



Women-Led Development through Women Workforce Integration in India: Laying the Groundwork for Vikshit Bharat @ 2047

Tapas Mondal^{1,2}, Priyajit Kumar Ghosh^{3*}, Biswajit Paul¹

¹Department of Commerce, University of Gour Banga, Malda, 732101 India

²Department of Commerce, Dum Dum Motijheel Rabindra Mahavidyalaya, Kolkata, 700074 India

³Department of Commerce, St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Kolkata, 700016 India

*Corresponding Author's E-Mail: priyajitkumarghosh97@gmail.com

Abstract

From ancient civilisations to present-day India, Indian women have played a critical role in the country's socioeconomic growth. Given the importance of women in defining socioeconomic growth, the Indian government has launched various projects to encourage women's education, entrepreneurship, and empowerment. However, women's workforce participation in India is among the lowest in the world. This discrepancy impedes the country's progress towards inclusive and sustainable development. In this context, the present study aims to investigate how the integration of women's workforce paves the way for women-led development from the perspective of women's development, as well as how it contributes to India's journey to become a developed nation by 2047. This study emphasises the multifaceted, constructive effect of female workforce inclusion on driving women-led development in India. This study offers a unique perspective that can help policymakers design targeted policies to remove roadblocks to the nation's progress toward achieving women-led development and being a developed country, or Vikshit Bharat, by 2047.

Keywords: *Vikshit Bharat; Women Workforce; Women-Led Development; Workforce Integration*

Introduction

India's goal of being a developed country by 2047, as stated in the Viksit Bharat by 2047 vision, is largely dependent on the sustainable and inclusive participation of all socioeconomic groups. In particular, women are an important but frequently disregarded group whose full participation in the workforce can be a potent catalyst for revolutionary change. In addition to being a question of social justice, women's advancement is also economically necessary and has the potential to significantly boost the Indian economy's resilience, growth, and innovation (Ubfal, 2024). A concentrated effort to empower women and completely integrate them into diverse economic sectors is necessary for the successful achievement of this vision. India can create a more vibrant and dynamic economy by utilising women's potential, which would ultimately help the country achieve its overall development objectives. The foundation for a prosperous and sustainable future for all residents is strengthened by the dedication to women-led development, which is crucial for guaranteeing that the advantages of economic advancement are distributed fairly (Ramya, Pushpa & Ghosh, 2024). Given its demographic advantage, India is at a turning point in its history. Even though women make up about half of the population, their labour force participation rate (LFPR) is startlingly low (20–30%), according to contemporary statistics (Heath *et al.*, 2024). This stark gender disparity in workforce participation indicates a significant loss of potential economic growth in addition to the presence of structural barriers.

For Viksit Bharat 2047 to achieve its lofty goals of building an affluent, inclusive, and self-sufficient country, closing this participation gap is essential. India can realise substantial economic potential and get closer to its goal of having a prosperous and just society by removing the obstacles that prevent women from entering the workforce.

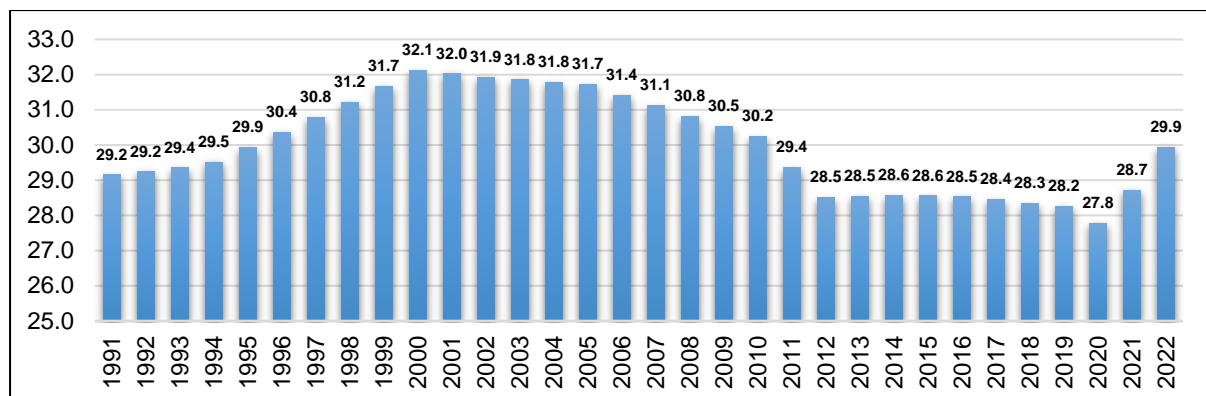
The concept of women-led development goes well beyond merely participating economically; it entails creating an environment that enables women to flourish as change agents, leaders, and innovators (Turkey, 2022). Systemic barriers such as gender discrimination, restricted access to education and skill development, a lack of childcare facilities, and cultural norms that restrict women's freedom and independence must be removed in order to achieve this goal (Farrell *et al.*, 2024; Kanyagui *et al.*, 2024; Senapati & Parida, 2024; Gupta & Kothe, 2024). It is crucial to note in this regard that a wide range of earlier empirical research, such as Bardasi *et al.* (2011), Islam *et al.* (2020), Fang *et al.* (2022), who proved a number of financial and non-financial barriers that women-led enterprises frequently encounter. They discovered that compared to men-led enterprises, women-led enterprises experience lower manpower levels, lower levels of total factor productivity, and lesser revenues. However, it is critical to foster a supportive environment through corporate programmes, community efforts, and deliberate policy measures that support gender equality and women's empowerment. Such initiatives are essential to building a society in which women may reach their full potential and make significant contributions to advancement. Given this context, the current study aims to investigate how women's employment can serve as a catalyst for women-led development, especially when viewed through the prism of women's advancement. The ramifications of this integration for India's goal of becoming a developed nation by 2047 are also examined. The study emphasises the varied and advantageous effects that women's employment has on supporting women-led development projects in India. By offering a unique perspective, this study seeks to help policymakers create focused plans that tackle the obstacles preventing the country from moving closer to women-led development and reaching the goal of a developed India, or Vikshit Bharat, by 2047.

