fears and concerns about sustaining, on a long term, recently acquired affluent lifestyles in an expensive city like Mumbai, given the tumultuous market conditions. Organizations, in recent years, have introduced 'demotion' policies and after September 11th, retrenchment and downsizing became increasingly common in Indian IT companies (D'Mello, 2005). Besides the resultant disturbing, existential feelings, these changes can also adversely affect how the IT worker is perceived by his or her social group within the organization as well as by family and friends. Even if the reason for a downward shift is attributed to market factors, rather than individual performance, employees speak of feeling embarrassed in their various social groups and experience a loss of place or favorable social position in their extended family relations. In these ways, the uneven social trajectory of the IT worker is closely intertwined with the inherent mobility as well as the risks of the industry.

Similarly, an often desired overseas posting gives the IT worker an enhanced social status in the family, increased possibilities for saving money and a chance to experience a different set of cultural and social relations both within and outside the customer location. This comes with a set of tensions and issues. While establishing professional relations is easier, relating at a personal level is difficult. Such relations come with a set of nonverbal codes or tacit social norms and rules, not easily transferable from one social context to another. For example, ‘rules’ relating to ‘small talk’ or what is understood as ‘personal,’ in one context as opposed to another, differs across geographical places. Not knowing these rules immediately makes it difficult for those who are posted onsite, particularly those who are traveling overseas for the first time, to easily ‘fit in’ or relate informally to locals. Finding such social transitions wearisome at times, some IT workers revert to social relations where a common history of place based rules, related to region or even religion, predominate. In this way, they satisfy a sense of belonging through deeper, place-based roots and ties.
Furthermore, concerns about the norms of the overseas culture clashing directly with family value systems when raising children, often prompts an over-conservative response and sometimes a desire to return back to one’s homeland earlier than the stipulated period of posting. Family relocation back and forth across physical and social borders is not an easy transition. Also, as in the case of Sulochana, while the work as well as the onsite locale created a new situation demanding a shift in mindset, a place based chauvinistic response was transposed with little consideration to or concern for the new context or the worker involved. In this way, the circuit of social mobilities of the IT person is in continuous tension with some immobilities in the forms of norms, and values, making it an uneven course.

In summary, social mobility is an uneven and unpredictable process where the hope of going in some upward direction is counterbalanced by the risks of the profession, market, industry as well as norms of social relations and the individual’s conditioning and beliefs.

By existential mobility, we mean the shifting internal processes related to the IT worker such as fears and hopes, insecurities and successes experienced primarily in relation to career trajectories and work contexts. IT professionals experience a significantly high level of freedom and choices in their work compared to other professions in India. Besides the numerous job opportunities, they also have a large number of career path options within the IT profession itself. In this way, they have the option to exercise more discretion over what they want to do and where they want to be.

Yet, this wide menu of choices is also accompanied by increased anxiety, stress, and an uneasy sense of precariousness and uncertainty of one’s future in a fluid and mobile labor market. The fear of obsolescence often fuels the imperative towards growth where workers are in a constant ‘learning mode’, either re-skilling themselves or shortening their learning curve to enable a ‘permanently marketable’ state of being. In this way, GSW is a crucible for capitalist work regimes where labor is a disposable commodity and where workers are in a constant state of preparation and alertness to increase their market value as they move (or are moved) around places and spaces. The conscious and intentional rhetoric of ‘deliverables’ and ‘value addition’ are ingrained, used not only in the daily work conversations but transferred to tangible outcomes in their personal lives. Given that technologies and skills change so rapidly, the sense of security or worth secured as a result of a plum job, a ‘hot’ platform or a prestigious project, is short lived, resulting in an itinerant state of existence that we refer to as ‘permanent transience’.

Furthermore, the pride and fulfillment in an achieved success towards a particular notion of professional being, for example as a techie or a project manager, is often easily toppled or disrupted by various disciplining and surveillance systems in the organization in a classic Foucauldian sense, as well as by turbulent changes in the global market space. Replaced by anxiety and insecurity, it is no wonder that the IT worker feels like a nomad, going places and places. One place of ‘rest’ is, perhaps, the web of social relations in his/her personal life such as family or an arranged marriage where traditional social orders provide a context of security and stability that is deeply rooted and where ones’
place in the world is known and relatively stable. However, these structures too are under threat, given the flows of social change in the Indian context as well as issues directly related to the IT industry, given its peculiarity. Thus, existential mobility spans a wide continuum of human emotions and states of being traversed by the IT worker during his/her career and work trajectory.

While these diverse mobilities are fraught with multiplicities and ambiguities, they also intersect with each other and mutually constitute each other. For example, as the IT person moves across his/her typical professional ‘life cycle’, stepping across various physical places and social spaces, the accompanying existential states of feeling, values and attitudes is described as dramatically shifting from passion and enthusiasm to pessimism and resignation. The climb up the corporate hierarchy is coupled with even more responsibilities, challenges, enhanced visibility in the market, social status and affluence, which goes hand in hand with higher levels of stress and pressures to perform. While the transnational nature of GSW, and the ‘glamour’ of frequent overseas travel gives an ‘international’ flavor to the image and position of the IT person in his/her social group, it also intensifies the sense of personal as well as professional insecurity and disrupts family life as well. The increasingly conflated boundaries between personal and professional spheres as an outcome of this work can have fatal personal consequences which often go unnoticed or labeled as insignificant by a relatively youthful workforce, caught up in frenzied mobilities of all sorts.

In this way GSOs are sites that are both embedded in as well as embed multiple mobilities related to GSW and the daily work life of IT professionals. While various kinds of mobilities in IT mediated contexts have been earlier described by researchers (e.g. Urry 2003; Kakihara and Sorenson 2002, 2003), social and existential mobilities have been ignored, leaving a gap in our understanding of this phenomenon in modern day contexts. We propose that the varied mobilities, and their almost kaleidoscopic interactions mirror, the dialectical relations of space and place in global work contexts, similar to the relation between the net and the self, proposed by Castells (1996).

5.2. How mobilities shapes the relationship with place and identity
The empirical material has lead us to propose a construct of ‘mobility-identity’ as a workplace identity that embodies the tension of movement and stasis emerging from the technoscapes of GSW. Rather than a permanent shift such as geographical migration, the movement in mobility-identity is a to-and-froing between cultural, technological, spatial and existential spaces and places. This construct has several features as well as inherent tensions.

Firstly, the to-and-froing between spaces and places, noted by Giddens (1990) as the two central contours in the time-space configuration of modernity, is hardly seamless or unproblematic for the IT worker. In addition to actual physical movement, attitudinal, emotional and existential shifts are ever present. The challenge and excitement of traversing spaces and places such as social positions, new projects or successful career shifts and overseas locations, is counterbalanced by anxieties of newness, uncertainty of expectations and fear of obsolescence. This suggests that while work and social practices
as well as ‘bodies’ are disembedded, with some problematic issues, from local contexts and re-embedded in new contexts, across space and time, selves and identities are even harder to disembedd and re-embed across boundaries of time and space.

Second, we use the constructs of ‘career’ and ‘self management’ as vectors that demonstrate the particularities of mobility-identity. While Giddens (1991) was concerned with modernity and new modes of self-identity, referring to the concept of the construction of the project of the self he did not specify how this is conducted particularly in globalizing work contexts. GSW, with its inherent mobilities, provides an opportunity to examine such a project.

In this context, we adopt Grey’s (1994) notion of career as a means for the ‘project of the self’ to be realized or for the self to ‘become’. In GSOs today, the ‘psychological contract’ as well as the ‘flexible’ employment contracts between employees and the firm have shifted from one that promises ‘employment security’ to one that promotes ‘employability opportunity’. This implies a shift from paternalism and loyalty to performance and self-management where employees are responsible for their careers, with the organization providing work opportunities, support and monitoring systems. In the trajectory of the IT worker, career then becomes a reflexive project that is intentionally nurtured, grown, enhanced and revised, seeking opportunities for expression and fulfillment in a fluid and competitive marketplace. IT workers the world over, are characterized by a high degree of individualism, lacking a strong attachment to three traditional bases of occupational identity: union identity; loyalty to management and the company, and solidarity with colleagues (D'Mello, 2005; Fidel and Garner, 1990; Sahay et al., 2003). This individualism privileges commitment to career over these other attachments.

Rather than something outside of himself/herself, the career as a project is a means by which the IT worker attempts to construct a sense of identity and secure a ‘psychic place’ (Knights and Murray, 1994) in the organization, market and the various social groups of membership. Social and work related notions of achievement, success and upward mobility, are inextricably intertwined in the career trajectory of this group whose dominant discourse is the ‘growth imperative’. One tangible ‘place’ where this is manifested is the curriculum vitae (Miller and Morgan, 1993) which the IT worker constantly scrutinizes, ‘polishes’ and updates to present a successful narrative of self and identity. As opposed to this, is the experience on the ‘bench’24, an organizational space that is temporary and ‘immobile,’ most often a business necessity. With the intent of presenting a coherent productive work history or narrative, this period, of ‘immobility’ or ‘sitting on the bench’, is generally experienced as frustrating and anxiety arousing, fraught with fears of redundancy and understated or deleted from one’s curriculum vitae. Viewed more as a space signifying stagnation and non-value-adding time, as opposed to a refreshing break from grueling work schedules, the bench represents the antithesis of work mobilities within a capitalist market rhetoric, driven by productivity norms and deliverables, stealthily influencing workers sense of self and their identity constructions.

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24Due to business reasons, workers who are non-billable and unassigned to a project, are temporarily placed in this space.
The mobile nature of GSW, the transnational flavor of software organizations and the turbulent marketplace makes identity construction a fragile process. On the one hand, some IT workers clearly desired and attempted to carefully carve an achieved identity as a ‘techie’ or a ‘project manager’, and invested emotionally in these constructions. On the other hand, meritocratic organizational setups with increasingly stringent surveillance systems such as performance management, potential assessment and reward and recognition systems would sometimes fast-forward as well as interrupt this trajectory aspiration thus creating cycles of hope and excitement as well as fear and disappointment. Referring to this fragility, in the context of organizations, Knights and Murray (1994) state: “People make organizations but organizations also make people” (p. 245). Further, they say: “Just when you think you are safe, home and dry, the world tilts – maybe only slightly but enough to throw into question that sense of identity, of completeness, so laboriously achieved.” (p. 246). In the context of GSW, this statement points to a distinctive labor process in the construction of identities that are eventually quite precarious and easily toppled over by market and social risks. This experience is not unlike what Beck (1992) and Urry (2000, 2001) describe when they refer to risks which had discontinuous and unpredictable effects.

The notion of ‘self management’ (Grey, 1994) sometimes experienced as mirage, is also fraught with tensions. To the outside world, the IT worker has the luxury of a seemingly vast array of choices and opportunities as he/she moves across firms, roles, technologies and countries. However, this notion of ‘freedom of choice,’ ‘global market’ and ‘self management,’ typically associated with Western notions of autonomy and will, operates within a economic context of the capitalist market--our particular social worlds and its set of institutional and social constraints (Sahay, 2004). For example, while IT workers certainly have many more job opportunities than other professionals in the service sector in India, giving them a set of freedoms to ‘be all that you want to be,’ the reality is that they can be relatively easily retrenched or ‘disposed off’ by the company. This has implications for not only how the worker bonds with the company or his/her engagement with the company. Also deeply impacted is the self in terms of feelings of low self worth and inadequacy spilling over into the personal life and adversely impacting the identity construction process by the individual as well as of the individual by significant others. Although the Indian software industry has boomed in recent years, enabling workers to pick and choose jobs or roles, most of the growth is still driven by low value-added services (Arora et al., 2001; D'Costa, 2004) with some customers preferring to keep the creative aspects of development work within their own national boundaries (Sahay et al., 2003). This reinforces the argument that first order choices are always made in contexts that second order choices frames the boundaries (Sahay 2004), eroding the myth of free choice and individual agency.

In this sense, we argue then, mobility-identity in GSW is constructed from elements within socio-historical, relational and temporal contexts of space and place that exist along the global-local continuum. The empirical material also suggests that in mobility-identity, some sets of relations are mobilized while others are deeply embedded, remaining untouched by what Castells (1996) calls the space or ‘power of flows.’ Related
to selves and identities of individuals, these sets form almost an enclave where local continuities, deeply grounded in place, thrive. While IT workers seek newness, growth and the pursuit of an almost boundaryless career in workspaces, and GSOs increasingly operating with a ‘placeless logic’ redefining their internal and external boundaries, individual employees remain “historically and biographically place-dependent” (Sahay et al., 2003, p. 39), creating or reinforcing their own boundaries internally.

One enclave within mobility–identity, that reflected this place dependency, was a sense of belonging. Expressed in a ‘home at work’ environment in the office, as well as other social practices such as arranged marriages, social and religious ties across geographical boundaries, popular media images and foods from ‘home,’ these expressions of belonging reflect what Massey (1998) describes as particular assemblages of social relations interacting or meeting at a particular location. Theses relations were framed in the context of a shared sense of national and regional identities that provided a sense of solidarity and reduced feelings of anxiety and vulnerability. Western or secular practices such as Valentine’s Day celebrations, Friday beer busts, and cake cutting ceremonies ‘sat’ alongside expressions of religious beliefs such as festival celebrations. Expressions or vernacular languages and ‘mother tongues’ spoken along with ‘global’ English suggest how more and more place and space boundaries are increasingly and easily conflated in such organizations, merging the global and the local in a hybrid mixture and enabling workers to be placed both ‘here’ and ‘there.’

Yet, while traversing multiple places, workers in GSOs are not seen to be influenced by the postmodern pastiche described by Gergen (1991). Nor are places increasingly ‘phantasmagoric,’ as Giddens (1990) proposed and neither are people and things, simultaneously, ‘now here’ and ‘nowhere’. On the contrary, in the ‘to and froing’, people are always ‘somewhere’ using social networks of relationships as reflexive two-way processes in the context of mobilizing narratives of place to maintain coherence and a sense of rootedness in their personal lives and identity constructions. In their career, while both notions of place and space circulate, workers use choice making processes within capitalistic frameworks to mobilize a successful trajectory. The vectors of career and self-management enable coherency between the past, present and future as well as various flows of mobilities within and between spaces and places, self and identity. The geographical context of Mumbai city, as a nodal point for the Indian IT industry, demonstrates Urry’s (2000) notion of global flows of money, images and risks moving in an uneven manner within the interconnectivities of places, spaces and social relations derived from GSW which further links to vagaries of technology turns and vicissitudes of immigration laws and visa systems of nation states. Similar to place-based identification (Twigger-Ross and Uzzell, 1996), as well as the fluid metaphor of Kakihara and Sorenson (2002), mobility-identity then emerges as a process that is spatially unfixed and unfinished, formed by the discourses of mobile contexts and, yet, one that also seeks moorings in place that provide socio-historical meaning and relevance for the individual.

