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Closing The Gender Pay Gap in India: An Analysis

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Abstract: The gender pay gap is the difference between what men and women get paid for doing the same work. India's gender wage disparity exists despite significant progress in literacy, economic growth and participation in the labour force by women, and women's rights-based movements. Overall, women in India earn 19–24% less than men, across all sectors. This gap is due to various factors including stereotype ideas about gender, occupational separation, and structural inequalities. The gender pay gap is a widely used measure of gender disparity in the workplace and is used to track progress towards gender equality. In the unorganised economy, women experience more pay disparity. Since they are paid less than males, this wage disparity is particularly common in the industry, IT, and agriculture sectors, highlighting their disparate skill sets. The stigma associated with women is that they are perceived as having less power than males. Gender justice cannot be accomplished, and the wage gap may not narrow, unless the societal stigma against women in the workplace and society is removed. Globally, gender inequality is a serious problem. It acts as a barrier to greater economic equality and improved working conditions.

Keywords: constitutional provisions; equal pay for equal work; gender pay gap; gender equality; unorganised economy; India

1. Introduction

The gender pay gap, is the difference in salaries that men and women experience for same work. In 21st century, the gender pay gap is a global problem and a major concern. It represents an egregious instance of gender discrimination, mirroring the general problem of women and men being treated differently. Because of the horizontal and vertical split of labor markets, this discrepancy is an example of systemic gender discrimination. Currently, women are more educated and involved in the workforce, but these advancements have not been sufficient to eliminate this gap (Pooja 2022). Indian Constitution mandates equal compensation for equal effort and prohibits discrimination based on gender, race, caste, class, or religion in the workplace. Gender inequality is a major issue in the world today and India is facing the same issue. However, India is working towards gender equality (Anonymous 2025).

Gender wage discrepancy also exists in applied sciences and clinical practice domains also. The continued gender wage gap jeopardizes not just the livelihoods of individual professionals but also the development of these vital industries, where innovation, research, and patient care are crucial. Hence, recognizing and resolving the gender wage gap in clinical practice and the applied sciences is not just an issue of justice but also essential for promoting inclusion, stimulating innovation, and enhancing patient outcomes. Deep-rooted patriarchal norms, the marginalization of women in the workforce, undervaluation and devaluation of women's work and labor are widening this gender wage gap. India's female labor force participation rate (LFPR) reported by the 2022–2023 periodic labor force survey (PLFS) was 32.8%, and much lower than the world's female labor force participation rate of 47%. Most women's work in the informal sector in rural areas where the gap is more pronounced (Drishti ias 2023). We will explore various dimensions of the female pay gap in India, stemming from marginalization, sector manifestations, legal landscape, and suggest measures to ensure pay equality. The study takes a multidimensional view of this topic by using scholarly publications, government documents and statistical evidence for understanding this phenomenon that impacts the prospects of inclusive growth and social justice for the country.

Even after controlling for other characteristics including education, experience, and job characteristics, there remains a wage gap. Contrary to global trends where this gap is shrinking, the gap is widening in India. Specifically, a 2021 study published in The Indian Journal of Labor Economics found that only one-third of the gender wage gap in Indian urban labor market is

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attributable to differences in human capital endowments (e.g., education, and experience), while two-thirds is accounted for by pure discrimination occurring in the labor market (Mitali 2018). It indicates how persistent biases devalue women to earn based on productivity and credentials. The annual labor force surveys (2019–2023) indicate that while this discrimination occurs in all forms of employment, it is especially noticeable among independent contractors, where females earn 2.8 times that of male counterparts.

2. India and Global Gender Gap Index

Table 1 indicates Indian position in Global Gender Gap Index (Anonymous 2024).

Table 1. Indian Position in Global Gender Gap Index.

S. No.	Year	Rank
1	2024	129 out of 146 countries
2	2023	127 out of 146 countries
3	2022	135 out of 146 countries
4	2021	140 out of 156 countries
5	2020	135 out of 156 countries

Here is a brief overview of gender pay gap among various domains in India

Technology Sector: Gender inclusion in India's IT sector has improved; from 9.51% in 2020 to 27.98% in 2024, the percentage of women working in contractual tech positions nearly tripled. Leading the way in gender diversity are global capability centres (GCCs), where women made up 38.3% of the workforce in 2024 up from 31.4% in 2020. Notably, there are still large disparities in income 16.1% overall, up to 22.2% for high-demand tech professions and leadership only 13.6% for senior posts (Aavienda 2025).

