

Ambedkar's Labour Rights Philosophy and the Contemporary Gig Economy

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ABSTRACT:

The transformation of labour relations in the twenty-first century, particularly through the emergence of the gig economy, has raised fundamental questions about worker rights, social security, and state responsibility. This article critically examines the relevance of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's labour rights philosophy in addressing the precarity and informality embedded within contemporary gig work structures. Ambedkar, as an architect of India's constitutional framework and a pioneering labour reformer, advocated for dignity of labour, state intervention, and social justice through protective legislation and institutional mechanisms. His tenure as Labour Member in the Viceroy's Executive Council led to several progressive reforms, including the introduction of minimum wages, maternity benefits, and social insurance schemes. The gig economy, characterized by platform-based, flexible, and often precarious employment, challenges traditional legal definitions of "worker" and "employment relationship". This has resulted in regulatory gaps where gig workers remain excluded from labour protections such as minimum wages, social security, and collective bargaining rights. By juxtaposing Ambedkar's vision with current labour realities, this article argues that the gig economy represents a regression from the principles of labour welfare and justice envisioned by Ambedkar. The article further explores how constitutional mandates under Articles 14, 21, 23, and Directive Principles of State Policy align with Ambedkarite thought and can be reinterpreted to extend protections to gig workers. It advocates for a rights-based regulatory framework that integrates Ambedkar's philosophy with modern labour challenges, emphasizing the need for inclusive labour jurisprudence in India.

Keywords: Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Labour Rights, Gig Economy, Informal Labour,

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