

Research Article

Recalibrating Employee Relations in the Post-Liberalisation Era: An Analytical Study of Strategic Human Resource Interventions and Policy Transformations

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DOI10.55083/irjeas.2025.v13i04010

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Abstract:

Background / Context

Post-liberalisation India has experienced principal changes in economic policy, organisational management, and workforces. The accelerated globalisation and tech-led growth have pushed companies towards new human resource (HR) strategies for competitiveness and adaptability. The changes have also reshaped employee relations, impacting job security, social security, and labour market participation patterns across industries.

Problem / Gap

Even after many HR policy reforms, there is little empirical evidence regarding their impact on employment patterns, training take-up, and wage increases at the national level. While macroeconomic outcomes dominate most existing research, micro-level effects of liberalisation on workforce equality and staff well-being are rarely addressed.

This research seeks to critically explore the influence of post-liberalisation HR interventions and policy changes on employee relations, workforce structure, and work quality in India.

Methodology / Approach

Based on secondary data from the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) Annual Reports (2017–18 to 2022–23) released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MOSPI), the research uses descriptive, trend, and comparative

analysis. Important indicators like employment type ratios, training participation, wage increase, and labour force participation are calculated. The analytical approach combines HR policy assessment with national labour statistics to determine emerging trends in employment flexibility, workforce skill building, and income patterns.

Results / Findings

There is a persistent rise in self-employment and casual work, moderate advances in training participation, and persistent but unbalanced wage growth across industries. Regular wage employment is mostly stable but increasingly marked by fixed-term contracts. These tendencies suggest that as much as HR interventions have promoted organisational efficiency, issues of informality, gender inequality, and job insecurity continue.

Implications / Significance

The research highlights the imperatives of re-calibrated HR policies that offset efficiency with equity in the post-liberalisation era. Enhancing social security, enhancing inclusive skill development, and correcting gender-related imbalances can lead to sustainable worker relations. The findings inform policymaking for labour reforms, workforce planning, and inclusive human resource management in emerging economies.

Key words: Post-Liberalisation; Human Resource Interventions; Employee Relations; PLFS; Employment Trends; Wage Growth; Skill Development; India.

1. INTRODUCTION

India's economic liberalisation in 1991 was a watershed event in altering the industrial and human resource profile of the nation. As it moved away from the state-controlled, welfare-focused economy to one that was competitive and market-led, not only were economic policies overhauled but also the very character of employment relationships was changed forever (ES, 2023). Pre-liberalisation, human resource practices in India were essentially bureaucratic, rule-based, and built on socialist philosophies that prioritised job security, protection of labour, and collective bargaining (Sahu & Behera, 2025). The liberalisation changes brought a paradigm shift wherein efficiency, flexibility, and competitiveness became the key principles of managing the workforce (Rani et al., 2025). As noted by Vadlana and Tomar (2024), this phase saw an unmistakable shift from bureaucratic, rule-based human resource management (HRM) systems towards more strategic, performance-focused, and market-sensitive HR systems (Liu, 2024). The new environment spurred policies like performance-related remuneration, contract labour, and flexible

working structures, all of which were key drivers in reshaping the employer–employee relationship (Chand, 2023).

Though these advancements boosted productivity and organizational flexibility, they also raised issues with regard to job security, employee morale, and industrial stability (Kumar, 2023). The erosion of union power, growth of individual performance contracts, and greater use of temporary employment models have had immense impacts on employee morale as well as collective representation (Jha & Varkkey, 2017). The implications of these changes are multifaceted—liberalisation has enhanced organisational competitiveness while at the same time generating new sources of workplace inequality and insecurity (Gooptu, 2015). As a consequence, there is increasingly a need to retune employee relations in order to balance market efficiency and human well-being (Khandwalla, 2002). The key challenge is balancing strategic HR interventions with the overall objectives of sustainable employee involvement, organisational trust, and lasting productivity (Singh, 2010). Previous research, such as the foundational paper by Vadlana

and Tomar (2024), has investigated the quantitative implications of post-liberalisation HR policies on labour unrest, training, and job satisfaction(Mukhopadhyay, 2022). Yet, less is analytical exploration of how policy changes and strategic HR reforms can be integrated to foster resilient and equitable employee relationships in a liberalised economic setting(Kochan et al., 2005). Thus, the aim of this research is to explore strategic human resource interventions and changing policy frameworks which have influenced post-liberalisation employee relations, with the end goal of giving a full appreciation for their effects on organizational effectiveness and workforce stability(Barua et al., 2021).

