



**The Status of Women's Empowerment Through Workforce Participation
in Jharkhand Over the Past Decade**

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Abstract: Female labour force participation is a crucial indicator of women's economic empowerment and overall economic development. But women's participation rates vary considerably across countries for various reasons. While the Indian economy is expanding rapidly, women's workforce participation is declining. In India, the male work participation rate (WPR) is about 53.3%, whereas the female WPR is approximately half, at 25.5%, according to the 2011 Census. Similar to India, Jharkhand has a male workforce participation rate of approximately 53–54% and a female workforce participation rate of 25–26%. This paper examines trends and patterns in the women's employment structure in Jharkhand over the years, focusing on their influence on women's empowerment, particularly among tribal women. We all know that Jharkhand is a tribal dominated state, and tribal women play a crucial role in the Jharkhand economy. This paper is based on qualitative and quantitative data collected from secondary sources. The data used in this study are from the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) across all available rounds (2017-18 to 2022–2023), the 2011 census of India, Jharkhand Economic Survey, recent articles, etc. The research indicates significant disparities in labour force participation between India and Jharkhand. The ongoing study displays the findings through multiple tables and graphs. This research highlights the reasons for reduced female workforce participation and indicates how tribal women differ from others in Jharkhand.

Keywords: Empowerment; Workforce Participation; Tribal Women; Economic Development; Census 2011; PLFS

1. Introduction

Gender equality and women's empowerment are integral to the Sustainable Development Goals. Goal 5 focuses on closing the gender gap and providing equal opportunities for all. Women and girls represent half of the world's population; therefore, half of the world's

potential lies in them. However, gender inequality persists everywhere, which stagnates societal progress. From the past to the present, much evidence points to the fact that women have been exploited and discriminated against in many ways. In Indian patriarchal society, women have often been forced to play a secondary role within their households. They do not always have the right to make decisions on their own. The government has introduced many policies, legal rights, and schemes to promote women's empowerment. True women's empowerment can be achieved only through women's participation in the workforce.

The researcher emphasised that having access to resources (material, human, and social) is an obligatory precondition for empowerment, as resources increase the ability to exercise choice (Naila Kabeer, 1999). Berta Esteve-Volart (2004) examines the social norms and restrictions prevalent in society that constitute the primary obstacles to women's employment. Many times, women participate in economic activities, but these activities remain unrecognised and undervalued. Ellina Samantroy (2020) concludes that women's workforce participation in India is declining due to increased domestic responsibilities. In most states in India, female participation has grown faster in rural areas among married women, but in some states, the presence of children has dampened the growth of female workforce participation (Shamika Ravi and Mudit Kapoor 2024). In India, gender inequalities exist across every sphere, including agriculture, occupations, education, health, and politics (I. Sundar 2017). Without the eradication of these inequalities, women can never achieve empowerment. Swati Dutta (2016) highlights that more women are engaged as unpaid agricultural labourers as household agricultural landholding increases. A similar kind of scenario is found in Jharkhand. Women are primarily employed in low-paid jobs, such as casual labour and self-employment. Tanuka Endow (2022) found, through her primary survey database, that workforce participation in rural districts of Jharkhand is comparatively low, and a significant gender gap exists between men and women. The majority of women in Jharkhand have a medium level of empowerment. Various factors, including marriage, education, occupation, and annual income, influence empowerment. (Sudha Suman and Jhanara 2024). Sudha Kumari and Renu Bose (2024) observe, based on their survey, that women employed in government organisations are more empowered than those in non-government organisations, because work in government organisations is more secure.

Based on the existing literature, we find that most studies focus either on women's workforce participation or on women's empowerment separately, and fewer studies have examined trends in women's workforce participation and their influence on women's empowerment over the past years in a state like Jharkhand. The present study examines women's workforce participation and its influence on empowerment together, and analyses the trends and extent of women's workforce participation in Jharkhand over the past years. The research area of this study is Jharkhand. The reason for choosing Jharkhand is that it is a tribal-dominated and underprivileged state, whose socio-economic structure is quite different from that of other states in India.

