

# EDUCATION CONCERNS (SNC TO NCP)

Among the good ways to value the book's contribution is to see it as an incisive analysis of the politics of the 'Single' National Curriculum. The central thrust is the desire to demonstrate the delink between the curriculum's expressed aim of ending class-based education and the way it was developed and implemented which ensured that the aim was never going to be achieved.

The book brings together various perspectives on the SNC – from outright rejection to persistent defence - and the voices of different players - from those who made the curriculum to those who are using it. Despite its overall critical stance towards the SNC, the book gives space to voices that defend and support the curriculum.

The book is a must-read for those interested in the history of education, and especially of curriculum development, in Pakistan. A particular strength of the book is the advice, suggestions, and directions for creating a sound education system scattered throughout the text waiting to be heard. The book points to many future research possibilities which can be taken up by researchers and doctoral students.

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AMJAD NAZEER  
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## Acronyms

AEPAM	The Academy of Education Planning and Management
AKU-IED	Agha Khan University – Institute of Education Development
ASER	The Annual Status of Education Report
CAR	Directorate of Curriculum Assessment and Research
CoP	The Constitution of Pakistan (1973)
CUP	Cambridge University Press
DCAR	Directorate of Curriculum Assessment and Research
DEAs	District Education Authorities
DRA	District Registering Authority
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
FGEIs	Federal Government Educational Institutions
HRCP	Human Rights Commission of Pakistan
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICT	Islamabad Capital Territory
IPEMC	The Inter Provincial Education Ministers Conference
ITA	Idara Taleem-o-Agahi
ITM	Ittehad Tanzeem-ul-Madaris
KII	Key Informant Interview
KP	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
LMS	Learning Management System
LUMS	Lahore University of Management Sciences
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MoFEPT	Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training
MoI	Medium of Instruction

MTBs	Model Textbooks
MUB	Mutahida Ulema Board
NBF	National Book Foundation
NCC	National Curriculum Council
NCHR	National Commission for Human Rights Pakistan
NCM	National Commission on Minorities
NCRC	National Commission on The Rights of Child
NEP	National Education Policy
NOC	No Objection Certificate
OOSC	Out-of-School Children
OUP	The Oxford University Press (OUP)
PAPSA	Pakistan Alliance of Private Schools Association
pc	Percent
PCC	Provincial Curriculum Council
PCTB	Punjab Curriculum and Textbook Board
PEP	Pakistan Education Policy
PLWD	Persons Living with Disabilities
PMIU	Programme Monitoring and Implementing Unit
PPP	Pakistan People’s Party
PSMA	Private Schools Management Association
PTBB	The Punjab Textbook Board
PTBs	Provincial Textbook Boards
PTI	Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf
RCC	Regional Curriculum Council
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SED	School Education Department
SLO	Student Learning Outcome
SNC	Single National Curriculum
STB	Sindh Textbook Board

TFD	Taiwan Foundation for Democracy
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
TPA	The Textbook Publishers Association
TRC	Textbook Review Committee
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
USE	Uniform System of Education
USF	Universal Service Fund

## Foreword

**Dr. A.H. Nayyar**

**T**hat Pakistan's public system of education requires a major repair is hardly disputed. It has been in a state of continuous decline for decades despite many policy actions and reform agendas. It is a state of serious crisis, and the poor education the students get poses a grave threat to the future of the nation. Both official and private surveys show year after year how those children who are fortunate enough to be in schools lack adequate skills in literacy and numeracy.

While taking charge in August 2018, many hopes were pinned on the incumbent government, especially because of the tall political claims and the promises made in their National Education Policy Framework the same year. The framework stressed four priority areas: *(a) putting out-of-school children (OOSC) back to schools; (b) augmenting the quality of education par excellence; (c) removing 'educational apartheid' by bridging the gap between the prevalent class-based education system; and (d) emphasising technical and vocational education.*

Over three years and a half passed without tangible progress in any of the four priority areas. Instead of bringing a uniform system of education, the government moved in a different and fruitless and retrogressive direction by producing a Single National Curriculum (SNC), a move that spawned an unprecedented amount of debate in the country. The enormity of comments reflects the fact that SNC was affecting almost all the sectors of education – public, private, low-fee, elite, madrassas, etc. Interestingly the debate continues because what came forth was a step-by-step introduction of the new curriculum, and much more was yet to come<sup>1</sup>. Barring a few voices of support, most of the commentaries are deeply critical of the SNC on various grounds, which are laid out in detail in this book.

SNC is, in fact, a derogation of the promise of the Framework to remove apartheid in the provision of education, replacing it with a uniform education system, meaning thereby raising the standard of learning and educational facilities to the same level as in the best schools. But this would have involved a huge investment in public education. It is a fact that Pakistan's public education is a severely starved sector, being allocated a mere two percent (pc) or less of the Gross Domestic Product. The promised uniform education system would have required at least two to three times as many resources. Since that was not possible, and since something cheap needed to be done, the result therefore is the SNC. And what has come out as SNC is in

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<sup>1</sup> The books were revised again in 2024, covering the claims and practical measures taken by the caretaking and then the upcoming PPP and PML-N's coalition government from April 2022 to November 2024.

essence *madratisation* of schools. No school curriculum in Pakistan's 75-year history had as much religious content as SNC. Some of its architects may take pride in this achievement, but they have no idea how much harm their product is going to inflict on the future of the nation.

To balance the heavy incursion of Islamiyat in nearly all the subjects, the architects of SNC take pride in introducing religious studies curricula for minority religions in the country for the first time in history. It seems that the minority faith students and their parents are happy about this development. It would save them the contrived alternative course on ethics, which, anyway, appeared modelled on Islamic ethical principles. Nevertheless, the actual teaching of this course is likely to face several logistical problems. Yet, the National Curriculum Council (NCC) feels very proud of adding these courses to the school syllabus, not realising that enhancing religious studies in schools makes it more difficult to avoid communal and sectarian divisiveness. Besides, it becomes difficult to promote critical thinking in students also.

In discussing serious pedagogical issues with the curriculum (at least the part announced and implemented so far) and the textbooks published officially, this book not only includes opinions expressed by commentators in various publications but also responses of government officials. Since the avowed hallmark of the new scheme is its uniform application to the three schooling systems – public, elite private and Islamic seminaries (madrassas) – the book, at first, examines this particular aspect carefully and without any bias through a survey of schools, teachers and parents. Where needed, it

highlights the issues with historical background as well, including a chapter on ‘the state of education’ in the country.

Since the implementation of SNC in the elite English medium private schools would have lowered their learning standards, the move was strongly resisted by them. As a result, the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training (MoFEPT) relented and insisted that “*SNC should be taken as the floor, not as the ceiling*”, meaning that it defines ‘the minimum’ that all the private schools must accept, but they can be free to prepare their students for any higher standards for foreign curricula and assessment measures. In saying so the Ministry failed to realise how much this twist militated against their promise of eliminating educational apartheid.

One of the merits of the book is the survey it conducted on the various aspects of SNC debated in education circles, electronic media, newspapers and social media. However, its weakness is the lop-sidedness sampling: overwhelming coverage of Punjab, very little of Baluchistan, nearly zero in Sindh, and total absence of opinions from Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province. As a result, many would perhaps look skeptically at the conclusions drawn from the survey. Yet it was important to gain a sense of perceptions among concerned citizens, experts, officials, teachers and students about the development.

The second year of SNC saw the formulation of curricula for the middle school, having its significance because of the supplement disciplines of history and geography. In the times before 2006, geography ceased to be a separate subject; its topics were taught rather cursorily as a part of other subjects.

Secondly, history was taught as a heavily nationalistic subject, devoid of objectivity, and fraught with historical distortions and hate material. An appraisal of the history curriculum in SNC was therefore an important need.

Among the grave concerns regarding curriculum and learning material is the increasing role of religious leaders in the determination of what the students can and cannot learn in schools. Their initial role to only check if anything prejudicial to the fundamental religious sensitivities gets inadvertently included in the texts seems to have now been extended to groping the entire content for acceptability to the Ulema. A dangerous trend as it is, that needs to be reversed. The nation is already witnessing an unprecedented surge in religious militancy threatening its social fabric. Examples galore. The PTI government was too beholden to the clergy and was not willing to reverse the tilt. One could only hope that sense will eventually prevail, and this lawlessness will end.

## **An Indictment of SNC and NCP**

**Dr. Naazir Mahmood**

**T**hat the so-called SNC prepared and propounded by the PTI government was an exercise in futility is old news. There have been many critics of the SNC including this writer, but now a most comprehensive review by Amjad Nazeer and Asad Khan has done a good job by conducting both qualitative and quantitative research.

Amjad Nazeer heads the Institute of Development Research and Corresponding Capabilities (IDRAC). He is a dedicated social science researcher and a seasoned analyst of policy issues in the country. His credentials as a human rights activist are also impressive. With his latest project with Asad Khan, he has filled a gap in the analysis of the SNC. The Taiwan Foundation for Democracy provided financial support for the study that captures the journey of school curriculum in Pakistan from the SNC to the National Curriculum of Pakistan (NCP) – a renaming of the same by the coalition government that followed the PTI government.

The study begins with the background of the SNC and highlights that one of the main promises of the PTI before the elections of 2018 was the creation of a Uniform System of Education (USE). The framework that the PTI presented was impressive and sounded excellent on paper as it promised to eliminate class differences in the education

system in Pakistan by offering equal opportunities to all children irrespective of their financial status. This was an impressive claim and who would have disagreed with this lofty ideal? But soon after coming to power the PTI changed its tack and opted for the easiest way out.

Renewed educationist A H Nayyar in his preamble to the study declares at the outset that the SNC was in fact a derogation of the promise of the Framework to remove apartheid in the provision of education, replacing it with a uniform education system, “meaning thereby raising the standard of learning and educational facilities to the same level as in the best schools. But this would have involved a huge investment in public education. It is a fact that Pakistan’s public education is a severely starved sector, being allocated a mere two per cent or less of the gross domestic production.”

An interesting point that the research by Amjad Nazeer and his team highlights is that while the SNC debate and controversies were not yet resolved, the PTI government came up with yet another contentious move of drafting a New Education Policy (NEP) and completing it within the year 2021... the official background paper of the NEP bragged of “revolutionising Pakistan’s education system by accelerating enrolment, bringing millions of out-of-school-children back to schools, constructing the required number of new schools, imparting modern scientific, technological and vocational education at various level, and linking the whole discipline with business, entrepreneurship, industry, information technology, and trade.”

Amjad Nazeer and his team have collected intensive primary and secondary information gathered from Dera Ghazi Khan, the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT), Khanewal, Lahore, Layyah, Multan, Rawalpindi, (Punjab), Karachi (Sindh), and Killa Abdullah and Pishin (Balochistan) making it slightly lopsided in favour of Punjab but still it has a comprehensive set of data for a study of this scale. Interestingly, some of the executive district officers (EDOs) from Layyah, Multan, and Rawalpindi kept putting off indefinitely meetings for the interviews, showing a lack of interest or certain insecurities in discussing educational affairs in their areas.

Chapter two of the study presents a dismal picture of education in the country as our net enrolment ratio is hardly 70 per cent meaning nearly one-third of all children are either not enrolled or enrolled with the wrong age group, whereas nearly four million children are enrolled in religious seminaries -- madrasa schools mostly attached with a mosque. Rather than addressing more important issues, the PTI government advocated for SNC as if it was a panacea to all educational ills. The government claimed that it consulted over 400 educational experts to develop the SNC.

Independent educationists countered the claim by saying that 400 is nothing more than an empty number which is pretty deceptive. If you consult the ‘experts’ who are part of the system, they are mostly naïve and compliant. “So long as the result is disappointing, it does not matter whether you consult 400 or 4000 people”. This is like a pseudo-consensus that is commonly reached in consultations led by the government and its functionaries. Even the names of the experts and stakeholders consulted were not made public. Then for the

new education policy, 45 vice-chancellors were invited to one such seminar to gather their views to formulate the document.

The new policy, like all previous ones, was full of verbose claims and led to more working papers. Both the policy and the SNC were in gross violation of the Constitution as after the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment only the provincial governments were responsible for all educational matters in their provinces. The PTI government tried to encroach upon the jurisdiction of the provincial government without doing what it was supposed to do i.e. taking care of education at the educational institutions and schools that fall under the Ministry of Federal Education. Imran Khan launched the SNC in August 2021 claiming that it would prove an essential step in transforming the nation into a ‘unified entity’.

Then the PTI government embarked upon a journey to develop model textbooks (MTBs) based on the SNC. Hundreds of publishers received no-objection certificates by the Punjab Textbook Board to publish new textbooks. There are 25 public examination boards and all were expected to develop examination papers on the SNC. The study also found that there are less than 10 per cent of the seminaries that are already offering Islamic as well as secular studies systematically, though their declared purpose is to ‘serve Islam and produce religious scholars, *maulvis*, and Imams of mosques.

The research study also discusses the structure and content of *Dars-e-Nizami* based on the centuries-old system of *maqulat* (rational sciences) and *manqulat* (imitational sciences) and

how it could or could not accommodate the SNC. Needless to say that their teaching of ‘rational sciences’ is highly questionable in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For example, their books on *Falakyat* (Astronomy) *Iqtisadiyat* (economics), *Falsafa* (philosophy) and *ilm-e-mantiq* (logic) all use obsolete books and ideas. The research study also tried to gauge teachers’ perception of the SNC. Most teachers did not agree with the notion that the SNC would put an end to the apartheid system in education.

Chapter five of the study is perhaps the most comprehensive as it discusses the management and implementation of SNC textbooks with a wider discussion on federal and provincial concerns. The study discusses the implementation of the SNC in private, public, and religious seminaries separately. Chapter six critically analyses the SNC curriculum, contents, student learning outcomes (SLOs). Chapter seven analyses the curriculum from grade six to eight, and chapter eight outlines the overall concerns in the curriculum.

Overall, the study by Amjad Nazeer is a valuable addition to the existing discourse on curriculum and its implementation. It is an indictment of the PTI government that kept boasting about eliminating the class divide in education but ended up doing what it should not have done at all at the federal level. The entire exercise of developing and implementing the SNC was nothing more than a waste of resources that could have been used for much better purposes.

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## Introduction

**D**ismal as it has ever been is the state of education in Pakistan. Despite calls for reforms now and then, no remarkable shift is out there to demonstrate. Policy shifts and curriculum reforms are neither novel nor inadvisable; their genuine need and adequate implementation, however, desire in-depth appraisal. Haphazard measures assumed by multiple regimes, unfortunately, prove to be politically motivated rather than a sincere effort to put education on a path to progress. The new national curriculum, evolving from 2006 to 2009, was hardly absorbed by the system by 2014 and was troubled again in 2019. Enfamed as a SNC (2019-2022) and renamed as NCP (2022), Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and Pakistan Muslim League – Nawaz (PML-N) also failed to transform and modernise the system. Contrary to the claims of building a ‘uniform system of education’ across all spectrums, elite private systems and even certain public ones remained the same. It is nevertheless, the largest and underprivileged public schools and their curriculum that had to bear the brunt of yet another political gimmick. The book delves in and draws deeper analyses of the issue along with elaborating on the real problems, historical errors and inadequacies that the public system of education suffers from.

Textbook development and implementation have long been contested in their entirety, but with the emergence of SNC policy framework and MTBs, a floodgate of commentaries, opinions and analyses opened up, nevertheless, without a thorough analysis. The book attempts to thoroughly assess the move along with stretching it to the ideological, financial and technical complications the public education has been infested with, in the country. The information and analyses offered in the book form a fine blend of on-ground and extracted data. Apart from relying on secondary sources, the data collected from multiple public, and some private schools and Madrassas also feature in understanding the issue better. Despite being confined to criticism, the work essentially outlines systematic shifts in approach and underpinnings to pull it out of the chronic crises. Priorities and prerequisites – theoretical, administrative, financial and curricular - are specifically highlighted.

Throughout PTT's regime from late 2018 to mid-2022, the SNC was aggressively promoted by the then Prime Minister, the Minister for Federal Education and Professional Training, the NCC, and provincial education ministers of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The SNC and its MTBs from Grade I to Grade VIII were mainly implemented in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Balochistan, while Sindh adopted it only partially. The textbooks for Grade IX to XII were designed in 2024, and those for Grade XII were likely to come to the fore by 2025.

The superimposed, all-pervasive ideology of Pakistan, deeply rooted in Islamic principles and a monolithic idea of nationhood, unity and patriotism, often disregards the

country's socio-cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity. The myopic approach to nation-building causing exclusionary tendencies, even racism and hatred are manifested in several of our socio-religious spheres. More often than not, they are reflected in our education too. SNC and NCP addressed the problem in certain subjects, but they surfaced again in certain other subjects one way or the other. Efforts to reinforce faith and patriotism through curricula are a repackaging of stubborn convictions. Eventually, democratic values, equality, inclusion, human rights and embracing diversity become a casualty of the state's fixation with oneness.

Promoted under the leadership of the PTI government (2018-2022), the SNC aimed to standardise education across the country. Introduced as an idea of uniformity, though deceptively, its development and descent ignited widespread pedagogical and political controversy. Post 18<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment (2010), the federal and provincial jurisdiction of education is also unravelled. Decentralising the affairs of education, the provinces are legitimised to shape their policies and curricula, tailored to their specific needs, that SNC/NCP seemed to violate. The federal government's push for a uniform curriculum disregarded the provincial autonomy and their right to set their priorities. By overriding the principle of autonomy, the SNC sent the signal of provinces' subordination to the federal authority. This top-down manoeuvring contradicts the spirit of devolution meant to empower provincial governments in the areas of public concern.

While the federal government argued that the SNC would uplift educational standards, the provinces, particularly Sindh and Balochistan, strongly discorded. One-size-fits-all curriculum would fail to accommodate diverse educational needs along with pulling down those already performing better. Sindh remained apprehensive of ignoring the province's political and cultural history, and alienating students from their heritage. The controversy surrounding the SNC reflects the complexities of governance in a federal system, where educational policies cannot be enforced from the top. The SNC's imposition, despite widespread resistance from the provinces, calls into question the true meaning of federalism in Pakistan. It reveals the tensions between national unity and regional diversity and highlights the challenges of balancing centralised authority with the desire for provincial autonomy. The fact is, our political stalwarts resist stepping back from their nation-formation endeavour in an awkward manner.

The National Book Foundation (NBF) and the Punjab Curriculum and Textbook Board (PCTB) led the printing of the MTBs in alignment with the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) guidelines and learning outcomes. Simultaneously, private publishers were also allowed to print books, provided they observed prescribed principles and sought necessary approvals from the Provincial Textbook Boards (PTBs). Precisely, despite efforts to standardise the curriculum, key managerial issues, topical preferences and discrepancies in quality persisted.

Nationwide brouhaha sprang up in 2021 when the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training (MoFEPT)

advised provinces to implement the SNC in all public and private schools, as well as Madrassas. The initiative faced resistance, particularly in its rollout during the pandemic (COVID-19: 2019-2021), which caused delaying the academic session too. In response, a committee was formed to address implementation challenges, streamline approval processes, and foster public-private partnerships for textbook development. However, challenges regarding enforcement and resource allocation continued to hamper the success of the move.

Extended analyses of the MTBs concerning their efforts to inculcate Islamist nationalist ideology, their proposed heroes, historical figures and role models in young minds also find a reasonable space. Cultural norms, values, and dress codes as well as the representation of men, women, children, minorities, character and overall national character of the society and citizenship are also commented. Where striking, skewed approaches, inaccuracies or deliberate distortion of facts are significantly unclothed.

Ousting PTT's government from power through a no-confidence move, the interim government (April 2022 - January 2024) proclaimed reforming education management, and improving SNC while enhancing quality and minimising provincial grievances. The provincial governments of Sindh, Punjab and Balochistan echoed similar concerns, highlighting the need to revise SNC to accommodate cultural and linguistic diversity and ensure provincial autonomy.

Expressing their reservations about the word "single", which they believed caused confusion and undermined diversity, the

initiative was renamed the NCP by mid-2022. The new name claimed the interim government, aimed to erode confusion and reflect inclusivity in our education and curriculum. The interim minister for FEPT vowed not to impose curriculum reforms on provinces without their consent. Sindh had already refrained from joining the SNC initiative and Balochistan too had reservations. The elite private sector was alienated by the PTT's attempt to enforce SNC as a maximum rather than a threshold measure.

Teacher training and moving on from reproducing crammed material to conceptual assessment in the exams were re-emphasised. The interim federal minister pledged to adopt a consultative approach for developing and continuously updating the curriculum based on evidence and international best practices. *'The establishment of the NCC Secretariat in 2015 marked the beginning of standardised education in line with Article 25-A of the Constitution'*, claimed the same minister. *'It was the PML-N's government which introduced a NCF and a draft National Education Policy in 2017, emphasising progressive and concept-based religious education,'* stressed the interim minister.

As Prime Minister, Mian Shahbaz Sharif (February 2024-) declared a kind of emergency to improve education over his five-year tenure. The plan included skills enhancement, bringing out-of-school-children (OOSC) back to schools, teachers' training, imparting IT education and upgrading school infrastructure. Dr. Khalid Maqbool Siddiqi, the MoFEPT expressed his will to remove SNC's flaws and refine the curriculum. Removing federal and provincial governments' distrust and reviving the 2009's policy framework was also one of his objectives. Although he

endorsed NCP's goal of standardising curricular content but his designs to replace the old framework remained unfulfilled. Precisely, much of the interim and formal government's plan is already proving nothing more than rhetoric. Deplorably, Pakistan constitutes the second highest number of OOSCs in the world. The much acclaimed, National Education Policy (NEP 2009), determined to lift the country's literacy to 86 pc by up-scaling ongoing formal and non-formal literacy programmes till 2015 also failed miserably. Now outsourcing and privatisation of education, are resolving some but giving birth to numerous other problems – giving an impetus to profiteering within the public system of education is an eminent one to mention.

Pakistan's public education system faces multiple crises, including poor learning outcomes, infrastructure decay, and governance failures. National assessments show that nearly half of Grade V students struggle with a Grade II performance, while mathematics and science proficiency remain disappointing. The chronic shortage of teachers at the primary level, exacerbated by the recruitment halt since 2018 led to multigrade overcrowded classrooms and worsening the quality of instruction. Thousands of public schools lack vital facilities deterring attention and discipline. Ill-conceived policies and political interference further paralysed the system. Millions of children are still out of school, and many of the enrolled are learning little. Massive rural-urban disparity, longer distances, inaccessible school locations, child labour, girls' complementary household chores, and continued corporal punishment coupled with missing facilities cause boys and girls to drop out prematurely. In

other words, the system is failing its youth and jeopardising the country's future.

Beyond politically driven symptomatic shifts like SNC/NCP and outsourcing or creating islands of excellence, education reforms require a multi-pronged strategy. A comprehensive, well-funded and well-thought-out reform plan that integrates micro-planning, targeted resource allocation, and transparent investment is essential to reverse the further decline. Providing and restoring school infrastructure - including labs, IT centres, libraries and laboratories, particularly of remote, rural and suburban schools - is important to ensure that every child enjoys safe and well-equipped learning spaces. Teacher-student ratio needs to be rationalised mainly at the primary level while ensuring merit-based recruitment of adequately qualified teachers, rigorous training and exposure are important to improve the learning environment in the classroom. Save a standard curriculum framework and student learning outcome, the provincial and federal governments should allow private publishers to come up with competitive quality textbooks. Addressing governance failures through periodical monitoring, eliminating political interference, and strengthening local accountability mechanisms can help improve standards.

