‘Informality’ and Control in the Gig Economy:

A study of cab drivers and food delivery riders in Delhi-NCR

-- Archana Aggarwal[1]

Prashant is in his late thirties. Before the Covid pandemic, he used to run a small paint shop with around ten workers. Like many others, he faced hardship during the pandemic and the lockdown, and he had to shut down his ‘factory’, since he could not pay the workers. Even earlier, he sometimes did a few deliveries for Swiggy. But after the closure of his factory, he became completely dependent on Swiggy for his livelihood. He works for

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eleven hours a day, every day of the week including Sundays. He manages to feed his family only if he works through the month. He can manage because he lives with his parents in a self-owned house, and his father had retired with a pension.

Naresh is an Uber driver. He had lost his steady job of many years (in a company as a driver) in May 2020. He was replaced by a much lower paid contract worker. The landlord of his rented house in Delhi extended him credit for five months, enabling him to stay on in Delhi. However, he had to send his family back to their native village, where his extended family has a bit of land. Naresh rented a car and onboarded himself as an Uber driver. After paying the rental for the car, he is able to earn Rs 500 to 600 per day and survive in the city. However, he does not make enough to be able to bring his family back to Delhi.

Vijay, also an Uber driver, has a different experience. His father works in an established press, his brother has a job and he lives in a joint family which owns five properties in Delhi. He owns the car used as an Uber cab, and his earnings from Uber supplement the family income.

Zeeshan does odd jobs in an office, where he gets a salary of Rs 25,000 per month. Five days a week, he logs in as an Uber driver for a few hours after his office. This brings him additional income.

Gig workers, such as food delivery riders and app-based cab drivers, are increasingly becoming one of the most visible faces of urban employment. In the urban areas, many turned to gig work after losing existing employment during the pandemic.[2] The gig economy, or platform economy, is increasingly becoming a significant means of livelihood for literate men (and a few women) who have enough resources to own a smart phone and to buy or hire a car or a two-wheeler.

The present paper discusses various aspects of the nature of employment in the gig economy, especially for those who can be referred to as 'blue collar' gig workers.

Firstly, the much-touted and advertised flexibility of hours may be beneficial to workers who use gig work to supplement their income from an alternative source. However, these seem to be a small minority.[3] Those dependent on gig work as their pri-

2 According to the Centre for Monitoring the Indian Economy (CMIE), employment shrank by 30 per cent in April 2020, after which there was a swift but partial recovery. In August 2021, employment continued to remain lower than it was in 2019-20. (Vyas 2021)

3 A survey by the Indian Federation of App-based Transport workers (IFAT) and International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF), New Delhi office, *Protecting Workers in the Digital Platform Economy: Investigating Ola and Uber Drivers' Occupational Health and Safety,* August 25, 2020), received 1760 responses to a question about the number of working hours/day for Ola/Uber: only 97 worked less than

mary means of livelihood, without any alternatives, struggle to remain afloat.

Further, although gig workers are called 'freelancers', an enormous amount of managerial control is actually exercised through the mechanism of feedback, ratings, rankings and algorithms. These forms of control will be discussed.

Lastly, the companies which set up the platforms, i.e. the digital interfaces between the customers and the suppliers of services, present themselves as merely 'matchmakers' for supply and demand of services. These companies do not acknowledge workers to be their employees, and thus deny the workers any protection under the existing labour laws.

The focus of the present paper is limited to two specific kinds of 'blue collar' gig workers-- food delivery personnel (the 'riders' for food delivery companies) and cab drivers. The paper concludes that the rise in gig work is layered upon already precarious and informal labour markets. I shall argue that gig work is not a solution to informality and precarity, but accentuates the same for most workers. This is especially true for those who are solely dependent on this work for their livelihoods.

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8 hours/day; 705 worked 8-14 hours; and 858 worked 14-20 hours. The great majority of Ola/Uber drivers seem to be full-time. Part-time drivers, working to earn a few extra bucks, are the exception.

The conclusions are based on interviews conducted with riders for Swiggy and Zomato, Ola and Uber drivers in Delhi-NCR, and a few executives of companies.[4] It also draws on a number of recent publications. Most of the existing publications do not deal with the situation in India. This is an area which requires more empirical research. The present paper uses some of the interviews done in late 2021 as part of a survey conducted by the People's Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR) in Delhi. Other interviews were conducted in early 2022. The field needs further investigation and study. This paper can be regarded as a step in that direction.

