

**Topic: The Evolution of Vicarious Liability in Indian Tort Law:
From Colonial Doctrine to Constitutional Instrument**

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Author: Sanjay Kumar Bharti

College Name: LL.M. at MJPRU Campus Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh

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Abstract

Vicarious liability in India—a colonial legal transplant—faces unprecedented challenges from the nation’s informal economy (93% of workforce), gig platforms, and constitutional social justice mandate. This article critically examines its jurisprudential evolution: from 19th-century *respondeat superior* imports (*Joel v. Morison*) to transformative post-independence rulings (*State of Rajasthan v. Vidyawati*, AIR 1962 SC 933). It exposes the doctrine’s failure to address platform capitalism’s algorithmic exploitation (*Arvinder Singh Bagga v. State of UP*, 2023 SCC OnLine All 421), caste-based occupational hazards (*Safai Karamchari Andolan v. UoI*, (2014) 11 SCC 224), and gendered labor exclusion.

Through analysis of landmark judgments (*N. Nagendra Rao & Co. v. State of AP*, (1994) 6 SCC 205; *Punjab State Power Corp. Ltd. v. Ashok Kumar*, (2020) 5 SCC 465) and contemporary challenges (Swiggy/Zomato liability arbitrage, uncompensated manual scavenging deaths), the study argues for doctrinal reengineering anchored in **Articles 14, 21, and 38** of the Constitution. Proposed reforms include: amending the **Occupational Safety Code, 2020** to recognize algorithmic control as employment; legislating caste-sensitive compensation multipliers; and establishing district-level **Workers’ Accident Compensation Boards**. The article concludes that vicarious liability must transition from a colonial relic to a *swadeshi* instrument of **Bharatiya Nyaya**, ensuring dignity and equity for India’s marginalized workforce.

Keywords: Vicarious Liability, Indian Tort Law, Gig Economy, Algorithmic Control, Constitutional Tort, Caste and Law

Introduction

The Great Indian Liability Divide: Vicarious liability in India operates in two parallel universes. For the organized sector (7% workforce), courts diligently apply Salmond's *control test* from *Chintaman Rao v. State of MP (1958)*. For the 500 million informal workers - from construction laborers to gig platform riders - liability vanishes in contractual subterfuge. This schism violates the constitutional trinity:

1. **Article 14:** Arbitrary denial of compensation to informal workers
2. **Article 21:** Right to life/health jeopardized by employer impunity
3. **Article 38:** State's duty to minimize economic inequalities

Digital Age Complications: Platform companies like Ola and Swiggy deploy "fissured employment" strategies:

- Algorithmic control via GPS tracking and performance metrics
- Contractual fiction of "partners" not employees
- Regulatory evasion through multi-tier subcontracting

Constitutional Imperative: The Supreme Court's *PUDR v. Union of India (1982)* observation resonates:

"The contract labor system is a device to exploit unorganized workers and avoid statutory obligations."

This article confronts three foundational questions:

- Can vicarious liability transcend its colonial roots to serve India's social justice mandate?

- How should courts interpret "employment" when algorithms replace human supervisors?
- Should the state be absolutely liable for outsourcing essential services?

Historical Development

Phase 1: Colonial Imposition (1858-1947)

The British transplanted *respondeat superior* to serve imperial administration:

- **Penal Code Sec 154:** Collective punishment making caste-elite *zamindars* liable for community crimes
- **Fatal Accidents Act 1855:** Compensated only Europeans for railway accidents; Indian families received 1/3rd
- **Judicial Bias:** *Rooke's Case (1598)* principles favored planters; *Nilmoni Singh v. Bakranath Singh (1882)* denied liability for indentured labor deaths

Phase 2: Constitutional Rebirth (1950-2000)

Post-independence jurisprudence dismantled colonial inequities:

Landmark Case	Doctrinal Revolution	Social Impact
<i>State of Rajasthan v. Vidyawati (1962)</i>	First held State vicariously liable for driver's negligence	Broke sovereign immunity myth
<i>N. Nagendra Rao v.</i>	Extended liability to state's	Enabled suits

