

Youth Perspective on Peace between India and Pakistan: A Quantitative Analysis

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Abstract

Since independence, India and Pakistan have cultivated hostile relations, over the issues such as Kashmir, civil war in East Pakistan, sharing of water resources and cross border covert operations etc. Although, the local politics in India has always been Pakistan centric, however, for the past decade, Indian national politics, particularly elections, have increasingly centered on an anti-Pakistan agenda, yielding favorable outcomes for proponents of such populist rhetoric. The younger generation, devoid of direct memories of past conflicts, is being swayed by narratives surrounding Kashmir, border skirmishes, and cross-border terrorism. The youth on both sides of the border have not seen an active war since the 1999 Kargil crises. Policy makers, politicians and defenders in Pakistan and India have not made efforts to apprise themselves with the opinion of youth that how do they see the hostilities between the two countries. This research is an attempt to explore the impact of propaganda and political exploitation regarding cross-border threats on the opinion of youth in both countries. Understanding the perceptions and insights of the youth regarding bilateral relations and conflicts is crucial for fostering peace in the region. Such studies are imperative for potential peace initiatives, future inter-state relations, trade perspectives and progressive interdependencies.

Keywords: Youth; Peace; Pakistan; India; Kashmir.

1. Introduction

The persistent rivalry between India and Pakistan has emerged as one of the most enduring and unresolved conflicts of contemporary history (Victoria, 2000). Stemming from the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, this rivalry has endured through intermittent wars and crises (Spate, 1948). The dynamic relations between India and Pakistan have been characterized by a perpetual juxtaposition of military conflicts or threats and discussions surrounding trade, cooperation, and peace (Action, 2022). These two nations have been engaged in three full-scale wars and recently in February 2019, mobilized their armed forces, escalating the specter of warfare.

Since the early 1990s, insurgencies in the region of Kashmir (Goel V., 2019) and terrorist incidents across various parts of India have exerted

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significant influence on bilateral relations (Hashim, 2019). Noteworthy terrorist attacks within India, such as the 2005 Mumbai bombings, Mumbai bombings signal sustained rail terrorism, 2007 and the 2008 Mumbai attacks (Raina, 2011) have frequently precipitated public disillusionment with dialogue efforts towards Pakistan. Despite numerous peace initiatives in the recent times, they have largely fallen short of their intended objectives and have occasionally been followed by further acts of terrorism. For example, following India's revived geopolitical interaction with Pakistan in the late 2015, the two nations agreed to resume formalized peace discussions after three contentious years (Denis, 1989). However, a terrorist strike on an Indian air base in the border province of Punjab in January 2016 highlighted the relationship's enduring uncertainty (Ganguly, 2006).

Critics assert that the trend of dialogue-disruption and interaction will continue. However, PMs can break free from this vicious spiral by changing the way of sharing ideas peacefully. Despite sporadic attempts at peace, the conflict continues to have an impact on many facets of interstate and societal interactions between the two nations.

1.2 Research Objectives

To analyze the perspective of youth of India and Pakistan in promoting peace.

1.3 Research Questions

How does the youth of both countries see each other and what role they can play to mitigate the conflict between the two conventional rivals in the region?

2. Literature Review

Riedel (2013) highlighted the history of Pakistan-India enmity in his book 'Avoiding Armageddon' in the following words, "Born from the British Raj, the two nations share a common heritage and history (Riedel, 2013). Both the nations have been traditional rivals (Davis, 2011) Competing with each other for more than half a century now, the two nations have been through many conflicts (Jacob, 2020). Since both; India and Pakistan are nuclear armed rivals, therefore, this rivalry has caught the attention of the whole world and whenever the situation is tense between the two, the entire world becomes concerned because any kind of major war or a possible nuclear strike by any of the two rivals can pose a dangerous threat to the world peace and the entire humankind (Pariona, 2019).

Since the partition of British India, the relationship between India and Pakistan has been intricate, marked by various cultural and political events (Khan, 2006). The persistent military conflicts, particularly the Kashmir issue, have remained significant points of contention since both nations gained independence (Routary, 2014). Besides, water disputes (Mary, 2009) and terrorism further complicates their ties. Despite these challenges, there exist shared cultural elements, including cuisine and language, underscoring the historical connections between these South Asian states (Spate, 1948).