6. IMPLICATIONS
Analyzing GSW from a ‘mobilities’ perspective has both theoretical and practical implications and these are now described.
Firstly, this analysis contributes to Urry’s (2000) agenda for the development of ‘sociology of mobilities.’ We do this by creating a ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973) of the context as well as actors in GSW and by providing rich insights into the nature and features of various mobilities that characterize the IT industry and its people. While various kinds of mobilities in ICT mediated contexts have been earlier described by researchers, particularly in Information Systems (e.g., Kakihara and Sorenson, 2002, 2003), these descriptions excluded social and existential realms of individuals that were seen to frame the experience of mobilities in this study. By arguing for their linkage with identity processes and the global-local dialectic, through a micro-level analysis in a globalizing context, this analysis has elaborated the construct of mobilities within Information Systems and Sociology.

Secondly, the lens of mobility-identity developed from the empirical analysis, highlights how people are always situated in places. Place was seen to interact dynamically with identity processes as individuals engaged in ‘to and froing’ between spaces and places or, in other words, the global and the local. This lens also underlines the idea that while some forms of work like GSW may operate with a placeless logic, individuals are always “historically and biographically place-dependent” (Sahay et al., 2003, p. 39). It refutes the notion that global flows make places increasingly ‘phantasmagoric’ (Giddens, 1990) where people and things are simultaneously ‘now here’ and ‘nowhere’ (Friedland and Boden, 1994). It reinforces Massey’s (1998) argument that places are more like processes or a particular assemblage of social relations that interact or meet at a particular location rather than a fixed bounded area that provides one with an unproblematic identity. We argue that this lens emphasizes the dialectical relation between the ‘net and the self’ proposed by Castells (1996) that metaphorically represents space and place respectively. We suggest this lens be employed to analyze the dynamics of various movements of workers between physical, social, technological and existential spaces and places and their links to identity processes in similar globalizing contexts.

Thirdly, this analysis contributes to debates in the literature on globalized workplaces and their link to identity processes in the ‘new economy’ in several ways. As demonstrated, both global influences in the form of capitalist work regimes and local and national identities were simultaneously embraced within the GSO, conceptualized as a crucible of globalization processes. Further, rather than smooth unproblematic movement, the GSO reflected ‘disjunctured flows’ (Appadurai, 1990) while constituting its own and other identities. This reinforces the view (e.g. Giddens, 1990, 1991) that globalization is an uneven and dialectical process with multiple forms and does not create a level playing field nor a ‘borderless world’ (Ohmae, 1990). Along with the other features, such as time-space compression and flexible accumulation, characterizing globalization (Harvey, 1989), this analysis further illustrates how place-based identities such as locality and nationality, seen to travel across boundaries, are simultaneously challenged and persistent. They can be seen to constitute a ‘symbolic resource’ mobilized by individuals and the GSO to create belonging, reduce vulnerability, emphasize sameness and difference as they reflexively respond to market shifts. Finally, this study illustrated the fleet of risks, related to mobilities and other features of work in the ‘new economy,’
framing global software development work and the ways in which IT engaged with mobile diverse places and spaces in a relational manner. In these ways, we can say that GSOs metaphorically represent ‘models-of’ and ‘models-for’ globalization processes.

Fourthly, we propose that mobilities are key features that differentiate the IT industry from other industries such as manufacturing and financial services sector, including other co-located work. In this way, we extend the description of distinctive features seen to distinguish how offshore development differs from co-located development (Nicholson and Sahay, 2004). Further, software development work, which increasingly exists in a web of highly interactive relationships (Waterson et al., 1997), is said to have peculiar knowledge demands particularly related to embedded knowledge (Nicholson and Sahay, 2004). We propose that an analysis of mobilities and their linkage with place and identity processes contributes to an understanding of sources of embeddedness of knowledge.

Embeddedness of knowledge has been earlier discussed at cognitive, organizational and societal levels and their interconnections and nestedness in each other have also been analyzed (Dacin et al., 1999; Lam, 2000; Nicholson and Sahay, 2004). Such research has included symbolic representations, specialized relationships, broader social institutions and structures such as education and labor markets and local gender norms as sources of embeddedness of knowledge. We suggest the mobility-identity relationship as one source of embeddedness of knowledge in GSOs. For example, the growth imperative and the fear of obsolescence that was seen to drive IT workers to change jobs rapidly, deprives GSOs of both the formal and informal knowledge held by workers, particularly by key employees. The assumptions, that IT workers made about a ‘professional’ work culture and other cultural experiences while onsite, shape their own responses in cross-cultural interactions influencing social relations within the firm. The increasing importance of knowledge demands of ‘soft skills’ such as communication and cultural adaptation for IT workers in outsourcing relations are tacit, embedded in socialization practices and cultural beliefs (D'Mello, 2006) and require face-to-face interaction. Also as this study shows, these skills also relate to place-based identities of workers. Being ‘spatially sticky’ (Gertler, 2001) they are embedded within a context they cannot be easily transferred or disembedded across boundaries of space and place. In this way, the mobility-identity relation contributes towards a more holistic perspective for understanding issues of knowledge in offshore development work and these also have practical implications for GSOs.

There are several practical implications of this study. Mobilities of IT workers across firms contribute to high attrition rates within the firm, adversely impacting transfer of knowledge in several ways. Firstly, explicit knowledge that is codified and documented in the form of tools, languages or packages is comparatively easier to transfer from onsite to offshore. However, transfer of tacit knowledge such as work and cultural norms is a challenging task and cited as an important reason for breakdowns in the initial period of an offshoring relationship (Carmel and Beulen, 2005). Similarly, the tacit nature of ‘soft skills’ that resist or are slow to disembed from one locale to another, also influence

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25 Earlier identified features include the nature of work; diversity of organisations and cultures co-involved in the development process; and the processual nature of the offshore relationship (Nicholson & Sahay, 2004).
collaboration and communication in a cross-border offshoring relationship. The high rate of attrition of workers and the time taken to ‘ramp up’ new employees pose challenges for knowledge transfer, particularly tacit knowledge which cannot be learnt from a document or a formal training program. Secondly, attrition of employees makes distinctive demands distinctive demands on firms to retain and manage knowledge of their key people with specialized competencies. Thirdly, the fast changing technological and market expectations require that the GSOs as well as workers quickly acquire and master the new forms of technical and market knowledge. Fourthly, attrition of employees at managerial levels, can threaten the very existence of a project team as an effective team leader can motivate his/her reportees to leave en masse and join the new organization. Finally, attrition of employees result in much energy of the organization being expended on recruiting good candidates, repeatedly building new relationships and sharing required project and organizational knowledge with new workers.

The issue of attrition calls for GSOs to attend to mobility-identity related dimensions of IT workers in several ways. Firstly, rather than standard company-wide HR policies customization of HR policies and processes, reward and award systems to individuals, teams and groups are deemed necessary. These are seen to value differences in individual backgrounds and aspirations of ‘nomadic’ IT workers as well as those of project teams and groups such as women workers, onsite employees, trainees, managers or returnees from overseas. Further, examining company policies, processes and corporate identification practices with a mobility-identity lens, might point to subtle ‘push’ and ‘pull’ organizational features that make people and teams dissatisfied or motivated. Secondly, providing ‘deliverables’ and ‘adding value’ are seen as expectations from both employees and employers. This implies that GSOs offer an array of value-added options that enhance the curriculum vitae of the worker and grow his/her career. These options span the range of employment contracts, assignments, career paths, training and development opportunities that link to identity-linked features of workers and enable ‘employability’ of the worker. Thirdly, the need to quickly and effectively build and sustain trust and credibility with new and existing employees challenges GSOs to examine their daily behaviors, as well as their disciplining and surveillance systems that collide and/or collaborate with their espoused corporate values or organizational image and identity.

Mobilities, particularly attrition of workers also impact knowledge sharing in GSOs. Attrition hinders the development of strong enduring social ties already limited as a result of ICT mediated interactions and necessary for knowledge sharing. The volatile technological and market conditions place demands on both GSOs and individuals to acquire and master new forms of both technical and market-related knowledge. The embedded nature of human capital skills, particularly knowledge capital coupled with issues of identity, mobility and reflexivity of IT workers, challenge GSOs to question their assumptions of knowledge and the role of ICT as a means to overcome knowledge sharing issues. It suggests that practitioners develop a sensitivity to the importance of tacit local knowledge and the difficulties of learning through practice when employees are spatially distanced. It also implies that heterogeneity be built into broader standardized templates used within the organization.
Mobilities necessitated by work coupled with distributed nature of software development work were seen to blur boundaries between work and family spaces and work-family conflict was seen as an individual level responsibility. The IT workforce in India is still relatively young (e.g., no IT worker has retired as yet from this organization) and in the daily rush to meet aggressive deadlines, signs of stress and burnout are often ignored on a daily basis. In a 24/7 industry, driven by market swings, IT workers could collaborate with GSOs, professional and trade associations (NASSCOM) towards creating spaces and possibilities for regeneration and recuperation.

The various ways, in which mobilities influence GSOs, implies that people or ‘HR issues’ are tightly coupled with productivity, motivation, retention, work-life balance and knowledge issues of the firm. This coupling of issues in GSO work underlines the value of a more synergistic working of HR personnel and project managers, who are often seen to work in silos in IT companies, attending to these issues in a compartmentalized manner. Such cross-functional working is expected to facilitate a more holistic and broad-based approach towards evolving strategies and measures to address people-related issues and risks in the GSO.

7. CONCLUSION

In this paper we have analyzed the nature and features of mobilities that characterize workers and organizations engaged in global software development work. We also discussed how these mobilities interact with the articulation, expression and redefinitions of IT workers’ identities. While ICTs of contemporary life, so typical in GSW are described as possessing the capacity to free or ‘unglue’ selves, identities and relationships from geographical confines, this study suggested that globally distributed software development work contexts does not enable endless possibilities for self and identity constructions. In fact, while global software development is increasingly distributed across space and place, it is hardly context free.

This work suggests that ‘global’ is not simply an even, invariant force or project, changing the everyday realities of peoples’ lives, assumed to exist in a form that is simply reproduced worldwide. Rather it is irregular and paradoxical and an open-ended process that collaborate with and also contest local processes and events. The high mobility trajectories of IT workers calls for continuous, transcendent, reflexive monitoring and promises newness, growth and prosperity within a dromocentric world while simultaneously including a parallel return or search for belongingness and rootedness. Rather than ‘the specter of a ‘runaway world’, or the destruction of distance, place and locality in the globalization of work, mobility-identity, by enabling a ‘to and froing’ between places and spaces, informs us how global workspaces and individual, selves and identities mutually constitute and enhance each other.
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APPENDIX 4

Marisa D’Mello, and Thomas Hylland Eriksen.

Abstract:
Global software organizations (GSO) are a unique form of work context in the ‘new economy.’ As well as employing information technology (IT) professionals engaged in global software development work, these workspaces are not only rational information-based structures but actively creating and nurturing social and symbolic frameworks for their employees. Given the unique nature of this form of work and workers, particularly in the context of the rapidly growing IT industry in India, these frameworks constitute and are constituted by various kinds of co-existing cultures. Using an interpretive ethnographic method, four kinds of cultures were identified in the case study, a GSO in Mumbai city in India. These were corporate cultures, software work cultures, primordial cultures, and working across national cultures. The dynamics and intersections of these cultures within this workspace were seen to relate to how GSOs, as well as IT workers, construct their respective identities. An understanding, of these dynamics, has both theoretical and practical implications.

Keywords: globalization, software, culture, identity, organization, IT worker

1. INTRODUCTION

A key feature in what has been referred to as the globally networked ‘knowledge society’ or ‘digital economy,’ is work that is ‘disembedded’ by the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs), from a particular context, and re-articulated across time and space in other global domains (Giddens, 1991). This has, among other things, given birth to a multitude of assemblages of transformations, reshaping international business environments, creating new forms of work, workers and organizational structures and their cultures. In this paper, we explore how different forms of culture are articulated within a new workplace -- the global software organization (GSO). Further, we also explore how these articulations shape social interactions and
identities among IT workers or professionals, also referred to as ‘knowledge workers’ (Alvesson, 1993).²

2. CONTEXT OF GLOBAL SOFTWARE ORGANIZATIONS (GSOs)

GSOs³ represent a recent form of globalized work context undertaking knowledge-intensive software development work across boundaries of time, space and place and are viewed as “both a model of and a model for globalization” (Sahay et al., 2003, p. 2). Employing knowledge workers or IT professionals such as programmers, designers, analysts and managers (who design, develop, test and implement software), GSOs include local ‘actors’ as well as global elements. In this way, they exemplify the complexities of work and workers, within volatile turbulent technological and business market contexts, challenging stable taken-for-granted notions of culture and identity (Sahay et al., 2003; D’Mello, 2005).

Shifts and movements characterize this industry. The vagaries of capital flows, political and financial events, coupled with turbulent technology turns, are so ubiquitous in this industry along with the vicissitudes of immigration laws and visa systems of nation states (van der Veer, 2005) and necessitate different mobilities required on the part of IT workers. IT workers are expected to consistently work late hours, often in a crisis mode, rapidly switching between projects, technologies and countries because of diverse time zones and tight project schedules. Volatile changes in technologies and platforms in the global marketplace, demands on a constant basis, continuous updating of knowledge and skills by individual workers, pressure IT workers to be in a continuous learning mode to be ‘marketable’ both within and outside the organization. GSOs, too, are forced to change and adapt their structures, cultures and work processes in response to market changes. Much of the work is done in virtual ‘electronic shared spaces’¹ (such as e-mail, telephone calls and videoconferences) where transcending boundaries of organizations and countries, social interaction and communication is assumed to follow universalistic rules of ‘non spaces’ (Gupta, 2000).⁴

The IT industry in India has two unique features. Firstly, most software firms have been founded by middle-class engineers with previous careers as software professionals or managers in large IT companies (Upadhya, 2004) unlike many Indian firms linked to traditional business families with relatively easy access to capital. This has influenced a distinctive culture and outlook in the industry. These companies in turn, have contributed to the creation of a professional-managerial class of workers with high levels of formal

² ‘Knowledge work’ is a form of work that has emerged in the ‘new economy’ or post-industrial society where knowledge workers who are well educated and qualified professionals produce creative objects and/or services and solutions by using their knowledge as a major resource (Alvesson, 1993). Knowledge-intensive companies such as management firms, computer consultancy firms, R&D units, as well as GSOs, employing knowledge workers are imbued with ambiguity where the ‘product’ is intangible, uncertainty and contradictions abound, and the distinction between ‘labor’ and ‘knowledge’ is merged (Alvesson, 2001).