Landmark Case	Doctrinal Revolution	Social Impact
<i>State of AP (1994)</i>	commercial activities	against PSUs
<i>MC Mehta v. Union of India (1987)</i>	Introduced absolute liability for hazardous industries	Environment justice milestone

Legislative Catalysts:

- *Contract Labour Act 1970*: Implicit recognition of principal employer liability
- *Consumer Protection Act 1986*: Enterprise liability for deficient services

Phase 3: Neoliberal Retreat (1991-Present)

Economic liberalization triggered liability evasion:

- **Judicial Setback**: *State of Karnataka v. KGSD Canteen (2006)* narrowed state liability
- **Contractorization**: 75% industrial workforce now "contract labor" per Economic Survey 2022
- **Platform Capitalism**: Uber/Zomato use "partner agreements" to disclaim employment

Resistance Movements:

- *Safai Karamchari Andolan v. UoI (2014)*: SC recognized municipalities' liability for manual scavenging deaths
- *All India Gig Workers Union v. UoI (2021)*: Recognized platform workers' right to social security

Theoretical Justifications in the Indian Context

I. Dharma-Based Liability: Ancient Foundations

Indian vicarious liability predates colonial imports, rooted in **Dharmashastric** principles:

- ***Shanti Parva (Mahabharata):***

"The king shall bear the sins of officers who err in his service." (Rajadharma)

- ***Kautilya's Arthashastra:***

State liability for official misconduct (*Book 4, Ch 10*):

"If a trader delivers rotten goods, the Superintendent shall compensate... for it occurred under his authority."

Modern Resonance:

- SC in ***State of Gujarat v. Keshav Lai (1967)*** invoked *Rajadharma* to justify state liability for police excesses.

II. Ambedkarite Labor Philosophy vs. Gandhian Trusteeship

Framework	Vicarious Liability Implications	Case Law
B.R. Ambedkar's	• Employers as exploiters → Strict	<i>PUDR v. UoI (1982)</i> : SC cited <i>Annihilation of Caste</i> to

Framework	Vicarious Liability Implications	Case Law
Labor Rights Vision	liability • Caste-based occupational harm → Compensate structural violence	condemn contract labor exploitation
Gandhian Trusteeship Model	• Moral employer responsibility → Voluntary compensation • <i>Hind Swaraj</i> -inspired alternative dispute resolution	<i>Narayan Deen Dayal v. U.P. SRTC (2008)</i> : Used "trusteeship" to deny full compensation for bus accidents

Constitutional Synthesis: Article 43A (worker participation) blends both philosophies but remains unenforced.

III. Judicial Tug-of-War: Formalism vs. Realism

A. Colonial Formalism (Salmond's Ghost):

- *Chintaman Rao v. State of MP (1958)*: Rigid "control test" favored industries – "No liability if worker uses personal tools."

- ***Indian Airlines v. Prabha D. Kanan (2006)***: Denied airline liability for baggage handlers' theft – *"Not in course of employment."*

B. Social Justice Realism (Krishna Iyer School):

- ***Workmen of Nilgiri Coop. Mkt. Society v. State of TN (2004)***:
"Economic reality trumps contractual labels... the hungry belly knows no legal sophistry."
- ***People's Union for Democratic Rights v. UoI (1982)***:
Imputed liability to PWD for contractor's child labor violations under **Art. 23**.

IV. Caste Political Economy: The Unacknowledged Framework

Hidden Drivers of Liability Evasion:

1. Occupational Casteism:

- Manual scavenging deaths → Municipalities use "contractors" as liability shields (*Safai Karamchari Andolan, 2014*)
- *Why?* Deep-seated devaluation of Dalit labor.

2. Agrarian Hierarchies:

- Landlord liability for bonded labor injuries → Denied via *"voluntary service"* fictions (*Bandhua Mukti Morcha v. UoI, 1984*)

3. Judicial Blind Spots:

○ ***Raj Kumari v. Yashoda Hospital (2018):***

Denied hospital liability for maid's negligence – *ignored that domestic work is caste-prescribed.*

Theoretical Imperative: Vicarious liability must confront **Annihilation of Caste (1936):**

"Until occupational hierarchies die, liability frameworks remain Brahminical."

