



WOMEN AND YOUTH IN NATION BUILDING: CHALLENGES, CONSTRAINTS, AND EMERGING OPPORTUNITIES

Dipesh Roy

RESEARCH ARTICLE



Author Details:

Ph.D. Research Scholar,
Department of Political Science,
Raiganj University,
West Bengal, India

Corresponding Author:

Dipesh Roy

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.70096/tssr.260402041>

Abstract

Youth and women represent two of the most dynamic and influential demographic groups in any society, yet they continue to face persistent challenges that limit their full participation in nation-building. In the present scenario, rapid socio-economic transitions, technological advancements, and evolving political landscapes have created both opportunities and barriers for these groups. Despite increased awareness and policy initiatives aimed at empowerment, youth often encounter high unemployment, limited skill development, inadequate political representation, and socio-psychological pressures that hinder their constructive engagement in national development. Women, on the other hand, continue to struggle against gender-based discrimination, restricted access to education and economic resources, socio-cultural norms, and security issues that impede their active contribution to governance, economic growth, and community development. The intersection of these challenges becomes particularly significant in developing societies where structural inequalities persist. This article examines these multi-dimensional barriers and highlights the need for inclusive policies, capacity-building, gender-sensitive frameworks, and participatory platforms to harness the full potential of youth and women. Strengthening their roles is essential not only for sustainable development but also for building resilient, equitable, and progressive nations.

Keywords: *Barrier, Capacity building, Discrimination, Literacy, Participation, Policies, Political representation, Socio-economic, Transformation, Unemployment*

Introduction

Women in India play a crucial role in the social, economic, and political development of the country. Yet, despite progress, they continue to face numerous barriers that limit their full participation in nation-building. Youth are often described as the backbone and future of a nation. Their energy, creativity, and vision have the potential to shape social, economic, and political progress. However, in the present scenario, young people face numerous challenges that hinder their active and constructive participation in nation-building. Political participation is the foundation of democratic governance. It allows citizens to express their opinions and influence public decisions. In a democracy, people participate through voting, campaigning, joining political parties, or engaging in public debates (Verba, Scholzman, & Brady, 1995). The largest democracy in the world is India. Its democratic system depends on the active participation of adult citizens. Among them, youth and women represent a large and important section of the population. According to the United Nations (2023), youth constitute a significant proportion of the population in developing countries. Similarly, women account for almost half of India's population. Despite their numerical strength, youth and women often remain underrepresented in political processes. Their participation is influenced by social norms, economic conditions, and political structures. Increasing their participation is necessary for inclusive governance and democratic nation-building.

Concept of Political Participation

Political participation refers to the activities through which citizens influence government decisions. These activities include voting, attending political meetings, contacting officials, and participating in social movements (Huntington & Nelson, 1976). Political participation can be divided into several forms: Electoral participation – voting in elections and campaigning for candidates. Institutional participation – joining political parties or public institutions. Non-institutional participation – protests, demonstrations, and social movements. Digital participation – expressing political views through social media and online platforms. Active participation helps citizens hold governments accountable and strengthens democratic institutions.

Women's Political Participation in India

Women's participation is essential for gender equality and democratic development. Women leaders often focus on issues such

as education, healthcare, and social welfare. India has made progress in increasing women's representation in politics. The introduction of reservations for women in local governance has improved their participation. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act and the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act reserved one-third of seats for women in local bodies. As a result, millions of women have become members of Panchayati Raj institutions. This has increased women's role in local governance and decision-making. However, women remain underrepresented in state legislatures and the national parliament. Cultural norms, financial barriers, and political violence discourage many women from entering politics. Education and economic empowerment can increase women's political participation. Support from political parties and civil society organizations is also necessary.

Youth Participation in Indian Politics

Indian youth play an important role in political change. They often bring new ideas and energy into political systems. India has one of the largest youth populations among all countries in the world. Young citizens participate in politics through voting, activism, and public campaigns. Youth voting participation has increased in recent elections. Social media plays a crucial role in capturing the youth in politics. The Election Commission of India has introduced several initiatives to encourage young voters. These initiatives include voter awareness programs and easier voter registration. Youth also participate in political discussions through social media platforms. Digital technologies have provided new opportunities for political engagement. However, youth participation faces several challenges- lack of political education, limited opportunities in political parties, economic insecurity, and distrust in political institutions. Despite these challenges, youth movements have influenced important social and political debates in India

Factors Influencing Political Participation

- **Education:** Education increases political awareness and civic responsibility in all its citizens. Educated individuals are more likely to participate in political activities. Education helps women and youth understand their rights as well as crucial time correct decision at the right time.
- **Socio-economic status:** People with better economic resources have more opportunities to engage in politics. Poverty often limits political involvement.
- **Government policies:** Government programs and electoral reforms can encourage greater participation. Voter awareness campaigns and leadership training programs are important in this regard.
- **Social Norms:** Traditional gender roles sometimes discourage women from political engagement. Patriarchal attitudes continue to affect women's participation.
- **Media and Technology:** Media and digital platforms play a significant role in spreading political information. Social media has become an important tool for youth political engagement.

