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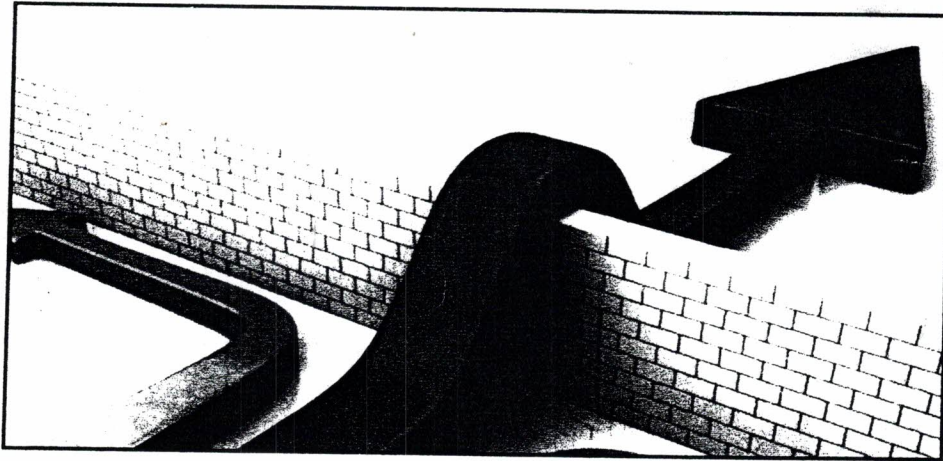
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INDIAN YOUTH : CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES



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: CONTENTS :

1.	Effect of Social Media on Youth.	01
	Dr. B. S. Kavhar	
2.	Library and Information Services in Changing Era.	4
	Dr. Dattatray Ramrao Dhumale	
3.	Youth Participation in National Development : Opportunities and Challenges	7
	Dr. Donge Satish B.	
4.	Unemployment, Youth and Government...!	11
	Prof. A. M. Shekh	
5.	Digital Library: Need of Today	14
	Amol Bhaudas Meshram	
6.	Various Benefits of Physical Fitness in Youth	17
	Dr. Anil A. Deshmukh, Prof. Rajabhau Deshmukh	
7.	Youth and Society	19
	Dr. Dinkar Eknath Umberkar	
8.	The Role of Youth in Society	21
	Dr. Ulhas N. Rathod	
9.	Role of Fitness and Sports in Youth and Their Benefits	23
	Prof. Anjali Barde	
10.	Unemployment in India : Skill Development Initiative	26
	Dr. Nilesh N. Chotiya	
11.	The Role of Youth in Political Participation	28
	Dr. Ratan V. Rathod	
12.	Influence of Music on Youth	31
	Dr. Ajay Solanke	
13.	Role of Indian Youth in Swachh Bharat Abhiyan	33
	Dr. Anil M. Tirkar	
14.	Comparative Effect of Warming Up Exercises on Selected Physical Fitness Components of M.P.Ed. and M.Ed. Students	36
	Prof. Ashish Govindrao Barde	
15.	Impacts of Social Media in Youth	39
	Dr. Ravi S. Dakhore	
16.	Challenges Faced by Youth in India	41
	Dr. D. K. Rathod	
17.	Role of Youth for Cleaner and Greener Environment	44
	Dr. Sujata H. Shende	
18.	Social Media and Youth : Pillar in Nation Building	46
	Dr. Dinesh A. Gundawar	

Youth Participation in National Development : Opportunities and Challenges

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Abstract:

In modern life, social media is developing fast. It is used by many people all over the world. Social media is especially very popular among the young. However, there are many young people who cannot control themselves and are addicted to social media. Addiction to social media has many serious effects, including poor study habits, living away from reality and bad health.

Introduction:

"The youth are recognized not only as future leaders but also as actors and foundation of our society, with a direct stake in the development process of our great nation."

Youth are one of the greatest assets any nation can be proud of. Not only are they legitimately regarded as the future leaders, young women and men are potentially and actually the vital resources worth of investment by a country as well as the valued possession for national development. As critical stakeholders, they are the center of reconstruction and sustainable development of any nation. The emerging global and regional consensus on youth development clearly underscores the need to ensure the inclusion of youth perspectives in the development process along with the effective participation of youth in national development practice. Over the years, there has been a gradual increase in global awareness about the vital role of young people in sustainable development.

