

Gender Wage Disparity In India

Swarita De¹, Ria Dave², Rashi Lakhotia³, Prerana Isaac⁴, Rashmi Shroff⁵

¹Assistant Professor, Economics, ASMSOC, NMIMS Deemed to be University
^{2,3,4,5} Students of BBA, ASMSOC, NMIMS Deemed to be University

Abstract

The paper, Gender Pay Gap in India, focuses on wage disparities between men and women across industries and states. Drawing on secondary data, the study evaluates differences in earnings within agriculture, construction, healthcare, and educational services sectors where women face unique barriers and limited opportunities. Despite decades of campaigns for equality, women's earnings continue to lag men's in most occupations, though the extent of the gap varies regionally. Findings highlight that wage differentials are not uniform, instead, they are influenced both by industry characteristics and state-specific socio-economic contexts, thereby presenting a more nuanced regional picture of inequality. The paper further emphasizes the need for targeted strategies to address these disparities, particularly in regions where women's advancement remains slow. Recommendations focus on enhancing equal opportunities, promoting fair labour policies, and encouraging inclusive economic participation. Overall, the study provides critical insights into wage inequality and strategies for fostering gender equity in India.

Keywords: Gender wage gaps, State-wise wage differentials, Industry-wise wage disparity, Equal Remuneration Act.

1. Introduction

Gender pay gaps in India are acute and reflect more pressing societal/sectoral issues. Some industries, although women make up a large percentage of the labour force, women rather earn less compared to their male counterparts with wage gaps varying from state to state and by industry.

To exemplify, women play a significant role in the agricultural sector accounting for 43% of the agricultural workforce, however, they earn less because of their inability to own crucial resources such as land and credit. Doubts and similar situations arise in the construction sector, where women engage, but wage and safety decisions do not include them. In the health sector, women practitioners and caregivers do the same jobs as men but are paid lower.

Women literacy stood at 70% as of 2021, but this advance in education has failed to promote wage equity particularly in upwardly mobile occupation of information technology, which employs only 28% of women. Even in the corporate sector where there are more women occupying executive positions, women still earn 34% less than men for the same work.

A large share of working age Indian women choose not to participate in the labour market. When they do, they find themselves very poorly trained with most of them having very little education.

Consequently, most women workers end up working in low skill and low return agrarian jobs while men typically perform the higher skill white-collar jobs. Starting with the basic premise that there are no innate differences between the genders in ability, these statistics tell a rather different story of the allocation of labour in the country.

Gender wage inequality is a barrier not only to female empowerment but also to economic growth. Closing the wage gap would not only facilitate an increase in the economic status of women but would also enhance the GDP of India and further societal progress. This paper investigates the phenomenon of gender wage inequality in constraining sectors and proposes policy measures to facilitate gender wage equality and developing an equitable economy.

Despite, immense measures and initiatives taken by the government of India to reduce gender inequality and wage disparity by implementation of different acts and code of conducts, gender wage disparity still prevails in India. The World Economic Forum's release of the Global Gender Gap Index data in October 2023 highlighted a concerning trend for India, as the nation saw a drop of two positions, now ranking 129th out of 146 countries in the index. Gender wage disparity is a prevailing problem in developing countries, and India being one of them also faces a challenge dealing with the issue. However, India is taking continuous efforts to curb gender inequality and lower the gender gap.

2. Literature Review

Pattayat, Parida, & Paltasingh (2023) in this article focuses on the gender wage disparity of regular as well as casual employees in rural non-farm sector. The main determinants of the wages according to the article are endowment variables (gender, marital status, educational levels, and technical training) and occupational variables (that is the occupation dummies such as administration, salesclerk, professional). The article mainly talks about the existence of a sticky floor phenomenon in the gender wage disparity wherein, the wage disparity is relatively large at the bottom end of the income-earning pyramid however; it reduces as we move up towards the higher levels of the earning distribution. Another factor for the increase in gender wage disparity in the rural non-farm sector is the decrease in female workforce labour participation due to unequal distribution of education, socio cultural setup, unavailability of suitable jobs, some women being restricted to work, due to these existing labour market anomalies and discriminatory treatments women typically earn lesser than men do. After analysing the NSSO data, the article revealed that even though the absolute mean wage difference continued to rise in rural India, the real wage gap was reduced to some extent. This trend will likely increase female WPR. Hence this article suggests that policies aiming to enhance skill endowments of rural women can reduce both the non-farm sector gender wage gap and the inequality in non-farm employment.

Khanna (2012) in his paper describes where wage gaps between men and women tend to concentrate in the wage distribution. It undertakes a distributional analysis of gender wage gaps using wage data for regular wage workers from the National Sample Survey (NSS) Employment Unemployment Schedule (EUS) for the years 2009-2010. It uses OLS log wage quantile regressions to understand gaps across the distribution, he logs wage gap is 0.79 at the 7th

percentile (indicating a 120% wage differential), it drops significantly to 0.04 at the 84th percentile, showing the narrowing of gaps for higher-wage earners. The Machado-Mata-Melly (MMM) decomposition method is applied to decompose wage gaps into two components: explained (due to characteristics like education) and unexplained (attributed to discrimination). The paper finds that even after controlling factors like education and occupation, a significant portion of the wage gap persists due to discrimination, especially for lower-wage women. The paper also studies the gender wage gaps for different levels of education, as we move up the education scale the average daily wages increased for both men and women. The wage difference was highest for lower levels and smallest for university graduates. Across occupations, higher log wage gaps are found in Elementary occupations as opposed to high paying occupations such as Managers, professionals, and associate professionals. The paper concludes that a sticky floor phenomenon is observed across various sectors public as well as private. Women in the rural and public sectors experience more disparity than those in the urban and private sectors.

The research paper by Singh & Ningthoujam (2022) talks about the gender wage gap in rural labour markets in Northeast India have been a topic of concern, as highlighted by various studies. A significant body of literature examines this gap, attributing it to factors such as the unequal distribution of human capital, discrimination, and socio-cultural stigmas surrounding women working outside the home. Mukhopadhyay and Tendulkar (2006) point out that both demand and supply-side constraints hinder female participation. On the demand side, economic growth has been largely jobless, benefiting male workers more, while on the supply-side, women often lack the human capital necessary to compete effectively. In addition, social norms, particularly in South Asia, often tie family prestige to women's behavior, discouraging women from participating in paid labour (Eswaran et al., 2013). Discriminatory practices also limit women's access to better-paying jobs (Becker, 1971; Bergman, 1974). However, Kaur (2016) found that the tribal dominance in some areas of the Northeast has led to higher female labour force participation (LFPR) compared to the rest of the country. Even within this region, there are interstate differences in female workforce participation and wage levels, as shown by Malakar (2017), with rural women in some states having higher participation rates due to socio-economic factors unique to the area. The educational divide further exacerbates this gap, as higher education levels are associated with increased economic participation, yet women significantly lag men in higher education attainment (Goldin, 1995). Thus, addressing these disparities requires targeted policies to reduce stigma, enhance educational opportunities for women, and combat wage discrimination in rural labour markets.