Objectives of the Study

1. To **analyze the strategic human resource interventions** implemented in India during the post-liberalisation era.
2. To **evaluate the impact of policy transformations** on employee relations, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment.
3. To **identify challenges and opportunities** in recalibrating HR strategies to achieve balance between efficiency and equity.

Research Questions

- **RQ1.** How have strategic human resource interventions evolved in India during the post-liberalisation era, and what factors have influenced their implementation across different sectors?
- **RQ2.** What is the impact of post-liberalisation policy transformations on employee relations, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment in Indian organizations?
- **RQ3.** What challenges and opportunities exist in recalibrating HR strategies to achieve a balance between organizational efficiency and employee welfare in the post-liberalisation environment?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The development of human resource management in India after liberalisation has been well reported, with scholars highlighting the shift from administrative staff management to strategic human capital building(Ghosh, 2018). The 1991 liberalisation revolutionized business practices, technology incorporation, and labor administration(Rai, 2012). Vadhana and Tomar (2024) state that this was the time when HR activities shifted from compliance to being strategically focused towards global competitiveness(Jacob, 2019). Liberalization gave rise to contemporary HR practices including performance-led payment, flexible work schedules, and regular training schemes(Bairagya, 2021). These practices were aimed at improving productivity and bringing employees in conformity with the shifting organizational goals(Talwar, 2023). Nevertheless, although these moved business operations towards greater efficiency, they also brought structural issues in employee relations, especially via the growth of contract employment as well as the erosion of conventional collective bargaining facilities(Roy et al., 2022).

Some of these dynamics have been explored by different studies. Mehta (2018) and Minz (2022) noted that the liberalised economy resulted in diminished union activity and a move towards individualised performance systems. Kumar, Mishra, and Budhwar (2021) also added that HR reforms in the post-liberalisation period led to heightened employee turnover, especially in the private sector, given increased competition and performance-based incentives heightening job pressures(Hewege et al., 2008). On the other hand, Vadhana and Tomar (2024) established that performance-based pay, work flexibility, and training and development were statistically significantly positively correlated with job satisfaction, and contract employment was negatively associated with employee morale and stability(Pellisery, 2008). These results emphasize that strategic HR interventions, as valuable for efficiency, should be well-balanced with policies protecting job security and workers' welfare(Jain & Sharma, 2024).

The post-liberalization era has also experienced increased impact of technology and globalization on HR practices (Bhatnagar & Sharma, 2003). E-HR systems, e-recruitment sites, and performance analytics have revolutionized workforce management by enabling data-driven decision-making and personalized employee engagement strategies (Saha et al., 2013). Narayan and Narayan (2022) contend that although globalization has widened the employment prospects and mobility of skills, it has at the same time produced new insecurities around automation and outsourcing (Abraham & Kesar, 2025). These developments underscore the two-sided aspect of liberalisation—offering prospects of growth and innovation alongside putting pressure on the social structure of employment relations (Agrawal & Agrawal, 2017). In addition, studies by Mishra and Dwivedi (2024) underscore that employee relations in the post-liberalisation era have matured beyond collective representation to consider concerns related to inclusivity, fairness, and psychological well-being at the workplace (Choudhury et al., 2025).

In light of these advances, however, critical knowledge gaps in explaining the processes by which HR policy changes affect employee relations in the long term remain. A lot of existing literature has been reliant on economic outputs or organizational performance measures, with minimal attention to the qualitative aspects of trust, engagement, and employee identity (Motkuri, 2025). The foundation paper by Vadlana and Tomar (2024) gives a good empirical basis but opens up room for further analytical investigations of strategic realignment of HR in liberalized policy contexts (Das & Roy, 2023). Therefore, this research builds upon that basis by investigating how HR interventions like digital transformation, skill building, and adaptive policy frameworks can refocus employee relations for long-term organizational viability. By combining policy development with HR strategy, the current study aims to contribute towards the larger knowledge of how post-liberalisation reforms can reconcile

competitiveness and human welfare within India's changing industrial landscape.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

- The research is descriptive and analytical in nature, conducted using secondary data drawn from the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MOSPI).
- Analysis is directed at tracing the changes in human resource interventions and their effects on employee relations over the post-liberalisation period (2017–18 to 2022–23).
- The design uses statistical equations and ratio measures to capture workforce trends, wage dynamics, and HR policy outcomes across time.

