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BEYOND JOB TITLES: UNDERSTANDING UNEMPLOYMENT, DIGNITY OF LABOUR AND SOCIAL RESPECT

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1. Abstract

In India society decides a person's value or judge a person based on their job position or title they hold rather than by skills, efforts, and character. This article explains that unemployment is not only limited to loss of economic support, rather it's also a loss of social respect and dignity of a person. It assesses different constitutional provisions related to dignified work and right to livelihood which given under Articles 14,16,21, 39(a), and 41, with certain judicial decisions. It also displays about how workers from unorganized sector and self-employed workers receive less security as well as less recognition than persons who are employees of the government or those having formal jobs. This article further discusses about the role of education, change in social perspective and skill development, with the help of real-life examples of people who built their lives through determination and skill. At the end it suggests that the state should provide fair economic value and social security to all types of work, and society should stop judging people by their occupational status.

Keywords: *Unemployment, Dignity of Labour, Social Respect, Right to Livelihood, Occupational Status, Self- Employment, Social Justice,*

2. Introduction

Money is an essential necessity in today's life. Without money life becomes difficult. Although, society judges a person on their income and primarily on the source of that income. In today's society a government employee on a salary of ₹50,000 per month will probably be held in far greater regard than a person running a small business of their own

or indeed earning more than a government employee.[1] That demonstrates that what really matters is the professional status of the person in society rather than their actual income. In India this problem is serious because young people make up about 83% of country's unemployed workforce.[2] Unemployment among the people who have completed their secondary and higher secondary education is raising, as in 2000 it was 35.2% and in 2022 it was 65.7%.[3] which means that unemployment is not just limited to the uneducated people but it also includes well educated and skilled persons. Unemployment, raises the questions regarding the social status, dignity, economic independence and the recognition of human capability rather than merely as the absence of government job or job in a private sector. The real hardship is to create a such society where individuals are respected for their abilities, contributions, characters, hard works rather than based on their occupational status. This article tries to focus on changing the social attitudes, education practices, and at the same point policies, as the unemployment and low respect for work other than the government job damage dignity of a person.

3. Legal Framework: Livelihood, Equality and Dignity

3.1 Fundamental Rights and the Right to Livelihood

The constitution of India protects several rights of individuals and conferred important principles like livelihood, equality, fairness and social Justice. *Article 14* is about equality before the law and equal protection of the law; *Article 16* is about equal opportunity in public employment. *Article 19* of the Indian Constitution also provides the freedom to citizens to engage in any profession, trade, business which demonstrates the direct link to self-employment. Right to livelihood protected under *Article 21* i.e. Right to life and personal liberty. [4]

3.2 Judicial Recognition of Livelihood

In the case of *Olga Tellis v. Bombay municipal Corporation (1985, SC)* the court held that a person cannot deprived of right to livelihood as it is protected under article 21 i.e. under Right to Life.[5] Also, the court held that removal of encroachments as long as a reasonable

[1] NJ MacKinnon and T Langford, 'The Meaning of Occupational Prestige Scores: A Social Psychological Analysis and Interpretation' (1994) 35(2) The Sociological Quarterly 215.
[2] International Labour Organization and Institute for Human Development, India Employment Report 2024: Youth Employment, Education and Skills (ILO 2024).
[3] ILO and IHD (n 2).
[4] Constitution of India 1950, arts 14, 16, 19(1)(g) and 21.
[5] Olga Tellis v Bombay Municipal Corporation (1985) 3 SCC 545.

and fair procedure was followed, but did not give an absolute right to stay on public pavements to the pavement dwellers.

Also, in the case of *Sodan Singh v. New Delhi Municipal Committee (1989)* the court acknowledged the freedom to engage in trade under Article 19(1)(g).[6] later the Street Vendors Act, 2014 was passed to recognized and safeguard the livelihood of street vendors.[7]It shows that small dealers or labours are acknowledge and protected by the law.

3.3 Directive Principles and Government Schemes

From directive principles of state policy *Article 39(a)* directs state to ensure adequate means of equality in livelihood for men and women. *Article 41* imposes duty on the state to formulate effective policies so as to ensure right to work and to provide public assistance under certain circumstances such as unemployment.[8] This article (Article 41) is a call upon the state to help build a society where people can make a life. The Centre and State governments have taken various measures through different policies in this direction for increasing employment opportunities for people or workers, also measures for better working conditions, raising wages, to provide social security and occupational safety to workers who are eligible to seek benefits under such schemes.[9] Such as, e-Shram portal- a platform created for unorganized workers and by august 2025 over 30.98 crore unorganized workers had registered there, even though the registration begins the recognition and actual benefit is different step.[10]

3.4 The Gap between Legal Protection and Social Recognition

However, workers in an unorganized sector like small vendors, shopkeepers, self-employed workers, mechanic etc. may lack the stability, social security, access to social protection and recognition associated with conventional employment.[11] As, they were treated differently than that of the persons working in a formal sector.[12] While ensuring the legal

