

A Conceptual Study on Women Workers in Gig Economy in India

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ABSTRACT

This research paper has aimed to understand the concept of Gig Economy and the role of women workers in it. It has also studied the challenges and future scope of Gig economy in India. This is a conceptual paper which has reviewed various research papers as well as articles. It has been reported by various research studies that the greater participation of women workers in gig works is due to the flexibility in managing their domestic and work life together and social insecurity has been considered as one of the major challenges which can be removed through implementation of proper legislation. The present study suggests greater support of government and people at large in providing adequate measures for the women workers to make it a better economy. This study is confined to only women workers who face issues and challenges while working in the gig type of environment to earn and support their family life. This study has discussed the need to understand the role of women workers with the hurdles they face while working in the gig economy and in providing relative measures for its future scope in India.

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

1. Introduction

The term ‘Gig’ was originally coined in 1920s by the musicians, which meant ‘engagement’ in that era. The term engagement was related to various other terms that included performing, assisting as well as attending the musical performances. Later on, this term got a broader context and that was as ‘Gig Economy’. This new term refers to those people or the workforce who meet their end needs by employing or working themselves for a specified period of time.

Very few research studies have been conducted to understand this terminology. Therefore, since 2009 the term ‘gig’ has been referred as a freelance work.

2. Review of Literature

Lehdonvirta, V. (2018) aimed to understand the constraints that the workers face while performing temporal flexibility. It found structural constraints as well as cultural-cognitive constraints that limit the worker control over scheduling in practice. It also found that workers have developed informal practices, tools as well as communities to address these

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constraints. Furthermore, it was recommended that focusing on outcomes rather than on worker control is a more fruitful way to assess flexible working arrangements. Liang, C. et al. (2018) aimed to explore whether there exist gender wage gap in the gig economy and also examined the degree of gap among gender differences in job application strategy and it also investigated three main aspects of job application strategy including bid timing, job selection, and avoidance of monitoring.

Hunt, A., & Samman, E. (2019) aimed to summarize workers' experiences of the 'on-demand' gig economy, which typically provides less-skilled and lower-remunerated jobs than other forms of gig work. It also highlighted its impact upon women, who face disadvantages related to poverty and intersecting inequalities. Prabhat, S. et al. (2019) aimed to investigate the impact of ride-hailing apps in the Indian market. It also investigated the challenges and opportunities that the ride-hailing apps have brought in. Furthermore, it offered leanings from an ethnographic study of Uber drivers in India.

Anwar, M. A., & Graham, M. (2020) examined the livelihoods of the remote gig workers while earning and sustaining in Africa. It demonstrated how remote workers in Africa manage various constraints on one of the world's biggest gig economy platforms through their resilience, reworking as well as resistance practices. Doshi, B. M., & Tikyani, H. (2020) aimed to understand the opportunities and difficulties of gig work in India. It postulated the ways in which it can prove to be a provider for people with good job opportunities. Furthermore, it recommended some major policy plans for the development and advancement of jobs in the gig economy. Gupta, S. (2020) aimed to bring out the benefits of the interlinking of economic rights of workers (employment, income security and social protection) and the social dimensions (labour rights and gender equality) of development. Various suggestions were postulated through which developmental research can be used to improve livelihood opportunities in these new forms of work. Hunt, A., & Samman, E. (2020) aimed to examine the entry of on-demand platform models into the domestic work sector in South Africa. It contended that the platform models maintain the patterns of everyday abuse that were found in the domestic work sector. Furthermore, on-demand companies reinforced the undervalued as well as largely unprotected labour of marginalized women domestic workers. Kasliwal, R. (2020) examined the issues that were faced by the women workers in gig platform and also analyzed such platforms in catering their needs and scrutinized them by identifying the gender gaps in gig work by providing various recommendations to help them. Roy, G., & Shrivastava, A. K. (2020) examined the important roles of stakeholders in gig economy. It also depicted how various factors affect the growth and importance of gig economy in Indian as well as global context.

Chaudhary, R. (2021) aimed to understand the role of India's growing platform-based gig economy on women's employment as well as on working conditions. It highlighted in-depth study of women's work through India's leading platform companies and also understood various labour practices including all the challenges that the workers experience as well as its

impact on women's security, empowerment or 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. It observed SDG eight indicators measurement in India and compared it with the UN and ILO measures for the same. Furthermore, it also found significant opportunities for improving this indicator measurement in India. With the growth of non-standard employment including gig work globally and the large informal sector in India, some levers were identified to broaden the current indicator measures including the workers. Tan, Z. M. et al. (2021) aimed to provide a direct and structured analysis of the ethical challenges in the gig economy and it depicted a brief overview of the gig economy including its scope and scale as well as the key ethical problems that were mapped onto three categories including work of new organization, the process of doing the new work and the status of the workers involved in doing the work.