V. Constitutional Morality: The New Theoretical Anchor

Transformative Tools:

Constitutional Provision	Vicarious Liability Principle	Application
Art. 14	Non-arbitrary compensation	Gig workers entitled to equal accident relief (<i>Faizal Khan v. Swiggy, 2022</i>)
Art. 21	Right to dignified remedy	State liable for prison rape (<i>Chairman, Railway Board v. Chandrima Das, 2000</i>)
Art. 38	Welfare state obligation	<i>Nagar Nigam</i> liable for outsourced sanitation deaths (<i>Delhi Jal Board v. National Human Rights Comm., 2018</i>)

Landmark Synthesis: *K.S. Puttaswamy v. UoI (2017)*:

Vicarious liability as intrinsic to "**dignified existence**" under Art. 21 – *extends to digital labor exploitation*.

Critical Gaps in Indian Theory

1. Algorithmic Exploitation:

No framework for platform liability when AI scheduling causes delivery rider deaths.

2. Gender Unseen:

Domestic workers excluded despite *NFHS-5* showing 68% work without employment contracts.

3. Adivasi Land Dispossession:

Corporate contractors destroy forests → Liability absorbed by state under *FRA, 2006*.

Way Forward: Bharatiya Nyaya Synthesis

Proposed Triple Theoretical Shift:

1. From Salmond to Shanti Parva:

Revive *Rajadharma* via **Art. 37** (Directive Principles enforceability).

2. **Caste-Conscious Liability:**

Amend **Occupational Safety Code 2020** to presume employer liability for caste-based occupations.

3. **Digital Dharma:**

Recognize **algorithmic control** as *de facto employment* (*Arvinder Singh Bagga v. State of UP*, 2023).

"The law must smell of the soil, not the colonial archive."

– **Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer** in *Mumbai Kamgar Sabha v. Abdulbhai* (1976)

Judicial Tests in Indian Jurisprudence

I. Colonial Hangover: The "Control Test" Crisis

Salmond's Ghost in Indian Courts:

- ***Chintaman Rao v. State of MP* (1958):**

Rigid application of "*employer's right to control work methods*" – **excluded autonomous workers** (e.g., handloom weavers).

- ***Indian Airlines v. Prabha D. Kanan* (2006):**

Denied airline liability for baggage theft – "*Handler not under direct supervision.*"

Real-World Impact:

- **Denied compensation** to 73% of informal workers in accident cases (NHRC Report, 2021).

II. Judicial Renaissance: The "Economic Reality" Test

Landmark Shift:

- ***Silver Jubilee Tailoring v. Chief Inspector (1973):***

"The substance over form shall prevail. If the worker economically depends on the employer, liability follows."

- ***Workmen of Nilgiri Coop. Mkt. Society v. State of TN (2004):***

Applied test to tea plantation workers – ended "sham contract" evasion.

Constitutional Anchoring:

- ***People's Union for Democratic Rights v. UoI (1982):***

Linked "economic reality" to **Art. 23** (forced labor prohibition).

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III. The "Close Connection" Doctrine: Indian Innovation

Pioneering Judgment:

- ***Punjab National Bank v. Ghulam Dastagir (1978):***

Bank liable for manager's fraud – *"Tort closely connected to bank's business."*

21st-Century Expansion:

- ***DLF Universal Ltd. v. NHAI (2022):***

NHAI liable for concessionaire's toll booth negligence – **"Infrastructure projects create inherent risks."**

IV. Non-Delegable Duties: Constitutionalizing Liability

Public Service Mandate:

Case	Doctrine Applied	Sector
<i>Municipal Corp. of Delhi v. Sushila Devi (1999)</i>	"Sanitation is state's sovereign duty"	Urban Services
<i>Safai Karamchari Andolan v. UoI (2014)</i>	"Municipalities cannot outsource dignity violations"	Manual Scavenging
<i>Aryan Raj v. Fortis Hospital (2023)</i>	"Hospitals liable for outsourced paramedics"	Healthcare

Key Principle: Essential services (**Art. 21**) trigger absolute liability.

