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Algorithmic blindness and gender sensitivities in India's platform Gig work: A feminist review of literature and cases

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Abstract

Algorithms are often presented as neutral tools that treat all workers equally, yet they are designed and deployed within social structures that have long sustained gendered inequalities in labour. This paper examines how algorithmic platforms in India's gig economy overlook gender related disparities and what this means for debates on the future of work. It is a qualitative, feminist review of academic and non academic literature, including Fairwork ratings, time use data, company statements, and press and union reports, with Urban Company as the main illustrative case and Swiggy, Zomato, and Zepto as comparators. The analysis focuses on two platform functions, time scheduling and location matching, and identifies three constraints that shape women's participation: norms of respectability in public space, time poverty arising from unpaid care, and personal safety. It argues that policies such as auto assignment, strict cancellation limits, minimum rating thresholds, and one sided information flows can penalize protective choices, and that platform safety measures remain largely reactive. A review of five Indian labour laws shows that platform workers remain outside the protections that would address harassment, wage discrimination, and arbitrary deactivation. The paper proposes human review and appeal, gender disaggregated algorithmic fairness audits, safe refusal without penalty, and greater transparency in task information. Findings rest on secondary sources and indicate patterns for further empirical testing, not measured effects on gig workers.

***Keywords*:** Algorithmic Management, Gig Economy, Platform Work, Gender Inequality, Time Poverty, Worker Safety, Urban Company, India

JEL Classification: J16, J46, J81

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1. Introduction

A considerable body of research has concentrated on Female Labour Force Participation within the Indian framework, thereby expanding the horizons of current understanding regarding labour theories (Boserup, 1970; Chen, 1989; Eswaran et al., 2013; Klasen & Pieters, 2015; Mahajan & Ramaswami, 2017). These investigations reveal that gender-based disparities in labour are not uniform and can manifest in various forms, intertwining with other historical socio-economic inequalities, which pose distinct challenges and exploitative circumstances for women who are currently part of or wish to join the workforce. The growing platformization of work must be examined in this light. Algorithms are frequently claimed to be free from human bias, thus regarded as environments that foster equality for all. However, these algorithms are created, implemented, and propagated within the same socio-economic frameworks that have historically perpetuated inequalities. The pervasive application of algorithmically driven software, both apparent and hidden from the general populace, necessitates a thorough evaluation of the values that are emphasized in such automated decision-making systems (Noble, 2018). This study aims to explore the degree to which algorithmic platforms in India's gig economy neglect gender-related inequalities in labour and the implications of this neglect for future work discussions. In this regard, the paper will concentrate solely on platform-based gig employment and will interchangeably use the terms gig workers and platform workers throughout the document. It relies on a comprehensive array of historical and theoretical literature that has critically examined the phenomenon of gender blindness in labour practices. The research has also analysed how the gig economy, rather than addressing these systemic exclusions, either intensifies them or remains largely oblivious to the social and historical elements that have shaped gendered labour divisions.

2. Literature Review

In this context, the research seeks to critically examine two fundamental dimensions of gendered disparities within gig work platforms: time scheduling and location matching. Time poverty is disproportionately faced by women, who often bear the burden of a "second shift" involving domestic, caregiving, and emotional labour in addition to (or concurrently with) their paid employment (Hochschild & Machung, 1989). Likewise, algorithms that fail to account for safety threats and concerns specific to women may assign them to work locations that are particularly hazardous and undesirable. Given the absence of supervisors or managers, and the fact that scheduling and location matching predominantly occur through algorithmic interfaces, these women miss out on potential incentives and ratings. A multitude of studies has investigated the significance of enhancing digital access for women, and since this is directly beneficial to telecom and technology firms, advancements in this area have been consistent. As reported in the GSMA Mobile Gender Gap Report 2024, 83% of women now possess a mobile phone compared to 89% of men; additionally, 60% own a smartphone and 66% utilize mobile internet in Low and Middle Income Countries (GSMA, 2024). The growth of mobile phone ownership and internet access

