Chapter 3

Research Methodology

(In this chapter on methodology which is the crux of the research process, I will justify the choice of my ontological stance and describe the epistemological and methodological premises which follow the ontological stance of this study. This will be followed by the research design and the methods adopted for this study. The limitations and the delimitations of the study are also stated. The steps taken for maintaining the rigour in the research and the ethical considerations that are involved in the research process will be described, thereafter.)

At the fount of research methodology, lie the philosophical underpinnings that guide the viewpoint, approach, and action of the researcher. Heidegger (1962) says “Every enquiry is a seeking and every seeking gets guided beforehand by what is sought” (Heywood & Stronach, 2005). Philosophy is not an option; it is a default condition, as a non-philosophical person too has an unconscious philosophy that governs his practice (Recker, 2005). The philosophical beliefs must be converted into research strategies and must employ specific methods of research to produce research writing (Creswell, 2003). The research paradigm is defined by Denzin and Lincoln Oakley (1999) as a combination of the ontological, epistemological and methodological premises of the researcher. Paradigms are normative and help to break down complex reality into parts, which help their adherents to understand or manage it. They are ‘intellectual cultures’. The belief about reality (ontology) informs the method of seeking knowledge
(epistemology) and this in turn determines the particular method of research used to gain knowledge (methodology) (Tuli, 2011). A harmony between these elements is also essential for the soundness of the theoretical paradigm that is envisaged. Therefore, a description of the ontological and epistemological basis needs to be outlined before elucidating the methodology and methods adopted for this thesis (See Figure 3.1).

### 3.1 Ontological Premises of This Study

Ontology has its basis in Philosophy and it relates to the worldview or the core belief of the researcher. The two broad and contrasting ontological positions are positivism and constructivism. In course of time more ontological stances developed, like pragmatism and advocacy or participatory knowledge claims which are a part of the critical realism movement. These ontological positions fall in the continuum between the extremity of positivism and constructivism. The major schools and approaches have been well classified by L. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2000) and this is replicated here (Sourced from Clough and Nutbrown (2012)). (See Table 3.1)

The social researcher is confronted with many options but must choose what best suits the purpose of the research.

“These paradigms are ultimately no more than post hoc descriptions of gross
Table 3.1: A comparison of major qualitative ontological schools of thought

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>NORMATIVE</strong> (Positivists)</th>
<th><strong>INTERPRETIVE</strong> (Social constructionists)</th>
<th><strong>CRITICAL REALISM</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Society and social system</td>
<td>The individual</td>
<td>Societies, groups, individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium/Large scale research</td>
<td>Small scale research</td>
<td>Small scale research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impersonal, anonymous forces regulating behavior</td>
<td>Human actions continuously re-creating social life</td>
<td>Political, ideological factors, power and interest shaping behaviours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model of natural sciences</td>
<td>Non-statistical</td>
<td>Ideology critique and action research</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Objectivity</strong></th>
<th><strong>Subjectivity</strong></th>
<th><strong>Collectivity</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research conducted ‘from the outside’</td>
<td>Personal involvement of the researcher</td>
<td>Participant researcher, researchers and facilitators</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Generalizing from the specific</strong></th>
<th><strong>Interpreting the specific</strong></th>
<th><strong>Critiquing the specific</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explaining behavior/ Seeking causes</td>
<td>Understanding action/ meanings rather than causes</td>
<td>Understanding, interrogating, critiquing, transforming actions and interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assuming the taken for granted</td>
<td>Investigating the taken for granted</td>
<td>Interrogating and critiquing the taken for granted</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Macro concepts – society, institutions, norms, positions, roles and expectations** | **Micro concepts – Individual perspective, constructs, negotiated, meanings, definitions of situations** | **Macro and micro concepts – political and ideological interests, operations of power** |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
| Structuralists | Phenomenologists, symbolic interactionists, ethnomethodologists | Critical theorists, action researchers, practitioner researchers |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technical interest</th>
<th>Practical interest</th>
<th>Emancipatory interest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Source: Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000)
characterization. . . . In addressing a task we do not adopt this or that methodology as such; rather, we again confront specific problems which we come to eventually locate in continually related- rather than opposed- ways of construing the world.” (Clough & Nutbrown, 2012) (pp.15)

Thus, the traditions of enquiry are not so rigidly demarcated and a pragmatic approach of what best suits the purpose of the study is necessary. However, it cannot be denied that the ontological stance governs the approach of the study. And the constraints of purpose and character of the study, in turn affect the ontological stance adopted. This ‘give and take’ has to be adequately discussed to provide a clearer comprehension of the methodology chosen for the study. In short, the purpose must govern the paradigm and the specific situation and phenomena being researched should govern the methods of research.

The broad domain of gender has social and historic construction and so a qualitative paradigm is needed for understanding it. There is also the purpose of making the research change-oriented, as is already stated in the purpose and aims of this study. The aims themselves presuppose an advocacy and pragmatic paradigm. The critical realism approach is broadly classified under the advocacy paradigm. Critical Realism introduced by Roy Bhaskar in the 1970s, is a more realistic approach to positivism and social constructionism. It believes that research must unearth the deeper structures and mechanisms that drive empirical phenomena. It is classified as a part of Advocacy or Participatory school of thought by some authors (Creswell, 2003). Bhaskar says that ontologically there are three domains to reality- the empirical reality (which is observable), the actual reality (which exists irrespective and independent of the researcher, and the real reality (which relates to events and other surface phenomena). Bhaskar believes science must explore the real domain and find the relationship of the real domain with the other domains. Real is that which has causal effect, according to critical realists. It affects behavior and it can be an action or an idea or a belief (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000). An understanding of the social reality of woman executives in India, in terms of these domains will not only create a deeper insight into the issues they face at work and at
3.1. **ONTOCLOGICAL PREMISES OF THIS STUDY**

home but also reveal possible solutions to their problems. The justification of this ontological stance is further elaborated. Figure 3.2 visually presents the arguments in favour of the ontological stance adopted for this study.

Feminist studies\(^1\) generally use the qualitative approach since they need to address issues of subtle marginalization and lead social change (Burns & Walker, 2005). Besides, it is realized that women’s experiences vary based on location, class, ethnicity and religious grouping. The western ideas of feminism do not correspond to Indian women. The diversity of India, coupled with the contradictory status of women in India, is further compounded due to modernization. Modernization too is not gender neutral and impacts women in different societal strata in different ways (Sharma, 2004; Aggarwal, 2007). Therefore there is a need to delineate the impact of different local factors that contribute to the marginalization of women. This study, which concentrates on the subtle biases that women face in organizations and the way they cope with work life balance, needs to necessarily use qualitative epistemologies.

