Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Overview

Women studies in management have become the need of the hour for more than one reason. Macro forces of globalization, liberalization of the economy, detraditionalisation, and westernization have changed and challenged many existing structures. These changes impact women too in multiple ways. Economic liberalization has transformed the landscape of India to a great extent. Liberalization has created opportunities and also great many conflicts, which put pressures of survival on business firms, which seek to adjust and innovate by developing the necessary strategies, operations and attitudes to succeed. It has also put pressure on individuals, who seek to balance their lifestyle, ambitions, and roles in society. However, at a deeper level these forces also challenge existing mindsets and provoke some new and broad ways of thinking which will eventually influence the lives of individuals in terms of their role, status and identity, and organizations in terms of management environment, organizational attitudes and policies. Gender\footnote{Sex is the term used to indicate biological difference, gender is a term is used to indicate psychological, social and cultural difference between men and women.} is a social construct.\footnote{Goffman, as quoted by Cales (1999), describes gender as a sex-class linked individual behavioral practice. Gender is believed to emerge from the rearing patterns and not hormones. Since social structure is not preordained but is historically composed, therefore gender is historically mutable.} It is influenced by societal beliefs. Dasgupta (2003) observes that the majority of women in India
are tradition bound and in a disadvantageous position. But now globalization has created employment opportunities and it is expected that it will eventually bring changes in attitudes towards the role of women. However, this positive change can occur only if it is backed by social and organizational changes, which are conducive to their growth. It is in this context that the study of women executives in liberalized India becomes relevant. Gender issues have been studied extensively by researchers in the field of sociology, psychology, cultural studies, literature, and organizational behaviour. The unique perspective of each of these disciplines offers a distinct understanding of gender and its impact on individuals and society. In the specific area of management and organizational behaviour, gender issues have been studied to increase the fit between organizations and employees and to preserve and enhance the diversity of work places to set free greater creativity (Himelstein & Forest, 1997). The feminine and masculine styles of leadership and management and their special traits have been extensively researched to discover the differences and similarities between them (Claes, 1999; Helgesen, 2011; Rosener et al., 1990). Basic issues of gender inequality in terms of choice of employment, sexual harassment, safety standards, remuneration and promotion in organizations have also received much attention in research (Prabhakar, 1990). The glass ceiling and the socio-cultural prejudices which prevent career growth for women in organizations has been studied in detail and many measures have been prescribed to overcome these subtle barriers (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Similar studies have been done to study the impact of liberalization on women, but most of them study the impact on women in rural and socially backward sectors, and lower level employees in organizations. The studies of women in the top level of organizations are fewer and circumspect in their scope. This study is interdisciplinary in nature. It seeks to study the agency of executive women in terms of work life balance and gender bias. The social lens is used to study gender in management. It seeks insight into the larger truth of gender dynamics in management through individual perspectives of women executives. The Indian society is hierarchical, tradition bound, collectivist in culture. The emancipation of women is in pockets. A vast majority
of women live in the shackles of poverty, illiteracy and poor health (Bumiller, 1991). Yet there is a slow, but sure change happening. This change is profound and uneven, creating great contradictions in the status of women. The impact of changing structures on women and their actions are the focus of this study. Indian women working in organizations, have to redefine their values and roles within the framework of their cultural beliefs that clash with westernized values and modes of behaviour. Their fit is therefore unique and offers a fertile ground of investigation. This study seeks to explore their agency within the given structures and the impact this dyad has on their self construal.

1.2 Need and Importance of This Study

The need and importance of this study can be viewed from three perspectives—individual, organizational and the social perspective.

