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Beyond Participation: A Multidimensional Assessment of Gender Inequality in India's Labour Market

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Abstract: ***This paper explores gender inequality in India's labour market using the redesigned Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), 2025. The paper uses a descriptive comparative framework to examine differences in overall labour force participation, employment, unemployment, employment structure and earnings by gender in rural and urban India, drawing on human capital theory, labour market segmentation theory and feminist economics. The findings suggest pervasive and interlinked inequalities in the Indian labour market. Women's participation in the labour force and their employment rates are considerably lower than those of men, and they are also over-represented in self-employment and informal employment. The unemployment rate among females is also higher in urban areas, especially among youth. Earnings gaps are also significant across all employment categories, indicating that increased labour force participation has not led to higher earnings, employment quality, or economic returns. These patterns suggest that structural barriers, occupational segregation, unpaid care responsibilities, and institutional constraints play a role, not only differences in human capital. This study provides timely evidence from the revised PLFS 2025. It underlines the need for a single analytical framework that accounts for multiple facets of the labour market and defines meaningful access to the labour market in terms of participation, employment quality, and earnings. The results can help policymakers design gender-sensitive and inclusive development policies for the Indian labour market.***

Keywords: Gender Inequality, Labour Market; Female Labour Force Participation, Employment Quality, Informal Employment, Gender Wage Gap, Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), India
JEL Classification, J16, J21, J31, O15, R23

Nomenclature:
PLFS: Periodic Labour Force Survey
LFPR: Labour Force Participation Rate
WPR: Worker Population Ratio
UR: Unemployment Rate
STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

I. INTRODUCTION

Gender equality in labour markets is widely recognised as a prerequisite for inclusive economic growth, social justice and sustainable development.

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Increasing women's access to productive, decent employment improves household welfare, raises labour productivity, and strengthens long-term economic resilience. Accordingly, promoting gender equality (Sustainable Development Goal 5) alongside decent work and economic growth (Sustainable Development Goal 8) has become a central objective of national and international development agendas [13]. Despite sustained policy efforts, however, substantial gender disparities persist in labour force participation, employment quality, occupational mobility, and earnings across both developed and developing economies.

India is a unique setting for studying these challenges. Rapid economic growth, structural transformation, and a significant increase in women's education have not been matched by a commensurate reduction in gender inequality in labour market outcomes. Women are less likely than men to participate in the labour force, are over-represented in informal and low-paid employment and face persistent barriers to access to productive and secure employment, especially in urban labour markets. These inequities not only constrain women's economic empowerment but also restrict labour productivity and India's potential to fully realise its demographic dividend.

Increasing evidence shows that differences in education, skills, or work experience alone cannot explain these inequalities. Rather, the interaction of human capital, labour market institutions, occupational segregation, unpaid care responsibilities, and deeply embedded socio-cultural norms shapes labour market outcomes. Gender inequality should therefore be considered a multidimensional phenomenon, not only in labour force participation but also in employment opportunities, job quality, and economic returns from work.

Successive rounds of the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) illustrate this complexity. Although female labour force participation has improved recently, much of this increase has occurred in self-employment and unpaid family work. At the same time, women's access to regular wage or salaried employment has remained comparatively limited. Earlier studies also report lower job-finding rates, higher labour force exit and persistent barriers to formal employment among women. These patterns indicate that labour force participation alone is not a sufficient measure of women's economic inclusion and emphasise the necessity of a broader assessment of labour market outcomes.

The release of the PLFS Annual Report 2025, the first based on the redesigned survey framework introduced in January 2025, provides an important opportunity to reassess gender disparities using the latest nationally representative evidence [10]. However, empirical research using the

redesigned PLFS remains limited. Moreover, existing studies generally examine labour force participation, employment, unemployment, employment status, or earnings separately, resulting in a fragmented understanding of gender inequality. Consequently, evidence remains limited on whether corresponding gains in employment quality and economic returns have accompanied recent improvements in female labour force participation.

Against this backdrop, the present study provides one of the earliest multidimensional assessments of gender disparities using the redesigned PLFS Annual Report 2025. Drawing on human capital theory, labour market segmentation theory and feminist economics, it analyses gender differences in labour force participation, employment, unemployment, employment structure and earnings in rural and urban India. The study contributes to the literature in three ways. It starts with the most recent empirical evidence, using the reformed PLFS 2025, a dataset that has received little scholarly attention. Second, it combines several labour market indicators into a single analytical framework, providing a more comprehensive assessment of gender inequality than studies focusing on individual dimensions. Third, it combines complementary theoretical perspectives to interpret persistent gender disparities and generate policy-relevant insights for advancing inclusive labour market development in India.

