**SNC at Ayaz Melo**

Dr Rafique A Memon

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Ayaz Melo (the festival named after Sindhi national poet Shaikh Ayaz) is an annual event that takes place in Hyderabad every year in December. This year, the seventh iteration of the festival, it continued for five consecutive days and attracted a diverse audience from across the country, with intelligentsia from Pakistan and abroad taking part in this national festival.

The academic sessions discussed a diverse range of subjects, one of which was on the Single National Curriculum (SNC). The speakers at the session discussed this topic at length. The majority of experts from Islamabad, Punjab and Sindh maintained that the SNC will not forge any unity rather it will create schisms in an already divided society.

After the promulgation of the 18th Amendment, education policies cannot be centralised. An Islamabad-based development professional and columnist in this newspaper, Dr Naazir Mehmood, interpreted the SNC as ‘Single Narrative Conditioning’ aimed at controlling the minds of the youth. The underlying intention for introducing this may well be creating One Unit-like conditions.

Dr Taimur Rehman, a professor from the Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS), pointed out that currently 25 million children are out of school. The government must make efforts to bring them to the national fold. The dean of social sciences at SZABIST Karachi expressed the view that the SNC is not inclusive – and is therefore harmful for minority communities in the country.

Dr Arfana Mallah, a professor at Sindh University brought forward the fact that women are not only under-represented in the SNC textbooks but have also been largely shown with veils around their faces, which represents a more Arabised culture. This is ironic when Saudi Arabia in fact wishes to compete with Europe in all spheres of life by 2030. Hence the SNC perpetuates a rather myopic vision of our society. Striking off the picture of Malala Yousafzai and her story from some textbooks is an example to this effect. The experts in the session also maintained that the portrayal of local heroes such as Dr Adeeb Rizvi, Nisar Siddiqui etc may be included in the textbooks rather than highlighting those who are not relevant to our society anymore.

Connecting schools with seminaries seems to be another downside of the SNC. Here two opposing teaching and learning cultures are required to execute the same curriculum. The culture of the latter revolves round submissiveness, obedience, and discouraging critical thinking. These ideas defeat the very purpose of education which should revolve round inquiry, critical thinking and interaction.

The infrastructure of private and public schools in urban and rural areas across the country must be brought at par. Teachers should be equally qualified and trained to carry out the change. The textbooks should ideally contain secular, authentic activities aimed at encouraging critical thinking rather than rote learning and cramming. Without overhauling the entire system of education, a mere change in curriculum will not serve the purpose.

The insights provided by the panel discussion at the Ayaz Melo suggest that any change parachuted in from the top may not yield positive results. The federation should provide some general parameters in terms of learning objectives and core competencies such as: communication, collaboration, critical thinking, creation, project based/ problem-based learning whereas content selection may well be left to the provincial governments. Provincial governments can then, in collaboration with experts and local teachers, select/devise authentic, culturally sensitive materials for the textbooks. The role of teachers cannot be undermined because they are the key players in this whole saga. Teachers cannot be treated as technicians; rather they need to be empowered to conceptualise the process of curriculum change before putting it into practice.

Another national dialogue may well be initiated on this, and the concerns of all stakeholders should be taken on board. The purpose is to provide our young generation with quality education which can equip them with 21st century skills. To achieve this aim, a modus operandi may be revisited so that all federating units take ownership of this issue of national importance.

The writer is the pro vice-chancellor at University of Sindh, Thatta Campus and can be reached at: dr.memon1970@gmail.com