

Human Development and Female Employment in Kerala: An Analysis of Persistent Labour Market Gaps

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Abstract

For years, Kerala has been lauded as the best example in India of social development through public investment in education and health, not just income growth, with women's advancement at the core of this achievement. The state boasts of more than ninety percent female literacy, the gender parity index in education is far better than the national average, and the sex ratio has been the best in the country among big Indian states. However, Kerala still has one of the lowest and slowest-growing rates of female labor force participation in the country, with acute unemployment among its educated women. This article revisits this age-old paradox with the most recent data, up to the Periodic Labour Force Survey Annual Report for 2025 and the Kerala Economic Review 2024. It looks at trends in participation, employment, and unemployment; the industrial and occupational distribution of women workers in Kerala; gender gaps in wages; and a recent national classification which puts Kerala in a small league of states with low female labour force participation and a low rate of growth of such participation in the last seven years. The article contextualizes these patterns within the existing literature, offering an original synthesis of the structural, social, and labour-demand factors that together sustain the gap between capability and participation, and concluding with policy suggestions for closing it.

Keywords: *Female Labour Force Participation; Kerala Paradox; Human Development; Gender Parity Index; Unemployment; Women and Work; Kerala Economy*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Kerala has a unique place in the literature on economic development in that it achieved high levels of social development, such as high literacy, low infant and maternal mortality, high life expectancy, and a sex ratio favoring women, at levels of per-capita income far below those of comparable regions elsewhere in the world (Kannan et al., 1991). This experience, much discussed as the 'Kerala model' of development, placed investment in personal capabilities, and in women's capabilities in particular, as a driver of welfare outcomes independent of, and in some readings prior to, income growth (Devika, 2016). In this model, women's educational attainment has held a special place of pride: Kerala's female literacy rate is close to 92 percent, and its gender parity index in school and higher education enrolment is considerably higher than the corresponding all-India average. (Ghosh & Kundu 2021). Against this backdrop, Kerala's record of women's labour force participation appears anomalous. Rather than leading the way in the translation of educational advantage into economic participation, Kerala has consistently been among the states with the lowest female labour force participation rate (FLFPR) and, more remarkably, among the states where the rate has increased the slowest over the past several years even as the national female employment rate has risen sharply (Prakash, 2004). This has resulted in a parallel high rate of unemployment of educated women in Kerala, a pattern documented across successive rounds of national and state-level labour force data. This combination of exceptional capability formation and weak translation into paid economic activity is the Kerala paradox of this article.

The article re-examines the paradox using the latest available data, including the Periodic Labor Force Survey Annual Report for calendar year 2025 and the Kerala Economic Review 2024. Instead of treating the paradox as a static fact that needs to be explained once, the article traces its evolution, looking not only at Kerala's FLFPR but also at the rate of change relative to other states, its industrial and occupational composition, and the wage differentials that accompany it. In this way, this article attempts to shift from a general acknowledgment of the existence of the paradox to a more recent, clearer, and multidimensional account of its nature.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on women's labour force participation in Kerala can be classified into four broad strands. This article draws upon each of these strands while extending the analysis to more recent data.

The first and oldest strand records the paradox itself. Based on National Sample Survey rounds, initial studies indicated that the female labour force participation rate in Kerala based on the Usual Principal and Subsidiary Status was around thirty-two per cent in 2011-12, already lagging behind many major states even as Kerala led in social indicators(Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) (in per cent) by usual principal status , 2024). The literature attributes the gap to the structure of Kerala's economy, which is weighted towards services and consumption financed by remittances, rather than labour-absorbing manufacturing or commercial agriculture, combined with social expectations of the kind of work appropriate for educated women, often summarised as a preference for secure, salaried and preferably government employment over private, informal or manual work.

