



Research Article

Gig Economy in India: An Analysis with Survey Data

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Abstract

The present study examines the recent changing pattern of the Indian labour market and highlights the gig economy as one of the fastest-growing employment generation platforms. It explored the importance of gig workers in the present Indian context, as it provides vast employment opportunities among the Indian workforce, especially among the present generations. Using the different survey data, the study analyses the various aspects of the gig economy in contemporary India. This study highlights the sector-wise gig workers hiring in India and found that the maximum of them were engaged in the retail trade sector, followed by e-commerce. The state-wise analysis shows that West Bengal is recorded as the highest provider of gig workers, followed by Uttar Pradesh, in terms of the number of gig workers during 2022. The various reasons are discussed for the emergence of the gig economy, but the most reported reason was to have some extra money besides the main occupation. Finally, it summarizes and concludes.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 A Brief Overview

The gig economy in today's India is one of the fastest-growing as it creates more than half of the employment of the Indian population. During the last decade, India has undergone a remarkable digital transformation. The State of India's Digital Economy Report (2024) notes that India ranks as the third most digitalised economy in the world and stands 12th among G20 nations. The COVID-19 pandemic itself accelerated the growth

of the gig economy as the pandemic disrupted the job market, and so during this time platform economy emerged as a viable source of income.

The term "gig" refers to temporary, short-term employment without any kind of work benefits according to the labour laws. According to the Ministry of Labour Employment, a Gig worker is defined as a person who works in the labour market and generates income from activities outside the so-called traditional employee relationship. According to the World

Economic Forum (WEF), the exchange of labour for money between individuals or companies via a digital platform with the customers is known as the gig economy. Gig workers were first incorporated into the legal framework during 2020 in the code of social security for providing them with social security, accident insurance, health and maternity benefits and other work benefits.

Gig and platform workers are playing a significant role in the contemporary labour market of India, as it can ensure the employability of any person who is willing to work in the existing market structure. In this regard, the women and upcoming youth workforce are important as it anyhow increasing their living standard by providing them instant cash for their work. There are mainly two kinds of platforms: 1) web-based, 2) location-based. The web-based platform workers are those who work from anywhere with a prerequisite smartphone with internet. On the other hand, the location-based platforms allow working from any specific locations, like carpooling, ridesharing, food and grocery delivery services [ILO (2021)].

The gig and platform economy is one of the flourishing employment sectors in contemporary India as it offers new platforms for business, new income-generating opportunities and an easy way of income, especially for the young generations. Not only in India, but the gig workers are also increasing rapidly all over the world within a short period. According to the ILO's World Employment Outlook report (2021), the number of web-based and location-based online platforms increased from 142 in 2010 to over 777 in 2020, especially in the restaurant and retail industries. The gig workers have a long history, but during the COVID-19 pandemic, an abundance of workers were once again shifted to

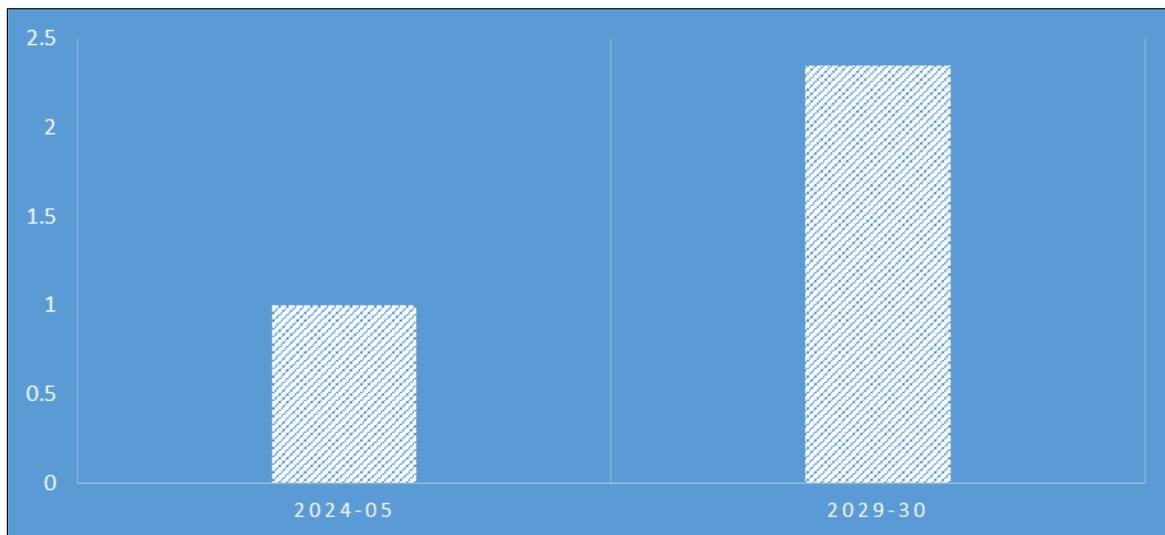
the gig economy to overcome themselves from the suffering of job loss due to the nationwide lockdown.

