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Gig or Trap? Navigating Gen Z's New Workforce

ABSTRACT

The global workforce has seen a fundamental shift with the rise of gig economy. Gig Workers defined independent contractors, freelancers, or temporary workers who take on short-term assignments, often through digital platforms like Uber, Swiggy, Upwork, or Fiverr. The growing informal nature of employment in gig economy does not merely provide employment and high earning in short time but also causes various insecurities, psychological challenges, exploitation, bounded trap and exclusion from social security because of its anonymous nature. In India, this concept has witnessed a tremendous growth owing to factors like urbanization, digitisation and increasing smartphones penetrations. This paper studies the regulatory frameworks of other jurisdictions regarding gig workers. This is adhered by critical examination of the current landscape, nature, employment and so on, which assists in the identification of gaps put forth the protection of Gig worker's rights. It attempts to highlight the comparative outlook between gig economy and traditional employment models. It explores the case study showcasing the entrusted nature of Supreme Court of India. This paper further examines through the lens of International Relations (IR) theories. This paper intends to delve the intersection of caste and gender significantly influences experiences within India's gig economy. This paper poses some fundamental questions such as; why Gig economy leads psychological problems? What are the reasons behind the emergence of Gig economy? The paper broadly divided into three section deals with different criteria and perspectives.

Key words: Gig economy, Insecurity, Bounded Trap, Psychological Challenges

INTRODUCTION

With the advent of growing technological infrastructure and its mounting awareness have expanded the scope of employment manifolds. Gig economy come under the Fourth Industrial Revolution lead the emergence of digital platform. Gig work based on digital platform allows startups to compete with existing business by lowering the costs of market access. This

platform work is non- standard work, such as a new form of labour in the digital era & gig workers are engaged in non- standard labour, such as temporary employment, dispatched work, & multi- party employment contracts. As a consequence, gig workers and Platform workers observed as emerging workforce in India and across the globe. Due to Urbanization, Digitalization, rising smartphone penetration and advancements in associated technology India is poised to be concerning Gig Workers. However, with the rising of Gig economy in India envisioned advantage but far more disadvantage.

GIG WORKFORCE IN INDIA

ILO (2018) finding stated that there is no universally accepted definition of Gig work or Platform based ride/ delivery work. The Gig economy in itself is expansive& undefined and can include a variety of workers outside of a traditional worker definition. The rise of gig economy/ workforce in India is changing due to face of its workforce. The current estimation

for Gig economy jobs in India is at 8-18 million which further increase over 90 million jobs in non- farm sector upcoming 8-10 years (Tiwari, Ram & Roy,2019; BCG and Miachel& Susan Dell Foundation, 2021). Therefore, by next upcoming decade Gig economy In India transacted at 1.25% of the country's GDP. Gig economy is fast-reaching and expanding. The presence can be visible in other industries such as Textile, Banking, Electricity, Gas& water, IT, Education, Personal services (IBEF, 2021). Shifting the focus to platform economy, estimates that eleven platforms in India report about 30 lakh workers in 2020 has increased (Study of Fair work India, 2020). By looking at the estimate get to know that A Gig worker is a person who engage, in income- earning activities outside of a traditional employer-employee relationship, as well as in the informal sector (Ministry of Labour& Employment,2020a). The phrase "Gig Workers" describe a person who accepts a temporary job must be finished in a specific amount of time under unusual working conditions. Now, a fundamental question arises what is Gig Economy? 'Gig Economy' is a market system wherein Individuals, companies or Institutions hire independent contractors. As another term associated with the Gig economy, "Platform Workers". It generally, refers to individuals who work for companies that offer services to customers directly through Web- Based Platforms. Workers use platforms-i.e., websites or apps like Ola, Uber, Dunzo, Zomato, Swiggy or urban company (OCED,2019). However, Gig workers are Individuals contractors who have the freedom and flexibility to work without being tied down by traditional job roles (Wood et al.,2029). According to Niti Aayog's research in 2022, around 77 lakh people were working in Gig economy in 2020-21. By 2029-30, it is

estimated that gig economy would have attracted 2.35Crore employees. Further,47%of gig workers in medium- skilled employment, 22%in High skilled profession, &31% in low-skilled jobs. According to ILO (2024), India approximately 20% of the total share in developing economies. This growth also had large contribution of COVID-19 & lack of fixed employment opportunities. So, these two were also major drivers for this growth.

