EMPOWERING WOMEN IN THE NEW NORMAL: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Ms. Shobhna Gupta, Research Scholar, I.K. Gujral Punjab Technical University Jalandhar,(& Assistant Professor Department of Business AdministrationCSB, Jhanjeri)
Dr.Satinderpal Singh, HOD, Department of Business Administration, Chandigarh university Gharuan

Abstract

Women empowerment is a topic that has garnered significant attention and discussion in recent years. It refers to the process of enabling women to take control of their lives, make their own decisions, and have equal opportunities in various spheres of life. The need for women empowerment arises from the fact that women have traditionally been subjected to discrimination, exploitation, and marginalization in various areas of life. Women in India have been stereotyped and discriminated since ancient times due to the patriarchal mindset. Social evils such as sati, purdah system, female foeticide, female infanticide, dowry, domestic violence have been faced by women. In contemporary times, women have become sensitised about their rights and have come a long way in terms of women empowerment. Gender equality and women empowerment have been on the top of the agenda globally. Achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls has been mentioned by the United Nations in its Sustainable Development Goal (SDG-5) as a target. Women empowerment is not only important for the progress and development of society but also has various individual benefits. Empowered women are more likely to have better health, education, and economic outcomes, and are also more likely to be able to take control of their lives and make their own decisions.

Despite the increasing awareness and attention given to women empowerment, there are still significant challenges that need to be addressed. These challenges include gender discrimination, gender-based violence, lack of access to education and employment opportunities, and social and cultural barriers.

This paper aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on women empowerment by highlighting its importance and the various ways in which it can be achieved. Its aims to explore the state of women empowerment in 2020, highlighting the challenges and opportunities for women's progress. The study is based on the secondary data collected from various government sources, magazines and newspapers. An analysis of the reasons responsible for the trends as well as various efforts and initiatives which have been taken at global, regional and local level to eliminate gender inequality. It has been found in the study that female literacy has a positive bearing on the health and decision-making of females. Also, government support in the form of infrastructure and schemes act as a catalyst in women empowerment. Women-centric organisations and Self-Help organisations have promoted economic empowerment and decision-making of females. Women empowerment can be achieved through various means, including education, employment, political participation, and social and cultural changes.

Key words: - Women Empowerment, Education, gender inequality, biasness, Health, Socio-Economic Status. Crimes against women, Policy implications

Introduction:

The concept of women empowerment has gained traction in recent years due to the increasing realization of the importance of gender equality. Empowering women is essential for the progress and development of any society as it ensures that half of the population is not left behind. In India, women's empowerment has been a long-standing issue, with women facing numerous challenges such as gender discrimination, poverty, illiteracy, and domestic violence. Despite the constitutional provisions for gender equality, the Indian society has been patriarchal, with women being considered inferior to men. Women have been victims of numerous social evils, including child marriage,

dowry, female infanticide, and sexual harassment. Empowering women is essential for achieving gender equality and sustainable development. It involves enabling women to have control over their lives and to participate fully in social, economic, and political spheres. Women empowerment has been a crucial issue for decades, and in 2020, it remained an essential topic of discussion, given the significant challenges women faced due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Women empowerment and gender equality has become the pivot of all global agendas. The struggle for ending gender inequality and achieving emancipation of women is long drawn. Moreover, women empowerment is considered as a pre-requisite for the attainment of sustainable development (UNFPA, 2021).However, in recent years, there has been a significant shift in society's perception of women, and there have been significant strides in women's empowerment in India. women empowerment is a crucial concept that is essential for promoting gender equality and ensuring the progress and development of any society. Empowering women requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders, including governments, civil society, and individuals, to ensure that women have equal opportunities and are not subjected to discrimination, exploitation, and marginalization. Various schemes have been launched by central and state governments for emancipation of women. However, the patriarchal mindset still exists and gender biasness is still experienced by women both in public and private space.

