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# The Emergence Of Gig Talent Ecosystem In India And Its Implication On Future Of Work, Workforce & Workplace In The Post COVID Business Landscape

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## **Abstract :**

The paper aims to study the Emergence of Gig Talent Ecosystem in India and its implications on future of Work, Workforce & Workplace in the post COVID Business landscape. Growth of Gig Economy in developed countries, is being fueled by Digital transformation & Work flexibility preferred by new age Millennial & Gen Z workforce. As per literature review, most of the earlier studies on the Gig economy have been based on knowledge of workers in the industrialized or developed world, with only a few studies concentrating on developing countries like India. As per ASSOCHAM study, India's Gig economy is estimated to grow at a CAGR of 17.4 per cent. India's Gig economy is projected to achieve a size of \$455 Billion by 2023. Post COVID led disruption, companies in India are compelled to explore & experiment Gig Talent model to optimize cost & leverage flexibility for scaling up/down based on Customer centric Business demand. The hybrid Work arrangement leading to organizations experimenting with remote work culture, with flatter, flexible, inter-connected & collaborative organizational structures. The Gig model in India have associated challenges of Legal ambiguity, Financial & Social Security, Work ownership & Workforce engagement, Performance & Productivity management.

**Key Words:** Gig Talent Economy, India Talent Marketplace, Work Workforce & Workplace, Portfolio Careers, Freelancing, On-demand employment challenges, Flexible work arrangement, Future of work.

## **Introduction:**

A gig economy, is a setting in which establishments contract with independent workers for brief, short-term engagements, which augments on-demand expertise, provides flexibility of work, workforce and workplace, and also optimise cost. It is the collection of markets that match providers to consumers on a gig (or job) basis in support of on-demand commerce (Donovan, S. A., Bradley, D. H., & Shimabukuru, J. O. 2016). India constitutes about 40% of

the freelance jobs offered globally, with 15 million skilled professionals fueling the ever-so-increasing demand for contract-based jobs or the freelance industry. Freelancers are involved in the Gig economy because they can follow their niche and, at the same time, leverage the flexibility and independence that originates with it (Manishii Patha, Shrijita Jha 2019). A Gig ecosystem is also cost-efficient for businesses, given that they can accommodate temporary workforce, according to the client requirements or business needs, leading up to saving administrative and compliance costs that they would otherwise incur if they choose to hire full time or regular workforce (Sebastian Klovig Skelton, 2019). The growing Millennial workforce in India is driving the creation of this Gig economy that leverages technology to accommodate their work & family life with the preference of workplaces offering the choice of freelancing with ventures that suit them best. As per literature review, sufficient research studies & data are not available to analyze the COVID impact led emergence of Gig Talent Economy in India. This methodology followed for collecting Qualitative data & insights for the purpose of writing this paper, has been gathered through a combination of Primary & Secondary sources such as One-on-one discussions with Business & HR leaders from diverse sectors, Focussed Group discussions with potential Gig Talent pool and prospective Contingent Workforce, Recruitment Teams & Search Firms, Interviews with Contingent Manpower Service providers, Recent reports published by Deloitte & ASSOCHAM, Insight reports from Webinars & Panel discussions, Review of relevant peer reviewed Journals, Research Papers & Articles. Every such disruption like Covid pandemic also throws up an opportunity, as long as we are agile enough to spot it and adapt it for the better. We sought to understand if the present experience has truly enhanced mindset shifts to the Future of Work, and saw the current lockdown as an opening to test our hypothesis on acceleration of the rise of Gig Talent ecosystem in India. The COVID-19 pandemic has pushed most individuals indoors and demanded remote working, with hefty dependence on Internet connectivity and appreciation of gig work has amplified manifold, so much so that it has started to be counted among vital services, who continue working outdoors by putting their life at risk. At the same time, due to lockdowns, need for some services offered in the gig economy has reduced and some services have become impossible to offer due to social distancing rules. The review of literature on this subject, shows that most of the preceding studies on the gig economy have been built on experiences of workers in the industrialized or developed world, with only a few studies focusing on developing countries like India (Balwant Singh Mehta, 2020). The conclusions from these studies cannot be general to explain the influence of the gig economy on the labour market in the evolving world like India, where the labour market features are significantly different. Rapid increase in digitization in developing countries has led to the penetration of digital work platforms, which are likely to play an important role in shaping the future of Gig talent ecosystem. Further, almost 45 percent of the HR heads surveyed, wanted to hire a gig worker so that they can complement skills of the current workforce, 39 percent would do this to reduce the