1.2 OBJECTIVE

The basic objective of this paper is to portray a picture of the gig workers in contemporary India. The study examines the sector wise hiring of the gig workers using the recent survey data along with state wise distribution of the gig workers as per their registration on the e-shram portal. This analysis help us to identify the major sectors in the gig economy where the workers concentrate most and also important states in India where gig economy is more flourishing. Apart from this, the study also analyse the gender wise participation in the gig economy to examine the relative participation of women in the gig economy compared to men and hence to identify their position in the gig sector.

1.4 Gig Workers in India

India has one of the largest and rapidly growing gig economies, where industry estimates more than 12 million people deliver food, driving cabs, sorting e commerce packages and perform other services as per demand. So this sector has become very crucial and important for present generation workers who even migrate from rural to urban sectors to secure an employment into these gig platforms. According to a report by Niti Ayog (2023), around 9.9 million Indians are currently engaged in gig platforms. Moreover, India is expected to have 23.5 million gig workers by 2029-30. The below figure shows the expected rise in the gig workers in India in the coming 30 years. It is observed that during 2024-25 there is about 1 crore gig workers in India which is expected to be rise about 2.35 crores during 2029-30.

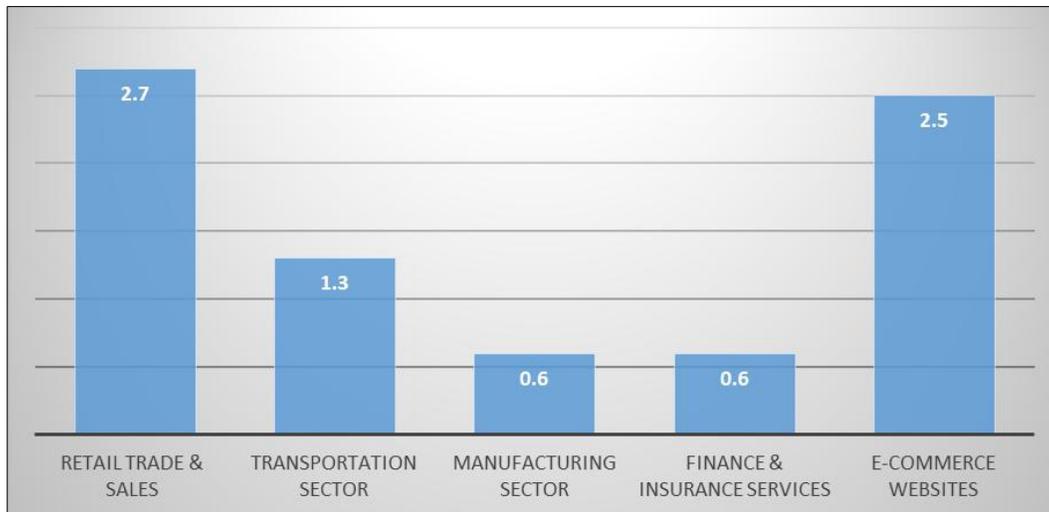


Source: Niti Ayog

Fig 1: Projected Employment in India's Gig Economy (Numbers in crores)

Gig workers are not suitable for every sectors. They are particularly concentrated in some sectors which are mainly service oriented and driven by digital technology. The below

figure shows some important sectors of the gig economy by their employment during 2023 where retail trade & sales have the maximum share followed by e-commerce.



