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CODE ON SOCIAL SECURITY, 2020 – A CRITICAL STUDY

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INTRODUCTION:

The way we work, live, and engage with one another has changed dramatically with the arrival of the digital age. The social security sector, which has historically been regulated by a combination of legal frameworks, administrative procedures, and social norms, is one of the most significant effects of this age. 2020 was a turning point in this evolution, with the world attempting to deal with the unprecedented challenges brought on by the COVID-19 epidemic. The goal of this study paper, "Code on Social Security, 2020 – A Critical Study," is to examine the complex interrelationship between social security and technology, with a particular emphasis on 2020 as a turning point.

In addition to speeding up the digital revolution across a number of industries, the epidemic has brought attention to the shortcomings and promise of the current social security frameworks. With governments and organisations struggling to adjust to new circumstances, technology's ability to improve social security systems has grown in importance. By analysing the effects of digital interventions on policy, administration, and the distribution of social security benefits, this study aims to investigate how the year 2020 acted as a catalyst for innovation and change within the social security landscape.

This article attempts to provide a thorough overview of the changing social security scenario in the digital era by critically examining case studies, policy assessments, and technology breakthroughs. It will analyse the difficulties social security systems encountered after the epidemic and the creative solutions that arose in response. By doing this, it hopes to add to the conversation on social security's future by emphasising how crucial it is to embrace digital transformation in order to maintain the sustainability and resilience of social security services.

Policymakers, practitioners, and academics who are interested in the relationship between technology and social security should find great

value in the insights this research is expected to provide. It seeks to stimulate more research and development in this important field by highlighting the crucial role that code will play in determining the direction of social security in the future.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE STUDY:

The study "Code on Social Security, 2020 – A Critical Study" explores the Social Security Act's historical, economic, and social ramifications, paying particular attention to how it affects labour and capital dynamics. The development of social security programmes, the underlying financial structures, and the larger socioeconomic environment in which they function serve as the foundation for this examination.

With the intention of offering a safety net for the aged, jobless, and disabled, the Social Security Act was passed in 1935, marking a significant turning point in the history of social security. This act represented a move towards more extensive social assistance programmes and was a reaction to the economic challenges of the Great Depression. The enactment of the act and its following developments have played a pivotal role in moulding the social and economic terrain

of both the United States and other nations that have implemented analogous frameworks.¹³³⁶

The Social Security Act's finance method, which has changed throughout time, is one of its most important features. The scheme was originally intended to be paid for on a pay-as-you-go basis, with current taxpayers funding current retirees' payments. This model has encountered difficulties, mainly related to the ageing population and the system's long-term viability. When workers reach age 65 in 2020, the average real rate of return on Social Security taxes is expected to drop to roughly 2%, which is far less than the real return on private capital investment. The distribution of wealth and income within the system as well as the system's long-term viability are affected by this disparity between the returns on private assets and Social Security.¹³³⁷

The pay-as-you-go paradigm is significantly altered by the planned Personal Security Account (PSA) scheme. The goal of the PSA plan is to free up hundreds of billions of dollars in payroll taxes for private sector investment by converting most Social Security taxpayers into investors. In constant 1996 currency, this change is predicted to cause the total amount of assets accumulated in personal accounts to approach \$6 trillion in 2020 and \$16 trillion in 2040. With a higher rate of return on taxes, the PSA plan aims to rectify the drawbacks of the pay-as-you-go model and maybe restore the system's financial sustainability.

From an economic perspective, the transition from a pay-as-you-go to an advance-funded system like the PSA plan is expected to have significant implications. It is anticipated to reduce the net tax on wages for the typical worker, thereby potentially increasing labor market outcomes and workers' desired form of compensation. Economists across the ideological spectrum suggest that moving away from the low-yielding system of income transfers towards

a more advance-funded system could lead to substantial economic gains.

"Code on Social Security, 2020 – A Critical Study" offers a thorough examination of the Social Security Act's evolution over time and its present problems. It draws attention to the significance of financial sustainability, income and wealth distribution, and the wider socioeconomic effects of social security systems. Future generations can look forward to a more safe and just social security system thanks to the suggested reforms, including the PSA plan, which offer potential solutions to these problems.¹³³⁸

LEGISLATIVE PERSPECTIVE OF THE STUDY:

In an effort to modernise and harmonise the social security system, India's labour and employment laws have undergone a substantial legislative change with the passage of the Code on Social Security, 2020. Through the consolidation of nine significant labour law laws into a single Central Code, this legislation has been adopted to offer social security benefits to a wider workforce, including individuals in both organised and unorganised industries.

