

The Threat of Artificial Intelligence and Automation Technology—The Task of the Working Class

From the beginning of this year 2016 several experts of various economic and financial institutions of international repute have been warning about the impending threat of 'industrial revolution 4.0' and automation to the jobs and employment prospects particularly in the developing countries.

In the yearly convention of World Economic Forum-46, held at Davos of Switzerland between Jan 20-23, a report about the "Fourth Industrial Revolution" was presented by an economist and executive chairman of Germany Claus Squab. A book explaining about the fourth industrial revolution, and how the world has to react to it and be prepared to adapt to it also has been released during this convention. The WEF has also given a call that it is working to bring about the fourth industrial revolution, and the world should be ready to receive the fruits of the fourth revolution. They have also propagated that with the technological inventions of the fourth industrial revolution, the life style of human beings of the entire world will be changed and that everyone on the globe shall be the stake-holders in the oncoming fourth industrial revolution.

Robotics, artificial intelligence, internet of things, 3.D printing, Nano technology, big-data, bio-technology, the vast researches about the maximum use of power of human mind and nervous system are the motive forces of the fourth industrial revolution.

A significant public debate is being done in the media about the necessity of readiness and pre-paredness to enjoy the benefits of the fourth industrial revolution which is imminent.

Research based on World Bank data has predicted that while the technology is fundamentally reshaping the world, it could fundamentally disrupt the pattern the Traditional economic path from increasing productivity of agri-culture to light manufacturing and then to full scale industrialisation may not be possible to all developing countries. Research based on World Bank data has predicted that the proportion of jobs threatened in India by automation is 69%. In China it is 77% and in Ethiopia it is 85%. According to this research report the largest risk from automation lies with jobs like clerks, proof readers, jobs that can be easily replaced by soft-ware. Other new jobs at risk are those involving manual labour.

In a report released last year by Bank of America-Merrill Lynch it is warned that with indiscriminate automation the inequalities will become severe.

The researches of Oxford University found that, in the coming two decades there will be 35% job losses to workers in Britain and 47% job losses due to AI technology and automation.

The organisers of World Economic Forum too estimated that, within 5 years 70 lakhs of jobs will be lost and particularly women workers will lose jobs at a higher percentage.

These researchers insist and predict that the AI technology will have a devastating effect on the employment prospects of developing countries with a grim future.

Even the Pope Francis addressing the world Economic Forum had to plead, to not to change this globe in to a desert without any flowers, fruits and trees with technology for the benefit and pleasure of few, but the fruits of technology shall reach to one and all and the social security of the poor has to be taken in to consideration.

Thus the AI technology of automation has been transformed in to a disruptive technology to the developing and poor countries. The developed industrial countries like Switzerland, Netherlands, Singapore, USA, Britain, Germany, France will be benefitting from it.

Already the introduction of Automation technology is creating panic stunning the world with the lay-offs. Foxconn the poster child of Chinese manufacturing with its announcement of 60,000 job cuts has stunned the world. The recent shock given by Volkswagen is to cut 30,000 jobs globally.

The introduction of robots in Chinese restaurants as waiters, cooks etc is a glaring example of the impending doom to job-seekers in future.

The introduction of a 'Roomba' robot that cleans rooms better than any manual labour is an indication how such automations will be a threat to the lively-hood of numerous house-maids and helpers at home. Security cameras are substituting watchmen.

Already the driverless cars introduced spell the doom of human car, truck and other automobile vehicle drivers. This is how artificial intelligence with technology is occupying the place of human operators; displacing them of their jobs. Robot surgery is gaining momentum. American company Telsa has readied itself to sell driverless cars in tens of thousands.

A recent Mekinesy study estimated that automation in US threatened 73% jobs in food service and accommodation; 60% in finance and insurance, 53% in retailing and 59% in manufacturing.

Nike has come out with Flyknit shoe robotically knitted from fibres and other materials threatening a huge loss of jobs in footwear industry.

