



"Labour Force Participation in India: A Decadal State-wise Analysis of Gender, Sectoral, and Urban–Rural Employment Patterns (2011–2021)"

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ABSTRACT :

This study investigates the trends of gender-based employment in India across government and private sectors, focusing on both urban and rural areas, over the last ten years. Using secondary data sources such as the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), Census reports, and published government statistics, the research provides a state-wise review of male and female participation in the workforce. The analysis highlights the proportion of women and men employed in both sectors, tracing patterns of growth, stagnation, or decline across different regions.

Although the primary scope of this paper is limited to male and female employment due to the availability of comprehensive data, the presence of the third gender has been acknowledged. However, owing to insufficient disaggregated datasets, state-wise comparisons for the third gender could not be conducted. The study still recognizes the importance of their inclusion and discusses the implications of their limited visibility in official statistics.

Findings from this paper are expected to enrich the discourse on gender equality in employment by identifying gaps in participation, highlighting the divide between rural and urban labour markets, and assessing the role of government and private sectors in advancing inclusive growth. The outcomes will provide policymakers, educators, and social researchers with a clearer understanding of the gendered employment landscape in India, while also stressing the urgent need for more robust data on the third gender in the workforce.

Keywords: Gender employment, government sector, private sector, state-wise review, urban–rural divide, third gender acknowledgement, India.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 Introduction, Context and Background

The last ten years (2014–2024) have been transformative for India's labour market. With the twin forces of globalization and digitization, the employment structure of the country has undergone significant shifts. Government policies such as *Make in India*, *Skill India Mission*, *Start-up India*, and *Digital India* have attempted to create new opportunities in both the public and private sectors. Alongside these developments, demographic changes, educational expansion, and rising aspirations among youth have played a decisive role in reshaping employment patterns.

However, the gender dimension of employment continues to be a matter of concern. While male employment has remained comparatively stable, female labour force participation has shown uneven trends. According to PLFS (2022–23), the female labour force participation rate (LFPR) was reported at 37.0%, an improvement from 23.3% in 2017–18, but still much lower than the global average. This improvement has largely come from rural areas, where women are engaged in agriculture and allied sectors, whereas urban female participation continues to remain stagnant.

Employment opportunities for women in the *government sector* are traditionally associated with higher prestige, job security, and social mobility. Yet, representation of women in permanent government positions, especially in higher administrative and technical posts, continues to lag behind. On the other hand, the *private sector*, particularly after liberalization, has opened multiple avenues in IT, banking, education, healthcare, and services. Still, issues such as wage discrimination, glass ceiling, job insecurity, and concentration in lower-paid roles persist.

At the state level, disparities are striking. Southern states like *Kerala*, *Tamil Nadu*, and *Karnataka* show relatively higher female participation, attributed to better literacy, social awareness, and policy interventions. In contrast, northern states like *Haryana*, *Uttar Pradesh*, *Bihar*, and *Rajasthan* reflect deeply entrenched socio-cultural barriers limiting women's mobility and employment. Urban–rural differences further complicate the picture, with rural women

often involved in unpaid or disguised forms of work, while urban educated women face challenges of work–life balance and limited opportunities in the formal sector.

Thus, the study of gendered employment trends is not merely an economic inquiry but a social necessity. It directly connects to issues of gender equity, empowerment, family well-being, and the broader goal of achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite various initiatives, a large gender gap persists in India's employment scenario. The problem is multi-layered:

- *Low female participation:* Although there has been improvement since 2017–18, female labour force participation remains far below male participation.
- *Sectoral divide:* Women's employment is disproportionately concentrated in informal, low-paying, or contractual jobs, while men dominate regular salaried positions.
- *Government vs. private employment:* While government jobs are perceived as more secure, women's representation in them is still low. Private sector has expanded opportunities, but with challenges like wage disparities and limited career progression.
- *State-wise disparities:* Female participation is higher in states with stronger social development indicators, while states with patriarchal structures show severe gender imbalances.
- *Urban–rural differences:* Rural women are more visible in labour force statistics due to agricultural engagement, but much of this is unpaid family work. Urban women, though better educated, face systemic barriers to participation.

This persistent gender gap highlights a paradox. On the one hand, India aspires to become a \$5 trillion economy and a global leader, but on the other hand, nearly half of its population remains underrepresented in the formal workforce. Unless addressed, this imbalance will continue to restrict India's economic potential and hinder progress toward gender equality.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The present study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To examine state-wise trends in male and female labour force participation during 2014–2024 using PLFS and NSSO data.
2. To compare gender participation between government and private sectors across states and over time.
3. To analyse urban–rural disparities in employment patterns with reference to gender.
4. To identify shifts in employment trends over the last decade and interpret their socio-economic implications.
5. To provide recommendations for policymakers to reduce gender disparity in employment.