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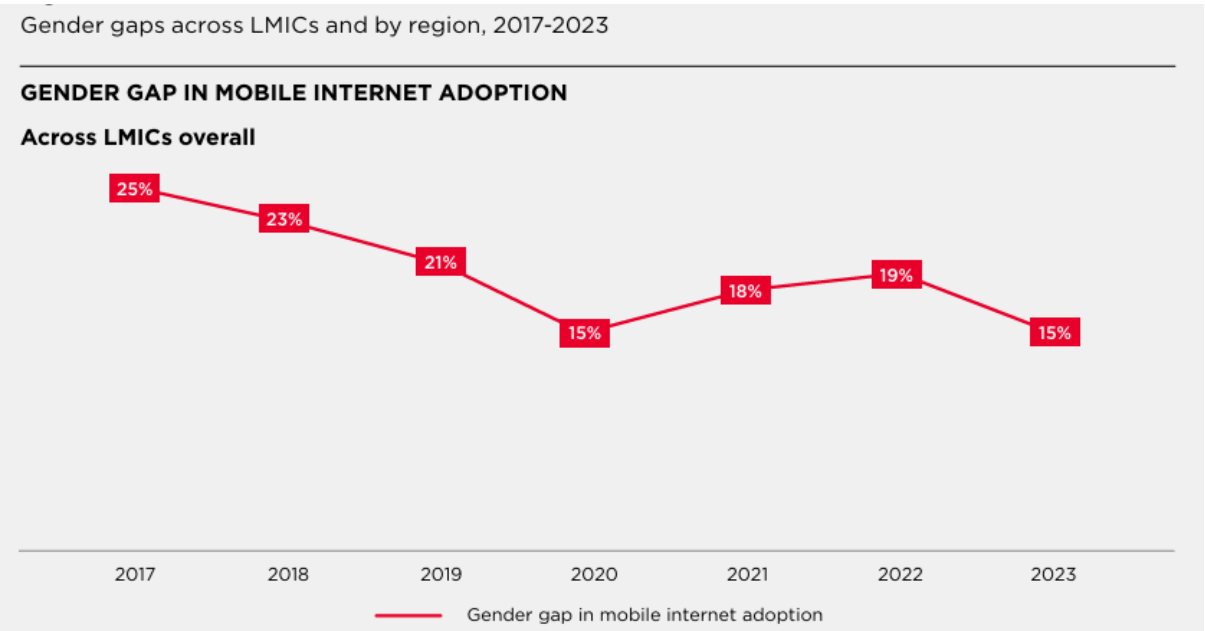
among women has been actively pursued not only as a social benefit but also as a burgeoning market opportunity.

Figure 1. Gender gap in mobile internet adoption across low and middle income countries



Source: GSMA (2024), The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2024.

Figure 1 shows that the gender gap in mobile internet adoption narrowed between 2017 and 2023 across low and middle income countries. However, digital access alone does not remove the time, mobility and safety constraints examined below. The discussion must therefore also encompass barriers that are difficult to quantify but affect women's working lives.

3. Research Methodology

The paper is written based on a qualitative research. Several published literature, both academic and non-academic literatures have been covered in the present research to identify the research trends on the relevant areas such as positioning place and time within gig economy platforms, Platform Architecture and Regulations, several other available literature on other practices and challenges related to platform based employment of gender related women in India and abroad. A total number of more than 100 literature were initially reviewed and approximately 50 plus key literature, both academic and non-academic have been consider for inclusion in the present study. These have been highlighted in the following portion of the research paper.

3.1 Positioning Place and Time within GIG Economy Platforms

When examining the obstacles to employment for women, both location and time have historically been significant constraints, and online gig work platforms are no exception. However, with the

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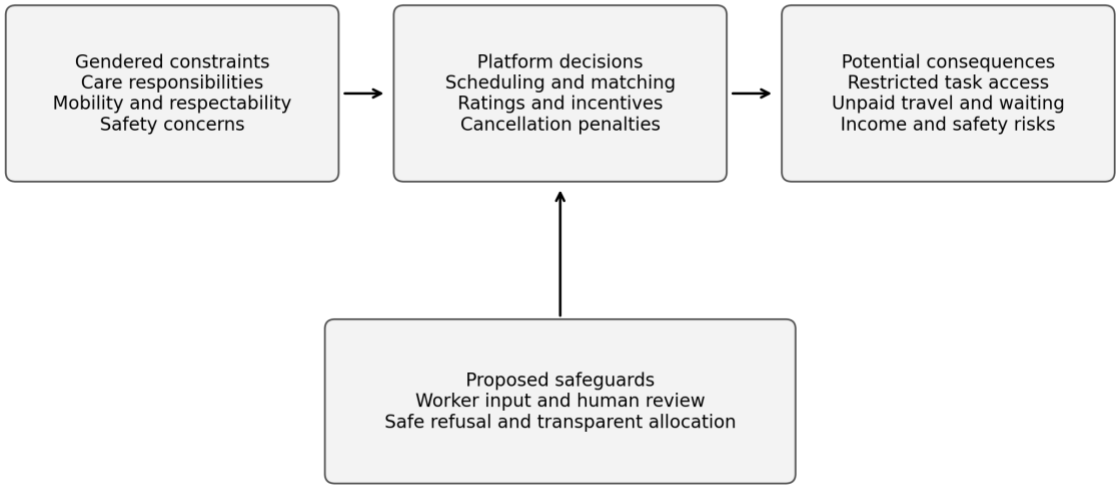
advent of algorithmic gig work, these constraints have evolved. Platform-based gig work is often celebrated as a new era of accessible and flexible employment opportunities; nevertheless, a crucial question persists regarding who truly benefits from this widely embraced business model. Women participating in algorithmic gig work encounter three primary challenges associated with location and time: issues of respectability, time poverty, and personal safety. Figure 2 summarises the proposed relationships between these constraints, platform decisions and potential worker outcomes.

