



# An Interdisciplinary Analysis Of Indian Gig Economy With A Focus On Women Workers

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## ABSTRACT

This study sought to understand the concept of the gig economy and the role of women workers in it. The challenges and future scope of the Indian gig economy are also explored. Under this study various studies have shown that the greater participation of female workers in gig work is due to flexibility in organizing home and work life together, and social insecurity was considered one of the biggest challenges that can be eliminated by implementing the relevant legislation. This study suggests greater support from the government and citizens for appropriate measures for women workers to improve the economy. This study is limited to women who face problems and challenges while working in a gig environment to earn and support their family life. An in-depth interviews were conducted with several actors from the "gig universe", women workers, and platform representatives in all four sectors. This study addressed the need to understand the role of women workers in the barriers they face while working in the gig economy and provide relative measures for its future scope in India.

**Keywords:** Gig Economy, Gig Work, Women Workers, Freelance, India

## 1. Introduction

With the advent of digitally driven work platforms, the information and communication technology (ICTD) industry has become even more casualized in recent years. Although labor has lost value as a result of neoliberal economic restructuring, the "sharing economy," which was defined by businesses established on information technology platforms, has altered the nature of work. This byproduct of neo-liberalization has resulted in significant changes in terms of speed, scope, and size, with work now lasting as short as a few minutes. The industrial relations of neoliberalism have been so severely impacted by this new industry that a new name, the "Gig Economy," has emerged to characterize the situation where workers now have "gigs" rather than jobs (Zwick, 2018; Bracha and Burke, 2018; Yaraghi and Ravi, 2017).

The gig economy, also known as sharing, is primarily an urban phenomenon that is quickly taking over as the main way that urban dwellers obtain the commodities and services they need, changing urban economies (Davidson and Infranca, 2016). According to the neo-liberal paradigm, the gig economy has made it possible to pursue new, technologically enabled career paths that offer good pay and "flexibility."

This new phrase describes the workforce or individuals that hire themselves or work for a set amount of time in order to meet their end demands.

There aren't many studies that have been done to clarify this word. As a result, the term "gig" has been used to refer to freelance work since 2009.

## 2. Review of Literature

Lehdonvirta, V. (2018) the objective of him was to comprehend the limitations that employees have when executing temporal flexibility. It discovered that cultural and cognitive limitations in addition to structural ones also restrict worker influence over scheduling. Additionally, it was discovered that in order to deal with these limitations, workers created communities, informal behaviors, and tools. Additionally, it was suggested that evaluating flexible work arrangements more effectively would involve putting less emphasis on worker control and more on outcomes. In addition to examining the degree of gender differences in job application

strategy, Liang, C. et al. (2018) looked into three key areas of job application strategy: bid timing, job selection, and avoidance. The study sought to determine whether there is a gender wage gap in the gig economy.

Prabhat, S. et al.'s 2019 study examines how ride-hailing applications are affecting the Indian market. It also looked into the opportunities and difficulties that the ride-hailing apps have created. It also provided insights from an anthropological study of Indian Uber drivers.

An overview of workers' experiences in the "on-demand" gig economy—which generally offers lower-skilled and lower-paid jobs than other forms of gig work—was the goal of Hunt, A., & Samman, E. (2019). It especially emphasized how it affects women, who are disadvantaged due to poverty and other interconnected inequities.

Doshi, B. M., and Tikyani, H. (2020) sought to comprehend the opportunities and challenges of gig work in India. Their study suggested how gig work could offer valuable job opportunities to people. Additionally, they proposed several key policy recommendations for the growth and enhancement of jobs within the gig economy.

Anwar, M. A., and Graham, M. (2020) investigated the livelihoods of remote gig workers in Africa, focusing on how they earn and sustain themselves. The study highlighted the ways in which these workers navigate various challenges on one of the world's largest gig economy platforms through practices of resilience, adaptation, and resistance.