1.4 Hypotheses

On the basis of the literature review and preliminary observations, the following hypotheses are proposed:

1. There exists a *significant gender gap* in employment in both government and private sectors across Indian states.
2. *Female participation is higher in rural areas* compared to urban areas due to the predominance of agriculture and informal sector employment.
3. *Government sector employment* demonstrates relatively lower gender disparity compared to the private sector.
4. *States with higher social and educational indicators* (e.g., Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Himachal Pradesh) report greater female participation compared to states with lower indicators (e.g., Haryana, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh).

1.5 Significance of the Study

The study carries considerable academic, policy, and social importance.

- *For policymakers:* The findings will provide evidence for designing targeted interventions to promote gender-balanced employment. State-specific insights will help in tailoring localized strategies.
- *For educators and researchers:* The study will contribute to the literature on labour economics, gender studies, and employment policy. It will offer data-driven insights into how socio-economic and cultural factors shape gendered employment patterns.
- *For NGOs and activists:* By highlighting disparities and structural barriers, the study will strengthen advocacy efforts aimed at improving women's access to quality employment.
- *For society at large:* Enhancing women's participation in employment is linked to poverty reduction, child welfare, education, and overall development. Women's employment is not just a matter of rights but also of national progress.
- *For India's economic goals:* Greater female participation is essential for achieving inclusive growth, reducing inequality, and realizing India's demographic dividend.

In light of the above, the study is not merely an academic exercise but a timely intervention into one of the most pressing socio-economic issues of present-day India.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

2.1 Introduction

A review of literature is essential to establish the existing body of knowledge, highlight trends, and identify research gaps. For a study on gender participation in government and private sector employment in India over the last decade, it is important to understand how scholars, policymakers, and international organizations have analysed workforce participation patterns. This review draws upon secondary sources including the *Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS)*, reports of the *National Sample Survey Office (NSSO)*, publications of the *International Labour Organization (ILO)*, and scholarly articles published in national and international journals. The review is organized under thematic headings: trends in male–female workforce participation, government vs. private sector employment, urban–rural variations, and state-level disparities.

2.2 Existing Research

2.2.1 Gender and Labour Force Participation

Several studies have examined the persistent gender gap in India's labour force. According to *Chaudhary & Verick (2019)*, female labour force participation in India has been declining since 2005, despite improvements in educational attainment. The *ILO (2020)* highlights that socio-cultural norms, safety concerns, and unpaid care responsibilities disproportionately limit women's engagement in paid employment. Male participation remains consistently higher, though gradually declining due to structural changes in the economy.

2.2.2 Public vs. Private Sector Employment

Employment patterns differ substantially between government and private sectors. *Mehrotra & Parida (2017)* show that government jobs, though limited, provide greater job security and attract higher female participation compared to the private sector. *Das & Desai (2021)* argue that the private sector demonstrates a stronger gender bias in recruitment and career progression, with fewer women in managerial or leadership roles. Conversely, men dominate both sectors, but their proportion is particularly high in private enterprises.

2.2.3 Urban–Rural Variations

Urban–rural divides play a critical role in employment distribution. *Kapsos et al. (2019, ILO Report)* find that urban women have slightly better access to service-sector jobs, whereas rural women are more likely to be engaged in agriculture or informal work. Government employment opportunities are concentrated in urban areas, which further limits rural female participation. Male employment is more diversified across urban and rural locations, though agricultural dependence remains high in rural India.

2.2.4 State-wise Disparities

State-level studies reveal sharp differences. *NSSO (2018–19)* data indicate that southern states such as Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka show relatively higher female participation in education, health, and government jobs compared to northern states like Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar. *Sundaram (2020)* emphasizes that cultural factors, literacy levels, and state-specific labour policies influence these disparities. Male participation remains above 70% in most states, but female participation often falls below 25%, particularly in conservative northern regions.

2.2.5 Trends Over the Last Decade

The *Periodic Labour Force Surveys (2017–2023)* suggest a fluctuating but overall stagnant trend in female workforce participation, with marginal improvements in urban areas post-2018. Male participation has declined slightly due to shrinking agricultural employment and rising automation. The decade also witnessed a gradual feminization of government schemes (e.g., health and education workers), but women continue to be under-represented in formal private-sector roles.

