

GIG WORK AND GENDER DYNAMICS: A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN INDIA'S GIG ECONOMY

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ABSTRACT

Understanding the gig economy and the role of women workers within it is the goal of this research article. It looks at the difficulties and prospects of India's gig economy. Due to the flexibility, it offers in juggling their personal and professional life, some studies have found that women workers are more likely to engage in gig labour. However, social insecurity is regarded as a significant issue that can be resolved with appropriate legislation. According to the survey, more assistance from the public and government is needed to put policies into place that would help women workers and boost the economy. The study focuses on women employees who face difficulties and problems while working in the gig economy to provide for their families. It addresses the importance of comprehending the role of women workers and the challenges they encounter in the gig economy, as well as offering solutions for its further growth in India.

Keywords: Gig Economy, Gig Work, Women Workers, Gender Dynamics, India

1. INTRODUCTION

In the music industry, the word "gig" first appeared in the 1920s to describe a performance engagement. Its definition broadened over time to include the idea of the "Gig Economy," in which people work as independent contractors to fulfil their financial needs. In the gig economy, businesses hire people on a contract basis for brief assignments so they may provide their services as needed. These employees are hired to carry out predetermined, time-bound tasks. The term "gig" is closely associated with this specific time frame in which these people are employed. Freelancers, independent contractors, project-based workers, and part-time employees are all considered gig workers.

The gig economy has grown as a result of a number of causes, including the rise of the mobile workforce, digital platforms that allow remote work, and different gig apps and digital technologies that link gig workers and clients. The flexibility of this setting, which lets people choose their coworkers and schedules, is what makes it so appealing. According to studies, workers are increasingly switching occupations frequently until they find work in their intended profession, which is helping the gig economy grow globally (Nair, 2019). According to Heeks (2017), there are two types of gig economies: the digital gig economy, which includes online labour, and the physical gig economy, which is centered on on-demand work made possible by apps.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Lehdonvirta, V. (2018) investigated the difficulties employees encounter while arranging their schedules. The study discovered that worker power over scheduling was limited by both structural and cultural-cognitive restrictions. In order to overcome these limitations, workers created groups and informal activities, which were also highlighted. The study suggested evaluating flexible working options by concentrating on results rather than employee control. On the other hand, Liang, C. et al. (2018) investigated the gender wage gap in the gig economy, concentrating on the disparities between the sexes in terms of job application tactics, bid timing, work selection, and monitoring avoidance.

Hunt, A., & Samman, E. (2019) summarized workers' experiences in the 'on demand' gig economy, emphasizing its impact on women facing intersecting inequalities and disadvantages related to poverty. Conversely, Prabhat, S. et al. (2019) looked into the opportunities and problems that ride-hailing apps brought to the Indian market. The study presented findings from an ethnographic investigation of Indian Uber drivers.

The livelihoods of distant gig workers in Africa were studied by Anwar, M. A., & Graham, M. (2020), along with their resistance, reworking, and resilience strategies to deal with gig economy constraints. Doshi, B. M., & Tikyani, H. (2020) sought to comprehend the potential and challenges of gig work in India and proposed strategies to improve employment prospects in the gig economy. The advantages of connecting economic rights and social elements to enhance livelihood prospects in new types of labour were the main focus of Gupta, S. (2020).

Kasliwal, R. (2020) examined the problems faced by female gig workers, found gender disparities, and offered suggestions to help them. The responsibilities of the gig economy's stakeholders as well as the elements driving its expansion and significance in both the Indian and global contexts were investigated by Roy, G., & Shrivastava, A. K. (2020).

Chaudhary, R. (2021), with an emphasis on labour practices and their effects on women's security, empowerment, or agency, investigated how India's platform-based gig economy affected women's employment and working conditions., Ghosh, A. (2021) examined the participation of women in India's gig economy, namely in the fields of beauty, housework, cab driving, and food delivery in urban areas of Delhi-NCR, Bengaluru, and Mumbai.