Figure 2. Gendered Constraints and Algorithmic Platform Decisions



Source: Authors' conceptual synthesis of Hochschild and Machung (1989), Phadke et al. (2011), Noble (2018) and Fairwork (2023). Arrows indicate proposed relationships rather than empirically tested causal effects; safeguards are recommendations.

a) The historical segmentation of public areas and notions of respectability

The limitations imposed on women in urban public spaces have deep historical roots. Elizabeth Wilson examines the moral panic associated with the heightened visibility of women on the streets of Victorian London. The phrase "public woman" serves as an antiquated euphemism for a sex worker (Kern, 2021; Wilson, 1992). In this context, location can be interpreted as a metaphorical representation of the spatial divisions within cities and how these divisions have sustained inequalities.

Phadke et al. (2011) contend that women's access to public spaces is frequently contingent upon their ability to exhibit "respectability" and a valid purpose. Through their ethnographic research in Mumbai, they note that women often partake in self-surveillance behaviors, such as carrying large bags or appearing absorbed in thought, to validate their presence in public areas. This process of "manufacturing respectability" highlights the societal norms that compel women to rationalize

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their right to occupy public spaces without a defined purpose. Fairwork (2023) conducted a study involving 38 Fairwork Country teams, revealing a distinct gender segregation among platforms operating in public spaces (such as transport services, which are predominantly male) versus those in private spaces (like domestic, beauty, and care work, which are primarily female). Although these gender divisions are deeply rooted in historical and cultural contexts, they are sustained by consumer preferences for specific tasks to be performed by particular genders. Gig work, particularly in delivery services, occupies a precarious position, as it is deemed legitimate yet requires constant travel and activity in public, which is often not considered respectable for women. This is evident in the statistics, with Swiggy employing only 1,000 women out of a total workforce of over 200,000 (Press Trust of India, 2021). Furthermore, a mere 0.5 percent of Zomato's delivery partners are women (Goyal, 2021). In contrast, Urban Company, which has established its operations based on traditional gender roles and focuses on women working in private settings, boasts 32,000 active service partners, with one-third being women (Faleiro, 2023).

b) Care work

The issue of time poverty and its effects on female employment has emerged as a significant focus in both policy and economic research since the inaugural Time Use Survey was carried out in India in 2019. This survey highlighted the disproportionate burden of unpaid domestic duties that are imposed on women. According to the Time Use Survey 2024, 41% of women aged 15–59 participated in unpaid caregiving, compared with 21.4% of men in the same age group. Furthermore, women dedicate an average of 140 minutes per day per participant aged 15–59 to caregiving activities, in contrast to men, who allocate only 74 minutes, resulting in nearly double the time commitment for women. The situation regarding unpaid domestic work is even more alarming, with 81.5% of women and girls aged 6 and older involved in such services, while only 27.1% of men participate in similar activities (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, 2025). This data clearly indicates that the caregiving and domestic responsibilities that men undertake are predominantly fulfilled by women. Figure 3 compares the time spent by participating women and men on unpaid domestic and caregiving activities. These population estimates contextualise time poverty; they are not estimates for gig workers.

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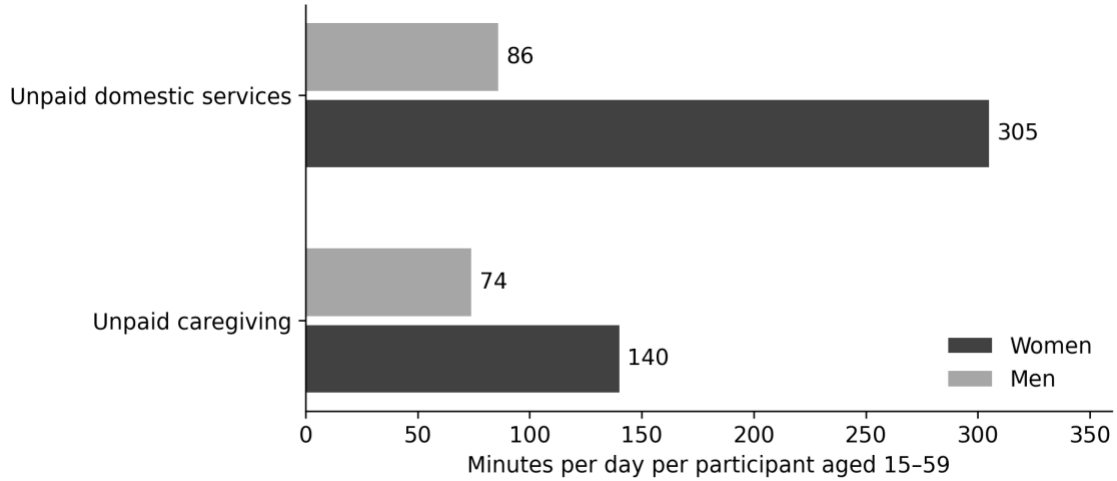
Figure 3. Unpaid Domestic and Caregiving Time in India In 2024



Source: Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (2025), Time Use Survey 2024. Values are minutes per day per participant aged 15–59: domestic services, women 305 and men 86; caregiving, women 140 and men 74. The categories have different participant groups and should not be added.

