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DYNAMICS OF GIG-ECONOMY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO DIGITAL PLATFORMS IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Our country is emerging as the third largest on-line labour market according to On-line Labour Index Survey and India-based employers represented 5.9 per cent of all projects/tasks posting for online labour of which 45.0 per cent were for software development and technology projects. The highly informal and micro nature of our economy provides impetus to digitally-enabled independent employment opportunities. These forms of work have gained momentum in recent years with the emergence of native and international freelancing platforms. These trends show that the nature and structure of employment in our economy has been undergoing a reformative change towards more independent, freelance on-line jobs. "Gig Economy" is such a new trend in the employment models in these days of digital influences. The present paper deals with this concept of "Gig Economy" with special reference to our economy. The gig economy can be defined as "a free market system where organizations and independent workers engage in short-term work arrangements. Technology has lowered the barriers to entry so much that "gigs" have become easily accessible to an unprecedented number of people. Based on secondary sources of information and statistics, this paper briefly discusses about the traditional job market and the job necessities in the context of the present 4th Industrial Revolution. An attempt is made to discuss about gig and freelance work in India and gig workers' earnings in Top-10 countries along with India. Types of gig work rise of gig economy with its broad segmentation and subsectors. Discussion was also presented about the converging factors responsible for thriving the gig economy in our country, the motivational factors acting as growth drivers of gig economy. The high paying tech-savvy gig jobs in advanced countries and in our country is also present to provide a comparative picture of gig works. The paper concludes with a remark for the necessity of encouragement to be provided for the development of gig economy, keeping in view the unemployment rates both in urban and rural areas with specific reference to women.

KEYWORDS

GIG economy, on-line employment, freelancers, independent work, growth drivers, motivational factors, unemployment rates.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the traditional job market and the work-dynamics have been changing allowing greater autonomy and flexibility. The technological disruption has been potentially reshaping the employment landscape by generating opportunities to earn income on-line and better matching of workers with opportunities through digital platforms. The demographic shift and technological developments that are taking place today are demanding rapid job creation to be matched with workers and employers. These shifts are acting as potential drivers of creating opportunities for generating new, relevant and decent jobs for the future of our country. It is argued that the present demand for jobs should be accompanied by the need to create high quality employment opportunities in general and for aspiring youth and women specifically. Digitalization and technological adoption are sound supporting the growth of decent jobs and greater economic inclusion, since employment-generation strategy of our country aims at inclusion of women in the labor market, to erase the gender-bias, which is both a social and economic imperative.

Keeping the approach to strategy of economic development in our country, today, most of the companies are adopting industrial technology and machinery to improve the quality of their output, to maintain their current market position, associated with qualitative improvements in supply-chain management as well as are planning to introduce digital tools and services to attract new customers.

In the context of fast changing business environment and rapid developments in technology, it is necessary for employers to prepare for changes at the workplace. The experts have been observing that there are 10 important workplace trends that are taking place in our country and the companies are found preparing the work force for the future by embracing new developments in labor-market like "Gig-Economy". Gig-Economy consists the gig workers or freelance workers, who work without the frills and collars of traditional jobs, who are called as "Blue Collar Workers". Defined as "Gig Economy", this recent trend presents a distinct strategic opportunity for the organizations of the future, with a specific focus on "Digital Skills" and also on "Digital Platforms". In other words, the "Gig Economy" refers to "labor market activities that are coordinated via digital platforms". Workers take on particular "gigs" without any guarantee of further employment, and the persons who mediate in between these workers and employers, are called as intermediaries, independent contractors and not employers. Generally, the companies operating these platforms are intermediaries, who enable purchasers to order a timed and monetized task from an available worker, by taking a commission, whenever the service is paid for or completer. The Gig Economy operates through two kinds of platforms – "Crowd Work" and "On-demand Work" (Hunt et.al.2017). Crowd Work refers to jobs which are commissioned and carried out virtually, via internet. On-demand work refers to activities which are generally organized through mobile platforms and the jobs are carried out locally with the purchaser and the provider in physical proximity. These jobs are also carried out by text messages or phone calls instead of a mobile platform. Increasing access to internet, increasing number of mobile and smart phone usage and improvements in digital infrastructure have significantly influenced the proliferation of on-line market places and transactions, facilitating a forward movement towards physical world to the digital world. Social networks and cloud computing are found supporting the access to e-commerce transforming cross-border trade in merchandise and services.