While a notable correction has been made by allowing minority students to study their respective faiths instead of ethics or Islamiyat, issues remain. Despite constitutional guarantees and rights-based commitments to religious freedom, social science subjects still impose Islamic content and Islamised nationalism, compelling non-Muslim students to engage with religious narratives within and outside their

beliefs. In other words, indirect coercion, rights violations, intolerance and discrimination continue one way or the other. Moreover, the lack of sufficient minority teachers and minority parents' avoidance of admitting their children to public schools continue alienating minority students, reinforcing a majoritarian, monolithic and exclusionary educational atmosphere.



# Chapter 1

## Outlook of the Work

Conventionally, education is imparted through a curriculum – though it is certainly possible without the curriculum too. The curriculum is a complex whole - incorporating multiple processes of teaching and learning right from cognitive to physical, social, cultural, scientific, philosophical and technical ones – depending on the age and preferences of society and the State. It is designed to communicate knowledge, skills, attitudes, experiences and comprehensions acquired from historical narratives, traditional wisdom, books, lectures, illustrations and demonstrations along with some observation, intuition and heuristic experimentation. Academically, a whole range of methods and approaches have been accepted, adapted, criticised, modified and innovated to keep pace with the changing socio-economic circumstances, teaching aids and materials, and a given academic environment. World-recognised academicians and educationists have been offering a range of definitions of education and curriculum – at times overlapping but not always because curriculum is just an element of education.

John Dewey, the famous educationist casting profound influence on the American system of public education purports that, *'Curriculum (1902), is a continuous reconstruction, moving from the child's present experience out into that represented by*

*the organised bodies of truth that we call studies*'. Harold O. Rugg, another known educationist defines curriculum (1927) as *'It is a succession of experiences and enterprises having a maximum lifelikeness for the learner i.e. giving the learner a development most helpful in meeting and controlling life situations'*. Hollis Caswell in Caswell and Campbell (1935) thinks, *'The curriculum is composed of all the experiences children have under the guidance of teachers... Thus, curriculum, considered as a field of study represents no strictly limited body of content, but rather a process or procedure*. On the other hand, in J. L. McBrien and R. Brandt's (1997) views, *'Curriculum refers to a written plan outlining what students will be taught i.e. a course of study. Curriculum may refer to all the courses offered at a given school or all the courses offered at a school in a particular area of study'*. Nevertheless, according to the Indian Department of Education, *'Curriculum means the planned interaction of pupils with instructional content, materials, resources, and processes for evaluating the attainment of educational objectives'*; while Robert Gagne (1967) thinks that *'Curriculum is a sequence of content-units arranged in such a way that the learning of each unit may be accomplished as a single act, provided the capabilities described by specified prior units - in the sequence - have already been mastered by the learner'*.

Depending on the subject, a whole range of teaching methodologies or approaches and classroom environments are recommended by educationists to effectively transmit elements of curriculum i.e. Montessori, teacher or student-centred approach, programmed instruction as a teaching strategy, heuristic approach, brainstorming, fishbowl-discussion or a problem-solving strategy, inquiry-based learning, role-play or simulated skills training, kindred or group-teaching approach, inductive and deductive teaching

methods, cooperative teaching-and-learning strategy, think-pair-share strategy, jigsaw-learning and sharing skills, cognitive or mental mapping and KWL techniques i.e. “*what I know, what I want to know and what I have learnt*” strategy and integrated skills transmission<sup>1</sup>.

In these perspectives, the study in hand is going to evaluate the content, contours and implications of the Single National Curriculum (SNC), to be known as the NCP over time, along with implicit teaching-methodology assessment advised by the official arms of the sitting government i.e. Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training (MoFEPT), NCC and the PTBs. An elaborate analysis and critique of the SNC/NCP lie ahead.

Since late 2019, the incumbent government took the centre stage of education by storm with mindboggling claims of introducing a SNC in all streams of education i.e. public and private schools along with religious seminaries. “*It will put an end to apartheid, class-based and poor system of education and put in place a uniform curriculum and quality education through a broad-based consensus*”, the then government claimed. By March 2021, Curriculum Guidelines and MTBs had been brought to light by the NCC and PTBs (not all, however). Obviously, it took the progressive circles and educationists of the country by surprise, transpiring that the ‘proposed curriculum’ and ‘model textbooks’ were neither rational nor objective or progressive as claimed by the official stalwarts. They attempted to build upon a curriculum, developed earlier in 2006 under a dictatorial regime striving for ‘enlightened

moderation<sup>ii</sup> from 2001 to 2008. Nevertheless, the proposed curriculum was relatively better – whatever known and unknown factors were operative behind it. In between a half-baked curriculum framework was also introduced in 2009.

With fits and starts, nevertheless, the curriculum was gradually adopted by 2014. Compared with the past, the said curriculum was meant to be unbiased and objective though not without its voids and weaknesses. Certain conservative and retrogressive content still found its place there, implicitly or explicitly, and the proposed Students Learning Outcomes (SLOs) were also not thoroughly adopted but still, it was a worthy effort. Obviously, the current plan to ‘revise and improve’ the curriculum has, once again, stirred a massive debate amongst civil society and progressive as well as conservative educationists.

Right with the maiden overview of SNC, a nationwide social, political and academic discussion and deliberation gushed out. Along with the hyperbole statements of building an advanced system of education, abolishing inequality within, wider stakeholders’ consultations, developing SLOs, and setting forth quality content and core competencies, everything came under discussion – so widely that it was, perhaps, unprecedented in Pakistan’s history of education. The chronically poor education infrastructure, teachers’ incompetency and compromisable recruitment procedure, medium of instruction, the content and contours of sciences

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<sup>ii</sup> A term made popular in Pakistan by the former military ruler General Parvez Musharraf implying to the process of replacing traditional notion of Islam with its progressive and tolerant version.

and social science subjects, contemporary education standards, lessons in Islamiyat and inbuilt religious and ideological elements in social science subjects; thus, every aspect was meticulously examined and argued for and against by the experts, journalists, academicians and social scientists of the country. Implementing it, as claimed by the PTI government with all three streams of education (public, private and Madrassa) has also been debated since day one.

While the SNC debate and controversies were yet not resolved, the then government came up with yet another contentious move of drafting a New Education Policy (NEP) and completing it within the year 2021 – a perfect example of putting the cart before the horse. Once again, the official background paper of NEP bragged of revolutionising Pakistan’s Education System by accelerating enrolment, bringing millions of out-of-school children (OOSC) back to schools, constructing the required number of new schools, imparting modern scientific, technological and vocational education at various levels, and linking the whole discipline with business, entrepreneurship, industry, information technology and trade. Though expected, ironically, it showed signs of retreating from its oral and written commitment right from the start. Pertinent it is to mention here that since the 18<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment (2010), primary and secondary education was devolved to the provinces (right from curriculum design to school management). Nationalists and those believing in federal democratic governance strongly criticised the Central Government for trespassing its jurisdiction by conceiving NEP as well as drafting (model) SNC.

### **1.1. Approach and objectives of the research**

The study attempts to understand and analyse NEP<sup>iii</sup>, and SNC in particular – along with in-depth critical reflection on its multiple aspects and implications. SNC aspires to become ‘one system of education for all’, in terms of curriculum, medium of instruction, learning outcomes and assessment standards to offer fair and equal opportunities of learning to all children. Precisely, it ventures to examine: Whether all children have equal prospects for quality education. Is it going to eliminate educational disparities across multiple streams? May it offer an equal chance for upward social mobility to underprivileged students as well? If and how is it going to be implemented in all systems of education? Does the incorporated content commensurate to the claims vociferously peddled by the federal government? And, most importantly what is the reaction of the provincial governments in the context of the 18<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment?

In general, the opinions of education experts, critics and advocates for egalitarian and quality education, government representatives - respective ministers and ministries in particular - private schools, madrasa representatives, religious minorities and civil society - have also been awarded proportional space. Agreements, disagreements and differences of opinion – technical, social or religious – have been precisely enunciated section by section. Although ‘medium of instruction’ too has been a subsidiary debate around SNC, it has been deliberately avoided to keep the study’s focus specific and limited.

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<sup>iii</sup> So far, no significant progress has been made around NEP.

## **1.2. Methodology and sampling size**

Employing the said approach, intensive primary and secondary information has been collected and analysed. Primary information has mainly been collected from the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT), Rawalpindi, Layyah, Multan, Lahore, Khanewal, Dera Ghazi Khan (Punjab), Karachi (Sindh), and Pishin and Killa Abdullah (Balochistan), but there are some exceptions too. Having gone through a comprehensive desk review, both Quantitative and Qualitative research questionnaires, along with guidelines, were prepared to interact with the teachers and representatives of the three systems. Where desired, intensive secondary data has been borrowed from esteemed papers, journal articles, reports and news articles to have an idea, of how experts and activists comment on and perceive SNC.

Adopting, a participatory approach in general, around 45 KIIs, and 232 quantitative questionnaires were administered from one or another system of education including public school teachers, heads or instructors of deeni Madrassa (Shia, Sunni, Deoband or Ahl-e-Hadees), private school teachers and from some independent experts too. Select representatives of religious minorities i.e. Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, Parsis, and Bahais have either been spoken to directly or their opinion has been collected from some alternative source in writing. Views and opinions of NCC, Curriculum and Textbook Boards (Provincial), School Education Departments (SED), Mutahida Ulema Board (MUB) and private schools associations and publishers have also been taken into account to approach reliable conclusions.

The purposive sampling technique was adopted to gather quantitative and qualitative data. Face-to-face interviews, proved instrumental in building an appropriate understanding of the issues and challenges on the ground. In addition, data has also been collected using Google Forms. Respective forms were circulated to all three systems i.e. public, private and the madrassas. An exact number of quantitative and qualitative interviews, their source and districts visited are enlisted here below:

<b>District-wise quantitative sample size distribution</b>		
Region/Province	Quantitative	Qualitative
Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT)	32	9
Layyah	40	6
Multan	38	6
Rawalpindi	56	5
DG Khan	16	2
Khanewal	13	2
Lahore	35	1
Karachi	0	8
Pishin	1	2
Killa Abdullah	1	2
Quetta		2
Total	232	45

*Table 1: Sample size covered*

Overall, a sample size of 232 quantitative questionnaires was collected. A majority 24 pc was collected from Rawalpindi, Layyah (17 pc), Multan (16 pc), Lahore (15 pc), and Islamabad (14 pc). A couple of voices were also gathered from DG Khan, and Khanewal, as well as from Pishin and Qila Abdullah (Balochistan) respectively.

<b>Gender Wise Coverage</b>		
	Frequency	Percentage
Boys	82	35
Girls	43	19
Mixed	107	46
Total	232	100

*Table 2: Gender-wise coverage*

		<b>Type school/ madrassa</b>					
		Public		Private		Madrassa	
		Count	N %	Count	N %	Count	N %
School/ Madrassa	Boys	38	43	3	3	41	85
	Girls	41	47	0	0	2	4
	Mixed	9	10	93	97	5	10
	Total	88	100%	96	100%	48	100%

*Table 3: Gender-wise participation*

About 35 pc of schools were for boys, 19 pc for girls, and 46 pc had co-education. Out of 88 public schools, 43 pc were boys, 47 pc were girls, and 10 pc were girls. Whereas 97 pc of private schools were mixed, 85 pc of Madrassas were boys, and only 4 pc were girls and 10 pc were mixed.

Qualification of teachers													
	10 years			12 years			14 years			16 years		M.Phil.	PhD
	n	N	%	n	N	%	n	N	%	n	N		
Public	2	33	5	29	14	23	59	44	8	67	0	0	
Private	0	0	1	6	37	62	57	42	1	8	0	0	
Madrassa	4	67	11	65	9	15	19	14	3	25	2	100	
Total	6	100	17	100	60	100	135	100	12	100	2	100	

Table 4: Qualification of teachers

Interestingly, there were 2 PhD teachers, teaching in Madrassa, though, they did their doctorate in Islamic and Arabic studies. While, 67 pc of Madrassa teachers were Matriculate, 65 pc Intermediate, 15 pc Bachelor, 14 pc Master, and 25 pc had done their M. Phil. Among government teachers, a majority (44 pc) had acquired their

master’s degree, and 62 pc of the private school teachers had finished their Bachelor.

*Table 5: Teaching experience*

		Teaching experience							
		Less than 5 years		5 to 10 years		11 to 15 years		20 years or above	
School/ Madrassa		Count	N %	Count	N %	Count	N %	Count	N %
		Public	31	35	37	39	13	32	7
	Private	45	52	42	44	7	18	2	22
	Madrassa	11	13	16	17	20	50	1	11
	Total	87	100	95	100	40	100	10	100

In the public sector, the majority of teachers possess teaching experience of up to 10 years while more than 50 pc of teachers in private schools have less than 5 years of experience. In the case of madrassas, about 50 pc of the teachers are teaching for 11 years or above.

### 1.3. Challenges, ethics and constraints

Although, earnest efforts were made to make this study as trustworthy as possible but obviously, there are limitations and constraints too. First, the novel COVID-19, surfacing in March 2020 and subsequently mutating into several waves, was still prevalent during the initial phase of the study, essentially causing accessibility constraints. Observing precautionary measures, however, we did manage to collect data but there were some gaps and anomalies too, that were removed later. However, generalisations are made by carefully triangulating information with secondary data to

avoid inaccuracies. Precisely, it is a quantitative study with elaborate qualitative, secondary analysis.

Secondly, due to the bureaucratic reservations, meetings with certain respective education officials in Islamabad and Punjab, could not be arranged. For instance, some of the Executive District Officers (EDOs), Education, from Multan, Rawalpindi and Layyah simply kept putting off, indefinitely, meeting for the interviews. Hence the plan had to be discarded. Though government school teachers or principals were reluctant to sit and talk, a reasonable number of them also agreed too, some of them requesting to be mentioned anonymously. Nonetheless, Madrassa and private school representatives had no reservations in general. A few of the respondents were sceptic about the purpose of the research in the sense, of ‘who and why it was being conducted for’ while a few were curious to know, ‘what and how will they be quoted and if the study was going to be published?’ The authors, however, kept things transparent and were able to secure their confidence for a frank discussion. On the other hand, the views and arguments of the custodians of SNC have been extracted mostly from secondary sources.

Predominantly, it is a narrative as well as, a qualitative and analytical study in nature with a limited quantitative analysis – though important in its own terms. In the case of education statistics, secondary sources have been relied upon. Where first-hand information regarding SNC’s planning and implementation was not available, secondary sources had to be relied upon. Intellectual honesty was exercised in quoting a source or borrowing an idea or analysis anywhere. Names

and roles were mentioned, and the respondents had no reservations about putting in their names.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Context and the State of Education in the Country**

#### **2.1. Single national curriculum as a misplaced priority**

Just a cursory look at the spectrum of primary and secondary education, speaks volumes about the misplaced priorities of the current government. SNC is another similar move. Approximately, 22.8<sup>2</sup> million children are out of school (OOSC). The country maintains one of the largest primary-school drop-out ratios in the world which stands around 41 pc (40 pc boys and 42 pc girls)<sup>3</sup>. However, the official drop-out rate at the primary level stands at 33 pc<sup>4</sup>. Of OOSC, about 63 million are of primary school-age-going between 5 and 16<sup>5</sup>. Out of this, over 20 million (32 pc<sup>6</sup>) is currently out of school at the national level at the government level. This implies that one-third of children are out of school. Massive rural-urban poverty, long distance, inaccessible school locations, child labour and girls' domestic labour, physical punishment and missing facilities (including classrooms, helping aids, boundary walls, toilets and potable water) cause children to drop out prematurely.



*Picture 1: A glimpse of out of school children, Mirpur Khas (Sindh),  
©Zaboor Joya 2024*

Pitiably enough, Pakistan's gross enrolment ratio (GER) stands around 95.48 pc<sup>7</sup> (2019), but its net enrolment ratio (NER) hardly remains at 67.575 pc (2018)<sup>8</sup>. There are only 137,079<sup>9</sup> Primary Schools in Pakistan. At least 85,000 more primary schools will be required by 2040<sup>10</sup> i.e. 35,000 in Punjab 25,000 in Sindh, 15,000 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and 10,000 in Balochistan<sup>11</sup>. Out of these, close to 87 pc of the primary schools fall in the public sector while the remaining 13 pc are part of the private sector. In these primary schools, more or less 18.664 million children are enrolled at the

primary level<sup>12</sup>, of which 12.065 million<sup>13</sup> children are studying in public schools.

Amassing around 26.2 million school-going-age children (mostly girls) out of schools, Pakistan constitutes the second highest number of OOSCs<sup>14</sup> in the world after Nigeria. The much acclaimed, National Education Policy (NEP 2009), determined to lift the country's literacy to 86 pc by up-scaling ongoing formal and non-formal literacy programmes till 2015 also failed miserably. The ratio of Early Childhood Education (ECE) fell from 39 pc (2015) to 37 pc (2016) - waning Pakistan's Sustainable Development Goal (SDG-4) which obliged the states to provide at least 12 years of children's schooling and 25-A of the country's CoP committing Universal Primary Education (UPE). The country has already botched on Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) target of 87.5 pc enrolment by 2016<sup>15</sup>. Though increasing steadily, in certain years our NER and GER even decline from the previous<sup>16</sup>.

Though performing generally better even Punjab's NER at the primary level (age 6-10) hovers around 70 pc<sup>17</sup> - too low by international standards. Close to 1300 Union Councils lack girls' schools across the country. As estimated by the United Nations Girls Education Initiative (UNGEI), at least a 15 pc annual educational-development budgetary increase is desired to achieve 89 pc enrolment by 2024-2025<sup>18</sup>.

In 25 key districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), the literacy rate stagnates at 55 pc<sup>19</sup> which was 53 pc in 2014-15<sup>20</sup>, meaning that 45 pc of the adults remain non-literate. The province's GER at the primary level is 89 pc<sup>21</sup>, which was 92

pc in PSLM 2014-15, this implies that it fell by 3 pc. Similarly, KP's NER at the primary level is 67 pc<sup>22</sup>, which was 71 pc in PSLM 2014-15, implying it increased by 4 pc. Even then the KP government claims that education is their top priority, of issuing girls' education vouchers, and boasts of 34,000 students moving from private to public schools in 2016<sup>23</sup>, what they claim to be a sign of parents' improved confidence in public schooling. Beyond political rhetoric, such claims are rarely proved on the ground - even through the official data.

In percentage terms, the province of Balochistan has the highest proportion of OOSC at 47 pc (2 million: boys 38 pc and girls 59 pc), followed by Sindh at 44 pc (6.4 million: boys 39 pc and girls 51 pc), KP at 32 pc (3.8 million: boys 22 pc and girls 44 pc), Punjab at 24 pc (7.7 million: boys 22 pc and girls 26 pc), and Islamabad at 10 pc (52 thousand: boys 9 pc and girls 11 pc). In absolute terms, it is evident that the Punjab province holds the largest total population of OOSC and then the Sindh province<sup>24</sup>.

At the National level, the literacy rate of the population (10 years and above) remains stagnant in 2019-20 with 60 pc as in 2014-15<sup>25</sup>. Comparatively, the literacy rate of Punjab is the highest with 64 pc among other provinces in 2019-20 as compared to 63 pc in 2014-15. This is followed by Sindh with 58pc in 2019-20 in comparison to 60 pc in 2014-15. While Balochistan has the lowest literacy with 46 pc in 2019-20 as against 44 pc in 2014-15. It is appropriate to bring up that Punjab and Balochistan are witnessing an increasing trend in Literacy, whereas Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh are depicting a decreasing trend during 2019-20. Moreover, the literacy rate of Islamabad is the highest at 85 pc<sup>26</sup>.

Indicators of education in Balochistan are even poorer. As mentioned above, the literacy rate rubs around 46 pc<sup>27</sup> inclusive of those who can barely read or write; girls' literacy is even dismal just touching 29pc<sup>28</sup> - perhaps the lowest in the world. The overall Gender Parity Index (GPI) for enrolment ratios in primary education<sup>29</sup> is 0.87. While province-wise, GPI places Balochistan at (0.61) i.e. lower than KP (0.75), Sindh (0.79) and Punjab (0.96), GB (0.94), and ICT (1.01). Wretchedly, as many as 5,000-6,000<sup>iv</sup> or above, public primary schools are single-teacher, single-roomed without toilets, electricity, gas or running water. About two-thirds of the schools in the province lack vital facilities<sup>v</sup>. According to Balochistan's official statement around 2<sup>30</sup> million children are out of school and about 60 pc of the children quit by the time they reach primary or middle level whereas 45 pc of the students drop-out before their 10<sup>th</sup> Grade.

The enrolment and sustenance ratio shows a dreary picture in Sindh too. The province's NER at the primary level rests around 61 pc<sup>31</sup>; for the middle level (age 11-13) it just hits 34 pc<sup>32</sup> while at the tertiary level 25 pc (age 14-15)<sup>33</sup> only. Overall, NER for the province at the primary level sticks to 51 pc<sup>34</sup> while amenities, teachers' availability and presence, and accessibility to schooling are quite bad. For several socio-political and administrative disruptions, scores of schools are either closed or practically dysfunctional. Inequity, inequality, poor quality of education and the rural-urban divide are

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<sup>iv</sup> The figure is also endorsed by the Deputy Director Bureau of Curriculum (Balochistan), Dr Gulab Khilji.

<sup>v</sup> The figure is also endorsed by the Deputy Director Bureau of Curriculum (Balochistan), Dr Gulab Khilji.

turning chronic. Whatever improvement, of whichever indicators (including the provision of missing facilities and enhancing teachers' capability) is observed, is the product of DfID, EU, UNICEF, ITA, BRSP, AKRSP, SPARC, Save the Children, Plan International, Alif Ailaan, right to Play, Knowledge Platform and other national and international donors' and NGOs' contribution, not the outcome of governmental efforts and resource allocation. Given the existing pace of growth, according to the British Council's, 'Pakistan's Education Emergency Report', the country will not be able to achieve minimum international standards of education even in the next several decades<sup>35</sup>. Skipping a few Sub-Saharan African countries like Ghana, Niger, Namibia, Mali, Angola, Benin and Burundi, the quality of education is poorer across the world.

Unfortunately, the average education budget in Pakistan (since 1971) has been 2.2 pc of the GDP, almost half of the global average of 3.7 pc based on data from 63 countries<sup>36</sup>, while UNECO's recommendation hovers around 4.5 to 6 pc. In terms of the adult literacy ratio (58%), Pakistan ranks 136<sup>th</sup> out of the 160 countries<sup>37</sup>. What of the world, Pakistan's current education budget in GDP terms is lower across the South Asian countries, save Afghanistan's (1.69 pc) and Sri Lanka (1.2 pc - declined mainly after its economic crisis commencing in 2020) whereas India, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Nepal have got it sequentially as 2.7 pc, 5.8 pc, 2.1 pc, 3.3 pc.

Select national statistics of education			
Level/Category	Year	Number (Millions/ Crores)	Percentage
OOS Children – National	2017	22m (2.20 Crores)	44%
OOS Children - National	2023	26.089m (2.60 Crores)	38%
Drop Out: Primary – National	2017	-	35%
Drop out: Secondary Level – National	2017	-	28%
OOS Children (Poorest of the Poor)	2023	-	75%
Literacy Ratio - National	2023	-	62.3%

Table 6; Source: Pakistan Institute of Education (PIE) – Education Statistics of Pakistan.

