# Nurturing Inclusivity and Social Cohesion: Empowering Educated Youth for Leadership in India's Diverse Landscape

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**Abstract**

When discussing diversity, the concept of inclusion is inherently intertwined. Nevertheless, when differences are neither comprehended nor embraced, and diversity is met with resistance, it leads to turmoil, societal discord, and animosity among individuals. India, often described as a place of "unity in diversity" and simultaneously home to the largest population of young individuals, must reflect on the aforementioned aspect.

The responsibility for shaping a healthy, unified, and inclusive society in the future primarily rests on the shoulders of the youth, particularly the educated youth who constitute the intellectual elite. Educators and policymakers must actively impart a sense of collective social responsibility to prepare the youth for leadership in governance. Only through this process can we rebuild social cohesion, and only then can we bring to fruition the vision of the framers of the constitution.

While Indian society has historically embraced diversity in its composition, recent developments at the policy level have revealed signs of self-serving and exclusionary behaviors. This evolving trend poses a threat not only to the various segments of our society but also hampers the potential contributions that the "Youth of India" can offer on the global stage.

The authors became aware of the imperative to foster unity, reduce discrimination, and diminish exclusion within college campuses when they conducted a series of programs under the Equal Opportunity platform. Collaborating with youth from diverse backgrounds provided them with the opportunity to identify and acknowledge young individuals with exceptional talents and a strong commitment to creating environments characterized by peace, inclusivity, and intellectual stimulation. As a result of their intellectual curiosity, the authors decided to conduct a focused study on a micro-level examination of their own alma mater. They aim to share their experiences and data with the intention of learning from the discussion and to take this initiative further.

**Keywords:** Youth in Governance, Cohesive Academic Campuses, Social Work with Youth

## Introduction

Cohesiveness refers to the presence of elements that bind together each component of an organism or system. A system is considered cohesive when it can keep its individual units unified even in times of adversity. The term "Social Cohesion" was initially coined by the sociologist Emile Durkheim, who defined it as "an organizing principle of a society and its ability to ensure the well-being of all its members,

minimizing inequalities and preventing marginalization." Cohesive societies are characterized by sustainable patterns of human interaction, where every individual shares a collective responsibility to support the continuity of the entire system. When a society achieves cohesion, it actively seeks to include every element within it, resulting in a harmonious, equitable, just, and respectful social environment.

Social cohesion represents the glue that holds a society together, fostering unity, inclusivity, and a sense of shared responsibility among its members. It ensures that no one is left behind and that the well-being of all individuals is safeguarded, ultimately contributing to a fairer, more just, and harmonious society. Social scientists have shown a growing interest in understanding the concept of social cohesion and have identified key factors contributing to the cohesiveness of a society. The rise of globalization has significantly blurred the boundaries between different societies, creating a need to foster unity and harmony among diverse groups from across the world. This surge in diversity presents both a challenge and an opportunity, as societies must find ways to assimilate with various groups and harness the strengths of these diverse populations for the betterment of humanity. This challenge becomes even more significant in countries that already host highly diverse populations, highlighting the critical importance of addressing and enhancing social cohesion in such contexts.

In an increasingly interconnected world, the pursuit of social cohesion takes on a renewed significance. As societies grapple with the complexities of globalization and the coexistence of diverse cultures and backgrounds, there is a growing imperative to bridge divides, promote inclusivity, and leverage the rich landscape of diversity to advance the common good. This endeavor is particularly crucial in nations characterized by a mosaic of cultures and identities, where nurturing social cohesion becomes not just a goal but a fundamental necessity for fostering unity, progress, and shared prosperity.

**Diversity in contemporary India:**

India's first Prime Minister, Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru eloquently characterized India as a "Unity in Diversity." This phrase encapsulates India's unique position as the second most populous nation globally, marked by a rich landscape of cultures, traditions, religions, and ethnicities. The concept of diversity inherently invokes the notion of inclusion. Cohesion and inclusion are intricately connected, as they revolve around society's ability to adapt and accommodate diversity through the creation of inclusive policies and practices. When differences are neither comprehended nor embraced, when diversity is shunned, it can give rise to turmoil, social disarray, and animosity among individuals.

