



AN OVERVIEW OF CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN IN THE GIG ECONOMY

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Abstract

This research paper focuses on women workers who are the part of gig economy. The fourth industrial revolution bring drastic change in the structure of economy. due to change in industrial structure. There has also been a change in the labour market. Industrial revolution forth is technology driven, many companies provide platform to workers to become a part of a gig platform.

Gig economy provides best option to organization to hire independent contractors and freelancers instead of full-time employees. It is because work is allocated on a temporary basis, not requiring a systematic schedule. Women can become a part of this economy since this platform provides flexibility.

One of the main reasons behind to become a part of gig platforms is after starting family women carry out dual responsibilities of unpaid work at home and paid work in their professions. Gig platforms offers flexibility to women to better manage paid and unpaid work. However, number of women in gig platform economy is very less.

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Introduction:

Industrial revolution 4.0 creates drastic change in the structure of economy. This is technological era. Technology enabled persons to innovate themselves in to digital platforms. Platforms provide opportunities to aggregators and workers to earn through it. Individual can market their skill and sell their services online on different platforms or companies.

According to Investopedia a gig economy is a labour market that relies heavily on temporary and part-time positions filled by independent contractors and freelancers rather than full-time permanent employees. Gig economy provides best option to organization to hire independent contractors and freelancers instead of full-time employees. Gig economy provide flexibility and easy access to service. Digital platforms are best option for women, because women have dual responsibility.

Historically, women have played a subordinate role in most societies for a long time. However, with the advent of industrialization and urbanization, the role of women in the economy has significantly changed. They participate in various sectors of the economy, traditional such as manufacturing, services, and agriculture, and are involved in numerous jobs such as teachers, doctors, engineers, and lawyers and non-traditional sector like platform, gig economy. India has seen a significant growth in the gig economy in recent times, and many women are contributing to this sector through various gig works.

India has seen a significant rise in the number of gig workers in the past few years, and it is believed that women hold a substantial portion of these positions. While there is no accurate government data on the number of women gig workers in India, various studies

and reports suggest that women are playing an increasing role in the gig economy.

Objectives:

To study available opportunity in this economy for women.

To study the problems of women, gig workers.

To examine the impact of gig work on women.

Methodology:

The present paper used the secondary data and data has been collected from Government report, Research article, labour law generals, NGO and company reports.

Meaning of gig worker:

Gig workers have been defined for the first time in code on social security, 2020 under Sec. 2 (35) as a person who works and earns in an arrangement that is outside the scope of the traditional employer-employee relationship.

The gig economy refers to a work trend that involves independent workers who offer their services to customers as needed, rather than engaging in full-time employment with established businesses. Gig workers are usually self-employed, working as freelancers, independent contractors, or online platform workers.

Challenges faced by women gig workers:

Women who engage in gig work are often required to work alone, in remote locations, and at odd hours, making them vulnerable to harassment and violence. Women who work as delivery executives or taxi drivers' safety is major concern, as they have to interact with strangers on a regular basis.

In India Women are less likely to own mobile phones and devices. Due to socio cultural restrictions. Majority of company did not provide devices to workers they have to use their own devices. To become part of this economy technology is primary requirement. Major gig platform run through digital tools like mobile laptop and other devices. As per the GSMA Mobile Gender

Gap Report 2022, 22% men are using Basic phone, 8% Feature phone and 49% men uses Smart phone Where as women 26% women own basic phone, 9% feature phone and 26% own smart phone. This disparity speaks a lot about women participation in this economy. Apart from availability of mobile and other tools digital literacy is also plays important role. Despite government initiatives digital literacy remains a problem amongst women.

Another challenge by women in this field is the lack of legal protection. Many platform workers are considered independent contractors, which means they have fewer benefits and protections like healthcare or workers' compensation. This undermines women's rights to equal opportunities in the workforce, as they have limited access to social protection systems, particularly in cases of ill health, injury, maternity benefits, insurance etc. Moreover, women who work in the platform economy are often subjected to harassment and abuse, with no legal or institutional recourse.

One of the significant barriers that women face in the economy is gender inequality, which has been a pervasive issue across the world for centuries. Gender inequality in the labour market manifests in different forms, including unequal pay, occupational segregation, and limited job opportunities. Even when women have similar qualifications, experience, and education compared to their male counterparts, they are often paid less. Apart from it other challenges that women face is the burden of unpaid care and domestic work, which has negatively impacted their economic participation. Women are often expected to take care of children, the elderly, and other dependents, after taking care of them leaving less time for paid work. Moreover, women who work outside the home often face the "double-shift" scenario, where they are expected to work both at work and at home.

Women in the gig economy also face challenges related to financial stability. Gig work is characterised by an unpredictable income stream, and women often have to balance multiple gigs to make ends meet. In addition, women are often paid less than their male counterparts, further exacerbating their financial struggles. Lack of specific policies and provision for dispute redressal related to women workforce stops them to enter in this economy.