<b>Education sector budget – includes higher education PSDP and BISP</b>			
<b>Year</b>	<b>Category/Level</b>	<b>Allocation PKR Billions</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
2024-25	Overall: Including Higher Educ.	103.781	1.7% of GDP
2024-25	Higher Education	79.312	76.122%
2024-25	Primary and Secondary Education	24.781	23.878%
2024-25	Secondary Educ. Budget	12.973	12.16%
2024-25	Pre-Primary and Primary Educ.	5.224	5.0%
2024-25	Administrative Expenses	4.497	4.333%
2024-25	Primary Educ. Dev. Budget	Nil	0

*Table 7: Education sector budget – includes higher education PSDP and BISP<sup>vi</sup>*

Earmarking of a budget of Rs.103.781 billion in 2024-2025 records about 0.9 pc cumulative increase for Education Affairs and Services from (2023) but in GDP terms it actually came down from 1.7 pc to 1.5 pc, strikingly lowest in the region, skipping Afghanistan. The bulk of amount i.e. Rs79.312 billion (76.5 pc) has been ring-fenced for higher education; Rs5.224 billion (5 pc) for pre-primary and primary education affairs; Rs. 12.973 billion (12.16 pc) for Secondary Education and Rs. 4.497 billion (4.333 pc) for administrative expenses for administrative affairs. On top of that bulk of the education development budget it allocated to the higher

<sup>vi</sup> Source: CPDI briefing paper on evaluating trends in education budget allocation (2024-25)

education. A colossal amount of primary education development budget is allocated to the higher education or consumed by the privileged public schools like Danish Public Schools, Cadet Colleges and/or Divisional Public Schools etc.



*Picture 2: A government boys and a girls primary school, Layyah. ©Amjad Nazzeer*



*Picture 3: A classroom of government middle schools, Pishin (left), and Rajanpur (right) ©Amjad Nazeer*





*Picture 4: Images of multiple government girls' schools, Rajanpur. © Amjad Nazzeer*



*Picture 5: Government girls primary school and a deserted school in Rajanpur<sup>vii</sup> ©Amjad Nazzeer*

Roughly, there are over 31,115<sup>38</sup> madrassas in Pakistan (of all sects and schools of thought) with over 4.009<sup>39</sup> million children (58 pc male (2.362 million), and 42 pc female (1.737 million)<sup>40</sup> studying there. It is noteworthy that all the 31,115 deeni Madrassas are working under the patronage of local

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vii Pictures taken by the author.

and foreign philanthropists, and not a single madrassa is being managed and controlled by the public sector. Approximately, the country produces about 35,000 to 40,000 qualified students every year<sup>41</sup>. Education Statistics of Pakistan (2022-23) puts the number of Madrassas in the country around. 64,417. Reckoning that the number of ‘unemployable’ youth sent out to the country’s fragile market goes even higher. Not all of the parents are gullible or are wooed by religious clerics to enrol their kids there in the service of Islam. Poverty and unaffordability compel hundreds of thousands of parents to look forward to Madrassas for their children’s free-of-charge learning and other essential needs. Many of the relatively formal Madrassas have a well-defined merit to admit a select number of students. Many a student hailing from poorer income echelons prefer getting in here for free accommodation and free food. According to Fayyaz Hussain, completing his ethnographic research on Jamia Ashrafia (Lahore)<sup>viii</sup>, almost 50 pc of the students join a madrassa due to poverty, 41 pc for social reasons and only 6 pc seem to be driven exclusively by faith. About 3 pc enrol here in search of education and only 2 pc state political cause for joining Madrassa<sup>42</sup>. The causal statistics, therefore, explode the myth of parental free choice or the students’ inclination towards Madrassas in the service of Islam.

Save water and toilets, an overwhelming number of Madrassas too lack essential infrastructure. Violence and child abuse are also frequently reported from Madrassas. On

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<sup>viii</sup> Though the data is quite old i.e. of 1994 but seems to be still valid – in the absence of recent data in this regard.

financial count, all Madrassas are run on charity (*zakat, atyiat, kbairat, chanda* and minor but irregular contributions by the parents or some of the former students). Reforming or transforming such Madrassas into modern institutes not only asks for careful negotiation and planning but a huge amount of periodical budget too. Driven by charity, how cum the custodians of Madrassa are going to adopt such radical change like replacing or supplementing their curriculum with the one proposed by the sitting government?<sup>ix</sup>

## **2.2. The real challenges on the ground**

Multiple national or international assessments place our students' knowledge and skills far below their grades. The Standardised Achievement Test results – not only in languages but in sciences and mathematics too – are utterly disturbing. Our national average score in languages from Grades V to VII remains roughly around 35 pc while for sciences and mathematics, it is around 25 pc. On average, as per ASER's<sup>x</sup> periodical assessment, about half the Grade-V students stumble on reading Grade-II level texts, even simple sentences. Children's arithmetic competency falls below average, as less than half the Grade-V students miscalculate even two-digit division. Comparatively, 60-65 pc of private school students perform better in all subjects on the same parameters. Contrary to the claims of lifting up public education standards, public schools continue to be transferred to private entities. The problems of equity, access, availability, adaptability and acceptability as well as poor education governance, lack of transparency and

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<sup>ix</sup> M. Arif Ghazali, Principal Multan Public School, Multan.

<sup>x</sup> Annual Status of Education Report (ASER).

accountability are being squarely neglected by the new Education Policy Framework.

In Punjab, approximately, one-third of all schools run short of required teachers. Over 5,000 teachers are likely to retire in 2022 and about 6,300 teachers are going to retire in 2023 i.e. 11,300 teachers shall vacate their seats. There are about 4,421 teachers who are known to be erratically positioned and can be transferred to other districts leaving behind a void in the schools they are currently teaching. Almost no recruitment for school teachers was made during 2018-2020. Thus, teachers' shortfall is on the rise. According to Muhammad Imran, President - Punjab Teachers Union (PTU), Rawalpindi Division, *"The rationalisation policy that the Punjab government had recently devised was completely cut off from our local realities. There are issues of overstaffing in some schools, while others remain understaffed resulting in an inadequate number of students per per-teacher ratio (STR)<sup>43</sup>"*.

Presently, there are 81,466 vacant posts against 433,134 sanctioned posts. Comparative analysis of vacant seats among 36 districts reveals Sialkot having the lowest share i.e. 13 pc whereas Jhelum, with the highest ratio i.e. 39 pc (out of 4,034 seats, 1,591 are lying vacant). In all, 55 pc of the districts i.e. 20 out of 36 districts, maintain over 20 pc vacant seats. In the remaining 16 districts, the vacant seats lie at 15 pc or above. As per the government's own data, teacher recruitment went up till 2015 but the trend started going down in 2018. A stark decline in teachers' strength is observed at the primary and elementary levels with nominal positive trends at the secondary and higher secondary level.

In Punjab, 391,799 (male 173,88 and female 217,911) teachers were appointed in 2018; around 377,895 (male 168,457 and female 209,438) in 2019 while 366,671 (male 163,216 and female 203,455) were appointed in 2020. Since 2015, the teachers' strength began to increase from 109,763 to 126,225 by 2020. The highest number of hiring teachers was done between 2016 to 2018, with an increase of 29.5 pc at the primary level shot to 142,151. The same trend was, however, not maintained as the strikingly declining trend (11 pc) was noticed between 2018 and 2020 i.e. a drop of 10,601 teachers in 2019 and a drop of 5,325 teachers in 2020. The 19.4 pc drop in a single year (2020) was shocking while in 2015, the strength was recorded at 82,745 with an increase of 9 pc in 2018. The highest recruitments were observed in 2017. However, the drop in strength is estimated at 23 pc between 2018-2020. Since 2015, there has been an increase of 21 pc in teacher strength in the province. Nevertheless, between 2015 and 2019, an increase in teachers' strength was observed by 14.31 pc, with a sharp rise in 2017 by 6.2 pc. But once again in 2020, 3 pc decrease in teachers' strength was noticed bringing their strength to 24,380<sup>44</sup>. No rational or realistic recruitment policy is followed. Such a strategic measure is also sacrificed at the altar of political or electoral gains.

The teacher-students' equation is almost double (1:40) than the international standard. While, at the national level, the pupil-teacher ratio from primary to secondary levels was 29 for the public and 18 for the private sector<sup>45</sup>. Moreover, the pupil-school ratio at the national level was 158 for the public and 212 for the private sector<sup>46</sup>. Similarly, the teacher-school ratio for the public was 5 and 12 for the private sector<sup>47</sup>. In

addition, teaching secular subjects in Madrassas requires appointing at least 1,15,000 teachers along with guaranteed pay – as (reportedly) bargained by the Ittehad Tanzeemat-ul-Madaris (ITM). Thousands of schools in Pakistan are one-room, one-teacher schools while the number of dysfunctional schools also runs in the thousands. Federal and provincial governments both have failed in weeding out ghost schools and frequently absent teachers. Generally effective, but even a biometric attendance system is tricked. Many teachers act more as political workers or evangelists instead of instructors. Efforts to fire absent or incompetent teachers or discontinue their salaries invoke unionised protests or are resisted by MNAs/MPAs indirectly influencing the Chief Minister – though the situation varies between regions and provinces. Under such circumstances, how can one admit SNC to be the first right step as stressed by NCC? The fact is, the ruling party itself overshadows reforms by opting out of the false direction, miscommunication, lacking will and realistic planning<sup>48</sup>.

Multiple efforts, though without much substance, have been made to improve the quality and content of education – resulting in either small progress or maintaining the situation as it is. Over the years, a range of plans and policies have been adopted to comply with the constitutional commitment to provide ‘free and compulsory’ education, and improve quality and content to eliminate inequality but without notable success. An official and nationally recognised Annual Education Monitoring Report (AEMR) is missing in the country. Working under the Federal Ministry of Education, the Academy of Education Planning and Management (AEPM), produces Pakistan Education Statistics every year,

but it does not include an education monitoring framework and misses out on several other strategic indices to measure the quality and progress of education<sup>49</sup>.

Nevertheless, through a house-to-house survey, Idara Taleem-o-Agahi (ITA) produces the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) by assessing children's competency from Grade-I to Intermediate. It also looks at the enrolment, learning outcomes and basic schooling facilities as well<sup>50</sup>. Similarly, Alif Ailaan, an initiative launched by a team of media and communication experts, has been identifying the gaps and concerns in educating children. Apparently, policymakers were also assisted in implementing better policies and the general public was sensitised about the significance of education. However, how much are such voices heard by the federal and provincial governments and education bureaucracy is uncertain<sup>51</sup>. The same is not clear in the case of the SNC too.

As amply demonstrated above, it is the missing schools and missing facilities, inadequate enrolment, the gender gap, rural-urban and public-private disparity and enormous inadequacies of the existing schools that need to be addressed first – which is obviously not possible without due priority and appropriate allocation of funds. Not the so-called SNC but rather bringing millions of OOSCs back to schools and immediate provision of missing facilities that need to be the government's top priority, not the other way round. There is a prominent need for a school census. How many children are missing from which schools and which Union Councils, Tehsils and Districts? How many new schools need to be constructed across the country and where? Which and how

many facilities are needed, where and in which schools? How many new teachers need to be appointed, where, at what level and with which qualification? Madrassas essentially need to be counted to know how many children are being schooled there, what is the quality of teaching and learning there and what is their future. Provincial Education Foundations (PEF), Punjab Education Initiatives Management Authority (PEIMA), Wafaq-ul-Madaris and Ittehad Tanzeemat-ul-Madaris need to facilitate in this regard. Identifying, locating and putting these children back to schools with micro-planning is the real challenge. Incentivise like school meals or stipends and some financial support can be then planned to retain these children in schools. Similarly, there is a need for effective planning to bring Madrassa children to schools as religious teaching, if at all, should only be supplementary, not exclusive.

Mere re-doing a curriculum, in the absence of the required number of schools, teachers, labs, libraries, playgrounds and other prerequisites is tantamount to putting the horse before the cart. Teachers' training is another significant area the government needs to invest in and improve before embarking upon implementing something like a uniform or singular curriculum. All that requires allocating at least 6 pc annual budget for the development of education as committed by several developing countries, including Pakistan, in the World Conference on Education for All (1990)<sup>52</sup>, 32 years back. One can begin with 4 pc at least. In fact, the SNC move was nothing more than old wine in a new bottle for about a dozen education policies and curriculum reform efforts are there on record in the seven and half decades of the country's independent existence. None could

achieve its stated objectives due to a lack of commitment, insufficient financing and unclear aims at large.

Perhaps no stronger arguments are required to prove that, it is not the curriculum alone, even if it is relatively better, but pre-schooling, academic environment, infrastructure, quality of instruction and helping aids that certify the quality of education. The proposed framework almost entirely undermined that. Theory-driven SLOs, teaching guidelines and training packages, lifted and refined from 2006's initiatives, were certainly not going to revolutionise the quality and content of education.

In Dr. Adil Najam's<sup>xi</sup> views, *“literacy cannot be seen in isolation from the broader failures of the education system. Pakistan’s literacy problem has persisted, with 25 million children still out of school, making the country the second largest in this regard after Nigeria...Constitutional mandate for education remains unenforced, questioning why there is no societal or governmental push to implement Article 25, which guarantees every child the right to education...Failure of education policies stems not only from ineffective governance but also from a lack of demand from society itself...The root cause of this crisis lies in the absence of public outrage and societal pressure to improve education, ultimately limiting the nation’s potential for progress”*.

Highlighting systemic flaws and societal apathy, he argues that *“as a society, Pakistan does not genuinely value literacy, which is reflected in both the government’s lack of enforcement of literacy-related*

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<sup>xi</sup> Dr. Adil Najam is the global president of the World Wide Fund (WWF) for Nature as well as dean emeritus and professor at Boston University. His views have been extracted from his interview with Zehra Batool published in The News.

*policies and the public's indifference to education*". Suspecting the official claims of the education ratio being 60-80 percentage, he believes that, 'such figures are often manipulated to present a more favourable picture'. Asserting further, he states that "education is not prioritised in societal values or rewarded, resulting in deep divides - economic, geographical, and educational - across the country. This lack of genuine care for literacy and education is a telling sign of deeper societal issues that prevent any meaningful progress in addressing the nation's literacy challenges"<sup>53</sup>.

Though SNC was trumpeted as an act of 'putting an end to class-based, apartheid or discriminatory system of education', demonstrably it was an act of political deception, especially keeping in mind the country's vital indicators of education falling at the far end of the global education spectrum – including the measures set by MDGs and SDGs that Pakistan already failed and was going to fail again. In addition, the effort or the spirit of SNC was nothing new. The idea and the policy position have been there since the 1970s. On top of that, as acknowledged by the government herself, more than two-thirds of the syllabi proposed, was already adopted since 2014, under the process maturing from 2006 to 2009. Just striking one-fifth of the change with great pomp and the show was raising a storm in the teacup.

Concerning the school closures caused by COVID-19 during 2020-2021, a corresponding report 'Measuring Learning Losses', developed by ITA and UNICEF, reveals that compared to 2019, enrolment of children (aged 6-16) dropped by 2 pc points in 2021. However, about 63 pc children reported of their parents stepping up efforts to sustain or enhance their children's learning. Less than one-

third i.e. 32 pc of children stated that their schools provided them with some learning materials during the school closure, whilst 58 pc reported that their school teachers or school management never reached out to them. Nevertheless, around 32 pc of the children did seek some help from PTV's TeleSchool Programs. Likewise, around 40 pc of the children, who have smartphones at home, reported of continuing with certain bits of learning. The ratio of Grade-III children who could read an Urdu story in 2019, fell from 19 pc to 15 pc in 2021 while their capability of reading English sentences dropped from 21 pc in 2019 to 8 pc in 2021. Similarly, the number of students of the same level who could solve the 2-digit division declined from 17 pc to 10 per cent<sup>54</sup>.

The World Bank terms such effects as 'learning poverty' and estimates it to reach down to 75 pc from 79 pc in 2019. Given the serious shortfall of trained teachers to teach English as a second language, most of the public and low-income private schools will have detrimental effects on their language learning. There is a serious need to take remedial measures to address such needs and lacunae. The idea of a SNC might have proved its effectiveness when serious problems of education resources had been resolved<sup>55</sup>.

Despite failing to address glaring issues and concerns around the structure and substance of education, the MoFEP was acknowledged by the PTI regime to be one of the top 5 ministries performing better and achieving its targets within time<sup>56</sup>. One fails to understand, what criteria were employed to measure the ministry's success as noting was on track even according to its own step by step plan.

## Chapter 3

### Aspiring for SNC – Gaps and Concerns

**D**espite coming of age after three-quarters of its independence, Pakistan has failed to come up with a concerted policy content and strategic course of action for education. More than anything else, it has been, unfortunately, instrumentalised to serve certain political ends rather than a goal in itself. Since 1947 to date, close to a dozen policies have been shoved through - each to serve the ideological or ulterior motives of the ruling elites, more than anything else. For instance, one of the earlier education policies devised by the Ayub Khan's appointed Education Commission in 1959<sup>57</sup>, was meant to influence younger minds to forego their socio-cultural and linguistic identities and believe that Pakistan was one homogenous socio-cultural unit. An unnatural rather sinister objective that could never be realised. People of Pakistan not only hold their ethno-lingual identities closer to their hearts, they have rather deepened with time. Those at the helm fail to apprehend that diversity if acknowledged and interpreted appropriately, might prove to be the country's strength rather than weakness.

Likewise, even worse policies and propositions were assumed in the 1980s, mainly to realise General Ziaulhaq's myopic societal vision and serve America's proxy war against the Soviet influence and invasion of Afghanistan (1979).

Islamisation rather an extreme version of Islam, embedding the elements of sectarianism, jihadism and glorification of war and martyrdom – was introduced under the influence of CIA-US war against socialism and the Soviet Union. Through Islamisation and radicalisation of national education, General Ziaulhaq created anti-communist bulwarks. The subject of *deeniyat* (or the knowledge of faith, including minority faiths) was replaced with Islamiyat (the study of Islam only) proving detrimental to the multicultural, multi-lingual and multi-religious ethos of the country. Religious minorities were almost sent to oblivion and wiped out of the national curriculum. *Pakistaniyat* was equated with one's devotion to Islam<sup>58</sup>. Truly, Pakistan has yet not recovered from the boomerang effects of the General's parochial and conservative policy and approach – where education was particularly manoeuvred as an ideological weapon.

Nevertheless, this is also true that having gone through the turbulent decade of the 1980s and 1990s, the progressive curriculum and policy foundations were laid down in 2002, paradoxically again by a General i.e. General Musharraf this time, as post 9/11, 2001, global demands tilted the scales towards the other end this time. Thus his overarching vision of 'enlightened moderation' influenced multiple areas of public concern including education. Under the Education Sector Reforms (2002) plan, the primary and secondary school curriculum began improving in 2006 and was gradually adopted from 2009 to 2014. Come 2019, with the introduction of yet another curriculum, the country seems to be struggling with the conventional syndrome of one step forward two steps back.

### 3.1. The idea of SNC and its stated objectives

In early 2019, entering into the very first year of its rule, transforming school curricula was one of the first missions that PTI embarked upon. Ignoring fundamental problems and lacuna of public education, the Premier, picked up one of its, perhaps, minor problems i.e. a compartmentalised and class-based system of education. In his own words, *“There are multiple levels of education with different content and quality in the country – ‘inherently discriminatory between ghareeb ka bacha (the poor man’s child) and ameer ka bacha (the rich man’s child). There is another section of society whose children go to charity-driven Madrassas without any likelihood of entering into any decent public or private arena of employment. This is almost an apartheid system of education that must end. Therefore, we are going to introduce ‘Uniform System of Education’ to address the problem”<sup>59</sup>*, he kept on repeating the mantra time and again, in his multiple speeches in multiple words and styles.

The new education curricula, contended the Premier, was also a step towards freeing *“ourselves from English culture<sup>60</sup>”* and would help us to *“break the shackles of slavery”*. Within a few months down the road, the very notion of a ‘Uniform System of Education (USE)’ was commuted with a ‘SNC’ without changing his pronounced objectives of *‘putting an end to the apartheid system of education<sup>61</sup>’*. It is important to stress that for a good long two years and, in many a case for the next three years, multiple representatives of the government kept confusing SNC with USE either due to a lack of understanding or to make it politically attractive and deliberately deceptive for the common masses.

Taking pride in their plan of introducing SNC, the then Minister for Federal Education and Professional Training (MoFEPT), Shafqat Mahmood (2018-2022), used to say that, *“for the first time in the country’s history, SNC was being introduced. Though it was a difficult task riddled with many hurdles, their government was determined to realise it. Education, he stressed, was ignored for long and it was PTI’s government that made it their top priority. They were determined to introduce new curriculum as well as new methods”*. Supplementing, he also stressed that *“no system of education i.e. public, private and Madrassa was being replaced but only uniform standard of teaching and learning was being introduced. Adopting the MTBs, designed by the Ministry, was not obligatory for all systems. The schools and systems could design their own syllabi - as per guidelines - but having sought a No Objection Certificate (NOC). Private schools and Madrassas were free to teach subjects and textbooks of their own choice along with adopting the core subjects recommended. English, Science and Mathematics are going to be taught in the English language and to teach English at pre-school level, teachers shall be trained accordingly. SNC was going to recommend minimum learning standards not necessarily the specific syllabus or books”*<sup>62</sup>.

Nevertheless, the history of curriculum development in the country refutes all such claims. All public curricula in the country, so far, have been single national curricula, not only for government schools but also for low-fee private and charity schools as well. The 18<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment (2010) overturned it constitutionally. Yet the ‘SNC’ continued since 2006, until the so-called SNC was launched in 2019. If at all, the new curriculum is single in the sense of denying the constitutional right of provinces to define and develop their own curricula. In addition, it might be a ‘SNC’

also in the sense of trying to replace the three curricula i.e. public, private and Madrassa streams.

The MoFEPT described the purpose of SNC as to introduce ‘one system of education for all, in terms of curriculum, medium of instruction, quality of teaching and learning, and a common standard of assessment’. Once again, the phrase ‘one system of education’ is striking. It stresses further that through this system of education, ‘*all children have a fair and equal opportunity to secure high-quality education, social cohesion and national integration*’. ‘*Alleviation of disparities in education content across multiple streams, equal opportunities for upward social mobility, holistic development of children in the light of emerging trends and smooth inter-provincial mobility of teachers and students*’ are highlighted as its complementary objectives<sup>63</sup>.

*Incorporating international trends in teaching, learning and assessment; adopting an outcome-based approach; focusing on values, life skills and inclusion; respect and appreciation of different cultures and religions in the local and global context; intellectual, spiritual, aesthetic, emotional and social development of learners; development of 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills including enabling children to grasp ‘Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)’ through the use of ‘information and communication technology’ are stated as SNC’s key considerations. The PTI government also claimed that ‘before the development of SNC, multiple comparative studies were conducted to align it with international standards – including the comparison of proposed curriculum with the Cambridge System, and education standards in Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore’s and their respective learning standards’<sup>64</sup>. The proposed outline also claimed to impart digital skills, entrepreneurship, comprehension of*

contemporary issues as well as compassion and tolerance as never taught before.

As outlined by the same, the SNC also stressed ‘equipping children with principles and attributes of truthfulness, respect, honesty, tolerance, democracy, human rights, sustainable development, global citizenship, personal care, environmental awareness, empathy, equality of persons living with disability (PLWD) and peaceful coexistence. The plan also boasted of, *‘developing students’ analytical, critical and creative thinking through activities-based approach rather than teacher-centric linear method’*. The desired benchmarks and SLOs across subjects, it asserts, were not there in the 2006 curriculum while SNC was careful enough to develop them in advance. Statedly, *‘creative arts, local culture and environment, health, hygiene and safety, alongside innovative trends concerning Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) were also taken care of. Lifelong learning through the development of inquiry and independent learning skills as well as child protection and increased emphasis on positive attitudes for the holistic development of students were also part of it’*<sup>5</sup>, they claimed. Theoretically, who can repudiate such lofty tenets of education save the reality on the ground.

