

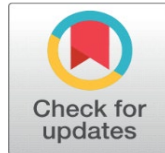


INVISIBLE LABOR IN DIGITAL AGE: WOMEN AND THE GIG ECONOMY

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ABSTRACT

Over the past few years, the gig economy has led to a major shift in work and employment patterns, characterized by task-based, flexible, and technology-mediated employment opportunities. Promising greater flexibility and potential income as an alternative to traditional work, gig jobs have gained a strong foothold in the developing world, including India. However, the benefits of this economic shift are not distributed equally, especially regarding women's participation in the gig sector. This study explores the role of women in the gig economy to understand patterns, barriers, and opportunities. It draws on secondary data from academic research, policy papers, and reports by international organizations that study the gig economy. Overall, the participation of women in gig work remains notably low. Several interconnected barriers are identified, including societal attitudes, safety and privacy concerns, expectations around work-life balance, and the precarious and informal nature of gig work. By critically examining these issues, the study highlights systemic obstacles that limit women's access and sustainability on gig platforms and presents policy recommendations to promote a more gender-inclusive gig economy. This research adds to the broader literature on gender, labor, and digital transformation and calls for a rethinking of gig work policies to foster equity and inclusion.

Keywords: Gig Economy, Digital Platforms, Rate of Participation, Women Empowerment

1. INTRODUCTION

The gig economy, a hallmark of the modern world of work, is characterized by its increasing reliance on short-term contracts, freelance, or task-based work, rather than traditional permanent employment [De Stefano \(2016\)](#). The word "gig" first came from the music industry, where it referred to a short performance or show. Today, "gig" is used to describe short-term or temporary jobs. This fast-growing model of work leverages digital platforms and offers flexibility, autonomy, and a sense of independence compared to traditional employment [Kässi and Lehdonvirta \(2018\)](#). Individuals who work in gig jobs have the opportunity to perform different jobs and can usually choose their working hours. They can perform a variety of tasks, from ride sharing and food delivery to working remotely and providing professional services such as graphic design or creating content. In India, the gig

economy is rapidly growing, with a significant increase due to the proliferation of smartphones, the increasing prevalence of internet access, and a growing consumer need for on-demand services across various sectors [NITI Aayog \(2022\)](#). This quick growth is not anecdotal; conservative estimates predict gig workers to rise to 23.5 million by 2029-30 [NITI Aayog \(2022\)](#), and it will have an important role in India's economic future.

Figure 1

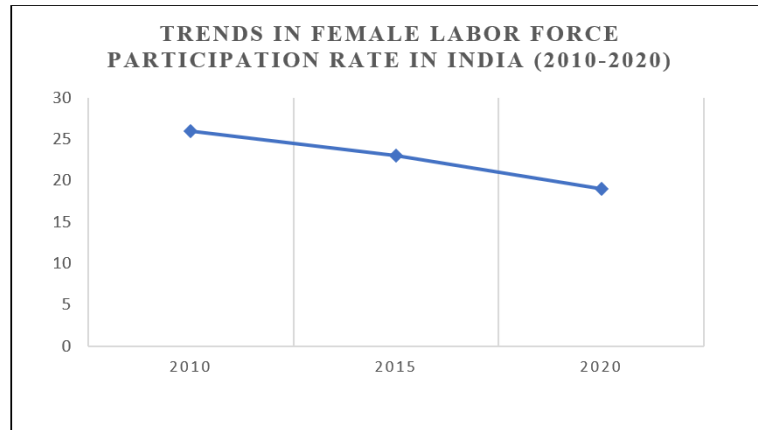


Figure 1 This Line Graph Illustrates the Decline in Female Labor Force Participation in India from 2010 to 2020

Source: (ILO)

Although the gig economy has the potential to bring about tremendous changes, especially for those who would like to have flexible sources of income or those who are encountering barriers to traditional employment, sadly, there is a rather stark gender disparity in the burgeoning gig workforce. Although it is a little bit fluid when we discuss exact, universally accepted figures in terms of women's engagement in gig work, the precarious reality is largely that women's labor force participation in India is extremely low, only about 19% in 2020 [International Labor Organization \(2021\)](#), as visually represented in [Figure 1](#). This figure places India as one of the lowest globally and speaks to fixed and deep-rooted socio-cultural and economic issues (World Bank, 2022). Women's participation in labor (in general), and their link to the gig economy is muted by a variety of systemic conditions, namely (but not limited to) normative socio-cultural contexts, differences in access to important digital infrastructure, and heightened concerns around personal safety (in both an online and offline context) [International Labor Organization \(2021\)](#), [NITI Aayog \(2022\)](#), [Oxfam India 2023](#). This research examines these questions in-depth with attention to some of the factors that have influenced and continue to undermine women's participation in the Indian gig economy. This research will then provide some context for further understanding the challenges and opportunities present for women in this ecosystem.