Youth have been making enormous contributions to the improvement of life on the planet. There is hardly any function, be it social, cultural or economic, where youth have not played part: from leaders of crusades to national presidents, from prolific writers to media pundits. Yet the acknowledgment of their contributions to human and societal development has not been fully appreciated. Their contributions were not also proportionate to their demographic weight as youth have remained mostly excluded from society's important and critical socioeconomic decisions. There are also instances where youth are exploited through their labor and courage in militant and insurgent groups and as instruments of political struggle though they end up being the least beneficiaries. Thus, one can fairly say

that attempts by youth and youth groups at participating in national development have been greeted by barriers that come in varied forms and styles.

On the economic front, poverty, underemployment and unemployment have barred young people from committing their fresh energy and intellect to their own good as well as that of the society. The problem of unemployment and underemployment is compounded by the lack of access to affordable, functional and qualitative education and training that is oriented to local and global employment markets. Additionally, youth are plagued by problems of attitude that can be attributed to the gerontocratic and conservative adults and their patronizing sentiments as well as their own mind-set about adults and old people. There are cultural norms that still favor hierarchical relationships between the old and the young. The problem of attitude of adults towards youth has extended into the realm of government operations. Most governments have not only failed to provide constructive outlets such as recreational facilities for youth, but also have proclaimed laws that keep youth from streets which constitute an important sphere of youth social participation and integration and have even taken repressive measures to the effect of labeling the youth with derogatory names. There is also the problem of lack of access by the youth to information as an empowering tool for participation. Whatever information is available for youth is not communicated in a youth-friendly way.

Definitions of Youth :

The way by which a nation defines its youth is related to the objective conditions and realities that exist on the ground especially historical and contemporary socio-economic and political issues that need to be

addressed. Most national youth policies attempt to define 'young people' in order to determine the main beneficiaries of policy interventions. Defining 'youth', however, is not a simple task since there is no international consensus on what the term implies or a clear-cut indicator such as age intervals to define it. Who is designated a 'youth' in every country will depend on a variety of factors (Cultural and Political). Flexibility of interpretation is essential in overcoming the difficulties of age definition. It is equally significant to acknowledge that young people may not be seen as a single demographic unit, but must be considered as a broad category encompassing many specific subgroups, which might require specifically targeted policies.

Benefits of Youth Participation

The following are key benefits to youth participation in promoting national development:

- (a) **Participation Promotes Youth Resilience:** Service providers within governments tend to view youth as a problem in need of solution. Emphasis is therefore placed on problem intervention rather than young people potential. In contrast, resiliency-based approaches involve community-wide, intersectoral collaboration. They focus as much on enhancing young people's skills as on reducing risky behavior or avoiding an undesirable outcome indicates that opportunities for meaningful youth participation in problem solving, goal setting and planning are major factors in helping youth withstand the negative impacts of neglect, poverty and other problems.
- (b) **Youth Participation Leads to Better Decisions and Outcomes.** Many of the profound difficulties faced by young people around the globe-illiteracy, poverty, HIV/AIDS, substance abuse, discrimination and forced engagement in armed conflict- are subjects of widespread concern at the national and international levels. In all regions of the world, young people have to deal with increased unemployment and insecurity at work, greater family instability, and reductions in social welfare programmes.
- (c) **Participation Allows Unique Youth Perspectives in Policy and Decision-Making:** Although youth tend to want immediate results from decisions and actions, usually they focus on their futures

and typically think in the long-term when analyzing policy decisions. This long-term view can help counterbalance the short-term thinking which dominates governmental decision-making that is predominantly adult-led. Because they are typically excluded from positions of power or influence, young people's perspectives are usually those of the outsider. Youth, though may lack knowledge, is certainly not devoid of intelligence; it sees through shams with sharp and terrible eyes. Given the opportunity, young people can provide contributions that are extremely beneficial in forcing organizations to look beyond the comfort zone where decisions are taken according to tested approaches. This boosts creativity and can lead to new solutions to policy problems.

