

## **Precarity and Possibility: Rethinking Definitions, Classification, and Policy Lessons from Kerala's Experience in India's Gig Economy**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The rise of gig work in India has drawn a growing share of the labour force into roles distinct from traditional employer–employee arrangements. Typically mediated through digital platforms, gig work is characterised by short-term contracts, task-based engagements, and flexible work structures. Yet the absence of definitional clarity has hindered efforts to analyse its scale and assess the associated precarity. This paper conducts a systematic review of the literature to identify a definition that encompasses the key features of gig work, providing a stronger analytical basis for evaluating its vulnerabilities. It further proposes a classification of gig work types to enable more precise estimation of precarity across segments of the workforce. The paper also examines the role of upskilling as a strategy to reduce vulnerability and enhance employment outcomes in the gig economy. In particular, it evaluates the Kerala Knowledge Economy Mission as a policy intervention addressing structural unemployment through skill development. Findings suggest that higher-skilled workers face lower levels of precarity, and that a mix of large-scale government initiatives and private-sector implementation through franchise models can offer a sustainable pathway for improving employment security in the rapidly evolving landscape of gig work.*

**Keywords:** Gig work, Digital platforms, Upskilling, Employment outcomes, Kerala

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

India has the largest informal economy in the world (Harriss-White 2024), with estimates suggesting that over 90% of employment in India is informal, driven largely by agricultural jobs (*World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2019* 2019, 51). Even as the republic is experiencing rapid economic and technological growth, less than a fifth of the population in India is covered by some form of social protection (International Labour Office – Geneva 2019, 52). Over the past two decades, this informality has deepened, especially in the manufacturing

sector, where a growing number of formal roles have transformed into informal contracts or temporary engagements (Duvisac 2023, 361). Within this vast landscape of informal work, the past few years have seen the rapid expansion of gig work, characterized by digitally mediated and flexible work arrangements.

This paper explores the contours of India's predominantly informal labour market and will attempt to explain the existing definitions of gig work, keeping in mind its definitional inconsistencies. Gig work also comes at certain precarities like financial instability, social exclusion, job insecurity, and the lack of traditional employment protections such as health insurance and paid leave (Pathirana 2024, 2289). At present, around 78% of gig work is in low to medium skilled jobs (Niti Aayog 2022, 20). Upskilling is an important determinant of ensuring that individuals get better jobs as it creates avenues of horizontal and vertical mobility for workers, empowering them to augment their earnings (Niti Aayog 2022, 23). The paper also discusses the significance of upskilling in enabling better employment outcomes within India's gig economy. In this context, it is also important to consider policy imperatives. In an economy where informal and gig work comprises a majority of existing employment arrangements, ensuring that individuals are upskilled according to industry demands is vital. This will not only enable better employment outcomes but will also alleviate the vulnerabilities faced by gig workers. This paper examines Kerala's Knowledge Economy Mission (KKEM) to evaluate the same and consider policy recommendations. In the next section, we discuss the background literature on India's gig economy, followed by the discussion on the definitional aspects of gig work.

## **2. BACKGROUND LITERATURE**

Gig work usually refers to the type of work structure that is distinct from the traditional employer employee arrangement as it relies on the use of digital interfaces as the primary means of contact between the seller, buyer and the commodity; short-term contracts and flexibility (Campion, n.d., 2-3).

Gig work is rapidly growing worldwide with the advent of digitalization and increasing reliance on such platforms due to accessibility and ease. The number of digital labour platforms have grown five times over the last decade (ILO 2021). This growth can be attributed to easier and attractive income opportunities provided to workers with different capabilities and simplified market development and penetration for the quick commerce industry, especially in urban areas. This holds true in India, in particular due to the widespread smartphone adoption, rise of digital platforms like Ola, Uber, Zepto, Zomato and Urban Company due to increasing consumer demand for such services ("The gig economy in India" 2024, 68). The worker population ratio (WPR) in India for 2024 was 53.5% (Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation 2025),

