

Is GIG Economy Changing the Work for Women?

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ABSTRACT

The digitisation of the global economy emerged a new trend of workforce. The term gig economy is the new buzzword. It refers to accomplishment of the task/work by hiring temporary/ part-time workers, or freelancer. In recent years, there is a surge in the gig economy. In 2020-21 nearly 7.5 percent million of the workers engaged in the gig economy (Indian express, 28th June 2022). The participation of women in the labour force contribute to the economic development of the nation and gender equity. In spite of all the challenges, in India the participation of women in the gig job is low in between 16 to 23 percent. The present paper highlights on the participation of the women in the gig-work, issues and challenges, and policy recommendation.

Keywords: *Gig economy, Gig workers, Women, Labour force*

Women plays a significant role in gig economy. They perform different types of tasks by working in varieties of fields such as technology, customer service, home service and creative industries. But women participation in labour force is low (57%) as compared to men (69%). The participation of the women in the labour force affects both economy of the nation and gender equity. Due to care-giving responsibilities (child, elder members and loved one's) of the women, autonomy and flexibility characteristics of the job is being preferred by them. The care giving responsibilities of the women acts as a barrier for their growth in the traditional career path. The autonomy and flexibility in the non-traditional structure of the job allow them to maintain a balance in their dual role in family as well as in workplace. This non-traditional employment such as contract /part time and freelancing are known as gig economy. In India, the rate of women participation in labour force is 20.3 as compared to 76 percent (Men). In last ten years, due to the growth of gig economy, there is a little improvement in women's labour force participation especially young men of urban area.

Meaning of GIG Economy

The word Gig has gained prominence in recent years. Gig means jazz or rock musician ([www. dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com)). The term Gig economy was coined during recession, as most of the workers loses their jobs, so they prefer short term employment. "On demand economy", Collaborative Consumption", and "Sharing Economy" are other terms used for gig economy. Gig economy can be defined as a free market system where the organization can hire the workers for a project or service on a short term basis. The job is neither full time nor

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permanent one rather the worker may join as a contractual as independent workers, very popularly known as freelancers or gig workers (Techtarget 2020). The International Labour Organization (ILO) has defined the gig economy under two broad headings: task and services.

- i) Microtasks can be performed online and organized on a global scale,
- ii) By using websites and mobile apps, services can be enabled by online companies.

Gig economy opens an avenue of earnings through gig work. The various gig online platforms with registered users are: Upwork.com (17million users), Freelancer.com (31 million users), Fiverr.com (7 million user), (Werner 2020). Two categories of Gig economy:

- i) Independent gig workers: Freelancer, Online, Platform workers
- ii) Contingent gig workers: On call contract, Temporary workers.

Women in Gig economy: Research Findings

- According to Mercatus Center Study, more women prefer to work in non-traditional work due to flexibility with customized work weeks.
- A sample survey of 33,000 workers, 4.1 out of 5 rated the “importance of being one’s own boss” (Global Workforce study of IBM).
- A study on Freelance in America (2019) found:
 - i) Flexible scheduling is the top reason for the full-time freelancer to pursue freelancing.
 - ii) 46 % freelancer report due to independence in work they participate in the workforce.
- According to a National study:
 - i) 33% women reduce their working hours for care-giving responsibilities.
 - ii) 29% skip promotion and job training.
 - iii) 16% quit their job completely.
- According to the American Action Forum (2017), in a total employment the female independent workers constitute 33% which has been increased to 46%.
- In 2020, the independent workers constitute 36 percent of the total work force and independent contract work is mainly opted by men. In 2000, the participation of the female workforce in gig job has been increased and they are participated in gig work such as project-based work, part-time work, and freelancing. During Covid-19 pandemic, women have joined in gig work at a rapid clip.
- The contribution of women workforce in gig economy has been increased to 55% between 20001 to 2016. Nearly half of the delivery drivers in Uber eats (50%), Amazon, and DoorDash (58%) are females and their number has been increased double in April 2020 – January 2021.

Reason: The women were largely dominated in care giving as well as home cleaning. But the participation of women in delivery economy is very recent. The reason of women turning into gig economy is as follows:

- 80 % of the women in Door Dash’s delivery stated flexibility is the reason. 60% (women) and 30 % (Men) said flexibility allowed them to take care of their child and loved one’s.
- 50% (Women) and 34% (Men) delivering in Uber Eats stated flexibility is the reason.

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BENEFITS

- Opportunity for innovation and growth in one's own respective field which enable the women to start their own business/start-ups and contribute to the economic growth of the country.
- Empowering the women by being the owner of the business with one's own terms and conditions. It provides the opportunity for the self-employment and employment generation for others too.
- Gig job provides financial independence and economic security to the women, so that they can invest their own money for the expansion and growth of their business.
- Gig job not only provides flexibility and autonomy to the women, but also balancing their work life with their care-giving responsibilities.
- Gig job break traditional gender stereotypes, which indicate equal and diverse workforce.

CHALLENGES

- Large number of women workers are being paid less in gig jobs and face economic precariousness. In 2018, a survey conducted by Observer Research Foundation revealed that 35% women are disinterested for gig job due to less pay. A survey conducted by Staffing Consultancy Team Lease on gender earning found 8-10% gap in income earned by men and women.
- Women in gig job lack voice and bargaining power with employers due to lack of group solidarity and unable to take action.
- Women face challenges in gender related occupational segregation, performance monitoring system, categorisation of the job as "Feminine", stereotypes and barriers. In UK, in Hassel (Providing cleaning services) are women workers, where as in Deliveroo (Food delivery platform) and Uber (Private transport platform) 94% and 95% are men respectively.
- Gig workers are not entitled to maternity benefit, health insurance, compensation, allowances, retirement benefits etc.
- The women in gig jobs are harassed in the workplace. According to Kasilwal (2019) there is no provision of grievance redressal mechanism for women. The dispute between the customers and workers are resolved at their level.

Policy Recommendation

The policies recommended to protect the rights of the women gig workers are as follows:

- Amendment in labour laws for the women workers in the unorganised sector.
- Protection to women gig workers by implementing grievance redressal mechanism, and sexual harassment cell at workplace.
- Due to low level participation of women in trade union, opportunities should be given to them for network building. Self Employed Women Association (SEWA) providing support to women working in informal sectors.
- Lack of data on total number of women workers in gig economy relating to geographic location, age, health related issues, migratory state etc. may be maintained in database in order to provide them support and assistance required by them.

CONCLUSION

Gig jobs provide both opportunities and challenges for women. Due to flexibility in working hours, autonomy, self-employment and income more and more women turned into gig jobs. The women participation in gig economy can be increased with enhancing their skill and

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knowledge by imparting training, adequate financial resources, gender sensitization awareness programme, and access to digital skill. In order to encourage the women participation in the gig economy, NITI Aayog in a report entitled “India’s booming Gig and Platform economy in India” has introduced fiscal incentive such as tax relief and start up grants for companies in which one third participants are women and persons with disabilities. The contribution of women in gig economy should be recognised with celebration and sharing the success stories of their achievement by creating inclusive and gender equity.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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