Despite its rapid expansion, Gig economy in India intends to showcase several challenges such as lack of social security, low-income individuals, absence of legal protections, psychological problem, work/life imbalance. Pathiranaige (2024) emphasizes migrant (internal or external) are subjected to volatile and insecure job conditions, leading to financial instability and social exclusion.

Table 12: Occupational Classification of Gig Workers in Numbers (2011-12 to 2019-20)

National Classification of Occupation-2004	2011-12	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	Change 2011-12 to 19-20
Computing Professionals	0.4	1.8	2.2	2.7	2.3
Architects, Engineers and Related Professionals	0.5	1.0	1.6	1.7	1.2
Business Professionals	2.0	2.6	3.0	3.8	1.9
Computer Associate Professionals & Optical and Electronic Equipment Operators	0.4	2.6	1.7	1.6	1.2
Finance and Sales Associate Professionals & Business Services Agents and Trade Brokers	1.3	3.3	3.4	5.2	3.8
Secretaries and Keyboard Operating Clerks & Numerical Clerks & Material Recording & Transport Clerks	2.4	3.4	2.8	6.2	3.8
Cashiers, Tellers and Related Clerks & Client Information Clerks	0.9	1.6	1.7	2.0	1.2
Travel Attendants, Guides and Related Workers	0.3	0.7	0.3	0.9	0.5
Housekeeping and Restaurant Services Workers & Personal Care Workers	1.4	2.6	3.0	3.9	2.5
Shop Salespersons and Demonstrators & Stall and Market Salespersons	9.9	18.9	22.0	22.8	12.9
Motor Vehicle Drivers	4.4	10.9	9.2	13.0	8.5
Street Vendors and Related Workers	0.8	1.5	1.7	2.6	1.8
Domestic and Related Helpers, Cleaners and Launderers	0.6	1.4	1.0	1.7	1.1
Building Caretakers, Window and Related Cleaners	0.0	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.1
Total	25.2	52.6	53.9	68.0	42.8

This Table taken from (Niti Aayog) represents the Gig Workers in India at five different time period.

FROM GLOBALIZATION TO GIGIFICATION: ANALYZING THE GIG ECONOMY WITH IR THEORIES

1.Marxist & Neo Marxist Approaches (Dependency Theory, World System Theory)

Proponents Immanuel Wallenstein & A.G. Frunk cited that Gig economy presents a result of Global Capitalism, Unequal power relations & distribution between developed and developing countries. However, from looking at outsourced, the Global North (Developed countries) to Global South (developing countries) reinforcing economic decency. Various platform like amazon, Uber and so on create division of labour where low wages poised to Global South while Global North (Core Countries) regulated technology and capital. E.g., BPO& IT Companies.

2. Realism (Hans Morgenthau & Kenneth Waltz)

This theory focused on National Interest & security). Here, realism stated that states act in their own interest often perennially prioritizing economic growth over worker rights. Here, Government Supports deregulation to attract tech Companies and Investment. E.g., (BBC2025) In India, Reliance Jio & Bharti Airtel signed Separate deals with Elon Musk's SpaceX to bring the Starlink internet service to the country.

3. Feminism (Cynthia Enloe & J. Ann Tickner)

The core arguments opined by this theory that the Gig economy disproportionally affect women & marginalized workers, leading gendered precarity. Women's have low paying gig jobs and faced discrimination. E.g., Uber for House cleaning services often exploits migrant women with little protections.