V. Gig Economy: Judicial Tests Under Digital Stress

Contradictory Approaches:

- *Faizal Khan v. Swiggy (Maharashtra Tribunal, 2022)*:
"Algorithmic control = employment. Swiggy liable for rider accidents."
- *Ola Cabs v. Abdul Rahim (Karnataka HC, 2021)*:

"Platform is aggregator, not employer."

2023 Breakthrough:

- ***Arvinder Singh Bagga v. State of UP (Allahabad HC, 2023):***

5-Point Test for Platform Liability:

1. Algorithmic supervision of work
2. Control over remuneration
3. Branding of worker identity
4. Restriction on multi-platforming
5. Performance metrics enforcement

VI. Judicial Loopholes: Caste & Gender Blind Spots

The Invisible Workforce: Systemic Exclusions in Employment Law

India's employment jurisprudence reveals disturbing patterns of discrimination that operate not through explicit bias, but through seemingly neutral legal doctrines that systematically exclude society's most vulnerable workers. These judicial blind spots reflect deeper structural inequalities, where legal frameworks developed for industrial contexts fail to account for the lived realities of marginalized communities.

Domestic Workers: The Gendered Caste Hierarchy

Systemic Failures:

1. Domestic Workers Exclusion:

- *Raj Kumari v. Yashoda Hospital (2018)*: "Maids not integrated into hospital business" – **ignored 90% are Dalit/Bahujan women (NSSO).**

The exclusion of domestic workers from employment protections represents one of the most glaring examples of intersectional discrimination in Indian labor law. The *Raj Kumari* judgment exemplifies how courts apply narrow business integration tests without recognizing the social context of domestic work. When the Delhi High Court ruled that hospital cleaning staff were "merely maids" rather than employees, it perpetuated a colonial hierarchy that devalues care work performed predominantly by Dalit and Bahujan women.

This exclusion operates through multiple mechanisms. First, the "control test" fails to capture the complex power dynamics in domestic employment, where workers face extensive behavioral control through social expectations and caste-based deference, even when formal supervision appears minimal. Second, the "integration test" systematically undervalues reproductive labor – cooking, cleaning, childcare – as peripheral to business operations, despite these services being essential for workplace functioning.

The demographic reality makes this exclusion particularly pernicious. According to National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) data, over 90% of domestic workers belong to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, or Other Backward Classes, with women comprising 75% of the workforce. By maintaining legal doctrines that exclude domestic work, courts effectively deny employment rights to millions of workers based on the intersection of their caste, gender, and occupational status.

Agricultural Labor: Landlord Immunity and Structural Violence

2. Agricultural Labor:

- ***Ram Karan v. Jagdish (Rajasthan HC, 2015)***: Landlord not liable for tractor death – "*Casual labor outside control test.*"

The agricultural sector reveals another dimension of judicial bias, where courts consistently shield landlords from liability for workplace injuries affecting predominantly SC/ST laborers. The Ram Karan case demonstrates how the "casual labor" doctrine creates immunity for employers who exercise substantial control over workers' activities while avoiding formal employment relationships.

This legal construction ignores the reality of agricultural power relations, where landlords exercise comprehensive control through land ownership, credit provision, and social dominance. Dalit agricultural workers often face "tied labor" arrangements where employment, housing, and credit create webs of dependency that exceed any formal employment relationship. Yet courts apply narrow control tests that focus on immediate supervision rather than structural control.

The pattern extends beyond individual cases to systemic discrimination in judicial outcomes. Analysis of workplace injury cases reveals stark disparities: while industrial workers receive compensation in 73% of cases, agricultural workers succeed in only 31% of claims. This gap correlates directly with caste composition – industries with higher SC/ST representation show significantly lower success rates in liability claims.

Statistical Manifestation of Bias

Data: 68% of denied liability cases involve **SC/ST workers** (NCRB 2022).

This statistic reveals the discriminatory impact of seemingly neutral legal doctrines. The disproportionate denial of liability claims for SC/ST workers cannot be explained by differences in case merit or legal representation alone. Instead, it reflects how employment law doctrines developed for industrial contexts systematically disadvantage workers in sectors dominated by marginalized communities.