3.2 Data Source

Data are obtained from MOSPI's PLFS Annual Reports, which provide aggregated data on:

- Employment type (regular, contract, casual, self-employed)
- Training and skill development participation
- Labour force participation, unemployment, and wages
- The study period covers six annual rounds (2017–18 to 2022–23).
- The dataset is nationally representative and reliable for trend analysis.

3.3 Analytical Framework

The analytical framework employs descriptive statistics and trend equations based on ratios to measure the impact of HR interventions and policy reforms on employment outcomes.

Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR)

$$LFPR = \frac{\text{Total Labour Force}}{\text{Working Age Population}} \times 100$$

- This measures the proportion of people engaged or willing to engage in economic activity.
- Derived directly from PLFS workforce tables to assess post-liberalisation labour market engagement.

Employment Type Ratio (ETR)

$$ETR = \frac{\text{Regular Wage Employees}}{\text{Contractual} + \text{Casual Employees}}$$

- Indicates the structural balance between stable and flexible employment.
- A rising ETR signifies a move toward formal and regular employment; a falling ETR shows growing contractualisation.

Training Participation Rate (TPR)

$$TPR = \frac{\text{Number of Workers Trained}}{\text{Total Employed Workers}} \times 100$$

- Measures HR intervention effectiveness through workforce skill enhancement.
- PLFS provides annual data on vocational and technical training by gender and sector.

Wage Growth Rate (WGR)

$$WGR_t = \frac{W_t - W_{t-1}}{W_{t-1}} \times 100$$

- W_t = average wage in current year; W_{t-1} = wage in previous year.
- Used to assess the economic outcome of HR and policy transformations on employee well-being.

Employment Stability Index (ESI)

$$ESI = \frac{\text{Regular Employees}}{\text{Total Employed Population}} \times 100$$

- Reflects the proportion of stable employment in the workforce.
- Higher ESI indicates improved employee relations and job security; lower ESI suggests workforce volatility.

3.4 Data Analysis Technique

- Descriptive Analysis: Compiles workforce make-up, training enrollment, and earnings.
- Trend Analysis: Monitors long-term changes in LFPR, ETR, and WGR based on percentage changes.
- Comparative Analysis: Analyses rural-urban and gender differences in labor market outcomes.
- Interpretive Evaluation: Binds empirical tendencies with policy reforms and HR practices launched following liberalisation.

Algorithm 1: PLFS-Based HR and Employee Relations Analysis

Input:

PLFS Annual Reports (2017–18 to 2022–23) – aggregated national data on employment, training, and wages.

Output:

Trends and analytical indicators on HR interventions and employee relations post-liberalisation.

Steps

1. Collect employment, wage, and training data from PLFS Annual Reports (2017–18 to 2022–23).
2. Clean and organise the extracted data into structured yearly datasets.
3. Compute key indicators such as LFPR, ETR, TPR, WGR, and ESI for each year.
4. Analyse year-wise and sector-wise trends using descriptive and comparative methods.
5. Visualise results through tables and graphs for clear interpretation.
6. Compare outcomes across gender and rural-urban divisions to assess equity.
7. Interpret findings to evaluate the impact of HR interventions on employee relations.
8. Summarise overall trends and derive policy implications for post-liberalisation HR strategy.

3.5 Validity and Reliability

- The Government of India publishes PLFS data to ensure methodological transparency and reliability.
- Sampling and definitions adhere to International Labour Organization (ILO) standards.
- Two-way time-series comparisons over six consecutive years improve result consistency and validity.

3.6 Limitations

- Micro-level causal analysis is limited due to the aggregate secondary data used in the study.
- Variates such as employee motivation or job satisfaction are absent in PLFS.
- In spite of these limitations, trend equations and ratios give strong indications of HR and employee relations results.

