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**A Review Study on The Contribution of Microfinance to The
Empowerment of Women with Special Reference To
Purba Bardhaman District, West Bengal**

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ABSTRACT

Providing economic independence, enhancing decision-making power, building confidence, and improving socio-economic well-being through loans through Self-Help Groups (SHGs) are all ways in which microfinance contributes to the empowerment of women in Purba Bardhaman. These programs give women the opportunity to launch or expand micro-businesses, lessen their reliance on financial assistance, and take a more active role in the life of their households and communities. Nevertheless, obstacles such as poor financial literacy and socio-cultural barriers continue to exist, making it necessary to provide support and implement focused programs in order to achieve the greatest possible impact. A significant number of women do not possess the financial literacy required to make the most of the opportunities presented by microfinance. Women are able to start or expand microbusinesses in industries such as commerce, textiles, and food services when they have access to microcredit. This results in a consistent income and reduces their dependency on family members of the same gender.

Keywords: Households, microfinance, finance, socio-cultural, commerce

1. INTRODUCTION:

One of the most important issues that has to be addressed in nations that are still in the process of developing is the empowerment of women. Women are able to achieve progress and self-realization through the process of empowerment, which ultimately results in an increase in their standard of living. Empowerment is a comprehensive process that helps women achieve these goals. In terms of the degree to which they are empowered, there is a very low level of empowerment in rural areas. They have the ability to make modest purchases, the flexibility to move about freely, and the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process about economic and financial matters. These are all perks that they enjoy. Despite the fact that women is a vital part of society, she is typically regarded in a manner that is inferior to that of males. Through its engagement in economic activities, microfinance offers a substantial contribution to the enhancement of women's decision-making. This contribution is made possible by the fact that microfinance empowers women.



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The individual is held in extremely high esteem inside Indian society. This nation suffers from a significant lack of respect for women and girls as a direct consequence of this. Cooking is traditionally done by women, despite the fact that men often consume the majority of the food that is prepared in their homes. After the men have finished their meal, it is time for the females to have their turn. This creates a significant problem with malnutrition, particularly for mothers who are pregnant or nursing when they are nursing their children. It is uncommon for expectant moms to seek medical assistance because the majority of people believe that pregnancy is a situation that is only temporary. The high rates of maternal and neonatal mortality in India are highly associated with this factor. In comparison to the amount of time and effort that parents put into their sons' lives from the moment they are born, they do not devote as much time and energy to their daughters' lives. Taking a newborn girl as an example, she would only be able to consume breast milk for a short period of time, which would not be enough to satisfy her nutritional requirements. This will make it easier for the woman to conceive a child in a shorter amount of time, which will increase the likelihood that she will have a son the next time around. As a result of their lack of education, women are at a disadvantage when it comes to performing work that is both physically demanding and unpleasant.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Mengstie (2022) in his paper discussed about impact of Microfinance on Women's Economic Empowerment. Women's economic empowerment is a technique meant to give them more authority over decisions, increase their income, and own assets. The study's primary objective is to analyse how microfinance affects women's economic empowerment. Data were obtained through a questionnaire given to a sample of 346 female microfinance consumers. The study made use of multiple regression and paired sampled t-test data analysis methods. Age, marital status, education level, credit amount, and number of trainings all significantly affect women's economic empowerment, according to the results of multiple linear regression. Prior business experience did not, however, significantly affect the economic empowerment of women. The results of a paired sampling t-test showed that there was a significant mean difference in terms of income, assets, and savings before and after receiving microloans. Microfinance significantly boosts women's independent income, their levels of asset ownership, and their monthly savings amounts, which all contribute to their economic empowerment. The study also demonstrated that microfinance positively affects the growth of women's entrepreneurship and exposure to business opportunities.

Chutia. A (2022) explained thoroughly Women Empowerment in his research paper. Women Empowerment is a comprehensive concept and multidimensional. It relates to economic, social, political and other aspects of life. Being comprehensive, it suggests that all dimensions of life need to be empowered. Empowerment with regard to all dimensions of life apparently to be initiated simultaneously. Empowerment expresses at different level and also in different aspects of life. Significantly the concept takes ideological commitments into its formations. It is based on gender, equality, ability of self-assertion and enabling skill development. The term has been used to represent a wide range of concepts and to describe a proliferation of outcomes. Women Empowerment has its origin in their subordinate position in patriarchy and associated ill treatments and non-recognition to their contributions. It is important that the additional positive contribution of women to general



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development by enabling their participations meaningfully in development process. Significantly, the promotion of women's empowerment has concerns with development goals of equality, social justice and freedom. World Bank (2001) in its reports identifies gender equality both as a development objective in itself and as means to promote, growth, reduce poverty and promote better Governance. As a means, women Empowerment would be a contributing force to overall development of a nation. The study tries to conceptualize the term empowerment and women empowerment in particular.