Historical literature emphasizes the centrality of territorial disputes like Kashmir and Sir Creek (Cohen, 2002). However, certain historical events, such as the Liaquat-Nehru Pact (1950), Indus Waters Treaty (1960) (Denis, 1989) and the more recent "Cricket diplomacy," reveal both the limitations of a realist perspective (Chopra, 1992) and the need to interpret cooperative initiatives from alternative viewpoints (Basit, 2012). These events underscore the complex historical dynamics that have shaped and continue to influence the relationship between India and Pakistan.

Such incidents, as well as a lack of professional expertise in addressing conflict issues, particularly in the pursuit of peace, have resulted in distress, which has led to stress and trauma (Pariona, 2019). The most vulnerable and affected group is the youth. Youth of both countries are tired of continuous tension and demanding for peace as peace process is the component of permanent solution.

Guftagu-Indo-Pak Peace Project is an initiative by Youth for Peace International, in partnership with CYPAN, Red Elephant, The Lighthouse Project and Humans of Pakistan. The literal meaning of the word Guftagu is "communication", and that is the main aim of the project to start a conversation between two nations that were once together.

A potentially lucrative dialogue regime in South Asia will have to connect to pertinent electoral districts and community members left out so far (Wolpert, 2010). Core groups with profound mutual interests need to be recognized to expand the ambit of dialogue. Business executives and financial advisers, scholars, researchers, attorneys, historians, teachers, pupils, activists, engineers, agronomists, scientific experts, and the local press could all fall under this category. Peace-building initiatives can be designed only through a holistic and sustained discussions between organizations representing the civil societies in both countries. All the nongovernmental measures should inherently serve as evolution grounds for new opportunities and effective strategies as opposed to a mini version of official policy postures (Lederach, 1997).

3. Research Methodology

The main research method utilized for this work is quantitative analysis of the data gathered through research tools from participants on both sides of the border. The target population for this study was youth from various age groups and various strata of society.

A detailed questionnaire was developed for the data collection from multiple respondents in an effective and efficient way. There was challenge of collecting data from the participants from India due to the geographical barrier. However, it was resolved with the help of online social media platforms. The questionnaire was developed which was distributed to the participants using various means. 359 respondents filled the questionnaire completely and contributed to sampling for the research. The data collected was later analyzed and results were presented accordingly.

4. Perceptions of Youth in both Countries

The history of both countries is filled with regional clashes, border disputes, diplomatic friction and demonizing other government for electoral politics to secure government (Khan, 2017). However, there has always been a ray of hope for the betterment of relations from academia, artists, civil society, and students through people-to-people contacts time after time (Chaplain, 2017).

The impact of the events happening in both countries including the Kashmir hostile lockdown, Pulwama attack, the Jawaharlal Nehru University attacks, Jamia Milia Delhi, etc. was seen in the youth (Jaffrelot, 2002).