2. Data Sources and Methodology

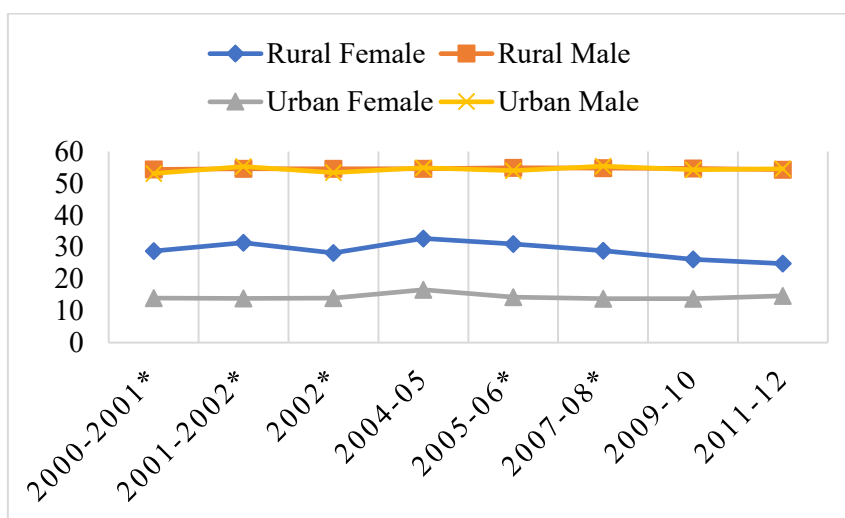
The present study is based entirely on secondary data sources. The data have been collected from the following secondary sources:

- Census of India, 2011
- Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) reports from 2017–18 to 2025–26
- Jharkhand Economic Survey, 2025
- Scholarly books related to women’s studies, labour economics, and empowerment
- Peer-reviewed journals
- Academic research articles
- Government reports and publications
- Credible websites and online databases

This study uses both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The data were systematically sorted, organised, and analysed. Tables, charts, and diagrams were created in MS Excel to clearly show the results. These visuals make it easier to see trends, comparisons, and patterns about female labour force participation and women’s empowerment.

3. Main Findings and Discussions

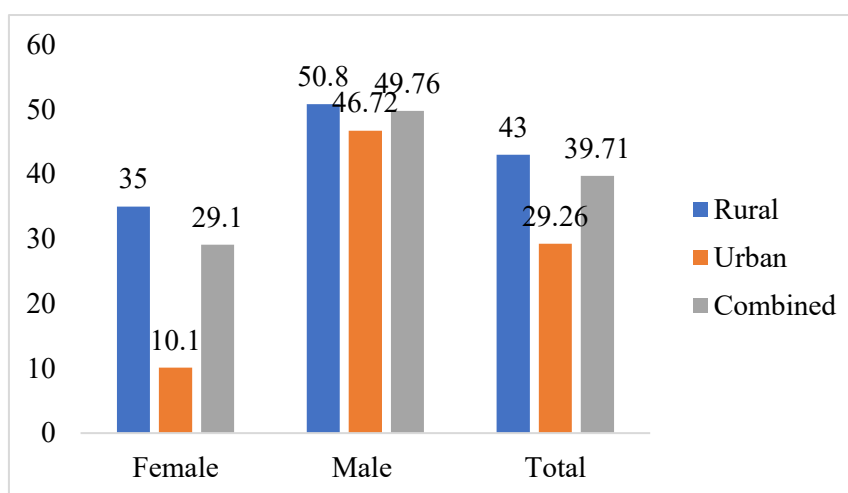
According to the 2011 Census, 25.51% of women in India participate in the workforce, compared to 53.26% of men. The rural sector has a slightly higher female participation rate, about 25%, while the urban rate is around 15%. Over time, female participation has decreased in rural areas but stayed about the same in urban areas. Male participation rates have not changed much in either area. Fig 1 shows workforce participation rates in India from the 2001 and 2011 censuses for both rural and urban areas. While male participation remains steady, a significant gender gap persists in workforce participation. This is because female labour force participation, though improving over the years, still lags behind male participation



Source: Census 2011

Fig. 1: Trends in Workforce Participation in India

A similar scenario is also found in Jharkhand. If we look at fig 2, we see that, according to the Census 2011, Jharkhand’s workforce participation is also not up to par. About 29 per cent of females are engaged in the workforce, with 35 per cent in rural areas compared to 10 per cent in urban areas.



