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Enrolment of Women in Higher Education: A Comparative Study on Women's Equity in Governance and Employment Status in India

By Anita C.¹ and D. Ravindran²

Abstract

Many research studies, globally, suggest that a rise in the rates of higher education of women enhances their living standards and decision-making powers. Education has served as a powerful tool for empowering women. Having higher women's representation in governance should enable the empowerment of women. The Gross Enrolment Ratio [GER] of Indian women has shown a steady rise in the past two decades. The GER of women has surpassed men in the age group of 18 to 23 in the year 2018-2019 (All India Survey of Higher Education [AISHE] Reports, 2019). In the year 2019, only 48.20 % of the Indian population are women. India shows a negative trend concerning women entering the workforce despite their increasing literacy rate and GER of women in higher education. In the Indian parliament, only 14.36 % of elected representatives in the lower house (The Lok Sabha) are women in the year 2020 (www.loksabha.nic.in). These statistics raise an important question on whether the efforts taken to empower women are yielding the intended results in terms of their equity in workforce and governance. This study is an analysis of the relationship between the enrolment of women in higher education and literacy level of women with their representation in governance and the workforce in India.

Keywords: Women's equity, Higher education, Governance, Employment status, Women in India

Introduction

It is a generally accepted notion that a woman's education has a direct relationship with her empowerment. Research studies conducted all over the world substantiate this assumption. Women's education directly influences the improvement of the socio-economic and health status of the society at large. (Bhagavatheeswaran *et al.*, 2016; UNESCO, 2013). In the Indian scenario, almost all governments have taken initiatives to increase the enrolment of women in education starting from the school level leading to secondary and higher education. These initiatives have been largely successful as the enrolment ratio of women has steadily increased over the past years. The very need for improving the enrolment ratio is to ensure the enhancement of the living standards of women by empowering them with education, thereby helping them to enter the workforce as well as take part in governance.

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Women entering the workforce and representation of women in governance are essential for voicing the concerns and needs of women. This study analyses the relationship between the literacy level and GER of women in higher education with their representation in the workforce and governance. The representation of women in the Indian parliament's lower house - The Lok Sabha, the upper house of parliament – The Rajya Sabha, the central and state legislatures and local self-government (Panchayati Raj bodies) are considered for this study.

Select Literature Review

The participation of women with secondary education in the labour force with is low in India compared to many other countries. Among the 14 countries having lower labour force participation of women with secondary education, India stands second. (Chatterjee, Esha, Sonalde Desai & Reeve Vanneman, 2018). The literacy level of women is increasing but has not yet reached the desired level. (Maitra-Sinha, 1993). The overall literacy rate of women is increasing in India every year. The literacy rate of women was 29.8 in the year 1981 and had increased to 65.5 in the year 2011 (Source: www.census.gov.in). The enrolment of women in higher education had increased from 17.9 in the year 2010-2011 to 26.4 in the year 2018-2019 (AISHE Report). Therefore, the decrease in the number of women joining the workforce despite the increasing GER is a matter of great concern. The female workforce participation in India had fallen from 36.7 percent in 2008 to 26 percent in 2018 (The Hindu, March 8, 2019).

Women hold only a meagre 7% of the senior management roles in India which is much lower than the global average. (Grant Thornton press release, 2017). Women enrolling in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics-related education stands at 39 percent (Source: Girlsintech.org). The representation of women in the lower house of Indian parliament remains at 14.36 % despite nearly half of the Indian population being women. 44.37 % of elected representatives are women in Panchayati Raj, the institutions of local self-government in India. (Source: www.panchayat.gov.in)

Objectives of the Research

- To establish the relationship between the literacy level, gross enrolment of women in higher education and their representation in governance and workforce.
- To analyse the factors influencing the empowerment of women in India.

Research Methodology

This is a descriptive study that has taken into consideration the analysis of secondary data hosted by the various open data platforms of the Government of India and other international bodies.

Observations

Trends in the Female Literacy Rate in India

The female literacy rate in India had increased from 8.86% in the year 1951 to 65.46 % in the year 2011, a whopping increase of 638%. Even though this is a substantial increase, India is

still lagging, behind the global female literacy level of 80.33% in the year 2011. As per the latest census data (Census, 2011), there is a gap of 16% between male and female literacy rates in India.