As a positive sign being driven by these transformations, "independent work" (flexible work) has gained momentum, both in advanced and developing countries. Independent work is not new to our country since we have the tradition of self-employment- the other term used for independent work, is deeply engrained in our economy and this is reflected in micro-nature of organizations of our country. In this sense, we can use the term "self-employment" as alternative term for "independent work" or gig-based "freelance work".

THE IMPACT OF 4th INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

The present century has been witnessing and experiencing the 4th Industrial revolution being propelled by the convergence of a cluster of technologies representing physical, digital and biological impact factors. Machine learning, artificial intelligence, advanced robotics, cloud computing, the IoTs, and block chain etc., are

evolved and employed for profoundly transforming the future and nature of work in developing and developed economies. Many traditional employment opportunities are found outdated and many are created newly influenced by these modern technologies, embracing and influencing the production processes, business models, service delivery mechanisms, establishing a relationship between generation of employment, flexible working environment, autonomy in working opportunities and decent remuneration to meet the increasing cost of living. Under these transformative conditions, experts, economists, entrepreneurs, employment-model strategists and technocrats are striving to analyze the impact of 4th industrial revolution and are arriving at different arguments and observations, with a specific focus on employment conditions, job displacement and inequalities in labor market in the economies around the globe.

The technology-led employment models that were designed and evolved to suit the requirements of 4th industrial revolution, as they have thought, provide solutions to improve the low productivity and output in the key economic sectors. A variety of strategies were designed for shaping the emerging technologies to play out in the complex socio-economic and cultural contexts of work, among which digital literacy and ICT were recognized as the basic skills required in the current environment of work and to access the public goods and services.

Use of technology has become the major driving force for the present 4th industrial revolution to displace as well as replace the traditional employment opportunities, particularly in India. Of late, the concepts like "Uberization", "Gig-workers" "Independent work", "Freelance Industry", "On-demand Jobs", "Flexible Staffing", "Leased work" and "On-call Workers" are gaining currency in advanced as well as advancing economies. Independent work is on the rise in many advanced economies of Asian, European, North America, Africa, South America and Oceania economies. Asian economies are providing gig work to the estimated tune of 62.0 per cent, 18.0 per cent in European economies, and 16.0 per cent in North American economies (On-line labour Index Worker Supplementary-2017). These gig workers are found engaged in software development and technology, creative and multimedia, sales and marketing support, writing and translation, critical and data entry and professional services. According to the On-line Labour Index-2017, India is the largest supplier of online labour and also traditional outsourcing destination. It is estimated that 24.0 per cent of workers are gig workers in India, followed by Bangladesh (16.0 per cent), United States (12.0 per cent), Pakistan (8.0 per cent), Philippines (6.0 per cent) and UK (5.5 per cent). There are four largest online labour outsourcing platforms namely Fiverr, Freelancer, Guru and People Per Hour, which are English language platforms, covering 40.0 per cent of the global gig labor market for platform-based online work. Research efforts were also made to understand the "Gender-dynamics" of Gig Economy for identifying the existing critical knowledge gaps, which are useful of policy makers (Abigail Hunt and Emma Samman, 2019). The research findings indicate that a smaller proportion of women than men are involved in gig work; less regularly work than men and are more likely exit the gig economy. Van Dorn (2017) has analyzed that the gender, racial and class inequalities were acting as dragging forces in the low-wage gig workers. It was estimated that the proportion of women in the gig economy of US accounts to 33.0 per cent to 55.0 per cent, in UK this proportion works out to 31.0 per cent to 52.0 per cent, Germany (39.0 percent), Sweden (39.0 percent) Austria (41.0 per cent) Switzerland (43.0 per cent) and Netherlands (44.0 per cent). The evidence suggests that in many of the economies, women earn less than men through gig work.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present paper is exclusively based on secondary sources of information collected from different national and international published reports, research papers and newspapers. The primary purpose of this analytical paper is to explain the concept "Gig-Economy", its features, segmentation, nature of jobs and income offered in general and in our country in particular. The paper focuses on the following objectives:

1. To define and explain the concept "Gig-Economy", its types and segmentation.
2. To introduce the rise of Gig-Economy in India.
3. To analyze the Motivational Factors that drive the performance of Gig-Economy in India.
4. To present the estimates of income offered for the Gig Jobs in India.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

GIG-ECONOMY AND FREELANCE WORKERS IN INDIA

The term "Gig" refers to the concept of 'engagement' coined during the financial crisis-2009., when the unemployed made a living by "gigging" or working in several part-time jobs wherever they were available and they could. It was observed that "Gig-Economy" was a sharing economy, open talent economy, freelance economy and also on-demand economy, representing the new paradigm of work. Gig work is characterized by the prevalence of short-term contracts or freelance work as contrary to the permanent jobs in the organized sectors. Technology has been playing an important role in gig-economy as a new business and employment model. The current cutting edge digital on-line platforms along with the proliferation of mobile and smart-phone penetration and application are treated as the important influencing factors for thriving of this gig-economy. By these digital aids, the work assigned to a professional can be completed within the scheduled time and has the flexibility to choose location of the assignments and areas.

