



# Digital Democracy vs Invisible Oppressions of Platform Partners: Critical Understanding of Platform Economy in the Regime of Digital India

Dipika Nath 

Centre for Political Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India

## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the emerging challenges of the digitalized economy with specific reference to ride-hailing and food delivery platform workers in India. It critically analyses the oppressive nature of the platform economy through the lens of worker rights, highlighting how algorithmic control, employment informality, and the absence of social and legal protection shape workers' everyday experiences. A significant concern addressed in the study is the growing participation of youth in precarious platform work, often at the cost of discontinuing formal education. This trend raises serious long-term implications, including potential skilled labour shortages and increased workforce vulnerability. The paper therefore emphasizes the importance of understanding both the perspectives of young platform workers and the role of the state in regulating platform-based economy. It further interrogates the notion of "digital democracy," arguing that while platform capitalism promotes economic growth and technological inclusion, it simultaneously fails to ensure democratic rights of the workers. This contradiction is examined through a critical analysis of the Social Security Code and its provisions for platform workers. Methodologically, the study adopts a focused group interviews method, content analysis, and participants observation method. Fieldwork was conducted among the workers of ride-hailing and food delivery platforms in Kolkata, West Bengal and in South Delhi. By foregrounding workers lived experiences, the paper contributes to ongoing debates on platform workers, youth employment, and the limitations of welfare provisions of workers in the digital economy.

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**Keywords**

digital democracy; Digital India; food delivery platform; invisible oppressions; ride-hailing platform; Social Security Code; workers' rights

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**INTRODUCTION**

Artificial Intelligence has initiated a rapid change in the Indian labour market. Since mid-21<sup>st</sup> century a new concept of 'platform economy' evolved based on technology for managerial and non-managerial task (Laskar, 2023; Sindakis & Showkat, 2024). This ecosystem invents a new method to regulate the behaviour of human beings. The advance technology helps to modernize the entire structure of the society as 'computational algorithms' monitor every action of consumer and the workers. The aspirational middle-class find happiness from quick delivery system on their door step, the ecosystem makes their live easier. Now they have more time and patience for their corporate work, which helps capitalism to grow in a tremendous manner. The other side of modernity is that, it always comes with some negative consequences that impacts mainly the historically suppressed marginalized people who are semi-skilled rural masses, urban poor, and women (Damioli et al., 2021; Frank et al., 2019; Shen & Zhang, 2024).

Surprisingly, not only India but across the globe people are exaggerating that technological advancement empowers the masses and democratize every aspect of their life. The mission 'Digital India' launched in 2015 aims to build a society where people can adopt the knowledge of technological usages and led India toward SMART<sup>1</sup> governance (Dhal, 2020; Sindakis & Showkat, 2024; Singh & Bhardwaj, 2025; Singh & Kumar, 2025). The 'platform economy' operates based on online applications such as Amazon, Netflix, YouTube, Swiggy Instamart, and Zepto. They run their businesses on an application, which also called 'app-based' economy (Hein et al., 2020; Täuscher & Laudien, 2018; Van Der Aalst et al., 2019). For this study five platforms; Uber, Yatri Sathi, Zomato, Blinkit, and Urban Company were taken into consideration which dominate the Indian market. The digital economy is an informal one recognized under unorganized sector in India. To understand the emergence of this new economic model it is important to go back in 1970s.

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<sup>1</sup> SMART- Simple, Moral, Accountable, Responsive, and Transparent Governance.

The shifting of economic model from Fordism to Post Fordism introduced the process of accumulation with flexibility. By following the rules of Taylorism in the post-World War II period, production system was characterized by mass production with standardized task (Cole, 2023; Fuchs, 2020; Vidal, 2019). But this rigid standardization model could not meet the market demands on time and served consumer preference. Meanwhile, in 1973 the oil shock entirely destroyed the utopian concept of Smith's (1776) invisible hands of market to resolve all problems single handedly. The well-known British-American academician David Harvey in his book titled "The Condition of Postmodernity" thoroughly discussed the transition process from Fordist to Post Fordist neoliberal regime. Where he introduced the concept of 'flexibility accumulation' (Harvey, 1989). The Post Fordist model of economy came up with the new ideas of flexibility, decentralization of supply-chains, and use of technology to deliver the services on demand and as quickly as possible. After 2000 the advance artificial technology helps to boom this economy in a larger scale.

