



MIGRANT LABOUR IN THE INDIAN GIG ECONOMY-FUTURE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

The gig economy, distinguished by flexible, short-term, and freelance work facilitated through digital platforms, has significantly transformed the employment landscape in India. This study provides a inclusive overview of the living conditions, driving factors, impact, and regulatory challenges of the gig economy in the Indian context. The gig economy offers workers flexibility, independence, and skill development opportunities, but also presents challenges such as job insecurity, lack of benefits, and economic vulnerability. For businesses, it provides cost-effective labour and equipped flexibility while posing challenges in workforce management and retention. This study highlights important policy challenges, emphasizing the need for comprehensive frameworks to protect worker rights, address gender inequalities, and ensure fair treatment. The nonappearance of adequate social security measures and the precarious nature of gig work underscore the urgency of policy interventions. The future route of India's gig economy depends on balancing its growth potential with worker welfare, which requires collaborative efforts between policymakers, platforms, and stakeholders to develop complete policies. While the gig economy offers considerable opportunities for employment generation and economic growth in India, it requires careful regulation and policy formulation to ensure reasonable and sustainable development.

KEY WORDS: GIG Economy, Migrant Worker, Social Security, Challenges, Opportunities, Insecurity-----

INTRODUCTION

The gig economies nearby a "double-edged sword" for migrant workers, offering much-needed income chance and flexibility while simultaneously degrading working conditions and increasing precocity. Gig workers in India face poor conditions including low, uneven income due to pay-per-task models, extensive and demanding hours that blur into full-time work, and a lack of legal safety and social security benefits like paid leave, health assurance and retirement plans. Migrant labor is a significant part of India's growing gig economy, particularly in sectors like delivery and ridesharing. While it offers faster access and potentially higher pay compared to some informal jobs, migrant gig workers often face insecure working conditions, including a lack of benefits and job security because platforms classify them as independent contractors. Problem include algorithmic control over work and deactivation, which lack simplicity, creating a "grey area" where companies avoid traditional employer responsibilities.

The gig economy is described by flexible, short-term, and often digitally mediated work arrangements that have significantly influenced Labour market dynamics in recent years. It offers workers with opportunities for autonomy, the ability to generate multiple income streams, and a potentially improved work-life balance by allowing them to independently shape their career paths (Li, 2023). In spite of offering opportunities, the gig economy presents challenges, such as job insecurity, lack of workers' rights, and limited employment benefits, prompting discussions on how to ensure the economic welfare of gig workers (Li, 2023). From a business perspective, the gig economy presents cost-effective, on-demand Labour, although it necessitates businesses to adapt their strategies to manage a decentralized and flexible workforce (Li, 2023).

As India progresses to a digital-first economy, the rights of its most vulnerable workers must be front and centre in that idea. The future of migration shouldn't mean invisibility, and knowledge doesn't have to come at the expense of fairness. Ensuring decent work for gig workers is not just a labour issue, it is a question of justice, equity, and the kind of society we want to build. The epidemic has already shown us the essential nature of delivery workers, cleaners,

transporters, and domestic gig workers. Now it is time to accept their contributions not only with applause but with rights, protections, and dignity.

What is Gig Economy and Gig Worker?

Gig Economy is the growing economic model wherein the firms hire workers on a part-time stretchy basis rather than as full time employees. The Code on Social Security, 2020 defines GIG workers as those occupied in livelihoods outside usual employer-employee relationship. The employees work as service providers or independent contractors. They generally have elastic and adjustable working hours based on individual preferences. Gig workers prefer a bendy work schedule, typically with a low to middle level of education. Income through gig work is not their main source of income and they are often holding another regular job.

The jobs in gig economy naturally involve interrelate with the users through online platforms e.g., the drivers occupied with cab hailing platforms, delivery workers taken with restaurant aggregators, or tutors delivering lectures over online platforms. The workers affianced in such jobs are called Gig Workers. Gig Workers can be roughly classified into two categories platform and non-platform-based workers. (1) Platform workers are those whose work is based on online software apps or digital stage. (2) Non-platform gig workers are generally informal wage workers and own-account workers in the conservative sectors, working part-time or full time.