In India, this mosaic of diversity, with its myriad languages, customs, and belief systems, is a testament to the country's pluralistic heritage. The challenge and imperative lie in fostering an inclusive society that not only acknowledges but also respects these differences. Inclusion is not merely a concept; it is a pathway to harmony, where individuals from diverse backgrounds coexist in a state of mutual understanding and acceptance. When harnessed effectively, India's "Unity in Diversity" becomes a source of strength, resilience, and progress, propelling the nation toward a harmonious coexistence and shared development.

Over the past decade, India has faced challenges that have tested its unity. The prevailing social structure, often disregarded and marked by a collective acceptance that excludes diversities, has hindered the realization of the vision set by the framers of the Indian Constitution. Recent instances of policy alterations followed by widespread public outcry exemplify the erosion of governance standards, underscoring the pressing necessity for initiatives aimed at fostering social cohesion.

The country's social fabric has been stretched thin, emphasizing the urgent need for activities that can

bring communities together and bridge the gaps that have emerged. These developments reflect the importance of revisiting and strengthening the principles of inclusivity and unity envisioned by the creators of the Indian Constitution.

Diversity within society necessitates the establishment of inclusive governance and an engaged, responsible citizenry. Such governance should not only encourage civic participation but also maintain an inclusive perspective when assessing the current state of affairs while simultaneously envisioning its consequences. It must address the diverse needs of its populace, thereby preventing social disorganization and chaos. This calls for compassionate and insightful leaders steering the ship of governance. India, renowned as the epitome of "unity in diversity" and home to the world's largest population of young individuals, must carefully reflect on the aforementioned considerations.

In light of India's rich landscape of diversity and the sheer size of its youthful demographic, there exists a compelling need to deliberate on these issues. It is imperative to foster governance that embodies inclusivity, encourages active citizenship, and comprehensively addresses the multifaceted needs of the populace. Only through such an approach can India navigate its path towards a harmonious and prosperous future, upholding the principles of unity amid diversity.

Young individuals constitute over half of India's population, with the age range of 15 to 29 years officially recognized as the "Youth of India." A cursory examination of the policies designed for this demographic reflects their significance within society. Initiatives such as the National Cadet Corps, Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan, and the National Young Leaders Programme all exemplify a concentrated effort to empower and harness the full potential of India's youth for the betterment of society. These policies not only aim to unlock the youth's capabilities but also recognize the pressing need to prioritize gender equality across health, education, and economic sectors. Thus, youth-oriented policy-making becomes a pivotal step towards realizing the vision of a participative democracy.

Efforts directed at the youth are instrumental in nurturing the future leaders and contributors to the nation's development. By focusing on policies that promote gender equality and inclusivity, policymakers aim to create a society where every young person has the opportunity to thrive. These initiatives not only empower the youth but also align with the broader vision of fostering a participative democracy, where the voices and contributions of young individuals play a central role in shaping the nation's future.

**Youth in building cohesive and Inclusive campuses:**

Youth development is significantly molded by a myriad of socialization agents, but none are as pivotal as social institutions. Among these, the family plays a paramount role in imparting foundational lessons in ethics, values, and the intricacies of societal norms. From the simplest customs like prayer to more complex interactions, individuals learn the fundamental principles that shape their understanding of societal structures and the roles they are ascribed within them during their formative years. As a result of these early teachings, individuals embark on their educational journey within the formal education system, carrying with them the cumulative wisdom imparted by both family and religion as crucial socializing agents.

Within the family unit, individuals acquire their initial moral compass and a set of values that serve as their guiding principles throughout life. These early lessons instill a profound understanding of how society is organized and the roles individuals are expected to fulfill. As youth progress through their educational endeavors, they build upon this foundation, shaping their identities and perspectives based on the combined influence of family and religion as influential socializing forces.

Upon establishing a foundation in the social realm, shaped by informal systems of socialization, individuals begin to appreciate the amalgamation of formal and informal knowledge within the campus environment. This confluence enables them to synthesize their family-derived beliefs and attitudes with a diverse array of group dynamics and ideas encountered during their academic journey. Spanning from early primary education to university-level learning, these experiences collectively mold an individual's perception of how to navigate the path toward a purposeful and constructive life.