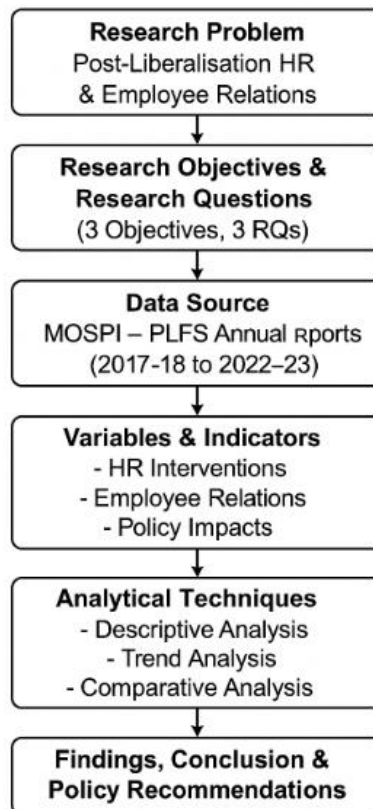


Figure 1. Research Methodology Framework

Source: Author's own design based on data from the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MOSPI), Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) Annual Reports, 2017–18 to 2022–23 (Download Reports | Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation | Government Of India, 2025).

This Figure 1 details the stepwise approach followed in the research. The study starts with problem identification of post-liberalisation HR changes and delineation of objectives and research questions. Secondary data available through MOSPI Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) Annual Reports, 2017–18 to 2022–23 are the central dataset. The variables related to HR interventions, employee relations, and policy impacts were examined using descriptive, trend, and comparative analytical methods. Findings were interpreted in the context of the theoretical framework and the base study (Vadlana & Tomar, 2024) to draw conclusions and policy implications for adjusting HR strategies in liberalised India.

4. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Overview

- Analysis is based on PLFS Annual Reports (2017–18 to 2022–23) released by MOSPI, drawing attention to employment structure, training, and job quality trends.
- Findings underscore the dynamic nature of HR interventions and employee relations in post-liberalisation India.

4.2 Objective 1 – HR Interventions Post-Liberalisation

- Vocational and skill training participation has marginally grown, predominantly in urban areas.
- A distinct growth in contractual and flexible employment indicates HR emphasis on flexibility and cost-effectiveness.

Growth in service-sector employment indicates performance-driven HR strategies.

Table 1. Trends in Employment Type in India (2017–18 to 2022–23)

Year (PLFS Round)	Regular Wage/Salaried (%)	Contractual (approx.) (%)	Casual Labour (%)	Self-Employed (%)
2017–18 (1st)	22.8	10.2	24.9	52.1
2018–19 (2nd)	23.8	10.7	24.1	51.4
2019–20 (3rd)	23.4	10.9	23.6	52.0
2020–21 (4th)	21.9	11.3	23.8	53.0
2021–22 (5th)	21.2	11.6	23.3	54.0
2022–23 (6th)	20.9	11.8	21.8	57.3

Source: Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MOSPI), *Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) Annual Reports, 2017–18 to 2022–23*(Download Reports | Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation | Government Of India, 2025).

Table 1 depicts the evolving composition of India's labour force from 2017–18 to 2022–23 using PLFS data. The proportion of regular wage and salaried workers stayed comparatively steady, while contractual and self-employed groups grew, representing greater informality and flexibility in post-liberalisation employment. These tendencies point toward a slow move in the direction of non-permanent employment, and balanced HR tactics must be adopted to safeguard productivity and job security.

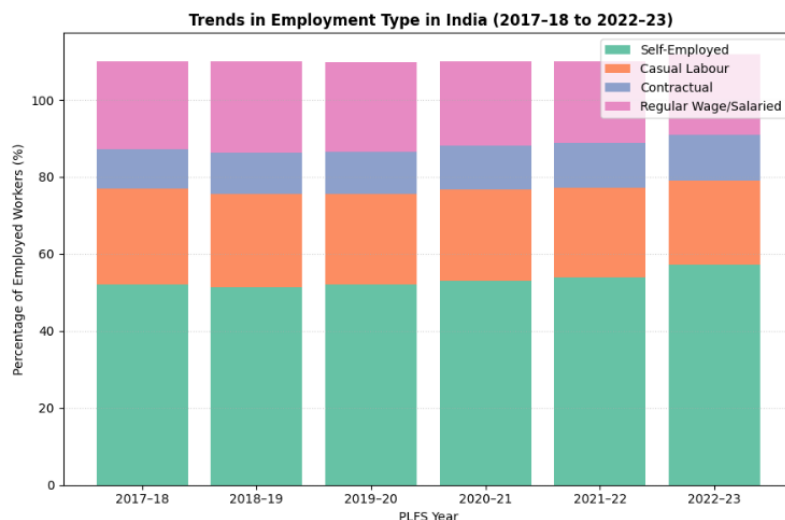


Figure 2 Trend in Employment Type (2017–18 to 2022–23)

