

**DR. B.R. AMBEDKAR'S IDEAS ON LABOUR WELFARE AND THEIR
RELEVANCE IN THE GIG ECONOMY AND INFORMAL SECTOR**

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Abstract

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's labour thought is often remembered through constitutionalism and social justice, but his work as a labour policymaker also provides a powerful framework for interpreting contemporary employment. This paper analyses Ambedkar's ideas on labour welfare and examines their relevance to India's gig economy and informal sector. It argues that Ambedkar treated labour welfare not as charity or administrative benevolence, but as a democratic condition necessary for dignity, security, equal opportunity and economic citizenship. His ideas on reasonable working hours, social security, maternity protection, industrial democracy, state responsibility and the organization of labour remain important in a labour market where platform workers, self-employed workers, casual labourers and unorganised workers often lack stable

contracts, paid leave, social security and collective voice. The study uses a qualitative, historical and analytical research design based on secondary data, including Ambedkar's writings and speeches, labour legislation, government reports, PLFS 2023-24, NITI Aayog estimates of gig work and recent studies on platform labour. The analysis shows that the gig economy reproduces older informal-sector vulnerabilities in a technologically mediated form: flexible work is accompanied by income uncertainty, algorithmic control, weak bargaining power and fragmented welfare coverage. Ambedkar's labour welfare vision therefore remains relevant because it connects legal recognition with substantive protection. The paper concludes that the future of decent work in India requires portable social security, fair earnings standards, transparent platform governance, gender-sensitive protections and stronger

worker representation.

Keywords: Ambedkar, labour welfare, gig economy, informal sector, social security, platform work, decent work, India

1. Introduction

The transformation of work in India has revived an old but unresolved question: how can labour be protected when employment does not fit the standard model of permanent, factory-based or office-based wage work? Digital platforms now organize delivery, transport, domestic services, logistics, beauty work, freelance services and micro-tasks. At the same time, the informal sector continues to employ a very large section of India's workforce in self-employment, casual labour, home-based work, street vending, construction, domestic work and small enterprises. The language of the gig economy appears new, but the insecurities experienced by many gig workers are familiar: irregular income, weak bargaining power, absence of paid leave, lack of employer-funded social security, occupational risks and dependence on intermediaries who control access to work.

1.1 Problem Statement

India's employment structure is characterized

by a persistent gap between work and welfare. While new digital platforms create livelihood opportunities and claim to offer flexibility, many workers remain outside traditional employer-employee protections. The informal sector also continues to dominate labour absorption, but with limited written contracts, weak access to paid leave and gaps in social security. The problem, therefore, is not only the quantity of employment, but the quality of employment. A labour market that generates work without protection risks creating a class of workers who are economically active but socially insecure.

This problem is especially significant because the gig economy often blurs the boundary between self-employment and wage labour. Platforms describe workers as partners or independent contractors, yet many aspects of the work process are shaped by ratings, algorithmic allocation, incentives, penalties and terms unilaterally designed by platforms. Informal workers face similar constraints through contractors, middlemen, piece-rate arrangements and irregular demand. The central research problem is whether Ambedkar's labour welfare ideas can provide an analytical and policy framework

for securing dignity, security and fairness in these non-standard forms of work.

1.2 Importance of the Study

The study is important for three reasons. First, it expands the discussion of Ambedkar beyond caste and constitutionalism to his labour welfare thought, while showing that his approach to labour was inseparable from his wider commitment to social justice. Second, it connects historical labour philosophy with present-day policy challenges in the gig economy and informal sector. Third, it contributes to contemporary debates on social security, platform regulation and decent work by arguing that labour welfare must be viewed as a democratic right, not as a residual welfare measure for vulnerable workers.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1. To analyse Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's ideas on labour welfare, social security and industrial democracy.
2. To examine the nature of contemporary gig work and informal employment in India.
3. To assess how current labour-market vulnerabilities relate to Ambedkar's

concerns about dignity, security and exploitation.

4. To evaluate the relevance of Ambedkar's labour welfare principles for platform workers and informal-sector workers.
5. To suggest policy implications for building a fairer and more inclusive labour-welfare framework in India.

2. Conceptual and Background Context

2.1 Ambedkar's Labour Welfare Vision

Ambedkar's labour welfare vision may be understood through five interconnected principles. The first is dignity of labour. Ambedkar's critique of caste was also a critique of graded occupational inequality. In a society where caste attached stigma to certain kinds of work and excluded communities from property, education and mobility, labour welfare could not be reduced to factory conditions alone. It required social respect, equal citizenship and dismantling structures that made some workers permanently vulnerable.