Source: Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, GoI

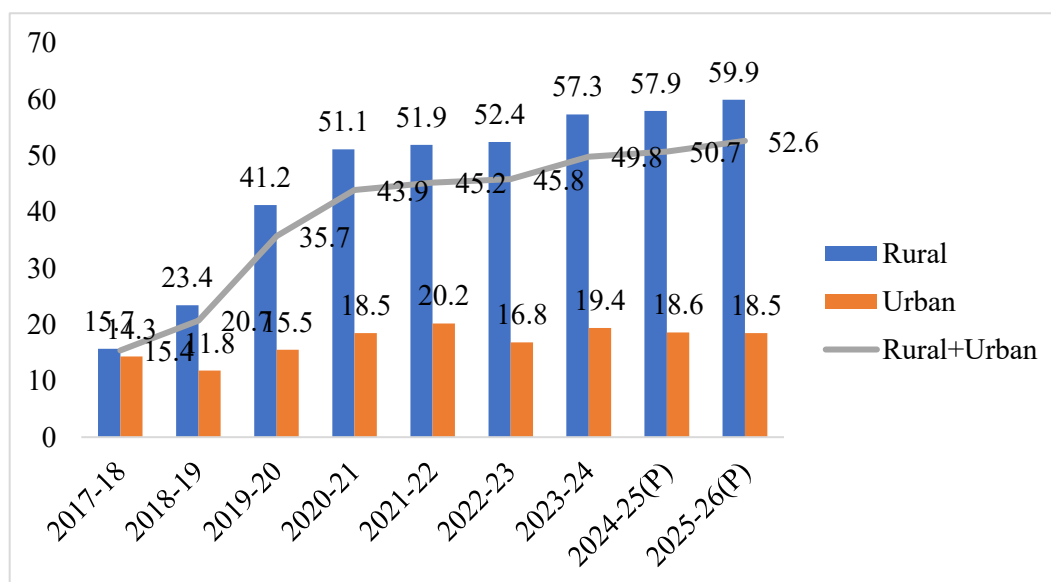
Fig. 2: Workforce Participation Rate in Jharkhand

Table 1: Labour Force Participation Rate (PS+SS) for Persons Aged 15 Years and Above: Jharkhand and All India, 2017-18 to 2023-24 (in percent)

Year	Jharkhand			All India		
	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person
2017-18	73.9	15.4	45.1	75.8	23.3	49.8
2018-19	76.4	20.7	47.4	75.5	24.5	50.2
2019-20	76.9	35.7	55.9	76.8	30.0	53.5
2020-21	78.9	43.9	61.6	77.0	32.5	54.9
2021-22	79.3	45.2	61.9	77.2	32.8	55.2
2022-23	78.6	45.8	61.9	78.5	37.0	57.9
2023-24	78.3	49.8	63.8	78.8	41.7	60.1

Source: Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, GoI

Table 1 provides a comparison of workforce participation between Jharkhand and all-India based on PLFS data across different rounds. The data show that since 2017–18, there has been a sharp and sustained increase in female labour force participation, particularly in rural areas. The reasons include increased involvement of women in agriculture and allied activities, as well as various public employment programmes. On the other hand, improvements in urban employment are insufficient, and there is a significant disparity in workforce participation between urban and rural women. The reason is that urban jobs are skill-oriented, and women have limited access to them. Figure 3 also shows that female labour force participation has increased each year in both areas, but the increase is more significant in rural areas than in urban areas. In rural areas, female participation rose from 15.7% in 2017–18 to 57.3% in 2022–23. It is estimated that in 2025–26 it will reach 59.9%. However, in urban areas, the rate of increase is very slow.



Source: Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, GoI

Fig. 3: Labour Force Participation Rates in different regions of Jharkhand

Figure 4 shows that the unemployment rate for females in rural areas declined from 3.7% in 2017–18 to 0.1% in 2020–21 and thereafter remained constant at 0.1%. In urban areas, the unemployment rate has also been decreasing, but it is still higher than in rural areas. The rate of decline is higher in rural areas compared to urban areas. This indicates limited employment opportunities in urban areas, while females are increasingly actively involved in farming-related activities. The decline in rural unemployment does not imply that rural women are entering high-quality or higher-paid jobs; in reality, they cannot afford to remain unemployed for long and need to work to escape poverty. On the other hand, in the urban sector, the demand for formal, skill-oriented managerial jobs is higher, and these jobs are dominated by males, which leads to discrimination against females.

