



Gig Work and Platform Capitalism in India: Precarity, Autonomy, and Income Security

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Abstract: This study seeks to explore how platform-based gig work in India shapes workers' experiences of precarity, autonomy, and income security. It focuses particularly on delivery workers and similar platform-based occupations, where these dynamics are especially visible in everyday work practices. The study aims to examine the extent to which gig work provides flexibility and autonomy, while also investigating the forms of insecurity that may accompany such work. In doing so, it looks at issues such as income instability, the unpredictability of working hours, and the lack of formal labour protections. At the same time, it considers how platform structures—particularly algorithmic management and rating systems—shape workers' control over their work and their earning potential.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background of the Gig Economy in India

Over the past decade, the nature of work in India has undergone significant changes, particularly with the rapid expansion of the gig economy. Digital platforms such as food delivery, ride-hailing, and online freelancing services have created new forms of employment that are flexible, accessible, and largely app-based. This shift is often understood as part of a broader transformation in the economy, where digital technologies play an increasingly central role in organising labour and connecting workers to consumers.

The gig economy is frequently presented as offering opportunities for flexibility, autonomy, and income generation. Many workers are able to choose their working hours, take up multiple gigs, and enter the labour market with relatively low barriers. These features have made platform-based work particularly attractive in a country like India, where formal employment opportunities are limited and unemployment remains a concern. At the same time, this form of work has expanded rapidly due to factors such as the widespread availability of smartphones, the growth of digital platforms, and changing consumption patterns.

However, alongside these perceived advantages, a growing body of research highlights several challenges associated with gig work. These include income instability, long and irregular working hours, and the absence of social security or formal labour protections. Workers are typically classified as independent contractors rather

than employees, which limits their access to benefits such as insurance, paid leave, and minimum wage protections. In addition, the increasing use of algorithms and rating systems introduces new forms of control and monitoring, which can affect both earnings and working conditions.

This contrast between flexibility and insecurity raises important questions about the nature of work in the contemporary economy. While platform-based employment is often described as a new and innovative form of work, it also appears to reproduce many characteristics of informal labour, including uncertainty and lack of protection. This makes it important to examine the gig economy not only as a technological development, but also as part of a broader economic structure shaped by capitalism and labour market dynamics.

1.2 Rationale for the Study

The rapid growth of platform-based work in India makes it an important area of study, particularly in understanding how it is reshaping labour relations. While the gig economy is often framed in terms of opportunity and flexibility, the lived experiences of workers suggest a more complex reality marked by both autonomy and vulnerability.

There remains a need to critically examine how these forms of work operate in practice, especially in sectors such as delivery services where the pressures of algorithmic management, customer ratings, and time-bound tasks are highly visible. The coexistence of flexibility and insecurity highlights a gap between how gig work is presented and how it is experienced.

By focusing on workers' perspectives, this study aims to move beyond purely theoretical or platform-centric analyses and instead provide a more grounded understanding of gig work. This is particularly relevant in the Indian context, where informal employment has historically dominated the labour market, and where platform work may represent both continuity and change within existing structures.

1.3 Research Aim and Questions

In this context, the present study seeks to explore how platform-based gig work in India shapes workers' experiences of precarity, autonomy, and income security. It focuses particularly on delivery workers and similar platform-based occupations, where these dynamics are especially visible in everyday work practices.

The study aims to examine the extent to which gig work provides flexibility and autonomy, while also investigating the forms of insecurity that may accompany such work. In doing so, it looks at issues such as income instability, the unpredictability of working hours, and the lack of formal labour protections. At the same time, it considers how platform structures— particularly algorithmic management and rating systems — shape workers' control over their work and their earning potential.

More specifically, the study is guided by the following questions: how does gig work influence income security and economic stability among workers? To what extent do workers actually experience autonomy and flexibility in platform-based employment? In what ways do algorithmic systems affect working conditions and decision-making? Finally, how do workers themselves understand and navigate the trade-off between flexibility and insecurity within this form of work?

By combining quantitative survey data with qualitative insights, the study aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of how these different dimensions are experienced in practice.

1.4 Overview of the Study

Overall, this research attempts to contribute to ongoing discussions on the gig economy by connecting broader economic frameworks with the everyday realities of workers. Rather than viewing platform-based work solely as a technological innovation, the study situates it within existing labour market structures and highlights the continuities it shares with informal forms of employment.

In doing so, the study brings together empirical findings and theoretical perspectives to better understand how digital platforms are reshaping labour in India. It also seeks to reflect on the implications of these changes, particularly in terms of worker protections, employment relations, and the future of work. By focusing on workers' lived experiences, the research aims to provide a grounded perspective that can inform both academic debates and policy discussions surrounding the gig economy.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Frameworks: Platform Capitalism, Precarity, and Algorithmic Control

The existing literature on the gig economy in India highlights its rapid expansion, its perceived benefits, and the challenges it creates for workers. Broadly, this body of work engages with several interconnected themes, including the growth of platform-based work, the promises associated with it, the realities experienced by workers, and the broader theoretical and policy frameworks used to analyse these developments. Rather than presenting a single, unified view, the literature reflects an ongoing debate about whether the gig economy represents new opportunities or a reconfiguration of existing forms of labour precarity.