Apugol (2016) in his findings of gender wage disparity highlights persistent inequalities in remuneration between men and women, despite legal frameworks like the Equal Remuneration Act of 1976 in India. Studies reveal that systemic barriers, such as traditional gender roles and socio-economic factors, continue to marginalize women, particularly in the informal sector where wage gaps are wider. International conventions, such as the ILO's Equal Remuneration Convention (1951) and the UN's CEDAW (1979), emphasize the need for equal pay, aligning with constitutional mandates in India. However, literature suggests that while the legal provisions exist, their enforcement remains inconsistent, necessitating stronger institutional mechanisms. Researchers argue that bridging wage gaps requires not only legal interventions but also social

and economic reforms, as women's contributions to GDP remain disproportionately low, especially in developing economies like India. Overall, the literature calls for comprehensive efforts to address gender-based wage disparities, which are critical for inclusive economic growth and gender equality.

Jain (2019) explores the persistent pattern of discrimination regarding wages between male and female workers in India, where females are known to earn less than their male counterparts in jobs that are of similar occupational categories and face employment opportunities that are not in work equal to their qualifications. Such laws as the Equal Remuneration Act may have been put in place to avoid this kind of exploitation, but women remain at the margins of the economy performing informal low-paying jobs and secondary labour. The authors cite several studies that indicate the small number of women participating in the labour market and the difficulties they experience in their attempts to climb the social ladder and occupy better-paid jobs. Moreover, while some studies maintain that no gender bias in pay exists in the more developed IT sectors, there is more evidence pointing out the existence of patriarchal practices that caused problems and limited women's development and progression. Finally, the authors suggest that India cannot be a self-respecting superpower without making use of all its women and formulating strategies aimed at decreasing the gender pay gap.

Jagani & Bandoorkwala (2021) in their paper introduce a universally acknowledged social evil, the gender wage gap, but hinge their case, particularly on the nation of India, which is reported to be the second highest wage discriminative country within the BRIC nations. Minimum wage laws and policies to treat employees of all genders equally have been established but the wage gap is still rampant and even wider in developing countries. The Global Gender Gap Report by the World Economic Forum indicated by OECD that India performed very poorly in women's economic involvement. At this rate, it is suggested that it will take more than 250 years to accomplish equal pay. The research demonstrates many wage differences in and outside of agriculture where women do the same work as men, yet they get lower payments. It is observed that they not only get lower pay but also do not have chances of career growth, thus making the glass ceiling even stronger. The writers petition that the governments and other interested parties put policies into place that support gender equality and balanced opportunity for all people in as much as it seeks to build a better economy and society.

Shwetha (2017) in her paper argues that gender-specific protective legislation and work process changes have made occupational segregation in Kerala's cashew sector worse, resulting in the exclusion of female workers. The business was not gender segregated before the 1920s. Women in agriculture are mostly engaged in manual labour, which is less productive, and they are paid lower wages despite working harder and for more time. Theories suggest that cultural devaluation in society leads to men's occupations being valued higher than women's. The Equal Remuneration Act 1976 mandates employers to pay equal remuneration to both men and women for similar work. However, the law ambiguously defined "similar work" for men and women, enabling producers to protect workers from harmful materials like cashew shell oil, justifying gender-based occupational segregation. This leads to wage differentials, as women workers are often rewarded less due to their reduced opportunities, cultural devaluation, ignorance, and

prejudice. The MGNREGA, a government program that guarantees 100 days of employment for rural households with adult members willing to do unskilled manual work, has helped address this issue. The scheme has been criticized for not considering life course issues for women, particularly older women, and their physical capabilities. Factors preventing women's participation include inadequate worksite facilities, gender insensitivity, and lack of crèche facilities.

The paper by Sharma (2018) says the gender-based pay gap is a significant issue affecting women's participation in the formal economy. Factors contributing to GPG include undervaluation of women's work, workplace organization, employer discrimination, occupational segregation, cultural restrictions, low pay due to wage discrimination, career stage, denial of employment for singleness, potential mothers, a shorter expected lifetime in the labour force participation, shifts in women's roles in the labour market as a result of reforms, their ability to do certain tasks, their concentration in low-productivity professions, and factors such as age, experience, industry, and employment status may all have an impact. Laws have been passed in India in an attempt to end discrimination in the labour market and to guarantee equal pay and treatment at work. Even though the Indian constitution prohibits unequal pay based on gender, more than 90% of India's labour force works in the unorganized sector. Preschool teachers, domestic helpers, Anganwadi workers, nurses, and other low-paying jobs make up the majority of women employed in the services sector. India's largest gender pay gaps are found in West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, and Bihar, among India's least developed states. The lowest gaps are found in Sikkim, Odisha, Mizoram, Haryana, and Nagaland. Punjab and Urban Sector Delhi have negative GPGs. Urban sector gender pay gaps are narrowing.

Sengupta & Puri (2021) in their research analyzes the issue of wage discrimination in India utilizing the data collected from the 2012 Employment-Unemployment Survey carried out by NSS. Their findings indicate that there exists a significant wage gap among the male and female segments with age possibly influencing the present status of women and industry moderating the situation for men. Also, the review reveals that the gender wage gap still exists, and women in rural versus urban settings face a difference of 37% in wages. Investment in education is shown to narrow down the gap; nonetheless, the rising trend of women joining the workforce is not able to lessen the wage gap considerably. The authors do not think it prudent to depend on secondary data alone and point out that there is a need to explore some factors in their wages like personal choices, social norms, and discrimination within organizations that may be contributing to the differences in their wages.

Agrawal (2014) paper analyzes the wage discrimination by gender and social groups in India by using a household survey representative of the entire country. By analysing the data, the authors employ the Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition and use the Heckman correction for the sample selection bias. The results show that there are significant wage gaps between men and women, within, and between social groups, such differences being higher in the rural than in the urban areas. The gender wage gap is more driven by discrimination in the labour market, rendering it difficult for women to utilize their human capital fully, while differences within social groups, such as SCs, STs, and OBCs, and wage differentials are largely due to differences in endowments such as education and skills. The additional lessons that the research findings reveal indicate the

need for the adoption of equal employment opportunity initiatives, antidiscrimination legislation, and education for the women and marginalized population in the countryside in particular. Values help bridge the wage gap, maximize the returns of females' education, and lessen social inequities, which will in turn enhance economic and social developments.

3. Research Objectives

Considering a world where two people, equally skilled, equally dedicated, and equally hardworking, walk into the same workplace but walk out with very different pay checks—simply because one of them is a woman. This is not a hypothetical scenario. This is the reality for millions of women across India. Despite being the backbone of our agricultural fields, the lifeline of our classrooms, and the heart of our healthcare systems, women are paid significantly less than their male counterparts are. This paper will discuss this very critical issue that persists in our society—Gender Wage Disparity in India

The broad objective of this paper is an attempt to study the Gender Wage Disparity in India across various states and sectors. Considering the broad objective, the specific objectives of the present study are as follows:

1. To analyse the State-wise Gender Wage Disparity in India.
2. To evaluate the key factors contributing to the Industry Wise Gender Wage Disparity in India.

4. Research Methodology

This section details the research methodology undertaken for the research objectives of this paper. Secondary research has been conducted to determine the various factors contributing to gender wage disparity in India. Extensive secondary research was conducted to analyse the causes of gender wage disparity at the state level and at the industry level.

Variables:

1. Average wages- Average wages of males compared to females in every state has been used to discuss the wage gap and analyse the gender wage disparity in India States.
2. No. of male employees- The no. of male employees hired in each state is then compared with the no. of female employees hired which gives a better idea even of gender inequality in each state.
3. No. of female employees- After comparison of this variable with the no. of male employees, we can analyse the reason of gender wage disparity as it has a high positive correlation with gender inequality.
4. Average gender gap in each Industry- This variable helps to analyse the factors affecting gender wage disparity in each sector like construction, agriculture, textile, nursing and education and unorganised sector.