Source: Niti Ayog

Fig 2: Sector-wise Gig Hiring in 2023 (Values in Millions)

Table 1 represents the share of the gig workers by industrial classification during the mentioned years. It is observed that retail trade was the dominating sector throughout the entire periods followed by the transportation and storage. This may be because of that these industries heavily rely on location specific demand and offer flexible staff solution by bridging the demand supply gap of labour. A recent report from Deloitte in partnership with FICCI, "Spotting India's PRIME innovation moment," reveals that the gig workforce in India is expected to reach 23.5 million by 2030, with retail being a major driver. The growth of these industries was actually triggered by the massive demand on e-commerce platforms by the customers especially for quick delivery and fulfilment roles in metro cities. Apart from these sectors, the gig workers was marginally found in the information, communication, financial, insurance and food service activities during the study periods. According to a report by World Bank titled ' Financial Services for Gig Workers: Lessons on Getting Design and Delivery Right' mentioned that gig workers in the financial and communication services mainly consists of "high-skilled" gig workers as a role of freelancers, independent contractors and consultants.

Table 1: Distribution (in percentage) of gig workers by industrial classification for the periods 2017-18, 2018-19, 2019-20

NIC 2008	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Manufacturing	10.5	10.03	9.17
Electricity, gas, steam and air condition supply	0.67	0.73	0.33
Water supply, sewage and waste management	0.59	0.49	0.47
Construction	2.31	2.58	3.06
Retail trade	36.48	40.3	38.95
Transportation and Storage	20.86	17.4	19.18
Accommodation and food services	6.05	5.2	5.94
Information and Communication	7.91	7.74	7.39
Financial and Insurance activities	7.78	8.98	9.21
Real estate activities	3.77	2.84	3.53
Administrative and support service activities	0.36	0.68	0.55
Other education group	0.38	0.58	0.67
Education support services	2.34	2.44	1.56
Total	100	100	100

Source: Niti Ayog

Gig economy in Indian demography is growing fast as the workers consider it as an alternative way of surviving their livelihoods other than regular salaried employment with instant income. To them platform works appear to be very attractive due to income opportunities within a short time. As per Niti Ayog, (2022) [4] participation of women have also increased in this platform and they are more likely to take this platform after marriage. An industry report surveyed over 4000 gig workers from platform zomato,swiggy, uber, ola, urban clap and amazon are found that these jobs are increasingly become famous among those who have just completed or studying graduation. According to a survey by Fairwork, Uber, Bigbasket, Flipkart & Swiggy are the top rated gig platforms in India. An observe Research Foundation report claims that 98 percent of this gig workforce earn less than Rs.500,000 annually and around 77.6 percent of gig workers earn Rs. 250,000 or less on an annual basis.

The gig economy in India is heavily concentrated in the major metropolitan cities may be due to the digital transformation, expansion of e-commerce and overall rise in demand among the consumers. According to the report by Niti Ayog (2022) [4], metro cities account for 50 percent of total demand where Delhi NCR leads as the prime hub for gig workers where the demand was roughly 17-18 percent followed by Mumbai, which was particularly strong in platform based services and accounts for about 20 percent demand. Bengaluru was emerged as a major hub driven by technology, start up and so it was mainly driven by platform based gig workers accounts for 15 percent of total demand. Kolkata was mainly constitute by blue colour gig workers who were mainly engaged as delivery partner, home services, logistics and ride-hailing.