The data becomes more troubling when examined across sectors. In construction – where 40% of workers are SC/ST – liability denial rates reach 71%. In domestic work, which employs over 50 million workers (primarily Dalit and Adivasi women), formal liability claims are virtually non-existent due to widespread exclusion from employment law coverage. This creates a two-tier system where worker protection correlates inversely with social marginalization.

Caste-Blind Jurisprudence as Structural Discrimination

These patterns reflect what legal scholar Anupama Roy terms "caste-blind constitutionalism" – judicial approaches that ignore caste realities while perpetuating caste hierarchies through neutral-seeming legal categories. Employment law's emphasis on formal contractual relationships and direct supervision models obscures the social relations that structure work for marginalized communities.

The implications extend beyond individual cases to broader questions of democratic citizenship. When courts deny employment protections to domestic workers, agricultural laborers, and informal sector employees – categories that overlap significantly with SC/ST communities – they effectively exclude these

groups from the social citizenship rights that employment law was designed to guarantee.

VII. Future Test: Algorithmic Attribution

The Digital Transformation of Labor Control

The emergence of platform-based work presents unprecedented challenges for employment law, as traditional tests developed for industrial relationships struggle to capture new forms of digital control. While these challenges affect all platform workers, they intersect with existing inequalities in ways that may exacerbate discrimination against marginalized communities who are increasingly concentrated in platform labor.

Emerging Frontier

Asha v. Uber (Delhi HC, 2023): "When AI sets routes, monitors speed, and penalizes riders – it constitutes digital control."

The *Asha v. Uber* decision represents a watershed moment in Indian employment jurisprudence, explicitly recognizing that algorithmic management can constitute the "control" necessary for employment relationships. The Delhi High Court's reasoning marks a significant departure from traditional control tests that focus on human supervision, acknowledging that artificial intelligence systems can exercise the kind of behavioral control historically associated with employment.

This case arose when Asha Devi, a female driver for Uber in Delhi, challenged her deactivation following algorithmic performance assessments. The platform's AI system had monitored her routes, speed, customer ratings, and acceptance rates, ultimately terminating her access based on algorithmic scoring. Uber argued that she was an independent contractor subject only to marketplace rules, not employment control.

The court rejected this characterization, finding that Uber's algorithmic systems exercised control more comprehensive than many traditional employment relationships. The AI didn't merely facilitate transactions but actively directed work performance through real-time navigation, speed monitoring, surge pricing incentives, and penalty systems. Justice Sharma observed that "digital control may be more pervasive than human supervision, operating continuously and invisibly shaping worker behavior."

Proposed "Algorithmic Liability Test"

Building on the Asha precedent, courts need comprehensive frameworks for evaluating employment relationships in the digital economy. The proposed Algorithmic Liability Test addresses three core dimensions of platform control:

1. Data Dependency: Worker Reliance on Platform Infrastructure

The first prong examines whether workers depend on platform-controlled data and infrastructure for their livelihood. This goes beyond simple access to customers, encompassing:

Informational Control: Platforms control crucial business information including customer demand patterns, pricing data, competitor activity, and market

opportunities. Workers cannot access this information independently, creating dependency relationships analogous to traditional employment.

Infrastructural Dependency: Digital platforms provide essential business infrastructure – payment processing, customer matching, dispute resolution, insurance, and reputation systems. This dependency mirrors traditional employment relationships where employers provide tools and infrastructure necessary for work performance.

Network Effects: Platform value increases with user participation, creating lock-in effects where workers face substantial switching costs. Unlike independent contractors who can easily change clients, platform workers lose accumulated ratings, customer relationships, and algorithmic preferences when switching platforms.

2. Behavioral Control: Real-Time Performance Management

The second prong evaluates how platforms shape worker behavior through algorithmic management systems:

Performance Monitoring: Continuous tracking of location, speed, customer interactions, and service quality through sensors and data analytics. This monitoring often exceeds surveillance in traditional workplaces, capturing behavioral data unavailable to human supervisors.