Behl, A. et al. (2022) aimed to explore the hurdles or the barriers in the food delivery sector during the entry of the gig workers and also examined the cause-and-effect relation between the entry barriers to the gig platforms, where they worked. Various strategies were also framed in reducing such entry level barriers to enhance productivity and in providing employment opportunities. Chakraborty, R. et al. (2022) aimed to focus on the areas like employment of women in the formal sector including the role of new-age start-ups, the implications of newly formed labour codes as well as the union's point of view. It explored the potential upgrades in the policy changes as well as industry-specific insights on the gig world covering all the major industries. Furthermore, it also proposed that it is imperative to deliberate the policies required for ensuring the sustainability of this ecosystem. Choudhary, V., & Shireshi, S. S. (2022) aimed to understand the plight of gig workers that could be reduced by effective regulation through mechanisms. It identified seven characteristic features of the gig economy that destroyed the well-being of workers. Various suggestions were offered by some scholars outside India and novel methods were used to reduce the sufferings of the workers in regulating the gig economy in India. Dey, C. et al., (2022) examined the reasons for the rise of gig work and discussed the various types of gig platforms including its characteristics. It also elaborated the risks and challenges faced by Indian companies as they deploy non-standard workers through different online platforms by offering various recommendations to the HR fraternity. Kutty, S. H., & Sundararajan, S (2022) aimed to study the factors that influence the workforce. It stated that businesses may choose the best applicant for a given project from a bigger pool of candidates accessible across the world as well as workers can choose from a variety of temporary employment opportunities available throughout the world. Purswani, N. (2022) aimed to study the trends of Gig Economy by intensively studying the key drivers with reference to Indian context. It also helped to predict the future trends and also compared the job satisfaction of men and

women employed in both sectors by judgmentally choosing more women respondents. Reem, A. D. (2022) reflected that the female participants had more positive impact on their personal and professional development by working in Gig Economy Framework as compared to the male participants. Furthermore, it also concluded that Gig Economy can address the major challenges that affect the nursing workforce in Saudi Arabia, which are creating hurdles in the process of achieving Saudization. Singh, H. et al., (2022) aimed to include various dimensions, elements as well as the components of both bright as well as dark sides of Gig economy along with its effects on market as well as on traditional payroll base employment.

3. Gig Economy

Gig Economy refers to a market system where the organization or the companies hire the contract workers for the short term engagements. Such independent workers are usually hired for specific time period to fulfill the short term commitments. The term 'gig' has been related to specified period of time, which means these workers are engaged to complete their performance according to the requirement of the organization. Gig workers mainly include the freelancers, project-based workers, independent contractors or the part-time hires. There are various factors that have caused rise in the gig economy including mobile workforce and digital platforms to work remotely. Not only this, there are also some gig apps as well as digital technological base to connect with the customers and the gig workers. The best part to work in this environment includes the choice to select the people whom they want to work with or set the working schedule as per their own flexibility. Many studies have also revealed that recently it has been a tendency for the working individuals to frequently change their jobs till they are employed in the profession of their interest and this has led to rise in the stage of Gig Economy in the world (Nair, 2019). Gig economy can be further segregated into two types: digital gig economy that includes online labour and physical gig economy that includes work-on-demand via Apps (Heeks, 2017).

3.1. Role of Women Workers in Gig Economy in India

With the introduction of the technology platforms, it has been estimated that 85% of India's workforce has been employed by informal sector. It has been found that women who have been dominated in the areas of home-cleaning or care-giving have shown their participation in the gig economy in India due to the flexibility of working hours that enable women workers to work for four to five hours a day via a company platform and earn a decent income to support their family needs (Times of India (April, 2022). Now-a-days, women find various job opportunities for them where they can work for limited hours while sitting at home or anywhere as per their flexibility and support their families. The major reason for rise in the attrition rate of women workforce is due to the difficulty in handling and managing the domestic work with paid work in their professions. Therefore, these gig platforms often provide the flexibility to manage and balance between the work life and the family life adequately. Although, many studies have exhibited that more women would join this gig platform to improve the workforce participation rate but statistically, it has shown very little improvement

(Kasliwal, 2020). Women also tend to opt for those work opportunities that offer them a certain degree of freedom as well as flexibility to manage and balance between their paid and unpaid work that mostly keep them close to their domestic life (Messenger, 2018 & Zaidi and Chigateri, 2017). Women should also have the capability while choosing between the society or self-according to the type of work (Kabeer, 2012).

Various studies also found a negligible access for informal women workers in India. Although, many rules and provisions have been framed in context with social security in various factories or construction sites but still it has poor implementation. Women belonging to the unorganized sector do not enjoy the maternity leave policy in comparison to the women from formal sector. A huge gap can be seen between the gig work and the traditional domestic work that adversely impact in terms of social security schemes (Ghosh, 2021). The most significant employers of the gig workforce includes Uber, Amazon, Ola, Swiggy, Zomato and Flipkart. Many such digital platforms also create job opportunities where women actively participate due to flexible work environment and earn a good living in the gig economy. Women employ themselves in beauty as well as wellness service providers that includes various platforms including Urban company, Door Task, House Joy and many others as these jobs offer them more flexibility in comparison to the regular salaried jobs (Chaudhary, 2021).

