FAITH AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS; A STUDY OF A FAITH BASED ORGANISATION

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Abstract: The 'Agenda 2030' envisages to end poverty and bring peace and prosperity to all by the end of 2030. In order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), helping hands from every part of society is the need of the hour. Due to secularization and modernization project, 'Development' and 'Religion' was perceived as antithetical (Hynes, 2005; Wilson, 1992). Though this exists, in the last two decades it has been witnessed that Religion and Faith based Organisations (FBOs) are receiving widespread attention (Hynes, 2007) not only from academia but also from the international development actors. This paper is attempting to explore the role of Faith Based Organisations (FBOs) in achieving the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable development goals. By adopting 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, United Nations urged the developing and developed countries to come together and work hand in hand (Palmer, 2015). Faith based organisations are significantly contributing in the socio economic and educational needs of individuals, families and communities.

Keywords - 2030 Agenda, SDG goals, Faith Based Organisations, Sustainable development

I. INTRODUCTION

'Religion profoundly shapes development agendas and people's willingness to be involved in them. In this sense, understanding faith is central to developing policies'

(Marshall & Keough, 2004, p.24)

Faith has a significant role in human life. It is an all-encompassing factor which influence people's choices, selection, happiness and all other aspects. Faith gives immense force to counter the miseries and difficult situation in day to day life. It also acts as a shield which enables human beings to confront the personal as well as social adversaries. People, Societies, Communities are experiencing diverse dynamic socio-political problems. Poverty, illiteracy, lack of health amenities, pure drinking water and sanitation are major problems faced by poor and marginalised strata of the society. Sometimes these problems are the outcomes of developmental disparity and discrimination to a class, community, religion or region. Faith, Faith Based Organisations and its agencies have been attempting to deliver possible interventions to resolve these social issues. Though its planning, operation and implementation modes are very selective according to organisations principles, the services which faith-based organisations are providing is commendable.

According to the available estimates, 90 per cent of the global aid workforce are faith oriented and majority of the organisations are also working for faith-based development actors (Ager & Ager 2011). Significance of religion cannot be ignored like it happened in twentieth century (Campbell 2009; Gray et

al.2009). At present religion or faith regained its glory. It gained position as a major stake holder in international development scenario. In this context, we have to understand the role of faith-based organisation in achieving the 2030 agenda of sustainable development.

II. METHODOLOGY

This paper is attempting to understand the relevance of FBOs in achieving the goal - agenda of 2030 sustainable developmental goal and its contribution in terms of socio-economic development.

In order to explore the significance of Faith Based Organisations in achieving the 2030 sustainable development goals, researcher has engaged Qualitative method. The Research Design is Exploratory and the Sampling is Purposive Sampling. Case Study method, In- depth interviews using open ended questionnaires and participant observation were the tools for data collection. Secondary sources of review have also formed a part of the analysis of the discourses related to the subject.

Researcher selected Human Welfare Foundation and field visits contributed significantly as part of data collection.

III. HUMAN WELFARE FOUNDATION

Human Welfare Foundation is a prominent Non-Governmental Organisation which is established in 2006. Its national headquarter is situated in Delhi. Human Welfare Foundation is an offshoot of Jamat-e-Islami and comes under their guidance and supervision. Marginality and socio economic and educational backwardness among the Muslim Community in India was and is still a debate in this country. Up to 2006, discussion of marginality and backwardness of Muslim community was an argument of community leaders. But the Sachar Commission Report (2006) brought a new shift to the discussions and arguments among the Indian Muslim community. According to Basant (2006) it was the first attempt to provide information about Muslim marginality based on empirical data basis. "The report highlights significant inter-regional differences in the conditions of Muslims in India" (p.832). Alam (2008) observed that the submission of Sachar commission report essentially reshaped the way of articulation of Muslim communities' political demands. Jodhka (2011) adding to that the report of 'development deficit' which means the Sachar commission report changed debate among the Muslim community. It attracted the involvement of faith-based development actors to contemporary development discourses in India.

Jodhka (2011) adds that:

Religion or Faith-based organisation (FBOs) are mostly involved in the fields of education, health, emergency relief and community development. More recently, some have sought to empower marginalised social groups, including women. They vary widely with respect to the scale of their operations; their value orientation; and their conceptions of welfare, development and appropriate gender roles (p.2).

The post-sachar commission scenario of the country boosted the morale and functioning of Human Welfare Foundation. The report brought out marginality and development disparity of the Muslim Community particularly in Northern and North-eastern parts of the community. It is because of that Human Welfare Foundation is focusing on the same regions for the interventions. Human Welfare Foundation declare its objectives through the official website as:

To strive for holistic and sustainable development work among the poor, marginalized, downtrodden, illiterate, vulnerable and the exploited ones, irrespective of their caste, creed, language, sex or religion; A positive socio-economic life to bring change in the lives of deprived communities and to uplift their status at par with the national average thematic areas in of human development; To enable them to contribute towards nation building in all spheres of life; Striving for a just society and to make India compassionate in which all citizens of the nation have the opportunity to achieve their optimum potential (Human Welfare Foundation, 2022, Objectives)

"Human Welfare Foundation has started its functioning after a series of debate and discussion within the mother organization Jamate Islami and also the outside of the organization. It met with community leaders, scholars, religious leaders, donors, social workers, development experts and actors. As

a result of the consultation process it put forward a roadmap named 'Vision 2016'. It was conceived as ten-year long plan for achieving sustainable development and positive social change. It was planned to "bring about sustainable change in the socio-economic status of marginalized and deprived communities living in the poorest conditions, mainly in the states of North and North-East India. After a year-long highly consultative process, a flagship project was launched with the objective of closing the gaps between the two apparently distinct versions of India" (Human Welfare Foundation, 2022, who we are, para1).

