

## The rise of the gig economy in India: Market domination and the need to regulate the future of work

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### Abstract

The gig economy represents a paradigm change in the traditional labour market, inspired by technological progress and changing functioning preferences. Characterized by short-term, freelance and contract-based employment, it enables individuals to flexible in various industries, including ride-sharing, food distribution, digital services and distance freelancing. While the gig economy provides benefits such as autonomy, diverse income currents and global function opportunities, it also increases concerns about job security, proper wages, activist safety and social benefits. For businesses, the gig economy provides cost-effective access to a scalable workforce, promoting innovation and efficiency. However, the absence of standardized labour protection and regulatory structure has launched a debate on the rights, taxation and employment classification of the workers. Governments and policy makers face a challenge to balance flexibility with fair labour practices to ensure permanent and equitable work situations. This study examines the development, advantages and shortcomings of the Gig economy, analysing its implications for workers, businesses and society. It investigates potential policy solutions and strategies to create a more inclusive and flexible gig task in a rapidly digital and globalized world.

**Keywords:** Gig economy; Digital Workforce; Remote Work; Job Security; logistics & delivery jobs; Global Gig Markets; on-demand Jobs

### 1. Introduction

The gig economy is a fast-growing hard work marketplace pushed through short-time period, flexible jobs wherein employees perform as unbiased contractors in preference to complete-time employees (Kapoor, R. 2022). This shift has been fuelled via the upward thrust of virtual platforms that connect employees with customers, allowing organizations to scale their services effectively. Companies like Swiggy, Zomato, and Blinkit have revolutionized industries along with food transport and brief trade, demonstrating how gig paintings are reshaping consumer reports and employment styles (Abraham, R., Basole, A., & Kesar, S. 2021).

In India, structures like Swiggy and Zomato rely on a large network of delivery companions who work on a contract foundation, deciding on their own hours at the same time as earning in step with order. Similarly, Blinkit, a short-trade platform, has transformed the grocery and essentials transport zone by way of leveraging gig employees to satisfy orders inside minutes. These organizations thrive on flexibility, ensuring quicker service for clients while presenting job possibilities to thousands (Aneja, U., & Sridhar, V. 2020).

This has a look at targets to discover the increase of the gig economy, highlighting the factors contributing to its rapid growth. It additionally examines about the gig jobs that are taking over traditional job markets, affecting the

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employment developments, and altering enterprise strategies (FICCI & EY. 2020). Additionally, as the gig financial system grows, concerns round activity security, honest wages, and worker rights emerge, necessitating a nicely-established regulatory framework (Kapoor, R. 2022). This observe will recommend rules to stability commercial enterprise efficiency with employee protection whilst assessing the destiny of the gig financial system in India and beyond.

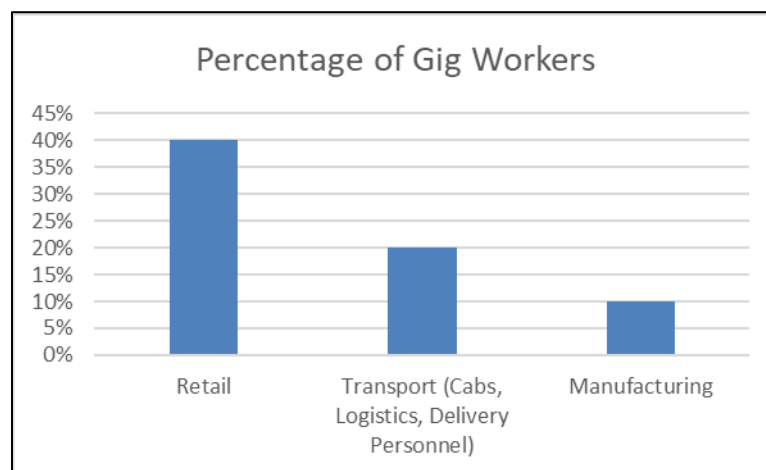
### 1.1. Objectives of the Study

- This study explores the rapid growth of the gig economy in India by evaluating the factors affecting the expansion of gig economy and its impact on traditional job market and employment structures.
- To examines the reshaping market dynamics by gig work, employment trends, and business strategies.
- To focuses on identifying key challenges faced by gig workers, including income volatility, job insecurity, and lack of social protections.

