

Bimonthly

# Pax Lumina



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A Quest for Peace and Reconciliation



**Challenges  
Before  
the Youth**

# Pax Lumina

A Quest for Peace and Reconciliation

**Good habits formed at youth  
make all the difference.**

- Aristotle

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# Pax Lumina

A Quest for Peace and Reconciliation

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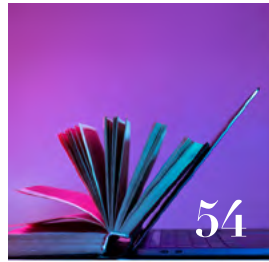


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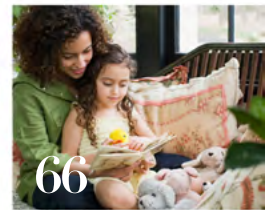
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# Whither the Youth of Today?

## Editorial

It has been said that if a person does not show talent in mathematics before the age of 25, it is unlikely he/she will produce any significant work in the field later in life. The same rule applies to poetry. Like all rules, however, exceptions characterise and define these statements. But the essential point is that youth is often marked by a blooming of imagination, with both positive and negative consequences. We will examine some of these in the context of the challenges facing today's youth.

Young people around the world are often impatient with their surroundings, with the past, and with the rules and regulations that are supposed to govern the world around them. This is true across countries, cultures, societies, and economic systems. Let us consider some of these factors, evaluate their repercussions, and examine how the rest of the population responds to these challenges.

Young people tend to prefer movement over stability. In fact, human history on this planet has been shaped by migration. Despite the many rules and regulations imposed by different nations, migration — both legal and illegal — continues unabated.

Young people want to explore the 'greener' pastures they believe exist beyond their immediate boundaries. This has led to the enrichment of cultures and civilisations, improvements in trade and commerce, and overall economic development, fuelled by foreign exchange.

On the other hand, migration and immigration, especially when unregulated and illegal, lead to widespread human suffering.

Another striking aspect of today's youth is their response to technology. Since the Industrial Revolution, we have seen accelerated growth in technology across all aspects of life. No country or culture remains isolated from the rapid advancement of technological progress, which has fuelled economic development worldwide.

Yet this acceleration has brought undesirable effects on the social cohesion and harmonious stability of the society in question. The issue is the uneven and unequal absorption of technology by the marginalised sections of society. In short, a key question to ask is: Does technological advancement lead to greater inequality?



If this is indeed the case, young people, who eagerly adopt and absorb new technologies, may become disillusioned by the social distortions these technologies can create, leaving them feeling alienated. Such a situation may result in serious consequences, including drug addiction and alcoholism.

A more pressing issue is the aspirations of youth and their universal desire for freedom and aversion to regulation and regimentation. In many cases, this brings them into direct conflict with authorities. This conflict is particularly pronounced in autocratic regimes, but even in so-called democracies, where the values of individual liberty and freedom of expression have not fully taken root, the challenges faced by young people are multifaceted and daunting.

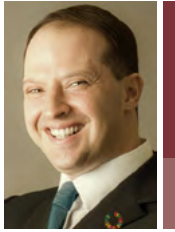
The massacre of peacefully protesting Chinese youth in Tiananmen Square in 1989 remains a painful wound in the world's collective conscience. More recently, the brutal suppression of unarmed women protesting in Iran demonstrates the fragility of peace in many parts of the world.

The question raised by Pax Lumina in this issue on the challenges faced by today's youth is crucial. How can the youth's yearning for freedom be channelled into peacebuilding for all nations and, by extension, the planet itself?

This issue explores this question with reports from diverse countries and cultures, seeking non-violent, peaceful solutions. We hope that the approaching Christmas season will remind everyone of goodwill that peacebuilding requires constant and sustained effort, even in the face of repression and the absence of true democracy.

*Jacob Thomas*

Editor



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# THE **NEED** FOR AN **ETHICALLY** **ENGAGED UNIVERSITY**

## **NAVIGATING TECHNOLOGICAL CHALLENGES AND PROMOTING A GLOBAL ETHIC**





**B**y fostering a commitment to a global ethic, the ethically engaged university empowers youth to actively contribute to creating a more just, equitable, and sustainable future through education that emphasises ethical responsibility and global citizenship



**I**n an era marked by rapid technological advancements, particularly the rise of artificial intelligence (AI), universities face growing pressure to adapt and prepare students for an unpredictable future. The staggering speed and scope of AI and digital innovations are reshaping industries, social interactions, and personal identities at an unprecedented rate.

While young people adapt to these changes with ease, they also face unique challenges, including over-reliance on digital platforms, privacy concerns, and the potential misuse of AI. These challenges require universities to foster critical reflection, equipping students with the moral compass to responsibly navigate technological complexities (Bosio, 2024).

In this context, the ethically engaged university (Bosio, 2023) emerges as a transformative platform. It is uniquely positioned to address the ethical challenges posed by today's rapidly evolving world.

By fostering a commitment to a global ethic, the ethically engaged university empowers youth to actively contribute to creating a more just, equitable, and sustainable future through education that emphasises ethical responsibility and global citizenship (Bosio & de Wit, 2024).

### **What is an Ethically Engaged University?**

The ethically engaged university aims to develop students' critical consciousness toward a 'global ethic', grounded in five core dimensions shown in Figure 1: praxis, reflexive dialogue, caring ethics, humanity empowerment, and



an ecocritical perspective. These dimensions offer students a framework to think about the broader implications of technology and their role as global citizens.

- ❑ Praxis emphasises the importance of integrating theory with practice, encouraging students to apply ethical concepts in real-world scenarios.
- ❑ Reflexive dialogue promotes open, inclusive discussions that challenge assumptions and broaden perspectives.
- ❑ Caring ethics fosters empathy and compassion in addressing social issues.
- ❑ Humanity empowerment inspires students to work toward greater social equity and justice.
- ❑ Eco-critical perspective expands students' ethical considerations to include environmental sustainability and the consequences of technological innovations on our shared planet.

Based on these five dimensions, the ethically engaged university seeks to equip students not only with the technical skills needed to thrive

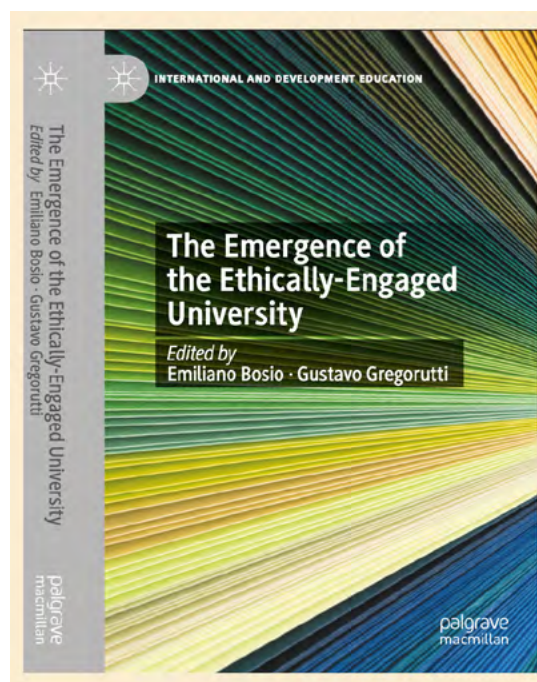
**B**y fostering critical thinking, ethical reflection, and social responsibility, the ethically engaged university not only helps students adapt to a changing world but also empowers them to actively shape it for the better.

in a rapidly changing world but also with the moral and ethical foundations necessary to approach technological advancements with care and responsibility.

## Social Justice and the Global Ethic

Central to the mission of the ethically engaged university is the promotion of social justice. This is not confined to a specific geographical context but extends globally, ensuring that all individuals — regardless of whether they are based in the Global North or South — can critically examine their responsibilities toward a 'Shared Planet.'

In this light, universities become ethical platforms that empower students to question who benefits from technological advancements and who might be marginalised by them.



This vision aligns with my recent book, 'The Emergence of the Ethically Engaged University' (Bosio & Gregorutti, 2023). This explores the growing recognition that universities must play an active role in shaping ethically responsible global citizens.

As outlined in the book, the ethically engaged university is uniquely positioned to instil a global



ethic in students, one that encompasses justice, equity, and sustainability. Through this lens, higher education becomes not only a path to professional success but also a tool for societal transformation. Students are encouraged to contribute positively to the world around them.

### **The University as a Critical Agent for Change**

This year, I travelled to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, where I had the pleasure of speaking at the Times Higher Education Asia Universities Summit 2024. The panel, titled ‘Innovative Approaches to Curriculum Design and Skill Development’, addressed key questions highly relevant to the concept of the ethically engaged university.

These included: How can universities strike a balance between specialisation and a holistic education approach? How can we equip students for careers that do not yet exist? Should we integrate ethical, value-centric knowledge into the curriculum?

The summit provided an excellent platform to explore themes of ethics, passion, sustainability, and AI in pedagogy and curriculum design. These discussions are central to the evolving

**The ethically engaged university is uniquely positioned to instil a global ethic in students, one that encompasses justice, equity, and sustainability. Through this lens, higher education becomes not only a path to professional success but also a tool for societal transformation.**



role of universities in shaping ethical future leaders. They highlight the importance of universities as ethical platforms that engage students in conversations about their collective responsibilities to our global community.

As technology continues to redefine the fabric of society, the role of the ethically engaged

*Panel times Higher Education Asia Universities Summit 2024*



university becomes increasingly essential. As I recently suggested in my talk at the Ethically Engaged University Webinar<sup>2</sup> at the University of Tokyo in Japan, universities are uniquely positioned to challenge students to think beyond the immediate benefits of AI and other technologies and to consider their long-term societal impacts.

By fostering critical thinking, ethical reflection, and social responsibility, the ethically engaged university not only helps students adapt to a changing world but also empowers them to actively shape it for the better.

## Conclusion

The ethically engaged university is not just a theoretical ideal but a practical necessity in today's rapidly changing world. As young people face unprecedented technological challenges, the ethically engaged university provides the grounding they need to navigate these complexities responsibly.

By fostering a global ethic rooted in praxis, dialogue, caring, and sustainability, the ethically engaged university offers a meaningful way for students to contribute to a more just, equitable, and sustainable future.

Through this vision, higher education plays a transformative role, empowering youth to become agents of positive social change in an increasingly interconnected world.

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*Emiliano Bosio, Ph.D., is a leading educator and author known for his work on ethical, critical, and values-based global citizenship. Bosio teaches at Toyo University and Sophia University in Tokyo.*

1. More information: <https://www.timeshighered-events.com/asia-universities-summit-2024/agenda/speakers/3238359>

2. More information: <https://www.gfd.c.u-tokyo.ac.jp/events-archive/6-13-ethically-engaged-university/>



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Video-recording: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_ifP2zEBTgo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_ifP2zEBTgo) and: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fa4EJ3kuPnk>

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**Website:** <https://www.timeshighered-events.com/asia-universities-summit-2024/agenda/speakers/3238359>.



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# CONGOLESE YOUTH

## STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES

**The youth are terrific. They are courageous and resilient. Despite the current challenging socio-economic situation, they do not give up or despair. They love their country and work to create better living conditions.**



**A**ccording to current estimates, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has around 90 million inhabitants, with most of its population being young. The youth constitute a significant asset for the country because they are more than just a generation. They are a driving force of the country's development and embody its hopes.

Congolese figures like Kimpavita during the slave trade (18th century), Simon Kimbangu in the colonial era (early 20th century), and Patrice Emery Lumumba, father of independence and national hero (20th century), have left indelible marks on the country's history through their significant contributions to its emancipation.

Today, many young people strive to contribute to the country's development and the well-being of its people. They have the potential to contribute to the progress of their country. However, they also face significant challenges that negatively affect their well-being and willingness to contribute to the DRC's development.

The youth are terrific. They are courageous and resilient. Despite the current challenging socio-economic situation, they do not give up or despair. They love their country and work to create better living conditions.

For instance, when unable to find jobs in the public or private sectors due to limited opportunities, the youth often organise small, informal businesses under difficult conditions to help meet their needs.

Most young people work informally. Brave and resilient, they do not hesitate to claim their rights and demand better living conditions. They create non-violent social movements ("mouvements citoyens") to strengthen solidarity, promote social justice, and foster the necessary social change.



Another major force of today's youth is their openness to the world through technology. In this third decade of the 21st century, the youth, like many others globally, have access to a variety of learning and informational resources.

Technology provides the young with unprecedented opportunities for education, employment, and personal expression, especially in a country with underdeveloped traditional educational or economic structures.

Economically, technology facilitates entrepreneurship. Many young people use social media and digital platforms to promote their products, services, and innovative projects, thus contributing to developing local, often informal, small businesses.

Technology also offers the young a powerful way to express themselves and claim their rights. By engaging on digital platforms, they raise awareness across the country and the world about their challenges and aspirations, drawing attention to concrete social issues.

The youth have many other potentials, such as a solid attachment to local cultures and religious values. Music occupies a significant portion of cultural expression. Local traditions promote respect for elders and emphasise the importance of family and community.

Religion is deeply embedded in the country's life. Over 90 percent of the population is Christian. Young people are active in the church. They initiate and participate in various community groups and activities. They play a crucial role in the church's ministry and animate liturgical services.

Alongside this, the youth also face challenges. While access to various information sources is a strength, it sometimes leads to manipulation. With a less developed education system, young people sometimes struggle to sift through abundant information to find what is most beneficial or relevant for their growth. Many become distracted and lose focus on what matters.

Another major challenge is security. It has been nearly 30 years since a war ravaged the east of the country. It was mainly fuelled by mining exploitation. A lot of the youth were born and raised in conflict zones. They have witnessed the deaths of loved ones. These youngsters face numerous challenges that profoundly affect their personal, social, and economic development.

Constant insecurity and armed violence disrupt their access to quality education. Schools are often damaged or turned into temporary shelters, and teachers flee conflict zones, leaving youth without learning opportunities.

Additionally, the young victims of armed conflicts suffer from psychological trauma due to exposure to violence, forced displacement, and, for some, recruitment into armed groups.

These experiences impact their mental well-being, self-confidence, and ability to envision a future. They often lack psychological support and resources to rebuild their resilience. For these youths, economic opportunities are minimal. With destroyed infrastructure and a weakened economy, they struggle to find stable and dignified jobs. Most of them live in extreme precarity.



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Many of them come from low-income families and face complex challenges marked by precarious living conditions and limited access to opportunities. Growing up in such a context of deprivation affects their development from a young age. Often forced to contribute to household income early on, some are drawn into hard labour, limiting their access to education and compromising their future.

Some youth, and sometimes infants, sell products on the streets while their peers are in class. Despite the recent enforcement of free public education, many young people still have problems studying properly because of hunger and a lack of quality healthcare.

Some youth, due to complicated circumstances, bad influences, or lack of alternatives, engage in crime and violence. They are called 'kuluna'. This term refers to organised groups of young delinquents. They are often violent and active in urban areas.



Members of these gangs, many of whom are minors and from disadvantaged backgrounds, commit acts of aggression, theft, and intimidation with bladed weapons. A lack of educational and professional opportunities largely fuels this phenomenon.

Despite these challenges, young people have strengths that can help them move towards progress. They need appropriate guidance and support from the government to strengthen their capacities and transform them into practical tools for the country's development.

Good governance, security, and inclusive social systems that improve access to education, healthcare, and employment will be crucial for maximising the youth's abilities. With proper support, the youth could play a vital role in the future stability and prosperity of the country.

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# UNSEEN BATTLES

THE COMPLEX  
CHALLENGES OF  
MODERN YOUTH AND  
THE PATH FORWARD



**H**igh unemployment, limited access to quality education, and persistent political instability create barriers that hinder young people’s potential. Furthermore, traditional expectations often clash with modern aspirations. This creates an identity crisis and social pressures.



## **I**ntroduction

In Africa, the youth represent a substantial portion of the population, making them essential to the continent’s future prosperity. However, the challenges the youth face are particularly complex, influenced by socio-economic and cultural factors.