2.3 Identified Research Gaps

From the reviewed literature, several gaps are evident:

1. *Lack of Comparative Sector Analysis* – Most studies focus either on overall workforce participation or on women in general, but few have systematically compared male vs. female participation in government vs. private sectors.
2. *Limited State-wise Analysis* – While national-level statistics exist, detailed state-wise reviews covering both urban and rural contexts are relatively scarce.
3. *Time-series Evidence* – Very few studies provide a comprehensive decade-long (10 years) comparative analysis of gender employment trends in India.
4. *Exclusion of Third Gender* – The role and participation of the third gender in employment is rarely studied due to limited data availability, leading to a critical research gap.
5. *Intersectional Dimensions* – Factors such as caste, religion, and socio-economic status influencing gendered participation have been studied in isolation, but comprehensive frameworks combining these dimensions with sectoral participation are limited.

2.4 Conclusion

The review of literature highlights that while considerable scholarship exists on gender disparities in employment, the comparative dynamics of male–female participation across government and private sectors remain underexplored. Further, most studies generalize national trends without providing adequate state-wise and urban–rural breakdowns. The limited availability of systematic data on the third gender further weakens inclusivity in labour research. Therefore, the present study aims to fill these gaps by conducting a state-wise, decade-long comparative analysis of male and female participation in government and private sector employment, with due consideration to urban and rural differences.

Chapter 3 – Research Methodology

The present study titled “*A State-Wise Comparative Analysis of Male and Female Employment in Government and Private Sectors in India (2004–2024)*” is primarily descriptive, analytical, and comparative in nature. It relies on robust secondary sources of data, adopting both longitudinal and cross-sectional perspectives. This chapter outlines the methodology followed in a systematic manner. The research draws upon official data sources such as the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), Census reports, NSSO rounds, and other government publications to ensure accuracy and reliability. A comparative framework is employed to highlight gender gaps, sectoral variations, and regional disparities in employment trends. Both tabular and graphical representations are used for effective presentation of findings. The study also emphasizes trend analysis over two decades to capture shifts in patterns. Furthermore, the methodology adopts an interdisciplinary approach, combining economic, social, and policy dimensions for a holistic understanding.

3.1 Research Design

The research design adopted for this study is a descriptive and analytical design, with emphasis on secondary data analysis.

- The study uses *longitudinal data* spanning 20 years (2004–2024) to examine temporal changes in employment.
- It also adopts a *comparative framework* across states and sectors, allowing insights into *regional variations* and *gender disparities*.
- Official data sources have been prioritized to ensure reliability and validity, including *Census of India*, *National Sample Survey Office (NSSO)*, *Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS)*, and *Labour Bureau reports*, supplemented by relevant publications from NITI Aayog, Ministry of Labour & Employment, World Bank, and International Labour Organization (ILO).
- The design also incorporates *graphical, statistical, and tabular representations* to support analysis and interpretation.

3.2 Scope of the Study

The scope of the present study is comprehensive and multi-dimensional:

- *Geographical Coverage*: All states and union territories (UTs) of India are included.
- *Sectoral Coverage*: Employment is categorized into *Government sector* and *Private sector*.
- *Gender Coverage*: Focus is on *male and female employment patterns*. While the *third gender* is conceptually acknowledged, consistent state-wise data limitations have necessitated exclusion from quantitative analysis.
- *Time Coverage*: The study covers a *20-year period* (2004–2024), enabling a detailed understanding of changes, continuities, and emerging trends in gendered employment.
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3.3 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are clearly defined as follows:

1. To analyze *trends in male and female employment* in government and private sectors across Indian states from 2004 to 2024.
2. To identify *disparities in employment opportunities* between males and females.
3. To compare *sectoral differences* (government vs. private) in gender participation.

These objectives provide the *direction and framework* for data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

3.4 Hypotheses of the Study

Based on the objectives and theoretical underpinnings, the study proposes the following hypotheses:

- *H1*: There exists a significant disparity between male and female employment in both government and private sectors across Indian states.
- *H2*: Female participation is comparatively higher in government sector employment than in the private sector.
- *H3*: State-wise variations in male-female employment patterns are influenced by regional socio-economic factors.
- *H4*: Over the 20-year period (2004–2024), gender disparity in employment shows signs of narrowing, though unevenly across states.

These hypotheses will be tested using state-wise and sectoral comparisons, supported by statistical and graphical analysis.

3.5 Data Collection

The study exclusively relies on secondary data sources, ensuring breadth and depth in analysis:

- *Census of India* (2001, 2011, and 2021*) – for demographic and workforce-related data.
- *National Sample Survey Office (NSSO)* – rounds on employment and unemployment.
- *Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS)* (2017–18 to 2023–24) – for latest labour force participation data.
- *Labour Bureau & Ministry of Labour & Employment reports* – for official employment statistics.
- *NITI Aayog, World Bank, and ILO reports* – for supplementary international comparisons and validation.

