

NURTURING YOUTH LEADERSHIP

In today's dynamic and complex world, the role of youth in nation-building is more critical than ever. As we navigate an era defined by rapid technological advances, climate change, economic transitions, and global uncertainties, one truth remains constant - the future belongs to the youth. To secure that future, youth leadership development must become a national priority and a strategic investment.

Youth are not merely the leaders of tomorrow; they are the change-makers of today. Across the world, young people are stepping up - leading climate movements, innovating in technology, contributing to social causes, and actively participating in governance. However, for this potential to be fully realized, leadership must be nurtured through deliberate and inclusive policies, programs, and mentorship.

Leadership is more than just holding a title or position. It involves vision, responsibility, empathy, and the courage to take action. Young leaders often bring fresh perspectives, a spirit of innovation, and a sense of urgency to challenges that require new solutions. Whether it's addressing unemployment, promoting sustainability, or tackling mental health issues, youth leaders are uniquely positioned to offer insight from the front lines.

In a country like India, where over 65% of the population is under 35, youth leadership is not just important - it's indispensable. But leadership does not emerge in a vacuum. It requires opportunities, encouragement, and a supportive ecosystem that fosters confidence and capacity-building.

One of the key arenas for youth leadership development is the education system. While academic excellence is important, leadership skills such as critical thinking, communication, problem-solving, emotional intelligence, and ethical decision-making must be integrated into the learning process. Co-curricular activities like student councils, debates, model parliaments, NSS, NCC, and sports play a vital role in cultivating such skills. Schools and colleges must actively create spaces where students can take initiative, voice opinions, and lead with purpose.

The New National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 rightly emphasizes holistic development and experiential learning. Implementing these reforms with sincerity can act as a catalyst for youth leadership, especially when combined with mentorship from educators and professionals.

Youth leadership does not begin in college or workplaces - it begins at home and in communities. Families must encourage curiosity, independent thinking, and the courage to question and act. Communities, including religious, social, and civic groups, must identify and empower young people to take on leadership roles in local development, governance, and cultural preservation.

When communities create platforms for youth participation, such as youth clubs, innovation labs, and local governance bodies, they help instill a sense of responsibility and belonging that is fundamental to strong leadership.

Policy-makers also have a central role to play. Youth policies must go beyond token representation. Programs like Skill India, Start-up India, National Youth Parliament, and various fellowship schemes are commendable, but more focus must be placed on leadership training, civic education, and public policy exposure for youth from diverse backgrounds - particularly those from rural and marginalized communities. States should also institutionalize leadership training at school and college levels and partner with NGOs and international organizations to provide real-world experiences through volunteering, internships, and global exchange programs.

Cultural Platforms Lighting the Path of Harmony in Jammu & Kashmir

■ ABDUL QUDDIR KUNDRIA

In an age where divisive forces often overshadow the values of unity and compassion, the role of social and literary organizations in Jammu & Kashmir stands out like a ray of hope. These institutions, along with theatre platforms and cultural forums, have been working tirelessly to spread the fragrance of peace, love, literature, and brotherhood. Through their gatherings, performances, and initiatives, they are not only preserving culture but also creating bridges of understanding between communities.

Recently, Dogri Sanstha Jammu, in collaboration with Punjabi Sabha Jammu, organized a unique joint literary meet at the Dogri Sanstha premises. The program was conducted in both Dogri and Punjabi languages, celebrating the cultural richness of the region. Poets, poetesses, and writers presented poems, ghazals, and songs infused with patriotism. Every performance seemed to come straight from the heart, as if each poet was turning their feelings into a bouquet of words, whose fragrance filled the hall.

The audience responded warmly, showering heartfelt congratulations on the President of Dogri Sanstha Jammu, Padma Shri awardee Prof. Lalit Magotra, and his team, as well as Punjabi Sabha Jammu's President, Dr. Baljit Singh Rana, and their members. The gathering was hailed as an event deserving limitless praise.

