

The world in our hands

YOUTH POWER The power of youth is invigorating, capable of propelling a revolution and transforming a traditional society. As a new year begins, **V Pradeep Kumar** lists several causes and issues that the young can lend their weight to, apart from academics

With the dominance of Europe and America ending, the face of the world is changing rapidly in the 21st century. We are heading towards a tri-polar world, where large emerging nations such as India and China can play a decisive role in shaping the future world. In this regard, can our youth be catalysts of change, taking India to the next stage of development?

Indeed, the power of youth is invigorating, capable of propelling a revolution, transforming even a traditional society. In 2009, Wael Ghonim was a young Google executive I had known, in the business circle of Dubai. Now, as per *Time* magazine, Wael Ghonim is one of the top 100 influencing leaders of 2011. Rising like a phoenix, Wael led the recent Egyptian revolution demonstrating the indomitable combination of youth and social media. It was Wael's Facebook page that drew the country's youth to the centre-stage of the Egyptian revolution ushering in a new era of hope.

In India too, youth have demonstrated an innate ability to be catalysts of change in the past and in the current campaign against corruption. Two features about youth are striking: a tendency to question the 'status-quo', and high energy levels which are the most crucial factors to drive 'change'.

In a recent survey, 'Youth in the day and age of Social Media', conducted by India Biz News and Research Services, anti-corruption (endorsed by 32% of the respondents) and protection of the girl child and violence against women (by 35%), were major issues. The respondents felt that through the social media, they influence consumer choice (28%), human rights and social change (27%), politics and policy making (24%) and corporate governance (21%).

Global and national issues

The following major issues, need the participation of the youth:

Environment: The temperature of the earth's atmosphere and ocean levels is increasing, endangering the very survival of humankind in many regions. Al Gore, Noble Prize winner and former US Vice President, says in his award winning book, *The Inconvenient Truth*, that "The world atlas may undergo significant change in the next century with developments such as the submerging of the Maldives, Amsterdam, Miami and parts of Manhattan, NY. Al Gore also foresees parts of Bangladesh and Kolkata facing the threat of people being uprooted.

Despite the threats, we continue to abuse our environment by felling trees, over-exploiting ground water, encroaching lakes, leaving sewage untreated and carrying on with unregulated mining. Youth can stall further aggravation of the environmental issues by propagating awareness and waking up a passive administration.

Social issues: Economic development doesn't necessarily lead to a society of a high order. Indian society is still plagued by evils such as the caste system. In many parts of India, continuing cases of 'honour killing' are inhuman, illegal and shameful. We are plagued with many such social evils.

The quality of living has gone down, requiring our urgent action. The inability to balance work and life has led to increased cases of divorce, signifying that urban living is fraught with tremendous pressure.

Abandoning parents or despatching them to old age homes, are new social issues. Considering that it's neither in our culture nor humane to abandon parents, a law is enacted. It's compulsory to give a comfortable and dignified life for our parents and senior citizens.

Corruption: The recent movement against corruption was admirable demonstrating the power of the youth to rise for a cause of national importance. Besides, it also effectively silenced the sceptics of youth power and of social media. Though the fight against corruption has only begun, it has instilled a sense of fear in all those who have brushed the corridors of power with corruption, and has provided hope to citizens.

Gender issues: Gender inequality and atrocities on women are still an unfortunate reality in India. Physical abuse, sexual exploitation and discrimination in employment are common gender issues.

Health: As science and technology has helped us fight many dreadful diseases such as cancer, there are others to fight like Alzheimer's for which there is no hope yet. An increase in income, has led to a spurt in life style diseases. Diabetes, heart diseases, child obesity etc. have become common. In a country with 37% people living below the poverty line (BPL), it's sad to see people dying due to overeating and a poor life style. Further, air and sound pollution have reached alarming levels in urban India triggering allergic and respiratory disorders.

However, it's quite gratifying to see students participate in walkathons, rallies, street plays etc. to build social awareness.

Rural India: Literacy in India has been increasing, yet villages even on the outskirts of cities, lack good schools. Deeper into rural India, we find how deceiving average literacy can be and what they really conceal. NGOs and businesses have adopted villages and schools to address many rural issues. In rural India, there's a lot to

be done on education, sanitation, primary health, drinking water, power and roads. The above isn't an exhaustive list. We have other issues to tackle like water management, poor sanitation and hygiene standards, everywhere. Experts say India is sitting on a tobacco epidemic, which may cause horrendous social and health problems. Youth should be conscious of high toxic residues in soft drinks, fruit juices and other beverages, and consume moderately.

Voting
India's transformation will be quick and radical, if 100% youth vote in elections. You can do a lot by doing simple things like using less fuel, planting trees in the neighbourhood, avoiding wastage of power, water and discouraging plastic.

The youth should build awareness of these issues by joining social groups and contribute to make society, a better place to live.

Unleash the power of youngistan
Resolving social issues is of a long-term nature. Yet it's important to raise your voice against evils in the society.
Identify issues to work like the environment, corruption, health, rural education etc. Join groups who are already working for the cause in the identified area.
Allocate your time and other resources, to work for the cause.
Think out-of-the-box, generating fresh ideas. Work for a while and get your friends, relatives to join.
Talk to your institution or the organisation you work with. Do remember, seeking help for a cause is a matter of pride. By asking for help, you are tapping resources and becoming a catalyst of change. Importantly, you are developing your personality.
Check the progress made after a year. Decide the next course of action.

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Ensure you and your friends compulsorily vote.

Balance education, career and social responsibility

Prioritise

Get conscious of social issues and your responsibility

Devote a day, every month/year to begin with, in order to do socially relevant work.

The transformation of Indian society can truly happen by harnessing the power of the youth, in the right direction. A hundred years ago, Swami Vivekananda had said, "We are responsible for what we are, and whatever we wish ourselves to be, we have the power to make ourselves". Former President of India, Dr APJ Kalam echoed the same when he said, "The great challenge of transforming India can be achieved through youth which has got the power of ideas, ambition and ability".

N R Narayana Murthy, Chairman Emeritus of Infosys Technologies, praising the 'power of youth', recently said, "I travel around 50-60 countries, every year. Our youngsters are as smart as the young generation in developed countries".

A new year brings new hopes. Go ahead, unleash the power of the youth and shape the future of our society, enabling India to play a decisive role in the emerging new world. (The writer is a management and career consultant.)