making India's labour force among the largest in the world. The sheer size of the workforce comprising individuals (millennials and Gen Z) aged 15-44, signals to the increasing preference for flexible and non-traditional work arrangements, these preferences also stem from the COVID pandemic which accelerated the viability of remote and flexible work, making gig work more feasible and accessible (Jain 2022). Companies are increasingly inclining towards gig workers as they reduce fixed labour costs and can be contracted according to firm requirements. The gig worker model is especially appealing for businesses as they can access talent across a range of industries for short to medium term assignments without having to provide any long term benefits of traditional employment structures. However, these so-called "liberties"<sup>1</sup> Gig work comes at the cost of a lack of job security and stress due to algorithmic management and rating based appraisal (Niti Aayog 2022, 12-14). Gig work, due to its "mercantile" nature, devoid of any relationship of subordination and is thus located outside the protection of labour law, of the guarantees of the employment contract and the social protection of the "salaried status" (Fairwork 2024).

Having outlined the basic features of gig work, the following section examines its definitional aspects of gig work through a review of literature on the same.

### **3. DEFINITIONAL ASPECT OF GIG WORK**

One impediment in assessing the characteristics of gig- work is the lack of clarity regarding what constitutes a gig worker and how this differs from traditional employment structures. Niti Ayog Report titled "India's Booming Gig and Platform Economy- Perspectives and Recommendations on the Future of Work" defines a gig worker as a person who performs work or participates in a work arrangement and earns from such activities outside of traditional employer-employee relationship (Niti Aayog, 2022). While this definition tries to account for the spectrum of activities that can be classified as "gig work", it is vague as it mentions "the traditional employer-employee relationship" without discussing what such a relationship can be defined as. The same report defines the gig economy as "in itself being expansive and undefined and can include a variety of workers outside of a traditional worker definition." Again, this definition lacks clarity as it fails to convey what the traditional worker definition represents. To consider another perspective, "gigs" are often defined as pieces of work or tasks carried out for different clients over a stipulated period (Banwari, 2018). Similarly, the gig economy has been described as comprising temporary, flexible jobs that enable individual freelancing and contract-based work (Dawid, 2024). However, a closer look at these definitions reveals that they do not

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<sup>1</sup> Liberties refer to the freedoms associated with the contractual and short-term nature of gig work including but not limited to the ability to engage in service according to the workers' flexibility and use of digital platforms.

explicitly acknowledge the mediating role of platforms or digital interfaces in facilitating gig work. In contrast, another definition highlights this aspect more directly, framing the gig economy as “the collection of markets that match providers to consumers on a gig (or job) basis in support of on-demand commerce” (Radhakrishnan & Singha Roy, 2023). However, this definition is vague as it excludes the role of platforms and does not detail the payment mechanisms involved. Another definition, although it gives a convincing explanation of platforms involved in facilitating gig work, does not include the same in its definition: “ In the present context, a ‘gig economy’ involves a temporary contractual job or short-term contract or freelance work that a person may take, on a project-to-project basis, for which the payment is made once the task is completed.” (The Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM) 2020) The gig economy is defined as the contingent, short-term work arrangements that the platform economy fostered, while the platform economy is defined as digital business models where profit is derived from entities serving as intermediaries, rather than a traditional service provider, between providers and customers (Zwick, 2023). These comprehensive definitions mention payment and the use of digital interfaces but misses on the location(s) through which such gig arrangements are carried out. Another study defines the gig economy as the last frontier of precariousness, as it is characterized by a mix of old exploitative practices, such as the use of bogus self-employment and of piecework, as well as by new technologies of workers’ control through algorithmic surveillance and management (Maccarrone & Tassinari, 2023). While the definition rightly highlights the precarity and exploitation associated with gig work, it omits the flexibilities associated with gig work.