This is the brief overview of how the platform economy came up into limelight, transforming the entire concept of market by diversifying the process of generating values. Primarily to understand this transformation one must look into the functional aspects of matrix behind creating values. This entire platform business model runs with network effects (Nath, 2025) where an online platform like Uber, Zomato, and Urban Company interact with service providers, customers, and the person who is going to deliver the finished products door to door. The entire ecosystem shaped by information and communication technology forms a network society (Castells, 2000; Sarkar, 2023) where the dominant platforms establish monopoly by overthrowing the traditional hierarchical industrial model. This diversification of supply-chains helps reduce the extra burdens on platforms to buy raw materials, cost of production and labour cost etc. Therefore, this system is more cost-effective compared to the traditional model. The fourth industrial revolution was a giant leap forward according to industrial expert and researcher Sangeet Paul Choudary, because it digitalized every possible object that interact with human beings. Platforms use this technology in media industry, telecommunication, and in the field of auto-mobiles. Now, a car is not just a luxurious object for a middle-class but digitalization of car in terms of installation of tablets, GPS connector (Choudary, 2016) influences the market and create more job opportunities. These platform economy produces a common sense of win-win approach by defining their workforce as a partner. But the reality is different.

Someone can understand the nuances with the help of Foucauldian concept of power/knowledge (Foucault, 1980). Some relevant questions that need to be critically think before praise such as who are the partners of these platforms? How it creates money? And why some platforms hold monopoly? The actual game of these platforms

is played in an enclosed dark space where half of the functions have been done already by setting computational algorithms (Norozpour & Safaei, 2020; O'Connor, 1999). It automatically collects the user data to segregate who are their consumers, whose body is more fit to do the non-managerial work on the behalf of the platforms. The platform adopts the knowledge of how to run online business and how to manipulate consumer minds through everyday implantation of ideas like how to live a standard life, how and what to eat, how to dress, what to dress etc (Bajwa et al., 2018; Muldoon & Raekstad, 2023). In the case of workers, this is not a field without any competition, not a democratic space without job criteria, not a flexible zone to participate. They are under continuous surveillance of algorithm (Srnicek, 2017) which is the main decision maker of hiring and firing.

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND RESEARCH GAP

The economic model based on online platform is a contemporary 21<sup>st</sup> century phenomenon. Platform economy comes under multi-disciplinary subject and fascinates academicians and researcher to develop a nuanced understanding. Many books and articles were published covering various aspects. For example, recently published edited book titled "Migrant Labour in the Gig Economy: The Intersection of Migrant Labor, Platform Capitalism, and Resistance" edited by Della Puppa et al. (2025) specifically highlighted the problems of migrant platform workers in Greek, Portugal, China, and India. Extensively covered the problem of precarity, vulnerability, transversal unionism, and the consequences of neoliberalism. Another book by Ness et al. (2022) titled "The Routledge Handbook of the Gig Economy", 2023 opened up new approaches to look up 'gig economy'. Gig economy is a larger aspect of platform economy, which include freelancer, app developer and some other profession in its ambit. The book explains the conceptual and theoretical background of gig economy and in the later chapters discussed the regional dynamics, including Indian market as a case study.

Two important books of Ghosh (2020) and Woodcock (2021) elaborated on the discussion of Indian labour market and the impact of platform economy in it. For example, Woodcock mentioned about India, which has quite a few labour laws, but those laws are not implemented properly. He said India also has federations like 'The Indian Federation of App-based Transport Workers (IFAT)' which helps workers to raise their demands. On the other hand, Ghosh said about the Indian states; Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Telangana, and Andhra Pradesh, which played a major role behind the growth of platform economy. He considered these workers as blue-collar workers. Report of NITI Aayog stated that central and state governments should adopt a five-pronged approach that is 'RAISE', 'Recognise', 'Allow', 'Incorporate', 'Support', and

‘Ensure’ in favour of platform workers. It also gave recommendations to the virtual platforms to provide safeguards for workers social security and give extra opportunities so that women and persons with disability can also participate in that sector. Some literature helped this study to build a strong theoretical framework is Foucault’s idea of biopolitics and Scott’s concept of everyday resistance.

The available literatures on platform economy lacks the discussion of multi-platform work process in the form of resistance, language-based discrimination, youth exploitation, hidden provisions within platform document, and the ongoing debate of Social Security Code. This study is going to help the readers to understand this new aspect deeply which open up future research dimensions.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODS

Main research questions which have been taken into consideration were;

1. How has techno-capitalism reshaped the Indian market in the context of the platform economy?
2. How are the virtual platform workers being socially and economically exploited in this new pattern of the platform economy?
3. How Social Security Code creates paradox in its provisions?

Mainly, five methods have been used to analyze the above questions: the structured survey, focus group discussion, interview methods, participant observation, and content analysis method. Here convenient and snowball sampling methods have been also used. The fieldwork was conducted among the app-based workers of food-delivery and ride-hailing platforms such as Uber, Yatri Sathi, Zomato, Blinkit, and Urban Company. The participants are selected from tier one cities of India; South Delhi and Kolkata. The quantitative approach used to understand the lived experience and everyday vulnerabilities of workers. The content analysis method of ‘Terms and Conditions’ of Zomato Drivers app helped to know the hidden governance mechanism within this popular platform those are majorly invisible. This method also helped to understand the legal paradox within Social Security Code.