After the execution of decade long 'Vision 2016', Human Welfare Foundation launched another flagship program in the name of 'Vision 2026'. Obviously, it was designed as part as well as the continuation of 'Vision 2016'.

Official website states that, through the 'Vision 2026';

"We will also be aiming to build many more partnerships so that we can leverage our work and become more beneficial collectively to achieve the very ambitious goals and targets that we have set out for ourselves for the coming ten years. Through the Vision 2026 program, we aim to create a just and harmonious society where everybody shares and cares for the poor, unprivileged, and exploited people and make our society a better place to live in (Human Welfare Foundation, 2022, who we are, Vision 2026, para2)".

As part of educational interventions, HRF has done various things. Establishing new schools, adding capacity building to old one, bringing drop out children back to class room are the major attempts. HRF is ensuring local community participation to all these efforts to make the model as a sustainable move. In order to provide quality education to the marginalised communities, HRF has aimed to establish educational campuses across the country. At present HRF is running six educational campuses in five states. These newly started Centre for Training and Educational Guidance (CTEG) is functioning as a clubbing point of marginalised students the world of quality education and opportunities. It provides career guidance and various scholarships. HRF has newly introduced scholarship for talented post graduate students which is known as Prof K A Siddique Hassan Memorial PG Scholarship.

Educational campuses are spread across the five North Indian states namely Delhi, Haryana, West Bengal, Assam, and Jharkhand. In Delhi it is 'Scholar school' close to Jamia Nagar. In Haryana educational campus is situating in Mewat District, spread over 27 acres of land. Primary schools and Community centre are fully functioning now. Orphan Boys Hostel, Orphan Girls Hostel, Hospital, Paramedical College, ITI, Women's' College, The Scholar School, Girls' Public School, Boys' Public School, Special School, Staff Quarters, Guest House, Library, Canteen and Auditorium are envisaged as future plan in the state of Haryana.

In West Bengal, Human Welfare Foundation is running two Educational campuses; in Howrah and Maldah and planning to build Hospital, Centre for Competitive Skills, Skill Development Centre, UG and PG College, The Scholar School, Hostels for Boys and Girls, Staff Quarters and Mosque. In Jharkhand campus is situated in Ranchi district. Newly established school and orphanage cum hostel is spread over five acres of land. In Assam the campus is located in Guwahati. Scholar school and girls hostel fully function in the two acres of land. Under the 'Vision 2026' various educational projects are envisioning to be launched in all these campus sites.

Human Welfare Foundation is also undertaking various programs to provide health care and immediate medical services across the country. It focuses on rural areas where people are not getting proper health care services. Through its interventions HRF attempts to support the people's basic medical needs. HRF runs mobile medical camps in rural areas, slums, etc. HRF also conducts blood donation camps, vaccination camps, ambulance services and medical aid to poor patients. In the Covid pandemic time also, HRF took effort to provide relief and help needy people. It has provided oxygen cylinders, concentrators, ventilators and emergency medical assistance in various parts of the country.

IV. CONCLUSION

As part of the Human Welfare Intervention, researcher interacted with a donor who is financially assisting a poor student in order to get quality education. In fact, the donor's financial assistance is helping him to attain quality education. Researcher asked the donor, "Why you are helping the student? What you are expecting in return? Do you think that he will finish the studies and once he secures a job he will repay you back??"

He responded,

"I am not expecting anything return from him and I don't want anything. Sometimes I too have financial problems. I am also struggling to meet the needs of the daily life. But here I am expecting reward from my god Almighty only. In this life or here after life (Life after death) indeed almighty will reward me for this good act of empathy. He will pour his blessings, indeed this is his promise"

What's interesting to note is that the donor is not driven by the concepts of poverty eradication or Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of United Nations. Rather he is empathetic to the suffering in the neighbourhood, trying to be kind to human beings for those who are in misery and in difficult situations. His actions are driven by his faith and religious principles. He is inspired by the godly reward and divine blessing. Faith fuelled him to take part in the socio-economic development activities. But he is unaware about the Sustainable Development Goals. Even though his faith-based actions significantly contribute to the SDGs, this specific development process seeks professional social work intervention. The existing gap between the international agencies attempt to attain the sustainable developmental goals and grassroot level faith based developmental initiatives must be bridged. Call for professional Social Work practice to document the same is the need of the hour. In order to 'think global and local', social work experts are needed. Spreading the idea of SDGs, integrating faith based developmental actions to the framework, bringing together all the developmental actors, donors, advocators should be the prime consideration of social workers. It is certain that through a combined and integrated approach of all the actors in the field, achieving 2030 SDGs will not be a distant dream.

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