Thus, there exist several disparate definitions of gig work, with a common trend being that all its critical characteristics like location, payment, use of digital platforms, skill and educational level, employment benefits and job security are not discussed in the definitions.

This lack of definitional clarity, partly due to the novelty of the matter, results in challenges when evaluating the gig economy and its components in providing an assessment of it as well as suggesting measures for future policy. This issue is exacerbated due to the lack of adequate data on the gig economy and gig workforce of India in particular is concerning as NITI Aayog and other reports like the Periodic Labour Force Service (PLFS), which although detailed, are unable to provide exact insights into the number of gig workers, their income levels, educational standing, working conditions, job security and other parameters which are indicators of decent work and economic growth (SDG 8). Not only this, but the lack of definitional clarity has led to major concerns in estimating the size and demand for gig workers, which is a major gap in the existing literature (Jain, 2022) .

The assessment of definitions detailed in the section above highlights that the defining gig-work should be reflective of the basic nature of gig work outlined in the duration, platform required

and employer-employee relationship involved In this context the following definition takes into account the factors discussed so far except for skill levels and job security, “Gig work refers to work where workers are hired to complete specific tasks, and compensation is tied to the completion of that task; the relationship between the worker and the buyer of the service is mediated through a digital platform, and the service can be completed either digitally or in person.” (Duvisac 2023, 361). This paper examines and evaluates gig work and the gig economy on the basis of this definition and considers skill level and employment security in this assessment.

The discussion on definitional clarity pertaining to gig work must be complemented by a categorization of gig work itself. This is essential because the broad definition initially discussed includes a heterogeneous workforce that varies significantly across multiple dimensions, such as skill levels required, the nature of tasks involved, and other relevant characteristics. Additionally, gig work is frequently associated with or referred to alongside specific terms like platform-based work, contractual arrangements, and task-based employment, underscoring the need for clearer distinctions within this broader conceptual framework. Platform workers are those whose work is based on online software apps or digital platforms (Niti Aayog 2022, 51-52). Contractual employment refers to the relationship of the same nature between the platform owner and worker and is characterized as other than one of employment. Platform workers are considered as “independent contractors” and cannot access many of the workplace protections and entitlements (Niti Aayog 2022, 21-22). Task based works involve receipt of income upon completing certain tasks or projects, often through online platforms. On closer inspection, platform, contractual and task-based work can be categorized under gig work as they involve characteristics associated with gig work as illustrated in the definition presented above. However, they are categorized by certain characteristics which contribute to the unique challenges faced by gig workers in each of these roles. Perhaps understanding these diverse characteristics can enable us to better understand and inform policies to ameliorate the challenging circumstances gig workers face.

#### **4. METHODOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTION**

The review of existing literature reveals that there are several detailed categorizations of gig work. Notably, Florisson & Mandl (2018), present a compelling overview of theoretical classification elements for platform work (Florisson, Mandl, and Eurofound 2018, 66). Pierre Bérastégui, in his research, presents a simplified classification that covers the wider scope of the modern gig economy (Bérastégui 2021, 10). The classification discussed aligns with peer reviewed research and considers measurable parameters like type of work, location, task division and task complexity. It also accounts for the large scope of modern gig work which avoids leaving a large number of work types unaccounted for.

While this classification provides a sound structural foundation, its geographical grounding is largely global and lacks explicit focus on India's socio-economic environment. The Niti Aayog report offers a critical contextual basis, as it reveals the expansion of India's gig workforce and also signals a shifting skill level distribution in gig work. Thus, considering skill level in the classification is vital to account for India's gig economy.

To this end, and on conducting a systematic review of existing literature, the table presented below, as discussed above, is a methodological contribution to the literature on gig work as it aims to enable policy makers to better estimate the scope, structure and heterogeneity of gig work by systematically categorizing skill level and degree of platform mediation. This structured synthesis supports more precise policy interventions and addresses policy variations and effectiveness across contexts.