Research Methodology

This study has a descriptive design that focuses on secondary data analysis. In order to provide a comprehensive grasp of the potential and difficulties related to women's integration into the Indian workforce, the approach is painstakingly structured to collect, evaluate, and interpret data from a range of sources. Both qualitative and quantitative data are used in the study to glean important insights that support its findings. The graphs and charts that successfully portray trends, patterns, and discrepancies in women's workforce participation are used to illustrate quantitative data. Qualitative data, on the other hand, provides a more profound understanding of the structural and sociocultural barriers that women face by placing these findings in context.

Results and Discussion

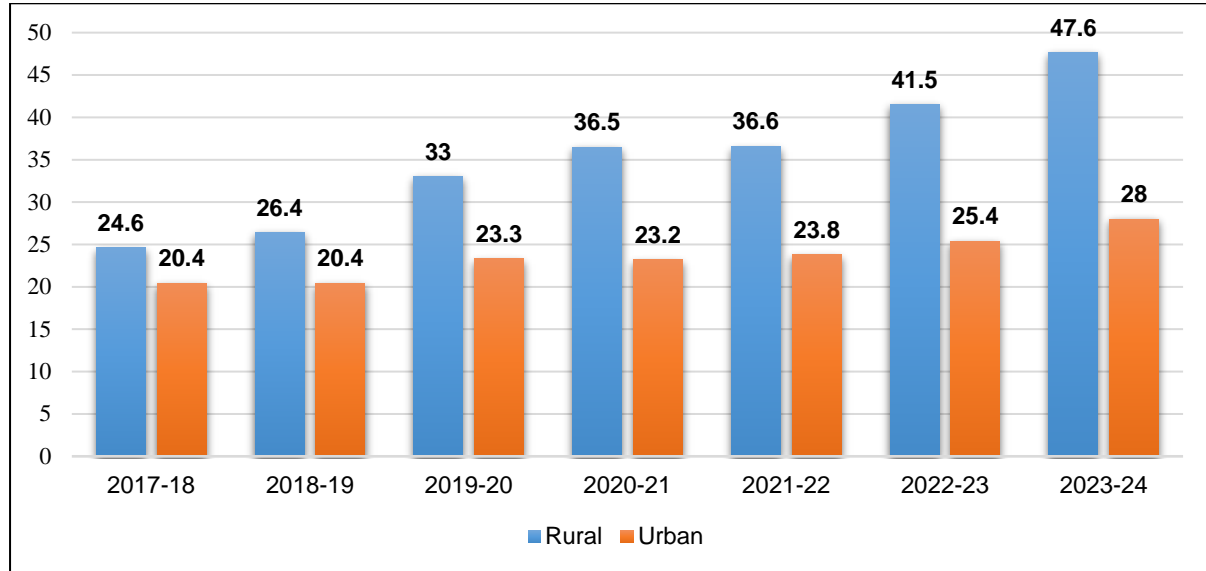
Status of Women's Workforce Participation in India



Source: World Bank (2023)

Figure 1: Labor Force Participation Rate, Female (% of Female Population Ages 15-64) (Modelled ILO Estimate)

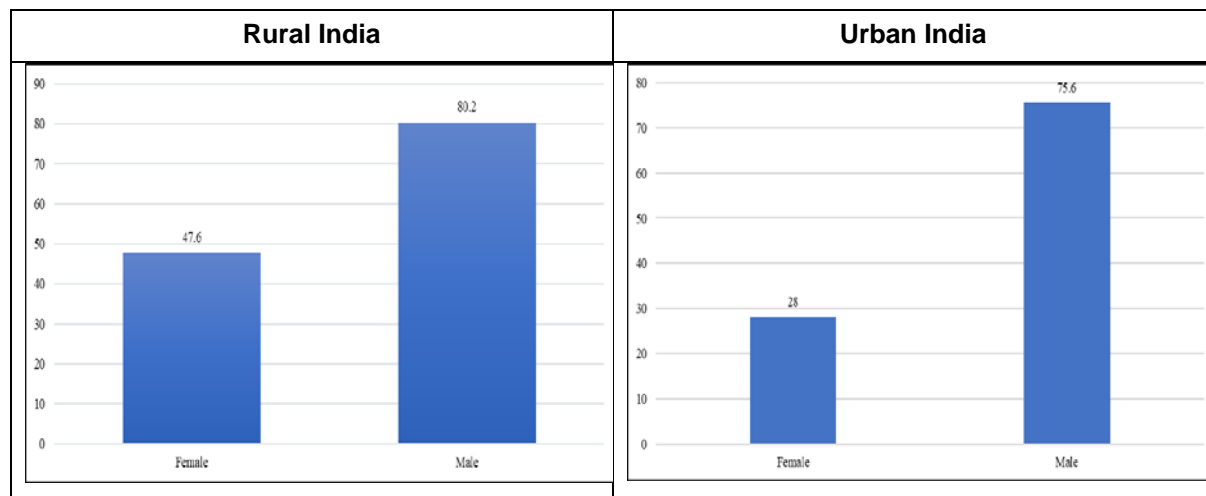
The Figure 1 depicts the variable trend of female labour force participation in India from 2001 to 2022. It begins with an upward trajectory, reaching a peak of 32.10% in 2001, which signifies an increase in employment opportunities for women. However, following this peak, the participation rate experienced a decline, falling to 27.80% by 2020, a year significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which had a disproportionate effect on women's employment. After 2020, the trend shifted positively, with participation rates increasing once more, culminating at 29.90% in 2022. This number suggests a gradual recovery as economic activities resumed, and initiatives aimed at reintegrating women into the workforce gained traction.