Sobha et al. (2021) in their paper attempted about several issues on Women Empowerment. According to the research paper empowerment of women is essentially the process of upliftment of economic, social and political status of women, the traditionally underprivileged ones, in the society. It is the process of guarding them against all forms of violence. Women empowerment involves the building up of a society, a political environment, wherein women can breathe without the fear of oppression, exploitation, apprehension, discrimination and the general feeling of persecution which goes with being a woman in a traditionally male dominated structure. Women constitute almost 50% of the world's population but India has shown disproportionate sex ratio whereby female's population has been comparatively lower than males. As far as their social status is concerned, they are not treated as equal to men in all the places. In the Western societies, the women have got equal right and status with men in all walks of life. But gender disabilities and discriminations are found in India even today. Thus this paper will focus on the place of women in the society of India.

Loya (2021) in their paper titled "Women Empowerment in India" discussed about Women Empowerment. It is one of the important concepts in the present scenario. Empowerment of women leads to the socio-economic development of the society and bringing women into the mainstream. It makes improvement of women in social, economic and political empowerment, which leads to women in equal participation in politics and decision-making process and makes active participation of women in all levels of development. It involves power to, power with and power within. It guides women into capacity building and leading to greater participation, effective decision-making power and control leading to transformative action. The Central and State Government has launched various schemes for the growth and development of women status. The present study is an attempt to examine the conceptual meaning of women empowerment and various Government Schemes initiated by the government of India for upliftment of women.

Kumari et al. (2020) in their paper discussed about Women Empowerment. Women's empowerment is a requirement for both sustainable development and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), according to the World Bank. A key component of women's empowerment in literature has been identified as economic empowerment. Women's economic empowerment would increase their participation in the labour force, which would be a key component of the nation's inclusive growth. Increased economic empowerment has a direct impact on women's increased ability to make decisions and on their financial security. This essay's major goal is to offer a comprehensive analysis of the causes and effects of women's economic empowerment. For future studies and policy makers, a thorough analysis of women's economic empowerment is presenting as a crucial subject. Based on the prior literature, a comprehensive summary table and an integrated framework are offered. The study's findings led to the identification



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of five key factors that influence women's economic empowerment, including decision-making ability, control over how money is spent and earned, leadership in the community, control over time management, and financial security. Among all of the effects, inclusive growth stood out as the primary effect. Policymakers can use the compilation of factors that influence women's economic empowerment to help them decide which factors are most important in advancing this empowerment and to create new economic plans that will help them achieve inclusive growth, which is one of the main effects of women's economic empowerment. This study offers a relevant overview and an integrative framework of existing research on women's economic empowerment and, its antecedents and implications. As new vistas open for advancing economic empowerment leading to inclusive growth. This work makes a contribution to the field of economics by combining a large body of research on a crucial economics topic and by providing a wide range of study directions. Women's economic empowerment, decision-making, control over how money is spent and used, community leadership, time management, and financial security are some of the terms used.

Folayan et al. (2020) in their paper attempted to ascertain whether there were correlations between indicators of processes, outputs, and outcomes of women's empowerment and the prevalence of early childhood caries (ECC) in light of the relationship between early childhood caries (ECC) and maternal social risk factors. Indicators assessing the explanatory variables, economic empowerment, decision-making, and violence against women, were chosen for this ecological study from the WHO database and the Integrated Results and Resources Framework of the UN-Women Strategic Plan 2018-2021. From a published literature, indicators measuring the outcome variables—the prevalence of ECC in children between the ages of 0 and 2 years and 3 and 5 years—were taken. The general linear models that were used to find the relationship between the result and explanatory variables were modified to account for the economic development of the various nations. A partial eta squared (2), 95% confidence intervals, and regression estimates (B) were calculated.

