



GIG ECONOMY AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT – INDIAN SCENARIO

Dr. Bhagya Rathna R

Professor

MBA Department

Community Institute Of Management Studies

Bengaluru, India

ABSTRACT

The gig economy is a rapidly growing phenomenon that has revolutionized the way people work and earn money. It has enabled individuals to take on short-term, flexible jobs and make money without having to commit to long-term contracts or traditional employment. Gig workers have the freedom to choose when, where, and how much they want to work, giving them more control over their own lives. With this increased flexibility comes increased responsibility for gig workers to manage their finances and plan for the future. The gig economy is an emerging economic model that is rapidly gaining traction. It involves the use of short-term or freelance contracts to provide services and goods. This model has allowed people to work in flexible roles and earn a living from it. It has also enabled businesses to benefit from access to a global pool of talent, as well as reduced costs associated with hiring full-time employees. As the gig economy continues to grow, it is important for us to understand its implications for both workers and businesses alike.

Gig economy is providing skilled, semi skilled and unskilled jobs in several manufacturing and service sectors across the country and is playing a major role in the Indian economy and thus contributing towards the country's GDP. The gig economy is a rapidly growing and transforming the way people work and live. It provides women with an opportunity to take control of their lives, empower themselves financially, and achieve greater independence. Women are now able to create flexible working schedules that fit their needs and use the skills they already possess to find meaningful work. This shift in the workforce has created new opportunities for women to pursue their dreams while also providing them with more financial security. The gig economy has been a major driver of women empowerment in recent years. It has enabled more women to break into the workforce, while also providing them with the flexibility and autonomy they need to manage their own time and resources. With the right support, gig economy workers are able to achieve greater economic success and financial stability than traditional employees. This article will explore how the gig economy is helping to empower women and how it can be further leveraged for greater success.

Key words: Gig economy, Women Empowerment.

INTRODUCTON

In recent years Indian economy has been influenced by Gig economy , providing numerous skilled, semi skilled and unskilled jobs and enhancing country's GDP. Gig economy is the terminology used for less structured work arrangements ,contract workforces and freelancers who are paid for short-term work and flexible jobs are mediated through various online Platforms, the goods and services are acquired through apps on smart phones and other web based applications. These workers are called “Giggers ” or gig workers with flexible work schedules and offering their services to more than one employers.

These tasks could be in the form of delivery of items or food, completion of rides, attending maintenance or repair works, tutoring classes etc. With the rise in demand for online and door delivery services there are various services being provided on time share basis. It is having temporary jobs or doing separate pieces of work, each paid separately, rather than working for an employer, as the gig economy refers to temporary work positions. In gig economy, organizations hire independent workers on short-term assignments or temporary projects rather than full-time workers with permanent employment. The technological uptrend connects gig workers and the clients through online portals, service providing consultancies and agencies.

ORIGIN OF GIG ECONOMY

In 1915, Jazz musicians in US used the word “gig” for job. In 1940, an agency provided job for typists and other clerical staff on a temporary basis. Gig economy saw a steep rise in 90s along with digital growth age, 10% of the US workforce were employed on contract basis, temporary and on-call basis, when the demand for flexible work style increased so did the gig economy. Introduction of Craigslist in 1995 provided online classifieds for local San Francisco-based jobs, sales and services. In 1999, Upwork was launched for freelancers to find new projects and clients using internet. During recession in 2008 Gig economy gained significance. The former New Yorker editor Tina Brown coined the term “gig economy” in 2009. With the growth of information technology gig economy penetrated and has found its existence globally.

GIG ECONOMY IN INDIA

In India, there is upsurge in gig economy with the advent of the technology, it has created job opportunities to all levels of skilled workforce. There are number of people in India who work as gig workers, freelancers, flexi workers and with the companies like Ola, Uber, Swiggy, Zomato, Urban company, Pharmeasy, Dunzo, Big Basket, Flipkart, Blinkit, and many other companies are providing workers greater opportunities, there is an increasing trend of gig economy in India. The workers are hired on the contractual basis as per the organization requirement for a stipulated duration and are paid accordingly.

