

# Women Participation in Contingent Workforce

<sup>1</sup>Dr. Sarika Gupta, <sup>2</sup>Dr. Sanjeet Kumar Gupta

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce (Banking and Insurance), Deen Dayal Upadhyaya, Gorakhpur University  
Gorakhpur, (UP), India

<sup>2</sup>Professor, Department of Commerce, Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gorakhpur University  
Gorakhpur, (UP), India

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15016320>

Published Date: 13-March-2025

---

**Abstract:** The participation of women in the workforce has evolved significantly over the years, shifting from traditional full-time employment to contingent work arrangements. Contingent work provides flexibility but also presents various challenges for women in terms of job security and career growth. This study examines the trends and patterns of women's participation in the contingent workforce in India, analysing the benefits and drawbacks of this shift. The paper explores the factors influencing women's preference for contingent work and discusses policy implications to improve their work-life balance and economic stability.

**Keywords:** Women, Contingent Workforce, Work-Life Balance, Employment Trends, India, Labor Market.

---

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Contingent work includes part-time jobs, freelancing, contractual employment, and gig economy roles. This shift is driven by the need for flexibility, career breaks for family responsibilities, and evolving workplace dynamics.

Women's participation in the workforce has undergone a fundamental transformation in recent decades, driven by social, economic, and technological changes. The labor market has undergone significant transformations, with an increasing number of women opting for contingent work arrangements. In India, the transition from traditional full-time employment to contingent work has been influenced by factors such as flexible work arrangements, family responsibilities, digitalization, and the rise of the gig economy (NITI Aayog, 2022). The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2021) highlights that while contingent work offers women greater autonomy and work-life balance, it also raises concerns about job security, wage disparities, and career progression. The Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS, 2021-22) reports a significant increase in women's participation in contractual and gig-based jobs, reflecting a shift in employment patterns. This paper delves into the factors driving women's engagement in contingent work, the advantages and disadvantages of such employment, and policy measures needed to ensure fair treatment and economic stability for women in this segment of the workforce.

However, the nature of contingent work raises concerns about job security, benefits, and career progression for women. This study explores the role of women in the contingent workforce, particularly in India, highlighting key trends and challenges.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies have explored various aspects of contingent employment, particularly concerning gender disparities, economic impact, and job satisfaction. According to Kalleberg (2000), contingent work is characterized by a lack of stability and benefits, which disproportionately affects women. Similarly, Smith (2012) highlights that women in non-traditional employment often experience wage gaps and limited career mobility.

A study by Barker and Christensen (1998) found that while contingent work offers flexibility, it also results in fewer employer-provided benefits, making it a less desirable option for long-term financial stability. Additionally, the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2016) emphasizes that women in emerging economies, including India, are more likely to engage in precarious employment due to socio-economic constraints.

In the Indian context, a report by Mehrotra and Parida (2019) on employment trends suggests that the gig economy has created new opportunities for women, but concerns regarding job security and fair wages remain prevalent. Moreover, Das and Kotamraju (2020) argue that while flexible work arrangements cater to women's domestic responsibilities, they often reinforce gendered labor market segmentation.

Previous studies have examined various aspects of contingent work, such as job satisfaction, economic impact, and gender disparities. Research indicates that women often engage in contingent work due to family obligations, lack of full-time opportunities, or preference for work-life balance. However, literature also points out wage gaps, lack of benefits, and career stagnation as critical issues. Studies focusing on India emphasize the growing gig economy and its impact on women's employment patterns.

### **Research Gap**

Despite extensive research on workforce participation, limited studies focus exclusively on women's participation in contingent employment in India, research gaps persist in understanding the long-term career implications of contingent work for women and the role of policy interventions in mitigating associated risks. There is a need for an in-depth analysis of the advantages and disadvantages faced by women in this sector and potential policy interventions to address their challenges.

### **Objective of the Study**

1. To analyze the extent and pattern of women's participation in the contingent workforce in India.
2. To examine the reasons for women choosing contingent employment over permanent jobs.
3. To evaluate the challenges and opportunities for women in contingent work.
4. To suggest policy recommendations for improving women's experiences in contingent employment.

## **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study adopts a mixed-method approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Data is collected through:

- Secondary sources such as government reports, labor market surveys, and academic research papers.
- Surveys conducted by Non-Profitable Organizations, with women engaged in contingent work across various sectors in India.
- Statistical analysis to identify trends and patterns in women's participation in contingent employment.