The second principle is social security. Ambedkar recognized that industrial society exposes workers to risks that individuals cannot handle alone: unemployment, sickness, old age, accident, maternity and

loss of income. His labour speeches show an insistence that policy must be based on facts about workers' actual conditions and that social security requires planning, institutional design and public responsibility (Ambedkar, 1991). The third principle is reasonable working conditions. Limits on working hours, leave, safety and welfare provisions are necessary because unequal bargaining power can otherwise make labour accept harmful conditions.

The fourth principle is gender-sensitive welfare. Ambedkar's labour policy work is commonly associated with attention to maternity benefits and the protection of women workers. This matters today because women in informal and platform work often carry unpaid care burdens while also facing lower earnings, safety risks and limited access to social protection. The fifth principle is industrial democracy: workers must have voice in the conditions under which they work. Welfare without representation can become paternalistic; representation without welfare can remain formal. Ambedkar's thought links the two.

2.2 Gig Economy and Platform Work

The gig economy refers to work arrangements where tasks are performed on a

short-term, demand-based or project-based basis. Platform work is a subset of this broader category in which digital platforms match consumers, clients or businesses with workers. It includes location-based services such as food delivery, ride-hailing, logistics and home services, as well as online work such as freelancing, content moderation, design, data annotation and micro-tasks. The promise of such work lies in entry opportunities, flexibility, urban livelihood generation and low barriers to participation. Its risks lie in unstable earnings, opaque algorithmic management, unilateral deactivation, absence of traditional employment benefits and weak mechanisms for dispute resolution.

NITI Aayog estimated that 7.7 million workers were engaged in India's gig economy in 2020-21 and projected expansion to 23.5 million workers by 2029-30 (NITI Aayog, 2022). The rise of platform work therefore cannot be treated as a marginal issue. It is becoming an important part of the labour market and must be assessed not only as a business innovation, but as a labour-welfare challenge.

2.3 Informal Sector and Labour Vulnerability

The informal sector is broader than the gig

economy. It includes unincorporated enterprises, own-account work, casual labour, unpaid family work and many low-protection arrangements in both rural and urban India. Informality is not only a statistical category; it is a condition of low protection. Informal workers may be outside labour-law enforcement, social security contributions, written contracts, stable wages and collective bargaining institutions. The National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector described unorganised workers as the overwhelming majority of India's workforce and highlighted their poor working conditions and insecure livelihoods (NCEUS, 2007).

Gig work and informal work therefore overlap in practice. Many platform workers are formally treated as independent contractors and practically experience conditions similar to informal workers. Informal workers, meanwhile, are increasingly being drawn into digital markets through apps, payment systems and aggregator models. Ambedkar's labour

welfare ideas are relevant precisely because they address the structural problem of workers who depend on work for survival but lack institutional power to secure fair terms.

2.4 Labour Welfare as Economic Democracy

Ambedkar's idea of democracy was not confined to elections. He argued that political democracy must rest on social and economic democracy. Applied to labour, this means that workers cannot be truly free where work is governed by fear, hunger, insecurity or humiliating status. Labour welfare is therefore an institutional expression of economic democracy. It converts abstract equality into practical protections: fair working hours, social security, safety, representation and access to opportunity. This conceptual point is central to the relevance of Ambedkar's thought today. The gig economy may be technologically modern, but without welfare and voice it can reproduce older forms of domination in digital form.

