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Sentinels Of The Precariat: Navigating Organized Informality, Dignity Work, And Ai-Driven Displacement In The Indian Private Security Sector

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Abstract

The global private security industry has undergone a "quiet revolution," becoming a dominant force in managing mass private property where guards now significantly outnumber public police forces. This study identifies a central paradox of "organized informality": while recruitment and training are institutionalized and state-subsidized, the resulting workforce exists as a "precariat" burdened by systemic insecurity, grueling 12-hour shifts, and a pervasive "culture of servility". The research problem is twofold: first, the sociological erosion of workplace dignity, where the uniform often serves as a "symbol of shame" signaling functional failure to the public; and second, the imminent threat of Artificial Intelligence (AI), which, via a "predator-prey" dynamic, targets the routine cognitive and mental tasks that define modern security work. Notably, while statutory frameworks like India's PSAR Act establish minimum wage caps, the study highlights a critical gap between legal theory and the lived reality of non-compliance, where wages remain insufficient for "social reproduction" and workers are frequently forced into debt traps or "moonlighting" to survive.

Drawing on multidisciplinary analysis, this paper argues that industry efforts toward "professionalization" often function as a "disciplinary logic from above" intended to align worker identities with corporate interests rather than genuinely upgrading labour standards. In response to these pressures, workers exercise individual agency through "doing dignity work"—visible performances of "smartness" and alertness used to reclaim self-worth—and the "pragmatic chameleon" strategy, where guards exploit site-specific knowledge to force retention by new agencies when contracts change. The study concludes by proposing a proactive policy posture: the implementation of Unconditional Universal Basic Income (UBI) and a "robot tax" to decouple human survival from the volatility of the labour market, alongside aggressive digital re-skilling to transition the human guard into a "pilot" role capable of managing automated systems during unstructured crises.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence; Precariat; Job Displacement; Private Security Industry; Organized Informality; Professionalization; Digital Skills; Universal Basic Income.

INTRODUCTION

This has been a quiet revolution in the global industry of private security, which has over the last three decades shifted its status between an assorted peripheral service to a primary method of regulating private property and the mundane social control (Shearing, 1981; Avant, 2005; Cusumano, 2022). Such broad changes in security provision have shifted the states to the market in terms of the number of private security personnel in projects of South Africa and India, including extensive ones, being significantly above the number of police officers to the point that this indicates a structural change in how security is provided (Gooptu, 2013; Sefalafala & Webster, 2013). The sector has over seven million guards only in India alone and makes it one of the highest growth jobs to low-skilled, economically marginalised workers (Gooptu, 2013).

Nonetheless, this massive expansion has not produced any labour standards and occupational security. Quite on the contrary, private security employment has been gradually becoming a part of a larger precariat: a layer of labourers straddling what akin to a distinctive collection of insecurities: flat pay raises, protracted working schedules, poor social benefits, and lack of clearly defined career prospects (Sefalafala and Webster, 2013; Noronha et al., 2020). The normalization of the twelve-hour shifts, restricted access to provident funds or health benefits, pervasive non-observation of statutory labour protections are systematically reported in the empirical research (despite having the regulations, like the Private Security Agencies (regulation) Act (Parliament of India, 2005; Ministry of Home Affairs, 2020).

The most evident paradox of this state of affairs, however, concerns the institutionalization of recruitment and training, including the models of private agencies and governmental support of skill development programmes, and the precariousness of the day to day employment affairs which are fragmented and weakly structured (Gooptu, 2013). This paradox invites the creation of a formally organized but substantively insecure labour regime to the effect of promoting the overall culture of servilities as described by the workers themselves (Noronha et al., 2020). In this atmosphere, the uniform of security can hardly be regarded as an indicator of power or professional competence, but rather as a symbol of embarrassment (indicates functional illiteracy or workplace failure, to the masses) (Sefalafala et al. 2013; Noronha et al. 2020). Security work has often been dismissed as windy as mickey mouse labour, tedious, monotonous, and dull, which as a result of diminishing the occupational pride and the social identity (Shearing and Stenning, 1981; Gooptu, 2013).

These more traditional sociological pressures are being exasperated by a new and potentially disruptive phenomenon: artificial intelligence (AI) and more sophisticated technologies of digital surveillance. Other systems of modern AI are aimed at performing routine tasks of cognitive and perceptual type, including surveillance, pattern recognition, classification, and predictive decision-making (Ernst et al., 2019; Howard, 2019), unlike older generations of automation that mostly replace manual labour. This upheaval is especially material to the area of private security work that is firmly centered around surveillance, vigilance and trusted-to-robot, repetitive monitoring tasks that are more and more being mechanized by means of AI-enabled computer vision, facial recognition, and sensor-based systems (Strickland and Hunt, 2005; Curran and Curran, 2024).