The participants are working in these two capital regions. But most of them actually belong from neighbouring states e.g. Bihar, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha and from some others states as well. Total sample size was 125. Simple random sampling method was used to segregate the workers based on homogenous platforms. Twenty-five participants were selected from five platforms. Focus group discussion consist of five workers, two groups for each platform. The data collection methods started from June 2025 till Mid of January 2026. To simplify the understanding of workers background and gender identity tables were provides below.

Nominal scale helped to segregate the data on the basis of gender, caste, and place of residence.

**Table 1**

*Participants Based on Gender*

Name of the Platforms	Male	Female
Uber	21	4
Yatri Sathi	25	0
Zomato	22	3
Blinkit	25	0
Urban Company	16	9
Total Number of Participants	109	16

Source: Primary data.

**Table 2**

*Participants Based on Caste/Class*

Name of the Platforms	Scheduled Caste (SCs)	Scheduled Tribe (STs)	Other Backward Class (OBCs)	Unreserved Category
Uber	17	3	3	2
Yatri Sathi	19	2	3	1
Zomato	16	2	4	3
Blinkit	17	1	5	2
Urban Company	10	1	12	2
Total Number	79	9	27	10

Source: Primary data.

**Table 3**

*Participants Based on Place of Residence/Working*

Name of the Platforms	South Delhi	Kolkata
Uber	13	12
Yatri Sathi	0	25
Zomato	14	11
Blinkit	17	8
Urban Company	19	6
Total Number	63	62

Source: Primary data.

Using Ordinal scale data related to the educational qualifications of workers were collected.

**Table 4***Participants Based on Educational Qualification*

<b>Name of the Platforms</b>	<b>Primary Level</b>	<b>Secondary Level</b>	<b>Higher Secondary Level</b>	<b>Graduate Level</b>	<b>Postgraduate Level</b>
Uber	2	9	10	3	1
Yatri Sathi	12	9	3	1	0
Zomato	2	8	10	4	1
Blinkit	4	2	11	6	2
Urban Company	1	8	12	3	1
Total Number	21	36	46	17	5

Source: Primary data.

These data were collected through open and close ended questions during interview and focused group discussion. The data was thoroughly discussed in the part of analysis. Other than these methods, data was also collected from secondary sources e.g. books, journals, articles, and newspaper. The data was collected with the consents of the respondents. In this study it is being taken care that respondent identity is not revealed.

## FINDINGS

Capitalism is the reality of today's globalized world. It cannot be ignored or erased by any other alternatives. We live in a digital society where everything comes before our hands within a minute. In the same manner capitalism tries to serve consumers preferences by following the rules of quick service delivery. No doubt that the rich and upper-middle class consumers are happily getting those services but a section specifically the marginalized one faces a deep-rooted vulnerability which is invisible, unrecognisable, and undemocratic. Oppressions mentioned below are going to be eye opening for the masses, civil society, and for the oppressed working class who have not yet realized the forms of oppression. First research question about platform economy was already discussed in the introductory part. In the findings the other two questions related to the forms of oppression and the paradox of Social Security Code were discussed with the help of fieldwork data.

### Exploitation of Youth

Like the other countries India has hierarchical structure and it is important to understand that who are the targeted ones in this platform economy. It is obvious that the economically uplift person does not prefer to do this precarious work. Mostly the marginalized groups who belong to the lowest ladder choose to do this work, without having alternatives. Their marginalization is not only socio-economic and political but also geographical. Most of the workers are migrants, coming from rural areas to tier one



and tier two cities like Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, Hyderabad and other places. The fieldwork data showed that more than 83 percent of workers in these platforms are India's young minds, between 18 to 25 age group. The respondents who are working full time were said that "the platforms set their algorithm in a way that it recognizes the age from the uploaded IDs like Aadhar Card and pay more amount to the young people who have the courage and energy to invest their labour in this work". The young workers said that "they joined Zomato or Blinkit because their family's economic condition is not so good, they have to support their family and to earn some pocket money as well", sometimes in this early age they take the responsibilities of their families while balancing their studies.

Their opinion seems to be on the positive side of platform economy which helps the youth to earn but we cannot ignore the vulnerabilities of this sector. The economic system has been creating a mire from which people cannot stay out. It generates an economic greed, and as it does not ask for educational qualifications people think that it is the easiest way to earn money with flexibility. Beside the pull factor of flexibility, structural problems like unemployment and underemployment force individual to work in platforms (Bajwa et al, 2018). In the long-term this process decreases the capability of having a standard life. Historically, marginal sections are deprived from their basic rights and currently they are also being deskilled to serve for the middle class. Data represent 92 percent people working in this sector who belong from SCs, STs, and OBC. They do not get the opportunity to skill themselves with the requirements of the market.