Hunt, A., & Samman, E. (2020) aimed to investigate the introduction of on-demand platform models into South Africa's domestic work sector. They argued that these platforms perpetuate the daily abuse prevalent in the sector. Moreover, they asserted that on-demand companies further entrenched the undervaluation and lack of protection for the labor of marginalized women domestic workers.

Roy, G., & Shrivastava, A. K. (2020) explored the crucial roles of stakeholders in the gig economy. Their research highlighted how various factors influence the growth and significance of the gig economy in both the Indian and global contexts.

Gupta, S. (2020) sought to highlight the benefits of integrating workers' economic rights (such as employment, income security, and social protection) with the social dimensions of development (including labor rights and gender equality). The study proposed several recommendations for using developmental research to enhance livelihood opportunities in these emerging forms of work.

Kasliwal, R. (2020) investigated the challenges faced by women workers on gig platforms and analyzed how these platforms address their needs. The study identified gender gaps in gig work and provided various recommendations to support women workers.

Chaudhary, R. (2021) sought to gain insight into the impact of India's expanding platform-based gig economy on women's employment and working conditions. The study delved deeply into the nature of women's employment within India's prominent platform companies, examining various labor practices and the challenges faced by workers. Additionally, it aimed to understand the effects of the gig economy on women's security, empowerment, and agency.

Ghosh, A. (2021) aimed to analyse the engagement of those women working in the gig economy in India, while studying deeply about such women workers into four main sectors that includes beauty work, domestic work as well as cab driving or food delivery particularly in three main urban cities i.e. Delhi-NCR, Bengaluru and Mumbai.

Loganathan, M. (2021) aimed to assess the impact of gig workers on social sustainability, focusing on measuring SDG eight indicators in India and comparing these with UN and ILO standards. The study identified significant opportunities to enhance indicator measurements in India. Given the global rise of non-standard employment, including gig work, and the large informal sector in India, several levers were proposed to expand current indicator measures to better include gig workers.

Tan, Z. M. et al. (2021) aimed to provide a direct and structured analysis of the ethical challenges in the gig economy. The study offered an overview of the gig economy's scope and scale, mapping key ethical issues into three categories: the nature of new organizational work, the process of performing new types of work, and the status of workers involved in these activities.

Singh, H. et al. (2022) aimed to include various dimensions, elements, and components of both the positive and negative aspects of the gig economy, analyzing its effects on the market and traditional payroll-based employment.

Behl, A. et al. (2022) aimed to explore the hurdles and barriers in the food delivery sector during the entry of gig workers, examining the cause-and-effect relationship between these entry barriers and gig platforms. Strategies were developed to reduce entry-level barriers, enhance productivity, and increase employment opportunities.

Chakraborty, R. et al. (2022) focused on women's employment in the formal sector, the role of new-age start-ups, the implications of newly formed labor codes, and the union's perspective. The study explored potential policy upgrades and provided industry-specific insights on the gig economy across major industries, emphasizing the importance of policies for sustaining this ecosystem. Dey, C. et al. (2022) examined the rise of gig work, discussing different types of gig platforms and their characteristics. The study elaborated on the risks and challenges faced by Indian companies employing non-standard workers through online platforms and provided recommendations for HR professionals.

Choudhary, V., & Shireshi, S. S. (2022) aimed to understand the challenges faced by gig workers and suggested that effective regulation could mitigate these issues. The study identified seven characteristics of the gig economy that negatively impact worker well-being and offered various international suggestions and innovative methods to improve conditions for gig workers in India. Kutty, S. H., & Sundararajan, S. (2022) aimed to study the factors influencing the gig workforce, noting that businesses can choose the best candidates from a global pool and that workers can select from various temporary employment opportunities worldwide. Purswani, N. (2022) aimed to study gig economy trends, focusing on key drivers in the Indian context, predicting future trends, and comparing job satisfaction between men and women in both sectors, with a focus on women respondents. Reem, A. D. (2022) found that female participants experienced a more positive impact on their personal and professional development within the gig economy compared to male participants. The study also concluded that the gig economy could address major challenges affecting the nursing workforce in Saudi Arabia, hindering the Saudization process.

