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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.

Objective

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

Limitations

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

Indirect role of women in family business

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

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

Frameworks on Women in Family Businesses

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

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

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

Women's Leadership and Empowerment in Indian Family Businesses

Gupta and Jain documents the rise of women to leadership positions in Indian family businesses. They evaluate how traditional barriers such as cultural expectations and societal 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.

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

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

Women Entrepreneurs in Family Businesses

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

Agrawal et al. explore the intersection of gender and entrepreneurship in family 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 Faraudello, 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.

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

Generational Perspectives for Succession Planning

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

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

Women's Role in Family Business Performance

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

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

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.

Key observations

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

Conclusion

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

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

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

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