Source: Ministry of Statistics & Program Implementation (2024)

Figure 2: Female Labour Force Participation Rate (in %) (LFPR)

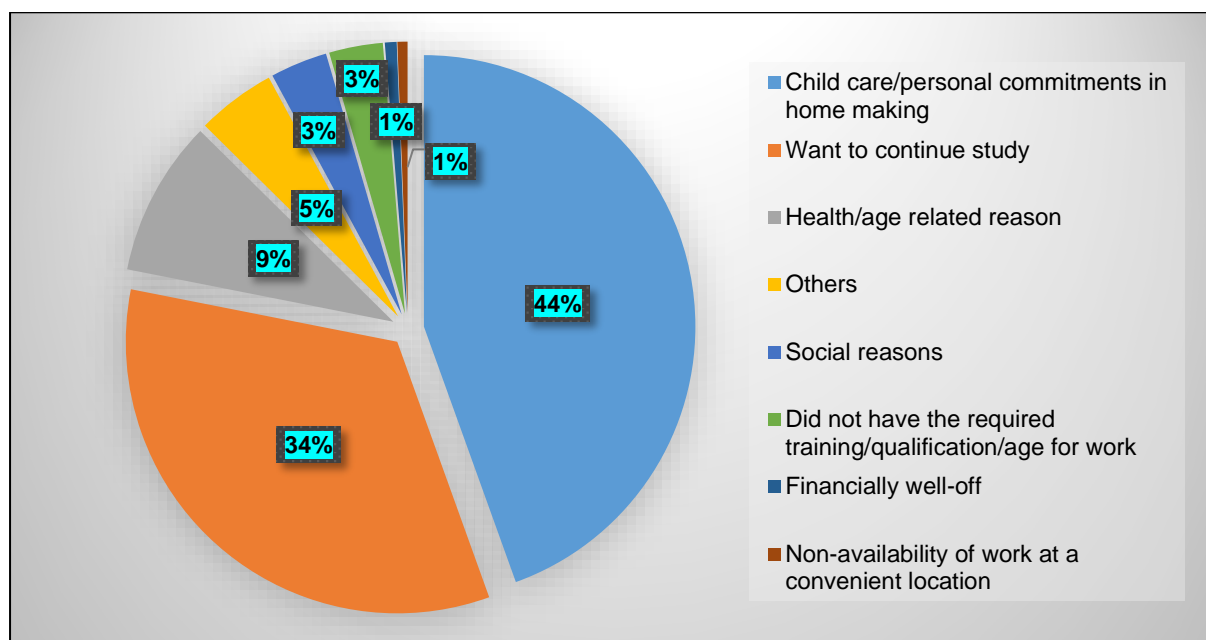
Figure 2 clearly illustrates that the participation of women in the labour force in rural areas consistently exceeds that of their urban counterparts. Notably, there has been a significant increase in female labour force participation in rural regions following the COVID-19 pandemic, with the rate rising to 47.60% in the 2023-24 period, compared to just 33% in 2019-20. In contrast, the urban female labour force participation has not shown substantial improvement in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis. This disparity highlights the differing trends in labour engagement between rural and urban women, emphasising the resilience and growth of female employment in rural settings during this time.



Source: Ministry of Statistics & Program Implementation (2024)

Figure 3: Female Labour Force Participation Rate (in %) (LFPR) - (2023-24)

Figure 3 illustrates that males' participation in the labour force surpasses that of females in both rural and urban settings. However, this disparity is particularly pronounced in urban areas, where female participation stands at approximately 28%, while male participation reaches 75.60%. In contrast, women in rural areas exhibit a stronger presence in the workforce compared to their urban counterparts. In rural regions, female labour force participation is around 47.60%, in comparison to male participation at 80.20%. This data indicates that while men dominate the labour market overall, women in rural contexts are better represented than those in urban environments, highlighting a significant variation in gender participation across different geographical settings.

