

THE GIG ECONOMY AND WOMEN WORKERS: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

In 21st century we are witnessing the new concept of economy called as “Gig Economy”. Both men and women are provided with flexible employment opportunities in gig economy. Over the period of time, India, has experienced significant growth, employing millions various sectors. However, this expansion has also highlighted challenges related to differences in income and the limited legislations available to protect gig workers. During COVID-19 were people lost their jobs temporary and permanently gig economy played a crucial role for providing employment. This research paper focuses on participation of women in the gig economy, highlighting the opportunities and hardships faced by them. While gig work offers supply and independence, it also presents gender-specific obstacles, including wage disparities, lack of social protections and job insecurities. To enhance the concern of women in gig economy the paper focuses on the earlier Acts, new policies and strategies made by the government.

Key words- *Gig economy, gig workers, short term, women, flexibility, opportunities, safety measures.*

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Introduction:

We have seen the drastic change in recent times in the nature of employment/ jobs that is typical and permanent to temporary and flexible or elastic. The employment is contract based, temporary, feasible instead of full time. The, nature of employment is short term contractual relationship that stands to benefit both employer and worker. The gig economy, characterized by freelance, short-term, Short lived, and on-demand work, has grown significantly in recent years, is generated by digital platforms such as Urban Company, Ola, Uber, Upwork, TaskRabbit, Zomato.

Women have increasingly entered this workforce, attracted by the promise of flexibility and balance between work and private and social life. However, the gig economy also complicates gender inequalities, as women often earn less, work in lower-paying sectors, and face barriers to career growth. The present paper aims to look over the opportunities and hardships that

are faced by women as a participant of the gig economy and propose policy interventions to improve their working conditions.

Key features of the gig economy include:

- **Flexibility:** There is time and choice flexibility to Workers. They can choose when and where to work.
- **Independence:** Workers operate as freelancers or independent contractors for short term rather than full time employees.
- **Technology-driven:** Online platforms provide short term employment for gigs.
- **Lack of benefits:** Gig workers are denied with the benefits of health insurance, paid leave, or job security.

Literature Review:

Dr. Shefali Pawar et al (2024) studied that although there is rapid growth in gig economy the women participants find it flexible due to domestic responsibilities and working time. She also emphasised

on that, the government should make laws to protect such workers.

Dr. Balwant Singh Mehta (2023) focused on the statistical data of traditional employment along with new trend of gig employment. He studied the scope and challenges in India. He also suggested future policies for the growth and betterment of gig workers.

Ria Kasliwal (2020) studied the gender issues in gig economy, legislation especially on the protection of women are very scarce.

Heeks (2017) emphasis that online labour platform can have digitalization of organisation of work or work itself or by both.

Zaidi et al (2017) The gender gap is attributed to the fact that the women's work is often governed by the unviability of decent work.

Gig Economy: Opportunities for Women.

1. Flexibility and Work-Life Balance

Flexibility is one of the main attractions of gig work for women. Flexible working hours can help to have greater control over their schedules, and allowing them balance their work and manage their domestic life. Many women use gig platforms to work part-time, set their schedules, and avoid the rigid structures of traditional employment.

2. Financial Independence

Women are provided with an opportunity to be financially independent. It allows them to contribute household income and also make independent decision maker. They are also provided with an opportunity especially in regions where cultural norms limit their participation in formal employment.

3. Entrepreneurship and Skill Development

Many gig jobs require specific skills, promoting women to acquire new competencies. Digital platforms enable women to access global job markets, increasing their income potential. It has also provided platforms to start small businesses, exploiting their skills in areas such as writing, design, tutoring, and home-based

services. Financial and institutional support for women-led startups in the gig economy can promote economic empowerment. Access to microfinance, grants, and mentorship programs can help women succeed in gig-based businesses.

4. Digital Literacy and Skill Development Programs

Initiatives aimed at improving digital literacy and technical skills for women can enhance their access to high-paying gig opportunities. Governments and private sectors should collaborate to offer training programs.

