

Q. India's youth are increasingly becoming agents of social change rather than merely beneficiaries of the demographic dividend.

Introduction

India's demographic advantage is increasingly acquiring a social and civic dimension, with young people shaping public discourse, community action and social norms. With nearly 65% of Indians below 35, youth agency has become central to the trajectory of social change.

Factors driving youth from beneficiaries to agents of social change

- 1. Digital democratisation:** Smartphones and social media have lowered barriers to information, organisation and self-representation, creating networked youth agency beyond traditional organisations.
Eg: MY Bharat, a digital youth-engagement platform, had over 2.07 crore registrations by January 2026, reflecting expanding digitally mediated participation.
- 2. Rising education and aspirations:** Greater educational exposure has strengthened expectations of merit, dignity, mobility and institutional fairness, encouraging youth to question established structures.
Eg: Recent youth mobilisations around recruitment delays and examination integrity show livelihood aspirations translating into demands for systemic accountability.
- 3. Changing social values:** Younger generations increasingly challenge inherited hierarchies surrounding caste, gender, patriarchy and individual choice, accelerating normative change.
Eg: Youth-led conversations around gender equality, inter-caste relationships and LGBTQ+ inclusion increasingly contest traditional social

boundaries.

4. **New forms of civic participation:** Volunteerism, community initiatives and issue-based networks allow youth to become direct participants in solving local social problems.

Eg: By June 2026, MY Bharat offered over 1.52 lakh volunteering opportunities spanning blood donation, cleanliness, disaster response and community service.

5. **Aspiration-opportunity mismatch:** Employment insecurity and intense competition have converted individual frustration into collective consciousness and mobilisation.

Eg: Student and aspirant movements over paper leaks, recruitment irregularities and delayed examinations illustrate collective action around fairness and opportunity.

Implications for Indian society

1. **Deepening participatory citizenship:** Youth engagement extends participation beyond periodic voting towards continuous civic involvement and social accountability.

Eg: The Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue 2026 involved over 50 lakh youth across multiple participation tracks.

2. **Acceleration of social reform:** Youth questioning of inherited norms can weaken discriminatory practices and expand acceptance of equality, autonomy and diversity.

Eg: Youth participation in campaigns against dowry, menstrual stigma and gender discrimination has helped bring previously private issues into public discourse.

3. **Transformation of social movements:** Mobilisation is becoming more decentralised, issue-based and digitally networked, reducing dependence on formal organisational leadership.

Eg: Digital platforms allow young citizens to document grievances, build solidarity and mobilise support rapidly

through citizen-generated content.

4. **Strengthening community capital:** Youth volunteering can generate social trust, cooperation and inter-regional interaction, converting demographic strength into social capital.

Eg: In 2026, 500 MY Bharat volunteers engaged with 100 border villages through Gram Sabhas, surveys and community activities.

5. **Possibility of social polarisation:** Digital activism can also amplify misinformation, echo chambers and performative activism, fragmenting rather than integrating social opinion.

Eg: Algorithm-driven platforms can rapidly circulate unverified content, making digital literacy and critical thinking essential for constructive youth participation.

Conclusion

India's demographic dividend will be realised fully when youth are treated not merely as future workers but as present-day social stakeholders. Expanding meaningful avenues for civic participation can channel youthful aspiration into inclusive and constructive social transformation.