BEYOND THE FLEXIBILITY: CHALLENGES IN THE GIG ECONOMY

Technological development and the rise of Gig workforce altered traditional knowledge concepts of employer- employee relations. The line between an independent contractor and an employee is blurred as a result of gig economy which opposed to conventional employment. It is important to note the different criticisms faced by Gig & Platform economy in India. They criticised for having opaque algorithms, imposing excessive control over their workers through ratings-based reputation system, excessive burden over workers who causing significant risk to workers who are unfairly always punished due to customer feedback. Platforms also censured for classifying or rather misclassifying workers as independent contractors. Therefore, lack of dignity and job security, informalisation of the economy and precarity of work are growing concerns in the world of platforms. On the other hand, 10 to 12 hours on Platforms, decreasing incentives, low earning and reproduction of exploitative work practices

and structural inequities of the unorganised- informal economy within the platform economy are considered red flags globally. (Sehrawat et al., 2021; Davidov, 2016; Slee (2016); Ahmed et al, 2016; Stefano, 2016, Fan, et al, 2020; Glöss, McGregor & Brown, 2016; Hanrahan et al, 2015; Hodges, 2020; Fairwork India, 2021; Isaac, 2014; Kasera & Bidwell, 2016; Kittur et al, 2013; Kumar, Jafarinaini & Morshed, 2018; Lee et al, 2015; Lustig et al, 2020; Ma et al, 2018; Martin et al, 2014; Means & Seiner, 2015; Purdy, 2017; Raval & Dourish, 2016; Rogers, 2015; Rosenblat & Stark, 2016; Shapiro, 2018; Srija & Shirke, 2014; Wilson, 2015; Rest of World, 2021; ISST, n.d.).

INDIA

1. Lack of Accessibility

With the rapid rising of Gig economy in India, Gig economy offers a wide variety of employment, some can easily access or others not. However, Internet services and digital technology are two factors which can be a restrictive factor in accessibility by gig workers. This is realistically true for those who are inhabitants in rural and remote areas. Indeed, this phenomenon lead Gig economy largely an urban phenomenon (IWWAGE 2020). Women or rural women are low in Gig economy.

2. Unpredictable nature of Job & Income Insecurity

Gig and Platform workers in India are paid on the basis of per task (A piece rate) typically classified as independent contractors or as ‘driver/delivery partners. Digital enterprises like Zomato and Swiggy have created this nature contractual and precarity of workers.

Case study

In India, Food delivery workers associated with digital platforms are not regulated by labour law & the work. Arrangements between platform workers do not fall under into the traditional employer-employee relationships. (Fairwork Report 2021) points out that a prominent issue with work on digital platforms is employment status as most workers not classified as employees with income security and social protection. There is flexibility but also faced several problems. they point out:

Participant1: I want an office job, so I don’t have to run all day long. I want to leave this job but there are no other options. (A 29-year-old commerce graduate who had worked for Swiggy For almost a year).

Participant 2: These days I am getting very few orders to deliver even though lockdown is eased. I am still working 10 hours, but the company is neither concerned nor providing any incentive. (A 25-year-old diploma holder, worked for Zomato for nine months).

The resulting discontent & Stress was expressed by several of interviewees.

3. Psychological, Occupation and health risks

ILO Global Surveys Studies reported that workers engaged in Freelance Platforms, particularly women workers in the app-based taxi and delivery risks faced occupation Safety and health risks. Due to Volatile and informality in platforms jobs, they also faced psychological problems. About 83% of workers engaged in app- based taxi sector while 89% of workers engaged in app- delivery sector reported having safety concerns about their works, road safety, theft and physical assault. This result found in India, Mexico. Morocco). these reported facing discrimination or harassments (ILO 2022).

