**SNC and the quest to reinforce one national vision**

[Marian Sharaf Joseph](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/marian-sharaf-joseph/" \o "More Articles by Marian Sharaf Joseph)

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The Single National Curriculum (SNC) is set to be enforced in August and many people are not happy. The government initiative aims to introduce a uniform basic core curriculum across the board for both private and public educational institutes as well as madrassas, under the banner of: One system of Education for all. The government assured that this would not lead to a de-standardised system. Yet not everyone is convinced.

For Pakistan’s religious minorities, however, the matter remains an even more serious one, since there are concerns that the SNC may not be in accordance with Article 22 of the Constitution, which safeguards against the receiving of religious instruction at educational institutes if it relates to a religion other than one’s own. Yet, as of the last hearing on March 31, 2021 the Compliance Report on this very issue, submitted by the Ministry of Federal Education, was dismissed by the Supreme Court. The Education ministry is, therefore, expected resubmit a Compliance Report before the next hearing.

This naturally is a cause of great concern. Human Rights and Minorities Rights Defender Justice (Rtd) Nasira Javed believes that quality education must overlook all religious and social discrimination. Thus, she supports the government the introduction of the SNC provided that it upholds Article 22, stressing that this would benefit students everywhere.

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Quoting a verse from Sir Allama Iqbal’s Dua ‘Lab Pe Aati Hai Dua Ban Ke Tamanna Meri. Zindagi Shamma Ki Surat Ho, Khuda Ya Meri,’ Justice Nasira said that the priority had to be conceptual learning – especially at the primary school level – so that young students develop both the wisdom and maturity to understand what they are learning as well as the ability to question and analyse the knowledge imparted to them.

In my conversation with her, she went on to say: “The religious parties don’t agree on having the Single National Curriculum in their institutes unless it has an overdose of religiosity in all the subjects including sciences, languages and arts. If this continues to be so, the students would find such studies difficult. It will create prejudice against minority students, who are guaranteed by Article 22 of the Constitution of Pakistan that they will not be compelled to study religion other than their own.”

Eminent professor Kalyan Singh, Pakistan’s first professor from the Sikh community, tends to agree. He believes that the SNC is a good first step. “Since Pakistan is a religiously diversified nation, implementation according to Article 22 of our constitution should be taken into consideration or else all efforts would be in vain.” Be that as it may, he did envisage one problem. “The main issue is that the number of mainstream educational institutes (schools, colleges and universities) is less than Madaris, which have their own syllabus. The percentage of Madaris students is much higher than that of mainstream schools which is why the impact of knowledge imparted to them surpasses that of mainstream students. The nation would only benefit at large if all communities and types of schooling are taken into consideration. Only then we can achieve the much-needed balance in our education system.”

The official website of the Minister of Federal Education and Professional Training presents the vision of the SNC thus: “One system of Education for all, in terms of curriculum, medium of instruction and a common platform of assessment so that all children have a fair and equal opportunity to receive high quality education. Single National Curriculum is a step in that direction.” The stakeholders listed on their Consultation with Stakeholders section regarding this include all federating units, public sector, private sector, Federal Government Educational Institutions (FGEIs) Cantts & Garrisons, Deeni Madaris, Cambridge University UK for English, Maths and Science, Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS) and Aga Khan University Institute for Educational Development (AKU-IED).

Yet despite having such having esteemed stakeholders on board – it seems that there has been no final as yet. Time is running out.

Peter Jacob, Chairperson People’s Commission for Minorities Rights (PCMR) commented: “Irrespective of intimidation and manipulation that has gone on in April 2021 from some quarters, I think the question of implementation of Article 22(1) of the constitution is far from over. Under this article the government is bound to ensure that students are not forced to learn any religion other than their own. Hence, this issue is still very much alive and the peoples’ fundamental right is as uncompromisable as the constitution of Pakistan itself.”

The SNC aims to achieve one national vision, mission, goals and objectives through one standardized education system. Famous Chinese philosopher Confucius said: “If your plan is for one year, plant rice; If your plan is for ten years, plant trees; If your plan is for a hundred years, educate children.”

It is, therefore, only through standardised quality education that we can build an intellectually groomed, strong and progressive nation. Hence, the challenge doesn’t lie in the implementation of the SNC but rather in reinforcing one national vision that aims to cultivate national unity and peaceful coexistence.

*The writer is an independent journalist and can be contacted at mariansharafjoseph @gmail.com*