The Gig workers can also be divided on the basis of ability. These are high-skilled, medium-skilled and low-skilled workers. Regarding the NITI Aayog Report, at present, about 47% of the gig work is in medium-skilled jobs, about 22% in high-skilled jobs, and about 31% in low-skilled jobs. Trends illustrates that the concentration of workers in medium skills is gradually declining and that in low skills and high skills is increasing.

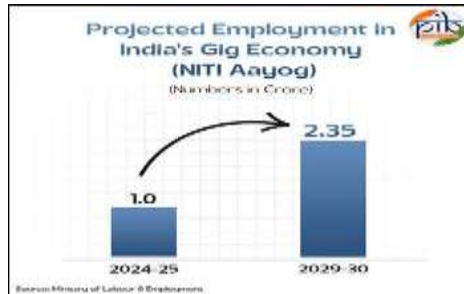


As on recent survey by a private firm, Quick Commerce, Healthtech, Fintech, and e-Commerce are the top sectors in the Indian gig economy. Within the gig workforce, work-from-home jobs account for 33% of the roles and 67% were on-field roles.

Characteristics of Migrant Labor in the GIG economy

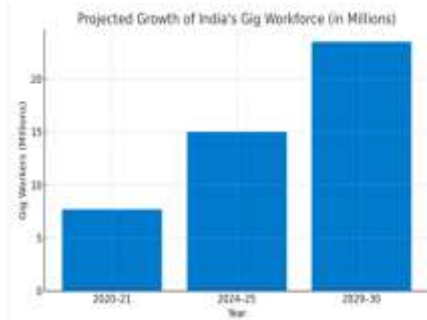
- **Prime sectors:** Migrant workers are particularly able to be seen in delivery services, but also find work in ridesharing, logistics, and other on-demand services.
- **Desirable factors:** The gig economy is smart because it offers relatively higher pay and is faster to access than many traditional jobs, a key benefit for migrant workers seeking to earn income quickly.
- **Insecure conditions:** Gig work is often portrayed by a lack of social security benefits like paid leave and health insurance, as workers are classified as independent contractors rather than employees.
- **Algorithmic management:** Workers are subject to not clear algorithmic systems for task assignment, performance evaluation, and deactivation, with limited recourse for grievances.
- **Deskilling and depression:** The growth of the gig economy can lead to a de-skilling of labor, where workers become easily disposable and dehumanized parts of the larger capitalist machine.

Size of Gig Economy in India



As per NITI Aayog Report, India’s gig workforce currently stands at 77 lakh (2020-21). It is anticipated to rise to 2.35 crore by 2029-30. By 2029-30, gig workers will form 4.1% of India’s total workforce, rising from 1.5% in 2020-21. At present 27 lakh gig workers (35% of gig workers) are occupied in retail trade and sale, while 13 lakh (17%) are engaged in transportation sector. There are 6 lakh workers (8%) in manufacturing and another 6 lakh (8%) in finance and insurance. Though a report by the Boston Consulting Group expects India’s gig economy to rise to 90 million jobs (9 crore) in the next 8-10 years An additional industry report indicates that by 2024, more than 75% of the services industry will be staffed by gig workers. A report by Ernst and Young observed that Indian Freelancers hold a 24% share of the global online gig economy. According to a report by ASSOCHAM (Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India), the gig sector has the potential to grow to US\$ 455 billion by 2024.

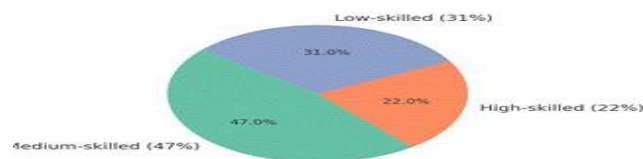
The Projected Growth of India’s GIG workforce from 2020-21 to 2029-30



Source: NITI Aayog policy Brief 2022

Skill Composition of GIG Workers in India

Skill Composition of Gig Workers in India



Source: NITI Aayog, Indias Booming and Platform Economy (2022)

LITERATURE REVIEW

During the course of, numerous academic and social science researchers have conducted studies on various aspects of the gig economy in India. For the purpose of the present study, some of the most significant articles were reviewed, and are presented below.