The paper is organised as follows. Section 2 surveys relevant theoretical and empirical literature. Section 3 describes the data and the methodology. Section 4 discusses and summarises the empirical results. Section 5 examines policy implications, and Section 6 concludes with limitations and directions for further research.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Gender inequality in labour markets has been a constant field of academic research because of its impact on economic growth, social inclusion and sustainable development. Although women's educational attainment and labour market participation have improved worldwide, employment quality, occupational mobility, and earnings have not improved proportionately. In recent years, therefore, gender inequality is increasingly seen as a multidimensional concept shaped by individual capacity, labour market institutions, and socio-cultural context, not just human capital. This view provides a conceptual framework for understanding the persistent gender gap in India's labour market.

A. Theoretical Perspectives on Gender Inequality in Labour Markets

The literature offers three complementary ways to explain gender differences in labour market outcomes.

The Human Capital Theory states that investments in education, skills, training and work experience are the main determinants of employment and earnings. Higher human capital is expected to result in higher productivity and better labour market outcomes for individuals. This framework remains central to labour economics; however, it has become increasingly limited in explaining contemporary gender inequality. Despite the large increases in women's educational attainment, gender gaps in employment quality and earnings remain widespread [5]. This suggests that equal human capital does not necessarily translate into equal labour market opportunities.

This perspective is supported by the labour market segmentation theory, which stresses the influence of institutional arrangements in determining employment outcomes. It claims that labour markets are divided into primary and secondary segments that differ in wages, employment security, career opportunities, and working conditions. Women are over-represented in secondary labour market segments, which are characterised by informal, insecure and lower-paid jobs. Labour market inequality thus reflects structural barriers that prevent access to quality jobs, even for workers with similar qualifications.

Feminist economics moves beyond labour market institutions in recognising that employment decision-making occurs in households and wider social contexts. Unequal bargaining power, gender norms, household responsibilities and unpaid care work influence women's participation in the labour force, their occupational choices and their lifetime earnings [4]. Goldin further contends that gender inequality increasingly reflects workplace structures' failure to meet the demands of caregiving responsibilities [5]. This perspective implies the need to analyse labour market outcomes within the context of the social institutions in which they are situated.

Overall, these perspectives imply that gender inequality results from the interplay between human capital, labour market institutions, and socio-cultural constraints. They also imply that labour market inclusion should be evaluated not only through participation but also through employment quality and the economic returns generated from work. This integrated framework guides the empirical analysis undertaken in the present study.

B. Empirical Evidence on Gender Inequality in Labour Markets

Global evidence consistently shows that gains in women's educational attainment have failed to eliminate gender inequality in the labour market [6]. Women's labour force participation is still lower than that of men in both developed and developing countries; occupational segregation is still occurring; there are still fewer quality jobs for women; and gender wage gaps are still large [14]. Therefore, recent studies have shifted their focus from labour force participation to employment quality, job security, and earnings as complementary indicators of women's economic inclusion.

Indian evidence is broadly consistent with these global trends and highlights the importance of country-specific institutional and socio-cultural factors. Some studies [7] have attributed low female labour force participation mainly to constraints in labour demand, rising household incomes, the expansion of education, and prevailing gender norms [3]. Some recent studies [11] also suggest that social and demographic factors [2], such as education, caste, religion, marital status, household size, and household location, affect women's labour market outcomes [1]. Moreover, the results reveal that gender inequality is multidimensional and cannot be explained by a single economic or social factor.

Research based on successive rounds of the

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PLFS also suggests that women have lower job-finding rates, higher labour force exit rates, and limited access to regular wage/salaried employment. Existing studies [9] also highlight the importance of vocational training, digital skills, and positive labour market conditions in enhancing women's employment prospects [12]. However, the recent increase in female labour force participation has largely been attributed to self-employment, unpaid family work, and other forms of informal employment. This pattern suggests that higher participation does not necessarily mean better-quality employment or greater economic security.