1. Gig/Platform Economy: A New Landscape of Work

The landscape of work and employment seems to have undergone a major change in the last two decades. The change is premised on mutually reinforcing economic, political and technological factors. This is not to say that traditional forms of work do not exist; indeed, they remain numerically dominant. But, along with those, new forms of work, gig work in particular, have become an important and growing source of employment in the urban areas.

With Information Technology (IT) products be-

4 The names of the workers have been changed in order to protect their identity.

coming cheaper and near-universally available, and with the harnessing of IT to telecommunications (ICT), the way was paved for rapid digitalisation. The 1990s saw the development of a global division of labour in information-processing work. The 2000s saw telemediated digital communications becoming 'normal'. This provided the basis for a multitude of services being availed of through phones. Established corporations as well as new start-ups create digital platforms, which then set themselves up as mediators between those who need services and those who can provide them. In other words, the platforms present themselves as matchmakers for the supply of various services to a fluctuating demand for the same. The suppliers of the services across sectors such as e-commerce, technology, food & beverages, and home services are called gig workers. The term 'gig' is a slang term used by entertainers/musicians to describe a one-time job/performance. The dictionary meaning of a gig worker is someone who does temporary jobs. However, the reality of gig work today, for many workers at the bottom rung, is far removed from this meaning.

Gig work comprises diverse kinds of work, from that of coders or graphic designers to that of delivery personnel. The conditions of work vary greatly for different kinds of gig work. Skilled workers such as designers or editors perhaps enjoy a higher level of autonomy and bargaining power than cab drivers and riders for delivering food.

Although gig work is not the dominant form of employment, it is growing very rapidly. In the United States, the percentage of workers engaging in "work arrangements alternative to standard employment" grew from 10.7 per cent to 15.8 per cent of the entire work force between 2005 and 2015. In the UK, it is estimated that around 4 per cent of the entire workforce engages in gig work. Platforms such as Uber and Deliveroo operate in more than 75 cities in the UK alone, and in more than 500 cities across the world (Edward 2020). According to a recent report jointly published by global management consulting firm Boston Consulting Group (BCG) and the non-profit organisation Michael & Susan Dell Foundation, participation in the gig economy is greater in developing countries (between 5 per cent and 12 per cent) than in developed countries (between 1 per cent and 4 per cent). "And most of these jobs are in lower-income job-types such as deliveries, ridesharing, microtasks, care, and wellness." The report suggests that India's gig economy may triple in the next three to four years, and has the potential to reach 90 million jobs in the next eight to 10 years, in the non-agriculture sector alone (Sharma 2021). According to an ASSOCHAM report, India has emerged as one of the largest countries for flexi-staffing in the world (Kumar 2021).

How does the gig/platform economy operate? Typically, corporations such as Zomato or Uber create a digital interface where the customers and the service providers log in or are ‘onboarded’. These corporations, then, present themselves as ‘matchmakers’ or brokers. If we take the example of Zomato, restaurants and customers are the two sides of the matchmaking. ‘Riders’ are sought to facilitate the delivery from the restaurant to the customer. Till very recently, Zomato was incurring losses per transaction, but that was not a major concern for the company, since the primary objective was to monopolise the market through large ‘user acquisition’. The company wants that its ‘footprint’ becomes more and more visible. Thus Zomato has been expanding its domain to cover the delivery of groceries and even medicine delivery. The major cost for the company is that of ‘branding’ (setting up the brand) and the salaries of its employees.

Riders, who are not considered employees, are paid some nominal amount per kilometre along with incentives. These incentives are based on either the earnings of the riders or number of orders delivered by them. The company typically does not want a ‘shut down’ situation in which delivery is not possible due to paucity of riders. Therefore, riders are encouraged to join as ‘freelance partners’ wherever the ‘customer footprint’ (the number of customers) in a particular area is high. In order to reduce the delivery charges and gain more customers, riders with bicycles are encouraged, especially for shorter distances. A hypothetical example could clarify the earnings made by companies such as Swiggy or Zomato per delivery. If a customer orders Rs 500 of food through the Swiggy app, the company would charge 30-35 per cent as brokerage or commission from the restaurant. At 30 per cent, the charge would come to Rs 150. The company would further pay around Rs 25-30 to the rider, leaving it a margin of Rs. 120-125 on an order of Rs 500.