Figure 1: Trends in Literacy Rate of Women in India

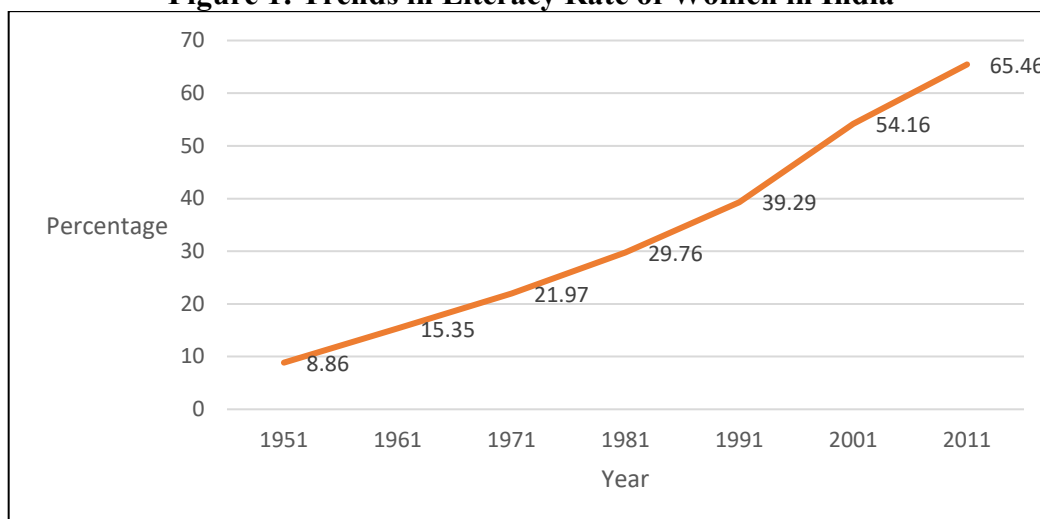


Table 1: Gap between male and female literacy levels in India

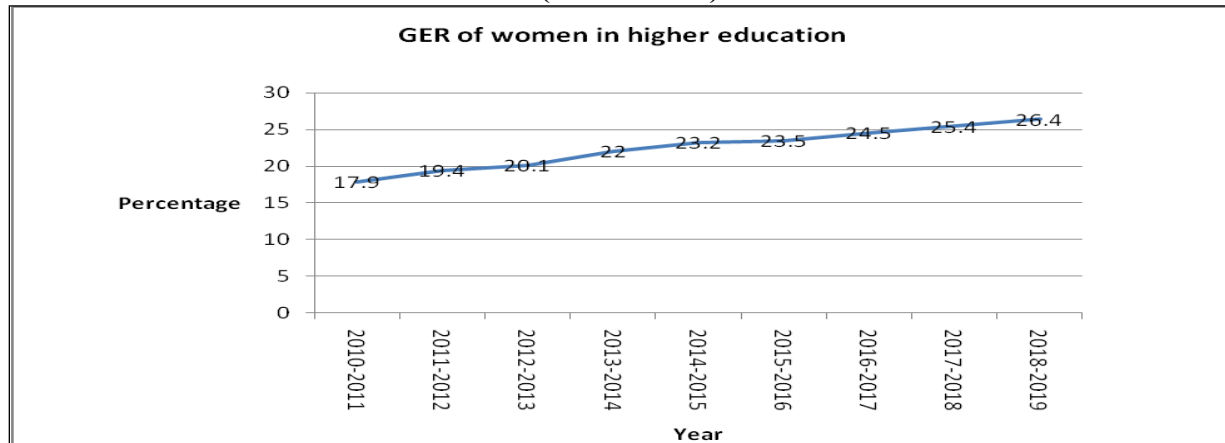
Census – Year	Male – Literacy Rate	Female – Literacy Rate	Gap
1951	27.16	8.86	18.3
1961	40.4	15.35	25.05
1971	45.96	21.97	23.99
1981	56.38	29.76	26.62
1991	64.13	39.29	24.84
2001	75.85	54.16	21.69
2011	82.14	65.46	16.68

[Source: census.gov.in]

Trends in Gross Enrolment Ratio of Women in Indian Higher education

The enrolment ratio of women shows a steady increase in India. All the Indian states show a steady increase in enrolment of women in higher education except for the states of Goa and Nagaland.