While a large literature exists on gender inequality in the labour market in India, important gaps continue to persist. Much of the existing research focuses on labour force participation, employment, unemployment, employment status or earnings separately, providing only a partial view of women's experiences in the labour market. Further, evidence from the redesigned PLFS launched in 2025 remains limited. Consequently, limited attention has focused on whether corresponding improvements in employment quality and earnings have accompanied recent improvements in female labour force participation. In addition, relatively few studies integrate complementary theoretical perspectives to explain the interconnected dimensions of labour market inequality.

The present study addresses these gaps by providing one of the earliest multidimensional assessments based on the redesigned PLFS Annual Report 2025. It simultaneously analyses labour force participation, employment, unemployment, employment structure and earnings within a single analytical framework informed by human capital theory, labour market segmentation theory and feminist economics. The study integrates different dimensions of labour market performance with complementary theoretical perspectives to provide updated evidence on the structural nature of gender inequality and improve understanding of inclusive labour market development in India.

III. DATA AND METHODS

This study uses secondary data from the PLFS Annual Report 2025 (Government of India). This is the first annual report under the redesigned PLFS framework, introduced in January 2025, and provides nationally representative estimates of labour market indicators, disaggregated by gender, age group, and place of residence. It is the latest official source of labour market statistics and a reliable basis for assessing gender gaps in the Indian labour market.

This study uses a descriptive and comparative research design to analyse five key labour market indicators: the Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR), the Worker Population Ratio (WPR), the Unemployment Rate (UR), the quality of employment, and average earnings. The indicators together address four aspects of inequality in the labour market – participation, employment, quality of employment and economic returns – to offer a holistic view of gender inequality.

The analysis is situated within an integrated theoretical framework of human capital theory, labour market segmentation theory and feminist economics. Together, these perspectives help us understand the role of individual, institutional, and gendered social norms in labour market outcomes.

The empirical analysis is based on the aggregate statistics reported in the PLFS Annual Report, 2025. This study uses descriptive tables and figures to examine gender differentials in rural and urban India. It uses aggregate data rather than unit-level data, so it avoids econometric techniques and causal relationship tests. The redesigned PLFS is nationally representative, methodologically robust, and provides a strong basis for generating reliable, policy-relevant evidence on gender inequality in the Indian labour market.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

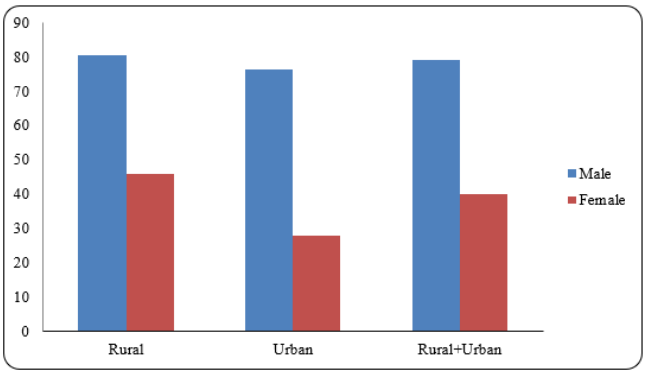
A. Labour Force Participation Rate

Table 1 and Figure 1 show the Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) in usual status (ps+ss) of persons aged 15 years and above by sex and residence. The findings reveal that the gender gap in labour market participation persists across India. Nationally, the LFPR for men is 79.1 percent, compared with 40.0 percent for women, a gender gap of 39.1 percentage points. Women's participation is higher in rural (45.9 percent) than in urban (27.7 percent) areas, but significant gender gaps remain in both cases and are much larger in urban labour markets.

Table I: Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) by Gender and Place of Residence, 2025

Category	Male	Female	Person
Rural	80.5	45.9	62.8
Urban	76.2	27.7	52.2
Rural+Urban	79.1	40.0	59.3

Source: Compiled by the author from the PLFS Annual Report 2025.



[Fig.1: Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) by Gender and Place of Residence, 2025]

The rural-urban difference suggests significant variation, particularly in women's labour market participation. The higher rural share is mainly attributed to women's concentration in agriculture, household activities, and other forms of informal work, which are generally associated with low productivity, irregular income, and limited social security coverage. The low urban LFPR, by contrast, suggests that increases have not kept pace with gains in economic growth and rising educational attainment. in women's participation in paid work. in economic growth and rising

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educational attainment in women's participation in paid work in economic growth and rising educational attainment in women's participation in paid work. This suggests multiple barriers on both the demand and supply sides of the labour market, including structural segregation, a lack of flexible employment options, childcare challenges, workplace safety concerns, and social conventions around working outside the home.