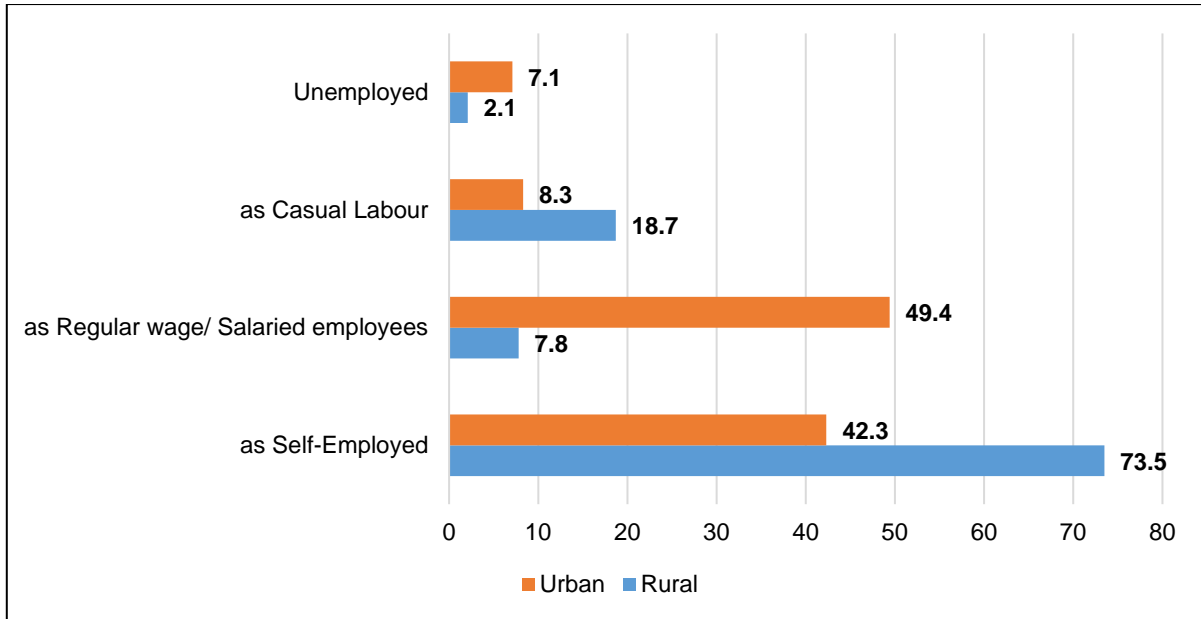


Source: Ministry of Statistics & Program Implementation (2024)

Figure 4: Reasons Reported by Females for Not Being in Labour Force (in %)

In Figure 4, the data presented clearly indicates that among the total number of women not participating in the labour force, approximately 44% are absent from the market due to their activities related to "Childcare/personal commitments in home making", while 33.6% express a desire to pursue further education rather than enter the workforce. Additionally, approximately 3.4% of women are separated from the labour force for "social reasons." This information highlights that a significant portion of women's work is centred around home-based activities, such as caregiving and other non-market contributions that provide economic advantages to households. Women fulfil multiple roles within the family structure, often leading to an increased burden of discharge of domestic responsibilities, a situation shaped by prevailing gender norms. Such contributions are frequently disregarded, underestimated, and imperfectly reported, making measurement a critical issue in understanding the low female labour force participation.

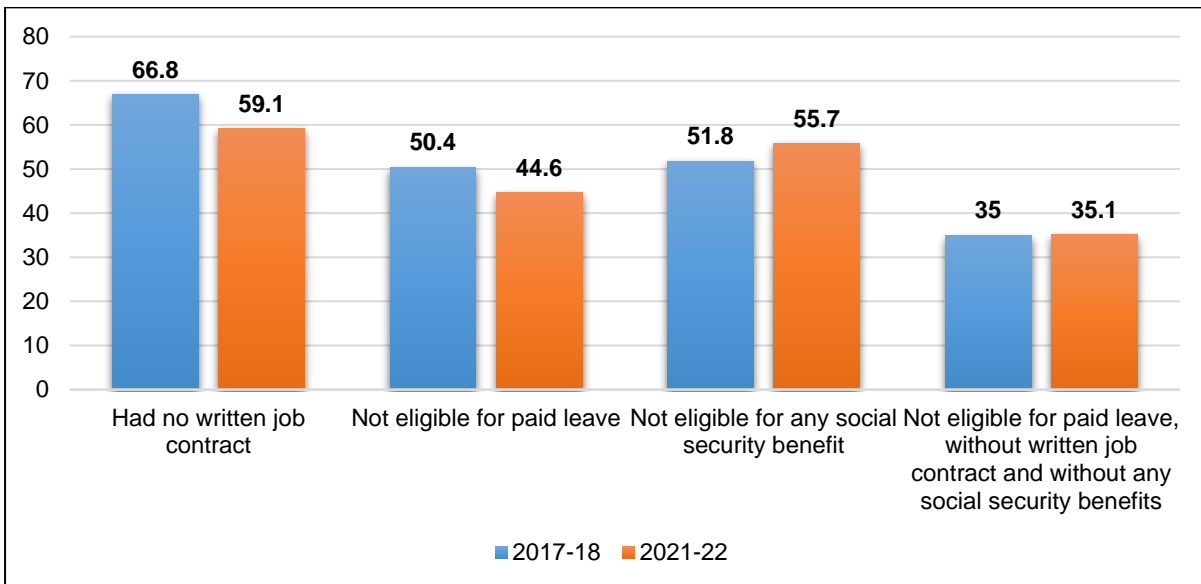
Social norms, which are informal and unwritten guidelines governing behaviour and conduct, dictate what is deemed acceptable and appropriate within a given social context. The dominant social norm for women is the "Female Homemaker norm", which assigns the responsibility of home and childcare to women, while the "Male Breadwinner norm" allocates the duty of household financial support to men. Consequently, a significant social and cultural issue is 'time poverty' among married women. Even when women attain education and are permitted to work outside the home, many opt not to engage in employment due to the disproportionate demands of caregiving responsibilities.