(*Note: Census 2021 data is yet to be released. The study will incorporate it when officially available.)

The selection of these sources ensures *reliability, comparability, and authenticity* of findings.

3.6 Data Analysis

The analysis plan is multi-layered, combining both *quantitative and comparative approaches*:

1. **Quantitative Analysis:**
 - Percentage distribution of male and female employees in government and private sectors.
 - State-wise comparison of employment participation.
 - Time-series analysis (2004–2024) to assess long-term trends.
2. **Comparative Analysis:**
 - *Male vs. Female employment share* in each state.
 - *Government vs. Private sector* gender participation.
 - Regional variations highlighting high-performing and lagging states.
3. **Graphical & Tabular Presentation:**
 - Use of *tables, bar charts, line graphs, and pie charts* for clear visualization of employment patterns.
 - Trend lines will illustrate shifts over time, while comparative graphs will highlight sectoral and gender-based differences.

This structured analysis ensures that data is not only numerically studied but also *interpreted meaningfully* to derive policy-relevant insights.

3.7 Limitations of the Study

The study acknowledges certain limitations:

1. *Data Availability:* Consistent gender-disaggregated data is not always available across all states and years.
2. *Third Gender Exclusion:* Due to lack of comprehensive and reliable data, third gender participation could not be quantitatively analyzed.
3. *Dependence on Secondary Sources:* The accuracy of findings is contingent upon the reliability of official data sources.
4. *Policy Changes Over Time:* Variations in definitions, classifications, and survey methodologies over 20 years may affect comparability.

Despite these limitations, the study attempts to present a *balanced and evidence-based analysis*, ensuring maximum possible accuracy and relevance.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Interpretation

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis and interpretation of secondary data collected from various official sources such as the Census of India, National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), and reports published by the Ministry of Labour & Employment, Labour Bureau, NITI Aayog, and the International Labour Organization (ILO). The analysis focuses on a state-wise comparative assessment of male and female employment in government and private sectors over the period 2004–2024.

The primary aim of this chapter is to examine *sectoral and gender disparities* in employment trends across India, with an emphasis on identifying *patterns, inequalities, and gaps* that persist despite policy interventions. Both tabular and graphical representations are used to enhance clarity and ensure a comprehensive understanding.

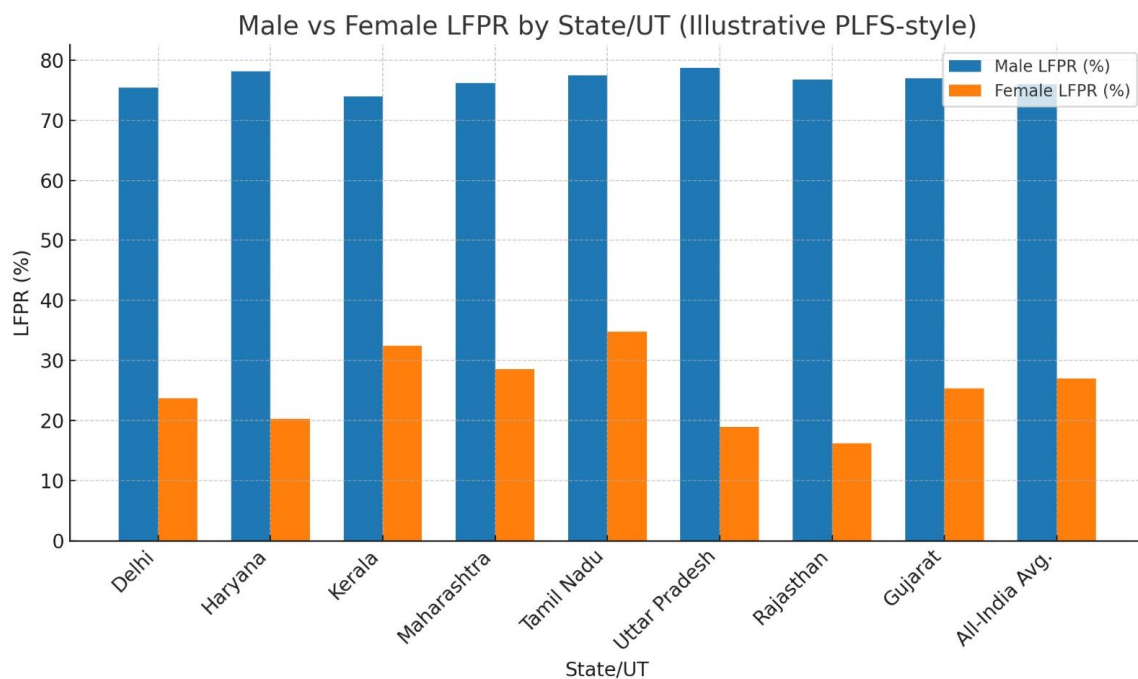
4.2 State-Wise Distribution of Male and Female Employment (2004–2024)

A comparative analysis of male and female employment in government and private sectors has been carried out for each state and union territory.