A second strand uses primary survey data to study the individual and household-level determinants of participation. This literature suggests that the factors that determine whether a particular woman in Kerala enters or remains in the labour force are her marital status, the presence of young children or elderly or sick members in the household who need care, family income, and the availability of a suitable job within a reasonable distance from home. The relationship between education and participation in Kerala is a recurring finding of no straightforwardly positive relationship across the education spectrum. Participation is comparatively high among women with very limited education, typically entering low-paid manual or agricultural work out of necessity, and rises again among the most highly qualified. Women with intermediate levels of education, particularly those who have completed secondary schooling but do not hold a professional degree, show comparatively lower participation, showing a mismatch between their aspirations for white-collar work and the limited local supply of such positions, Mathew (2015).

A third strand is especially concerned with unemployment and describes Kerala's labour market as one of 'educated unemployment' where the problem is not primarily an absolute lack of work opportunities but rather a continuing mismatch between the type of employment for which job seekers are qualified and willing to work and the type of employment generated by the local economy. The literature suggests that the unemployment rate among young women in Kerala is much higher than among young men, and the unemployment rates for educated female job seekers in Kerala have been estimated to be between twenty and thirty per cent in different studies, a level that would be considered indicative of a serious labour market failure if found among the workforce as a whole (Francis, 2022). A fourth and more recent strand, which draws largely on Periodic Labor Force Survey data from 2017-18 onwards, places Kerala's experience in relation to the larger national rise in female labour force participation. This literature finds that India's FLFPR has almost doubled over this period, driven disproportionately by rural, agriculture-linked self-employment, and warns that part of this national increase may reflect distress-driven employment associated with slow non-farm job creation rather than a straightforward improvement in women's economic opportunity (Misra, 2025). On the basis of the level of FLFPR and the rate of its growth over the period, states have been classified within this system and Kerala, along with a small number of other states including Haryana, Karnataka and Maharashtra, have been classified as having a low participation level with a low growth rate, vis-à-vis states such as Assam, Jharkhand, Gujarat, Uttarakhand, Odisha and Rajasthan, which have been classified as having a high level with high growth (Boruah & Das, 2022). This classification is important because it shows that the position of Kerala in the national female employment scenario has, if anything, become comparatively less favourable even as the aggregate national picture has improved.

The literature generally indicates that Kerala's low FLFPR is a long-standing, structurally embedded, and multiply determined phenomenon, but comparatively less explored is how the paradox has played out in its latest phase, especially in relation to the sharp national rise in FLFPR post-2021-22, and how unemployment, industrial composition, and wage differentials have moved in tandem rather than alongside the participation rate itself. The present paper seeks to address this gap by using the most recent data available.

III. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This article addresses the central empirical issue of the persistence and even deepening of the gap between women's capability achievement and their economic participation in Kerala. However, Kerala's FLFPR is well below the national average on many parameters, even though the state ranks at or near the top on almost all human development indicators for women among Indian states. In a recent classification of major states based on the level and growth rate of female labor force participation during 2017-18 to 2023-24, Kerala falls under the unfavorable category of states with a low level and a low growth rate of female labor force participation, which is shared by only a few states (Philip, 2021). This is a substantively different and arguably more troubling finding than a simple low-level snapshot: it suggests that whatever forces are driving the national rise in women's economic participation are least active in Kerala.

The second dimension of the problem is unemployment. It is not just that fewer women in Kerala participate in the labour force; among those who do seek work, a disproportionately high share, especially among the educated, remains unemployed. It implies that the low participation rate is not merely reflective of a large number of women choosing to remain outside the labour force but is exacerbated by a labour market that is failing to absorb a significant share of those women who do seek paid work, a distinction with direct implications for the type of policy response required.

A third dimension is the changing composition of women's work itself. But the existing statistics indicate that the share of regular wage/salaried employment among the women workers in Kerala is decreasing and that of casual employment is increasing. The female workforce in the state remains more clustered in the services sector than in agriculture. If accurate and ongoing, this shift would suggest that whatever jobs Kerala's women are able to find are becoming less secure, a trend that would not be visible from participation-rate data alone. Thus, the problem this paper addresses is not merely why the FLFPR of Kerala is low, a question that has been addressed extensively in prior literature. Rather, it is how the paradox is currently shaping up in terms of level, growth, unemployment, and employment quality, using the most recent data available.