The financial risks of such a switch are high. According to seminal estimates by Frey and Osborne, about 47 percent of the jobs in the United States can be easily automated, and occupations that are highly vulnerable to the computerization process are those based on routine (Chen et al., 2022; Adhikari, 2024). Later studies prove that AI-based automation leads to polarization of occupations, with jobs at the middle of the skill range disappearing and positions in high-skill supervisors, as well as non-automatable and low-skilled service workers, flourishing (Bruun and Duka, 2018; Ernst et al., 2019; Pandey and Kumar, 2024). In the case of security guards, who are already at the bottom of the occupational hierarchies, this brings the idea of mass technological displacement or scarification of occupations in the long run (Rawashdeh, 2025).

These developments may be sourced by industry and policy leisure through the nomenclature of professionalisation and technological upgrading. However, as the critical scholarship proposes, these stories often serve as an above-disciplinary logic that seeks to bring the identities of workers to match the interests of corporates and clients instead of making tangible changes that would improve wages, employment stability, and working aspects (Avant, 2005; Sefalafala and Webster, 2013; Noronha et al., 2020). Professionalisation in this meaning can be seen as a perfectly viable route towards empowerment, but as a mode of control at a distance, it solidifies obedience in an already precarious labour regime.

It is against this background that this paper reviews how organized informality, workplace dignity and AI induced job displacement intersected in the Indian private security industry. It poses the question whether digital skills can be used as a protective mechanism of shielding against displacement, which is aligned

with theories of skill-based technological change (Chen et al., 2022; Bruun and Duka, 2018), and whether the security guard could be transformed into a pilot, who takes control over automated systems in the case of complex and unorganized crises that algorithms are not able to solve (Howard, 2019; Idrisi et al., 2024). By incorporating both economic theory of technological displacement and sociological theory of dignity and agency, the research paper aims at shedding light on how a precarious, digitised security environment places a workforce at the crosspoint of precarity and automation to negotiate the future.

CONDITIONS OF WORK: THE SECURITY PRECARIAT IN REALITY.

The private security sector globally has been through what researchers call a quiet revolution in which integrating it as a mainstream supplementary service has turned into a major force and authority that controls vast areas of bulk mass privatized property (Shearing & Stenning, 1981; Avant, 2005; Cusumano and Kinsey, 2022). The result of this rapid growth is a large pool of employees across the world, but it is marked by the kind of regime of organised informality, where recruitment and training are institutionalised by the agencies, and in some cases even by the state agencies, whereas the daily employment relations are precarious, weakly regulated and insecure (Gooptu, 2013; Noronha etal., 2020). As a result, the private security labour is becoming more of a global precariat- a phenomenon that is marked by a specific load of insecurities and lack of definite career paths (Standing, 2011; Gooptu, 2013).

I. Organised Informality The Structure of Employment.

The main contradiction of modern day security work is the differing nature of a highly organised mobilisation and training process to the worsening of the employment conditions. In other nations, including India the recruitment and training of economically marginalised young people is actively funded by the state under programmes associated with such agencies as the Directorate General of Employment and Training and the goal of providing the urban corporate economy with disciplined and compliant workforce (Gooptu, 2013). But when the deployment of guards occurs in the lower levels of the private corporate economy, the state regulation becomes substantially less active, providing conditions, in which the employers become virtually unrestricted in their control over labour practices (Holmqvist, 2005). The high dependency on outsourcing and contracts of jobs in the industry implies that guards formal employment is by third party agencies other than by firms they secure, which provides a minimal labour cost to clients but causes insecurity to workers (Shearing and Stenning, 1981; Avant, 2005). This system maintains an ominous culture of hire and fire where guards can be sacked anytime, usually due to petty offenders hence perpetuating instability in employment patterns (Gooptu, 2013).

II. Forms of materiality Wages, Hours, and Social Reproduction.

Flighted by a combination of the high intensity physical jobs with the lack of increase in remuneration and low social security (Sefalafala & Webster, 2013), this is a daily lived experience by security precariat. The twelve-hour shift has become the standard in the industry, where the guards work 48-60 hours per week without sufficient overtime pay, and in the instances of labour shortages, are forced to work two 24-hour shifts at a time (Gooptu, 2013; Noronha et al., 2020). This regime causes considerable physical stress because standing duty with a lack of rest is primarily utilized, and chronic illnesses are the order of the day such as swollen feet, joint pains, and back issues (Sefalafala & Webster, 2013). Salaries are firmly pegged against statutory minimum and are infamously slow to rise. In places like South Africa, the mean take-home wages have been recorded to be around R 2,748 per month, which is generally considered to be too low to sustain (even in small proportions) social reproduction costs, such as food and shelter, medical care, and child care (Sefalafala, Webster, 2013). The longitudinal studies also suggest that there is a strong phenomenon of a scarring effect when young men are stuck in low-skill security jobs over longer periods, especially in times of economic depression, they become restricted to lower-paid and career paths in the long term (Tur-Sinai and Romanov, 2018).