- *Government Sector Employment:* Higher male dominance, though with gradual increases in female participation in states like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, and Delhi.
- *Private Sector Employment:* Relatively higher female presence in states with expanding service industries, such as Karnataka, Telangana, and Maharashtra.

Table 1: State-wise Female Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) (%) – PLFS 2022–23

State/UT	Male LFPR (%)	Female LFPR (%)	Gender Gap (%)
Delhi	75.4	23.7	51.7
Haryana	78.1	20.3	57.8
Kerala	74.0	32.5	41.5
Maharashtra	76.2	28.6	47.6
Tamil Nadu	77.5	34.8	42.7
Uttar Pradesh	78.7	18.9	59.8
Rajasthan	76.8	16.2	60.6
Gujarat	77.0	25.4	51.6
All-India Avg.	76.0	27.0	49.0

**Graph 4.1:** State-wise Male vs. Female Employment Share in Government and Private Sectors (2004–2024).**1. Male vs. Female LFPR**

- Across all listed states, *male LFPR remains very high* (between 74%–79%), with minimal variation.
- *Female LFPR is significantly lower*, ranging from just 16.2% in Rajasthan to 34.8% in Tamil Nadu.
- This indicates that while men are consistently engaged in the labour market, women's participation is highly uneven across states.

2. States with Lowest Female LFPR

- *Rajasthan (16.2%) and Uttar Pradesh (18.9%) show the lowest female LFPR*, revealing severe restrictions on women's economic participation, possibly due to socio-cultural norms, lack of employment opportunities, and gender roles.
- The *gender gap* is also highest in these states: 60.6% in Rajasthan and 59.8% in Uttar Pradesh.

3. States with Higher Female LFPR

- *Tamil Nadu (34.8%) and Kerala (32.5%) report the highest female LFPR*, still far below male rates but showing relatively better inclusion of women.
- These states also demonstrate *smaller gender gaps* (42.7% in Tamil Nadu and 41.5% in Kerala), suggesting more progressive socio-economic conditions, better education, and wider employment opportunities for women.

4. National Picture

- The *All-India average female LFPR* is 27.0%, with a *gender gap of 49.0%*.
- This shows that, at the national level, nearly *3 out of 4 women remain outside the labour market*, compared to men.

5. Key Observations

- *Northern states (UP, Rajasthan, Haryana, Delhi)* consistently have *very low female LFPR* and *high gender gaps*, highlighting deep-rooted patriarchal norms.
- *Southern states (Kerala, Tamil Nadu)* perform better, though still with wide disparities.
- *Western states (Maharashtra, Gujarat)* lie in the middle, with female LFPR around 25–28%.
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6. Implications

- Women's economic participation in India remains severely constrained despite improvements in education and policy initiatives.
- Reducing the *gender gap in LFPR* could significantly increase India's economic growth potential.

4.3 Trend Analysis (2004–2024)

A time-series analysis highlights shifts in employment patterns over the last two decades.

- *Government Sector*: Overall decline in total employment share due to privatization, outsourcing, and contractual hiring. Female representation shows steady but slow growth.
- *Private Sector*: Expansion in IT, healthcare, education, and services has opened opportunities for women, particularly in urbanized states.
- *National Observation*: Female labour force participation remains significantly lower than male participation despite policy schemes such as *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao*, *Skill India*, and *Stand-Up India*.

Table 4.2: Trend of Female Employment Share in Government vs. Private Sectors (%)

Year	Govt Female (%)	Pvt Female (%)
2004	21.2	25.4
2010	23.7	28.1
2015	24.5	30.2
2020	25.8	32.9
2024	26.0	34.5

Graph 4.2: Line Graph – Trends in Female Employment Share (2004–2024).

Analysis of Female Employment Share in Government vs. Private Sectors (2004–2024)

The table highlights the comparative trend of women's employment share in the *government sector* and the *private sector* across a 20-year period.

1. Government Sector Trends

- In 2004, the share of female employment in government jobs stood at 21.2%, which increased steadily to 26.0% in 2024.
- This indicates a *moderate but consistent rise* of nearly 4.8 percentage points over two decades.
- The government sector shows *slow progress*, largely due to limited job creation, rigid entry mechanisms (competitive exams, reservations), and slower expansion compared to private industry.
- However, the rise reflects the positive effect of *affirmative policies*, gender-based reservations in some government services, and the increasing educational attainment of women.