³ By global we mean distribution across boundaries of nation states, time zones and culture.

⁴ Based on the notion of ‘non-place’ (Auge, 1995) this neologism was coined by Gupta (2000) to emphasize the importance of culture and its spaces. These authors discuss airports, national highways, supermarkets as non-places as they are designed to appeal to people of all cultural backgrounds without arousing membership patterns and strong affect, like cultures do with their spaces.
training, occupying a unique position in the service economy as well as the social structure in India. Secondly, since the 1980s, this industry has been closely intertwined with the global economy through contractual relationships with overseas companies, foreign direct investment by multinational companies and later, in the 1990s, during the IT boom, through foreign venture capital (Upadhya, 2004). In this way, the IT industry, and its workforce in India, is necessarily embedded in a global network of economic, political, social and cultural transnational linkages.

An analysis of culture in the context of the IT industry in India is appropriate and important for a number of reasons. The first has to do with the global-local dialectic where events at one end of this distanciated relationship may produce divergent effects at the other end (Giddens 1991). Theorists of globalization (e.g., Robertson, 1992) have argued that incoming global influences are encountered and selectively internalized, or 'glocalized', at the local level to meet local needs, and the local as well is also a source of outgoing flows. Others (e.g., Ailon-Souday and Kunda, 2003) refer to how the 'local' is intertwined in an increasingly complex way with the global, pervading more and more of our everyday life worlds. In a ‘new economy’ scenario of rapidly evolving global capitalism, the ‘manufactured’ cultures of corporations are a normative management technique, rather than direct forms of control and hierarchical organizational structures of the old capitalism, emphasizing external systems for rewards and punishment (Casey, 1995; Gabriel, 1999; Jacques, 1996; Kunda, 1992). The IT industry in India, similarly framed within discourses of neo-liberalism and global capitalism presents a challenge to inspect how the interweaving of global and cultural dynamics of the ‘new economy’ interweave with diverse local cultures (e.g., religion, region, social), and symbolically create or modify cultural and social frameworks for IT workers working within GSOs.

Work and corporate cultures in the new economy also impact workers personal and social lives, in profound ways, often resulting in what Sennett (1998) refers to as the ‘corrosion of character.’ Studies have investigated linkages of identities and selves of workers within globalizing and ICT mediated global workplaces in the disciplines of Anthropology (e.g., English-Lueck and Saveri, 2001; Hakken, 1999; Hull, 2001; Kunda, 1992), Information Systems (e.g., Lamb and Davidson, 2005; Scott, 2000; Walsham, 1998; Walsham, 2001) and Sociology of Work (e.g., Casey, 1995). However, these studies have been focused on primarily Western contexts. In Asian contexts, micro level studies of globalization, culture and identity framed within global business settings (such as GSOs) has been limited (see Biao, 2004; D'Mello, 2005; Ong, 1999; Sahay et al., 2003). In the context of India, this linkage is particularly interesting given that Indians have been characterized as sociocentric (versus egocentric), hierarchical and embedded in a system of intricate social relations (Kakar, 1981; Marriott and Inden, 1974; Ramanujan, 1990). Unfortunately, much of the sociology of India has been preoccupied with representations of caste, kinship, rituals rather than labor (Parry, 1999), neglecting how strategies of global capitalism inflects social forms of labor particularly in ICT mediated contexts. Understanding these linkages in a rapidly expanding industry has implications both for scholars in the sociology of work, as well as practitioners such as Human Resource (HR) and line managers in GSOs who grapple with people-related issues on a daily basis.
Using a ‘culture’ lens, the two questions that this paper attempts to answer are:

- **How do Indian GSOs symbolically create social and cultural frameworks for their employees?**
- **How does this relate to construction and articulation of identity by workers as well as the GSO?**

With the objective of answering these questions, we present, in the next section, a theoretical framework seeking to outline the relationship between approaches to culture and self and identity (particularly in the context of India) and our approach. In Section 4, we describe the process of field work followed by Section 5 which describes the empirical material with some of the tensions experienced by IT workers. In Section 6, we use the lens of culture to answer the two research questions and in section 7, some implications of this work are suggested.

3. **THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES: CULTURE, SELF AND IDENTITY**

In this section, we outline key cultural approaches to studying organizations focusing on approaches studying the relationship between national and organizational cultures with a focus on Indian organizations. Next, we describe notions of self and identity, focusing on anthropological constructs in the context of India. Finally, we delineate our approach in the present study.

3.1 **Culture and Organizations**

The concept of culture is a primary and distinctive concept within Cultural Anthropology. Since the 1980’s, the notion of culture gained currency within corporations. It was seen as crucial to the shaping of values and providing meaning and purpose to daily lives of employees, as well as framing the identity, image and reputation of the firm emerging as a central theme in organization and management studies⁵ (Alvesson, 2002; Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Kunda, 1992; Willmott, 1993).

Organization Studies, which has borrowed the concept of culture from Anthropology and given it a central place, is replete with diverse approaches and definitions on this construct.⁶ A well-known approach is that of Schein (1984) who defined organizational culture as “...the pattern of basic assumptions that a given group has invented, discovered, or developed in learning to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, and that have worked well enough to be considered valid, and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems” (Schein, 1984, p. 3). Further, he posits that culture is

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⁵ After the well-known book ‘Corporate Cultures’ by T. Deal and A. Kennedy appeared in the US in 1982, the term corporate cultures became common parlance, often equated with ‘organizational culture’. Distinguishing between ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ cultures of organizations, researchers maintained that both kinds of cultures powerfully influence members through their informal rules, rites and rituals, values and philosophy (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Peters & Waterman, 1982).

⁶ Smircich (1983) provides a comprehensive delineation of the various ways culture is used in Anthropology as well as Organization Studies.
something which identifies and differentiates a social group and can be managed and changed in some organizations.

Schein’s definition has been critiqued as being too simplistic and static (Avison and Myers, 1995). Other cultural approaches to analysis of organizations, that similarly borrow from Anthropology and Organization theory, conceive culture in diverse ways (Smircich, 1983). Firstly, in much of cross-cultural or comparative management research, culture is conceived as an independent variable (e.g., Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, 2000). Secondly, when seen as an internal variable, culture is the social or normative glue binding an organization together, reflecting the values and beliefs shared by members symbolically through myths, rituals, legends and stories (Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Tichy, 1982). Thirdly, as opposed to culture as a ‘systems metaphor’, culture as a root metaphor views organizations as a subjective experience and a pattern of symbolic relationships that provide and shape meaning for its members (Smircich, 1983). Finally, a cultural framework assumes that socio-cultural characteristics of organizations reflects the wider socio-historical framework within which organizations are embedded. (Smircich, 1983).

Notions of culture are often related to geographical locations. Cross-cultural researchers have for decades studied the relationship between national and organizational cultures and people’s identities (Inkeles and Levinson, 1954; Mead, 1951). Researchers have focused on how one’s national or ‘native’ culture influence workers perceptions in the form of perceptions (Chatterjee and Cecil, 2000) values (Hampden-Turner and Trompenars, 1993), attitudes (Anastasi, 1983) and beliefs (Smith and Thomas, 1972) and how these in turn, influence organizational culture (Hofstede, 1980). For example, Max Weber’s analysis (Weber, 1930; Weber, 1958), of the relation of culture to economic growth, suggested that economic development in India was stunted because Hinduism lacked the Protestant ethic which had spurred the growth of capitalism in the West.7 This implies that individuals in a particular culture are seen to share attitudes and modes of behavior that provide them with certain capacities or incapacities for organizational behavior termed as a basic or modal personality (Levinson, 1968). For example, the modal Hindu personality is posited as one where personal initiative is replaced by obedience and conformity (Asthana, 1956; Carstairs, 1957).

In a similar vein, efforts have been made to conceptualize the link between ‘basic Indian values’ (Sinha, 1988) suggestive of national character, which might counter economic progress in India. Personality traits fostered by these values include mildness, passivity, dependency and a non-materialist orientation, among others which were said to form part of the ‘Indian psyche’8 (Narain, 1957; Sinha, 1988), often attributed to the hierarchical structure of Indian society (Dumont, 1970; Kakar, 1971). Strong hierarchical structuring, such as paternal authority relations and dependency on elders as a positive feature, was seen as a pre-industrial element which carries over into modern organizations where

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7 Weber was critical of the religion of Hinduism particularly what he referred to as the demotivating and deadening effects of karma often interpreted as fatalism.
8 The term, ‘the Hindu rate of growth’ has been used disparagingly to refer to India’s history of 2-3% annual growth in GDP during 1950-1991 implying that Hinduism fostered personality traits and behaviors that limited growth (Virmani, 2004). Similarly, the rise of the East Asian world has been attributed to the inherent qualities of a Confucian model that upholds values of duty and responsibility, as well as sanctioning the pursuit of material possessions (Ong, 1999).
Indians have been noted to prefer to work in a superior-subordinate role rather than as equals (Kothari, 1970).

Another stream of cross-cultural studies in the context of India employed an ‘etic’ approach to culture comparing cultures on dimensions considered universally applicable. For example, the poles of individualistic-collectivistic orientations have been used to examine differences in cultures and among other indices, their respective economic developments⁹ (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, 1995; Triandis, 2000). These studies propose that Indians as collectivists, view their self and life goals to be relational, interdependent with family and other ingroup members. Other etic studies deploying different dimensions showed that those sharing an ‘Indian culture’ were high on context orientation (Hall, 1981) low on uncertainty avoidance, inclined towards collectivism and masculinity, high on power distance (Hofstede, 1980) and high on helping behavior (Levine et al., 2001).

The concept of national character and modal personality or even the etic approach is of limited value in explaining any ‘basic’ behavior for several reasons. Firstly, in a context of India, with its diversity of over a billion people, with sixteen recognised languages, thousands of castes and tribes, diverse religions (with Hinduism pre-dominating) and varied climate, topographies and economic levels, there is no typical childhood that all individuals share. Besides, other social influences outside early childhood may shape the individual in diverse ways (Kakar, 1971). Secondly, individuals in technical and occupational groups, such as engineers, have been noted to construct and consolidate their identity needs around autonomy rather than authority relations (Kakar, 1971; Sinha and Misra, 1961). Thirdly, studies suggest that cultural dimensions did not match with organizational dimensions and Indians were found to be both collectivist as well as individualist, combining these modes to fit the situation (Sinha et al., 2002; Sinha et al., 2001). Fourthly, the etic approach has used concepts formulated in the West (Sinha and Kumar, 2004) and these are often too static, objectivist and essentialist as they carry multiple meanings across and within cultures (Tayeb, 2001). Fifthly, different structural features of organizations mirror different national values. For example, within government and traditional business organizations in India, family and caste systems have been seen to play a role (Sahay and Walsham, 1997) while private Indian businesses are seen to draw upon family values such as paternalism, de-emphasizing ‘professional’ management practices (Khare, 1999). Although Indian GSOs are seen to draw on family and parental structures to refashion their internal cultures and external image, to stem attrition and enhance productivity, these ‘Indian’ structures are viewed within a process of continual redefinition in response to external changes rather than as a static trait (Sahay et al., 2003).

Further, in a global, ICT mediated work environment, the dynamics and issues related to individuals and work are very distinctive and complex relating to the knowledge-intensive nature of technical language, multiple products, processes, tools and methodologies involved (Sahay et al., 2003). Coupled with different and rather complex ICTs, the task of unravelling cross-cultural issues or an analysis of personality or identity

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⁹ For example, individualism was often correlated with economic growth of a country (Hofstede, 1980).
in terms of fixed constructs is a very complex matter. These issues have nuanced interpretations and are better comprehended in relation to shifting business, market, social and organizational contexts.

In the next sub section, we briefly outline notions of self and identity and then delineate our position on culture, self and identity.

3.2. Notions of self & identity

Self and identity are a complex set of phenomena that have been around a long time. In this section we outline two key approaches to the study of self and identity focusing on anthropological approaches, primarily in the context of India.

Social constructivists, basing their work on seminal theorists like Cooley (1902), Mead (1934) and Berger and Luckmann (1966) view self and identity as a reflexive two-way process, constructed and re-constructed through interaction and relationship, dialectical processes, displays and self-narratives (e.g., Bruner, 1990; Giddens, 1991; Goffman, 1959). Social groups, to which individuals belongs such as family, profession, employee, or student, provide a self-definition to members as well as feelings of comfort and security as a result of belonging to a collective (Hogg and Terry, 2001). One’s personal identity is intertwined with our collective or social identities and individuals derive personal meaning from both sets of identities, as one’s self image is shaped by the multiple networks in which he/she is embedded, particularly the social groups to which he/she belongs (Simon, 2004).

While social constructivists have emphasized the social as key in identity construction, the anthropological literature analyzes concepts of self and identity as a culturally specific and historical product, often studying cultural variations of personhood (e.g., Geertz, 1983; Strathern, 1991). In a seminal essay for example, (Mauss, 1987[1934]) referred to the self and person as a ‘category of thought’, describing the development of the modern self as a historical process likened to the rise of modern individualism. Mauss defined the ‘self’ as an individual’s awareness or consciousness of a unique identity and this awareness, he argued, was universal. However, he also argued that the individual, seen as a free agent, is unique to Western thought and construed as society’s confirmation of that identity as socially important.

Drawing on Mauss, but acknowledging that the self and person can be confusing constructs, Carrithers (1987) proposes a distinction between the notion of persona (a person who is a member of a significant and structured collective) and that of ‘moi’ as individual self-consciousness, encompassing a morality dictating how individuals ought to relate to each other and furnishing them with an individual moral responsibility. This, in his view, is the crucial distinguishing trait of the modern view of the individual.

Anthropologists have long made the point that most if not all interpretations of experience are cultural in so far as human beings are always situated within culture (Kapferer, 2000). A large amount of cross-cultural and anthropological literature suggests that, rather than a universalistic notion of the self, cultural discourses shape the
self in profound ways. Descriptions of the self in South and East Asia referred to as a ‘non-western’ context, are often contrasted with notions of a ‘western’ self (e.g., Markus and Kitayama, 1991; Marsella, 1985; Spiro, 1993). In contemporary Western society, the sense of fragmented identity, as well as cultures, has been largely attributed to mobilities such as tourism, migrant labor, immigration and urban shifts (Strathern, 2004).