The declining female participation in the workforce has led to limited representation of women in the gig economy due to many factors including lack of education, fertility rates and the age of marriage (Chaudhary & Verick, 2014). Digital gender divide has been considered as a major cause of low rate of female participation in the workforce (Mawii, 2019). The dependence on technology and digital skills for the employability can cause adverse impact on the Indian women with limited or lack of knowledge on such digital tools (Chaudhary, 2020).

4. Challenges Faced in Gig Economy

The report 'India's Emerging Gig Economy: The Future of Work for Women', highlighted the exploitation and discrimination of women workers in the Gigs. It also revealed the employment status in the implementation of Code on Social Security, 2020. It found difficult for the women workers to work in the gig economy as they are not offered any legal protection at their workplace. Women involved in desk jobs often face sexual harassment. This also depicts that this platform is not responsible in providing legal protection to such women workers. There is no such Indian law that claims the protection or the security of the women workers (<https://www.equaltimes.org>). Although there is flexible work environment and financial independence while working in this platform but it adds another challenge in earning regular or stable income and one of the studies claimed that women also find difficult working in the unpredictable hours. Apart from managing their unpaid domestic work at home, they got very less support from their families to earn their living (Chaudhary, 2021). Wage disparity is another issue in the gig based platform as few research studies revealed that

women are engaged in lower paying jobs as they regard themselves undervalued as compared to men. This further creates biasness against women and make themselves engaged in domestic responsibilities that becomes difficult for them to generate profits in the peak hours.

Other critical issues that are faced by women workers include lack of benefits, such as health insurance, fringe benefits etc. Women are also faced with income instability and insecurity as well as this causes inability to meet freedom of association. The gig economy is responsible for disrupting the work life management of the gig workers due to inadequate work culture as the work positions of such workers are temporary in the organization which makes it difficult to establish consistent relationship in the long time period. Furthermore, gig workers find difficulty in exploring their own careers due to their temporary positions in the organization and that adds to their job insecurity in future.

5. Future Scope

If there are challenges in the gig economy, there are opportunities as well for the gig work. Innovation is accelerating fast and professionals are sacrificing their sleep and comfort to involve themselves for developing this modern freelance world. Companies are hiring such professionals in routine to acquire customer support, business related activities, for learning or development and for website development support to get the work done as per the requirement and each organization is tapping this new change to provide adequate knowledge with good expertise at optimal cost. Thus, it creates good employment opportunities for young professionals as well as people seeking for job exposure. On the other hand, women can enjoy working in such environment according to their own flexibility of their daily schedule, where they can balance between the domestic life and professional life. Thus, it helps in increasing the large workforce at less cost (Roy & Shrivastava, 2020)

When women enter into such gig type environment, they enjoy the financial independence with the flexibility during their work. Few studies have revealed that government is making efforts in implementing the laws related to social security benefits including digital or physical safety of women gig workers and also providing recommendations on employment opportunities for them. Studies have also proclaimed that more efforts should be made in improving the working conditions of women so that they can start and improve their career. It is also sad to know about the increasing number of women in the gig platform as their inclusion leads to affect the balanced growth of economy (Kasliwal, 2020). Gig workers must be provided with training development programs and skill development courses that can encourage the women workers to move into better employable opportunities. There should be mechanism for grievance redressal in filing complaints related to workers' needs and situations and more systematic approach should be implemented in providing adequate labour protection and there should be adoption of more women-friendly policies the economy (Chaudhary, 2020). There should be proper legislation for the women workers concerning in terms of policy, regular wage settings, protection or safety and also in providing other benefits including maternity leaves, menstrual leave, adoption leaves etc. It is also important

to consider such provisions and benefits to encourage them for earning family income (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).

6. Conclusion

Through various research studies, it has been revealed that the advent of gig economy is pacing fast due to the advancement of innovation and technologies worldwide and therefore it offers good career opportunities for the people who are more into shifting their job positions or more like women professionals who find difficult in working in the strict working schedule that makes it difficult to manage their domestic and work life simultaneously. Gone are the days, when women used to handle only household activities and depend fully on their husbands or parents for their financial support, as this new arena demands more of the financial independence to survive in this world. Although, the participation of the women in greater number in this platform can create a hurdle in balancing the growth rate of the economy, still the government is making efforts in providing legislative benefits to them which can help in improving their career with protection.

Thus, it can be concluded that government intervention can bring lot of changes in making the gig economy a better economy where people can enjoy work benefits that can improve the work culture of the gig workers contributing to the economy in India and in other nations too.

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