Gig economy which is also called as "Flex-economy" or "Mobile Economy" is among the fastest growing employment trends in India along with advanced countries during the recent years. The Global Gig Economy Index-2019 published by "Payoneer" observed that among Top-10 countries, India is emerging as the 3rd largest on-line labor market and the "On-line Labor Index Survey-2016" estimated that India-based employers represented 5.9 per cent of all projects/tasks posting for on-line labor of which 45.0 per cent were for software development and technology projects. The Global Gig Economy Index-2019 also shows that India occupies 7th rank in the year over year revenue growth of gig workers engaged in the economy, as shown in Table. 1.

TABLE 1: TOP-10 COUNTRIES WITH HIGH GIG-WORKER EARNINGS AND REVENUE GROWTH

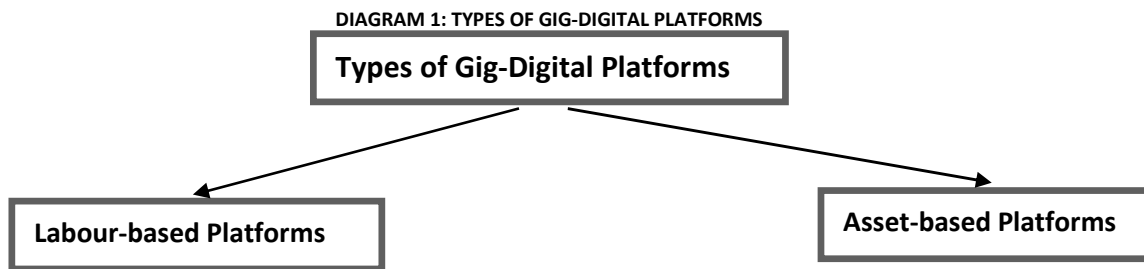
Rank	Country	% of YoY Growth in Revenue of Gig worker earnings
1	United States of America	78.0
2	United Kingdom	59.0
3	Brazil	48.0
4	Pakistan	47.0
5	Ukraine	36.0
6	Philippines	35.0
7	India	29.0
8	Bangladesh	27.0
9	Russia	20.0
10	Serbia	19.0

Source: Payoneer (2019) Report on The Global Gig Economy Index-2019, p.3

It is evident from the data presented in Table.1 that technology has made easier than ever for individuals to get increased earnings by engaged themselves in profitable gig-work and received favourable rewards. The data shows that India got the 7th rank in terms YoY growth in gig-earnings, accounting for 29.0 per cent among the top-10 countries. However, it is to be noted that India has to make sincere digital efforts to touch the revenue growth of Pakistan (47.0 per cent) as well as the rank of USA (78.0 per cent). As an effort to improve the earnings from gig work in India, it is to be noted that gig economy is churning out of a large number of solopreneurs, micropreneurs and our country has to provide the congenial business and technological environment for the development of gig work.

GIG-DIGITAL PLATFORMS

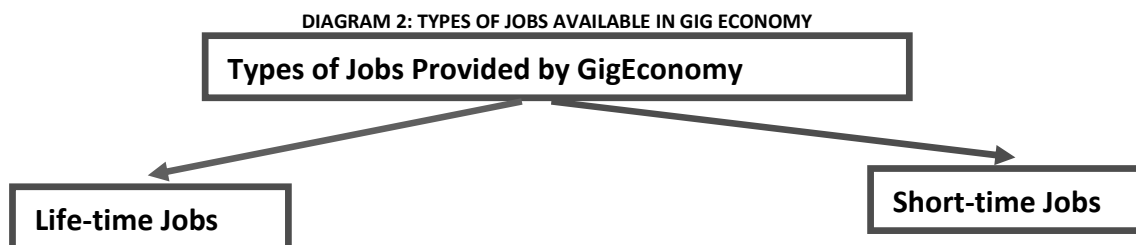
It is to be observed that gig-digital platform can be categorized into two main types in India as shown in the following diagram-1.