In theory, the flexibility that gig work brings should be a significant opportunity to reduce one of the persistent barriers women have historically faced in accessing formal employment, particularly in patriarchal societies where traditional mobility and limited time spent in the labor force have constrained access to work. Gig work allows women to better manage work and domestic responsibilities, access remote work opportunities, and avoid nearly all of the more traditional entry barriers associated with the formal labor market [International Labor Organization \(2021\)](#), [Chen and Van der Aalst \(2021\)](#). Such flexibility is often hailed as a pathway to power

that can give women economic and other independence and greater autonomy over their own time, work, and lives.

The practical reality starkly contrasts with this optimistic theoretical framework; in the Indian gig economy, women are significantly underrepresented. According to a compelling 2021 report by the Boston Consulting Group (BCG), women make up only 20% of India's gig workforce [Boston Consulting Group \(2021\)](#). This statistic illustrates our significant social gender gap, which reflects broader socio-economic inequalities across the country. The gap is much more than a simple ratio; it is a functioning part of a mosaic of structural and cultural realities that affect women unequally. Women gig workers often struggle with limited access to vital digital infrastructure like devices and reliable internet connectivity, as well as limited access to banking and financial technology services, both of which are essential for seamless participation in platform-based work [ForumIAS \(2024\)](#), [Question of Cities \(2024\)](#). In addition, the report established that women gig workers often have limited access to training, and they demonstrated lower digital literacy rates than men. This creates a large, often overlooked, skill gap [Digital India Foundation \(2023\)](#).

In addition to access and skills issues, substantial safety concerns are a strong barrier to women's participation, particularly in service roles where physical presence in public or private locations is required [Britsafe \(2024\)](#), [Human Rights Watch \(2022\)](#). The gig economy is often poorly regulated and rarely provides safety nets, protections, reporting processes, or grievance systems. In cases where protections do exist, they are usually weak and put women at risk. In addition to safety, women's ability to report harassment, seek redress for unfair labor practices, and negotiate for fair remuneration in gig employment is limited because there are often no formal contracts or grievance procedures in gig employment [Fairwork India \(2023\)](#), [Workers' Rights Institute \(2022\)](#). It is also important to remember that there can even be algorithmic management and worker management processes that are platform-based. Where gig workers are rated, directed to tasks, and paid based on their perceived performance, indications that are unknown to them and sometimes very subjective at the same time, we can easily produce a layer of complexity that makes existing discrimination worse. There are real algorithmic barriers to some workers with caregiving responsibilities, as well as mobility constraints etc, which can unfairly penalize many gig workers, particularly citing any reasons for not prioritizing them for the most lucrative assignments, and consequently reducing their ratings [Wood et al. \(2019\)](#), [International Labor Organization \(2023\)](#). The reliance either actively or implicitly on algorithmic rating and other platforms means that not only can they reinforce existing forms of discrimination, but they can also enhance social and economic inequalities that decrease the equity of the worker community overall, especially for women.

As a consequence, this study purposefully examines the diverse experiences of women in the Indian gig economy, and relatedly, will carefully analyse the ways they participate, the barriers they face, and will also identify the opportunities for greater participation. The research contributes to the larger global discussion of the future of work, digital labor, and gender equity in the discipline of gender research by presenting context-based analysis and recommendations for gender-based policy proposals tailored specifically to the Indian context. By exploring the socio-economic and institutional characteristics of gig work, this project highlights the need to rethink and redesign platform-based work models.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The scholarly discourse on the gig economy increasingly highlights its gendered dimensions, noting that while platform-based labor offers opportunities for flexible income generation, it often reproduces traditional labor market inequalities. The promise of autonomy and flexibility, often associated with gig work, is frequently undermined by structural constraints such as low and inconsistent wages, a lack of legal protections, and informal employment contracts. These vulnerabilities are more acutely experienced by women, who often enter gig work from already precarious positions in the labor market [International Labor Organization \(2021\)](#), [Fairwork India \(2023\)](#), [Wood et al. \(2019\)](#). This tension between flexibility and precarity is particularly salient in the Indian context, where women's participation in paid labor has historically been shaped by domestic responsibilities. [Deshpande and Kabeer \(2021\)](#) argue that women's entry into gig work is often conditioned by their roles as primary caregivers. As a result, their engagement tends to be part-time, home-based, or limited to specific sectors, which directly affects their earning capacity and career continuity. Their findings underscore the persistence of patriarchal norms that view women's income-generating activities as supplemental rather than essential [Deshpande and Kabeer \(2021\)](#).