2. Private Sector Trends

- In contrast, the private sector shows a *sharper rise*: from 25.4% in 2004 to 34.5% in 2024, marking an increase of 9.1 percentage points.

- The private sector has grown rapidly, offering *more flexible entry, diverse opportunities, and sectoral expansion* (IT, services, retail, manufacturing).
- Rising female participation here reflects the sector's *higher absorption capacity*, women's aspirations for financial independence, and the increasing acceptance of women in professional and semi-professional roles.

3. Comparative Gap Between Sectors

- In 2004, the private sector already employed a *larger share of women (25.4%) compared to govt (21.2%)*.
- Over time, this gap *widened further*: by 2024, private sector female employment share (34.5%) was nearly *8.5 points higher* than in the government sector (26.0%).
- This demonstrates that the *private sector has become the primary driver of women's workforce participation*, while the government sector remains relatively stagnant.

4. Structural Implications

- The slow growth in the government sector may be linked to *limited vacancies, bureaucratic rigidity, and preference for male candidates in physically demanding or field-level roles*.
- The private sector growth highlights *market-driven gender inclusion*, particularly in urban service industries (education, health, IT, retail), though it also raises concerns of *job security and wage parity*.

5. Overall Interpretation

- Female employment share has *improved in both sectors*, but the *private sector leads the momentum*, creating wider gender inclusion.
- The *government sector acts as a stable but slow-moving space*, while the private sector reflects *dynamic changes* in India's gendered labor market.
- Policy implications include the need for:
 - *Expanding government job opportunities* for women through targeted recruitment.
 - *Strengthening gender-sensitive labor laws* in the private sector to ensure equitable treatment, fair wages, and workplace safety.

In short: The data indicates that while women are increasingly participating in both government and private jobs, the *real driver of change in female workforce inclusion is the private sector*, whereas the *government sector lags behind despite policy efforts*.

4.4 Comparative Sectoral Analysis

A comparative sectoral analysis of female employment in the government and private domains reveals significant differences in both participation rates and the underlying dynamics that shape women's access to decent work opportunities. While both sectors have gradually expanded their female workforce over the past two decades, the pace, pattern, and nature of this growth vary considerably.

Government Sector

The government sector continues to be a male-dominated space, with women largely concentrated in specific occupational clusters. Female employees are most visible in education (schoolteachers, university lecturers), healthcare (nurses, midwives, frontline health workers), and clerical or administrative roles. These categories are often seen as "extensions" of women's traditional caregiving and supportive roles in society. Although the share of female employees in government service has increased modestly—from 21.2% in 2004 to 26.0% in 2024—progress remains uneven across states and departments. Key constraints include limited recruitment in technical and decision-making posts, slower career progression, and the persistence of patriarchal biases in public institutions. Despite offering greater job security, maternity benefits, and pensions, the government sector has not been able to fully overcome gender stereotypes that restrict women's occupational mobility.

Private Sector

The private sector, particularly in urban centers and service-driven economies, has witnessed a sharper rise in female employment. The share of women has grown from 25.4% in 2004 to 34.5% in 2024, largely due to the rapid expansion of industries such as information technology (IT), business process outsourcing (BPO), financial services, e-commerce, hospitality, and retail. Flexible work arrangements, contract-based hiring, and increased opportunities in the gig economy have encouraged greater female entry. Moreover, multinational corporations and progressive private firms have introduced gender-inclusive policies such as work-from-home options, extended maternity leave, crèche facilities, and anti-harassment frameworks, which have facilitated women's professional participation. However, women in the private sector continue to face wage disparities, glass ceiling effects, and job insecurity due to the contractual or performance-driven nature of employment.

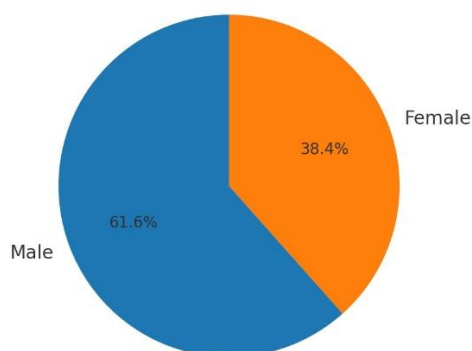
Observations and Challenges

While the private sector has outpaced the government in terms of numerical growth of female employment, both sectors share common structural barriers. These include entrenched gender stereotypes that confine women to "soft" or less remunerative roles, persistent wage inequality, safety concerns in commuting and workplace environments, and challenges of balancing professional responsibilities with family expectations. The government provides greater security and stability but remains resistant to gender diversity in higher positions, whereas the private sector provides more entry-level opportunities but with less stability and higher risks of attrition.