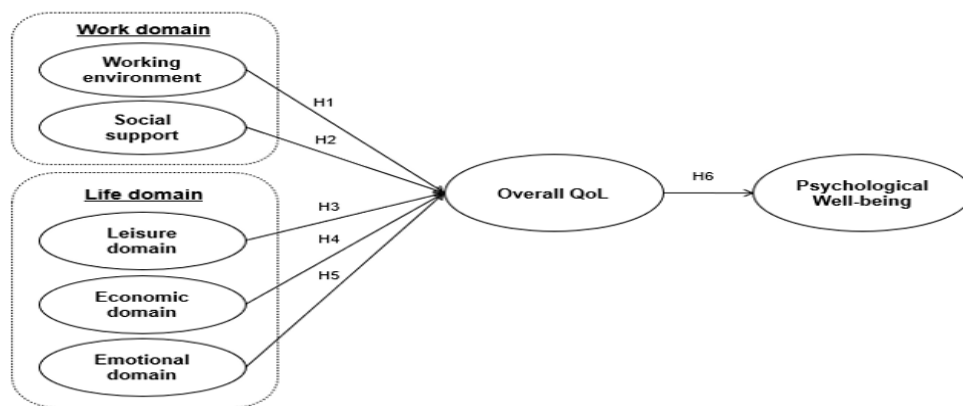


Figure 1. Proposed research model.

This Model stated: Fan and Luo (2020) [43] (p. 3) mentioned that ‘psychological well-being was suggested by the eudaimonic theory of Aristotle’s school, which primarily stresses the good personal mental state and the full realization of personal potential’. This psychological well-being is generally regarded as an individual’s fulfilment and purpose in his/her efforts [40,43]. According to Baker and Kim (2020) [44], psychological well-being is dealing with a bigger concept than work satisfaction, considering employees’ overall effectiveness of their psychological functioning. Psychological well-being is associated with an important influence on the quality of life improving an individual’s overall life [45,46].

However, this model is missing in Gig economy and its Gig workforce.

4. Issue of Contractual Relationship and Weak Collectivization

(ILO 2018b) stated that working conditions on digital platforms are largely regulated by terms of service agreements. Platforms workers are termed as 'Independent Contractors'. As a result, platforms workers cannot access many of the workforce protections and entitlements. (Fairwork,2021) weak collectivization constraints the ability of workers to negotiate with the platforms to settle disputes and readdress grievances.

5.Challenges of Skill Mismatches

ILO surveys found that countries like India and Chile, a higher proportion of app- based delivery worker or taxi drivers found to be highly educated than traditional sectors. They are more educated than traditional sectors. They are more educated as compared to what they demand. Younger app- based taxi drivers and delivery workers (18-24year), are highly educated (24 & 17 percent) respectively compared to traditional sectors (12 & 4 percent) respectively (ILO WESO 2021). Skill mismatches then, also appears to be issue that may need to be addressed, also from the gender perspective, in the gig and platform sector.

Structural Barriers for Women in Gig Economy

With the advancement of economic growth that India has experienced, only a third of the country's women partake in economic activities. According to FLPR, women participation remained low, between 16 to 23% in last few years (Kumar,2021; Kapoor& Negi,2021). NSSO Data (1970-2018) indicates that an increase in household income leads to decline in the 'need' for women to work (Nikore,2019). Women specifically face constraints related to time, dual responsibilities, women compared to man received low paid and Devoid of social security occupational choices and discrimination result of two factors led women restrictions in Gig economy. Factors such as less access to education and less work experience than men that further reduce earning potential of women (Ibid). According to the report (ILO,2021) indicates digital platform or online labour market poses, challenges for women in accessing work, just as in the case of offline labour market.

1.Intersection of Gender Inequalities

According to the GSMA Mobile Gender Gap Report 2021, only 25% women owned smartphones compared to 41% men in India in the year 2020. Ownership of Smartphones between men and women still stark (GSMA 2021). Qualitative research undertaken by GSMA with female mobile Internet users in Madhya Pradesh and Bihar highlighted four important life needs for women over the year 2020: online education for children, Video calls, Access to

Income opportunities and Increased demand on devices in home for entertainment and other purposes. Unequal access to smartphone indicates that women still lag behind in access vis-à-vis men.

2.Dual Responsibility of Women

Women feel extra double burden by looking at household chores and work. This lead stark line between paid and un-paid workers. In UK Studies, women exist from Gig economy & their income being of the “Distressed Category”. This phenomenon is much prevalent in India where, women’s normative responsibilities of household & care work is often responsible for their inability to continue in any form of employment and more so in employment that lacks job security and future career prospects. (Kasliwal 2020, Khurana 2020).