These findings align with a growing body of research suggesting that labour force participation should be analysed alongside other indicators to understand women's economic inclusion [9]. Existing studies [7] indicate that increases in women's labour force participation in India have been mainly associated with informal and precarious work, rather than productive and stable employment [3]. The PLFS 2025 evidence also corroborates these findings: higher participation does not necessarily translate into better labour market opportunities or economic empowerment.

The results also show the added value of the theoretical framework used in this study. According to human capital theory, increased women's education and skills should reduce gender gaps in labour market participation. But the large participation gaps that persist despite significant gains in education suggest that human capital alone can explain only part of the story. Labour market segmentation theory provides a better understanding, as it stresses that institutional structures and occupational segmentation still restrict women's access to secure, better-paid employment. Feminist Economics also considers how unpaid care responsibilities, household decision-making, and gender norms shape women's labour-market choices and limit their participation, especially in urban areas where the opportunity cost of combining paid work and unpaid care may be higher.

Taken together, these results suggest that gender inequality in labour market participation results from structural constraints, not just differences in individual capabilities. Therefore, gains in female labour force participation should be assessed alongside employment quality and earnings to provide a more comprehensive picture of women's economic inclusion.

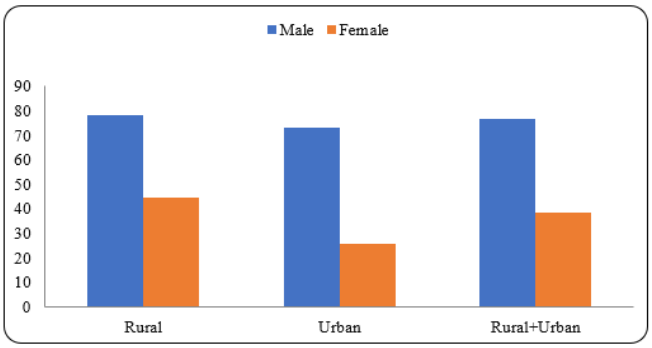
B. Worker Population Ratio

Table 2 and Figure 2 present the Worker Population Ratio (WPR) in usual status for persons aged 15 years and above, by sex and place of residence. Results indicate that the gender gap in employment persists in both rural and urban India. Nationally, the WPR is 76.6 per cent for men and 38.8 per cent for women, a gap of 37.8 percentage points. The gap is narrower in rural areas but widens considerably in urban India, where women are still far less likely than men to be in employment.

Table II: Worker Population Ratio (WPR) by Gender and Place of Residence, 2025

Category	Male	Female	Person
Rural	78.4	44.9	61.2
Urban	73.0	25.9	49.7
Rural+Urban	76.6	38.8	57.4

Source: Compiled by the author from the PLFS Annual Report 2025.



[Fig.2: Worker Population Ratio (WPR) by Gender and Place of Residence, 2025]

The strong similarity between the LFPR and WPR suggests that women's lower employment is mainly due to lower labour-market participation, rather than greatly reduced employment opportunities upon entry to the labour market. However, the rural–urban gap indicates that employment quality remains a factor. The higher employment rate in rural areas implies higher participation in agriculture and household activities. The lower urban employment rate suggests ongoing obstacles to accessing formal, paid work, despite the growth of urban labour markets.

These results are consistent with previous studies [7] that found that increases in women's employment are primarily in informal and vulnerable activities, not in regular wage or salaried work [9]. They also add to the evidence that economic growth has not generated enough employment opportunities to reduce gender gaps in productive employment.

The findings suggest, theoretically, that factors affecting employment outcomes go beyond personal abilities. Human capital theory predicts that higher educational attainment (i.e., higher human capital) should lead to greater employment opportunities. However, while women's educational attainment has improved, persistent gender differences suggest labour market segmentation and gendered institutional constraints. Feminist economics also points out that the burden of unpaid care responsibilities and differential household roles continue to constrain women sustained and regular employment. The evidence as a whole suggests that gender inequalities in employment are not simply the result of differences in human capability but rather of structural constraints that limit women's access to productive employment.

C. Unemployment Rate

Table 3 and Figure 3 show the Unemployment Rate (UR) in usual status by gender, age group and place of residence. The aggregate unemployment rate is the same for men and women (3.1%) and shows little overall gender difference. But these apparent parities hide wide differences by age group and place of residence. In rural areas, the female unemployment rate (2.1 per cent) is slightly lower than the male rate (2.6 per cent), but in urban areas, women's unemployment rate (6.4%) is much higher than men's (4.2%).

