

The Role of Women in Indian Family Business

Abstract

This study explores the evolving role of women in family businesses based in India by reviewing various insights from a range of scholarly articles and providing a deeper understanding of their contribution. Women have been confined to peripheral roles constrained by socio-cultural norms. However, recent research highlights a gradual shift towards leadership positions held by women. This review categorises recent developments into six thematic areas: indirect role, framework, leadership and empowerment, entrepreneurial contributions, generational succession and impact on business performance. The research identifies barriers such as gendered succession practices and prevalent societal norms, while emphasising successful leadership with increased female participation in family businesses. This paper bridges theoretical knowledge with a practical roadmap for future research. The research argues in favour of leveraging the potential of women for the success of family businesses in India.

Keywords and Meaning

- **Women Leadership:** the participation of women in positions of power and decision-making in companies.
- **Women Empowerment:** process by which women gain power and control over their own lives and acquire the ability to make strategic choices.
- **Succession:** the process by which someone takes an official position or job after someone else has been doing it.
- **Gender Bias:** prejudiced actions or thoughts based on the gender-based perception that women are not equal to men in rights and dignity. OR the tendency to give preferential treatment to one gender over another.
- **Family Business:** a business that is owned and/or run by current generation members of the founding family.

31 **Objective**

- 32 ● To analyse the evolving role of women in Indian family businesses.
- 33 ● To identify professional barriers and challenges faced by women.
- 34 ● To highlight success stories and best practices.
- 35 ● To investigate the impact of women's involvement on family business performance.

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37 **Limitations**

- 38 ● Urban context: The study may not fully capture rural or semi-urban family businesses.
- 39 ● Narrow scope: Only specific academic literature and family business are studied,
40 hence the findings cannot be generalised.
- 41 ● Contextual factors: societal expectations can vary across different regions, impacting
42 the way different families approach legacy.

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44 **Indirect role of women in family business**

45 Women have been playing an important role by ensuring the harmony in family
46 structure. Her contributions have been silent but this indirectly affected the success of the
47 family business. While they largely remained invisible in formal settings of the business, they
48 created and maintained a family environment where men could focus on managing the family
49 business. Women have an incredible ability to manage things with utmost efficiency. They
50 not only ensure seamless functioning of the household but also nurture family bonds. This
51 emotional support naturally reduces potential internal conflicts. Women are often
52 underappreciated for their role in providing stability, maintaining values, traditions and a
53 sense of unity. All these factors together shape the identity of traditional Indian family
54 business in the long term.

55 Besides, traditionally women have assumed the role as custodians of wealth, culture
56 and family secrets. They have often shared invaluable insights during informal family
57 discussions that have influenced many business decisions but were never formally
58 recognised. With the recent shift across business, women are increasingly taking up official
59 roles at family and non-family businesses. They bring fresh-perspective and are recognised as
60 leaders, decision-makers, and innovators in traditional family businesses.

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62 **Frameworks on Women in Family Businesses**

63 Bang et al provides an overview of the existing research about women in family
64 businesses. Their article highlights key research gaps like multifaceted roles of women
65 beyond stereotypes. They provide a foundation by identifying theoretical framework and
66 methodologies.¹ They use bibliometric analysis of existing literature in disciplines like
67 sociology and social psychology. They successfully map out the current state of knowledge
68 and identify factors affecting women's role in family businesses. The paper presents a
69 framework to guide future research by highlighting gaps in understanding from gendered
70 lenses. The key themes of their research include gender bias, succession challenges and
71 traditions responsibilities.

72 The research of Bang et al serves as a critical resource particularly in India's context
73 where family businesses are integral to the economy and society. Their key findings highlight
74 role diversity for women who serve as managers, owners, as well as family members in the
75 traditional context of family business. They also highlight persistent gender bias where
76 societal norms expect women to prioritise family responsibilities over professional pursuit.
77 They suggest that women leadership often encourages collaboration, emotional intelligence,
78 which can naturally enhance business performance and maintain family harmony. Thus, they
79 intend their research to serve as a foundation to advance women's role in family businesses in
80 India by underscoring the need for systemic change.

81 The work of Gupta and Levenberg categorises the research on women in family
82 businesses into three phases: invisibility, visibility, and transformation. They back their work
83 by providing historical evidence to understand evolving perceptions of the role of women
84 over generations. Their critical analysis about persistent biases is commendable.²

86 **Women's Leadership and Empowerment in Indian Family** 87 **Businesses**

88 Gupta and Jain documents the rise of women to leadership positions in Indian family
89 businesses. They evaluate how traditional barriers such as cultural expectations and societal
90 norms presented a challenge in women's rise. They present inspiring narratives of breaking

¹ Bang, Nupur Pavan, Sougata Ray, and Satish Kumar. "Women in family business research—What we know and what we should know?." *Journal of Business Research* 164 (2023): 113990.

² Gupta, V. and Levenburg, N.M., 2013. 16 Women in family business: three generations of research. *Handbook of research on family business*, p.346.

