



LEGACY, LEADERSHIP
AND REINVENTION:
**A FIRESIDE
CONVERSATION WITH
SANJIV BAJAJ**
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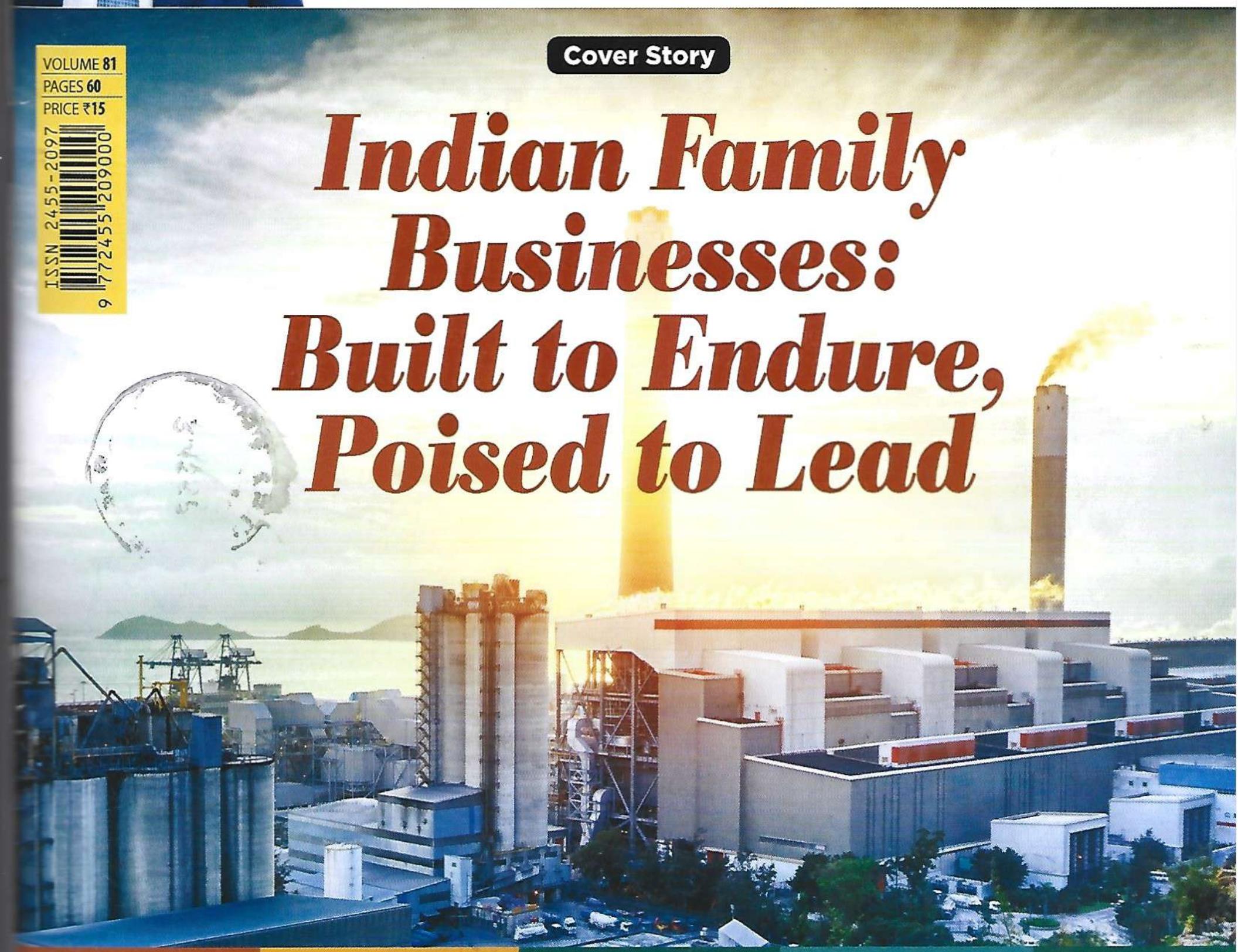
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Cover Story

Indian Family Businesses: Built to Endure, Poised to Lead



WOMEN, LEGACY
AND LEADERSHIP:
**THE NEW FACE
OF INDIA'S FAMILY
BUSINESSES**
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Second-Generation Woman's Journey in a Language Enterprise

Devaki's earliest memories were filled not with toys but typewriters, letterheads, and the steady hum of business calls happening right inside her home. While many children played imaginary household games, she was already running a pretend office, confidently speaking to major clients like Tata and Bajaj on her toy phone. Clients often visited at unusual hours, dropping off or collecting documents after their factory shifts. Through these scenes, she absorbed the essence of leadership early on: responsibility, commitment, professionalism, prioritisation, and leading by example.

