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Compensation, Social Security and Employee Benefits for Courier Delivery Workers in India: A Systematic Review

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Abstract :

The rapid expansion of India's digital economy has significantly increased the demand for courier and delivery services. E-commerce platforms, food delivery applications, and app-based logistics systems depend heavily on delivery workers for last-mile operations (NITI Aayog, 2022; ILO, 2021). Despite the growth of the sector, concerns related to wages, compensation systems, employment security, occupational safety, and social security continue to affect delivery personnel across the country (Rane, 2024; Fairwork India, 2023). This systematic review examines existing studies on compensation practices, wage structures, and employee welfare provisions for courier delivery workers in India. The review follows the PRISMA framework to identify, screen, and analyse relevant literature published between 2015 and 2026. The findings reveal that gig-based employment models have increased labour flexibility for companies but also contributed to income instability, long working hours, limited welfare benefits, and weak legal protection for workers (Berg et al., 2018; Woodcock & Graham, 2020). The study highlights major issues such as algorithmic management, occupational risks, lack of social security coverage, and employment uncertainty. The paper concludes with recommendations relating to minimum wage protection, expansion of welfare measures, transparent compensation systems, and stronger labour regulations for delivery workers in India.

Keywords: Courier Industry, Delivery Staff, Compensation, Wages, Employee Benefits, Social Security, Labour Welfare

1. Introduction

The courier and logistics industry has become one of the fastest-growing sectors in India due to the rapid growth of e-commerce, digital retailing, food delivery services, and app-based logistics platforms (NITI Aayog, 2022; Srnicek, 2017). Increasing internet penetration, smartphone usage, and changing consumer preferences have strengthened demand for fast and efficient delivery systems (Ray, 2024). Companies such as Delhivery, Blue Dart, DTDC, Amazon India, Swiggy, and Zomato have expanded rapidly and created employment opportunities for millions of delivery workers.

become an important area of concern among researchers, policymakers, and labour organizations (Fairwork India, 2023). Existing Courier delivery workers play an essential role in ensuring timely transportation of goods and maintaining customer satisfaction (Gupta et al., 2022). However, the working conditions of delivery personnel have studies indicate that many delivery workers face unstable income, extended working hours, occupational risks, and limited access to employee benefits and social protection (Berg et al., 2018; IWWAGE, 2022).

The rise of the gig economy has further altered traditional employment relationships within the courier sector. A significant number of delivery workers are now engaged through app-based platforms where they are treated as independent contractors instead of permanent employees (De Stefano, 2016; Rane, 2024). As a result, workers often remain outside formal labour protection systems and welfare schemes (ILO, 2021).

This study systematically reviews the available literature on wages, compensation systems, and employee benefits for courier delivery workers in India.



Figure 1 Illustrates the operational structure of the Indian courier and delivery industry, including e-commerce logistics, food delivery services, hyperlocal delivery, and traditional courier operations.(Source: Company Websites)

2. Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this systematic review are:

1. To study the wage patterns adopted by courier and delivery service companies in India.
2. To examine the compensation methods and incentive schemes provided to delivery personnel.
3. To assess the employee welfare measures and social security benefits accessible to courier workers.
4. To explore the key employment-related issues and challenges experienced by delivery employees in the courier sector.
5. To propose suitable policy measures for enhancing labour welfare and working conditions in the courier industry.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a systematic review approach guided by the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework developed by David Moher and colleagues (2009). This approach enables a , transparent, and organized process for identifying, screening, selecting, and evaluating relevant scholarly literature.

3.2 Sources of Data

Secondary data were collected from:

- Scopus
- Google Scholar
- Web of Science
- SSRN
- ResearchGate
- Government publications
- International Labour Organization reports
- NITI Aayog reports
- Peer-reviewed journals

3.3 Search Keywords

The review of literature was carried out using different combinations of keywords related to the study objectives. They are as follows:

- Courier delivery workers India
- Gig economy labour
- Compensation of delivery personnel
- Employee benefits in the logistics industry
- Social security provisions for platform-based workers
- Wage structures in the Indian courier sector
- Welfare measures for delivery staff

3.4 Inclusion Criteria

Studies were included if they:

- Focused on courier, logistics, or delivery workers
- Discussed wages, compensation, labour welfare, or social security
- Were published between 2015 and 2026
- Were available in English
- Included Indian or relevant international perspectives

3.5 Exclusion Criteria

Studies were excluded if they:

- Were unrelated to delivery or platform workers
- Focused on sectors outside logistics and courier services
- Lacked sufficient academic relevance
- Were duplicate records

The review focuses on studies related to courier services, gig economy workers, delivery staff compensation, labour rights, and social security frameworks in India. Relevant literature was critically analysed to identify recurring themes related to wages, compensation systems, worker welfare, and labour regulation.