In Japan there are over 1,500 robots for every 10,000 workers in automobile manufacturing.

In our India where the Traditional major job and lively-hood creating sectors like agriculture and handloom have been totally neglected and thrown in to unending crises, where poverty, illiteracy, ill-health, ignorance and huge unemployment is perpetrated through imperialist neo-liberal economic policies, our rulers have been gloating over the bubble of 'economic development' achieved through export of I.T and software services. They have been boasting about the employment opportunities created by I.T & software sector bragging about their so called success in the development of economy and creation of jobs. That now with the impending attack of A.I technology this bubble of affluence is going to be broken and vanish in to thin air is certainty.

Already the big companies like Infosys, TCS, Wipro which have been exporting I.T and software related services and earning around 11,000 crores of dollars of business, providing 42.50 lakhs of jobs, by gaining a share of 60% in the world are losing their sheen as their business has stagnated for the past two years.

Out-sourcing business, have started a speedy stagnation in their development indicating the impending doom of this industry due to the gallops of automation technology. This automation of I.T industry is estimated to cause job cuts to a tune of 10% viz around 2, 25,000 jobs of middle managers in the coming 10 year period. Already the campus hiring of I.T graduates started decreasing. Increased automation has caused a dip in the campus recruitments and flat salary growth at mid-level engineering colleges such as SRM University, Chennai, VIT Vellore and Chennai and National institute of technology at Warangal and elsewhere. This year there is a dip of 20-25% in offers of jobs. Uncertainty in global economy has an added effect in the dwindling campus hiring.

While such have been the facts about the effects of Automation and its disruptive nature, the experts (economic) that support the capitalist system like Martin Feldstein (professor of economics at Harvard university), Pritam Banerjee (senior director, corporate public policy, Deutsche post DHL), Bamchandar Nagarajan, (a Harvard graduate and a political and public policy advisor), while admitting the impending job cuts in huge numbers, particularly in developing and poor countries they are preaching that one shall not scare about this 'disruptive technology'. They assure that those who lose their jobs to the new technology will soon find other employment. They opine that changes in technology will increase the economies output and raise the potential standard of living of the population. They sanely remind us though robots and automated machined have replaced production workers in manufacturing for many years, that those who are no longer employed in manufacturing have found jobs else-where in the economy. They also assure us though computers have replaced workers in a wide range of service industries like elevator operators, switch-board operators, checking-in personal at air-ports, law firms, accounting firms etc, the overall unemployment rate will be held down because college graduates comprise a larger share of younger age cohorts. They pointout that the rising output per worker (due to automation) made possible by the increased use of robots and computers also will allow employees work fewer hours and enjoy more leisure just as is in practice in Germany where a workers on average works 1,371 hours per year and 1,790 hours a year in U.S. They preach us a reduction in working hours per employee translates in to quality-of-life improvements like longer vacations and longer week-ends. Fewer working hours will also provide more opportunities for travel, eating out, and other activities that create jobs for service workers.

Thus experts as well giant I.T.companies preach that there is no alternative to the technological onslaughts of capitalists on humanity and call the toiling people, particularly the workers to submit to it.

With such assurances they preach that workers and employees shall adjust positively to the changing technology. The Indian experts impress that since Robotics and AI are not going away, we shall tackle

technology and associated issues with a positive mind set and not to succumb to parnia. They prescribe that deep rooted reforms in education shall be initiated where the focus is on the methods and processes that equip the next generation with wide array of skills to enable them nimble. They point out that the tractor after all did not end up in killing the jobs of farmers.

On the other hand 5 world-class technical giants Amazon, Face book, Google, IBM and Microsoft have audaciously came forward and jointly created an organisation to set the ground rules for protecting humans and their jobs-in the face of rapid advances in artificial intelligence. They agree that technology would be a major force in the world for social and economic benefits at the same time acknowledging the potential for mis-use in a wide variety of ways. They intend “to foster public understanding” a set “best practices” for work in artificial intelligence. They seek “to ensure AI technologies benefit and empower as many people as possible. They have given a call to engineers of artificial intelligence “to oppose technology in weapons or other tools that could be used to violate human rights”. They have created this organisation also to ease corporate anxiety over the prospect of government regulation of this new technology.

