

## THE ROLE OF THE SPORTS AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION DEPARTMENT IN THE GIG ECONOMY OF INDIA

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### Abstract :

*The gig economy in India has surged in prominence, influencing diverse sectors, including sports and physical education. This paper investigates the evolving relationship between the sports and physical education department and the gig economy, analysing its historical roots, current dynamics, and future potential. Through a mixed-method approach, it explores the rise of gig-based roles such as sports coaching and fitness training, highlighting opportunities like flexibility and scalability alongside challenges such as income instability and job insecurity. The study integrates historical context, quantitative data, and qualitative insights to offer a comprehensive perspective on this intersection.*

**Keywords:** *Sports, Physical Education, Gig Economy, India, Employment, Coaching, Fitness Training, Technology*

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### Introduction:

The gig economy, defined by short-term, flexible, and platform-mediated work arrangements, has redefined employment paradigms globally, with India emerging as a key player. Within this framework, the sports and physical education sector has undergone a significant transformation, fuelled by rising demand for personalized fitness services, grassroots sports development, and wellness initiatives. This paper examines the role of the sports and physical education department in this gig-driven landscape, tracing its historical evolution and assessing contemporary trends, challenges, and opportunities. As India aims to bolster its sports ecosystem—evidenced by programs like *Khelo India*—the gig economy offers a dual-edged sword: empowerment through flexibility and vulnerability due to precarity.

### Historical Background

The intersection of sports, physical education, and employment in India has deep historical roots, shaped

by colonial legacies, post-independence policies, and economic liberalization. During British rule (1858–1947), sports were largely an elite pursuit, with physical education confined to military training and missionary schools. The establishment of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in India in 1891 introduced structured physical education, laying the groundwork for professional coaching. Post-independence, the creation of the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports in 1958 marked a shift toward state-sponsored sports development, though employment remained formalized within government institutions like schools and sports academies.

The liberalization of India's economy in 1991 catalysed a broader transformation, opening avenues for private-sector involvement in sports and fitness. The early 2000s saw the rise of fitness chains like Talwalkar's and Gold's Gym, employing trainers on contractual bases—an embryonic form of gig work. The advent of digital platforms in the 2010s, coupled

with India's smartphone boom (over 500 million users by 2019), accelerated this shift. Initiatives like the *Fit India Movement* (2019) and *Khelo India* (2018) further stimulated demand for freelance coaches and trainers, embedding sports and physical education within the gig economy's fabric. This historical trajectory underscores how structural changes have primed the sector for its current gig-based evolution.

### Objectives:

1. To evaluate the gig economy's impact on employment opportunities for sports and physical education professionals in India.
2. To identify the challenges gig workers, face within this sector.
3. To assess the influence of technological advancements on gig employment in sports.
4. To propose strategies for enhancing job security and career sustainability.

### Hypotheses:

- **H1:** The gig economy has significantly expanded employment opportunities in India's sports and

### Findings and Analysis:

#### 1. Expansion of Gig Employment

Historical shifts have culminated in a robust gig economy within sports. Data indicate a rise from 50,000 gig workers in 2015 to a projected 500,000 in 2024, driven by urbanization, health awareness, and policy support.

**Table 1: Growth of Gig Workers in the Sports Sector (2015–2024)**

Year	Number of Gig Workers	Percentage Growth
2015	50,000	-
2017	75,000	50%
2019	120,000	60%
2021	200,000	67%
2023	350,000	75%
2024*	500,000 (projected)	43%
Note: 2024 figures are projections based on trend analysis.		

**Finding:** H1 is substantiated—the gig economy has catalysed unprecedented employment growth, aligning with historical trends of privatization and digitalization.

physical education sector.

- **H2:** Job insecurity and income volatility adversely impact gig workers in this field.
- **H3:** Technological innovations and digital platforms enhance employment prospects for sports professionals in the gig economy.

### Research Methodology:

This study employs a mixed-method framework:

- **Primary Data Collection:** Surveys with 350 gig workers (sports coaches, fitness trainers, and wellness consultants) across metro cities and Tier-II towns, supplemented by in-depth interviews with 60 participants.
- **Secondary Data Collection:** Analysis of historical records, government policy documents, and industry reports from platforms like Decathlon India and UrbanClap.
- **Data Analysis:** Quantitative data were processed using statistical software (e.g., SPSS for correlation analysis), while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis.

## 2. Challenges for Gig Workers

Survey data reveal systemic challenges: 70% of respondents reported income fluctuations, 58% lacked social security, and 45% faced erratic schedules. Historical reliance on informal labor markets amplifies these vulnerabilities.

**Table 2: Challenges Faced by Gig Workers (2024 Survey)**

Challenge	Percentage of Respondents	Historical Context
Income Instability	70%	Pre-digital era informal contracts
No Social Security	58%	Lack of post-independence labor laws
Unpredictable Work Hours	45%	Shift from salaried to task-based work
Limited Skill Development	37%	Minimal historical training frameworks

**Finding:** H2 is confirmed—modern gig work inherits historical precarity, exacerbating job insecurity and financial instability.

## 3. Technological Influence

Digital platforms have redefined gig employment, with 80% of surveyed workers using apps like Cult. Fit or Playo. Historical parallels exist in the YMCA's early adoption of structured training, though today's scale is magnified by technology.

**Table 3: Technology Adoption and Impact (2024)**

Technology Type	Adoption Rate (%)	Earnings Increase (%)	Historical Precedent
Fitness Apps	80%	25%	Rise of fitness chains (2000s)
Wearable Devices	50%	18%	-
Virtual Coaching Tools	65%	20%	YMCA training programs (1890s)

**Finding:** H3 is validated—technology amplifies opportunities, echoing historical innovations while introducing new dependencies.

## 4. Qualitative Insights

- **Urban Trainer (Delhi):** A 29-year-old leverages Fitter Nity for ₹70,000 monthly but struggles with platform commissions (25%).
- **Rural Coach (Punjab):** A kabaddi coach earns ₹20,000 via community networks, limited by digital illiteracy—a legacy of uneven historical development.

### Discussion:

The gig economy's integration into sports and physical education reflects a continuum of historical labour shifts—from colonial elitism to post-liberalization flexibility. India's youthful demographic and policy momentum amplify this trend, yet the absence of robust labour protections—rooted in historical oversight—underscores persistent

challenges.

Technology bridges historical gaps in access but risks entrenching inequalities, mirroring global gig economy debates (e.g., OECD, 2022).

### Conclusion:

The gig economy has reshaped India's sports and physical education landscape, building on a historical foundation of evolving labour practices. It offers

scalability and flexibility, yet inherits vulnerabilities from informal employment traditions. Technological advancements

propel growth, but equitable distribution remains elusive. Addressing these dynamics requires a synthesis of historical lessons and forward-looking policies.

#### Suggestions:

1. **Regulatory Overhaul:** Implement a *Gig Workers' Protection Act* mandating minimum wages, contract standardization, and dispute resolution mechanisms, addressing historical labour gaps.
2. **Skill Development Ecosystem:** Establish regional training hubs, modelled on the YMCA's historical framework, to equip gig workers with digital and technical skills.
3. **Social Safety Nets:** Launch a government-backed *Sports Gig Worker Welfare Fund*, financed through platform taxes, to provide health insurance and pensions.
4. **Inclusive Technology Access:** Subsidize internet

and device costs in rural areas, rectifying historical disparities and boosting gig participation.

5. **Collaborative Frameworks:** Foster partnerships between the Sports Authority of India and private platforms to create hybrid employment models, blending gig flexibility with stability.

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