4. Growth of the Courier and Delivery Industry in India

India's logistics and courier industry has witnessed significant growth in recent years .The main factors were:

- Expansion of e-commerce businesses
- Wider use of smartphones
- Rapid urban development
- The growth of quick-commerce operations
- Changing consumer preferences
- Evolving consumer buying behaviour

The increasing adoption of app-based delivery platforms has further raised the demand for delivery personnel. Hyperlocal delivery services, which focus on delivering products within very short timeframes, often create intense workload pressures and strict delivery targets for workers (Ray, 2024; Nick Srnicek, 2017).

At present, the industry consists of a wide range of service providers, including conventional courier companies, e-commerce logistics organizations, online food delivery platforms, grocery delivery services, and third-party logistics firms.

5. Literature Review

5.1 Growth of Gig-Based Delivery Employment

The development of digital labour platforms has significantly transformed the employment pattern within the courier and delivery industry. According to Nick Srnicek (2017), app-based service models largely rely on flexible work arrangements in which workers are paid on the basis of completed tasks and performance-related indicators. Studies by Jamie Woodcock and Mark Graham (2020) suggest that although these models improve operational efficiency for companies, they may also weaken job security and employment stability for workers. Research conducted by International Labour Organization researchers, including Berg et al. (2018), similarly highlights concerns regarding insecure working conditions in platform-based employment systems.

A number of studies indicate that the courier and delivery industry has emerged as an important source of urban employment, especially for youth, migrant workers, and semi-skilled labourers (NITI Aayog, 2022). Despite generating large-scale employment opportunities, the sector is often characterized by unstable income, demanding workloads, and inadequate labour protection measures (IWWAGE, 2022; Fairwork India, 2023).

5.2 Wage Structure and Compensation Systems

Compensation practices in the courier and delivery industry commonly include a combination as below:

- Fixed monthly wages
- Payment per delivery

Most app-based delivery platforms follow a per-order compensation model where workers are paid based on:

- Number of deliveries completed
- Distance travelled
- Peak-hour performance
- Customer ratings
- Incentive targets

This model creates income variability and earnings uncertainty. Research indicates that workers often work extended hours to achieve incentive thresholds (Ray, 2024; Berg et al., 2018).

- Performance-related incentives

Courier companies frequently use algorithm-driven incentive structures including:

- Surge pricing
- Weekend bonuses
- Peak-hour rewards
- Target completion bonuses

While incentives may increase earnings temporarily, workers report inconsistencies and unpredictability in incentive calculations (Negi et al., 2025; Rosenblat & Stark, 2016).

- Fuel allowances,
- Attendance-based benefits
- Additional rewards during peak working hours

Conventional courier organizations generally follow a salary-based payment model, while app-based delivery platforms tend to emphasize earnings linked to worker performance and completed deliveries (Ranjan, 2021). Research findings suggest that delivery personnel are often required to complete a large volume of orders in order to maintain a consistent level of income (Ray, 2024).

The growing dependence on incentive-driven payment mechanisms has also increased competition among workers and added pressure to achieve strict delivery targets (Negi et al., 2025). In addition, regular modifications in incentive policies may lead to uncertainty and fluctuations in workers' monthly earnings, as highlighted by Alex Rosenblat and Luke Stark (2016).

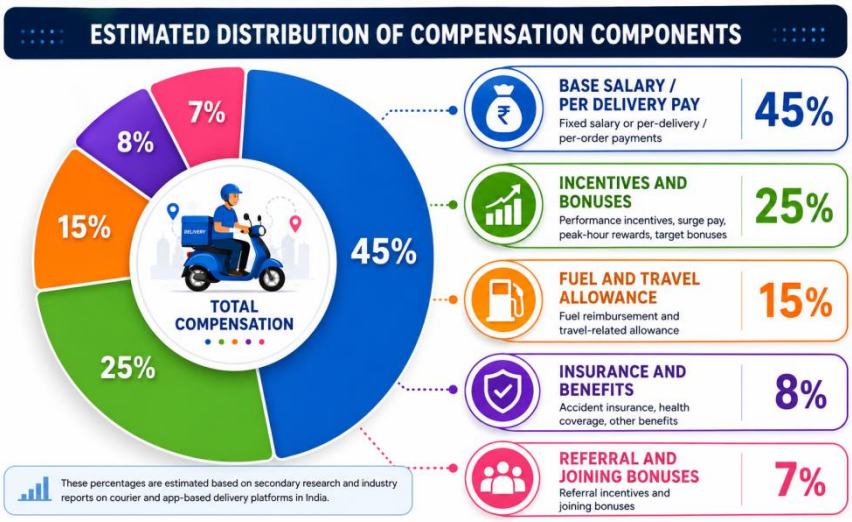


Figure 2 Shows the estimated distribution of compensation elements in courier and app-based delivery platforms in India based on secondary literature