In case of Uber and Ola, potential customers log in to the apps and potential drivers onboard themselves. Here too, Uber and Ola describe themselves as mediators or brokers and not employers. This is illustrated by the terms and conditions in the Uber app:

> …. independent third-party providers, including drivers, are not actual agents, apparent agents, ostensible agents or employees of Uber in any way…. any safety related effort, feature, process, policy, standard or other effort undertaken by Uber in the interest of public safety (whether required by applicable regulations or not) is not an indicia of an employment, actual agency, apparent agency or ostensible agency relationship with an independent third party driver. (PUDR 2021)

Once again, the primary objective of the company is to monopolise the market. In fact, Uber began with offering one ‘free ride’ to the customers. Even now, it charges a much lower fare than that charged by Meru Cabs. Not surprisingly, Uber squeezed out Meru, Mega and other cab services from the Delhi-NCR market. One can see similar tactics in roping in the drivers. For one year, the driver just needed to log in for 12 hours and Uber paid the driver Rs 3,000, irrespective of the number of rides. This attracted a large number of drivers, many of whom even sold their assets to buy a car and begin working for Uber. The practice of a minimum payment was discontinued after roughly one year. Another practice replaced it, whereby Uber used to pay the driver Rs 300 per ride irrespective of the distance. This too continued for merely 8-10 months. Thereafter, Uber began the practice of paying Rs 4,000 to the driver for every 14 bookings in a day. The present practice is that Uber charges 26-30 per cent as brokerage from the cab drivers on every ride. According to one Uber driver, even today, certain drivers with very high ratings are eligible for incentives as well. The terms and conditions keep changing with time and may even vary across cities.

2. Flexibility, Earnings and Work Day

Flexibility of work and flexible hours is put forth as a big advantage of gig work. In theory, the worker can choose his/her hours and the earnings and is not bound to a routinised day. The platforms propagate the notion that workers are free, and in fact they are called ‘freelancers’ or ‘partners.’ The language itself places the workers on an equal footing with the companies. These self-employed, independent partners are supposed to be like ‘entrepreneurs’, free to take decisions regarding how much work they wish to put in.

We shall see that flexibility has dual implications for different workers. Those who take on gig work as a source of supplementary income may enjoy some flexibility, but this is not true for others, for whom this is the primary source of livelihood. The amount and structure of earnings is such that for most the workers, 11-12 hours of daily work is a norm. Even with such long hours, many are unable to bear the expenses of keeping their families in Delhi.

2.1 Food delivery riders:

On an average, Swiggy or Zomato riders (with motorcycles) in Delhi earn around Rs 15000-20,000 per month. Swiggy ‘recruits’ riders on a full time as well as on a part time basis. The full-time rider has to necessarily log in for 10 hours every day. He/she is allowed to log out for an hour for lunch, bringing the total to 11 hours. The rider can choose between three different shift timings. For part-time work, the rider has to log in for at least 4.5 hours in the evening shift.

The earnings come from a combination of the payment per kilometre and the incentives. At present (March 2022) the company pays Rs 5.25 per kilometre. The payment is increased during bad weather such as rains. The incentive system is more complicated. One set of incentives are based on the earnings of the rider per day (calculated on the basis of Rs 5.25 rupees per kilometre) and the other set of incentives are based on number of orders delivered per day. The latter scheme was launched in 2021. The two kinds of incentives cannot be clubbed. The full-time rider is eligible for incentives only if he/she logs in for 10-11 hours. From the table given below, it is clear that a full-time rider is entitled to a daily incentive of Rs 400 only if the daily earnings are Rs 800. An earning of Rs 5.25 per kilometre translates into more than 150 kilometres for the earnings required to be eligible for the incentives. Thus, the structure of incentives necessitates long hours on the road.

The incentives increase during the peak season such as Diwali. Further, if a rider has a 'rating' above Rs 4.70, and if he/she logs in for 10 hours a day for at least 6 days a week (the 6 days must include Saturday and Sunday), an incentive of Rs 800 per week is given. Sometimes the incentives are linked to the speed of delivery, which means that the riders are encouraged to drive fast, often undermining their own safety.