Challenge to Nation Building

Challenges Faced by Women in Nation Building, India's women encounter numerous challenges and obstacles in contributing to nation building, including:

1. **Patriarchal Society:** Deep-seated societal norms and biases restrict women's participation. Approximately 71% of married women in India obey the family decision-making related to their own healthcare. In the present society, basically in rural areas, most of the family's vital decision taken male any states of India. National Family Health Survey-5 (NFHS-5) data from 2019-2021. (Joint/Independent) States like Nagaland, Mizoram, and Kerala show very high participation rates, and Low decision Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir, and Karnataka.
2. **Limited Access to Education and Healthcare:** Insufficient access to essential services hinders women's empowerment. Economic Inequality: Women often lack economic opportunities, perpetuating dependence. Education, 2011 Census data showing male literacy at ~82% vs. female at ~65%, while newer 2021 estimates suggest a smaller gap with ~84.7% male and ~70.3% female literacy, showing significant progress. Higher Education: Interestingly, some data from around 2024 shows the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) in higher education for females (27.9%) slightly higher than for males (26.7%). In West Bengal, the 2011 Census, male literacy was around 82.67% and female literacy was 71.16%.
3. **Violence and Harassment:** Gender-based violence and intimidation silence women's voices. The Indian Penal Code (IPC) doesn't have one single "article" for women's violations but several sections addressing different offenses, notably Section 354 (outraging modesty), Section 376 (rape), Section 304B (dowry death), and Section 498A (cruelty by husband/relatives), with newer additions like 354A-D for sexual harassment. The Constitution of India does not have a single article that specifically addresses "women violence and harassment" as a standalone topic, Articles 14, 15(3), 21-19(1-g), etc. Domestic Violence Act 2005 and sexual harassment of Women at Workplace Act 2013(Rajasthan village near Jaipur). National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) for 2023 Cruelty by Husband and Relatives (Domestic Violence), West Bengal reported a high number of cases, nearly 19,700, making it one of the highest in India. Acid Attacks, West Bengal accounted for 57 of the total 207 acid attack cases in the country in 2023, representing over a quarter (27.5%) of Assault on Women with Intent to Outrage Modesty. The state registered over 20,400 cases. Kidnapping and Abduction, with 6,920 cases, and Dowry Deaths. The state recorded 350 dowry deaths. R.G. Kar Medical College and Hospital Case (August 2024), Law College Gang Rape (June 2025), Sandeshkhali Violence (Early 2024), etc.
4. **Underrepresentation:** Ambedkar mentioned five important principles to maintain one's existence in society, one of which is political representation. Women hold only 14.4% of Lok Sabha seats, despite constituting nearly 50% of India's

- population. 2004- General election -45 women's seats from a total of 543, 2009-58 from women's seats 543, 2014 general election 62 seats from 543, 2019-general election, 78 seats from 542, 2024 general election, 74 seats from the total seats 543.
5. **Empowerment:** India's male-female empowerment ratio shows significant gaps, especially in economic participation (low female Labour Force Participation Rate at ~30-37% vs. ~78% male). West Bengal, Worker Population Ratio (2022-23): Males (Rural: 54%, Urban: 55.6%) are significantly higher than females (Rural: 30%, Urban: 18.7%).
- Youth -The Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports officially defines youth as those aged 15-29 years. Around 27.2% to 27.3% of the population (2021 figures), approximately 371.4 million (2021 projection).
6. **Skills Gap and Inadequate Education:** The rapid advancement of technology demands new skillsets, but the education system in many places remains outdated. Limited access to quality education especially affects rural youth. India faces a significant youth skill gap, with reports showing that less than half of graduates are employable, and a vast majority (around 80%) of youth lack formal vocational/technical skills, despite government initiatives. Key issues include low employability rates (around 54.8% in 2025).