A crucial objective is to propose a well-structured regulatory framework that balances business efficiency with worker rights, ensuring fair wages, social security, and long-term sustainability for the gig workforce in India.

## 2. The Gig Economy is Taking over the Market

Gig economy is rapidly expanding due to increased digitalization of economy services, rising urban demand for convenience and rise of platform-based work models (Sundararajan, A. 2017). Companies are hiring gig workers to reduce costs, increase the workforce flexibility and meet the demands of ups and downs (The Economic Times. 2023).



**Figure 1** Major market trends: Gig employment in India is increasing in various industries

- Retail: 40% gig workers.
- transport (CABS, Logistics, delivery personnel): 20% gig workers.
- Manufacturing: 10% gig workers.

In the last decade, the construction industry gig of workforce has increased from 1.2% to 3.06% post-pandemic dependence on gig work: A study showed that 90% of gig workers experienced a decrease in post-lockdown after earnings, highlighting the volatility of the area

### 2.1. Global Rise in Gig Work

According to a World Bank report, up to 12% of Global Labour Markets eat gig work.

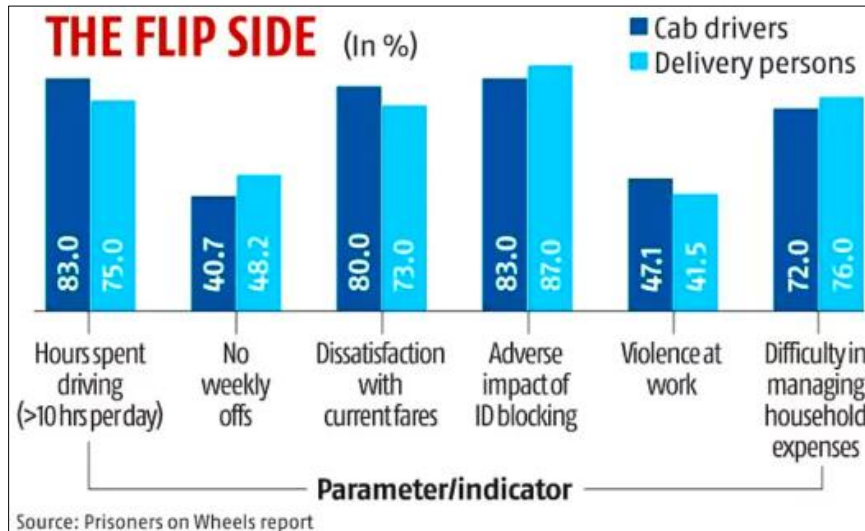
- *Demand is particularly high in developing countries:* Gig job posting saw a 130% increase in sub-Sahara Africa. North America saw only 14% increase in gig jobs. Low and medium -income countries produce 40% of global gig platform traffic.
- *Online and Digital Gig Jobs shift:* Oxford University Online Labour Index reported that India is mainly in software development and technology for 24% of the global online gig task force.

However, when the gig platforms claim to remove the middlemen, they often act as technology-based intermediaries by charging high commission on each service, which reduces the house earnings of gig workers (Kuek, S. C., et. al. 2015). In

addition, strict rating systems and rigorous cancellation policies account inaction, income insecurity deteriorate.

## 2.2. The Growth of Gig Economy in India

The survey on the gig economy in India, conducted by the Indian Federation and the University of Pennsylvania, analysed responses from 5,028 delivery boys or delivery partners of the online platforms and 5,302 cab drivers across eight cities.