Data Sources:

The secondary data has been taken from different research papers, journals, and databases. The surveys by NSSO, articles by NLI and information from DGET and MoSPI were our main sources of secondary data. Due to credit has been given wherever necessary.

Throughout the paper, comparative analysis has been used to compare each state with the other and same amongst the industries to get a better idea of where gender wage disparity in India is prevalent and what are the factors contributing to it.

5. Findings

The analysis of gender wage disparity in India highlights significant variations across states and industries, revealing persistent structural inequalities. Despite increased female participation in the workforce, wage gaps remain pronounced, particularly in agriculture, construction, healthcare, and education. State-wise data indicates that socio-cultural norms, occupational segregation, and differences in educational attainment contribute to these disparities. The findings emphasize the urgent need for policy interventions to bridge the wage gap and promote economic equity for women.

5.1: A State-wise Analysis of the Gender Wage Gap

The gender wage gap continues to be a burning issue in India cutting across sectors and states. Having reached considerable education levels and workforce participation, the wage gap remains an area where women in India continue to draw less than their male counterparts for similar work, thus demonstrating deep structural inequalities. This objective shall provide a state-wise analysis of the gender wage gap, bringing out regional differences as well as factors underlying this phenomenon over trends in time.

Table 1: Average wage/salary earnings (Rs. 0.00) during the preceding calendar month from regular wage/salaried employment among the regular wage/salaried employees in CWS for each State/ UT

State \ UT	Rural+Urban		Rural+Urban		
	male	female	person	Wage Gap	%
Andhra Pradesh	15,208.85	9,618.40	13,587.48	5,590.45	58.1 2
Arunachal Pradesh	29,873.54	16,232.22	26,808.39	13,641.32	84.0 4
Assam	19,056.70	9,349.90	16,563.08	9,706.80	103. 82
Bihar	17,773.58	15,384.06	17,424.94	2,389.52	15.5 3
Chhattisgarh	19,812.53	12,872.97	17,852.94	6,939.56	53.9 1
Delhi	26,653.18	25,095.54	26,312.76	1,557.64	6.21
Goa	21,911.86	23,830.53	22,376.52	-1,918.67	-8.05
Gujarat	15,098.71	11,239.77	14,328.85	3,858.94	34.3 3
Haryana	17,863.57	27,078.60	19,203.10	-9,215.03	- 34.0 3

Himachal Pradesh	15,771.45	14,408.77	15,403.29	1,362.68	9.46
Jharkhand	18,325.96	14,801.70	17,722.10	3,524.26	23.8 1
Karnataka	22,174.72	17,009.01	20,830.93	5,165.71	30.3 7
Kerala	23,247.40	15,874.03	20,176.67	7,373.37	46.4 5
Madhya Pradesh	21,517.30	14,587.33	20,114.84	6,929.97	47.5 1
Maharashtra	21,687.60	18,103.66	20,840.99	3,583.94	19.8 0
Manipur	24,634.52	19,560.11	22,732.23	5,074.41	25.9 4
Meghalaya	20,803.53	14,562.98	18,734.32	6,240.55	42.8 5
Mizoram	32,522.69	27,369.19	31,226.51	5,153.50	18.8 3
Nagaland	22,835.03	23,340.95	22,996.02	-505.92	-2.17
Odisha	19,416.86	13,074.32	17,989.42	6,342.54	48.5 1
Punjab	14,677.36	11,757.21	13,917.44	2,920.15	24.8 4
Rajasthan	18,811.37	16,920.30	18,488.90	1,891.07	11.1 8
Sikkim	17,869.39	16,927.84	17,495.01	941.55	5.56
Tamil Nadu	16,379.34	14,648.44	15,826.77	1,730.90	11.8 2
Telangana	21,837.56	13,304.38	19,794.63	8,533.18	64.1 4
Tripura	17,376.00	7,642.21	13,846.51	9,733.79	127. 37
Uttarakhand	27,874.21	24,089.93	27,028.70	3,784.28	15.7 1
Uttar Pradesh	15,056.79	15,968.92	15,175.80	-912.13	-5.71
West Bengal	12,776.79	7,990.22	11,432.64	4,786.57	59.9 1
Andaman & N. Island	35,579.62	21,060.49	30,197.32	14,519.13	68.9 4
Chandigarh	18,602.96	18,895.39	18,664.05	-292.43	-1.55
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	16,048.06	22,458.50	16,383.55	-6,410.44	- 28.5 4

Daman & Diu	13,696.91	8,893.25	12,730.64	4,803.66	54.01
Jammu & Kashmir	25,368.70	23,594.13	25,150.46	1,774.57	7.52
Ladakh	0	0	0	0	#DIV/0!
Lakshadweep	0	0	0	0	#DIV/0!
Puducherry	17,804.54	17,646.28	17,749.71	158.26	0.90
all India	18,514.89	14,688.15	17,600.17	3,826.74	26.05
estimated no. of regular wage/salaried employee (00)*	588,651	184,906	773,557	403,745.00	218.35
sample no. of regular wage/salaried employee*	19,143	6,348	25,491	12,795.00	201.56

Source: MOSPI (NSC), Apr-Jun,2020

Note:

- * Reported earnings from regular wage/salaried employment*
- Figures based on first visit schedule for rural areas and first and revisit schedules for urban area.*
- Estimated number of regular wage/ salaried employees given in Table 1 is design-based estimates and may be used as control totals for combining and arriving at averages wage/salary. These figures are not intended for providing the number of regular wage/salaried employees.*
- Cell value zero (0) indicates no sample observation in the respective category.*
- A few columns containing statistics for rural and urban wages separately were removed from the original table to focus on the aggregate.*
- The percentage of the wage gap was calculated by taking the average female salary as the base, i.e., how much more an average male earned as compared to an average female.*

This analysis examines the economic, social, and cultural dynamics of differences in wage disparity across the various states through the examination of wage data from different regions. Industrial composition, higher levels of education, urbanization, and percentages of people involved in labour forces are some variables that shape the gaps in genders. These regional and state-wise variations are important for formulating policy-level interventions to promote the issue of wage equity and women's economic empowerment in the entire country.

As shown in Table 1, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Telangana, Tripura, and Andaman and Nicobar Islands, where the gender wage gaps stand at much higher figures ranging from Rs.8000 to Rs.15000 with an interplay of both socio-economic and cultural factors. Further, it is also reported that male earnings as compared to females earned are more than 64%, with significant differences noticed in Tripura, Assam, and Arunachal Pradesh at 127%, 103.8%, and 84%, respectively.

Women make up many people engaged in informal and low-wage sectors like agriculture, domestic services, and handicrafts. The men work in the formal sectors with a higher wage scale like construction, manufacturing, and governmental services. Hence, the occupation-based division of labour must do much with worsening wage disparities. Poor education status and skill building among women, especially in rural places, make them enter unavailable better-paid jobs. The education gap between genders often forces people into stereotypical crowding of women into less-skilled, underpaid, and less-rewarded work. More fundamentally, prevailing cultural and social attitudes are major causes of the wage gap perpetuation. In such countries, traditional gender roles and patriarchal structures often assign women more family responsibility, thus constraining them to participate less in the workforce and reducing their ability to bargain for higher wages.

In Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Odisha, West Bengal, and Daman & Diu, a high wage gap is seen where an average male receives 18.8% to 59.9% more than an average female.