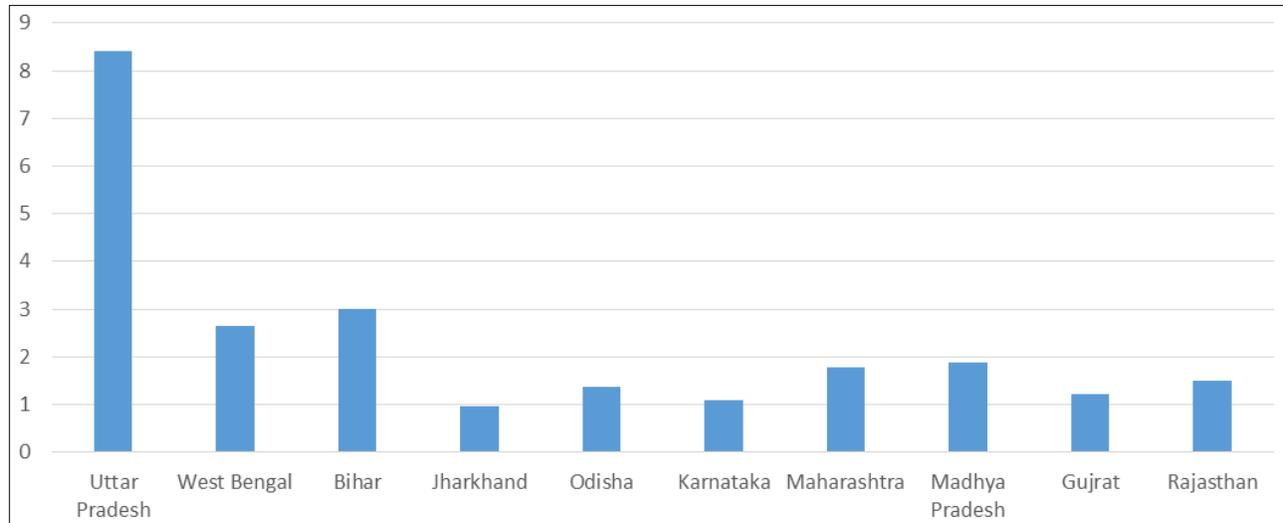
According to the data by Union Ministry of Labour there were about 7,17,686 registered gig workers and almost 58 percent of them emerged from West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar alone. The below figure also depicts the situation where West Bengal recorded as the highest number of gig workers followed

by Uttar Pradesh and Bihar as per the Central Government registration database. This dynamism may be due to the huge population of the state, so to find employment, many of them have joined into this gig economy especially the present generations as it doesn't require any skill and also provide instant cash on works. Moreover, the provision to get employed into the public sector was too low and so there always remain a heavy demand in the unorganized sector. So, in order to get rid from this, many young graduates employ themselves in the gig economy.

On the other hand, the number of gig workers were low in

Maharashtra and Gujarat may be due to the fair industrialization while in case of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, the greater provision of public as well as organized private sector lowers the number of gig workers in the economy.

The figure below depicts the top 10 states reporting the highest registration of the gig workers on e-shram portal as per 3rd August, 2025. It is observed that Uttar Pradesh reported the highest registered state on gig workers followed by West Bengal and Bihar whereas Gujarat and Rajasthan experienced comparatively a low rate of gig workers may be due to the high employment in the industrial sectors.



Source: E-Shram portal

Fig 3: Top 10 states reporting the highest registration on e-shram portal as on 3.8.2025

Table 2 shows the state wise participation of male and female workers in the gig economy according to the registration on e-shram portal as per the latest record. It is observed that almost in every states of India the work was mainly dominated by the male workers where female participates very less. The disparity in the participation of male and female gig workers is prominently observed some states like- Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Telengana where the gig economy was mostly dominated by the male workers whereas a significant amount of female gig workers was found in West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Assam,

Maharashtra though there number were less than their male counterparts. According to Fernandez *et al.* (2026) overall female participation in the gig economy broadly ranges from 10 to 30 percent. The report, 'Women's Inclusion in the Gig Economy: An Unfulfilled Promise' mentioned that two factors determine the participation of female in the gig economy which are access to internet and smartphones and both of these continue to favour men. Moreover the report also stated that women gig workers often face challenge due to low wages, lack of security and limited bargaining power.