1.2.1 Individual Perspective

Positions in organizations are taken up by women most often to make a difference to their organization or society or to actualize their own personal vision and potential. Leadership not only allows a person to express their deepest qualities and abilities but it also acts as a catalyst in inspiring and motivating others to reach their own potential. Thornton (2007) says, “The core leadership characteristic we all possess is desire - the desire to make a difference. People want to add value.” Women managers have to face many obstacles within themselves and externally to authenticate their potential in terms of their job. The external constraints appear in two settings, home and work place. This study identifies these constraints and the coping strategies used by women executives to overcome work life conflict. The agency and the initiative to realize their potential is within the broad framework of the societal and cultural definitions and expectations. And so their self construal has to accommodate their needs as individuals and the social expectations from them. In organizations
women have to integrate their innate feminine qualities with masculine skills that are demanded at work. The aligning of the self with external demands is necessary to increase the effectiveness of their performance (Bancroft, 1995). This exercise is even more daunting while adapting to a hierarchical, patriarchal and masculine culture. “To be deemed ‘successful’ in our society, a woman has to become more like a man”, observes Mason (1991, p. 19). Indian women are traditional in their outlook and are also greatly influenced by their culture. In the post-liberalization era, when there is an increasing exposure to western lifestyles, modes of behaviour and attitudes; when education and employment has created avenues to step out of the confines of home, women are forced to redefine their roles and values. It is in this context that this study is valuable because it throws light on how women executives redefine their values in the broader cultural context and how they balance the different roles they have to play.

1.2.2 Organizational Perspective

To meet the challenges of present times, there is an urgent need to broaden business strategies and goals, improve levels of communication and have open cultures, empower and support employees, and most importantly examine the ethics and goals of business and how they impact society. Organizations are faced with the formidable task of maintaining the diversity in the organization to foster creativity. Hill (2009), claims that the increasing diversity within business organization and growing interdependence of players- from business partners to NGOs- within a business ecosystem forces leaders to adopt a more inclusive and collaborative style of management. The team approach is needed for problem solving. He/she needs to be able to see extraordinary potential in people in order to motivate them and has to make decisions with the balance of idealism and pragmatism. This new style of management is essentially a balance or integration of the masculine and feminine style of management (Bancroft, 1995). The behavioral attitudes that women bring to work are thus
1.2. NEED AND IMPORTANCE OF THIS STUDY

important to create a workplace that fosters and values both skills and allows for the development of an integrated style that combines these skills. Women are entering business ranks in greater number than before. They are transcending barriers within themselves and those created by social circumstances to find their own place in organizations. As more women go to work, organizations are forced to consider their special needs (Budhwar, Saini, & Bhatnagar, 2005). The prevailing cultural norm that reinforces a limited view of masculine attributes and devalues the feminine affects both men and women in the organization. This study mainly focuses on the subtle biases that influence women executives. While most organizations implement pro women policies, their number in higher ranks remains low. The causes for this are insidious systemic and cultural barriers, that are difficult to pin point (Majumdar, 2007; Eagly & Carli, 2007). This study throws light on the subtle biases perceived by women executives and this understanding is important to create truly conducive organizational environment for women.

1.2.3 Socio-national Perspective

From the national perspective it is useful because women constitute 48% percent of the population and are an important resource that cannot be neglected (Yadava, Sharma, & Sharma, 2007). Their induction in work places is not an option but a necessity to achieve national goals. Social and gender inequality have far reaching consequences on the nation and society. Providing equal opportunity to men and women for education and employment is one way of mitigating the problems that besiege us as a nation. According to Bumiller (1991), India cannot accomplish the challenge of maintaining democracy, secularism and national unity without securing justice, including justice for women. Besides, the empowerment of women has greater impact in rectifying the social ills of our society as a woman’s power and initiative can uplift the lives of all the people who surround her - men, women and children (Sen, 2005). This study does not scan social and national implications of gender per se but only
examines these variables in terms of their influence on women executives in their workplace and at home. Though viewed through this limited lens of the gender construct, this study offers valuable insights into the subtle social and cultural barriers that women face. In collectivist cultures individuals define themselves in terms of others. This interdependent construal creates a unique context for women executives (as compared to their western counterparts) as they try to express their agency within the structural definitions that they have internalized from society. This study aims at examining structure and agency in two specific areas, work life balance and gender bias. Both these areas provide a fertile ground for insight because they embody the conflict between structure and agency. The study, thus gives valuable inputs in understanding the complex mechanism of self construal and agency in collectivist cultures.