Placing this discussion within the larger framework of gig employment reveals two significant aspects. Firstly, although the gig economy is frequently lauded for granting workers the autonomy to select their own hours, this flexibility is not uniformly accessible. Given the so-called 'flexible' characteristics of gig work, which particularly encourages deliveries during the hours of 12 a.m. to 6 a.m., women are indirectly impacted, even if they are not directly involved in such roles. These women often provide support to male family members – husbands, sons, or fathers – who participate in the gig economy. Consequently, they are compelled to bear the weight of this unpredictable schedule. They exert additional effort on unpaid domestic responsibilities to accommodate this purported 'flexibility.' Ironically, this situation renders their own schedules significantly less flexible. This leads to increased time poverty for women at home, further constraining their schedules and making them more rigid and burdensome. The care and domestic labour performed at home establishes the context and support necessary for other forms of work conducted outside the home (Arora et al., 2023). Secondly, women aspiring to join the gig economy often discover that they are not genuinely presented with flexible job opportunities. Their daily lives are already governed by care responsibilities, child-rearing, and various domestic obligations, which are typically non-negotiable and ongoing in most households. As a result, the 'freedom' to select working hours becomes largely a mirage; their options are limited not by the inherent nature of gig work, but by the structural inequalities that influence gender roles within the household.

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In her influential book, "Second Shift," Arlie Hochschild contends that women disproportionately shoulder the consequences of what she refers to as a "stalled revolution." This phenomenon enabled wives to transition from the home to the first shift of paid employment; however, it has led to unexpectedly minimal progress in the domestic second shift. Typically, the wife remains the primary caregiver, and in the majority of marriages, the woman's paid employment is still viewed merely as a job, unlike the man's career (Hochschild & Machung, 1989).

c) Safety

Safety is a factor that arises at the intersection of location and time. In a research study conducted by Chaney et al. (2024), 571 participants were presented with images from their respective college campuses that illustrated varying lighting conditions (daytime and nighttime) and levels of entrapment (high and low; where high entrapment indicates difficulty in escape and low indicates ease of escape). Generally, male participants were more inclined to recognize paths and walkways, while female participants were more prone to highlight areas adjacent to the paths, such as bushes or dimly lit regions (Chaney et al., 2024). This trend was particularly pronounced during nighttime and in areas of high entrapment, suggesting that the perception of time and location differs between women and men, even in familiar environments. Lighting and entrapment are relevant to gendered perceptions of safety in walking environments. Chaney et al. (2024) found that women more often attended to areas outside the walking path, particularly at night and in settings where escape was difficult. These findings support examining perceived safety alongside the time and location of platform assignments; they do not directly establish outcomes for Indian gig workers.

Parikh (2018) elaborates on how the outsourced call center sector, once celebrated as a symbol of modernity in the early 2000s, faced a similar dilemma. In this context, women found themselves at the centre of narratives that vilified them as 'bad women' for being outdoors at night, despite working in sectors that actively sought female employees willing to undertake night shifts. The research illustrates how familial anxiety influenced women's mobility, often compelling them to leave for home immediately after their shifts to demonstrate that they were not 'loitering' or engaging in unproductive activities post-work (at night). Women expressed concerns about being perceived as frivolous, internalizing the stigma associated with a lack of respectability. Concerns regarding sexual safety are intertwined with the intricate and multifaceted ideas surrounding the definition of a "bad woman," with nighttime "loitering" serving as a significant criterion. Sexual violence is frequently justified when directed towards these so-called "bad women," thereby heightening the fears of women engaged in nighttime work. In India, delivery gig work predominantly operates through storage facilities known as "dark stores," which are specifically designed for the fulfilment of online orders. When delivery partners receive an order, they arrive, collect the items, and deliver them directly to the customer's door. The very term "dark stores" implies a particularly alarming scenario for women, where both the safety of location and timing converge. Research has demonstrated that lighting plays a critical role in women's perception of

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safety. The interaction of light with various surfaces and colours within the built environment significantly influences how individuals perceive brightness and security. Alongside the social context of a given space, these elements are strongly linked to feelings of safety and comfort (Arup, 2024).

3.2 Platform Architecture and Regulations

As outlined in the earlier sections, time and location represent the most significant vulnerabilities for women in these situations. Although the platforms vary in their service offerings, their policies regarding gig workers tend to be largely consistent. On a global scale, individuals with caregiving responsibilities for children or the elderly, as well as those who belong to minority groups due to their gender identity (in addition to race, caste, or ethnicity), often seek platform work due to its relatively low barriers to entry. Consequently, platform work draws in individuals who are already in precarious and vulnerable positions. In this context, while platforms can provide essential opportunities for their workers, they are, without a doubt, also in a position to exploit those workers who are disproportionately reliant on them (Fairwork, 2023).

3.3 Urban Company (Formerly Urban Clap)

Urban Company is a digital platform that allows consumers to request various services, such as skincare, hair grooming, massage therapy, cleaning, pest control, plumbing, carpentry, appliance servicing and repair, and painting, all from the comfort of their own homes (Urban Company, n.d.).