Acts pertaining to

- Employees' Compensation (1923),
- Employees' State Insurance (1948),
- Employees' Provident Funds and Miscellaneous Provisions (1952),
- Employment Exchanges (Compulsory Notification of Vacancies) (1959),
- Maternity Benefit Act (1961),
- Payment of Gratuity (1972),
- Cine-Workers Welfare Fund Act (1981),
- Building and Other Construction Workers' Welfare Cess Act (1996), and Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act (2008)

are among those that have been repealed. It is anticipated that this unification will facilitate corporate operations, simplify labour law processes, and enhance formal employment conditions, especially for small and medium-sized businesses.

¹³³⁶ V Naik, Neela, Code on Social Security: An Impact Analysis on Labour and Capital (May 16, 2023).

¹³³⁷ Restoring Security to Our Social Security Retirement Program Joan T. Bok, Ann L. Combs, Sylvester J. Schieber, Fidel A. Vargas, and Carolyn L. Weaver

¹³³⁸ India's Social Security Code, 2020: A Catalyst for Promoting and Protecting Platform Labour Aishwarya Raman , Sreelakshmi Ramachandran and S.K. Sasikumar pg 5-6

A number of new ideas and clauses are included in the Code, including career centres, fixed-term employment, and a revised definition of "wages" with clear inclusions and limitations. By ensuring that statutory benefits and quantities are determined uniformly across all industries, these modifications seek to strike a balance between the rights of employers and employees. Additionally, the Code provides social security benefits to gig, platform, and unorganised workers—groups who were previously not covered by labour laws—as well as to them. It is anticipated that this expansion will shield these workers from exploitation and discriminatory acts.

The Code sets stricter consequences for noncompliance, including higher fines for certain offences, in order to guarantee compliance. Additionally, the introduction of compounding of offences permits a reduction in fines under specific circumstances. These actions are intended to discourage non-compliance and motivate companies to follow the Code's guidelines.

Additionally, regardless of employee count, the Code broadens the purview of the Employee State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) to encompass businesses involved in dangerous or life-threatening professions. With this modification, a larger group of workers—including those employed in seasonal manufacturing and risky jobs—will be eligible for social security payments.

In addition, the Code presents the idea of optional opt-in and opt-out for social security programmes like ESIC and the Employees Provident Fund (EPF). This offers flexibility in the social security system by letting employers and employees decide whether to participate in these schemes.

To summarise, the Code on Social Security, 2020 is an all-encompassing legislative endeavour that aims to modernise and harmonise India's labour and employment law. Its objectives are to expand the scope of social security benefits to a wider workforce, optimise labour law procedures, and facilitate business transactions. In order to maintain compliance, safeguard vulnerable

workers from exploitation and discriminatory acts, and strike a balance between the rights of employers and employees, the legislation incorporates a number of new ideas and measures.

LITERATURE REVIEW OF THE STUDY:

Considerable research has been conducted on the US social security system, with a focus on retirement benefits. Research by Konkolewsky (2017) sheds light on the difficulties experienced by American workers who migrate abroad, as local rules frequently result in modifications to their retirement benefits. Employees in nations experiencing financial or economic crises, like the Republic of Ireland's recession, may suffer as a result of this scenario. By extending the retirement benefits programme to more working citizens, the US Social Security System has attempted to solve these problems and highlights the significance of adjusting to shifting social and economic environments.

The US Social Security Pension System and married couples' combined labour supply decisions are examined by Nishiyama (2019), who highlights the redistribution of resources from high-wage earners to low-wage earners inside the system. To promote a more equitable benefit distribution, the system also provides survivorship benefits and spousal retirement benefits, which are determined by taking into account the earnings of both partners. In keeping with ongoing efforts to increase the inclusivity and fairness of the system, attempts are being made to extend social security benefits to more women and to people who have not been insured for years.