Building on this, [Agarwal et al. \(2021\)](#) explore how gendered segmentation manifests in task allocation on digital platforms. Women are predominantly employed in caregiving, beauty, wellness, and domestic services—areas that mirror conventional gender roles. While these tasks may appear accessible and flexible, they often offer lower pay, fewer protections, and limited opportunities for career advancement compared to male-dominated segments like logistics and ride-hailing. This occupational clustering not only reinforces existing gender hierarchies but also restricts women's economic mobility within the gig sector.

Access to digital tools further complicates this dynamic. The digital divide remains a significant structural barrier for many women, particularly in rural and low-income households. [GSMA \(2020\)](#) reports that women in South Asia are 23% less likely than men to own a smartphone and 51% less likely to use mobile internet. This lack of access impairs their ability to navigate app-based platforms, engage with clients, and access digital payment systems—functions that are integral to gig work. Similarly, [Madgavkar et al. \(2022\)](#), in their McKinsey Global Institute report, argue that addressing the digital gender gap is a prerequisite for equitable participation in digital labor markets. Without targeted interventions, technology may deepen, rather than bridge, existing gender disparities.

Another layer of disadvantage emerges from the algorithmic management practices that underpin gig platforms. Algorithms determine work allocation, performance ratings, and payment structures, often with limited transparency or recourse for workers. [Wood et al. \(2019\)](#) demonstrate how such systems reward continuous availability and rapid responsiveness, metrics that inherently disadvantage women with caregiving duties or mobility limitations. This creates a cycle where women receive fewer assignments, earn lower ratings, and are subsequently deprioritized in task distribution ([ISB SRITNE, 2024](#), [OSF \(2023\)](#)). Recent studies further highlight the emotional and cognitive toll of algorithmic surveillance, particularly on women who must navigate not only labor precarity but also the pressures of digital performance management ([Labor Law Unibo 2024](#)). Globally, the absence of robust legal and institutional safeguards compounds these challenges. Informal gig work often operates outside the purview of labor laws, leaving workers, especially women, without basic protections such as

maternity benefits, anti-harassment policies, or insurance coverage (Labor Law Unibo (2024), OSF (2023). Hunt and Samman (2019) observe that this regulatory gap is particularly acute in developing economies, where labor markets are already marked by informality and fragmentation. The lack of social security provisions and grievance redressal mechanisms makes gig work an unviable long-term option for many women, contributing to their continued marginalization.

This regulatory shortfall is echoed in the platform-specific evaluations conducted by Fairwork India (2022), which assess digital labor platforms based on criteria such as fair pay, conditions, contracts, management, and representation. Their findings indicate that only a handful of platforms have implemented gender-sensitive policies or support systems for women workers. Many platforms lack mechanisms to address discrimination, enforce safe working conditions, or provide recourse in cases of harassment—all of which are critical for sustaining women's participation in the gig economy Fairwork India (2022).

Finally, Rani and Furrer (2021) link these structural and digital inequalities to broader policy inertia. While the gig economy continues to expand at a rapid pace, governance frameworks have struggled to keep up. Women, already disadvantaged by traditional labor market structures, face heightened precarity in this emerging form of work. Without comprehensive reforms that incorporate gender-sensitive digital infrastructure, inclusive platform design, and enforceable labor rights, the gig economy risks reinforcing—and even deepening—existing inequalities Rani and Furrer (2021).

Together, this body of literature underscores that the barriers women face in the gig economy are not isolated or incidental but rather deeply embedded in socio-cultural norms, technological systems, and institutional structures. Any effort to create a more inclusive gig economy must therefore adopt a multidimensional approach—addressing not only access and participation but also equity, safety, and dignity at work.

3. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

To examine the structural, socio-cultural, and institutional barriers shaping women's participation in the Indian gig economy, and to develop policy-oriented strategies for fostering gender-inclusive platform work.

4. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive research design, relying only on secondary data to examine the gendered dimensions of gig work in India. It draws on a breadth of academic literature and policy documents, and reports published by international organizations [including the International Labor Organization (ILO), Fairwork India, the McKinsey Global Institute, GSMA, and others]. Specific documents were selected purposively because they addressed digital labor, gender equity, and the gig economy in India.

Thematic content analysis was conducted to identify and synthesize patterns emerging from the literature related to the barriers, opportunities, and systemic inequalities for women participating in platform work. The main themes included safety and privacy concerns, digital exclusion, algorithmic bias, cultural norms and expectations, and inadequate institutional support. Using gender-disaggregated data on labor force participation, segmentation of sectors, and platform design, to triangulate and augment the analyses where possible.

These methods enable a contextualized, critical understanding of women's unique experiences in the gig economy and provide evidence-informed insights and policy strategies, but do not claim to be generalizable. The interpretive design of this study attempts to dismantle structural asymmetries and also surface the "invisible labor" done by women in the digital economy.

5. BARRIERS FACED BY WOMEN IN THE GIG WORK/ECONOMY

Figure 2

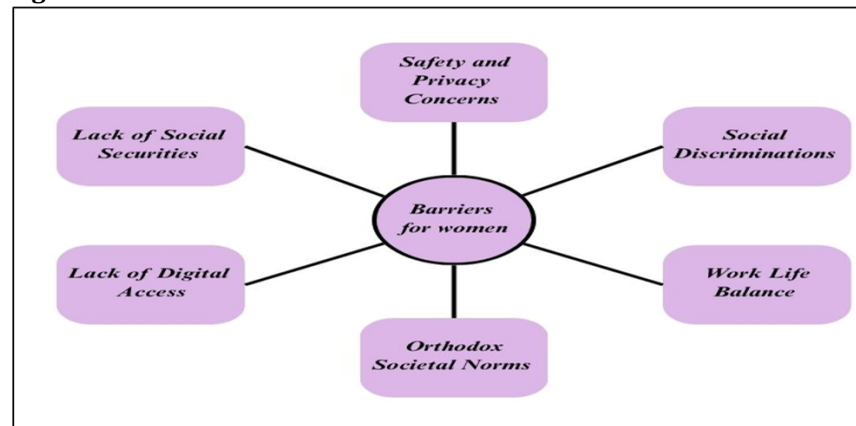


Figure 2 Represents the Different Barriers/Challenges Faced by Women While Working in the Gig Economy.

Source: (Author's work)

As seen in [Figure 2](#), the complex barriers experienced by women working in the gig economy are numerous, and these are also connected to each other. Ultimately, the barriers to women working in decent work within the gig economy can be seen as clusters of structural, social, and digital barriers that perpetuate and maintain the inequality that exists within the labor market in India, and specifically in the context of platform-based work.

The first major barrier to women working in decent work in the gig economy is safety and privacy. Many gig jobs (e.g., delivery jobs or domestic work) entail mobility; for a woman to access the work, she may need to travel to pick up or deliver a parcel, or go to a client's house, and therefore, there are real physical risks for women workers. The absence of safety features on platforms, the absence of route planning features if the nature of the job requires mobility, limited escape routes, and the requirement for women to travel into public spaces hold them back. Women also have limited choices on the apps for reporting unsafe behaviours, so they remain vulnerable. Moreover, issues of digital safety, such as online harassment or exploitation of their data, become crucial issues that can limit their capacity to work on these platforms.

Social discrimination and gender discrimination continue to influence women's experiences in the labor force. Gendered stereotypes and patriarchal norms can have implications for women's wages, availability of work, and access to in-demand jobs. These stereotypes exist not just in the actual and interpersonal relationships women encounter in the offline world, but they also show up in the algorithmic rating and prioritization of workers within platforms that assess performance across several parameters that do not speak to women's actual work realities.

In addition, domestic responsibilities and the balancing of work-life spheres can present a heavy burden on women; women too often have to balance paid gig work with unpaid work in the home. Gig work comes with the potential for flexibility, but it often results in irregular work hours and a lack of predictable income support, making it difficult for women to consistently engage in gig work. Women are usually left making trade-offs that generally remove them from platform work or force them to engage with lower-paying, less demanding work.