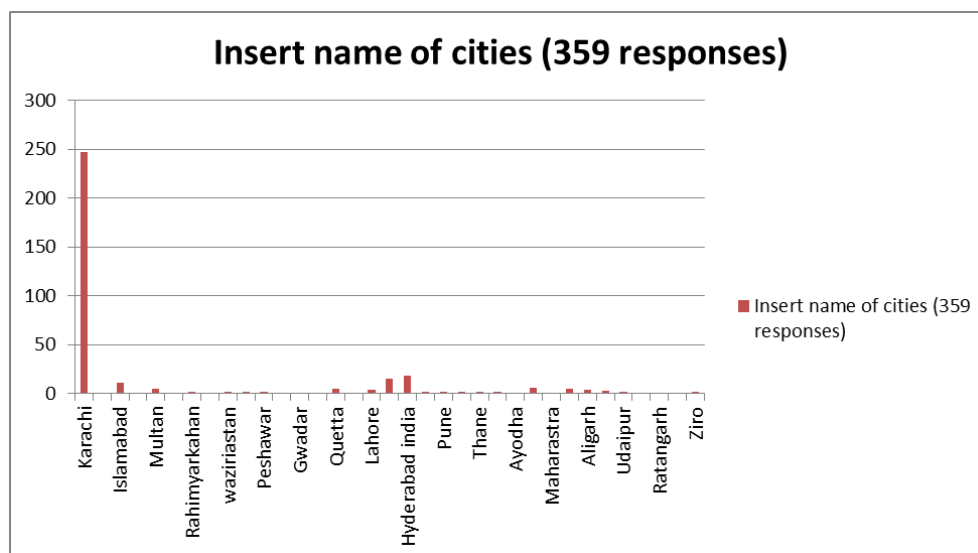
The historical narrative surrounding the youth in both India and Pakistan reveals a marginalization of their identity and significance in the context of cross-border relations (Hussain, 2019). Over the past six decades, the injected hatred and enmity have contributed to a loss of identity amongst the youth, relegating them to the back seat in the broader narrative of bilateral relations (Chaplain, 2017). Addressing this issue requires a comprehensive approach encompassing government, societal, and individual levels to instill confidence in the youth and facilitate the rediscovery of their lost identity (Poudyal, 2003). To salvage the situation, concerted efforts are needed to liberate young people from the shackles of frustration, parochialism, and other detrimental influences that perpetuate a mindset of animosity between the two nations. Civil society and government, as the key stakeholders, must collaboratively strive to create an environment that fosters a sense of freedom, empowerment, and shared understanding among the youth, transcending the historical narrative of enmity. The major aspects influencing the youth mindset in both countries are; role of education and role of media.

Youth is generally the section of the society which does not dwell deep into the history. In the modern times world history is becoming more and more irrelevant due to the fast pace of life and day to day struggle to compete, survive and progress. Youth today is engulfed by the rigorous schedule of studies, professional development, and work.

5. Survey and Analysis

The purpose of this survey is to analyze the perspective of youth from both; India and Pakistan. To add context and perspective to the answers, respondents also provided relevant data about themselves, including their cities and gender.

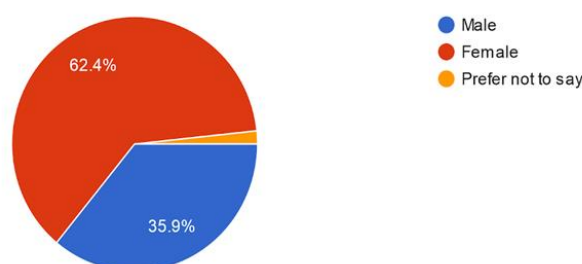
Data was converted into statistical expression automatically on Google Forms in the form of bar-graphs and pie-charts showing percentages of responses to each question. Collected data has been analyzed on the basis of research questions.



For the purpose of this research article, data of 69 Indian youth and 289 Pakistani youth was collected ranging from the age of 13 years to 30 years.

Insert your Gender below:

359 responses

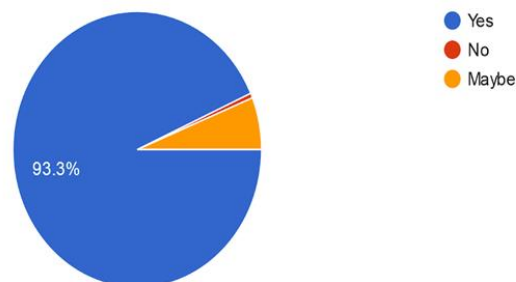


Out of the data of 358 Indian and Pakistani youth, the percentage of male participants is 35.9%. Whereas the female constitute 62.4% of the participants.

5.1 Do you want peace between India and Pakistan?

Out of the data of 358 Indian and Pakistani youth, 93.3% of the young people think that peace should exist between the two neighboring countries. While only a thin number of young people i-e. 6.7% were found unsure that whether the peace is suitable or not. This is probably the most significant question every Pakistani and Indian is concerned with. Such a high percentage of the sample shows that there is a strong desire amongst the youth of both countries for peace. Youth are neither concerned nor appreciate the hate preached by political leadership on both sides of the border. This is a clear indication of the fact that youth do not seem interested in dragging the enmity between the two countries.

