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Patriarchal Discrimination and Capitalist Relations: The Gender Question in the Gig Economy

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INSTITUTE FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
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Govind Kelkar*

1. INTRODUCTION

An important manifestation of new economic system is the gig economy, which disaggregates traditionally built capabilities through experience into as the needed task fulfilled via online platform services. Workers from single role work experience are moved to fluid and collaborative ways of working and are aided by digital workflow tools and collaboration platforms. The gig economy consists of freelance and short- term jobs or gigs in which platforms (organizations) set up contractual arrangements with independent workers on a non-permanent basis. In recent years, the scale and scope of gig work, including digital platforms, have grown in India. Data from multiple sources indicate that the gig economy provides work for 30 million people in the Global South (Heeks, 2019). Some predictions about the future of the gig economy indicate that in the next 8 to 10 years gig economy has the potential to service up to 90 million jobs in India's non-farm sector, with more than USD 250 billion in volume of work. Of these 90 million, close to 35 million jobs will be available to middle- and low-income workers. Reportedly, this rise in gig economy has seen increased participation of women enabling them to take up jobs that have traditionally been dominated by men like taxi driving through Uber and Ola, computer programming, selling cosmetic and so on. This rise in gig economy is expected to offer them flexibility in carrying out their tasks, suggesting thereby that women will be able to perform both household and care work along with the assigned gig work. (BCG, 2021, www.hyperwallet.com)

Several estimates suggest that there is great potential for the growth of gig work in India. In 2018-19, the gig economy registered the entry of 1.3 million new workers, an increase of 30 percent from the previous year. In 2018, close to 70

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percent of companies employed gig workers in major assignments. A TeamLease study (2019) estimated that 2 million jobs would be created in Indian metropolitan cities, of which 1.4 million would be in the gig economy (food, e-commerce, and delivery). Since March 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic has led to an increase in remote work and online work arrangements; more than 36 percent of employers provide options to work from home as company policy. According to ILO study of 2021, India is the largest supplier of workers on the digital platforms, with a 20 percent of the total share in the developing economies. However, women workers' engagement on web-based platforms show grim picture, with only 20 percent while it is 31 percent in Ukraine and 41 percent in United States (ILO, 2021). The gig economy has been noted for disrupting labor regulations and promoting the invisibility of women workers despite its growth and global expansion, leading to lack of social protection and sick leave as well as unfair and low incomes. An analysis of digital piece work in India showed that platform workers "earn almost 62 percent less than their counterparts in the offline labour market" (Rani, 2021, p. 20).

My observations of the workings of gig economy in India shows that women's gig work is embedded in the market-led gender-specific unequal power structures of the productive systems, which maintain and promote social and gender hierarchies. With the growing feminization of gig economy, it is important to understand how the gig economy has structural, gender problems and how things might evolve or change.

He question is: has the increased flexibility of production systems and delivery services of gig work changed the cultural phenomenon that affects gender relations and social value systems, or has it contributed to the continued gender hierarchies undermining women's work and contributions in production spaces, as it currently exists in offline firms, factories, and households?

2. THE GIG ECONOMY

Gig workers are classified as "independent contractors" or self-employed individuals lacking the rights and benefits of conventional "employment". Digital labor platforms offer two types of task-based work: 1) online web-based platforms: tasks that are commissioned and carried out virtually like content writing, digital marketing, software development, translations, data analytics, legal work, telemedicine, and social work (all involving individual freelancers who can do the work from anywhere); and 2) location-based platforms that have tasks that are carried out locally and organized by mobile platforms, such as personal transport services (Uber and Ola),

food delivery services by Zomato and Swiggy, and e-commerce services such as Amazon and Flipkart. The success of the gig economy is attributed to its flexible working conditions and freedom from nine-to-five jobs. They use apps and websites to undertake piecemeal work from "platforms" (companies that use digital means to assign work). This relationship means that an individual pays to use a service that connects her/him to potential clients. The platforms, such as Amazon, Uber, Ola (taxi services), Air BnB, Swiggy and Zomato (food delivery) have created a new form of outsourcing, which were named crowdsourcing (Howe, 2006).

In this system of outsourcing, they have created huge armies of workers. Uber in the USA has 3 million drivers. In India, before the pandemic, Uber had 1.5 million workers, while Ola had 1.2 million workers. The two food delivery platforms in India together had about 0.5 million workers. The Indian conglomerate, Tatas, including its IT service company, TATA Consultancy Services, had about three-quarters of a million workers. These platforms show market or corporate power in labour relations on a scale not seen before. Platforms do not need to take the responsibility for paying a minimum wage or regular salary—neither do they need to provide sick leave or other benefits. However, platforms can impose new working conditions, structures, or systems of payments without any consultation with the workers. The workers do not have any collective bargaining rights. This practice has caused tension between workers and platforms; there are ongoing attempts to resolve some of these problems by making the working conditions better than the existing ones.