Figure 2: Trends in Gross Enrolment Ratio of Women in Higher Education in India (2010 – 2018)



[Source: Based on AISHE reports]

Table 2: GER of Men and Women in Higher Education in India [2010 - 2018]

Year	Men	Women	Gap
2010-2011	20.8	17.9	2.9
2011-2012	22.1	19.4	2.7
2012-2013	22.7	20.1	2.6
2013-2014	23.9	22	1.9
2014-2015	25.3	23.2	2.1
2015-2016	25.4	23.5	1.9
2016-2017	26	24.5	1.5
2017-2018	26.3	25.4	0.9
2018-2019	26.3	26.4	-0.1

[Source: Based on AISHE reports.]

The GER of women in higher education has surpassed that of men in the year 2018-2019. This trend should actually increase the avenues of job opportunities for women.

Representation of Women in the Work Force of India

The decline of women in the Indian workforce is a matter of concern. The percentage of women aged 15 or above participating in the labour force in India is just 23.6% while that of men in the same age group stands at 78.6%. (World Bank Group, “Labour Force Participation Rate, Male (% of Male Population Ages 15+) (Modelled ILO Estimate), India)

Despite the increase in GER in higher education and an increase in literacy levels, the percentage of women entering the workforce is declining. The STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) careers in India are showing a gender gap and this is reported by India Today magazine on August 21, 2019. Females account for only 13.7 % in senior and middle management positions in India. As per the report of National Association of Software and Service Companies (NASSCOM), the labour force contribution of women in India’s technology industry is 35%.

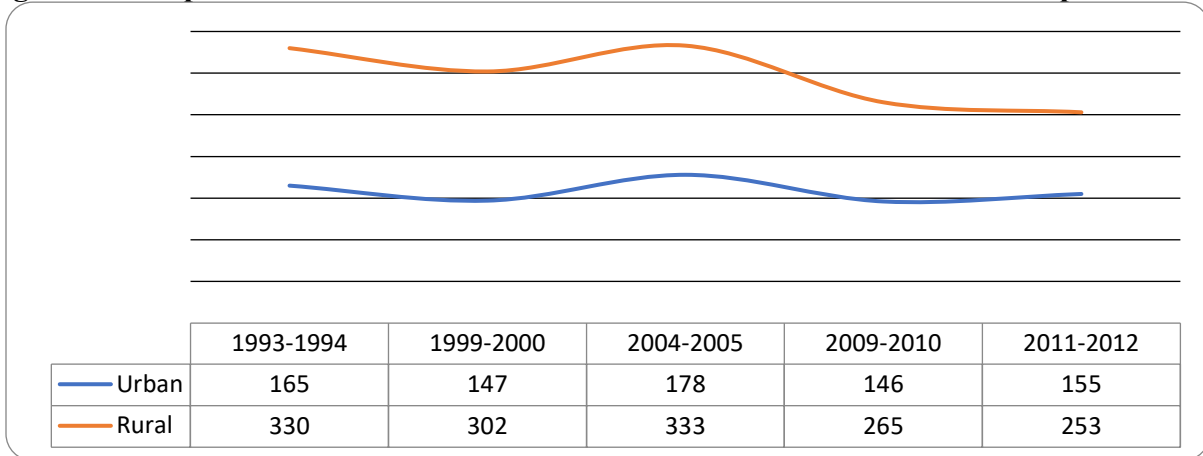
Figure 3: Trends in female participation in the Indian workforce.



[Source of data: Labour force participation rate, female (% of female population ages 15+) (modelled ILO estimate), India]

The participation of women in the Indian workforce has declined from 30.72% in the year 2001 to 23.41 % in the year 2019. The participation of women in labour force is declining among both urban and rural population. The declining trend is conspicuous in the rural population of India as compared to the urban population. The Labour Force Participation Rate [LFPR] which is the measure of people in the workforce per thousand persons in urban areas had declined from 165 in the year 1993 to 155 in 2011. In rural areas, the decline of female labour force participation rate had been from 330 in 1993 to 253 in 2011 as per the national sample survey data. There was a 30% decline in rural areas as compared to 6% in urban areas.