Review of Literature
"Violence against Women in India: Evidence from Rural Maharashtra" by Dipti Jain in Oct 2004. This study examines the prevalence and impact of violence against women in rural Maharashtra. The authors conclude that violence against women is widespread and has a negative impact on women's physical and mental health, as well as their economic and social empowerment.

Dr.JoyNerella"Empowering Women Entrepreneurship in India: Through Self Help put a light that how self help group can help the women to get self employed and helpful in economic growth. In his study he discussed about opportunities available to women through self-help group and challenges faced by them.

"Empowering Women through Entrepreneurship Development in Emerging Economies: An Overview " by NimalathasanBalasundaram, Sadia Akhter, Mir Mohammed Nurul Absar 2010. This study examines the barriers and opportunities for women's entrepreneurship in India. The author concludes that while women face significant challenges in accessing credit, markets, and other resources necessary for entrepreneurship, there are also opportunities to promote women's entrepreneurship through policies and programs that provide training, mentoring, and access to finance.

Duflo E. (2015) According to a study by the National Bureau of Economic Research in Cambridge, the connection between women's empowerment and economic development may not be strong enough to be self-sustaining. The study suggests that there may be a need for consistent policy commitment towards gender equality, even if it is not directly tied to economic development, in order to bring about equal opportunities between men and women. In other words, promoting women's empowerment and gender equality for their own sake may be necessary to ensure that progress towards equality is not stalled.

(Rouf Ahmad Bhat 2015), "Role of Education in the Empowerment of Women in India" said that due to the various efforts of Govt. and knowledge management we can see that growth of women empowerment is taking place. We can see that women are getting their place in each field either it is retail sector, health care, education, defense, insurance, tourism Technology etc. As the major part of India is dominated by males, women are growing as leader and entrepreneurs in small-scale or household businesses. A Large section of the women is self-employed both in the rural and urban areas.Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in India" by R. Jayaraman and P. John, 2018. This study examines the relationship between gender equality and women's empowerment in India. The authors conclude that while progress has been made in promoting gender equality, there are still significant gaps in women's economic and social empowerment, particularly in rural areas.

Microfinance and Women's Empowerment: A Review of the Empirical Evidence" by S. Saravanan, Devi Prasad Dash, 2017. This study reviews the evidence on the impact of microfinance on women's empowerment, focusing on factors such as economic participation, decision-making power, and social status. The author concludes that while microfinance has the potential to empower women, the impact varies depending on factors such as the design of the program, the social and cultural context, and the level of support provided

"Women's Empowerment in India: A Review of Literature" by K. Shrivastava, 2017. This study provides a comprehensive review of the literature on women's empowerment in India, focusing on factors such as education, health, and economic empowerment. The author concludes that while progress has been made in promoting women's empowerment, there is still a long way to go, and greater attention needs to be paid to addressing the underlying social and cultural factors that contribute to gender inequality.

Objectives of the Study
The following are the objectives of the study.
1. To understand the necessity of women's empowerment, examining the underlying factors that make it a critical issue in contemporary society.
2. To evaluate the progress made in women's empowerment in India, analysing the key developments in recent years and identifying areas where further advancement is needed.
3. To examine the various government schemes designed to promote women's empowerment in India, evaluating their effectiveness and identifying areas for improvement.
4. To analyse the opportunities and challenges that exist in the context of women's empowerment, examining the socio-cultural, economic, and political factors that impact women's ability to participate fully in society.

Research Methodology
This paper is basically descriptive and analytical in nature. In this paper an attempt has been taken to analyse the growth in women empowerment in India. The data used in it is purely from secondary sources according to the need of this study.

Overview and summary
The concept of women empowerment has gained traction in recent years due to the increasing realization of the importance of gender equality. Empowering women is essential for the progress and development of any society as it ensures that half of the population is not left behind. Women empowerment can be achieved through various means, including education, employment, political participation, and social and cultural changes.

Education is one of the most crucial factors in women empowerment as it enables women to acquire knowledge and skills that can help them to become economically independent and self-reliant. Providing education to women also helps in breaking down gender stereotypes and promoting gender equality.