Gig work in India can be better understood using a set of theoretical perspectives that connect individual worker experiences to broader economic structures. Rather than looking at gig work only in terms of flexibility or income opportunities, these frameworks help explain why it often involves both opportunity and insecurity at the same time.

One of the key perspectives used is precarious work theory, which focuses on forms of employment that are unstable, lack long-term security, and offer limited social protection. Gig work fits this description in many ways, as workers are typically not formally employed and do not receive benefits such as health insurance or paid leave. Income is often unpredictable, and work availability can vary from day to day. This makes the concept of precarity useful for understanding why gig workers may experience financial and social insecurity despite being actively employed.

Another important concept is platform capitalism, which highlights the role of digital platforms in organising and controlling labour. Platforms act as intermediaries between workers and customers, but they also shape how work is assigned, monitored, and evaluated. While this model allows for flexibility, it also enables companies to reduce costs by shifting risks onto workers. For instance, classifying workers as independent contractors allows platforms to avoid providing benefits or ensuring stable wages. As discussed in existing literature, platforms are able to maintain control through systems such as ratings, incentives, and performance tracking, even without formal employment relationships.

Closely related to this is the idea of algorithmic control, where digital systems play a central role in managing workers. Ratings, automated task allocation, and incentive structures influence not only how much workers earn, but also how they behave on the job. This creates a form of indirect control, where workers appear independent but are still closely managed by the platform. This is particularly relevant in sectors such as delivery work, where performance metrics and customer feedback directly affect access to future work.

The study also draws on employment relations theory, which examines the balance of power between employers and workers. In traditional employment, this relationship is more clearly defined, but in the gig economy, it becomes less visible while still being present. Platforms may not be employers in a legal sense, yet they exercise significant control through

algorithms and platform rules. This creates a situation where workers are managed and evaluated without being formally recognised as employees, pointing to an imbalance of power.

Finally, insights from labour process theory, particularly its Marxist interpretation, help to further explain how work is organised under platform systems. This approach focuses on how labour can be structured in ways that increase control and reduce worker autonomy. In gig work, tasks are often broken down into smaller units, sometimes described as an “errand economy,” where workers complete short, repetitive tasks for relatively low pay. This can lead to a form of deskilling and make workers more replaceable, while allowing platforms to extract value more efficiently.

Taken together, these frameworks make it possible to move beyond surface-level descriptions of gig work and instead analyse the deeper structural factors that shape worker experiences. They also provide a basis for interpreting the findings of this study, particularly in relation to issues of insecurity, control, and economic power.

2.2 Review of Global and India-Specific Studies

Growth and Expansion of the Gig Economy

One of the most widely discussed aspects of the gig economy is its rapid growth, particularly in the Indian context. Studies such as those by Souhitya Samanta (2024), along with reports drawing on NITI Aayog estimates, suggest that India had approximately 7.7 million gig workers in 2020–21, with projections expected to rise significantly in the coming decade. This expansion has been driven by factors such as increasing smartphone penetration, the growth of digital platforms, and persistent challenges in the formal labour market, including unemployment and underemployment. Similarly, Harish Kumar, Priyadharshini, and Dr. F.X. Lovelina Little Flower (2024) emphasise the role of rapid digitalisation in enabling flexible, platform-based work arrangements.

Perceived Benefits of Gig Work

A substantial body of literature focuses on the advantages associated with gig work. According to Kumar et al. (2024), such employment offers flexibility in working hours and location, opportunities for multiple income streams, and the potential to reduce unemployment, particularly among semi-skilled and unskilled workers. Samanta (2024) similarly finds that many workers associate gig work with flexibility, independence, and improved work-life balance. These features are often framed within a broader narrative of entrepreneurship, where workers are viewed as independent agents managing their own labour.

Challenges and Worker Precarity

At the same time, a large number of studies highlight the structural challenges associated with gig work. These include income instability, long and irregular working hours, and the absence of social security benefits such as health insurance, paid leave, and pensions. Huws and Joyce (2016) demonstrate that many gig workers earn relatively low and unstable incomes, while findings from the International Labour Organization (ILO) indicate that freelancers often receive low effective hourly wages when unpaid work is taken into account. These conditions contribute to what is widely described as precarious work, characterised by insecurity and economic vulnerability.

Technology and the Changing Nature of Work

The literature also examines the role of technological change in shaping gig work. In the context of the Fifth Industrial Revolution, Dr. Nitu Maurya highlights how developments such as artificial intelligence and automation are transforming labour markets. Her study, focusing on regions like Delhi NCR, finds that while technological adoption can improve efficiency and, in some cases, job security, increased automation may also reduce stability and contribute to deskilling. This reflects the dual role of technology as both an enabler and a source of risk.

