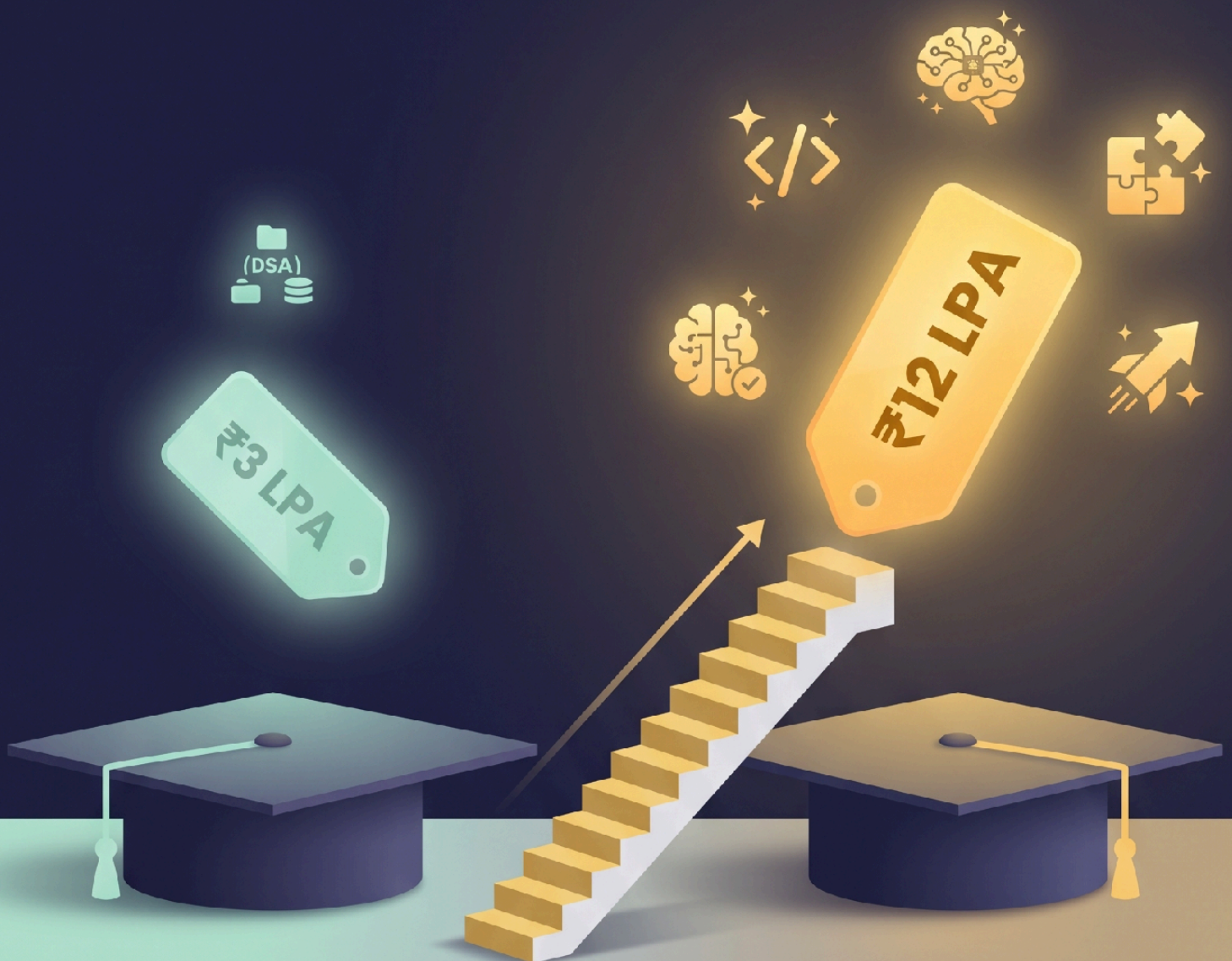


The ₹3 LPA vs ₹12 LPA Difference? It's Not Just DSA Anymore



The Two Engineers

Picture two engineers. Same college, same graduating year, same branch, similar CGPA.

One signs an offer that starts near the bottom of the generic IT band. The other walks into a specialised role at a product company, earning tens of lakhs higher.

Nothing about their degrees explains the gap.

What separates them is a portfolio of AI work and the skills behind it. And increasingly, an AI screens both of them before a recruiter reads a single line ^[1].

The ₹3 LPA vs ₹12 LPA difference isn't luck. It's not even just DSA. It's something else entirely.

The Gap, In Numbers

Let's start with what the money is saying.

Market salary guides for 2026 put Indian fresher pay across an enormous range: from roughly **₹3.5 LPA for generic IT roles to ₹40 LPA and above for AI/ML roles** at leading product companies ^[1].

Infosys is now offering fresher packages of **up to ₹21 lakh per annum** for specialised technology roles. The company plans to onboard engineering and computer science students for specialised roles, with salaries ranging from **₹7 lakh to ₹21 lakh per annum** ^[2].

The same analysis suggests AI-aligned candidates frequently earn **30 to 50 percent more** than peers with identical academic qualifications—a premium recruiters say is widening each quarter ^[1].