### **Women Participation as Contingent Workers**

Indian women are deeply influenced by their traditions and cultural values, which emphasize family, society, compassion, and responsibility toward household duties (Chowdhury, 2016). These socio-cultural factors have played a significant role in shaping women's employment preferences, leading many to opt for contingent work arrangements that offer greater flexibility and work-life balance.

According to the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO, 2021), the participation of women in flexible and non-traditional employment has increased in response to the need for balancing household responsibilities and economic independence. The gig economy, particularly in sectors such as e-commerce, education, and healthcare, has become an attractive option for Indian women, allowing them to contribute financially while fulfilling familial obligations (FICCI, 2022).

However, contingent work also exposes women to various challenges, including lower wages, lack of social security benefits, and career stagnation (ILO, 2021). Despite these challenges, women continue to opt for contingent employment due to the autonomy it provides and the ability to engage in dual roles effectively (NITI Aayog, 2022).

Women are increasingly engaging in temporary and freelance jobs, particularly in sectors such as IT, education, healthcare, and the gig economy. While these jobs provide flexibility, they also lack stability and benefits, raising concerns about long-term career prospects and financial security.

### **Trend and Pattern of Women Participation as Contingent Workforce in India**

The participation of women as contingent workers in India has seen a significant rise over time. According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2021-22, the proportion of women engaged in part-time and contract-based work increased by 8.5% compared to 2017-18. A study by NITI Aayog (2022) indicates that nearly 24% of gig workers in India are women, with the number expected to rise in the coming years.

Data from the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE, 2023) shows that more women are entering freelance and gig economy jobs, particularly in urban areas where digitalization and remote work have facilitated greater flexibility. Additionally, the employment rate of women in the informal sector has increased due to rising participation in e-commerce, ride-sharing, and online tutoring (FICCI, 2022).

Despite these positive trends, challenges such as income instability, job insecurity, and lack of social security persist for women in contingent employment (ILO, 2021). Addressing these concerns through policy interventions is essential for sustaining and improving women's participation in this workforce segment.

India has witnessed a rise in gig and contract-based employment, with women constituting a significant proportion of this workforce. Factors influencing this trend include:

- Increased digitalization and remote work opportunities.
- The growing preference for work-life balance among women.
- The expansion of platform-based jobs in e-commerce, ride-hailing, and food delivery services.

### **Arguments in Favor of Women as Contingent Workforce Group**

- 1. Flexibility in Work Hours Allows Better Work-Life Balance** One of the most significant advantages of contingent work for women is the flexibility it offers in terms of work hours. Studies by McKinsey & Company (2021) and ILO (2022) indicate that flexible work arrangements enable women to balance professional responsibilities with household duties, particularly in societies where women bear a disproportionate share of caregiving roles. According to Chopra and Mehrotra (2020), women working in the gig economy report higher job satisfaction due to the ability to customize work schedules around family obligations.
- 2. Opportunity to Explore Diverse Career Paths and Skill Development** Contingent work provides women with opportunities to explore various career paths without committing to long-term employment contracts. Research by Broughton et al. (2018) highlights that non-traditional employment options such as freelancing and contractual work allow women to gain experience across multiple industries, enhancing their skill sets and employability. Furthermore, the rise of online education platforms has facilitated continuous learning, enabling women to upskill while working on short-term projects (NASSCOM, 2021).
- 3. Availability of Remote Work Reduces Commuting Challenges and Safety Concerns** A major barrier to women's participation in full-time employment, particularly in India, is safety during commuting. Studies by Agarwal (2019) and FICCI (2022) indicate that remote work options have significantly reduced the risks associated with long-distance travel, especially in urban areas where public transport infrastructure may not be women-friendly. Women working remotely in IT, education, and digital marketing sectors report improved job satisfaction and reduced stress due to the elimination of daily commuting (World Bank, 2020).
- 4. Increased Autonomy and Potential for Entrepreneurship through Freelance Work** Freelance work and gig economy opportunities allow women to operate as independent entrepreneurs, providing them with financial independence and decision-making power (Sengupta, 2022). According to a study by NITI Aayog (2022), nearly 30% of women in India's gig workforce engage in entrepreneurial activities, leveraging digital platforms to run businesses in areas such as e-commerce, content creation, and consultancy services. This shift is empowering women to take charge of their careers while maintaining control over their work environment and income sources.