### **Exclusionary Nature of Platform Economy**

The platform economy claim that it promotes inclusivity. In practical sense this inclusivity excludes a large part of the society. It does not provide the satisfy working conditions for women. Therefore, the participation of women in this workforce is more or less than 13 percent. Raman et al. (2023) conducted a case study in India, where they emphasized women's participation rate in the platform economy. According to them India's position is vulnerable compared to all other countries in the world of hiring women in this informal sector. The findings of their research stated that the women in this sector do not want to participate as blue-collar workers; they want to be joined as white-collar workers or as an entrepreneur. The reasons behind not engaging in this sector are lack of education, skill, resources, family support and awareness. Neither the platforms nor the state provides resources and ensure safety and security so that the women can join in this economy system without hesitation and fear. This is the harsh reality of this platform economy. The respondents were also saying that "it is difficult for them to work in this male-dominated sector where the other male workers are always staring and making them feel uncomfortable". Another female respondent of Zomato



said that “the company cannot provide them enough delivery and they cannot get incentives as well. Other social barriers also restrict them to work as a ‘delivery girl’. My life became complex to work outside and take care of my family”.

Most of the female choose to do this because of flexibility so that they can equally manage their care work. But women’s body cannot do this kind of work for 12–15 hours to earn money. It is not an easy task to drive in any weather condition. People work at night to get the incentives but for women there remains a safety concern, which does not bother to the platforms and the government. They have not taken any measure yet to safeguard the women in this economy. Therefore, most of the women do not prefer to work here. Other problems are also existed which restrict women to enter in this workforce. Those points are discussed below.

### **Lack of Alternative Workforce**

The system to deliver order and earn money operates without office and ten to five office hours. There is no option of shifting duties like the other sectors. A thousand of workers working more or less same time in a day. This is the ‘rule of flexibility’. Moreover, it sounds well but need much focus to understand the problems. Besides the problems of having fixed hours, it has some positive sides as well. The lower middle class and poor do not have much aspirations. Earlier they lived happily with their small business-like farming, handicrafts etc. But big companies use the method of ‘data capitalism’ to manipulate the consumer minds to know their preferences and makes the finished products to fulfil their needs. Instead of any specific class all started desiring for a better life at any cost to get satisfiable end result. Therefore, here the end result creates eudaimonia/happiness for the people not the process. The platform economy tries to create alienated working class who put their labours for incentives without questioning or demanding anything. Since mid-21<sup>st</sup> century platform economy is smoothly run by making this false desire. The economy does not think to create an alternatives workforce who can serves in the alternative time. This workforce can help the other worker to take rest, have food on proper time. But without having this all workers are suffering from fatigue, major health problems in the longer time, this is the response of the workers. During the focus group discussion workers stated that “platforms and government do not recognize them as human, they push them toward death, in Delhi where AQI is 198 to 230 we are working in the roads and expose to the pollution every second”. Capitalist does not think about the alternative force because it requires extra money to maintain, they have to cut short the money from their surplus values, they are not ready to do that and the state act as a mere spectator.

## Platforms with No Risk

The other way to look at the forms of oppression is changing pattern of ownership of the means of production. Traditionally the workers used to only have their labour and by selling industries generate values. But, now entire concept of worker has been thoroughly changed. In the platform economy the first criteria to become their partners is to have a commercial motorbike or bicycle, four-wheeler, auto rickshaw, mini-trucks for package delivery, mobile phone with internet connection, driving licence, and Aadhar Card/Pan Card. The platform economy runs digitally and connects service provider and the customers. The workers take all the risk for getting these casual works. Firstly, the workers must buy a vehicle whether it will be a bike or a car and they should timely pay the EMI, daily expenses like petrol, other services if needed, yearly pay for the insurance, fitness certificate etc. The platforms do not take any risk of the workers or the instruments which are necessary to run this growing economy. Not only that some platforms charge onboarding fee like Zomato charges 1,799 rupees just to provide a t-shirt and a bag<sup>2</sup>. Srnicek (2017) has rightly pointed out in his book "Platform Capitalism" that the platforms like Uber uses a business model designed to "externalize risk," meaning they shift financial and operational risks away from themselves and onto their workers. This data helps us to understand the recruitment criteria of workers by the platforms. It is important to know because the platforms claim that there are no specific job criteria for the workers and they can easily get into it and earn 35,000 to 50,000 per month.<sup>3</sup>

The other way to understand the oppressions of the rental companies, providing vehicles on rent. Companies like Mallik Travel based in Daryaganj, old Delhi charges 500 per day for e-vehicles and 300 for normal bike and scotty. Gobikes charges 3,000 to 7,000 per month for renting a scotty with imposing the limits on kilo meters. Like if a person rented a scotty in 4,449 rupees, he/she must maintain 1,500 kilometres limit. The other transport companies locating in Delhi which do the same thing are Yulu for e-bikes and cycles, Zypp provides e-bikes, scooters etc.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, for certain section of people it is difficult to purchase a vehicle too. The respondents were saying that "they do not have enough earnings to pay the EMIs or interest rates for loans then they prefer renting but these intermediary companies also exploit them with high charges and sometimes by taking extra charges in the form of insurance, licencing, vehicle maintenance charge etc".

