NEXT IAS

DAILY EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

TOPIC

Meritocracy in the age of Artificial Intelligence

MERITOCRACY IN THE AGE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

In Context

- Recently, the concept of meritocracy has been extensively debated.

About Meritocracy

- It is a political, social, or economic system in which individuals are assigned to positions of power, influence, or reward solely on the **basis of their abilities ,hard work, and achievements** rather than their social status or background.

- It represents a rejection of **hereditary aristocracy and nepotism.**

- Young, a British sociologist, foresaw a dystopian meritocratic world in his satirical book, **The Rise of the Meritocracy (1958)**.

  - He envisioned a future, specifically **2034**, as a society where social class and mobility were determined solely by intelligence and effort, as measured through standardised testing and educational achievement.

Significance

- The theory of meritocracy presupposes the possibility of **equality of opportunit**y.

- The evolution of meritocracy has witnessed significant transformations, influenced by the critiques and analyses of thinkers such as **Michael Young, Michael Sandel, and Adrian Wooldridge.**

Impact of AI on Meritocracy

- **Positives :** AI refers to the ability of machines to perform cognitive tasks like thinking, perceiving, learning, problem solving and decision making. Initially conceived as a technology that could mimic human intelligence

  - The progress of technology has created specialized skills, as emerging industries and job options demand expertise in new domains.

  - As a result, the nature of work is constantly evolving, and individuals need to acquire new skills to stay current with the demands of a changing market.

  - This latest wave of emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), quantum computing and Web3, is poised to accelerate change faster than ever before, **bringing the interlacing of skills** and technologies closer than they have ever been.

  - **Skills-based organizations** will lead the future of work. Shifting to a skills-based approach helps organizations hire and retain the right talent and enables them to upskill their existing talent to meet the needs of today's digital world.

  - Fundamental to delivering on this shift to a skills-based approach are technologies, such as AI and ML, which can understand key attributes to help drive automation and provide insights and predictions that help to identify and align skills with jobs, quickly turning employee data into a strategic advantage, while helping businesses adapt to change.

- **Negatives :** AI questions the **basis of human merit** by introducing a non-human entity capable of performing tasks, making decisions, and even 'creating' at levels that can surpass human abilities.

  - Individuals with access to AI tools gain a significant advantage, not necessarily due to their personal abilities, but because of the enhanced capabilities of these tools.

  - **Biases :** AI systems trained on historical data can **perpetuate and even exacerbate** biases present in that data, leading to discriminatory outcomes in areas such as hiring, law enforcement, and lending.

  - **Promote unemployment:** an AI tool can predict pancreatic cancer in a patient three years before radiologists can make the diagnosis.

  - Capabilities such as this can lead to the displacement of jobs that involve routine, predictable tasks.

- **Socioeconomic disparities:** AI would push the workforce towards either high-skill, high-wage jobs involving complex problem-solving and creativity or low-skill, low-wage jobs requiring physical presence and personal interaction, which AI cannot replicate yet.

- ◆ This polarisation will exacerbate socioeconomic disparities, as individuals without access to high-level education and training are pushed towards lower-wage roles.
- **Accountability:** The opaque nature of many AI algorithms, coupled with the concentration of power in a few tech giants, poses significant challenges to accountability.
  - ◆ The 'black box' nature of many AI systems can **obscure Meritocracy criteria,** making it difficult for individuals to know how to advance or challenge decisions made by AI, thus eroding the meritocratic ideal.
- **Loss for small players :** Tech giants with access to unprecedented volumes of data have a distinct advantage in training more sophisticated and accurate AI models.

Conclusion and Way Forward

- Meritocracy in the age of Artificial Intelligence calls for a deliberate rethinking of how merit is defined and rewarded when AI tools can both augment human capabilities and deepen existing inequalities.
- India, being the fastest growing economy with the second largest population in the world, has a significant stake in the AI revolution.
  - ◆ Recognising AI's potential to transform economies and the need for India to strategise its approach
- In a meritocratic society, individuals must understand the criteria by which their efforts and talents are evaluated.
- Together, the public and private sectors can work to establish standards and policies that ensure new technologies, such as AI and ML, drive human progress, create job opportunities for future workforce and grow our economies.

Mains Practice Question
Recalibrating meritocracy in the face of Artificial Intelligence(AI) advancements demands a sophisticated understanding of the interplay between technology and societal structures. Discuss