IV. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To examine trends in female labour force participation, worker population ratio, and unemployment in Kerala relative to India, using the most recently available data up to 2025.
- To assess Kerala's female human development achievements, in education and related capability indicators, against its labour market outcomes for women.
- To analyse the industrial and occupational distribution of Kerala's women workers, and how it compares with the national pattern.
- To examine gender differentials in wages within Kerala's labour market.
- To situate Kerala within a recent national classification of states by the level and growth rate of female labour force participation, and to assess what this classification implies for the state's relative position.

V. METHODOLOGY

The article is based on a descriptive-analytical design using only secondary data, mainly from the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) of the National Sample Survey Office, and, from January 2025, the redesigned monthly and quarterly PLFS series for both rural and urban areas. These include the PLFS Annual Report for calendar year 2025, PLFS quarterly bulletins for 2023 and 2024, and PLFS monthly bulletins for 2025, supplemented by the state-level analyses published by the Kerala State Planning Board in the Economic Review 2024, by NITI Aayog and by research organisations including Initiative for What Works to Advance Women and Girls in the Economy (IWWAGE), Asian Development Bank Institute and Center for Socio-Economic and Environmental Studies.

Different sources have different definitions (Usual Status on a Principal and Subsidiary basis, or Current Weekly Status), different reference periods (annual, quarterly, or monthly), and different geographic coverage (state-specific or all-India), and therefore, the analysis presents the definition, reference period, and source along with each statistic presented. The analytical techniques employed are descriptive: trend description, cross-tabulation by sex and rural-urban residence, ratio and gap analysis, and comparison of capability indicators with participation indicators. The article's contribution is in bringing together, comparing, and interpreting recent official data across several dimensions of women's labour market status in Kerala.

VI. ANALYSIS

6.1 Human Development Achievements of Women in Kerala

Kerala's achievements in female capability formation are well established and are reaffirmed by the most recent available data. Female literacy in the state stands at approximately 91.98 percent, trailing the male literacy rate of 96.02 percent by a comparatively narrow margin of about four percentage points, a gap considerably smaller than the corresponding national gap. Kerala's gender parity index in education, which measures the relative enrolment of girls to boys, stood at 1.44 in 2021-22, well above the all-India figure of 1.01, indicating that girls in Kerala are, if anything, more likely than boys to be enrolled in and to progress through the education system (All Kerala Higher Education Survey (AKHES) 2021-22). Kerala's sex ratio of 1,084 females per thousand males remains the most favourable among major Indian states, against a national average of 943. Life expectancy at birth in Kerala, at 75 years, is the highest recorded among Indian states and exceeds the all-India average of 70 years (State-wise Life Expectancy - Data Portal Kerala, 2026).

Table 1 summarises these indicators. Read together, they confirm that Kerala's lead over the rest of India in the foundational capabilities conventionally expected to enable economic participation, education, health, and survival is not marginal but substantial, ranging from 4 to over 40 percentage points depending on the indicator.

It is against this scale of advantage that the state's position on labour force participation, examined in the next section, appears especially anomalous.

Table 1: Human Development and Capability Indicators for Women — Kerala and India

Indicator	Kerala	India	Reference Period
Female literacy rate	91.98%	—	2020-21
Male literacy rate	96.02%	—	2020-21
Gender Parity Index in education	1.44	1.01	2021-22
Sex ratio (females per 1,000 males)	1,084	943	Census-based estimate
Life expectancy at birth (years)	75	70	2024 (Economic Review)

Source: *IWWAGE Kerala Factsheet; Centre for Public Policy Research; Kerala Economic Review 2024.*