3.4 Insta Maids

While the data appears to bolster the position of women within the developing gig economy, Urban Company's entire business model is fundamentally based on leveraging traditional gender roles to generate business opportunities. This was particularly apparent when they recently introduced their latest service, "Insta Maids," which sought to link customers with domestic assistance. The name elicited immediate criticism on social media for being not only insensitive but also profoundly sexist and casteist. The term "maid" carries significant historical connotations, as it diminishes women to subordinate roles associated with household labour, thereby reinforcing patriarchal standards that regard domestic work as less valuable and inherently feminine. Furthermore, the use of the prefix "Insta" further commodifies this labour, suggesting on-demand servitude and negating the dignity and skill required for such work. It also subtly perpetuates the idea that domestic work is something to be consumed conveniently, rather than honoured as labour. Although Urban Company, in its statement, asserts that "Insta Maids" was a sound marketing decision, their branding choice reveals a more profound organizational attitude towards the gendered nature of labour. In response to the swift backlash on social media, Urban Company ultimately rebranded the service as "Insta Help."

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3.5 Location and Time

Positioning Urban Company within the broader context of this paper, it emerges as a significant platform where the challenges of location matching and time scheduling for women are particularly evident. These issues arise mainly from two key factors: firstly, the nature of the work necessitates that women physically enter clients' homes to provide services, in contrast to delivery platforms where mobility is restricted to pickup and drop-off; secondly, although Urban Company asserts that jobs are limited to a 10-kilometer radius from the worker's home, this limit is frequently disregarded in reality, compelling workers to endure taxing and costly commutes between jobs (Faleiro, 2023).

In the account reported by Faleiro (2023), an Urban Company service professional described the fear and exhaustion associated with entering unfamiliar homes. She recounted refusing a request to provide a massage to a male client after having accepted a booking for a woman. This example illustrates how the circumstances encountered at a client's home may differ from the information available when a task is accepted. Urban Company states on its website, "Utilize the app to inform us of your preferred working times and locations. We will arrange jobs for you during your selected time slots, alleviating any concerns regarding scheduling." However, in June 2024, the Company implemented new policies that were characterized as "horrific" and reminiscent of "slavery-like conditions" by the Gig and Platform Services Workers Union (GIPSWU), which is affiliated with the Indian Federation of App-based Transport Workers (IFAT). GIPSWU denounced these policies and organized a strike in front of the UC Bangalore office (Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, 2024). The revised policies indicated that workers were now obligated to work approximately 13 hours on weekends without any extra incentives, despite being assured of flexible working hours of up to 10 hours daily. Furthermore, the new regulations require a minimum rating of 4.8 and permit only two cancellations per worker each month, with the threat of job loss if cancellations exceed this limit. One of the most controversial aspects of the new policies is the 'auto-assign' system, which eliminates the worker's capacity to accept or reject a booking based on considerations such as location, order value, or personal emergencies. A GIPSWU leader remarked during the protest that "Women are disproportionately affected as they join the platform under the assurance of assignments within a 5-kilometer radius, yet they are now being dispatched to distant locations. This forces them to incur higher transportation costs for commuting to work" (Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, 2024).

Even those workers who wish to adhere to this schedule may find it challenging to do so. A task that is scheduled for just 45 minutes can extend to several hours due to the travel required to reach and return from a client's residence. Workers do not receive compensation for this additional time, nor are their travel expenses reimbursed. This situation underscores the primary thesis of the paper: that the algorithmic gig economy, as it presently operates, not only neglects the unique

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vulnerabilities faced by women workers but also intensifies these issues through unclear and gender-insensitive policies.

In this context, the fundamental requirement for an organization is to implement strong and enforceable safety protocols, particularly given the solitary, mobile, and frequently personal nature of the tasks these workers are expected to undertake. However, the situation is disheartening. Fairwork (2024) indicates that Urban Company has established policies and mechanisms intended to safeguard its workers from task-related hazards, which include safety training and an SOS button. "Workers are also supplied with safety gear such as harnesses and gloves, at no extra charge." Beyond the SOS button, which serves as a reactive measure rather than a proactive safeguard, there is scant evidence in the company's publicly available documentation of any specific policies or mechanisms aimed at addressing issues of sexual harassment, unsafe working conditions in private residences, or the necessity for support systems during emergencies. It took the company seven years following its inception to enhance safety protocols to incorporate an SOS button for female workers on the app, which would link workers to a company helpline in the event of an emergency. The SOS button was only introduced after considerable protests and extensive media scrutiny. In reaction to the criticism, Urban Company released a Medium blog detailing a "12-point program" designed to "enhance partner earnings and livelihood" (Urban Company, 2021).

Considering that the fundamental nature of the occupation entails women entering private residences, frequently alone and in unfamiliar settings, the lack of explicit, gender-sensitive safety protocols is not merely an oversight but rather a reflection of a more profound structural oversight. This situation highlights a significant disconnect between the design of the platform and the real-life experiences of its predominantly female workforce. The absence of proactive measures to guard against gender-based threats indicates that the designers of these systems either failed to fully acknowledge or deliberately chose not to address the specific vulnerabilities that women encounter in these situations. The failure to consider and prioritize these issues is damaging enough, but the wilful ignorance and even the litigation against workers who protest against gender inequitable practices represent a serious concern (Chandran, 2021).