Employment is another crucial factor in women empowerment as it provides women with the means to earn a livelihood and become financially independent. Providing equal opportunities in the workplace and promoting women entrepreneurship can go a long way in empowering women.

Political participation is also an essential aspect of women empowerment as it enables women to participate in the decision-making process and have a say in matters that affect their lives. Women's representation in politics is crucial for promoting gender equality and ensuring that women's issues are addressed.

Social and cultural changes are also necessary for women empowerment as they help in breaking down gender stereotypes and promoting gender equality. This can be achieved through various means, including media, awareness campaigns, and community mobilization

India has implemented several women empowerment schemes over the years to promote gender equality and women's rights. Here are some examples of women empowerment schemes in India in 2000

MahilaSamridhi Yojana (MSY): Launched in 1993, the MSY scheme aimed to promote women's savings and self-employment. It provided financial assistance to women living below the poverty line to start their own small businesses. The scheme also encouraged women to save by offering them incentives for depositing money in their accounts regularly.

Swashakti Project: This project was launched in 2000 and aimed to empower women in rural areas by promoting their participation in income-generating activities. The project provided training to women in areas such as handicrafts, food processing, and animal husbandry.

Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP): The STEP scheme was launched in 1986, but it was expanded in 1997 to cover more women. It aimed to provide vocational training and employment opportunities to women. The scheme also provided support for the development of women's entrepreneurship and self-employment.

Swayamsidha Scheme: The Swayamsidha scheme was launched in 2001 and aimed to empower women through self-help groups (SHGs). The scheme provided financial assistance to SHGs and encouraged women to form SHGs for mutual support and assistance. Overall, these schemes and initiatives played an essential role in promoting women's empowerment in India in the year 2000 by providing women with access to education, training, financial assistance, and opportunities for entrepreneurship and self-employment. These initiatives also helped to raise awareness about the importance of women's empowerment and gender equality in Indian society.

Advancements in Women Empowerment in 2020:
India has made significant progress in women's empowerment since 2020. Various government initiatives, private sector initiatives, and civil society efforts have contributed to this progress. In this essay, we will discuss some of the key initiatives and factors that have contributed to women's empowerment in India after 2020.

One of the most significant initiatives that have contributed to women's empowerment in India after 2020 is the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) scheme. This scheme was launched by the Indian government in 2015 to address the declining sex ratio of girls in India. The scheme aims to promote the value of the girl child and to ensure equal opportunities for education and growth. The scheme has been successful in increasing awareness about the importance of the girl child and has also helped to improve the sex ratio in some states.

Another key initiative that has contributed to women's empowerment in India after 2020 is the Mahila-E-Haat platform. This online platform was launched by the Ministry of Women and Child Development in 2016 to provide a marketplace for women entrepreneurs to sell their products. The platform has been successful in providing opportunities for women entrepreneurs to reach a wider market and has helped to create employment opportunities for women.

The government has also launched the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) scheme, which provides financial assistance to pregnant women and lactating mothers. The scheme aims to improve the health of mother and child and to provide financial support to women during pregnancy and childbirth. The scheme has been successful in providing financial support to women and has helped to reduce maternal mortality rates.

In addition to government initiatives, the private sector has also played a significant role in women's empowerment in India after 2020. Many private companies have launched initiatives to promote gender equality and to provide employment opportunities for women. For example, Tata Group has launched the Women of Wellness (WOW) initiative to promote the health and well-being of women employees. The initiative provides health screenings, counselling, and education to women employees.

The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) has also launched the Indian Women Network (IWN) to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in the workplace. The network provides a

platform for women professionals to share their experiences and to learn from each other. The initiative has been successful in providing networking opportunities for women professionals and in promoting gender equality in the workplace.

Civil society has also played a significant role in women's empowerment in India after 2020. Many NGOs and civil society organizations have launched initiatives to promote gender equality and to provide support to women. For example, Breakthrough India has launched the Bell Bajao campaign to promote the prevention of domestic violence against women. The campaign has been successful in raising awareness about the issue of domestic violence and has encouraged people to take action to prevent it.