On another front, Adbi Kunj Jammu & Kashmir recently held a successful literary session that once again reminded everyone why it has become a beacon of cultural and emotional connection. Known for infusing every gathering with the spirit of harmony, Adbi Kunj's events blend literary excellence with messages of love, unity, and national brotherhood.

This session also carried a moment of solemn remembrance. Under the joint banner of Adbi Kunj and Anjuman-e-Farogh-e-Urdu, a two-minute silence was observed for departed souls, including the sister-in-law of Ameen Banhali Sahib, victims of a tragic landslide in District Reasi (Thuro), JKAS officer and SDM Rannagar, Mr. Rajinder Singh Rana, and his four-year-old son, as well as the young daughter of SSP Udhampur, Mr. Amod Kumar Nagpuri. Their memories were honored not only in Adbi Kunj but also in Dogri Sanstha Jammu and Punjabi Sabha Jammu gatherings.

Adbi Kunj Jammu & Kashmir, Dogri Sanstha Jammu, Punjabi Lok Sabha

Jammu, Gujjar Desh Trust Jammu, Anjuman-e-Farogh-e-Urdu Jammu & Kashmir, and Ek Dogra Manch Jammu are all organizations deeply committed to the cause of literature and humanity. They are more than just meeting places for writers; they are platforms where humanity itself takes center stage. Their work is rooted in the belief that literature and art can break barriers, heal divisions, and inspire social progress.

What makes these institutions particularly remarkable is their openness. Anyone with a love for literature is welcomed with warmth and respect, regardless of background. This spirit of inclusivity is, in many ways, the true hallmark of genuine literary organizations.

One of Adbi Kunj's most memorable recent gatherings was dedicated to the late Sham Talib Sahib, a celebrated writer and poet who served the organization for nearly fifty years. His leadership transformed the institution, making it a strong pillar of literature in the region. Under his guidance, the organization reached new heights, hosting countless events that enriched the cultural life of Jammu & Kashmir.

Many respected personalities have contributed to this journey, such as Arsh Om Dalmotra, Piyasa Anjuman, Sarbar Chouhan Habib, Santosh Nandan, Sathhi K.R. Salgotra, Mohammad Baqar, Shashi Kumar Verma, and others who, through sincerity and vision, laid strong foundations for the organization's future. Their combined efforts have turned it into a vibrant, purposeful body and a treasure of literature and brotherhood.

Today, the institution's leadership includes Chairman Piyasa Anjuman, Vice Chairman Sarbar Chouhan Habib, President Arsh Om Dalmotra, Vice President Santosh Shah Nandan, General Secretary Sardar Manjit Singh Kamra, Sathhi K.R. Salgotra, and Mohammad Baqar from Ladakh UT, along with members like Rajan Singh, Jitendra Jolly, and Shashi Kumar Verma. Backed by a team of sixty dedicated members, they are promoting literary activities with honesty and dedication while contributing towards national prosperity, social awareness, and guiding the youth.

In a recent event, the institution honored social and literary personality Abdul Quddir Kundria as session president, a decision widely appreciated as an example of unity and brotherhood. For more than 35 years, Kundria has been associated with numerous literary and social organizations including Adbi Kunj Jammu & Kashmir, Anjuman-e-

Farogh-e-Urdu Jammu & Kashmir, Dogri Sanstha Jammu, Punjabi Sabha Jammu, Gujjar Desh Trust, KL Saigal Hall Writers' Club, Dogra Manch Jammu, Nawi Dogri Sanstha Jammu, Bhaveshkrma Sabha Jammu, All J&K Backward Classes and All India Backward Classes Federation, and All Reserved Categories OBC/SC/ST Federations.

Theatre platforms in Jammu & Kashmir have also played a vital role in promoting social messages and human values. Groups like the J&K Cultural Academy, Natrang Theatre Group, Kala Sangam Jammu, Nat Manch Jammu, Bhraj Kala Manch Jammu, Rang Yug Manch, Dogra Manch Jammu, and Mandali Mitraan Di, along with many storytellers, have presented plays that resonate with audiences. Their performances blend entertainment with moral and social themes, ensuring theatre remains a meaningful cultural force.