The direct threats of sexual harassment faced by gig workers in their environments merely scratch the surface of the more profound structural challenges inherent in location-based matching systems. A more sophisticated feminist examination of 'location' indicates that for numerous women, the choices regarding whether to accept or decline a job are influenced by subjective and valid concerns related to safety, mobility, and societal norms. When platforms enforce strict cancellation policies without taking into account a worker's perceived risks or discomfort, they establish systems that not only disregard these lived experiences but also actively jeopardize women's safety by penalizing them for making protective choices.

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This rigidity does not engage with the entrenched gender dynamics of public spaces, where women have historically faced exclusion or discouragement from participating in the workforce due to fears of violence, societal stigma, or inadequate safe transportation. As discussions surrounding the "future of work" increasingly focus on the gig economy as a flexible response to labour market needs, it is essential to acknowledge that sustainability in gig employment cannot be realized without rethinking platform design to prioritize the safety, agency, and social status of women. Absent such an intersectional framework, these systems risk perpetuating and exacerbating existing inequalities under the pretence of innovation. Simply providing women with opportunities to maximize profits by leveraging traditional gender roles does not equate to empowering women.

Table 1 links the time and location constraints discussed above with platform design responses. It presents recommendations derived from the literature rather than measured effects.

Table 1. Gendered constraints and proposed platform responses

Constraint	Platform mechanism	Proposed response
Time poverty	Fixed availability and peak-hour incentives may conflict with unpaid care.	Care-compatible scheduling; disclose task duration and travel time.
Safety and mobility	Limited location information and penalties for refusal may discourage protective choices.	Provide route and client information; allow safe refusal without penalty.
Ratings and account access	Opaque ratings or deactivation can limit workers' ability to challenge decisions.	Human review, accessible appeals and gender-disaggregated fairness audits.

Source: Authors' synthesis of Hochschild and Machung (1989), Phadke et al. (2011), Fairwork (2023, 2024) and Arora et al. (2023).

In spite of the evident lack of gender sensitivity in platform policies and designs, it is also important to acknowledge recent initiatives aimed at addressing domestic violence by Urban Company. Urban Company's Project Nidar aims to assist the company's active service professionals who are currently experiencing or have previously encountered domestic violence and abuse. The organization will offer counselling, legal support, and emergency accommodation. In addition, the company will extend medical assistance, surpassing the existing INR 1 lakh insurance coverage, and provide financial support of up to INR 50,000 to service partners in need (Urban Company, 2024). By embedding domestic violence support directly into their platform framework, this initiative acknowledges that women's economic involvement in the service sector cannot be

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separated from the broader issues of patriarchal violence and control. Nevertheless, the transformative potential of this initiative depends on whether it truly redistributes power and agency to women workers or merely addresses the symptoms of structural inequality while maintaining existing labour hierarchies.

3.6 Other Platforms

In contrast to Urban Company, which has historically assigned gender-specific roles such as beautician and massage therapist, platforms like Swiggy and Zomato concentrate on delivery services, resulting in a lower employment rate for women. These delivery platforms offer greater flexibility regarding work hours and locations, allowing workers to commence their shifts at their convenience. Additionally, they provide part-time opportunities that are particularly appealing to college students, who can log into the app after classes to fulfill delivery orders. This flexibility should, in theory, encourage more women to engage in these roles, especially considering their caregiving responsibilities and the consequent time constraints they face. However, the representation of women in this sector remains minimal. This paradox necessitates a deeper examination, revealing that the complexities of an unequal patriarchal framework are both interconnected and multifaceted. While the time flexibility appears advantageous, women encounter further limitations related to public spaces and employment, as elaborated in section III. The majority of delivery personnel utilize motorcycles or scooters for their tasks. In India, it is uncommon to see women riding motorcycles, and their involvement in door-to-door delivery challenges long-standing notions of propriety and the perceived lack of safety infrastructure, which are strongly upheld by families and communities. Consequently, the dual pressures of time and location constraints imposed on women significantly limit their job choices and opportunities, even within the gig economy, which is often promoted as being more flexible and accessible. However, this does not imply that the existing barriers to entry and the male-dominated nature of delivery gig work should remain unchanged. According to the Fairwork India ratings report (Fairwork, 2024), platforms such as Swiggy, Bigbasket, Zepto, and Zomato have introduced SOS buttons as of 2024. Aside from this feature, there are hardly any protections against gender-based inequalities within these applications. The Scoring System indicates that certain platforms, including Swiggy, Bigbasket, and Zomato, provide workers with the ability to reach out to human representatives for assistance with issues and to contest disciplinary measures. Furthermore, workers retain access to the platform's application even after deactivation, and they are not penalized for voicing their concerns. In contrast, apart from the SOS buttons, Zepto appears to lack any of these protective measures according to Fairwork.

4. Conclusion

Where do gig workers within the platform economy fit into the Indian legal framework?