The table below (Table 1) synthesizes the kinds of gig work roles on the basis of 2 primary parameters, as defined by the Niti Aayog report: skill level and platform dependency.

Skill level is ranked on a scale of one to three. A rating of one indicates tasks requiring minimal prior training or education. This applies to roles that are based on physical skill application like driving and delivery and not on jobs requiring cognitive skills. A rating of two indicates roles requiring vocational training and certification. Cognitive skills are involved here, but to a minimal level. A skill rating of three refers to specialized professional roles mandating formal, and often advanced education. Cognitive skills are highly employed in such roles. Incorporating skill level in this classification is vital given the current trend of changes in skill level distributions, as the concentration of workers in medium skills is gradually declining and that of the low skilled and high skilled is increasing (Niti Aayog 2022, 20). Moreover, including skill level will help in understanding barriers to upward mobility (if any) and will help to design better skill development programs based on overall precarity as well.

Platform dependency refers to the extent to which gig workers are reliant on digital interfaces for client contact and task allocation and is ranked out of five. A ranking of one indicates that workers are entirely independent from platforms as they operate outside of such networks, sourcing clients from other means. A rating of two refers to low dependency as workers occasionally use digital platforms and predominantly rely on independent client acquisition. A rating of three signals moderate dependency as workers rely partly on platforms but also maintain independent client streams. A rating of four refers to high dependency as workers depend predominantly on platform(s) for consistent work. A rating of five signals that workers are entirely reliant on platform(s) for task allocation. It is important to note that as platform dependency increases, worker precarity also increases as their income generation depends solely on the platform(s) algorithms and terms. Gig work that involves a rating of 4 or 5 in platform

dependency indicates minimal control over pricing or work allocation. Gig work rated at 1 or 2 allows gig workers to negotiate rates and choose clients. Considering platform dependency as a parameter in the classification is essential as policy protections must be varied according to level of precarity. For instance, gig work with high platform dependency has consistently been shown to lack standard employment protections found in traditional roles (Pawar and Srivastava 2022, 94-99); (Vu and Nguyen 2024). Moreover, the greater platform dependency, the more endangered are gig workers reliant on such platforms if platform policy and algorithm changes or technological disturbances occur. Thus, classifying gig work by platform dependency enables policy makers to tailor regulations and skill development programs to the unique challenges faced by specific gig workers. This methodological contribution is presented as a heat map below.

Table 1 presents each gig work type with two numerical ratings, the first being skill level (1-3) and the second representing platform dependency (1-5). For instance:

Food Delivery Driver (1,5) - Low skill, high platform dependency.

Freelance Photography (3,2) - High skill, low platform dependency.

**Table 1: Platform Dependency and Skill Levels across Modern Gig Work**

		<b>PLATFORM DEPENDENCY (1-5)</b>				
		1	2	3	4	5
<b>SKILL LEVEL (1-3)</b>	1		Physical and freelance work (Movers, Cleaners)			Physical, Platform, and Task Based Work (Zomato Delivery Partner)
	2		Physical and freelance work (Home Repairs)		Digital, Platform, and Freelance (Basic Data Entry, CAPTCHA solver)	Physical, Platform, and Semi Contractual Work (Urban Company Cleaner)
	3		Physical or Digital and freelance work (Part-time Photography)		Digital, Platform, and Freelance (Online Tutor)	Digital, Platform and Semi-contractual, project based Work. (Software Developers, Copywriters)

**Table 2: DETAILED EXPLANATION OF THE CLASSIFICATION**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Example Roles</b>	<b>Nature of Work</b> (Medium of Service Provision)	<b>Skill Level</b> (1-3)	<b>Platform Dependency</b> (1-5)	<b>Contract Type</b>	<b>Example(s) of Associated Precarity</b>
<b>A.</b> <b>Physical – Platform – Task-based</b>	Swiggy/Zomato Delivery Partner	Physical	(1)	(5) Fully Dependent	Task-based	Income instability due to algorithmic control and vulnerability to technological disruptions.
<b>B.</b> <b>Physical – Platform – Semi-Contractual</b>	Urban Company Beautician, House Cleaning Staff	Physical	(2)	(5) Fully Dependent	Task based semi contractual work	Pressure to maintain high ratings or risk being blocked or suspended from the platform and need to upskill in fear of competitors and changing labour market demands.
<b>C.</b> <b>Physical - Platform</b>	Movers, Cleaners (Skill level 1)	Physical	(1-2) (1) Minimal	(2) May use platforms occasionally		Safety risks