The importance of this study can be summarized in the following points:

- It will provide an understanding of the factors that affect women executives at home (work life balance) and at work (gender bias in organizations).

- It will help in understanding the coping strategies that women use. This insight will help organizations to weed out insidious barriers that marginalize executive women.

- It will help in determining the degree of gender sensitivity in organizations and society as perceived by executive women in India.

- It will provide an insight on how Indian women executives actually handle the demands made on them by society, family and work place and how this agency defines them.

- It will also consider the impact on families as more women opt for demanding and ambitious careers.

Thus, in a theoretical sense this study explores causes which constraint and enable women executives and analyses the effect of their agency, on themselves
1.3. AIM AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

and on others. This theoretical insight adds to the gender discourse in India. In a practical sense, this study identifies measures used by women executives to handle work life conflicts and provides valuable cues on overcoming subtle biases in organizational cultures. This knowledge will not only help aspiring women executives but also provide organization an insight into what really helps women executives to perform their jobs.

1.3 Aim and Purpose of the Study

The broad area of this study includes Gender, Management and Sociology. This interdisciplinary area is again influenced by other disciplines like Cultural studies, Psychology, Organizational Behaviour, and Family studies. Therefore, clarity is ensured by spelling out the objectives of the study in an exact manner.

1.3.1 General Objectives

The underlying purpose of this study is to understand the status of women executives in Indian business organizations. The main objective of this study is to explore the factors which affect women executives. The factors are located in the macro setting (social, cultural and economic realities) and the micro setting (home and work place). The impact of these factors on them and the measures they take to overcome them, form the context in which structure and agency is studied. The purpose of this study is therefore to identify the factors that affect women executives and to understand their coping strategies. The impact these actions have on their self construal and on their society is also a part of the general purpose of the study.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

It is the interplay of macro and micro factors that creates the pressure of work life balance and manifests as gender bias in organizations and in society. Since work life balance and gender bias form the areas in which the structure agency
dynamic are explored, they form the basis of the research questions. The specific research objectives are -

- To determine the macro and micro factors that affect women executives.
- To identify the subtle biases that women executives face in organizations.
- To relate the cultural and social perceptions about women managers to the barriers they face in organizations.
- To determine the ways in which executive women in India achieve work life balance.
- To examine the agency of women executives in the areas of work life conflict and gender bias
- To understand the self construal of women executives in collectivist culture like that of India.

1.3.3 Research Questions

Based on the specific objectives, the research questions in each area are given below.

Work Life Balance

- What economic, cultural and social factors define the context of women executives in India?
- What is the nature of influence that familial, social, and professional factors have on women executives’ career and personal lives?
- What are the conflicts that work and home create for women executives?
- How do they cope with these conflicts?
- What does their agency imply in terms of their self?
- What are the implications of such agency on society?
1.4. Scope of the Study

It is important to define the scope of the proposed research as the area of women studies is vast and interdisciplinary in nature. The exact parameters of this study are stated below and the reasons of limiting the study are also explained.

- The study is limited to women in managerial and leadership positions in Indian corporate settings.
- The study is exploratory, diagnostic and descriptive in nature.
- A mix of qualitative and quantitative methodologies is used.
- The study uses a gender lens to examine the variables which affect women executives.

Why is the Study Limited to Women in Top Managerial and Leadership Positions in Corporate Settings?