IT Services: Female leadership presence in senior jobs is still appalling at 6.91%, despite a rise in female workforce participation from 2020 to 2024 from 7.8% to 21.2% (Anonymous 2023). The salary disparity widens with seniority, reaching 8.34% for senior roles, 6.12% for mid-level, and 3.55% overall. Within IT services, the difference is even more pronounced, at 18.3%, for non-tech professions.

Non-Tech Industries: Only 14% of women work in IT, up from 1.9% in 2020, and industries like manufacturing, automotive, BFSI, energy, and healthcare are still dominated by men. For mid-level jobs, the salary disparity reaches its highest point at 19%. These sectors show how pay discrepancies are greatly exacerbated by occupational segregation (Drishtiias 2023).

Informal and Agricultural Sectors: Women from lower castes, Muslim communities, and the gender pay gap disproportionately affects lower-skilled workers, and it is most noticeable at the bottom of the income distribution. Many women are kept in low-paying positions with little opportunity for advancement due to the "sticky floor" problem.

3. Principal Reasons of The Wage Disparity

In India, women continue to be under-represented in high-paying fields like technology, engineering, and finance and concentrated in lower-paying jobs and industries (caregiving, administrative tasks). Vertical discrimination, which prevents women from rising to positions of leadership, exacerbates this horizontal division. Women only make up 13.6% of senior positions in GCC countries and 6.91% of IT service positions, even in forward-thinking industries like IT. The occupational downgrading phenomenon, which places women in lower-ranking professions while having comparable qualifications to males, makes inequities even worse. The motherhood penalty, in which women's careers are hindered by childcare obligations, is a significant contributing element. In contrast, males frequently enjoy a fatherhood bonus with higher incomes following childbirth (Michael, 2025).

Gender roles are still shaped by deeply ingrained patriarchal traditions in India, where women are disproportionately responsible for unpaid caregiving and domestic chores. Because activity like dairy production takes place in households, upper- and middle-caste women's economic contributions are not included in official statistics. Despite averaging three hours per day, this invisible work is not included in labour force participation statistics. Women's mobility and capacity to work irregular hours are also limited by social standards. Due to safety concerns and family responsibilities, women are unable to work numerous jobs that involve overtime or night shifts. Transportation concerns also limit employment opportunities, particularly in urban areas where commuting is often necessary. About 67% of the gender wage disparity in India's urban labour market is caused by direct discrimination. Because of unconscious biases that permeate workplaces, women are frequently perceived as less committed especially if they are married or mothers or less capable of holding leadership positions. Even though gender-diverse businesses perform better financially and innovate more, these preconceptions still exist (Smriti 2024).

Articles 39(d) and 42 of the Indian Constitution and the Equal Remuneration Act of 1976 are strong provisions requiring equal pay in India, but their implementation is still lacking. India's paradox strong legal frameworks on paper but inadequate enforcement at the local level is highlighted by the Women, Business, and Law Index 2.0. Additional structural problems consist of variations in retirement age affecting pension benefits, restricting women's work in certain industries (e.g., excise, factories), limited access to capital for women entrepreneurs, and inadequate maternity protections beyond formal sectors.

Women are less likely to engage in aggressive wage negotiations due to cultural norms. When they do, they frequently encounter criticism from society for being "too assertive." The dearth of female leadership models makes it challenging to aspire for jobs they dream, which widens the negotiation gap. Women's voice is diminished by their under-representation in worker unions and collective bargaining units. Women's economic power is still disproportionately low, since they only get 18% of the nation's labor income (Sonalde 2023).

4. Policy Efforts and The Legal Framework

The Indian Constitution offers a solid basis for gender parity in the workplace. A Directive Principle of State Policy, included in Article 39(d) of the Indian Constitution, requires the state to focus its policies on ensuring that men and women receive equal compensation for equal labor. As part of the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP), Article 42 of the Indian Constitution mandates that the state implement policies for maternity leave and equitable and humane working conditions. The government must make an effort to guarantee that working conditions are equitable, secure, and supportive of employees' well-being. This include setting rules for working hours, making sure workplaces are safe, and stopping exploitation. Article 15(1) of the Indian Constitution prohibits the state from treating someone unfairly on the basis of their race, religion, caste, sex, or place of birth. Additionally, Article 15(2) prohibits discrimination in public places and establishments. All citizens are guaranteed equal treatment under the law according to this clause, which is a component of the basic right to equality (Shivangini 2023).