High unemployment, limited access to quality education, and persistent political instability create barriers that hinder young people’s potential. Furthermore, traditional expectations often clash with modern aspirations. This creates an identity crisis and social pressures.

Yet, the youth are resilient. Many are engaged in entrepreneurship, social change, and innovation. Empowering them through inclusive policies, improved education, and mental health support is essential for fostering a generation capable of leading Africa toward a prosperous future.

Youth is a critical stage in life. It is filled with potential, aspirations, and energy. However, it is also a period marked by numerous challenges that can impact young people’s development and future.<sup>[1]</sup>

As societies evolve, so do the problems faced by the younger generation. From unemployment to mental health struggles, social pressure, and political disempowerment, the youth today confront a wide range of challenges that require collective attention and intervention.<sup>[2]</sup>

This article delves into some of the most pressing challenges faced by today’s youth and examines their root causes and potential solutions.



**T**echnological disruption, Automation and Artificial Intelligence have significantly changed the nature of jobs. Many industries now rely on machines and algorithms, reducing the demand for entry-level workers, who are often young. Jobs in manufacturing, retail, and customer service, historically common for youth, are being replaced by technology.



### **The Declining Engagement with Reading Books**

A growing challenge among today's youth is their declining engagement with reading books. With the rise of digital media and the constant allure of social networking platforms, many young people are turning away from traditional reading.

This shift has led to a preference for quick, visually stimulating content over the more time-consuming and reflective activity of reading books.<sup>[3]</sup> The decline in reading books is not just a concern for academic performance but also for their intellectual, emotional, and social development.

One major impact of not engaging in reading is the reduced ability to concentrate and think critically.<sup>[4]</sup> Reading books requires focus, patience, and the ability to process complex ideas over extended periods.<sup>[5]</sup> Without regular reading, young people may find it difficult to

develop deep comprehension skills or the ability to engage in critical thinking.<sup>[6]</sup>

These skills are essential not only for academic success but also for problem-solving in everyday life. A lack of reading can limit one's vocabulary and language proficiency, which are crucial for effective communication.

In addition, reading enhances empathy and emotional intelligence. Through books, young people can explore diverse perspectives, cultures, and experiences that broaden their understanding of the world.<sup>[7]</sup>

When youth disengage from reading, they may miss out on opportunities to cultivate empathy and develop a deeper understanding of human emotions and relationships. This can have long-term effects on their social interactions and emotional well-being.

The lack of reading can contribute to a disconnection from knowledge and personal

growth. Books are a source of wisdom, historical context, and cultural heritage. When young people do not engage in reading, they miss out on the benefits of gaining knowledge that can shape their identities, broaden their horizons, and inspire them to make informed decisions in life.<sup>[8]</sup> Consequently, this may leave youth less prepared to navigate the complexities of adulthood and make meaningful contributions to society.

## Unemployment and Economic Instability

One of the most urgent challenges faced by youth across the globe is unemployment and economic instability.<sup>[9]</sup> The labour market is rapidly changing, with technological advancements, global economic fluctuations, and shifts in industries contributing to a lack of stable employment opportunities.<sup>[10]</sup> According to the International Labour Organisation, global youth unemployment rates are consistently higher than those of older adults. More than 13 percent of the world's youth were unemployed in 2022.<sup>[11]</sup>

Technological disruption, Automation and Artificial Intelligence have significantly changed the nature of jobs.<sup>[12]</sup> Many industries now rely on machines and algorithms, reducing the demand for entry-level workers, who are often young. Jobs in manufacturing, retail, and customer service, historically common for youth, are being replaced by technology.<sup>[13]</sup>



Educational institutions in many parts of the world are not adequately preparing young people for the modern labour market. Many youths graduate with degrees or skills that do not align with the needs of employers, making it difficult for them to find meaningful employment.<sup>[14]</sup>

Events such as the global COVID-19 pandemic and economic recessions have severely affected job availability for young people.<sup>[15]</sup> Businesses often lay off younger employees during economic downturns, leaving them vulnerable to prolonged periods of unemployment.<sup>[16]</sup>

Unemployment affects young people's financial stability, which in turn delays life milestones such as buying a home, starting a family, or pursuing further education.<sup>[17]</sup> It also contributes to higher levels of anxiety, depression, and social isolation.

## Psychiatric Crisis

The psychiatric crisis has become one of the most significant challenges for youth today.<sup>[18]</sup> The World Health Organisation reports that 1 in 5 young people suffer from mental health disorders, with anxiety, depression, and stress being the most common.

While mental health has always been a concern, the pressures of modern life have exacerbated these issues.<sup>[19]</sup>

While technology has brought many benefits, it has also created a culture of comparison and constant connectivity.<sup>[20]</sup> Social media platforms, where users often portray idealised versions of their lives, lead to feelings of inadequacy, loneliness, and low self-esteem. The pressure to fit in, gain likes, and present a 'perfect' image is overwhelming.<sup>[21]</sup>

The drive to succeed academically has intensified. Many young people feel an immense burden to perform well in school, secure good grades, and gain admission to prestigious universities. This pressure leads to burnout, anxiety, and depression.<sup>[22]</sup>

Many young people do not have access to adequate mental health services. In some regions, there is a shortage of counsellors and psychologists, while in others, mental health issues are stigmatised, preventing young people

**M**any young people feel the weight of societal expectations to have everything figured out at an early age. **This can lead to feelings of confusion and anxiety. Navigating this complex social landscape can be overwhelming for young people. This can lead to a crisis of identity and increased mental health challenges.**



from seeking the help they need.<sup>[23]</sup> The mental health challenges faced by youth today have long-term effects, influencing their ability to succeed academically, maintain relationships, and navigate adulthood.

### **Substance Abuse and Addiction**

Substance abuse is a growing concern, particularly in urban areas.<sup>[24]</sup>

Many young people turn to drugs, alcohol, and other substances as a way to cope with stress, peer pressure, or mental health issues.<sup>[25]</sup> According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, substance use among adolescents and young adults has risen over the past decade. Alcohol and marijuana are the most commonly abused substances.<sup>[26]</sup>

Peer pressure, adolescence and early adulthood are times of social exploration, where fitting in with peers often takes precedence.<sup>[27]</sup> Many young people experiment with drugs or alcohol to gain social acceptance or to seem 'cool'.

The pressures of modern life, whether academic, economic, or social, can drive young people to use substances as a way to escape their realities temporarily.<sup>[28]</sup> Many young people do not understand the long-term consequences of substance abuse. They may not have received adequate education about the risks of addiction, or they may underestimate the impact of their actions.

The consequences of substance abuse are severe, leading to health problems, addiction, academic failure, and, in some cases, criminal behaviour.<sup>[29]</sup>

It is crucial to provide young people with the education and support they need to make healthy decisions.

### **Social Pressure and Identity Crisis**

The youth today face an increasing amount of social pressure, particularly related to identity formation and self-expression.<sup>[30]</sup> Adolescence and young adulthood are times of self-discovery, where individuals work to establish their sense of self and place in society. However, this process has become more complicated in the modern age.

In many parts of the world, traditional values often clash with modern influences, leaving young people torn between the two. For example, young people struggle to reconcile conservative family expectations with the progressive ideals of their peer groups. Many young people today are exploring their gender and sexual identities in a more open and inclusive world.<sup>[31]</sup>

However, societal stigma, discrimination, and lack of understanding can make this process difficult and emotionally taxing. The need to achieve success in academics, career, and social life can create a sense of competition and inadequacy.

Many young people feel the weight of societal expectations to have everything figured out at an early age. This can lead to feelings of confusion and anxiety. Navigating this complex social landscape can be overwhelming for young people. This can lead to a crisis of identity and increased mental health challenges.<sup>[32]</sup>

## Political Disempowerment

Despite making up a significant portion of the global population, young people often feel politically disempowered.<sup>[33]</sup> Political systems are frequently dominated by older generations, leaving little room for youth voices in decision-making processes. This political marginalisation can lead to feelings of frustration and apathy among young people, contributing to a growing sense of disillusionment with politics and governance.

Youth are often underrepresented in political offices and decision-making bodies, making it difficult for their interests and concerns to be adequately addressed.<sup>[34]</sup> Many young people feel that current political systems do not serve their needs or are corrupt, leading to a lack of engagement and participation in political processes.<sup>[35]</sup>

In some regions, young people do not have access to platforms where they can engage in meaningful political discourse or activism.<sup>[36]</sup> Political disempowerment can lead to a cycle of disengagement, where young people feel

that their voices do not matter, resulting in lower voter turnout and less involvement in community leadership.<sup>[37]</sup>

## Conclusion

The challenges faced by today's youth are diverse and complex.<sup>[38]</sup> Unemployment, mental health issues, substance abuse, social pressure, and political disempowerment are a few of the obstacles that young people must navigate.<sup>[39]</sup>

Addressing these challenges requires collective action from governments, educational institutions, families, and communities. By providing young people with the resources, support, and opportunities they need, societies can ensure that the youth of today become the thriving leaders of tomorrow.

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# THE MASS EXODUS OF AFRICAN YOUTH TO EUROPE AND AMERICA

A COMPLEX  
NARRATIVE OF  
GLOBALISATION





**I**n recent years, the phenomenon of mass migration among the youth towards Europe and America has garnered significant attention. It highlights a complex interplay of aspirations, challenges, and socio-economic realities. This exodus is often driven by the allure of better opportunities and improved living conditions in the developed world.<sup>[1]</sup> However, this pursuit of greener pastures comes at a steep price, with many risking their lives in perilous journeys across treacherous terrains and seas. Central to this migration narrative is the impact of globalisation.

This is a double-edged sword that has simultaneously opened doors to new possibilities while fostering a sense of impatience among young Africans.<sup>[2]</sup>

The rapid pace of development witnessed in Western nations has created an unrealistic benchmark for success. This has led many to overlook the gradual processes necessary for sustainable growth within their countries.

As a result, there exists a growing discontent with local systems and institutions that are perceived as slow or ineffective.<sup>[3]</sup> While globalisation presents numerous opportunities, it also cultivates an environment where the desire for immediate success overshadows the value of patience and perseverance.

By embracing a more measured approach to development, one that recognises the importance of building robust national identities and systems, the youth can contribute to a future that is not only prosperous but also reflective of their unique cultural contexts.

## **Understanding Globalisation's Dual Impact**

Globalisation has significantly altered the landscape of opportunities available to individuals worldwide. For many youths, it represents both hope and despair.

**E**conomic policies influenced by global markets can exacerbate inequalities, leaving many young people feeling disenfranchised.

**The allure of a better life abroad becomes irresistible when faced with limited opportunities locally.**



On the one hand, globalisation has facilitated access to information, education, and networks that were previously unavailable. Young people are now more aware than ever of the disparities between their living conditions and those in developed nations.<sup>[4]</sup>

This awareness often breeds impatience. They see rapid advancements in technology, infrastructure, and quality of life in Western countries and yearn for similar progress at home. Conversely, globalisation has also led to increased competition for resources and jobs within Africa itself.

Economic policies influenced by global markets can exacerbate inequalities, leaving many young people feeling disenfranchised. The allure of a better life abroad becomes irresistible when faced with limited opportunities locally.<sup>[5]</sup>

## **The Problems**

Economic factors are central to understanding why many youths risk their lives to migrate. High unemployment rates, particularly among educated young people, create a sense of urgency to seek opportunities elsewhere.

According to the International Labour Organisation, youth unemployment rates

in several countries can exceed 30 percent, prompting many to view migration as their only viable option for economic stability.<sup>[6]</sup>

This mismatch between education and available jobs leads to frustration and disillusionment among the youth. It prompts them to seek opportunities abroad where they believe their skills may be better utilised.

Countries like South Africa, Nigeria, and Egypt have reported youth unemployment rates that are alarmingly high. In South Africa, the youth unemployment rate was recorded at approximately 34 percent as of early 2023.<sup>[7]</sup>

Similarly, Nigeria faces significant challenges with its youth unemployment rate hovering around 40 percent. Such figures illustrate a pervasive trend across the continent where educated youths are unable to find suitable employment within their home countries.

Faced with these dire circumstances, many young people view migration not merely as an option but as a necessity for survival. The desire for better economic prospects drives them to undertake perilous journeys across borders or even oceans.<sup>[8]</sup>

Moreover, remittances sent back home by migrants play a crucial role in local economies. In 2020 alone, remittances from Africans living abroad amounted to approximately \$42 billion (World Bank).<sup>[9]</sup>

This financial support not only uplifts families but also fuels local businesses and contributes to national GDPs.

## Historical Context

To understand the historical context regarding the political instability and economic mismanagement faced by many nations since gaining independence, it is essential to consider several key factors: the legacy of colonialism, the nature of post-colonial governance, and the socio-economic challenges that have persisted over time.

Colonialism profoundly shaped the political and economic landscapes of African nations. European powers established arbitrary borders that often grouped diverse ethnic groups with little regard for existing social structures. This has led to ongoing ethnic tensions and conflicts. The colonial administrations typically prioritised resource extraction over local



governance, leaving behind weak institutions that struggled to manage post-independence transitions effectively.<sup>[10]</sup>

After gaining independence, many nations adopted various forms of governance, including authoritarian regimes and military dictatorships. The lack of experience with democratic governance often resulted in power struggles among elites rather than inclusive political processes. Corruption became rampant as leaders prioritised personal gain over national development.<sup>[11]</sup>

### Social Media Influence

The advent of social media platforms has fundamentally transformed the way information is disseminated and consumed. This transformation has significant implications for how success stories are perceived, particularly in the context of local versus global achievements.

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok have a vast reach that allows content to be shared rapidly across borders. When an individual or organisation achieves success in one part of the world, this story can quickly gain attraction and become viral. The algorithms employed by these platforms often prioritise content that generates high engagement; likes, shares, and comments, which tend to favour sensational or extraordinary stories.

As a result, success stories from abroad are amplified significantly more than local achievements.<sup>[12]</sup> The disparity in recognition between global and local successes can have several consequences. For instance, when local achievements go unnoticed while foreign successes are celebrated, it can lead to feelings of inadequacy among youth within those communities.

This lack of recognition can diminish motivation and discourage innovation at the local level. Thus, the desire to journey to those places where they can find recognition becomes apparent.

In addition, Rana Ali Adeeb and Mahdi Mirhoseini, of the John Molson School of Business, Montreal,

The disparity in recognition between global and local successes can have several consequences. **For instance, when local achievements go unnoticed while foreign successes are celebrated, it can lead to feelings of inadequacy among youth within those communities.**



discuss how social media platforms, characterised by emotionally charged content, are vulnerable to the spread of misinformation, including fake news.

The study highlights that while research has predominantly focused on cognitive processing aspects of fake news, the affective (emotional) processing that influences belief in and dissemination of fake news is less understood.

Social media allows for the rapid dissemination of false information due to its vast reach and the emotional reactions it elicits from users. Emotionally charged content can lead to behaviours such as sharing and commenting, which contribute to the viral spread of misinformation.

The review identifies research themes and gaps related to the impact of affect on the perception of fake news, suggesting that emotions play a significant role in how users engage with false information on social media.<sup>[13]</sup>



## Cultural Shifts

Historically, education has been viewed as a cornerstone for personal and national development in Africa. The belief was that obtaining a degree would lead to stable employment opportunities within government or established private sectors.

However, with the rapid changes in the global economy and job market dynamics, many youths are beginning to question the efficacy of this traditional model.

Moreover, exposure to global cultures through media and travel has introduced new values and lifestyles that prioritise instant gratification over delayed rewards. Young people are increasingly influenced by success stories from peers who have achieved wealth or fame quickly through unconventional means.

## Nationhood vs. Developmental Aspirations

The concept of nationhood is relatively nascent as compared to Western counterparts that have had centuries to develop cohesive national identities. Many States were formed through arbitrary borders drawn during colonial times without regard for ethnic or cultural divisions.