The feminist lens, or feminist perspective, assumes that men and women differ in their perceptions of life due to the difference in their social status. Feminist research aims at providing a voice to women so that their perspective can be expressed, and ultimately social change or reconstruction can occur (Burns & Walker, 2005). The feminist research uses many methodologies, but it is predominantly interpretivist and constructivist in its ontology. Feminist research makes gender the centre of social inquiry. Making women visible and representing women’s perspectives are one of the major objectives (Harding, 1998). This study, too, is focused on women executives and aims at finding their perspectives about issues like bias and work life conflict.

Gender is a layered and complex concept. The Indian woman shaped and defined by a unique culture, social reality, and individual aspiration, needs to be approached with in-depth analysis. Critical realism has interest in the ‘deeper

\(^{1}\)I have not classified my study under feminist studies, though I share their motivation, because I am basically looking at management issues through a feminist lens. The marginalization of executive women, in corporate set up, is studied through an insider perspective.
Figure 3.2: The justification for the ontological premise of this study
dimension’, unlike positivism that tries to look at broad patterns through generalizations at a more surface level (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000). One of the aims of this study is to explore the deeper dimensions that affect women executives. Epistemologically, critical research aims to uncover the relationship between experiences, events, and mechanisms. It is not predictive. It questions the causes of a phenomenon in terms of its specific nature (Jeppesen, 2005).

Social structures lie beyond the intention and sometimes consciousness of the individual. Critical researchers believe that societal phenomena are objective, unlike the social constructionists. This ‘real’ is what needs to be understood because what is ‘real’ affects or causes events (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000). In this case the social and organizational realities of women executives in India cause the differences in their relations, power, and status.

Social reality is influenced by many factors and is still constantly undergoing many changes. The ancient culture of India and its spiritual outlook blends with global values in liberalized India, creating a different reality for Indian executive women, who perhaps come face to face with this duality when they take up responsible positions in corporate India. Critical researchers acknowledge the slow-changing, emergent and relational quality of social reality, and neither make it too individualistic (by focusing only on the individual) or too holistic (by focusing on the collective only) (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000). Hence this study aims at understanding the various relational and emergent factors that influence the Indian women executives. India, being a huge country with diverse subcultures, a large number of women had to be approached to mark the study pan-India, and as such interviews are chosen as the tool to identify and comprehend the underlying factors which affect them.

Critical realism also distinguishes structure from agency. Structure impacts and informs human action. This way, it is believed that understanding the structure allows an enlarged space to agency (Due Billing & Alvesson, 2000). An understanding of the deeper dimensions of structure that the social and organizational reality of women executives create, will inform the strategies they can employ to achieve better work life balance. It will also help to understand
to what extent their attitude and others’ attitudes are responsible for the subtle gender biases faced by them at work places.

Personal beliefs play a critical role in the research paradigm. Since human values, attitudes and beliefs precondition what is observed, every person accordingly brings his or her lens, which is conditioned by nationality, culture, social background and individual personality. My background of interest in Indian transcendental philosophy has much to do with the appeal that critical research approach has to me. This could be because it takes the middle path acknowledging both extremes of beliefs. It also asserts a reality that is transcendent of viewpoints. Personally, I am interested in the concept of a holistic personality, which combines both masculine and feminine qualities and consequently gives a person a wider range of efficacy and efficiency. A similar concept in Indian philosophy- Ardhanareshwar exists, and its practical application needs to be explored. The Ardhnareshwar principle reconciles and unites the masculine and feminine power without undermining either. The Supreme Godhead or power transcends gender. “Mythology describes Rudra being born as an androgyne at the behest of Lord Brahma the creator. The right half of this resplendent being represents the male and the left half represents the female, these two halves have no procreative association. In fact they represent a wholeness of being which transcends gender” (Kramrisch, 1981). In the recent literature on androgyny, Bem (1981) regards the androgynous individual as adaptive, flexible and effective in particular interpersonal contexts. She says, “An androgynous individual can be both instrumental (assertive, competitive, independent) and expressive (warm, nurturant, compassionate, supportive), depending upon the demands of the situation” (Zanetti, 2002). This belief of mine, which affects the research process, is in consonance with the critical realist’s belief in the actual reality which is different from the empirical or real reality.\(^2\)

\(^2\)The concept of actual reality was used by Roy Bhaskar to indicate underlying structures in society independent of the actual and empirical domain, and not in a transcendental sense. But in principle, its format is based on a concept in Indian philosophy which believes that the divine qualities of a human being are beyond gender and are above sex roles. And this reality is independent of the actual or observable nature of the human being. While these two concepts are far away from each other and are not strictly comparable, their basic pattern is
3.1. ONTOLOGICAL PREMISES OF THIS STUDY

I feel that the true solution lies in developing a human being, male or female being a secondary consideration. The individual identity must be more important than gender. However, it does not imply that the power of the psychic strength in a woman could not be undermined. Perhaps an intra-personal empowerment of women will ensure not only external freedom but also respect, because women will be able to discharge their role in a better manner. The prospect of self-realization may realize more than equality with men, it may enable her to transcend the limited gender identity and expand the identity of an inclusive-human being. I believe that an understanding of the obstacles women executives face and the various factors that affect them, will help me to get an insight into how true empowerment can be effected. Though this is not the sole objective of the present study, which is more exploratory (and emancipation oriented) in nature, nevertheless it is the underlying motive which prompted me to pick this area. The deeper motivations of women executives, as they contend with social, organizational and structural limitations, develop them. In seeking external agency, they also internally empower themselves. Understanding this phenomenon is facilitated through this study.

I also believe that at the core, human behavior, despite all its diversity, has some basic common elements, which prompts the conduct of research studies tailored to specific and contextual situations and subjects. It allows us to distill all the relevant information which can make sense to a larger audience, divorced from that specific situation. If an essential commonality in human experience did not exist, knowledge gained in specific situations would bear no relevance to other people. Social constructionists maintain that reality consists of multiple and often disjointed truths and meta truths do not exist. Critical realism, because of its belief in social change and impact, permits a degree of reductionism or generalization.

I am also aware that there is an inherent weakness in adhering rigidly to one school of thought or philosophical approach. The classifications sometimes oversimplify and thwart researchers from the desired openness that is required.
in the research process (Heywood & Stronach, 2005). So an attempt will be consciously made to factor in diverse points of view to ensure dynamic balance in the study.

### 3.2 Epistemological Premise

The method of seeking knowledge is called epistemological premises of the study. It aims at distinguishing between adequate and inadequate knowledge. It deals with the nature, sources and limits of knowledge (Klein, 1998). The ontological belief informs the epistemology, so the basic modes of knowing based on the ontological belief systems are described briefly before considering the conflicting issues in the process of knowing in critical realism. (Figure 3.3 presents a mind map of the different schools of thought and the epistemological issues involved in this study).