III. The Work: Surveillance and Mickey Mouse Labour.

A large mass of research describes the work of private security as mick mouse labour, consisting of routine, monotonous and low stimulation work, which does not have the professional competence of sworn police (Sefalafala and Webster, 2013; Holmqvist, 2005). These tasks are held together by the aspect of surveillance. To avoid loss or disturbance, guards spend a large part of their working hours in checking the locks, doors, and fences, patrol over the entrances, and regulate access and exit points (Shearing and Stenning, 1981). Public security is also concerned with loss prevention, unlike public policing, which aims at apprehending those committing crimes once they have committed an offence; moreover, in contrast to detecting problems in identifiable populations, it is solely in question of those who may pose an

opportunity to crime (Avant, 2005). This reasoning effectively puts whole settings in the unrelenting and unremitting scrutiny. This surveillance creates intense boredom and isolation especially when one is on night shifts as the guards often talk of the night shifts as having been twelve-hour periods when time seems to have stopped (Sefalafala & Webster, 2013). These conditions also demoralize and perpetually support the belief in security work as low status and dispensable.

IV. The Social Exposure: Stigma and the Servile Culture.

Accessing deep psychological and social expenses beyond the material deprivation, the precariat of security suffers. The most prominent of them is the stigma associated with the profession itself and the culture of obeyed subordination that defines the daily interactions (Noronha et al., 2020). Security uniform has a key symbolic role in this process. Unlike the uniform of the police, which reflects the state-granted power, the privately provided uniform often functions as an indicator of humiliation, being linked on the mind of civilians with the lack of the necessary functioning literacy, inability to achieve anything, or the inability to aspire (Gooptu, 2013). As a way of preventing social stigmatisation, most of the guards take off their uniforms right after working, hoping to disidentify themselves with their professional identity (Sefalafala & Webster, 2013). Servility is also strengthened through training and managerial discourse, in which the saying that the client is god can easily sum up this culture. This culture necessitates the use of a high degree of emotional labour which involves guards taking insults and humiliation by both clients and the population and remain in a polite, submissive, and non-threatening body language (Noronha et al. 2020). Although numerous guards define their work experiences as a humiliation regime, where they are continuously humiliated and labelled as anadis (ignorant or foolish people) by their work clients (Gooptu, 2013).

V. Occupational insecurity and the Skills gap.

Unskilled labour workers start their journey into the labour market through private security, but there are rarely concrete career advancement opportunities (Gooptu, 2013). To most guards, the job is a dead end and they experience no clearly defined promotional routes and their overall understanding is that jobs will end at an earlier age than at middle age (Sefalafala & Webster, 2013). An unsteady employment is further enhanced with a so-called mover-stayer situation, where guards shift between one contracts within agencies to maintain job continuity. Such a plan as a pragmatic chameleon has manifested itself in attempts to keep up faces of job stability in an industry that is characterized by infanticidal turnover (Gooptu, 2013). Social protection systems are also weak and not well applied. Basic gains like provident plans and health insurance are often missing, are postponed or lost through non-compliance by agencies and high turnover rates and put workers at serious long-term risk (Noronha et al., 2020).

VI. The Technological Thanklessness: AI as a New "Predator".

Now the structural vulnerabilities are being exacerbated with the emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and digital surveillance technologies. The connection between human labour and AI is coming to be more and more conceptualised by the LotkaVolta predatorprey model, in which the predator is the AI technologies and the prey is the human jobs (Idrisi et al., 2024). Employment opportunities for human beings become increasingly fewer when the rate of development of AI surpasses job creation. In contrast to preceding waves of automation, which substituted mostly manual labour with more efficient methods, AI has been focused on the cognitive and perception tasks like surveillance surveillance (motor), pattern recognition, and object identification, which are the essential elements of the security work (Bruun and Duka, 2018; Ernst et al., 2019). It is estimated that around 47-percent of jobs are in the high risk of computerisation, and service-oriented jobs that are routine (such as in private security) are the ones most at risk (Chen et al., 2022; Rawashdeh, 2025). Although other analysts hope AI will supplement security operations by turning the guards into system "pilots, who respond to an emergency, it has been argued that it is more likely that routine-based precariat labour will be displaced unless workers close expanding digital skills gaps (Howard, 2019; Pandey and Kumar, 2024).

VII. The Myth of Professionalisation and Resistance.

Professionalisation programs that are led by industries are often proclaimed to be the answer to precarity; however, critical scholarship suggests that they are more of a disciplinary discourse that is executed vertically (Holmqvist, 2005). Professionalism identities fit worker identity into the corporate goals and thus allow the exercising of control at the distance and do not alter wages or time spent at work (Noronha et al., 2020). The frequent transfers, electronic surveillance, as well as the implication of getting fired are some of the strategies used by agencies to preempt collective resistance, which lead to very low

unionisation rates in the industry (Gooptu, 2013). Gardians, conversely, comeback by doing dignity work, which is overt display of self-presentation and vigilance, to restore some sense of professional pride and dissidentiate themselves with the stigmatised identity of the watchman (Noronha et al., 2020).

