

Importance of Education in Religious Teachings and the Role of Religious Leaders in its Promotion for all

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Abstract- the paper discusses the main reasons for the social and economic deprivation of large sections of population in countries like India. It identifies low educational learning as one of the main reasons behind their deprivation; and one of the main reasons behind low educational learning, despite rapid increase in school admissions in the recent past, is the low retention and irregular school attendance. The paper argues that religious and spiritual teachings can play decisive role in changing the situation by mobilizing the parents and guardians for regular school attendance and sensitisation of school authorities for providing enabling environment for children to attend school regularly. It highlights certain religious teachings which strongly supporting education and knowledge for all. To substantiate this argument, the paper quotes a few important verses from the Holy Qur'an and Hadiths. The article provides evidence based methods for engaging with religious and spiritual leaders and institutions for sustainable mobilization for regular school attendance.

Index Terms- School education, religious and spiritual leaders, principles and methods of engagement in education

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the important conditions for achieving quality school education for all in several states of India is ensuring regular school attendance. Attendance is one of the precursors of quality education. It is a well-established fact that high attendance correlates with high levels of learning. As a result of irregular attendance, quality of school education remains a matter of concern for quite some time which needs to be urgently addressed. Out of box thinking and multipronged strategies are needed to address this concern; sensitization of religious and spiritual leaders and institutions about school education and their systematic involvement in its promotion can be highly useful.

II. IDENTIFY, RESEARCH AND COLLECT IDEA

One of the key factors for low school attendance in certain areas is also the lack of interest and low perceived benefits among parents and guardians about school education for their children. While people are getting conscious and active about school enrollment, they are complacent about

irregular attendance. Owing to uncertainty in life due to their social and economic conditions and out migration in search of livelihood, many parents don't see much value in pursuing school education for their children. In some cases even if they admit their wards in school, after some time the wards' school attendance become irregular. Consequently, they drop out and join their parents and supplement the families' income by directly earning wages or by way of helping the household chores. Therefore, the demand for quality school education among such sections of parents and households is comparatively low.

The supply side has its own share of responsibility for low school attendance. In many cases the implementation of The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act 2009 is very weak. Due to weak implementation of the RTE Act, the very environment in schools is unconducive to attract and retain children for regular attendance especially in areas which have specific social, cultural and economic characteristics. The school administration is incapable of understanding and addressing special learning needs of the children; inadequate teaching-learning materials in many schools and their use; inappropriate teachers-pupil ratio, teachers' apathy and lack of training for interaction and transaction of learning with children and parents are also responsible for such a state of affair.

Irregular school attendance leading to drop out and consequently poor education status especially among certain social groups are surrounded by complex issues, and can't be approached and addressed in simplistic manner. A well thought multipronged strategy is required to address this phenomenon effectively. Evidences reconfirm the fact that religious, spiritual and social leaders and institutions have profound influence over parents and their immediate social ecology and can influence opinions and decisions for issues such as health, education, nutrition, etc.

Many sections in socially and economically backward groups have certain barriers and bottlenecks for school

attendance and retention. Some of the barriers are common across all social and religious groups, while some factors including social norms and beliefs, are specific to each group. Evidences indicate that traditional, social, religious and spiritual leaders and institutions play significant role in reinforcing traditional norms. Experiences and evidences also show that, if engaged strategically, these very leaders and institutions can be extremely helpful in changing traditional norms and beliefs. Therefore, social, religious and spiritual leaders, institutions and platforms should be

III. WRITE DOWN YOUR STUDIES AND FINDINGS

Principles and methods of engaging with religious and social leaders and institutions

Experience on engaging with religious, spiritual and social leaders for advocacy and social mobilization for development programmes guide on certain principles. The main principles include make them think and feel that development programme which they are expected to get involved in aligns with their religious and spiritual thoughts and teachings, and that it is not different from them; the whole approach, in terms of gestures, body and oral language of those tasked with sensitization of religious leaders and institutions should not be challenging the participants with so called modern, rational and areligious arguments, at least not in ice-breaking and opening up phase of the sensitization process. All religious teachings unambiguously emphasize on the importance of *gyan, ilm, taleem* (knowledge and education). One should have preparation and practice of playing on the turf of religious and spiritual leaders and institutions i.e., knowledge of the teachings and the preaching of the scriptures and school of thoughts that they follow; pick up certain teachings, scriptures and verses which align with the specific development programme that they are expected to be sensitized about and support for social mobilization. For example, in the case of Muslim religious and spiritual leaders and institutions' sensitization for education and school attendance, one should know and articulate the emphasis that the Islamic teachings lay on the importance of reading, gaining knowledge, etc.