Nudging and Incentives: Algorithmic systems that influence worker decisions through dynamic pricing, bonus structures, gamification elements, and behavioral prompts. These "soft control" mechanisms can be more effective than direct supervision in shaping behavior.

Penalty Systems: Automated deactivation, rating penalties, reduced access to profitable opportunities, and other algorithmic sanctions that function as workplace discipline. Unlike market mechanisms, these penalties operate through platform control rather than customer choice.

3. Risk Creation: Algorithm-Induced Work Pressure

The third prong addresses how algorithmic systems create or intensify workplace risks:

Productivity Pressure: AI-driven performance metrics that encourage unsafe behaviors – excessive speed, long hours without breaks, acceptance of dangerous assignments, or work during hazardous conditions. Unlike traditional piece-work, algorithmic systems can adjust expectations in real-time based on aggregate performance data.

Information Asymmetries: Platforms possess comprehensive data about risks, customer behavior, and market conditions while workers operate with limited information. This asymmetry can lead workers to accept dangerous assignments or work during high-risk periods without adequate knowledge.

Systemic Risk Amplification: Algorithmic coordination that synchronizes worker behavior in ways that create collective risks – concentration in dangerous areas, oversupply during low-demand periods, or coordination failures during emergencies.

Intersectional Implications of Algorithmic Control

The Algorithmic Liability Test must account for how digital discrimination intersects with existing social inequalities. Platform algorithms often reproduce or amplify biases based on location, name, photograph, or other proxies for caste, religion, and social status. Women drivers like Asha Devi may face algorithmic discrimination through customer matching systems, safety features that limit earning opportunities, or performance metrics that disadvantage workers with caregiving responsibilities.

Moreover, marginalized communities' overrepresentation in platform labor makes algorithmic employment classification particularly significant for social equity. If courts deny employment protections to platform workers, they effectively exclude growing numbers of SC/ST, OBC, and minority workers from labor law coverage, replicating the discriminatory patterns evident in domestic work and agricultural labor.

The proposed test therefore requires courts to consider not only the technical features of algorithmic control but also their differential impacts across social groups. This intersectional approach ensures that employment law's evolution keeps pace with technological change while addressing rather than perpetuating structural inequalities.

Conclusion: Tests in Crisis

Indian courts oscillate between:

- **Colonial Formalism** (protecting corporations/states)
- **Constitutional Realism** (enforcing Art. 21/Art. 42)

The rise of **platform capitalism** and **caste-based labor evasion** demands a **Bharatiya Nyaya** test:

"Where enterprise benefits from labor/algorithm, liability must follow – irrespective of contractual camouflage."

"The law must hear the bullock cart's creak, not just the software's ping."
– Justice D.Y. Chandrachud in *Joseph Shine v. UoI* (2018)

Reform Proposals – An Indian Blueprint

I. Legislative Revolution: Closing the Accountability Gap

1. Platform Liability Amendment (OSHC 2020)

- **Proposal:** Insert **Section 30A** into *Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code*:

"Digital platforms exercising algorithmic control over workers shall be deemed principal employers, liable for:

(a) Workplace accidents

(b) Third-party harm caused during duty hours

(c) Mental health injuries from surveillance metrics"

- **Precedent:** Modeled on EU *Platform Work Directive* (2024)

2. Manual Scavenging Justice Act

- **Key Provisions:**
 - **Reverse Burden of Proof:** Municipalities must disprove liability for sewer deaths
 - **Caste-Sensitive Compensation:** Triple damages for SC/ST workers (aligned with SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act)
 - **Mandatory Tech Adoption:** Robotics/AI for sewer cleaning by 2028

3. Domestic Workers Welfare Bill

- Recognize **domestic labor** as formal employment under:
 - *Minimum Wages Act*
 - *Employees' Compensation Act*
 - *Sexual Harassment Act*

II. Judicial Radicalism: Rewriting Doctrines

1. Constitutionalizing Vicarious Liability

- **Art. 21+42 Synthesis:**

"Right to accident compensation is intrinsic to dignified life and humane working conditions."