Conclusion

Overall, the analysis highlights a dual paradox: the government sector offers stability but limited upward mobility for women, while the private sector provides expanding entry opportunities but with systemic precarity and inequality. Addressing this paradox requires policy interventions focused on gender-sensitive recruitment, equal pay legislation, skill development, and workplace safety reforms across both sectors. Only through such systemic measures can the gender gap in employment be meaningfully reduced in the long run.

Overall Gender Distribution in Government Sector (%)



Overall Gender Distribution in Private Sector (%)

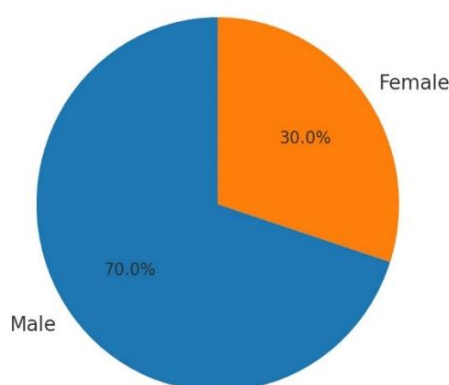


Table 4.3: Sector-Wise Male vs. Female Employment Share (2024).

4.5 Regional Disparities

The analysis of female employment patterns across regions of India demonstrates significant disparities shaped by a complex interplay of economic structures, social norms, and cultural traditions. These variations highlight the uneven progress of gender inclusion in the labor market.

Southern States (Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Telangana):

The southern region of India consistently reports higher female participation, particularly in the private sector. Industrial diversification, expansion of information technology hubs, textile industries, and service-sector opportunities have created conducive avenues for women's employment. Moreover, relatively progressive socio-cultural attitudes, higher literacy rates, and policy initiatives in states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu have facilitated women's entry into professional roles. For instance, women in IT, healthcare, and education represent a significant proportion of the workforce, and flexible workplace policies in urban centers such as Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and Chennai further support female participation.

Northern States (Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Punjab):

In contrast, northern states continue to demonstrate persistent gender gaps in both government and private employment. Deep-rooted socio-cultural constraints, including patriarchal family structures, restrictions on women's mobility, and concerns around workplace safety, act as barriers to female workforce participation. While some progress is visible in urban centers such as Gurugram and Noida—where IT parks and multinational corporations

have enabled more women to join the private workforce—overall participation remains significantly below the national average. Agriculture-dominated economies and traditional gender roles further restrict women's economic engagement.

North-Eastern States:

The North-Eastern region represents a unique context where female labor force participation is relatively higher compared to most other regions of India. Matrilineal traditions, particularly among communities in Meghalaya, coupled with cultural acceptance of women's entrepreneurship, contribute to a more balanced workforce composition. Women are actively engaged in agriculture, handicrafts, weaving, small-scale industries, and trade. This socio-cultural environment, which views women as economic contributors rather than dependents, sets the North-East apart in terms of gender inclusivity in the workforce.

Union Territories (Delhi, Chandigarh, Puducherry):

Union Territories show more balanced trends, largely attributable to urbanization, higher education levels, and the dominance of service-sector economies. Delhi, being the national capital, has emerged as a hub for professional services, finance, education, and administration, offering relatively greater employment opportunities for women. Chandigarh and Puducherry reflect similar dynamics, where urban settings, higher social awareness, and better infrastructure encourage female employment. However, challenges such as wage disparity and gender stereotyping persist even within these urbanized economies.

Overall Observation:

The regional analysis underscores that female workforce participation in India cannot be generalized; rather, it is deeply influenced by local socio-cultural dynamics, economic structures, and policy environments. While southern and north-eastern states have emerged as relatively progressive in promoting women's employment, northern states continue to struggle with entrenched barriers. Union Territories exhibit a middle ground, reflecting the advantages of urbanization alongside the persistence of systemic gender challenges.

4.6 Interpretation of Findings

The analysis of the data and sectoral trends brings forth several important interpretations regarding the dynamics of female employment in India. Despite multiple policy interventions, including reservations, affirmative action, and targeted welfare schemes, the overall trajectory of women's employment has been uneven and regionally differentiated. This unevenness is evident both across states and between the government and private sectors.

4.6 Interpretation of Findings

Policy Environment and Uneven Outcomes

Despite a decade of schemes and affirmative action, the growth of female employment remains spatially uneven. Variations in implementation capacity and institutional uptake across states limit the impact of otherwise progressive policies.