Ahammiatul-Maerifatul Wattaelimu Fil-Islam (Importance of Knowledge and Education in Islam)

The teachings of Islam place extremely high value on Education (reading and learning). The very first verse of the Holy Qur'an revealed to the Prophet Muhammed is *not* about the God or the Satan, the Hell or the Heaven, and not even about the Sin or the Virtue, this World or the other World; it is in fact: "*Iqra Bismirabbikal Lazee Khalaq¹ . . .*" (Read in the name of the Creator . . .). The Holy Qur'an

sensitized and involved in a sustainable promotion of the desired behaviours and norms for *regular school attendance*. The thrust of the sensitization should be to share facts and perspectives with such leaders highlighting the importance and benefits of school attendance for the population under their influence, and convincingly explain their role and responsibilities to change the situation, particularly in the areas where the attendance is low and dropout high.

further reads: *Wallazeena Útúl Ilma Darajaat² . . .* (. . . and those who are given knowledge, are of higher status . . .); *Rabbi Habli Hukmawn Wa-alhiqni Bissaliheen³ . . .* (O' My Lord! Bless me with knowledge and wisdom, and let me be with the virtuous ones . . .); "*Waqúr Rabbi ZidniIlma⁴ . . .*" (. . . and you (Prophet Muhammed) say: O' My Lord! Do bless enhancement in my knowledge . . .). The Holy Qur'an is *Zalikal Kitabu Lareybafeeh* (*this is the Book in which there is no scope for any doubt*).

In addition to the Holy Qur'an, there are several Hadiths which also emphasize on the value of education. For example, "*Útlúbul Ilmi Walawbisseen, Talabúl Ilmi Fareedatún Ala Kúlli Muslimin⁵*." (In quest of knowledge go even to China, gaining knowledge is a must for each and every Muslim including men, women, children and aged). There are quite a few more evidences in the Holy Book as well as in Hadiths directly and strongly emphasizing on the supreme importance of knowledge and education for all regardless of class, creed, colour and gender. It becomes here absolutely clear that religious teachings, including that of Islam, provide full freedom and encourage their believers to learn and seek knowledge wherever it may come from and wherever its seeker/s may have to go to get it. It can be sought in China, Iran, Indonesia, USA, Europe, Africa. Gaining knowledge through Arabic, Persian, Hindi, German, Urdu, Telegu, English, French Tamil, Bengali or Sanskrit does not disobey any religious principles; studying mathematics, physics, medicines, civil engineering and excelling in commuter science do not make believers any lesser believer. In fact, those who are given opportunity to gain knowledge and education are of *Darajaat* . . . (. . . of higher status . . .).

²Holy Qur'an Surah Almujaadilah, Aaya No. 11

³Holy Qur'an Surah Ash-shuaraa, Aaya No. 83

⁴Holy Qur'an Surah Ash-shuaraa, Aaya No.114

⁵Hadiths, Muslim Shareef

¹Holy Qur'an, Surah Al-Alaq, Aaya No. 1

IV. CONCLUSION

Hence, religion and spirituality are doubtlessly in favour of education and unambiguously support and promote acquiring knowledge and learning by all in any case and at any cost. Yet a large number of people including women and children are deprived of education. This is a situation which is against religious and spiritual teachings and preaching of all religions. The factors preventing and depriving people from gaining education and enjoying a dignified life are more in their relation with social and economic transactions and interactions rather than religion. However, as stated earlier that religious, spiritual and social leaders often have heavy influence over underprivileged people. Therefore, these leaders, institutions and platforms of influence have to be identified in society; they should be sensitized and informed about the decisive role that they can play for ensuring education for all. They should be systematically involved for changing the situation for those who are deprived of quality education and knowledge against religious teachings.

Religious and spiritual leaders, *Shankracharyas*, *Maths*, *Sufi Shrines*, *school*, *grukuls* and *madrasah* teachers and administrators and similar other stakeholders must get involved for the promotion of school attendance, particularly in the areas where school attendance is low and

dropout rate high. At the same time the concerned authorities in education and other relevant departments responsible for planning and implementation of the laws, special schemes and programmes for school education must be more creative and proactive in implementing and monitoring regular school attendance. A greater attention and emphasis on girls' education belonging to underprivileged communities living in hard-to-reach areas will produce greater results for social change and equity that all religions teach.

REFERENCES

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