As individuals progress through their educational continuum, they not only draw from the wisdom imparted by their familial upbringing but also embrace the rich landscape of perspectives encountered within the campus community. This holistic blend of formal education and the informal nuances of social interaction fosters a comprehensive understanding of life's possibilities and the means to contribute positively to society.

Education plays a pivotal role in equipping young individuals with a comprehensive understanding of society and its intricate mechanisms. It encompasses both theoretical teachings and practical experiences that enable the youth to grasp the multifaceted nature of societal governance. Through education, young people not only gain insights into their own culture but also delve into the rich landscape of diverse cultures and perspectives beyond their immediate surroundings. This holistic approach fosters an awareness of and appreciation for the variations that exist in the world, imparting valuable lessons in embracing differences. Moreover, education empowers the youth to be discerning and open-minded individuals who can navigate the complexities of an interconnected world. It instills in them the ability to critically analyze societal structures and encourages them to actively engage in shaping a more inclusive and harmonious society. In essence, education serves as a bridge that connects young minds to the broader spectrum of human experiences, promoting tolerance and empathy in an increasingly globalized world.

Higher education plays a pivotal role in the socialization of young individuals, imparting lessons that are crucial for effective contribution to society. The knowledge and values acquired during this phase serve as a foundation for their future roles within the realms of the economy and state institutions. As these youth transition into active members of society, they become key players in governance and decision-making processes. Whether fulfilling basic responsibilities as voters and citizens or taking on more advanced roles in administration, such as becoming an IAS officer, the youth apply the insights gained from their education. Universities, often referred to as Vishvavidhyalayas, inherently symbolize the convergence of diverse individuals with varying cultural backgrounds and life experiences. This rich exposure provides young people with broader perspectives, equipping them to steer future societies by preparing them to confront the challenges and embrace the necessity of accommodating and accepting differences.

Higher education serves as the breeding ground for responsible and engaged citizens who go on to shape the future. It equips the youth with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for active participation in the social, economic, and political fabric of their nation. As they step into diverse university environments, they not only gain academic insights but also cultivate the ability to navigate the complexities of a pluralistic society. This holistic preparation empowers them to be leaders and contributors who can effectively address the evolving needs and challenges of a society characterized by diversity and change. Fulfilling the dream of education requires a concerted effort involving the educational system and those in positions of authority. It is imperative that they recognize the fundamental role of education in nurturing democracy and fostering societal cohesion. Universities, as centers of higher learning, have a critical role to play in this endeavor. They should impart knowledge about the mechanisms of governance, the

responsibilities of citizenship, the ethical principles essential for decision-making roles, and the broader consequences of civic non-participation to the youth. Furthermore, universities can instill the importance of embracing diverse perspectives and viewpoints, creating an environment where students engage in inclusive and open dialogue. By providing experiences that encourage diversity learning, educational institutions can prepare the youth for governance roles, even before they enter the realm of formal politics, thus laying the foundation for informed and responsible citizenship.

Realizing the dream of education involves a comprehensive approach that emphasizes the importance of education in democracy and societal cohesion. Universities are crucial in this process, as they can educate the youth about governance, citizenship responsibilities, ethical decision-making, and the significance of embracing diverse perspectives. By fostering an inclusive learning environment and providing opportunities for engagement with diverse viewpoints, educational institutions can prepare young individuals for future governance roles, ensuring that they enter the political arena as informed and responsible citizens.

In the era of globalization, workplaces are undergoing significant transformations, resulting in more diverse compositions and a growing necessity to adapt to this diversity. India, home to one of the world's largest youth populations, faces the crucial task of preparing its higher education students to collaborate effectively with individuals from various backgrounds. Beyond acquiring higher education credentials, today's youth must be equipped with the skills and competencies necessary to engage with a dynamically changing population, a capability nurtured through the guidance and training provided by their educational experiences. The successful economic integration of these young individuals, combined with their ability to adapt to challenging circumstances, has the potential to enhance social cohesion among contributors to the economy. By channelizing the boundless energy and potential of India's youth in the right direction, we can unlock their capacity to make substantial contributions to the nation.