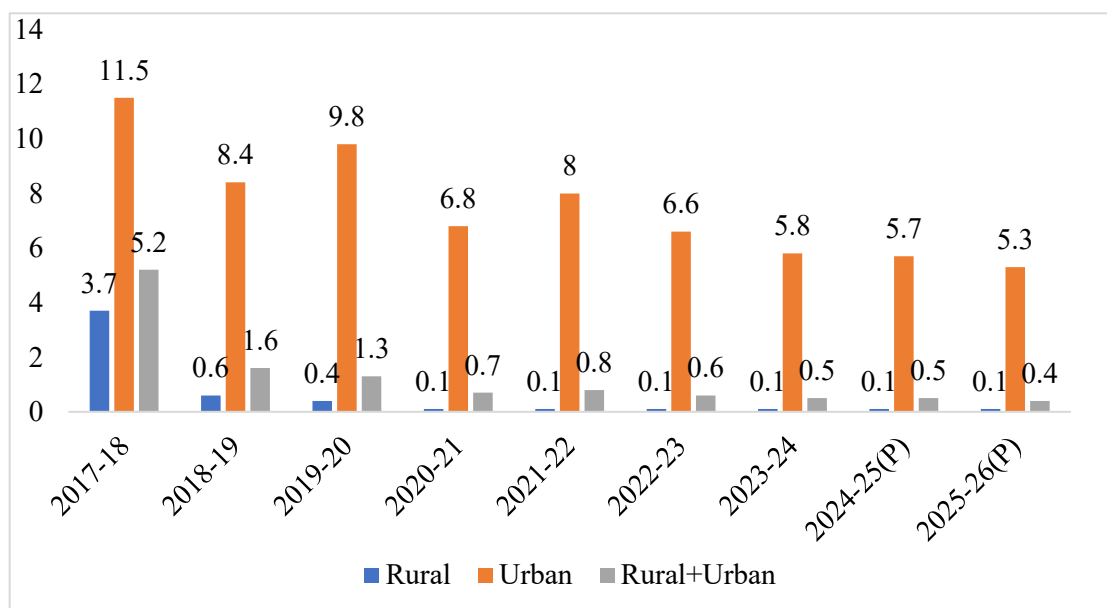
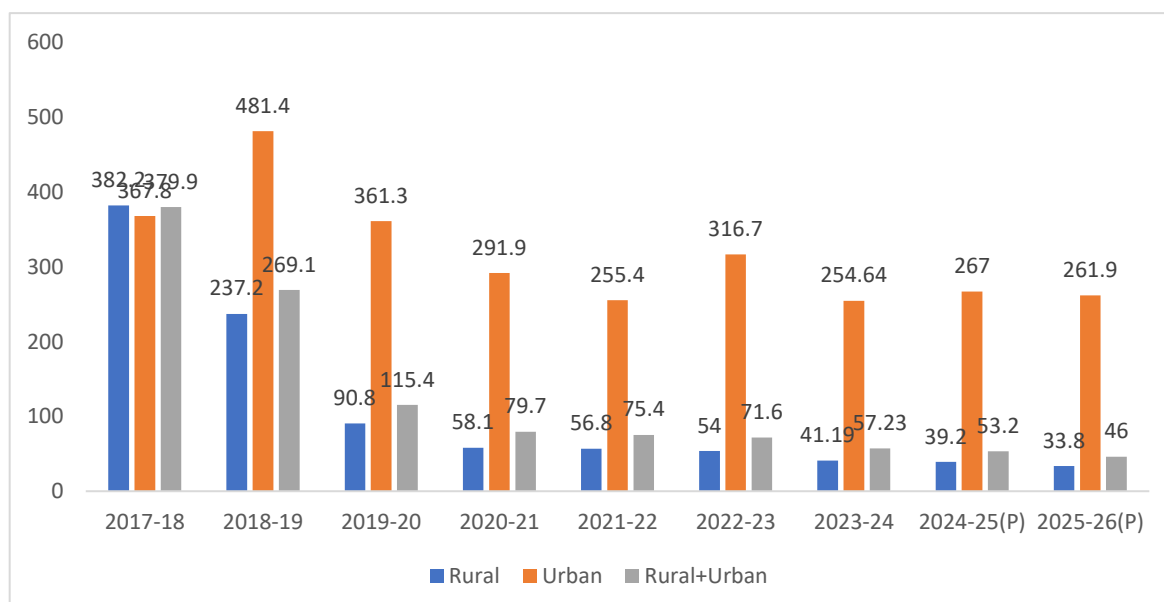


Fig. 4: Unemployment Rate of Females in Different Regions

Figure 5 shows that the gap between male and female average earnings is decreasing each year in both rural and urban areas. However, the rate of decrease is much higher in rural areas; it declined from Rs. 382.2 in 2017–18 to Rs. 41.19 in 2023–24, and the projected value for 2025–26 is Rs. 33.8. Urban areas also show improvement, with the difference decreasing from Rs. 379.9 in 2017–18 to Rs. 46 in 2025–26.



