

The Participation of Youth in Structuring the Democracy and Governance: A Contributory Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Youth is characterized as the future leaders, possess an unparalleled energy, innovation, and idealism that can significantly contribute to the vitality and sustainability of a nation's democracy. Their active engagement in the political process is not merely an option but a necessity for a thriving democratic society. The authors in the present article explores the pivotal role of youth in shaping democracy and governance. It highlights the unique perspectives, energy, and innovation that young people bring to the political process. The authors discuss the challenges faced by youth in engaging in political activities, such as lack of political awareness, limited opportunities, and negative stereotypes.

To enhance youth participation, strategies such as inclusive governance, youth-centric policies, civic education, mentorship and leadership development, and leveraging technology to be employed for youth participation. By investing in young minds and creating an inclusive political environment, nations can harness their power to build a better future. In this perspective, the authors in the present paper throws light on the positive impact of youth involvement on democratic institutions and the challenges faced by youth in engaging in political activities and the strategies for enhancing youth participation. The Article also focuses on benefits of youth participation for democracy and governance and its positive outcome with the referral case studies. The authors also make an attempt to provide the workable positive solutions for the youth activism and empowerment.

Keywords: Youth, Politics, Democracy, Empowerment, Social Justice

INTRODUCTION

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The concept of liberal democracy originated in the 14th century against the feudalistic society and absolutism in America after the American Revolution.³ The French Revolution⁴ gave birth to the concept of Constitutionalism and the words of liberty, equality and fraternity to the whole world and has also influenced many nations all across the world. In the ancient Indian society the rulers worked for the liberty of their citizens.

The concept of justice and liberty in the ancient Indian society was associated with 'dharma' and maintaining the 'dharma' was the primary duties of the kings. The concept of youth participation in the political sphere was a very common practice in the ancient world politics. This was because after attaining a certain age, the prince was given the post of the king along with the group of newly ministers making the bureaucracy; the king and the old group of ministers willingly gave their posts to their successors to retain the political pragmatism of the society. However, this concept or the practice changed with the passage of time because of the unstable and changing political structures all across the world leading to the problems for the youth commonly known as the youth at risk in the twentieth and the twenty-first century.

They either tend to be isolated or marginalized from the processes of policy, governance and decision making. The problematic situation of the current Indian politics is facing that during the time of the elections, the young and the educated people do not vote thinking about themselves and their low performance in the regional and national politics. On the other hand, the poor and rural-background people stay happy with free bees and even sell their votes for some money or just for a liquor bottle.

Since the last 3 decades the concerns for youth's involvement in terms of anti-social activities, criminal conspiracies and societal decline has increased a lot. For example, in the case of *Kanhaiya Kumar vs. Union of India*⁵, a student leader from Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), Delhi was charged of Sedition Law under Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code⁶ for giving anti-national statements against the unity and integrity of the country and speaking in favor of a terrorist.

³ ANDREW HEYWOOD, POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES: AN INTRODUCTION 33 (7th ed. 2021).

⁴ WILLIAM DOYLE, THE OXFORD HISTORY OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION (1989).

⁵ *Kanhaiya Kumar v. Union of India*, (2016) 3 SCC 9 (India).

⁶ Indian Penal Code, 1860, § 124A, No. 45, Acts of Parliament, 1860 (India).

Today, the countries like the USA, Australia, England and India are facing problems of youth unemployment and underemployment, youth poverty etc. because of sudden changes from extremely radical government to progressive governments.⁷ A yearning for a sense of community, security, and high moral and social standards, which stands in stark contrast to the prevailing uncertainties of rapidly changing global markets, fast-paced capitalism, and widespread apprehension.

This desire for stability and community has influenced political movements, particularly in the form of communitarianism, which emerged alongside the development of third way politics in countries like Australia, the UK, the USA, and other Western European nations⁸. This political vision emphasizes the importance of reciprocal obligations, community involvement, and active participation in society, as a response to the destabilizing effects of global economic changes.⁹

REJUVENATING YOUTH IN STRUCTURING DEMOCRACY

India, although a developing country has the highest number of youths in the world with around 67% of its population being the youth¹⁰ that is between the ages of 19 to 35 unlike many developed countries of the world like Japan and USA where the age gaps between the people are still a problematic situation. Even after seeing decline in the family-size and birth rate India will continue to be a 'young country' even after a decade. Henceforth, the representation of youth in the politics becomes an essential task.