2.1 Gig Workers

Gig work is not new; it appears similar to work in the informal sector (Ghosh and Ramchandran, 2021). Similar to the platforms managed gig work, factories and construction companies utilize personal networks to hire contractors and through them workers on a daily basis. These workers are paid each day in the evening on the completion of an assigned task. The gig workers, however, are different from the regular non-gig workers. This difference can be noted in the age group of workers, inthe working hours and in expected remunerations for work done. First, nearly 70 to 75 percent of gig workers are in the age group of 18 to 23 years versus 16-17 percent among non-gig workers. Second, most of gig workers have no fixed eight- hour commitment to work. Youth and students tend to pick up gig work along with their studies or other work. Third, there are more women (30 percent) in the gig work than in the non-gig work (e.g., 26 percent in regular jobs and 13 percent in urban casual work, including household helpers. Of course, rural areas

are likely to have more women workers in the informal sector. Reportedly, flexibility has allowed a greater number of women to pick up gig work (BCG, 2020). Fourth, gig workers typically work for a limited number of hours in a day; 61 percent of gig workers work for less than eight hours a day as compared to 11 percent of non-gig workers. Fifth, the earning platforms of gig workers also show that many of them (78 percent) earn less than Rs 20,000 a month as against 10 percent in the non-gig workers' category. Many of them take up gig work to meet some extra requirements in the family, such as medical emergency or fund expenses other than regular household expenses (BCG,2021).

2.2 Precarity of Gig Work

Migrant workers coming from rural areas are generally not aware of new forms of work that gig economy requires. Most of tech companies have organized work in a new manner, which requires 'digital legibility', such as pick up and drop using GPS, online payments, and skillful use of smart phones. What is important to understand in this political economy of gig economy that there is capability deficit of workers who are caught into the intersection of technology, gender norms and the concealed power of the market, which not only creates and runs the platforms, but also facilitates gender disparity in payments, and establish monopoly mechanisms and surveillance of workers like the driver routing in Ola and Uber taxis. This concealed operation of platforms managed by corporates power makes gig work precarious, and anxiety ridden rather than straight forward use of platforms as a marketplace where workers and clients meet (Woodcock and Graham, 2020). Housejoy and Urban Company, for example, keep track on workers' location by accessing the GPS-receiver in workers' smartphones, to check 'before and after' the time of work, at what time workers reached the customer's place, the start and end time of each work and to know if the worker got a good rating of the work done (Rathi and Tandon, 2021:45).

In the seemingly projection of digitally driven progressive gig economy, women workers confront a hidden narrative of economically conservative rules and the capitalist employment relationships ridden with precarity, more like the informal sector work with marginal security, safety, and regularity of benefits. This gender precarity of gig economy is not new; it has existed even in the formal and informal work noted for gender-based discrimination, supervisory abuse of workers and caste hierarchies. However, precarity in the labour market has deepened and became much wider with uncertainty and short-term employment, sometimes lasting only 20-25 minutes. This precarity of gig work became more serious with stringent lockdown

measures of Indian economy, affecting food industry, tourism, aviation, retail and education. This resulted in 15.3 million jobless in urban India in May 2021. An analysis of CMIE-CPHS data for 2020 showed that more women than men were likely to lose employment and not return to work (Lingamurthy & Gunda, 2021).

2.3 Labour-Capital Relationship: Selling the Product of Labour

Some Marxist analysts are used to the idea that what labour sells is labour power, the ability to perform labour, and not the labour itself. One can't sell the labour itself, but what one can sell is the product of that labour. If a factory worker is unable to carryout stitching when employed in a factory, it is expected that she will be given paid leave on health grounds. Also, if as a factory worker, she is unable to do her task because the materials she has to work on have not arrived before her, she is not held responsible for the failure to perform her task. She is paid, irrespective of whether or not she actually completes her task at the factory, when the reasons for that failure are those of management. On the other hand, the gig worker is paid only after a task is completed. A failed task for any reason does not entitle the worker to payment.

There is yet another factor that points to a difference in the nature of work. The gig worker brings not only her working ability, but also the tools and equipment for her work. In this sense, she is not separated from the means of production, which Marx had pointed to as a feature of the proletariat. The worker free from the means of production is Marx's worker, the proletariat. But the gig worker is not free from the means of production. In fact, it is a requirement for a gig worker that she brings with her the means of production – a smartphone, an automobile as a taxi service provider, a motorcycle or some such transport to be a delivery worker, a computer to be an online digital worker. The traditional homeworker is also expected to bring with her the means of production – for instance, needles and scissors, along with the built-up space with lighting etc. to carry out her garment production tasks, and a ring frame for hand embroidery. She brings not just her capabilities as a worker but also the means of production to carry out her task.