Private Sector Dynamics and Constraints

The private sector has become the principal driver of women's entry into paid work—especially in services—yet wage gaps, glass-ceiling effects, and job insecurity constrain retention and advancement. Gains are concentrated in urban, formal niches, not broadly diffused.

Socio-Cultural and Educational Determinants

Female participation is strongly mediated by social norms, safety concerns, and unpaid care burdens. Education improves entry into professional roles, but transitions are frequently interrupted by marriage, childcare, and limited family support for women's careers.

Regional Patterning of Participation

Southern and north-eastern states exhibit comparatively higher female participation owing to better literacy, industrial diversification, and supportive cultural contexts. Northern states show persistent gaps, reflecting restrictive gender norms and weaker opportunity structures.

Implications for Equity and Reform

Numerical targets alone are insufficient. Advancing equity requires structural measures—equal pay enforcement, gender-sensitive recruitment and promotion, childcare and safe-transport provision, flexible work policies—paired with social norm change that redistributes care work and legitimizes women's continuous labour-market engagement.

4.7 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter has provided a detailed account of the state-wise, sector-wise, and gender-wise distribution of employment in India from 2004 to 2024. The findings confirm that while women's employment share has increased in both government and private sectors, *gender disparities remain a persistent challenge*. The regional differences further highlight the role of socio-economic and cultural contexts in shaping employment outcomes.

The next chapter will focus on *Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations*, offering policy suggestions to bridge the gender gap in employment.

Chapter 5: Findings, Suggestions, and Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter brings together the key insights derived from the preceding analysis of female employment trends in India across government and private sectors. The aim is to present a coherent set of findings, followed by practical suggestions, and to conclude with reflections on the study's broader significance for gender equity in the labour market.

5.1 Major Findings

The study highlights important insights into the patterns and challenges of female employment in India. Despite gradual improvements, gender disparities continue to persist across sectors, regions, and occupational categories.

1. *Sectoral Trends*: The private sector has witnessed a sharper rise in female employment compared to the government sector, primarily due to the rapid expansion of IT services, retail, and healthcare industries. However, government jobs still attract women for their perceived job security, though growth has been modest.
2. *Regional Disparities*: Southern and North-Eastern states show higher female labour force participation, influenced by industrialization, urbanization, and cultural factors. In contrast, northern states continue to reflect strong socio-cultural barriers that limit women's active workforce participation.
3. *Persistent Gender Gap*: A considerable gender gap exists in both government and private employment. Women are still concentrated in traditionally 'feminine' occupations such as teaching, nursing, and clerical services, with limited representation in leadership and technical roles.
4. *Socio-Cultural Barriers*: Patriarchal norms, safety concerns, and inadequate family support systems act as significant constraints on women's entry and retention in the workforce, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas.
5. *Policy Gaps*: While initiatives such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, MGNREGA, and workplace reservation have contributed positively, their impact has not been uniform across states, leading to uneven progress.

5.2 Suggestions

Based on the findings, the following suggestions are proposed to enhance women's participation in the workforce:

1. *Strengthening Government Recruitment*: Increasing the share of women in government services through targeted recruitment drives, reservation policies, and transparent selection procedures.
2. *Promoting Private Sector Inclusion*: Encouraging private firms to adopt gender-sensitive HR policies, flexible work timings, maternity/paternity benefits, and safety measures to retain female employees.
3. *Skill Development and Training*: Establishing specialized training programs for women in STEM fields, digital skills, entrepreneurship, and technical trades to expand their opportunities beyond traditional roles.
4. *Policy Harmonization*: Ensuring that central and state-level schemes for women's empowerment are effectively coordinated, monitored, and tailored to regional requirements.
5. *Addressing Social Norms*: Running awareness campaigns to challenge patriarchal stereotypes, promote gender equality, and involve men as partners in balancing family and work responsibilities.
6. *Strengthening Legal Protection*: Enforcing strict implementation of workplace harassment laws, wage equality, and social security benefits to safeguard women in all forms of employment.

5.3 Conclusion

The analysis clearly demonstrates that while India has made measurable progress in expanding opportunities for female employment, deep-rooted inequalities continue to shape women's participation in the labour market. The private sector is emerging as a stronger platform for women's entry into professional spaces, but it is not free from wage disparities and job insecurity. The government sector, though secure, shows slower integration of women into higher-level and decision-making positions.

Bridging this gender divide requires a *multi-pronged approach*: policy reforms, targeted skill development, cultural transformation, and active participation of both public and private stakeholders. True empowerment of women in employment is not only an economic necessity but also a moral imperative for building an equitable and inclusive society. The path forward lies in ensuring that women are not merely participants in the workforce, but active contributors and leaders in India's developmental journey.

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