The youth of India possess a reservoir of untapped potential, and their contributions to the country's development are assured if they are appropriately channeled. As globalization continues to reshape workplaces and societies, the ability of the Indian youth to adapt, collaborate, and thrive within diverse environments is of paramount importance. Higher education serves as a vital foundation, but it is the practical application of acquired skills and competencies in an evolving population that will drive economic success and foster social unity. Harnessing the potential of India's youth not only ensures their individual growth and prosperity but also positions them as catalysts for positive change in the nation's trajectory, ultimately leading to a more cohesive and thriving society.

Building social cohesion in society relies on active and cooperative citizens who have a high level of confidence in the inclusivity of societal structures and systems. Initiating this crucial work can commence within our educational institutions, particularly on campuses, by equipping and educating young people for future governance roles. The primary responsibility for nurturing a healthy, cohesive, and inclusive society of tomorrow falls upon the shoulders of the youth, especially the educated youth who constitute the intellectual vanguard. Educators and policymakers must consciously instill the sense of collective social responsibility in the youth to prepare them for leadership in governance. Only through these concerted efforts can we reconstruct social solidarity and bring to fruition the vision of our constitution's framers.

Fostering social cohesion demands the active participation and cooperation of citizens who believe in the inclusiveness of their societal structures. Campuses serve as ideal starting points for imparting the necessary knowledge and skills to the young generation, particularly the educated elite, who hold the key

to shaping the future of our society. It is incumbent upon educators and policymakers to instill a sense of collective social responsibility in these youth, preparing them to assume leadership roles in governance. This deliberate cultivation of responsible and engaged citizens is the path to rebuilding social solidarity and realizing the aspirations set forth by the framers of our constitution.

**Social work and this research**

In every society, the richness of diversity inevitably brings forth the complex challenge of exclusion, whether driven by prevailing attitudes, entrenched stereotypes, or the indifference of those in privileged positions. These formidable barriers often obstruct the active participation of certain segments of the population in critical decision-making processes, consequently leaving a portion of the capable populace marginalized and unheard. The social work profession, at its core, endeavors to confront these insecurities stemming from exclusion and the absence of social cohesion. By addressing these deep-seated insecurities, social work not only restores individual dignity but also fosters a profound sense of belonging within society, thereby empowering individuals to contribute meaningfully to the collective welfare.

The mission of social work is to dismantle these divisive barriers, affording individuals the opportunity to engage, irrespective of their background or circumstance. Through these efforts, social work not only seeks to uplift marginalized voices but also strives to weave a landscape of inclusion and unity within society. This transformative endeavor not only restores the marginalized to their rightful place within the social fabric but also rekindles the innate desire within individuals to be active, engaged members of their communities.

In this paper, we aim to elucidate the primary objective of a notable endeavor undertaken within the realm of equal opportunity education. This initiative unfolded within the auspices of an equal opportunity cell, where the focus was on engaging the youth in higher education across diverse academic disciplines in contemplative discussions regarding the concept of inclusiveness within the educational framework as a pivotal social institution. We explored their perspectives on how they envision inclusiveness evolving in the forthcoming decade.

The research conducted by our team not only furnished valuable insights into the thought processes of these educated young individuals but also identified areas where they may lack preparedness. It shed light on how educational campuses can be transformed to effectively facilitate and nurture these aspects. The imparting of social cohesion principles within educational institutions holds the potential to bring about significant transformation in both the present and future societal dynamics, particularly within a diverse nation like India, which boasts a multifaceted population.

Teaching social cohesion within the educational sphere can wield a transformative influence on contemporary society, shaping not only the present landscape but also laying the groundwork for the future. In the context of a nation as diverse as India, characterized by a myriad of cultures, languages, and traditions, the significance of this endeavor is magnified. Our research endeavors to reflect the pivotal role of educational institutions in fostering inclusiveness and social cohesion among the educated youth. By delving into their perspectives and identifying areas of unpreparedness, we endeavor to pave the way for educational campuses to become catalysts for positive societal change. As we navigate the complexities of diversity and coexistence, we recognize that nurturing these principles within the youth is a key step toward a more harmonious and inclusive future.

