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Mains Practice Questions

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Q. Technology, if not effectively disbursed, creates new power asymmetries. Examine. (250 words)

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Approach

- Briefly write about technology keeping in perspective the 4th Industrial Revolution and its role in creating power asymmetry.
- Write how technology can create power asymmetry globally, economically and socially.
- Provide the way forward so that technology can be effectively disbursed.

Introduction:

As the Fourth Industrial Revolution gathers pace, innovations are becoming faster, more efficient and more widely accessible than before. Technology is becoming increasingly connected, and the world is now seeing a convergence of the digital, physical and biological realms. Emerging technologies, including the Internet of Things (IoT), virtual reality (VR) and artificial intelligence (AI) are enabling societal shifts by drastically impacting economies, values, identities and possibilities for future generations.

Body

With the beginning of the industrial revolution in the mid 19th century, the benefits of the revolution accrued to the western countries at the expense of their colonies which created the power asymmetry between the first world dominated by the western countries and the third world countries (newly independent colonies in Africa and Asia).

Now in the present era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution driven by disruptive technologies, the world is again at the cross road. If this technology is not effectively disbursed, it will create global power asymmetries as well as economic and social power asymmetries within the countries.

Global power asymmetry

- The lessons of previous industrial revolutions include the realization that technology and its wealth generation can serve the developed countries disproportionately.
- Developing countries have moved away from manufacturing into services long before their more developed counterparts did, and at fractions of the income per capita which is called “**premature deindustrialisation**”. It will adversely affect the developing countries in reaping the potential of 4th Industrial revolution.
- Artificial intelligence, robotics, bioengineering, programming tools, and other technologies can all be used to create and deploy weapons and create military power asymmetry.

Economic asymmetry

- New technologies threaten to amplify current inequalities, both within and between countries by displacing the conventional jobs. The fourth industrial revolution with the massive use of artificial intelligence (AI) will **take away more human jobs**.

In the next decade, around 20% of the jobs like fire-fighters, photography etc will be affected by robotization. Similarly, 80-90% of the jobs of taxi drivers, fisherman, bakers, and fast food workers are likely to be replaced by technology.

- New technologies may further concentrate benefits and value in the hands of the already wealthy. Those who didn't benefit from earlier industrialisation risk being left even further behind.

Social asymmetry

- According to the World Economic Forum Global Risks Report 2017, “the Fourth Industrial Revolution has the potential to raise income levels and improve the quality of life for all people. But today, the economic benefits of the Fourth Industrial Revolution are becoming more concentrated among a small group. This increasing inequality can lead to political polarization, social fragmentation, and lack of trust in institutions.
- Rising inequality and income stagnation are socially problematic. Unequal societies tend to be more violent, have higher incarceration rates, and have lower levels of life expectancy than their more equal counterparts.
- Powerful new technologies built on global digital networks can be used to keep societies under undue surveillance while making vulnerable to physical and cyber attacks.

Way Forward

- It should be ensured that the opportunities new technologies bring are well-distributed around the world and across all communities. In particular, the global forum must help those who missed out on the huge increases in quality of life that the first, second, and third industrial revolutions provided.
- Instead of demanding job protection, the focus must be on lifelong learning plan and training budget of the employees. Ensuring skill development for the demographic dividend is the growing need of the hour.
- The potential negative impacts new technologies can have must be recognised and managed, especially in the areas of equality, employment, privacy, and trust.
- This effort requires all stakeholders—governments, policymakers, international organizations, regulators, business organizations, academia, and civil society—to work together to steer the powerful emerging technologies in ways that limit risk and create a world that aligns with common goals for the future.