Gig Economy : Problems Faced by Women

1. Pay Gap

Studies indicate that, due to occupational segregation and lower negotiation power women are paid less than male. Women are more likely to take up caregiving-related or lower-paying gigs, while men dominate higher-paying technology and transportation sectors.

2. Job Insecurity and Lack of Benefits

Traditional employment provides stability whereas stability lacks in gig workers, with health insurance, no access to paid leave, retirement benefits and other benefits. Economic vulnerabilities are faced by the women, who often rely on gig work as a primary or supplementary income source.

3. Workplace Harassment and Safety Measures

Women gig workers, particularly those in transportation and domestic services, are vulnerable to harassment and unsafe working conditions. Gig workers, particularly women, face hardships like harassment and violence during their assignments. The absence of formal workplace protections complicates women's safety.

4. Digital Divide and Barriers to Entry

Many gig jobs require specific skills, promoting women to acquire new competencies. They should have access to technology and digital literacy remain significant barriers for women, especially in

developing economies. Many women lack the necessary skills or resources to fully participate in high-paying gig work.

Inadequate laws to protect gig workers

The expansion of gig economy has also highlighted challenges related to discrimination and the limited legal protections available to gig workers.

- 1. Equal Remuneration Act, 1976:** The act aims prohibits gender-based wage discrimination. “Equal pay for equal work” and the application of this act remains ambiguous in respect of gig workers.
- 2. Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013:** The present Act aims to protect women at their place of work from sexual harassment. As the gig women workers are employed for short term the application of this law to gig workers is not clearly defined.
- 3. The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 (Amended 2017) :** This act remains ambiguous while advocating maternity benefits.
- 4. The Workmen Compensation Act, 1923 (Now named as Employees Compensation Act, 1923) :** This act was enacted to provide financial protection to the employees and their dependents in case of any injury caused, any disability or death caused in due course of employment. But, as the gig workers are considered as independent workers they are excluded from this Act.

NITI Ayog and Statistical Data

According to NITI Ayog, India is witnessing growing significance of the gig workers. In its report “India’s Booming gig and platform Economy”, the Aayog had estimates from 7.7 million in 2020-21 which is expected to raise 23.5 million by 2029-30. The participation of female workers is growing at slower rate. The report notes that female labour force participation in India has remained between 16% to 23% in recent years.

NITI Aayog has proposed several recommendations to meet the challenges and promote greater inclusion of women in the gig economy:

- 1. Fiscal Incentives:** Where women are offered tax rebates or startup grants to businesses where women constitute a substantial portion of the workforce, suggesting a threshold of 30% or more.
- 2. Skill Development and Training:** Collaborating with platforms to provide targeted skill development programs for women, enhancing their employability in various sectors of the gig economy.
- 3. Social Security Measures:** Implementing provisions from the Code on Social Security, 2020, aims to give health and maternity benefits, secure life and disability cover, and old age protection to gig and platform workers.
- 4. Enhancing Accessibility and Safety:** Encouraging platform businesses to create a more enabling environment for women through changes in work design and workplace facilities, ensuring safety and accessibility.

By implementing these above measures, NITI Aayog aims to create a more inclusive gig economy that leverages the potential of women, thereby contributing to economic growth and gender equality.

Recent Legislations

Indian government has taken an initiative to protect gig workers:-

1. Rajasthan is the first state to make the law in respect of gig workers “ Rajasthan Platform Based Gig Workers (Registration and Welfare) Act, 2023.”
2. The Code on Social Security, 2020: It recognises the gig and platform workers in different category. The act has provisions regarding social security and other benefits. It also enables the government to frame policies and schemes for gig workers especially women.
3. The Occupational Safety, Health, and Working Conditions Code, 2020:- It aims to ensure safe

working conditions, which may protect women gig workers.

Conclusion:

On one hand gig economy provides opportunities and on other hand unsolved challenges for women workers. While it offers flexibility and economic independence, gender inequalities persist in pay, security, and career growth. While managing these disparities it requires coordinated efforts from governments, businesses, and digital platforms to ensure inclusive growth and fair working conditions for women in the gig workforce.

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