Challenges faced by youth in nation building

- **Unemployment and Underemployment:** A major challenge faced by today's youth is the lack of sufficient job opportunities. Recent PLFS (Periodic labour force survey) by the National statistical office) Data (2023-24): 10.2% for youth (15-29 years). August 2025 (Macro Indicators): 14.6% for youth (15-29 years). ILO Report 2024: Youth (under 35) made up nearly 83% of India's unemployed in 2022, a significant rise for educated youth.
- **Growing Mental Health Issues:** How prevalent are mental health issues among youth in India? Over 15% of Indian youth face mental health challenges, with conditions like depression and anxiety on the rise. Suicide is also a leading cause of death among individuals aged 15 to 29. The NCERT Survey (2022) highlighted that 11% of students reported anxiety, 14% experienced extreme emotions, and 43% had mood swings.
- **Corruption and Bureaucracy:** Corruption acts as a major barrier to youth-led nation-building by diverting funds from essential services (education, health, jobs), fostering nepotism. Corruption in India acts as a huge barrier to nation-building, especially for youth, by creating unfair systems (like exam leaks, bribe demands for jobs/services) that crush merit, foster cynicism (63% fear reporting corruption).
- **Social and Political Exclusion:** Youth have limited representation in the decision-making, which means they have less representation. 18th Lok Sabha, 2024), youth representation in India's Parliament is low, with about 10.7% to 11% of MPs being 40 years old or younger. 2021 West Bengal Assembly elections, approximately 14% of the Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) were in the 25-40 age group. Law participation features look almost all elections of India, either parliament election or the Vidhan Sabha election.
- **Substance Abuse and Negative Peer Influence:** Many young people fall prey to alcohol, drugs, and other addictions due to stress, peer pressure, or unemployment. According to NCRB 2022 data, over 13,000 student suicides were reported in India, which amounts to nearly one every hour. West Bengal accounted for roughly 2% of these cases. Additionally, 7% of school students in the state use tobacco, 3% consume alcohol, and 2% have used illegal drugs. Over 12% reported suicidal thoughts, and more than 3% had attempted suicide. The data is stark, but the warning is clear. Devdeep Roy Chowdhury, a senior clinical psychologist in Kolkata, says, "Without early intervention, we risk losing more lives to problems that are easily preventable." CT takes a deeper look into this concerning issue (Times, 3 July 2025). Highlights for the 2023 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: An estimated 28.4% of adolescents aged 12 to 17 with a past year MDE used illicit drugs in the past year, compared with 11.6% of those without a past year MDE.

Addressing the Challenges or Opportunities

- **Education and Skills Development:** Promote equal access to education for girls and rural youth. Focus on skill-based training (digital, vocational, leadership). Encourage lifelong learning and entrepreneurship programs. Use online platforms to learn globally competitive skills.
- **Empowerment and Leadership Opportunities:** Youth and women should actively participate in student unions, local governance, and community organizations. Governments and NGOs should provide leadership workshops, mentorship programs, and internships.
- **Access to Technology and Innovation:** Provide affordable internet and devices for rural and marginalized groups. Encourage girls in STEM with scholarships, coding boot camps, and competitions. Support innovation hubs, incubators, and hackathons.
- **Economic Opportunities:** Promote women's entrepreneurship and employment. Promote entrepreneurship with access to credit, microfinance, and startup funds. Train youth and women in market-relevant skills (AI, IT, healthcare, sustainable agriculture).
- **Legal Reforms:** Strengthen laws against gender-based violence and ensure enforcement. Strong enforcement of laws on women's rights and youth protection, Safe public transport, self-defense training, and helplines. Community policing and awareness programs.
- **Increased representation:** Encourage more women and young people to compete for political roles.

Conclusion

Youth and women are central pillars in the process of nation-building, yet they continue to face significant social, economic, and structural challenges. Overcoming these barriers requires equal opportunities, access to education, supportive policies, and an environment that empowers them to participate fully in national development. Ultimately, removing these challenges is not only a matter of justice – it is essential for building a resilient, innovative, and prosperous society for all.

Acknowledgment: No

Author's Contribution: *Dipesh Roy*: Data Collection, Literature Review, Methodology, Analysis, Drafting, Referencing

Funding: No

Declaration: The author has given consent for the publication.

Competing Interest: No

References

1. Ittianath, A. (2021). Essay on Role of Youth in Nation Building: Key Contributions and Examples Reviewed.
2. Bhagwat. R. (2023), The role of youth in nation building, Suruchi Prakashan, Delhi.
3. Pande, M. (2018). National movement and empowerment of women nation-building in the United Provinces. Ankit Publication House.
4. Pande, M. (2018). Women, Education and Politics in the United Provinces: An Overview, 1916–1942, Rawat Publication.
5. Sagar, R. (2008). Role of women in nation building, Publication in Delhi.
6. Singh, N. (2012). Women rule in nation-building, Cyber Tech Publications.
7. Subrahmanya, S., Chakravorty, M., & Viswanath, N.S. (2005). Women in Nation Building: Perspectives, Issues, and Implications, Southern Economist Publisher, University of Michigan.
8. Verba, S., Schlozman, K. L., & Brady, H. E. (1995). Voice and equality: Civic voluntarism in American politics. Harvard University Press.
9. Dahl, R. A. (1989). Democracy and its critics. Yale University Press.
10. United Nations. (2023). World Youth Report. United Nations Publications.
11. Election Commission of India. (2022). Voter turnout statistics. Government of India.
12. <https://haryanarajbhavan.gov.in/Let>.
13. <https://india.un.org>.
14. <https://www.researchgate>

Publisher's Note

The Social Science Review A Multidisciplinary Journal remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published data, map and institutional affiliations.

©The Author(s) 2026. Open Access.

This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>