Contrary to the 2006 curricula, in which Islamiyat was integrated with General Knowledge up to Grade II and started as a separate subject from Grade III onwards, the subject now begins separately from Grade I, continuing up to Grade XII.

Ironically, the respective federal Minister and NCC representatives acknowledged that the curriculum introduced back in 2006 was also based on the premise of ‘uniformity’.

However, they were the ones who were truly keen on ‘*uniform learning outcomes*’. The point, they sold, was that the students enrolled in Grades I to VIII shall now study 7 compulsory subjects i.e. Urdu, English, Social Studies, Islamiyat, General Science, Mathematics and General Knowledge. Also, they were going to, ‘*teach children Holy Quran and Sunnah in a manner that students stop cramming, understand the text and turn creative in their course of learning, they asserted*’<sup>66</sup>. Earlier, ‘*the non-Muslim students were compelled to study Ethics instead of Islamiyat but now the respective 6 communities had the opportunity to study their own faith at all levels*’, they argued.

The Ministry also asserted that ‘the content was also aligned to Pakistan’s commitment to ‘*SDG-4 comprising 10 Targets, 7 Outcomes and 3 Means of Implementation i.e. universal primary and secondary education, equal access to technical/vocational and higher education, gender equality and inclusion and the provision of 12 years of free, publicly-funded, inclusive, equitable and quality education - leading to relevant learning outcomes and assured to all, without discrimination*’<sup>67</sup>.

### **3.2. Planning and processes of SNC**

Following the tall claims of the Prime Minister, Imran Khan (2018-2022), and the then Federal Minister, Shafqat Mahmood, two of the former Provincial Ministers for School Education and Literacy i.e. Murad Raas (2018-2021) (Punjab) and Shahram Khan Tarakai (2018-2023), (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) in particular, began to munch the same claims as the ruling party was on driving seat in these provinces. Soon, the eminent members of the cabinet, mainly the Minister for Information, Communication and Broadcasting, the Minister for Science and Technology and the respective

Chief Ministers of the aforementioned provinces also began chiming with the Premier and the Federal Minister without knowing the situation on the ground or listening to the critical voices around<sup>68</sup>.

According to the government's phased planning of developing and launching the curricula in all three systems: The First Phase comprised the development of the MTBs of Grades I-V by the Provincial PTBs for the academic year of 2021-2022. In the Second Phase, the curriculum of Grade VI-VIII was to be prepared and launched in 2022-2023 while the Third Phase was supposed to commence with the preparation and adoption of the curriculum for Grade IX-XII in 2023-2024<sup>69</sup>. To realise its plan, the government set up a NCC, 4 Provincial Curriculum Councils (PCCs) and, 2 Regional Curriculum Councils (RCCs) catering to Gilgit Baltistan (GB) and Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). On the ground, however, only the NCC remained active. The latter claimed to consult at least 400 public and private sector experts, along with some foreigners, and Madrassa representatives too to agree on 'learning outcomes' and devise a proposed outline and content of the SNC. *'Representatives of religious minorities, including Christians, Hindus, Bahais, Kalasha, Buddhists and Zoroastrians were also told of having been consulted for the first time in the history of curriculum formation. The minority's historical grievances, reservations, suggestions and opinions were taken into account – as stated by the NCC's chair and the respective ministers.*

In addition, the corresponding Federal Ministry also stated that the *'teachers' training programme was designed to train teachers who might confront challenges in teaching SNC. The conventional*

*assessment system was the textbook-based examination, largely inadequate for judging a student's competency and learning outcomes'. The development of new and up-to-the-mark examination and assessment system was also in process', emphasised the NCC<sup>70</sup>. 'To arrange, online teachers training the government was going to collaborate with Google UK and other relevant institutes', stated the then NCC director Maryam Chughtai (2019-2022).*

### **3.3. Concerns over consultation**

Though the subject of Education was devolved to the Regions and Provinces under the historic 18<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment adopted in 2010<sup>xii</sup> but MoFEPT claimed that the formation of NCC was unanimously approved by all the provinces and areas in the Inter-Provincial Education Ministers Conference (IPEMC) held at February 2014, to develop a curriculum ensuring Minimum National Standards in all subjects with emphasis on national ideology and societal preferences. The National Education Policy (NEP-2009), it argued, *'was a jointly owned document ever since the 18<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment'*. The NEP-2009 assigned NCC the role of overseeing educational development, along with monitoring, supervision and review. Later, in 2016, the NCC developed the NCF, Minimum Standards of Quality Education, Education Supplement for Curriculum and Textbooks for ICT from Grades I-VIII. Thus, the development of the SNC curriculum and guidelines was the rightful mandate of the NCC<sup>71</sup>. Nonetheless, such implications were inadequately interpreted and fervently rejected by the exponents of provincial autonomy and independent educationists.

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<sup>xii</sup> Critical implications of 18<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendments shall be shared ahead in this document.

Also, the respective Federal Minister, Shafqat Mahmood, said that *“the curriculum and textbooks were never static and could be updated as and if desired. The feedback received will assist the experts in reviewing the exercise”*<sup>72</sup>. He kept underlining time and again that character-building and promoting values (read Islamic) were SNC’s prime objectives<sup>xiii</sup>. And the experts were working to promote these<sup>73</sup>. *“Initially, he spoke at some other occasion “We faced huge challenges when the Prime Minister tasked us to bring up uniform education system”<sup>xiv</sup>; especially after the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment, as it was not possible to bring all stakeholders on board. But I was pleased to see the full support and cooperation of the stakeholders including the Madaris and private schools”*<sup>74</sup>.

Equivocating, the then NCC director also affirmed that regarding curriculum, *‘many people, including parents, teachers, and even students were consulted. Suggestions were welcomed over the website too. Contrary to the older practice, when the syllabus was prepared by the educationists of Punjab and emulated by the rest of the provinces, this time, other provinces and even regions were taken on board. The subject of Islamiyat was flexible and consensus-driven by religious scholars of all schools of thought, and advocating the teaching of Nazira Quran, she argued that ‘when kids learn it at home, no harm if they learn it in schools too’.*

The claim of wider and diversified consultation and consensus was challenged by several independent experts. Dr. Pervez Hoodbhoy, a known education activist said, *“This 400 is nothing more than just an empty figure. Pretty deceptive. Even if*

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<sup>xiii</sup> Emphasis is of the authors’.

<sup>xiv</sup> Note the point, ‘uniform system of education’.

*they did it, most of the participants seem to be either part of their system or naive and compliant. So long as the outcomes are disappointing, it does not matter whether you consult 400 or 4000 people<sup>75</sup>”. Dr. A. H. Nayyar believed that, “The mere claim of consulting a large number of persons may not mean much. We have often witnessed crowd consultations and unstructured discussions where one could hardly speak for a minute or so without being able to make a point. Many could not utter a single word. The exercise was only meant to present whatever was already formulated under a fake cover of consensus. I term this pseudo-consensus<sup>xv</sup>.” Similarly, in the opinion of Peter Jacob, head of the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), who was part of the consultation, “Constituted through an administrative notification, NCC lacked statutory powers and function. The non-government members, like myself, basically volunteered their time and energy. I asked for sharing the minutes a couple of times but the organisers did not bother. The NCC did not formally approve any document of SNC, perhaps it was only assumed that it did.”*

Nevertheless, the representatives of Ittehad Tanzeemat-ul-Madaris (ITM) (National Federation of Madrassas) were essentially there to assert incorporating Islamic education as part of all social science subjects. *‘Islam is part and parcel of our national integrity and serves as brick and mortar of patriotism’*, they kept asserting end to end. Their point of view was not only heard but rather registered as well.

Despite the Ministry of Federal Education and NCC’s drumming up wider consultation, several questions prop up. What happened to the original idea of introducing a uniform system of education? If the syllabus is more or less the same

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<sup>xv</sup> KII with A. H. Nayyar.

as in 2006 (save certain insertions and omissions), then what was the whole euphoria about? Why was such a strategic subject of education propagated more as a political action than as an act of academic serenity? Why the names of the experts and stakeholders consulted were not made public? Did they genuinely and meaningfully represent multiple spheres of life and education? Was any report produced as an outcome of the consultation and if it was, why was it not circulated widely? Why was SNC trumpeted as a revolutionary step? Why did the PTI government attempt to implement it in haste? The truth is that the SNC failed to reach a consensus and the so-called wider consultation was nothing more than a political gimmick to seek the political legitimacy of the regime.

By the end of January 2021, bypassing the devolution decree of the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment, the Ministry of Federal Education issued a letter to the 4 Provincial and 2 Regional Textbook Boards<sup>xvi</sup> to implement their SNC Policy. It also allowed the private publishers to develop SNC textbooks, however, in alignment with the NCC-determined contents, objectives, and SLOs and ensured no anti-state, anti-Islam or incitement-to-hatred material features. '*Avoid putting up unnecessary constraints and cumbersome procedures rather facilitate the private entities*', the Ministry advised the respective Textbook Boards<sup>76</sup>. The PCTB, thereupon, issued NOC to the private publishers and approved 125 books of Grades I to V<sup>77</sup>.

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<sup>xvi</sup> Regional here stands for Gilgit Baltistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir.

### **3.4. The enigma of new education policy 2021**

The National Education Policy (2009) was hardly implemented, perhaps counterweighed by the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment 2010 despite ascending to a ‘joint declaration’; the Education Policy Framework (2017-18) was half-baked and SNC was already in hot waters that yet another ‘majestic plan’ of developing new Pakistan Education Policy (2021) landed in. *‘Several initiatives have been taken with respect to SNC’,* the then Federal Minister reiterated, *‘and now a formal education policy was necessary. The process, including widespread consultation, was started and all suggestions were welcome’*<sup>78</sup>.

*‘To kick off the process, seminars and consultations were held in all the regions and provinces to finalise the plan’*<sup>79</sup>, tweeted the Minister. Reportedly, 45 Vice Chancellors of multiple universities were invited to a seminar to gather their views on PEP 2021<sup>80</sup>. The federal and provincial ministries and concerned departments discussed and reviewed a range of issues such as uniform national curriculum, drop-out and OOSC, tech use in education and training, and other related issues. Equity and quality of education for all children and institutions also came under discussion. *‘The policy, stated the Ministry, ‘will build consensus on national education standards and stages of education along with the system of admissions and exams, teaching and teachers’ management standards etc. National harmony and cohesion across religious and ethnic diversity and denominations shall also be determined in the socio-cultural context of Pakistan’*<sup>81</sup>, it argued.

Further on, the Ministry directed all the provincial and regional governments to collect their input on key aspects of the policy. It also prescribed certain topics desired to be discussed in the national policy document. At least in theory,

it expressed its intent to discuss the plan with eminent stakeholders including writers, researchers, academia, and educationists and encouraged them to proactively participate in this nationally significant initiative<sup>82</sup>. All federating units, public and private sectors, Federal Government Educational Institutions (FGEIs), cantonment and garrison schools, LUMS (Lahore University of Management Sciences) and AKU-IED (Agha Khan University – Institute of Educational Development) and the representatives of *deeni madaris*,<sup>83</sup> were invited to extend suggestions. To serve this purpose, the Ministry organised a workshop and a 4-day national conference in February 2021 in all the provinces and regions to address the subjects of life-skills-based education and critical thinking. *‘The inputs and feedback gathered will be incorporated in the NEP’*, the Ministry stated<sup>83</sup>.

While meeting techno-industrial owners, the Minister asserted that *‘ed-tech is going to be the core pillar of the would-be education policy as it may encourage innovation in the learning processes. The technology would make learning holistic and enjoyable and shall create an ecosystem of education to produce learned, tech-sophisticated and productive students. In the PEP-2021, computer education shall be fused from Grades VI-VIII along with the provision of online content. Universal Service Fund (USF) – Pakistan, was requested to enhance internet coverage and connectivity across the country. Also, teachers shall be given the training to adopt modern learning technologies and innovative methods’*<sup>84</sup>. Reasserting the purpose, the Secretary of the Ministry<sup>xvii</sup> stated that, *‘with all its associated entities and, provincial education and training departments, the Ministry was striving to develop and implement effective educational plans and strategies to*

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<sup>xvii</sup> Syeed Javed Iqbal Bukhari (August 2021 to March 2022).

*rectify learning losses, retain students and to ensure ‘no child is left behind’. Also, it is re-envisioning ‘Pakistan Education Policy 2021’ while maintaining a focus on improved education at all levels, transforming distant and non-formal education, engaging OOSC and imparting relevant skills*<sup>85</sup>. Such were the towering claims of the PTI Government. Once the regime was voted out through a no confidence move, all that proved nothing else but a storm in the tea cup.

### **3.5. The tragic flaws in education policies**

Contrary to its verbose claims, not a single inch of progress around NEP-2021 was observed, save a working paper on the state of school education put up on the website MoFEPT. “Upon the Prime Minister’s directives, ‘the Ministry, said the Federal Minister, *‘is developing the policy as a living document to enable future generations to be a source of greatness for our country. Everyone’s suggestion counts for national harmony and an inclusive future. Be part of this historic process*<sup>86</sup>”. Ironically the cliché of ‘NCP being the living document’ still lingers with the current PMLN-led coalition government as well.

In fact, what Prime Minister Imran Khan and the Federal Minister bragged about was neither new nor surprising for anyone who flips through a few pages of the history of Pakistan’s education. Every single government - be it civilian or military - venturing for the curriculum shift or new education policy blamed the former regimes for not awarding enough importance to education - vital for the socioeconomic, industrial or technological progress of the country. Every new government charmed people with the slogan of lifting the country out of its chronic educational crisis and putting it on the sacred path of progress. Perhaps

except for 1947 and 1972, every single regime set its targets as ambitious, unrealistic and exaggerated<sup>87</sup> – alleging the previous one to be incompetent and insincere with education. Nonetheless, the incumbent government would set the wheel in motion all over again. So was the previous (PML-N) government (2013-2018) as was the PTI's (2018-2022). Hindsight reflection exposed their lack of will, incapability and insincerity in genuinely improving the flawed system of our education. Save paying bare minimum salaries, none of them allocated the required resources to achieve their acclaimed objectives.

Reviewing the history of educational policy and planning manifests that setting huge targets, bemoaning the failure and devising them anew with unqualified hopefulness has been, a kind of game, policy-makers played ad nauseam. Over the last seven-and-half decade of independence, about 9 national education policies, 12 five-year plans and close to a dozen other schemes were launched while several seminars, conferences and educational moots were held<sup>88</sup>. Obviously, their respective educational priorities were not only limited to enhancing NER/GER and literacy targets rather their approach towards education – imbued by Islamic, authoritarian, socialist or democratic inclinations - also varied. For example, the 7<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan (1988-1993) categorically rejected non-formal education in their bid to promote education and literacy, whereas the non-formal schooling was resurrected in 1992. The Education Policy developed in 1998, on the other hand, literally condemned formal education and preferred a non-formal approach to up thrust primary education. Keen analyses unfold their lack of political and financial commitment to education. Save for the

sole exception of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Five Year Plan (1959-1965), what has been common with all such plans, policies and programmes is their drastic failure<sup>89</sup>.

Eloquence gradually replacing constituents in all upcoming governments' plans and policies manifests their doublespeak. Though, quality and content consciousness began improving by the mid-2000s, but inadequate planning and poor financial commitments remain the same. Apart from incorporating advanced objectives and learning outcomes, however, Islamism, nationalism or nationalist constructivism and traditionalism have always been overtly or covertly an integral part of the country's education policies and content of the curriculum.

## Chapter 4

### Political Controversies Surrounding SNC

The way SNC was enforced in the provinces and the regions triggered colossal criticism from the legal and constitutional standpoints. To minimise conflict probability, the CoP separates the legal and executive powers. Trespassing the constitutional limits and constraints – the PTI government headed towards not only devising the so-called SNC but also cajoled the provincial governments to adopt and implement it, especially in the provinces where it held the reins of power. Espoused unanimously in 2010, the 18<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment devolved the jurisdiction of primary education entirely to the provinces and regions. It did not allow the Federal Government to devise policy and content of education in the Capital Territory and thrust it upon the federating units. Nonetheless, Point XII (Part-II) of the Federal Legislative List did allow it to prescribe the institutional standards of higher, scientific and technical education of universities, vocational institutions and institutes awarding degrees. Rolling out SNC simply encroached on the provincial policy and legislative environs. Therefore, through their ministerial and administrative bodies, such as the Provincial Ministries of Education, the Provincial Curriculum and Textbook Boards and School Education Departments, the provinces were completely authorised to form their plans, policies, curriculum, syllabi and standards of primary and secondary education<sup>90</sup>.

Enforcement of any curriculum or policy position on primary and secondary education by the Central Government is ultra vires to the constitutional prescription. The Federal Government, at best, can only play a consultative role, and that is it. Contrary to the claims made by the Ministry of Federal Education, the Centre is not authorised to set uniform or minimum curriculum standards. Also, this is not an appropriate justification, as is extended by the SNC and NCC spokespersons that they built upon the 2006 curriculum to bring it at par with the international standards or that SNC was not binding on provinces to abide by and they could evolve their curriculum under the same guidelines. If that was the case, there was no reason to coerce the provinces to adopt it. Why rebuff all criticism and term it as ‘the mafia’s elitist objections? What the Ministry failed to acknowledge was that it was the ‘Ministry of Federal Education’ and not the ‘Federal Ministry of Education’. So much so that the Ministry advised the NBF and the PCTB to develop MTBs and itself spearheaded enforcing it too. The very attitude was a precursor to other coercive measures within the provincial arena of education to intensify an already repressive environment. All such measures went against the spirit of federalism. Allowing, the provincial and federal governments to work side by side but independent of each other is, at times, known as ‘marble-cake federalism’ i.e. vertical sharing of legislative powers while enjoying legislative competence on the subjects of concern<sup>91</sup>.

Rather than observing restraints, the corresponding minister took pride in saying that, *‘for the first time in the history of Pakistan, SNC along with the MTBs, teachers-training modules and*

*assessment-framework<sup>xviii</sup> were being developed', simultaneously<sup>92</sup>* - implying that the respective ministries and regions were no more than rubber stamps. Thus, SNC put the essence of cooperative federalism into question. Rather than naively buying into the Federal Government's ideas, the provincial legislatures questioned and criticised (save the GoPj) all such matters that did not fall under their jurisdiction. The fissures in the federation-province cooperation were quite visible. The devolution of powers and devolved services were opposed - what the ruling party asserted before it came to power. Sindh Government, particularly, challenged and maintained its autonomy by not adopting much of the SNC<sup>93</sup>.

#### **4.1. The 18<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendment and SNC**

By abolishing the controversial 'concurrent list', the 18<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment (2010) reconstituted the centre-province relationship and affairs of governance amongst and within the two. Along with education, several areas of citizens' and civic concerns - inclusive of their legislation - were devolved to the provinces. Regarding the right to education, Article 25-A was inserted describing that: *The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of age 5-16 in such a manner as may be determined by law*'. The landmark amendment imparts provinces with strong legislative and financial autonomy in the said subject too – inclusive of the weighty implications for the overall system of education. In other words, it terms education to be the fundamental right of every child, legible to be enforced by the court of law. In other words, the provinces are now authorised to pen down their policy, curriculum, and syllabi and, are qualified to

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<sup>xviii</sup> Technically, the part of provincial jurisdiction.

design the teaching, learning and assessment standards too. In the meantime, all 4 provinces have legislated to provide free and compulsory education to children in their respective territories. Unfortunately, no further progress beyond that<sup>94</sup>.

*'By introducing SNC, the Federal Government breached the provincial rights they are entitled to. 'Sindh Government will come up with its policy and curriculum if the need arises', stressed Sardar Ali Shah, the former Minister for Literacy and Education (2021-2023), Sindh. 'Implementing SNC is not mandatory for each province. Empowered by the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment, it may embrace or disregard the so-called SNC. The federal government cannot impose its unconstitutional act on other provinces. The province may accept positive changes but only in the subjects of science. Each province has its own history, language, culture, and of course, its heroes too – the stuff that constitutes Social Sciences. National heroes are already part of Sindh's curriculum. They have every right to teach their own culture and language along with Urdu and English. It is their historical and constitutional right, they would hate to forgo,'<sup>95</sup> supplemented the Minister.*

*'SNS is part of the ruling party's manifesto, not a sacred constitutional provision. While evolving SNC, the Sindh Government was not taken on board. They simply handed over the books to them, already printed. It is, obviously, not acceptable. A curriculum could be no more than a parameter, flexible enough to be adapted as per provincial needs and preferences. But SNC is an impractical package being forcibly implemented. The federal government desires to impose SNC in haste'<sup>96</sup>, said the minister somewhere else. 'The ruling Pakistan People's Party (PPP) in Sindh, is a democratic party believing in constitutional supremacy and abhors violating the constitution. Without the participation of one of its provinces i.e. Sindh, any curriculum could not be called 'national and uniform',<sup>97</sup> he argued.*

Pleading in favour of the said Amendment, the Sindh Law Department also opposed the implementation of SNC in the province. Chief Minister, Sindh, Murad Ali Shah (2018 – 2015, to date) contended the infiltration of SNC – terming it a trojan horse breaking in provincial autonomy. Without ascending the apposite or opposite position, Balochistan province, however, chose a middle ground of grumbling and conceding. The latter had several reservations including ignoring the fundamental barriers to better education i.e. missing teachers and missing facilities, teachers’ incompetency in teaching the new curriculum, the proposed curriculum’s limited relevance to Balochistan’s socio-cultural and historical context, advanced and extended essays and exercises, heavy Islamic content (within and outside Islamiyat), undermining Balochi, Pashto and Brahui languages and most importantly the budgetary constraints etc<sup>xix</sup>. In other words, with Sindh’s refusal and Balochistan’s strategic reservations and seeking one full term to implement it, the curriculum already ceased to be uniformly accepted. On-ground situation, opaque as ever before, NCC once again claimed to secure consensus on the core curriculum for Early Childhood Education (from Grade I to Grade III) in February 2022<sup>98</sup>. Contradictions abounded, but the former

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<sup>xix</sup> Part of the views were shared by Dr Gulab Khilji, Deputy Director Bureau of Curriculum, Balochistan (KII). ‘The curriculum, mainly of social sciences, has been revised according to socio-cultural context of Balochistan. Provincial Cabinet has approved it and it has been notified by the Chief Secretary, Education. The SNC Textbooks (Balochistan) are now being printed in Lahore. However, practically, it cannot be formally adopted before March 2023’, supplemented Dr Gulab Khilji.

NCC director<sup>xx</sup> Dr. Maryam Chughtai (2019-2022), kept stressing on having all provinces on board – including Sindh. *‘The Government of Sindh, through an official letter, had informed NCC about the adoption of core subjects, at least’, she claimed<sup>99</sup>.*

Eventually, Prime Minister Imran Khan launched SNC in August 2021, stating that, it would prove an essential step in transforming the nation into a *“unified entity, rooted in common morals and ethos; and will help the nation to achieve the common goal of progress<sup>100</sup>”*. The Minister for Federal Education began repeating the same mantra that *“one national curriculum was need of the hour to eliminate injustice and to lead us to become one nation<sup>101</sup>”*. *“Introducing a ‘uniform system of education<sup>xxi</sup>’ across the country was meant to generate a uniform pattern of thought across the nation, possessing reformative effects on society. The new generations will be proud of them”, he even dared to boast<sup>102</sup>.*

Little effort was required to lay bare the emptiness and insincerity of such statements. The federal government intentionally undermined provincial autonomy in the field of education<sup>xxii</sup> - as was the case with several other areas. The PTI government was inherently opposed to the 18<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment and devolved powers to the federating units. Constitutionally wrong but it took advantage of having its government in three out of the four provinces (save Sindh) and two of the regions i.e. AJK and GB either seemed to accept SNC without any reservations or remained

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<sup>xx</sup> M. Rafique Tahir.