Yet here's the reality for most graduates: **75 to 80 percent of IT services freshers still enter traditional IT or digital roles at ₹4–6 LPA**. Only **5 to 7 percent** qualify for ₹10 LPA-plus offers, typically in AI, data, cloud, or product engineering roles hired through competitive specialist tracks ^[2].

The credential that used to set your starting band—your college tier and grades—is no longer the thing doing the sorting.

The Old Rules vs. The New Rules

For years, the path to a high-paying tech job was simple.

The Old Formula	The New Formula
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Get into a top college	Demonstrate specialised skills
Score a high CGPA	Build hands-on project experience
Crack the campus placement	Show AI collaboration ability
Join as a fresher	Start at a premium salary

In 2006, a fresher at a large IT services firm started at around ₹3.2 LPA. In 2026, many freshers still start at ₹3.6 LPA—a **12% hike in 20 years**. Meanwhile, rent is up by 300%. Milk prices are up by 250%. Adjusted for inflation, a fresher today earns **less in real terms** than someone who joined in 2010 ^[3].

The industry argument? Only **5 to 7 percent of freshers are employable** for premium roles ^[2]. But does that justify keeping entry-level pay frozen while top executives have seen **1,500% salary increases**?

This is the structural contrast playing out in India's tech sector: at the top, multi-crore executive compensation; at the bottom, starter salaries that struggle to keep pace with urban inflation ^[4].

What Creates the Difference?

The gap isn't about the college brand alone.

A Randstad analysis of **over 35 million job postings** between 2021 and 2026 found that entry-level workers with **verified AI skills earn 25 percent more** than their peers without those skills ^[5].

Not after years of experience. Not after a promotion. **At the entry level.**

In India, the premium is even steeper. **58 percent of Indian employers are willing to pay more than 15 percent higher salaries** to fresh graduates with GenAI micro-credentials—the highest proportion among seven countries surveyed. **81 percent of Indian employers** said candidates with micro-credentials move faster through hiring pipelines. And **97 percent** believe entry-level employees with micro-credentials perform better during their first year ^[6].

TeamLease Digital's Digital Skills & Salary Primer shows that freshers with job-ready AI, cloud, or data skills are earning an average starting salary of **₹7.5–9 LPA**, compared with **₹3.5–5 LPA** for standard IT roles ^[2].

The Hidden Differentiators

Here's what's actually creating the salary gap:

1. AI Literacy is Becoming Table Stakes

AI professionals could see **50 to 60 percent cumulative salary growth** over the next two to three years, while those in non-AI roles are likely to see **18 to 25 percent**. Companies have moved from a world where AI skills were a differentiator to one where **their absence is a disqualifier** ^[7].

2. Code Quality Matters More Than Syntax

Code Quality skills command a median salary of **£70,000** in the UK market ^[8]. The premium isn't about correctness—it's about maintainability, scalability, and security.

3. Capability Over Experience

Entry-level roles in highly AI-exposed occupations are now **seven times more likely to require skills that traditionally appeared later in a worker's career**—strategic decision-making, stakeholder management, leadership, and judgment. The "professionalised" roles, where AI handles routine work and humans bring judgment, are growing roughly **twice as fast** as the roles AI makes easier ^[1].

4. The Premium Is Real

Some organizations are willing to offer **higher compensation to secure niche talent**, especially where there is an immediate business need or skill scarcity ^[2]. Infosys is now offering specialist programmer (trainee) positions at **L3: ₹21 LPA, L2: ₹16 LPA, and L1: ₹10 LPA**, along with a joining bonus ^[9].

The Assessment Reality Check

Here's the inconvenient truth.

A Bengaluru-based CEO offering **₹50 LPA base salary** for a backend engineering role reviewed **1,000 applications** in just 2-3 days. The submissions? **"Mostly absolute trash. AI-generated crap everywhere. Code that doesn't even run. Libraries needed for the code to work are even missing"** ^[10].

The CEO's message was blunt: *"At this pay scale, expecting code that actually runs is justified"*.

The market is rewarding genuine skill—not just degrees, not just certifications, and not just AI-generated submissions. Companies are increasingly skilled at detecting shallow AI use. The premium goes to candidates who combine AI fluency with genuine understanding and judgment.

What This Means for You

The gap between ₹3 LPA and ₹12 LPA isn't determined by your college rank. It's determined by:

1. **What you can actually build**—not what your degree says you should know
2. **How you use AI tools**—as a thinking partner, not a substitute
3. **How you demonstrate your skills**—through portfolios, projects, and verifiable credentials
4. **How you approach problems**—with judgment, not just code generation

The average entry-level job might start to look more like a mid-level job. That means you have the opportunity to **accelerate your career faster** than any previous generation.

But only if you adapt.

The Opportunity Is Yours

A 25% salary premium at the start of your career isn't just a nice bonus—it's a powerful head start. Over a 40-year career, that difference can add up to **hundreds of thousands of dollars** in additional lifetime earnings.

The opportunity is within reach. Industry-recognized certifications are more accessible and affordable than ever, and the value they bring is backed by real hiring and salary data.

The question isn't whether the opportunity exists. It's whether you'll seize it before the rest of your graduating class does.

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