Some states show overrepresentation of women in low-wage sectors, while males are often the dominant groups in high-wage sectors. Informatics and industry formal sectors in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, for instance, have been more represented by men, while women are likely to be clumped together in certain labour-intensive, informal sectors. Such a dualistic division of labour leads to gaping wage gaps. In fact, today, while some states like Kerala have much higher literacy among women than others, like Madhya Pradesh and Odisha, remain backward. Moreover, in states with high literacy, such as Kerala, women often have trouble in obtaining higher technical and vocational training, and this limits their prospects of getting highpaying jobs in skilled occupations. As a result, this further worsens wage inequalities because men tend to be better placed for high-paid jobs requiring higher qualifications and offering better wages.

Traditional roles still forbid them from working full-time, getting promotions, or attracting higher wages. Women hardly undergo full professional development in the states of West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, or Odisha. Even in more progressive states such as Kerala and Karnataka, women assume the role of household work mostly and thereby restrain professional growth. For example, women in rural areas mostly in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh appear to have relatively better opportunities for education and even more rewarding jobs compared to their counterparts in towns. Most women remain in rural areas where they form low-wage employment in a relatively narrow scope, mainly agricultural. Also, men leave for cities in search of better-paying jobs, thereby increasing the wage gaps. Strong cultural biases have affected the hiring practice and negotiation over salary in Odisha, Chhattisgarh, and Manipur, making it even more difficult to strive for wage parity among women.

The various states have a relatively small gender wage gap, reaching Bihar, Delhi, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Sikkim, and Jammu and Kashmir. There, male wages are higher than female earnings averaging around 16%. Even with increased participation of women in formal sectors, these regions are found to remain mainly in lower-wage jobs than men, for example, in IT and engineering. Economic growth with

consequent urbanization in states like Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu offers more possibilities for women. In Maharashtra, women make up 30% of the IT workforce but receive salaries substantially lower than those of their male counterparts for equivalent work, due mainly to the "glass ceiling effect" putting limits on advancement. In Tamil Nadu, 49% percent of students enrolled in higher education are women, while only 19% own companies; clearly, this has an impact on wage equity.

However, social norms and lack of opportunity for female advancement form a basis for this gap. In Delhi, though women form a respectable percentage of the workforce in education and health, jobs related to finance, or the IT sector compensate such women 20% less than similar men with qualifications. Despite large educational gains by women in most countries, women continue to be scarce at the high-paid leadership levels. This phenomenon is sometimes referred to as the "leaky pipeline." Although government policies and corporate programs were initiated to address the pay gap, occupational segregation is also closely linked to wage discrimination as factors that may exceptionally explain this situation quite among the small- and medium-sized enterprises. For example, in Himachal Pradesh, whose women's share of agricultural labour force participation is highest in the country, women often perform the same work as men but earn less because of the societal perception that gives lesser value to their contribution. To summarize, though the states of India have shown evidence of progress and also gender wage equality, the systemic barriers prevail.

Women are paid more than men or even possess a zero or negative wage gap in Goa, Haryana, Nagaland, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Chandigarh, and Dadra and Nagar Haveli. Correspondingly, in Puducherry, a modest wage gap of Rs.158 is seen.

Women are doing well in high-paying sectors such as hospitality and healthcare in both Goa and Chandigarh. For instance, with more women entrepreneurs coming into tourism in Goa, their incomes are rising. The changing values in Haryana and Nagaland increase the female economic status. Women are being increasingly identified with agriculture in Haryana, while traditional matriarchal institutions in Nagaland enhance women's earning potential.

Several initiatives in Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh work to increase women's participation in the workforce. Government interventions, such as self-help groups, facilitate starting enterprises, thereby increasing their earning capabilities even further. In Uttar Pradesh, men are invariably engaged in low-paid agriculture and informal work, while women occupy more remunerative jobs that tend to imply higher earned incomes for women.

In case of Chandigarh and Puducherry, better chances exist for women to acquire more skilled jobs that guarantee higher incomes, which often cross the threshold of those received by men. The wage gap for Puducherry at Rs. 158 captures a diversified economy which also, with social welfare and education initiatives, is improving female employment in better-paying sectors. In Goa and Uttarakhand, flexible workplace arrangements help women retain their balance between family and career activities, earning advantages over men holding rigid structures.

5.2: Analysis on the key factors contributing to the Industry Wise Gender Wage Disparity in India

On an average, female workers in India earn only about 66 percent of the wages earned by male workers. (NSSO, 2011-12) However, differences in wages occur depending on the sector, nature of occupation and types of contracts.

5.2.1: Agriculture

Women are often paid less than men, despite their significant contributions in the agriculture sector.

As per Shwetha (2017), case studies on the gender wage gap, gender-based exclusion or occupational segregation from certain tasks has led to disparities in wages. Agriculture tasks historically performed by women, such as threshing, winnowing, and transplanting, are categorized as unskilled and pay less, whereas tasks performed by men, such as ploughing, are categorized as skilled and pay more. Thus, historical gender exclusion was due to the introduction of machines and protective legislation.

The Equal Remuneration Act 1976 showed an ambiguity while defining “similar work” for men and women. Such laws protecting workers from hazardous materials, like cashew shell oil, were used to justify removing women from certain tasks, reducing their earning potential. The majority of women's labour in agriculture is manual, and as a result, it is viewed as less competent and productive. Because of this, women consistently receive lower pay while putting in more effort and working longer hours.

One prominent theoretical explanation for the prevalence of the gender wage gap in the agricultural sector is that biases from the measurement of productivity could result in women earning less. This undervaluation of women's labour may lead to inefficiencies and lower overall productivity in the sector, as the skills and hard work of women are not fully utilized or rewarded. This kind of occupational segregation is prevalent not only in agriculture but also in non-agricultural operations.

Table 2: Table showing sector-wise gender pay gap in India

SECTOR	GENDER PAY GAP
Legal and market consultancy, business activities	24.20%
Information and communication technology	34%
Health care, caring services, social work	26%
Education, Research	22%
Financial Services, banking, insurance	17.70%
Transport, logistics, communication	17.70%
Construction and technical Consultancy	25.30%
Manufacturing	34.90

Source: Based on a report from the National Statistical Organisation, 2011-12

5.2.2: Construction, Transportation and Storage

In the construction sector, women often face significant barriers to entry and advancement, resulting in a pronounced gender wage gap.

Cultural biases and societal norms may deter women from pursuing careers in construction, further limiting their representation in higher-paying roles. Occupational segregation plays a significant role, as women are often employed in lower-paying, less skilled roles, while higher-paying positions, such as truck drivers and warehouse operators, are predominantly held by men. Cultural barriers also discourage women from pursuing careers in this sector, limiting their access to better-paying roles and opportunities for advancement. Furthermore, safety and access issues can impede women's participation and career progression in transport and storage. In the transport and storage sector, women are often underrepresented, particularly in roles that are traditionally male dominated.

This underrepresentation contributes to gender wage disparities as women are funnelled into lower-paying, less skilled positions.

5.2.3: Manufacturing

In industries like textile manufacturing, there is often a significant gender wage gap, with women being underpaid for similar tasks compared to men.

Women are typically employed in lower-wage jobs, such as sewing or assembling, while men dominate higher-paying roles, like machine operation, maintenance, or supervisory positions. Cultural biases contribute to occupational segregation, where jobs typically performed by women are considered unskilled and thus less remunerated. This segregation is seen in industries like textiles and other labour-intensive manufacturing sectors.