Women studies have undergone many revisions in terms of their scope. Gender has been researched by anthropologists, psychologists and sociologists. It has been a topic of interest in cultural studies and literature. Gender Studies is sometimes related to studies of class, race, ethnicity, sexuality and location.
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It is also viewed as a product of socialization. The philosopher De Beauvoir (2012) said: “One is not born a woman, one becomes one.” Finally, each field began to view ‘gender’ as a practice. In Butler (1999)’s terms the performance of gender, sex, and sexuality is about power in society. Women have had less power and consequently have not been able to uplift themselves in society and in organizations. This disadvantaged position of women is reflected in the stereotypical attitudes which women face and which undermines their ability to prove themselves. This study focuses specifically on executive women in Indian organizations. The study is limited to women executives in corporate setting and does not include entrepreneurial women or women in NGOs and other sectors. Even in corporate setting it does not include women at all levels but restricts itself to women in top managerial and leadership positions. The reason for this is that the challenges of entrepreneurial women are different from that of corporate women executives. The entrepreneurial woman has greater freedom as she determines the work culture and values of her business while corporate women have to fit in a pre-determined and often patriarchal culture. Mattis (2004) reports that the four reasons most frequently cited by women who left corporate jobs to set up their own businesses were - the need for more flexibility, dissatisfaction with the work environment, experiences with glass ceiling factors and lack of challenges in the job. Women in NGOs and government too have to contend with different kinds of challenges. Since the study envisages the in depth analysis of the particular problems of women in a given setting, increasing the variety will reduce the representativeness of the factors which influence them.

Why is the Study Exploratory, and Descriptive in Nature?

The purpose of this research is to investigate and explore and not so much to prove. Exploratory studies are used when what is to be studied is not specific. These studies have a loose structure as compared to formal studies and their objective is to discover future tasks or develop hypothesis (Davidson & Cooper, 1984). Though gender issues in organizations are much researched in India and abroad, the impact of liberalization and subsequent increase of women in
1.4. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

management is a new phenomenon which has altered even organizational culture and levels of social acceptance to working and powerful women. The exploratory model is used to first identify the important issues in the new scenario. A descriptive study tries to discover answers to the questions who, what, when, where, and, sometimes, how. The researcher attempts to describe or define a subject, often by creating a profile of a group of problems, people, or events. The descriptive study is popular in research because of its versatility across disciplines. Since the study of women executives also requires the inclusion of methods and techniques adopted in various areas of study, it is adopted here. Descriptive studies may or may not have the potential for drawing powerful inferences. A descriptive study, however, does not explain why an event has occurred or why the variables interact the way they do. In order to overcome this lacuna I used theories of sociology and gender to interpret the specific variables revealed in the exploratory stage of the study. The research findings were analyzed to clarify their meaning and to test their transferability. Hence the study is partly diagnostic (Zikmund, Barry, Jon, & Mitch, 2010).

Why Mix Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in the Research Design?
The distinction between methods and methodology is succinctly made by Clough and Nutbrown (2012) (p. 22) in the following words, “Methodology provides reasons for using a particular research recipe while method refers to the ingredients”. The choice of methodology is determined by the value and assumptions of the study. It is basically a justification and allows the researcher to avoid self-delusion and increases confidence. “Without methodological frankness we run the risk of reporting what is not true” (Miles and Hubberman as cited in Clough and Nutbrown (2012)). Since the proposed research is interdisciplinary, a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods is chosen. Mixed methods approaches to social inquiry involve the planned use of two or more different kinds of data gathering and analysis techniques. The supporters of quantitative methodology advocate the cause of realism, objectivity and causal explanations to identify universal truths, while the advocates of qualitative schools of research
give importance to the interpretive, value laden, contextual and contingent nature of the methodology which provides social knowledge. Using both is to take full advantage of the methodological repertoire (Greene, 2008). The mixing of methods however has certain inbuilt problems. The philosophy behind the methodologies is not always reconcilable. The view of the social world, the perspective regarding the nature of knowledge (objective or subjective) and the fact whether the study is contextual or generalized favors one of the methodologies over the other. I used a concurrent design where data from various methods is viewed together to clarify the issues under study. Here the data of different types become iteratively merged or blended in analysis and yield a unique set of results and inference. I used the component design wherein the data retains its original form and the conclusions and inferences seek harmony rather than full blending. Qualitative research uses many methods like focus groups, individual depth interview, case study, ethnography, grounded theory, action research and observation. I used semi structured interview and survey techniques and triangulated the findings. The interviews provide rich descriptions and add insight to what is found in the survey.