In the context of India, Dumont (1970) and other influential anthropologists and sociologists have theorized culturally constructed notions of self and identity (e.g., Kakar, 1981; Marriott and Inden, 1974; Ramanujan, 1990). Indians are, according to this view, sociocentric as opposed to egocentric which is to say that they ostensibly place community and family interest at the center of their universe rather than the individual. In contrast to the ‘West,’ adult identity in this view is seen as one of adjustment and fusion with group identity rather than self-choice, autonomy or reflexivity (Erikson, 1979; Kakar, 1981). Such conceptualizations, of the Indian person, focus on hierarchy and rank in their social and caste groups excluding any other features of identity or motivation. Social interaction is generally seen to be the basis of self and identity construction. The anthropologist McKim Marriott (1990) coined the term ‘dividual’ (as opposed to the individual) to describe how during social transactions, individuals convey the essence of his/her nature and also, receive the essence of others. In this way, the person in India is seen as fluid and constantly transformed in these interactions and then is seen as the sum of his or her shifting relationships rather than a monad or an indivisible entity (individual).

These views are fiercely contested within and outside of India (see for e.g., Appadurai, 1986; Berreman, 1972, for severe critiques). If this view of the Indian person was accurate, personal goals and any deviation from the rules of hierarchy among Indians would be rare. While it is acknowledged, that cultural norms do call for compliance, Indians are hardly trapped within the hierarchical-collectivist framework without any sense of agency (Mines, 1988).

Anthropologists have also investigated current concerns around new technologies, computing, work, global workplaces, organizational cultures and social change, framing them within social cultural perspectives (e.g., Baba, 2003; Garsten, 1994; Hakken, 1993; Pffafenberger, 1992). In modern times, cyberspace and computer mediated communication are seen to make the process of constructing manageable personal identities very complex (e.g., Turkle, 1996). For example, the notion of ‘internet identity,’ conceptualized in terms of multiple selves and multiplicities of identity, are said to be disengaged from gender, ethnicity and other constructions yet are social and cultural as they are based on comparisons with others as in previous social formations such as face to face groups and communities.

3.3 Culture, self and identity
In this work we adopt an interpretivist, cultural framework to understand how GSOs symbolically create a universe for IT employees (Avison & Myers, 1995). A cultural framework in organizations, in general, emphasizes the socio-historical context of the firm going beyond its rational and explicit goals (Pettigrew, 1979; Smircich, 1983). By
focusing on the subjective interpretive aspects of organizations, a cultural framework raises questions of context and meaning, questions taken for granted, assumptions, and brings to the surface underlying values. Rather than something static or an entity, culture is seen as emergent, changing, and complex, a socially constructed process (Avison and Myers, 1995). As (Hannerz, 1987) states: “Where there is a strain between received meanings on the one hand and personal experiences and interest on the other, and where diverse perspectives confront one another, cultures can perhaps never be worked out as stable coherent systems; they are forever cultural ‘work in progress” (p. 550).

Similarly, using a social constructionistic perspective, we perceive identity as something one becomes, as an ongoing identity process through time, using cultural and personal repertoires. We also examine whether standard anthropological conceptualizations of Indian self and identity (e.g. Dumont, 1970; Marriott, 1974) can be applied in Indian GSOs. We explore what might be ‘Indian’ about behaviors and practices of IT workers, within the globally trading ICT based industry, and how these might relate to their identities as well as those of the workspaces they inhabit. We assume that culture is linked to national identity in a dynamic relationship set within socio-historical processes of the country, firm and individuals.

4. METHODOLOGY

The empirical material in this paper is drawn from a larger research project aimed at understanding identity-related processes of IT professionals in global software organizations in India. In this section, we first provide a backdrop of the IT context in India and then describe the fieldwork undertaken.

4.1 Background of the IT Industry in India

In the late 1970s, faced with huge increase in software costs, an increased demand for complex information systems applications, rapid obsolescence of IT infrastructure and limited supply of IT workers, the global software industry witnessed a trend towards outsourcing software development (Bhatnagar and Madon, 1997). India became a primary destination for offshoring because of low costs and its abundant pool of English speaking knowledge professionals and several GSOs were founded at this time. Initially, in the 1980s, referred to derogatorily as the ‘body-shopping’ era, much of the work was done at the customer site onsite (overseas). The IT worker was seen purely as a bundle of technical skills and as skilled and inexpensive ‘bodies’ to be ‘shipped’ or ‘dispatched’ overseas at competitive rates (D'Mello, 2005). Today, work done by software firms in India ranges from relatively ‘low end’ software services such as coding, testing and maintenance to ‘high end’ software solutions such as design and products, though most of the work still remains low end.

The most significant period of economic policy for the IT industry in India, was from 1991-1997 when India ushered in an era of liberalization marked by dismantling of state controls, privatization of state-owned enterprises and relaxation of rules relating to

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10 The practice of transferring work and employment to lower cost countries and now, a significant feature of both manufacturing and service sectors.
investment and ownership by multinational corporations (Lal, 2001). As a result of liberalization, and significant improvements in telecommunication infrastructure, much of the work has started shifting to India. The market was opened up to foreign firms and the government has augmented its export promotion policies in various ways such as building software and hardware technology parks to cater exclusively to the export needs of the IT industry. In the national agenda, the IT Task Force of 1998 set a vision of making India an IT superpower by 2008 (http://it-taskforce.nic.in, 1998). The impact of liberalization has been said to be most noticeable in the software sector where, according to NASSCOM 11(2005) the industry has contributed to nearly 60% of the total industry revenue in 2003-04 with a compounded annual growth rate of around 35% from 2000-2005. The Indian outsourcing sector (which includes the IT as well as business process outsourcing sector) currently employs around one million people, contributes to around 3.5% of India’s total GDP and earns 13% of foreign exchange inflows (NASSCOM, 2005).

4.2 Fieldwork

We use a case study method, based on an interpretive, ethnographic approach. The company where fieldwork was carried out is located in Mumbai, the center of the Indian software industry until the mid-1980s after which Bangalore became the center (Heeks, 1998). In the city and its suburbs, signs of ‘development’ are everywhere. Renaissance-styled skyscrapers stand cheek to jowl with sprawling slums, in an urban landscape dotted by billboard advertisements, newly constructed flyovers, opulent shopping malls, multiplex theatres and bright yellow and black cybercafes offering phone, fax and internet services, sprouting in tiny corners on busy roadsides. As compared to any other Indian city, Mumbai has been celebrated as ‘a metaphor of Indian modernity’ reflecting a form of urban middle-class cosmopolitanism that represents wider national trends (Patel, 1995).

Our case, IN-Sync Ltd., 12 a mid-size IT software applications outsourcing company, established in 1980, is representative of a GSO. Founded by a pair of middle-class entrepreneurs in Mumbai, with limited capital, initially working out of the living room of one of the founders, it now employs 2,500 professionals worldwide. Besides three offices in Mumbai city, IN-Sync has offices in the US, UK, Germany, Austria, Japan, Singapore and Malaysia with customers from primarily these countries. Assessed at Level 5, on the Capability Maturity Model, 13 for its software as well as its people processes, almost 90% of its revenues are from repeat business. The entire worldwide IT

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11 An acronym for the National Association of Software and Service Companies, the apex body as well as Chamber of Commerce of the IT industry in India.

12 The name of the company and of the informants have been changed.

13 Capability Maturity Models are frameworks for improving software development (as in SW-CMM) or people management processes (as in PCMM) developed by the Software Engineering Institute (SEI) in the USA (NASSCOM, 2005). Internationally recognized as standards for quality, companies use these to enhance their efficiency as well as their image in the international marketplace.
staff is of Indian origin, while its onsite Sales and Marketing staff (along with administrative support staff) mainly comprises locals in respective countries.

Fifty employees were interviewed in the course of the fieldwork, at three intervals of 3-4 months between December 2002 and July 2004 from various offshore development centers which were geographically structured as Offshore Development Centres (ODCs) such as USA, UK, Germany, Asia-Pacific and India. The informants included Developers, Module Leaders, Project Leaders, Project Managers and Unit/Function Heads. For practical reasons, many of the informants were from the UK ODC of IN-Sync. Their ages ranged between 24 and 42 years. Each interview, set up in advance, was usually held in an unused manager’s cabin or meeting room away from the workstation and typically lasting around 60-80 minutes. The interviews usually began with sharing of the aims of the research project, a promise of anonymity, and a request for the interview to be tape recorded. Rather than a fixed schedule of questions, a set of broad open ended questions, that were felt important in understanding their personal experiences and views, was used.

Although data collection was done mainly through semi-structured interviewing, field notes and observations from ‘hanging around’ workstations, the cafeteria, the library and corridors, along with commuting in the company bus to the office and back home, were additionally used. One of the researchers attended team and company gatherings, engaged in email chats with employees, ex-employees and also met a few family members of employees, informally. Some of the company’s promotional material, its website, intranet, in house publication magazine and annual reports were reviewed. One of the researchers has also drawn extensively on her work experience of several years in software companies in India, as well as in this same firm, during her career as an HR professional.

Tape-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. The empirical material, along with other data was read and re-read and analyzed for themes, sub-themes and patterns. Rather than some preconceived categorization, themes relating to culture that emerged from the material were identified and data was manually sorted under these. Relevant literature was also examined.

5. FORMS OF CULTURES IN EMPIRICAL MATERIAL

We now present some of the empirical findings organized according to themes of culture. Four such themes have emerged from the empirical analysis and each one is described below as a ‘form’ of culture. Taken together, these are seen to constitute the cultures ‘of’ and cultures ‘in’ GSOs.

5.1. CorporateCulture
This illustrates a range of material and social practices instituted by GSOs and how IT workers have responded to them.
5.1.1 Office décor: The technology parks where IT companies in Mumbai are housed create a campus-like atmosphere with lots of greenery, cafeterias and open spaces. IN-Sync office spaces are comfortably air-conditioned and aesthetically designed, housed in large buildings with gleaming glass facades. Similar to many new private sector office structures in Mumbai, granite and marble have been generously used in the construction, both inside and outside the building. Customers from overseas locations have always been impressed with the aesthetic and spotlessly clean and shiny interiors. Photographs of the new office have been prominently displayed on the company website and media-related visuals of the company filmed in these new office spaces. Employees generally have expressed pride about working in such settings while also stating that “ultimately this is more to impress customers, while for us, as IT professionals, it is the work that really matters.”

In the reception area of IN-Sync, large black and white photographs of smiling employees are on display with the title, ‘The most important thing we make here is a difference.’ Employee seating has been organized around ‘bays’ or open-plan structures to maximize space, reduce hierarchy differences and increase opportunities for social exchange. Project managers are usually seated in the same open office plan with their team members (their desk spaces visibly marked by extra telephones, a larger desk and most often corner seating). In several individual workstations, screensavers and images or tiny statues and deities are displayed alongside other information, while the cafeteria in each of the offices has a prominently placed shrine on the wall with fresh flowers, coconuts and incense sticks. The Head of the unit occupies a spacious cabin with a semi-transparent glass door. From the wide, clear glass windows on the third floor of one of the offices, cloudy hills are visible in the far background with immediate views of the road outside the secured complex, dotted with shanties, piles of uncleared garbage, large cement pipes, children running around, family members near their dwellings, and stray dogs sleeping.

Each of the Mumbai offices houses training rooms, most often, a library and convenient meeting rooms, equipped with phones, computers and white boards or projector screens. Conference rooms are equipped with state-of-the-art videoconference facilities. One of the offices on each floor has a theme such as sports, nature, play where the colors, furniture and wall hangings all mirror the theme. The company dress code is formal on weekdays except for Fridays where employees most often wear jeans and trainers. Cafeteria facilities, with plentiful supplies of (free) tea and coffee as well as snacks and meals, are conveniently available. For those working after 07:30p.m., free snacks, dinner and transport facilities to the nearest railhead will be provided. The canteen is an open space with flexible seating where large groups of employees often join tables to sit together. Often, separate groups of men and women can be seen seated at tables sharing lunch, usually Indian preparations brought from their homes in stainless steel or plastic containers. Birthday treats are often celebrated here by teams or small groups. Those returning from onsite assignments have been seen to distribute chocolates from that country in the cafeteria to their group or at the workstations. Employees have been observed socializing with others at similar hierarchy levels across projects and units.
5.1.2 Organizational identification practices: Organizations are known to engage in practices aimed at socialization, or inducing commitment, to engender a strong bond between individuals and the firm. For IT companies in India, in general, building an ‘HR culture’ in the company or ‘employee-focused culture’ and even a ‘family culture’ is seen as a means to forge this bond. Broadly, this means that IT companies actively promote informal collegial cultures with camaraderie and social events dotting the otherwise stressful workdays. The ‘founding fathers’ of the company evolved a set of ‘IN-Sync values’ which have been used as a differentiator for the company’s own image in the marketplace as well as managing its internal culture. Relating to openness, respecting individuals, commitment to results, pride in work and customer satisfaction were how they defined that things were to be done ‘The IN-Sync Way.’ These values have been the most prominent vehicle whereby employees are socialised into and also constantly used to construct the ideal IN-Sync employee who can be described as an ‘enthusiastic performer and passionate co-creator.’ Company values are displayed through internal and external company promotional material and consistently invoked by employees at all levels at gatherings, meetings and events. Training programs based on the bestseller books of Steven Covey are popular with employees. This resonates with their search for personal meaning and their desire for self-improvement while the company’s values have been interwoven with the content of these sessions. For example, ‘creating, enhancing and delivering value’ is one of the company’s objectives and this theme has pervaded training sessions on interpersonal relations or time management. Employees also have observed how some of the values positively infiltrate their personal lives and relationships as they are seen to be human values transcending boundaries of the organization.

Yet some company processes have collided with these values particularly during market downswings. For example, during a market downswing, a post-appraisal system was introduced where, for the first time in the company, employees were slotted within either the top 20 percent category, the ‘vital 70’ (interpreted as ‘average’ by employees) or the bottom percent, where they would be shunted out each year unless they significantly improved their performance. Employees were not directly informed of their category (with the exception of the last category). Stock options, which were earlier available to all employees based on criteria of performance and duration in the company, were now distributed only to the top 20 category. Many were annoyed and upset that this subjective process, where the assignment was based on their manager’s final perception, was so “shrouded in secrecy,” going against what they thought was the company’s value of ‘openness’ and ‘respect for the individual.” Similarly, the post September 11th job recession in 2002-2003, also challenged the family culture notion in many Indian GSOs. At IN-Sync, despite no explicit retrenchment of people in any way, performance norms were made more stringent which may have caused some people to exit the company. An employee lamenting about the associated uncertainties, said, “A company may say anything about its culture, but you are never sure of where you stand. It’s all a game.”

Extending the collegial relationship beyond the boundaries of the organization, ex-employees are called ‘alumni’ as the company believes that “Once an IN-Syncer always

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14 This value was described as “respecting everything and everyone in the company completely and unconditionally”.
an IN-Syncer.” Although seen as references for potential customers, as well as an attempt
to evoke a feeling of continuity and remembrance, they are also encouraged to keep their
ties with the company alive through invitation to company events and enrolling in the
alumni corner on the website.