<sup>xxi</sup> Note that at this stage too, he is deceptively using USE instead of SNS that the PM launched.

<sup>xxii</sup> Similar acts, intentions and expressions could easily be found in other areas such as health, civic services and social welfare.

silent during the whole process. Practically, they had little say in the process. Constitutional constraints, understandably, did not let them have a say.

Ironically – despite the enormity of the problem - opposition politicians and political parties did not play a noteworthy role in posing resistance to such a poor show put up by the ruling party. Save a couple of tweets and some eloquent voices from the Sindh government; the Senate, National Assembly and Provincial Assemblies remained deafeningly silent on the issue of SNC. Throughout the PTI's term, not a single striking statement was heard about SNC from the opposition benches. Equivocating, the Standing Committee on Education (Federal and Provincial) did not hold any meaningful deliberations on SNC.

Punjab Teachers Union (PTU) General Secretary Rana Liaqat Ali, an experienced teacher thought that, for long, there had been a cold war between the provincial and federal government over SNC and a USE. Introducing Urdu as the national language was also debatable because post-18<sup>th</sup> amendment, certain provinces (Sindh in particular) promoted mother languages in school curricula. But at the same time, certain academic experts and critics wrote to the centre that, education being a national matter, should not be treated heterogeneously in the country<sup>103</sup>.

## Chapter 5

### Management and Implementation of SNC Textbooks

Like textbook development, textbook management and implementation have also been contested to the core, almost in its entire past. But with the appearance of SNC-driven textbooks, almost a floodgate of criticism, analyses and opinions opened up. NBF at the federal level and the PCTB pioneered in printing out MTBs in compliance with the NCC guidelines and learning outcomes. Certain private publishers were also allowed to print books – provided they followed the prescribed principles and sought NOC from the PTBs. Curriculum review or change is not or might not be something new or abhorring as it is a long-standing tradition in the developing as well as developed countries but the problem lies in its' genuine need, management and effective implementation. What is even more important is the provision of desired institutional structure and paraphernalia.

The new national curriculum - evolving in 2006 and culminating in 2009 - was steadily sinking in the public education system across the country with marginal exceptions. Regarding other systems, exceptions could also be observed in the elitist Cambridge, Harvard or Oxford System's schools and syllabi across the country; the case of Madrassa aside most of them follow their *dars-e-nizami* syllabi for a long while those following government syllabi

exclusively or in parallel had adopted it. The whole process was completed by 2013-2014. Except for “O” and “A” level international exams, other systems follow the same SLOs to appear in the Governmental Board Exams. But under the whole cacophony of ‘revolutionary change’, the whole state of affairs around was kept opaque and controversial. Some of its key controversies and managerial issues are discussed here below.

### **5.1. Federal level concerns**

Ultra vires in the backdrop of devolution but earlier in 2021, the MoFEPT advised all provinces, except Sindh, to launch and implement SNC in all public and private schools and Madrassas. While commenting on SNC’s progress, the Prime Minister had already said that by April 2021, all schools in the country would be studying the same curriculum<sup>104</sup>. It also informed concerned authorities that the new academic session would start in August 2021 as due to COVID-19 and the prolonged closure of schools, the exams were held in May-June 2021. Technically, PTB only prepared and published textbooks whereas it was the Programme Monitoring and Implementing Unit (PMIU) that acquired books to distribute them in public schools<sup>105</sup>.

In November 2021, the federal and provincial education ministers huddled to form a committee, headed by the Additional Secretary – Education, to implement SNC. Resultantly, the MoFEPT notified a 10-member committee to effectively implement SNC. The Committee was mandated to streamline NOCs and facilitate schools and publishers operating around the country. Norms like joint provision of NOCs, rapid review process and honouring

inter-provincial NOCs were devised. The Committee was also mandated to foster greater public-private partnerships and scale up the development of quality textbooks by private publishers. Careful use of provincial training and assessment resources was also considered<sup>106</sup>.

NCC Director, Secretary - Education and Literacy Department (Sindh), Secretary - School Education Department (Punjab and Balochistan), Secretary of Elementary and Secondary Education (KP), Managing Director PCTB, Chairperson - Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Textbook Board (KPTB), Directorate Curriculum and Teacher Education (KP) manned the Committee. As entitled, the Committee was supposed to evolve consensus, draft guidelines on Core Standards and SLOs – as defined in the SNC framework - and Inter-Provincial Harmony. Further on, the notification emphasised to accentuate the process of SNC implementation<sup>107</sup>.

The then NCC director Maryam Chughtai believed that, *‘the government must be commended in striving to create a standard national syllabus’*. *Nevertheless, essential enforcement of SNC - in the absence of supplementary information and training - would make it problematic for teachers as well as students’, she argued. ‘Parents, she stated, ‘should have a choice as to what they would like their children to study. Implementation of SNC should be made a matter of choice rather than compulsion. Ideally, the government should have improved the structure of the public schools along with the provision of better teachers and required training. As a matter of urgency, it should have allocated more resources and improved the learning conditions rather than lowering the standard for all<sup>108</sup>.*

It appears to be a valid critique but in reality, her very role as NCC director and as the Coordinator for SNC's national consultation contradicts her so-called reservations while remaining part of the system and enjoying powers. By the end of the day, it proved nothing more than lip service. Refuting several political claims, precisely, the government kept shifting its stances and statements as well as implementation plans throughout 2020 and 2021. One can rarely find such a caterwauling around any educational policy in the past as was produced by the PTI government

## **5.2. Implementing SNC in public schools**

According to PCTB representatives, 'SNC provided only the guidelines to all educational institutes, responsible for implementing SNC accordingly. It was nothing more than a curriculum plan without any restrictions to adopt a particular textbook. Therefore, private schools were free to publish and teach textbooks of their own choosing, however, not without having obtained an NOC from the corresponding authority. Validation and implementation of SNC fell within the jurisdiction of the Programme Monitoring and Implementing Unit (PMIU). Punjab Education Department directed the respective heads of the District Education Authorities (DEAs) and the District Registering Authorities' (DRAs) Commissioners to ensure that all registered private schools sought approval from PCTB for textbooks and supplementary reading materials<sup>109</sup>.

*'So far, hundreds of publishers have been provided NOC by the PCTB. For instance, the Oxford University Press (OUP) and Cambridge University Press (CUP) got approval from PCTB and could publish their own science and social science textbooks. Similarly, several other*

*publishing institutes also sought approval. Even if a private school wanted to adopt a specific book, it could, by seeking approval and moving ahead. Nonetheless, it was yet not clear how many schools and institutes were granted NOCs so far*, stated some of the PCTB officials. Reportedly, regarding the enforcement procedure of SNC, Punjab's School Education Department (SED) was not clear and placed responsibility on PCTB. Dealing with things within time was a chronic challenge for PTBs. On top of that lack of clarity and mutual contradictions made the process further confusing. The former Minister for School Education (Punjab), Murad Ras (2018-2021), described the implementation of SNC to be '*absolutely essential*' while stressing that '*any news on electronic or social media regarding the exemption were fake*'<sup>110</sup>. However, in the views of certain undisclosed representatives, '*it was very difficult to stop 'SNC violation' as the available human resource was drastically insufficient to monitor the process as it was being implemented without taking into account the available institutional capacity and resources*'<sup>111</sup>.

Post 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment, the Sindh School Education Standards and Curriculum Act was passed in 2015 ending up constituting the Sindh Curriculum Council while the Bureau of Curriculum was refurbished as Directorate of Curriculum Assessment and Research (DCAR). Having had about 9 meetings with the Sindh Textbook Board (STB), the former Minister for Education, Sardar Ali Shah, in consultation with STB and other associated departments decided not to implement SNC as it was entirely an arena of the provincial government. Even then the Minister, being cautious enough, advised his department to study, compare it with the proposed SNC and extend any workable suggestions<sup>112</sup>. STB, therefore, did not prepare new textbooks as desired or

directed by the MoFEPT. The Board rather developed its own new curriculum to be introduced at the secondary, higher secondary and intermediate levels of the new academic year 2022-2023. The Directorate of Curriculum Assessment and Research (DCAR) and STB published primary class textbooks according to their existing syllabus<sup>113</sup>.

Monopolising, the production of books, the provincial textbook boards, usually produce shoddily printed books with poor pedagogy and graphics over low-quality papers, fraught with mistakes. The very attitude, in fact, props up the probability of corruption. The handsomely paid, textbook authors are usually handpicked who keep coming up with new editions, one after the other, with marginal amendments only to secure their share. Sticking to ‘singular curricula’ multiplies their profits as textbooks are printed in millions – throwing a massive financial burden on parents. But for writers, reviewers and publishers every new edition multiplies their profits. SNC, therefore, phenomenally intensified the problems for multiple streams of education. Since the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment, textbooks were being provided free of charge to government schools but hundreds of thousands of children in scores of low-fee private cum charity schools (following the government-recommended curriculum) had to buy books from the market. Where provincial governments failed to provide the required quantity of books, parents had to purchase them. Ripping or losing books to be substituted aside. Thus, SNC textbooks limited the choice and learning horizons even further. Parochial bureaucracy routinely welcomes all such moves to narrow down the younger generation’s vision and amplify their authority<sup>114</sup>.

In case of change, be it positive or negative, education bureaucracy proves to be indolent and inefficient<sup>xxiii</sup>. If at all, the new curriculum naturally takes time to settle down within the existing framework, further so in this case of the heavier curriculum introduced in the name of SNC. Even the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Graders were burdened with 5 subjects whereas most public schools were run just by 1 to 3 teachers, already struggling to cope with the existing strength and subjects to teach. Around 71 pc of the schools in Sindh have 1 to 3 teachers. Save Punjab, the situation is more or less the same in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, particularly in rural schools of the provinces. Far from the governmental claims, inequity went up rather than coming down<sup>115</sup>.

Critics and analysts were not duly heard. Even Sindh's reservations and causes of concerns remained unheard. SNC was not the first and the sole starting point. By and large, the programme was poorly designed, awkwardly launched and implemented haphazardly. Public school teachers failed to adapt to the new content even after the training – a ritual performed virtually in a hodgepodge, sporadic and superficial manner – replete with errors and absenteeism. Counteracting the truth on the ground, the Punjab Government claimed to extend SNC training to thousands of teachers after careful consideration<sup>116</sup> that was assisted by an online Learning Management System (LMS)<sup>117</sup>.

Independent educationists remain concerned that clueless, yet powerful government officers, might harm the future of education. The private sector struggled to publish their

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<sup>xxiii</sup> Muhammad Arif Ghazlani, Head of Multan Public School, Multan.

textbooks without securing NOC – turning out to be a multi-layered and constrictive process. Besides, they ran the risk of complying with the shoddy standard MTBs published by the government. Naturally, they failed to figure out which books could or could not be offered to the students in the next academic year. Off the record, several high-ranking officials, overseeing SNC’s implementation, confessed of the messy situation. There were others, who bothered about least. One of the high officials, reportedly, told the concerned private schools’ representatives that *‘they need not be overly concerned about the slapdash situation. As time goes by, everyone will adjust and the brouhaha will stop’*. Just to prove its loyalty to the central government, only PCTB proactively played and is still playing the role of an arbiter of the textbooks published in the province – even though the structure and content of MTBs have been under fire. Pretty awkwardly, the Board appeared to be a dollop of faith and patriotism<sup>118</sup>.

The former Punjab’s Minister for School Education, Murad Ras, termed the independent critics as *‘mafias’* campaigning against SNC’s implementation and reiterated his will in the words, *“Make no mistake about it, SNC will be implemented in its letter and spirit. These mafias<sup>xxiv</sup> have only personal interests and slave mentality<sup>119</sup>”*. Following suit, conservative journalists and religious clerics also began labelling cogent critics as *‘infidels’*, *‘anti-state elements’* and *‘elitists’* – without giving an ear to their reasonable suggestions. Regarding the technical aspects of SNC, the Director of the Bureau of Curriculum and Extension Wing (BCEW), Sindh, thought that *“the larger part*

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<sup>xxiv</sup> In original tweet the key word “Mafia” and “Slave Mentality” appear in bold and first letter capital. Written as regular text by the Authors.

*of SNC was an emulation of the 2006s National Curriculum that the province had already incorporated. Their school curriculum was largely activity-based and took into account the 'students' learning outcomes too. Overlooking learning outcomes, what was mainly taken care of in the SNC was Islamiyat<sup>120</sup>. Had the Federal Government been seriously interested in introducing a progressive curriculum, it would have worked more on science subjects”.*

Contradicting all such claims of introducing an ideal system, the reality on the ground was the opposite. In the views of an acclaimed educationist, A.H. Nayyar “*sticking to one textbook for one subject was responsible for the dismal state of affairs. The public examination boards - about 25 of them - follow the same pattern. The 'students learning outcomes,' 'analytical ability,' 'creativity' and 'comprehension' indicated by NCC were nothing more than fancy words devoid of any substance, as the kind of curriculum and textbook recommended by SNC did not hold much worth. An attempt to discourage singular textbooks in favour of multiple books for a subject - as was the case in 1970 - was made in 2007 too under the National Textbooks and Learning Materials Policy. Multiple publishers were invited to submit draft textbooks for approval and MoFEPT chose eminent authors to write textbooks. But the plan was eventually shelved. Had it been adopted, it would have introduced positive competition between authors and publishers, and multiple-quality textbooks might have been circulating in the market. As the initiative would have undermined the importance of PTBs – monopolising textbook regulation – they left no stone unturned to overturn it. Eventually vested interests and malevolent influences crept in during the final rounds of the policy shift and subverted the process of change underway<sup>121</sup>. With the launch of SNC, similar interest lobbies became active and even stronger”.*

The PTI government once again strengthened the conservative single textbook policy. The so-called MTBs, prepared by the Ministry of Federal Education, were passed on to other provinces to print them as the product of their own textbook boards. Naturally, the provinces and regions following the centre underwent a plethora of problems. In fact, doing away with the single textbook policy is the stepping stone to improving our public education. Exam questions should be posed not from a particular text but from the curriculum-defined learning outcomes that students may answer from the subject comprehension gleaned from multiple books. Currently, the officially defined experts set exam questions only from the prescribed textbooks. So much so that indicating which page and paragraph they prepared their exam questions from is also part of the standard operating procedure. Thus, it naturally binds teachers and students to one book per subject per class. Words like ‘critical understanding’ and ‘cognitive skills’, used by the SNCs’ SLOs are nothing more than empty words. The SNC compelled teachers, students and examiners to treat one textbook as sacred. The exercise questions in the SNC MTBs ask nothing more than cramming answers from a particular text. Therefore, rote memory dominates the public schooling system, massively cutting down genuine understanding of a subject<sup>122</sup>.

Ideally, SNC textbooks should never have been published. If at all, the entire curriculum needs redesigning in light of the criticism and suggestions extended above. Likewise, the NCC should have held sincere consultations with the eminent educationists of the country.

### 5.3.SNC in private schools

Private schools remained at a fix over the federal and provincial government's command to implement SNC. The sudden shifting in the medium of instruction (MoI) from English to Urdu for Science and Social Studies – merged into one subject i.e. General Knowledge at the primary level – also made the transition challenging. SNC-prescribed books (till Grade V) were approved, prepared and distributed far later than the commencement of the academic session 2021-2022 in March 2021. Grade VIII to Grade X books took almost another 2 years. Procedural difficulties aside, the elite schools had strong reservations about the SNC-recommended texts. Beaconhouse School System, Aitchison College, City Schools System, Roots Millennium, Lahore Grammar School, The Educators and even Army Public Schools and Colleges expressed their reluctance to blend SNC into their existing curriculum – which they believed was higher quality than the one recommended. Reportedly, certain influential schools were allowed to carry on with their own curriculum without making a fuss – so long as a way out was found for them. But certain other schools, such as Aitchison College, were strictly instructed to implement SNC immediately, or *'an action will be taken against it'*<sup>23</sup>, said Murad Ras. Even some of the private schools were threatened to revoke their licences if they would not adopt SNC. There was, *'zero exemption', on the implementation of SNC; it shall be equally implemented in all public and private schools and Madrassas'*<sup>24</sup>, tweeted the same Minister for Education, Punjab. He also termed avoiding implementation of SNC as a *'challenging writ of the government'*<sup>25</sup>.

The Textbook Publishers Association (TPA) demanded the federal government to direct the PCTB to speedily issue them

NOCs and withdraw the hefty fee for that. Otherwise, they would have to increase the prices of the books even further – as high as 300 pc because they were made to pay Rs 140,000 to PCTB and its Review Committee. Also the publishers were supposed to pay Rs 15,000 to Curriculum Review Committees; Rs 45,000 to Mutahida Ulema Board, Rs 80,000 to External Review Committees and Rs 15,000 to PCTB herself against the issuance of NOC. Also, for approval, the publishers had to submit 5 to 8 copies of each book to PCTB desiring additional publishing by spending Rs 2,500 more. *'In this manner'*, argued TPA, *'SNC would turn out oxymoron and strengthen class-based education system further'*. *'Though, respective curriculum boards'*, said Private Schools Management Association (PSMA), Sindh, and General Secretary, Pakistan Alliance of Private Schools Association (PAPSA), *advised us to print books as per government's MTBs - keeping in mind their themes and methodology, but the transition from one curriculum to the other was never a smooth sailing as the government tended to think*<sup>126</sup>.

Accumulatively, including fees and prices of the authors and the editors, the cost of paper, printing, binding, marketing and office overheads, the end price of the books was likely to increase exorbitantly – heavily burdening the parents. In the words of TPA's representative, 'last year's primary class syllabus cost close to Rs 4,000 which could swell to Rs 12,000 if associated fees were not subsidized. Simultaneously, certain representatives of PCTB approved around 125 books of the private publishers from Grade I to X<sup>127</sup>. To worsen the situation further, private publishers were imposed a deadline without taking them in confidence. Complicating things further, review and NOC procedures varied between provinces. Instead of clear policy prescriptions, chaos

abounded<sup>128</sup>. On top of that the then Education Minister (Punjab) tweeted proudly that *'private publisher's books cost thousands of rupees, while the government's one-year course could be purchased for Rs 800 only. The Mafia's object because their money will stop flowing in,'* he stated<sup>129</sup>.

National and Provincial Private School Associations (PSAs) growled that the government was insisting on adopting SNC while the books, till the beginning of the session, were not available in the market. Whatever was there, was in piecemeal either in the shape of screenshots, social media clips or certain bits were placed on the ministry's website. A noteworthy private school's letter written to the parents stated that: 'working within the SNC constraints and providing quality education to children was no less than a challenge. Preparing students to be internationally competitive - along with teaching SNC subjects - might significantly increase work pressure on students and teachers, particularly at the middle and secondary levels. School administration had always complied with the government directives and implementing SNC required a complete renovation of the school programme in 3 months - an endeavour that could only be carried out over several years. Under the circumstances, if the parents had some complaints<sup>xxv</sup>, they were supposed to communicate to the respective ministries<sup>130</sup>.

A large number of parents were apprehensive of implementing SNC in high-fee private schools - lest it degenerate their children's quality education and learning.

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<sup>xxv</sup> Emphasis is of the Authors'.

Nevertheless, the private schools, somehow, managed to maintain their standard. After all, it was their business yielding them massive profits. Eventually, it was the low-fee private and underprivileged public schools and non-formal community, and charity schools that bore the brunt of unthoughtful political experimentation with schooling<sup>xxvi</sup>. In principle, parents have the right to choose whatever nature and quality of education they wish to impart to their children – though under certain qualifiers. So long as they do not trust government schools to impart the progressive social and scientific education – that they want their children to receive – they have every right to pick and choose the school and syllabi for their kids<sup>131</sup>. In other words, SNC over boarded parental right to choose the quality and content of their children’s learning. Reportedly, Aitchison expressed its concerns over the quality and content of the MTBs and refused to adopt them<sup>132</sup>. Elite schools were reluctant for their own reasons while low-fee schools, despite having multiple concerns, were too vulnerable to argue against<sup>xxvii</sup>.

#### **5.4. Implementing SNC in religious seminaries (Madrassas)**

Before describing the status of SNC’s implementation in Madrassas, it is pertinent to mention what the former Minister for Federal Education, Shafqat Mahmood, believed in this regard, “...*The new generation would be made a true Muslim, and a good Pakistani through the new syllabus*<sup>xxviii</sup> (read education), he

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<sup>xxvi</sup> N. Khalid, Senior Teacher of a Private School in Multan (The respondent requested to keep his/her name anonymous).

<sup>xxvii</sup> As revealed from KIIs with a range of private schools’ representatives.

<sup>xxviii</sup> Insertion in the parenthesis is of the Authors.

argued. *The new curricula should teach ethics to the minorities according to their own faith*<sup>33</sup>...and *Madrassas*, he reiterated, time and again, *were... 'imparting education to the hundreds of thousands of the children of the poor and underprivileged sections of the society'*<sup>34</sup>, thus lending a great service to the nation.

The then Prime Minister and, the Federal and the Provincial Ministers for Education in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, specifically claimed to implement SNC in Madrassas too without considering the non-conducive state of affairs there. Those at the helm were either unaware of the obstacles in doing so or they deliberately underplayed it for political gains. The latter proved true. Madrassas were not homogenous in terms of sect, system, syllabi, school of thought and most importantly in their motives of teaching Islam and Islamic history.



Picture 6: Jamaia Salafia Mosque, Islamabad

Before realising such plans, no deeper analysis and corresponding strategies were drawn. Since day one, save for a few ill-thought-out statements, no sense of the situation was observed on either side. At what levels, and in how many

Madrassas will SNC be implemented? Social science subjects alone or the whole of the curriculum and under which timeframe will SNC be implemented? How was it going to fit in with their so-called *dars-e-nizami* curricula? Who will teach Madrassa-going kids the proposed public school curriculum? Will their Madrassa-qualified teachers be appointed formally (despite their incapability, and without desired qualification and, training) with equivalent salaries and benefits? No policy statement was ever made. Nothing was clear. The government's respective ministries, PTBs and SEDs never did their homework to deal with such a daunting task. All circles concerned were simply clueless. Implementing SNC in Madrassas, if at all, was a bigger and far more challenging task than implementing it in any other stream of schooling, so to speak.

Save Tableeghi Jamat, which provides highly informal Islamic education without any certification<sup>xxix</sup>, all other systems offer a formal Islamic education under 5 of their Boards i.e. Wafaq<sup>xxx</sup>-ul-Madaaris Al-Arbia (Hanfi and Deobandi), Wafaq-ul-Madaris al-Salafia (Ahl-e-Hadeeth), Tanzeem-ul-Madaris (Ahl-e-Sunnat), Wafaq-ul-Madaris (Al-Shia) and Rabta-tul-Madaris of Jamat-e-Islami<sup>xxxi</sup>. The first one is the largest Wafaq,<sup>xxxii</sup> and their apex body i.e. Ittehad Tanzeemat-

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<sup>xxix</sup> For example, the madrasas run by the known Maulana Tariq Jameel prover informal Quran-o-Sunnah education without handing over any certificate to the qualifying students. They believe, their Islamic education is just to please God.

<sup>xxx</sup> Wafaq stands for 'federal'.

<sup>xxxi</sup> Save certain variance in sectarian interpretation, all of the claim of teaching Nizami Curriculum.

