

delivered or the cash collected. The delivery boy, in many ways, becomes an extension of the brand, its physical embodiment.

"You might advertise and have Aamir Khan or Shah Rukh Khan as brand ambassadors, but the point is, the guy at the door is my brand. That determines my experience of companies such as Flipkart. If the organisation is smart, punctual, energetic, empathetic, courteous," says Sanjeev Duggal, CEO & Director of Centum Learning, a corporate training firm.

Jobs for Bharat

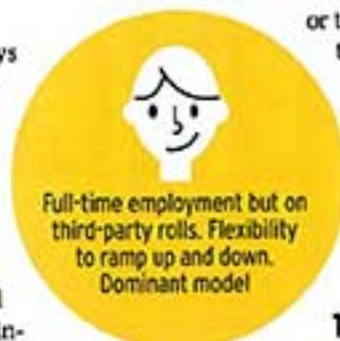
There are about 100,000 delivery boys working for around 20 established e-commerce, hyperlocal and traditional logistics companies today delivering an estimated 1.5 million packages every day – everything from electronics to furniture to grocery and food. Besides third-party companies such as Ecom Express, Delhivery, Roadrunner, Parsel and Quickli among many others, there are in-house delivery set-ups of Flipkart, Myntra, Amazon, and Snapdeal. The number of people this industry hires could explode in a few years. By 2020, e-commerce is expected to be a \$100-billion industry, a more than eight times growth over 2015. The manpower growth may not keep pace because of productivity improvements, but it is still expected to jump five times to half a million delivery jobs.

That's part of the story. Sahil Barua, CEO and co-founder of Delhivery, points out that for every 2.7 riders the company employs, it has one employee in an operational function. The e-commerce supply chain, he estimates, will end up employing 800,000 to a million people by 2020.

The larger companies today claim to reach far-flung PIN codes in the country. Delhivery covers 350 towns and cities, while Ecom Express says it is delivering in 500, from Bomdila in Arunachal Pradesh to Old Srinagar, where one of its delivery boys barely managed to escape a terror attack last year. About 50 per cent of the firm's orders are delivered in tier-III and tier-IV towns. Delivery jobs, therefore, are being created across the country. That's a potential balm to two pains: rural-to-urban migration and the bane of unemployment itself, among the less-skilled.

"In the age group of 21-35, there are about 100 million people who are underemployed or ill-employed in India with low skills and poor education," Chairman of Manipal Global Education and Chairman of FICCI Skills

HOW THEY ARE HIRED



Development Forum, Mohandas Pai, estimates. "These are largely in the north and the east of India where education delivery is weak as also skill development." The rising consumerism that comes with seeing others having cars, nice offices, going to restaurants and people spending is impacting those underemployed or unemployed. In many cases, the young are resorting to violence or are trying to get politically active. "They believe that by reservation, they will be entitled for jobs. That's why you have the Patidar agitation in Gujarat, the Gujar agitation in Rajasthan or the Jat agitation in Haryana. That is where the challenge rise," Pai adds.

The ballooning of delivery jobs, along with those of security guards (India needs 300,000-400,000 every year) and drivers (nearly a million every year, including truckers) can address that challenge, providing well-paying jobs to the bottom of the pyramid.

The Formal Switch

Chandravir Singh is 25 years old and recently joined AskMe Grocery as a delivery boy, delivering everything from pulses to medicines. He is from Aligarh in Uttar Pradesh and migrated to Noida three years ago, in search of a job.

In Noida's Raipur Khadar village, he shares his rented one room with two friends who work as security guards. Even Singh was a guard till five months ago. Guarding offices was a 12-hour job that paid him ₹10,000. He didn't have holidays. If he skipped work, his employer pared his pay.

AskMe Grocery promised improvements. He currently makes ₹16,000 with incentives. The company pays for his provident fund (PF) and employee state insurance (ESI). He gets a day off every week. After paying the monthly room rent of ₹2,500, he can now remit ₹8,000 to his family. His parents, wife and two children continue living in Aligarh and are his dependants.

It's a cold winter morning. The sun has just cut through the fog. Singh sits on a rope-woven *chaarpai* outside his room. "Last month, I bought a 23-inch LED television," he says. His landlady sits nearby, smiling at him. Singh switches to talking about his role. "I can communicate better now. I think I can do marketing because I keep talking about my employer all the time."

Singh's story underscores a few things. His quality of employment has climbed a few notches because he is picking up communication skills, a stepping stone to poten-