Do you want peace between India and Pakistan?
359 responses

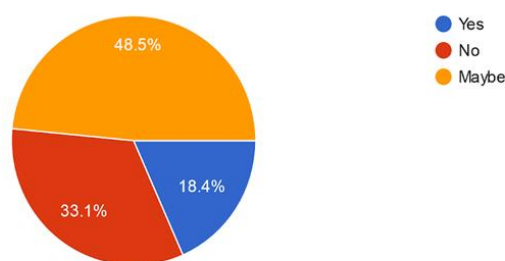


5.2 Do you think that there will be peace between India and Pakistan?

Out of the data of 358 Indian and Pakistani youth, 18.4% of the youth believe that peace between the two neighboring states is possible at some stage, whereas, 48.5% of the youth were found skeptical that whether there will ever be peace between the two countries, while, 33.1% the of youth were found pessimist and believed that Indo-Pak relations shall be subjected to this never-ending conflict.

Though the hope in the hearts of youth is still high; however, the number of people who think that it seems almost impossible to reach peace is significantly high. All the negativity in the electoral political campaigns revolve around portraying the other country the worst enemy and a great threat which is affecting the youth gradually, consequently, they have started to surrender their hope of peace.

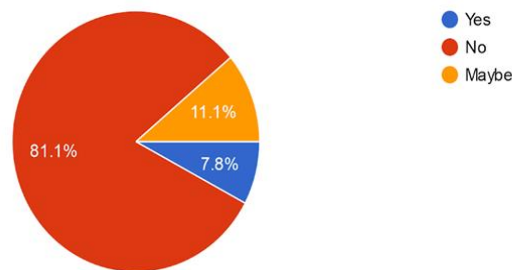
Do you think there ever will be peace between India and Pakistan?
359 responses



5.3 Do you think Kashmir is the only reason of the conflict?

Out of the data of 358 Indian and Pakistani youth, 81.1% of the youth believe that Kashmir is not the sole reason behind the conflict between India and Pakistan, 11.1% young people were found not sure. Whereas, 7.8% of the participants were of the view that Kashmir is the only reason behind the enmity between India and Pakistan.

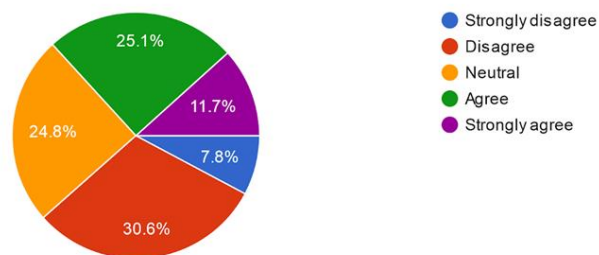
Do you think Kashmir is the only reason of the conflict?
359 responses



5.4 Is the conflict just a Political Issue?

Out of the data of 358 Indian and Pakistani youth, 7.8% youth strongly disagree that the conflict between the two countries is just a matter of political issues, whereas 30.6% disagree that the conflict between the two countries is just a matter of political issues. While 24.8% were found neutral on this situation. However, 25.1% agree that the conflict between the two countries is just a matter of political issues, and 11.7% strongly agree that the conflict between the two countries is just a matter of political issues.

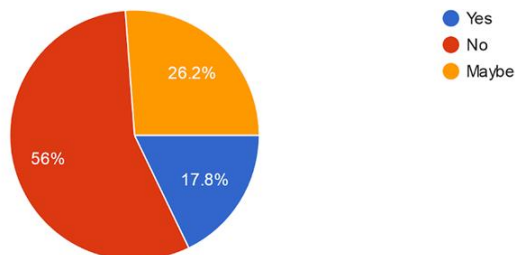
Is the conflict just a political issue?
359 responses



5.5 Do the people of both Countries dislike each other according to you?

Out of the data of 358 Indo-Pakistani youth, 17.8% of the youth think that people of both countries dislike each other. While 26.2% of the youth were found unsure, whereas 56% of the youth think that the people of both countries don't dislike each other.