Even in district headquarters, tehsils, and villages, these platforms are thriving. In Reasi district, villages like Kundra, Bhabbur, Dera Baba, Kanjali, Tanda, Mansu, and Chumbian have hosted performances where artists sing ballads, perform folk songs, and display their art with passion.

Reasi has produced many respected poets and writers who have carried the district's name to all corners of India, including Gopal Krishan Komal, Mohammad Rashid Rai, Raj Kumar Rahi, Tariq Butt, Babu Bhatti, Bishan Das Gehria, and Abdul Quddir Kundria himself. Yet, many other talented poets from Reasi remain unrecognized by the administration.

The same can be said for Kathua, Udhampur, and Samba districts, where poets and theatre artists are tirelessly working to promote brotherhood, unity, and humanity. Numerous institutions here also await recognition and support from the authorities.

Attending literary gatherings, plays, and storytelling events brings a sense of spiritual peace. These occasions allow participants to immerse themselves in the world of literature and reflect on the deeper truths of humanity. When gatherings include readings from holy scriptures such as the Gita, Quran, Guru Granth Sahib, and Bible, they naturally foster peace, love, tolerance, and brotherhood.

However, it is also a fact that most of these organizations and artists work without significant financial backing from the government, often funding their activities from their own pockets. The lack of even ten percent of the

needed financial support limits their ability to reach wider audiences or take their art to international stages. For the sake of preserving culture and promoting national unity, government support for these initiatives is essential.

These organizations are living examples of India's cultural pluralism. They bring together people from different religions, languages, and traditions to share the common ground of literature and humanity. They provide intellectual nourishment for writers and instill social awareness among audiences. For the youth especially, such gatherings can be transformative, guiding them away from destructive habits and towards constructive engagement with art and culture.

One of the most commendable developments in recent years has been the collaboration between these organizations and district administrations, including the Jammu & Kashmir Police, to address the drug menace. By organizing special programs, plays, and awareness campaigns, they are guiding young people away from addiction and towards healthier, more meaningful lives. This partnership deserves the highest praise and offers a model that other regions could follow.

When literary and theatrical institutions work hand in hand with civil society and government agencies, they can effectively tackle challenges like drug abuse, moral decline, and social unrest. By engaging the youth in constructive cultural activities, they help lay the foundation for a more humane and civilized society.

In today's turbulent times, supporting these organizations is more than a gesture, it is an investment in the moral and cultural strength of the nation. Participation in their events is not just an act of appreciation for literature or theatre, it is an expression of love for humanity and loyalty to the nation.

Our collective focus should be on nation-building. In areas where schools and colleges are still underdeveloped, we must work together to improve infrastructure and opportunities. With unity and brotherhood, we can strengthen peace, combat drug addiction, promote literature and culture, and contribute to a pure, healthy, and prosperous society. This is not merely a cultural duty, it is a moral imperative, and it is the true pride and glory of our nation.

(The writer is an eminent Dogri Poet/Writer of Jammu and Kashmir)

Development or Destruction? A Wake-Up Call to Humanity

■ AMEET KUMAR BALI

In the name of development, humanity is rushing blindly into disaster. Tragedies like the Kedarnath flash floods of 2013 and the recent catastrophe in Uttarakhand (2025) are not mere natural events, they are man-made warnings. We have turned our backs on ecological balance, replacing sacred forests with concrete, rivers with dams, and entire hillsides with highways and hydropower projects. This is not progress; it is plunder. As Dr. Vandana Shiva, a globally respected environmental thinker, points out:

"What we call development is actually a process of displacement, dispossession, and destruction of life itself."

But this destruction isn't limited to nature. There is a silent and dangerous race happening across the globe - the race for nuclear power. With over 13,000 nuclear weapons stockpiled

today, the world is more vulnerable than ever before. Superpowers are rearming, not disarming. Treaties are being ignored, and the risk of a global catastrophe looms large.