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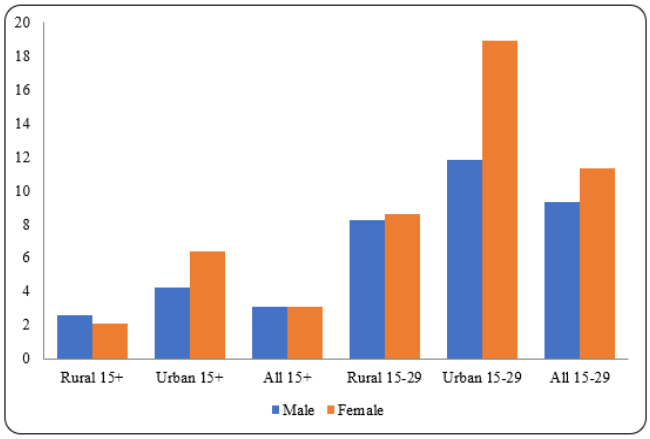
Table III: Unemployment Rate (UR) by Gender and Place of Residence, 2025

Category	Aged 15 Years and Above			Aged 15–29 Years		
	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person
Rural	2.6	2.1	2.4	8.2	8.6	8.3
Urban	4.2	6.4	4.8	11.8	18.9	13.6
Rural+Urban	3.1	3.1	3.1	9.3	11.3	9.9

Source: Compiled by the author from the PLFS Annual Report 2025.



[Fig.3: Unemployment Rate (UR) by Gender and Place of Residence, 2025]

The gender gap is more pronounced for the youth (ages 15-29). At the all-India level, the youth unemployment rate for females is 11.3 percent, compared with 9.3 percent for males. The gap is wider in urban India, where nearly one in five young women (18.9 per cent) are unemployed, compared with 11.8 per cent of young men. In comparison, rural women (8.6 per cent) and men (8.2 per cent) have similar youth unemployment rates. These findings indicate that young women in urban areas are the most disadvantaged in the labour market, not women overall.

The gap between aggregate and age-specific unemployment highlights the need for disaggregated analysis. Aggregate indicators point to gender equality in unemployment, but age- and place-of-residence-specific estimates reveal significant inequalities in the transition from education to employment. The very high unemployment rate among young urban women points to barriers beyond labour market access, such as limited access to suitable employment, occupational segregation, skills mismatches, and social norms.

These results align with previous literature [9], which shows that women face greater challenges in securing regular employment despite improvements in educational attainment [12]. The results are also relevant to the theory of labour market segmentation, which emphasises the unequal access to job opportunities, and to feminist economics, which emphasises the institutional and social factors affecting women's transitions in the labour market.

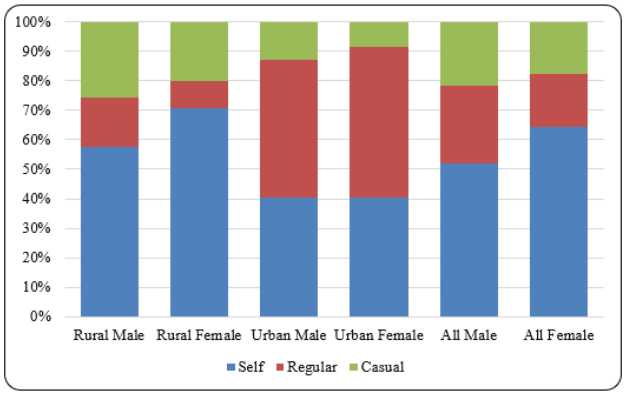
D. Employment Structure

Table 4 and Figure 4 show the distribution of employed workers by employment category and gender. The results indicate significant differences in the quality of jobs available to women and men. Self-employment is the dominant form of employment for both sexes but is considerably more common for women. Nationally, 64.2 percent of employed women are self-employed, compared with 52.0 percent of men. The disparity is most pronounced in rural areas, where over two-thirds of employed women (70.7 percent) are self-employed, compared with 57.4 percent of men. In contrast, women account for a smaller share of regular wage or salaried employment than men at the national level (18.2 percent versus 26.5 percent).