Critical theorists and the social constructivists assume that the researcher and the subject are interlinked and mutually influence each other. The findings are ‘value mediated’. The values of the researcher and of the ‘situated other’ affect each other and the enquiry. The demarcation between epistemology and ontology blurs. The findings are created in the inquiry process in the constructivist theory and so interaction produces knowledge while the critical realists look at impact of values on findings and the subjectivity it creates (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The epistemological questions to be considered while using the critical realist stand revolve around certain issues. The first issue is that of generalization and contextuality. Socio cultural factors are embedded and situational. The way to get knowledge therefore is through deep understanding (Vaara & Knuttila, 1999). Social research, which uses qualitative methods, is seen with suspicion due to its subjective interpretation. While non-qualitative research proves its trustworthiness by establishing internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity. The rigour in critical research is ensured through establishing credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability (Guba, Lincoln, et al., 1994). Gender research has always preferred a qualitative stance
3.2. EPISTEMOLOGICAL PREMISE

Figure 3.3: The epistemological premise of this study
wherein quantitative generalizations have been viewed with disfavor. But this is being questioned by more pragmatic approaches, which believe that to arrive at a holistic picture about phenomenon; both approaches can be used (Oakley, 1999).

The second issue is about causality. Positivists and post positivists believe in a direct relationship between cause and effect and so their epistemology seeks to establish the regularity in patterns that occur in phenomena. They wish to enhance predictability and therefore make generalizations based on statistical regularity. The constructivists and critical realists who acknowledge the multi factors, visible and invisible, which affect a phenomenon, speak of mechanisms, trends, and tendencies. They sometimes discard the causal language completely but it robs them of the ability to make their research actionable (Vaara, 1999). Gender research, which aims at emancipatory action, must embrace a broader concept of causality, which weds the two extreme approaches. It should draw a few tentative generalizations from the mechanisms observed Oakley (1999).

Critical research, which accepts the concept of a ‘real’ phenomenon independent of the actors, believes that social practices include some tangible elements and some discursive ones. Critical research promotes judgmental relativism, which claims that there is one reality with multiple interpretations; and so cross comparing these multiple angles will reveal thick descriptions that can inform decision making or action (Fleetwood & Ackroyd, 2004).

The third issue is about conceptualization in contrast to description. Conceptualization is often associated with simplification and generalization, while narration and description are considered more subjective and contextual in content (Vaara, 1999). Conversations and descriptions also have rationality and are effective tools in understanding gendering processes. Interview analysis and generalizations help in achieving particular changes in society that are useful.

The last issue is that of value. A value neutral approach is not possible in critical realism. In fact the value laden nature of the approach is what distinguishes it. The respecting of voice (in this case of women) itself is a value stand (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000). Social research by nature is political.
and purposive and positional (Clough & Nutbrown, 2012). Hence the value mediated stance needs to be acknowledged and described. The epistemological stance in this study is best answered in Table 3.2. The choice of the pluralistic epistemological stance is discussed in Appendix A. The elements of this table are taken from multiple sources. (Tuli, 2011; Guba et al., 1994; Oakley, 1999).

Knowledge can basically be approached in two ways: inductively or deductively. When the researcher starts with a theory, forms an hypothesis, and checks it up in the context of study objects, it is a deductive approach. In contrast to this, the inductive approach begins with the study object and leads to theory generation (Dahlberg & McCaig, 2010). In studying women executives and the coping strategies they employ to handle work life issues and the biases they perceive, I will use both the approaches.

Having outlined the epistemological stance of the study, the next task is to outline the methodological premises of the study.

### 3.3 Methodological Premise

Methodology refers to the strategic plan of research while methods refer to the techniques and tools. If methodology is the recipe then the methods are ingredients according to (Clough & Nutbrown, 2012). The quantitative procedures are usually associated with experiments, questionnaires, survey and experiments (Oakley, 1999). Given the complexity of the qualitative process, there are many approaches to it. (See Figure 3.4)

Qualitative studies are often contrasted with quantitative studies and there are vociferous supporters for each of them. The adherents view these methodological perspectives to be inimical to each other. The basic views of the two schools as given by Reichardt and Cook as cited by (Oakley, 1999) is given in Table 3.3

The rigid differentiation between these two paradigms is seen with disfavor by some social researchers who think that the demarcation defeats the purpose of research. “It is time to move beyond the confines of the dialectical language
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is the relationship between the knower and what is known?</td>
<td>Personal contact and interaction is necessary. Establishing rapport with the subject is important. An insider perspective and not a disinterested observer. (Tuli, 2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do we know what we know?</td>
<td>Through first hand information and truthful reporting of what is said by the participant. Quotes from actual conversations need to be included.(Merriam et al., 1998; Tuli, 2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What counts as knowledge?</td>
<td>Patterns of human behavior which are created out of an evolving, meaning system that people create as they socially interact. (Neuman, 2003 cited in (Tuli, 2011) [pp100])</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the nature of knowledge?</td>
<td>Structural insights based on individual information combining around consensus (Guba et al., 1994)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does knowledge accumulate?</td>
<td>Generalization by similarities. A generalization of cultural, social, organizational and factors that is similar across the gender circumstance or setting. Knowledge grows through dialectic process and not in an absolute sense (Guba et al., 1994)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the criteria to judge the trustworthiness of the inquiry?</td>
<td>Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. (Guba et al., 1994)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the role of values in the study?</td>
<td>Values are important and they shape the interpretation of the inquirer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the place of ethics?</td>
<td>Ethics is important. Researcher must have informed consent of the participant. Other issues include confidentiality and anonymity of the participant.(Guba et al., 1994)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What “voice” is given importance?</td>
<td>The inquirer’s voice is that of the ‘transformative intellectual’ in critical realism and that of a ‘passionate participant’ in the constructivist theory. My stance is in between these two. I wish to facilitate the multi voice reconstruction (mine and the other participants) and develop insights into the existing state of affairs for executive women who face subtle biases at work and home and struggle to achieve work life balance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the scope of the conceptual framework?</td>
<td>The pure critical realists and constructivists do not believe that there exists commensurability between the two paradigms of realists and constructivists (Guba et al., 1994). However there are others who think that they can be accommodated and the focal point of their accommodation is purpose and not method (Oakley, 1999). Mixed methodologies are gaining credence as more researchers are adopting it (Creswell, 2003).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (Tuli, 2011; Guba et al., 1994; Oakley, 1999)
Table 3.3: A comparison of attributes of qualitative and quantitative methodology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualitative Paradigm</th>
<th>Quantitative Paradigm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advocates the use of qualitative methods</td>
<td>Advocates the use of quantitative methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phenomenologism: concerned with understanding behaviour from actors’ own frames of reference</td>
<td>Logical positivism: seeks the facts/causes of social phenomena</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naturalistic and uncontrolled observation</td>
<td>Obtrusive and controlled measurement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective</td>
<td>Objective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close to the data: the ‘insider’ perspective</td>
<td>Removed from the data: the ‘outsider’ perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grounded, discovery oriented, exploratory, expansionist, descriptive, inductive</td>
<td>Ungrounded, verification oriented, reductionistic, hypothetico-deductive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process-oriented</td>
<td>Outcome-oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid: real, rich, deep data</td>
<td>Reliable: hard and replicable data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ungeneralizable: single case studies</td>
<td>Generalizable: multiple case studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holistic</td>
<td>Particularistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumes a dynamic reality</td>
<td>Assumes a stable reality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Oakley (1999, pp.157),
about the advantages and disadvantages of ‘qualitative’ and ‘quantitative’ methods. We need to examine all methods from the viewpoint of the same questions about trustworthiness, to consider how best to match methods to research questions, and to find ways of integrating a range of methods in carrying out socially useful inquiries”. (Oakley, 1999), [pp. 167]. The pragmatists feel that the purpose of research is more important than the ontological or epistemological basis and urge adaptation of any method based on the characteristic features of the research project. It is believed that distinction between the paradigms is epistemic and in practice the researcher uses both theory and data and thinks both inductively and deductively. But the methodological traditions have different roots and a careless mixing of methods can lead to serious errors (Dahlberg & McCaig, 2010). 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. The basic difference between the two methods is...
perhaps the fact that quantitative methods explore breadth, and are useful to compare or contrast groups or sets of data, while qualitative methods aim at deepening meaning and uncovering nuances and subtle differences. It does not lend itself to be used in rigorous comparing. Using both is to take full advantage of the methodological repertoire. So, having given the word of caution, one cannot deny the depth and dimension added to the research when the research design uses both the methods (Clough & Nutbrown, 2012). It was also felt that biases in one method are overcome by the use of the other method (Creswell, 2003).