Figure 4: Comparison Between Rural and Urban Female Labour Force Participation Rates



[Source: National Sample Survey of India, 2014]

The analysis of the national sample survey data of the year 2014 is substantiating the overall decline in LFPR mainly due to lesser participation by rural women in the work force (Prachi Salve, 2019). There are varied reasons for the decline in LFPR of rural women. There was a fall in average farm size from 1.23 hectares in 2001 to 1.15 hectares in 2011 (As per the 2011 Agriculture census data) which in turn led to a reduction in agriculture-related jobs. The decrease in demand for labour in rural areas could be due to the increase in mechanization. The increased

literacy rate is not driving more rural women into the workforce. The aspiration of educated women to enter into a formal salaried job and the scarcity of such jobs in rural areas also could be suggestive of this decline. The Indian Human Development Survey of 2004 and 2011 is indicating that better transport infrastructure can improve female participation in the workforce in rural areas. Better connectivity through good roads and an increase in the frequency of public transport is still a challenge in rural India.

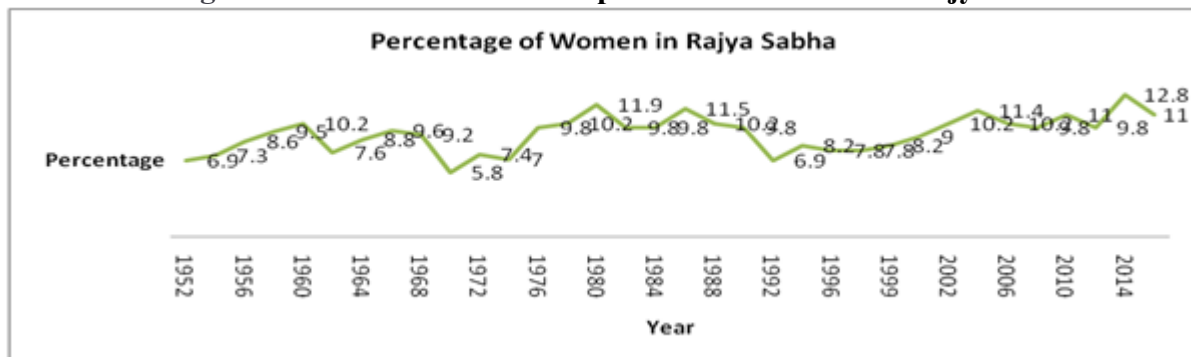
Women in Leadership Roles and Governance

Women in Corporate Leadership Roles

The representation of women in senior leadership roles is shrinking in prominent multinational companies in India (Shyamsunder, Pollack, Travis, 2015). Only 15% of board seats and 6% of board chairs are held by women (Catalyst, 2019). As per the global survey conducted by Grant Thornton, India is ranked third lowest concerning women in leadership roles. Only 17% of the senior management roles are occupied by women. Women as chief executive officers or managing directors form only 7% of the total numbers in such positions. Women are not highly vocal about their ambitions, risk-taking abilities and decision-making capabilities and this stands in the way of women’s progress to senior management roles. (Grant Thornton, 2017)

Women in the Indian Parliament

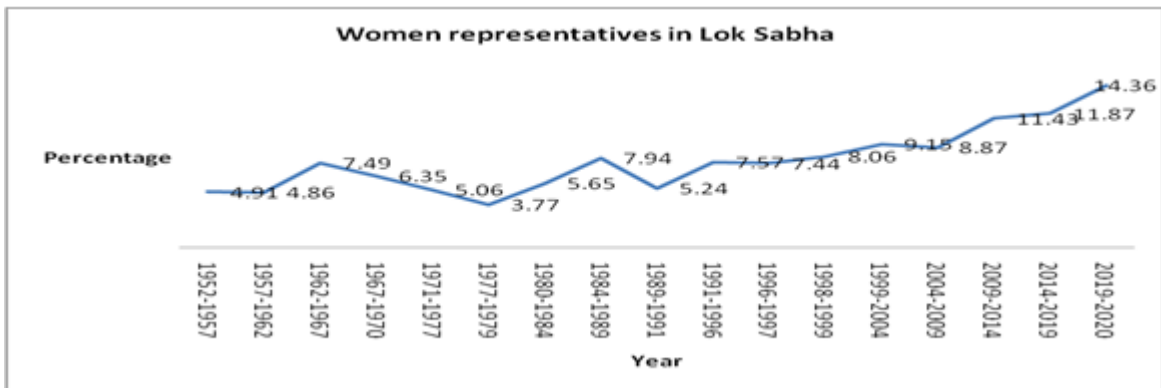
Figure 5: Trends in Women Representation in Indian Rajya Sabha