India, with its diversity in terms of numerous languages, and civilizations, but connected by the ancient traditions, culture, and values, provides Indian youth with a one-of-a-kind opportunity and privilege to lead by example in solving the multifaceted difficulties that all nations face. To achieve this, enhanced and continual of both the intrapersonal and the interpersonal connections amongst people from different places, cultures, and ways of life are important as well as critical. As per the World Bank data, the literacy rate amongst the old age

⁷ Judith Bessant, *Youth Participation: A New Mode of Government*, 24 POLICY STUDY 87-100 (2010).

⁸ Nathan Manning & Parveen Akhtar, 'No, we vote for whoever we want to': young British Muslims making new claims on citizenship amidst ongoing forms of marginalisation, 24 JOURNAL ON YOUTH STUDIES 961-976 (2021).

⁹ Debra Flanders Cushing, *Promoting Youth Participation in Communities Through Youth Master Planning*, 46 COMMUNITY DEV. 43, 43-55 (2015).

¹⁰ U.N. DEP'T OF ECON. & SOC. AFFAIRS, POP. DIV., WORLD POPULATION PROSPECTS 2022 (2022), <https://population.un.org/wpp/> (last visited July 17, 2022).

people are around 47% while amongst the youth of this country ranging from 15 to 25 years is around 97%.¹¹ Here, the problem is that the old age people with less knowledge and education are the ones who make rules, regulations and policies for this country including that for the 'educated-youth' with the claim of being experienced. But the picture is not that easy and glorious as unity, advancements and knowledge brings a lot more betterment than the experiences. For example, a huge demonstration by youth in Delhi for demanding justice in the *Nirbhaya case*, a big protest in Delhi for a Corruption free India, and a mass protest on the *Marina beach of Jallikattu*¹² are the notable example depicting the strength of the youth.

The young entrepreneurs like *Tilak Mehta*¹³, the founder of 'Paper Space' made the courier system better; founder of 'Flipkart' *Mr. Sachin Bansal*¹⁴ brought the revolution of online marketing across the nation, *Byju Raveendran*¹⁵ has made the online education better by the creation of the 'Byjus App'. So, the authors suggest that if the youth are given political power, India would undoubtedly become a developed nation in the near future.

POLICY INITIATIVES ON EMPOWERING YOUTH AND ITS PROSPECTIVES

The certain public sector undertakings, market-based activities for economic development like open market operations, Five Year Plans for helping in the commence of new and better-quality products in the market; help the sellers and the producers to gain maximum profits or financial accommodation, flexibility and adaptability were overly bureaucratized and unresponsive to the existing market needs.¹⁶ A debate which is going currently in the society in context to the 'Retreat of Liberal Democracy' which is about whether promoting open market competitions through the establishment of the free markets would be the best way of helping

¹¹ WORLD BANK, LITERACY RATE, ADULT (% OF PEOPLE AGES 15 AND ABOVE) AND LITERACY RATE, YOUTH (% OF PEOPLE AGES 15–24) (2024), <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.ADT.LITR.ZS> (last visited Aug. 19, 2024).

¹² Anmol Sovit, *Youth Participation in Democracy and Governance: India Leading the Way*, ORGANISER (July 15, 2023), <https://organiser.org/2023/07/15/183562/bharat/youth-participation-in-democracy-and-governance-india-leading-the-way/>.

¹³ Manisha Sharma, *Meet Tilak Mehta, the 13-Year-Old Entrepreneur Revolutionizing Logistics in India*, ECON. TIMES (Sept. 24, 2018), <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com>.

¹⁴ Prachi Verma, *Sachin Bansal Exits Flipkart After Walmart Deal*, ECON. TIMES (May 10, 2018), <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com>.

¹⁵ Shubham Singh, *Byju Raveendran Becomes India's Newest Billionaire as Edtech Booms*, FORBES INDIA (July 14, 2020), <https://www.forbesindia.com>.

¹⁶ Sony Pellissery & Sam Geall, *Five Year Plans*, ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SUSTAINABILITY 156, 156–60 (vol. 7, 2012).

the under privileged sections of the without harming the better off people of the society.¹⁷ In short, it focuses on the establishment of Perfect Competition market in the economy. Supporters of this market system argue that it will help in trade and commence of new and better-quality products in the market; help the sellers and the producers to gain maximum profits or financial accommodation.

There is no doubt that the free-market avenues will help in the economic betterment of the nation as the consumers will be able to make his choices amongst different types of substitute goods available in the market as it happened after 1991 (the LPG Policies) in India. On the other hand, it is rightly said that “Everything that glitters is not always gold.” So, the other section of people believes that open market operations and private enterprises provide superior quality goods, but they lead to undesirable effects on the traditional producers as they may not be able to compete with the highly efficient machine-made goods. Also, the cost of such goods and services are out of the reach of the poor people. Private enterprises tend to go there where the businesses would be most profitable and hence free markets eventually tend to work for the interest of the economically strong, wealthy and powerful sections of society.