There was never a single moment of revelation about joining the family business. The idea was embedded in her subconscious long before she could name it. Even in school, she gravitated towards languages, interacting in German with visiting professionals and tutoring classmates. Although she pursued science until the 12th



**Devaki
Datar Kunte,**

CEO, Language Services Bureau

standard, her entry into the business afterward was entirely organic. The professional space into which she stepped already felt familiar and deeply personal.

As a second-generation woman leader, she found a landscape full of opportunities and a few early tests. The family business had already achieved strong brand recognition, providing her a solid platform from day one. Her mother, a respected linguist and pioneer in the industry, had built credibility over decades. Yet, she had to demonstrate her own capabilities and establish her independent identity within the company's reputation. Fortunately, that phase was short-lived as her contributions began speaking for themselves.

Leadership has no Gender

Gender bias, a challenge common to many women in leadership, did not feature prominently in her experience. Her mother had already normalised women's leadership in the company, making it the accepted norm rather than an exception. Equality was ingrained in the organisation's culture from the beginning. Leadership, to them, had no gender.

She did, however, take away one important parenting lesson from observing the previous generation. During her childhood, work-life balance was an unheard-of concept, and she often saw less of her mother due to professional commitments. While she admired that dedication, she resolved to ensure her own daughters had more time with her during their formative years. This personal decision became a vital component of her leadership style, balancing professional aspirations with meaningful family presence.

Preserving Legacy

Preserving the organisation's legacy was crucial. The business was known for its ethics, quality, and on-time delivery — values that had earned it client loyalty lasting decades. Even when it meant losing revenue, compromising ethics was never considered. This approach, though sometimes seen as idealistic in today's world, continued to shape their identity and reputation.

Yet, continuity alone was not enough. She spearheaded key transformations to make the organisation future-ready. By institutionalising ISO standards, she shifted the business from a founder-driven structure to a well-defined,

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process-oriented system. She introduced policies promoting work-life balance, ensuring the new generation of employees would not face the same pressures once considered inevitable.

Significant Contributions

One of her most significant contributions was the early adoption of language technology. Over the last two decades, she helped embed technology into operations, long before automation and artificial intelligence became the industry norm. This futuristic transition ensured the business stayed relevant through changing times.

Today, even while AI trends dominate the market, the organisation applies technology as an enabler rather than a blanket solution. Human judgement, cultural sensitivity, and contextual understanding remain central to the final output.

Her journey has required maintaining a delicate equilibrium among many identities — daughter, leader, custodian of legacy, and innovator of change. She believes in responding to the demand of each moment: whether a strategic business call or a cultural decision that affects employee well-being, the situation dictates which role must take precedence. Throughout her career, she has relied on strong support systems — her family and mentors from entrepreneurial networks such as TiE — who have helped shape her leadership thinking.

Valuable Lessons

The lessons she inherited from her mother continue to be her compass: hard

work, perseverance, integrity, sincerity, and unwavering focus on values. In a rapidly evolving marketplace, she views change not as a threat but as a driving force. Aligning family values with business realities requires embracing new technologies, collaborations, and partnerships — each filtered through the lens of ethical compatibility.

To young women entering their family businesses, she offers a clear piece of advice: gain external experience before stepping into the fold. Exposure to other work environments builds confidence, independence, and competence. Walking in too comfortably can create perceptions of entitlement. Success in a family business must be earned, not inherited, and there is always room at the top for those who pursue excellence with conviction.

Continued Promise

For her, legacy is not merely heritage — it is a continuing promise. It represents a shared responsibility to uphold excellence, maintain purpose, and protect the trust built over generations. As a leader and a member of a business family, she sees legacy as a bridge between the pioneering spirit of the past and the innovation required for the future.

Her story is one of evolution; a journey that began with the vision of a woman entrepreneur who defied the norms of her time, and continues with a daughter who carries that legacy forward with modern insight and heartfelt intention. It is a narrative grounded in values, strengthened by transformation, and guided by the belief that success must always reflect purpose.

This multigenerational enterprise stands today as a testament not only to professional excellence but to the resilience, adaptability, and leadership of women who shaped it. And as it navigates the future, that legacy remains steadfast: deeply rooted in ethics, driven by innovation, and dedicated to delivering the best.