5.3 Compensation Practices in Courier Companies

5.3.1 Components of Compensation

Courier delivery compensation generally includes:

Components		Description
Base Pay	-	Fixed or per-delivery payment
Incentives	-	Performance based bonus
Fuel Allowance	-	Partial reimbursement for fuel
Joining Bonus	-	Initial recruitment incentive
Referral Bonus	-	Incentives for recruiting new workers
Peak Pay	-	Extra compensation during busy periods
Attendance Bonus	-	Rewards for consistent attendance

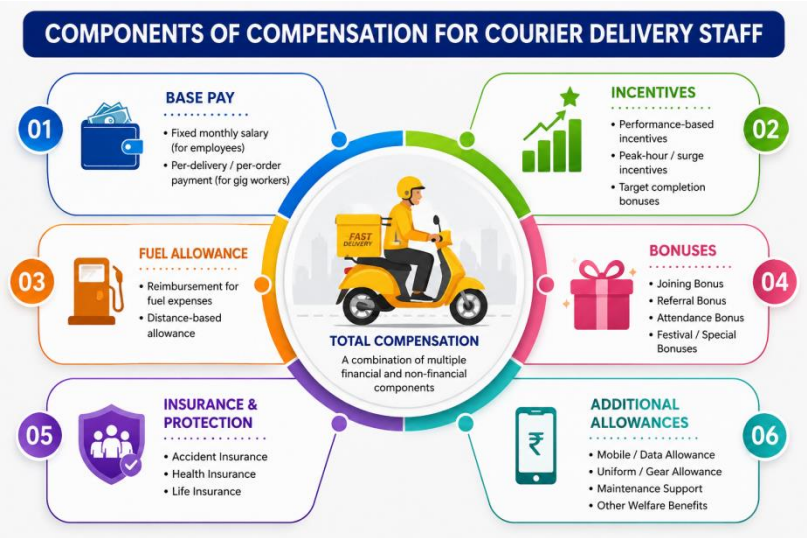


Figure 3 presents the major components of compensation systems adopted by courier and delivery companies in India.

5.4 Employee Benefits and Welfare Measures

The nature and extent of employee benefits provided to delivery personnel differ significantly between conventional courier companies and platform-based delivery services (HB et al., 2023).

Workers employed on a permanent basis in traditional courier organizations are generally entitled to benefits such as:

- Provident Fund,
- Employee State Insurance
- Paid leave
- Gratuity
- Health insurance
- Accident protection coverage.

On the other hand, many gig-based delivery workers have restricted access to welfare and social security provisions because they are often classified as independent contractors instead of formal employees (Valerio De Stefano, 2016; Rane, 2024).

Although certain delivery platforms offer accident insurance and emergency support programs, comprehensive social security coverage for platform workers continues to remain inadequate (International Labour Organization, 2021; Fairwork India, 2023).

5.5 Labour Rights and Legal Protection

India's existing labour regulations have only partly responded to the challenges associated with platform-based and gig employment models (Kanswa & Choudhary, 2025). Although the Code on Social Security, 2020 formally recognized gig and platform workers and introduced certain welfare-related provisions, its practical implementation has remained inadequate (ILO, 2021).

Several studies have highlighted that the lack of a well-defined employment status for delivery personnel restricts their access to labour rights, social security benefits, collective representation, and collective bargaining mechanisms (Choudhary & Shireshi, 2022; Rane, 2024).

5.6 Algorithmic Management

Digital delivery platforms are increasingly relying on algorithm-driven systems to assign deliveries, track worker performance, and calculate payments. However, delivery workers often receive little information about how these systems function, particularly in areas such as:

- Order assignment procedures
- Penalty and deduction calculations
- Performance evaluation criteria
- Account deactivation or suspension decisions

The growing use of algorithmic management has become a major issue in the gig economy literature (Negi et al., 2025; Rosenblat & Stark, 2016). Many workers have expressed concerns that automated systems control rewards, incentives, and penalties with minimal transparency or justification, creating uncertainty and reducing trust in platform operations.