### 3. Gig Economy

The gig economy refers to a market system where organizations or companies hire contract workers for short-term engagements. These independent workers are typically employed for a specific period to fulfill temporary commitments. The term "gig" is associated with this defined period, indicating that workers are engaged to complete tasks as required by the organization. Gig workers mainly include freelancers, project-based workers, independent contractors, and part-time hires. Several factors have contributed to the rise of the gig economy, such as a mobile workforce and digital platforms that facilitate remote work. Additionally, gig apps and digital technologies enable connections between customers and gig workers. One of the primary benefits of working in this environment is the ability to choose whom to work with and to set a flexible schedule. Many studies have shown a recent trend among workers to frequently change jobs until they find a profession that aligns with their interests, which has contributed to the growth of the gig economy globally (Nair, 2019).

The gig economy can be further divided into two types: the digital gig economy, which involves online labor, and the physical gig economy, which involves work-on-demand via apps (Heeks, 2017).

#### 3.1 The rise of the Gig Economy

According to Intuit and Emergent Research (2022), 59 percent of independent workers in the U.S. began freelancing by choice rather than necessity. Over 83 percent of these freelancers were motivated by the benefits of flexibility and independence. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this trend, as many people who lost traditional jobs turned to gig work, either temporarily or permanently. Upwork estimates that by 2025, 22 percent of the workforce (36.2 million Americans) will be working from home. Additionally, an OECD report indicates that the crisis has accelerated existing trends toward more flexible work patterns.

#### 3.2 Role of Women Workers in Gig Economy in India

With the advent of technology platforms, it is estimated that 85% of India's workforce is employed in the informal sector. Women, traditionally dominant in home-cleaning and caregiving roles, have increasingly participated in the gig economy due to the flexibility of working hours. This flexibility allows them to work four to five hours a day through company platforms, earning a decent income to support their families (Times of India, April 2022). Nowadays, women find various job opportunities that enable them to work for limited hours from home or any location of their choice, helping them support their families.

A major reason for the high attrition rate among the female workforce is the difficulty in managing both domestic responsibilities and paid work. Gig platforms provide the flexibility needed to balance work and family life adequately. While many studies suggest that more women would join these gig platforms to improve workforce participation rates, statistically, there has been only minimal improvement (Kasliwal, 2020). Women tend to choose job opportunities that offer freedom and flexibility to manage their paid and unpaid work, keeping them close to their domestic life (Messenger, 2018; Zaidi & Chigateri, 2017). Women should also have the capability to choose between societal expectations and self-interest depending on the type of work (Kabeer, 2012). Various studies have found that informal women workers in India have negligible access to social security benefits. Although numerous rules and provisions exist for social security in factories and construction sites, their implementation remains poor. Women in the unorganized sector do not enjoy maternity leave policies like those in the formal sector. There is a significant gap between gig work and traditional domestic work in terms of access to social security schemes, adversely affecting informal women workers (Ghosh, 2021). The digital gender divide is a significant cause of the low rate of female workforce participation (Mawii, 2019). The reliance on technology and digital skills for employability can negatively impact Indian women with limited or no knowledge of digital tools (Chaudhary, 2020). Declining female participation in the workforce has resulted in limited representation of women in the gig economy. Factors contributing to this include lack of education, high fertility rates, and the age of marriage (Chaudhary & Verick, 2014).

Major employers of the gig workforce include companies like Uber, Amazon, Ola, UrbanClap, Swiggy, Zomato, and Flipkart. These digital platforms create job opportunities where women actively participate due to the flexible work environment, enabling them to earn a good living in the gig economy. Women often work

in beauty and wellness services through platforms like Urban Company, Door Task, House Joy, and others, which offer more flexibility compared to regular salaried jobs (Chaudhary, 2021).

#### 4 Gig Economy challenges and issues

The report titled "India's Emerging Gig Economy: The Future of Work for Women" highlighted the exploitation and discrimination faced by women workers in the gig economy. It also shed light on the employment status concerning the implementation of the Code on Social Security, 2020. Women workers in the gig economy often lack legal protection in their workplace, with desk job employees particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment. This underscores the platform's failure to provide adequate legal protection for these women workers, as there is currently no Indian law safeguarding their rights (Equal Times).