RESEARCH GAP OF THE STUDY:

The goal of the research Gap is to close a number of significant knowledge gaps on the effects of the Social Security Code, 2020 on gig and platform workers. First, it looks at the current legal framework that regulates gig and platform workers and evaluates whether the Social Security Code of 2020 provides them with enough benefits. The study also seeks to pinpoint any gaps or inadequacies in the Social Security Code related

to the gig economy. In order to offer context for the investigation, it also plans to look into the existing state of gig and platform workers abroad. The study's ultimate goal is to determine whether the Social Security Code will primarily benefit capital or labour in the context of the gig economy.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTREPRETATION:

One of the most important human rights outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was ratified and proclaimed by the UN General Assembly on December 10, 1948, is the right to social security. The Indian judiciary has emphasised the significance of the right to social security, even though it is not a fundamental right. In the *Olga Tellis v. Bombay Municipal Co-operation case*,¹³³⁹ for example, the court held that "the right to livelihood must be deemed to be an integral component guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution." Since the right to health is recognised as a fundamental component of the right to life under Article 21 along with Articles 39(c), 41, and 43, which give a workman's life significance and purpose while upholding their human dignity, it can also be said to be implicit in the Constitution.

The Social Security Code, 2020 has been enacted in India to unify the nine regulations governing social security. It would operate as a single point of contact for the enforcement of social security rights as stipulated under the relevant sections. The current legislation has undergone a number of revisions. Among them, "Social Security for Unorganised Workers, Gig Workers, and Platform Workers" is covered in Chapter IX of the SS Code, 2020.

Until the SS Code was passed, there was no law that defined the terms "gig workers" or "platform workers." This prevented some gig workers from receiving social security benefits and gave some companies an advantage in that they were able to avoid paying their platform workers enough in benefits and compensation by passing off that they were hiring "gig workers," who were not

recognised as social security benefit recipients under any of India's labour laws.

The title of independent contractors is typically granted to gig workers, who receive high commissions, incentive-based pay-out mechanisms, low base pay, and arbitrary surveillance systems that assess the quality of their work. Even though independent contract work arrangements have been around for a while, they are still largely unregulated because workers in these arrangements often work long hours in dangerous environments, pay for petrol and fixed asset purchases, and do so without having any formal claim to social security benefits.

One of the numerous uncertainties in this type of economy is the job relationship, which needs to be clarified. The rise of the platform-driven gig economy has given rise to a new kind of employer-employee relationship that differs from the traditional employee-employer relationship as defined by most labour regulations. Gig workers are not specifically covered by any case law or labour law legislation. Owing to this loophole, companies like Urban Company, Uber, Ola, Swiggy, etc. have profited from platforms from all over the world. These companies are exempt from these labour rules because there is no set physical work location or minimum number of hours that must be devoted to the given work.

Most of the companies who hire these people refer to them as their "delivery partners" rather than as workers in order to avoid paying them the minimum wage and to avoid giving them perks like PF (Provident Fund), ESI (Employment State Insurance), and other benefits. Moreover, the compensation structure relies on intricate calculations that are entirely up to the employers' discretion, frequently leading to workers receiving less than the minimum wage for 12- to 15-hour workdays. In this type of employment arrangement, it's also typical for the gig workers' base compensation to fluctuate often.

Furthermore, unlike traditional employment agreements, digital platforms such as Airbnb and Uber merely offer a user agreement to their hosts

¹³³⁹ 1986 AIR 180, 1985 SCR SUPPL. (2) 51, AIR 1986 SUPREME COURT 180, 1986 CRILR(SC&MP) 23, 1985 (3) SCC 545, (1985) 2 BOM CR 434

and drivers, respectively, which comprises solely terms of service. Because their form of employment is completely unprotected, this further contributes to income instability by creating uncertainty in their earnings.

Since these businesses classify themselves as "internet services" or platforms that connect customers with suppliers of products and services and waive their own liability under labour rules, their retention rates are also far lower than their recruiting rates.

Companies have also widely publicised their activities under the guise of offering social security through the execution of insurance plans for the employees; however, this is not the case for all employees, including gig/platform workers. This has primarily been observed in the context of Swiggy and Zomato, where initiatives such as the Swiggy Smiles Programme and the Hunger Service Fund seem to have been restricted to a particular workforce.