The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) is another example of a civil society organization that has contributed to women's empowerment in India after 2020. SEWA is a trade union that provides support to women in the informal sector. The organization has been successful in providing financial assistance and training to women in the informal sector and has helped to improve their living standards.

In addition to these initiatives, there have been several other factors that have contributed to women's empowerment in India after 2020. One of the most significant factors is the increasing awareness about the importance of gender equality and women's rights. The #MeToo movement and other similar campaigns have helped to raise awareness about the issue of sexual harassment and have encouraged people to take action to prevent it.

The increasing representation of women in politics and in leadership positions is another significant factor that has contributed to women's empowerment in India after 2020.

In 2020, several achievements were made in the field of women's empowerment. For instance, the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report showed that women's political participation and representation increased in some countries. In addition, some countries introduced legislation to promote gender equality, such as the Gender Equality Act passed in Japan in June 2020. Furthermore, some companies and organizations implemented policies to promote gender diversity and equality in the workplace, such as the introduction of equal pay for equal work policies.

Opportunities for Women Empowerment in 2020:
Despite the challenges, 2020 also presented opportunities for women's empowerment. The pandemic highlighted the critical role of women in the healthcare and social care sectors, with many women frontline workers risking their lives to save others. Moreover, the pandemic brought attention to the issue of unpaid care work, leading to calls for a more equitable distribution of care responsibilities between men and women.

In addition, 2020 saw increased representation of women in leadership positions. The election of Kamala Harris as the first woman, Black, and South Asian Vice President of the United States was a significant milestone for women's political representation. Similarly, women were appointed to key positions in international organizations, such as the World Trade Organization and the International Monetary Fund.

Furthermore, 2020 witnessed significant progress in women's digital empowerment, with more women gaining access to digital technologies and participating in the digital economy. The pandemic's shift to remote work and online education also provided opportunities for women to participate in the labor market and education, regardless of their location.

Challenges to Women Empowerment in 2020:
Despite some progress, women faced numerous challenges in 2020, particularly due to the pandemic. The pandemic resulted in a significant increase in gender-based violence, with reports showing a 30% increase in cases in some countries. The pandemic also resulted in an increase in unpaid care work, which is predominantly done by women, leading to a further widening of the gender gap in the workforce. The pandemic also had a severe impact on women's mental health, with women reporting higher levels of anxiety and depression.

The COVID-19 pandemic posed significant challenges to women's empowerment in 2020. The pandemic's economic impact affected women disproportionately, as they were more likely to work in informal and low-paying jobs and were more likely to be laid off or furloughed. Moreover, women's unpaid care work increased due to the closure of schools and childcare facilities, adding to their burden of domestic responsibilities.

The pandemic's impact on women's health was also significant, with reports indicating an increase in gender-based violence and a decrease in women's access to reproductive health services. Lockdowns and movement restrictions made it difficult for women to access health facilities, while limited resources and overstretched health systems reduced the quality of care available.

Despite constitutional guarantees of equality, women are significantly underrepresented in political institutions in India. This can limit their ability to advocate for their rights and interests and participate fully in the political process

One of the most significant challenges is education. Although India has made significant strides in education since independence, there is still a severe gender gap. Only 65.46% of adult women are literate, compared to 82.14% of adult men. Women face greater bias in higher education and specialized professional training, making it difficult to attain top leadership positions in any field. Despite legal reforms, women in India continue to face various forms of gender-based violence, including sexual harassment, domestic violence, and rape. This violence can prevent women from achieving their full potential and participating equally in society.

Poverty is another major obstacle to women's empowerment in India. Poverty is considered the greatest threat to peace in the world, and eradicating poverty should be a national goal. Women are often exploited as domestic workers due to poverty, further perpetuating their subordinate status. Women in India face significant economic disparities, including lower wages, limited access to credit and financial services, and a lack of job opportunities. These disparities can prevent women from achieving economic independence and participating fully in the economy.