The Supreme Court in *Randhir Singh v UOI* (1982 SCR (3) AIR 879), held that while equal pay isn't a fundamental right, it's a constitutional goal enforceable under Article 32. This "equal pay for equal work" doctrine applies when work is similar in nature, qualifications, and responsibilities.

4.1 Legislative Measures

Equal Remuneration Act (1976) prohibits pay discrimination since gender for same/similar work. It guarantees equal compensation for men and women performing the same or comparable job, forbids gender-based discrimination in hiring, compensation, and employment, and encourages the provision of equal benefits to all employees. Employers are required to provide the same employee benefits for all employees regardless of gender which includes maternity leaves and paternity leave, and provisions on health coverages and pension savings schemes.

Maternity Benefit Act (1961, amended 2017) increased paid maternity leave from 12 to 26 weeks. While progressive, its limited coverage for formal sector and had unintended consequences. The 2017 amendment to the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961, extended paid maternity leave to 26 weeks for the first two children, including 8 weeks before the expected delivery, and introduced provisions for work-from-home, crèche facilities, and maternity leave for adoptive and commissioning mothers (Smriti 2024).

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) of 2005 contributed to a quick increase in total rural and agricultural earnings in the country. It benefited rural female workers and helped to close the gender wage gap, both directly and indirectly. Directly, by enhancing the pay levels of female workers, and indirectly, by increasing wages for women in agricultural jobs.

Sexual Harassment at Workplace Act (2013) mandates grievance mechanisms against harassment, indirectly supporting pay equity by creating safer work environments. It offers protection against sexual harassment of women in the workplace, as well as for the prevention and resolution of sexual harassment complaints and issues related or incidental to them. Payment of Wages Act (1936) controls how employees are paid, making sure they receive their earned income on schedule and that no unapproved deductions are made. It controls how wages are paid to workers, guaranteeing that no unlawful deductions are made and that workers receive their money on schedule (Siba Sankar Mohanty, 2014).

The Minimum Wages Act, 1948, is the minimal amount that no contract or collective agreement can reduce the amount that an organization must pay a specific person (skilled or unskilled) for a specific task at a specific time. First enacted in 1948, the Minimum Wage Act became operative on March 15. The Tripartite Committee on Fair Wage was also established under the Act. This committee was established to establish India's minimum wage standards. It described the minimum wage and the criteria used to calculate it. It established the foundation for the wage-fixing practice in India. The pay scale is based on the number of employees (Suryansh, 2023).

The 1948 Minimum Wage Act has important implications for both companies and workers. In addition to helping the worker support his family, it will lessen the likelihood of exploitation. Furthermore, the statute stipulates that the government has the authority to establish the minimum rate. Every five years, the government must evaluate the rates in accordance with its regulations. Despite the complexity of this procedure, the statute highlights the important points. To have the ideal position in the firm, every citizen must be aware of the legislation, which is required to lower the danger of exploitation (Sonalde, 2023).

The Indian Constitution provides comprehensive principles for achieving gender equality in the country. The judiciary has the power to transform this de jure reality into a de facto one. In the 1962 case of *Kishori Mohan Lal Bakshi* v. *Union of India* (AIR 1962 SC 1139), Indian Supreme Court examined the question of equal pay for equal labour regardless of gender discrimination and ruled that it could not be upheld in a court of law. But it was given the credit it deserved in 1987 when *Mackinnon Mackenzie* v. *Audrey D'costa and Anr*. (1987 SCR (2) 659) was decided. The Supreme Court concluded that the woman had been paid significantly less than her male co-workers who were doing same work. It does not matter that there weren't any men working in the same position within the company because the equal compensation principle assumed that people should be paid the same for doing the same work as well as for doing work that was deemed to be of equal value. In *Randhir Singh* v. *Union of India* (1982 SCR (3) 298), the Supreme Court ruled that, although not a fundamental right, the Equal Pay for Equal Work principle is unquestionably a constitutional goal and, as such, can be enforced through constitutional remedies mentioned under Article 32 of the Constitution. In *Grih Kalyan Kendra* v. *Union of India* (1991 SCR (1) 15), equal pay for equal labour has been deemed to be a basic right in service jurisprudence with regard to the constitutional demands, taking into account the Directive Principles of State Policy as outlined in article 39(d) of the Constitution. However, Indian courts have stopped getting involved in executive activities in recent years. As per the Supreme Court's verdict, unless there is a thorough and wholesale identification between the entities, there is no claim for equal compensation. In *Union of India* v. *Indian Navy Civilian Design Officers Association and Anr*. (MANU/SC/0156/2023), the Supreme Court ruled that the Executive, not the Judiciary, should oversee determining pay rates and assigning postings. The legal idea of equal compensation for equal effort has undoubtedly been poorly interpreted by Indian courts. Thus, to guarantee gender fairness in the workplace, the legislative should now take the initiative to define the terms "same work," "work of similar nature," and "expense equal."