Fostering a sense of belonging and loyalty can be challenging when juxtaposed against the backdrop of global citizenship ideals promoted by globalisation. This lack of deep-rooted nationhood complicates efforts toward collective

progress as citizens may feel disconnected from their governments' developmental agendas.

Consequently, there is an urgent need for leaders within these nations to engage with their youth meaningfully, creating platforms for dialogue that address grievances while promoting patience in pursuing sustainable growth.

## Proposing a Path Forward

To counteract the trend towards mass migration fuelled by impatience, I recommend that:

1. Educational reforms should focus on equipping students with skills relevant not just locally but globally, emphasising entrepreneurship alongside traditional academic paths.
2. Governments must prioritise job creation through investment in infrastructure projects that harness local talent while attracting foreign direct investment.
3. Encouraging youth participation in governance can foster a sense of ownership over national issues, transforming impatience into proactive engagement rather than flight.

By embracing these strategies collectively as nations rather than individuals seeking escape routes abroad, African countries can cultivate environments where youth feel valued and invested in their futures at home.

In conclusion, while globalisation presents both challenges and opportunities for the youth, fostering patience through systemic change will ultimately lead not only to individual success but also contribute positively towards holistic national development, a legacy that future generations will appreciate.

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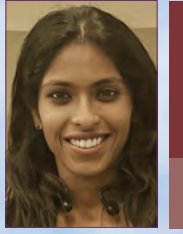
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# BEYOND THE AMERICAN DREAM



Immigrants in the U.S. often find themselves caught between cultures, and simple interactions can require more thought and caution.

**What's acceptable back home might be perceived as rude or even offensive here. This need for cultural adaptation often runs parallel to a harsh reality: discrimination.**



The United States is often seen as the ultimate destination for personal and professional success—a land where dreams can come true. Social media may amplify this allure, depicting picturesque lifestyles and seemingly endless opportunities. However, beneath the glossy Instagram posts lies a more complex reality, one filled with sleepless nights, gruelling hours, and relentless challenges that immigrants face daily, particularly the youth.

Moving to the U.S. or any other foreign country brings a whirlwind of adjustments, particularly for those arriving alone. At first, even seemingly simple tasks - such as finding a place to live, learning local transportation options, and understanding how to navigate the city - can be overwhelming. Majority of the suburbs in the US have minimal public transport, necessitating a car, a local driver's license, and knowledge of traffic rules that differ from those back home. On top of these practical concerns, immigrants are often managing finances independently, including handling bills, taxes, and grocery expenses that can vary widely from what they are used to.

Adjusting to this new life alone can be draining, as the stress of setting up in an unfamiliar environment weighs heavily. Studies have shown

that moving abroad is one of the top stressors people can experience, on par with major life events like changing jobs or getting married.

Living as a minority in any country brings its own set of unique challenges. Immigrants in the U.S. often find themselves caught between cultures, and simple interactions can require more thought and caution. What's acceptable back home might be perceived as rude or even offensive here. This need for cultural adaptation often runs parallel to a harsh reality: discrimination.



**T**o build a fulfilling life in a new country, it's essential to stay proactive, informed, and connected. **Many immigrants benefit from joining communities that share their background or interests, whether through religious organizations, sports clubs, or hobby groups.**



Many immigrants, especially those from developing countries, face assumptions that they're competing for jobs at lower wages, sometimes creating resentment among locals. This perception can manifest in workplace discrimination or even hostility in everyday interactions. According to a 2023 Pew Research report, 6 in 10 Asian Americans reported that they have faced discrimination because of their race or ethnicity, a statistic that underscores the challenges immigrants face in adapting to their unfamiliar environment. Immigrants are often subtly and at times blatantly reminded of their racial identity. Building resilience to these issues becomes essential for those who plan to stay long-term.

For those coming from cultures where domestic help is common, adjusting to the high cost of

such services in the U.S. can be a jarring reality. Back home, daily chores like cleaning, cooking, and laundry might have been outsourced. Here, these tasks become part of an already long day. For many immigrants who work or study full-time, managing the household independently can be exhausting and time-consuming.

The experience for women moving to the U.S. can be particularly complex. While some may appreciate the distance from family expectations or cultural pressures fuelled by centuries of patriarchal conditioning, others face new obstacles that can be profoundly isolating. Often, women having expectations about equality and autonomy move abroad to join their spouses, but this can bring its own hurdles. Language barriers, visa limitations on employment, lack of a social network, and balancing personal goals with family responsibilities can make it difficult to maintain autonomy.

Additionally, visa restrictions can hinder women's careers, especially those who once held high-status roles in their home countries. For women who cannot work, feelings of frustration, isolation, and even depression are common. Studies have shown that trailing spouses, those who relocate to support their partner's career experience higher rates of depression than their partners due to these limitations.

Even for women who can work, balancing a career with the added pressures of household responsibilities, often without extended family support, can be challenging. Unfortunately, if domestic abuse arises, women who are financially dependent on their partners may find themselves in especially vulnerable situations.







Despite these challenges, life in the U.S. offers undeniable perks. Improved infrastructure, efficient public services, and the availability of diverse goods and services make life here comfortable once you are settled. For many, the overall quality of life is higher, with a greater sense of freedom and independence that allows individuals to thrive both personally and professionally.

Immigrant communities and social networks offer support and connection, helping newcomers navigate this transition. Social media groups, cultural clubs, and meetups bring people together, fostering friendships and helping immigrants maintain a connection to their roots. Many cities also have resources like student groups, mental health services, and emergency helplines, making it easier to find support when challenges arise.

To build a fulfilling life in a new country, it's essential to stay proactive, informed, and connected. Many immigrants benefit from joining communities that share their background or interests, whether through religious organizations, sports clubs, or hobby groups. Physical and mental well-being can also play a pivotal role, and maintaining regular exercise has proven effective in alleviating stress. Studies by the American Psychological Association show that regular exercise can decrease symptoms of anxiety and depression, which are common among those adjusting to a new culture.

New hobbies, volunteering, and local community engagement can also help foster a sense of belonging. Whether you are trying new things, meeting new people, or finding ways to give back, staying active and involved can transform the experience from a struggle to an enriching chapter of personal satisfaction.

The journey of moving abroad is complex, filled with hurdles as well as opportunities. Every immigrant's experience is unique, shaped by their circumstances, personality, and approach to life. This article is solely based on my experience as an immigrant from India settled in the US and also the narratives of other immigrants who have interacted with me and belong to my circle. By being informed, prepared, and open to change, it is possible to transform the challenges into milestones. For those who choose to stay, the journey becomes a story of resilience, growth, and ultimately, a new home in an unfamiliar land.

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# CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY YOUTH IN SRI LANKA

## A CALL FOR URGENT ACTION

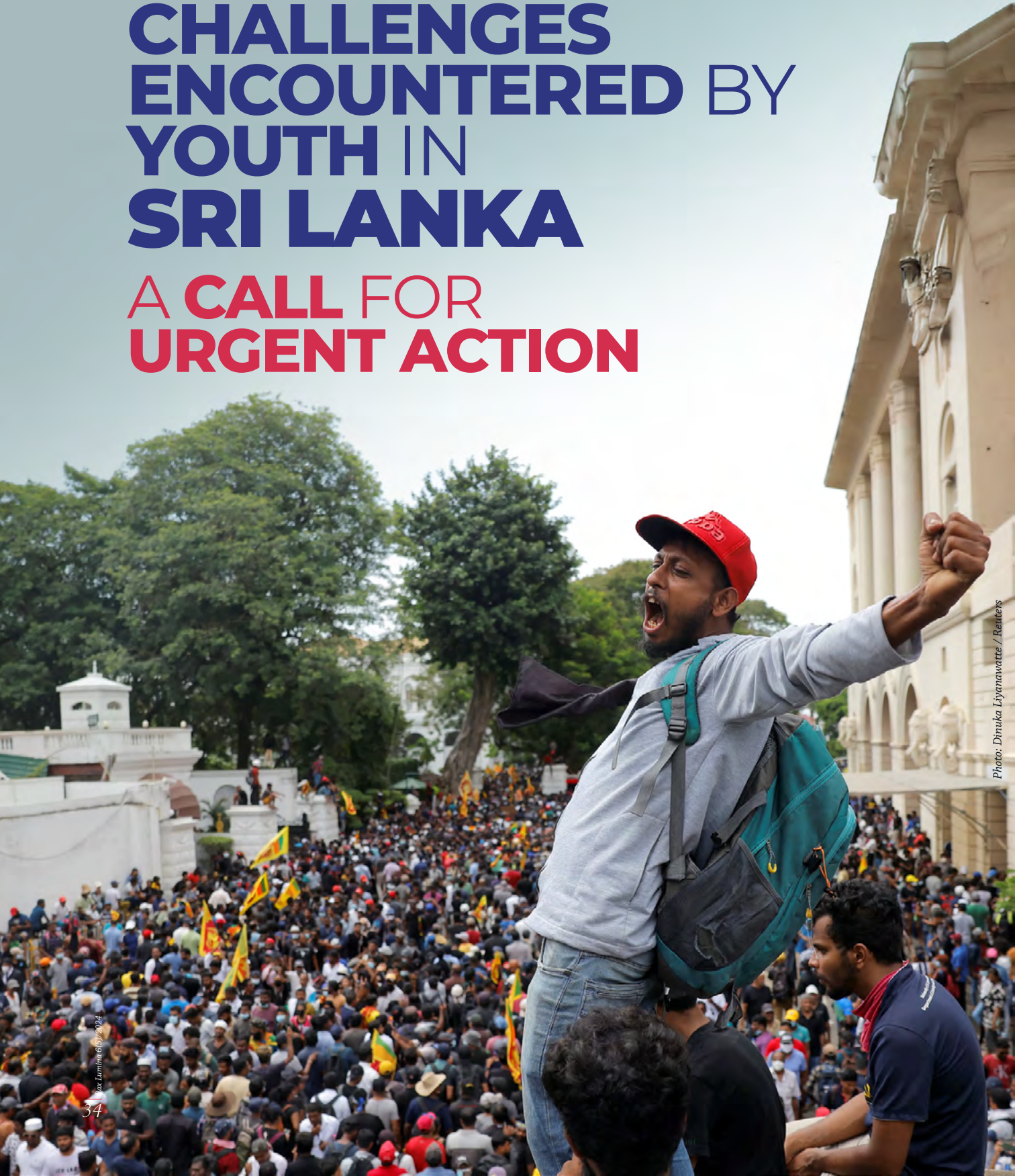


Photo: Druka Liyanawatte / Reuters

One of the harshest realities confronting the youths today is economic instability. **Despite their hard work and dedication, many young people, especially graduates, find themselves in a paradox. They are highly educated, yet face a job market that offers little in return.**

Sri Lanka is at a crossroads. As it grapples with a host of issues, the nation's youth, representing a significant portion of the population, find themselves facing profound challenges. With over 30 percent of the population under the age of 30, their struggles — economic, social, and psychological — are shaping the future of the country.

These young voices, full of dreams and potential, are often met with barriers that prevent them from thriving, creating a sense of frustration and disillusionment.

### **Economic Instability: A Shattered Dream**

One of the harshest realities confronting the youths today is economic instability. Despite their hard work and dedication, many young people, especially graduates, find themselves in a paradox. They are highly educated, yet face a job market that offers little in return.

With youth unemployment hovering around 20 percent, nearly double the national average, countless youngsters remain trapped in uncertainty, unable to find stable employment. This crisis is even more severe in rural areas, where access to opportunities is scant.

Underemployment is another issue, forcing many talented young individuals to settle for low-wage, informal jobs that don't align with their qualifications. The mismatch between education and the demands of the job market is glaring.



Adding to this challenge, the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has only deepened the struggles of youth, leaving them feeling increasingly disenchanted and without a clear path forward. For a generation that grew up believing in the power of education to shape their future, this economic landscape feels like a broken promise.

### **Education and Skill Mismatch: Lost Potential**

The country has made remarkable progress in expanding access to education, and achieving high literacy rates. Yet, there remains a painful disconnect between what is taught in schools and universities and the needs of the labour market.

Many young graduates emerge with degrees that do not translate into job opportunities, exacerbating issues of unemployment and underemployment. This frustration is deeply felt by the youth, who often feel that their education did not prepare them for the real world.

Calls for reform in the education system are growing louder, especially in terms of vocational training and practical skills development. Industries like technology, tourism, and agriculture hold great potential for growth, yet the education system hasn't adequately prepared young people to seize these opportunities.

Bridging the gap between education and employment through initiatives like internships, apprenticeships, and closer collaborations between educational institutions and businesses could provide a lifeline to the youth, offering them hope where there is now uncertainty.

### **Mental Health: Struggling in Silence**

Beneath the surface of these economic and educational challenges lies a deeper, more insidious crisis: the mental health struggles of the youth. The relentless pressures of academic achievement, societal expectations, and economic instability take a heavy toll.

Many young people are silently battling anxiety, depression, and other mental health disorders. Unfortunately, mental health remains stigmatised, discouraging those who need help from seeking it.



In many ways, the mental health crisis is the invisible burden that weighs down the nation's youth. It's essential to foster open conversations around mental health, create access to resources, and integrate counselling services within schools and universities. The youth must be reminded that seeking help is not a sign of weakness but a step toward healing.

### **Political Instability: A Growing Disillusionment**

The political landscape is another source of deep frustration for the youth. The country's recent political upheavals and economic crises have created an environment of uncertainty and disillusionment. Many young people, once hopeful about their role in shaping the nation's future, now feel powerless. While they are increasingly becoming politically aware and using social media to express their discontent, the risks associated with political engagement, including fear of repression, are real.

For the youth to truly become agents of change, they need a stable and transparent political environment. It is essential to create safe spaces for young people to voice their concerns, participate in decision-making processes, and contribute to shaping the policies that directly affect their lives. Their energy, passion, and ideas are vital to the country's progress.

### **Social Inequality: Barriers for Women and Minorities**

The challenges of youth are further compounded by entrenched social inequalities, particularly those related to gender and ethnicity. Young women often face significant barriers to education and employment due to traditional gender roles and societal norms. Gender-based violence remains a pervasive issue, limiting women's freedom and opportunities for growth.

Ethnic minorities, too, experience systemic discrimination that restricts their access to education and employment. For the nation to move forward, these inequalities must be addressed head-on. Empowering young women and marginalised groups through targeted educational programmes, mentorship opportunities, and economic support is critical to creating a more just and equitable society.

**D**espite the obstacles they face, the youth remain resilient, creative, and determined. **By fostering a supportive and inclusive environment, Sri Lanka can empower its youth to become active contributors to society, helping to steer the nation toward a future filled with hope and possibility.**



### **Migration and Brain Drain: A Nation's Loss**

In response to the lack of opportunities, many young people are opting to leave in search of a better future abroad. While this migration may provide individuals with valuable experiences and opportunities, it results in a devastating brain drain for the nation. The exodus of skilled workers weakens the country's potential for growth and innovation.

To counter this trend, Sri Lanka must create an environment where young people feel motivated to stay. Offering competitive salaries, fostering innovation, and supporting young entrepreneurs with access to capital and resources can help retain the country's brightest minds. The future depends on the country's ability to harness the talents of its youth.

### **Digital Divide: Unequal Access to Opportunity**

In today's increasingly digital world, access to technology is a critical factor in success. Yet, many young people, particularly in rural areas, lack access to the internet and digital tools, putting them at a disadvantage.

This digital divide is another barrier that prevents the nation's youth from competing on a level playing field, particularly in a globalised economy that increasingly relies on technology.

Investing in infrastructure, expanding internet access in rural regions, and implementing digital literacy programmes are essential steps

in ensuring that all young people have the tools they need to succeed in a technology-driven world.

### **Conclusion: Hope for a Brighter Future**

The challenges facing the youth are vast, interwoven, and complex. Addressing them requires not only economic and educational reform but also a cultural shift in how society views mental health, social inequality, and political engagement.