Despite these challenges, women play an important role in the economy's growth and development. Women's participation in the labour force has contributed to economic growth and poverty reduction in many countries worldwide. Increasing women's participation can also help close the skills gap, increase productivity, and promote innovation in workplaces.

In India, labour laws fall in the concurrent list and are extremely complicated, therefore there was a need to bring reform by addressing some of the issues like multiple definition of wages, low wages etc.

Opportunities for women gig workers:

There are significant opportunities for women working in the gig industry in India. With the rise of technology, there is a higher demand for skilled women in the gig industry. Women can work on their own terms and timings, which in turn, ensures their flexibility in working hours and managing other responsibilities.

SDGs focused on the issue empowerment of all or “leave no one behind” gender equality and women’s empowerment is focused areas of the 17 SDGs. According to estimated report of NITI Aayog 7.5 million workers were engaged in the gig economy in 2020-21. This could grow to 23.5 million workers in the next eight year.

According to Taskmo gig index 28% women’s currently working in gig economy. Moreover, the platform economy offers women an opportunity to explore new career paths and industries that were not

available before. Women can utilize their diverse skills to provide services like writing, graphic design, or translation services, which were previously dominated by men. Platforms such as Mahila E-haat, Meesho, and Amazon many more platform allow women to start their online business, to market their products globally, and to sell their products in different countries.

The gig economy allows women to simultaneously manage their home and work while earning or contributing to an income in their spare time. Earning income not only changes a woman's economic condition but also changes her social status.

Women in India constitute only four percent of the blue-collar economy Media and other reports suggest that few women work as mid-level executives (high or medium-skilled) and are more into traditional, less skilled activities, working for platforms such as Urban Company, House joy and so on which provide beauty and salon services on demand at home. These jobs though informal in nature, provides additional flexibility as compared to regular and salaried salon-based jobs, enabling women to balance the needs of work and family.

The gig economy provides free entry and exit for women working in this sector so more women enter this field, due to their family responsibility women is more likely to leave work in case of household or family responsibility. If women want to start a business it requires finance, for investment on plant, machinery, and other inputs. Which requires huge investment. Gig and platform economy allow women to participate with few require things. It does not require higher investment. Due to which more women worker prefers gig platform for earn good of income.

NITI Aayog launched a report titled ‘India's Booming Gig and Platform Economy.’ According to the report, India's gig workforce is expected to expand to 2.35 crore by 2029-30. The report estimates that in 2020–



21, 77 lakh (7.7 million) workers were engaged in the gig economy. They constituted 2.6% of the non-agricultural workforce or 1.5% of the total workforce in India.

Conclusion:

The impacts of the gig economy are both positive and negative. Opportunities for women to sit at home and make good use of their free time on productive activities were very limited. Today, women have benefited a lot due to the increase in technology and the increase in the percentage of education among women. The gig economy has created great opportunities for women to fully utilize their knowledge and skills. As women are bound by social responsibilities, they cannot use their full potential, but the increase in technology

The increase in technical knowledge has also given many opportunities to women and due to the increased service sector in India, there has been an increase in the participation of women. Many platforms come with variety of services, where women can contribute.

Aggregators in gig economy uses dual approach of incentives and penalties to keep workforce productive and disciplined respectively. Incentives will motivate workers to boost their performance and productivity. Penalties served the purpose of maintaining minimum standards of service or disciplining the workers.

The gig economy has the potential to offer women new opportunities for economic empowerment, they also face significant challenges. These include safety concerns, financial instability, lack of access to social security and benefits, and discrimination based on gender. Addressing these issues will require concerted efforts from policymakers, employers, and society at large to create an inclusive and equitable gig economy that benefits everyone, regardless of their gender. governments must take initiatives to ensure a conducive environment, which is free from

discrimination and recognizes the contribution of women gig workers.

Despite numerous laws and provisions for workers India, many challenges still exist in the implementation of these laws. Despite the Maternity Benefit Act, many women workers find it challenging to take maternity leave, as the employers do not adequately implement the law and in case of gig economy this law is not applicable for them since they considered as worker not employees of the company. Contract labour are not coming under this law. There is a significant gap between the wages earned by men and women workers, and many employers often fail to comply with the Equal Remuneration Act. There is also a need to ensure gender sensitivity in the workplace and to establish mechanisms to deliver justice to women who face discrimination at the workplace.

Another crucial issue that needs to be addressed is the inclusion of informal workers. Most women workers in India work as informal labourers with little or no protection. The unorganised sector accounts for around 94% of women employment in India, and many of them work without formal agreements, job security or fixed hours of work. They need to be brought under the purview of labour laws to ensure their basic rights and welfare.

Government should undertake a separate enumeration exercise to estimate the size of the gig economy, and identify the characteristic features of gig workers. During enumerations, collect information to identify gig workers. This could include questions on the nature of contract between worker and job creator, use of technology in work, etc. Census data must include gig and platform-based workers. This new category of working class will give clear picture to policy makers.

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