For its contractual women players, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) will implement a new pay equity policy that will effectively pay men and women the same match fees. Cricket features a retainership payment system in addition to match money. In addition to match fees, women cricketers receive an annual salary of Rs 50 lakh for Grade A, Rs 30 lakh for Grade B, and Rs 10 lakh for Grade C. Men cricketers, who play more games, get paid between Rs 7 lakh and Rs 1 crore, depending on their grade, which begins with A Plus. This is unlikely to change for the time being (Anonymous 2022).

Kerala's integration of gender perspectives into budgetary processes offers a model for addressing pay gap root causes through investments in girls' education, support for women entrepreneurs, public sector recruitment drives, and infrastructure for women's safety. The pandemic-driven shift to remote work accelerated female participation in tech contractual roles from 9.51% to 27.98%. This shows how flexible arrangements can overcome traditional barriers to women's employment.

Global Capability Centres (GCCs) have increased female representation from 31.4% to 38.3% (2020-2024) through structured diversity policies. Their best practices include clear diversity targets tied to executive compensation, return ship programs for career re-entrants, employee resource groups for women, and leadership development pipelines. However, their 16.1% pay gap and 22.2% disparity in high-demand tech roles show more work is needed. However, as the Centre for Public Policy Research notes, India's higher ranking in legal framework and lower ranking in supportive framework indicates that though we have successfully drafted expansive laws for women, they fail to be implemented in full force on ground.

5. Progress and Challenges

India has made great progress in attaining gender pay parity, thanks to laws like the Equal Remuneration Act that guarantee women's equal compensation. Women's education and skill-development initiatives have also made significant strides, empowering them in the workforce. Corporate actions such as the implementation of gender-sensitive policies and the conduct of pay equality audits have been crucial in addressing gender pay disparities and fostering inclusive workplaces. However, there are still a number of obstacles standing in the way of achieving full gender pay parity.

One of the enduring issues that prevents women from obtaining higher-paying positions in a variety of industries is occupational segregation. Women are under-represented in leadership roles in traditionally male-dominated fields as a result of this separation, which frequently stems from cultural conventions and prejudices. Maternity leave and career breaks are two further factors that might worsen the gender pay gap by impeding women's career progress and ultimately reducing their earning potential. Cultural biases that are prevalent in sectors like banking and IT further aggravate gender-based pay disparities (Mitali, 2018).

The fact that gender-based wage disparities still exist in a number of areas, including film, technology, education, and agriculture, indicates how complicated the gender pay gap is in India. Despite efforts to promote gender equality, these disparities persist for intrinsic structural and cultural causes. To address these problems, a tailored and comprehensive approach is required that addresses the underlying causes of income disparity and promotes fair opportunities for all.

When assessing the challenges and advancements in the applied sciences, it is important to consider both the progress made in narrowing the gender pay gap as well as persistent barriers and areas that require improvement. There are still a lot of challenges to be solved, notwithstanding considerable success in closing the pay gap and increasing participation in several scientific fields. These challenges might include unequal access to funding and resources, a dearth of opportunities for women to receive mentoring and advance in their careers, and covert biases in hiring and promotion practices.