A significant discussion that has pervaded labour law since its establishment is whether a specific group of workers should be categorized as independent contractors or as individuals requiring

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protection under conventional labour law (Chokshi & Madhulika, 2025). In 2021, the Indian Federation of App-Based Transport Workers (IFAT) submitted a petition to the Supreme Court contesting the contracts employed by companies such as Ola, Uber, Swiggy, and Zomato, which label gig workers as 'partners' rather than 'employees'. The organization contended that by referring to gig workers as 'partners' instead of 'employees,' these companies are able to circumvent their obligation to provide social security benefits, a practice that IFAT asserts infringes upon constitutional rights as outlined in Articles 14 (Right to Equality), 21 (Right to Life and Personal Liberty), and 23 (Prohibition of Forced Labour and Exploitation) (Sadashiv K, 2024).

At present, the Indian legal system does not recognize gig workers as "employees." The Code on Social Security, 2020, for the first time, included gig workers under the law's jurisdiction. The Code on Social Security Bill 2019 authorized the central government to establish social security funds for unorganised workers, gig workers, and platform workers, and the 2020 Bill confirms that the central government will create such a fund. The Code outlines the development of social security measures for gig and platform workers, including life and disability coverage, accident insurance, health and maternity benefits, and old age protection, among others (Press Information Bureau, 2024). Additionally, the 2020 Bill includes provisions for the registration of all three worker categories: unorganised workers, gig workers, and platform workers. Chapter I, Section 2(35) of the Code on Social Security, 2020, defines a gig worker as "a person who engages in a work arrangement and earns from such activities outside of a conventional employer–employee relationship." However, this definition lacks precision regarding the exact identity of a gig worker, although it distinctly differentiates gig workers from regular employees and other non-employee worker classifications. Section 2(61) of the Code defines a platform worker as "someone engaged in or undertaking platform work," which offers little operational clarity in the definition. While all platform workers are likely to be gig workers, not all gig workers necessarily fall under the category of platform workers (Deepika & Madhusoodhan, 2022). Despite being a significant initial measure, it falls short of providing gig and platform workers with the same rights as traditional employees.

Let us examine five essential laws that could provide advantages to female gig workers if they were acknowledged as employees under the law:

1) Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 (POSH Act)

Should gig workers receive formal recognition as employees, the POSH Act could provide them with significant protections against sexual harassment. While the Act clearly extends its protections to harassment perpetrated by clients, customers, and third-party vendors during work activities, platform companies persist in exploiting the legal uncertainties surrounding worker classification, thus avoiding accountability for maintaining safe working environments. In instances where a client engages in sexual harassment towards an employee or another client, the

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victim is entitled to lodge a complaint under the POSH Act, obligating the organization to conduct an investigation and implement corrective measures (Sexual Harassment Law Compliance, 2022).

2) The Code on Wages, 2019

It ensures minimum wages, timely payment, and equal remuneration for men and women. But gig work platforms argue workers are self-employed and not covered under wage laws, allowing them to pay per task without meeting minimum wage thresholds.

3) The Code on Social Security, 2020

The legislation unified regulations concerning the Employee Provident Fund (EPF), Employees' State Insurance (ESI), maternity benefits, gratuity, and additional provisions. For the first time, gig workers were acknowledged within this legislation; however, as they fall under the designation of "platform workers," they belong to a distinct category that offers limited and non-binding social protections, thus the benefits are not directly applicable to them. Furthermore, there are no obligatory contributions required from platforms for pension, insurance, or maternity leave.

4) The Industrial Disputes Act, 1947

Reports indicate that companies have been known to deactivate employees' accounts without providing any rationale or following due process, frequently depending on unclear algorithmic determinations (Kalia, 2023; Tan & Gong, 2024). Alacovska et al. (2025) define the subjective experiences and emotional reactions to these commonly viewed abusive, opaque, and anxiety-inducing algorithmic management practices as 'algorithmic paranoia.' This measure safeguards employees against unjust termination and mandates notification and compensation upon dismissal. Such provisions would be particularly beneficial for female employees who may hesitate to voice their concerns to the platform due to fears of having their accounts deactivated without any means of redress or recourse.

5) The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 (now merged into Code on Wages)

The Equal Remuneration Act, now subsumed under the Code on Wages, 2019, mandates equal pay for equal work and prohibits gender-based wage discrimination. The wage registry requirements (Form D) that mandate gender-disaggregated pay data for traditional employers do not apply to gig platforms, eliminating transparency mechanisms that could expose discrimination. While traditional employers face inspection by Labour Enforcement Officers and complaints procedures, gig platforms operate in a regulatory vacuum where female workers have no institutional recourse for wage discrimination.

4.1 Limitations and Future Scope of Research

Arora et al. (2023) proposed a framework for addressing policy redesign in the context of women's roles in the workforce. They identify two essential areas where significant policy intervention is required – the workplace and the work-form. The first area focuses on the characteristics of the

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labor market and the design of labor that either promotes or hinders the participation of women workers. The second area pertains to the nature of work itself and how it is valued both in the market and within society.