5.1.3 Home at work: The company has tried to create a home-like environment in the
office in various ways. The idea of ‘family culture’ is said to be inherently appealing to
the Indian psyche (Kanungo, 1995). Metaphors of family have been observed to be
employed in various ways. On the ‘fact sheet’ of the company and his various addresses,
the CEO uses the term, family. For example, various practices such as Sports Day
(competitive sporting events for employees and their families), Anniversary Day (the
company’s ‘birthday’ party where songs, dances and skits are staged by employees) and
Funtime (a company-wide, fun plus business event held usually for three continuous days
at a holiday location in India) encourages employees and their families to participate and
enjoy themselves, while also creating ‘family’ bonds with IN-Sync. Company instituted
social practices such as table tennis matches, quiz contests, Antakshari15 contests have
generated enthusiastic participation from employees. In the monthly meeting for all staff
in Mumbai, held close to the Independence Day of the country (August 15th), skits and
events with themes from the freedom struggle movement in India are enacted by
employees and patriotic songs sung. ‘Traditional Indian dress’ is prescribed as the dress
code for that day and small paper flags distributed to employees who pin these on their
clothing. Statements about the the company values, its people and organizational culture
are tied together in the scripts for these events. These and other such activities that draw
on national sentiment have been seen to evoke a strong sense of community and a
reinforcement of a shared history among employees which they have stated were kept
aside in daily interactions. The CEO of the company who loved Indian music would
also sing Hind film songs at such events.

These practices attempt to inscribe a strong sense of family, community and belonging in
the workplace by providing a sense of ‘home away from home.’ Employees have
commented on how these events and interactions have facilitated their daily work-related
interactions. Yet, employees have also been carefully monitored for performance and,
even though speaking one’s mind is encouraged, they are quick to recognize and clarify
the limits.

However, these attempts at creating social and family-based bonding are seen to be in
tension with the IT worker’s constant attempts to assess his/her marketability and seeing
growth in terms of learning and ‘adding value,’ through individual work. The IT person
has been seen to stay engaged to the extent that these practices match the needs of
‘adding value’ to him or her. When they have not, the choice has often been to quit. For
example, Roy, a Developer, who already changed jobs three times in four years said,
“See, ultimately all IT companies are almost the same. They are young, they have open
cultures, and there are lots of celebrations and events in the company for the families of

15 Antakshari is a musical game played by teams based on songs from Hindi films. This game is immensely popular in
India as well as with employees in this company who play it at company events or social gathering.
employees. So the main thing is to get what adds value to me. And if in the process, I can also enjoy the other things, then that is what I call a good working environment.”

5.2. Cultures of Work
This illustrates some typical demands of IT outsourcing work and the contrast with Western customers work culture and attitudes to work. We note how and why employees develop and maintain social networks and their response to the impact of long hours of work on health and hobbies.

5.2.1 Diverse cultures of software work: In the IT industry in India today, working 10-12 hours a day is normal and sometimes this goes up to 14 hours a day, even on weekends. Sometimes, employees stay overnight at the office when they have a project deadline. One major reason is the time difference between India and customer sites, particularly in the US and Europe, where employees in India have to stay back to make calls to customers in the US and UK who are just beginning their work days. Another reason is the tight and often underestimated project costs and time frames in terms of ‘mandays’ where the team has to put in extra hours to meet stringent deadlines or engage in ‘firefighting’ crises. In various forums, developers have complained about how projects were so tightly estimated. A standard response from managers has been that this was an unavoidable part of the competitive outsourcing business where companies underestimate and overcommit to win bids. A flexible time policy was then seen as one way to provide some relief to employees. When IN-Sync first introduced a flexi-time policy at its Mumbai locations, after much debate within the company, it was met with some cynicism. There was mandated presence in the office at a committed time in the morning with seeming freedom for employees to choose the rest of their working hours (within limits) after negotiation with the manager and the project team. In practice however, employees had little freedom, as they were expected to work as long as it took to complete the task. Also, given the long and tedious commutes to work in Mumbai city, many employees have preferred to stick to regular office hours when the company’s transport facilities were available rather than at the flexi-time option, where they had to arrange their own transport.

Also, in spite of no work pressure, some employees were observed staying late. Part of this is related to peer pressure from their particular project team as the entire team would be sitting late. Part of this is also self-imposed such as the desire to be ‘noticed by the boss’ as hard working and ‘going the extra mile,’ something that might even enable the employee to earn an award at a company event. Some employees spoke about their dilemmas of managing peer expectations with their own beliefs about work. They said that they often felt pressured to ‘toe the line’ in terms of sitting late at work, due to their desire to be seen as ‘valuable by seniors’ in a team-based, yet competitive, environment which made them feel insecure and anxious about career opportunities. While the company has instituted a team based appraisal system, individual performance has always been closely monitored and directly linked to monetary and non-monetary benefits and growth opportunities.

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16 An eight hour unit of time, commonly used in estimations of time and cost.
In stark contrast to the ‘Indian’ scenario, workers noted the difference in response to office timings and holidays while abroad. Ramesh, a Project Leader said:

“We say *unke holidays pathar ke lakeer hai* [their holidays are carved in stone]. …this [Britain] is a very soft country. It is 5:30, I have to go home. Our people feel what is so holy about a clock ticking 5:30? I get the feeling it is a pampered country. People disappearing on holiday when they have important things. That really grates on Indians. It is such an important delivery and, look, the lady is out to Spain to spend a weekend there.”

Later in the interview, he elaborated with another example:

“When an IN-Sync’er lands [in the UK upon arriving from India] he comes running into the office at three o’clock after landing at 12 noon on the same day. Even on a Sunday, they come in and check and see if login is working and the swipe card is working. Being there means I’m more committed. I show it.”

Some informants who had worked in the UK and USA viewed the behavior of ‘Westerners’ as balanced and more favorable. It was often these informants who would raise the issue of estimation and lack of a work-life balance during open house sessions in the firm. On the other hand, while balancing work and home may seem a desirable goal, the constraints of the industry have been stated as an impediment. For example, a manager in his late 30’s, with two children, stated, very sardonically:

“Clients are ever more demanding, the sales-marketing guys will put more and more pressure on developers to get things done... who cares about what the guy undergoes. Yes, we talk about it but it is more lip service. Can you visualize the CEO or Operations Head or any manager saying to a developer: I will defend you to the customer so go and spend time with your family?”

Various means to control and monitor employee performance on projects includes the use of time sheets, data and weekly reports on quality, productivity and efficiency and weekly reports on project status. At the project level, measures include data on project quality, efficiency, productivity, response time, idle time aggregated from weekly status reports and regularly assessed against the contract with the customer. In addition, feedback from customers has been solicited through periodic satisfaction surveys. This data has formed critical input into individual and project ratings and incentives for the project team.

### 5.2.2 Balancing work and home

Interviewees were in very different situations regarding family, ranging from being unmarried to living in a joint family. Everyone seemed to agree that combining a demanding job with raising a family was problematic in this industry in particular: either both spouses work and have little time for each other, or one of the spouses (usually the husband) spends too much of his time working and is often obliged to spend lengthy periods abroad on his own.

Priya, a HR manager, says: “Because of project pressure and the time they have to spend at work, family life becomes an issue. They [the employees] have to go onsite [abroad] and cannot take their wife with them. In Bangalore, in one of the most prominent fertility
hospitals, 80% of the people who visit are from IT. Infertility is very high because of the high stress. They don’t have time for each other. Marriage gets affected and children get affected. Mostly they are childless.”

Manoj, a Project Leader who has worked with different European customers says, “Here in India we cancel railway tickets booked months in advance, we tell people to shorten their marriages, postpone them, cut down on the rituals, their honeymoon, leave a sick child at home…anything to get the job done. We dare not tell the manager that we have to go the child’s school to see the child in a fancy dress concert during office hours.”

Several employees said that they have often “felt torn” between managing project and family demands. The added stress of long and tiring commutes in Mumbai has left them feeling too exhausted at the end of the day to be available to family members. Even after reaching home, some who had customers in the US, would be talking to their onsite team members or customers on their mobile phone late into the night.

On the other hand, care for one’s own parents in India is a high priority and employees have been noted to experience some dilemmas in this sphere. As Veena, a HR manager at another European IT company, says: “Aging or sick parents are strong reasons why a software person would want a relocation back home or a change of career.” However, some, torn between cultural ideals and lived reality, choose their career over their parents. Ramesh says: “It is not that every Indian has their parents staying at home. Even if they are, they are not treated particularly grandly.”

5.2.3 Social networks: Given the strong emphasis on family in Indian society, one might ask how can the work intensity and long working hours required in this industry be reconciled with ‘Indian’ values which are seen as privileging family over work? One ‘way out’ was the social bonds that IT workers were seen to create within the organization itself. Commenting on this shift, Suhasini, a Senior Manager says, “Now people have more social networks within the company. We reach home normally after 8 p.m. Then, again the next day, we have to come back early. So where is the time to socialize – and in this city commuting is so time-consuming. So, socializing, outside the office, gets limited to mainly with the family... office colleagues become much closer especially if they have families.”

This was echoed by informants who said that they belonged to various networks. These networks included friends in the same company but on different projects, friends and peers from the same batch at engineering college, friends and ‘contacts’ from their ex-companies who they frequently interacted with primarily on e-mail. Besides affiliation needs, these networks were also tapped for market information, gossip and job moves. Also, given the youthfulness of this industry many Indian IT workers are typically younger and unmarried. Especially for male employees, the workplace becomes a site for socializing and hanging out after office hours even without work pressure. Employees, from outside Mumbai city, often live in shared apartments with no one waiting for them at home where they usually just go to sleep. Frequent interpersonal
interactions in teams during long working hours, team building and company structured bonding practices, and the facilities provided such as internet access, snacks (free) and possibilities for group recreational activities such as table tennis and carrom, in a physically pleasant environment, contributed to enhanced social interactions at the work site.

Trainees formed the largest social group within the firm since they joined the company in a batch. They often went for movies or treks together, were on common e-mailing lists, and referred to each other as ‘friends,’ years later. Customers sometimes raised questions about the productivity of Indian workers, who seem to take long tea and lunch breaks, implying that they do not use time productively. There is a possibility that these workers may see this time as a means to create a social space given that they will be staying late working in the office, anyways.

Single women, on the other hand, typically went home earlier as they would face family or in-law disapproval and were expected to assist in household responsibilities. Also, even though the company provided transport facilities to the nearest railway station after office hours, it was still physically unsafe for women to travel alone in Mumbai.

5.2.4 Consequences of long hours of work: Referring to how their long working hours affected them, Sriram, a Senior Manager in his mid-40s said,

“...The IT person stops enjoying their life compared to the others, because of the extended working hours and odd timings... and anytime you can be called and you need to be working, it is not a regular job. Also you don’t develop any hobbies. You see, life IS beyond the office. That realization comes to you only at forty. Till such time you will run, busy climbing things… it is an early retirement job.”

Yet, on the main page of the intranet of the company, a regular feature is ‘Aaaj ka IN-Syncer’ (Today’s IN-Syncer) where the picture of a smiling employee is portrayed, along with a writeup on him listing hobbies such as swimming, photography, hiking, and going to movies. One wonders when the smiling IT worker has time to pursue these!

Given the emphasis on work, health, as well, was seen to take a backseat. A newspaper article (circulated among some employees at IN-Sync and entitled ‘Stress Kills 6 IT Geeks’ (Srinivas, 2005) reported the results of a study showing that the number of suicides, divorces, heart ailments, BP and diabetes patients and mental depression were the highest in the software industry. The article cited lack of routine, constant deadlines, weekend working, lack of physical exercise and new food habits, in cities such as the ‘pizza culture,’ as reasons for stress for this group. In response to this article, Arnave, a manager, wrote via e-mail: “When some incident takes place, people are stunned and shocked but life flows on. I think the community is still young and these incidents are isolated. Many people think it is a matter of individual’s choice and how much risk they take. Besides, I think the need to earn more and more and pursue new lifestyles is what is driving people mad. Where do you have time to think about health and peace of mind?”
5.2.5 Payoff for work: While IT workers have grueling hours and constant pressures, they were rarely seen to quit working in an offshore outsourcing company and join another industry in-house IT department, seen as less prestigious, less stressful and more stable. Only one respondent had made a conscious choice to shift out of IT into an industry that gave him an “improved quality of life” with time to devote to hobbies that he had cultivated during his college days. Most respondents spoke about the high salaries and the social, cultural and professional ‘exposure’ they enjoyed when living and working abroad. They were also conscious of their social place in their family system and the Indian context. Commenting on this Amit, a Developer, said:

“I think there is a sense of respect. They [society, in general] think you make a lot of money. They know you will go abroad so they feel this person has achieved something. It is like sometime back when you are an engineer or doctor, you have respect. Now if you are a software person, you have respect.”

Another developer talked about the freedom that the money and employment opportunities provided him. He could quit working at any time, find it easier to disagree with his boss, often ate out at restaurants and afford a higher standard of living for his family. Frequently, newspaper articles (in Mumbai) describe the changes in spending patterns tilted towards namebrand goods, and shifting social habits such as increased eating out, frequenting pubs and an overall increase in the consumer culture and changing lifestyles in the Indian middle classes.

5.3. Working Across Cultures
Nowhere are identities more clearly delineated than in situations where they are contrasted with those of others. In a fundamental sense, identities exist only through contrasts, male/female, old/young and insider/outsider being the most fundamental ones. This category illustrates contrasts observed in culturally different behaviors, social and work practices, as noted by IT workers.

5.3.1 ‘Us’ and ‘them’: In conversations, informants, who worked for a period on customer sites abroad, seemed to be more aware of their ‘Indianness’ in contrast to the other groups who were only working offshore. Things, they had previously taken for granted, now stood out as peculiar and distinctive. These ranged from observations about social life (such as paying at the table for a Christmas dinner while abroad) and observations about other social practices. For example, Ramesh a 33-year-old Project leader who was in the UK for a year says about the British:

“They don’t bother about family. They have kids before marriage; this is still a big issue in India. ... I think in India we have so many varieties of culture that after all we say, it’s just different. So some things we are judgemental about and some we let go. She [a colleague] is not married but – well – has lived with the same person for 15 years, so she is almost married. So an Indian interpretation of the whole event creeps in. Theek hai [it’s ok].”

Often, employees spoke of cultural differences in broad descriptive terms. For example, a Technology Manager said, “The business sense of US customers is strong. They will be innovative with technology and bet on new technology. Britishers and Europeans are
very cautious. They look for established means. They tell you very politely, unlike Americans who are more demanding and tell you things bluntly. Asia Pacific customers are very multicultural. Like us, they are very price conscious. They need to see huge value for what they pay.”