<p>– <b>Semi-Contractual</b></p>	<p>Home Repairs/Electrician (Skill level 2)</p>		<p>prior training or education.  (2) Roles requiring vocational training and certification.</p>	<p>but predominantly rely on independent client acquisition.</p>		
<p><b>D. Digital</b> – <b>Platform</b> – <b>Freelance</b></p>	<p>Basic Data Entry (skill level 2) Chegg Tutor (skill level 3)</p>	<p>Digital</p>	<p>(2-3)  (2) Roles requiring vocational training and certification.  (3) Specialized professional roles mandating formal, and often advanced education.</p>	<p>(4) High dependency as workers depend predominantly on platform(s) for consistent work.</p>	<p>Task-based, Freelance</p>	<p>Unpredictable hour, high commission charged by platforms, stress due to constant digital monitoring, pressure to maintain high ratings.</p>

<p><b>E. Digital – Direct-to-Client – Freelance</b></p>	<p>Content Writers, Graphic Designers, AI Engineers, Freelance Coders, Blockchain Devs</p>	<p>Digital</p>	<p>(3) Specialized professional roles mandating formal, and often advanced education.</p>	<p>(5) Fully Dependent</p>	<p>Semi contractual Project Based</p>	<p>Income instability due to algorithmic control and vulnerability to technological disruptions,</p>
<p><b>F. Freelance work</b></p>	<p>Photography, graphic design, consulting that relies on independent client acquisition</p>		<p>(3) Specialized professional roles mandating formal, and often advanced education.</p>	<p>(2) May use platforms occasionally but predominantly rely on independent client acquisition.</p>	<p>Freelance Project Based</p>	<p>Isolation and stress, income instability, need to upskill in fear of competitors and changing labour market demands.</p>

As the table presented above depicts the precarity workers face as a result of platform dependency, ranked on a scale of 1-5 and their skill levels, ranked on a scale of 1-3. The table aims to illustrate the vast types of gig work and link skill level and platform dependency to identify the unique challenges gig workers might face and design tailored policy interventions. While precarity exists across all kinds of gig work (Pathiranage 2024, 2288), research shows that higher skill levels are correlated with higher payment and the autonomy to choose better gig work opportunities (Behera and Gaur 2022, 2838). This choice, that gig workers can make at a higher skill level is not always available at a lower skill level.

While this observation finds basis in literature, its application to policy making leaves much to be desired, especially in a country like India. However, Kerala’s Knowledge Economy Mission

(KKEM) stands out as an exceptional program that addresses this concern. The next section discusses the socio-economic indicators in the state of Kerala. It then discusses the KKEM and how it has and can help devise policy measures to upskill workers for improved labour market outcomes.