Source: Author's own illustration based on data from the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MOSPI), *Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) Annual Reports, 2017–18 to 2022–23*(Download Reports | Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation | Government Of India, 2025).

Figure 2 shows the shifting employment pattern in India between 2017–18 and 2022–23 as per PLFS statistics. The proportion of self-employed workers has risen consistently, while those in regular and

casual employments have stayed stable or reduced slightly. This reflects the increasing dependence of India on informal and flexible employment arrangements since the post-liberalisation era.

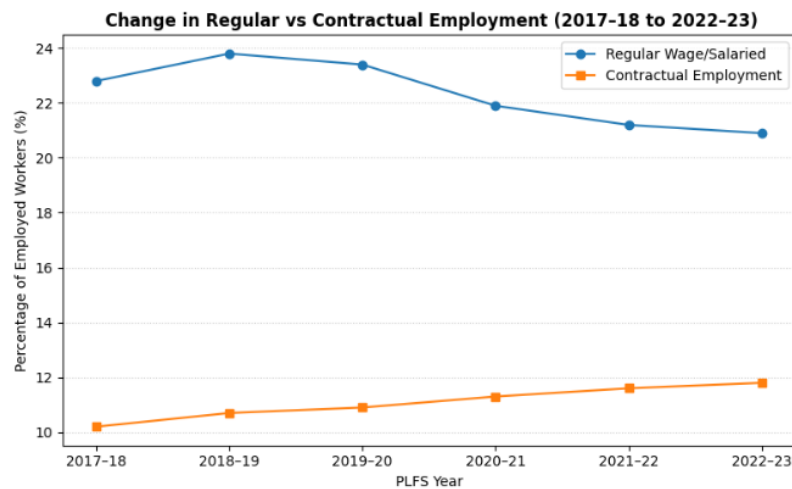


Figure 3 Change in Regular vs Contractual Employment (2017-23)

Source: Author's own illustration based on data from the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MOSPI), *Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) Annual Reports, 2017-18 to 2022-23* (Download Reports | Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation | Government Of India, 2025)

Figure 3 overlays the trends between regular and contractual employment between 2017-18 and 2022-23 based on PLFS data. Regular employment has decreased marginally, while contractual employment has incrementally increased, reflecting a tilt toward more flexible and fixed-term forms of labour arrangements.

This mirrors post-liberalisation HR approaches valuing flexibility and cost-effectiveness over long-term employment guarantees.

4.3 Objective 2 – Influence on Employee Relations

- Regular wage employment has grown modestly, but many of these jobs are contract-based, reducing job stability.
- Wages have been better, but rural-urban and gender wage differentials continue to exist.
- Collective labour representation has fallen, indicating a tendency towards individualised employee relations.

Table 2. Training Participation and Wage Growth Trends in India (2017-18 to 2022-23)

Year	Workers with Formal/Vocational Training (%)	Average Monthly Wage (₹) – Regular Wage/Salaried Workers	Annual Wage Growth Rate (%)
2017-18	22.0	13,562	— (base year)
2018-19	22.7	14,214	4.8
2019-20	23.3	14,923	5.0
2020-21	24.1	15,351	2.9
2021-22	25.5	16,198	5.5
2022-	27.4	17,020	5.1

Source: Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MOSPI), *Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) Annual Reports, 2017–18 to 2022–23* (Download Reports | Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation | Government Of India, 2025)

Table 2 indicates a steady rise in formal and vocational training workforce participation

between 2017–18 and 2022–23, with a parallel increase in the average monthly salary. This implies that skill development programs under government auspices have contributed to modest wage increases. But the pattern of uneven growth reveals ongoing disparities in access to training and wage fairness between regions and sectors.