What the gig worker lacks or has restricted access to, is the customer. It is this interface with the customer that is controlled by the platform; and this control of interface with the customer enables the platform firm to capture a substantial part, e.g., 30 per cent of what is paid by the customer for the taxi ride, as the platform's commission. When multiplied by the enormous scale of platform operations, where Uber has 3 million taxi drivers, the result is the massive revenue of the platform. A

major part of the costs and risks is borne by the gig workers, while the platform has the self-assumed responsibility of running the platform. Significantly some change is happening in assessing or making it known the responsibility of platforms. For example, the FairWork project has come up with five metrics to assess the quality of gig work or digital platforms. These include: 1) fair pay: workers should earn a decent income; 2) fair conditions: Platforms should have policies in place to protect workers from risks arising from work processes, and they should protect and promote the health and safety of workers; 3) fair contracts: terms and conditions should be transparent and provided to workers in an accessible form; 4) fair management: the use of algorithms must be transparent and result in fair outcomes for workers, and that workers must have a clear channel of communication to appeal management decisions or deactivation; and 5) fair representation: workers should have the right to organize in collective bodies, and that platforms should cooperate and negotiate with them. (Fairwork, 2020).

Surprisingly, in the use of metrics in evaluating 11 digital platforms in India and South Africa, only two firms (Urban Company and Flipkart) scored greater than 5

Urban Company is an at-home service provider platform with its headquarters in Gurgaon in India. Using its app and website, the company connects its customers to the providers of various services, such as beauty, deep cleaning and maintenance work. Most workers follow a 48-hour working week and appear to earn above the local minimum wage after factoring in costs. To ensure proper-quality provisions, beauty workers are mandated to buy their equipment and products from the platform. Some innovative features include:

1) company workers participate in a 10-day training session and are evaluated at the end of the period. In February 2020, 70 percent of Urban Company's workers had received certification for this training; 2) the Company tries to ensure workers' comfort and safety in various ways—for example, by providing them with lightweight massage tables which the workers would find easy to transport to customer locations; 3) workers are provided with oral explanations of their contracts, and now they are provided with written contracts in their local languages—also, Urban Company has clear communication channels to redress workers' grievances and a non-discrimination clause in its customers' terms of use; 4) the company has a system of regular Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) between the management and small groups of workers to discuss collective grievances.

Source: Fairwork Ratings 2020.

points (out of a maximum of 10), while 7 scored only 2 or less. India's four largest platforms Uber, Ola, Swiggy, and Zomato were at the bottom of the rankings. As reported in Fairwork ratings of 2020:

However, in December 2021, the workers of Urban Company (called 'partners') protested in large numbers and later filed a lawsuit against the Company's alleged 'unfair labour practices. Reportedly the protesting workers demanded better wages, safer working conditions and social security benefits (The Wire 23 December 2021).

3. WOMEN'S WORK IN THE GIG ECONOMY

Among developing countries, India is reported as one of the low percentages of women in the labor force. It stood at 24.5 percent in 2018-19 for women (15 years and above), declining sharply from 31.2 percent in 2011-12. This is far below the global average of 45 percent. Currently, this decline is reported to be 21 percent (World Bank, 2021). This decline, which is one of the steepest in the South Asian region, has concerned both researchers and policymakers. Feminist economists have questioned the System of National Accounts for overlooking women's work as well as the categories of women's work that ignores both women's economic and unpaid care work within a household and in the community. A substantial amount of unpaid care work in the household, a lack of mobility due to social norms, gender-based violence within the home, the workplace, and in public spaces, along with patriarchal attitudes that discriminate in the hiring and promotion of women in the non-farm economy are the key drivers of the decline in the number of women in paid market activities (Kelkar, 2013; Mehta, 2020).

An increasing body of research shows that women within the household do bulk of housework and childcare, and more hidden forms of household-based productive activities and caring responsibilities fall to the women (Kapur Mehta, 2021). A major part of women's agricultural work on their family farms e.g., threshing, winnowing, seed management, as well as working as household help in other people's homes is not counted as work. Noting inaccuracies in estimation of women's work, Kapur Mehta says, 'Not capturing unpaid non-SNA work is only one part of the problem. The bigger hassle is ignoring SNA work done by women but not attributed to them' (personal communication, 07 June 2022).

The recent 'Time Use in India 2019 (TUS)' report released by The National Statistical Office indicates disproportionate differences in household work between women and men in burden of unpaid activities: "The women spent around 5

hours a day on unpaid work while men spent just 1.6 hours" (Sridharan, 2021:59). The TUS study also showed that education of men did not make any difference towards sharing of unpaid domestic work or in a gendered system of control of women to regulate themselves for domesticity and to carry out all the domestic work as their duty. Interestingly, the World Values Surveys Wave 6 (2012) showed that close to one-third of India's women agreed to the statement "if a woman earns more money than her husband, it is almost certain to cause problems". These data show that patriarchy defines both the realities of women's domestic inequality and men's dominant role and higher valuation of their work. With no better options women tend to be complicit in this male-centered hierarchal system and internalize undervaluation of their own work and socio-political position.