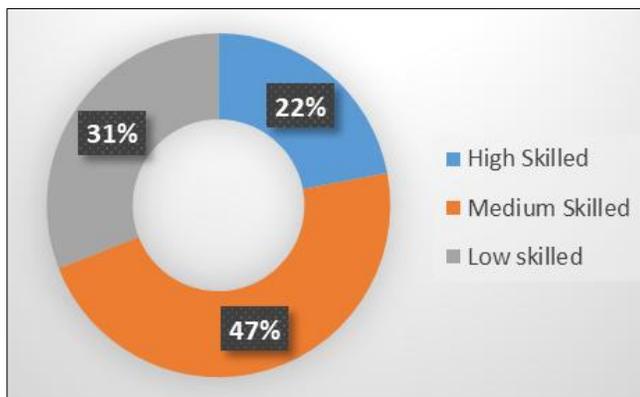
Table 2: State/UT Wise Gig Workers and Platform Workers Registered on e-shram portal as on 27-03-2025

State/UT	Male	Female
Andaman and Nicobar Islands	21	11
Andhra Pradesh	2729	2396
Arunachal Pradesh	43	28
Assam	5387	5422
Bihar	2205	2338
Chandigarh	109	23
Chhattisgarh	437	210
Delhi	2807	938
Goa	83	21
Gujarat	3108	1306
Haryana	1299	334
Himachal Pradesh	104	158

Jammu and Kashmir	326	160
Jharkhand	981	543
Karnataka	4115	1220
Kerala	974	203
Ladakh	11	3
Lakshadweep	1	NA
Madhya Pradesh	2357	1564
Maharashtra	8467	3355
Manipur	28	29
Meghalaya	71	36
Mizoram	21	15
Nagaland	24	11
Odisha	876	277
Puducherry	62	18
Punjab	881	563
Rajasthan	2834	2010
Sikkim	29	13
Tamil Nadu	3100	1733
Telangana	3656	317
Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu	13	10
Tripura	128	44
Uttar Pradesh	4788	1636
Uttarakhand	294	161
West Bengal	14313	12058
Grand Total	66682	39164

Source: E-Shram portal

The figure 4 shows the percentage of gig workers by their level of skill where it is observed that about half of the gig workforce are of medium skill type and a very few are of high skill type. This trend is quite obvious as the gig workers do not need any prerequisite skill, just they have common knowledge about internet as the works are mostly app based. So, due to lack of formal jobs and huge population demand, many medium educated boys and girls join the gig economy to survive with their family.

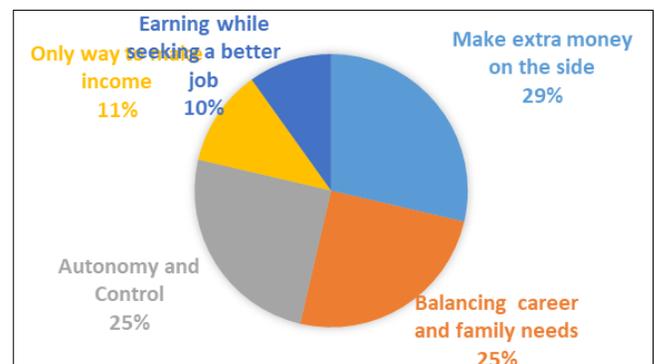


Source: Niti Ayog 2022 [4]

Fig 4: Percentage of Gig Workers by their Level of Skill

The Figure below shows the different reasons for choosing the gig work and explored the fact that maximum people are preferring it to make some extra money may be after their primary jobs to sustain better. Besides this around 25 percent of people are choosing it to balance between their career and family needs. It may be scenario that they are preparing for government exams or continue with any higher education and

to support their family they are working as the gig workers to have some money in hand to support their family. The situation depicts that around 25 percent workers are in the gig economy for their own autonomy and control. On the other hand, only 11 percent of the people are working in this gig economy as this is their only way to make income.



Source: Future of India's GigWork (<https://www.drishitias.com/daily-updates/daily-news-editorials/>)