### **Arguments Against Women as Contingent Workforce Group**

- 1. Lack of Job Security and Long-Term Financial Stability** One of the most significant disadvantages of contingent work for women is the absence of job security and long-term financial stability. Research by Kalleberg (2011) suggests that contingent workers, particularly women, face employment instability, making it difficult for them to achieve financial independence. Similarly, a study by Standing (2014) on labor market precarity indicates that women engaged in contingent work often struggle with frequent job changes, leading to economic vulnerability. The lack of permanent contracts means they have little bargaining power in the labor market (ILO, 2021).
- 2. Absence of Employee Benefits Such as Health Insurance and Retirement Plans** Contingent workers, particularly those in freelance or gig economy roles, are often excluded from essential employee benefits such as health insurance,

paid leave, and retirement plans (Stone & Arthurs, 2013). A study by the OECD (2020) highlights that women in temporary employment are disproportionately affected by the absence of social security, increasing their financial insecurity in the long run. In the Indian context, the NITI Aayog (2022) report on the gig economy suggests that while contingent work offers flexibility, it lacks institutional support mechanisms that safeguard women's financial and health needs.

- 3. Wage Disparities and Exploitation in Certain Contingent Work Sectors** Wage disparities are a pressing concern for women engaged in contingent work. Research by Hegewisch and Hartmann (2019) reveals that women in non-permanent roles often receive lower wages compared to their male counterparts for the same work. This issue is particularly severe in sectors such as domestic work, data entry, and digital gig jobs, where wage exploitation is prevalent (ILO, 2021). Moreover, a study by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE, 2023) indicates that the gender pay gap is exacerbated in informal and contract-based employment, limiting women's economic progress.
- 4. Limited Career Progression Opportunities Compared to Full-Time Employment** Women in contingent work often encounter barriers to career growth. Research by Appelbaum (2012) suggests that contingent workers are less likely to receive promotions or access skill development programs, which hinders long-term career advancement. Similarly, Mehrotra and Parida (2019) argue that Indian women in the gig economy often face a glass ceiling that prevents them from transitioning into leadership roles. The lack of structured career pathways in contingent work reinforces job stagnation and limits professional growth opportunities (World Bank, 2020).

#### 4. FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS

The findings from various research studies indicate both advantages and challenges in women's participation in contingent work. To address these challenges and enhance the experience of women in contingent employment, the following suggestive measures are proposed:

- 1. Implementation of Policies Ensuring Fair Wages and Benefits for Contingent Workers** Research by Kalleberg (2011) and the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2021) highlights that women in contingent work often experience wage disparities and lack essential benefits. To bridge this gap, policymakers should introduce and enforce minimum wage regulations, provide access to health insurance, and ensure social security coverage for non-traditional workers (OECD, 2020).
- 2. Government and Corporate Initiatives to Provide Training and Skill Development Programs** Studies by Mehrotra and Parida (2019) suggest that skill development initiatives can significantly enhance women's employability in the contingent workforce. Government-led programs such as India's Skill India Mission and private sector collaborations should focus on upskilling women in digital, technical, and managerial domains to ensure better job opportunities and income stability (World Bank, 2022).
- 3. Strengthening Social Security Measures for Contract and Gig Workers** The NITI Aayog (2022) report on the gig economy underscores the importance of robust social security measures for women in contingent employment. Expanding financial safety nets such as pension schemes, maternity benefits, and unemployment insurance can mitigate economic vulnerabilities faced by women in precarious jobs (ILO, 2021).
- 4. Encouraging Women-Centric Entrepreneurship Programs to Enhance Economic Independence** Promoting women-led startups and freelance businesses can provide sustainable employment opportunities for women in contingent work. Research by Das and Kotamraju (2020) emphasizes that access to microfinance, mentorship programs, and business incubation centers can empower women to establish independent career paths and contribute to economic growth (UN Women, 2021).

#### 5. CONCLUSION

Women's participation in contingent work has witnessed a steady rise, reflecting changing workforce dynamics and socio-economic factors. While contingent employment offers benefits such as flexibility and skill diversification, it also presents challenges related to job security, wage gaps, and social security. Research from NITI Aayog (2022), ILO (2021), and other sources highlights the need for policy interventions to support women in non-traditional employment roles. Strengthening labor laws, expanding social security, and providing skill development initiatives can help women thrive in contingent work while ensuring economic stability and career growth.