Source: Ministry of Statistics & Program Implementation (2024)

Figure 5: Female in Work Force (%) (2023-24)

Figure 5 demonstrates that the allocation of the female workforce is primarily concentrated in the "self-employed" category, with "regular or salaried employment" following closely behind. In India, 73.50% of women in rural areas and 42.30% in urban areas are self-employed. Additionally, 7.8% of women in rural regions and 49.40% in urban regions are engaged in "regular or salaried employment", while 18.70% and 8.30% are involved in "casual labour" in rural and urban areas, respectively.



Source: Ministry of Statistics & Program Implementation (2024)

Figure 6: Percentage (%) of Regular Wage/Salaried Employees by Terms of Employment

The data presented in Figure 6 for the year 2021-22 clearly indicates that approximately 60% of female employees lack a written job contract. Furthermore, nearly half of the female regular wage or salaried employees are ineligible for paid leave. Additionally, 55.70% of female employees are not covered by any social security benefits.

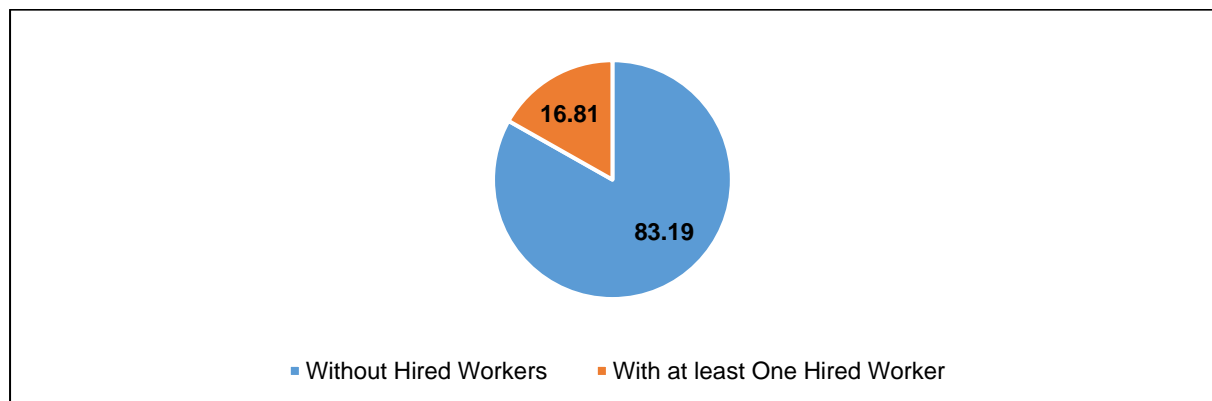
Women-Led Development

- Economic Involvement and Opportunity
- State of Indian Women's Involvement in the Entrepreneurial Activities

Table 1: Total Number of Establishments under Women Entrepreneurship by Type of Establishment in India

	Without Hired Workers	With at least One Hired Worker	All
Total Number of Establishments under Women Entrepreneurship by type of establishment	6697354	1353465	8050819

Source: Ministry of Statistics & Program Implementation (2024)



Source: Ministry of Statistics & Program Implementation (2024)

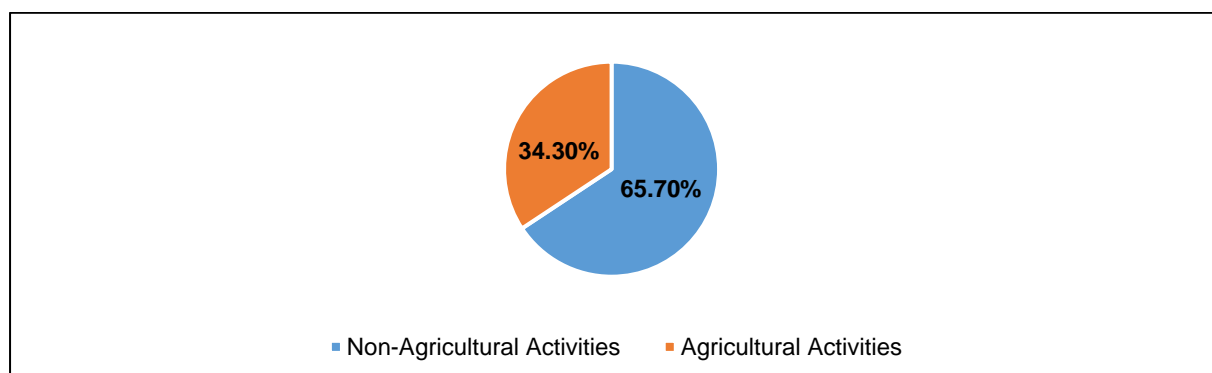
Figure 7: Establishments under Women Entrepreneurship by Type of Establishment (in %)

Table 1 illustrates that the total number of women-owned establishments in India has reached 8,050,819. Of this total, approximately 83.19% operate without hired workers, while 16.81% employ hired workers (Figure 7).

Table 2: No. of Establishments under Women Entrepreneurs for Agricultural and Non-Agricultural Activities

	Non-Agricultural Activities	Agricultural Activities	All
No. of establishments under Women Entrepreneurs for agricultural and non-agricultural activities	5289052	2761767	8050819

Source: Ministry of Statistics & Program Implementation (2024)



Source: Ministry of Statistics & Program Implementation (2024)

Figure 8: Establishments under Women Entrepreneurs for Agricultural and Non-agricultural Activities

Table 2 shows that there are 5289052 and 2761767 establishments under women entrepreneurs in India for agricultural and non-agricultural operations, respectively. In this case, roughly 65.70% work in the agricultural sector, whereas 34.30% work in the non-agricultural sector (Figure 8).