## **5. KERALA IN COMPARATIVE SOCIO-ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE**

Kerala has been known for consistently achieving exceptional social indicators, with near-universal literacy, historically high life expectancy of 75.2 years across urban and rural populations (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare 2020), and positive health outcomes that rival developed nations. With 95% of its urban and rural population being literate (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation 2024), Kerala is positioned as an exemplar of human development within the developing world context. (Many, n.d., 54) What stands out is that while educational attainment across all categories is higher in Kerala compared to the all-India average, the unemployment rates for these categories are also higher in Kerala. This suggests that higher educational attainment has not necessarily translated into better employment outcomes in the state as the state deals with concerns like unemployment of educated individuals and brain drain. The most recent PLFS report (2023-2024) highlighted that 29.9% of Kerala's 15-29 aged youth population is unemployed. The government of Kerala has thus emphasized the need for an increased focus on pivoting towards an upskilling and knowledge-based economy, as evident in the Budget Speech for 2021-22. The KKEM is a program established by the government of Kerala that aims to skill 60 lakh people in high end jobs (Kerala State Planning Board, Mehrotra, and Antony 2022) and provide gainful employment to 20 lakh individuals across a variety of industries and job areas in 5 years (2021-2026). (Kerala Development and Innovation Strategic Council (K-DISC), n.d.) The project was established in 2021 as a Kerala Development and Innovation Strategic Council (K-DISC) initiative. It aims to develop Kerala into a knowledge society and to achieve economic wellbeing including higher standards of living for its citizens. (Kerala Development and Innovation Strategic Council (K-DISC), n.d.) The program uses an online platform known as the Digital Workforce Management System (DWMS) that acts as a centralized platform connecting job seekers and employers. It offers services such as job matching, resume building, career counselling and more. (Kerala Development and Innovation Strategic Council (K-DISC), n.d.) The program offers a variety of courses from AI and cybersecurity to baking and hydroponic gardening. The program's cost varies considerably depending on the field of education, and includes some free courses, with courses like digital marketing starting from INR 1,500 and going up to INR 100,000 for a certificate in airport operations.

While KKEM provides a regional model to promote upskilling to deal with educated unemployment, upskilling holds greater relevance at a national scale as well. Gig workers in

India's platform economy are comparatively young, working for fewer hours a day on gig work, and typically have a low to middle level of education. For a majority of gig workers, income through gig work is not their primary source of income and they are often holding another regular job (Niti Aayog 2022, 12). Therefore, this favorable demographic structure of youth gig workers and the rapid dissemination of digital technologies position India favorably to adapt to the advent of the digitalized gig economy. (Niti Aayog 2022, v) Now that we have established the booming potential for gig work in India, we must consider the vital role upskilling plays amidst changing industrial demands.

Research proved that gig workers with access to skill development opportunities are better equipped to adapt to technological advancements, potentially due to enhanced training and exposure to relevant skills. (Maurya, n.d.). Indicating how upskilling can significantly enhance employability outcomes (Bhatt, Yadav, and Khan, n.d.) by eliminating some of the precarity associated with gig work. Thus, upskilling can be considered a solution to the structural unemployment arising out of the mismatch between labour skills and changing technical and technological demands across industries.

Upskilling is becoming increasingly significant given the threat that the advent of artificial intelligence and machine learning poses to the viability of many jobs, especially those performed by low to medium skilled workers (Nartey 2025). It also increases worker productivity and employment outcomes. Not only this but, upskilling promotes better gig work outcomes as it increases gig workers' earning potential by equipping them with in-demand skills that enable upward mobility and improved employability (Behera and Gaur 2022, 2839).

## **6. LEVERAGING LOCAL DEMOGRAPHICS FOR EFFECTIVE UPSKILLING: KKEM AS A MODEL FOR PRIVATE INVOLVEMENT IN STATE SKILLING PROGRAMS**

State run programs are advantageous as they target the demographics and conditions unique to the specific state, which national upskilling initiatives may not be fully able to capture. Consider Kerala's case for instance, the KKEM targets graduates of any discipline due to the 94.0 percent literacy (PLFS), rivalled only by 94.8 and 94.1 percent literacy in the union territory of Lakshadweep and the state of Nagaland respectively. Kerala's KKEM would not be suited in a state like Rajasthan, which has the lowest literacy rate in India at 65.8 percent and where approximately 20 lakh youth drop out of the formal general education streams between class Vth and XIth and 8 to 10 lakh more students drop out after completing class XIIth. (Government of Rajasthan 2024) In Rajasthan's case, as it should be, upskilling programs are focused on school dropouts.