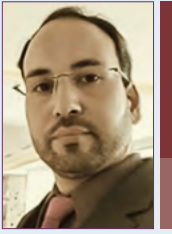
It demands a concerted effort from the government, civil society, and private sectors to create opportunities that allow young people to realise their full potential.

Despite the obstacles they face, the youth remain resilient, creative, and determined. By fostering a supportive and inclusive environment, Sri Lanka can empower its youth to become active contributors to society, helping to steer the nation toward a future filled with hope and possibility. It is only by addressing these challenges with empathy, urgency, and collaboration that the nation can unlock the true potential of its young generation—its most valuable asset.

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# KASHMIRI YOUTH

**NAVIGATING CHALLENGES  
BUILDING BRIDGES  
TO PEACE**



Photo: M. Mehtab Fazel

The stereotyping of the youth and its associated stigma further exacerbated feelings of vulnerability in terms of isolation, marginalisation and biases (exclusion) against them when studying or working outside Kashmir. **This has led to a cycle of mistrust and fear within them**



Viewing Kashmiri society through the lens of peace and conflict studies, it can be argued that conflict management has been an ongoing process for an extended period. Currently, the region is in a state of stable transition, characterised by neither active or intense conflict nor complete stability.

This 'stable transition' environment presents unique challenges to all stakeholders, particularly for youth grappling with unseen struggles in their pursuit of careers and livelihoods amidst high unemployment rates.

Amid the transition from active gun violence to a phase of apparent normalcy (deceptive peace and uncertain calm), these young individuals yearn for a meaningful conflict transformation and their functional engagement that embodies the ideals of positive peace.

Thus the youth represent a generation caught in limbo that is striving to navigate the complexities of social, psychological, cultural, political and identity crises. Their resilience, potential and aspirations though praiseworthy are crucial for fostering a sustainable peace, as they seek to redefine their futures in a landscape still marked by the shadows of past violence, suffering and uncertainty.

### **Are the Youth a Homogeneous Group?**

A significant proportion of Jammu and Kashmir's population resides in the Kashmir Valley, with a substantial portion of this population being young, particularly those under the age of 35.



The term 'Kashmiri youth' generally refers to young people living in the Kashmir Valley. However, it is important to note that this category is not a monolith. These youth come from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds, including Koshur (Kashmiri origin), Gujjar, Bakerwal, Sikh, Pashto, Kohistani, Dard, Pahadi, Sippi, Baltis, Shina, and other smaller linguistic and ethnic groups, as well as Tibetan Muslims, who are often regarded as refugees.

They have been living in Srinagar since their exodus from Lhasa during the Chinese Communist oppression followed by a failed uprising against Chinese rule by Tibetans in 1959.

The youth as a category is further differentiated by religious identities, encompassing Muslim, Hindu (Pandit), Sikh, and even a small Christian community (about 700) in Srinagar.

To address the challenges, it is essential to create platforms for dialogue, enabling youth to articulate their experiences, hopes, and aspirations, and ultimately fostering a sense of agency and promoting pathways to healing and constructive engagement in the peace-building process.



Sociologically, it is noteworthy that discussions about the youth often overlook the women. This is a grave oversight. Consequently, the diverse identities within these demographics face unique challenges based on their local contexts and local issues and their exposure to modernity through new technologies, peer pressure, moral policing, community control, and economic pressures.

### **Growing up in the Shadows of Conflict: Scars of Suffering and Resilience**

The prolonged conflict situation has profoundly shaped the social and psychological landscape of the youth. Their constant exposure to violence, militarisation, uncertainty and instability fostered

significant mental health challenges, including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorders, besides affecting their educational and career prospects. It has also hindered their personal development and community engagement.

However, amidst this adversity, many young individuals demonstrated remarkable resilience. They have found ways to cope and assert their identities. The youth kept looking for community support networks, did grassroots activism and worked for cultural expressions that could serve as vital outlets for healing and empowerment.

This duality — struggling with trauma while fostering resilience — highlights the complex interplay between conflict and the agency of the youth in navigating their lived realities.





The decades of turmoil shaped a plethora of social conflicts and a system collapse besides trauma, torture, labelling, security concerns and lastly huge conflict fatigue that led to the alienation of youth.

They faced the worst and paid a huge cost in terms of the detrimental impact on their education, career and job prospects, financial progress, and most importantly, physical and mental health aspects.

Also, the stereotyping of the youth and its associated stigma further exacerbated feelings of vulnerability in terms of isolation, marginalisation and biases (exclusion) against them when studying or working outside Kashmir. This has led to a cycle of mistrust and fear within them (a situation of Us versus them).

They faced hardships due to security concerns and a weakened community support system, while conflict fatigue left them with a feeling of worthlessness. Thereby, it reduced their active engagement in peace-building efforts.

Such an ecosystem also got shaped due to a lack of activism or any campus politics since there were hardly any student unions or elections on educational campuses. This left youth choked and socially suffocated since there was hardly any scope for politics.

The atmosphere of active politics and fearless political participation has now gained momentum. The youth have significantly and positively responded to this change. This can be seen by their overwhelming participation in the recently-held assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir. It reflects their yearning for change and peaceful life.

### **Pressing Issues of Youth**

Amidst rising unemployment and diminishing opportunities, many youths face a mental health crisis, with issues such as drug addiction becoming increasingly prevalent.

This mounting challenge reflects not only personal struggles but also a broader societal malaise. The emerging voices are unlocking potential solutions and trying to shape the aspirations for a more hopeful future.

To address the challenges, it is essential to create platforms for dialogue, enabling youth to articulate their experiences, hopes, and aspirations, and ultimately fostering a sense of agency and promoting pathways to healing and constructive engagement in the peace-building process.

The holding of elections after a 10 year-gap was much needed for. The Centre needed to demonstrate that normalcy has returned to the region after the constitutional changes of 2019. However, even when the scale of attacks by armed groups has reduced, they have not stopped. Therefore, to claim that terrorism has been wiped out is wrong given the fresh wave of attacks in central and north Kashmir.

The youth aspire to move toward peace, prosperity, and development while seeking redress for their basic issues. They voted overwhelmingly to choose leaders who can advocate for their voices, dignity, and the creation of employment opportunities.

On one hand, they don't feel it is a challenge to navigate through digital landscapes and are ready to chart new career paths like their rising interest in civil services, research and teaching degrees. But simultaneously, they feel demoralised due to lack of jobs in the region. A larger chunk of youth is trying for jobs in West Asia.



Addressing the youth's challenges requires a holistic approach that **fosters economic opportunities, promotes mental health awareness, programmes for drug de-addiction, and the promotion of clinical psychology and counselling to address their mental trauma.**



They are worried about their freedom since many of them remain in jail. They need a second chance to shape their lives. The youth are trying their best to amplify their voices. They are entering police and civil services, doing politics through active participation, and navigating the complexities of the political landscape.

They voted as silent voters yet resolute participants, channelling their anger into a demand for democracy and free voices. The youth want the government to focus on unemployment, identity issues and address the deteriorating mental health situation.

### **The Last Word**

Youth yearning for change, hunger for youth-led activism and youth-driven solutions. This has the potential to unlock sustainable peace. They are speaking for peace and advocating for a transformative future. They are making conscious choices amid challenges. This can be seen in their shift in voting behaviour from traditional political affiliations.

They are articulate on issues, and challenges. They are aware, too. That is why as young voters they have increasingly prioritised youth leaders, unemployment and regional identity as the major issues over familial loyalty to political parties.

Addressing the youth's challenges requires a holistic approach that fosters economic opportunities, promotes mental health awareness, programmes for drug de-addiction, and the promotion of clinical psychology and counselling to address their mental trauma. The youth need



constructive engagement in the social, economic and political spheres. This will empower them to navigate their circumstances and contribute positively to society.

The resilience and agency of the youth today represent a significant shift towards fostering a culture of peace, suggesting that their involvement could play a transformative role in the socio-political landscape of Kashmir.

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# **YOUTH AND THE FUTURE CHALLENGES IN THE AGE OF AI**



**T**he survival of democracy in India and the rest of the world where dictatorial tendencies have crept in comes as a huge challenge. **There is an urgent need for the youth to be educated on democracy and its meaningful functioning. It is a recent trend that the educated hardly vote and exercise their democratic right.**



**A**rtificial Intelligence has completely changed the behaviour of all sections of society. The most affected are the gadget-freak youth. They have found new spaces in the cyber world, while losing the physical space they hitherto have enjoyed in society.

Globally, the student communities from Latin America to Europe as well as the Arab world had risen to face the challenges posed in their respective countries, be it due to the dictatorial tendencies of their leaders or the severe economic crunch the countries had to face.

One could notice the physical presence of the youth taking the initiative. One recent example is that of Bangladesh where the regime was changed with the participation of the youth. They used AI to oust the defunct regime.

Though AI creates new employment opportunities as well as creates space for the exchange of ideas as well as provides information, there are many ill effects, too.

A majority of the youth seem to be far away from societal realities and do not fulfil their human obligations as part of society. There is an urgent need to regulate news as most of the youth get

information from WhatsApp University for free. There is so much propaganda and falsification of history. But the youth believe it is accurate information.

The social content and the entertainment available keep them glued to their smartphones. However, this results in them being socially and economically marginalised.

The recent trends in Indian politics have disturbed the student community.

The New Education Policy, hate politics, violence against minorities, mob lynching, moral policing, polarisation of communities, violence against women, corruption, nepotism, distortion of history, unemployment, lack of social welfare measures, disregard for civil society concerns, and unplanned mega projects without concern for the environment are some of the issues which the students are concerned about.

Since 1992, in India, the globalisation and liberalisation of the economy have widened the gap between the rich and the poor. There is also a rise in communalism leading to unprecedented violence.

From 2014, crony capitalism, and control of business by a couple of big business conglomerates have dented the future of millions of youngsters. The rise of jobless youth is a cause of concern as it deals with future generations.

The control of the media by a few big business houses has led to the spread of false information. This has had an adverse effect on the larger student community. Some of the issues need an immediate and urgent response. In that

sense, there is a need for a long-term as well as a short-term or immediate response.

The survival of democracy in India and the rest of the world where dictatorial tendencies have crept in comes as a huge challenge. There is an urgent need for the youth to be educated on democracy and its meaningful functioning. It is a recent trend that the educated hardly vote and exercise their democratic right.

There are no youth leaders worth their name. Though India comprises 70 percent of youth as part of their demography, there is not a single Member of Parliament who is below the age of 30.

Our educational institutions should include meaningful engagement of our youth in discussing issues related to economic, environmental, and social justice, and justice for Adivasis and women. Participation, learning, service, and leadership should be prioritised on our campuses.

Climate change is going to affect the youth as they are the ones who are going to inherit this

planet in future. Hence, it becomes important that they understand the challenges of fast-depleting resources and adopt lifestyle changes towards sustainable living.

There is a great need to educate the youth on the UN Sustainable Development Goals which really touch every aspect of their lives. The youth face issues related to inclusivity. This comes in the face of inexperience when seeking a job. Lack of previous work experience due to their youth constitutes a serious obstacle in entering the labour market since most employers are not willing to hire young employees and invest in their training.

It is estimated that more than 500 million youth live with an earning of less than \$2 per day. About 152 million young workers live in households that are below the poverty line. This accounts for 24 percent of all working poor. There are still 781 million adults and 126 million youths who cannot read or write.

Mental health issues are another very important area which is often neglected. It is estimated that nearly 10 percent of youth need psychological help which is not available. Substance abuse and alcoholism are two other important problems the youth need to grapple with.

Through our institutions, we have to try to help the youth learn about one's identity and attitudes towards others dissimilar to them, about valuing the knowledge and experiences of others and learning to appreciate the diversity of perspectives, opinions, and actions.

Though there are a multitude of other problems including indoctrinating youth into terrorism, it becomes the responsibility of the educated and the obligation of the country not to mislead the youth. They should be guided properly. Then they can become good global citizens who meaningfully contribute to the development of the world. Artificial Intelligence could become the game changer if used in the correct perspective.

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# BEYOND AI

## THE NEED FOR ARTICULATING INTELLIGENCE IN A DIGITAL AGE



Unemployment presents another formidable challenge. It is one that intersects significantly with technological advancement. **The digital age is transforming job markets, and making traditional career paths uncertain.**



In the rush of These issues are complex and manifest across multiple dimensions: technological, social, economic, and psychological. This multifaceted challenge presents unprecedented obstacles and unique opportunities for growth and transformation. As sociologist Anthony Giddens notes in his work on modernity, we are living in an age of ‘Radical Reflexivity’, where traditional structures are constantly being examined and redefined.

The rapid acceleration of technology, especially Artificial Intelligence (AI), stands at the forefront of these transformations. It's fascinating, yet daunting, how AI has reshaped our world. But what if we thought about AI not just as Artificial Intelligence, but as an Articulating Intelligence?

It is a tool to express our highest form of wisdom, making thoughtful decisions about what to articulate, and how. This reconceptualisation aligns with philosopher Luciano Floridi's concept of ‘Infosphere’, where information and its articulation become fundamental to human existence.

This shift in perspective feels crucial, particularly when considering the broader implications of technological integration in society. Technology offers immense potential, but it also carries profound risks.



Our youth, more than any other generation, are at the forefront of this technological revolution. They have grown up in what American writer and speaker on education Marc Prensky termed the era of ‘Digital Natives’, where digital tools are as natural as breathing, adapting effortlessly.

Yet, this same ease can lead to troubling consequences. Reports indicate that approximately 59 percent of teens in the United States have experienced cyberbullying, according to the Pew Research Centre (2022).

The psychological impact of technology deserves particular attention. American psychologist Jean Twenge, in her book ‘iGen’, discusses how the pervasive use of smartphones and social media has contributed to heightened levels of anxiety and depression among youth.

This observation is further supported by research from the American Academy of Paediatrics. It has documented significant correlations between screen time and mental health issues. The creators of these technologies, in their pursuit of progress, may not always foresee the ramifications. This is a phenomenon that technology ethicist Tristan Harris calls ‘Downstream Unintended Consequences’.

Unemployment presents another formidable challenge. It is one that intersects significantly with technological advancement. The digital age is transforming job markets, and making traditional career paths uncertain. Globally, the youth unemployment rate remains alarmingly high.

The International Labour Organisation has reported a rate of 14.6 percent in 2020. This statistic becomes even more concerning when viewed through the lens of what the economists Erik Brynjolfsson and Andrew McAfee term ‘The Second Machine Age’, where automation and AI increasingly replace human labour.

The mental health crisis among youth deserves particular attention, especially considering its intersection with social media use and academic pressure. The World Health Organisation underscores that depression and anxiety disorders are among the leading causes of illness and disability for adolescents globally.

This crisis is exacerbated by what the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman terms as ‘Liquid Modernity’. It is a state where social forms and institutions no longer have time to solidify and cannot serve as frames of reference for human actions.

The erosion of traditional family and community bonds presents another critical challenge. Sociologist Robert Putnam, in ‘Bowling Alone’, vividly illustrates how the weakening of social capital has left many young people navigating these challenges in isolation. This phenomenon is further complicated by what philosopher Byung-Chul Han describes as the ‘Transparency Society’, where digital connectivity often masks genuine human connection.

The socio-political realm presents its unique challenges. Despite obstacles, youth are often the most politically aware and active demographic. Figures like environmental activist Greta Thunberg have galvanised global movements.



**A**s we continue to grapple with these challenges, the focus must remain on fostering **resilience, creativity, and wisdom among our youth, ensuring that they are equipped not just to survive but to thrive in articulating themselves in an increasingly complex yet beautiful world.**



It demonstrates what sociologist Manuel Castells calls 'Networks of Outrage and Hope'. According to a survey by Amnesty International, young people today are more likely than older generations to believe in the importance of social and political activism.

The political landscape's polarisation adds another layer of complexity. Political theorist Hannah Arendt's warnings in 'The Origins of Totalitarianism' about ideological extremism remain particularly relevant today.