Women may feel an imperative to abide by cultural expectations that are associated with orthodox societal roles, which inhibit and shape women's monetary participation. In many cultures, women are taught and expected to prioritize family obligations and domestic duties above paid work responsibilities, which erode women's mobility and autonomy to make decisions that affect their career trajectories, particularly when family members are opposed to non-monogamous or non-traditional work. A lack of access to digital technology is another significant barrier. Many women, particularly those living in rural or low-income areas, do not have smartphones, access to reliable internet, or basic digital skills. Because gig work is digital, women are unable to access opportunities or onboard to apps, or use systems to accept digital payments. This worsens the digital divide for women.

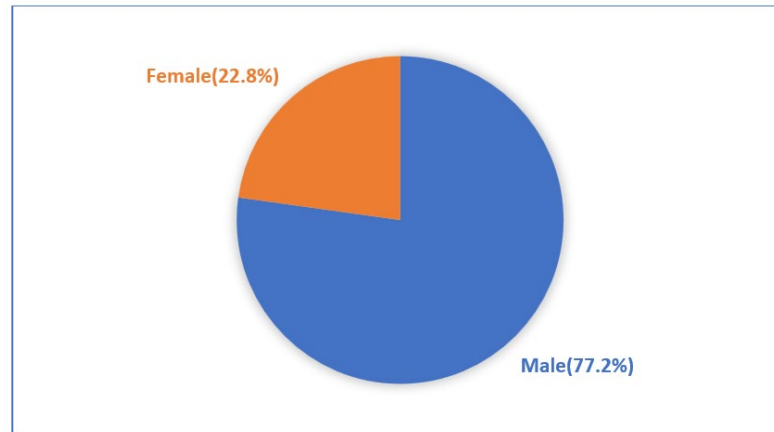
A lack of social security exacerbates economic vulnerability among women while in gig work. Many gig jobs are informal and may not offer any of the entitlements of traditional employment, in addition to a lack of employment benefits, meaning gig work does not include paid leave, health insurance, maternity protection, or retirement savings. Due to this, gig work is generally precarious as a choice for women, particularly those who have economically and socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

In conclusion, these barriers exist in isolation from each other but are rather part of a much larger ecosystem of exclusion to women's equal participation in the gig economy. To turn the tide toward a more equitable and inclusive future of work in India, we first must understand the interlocking constraints and barriers that women face.

6. LOW RATE OF PARTICIPATION

6.1. GENDER GAP IN GIG WORK

The gender gap in gig work is reflective of broader labor market trends. The Periodic Labor Force Survey (2020-21) reported a female labor force participation rate (FLFPR) of just 22.8% shown in [Figure 3](#), and this underrepresentation extends into the gig economy. According to [NITI Aayog \(2022\)](#), although the gig workforce in India is projected to expand to 23.5 million workers by 2030, the proportion of women remains significantly low.

Figure 3**Figure 3** Gender-Wise Distribution of the Workforce in the Gig Sector**Source:** NITI Aayog (2022)

This low participation is largely attributable to deeply entrenched gender norms that view women's income-generating activities as secondary to their domestic responsibilities. Moreover, there is limited outreach and targeted engagement from digital platforms to onboard women workers, especially in non-traditional roles such as logistics and transport.

6.2. PLATFORM-SPECIFIC TRENDS

A gendered segmentation of gig work is evident across platforms. Women are predominantly concentrated in beauty and wellness services, online teaching, content writing, and micro-tasking platforms, which are viewed as "safe" and aligned with traditional gender roles [Agarwal et al. \(2021\)](#). In contrast, food delivery, ride-sharing, and technical freelancing remain heavily male-dominated due to mobility requirements, irregular working hours, and safety concerns. This horizontal segregation reduces the earning potential and upward mobility of women in the gig sector.

7. CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN IN THE GIG SECTOR

7.1. SAFETY AND PRIVACY CONCERNS

Safety remains one of the most significant deterrents for women contemplating gig work. In location-based services like delivery and cab driving, women face increased exposure to physical and verbal harassment. Moreover, the lack of platform accountability for user behaviour, coupled with inadequate grievance redressal systems, worsens the situation.