Albert Einstein had warned us decades ago:

"I know not with what weapons World War III will be fought, but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones."

Yet, while the planet stands at the edge of ecological and nuclear collapse, global dialogue has shifted from sustainability to polarisation, from cooperation to conflict. Debates today are dominated by religious divides, caste politics, race wars, and regional hatred. The real issues - climate crisis, nuclear disarmament, forced migration, and human rights - are barely mentioned.

Where is the United Nations?

This brings us to a painful truth: The role of the United Nations, once the

moral compass of global governance, is now visibly diminished. No strong action is being taken to enforce climate agreements. There is silence on the displacement of indigenous people due to mega-projects and wars.

Nuclear disarmament, once a core UN objective, is now missing from the agenda. Human rights violations in war-torn or environmentally devastated regions are ignored or politicised. Noam Chomsky, one of the most influential intellectuals of our time, puts it bluntly: "We're approaching the most dangerous point in human history... the prospect of the destruction of organized human life on Earth."

Meanwhile, the Amazon burns, the glaciers melt, the seas rise, and the poor are displaced - with little more than symbolic concern from global institutions. At a time when bold and united leadership is needed, we are facing institutional silence and public apathy.

As Greta Thunberg said at the UN: "Our house is on fire. I want you to panic. I want you to act."

What Needs to Change?

- 1. Global Unity for Survival**
We must rebuild the authority and accountability of the United Nations and its affiliated bodies. Environmental protection, nuclear disarmament, and human rights must return to the core of global dialogue - not just as side topics but as central goals.
- 2. Responsible Leadership**
National leaders must rise above vote-bank politics and focus on long-term planetary survival. Development should be balanced with nature, not built on its grave. Mahatma Gandhi reminded us: "Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need, but not every man's greed."
- 3. Human Rights & Displacement**

Focus

Every development project and conflict zone must be seen through a human rights lens. The voices of the displaced-tribals, refugees, farmers - must be amplified. International bodies must monitor and act on environmental injustice.

4. Citizen Awakening

The power lies with people. Citizens must raise their voice, demand change, and hold governments and corporations accountable. We must transform from passive consumers to active guardians of the planet.

5. Education for Ecological Ethics

Reform our education systems to build eco-consciousness, peace values, and responsible citizenship. Teach children not just how to make money, but how to respect life.

6. Media Reorientation

Media houses must act responsibly - prioritizing climate, peace, and dis-

placement coverage over divisive, sensationalist content. The press should become a force for planetary change, not a tool for distraction.

Conclusion:

In our chase for material progress, we are creating a future full of floods, fires, fallout, and fear. We need to act now - not as Indians, Americans, Chinese, or Europeans - but as humans. Not for votes or profits, but for generations to come.

If the United Nations remains silent, and if citizens remain passive, then the world will not end with a bang, but with a long, slow collapse of ecosystems, communities, and hope.

Let us rise before the rivers rise.

Let us disarm before nature strikes back.

Let us rebuild - not just economies, but our humanity.

Because if we don't, the question won't be who wins - but who survives.

Shaping a Better Tomorrow: Youth, SDGs, and Vivekananda's Path

■ PROF. (DR) JAIPAL SINGH

Swami Vivekananda, India's greatest spiritual leader and social reformer, deeply believed in the power and potential of youth. His teachings, spiritual truth, and love for the motherland, remain immensely relevant today especially in the context of 2025 International Youth Day (IYD) theme: "Local Youth Actions for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Beyond."

The set seventeen Sustainable Development Goals are a global call to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure peace and prosperity for all. These goals ranging from no poverty, good health and well-being, quality education, clean water and sanitation, gender equality, climate action, reduced inequalities to partnership for goaletc., require not just government policies but active participation from citizens, particularly the youth. Swami Vivekananda's life was a testament to local action with global impact. His vision aligns seamlessly with the SDGs, especially in areas like education, poverty alleviation, sustainable living, and social justice.