Table 3: Startups with at least one-Woman Director

	Startups with at least one-Woman Director	Startups Supported by the Government (Total)
Startups with at least one-Woman Director in 2024	73,151	1,52,139

Source: Ministry of Statistics & Program Implementation (2024)

Table 3 indicates that among the 152,139 startups receiving government support, 73,151 have at least one-woman director. This figure signifies that approximately 48.80% of the supported startups include at least one woman in a directorial position.

Access to Financial Resources in Respect to Startups

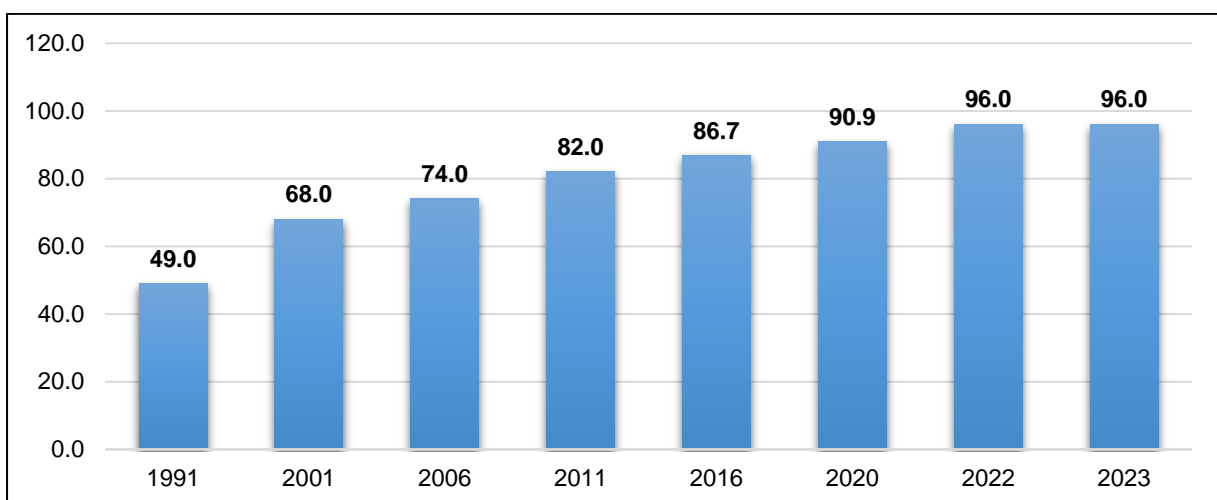
Table 4: Flagship Funding Schemes and Women-led Startups

Flagship Schemes	Fund (in ₹)	Women-led Startups
Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs)	₹3,107.11 crore	149
Startup India Seed Fund Scheme (SISFS)	₹227.12 crore	1278
Credit Guarantee Scheme for Startups (CGSS)	₹24.6 crore	-

Source: Ministry of Commerce & Industry (2024)

According to Table 4, 149 women-led businesses received ₹3,107.11 crore funding from Alternative Investment Funds. Additionally, the Startup India Seed Fund Scheme has provided ₹3,107.11 crore funding to 1,278 women-led enterprises. The Credit Guarantee Scheme for Startups (CGSS), on the other hand, has paid out ₹24.6 crore in total.

Educational Aspect

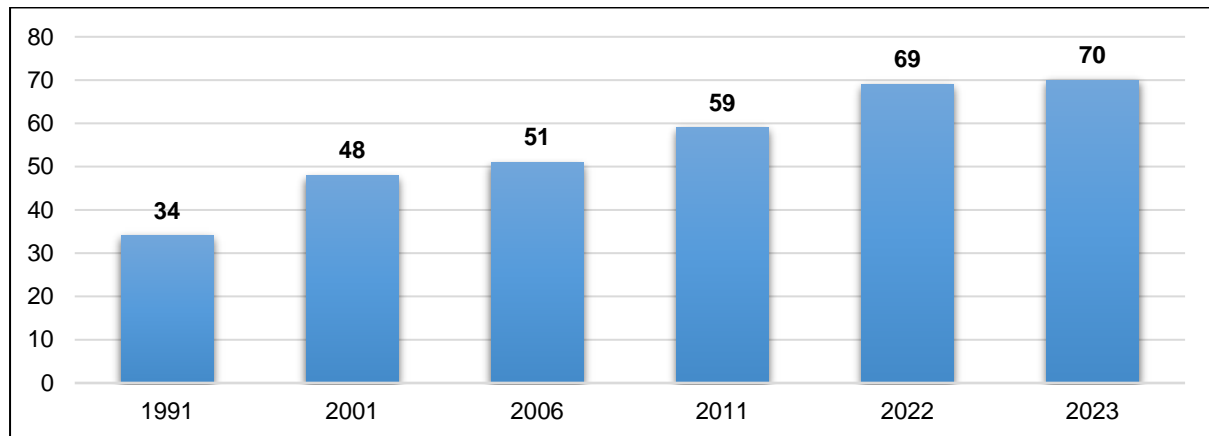


Source: World Bank (2023)

Figure 9: Literacy Rate, Youth Female (% of Females Ages 15-24)

The graph in Figure 9 shows how India's youth female literacy rate (ages 15 to 24) has steadily increased over time, indicating notable advancements in gender equality and educational access.