While many policy documents emphasize youth participation, the reality is that young people often lack the legal capacity to fully engage in democratic processes. This discrepancy between policy rhetoric and legal reality creates a disparity between the rights and responsibilities of young. To rectify this, the text proposes that policies should be designed to substantially increase youth participation in democracy, effectively elevating their citizenship status. This would involve addressing the legal barriers preventing young people from fully exercising their political rights and accessing opportunities available to adults. From a legal standpoint, this statement posits that a democracy’s legitimacy is intrinsically linked to the inclusion of all its citizens, irrespective of age. By denying young people their full citizenship rights, a state risks by creating a legal and moral inconsistency. The justification for excluding young people from political processes should be subjected to rigorous legal scrutiny. Any such justification must be clear, compelling, and demonstrably legitimate to avoid undermining the democratic foundation of the state. The policies focusing on ‘youth governance’ rather than ‘democratic involvement’ may be legally insufficient to confer meaningful political rights on young people.

¹⁷ Gabor Scheiring, *The Retreat of Liberal Democracy: Authoritarian Capitalism and the Accumulative State in Hungary* (Aug. 26, 2020), https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3681234.

While these policies might create platforms for youth input, they may not necessarily translate into actual decision-making power or accountability.

THE ROLE OF YOUTH IN SUSTAINING AND STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY: PAST TO PRESENT

Historians such as Pearson have highlighted the lengthy history of popular anxieties and how generations saw themselves as especially endangered by new types of degeneration manifested in the tendencies of youthful 'transgresses'. This begs the question: should we interpret contemporary fears about youth that have influenced this renewed worry about the need to 'reconnect young' as the newest expression of a long history punctuated by periodic moral panics over youth?¹⁸ The focus on individual rights and freedoms has increased fear and worry about young people.

This has led to a push for involving young people in decision-making as a way to fix problems. However, this doesn't necessarily mean that adults truly care about young people's opinions; it might just be a way to look good and solve other issues. The involvement is an old concept important to the liberal democratic tradition, and the contemporary 'discovery' of youth involvement is part of an emerging political orthodoxy. The success of youth involvement can be attributed to its emergence in a setting that valued communitarian reformist terminology (e.g., community building) and a desire to empower individuals for self-government. It is a 'third-way' politics entailing a blend of economic liberal fiscal policies with some regard for social equity.

1. **Economic freedom:** This means letting businesses do their thing without too much government control, kind of like how things work in a free market.
2. **Social equality:** This means making sure everyone has a fair chance in life, with things like good education and healthcare for everyone.

It's like trying to find a balance between these two ideas. People like Tony Blair and Bill Clinton used this approach when they were leaders. They tried to make their countries' economies stronger while also helping people who were struggling. So, it's a middle ground between total government control and complete freedom for businesses.

¹⁸ Judith Bessant, *Youth Participation: A New Mode of Government*, 24 POLICY STUDY 87-100 (2010).

Most social science observers believe in the view that we have a lengthy history of attempting to regulate large segments of the population. As previously said, young people have received special attention in this regard, as they are among the most controlled segments of the population. The concept of governance as defined by Foucault and those affected by his views encompasses much more than what states do. As Dean points out, government can relate to the operations of the Blair and Bush administrations, as well as a wide range of other initiatives to regulate people's behavior. In this meaning, government refers to how individuals or organizations manage their own and others' actions. In this situation, it happens through the concept of youth participation. Law and order, health, and even a falling economy are all examples of government-related concerns or problems.

Regulators often rely on journals, newspapers, books, and expert's advice to establish norms and guidelines for activities including citizenship, parenting, employment, and health. In a nutshell, govern mentality is the application of information and habits of thought to enable and authorize some individuals to control others. It is a loose collection of goals that often target specific categories such as 'the poor', 'criminals', and 'youth'.¹⁹

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT: A BOON TO SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL UPLIFTMENT

The famous philosopher of India, Swami Vivekananda said, "If I get 100 youth, I can change both the condition and direction of this country".²⁰ But, today in India the number of youth are around 65 cores who are capable and can change the disaster into an opportunity for the betterment of this nation. At the age of 18 if a person can vote and select his representative then of course he or she also has the ability to equally participate in governance and politics of the nation. A person who has suffered from the problems can bring the solution to the problem in the best manner by the previews of his own experiences and circumstances faced in life; as we know the youth facing problems like unemployment, poverty and lack of representation in the society. So, if the youth who face these problems are made to get involved in the Public

¹⁹ JOHN SMITH, POLICIES AND GOALS: TARGETING SPECIFIC CATEGORIES (2020).