Table IV: Distribution of Workers by Employment Category, Gender and Place of Residence, 2025 (%)

Employment Category	Rural		Urban		Rural+Urban	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Self-employed	57.4	70.7	40.4	40.4	52.0	64.2
Regular Wage/Salaried	17.0	9.3	46.5	50.9	26.5	18.2
Casual Labour	25.6	20.0	13.1	8.7	21.6	17.6

Source: Compiled by the author from the PLFS Annual Report 2025.



[Fig.4: Distribution of Workers by Employment Category, Gender and Place of Residence, 2025 (%)]

The employment structure shows that higher levels of women's employment do not necessarily mean better employment outcomes. Women are concentrated in self-employment, especially in rural India, mostly in agriculture, household enterprises, and other informal work, which is generally characterised by lower productivity, lack of social protection, and unstable earnings. The composition of women's employment therefore suggests persistent differences in employment quality, not just employment status.

Although urban women have a slightly higher share of regular wage or salaried employment than urban men (50.9 percent versus 46.5 percent), this finding should be interpreted with caution. As shown in the preceding sections, urban women have substantially lower labour force participation and employment rates. The higher proportion of salaried employment, therefore, reflects the composition of employment among those already employed rather than greater access to employment opportunities. In other words, women who gain access to urban labour markets are relatively more likely to be employed in salaried jobs, but many women are excluded from employment altogether.

The findings are consistent with the existing literature [8] that, despite increasing labour force participation, women remain over-represented in informal and low-quality employment [12]. They are also consistent with labour market segmentation theory, which explains the concentration of women in lower-quality jobs,

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and feminist economics, which highlights the effects of unpaid care responsibilities, occupational segregation, and social norms on employment choices and opportunities. To summarise, the evidence suggests that improving women's labour market outcomes requires not only more employment opportunities for women but also higher-quality jobs.

E. Earnings Differentials

Table 5 illustrates average earnings by employment category, gender and location of residence. Results show persistent gender earnings differentials for all types of employment. Men are paid more than women regardless of employment status or location. This shows that gender inequality exists not only in access to and participation in the labour market but also in the economic returns from work.

Table V: Average Earnings by Employment Category, Gender, and Place of Residence, 2025 (₹)

Category	Rural		Urban		Rural Urban	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Average wage/salary earnings of **Regular Wage/Salaried Employees** during the last 30 days (Current Weekly Status)	19,300	13,208	27,973	21,653	24,217	18,353
Average gross earnings during the last 30 days from **Self-employment** (Current Weekly Status)	14,972	5,540	26,094	10,237	17,914	6,374
Average wage earnings per day by **Casual Labour** engaged in works other than public works	435	305	552	363	455	315

Source: Compiled by the author from the PLFS Annual Report 2025.

For regular wage/salaried workers, the average monthly earnings are ₹24,217 for men and ₹18,353 for women, or about 76 per cent of men's earnings. The gap is far more pronounced for the self-employed, where women earn ₹6,374 compared to ₹17,914 for men, or only 36 per cent of men's earnings. Casual male labourers earn ₹455 per day, while casual female labourers receive ₹315 per day, or 69 per cent of the daily wage of male labourers. Generally, in urban areas, both men and women earn more, and men earn more than women across all categories of employment. This significant earnings disparity between self-employed women and men stems from the fact that women are more likely to be engaged in low-value economic activities, which are characterised by limited access to productive resources and market opportunities.

The results are consistent with the extensive evidence at the national [5] and international [6] levels showing that gender wage gaps persist despite advances in women's educational attainment and labour force participation [14]. They also support the argument that employment quality and earnings are significant indicators of labour market inclusion and should be studied alongside participation and employment.

The earnings evidence also highlights the complementary value of the study's theoretical framework. Human capital theory provides only a partial explanation because gender wage gaps persist even where educational differences have narrowed. Labour market segmentation theory explains these differences through occupational segregation and unequal access to primary labour market opportunities. Feminist economics highlights how unpaid care work, career interruptions, and institutional discrimination affect women's lifetime earnings.

Taken together with evidence on labour force participation, employment, unemployment, and employment structure, these findings highlight that gender gaps in the Indian labour market are multidimensional. Women face additional barriers to labour market participation and employment, and when employed, they also earn significantly less. Therefore, inclusive labour market development requires policies that promote equal pay, expand women's access to productive assets, strengthen skill development and enterprise support, and expand opportunities for productive and formal employment.

V. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Our results indicate that gender inequality in the Indian labour market is multidimensional and extends beyond labour force participation to include employment quality, occupational segregation, unemployment, and earnings. Policy interventions should therefore not be about simply raising women's labour force participation but rather about addressing the structural constraints that limit women's access to productive, secure and well-paying jobs.

First, women's labour force participation needs to improve by reducing obstacles to labour market entry, especially in urban areas where participation remains significantly lower than in rural India. Greater availability of affordable childcare services, improved workplace safety, flexible work arrangements and access to safe and reliable public transport would help more women to combine paid work with household responsibilities.

Second, policies should not just aim to generate employment but also to create quality jobs. The concentration of women in self-employment and as unpaid family workers suggests the need to expand opportunities in regular wage and salaried employment through targeted skill development, entrepreneurship support and stronger linkages between vocational training and labour market demand. Special attention should be given to sectors with high potential for women's employment, such as manufacturing, modern services, digital industries, healthcare, and the care economy.

Third, reducing gender disparities in earnings requires stronger enforcement of equal remuneration legislation, greater transparency in wage-setting practices, and measures to reduce occupational segregation. Encouraging women's involvement in higher-skilled occupations, managerial roles, and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields would help close earnings gaps in the longer run.

Finally, labour market policies must consider that gender inequality is influenced not only by

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economic factors but also by institutional and socio-cultural constraints. Public investment in care infrastructure, family-friendly workplace policies and initiatives to promote a more equitable distribution of unpaid care responsibilities can help to address structural barriers that continue to constrain women's labour market opportunities. These should be supplemented by regular monitoring through the redesigned PLFS to assess progress on multiple dimensions of labour market performance, not just labour force participation.

VI. CONCLUSION

This paper examined gender gaps in India's labour market using the redesigned PLFS Annual Report, 2025. The study employed human capital theory, labour market segmentation theory and feminist economics as its theoretical framework. It examined labour force participation, employment, unemployment, employment structure, and earnings to provide a multidimensional assessment of women's labour market outcomes.

The results show significant gender disparities in all aspects of labour market performance. Although female labour force participation has improved recently, women still have lower employment rates, higher concentration in self-employment and informal work, higher urban unemployment rates and lower earnings than men. These patterns indicate that although women's labour market participation has improved, employment quality and economic returns have not improved in corresponding ways.

The analysis also indicates that the persistent gender gap is not solely due to the difference in human capital. Instead, the data show that institutional factors, occupational segregation, unpaid household care duties, and dominant gender norms shape women's labour market experiences. Therefore, the integrated theoretical approach provides a more complete explanation of gender inequality than individual-characteristics approaches.

This study makes three important contributions to the literature. First, it provides one of the earliest empirical assessments based on the redesigned PLFS Annual Report 2025. Second, it provides a multidimensional assessment of gender inequality by analysing participation, employment, unemployment, employment structure and earnings in a comprehensive analytical framework. Third, it highlights the importance of integrating human capital theory, labour market segmentation theory and feminist economics to understand the existing labour market inequalities in India.

The study has certain limitations. The analysis is based on the published aggregate statistics from the PLFS Annual Report 2025 and does not permit causal inference or multivariate analysis of the determinants of gender inequality. Future research can use unit-level PLFS data to study the impact of education, occupation, caste, marital status, region and other socio-economic characteristics on the labour market outcomes. Comparative analyses across rounds of the redesigned PLFS would also provide useful evidence on how gender gaps change over time.

Overall, the findings suggest that policies to promote labour force participation need to be complemented by policies to improve the quality of employment, earnings and employment security to achieve gender equality in India's labour market. Hence, inclusive economic development will require not only increased female participation in the labour market but also equitable and productive employment opportunities.

DECLARATION STATEMENT

Some of the cited references are older and are noted explicitly as [2], [7], and [13]. However, these works remain significant for the current study, as they are pioneering in their fields.

- **Conflicts of Interest/Competing Interests:** The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest or competing interests.
- **Funding Support:** The authors received no financial support or funding for this research.
- **Ethical Approval and Consent to Participate:** Ethical approval and consent to participate were not applicable, as the study used only publicly available secondary aggregate data from the PLFS Annual Report 2025 and did not involve human participants or identifiable personal data.
- **Data Access Statement and Material Availability:** The data used in this study are publicly available from the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) Annual Report 2025, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), Government of India.
- **Authors' Contributions:** Both the authors contributed equally in preparing the manuscript. Both authors approved the final manuscript and agreed to be accountable for the work.

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