**4401 | Amit Das    The Emergence Of Gig Talent Ecosystem In India And Its Implication On Future Of Work, Workforce & Workplace In The Post COVID Business Landscape**

cost and 10 percent for filling temporary positions in their teams (Gig Readiness survey, Teamlease 2019). India, due to its absolute number of the working population, many of whom are starting to get digitally connected, has created a growing acceptance to gig work. India has 15 million freelancers with its gig ecosystem workforce increasingly gaining independent contracts in industries like IT and programming, finance, HR, and design, among others. The absence of entry barriers has led to a rising demand for researchers, consultants and skilled professionals from India and other developing countries as well. It transpires from the literature review that established frameworks for identification of Gig roles are yet to be created across Organizations in India. There are no Legal & Statutory labour frameworks to officialise & provide entitlement for Gig Workforce in India. Gig roles are yet to get Social acceptance at the Workplace & Society, which is a deterrent for Organizations to attract potential Talent for Gig roles. There are still doubts & ambiguity on the areas of Non-disclosure, Confidentiality & Non-compete aspects of the Employer–Employee relationship in Gig Talent ecosystem, while having simultaneous Gig engagements with multiple Organizations (The Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India,2020)

### **Observations & Findings :**

In a country like India where the demographic pressures are really high, Gig economy comes as a big solace for a large part of the population comprising of skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled labour force in meeting their employment needs. Along with the development of employment this provisional staffing trend frequently gives the millennials, who form the significant share of the workforce positioned a sense of satisfaction with the job, flexible timing, added income source and freedom (Kathuria, R., Kedia, M., Varma, G., Bagchi, K., & Khullar, S. 2017). The country has seen a surge of the staffing companies emanating both domestically as well as through the foray of the international players. These staffing firms not only are providing the industry with the office boys and liftmen but also the people for the senior leadership roles like CEO, COO, CFO, etc. The opportunities and challenges in the gig Talent ecosystem are as follows.

Opportunities in the Gig Talent ecosystem.

The flexibility to scale up or down of the Gig workforce based on the client or market demands, turns out to be one of the significant benefits of the Gig ecosystem. Even many complex roles in organizations today, are being hired through this route. For example, when building a new technology system, establishments may provisionally hire or contract with programmers and IT professionals until execution (Gianpiero Petriglieri, Susan J. Ashford, Amy Wrzesniewski 2019). Organizations would have the advantage of engaging independent contractors or other contract firm workers to leverage the expertise without having to carry those resources on their balance sheets for the entire year. For example,

during a merger & acquisition, the legal and accounting teams may need to hire extra support to organize that project to completion. At times, Organizations may decide to incentivize the Gig workforce for specific challenging tasks for achieving certain short term Business goals, which could motivate these workforce to walk the extra mile beyond their job description and solve some real Business problems or issues faced by Business. The companies need to learn the mechanics of hiring, engaging and managing this category of on-demand Gig Talent in order to derive incremental value from the diverse skillsets available in the Talent marketplace, and find an effective solution to the talent supply chain challenges. Attraction and retention of top talent has been a steady challenge for global pharma companies and this can be the answer to a severe talent shortage in the pharmaceutical sector, specifically biopharma. When it comes to the workforce, they have complete flexibility and autonomy to pick and choose the gig projects they want to work on, while having the option to avoid the work-related hazards of the regular job. This provides an opportunity for them to operate as entrepreneurs, with the right work-life balance.