Do the people of both countries dislike each other according to you?
359 responses

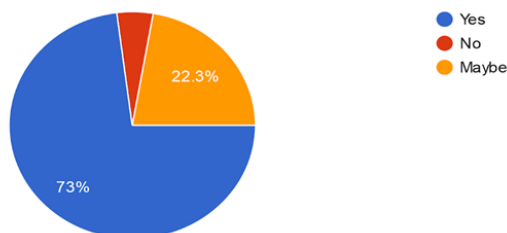


5.6 Do you think we, the youth can be the Ambassador of Peace between India and Pakistan?

Out of the data of 358 Indian and Pakistani youth, 73% of the youth think that it is the right time for youth to play the role of an ambassador of peace between the two countries. While 22.3% were found unsure and 4.7% of the youth said no.

Out of the data of 358 Indian and Pakistani youth, 73% of the youth think that it is the right time for youth to play the role of an ambassador of peace between the two countries. While 22.3% were found unsure and 4.7% of the youth said no.

Do you think we, the youth can be the Ambassador of peace between India and Pakistan?
359 responses

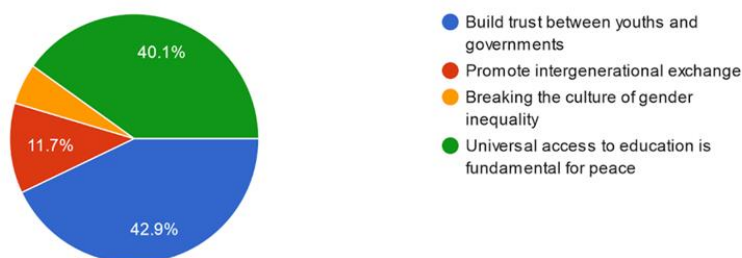


5.7 How the youth can be the Ambassador of Peace?

Out of the data collected, 42.9% youth think that by building trust between the youth and the governments, is the way to become the ambassador of peace. While 11.7% of the participants think that promoting intergenerational exchange is the way to become the ambassador of peace. Whereas 5.3% youth think that breaking the culture of gender inequality is the way to become the ambassador of peace. However, 40.1% youth thinks that universal access to the education is fundamental for peace and is the way to become the ambassador of peace.

How the youth can be the Ambassador of peace?

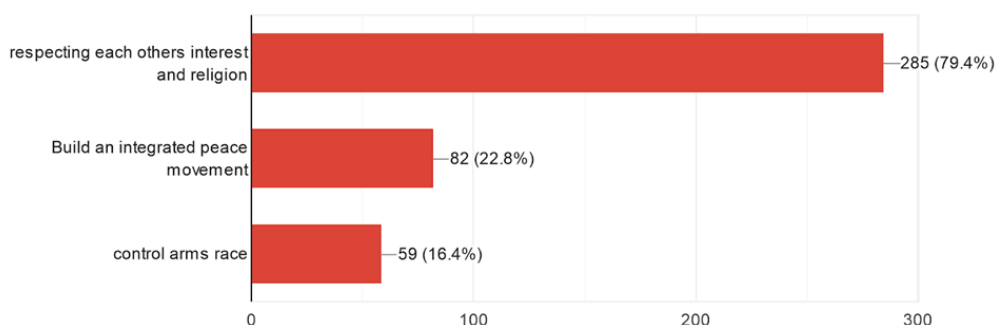
359 responses



5.8 What according to you can be the best course of leading to peace?

What according to you can be the best source leading to peace?

359 responses



According to the survey conducted for the purpose of this research paper, 79.4 % youth chose respecting each other's interests and religion as the possible way to have a peaceful environment between India and Pakistan. While, 22.8% youth chose that building an integrated peace movement is the possible way for a peaceful environment between India and Pakistan. Whereas 16.4% youth think that controlling of arms race is the possible way to have a peaceful environment between India and Pakistan.

6. Discussions and Conclusions

History is witness to the fact that the youth-led mass demonstrations have in fact overturned political institutions (Youth, political participation and decision making, 2013). Students are still agents of change and personification of togetherness and enlightenment (History of Student Protests, 2018). The survey under discussion has shown that youth on both sides are very confident of the fact that most of the issues between India and Pakistan are related to the manipulations made by the political parties and political leaders to further their cause and harvest the feelings of hatred hidden deep inside the hearts of the masses.