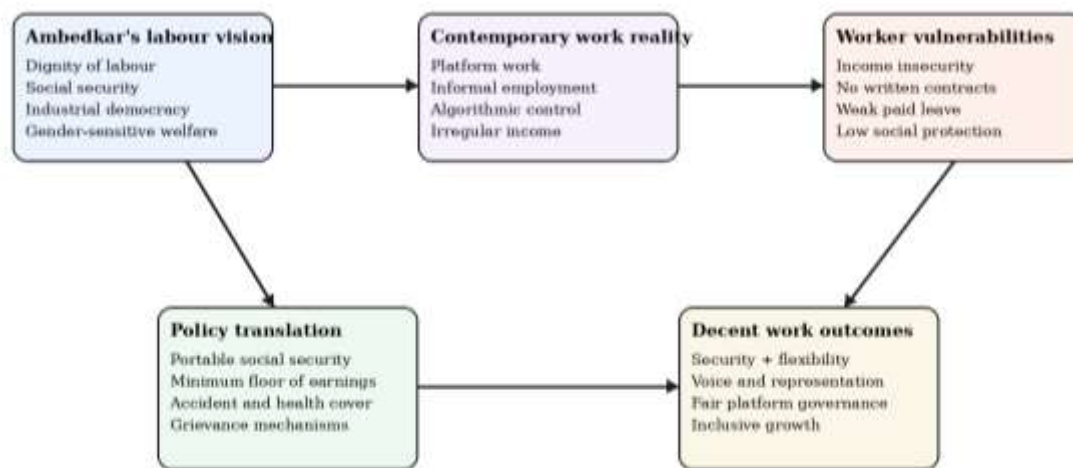


Figure 1. Ambedkarian labour welfare framework for interpreting gig and informal work.

3. Review of Literature

3.1 Ambedkar, Labour and Social Democracy

The literature on Ambedkar often emphasizes his critique of caste, his role in constitution-making and his contribution to democratic theory. Jaffrelot (2005), Omvedt (2004) and Zelliott (1992) show that Ambedkar's politics was rooted in the struggle against caste-based exclusion and social degradation. However, his labour ideas are not separate from this larger project. Labour welfare was one route through which marginalized groups could obtain dignity, security and citizenship in a society structured by caste and class.

Ambedkar's emphasis on education, representation and state action shaped his understanding of the working class as a social and political category rather than merely an economic category.

Ambedkar's own writings and speeches indicate that he saw labour policy as a matter of social reconstruction. The chapter on welfare and social security of workers in Volume 10 of his collected writings shows his concern with fact-finding, planning and institutional mechanisms for worker protection (Ambedkar, 1991). His approach is therefore both moral and administrative: workers deserve dignity, but dignity must be supported by institutions, law and public policy.

3.2 Informality and Labour-Market Segmentation

Research on India's informal sector has long shown that economic growth does not automatically produce secure employment. The NCEUS (2007) report remains important because it demonstrated the depth of vulnerability among unorganised workers and emphasized the need for livelihood promotion, social security and better working conditions. Chen (2012) argues that the informal economy must be understood through employment relations, enterprise structures and worker vulnerability rather than through a simple formal-informal binary. This is relevant to India because workers may be visible in markets but invisible in welfare systems.

The informal sector also intersects with caste, gender and migration. Thorat and Newman (2010) show that labour-market discrimination and social exclusion shape access to opportunity. This aligns with Ambedkar's insight that economic inequality in India cannot be separated from social hierarchy. Informal workers are not vulnerable only because they are poor; they are often vulnerable because social status, lack of assets, weak education and limited

bargaining power reduce their ability to negotiate fair terms.

3.3 Gig Work, Flexibility and Algorithmic Control

The literature on the gig economy identifies a tension between flexibility and precarity. De Stefano (2016) describes gig work as part of a 'just-in-time workforce' in which labour is mobilized when needed but not necessarily protected between tasks. Wood et al. (2019) show that platform workers may experience autonomy in choosing when to work, while also facing algorithmic control through ratings, task allocation and platform rules. Vallas and Schor (2020) explain that platforms do not simply match supply and demand; they restructure labour relations by controlling information, market access and worker evaluation.

This literature is important for the present paper because it shows that gig work does not eliminate labour dependence. It changes its form. Instead of a direct supervisor, workers may face automated ranking, opaque incentives, dynamic pricing and customer ratings. Instead of a factory gate, a worker's access to work may depend on an app login, acceptance rate or performance score. Ambedkar's concern with unequal power in

labour relations is therefore relevant to algorithmically managed work.

3.4 Social Security and Platform Regulation

The International Labour Organization (2021) argues that digital labour platforms have expanded rapidly and created new work opportunities, but they also raise questions about decent work, social protection and labour standards. In India, the Code on Social Security, 2020 formally recognizes gig workers and platform workers and allows schemes for unorganised, gig and platform workers. This is an important legal development because recognition is the first step toward welfare coverage. However, recognition alone does not guarantee adequate benefits, fair earnings, grievance redressal or worker representation.

Fairwork India (2024) evaluates labour standards on digital platforms using principles such as fair pay, fair conditions, fair contracts, fair management and fair representation. Its framework is relevant because it moves the debate beyond whether platforms generate work and asks whether

they generate fair work. This shift is consistent with Ambedkar's labour welfare vision: economic participation must be accompanied by dignity, social security and voice.