### **Challenges in the Gig Talent ecosystem.**

A flexible on-demand employee base also has its challenges for the organisation leadership, wherein they have to steer through the legal outline and compliances. Meanwhile, technology continues to distort the lines between employees and alternative workplace relationships. Organization leaders must examine and decide which roles are best occupied with gig workers, and which positions are business-critical from an operation, brand or information standpoint. Once these roles are defined, leaders need to deliberate how to mature ongoing relationships within a talent pool that may also be employed for their competitors. Organisations deploying a large section of gig talent pool must continually assess their engagement level and proactively meet their needs. The other challenge the business faces is when the gig worker is based in another city. Coordination becomes a task and so does creating a rapport with the team. A Gig talent would always have a higher share of uncertainties compared to a traditional employee, which demand a do-it-yourself, disruptive attitude, which pose a real challenge for contingent workers. For example, it's difficult to guarantee these freelancers are up to speed on compliance, training and their complete impact on the business; all things you can effortlessly teach a traditional worker. Employers need to think outside full-time employees and tap into the Open Talent Economy (Kathuria, R., Kedia, M., Varma, G., Bagchi, K., & Khullar, S. 2017). The art and science of supervision wouldn't be about management of an ever-shrinking base of internal resources; it'll instead be about curating capability or contribution across a network of sources. Organisations need to come up with transformational tactics to cope up, while the government will need to put in place a new framework for labor relations. Governments across the world are trying to figure out the size, scale, and loopholes associated with the gig

economy, with specific focus on unionization and regular demand for regularization or extension of benefits similar to traditional employees. Since most of the Gig workforce have flexibility but lack the benefits of paid sick leave, time off, and retiral benefits, the government may need to legislate the labour framework by redefining the labor laws that prevent exploitation and encourage flexible innovation. In a country like India, freelance engagement option is yet to be prevalent beyond urban geographies. In India's huge casual work economy, 50 percent of self-employment is premised on self-exploitation, which need to be addressed through workforce formalization, with an eye on advanced ways to take care of statutory benefits such as provident fund, gratuity, and bonus. The gig economy is cutting through generations, is no longer constrained to the services sector and raking in high- value gigs. It has arrived and is here to continue. We have also observed the following trends in the Indian organisations.

### **1. Shift from Talent Management to Portfolio Management**

Today the Gig economy is compelling organisations to make a fundamental shift in the traditional Talent management philosophy that always focused on full-time employees. There is a paradigm shift that is happening today to Talent portfolio management, which represents both internal and external talent. The success of organisations to manage the HR processes, policies and philosophies, depend on their ability to manage an entire talent portfolio and partnership across the internal & external talent continuum. The culture in some organizations restrict them to treat freelancers differently from their internal employees, and their contingent workforce are not given equal status and treatment like their internal employees. Hence Organisations need to develop the fundamental mindset of managers to effectively manage the entire talent portfolio. The steady growth of the Gig economy has its own share of implications for the labor market and more importantly HR processes & policies. While agility would be the key ingredient for Gig economy workforce, the active encouragement for workforce participation with innovative earning opportunities are essential, that provide the requisite benefits and income stability to this segment of workforce, when compared to traditional work arrangements. Also, as technology platforms which can support contingent workforce become more ubiquitous, additional data points will be critical to measure the extent and impact of the gig economy.

### **2. Organizational Barriers to Transforming to the Gig Economy**

Organizational barriers can prevent effectively managing in the gig economy (Chloe Chappa, Marsha Varghese, Kisha Chandler,2017), which range from HR processes to organization culture. For example, the current HR processes for hiring, on-boarding, talent management and engagement, mainly focus on full-time employees with restricted consideration for contingent workers as part of the organization's Talent portfolio. Organisations tend to negotiate contracts with contingent workforce, primarily focusing on cost management, and

often ignoring the talent portfolio value that is created by contingent workforce for the organization. It is mostly expected for the Hiring managers to manage the association with Gig talent as part of their talent portfolio. The challenge is to work with hiring managers with a more collaborative approach for acquiring talent in the gig economy. New age Talent platforms like Tongal can be leveraged by procurement, marketing, and human resources teams to work collaboratively for accessing and coordinating a new talent portfolio in an on-demand and crowdsourced talent market.

### **3. Shift in the Organisation mindset to leverage Opportunity post Covid crisis**

With most managers alluded to the economic strain that industries are going through in light of the pandemic, and their alignment towards protecting on-roll workforce interests as much as possible, the fate of the alternate workforce in the face of this interruption seems to depend mostly on the goodwill of employers. Many establishments are beginning to evaluate the benefits of an alternate workforce model. For example, a global business process management company may see an opportunity to employ alternate workforce for their blue-collar workforce segment to recover and sustain their business post the pandemic crisis. This company may also consider to undertake into a shared employment workforce model with other companies. There is a growing realisation that a gig economy is price effective for companies, given that they can accommodate temporary workforce, as per the customer requirements or business needs, leading to saving administrative and compliance charges. This framework can also allow start-ups and micro-enterprises to leverage skilled workforce as and when required.