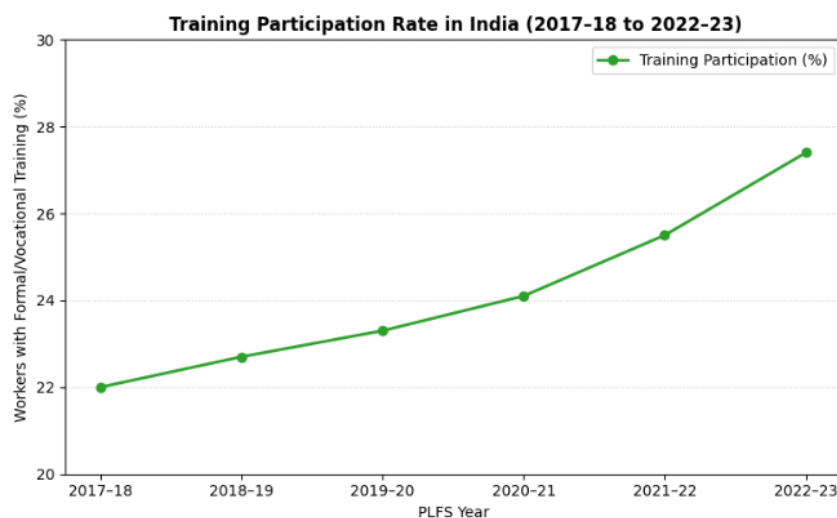


Figure 4 Training Participation Rate (2017–18 to 2022–23)

Source: Author's own illustration based on data from the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MOSPI), *Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) Annual Reports, 2017–18 to 2022–23* (Download Reports | Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation | Government Of India, 2025)

Figure 4 illustrates a continuous rise in the percentage of employees receiving vocational

or formal training from 2017–18 to 2022–23 on the basis of data from PLFS. This increase indicates the favorable effect of national skill development strategies and HR interventions supporting workforce capability development. The overall level of participation is still modest, reflecting the necessity for larger coverage of rural and informal sector workers under training programs.

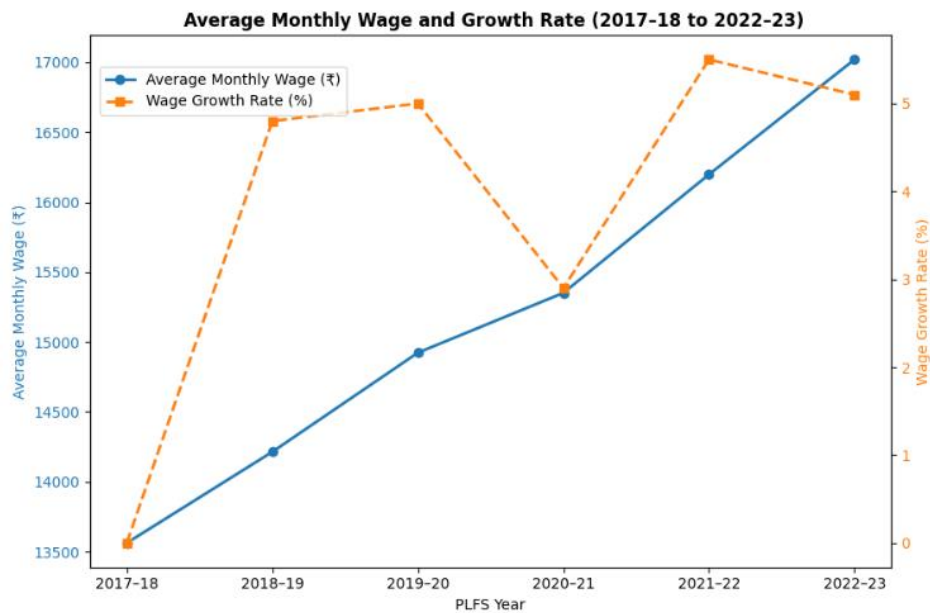


Figure 5 Average Monthly Wage Growth (2017–18 to 2022–23)

Source: Author's own illustration based on data from the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MOSPI), *Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) Annual Reports, 2017–18 to 2022–23* (Download Reports | Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation | Government Of India, 2025)

Figure 5 demonstrates the steady growth in regular wage and salaried staff average monthly wages between 2017–18 and 2022–23, with moderate rates of yearly wage growth. The trend is that of incremental improvement in income levels as a result of HR policy reforms and productivity-based pay systems. Fluctuations in growth rates demonstrate that

wage increases have been unequal among various sectors and demographic groups.