In the Gig Economy, the company becomes more of connector between the contractors and the clients than an employer to the worker, since the gig economy relies more on operation through technology platforms which aims at to connecting workers looking for flexible work arrangements with the companies who need them in a centralized location, such as an app or website. However, Gig economy workers can also work for more traditional companies, which have changed how their staffing system operates. When Companies have flexible workforce; they can cut down expenses on recruitment or training or office space & equipment and need not pay for any medical coverage, and can more easily replace their workforce if needed. Contract workers are more cost-effective for businesses and employers are benefitted with a wider range of applicant pool to choose from.

RISE OF THE GIG ECONOMY DURING PANDEMIC TIMES

Advent of enhanced digital technology in the backdrop of covid 19 and lockdown have compelled firms to re-engineer their activities so that a greater share of work is done by employees from their home base and also by individuals who are not permanent employees of the firm.

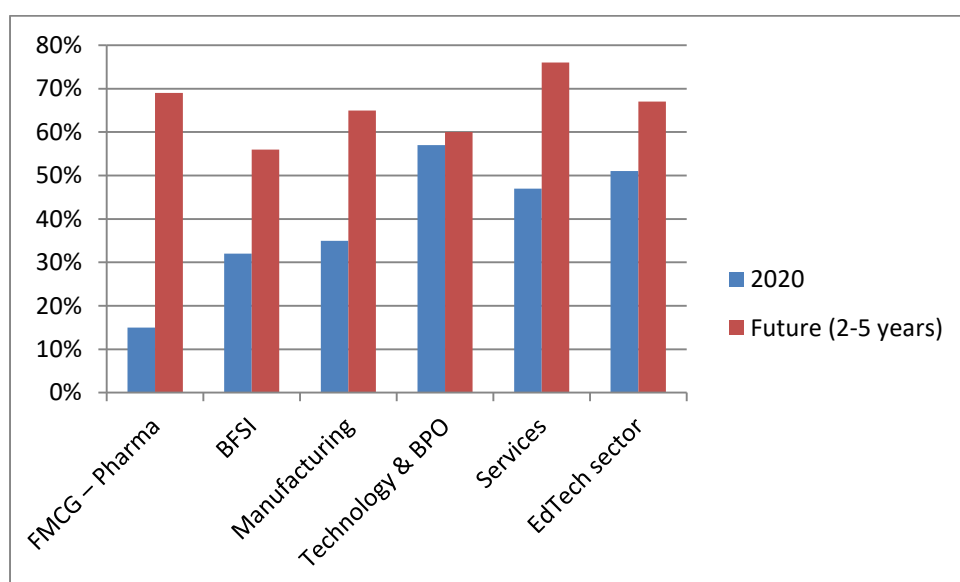
Gig economy has undeniably been in existence in any organization's workforce but it accelerated during the pandemic. Covid-19 and lockdown created ripples in the business world and crippled the functioning of many industries leading to closure of many offices, companies and educational institutions; it knocked - off the conventional 9-5 working style, loss of jobs, this caused many employees to turn as gigs for earning primary income and also additional source of income to meet their livelihood expenses. Pandemic transformed the work, workplace and work culture, operating with gig workers is becoming vital for the service provider organizations. Gig economy allowed the individual workers to choose the jobs for tending their families during the pandemic. So was the situation of companies also, they could not afford to hire full-time employees and gig workers were the easier resort.

INDUSTRIES CONTRIBUTING TOWARDS GIG ECONOMY

In recent years there has been rapid growth in gig economy of India, as per the Niti Ayog report of June 2022 , 68 lakh (6.8 million) gig workers were there in 2019-20, which is 2.4% of the non-farming workforce or 1.3% of the total workers in India. In 2020-21, 77 lakh (7.7 million) workers were engaged in the gig economy constituting 2.6% of the nonagricultural workforce or 1.5% of the total workforce in India. The report estimates that the gig workforce can rise to 2.35 crore workers forming 6.7% of the non-agricultural workforce or 4.1% of the total workers in India by 2029-30.