Well such debates of academic scholarship and knowledge may appear to be convincing and their advice more lofty on hearing them, when examined under the reality of experiences of the workers and toiling masses such advices and assumptions prove to be dubious and useless for the attainment of human prosperity under capitalist system with its mode of capitalist production.

The workers and working-class shall not fall prey to these exhortations of these capitalist economy experts and become complacent in fulfilling their historical class mission; since the fourth industrial revolution cannot be stopped.

Even without the fourth industrial revolution which is supposed to pervade Indian economy by 2040, the workers and Indian working class has been suffering with the devastating effects of 3rd I.T and computer revolution.

Already the small, marginal and middle farmers in our country are being displaced from the sector due to non-viability of agriculture being the seeds, chemicals, fertilizers becoming more and more costly and with lack of remuneration prices and institutional credit facilities. Many farmers (thousands) are forced to commit suicides to liberate themselves from the debt-traps and other nuances of bankruptcy. Added to this, forcible land acquisition by the state has devastated the lively-hoods of small, marginal and middle forms. With the fourth industrial revolution and the introduction of technology (automation and machinery), this sector will be occupied by the land-lords and corporations reducing the employment prospects dramatically. The agricultural sector a major job provider to Indian economy will become barren of jobs; with the introduction of AI technology and automation in this sector.

Already with the introduction of textile machinery, and the introduction of power looms and Jet looms have been playing havoc with the lives of the hand-loom workers for all these 7.decades, forcing hundreds of them to commit suicides are live like paupers.

Already the introduction of giant earth moving machinery like proclines J.Bs and road laying machinery in construction the rural poor workers and the tribal poor workers are derived of their lively hood even reducing their job prospects in works of MGNREGS schemes and other relief schemes at the time of droughts and disasters.

Again the introduction I.T and software technology though initially provided jobs to the educated engineers and MBA graduates to some extent of satisfaction, and presently millions of youth graduated from the private engineering colleges and business management schools are unable to find jobs, since the I.T industry finds hardly one-tenth of them employable. Still these private universities are mush-rooming and producing graduates that are not qualified for white collar jobs. We see them with their MBAs and B.Tech/M.Tech degrees hawking to sell consumer goods just like the uneducated peddlers and rural self-employed selling vegetables or some agriculture produce or other, going to each and every thresh-hold begging them to buy consumer-goods. Or we find many of them in fine attire beside roads in temporary tents propagating as salesmen of one consumer good or other, carrying the load of temporary tents and sales ware in the morning and evenings. At some instances these educated youth have been reduced to work as home delivery boys of goods for e-sale companies and e-marketing business and for courier companies. Such is the pathetic condition of the educated youth in our Country, where they are provided with such jobs (low end works) that is beneath them.

When Amroha municipality advertised for 114 posts of “Safai Karmachari” or sweepers applications came from 19,000 people including MBAs & Engineers.

MBAs AND Engineering graduates in Mahabubnagar of Telangana state have enrolled for the MGNREGS. Post graduates too worked in the works of MGNREGS in this area. Such has been the grim of reality of the new jobs to be created after any technological revolution. The same will be the fact with the fourth industrial revolution. At the most it may create a few low-end jobs, leaving people to be self-employed hawkers or such jobs beneath the human dignity.

The predicament that with the advance of technology and automation, the living standards of people and workers will be improved and quality of life improved is also a myth disproving such a claim. With the introduction of I.T & Software technology, the living standards of workers and toiling masses have not increased. On the contrary their lives have worsened even in industrially developed countries like U.S, Japan, France, Germany, Britain, Greece etc since their real wages have not increased for the past two decades and the economic meltdown of their economies have further worsened their quality of life.