THE SOCIAL SECURITY CODE AND GIG WORKERS:

Due to the absence of regulations pertaining to this industry, gig workers in India have been facing ongoing difficulties. One of the primary causes is that, due to the aforementioned employment's ambiguous nature, none of the labour laws apply to this kind of employer-employee relationship. The Industrial Relations Code is applicable to all workers in industrial units; but, in this instance, the Code is judged irrelevant because the employees are not given an employment site. The most important law that has to be put into effect on this is the Occupational Health, Safety, and Working Conditions Code, but it is likewise not relevant.

In view of this uncontrolled business, the introduction of the Social Security Code, 2020, which identified gig workers and enumerated certain welfare measures, was seen as a ray of hope. "A person performing a work or participating in a work arrangement and earning from such activities outside of traditional employer-employee relationships" is the definition of a gig worker under section 2(35) of the SS Code. The majority of the job is temporary, and it

must be finished within the agreed-upon time frame. A platform worker is described as "a worker working for an organisation which uses an online platform for providing specific services to individuals or organizations" under section 2(61) of the SS Code.

Section 2(86) of the SS Code defines a "unorganised worker" as "a self-employed, home-based, or wage worker in the unorganised sector," which is another phrase that the SS Code has particularly addressed.

The provisions of various welfare schemes that the Central Government may occasionally offer for the unorganised sector are addressed in detail in Chapter IX of the SS Code. These schemes include life and disability insurance; (ii) health and maternity benefits; (iii) old age protection; (iv) education; and (v) any other benefit that the Central Government may deem appropriate. In addition to mandating the State Government to supply specific benefits like housing, employment benefits, etc., the Indian Constitution's Concurrent List contains a section on labour law. Furthermore, the SS Code specifies the structure and procedures by which the Federal and State Governments may create programmes for the advantage of gig workers.

JUDICIAL ACTIVISM AND THE GIG ECONOMY:

"Litigation has not been facilitated by the Indian scenario's non-recognition of gig workers. Nonetheless, there has always been conflict over how to give unorganised workers a job and social protection. And one of the earliest instances that can be found that establishes the link between an employer and employee is *Dhrangadhara Chemical Works v. State of Saurashtra*,¹³⁴⁰ which established that the main standard to confirm an employer-employee relationship is that of supervision and control. In essence, it indicates that there is a relationship between an employer and employee if the employer oversees the employee's work and has control over the nature and style of work the employee completes.

¹³⁴⁰ 1957 AIR 264, 1957 SCR 152, AIR 1957 SUPREME COURT 264, 1957 (1) LBLJ 477, 1957 SCJ 208, 1956-57 11 FJR 439

However, this might change based on each person's unique set of events and facts.

However, later rulings by the Supreme Court disagreed with the earlier ruling that determined an employer–employee relationship solely based on control and supervision over labour law concerns. Thus, in the case of *Ram Singh and Ors. v. Union Territory, Chandigarh and Ors.*¹³⁴¹ the Supreme Court partially upheld the ruling in *Dhrangadhara Chemical Works v. State of Saurashtra*¹³⁴² by establishing that “if the employer exercises control over the means and modes in accordance with which the contactors perform, then there exists an employer–employee relationship.” Nonetheless, it further maintained that businesses maintain equal rights over hiring and firing employees, as well as the ability to pay salaries and deduct insurance costs.

This was followed by another case wherein the apex Court clarified that simply because the management of a company has control over the execution of work or dismissal, the workers cannot be rendered as employees of that company.

A public interest litigation (PIL) filed by The Indian Federation of App-based Transport Workers (IFAT) before the Supreme Court of India on behalf of gig workers is one of the most recent and pertinent cases in light of the emerging gig economy. The PIL aims to bring gig/platform workers under the purview of the “unorganised workers” in the Unorganised Workers’ Social Security Act, 2008 (the UWSS Act) and obtain statutory protection in the form of social security benefits. Through this petition, the IFAT has further urged that some programs—like maternity benefits and disability allowance—that are typically provided to employers under current regulations be extended to gig workers.