Workplace considerations encompass a wide array of factors, from the physical layout of factories or shop floors to the legal frameworks that protect workers' rights across different sectors. In the context of the digital age, this also involves the design of platforms for gig work, alongside the education and awareness of both workers and employers regarding the changing landscape of rights and responsibilities in the new economy. When examining workplace considerations within the realm of gig work in India, these factors become especially significant due to the algorithmic mediation involved in labor allocation and management on digital platforms. Much like ESG audits, which are a relatively new development, there is potential for mandatory algorithmic fairness audits for companies utilizing algorithmic platforms. Fairwork's ratings indicate that Swiggy and Zomato have undergone external independent audits of their work allocation algorithms to identify any instances of bias (Fairwork, 2024). The ESG framework in India, which has been formalized through SEBI's Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reporting (BRSR) guidelines for publicly listed companies, sets a precedent for how systematic auditing can enhance corporate accountability. Within the context of the gig economy, such algorithmic audits would fulfill a dual role: ensuring equitable work distribution while also addressing the gendered aspects of platform labor that frequently exploit the vulnerable situations in which women workers find themselves, often exacerbated by biased recommendation systems, unclear performance metrics, and discriminatory customer rating practices. This would require platforms to not only carry out regular third-party algorithmic audits but also to establish transparent grievance redressal systems, disclose the criteria for algorithmic decision-making, and create accessible channels for workers to contest automated decisions that impact their livelihoods.

A crucial element within audits is the inclusion of human representatives in algorithmic platforms. There is an increasing apprehension regarding the potential for AI to supplant human workers; however, a robust policy framework can facilitate the transition of workers into new and emerging industries rather than their outright replacement by AI. In this instance, the complete automation of algorithmic matching is resulting in the unjust treatment of workers, particularly by rendering gendered nuances invisible. The incorporation of human representatives, who can serve as checks and balances, will enable workers to seek assistance for grievance redressal, safety resources, and other concerns, ultimately fostering improved treatment of workers and securing employment in a burgeoning sector that urgently requires context-specific solutions that only humans can offer. This approach will also reinforce the issues raised by workers during various protests, including the demand for continued access to the platform's application post-deactivation and the assurance that workers will not face penalties for voicing their concerns.

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Another significant modification needed in platform design is enhanced transparency. Regarding ride-hailing platforms, Pallavi notes that comprehensive information about rides is particularly pertinent for women drivers, who express apprehension about unfamiliar locations and routes. All drivers involved in her fieldwork indicated that they could only view passengers' photographs and names after accepting a ride. In contrast, passengers are able to see the drivers' photographs and names immediately upon the allocation of the ride, resulting in a transparency process that is skewed in favour of passengers within the platform economy (Arora et al., 2023).

Considerations regarding work forms may necessitate a rethinking of both the concept of work and the identity of the worker in discussions about a feminist vision for the future of work. Work is progressively being conducted in environments that have not historically been recognized as sites of productive labour, such as the home, which must consequently be acknowledged within the economic framework. This situation underscores two significant and interconnected themes: the economic acknowledgment of care work and the commercialization and outsourcing of care responsibilities via algorithmic gig platforms like Urban Company.

Hochschild provides an insightful framework for comprehending the changing dynamics of gig-based domestic service platforms. She posits that American capitalism has gradually adopted empowerment while sidelining care. In the absence of a counter-movement, care has transformed into a job passed down through generations – men pass it to women, and high-income women pass it to low-income women (Hochschild & Machung, 1989). This pattern closely mirrors the manner in which care and domestic service responsibilities are being transferred to gig workers through emerging platforms such as Insta Help (previously known as Insta Maid). This hierarchical delegation of care illustrates broader socio-economic structures, where domestic labour is systematically outsourced to individuals in more precarious positions who are deemed "easy to access." The rise of digital platforms like Insta Help (formerly Insta Maid) perpetuates this trend in a technologically mediated context. Although these platforms are presented within narratives of flexibility and economic inclusion, they frequently reproduce historical inequalities in new algorithmic formats, further solidifying care work as undervalued and rendered invisible.

These platforms exploit the gendered characteristics of care work, often functioning within regulatory grey areas with minimal oversight from governmental bodies or academic examination. Consequently, the future of work, when analyzed through a gendered perspective, appears increasingly exploitative, as gig platforms have discovered a lucrative opportunity within the undervalued and largely unseen care labour market.

However, the focus should not solely be on enhancing female participation; it is equally important to guarantee that women who are already involved in this sector are treated with equality, dignity, and fairness. During the expansion of the outsourced call canter industry, national policies were established that advised companies to offer transportation for night-shift employees to safeguard women's sexual safety (Parikh, 2018). Some states, such as Maharashtra, took further action by

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mandating that companies comply with this requirement. In summary, incorporating a feminist critique into the examination of women's involvement in gig economy platforms uncovers the intricate relationship between location and time. By addressing these overlapping factors alongside the enhanced legal protections mentioned earlier, we can strive to develop a more inclusive and equitable gig economy that acknowledges and upholds women's rights to participate fully and freely.

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