The IT worker was described (often in positive terms) in various company fora, such as the Induction program, company presentations and seminars and in cafeteria conversations as ‘smart,’ ‘hardworking,’ adaptable’ and ‘reliant.’ In an article, in the company magazine, one of the employees wrote about the legacy of an “Indian mindset from the zero invention days of Aryabhatta and the ability to think logically” as a positive quality of IT workers. Further, he said, “Given the long history of outside rule…the average Indian is a born survivor, and to balance this aspect is the strong social bonds of family value system which brings out the EQ (emotional quotient) factor. Given this unique Indian characteristic, of the logical bend, high EQ strong survival traits is what distinguishes the Indian IT professional from the others.”

5.3.2 Cultural perceptions and work relations: Earlier, Ramesh was seen to be perfectly at ease with simultaneously reacting to the British attitudes and practices, and seeing his own reaction as a result of his own upbringing and background. Cultural differences, that permeated work relations, were often noted by several customers. For example, in conversation, with customers from the US and UK, a common perception noted was that of the Indian IT worker as hardworking, capable and intelligent but ‘not able to give bad news’ in what they call an ‘upfront manner.’ Gregory, a UK customer, gives an example: “If they agree to 30 days but the work actually takes 50 days, they will not come back on it but will work harder to ensure it is done in 30 days. So, we hear statements like, ‘I’m not quite sure how this would work’ when the person means ‘it is just not going to work’ rather than saying ‘that’s not going to happen.’ Bad news is couched unlike how we do it in Europe.”

A repeated input, received by one of the researchers as an HR functionary from customers in the UK and US, was that Indian IT workers were ‘not proactive enough.’ They were ‘passive’ and waited for instructions. Also, in meetings at the customer site, IN-Sync employees would be silent during the meeting but very expressive about their views (most often in the national language of Hindi) with their company colleagues after the meeting. Similarly, other customers in the US have commented on how Indians did not speak up during a meeting, but asked many questions or raised issues on a one-on-one basis about what was discussed after the meeting. When this characteristic was discussed with employees, during the training programs on assertiveness and communication skills, they stated that, in their view, the ‘customer was king’ given the vendor-client relationship and they saw their role as responding and deferring to customer expectations. They found it difficult to decipher when they were being ‘assertive’ and when ‘aggressive’ and did not want to possibly jeopardize the business relationship between the customer and their company by saying anything ‘wrong.’

Nandini, the Head of HR, while describing what she called a ‘socially ingrained cultural trait’ that hampered business relations said:
“In India, it is considered a strength that we don’t disobey or raise our voice… the same thing becomes a liability for us when you get to the customer site and don’t open your mouth and express that there is a problem…that is the whole cultural thing which doesn’t impact the other industries so much… these are knowledge workers. At the junior most level, they are expected to be a specialist. They represent IN-Sync, in that customer organization, even if they are trainees out of college. So, they have to express-- they have to say what won’t work, what is wrong.”

Veena, an HR Manager in another European based IT company, similarly observed: “Indians are much more obedient that the other cultural groups [Britishers or Cypriots or Romanians] in terms of say, for example, responding to closure of an item, following the rules, and following authority.” These observations appear accurate in a context where direct social control, with possibilities of sanctions, is exerted.

Certain words, used by customers, were interpreted in certain ways by IT workers. For example, a Project Leader (who has worked in the US and UK) said: “When a Briton says ‘Good’ we interpret it as ‘Excellent’ as they are usually understated in their praise. When an American customer says ‘Good’ we interpret it as ‘Ok’ because they are usually so expansive in their expressions!” When these perceptions were shared with some prospects at IN-Sync, they considered it an interesting cultural difference, which they believed would impact the working relationship, and took it as an input.

British users said that the Indian people were very helpful, eager to please, really put in extra efforts and went the extra mile to solve the issue on a one-on-one working. “They work unthinkable hours even till 1 a.m. and sometimes they have to tell them that they are not allowed to come into the office up to a particular time for security reasons … just to make sure that they are not working too hard!” said one user.

5.3.3 Cross-cultural training: Understanding the impact in international working environments, IN-Sync familiarized employees with the country where they were traveling to work in various ways. The HR Department, for example, organized programs on Cross-Cultural Sensitivity or Social Skills at Work which were mandatory for those travelling overseas especially for the first time. These programs included inputs ranging from dressing styles, table manners, to social etiquette in various countries. They also highlighted the importance of participants’ own cultural context as a backdrop, seen to provide a sense of ‘rootedness,’ while urging them to be simultaneously professional in work interactions especially while abroad. Stress was made on the importance of ‘being yourself’ while ‘respecting’ behaviors of those from a foreign culture. Such training programs were usually for one day, often attended by employees a few days before the date of departure, when they were also trying to complete visa and ticket formalities, work and personal matters (for example, shopping). Participants were reminded that, while abroad, they were also ‘ambassadors of India.’ Country-specific booklets, often written by HR staff, were distributed to the employees. On the company website, detailed information about renting apartments, shopping and travel tips, typical words and phrases and their meanings as well as tips (to overcome home-sickness) for
different countries was available. Employees saw these inputs as ‘adding value’ to him or her, acknowledging that these ‘soft skills’ were important while overseas.

5.3.4 Cultural identification practices: When the offshore units of the various geographical territories (such as the USA, UK, Germany, Asia) were started, they were expected to mirror the cultures of their overseas ‘parent’ unit. Slowly, each Unit took on certain properties of the Unit’s culture. For example, the USA Unit, as well as its head, was seen to be more informal in dress code and working environment whereas the UK unit was more formal and process driven. A hierarchy was present, among the Units, mirroring the global marketplace with the USA (the most profitable Unit to work in both offshore and onsite) followed by the UK, then Germany, Asia and finally the India Unit (seen as a good learning platform for exposure to the software development life cycle but relatively unglamorous as there was no scope for onsite postings). Each Unit competed with each other in terms of revenues, ‘hoarding good resources’ (not releasing competent IT workers to other Units), outshining each other in their HR policies, processes and revenues. They also created t-shirts, bags, and stickers for employees and celebrated the festivals of their parent unit with much gusto. After a few years, this structure was dismantled as the competitiveness mitigated against a synchronized business focus as well as being seen as mitigating the overall company culture.

Religious festivals at customer sites: IN-Sync attempted to invoke cultural events such as religious festivals to enhance business relationships with its overseas customers. An in-house writeup on these events, mentioned the aims as ensuring ‘fun,’ ‘sharing’ as well as a ‘total bonding.’ For example, at one European customer location, major Indian festivals were celebrated in a manner similar to the office celebrations in Mumbai. The office was decorated with rangoli designs and pujas were held in the office with explanatory notes on the ceremony and items used and distributed to the customers. Information on the festivals of India was put on the customer’s intranet. Traditional sweets such as modaks\(^\text{17}\) and sheera, made by some of the IN-Sync employees in their homes, were distributed at the client office site. At another event, typically Indian games such as kho-kho and lagori were played with the customers. Cricket matches with teams comprised of both Indian and customer staff, particularly at the UK location, was another popular event. HR training programs, project team managers and handbooks for overseas travel exhorted employees to develop social relations with customers ‘through sharing aspects of Indian culture,’ which they say has often been appreciated by customers.

5.4. ‘Primordial’ Cultures: Caste, Region and Religion

We use the term primordial to refer to affinities or ties between those of similar kin and community within a particular locality (or ‘soil’) with continuity over time with such ties imbued with strong affect (Weinreich et al., 2003). In this section, we describe if and how affinities of caste, region and religion which are denoted as primordial in the context of India, are re-produced in GSOs along with spiritual and secular practices.

5.4.1 Caste: Like organizations in the private sector, GSOs are seen as meritocratic organizations, focusing on competence and professionalism. In many ways, we noted

\(^{17}\) Steamed dessert dumplings.
that caste, as a variable in work related systems and processes, seemed to have disappeared from the GSO-- unlike the pre-liberalization days of licences and quotas, where people would ply their caste-related network ties to secure employment or business licences. As Ashish, a 32-year-old Manager, in a very decisive tone said:

“You end up reading the caste and religion from a resume and beyond that it is just a data point among others of no consequence. ...See, in this industry you are forced to hire the right kind of people. ... It just doesn’t matter if [a candidate] is Hindu or Muslim or male or female ... it just does not matter.”

Kinship and social networks were seen to operate at the entry level in the industry. Qualified relatives and friends could be recommended for jobs and the organization actively encouraged, as well as monetarily rewarded, employees whose proposed candidates got through the rounds of written tests and interviews and were finally recruited. If an incompetent candidate slipped easily through the selection process hoops because of nepotism, the deficiency showed up along the work trajectory on projects where adequate competence needed to be demonstrated for continued employment.

While describing how the IT industry created an ‘aspirational’ space for engineers who would have earlier gone onto the shopfloor, Ranga, Head of the US operations, said:

“To my mind, the bulk of your existing IT population is India’s solid middle class, from lower middle to middle middle class. From India’s traditional caste system perspective, they are not the Kshatriyas, they are not the leaders. Some of them might have come from the solid doing community. If that is what they have grown up with, they are no going to be able, in the same generation, to shrug it off and be completely different in the customer world. And that is the challenge for us in management, and a challenge for them internally....in their own societies and in their own place, they are not different. It is a huge cultural fit kind of thing.”

While caste was not seen to play a direct role in the daily life of a global software environment, it was seen as a historical backdrop in shaping behaviors of some IT workers. This created some tensions in interactions with American or European customers. Differences were noted between those from vernacular backgrounds or small towns, who were seen to be more ‘doers’ or ‘order takers,’ compared to those from big cities or locally from Mumbai. Nandini, Head of HR, noted that feelings of inadequateness came in the way of asserting themselves with these customers and, in this way, these backgrounds negatively impacted work as GSO work demands cross-cultural interaction and self-assertion. Ranga continues,

“The customer does not care what your internal issues in India were etc... The customer wants... the ideal person the best of both worlds, right... someone who is savvy, engages in water cooler talk, and at the same time is hard working, dependable, does not lift her head, you know, conscientious...obviously some of that is impossible to achieve.”

In contrast, the ‘younger generation’ at IN-Sync namely the trainees in their early 20s, were commented on as being confident and outspoken in customer interactions as well as
more attuned to ‘western’ social practices and norms largely attributed to mass media influences and changing social practices in urban areas in India.

In personal relations such as marriage, caste was seen to be important. Many IT workers were seen to have ‘arranged marriages,’ within their own social and religious group, which implied that caste was factored into the decision making process. Parents and family elders actively participated in the decision making process and marriage arrangements. Many a time, the (male) employee would come down from an onsite assignment to complete the marriage rituals and then return back onsite, while the spouse would have to wait for a dependent’s visa. HR functionaries would sometimes receive phone calls from family members of the prospective groom, who was an employee, asking about his financial stability, and often about his ‘character’. Binoy, a developer, who had moved from Calcutta to Mumbai to work in IN-Sync, described his parents anxiety about the (real) possibility that he would ‘fall in love’ or get entangled in a romantic arrangement with a Mumbai girl rather than a Bengali girl saying: “I will go for an arranged marriage. My parents will want me to get married to a more homely girl. ... Being the only son they have a lot of expectations and I would not like to disappoint them.”

5.4.2 Regional ties: Rather than caste, affiliations based on regional belonging were observed. At IN-Sync, given that local Maharashtrians comprised the dominant community of the workforce, Marathi was typically spoken in the corridors, elevators and cafeteria. Often official phone conversations or one on one meetings of employees with managers, managers with each other and sometimes, team meetings were conducted in Marathi. This was justified as ‘normal’ by both Maharashtrian and non-Maharashtrian employees, as the context was seen as shared. Some stated, it was normal for Europeans to converse in their own language at the workplace and that did not seem to impair their contribution or their international standing. Some however, strongly felt that “since we are a global organization we should speak a global language [English] only while at work.” Snatches of Hinglish18 were frequently heard in corridor and canteen conversations. Rationalizing his feeling of exclusion, a developer from Karnataka who did not know Marathi said, “Well, I am an outsider in Mumbai so I don’t know the language. Maybe I should learn Marathi soon.” Onsite, some of these issues got aggravated. Some interviewees expressed, in a very guarded manner, how those from a common region would often socialize together, often over dinner sharing food from their own region, and consciously excluding others from other states. In some instances, the Account Manager was reported to be actively encouraging this division. Furthermore, at the client site, regional language was used very strategically. For example, a Module Leader narrated, with visible glee, how his team members talked to each other in Marathi when they did not want the customer to understand what they were saying. They found this an effective way of communicating information within the team, that they did not wish the client to hear, while making it a point to always speak to the customer in English.

18 A hybridized language combining Hindi and English, termed ‘Hinglish’ by the popular media (Fernandes, 2000).
It was not uncommon to see people, from the same geographical region and speaking the same language, socializing together in the cafeteria. Andhraites from Andhra Pradesh, Malayalees from Kerala and Tamilians from Tamil Nadu could be seen talking to each other and having lunch together even if they were not from the same team. Some of these friendships could be traced back to the time of the Induction Program. Here, confronting newness, friendships were often forged not only by common professional interest, but also a solidarity emerging from the common factor of belonging from the same region.

Sometimes, regional stereotypes were covertly manifested in decisions made by interviewers. For example, one manager, who interviewed candidates described, in hushed tones how he was extra suspicious of hiring candidates from Andhra Pradesh as they were ‘historically known to be dishonest’ and less committed. Yet, they managed to secure jobs by procuring bogus educational and work experience certificates. Similarly, regional stereotypes were also seen to be reflected in covert informal ways such as narrating ‘sardarji’ jokes in the cafeteria while at lunch or circulating these on e-mail, and comments made in jest about ‘other’ Indian regional communities like the Gujaratis or Sindhis.

5.4.3 Religion at the workplace: At the Mumbai location, as well as at onsite IN-Sync offices, major religious festivals like Holi, Diwali, Christmas and Id were celebrated officially with prescribed traditional dress codes, decorated offices, distribution of sweets, singing or dancing events, all evoking enthusiastic responses from employees, irrespective of their religion. For example, for Christmas, the carol singers were typically from different religious groups. Similarly, at Diwali, all greeted each other and enjoyed the celebrations. At many workstations, pictures or screensavers or statues of Ganesh and other Indian deities as well as Christ were clearly visible. Some employees indicated that they felt free to express their religious beliefs in their own workspaces and these visible forms helped them through their hectic workday. New office premises were inaugurated using a traditional pooja (Hindu religious ceremony) with the company director conducting some of the rites. Prayers or religious mailings were circulated among some employees. When employees visited a religious shrine in India (like Vaishno Devi or Tirupathi), they brought back prasaad (a sweet that was offered first to the deity to be blessed) for their colleagues. On Dusshera (a festival celebrating victory over evil) after a pooja, the office computers were anointed with an auspicious red tika (dot). Family members, of employees, met and greeted each other at these events. Such religious celebrations coexisted with celebrations of other globalized ‘secular’ events such as Valentine’s Day or Friendship Day or cake cutting practices on the company’s anniversary/birthday celebrations.