Industry	2020	Future (2-5 years)
FMCG – Pharma	15%	69%
BFSI	32%	56%
Manufacturing	35%	65%
Technology & BPO	57%	60%
Services	47%	76%
EdTech sector	51%	67%

Table 1: Industry wise Gig workforce Proportion (Source:- Aon Survey)



Graph 1: Industry wise Gig workforce Proportion (Source:- Aon Survey)

Boston Consulting Group in its report says that , in India there are 15 million gig workers employed across software, professional services and shared services industries i.e . IT and IT enabled services , Digital Marketing , at home health care services & elderly care assistance, media industry (freelance photographers and content writers) . insurance agents , online tutoring , real estate property dealers, household maintenance and repair works, Careers in accounting and finance; annually growing by 4 million .

According to ASSOCHAM report, by 2024, gig sector is estimated to rise upto US\$455 billion at a CAGR of 17%, and 350 million gig jobs by 2025.

RISE IN GIG WORKFORCE

The rise in gig workforce is due to many Multi national corporations surging towards flexi-hiring options for niche projects as to cut down operational expenses. The rapid rise in development of start-up innovations has led to hiring of contractual freelancers for non-core activities and skilled technology freelancers for their technical platforms to cut down high fixed costs of employing full time permanent employees. HR service based companies are preferring “Giggers” for customer support, HR operations, processing, software development, IT support, graphic design, marketing & sales.

Many workers prefer to pursue a working style which better fits their lifestyle rather than full-time, due to the flexibility it gives in terms of both working hours and the type of jobs. it enables freelancers to choose their lifestyle choices which a conventional job would not allow. Mobility and adaptability has created better opportunities of finding more work across the globe as per the changing needs and demands for flexible lifestyles. When they work on a various tasks or at different shifts for different clients or companies, their cumulative earnings can be of full-time employment.

Some companies are preferring freelancers for management positions also and not just for entry-level positions., Chief Financial Officers are hired for organizing and auditing company finances, which has helped to increase operational savings by up to 70%.

Increase in freelancing platforms from 80 in the year 2009 to 383 in 2022 with the clientele of not just start-ups, but also Fortune 500 companies have contributed for the development of the gig economy. Flexibility in working hours, working with clients or customers through online portals is gradually diverting women towards gig jobs and boosting women employment and increasing their participation in Gig workforce. Due to economic and financial upheavals during pandemic when many lost secure employment, it is the the gig economy which has been a ray of hope for to find part-time work and freelance jobs. It has also encouraged women who could not take up full-time jobs due to their domestic responsibilities and commitment to opt for gig jobs.

As per a study based on Taskmo recruiters who are leading recruiters for companies like Jiomart, Zomato, Amazon, SBI, Byjus, Swiggy. Ola, Uber, Grofers, Meesho, Rapido, Bounce, Zepto, Wakefit and many more, women candidates prefer to work in jobs related to Customer support, Content monitoring & moderation, Tele-sales, Audits & Surveys which are more of desk, when we take the statistics of women workers in gig platform based on demography more than 50% of women are from urban and tier 1 cities, around 30% are from Tier 2 cities and nearly 20% from Tier 3 cities.

Though there is not much data available on the proportion of female workforce in Indian gig workforce but there is an estimate that women are less than 10 percent of gig workforce of independent contractors, consultants and workers. The minimal proportion of women in the gig workforce could be due to social norms, educational qualifications and age of marriage which deprive the women of rural background from job opportunities. Rikta Krishnaswamy, coordinator of the All Indian Gig Workers Union (AIGWU) opines that “Women mostly join the platform economy for the flexibility as they have domestic and care responsibilities. However, if women workers don’t respond to jobs/tasks, their rating is lowered. That means they only get low-paying basic jobs like threading eyebrows for 300 rupees (US\$4.50), even if a worker is skilled enough to earn three times that amount in the same amount of time.”