<sup>xxxii</sup> Information disclosed by the representatives of Jamia Muhammadiya, Islamabad.

ul-Madrassas is known requested the Federal Government to allow them 5 to 6 years to accommodate SNC within their system. Reportedly, an MoU was signed for the same<sup>135</sup>. Al-Arbia and Al-Shia Wafaq agreed that Madrassas could be managed by the respective education ministries while the other three repudiated the idea<sup>xxxiii</sup>. However, not a single Madrassa, that interacted during the study, mentioned having been consulted. Nothing, on the part of their apex bodies advised them whether to adopt SNC or not. The fact is, the PTI government never meant it. All that was nothing more than a brouhaha. Eventually, no solid step was taken in this regard. The smoke settled with time.



*Picture 7: Jamia Muhammadiya, Islamabad*

Although the Sunni sect makes up around three-fourths of the population in the country, a larger number of Madrassas are affiliated with the Deobandi school of thought. Save Ahl-

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<sup>xxxiii</sup> As reported by Mujahid Gardezi, Head of Majlis Wahdat-ul-Muslimeen (MWM), Multan Division.

e-Tashee's Wafaq-ul-Madaris, the Islamic syllabus of all the systems is largely the same<sup>xxxiv</sup>. Conventionally, they have not been teaching sciences and even social sciences too – save those seminaries, religious charities or welfare schools that were already teaching government-approved curricula in parallel with the Islamic courses<sup>xxxv</sup>.

Roughly, there would be, perhaps, less than 10 pc<sup>xxxvi</sup> of the Madrassas who offer Islamic as well as secular studies systematically and could, if they liked, adopt SNC. But no such reports were there. Even these Madrassas stated that their aim was to 'serve Islam and produce religious scholars, maulvis and imam mosques, not scientists or IT experts. They imparted basic literacy and numeracy skills just to help them manage their mundane matters. Usually, they allocate less than one-fourth of their teaching-learning time to the latter than to the key thrust of their schooling i.e. religious education. Most of them rather wished formal schools to adopt their model than the other way around. Dedicating one's time to secular studies more than what was allocated, was even believed to be a disciplinary violence. Usually, their academic year was about two months longer than a government school's typical academic year<sup>136</sup>.

A huge number of Madrassas – statistics unavailable – simply lack an academic framework, resources, classrooms and

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<sup>xxxiv</sup> Maulana Tanveer A. Alvi, Jamia Muhammadiya, Islamabad.

<sup>xxxv</sup> First-hand information collected from multiple madrasas in Islamabad, Karachi, Multan and Layyah.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> This is just a rough estimate drawn from random visits to and conversations with madrasas representatives. No reliable statistics are available in this regard.

teachers to accommodate SNC<sup>xxxvii</sup>. Their SLOs, written or unwritten, are entirely faith driven. Those who exclusive offer Islamic education, simply enrol a student with whatever formal or informal learning he comes with; whatever age and whichever area he comes from. Characteristically, a Madrassa begins with teaching him Arabic alphabets, phonology and certain expressions to help him learn nazira Quran and then proceed to hifz. *“A few Madrassas, i.e. the likes of Jamia Salfia, Dar-ul-Uloom-e-Islami, Jamia Dar-ul-Uloom and Khair-ul-Madaris, as explained by Maulana Akhtar Ayubi, put a condition of having primary pass certificate. A Hafiz must not exceed the age of 15 and if not a Hafiz, the candidate must not be older than 10. Higher education such as Khasa Anwal and Khasa Doam, Aaliya Anwal, Aaliya Doam, and Doara-e-Hadees or Shahadat-e-Aalmya are offered by an extremely limited number of Madrassas in Sindh, Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa<sup>xxxviii</sup>”*.



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<sup>xxxvii</sup> KII with Saeed-ur-Rahman Rabbani, اسلام آباد، اداره علوم اسلامی، مدرس و ناظم امتحانات

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Ideas extracted from KII with Maulana Taimoor Usmani and Hafiz Abdul Basit (Dar-ul-Uloom-e-Islami, Islamabad) and from representatives of multiple other madrasas; and Abd-ul-Basit, the Mohtamm (Administrator).



Picture 8: *Jamia Rabeemia, and madrasah in Layyah*

Charity schools operating within the aegis of Madrassas such as Faiz-ul-Islam or Ahrar-ul-Islam schools intended to implement SNC without reservations as they embraced governmental system in its entirety despite managing their premises, salaries and operational costs themselves through charity<sup>xxxix</sup>. Despite espousing some sectarian and ideological differences, Madrassa moulvi thought that SNC's implementation there was highly likely to fail as it was mundane not Islamic. The government, they also stressed, was neither sincere nor willing or resourceful enough to transform all systems all at once<sup>xl</sup>. As articulated by Maulana Tanveer A. Alvi<sup>xli</sup>, of Jamia Muhammadiya (Islamabad) *“Uniform System of Education (Madrassa representatives usually*

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<sup>xxxix</sup> Faiz-ul-Islam school is registered as trust and is affiliated with Rawalpindi Secondary School Board. Periodical as well as random contribution is made by the ordinary people or, in certain cases, from those already having studied in the school and now serving at some privileged positions. Some of the retired teachers also server here, without any major financial interest (KII with the Principal of the School).

<sup>xl</sup> Representatives of Anjuman Faiz-ul-Islam (Shabbir A. Satti) and Majlis Ahrar-e-Islam – names kept synonymous upon request. Representative of Future Generation School, A Charity School in Sang Jani.

<sup>xli</sup> Deputy Head of Jamia Muhammadiya, Islamabad.

*confuse between USE and SNC<sup>xlii</sup>) is a beautiful idea as it may put an end to the deprived children's feelings of inferiority, but the government lacked both empathy and resolve coupled with its inability to afford required financial and technical support Madrassas needed".*

Unlike common public perception, most Madrassas<sup>xliii</sup> (save Jamat-e-Islami's Rabta-tul-Madaris) did not explicitly associate themselves with any local or larger political party. Some of them<sup>xliv</sup> state expelling students associated with any political party or participating in a religio-political procession. "Once Ijaz-ul-Haq (the son of Zia-ul-Haq)", stated Saeed-ur-Rahman from Jamia-Uloom-e-Islamia, Islamabad, *sent us a cheque of Rs 400,000 in charity, but we turned it down with thanks,*".

### **5.5.Madrassas or NGOs?**

Known as 'Pakistan Madrassa Education Board Ordinance 2001' (Establishment and Affiliation of Model Dini Madaris) was promulgated on August 18<sup>th</sup>, 2001, under General Musharraf's regime. Under the proposed Education Sector Reforms, three model institutions were set up; one each in Karachi, Sukkur and Islamabad. Their curriculum included Mathematics, Computer Science, English, Economics, Political Science, Law and Pakistan Studies at different levels. The reform effort was not welcomed by the ulema. Similarly, the Voluntary Registration and Regulation Ordinance 2002 was also rejected by most of the madrassas as a measure of resisting any possible state interference in the affairs of Madrassas. According to P.W. Singer, only about one-tenth

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<sup>xlii</sup> Insertion within the parenthesis is of the authors.

<sup>xliii</sup> At least those the authors interacted in Punjab and Sindh.

<sup>xliv</sup> Dar-ul-Uloom-e-Islami and Jamia-tul-Rasheed for instance.

of the madrassas agreed to be registered and the rest simply did not bother about the statute<sup>137</sup>. The move came to a halt, there and then. No more model Madrassas could be set up in the years to come.

One way or the other the 5 apex bodies (wafooq) of Madrassas insist on being the seminaries. Come 2024, in the pretext of the 26<sup>th</sup> amendment, Moulana Fazal ur Rehman of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI), contrary to the Madrassa Education - Establishment and Affiliation of Model Dini Madaris - Board Ordinance, 2001, not only insists rather threatens to storm Islamabad if the madaris are not registered as a kind of NGO under the Societies Act (1860). Moulana also stresses on complete independence of madaris without any financial or educational monitoring and control. Not clear what commitments were made behind doors by the coalition government while taking him in confidence to vote in favour of the 26<sup>th</sup> amendment bill<sup>138</sup>.

Either abiding by their promise or compelled by the JUI's pressure, the parliament sent the bill to President Asif Ali Zardari for his assent. The president, however, returned the bill raising pertinent objections that the Madrassa Education Board Ordinance (2001) and the Islamabad Capital Territory Trust Act (2020) were already in effect and were sufficient. The amendment would override the existing provisions. Registering Madrassas under the Societies Act could have serious repercussions, such as the reintroduction of Financial Action Task Force (FATF) conditionalities and withdrawal of the European Union's Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP+) programme, and sanctions from other international organisations. Further sectarianism and other

divisive tendencies. He also cautioned that allowing multiple Madrassas to operate under a single society could create “fiefdoms”<sup>139</sup>.

Like almost all apex bodies and their seminaries’ representatives, JUI is bent on conserving Madrassas frozen in time in substance and spirit along with their sectarian prejudices. Its chief, Fazal ur Rehman, rejects the idea of seminary registration with the education ministry. Following the same old exploitative tactics of religious-political parties, he threatened to stage street protests across the country if the federal government did not approve the Madrassa registration bill passed by the parliament. He reminds the government of the promise that seminaries would have the option of affiliating themselves with the Societies Act or the education ministry<sup>140</sup>. The insincerity of the leaders of the religio-political parties in promoting progressive education in seminaries is quite clear. They want them to be as fundamental in their approach and outlook as they are. After all the students there are a reserve political and voting force to be manoeuvred at the whip and whims.

### **5.6. Structure and content of dars-e-nizami and accommodating SNC within**

Whatever point of the spectrum it may exist, whosoever you meet in a Madrassa (teachers or students), they term it the Dars-e-Nizami system of education. So, what Dars-e-Nizami is? Historically, Nizami Curriculum was devised by an Islamic scholar, Mullah Nizam-u-Din (1677-1740) (of Barabanki, Utter Pradesh) around the 1730s or so. Mullah Nizami radically reformed the tradition of Islamic teaching comprising *manqulaat* (imitational sciences) to integrate it

with *maqulaat* (rational sciences) as well in the given system. Building upon and expanding the curriculum to serve the temporal needs, Persian Literature, Philosophy, Mathematics, Astronomy, History, Medicine, Engineering even Managerial and Bureaucratic Knowledge of the time were also part of the studies along with Arabic Grammar i.e. Sarf-o-Nahv, Quran-o-Hadeeth, Fiqh, Usool-e-Fiqh (Islamic Jurisprudence), Ilm-e-Balaghat (knowledge of rhetoric), Qanoon-e-Virasat (law of inheritance), and Sharah-o-Tafseer (principles of exegesis). But with the passage of time, almost three-fourths of that has gone through foundational transformation (read it degeneration), so much so that it can hardly be called Dars-e-Nizami, save a historical attribution or merely a nomenclature. Comparatively, Mullah Nizami's reforms not only supplemented but rather preferred *maqulaat* (logic and science) over *manqulat* i.e. Islamic tradition or imitational knowledge<sup>141</sup>.

No surprise, there was a movement against Dars-e-Nizami within the next couple of decades due to its predominant inclination towards logic, science and arts than traditional Madrassa studies. Shah Abdul Raheem (1644-1719), the father of the well-known Islamic reformer Shah Waliullah, who had already constituted his own system of Madrassa education, dubbed as Dars-e-Raheemia, that preferred *manqulaat* over *maqulaat*<sup>142</sup>. Post humorously, his sons Shah Waliullah (1703-1762) and Shah Abdul Aziz (1746-1824) who overtook his father's legacy, further promoted *manqulaat* over *maqulaat*, and institutionally preferred traditional subjects over rational sciences. In certain instances, they rather opposed the modernist tradition of Dars-e-Nizami. But for

having relatively weaker content<sup>xlv</sup>, the name i.e. Dars-e-Raheemia went into oblivion though having caused irreparable damage to the original Dars-e-Nizami was ironically known as Dars-e-Nizami.

Nizami Curriculum was initially adopted by Dar-ul-Uloom Deoband (India) and is now part of Madrassas of all sects and schools of thought both in India and Pakistan. Though, lagging behind in keeping pace with the contemporary scientific and technological demands, it has lost the original spirit of the system, yet it is still popular as Dars-e-Nizami. Only a few of the Madrassas say Dar-ul-Uloom Deoband (Karachi), Darul-uloom-e-Islami (Islamabad) and Jamia Khair-ul-Madaris (Multan) may sustain bare minimum elements of *maqulaat* in their Dars-e-Nizami curriculum. In other words, it is the conservative Dars-e-Raheemia curriculum that they teach under the garb of Dars-e-Nizami<sup>143</sup>.

The fact is that along with exclusively Islamic syllabus, part of the rational sciences such as Falakyat (Astronomy), Iqtisadiyat (Economics), Falsafa (Philosophy), Elm-e-Mantiq (Logic), Tassuvrat-e-Feesaghoras (theories of Pythagoras), Meeras (the law of inheritance), Ilm-e-Balaghat (Rhetoric) are still taught in Pakistani Madrassas but their approach is exclusively conservative or pseudoscientific – devoid of rational and scientific logic, modern theories, innovative

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<sup>xlv</sup> Emphasis is of the Authors.

approaches and new discoveries in all spheres of life and existence<sup>xlvi</sup>.

Now the question is how SNC can be accommodated within Dars-e-Nizami curricular framework (read Dars-e-Raheemia). Obviously, without drastic reforms or at least bringing it closer to the classical and original Dars-e-Nizami, no secular system of education be accommodated within the existing curriculum of even the relatively better seminaries of Dar-ul-Uloom Deoband (Karachi), Darul-uloom-e-Islami (Islamabad) and Jamia Khair-ul-Madaris (Multan). In fact, by incorporating elaborate Islamic studies (including *Naẓīra* and *Hifz*) right from Grade – I to Grade XII, regular school education was brought closer to Dars-e-Nizami through SNC. On top of that, not a single Wafaq out of the eminent five was willing to accommodate rational studies into their existing curriculum.

### **5.7. Teacher's perception of SNC**

To gather teachers' views about their familiarity, content, quality and applicability of SNC, the teachers of the public and low-fee-private schools as well as Madrassas inquired about. The survey questionnaire also inquired if their school had received SNC books and alternatively, if they were available in the market; had gone through these books (especially their own subject); did they find the new syllabus easy or difficult for students; and would it put an end to the apartheid system of education or not and, what was their

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<sup>xlvi</sup> Extracted from the Authors' observations and interaction with several madrasas in Punjab, Islamabad and Karachi.

opinion about the excessive Islamic material within Islamiyat and other subjects etc.?

<b>Teachers' familiarity with single national curriculum</b>					
		<b>Yes</b>		<b>No</b>	
		Count	N %	Count	N %
School/ Madrassa	Public	85	39	3	23
	Private (low-Fee)	92	42	4	31
	Madrassa	42	19	6	46
	Total	219	100%	13	100%

*Table 8: Teacher's familiarity with the single national curriculum*

A majority of government teachers (n=85, 39 pc) were aware of the SNC initiative launched by the federal government in the country. Similarly, a fair number of private (n=92, 42 pc) and Madrassa (n=42, 19 pc) teachers had had familiarity with the SNC. While, in absolute count, only a fraction of respondents were not acquainted with the needful details of SNC.

<b>Provision of SNC textbook in school / madrassa</b>							
		<b>Yes</b>		<b>No</b>		<b>N/A</b>	
		Count	N %	Count	N %	Count	N %
School/ Madrassa	Public	88	75	0	0	0	0
	Private (Low Fee)	19	16	77	76	0	0
	Madrassa	10	9	24	24	14	100
Total		117	100%	101	100%	14	100%

*Table 9: Provision of a SNC textbook in school/ madrassa?*

All the government teachers (n=88; 75 pc) who participated in the survey affirmed that they have received the SNC-based textbooks (Class I-V) provided by the respective education department. It is important to note here, that not a single teacher negated the provision of textbooks. When it comes to private schools' teachers, about 16 pc reported that not all, but some of the textbooks were available in the market, and could be purchased, however, in accordance with their school system. Though, 76 pc of teachers reported that schools were: (i). waiting for the PCTB to issue NOC; (ii). NOC issued, yet books were in the printing phase; (iii). limited number of copies were available in the market; and (iv). not available in the market. Similar reasons were offered by the Madrassas students with regards to buying and availability of the textbooks.

In the opinion of the Headmaster of a Government School in the suburbs of G-14, they had yet not received books officially. Though they had one personal copy of each subject. Schools that rapidly received the new syllabus earlier even did not receive it before October 2021. Regarding the element of change in the new textbooks, he thought, there was no remarkable change, perhaps no more than 30 pc from the 2006's syllabus. The major shift that he noticed was in the subject of Islamiyat<sup>xlvi</sup>.

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<sup>xlvi</sup> Respondent's name is being kept synonymous on his request.

		Read the SNC textbooks?					
		Yes		No		N/A	
		Count	N %	Count	N %	Count	N %
School/ Madrasa	Public	80	70	8	10	0	0
	Private (Low Fee)	25	22	64	79	7	30
	Madrasa	9	8	9	11	16	70
	Total	114	100%	81	100%	23	100%

Table 10: The teachers having read the SNC textbooks

Around 70 pc of the public school teachers, 22 pc of the private schools' teachers and 8 pc of the madrasa *assatiza* stated that they had gone through the SNC textbooks. At the same time, a relatively large proportion of private (n=64; 79 pc), and meaningful (11 pc) Madrasa teachers replied negatively. Rarely a teacher, opined the Head of the Allied School, had gone through SNC MTBs – including the subject he or she teaches. All opinions that you hear around are perceptual<sup>xlvi</sup>.

Is SNC easier for the students?		
	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	129	56
No	24	10
Don't Know	79	34
Total	232	100

Table 11: Course is easy or difficult for students

Overall, 56 pc (n=129) of the teachers responded that the SNC course was easier than before. A fair 34 pc teachers had

<sup>xlvi</sup> KII with Dr. Maria, the representative of the Allied School, Layyah.

no idea, and 10 pc replied in the negative, and i.e. they found it difficult for students to grasp new concepts and information.

The foundation of the entire SNC stood on the question of whether the new curriculum-based system of education was able to eliminate the discriminatory and class-based system of education. The responses received were diverse. Unsurprisingly government school teachers overwhelmingly (56 pc in contrast, and 85 pc among) opposed the assumption, anticipating that SNC would certainly fail to eliminate multiple systems of education, and would rather strengthen the class divide. Teachers of the low-fee private schools were found in disarray (46 pc said yes, it may end the class-based system of education while 44 pc were not sure). On the other hand, the government teachers (n=7, 21%), low-fee private schools (n=10, 29%), and Madrassa (n=17, 50%), opposed the assumption. They argued that SNC would not help put an end to the class divide.

		Will the new curriculum eliminate class segregation?																		
		Yes						No						Don't Know						
School/ Madrassa	Public Low- Fee Pvt. Schs.	Count	Column N %	Row N %	Count	Column N %	Row N %	Count	Column N %	Row N %	Count	Column N %	Row N %	Count	Column N %	Row N %				
				75	56	85	7	21	8	6	9	7	44	33	46	10	29	10	42	66
		15	11	31	17	50	35	16	25	33	134	100%	58%	34	100%	15%	64	100%	28%	28%

Table 12: Will the new curriculum eliminate class segregation?

In the views of some of the Madrassa representatives, say Maulana Tanveer A. Alvi from Jamia Muhammadiya, *‘Madrassas were there to serve Islam and produce aalim-e-deen (religious*

*scholars) and not to produce doctors or engineers<sup>xlix</sup>, while others thought, 'the purpose of Madrassas was to produce a fine blend of asri (contemporary) and deeni uloom (religious scholarship)<sup>l</sup>. But in both of the representative views, their main thrust remains on Islamic education, not necessarily to impart worldly or secular education.*

Yet another set of Madrassa representatives (say Qari A. Ghafoor and Moulvi Hafeez-ur-Rahman) thought, *"the so-called governmental effort to implement SNC in Madrassas was pointless. Why did they dare to come up with this idea? They argued. What contribution (financial or otherwise) does it make in sustaining or facilitating our system? What of facilitating us, this or that government keeps slinging one or another blame upon Madrassas – including the most serious one of 'being terrorist nurseries'? Thus, it held no legitimacy for reforming the existing system or syllabi of Madrassas. It never even appointed Madrassa-qualified youth as teachers of Islamiyat in public schools or colleges. We ourselves afforded our students' boarding, lodging and utility expenses. Why should we then abide by their commands? In fact, it was the government's tactic to appoint its own teachers in Madrassas – as intruders<sup>li</sup>".*

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<sup>xlix</sup> KII with Maulana Tanveer A. Alvi, Deputy Head of Jamia Muhammadiya, Islamabad.

<sup>l</sup> To simplify, those sticking to traditional religious education hold the first opinion while those imparting formal education as well along with religious studies believe the latter. The former category is quite limited in terms of number – though no formal statistics are available.

<sup>li</sup> Qari Abdul Ghafoor (KII), Jamia Raheemia, Layyah, Hafeez-ur-Rahman, Jamia Slafia, Islamabad, Madrasa Al-rasheedia, G-11/3 and others.

On the other hand, those Madrassas registered with the ‘provincial affiliation and examination boards’ had no option but to welcome the new syllabus. Others (like Shabbir A. Satti) argued that *‘who could refuse its benefits if public and private students were brought at par through the singular national curriculum. But it was almost impossible for the government to arm-twist the powerful elitist private schools<sup>lii</sup>. It simply lacked credentials to push down ‘alligators’ in the field and on top of that, ‘they were not willing to allocate resources desired for madaris reforms<sup>liii</sup>.*

Not dealt with in detail but the employment probability of students qualifying from all three streams of schooling did come into question, whosoever one spoke to. Madrassa representatives particularly complained of being discriminated against in the job market. In the words of the Head of Jamia Salafia, Hafeez-u-Rahman<sup>liv</sup>, *‘Forget about sciences, at least we can teach Urdu, Arabic and Persian far better than teachers in other systems of education. Even after having secured ‘equivalence’ from the Higher Education Commission (HEC), men qualifying from our system were not employed as teachers for the said subjects too, save they held a parallel degree in the same subject from a government-recognised university. It is no less than a conspiracy against those serving the cause of Islam. Only the KP government respected Madrassa graduates, and if on merit, employed them too. Nevertheless, a limited number of graduating students from Dar-ul-Uloom-e-Islami (Islamabad), Jamia Khair-ul-Madaris (Multan) and Dar-ul-Uloom Deoband (Karachi) turned out to be relatively successful in securing*

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<sup>lii</sup> Muhammad Taimoor, Senior Arabic Grammar and Arabic Literature Teacher, Idara Uloom-e-Islami, Islamabad.

<sup>liii</sup> Principle Anjuman Faiz-ul-Islam School, Shabbir A. Satti (KII).

<sup>liv</sup> Hafeez-ur-Rahman, Principle Jamia Salfiya and Abdul-Basit, Admin Officer, Dar-ul-Uloom-e-Islami, Islamabad

*employment for teaching in public universities, colleges or in armed forces as Religious Motivation Officers (RMOs), Khateebes, Imam Mosques, and though few, but College or University Lecturers too<sup>lv</sup>.*

### **5.8. SNC, teachers' absenteeism and corresponding apprehensions**

In remote and rural areas, many teachers remain missing from classrooms, particularly in Sindh and Balochistan. For example, the Principal of a GGHS (Purana Chaman, Balochistan)<sup>lvi</sup> disclosed that *“since I joined the school in 2018, out of the 8 formally appointed teachers, not a single one would turn up – though they would draw their salaries without a miss. To get things going, I have privately hired 3 teachers urging the original ones to pay off at least one-third of their salaries to them. Summing up the ‘contribution’ made by three government-appointed teachers, I pay salaries to the four proxy teachers”*. *“The ‘system’ is quite common in northern Balochistan, known as evazi ustad<sup>lvii</sup>”*, as told by another teacher of GBMS of Quetta<sup>lviii</sup>.