3.5 Research Gap

Existing literature on Ambedkar generally gives limited attention to the application of his labour welfare ideas to platform work and the gig economy. Literature on the gig economy, meanwhile, often focuses on technological disruption, classification disputes or platform regulation without sufficiently connecting these issues to older Indian debates on caste, informality and social democracy. The research gap is therefore the lack of an integrated analytical framework that reads gig and informal-sector vulnerabilities through Ambedkar's labour welfare principles. This paper addresses that gap by bringing Ambedkar's ideas on dignity, social security, working conditions and representation into conversation with current labour-market data and platform-work debates.

Theme	Representative insight	Relevance to present study	Key sources
Labour dignity	Work must be	Connects caste, class	Ambedkar; Jaffrelot;

	protected from social degradation and unequal power.	and worker status in informal and platform work.	Omvedt
Social security	Worker welfare requires institutional planning, not charity.	Supports portable social protection for gig and informal workers.	Ambedkar; NCEUS; Code on Social Security
Informality	Vulnerability persists where contracts, benefits and enforcement are weak.	Explains why informal-sector workers need more than employment access.	NCEUS; Chen; PLFS
Algorithmic control	Platforms may provide flexibility while controlling work through data and ratings.	Shows new form of labour dependence in gig economy.	De Stefano; Wood et al.; Vallas & Schor
Fair work	Digital labour must be assessed through pay, conditions, contracts and voice.	Translates Ambedkarian welfare into platform standards.	ILO; Fairwork India

Table 1. Thematic synthesis of literature on Ambedkar, labour welfare, gig work and informality.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This study uses a qualitative, historical, descriptive and analytical research design. It

is qualitative because it interprets Ambedkar's labour welfare ideas as normative and institutional principles. It is historical because it situates those ideas in Ambedkar's role as a labour policymaker and

social democrat. It is descriptive because it presents contemporary labour-market indicators relating to gig work and informal employment. It is analytical because it evaluates whether Ambedkar's ideas can be applied to current labour challenges.

4.2 Nature and Sources of Data

The study is based entirely on secondary data. Primary texts include Ambedkar's writings and speeches, especially material relating to labour, welfare and social security. Policy and statistical sources include the NITI Aayog report on India's gig and platform economy, the Periodic Labour Force Survey 2023-24, the Code on Social Security, 2020, Ministry of Labour and Employment releases on e-Shram, the NCEUS report on unorganised-sector workers and Fairwork India reports on platform labour standards. Scholarly sources include research on informality, labour-market segmentation, platform work, algorithmic control and decent work.

4.3 Method of Analysis

The analysis proceeds in three steps. First, Ambedkar's labour welfare ideas are identified through thematic reading of his writings and historical role. Second,

contemporary labour-market evidence is organized around key issues: size of the gig economy, structure of employment, informality, contracts, paid leave, social security and worker registration. Third, the two are compared through a normative policy lens: dignity, welfare, voice, security and equality. This method does not claim to produce causal statistical results. Rather, it offers an analytical interpretation of how Ambedkarian labour principles can guide present labour policy.

4.4 Scope and Limitations of Methodology

The paper does not conduct field interviews or collect survey data from gig workers. Therefore, it cannot provide platform-specific worker experiences or statistically test hypotheses. Its strength lies in integrating historical political economy with contemporary secondary data. A further limitation is that gig-work data in India remains developing; official estimates exist, but many workers combine platform work with other informal livelihoods. Despite these limitations, secondary analysis is appropriate for a conceptual and policy-oriented research paper because the objective is to examine relevance, not to measure platform-specific outcomes.

Source category	Examples used	Analytical purpose
Primary Ambedkar texts	Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches, Vol. 10	Identify labour welfare, social security and worker-dignity principles.
Government statistics	PLFS 2023-24; e-Shram registration data	Assess contemporary informality, contracts, paid leave and social security gaps.
Policy/legal documents	NITI Aayog gig economy report; Code on Social Security, 2020	Examine legal recognition and projected growth of gig/platform work.
Independent labour studies	Fairwork India; ILO platform economy reports	Understand fair-work standards and platform labour risks.
Academic literature	De Stefano; Wood et al.; Vallas & Schor; Chen	Build conceptual links between informality, algorithmic control and labour welfare.

Table 2. Secondary data sources and analytical focus of the study.