**Figure 2** Parameter/Indicator analysed on Cab Drivers & Delivery Persons

The study highlighted critical challenges, including low pay and long hours, with over 43% earning less than ₹500 per day despite working 10+ hours. Work-life balance is poor, as 41% of drivers and 48% of delivery personnel cannot take even a single day off, leading to burnout and deteriorating health. Unfair fares and high commission rates (31-40%) result in financial struggles, with 68% of cab drivers reporting expenses exceeding earnings. Social inequalities persist, with over 60% of Scheduled Caste/Tribe drivers working 16+ hours daily, compared to 16% in the unreserved category. The study also found physical exhaustion, road safety risks, and mental health issues, with 99.3% of drivers experiencing physical ailments and 98.5% reporting mental stress. Additionally, violence at work is a major concern, affecting nearly half of drivers and 41% of delivery workers.

The gigging economy has become an integral part of India's labour market, providing employment opportunities for various types of workers (ILO (International Labour Organization). 2021). The gig jobs are mainly classified as Service-based (blue-collar) jobs-These include delivery agents, cab drivers, construction workers, domestic workers, etc., which form a majority of the Gig workforce. They include consultants, data analysts, graphic designers, writers, etc. in the knowledge-based jobs, which often have highly skilled roles.

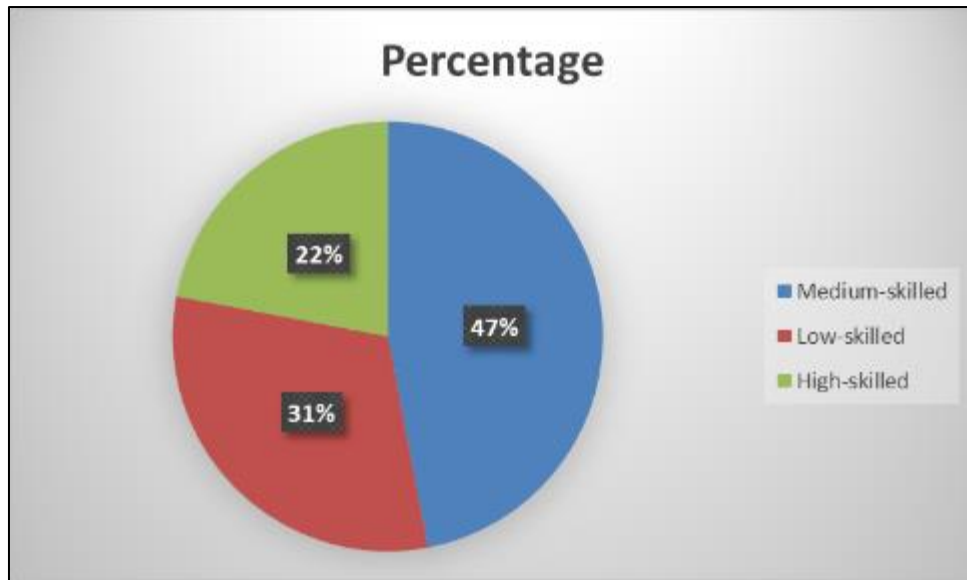
## 2.3. Current Status and Gig Economy Growth Estimates of India

According to the reports by NITI Aayog, "the gig task force in India consisted of 77 lakh (7.7 million) workers in 2020-21, 1.5% of the total labour force and 2.6% of the non-agricultural workforce. By 2029-30, the gig task is estimated to increase to 2.35 crore (23.5 million), which is 6.7% of the non-agricultural workforce and 4.1% of India's total workforce" (NITI Aayog, 2022).

**Table 1** Current status and growth estimates.

Category	Details
Total Gig Workforce (2020-21)	7.7 million (1.5% of labour force, 2.6% of non-agricultural workforce)
Projected Gig Workforce (2029-30)	23.5 million (4.1% of total labour force, 6.7% of non-agricultural workforce)

The breakdown of the gig work shows



**Figure 3** The breakdown of the gig work

- 47% of workers are engaged in medium-skilled jobs (customer aid, data entry, construction).
- 31% in low-skilled jobs (distribution personnel, domestic workers, labourers).
- 22% in high-skilled jobs (advisor, financial advisor, IT professional).