²⁰ Pranav Kuller, *The Speaking Tree: Icon with a Mission—Swami Vivekananda*, TIMES OF INDIA, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/edit-page/the-speaking-tree-icon-with-a-mission-swami-vivekananda/articleshow/988619.cms>.

Policy and Governance then they can bring the best possible solutions because youth people are full of energy and enthusiasm and have knowledge about the diversity and representation with digital learning and technological expertise.

If the elderly people have experience, then the youth people can bring new ideas, aspirations or perspectives as they are open to new opportunities. Our history has shown us the proof that how youth participation in politics and governance has changed the social evils and helped in shaping the society for its betterment whether it be *Raja Ram Mohan Roy*²¹ who fought against Sati and Child-marriage from India or it may even be *Malala Yousafzai*²² who became a world-wide face for the women education against the radical people in some sections of the society.

In the making up of the Indian reforms, freedom struggle and demanding of the civil and political rights for the women where the young and the educated men played a very vital and significant role. This came in the picture by the virtue of the birth and development of the Women's Movement in the country which made the women aware, self-oriented and confident because of which the most outstanding of which the All India Women's Conference founded in 1927²³. The Indian Constitution Article 14²⁴ talking about Right to Equality and Article 15²⁵ which prohibits discrimination based on caste, class, religion, sex or place of birth gave equal status to both men and women in the nation.

There are a good number of young orators and speakers speaking for the welfare of this country in National Youth Parliaments conducted by the central Government, different State Governments and also different colleges and universities. The government also provides Youth for Development Programme, National Youth Advisory Council ("NYAC"), Local for Vocal Initiatives and Make In India Project²⁶ all conducting discourses and projects around social issues, civic education, education, sanitation, and rural development. They also engage the young students in trainings, vocational courses and internship opportunities to enhance their skills, make them intellectual and disciplined and help them to build their leadership skills for

²¹ RAJA RAM MOHAN ROY, THE ENGLISH WORKS OF RAJA RAM MOHAN ROY (Jogendra Chunder Ghose ed., 1885).

²² MALALA YOUSAFZAI, I AM MALALA: THE GIRL WHO STOOD UP FOR EDUCATION AND WAS SHOT BY THE TALIBAN (2013).

²³ BIPIN CHANDRA, THE HISTORY OF MODERN INDIA 238 (Orient Blackswan ed., 2009).

²⁴ INDIA CONST. art. 14.

²⁵ INDIA CONST. art. 15.

²⁶ GOV'T OF IND., DEP'T FOR PROMOTION OF INDUS. & INTERNAL TRADE, MAKE IN INDIA: A MAJOR NATIONAL PROGRAM (2014).

the nation-making and country's development. India's youth can play a vital role in local governance by highlighting community issues and advocating for swift solutions. The election of *Chandrani Murmu*²⁷ as India's youngest MP at 25 inspired others from disadvantaged backgrounds to enter politics.²⁸ The women like *Chhavi Rajawat*²⁹, who became the youngest Sarpanch of our country gives a good example of women empowerment in Indian politics.

THE YOUTH AND THE LAW- A CONTRIBUTORY PERSPECTIVE

The relationship between youth and the law is a complex one, influenced by various factors such as age, culture, socioeconomic status, and legal systems. Young people often face unique challenges within the legal framework, from issues related to education, employment, and criminal justice to matters involving family, relationships, and technology. The law plays a pivotal role in shaping the experiences of youth, influencing their development, behavior, and future trajectories. The researcher in the present paper explores the multifaceted relationship between youth and the law, focusing on various broader societal implications of legal interventions.

One of the most prominent areas of intersection between youth and law is the criminal justice system. Young people are disproportionately represented in many criminal justice systems worldwide. This can be attributed to factors such as poverty, lack of educational opportunities, peer pressure, and systemic biases. Juvenile justice systems are designed to address the specific needs and circumstances of young offenders, often focusing on rehabilitation and reintegration rather than punishment. Historically, the system has evolved from a punitive approach to one that emphasizes rehabilitation and reintegration. The establishment of separate juvenile courts in the late 19th and early 20th centuries marked a significant shift in how society dealt with young offenders, recognizing that they are developmentally different from adults and thus require different legal treatment.