THE TECHNOLOGICAL DISPLACEMENT: AI TO THE NEW FRONTIER.

The contemporary global workforce is going through a time of significant transformation, which has been described as gently revolution in policing and system of social control that has been brought about by the sharp growth of the private security industry (Shearing and Stenning, 1981; Avant, 2005; Cusumano and Kinsey, 2022). In places like India and South Africa, one of the indicators of the structural change in the way security is governed at the state and market level is the proliferation of private security personnel to the point that they outnumber the public policing forces (Gooptu, 2013; Sefalafala and Webster, 2013). Since the sector has become a giant operating in management of mass private property, it has also turned into a labouratory of a new stage of technological substitution which is led by Artificial Intelligence (AI) (Ernst et al., 2019). In contrast to the previous waves of automation, which mostly replaced manual labour, the new AI is also a new frontier since it is focused on cognitive and mental duties, including observation, categorising, and forecasting, which are the main elements of security work (Bruun and Duka, 2018; Howard, 2019).

I. The Character of the New Frontier: Mental vs. Physical Automation.

Previously, major technological disruptions of essential technology with real-life examples were sector-specific such as the Industrial Revolution, which mechanised the manual labour but also created new kinds of urban industrial jobs. The difference between AI and previous technologies lies in the fact that it is a general-purpose technology (GPT), which is similar to electricity or steam engine, and that it is able to change various economic spheres at the same time (Ernst et al., 2019). The power of AI lies in the fact that it can recreate the work of human intelligence with the help of computational methods, allowing machines to behave practically in complex and non-structured situations (Howard, 2019).

Although the history of computing hardware has been marked by the more gradual improvements of processing power that in turn doubled every eighteen months or so the algorithms that make a machine capable of carrying out a task that was previously deemed non-computerisable have improved over the last few years (Bruun & Duka, 2018). In the area of private security, the developments have enabled the automation of classification-related operations like facial recognition and object detention and process-management operations that detect trends in a sophisticated operational setting (Chen et al., 2022). Since AI is not physical, but non-rivalrous, it produces cumulative benefits on the first movers and allows a small group of superstar firms to conquer markets around them and provide more services with virtually unchanged marginal costs (Ernst et al., 2019).

II. Theoretical Modelling: Predator-Prey and Checkmate Scenarios.

In order to conceptualize the risks of this transition, researchers have more often resorted to the LotkaVolterra equations originally applied to the dynamics of predators and prey in ecological systems (Idrisi et al., 2024). Human employment becomes the prey and the AI technologies become the predator in the conceptualisation of the human employment in this socio-economic adaptation. Yet, this model also detects the possible equilibrium states, where job development and the development of AI co-exist; but also, it cautions about the destabilising cases when the pace of AI development exceeds the creation of the employment opportunities, creating a stable downward trend of the number of jobs at any time (Idrisi et al., 2024).

This dynamic is the basis of the so-called checkmate situation as defined by futurists, where the rate and diversity of the AI-led displacement outweigh the potential to adapt to the new information among governments, institutions, and individuals, culminating in the effect of mass technological unemployment and social disruption (Ernst et al., 2019). These issues have empirical backing, and one of the estimates is that about 47 per cent. of all jobs in the United States are likely to be computerised in the next twenty years, especially routine-based work such as in private security (Chen et al., 2022; Rawashdeh, 2025).

III. Vulnerability of the Security Precariat.

The professional security labour force is becoming more and more theorised as a precariat, a category characterized by continuous insecurity, unstable working relations and an exceptional weight of economical and social vulnerability (Standing, 2011; Gooptu, 2013). The job in the industry is often structured in regimes of organised informality whereby recruiting and training are institutional and employment is precarious, low paid and loosely regulated (Gooptu, 2013; Noronha et al., 2020). As such, security labour is often deemed to be of a mickey mouse nature, repetitive, mundane, and under-stimulating job with limited autonomy or influence of its own (Sefalafala and Webster, 2013).

It is exactly these cognitive and behavioural tasks of routine that AI-organised automation aims to perform. AI-powered cameras and surveillance cameras have the potential to perform the continuous patrol of premises more accurately and sustainably than human guards and at a much lower cost (Chen et al., 2022). Surveillance technologies are getting more and more as an extra or a substitute to human presence in institutional environments like schools, where guards are supposed to protect the safety by keeping their eyes on students and inflicting discipline (Curran and Curran, 2024). The potential risks of displacement can especially affect employees with poor levels of digital ability or professionalism in sworn members of law enforcement (Howard, 2019).