In conclusion, women's participation in the contingent workforce is a growing phenomenon that requires balanced policy interventions to ensure equitable opportunities and protections. While contingent work provides flexibility, addressing the associated risks is crucial to empower women in the labor market effectively.

Future research should focus on assessing the long-term impact of contingent work on women's economic and social status in India.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] Agarwal, P. (2019). Women's Safety and Mobility: The Role of Public Transport. *Economic & Political Weekly*, 54(9), 45-58.
- [2] Appelbaum, E. (2012). *Precarious Work and the Labor Market*. Cambridge University Press.
- [3] Barker, K., & Christensen, K. (1998). *Contingent Work: American Employment Relations in Transition*. Cornell University Press.
- [4] Broughton, A., et al. (2018). The Growth of the Gig Economy: A Global Perspective. *International Journal of Labour Economics*, 7(2), 77-92.
- [5] Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE). (2023). *Labour Market Trends in India*.
- [6] Chopra, R., & Mehrotra, S. (2020). Flexibility at Work: A Key to Women's Job Satisfaction in India. *Journal of Labor Studies*, 35(1), 105-120.
- [7] Chowdhury, S. (2016). Women, Work, and Family in India: A Socio-Cultural Perspective. *Journal of South Asian Studies*, 39(2), 150-168.
- [8] Das, M., & Kotamraju, P. (2020). Women in India's Labor Market: Changing Trends and Challenges. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 55(7), 45-53.
- [9] FICCI. (2022). *Women and the Gig Economy in India*.
- [10] Hegewisch, A., & Hartmann, H. (2019). Gender Wage Disparities in the Gig Economy. *International Labour Review*, 158(3), 289-305.
- [11] International Labour Organization. (2016). *Women at Work: Trends 2016*.
- [12] International Labour Organization. (2020). *Women in the Changing World of Work: Emerging Trends and Challenges*.
- [13] International Labour Organization. (2021). *India Employment Report*.
- [14] International Labour Organization. (2021). *World Employment and Social Outlook: The Role of Digital Labor Platforms*.
- [15] Kalleberg, A. L. (2000). Nonstandard Employment Relations: Part-time, Temporary, and Contract Work. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26(1), 341-365.
- [16] Kalleberg, A. L. (2011). *Good Jobs, Bad Jobs: The Rise of Employment Insecurity*. Russell Sage Foundation.
- [17] Kalleberg, A. L. (2018). *Precarious Lives: Job Insecurity and Well-Being in Rich Democracies*. Polity Press.
- [18] McKinsey & Company. (2021). *Women in the Workforce: The Impact of Flexible Employment*.
- [19] Mehrotra, S., & Parida, J. (2019). *Employment Trends in India: An Analysis of Job Creation and Job Quality*. ILO Working Paper.
- [20] Mehrotra, S., & Parida, J. (2019). Trends in Employment and Self-Employment in India: 2000-2018. *Economic & Political Weekly*, 54(12), 45-53.
- [21] Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India. (2021). *Annual Report on Employment Trends*.
- [22] NASSCOM. (2021). *The Role of Digital Platforms in Women's Skill Development*.
- [23] National Sample Survey Office (NSSO). (2021). *Employment and Unemployment in India*.

- [24] NITI Aayog. (2022). India's Booming Gig Economy: Trends and Outlook.
- [25] OECD. (2020). The Social Impact of Temporary Work. *OECD Publishing*.
- [26] Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS). (2021-22). Employment and Unemployment in India.
- [27] Sengupta, R. (2022). Empowering Women Entrepreneurs through the Gig Economy.
- [28] Smith, V. (2012). New Forms of Work and the Flexibility Paradox. *Oxford University Press*.
- [29] Standing, G. (2011). The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class. *Bloomsbury Academic*.
- [30] Standing, G. (2014). The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class. *Bloomsbury Academic*.
- [31] Stone, K. V. W., & Arthurs, H. (2013). Rethinking Workplace Regulations: Beyond the Standard Contract of Employment. *Russell Sage Foundation*.
- [32] Sundararajan, A. (2017). The Sharing Economy: The End of Employment and the Rise of Crowd-Based Capitalism. *MIT Press*.
- [33] UN Women. (2021). Promoting Women's Economic Empowerment in the Digital Age. *United Nations*.
- [34] World Bank. (2020). The Role of Remote Work in Women's Economic Empowerment.