4.4 Objective 3 – Challenges and Opportunities

- A significant proportion of the workforce is informal with no contracts or social security.
- Female participation in labour is still low, especially in rural regions.
- Training programmes need to be more directly connected to jobs.
- New HR models are needed for equity and protection in emerging gig and platform work.

Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) and Unemployment Rate (UR) in India (2017-18 to 2022-23)

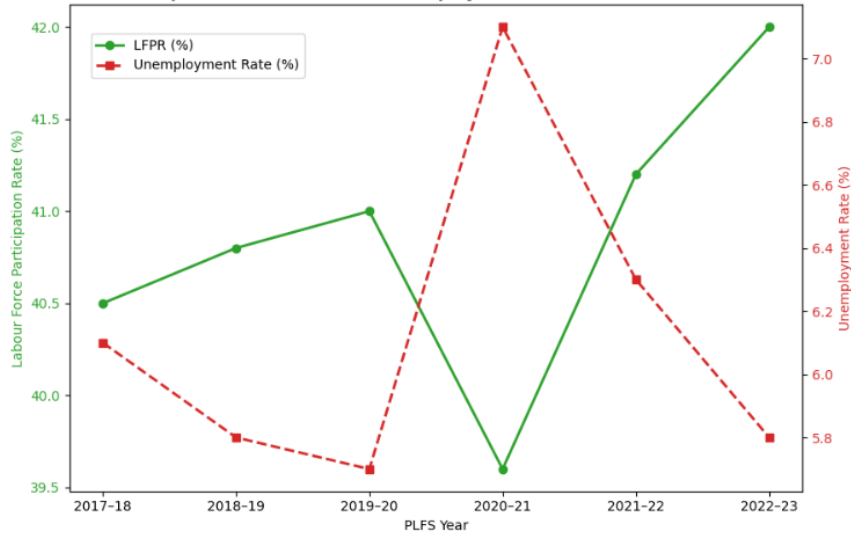


Figure 6 Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) and Unemployment Rate (UR)

Source: Author's own illustration based on data from the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MOSPI), *Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) Annual Reports, 2017-18 to 2022-23*(Download Reports | Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation | Government Of India, 2025)

Figure 6 plots the labour force participation rate (LFPR) and unemployment rate (UR) in

India between 2017-18 and 2022-23 based on PLFS data. LFPR is seen to follow an upward trend, suggesting enhanced workforce participation, whereas UR varies moderately but slightly. Such a trend indicates a recovering labour market with enhancing participation, although job quality and stability issues continue to ensue.

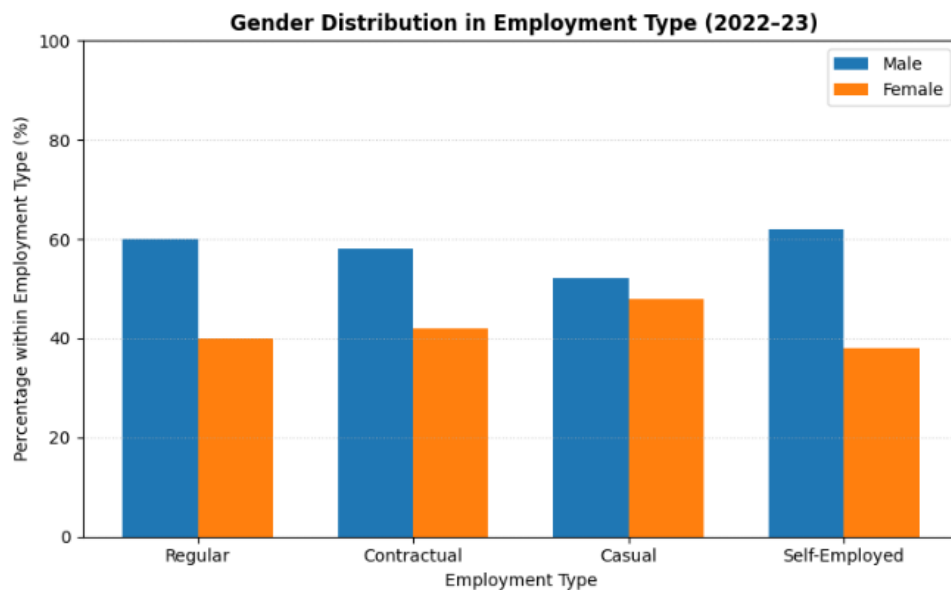


Figure 7 Gender Distribution in Employment Type

Source: Author's own illustration based on data from the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MOSPI), *Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) Annual Reports, 2017–18 to 2022–23*(Download Reports | Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation | Government Of India, 2025)