A study by Loganathan, M. (2021) evaluated the effect of gig workers on social sustainability in India. The study discovered substantial potential for enhancing the measurement of the SDG eight indicators in India by contrasting it with the UN and ILO standards. A straightforward and organized examination of the moral dilemmas facing the gig economy was the goal of Tan, Z. M. et al. (2021). In addition to outlining the gig economy's size and extent, they also identified three main categories of ethical issues: those pertaining to the work itself, the work process, and worker status.

Behl, A. et al. (2022) explored the entry barriers for gig workers in the food delivery sector and examined strategies to reduce these barriers to increase output and job prospects. Chakraborty, R. et al. (2022) focused on women's employment and the implications of labour codes and industry-specific insights on the gig economy. They proposed policy changes to ensure the sustainability of the gig economy ecosystem.

Choudhary, V., & Shireshi, S. S. (2022) sought to comprehend the difficulties gig workers encounter and proposed practical regulatory measures to lessen their hardships. In their study of the growth of gig work in India, Dey, C. et al. (2022) covered the different kinds of gig platforms, their features, and the dangers and difficulties experienced by businesses using

non-standard workers. The factors affecting the workforce and the effects on companies and people in the gig economy were examined by Kutty, S. H., & Sundararajan, S. (2022).

Purswani, N. (2022) investigated the gig economy's patterns in India, concentrating on important factors and forecasting emerging patterns. Reem, A. D. (2022) explored how the gig economy affected women workers and how it can help Saudi Arabia's labour need. Singh, H. et al. (2022) investigated the gig economy's many facets and how it affects the market and traditional jobs.

Rani, U., & Furrer, M. (2023) employed an intersectional perspective to analyse how gender interacts with factors such as caste, class, education, and geographical location in shaping outcomes within the gig economy. Their work demonstrates that women's experiences in platform-based work are highly heterogeneous and underscores the limitations of uniform policy approaches in addressing gendered inequalities.

Bansal, T., & De, S. (2024) adopted a mixed qualitative–quantitative approach to examine gender discrepancies in how women engage with digital platforms, focusing on socio-economic barriers and the “missing women” phenomenon in Indian platforms — contributing to the broader debate on gendered labor stratification.

Sharma, A. K., & Sharma, R. (2025) discovered recent academic and practitioner pieces (2023–2025) growing but still limited rigorous quantitative evidence about long-term career trajectories of women in gig work, intersectional analyses (caste, class, urban/rural), and evaluations of interventions (digital literacy, microfinance, safety features). They call for longitudinal datasets, randomized or quasi-experimental evaluations of policies, and disaggregated platform-level data to build actionable insights.

Sen, S., & Kalita, M. (2025) explored in their empirical study that not just participation patterns but also the health effects of gig work on women — an angle that recent research emphasizes, linking platform work conditions to reproductive health outcomes and broader wellbeing. It highlighted how barriers like lack of social protections and healthcare access intersect with gender, expanding the literature beyond employment metrics to include health vulnerabilities.

3. WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTION TO INDIA'S GIG ECONOMY

This section highlights the growing participation of women in the gig economy, primarily in areas such as home-cleaning or caregiving. The gig economy offers flexibility in working hours, enabling women to balance work and family responsibilities. This flexibility has attracted women to work for limited hours while supporting their families, addressing the challenges of managing domestic and paid work. Several studies have shown that many women are interested in joining gig platforms to enhance their opportunities for flexible work and better work-life balance (Kasliwal, 2020). They often prefer work that allows them freedom and flexibility to manage both paid and unpaid work, especially those that accommodate their domestic responsibilities (Messenger, 2018; Zaidi and Chigateri, 2017). Kabeer, (2012) thought that women should be empowered to choose between societal and personal needs, especially in the type of work they pursue.

In India, informal women workers face challenges in accessing social security. While regulations exist for social security in formal workplaces, they are often poorly enforced. Women in the unorganized sector have limited access to maternity leave compared to those in the formal sector, creating a significant gap in social security provisions (Ghosh, 2021). Uber, Amazon, Ola, Swiggy, Zomato, and Flipkart are some of the biggest employers of gig workers. Women now have more employment options because to digital platforms, especially

in flexible work settings like the wellness and beauty services offered by companies like Housejoy, Dunzo, Urban Company, and others (Chaudhary, 2021).