We see the persistence of gender pay gaps in the labour market, fueled by norms around the duties of care giving and housework. Policies have failed to reduce bias against men's care giving or gender equitable sharing of unpaid household work.

Notwithstanding the precarity of women's economic activities in agriculture, industries, and services (i.e., low wages, poor working conditions, and limited access to social protection), the digital restructuring after the emergence of gig work has been reported to have the potential for bringing more women onto the labor market. Has it done so?

There is some evidence that women are being increasingly drawn to both digital platforms that provide traditionally women-dominated employment (such as cleaning, cooking, primary school teaching, and beauty care) and non-traditional jobs like transport and food delivery (Kar, 2019). A survey conducted by the TeamLease service in 2019 showed that there were 67,900 women in platform-based jobs in India. A 2018 report by Nobel House says that the ratio of women to men workers is close to 50-50 in the gig economy (Noble House, 2019). Another TeamLease study from 2019 states that women are increasingly working in frontline jobs in the new- age internet-based companies. Notwithstanding the above, recent research by Rathi and Tandon (2021) noted that cleaning work is the most popular service offered by on demand platforms.

During the pandemic, "working from home has made domestic abuse a professional issue" (Ravichandar, 2021). Several organizations apparently increased budgetary allocations introduced a host of wellness programs for their employees like virtual coffee hours, potluck virtual get-togethers, and webinars on mental health as part of the process of making employees adapt to working from home.

Hindustan Unilever Ltd recently announced a "gender-neutral policy" to support survivors of domestic abuse by listing domestic violence into the employees' well-being realm (Ravichandar, 2021).

In China's ride-hailing giant platform DIDI, women drivers account for 7.4 percent of the total, of whom 14 percent have college degrees or other higher education qualifications. These DIDI drivers earn an average of CNY 2,557 (USD 381) per month, while about 10 percent of them earn CNY 8,000 per month. Interestingly, more than half the Airbnb hosts in China are women and 60 percent of them rated as, "active and better". However, among those primarily working as DIDI drivers, 33.2 percent were reported to have said that they had to give up a conventional nine- to-five job to take care of household members. Close to 20 percent of them said that they were the sole supporters of the family (South China Morning Post, 2020).

In a cultural context where social norms limit women's mobility outside the household and assign the primary responsibility of unpaid care and housework to women, gig work mediated by digital platforms was seen as a potential process of change to bring about a gender balance in India's labor force participation. An important initiative led by the Indian government—the Digital India Mission—was launched to strengthen women's access to internet services and close the gender gap in the gig work mediated by digital platforms. Numerous service provider companies flooded the market with varieties of digital platforms catering to services like cosmetics, food delivery, and household work.

4. THE GENDERED WORKINGS OF THE GIG WORK: DOES FLEXIBILITY HELP?

Some reports indicate that women gig workers thrive upon the flexibility in working conditions, allowing them to work 'where they want to work and how they want to work (BCG, 2020). That this flexibility is especially suitable for women workers, in the sense that they can combine their domestic/care work and the gig work. These reports tend to ignore how most women gig workers grapple with the anxiety to earn to meet their livelihood needs and how they continuously negotiate with their 'duties' of care responsibilities in the given cultural norms and inadequate safety and security in working conditions. These concerns or determinants also restrict them to upgrade and acquire new skills. An inflexible point in corporate culture sees caregiving as something that cannot be solved on an individual or

household level, as is well stated in J.P. Morgan Chase director Samantha Saperstein's 'Women on the Move' program. The pandemic made it clear for many executives that the corporate culture that existed before the pandemic "was not working either. So, reverting would be counterproductive. Hence the need for an understanding and recognition of the importance of caregiving" (New York Times, May 20, 2021).

4.1 Low Paid Conditions of Work and Economic Insecurity

Despite the rapid expansion of flexible work opportunities for women in the gig economy, there has been little improvement in working conditions and almost no change in their socio-economic position. Existing studies point out several gender-related challenges faced by women gig workers. Generally, women encounter issues of mobility and safety, a lower income (roughly 8 to 10 percent lower than male counterparts), lack freedom of association, as well as lack effective bargaining power. They do not have adequate labor and social protection mechanisms. (Hunt and Emma, 2019; Kar, 2019 and Kasliwal, 2020). Together, these contribute to the precariousness of women's gig work and the strengthening of gendered norms and structural barriers.