Contemporary political scientist Jonathan Haidt's work on moral psychology and political polarisation provides valuable insights into how young people can navigate these divisive landscapes while maintaining democratic discourse.

The educational sphere requires particular attention in addressing these challenges. Drawing from Brazilian philosopher Paulo Freire's 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed', we must consider how educational systems can be transformed to empower youth rather than perpetuate existing inequalities. The concept of 'Critical Digital Pedagogy', as developed by scholars like Henry Giroux, becomes increasingly relevant in preparing youth for a digitally mediated world.

English philosopher John Stuart Mill's 'On Liberty' emphasises the importance of individual freedom balanced by social responsibility. This balance becomes particularly crucial in the digital age, where actions in virtual spaces can have real-world consequences. Contemporary philosophers like Helen Nissenbaum have expanded on this concept through the lens of 'Contextual Integrity' in digital spaces.

As we look to the future, the late South African President Nelson Mandela's words "that the youth of today are the leaders of tomorrow" take on new significance. Their journey represents not just individual struggles and triumphs, but the collective future of our society. This understanding is crucial as we work to support and empower young people in navigating the complexities of the modern world.

In all of this, the path forward requires what philosopher Martha Nussbaum calls 'Cultivating Humanity'. This means developing not just technical skills but also the capacity for critical thinking, empathy, and ethical judgement.

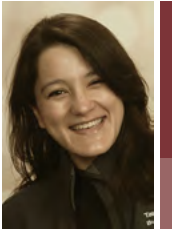
As we continue to grapple with these challenges, the focus must remain on fostering resilience, creativity, and wisdom among our youth, ensuring that they are equipped not just to survive but to thrive in articulating themselves in an increasingly complex yet beautiful world.

We must never forget that human beings have the enormous strength and capacity to turn every adversity into a blessing. May the fears and ill effects of AI be used and monitored towards the flourishing of humanity. May the digital natives be the torchbearers of this mission.

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# OPINION

## SOCIAL MEDIA USE AND CONNECTION TO YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH



**T**hus, it is important for caregivers and parents to adapt to these ever-growing challenges **to support the youth under their care, promote emotional resilience, and provide much-needed structure in an increasingly digital world.**



**I**n today's fast-paced and ever-changing digital landscape, it is imperative to adapt and respond flexibly to change. The increased emphasis on digital technologies and the expansion of digital products and services, including the expansion of social media and the growth of AI technologies have become unavoidable.

Today's youth, including children and adolescents, are increasingly accustomed to this way of life. For several members of Generations Z and Alpha, a digital world is all they have ever known in their lifetimes. As such, younger generations are often savvier and quicker to adapt to newer technologies than their older counterparts.

Additionally, children and adolescents are more likely to spend a considerable amount of their leisure time on the Internet or on social media to interact with their friends. Following the

COVID-19 pandemic, it appears that more youth spend more of their time online to socialise and interact with others and the world around them.

Despite the benefits of social media and the Internet to easily connect with others, obtain information about various topics, and to boost overall productivity, recent emphasis has also shifted towards the negative impact of these irreplaceable and unavoidable digital technologies.

Youth (i.e. child and adolescent) mental health challenges have steadily increased over the last few years. This is likely due to broader societal trends towards increased online presence and social media self-focus.

Childhood rates of depression and anxiety have spiked, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic and increased isolation from others, information overload, social comparison, and reliance on digital technologies could be a few of the reasons for these major shifts.

In addition, increased Internet use has been linked to decreased levels of attention and



focus in youth, amplifying academic and mental health challenges. Although the use of social media is an important way for children and adolescents to interact with their friends and peers, social media platforms have increasingly been incentivised to maximise profits by holding consumer attention instead of connecting individuals with their social networks.

Child and adolescent mental health care needs are not prioritised (and are often dismissed). For children who are struggling with mental health conditions like depression, social media algorithms tend to showcase content that reflects a child's mood, which can thereby amplify and perpetuate negative feelings.

Thus, it is important for caregivers and parents to adapt to these ever-growing challenges to support the youth under their care, promote emotional resilience, and provide much-needed structure in an increasingly digital world.

Children and adolescents often learn from and require structure and stability provided by the important adults in their lives to learn to navigate their emotions and stressors.

Some strategies that adults concerned and caregivers may adopt include open communication of the various pros and cons of social media use and modelling of appropriate use of digital technologies, themselves.

Children and adolescents often seek to learn from others, especially respected adults and parents. So, caregivers and adults need to monitor their daily use of social media, especially in the presence of impressionable youth.

Parents and caregivers should also understand their individual child's temperament, and select an appropriate time to introduce the use of smartphones or the Internet/social media to them.

A child's readiness for social media use may depend on a few factors, such as their overall level of impulsivity, vulnerability and sensitivity to criticism and/or rejection, social-emotional functioning, and ability to read and respond appropriately to social cues.

A child who finds it difficult to disengage from enjoyable activities such as playing video games to focus on other activities might find it more challenging to disconnect from social media. Additionally, although not preferred by children, caregivers and parents must provide oversight and monitoring of social media use.

Initial access to social media should be permitted after discussions about appropriate, inappropriate, and unsafe behaviours on social media and caregivers should provide specific examples of such behaviours to children to avoid miscommunication and any misunderstandings.

Such discussions are ongoing and could be reviewed and revised with children as they grow older to provide a sense of autonomy and personal control while fostering trust between caregiver and child. Also, although challenging to implement, caregivers should emphasise and model a lifestyle balance between a child's digital and real life.

Strategies to do so may include the use of allocated screen times for youth, planning outings with family and/or friends to encourage alternative ways of socialising, taking social media breaks, and using parental controls and related applications to limit social media use.



Strategies to do so may include the use of allocated screen times for youth, planning outings with family and/or friends to encourage alternative ways of socialising, taking social media breaks, and using parental controls and related applications to limit social media use.

Finally, parents and caregivers are encouraged to stick firmly with their boundaries and rules even in the face of resistance from children and adolescents to the greatest extent of their abilities, while also extending grace and flexibility on occasion.

As with all emerging trends and technologies, adults are tasked with unforeseeable and novel challenges to support and protect the youth in their care or their close lives.

There are no easy or concrete solutions to drastically improve the well-being of children and adolescents overnight due to the harmful impact of social media use. However, in moments of increasing complexity and difficulty, it is sometimes best to return to the basics of modelling, mentoring, caregiving, and parenting of children and adolescents.

Adults must support, listen, validate, and flexibly provide structure and limits to the youth in their lives to instil a sense of psychological safety, self-esteem, and relative calm in an ever-changing and digital world.

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# THE DIGITAL DIVIDE AND ACCESS TO EDUCATION

## A BARRIER FOR TODAY'S YOUTH



**D**uring the COVID-19 pandemic, these disparities became particularly evident. **While students in urban or higher-income households could continue learning through online classes, students in rural or low-income areas often struggled due to limited or no internet connectivity.**



**T**he digital divide — uneven access to technology and the internet — has become a pressing issue in modern education, where technology is increasingly integral. According to the World Bank (2020), over 40 percent of the global population lacks reliable internet access, which creates significant obstacles for students in these areas to access educational resources.

For today's youth, particularly those in marginalised communities, this gap translates to limited learning opportunities and restricted access to critical skills in an increasingly digital world (UNESCO, 2020).

The unequal distribution of digital resources perpetuates disparities in educational attainment, putting those without access at a disadvantage and widening the educational inequality gap (van Dijk, 2020). Addressing this divide is essential for creating equitable learning environments that empower all students.

The digital divide is the gap in access to digital technology, encompassing the internet, computers, and smart devices, between various populations. This divide is commonly defined by disparities across urban and rural areas, socio-economic status, and national development levels.

In urban centres, youth are more likely to have access to high-speed internet and devices, while rural and economically disadvantaged communities often face limited or no access. In developing countries, the divide is even more pronounced, where connectivity and devices are less accessible (International Telecommunication Union, 2020).

This gap has significant implications in education, where technology is increasingly essential. Digital resources and e-learning platforms enhance learning, provide diverse resources, and connect students globally.

However, for those on the disadvantaged side of the digital divide, limited access means missing out on these critical educational tools, leading to disparities in learning outcomes and future opportunities (Selwyn, 2021).



The lack of access to technology severely limits learning opportunities, especially as education increasingly relies on digital tools. Youth in under-resourced communities, which lack reliable internet, computers, or mobile devices, face barriers to basic learning resources and interactive platforms essential for modern education (OECD, 2021).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, these disparities became particularly evident. While students in urban or higher-income households could continue learning through online classes, students in rural or low-income areas often struggled due to limited or no internet connectivity (UNICEF, 2020).

This digital gap has created disparities in educational attainment, as students without digital access fall behind academically. For example, UNESCO (2021) reported that students in developing countries experienced greater learning loss, with some dropping out altogether due to the lack of digital resources.

These educational setbacks have a compounding effect, limiting students' opportunities for future academic and career success and reinforcing socio-economic inequalities across generations.

Without addressing this divide, the educational gap between affluent and underprivileged students will continue to widen, undermining efforts for inclusive education and equitable learning outcomes globally.

Youth without access to digital resources face significant barriers in acquiring critical skills needed for the future job market, particularly in areas like STEM and digital literacy, which are essential in an increasingly tech-driven economy.

Students lacking these skills often struggle to keep up with peers with access to educational technology, making it difficult to compete in higher education and beyond (World Economic Forum, 2020).

Digital literacy is now as fundamental as traditional literacy for many jobs, and without it, these youths are disadvantaged from the outset (van Dijk, 2020).

In the long term, this skills gap affects social mobility and economic opportunity, creating a cycle of disadvantage that limits access to higher-paying and stable jobs, and consequently, overall economic participation.

Additionally, it widens inequalities between those equipped for a globalised workforce and those left behind, contributing to the persistence of economic disparities across generations (World Bank, 2021).

Addressing the digital divide requires coordinated efforts across government, private, and non-profit sectors. Governments play a key role by investing in digital infrastructure, especially in underserved rural areas, to expand internet connectivity.



**A**ddressing the digital divide requires coordinated efforts across government, private, and non-profit sectors. **Governments play a key role by investing in digital infrastructure, especially in underserved rural areas, to expand internet connectivity.**



Public-private partnerships have also been effective in providing low-cost technology solutions. Programmes like One Laptop per Child have delivered affordable devices to students in developing countries, allowing greater access to educational resources (Kraemer et al., 2019). Additionally, companies like Google and Microsoft have launched initiatives offering discounted devices and internet to schools in low-income areas, bridging the resource gap.

Educational institutions and NGOs are critical in implementing these technologies effectively. NGOs like the Digital Empowerment Foundation work in India to provide digital skills training and affordable internet to rural communities.

Schools can collaborate with such organisations to incorporate digital literacy into their curriculum, ensuring students acquire the necessary skills for future job markets. This multi-stakeholder approach is essential for creating lasting change and bridging the digital divide in education.

To conclude, the digital divide poses a significant barrier to equal educational opportunities for today's youth, impacting their future career prospects and economic mobility. Bridging this gap requires urgent, coordinated efforts globally, including policy reforms, public-private partnerships, and initiatives tailored to disadvantaged communities.

When governments, companies, and NGOs work together, they can expand digital access, equipping young people with essential skills for a rapidly evolving job market. With sustained investments and targeted action, we can close this divide and build a more inclusive educational landscape, empowering all youth to participate in the global economy.

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# TECHNOLOGY

## A PRO AND CON FOR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS



**O**ver the last decade, learning in Kenya has embraced technology. This was most evident during the COVID-19 pandemic when learning institutions adopted digital learning.

### **Technology is A Challenge During Studies**

The writer interviewed three students from institutions of higher learning in Kenya. They mentioned that online learning can be detrimental to students because computer labs

in universities are overcrowded. One computer is used by three or more students simultaneously, leading to insufficient work submission.

Moreover, they are stocked with old computers, which are slow and cause disruptions while doing assignments and online exams.

Staring at the screen for a long time whether on the phone or a computer has an implication on one's health as it harms their eyesight.

**T**hese students proposed that when studying, one should use website-blocking apps to avoid distraction.

Tightening privacy settings for accounts that are used regularly, and sharing less personal information also enhance the security of users.

**To reduce health risks, students should limit screen time, stay active by taking regular breaks and have the correct sitting posture.**



There are privacy concerns with putting personal information online, yet the legitimacy of some internet sources cannot be verified. Understanding through classroom interaction has now been replaced with copy-pasting from online sources, not to mention the distraction due to online rabbit holes.

Distraction by social media apps is time-consuming and keeps one away from books. There is selective integration of technology used by tutors who forbid the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) e.g. ChatGPT. This unknowingly cuts students from its benefits or keeping with global trends.

### **Utilisation of AI in Institutions of Higher Learning**

Marinne, a student from Daystar University in Nairobi, Kenya said, “I use ChatGPT to grasp concepts efficiently, generate study guides, track assignments and do quick research.”

Njiru from Kenya’s Boma College said, “I used my phone to learn and research on AI. It provides straightforward answers as compared to search engines, where you go through pages of information and not find the answers you need.”

### **A Way Out to Address the Challenges**

These students proposed that when studying, one should use website-blocking apps to avoid distraction. Tightening privacy settings for

accounts that are used regularly, and sharing less personal information also enhance the security of users.

To reduce health risks, students should limit screen time, stay active by taking regular breaks and have the correct sitting posture.

Computer labs should increase the number of computers and update them more often because faster and more modern computers are easier to work with. Learning institutions should also encourage the correct use of technology by teaching coding and basic programming as subjects in the curricula.

### **Workplace and Technology**

In the workplace, offices are being compelled to offer free Wifi for employees and customers. Though it is deemed a necessity, it has been a distraction during meetings where people may be responding to emails and messages as opposed to concentrating on the meeting.

In workplaces that lack a policy on the use of technology, the youth feel that the limited use of social media platforms to promote company operations is a detriment to its publicity. Many youngsters are making additional income through online businesses and have continued to push companies to embrace digital tools.

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# THE PARADOX OF PROGRESS CHALLENGES FACING TODAY'S YOUTH



**N**avigating this paradox of progress requires a balanced approach. It starts with fostering digital literacy and teaching responsible technology use. **Schools should incorporate digital wellness programmes that emphasise critical thinking and healthy online habits.**



### A Sea Change

**I**n a world that has fought for and embraced equality, cultures have undergone a sea change – some profoundly enriching, others subtly eroding our essence. We stand today in an era of unprecedented technological advancement, with the internet being a central part of our lives.

Yet, as we bask in the ease of connectivity, we must confront the silent adversaries that emerge in its wake. Imagine a life devoid of the internet: no social media to amplify cries against injustice, no AI-driven convenience, no real-time connectivity with loved ones across continents, and no means to virtually participate in life-defining moments from afar.

The mere thought is terrifying, underscoring how intertwined technology has become with our existence. But, just as it unites us, it also profoundly reshapes societal traditions and personal interactions.

### The Double-Edged Sword of Connection

Technology, a boon to modern society, offers connectivity, empowerment, and an avenue for raising our voices. Yet, it has subtly redefined how we celebrate, communicate, and live.

Festive gatherings that once brimmed with genuine joy and intimacy have become opportunities for curated social media posts. We often focus more on showing the world that we are happy than on truly feeling that joy.



As Sherry Turkle (2017) writes in 'Reclaiming Conversation', "We are tempted to think that our little sips of online connection add up to a big gulp of real conversation, but they don't" (p. 45).

One of the most groundbreaking societal revolutions in recent years has been the rise of feminism. This movement shattered patriarchal barriers, empowered women to join the workforce and paved the way for significant progress and equality. The digital age amplified these changes, providing platforms for women to advocate for their rights and make their voices heard.

Feminism has been a vital force for societal transformation, granting women opportunities they have long deserved. However, as both parents increasingly embraced professional roles, a new reality emerged.

