Right To Repair as a Consumer right

Mains: *GS2 – Governance | Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation*

Why in News?

As India takes steps toward making right to repair a consumer right, we must also treat it as a cultural and intellectual resource a form of knowledge that deserves preservation and support.

What is the right to repair?

- **The right to repair** – It refers to empowerment of consumers to have control over the reparability of a consumer goods.
- It allows end users, consumers as well as businesses, to repair devices they own or service without any manufacturer or technical restrictions.
- **Need** – In an age of cloud backups and algorithmic processing, it is easy to forget the value of knowledge that cannot be codified.
    - **Restoration by skills** – Repairers are experienced technicians or craftspeople restore devices not by strictly following manuals or written instructions.
    - Instead by using their senses (sight, hearing, touch, sometimes even smell) to detect faults, and by creatively adapting solutions based on available parts and unique situations
- **Recent developments** – Indian government recently accepted a report proposing a *Repairability Index* for mobile phones and appliances, ranking products based on ease of repair, spare part access, and software support.
- **Right to Repair movement** – Globally it gained momentum rapidly.
    - **European Union** recently introduced rules requiring manufacturers to provide access to spare parts and repair documentation.
    - **India**, the Department of Consumer Affairs launched a Right to Repair framework in 2022, followed by a national portal in 2023 covering electronics, automobiles, and farm equipment.
    - **United Nations** Sustainable Development Goal 12 promotes repair as part of responsible consumption.
- India now can lead by recognizing repair not just as a service but also as a form of knowledge work.

What is the necessity for the right to repair?

- **Declining product repairability** – Many modern products are made with sealed

parts and special tools, making it hard to repair them without help from the manufacturer, limiting what informal repairers can fix.
- **Rise of disposable consumer habits** – Consumers tend to throw away broken items instead of repairing them, influenced by low-cost products and strong marketing.
    - This reduces the need for informal repair services.
- **Exclusion from formal skilling** – Training programs for new technologies focus on formal workers and are hard to access, leaving informal repairers without chances to improve their skills or earn certifications.
- **Neglect in policy and regulation** – Policies on e-waste and consumer rights usually benefit manufacturers and large service centers, ignoring the needs and contributions of informal repairers and minimizing their role in sustainability
- **Neglect of unspoken knowledge** – The risks being lost is not only economic opportunity but also a vast, Unspoken knowledge that has long supported India's technological resilience.

Unspoken Knowledge
• **Unspoken knowledge –** It refers to forms of skill and intuition that are difficult to formalize. • **Expertise lives in** – Muscle memory, quiet observation, and years of hands-on improvisation. • **Expertise shared through** – Mentorship, observation, and repetition not through formal training or certification In India's repair economy. • **Significance** – It is inherently adaptive and context-sensitive, qualities that structured digital systems, including AI, often struggle to replicate.

What are the existing initiatives?

- **The E-Waste (Management) Rules, 2022** – This introduced Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) a principle that makes manufacturers responsible for post-use product management.
- However, while these rules encourage recycling, they make only a passing mention of repair as a preventive strategy.

In 2021-22, India generated over 1.6 million tonnes of e-waste, becoming the world's third-largest producer.

- **National skilling programmes** – Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) focus on short-term certifications for formal industrial roles.
- This includes repair work, which requires improvisation, diagnostic skill and creative reuse does not easily fit this framework.
- **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** – This celebrates Indian knowledge traditions and experiential learning but offers little guidance on how to support or transmit hands-on repair expertise.
- **Campaigns –** Mission LiFE (LiFEStyle for Environment) promote repair and reuse, but complementary efforts are needed to support the workers who make such sustainability practices possible.

What are the advantages of repair justice?

- **workforce skill recognition** – The policies focus they risk leaving behind the very workforce whose skills make it real.
- **Using feedback loops** – To make use feedback loops and sources of practical insight i.e. a discarded circuit board can become a teaching tool.
- **Safeguarding data** – Repairing through informal repairers enhances security as a salvaged phone part can restore someone's access to work or school.
- **promoting circular economy –** It is done through including reuse as a design principle.
- The 'unmaking' is the process of taking apart, repairing, or repurposing devices after their first use, revealing design flaws and opportunities for reuse.
- **Aligning with repair mechanisms** – Most modern gadgets are built for compactness and control, not repair.
- As the country invests in AI infrastructure and digital public goods, it must align with the ground realities of repair.

> *According to a 2023 iFixit global report,* ***only 23% of smartphones sold in Asia are easily repairable*** *due to design constraints.*

- **Inclusive policy making** – Public policy must consider not only how products are manufactured and used but also how they break down, are repaired, and find new life.

What steps can be taken?

- **Design developments** – The shift toward designing for "unmaking", This includes disassembly and repair are anticipated from the start, should inform both hardware standards and AI-integrated systems.
- **Coordinated institutional action** – The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology can embed repairability criteria into AI and procurement policies.
- **Integrating informal platforms** – It means e-Shram, under the Ministry of Labour and Employment, can formally recognize informal repairers and connect them to social protection and skill-building schemes.
- **Enhancing training programmes** – The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship can consider training programmes to account for the unspoken, diagnostic nature of repair work, which does not conform to standardised industrial templates.
- **Usage of AI** – To support this, AI can help codify typical repair pathways, while Large Language Models can capture, summarise, and translate unspoken repair narratives into structured, shareable knowledge.
- **Ensuring broader leaning** – Enabling broader learning without stripping local context or expertise, supporting this ecosystem is not merely a question of intellectual property or technical efficiency.
- It is about valuing the quiet, embodied labour that sustains our digital and material lives is an essential step toward a just, repair-ready technological future.

Reference

The Hindu| Right to Repair