The labour-based platforms enable workers to provide activities and completing tasks assigned (Uber, Ola etc., The asset-based platforms allows people to rent or sell their unused asset (Airbnb, eBay etc., These two platforms have enabled the transformation of the gig economy from a C2C market to B2C market with new models of work and employment. These two kinds of platforms represent gig economy as a broad umbrella term originating from the digital universe of the "Sharing Economy". It is an economy and a novel organization of digital workers, distributed across the economy and organized through task markets and network connections. It is beyond doubt that the rise and advancement of technology has given people more options in the kinds of work they can do in the gig economy. A variety of mobile apps and E-commerce websites like Amazon, Flipkart, Alibaba and Shop clue etc., have proved that anyone can become a merchant and portals like Flexiorg.com, Getmeexperts.com etc., are providing work opportunities for any one with specialized knowledge and skills by connecting them with companies that have such needs.

SEGMENTATION OF GIG ECONOMY

An observation of jobs that are provided by the gig economy can be classified into two types, as shown below in diagram 2.



Gig economy provides both lifetime jobs as well as short-time jobs. Life-time jobs mean short-term projects and which give provide jobs with independence and work flexibility, pay very well and offer future opportunities. Work with only 1 or 2 hours of working represent short-term jobs with good remuneration. The gig job options comprise a variety of digitally-skilled jobs like creative services, content writing, virtual assistance, engineering and architecture, accounting and consulting, software development, automation, artificial intelligence, IoT, ML, IT infrastructure, management, sales and marketing, civil BIM, automobile connected vehicles, PR and Branding, project management and data assembling etc.,

All the modern gig business offers on-line applications to connect individuals seeking jobs/services with those providing jobs and services, fueled by internet startups and a majority of talent managers are found leveraging gig workers in their teams and departments, to drive efficiency, innovation and competitive advantage.

RISE OF GIG ECONOMY IN INDIA

The incentives, schemes and financial assistance provided by Government of India and the creation of SEZ culture, start-ups have flourished in India and 70.0 per cent of the corporate were found using gig workers for solving organizational issues. It was reported by HR professionals and independent consultants interviewed that gig workers were found very useful for supplementing the skills of the existing workforce, reduce the cost of production and fill the temporary vacancies in the firms/organizations/enterprises. The gig workers containing self-employed, freelancers, independent contributors and part-time workers, though represent very much fragmented, got recognition across the globe in general and in India in particular and emerged as a modern workers'-economy, wherein workers come, gig and leave.

In India during the last five years, a large segment-- about 81.0 per cent--has joined the gig economy. Delhi accounts for 43.0 per cent of gig workers, recognized as the biggest hum followed by Mumbai with 19.0 per cent and Bengaluru with 18.0 per cent.

Besides the above mentioned two types (as shown in Dig:2), the gig economy can be segmented into the following 4 important categories and with a broad description of each segment is presented in Table. 2

TABLE 2: BROAD SEGMENTATION OF GIG ECONOMY WITH ITS SUB-SECTORS IN INDIA

S. No.	Sector	Description	Subsectors included
1	Asset-Sharing Services	Digital Platforms that facilitate short term P2P rentals of one owner's (or freelancer) property to another individual	Home-sharing Car-sharing Boat-sharing Parking space-sharing P2P Equipment-sharing etc.,
2	Transport-based Services	Digital Platforms that require a freelance driver to complete the requested transport service	Ride-sharing Car pooling Restaurant Delivery Coupled with guiding skills
3	Professional Services	Digital Platforms that connect freelancers directly with business to complete projects	Management skills, Business work, Designing, Coding, Writing/ Translating, Artificial intelligence, ICT, Cloud computing, Robotics etc.
4	Handmade Goods, Household and Miscellaneous Services (HGHM)	Digital Platforms for freelancers to sell homemade goods/crafts or offer on-demand services for household related jobs.	Home services Baby sitting Handicrafts Tutoring Pet Services and Miscellaneous services etc.,

Source: Master Card and Kaiser Associates: (2019) Report of The Global Gig Economy: Capitalizing on a \$500 B Opportunity.