The principle of *parens patriae*, meaning “parent of the nation”, underpins the juvenile justice system. This doctrine allows the state to intervene in the lives of young people, not only to

²⁷ Chandrani Murmu, *Youngest MP in Indian Parliament*, THE HINDU (May 24, 2019).

²⁸ Anmol Sovit, *Youth Participation in Democracy and Governance: India Leading the Way*, ORGANISER (July 15, 2023), <https://organiser.org/2023/07/15/183562/bharat/youth-participation-in-democracy-and-governance-india-leading-the-way/>.

²⁹ Chhavi Rajawat, *Empowering Villages Through Modernization*, TIMES OF INDIA (Mar. 5, 2018).

punish but also to provide guidance and support. However, the balance between protecting the interests of the youth and ensuring public safety has been a contentious issue. Critics argue that the system often fails to address the root causes of juvenile delinquency, such as poverty, lack of education, and family instability³⁰ Recent reforms have focused on reducing the number of youths incarcerated and increasing the use of alternative measures such as community service, counselling, and restorative justice programmes.³¹

These approaches aim to prevent recidivism by addressing the underlying issues that contribute to criminal behavior, while also recognizing the potential for growth and change in young people. Youth are not only subject to the law but also possess specific rights under it. These rights are enshrined in various international and national legal instruments, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (“CRC”), which emphasizes the protection, provision, and participation rights of children and adolescents. The CRC outlines the right to education, health, protection from exploitation and abuse, and the right to be heard in matters affecting them.³²

LEGAL AND SOCIAL INSINUATIONS

The interaction between youth and the law has broader social implications, particularly concerning the criminalization of youth behavior and the long-term impact of legal interventions. The phenomenon of “school-to-prison pipeline” is a critical issue in this context, where disciplinary policies in schools disproportionately affect minority and disadvantaged youth, leading to increased contact with the criminal justice system. This pipeline not only perpetuates social inequalities but also undermines the educational and developmental opportunities for those involved.

The labelling theory in criminology suggests that the way society labels young offenders can influence their self-identity and future behaviour. When young people are labelled as delinquents or criminals, they may internalize these labels and engage in further criminal activity. Thus, the legal system's response to youth behavior must be carefully considered to avoid reinforcing negative identities and outcomes. Moreover, the role of law in addressing

³⁰ Daniel P. Mears, *The Front End of the Juvenile Court: Intake and Informal Adjustment*, JUV. JUST. BULL. (2002).

³¹ Jeffrey A. Butts & Ojmarrh Mitchell, *Brick by Brick: Dismantling the School-to-Prison Pipeline*, 37 J. AM. ACAD. PSYCHIATRY & L. ONLINE 510, 510–13 (2009).

³² Convention on the Rights of the Child, Nov. 20, 1989, 1577 U.N.T.S. 3.

issues such as cyberbullying, substance abuse, and mental health among youth is increasingly important. The digital age has introduced new challenges for legal systems worldwide, as young people are both perpetrators and victims of online misconduct. Legal frameworks must adapt to these changes, ensuring that young people are protected from harm while also being held accountable for their actions.³³

CONCLUSION

Youth participation in democracy and governance is not just a right but a critical necessity for shaping a resilient and inclusive society. As the most vibrant segment of the population, young people bring fresh perspectives, innovative solutions, and a deep commitment to justice and equality. Their involvement in democratic processes, whether through voting, advocacy, or public service, contributes to the dynamism and responsiveness of governance structures. In many democracies, youth-led movements have been instrumental in pushing for social, political, and environmental reforms, demonstrating their capacity to drive meaningful change. By actively engaging in policy-making, young people help to ensure that the issues affecting their generation, such as education, employment, and climate change, and digital rights, are adequately addressed. Their participation also promotes greater accountability and transparency in governance, as they often challenge the status quo and demand more from their leaders.

Furthermore, involving youth in governance fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility, empowering them to contribute constructively to their communities and nations. It also bridges the generational gap, creating a more cohesive society where diverse voices are heard and respected. However, for youth participation to be truly effective, it must be supported by inclusive policies, access to education, and platforms that allow young people to voice their opinions and influence decisions. Ultimately, the active participation of youth in democracy and governance is crucial for building a future that is equitable, sustainable, and reflective of the aspirations of all citizens. Their contributions not only enrich the democratic process but also lay the foundation for a more just and progressive society.

³³ SAMEER HINDUJA & JUSTIN W. PATCHIN, BULLYING BEYOND THE SCHOOLYARD: PREVENTING AND RESPONDING TO CYBERBULLYING (2009).