

# *THE FUTURE OF WORK*

*We need to plan for TEch 4.0-driven creative destruction in employment*



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***The Future comes too soon and in the wrong order." It is our moral responsibility not to stop the future but to shape it."***

***-Alvin Toffler***

**THE PANDEMIC IS** hurtling the world into a Technology 4.0 transformed "future of work" much earlier than anticipated in the ILO's Centennial Declaration of 2019. India's global significance in mastering the future of work through technology-adaptive and high-productivity human capital employing the largest global cohort of 820 million youth is huge. Along with declining fertility rates and women's empowerment, this could yield a large demographic dividend of high growth rates for decades despite short term shocks.

Government must sustainably manage the Fourth Industrial Revolution triggered "gale of creative destruction" in employment. Otherwise, India could suffer from mass unemployment, precarious, informal and migrant work with deepening social inequalities and poverty, leaving millions behind.

Indian civilization has valued "work as worship." The four Vedic purusharthas Dharma., Artha, Kama, and Moksha- are realized through decent work for all. Work serves family, community and national purpose and is an engine of economic growth, social welfare and equality.

The potential of capita-labour substitution and the new ecosystem of software/AI/automation-mediated work will upend 100-year-old ideas of work and employment. The ILO warns that the future may not hold enough jobs for everyone and 428 million workers in low middle-income countries like India not find new jobs.

In 5-10 years, 10 percent of human jobs will be substitutable and 50-70 percent of jobs could be partially automated. Two-thirds of jobs in developing countries including India are susceptible to automation. India is enmeshed in the gig economy of digitally-enabled part-time, freelance, zero hour, flexible and temporary work in global digital factories and market places. Long-term employment or spatially-bound infrastructure is being replaced, creating "digital day-labourers." Tech Economy 4.0 "transformers" in India's world of work include robotics, AI, the Internet of Things, cloud computing, supply chain 4.0, 3D printing, big data, digital payments, retail, health, education and professional services. These have found accelerated, irreversible and job-displacing application due to COVID-19.

WEF/ILO studies indicate a medium-term job neutral transition of Tech 4.0 work if managed well. Short-term "job churn" involving downstream/lower skill job redundancies and upstream, new tech job creation is expected. This when nearly 10 million job seekers enter the labor market every year. As farm, manufacturing and public sector jobs shrink; India needs 90 million non-farm jobs in 10 years.

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The most-affected labour intensive sectors include textiles, finance, and construction, hospitality, travel, tourism, media, electronics, mining, agriculture, transportation and entertainment. India's auto industry, projected to create 65 million jobs by 2030, may suffer automation-related job destruction. The retail sector, the largest employer of lower skill youth, is job shedding as e-retail accelerates and human jobs in logistics, warehousing and delivery services are being robotized. The Indian ICT sector, another major employer, is susceptible to AI/robots replacing workers in its major IT export markets.

The "great growling engine" of technological change need not cause a train wreck of productive jobs. We could steer it to four powers of possible destinations or Char Dhams.

Gyaan Dham is establishing a national observatory for scoping the tech-to-work equation and its trajectory. Database on extant and future trends, sector by sector, need to be created. We must set the north star on India's future of Tech-Economy 4.0/employment nexus using a human power by 2030 compass and pivot relevant strategies towards that.

Kaushalya Dham means fostering "human capabilities" for Tech-Economy 4.0 work. To meet labour market needs, potential skill gaps must be closed through the NEP and comprehensive training infrastructure. Universal access to life long learning, for skilling, reskilling and upskilling, and establishment of a skills bank will generate large-scale, quality jobs.

Suniyojan Dham involves transformative investments in multi-stakeholder ecosystems to empower the youth and women through future-of-work transitions. It is imperative to foster institution, job-rich sectors and MSMEs, close the rich-poor, rural-urban and gender gap in access to high-quality digital and physical infrastructure and tools. Enhanced Wifi-network smartphone and mobile fluency for India's AI/hi-tech developer community and a reinforced and updated startup ecosystem is required. New regulations covering business structures, fiscal and taxation policies, corporate accounting standards and reporting practices and essential.

Samajik Nyaya Dham means ensuring a just transition through a new social compact among all stakeholders and a universal social protection floor. A human-centred and equity based approach in future labour market policies and standards is needed. National and international systems for the governance of digital labour platforms, regulation of data use and algorithmic accountability must be evolved. Local and rural production, care and green economies and social and health services must be fostered as job generators.

Upakram Dham involves taking special initiatives enabling India to leverage the world's third largest India to leverage the world's third-largest ICT workforce to polevault into Tech4 excellence. India's diversity, scale for neural net, data richness, huge base of engineers, mathematicians and coders of AI available or trainable at scale, and decent ecosystems in ICT metros are critical assets.

Following this Char Dham roadmap, we could avert the alarming prospect of a job poor future. We could ameliorate the gig economy insecurities and assure basic income, welfare and gender equality. India's ambition of sustainably transitioning to Tech 4.0 future of work is recognized in PM Modi's Atmanirbhar Bharat.

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