Mali (2020) examined an investigation into the expansion and implications of the gig economy in India, highlighting its swift growth driven by technological advancements, digital platforms, and evolving workforce preference. This study underscores the information that India ranks second globally in terms of freelance professional contributions, with approximately 15 million workers. The gig economy presents flexibility, cost efficiency, and novel employment opportunities, particularly in sectors such as information technology, food services, and e-commerce. However, challenges, such as the absence of legal protection, social security benefits, job security, and management issues persist, potentially hindering sustainable growth. The study concludes that while the gig economy is not entirely displacing traditional employment, it is increasingly permeating Indian Labour markets and influencing economic and organizational dynamics.

Pawar and Srivastava (2022) analysed India's gig workers in relation to employment laws. This study highlights the expansion of the gig economy through skill and urbanization, noting challenges such as job insecurity, irregular income, and unclear legal status. The authors analyzed India's legal framework, including the Social Security Code's provisions for gig workers, while identifying gaps in categorization and rights enforcement.

Gowda and Manasa (2023) described the impact of digitization on employment in India, focusing on the gig economy. Digital conversion has facilitated global trade and created new employment opportunities. India's gig jobs are planned to grow from 8 million to 90 million in the nonfarm sector within 8-10 years, with gig workers contributing 4.1% of India's income by 2029-2030. This study suggests industry platformisation, financial inclusion, and digital literacy enhancement.

David et al. (2024) examined India's gig economy and its impact on work in the digital age. The gig economy comprises short-term contracts and temporary work rather than permanent employment and is growing due to technology and changing work preferences. This paper discussed India's regulatory framework, including the Code on Social Security 2020, aimed at protecting unorganized sector workers. The gig economy continues to reform India's work landscape by presenting opportunities and challenges.

Bekal et al. (2023) review the literature on India's gig economy and examined its growth, opportunities, challenges, and policy implications through government reports, academic studies, and industry surveys. Whereas offering flexibility, the sector faces challenges such as job insecurity and a lack of benefits. The gig economy creates opportunities for job creation and entrepreneurship, while raising concerns about worker protection. The study suggests policies to support worker and sector growth while ensuring fair treatment and benefits.

Chandrashekhar (2025) argued the role of the gig economy in employment generation in India. The gig economy is expanding quickly, and could create over 90 million jobs in the next decade. Gig workers employ in short-term flexible work without fixed contracts. This study suggests promoting job-intensive sectors, regulating the gig economy, and enhancing skill development.

Thankachan (2024) viewed the growth prospects of India's gig economy. The gig economy involves fixed-term contracts or per-project compensations through online platforms, and has grown substantially globally. The factors driving India's gig economy include technology acceptance, job opportunities, urbanization, changing workforce vibrant, and government regulations. The sector offers chance such as short-term employment, entrepreneurship, increased consumption, skill development, and flexible work arrangements. Though challenges include inadequate legal frameworks, income instability, lack of social security, worker exploitation, and market disruption. The study concludes that while the gig economy has growth potential in India, addressing these challenges is crucial for balancing flexibility, productivity, and worker protection.

Sector Wise Distribution Gig Workers in India

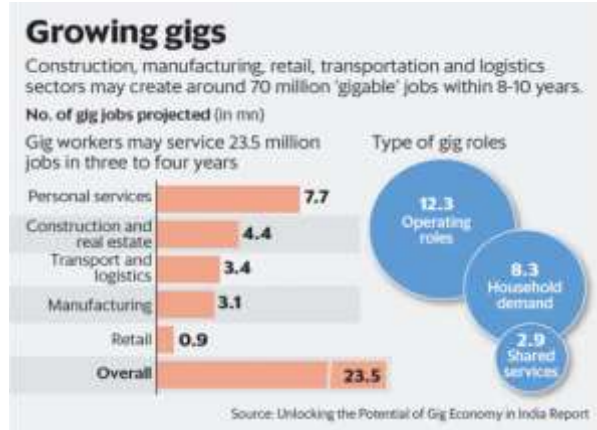
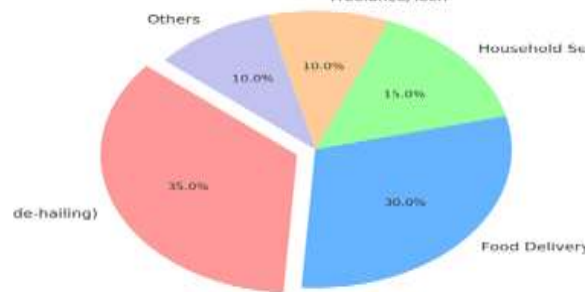