Food delivery companies like Swiggy and Zomato have adopted algorithm management system for their deliveries. Through their app, they allocate orders,trace delivery status, monitor timely delivery and receive online payments from the customers as well. (Hussain, M.S. 2025).

5.7 Overtime and Extended Work Hours

Delivery workers frequently work longer than conventional working hours because of factors such as:

- Increased delivery demand
- Pressure to achieve incentive targets
- Traffic-related delays
- Strict delivery timelines

Studies indicate that many delivery personnel spend nearly 10–15 hours per day on the job in order to earn a stable and sufficient income (Ray, 2024; IWWAGE, 2022). Such extended working hours often lead to physical exhaustion, mental stress, and increased work-related fatigue.

6. Thematic Analysis

The systematic review identified six major themes across the selected studies:

Theme	Key Findings	Supporting References
Income Instability	Earnings vary depending on demand and incentives	Berg et al. (2018); Ray (2024)
Algorithmic Management	Workers are monitored through app-based systems	Rosenblat & Stark (2016); Negi et al. (2025)
Limited Social Security	Many gig workers lack formal welfare benefits	ILO (2021); Rane (2024)
Occupational Hazards	Delivery workers face physical and road-related risks	Fairwork India (2023); HB et al. (2023)
Long Working Hours	Workers often work extended shifts	IWWAGE (2022); Ray (2024)
Legal Ambiguity	Gig workers are not fully protected under labour laws	De Stefano (2016); Kanswa & Choudhary (2025)

7. Employee Benefits Available to Courier Delivery Staff

7.1 Insurance Coverage

Certain courier and delivery firms offer welfare benefits such as:

- Accident insurance
- Health coverage
- Life insurance

Despite the availability of these schemes, many workers face challenges in understanding policy terms and procedures, and they often experience difficulties while filing or receiving insurance claims (HB et al., 2023; Fairwork India, 2023).

7.2 Provident Fund and Gratuity

Regular employees working in organized courier firms are often entitled to benefits such as:

- Provident Fund (PF)
- Employee State Insurance (ESI)
- Gratuity payments

In contrast, gig workers and contract-based delivery personnel are frequently deprived of these forms of social security employment benefits (Rane, 2024; De Stefano, 2016).

7.3 Paid Leave and Holidays

Employees working in traditional courier organizations may be entitled to benefits such as:

- Casual leave
- Sick leave
- Paid holidays

By comparison, platform-based delivery workers generally do not receive paid leave benefits because they are typically classified as independent contractors rather than formal employees (Ranjan, 2021; Berg et al., 2018).

7.4 Social Security Benefits

The Code on Social Security, 2020 introduced specific provisions for gig and platform workers in India. Despite this policy initiative, several implementation-related challenges still hinder the effective delivery of social security and welfare benefits to these workers (Sharma, 2026; ILO, 2021).

7.5 Welfare Initiatives

Certain companies provide welfare and support initiatives such as:

- Safety and road-awareness training
- Emergency support services
- Assistance for vehicle maintenance

- Educational scholarships for employees' children

However, the availability and quality of these benefits differ widely across the courier and delivery industry, resulting in uneven worker support and protection (HB et al., 2023; Fairwork India, 2023).

Table 1: Explains the disparity in social security and employee welfare benefits between permanent and gig delivery workers.

Employee Benefit	**Traditional Courier Employees**	**Gig Delivery Workers**
Provident Fund	Yes	No
Health Insurance	Yes	Partial
Paid Leave	Yes	No
Pension Benefits	Sometimes	No
Accident Insurance	Yes	Conditional
Gratuity	Yes	No

8. Challenges Faced by Courier Delivery Staff

8.1 Income Instability

Gig-based payment structures often result in unstable monthly incomes because earnings are influenced by factors such as:

- Changes in customer demand
- Modifications in platform algorithms
- Seasonal fluctuations in delivery activity

As a result, income insecurity has emerged as a major concern for delivery workers operating within the gig economy (Ray, 2024; Woodcock & Graham, 2020).

8.2 Occupational Hazards

Delivery workers face:

- Road accidents
- Weather exposure
- Physical fatigue
- Air pollution
- Theft and violence risks

Studies indicate increasing concerns regarding workplace safety and accident-related vulnerabilities (HB et al., 2023; ILO, 2021).Risk due to extreme weather conditions to delivery staff when they are on road is also one of the important factor which also effects them psychologically(Kidwai A.G. 2024)

8.3 Lack of Legal Protection

A large number of delivery workers are designated as "partners" or independent contractors instead of formal employees, which restricts their eligibility for labour rights, social security measures, and employment-related benefits (Rane, 2024; De Stefano, 2016).