Generation Z – the children of millennial parents – grew up navigating life in the digital realm, often without consistent parental guidance. While it was commendable that women gained opportunities and independence, it also highlighted the necessity for a cultural shift where men were equally encouraged to embrace responsibilities at home. Without this balance, screens became modern-day pacifiers for toddlers, while teenagers turned to social media to combat their loneliness.

Research from the 'Journal of Family Issues' (Bianchi, Robinson, & Milkie, 2016) reveals that while women have increased their workforce participation, the redistribution of household and childcare responsibilities between genders has not kept pace.

The Pew Research Center (2019) further underscores that children benefit significantly when fathers are actively involved, experiencing better emotional stability and improved academic outcomes.

Thus, to ensure holistic well-being for the next generation, society must continue to emphasise not only women's empowerment but also the importance of shared parenting responsibilities.

### **The Illusion of Validation and the FOMO Culture**

The rise of social media created an ecosystem where thoughts, emotions, and opinions are shared, sometimes without filter or consequence. This unprecedented openness has both empowering and disorienting effects.

The Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) traps many young people in a cycle of comparison and self-doubt. According to a report by the Pew Research Center (2018), over 70 percent of teens say anxiety and depression are major problems among their peers, with social media being a significant contributor.



One of the most groundbreaking societal revolutions in recent years has been the rise of feminism. This movement shattered patriarchal barriers, empowered women to join the workforce and paved the way for significant progress and equality. **The digital age amplified these changes, providing platforms for women to advocate for their rights and make their voices heard.**



The McKinsey Health Institute (2022) further notes that excessive social media use correlates with heightened feelings of loneliness and anxiety. The craving for validation often leads youth to chase likes, comments, and trends. Yet, these digital affirmations can never replace genuine connection.

Research shows that the dopamine release associated with social media interactions creates a temporary sense of happiness, much like an addictive substance (Alter, 2017). This digital validation paradoxically amplifies feelings of emptiness and inadequacy when the virtual applause fades away.

Consider the dangerous trends that have emerged. From the Blue Whale challenge, which preyed on the most vulnerable, to augmented reality games like Pokémon Go, which led to life-threatening situations, the internet's darker side has had real-world consequences.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (2019) warns that unsupervised online environments expose youth to risks like cyberbullying, radicalisation, and psychological manipulation. As we hand young children devices without teaching them responsible use, we set the stage for a range of emotional and social challenges.

### **Cultural Shifts and Societal Pressures**

The internet's boundary-less nature has reshaped cultural norms. Once-taboo subjects are now discussed openly, which can be liberating. However, this has also desensitised us to the human impact of our words.

Behaviours that would have been unthinkable face-to-face are now commonplace online. This erosion of social restraint has contributed to

**C**ommunities and policymakers must also play their part. **Regulations around online safety, mental health support systems in schools, and campaigns that promote digital responsibility are crucial.**



a culture where instant outrage is the norm, and empathy is often lost in the digital noise. Moreover, today's youth are grappling with intense societal pressures.

The relentless pursuit of academic and professional excellence has become more cutthroat, driven by globalisation and the hyper-competitive job

market. A study by the American Psychological Association (2020) reveals that Gen Z reports the highest levels of stress, with 81 percent citing concerns about their future.

The desire to appear successful or 'cool' often drives young people to risky behaviours, such as underage drinking or substance abuse. These issues are compounded by traditional cultural norms that discourage vulnerability, particularly in patriarchal societies where expressing emotions is equated with weakness.

Twenge (2024) notes that this emotional repression exacerbates the mental health crisis, leading to feelings of isolation and despair.

### **The Rise of a Conscious Generation**

Yet, amid these challenges, there is hope. Gen Z is also a generation defined by its passion for change. They are the leaders of climate strikes, the advocates for racial and social justice, and the champions of mental health awareness.

They have harnessed technology to amplify their voices, often turning social media into a powerful tool for activism. Their resilience and adaptability offer a glimmer of hope for a brighter, more equitable future.

The work of scholars like Jean Twenge (2024) emphasises that while Gen Z faces unprecedented struggles, they also possess an acute awareness of societal issues. This generation's desire to create meaningful change has given rise to movements that are shaping policies and transforming communities.

### **Towards a More Mindful Future**

Navigating this paradox of progress requires a balanced approach. It starts with fostering digital



literacy and teaching responsible technology use. Schools should incorporate digital wellness programmes that emphasise critical thinking and healthy online habits.

Families must prioritise face-to-face connections, promoting open dialogue about mental health and the impact of social media. As Turkle (2017) poignantly argues, “We need to reclaim solitude and recognise it as the necessary precondition to true human connection” (p. 75).

The concept of social media detoxes, once a humorous idea, is now a legitimate strategy to combat digital addiction. It’s about more than just limiting screen time. It’s about re-engaging with the world around us. Encouraging mindfulness, promoting hobbies that don’t involve screens, and spending quality time outdoors can help anchor youth in the present moment.

Communities and policymakers must also play their part. Regulations around online safety, mental health support systems in schools, and campaigns that promote digital responsibility are crucial. If we, as a global community, value genuine connections over virtual validation, we can create a world where the internet empowers rather than ensnares.

## Conclusion

Rediscovering the essence of connection, imagine a world where young people feel seen, not because of the number of likes they receive, but because of the depth of their real-life relationships. Imagine family dinners filled with laughter rather than the glow of phone screens.

This vision is possible if we commit to guiding the next generation toward a future where technology serves humanity, not the other way around. We owe it to our youth to equip them with the tools to navigate this digital age with grace and wisdom.

Only then can we transform this paradox of progress into a harmonious blend of technological advancement and human connection? The future is in our hands, and the choices we make today will shape the world of tomorrow.

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# STORYTELLING

## THE WAY TO SAVE OUR YOUNG PEOPLE



It reminds us that behind the face which people present to the world, **there is also a hidden life, a hidden interiority that is so rich but that can also involve a lot of pain and suffering.**



**I**n these past few months, I have heard of several young adults who have died through suicide. It is shocking, indeed devastating. It reminds us that behind the face which people present to the world, there is also a hidden life, a hidden interiority that is so rich but that can also involve a lot of pain and suffering.

In another conversation, I heard of problems that young people have because their parents are so busy on their smartphones and at work that they have no time to listen to them deeply. A 'Smartphone Loneliness' is Emerging.

Over years of listening to young people in spiritual accompaniment, I have attained an ever-greater respect for each person's inner journey: their struggles, joys and concerns.

I have an ever-greater conviction that Ignatian spirituality has something to offer. St. Ignatius of Loyola helped people discover God in a personal and passionate way. He moved from a faith which was largely based on external practice to discovering a God who was kind, forgiving, merciful, liberating, and personal. A God who spoke to him in the inmost recesses of his heart.

And so for us: can we help our students and those in our parishes and social centres come in touch with that kind of God? A God who ignites passion. A God who loves to the end. A God who commits Himself to me totally. I believe that, yes, this is possible, whatever the background of their faith.

The tools of the examen, Ignatian meditation, spiritual conversation, and above all, contemplative imagining make this possible. And of course, our Ignatian way of offering and receiving friendship in a deep and trusting way.

These are all ways in which God can and does speak to people today. They need to be refreshed and taken out from under the wrappings of sometimes outdated language, dusted off, and offered with freshness and conviction.

A number of years ago in a meeting in Ireland, people were lamenting how young people are leaving the church today.

One of the women leading the group said, “Ok so what are you doing about that?”

She challenged us to stop wringing our hands and change our attitude.

“Why don’t you reach out, catch those people by the sleeve and say: ‘Wait. Don’t leave. We have a message for you that can change your life.’”

We need to believe we have this life-changing message and find new ways to offer it.

The new global project called Magis Digital Home, led by South Asia, aims to do that. Started by Fr General Arturo Sosa, it is being piloted by the Chennai province with help from Karnataka. Its aim is to offer a home. A place of encounter and trust for young adults. A place where they can experience these Ignatian ways to find themselves, to encounter others and, ultimately, to meet the living God and to be transformed.

**A**nother way to reach out to young adults and to hear from them is through storytelling. **Many of the posts we see on Facebook and Instagram are in the format of short stories. Stories capture the heart and change our attitudes.**



As I have worked with the Chennai-Karnataka team these past months and with the convenor Fr Sarathi, I am filled with hope for the future that we are creating with and for young adults.



*Germán Muñoz Diaz, Project Manager - Discernment and Apostolic Planning, in the General Curia of the Society of Jesus, has played a pivotal role in bringing people together and encouraging us all on the journey as have the Conference President Fr Stany D'Souza and the Provincials of Chennai and Karnataka.*

Another way to reach out to young adults and to hear from them is through storytelling. Many of the posts we see on Facebook and Instagram are in the format of short stories. Stories capture the heart and change our attitudes.

Jesus told stories.

We think of the story of the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son, the Good Shepherd, and the woman with the lost coin. To reach people's hearts and minds today, we need to tell stories: stories of grace, and liberation, from our parishes and schools, from our social centres, where people are finding liberation.

On the news, we hear stories of darkness, war and repression. But as Jesuits and religious, we have access to stories where God is active and alive and where people are finding freedom.

Young Jesuits, skilled in media and with just a smartphone in hand, can contribute so much to helping those of similar age find the still small voice of liberation deep down inside them.

My hope for the future is that we can accompany young people as they try to understand their deepest selves. We want to help them to share that deeper self with others in trust and confidence. We want them to be people of passion, energy, commitment and love.

If we help people to discover this amazing energy within them, an energy springing up from the Spirit, we will help them change the world. That was how Ignatius accompanied Francis Xavier, Peter Faber (*original companion of St Ignatius*) and others, helping them to be men on fire with love who went out to spread the Good News and bring liberation and healing. Our call is to accompany others today in the same way.

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# THE INTERNAL COLONIALISM FACED BY ADIVASI YOUTH

**I**n the once forested, hilly and mineral-rich plateaus of central India live the Adivasis. They managed to keep themselves away from the caste-based graded inequality of the social formations of the plains. Naturally, Adivasis were freedom-loving. They evolved for themselves egalitarian social formations with symbiotic relationships with nature animated by sacral polities.

On the contrary, the plain's people were animated by political Brahmanism. This gradually expanded into 'unequal appropriation and social exclusion'. Those who were better, among social formations, were incorporated into small gangs of the ruling elite while the weaker majority would be relegated to the 'lower categories'. They were forced to survive by selling their labour at a price always fixed by the elite 'uppers', who employed them, at their mercy.

**A**divasi youth have lost their rootedness and identity as they are foisted with a centralised educational curriculum and pedagogy. It does not demystify the age-old caste system. **It also denies the history of Adivasis' resistance against Brahmanical and British colonialism and the numerous constitutional and legal provisions gained by numerous Adivasi rights movements.**



The process can be summed up as the assimilation of the Indigenous peoples into a caste-divided and market-driven 'mainstream' in which political Brahmanism aggressively attempts to consolidate the atomised, pauperised, multi-lingual, religious, regional and linguistic populations in the name of Hindutva.

The proponents of this dangerous ideology aim to ensure continued enjoyment of political power for themselves. In this context, this article attempts to enlist the challenges faced by Adivasi/indigenous youth in central-eastern India.

### **Loss of Rootedness and Identity**

Adivasi youth have lost their rootedness and identity as they are foisted with a centralised educational curriculum and pedagogy. It does not demystify the age-old caste system. It also denies the history of Adivasis' resistance against Brahmanical and British colonialism and the numerous constitutional and legal provisions gained by numerous Adivasi rights movements.

Not only has this important knowledge of their history and special rights been denied, but the State systematically violates the constitutional and legal provisions in the name of development.



Consequently, Adivasi youth get lost in the mainstream. It remains discriminatory, hostile, oppressive and exploitative.

### Discrimination

Economically impoverished, socially excluded Adivasis, Dalits and other linguistic and religious minorities in India have been discriminated against and abused routinely. Access to justice is almost impossible for them since the legal justice system in India is highly biased against the poor and the 'lower' castes.

Jharkhand's jails have more young undertrials from Dalit, Adivasi, other marginalised communities and religious minorities than their percentage share of the total population.

### Lack of Quality and Relevant Education

Most Adivasi groups (Scheduled Tribes), in rural settings, speak their mother tongue. However, the little children have been forced to take their initial lessons at schools in Hindi or English which are alien to them. Neither instructions nor textbooks are available in their mother tongue. This creates a serious learning disability among Adivasi children and makes them disinterested in schooling.

The mushrooming of private English medium schools worsens the government school system **which is merely a showpiece with dilapidated school buildings and a plethora of useless formalities. It ensures that no meaningful and relevant teaching and learning take place.**





Consequently, the teachers label them as 'backward', denying them dignity and self-respect. Thus, school education proves to be wasteful and counterproductive in predominantly Adivasi regions. The youth feel disoriented and demoralised.

Moreover, the mushrooming of private English medium schools worsens the government school system which is merely a showpiece with dilapidated school buildings and a plethora of useless formalities. It ensures that no meaningful and relevant teaching and learning take place.

Unemployment and production of a cheap and bonded labour force

Young men and women, who come out of such a school system, ensure the production of a huge unorganised labour market which uses and abuses workers as per the needs of a market-animating inhuman economy and society.

### **Human Trafficking and Distress Migration**

Many Adivasi teenagers have been trafficked to work as domestic workers by their relatives and friends who, due to lack of unemployment and limited sources of income, succumb to the pressures of labour contractors who supply cheap

labour to various sectors. Both trafficked and migrants are forced to work in an unfriendly and hazardous workplace. They are physically and psychologically abused.

### **Land Alienation, Resources Depletion and Incarceration**

Most Adivasi ethno-territories in central-eastern India remain endowed with abundant mineral resources. However, the exploitation of these resources by non-Adivasi agencies – national and multinational companies – causes displacement of Adivasis.

They are alienated from their ancestral homeland which remains an important basis of their subsistence, identity and existence as distinctive social formations. Moreover, deforestation, coal mining and other allied industries aggravate the effect of climate change, inducing unpredictable and extreme weather conditions. This, in turn, adversely affects agriculture and allied activities which are the main sources of income for the Adivasi communities.

Moreover, when young Adivasis resist unregulated mining and raise his/her voice against unjust land alienation by the State and non-State agencies, they are falsely accused as Maoists, and are incarcerated indefinitely.





### Departmental and Political Corruption

Departmental and political corruption and manipulation of legal provisions become normalised when the local population remains unaware of their constitutional rights. The elite among them are being systematically co-opted into the corrupt mainstream.

Since the land of the Adivasis has been 'protected', the bureaucrats entrusted with the implementation of many protective provisions get bribed for manipulating the provisions. This allows illegal transfer of land for industries and non-Adivasis.

They intrude into predominantly Adivasi regions. Hence the district collectors, block development and circle officers compete to get posted to these regions where possibilities of mining and intrusion of non-Adivasis remain at a comparatively higher rate. Such postings enable them to get high bribes.

Semi-educated, unemployed youth, who do not out-migrate for work, would have to naturally get socialised in this normalised nexus of corrupt politicians, bureaucrats, industrialists and petty contractors.

**D**epartmental and political corruption and manipulation of legal provisions become normalised when the local population remains unaware of their constitutional rights. **The elite among them are being systematically co-opted into the corrupt mainstream.**



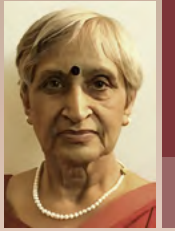
A few of them get recruited to be cultural mediators and political leaders to enable this corrupt system to perpetuate itself.

This is what happens to most Adivasi youth. The geographical region has been divided into different neighbouring States. These are controlled by non-Adivasis for the loot of its rich resources to the gross disadvantage of the local Adivasi population. Moreover, the Adivasi population remains divided by their affiliations to various political parties, religions, classes and castes. This is how internal colonialism functions in predominantly Adivasi regions.