Figure 1: Sector-wise Distribution of Gig Workers in India (Source: NITI Aayog, 2022)



More than a few industries including textiles have hopped on to the gig economy bandwagon in India as per a special report on India’s gig and platform economy. The accountability of technology, especially in the form of widespread Smartphone use, in the rise of the gig economy was also highlighted. A gig economy is a free market system in which provisional positions are common and organizations employ independent workers for short-term commitments. The gig economy has extended its occurrence noticeably in a host of industries like textiles, banking and financial services, electricity, gas and water, real estate, IT and ITES, education, and personal services, according to the India Brand Equity Foundation, which was quoted in the paper titled ‘India’s Booming Gig and Platform Economy’. India’s gig workforce is predictable to expand to 2.35 crore by 2029-30 from 77 lakh in 2020-21, a NITI Aayog report said and advocated extending social security measures for such workers and their families in business mode as envisaged in Code on Social Security.

Objectives

The present study has the following objectives. There are

- To analyse living conditions and challenges of migrant workers in Gig economy.
- To evaluate the reasons for backwardness of migrant workers.
- To examine available social security benefits of migrant workers.
- To suggest Government initiatives to develop the vulnerable group.

Methodology

This study primarily involves a descriptive and analytical review of the extant literature. The data sources consisted of secondary data derived from government reports (e.g., NITI Aayog), academic journals and reputable

news articles. The analysis is centered on synthesizing information from these diverse sources to provide a comprehensive overview of the Impact of migrant workers in GIG economy. Particular emphasis is placed on identifying the key challenges, and opportunities. Furthermore, this study investigates the need for government policies and initiatives to grow and development of Migrant workers in India.

What are the Challenges Facing the Gig Economy?

Even now, seriously some challenges are faced by the migrant workers. There are

- **Low Wages and Income insecurity:** Gig workers face low volatile pay, earning per task rather than a permanent salary, often working long hours, and face pressure to meet targets that blur the line between “bendy” and full-time employment.



- **Restricted Legal and Social Protections:** Minimal legal support and insufficient recognition in labour laws leave gig workers vulnerable.
 - The **Code on Social Security, 2020** recognizes gig workers but fails to supply full labor rights, such as minimum wage guarantees and regulated working hours.
 - Vulnerabilities are sensitive during crises like heat waves, poor health or accidents, with no formal safety net.
 - Gig workers are treated as **independent contractors**, not employees, leaving them without regulated hours, paid leave, despite often working full-time.
- **Algorithmic Control and observation:** Digital platforms track workers’ location, monitor presentation and sometimes even require scanning of every product used during service.
 - Algorithms allocate rigid programs, penalise abolitions or delays, and can block worker accounts without human oversight. This creates constant pressure, forcing workers to comply or risk losing income.
- **Require of Social Security and Benefits:** Gig workers are generally debarred from benefits such as health insurance, accident cover, maternity benefits, provident fund, and pensions.
- **Gender precise Vulnerabilities:** Women, particularly in roles like cleaning or beauty services, face harassment from customers and domestic aggression at home.
 - Entering private homes for work increases contact to unsafe conditions. Platforms’ rating and penalty systems often leave women helpless, with little legal recourse.
- **Physical sprain:** Gig work has no fixed hours; liveness often means being on-call round-the-clock, leading to long hours, strict deadlines, and constant target pressure, causing physical and mental strain.

What Measures can Strengthen India’s Gig Economy?

Government scheme

The government has introduced actions like the Code on Social Security, 2020 and the e-Shram portal to offer social security and other benefits to gig workers

- **Complete Legal Framework:** Clearly describe rights and responsibilities of gig workers. Include minimum wages, regulated working hours, protection against unfair termination, and provisions for collective bargaining.
- **Women Centric Measures:** Make sure women can avail maternity benefits under Code on Social Security, 2020. Promote remote and project based roles to accommodate care giving and household responsibilities.