The Equal Opportunity Cell platform, initiated as part of the 11th five-year plan within the framework of the National Higher Education Policy, has made significant strides in tackling inclusiveness and diversity

challenges within educational institutions. This paper endeavors to explore the prospective contribution of the social work profession in equipping higher education students to foster a more united and inclusive society. As integral components of the broader societal fabric, educational institutions stand to gain from a more inclusive and diverse youth population. By actively engaging and preparing this demographic, these institutions can play a vital role in shaping a generation poised for future governance that is both inclusive and participatory.

This paper reflects the pivotal role that the social work profession can play in harnessing the potential of higher education youth to promote societal cohesion and inclusivity. It highlights how educational institutions, as microcosms of society, can benefit from nurturing an inclusive youth population and, in turn, contribute significantly to the cultivation of future leaders who champion inclusiveness and active participation in governance.

The policy's platform for remedial coaching has made significant progress toward its ultimate objectives, which encompass the establishment of equality, the prevention of discrimination, and the promotion of openness and equitability. The recent introduction of the National Educational Policy in 2020 has further accelerated the exploration of youth's role in governance, serving as a valuable source of future data to comprehend the dynamics within the youth and campus environments for fostering social cohesion. The anticipation is that this research will yield positive outcomes, which can be instrumental in shaping future policy formulations for the betterment of society.

The policy's remedial coaching platform has made substantial strides in its mission to achieve true equality, eliminate discrimination, and promote openness and equity. The introduction of the 2020 National Educational Policy has given fresh impetus to the study of youth's involvement in governance, offering a promising avenue for gathering insights into the dynamics of youth and campus life in relation to social cohesion. It is anticipated that the research will yield valuable results that can inform future policy development for the benefit of society.

The concept of the role of educated youth in governance predates the recent implementation of the Education policy, which strives to establish inclusive campuses in India. However, the research on this subject has gained significant momentum in light of the policy's implementation. This development has amplified the relevance and significance of studying the aspirations of youth in fostering inclusive governance and determining the necessary training to actualize these aspirations. It is anticipated that the outcomes of this research and the current policy will mutually reinforce each other. Specifically, the findings of this study can inform the formulation of policies aimed at enhancing the value of education for youth and society as a whole, thereby advancing the collective vision of a more productive and inclusive educational environment.

While the idea of involving educated youth in governance existed prior to the recent Education policy, the policy's enactment has breathed new life into research on this topic. This synergy holds the potential for the research outcomes to inform and shape policies, ultimately contributing to the creation of a more beneficial and inclusive educational system that aligns with the aspirations of the youth and the broader societal goals.

**Reflections**

The educated youth are often recognized as the bearers of information and knowledge. They possess an incredible advantage with the entire digital world at their fingertips, enabling them to explore, learn, and even shape the world around them. Armed with technology, today's young generation not only gains

insights into the myriad aspects of life but also remains interconnected and engaged in the dynamics of contemporary governance and social issues. This technological prowess equips them with awareness, not only of their own rights and aspirations but also of the needs and concerns of others within society. The youth of today demonstrates a remarkable openness of mind and a conscientious vigilance towards the ever-evolving realities of our society.

The digital age has empowered the youth to access vast amounts of information, enabling them to stay well-informed about the complexities of the world. This knowledge doesn't merely remain passive; it serves as a catalyst for active participation in the governance of our societies. Informed and connected, today's youth actively advocate for their rights and contribute to addressing the pressing issues that affect their communities. They are quick to identify and respond to the prevailing challenges and opportunities, showcasing a remarkable level of engagement and social consciousness.

Furthermore, the contemporary youth's penchant for staying informed and engaged extends beyond their individual concerns. They exhibit a collective awareness of the broader social realities, which allows them to empathize with and support the needs and aspirations of others. This open-mindedness, combined with their vigilance, positions them as active agents of positive change in a world that is constantly evolving. Today's educated youth are not just consumers of information; they are dynamic contributors to the ongoing dialogue and progress of our societies.