In the recent years it has been noticed that the application of populism has increased many folds all over the world, South Asia is no exception to it. Indian Prime Minister Modi has been blamed by majority of the political scientists across the world of utilizing populism to best of his and party's advantage. Such political strategies have affected the masses in general and youth in particular. However, despite such a blatant preaching of hatred, youth are still aloof to the level of enmity and hopeful of a peaceful future.

The most significant finding of the survey is the fact that common people, especially youth are still in contact and want to increase the people to people contact much more than already exists. The modern-day modes of communication through social media have brought people much closer to each other than ever. Boundaries have evaded and people connect in an instant. The happenings in any part of the world are known to the rest of the world within no time.

The youth of the both countries are also united through many commonalities such as sports, entertainment industry and academia. The most popular sport in both countries is cricket and the fans do not restrict themselves from appreciating the sportspersons of the other team. Indian cricketers like Sachin Tendulkar, Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma and others are as popular in Pakistan as they are in India. Likewise, Wasim Akram, Shoaib Malik, Shahid Afridi, Babar Azam and others are evenly popular amongst Indian youth. The strongest evidence of this cross border following is the views, likes, follows and comments these sportspersons receive on their social media platforms from other side of their respective borders.

Another factor, which brings the youth closer, is the education. The educated youth feel more open to peace. University students collaborate and participate regularly for various academic seminars, conferences and research projects. Nelson Mandela's assertion, "education is the most powerful weapon to change the world" (Duncan, 2013), underscores the transformative potential of education. A liberal education, free from political constraints, serves as a reflective mirror for societal structures, shaping students' critical perspectives and revolutionary voices based on a nation's history of conflicts, changes, and reformation.

In the twenty-first century, student involvement has markedly increased, with opposition to concepts perceived as prejudiced, threatening to unity, independence, and individuality. Both the Indian and Pakistani governments actively ensure that the youth can exercise their freedom to unite and express opinions for or against particular notions. This trend aligns with the understanding that "younger generations are the future nation builders," as students' disagreements significantly impact the country's development and historical trajectory.

There were some issues in few major universities of India. Students protested over the policies of government and demanded their rights. Consequently, several clashes between the protesting students and police were reported. Further, the incidents of violence in campuses like JNU, Jamia Milia,

and Aligarh Muslim University, aimed at silencing dissenting voices, were also reported. In solidarity with the students of JNU, the students of Pakistan protested outside press clubs (Bureau, 2020). "We demand that the United Nations urge the Indian government to end this reign of terror against students. We also urge the governments of both Pakistan and India to improve bilateral ties and allow for their populations to coexist the way people from other neighboring countries do all over the world" said by a student from Lahore (Hasan, 2020).

Furthermore, since 2016, Kashmiri youth have been routinely leading protests and campaigns, especially in the valley of Kashmir that is ruled by India (Dixit, 2002). These protests usually result in violent confrontations with law enforcement agencies. To lessen the bloodshed and establish enduring peace in the region, we think that Kashmiri participation is crucial, coupled with ongoing Pakistani and Indian youth talks (Smith, 2020).

Concluding from the results of the survey, the youth is willing to act as an ambassador of peace between the two countries as it is also evident by the student protest which is seen in the recent events. The students are ready to portray their ideas and thoughts and to make a better harmonized society.

Aaghaz-e-Dosti campaign is an effective example of cross-border initiatives. Aliya Harir along with her team of 18 Pakistani girls traveled to the Indian city of Chandigarh for a peace conference on September 27. (Aaghaz-e-Dosti initiative: Pakistani, Indian citizens advocate peace, support and uninterrupted friendship, 2021). The Aaghaz-e-Dosti project has been initiated through interactive sessions in many educational institutions along. This project has also connected a school in India with a school in Pakistan to promote peaceful relations between the two countries.