- set up panic buttons on apps, background verification of clients and delivery points, and dedicated help lines for women gig workers.
- **Ensuring Algorithmic equality and Transparency:** Control platform algorithms that determine task allocation, ratings, and penalties to prevent arbitrary income loss.
 - Mandate complaint redressal, individual oversight, and appeal device for workers affected by automated decisions.
- **Encourage Digital Literacy and Empowerment:** Enlarge digital access in rural and semi-urban areas to enable participation in the gig economy.
 - **Instruct workers about rights,** social security schemes, and safe platform practices to reduce dependence on **opaque corporate policies.**
- **Incentivizing Platform Observance:** Association incentives like tax breaks, subsidies, or preferential government contracts to adherence to welfare laws and fair payment practices.
 - support platforms to voluntarily comply and promote a sustainable gig ecosystem.
- **Formalization via e Shram Portal:** Increase e-Shram portal integration to provide gig workers with digital identities and access to welfare schemes, employment insurance, and health coverage.
 - trail gig workers formally to ensure inclusion in social security programs.

What are the rewards of Gig Economy?

Benefits to Gig Workers: Gig workers have the flexibility to work according to their expediency and availability. There are fewer restrictions related to fixed work-hours, attendance etc. Workers have some flexibility in choosing their work hours. Some workers take gig jobs on a part-time basis to supplement their income from regular jobs.

Cost Efficiencies for company The companies are able to save costs on hiring full time employees. They are able to provide services more economically to the users.

Works for Low-skilled workers: Gig economy offers jobs to many low and semi-skilled work force with minimum conditions.

Increase knowledge: It enables the young undergraduates to gather valuable work-experience before joining formal service.

Economical: Many gig workers work remotely and save costs.



What are the disadvantages of Gig Economy?

Job Security: Most gig workers work on a day-to-day basis, and can be terminated from their jobs without any note. Many gig workers were laid off during the epidemic.

Require of Benefits: Gig workers have no social security benefits like ESI, PF or insurance. They have no paid leaves so failure to work means loss of wage. Gig/Platform workers are not covered in all the labour codes, specifically the 'Code on Wages, 2019' which prescribes minimum wages for various jobs.



Work circumstances: Most workers have to connect long hours of work in order to make the job viable. A large mechanism of workers' wages consists of inducement which coerces workers to work for long hours. This reduces the advantage of 'flexible work' in gig economy. There is lack of transparency on incentive structures.

Hidden Charges: Many aggregators or platforms are burning cash by giving large discounts to users in order to capture larger market share. Companies try to maintain this by charging high commissions on gig workers.

Low Bargaining Power: Platform workers have little or no right to be heard. Technology has tilted the power and bargaining scales strongly in favour of the platform companies.

Platforms have multiple other issues like **(a)** recurrent and random changes to the commission structure, **(b)** Delays in expenses, **(c)** planned miscommunication of earnings potential to attract gig workers; **(d)** Lack of access to basic facilities.

What are the recommendations of the NITI Aayog Report?

The NITI Aayog Report, 'India's Booming Gig and Platform Economy' has analysed the gig economy from gig workers' outlook and has made some recommendations.

Speed up Access to Finance for Workers: Access to institutional credit may be improved through financial products specifically designed for platform workers and those interested to set up their own platforms.

Skill expansion for Workers: Platform-led models of skilling and job creation need to be encouraged for the gig and platform sector. Platforms can work together with the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, and the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) to look after skilled workers and micro-entrepreneurship. Transformational up skilling for workers presently occupied in the informal sector in trades such as construction, driving and other services can be start. This will create avenues for horizontal and straight up mobility for workers to take up jobs in the gig and platform sector, allow them to augment their earnings.

Platformization: A **Platform India** proposal can be begin on the lines of Start-up India. The reason would be to increase access to the platforms. This can be achieving by simplification and handholding, funding support and inducements, skill development, and social financial inclusion. The prospect of platforms can be broadened. Individuals engaged in the business of selling regional and rural cuisine, street food, etc. may be linked to platforms.

Attracting Social Inclusion: Gender Sensitization and Accessibility Awareness Programmes for workers and their families should be commence. Platform businesses can undertake company with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to enable different sections of workers such as women workers and PwDs to take up employment time in the platform sector through skill development, access to finance and assets. Platform businesses can **create a more enabling environment for women and PwD workers** through changes in the work-design and workplace amenities.