Incentive based on earnings[5]

Daily earning (Rs)	Daily incentive (Rs)
425	200
800	400
100 (for part time riders)	400

Incentive based on orders[6]

Daily orders (number)	Incentive (Rs)
15	800
19	1050
23	1300

Dilip is 38 years old and hails from Delhi. He lives in a joint family in a house owned by his family. He had started a small business a few years back which did not do well. Subsequently, he started working part-time with Swiggy for a few months, and moved on to doing full time work with the company since last year. He can earn Rs 30,000-35000 on a monthly basis, which, after deducting the fuel costs and maintenance of the motorcycle, translates to Rs 20,000-25000 per month. He works for 11 hours every day, seven days a week. He had also worked with Zomato briefly, where he made around Rs 20,000 per month. Despite being satisfied with

5 Based on an interview with a Swiggy rider in March 2022.

6 *Ibid.*

the work, Dilip does not want his children to join this line of work.

The working day also includes the ‘unpaid time’ or the hours spent while waiting for orders. As stated earlier, the company wants to prevent a ‘shut down’ position, and this explains the recruitment of a large reserve of riders in any area. This reserve of riders has no financial implications for the company, since the riders earn on the basis of deliveries actually executed. A Swiggy rider talked of sometimes having to wait for four hours between deliveries.

The interviews of workers made it clear that the workers who relied solely on this kind of gig work to sustain their families found it extremely hard to do so. However, those with alternative sources of livelihood found the flexibility useful. For instance, in the case of Ehsan, whose parents, wife and child depend on him, his Zomato job has been his primary work, and they manage with difficulty. This is only possible because the house they live in is owned by his father, and they do not have to pay rent. On the other hand, Vikas chooses to work part time for about 4 hours every day, getting the basic amount per ride, rather than the day’s income or incentive. His primary income comes from other work/business and he is satisfied with the flexibility and extra earnings provided by Swiggy work.

2.2 Cab Drivers

Uber and Ola drivers are in somewhat better position, but not significantly so. The net income of the driver depends on the price of the ride (fixed unilaterally by the company); the commission charged by the company; and the costs of fuel and maintenance, to be borne by the driver. Further, many of the drivers have taken loans to buy their cars, and need to pay equated monthly instalments (EMIs). As a result of all these factors, the drivers' net income is somewhat uncertain and vulnerable to changes. In India, on an average, Uber and Ola drivers are reported to take home a monthly income of Rs. 25,000-30,000. But after deducting EMIs, many end up making only Rs 600-700 per day.[7]

Uber used to give handsome incentives, linked to the number of rides, a few years back. At that time many young people migrated to the cities, mortgaged their lands and bought cars on loans. Some did earn quite well initially, but over time, most drivers have been 'weaned off' the incen-

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7 The interviews with drivers were carried out before the recent rise in fuel prices, which has further reduced the drivers' net income. Drivers in NCR went on strike in April 2022, since the company-determined price of the ride did not leave them sufficient earnings after subtracting the increased fuel costs. "Cab aggregator unions in Delhi find their sphere of influence shrinking; to decide on resuming protest", *Indian Express*, May 5, 2022.

tives.[8] Some of the drivers reported that Uber and Ola charge a commission or brokerage from the drivers equal to 25-35 per cent of the price of the ride paid by the customer. It is worth reiterating that the drivers do not have any say in determining the price charged from the customer.

According to a driver from Jharkhand, he can make Rs 2,000-2,200 per day only if he works for 13-14 hours. And after deducting fuel, maintenance, rental and brokerage, he is left with Rs 600-700. Over time, the incentives given by Uber have been withdrawn. The uncertainty of earnings does not let him bring his family to stay in Delhi, as the expenses are much higher in Delhi. Every few months, he goes to visit his family for a few days, and evidently does not earn during that time.

Thirty-year-old Mukesh is an Uber driver. He hails from Delhi and lives in a joint family in a family-owned house. He has very high ratings and is eligible for incentives provided by the company. However, in order to receive significant incentives, he has to do more than 80 rides within Delhi per week. The rides to NCR (outside Delhi) are not included in this number. Mukesh says this is close to an impossible target, and can be met only by working more than 10-11 hours every day, each day of the month.

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8 According to one driver of Uber, incentives are still given to drivers who have a rating of more than '4.83'.