Swami Vivekananda once famously said, "Give me 100 energetic young men and I shall transform India." This was not just a motivational quote - it was his deep conviction. He believed that youth are not only the future but also the present strength of a nation. According to him, when the young become fearless, disciplined, and rooted in moral values, they can shape a new and better world. This belief echoes strongly in the SDG framework, where youth led initiatives at the local level can bring about global change. Whether it is leading clean-up drives in villages, starting education centres for underprivileged children, or raising awareness about mental health, climate change, eradication of other irrelevant, non-social ill activities which are urgently needed to be taken care of. These grassroots actions are the very spirit of both the SDGs and Swami Vivekananda's teachings.

Swami Vivekananda emphasized man-making education means that education which build characters,



strengthens will and serves society. In his words, "Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man." Today, SDG 4 focuses on inclusive and

equitable quality education. But quality does not merely mean academics, it involves nurturing values like empathy, discipline and resilience.

Vivekananda travelled across India and saw deep inequalities in education. He urged for an education system that is accessible, practical and rooted in the nation's spiritual and cultural ethos. Local youth, inspired by this vision, can contribute to SDG 4 by volunteering in rural education, creating low-cost digital content or mentoring children from marginalized communities.

One of the core ideas Swami Vivekananda learned from his Guru, Sri Ramakrishna, was "Jiva is Shiva" - every living being is divine. He taught that service to the poor, the weak, and the needy is the highest form of worship. This message is deeply connected to SDGs that focus on eradicating poverty (SDG 1), good health and well-being (SDG 3), and reducing inequalities (SDG 10).

He himself lived this principle by founding the Ramakrishna Mission in 1897, an organization devoted to humanitarian work. Today, youth can follow this path by leading community service initiatives - whether it's distributing food, organizing blood donation camps or supporting local healthcare programs. These small actions, when multiplied, create large-scale impact.

Swami Vivekananda believed in the unity of all existence. He said, "We are not antagonistic to nature, but a part of it." This reverence for nature is the foundation of SDG 13 (Climate Action) and SDG 15 (Life on Land). At a time when the world faces unprecedented environmental challenges, youth inspired by Vivekananda's vision can lead sustainable practices at the community level like curbing deforestation, promoting plantation drive, organic farming, reducing plastic use or conserving water bodies, promoting eco-friendly transportation like cycling, carpooling and supporting the use of renewable energy sources such as solar or wind by conducting awareness campaigns, participating in clean-up drives and adopting minimalistic lifestyles. By embracing responsibility and compassion, the youth can be power-

ful agents in ensuring the protection and security of the environment.

Further, Swami Vivekananda's universal message of religious tolerance and brotherhood - expressed so powerfully at the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago in 1893 - aligns with SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). He taught us that despite diversity, humanity is one. This is especially vital in a world torn by divisions, where youth must become ambassadors of peace and social harmony.

While the SDGs lay out clear objectives, Swami Vivekananda encourages youth to go beyond measurable outcomes and focus on inner transformation. His famous call "Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached" is not just about physical action, but about cultivating mental discipline, courage, and spiritual insight.

In his short life of 39 years, Swami Vivekananda left behind a timeless roadmap for purposeful living. He urged young people to be strong in body, mind and soul to believe in themselves and to take responsibility not just for personal success but for societal progress.

In Gist, on this International Youth Day 2025, let us all be together and start with the well settled thought in mind that real change begins locally with each young person taking a step toward justice, equality and sustainability in their own community. Whether it's cleaning a street, starting a campaign, educating a child or planting a tree - it all counts.

We must remember that 'We are what our thoughts have made us.' So, let us think positively, dream with hope, act locally, and aspire globally to lead both the youth and the world towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Let us pledge to carry forward Swami Vivekananda's message not just through words, but through meaningful action. Together, we can build a future rooted in strength, unity, and shared responsibility for our planet and its people.

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