Fig 5: Reason for choosing Gig Work in India

1.4 Gig Economy and Women

The Gig platform not only creates a space for men but it is also opening up a position for women as many women in present India are coming to join the gig economy. They are actively participating in the gig economy, such as : domestic helper, providing salon service at home (for example: urban company) and also engaged as a food delivery partner or as an app cab driver, though as a smaller extent. Platforms like Meesho, Myntra have enabled the women, especially who are homemakers, to enter into the commercial business space by reselling their products which help them integrate with others

digitally. It is observed that women tend to be concentrated in some certain sectors of gig economy which are particularly famine based, like- beauty & salon work (Raval & Pal (2019))^[9], cleaning & caregiving sector (Hunt & Samman (2019))^[5], where the pay rates were lower compared to another sectors. So, as a whole the gig economy in present India help the women to get not only financially independent but also empower them socially. According to Niti Ayog Report (2022)^[4], around 83 percent of women gig workers are married which infers the changing pattern of female work in the labour market and breaks down the traditional principle of lower participation of married women as they are not at all want to remain depend on their husband. The report explored that the women have opted for the platform work for the need to participate in the economic activities to support the dependent household members. This scenario is a very positive vibrant towards women as it indicates changing societal norms and allowing women to balance between work and family.

1.5 Future of Gig Economy

The Gig Economy has offered new business ventures and income generating opportunities in a short span of time. It is becoming more attractive especially among the youths due to its returns in a short period with minimum investment. Particularly, the restaurant and retail industries are emerging as the most flourishing sectors in the gig economy. As most of the web based platforms are located at the urban and semi-urban areas, so it triggered more the migration from rural to urban areas and are also increasing among educated youths due to the lack of availability proper formal jobs. According to ILO Report, around 73 percent of highly educated people from developing countries work on web based platforms, which is relatively higher than developed countries and this is may be due to the huge population pressure and limited employment opportunities in the formal sector. The participation in the gig economy has been increasing over the periods due to flexibility in the job schedule due to web and app based by choosing when to work and when not. For women, this platform is more comfortable as they can engage in this activity after performing their domestic duties. According to ILO Report, the proportion of highly educated females working as freelancers is very high in developing countries compared to developed countries. So it is observed that gig economy has been growing as an exorbitant pace, as it can ensure income stability among a large group of young population who may face difficulties in getting a suitable job may be due to skill mismatch and other reasons in the so called traditional labour market.

1.6 CONCLUSIONS

From the overall discussion it is clear that gig workers constitute an important part of the labour market as their numbers are gradually increasing over the years which signifies many and many people are joining the gig economy in search of employment. As due to informalisation and reduction of public sector jobs, the workers are unable to find jobs in the formal economy and there is a huge pressure in the informal sectors.

So, to come out of this situation many workers join into this gig platform to earn as it doesn't require any prior knowledge and skill and instead it provides instant cash to the workers. The gig economy offer enormous advantages starting from low barriers to entry, easy enrolment, work time flexibility among the works. Though gig economy is growing up gradually in Indian labour market, but it has also several limitations. One of the important problem is that non-availability of data of the gig workers in India, so it is very difficult for the researcher to estimate the number of actual gig workers in the entire economy. The another problem is the lack of social security and written job contract for the workers as they working on temporary basis. In this regard, the situation of women are worst as they do not have any paid maternal leave, instead they face mental and even physical harassment from their client in many situations, which demotivate them and they often quit their jobs.

1.7 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

As the gig economy has been emerging as one of the important platform for employment generation especially among youths, so the proper policy would be recommended to remove the challenges of the gig economy. Though many women are opting this gig platform, but still WESO report (ILO 2021) pointed out that only four in ten female workers join online web based platform. So to include more women in the gig economy, the digital training is required so they can develop their skill and participate more in this platform which can even increase the female labour force participation in the economy. Apart from this, another issue related to the women in this platform is the safety of them in the workplace. To ensure this, proper work environment along with social securities and job contract should be implemented. This formal recognition is required for women as well as for men working as the gig workers so they get the benefit of insurance and health benefits which is essentially required as per the current labour laws. Finally, to uplift the skill of the gig workers the platform led skilling may be induced in India's National Skill Development Policy.

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Dr Madhurima Saha is currently engaged with the Department of Economics, South Calcutta Girls' College, affiliated to University of Calcutta. She has completed her PhD in Labour Economics from the University of Calcutta. She has published her research work in esteemed national and international journals. Her area of interest is Labour Economics, Development, Indian Economics and Econometrics. She is also a visiting faculty member of the Economics Department of Gargi Memorial Institute of Technology under JIS Group, affiliated to MAKAUT.