Privacy is another critical concern; women gig workers often have to share personal information, such as phone numbers and location details, with clients or customers. While some platforms have implemented masking features, many still lack basic privacy protocols [Fairwork India \(2022\)](#). These safety gaps disproportionately impact women's sense of security and limit their participation to only select sectors or hours.

7.2. LACK OF SOCIAL SECURITY

Most gig platforms classify workers as independent contractors rather than employees, which exempts them from providing benefits like health insurance, maternity leave, or retirement pensions. This model disproportionately affects women, particularly those who may require flexible work during pregnancy or need paid leave for childcare. The absence of formal employment rights makes gig work precarious and often unsustainable for women with caregiving responsibilities [International Labor Organization \(2021\)](#).

7.3. ALGORITHMIC DISCRIMINATION

Digital labor platforms use algorithmic management to assign tasks and evaluate performance. These algorithms often prioritize responsiveness, availability, and customer ratings, inadvertently disadvantaging women who may have time constraints or limited access to technology. Studies indicate that women tend to receive fewer assignments and lower ratings, which affects their visibility and earnings on these platforms [Wood et al. \(2019\)](#).

7.4. ORTHODOX SOCIETAL NORMS AND CULTURAL BARRIERS

Cultural norms and patriarchal values in India continue to restrict women's access to economic opportunities. In many households, women are discouraged from taking up work that involves interaction with strangers, working during late hours, or traveling alone. These societal attitudes are rooted in long-standing gender roles that see women primarily as caregivers and homemakers.

Additionally, the gig economy is often perceived as informal and unstable, making it socially less acceptable for women, especially in conservative families. Even when women do engage in gig work, they face constant scrutiny and pressure to prioritize family responsibilities. These norms not only hinder women's entry into the gig workforce but also limit their ability to scale up or transition to more lucrative roles [Deshpande and Kabeer \(2021\)](#).

7.5. WORK-LIFE BALANCE

While flexibility is touted as a key advantage of gig work, it often translates into unpredictability. For women juggling household responsibilities, childcare, and eldercare, the lack of fixed hours or consistent income can become a source of stress. The perception of autonomy is frequently undermined by platform algorithms that reward continuous availability.

According to an [Oxfam India survey \(2021\)](#), 76% of women gig workers reported that managing domestic duties alongside gig assignments was exhausting and unsustainable in the long run. The situation becomes more challenging during emergencies or personal crises, as gig platforms typically lack provisions for paid leave or temporary disengagement.

7.6. SOCIAL INSECURITY AND DISCRIMINATION

Women in gig roles often face double discrimination—as informal workers and as women. The lack of institutional safeguards, such as anti-harassment policies,

support networks, or unions, leaves them vulnerable to exploitation. Many female gig workers also report being paid less than their male counterparts for the same tasks, particularly in unregulated sectors.

Social stigma further isolates women engaged in gig work, especially in roles that involve domestic or beauty services. These roles, while essential, are often undervalued and seen as extensions of traditional gendered labor rather than skilled work deserving of dignity and fair compensation [International Labor Organization \(2021\)](#).

7.7. ACCESSIBILITY AND EASE OF ENTRY

Although digital platforms offer potential to democratize employment, access remains uneven. Women, particularly from rural or low-income backgrounds, face challenges related to smartphone ownership, digital literacy, and internet access. According to the [GSMA \(2020\)](#), women in India are 20% less likely to own a mobile phone and 50% less likely to use mobile internet compared to men.

Moreover, onboarding processes often require digital documentation, bank accounts, and familiarity with online payment systems, which can be exclusionary. Language barriers and the absence of user-friendly interfaces in regional languages further limit women's engagement with gig platforms.

8. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: INTERSECTIONALITY AND FEMINIST POLITICAL ECONOMY

This research draws on intersectionality and feminist political economy to explore the structural barriers that shape the experience of women in India's gig economy. Intersectionality, as a framework developed by [Crenshaw \(1989\)](#), examines how identities such as gender, caste, class, religion, location, and digital access intersect to co-construct experiences of marginalization and opportunity. Intersectionality as a framework makes clear that women's experiences and barriers in gig work are not uniform, but subject to several layers of disadvantage.