Regulation and Policy Gaps

Another important area of discussion concerns the regulatory environment governing gig work in India. Policies such as the Social Security Code (2020) formally recognise gig workers, but their implementation remains limited. Existing research suggests that many workers view these measures as inadequate, particularly in addressing concerns related to income security and access to benefits. Scholars such as Dev and Pillai (2022) emphasise the need for more inclusive policy frameworks that extend labour protections and address existing regulatory gaps.

Worker Agency and Alternative Models

While much of the literature focuses on vulnerability, some studies highlight forms of worker agency and resistance. Research by Ernest Cañada, Carla Izcarra, and María José Zapata Campos examines delivery cooperatives as alternatives to corporate platforms, showing how worker-owned models can create more equitable working conditions. Their work also points to the role of collective action, including protests and strikes, in challenging platform structures and advocating for reforms. These perspectives suggest that gig workers are not merely passive participants but are actively negotiating their conditions of work.

2.3 Research Gaps

Overall, the literature presents the gig economy as a rapidly growing yet complex segment of the labour market, marked by a clear tension between flexibility and accessibility on one hand, and insecurity and precarity on the other. While existing studies provide valuable insights into macro-level trends, theoretical frameworks, and policy debates, there remains relatively limited research that focuses on how workers themselves interpret and experience these conditions in their everyday lives.

In particular, there is a gap in understanding how workers perceive concepts such as autonomy, control, and income security in practice, and how they navigate the trade-offs inherent in platform-based work. Much of the existing research either emphasises structural conditions or relies on secondary data, with less attention given to primary, worker-centred perspectives.

In this context, the present study seeks to build on existing research by combining theoretical insights with primary data collected from delivery workers. By focusing on their lived experiences and perceptions of flexibility, control, and income security, the study aims to provide a more grounded and nuanced understanding of the gig economy in India.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Approach

This research adopts a mixed-methods approach to examine how gig work in India operates and how it affects workers, particularly in relation to income stability, flexibility, and job security. Combining quantitative and qualitative methods allows the study to identify broader patterns in working conditions while also capturing the more detailed, subjective experiences of workers.

The use of a mixed-methods design is particularly relevant in the context of gig work, where numerical trends alone may not fully reflect the realities of platform-based labour. While survey data can indicate general patterns such as income variation or working hours, qualitative insights are necessary to understand how workers interpret and respond to these conditions in their everyday lives. In this sense, the two approaches are used in a complementary manner rather than as separate components.

3.2 Description of Data Sources

The study relies on two primary sources of data: a structured questionnaire and semi-structured interviews.

For the quantitative component, a short questionnaire is used to collect responses from gig workers, including delivery riders and ride-hailing drivers. The survey includes questions related to income, working hours, flexibility, access to benefits, and overall job security. It also seeks to capture workers' experiences with platform-specific features such as rating systems, incentives, and performance-based metrics. Given the nature of gig work and the limited availability of respondents, the questionnaire is intentionally kept brief so that it can be completed quickly, thereby improving response rates.

In addition to the survey, the study incorporates a qualitative component in the form of semi-structured interviews with a small number of gig workers (approximately 8–10 participants). These interviews are designed to provide deeper insight into workers' lived experiences, including their reasons for entering gig work, their strategies for dealing with uncertainty, and their perceptions of flexibility in relation to stability. The interviews also explore workers' awareness of collective actions, such as protests or strikes, and alternative models like cooperatives.

3.3 Sampling Methods and Tools of Analysis

The sampling method used in this study is primarily convenience sampling. Respondents are approached through everyday interactions, for instance by requesting delivery workers to participate in the survey. In some cases, participants are also encouraged to share the survey with others within their networks, allowing for a limited form of snowball sampling.

While this approach does not aim to produce a statistically representative sample, it is appropriate given the practical constraints of time and access. It also enables the collection of first-hand data from workers who are actively engaged in platform-based employment.

The data collected from the survey is analysed using basic statistical techniques, including comparisons and simple correlations. The objective is to examine potential relationships between platform features—such as incentive structures or rating systems—and outcomes like income instability or perceived job insecurity. This approach is consistent with similar survey-based studies referenced in the literature, including research conducted in the Delhi NCR region. The survey questionnaire used for data collection is included in Appendix A.

The qualitative data from interviews is analysed thematically, with attention given to recurring patterns in how workers describe their experiences. This includes themes such as autonomy, control, financial uncertainty, and perceptions of platform management. Together, these methods allow for a more balanced interpretation of both measurable trends and individual perspectives.