6.2 Trends in Female Labour Force Participation, Employment, and the National Classification

The participation rate of women in the labour force in Kerala is far below that of men, and on some indicators, it is even below the corresponding national rate for women. According to the Current Weekly Status basis for the quarter April-June 2024, Kerala's female LFPR (age 15 and above) was 29.9 percent against a male LFPR of 70.0 percent, a gender gap of around 40 percentage points (PLFS, Quarterly Bulletin (April-June 2024)). On the broader Usual Status basis, Kerala's female LFPR was estimated at about 37 per cent for 2021-22, against an all-India female LFPR of 40.0 per cent on the same basis in 2025, and 41.7 per cent by 2023-24 as per PLFS Annual Report estimates, indicating that even on the more optimistic of the two measures, Kerala's rate has been converging towards, rather than surpassing, the national average (PLFS, Annual Report 2023-2024). These indicators, the worker population ratio and estimates of unemployment, are presented in Table 2, again with different reference periods and retained definitions of the underlying sources. A noted feature of the Kerala pattern is that female labour force participation is often higher in rural parts of the state than in urban areas, contrary to the usual pattern for educated, urbanizing populations. This is because social norms regarding non-farm work among rural women in Kerala are less prohibitive than the expectations placed on urban middle-class women (Mathew, 2015).

Perhaps the most important recent finding in understanding the direction of the paradox is a national classification of major states based on the level of female labour force participation (FLFP) and its compound annual growth rate from 2017-18 to 2023-24, a period when India's overall FLFPR rose sharply, partly due to a surge in rural, agriculture-linked self-employment. The classification places Kerala, Haryana, Karnataka and Maharashtra in the category of states combining low level of participation with low rate of growth, as opposed to states like Assam, Jharkhand, Gujarat, Uttarakhand, Odisha and Rajasthan which combine a high level of participation with high growth (The Education-Employment Nexus: Inter-State Variations on Female Labour Force Participation in India (2017-2024)). This finding implies that Kerala's relative position has not been improving over the recent period of national FLFPR growth, and that whatever combination of rural distress-linked self-employment and demand-side factors has driven the national rise has had comparatively little traction in Kerala.

Table 2: Labour Force Indicators for Women — Kerala and India

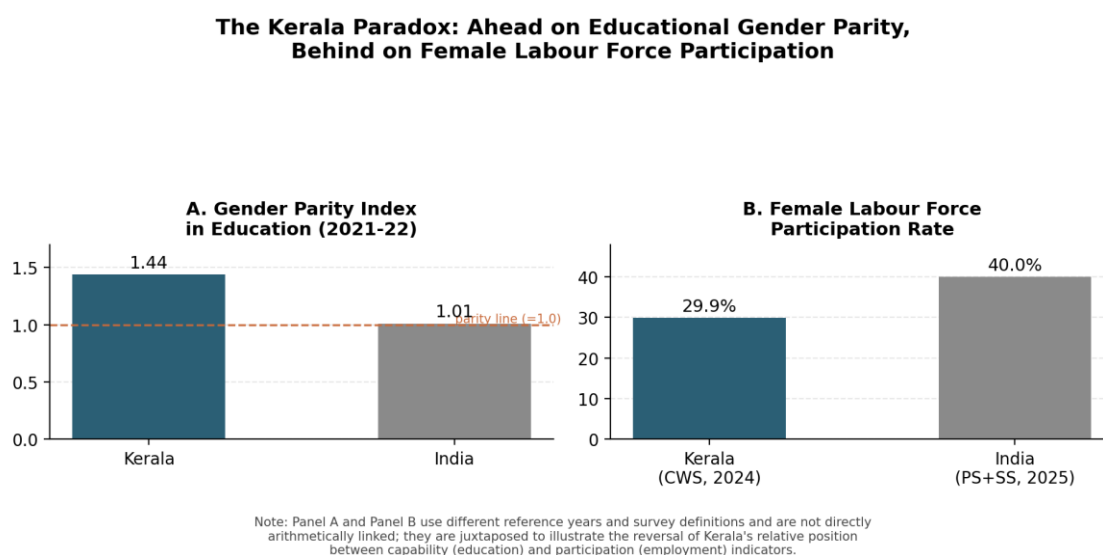
Indicator	Value	Reference Period	Basis
Female LFPR, Kerala	29.9%	Apr-Jun 2024	CWS, age 15+
Male LFPR, Kerala	70.0%	Apr-Jun 2024	CWS, age 15+
Female LFPR, Kerala (approx.)	~37%	2021-22	PS+SS, age 15+
Female LFPR, India	40.0%	2025	PS+SS, age 15+
Male LFPR, India	79.1%	2025	PS+SS, age 15+
Female LFPR, India	41.7%	2023-24	PS+SS, age 15+
Female unemployment rate, India	8.1%	Oct-Dec 2024	CWS, age 15+