Women tend to be concentrated in low-paid services such as on-demand domestic work, beauty care, and other multiple short-term works. As 'independent contractors', women gig workers are not eligible for the legal employment benefits like paid leave, maternity leave, guaranteed minimum wage, and health insurance, which are mandated for full-time employees. The existing evidence highlights the adverse terms of incorporation for women gig workers in Asia, North America, and Europe where women's earnings are generally lower than those of men (Hunt and Samman, 2019). For example, recent study of more than a million Uber drivers in the US noted a seven percent earning gap between women and men drivers. Strangely, this gender differential in earnings was ascribed to differences in the length of experience of using the platform, preference over where or when to work, and driving speed (based on the assumption that men tend to drive faster), despite the associated risks of collision or receiving a speeding ticket. (Cook et al., 2018).

There is evidence of gender pay gaps in carrying out same or similar work. A TeamLease survey (2019) showed that women delivery executives are paid 8-10 percent less than their male counterparts. Research findings from food delivery services (like Swiggy and Zomato) show gender disparities in terms of unequal pay for similar work. Lack of safety, sexual harassment at the workplaces, as well as harassment in public spaces persists for women workers. (Times of India, 2019).

However, women in some large-scale delivery services like Amazon and Flipkart have faced no such problems. In India, patriarchal hierarchical structures exist on the institutional power of social norms that place women's continuing engagement in the care of dependents within the home and in limiting their collective bargaining power in the labour market. Furthermore, capitalist relations of the gig economy that give platform owners power to set rules remuneration and surveillance of working practices tend to create, recreate, and reinforce gendered conditions of working and benefits for women gig workers.

4.2 Limited Voice and Agency

Work from home in low-paid sectors do not accord any control or negotiating power with the employers or with state actors.

Women gig workers or the informal workers have a marginal presence or representation in the labor unions. In India, most of the mainstream trade unions tend to focus on the interests of male employees. The isolated nature of gig workplaces limits on women's capabilities to come together and participate in collective bargaining about their working hours, wages, or any other aspect related to improvements in their working conditions. Most gig work is carried out from home and the workers lose out on building social networks and unionizing.

An increase in women's agency or empowerment requires collective action, which in turn, creates opportunities to increase socio-political power, influence cultural norms and increase power to claim rights to productive resources. However, in the given structure of individualised gig work, such a collective action has been missing. Within the labour market of gig economy, the individualised arrangements of women and other gig workers channel them towards arrangements that are consistent with patriarchal ideals of femininity with a general acceptance of lower wages than that of male gig workers. They continue allegiance to traditional gender norms and its gender essentialism. for same or similar work and gendered obligations of unpaid care work and (Kasliwal, 2020 and Mehta 2020). Such gender essentialism is disadvantageous to women but advantageous for capitalist development. For example, the women gig workers, like other workers in China have been asked by the present president Xi's political regime to shoulder the responsibilities of taking care of the old and young, as well as educating children. In the early 20th century Rosa Luxemburg rightfully argued that 'capitalism for its expansion was dependent on precapitalist modes of production. Nancy Folbre explains this argument saying that capitalist development also depends on precapitalist or non-capitalist hierarchies

that check the development of class or gender solidarity and thus limiting any transformational change.

According to conventional household norms in India, women are not able to use their meagre income from gig work for their own use; they are expected to use their earnings on food and welfare of other family members, and in consultation (and probably under the control) of the household heads (mostly men). This is likely to discourage women in taking up the gig work, as they are already overburdened with household care as mandatory duties. Not surprisingly, a survey conducted in 2018 showed that 35 percent of the women interviewed were unwilling to take up gig work (Chapman et al., 2018). Unlike high-skilled and well- paid freelancers, gig workers and informal sector workers (dominated by semi-skilled women) are left without any job security, poor working conditions, long hours of work, unfair dismissal from contract work, and no right to a compulsory national minimum wage.

4.3 Absence of Grievance Mechanisms

The management of structural changes in economic work has failed to keep up with changes about the safety of workers. For example, Zomato has a policy that women delivery personnel end their work shifts by 6PM; and that they operate only in areas that are regarded to be safe zones. For their safety, they should also carry pepper spray while on duty (Atal, 2020). Such measures are not the norm in other platforms. There are limited safety measures for women gig workers, including the lack of application and enforcement of the Sexual Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act of 2013.

A study by Kasliwal (2020) shows that platforms in India do not have adequate grievance mechanisms for women gig workers. Platforms generally expect that disputes will be resolved independently by the parties concerned (Kasliwal, 2020). This leaves women gig workers in a more vulnerable situation where they are unlikely to raise questions or report cases of abuse or sexual harassment by customers or contractors. Discussions at the World Economic Forum (2020) noted that gig workers have become more vulnerable than other labor groups due to the lack of standard labor laws and social protection measures.