Why Use a Gender Lens?
While studying the various factors that affect women executives as outlined in the gender construct, I looked at them from the gender perspective. For example in social factors I study the impact of family support, spouse support, socialization etc on executive women and not all the social factors like literacy, access to health, employment and wealth, which are a part of social studies. This is done partly because I am studying only executive women and partly because it is limited to impact of gender in the organizational set up. The other factors are important only to the extent that they influence the topic of study.

1.5 Scheme of Presentation
This doctoral study, on ‘Women Executives in India’, is presented in the seven sections listed below. A brief description of the content is given to the reader
1.5. SCHEME OF PRESENTATION

to know what can be expected from each section.

1. Introduction: This chapter introduces the study by giving a brief overview of topic of study namely Women executives in India (A diagnostic and descriptive study that explores structure and agency of women executives in the areas of work life balance and gender bias). The importance of this study and the contribution it makes to gender and management studies is explained. This is followed by the general and specific objectives of the study. The research questions are delineated and the scope of the study is defined in the end of this chapter.

2. Literature Review: In this chapter, a detailed literature survey of available empirical studies and theoretical concepts is presented under four headings, namely scoping studies, work life balance, gender bias, and structure and agency.

3. Research Methodology: The ontological, epistemological, and methodological premises of this study and the research design, is presented in this chapter. The mixed methodology adopted, the tools used and the sample design is described in detail.

4. Work Life balance: In this chapter the qualitative and quantitative findings about work life issues are presented. The findings in this area are presented in the categorization provided by Layder’s model- Context, Setting, Situated Activity and Self.

5. Gender Bias: In this chapter the qualitative and quantitative findings are presented. Gender biases in organizations include nine biases identified in the scoping stage (Heroic masculine cultures, Tokenism, Think manager-Think male, Homophilly, Double bind, Attributing gender for success, Devaluation, and Cinderella complex), which are presented in the categorization provided by Layder’s model- Context, Setting, Situated Activity and Self.
6. Discussion: Bourdieu’s social theory and Lois McNay’s Performative agency theory are applied to understand the structure-agency dynamic in the narratives of women executives.

7. Summary, Conclusions and Suggestions: The summary of findings and the discussion are presented as answers to research questions and the final conclusions are presented in this chapter. The HR implications and the suggestions for further studies are outlined, thereafter.

The inter-relationship between the chapters or the flow of thought and analysis is explained through Fig 1.1.

The literature survey helps in identifying variables in the gender construct. The gender construct becomes the basis of the questionnaire and the interview schedule, and thus grounds it in the empirical findings of extensive research already done in gender studies in India and abroad. The findings of the survey and the rich data from the semi structured interviews are layered using Layder’s structuration model and interpreted using the theories of social production of Bourdieu and McNay. The final picture emerges from the concurrent triangulation of survey data, interview data and the literature survey in the concluding chapter.

### 1.6 Terms Used in the Study

The main terms used in this study are given below. This list is not exhaustive but it covers the essential terms used in this study.

- **Women Executives**: ‘Women executive’ refers to women in executive positions in corporate hierarchy. Typical titles being CEO, Director, Vice president, General Manager, Associate Vice president, Chief Financial Officer, Managing Director etc. For the purpose of this study even functional heads will be included in the sample.

- **Work Life Balance**: Work/life balance refers to the way in which person balances work related chores and goals with family, friends and hobbies.
1.6. TERMS USED IN THE STUDY

Figure 1.1: The chapter scheme
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When career is favored above family and personal time it causes burnouts and stress related diseases. It also refers to the stress women feel when they have to choose between career and family.

- **Gender Bias**- The Dictionary (2009) defines gender bias as- “Unfair difference in the treatment of men or women because of their sex or unequal treatment in employment opportunity (such as promotion, pay, benefits and privileges), and expectations due to attitudes based on the sex of an employee or group of employees.”

- **Heroic Masculinity**- Heroic Masculinity refers to a culture which emphasizes achievement over nurturance. It is a culture which measures capability in terms of quantitative measures (hours spent at work, mobility, visibility, profits made etc.) and ignores qualitative measures (team skills, communication, communal and prosocial activities) (Eagly, 2009).