5. Data Collection and Analysis Strategy

5.1 Data Collection Approach

Data for this paper were collected through documentary review. The first set of documents provides historical and normative material: Ambedkar's writings and speeches on labour and social welfare. The second set provides statistical context: PLFS 2023-24, NITI Aayog's estimates of gig workers and e-

Shram registrations. The third set provides legal and policy context: the Code on Social Security, 2020 and government statements on gig and unorganised workers. The fourth set provides evaluative frameworks: ILO and Fairwork studies on platform labour.

The sources were selected because they are authoritative, directly relevant to labour welfare, and capable of connecting the historical argument with contemporary

labour-market conditions. Government data are used for descriptive labour indicators. Scholarly and institutional sources are used for interpretation of informality, platform work and social protection.

5.2 Analytical Categories

The paper analyses the data through the following categories: (1) legal recognition of workers, (2) employment security and

earnings stability, (3) access to social security, (4) written contracts and paid leave, (5) occupational safety and health, (6) gender and inclusion, (7) worker voice and representation, and (8) algorithmic transparency in platform work. These categories are derived from the intersection of Ambedkar's labour welfare ideas and contemporary decent-work standards.

Step	Activity	Purpose
1	Identify Ambedkar's labour welfare principles	Extract core ideas of dignity, welfare, state responsibility and labour voice.
2	Review gig and informal-sector data	Map current scale and vulnerabilities of non-standard work.
3	Compare historical principles with present conditions	Assess continuity between older informality and platform-based precarity.
4	Develop policy interpretation	Translate Ambedkarian ideas into contemporary labour-welfare proposals.
5	State limitations	Avoid overclaiming beyond available secondary evidence.

Table 3. Steps followed in data collection and analytical interpretation.

. Data Analysis

6.1 Scale and Growth of Gig Work

NITI Aayog's estimate that India's gig workforce was 7.7 million in 2020-21 and may reach 23.5 million by 2029-30 indicates that gig work is becoming a substantial employment category rather than a temporary urban trend (NITI Aayog, 2022). The projected rise also means that questions of welfare cannot be postponed. If platform work grows without adequate social protection, millions of workers may remain outside stable labour safeguards even while contributing to consumption, logistics and urban services.

The composition of gig work also matters. NITI Aayog notes that a significant share of gig work is medium-skilled, with low-skilled and high-skilled segments also present. This suggests that gig work cannot be regulated through a single template. High-skilled freelancers may require contract enforcement, payments security and dispute resolution, while low-skilled delivery or ride-hailing workers may require accident insurance, minimum earnings floors, fuel-cost protection and safety regulation. Ambedkar's welfare approach supports

differentiated but universal protection: every worker should have a basic floor of security, even if the type of work differs.

6.2 Informality in Employment Status

PLFS 2023-24 shows that a large share of India's workforce remains self-employed or casually employed. More than half of workers were self-employed, while casual labour also formed a substantial share. These patterns matter because self-employment and casual work often do not include employer-provided social security or stable contracts. The problem is not simply that workers lack jobs; it is that many forms of work do not automatically generate welfare entitlements. This finding directly connects with Ambedkar's labour vision. He understood that labour security cannot be left entirely to market relations because individual workers usually negotiate from a weaker position. In the informal sector, a worker's dependence on daily income reduces the ability to refuse unsafe work or low pay. In platform work, the worker may appear independent, but income depends on access to the app, customer ratings, incentives and platform rules. Both conditions require institutional welfare floors.

6.3 Contracts, Paid Leave and Social Security

PLFS 2023-24 reports that among regular wage or salaried employees, a significant share had no written job contract, no eligibility for paid leave and no social security benefits. If even many regular wage workers lack these protections, then the vulnerability of casual, self-employed, platform and informal workers is likely to be more severe. This supports the argument that labour welfare in India cannot focus only on the formally employed minority. The welfare framework must be portable and inclusive.

The e-Shram portal represents an attempt to create visibility for unorganised workers by registering them in a national database. The Ministry of Labour and Employment reported that more than 30.68 crore unorganised workers had registered by March 2025, with women constituting 53.68 percent of registrations (Ministry of Labour and Employment, 2025). Registration is important because it can reduce administrative invisibility. However, registration must be linked with real access to benefits. Ambedkar's approach would require not merely identification of workers, but effective welfare institutions that deliver protection.

6.4 Legal Recognition of Gig and Platform Workers

The Code on Social Security, 2020 is a significant step because it legally recognizes gig workers and platform workers and provides for schemes relating to their social security. It also includes provisions for registration and facilitation mechanisms. This recognition aligns with Ambedkar's belief that vulnerable workers require institutional protection. Yet the Code's effectiveness depends on implementation: contribution mechanisms, eligibility rules, benefit portability, grievance redressal and coordination between central and state institutions must operate in practice.