5. GENDERED NORMS AND STRUCTURAL BARRIERS

The gendered division of work has increased greatly during the coronavirus pandemic negatively impacting women (Deshpande, 2020). The ongoing pandemic period is noted for the absence of domestic helpers, the presence of a large number

of men working from home, as well as children studying online at home, leading to an increased demand on so-called women's work like cooking, cleaning, and caring (Tayal and Kapur Mehta, 2021). Any supposed flaw in the performance of these duties (like children crying, delays in the preparation of food/food not being tasty enough, and neglect in the care of parents-in-law has often been met with verbal or physical abuse of women. The "naturalization of men" with hegemonic power over women's bodies, lives and work is justified by holding up the "altruistic character" of "the male breadwinner"' and "'the heads of the household" in legal and socio- cultural norms. This dominant role of men is manufactured out of discourses on poverty, growth, class, caste, and ethnicity, as evident in more recent impact analyses of Covid-19.

Conventional economic theory has largely failed to measure and capture the value created by women's unpaid care work. It became a subject of concern with feminist economist interventions towards the end of the 1990s. Generally, trapped in the market-centric logic of work and existing under the state-led economic dependency on men—as well as under the influence of gendered social norms—women feel limited in bargaining with household heads and others, "who consume the products of their labour" (Folbre, 2020).

5.1 Masculine Norms of Work

The gendered division of work has increased greatly during the coronavirus pandemic negatively impacting women (Deshpande, 2020). The ongoing pandemic period is marked by an absence of domestic helpers, the presence of a large number of men working from home, as well as children studying online at home, leading to an increased demand on so-called women's work like cooking, cleaning, and caring (Tayal and Kapur Mehta, 2021). Any supposed flaw in the performance of these duties (like children crying, delays in the preparation of food/food not being tasty enough, and neglect in the care of parents-in-law has often been met with verbal or physical abuse of women. The "naturalization of men" with hegemonic power over women's bodies, lives and work is justified by holding up the "altruistic character" of "the male breadwinner"' and "'the heads of the household" in legal and socio-cultural norms. This dominant role of men is manufactured out of discourses on poverty, growth, class, caste, and ethnicity, as evident in more recent impact analyses of Covid-19.

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According to a 2018 ILO Report, women in India spend 312 minutes/day (in urban areas) and 291 minutes/day (in rural areas) doing unpaid care work (washing, cooking, cleaning, and caring for children and the elderly). In comparison, men spend only 29 minutes/day in urban areas and 32 minutes/day in rural areas on such unpaid care. In a recent case, Justice NV Ramana of the Supreme Court of India referred to a Government of India report (the *Time Use in India 2019 Report*), which states that on average, Indian women spend 299 minutes a day on unpaid domestic services for household members, compared to an average of 76 minutes spent by men on such tasks. In the absence of any data on the opportunity cost of work for women in multifarious activities to support the entire family, the Court observed that, "a modest estimation should be Rs 3000 per month and Rs 36,000 per annum" (Kirti and Another vs Oriental Insurance Company Ltd., 2021). What is even more unjustified about this gendered system of unpaid care work is that it is not recognized as work, and only seen as "'the women's duty". In most households, girls are trained to accept this work as their "feminine duty" and boys are told that they only do the decision-making and resource distribution among household members.

The government of India has been widely appreciated for stringent measures during the lockdown across the country. Of course, these measures have saved numerous lives, but at the same time they have deprived women and men under the poverty line—mainly migrants, casual workers, and daily wagers—of livelihoods, institutional care, and human dignity. Many of them have managed to return to their homes, exhausted physically and financially. However, this has also resulted in a disproportionate burden of unpaid care on the women of the households. The two worst outcomes of this pandemic for women are the increased domestic unpaid care work of women and an increase in domestic violence against women, thus furthering inequality, and indignity of women.

There has been an intensification of domestic violence against women that is not captured in the conventional analysis of the socio-economic impact of the pandemic. The reported data since the outbreak of Covid-19 in March 2020 shows that violence against women and girls has intensified globally: a 30 percent increase

in case of France, a 25 percent rise in Argentina, a 25 percent increase in China, a 33 percent increase in Singapore and a 100 percent increase in reported cases in India. In the period between March and September 2020, the National Commission for Women received 13,410 complaints of crimes against women. Of these, 4,350 were of domestic violence (Ravichandar, 2021). We are at a loss to understand 1) why homes where in women carry out both productive and reproductive activities have become "spheres of fear and anxiety" for women, and 2) why our representatives and democratic governments in the South have failed to place domestic violence on their crisis management agenda of the Covid-19 pandemic. We live in a time when masculinity proudly parades itself as sovereign authority.

Based on a conservative account of a 20 percent increase in violence during the COVID-19 lockdown period, a United Nations Population Fund study in 2020 estimates that the pandemic has the potential to cause 15 million additional cases of gender-based violence for every additional 3 months (UNFPA, 2020). The UN ESCAP study of 2020 noted three contributing factors for such an increase in the gender-based violence: 1) increased exposure to perpetrators and increased care responsibilities, including things like serving hot and tasty meals; 2) the lockdown- caused financial stress and increased alcohol consumption acted as triggers for the perpetrators; and 3) limited support and severely reduced security and legal services by the state of increased violence at home. All these resulted in limiting the freedom of women to seek help over the phone or Internet (UN ESCAP, 2020).