Data Source: Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, GoI

Fig. 5: Difference Between the Male and Female Earnings in Different Regions

Table 2: Percentage Distribution of Female Workers in Usual Status by Employment Type

Year	Sector	Self emp.	Own account	Helper	Regular wage	Casual labour
2017-18	Rural	78.1	18.6	59.5	6.9	15
	Urban	25.4	15.3	10.1	46.9	27.7
	Total	69	18	51	14	17
2018-19	Rural	78.3	22	56.3	10.7	11
	Urban	31.7	16.9	14.8	45.6	22.7
	Total	73	21	51	15	12
2019-20	Rural	88.6	16.6	72	4.9	6.6
	Urban	53.9	24.8	29.1	39.2	6.9
	Total	86	17	68	7.9	6.6
2020-21	Rural	90.1	19.8	70.2	3.5	6.4
	Urban	48	25.7	22.3	39.4	12.6
	Total	86.5	20.3	66.1	6.6	6.9
2021-22	Rural	88.6	20.8	67.8	3.1	8.2
	Urban	56.4	35.1	21.3	38.7	4.9
	Total	86	22	64	6.3	8
2022-23	Rural	90.3	27.8	62.4	2.4	7.3
	Urban	55.7	24.1	31.5	38.1	6.2
	Total	88	28	61	4.7	7.2
2023-24	Rural	89.3	29.1	60.1	5.1	5.6
	Urban	55.5	31.9	23.6	34.8	9.7
	Total	86.5	29.3	57.5	7.3	5.9
2024-25 (P)	Rural	89.4	33.1	56.2	4.5	6
	Urban	59.4	31.1	28.2	34.2	6.5
	Total	87.2	33.2	55	6.4	6.1
2025-26 (P)	Rural	89.3	36.6	52.6	5	5.7
	Urban	61.5	31.9	29.6	32.7	5.8
	Total	87.4	36.4	52.1	6.4	5.7