The next logical step is to deliberate on how the two paradigms can be mixed. Triangulation or seeking convergence between the two methodological paradigms is done in three ways. They are classified as sequential triangulation (Wherein one method informs the other in sequential order), concurrent triangulation (wherein the researcher uses both methods to comprehensively analyze it by nesting results of each method), and transformative triangulation (wherein the researcher has an overall design, a framework that accommodates the methods and the outcomes of the study. This can be sequential or concurrent in approach.) (Creswell, 2003). The pragmatic approach of reconciling methods is not however without pitfalls and so a careful consideration of how exactly they are mixed must be stated in the research design. Based on the lines of how exactly the mix of methods is achieved by Creswell (2003), a summary is created in the figure 3.5 given here.

Finally the methodological premise for this study on women executives in corporate setting is discussed below.

3.3.1 Methodological Premises of This Study

Based on the ontological stance of critical realism, the related methodology for this study is based on Layder’s Adaptive theory. While grounded theory is used by most researchers (of the critical realism school), it has its limitations. It concentrates on micro phenomena and so its application to macro structures
is limited. Most micro phenomena are influenced by macro factors in the field setting itself and hence cannot be ignored. Grounded theory concentrates on situated interpersonal factors, ignoring the bigger factors like national culture, social expectations which affect the actors and the setting subtly (Layder, 1998). The focus on agency without analyzing the systemic and macro influences will defeat the purpose of agency. Besides, the focus on mere voice will lead to detailed narratives if it is not distilled from the macro factors that colour it. Critical realism makes a distinction between real, actual and empirical domains. Roy Bhaskar calls the underlying structures and mechanisms which generate events and behaviours as real. The real domain is independent of other domains. The actual domain consists of events that are observable. They are triggered by the real domain. The experienced domain is the empirical domain (Bhaskar, 1989). When applied to the study on women executives in corporate India, one can theorize that the underlying social, cultural and economic factors trigger the biases women executives face in organizations and at home, which in turn leads to certain behaviours. (See Figure 3.6)

Layder’s Adaptive theory, though in consonance with critical realism in terms of bringing a scientific methodology into social research, departs from it in terms of method as it embraces the macro factors into its analysis (Carlsson,
3.3. METHODOLOGICAL PREMISE

Figure 3.6: The adaptation of Roy Bhaskar’s ontology to the present study

The elements\textsuperscript{3} of Layder’s theory can be described in the following points.

- The social world can be approached through many ontological stances as it is layered and operates on multiple domains. Therefore methodological plurality is justified.

- Social research is concerned with objective, pre-constituted factors and subjectively created factors by the actions of the actors.

- Openness to theory and variety in methodology (and yet being cognizant of their epistemological roots) is necessary. Prior theory must guide the research and empiricist data must also inform it.

- Abandoning social theory in research processes will lead to mere description of data and abandoning objective parts of society will obscure the systemic part of society (Layder, 1998).

Layder’s adaptive theory has been used in many organizational studies too and is not exclusive to social research. The model used by Carlsson (2004) in IS research (which is adapted from Layder, 1993) is used with changes for this study. (See figure 3.7)

The context in this study refers to the real domain, the underlying structures which trigger events - such as macro factors like gender, socio-cultural history

\textsuperscript{3}Though there are eight elements described by Layder in his book ‘Sociological Practice: linking theory and social research’ (1998), I have quoted four elements relevant to my methodological stance.
Figure 3.7: The adaptation of Layder’s model to the present study

Source: Adaptation of Layder’s model from Carlsson (2004)
and globalization, etc., which play out their influences on the setting and actors. The setting refers to more immediate environment, like the workplace or home or the transit-place between home and workplace, where women executives face issues. They may not be necessarily patterned but nevertheless outline the experience. The situated activity refers to the actual interaction that the actors have with their environment. It consists of the dynamic interaction among family and the woman executive, the colleagues, subordinates and bosses at work place. It takes into account the particular behavior or action of the woman executive and its effect on the interaction with the actors in the work place and home. The self relates to the individual’s understanding of his/her situation. In this case the women executive’s perception regarding her situation and her way of dealing with them, defines her ‘self’. The mental and physical strategies involved in dealing with the situated activity form her response to it (Carlsson, 2004).