Category	Description
Sample Size	35
Type of Workers	Delivery partners (Swiggy, Zomato, etc.)
Data Collection	Survey, Interviews
Location	Delhi NCR

Table 1: Sample Profile

3.4 Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations associated with this research design. The sample size is expected to be relatively small, which restricts the extent to which the findings can be generalised to the broader population of gig workers in India. In addition, the use of convenience sampling introduces potential bias, as the sample may not fully capture the diversity of experiences across different regions or types of platform work.

Time constraints also limit the scale of data collection, particularly in terms of the number of interviews that can be conducted. Furthermore, given the reliance on self-reported data, there may be inconsistencies in responses, especially in areas such as income or working hours.

However, despite these limitations, the combination of survey data and qualitative interviews allows the study to develop a reasonably well-rounded understanding of the topic. Rather than aiming for broad generalisation, the research focuses on generating meaningful insights into the experiences of gig workers, which can be further explored in future studies.

Chapter 4: Answering the Research Questions

4.1 Worker Precarity and Income Insecurity

A central concern that emerges from the findings is the extent to which gig work is characterised by economic insecurity, despite providing relatively easy access to employment. The data indicates that a large proportion of workers are concentrated in the lower income brackets, with most respondents earning below ₹10,000 per week and only a small minority reporting earnings above ₹15,000. This uneven distribution suggests that while earning opportunities exist, they are neither evenly distributed nor sufficient for many workers.

Weekly Income (Average)

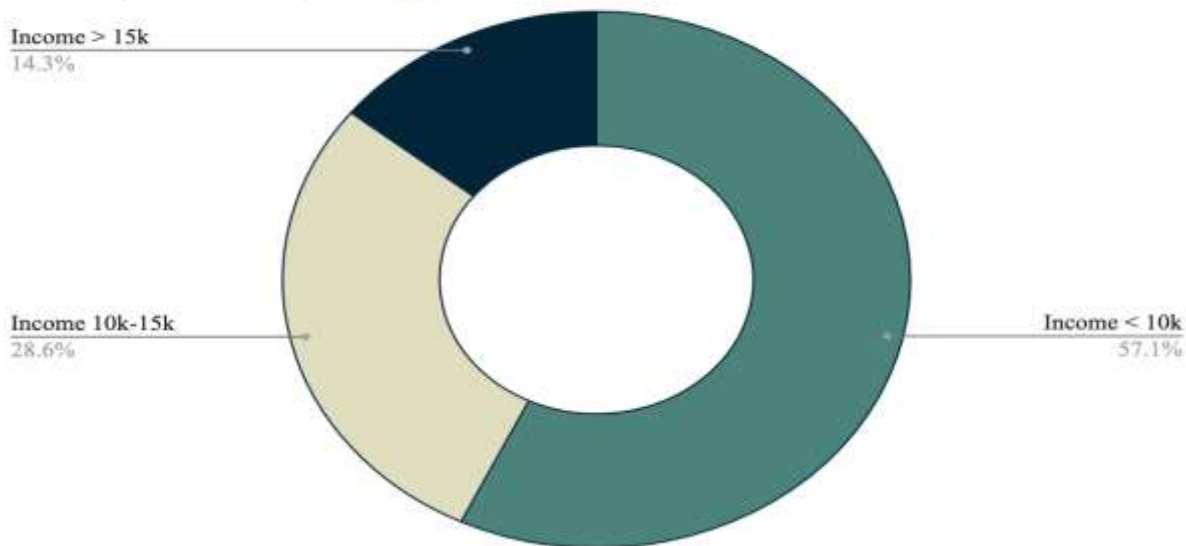


Figure 1: Distribution of Weekly Income | Source: Primary Survey Data

However, income levels alone do not fully capture the nature of insecurity in gig work. What stands out more strongly is the instability associated with these earnings. A significant majority of respondents reported that their income is not predictable on a weekly basis. This unpredictability is closely tied to the way earnings are structured. Workers do not receive a fixed wage; instead, their income depends on variables such as the number of orders completed and customer demand. As a result, even workers who put in long hours cannot reliably estimate how much they will earn at the end of the week.

This instability directly affects how workers perceive their financial situation. The responses show that a large number of workers do not feel financially secure in their current roles. The contrast between active participation in work and a lack of financial security highlights a key feature of precarious employment – the presence of work without the assurance of stability. Workers are earning, yet remain uncertain about meeting regular expenses.