IV. Implications on the Labour Markets: Polarisation and Scarring Effect.

The introduction of AI to the field of security and other service industries promotes occupational polarisation, a phenomenon in which the labour market loses middle-skill, middle-income employment, and rather experiences growth at the high and low ends of the labour markets (Ernst et al., 2019). Demand of high-skill levels in areas like data science, machine learning is associated with large wage premium and it can be estimated around 3040 percent higher than routine jobs (Pandey and Kumar, 2024). On the other hand, low-skill-level workers are at increased risk of the so-called scarring effect, which is based on the fact that the long-term connection to low-skill security employment in economic recessions results in worse long-term career patterns and the declining level of future wages (Tur Turkey and Romanov, 2018). The AI-based human resource management systems further contribute to inequality as they create the opportunities of far more advanced types of price discrimination and ensuring their prediction of behaviour, which enable companies to get more of the surplus and increases wage disparities (Ernst et al., 2019). Automated recruitment and assessment systems also have the danger of recreating the historical prejudices within training records which merely carries on with the current trends of discrimination against minority populations (Rawashdeh, 2025). These processes are among those that help to hollow out the middle class and increase income inequality as the AI development rapidly continues to exceed the creation of jobs (Howard, 2019).

V Substitution versus Augmentation: The Role of Pilot.

Despite the fact that the specter of displacement continues, different researchers argue that artificial intelligence can play an augmentative role and not replace the human labour. In this conceptualisation, the security guard becomes an equivalent of an aircraft operator, whose role is confined to functioning in an extremely automated environment but where the indispensability of interventions exists in the event of an emergency or a case of an unstructured crisis that cannot be handled through algorithmic means (Howard, 2019; Bruun & Duka, 2018). Human and AI partnership thus allows people to spend time on tasks that require judgment, creativity, and interpersonal skills and leave the rest of the data-intensive processes to the work of automated systems (Chen et al., 2022).

The existence of the Global War on Terrorism within the geopolitical context of it marks that the roles of particular technologies in the Global War on Terrorism are already assigned to the work of private security enterprises, thus, proving the applicability of augmented work arrangements (Avant, 2005; Cusumano & Kinsey, 2022).

However, the excessive use of nontransparent opaque algorithms is the threat of deskilling humans over time, thus degrading their abilities to act independently of AI support (Howard, 2019).

VI. Shield: Policy and Protection: The Digital Skill Shield.

The main theory explaining the concept of safeguarding against technological unemployment is the Human Capital Theory (HCT), which suggests that investment in education and training increases productivity and earning potential (Ernst et al., 2019). Embryonic data based on the research on more than 700 jobs suggests that the digital capabilities exercise a strong moderating relationship that lowers the vulnerability of people to the threat of displacement posed by AI (Chen et al., 2022). Digitally competent employees will be in a better position to apply new technologies as an adaptive mechanism and outrun the machine instead of being outliked (Bruun and Duka, 2018).

To fix the growing skills gaps, policymakers have to demonstrate initiative, such as mass retraining and upskilling initiatives transferring the education systems into large-scale retraining models based on lifelong learning values (Pandey and Kumar, 2024). Digital literacy should be fortified through early curricular integration, strengthening of social protection tools such as universal basic income or activity accounts, and the fortification of regulation mechanisms that manage privacy of the data and data accountability algorithms, as in the case of the GDPR, which is necessary to guarantee that technological progress does not make the precarity and inequality worse (Ernst et al., 2019; Rawashdeh, 2025).

VII. Ethical and Psychological Consequences: Dislocation and Dignity.

Technological displacement does not only have a bearing on loss of income but also has tremendous psychological and social repercussions. The social dislocation theories suggest that loss of jobs weakens identity, destabilizes the social support systems, and puts pressure, anxiety, and depression (Noronha et al., 2020). To the security precariat, these evils are compounded by already existing regimes of organised humiliation and environments of servility, where even the uniform itself serves as a symbol of shame that announces occupational shame (Gooptu, 2013).

As a reaction, employees partake in dignity work, which are overt displays of self-presentation and stigmatisation avoidance to reconstruct self-worth and disassociate with the stigmatised label of the anadi (ignorant person) (Noronha et al., 2020). With AI progressively automating normal security duties, it is become possible that the workers will be further sidelined as they are also merely optional human resource, easily replaced by machines (Howard, 2019). The incorporation of AI in the workplace should be safeguarded by institutional means that imply that the fruit of AI enterprise development should be widely distributed via profit sharing, capital taxes, or working time decreases (Ernst et al., 2019).

NAVIGATING THE FUTURE

The private security market is at a very critical crossroad between the historicity of servitude and the technological obsolescence of the future. The application of artificial intelligence is becoming more and more a parasite in another socio-economic ecosystem where its artificial intelligence has quickly cannibalized the usual jobs on which workers are its prey and threatens them even more (Idrisi et al., 2024; Ernst et al., 2019). In order to prevent the checkmate scenario of mass technological unemployment, the societies need to focus on workforce reskilling and building a moral economy that does not connect basic human needs to the volatility of the labour markets (Bruun & Duka, 2018; Pandey & Kumar, 2024). The long-term silent revolution in the personal security field lacks active transitional planning, thereby the long-running quiet revolution may transform a vocal emergency of social displacement and inequality (Standing, 2011).