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[6] Sodan Singh v New Delhi Municipal Committee (1989) 4 SCC 155.
[7] Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act 2014.
[8] Constitution of India 1950, arts 37, 39(a) and 41.
[9] International Labour Organization, India Wage Report: Wage Policies for Decent Work and Inclusive Growth (ILO 2018).
[10] Ministry of Labour and Employment, 'Nearly 31 Crore Unorganised Workers Registered on e-Shram Portal' (Press Information Bureau, 11 August 2025) <https://labour.gov.in/sites/default/files/pib2155172.pdf> accessed 6 November 2026.
[11] J Unni and U Rani, 'Social Protection for Informal Workers in India: Insecurities, Instruments and Institutional Mechanisms' (2003) 34(1) Development and Change 127
[12] A Moktan, 'Decent Work Deficit in India: A Disaggregated Trend over the Three Post-Reform Decades' (2016) 7(4) World Review of Political Economy 486.

protection of the workers, this demonstrates the need for recognition for such work as a dignified work and providing opportunities to live a life with dignity.

4. Understanding the Issue: Status, Self-Employment and Social Attitudes

4.1 The Prestige Gap

The mindset of society is one of the major issues related to unemployment. It becomes difficult now a days to get a dignified life- as, society judges a person based on his educational qualification, income sources and occupational status.

A government employee might be more respected and lead a more dignified life than a person who has his own business or doing manual labor and earning more than the government employee. This is due to the status of the position which the person holds as a government employee and he may enjoy prestige because of it.[13] Such perspective of people lowers the dignity of other workers who work in a different sector other than government sector.

4.2 Selg-Employment without Security

56.2% workers were self-employed in 2025 and 20.2% perrons work as a casual worker; this shows that majority of the Indian population depend on self-employment for their livelihood.[14] As per PLFS monthly bulletin for September 2026, unemployment is high specifically among young women as well as in youth from urban areas with rates of 26% and 19% respectively.[15] Aside from that, about 4 to 5% of young people enrolled in vocational training whose age is between 15 to 29 years.[16] This demonstrates that even though the people are self-employed and working independently then also there is no stable income, or proper working conditions or jib security.[17] Thus, society and government also

[13] MacKinnon and Langford (n 1).
[14] Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Press Note: Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) Annual Report 2025 (Government of India, March 2026) <https://www.mospi.gov.in/uploads/latestReleases/latest_release_1774607827733_3e8964a9-268b-4cc9-ad65-cfc8a9e32f08_Press_note_AR_PLFS_2025_23032025_V2.1_26032026_final.pdf> accessed 6 November 2026.
[15] Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) Monthly Bulletin, September 2026 (Government of India, 15 October 2026), as reported in 'Urban Youth Unemployment Rises to 19% in September, Reaches 26.6% among Young Women' The Tribune (New Delhi, 15 October 2026) <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/business/urban-youth-unemployment-rises-to-19-in-september- reaches-26-6-among-young-women/> accessed 6 November 2026.
[16] Ministry of Finance, Economic Survey 2023-24 (Government of India, July 2024); ILO and IHD (n 2).
[17] Unni and Rani (n 12); Moktan (n 13).

has to play a major role by proving protection, equal respect and financial security to such workers, only encouraging people to start their own business is not sufficient.

4.3 Every Profession Carries Its Own Value

There were several professions that contribute to society and which has a distinct nature. From such professions not a single one should be considered as less important or of lower value or status because each profession carries its inherent value and has a unique character. The work, responsibility, honesty, quality of work, etc. deserves more importance, than that of the position that particular post has or the societal exposure it has, and importance of title of that position.

4.4 Jobs, Education and Mindset

From a practical perspective the government alone cannot solve the problem of unemployment, as the population is increasing and the availability of the jobs are limited. Thus, only depending on jobs is not the appropriate thing to depend on. The people must look for different ways to earn money instead of just sitting helplessly and considering oneself as unemployed. Because of the passive attitude of the society, it wrongfully views unemployment, which frequently results in disrespect. If a person keeps waiting only for a job and does nothing else, society starts looking down upon them. But if a person starts something, even small, and works sincerely, dignity remains. This does not mean the State has no duty. The lack of enough quality jobs is a structural problem, and it needs public action as well.[18]

Education is important and crucial in such circumstances as it foster critical thinking, analytical thinking, responsibility, and respect for others. As good character and conduct of a person which should be ethically governed is not guaranteed by the education, if formal education would be able to promote morality and ethical conduct of a person then the different conflicting statements by the leaders would not exist. Education should make people mentally strong and skilled in areas; if people become skilled and active then a growing population will act as an opportunity for jobs rather than a problem, for unemployment.

Mindset of the society can make unemployment more difficult to deal with or easier to overcome, but it is only one part of the picture. Poor economic conditions, weak training,

[18] ILO and IHD (n 2).

limited resources and discrimination are also real causes, and the state and society must address them too.[19]

5. Lessons from Life and Tradition: Determination Beyond Degrees

5.1 People Who Built Their Own Path

The following examples show people who achieve success in their life based on their own will and skill.