Layder’s model is used more as a frame work to layer the influences on women executives, the actual interaction between the structures and agency is examined using Bourdieu’s Theory of ‘Structure’ and ‘Performative agency’ of Mc Nay. The agency–structure perspective can provide an insight into the perception of work life conflicts and the coping strategies of Indian women executives. Particular behavioral strategies are shaped by the capacity to act independently (agency), and the recurrent patterns or arrangements in society and culture, which affect or hinder the opportunities available (structure). Structuration theory believes that the actors are embedded in the social structure, which shapes their perceptions and they in turn, shape and evolve their social system or circumstance.(Giddens, 1984; Bourdieu, 1977; Archer, 2010). This dynamic interchange between agency and structure explains how people internalize the external structure and how this influences their practices. It also encompasses the actions of actors who invent and improvise within the boundaries of the structure and end up challenging the very structures that define them(Bourdieu, 1977). The contest on the primacy of structure or agency exists in sociologists. Social ontology grapples with question of the composi-
tion of the social world. The classical theorists believe that structure of the society is more powerful and shapes individuals while the methodological individualists believe that actors are central to social systems and the structure is a result of their actions. Midway to these schools of thought, lie sociologists like Pierre Bourdieu and Berger & Luckmann, who try to reconcile this dichotomous view. Bourdieu’s theory describes the impact of ‘field’ and ‘habitus’ on agents and presents a dialectic between the two. Agents ‘internalize the external’ and ‘externalize the internal’. Antony Giddens in the theory of Structuration says ‘social structure is the medium and result of social action’. He uses the term ‘reflexivity’ to describe how agents consciously alter their position in the social structure. He says that the globalized era has provided for greater reflexivity. This latent emancipatory idea is of significance for the analysis of gender in globalized India (Jones, 2004; Sulkunen, 1982)

I will primarily use Lois Mc Nay’s concept of ‘Performative agency’ to understand women executives’ agency and gender identity, but the description of the structure in terms of ‘habitus’ and ‘field’ is useful to clarify agency. Mc Nay looks at gender as a lived-in-social-relation. She avoids the ontological conflict between material and cultural analysts of social structure and between those who consider structure or agency on absolute grounds. Mc Nay does not endorse all of Bourdieu’s views but does consider his idea of phenomenology of social space. According to Bourdieu the errors of subjectivist approach (which suffers from substantialist illusion) and objectivist approach (which disregards agency) are avoided if representations of actors and the impact of these representations on their actions are analyzed. Social phenomenology studies perception and expression of actors and not abstract structures and economic forces (McNay, 2000). According to McNay, though analysis of experience does not offer a complete picture it is still better than examining only the structures removed from the immediacy of experience. It is in this sense that the accounts of the women executives present an interesting and rich area to explore agency, gender, reflexivity and ‘habitus’. (The social theories considered for this study and their critical analysis are given in Apendix A)
3.4. METHODS

Further a mixed methodology is used and triangulation is achieved by concurrently using quantitative and qualitative methods, both of which would present an all-inclusive picture of women executives in India.

3.4 Methods

The tools of qualitative research are usually surveys and experiments, and structured interviews, because they choose to determine causative patterns. They use measurement and observation and prove or disprove hypotheses. They generate numeric data and conduct replicable experiments. The generalizations formed involve deductive reasoning and reduction to specific variables. The instruments of research are predetermined and standardized. The tools of qualitative research are more open ended and data are emergent in nature. Popularly used tools include interviews, content analysis of text or image or conversations and observation techniques. They allow greater freedom to the respondent or participant, as compared to quantitative tools, which are restrictive in expression. Consequently, qualitative tools generate rich data which are unique and in depth, but not necessarily generalizable (Creswell, 2003; Dahlberg & McCaig, 2010). However, the difference among the tools is blurred in actual practice, though it is much emphasized in epistemology and methodology. Qualitative considerations enter the making of questionnaires and rating scales and quantification is done in analyzing qualitative data to determine the strength of the variable. However the method of collecting data and the generalizations drawn are affected by the tools used (Dahlberg & McCaig, 2010).

3.5 Research Design

The overarching strategy is called a research design. The strategy determines the tactical decisions taken by the researcher to approach and analyze the study. The goals, the research questions, the methods and the methodological framework must be aligned (Dahlberg & McCaig, 2010). (The details are presented
The strategic blueprint of this study is governed by the purpose of this study, which is about gender bias and work life balance issues faced by women executives in India. The views and opinions of women executives regarding these issues is what the study aims at exploring. At the heart of this research design is Layder’s adaptive theory, which is rooted in the ontology of the critical realist school. It is adopted as the blueprint of this study owing to the multiple reasons which are enumerated below.

- Social reality, which surrounds women executives, is layered and needs to be explored to get insight into the mechanics that trigger the biases or conflicts.

- Context, which is the impact of socio-cultural history and globalization in India, is independent of the women executives but does impact their
3.5. RESEARCH DESIGN

agency. Understanding the context and how it informs their situation can give them a larger arena of agency.

- The coping strategies used by women (though very unique) may give insights into how actually agency is achieved and what coping strategies are successful. So a certain degree of generalization too is possible which may be of help to the aspiring women executives.

- Prior theory/research can determine the study and it need not strictly emerge from data as it is believed in the grounded theory. The Adaptive theory favours the use of mixed methodology which satisfies the twin objectives of depth and generalization (Layder, 1998; Carlsson, 2004).

The literature survey was first used to create a gender construct, which identified the factors which affect women executives and problems they face while playing dual roles of parent and boss. The key issues were found to be work life balance and gender bias. Based on this understanding the research questions were prepared. Since a mixed methodology was adopted, interviews and survey were used to collect data. (Details of which are given in the subsequent section).

Layder’s model was used to layer and understand data. Each layer of the model is informed by different sources. The literature survey is used to describe the various macro factors that affect women executives and provide the ‘context’ to the study. In order to ensure that the socio-cultural factors identified by literature survey are relevant to women executives in the Indian context, questions were included in the survey which was administered. The next layer in Layder’s model namely ‘setting’ was analysed using literature survey, questionnaire responses and direct personal interview responses. The third layer of analysis namely ‘situated activity’ which, includes the interaction of women executives with various actors in the situated activity is derived mainly from interview responses. Literature survey was then used to substantiate it. The description of interactions also include the analysis of specific coping strategies that women executives use. The last layer of Layder’s model, ‘self’ relates to
CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

the role definition and self perception of the women executives. Again, thick descriptions from interview responses were used to understand the ‘self’ of women executives. The survey responses to preferred actions to deal with work life issues was triangulated with the interview responses, and literature survey was used to analyse it.