[Source of data: Men and women of India, 2018, www.mospi.gov.in]

Rajya Sabha is the upper house of the Indian parliament. The representation of women is showing an intermittent trend with the highest representation at any time being 12.8% in the year 2014 and at an average close to 10% representation of female members.

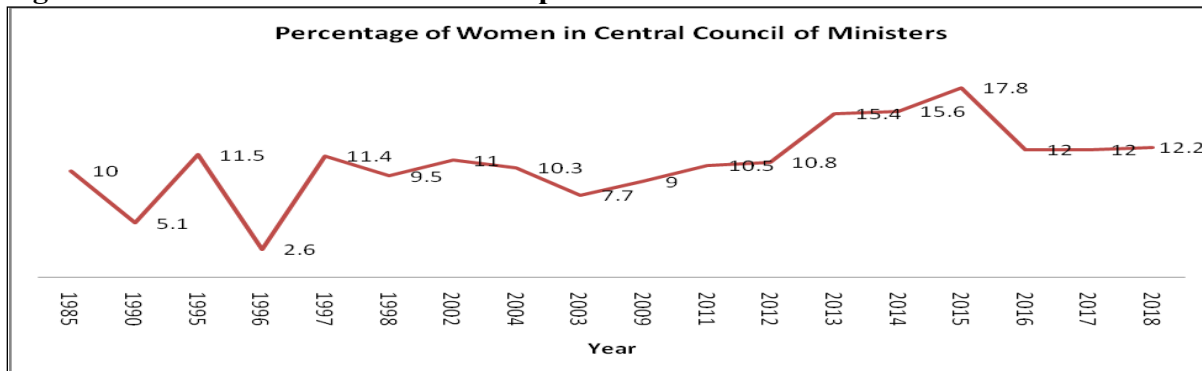
Figure 6: Trends in Women Representation in Indian Lok Sabha



[Source: loksabha.nic.in]

Lok Sabha is the lower house of the Indian Parliament. The representation of women in the Lok Sabha shows intermittent increases till 2009. Since 2009 there is an increase every five years. This trend raises a pertinent question that if this trend continues, then when will India have a fair share of women representatives? Ten states do not have a single female elected representative to the lower house of the Indian Parliament in the 16th Lok Sabha. The literacy rate of these 10 states is fairly high pointing out the fact that the increase in literacy levels of women is not having a direct bearing on women in governance of India. The states with the highest GER of women are Kerala, Goa and Uttar Pradesh. The representation of women in the respective recent legislatures is not encouraging even in these three states. 5.71% of representatives in Kerala assembly, 5% in Goa assembly and 9.42% in Uttar Pradesh assembly are women. This is very low compared to the representation of women in the central legislature.

Figure 7: Trends in Women Representation in Central Council of Ministers



[Source of data: Men and Women of India, 2018, www.mospi.gov.in]

On an average 10 percent of the council of ministers in the Indian Central council of ministers are women.

Representation of Women in State Legislative Assemblies

India has 29 states and 6 union territories as of January 2020. Each state has a legislative assembly and representatives are elected once in five years. The analysis of data shows that none of the states has female representation of more than 14% in the state legislature and are averaging to roughly 8%. This is in line with the representation of women in the central legislature.