A key analytical point is that recognition must not become symbolic. If gig workers are recognized but remain outside minimum wage protection, occupational safety, unfair deactivation remedies and collective representation, their welfare will remain partial. Ambedkar's labour welfare vision was broader than social insurance; it involved the democratization of labour relations. For platform work, this means that algorithmic management, rating systems and contractual terms should be subject to fairness and accountability.

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Indicator	Recent evidence	Interpretation for labour welfare	Ambedkarian relevance
Gig workforce	7.7 million workers in 2020-21; projected 23.5 million by 2029-30.	Platform work is becoming a major labour category.	Requires proactive welfare planning rather than delayed correction.
Employment status	PLFS 2023-24: self-employment forms the largest employment-status category; casual work remains significant.	Non-standard work is central to Indian employment.	Welfare must extend beyond formal wage employment.
Contracts	Many regular wage/salaried workers lack written contracts.	Legal insecurity extends even beyond informal workers.	Worker rights need enforceable institutional form.
Paid leave and social security	Large shares of regular workers lack paid leave or social security benefits.	Work does not automatically create welfare entitlement.	Social security is a democratic necessity, not charity.
Worker registration	e-Shram registered over 30.68 crore unorganised workers by March 2025.	Worker visibility is improving, but benefits must follow registration.	Recognition must translate into substantive protection.
Legal framework	Code on Social Security recognizes unorganised, gig and platform workers for welfare schemes.	Legal recognition creates an entry point for regulation.	State responsibility is central to worker protection.

Table 4. Contemporary labour indicators and their Ambedkarian interpretation.

6.5 Gender, Caste and Social Location

Labour welfare must also be assessed through social location. Ambedkar's critique of caste shows that workers do not enter the labour market as abstract individuals with equal bargaining power. Caste, gender, migration, education and asset ownership shape the kind of work people can access and the risks they face. Women workers in informal and platform work may experience income insecurity alongside unpaid care responsibilities, mobility constraints and safety concerns. Workers from historically marginalized communities may be concentrated in lower-paid or stigmatized work due to inherited social disadvantage.

Therefore, a policy framework inspired by Ambedkar cannot limit itself to generic social security. It must address discrimination, unequal access to skills, digital exclusion and occupational segregation. For gig work, this includes ensuring that platform onboarding, ratings and deactivation practices do not reproduce social bias. For the informal sector, it means linking welfare with education, skill development, housing, health

and anti-discrimination enforcement.

7. Analytical Discussion

7.1 Continuity Between Informal Work and Gig Work

The gig economy is often presented as a new and flexible form of employment, but in India it should also be understood as a new layer of informality. Many gig workers bear costs of production: vehicles, fuel, smartphones, data, maintenance and waiting time. They may not have a guaranteed wage, paid leave or long-term social security. Their employment relationship is often framed as partnership, yet platform rules may determine pricing, allocation, visibility and penalties. This resembles informal-sector dependence, but with digital infrastructure.

Ambedkar's ideas help reveal this continuity. He would likely question whether formal freedom to log in and out is meaningful if workers must accept long hours or risky conditions to earn a basic livelihood. He would also question whether a market arrangement is fair when one party controls information, demand visibility and terms of

participation. From an Ambedkarian perspective, the issue is not whether gig work should exist, but whether it can be made

7.2 Labour Welfare as

a Floor, Not a Favour

A major lesson from Ambedkar's labour thought is that welfare should not depend on employer goodwill or platform branding. Welfare must be institutionalized as a minimum floor. In gig work this can include accident insurance, health coverage, maternity benefits, pension or old-age support, transparent earnings calculations and grievance redressal. In informal work it can include universal registration, portability of benefits across occupations and states, simplified access to schemes and stronger local facilitation.

The idea of a welfare floor does not mean that every worker must be treated exactly like a permanent employee in every legal respect. It means that basic human and social risks should not be transferred entirely to workers. Flexibility may be retained, but not at the cost of social abandonment. Ambedkar's approach supports this balance because he recognized both the economic importance of labour and the moral duty to protect it.

compatible with dignity, security and democratic accountability.