Women are often funnelled into less skilled or semi-skilled roles, which are associated with lower wages. Women may face societal pressure to prioritize household responsibilities over pursuing careers in sectors like manufacturing or construction, which contributes to their lower representation in skilled roles.

5.2.4: Nursing and Education

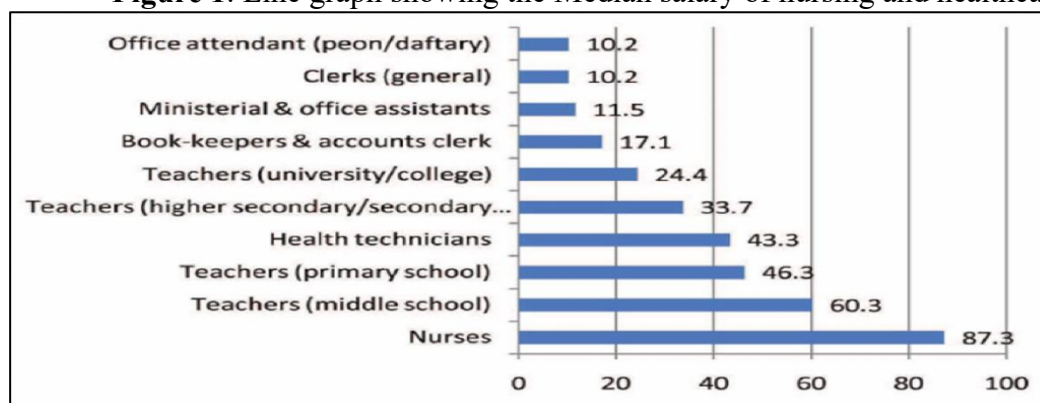
Claudia Goldin discovered that female labour market participation followed a U-shaped curve. This suggests that female participation decreased in the nineteenth century before increasing again in the twentieth century. This is because, prior to industrialisation, more women worked in agriculture and cottage businesses. However, post-industrialization witnessed a shift to factories, limiting female labour force participation due to cultural and social conventions.

Her research also shows that the gender pay gap for women expanded following the birth of their first child, impeding career advancement and ultimately resulting in lower earnings when compared to their male counterparts. Employers place a lower value on work done by women due to reasons stemming from gender bias, cultural differences, and social pressures.

Pay decreases when more women enter certain fields, even for jobs that previously employed more males. This is evidently seen in historical job records such as nurses, teachers, and professors.

According to the Bureau of Labour Statistics, the median salary of information technology managers, who are primarily men, is 27% greater than that of human resources managers, who are primarily women. On the opposite end of the economic scale, janitors (primarily men) make 22% more than maids and housecleaners (primarily women). In sectors like education and healthcare, roles predominantly filled by women tend to pay less, regardless of the high skill levels required.

Figure 1: Line graph showing the Median salary of nursing and healthcare sector



Source: Directorate General of Employment & Training report, 2011

5.2.5: Unorganised Sector

This includes informal jobs, where there is little regulation, and women face significant wage gaps. Although the Indian Constitution and Laws deem gender-based discrimination in the workforce illegal, 90% of the workforce is employed in the unorganised sector. Thus, this section remains unregulated.

There is a lack of clear implementation of the Equal Remuneration Act of 1976. The vague definition of "similar work" allows employers to justify different wages for men and women. Social and cultural norms limit women's access to education and skills, which, in turn, limits their opportunities and pay even in the organised sector. Persistent wage gaps discourage women from entering the labour market or seeking higher-skilled work, limiting the overall economic potential of the sector. This can perpetuate poverty and economic inequality. The wage gap in the unorganised sector is also exacerbated by the lack of social security measures or formal contracts, making women more vulnerable to wage exploitation.

The National Sample Survey Organization's (NSSO) statistical data on earnings of men and women by occupation, sector or industry, and level of skills or education, according to the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR), shows significant differences in earnings between men and women even in situations where they are engaged in the same occupations or have the same skills or education.

To address the gender, pay gap effectively, it is essential for the classification of tasks to be redefined to ensure equal pay for jobs that require similar levels of effort and skill. Additionally, education and skill development programs for women in rural areas can significantly enhance their productivity and access to higher-paying roles in agriculture. Furthermore, reforming protective legislation is crucial, as it should not disproportionately exclude women from higher paying tasks.

Moreover, the inclusion of women in all stages of production, accompanied by appropriate training and protective measures, is considered vital for fostering a more equitable workforce. Stronger penalties should be introduced for employers who fail to provide equal pay for equal work to enforce these changes. Compliance can be ensured by establishing job-specific wage standards that are gender-neutral, along with rigorous labour inspections. Lastly, policies that recognize the value of "care" work and provide financial incentives for these essential roles, which are often undervalued due to occupational segregation, should be promoted.

6. Government Initiatives

The World Economic Forum (WEF) recently ranked India at 135 out of 146 countries in its Global Gender Gap (GGG) Index for 2022. According to the World Inequality Report 2022 estimates, men earn 82 per cent of the labour income in India, whereas women earn 18 per cent.

Table 3: Mean daily wages (in Rs.) for regular wage/salaried men and women employees by level of education.

Sector	Level Of Education	1993-1994		1999-2000		2004-2005		2009-2010	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Rural	Illiterate	31.27	17.98	71.23	40.32	72.47	35.47	135.72	65.47
	Literate upto middle	45.87	23.92	91.63	50.18	98.59	47.75	160.04	80.32
	Secondary & Higher secondary	72.31	57.61	148.23	126.09	158.04	100.19	267.14	151.54
	Graduate & above	97.71	72.16	220.93	159.92	270.02	175.7	403.05	285.98
Urban	Illiterate	46.28	26.75	87.63	51.83	98.79	48.7	156.6	92.56
	Literate upto middle	53.02	30.11	105.08	64.41	111.44	64.79	183.8	114.38
	Secondary & Higher secondary	80.33	70.93	168.16	145.73	182.58	150.41	293.26	237.61
	Graduate & above	127.69	98.59	281.55	234.74	366.76	269.17	634.92	499.98

Source: Chapter no.50, 55, 61, 66 NSS rounds on "Employment and Unemployment Situation in India" (Sengupta and Das, 2014)

As seen in Table 3, the data clearly shows the wage differential over the years from 1993 to 2010. Against this background, it therefore becomes evident that India suffers from an inherent problem of discrimination against women, specifically when it comes to the payment of wages. India has made legislative strides to address pay disparity and enhance women's workforce participation through laws like the Minimum Wages Act 1948, the Equal Remuneration Act 1976

(‘Equal Remuneration Act’), now subsumed under the Code on Wages 2019 (‘Wage Code’) and the Maternity Benefit Act 2017.

The Equal Remuneration Act 1976

The Equal Remuneration Act imposes a duty upon employers to pay equal remuneration to men and women workers performing the same work or work of a similar nature. Furthermore, employers are prohibited from discriminating against women for the same work or work of a similar nature. Notably, India has also enacted the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2019, which prohibits discrimination against transgender persons in matters of employment.

This Act analyses the current Indian legal framework on equal pay and explores the need to reconsider the existing law and align it with international standards advocating for a broader concept of equal pay for equal value of work.

After the success of education programmes in the country, there has been a gradual increase in the employment of women in all sectors of employment and jobs which were gender-specific have gone through major changes to be gender-neutral. Women in the current age are not restricted to minimum paying jobs or traditionally female roles. Women are considered as an employee at par to their male colleagues, this has been enshrined and ensured with legislations drafted by the state and central governments.