Table 3: Women Representation in State Legislative Assemblies

Sl. No	State / Union Territory	Percentage of seat won by women candidates	Year - Last general election
1	Puducherry - Union Territory	13.3	2016
2	Assam	6.34	2016
3	Kerala	5.71	2016
4	Tamil Nadu	9.33	2016
5	West Bengal	13.92	2016
6	NCT of Delhi - Union Territory	8.57	2015
7	Bihar	11.5	2015
8	Andhra Pradesh	9.2	2014
9	Arunachal Pradesh	3.3	2014
10	Haryana	10	2014
11	Jammu & Kashmir	2.3	2014
12	Jharkhand	9.9	2014
13	Maharashtra	6.9	2014
14	Odisha	7.5	2014
15	Sikkim	9.4	2014
16	Chhattisgarh	11.1	2013
17	Karnataka	2.7	2013
18	Madhya Pradesh	13	2013
19	Meghalaya	6.7	2013
20	Mizoram	0	2013
21	Nagaland	0	2013
22	Rajasthan	14	2013
23	Tripura	8.3	2013
24	Goa	2.5	2012
25	Gujarat	8.8	2012
26	Himachal Pradesh	4.4	2012
27	Manipur	5	2012
28	Punjab	12	2012
29	Uttarakhand	7.1	2012
30	Uttar Pradesh	8.7	2012

[Source of data: Men and women of India, 2018, www.mospi.gov.in]

Representation of Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions [PRI]

The local self-government system in India is referred to as Panchayati Raj; 44.37 % of elected representatives in Panchayati Raj institutions are women. One third of the seats in Panchayati Raj institutions are reserved for women by article 243D of the Indian Constitution. Reservation of seats ensured at least 33% of women's representation in PRI's.

Table 4: Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions [PRI] - State Wise Representation

Sl.No	State/Union Territory	Total number of elected representatives	Total number of elected women representatives	% of women elected representatives
1	Andhra Pradesh	156050	78025	50
2	Arunachal Pradesh	9383	3658	38.99
3	Assam	26820	13410	50
4	Bihar	127391	57887	45.44
5	Chhattisgarh	170285	93287	54.78
6	Gujarat	144016	71988	49.99
7	Haryana	70035	29499	42.12
8	Himachal Pradesh	28723	14398	50.13
9	Jammu & Kashmir	33847	11169	33
10	Jharkhand	60782	30757	50.6
11	Karnataka	104967	50892	48.48
12	Kerala	18372	9630	52.42
13	Madhya Pradesh	392981	196490	50
14	Maharashtra	240122	121490	50.6
15	Manipur	1723	868	50.38
16	Mizoram	3502	828	23.64
17	Odisha	107487	53551	49.82
18	Punjab	97180	32393	33.33
19	Rajasthan	124854	70527	56.49
20	Sikkim	1096	548	50
21	Tamil Nadu	117599	39975	33.99
22	Tripura	6646	3006	45.23
23	Telangana	103468	51735	50
24	Uttarakhand	64606	35957	55.66
25	Uttar Pradesh	826458	272733	33
26	West Bengal	59402	30157	50.77
27	Dadra & Nagar Haveli	136	47	34.56
28	Daman & Diu	172	92	53.49
29	Goa	1564	516	32.99
30	Chandigarh	169	58	34.32
31	Lakshadweep	110	41	37.27
32	A & N Island	858	302	35.2

[Source: Basic Statistics of Panchayat Raj Institutions, 2019]

Table 5: Correlation Analysis of Gross Enrolment Ratio of Women with Representation of Women in Labour Force.

Year	GER of women	Women in labour force
2010-2011	17.9	25.82
2011-2012	19.4	24.38
2012-2013	20.1	23.01
2013-2014	22	23.18
2014-2015	23.2	23.35
2015-2016	23.5	23.5
2016-2017	24.5	23.65
2017-2018	25.4	23.79
2018-2019	26.4	23.6

The correlation between the gross enrolment ratio of women in higher education with that of women entering the workforce is showing a moderate negative correlation with an r-value of -.54.

Analysis of Percentage Increase in Literacy Level and Representation of Women in Governance from 1950 to 2011

The literacy level has increased by 449% while the increase in representation of women in Lok Sabha was by 132% during the time period of 1950 to 2011.