A recent study in the USA by McKinsey & Company (2021) shows that 77 percent of the men think that they share the workload at home equally with their partners, while only 40 percent of women agree. Giving the continuing work imbalance of unpaid care, it is not surprising that 25 percent of women in the corporate sector are thinking about leaving their work.

6. GENDER PRE-REQUISITES TO UNLOCK THE GIG ECONOMY

The preceding discussion highlights the precarious situation of women in the gig economy. They lack support from the state agencies and/or protection from labor laws. At the same time, the engagement of women in the gig economy is seen as having potential for livelihoods and economic well-being. A 2020 study by Tandem Research suggests five areas for improvement in the condition of women gig workers. I have added a sixth area to these conditions for improvement for women engaged in the gig work.

– Upgrading labor laws and instituting social protection for gig workers. Platforms need to be made responsible for income and health-related conditions of gig workers, providing support such as minimum wages and skill upgrading of gig workers (as has been done in Singapore). Platforms should not distance themselves from the responsibility of being employers. More importantly, in India, gig workers including home-based workers and domestic workers have recently been recognized as "wage workers" in the 2019 Code on Social Security. However, this definition is problematic, as they are not included in the more important definition of workers in the Code on Wages.

– Need to extend protection against workplace harassment to gig workers. This involves making platforms accountable so that they provide dignity to workers and ensure a violence-free work environment, particularly in cases of on-demand domestic work and ride-hailing where women gig workers are in close contact with clients.

– Strengthen bargaining power of women gig workers and support their collectivization to demand better rights from their employers and the state, as has been done by SEWA (Self-Employed Women's Association) which has worked to mobilize migrant women and organized re-skilling programs for women who lost jobs in the Covid-19 pandemic.

– Redress sexual harassment and data surveillance. Gig workers in India have raised concerns that tracking of biometric health-related data may challenge workers' rights to privacy and open new risk areas where such data can be used as discriminatory tools to determine their wages and terms of work affecting their job security. Research done about women garment workers, for example, shows that managers/supervisors used video data to harass women under the practice of "disciplining" them (Ranganathan, 2017).

– Track gender-related and intersectional data on women gig workers. As of now, there is no authentic data on women in the gig economy in India. The availability of such data through the NSSO employment-unemployment surveys is likely to help understand women's engagement in the gig economy. As a result, we will learn more about changing patterns of gender relations as well as its intersectionality with transformation in other systems of structural inequality and discrimination.

– Agency Development of women engaged in the gig work: Some immediate steps related to agency development of women and girls, like upgrading of management skills, know-how of new technologies and ownership and control over finances and productive assets need to be introduced towards a transformative change in social norms which prohibit women and girls from accessing not only employment opportunities but creates pre-conditions that limit them in building skills and technical education to enable themselves to work with men on equal terms. All the work related to unpaid care and domestic work are seen as the woman's duty. In most cases, women end up paying a major penalty in terms of their loss in building economic dependency by not asserting for their rights and control over income and productive resources. The real challenge for the policy and social practice is the casting away of patriarchy and misogyny in the institutional structures of India's polity and economy. A rich body of feminist research describes social rules, norms, ideologies, and platforms of control over economic assets that make women as dependents within a system of concrete constraints, accompanied by a system of dominance with an institutional variability of discrimination, exploitation, and appropriation within home and outside in the labour market. (Kelkar and Govindnathan, forthcoming Oxford University Press; Folbre, 2021)

7. CONCLUSION: POLICIES AND PRACTICES AGAINST STRUCTURAL BARRIERS

– As we noted earlier, the decline in the participation of women in the labor force has been a concern in the emerging economy of India. Discrimination in employment/self-employment opportunities and gender disparity in wages or earnings is widespread. Social norms and cultural practices severely restrict women's participation in the labor market. Given this situation, the promotion of the employment of women in gig work is an important move by itself, in the sense of its likely consequences for improvement in women's agency and in creating space for manifestation of their agency and capabilities. Therefore, my argument is not to be interpreted as suggesting any withdrawal of women's participation from gig work. What I have argued for is that there is a need to institute policies and practices to remove structural barriers, violence free homes, workplaces and public spaces, gender-discriminatory patterns of wages, remuneration and poor working conditions in gig work, and focused attention to skill upgradation and Women's ownership and control over productive assets.

Policy attention is needed to increase skills training for women and ending of gender barriers to enable women workers to seize simple and complex gig work opportunities.