Despite offering flexible work opportunities, gig workers face financial instability. According to Solutions and BFA Global, the average gig worker in India earns ₹ 6,000 per week, of which only 36% are financially flexible. In addition, 15% of gig workers face an average monthly financial deficit ₹ 5,000, leaving peers and informal lenders.

Gig workers are also overwork, a survey by NCAER suggests that platform-based food distribution workers put in 69.3 hours per week, compared to 56 hours for a regular worker, which means that Gig workers work 23% longer than other employees.

#### 2.4. Challenges Faced by Gig Workers in India – Summary

Gig workers in India face job insecurity, with 20% citing it as their top concern, especially among unskilled workers (30%). Income volatility is due to fluctuating and variation in demand and competition makes financial planning difficult. The lack of regulatory protection leaves workers vulnerable to exploitation, limiting access to benefits like healthcare and insurance. Delayed payments affect over 25% of gig workers, increasing financial stress. Additionally, many workers, particularly Ambitious Hustlers and Earn to Burn, struggle with limited skill-building opportunities, reducing their chances for career advancement. Addressing these issues is crucial for improving their working conditions and financial stability (Drishti IAS. 2024).

#### 2.5. Need of Regulatory frame work and future of Gig Economy in India

Despite its rapid expansion, the Gig economy lacks widespread worker security, fair wages and job security. Many companies call the gig workers as "partners" or "independent contractors" rather than calling them the employees, which avoid legal obligations such as minimal wages, laws, health benefits, and retirement provisions.

#### 2.6. International Best Practices for the Gig Economy

Countries worldwide have adopted various best practices to improve working conditions of gig workers, focusing on fair wages, social security, and legal protections.

##### 2.6.1. Legal Protections & Worker Rights

- **United Kingdom (UK):** The Supreme Court ordered that the Uber drivers are workers, not independent contractors, and due to which granting them rights to minimum wage, paid leave, and pensions.
- **European Union (EU):** The **EU Platform Work Directive** aims to ensure the fair working conditions and protect the interest of gig workers from unfair algorithmic management.

- **California, USA:** The **AB5 Law** requires the companies to identify the gig workers as employees if they meet the prescribed criteria and certain conditions, ensuring access to benefits.

#### 2.6.2. Social Security & Benefits

- **France:** Platforms contribute to a social security fund, providing health coverage, accident insurance, and pensions for gig workers.
- **Germany:** Gig workers are included in the state pension and health insurance system, offering long-term financial security.
- **Canada:** Some provinces mandate portable benefits programs, allowing workers to retain health insurance and retirement benefits even when switching platforms.

#### 2.6.3. Fair Pay & Income Stability

- **Netherlands:** Implemented minimum wage regulations for platform workers to prevent exploitation.
- **Denmark:** Unions negotiated agreements ensuring fair pay and predictable work hours for gig workers.
- **New York, USA:** Enforced **minimum wage rules for ride-hailing drivers**, guaranteeing a base income even during low-demand periods.

#### 2.6.4. Timely & Transparent Payments

- **Singapore & Australia:** Regulations ensure **faster payment cycles** to prevent financial strain on workers.
- **Brazil:** Some platforms have introduced **instant payout options**, enabling workers to access earnings immediately.

#### 2.6.5. Skill Development & Career Growth

- **Singapore:** The government funds **training programs for gig workers**, helping them transition to stable careers.
- **India:** Companies like Swiggy and Zomato offer **upskilling programs** to help workers gain new skills.
- **UK:** The "Good Work Plan" promotes **career progression pathways** for gig workers through vocational training.

These best practices can serve as models for **improving the gig economy in India**, ensuring better wages, social security, and career opportunities for workers.

### 2.7. Current and proposed rules in India:

The Social Security Code (2020) was introduced to include gig workers under labour security, but the implementation remains incomplete. The Government of Rajasthan has introduced a Gig worker registration law to provide access to social security schemes and punish non-compliance companies.