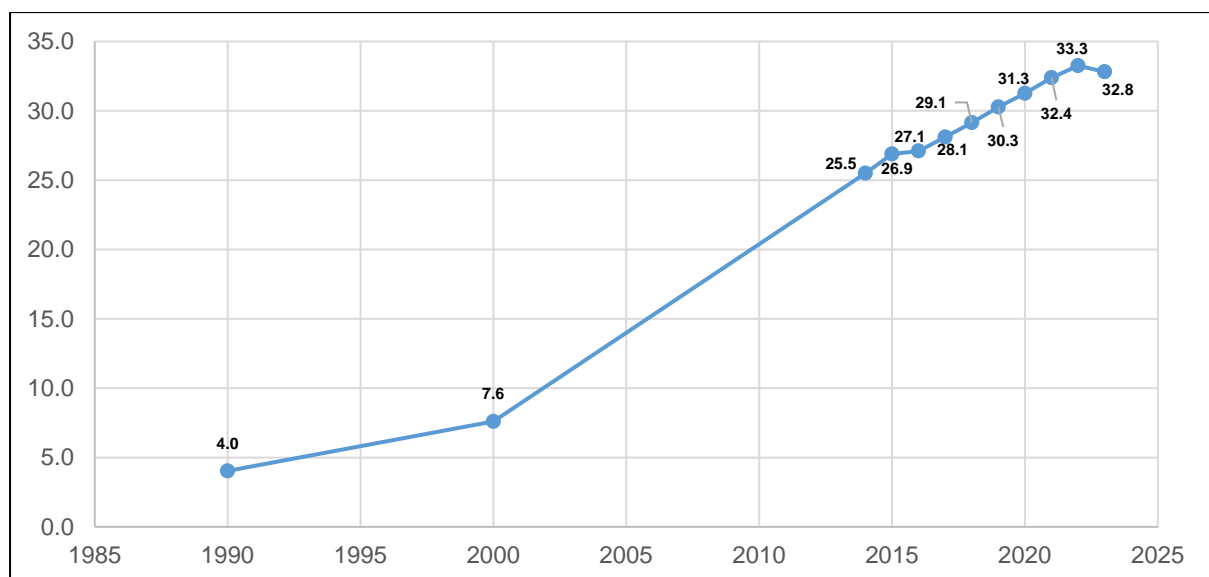
Beginning with a lower baseline, the percentage has steadily climbed due to government initiatives, better school facilities, and heightened awareness of the importance of education for girls. The remarkable 96% literacy rate for young girls by 2023 demonstrated the closing gender gap in education. This increasing trend highlights India's initiatives to educate women and empower them, fostering wider social and economic advancement and opening up more chances for next generations.



Source: World Bank (2023)

Figure 10: Literacy rate, Adult Female (% of Females Ages 15 and above)

Figure 10 demonstrates the consistent rise in adult female literacy in India over time, signifying significant progress in educational access and gender equality. The gender gap in schooling was narrowing, as seen by the impressive 70% literacy rate for adult females by 2023.



Source: World Bank (2023)

Figure 11: School Enrollment, Tertiary, Female (% Gross)

The graph in Figure 11 shows an increasing trend in the number of Indian women enrolled in tertiary education, indicating that women now have greater access to higher education. Government laws, scholarships, and cultural movements toward gender equality in education have all contributed to the steady increase in the proportion of women enrolled in postsecondary education throughout time. The gross enrolment rate rose to 32.8% by 2023, which was a major turning point for women's educational progress. In addition to facilitating increased involvement in skilled professions and promoting economic growth and gender parity in the workforce, this upward trend demonstrates India's achievement in empowering women through higher education. The rise emphasises how crucial it is to keep funding education.

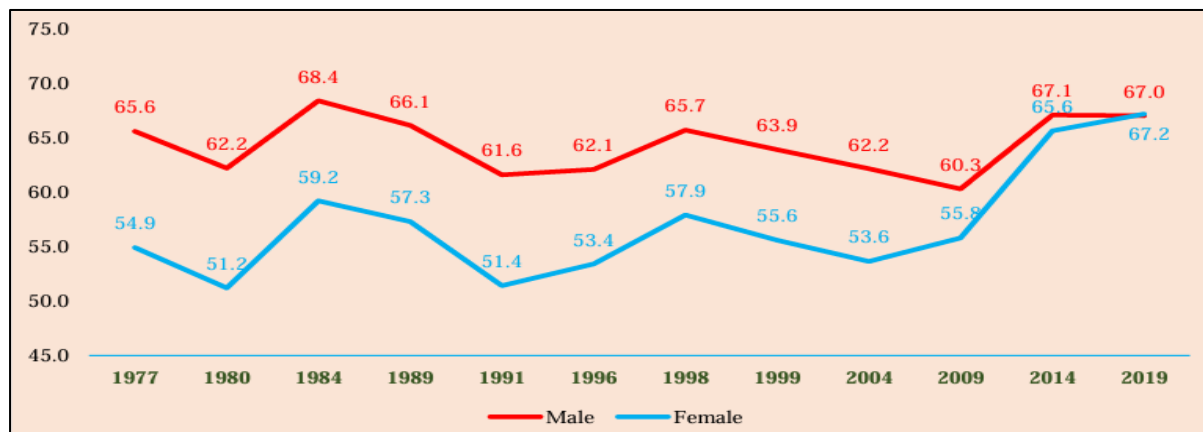
Political Participation and Leadership

Table 5: Number of Women in Judicial Positions (as judges)

	High Courts	Supreme Court
Women in Judicial Positions	13.40%	9.30%

Source: Ullal (2024)

The statistics demonstrate how under-represented women are in India's upper courts. According to current data, women make up just 13.40% of High Court judges, and even fewer, 9.30%, are represented on the Supreme Court (Table 5). The statistics show a sizable disparity that requires immediate action, notwithstanding initiatives to advance gender diversity. For India's legal system to be more inclusive and balanced, more women must serve in the courts.