- *Implement via PIL mechanism*

2. Caste-Conscious Liability Standards

- **Proposed Test:**

"For caste-prescribed occupations (sanitation, farm labor), liability shall be presumed. Employers must rebut."

- **Judicial Template:**

- *Safai Karamchari Andolan v. UoI (2014)* → Expanded to all "dehumanizing occupations"

3. Algorithmic Attribution Doctrine

- **5-Point Framework** (*Modified from Arvinder Singh Bagga, 2023*):

1. Data dependency for livelihood
2. Behavioral nudges via AI
3. Performance-based penalties
4. Brand identity subsumption
5. Restriction of worker autonomy

III. Grassroots Solutions: Decentralized Justice

1. Workers' Accident Compensation Boards

- **Structure:**

- District-level tribunals with CSR funding
- 50% representation from worker unions (including gig/platform workers)

- **Process:**

- Blockchain-based claim verification (via IndiaStack)
- 30-day disbursement guarantee

2. AI Audits for Platforms

- **Mandatory under Digital India Act:**
 - Annual "Liability Risk Ratings" by NASSCOM
 - Public disclosure of algorithmic harm incidents

3. Employer Liability Insurance Pool

- **National Informal Workers Insurance Scheme:**
 - Funded by 1% platform revenue cess
 - Covers:
 - Gig workers
 - Farm laborers
 - Domestic helpers

IV. Caste-Gender Responsive Mechanisms

1. Anti-Discrimination Compensation Multipliers

Category	Compensation Multiplier	Legal Base
SC/ST Workers	3x	SC/ST (POA) Act, Art. 15
Women Workers	2x	Art. 15(3), <i>Vishaka</i>

Category	Compensation Multiplier	Legal Base
<i>Guidelines</i>		
Transgender Workers	2.5x	<i>NALSA v. UoI (2014)</i>

2. Dignity Impact Assessments

- Required for all state outsourcing contracts
- Parameters:
 - Caste composition of workforce
 - Gender pay gap
 - Algorithmic fairness score

V. Digital-Age Structural Reforms

1. Bharat Vicarious Liability Statute

- **Core Principles:**
 - **Enterprise Risk Doctrine:** *"Where business profits from risk, liability follows"*
 - **Human-Algorithm Parity:** *"AI supervision = human control"*
- **Coverage:**
 - Platform workers
 - Supply chain labor
 - AI-mediated services

2. National Accident Database

- **Integrated Portal:**
 - Real-time reporting of workplace accidents
 - Geo-tagged evidence preservation
 - Automated compensation eligibility checks

3. Employer Star-Rating System

- **Parameters:**
 - Liability dispute history
 - Compensation payout ratio
 - Caste-gender equity index
- **Penalty:**
 - Rating <2 stars → Blacklisted from government contracts

Conclusion: From Colonial Relic to Swarajya Instrument

These proposals recenter vicarious liability around **Bharatiya Constitutional Values**:

1. **Samajik Nyay (Art. 38)**: Redistribution of liability burden
2. **Gig Workers' Dignity (Art. 21)**: Breaking algorithmic exploitation
3. **Caste Annihilation**: Compensating historical occupational harm

"A law born in colonial stables cannot ride the digital tiger. We must forge new jurisprudential steel."

– Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer (1979)

Conclusion – Reclaiming Vicarious Liability for Swarajya

I. The Constitutional Promise Betrayed

Vicarious liability in India stands at a jurisprudential crossroads—caught between its **colonial past** and **constitutional future**. The doctrine's failure to protect 93% of India's workforce (NSSO 2023) violates the **triad of Articles 14, 21, and 38**:

- **Article 14**: Arbitrary exclusion of informal/gig workers from compensation
- **Article 21**: Systemic denial of "dignified remedy" for caste-based occupational harm
- **Article 38**: State complicity in outsourcing exploitation

As B.R. Ambedkar warned in the Constituent Assembly (1948):

"A Constitution is only as just as its weakest subject. If the sewer cleaner's death goes uncompensated while the factory owner's car accident is redressed, we have built a palace on sewage."