What women gig workers need is an enabling production environment where masculinity itself called into question, where women's discussions about productivity and efforts at building their skills are not reduced to a perception of "gossip sessions". As candidly observed by Pierre Bourdieu, "Male privilege is also a trap, and it has its negative side in the permanent tension and contention, sometime verging on the absurd, imposed on every man by the duty to assert his manliness in all circumstances" (2001, p. 50). On the other hand, women become inadequately feminine in the way they are treated. "The more I was treated as a woman, the more woman I became…If I was assumed to be incompetent at reversing cars or opening bottles, oddly incompetent I felt myself becoming" (Bourdieu, 2001, pp. 61). A woman's success in gig work also involves holding a managerial position and the set of qualities that male workers have been prepared for and trained as men—a physical stature, a strong voice, confidence in negotiating skills, self-assurance and command over earnings and labor, all these are elements of women's agency.

Platforms set in capitalist relations could have recruited women for traditionally male jobs at little more than traditionally female remunerations. They had several possible reasons not to do so and instead, divide the workers by gender. As managed mostly by men, they had personal stakes in patriarchal institutions that privileged them within their own families and communities. Their training from traditional economists has taught them that women's participation in any paid employment, including freelance gig work would make them unfit for motherhood, care work and other household duties. (See for example: Andrew Ure, 1835; Alfred Marshal, the founding father of neoclassical economics 1890). More surprisingly, Friedrich Engles in his 1845 condition of the working class in England "warned of increased child mortality, the destruction of family life and the 'unsexing' of unemployed husband by their breadwinning wife" (Quoted in Folbre. 2020:138).

As privileged platform managers and citizens, they seem to believe in their social duty to keep up with the women's moral obligation in dedicating themselves to the care of husbands, in-laws and children and not distract them from carrying out unpaid care and domestic work. It is likely that they also anticipate anger and threat of replacement from male workers, should they attempt to treat women workers on par with men workers.

Women often find themselves in particularly contradictory positions when pursuit of their strategic interests threatens to weaken financial support from husbands, father, and brothers. These men find it hard to prefer a commitment that takes precedence over their financial existence and its 'duties'. However, there is a growing awareness and emergence of younger 'creative negotiations' that encourage flexibility within marital relations of housework in some urban centres. Nevertheless, intensive economic crisis during the coronavirus pandemic seems to be a compelling factor for most women workers to accept the pre-existing inequalities of offline market work.

It is argued that capitalist development can undermine patriarchal power, but much depends on a rapid expansion of community production and potential distribution of benefits and services. Patriarchal institutions and holders of power face trade-offs between efficiency and power if the opportunity cost of her labour (the market earning per hour or day) is greater than the value of her domestic unpaid care work.

Women's earning from market work also makes possible reduction in the male power, and increase in woman's agency, bargaining power to renegotiate to reduce or compliment the man's share of household income or compensation.

Economic opportunities created by the expansion of gig economy do matter, but it needs to be investigated what role women's increased agency in the sense of personal bargaining have persuaded men of advantages and benefits of change.

Women's concern about low wages, unfair conditions of work and disproportionate burden of household and unpaid care work as well as marginal presence in decision making and in unions point to the lack of bargaining power. In this context some recent research (Rathi and Tandon, 2021) reported that women's domestic workers organizations asked for the interventions of platforms to help achieve recognition and open bank accounts, which could then possibly used to receive the payment of work and thus increase their access to credit. However, these are not being done and leads us to reflect on Andre Lorde's (1984) famous warning for a patriarchy organized culture of the gig economy, "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house".

Any success in improving the conditions of gig work by women will have to be accompanied by an improved recognition of women's unpaid care work, whether through the state provision of wages of housework, as in case of Goa's Griha

Aadhar Scheme, under which every eligible housewife from poor families with an annual income less than INR 3,00,000 is entitled to receive INR 1,500 a month, or they are provided unmediated ownership and control rights of productive assets, including land, housing, and new technology. As noted elsewhere, gender parity in "asset distribution facilitates a restructuring of gender relations" in access to technology, finance, autonomy in governance, as well as control over women's own bodies and labor. (Kelkar, 2013; 2021). This, in turn enables women to improve their skills and knowledge of digitized work, and in realizing the feminist demand for women's unmediated rights to skills, knowledge, and productive assets.

What is needed is a shift from the precarious conditions of women's low-wage employment in the gig economy and changes in social norms that constrain women's professional mobility and their ownership and control over finances and productive assets. Any defense of social traditions has little appeal to those women (and men) who have suffered from the negative aspects of such traditions. To diversify and reshape the economy in recovery from the economic chaos caused by Covid-19, the state and the market agencies must ensure that women have financial independence, parity-based in remuneration and decision making that fosters gender equality. The state policy and social practice need realization that without incorporating the prevention of gender-based violence as an integral part of the recovery from the impact of Covid-19, any substantial restructuring of economic growth will not lead to inclusive and sustainable development.

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