In recent times, we have witnessed alarming instances of human rights violations against women, accompanied by a surge in vocal activism from highly educated young individuals, often hailing from prestigious institutions. These events reflect the undeniable potential that lies within the youth to reshape our current socio-political landscape. This dynamic and empowered youth cohort possesses the capacity not only to transform their own lives but also to effect positive change in the broader society. The research conducted here is aimed squarely at this emerging generation, seeking to equip them with the knowledge and skills needed to assume active citizenship roles and contribute to fostering a more cohesive and inclusive society.

The youth demographic, exemplified by their resilience and determination, represents a potent force for social and political transformation. Their ability to advocate for change and challenge existing norms is a formidable asset. Therefore, this research project is tailored to meet the needs and aspirations of these young individuals, who are poised to become influential actors in our evolving societal landscape. By preparing them effectively, we can harness their potential to not only enhance their own futures but also contribute to the broader fabric of our society, making it more united and inclusive.

Policy interventions are urgently required to address the needs of the youth population, ranging from creating opportunities for gainful employment to offering meaningful avenues for active participation. This research aspires to understand the vision of governance held by the youth, emphasizing the crucial objective at hand. The authors recognize that these efforts should have commenced a decade ago. Given the significance of this endeavor in nurturing capable decision-makers, it is evident that we are moving in the right direction to fulfill the aspirations outlined in the constitutional framework.

The current scenario necessitates policy interventions that cater to the multifaceted needs of the youth, spanning from providing avenues for gainful employment to facilitating their meaningful engagement in governance. The research endeavors to grasp the youth's perspectives on governance, underscoring the paramount objective. It is apparent that the initiation of these efforts should have occurred a decade ago, but recognizing their relevance in shaping adept decision-makers, we are now on the path to realizing the ambitions outlined in our constitutional framework.

In light of the pressing requirements of the youth, encompassing employment opportunities and active participation avenues, policy interventions are imperative. This research seeks to fathom the youth's vision of governance, underscoring its vital goal. While the authors acknowledge that these efforts should have commenced a decade ago, the recognition of their significance in molding proficient decision-makers indicates that we are now headed in the right direction to translate the constitutional framework's aspirations into reality.

To accomplish these objectives, educational campuses must recognize the imperative of equipping young individuals for future governance. This entails fostering leadership attributes among the youth, engaging them in meaningful policy discussions, and providing exposure to the rich landscape of global diversities. As college campuses evolve to mirror the evolving realities of society, it becomes crucial to work towards cultivating diversity, inclusivity, and unity among both the youth and these educational institutions. These endeavors are pivotal steps towards realizing the vision of the architects of our constitution—a vision where India stands as an all-encompassing, equitable, and harmonious society, with democracy flourishing and its youth actively leading the way to confront the challenges of the future.

In pursuit of these goals, campuses should prioritize the cultivation of leadership qualities among young minds. By nurturing leadership skills, institutions can empower the youth to play pivotal roles in future governance. Moreover, involving them in substantive policy dialogues enables them to gain a deeper understanding of the complex issues that governance entails. Additionally, exposing them to the diverse perspectives and cultures that our world comprises fosters a broader worldview and a sense of global citizenship among the youth.

The evolving composition of college campuses, reflecting the changing demographics of society, reflects the importance of fostering diversity, inclusivity, and cohesion. These attributes are not just moral imperatives but essential foundations for building a stronger and more unified nation. As we work towards these goals, we inch closer to the realization of the constitutional dream—a vision of India as an inclusive, egalitarian, and cohesive society, guided by the principles of democracy, with its youth at the forefront, ready to confront the challenges of the future.

In conclusion, recent events highlighting human rights violations against women and the outspoken activism of highly educated youth have demonstrated the significant impact that the younger generation can have on our socio-political reality. This research project is strategically designed to empower these young individuals, providing them with the necessary tools and knowledge to become proactive and engaged citizens. By doing so, we aim to nurture a generation capable of fostering a more harmonious and inclusive society, thereby securing a brighter future for all.