Health and safety concerns are also paramount for women's empowerment in India. Maternal healthcare is a particularly alarming issue. Inequality in employment and promotions is another major obstacle for women. Women face countless barriers in male-dominated environments in government offices and private enterprises, making it challenging to achieve professional equality. Addressing these challenges will be critical to empowering women in India.

Traditional social norms and cultural attitudes in India can limit women's opportunities and prevent them from achieving their full potential. These include gender bias in the family and workplace, the preference for sons over daughters, and the belief that women should prioritize their roles as wives and mothers over their careers. Inequality within households is prevalent globally, with particularly significant gender bias in India. This bias is evident in the sharing of household responsibilities such as housework, childcare, and menial tasks, which are often divided along gender lines. While these inequalities may seem small, they are significant and perpetuate gender disparities within households.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, women empowerment made some progress in 2020, but it also faced significant challenges. The pandemic had a significant impact on women, highlighting the need for more policies and programs to promote gender equality and protect women's rights. It is essential to continue to work towards gender equality and women's empowerment, taking into account the impact of the pandemic and its long-term effects. This can be achieved through the implementation of policies and programs that promote gender equality in all aspects of life, including education, employment, healthcare, and politics. The pandemic's economic impact and increased burden of care work have threatened to reverse the gains made in women's empowerment in recent years. However, the pandemic has also brought attention to the critical role of women in healthcare and social care and the need for a more equitable distribution of care responsibilities. Additionally, 2020 saw increased representation of women in leadership positions and significant progress in women's

digital empowerment. It is crucial to build on these opportunities and address the challenges to ensure that women's empowerment remains a priority in the post-pandemic world.Policies and programs that promote gender equality and protect women's rights should be implemented at the national and local levels. These should include efforts to address cultural beliefs that perpetuate gender inequality, increase women's access to education and employment, and improve their representation in politics and leadership roles. There is also a need to address the gender-based violence and discrimination faced by women in India. This can be achieved through the implementation of laws and policies that protect women's rights and hold perpetrators accountable for their actions. Additionally, efforts should be made to provide women with safe and accessible healthcare, including maternal and reproductive health services.

It is also crucial to address the disproportionate burden of care work that women face. This can be done by implementing policies that promote a more equitable distribution of care responsibilities between men and women. This could include providing support for caregivers, such as paid parental leave, affordable childcare, and access to healthcare services.

In nutshell women's empowerment remains a critical issue in India, and the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the challenges and opportunities for women's progress. While there have been some positive developments in women's empowerment in 2020, there is still much work to be done to achieve gender equality and promote women's rights. The challenges faced by women in India are complex and deeply entrenched, but with continued efforts, progress can be made towards a more equal and just society for all.

References: -

- Duflo E. (2011) Women's Empowerment and Economic Development, National Bureau of Economic Research, Cambridge.
- Bhat Rouf Ahmad (2015), "Role of Education in the Empowerment of Women in India", Journal of Education and Practice, Vol.6 (10), pp188-191, ISSN 2222-1735.
- Dr.JOY NERELLA "Empowering Women Entrepreneurship in India: Through Self Help Group Volume:4, Issue: 6, June 2015 • ISSN No 2277 – 8179
- Dipti Jain "Violence against Women in India: Evidence from Rural Maharashtra" in Oct 2004. DOI:10.22605/RRH304
- S. SARAVANAN, Devi Prasad DASH "Microfinance and Women Empowerment- Empirical Evidence from The Indian States" Vol. 17-2, 2017
- NimalathasanBalasundaram, Sadia Akhter, Mir Mohammed Nurul Absar "Empowering Women through Entrepreneurship Development in Emerging Economies: An Overview "Conference: International Conference on Knowledge Globalization (ICKG), Jan 2010
- Prof. B.Ananda Naidu Smt. M.C.Sahithya "An Analysis Of Issues And Challenges Of Women Empowerment In India" Volume - 9, Issue - 7, July - 2020 • Print Issn No. 2277 – 8160
- Suman kumari and vasu Siotra "Indian females in the twenty-first century: how they have fared? An analysis using geospatial techniques" GeoJournal. 2023 Mar 28: 1–17.