- (d) **Youth Participation has a Positive Impact on Adults:** Young people to achieve ownership of decision-making processes, they require support as well as challenges, voice, opportunity for action based on a cause, skill building, adult structure, affirmation, and a project that is relevant to them.
- (e) **Participation Strengthens Young People's Personal Development:** Youth participation can improve academic achievement by increasing young people's substantive knowledge and practical skills as a result of solving real problems. It also strengthens their sense of social responsibility and long-term civic values. Rather than simply accepting their situation, youth participants are more likely to think critically and to actively challenge their circumstances.
- (f) **Youth Participation Contributes to Development:** Participation involves youth in activities that bring people together. It teaches them to prioritize and make decisions, and enables them to plan programmes that can contribute to building the capacity of organizations. Youth participation contributes to community development.

Barriers To Effective Youth Participation :

Despite young people's current demographic significance, their full and meaningful participation in issues that affect their lives and national development is

hindered by a myriad of challenges and constraints. The following section explores few of the challenges faced:

1. **Lack of Access to Qualitative Education and Training:** Many of the current youth cohorts were unable to complete a basic primary education, which is considered the minimum level required to function in society (World Youth Report, 2007). In addition to formal education, non-formal education is also important for the development of a young person's capabilities as an individual and as a responsible member of society.
3. **Youth Unemployment and Underemployment:** Without adequate education, limited vacancies in the job market youth face a difficult transition to adulthood and independence, as they are likely to experience unemployment, poverty and social exclusion. This high rate of youth unemployment may be because levels of skills are lower among disadvantaged youth - or are perceived to be - and their social networks are likely to be limited.
4. **Youth Poverty:** Many of today's youth severe poverty from birth. In this sense, Unlike their parents' generation, which enjoyed many opportunities for free, like State-subsidized education and health care, today's youth, from birth, have experienced the consequences of a serious global economic recession and of structural adjustment and liberalization policies that led to major retrenchment and job losses and the withdrawal of State subsidies for basic services. These changes resulted in increased poverty in the households in which young people grew up and diminished opportunities for their early development.
5. **HIV and AIDS:** There is a strong interrelationship between HIV/AIDS, economic development, and poverty. Increasing evidence demonstrates that poverty contributes significantly to the spread of HIV and AIDS. This occurs in a number of ways, including through lack of educational opportunities, lack of health services, lack of viable employment opportunities, and a poverty-driven sense of hopelessness and fatalism

6. **Actions not Always Taken in Youth's Best Interests by Adults:** Actions detrimental to the well-being of young people occur not only through deliberate abuse or neglect. Adults across the professional spectrum have been responsible for decisions, policies and actions that have been inappropriate and sometimes actively harmful to young people, even when the underlying intention has been to promote their welfare. These actions are characterized by a consistent failure to appropriately consult or involve young people themselves.
8. **Discrimination against Young Women:** Gender norms and bias ingrained in educational and economic policies and structures limit the social, economic and political contributions of girls and young women. They are left vulnerable to physical, sexual and psychological harm by the men in their families and communities seriously curtailing their volition to involve in socioeconomic endeavors.
9. **Youth's Interests often Disregarded in Public policy:** Young people's interests are frequently overlooked in the public policy sphere in favor of those of more powerful interest groups. It is not necessarily the case that the welfare of youth is deliberately disregarded, but because their voices are not heard and the impact of public policy on their lives is discussed in decision-making forums, their concerns never reach the top of the political agenda.
10. **Globalization and the Digital Divide:** Young people both suffer and benefit from the process of globalization. On the one hand, they are flexible enough to use the new opportunities it offers. On the other, many lack the skills they need to benefit from these new opportunities.

Conclusion And Recommendations :

The value of youth participation in nation building needs to be fully recognized at all levels ranging from the local community to the international arena. The following recommendations are made with a view to assessing many of the aspects of effective youth participation and the barriers that may be encountered

- a) Access to Qualitative Educational Opportunities; reducing youth illiteracy and

hindered by a myriad of challenges and constraints. The following section explores few of the challenges faced:

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- a) Access to Qualitative Educational Opportunities; reducing youth illiteracy and

improving the coverage and quality of education and training are potentially powerful instruments for reducing levels of income distribution inequality.

- b) Developing and/or strengthening opportunities for young people to learn their rights and responsibilities.
- c) Encouraging and promoting youth associations through financial, educational and technical support and promotion of their activities;
- d) Taking into account the contribution of youth in designing, implementing and evaluating policies and plans at all level of governance;
- e) Improving access to information in order to enable young people to make better use of their opportunities to participate in decision-making;

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