The feminist political economy framework extends this as a critique of the commodification of women's labor within capitalist systems, specifically the undervaluation of unpaid work and informal work. This framework also necessarily critiques notions of autonomy and flexibility in gig work, arguing these concepts, largely touted as empowering, are often associated with further patterns of precarity and exploitation, and gendered exclusion [Fraser \(2016\)](#), [Pearson and Elson \(2015\)](#). Combined, these frameworks provide a strong basis for analysing how platform work serves to reinforce patriarchal power through control by algorithms, informal work arrangements, and the absence of any social protections. They also provide support for the policies in the paper that strive to uphold digital labor justice in the name of equity, dignity, and sustainability for women workers.

9. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

To close the gender gap in the gig economy and address the precarity of invisible labor, a multi-faceted policy response is essential. The following recommendations will support an inclusive, secure, and empowering platform-based work ecosystem for women:

- **Legal Recognition and Social Protection:** Legally recognize gig workers as formal employees under labor law, granting them rights related to

minimum wage, healthcare, and maternity leave. Implement portable social protection systems, such as universal benefit schemes tied to ID, to ensure a baseline of protection across platforms and gigs.

- **Gender-Sensitive Platform Design:** Create safety protocols for gig and platform work that incorporate emergency response systems, simplified GPS tracking, and preferred female time slots. Develop algorithms that include gender-sensitive elements to enhance worker assignment and ensure equitable visibility, qualifications, and wage distributions among gig and platform workers.
- **Access to Digital Infrastructure:** Expand the affordability of internet access for women who own devices, especially in rural and peri-urban areas. Provide cost-effective digital literacy and training programs to improve women's ability and opportunities to participate in tech-enabled platforms and gig work.
- **Institutional Support and Collective Bargaining:** Encourage women's unions or associations that facilitate collective bargaining with platforms. Provide state-supported resources for community-based gig work cooperatives to enhance their bargaining power and recognition in local economic development.
- **Gender-Disaggregated Data and Research Mandate:** The governments should collect and publish sex-disaggregated data along with information on platform work participation, income structure patterns, and grievances. Support researchers in conducting cross-cutting research on caste, gender, and class and their effects on workers' lived experiences in platform work to inform inclusive policy design.

10. FUTURE RESEARCH AND POLICY DIRECTIONS

Future research should focus on longitudinal studies that follow women's career paths in the gig sector over time to understand patterns of entry, exit, and advancement. It is also crucial to examine intersectional factors—such as caste, class, rural-urban divides, and disability—that influence women's experiences in gig work. Additionally, policy analysis should evaluate the effectiveness of current gender-focused initiatives by platforms and governments, identifying best practices for wider adoption. Platform design must also be rethought to incorporate gender-sensitive technology and inclusive management systems. As gig work continues to reshape global labor dynamics, prioritizing women's inclusion through intentional, data-driven efforts is essential to improve both access, quality, and dignity of work.

11. CONCLUSION

The gig economy presents a unique opportunity to reimagine women's participation in the workforce by offering flexible, technology-enabled alternatives to traditional forms of work. However, as this study explained, while there are claimed opportunities for flexibility and empowerment, women's participation is often hindered by a variety of structural, social, and digital barriers. From safety concerns to digital exclusion, entrenched gender norms, and insufficient social protection, women in India face a complex web that restricts their access to and mobility within gig work. Thus, these challenges do not arise from individual circumstances or experiences but stem from deeper socio-economic and institutional systems.

To maximize the gig economy's potential for women's economic empowerment, we need a multi-faceted, gender-sensitive strategy that employs interventions at multiple levels: policy, platform, and community. First, safety improvements such as GPS tracking, panic buttons, and women-only service options must be integrated to ensure women's physical safety and digital security on gig platforms. Second, social protections such as portable benefits—maternity benefits, accident insurance, and pension benefits—should be extended to gig work to help women address precariousness and diminish economic vulnerability. Third, skills development programs, particularly those focusing on digital literacy and platform navigation, must reflect gender considerations or risk limiting the potential to bridge the digital divide. Fourth, local community engagement through awareness campaigns can challenge patriarchal norms and foster greater acceptance of women participating in digital labor. Finally, substantial regulatory reforms are needed to address gaps in accountability for platforms and to enforce normative remuneration practices in employment, inclusive work environments, and equitable work standards.

These intertwined issues of access are crucial not only for social justice but also for inclusive economic development. India's redefinition of labor in platform-based modes, approached through a gender-equity lens, can transform the decent work agenda of platforms into a truly transformative force for women, equality, and sustainable livelihoods in the digital age.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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