7.3 Industrial Democracy and Worker Voice

Ambedkar's commitment to democracy has special relevance for worker voice. In platform work, decisions affecting income and livelihood may be made through automated systems, app-based rules or non-negotiable contracts. Workers may not know why tasks are allocated, why incentives change or why accounts are blocked. In the informal sector, workers often deal with contractors or employers without formal grievance mechanisms. In both contexts, welfare requires voice.

Worker representation can take many forms: unions, worker associations, platform councils, tripartite boards, welfare boards and grievance committees. The key principle is that workers must not be passive recipients of policy. They must participate in shaping the rules that govern their livelihoods. This is consistent with Ambedkar's democratic method: those affected by power must have institutional means to challenge and negotiate it.

7.4 Algorithmic Management and the New Labour Question

The gig economy introduces a new labour question: how should labour welfare respond when management is partly algorithmic? Ratings, acceptance rates, dynamic incentives and automated deactivation can function as forms of discipline. They may not look like traditional supervision, but they affect the worker's income, time and autonomy. Labour regulation therefore needs new concepts such as algorithmic transparency, data rights, explanation for adverse decisions and protection against

arbitrary deactivation.

Ambedkar's relevance lies in his insistence that formal categories cannot hide substantive inequality. If a worker is legally called a contractor but practically dependent on a platform, labour welfare policy must examine the substance of control. Similarly, if informal workers are legally self-employed but economically dependent on a dominant buyer or contractor, welfare must respond to the real distribution of power.

8. Relevance of Ambedkar's Labour Welfare Ideas Today

Ambedkarian principle	Meaning in labour welfare	Application to gig economy	Application to informal sector
Dignity of labour	Work must not produce social humiliation or insecurity.	Respectful treatment, anti-discrimination, protection from arbitrary platform penalties.	Recognition of domestic, construction, street-vending and home-based workers as rights-bearing workers.
Social security	Risk should be collectively protected through institutions.	Portable benefits for accident, health, maternity and old-age support.	Universal registration and benefit portability across occupations and states.
Reasonable working	Working time and	Road safety, rest	Safety standards for

conditions	safety require regulation.	time, heat/rain protection, waiting-time recognition.	construction, domestic work, small workshops and hazardous tasks.
Industrial democracy	Workers require voice in rules affecting livelihoods.	Platform worker councils, appeals against deactivation, collective bargaining space.	Worker boards, cooperatives, unions and local grievance forums.
Gender-sensitive welfare	Women's labour requires protection from unequal burdens and risks.	Maternity support, safety design, flexible but secure work options.	Care-linked social protection, crèche access and protection for women home-based workers.
State responsibility	The state must correct unequal market power.	Clear duties for aggregators, contribution funds and enforcement architecture.	Integrated welfare delivery through e-Shram, local bodies and labour departments.

Table 5. Ambedkar's labour welfare principles and their distinct relevance to gig and informal work.

The table shows that Ambedkar's labour welfare ideas can be translated into concrete policy directions without treating gig and informal work as identical. Gig work requires attention to algorithmic control, platform accountability and portable benefits. Informal work requires stronger registration, social assistance, local enforcement and

livelihood security. Both require the same ethical foundation: workers must be treated as citizens with rights, not as disposable labour inputs.

9. Policy Implications

9.1 Portable Social Security

The most important policy implication is

portability. Gig and informal workers often move between jobs, platforms, locations and occupations. Welfare must therefore attach to the worker, not only to a single employer. A portable system could integrate e-Shram registration, accident insurance, health coverage, maternity benefits and old-age protection. Contributions may come from the state, aggregators, employers and workers according to capacity, but benefits should remain continuous across work transitions.

9.2 Minimum Earnings and Cost Recognition

Platform workers often pay for fuel, vehicle maintenance, mobile data, equipment and waiting time. Informal workers may also bear tools, transport and health costs. A fair labour-welfare framework should recognize these costs. Minimum earnings standards need not eliminate flexibility, but they should prevent extreme underpayment after costs are deducted. Ambedkar's concern for labour dignity supports the view that a worker's income should sustain life, not merely record activity.

9.3 Transparent Platform Governance

Platforms should provide understandable explanations for rating systems, incentive changes, task allocation and deactivation.

Workers should have access to appeal mechanisms and timely human review. Data collected from workers should not be used in ways that unfairly penalize them without explanation. Algorithmic transparency is the digital equivalent of industrial fairness: workers must know the rules that govern their livelihoods.

9.4 Strengthening Worker Voice

Gig and informal workers need institutional channels for representation. Welfare boards, platform worker associations, unions and tripartite consultation mechanisms can give workers a voice in policy design. Ambedkar's democratic approach suggests that worker welfare cannot be designed only by the state and business. Workers' lived experiences must be part of the institutional process.