Key Issues

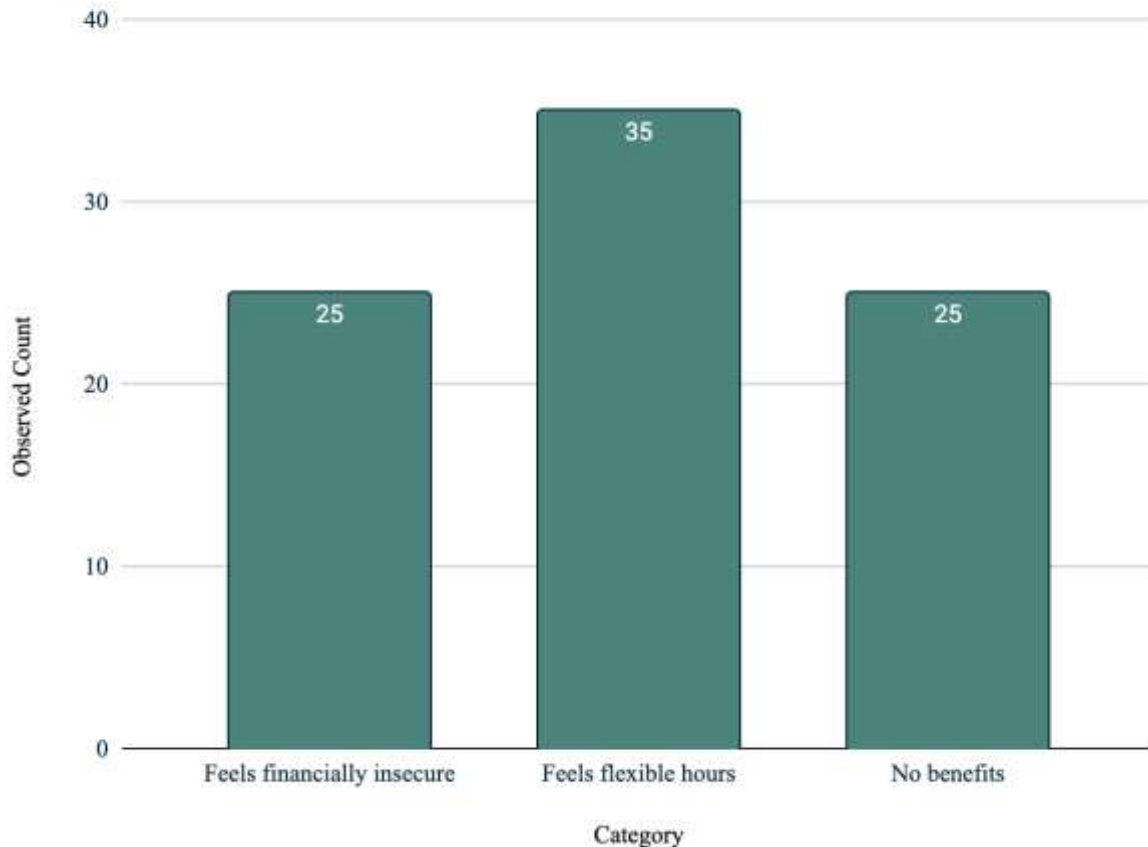


Figure 2: Distribution of Key Issues | Source: Primary Survey Data

The issue is further complicated by the cost structures associated with gig work. Interview responses provide important insight here. One respondent mentioned that they rent an electric vehicle for approximately ₹200 per day in order to carry out deliveries. This introduces a fixed daily cost that must be recovered before any meaningful income can be earned. In such a situation, workers are effectively pushed to work longer hours, not necessarily to increase earnings, but simply to offset operational expenses. This shifts part of the economic risk from the platform to the worker, reinforcing their financial vulnerability.

Another dimension of precarity becomes visible in the motivations behind entering gig work. One of the interviewees reported taking up this work while preparing for competitive examinations. This reflects a broader pattern where gig work is used as a temporary or supplementary source of income rather than a stable, long-term occupation. While this flexibility can be beneficial, it also indicates that workers themselves may not view the job as secure or sustainable.

The consistency of certain reported problems further strengthens this analysis. Across responses, workers repeatedly identified low income, long working hours, and lack of job security as major concerns. These are not isolated or individual-specific issues, but structural features of the work itself. This reinforces the link between long working hours and attempts to stabilise uncertain income.

Overall, the findings suggest that gig work operates within a framework where income generation is possible, but stability is not ensured. Workers bear a significant portion of the economic risk, whether through fluctuating demand, dependence on incentives, or work-related expenses. The result is a form of employment that provides short-term earning opportunities but falls short in offering long-term financial security. This aligns with the broader understanding of precarious work, where flexibility and access coexist with instability and uncertainty.

4.2 Autonomy, Flexibility, and Algorithmic Management

A key feature often associated with gig work is the idea of flexibility. This is strongly reflected in the findings, where almost all respondents agreed, many of them strongly, that they have the ability to choose their working hours. At a surface level, this suggests a high degree of autonomy, especially when compared to traditional forms of employment that operate within fixed schedules.

However, a closer look at the data reveals that this sense of flexibility exists alongside a more subtle but significant form of control. While workers are technically free to log in and out of the platform at their convenience, their actual working patterns appear to be shaped by external pressures, particularly those created by the platform itself. This is visible in how earnings depend on orders, incentives, and ratings. Since income is directly linked to these variables, workers are not entirely free in deciding when and how they work. Instead, they are encouraged to work during peak hours and accept as many orders as possible. In practice, this means that while workers can choose their hours, those choices are heavily influenced by the need to maximise earnings.