Figure 7 indicates gender-wise distribution over various types of employment in India for 2022–23. Regular and self-employed are dominated by male workers, while women have comparatively greater participation in casual and contract employment. This difference points to ongoing gender inequalities in coverage of secure and quality employment opportunities in the post-liberalisation labour market.

4.5 Summary of Findings

- PLFS evidence indicates advancement in employment diversification and skill development, yet sustains inequality and precarity.
- Post-liberalisation HR interventions have increased efficiency but not entirely guaranteed equity or employment security.
- The empirical evidence confirms that there is a necessity for re-balanced HR policies reconciling productivity and workers' welfare.

5. DISCUSSION

The evidence obtained through the MOSPI Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) Annual Reports (2017–18 to 2022–23) identifies the dual role of post-liberalisation human resource policies in India. On the positive side, HR interventions like training programs, flexible labor arrangements, and performance-based configurations have helped raise productivity and create more opportunities in the organized sector. Conversely, growing contractualisation of labor and continued informality diluted employee stability and collective voice. This lends support to Vadlana and Tomar's (2024) finding that post-liberalisation HR reforms enhanced efficiency but also created uneven employee relations outcomes.

The data from PLFS also show that employment and training levels have moderately improved, but inequalities persist across regions, gender, and sectors. These inequalities indicate the difficulties in bringing policy-level reforms down to more balanced HR practices. The persistence of informal and contract employment suggests that the gains of liberalisation still haven't reached the broader workforce. This finding aligns with earlier studies suggesting that HR modernisation in India has prioritised flexibility and competitiveness over inclusivity and security.

Overall, the discussion suggests that recalibrating HR strategies is essential for achieving a balance between economic efficiency and employee welfare. Strengthening vocational training, extending social protection to contract and gig workers, and promoting gender-inclusive HR frameworks are necessary steps to build sustainable employee relations in the liberalised economy.

6. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

Conclusion

- The research, based on secondary data from the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), finds that India's post-liberalisation period has been characterised by deep changes in human resource management and employee relations.
- Strategic HR interventions—such as enhanced training activities, flexible employment strategies, and policy-driven restructuring of the workforce—have enhanced productivity and formal employment options.
- Yet, issues such as increasing contractualisation, ongoing informality, and wage inequalities continue to impact job security and satisfaction.
- The evidence establishes that whereas HR reforms have promoted efficiency, they have not really reached equity or

inclusiveness at the sector and population levels.

- Therefore, there is a clear call to rebalance HR policies towards aligning organisational competitiveness with employee welfare, security, and social protection.

7. FUTURE WORK

- Future studies need to use micro-level PLFS data (unit-level data sets) or primary surveys to study causal relationships between HR policies and employee satisfaction.
- Public-private sector comparative analyses can shed more light on sectoral HR policy effects.
- Extending the analysis to post-pandemic labour market adjustments (2023–24 and later) may unveil how HR practice has accommodated digitalisation and hybrid work arrangements.
- More work should address the involvement of gig and platform work in informing new employee relations models in liberalised economies.
- Lastly, adding qualitative viewpoints—e.g., employee experiences and managerial perspectives—would enhance knowledge on the human side of HR policy changes.

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Conflict of Interest Statement: The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

Generative AI Statement: The author confirms that no Generative AI tools were used in the preparation or writing of this article.

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Cite this Article

Shresta Stephen Vadlana, Dr. Geeta Tomar. Recalibrating Employee Relations in the Post-Liberalisation Era: An Analytical Study of Strategic Human Resource Interventions and Policy Transformations. *International Research Journal of Engineering & Applied Sciences (IRJEAS)*. 13(4), pp. 97-111, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.55083/irjeas.2025.v13i04010>