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# BEING YOUNG AND DREAMING

# YOUNG PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES





**Y**oung persons with disabilities have displayed immense determination and resilience. **Despite difficulties in mobility and infrastructure, many managed to transition through secondary education, with a few moving on to higher education.**



## **I**ntroduction

I started working with Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) formally in the early 1980s as a part of my teaching job at the Regional College/Institute of Education at Bhopal. Today, we meet PwDs across all age ranges at personal and public places. Inclusion is a familiar word in our vocabulary across the globe.

But imagine a time when most of us were ignorant and unfamiliar with conditions in children and young persons mostly related to old age, such as difficulty walking, talking, hearing, recalling, and remembering. Most of these are visible and observable.

But today, we see infants, children, young and ageing people with medically and legally defined terminology. For example, we have in India the Rights of Persons with Disability (RPWD Act, 2016) fully endorsed by the National Educational Policy (NEP) 2020. This social model of looking at disability has brought young persons with disabling conditions into focus.

While this is an encouraging development, equally important is for each of us to reflect and ask ourselves and the system if we understand how to nurture their talents, ensure their dignity, and empower them as an agency to have a voice in all matters related to their becoming a contributing and responsible citizen.

## **Concerns and Magnitude**

Let me start with a few statements from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) (2018)<sup>[1]</sup> report just before the COVID-19 era.

❑ ‘Around the world, more than one billion women and men, boys and girls are living with some form of disability. Physical, social, and legal barriers continue to limit their access to education, and healthcare including sexual and reproductive health (SRH), employment, leisure activities, and family life.’ (p7)

❑ ‘Young persons with disabilities are like people everywhere: They have dreams and ambitions, interests and desires, and hopes for their future. But they face persistent social disadvantages worldwide stemming from discrimination, stigma and prejudice, and the routine failure to incorporate disability into building policy, and programme designs.’ (p7)

❑ ‘Recognising the diversity of young persons with disabilities. They are not a uniform group and include a much broader population. But data that recognise intersectional identities, especially gender identities, among young persons with disabilities are scarce.’ (p11)

Without reliable and timely data, this message is to understand that our young persons with disabilities should be at par with youth in general.



This report also summarised the key points I present below in Box-1.

Box-1:

### **Understanding the YOUNG PwDs**

*(KEY POINTS (UNFPA, 2018, p17)*

- ❑ **The freedom to exercise agency** — the freedom to make decisions for themselves about all aspects of their lives
- ❑ **Young persons with disabilities are vulnerable to discrimination** based on their age, gender, and disability, among other factors.
- ❑ **Disability is a complex, dynamic, and evolving concept.** Not all barriers are experienced by all young persons with disabilities in the same way.
- ❑ **Recognising how different systems of oppression intersect to shape experiences of discrimination is essential to a comprehensive understanding of the diverse and complex range of effects it can have in practice.**
- ❑ **Young persons with disabilities, especially young women and girls with disabilities, are more vulnerable to violence than their peers without disabilities.**
- ❑ **Young persons with disabilities, especially young women and girls, are often denied access to justice and response services for survivors of sexual violence and in accessing SRH** (Sexual and Reproductive Health) services.
- ❑ **Accessing their rights is further compounded** by poverty, risks associated with conflict settings and humanitarian crises, and institutionalisation.

The collection of data disaggregated by disability, sex, and age is critical to understanding the situation and informing policies that will ensure these young persons' social inclusion and human rights.

It is important to note that even youth with disabilities also face violence of all types. Today data sources are inadequate but we must flag these challenges faced by the youth and their response as reflected in the next section.

## Potential Causes of Violence Against Children with Disabilities

(Violence against children with disabilities: legislation, policies, and programmes in the EU.)' P27. UNFPA, 2018).

These are listed as:

- ❑ Societal attitudes based on prejudice and fear of 'otherness'.
- ❑ Lack of knowledge about disability.
- ❑ Isolation and segregation from the community.
- ❑ Risk factors relating to perpetrators seeing children with disabilities as 'easy targets'.
- ❑ Over-burdening of parents and lack of support.
- ❑ Overextended and untrained care.

## Voices of Young Persons with Disabilities

It is equally important to listen to the voices of these people. The youth are not hiding any more, but are vocal about their dreams, aspirations, and challenges. Maybe other young people can also learn from such voices.

We have seen in reports and documentation available in the public domain the achievements of PwDs in the Paralympics in 2024. Although this news is being highlighted now, they have been performing well for more than a decade now. Similarly, we talk about disability rights

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states, **'all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights' and 'everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms without distinction of any kind'.**



advocate Helen Keller, astrophysicist Stephen Hawking, and many more as role models for their contributions. We do have many such examples that are also nearer to us.

- ❑ <https://ncpedp.org/ncpedp-appi-youth-fellowship-on-disability/><sup>[2]</sup>
- ❑ <https://www.younglives.org.uk/sites/default/files/migrated/YL-DisabilitiesReport-India-Jul21-Proof05.pdf><sup>[3]</sup>





The educational and occupational trajectories of adolescents and youth with disabilities in India are part of a longitudinal study. The key facilitators to successful educational transitions included high parental aspirations, as well as encouraging teachers and supportive friends.

Young persons with disabilities have displayed immense determination and resilience. Despite difficulties in mobility and infrastructure, many managed to transition through secondary education, with a few moving on to higher education.

Encouragement from sensitive teachers was a key factor in motivating students with disabilities. While no gender discrimination was observed in the educational trajectories at the elementary level, gender inequality becomes prominent at the secondary level, with more boys than girls completing secondary education.

**It is important to note that while self-esteem and resilience are important not only for the youth, the enabling factors also have implications for society and governments. We all grow up with people. These are as heterogeneous as we all are.**

**Summing Up:** I am listing a few more such references that could be interesting for readers and enrich the purpose of this sharing. These are:

<https://myblurredworld.com/2019/02/17/message-young-people-disabilities/>

Curran, T., Jones, M., Ferguson, S., Reed, M., Lawrence, A., Cull, N., & Stabb, M. (2020). Disabled young people's hopes and dreams in a rapidly changing society: a co-production peer research study. 'Disability & Society', 36(4), 561-578. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2020.1755234>

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/andrewpulrang/2023/03/31/5-things-i-wish-i-understood-as-a-disabled-youth/>

**Five Things I Wish I Understood As A Disabled Youth, Andrew Pulrangm.**

Andrew Pulrang writes about disability practices, policy, and culture. "While I haven't gone so far as to write a letter to my teenage self, I do have thoughts as someone who grew up with disabilities and still has them, about what I might want to tell disabled youth today."

1. Connecting with other disabled people is a good idea.
2. It is important to create your interests and plans as soon as possible.
3. Be more confident about some things.
4. Be a little less confident about other things.
5. Recognise ways you have privilege.

### Areas of Concerns and Our Responsibility<sup>[4]</sup>

The best reality check for the participation of Young PwDS as a young citizen may be accessibility to higher education across the globe. The marginalisation within this section can be a barrier.

Participation and access to school education is a continuous challenge as youth transition to adult life through skills, education, and economic and social-political empowerment. Higher education is a process to reach all these goalposts.

**A. The transition planning for young persons** with disadvantages like disability coupled with other factors points out the needs where the boundaries between physical, academic, and socio-emotional accessibility dissolve/overlap as an interacting process.

Evidence generation and capacity building of the providers and users are equally important especially when acquiring adult roles. (refer to Pandey and Agrawal (2013)<sup>[5]</sup>



for evidence-based literature on transition to adulthood for youth with disabilities).

**B. Ensuring facilities and services** are provided and available to the public, the urban and rural areas, and indoor and outdoor facilities.

Public facilities like canteens, administrative services, and sports and recreational facilities are as important as classrooms and laboratories. The concept of accessibility also includes information and communication technology, including services and communication options and access to curriculum and teaching-learning materials.

‘Universal Design’ or ‘Design for All’: The Responsive Challenge: Throughout the world, it is being realised that there need not be an exclusive design effort to suit the needs of people with differences.

Being responsive to all is the key. In every institution, the faculty members and non-teaching staff of institutions with disabilities often face barriers to participation in all aspects of society, and even in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). In this case, a responsive HEI will become inclusive automatically. Experience is the best form of learning.

**Reasonable Accommodation:** Minimum standards required for persons with disabilities (students, faculty, non-teaching persons with disabilities) can work if minimum standards required for physical infrastructure, Information Communications Technology (ICT) and Teaching Learning Materials



**The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states, ‘all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights’ and ‘everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms without distinction of any kind’.**



(TLM) are adhered to. The goal of reasonable accommodations and academic adjustments is to level the playing field for people with disabilities.

### **C. Being A Woman with Disability**

To date, some of us are still struggling to make the point that disability is a condition and not a disease. Like gender, it is a cross-cutting challenge that we as people/society/community have created<sup>[6]</sup>. But it took even the UN many more years to arrive at the Biwako Platform (2003)<sup>[7]</sup> to bring the challenges being faced by the WwDs into focus for global attention and action.

But this does not imply that many others were not active at the ground level or on other international platforms. I published my first paper in 1993 on Education of the Handicapped Women (SERD Journal, Perspectives in Education, Vol 9 (4), pp 219-233, Baroda).<sup>[8]</sup>

As can be seen, the focus has been slowly shifting to make WwDs a visible and contributory agency in its rights. The world focus as of today is on monitoring SDGs such as Reducing Inequalities (Goal 10) and other SDGs that have highlighted concerns of persons with disabilities and gaining respect as an agency in the next eight years or so to SDGs.

These are:

- Challenge 1:  
Economic Empowerment, Poverty, Self- Esteem**
- Challenge 2:  
Real-Time Data and Inclusive Laws**
- Challenge 3:  
The Digital Exclusion**
- Challenge 4:  
Health**
- Challenge 5:  
Supporting Girls with Disabilities as They Transition To Adulthood**
- Challenge 6:  
Disability in Emergencies and Conflicts – ‘Reaching the most vulnerable’**



Like all other countries, India with 21 disabilities as per the RPWD Act faces significant changes for multiple reasons such as literacy levels, population growth rates, multiple challenges in health, education, infrastructure, GDP, and rulings by the courts.

Let us look at the digital exclusion explaining it as a necessary step in addressing other challenges also. Even exploring the scenario of digital exclusion, and within the PwDs, indicates the chances of these being at a greater disadvantage.

Another important point that can have significant implications for 'empowerment' relates to perceptions of the self and their need to exert. Using technology is an important life skill for the 21st century. Many quality-of-life indicators, even health and security against violence may need these skills more than ever.

## The Endnote

Being young and dreaming is the right of every generation and for that matter every living

being. Look around and we will find this process in plants, trees, birds, animals, and, of course, human beings.

Youth is defined by nurturing and expectations and every living being responds to how this is addressed. I decided to look at youth as the hope for the future. It is important to work consciously so that rather than mental health, mindfulness can be created.

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*Dr. Sudesh Mukhopadhyay, Former - Chairperson RCI, is currently a Member of the Standing Committee of NCTE. She is an Associate of London University Institute of Education in Special Education and a Visiting Fellow of Manitoba University, Canada and Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia.*



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[1] [https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Final\\_Global\\_Study\\_English\\_3\\_Oct.pdf](https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Final_Global_Study_English_3_Oct.pdf)

YOUNG PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES: GLOBAL STUDY ON ENDING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE, AND REALISING SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS. © UNFPA July 2018

[2] NCPEDP – Javed Abidi Fellowship on Disability, supported by the Azim Premji Foundation is a three-year immersive leadership development programme for youth with disabilities .

[3] Excerpts from 'The Educational and Occupational Trajectories of Adolescents and Youth with Disabilities in India', Renu Singh, Uma Vennam, Jayanthi Narayan, Amita Tandon, and Gina Crivello

[4] For details of the success story and other points in Part IV refer to <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1jNnIrjiaa2BSJUziBGCSIGDlFfXioKLY/edit#>Mukhopadhyay, Sudesh (2024) 'Enhancing Accessibility for People with Disabilities (PwDs) in Higher Education in India: A Status Paper'. Written for the National Academy of Legal Sciences and Research as part of submission to the Supreme Court by the Centre for Disability Studies Centre for Disability Studies, NALSAR University of Law, Link available in file at P26. [C:/Users/HP/Downloads/Finding%20Sizes%20for%20All%20-20Report%20on%20the%20Status%20](https://C:/Users/HP/Downloads/Finding%20Sizes%20for%20All%20-20Report%20on%20the%20Status%20)

[of%20the%20Right%20to%20Accessibility%20in%20India%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/259192994_Transition_to_Adulthood_for_Youth_with_Disability_Issues_for_the_Disabled_Child_and_Family)

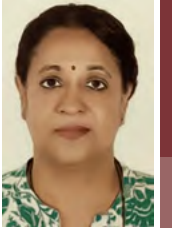
[5] Pandey, Sudha & Agarwal, Shalini, and Scholar, Research and Professor, Assistant. (2013). 'Transition to Adulthood for Youth with Disability: Issues for the Disabled Child and Family'. *Journal of Humanities and social Science*. 17. 41-45. 10.9790/0837-1734145; [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/259192994\\_Transition\\_to\\_Adulthood\\_for\\_Youth\\_with\\_Disability\\_Issues\\_for\\_the\\_Disabled\\_Child\\_and\\_Family](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/259192994_Transition_to_Adulthood_for_Youth_with_Disability_Issues_for_the_Disabled_Child_and_Family)

[6] Sudesh Mukhopadhyay, Keynote Speaker on December 15, 2022 at the Department of Special Education SNDT Women's University for the national seminar sponsored by National Commission for Women, on the theme, 'Rights of Differently Aabled Women'.

[7] Biwako Millennium Framework for Action Towards an Inclusive, Barrier-Free and Rights-Based Society for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific (E/ESCAP/APDDP/4/Rev.1 24 January 2003)

[http://www.forumsec.org.fj/resources/uploads/attachments/documents/Regional\\_Do\\_c\\_on\\_BMF.pdf](http://www.forumsec.org.fj/resources/uploads/attachments/documents/Regional_Do_c_on_BMF.pdf)

[8] Print copy and not accessible on digital platforms.



**Aley Alexander**  
aleya\_2@yahoo.co.in

**FILM  
REVIEW**

*Pax Lumina 6(5)/2024/83-84*

# The Importance of Resilience

## A Review of the Film **Brooke Ellison**

Brooke Ellison in 2000 as a student at Harvard with her mother, Jean Ellison, who roomed with her daughter there and helped her in her studies. *Credit: Evan Richman for The New York Times*



**T**he key takeaways are the importance of resilience, the power of unconditional love, and the need for family support, which enabled Brooke to bloom to her full potential. **This movie celebrates hope and family.**



**T**he movie, *Brooke Ellison* is a gripping tale of determination. It follows the true story of Brooke who was devastatingly crippled and became a quadriplegic at the age of 11. She spent her youthful years bravely navigating setbacks and achieving remarkable milestones.

The story is woven around the lives of Brooke and her family's untiring efforts to help, empower and equip her to face the challenges.

Brooke's life is fraught with innumerable challenges she faces daily. Her responses to these challenges are nothing short of extraordinary. She has many invaluable lessons to offer, not only to those who are differently-abled but also to the so-called non-challenged individuals who face difficulties and challenges.

The story is woven around the lives of Brooke, her parents and her siblings. Brooke can face the trials successfully owing to the incredible support from her family. This is an eye-opener in a world where family connections are often fractured.

The mother, who is with her daughter every step of the way, displays remarkable patience and courage in dealing with intense life moments. This serves as a lesson on how to face the curveballs which life throws at us.

Brooke's way of dealing with life's realities is commendable. For instance, despite her hope for a romantic relationship and subsequent disappointment, she moved on with the help of her mother. Her determination led her to Harvard University.

While there, she graduated with magna cum laude in cognitive neuroscience in 2000. Later, she got a master's degree in public policy from Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. Brooke became the first quadriplegic to graduate from Harvard.

This is a heart-warming film. This tale will resonate with anybody who has basked in the love and care of their families. The fact that it was directed by Christopher Reeve, who became quadriplegic after a horse-riding accident, makes it even more inspiring and meaningful.