The responses also show that many workers believe that the app, through its systems of order allocation, ratings, and incentives, plays a role in controlling how they work. Even in cases where respondents were unsure, this uncertainty itself reflects a lack of transparency in how the system operates. Workers may not fully understand how decisions are made by the platform, but they are still affected by those decisions in their day-to-day work.

Control is exercised indirectly through algorithmic systems rather than direct supervision. Instead of a manager assigning tasks or enforcing discipline, the platform uses automated systems to influence worker behaviour. For example, the promise of incentives can encourage longer working hours, while the fear of lower ratings may push workers to accept orders even under unfavourable conditions. In this way, the platform indirectly structures the work process.

This pattern points towards what can be described as “conditional autonomy.” Workers are not completely constrained, but their freedom operates within limits set by the platform’s design. They can choose when to work, but not the conditions under which work is offered or rewarded. As a result, autonomy becomes more apparent than real.

The interview responses, while limited, support this interpretation. Workers did not describe their work as being directly controlled in a traditional sense, but their experiences reflect an underlying dependence on the platform’s system. For instance, the need to cover daily costs, such as vehicle rentals, makes it difficult for workers to exercise true flexibility. Even if they have the option to log off, economic pressure often compels them to continue working.

Another important aspect is the lack of clarity in how the system functions. One respondent mentioned having to fill out forms through the app without fully understanding their purpose. This suggests that workers are participating in a system that they do not fully control or even fully comprehend. Such opacity further reduces their effective autonomy, as they are unable to make fully informed decisions about their work.

Overall, the findings indicate that flexibility in gig work is real, but limited. Workers do have control over certain aspects of their work, particularly their schedules, but this control is shaped and constrained by algorithmic systems that determine access to income. Rather than replacing traditional forms of control, the platform introduces a different kind — one that is less visible but equally influential. As a result, gig work reflects a complex balance between autonomy and control, where freedom exists, but within boundaries that are largely defined by the platform.

4.3 Employment Relations and Regulatory Gaps

The nature of employment relationships in gig work differs significantly from traditional forms of employment, and this difference becomes clearly visible in the findings. One of the most striking aspects is the absence of formal employment protections, particularly in relation to benefits such as insurance and job security.

The interview responses provide important insight into this issue. One respondent mentioned that insurance is provided, but described it as being “only in name,” implying that while it exists on paper, it may not be easily accessible in practice. This perception was not limited to a single individual, but echoed by others as well, indicating a broader pattern rather than an isolated experience. Another worker referred to a compensation amount of up to ₹1 lakh at a hospital, but the details surrounding eligibility, process, or actual claims remained unclear. This also reflects broader opacity in how platforms communicate worker protections.

This gap between formal provision and actual accessibility highlights a key issue in gig work – the ambiguity of employment status. Workers operate within a system where they are neither fully independent nor formally recognised as employees. As a result, platforms are able to offer limited forms of support without assuming the full responsibilities typically associated with employment. This creates a situation where workers bear many of the risks of independent work, without enjoying the corresponding protections.

The lack of job security further reinforces this condition. Many respondents identified “no job security” as one of their primary concerns. Since gig work is based on continuous access to the platform rather than a formal contract, workers can potentially lose access to work without clear explanations or safeguards. This absence of stability contributes to an ongoing sense of uncertainty.

An important point to note is that these gaps are not necessarily experienced as sudden disruptions, but as a normal part of the work itself. Workers seem to accept the lack of benefits and protections as something inherent to the system, rather than as an exception. This normalisation of insecurity is what makes regulatory gaps particularly significant — they are not always visible as problems, but they shape the overall working conditions in a fundamental way.

Overall, gig work operates within an ambiguous employment framework, where protections remain limited and unclear. The absence of strong regulatory mechanisms allows this ambiguity to persist, leaving workers in a position where they must navigate risks largely on their own. While platforms provide opportunities for earning, they do not fully assume the role of an employer, resulting in a gap between participation in work and access to protection.

Chapter 5: Results and Analysis

5.1 Key Findings of the Study

The findings of this study reveal a consistent set of patterns that reflect the everyday realities of gig work. Rather than presenting isolated issues, the results point towards a broader structure within which workers operate. Three key themes emerge clearly from the data: income insecurity, conditional flexibility, and limited employment protections.

First, income in gig work is characterised not only by relatively low levels, but more importantly by a lack of stability. Workers are able to generate earnings, but these earnings remain unpredictable and difficult to rely on. This creates a situation where financial planning becomes challenging, and workers are required to constantly adjust their effort in response to changing demand and platform conditions. Income, in this sense, is not fixed or assured, but something that must be continuously pursued.

Second, while flexibility is widely recognised and valued by workers, it does not function independently of economic pressure. The ability to choose working hours exists in practice, but is closely shaped by the need to maintain sufficient earnings. As a result, workers often extend their working hours or align their schedules with peak demand periods.