Constitutional validity of the act

The Act fulfils the rights provided to citizens under the following Articles:

- Article 14 emphasises on equality before the law Article 15 guarantees a right against discrimination based on gender.
- Article 15(3) recognizes ‘protective discrimination’ to bring women at par with men in all possible respects.
- Article 16 provides the right to equal opportunity regarding public employment irrespective of the gender of the person. Ø Directive Principles of State Policy.
- Article 39(a) states that the citizens, men, or women have equal rights to have an adequate means of livelihood.
- Article 39(d) “that there is equal pay for equal work for both men and women”.
- Article 42 requires the state to make provision for securing humane conditions of work and maternity relief.¹⁵ The Doctrine of ‘equal pay for equal work’ is a Directive Principle of State Policy and not a Fundamental Right therefore it is a Constitutional Right. As equal remuneration is a right of employees regardless of the gender, the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 was enacted to comply with Article 39 of the Constitution of India.

Table 4: Key points highlighting the offences and penalties of the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976

Offenses	Penalty
Employer omits:	Maximum fine Rs. 10,000
• Fails to maintain register	OR
• Produce the register and other relevant documents	Maximum Imprisonment- 1 month
	OR
	Both

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give evidence • Give any Information 	
Employer makes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any recruitment in contravention of provision of The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 • Any payment of remuneration for unequal rates for same work • Any discrimination between men and women • An omission to carry out directions made by the appropriate Government 	Minimum fine- Rs. 10,000 Maximum fine- Rs. 20,000 OR Minimum Imprisonment- 3 months Maximum Imprisonment- 1 year OR Both
Failure to produce or register or any other documents or to give any information to the Labour Inspector	Maximum fine- Rs. 500

Source: NLI Research Studies Series No 142_0

Minimum Wages Act, 1948

Background

- The initiative started with the resolution placed by one Shri. K. G. R. Chaudhary in 1920 for setting up Boards for determination of minimum wages in each industry.
- The International Labour Conference adopted in 1928 Convention No.26 and Recommendation No. 30 relating to wage fixing machinery in trades or parts of trades.
- On the recommendation of the Standing Labour Committee and Indian Labour Conference, a Labour Investigation Committee was appointed in 1943 to investigate into the question of wages and other matters like housing, social conditions, and employment.
- A draft bill was considered by the Indian Labour Conference in 1945.
- The 8th meeting of the Standing Labour Committee recommended in 1946 to enact a separate legislation for the unorganized sector including working hours, minimum wages and paid holidays.
- A Minimum Wages Bill was introduced in the Central Legislative Assembly on 11.4.46 to provide for fixation of minimum wages in certain employments. It was passed in 1946 and came into force with effect from 15.3.48. Under the Act, Central and State Governments are appropriate Governments to -
 - (a) notify scheduled employment
 - (b) fix/revise minimum wages

The Act contains a list of all these employments for which minimum wages are to be fixed by the appropriate Governments. There are two parts of the Schedule. Part I has non-agricultural employments whereas Part-II relates to employment in agriculture.

India introduced the Minimum Wages Act in 1948, giving both the Central government and State government jurisdiction in fixing wages. The act is legally non-binding, but statutory. Payment of wages below the minimum wage rate amounts to forced labour. Wage boards are set up to review

the industry's capacity to pay and fix minimum wages such that they at least cover a family of four's requirements of calories, shelter, clothing, education, medical assistance, and entertainment. Under the law, wage rates in scheduled employments differ across states, sectors, skills, regions, and occupations owing to difference in costs of living, regional industries' capacity to pay, consumption patterns, etc. Hence, there is no single uniform minimum wage rate across the country, and the structure has become overly complex. The highest minimum wage rate as updated in 2012 was Rs. 322/day in Andaman and Nicobar and the lowest was Rs. 38/day in Tripura. In Mumbai, as of 2017, the minimum wage was Rs. 348/day for a *safai karmachari* (sewage cleaner and sweeper), but this was rarely paid.

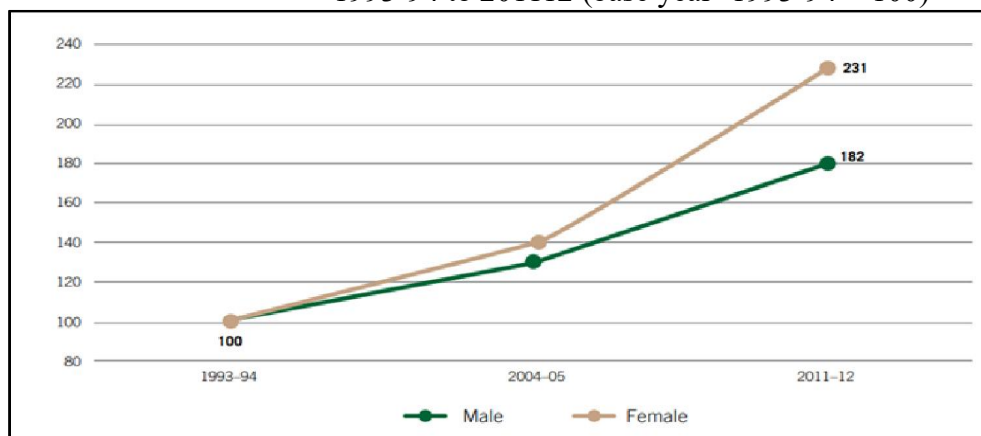
Table 5: Basic rates and Variable Dearness Allowance Payable w.e.f. 01.10.2020

Category of worker	Rates of wages including V.D.A. (in Rupees) Per Day	
	For work above ground	For work below ground
Unskilled	350+77=427	437+97= 534
Semi-Skilled / Unskilled Supervisor	437+97=534	523+ 116=639
Skilled Clerical	523+ 116=639	610+ 135=745
Highly Skilled	610+ 135=745	683+ 149=832

Source: Research paper of the NLI Research Studies, 2020

Labour markets in India are characterized by gender-based disparities. The NSSO data show that the daily wages of women have increased more rapidly than those of men, particularly more recently (2004–05 to 2011–12). The rapid rise in wages during this period was partly due to the implementation of Minimum Wages Act, which ensured employment and minimum wages for all workers in the programme and pushed up the wages in the agricultural sector.

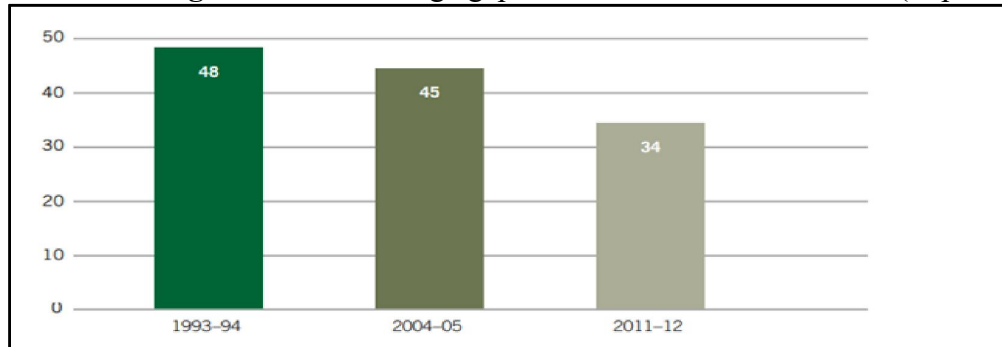
Figure 2: Evolution of daily real wages of male and female workers in India, 1993-94 to 2011-12 (base year- 1993-94 = 100)



Source: Report of International Labour Organisation estimates based on National Sample Survey Office data

Therefore, the raw gender wage gap (the difference in average pay between men and women, as a proportion of men's wages) has declined over time, falling from 48 per cent in 1993–94 to 34 per cent in 2011–12. The gap remains high by international standards.