8.4 Mental and Physical Stress

Ongoing pressure to achieve fast deliveries and maintain high customer ratings often leads to:

- Anxiety and emotional strain
- Work-related burnout
- Stress-induced health problems

Scholars have reported that gig workers frequently experience significant psychological stress as a result of constant performance surveillance, algorithmic monitoring, and rising customer expectations (Negi et al., 2025; Rosenblat & Stark, 2016).

8.5 Absence of Collective Bargaining

Courier and delivery workers frequently have limited access to:

- Labour union representation
- Structured grievance redressal systems
- Collective bargaining opportunities

As a result, their ability to demand fair wages, improved working conditions, and stronger labour protections remains significantly constrained (Choudhary & Shireshi, 2022; Bhowmik, 2019).



Figure 4 illustrates the major concerns reported by courier delivery personnel in India.

9. Labour Laws and Regulatory Framework in India

Key labour legislations associated with courier and delivery workers in India include:

- Code on Wages, 2019
- Code on Social Security, 2020
- Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020

Among these, the Code on Social Security, 2020 formally acknowledges gig and platform workers. However, several scholars argue that effective legal protection is still limited because of weak implementation and enforcement mechanisms (Sharma, 2026; Kanswa & Choudhary, 2025).

In response to growing concerns regarding gig worker welfare, some Indian states have begun exploring protective measures such as:

- Creation of welfare boards
- Provision of accident insurance schemes
- Mandatory employer or platform contributions toward social security

Researchers and policy experts continue to stress the importance of establishing clearer legal definitions of employer–employee relationships within digital labour platforms to ensure stronger labour rights and accountability (Rane, 2024; De Stefano, 2016).

10. Comparative Analysis: Traditional Courier Workers vs Gig Delivery Workers

Parameter	Traditional Courier Employees	Gig Delivery Workers
Employment Status	Permanent/Contractual	Independent Contractor
Wage Structure	Fixed Salary	Per Delivery
Job Security	Relatively Higher	Low
Social Security	Available	Limited
Paid Leave	Available	Generally Unavailable
Insurance	Structured Coverage	Limited/Conditional
Performance Monitoring	Supervisor-Based	Algorithm-Based
Income Stability	Moderate	Unstable

The comparison clearly demonstrates that gig delivery workers experience significantly lower employment security and weaker welfare support systems compared to traditional courier employees (Ranjan, 2021; Woodcock & Graham, 2020).

11. Recommendations

11.1 Minimum Wage Protection

The government should introduce minimum income or earning standards for delivery workers to guarantee fair and stable compensation, irrespective of variations in delivery demand and platform activity (Choudhary & Shireshi, 2022).

11.2 Social Security Expansion

Gig workers should be provided with essential social security benefits, including:

- Health insurance coverage
- Accident and injury protection
- Pension-related benefits
- Provident fund assistance

Strengthening and expanding social protection measures can enhance financial stability and reduce the economic vulnerability faced by workers in the gig economy (ILO, 2021).

11.3 Transparent Compensation Systems

Courier and delivery companies should maintain greater transparency regarding:

- Incentive and bonus calculations
- Penalty and deduction mechanisms
- Algorithms used for order distribution and task allocation

Improved transparency in these systems can strengthen worker confidence, enhance accountability, and reduce feelings of bias or unfair treatment among delivery personnel (Negi et al., 2025; Rosenblat & Stark, 2016).

11.4 Occupational Safety Measures

Companies should provide:

- Safety equipment
- Road safety training
- Emergency support systems

Improved occupational safety measures can reduce workplace injuries and accident risks (HB et al., 2023).

11.5 Legal Recognition of Delivery Workers

A stronger legal framework is necessary to define employment relationships and worker rights within the gig economy (Rane, 2024; Kanswa & Choudhary, 2025).

11.6 Grievance Redressal Mechanisms

Delivery personnel should have access to:

- Complaint resolution systems
- Worker representation forums
- Fair dispute settlement procedures

Effective grievance systems can strengthen labour relations and improve worker satisfaction (Bhowmik, 2019).Human resource departments of courier and delivery companies should practice emotional intelligence while looking at the grievances and complaints of their delivery staff in order to handle tactfully. Use of emotional intelligence helps resolving issues with internal as well as external customers. (Kidwai A.G, 2024).