Flexibility, therefore, does not necessarily reduce work intensity, but instead becomes part of how workers manage uncertainty in their income.

Third, the findings highlight the limited nature of employment protections within gig work. Most workers do not have access to clear or reliable benefits, and even where such provisions exist, they are often not well understood or easily accessible. This creates a gap between formal support and actual experience, leaving workers to manage risks largely on their own.

Across these themes, a common pattern becomes visible. Gig work provides access to income and a degree of control over work schedules, but it does so within a system that remains uncertain and weakly structured in terms of protection. Workers are able to participate in the labour market, yet the conditions under which they do so lack the stability typically associated with employment.

Taken together, the findings suggest that gig work is defined by a balance between opportunity and insecurity. While it offers flexibility and relatively easy entry, it also places significant responsibility and risk on workers, shaping a form of employment that is adaptive, but not necessarily secure.

5.2 Interpretation of Results in Light of Existing Literature

The findings of this study closely reflect broader discussions in existing literature on the gig economy, particularly in relation to the nature of precarious work. Many studies have highlighted that gig work tends to combine ease of entry and flexibility with a lack of stability and protection. The patterns observed in this study support this understanding, but also provide a more grounded view of how these dynamics play out in practice.

One of the most consistent themes in the literature is the idea that gig work shifts economic risk from employers to workers. This is clearly visible in the findings related to income and reinforces the idea that economic risk is shifted onto workers. The high level of income instability reported by respondents reinforces this argument. Workers are not only earning variable amounts, but are also exposed to uncertainty that they have limited control over. In this sense, the findings support the view that gig work places a significant portion of financial risk on the worker.

At the same time, the results also contribute to ongoing discussions about flexibility in gig work. Existing literature often presents flexibility as one of the defining advantages of platform-based employment. The responses in this study confirm that workers do value and experience this flexibility, particularly in terms of choosing their working hours. However, the findings also highlight an important limitation — flexibility does not operate independently of economic pressure. Flexibility, therefore, appears conditional rather than absolute.

This aligns with the argument that flexibility in gig work is often conditional rather than absolute. In practice, workers adjust their schedules in response to demand patterns, incentives, and personal financial needs. As a result, flexibility becomes less about freedom and more about adaptability. The findings suggest that while flexibility exists, it does not necessarily reduce the intensity of work or improve overall working conditions.

Another important area where the findings connect with existing literature is in relation to algorithmic management. Previous research has emphasised that digital platforms rely on automated systems to allocate tasks, monitor performance, and influence worker behaviour. The responses in this study reflect a similar pattern, which aligns with literature on algorithmic management.

This lack of transparency is significant. Literature on platform work often points out that algorithmic systems are not always visible or easily understood by workers, yet they have a direct impact on earnings and opportunities. The uncertainty expressed by some respondents in this study suggests that this opacity is not just theoretical, but experienced in everyday work. Workers operate within a system that affects them, but which they cannot fully interpret or question.

The findings related to benefits and employment protections also align with broader concerns in the literature regarding the classification of gig workers. Since they are typically treated as independent contractors, they are excluded from many of

the protections associated with formal employment. This study reinforces that point by showing that most workers do not receive benefits, and even when benefits are mentioned, they may not be practically accessible.

What is particularly notable in this study is the way workers describe these benefits. The idea that insurance exists “in name” but is difficult to use highlights a gap between formal provision and actual experience. This adds an important layer to existing discussions, suggesting that the issue is not only about the absence of benefits, but also about their effectiveness. Even when platforms offer certain forms of support, the lack of clarity and accessibility can limit their impact.

Finally, the findings contribute to the broader understanding of gig work as a hybrid form of employment. It does not fully resemble traditional employment, but it is also not entirely independent work. Workers have some level of autonomy, but are still influenced by platform structures. They earn income, but without consistent security. This combination of characteristics reflects what many studies describe as the “grey area” of gig work, where roles and responsibilities are not clearly defined.

Overall, the results of this study are consistent with existing literature, but they also reinforce the idea that the gig economy must be understood not just in terms of its features, but in terms of how those features are experienced by workers. Flexibility, for example, may appear beneficial in theory, but in practice it is closely tied to uncertainty and pressure. Similarly, the presence of benefits may suggest support, but their limited accessibility reduces their value.

In this way, the study supports existing arguments while also adding a more grounded perspective, showing how broader concepts such as precarity, flexibility, and platform control are reflected in the everyday realities of gig workers.

5.3 Policy Implications and Concluding Remarks

The findings of this study point towards a need for closer attention to the working conditions within the gig economy, particularly in relation to income stability, access to benefits, and the overall structure of employment relationships. While gig work has expanded opportunities for earning, especially for younger workers and those seeking flexible arrangements, the lack of stability and protection raises important concerns that cannot be overlooked.

