Preface

The status and role of Indian women in the society, in organizations, and in homes is undergoing change because of the influence of globalization. Change creates opportunities and challenges, and the innovative ways in which people and systems overcome these challenges are influenced by many factors. This study identifies the factors that influence women executives in organizations. It focuses on two areas: work life balance and gender bias. The study analyzes the influence of the cultural, social, organizational, and personal factors on these two areas. It endeavors to know the ways in which women executives actually manage their work life balance issues and seeks to identify the organizational and social factors which help them to achieve work life balance. In terms of gender bias, it seeks to examine the prevalence of subtle biases, which were identified in the scoping studies. It also studies the structure and agency dynamics of women executives in the area of work life balance and gender bias. Further, it examines how women executives who have a greater agency negotiate their structural constraints, and how these actions contribute to social production.

An investigation of multi-disciplinary empirical studies in psychology, sociology, organizational behavior, and leadership helped to delineate the major factors which affect women executives. These were categorized into four dimensions and a gender construct was created to provide a starting point for this study. The gender construct became the basis of the methods of study, namely the survey questionnaire and the interview. The rich data so collected was used to explore the relationship between the social structure and the agency of Indian women executives in the area of work-life balance and gender bias. Laydern Adaptive Theory was used as a model to layer the interview data into four levels - Context, Setting, Situated Activity and Self. The survey responses were triangulated with the interview findings and the literature survey was used to substantiate it. The findings that emerged were further analysed using the Social Theory of Bourdieu and Performative Agency of McNay.

The analysis reveals the social production of women executives in the area of work life balance. It shows that women executives reiterate marriage and motherhood, and they seek family support to balance work and life. This is in consonance with their habitus. However, they also perceive bias in the home environment in terms of their role, and feel the need to express themselves through corporate careers. This speaks of their agency. To balance these two needs, they engage in regulated liberties. Their regulated liberties are defined within the cultural framework and so they marginally challenge the structures that sur-
Women executives continue to marry, but choose partners who will support their careers; they continue with modified versions of the (ancient) joint family system by locating their extended family close to them, to use their support in bringing up children. They use hired help for routine household work and use vacations for quality time with family. While some traditional ideas are rejected, the basic values revolving around family roles are not changed. They seek a little more support from their spouses, but essentially accept a more prominent role in child rearing. Unlike their western counterparts, they tend to challenge their own attitudes more than questioning their structures. They treat their situations as a given condition, within which they find spaces of self expression.

The coping strategies used by women executives to manage work life concept hinge on personal empowerment. The workplace is perceived as a facilitating environment where they can achieve self-worth. The home is essentially considered as supportive. Spousal attitude, support of extended family and hired help are seen as supporting factors. The conflict thus, is viewed with the doxic understanding of a woman's position in society. They do not question the primacy of motherhood, but probably only challenge some of the factors which constitute the concept of an ideal mother.

In terms of gender bias, different types of biases identified from the literature survey were incorporated into the interview schedule and the survey to understand the nature of discrimination against women executives in India. The biases identified are - heroic masculinity in organizations (due to the patriarchal culture of India), tokenism, think manager; think male, cultures of advantage, homophily, double bind, attributing gender as a reason for success, devaluation, and cinderella complex. Comparatively, double bind and cinderella complex and cultures of advantage were reported to a greater extent than other biases. Tokenism and think manager; think male bias was found to be low. Devaluation was also reported lower indicating that women executives report high levels of confidence. Heroic masculinity and homophily were moderately reported, indicating the influence of the patriarchal culture inherent in the Indian society. Gender bias is perceived more as a general disrespect for women in Indian society. They feel that the society devalues their social and familial role. Since women executives primarily identify themselves with familial roles, they see careers as means of self expression. Career is an investment in self to feel more fulfilled, and the workplace is used for this end. Career as a luxurious role of self-indulgence, in collectivist culture, pre-empts the perception of bias in organizations which tend to give rewards to commitment (which women with families are not perceived to have). They reflexively consider their constraints and seem keen to look at their own limitations in terms of attitude or accomplishment. Agency for them is more about being your own person or personal empowerment.

Two trends, thus, stand out in this study - (i) The gendered habitus and the cultural arbitrary is deeply entrenched in the psyche of Indian women executives, and marriage and motherhood will be reiterated in their lives as a primary goal. (ii) While they do perceive devaluation in society for their role at home, their
essential habitus prevents them from making large or exclusive investments in a career.

Thus, the analysis of the investments and negotiations that women executives have made in order to cope with work life issues and gender bias reveal their unique adaptation to these structures. Collectivist cultures, with their insistence on social conformance, exert different pressures on women executives, as compared to what happens in individualist cultures. It is found that there are enduring structures in Indian society which resist change, and are unquestioningly absorbed by women executives. These findings confirm the social theories propounded by Bourdieu and McNay. The study thus provides insights into work life balance and gender bias faced by women executives in particular, and in a general sense, it describes the correlation between structure and agency of women executives in a developing, globalized context.