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<sup>2</sup> All this information collected from Zomato Delivery App and the Uber Drivers App.

<sup>3</sup> Data collected from platforms advertisement on their application and on the other platforms like YouTube, Facebook etc.

<sup>4</sup> This information is very much reliable because it collected from the company's official websites and verified by in person visit to their stores in Delhi.

### **Mechanism of Surge Price**

The precarity of this economy is uncountable. Another way to oppress the workers is the surge price. Basically, it means takes extra charges from the customers in the unfavourable weather condition like rain. The economy is completely dependent upon the demand and supply of the market. The market demand is also regulated by the weather conditions because the functioning of this sector is not limited within the four walls of a room or just the managerial computational functions operated in limited space but the maximum process of generating finance and surplus values functions in the roads. Therefore, the weather must also be taken in mind. In all seasons the consumers demand is high in this sector but in the rainy season sometimes demands are fluctuating. In these unhealthy circumstances workers serve the consumers. These customers can afford to take all the services like food or salon in their home. Meanwhile, the workers face difficulties of the unfavourable weather condition such as extreme summer, winter or in rainy seasons. Just by providing the extra money does not secure the life threat of a person. Workers said during the focus group discussion that “platforms like Uber gives three to five rupees extra per kilo meter in the rainy season and in normal time they get 12-13 rupees per kilo meter”. They do not come under social security benefits because they do not recognize as an ‘workers’ in the unorganized sectors. Here comes the oppression not just making by the capitalist but by the so-called welfare state by not providing basic rights of livelihood and security for them.

### **Hidden provision within ‘Terms & Condition’**

The Terms and condition of Zomato Delivery Partner App is completely written in English approximately in 4,849 words. The delivery partners mostly belong from marginalized section. They struggle for having minimum standards of life in any means. Formal education did not reach to their doors to educate them in a foreign language and they do not have leisure time and patience to carefully read and understand the terms and conditions in English, which are one of the major instruments of exploitation in this digitalized work space. Firstly, to log in, a desired person must upload either Aadhar Card or Pan Card for verification but it is clearly mentioned in the provision that the company does not ensure the protection of these documents, it is the sole responsibility of that person. But we have to understand that a lay men cannot protect their uploaded documents and thus state or any other agencies can use the documents for any purpose. By selling this data to the public and private firms the big companies earn capital ([Wang & Li, 2017](#)).

To define the relationship of the parties it is mentioned within this document that “The Parties to this Agreement are independent persons/entities and nothing in this Agreement shall make them joint ventures, partners, employees, agents or other

representatives of the other Party hereto and neither Party shall make any representation that suggest otherwise”, on the other hand platforms call workers as their partners, which does not make any sense. It also mentioned that “The Company will try to maintain Service uptime to the highest level possible”, but the workers are protesting against it for not getting enough bookings because the platform itself says that “it recruits thousands of workers in a month”. Lastly, these terms and conditions have been changing time to time according to the company preferences and it is the responsibility of the workers to update themselves. Workers said that “we prefer to log in because there are no such job criteria that the other sectors have like specific educational qualifications and they do not have other options to do. We realize that this job is not suitable for us, but we have to do it to take care of our families”.

### **Discrimination by Standardizing the Dominant Language**

To analyze the hidden provisions the content analysis method has been used. The data collected from two different platforms; Uber and Zomato. As we know that Uber is a ride-hailing platform and Zomato is a food delivery platform the functions of both these apps are different but the working nature is similar. These platforms claim that their services do not provide any discrimination rather it promotes inclusion, flexibility, and it reaches from Jammu and Kashmir to Andaman and Nicobar Island, but it excluded certain section of the people who do not understand and speak the dominant languages. In case of Uber Driver App, it just provides seven languages; English, Hindi, Bangla, Marathi, Kannada, Tamil, and Telugu for the convenience of the workers. Zomato has provided only eight options for languages. Surprisingly these platforms have been operated 2010 onwards in India but did not bother to add the other languages which together promote the diversity of India. It clearly express that the platform economy is not inclusionary at all. Zomato do better compared to Uber because it introduces audio-visual method in eight languages which explains the process of log in easily. That can guide a delivery boy but Uber, the largest ride-hailing US based company only rely on visual method<sup>5</sup>. The snowball sampling helped to reach a worker who is visually impaired but working in Zomato more than one year because this platform helps him through audio method. In this case Zomato is more inclusive than the Uber.