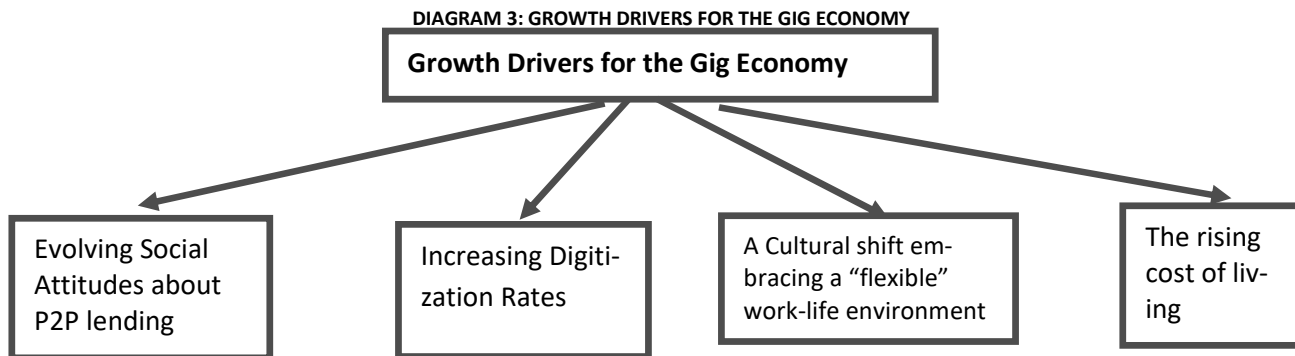
THE CONVERGING FACTORS

According to the report produced recently by BCG Henderson Group, the following are the factors that are pulling the gig workers towards gig economic activities:

1. Contrary to the mature economies, (1 to 4 per cent), a high proportion of more than 30.0 per cent of workers were found preferring the use of gig work platforms.
2. Job-seekers are entering into gig economy in each and every industry as freelancers.
3. There is a shift in the priorities among workers towards full-time employment as only 20.0 per cent of the freelancers preferred the fulltime employment.
4. The gig work platforms are targeting at workers with a specific level of expertise as well as management consultants, software developers and wellness workers with sophisticated modern skills.
5. 40.0 per cent of the companies, which have absorbed gig workers who have satisfied the characteristics of gig work reported that the gig workers have acted as a complementary source to their regular workforce and the labour productivity in their firms has improved.

THE MOTIVATING FACTORS

According to the recent reports on Gig Economy, the following factors can be listed as “growth drivers” for gig economy in India as shown in Diagram



With the advent of gig economic activities, major portion of gross volume of gig economy has been estimated coming from platforms that were relatively new to market, offering a greater diversity of services to customers, thus enabling the digital industry to expand and mature. The above flow-chart explains the important motivating factors, which acted as the growth drivers for the gig economy and for its expansion. In recent years sharing personal items has been accepted and there is a shift in social attitudes that are encouraging and facilitating of sharing underutilized as well as unutilized assets for profit.

Many digital lending and P2P lending platforms like Lendbox (New Delhi), Faircent (Gurugram), Lending Kart (Ahmedabad), Finzy (Bengaluru), i2i Funding (Noida), i-Lend (Hyderabad), LenDen Club (Mumbai), Paisa Dukan (Mumbai), Rupee Circle (Mumbai), Monexo (Mumbai), CashKumar (Bengaluru) etc., have been attracting the customers by providing an online marketplace to facilitate peer-to-peer lending by bringing together borrowers and lenders. The consumers are also actively engaged in this lending activity.

The recent trends in rapid smart phone adoption and increased access to internet are found expanding the numbers of eligible gig freelancers. The number of smart phone users is estimated to reach 442.5 million in 2022, which was 199.48 million in 2015. There are 1026.37 million active mobile phone users in our country as on 2018 with 2G,3G and 4G networks. It is also estimated that our country occupies 22nd rank, after China in the number of internet users which was estimated as 560 million and on an average 310 million people in India are spending time with social media accounting for an average of 17 hours per week. It is found that 80.0 per cent of the adults in our country are having at least one digital financial account and according to IMD World Digital Competitiveness Ranking for the year 2019, our country occupied 44th place with the improvement in terms of knowledge and future readiness to adopt and explore digital technologies.

It is also observed that work-life adjustments have been considered as important and a cultural shift has been taking place towards embracing a flexible environment altering the workers expectations of a typical 9 to 5 work day. It is also true that in recent times, the cost of living has been increasing alarmingly clubbed with a shrinking share of middleclass families, which is compelling the employed lower to middle class to pursue the sources of supplementary income by engaged in part-time jobs to earn income through gig work to satisfy the needs and demands of the family members.

It is beyond doubt the all the above discussed facts are motivating the people with skills and expertise to pursue the gig economic activities as the best option.