Figure 3: Gender wage gap in India, 1993-94 to 2011-12 (in percentages)



Source: Report of International Labour Organisation estimates based on National Sample Survey Office data

7. Policy Recommendations

Enforce and strengthen equal pay laws:

S. No.	Designation	Vulnerable area & industry which require immediate intervention and enforcement of ERA								
		Agriculture, Construction, Entertainment	Construction industry	Garment manufacture Industry	Handloom industry	Home made industry	Loading and Unloading, Construction Agriculture.	No Response	Private educational institute in rural areas.	Unorganized & Unregistered industry
1	Assistant Labour Commissioner	5.6	5.6	0.0	5.6	5.6	5.6	55.6	5.6	11.1
2	Deputy Commissioner of Labour	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0
3	Chief Labour Officer	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0
4	Assistant Inspecting Officer	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
5	Inspecting Officer	0.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
6	Labour Commissioner	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0
7	Labour Enforcement Officer	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0
	Total in %	0.8	15.1	14.3	0.8	0.8	0.8	65.1	0.8	1.6

Strengthen the existing laws by conducting regular audits of wage practices in all the sectors private and public to ensure that no unfair practices are being conducted. Ensuring that higher penalties for wage discrimination will be paid by the employers in malpractice is crucial.

Table 6: Vulnerable area and industry which require immediate intervention and enforcement of ERA (in %)

Source: A field survey conducted by the National Sample Survey Office on the Equal Remuneration Act

Assistant Labour Commissioner from different regions have conducted 5600 inspections in the previous 5 years. 10% of the Labour Enforcement Officers have conducted inspection only 10 times in the previous 5 years. This report was published in 2020, after which the number of inspections increased slightly.

The Labour Bureau should publish data pertaining to the ERA every year. The inspection report should also be available online. The online mechanism may be developed to conduct auditing of the inspections. Auditing the implementation of the ERA must be made mandatory in all organizations.

Table 7: Average annual number of inspections in the previous five years (in %)

S. No.	Designation	Inspections	
1	Assistant Labour Commissioner	18	5.6
		56000	5.6
		57000	5.6
		750	5.6
		NA	5.6
		No	11.1
		No Response	61.1
2	Deputy Labour Commissioner	No Response	100
3	Chief Labour officer	No Response	100
4	Assistant Inspecting Officer	NA	100
5	Inspecting Officer	NA	100
6	Labour Commissioner	No Response	100
7	Labour Enforcement Officer	10	10.5
		3	5.3
		5	5.3
		80	5.3
		NA	5.3
		No Response	68.4

Source: A field survey conducted by the National Sample Survey Office on the Equal Remuneration Act

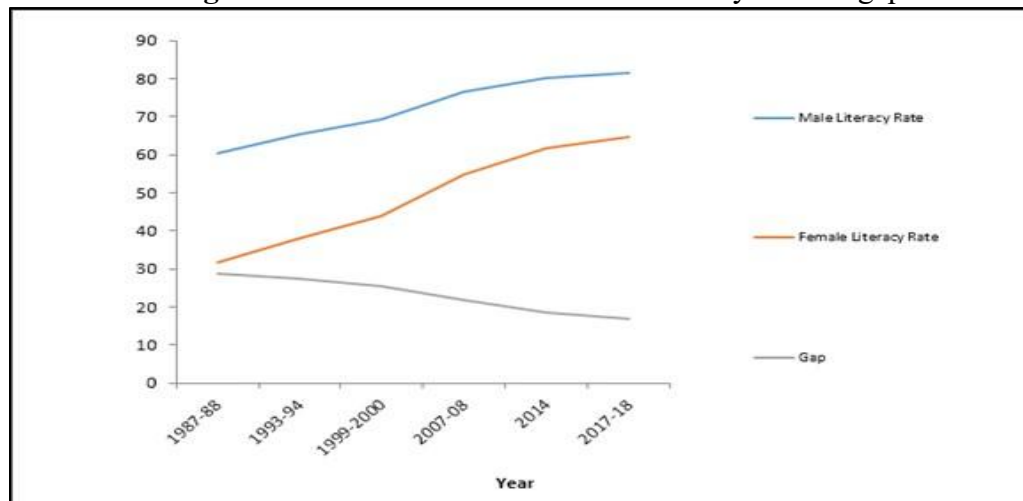
Raise the minimum wage floor, extend its coverage to previously excluded groups and ensure it is implemented through comprehensive labour inspection regimes.

Implement the principle of equal pay for work of equal value and extend equal pay legislation to allow for comparisons across organisations. Understanding and applying the concept of ‘equal pay for work of equal value’ is important to tackle the issue of the gender pay gap and achieve pay equality. This concept is more efficient than ‘equal pay for equal work’ in addressing gender-based discrimination and promoting pay equality since men and women often perform different jobs and under different working conditions and circumstances.

Improving Access to Education and Training

Invest in education, particularly for girls, to reduce educational disparities. Policies should focus on improving enrollment in secondary and higher education, particularly in rural areas. Even the research papers found that the biggest reason for wage disparity explained was education inequality; the women at university graduate levels were shown to have similar wages as those of their co-workers. Establish vocational training programs that equip women with skills aligned to high-paying sectors, including technology, engineering, and management. Emphasizing STEM education for women can help bridge the gender gap in high-demand, better-paying jobs. If done mainly in the rural areas, would help a lot to reduce the sticky floor effect of gender wage disparity.

Figure 4: Trends in female and male literacy and the gap in the literacy



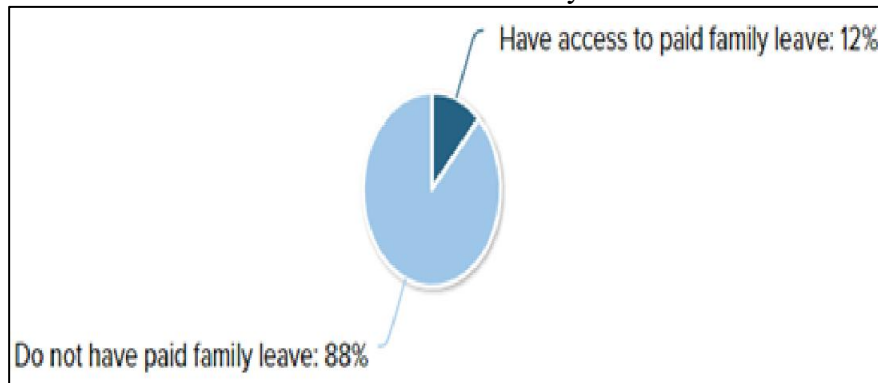
Source: Research paper of the Observer Research Foundation’s India Data Labs at the National Sample Survey

Ensure Equal Distribution of Work in Households:

The burden of household work and childcare often falls disproportionately on women, which can limit their ability to work outside the home or to advance in their careers. To address this, it is important to promote a more equitable distribution of household work and childcare duties between women and men. This can be achieved through policies such as parental leave, flexible work arrangements, and affordable childcare services. This would also help women to practice

their work more efficiently and would erase the misconception that women would disregard their work for family commitments and would also help employers to understand the role of women and would increase the recruitment as well as wage levels. Enable women to remain employed when they have children by providing universal, collectively financed maternity and parental leave, including use-or-lose quotas for fathers, as well as flexible working hours.