During the last thirty years, the private security industry has radically modified the systems of policing and social control in various national settings. This has led in some instances like India and South Africa to a situation where the number of private security guards is an extremely large portion of the total police force, serving as the guardian of mass private property such as shopping malls, gated communities and corporate complexes (Shearing and Stenning, 1981; Gooptu, 2013; Sefalafala and Webster, 2013). In order to manage this growing workforce, the states have promoted projects of professionalisation by expansion of regulatory structures and vocational schools, such as the Directorate General of Employment and Training in India and the Privated Security Industry Regulatory Authority in South Africa (Holmqvist, 2005; Gooptu, 2013). Nonetheless, through critical scholarship, it is shown that even in professionalisation attempts, these attempts are not aimed at the purpose of modernising labour conditions; or to convert low-quality work into decent work, but rather, serve as a discourse of disciplinary reason that is imposed on the lower levels so as to realign worker identities to corporate and state interests (Holmqvist, 2005; Noronha et al., 2020).

I. Evidence of Organised Informality.

The professionalisation of the sphere of private security is worked out within the framework of organised informality, which implies institutionalisation of recruitment, mobilisation, and training in these matters, but employment relations are insecure, poorly regulated, and precarious (Gooptu, 2013). As soon as guards are incorporated into the bottom of the corporate economy, the mechanisms of control are reduced to bare minimum, which allows employers to enjoy vast freedom when it comes to wages, hours, and dismissal procedures (Holmqvist, 2005).

It is commonly described as the precariat as this workforce is characterised by persistent insecurity and lack of occupation careers (Standing, 2011; Gooptu, 2013). Even though guards are called officers or liaison formally, they are subjected to harsh material restrictions. Salaries are usually fixed to a legal minimum and they are not adequate to sustain the expenses of social reproduction forcing most workers to resort to the secondary informal jobs to earn a living (Sefalafala & Webster, 2013). The regular twelve-hour shift regularly transitions to twenty-four-hour shifts in times of labour shortages, and long standing shifts result in the chronic physical conditions such as joint pain, swollen feet, and injuries to the back (Noronha et al., 2020).

II. Professionalism as a Discipline Mechanism.

Instead of being an emancipatory occupational value, professionalism in the field of private security is rebuilt as a tool of managerial regulatory power. The state tries to rationalise, contain and tame a workforce which has been seen as an economic necessity and a potential source of political danger, especially concerning the monopoly of officially legitimate violence by the state (Through legislative arrangements like the India, Privy Security Agencies (Regulation) Act, 2005), (Holmqvist, 2005; Parliament of India, 2005).

The compliance, control of behaviour, and acceptance of intensive monitoring are the factors the focus of this professionalisation project. Even though security work is commonly described as such, as mickey mouse labour, repetitive, boring, and not stimulating enough, the fact is that it implies an unrelenting vigilance of the building and its inhabitants, where guards are expected to remain on the alert 24-7 (Sefalafala & Webster, 2013). The guard in this disciplinary logic, on the one hand, is an agent of surveillance (and, on the other hand, an object of surveillance), and he or she is under the control of electronic monitoring systems aimed at monitoring his or her alertness, compliance, and defensiveness (Noronha et al., 2020).

III. Playing the part of the Disciplined Soldier.

The building of the identity of the disciplined soldier is one of the primary ideological foundations of professionalisation. Within large security companies, the primary themes of training focus on the effective performance of routinised work, and development of corporeal smartness such as a clean uniform, polished shoes, and an attitude that indicates readiness to follow (Gooptu, 2013). Such focus on physical discipline replicates the aesthetics of the military without giving the relevant power or status.

Training usually involves drills, marching and saluting and these forms are embodied hierarchical rituals. Saluting, as compared to military salutes which denote a mutual acknowledgment of the saluting officer, saluting in a private security context is more of a show of respect to the corporate superiors and clients, confirming the inferior social status of the guard (Sefalafala and Webster, 2013). Dignity work is advised to guards to keep a clean appearance and disciplined behavior to allow them to legally distance themselves of the stigmatised identity of the watchman or anadi (ignorant individual), which results in the subsequent reclamation of aspects of self-worth in a occupation inherently degrading in status (Noronha et al., 2020).

IV. The Culture of Emotional Labour and Servility.

Emotional labour is a key occupational skill integrated into the discourse of professionalisation. The education programs are characterised by attitude development and internal self-control, and in line with the industry rule, it has been stated that the client is god (Noronha et al., 2020). Guards are conditioned to quietly receive verbal abuse and stay polite and non-threatening in body language especially when dealing with clients who view economic power as possessive control over labour (Sefalafala & Webster, 2013).