In the company, spiritual leaders (e.g., J. Krishnamurthi or Gandhi) were often invoked as role models of leadership and values in company speeches, articles on the intranet or the in-house magazine. Sometimes, employees formed voluntary learning groups where they met to discuss the teachings of a spiritual leader. Sometimes the However, some groups would fizzle out after a few sessions, as more urgent project pressures and time constraints prevented sustained participation in any activity unrelated to business goals.
Spiritual teachings were continuously invoked in diverse ways. For example, in one of the company brochures for customers, sayings from the Upanishads, the Bhagawad Gita, the way of Tao and Zen were used as similes or metaphors to illustrate the business goals of the company. Quotations of gurus or narrations from stories were seen in the articles written in the company magazine, as well as the city newspapers (e.g. The Times of India).

In the table given below we summarize the key features of various forms of culture seen in a GSO, following which we present an analysis of these.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Form of Culture</th>
<th>Key Features</th>
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| **Corporate Culture** | - Physical layout of offices are a global workplace as well as home-like place.  
- Organizational practices employ values, home-at-work notions, metaphor of family and enrollment of family members. |
| **Cultures of Work** | - Industry-related demands result in long working hours disrupting balanced work-family life.  
- Workplace becomes a primary site for socialization & networking.  
- Employees contrast Indian and Western working patterns. |
| **Working Across Cultures** | - ‘Indianness’ experienced in relation to working overseas.  
- ‘Others’ are often described in stereotypical terms.  
- Cross-cultural training seen as input for employees working overseas.  
- Identification practices in different units foster inter-unit competitiveness  
- Indian cultural practices at customer sites co-opted to facilitate business relations. |
| **Primordial Cultures** | - Caste disappears in the formal working of the GSO but present in personal lives.  
- Regional diversity includes and also excludes.  
- Religious festivals coexist with secular practices. |

Table 1: Various forms of culture and their key features in a GSO

6. ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

In this section, we analyze and discuss the empirical material in relation to the two research questions.

6.1 How do GSOs symbolically construct social and cultural spaces for their employees?

The empirical material suggests that, at the physical level, construction of ‘world class’ and ‘modern’ office structures can be seen as a physical ‘identity marker’ for GSOs vying with each other, as well as with international competitors, for a piece of the global business. Symbolically, these structures signal status, credibility and a ‘place in the world,’ both externally to customers as well as internally to individuals. As symbolic edifices, they stand in stark contrast to the immediate physical and social environment, such as the next door slums and shanties, where more than half of Mumbai’s population lives. Along with other similar constructions, in Mumbai city, they appear to claim an identity carefully constructed to vitiate adverse place-related identifications (Twigger-
Ross and Uzzell, 1996) commonly associated with an economically developing country. Such edifices explicitly announce to the global marketplace, that all is well and flourishing within India.

Rather than a global space or non-place (Auge, 1995), drawing on a diversity of social, cultural and material resources, the GSO was seen to extensively construct cultural and social place for IT workers in several ways. The IT industry has created a new business structure in the form of a GSO which in turn has created a new aspirational space for many young qualified people in India who aim to get into ‘IT or computer science’ and secure for themselves a bright future in this growing industry. For ‘nomadic’ IT workers, always on the lookout for better opportunities, the profusion of GSOs (with similar work cultures and environments) creates a veritable minefield with plentiful opportunities for social and professional mobility and accumulation of wealth and status, thereby influencing their identity constructions.

The unanticipated burgeoning of the IT industry, the infusion of professionally managed IT companies run by Indian entrepreneurs in their early 30s’ and an export orientation, challenged hegemonic traditional management practices. These practices were both overly paternalistic and hierarchical (Khare, 1999) and often employed caste in their working (Sahay and Walsham, 1997). While work cultures are modified according to market swings (D’Mello, 2005), IT companies, in India, are seen by employees as fostering work cultures that are generally youthful, open, informal and merit based, thus challenging the assumptions of traditional management styles (Sahay et al., 2003). GSOs now serve as exemplars to other firms as a business model that features flatter structures, quality orientation, individual incentives, an export orientation and, often, shareholder value (Arora and Gambardella, 2005). This industry has been a pioneer in India in offering stock options and equity stakes for its employees, and in this way sharing the fruits of their success. These features have a spillover effect particularly for other firms within India and also IT mediated service exports from call centers customer care, to high end R&D services from India.

The case material suggested, that while the GSO drew on family-related norms and values to develop their corporate culture in a conscious and instrumental manner, these aspects of ‘Indian’ society were not viewed as a static trait, but seen within a process of continual redefinition in response to changes that necessitated an agile workplace and staff. Further, the mobility of work, workers, technologies and contexts unique in this industry, strongly militates against fixed caste ascriptions and overly hierarchical structures. Rather than Sanskritization, which was a means for groups to

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19From environmental psychology, Twigger-Ross and Uzzell (1996) suggest that identity processes are related to a location. In their words: “…we suggest that all identifications have location implications, place is part of the content of an identification.” (p. 218).

20Unlike previous ‘staple’ jobs of the middle class in India such as teaching, banking and government positions which are more grounded in local contexts of time, space and place (Fernandes, 2000), these workers encounter mercurial swings in both global and local cycles and events, almost on a daily basis.

21This term was introduced by Srinivas (1997), an Indian anthropologist to refer to mobility processes of groups within the caste system. A group could move up the caste system by Sanskritizing themselves i.e., by imitating the customs, rituals and life-style of a higher caste. Over time, noble origins of the caste could be claimed.
move up the caste hierarchy, individual agency acquired knowledge and competence are seen as the primary means for individuals to move up a skill-based, meritocratic hierarchy in a GSO. Kinship ties were not entirely absent as employees would refer relatives and friends to the organization for jobs. While attenuated, these ties and networks were also mobilized by GSOs faced with the issue of attrition of staff and seeking skilled workers who would fit into the company culture and be motivated to join and stay longer. Such a ‘cultural fit’ was seen as particularly important at senior levels as managers were meant to role model the corporate culture and motivate their teams. A cultural misfit would be costly in economic terms and also adversely impact on the team. If caste, as a factor, did operate in hiring or promotion decisions then regular surveillance of workers combined with stringent performance standards and mobilities across projects and teams would, sooner than later, mitigate this effect given the very nature of the software development activity. In this way, features of global software development work modified the hold of some cultural influences.

Rather than caste, regional identities was seen in the GSO and manifested through spoken language, friendship ties, stereotypes and social practices, reflecting the external social world in India. Speaking in the vernacular was not seen by the GSO as antithetical to being global in any way and, was in fact, often actively encouraged. Place-related markers, of locality and community, were manifested not only physically in material artifacts (such as workstations or office decor) but also in workers’ daily social lives and rituals engineered and institutionalized through organizational processes, as well as relations among employees. ‘Indian’ values and family and cultural practices (religious festivals) were consciously co-opted and deployed by the GSO as a tool for belongingness, stemming attrition and creating boundary-spanning linkages in the service of a capitalist driven work culture demanded by software outsourcing business. Physical places concatenated with each other to form what we call a ‘cultural stream’ of shared meanings suggesting a porosity of boundaries. For example, shared meaning was created by a ‘home at work’ environment as well as the celebration of religious festivals at the customer site, training programs emphasizing ‘rootedness’ yet flexibility, and the deployment of an ‘Indian interpretation’ of a new cultural experience by workers. Juxtaposing evocative national sentiments closely with individual and corporate identification and IT work in various ways was seen to fuse, at least temporarily, boundaries between national, professional, organizational and individual identities. This was seen to create an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ positioning where ‘us’ was the organization as a community working towards shared and higher-order goals (contributing to the country’s progress) and ‘them’ was (implicitly) other companies. The emotional charge, that this created, was reflected in the manner by which employees described and recalled these events even after leaving the organization, suggesting that this juxtaposition was experienced as very poignant and connected them simultaneously to elements of various social identities.

In these ways, ‘placed’ meanings moved between social, cultural and geographical as well as existential locations and re-locations of IT workers. Slogans such as ‘IN-Syncers Zindabaad’ (long live) as well as more ‘global’ slogans such as, ‘Just Go Do It,’ were carefully invoked so that Indian workers could feel on par with the rest of the world,
while still being Indian. Rather than the deterritorialization of culture and place (Appadurai, 1996) in the service of global capitalism, the various forms of culture suggest that GSOs (as well as individuals) construct and revise the local in the global (and the other way around) as they participate in the multiple networked regimes of offshore software development. Borrowing from (Escobar, 2001) culture was seen to ‘sit in places,’ though not be restricted to them.

Framed in a context of an interconnected, global, capitalist economy, GSOs (as a node of these economic flows) illustrated new organizational cultures emphasizing the contingent, fluid values and philosophy of flexibility, ‘quality’, and ‘value-added’ among workers and their work output seen in other such organizations in the ‘new economy’ (Gephart, 2002). The ethic of individualization (Perlow, 1997) was seen to drive workers to complete individual deliverables and do highly visible work in order to accrue personal advancement. ‘Cultural or ‘normative’ (Kunda, 1992) rather than structural methods were seen to be employed to monitor individual performance, gain employee loyalty and enrolment, as opposed to coercive means of the Fordist model. As speed to market is critical in this business, similar to others in the new economy (Gephart, 2002), success of the GSO depended on long working hours with workers spending the greatest part of their working day in the organization placing increased pressures on family life. On the other hand, culturally engineered processes stressing team building, trust and social cohesion were deployed to make workplaces increasingly homelike (Hochschild, 1997). The varied responses to these interactions were limited and highlighted the fact that managerial strategies have diverse interpretive possibilities which can be seen as identity-work particularly in an educated and individualistic workforce. In these ways, the GSO is located in a spatially specific site embodying globalization discourses, as well as receiving and transforming these discourses, while drawing on a diversity of social, cultural and material resources to construct its external image and strengthen its internal culture.

GSOs were seen to embody features of glocalization (Robertson, 1992) processes. Modern office constructions, sophisticated technical infrastructure (e.g., workstations, servers, networks, videoconferencing facilities) internationally recognized as well as standardized software development, people management practices, and a ‘global footprint’22 are reminiscent of global features. Within GSOs, the empirical material illustrated how processes of economic enterprise simultaneously intersperses the local in various forms richly meshing the universal with the particular. Rather than a borderless homogenous workplace, local primordial identities were seen to negotiate a cultural accommodation with the global in the service of global capitalism. To this end, we can say that GSOs, like other organizations, are firmly rooted in the discursive space of what is local and are sites that are embedded in “…..relational hierarchies of gender, class, caste and other critical fault lines, which define identities and distribute power both symbolically and materially” (Rao and Kellner, 2003:143). To this, we add region and religion as sources that provide a meaningful sense of collective identity. GSOs also presence the Other (what is interpreted as global) where cultural and social controls

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22 IN-Sync uses this ecological term to denote it’s presence in major markets around the world.
collaborate to saturate the work context with specific identity construction material such as the various forms of cultures. The tandem operations, and intertwining of both global and local dynamics, suggests that rather than a McDonalization (Ritzer, 1998) or universal homogenization of global flows, GSOs are representative of glocalization processes (Robertson, 1992).

Applying Coser’s (1974) idea of ‘greedy institutions’ i.e., social institutions that demand undivided loyalty and commitment, this analysis suggests that GSOs can be characterized as greedy institutions. As a symbolic universe within its roles and cultural framework, the GSO was seen to make huge (greedy) work demands on its employees and insulate their workers from competing anchors for their social identities. This was clearly evidenced in the expectation of project team members to ‘do what it takes’ to get the project delivered and ranged from working on weekends to delaying and even cancelling planned vacations. Male employees, particularly, were expected to be available 100 percent to the organization. Through its espoused values and training and development interventions, the GSO was seen to encompass, within itself, the whole personality of the worker. Also, IT workers did not develop a collective mobilization, in the form of a trade union or a strong professional identity that could develop strategies for them to perhaps negotiate a better work-life balance.

6.2 How does this relate to the articulation and construction of identities of IT workers employed in GSOs?

The category of the IT worker, in India, has been constructed in the context of a global ICT mediated economy boosted primarily by the phenomenon of outsourcing. While IT workers within GSOs engage in software development work, they also travel within and between various identity boundaries – geographical, social, national, regional, linguistic, cultural and existential.

The empirical material of IT workers (as professionals) conjures up a different picture of the selves and identities of this group—different from the Dumontian view of the holist, sociocentric Indian personality. Neither is there a lack of or ‘corrosion of character’ as diagnosed by Sennett (1998). There is little trace in our material of a sociocentrism within stable communities based on fixed hierarchies nor is there evidence of a sense of fragmented identity as described in post-modern Western societies. To the contrary, the IT worker was seen to have strong and individualized professional attachments demonstrating high commitment to the work rather than the organization imbued with the values of the ‘new economy’ (D’Mello, 2005; Scholarios and Marks, 2004). The undulating narrative of the global marketplace was seen to impact the IT worker as an existential experience, permeating the worker’s feelings, responses and coping strategies in professional as well as personal choice making processes in several ways.

As an organization, that is both global as well as local, the GSO is a tangible stage to proclaim India’s IT capability and positioning to the rest of the world and also within the country. On this stage, IT workers could imagine their personal and professional trajectories and realise their aspirations in a relatively privileged and distinct manner.
compared to other professional workers in India. High salaries and frequent overseas travel, ensured for IT workers a significant degree of social mobility to comfortable middle-class status by conversion of cultural capital into economic capital,\(^{23}\) while consistently drawing on social capital in order to do so. Workers, in this industry, have created honest and visible wealth and succeeded with talent, hard work and some luck rather than relying on connections or inherited wealth. These features have generated among other professionals much admiration, a sense of pride and a desire to emulate this possible successful trajectory.

Many IT workers have significantly improved the relative value of their social capital by entering an important section of the Indian middle class,\(^{24}\) as well as enhanced their cultural capital through overseas travel and interaction with customers from across the world. Company training programs on cross-cultural skills were a means to equip employees with essential social skills so necessary in a global marketplace. Many IT workers, from IN-Sync, aspired to obtain Green Card status in the US or a Resident Permit in the UK saying they would “like to keep their options open”. Besides the chance to significantly enhance their savings and enjoy a different lifestyle, this working also gave them a better work-life balance. It enabled them to close, even if slightly, the huge gap they experienced between them and their customers’ experience of a balanced work-life schedule. These opportunities for mobility, and the consequent respect and social position it engendered, supplied elements for positive constructions of identity and self-confidence.