Source: Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, GoI

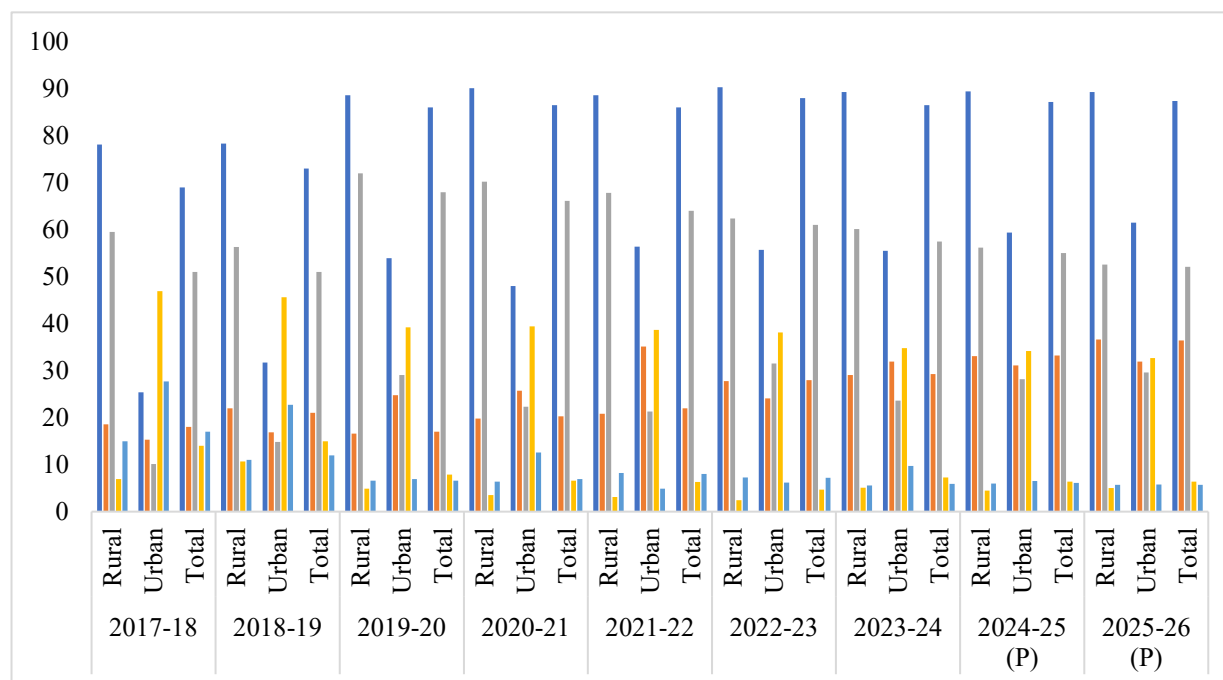


Fig. 6: Percentage Distribution of Female Workers in Different Regions

The above table and figure highlight that females participate in different types of work, but rural female workers are far more concentrated in self-employment. This points to a strong reliance on family-based, often unpaid, domestic work and on agricultural and allied activities.

Women remain engaged in domestic duties because no other member is available to take them on. This is the most common reason. Besides this, there are some social and religious constraints, and sometimes they cannot afford to hire someone to help them with domestic duties. (PLFS study. Some women choose to do domestic duties, while others are forced to do so due to a lack of alternative work. This is higher among urban women. The concentration of female workers in agriculture points to both constraints (e.g., limited access to non-farm employment, mobility, or skills) and the importance of improving conditions and productivity in agriculture for women. Promoting female participation in the secondary and tertiary sectors may require targeted skilling, childcare support, and more inclusive hiring practices. Urban areas are service-driven, with low-skilled, household-based activities that lack diversification into formal and knowledge-intensive sectors. We observe that the maximum number of rural women are engaged in the self-employment sector. Its percentage increases from 78 per cent to approximately 90 per cent. A good percentage of women are also engaged as helpers. Over the period 2017-18 to 2025-26, the average percentage is almost 60 per cent. Rural women’s contribution in the own-account, casual labour, and regular wage sectors is relatively very low. Urban women’s contributions to the self-employment sector also increase, but they are lower than in rural areas. In other sectors, urban women’s contributions are not very high, yet they are greater than those of rural women.

4. Position of Women in Jharkhand with respect to Empowerment

The different rounds of PLFS data and the Census data of 2011 show that female workforce participation in Jharkhand has been increasing over the years. The participation rate among rural women is higher than that of urban women. However, urban women have also shown some improvement. This indicates that not only in Jharkhand but across India, women, especially rural women, play an important role in the economy. Their contribution strengthens women's empowerment. They are now contributing to the family income, which helps uplift their confidence level. They can also participate in family decision-making.

Their financial independence helps them gain control over their lives. In our patriarchal society, women can find their own identity and existence. The unemployment rate and gender wage gap have also declined. This implies that women are increasingly participating in the workforce. Despite this progress, the gender gap persists, especially in the urban sector, where women are often offered low-paid and temporary work.

5. Recommendations

To increase the female participation rate and to strengthen women's empowerment, the following recommendations are given:

- a) Education is an important aspect, so the government should give more focus on female education and should reduce the obstacles that limit women's access to education.
- b) Women's participation in the workforce is low because of the lack of availability of work. Thus, the government and the private sector should create job opportunities for women.
- c) In the urban sector, most of the jobs are skill-oriented in nature, where women face difficulties accessing the jobs due to a lack of proper skills and training. The government should provide skill development programmes and training for women.
- d) To reduce gender discrimination in wages, the government should ensure equal wages for equal work.
- e) Safety and security measures should be given to the women in their workplace so that they feel free to join in work force.

6. Conclusion

The analysis of PLFS data across 2017–18 to 2025–26 shows that, in Jharkhand, although a gender gap in workforce participation exists, women's participation is increasing, especially in rural areas. Jharkhand is a tribal-dominated state, and most tribal women play an important role in tribal society. They engage in agricultural, forest-based, and animal husbandry activities to support their families' livelihoods. However, in urban areas, female participation is lower than in rural areas. Men still dominate urban jobs.

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