Increasing Social Security: Platforms can offer paid leaves, and right to use to insurance along with pension and retirement benefits. Gig and platform firms may believe providing income sustain to workers. This will help in providing assured lowest amount earnings and social security from income loss in the wake of uncertainty or irregularity in work.

Social Security for Gig and Platform Workers

The **Code on Social Security, 2020** define 'gig workers' and 'platform workers' and provides measures for their social security. This comprises benefits such as life and disability cover, accident insurance, health and maternity benefits, and old age protection. Gig workers earn their occupation outside the traditional employer employee setup. Platform based workers are division of gig workers whose work depends on online apps or digital platforms of the aggregator platforms.

Identify the contribution of the platform workers to the nation's economy, Union Budget 2025-26 announced provisions for

- Registration of online platform workers on e-Shram portal,
- Issue of identity cards, and



- Healthcare coverage under Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY).

The AB-PMJAY health scheme nearby covers of Rs. 5 lakhs per family per year for minor and tertiary care hospitalization across over 31,000 public and private hospitals in India. The AB-PMJAY scheme for platform workers is yet to be start. The Ministry of Labour and Employment begin the e-Shram portal on 26 August 2021 to build a comprehensive National Database of Unorganised Workers (NDUW) including platform workers, migrant workers, agriculture workers etc. The e-Shram portal is meant to register and support the unorganised workers by supporting them a Universal Account Number (UAN) on a self-declaration basis. As of 3 August 2025, more than 30.98 crore unorganised workers have record, including over 3.37 lakh platform and gig workers.

Future Implications and Possible Solutions

The gig economy here major challenges for traditional employment laws and requires a new legal framework to address the exclusive needs and challenges of gig workers. One possible clarification is to establish a new category of workers known as dependent contractors, who would get some of the benefits and security of traditional employees while retaining some of the flexibility of independent contractors. Another key solution is to develop a gig worker specific social security system that provides benefits such as healthcare, assurance, etc. This system could be support by a combination of employer contributions and government subsidy.

CONCLUSION

There is a need for some addition at this remote moment in time. Apparent legal standards are needed to determine who gig workers are and what protections they. Present labour laws need to be adjusted to ensure that this new way of working does not come at the cost of fundamental rights. Health insurance, accident insurance, and pension plans should be made convenient, allowing workers to take their entitlements from one platform or city to another, with algorithmic transparency on platforms. Companies need to be held answerable for the transparency of their algorithms. Workers should know how their pay is calculated, why their accounts are suspended, and how companies are rating them. Digital platforms need to have available Migrants must be recognised as an essential part of the urban realities in which they live and work. They should not be unused to access to basic services just because their documents are from another state. Shorten access to the public distribution system, health services, and voter registration would go a long way in restoring dignity and inclusion.

Workers Organisation is similarly important. Migrant gig workers are starting to organise through informal networks, unions, and digital platforms. Organisations such as IFAT, the Indian Federation of App Based Transport Workers, are also lobbying for distinction at work and the legal recognition of workers. Nevertheless these groups are often unable to bargain collectively under current labour laws. Encouraging supportive, or platforms owned by workers themselves, could be a step toward greater self reliance for gig workers and increased bargaining power. Digital literacy programs and legal aid centers oriented towards gig workers could also boost their capacity to navigate and fight back against extractive systems. Migration is more than a demographic incident; it's also a journey of transformation, aspiration, and accommodation. On behalf of India's internal migrants, especially those employed in the gig economy, adaptive capacity, and assistance to the urban economy go largely unrecognized. The passage is very often one of exclusion and deprivation. However, such flexibility, adaptive capacity, and contributions to the urban economy go largely unrecognized. They metaphorically hop around unfamiliar cities, learn new technologies, and work around the clock to send money home to those left behind. They are at the centre of India's digital economy but on the margin of its policies. That's what needs to modify now.

Only when our policies reproduce the realities of our most mobile, most vulnerable, and most vital workers will we build a truly inclusive economy. Migration will continue, as it always has, but the goal should be to make sure that it leads not to marginalisation, but to empowerment. The dispute for policymakers, civil society, and platforms alike is to rethink gig work not as a substitute or a hustle, but as labour deserving of full rights and human dignity. In doing so, we not only make stronger our labour market but also respect the spirit of resilience that defines India's migrant workforce.

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