While the gig economy offers a flexible work environment and financial independence, it presents challenges in earning a stable income. Studies indicate that women struggle with unpredictable working hours and receive minimal support from their families in balancing unpaid domestic responsibilities with earning a living (Chaudhary, 2021). Wage disparity is another issue, with research showing that women are often relegated to lower-paying roles and perceive themselves as undervalued compared to men. This bias further exacerbates their engagement in domestic responsibilities, making it difficult to generate profits during peak hours. Additional challenges faced by women workers include the lack of benefits such as health insurance and fringe benefits, as well as income instability and insecurity, which impede their ability to exercise freedom of association. The gig economy disrupts the work-life balance of gig workers due to the temporary nature of their positions, making it challenging to establish long-term relationships within organizations. Furthermore, gig workers struggle to advance their careers due to the temporary nature of their positions, contributing to job insecurity in the future.

#### 5. Prospective Range

Even while the gig economy presents difficulties, there are still chances for gig labor. Professionals are giving up their comfort and sleep to contribute to the development of the contemporary freelance environment as innovation picks up speed. These professionals are routinely hired by businesses for a variety of purposes, including customer service, business-related tasks, learning and development, and website development support. Each company is taking advantage of this new development to offer sufficient knowledge and expertise at a reasonable cost. As a result, it offers young professionals and those looking for job exposure good work chances. However, women can also benefit from working in such an environment where they can choose their own flexible work hours and strike a balance between their personal and professional lives. As a result, it assists in growing the labor size at a reduced expense (Roy & Shrivastava, 2020).

Women who work in gig-type environments benefit from having flexibility in their work schedules and financial freedom. A limited number of studies have demonstrated that the government is working to put social security benefits regulations into practice, particularly those pertaining to the physical and digital safety of female gig workers as well as recommendations for employment prospects. Studies have also shown that in order for women to launch and advance in their careers, more needs to be done to improve their working conditions. It is also disheartening to learn that there are more and more women working on gig platforms, since their presence has an impact on the economy's balanced growth (Kasliwal, 2020).

It is imperative to offer training development programs and skill development courses to gig workers, as this can motivate female workers to advance into more employable roles. In order to file complaints about the demands and circumstances of workers, there should be a grievance redressal mechanism. Adopting more policies that support women in the economy and implementing a more methodical approach to providing proper labor protection are also important (Chaudhary, 2020). Legislation pertaining to policy, regular pay sets, protection or safety, and other advantages like maternity leaves, menstrual leave, adoption leaves, etc. should be appropriate for women employed in the workforce. In order to motivate them to provide for their families, it is also crucial to take these clauses and advantages into account (Ghosh, 2021).

Many studies have revealed about the rise in gig economy during last few years that has led to so many changes in the labour market as well as the workforce that has increased employees' access to reach the clients due to the growing rate of mobile devices with internet connection. Therefore, this platform offers a vast opportunity in expanding the gig markets in other countries as well as in India (Kutty & Sundararajan, 2022).

#### 5 Conclusion

Various research studies have shown that the rapid growth of the gig economy is driven by advancements in innovation and technology worldwide. This growth offers promising career opportunities, particularly for individuals seeking flexible job positions. Women, who often struggle with the rigid schedules of traditional work due to domestic responsibilities, find the gig economy especially appealing. Historically, women primarily managed household activities and relied on their husbands or parents for financial support. However, the modern era emphasizes the need for financial independence. Despite concerns that a significant increase in women's participation in the gig economy could challenge economic growth rates, the



government is actively working to provide legislative benefits. These benefits aim to offer protection and enhance career prospects for women in the gig economy.

In conclusion, government intervention can significantly improve the gig economy, ensuring that workers enjoy better benefits and work conditions. This can enhance the work culture for gig workers, thereby contributing positively to the economy in India and other nations as well.

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