- **Stereotype**- Stereotypes are commonly held beliefs about men and women. They are considered as mutually exclusive groups and there are prescriptive norms about how the group members have to behave. They also form the basis on which people are judged, consciously or unconsciously (Kelan, 2010).

- **Cultures of Advantage**- Men have greater access to a large network of contacts, informal groups, are usually better at gathering support for their views or interests as compared to women.

- **Think manager think male**- Leadership is always associated with men and so women leadership is considered out of place. Men react when a women manager exercises authority and outsiders also prefer to negotiate with a man as compared to a woman.

- **Tokenism**- Being the only woman makes others react in stereotypical ways in meetings and in other interactions. Women who don’t conform to gender ascribed roles receive criticism and this is generalized to the
entire sex. Such generalizations further consolidate the perceived risk of promoting women.

- **Homophilly**- Top level perceives hiring a woman as a riskier decision than hiring a man. There a tendency of preferring people who resemble themselves, i.e. men prefer to hire men and if they deviate from this they have face peer pressure from colleagues.

- **Attributing Gender as a Reason for Success**- There is a backlash from others when a woman is more successful than a man. Women have to face derogatory backbiting or nicknames in chat rooms. Women are suspected of using ignoble means when they succeed.

- **Double Bind**- The adoption of a masculine style of management elicits complaints and feminine style makes people dismiss women managers. (communal qualities are expected and so agentic qualities are condemned)

- **Devaluation**- Constant devaluation and the attributing of a secondary role in family and society reduces the degree of self confidence women have.

- **Cinderella Complex**- Women have a tendency to wait to be rescued. They use feminine wiles to get their job done (Dowling, 1981).

- **Field**- A field is a setting in which agents and their social positions are located. It is a system of social positions structured internally in terms of power relationships (Bourdieu, 1977).

- **Structure**- Structures are ‘sets of rules and resources that individual actors draw upon in the practices that reproduce social systems’ (Giddens, 1984). For Giddens, structures were enabling and constraining because he gave structures a virtual space, in the minds of the actors. Structures have significance in the minds of the actors and are able to control them (the actors) only when they allow it to.
• **Habitus**- The habitus influences the actor’s perception of the external world and informs his/her action. It refers to that part of doxa which is internalized by the actor.

• **Doxa**- Doxa represents what is taken for granted in any particular society. The doxa is the experience by which “the natural and social world appears as self-evident.” (Bourdieu, 1977).

• **Embodiment**- Gendered habitus broadly refers to the “social construction of masculinity and femininity that shapes the body, defines how the body is perceived, forms the body’s habits and possibilities for expression, and thus determines the individuals identity—via the body—as masculine or feminine” Krais, 2006, p. 121, cited in (Thorpe, 2009)).

• **Hexis**- Hexis signifies “deportment, the manner and style in which actors ‘carry themselves’: stance, gait, gesture, etc” (Jenkins, 2002, p. 75, as cited in (Thorpe, 2009)).

• **Reflexivity**- reflexivity comes to mean “an act of self-reference where examination or action re examines itself. A simpler definition is “the regular exercise of the mental ability, shared by all normal people, to consider themselves in relation to their (social) contexts and vice versa.” (Archer, 2010).

• **Regulated Liberties**- Regulated liberties refers to the modified action of the agent that allow the agent to adhere to, and yet reinterpret old values in new circumstances. Bourdieu refers to regulated liberties as a “complex process of investment and negotiation.”

• **Self Construal**- The self construal process is the basis of self definition. The self is defined independently or interdependently with others. There is also a third categorization of the self construal called as relational self construal, “it represents the ways that people may define themselves in terms of close, dyadic relationships”.
1.6. TERMS USED IN THE STUDY

- **Performative Agency**—“Agency is configured as a capacity to institute new or unanticipated modes of behaviour” (McNay, 2000)(p.21). Agency modifies action and alters structures. It reflects the evolutionary nature of society.

Gender Studies are vast, multi dimensional and varied. In order to start the research journey, a preliminary framework was developed based on the scoping studies. This construct and the literature survey done in the areas of work life balance and gender bias are presented in the next chapter.