Karnataka has proposed a uniform outline, but the gig platforms have pushed back against the rules citing operating costs.

- **Proper wages and income safety:** Establishment of minimum wage rates and commission transparency on digital platforms. Ensuring the platform provides guaranteed base income rather than purely pay-work models.
- **Social Security and Benefits:** Implementing health insurance and retirement savings for gig workers. Providing emergency financial assistance to workers facing income losses.
- **Work status and job security:** Regulating maximum working hours per week to prevent worker exploitation. Anti-deactivation policies introduced, ensuring that platforms are not arbitrary.
- **Work status and job security:** Regulating maximum working hours per week to prevent worker exploitation. Introduction to anti-opposing policies, ensuring that the platforms do not arbitrarily suspend workers.
- **Transparent and equitable rating system:** Improving customer rating models does not lead to a negative review account expiry. Providing workers with the right to appeal to negative response.
- **Gender inclusion and worker diversity:** NITI Aayog recommends fiscal incentives such as tax breaks for platforms that employ women and disabled people. To encourage women participation in gig work by ensuring security provisions and fair wages.

Survey on the gig economy in India, conducted by the Indian Federation and the University of Pennsylvania, analysed responses from 5,028 delivery boys or delivery partners of the online platforms and 5,302 cab drivers across eight

cities.

### 3. Conclusion

The Gig economy has emerged as a transformational force in India's labour market, which offers flexible employment opportunities in various industries. With a significant contribution from service-based (blue-collar) and knowledge-based workers, Gig workforce is estimated to expand rapidly, to reach 23.5 million workers by 2029–30. This growth is inspired by increasing digitalization, increasing urban demand for convenience and proliferation of platform-based work models.

India's economy is estimated to increase by 7.5% in 2024, making it the third largest at the global level by 2027. This growth will increase the dependence on gig work, but without proper regulation, the area can wide economic inequality. AI and automated gig jobs, especially in IT, e-commerce and digital marketing. Fintech solutions were stitched for gig of workers, improving financial inclusion through flexible savings schemes and micro-laws. Government intervention has increased to ensure proper wages and social security run by activist protests and legal battles.

Apart from the advantages of gig work culture, the Gig economy has several challenges, that includes financial instability, income instability, excessive working hours and lack of legal protection. Many gig workers, especially in low-efficient roles, struggle with low wages and deduction of high commission by digital platforms. In addition, insufficient labour rights, absence of job safety and traditional social security benefits have been excluded as a result of classification of the gig workers as the "independent contractors" rather than classifying them as the employees.

To ensure permanent growth of the India's gig economy, it must adopt structured regulatory structure. This includes implementing minimum wage safety, ensuring transparent commission structures, presenting social security benefits like retirement schemes and health insurance and regulating working hours to prevent exploitation. Learning from global best practices, such as UK employees, can help in re-revival of gig workers, creating a fair and inclusive system.

As the expansion of India's economy continues, AI-driven automation and fintech solutions will play an important role in redefining the future of Gig jobs. Digital financial inclusion through flexible savings schemes, micro-laws and emergency funds can improve financial stability for gig workers. Additionally, increase in government intervention, labour rights, and strategic policy reform will be necessary in creating an equitable gigging economy that balances activist welfare with commercial innovation.

By addressing the challenges and opportunities in Indian gig economy, India can use the full potential of the gigging economy, ensuring that it acts as a driver of economic development while maintaining proper labour standards for millions of workers. Along that the gig sector has created millions of job opportunities, issues such as income instability, lack of social security, and exploitative work conditions persist. The study highlights the challenges faced by gig workers, including long working hours, unfair commission structures, and financial insecurity, underscoring the immediate need for regulatory intervention from the government authorities. As India's economy is growing, the reliance on gig work will increase and prioritising the stronger policies to balance the business efficiency with workers' well-being. With proper regulation, India can create a sustainable gig economy that fosters both economic growth and equitable labour practices.

### Compliance with ethical standards

#### *Disclosure of conflict of interest*

No conflict of interest.

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