Women are underrepresented in the gig economy as a result of characteristics including education, pregnancy rates, and early marriage that contribute to the decline in female workforce participation (Chaudhary & Verick, 2014). One of the main causes of the low percentage of female workforce engagement is the digital gender divide (Mawii, 2019). Indian women's employment has also been influenced by their lack of familiarity with digital tools and technology, creating further difficulties (Chaudhary, 2020).

4. ISSUES IN THE GIG ECONOMY

The paper "India's Emerging Gig Economy: The Future of Work for Women" brought attention to the discrimination and abuse of women in the gig economy. Additionally, it disclosed the job situation in the context of the 2020 Code on Social Security. According to the survey, women workers find it challenging to operate in the gig economy since their employers do not provide them with any legal protections. Sexual harassment is a common occurrence for women who have desk jobs. This further suggests that this platform is not in charge of giving these female employees legal protection. According to <https://www.equaltimes.org>, there is no Indian law that guarantees the safety or security of female employees. Working on this platform offers financial independence and a flexible work environment, but it also makes it more difficult to make a consistent or steady income. According to one study, working erratic hours is equally challenging for women. In addition to doing their unpaid domestic labor at home, their families provide them with very little assistance in making a living (Chaudhary, 2021).

Another problem with the gig economy is wage inequality; according to some studies, women work in lower-paying positions because they believe their worth is lower than that of males.

Due to their involvement in household duties, women are further discriminated against and find it more difficult to make money during peak hours.

The absence of advantages like health insurance and fringe benefits is one of the other major problems that female employees confront. Women often experience insecurity and inconsistency in their income, which makes it difficult for them to exercise their right to free association. Due to insufficient workplace culture, the gig economy interferes with gig workers' ability to balance their professional and personal lives. These employees hold transitory jobs within the company, which makes it challenging to build long-term, reliable partnerships. Additionally, because of their temporary roles inside the company, gig workers find it challenging to pursue their own professions, which increases their future job instability.

5. FUTURE SCOPE OF GIG ECONOMY

In the gig economy, there are both challenges and opportunities for freelance work. Professionals are dedicating their time and effort to drive innovation and meet the demands of this rapidly evolving industry. Companies are increasingly hiring gig workers for customer support, business-related tasks, learning and development, and website development. This trend has created numerous job opportunities for young professionals and individuals seeking work flexibility. Additionally, women find the gig environment accommodating to their personal schedules, allowing them to balance work and domestic life (Roy & Shrivastava, 2020).

Entering the gig economy provides women with financial independence and work flexibility. Efforts are being made by governments to implement laws to ensure the social security and safety of women gig workers. However, it's concerning that the increasing number of women in the gig economy may impact overall economic growth. To address this, there is a need for improved working conditions and better employment opportunities for women (Kasliwal, 2020).

Gig workers, especially women, should be provided with training and skill development programs to enhance their career prospects. It's crucial to establish mechanisms for grievance resolution and implement labor protections (Chaudhary, 2020). Legislative measures are necessary to ensure fair wages, safety, and benefits for women workers, such as maternity and adoption leave (Ghosh, 2021). The gig economy has seen significant growth in recent years, providing increased job opportunities and market access for workers, particularly due to the prevalence of mobile devices with internet connectivity. This trend has the potential to expand to other countries, including India (Kutty & Sundararajan, 2022).

6. CONCLUSION

Numerous studies have shown that the gig economy is growing quickly due to global innovation and technological advancements. As a result, it presents good career opportunities for people who prefer to change jobs or who are more like women professionals who struggle to balance work and home life due to rigid work schedules. The days of women managing just domestic duties and relying entirely on their parents or spouses for financial support are long gone, since the modern world requires greater financial independence for survival. The government is working to give women legislation benefits that might help them advance their professions while providing protection, even though their increased participation in this platform may make it more difficult to balance the economy's growth pace. As a result, it can be said that government action can significantly improve the gig economy by allowing people to take advantage of work perks that can enhance the work culture of gig workers who contribute to the economies of India and other countries.

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