Source: *PLFS Quarterly Bulletins and Annual Report 2025; CPPR; ADBI Policy*

6.3 Unemployment and the Educated Women's Crisis

Unemployment exacerbates Kerala's participation gap. Repeated studies of the state's labour market have estimated unemployment among educated women in Kerala to be between twenty and thirty per cent, a range that is much higher than both the all-India unemployment rate and the unemployment rate that is usually observed among Kerala's own male workforce (Mathew, 2015). The data from the live registry of the Employment Department of Kerala show that women comprise close to two-thirds (63.9 percent) of all registered job-seekers in the state, compared with 36.1 percent for men. This is a striking imbalance considering that women constitute a slight majority of the state's population. This pattern is best understood not as a simple withdrawal of women from the labour force, but as evidence of a continuing mismatch between the aspirations of a well-educated female labour force, often oriented towards secure, salaried and preferably public sector employment, and the actual composition of job opportunities generated by Kerala's services- and remittance-oriented economy. In this sense, low participation and high unemployment among those who participate are two faces of the same underlying labour-demand constraint, not two independent phenomena.

Figure 1: The Kerala Paradox — Education Parity Lead versus Participation Gap



6.4 Industrial Distribution of Women Workers

The industrial distribution of women workers in Kerala is quite different from the national pattern. It is a reflection of the state's specific economic structure. The recent growth in women's employment is disproportionately concentrated in agriculture, and PLFS-based analysis has found that about three-quarters of working women are engaged nationally in agriculture, forestry, and fishing in rural areas. Conversely, only about 39 percent of the women working in rural Kerala are engaged in agriculture, forestry, and fishing. About 12 percent are engaged in manufacturing, and the rest are distributed in other industries, mainly services. The sharp decline in the dependence on agriculture is reflective of Kerala's transition from food crop to cash crop cultivation, a traditionally male labour intensive activity, and the much higher dependence of the state on the services sector for output and revenue, with services accounting for nearly two-thirds (64.2 per cent) of Kerala's Gross State Value Added, as against the states' average of around 51 per cent (Economic Review, 2021).

The distribution is even more balanced in urban Kerala, with about 17 percent of women estimated to be engaged in each of agriculture and manufacturing, and the rest-half or so-in trade, education, health, and other services. Education and health are the main employers of women workers in Kerala's services sector, consistent with the state's historically high levels of public investment in the delivery of schooling and health infrastructure, which have, in turn, produced a large share of the formal employment available to educated women.

Table 3 shows the wide industrial distribution of women workers in rural and urban Kerala. The pattern suggests that Kerala's women workforce, where it is engaged, is concentrated in sectors, education, health, and other services, that are comparatively better paid and more secure than the agriculture-dominated employment that has driven the recent national rise in FLFPR. However, this same sectoral concentration, being smaller in absolute job-generating capacity than agriculture or large-scale manufacturing, may also help explain why

Kerala's overall participation rate remains comparatively low: the sectors best matched to Kerala's educated female workforce simply do not generate enough positions to absorb the available supply of qualified women.