9.5 Gender and Inclusion Measures

Policy must recognize that not all workers experience the gig economy or informal sector in the same way. Women workers, migrants, Dalit workers, religious minorities and low-income youth may face distinct barriers. Gender-sensitive measures should include maternity support, safety tools, protection from harassment, crèche facilities and flexible social security access. Inclusion

also requires skill development, digital literacy and anti-discrimination safeguards.

9.6 Linking Informal-Sector Welfare with Urban Governance

Many informal and gig workers operate in urban spaces: roads, markets, residential colonies, transport hubs and warehouses. Labour welfare should therefore be linked with urban policy. Resting spaces, sanitation, drinking water, parking, safe pickup points and emergency support are not minor facilities; they affect working conditions. Ambedkar's welfare logic supports this broader view because worker dignity depends on the material environment of work.

9.7 Implementation Roadmap

An Ambedkarian approach to labour welfare requires sequencing as well as principle. A short-term roadmap should begin with universal and verified worker registration, simplified benefit enrolment and emergency protection for accident, disability and health risks. Gig workers should not have to prove a permanent employment relationship before receiving basic protection. Informal workers should not be excluded because they move across worksites, employers or districts. The

first stage should therefore create a reliable worker identity that remains portable across platforms, occupations and states.

The medium-term roadmap should focus on financing and enforcement. Social security funds for gig and informal workers require predictable sources of funding. For platform workers, aggregator contributions can be linked to turnover, transactions or worker payments, while the state can support workers with low and irregular earnings. For informal workers, welfare boards, cess-based funds and budgetary support may be combined. However, the design must avoid excessive paperwork and delays. Ambedkar's emphasis on planned social security suggests that welfare institutions must be administratively capable, not merely announced in law.

The long-term roadmap should aim at transforming the quality of work. This includes a minimum floor of earnings, transparent rules for digital management, stronger occupational safety standards and recognition of worker organizations. The goal should not be to eliminate flexibility, but to prevent flexibility from becoming a justification for insecurity. In this sense, Ambedkar's labour vision can guide a

transition from informal survival work to rights-based livelihood security.

Policy phase	Priority action	Gig economy focus	Informal-sector focus
Short term	Universal registration and immediate risk cover	Link platform onboarding with portable social-security identity and accident cover.	Expand e-Shram-linked enrolment through local facilitation centres.
Medium term	Financing and benefit delivery	Aggregator contributions, clear eligibility rules, fast claim settlement.	Welfare boards, budget support, simplified access to health and maternity benefits.
Medium term	Fair work standards	Transparent pay calculation, waiting-time recognition, appeal against deactivation.	Written terms where possible, wage enforcement, paid leave in larger establishments.
Long term	Worker voice and economic democracy	Platform worker councils, collective bargaining space and algorithmic accountability.	Unions, cooperatives, producer collectives and local grievance forums.
Long term	Social mobility	Skill upgrading and protection against digital exclusion.	Education, credit, housing, health and anti-discrimination measures.

Table 6. Implementation roadmap for applying Ambedkarian labour welfare to new and informal work.

Conclusion

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's ideas on labour welfare remain highly relevant to India's gig economy and informal sector. His labour vision was based on dignity, social security, reasonable working conditions, gender-sensitive welfare, worker voice and state responsibility. These principles respond directly to contemporary labour-market challenges. Gig workers may use smartphones and apps, but many face old problems in new forms: income insecurity, weak bargaining power, absence of paid leave, occupational risk and limited social security. Informal workers continue to experience similar vulnerabilities outside digital platforms.

The paper has argued that Ambedkar's labour welfare thought should be used as an analytical framework for evaluating the quality of work, not merely as a historical reference. A labour market cannot be considered just because it generates employment if that employment lacks dignity and protection. Legal recognition of gig and platform workers is important, but it must be followed by effective social security, fair earnings standards, transparent platform

governance and worker representation. Similarly, informal-sector welfare must move from fragmented schemes toward portable, accessible and enforceable protection.

Ambedkar's enduring contribution is the insight that democracy must enter economic life. Political rights are incomplete when workers lack security, voice and social respect. In the gig economy and informal sector, this insight is more relevant than ever. The future of work in India should not be judged only by innovation, flexibility or growth, but by whether workers can live with dignity, security and equality. An Ambedkarian labour welfare framework provides a powerful basis for building that future.

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