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Q10

Examine the role of 'Gig Economy' in the process of empowerment of women in India.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2021 · GS I · 10 marks · Women, Population and Urbanisation

Role of women and women's organization, population and associated issues, poverty and developmental issues, urbanization, their problems and their remedies.

Core demand of the question

- Examine the role of 'Gig Economy' in the process of empowerment of women in India
- Keep the examination within a 10-mark length

Revision summary

Gig work is task-based income on digital platforms.

Some women gain flexible earnings in beauty, food, and tuition gigs.

Missing social security, safety, and care time cap empowerment.

Rural women's work is still mostly farm and informal, not apps.

Portable security and safe design would make the gig a real step.

Introduction

- **The gig economy pays for a task, not a stable career:** platforms for ride, food, beauty, tuition, and click-work. For some Indian women it opens a door to income. For many it opens a door without a floor.

Body

Empowerment that is real

- **Entry without a factory gate:** urban women use **Urban Company**-type beauty gigs, tuition apps, and home-kitchen cloud work when a 9-to-5 job clashes with care.
- Own-account earnings can raise bargaining at home, a point **Naila Kabeer** would call resources plus agency if the money is actually hers.
- Digital public goods - **UPI**, cheap data - lower the cost of finding a customer compared with a male-gated bazaar.

Limits that block empowerment

- No ESI, PF, maternity, or POSH-clear workplace; the 2020 social security code's gig chapter is still a thin promise.
- Safety on the road and in the client's house, and family control of the phone, keep many women off ride-hailing.
- Algorithmic ratings punish time spent on unpaid care. The gig then reproduces the double day.
- Most Indian women still work in informal self-employment and farm labour; platform gig is a sliver, concentrated in cities.

What would make it empowering

- Portable social security, mandatory grievance on apps, and gender-safe design (women-only time slots, panic buttons) as NITI and labour debates have sketched.
- SHG-linked micro-gigs with a floor wage, not only a five-star rating.

Flow diagram

Gig platforms -> Income entry

Gig platforms -> No floor ESI maternity

Income entry -> Partial agency

No floor ESI maternity -> Partial agency

Conclusion

The gig economy can empower some women with flexible cash. It does not empower as a system until security, safety, and care time are built into the platform. Treat it as a supplement, not as a substitute for decent work.

Facts & figures

Code on Social Security 2020

Defines gig and platform workers and allows a social security scheme; implementation remains the test.

UPI

Instant payments that let women receive gig fees without a shopfront cashbox.

Urban Company model

Home-service platform that employs many women partners, with ongoing debates on control and safety.

PLFS

Shows female labour force participation still low and mostly informal, so gig is not the national average story.

POSH Act

Workplace sexual harassment law that fits poorly when the 'workplace' is a customer's home.