3.5.1 Gender Construct (Based on Prior Research)

Gender bias and work life conflicts are affected by many variables. It was first necessary to identify these variables. For this purpose I undertook a rigorous literature survey and identified the different issues in work life balance and the different types of bias already identified in other studies. This formed my gender construct, which helped me to design the tools necessary for the study. A construct is an image or abstract idea specifically invented for a given research. It is hypothetical and is presumed to exist till it is tested (Donald Cooper, 2010). The reason behind such an exercise is that the studying of women executives, needs the consideration of the all the variables that affect them. These variables also affect each other. Delineating them makes the next steps in research process easier. The detailed gender construct is depicted in a diagram, highlights the areas identified in the literature survey. (See Figure 3.9)

3.5.2 Mixed Methodology

From the very conception of the idea of this research I was particular that the study must contribute in a practical way to women executives, who are the subject of this study. For this it was necessary to understand subtle bias from the point of view of the women executives themselves who contend with it. While organizations do address gender inclusion and gender friendly agendas, though many educated women have greater opportunity in liberalized India, the total number of women at the top level is less as compared to men. To unearth subtle pressures that operate, I did gravitate to a qualitative paradigm in my research design. However pure qualitative studies do not lend themselves to generaliza-
Figure 3.9: The detailed gender construct
tions and since a motive of advocacy also exists I adopted a mixed paradigm. In order to mix the two methods I used a concurrent triangulation strategy, where the same topics are addressed by two different methods, which help to arrive at a more holistic picture. The ratio of mixing was a 50%-50% when I began my study, but the response to my questionnaire was not as I expected while interviewing was more successful in terms of the response from women executives. The reason for this is probably the fact that top executives are usually time constrained and prefer an interview to answering a questionnaire. Yet another reason could be the fact that research in India is of varying quality so the tendency to participate in sponsored research/media driven research is greater, which excludes individual, academic researchers. I was also faced with the fact that my study being pan-India needs a substantive number from each area. Given these constraints, I settled for an 80%-20% ratio, so the qualitative insight from interviews forms the bulk of my data and the quantitative output is used more for a corroboration of methods to establish validity and a guarded generalization. A complete generalization is not advisable but certainly a degree of knowledge regarding the prevalence of the biases and conflicts is possible. So the dominant tool of this study is qualitative.

The method of triangulation as envisaged is concurrent triangulation. Both forms of data were collected concurrently. The questionnaire was answered by 90 women executives and 105 women executives were interviewed. However the overlap that occurred among these two groups happens to be only a small number amounting to 10 executives.

3.5.3 Qualitative Tools

Bias has to be understood vicariously from the standpoint of those who confront it. For this an exploration of their ‘voice’ is necessary. A qualitative tool is appropriate to gain insight. Interviews are suitable when face to face interaction is necessary and participant history and views are necessary. Semi structured interviews are more suited when issues of uniformity are considered
as the researcher has control over the line of questioning and inter comparison of interviews is possible. It also allows flexibility when required. When the researchers want to go in depth and cross-question, it is permitted in semi structured interviews. The problems of interviewing are that the responses are filtered through the views of the interviewee and the researcher’s presence also biases the information provided. Besides, all respondents are not articulate or perceptive to the same degree (Creswell, 2003). A semi-structured interview was designed from the variables found in the gender construct. (A sample of the designed interview areas/questions is included in Appendix B). Since bias and work life conflicts are governed by certain mechanisms, which create the particular set of constraints or barriers for women executives, who I believe are independent of women executives and commonly faced by many women. This, in one sense creates uniformity, despite the fact that the women executives belong to different industries, age groups, and positions. Yet, in order to make sure that their uniqueness is not overlooked, flexibility to probe deeper was necessary. The semi-structured tool looked appropriate for this purpose (Dahlberg & McCaig, 2010).

### 3.5.4 Quantitative Tools

Adaptive theory believes that prior research and theory can inform present research and theory. It gives a basic framework to begin research. The gender construct helped me to determine the key areas and construct the questions in my survey. The survey identifies the existence of the biases and the extent of prevalence in corporate India. The survey has economy of design and has rapid turnaround in data collection (Creswell, 2003). The survey tool was chosen so as to make valid generalizations and also to know how relevant the variables are. To make any generalization, a large number of executive women from different parts of India and in different industries were chosen. The survey for women executives was administered on line. It is cross-sectional and data were collected at one point of time. The sample is stratified by industry, age and marital status.
The survey instrument was a self-administered questionnaire, the sample of which is included in Appendix C. Respondents were initially solicited and then the link to the questionnaire was sent to them. A follow up and reminder was sent after 15 days of the request. After a month another reminder was sent. However the response rate was not that encouraging. A survey was developed for the men executives too which was administered to a few male executives, with a view to validating the questionnaire and detecting bias, if any, in the survey questions.

**Sampling**

The sampling details for both the qualitative and quantitative data are explained in terms of process of sampling and the stratification of sample. The total number of women working in top positions or as managers is a smaller number as compared to men. In the beginning, a few women executives from each industry were approached and then the sample snowballed from these key respondents. This technique is advocated by Layder’s (1998) adaptive theory as flexible sampling suits the unfolding character of the research. For the survey too, contacts snowballed. To make generalizations, probability sampling is preferable but random sampling for executive women is difficult as the number of them is low, and access is also difficult. So the HR heads, Head hunters or other important heads in a few industries were approached and their help was solicited to approach women executives. The respondents or the interviewees would then provide more contacts. A total of 90 women answered the questionnaire (completely) and 135 women participated in the interview. 105 were chosen based on the completeness of their interview responses. (The list of key interviewees is given in Appendix D.) Usually qualitative studies are focused on a smaller number and such a huge number may seem out of place. There are two reasons for this choice of big number. Firstly, the study is pan-India, and so to ensure that the impact of variables of place, industry, and position are taken into account the sample had to be large. Secondly there was a greater
availability of women in certain sectors and there were very few in other sectors. The large sample for interviews helped in detecting and analyzing the causes of this pattern, which could be compared with the survey sample to further the generalizability and validity of the findings. Later I stratified the sample in terms of position and industry. In general, stratification of the universe contributes to the efficiency of sampling if it establishes classes that are internally homogeneous but heterogeneous with respect to the characteristics being studied (Bhandarkar, Wilkinson, & Laldas, 2010).

**Sampling details for the survey and for the interview**

The distribution of the interview sample and the survey sample in terms of industry to which the women executives belong is given in figure 3.10 and 3.11. The percentages are calculated on a total of 105 women executives for the interview and 90 for the survey.

The sampling reflects the fact that more women are in the IT, Banking, Finance and Services sector as compared to manufacturing at higher levels. This is in keeping with other research too.

The position wise distribution of women executives in the interview sample
Figure 3.11: The industrywise distribution of the interview sample

and the survey sample are given here. (See figure 3.12). The interview sample has a lesser number of upper middle level executives (23% of senior managers), while the survey sample has a greater number of middle and upper middle level of executives (27% of managers and senior managers). There is a predominance of very top levels (67%) in the interview sample, as against only 44% in the survey sample.