NOT SIDE-HUSTLING WORK

Many workers feel that gig work is a part- time work which offers low income and they are not lucrative. It is a wrong notion and a mistake. The tech-savvy attitude and the skills and expertise fetches high amounts of income by serving a freelancer’s option. The study of “FitSmallBusiness.com” observed that the following are the most lucrative options for gig tech-savvy workers. The following Table-3 presents the jobs, their description and the income that can be earned

TABLE 3: TECH-SAVVY GIG JOBS AND THE INCOME OFFERED

S. No.	Name of the Tech-Savvy Gig Job	Income offered per Hour	Description of the Job
1	Deep Learning/ Artificial Intelligence	\$ 115.06	Self-Teaching systems, Machine learning, data scientists, software engineers etc.
2	Block Chain Architecture	\$ 87.05	Technology used to power, cryptocurrencies, digital currencies etc., It is also known as cloud computing, in which users share data on third-party servers via Google and Microsoft.
3	Robotics	\$ 77.46	Includes mechanical and electrical engineering and companies are expanding to develop devices in the medical and surgical fields.
4	Ethical Hacking/ Penetration Testing	\$ 66.33	Skills in coding and programming systems-security professionals and Penetration testing.
5	Bit Coin /Cryptocurrency	\$ 65.37	Ability to build automated payment tools using altcoins are sought after, including to integrate bitcoin payment technology into existing websites and apps.
6	Amazon Web Services/ Lambada Jobs	\$ 51.0	Specialization in AWS Lambada writing and load code for lambada
7	Virtual Reality	\$ 50.18	App designing to create digital content that combines visual and audio to create an interactive world in a user’s environment, including Development of Algorithms and 3D modeling and Scanning languages.
8	ReactJS Developers	\$ 40.75	Companies like Yahoo, Airbnb, and American Express rely on React to allow consumers to make multiple selections on a page (the number of bedrooms in a rental, for example) without needing to reload it.
9	Final Cut Pro Editor	\$ 37.12	This professional-grade software allows cutting video clips, altering pace, integrating music, editing scenes, inserting transitions, and more. As an editing freelancer, a gif worker can find work in almost every professional field.
10	Instagram Marketing	\$ 31.23	As a marketer and influencer, a Gig worker connects the brands and advertises their products through photos for an agreed-upon fee.

However, there are some gig works which offer and pay a small amount per hour. Particularly in Data Entry jobs which converts the paper-based books into e-books, in the typing projects and Captcha solving the payment is very low which ranges from Rs. 7 to Rs. 48 in gig platforms like Kolotibablo, Megatypers, Captcha solving websites and MTurk etc.

CONCLUSION

In our country the unemployment rate is estimated at 7.9 per cent on 29th February, 2020 according to the data released by CMIE. Urban unemployment rate was estimated as 8.6 per cent it was 7.6 per cent for rural areas. After going through this unemployment rates, it is to be noted that our economy is not able to generate the jobs for the people entering into labour market. Besides, it is to be observed that people in the age group of 15-24 years constitute nearly a fifth of India's total population (2011) and by 2020, they are predicted to make up a third of the country's population. The youth population with the age group of 20-24 years constitute around 40 per cent of India's labor force, have an unemployment rate of 32 per cent and the unemployment rate among the educated is even worse. The World Bank recently estimated that our country needs to create 8.1 million jobs a year to maintain the employment rate. With our demographic dividend and urgency to generate jobs in different sectors of our economy needs immediate attention in the present era of digitalization, which demands high skilled, well-educated and experts in modern technological literacy. The participation of women in the work force in our country is lowest in the world at around 21 percent, as absence of suitable jobs is observed as one of the reasons for this low rate of participation. The report on "Employment Outlook", women gig workers accounted for about 68,000 jobs in the country in 2019 and gig economy has to be resorted for generation of jobs in future. Keeping these unemployment rates, there is every need to support the gig works, which offer not only part-time jobs as well as full-time highly remunerative jobs for tech-savvy freelancers. Referring to the future of jobs in India, EY, FICCI and NASSCOM teams suggested that the jobs in future could be a combination of employee arrangements interspersed with gig working models. The jobs seekers should understand the importance and evaluate the benefits of contractual labor/project-based work arrangements. Gig work should be considered as relevant as any other type of employment and as the primary source of income and have its impact on society, which values stability in work. The Government, while designing the employment generation strategy should keep in mind the requirements of the present digitally-driven technological-dominant labor market to create employment opportunities for the future of India.

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