1) One of the great scientists George Washington Carver who has many discoveries in his name, was born in slavery, but created a way to reach at the top.[20]
2) one of the great cricketers Sachin Tendulkar who did not complete his higher education but today has a name in the list of masters in cricket or as a greatest cricketer.[21]
3) The business man who has made a name in India, that is Sanjay Ghodawat, who sells pan masala in his early life.[22]
4) Vasantdada Patil who was Chief Minister of Maharashtra, studies only up to 7th standard but then also holds such a position. And had a great impact on society.[23]

The above examples show us that success does not merely depend upon your degrees and percentage you gained rather it majorly depends upon your skills and determination and your inner guts.

5.2 The Story of Mahavira and Goshala

There is a story, about Mahavira and his disciple Goshala. One day Goshala asked Mahavira about the survival rate of a small plant, whether the plant has the ability survive in a weather condition or not. By examining the plant very carefully Mahavira replied that the plant will survive as it has strength and ability to survive even after the bad weather conditions. By hearing this Goshala immediately uprooted that plant and threw it away.

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[19] ILO and IHD (n 2).
[20] George Washington Carver' (Encyclopaedia Britannica) <https://www.britannica.com/biography/George-Washington-Carver> accessed 6 November 2026.
[21] Sachin Tendulkar with Boria Majumdar, Playing It My Way: My Autobiography (Hodder & Stoughton 2014); 'Sachin Tendulkar' (Encyclopaedia Britannica) <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Sachin-Tendulkar> accessed 6 November 2026.
[22] Sanjay Ghodawat Group' (Wikipedia) <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sanjay_Ghodawat_Group> accessed 6 November 2026.
[23] Vasantdada Patil' (Wikipedia) <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vasantdada_Patil> accessed 6 November 2026.

After a few days from that incident, the plant took root again on the same spot where it had been previously thrown. It was also seen that the plant started growing.[24] It began to make its way, in this world, as it took its roots again in the place where it was thrown before. Here Mahavira explained to Goshala that Mahavira had sensed the strength inside the seed. Even if the plant had been uprooted then also the plant had the power to grow again. This shows that if a person has ability, willpower, determination and inner strength then even if someone pulls the person down the person can rise again and create opportunities, for the person by rebuilding the circumstances and eliminating inequalities.

Not everyone can become collector, doctor, engineer or government employee. Society consists of several positions and needs people in different sectors. Therefore, rather than just based on person's position, people themselves should be appreciated and given a dignified life based on their talent, skills, hard work and quality of their job.

6. Suggestions and the Way Forward

6.1 Education and Skills

Education should focus on teaching skills, practical training and helping students think critically and analytically. It should also help each person grow their abilities. Also, it should help students to understand that no one kind of work is superior or inferior rather each and every type of work consists of a unique value and its own dignity.[25]

6.2 The Role of the State

On other hand, government should recognize each and every work equally by giving equal importance to them and by providing social security to eligible workers and different opportunities for different sectors. It should also support the small business where it is necessary and when people want to start something by their own by looking into its effectiveness.

At the same time, all kind of work should be treated equal by giving equal recognition to them by the government. Security has to be provided to certain workers who qualifies. The central or state government must create more employment opportunities where it is possible and may provide training for it when necessary. It should also promote self-employed work

[24] AL Basham, History and Doctrines of the Ājīvikas: A Vanished Indian Religion (Luzac 1951) 48-49; Osho, 'Mahavira, Instinct, Makkhali Gosala' (Osho Online Library) <URL to be inserted> accessed 6 November 2026.
[25] ILO and IHD (n 2).

and other types of business started at small scale. And should spread awareness about the practical perspective to live a dignified life. Also, the government should take different skill development programs for different workers to enhance their practical knowledge about the related field in which they work, which helps them to dream higher and strengthen their mindset about their work. Each profession should be given fair economic value. The Supreme Court has already held that paying workers less than the minimum wage can amount to forced labour.[26]

6.3 A Change in Social Mindset

Society must change how it thinks. Because just blaming the government and doing nothing will not solve the problem of unemployment. Society should create different opportunities through the challenges which it faces daily. It should look into it as an opportunity. And must create its own way forward. For example, rather than blaming increase in population, society should look towards it as an opportunity to gain profit and make employment opportunities for oneself and for others too. People should make new ways and welcome the new perspectives, different views to create better and dignified life. So, change in mindset is one of the important things for equal treatment to each person working in different area.

7. Conclusion

Unemployment is not only an economic issue. It also affects person's dignity, their place in society, fairness and how they are seen by others. It's not about money. It's about respect. When someone can't work, they often feel less valued, and it effects on their own worth in their own eyes and in the eyes of others. When society does not judge a person based on his/her job or the position they hold or the source of their salary then only that society to be called as a fair society. Instead, it values people for their skills their character, their effort and what they give back. Everyone deserves a chance to live with dignity. That means access to education smart government plans and a shift in how society thinks about work and worth. In the end a person's real worth isn't measured by their title or salary. It's measured by what they do for others and, for the community and also based on their skills and determination. That's where true value lies.

[26] People's Union for Democratic Rights v Union of India (1982) 3 SCC 235; Constitution of India 1950, art 23.