91 free from patriarchal structures and successfully leading family businesses.³ Their main
92 objective is to highlight the growing acceptance of women in leadership positions and how
93 they benefit the family businesses in terms of innovation, sustainability and governance.
94 Gupta and Jain adopted a qualitative empirical approach where they combine literature
95 review with case studies. Their findings emphasise on cultural shifts in societal norms like
96 pursuing higher education has led to increased participation of women in family businesses.
97 They find that women in family businesses often balance their leadership roles with
98 traditional family responsibilities. Study points out that women are more likely to adopt
99 ethical decision-making processes. However, Gupta and Jain argue that there are persistent
100 challenges like limited mentorship and resistance to female leadership in a patriarchal
101 environment. Their study addresses a gap in gender studies especially in the Indian context.
102 Thus, making their research contextually relevant. The paper offers rich insight to understand
103 India's socio-economy because the research is based on real-world scenarios and primary
104 data collection.

105 Hans examines the role of family businesses in perpetuating and challenging gender
106 norms. While underpinning that family businesses are slowly becoming a platform for
107 women empowerment, Hans argues that the businesses are still rotten in Indian tradition. The
108 article encourages a discussion on various empowerment strategies.⁴

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110 **Women Entrepreneurs in Family Businesses**

111 Faraulo et al review entrepreneurial contributions of women within family
112 businesses. They link their roles with creativity, innovation, and strategic development with
113 fresh perspective but argue that their entrepreneurial contributions are often overlooked due
114 to gender biases.⁵

115 Agrawal et al. explore the intersection of gender and entrepreneurship in family
116 businesses. Their work reflects on how women are aligning with entrepreneurial identities

³ Gupta, Prashant, and Sheenu Jain. "Breaking through the periphery: Growing role of women as leaders in Indian family businesses." *Indian Journal of Commerce and Management Studies* 11, no. 2 (2020): 33-52.

⁴ Hans, V. Basil. "Role of Family-Business in Women Empowerment." *Asian Review of Social Sciences* 8, no. 2 (2019): 30-34.

⁵ Faraulo, Alessandra, Lucrezia Songini, Massimiliano Pellegrini, and Luca Gnan. "The role of women as entrepreneurs in family business: A literature review." *Women Entrepreneurship in Family Business* (2017): 72-100.

117 within family businesses. According to them, this is reshaping traditional family business
118 structures.⁶

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120 **Generational Perspectives for Succession Planning**

121 The study by Goel et al. explores socio-cultural perspective of father-daughter
122 succession in Indian family businesses. Their work highlights the challenges such as
123 gendered expectations, and societal chauvinism. Their research is pivotal to the scholarship
124 for providing critical insights into the gradual shift in succession tradition from male-centric
125 decisions to daughters oriented.⁷

126 Mathew expands on regional trends in India and explores succession challenges faced
127 by women across Asia. With particular emphasis on India, the study highlights the
128 importance of education, mentorship, and advocacy to eventually overcome gender barriers
129 for succession in family businesses.⁸

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131 **Women's Role in Family Business Performance**

132 Hafezieh's study directly links women's participation in family businesses with its
133 performance. The analysis emphasises on empowering women's role as leaders because
134 quantitative evidence suggests that decisions made by women have enhanced the success of
135 family businesses.⁹

136 Sharma and Hoy offers a foundational literature on conceptualisation of family
137 business roles. They provide valuable insight through their analysis of women's role as
138 caretakers, leaders, and innovators.¹⁰

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⁶ Agarwal, Sucheta, Veland Ramadani, Vivek Agrawal, and Jitendra Kumar Dixit. "Guest editorial: Gender, entrepreneurship and family business." *Journal of Family Business Management* 13, no. 3 (2023): 546-551.

⁷ Goel, Geetika, Shefali Nandan, and Piyali Ghosh. "India: A Socio-Cultural Perspective on Father-Daughter Succession in Family Business in India." In *Father-Daughter Succession in Family Business*, pp. 35-44. Routledge, 2016.

⁸ Mathew, Viju. "Women and family business succession in Asia-characteristics, challenges and chauvinism." *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business* 27, no. 2-3 (2016): 410-424.

⁹ Hafezieh, Hami. "Firm performance and success of family businesses with emphasis on Indian women's role." *Advances in Environmental Biology* 9, no. 23 (2015): 310-315.

¹⁰ Sharma, Pramodita, and Frank Hoy. "Family business roles." In *The landscape of family business*, pp. 113-142. Edward Elgar Publishing, 2013.

140 **Key observations**

141 Through these literature reviews, it becomes clear that the role of women in Indian
142 family businesses is transitioning from supportive roles to leadership positions. Nonetheless,
143 this progress remains slow due to socio-cultural norms, and structural barriers.

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145 **Conclusion**

146 Although the role of women is gradually becoming entrenched in family business,
147 there are not many studies available that highlight their critical contributions. There is a
148 compelling case to recognise the progress made, and the obstacles that remain. Women's
149 potential is often underutilised due to persistent gender biases.

150 Successful cases of women breaking through leadership barriers highlight their
151 potential to contribute to this systemic change. This research underscores the importance of
152 encouraging inclusive business practice and promotes targeted mentorship programs for
153 women to leverage opportunities. The study also provides a way ahead for future research
154 and business practice.

155 Future studies should focus on success stories and best practices to speed up the
156 process for empowering women in family businesses. Studies may also explore policy
157 framework and strategies to promote inclusion of women.

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