¹³⁴¹ AIR 2004 SUPREME COURT 969, 2004 (1) SCC 126, 2003 AIR SCW 6567, 2004 LAB. I. C. 50, 2004 (1) SERVLJ 395 SC, 2004 LAB LR 47, (2004) 1 ALLMR 164 (SC), (2004) 1 SERVLJ 395, 2003 (9) SCALE 459, 2003 (7) SLT 200, 2004 (1) BLJR 490, (2004) 13 ALLINDCAS 904 (SC), 2004 (3) SRJ 266, (2003) 8 JT 345 (SC), 2004 (1) ALL CJ 576, (2003) 99 FACLR 1064, (2004) 1 MAD IJ 160, (2004) 1 SCT 366, 2004 SCC (L&S) 14, (2003) 8 SUPREME 79, (2004) 104 FJR 22, (2004) 1 LABLJ 227, (2004) 1 LAB LN 511, (2004) 1 SERVLR 251, (2003) 9 SCALE 459, (2004) 1 ESC 161, (2004) 13 INDLD 373, (2004) 1 CURLR 81

¹³⁴² Supra Note 5

The Social Security Code, 2020 has also been invoked to argue the necessity of identifying “unorganised workers” as the true arrangement created by the gig economy. Since the petition was filed during the COVID-19 pandemic, the petitioners have also requested monetary compensation in addition to an order prohibiting NBFCs and other financial institutions from seizing or auctioning gig workers’ vehicles because they are unable to make loan payments in equal monthly instalments (EMIs) while the pandemic is still in effect.

This story illustrates the exceedingly precarious state of the gig economy today. As previously stated, one of the main issues facing this labour sector is job security as well as social security. To address this ongoing struggle, a mechanism should be put in place that would allow gig workers to be included under the definition of employees in India, albeit with certain restrictions due to the nature of their employment.

CONCLUSION:

“In terms of providing social security benefits, which can be viewed as one of the fundamental human rights that employees are required to fulfil but which is still unattainable for the majority of the world’s population, the social security Code unquestionably represents a step in the right direction for gig workers in India. Only 45% of the world’s population is successfully covered by at least one social safety benefit, according to ILO reports, leaving the other 55% uninsured. Thus, these figures highlight how crucial it is to have access to social security benefits, which the SS Code has made available to gig workers.

Acknowledging the gig economy can be facilitated by defining gig/platform workers and giving governments flexible rights to set social security benefits, among other crucial considerations previously mentioned. To ensure the improvement of gig workers, it would be more hopeful to have rules that are more specific and place a greater emphasis on their protection, as well as to develop a framework that is more rigid and does not allow for the exercise of

discretionary power. The following methods can enable these modifications:

- a) The government's proactive role in putting into effect the rules set forth in Chapter IX of the SS Code and in its attempts to incorporate gig workers into the existing labour regulations.
- b) Creating a test that is comparable to the American ABC test to ascertain the nature of the employer-employee relationship that would be regulated by current labour laws, guaranteeing employment and social security.
- c) Limiting the ability of employers and gig economy aggregators to fire workers without cause and prohibiting commissions and payments from being withheld without giving workers notice, which will protect gig workers.
- d) The creation of legally recognised trade unions dedicated to the representation of gig workers will further ease the flow of information about problems that these workers confront and assist them in advocating to the government.
- e) In order to ensure that workers' rights are equal and that they have a place where they may voice their concerns in a fair and impartial manner, service agreements for gig workers should include dispute resolution clauses. In addition to giving employees a forum to voice their opinions, this also stops employers from firing staff members without cause because an impartial trial will take place before an alternative dispute resolution body.

Since there is no genuine mechanism in place to guarantee the minimum protection of their jobs and social security, the number of workers in this sector has been growing at a very rapid rate, making regulation of this industry extremely important. It is crucial for gig workers to have the same status as regular employees, even though one of the primary causes of the absence of laws governing this industry is the tripartite relationship that this form of employment exhibits, which

involves the end-user, the intermediary, and the digital platform.

Notwithstanding the reluctance of the government, aggregator, or courts to grant equal status, it is imperative that these workers be subject to regulations that offer benefits such as the ability to form unions, a universal minimum wage, and workplace safeguards better suited to the gig economy.

Now that the Social Security Code, 2020 is in effect, it may be claimed that the Indian government has acknowledged that gig workers do not now fall under the country's social security rules. However, after carefully examining the provisions and their implications, it can be concluded that, in the context of the gig economy, the SS Code benefits employers by not putting the benefits into practice in a tangible way because the government, which may or may not work to implement the plans, has the majority of the authority to establish them.

Furthermore, despite being the first to define some key terminology related to the gig economy, the SS Code will not actually have any effect on improving the lives of gig/platform workers, despite giving the impression that it is biased in favour of these workers.

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