Tariq et al. (2020) in their study discussed about how microfinance affects women's economic empowerment. Following MultiStage (Mixed) Sampling, information was acquired utilising a Structured Interview Schedule from 370 women who were part of Self Help Groups in rural Kashmir Division that were started and developed under the flagship National Rural Livelihood Mission program's Umeed scheme. The current study used a quasi-experimental design with 180 participants in the control group and 190 participants in the programme (treatment). Independent Samples Test has mostly been used to compare the two groups' empowerment measures. The findings show that the indices of economic empowerment—-independent income, independent savings, asset creation, control over household income and savings as well as control over major purchases—are significantly different between the two groups. However, as indicated by Effect Size, the study has a greater impact on two economic empowerment indicators: independent savings and asset creation. Conclusion: Microfinance has a big impact on women's economic empowerment. This study is expected to draw policymakers' attention to the need to strengthen the programme even more in order to enjoy its positive effects on reducing poverty. Future research will look at how microfinance affected non-economic empowerment as well and expand geographically due to the multidimensional nature of empowerment. Keywords: Quasi-Experimental Design, Independent Samples Test, SHGs, Microfinance, Women's Economic Empowerment.



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Menon et al. (2020) in their research paper highlighted the phenomenon women empowerment. According to the paper the urge to empower is a human quality and a multidimensional phenomenon. It allows individuals or groups to participate and prosper in households, communities, and countries through political or development processes. Numerous studies have associated empowerment with many developmental outcomes. In the past decades, significant advances have been made among women in many fields like health, education, and employment. However, increasing incidence of violence against women, under-representation of women in decision-making, discriminatory laws governing marriage, land, property, and inheritance hinder women's empowerment. It is further blocked by new challenges that have emerged over the last decade, such as tackling HIV/AIDS and dealing with trafficking of women and young girls. The present study is an attempt to measure to what extent women in urban Bangalore feel empowered in critical areas such as educational achievement, economic opportunity, health and well-being, decision-making, and autonomy in all matters. The research methodology involved the study of a sample population of women in urban areas of Bangalore City, India. Different women's empowerment indicators were analyzed using a structured questionnaire which was distributed randomly to the female population in urban Bangalore. The main emphasis was on indicators such as women's decision-making power in household affairs, financial autonomy, freedom of movement and access to education. Data analysis revealed that decision-making power in households and freedom of movement of women vary considerably with age, education, and employment. Very few women had the final say on how their earnings were spent. Control over cash earnings increased with age and education. The study also indicates that educational qualifications and access to employment are the essential factors that promote women's empowerment, but the degree of achievement of the goal depends mostly on the attitude of the general population towards gender equality.

3. CONTRIBUTION OF MICROFINANCE TO THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN PURBA BARDHAMAN DISTRICT

In Purba Bardhaman, microfinance greatly empowers women by promoting economic independence through small businesses, increasing family decision-making authority, raising self-esteem, and expanding families' access to healthcare and education. Research from the Burdwan region, which encompasses Purba Bardhaman, demonstrates that women benefit from microfinance through Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in sectors like food, textiles, and services, which raises income, improves financial literacy, and strengthens community involvement. But issues like exorbitant interest rates and low financial literacy still exist, necessitating improved regulations and assistance programs to reach its full potential.

Women can start or grow microbusinesses including grocery stores, tailoring, food stands, and textile companies thanks to microfinance, which gives them access to credit. This increases their income and lessens their reliance on male family members. The efficiency of certain microfinance programs may be hampered by excessive interest rates. Microfinance can further strengthen its position as a potent instrument for women's empowerment and sustainable development in Purba Bardhaman by tackling these issues with focused interventions and policy assistance.



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4. CONCLUSION

According to the findings of a study that investigated the impact of microfinance on women's empowerment in Purba Bardhaman, the availability of small-scale loans and financial services has been a crucial factor in the transformation of the socio-economic standing of rural women. In addition to enhancing their ability to make decisions within their households and communities, microfinance not only made it possible for them to generate money through the establishment of small businesses and through self-employment responsibilities. There was a significant improvement in the level of financial independence, increased engagement in social activities, and enhanced understanding regarding health, education, and rights among women who participated in Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and microfinance efforts.

Nevertheless, the empowerment that is achieved is not limited to economic matters. As a result of the process, women have gained more self-assurance, mobility, and collective solidarity, which has enabled them to defy the conventional gender roles that have been established. However, despite these favorable outcomes, there are still obstacles that prevent women from reaching their full potential in terms of empowerment. These obstacles include unpredictable income, pressure to repay debts, limited market access, and occasional male domination in financial decision-making.

The sustainability of microfinance in Purba Bardhaman is contingent upon continuing capacity building, appropriate training, diversification of livelihood choices, and supportive policies that address structural inequities. Consequently, despite the fact that microfinance has been shown to be a catalyst for women's empowerment, its continued existence is contingent upon these factors. A true instrument of holistic and long-lasting empowerment for women in the area can be achieved through the implementation of these measures, which will allow microfinance to transcend its current role as a tool for encouraging financial inclusion.

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