The samples of interview and survey are also analyzed in terms of geographic location (Figure 3.13). The interview was conducted in six major metropolitan cities in India (Mumbai, Chennai, Bangalore, Gurgaon, Delhi and Hyderabad). The on line survey was pan India and location was not asked. Instead other demographic details like marital status, age, number of children, age of children, spouse details, parental background etc. were asked. These will be used while analyzing the quantitative part of work life balance.
### Figure 3.12: The positionwise distribution of the interview and survey sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Survey Sample</th>
<th>Interview Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senior Manager/SC</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managers/Consultants</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MD/CEO/Director/PRES</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VP/HEAD/GM</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AVP/DGM</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Figure 3.13: The citywise distribution of the interview sample

- Mumbai: 40%
- Chennai: 24%
- Bangalore: 12%
- Hyderabad: 8%
- Delhi: 7%
- Gurgaon: 10%
- Other: 8%


3.6 Research Process

Access was gained through known executives, both men and women (convenience sampling) and this later snowballed into many more contacts. The response was overwhelming for the interviews. A mail would be sent in advance with a brief description of the study, a consent form and the interview schedule. The women executives would then schedule a date for the interview. I would take permission to record the interview and reiterate confidentiality and anonymity. The interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder and the participants would also permit me to take pictures of them (some of them refused to take a picture). The interviews were transcribed verbatim and used for the purpose of data analysis.

For the survey, questions were created from the gender construct. Questionnaires were made for men and women executives on the same issues. The questionnaire was tested on a few women executives, who gave a lot of constructive suggestions and criticisms. It was also shown to other experts for their opinion and comment. The responses were collected online. The survey respondents also were approached through contacts, and mails requesting them to oblige was sent with a letter describing the study, its purpose, and the time limit for their response. The informed consent form assuring confidentiality and anonymity was also sent. Many reminders had to be sent periodically to ensure response. However the response was poor compared to the interviews. The response rate of online surveys is usually lesser than interviews where personal engagement is possible (Dahlberg & McCaig, 2010).

3.6.1 Limitation of the Research Design

Qualitative studies are criticized on many grounds, chief among them being lack of uniformity and a high degree of subjectivity in the research procedure and observations (Creswell, 2003). The researcher’s point of view cannot be separated from the process of the study. This subjectivity makes generalizations suspect. However in the recent past qualitative research has gained legitimacy
Qualitative research takes place in natural setting. So the researcher can develop a detailed understanding of the situation and also be involved in the situation of the participant.

Qualitative methods use multiple methods that are humanistic and interactive. The researcher must not disturb the setting and must be sensitive to the participant. The researcher needs to use a vast array of materials to record information and observation.

Qualitative research is emergent. It evolves and so questions change and are refined over a period of time. What begins as initial codes develops into themes then into a broad interpretation.

It is fundamentally interpretative. His personal lens filters data.

It provides panoramic views of social phenomenon because it is holistic in nature.

The qualitative researcher uses complex reasoning that is multifaceted, iterative and simultaneous.

The qualitative researcher indulges in reflexivity. Her personal self becomes inseparable from her researcher self.

Unlike quantitative methodology wherein bias can be removed or reduced, qualitative research cannot avoid bias. “Qualitative research is necessarily biased – the researcher participates in the research and takes a stand and (whether aware or unaware) colors the results and interpretations of results with his or her own mindset” (Fielden, 2003). So the researcher must acknowledge bias. This honesty will help the researcher to become objective in looking at inherent bias. Olesen (2007) suggests that when the researcher becomes aware of
the 'cultural self' there is an additional set of resources upon which to draw in interpreting qualitative research results. The stance of internal objectivity and the ability to see one's own prejudices must be there throughout the process of research. Krieger (1991) states that realization of the self is fundamental to qualitative research. She also suggests that this realization of self is evoked through reflexivity and the related issues of subjectivity in the research process. Since qualitative research is subjective and susceptible to human error and bias in data collection and interpretation, exacting methodology is a must. Rigour in the quantitative and qualitative methodology is a must.

3.6.2 Rigour in Qualitative Research

Issues of voice and reflexivity, context sensitivity and empathic neutrality are of importance in qualitative research to achieve a true or dependable insight. These issues should be a part of the design, process and the analysis of data (Patton, 1980). I will now describe each of these issues and how they have come up in my study.

**Design Flexibility**- My initial road map was more ambitious in terms of scope. Along the way of my research journey, I discovered that a 'flexible openness with tolerance for ambiguity' was important (Patton, 1980). People who promise to give you time may not do so. Suddenly new contacts open up. I expected a greater response in the online survey, which did not happen despite many responses, but there was an overwhelming response to the interview requests. These changes had to be accommodated through modifications in the research approach.

**Empathic Neutrality**- The researcher’s cognitive stance and emotional stance can colour the data completely. It affects not only perception but also analysis. Objectivity, which is the strength of scientific methods, is doubted now and even science is not considered value free. However, even subjectivity is seen with suspicion and doubt. “The terms objectivity and subjectivity have become ideological ammunition in methodological paradigm debate.” says Patton
So to attain credibility, which is the purpose of all research; one must make sure that one has no particular theory to prove, or agenda to achieve. One must be open to see things as they unfold, and be true to the complexities that appear. This is not easy to achieve. Maintaining reflexivity at every stage, by consciously examining how one perceives what one sees, is one thing that must continue in the research process and reporting. Reflexivity involves introspection, honesty about the bias one brings to the study, and sensitivity to how these factors shape the study (Creswell, 2003). For instance, I found that my mode of dressing (which is a traditional Indian dress code (sari) affected the response of the women executives as they judged my probable acceptance to what they will say. Many times, I had to sense this dynamic and subvert it by actively voicing my openness to their way of being or their stance in life. I also found that my academic background reduced the fear of being reported wrongly. They were more wary of media or organization-sponsored research studies. Other than reflexivity, triangulation with multiple data and systematic data collection help in maintaining neutrality and consequently credibility.

This study is about subtle biases that women face in society and organizations. It is about women and for women and essentially uses a feminist lens of enquiry. Feminist theorists believe that the social construction of gender and gendered consciousness cause the problematic of gender in society (Burns & Walker, 2005). To understand how this happens exactly, the ‘voice’ of women needs to be heard. So this study is devoted to understanding the issue from the perspective of the woman. (It is also important to note that since it is also being conducted by a woman, the perspective could vary if a man were to conduct the same research. What I am implying is that being a woman influences the responses of the woman executives and also the perspective of the researcher). While it is true that research should be non-sexist to be credible, the specific problem of women has to be heard in her voice, her perspective, and this feminist standpoint must inform social knowledge.