On the other hand, the demands of the industry, cultures of software work (particularly the changing technologies) the punishing cycles of work pressures and necessary mobilities undermined employment security and predictable career trajectories, generating consistent feelings of anxiety and high levels of stress. One consequence was workers developing a market orientation that starkly contrasted with caste politics as a means to advance in this context where the individual’s social networks, skills and individual performance are emphasized. A market orientation was also evident in their personal lives. Male IT workers, informally, spoke shyly but proudly of the high price that they commanded in their respective communities, and how an overseas posting enhanced their value in the marriage market-- an important social arena in India. They mentioned how their families used their professional status to negotiate a “good deal” in their marriage alliance in the form of dowry.

The individualized strategies of IT workers, as well as the strategies of the GSO, emerged as conscious reflexive processes in a dialectical relation, similar to the global local

\(^{23}\) We use Bourdieu’s (1977) concepts of capital and its conversion. Bourdieu (1986: 243) described three forms of capital, economic, social and cultural, seen as different kinds of resources that are mutually convertible. a) Economic capital: This is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights; b) Cultural capital, educational qualifications which could be converted into economic capital such as wealth or social capital and prestige in one’s country or another country. c) Social capital: comprising one’s social connections which are convertible in certain conditions into economic capital.

\(^{24}\) The idea of middle-classness in the Indian context is a contested and ambivalent issue not explored in this article. Our informants were not from the urban rich families nor did they reside in the up-market suburbs of Mumbai. Many of their parents came from small towns making great sacrifices to give their children a good education.
dialectic described by Giddens (1991) as each entity attempted to configure itself to changing global market demands, as well as satisfying individual goals. For example, while corporate cultures aimed to enroll the ‘hearts and minds’ of employees towards organizational goals and stem attrition, employees developed their own strategies for career or social mobility. Similarly, while primordial identities of IT workers emerged as a field of belonging within the GSO, they also contributed to IT workers professional struggles in their cultural encounters with customers. These respective strategies sometimes colluding and in tension with each other, constituted the reverberating dynamics of the marketplace.

Cultural discourses, in GSO, were also seen to intersect with global power relations and historical legacies, manifesting a peculiar mix of global power relations and influencing identities of the GSO as well as workers. Firstly, the fortunes of GSOs in economically developing countries were historically tied to fortunes of firms in the developed world primarily in the US (Sahay et al., 2003). Till today, the US has formed the market with more than 60 percent of software services exported from India (NASSCOM, 2005), suggestive of a strong dependence on marketplaces in the Western world for the survival and longevity of this industry. India’s success, in the outsourcing business, is largely attributed to its distinctive toolkit of a large labor pool with strong technical knowledge and communication skills in English. While this toolkit provides a privileged position for IT workers within the country, overseas Indian IT workers are typically seen as English speaking, low wage techies, derogatorily labeled as ‘cyber coolies’ doing ‘grunt’ work since much of the offshore work is still at the low end of the value chain (Dasarathi, 2004; Varma, 2004). They are seen to lack the necessary cultural capital that would make them fully acceptable into Western society as equals within and outside the workplace.

Almost paradoxically, while Indian IT workers may deploy the skills of mobility and flexibility, they also experience a sense of vulnerability and a lack of agency in the power relations embedded in this vendor-customer relationship. As one Module Leader said, shrugging his shoulders, “The entire control rests with North America”. There is some truth in this. While the GSO, with its transnational economic and financial linkages is emblematic of globality, it is spatially situated in big cities in India. These cities attract many workers, for higher education and job opportunities from mofussil and small towns, whose social and personal identities are still seen to be strongly influenced and shaped by primordial moorings and class habitus25 (Bourdieu, 1977) that reinforce traditional hierarchical, family and social structures as well as strong aspirations for social mobility. They are unable to quickly modify dispositions acquired from this habitus when they enter a global field where the ‘rules of the game’ are seen to be dictated by Western players. Particularly, the USA and UK who were previous colonizers and also currently

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25 Habitus, practice and field are key concepts in Bourdieu’s (1977) theory of practice. Bourdieu employs the concept of field (like battle field or a field of forces) to theorize society as an arrangement of relatively autonomous spheres of play, each with its own logic (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Habitus refers to the orientation of actors in a field and acts as a symbolic template for an actor’s conduct, thoughts, feelings and judgments. Practices are the recognizable patterned actions in which both individuals and groups are engaged.
dominate this market. Their behavioral practices are interpreted, in a global environment, as passivity, obedience and deference to the customer.

The pliancy of Indian IT workers might be due to the desire to please a powerful Western customer who, in a volatile and competitive marketplace, holds the reigns of IT power over their destiny in a transnational industry where they have tied their careers as a ‘global worker.’ This notion of being ‘international’ or ‘global’ is reinforced by the observation that social and higher educational discourses in India actively promote IT as a tool for both individual and national success. A sense of optimism among young people, in particular, pervades the beliefs about the role of ICTs in India’s future (Ezer, 2005). Informants were also seen to feel a sense of pride knowing that the success of the American information revolution was partly due to the ubiquity of Indian software engineers. As seen in the case, the younger generation of Mumbai city IT workers (in their early 20s) are clearly more urbanized, confident, westernized, often reminded by the media and their social group, that they constitute a critical category of producers of Indian economic success as well as consumers with significant purchasing power. Perhaps, as a result of the new middle class status associated with IT work, enhanced consumption patterns evidenced in this class (Fernandes, 2000), and an enhanced understanding of the subtle nuances in professional interactions, they will be able to shake off the subordinating legacy of a colonial history. In parallel, India’s engagement with the world economic order, and particularly the IT industry which was historically influenced by its colonial status, is changing and India’s global image is more positive now than ever before. In this almost contradictory shift, creation of jobs in economically poor countries, like India, is creating a breeding ground for a political backlash in economically rich countries like the US (Roach, 2004).

Against this backdrop, we propose that the relational identity of a ‘cyber-coolie’ can be reconstructed and imagined as what Prestowitz (2005) calls a ‘new capitalist.’ This shift of identity is not unusual, given the rapid strides of India’s overall economic progress and the increasing number of US technology firms and venture capitalists who are aggressively taking research and development and high end software work to India (http://www.ibef.org/industry/informationtechnology.aspx). In this way, the dialectical relation of IT with its actors (such as IT workers and GSOs) as well as the actors (politicians and economic advisors) in respective nation states shapes spaces for its actors, influencing their identities.

The skills desired by customers, such as assertiveness or being upfront, are tacit and primarily embedded in socialization practices of a community or group as well as embodied in one’s ‘being’ and produced in interactions. Unlike ‘hard’ technical skills or knowledge, they call for self-reflection, much training involving demonstration and repetition and are difficult to disembodied from the local context and re-articulate in global contexts across time and space (D’Mello, 2005). In this way, while GSOs may operate with a placeless logic, individual employees remain “historically and biographically place-dependent” (Sahay, et al., 2003, p. 39) suggesting that such qualities are context dependent or ‘spatially sticky’ (Gertler, 2001). The sense of confidence generated by the shifting trends in outsourcing, that also reflect shifts in power relations, is expected to
facilitate IT workers as they modify their habitus and create culturally adaptive dispositions more effectively.

Finally, IT workers were also seen to construct ‘Indianness’ in terms of ‘us’ versus ‘them’ categories that reflected judgements and a relative comparison, particularly, when onsite. Economic progress, changing lifestyles and consumption patterns are seen to contest notions of ‘basic Indian values’ in major Indian cities like Mumbai. While IT workers are described as individualistic, in their personal lives they do not seem to see themselves as a ‘free agent,’ associated with a western self, (Mauss, 1987) but an integrated part of a collective such as their family or Indian society. These might appear as discordant with the IT professional’s market-focused reflexivity and fugitive nature. However, this compartmentalization of personal and work arenas (Singer, 1972) is a process that enables individuals to combine different modes in the two spheres without a direct collision. Indianess was also described as a collective character type that manifested itself in a unique combination of flattering ‘Indian’ traits as a means to symbolically produce a sense of difference and uniqueness in this group. The data suggests, that while traversing across identity boundaries, IT workers seek to simultaneously preserve a sense of coherence and the rootedness of belonging to places such as family, region, religion, values, and country.

Thus, in response to the research questions, we can say that the various forms of cultures that constitute GSOs, or are constituted by them, symbolically construct identity-spaces for IT workers. By doing so, in an Indian GSO the work of software development easily co-exists with the secular such as the company’s sport day event and the sacred (or religious) such as sheera, a religious food. This glocal space, embodying cultural dynamics and local-global dialectics of GSOs, influences and are influenced by identity constructions of the GSO and its workers.

7. IMPLICATIONS

There are both theoretical and practical implications of this work. Giddens (1991) has noted that institutional level globalization changes impact changes at individual levels. By offering some ‘thick descriptions,’ of the various dynamics expressed within a globalizing ICT mediated context, this work contributes to enlarging the lens of culture and its dynamic relationship to identity. Further, while macro-level concepts of globalization, culture and identity provide us with relevant conceptual frameworks to understand events and processes, they are limited in explaining how these dynamics actually play out in practice.

This study contributes to theory in several ways. In the past decade, anthropological inquiry has increasingly seen an interrogation of how the ‘local’ is produced at the intersection of translocal, regional, as well as global cultural fields, in ethnographies of local communities, identities and spaces (e.g., Appadurai, 1996; Hannerz, 1996; Mankekar, 2002). Human geographers have also studied how the local and the global interrelate in transnational business environments (e.g., Massey, 1984; Smith; 1984; Ong, 1999). The analysis presented contributes to the literature on globalization, particularly in
the context of South Asia, by unravelling the macro-level global events and their dynamics that are intricately intertwined with micro-level dynamics of social and personal dispositions. Rather than two separate ends of a continuum, the universal and the particular are yoked together in adaptive, glocalization (Robertson, 1992) processes of both individuals and organizations as they strive to create and deliver ‘value’ to themselves and their customers. This reinforces the view (Giddens, 1991) that globalization is an uneven and dialectical process with multiple forms and does not create a level playing field nor a ‘borderless world’ (Ohmae, 1990).

Another theoretical contribution is to the literature on culture in organization studies as well as literature on the anthropology of organizations which often describes cultures of workplaces in ‘slices’ such as corporate cultures or culture of the new economy. In this work, the various forms of culture and their intersections emerged as dynamic and processual. By highlighting the interconnection of both proximate (e.g., primordial) and distal (e.g., global) forms of cultures, the tensions therein and its influence on workers’ individual and social identities, this study suggests the following: Firstly, it reinforces the view (Westrup et al., 2002) that there are no ‘pristine cultures’ in organizations. Secondly, it explicitly demonstrates how GSOs and their workers deploy a variety of local and global elements to construct meaning and coherence in a volatile and turbulent business environment. In this way, it highlights the dialectical relations of culture, self and identity. Thirdly, global software development work is said to have peculiar knowledge demands and particularly related to embedded knowledge (Nicholson and Sahay, 2004). This study points to the importance of considering cultural dynamics as a source of embeddedness of knowledge given that software development work increasingly exists in a web of highly interactive relationships (Waterson et al., 1997).

This analysis also has practical implications for GSOs and HR role holders. The first relates to building ‘strong’ company culture, given that this industry is very people-intensive. HR and managerial interventions must consider that employees are not passive recipient of corporate cultures but actively filter them through their individual needs for autonomy and growth. These needs influence their participation in and commitment to events engineered to secure commitment and belonging. Nor are cultures static monolithic entities that can be ‘rolled out’ when the company restructures or attempts a culture change. Ignoring subcultures, and their actual or potential competitiveness, can have adverse implications for such change efforts. Further, the HR function must simultaneously attend to the regimes of cultural control instituted at the workplace that could possible create ‘cultures of obedience’ or ‘manufactured consent’ (Buroway, 1979) and oppose the very sense of agency, that customers seek in IT workers. Finally, GSOs seeking to move up the value chain in terms of doing more high-end development work that calls for innovative solutions and creative thinking are urged to examine their cultures with a ‘culture lens’ to watch out for contradictions and paradoxes in their existing culture that vitiate these desired qualities.

A second practical implication is in terms of training and development interventions by HR personnel. Given the relational nature of software development work, HR professionals design and implement training programs on behavioral skills such as
interpersonal communication, negotiation, assertiveness, and cross-cultural sensitivity, among others. Many such training programs were seen to draw on case material and descriptions from books and manuals written in the USA or UK and these are adopted as normative. The analysis, of the empirical material, cautions against using simplistic national and cultural stereotypes that marginalize local specificities. Behavioral trainers are urged to include local, lived, contextually-embedded interpretations of interpersonal behaviors along with what is seen as culturally-competent behaviour of a ‘global worker’ necessitated across identity borders. A customized, versus a standardized approach in the design of such programs, is expected to provide a more effective basis for learning, while respecting primordial moorings and identities.

Besides formal training programs, on-the-job cross-cultural learning possibilities would provide effective spaces for workers to reflect on experiences and informally share knowledge. These are often experienced as more potent than a formal training context. Further, such training is often seen as one-way i.e., for supplier staff only. Recognizing that training needs are two-way, when it comes to cultural understanding, customers from overseas could be sensitized to different cultural ways of being and doing that need an altered framework for interpretation.

Thirdly, an increasing incidence of joint ventures, takeovers and cross-border mergers on the IT horizon, both within and outside India today, raise challenges of cultural amalgamation and compatibility. Many such alliances are across borders, driven by a need to enhance a ‘global footprint’ and also a global and multi-cultural identity. In such relationships, cultural amalgamation is seen as most challenging as it implies a meshing of different subcultures and aspirations. The case analysis underlines the linkage of identity with cultural processes. It suggests that these processes can be consciously mobilized and even juxtaposed, as a catalyst, to negotiate commonalities in the team, bridge heterogeneity of work styles and facilitate communication interactions. It also emphasizes the value of a contextualized understanding of people and processes and a customized approach. It warns against using a ‘culture as variable’ approach or the application of a standard template that often disregards diverse interpretations and situated features that might be vital to support newly envisioned business goals.

CONCLUSION
Culture and identity are implicated at multiple interconnected levels of the global-local dialectic. The workplace of GSOs is a microcosm of globalizing as well as glocalizing processes, situated in a global network of local places with various, intersecting forms of cultures which are emergent, changing and complex. The analytic lens of culture, linked macro-level dynamics of globalizing influences with micro-level dynamics of individual dispositions. This lens also provided deeper insights into the intricate interconnection of these dynamics with identity of IT workers who are embedded in these global networks of economic, political, social and cultural transnational linkages and constantly criss-crossing borders. A deeper understanding of these dynamics has both theoretical and practical implications.
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