In order to resolve these problems and promote gender equality in the applied sciences, targeted efforts are necessary. The implementation of training and awareness programs to address unconscious biases, providing career development opportunities and mentorship to women, ensuring equitable access to funding and resources for research and innovation, and promoting diversity and inclusion in leadership roles are a few examples of these interventions. Resolving these issues and promoting gender equality would enable India to make the most of its workforce and foster innovation and growth in the applied sciences industry (Rishi Raj Mukherjee 2020).

6. Impacts of The Gender Pay Gap

McKinsey estimates that by 2025, achieving gender parity may increase India's GDP by $770 billion. Significant unrealized economic potential is represented by the existing pay disparity. Families that rely on the salaries of women are left financially exposed as a result of women's declining earnings. This is particularly severe for single mothers and other female-headed households. Pay inequity demotivates workers and in turn leads to lower productivity, particularly at the organization-level. Research shows that companies with gender diversity outperform companies with no gender diversity by 15-35% (International Labor Organization 2022. When educated women withdraw from the labor market or work below their educational capacity because of unequal pay, organizations are not leveraging their human capital investment. Wage disparity helps reinforce that idea that women are the secondary earners which affects women's aspirations and self-esteem. Lower earnings for women mean less money to invest in education for children and family health care thus perpetuating intergenerational disadvantage. If women become economically empowered, fertility rates drop. If there is a pay gap it will slow the demographic transition for the country. Long-lasting inequity goes against the promise of equality in the Constitution and undermines confidence in institutions. Institutions (Somasree 2018).

It requires regular gender pay gap reports for companies above a certain size, like the UK, and Team Lease Digital recommends, "conducting pay equity audits on a regular basis, as well as making sure you have a transparent approach to the compensation framework." Increased consequences for Equal Remuneration Act violations, including higher fines and disqualification from government contracts can help. Extending equal pay protections to informal sector workers through innovative policy designs can be beneficial (Amandeep, 2023).

Neeti Sharma of Team Lease Digital advocates for "structured career pathways for women" to help ensure women continue their progression into leadership. Companies should use diversity quotas, standardised pay ranges, and blind recruiting in their leadership pipelines. Companies who want to retain female talent might consider offering flexible and remote work options. Remote

work alternatives are a key factor in the increase in female participation in the tech sector, which went from 9.51% to 27.98% between 2020 and 2024.

7. Recommendations

Giving Women More Power: This may be achieved by supporting women in assuming leadership positions within their businesses and advocating for increased pay and benefits. This might lead to a greater number of women in leadership roles and help break the cycle of gender discrimination. Enacting new laws and enforcing existing ones are two strategies to prevent gender discrimination in the workplace. To ensure equal pay for equal work, for instance, the Equal Remuneration Act of 1976 may be enforced more rigorously. Offering women workers training and development opportunities will help them improve their knowledge and abilities, which will help them negotiate higher pay and progress in their professions. Affordable childcare facilities, flexible work schedules, and parental leave are some examples of policies that might help achieve this (Drishtiias 2023).

Concentrate on High - Impact Sectors: The most value will be recognized when interventions in which the technology are prioritized where opportunities for growth meet with continuing gaps in leadership. Manufacturing to break the male hold on solid production jobs with good pay. Healthcare to ensure we value the female-dominated care work sufficiently. Agriculture where most women have their employment but are least recognized and protected (Galsanjigmed, 2023).

Leverage technology: The leverage technology by using digital platforms for flexible work schedules, AI tools to eliminate bias in hiring and promotion, mobile banking to expand financial inclusion, and online education to help women remotely advance their skills.

Intersectional Disadvantages: Take Intersectional Disadvantages into Account Understand how gender pay disparities are exacerbated by caste, religion, and geography. Women from lower castes, Muslims, and rural areas are particularly affected by the "sticky floor." These layered inequities must be specifically addressed by policies**.**

8. Conclusions

Recognizing the gender pay gap in India as an economic and moral requirement is essential to manage it. According to global indices, gender parity may require five generations past the SDG objectives. All facets of society must move quickly and together to meet this unsustainable timetable. The answers range from corporate diversity programs to strict implementation of equal pay rules, and from increasing literacy to cultural changes in household duties. On a large basis, political will and group commitment are required. Closing the gender wage gap is about more than simply being fair; it's also about realising India's full economic potential and creating a more equitable, affluent society for all. India requires reforming laws that deal with the underlying causes of wage. India may follow the successful models such as the diversification initiatives of the GCC and the pay equality policy of the BCCI.

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