



General Studies-3; Topic: Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers

Data Equity

Introduction

- Today, the modern world is at an inflection point. It is experiencing a digital revolution, where the future is largely oriented around data.

Problem of inequality

- In 2020, the top seven global tech companies added \$3.4 trillion in valuation.
- At a time when the world was struggling with economic decline and unemployment, the disproportionate gain by tech companies reveals a larger problem of inequality.
- **Data plays a central role in the rise of tech companies.**
- Most of these firms have big data business models, i.e. they utilise user data to generate profits.

Emergence of big data businesses

- The emergence of big data businesses has caused a **shift in the global economic landscape.**
- Big companies have business models that rely on personal data of their users, often without their informed consent.
- Exploiting user data for targeted advertisements, these companies have generated windfall business gains.

Source of data inequality

- Unfortunately, no benefits have accrued to citizens whose data is being used in the process of generating profits.
- Such exclusions are a source of great inequality, especially during the present health crises.
- There is a need for our communities to get a fair and equitable share of benefits in their own data.

Data accessibility

- During Covid-19, many state governments have made real-time data about the cases, hospital availability and vaccines in an accessible and understandable manner.
- Such measures increase citizen awareness and strengthen democracy.

Algorithmic decisions by machines

- With artificial intelligence and machine learning, an increasing number of decisions are now being taken by automated machine processes.
- Algorithmic decisions by machines have implicit limitations.
- When the machine's database does not have sufficiently diverse data, its decisions are inevitably biased and arbitrary.
- For example, **facial recognition technology** has been criticised for making errors in identification, especially in certain minority demographics.

Global Initiatives

- Some countries have already recognised the importance of equity and proposed open data initiatives.
- The European Commission has formulated a strategy called the **European Data Strategy for inclusive digital growth and innovation**.
- It seeks improvements in health and well-being, environment, transparent governance, research and public services by facilitating wider access to data.
- It seeks to protect small businesses against data monopoly and creation of a common infrastructure.
- The commission has also proposed a legal framework on artificial intelligence to regulate the inequities arising from it.

Initiatives by India

- India is also moving towards data equity frameworks.
- The **Personal Data Protection Bill**, which is yet to be enacted by Parliament, has incorporated principles of personal data protection.
- Similarly, the **Data Protection Authority** is vested with wide powers to regulate the collection and processing of personal data.

Way Forward

- Laws should strive to devise frameworks that enable data principles to share the economic gains derived from their data.
- **Laws must ensure that privacy and related harms to individuals are minimised** by mandating data protection principles.
- A robust personal data protection law is the first step to achieving data equity.
- **Barriers created by the datafication of the economy must be removed.**
- Data should be made affordable and accessible to all sections of society.
- Devising data frameworks that require common standards of collection, storage and usage will facilitate ease of data access, quality and interoperability.
- Collective global efforts should ensure that progress in digital revolution is inclusive and equitable and that the digital revolution leaves no one behind.
- **The concept of data equity minimises risks of misuse and abuse of data.**
- **Being a global leader in technology services, India has an opportunity to lead a global effort in this direction.**