### **4. What companies are doing to extract benefit from Gig model**

a) The traditional job descriptions are being converted into skills-based categories. Presently, most establishments leveraging the gig economy to scale-up their business, are small to medium sized organizations. Larger businesses have been sluggish to adapt to this trend, is still figuring out how the recruitment strategy and compliance practices can accommodate short-term workers within their present structure, especially in terms of how gig workforce can fit their corporate culture and working style. With the growth of Robotic Process Automation (RPA), data analytics and repetitive tasks are often automated to achieve advanced efficiency and accuracy, permitting staff to engage in skills-based, value-added tasks. Hence, instead of holding up to the traditional categorization of job descriptions, companies can creatively divide work into skills-based tasks, so as to streamline processes of briefings, handover processes and management (François Pichault and Tui McKeown 2019).

b) The employee policy assessments and evaluations are being revamped. Companies are evaluating existing internal policies and applicant assessment processes, which were earlier meant for permanent employees. As more and more companies focus on deploying gig

workforce, it is also important for Talent acquisition function to reorient their approach to selection processes and redefine the job roles, as well as benefits and policies. This is equally essential for jobs that require gig workforce to work on-site and off-site. An effective assessment process is essential to ensure consistent and quality work, where customized assessment procedures will need to be established with the active contribution of the relevant line manager (Jon Younger, Norm Smallwood, 2016)

c) The Employer brand is being communicated more effectively in a Gig economy, where organisations have to communicate an authentic employer brand to the potential gig workforce segment, exactly the way it was needed during talent acquisition process for traditional workforce segment.. In fact, it is needed even more in a gig ecosystem, where the foundation is built upon trust. Otherwise, the impact of gig economy on the workforce will undermine an organisations's fundamental intent for fair treatment of gig employees. The communication of Brand promise has to be uniformly carried out across the employee segments, in a manner that is equally appealing to permanent or contingent employees, whether existing or prospective employees. The culture of the organisations also need to be inclusive enough to accomodate the latent and expressed purpose of both permanent and Gig workforce, to provide similar experience across their lifecycle touchpoints. The employee interventions and events in the organisations should be able to drive a consistent connect and engagement with both segments of permanent and Gig workforce to avoid disconnection, and strengthen the brand association which is relatable to all forms of employees. Companies are already using multiple digital platforms, such as user-centric mobile-friendly career sites, mobile-enabled application and assessment tools, through usage of video content and employee video blogs. Such progressive practices will go a long way to enhance employer brand and communicate the brand culture, by embracing the right flexibility to address the ever-changing societal growth.

d) The workflow is being re-engineered to redefine existing job roles for improving Productivity and overcome current cost challenges. Gig talent model acknowledges that traditional definition of Job role, where one person was expected to perform all the tasks from a specified physical workplace, has undergone change. Now a job role is broken down into tasks, some tasks are automated, and some other tasks require people to apply higher order thinking skills. As a result, some job roles will not require full time engagement at specified workplace with pre-defined work hours. Some work will also become time bound, and we may require some skilled people for say 3 month period when they come, deliver the project, and go away. Talent Marketplaces will allow organisations to access talent from different geographic locations to get engaged as Gig Talent, deliver, and leave. Their compensation will be dependent on the agreed project milestones/deliverables at a substantial reduced fees than a full time on-roll employees. However, they may be entitled to the welfare & medical facilities, insurance coverage, and access to learning & engagement interventions that are applicable to full time employees.

**4406 | Amit Das    The Emergence Of Gig Talent Ecosystem In India And Its Implication On Future Of Work, Workforce & Workplace In The Post COVID Business Landscape**

A methodical assessment framework based on five parameters are being deployed to identify the Gig roles from all the available roles in an organisation (Deloitte,2020).