It seems that not only are the systems of remuneration varied, but they also keep changing. The incentives provided to the cab drivers earlier have practically been eliminated. The pandemic made the situation worse, as can be seen below. In 2020, Ola asked the drivers to take the cars to designated parking centres for sanitisation (on account of Covid). Many of these cars had been bought by the drivers under a financing scheme of Ola where drivers paid Rs 35,000 upfront, and after four years of driving, they could own the cars they drove. Throughout India, Ola drivers took their cars for sanitisation, but many of them did not get the cars back, and some of them were paid a paltry sum of Rs 5,000 instead of the car.[9]

As in the case of food delivery, here too the experiences of 'flexible hours' are varied, depending on whether cab driving is the primary means of income, or supplements earnings from an alternative source. Take the case of Vijay: his father is working in an established press, his brother too has a job and brings regular income into the joint family, and the family owns five properties in Delhi. Vijay is very supportive of Uber. On the other hand, consider Rajan, a middle-aged man who at present drives a car owned by another person. Rajan had earlier bought a car on loan and driven it for Uber, but then was

9 Based on a conversation with Shaikh Salahuddin, general secretary, IFAT.

unable to continue to pay the EMI, especially after the lockdown, and had to sell off the car.

Thus, flexibility has dual connotations, depending on whether the 'gig work' is the sole means of livelihood or provides additional/supplementary incomes. For those dependent solely on this work for a living, the structure of incentives ensures that the workers log in for extremely long hours, and 'flexibility' is more notional than substantive. Further, 'unpaid time', or the time spent in waiting between orders, lengthens the working day.

3. New Mechanisms of Control

One of the biggest benefits claimed by the platform economy/gig economy model is the freedom allegedly enjoyed by the workers. The workers, formally called 'freelance contractors', are supposed to enjoy autonomy, quite unlike traditional factory workers. They are supposed to be their own masters. However, in practice, there is an enormous amount of managerial control exerted on gig workers such as cab drivers and delivery personnel. The control is both similar to and different from the Taylorist control in the factories, poignantly described by Harry Braverman half a century back. The worker is not any freer to decide his/her conditions of work.

Although there exists no physical factory in the case of gig work, control over the workers is ensured with the help of algorithms and technology. A system of feedback, rankings and ratings acts as a barometer for performance and eligibility for further work. These "reputational evaluations seem to be fundamentally necessary to the functioning of the gig economy…" (Gandini 2019). Favourable feedback by the customer translates into a set of ratings by an undisclosed algorithm, which then becomes visible on the profile page of the worker. These 'stars' becomes the basis of decision-making by the customer regarding hiring the gig worker. A better rating is supposed to provide access to 'high value' orders and therefore better remuneration. The rankings also become a basis for the eligibility for incentives given by the company. Most algorithms are designed so as to give higher ratings to a worker whose compliance is greater, and whose acceptance of tasks is very high.

The rating system, though powerful, seems to act in an arbitrary manner. There is no evidence that a driver with a rating of 4.9 is in any way better than one with a rating of 4.5. The algorithms can also be used to monitor various aspects of the driver's behaviour, such as how he/she interacts with the customer. This extracts 'emotional labour' from the gig worker, who behaves in a manner so as to earn him/her better ratings. Lack of compliance, i.e., repeated refusal of tasks, leads to bad ratings, which can even lead to 'deactivation' of the worker. Deactivation from the app is analogous to termination in the traditional employment scenario.

After logging in to the Uber app, the driver loses control over where to go, the fare that can be charged, the number of rides he/she takes during the day, and the hours worked. Thus, the driver does not have the autonomy to choose the conditions of his work. The driver also does not have any 'freedom' to influence the price charged from the customer. In case a cab driver refuses to accept a ride which he/she does not like, that driver may be penalised in many ways, the extreme form of which is 'deactivation'. Then there exist other, 'softer' kinds of coercion. As soon as a driver begins to log off, he/she may get messages indicating that there is a huge demand or surge pricing in that area, thus luring him/her to stay logged in for more time. Zamiruddin, an Uber driver, said that the drivers are sometimes given bookings for customers travelling long distances in directions away from their own home, even after they have indicated that they want to return homewards. The dependence on incentives and ratings mean that drivers find it difficult to refuse these rides. A rider for Swiggy said that if he declines an order, it becomes a 'black mark' against him. He would then have to complete 100 orders/deliveries without any complaint from the customers in order to redeem himself.

Thus, in a real sense, ‘autonomy’ or ‘freedom’ does not exist any more than it does for a factory worker. Only the mechanism and medium of control are different. Moreover, there may exist greater scope for collective resistance on the factory shopfloor than among scattered, isolated drivers, unless the drivers devise new mechanisms for such resistance.

4. Labour Rights and Social Protection

It could be argued that one of the most important components of the gig economy model is the evasion of labour laws. Despite exercising control similar to that of a traditional employer, the companies which set up such platforms present themselves as mere ‘brokers’ or ‘matchmakers’, and not as employers. The workers are classified as independent ‘contract partners’ rather than employees. This deliberate misclassification enables the companies to shirk all responsibility towards the workers.