### **Effects of Layoffs in Platform Economy**

As of now we are discussing about who are the majority participants in this informal sector. Now, the discussion would lead to another dimension. After the Covid 19

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<sup>5</sup> All this information of ‘Terms & Conditions’ and about language were collected from reliable source of Uber Drivers App and Zomato Delivery App using Content analysis method. The opinions of the respondents were consolidated during interview.

pandemic people were facing job losses because India's economy at that time had slowed down, small and large factories were closed. In the meantime, artificial intelligence came into picture and snatched the jobs from IT professional, and engineers. They were replaced by the life-less machines. These sudden layoffs have created a fear psychosis among the professional. Companies have started believing in artificial intelligence rather than the human intelligence. As a result, a large number of professionals have no options to choose but to do this unreliable work. This problem is still continuing. During the data collection period more than 15 percent workers said that before Covid they were working in private companies. The main problem is that they had a status in the society, lived a standard life style but this sudden change makes them hesitate to identify themselves as a delivery boy or a driver.

They sometimes prefer to hide their working identity from the society to maintain their established status. They are the most unsatisfied workers in this economy because they cannot easily associate them with the other workers. They feel alienated from the working process, from the other workers, the society, and from themselves (Marx, 1844). But they said that "we do not get relieved by the layoffs, now we are facing random job losses because our body capacity to work is less than the other workers. We used to work in a comfortable place but now we are working on roads with too many problems. Our less productivity became a reason for not getting sufficient delivery or bookings".

### **Recent Agitations by the Platform Workers**

The India Constitution ensures the basic rights of a human being as a fundamental one. Right to equality, freedom against exploitation have been mentioned in article 14 to 24 as a justiciable right to safeguard human dignity. Likewise, the Directive Principles of the State Policy (DPSP) aims to establish a democratic-socialist state by providing socio-economic justice. Within the division of socialistic principles in DPSP clearly mentioned that it is the sole responsibility of a welfare state to minimize the income inequality, ensure equal pay for equal works, adequate means of livelihood and many more (Laxmikanth, 2025). These provisions indirectly indicate the importance of right to work to live a dignified life. Unfortunately, after the 79 years of independence India have not completely achieved these desires. The aim of 'Viksit Bharat 2047' can achieve the economic growth but may lack behind the human development. This is not an argument of an individual or an oppressed worker but all over the country it became a crucial discussion point on 26<sup>th</sup> November, and 31<sup>st</sup> December last year after the implementation of four labour codes on 21 November 2025. More than ten central trade unions; INTUC, AITUC, HMS, CITU, AITUC, TUCC, SEWA, AICCTU, LPF, and UTUC<sup>6</sup> jointly called

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<sup>6</sup> INTUC- The Indian National Trade Union Congress  
AITUC- All India Trade Union Congress

strong condemnation against these labour codes. On 31<sup>st</sup> December, on the New Year Eve when all markets were in high demand the platform workers called for a nationwide strike. At Jantar Mantar, Delhi, some pockets in Tollygunge at Kolkata, and in Telangana, the delivery boys of Blinkit, Zepto, and Swiggy ([Inamdar, 2026](#)) protesting against the draconian ten-minutes delivery target and for safety, health insurance, minimum wages etc. Trade unions were saying that “neoliberal-authoritarianism regime take the country back to the exploitative era of master-servant relationship”. Also saying that “the codes as genocidal attacks on the lives and livelihoods of workers seeking to impose virtual slavery and snatching away every right and entitlements of the workers”. The codes have tried to control the power of the trade unions as well.<sup>7</sup>

This neoliberal economy individualized workers so that they cannot collectively protest against the undemocratic nature of work. The platform workers are sporadic and they do not have a particular space and time to establish human relations. The algorithms try to make robots who do not have any connection with the other workers. Earlier drivers had a particular stand to park their vehicles and had the power of negotiation with the customers. They were able to form the unions where their demands were raised and mitigated. But by the introduction of platform economy the entire concept of space has been diluted mindfully. They are becoming like a Taylor’s ([1911](#)) scientific men who have just become an instrument of production.