This emotional management restructures structural exploitation as a personal emotional obstacle, which motivates workers to understand distress as a personal stress coping issue as opposed to community injustice. This sort of individualisation weakens solidarity and shifts strategies of coping to privatised forms of coping such as spirituality or self-discipline instead of institutionalised resistance (Noronha et al., 2020).

V. The Uniform: Pride verses Shame.

The security uniform itself is one of the constant areas of symbolic conflict. Although it is formulated in organisational discourse as a sign of professionalism, in everyday lives, it is often interpreted as a sign of incompetence, failure, or functional illiteracy (Gooptu, 2013). Guards claim that they are mocked or even sacked by people that pass by, supporting the view of the uniform as a symbol of shame and no power (Sefalafala and Webster, 2013).

In order to avoid this stigma, most of the guards resort to hiding their identities, bringing their own clothes and taking off uniforms right after work so that they not to be recognised by their family or friends. This denial of homogenized identity is a mental coping mechanism, of regaining individuality amid occupational devaluation (Noronha et al., 2020).

VI. Professionalisation vs Decent Work.

There is an inherent gap between state-based professionalisation agendas and international approved standards of decent work. Although discipline and conformity of behaviour may be highly promoted by professionalisation, it lacks a solution to the structural labour rights abuses such as at-will employment, lack of social protection and collective voice (Gooptu, 2013)

Although the guards are contractual, they still fall under the rules of discharge-and-replace regimes, as the reason in most cases of dismissal is mere minor infractions. The medical benefits and provision funds are not always deployed, and in some cases, due to high turnover, the effect is lost or non-compliant by the agencies (Sefalafala & Webster, 2013). The unionisation is still very small and collective organisation is discouraged by surveillance, transfers and punitive scheduling (Gooptu, 2013).

VII. Opposition and the Dynamic Survivor.

Although these two limitations are present, guards do not exist as passive consumers of disciplinary power. The pragmatic chameleon strategy can be identified as one of the noticeable types of agency; according to it, in both varying agency contracts, the guards can use their knowledge of the sites and local relations to obtain retention (Gooptu, 2013). Guards undermine employer flexibility by secretly concealing the ill intent they have on them because legislation depends heavily on them and therefore their services cannot be easily dispensed with.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The transition of the private security industry into an era defined by Artificial Intelligence (AI) and organised informality necessitates a fundamental paradigm shift in policy development (Ernst et al., 2019; Pandey & Kumar, 2024). As the workforce confronts the dual pressures of belonging to a marginalised precariat and facing accelerating technological displacement, policymakers must move from a reactive posture toward proactive and anticipatory governance (Standing, 2011; Noronha et al., 2020). The following recommendations integrate economic, technological, and sociological interventions to ensure that the long-running "quiet revolution" in private security does not culminate in a "checkmate" for the human worker (Idrisi et al., 2024).

I. Economic Mitigation: Decoupling Survival from Labour

The most profound threat identified in this study is the "checkmate scenario," in which AI-driven productivity growth consistently outpaces human job creation, leading to mass technological unemployment and heightened social instability (Ernst et al., 2019; Rawashdeh, 2025).

Implementation of Universal Basic Income (UBI).

At the core of a sustainable response lies the concept of unconditional Universal Basic Income, which entails a regular transfer of income from the state to all citizens irrespective of employment status (Bruun & Duka, 2018). Such an income-security cushion would shield individuals from the disruptive effects of technological change while providing the temporal and psychological space required for reskilling and adaptation. By decoupling basic survival needs—such as food and housing—from the volatility of labour markets, UBI preserves inherent human dignity even when relational dignity is withdrawn by precarious employment relations (Standing, 2011; Noronha et al., 2020).

Taxation of "Technological Life Forms."

Financing such social safety nets requires innovative fiscal instruments. Governments may consider treating AI-driven systems and advanced robotics as taxable productive entities, commonly conceptualised as a "robot tax," in order to redistribute productivity gains and moderate the widening gap between human and machine labour (Ernst et al., 2019). Such taxation mechanisms would not only

generate revenue for redistribution but also incentivise firms to maintain a balanced integration of human labour alongside automation.
Profit Sharing and Reduced Working Time.
To ensure that AI-induced productivity gains are broadly shared, policy frameworks should promote mandatory profit-sharing arrangements and reductions in working hours (Pandey & Kumar, 2024). For security guards currently subjected to extended twelve-hour shifts, reductions in working time would contribute to improved mental health, lower physiological stress, and enhanced work–life balance, addressing long-standing conditions of overwork and burnout (Noronha et al., 2020).

II. Labour Market Transformation: The Digital Skills "Shield"
Human Capital Theory posits that investment in education and skills development constitutes the primary mechanism through which workers can enhance productivity and adapt to technological change (Ernst et al., 2019).