**Context Sensitivity**- The setting of the interview, the mood of the interviewee, the interruptions of work and other factors influence the response
obtained. I have maintained field notes to be sensitive to context and incorporated this in my writing. Since many of the topics were sensitive, I would request to meet the executive in a private setting where they could be at ease in discussing personal issues. Rigour in qualitative research is enhanced by six strategies according to Padgett (2008) (Bowen, 2005). They are- prolonged engagement, triangulation, peer debriefing, member checking, negative case analysis and auditing. I am using a concurrent triangulation strategy for this study, where the insight I draw from interviews inductively is cross-corroborated for the extent of prevalence through a survey. This will make the research more holistic. Inductive studies begin with specific observations and build to general patterns (Patton, 1980). I am also recording negative cases that I come across to suitably qualify the overall pattern that emerges so that the readers are not led to believe that the general pattern is the norm. Since I am also using a survey, I will now describe how rigour was maintained in the quantitative part of my research.

3.6.3 Rigour in Quantitative Research

Validity, reliability and objectivity are the hallmarks of rigour in quantitative studies. Validity is about correctness of the interpretation or explanation drawn. There are two types of validity- internal and external. Internal validity is about causality relationships between variables and findings, while external validity is about generalizability. Triangulation is the accepted method of ensuring validity especially when samples are insufficient (Dahlberg & McCaig, 2010). This research design in this case uses both qualitative and quantitative methods to provide convergent validity and a broader understanding of the topic of study. Reliability of the instruments was checked by submitting it to scrutiny from experts and by conducting a pilot study. The responses from the survey were also subjected to the Chronbach’s Alpha Coefficient. The Chronbach’s Alpha Coefficient is a measure to check reliability and internal consistency of the questionnaire. It is imperative when using Likert-scale type of questions. Chron-
### Table 3.4: The Chronbach’s Alpha coefficient for the survey instrument

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>No. of items</th>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha</th>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha based on standardized items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organizational attitudes and factors</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>.938</td>
<td>.936</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio - cultural factors</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>.849</td>
<td>.849</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work life balance facilities, supports, beliefs</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>.816</td>
<td>.803</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender perceptions (bias)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>.815</td>
<td>.815</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual factors- beliefs</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.665</td>
<td>.658</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The checklist I used to ensure that the rigour in the mixed methodology is maintained is presented in Table 3.5.
Table 3.5: Rigour in mixed methodology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Quantitative (Parameters of Rigour)</th>
<th>Qualitative (Parameters of Rigour)</th>
<th>Semi structured Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Validity (Internal)</td>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Credibility</td>
<td>Reflexivity and systematic collection methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gender construct from literature survey</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validity (External)</td>
<td>Triangulation of women executives response with findings from interviews (since the sample space overlaps only with about 10 women, they are distinctly separate groups)</td>
<td>Transferability</td>
<td>Thick descriptions which can be used by others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td>Expert test, pilot test and Chronbach alpha</td>
<td>Dependability</td>
<td>Confirmation of the verbatim text with the recorded interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectivity</td>
<td>Triangulation of women executives’ response with findings of other researches (literature survey)</td>
<td>Conformability</td>
<td>Audit trial/ member checking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Bowen (2005)
3.7 Delimitations of the Study

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. 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’s (1999) 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 managerial and leadership positions. The reason for this is that the challenges of an entrepreneurial woman are different from that of a corporate women executive. 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 executives in a given setting, expanding the diversity of the sample was not considered necessary.

Since the study specifically focuses on issues which women executives face in terms of work life balance and gender bias, and it is their voice that needs
to be heard, the study was restricted to women executives only. The opinion of men executives, spouse, family and other actors who interact with women executives in the work place and home were not considered.

The gender perspective is used while studying the various factors that affect women executives as outlined in the gender construct. For example in social factors, 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) are considered. 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.

The study is limited to ‘work life balance’ and ‘gender bias’. There are other issues which women executives face and other factors which influence them but they are not focused upon in this study. This was done because considering too many factors would make the study unwieldy and complicated. The entire research process from the stage of planning the design to executing and implementing, it is steeped in ethics. And so the last section of this chapter is devoted to describing how ethical standards have been maintained in this study.

3.8 Ethics

Ethics are moral principles that guide the research from conception to publication (Dahlberg & McCaig, 2010). And feminist research is value-mediated. In the process of unearthing the issues that personally affect women executives in their organizations and homes, it must not affect the respondents in an adverse manner. So the following measures were taken to ensure ethical sensitivity and compliance in the research process.

Informed Consent- This involves two factors: 1) an open and honest communication with the participant, so that they know what it entails; and 2) their voluntary consent to be a part of the research process. This was ensured
by drafting a letter that explained these issues in detail. The participants in
the interviews and the survey were asked to sign the consent form indicating
that they were willing to be a part of the study. (A sample of the consent form
is given in Appendix E.)

Participant Risks- Since my study involved recollecting situations in which
they encountered bias or conflict, there was a chance that this painful recollec-
tion would stress the respondents. I ensured that the discussions took place
in private situations even in the work places and also allowed them to desist
from speaking on certain issues if I noticed that probing questions made them
uncomfortable. This sensitivity went a long way in building a platform of trust
and comfort, and some of the women would open up further and discuss a great
deal more than what they had initially planned.

Use of Results- I assured the participants that my research was purely
academic and would be eventually published in academic journals, and that
no part of the raw data or the identity of participants would be available to
others. This was also an explicit requirement in some organizations and the HR
department would require me to sign certain documents to that effect.

Anonymity- The informed consent form also incorporates a clause that the
identity of the participants will not be revealed and the research findings also
will not be reported in a manner that makes them identifiable without their
explicit consent.

Confidentiality The study does evoke personal feelings and views of the
respondent, and so confidentiality has to be maintained both during the process
of research and while publishing the results of the study. If the participants
spoke of some personal incidents and told me to stop recording or to keep it off
record, I honoured their wish.

Other Issues

• Since most of the interviews were conducted in the work places, care
  had to be taken not to disrupt their flow of activities. I would convey
  my willingness to wait or to be scheduled at a later time if unexpected
situations arose.

- In my introduction, I would brief them about the purpose of the study and reiterate what was mentioned in the letter of consent.

- I would send my questions in advance so that they can decide whether to participate in the study or not.

- I would also approach the HR and other authorities, if a pre-consent was demanded by the organization. A brochure outlining the objectives of the study, benefits of the study and other details were given to all the participants.

Thus the ontological stance of critical realism and the related epistemology led me to adopt a mixed methodological approach for this study. The research design presented in this chapter forms the blueprint of analysis and presentation of the two main themes of this thesis, namely work life balance and gender bias, which are discussed in the succeeding chapters.