

Unlocking the Gig Economy in India

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Preface

The rise of the gig economy represents one of the most transformative shifts in the nature of work in the twenty-first century. Characterized by short-term, flexible, and often technology-mediated forms of employment, the gig economy has redefined traditional notions of labour, income security, and professional identity. In India, this transformation has been particularly profound. Fuelled by rapid digitization, a young and ambitious workforce, and the proliferation of platforms across sectors—from ride-hailing and food delivery to freelancing, logistics, and digital services—the gig economy now occupies a pivotal position in the nation's socio-economic landscape.

Unlocking the Gig Economy in India emerges at a time when this new world of work is both a promise and a puzzle. The promise lies in its inclusivity, adaptability, and entrepreneurial potential. For millions of Indians, gig work has become a gateway to economic participation, providing flexible income opportunities in urban and semi-urban areas alike. It has enabled women, youth, and marginalized groups to access livelihoods that were previously out of reach. At the same time, the puzzle lies in the precarity and fragmentation that accompany this flexibility—issues of fair wages, job security, social protection, algorithmic transparency, and collective representation continue to pose formidable challenges.

This edited volume, *Unlocking the Gig Economy in India*, brings together 18 insightful chapters written by distinguished scholars, practitioners, and policymakers. Together, these contributions examine the multidimensional nature of gig work—its economic promise, social realities, policy implications, and the future of labour in a rapidly digitizing society. Each chapter offers a unique perspective, collectively weaving a comprehensive narrative about how gig work is reshaping India's socio-economic fabric.

As India aspires to become a global digital powerhouse, the future of gig work will depend on how well policy, technology, and social innovation converge to create sustainable and equitable work opportunities. Strengthening labour protections without stifling innovation, fostering skills for the digital future, and ensuring that gig

workers have a voice in shaping their own destinies are critical imperatives. As per circular number No. W-11015/15/2024-RW (GPW) Government of India Ministry of Labour & Employment, had launched the eShram portal on 26th August 2021 to register and support the unorganised/migrant workers of the country by providing them with a Universal Account Number (UAN) that helps in skilling, finding jobs and checking their eligibility for different social sector schemes being administered by Central and State Governments. The challenge is not merely to regulate gig work but to reimagine the social contract around it—one that balances flexibility with fairness, autonomy with accountability, and efficiency with empathy.

We hope that the edited book titled “*Unlocking the Gig Economy in India*” serves as both a scholarly resource and a practical guide for understanding this dynamic sector. As editors, our endeavour has been to curate a dialogue that transcends disciplinary boundaries and engages with the broader question: how can India harness the potential of the gig economy while safeguarding the rights and aspirations of its workers? The 18 chapters in this volume do not offer easy answers, but they do provide critical insights and directions for policy, business, and research.

We believe that *Unlocking the Gig Economy in India* is not just a book about the future of work—it is about the future of workers. As India stands at the crossroads of technological advancement and social transformation, the challenge before us is clear: to ensure that the gig economy becomes a vehicle not merely for growth, but for inclusive and dignified progress.

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