



Mains Marathon

Day 53: "Inequality in the digital world is leading to inequalities in other areas like health and education as well". Discuss. (150 Words)

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Approach / Explanation / Answer

Approach

- Start your answer by giving a brief introduction about the increasing use of digital technologies.
- Discuss how Digital inequalities lead to inequalities in health and education.
- Conclude your answer by giving a way forward.

Answer

- The Covid-19 pandemic has increased economic inequality. This can be attributed by the fact that the super-rich have even become richer and millions of people are facing job losses and income shocks.
- **As a response against the pandemic, there has been an accelerated use of digital technologies in India.** Essential services such as health and education are at the forefront of this drive. Though these digital initiatives are helping in mitigating the disruption caused by pandemic, these are causing digital divide as education and health are getting reorganized in ways that make access more inequitable in an already unequal society.
- As per ITU's World Telecommunication, **only 43 percent of the population in India uses the internet.**

Digital Inequalities:

- The digital technologies and automated decision-making tools exacerbated inequalities, especially by raising the barrier for people to receive services they are entitled to. This can be majorly reflected in the main pillars of social infrastructure i.e. Education & Health.

How Digital Inequalities are leading to inequalities in health and education:

- **Digital illiteracy:** Many people in India are unaware of how to use digital platforms, resulting in further poverty.
- **Lack of financial Sources:** The financial constraint act as a major factor in restricting people from using digital sources.
- **Connectivity Issue:** There is a lack of physical infrastructure in the remote parts of the country

which creates a connectivity issue.

- **Language dominance:** Most of the government websites and most of the online content is available in English only which creates difficulty for those who know only their local/regional language.
- **Issue of Cost:** The high cost of the internet is also another hindering factor.
- **Privacy Issue:** People are suspicious of the authenticity and safety of online platforms due to the frequent theft of personal information.
- **Reluctancy:** People who have used offline modes for a long time are reluctant to switch to online modes.

Way Forward

- In this framework, the state would have:
 - **A positive obligation** to create infrastructure for a minimum standard and quality of Internet access as well as capacity-building measures which would allow all citizens to be digitally literate.
 - **A negative obligation** to protect citizen's right to privacy (declared a fundamental right by the Supreme court in Putta swamy judgement).
- The government should invest the resources saved by moving services online, to create Digital infrastructure.
- The definition of digital literacy today must include the ability to access and act upon resources and information found online.
- Internet access and digital literacy are dependent on each other, and creation of digital infrastructure must go hand in hand with the **creation of digital skills**.
- Apart from it, there is a need to **strengthen telecom regulations**, so as to ensure market competition and make the internet affordable to all.
- **Zero-rated services for mobile data access** could be an intermediate step to fully open and affordable Internet access for the poorest, provided that the choice of selecting services is transparent and inclusive.

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