The prediction that there will be a reduction in the working hours of employees and workers with the radical innovations and technologies is also a false propaganda. No doubt the production time of goods has considerably reduced. But the work hours of the employees, even in industrially developed and advanced countries have not reduced even in the present epoch advent to 3rd industrial revolution. On the contrary every effort is being made to increase working man hours, violating all the agreed international conventions on working hours. Due to present day automation itself, the working hours of workers or working shifts of workers are being reduced, duly reducing the proportionate wages for reduced working hours or working production days. That is why many industrial workers in developed countries are suffering with under employment, and are forced to take up more than two or three jobs in a day for sustenance.

The promise that with automation improvements longer week-ends and longer vacations can be obtained and that fewer working hours will also provide more opportunities for travel, eating out and other activities that create jobs for service workers is also a myth.

Fundamentally a human being is worker and who wants to work with dignity and enjoy possible and justified recreation. He doesn't want to be idle and aspire to travel and eating out. If such an opportunity occurs he uses it, but do not strive for it. Basically he strives to lead a good, dignified life without exploitation or oppression, with reasonable equality.

So the contentions that days of reduced work hours and improvements in living standards will occur and people will recreate more and pursue lofty hobbies is untenable and unfounded, with the experience of people under a capitalist system. Such ideas are mere imaginary to hood-wink common people and workers with an intention to subjugate them to bear the yoke of the unprecedented exploitation, and oppression caused by the ‘fourth industrial revolution’ of A.I technology, artificial intelligence and automation by the capitalists.

Even the organisation by the 5.gaint companies is in no way different about its outlook and attitude towards the disruptive technology-automation. This is another form creating public opinion in favour of this A.I technology that preaches to adjust with the oncoming attacks of the automation technology. As they themselves have announced that this organisation's main intention is to avoid any government regulations to control the technology and against its inhuman and ruthless exploitation creating abnormal misery for the human kind. Talk about human rights and weapons are nearly to cause illusion to thinking people against this threat by pulling wool on their eyes.

However the workers and working-class shall not forget the fundamental and basic tenets of the capitalism and capitalist system. Capitalism is a system under which production is carried on to procure profit for the capitalist owners of the industry. In capitalist system capitalists derive profit through the exploitation of wage labour. Karl Marx had amply proved this, with irrefutable clarity and correctness. He also proved workers produce surplus value which is becoming the profit of capitalists. Capitalists in their pursuit to earn more and more profits always look for ways to increase the productivity of labour. They are in endless, restless search for means to compel workers to produce more in less time. Technology and automation are such inventions, made exclusively to gain super profits. So High technology too is one more step forward in increasing productivity in other words, in increasing the exploitation of workers Robotics and A.I technology is only the latest development in an ongoing process.

JohnStuart Mill in his 'principles of economy' has rightly correctly pointed out and stated that "it is questionable if all the mechanical (technical) inventions yet made have lightened the day's toil of any human beings. This is a living reality in a capitalist system till its extinction.

So Marx had called upon workers and working-class to overthrow the capitalist system of private ownership for a new social system based on common ownership of the instruments of production-one in which all exploitation of one class by another would be impossible one in which peace, security and plenty would be the birth right of all.

Marx declared the working-class is revolutionary or it is nothing. To emancipate itself from the "everlasting uncertainty of life under capitalism", Karl Marx has given the call that the working class must understand this historic mission of the working-class to overthrow the capitalist system.

So the works need not and shall not worry and be complacent with 'positive mind-set' and adapt (adjust) to the coming onslaught of A.I technology and its destruction agreeing that it cannot be stopped and submit to it with inaction as is being advised by experts and capitalist organizations.

The alternative for the working-class is to take up task of its 'historical mission' to emancipate the working class from the exploitation and protect itself from the threat of automation and AI artificial intelligence technology used by capitalists and capitalist system.