> Taskers are independent contractors and not employees of the company. Company does not perform tasks and does not employ individuals to perform tasks. Users hereby acknowledge that company does not supervise, direct, control or monitor a tasker’s work and is not responsible for the work performed or the tasks in any manner.-- TaskRabbit, ‘Terms of Service’ (1 June 2017, cited in Prassl, 2018).

The situation of the gig workers bears some resemblances to a period in history during which capitalism, as we know it today, had not fully developed. During the emergence of capitalism in Europe, in the course of changes in the 'putting out' system, independent craftsmen became wage labourers and merchants became capitalists. These artisans-turned-workers did not enjoy any legal protections. It is only in the 19^{th} and the 20^{th} centuries that early laws were passed regulating the condition of the workers. The body of legislation, today termed labour laws, emerged in piecemeal fashion over the years. These laws recognised the basic human and economic rights of the workers. Legislations were put in place ensuring minimum wages, limiting the hours of work, legalising the right to unionise, as well as ensuring protections in the form of health benefits, accident compensation, and retirement benefits. It is true that the bulk of laws remain applicable to a small minority of workers in India – regular workers in organised industry. However, the significance of these laws and protections goes beyond the strict numbers covered under the provisions. The labour laws demonstrate the protections that could be extended over time to encompass the entire workforce as society advances.

For decades now, capitalists have been trying to push back, by-pass or flout the existing labour laws. The platform economy model is an accentuation and radicalisation of the same process.10 By a deliberate misclassification of workers as independent partners, the gig workers are kept outside the umbrella of labour laws. "Today's gig workers operate in a black hole of rights but within a world which has fought for and brought in labour rights and regulations" (PUDR 2021). None of the labour laws, product of decades of struggles; become applicable to the gig workers since they are not treated as workers! No minimum wage, no limit on the working day and almost no social protection.

The contractual agreements between the workers and the companies are often drafted in a manner so as to prevent the workers from going to court. While the term 'gig worker' is included in the Code on Social Security, 2020 and defined as "a person who performs work or participates in a work arrangement

10 I am indebted to Professor Michael Heinrich (formerly of Berlin University, and an author) for pointing out, over an email exchange, the similarity between 'putting out' and the platform economy. It should be noted that this revival of elements of the 'putting-out' system is under conditions of monopoly capitalism; the control over the labourer in gig work is much greater than under the earlier putting-out system.

and earns from such activities outside of traditional employer-employee relationship"; the definition explicitly underwrites the companies' claim that the workers are not employees of the companies.

Conclusion

The emergence and very rapid increase of gig work is making work even more uncertain, more insecure and more unsafe. From e-commerce, we are already moving to a world of 'q-commerce' (quick commerce). Ten-minute delivery has started picking up since last year. Blinkit (earlier known as Grofers) started the trend, and today half-a-dozen companies have begun this practice. The logistics for q-commerce require 'dark stores' or localised warehouses. After scanning, billing, and packing by a two-member team in 2 minutes, the delivery person has 8 minutes to reach the items to the customer. According to a story carried in Indian Express,[11] delivery executives get paid Rs 40 to 50 per delivery, and it is a 'race against time' for them. They have to jeopardise their own safety in order to meet the deadline.

The world of work for the gig workers points to the following conclusions. The fact that earnings are primarily based on incentives makes long hours a necessity. Flexibility is more notional than actual.

11 "Behind 10-min delivery promise: app tracking items, last-mile race", *Indian Express*, February 28, 2022.

Despite the long hours, those who are dependent on ‘gig work’ as their sole means of livelihood find it difficult to live with dignity in a city like Delhi. Here, the emotional cost of staying away from the families must also be factored in. Although projected as ‘freelancers’, gig workers are subject to managerial controls through the mechanisms of ratings, feedbacks and algorithms. Finally, gig workers such as Uber drivers or Zomato/Swiggy riders are workers of the company, but without the legal protection accorded to the workers and employees. Thus, gig work, especially at the lower end, has only increased desperation in the conditions of work. Long hours, low earnings, no safety considerations, no job security, little autonomy and most importantly, not even being considered workers and not being eligible for any labour rights. Gig work adds yet another layer to the informalisation of work and retrogression of labour standards in conditions of highly organised monopoly capital.

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