<b>Parameters</b>	<b>Key Questions</b>
Role Deliverables	Nature of work: transactional activities or need higher order thinking skills?
	Expertise: requires expert knowledge in a highly specialized field of study?
	Interactions: does or does not require the role holder to interact with a lot of cross functional internal stakeholders
	Exclusivity: Is the work similar or different to work in the media/ general industry?
Role Flexibility	Seasonality: variable or does it require continuous efforts throughout the year?
	Workload: Does the work occupy the/all incumbent(s) fully?
	Type of work: Composite work or mini=projects?
	Location: Does the work allow flexibility in terms of location / interaction mediums such that it does not bind the worker preventing them from picking up other roles
Role Impact	Reporting: Individual contributor or people manager role?
	Measurability: Can impact be defined by short/medium term measurable outcomes
Talent Availability & Readiness	Rarity: Talent is easily available for this kind of role
	Organizational knowledge: Requires extensive understanding of BCCL processes before contributing effectively to the set deliverables or can be managed without?
Cost Benefit	Cost: Will this role, if not engaged with BCCL on a full time basis give significant cost benefit to the organization?
	ROI: The role being full time in the organization will not lead to any significant ROI in the long term

### **Conclusion:**

This paper examines the development of Gig Talent ecosystem in India and it's impact on work, workforce and workplace in India post Covid pandemic. Description of contemporary literature and market survey confirm the fact that the gig economy is likely to bring transformational changes to traditional HR practices across the world, where gig and the traditional economy will succeed together (Pinakesh Mukherjee,2018). Based on the in-depth literature review, we have found that the Gig Talent ecosystem is still in a emerging



stage in India with Organizations & Workforce yet to have complete mindset shift from traditional full-time employment as favored Work arrangement, with evolving needs for Work, Workplace & Workforce. A dramatic workforce transformation is happening and is altering the way companies find and deploy talent. It transpires from the various researches so far, that India has significant the potential to become the leading freelancing and crowd sourcing hub, not only in the Asia pacific region, but even globally. While organisations in India are realising the value and need for acceleration of this Gig talent model, there is dearth of literature available on the structured readiness assessment which can enable organisations to prioritise investments in physical and digital strategies, as well as adopting new workforce models and remote/hybrid workplace models. Hence, future research may look into the several aspects of Gig Work strategy like alternate workforce models for superior flexibility in people costs, virtual working for productivity, collaboration, work- life balance, and performance management, concentrated effort towards driving an even culture across the physical and virtual workplace; and standards for teaming, collaboration, and overall engagement. Till some time back, employees were tempted to look at lifelong employment and vertical career provided satisfaction in their professional lives. Today, tables have turned and a increasing number of people trust that an ideal job doesn't come in the way of your own time, personal life goals and self-growth. The changing needs of today's workforce, the war for talent and the globalization of the workforce are just a few reasons that today's technology is evolving so rapidly. As Talent is becoming a true differentiator for organisations, these forces are driving workforce management to the top of the organization agenda.

The COVID led Business disruptions & Cost challenges, coupled with faster digitization in India, have obligated Organizations to quicken creation of the Gig Talent ecosystem, implement policies & guidelines to manage both Productivity & Experience across all Employee lifecycle touchpoints. The COVID led Job rationalizations & impact on livelihood/earnings coupled with burgeoning Millennial & Gen Z Workforce, and flexible Hybrid Work arrangement, have compelled Workforce to embrace Gig roles as an alternate option.

The approach being adopted by Indian organizations to leverage Gig model are as follows.

- Structured identification methodology to identify Gig roles from traditional job roles.
- Re-evaluation of existing policies & guidelines related to Work, Workplace & Workforce to customize Gig engagement needs.
- Re-craft of value propositions for Employer branding to attract & retain Gig Talent.
- Adoption of right technology to enable Human Capital re-engineering (Work flow, productivity, key deliverables, Workplace experience) to accelerate & leverage Gig Talent ecosystem

However, it is evident from the researches carried out so far, that the Gig Talent ecosystem in India needs to be reinforced through faster enactment of Legal, Financial & Social security

**4408 | Amit Das    The Emergence Of Gig Talent Ecosystem In India And Its Implication On Future Of Work, Workforce & Workplace In The Post COVID Business Landscape**

provisions to effectively manage & leverage the benefits of dynamic Business & Talent market.

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