*“We are short of rooms. Broken furniture is stuffed into two of the rooms. There are 500 girls enrolled in this small school. In the rest of the 5 rooms, I have to squeeze at least 100 students in one room. All students are compelled to sit on the floor even in the chilling cold of Chaman (Balochistan) in the winter for there is no furniture. This is how our school runs. It is not the case in this school or this district, rather the*

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<sup>lv</sup> Saeed-ur-Rahman, Nazim and Seerat Teacher of Islamiyat at Dar-ul-Uloom, Islamia, Islamabad.

<sup>lvi</sup> Upon the respective Head of the School's request, her name is being kept anonymous.

<sup>lvii</sup> The information was shared by one of the teachers from Government Boys Middle School, Killi Almas. Name kept anonymous upon request.

<sup>lviii</sup> Their names have been kept confidential upon request.

*situation is quite common in all northern districts of Balochistan,” the principal of GGHS (Purana Chaman), lamented.*

Similarly, in the words of the Headmaster of GBHS (Purana Chaman), *“over 550 students are enrolled in this school with 7 classrooms and 15 teachers. On average, each teacher has to teach 40 students while accommodating 71 or more in one class and classroom. Teachers’ absenteeism is common, but taking EDO in confidence, I began deducting around Rs 10,000-11,000 from their salary in case of absence for X number of days. The tactic has worked a bit but old habits die hard. There is a chronic shortage of teachers as well as classrooms. Come summer or winter, many students have to sit on the floor. Free books and free uniforms certainly work as incentives for poor parents but it is hard to manage uniforms for 500 plus kids with Rs 40,000 provided by the government under this head. Neither SNC books have been provided nor was any training conducted on that. Out of the 14 bathrooms in all, about 11 were constructed by Balochistan Rural Support Programme (BRSP); and only 3 by the government. But the bathrooms are useless, without water. Eventually, bathrooms run down”.*

Similarly, in GGHS, Piri Kahan (Turbat) close to 52 windows and windowpanes were repaired by BRSP. Earlier, children would suffer from blazing heat in summer and terrible cold in the winter. Also, the water well, boundary walls, floor, playgrounds and classrooms were repaired in addition to the provision of two more classrooms and verandas by the same NGO. Even sports goods and supplies were provided by the same NGO. It has also sponsored the school tournaments.

On top of the insufficient number of teachers available in schools, most of the existing teachers are incapable of

teaching improved courses in an effective manner. A poor-quality SNC training was imparted online to maintain social distance amidst the fears of contracting COVID-19. Such symptomatic training was highly unlikely to transform their ideology, approach and attitudes towards new subjects and new techniques. Most of the teachers are conservative and conventional in approach and behaviour themselves believing in cramming and pouring out the same material in classrooms or exams as a standard method of learning. How could they adopt techniques inducing improved learning outcomes as was expected by the SNC Management? Besides imparting effective training, teachers' 'learning assessment' and 'teaching guidelines' need substantial improvement. Apart from the language barrier (itself posing a substantial challenge), they are little familiar with modern teaching methods. The point is that the public-school teachers need to be intensively taught to teach in a rational and analytical manner<sup>144</sup>. Only training may not help. The teaching profession needs to be made prestigious and attractive. So that highly qualified, competent and ambitious men and women may join the profession. New subjects, new content, and new paradigms of assessments made students struggle. All politics and debate aside – you need an empathic heart to improve the whole state of affairs. It is a matter of children's future, after all<sup>145</sup>.

One way or the other most of the government schools still follow obsolete, teacher-centric or textbook-centric, top-down or in Paulo Freirean terms banking methodology of teaching. *“A senior lot of the teachers (usually above 40-45) fail to learn and practice new teaching techniques – despite having been through multiple trainings. More than often, a colossal amount of money is*

*wasted in a hodgepodge poor quality of teachers' training*", said Arif Ghazlani (Principal of Multan Public School)<sup>lix</sup>. In the words of Deputy District Education Officer (DDEO, Korangi, Karachi), Elahi Bakhsh *"Given their limited qualification and poor capability, explaining biological, zoological, physics and mathematical concepts to the children, that is part of the General Science, are almost a Herculean task for the teachers"*. On the contrary, in the author's view, his concepts of the above subjects were terribly poor, when he pleasingly demonstrated, how would he like to teach the scientific subjects.

Notwithstanding the desired capability of teachers, SNC's teachers' training was extended generically, without a classificatory understanding of school systems, teachers' age, qualification, subject, capacity, interest or experience, and without taking corresponding learning outcomes into account. *"Private school teachers were least interested in and their attendance in online sessions was disappointingly low"*, said Sajjad Khosa (Nice Model School, D.G Khan). *"In fact, the previous government (2013-2018) also tried to empower teachers through training but much of the budget was gobbled up by bureaucratic corruption and the rest was consumed in inattentive poor-quality training without imparting the required knowledge and skills on the ground"*, Stressed Arif Ghazlani. On the one hand, a Learning Management System (LMS)<sup>lxi</sup> discourages cramming but on the other, subjects like intense Islamiyat (*Nazira* and Hifz inclusive) and grasping relatively better scientific and social

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<sup>lix</sup> M. Arif Ghazlani, Principal Multan Public School, Multan.

<sup>lx</sup> M. Arif Ghazlani, Principal Multan Public School, Multan.

<sup>lxi</sup> LMS is a software that delivers online courses, providing the trainees with fresh data when it's not possible for them to gather in one place.

science concepts - and the way they are going to be assessed in exams - end up prompting cramming<sup>146</sup>.

In the views of a retired EDO (Education)<sup>lxii</sup>, M. Ramzan, *“Improving teachers’ competency precedes students’ competency. In remote and underserved areas, such as Sindh and Seraiki region, about half the government teachers are older – poorly qualified with limited capacity to absorb new concepts, theories and teaching methods. SNC content might prove arduous to their orientation. Children in public schools usually come from humble backgrounds – whose parents are generally poor and non-literate. Nurtured in unsupportive environments – kids find new concepts difficult to comprehend. Loading several languages upon their heads, unsystematically, leaves them bewildered. Whatever the government may say, the next two to three years shall remain a testing phase for SNC. In reality, there should have been a pilot phase before launching it with full vigour”*.

Observation and interaction with Madrassa teachers and administrators spoke volumes about their teaching methodology and behaviour. They, simply, believe themselves to be the instrument or exegesis of the divine truth – where a teacher can only play a role nothing more than a medium or vehicle of communicating the divine message inscribed in the Holy Quran and the Prophet’s sayings. Embracing traditional values, they believe teachers to be upright and have ultimate authority over the students. Right after parents, his position can neither be challenged nor undermined. His behaviour could be naturally good or not so good but the onus lies on the students to acquire whatever he imparts. Simply being qualified in Dars-e-Nizami from the

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<sup>lxii</sup> Mahar Muhammad Ramzan (Rtd.), EDO (Education), Layyah.

same or a different Madrassa, at a certain level, formally or informally, is enough to qualify as a teacher. Any system of teacher training was rarely heard of in any Madrassa – though teachers’ popularity amongst students varied<sup>lxiii</sup>.

In low-fee private schools, teachers are usually recruited without any training – just having a basic minimum qualification is enough. Elite schools, however, may consider some experience too. Nevertheless, low-fee and elite private schools do provide exposure as well as training opportunities to their permanent or senior teachers. A very limited number of private teachers appeared in SNC-related government training while, reportedly, no training was organised by the private school management themselves, exclusively on SNC. No specific, official data is available on how many teachers were trained and how many of them were drawn from different streams of education.

		<b>Received single national curriculum's training?</b>					
		Yes		No		Not Applicable	
		Count	N %	Count	N %	Count	N %
Public School	Public	66	75	22	16	0	0
	Private	13	15	83	61	0	0
	Madrassa	9	10	31	23	8	100
Total		88	100%	136	100	8	100%

*Table 13: Training on the single national curriculum*

A major chunk (75 pc) of the government teachers had received training on SNC, however, only through online

<sup>lxiii</sup> The Authors information and observations gathered by visiting several madrasas and interacting with multiple teachers there.

sessions provided by the education department. Similarly, a limited number of private (15 pc) and Madrassa (10 pc) teachers acknowledged of receiving the training online or face-to-face learning. Private teachers received one-day training through their respective administration. While only those Madrassa teachers received face-to-face training who (i). accepted SNC, and/or (ii). were operational under the support of the Punjab Literacy and Non-Formal Schools Initiative. The rest of the Madrassa teachers (23 pc) running under their respective Wafaqs either (i). accepted SNC, but were unable to receive training owing to multiple reasons, and (ii). were waiting for the respective authority to furnish them with the training. In addition, there were Madrassas (n=8) who only followed their respective Madaris education system, hence rejecting SNC in the first place.

## Chapter 6

### Critical Analysis of SNC's Content and SLOs

The real test of quality claims is the textbooks in black and white. Federal ministry and NCC's pronouncements of consulting around 400 experts and stakeholders along with emulating internationally recognised curriculum standards and embedding state-of-the-art SLOs can effectively be examined through MTBs published by NBF and PCTB (the only provincial board first publishing SNC books). Along with imparting theoretical knowledge and skills to the students, it is also important to consider what kind of human persons and citizens a system intends to produce.

The curriculum guidelines vaunt to promote international teaching and learning trends including peace, tolerance, civic sense, environmental and multicultural consciousness, humane attitude and understanding of national and global perspectives. It also stresses the removal of hate material and promotion of gender and cultural neutrality; teaching of multiple languages and vocabulary-building skills while adopting a spiral approach to the curriculum. In addition, it also proposes incorporating: a sustainable lifestyle, safety and security consciousness; a sense of social cohesion, community bond and the essence of Islam and other faiths<sup>147</sup>. But to get to the blood and bones of the tall claims, the

curriculum contours and learning outcomes need to be meticulously examined.

Scrupulous content analysis – drawn here below – comprises the study of English and Urdu Textbooks (Grades I-VIII), General Science and Waqfiyat-e-Aama (Grades I-VIII), Mathematics (Grades I, II, IV and VIII) and Muasharti Uloom or Social Studies (Grades IV-VIII). Both positive, as well as negative aspects of the Model Text Books (MTBs) and Curriculum Plan have been appropriately highlighted. The curriculum plan as well as the contents presented in the SNC's prescribed books have been hugely controversial. Their quality and content, immediately after they surfaced in the market, opened up a floodgate of assessment and analyses. Thus, it is important to draw attention to their multiple aspects.

### **6.1. Volume, extent and writing style of model textbooks**

Usually, an academic year spans 7.5 months and covering the sheer volume of information and material stuffed in a single book seems implausible to be covered within this period. On average, for instance, there are 22-25 chapters in Urdu and English Books of Grades II to VIII. Add exercises to each lesson, and the number of chapters may go up. Routinely, a period is 40 minutes long only. The same amount of time is dedicated to the languages too. In a year, a teacher gets to teach 130 to 150 periods - 5 periods a week - to cover all topics of a subject. Cut out off days, situational and national, a school functions 145 days out of 365 in a year. With this layout, 3 periods max, can be devoted to each chapter - which is obviously insufficient. Under volatile circumstances – like protests, strikes, security concerns or COVID-19-like

closures – the allocated number of periods shrinks even further. Thus, stuffing up so much material in a subject is pointless, if the teachers and students cannot do justice to it<sup>148</sup>.

Digging deeper into the subject matter of General Knowledge (GK) - introduced in Grades I-V demonstrates a clear lack of creativity. Much of the material is hammered in uninterestingly; is repetitive; riddled with gaps and omissions; and contrary to the NCC claims does not encourage critical, analytical or creative thinking. Though, it is undermined but an average child (aged 5 to 8) is familiar with most of what is part of the GK (Urdu and English). Internet or television, easily accessible these days already tell her much of that. If it is meant to create awareness of oneself, one's environment and others, even then the information provided fails to serve the purpose. If the GK textbooks are supposed to serve as the foundation course for Science and Logic in Grade-IV, then deplorably enough, they lack logic and the principles of topical hierarchy of teaching complex topics ahead. Missing pieces of information or unclear understanding leads to confusion. It resembles climbing a skyscraper with a ladder, missing its rungs in order<sup>149</sup>.

## **6.2. Logic, creativity and critical understanding**

Language and grammar serve as kids' vehicles to approach all social and scientific subjects. They must be taught in a highly interesting and creative manner. At the age of 4-6, average children in Pakistan enter a school already knowing at least two or three languages with a sharp language acquisition device – their mind. They are, inherently keen to learn new words, ideas and expressions – a talent usually undermined

by most of the teachers and parents. Both English and Urdu Language subjects in SNC-prescribed textbooks are generally devoid of interest and curiosity. Most of the essays – save certain stories or poems – are written by one particular author and edited cum supervised by a group of NCC-approved authors. They are plain, monotonous and driven by the so-called moral lessons (*naseehat amoḡ kabanian aur maḡameen*). No surprise that neither the authors nor the supervisors are recognised literary figures.

In the presence of massively rich, fascinating and creative literature - both in Urdu and English – assigning the task to unknown and incapable authors is utterly disappointing. Likewise, exercises could have easily been developed by some accomplished linguists and grammarians. One fails to understand, why the subject matter of Urdu and English was not chosen from a range of famous authors – including the celebrated children’s authors. Precisely, Urdu and English textbooks from Grades I - VIII lack depth, diversity, creativity and most importantly the beauty of Urdu and English that both languages possess. So much so, that there are even grammatical and lexical errors. Obviously, no single author can do justice to a wide range of themes – even if he or she is a competent person. Having already grasped much of the language at home (Urdu and/or their mother tongue), a child is potential enough to jump-start and move several steps ahead. It is unrealistic to expect a child to learn something unless she enjoys it first. Learning complements interest and excitement. Awarding one author to produce all essays and stories reveals the state’s agenda of Islamism, patriotism and nationalism where language and literature are employed merely as instruments<sup>150</sup>.

Some experts believe that science and technology should have been given more importance at the primary level. Under SNC, science is no longer a separate subject from Grade I to Grade III as it has been clubbed with social studies to be taught under Waqfiyat-e-Aama (General Knowledge) in Urdu. Children in Grade IV and V, who had earlier been studying Social Studies in English from Grade I onward, are now going to study it in Urdu under 'Muasharti Uloom or Social Studies' only to get back again to it in English in Grade VI and beyond<sup>151</sup>. But if the private authors and publishers are not allowed to produce books – though under SNC guidelines – then the prescribed MTBs may prove disastrous. Nevertheless, the then Minister for Federal Education reiterated that private publishers could also print the books as per SNC guidelines. Developments later revealed that private schools were finally allowed to stick to their own choice and preferences.

According to the former Chairman Higher Education Commission (HEC), Tariq Banuri, *“refuting all its claims, SNC is going to further confuse our education system in the country. Another generation risks not being able to question their learning as it has become an insidious problem. Instead of encouraging creativity and critical thinking, it is the same old stuff that we have seen for the past several years. With this curriculum, ‘free-thinking and innovation’ is highly unlikely to come by. Under the garb of ‘one nation, one curriculum’ the privileged students, once again, are going to offset the conservative teaching and the disadvantaged students will continue to suffer as ever before”*<sup>152</sup>.

Logically, shifting the curriculum may not strike any substantial change so long as the whole system of education

remains the same. Save in certain social science subjects, one way or the other, the substance of an area of study has to be as it is. For instance, how different can physics, chemistry, biology or mathematics be across different curricula or systems of schooling<sup>lxiv</sup>? The quality of education, teachers and teaching methodology, however, may differ across good and bad schooling systems. High-fee elite schools own larger premises, hire good teachers at handsome salaries and maintain better playgrounds, labs, libraries and laboratories<sup>lxv</sup>. Contrarily, public schools are deprived of most of such facilities, all because of the government's lack of priority and resource crunch in education. It is not hard to gather that children cannot comprehend scientific, logical or critical concepts without competent teachers teaching the same subjects easy-to-understand methods. How can they understand a phenomenon better without personally experimenting or looking through a demonstration, even if the curriculum is the same? How can children learn sports without having required playgrounds and trained coaches<sup>153</sup>?

Some effort, however, does seem to be made to accommodate contemporary topics in sciences and social sciences but the overall content and horizons of the curriculum and MTBs are still poor, ideologically driven and traditionalist. Part of them seems to rub its contours with the notions of peace, equality, human rights and democratic norms but in quite a narrow manner. Say, in the beginning, or conclusion of an essay, and at times in the margins, even

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<sup>lxiv</sup> KII with Uzair Mushtaq, Mathematics Teacher at Lahore College of Arts and Sciences, Wapda Town Lahore.

<sup>lxv</sup> Head of The Educators, Multan.

scientific subjects are manoeuvred to promote state ideology and Islamic beliefs. Essays or their sub-themes appear to be bundled up haphazardly without a deeper thought or preconceived logic. Several of the social science subjects turn out to be dull and drier. Patriotism, glorifying armed forces and Islamic ideology turn up now and then systematically or at random.

Examples and exercises for further learning are too lengthy and certain bits simply do not make sense. In other words, building the foundations of '21st-century outcomes' such as independent thinking, heuristic approach and problem-solving techniques – as claimed by the proponents of SNC – seem to be far off. On such brittle academic underpinning, an advanced learning edifice can never be installed. No surprise that in the last decade or more, our students' performance in ASER and STEM has been lagging. The 2017 STEM ranking places Pakistan at 131 out of 141 countries – almost at the bottom. Across the world, Pakistani students fall far behind in Maths and Sciences. As per NEAS, the contestants' average score falls below 50 pc<sup>154</sup>. No surprise that millions of parents – of whatever socio-economic standing they come from – prefer enrolling their children into private schools<sup>155</sup>.

Interestingly, the NCC director also acknowledged the problem in the words that *'inadequately trained teachers are the biggest hurdle to the NCC driven books. It is, now, up to the schools to adopt and teach the new books. No worksheets are given with the books. As is gathered from initial students' reactions, they were confused by two books bound together – though the purpose was to make them economical'*. Nonetheless, she admired the change of language

and argued that students were going to study General Knowledge in Urdu – as a precursor to science. Switching over to the relatively deeper or complicated ideas in English from Grades IV-V would become convenient for them<sup>156</sup>. The transition would help them to proceed to the relatively complex ideas or expressions in English and they would be well prepared to study sciences in English from Grade VI onwards.

### **6.3. SNC's potential for enhancing students' skills and cognitive ability**

The primary response from the teachers of the three streams, concerning the SNC's ability and potential role in enhancing students' critical understanding and cognitive ability to grasp new and complicated ideas goes as under:

Amongst the government teachers, 75 pc of teachers were optimistic that the new curriculum would increase the cognitive and practical skills of the students in terms of learning new ideas and skills. Low-fee private school teachers also followed the same trend. Whereas, Madrassa teachers seemed sceptic, and hence did not agree that over time, the new curriculum would bring any change.

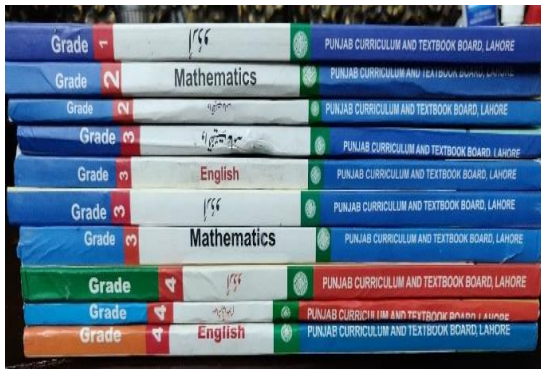
<b>SNC's potential for increasing students' cognitive and practical ability?</b>													
		Yes				No				Don't Know			
School/ Madrassa	Count	Column		Row		Column		Row		Column		Row	
		N %	N %	N %	N %	N %	N %	N %	N %	N %	N %	N %	N %
Public	66	61	75	15	75	17	7	7	7	7	7	8	8
Private	29	27	30	2	10	2	65	62	68	68	68	68	68
Madrassa	13	12	27	3	15	6	32	31	67	67	67	67	67

*Table 14: Teacher's opinion, will the new curriculum increase students' cognitive and practical ability?*

		Yes			No			Don't Know		
		Count	Column N %	Row N %	Count	Column N %	Row N %	Count	Column N %	Row N %
School/	Public	78	62	89	4	36	5	6	6	7
Madrassa	Private	38	30	40	5	46	5	53	56	55
	Madrassa	10	8	21	2	18	4	36	38	75

*Table 15: The new curriculum provided a strong academic/practical basis for children's next classes.*

From the teachers' perspective, 89 pc of government school teachers, 62 pc of private school teachers, and Madrassa teachers felt that the new curriculum provided a solid academic foundation for the next phase (e.g., from 9th to 10th grade). Teachers in low-fee private schools shared this view. However, Madrassa teachers expressed reservations, as their academic system differed and was not aligned with the public school curriculum



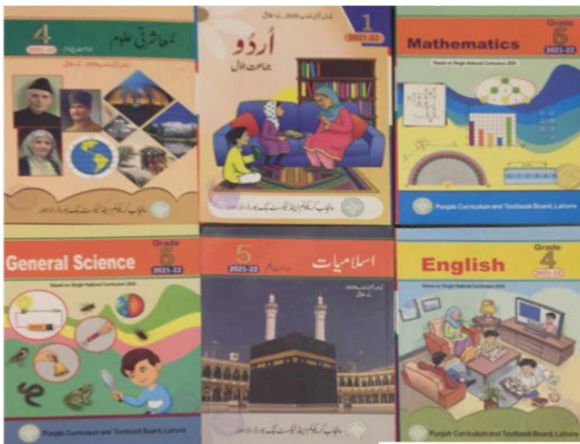
*Picture 9: Punjab govt. approved SNC textbooks from grade I to V available at affordable price*

#### **6.4. Cost, availability and illustration of the books**

All SNC MTBs books were locally produced, designed and published and have been, more or less, widely available across the country. However, from 1921-22, it was no less than a nightmare to find a complete set of SNC model books from one shop. This is however true that, in comparison to the elite private schools' textbooks – of whose one set at the primary level would cost no less than Rs 46,000 – 50,000; SNC's complete set of a particular Grade could be purchased for just Rs 900-1,200. In government primary and secondary schools, the books were provided free of charge.

Nevertheless, the low-fee private, charity, informal and non-formal schools were supposed to buy these books at an affordable price from the market.

Simultaneously, this is also true that the paper, drawings, colours, composition, illustrations and appearances of the books are quite unattractive. Obviously, there was no other way to make them cheaper. With the glassy papers and attractive illustrations, they would have turned expensive and unaffordable for underprivileged parents. This is what the concerned quarters rightly brag about. But the very characteristics or consciousness have caused some problems as well.



*Picture 10: A glance at locally designed and published SNC textbooks*

By the end of each book or in its margins certain public service messages are also inserted to raise children's awareness or to sensitise them about some societal ills. For instance, pieces of advice on cleanliness, environmental consciousness, natural disasters, not to talk to and not to

accept things from strangers are there. Also, there are blurbs about the safer way of crossing a road, the health benefits of exercising and how to avoid mosquitos to stay safe from malaria and dengue. All such messages are meant to transform children into civilised and responsible citizens, which is, of course, admirable.