One of the most immediate issues that emerges is income insecurity. Given the lack of predictable earnings, incentives, and the number of completed tasks, workers are left with limited predictability. This makes it difficult for them to plan expenses or maintain financial stability over time. In this context, there is a clear need for greater transparency in how earnings are calculated. Workers would benefit from a clearer understanding of how factors such as order allocation, pricing, and incentives affect their income. While it may not be practical to introduce fixed wages in such a system, some form of minimum earning assurance or baseline guarantee could help reduce uncertainty.

Another important area is the provision and accessibility of benefits. The study suggests that even when benefits such as insurance are mentioned, their practical value is often unclear. Workers may be aware that certain forms of support exist, but lack information about how to access them or what they actually cover. This points to a gap not just in provision, but in implementation. Ensuring that benefits are clearly communicated, easily accessible, and genuinely usable is essential if they are to have any meaningful impact. Without this, such provisions risk remaining symbolic rather than functional.

The issue of transparency extends beyond benefits to the broader functioning of the platform itself. Workers operate within systems that influence their earnings and working conditions, yet they often do not have full clarity on how these systems work. Improving transparency in areas such as order allocation, rating mechanisms, and incentive structures would allow workers to make more informed decisions and reduce uncertainty. At present, the lack of clarity contributes to a sense of dependence, where workers are affected by processes they do not fully understand.

In addition to these concerns, the findings raise questions about the current classification of gig workers. As independent contractors, they do not receive the protections typically associated with formal employment, despite being subject to significant levels of platform control. This creates a mismatch between responsibility and protection. Workers carry many of the risks, including income fluctuations and work-related expenses, without having access to corresponding safeguards.

Addressing this imbalance may require rethinking how gig work is categorised, or introducing hybrid frameworks that provide basic protections without completely altering the flexible nature of the work.

At a broader level, the study suggests that the challenges associated with gig work are not isolated issues, but part of a larger structural pattern. The combination of flexibility, uncertainty, and limited regulation is not accidental, but built into the way the system operates. This means that individual-level adjustments may not be sufficient. More comprehensive approaches, including clearer guidelines for platforms and stronger regulatory oversight, may be needed to ensure that workers are not left without support.

At the same time, it is important to recognise that gig work continues to serve a purpose for many workers. The ability to enter the workforce easily and choose working hours is valued, particularly by those balancing other responsibilities or pursuing alternative goals. The aim, therefore, is not to eliminate flexibility, but to ensure that it does not come at the cost of basic security.

In conclusion, this study shows that the gig economy represents a complex form of work, where opportunity and risk exist side by side. Workers benefit from flexibility and access to income, but face ongoing challenges related to instability, limited protection, and lack of clarity in how the system operates. Addressing these issues requires a balanced approach that retains the advantages of flexibility while strengthening the conditions under which work is carried out.

Ultimately, as gig work continues to expand, the question is no longer whether it should be part of the labour market, but how it can be made more sustainable and equitable for those who depend on it.

5.4 Further Scope of Research

While this study provides useful insights into the working conditions of gig economy workers, it is limited in scope and opens up several possibilities for further research. One of the main limitations is the relatively small sample size, which means that the findings reflect general patterns but may not capture the full diversity of experiences across the gig workforce. Future studies could expand the sample to include a larger number of respondents across different cities, allowing for more detailed comparisons and more generalisable conclusions.

Another area for further research is platform-specific analysis. This study looks at gig work in a broader sense, but working conditions may vary significantly across platforms such as food delivery, ride-hailing, and quick commerce. A more focused study on a single platform could provide deeper insights into how specific policies and systems affect workers.

There is also scope to explore differences based on demographic factors such as age, gender, and educational background. For example, understanding how female workers experience gig work, or how long-term workers compared with those who treat it as temporary employment, could add important dimensions to the analysis.

In addition, future research could examine changes over time by tracking workers' earnings, working hours, and job satisfaction over a longer period. This would help in understanding whether gig work becomes more stable with experience or continues to remain unpredictable.

Finally, there is a need for more research on the effectiveness of benefits and protections offered by platforms. While this study suggests that such provisions may exist in limited or unclear forms, a more detailed investigation into how these benefits are implemented and accessed would be valuable in assessing their real impact.

Overall, further research can build on the present study by expanding its scale, deepening its focus, and exploring aspects that could not be covered within the current scope.

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Appendix A: Questionnaire

1. What is your age group?
2. What is your highest level of education?
3. Which platform(s) do you work for?
4. Is this your main job?
5. How long have you been doing this work?
6. How many hours per day do you work (on average)?
7. What is your weekly income?
8. Is your income stable (predictable each week)?
9. What affects your earnings the most?
10. Would you agree with the following statement: "I have flexibility in choosing my work hours."
11. Would you agree with the following statement: "I feel financially secure in this job."
12. Does the app (order, ratings, incentives) control how you work?
13. Do you get any benefits (insurance, etc) from the platform?
14. What are your biggest problems in this job?