Source: Ministry of Statistics & Program Implementation (2024)

Figure 12: Percentage of Electors Participating in Lok Sabha Elections

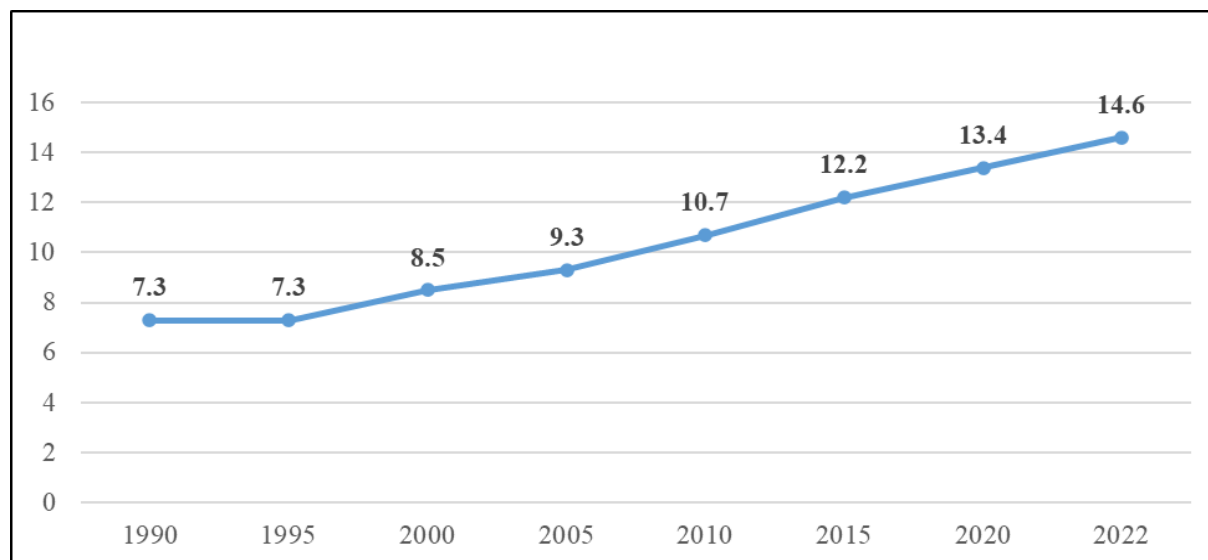
Figure 12 highlights an important turning point in India's democratic engagement, with 67.20% of female electors casting ballots in the Lok Sabha elections, somewhat higher than the 67% turnout of male voters. This shows that women are becoming more politically informed and involved, which reflects their growing influence on governance. This increase has been caused by a number of factors, such as government programmes, awareness efforts, and easier access to voting. In order to ensure a more inclusive democracy in India, the increased female turnout calls into question long-standing gender differences in political engagement and emphasises the necessity of having more women in leadership and policymaking positions.



Source: Ministry of Statistics & Program Implementation (2024)

Figure 13: Women in Central Council of Ministers (%)

The information shows how women's representation in India's Central Council of Ministers has changed over time. Women's representation in ministerial positions increased from 9.52% in 1998 to 17.78% in 2015, demonstrating advancements in gender inclusion. The ratio fell to 14.47% by 2022, indicating a reversal in women's political representation. Even while more women are voting in elections, there are still few prospects for leadership. In order to ensure sustained progress toward equitable representation in decision-making positions within the Indian government, the fall points to the necessity of more robust legislative measures, gender-inclusive governance, and increased initiatives to empower women in politics (Figure 13).



Source: Human Development Reports (2024)

Figure 14: Share of Seats in Parliament (%)

Figure 14 highlights the gradual increase in women's representation in India's Parliament over the years. In 1990, women held only 7.30% of parliamentary seats, reflecting significant gender disparity in political leadership. By 2022, this share had risen to 14.60%, indicating progress toward greater inclusion. Despite this improvement, women's representation remains low compared to global standards. The data underscores the need for continued efforts, such as the Women's Reservation Bill, to ensure equitable participation in decision-making. Increasing women's presence in Parliament is crucial for inclusive governance, gender-sensitive policies, and a more representative democracy in India.

Conclusion

The inclusion of women in the workforce is a vital catalyst for women-led development, playing a significant role in India's ambition to achieve developed nation status by 2047. Although women's participation in the labour force has seen an upward trend, it still lags behind that of men, with rural participation rates surpassing those in urban areas. Numerous women opt not to enter the workforce due to responsibilities related to childcare, household tasks, aspirations for higher education, and prevailing societal norms. In spite of these obstacles, there has been notable growth in women entrepreneurship, the emergence of startups led by women, and an increase in women-owned micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), along with improved access to financial resources. Furthermore, advancements in female literacy and educational enrolment have empowered a higher number of women to engage in economic activities. Nevertheless, the representation of women in prominent leadership positions remains insufficient. Their involvement in judicial roles, the Central Council of Ministers, and Parliament has not seen significant growth, underscoring the necessity for more robust policy measures and gender-inclusive governance. Ensuring equal opportunities for women across all sectors will be crucial in propelling India's journey towards inclusive and sustainable development by 2047.

Conflict of Interest

The authors affirm that there are no conflicting objectives.

Acknowledgement

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