In India the number of agitations, strikes, protects by the platform labours are limited in a large scenario. But they do resist in the way of everyday resistance. This can be understood from Scott’s ([2008](#)) “Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance”. The platforms produce false believes among the masses by releasing the adds like income up to 50,000 thousand per month in flexible time. In reality no one can earn that much, many of them were saying that “they choose to do this work because of not having any alternatives, if they get a dignified work, they will not do this anymore”. Protest against the platforms is not an easy task for the poorer one. Once they did it, their IDs has been blocked. In the recent agitation a delivery executive was saying that “On December 25, we held a strike near Sarjapur to oppose such exploitative practices

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HMS- Hind Mazdoor Sabha

CITU- Centre of Indian Trade Union

AITUC- All India Trade Union Congress

TUCC- Trade Union Co-ordination Centre

SEWA- Self-Employed Women’s Association

AICCTU- All India Central Council of Trade Union

LPF- Labour Progressive Federation

UTUC- United Trade Union Congress

<sup>7</sup> All this information collected from press release by Central Trade Unions and other sources like newspaper.

of aggregator companies. Now, the IDs of around 20 members, including mine, have been blocked". Platform called them 'strike enabler' or 'miscreants' ([Elizabeth, 2025](#)). They sometimes fear to be courageous. That does not mean they do not express their frustration. The workers know that they cannot earn enough money if they stick to a particular platform. They use more than two platforms simultaneously. It is a form of resistance to not depend upon a platform and help the crony capitalist to grow by selling their labour.

### **Paradox of Social Security Code 2020**

The Social Security Code 2020 define their working patterns of the platforms economy on section 2 (60) of the code, "Platform work to mean a work arrangement outside of a traditional employer-employee relationship in which organizations or individuals use an online platform to access other organizations or individuals to solve specific problems or to provide specific services or any such other activities which may be notified by the Central Government, in exchange for payment" ([Government of India, 2020](#)), paradox lies in this definition, it started by mentioning them as 'platform workers' but without recognizing them as a 'worker' in the definition. The problem of not being defined as workers is that they are excluded from the facilities a worker gets like the minimum wage, health security, benefits of Provident fund, gratuity etc. ([Ghosh, 2020](#)). Therefore, it is not surprising that the physical pain simultaneously creates mental trauma for the workers of not having any welfare benefits from the platform and their own state where they are the citizen. They elect their representative to serve their demands but unfortunately the politicians become the representative of the capitalist.

The New Labour Code combining of four labour laws; Code on Wages (2019), Code on Social Security (2020), Industrial Relations Code (2020), and Occupational Safety, Health and Working Condition (2020) came into effect on 21 November 2025. Specifically, Social Security Code deals with unorganized sectors. The problem that lies in its provision is that here state has given responsibility to the aggregators/platforms to contribute one to two percent of their annual turnover up to five percent for the social security of the workers. The workers who continuously work for one year have been declared as a beneficiary for the gratuity ([Kulkarni, 2025](#)). The problem faced by workers in these jobs is that they do not rely on a particular platform to earn money. Surge price, incidents of IDs block, not getting enough bookings or delivery, force workers to simultaneously use other platforms for example a food delivery boy of Blinkit wears a t-shirt of Zomato and change his dress according to the received delivery from a particular platform. For that reason, it is difficult to associate a worker to a particular platform. Let suppose a worker joined Uber on July 25 and logged in to Yatri Sathi on 15 December same year. The person is not a permanent worker of either platform so how



their employment period will be count? And which company will give the gratuity and other social security benefits to the workers? The Social Security Code do not clarify on these issues.

## **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

These problems of platform economy and the workers is not merely an individualistic problem of the working class. According to NITI Aayog report 23.5 billion peoples are going to be involved in this growing economy by 2030 ([NITI Aayog, 2022](#)). Their vulnerability is not limited to them only their families are getting suffered too. Therefore, it is the time to think about the improvement of this large section of workers who can become the bright minds of our country. The state is only an institution which can take initiatives not to breakdown this growing economy but to limit the oppressive nature of the capitalist. For that state should return back to its role as a 'nightwatchman'. The policies that can facilitate the workers are mentioned below.

### **Short-Term Policy Formation and Implementation**

- a. First responsibility lies on the state to legalizes platform partners as a 'worker' and ensure the necessary social securities like the minimum wages, PF, gratuity etc.
- b. Draws from the first point the platforms and the state should jointly take decision to build a 'unified insurance company' which will provide services to the platform workers jointly.
- c. The platforms should introduce the other languages in audio-visual mode so that workers can easily understand the process of log in and out and the mentioned terms and conditions. Also, recruit some representation who can help the workers during the working period.
- d. The workers take too much burden of buying a vehicle or renting it, oil, paying servicing charges etc. The platforms should take some responsibility of providing these means or at least state should give small loans with zero interest rate and subsidies in internet charges.
- e. Most of the workers do not know about the government initiatives like e-Shram, Shram Suvidha which provide single window to register as workers. They get the opportunity to upskill them through Skill India program. Government newly launched a separate window for platform workers in the 'e-Shram' portal where they can get monthly benefits like health insurance. But the problem is that it creates illusion rather than enough facilities. The platform workers work on the road and to meet the targets they expose more to the life threats. Government should provide extra facilities to them but they just get the nominal facilities

what the other people have like 'Ayusman Bharat' and 'Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana'.