Table 3: Broad Industrial Distribution of Women Workers in Kerala (%)

Sector	Rural Kerala	Urban Kerala
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	39%	17%
Manufacturing	12%	17%
Services and other industries (residual)	49%	66%

Source: *IWWAGE, Women's Workforce Participation in India: Statewise Trends — Kerala, based on PLFS unit-level data.*

6.5 Gender Wage Differentials and Employment Status

Gender wage differentials add a further dimension to Kerala's labour market pattern. Average daily wages in Kerala stood at approximately INR 741.89 for men against INR 536.68 for women in 2020-21, a gap of about INR 205 per day, or roughly 28 percent of the male wage (Economic Review, 2020). While this gap is narrower than in several other major states and has reportedly narrowed further over time, it remains a material disincentive to participation at the margin, particularly for women weighing the opportunity cost of paid work against unpaid domestic and care responsibilities. A related and concerning trend noted in the literature is a shift in the status of Kerala's women workers away from regular wage or salaried employment towards casual employment, even as the overall composition of the workforce remains services-oriented (Abraham, 2025). If this trend continues, it would imply a decline in the security and stability of the employment available to Kerala's women workers, independent of any change in the headline participation rate, underscoring the importance of examining employment quality alongside employment quantity when assessing the state of women's economic participation in Kerala.

Table 4: Average Daily Wages by Gender, Kerala

Category	Average Daily Wage (INR)
Male	741.89
Female	536.68
Gender wage gap	205.21 (~28% of male wage)

Source: *IWWAGE, Women's Workforce Participation in India: Statewise Trends — Kerala, 2020-21 data.*

6.6 Explaining the Paradox: A Four-Constraint Framework

To summarize, the evidence on human development, participation, unemployment, and industrial and wage presented in the above sections is brought together in this article to argue that Kerala's paradox is best understood as the outcome of four mutually reinforcing constraints working simultaneously, rather than any single predominant cause. The first is a labour-demand constraint. Kerala's services- and remittance-oriented economy, however successful in raising per-capita income, has not generated employment at a rate or in a form matched to the scale of its educated female workforce, especially in the mid-range of the education spectrum. Second is an aspirational mismatch – social expectations, cemented by decades of association between education and salaried, often public-sector, employment, mean that many women are waiting for particular kinds of work, rather than accepting available casual or informal alternatives. The pattern shows up statistically as high unemployment rather than low participation, but it reflects the same underlying gap. The third is an unpaid-care constraint, in which the heavy burden of domestic and care responsibilities, well documented in the determinants literature, continues to fall disproportionately on women and constrains the effective time and geographic radius in which paid work is a viable option. Fourth, and most clearly illuminated by the recent state classification evidence is a divergence constraint: the sharp national rise in FLFPR since 2017-18 has been driven substantially by rural, agriculture-linked self-employment, a channel of limited relevance to Kerala's low-agriculture, high-literacy rural economy, and Kerala has not benefited proportionately from this national trend, leaving its relative position within the country comparatively unchanged even as the aggregate national gap between India and international benchmarks narrows. This four-constraint framework implies that policy responses that address only one dimension, for example, skilling programs that address the aspirational mismatch without addressing labor demand, or participation-boosting schemes that do not take into account the specific, non-agricultural character of Kerala's rural economy, are unlikely to close the gap on their own.