12. Discussion

The findings of this systematic review reveal that courier delivery workers in India often function within highly demanding and uncertain employment environments (Fairwork India, 2023). Although the expansion of platform-based delivery services has increased operational efficiency and generated new job opportunities, it has simultaneously intensified concerns related to labour insecurity and unequal welfare provisions (Srnicek, 2017).

The review further shows that the income of many delivery workers remains unstable because earnings are largely linked to incentive structures and the number of completed deliveries (Ray, 2024). In addition, workers are frequently responsible for covering operational costs such as fuel, vehicle repairs, and mobile internet expenses, which significantly reduce their net earnings (Berg et al., 2018).

Another major issue identified across the literature is the growing use of algorithmic management systems. Digital platforms rely on app-based technologies to manage order distribution, worker ratings, and performance-based incentives (Rosenblat & Stark, 2016). While these technologies enhance efficiency and coordination, they may also limit transparency and increase worker dependence on automated decision-making mechanisms (Negi et al., 2025).Courier companies are adopting artificial intelligence in their day to day work (Kidwai A.G, 2025)

The review also indicates that social security coverage for gig and platform workers continues to be inadequate (ILO, 2021). Many delivery personnel still lack access to benefits such as paid leave, pension schemes, and long-term employment protection (Rane, 2024). With the rapid expansion of the gig economy, scholars and policymakers increasingly emphasize the need for labour reforms that better address the rights, welfare, and social protection of delivery workers (Kanswa & Choudhary, 2025).

13. Conclusion

Courier delivery personnel play a crucial role in supporting India's expanding e-commerce, logistics, and digital service sectors. The growth of online retail, food delivery applications, and app-based logistics networks has significantly increased the need for delivery workers to provide effective last-mile delivery services and maintain customer satisfaction. As a result, delivery workers have emerged as an important segment of the country's urban informal labour force (NITI Aayog, 2022).

Despite their growing contribution to the economy, delivery workers continue to face multiple employment-related issues. Studies show that many workers experience irregular and uncertain incomes because earnings are mainly linked to incentives and the number of completed deliveries rather than fixed monthly wages (Berg et al., 2018). Income instability is further influenced by fluctuating demand, rising fuel expenses, revisions in incentive structures, and algorithm-based order distribution systems (Ray, 2024).

The review also identifies challenging working conditions within the courier sector. Delivery personnel often work for extended hours and remain exposed to occupational hazards such as traffic accidents, air pollution, fatigue, and harsh weather conditions. In addition, strict delivery schedules, customer rating mechanisms, and continuous performance monitoring contribute to mental stress and psychological pressure among workers (Rosenblat & Stark, 2016).

Another major concern is the inadequate availability of social security and employee welfare benefits for gig-based delivery workers. Permanent employees in organized courier companies may receive benefits such as Provident Fund, paid leave, gratuity, and health insurance. However, many app-based delivery workers are excluded from these protections because they are treated as independent contractors instead of formal employees (Rane, 2024).

The growing use of algorithmic management has also reshaped employment relations in the courier industry. Digital platforms increasingly rely on automated systems for assigning deliveries, evaluating worker performance, and calculating incentives. Although such technologies improve operational efficiency, they may reduce transparency and increase workers' dependence on platform-controlled systems (Negi et al., 2025).

Courier and delivery companies whether private companies (Blue Dart, Dhelivery etc) or India Post,the adoption of new technologies for service enhancement and employee job satisfaction is of utmost importance.(Kidwai A.G. 2024). Courier companies should ensure that employees and delivery personnel feel supported and valued within the organization. Maintaining the health, safety, and overall well-being of couriers should be a key priority for employers. Factors such as safe working conditions, a

positive work environment, and opportunities for training and professional development play an important role in strengthening workers' trust and confidence in the company (Kidwai A.G, 2023)

The findings of this review indicate that while the gig economy has generated employment opportunities, it has also increased worker vulnerability due to limited labour protections. Existing labour laws and social security policies in India have not fully addressed the challenges associated with platform-based employment systems (ILO, 2021).

Therefore, stronger labour reforms are required to improve minimum wage protection, occupational safety, social security coverage, and grievance redressal mechanisms for delivery workers. Courier companies should also introduce fair compensation systems, transparent incentive policies, and worker-friendly employment practices. Enhancing labour protection and welfare support is essential for promoting fair working conditions, social justice, and sustainable development within India's courier and logistics industry.

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