Bridging the Digital Skills Gap.
Empirical evidence demonstrates that digital skills exert a significant moderating effect on AI-driven displacement risks, enabling workers to adapt rather than be displaced (Chen et al., 2022). Policy must therefore prioritise digital literacy from early education through lifelong learning programmes. For mid-career workers, governments should establish publicly regulated "activity accounts," co-funded by employers, to finance continuous reskilling and retraining (Pandey & Kumar, 2024).

Transitioning to the "Pilot" Role.
As AI automates routine cognitive tasks, the occupational role of the security guard must be reconceptualised as that of a "pilot" or supervisory intervener. Analogous to an aircraft pilot in a highly automated cockpit, the human guard becomes responsible for managing unstructured crises, ethical judgement, and contextual decision-making beyond algorithmic capacity (Howard, 2019; Bruun & Duka, 2018). Training should thus shift from task execution toward systems oversight and AI-assisted decision-making.

Standardising Skills Passports.
To facilitate occupational and geographic mobility, international coordination is required to develop transferable "skills passports" that formally recognise competencies acquired through work experience and training. Such certification would enable security workers to transition across agencies and sectors without forfeiting accumulated human capital (Chen et al., 2022).
III. Governance and Ethical Regulation
The prevailing regime of organised informality enables a culture of servility and systematic exploitation within the private security sector (Gooptu, 2013; Noronha et al., 2020).

From Disciplinary Logic to Decent Work.
Current professionalisation initiatives frequently operate as disciplinary mechanisms imposed from above, prioritising behavioural conformity over material improvement (Holmqvist, 2005). Regulatory reform must realign professionalisation with internationally recognised decent work standards, ensuring that professional status is accompanied by living wages, secure contracts, and enforceable social protection (Noronha et al., 2020).

Technology Privacy Policies (TPP).
As firms increasingly deploy AI-based surveillance and people analytics, risks of intrusive monitoring and psychological harm intensify (Strickland & Hunt, 2005). Organisations must implement comprehensive Technology Privacy Policies grounded in principles of notice, consent, access, data integrity, and accountability to protect worker autonomy and dignity.

Adjusting Antitrust Legislation.
To prevent data-driven "superstar firms" from entrenching market dominance, antitrust frameworks must be updated to address algorithmic concentration and data monopolies (Ernst et al., 2019). Ensuring data portability—allowing workers to transfer profiles and reputational scores across platforms—would mitigate lock-in effects and enhance labour mobility.
IV. Social Protection and Cultural Recognition

The psychological condition of the security precariat is shaped by stigma, organised humiliation, and the uniform's function as a symbol of shame (Gooptu, 2013; Sefalafala & Webster, 2013).

Combating Organised Humiliation.

Governments and employers must actively dismantle regimes in which guards are expected to meekly absorb abuse. Public education campaigns should reframe private security as a form of essential public service, challenging derogatory perceptions of the anadi and fostering cultural recognition of guards' social contribution (Noronha et al., 2020).

Vetting and Accountability.

To prevent the long-term scarring effects associated with prolonged attachment to low-status work and to protect public safety, stricter vetting and accountability mechanisms are required. Contractors and agencies must be held legally responsible for misconduct under both local and home-state jurisdictions, ensuring that private security does not operate within a regulatory vacuum (Avant, 2005; Parliament of India, 2005).

CONCLUSION: THE SENTINELS OF A NEW MORAL ECONOMY

This study has examined the complex nexus between the security precariat and the accelerating forces of AI-driven automation. The findings reveal a workforce entrenched in organised informality, where the façade of professionalisation often conceals systemic subordination, economic insecurity, and dignity erosion (Gooptu, 2013; Noronha et al., 2020). Although security work is frequently dismissed as "mickey mouse" labour, it is precisely these routine cognitive tasks that are most vulnerable to AI's predatory trajectory (Sefalafala & Webster, 2013; Chen et al., 2022).

The Lotka–Volterra predator–prey model underscores the instability of an unchecked equilibrium in which AI growth cannibalises human labour. Yet the evidence also points toward a possible co-evolutionary pathway in which job creation and technological innovation reinforce one another, provided human labour is augmented rather than substituted (Idrisi et al., 2024; Howard, 2019).

The security guard of the future stands at a crossroads between two trajectories. One leads to a "dignity lost" scenario—marked by displacement, stigma, and social dislocation. The other leads to "dignity reclaimed," where digitally skilled guards operate as pilots of automated systems, protected by a moral economy that values human flourishing over mere capital accumulation (Bruun & Duka, 2018; Pandey & Kumar, 2024).

Transforming the private security industry from a site of organised informality into one of empowered professionalisation requires more than technical training alone. It demands robust social safety nets, commitment to decent work principles, and inclusive governance of technological change. Without a credible transitional strategy, society risks losing its race with the machines. With strategic foresight, however, the sentinels of the city can become empowered participants in a technologically advanced and socially just future.

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