Discussion

From the observations, it is evident that the representation of women in central legislative bodies and the workforce has not increased though the GER in higher education has increased. The reasons for this gap can be varied. A norm followed by many Indian families is that a woman should prioritize housework rather than professional work (Bose and Das, 2014; Sudarshan, 2014; Sudarshan and Bhattacharya, 2009). Marriage and family-related responsibilities like childbearing and caring for the elderly can be cited as reasons for the dropping out of Indian women from the workforce. 95% of Indian women in the age group of 25 or more are married and the family-related responsibilities are forcing them to leave the workforce in the initial stages. Factory laws curtailing the working hours of the woman through labour laws can also be suggested as a reason (Gupta, 2014). Many Indian women do not focus on skills development and they quit the workforce, making it difficult to make a re-entry. The majority of youth in the working-age group are unaware of Government-run skills development programs (Mishra *et al.*, 2018).

The decline in workforce representation in rural women can be due to mechanization of many jobs traditionally done by women like agriculture, cottage industries, etc. Unavailability of appropriate jobs for women with intermediate levels of education in rural areas as compared to urban areas can also be cited as a reason. The decrease in demand can also be cited as a reason for decreased women's participation (Klasen and Pieters, 2015). The exclusion of educated women in jobs is evident in the census data of 2011. 93.1% of sales jobs and 87.3% of clerical jobs are held by men. Women's reluctance to work in manual jobs after getting a substantial education is also decreasing the LFPR rate of women. Other sources of family income and lack of suitable

employment opportunities are also decreasing the LFPR of women. (Chatterjee, Esha, Sonalde Desai, and Reeve Vanneman, 2018).

The political participation of women is an important indicator of the democracy of a country. In India, there is a negative correlation between the representations of women in legislation with the percentage of the female population. India is a country with 48.04 % of female population. The representation of women in Central legislature, State legislature and the central council of ministers stands close to 10%. This is a very huge gap that has to be bridged.

The representation of women in Panchayat Raj, the local self-government bodies stands close to 44.37 % which is in sharp contrast with that of the representation in central and state legislature with close to only 10%. One reason can be the implementation of a quota system for women in Panchayati Raj bodies. There are divergent views about the quota system implemented in Panchayat Raj bodies. The quota system has ensured the increase in representation of women representatives, but the effectiveness of their political participation is still a concern. (Kalaramadam, Sreevidya, 2018). Reservation ensures increased representation in decision making as well as the proper delivery of public goods to disadvantaged groups (Chattopadhyay and Duflo, 2005). The improvement in representation should be brought in by increasing the ease of participation rather than by implementing quota or reservation for women (Ban and Rao, 2007).

The study analysed the three important aspects, the literacy level and gross enrolment of women in higher education, the participation of women in the workforce and the representation of women in governance. The study is conforming to many other studies indicating that the Indian women entering the workforce are fewer in spite of increased literacy and GER in higher education. The study stresses on implementing sufficient support systems to help women join the workforce like attaching crèches in the workplace for childcare and community-based care centres for elderly as these two are cited as the major reasons for women leaving the workforce in India. Enforcement of labour laws that allow men also to be equal partners in bringing up children can be considered. Bringing in policies to bridge the parity in the pay gap in the private and unorganised sector also can attract more women into the workforce. The curriculum in all levels of education should stress avoiding gender-biased roles in daily life, which eventually can change the mindset of the generation who are at present in schools for building a gender unbiased future. Enforcing better transportation facilities in rural and urban areas would increase the participation of women in the workforce. The meagre representation of women in central legislation compared to their nearly 50% representation in local governance is a complex phenomenon. The successful implementation of the quota system in Panchayat Raj institutions suggests that India can try to implement the same in central and state legislatures. The representation points to the fact that women are interested in governance and decision making if given a chance as the experience empowers them. (Kalaramadam, Sreevidya, 2018).

Conclusion

The increase in female literacy and higher education enrolment is not ensuring increased participation of women in the workforce and governance of India. Policy changes and adequate support systems which enable women to achieve a work life balance can increase the labour force participation rate of women. Ensuring safe and frequent public transport system in rural and urban areas to increase the mobility of women plays a pivotal role in improving the participation of women in labour force. The increase in participation of women in local self-government strongly suggests that the implementation of quota system in central and state legislation for improved

female representation will be effective, though the efficiency of participation and representation still remains in question. India still has a long way to go in ensuring adequate representation of women in its workforce and governance.

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