The KKEM is an example of a successful public-private partnership, suited to Kerala's demographics. Under it, the various programmes and courses offered are operated by more than 90 private entities known as "skill partners", who deliver the program and provide course certification (Kerala Development and Innovation Strategic Council (K-DISC), n.d.). This includes the involvement of start-up accelerators and other private partners as KKEM encourages linkages between higher education institutions and private industries. This ensures that the training provided is aligned with dynamic industry requirements. KKEM allows private enterprises that operate skilling courses to gain access to a diverse pool of aspirants through the digital workforce management system (DWMS) as the platform brings together lakhs of educated unemployed youth seeking upskilling and career growth. Its partnership opportunities allow private training facilitators to join KKEM's training network, which elevates their visibility and credibility within the state ecosystem. (Kerala Development and Innovation Strategic Council 2022, 2-3)

Schemes like KKEM that are directly linked to job placements and internships increase the attractiveness of skilling courses among the masses. Missions like KKEM act as a bridge between 7500+ private organizations, 1,800,000 job-seekers, industry demands, and government resources (Kerala Development and Innovation Strategic Council (K-DISC), n.d.). This collaboration enables private operators to expand their scale, relevance and financial stability whilst contributing to the government's efforts of improved employment and economic development in the state.

## **7. STATE VS PRIVATE UPSKILLING: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF GREYBEEZ'S ASSISTED MIGRATION IN APPAREL SECTOR VS GOVERNMENT OF INDIA'S SAMARTH PROGRAM**

While it is agreed that state run upskilling programs have a greater potential to be effective as they target state specific demographics and issues, the efficacy of privately organized upskilling programs also comes to mind. One such program is the GreyBeez AMAS Program<sup>2</sup> - Assisted Migration in Apparel Sector program. AMAS is a privately run, field-rooted initiative designed to empower young, often first-time migrant workers from underserved regions like Bihar and Jharkhand with the skills, confidence, and pathways needed to build careers in India's rapidly growing garment sector. It offers hands-on entry-level training to rural youth for the apparel

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<sup>2</sup> This part of the study is also referenced in an independent audit report for the Greybeez's AMAS program, where the author evaluated AMAS program's outcomes against the Ministry of Textiles' Samarth framework, assessing placement rates, training quality, retention, socio-economic impact, and feedback systems. It identified key strengths such as high employment and rights awareness, alongside concerns like low retention, lack of standardized certification, and weak grievance mechanisms.

industry, conducted over a 12-day period. A comparative analysis was conducted with the SAMARTH (Scheme for Capacity Building in Textile Sector (SCBTS)) using surveys with 94 respondents including trainees aged 15-38, counsellors and instructors.

The SAMARTH scheme, implemented by the Ministry of Textile, aims to act as a demand-driven, placement-oriented skilling programme to supplement efforts in creating jobs in the organized textile industry which currently contributes 12% to India's total exports and is projected to reach a market size of US\$ 350 billion by 2030. (Ministry of Commerce & Industry 2025) The scheme had a target of training 10 lakh persons over a period of 3 years, from 2017-2020. (Scheme for Capacity Building in Textile Sector, Ministry of Textiles, Government of India, n.d.)

With its emphasis on short-term, migration-linked training for rural youth, especially women, the AMAS program stood out as an exemplar of skilling programs, evidenced by 96% job placement rates and a 93% trainee satisfaction rate. While the AMAS program lacks National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF) alignment, it goes beyond SAMARTH's typical mobilization procedures as 99% of respondents received counselling: the program's counselors work with 50-100 potential applicants every month, which helped them comprehend employment expectations, acquire confidence, and obtain family support. Most trainees also received soft skills training and became more aware of their worker rights, which improved their readiness for urban settings.