VII. FINDINGS

- Kerala's female literacy rate (91.98%), gender parity index in education (1.44 against a national 1.01), sex ratio (1,084 per thousand), and female life expectancy (75 years) substantially exceed corresponding national figures, confirming the scale of the state's human development lead for women.
- Despite this lead, Kerala's female LFPR (29.9% on Current Weekly Status, April-June 2024; approximately 37% on Usual Status, 2021-22) trails the corresponding all-India female LFPR (40.0% on Usual Status, 2025), and the gender gap in LFPR within Kerala (approximately 40 percentage points) is proportionately wider than the corresponding national gender gap.
- A recent classification of major states by FLFPR level and growth rate (2017-18 to 2023-24) places Kerala, together with Haryana, Karnataka, and Maharashtra, in the unfavourable 'low level, low growth' category, indicating that Kerala's relative position has not improved even as India's aggregate female LFPR has risen sharply over the same period.
- Unemployment among Kerala's educated women is estimated at 20-30% in the literature, and women constitute 63.9% of all registered job-seekers in the state's employment exchanges, indicating that low participation coexists with, and is compounded by, a substantial excess supply of women actively seeking but unable to secure work.
- Kerala's women workers are far less concentrated in agriculture than the national female workforce (approximately 39% in rural Kerala versus roughly three-quarters nationally), and are instead concentrated in services, particularly education and health, sectors that are better paid and more secure but of comparatively limited absolute job-generating capacity relative to the scale of Kerala's educated female labour supply.
- A gender wage gap of approximately INR 205 per day (28% of the male wage) persisted in Kerala as of 2020-21, alongside literature-documented evidence of a shift from regular wage employment towards casual employment among Kerala's women workers, suggesting a possible decline in employment security even where participation is achieved.
- The evidence is consistent with a four-part explanation for the persistence of the paradox: a labour-demand constraint mismatched to the scale of the educated female workforce; an aspirational mismatch reinforced by social expectations around 'suitable' work; a persistent unpaid-care burden; and a divergence constraint, whereby the agriculture-linked self-employment driving the recent national rise in FLFPR has limited relevance to Kerala's economy.

VIII. SUGGESTIONS

- Expand non-agricultural, non-traditional formal employment generation in sectors already shown to employ Kerala's women disproportionately, particularly education, health, and allied social services, through sustained public and public-private investment, so that job creation keeps pace with the scale of the state's educated female labour supply.
- Develop targeted employment-facilitation programmes for women with intermediate levels of education, secondary schooling and diploma-level qualifications, who the determinants literature identifies as facing the sharpest mismatch between aspiration and available opportunity, distinct from programmes aimed at either the least or the most highly educated.
- Strengthen care infrastructure, including accessible childcare and eldercare facilities at the local government level, to reduce the unpaid-care constraint identified as a persistent barrier to participation in the determinants literature.
- Address gender wage differentials through stronger enforcement of equal-remuneration provisions and greater wage transparency, particularly in the casual and informal segments of the labour market where the shift away from regular employment has been most pronounced.
- Monitor and report employment-status composition, regular wage/salaried, self-employed, and casual, for Kerala's women workers on a regular basis, so that any continuing shift towards less secure forms of employment can be tracked and addressed independently of headline participation-rate trends.
- Given Kerala's divergence from the agriculture-led national rise in FLFPR, design state-specific employment strategies rather than assuming that national employment programmes calibrated to agriculture-dependent states will have equivalent traction in Kerala's services-oriented rural and urban economy.

IX. CONCLUSION

The article re-examines the well-known paradox of Kerala of high human development and low female labour force participation, using the latest available data, extending the analysis through the PLFS Annual Report 2025 and the Kerala Economic Review 2024. The principal conclusion is that the paradox has not only survived but in fact deepened in relative terms in a specific and measurable sense: a recent national classification places Kerala among a small group of states with a low level of female labour force participation, and a low rate of growth in that participation even as India's aggregate female employment rate has risen sharply since 2017-18.

Despite high educational attainment, unemployment among women in Kerala remains high. They remain concentrated in a relatively narrow range of service-sector occupations, albeit better paid, and they are confronted with a labour market in which the previous balance between regular and casual employment appears to be turning against them.

The four-part explanatory framework outlined in this article - labour demand, aspirational mismatch, unpaid care and Kerala's deviation from the agriculture-led national participation trend - suggest that closing this gap will require a deliberate, multi-pronged and Kerala-specific policy strategy, rather than relying on either the passage of time or national level employment programmes designed with a different kind of state economy in mind. Given the human capital already invested in Kerala's women, the economic and social returns to closing this participation gap are likely to be large, both for the women concerned and for the state's growth prospects, making this an area that continues to warrant sustained empirical attention and policy priority.

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