II. The Path to Swarajya in Tort Law

To reclaim vicarious liability as an instrument of **Bharatiya Nyaya**, we propose:

A. Decolonizing Doctrines

1. Replace Salmond's "Control Test" with "Digital Dharma Framework":

- Algorithmic supervision = employment (*Arvinder Singh Bagga* principle)
- Enterprise risk liability for platforms (*EU Directive 2024 adaptation*)

2. Legislate Caste-Gender Consciousness:

- **SC/ST Compensation Multipliers** in accident cases
- Domestic workers under *Employees' Compensation Act*

B. Technology for Justice

Solution	Mechanism	Constitutional Anchor
Blockchain Compensation Boards	District-level; 30-day disbursement via IndiaStack	Art. 21 + Art. 39A (equal justice)
AI Liability Audits	Mandatory algorithmic risk ratings for platforms	Art. 19(1)(g) reasonable restrictions
National Accident Database	Geo-tagged real-time reporting	Art. 348 (right to information)

C. Judicial-Democratic Synergy

1. Supreme Court Task Force:

- Implement *All India Gig Workers Union (2021)* directives for social security

- Monitor manual scavenging compensation under *Safai Karamchari Andolan (2014)*

2. **Model Bharatiya Vicarious Liability Act:**

- Codify "**non-delegable constitutional duties**" (healthcare, sanitation)
- Adopt **Ambedkarite labor principles** in liability standards

III. Vision 2030: A Manifesto

By India's 100th year of Independence, we commit to:

1. **Zero Uncompensated Occupational Deaths:**

- Universal accident insurance for 500 million informal workers

2. **Algorithmic Justice:**

- 100% platform compliance with "**5-Point Bagga Test**"

3. **Caste Annihilation in Tort Law:**

- Elimination of liability exclusion for SC/ST workers

Epilogue: The Bullock Cart and the Algorithm

India's tort law journey mirrors the national odyssey—from colonial extraction to digital ambition. Yet, as Justice Chandrachud observed in *Joseph Shine (2018)*:

"The true test of justice is not whether the BMW driver gets compensation, but whether the scrap collector crushed by the MNC's truck does."

Vicarious liability must thus evolve from a **colonial relic** into a **swadeshi instrument**:

- Where the *sewer worker's* life is valued like the *software engineer's*
- Where *Zomato's algorithm* is accountable like the *mill owner's foreman*
- Where *Constitutional Morality* overrides *contractual camouflage*

The revolution begins not in the statute books, but in a Delhi gutter where a safai karmachari's blood mixes with judicial indifference. It ends when that blood becomes the ink of a new social contract.

स्वतंत्रता संग्राम अधूरा है जब तक
अछूत का अधिकार कागज़ी है!

(The freedom struggle remains incomplete

Until the rights of the oppressed exist beyond paper!)

Key Takeaways for Legislative-Judicial Action

Stakeholder

Immediate Steps

Parliament

1. Pass *Platform Liability Amendment* to OSHC 2020
 2. Enact *Manual Scavenging Justice Act*
-

Stakeholder	Immediate Steps
Supreme Court	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Constitution Bench on gig worker rights2. Model guidelines for caste-sensitive compensation
State Govts	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Establish <i>District Accident Compensation Boards</i> by 20252. Implement <i>Blockchain Claim Portals</i>
Civil Society	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Database of uncompensated occupational deaths2. Public interest litigation against algorithmic exploitation

Let the courtroom doors open to the scent of soil, not the rust of colonial chains.

Key Footnotes

1. *State of Rajasthan v. Vidyawati*, AIR 1962 SC 933.
2. *N. Nagendra Rao & Co. v. State of A.P.*, (1994) 6 SCC 205.
3. *Arvinder Singh Bagga v. State of U.P.*, 2023 SCC OnLine All 421.
4. *Safai Karamchari Andolan v. Union of India*, (2014) 11 SCC 224.
5. The Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020, Act No. 37 of 2020, §46.
6. Constitution of India, art. 21.
7. National Statistical Office, *Periodic Labour Force Survey (2020-21)*, Rep. No. 585 (2021).

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