According to Chiara Furtado, a researcher at the Centre for Internet and Society, Bengaluru, the gender based occupational categorization existing in the traditional labour market persists even in gig economy. Semi skilled women are preferred more in beauty, health, wellness, nursing, baby sitting and domestic work jobs which are less paid, women are not much preferred in ride-hailing and delivery services due to safety issues, particularly sexual remarks or unpleasant stares from male customers wherein the lady drivers are unable to retaliate as the customers end up giving low rating or complaint to the company as company might penalise the drivers. The companies do not provide sufficient safety measures for women as there are no legal safety laws as such presently for gig workers.

Usage of digital technology and remote working can enhance the job opportunities for women in app based online working platforms, as well as the technological advancement in manufacturing and service sectors can also be a boon for better job opportunities in finance ,health and pharmaceuticals, FMCG and electronics as per the study jointly conducted by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), with support from the government of Japan titled “The Impact of COVID-19 and Industry 4.0 on Future of Work for Women”.

With proper training to perform necessary jobs and upgradation of required skills can enhance job opportunities for women along with organizations also showing keen interest in providing employment opportunities for women . With present scenario of non gender based employment and need for financial support to the family there has been surge in women employment. Some companies have come forward to provide job skills training and placement for women job seekers . To cite a few : Amazon India has launched an all-women delivery station in Andhra Pradesh in Nov 2021, along with its already operating all-women delivery stations in Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Gujarat. Flipkart conducts Project Vividhta for women to involve in their supply chain.

Initiatives taken from Indian government to safeguard women Gig workers are: Govt of India has decided in 2020 to merge existing 29 labour laws into 4 labour laws and implement in coming years including social security, health insurance, maternity benefits and disability coverage for gig workers. Government introduced the Code on Social Security bill in 2020; the gig workers can register and set up a social security fund. According to this code, the companies which employ gig workers must allocate 1-2% of their annual turnover or 5% of the wages paid to gig workers, whichever is lower, to the social security fund. The social security benefits like maternity leave, gratuity, disability insurance, health insurance and old age protection is extended to the gig workers,. but the bill is yet to be implemented .

NITI Aayog has come up with fiscal incentives in form of tax breaks , grants for startup companies which provide job opportunities for women and people with disabilities (PwDs) and make them as at least one-third of their workforce .

According to NITI Aayog’s report ‘India’s Booming Gig and Platform Economy’ , due to lack of access to education & necessary skills , women labour force in India is low , it is in the range of 16% -23% presently but it is expected to rise from 77 lakh in 2020-21 to 2.35 crore in 2029-30.This phenomenon of rise in women participation in gig economy is due to women gradually drifting towards freelance jobs or flexi time jobs which are well paid and enabled with work life balance .

CONCLUSION

It is imperative to come into terms that if a country has to progress from developing country to a developed country, social transformation of the country is mandatory and women empowerment is an integral part of this entire process. Women empowerment can be achieved only when there is improvement of economic and social status. Hence providing right kind of opportunities and investing the necessary resources for up gradation of skills for women as well as in their ideas for entrepreneurial growth should be the prime concern of the government. Organizations should also recruit, recognise and retain women in their workforce for company’s growth.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Namrata Dadwal, UNDP in India, Sangita Khadka, UNDP in New York (2021, July 23)

<https://www.undp.org/india/press-releases/gig-economy-boost-employment-indian-women-formal-sector>

Manu Saigal (2022, April 14,) Opportunities for women in the Gig economy as the sector sees a huge surge in participation from Women. in Voices, Economy, TOI

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/voices/opportunities-for-women-in-the-gig-economy-as-the-sector-sees-a-huge-surge-in-participation-from-women/>

Roshni Tamta (2022, Mar 22) <https://startuptalky.com/gig-economy-companies-india/>

[https://www.niti.gov.in/sites/default/files/2022-](https://www.niti.gov.in/sites/default/files/2022-06/Policy_Brief_India%27s_Booming_Gig_and_Platform_Economy_27062022.pdf)

[06/Policy_Brief_India%27s_Booming_Gig_and_Platform_Economy_27062022.pdf](https://www.niti.gov.in/sites/default/files/2022-06/Policy_Brief_India%27s_Booming_Gig_and_Platform_Economy_27062022.pdf)