Figure 5: Share of private-sector workers without access to paid family leave in 2014

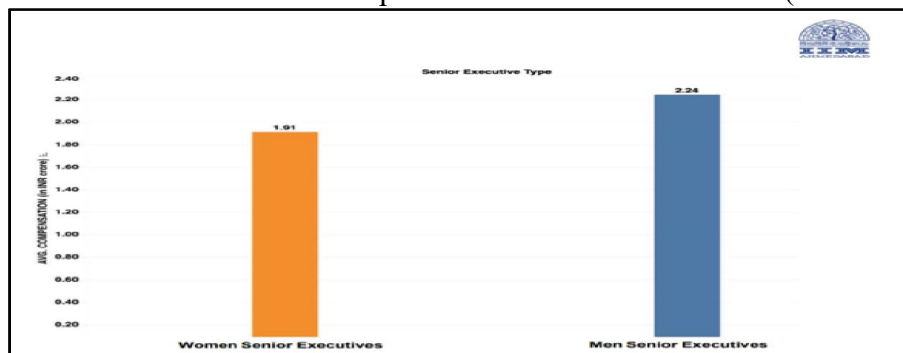


Source: A comprehensive study on closing the pay gap and beyond by the Economic Policy Institute in 2015

Empower Women

Women can be encouraged to negotiate for better pay and benefits by providing them better opportunities and to take up leadership positions in their organizations. This can help break the cycle of gender discrimination and lead to more women in leadership roles.

Figure 6: Average compensation of women senior executives as compared to men senior executives (in Rs. Crores)

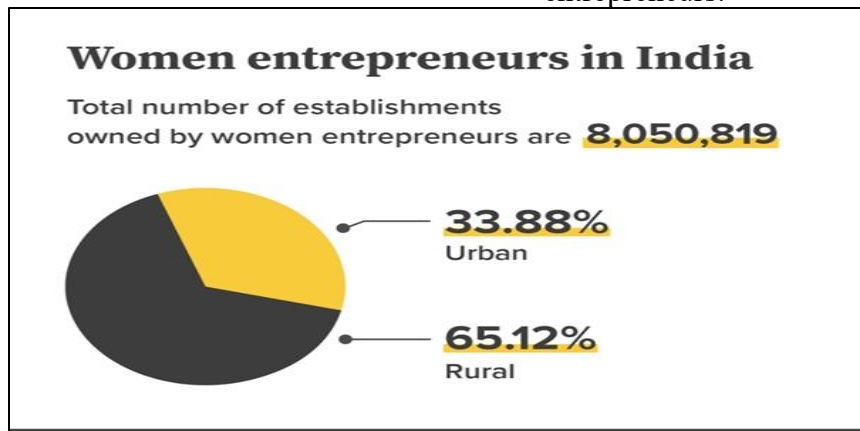


Source: Research study by the Indian Institute of Management

Encourage Entrepreneurship

Provide women with better access to financial resources, including loans, grants, and microfinance, to encourage female entrepreneurship. Offering financial literacy programs and business training can empower women to start and grow their businesses.

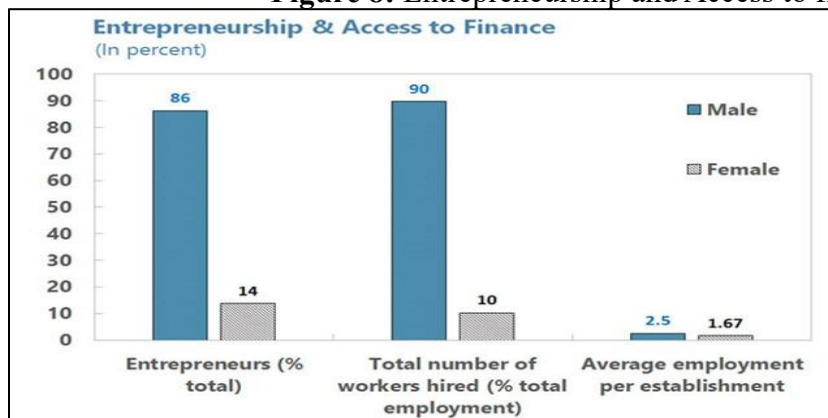
Figure 7: Division of urban and rural establishments owned by women entrepreneurs.



Source: Research paper 'The Rise of Women Entrepreneurs' by Luke Pardue

Entrepreneurship training, coaching and mentoring programmes for female entrepreneurs and women entrepreneurship loan guarantee schemes should be guaranteed to all women. If women have access to financial resources easily, they can start their own businesses. The share of women starting their own businesses is high in rural areas.

Figure 8: Entrepreneurship and Access to finance (in %)



Source: Article on Closing gender gaps in India: Does increasing women's access to finance help?

Strengthen Social Protection Systems

Social Security for Women Workers: Extend social protection benefits like healthcare, pensions, and unemployment insurance to women, particularly those in informal or low-wage employment. This helps secure women's financial independence and reduces their vulnerability.

Legal Protection Against Workplace Discrimination: Strengthen laws against workplace harassment and discrimination to create a safer, more supportive environment for women.

Improving public transportation and ensuring the safety of women in public spaces can encourage greater participation in the workforce, especially in urban areas. Accessible, affordable, and safe transportation is critical for women commuting to work.

Updating and enforcing labour standards, including raising the salary threshold below which workers automatically qualify for overtime pay, and cracking down on harmful practices such as wage theft, worker misclassification, and forced arbitration.

7. Conclusion

This paper explores the persistent issue of gender wage disparity in India, shedding light on how women, despite playing significant roles across industries like agriculture, construction, and healthcare, continue to earn considerably less than men. The analysis dives into how socio-cultural norms, traditional gender roles, and limited access to education or resources confine women to lower-paying jobs. The paper discusses how women's underrepresentation in higher-paying roles, due to occupational segregation and socio-cultural biases, increases the disparity. This wage gap is not just a financial inequality but reflects structural biases that hinder the economic progress of women. Furthermore, the research reveals that wage differentials also vary geographically, with states like Assam and Tripura showing a wider gap compared to others. These regional differences are shaped by factors such as literacy rates, urbanization, and industrial composition. The study stresses that reducing this gap is crucial not only for women's empowerment but also for boosting India's overall economic growth.

Closed wage gaps and equal pay for equal work will allow India to tap its full potential in female labour, which will contribute substantially to the nation's GDP. There is a need to establish stronger legal frameworks, promote skills acquisition, and strongly challenge societal norms that lead to unfavourable practices for women's representation in higher-paying sectors. Stronger enforcement of the Equal Remuneration Act and the Minimum Wages Act, along with targeted interventions to improve women's education and skill development, particularly in rural areas is the steps needed to reduce the disparity. It also advocates for improved access to social protections, such as healthcare and pensions, and the promotion of gender equity in household responsibilities to allow women to participate more fully in the workforce. Promoting female entrepreneurship and leadership is another key recommendation, as it empowers women to break through traditional barriers and advance their careers in higher-paying sectors. The paper reveals that in order to achieve wage parity a combination of legal reforms, social change, and a stronger focus on women's economic opportunities is required.

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