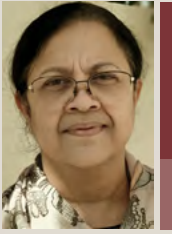
The key takeaways are the importance of resilience, the power of unconditional love, and the need for family support, which enabled Brooke to bloom to her full potential. This movie celebrates hope and family.

Brooke died on February 4, 2024 at the age of 45 in New York.

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*Dr Aley Alexander Neuropsychologist (retired)  
Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute for Medical  
Sciences & Technology, Thiruvananthapuram,  
Kerala.*





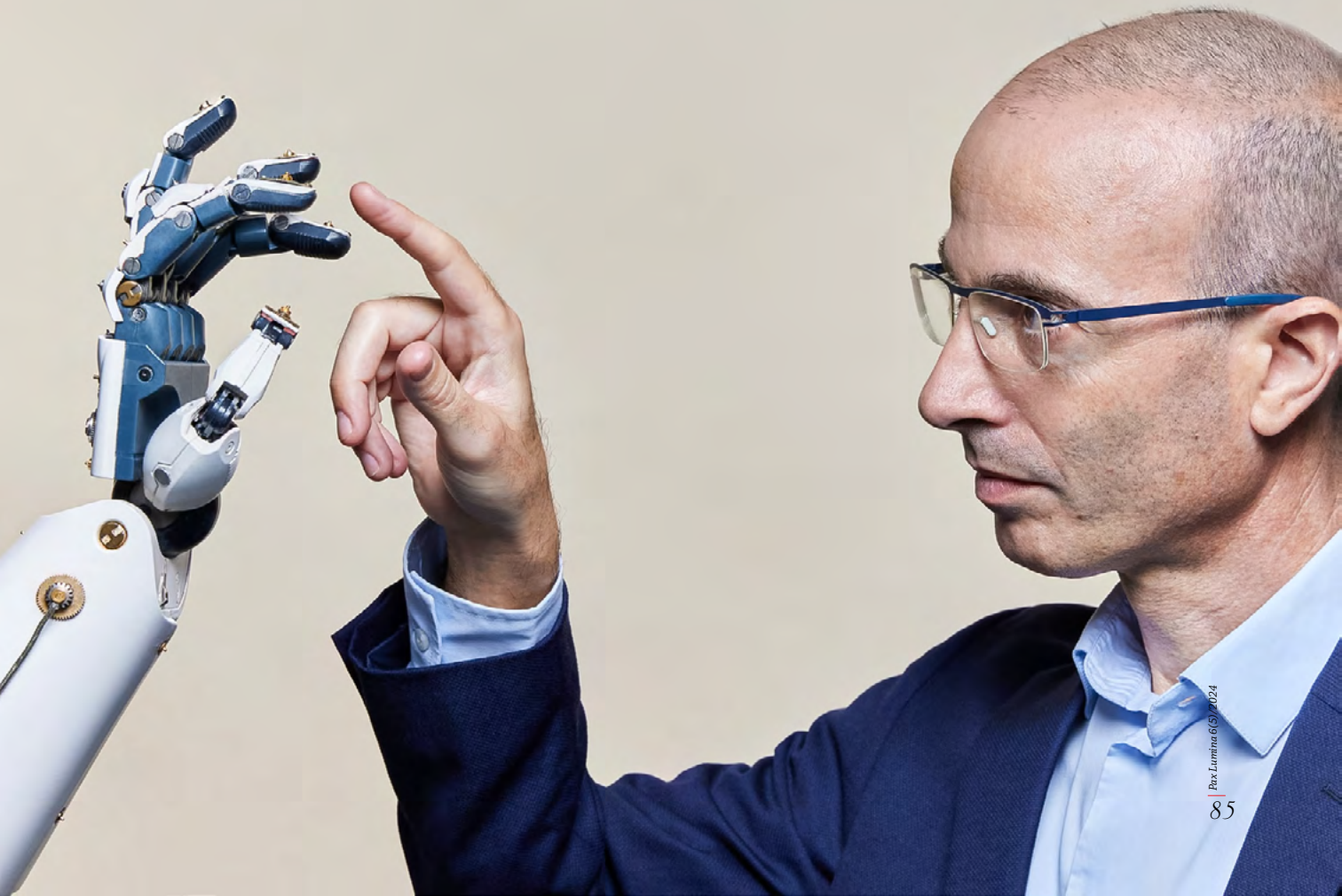
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**BOOK  
REVIEW**

*Pax Lumina 6(5)/2024/85-88*

# Nexus

A Brief History of  
Information Networks  
from the Stone Age to AI



**Z**illions of intricate information networks run through the length and breadth of human thoughts to anything that makes life in this universe. They organically evolve in creating stories or myths that become the building blocks of societies, and decide where power gets seated. Humankind is at a crucial juncture where algorithms of AI are all set to decide our future.

What could go wrong then?

In 'Homo Deus', his previous book, Israeli historian Yuval Noah Harari makes an oracular prediction – 'A small, breakaway republic of superhumans and techno-elites will eventually split off from the rest of humanity. Those who acquire the skills and proprietary algorithms to re-engineer brains, bodies and minds – the main products of the 21st century – will become gods; those who don't will be rendered economically useless and die off.'

In part 1 Harari discusses how the clergy and ruling class used stories and myths to establish their supremacy, a divinely sanctioned authority in bringing order to society. **Harari is known for his sceptical views of religions and their unquestionable infallibility.**

In 'Nexus', his latest book he takes us through the evolution of information networks to corroborate this prophecy. The problem statement in the prologue echoes his above-mentioned apocalyptic view of AI.

History is replete with self-destructive actions of humans, totalitarian regimes, and leaders of religion and delusional ideologies. Truth never reaches its recipients in its original form. It loses its form and substance as it travels. All the filters that prevent its free flow need not be manmade.

This also happens because information networks form themselves, and organically evolve to create stories far removed from the truth. This causes terror and misery to people. AI also can evolve haphazardly in this manner and is unlikely to privilege truth. He starts from this premise.

Harari joins an increasing number of researchers holding pessimistic views of AI with brilliant insights from the past that are entertaining, and revelatory. But we cannot be sure whether they are rooted in strong evidence and theoretical foundation, to be proclaimed as validated observations. The casualness in some of his deductions suits a fiction writer more than a researcher. This has been pointed out earlier as well.

He calls the ideologies of Nazi Germany, Stalinist Russia, and other totalitarian regimes delusional. They all manipulated data and corrupted the minds of people to stay in power. Every State wants to grab as much power as possible. Having all the information to oneself, better if in real-time, is the key to wielding unquestionable authority.

Readers familiar with the uncanny manipulations of the current deep state and the undercurrents of the Cold War have an issue with his cherry-picking of stories. He conveniently ignores the grey side of global political balancing by the so-called democratic States with unlimited power within the larger universe. With the advent of alternative platforms for networking such as Twitter and TikTok, we are exposed to a lot of information filtered out by the media today. The profit-motivated media houses have ceased to be the truth-bearers. Unfortunately, writers have also become infamously partisan while analysing global issues.

This naïve view of information, the underlying assumption he uses to examine the role of information networks in connecting societies and people, posits that more information bridges the gap between truth and reality. Hence, ideally, the free flow of information should not be prevented.

What information does is to create new realities by tying together disparate things, he says. However large information networks have problems too. They eventually assist the growth of large tribes, regimes, and religions and ascribe infallibility to the ideologies of such groups.

He holds on to his earlier rhetoric that history will repeat itself in the invisible realms of AI if uncontrolled power is vested in a few regardless of whether it is virtual or real. Towards this conclusion, he narrates several parallels from history.

In part 1 Harari discusses how the clergy and ruling class used stories and myths to establish

their supremacy, a divinely sanctioned authority in bringing order to society. Harari is known for his sceptical views of religions and their unquestionable infallibility.

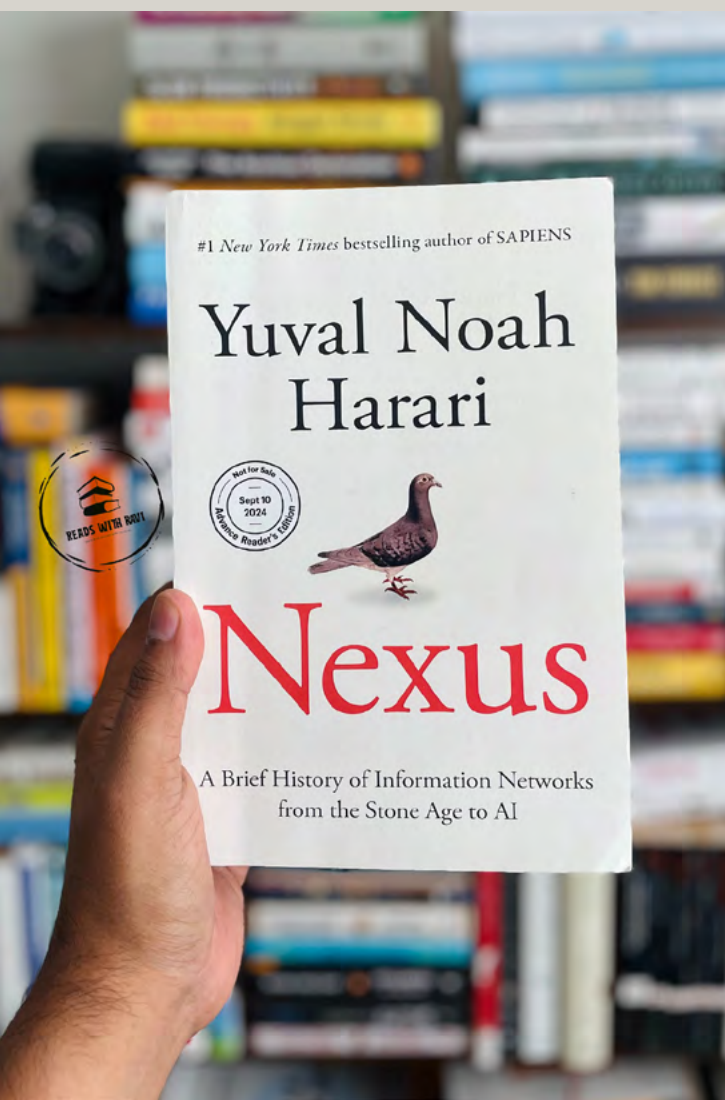
Stories can create non-existent entities, brand them as Gods, and equate challenging them to blasphemy. While we cannot agree more on the closed nature of religion, its socio-cultural relevance at an earlier point in history cannot be construed just as a mechanism for fostering order in society, in retrospect. The quest for the unknown had its evolutionary course too. He gives the example of Europe's witch-hunt in cementing his view.

Stories that are far removed from facts are compellingly credible. The story of Cher Ami, the heroic pigeon who supposedly saved hundreds of American soldiers, had many versions that no one knows what is the truth.

Ramayana, the Indian epic that was serialised on national TV had a profound impact on the masses in the late 1980s than any other statistical data on the economy or its progress. Harari is quite convinced that AI can create complex stories that go beyond simple biological dramas to include much larger socio-political issues or even algorithm-evolved myths in the future.

One key observation is that the absence of self-corrective systems in both religious and totalitarian regimes depends on stories of a fictive nature to attract followers. AI taking over the perilous job of propagating myths and falsehoods and unleashing a witch-hunt of dissidents is worrisome. At the same time, despite engaging the democratically approved process of weighing people's opinions, decisions have gone wrong, say, in Iraq's case.

Facebook played a crucial role in fanning the ethnic cleansing of the Rohingyas by the Buddhists in Burma. But surprisingly he condones FB, the corporate entity ignoring the repeated messages from aid workers while the hate campaign was spreading like wildfire.



Amusingly, he says, “Facebook’s algorithms were making active and fateful decisions by themselves.”

As we know, a timely human intervention was very much possible. He gives impunity to the experts who wrote the algorithm and their masters who wanted instant escalation in the stock prices, for the supposedly villainous pursuits of AI.

Like Guttenberg’s printing press, FB is just a tool, Harari argues. He likens algorithms to canonised Biblical scriptures that will assert themselves. He fears that although our choices matter, AI fed with a taught consciousness may travel this unchecked path in future.

How will AI replicate/imitate such complex transactions towards that end without being driven by human ulterior motives or errors? What is the probability of such a worst-case scenario emerging?

**H**e doesn’t suggest any alternative scenario, except saying that AI should be regulated. Greed is a close companion of AI. **Things like algorithmic trading mostly benefit those who are AI-empowered. Most often rich states and corporations with the wherewithal have an edge.**

He doesn’t suggest any alternative scenario, except saying that AI should be regulated. Greed is a close companion of AI. Things like algorithmic trading mostly benefit those who are AI-empowered. Most often rich States and corporations with the wherewithal have an edge.

The Silicon Curtain Harari is referring to in the conclusion is nothing but the invisible barrier between AI-empowered and unprivileged groups. A gaping hole in the discussion I see is the omission of AI’s disruptive impact on the job market which will destroy existing jobs in an unprecedented way.

We have little reason to deny that AI is more than capable of instigating hate and terror as he says. The wisdom of humans has not stopped them from inflicting self-destruction. This is why Harari thinks AI will most likely choose its path of annihilating humankind.

Perhaps, we fail to see or control the perpetrators of a grand scheme, who in Harari’s words are the AI overlords and not the humans who consider it a handy tool to achieve their goals. He reasons this by saying, “The regulation of AI will demand unprecedented levels of trust and self-discipline, for two reasons. First, it is easier to hide an illicit AI lab than an illicit nuclear reactor. Second, AIs have a lot more dual civilian-military usages than nuclear bombs.”

This posture enables the power-hungry to have all the information and use it for their purposes.

‘Nexus’ is a good read for its richness of information. In most parts, it is interdisciplinary and relatable. Yet it is short of cohesive arguments from a research methodology point of view. The major issue is with his premonitions in the prologue turning out to be the conclusion, giving a false sense of having done credible research.

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*Dr. Jazeela Sherif is an engineer turned CFO who writes frequently on gender and equality. She also has long years of academic experience.*





# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Pax Lumina 6(5)/2024/89



Dear Editor,

The issue on the World of Senior Citizens is an excellent issue with various perspectives from across the world. This will inspire many to develop respect and concern towards the older generation.

**R.J. Morris**  
California.

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Dear Editor,

Sachiko Takase's article sharing the experiences of aged people in Japan was highly inspirational. She has brought to light the dire need of providing support systems to older people.

**M. Arif,**  
Delhi.

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Dear Editor,

Writing a review on Ikigai in September 2024 Pax Lumina was inspiring and insightful as well. I am grateful to Pax Lumina team for this golden opportunity.

**Soorya S Kumar**  
Thiruvananthapuram

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Dear Editor,

I went through the magazine (September 2024) and would like to comment that this issue provided a holistic picture of the challenges faced by elderly people in the global context.

**Dr Tissy Mariam Thomas**  
University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram

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Dear Editor,

Congratulations Team Pax Lumina for the most relevant issue on senior citizens. The Canadian reflections on resilient aging by Ellen B. Ryan were amazing. Such inspirational models must be implemented everywhere.

**Fernando S.**  
Colombo

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Dear Fr Binoy,

Congratulations for the excellent issue on "The World of Senior Citizens.". The papers are very informative and useful.

Best wishes,

**Dr Roy Abraham Kallivayalil**  
Mar Sleeva Medicity, Palai, Kerala

---

Dear Editor,

Ah! The world of seniors!! Cannot have chosen another pertinent topic - for today at least!! I went through it, word by word!

Congratulations.

**Joel Urumbil**  
Patna

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Dear Editor,

The latest issue of Pax Lumina highlights the African views on caring for the elderly. Hearty congratulations to Barnet and Jacqueline for their insightful articles. The world will learn many things from that side of the globe.

**Christine**  
Netherlands

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**The Youth  
is the hope of  
our future.**

- Jose Rizal



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