Recently government has launched Bharat Taxi App in Delhi NCR on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2026. It is a first positive move by the government to launches a new ride-hailing platform which ensure fair earning up to 80 percent. Government called it a driver-owned platform. It may create a competitive market with the other dominant platforms like Uber, Ola, Rapido. Similar initiative has been taken by the West Bengal state government to launch Yatri Sathi App, though it was not promised such a fair amount of income like Bharat Taxi. The central and state government should jointly organize awareness programs to inform them about these facilitates. Without it the initiatives just became the populist propaganda.

### **Long-Term Structural Reform**

- a. If it is difficult to establish a unified insurance company then the platform should limit the numbers of hiring to a certain number so that it can individually takes the responsibility of each worker to provide necessary benefits. It seems to be unethical for the worker if the platform limits the number of hiring. Then probably only certain number of workers just get the benefits. But the proposed policy aims that the state should promote other companies to invest in this sector, that will create a competitive market without monopoly of any one or two platforms. If the number of platforms will increase, the aims of this policy get achieved. Many platforms will hire people and able to provide social security as well.
- b. State should pressurize the platforms to release the formula of set algorithms. On the basis of which the surge prices calculated and should explain the reasons behind ID blocks. The state should do question the platforms about unethical targets like delivery within 10 minutes. Meanwhile, this system has been taken back by the Blinkit after the nationwide protest on 31<sup>st</sup> December.
- c. State with the help of capitalist should focus on infrastructural developments like better roads, footpaths, resting areas, toilets, servicing centres, storehouses etc so that this ecosystem can run smoothly which is also going to improve the working condition for the workers.
- d. Like the consumer court it is needed to make a proper grievance redressal cell for the workers to easily go to the doorstep of fair justice. It helps government to get timely updates about the ongoing problems on the ground and take measure to mitigate those.

The proposed policies will definitely improve the working condition of platform workers. But the institution barriers, political clashes between the central and state governments, and structural problems are the main barriers of the implementation of existing policies, which also restrict to frame more suitable policies. Therefore, the concrete interventions by the state, platforms, civil society, and the union collectively

modify the problems and provide a better working environment for the workers and help to sustain the growing platform economy.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Traditional concept of industrial capitalism has been diluted into need capitalism. It brings certain positive developments in the society; it helps to promote market economy which is a pillar for a country's economic growth. Job opportunities should also increase per capita income so that an individual can purchase the goods from the market that maintain a balance between demand and supply. But neoliberal economy produces the concept of flexibility with precarity. It diffracted the individual; human agency has lost power to take decision. By name of flexibility the economy made a 'digital black box' where all the demand of workers are blocked ([Woodcock, 2021](#)) and as an output only the capitalist desires reflected in the government policies. Digital economy transgresses into data capitalism which further helps capitalist and the government to control the choice of the laymen's and selling the products with cost of human agency. Worker capability has decreased because of no job upliftment. People choose the works in this platform as a last resort.

It is the time for a wakeup call for the civil society who just being spectators and enjoy their luxurious lifestyle as a consumer. They should be the negotiator to the state to ensure the worker rights. Like the other protest movement civil society should stand beside the workers, which could not visible in those recent events. They should realize the importance of these labourers to make their life easier. State should take the necessary measures of these nonhuman activities of the platforms and implement the policies with having the knowledge about problems in the practical field. The collective endeavour of the state and civil society, control monopoly capitalism to stay in its limits. Lastly, capitalism needs to be more mature in terms of infrastructural developments and focus on human development as well because without ensuring certain welfare measures it cannot sustain for longer period. Goal of Viksit Bharat 2047 is going to achieve if we can balance this e-commerce economic growth with human development.

This study has some limitation like sample size should be increased and working condition of other states of India may help to understand the forms of oppressions more detail manner. But it definitely helps the readers and future researcher to critically understand the deep-rooted problems within platform economy in a nuanced way, because it clearly identified how 'digital democracy' operates as an ideological narrative that undermined the workers right.

## Author Contributions

Conceptualization: D.N.; Data curation: D.N.; Formal analysis: D.N.; Funding acquisition: D.N.; Investigation: D.N.; Methodology: D.N.; Project administration: D.N.; Resources: D.N.; Software: D.N.; Supervision: D.N.; Validation: D.N.; Visualization: D.N.; Writing – original draft: D.N.; Writing – review & editing: D.N. Author has read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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## Institutional Review Board Statement

The study was approved by Centre for Political Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India.

## Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained before the participants answered the interview for this study.

## Data Availability Statement

The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to institution's policy.

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## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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