The AMAS program leverages several communication channels to mobilize potential trainees in rural areas, including social media, village meetings, banners, local media, print media, radio, television, and word of mouth. An extension of this case would be to consider franchising out the operation of national upskilling programs for statewide implementation as a solution to the burden on the government for the enforcement of such policies. It is worthwhile to note that the government must drive the ideation and enforcement of such programs as the private sector does not have a significant incentive to contribute to such programs as the direct returns associated are long term and minimal for them.

## **8. CONCLUSION**

The literature review identified a lack of definitional consensus, which exacerbates the existing gap in data collection on the gig economy, creating a ripple effect as it complicates addressing problems arising from it (Aranguiz 2023, 296). As discussed in the introduction, the research set out to attain definitional clarity regarding the scope and characteristics of gig work, evaluate the role played by upskilling in enabling better employment outcomes within the gig economy and assess the effectiveness of existing labour laws and digital employment missions, particularly the KKEM, in addressing the vulnerabilities of gig workers.

To this end, the first part of the research synthesized existing definitions of gig work. Keeping the various characteristics of gig work in mind, as indicated by the Niti Aayog report, the research found and presented a definition that best expresses its nature. While the definitional aspect is a methodological contribution, the literature review identified that there was more to be done when it comes to gig work classification, so the author formulated a classification on the basis of platform dependency and skill level, the latter being a factor that is influencing the kind of gig roles available in India (Niti Aayog 2022, 20).

The classification helps to understand that higher skill levels face less work precarity as they are able to report increased earnings and flexibility (Javokhir et al. 2025, 504). The classification also enables us to identify the unique challenges that stem from platform dependency to better inform platform regulations and the design of national upskilling programs.

The research then ventures into the discussion of Kerala's KKEM. The mission offers over 700+ skill programs for over 18+ lakh registered individuals, partnering with over 90+ private skill partners to facilitate the same (Kerala Development and Innovation Strategic Council (K-DISC), n.d.). It targets individuals with a graduate level of education: these are individuals that require upskilling to obtain better gig work or avenues for entry into formal employment as well (Behera and Gaur 2022, 2839). The literature review highlights an anomaly in Kerala: high literacy rates and socio-economic indicators have not translated into proportionate employment gains. This has resulted in unique trends of rampant uneducated unemployment (citation) and migration, leading to brain drain (citation). Amidst these unique challenges, KKEM stands out not just as an upskilling program but as a subtle intervention in the mindset of Kerala's youth as it redirects them from seeking overseas jobs towards private sector and gig work pathways that better reflect the dynamic labour market. Its digital platform and public-private partnership driven approach stands out as a unique tool in implementing the same. The analysis further addresses how public and private programs are complementary but distinct means to address employability and worker relevance amidst changing skill-demands. AMAS leverages grassroots mobilization and focused training sessions to empower marginalized rural youth for work in the garment sector. This comparison highlights how franchising out the facilitation of upskilling programs can ensure that they are effective and reduce the burden on governments.

## **9. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE WORK**

The classification of gig work presented in the paper is not absolute, it only aims to categorize the major kinds of modern gig work to discern challenges that may stem from platform dependency and/or skill levels. Hence, the classification should only be used to understand the unique problems certain gig workers might face.

In this study, the initial object was to conduct a meta-analysis to explore the role of upskilling in enabling better employment outcomes within the gig economy. But the major challenge was the lack of data on upskilling outcomes in India. The scope for quantitative analysis on this matter thus becomes limited as there is a lack of data when it comes to upskilling for gig workers in India.

Moreover, this research evaluates the KKEM as an exemplary initiative in promoting upskilling and facilitating public private partnerships in the state. It is important to note that the state of Kerala on average performs better than most other Indian states in socio-economic indicators. Therefore, the efficacy of a similar program in other states depends not only on its implementation but also the modifications to suit the specialized demographic needs of the state.

These limitations highlight the work that needs to be done for gig work in the future. Scope for future research includes quantitative estimation of gig work on the basis of the definition and classification presented herein. This will be even more convenient to conduct when data on efficacy of government run schemes is released consistently and transparently.

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