3.Issue of job Insecurity

According to Observer Research Foundation and World Economic Forum (2018) cited that 35% of women surveyed were disinterested in joining the gig economy due to lack of job security and uncertain employment status (Kasliwal 2020). IWWAGE 2020 reported that uncertainty associated with regularity in the available work and income may lead workers, particularly women and workers, who already manage normative responsibilities of household and childcare, to discontinue or give up employment in the gig sector.

CHALLENGES FACED BY PwDs

Despite growing concerns of opportunities, structural barriers faced by PwDs range from access to education, lack of skilling and a direct co-relation between disability and incidence of poverty. PwDs who 2.1% to 10% of India’s Population (Kulkarni,2021) but have a labour force participation rate of 36%(MOSPI,2021). Even though Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act,2016 increased the mandate reservation from 3% to 4%in Government vacancies, still much irrelevant as opportunities for them is less or deceased.

Movie: Pay-by-Task, Life in the Gig Economy

Some of the movies showcasing a deep dark reality of Gig workers in the Gig economy are as follows:

Zwigato(2022)

Director of the movie Nandita das and protagonist Kapil Sharma.

The movie showcases the real-life difficulties faced by gig workers who are often forced to work under harsh conditions with little job security. *Zwigato* offers a close look at the human side of gig economy jobs, focusing on the emotional and psychological toll that comes with being a part of the growing informal workforce. (1: 54) time of this movie captures struggle of protagonist Kapil Sharma representing Gig workers as a food delivery man.

"Tumhari Sulu" (2017)

Director of the movie is Suresh Triveni and protagonist Vidya balan. This film opined a middle-class housewife who becomes a radio jockey, and it highlights her journey through freelance work and the challenges she faces in a non-traditional job market. It showcases how gig work impacts personal and professional life. Imbalance between work life balance.

POLICY RECOMMENDATION

- ❖ The Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India, in August 2021, launched the e-SHRAM portal. The portal is a first-ever national database of unorganised workers, including construction workers, gig and platform workers, migrant workers, among others (PIB, 2021b).
- ❖ Code on Social Security 2020 defines it as “the measures of protection afforded to employees, unorganised workers, gig workers and platform workers to ensure access to health care and to provide income security, particularly in cases of old age, unemployment, sickness, invalidity, work injury, maternity or loss of a breadwinner by means of rights conferred on them and schemes framed, under this Code.” The Code also provides for the setting up of a Social Security Fund for social security benefits to gig and platform workers with contributions from aggregators/ platforms (between 1-2% of annual turnover), workers and the government. (Ministry of Labour and Employment, 2020a).
- ❖ The worker will get an Accidental Insurance cover of INR 2 Lakhs under the Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY) and premium for the first year will be borne by the Ministry of Labour & Employment.
- ❖ A petition is filed in the Supreme Court of India, urging the Court to direct the Government to extend social security benefits to “gig and platform workers” engaged with Ola Cabs, Uber, Zomato and Swiggy, and have them treated as employees (“workman” under existing laws) (Singh, 2021; Suryam, 2021).

❖ RAISE Approach to Operationalising CoSS 2020

As Central and State governments formulate rules under CoSS 2020, they could adopt the five-pronged RAISE approach to ensure realisation of full access to social security for all gig and platform workers²⁵ (Ramachandran, Raman & Singh, 2021)

CONCLUSION

India has a growing population and a persistent unemployment issue since a sizable portion of the population continues to work in unskilled labour. One of the most susceptible groups in the workforce is the gig economy. Due to the unusual nature of gig employment and legislative uncertainty, businesses have been able to continuously use their employees dishonestly without fear of legal repercussions. It is time for us to advance because many tasks are now completed using technology, and customer behaviour plays a bigger part in identifying these workers and protecting their rights. This research study also laid emphasizes on movies about Gig Worker's struggle. legislative adjustment or policies offer an extra layer of protection.

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