There is a growing recognition that young individuals are the real change makers of the world who can significantly contribute to conflict prevention while instituting and maintaining peace (Ian, 2013). Acknowledging the profound impact of contemporary global violence on youth, scholars and leaders alike recognize the active involvement of young people as agents of positive change (Hart, 2004). Amidst the escalating challenges posed by the widespread violence and terrorism, there is a growing consensus among the world leaders regarding the imperative to actively engage young individuals as catalysts for peacebuilding efforts. This acknowledgment underscores the significance of harnessing the potential of youth in fostering peaceful coexistence and countering the pervasive threats of violence in our modern world. In recognizing the agency and potential of young peacemakers, there emerges a collective call to empower and mobilize youth towards meaningful contributions to global peace and security endeavors.

7. Recommendations

Violent extremism endangers the security and fundamental freedom enjoyed by the people all over the world and diminishes the endeavors of many nations

to achieve peace and stability. Several violent extremist groups enlist underprivileged adolescents and inspire them to commit violent crimes.

The way youth resilience characterizes itself is strongly reliant on its socio-political situations. When youngsters are provided with prospects for participation, they are more likely to focus on their endurance proactively, thus becoming very valuable assets in peace building.

Rather than giving them a label or assuming things about the youth based on their appearance and lifestyle, it's recommended to engage them and make them effective social actors with their own perspective and contributions (Khan, 2012). It is healthy to give them a space to express freely and improve their peace building skills.

There's no such rule that the youth can't make a powerful impact without tools but to achieve optimal results new and advanced tools can help. Some of the most effective initiatives also figure out how to use young people's passions for the arts, sports, media, informal learning, and interpersonal interactions to impart peace-building abilities.

We can't ignore the fact that the youth can play a very important role in peace building although they have not been provided a proper platform to showcase their skills. Former information minister and PPP leader Qamar Zaman Kaira during National peace summit in 2013 said,

"Unfortunately, continuity of democracy could not be maintained in the country due to which policies regarding the youth were not implemented. The government should invest in the youth and create opportunities for them." ('Youth's role vital in peace building', 2013)

Youth mobilization isn't a new concept; it is applied by the most superpowers to maintain healthy youth involvement in their countries. One of the smartest techniques is to increase job opportunities for youth within local and national government sectors. In recent times, Pakistani and Indian youth feel their governments have failed them sighting the corruption rates.

Therefore, remedial actions must be taken at the institutional, communal, and individual levels to restore the youths' faith. The most crucial initiative that civic society and the government can take in this regard is to strive to free the youth from the discontent, chauvinism, and other maladies which shape the mindset of hostility between the two nations. We must equip the next generation with the unwavering courage and nascent confidence necessary to face the upcoming challenges.

Our youth is largely a product of government-funded educational facilities. The government provides the acceptable version of events in textbooks in both countries. Teaching materials act as instrumental tools of state policy for influencing the minds of upcoming generations. Most pupils' brains are affected by the distorted history presented in the available publications, which leads to a mindset rife with prejudice, contempt and anger.

Therefore, it's recommended to introduce new curriculums to encourage equality and peace moments along with promoting institutionalized contacts between the universities and research institutes (Education, 2021).

To further close the gap, initiatives that endorse the legitimization of young individuals and nurture their representation in both regional and national government decision-making processes are crucial ('Youth's role vital in peace building', 2013). Hence, collaborative workshops, community initiatives, or cross-border forums can all assist in bridging the gap between young people and authorities. Additionally, it's crucial to support young people as they strive towards their personal peace priorities and urge them to learn about municipal or national peace agendas.

Besides, the governments should provide services/facilities to the youth such as financial support and rewards for their achievements and respect their views in order to keep a healthy relationship.

People must concentrate on the potential advantages of tranquility, as peace is worth more than money can buy. Let's make the 76th anniversary of the partition of India and Pakistan in 2023 an opportunity for young and existing leaders in those countries to address the issues like poverty, communal animosity, the COVID-19 issue as well as its aftermath, and the long-term global warming catastrophe in South Asia. The Citizens Archives of Pakistan's Interchange for Change programme, Roads 2 Roots in India, Aghaz-e-Friends Dosti's Without Borders, and Ajoka Theatre Lahore are among the peace-seeking initiatives currently in action.

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