### **6.5. Gender-based analysis of the SNC model textbooks<sup>lxvi</sup>**

Along with the essays and stories depicting gender roles and relations, there are illustrations too. Expressions, as well as illustrations there, triggered controversies between the proponents of SNC and feminists or independent critics and educationists. One of the in-depth and meticulous studies revealed that much of the criticism – if not all – was valid. For example, 60 pc of the MTBs portray men/boys as delivering societal functions while 39 pc of women/girls are observed playing those functions.

In all, about 42 pc of all women and girls are shown wearing a hijab; 29 pc as wearing traditional robes without a hijab; and 29 pc of the images present girls wearing Western attire. What comes forth is that out of 668 pages of English Books, 58 pc are men/boys and 42 pc women/girls. In 672 pages of Mathematics, 51 pc of the books portray men and 49 pc portray women in different capacities. Here about 54 pc of women/girls are seen without hijab and 46 pc with it. In 5 of the Urdu Books comprising 791 pages, there is about 60 pc of men/boys in comparison to 40 pc of women/girls. Here,

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<sup>lxvi</sup> Much of the Curriculum Analysis (VI-VIII) is borrowed from Zeeba Hashmi's unpublished work that she did for the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), Lahore.

58 pc of women/girls are wearing hijab while 41 pc are seen without hijab.

Take the books of General Science. Out of 310 pages in total around 77 pc of representation is of men/boys compared to 23 pc of women/girls. In general, 64 pc of women/girls are seen without hijab and 36 pc of women/girls are seen with it. In Waqfiyat-e-Aama, there is 50 pc of men's/boys' pictures compared to 50 pc of women/girls. A total of 54 pc of women/girls are seen without hijab and 46 pc are seen with it. Over here, 23 pc of women/girls are presented with hijab and 77 pc without it.

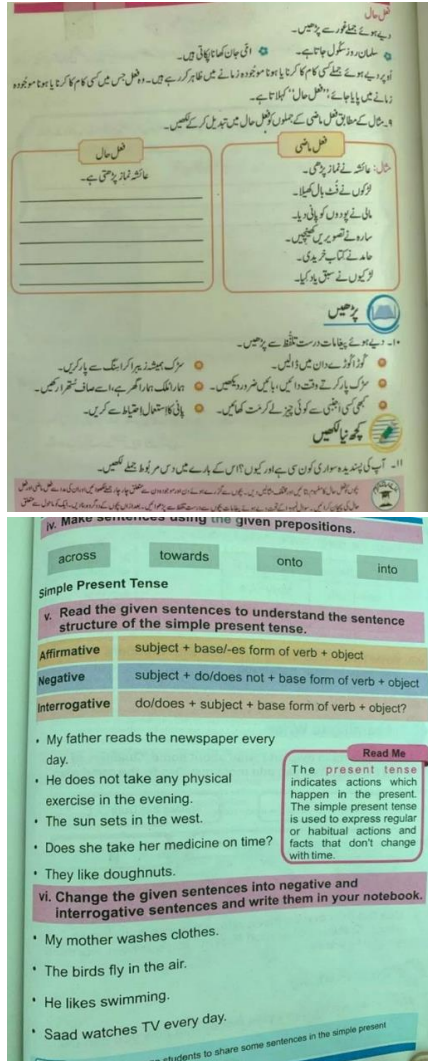
In the case of Muasharti Uloom (Social Studies), comprising 234 pages, there are 65 pc of men/boys and 35 pc of women/girls, whereas 37 pc of women/girls are seen without hijab and 63 pc with it. Of 5 Urdu Books, comprising 791 pages, a total of 60 pc presents men/boys as compared to 40 pc of women/girls. 58 pc of women/girls are seen wearing hijab and in 41 pc of the pictures, they are not wearing it. The message communicated by the Hijab or portrayal of women/girls is the same as uttered by the Premier (Imran Khan then) more than once that the dress code had a lot to do with violence against women, and the same mindset was reflected in SNC's imagery.

Where women are presented in powerful roles – it may count as an exception rather than a norm. Applying gender lens leads you to very different conclusions because of the stereotypical presentation of women proxies sexist thinking of the drafters' and the advisors' minds. Precisely, a total of

60 pc of the books paint images of men/boys while only 39 pc of the books present women/girls' images<sup>157</sup>.



Picture 11: Gender socialisation in school and at home - I



Picture 12: Gender socialisation in school and at home - II

It is also important to highlight that the girls wearing Western wear are all young– not women. Not a single woman is shown wearing Western attire. In books of English, around 30 pc of women are seen with Hijab and 70 pc without it. Summing

up, a massive 80 pc of men are seen wearing Western attires while only 20 pc of them are dressed in a traditional manner. Precisely, men and women are not equally represented. Critics argue that women wearing hijab, Pakistani or Western clothes should equally be represented while allowing them the freedom to choose whatever, they wish to put on. Others argue that in the country, hardly a fraction of women wear a head robe. The hijab is worn mostly in Arab countries. Pakistani women chose dupatta instead while girls before puberty rarely wear hijab or dupatta at all<sup>158</sup>.

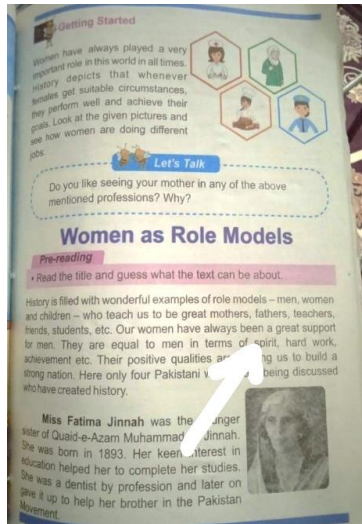
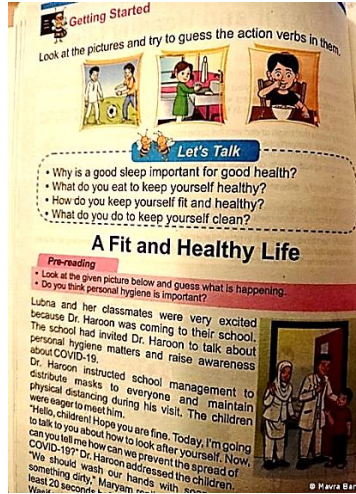
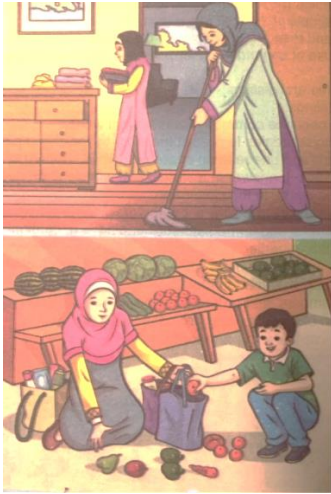
The portrayal of men and women in positions of power has also been debated. SNC books paint more men in positions of power than women. Women are mostly shown as homemakers or in subordinate positions. Though SNC authors do not agree, the fact is that more women are shown in secondary or subservient roles such as housewives, nurses, teachers and caregivers than men. But this is also true that women doctors, pilots, police officers, players, traffic warden, army officers, and politicians are also shown in relevant pictures. Nevertheless, at least three times more men are depicted in powerful roles than women<sup>159</sup>. In many a cases, women are shown doing household chores, family care, and tending to children. In addition, women/girls are mainly depicted as wives, daughters, mothers and teachers. Stories also depict women in secondary roles to their male counterparts. So much so, when women are presented as leaders, they are cited as men's aides, say Mohtarma Fatima Jinnah as the sister of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. The text below the heading 'Women as Role Models' reads, '*Our women have always been a great support to men*'. The essay then mentions Fatima Jinnah as one of the women who 'created

history' while her achievements are explained in the words i.e. *'her keen interest in education helped her to complete her studies'*.

While playing, boys are shown playing and exercising and girls simply stand by. In real life, women/girls are excelling in every field of life including sports. More than once, women have represented Pakistan at the Olympics. They are climbing mountains, playing cricket, contributing to IT, doing business and whatnot. Then why are they not being reflected in these significant roles? Put succinctly, criticism about gender role disparity is appropriate<sup>160</sup>. Criticising the title of an Urdu Book where women/girls are shown sitting on the floor while men are on the sofa – the Minister for Information and Communication (Sindh)<sup>lxvii</sup>, said, *'rendering women in the subordinate role is also one of the reasons for Sindh rejecting SNC. We keep women at the helm and want to communicate the same message to our future generation'*<sup>161</sup>.

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lxvii Syyed Nasir Hussain Shah.



Picture 13: Women in various lead roles

Similarly, the gender representation of the Curriculum Framework (VI-VIII) is also not encouraging. Examples and concepts reflecting gender roles, particularly women's roles, have got a limited share of 1 pc only i.e. 3 concepts out of the 127 in all. A broader assessment of 'Women's Role in the

History of the Subcontinent', divulges 3 categories i.e. Women in the Muslim World, Women in the Ancient World, and the part played by women concerning Pakistan's Emergence and History. Precise analysis reveals that only two women i.e. Razia Sultana (Grade VI) and Malika Noor Jahan are presented in a supportive role; one to her father Shams-u-Din Iltutmish and the other to her husband Emperor Jahangir in (Grade VII). Women's role in the country's freedom struggle is not presented appropriately. Similarly, in the post-independence era, their noteworthy contribution in multiple capacities seems underrepresented. Knowledge, concepts and corresponding skills are also unaligned. For example, the required skills component under the topic of 'Turkish Muslims in the Subcontinent' (Grade V), asks students to analyse, why, despite being capable, Razia Sultana could not carry on as ruler for long, whereas the knowledge concept does not correspond with the women's political competencies or potential to rule<sup>lxviii</sup>.

In addition, SNC also lacks transmitting life skills in connection with the harms of early marriage, tenable pregnancies, puberty, sexual, reproductive and antenatal health, safeguarding, and most importantly child abuse. Life-skills content has been given little importance under the overwhelming significance of religious values. Part of the hygiene concern could have been presented without couching it in the religious framework. The importance of life skills was acknowledged in the previous National

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<sup>lxviii</sup> The analysis has been borrowed from Curriculum Analysis (VI-VIII) drawn by Zeeba Hashmi for the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), Lahore.

Education Policy (2009) too but was ignored in the textbooks. Needs not overemphasis but life skills must be incorporated at the appropriate levels<sup>162</sup>.

### **6.6. Response to gender critique**

PTI representatives and their institutional cohorts have been defending several aspects of the MTBs along with the gendered representation of men and women. *“It is foolish to target SNC solely based on gender parity”*, argued the then NCC director Mariam Chughtai (2019-2022), *“for the published books belonged to the respective publishers not to the government representatives. All portraits in any book – be it of sciences and social sciences are of the publishers, designed by its own painters”*. Rebutting the massive gender-based criticism, she said that *“the curriculum is a dynamic and evolving process. Books may be changed by publishers in future. Schools and parents experience and response, and even the current criticism will induce them to change images and illustrations”<sup>163</sup>*. *“Without seeing or knowing the whole content, ‘only women wearing hijab or sitting on the floor (one picture only)’ is being criticised ignoring dozens of pictures where they are seated on a sofa or are not wearing hijab. It is the content that needs to be paid attention to more than pictures”*. Disapproving the criticism while posting the portraits of some empowered women from SNC English (Grade V), the Coordinator SNC, Sohail. B. Aziz tweeted: *“Look! How women have been shown in stronger roles in SNC, “Our women, Our pride”<sup>164</sup>.”*

**Dr. Ruth Pfau** was a German doctor and nun who is known as Mother Teresa of Pakistan. She devoted her life to fighting leprosy in Pakistan. She travelled to various parts of Pakistan with the aim of rescuing patients suffering from leprosy. She set up 150 leprosy clinics across the country. Due to her efforts, the disease came under control, in 1996. She was given numerous awards for her work, including Hilal-e-Imtiaz, Hilal-e-Pakistan and German Staufer Medal.



**Arfa Abdul Karim Randhawa** became the pride of our country when she was only nine years old. She achieved the world's youngest Microsoft Certified Professional award at this young age. Her representation in various prestigious technology- related events, including TechEd Developers Conference, made our country proud in the whole world. She flew her first aircraft at the age of ten in the U.A.E. She was a gem of our country, but sadly she left this world on January 14, 2012 at the age of sixteen due to cardiac arrest.



**Samina Khayal Baig** is the first Pakistani woman to climb Mount Everest and she is also the first Muslim lady to climb all Seven Summits. She was born on September 19, 1990. She loved climbing mountains and her brother supported and guided her in her mountaineering career. She climbed Chashkin Sar, a 6000 meters peak in Shimshal, in 2010. She also climbed Koh-i-Brobar in 2011. Samina Baig belongs to the Shimshal village in Hunza Gojal, Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan.



## Women as Role Models

### Pre-reading

- Read the title and guess what the text can be about.
- Share the names of some notable women of Pakistan.

History is filled with wonderful examples of role models – men, women and children – who teach us to be great mothers, fathers, teachers, friends, students, etc. Our women have always been a great support for men. They are equal to men in terms of spirit, hard work, achievement etc. Their positive qualities are helping us to build a strong nation. Here only four Pakistani women are being discussed who have created history.

**Miss Fatima Jinnah** was the younger sister of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. She was born in 1893. Her keen interest in education helped her complete her studies. She was a dentist by profession and later on gave it up to help her brother in the Pakistan Movement.



Picture 14: Women exhibited in SNC as strong role models

Humaira Abbasi, a private school teacher argued that *“one should focus more on the content and its quality than trivial issues such as a few drawings. The problem is that Pakistani society floats between two extremes i.e. being secular on one end and thriving religious extremism on the other”*. *“Education, she argued further, “should fare somewhere in the middle”<sup>lxix</sup>*. Certain conservative religious spokespersons argue that in other Islamic countries like Indonesia and Malaysia, women/girls are also depicted with headscarves in their textbooks. The Education Focal Person<sup>lxx</sup> of the then Chief Minister of Punjab (Usman Buzdar)<sup>lxx</sup> also rejected the criticism of SNC terming it a baseless propaganda. He said, *“SNC was just a ‘syllabus’ under which any publisher could publish his books after seeking approval from the “textbook board”*. Murad Raas, the former Minister for School Education (2019-2022), Punjab said, *“gender critique was unfounded; women and the girls in MTBs were also shown as pilots and doctors too. Also, this was the first year of a ‘uniform education system’. This would keep continuously improving<sup>lxx</sup>*. Another PTI and SNC supporter, Azhar Mashwani, took to Twitter (now renamed as X) saying, *“Select criticism of the SNC overshadowed positive changes in the books such as lessons on conflict resolution and child safety etc<sup>lxx</sup>”*.

### **6.7. Teachers’ response to gender equality**

On gender and gender roles and representation in the MTBs, the authors attempted to elicit the views of the government, public, and Madrassa teachers, and the analysis of their responses revealed the following results:

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<sup>lxix</sup> Azhar Mashwani.

<sup>lxx</sup> Usman Buzdar.

	<b>Has gender equality been taken into consideration in the SNC curriculum?</b>					
	Yes		No		Don't Know	
	Count	N %	Count	N %	Count	N %
School/	71	85	10	29	7	6
Madrasa	8	10	19	56	69	60
Madrasa	4	5	5	15	39	34
Total	83	100%	34	100%	115	100%

*Table 16: Has gender equality been taken into consideration in this curriculum?*

A substantial percentage of the government teachers (85 pc) responded in favour, meaning that gender equality was appropriately represented in the SNC-based textbooks. Accordingly, more than half of the private school teachers (56 pc), government school teachers (29 pc), and Madrassa teachers (15 pc) thought the other way around. In their opinion, gender equality was not taken care of in the textbooks. On the other hand, 34 pc of Madrassas, 60 pc of private, and 6 pc of public school teachers were not sure, what the situation was. It must be kept in mind that the respondents would answer questions not necessarily about the curriculum but keeping in mind the MTBs.

### **6.8. Islamiyat and Islamic content in Islamiyat and social science subjects**

It is universally recognised that teaching and learning of faith should either be a parental or personal choice and must not be instructed or enforced by state institutions. If at all, it should be non-discriminatory, non-sectarian and minimal in its scope and content. Rest must be left to the parents or to one's own choosing at higher classes. Where there is some admirable advancement, at least in the sense of making our social sciences non-racist, non-sexist, hate-free, tolerant and inclusive, the Islamic content within Islamiyat and social sciences, on the other hand, has been expanded and intensified further.

Contrary to modern schooling practices and experts' advice – even the social sciences are not devoid of ideologically driven religious quotes and maxims. Assessing MTBs' subjects, the following could be concluded: About, 9 pc of the content in English Books (Grades I-V) contains religious

flavour. Even the Books of Mathematics contain 4 pc of religious pieces of advice. General Science finds 1 pc of religious content. Around 13 pc of the content in Urdu Books could be termed as 'religious'. Out of the total number of pages in the books of General Knowledge, around 5 pc maintain a religious tint. In Social Studies (Muasharti Uloom) about 10 pc of the content can be identified as religious<sup>168</sup>.

Once again, the Government of Sindh disagreed with stuffing innocent minds with so much Islamic content at such a tender age, making it arduous to comprehend save cramming. In the views of the SED representatives, Sindh, *"The Centre (read PTI government) recommends teaching Islamic Studies from the primary level but in Sindh, schools start teaching Islamiyat from Grade IV. In addition, the province teaches 10 paras (chapters) of the Nazira Quran from Grades I-V while the centre stresses teaching the entire Quran (all 30 chapters/paras) until Grade V and the whole Quran with translation from Grade VI to XII, which is not possible for students at their age group"*. To make Madrassas and schools' curriculum uniform, around 40 to 50 Hadiths have been included in a single book at the primary level in the SNC MTBs. In this case, provincial diversity – as there are hundreds of thousands of Hindus in Sindh – has been ignored in Social Studies<sup>169</sup>. Even the Bureau of Curriculum (Balochistan) offered their reservations on including heavy Islamic Content in Islamiyat as well as in social sciences<sup>lxxi</sup>.

### **6.9. Presence of minority children in schools**

A significant number of government teachers (90 pc) stated that students of other faiths, save a few Christians, were not

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<sup>lxxi</sup> Dr Gulab Khilji, D.D. Bureau of Curriculum, Balochistan (KII).

studying in their schools. Private schools also affirmed that only Christian students, though in small fractions, were attending their school. One of the reasons for the extremely limited representation of minorities in schools could be the sample districts, where their population was quite low. The second reason could be that Christian parents prefer private schools for their children to avoid any likely discrimination in public schools but this is assumptive, not empirically tested in this study. In the case of Madrassas, minority students were, understandably, not enrolled. Around one-third of the government and private school teachers were not certain about the number of minority students in their respective schools. Obviously, Madrasa teachers deemed this question irrelevant and skipped it.

		<b>Non-Muslim children's strength in schools?</b>					
		Yes		No		Don't Know	
		Count	N %	Count	N %	Count	N %
School/ Madrasa	Public	27	82	57	31	4	33
	Private	6	18	90	48	0	0
	Madrasa	0	0	40	21	8	67
	Total	33	100%	187	100%	12	100%

*Table 17: Non-Muslim children studying in your school?*

<b>Minority children's strength in schools (faith wise)?</b>											
		Christian		Hindu		Sikh		Other		Don't Know / N/A	
		Count	N %	Count	N %	Count	N %	Count	N %	Count	N %
School/	Public	46	90	0	0	0	0	0	0	42	23
Madrasa	Private	5	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	91	50
	Madrasa	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	48	27
	Total	51	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	181	100%

*Table 18: Non-Muslim children studying in your school (religion-wise)?*

		<b>Minority children's representation in the SNC?</b>					
		Yes		No		Don't Know / N/A	
		Count	N %	Count	N %	Count	N %
School/ Madrassa	Public	42	42	12	80	34	29
	Private	58	58	3	20	35	30
	Madrassa	0	0	0	0	48	41
	Total	100	100%	15	100%	117	100%

*Table 19: Non-Muslims given equal representation in the SNC?*

However, comparatively, a substantial number of respondents (n=117) had no idea whether non-Muslims were given equal representation in the SNC or not. Whereas, n=15 (public = 12, private = 3, and Madrassa = 0) teachers rejected the idea that non-Muslim students were given an equal representation. Yet, a majority of public school teachers

<b>Children's ability to finish the Holy Quran till grade V?</b>											
		Yes				No				Don't Know	
	School/ Madrassa	Count		Row %		Column %		Row %		Column %	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
	Public	58	66%	24	27%	24	43%	6	10%	18	27%
	Private	20	23%	75	87%	76	100%	1	1%	3	4%
	Madrassa	22	26%	0	0%	0	0%	26	100%	79	94%
	Total	100	100%	99	99%	100%	100%	33	33%	100%	100%

Table 20: Children be able to finish reciting the holy Quran till the fifth grade?

responded positively. In their opinion, the SNC was inclusive and representative. Similarly, a vast majority of teachers (n=186) (including Madrassa teachers), had no clue about the

provision of a separate religious curriculum for minorities. About 26 government teachers said that *“so far, no separate religious curriculum was provided to minorities, while 16 teachers said, ‘it was’*”.

#### **6.10. Children’s likelihood of finishing the Holy Quran at schools and associated queries**

Among public schools, 66 pc of the teachers believed that children were capable enough, and would be able to finish *Nazira* Quran by the end of Grade V. Notably, despite being part of the government, 27 pc of the public school teachers, and 24 pc of the private schools in comparison thought that ‘children would not be able to finish reciting the Holy Quran till the fifth grade’. Needless to say, Madrassa representatives thought the other way around. While, 54 pc of Madrassa teachers and 79 pc, in contrast, did not know that with certainty.

Studying the Holy Quran and other subjects?																
	Yes						No						Don't Know			
	Count		Row N %		Column N %		Count		Row N %		Column N %		Count		Row N %	
Public	19	21	22	64	58	73	5	15	6							
Private	64	74	67	30	27	31	2	6	2							
Madrassa	4	5	8	17	15	35	27	79	56							
Total	87	100%	38%	111	100%	48%	34	100%	15%							

Table 21: If reading the whole Quran affect children's ability to study other subjects?

Responding to an important question i.e. whether reading the whole of the Quran (especially finishing *Naziru* till Grade V) would affect children's ability to adequately study other subjects, just 22 pc of government teachers said ‘yes’, while a substantial 73 pc thought, ‘it would not’. The trend was almost the same for low-fee private schools’ respondents too. Whereas, a substantial percentile of (35 and 79 pc in comparison to Madrassa teachers believed that it would not affect children’s concentration on other subjects. While a

minuscule (n=4) Madrassa teachers did feel that it would affect children's overall course of studies. There were schools, that accommodated teaching the Holy Quran by skipping Children's Music or Art Classes<sup>lxxii</sup>. Others switched over from two classes of Music or Art in a week to one class of Art or Music a week substituting the slot with two classes of Islamiyat and/or the Holy Quran a week<sup>lxxiii</sup>. Private schools (both low-fee and high-fee) in particular felt that heavy Islamic studies, along with the Nazira Quran overshadowed children's time and dedication to other subjects<sup>lxxiv</sup>.

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<sup>lxxii</sup> Head of the Educators, Multan.

<sup>lxxiii</sup> KII with representatives of some of the high-fee private schools who did not like their names to be mentioned.

<sup>lxxiv</sup> KII with Sajjad Hussain Khosa, Principal Nice Model School, Dera Ghazi Khan.

Appointing new teachers to teach the Holy Quran?											
		Yes				No				Don't Know	
		Count	Column N %	Row N %	Count	Column N %	Row N %	Count	Column N %	Row N %	
School/	Public	6	40	7	77	45	88	5	11	6	
Madrasa	Private	9	60	9	79	47	82	8	17	8	
	Madrasa	0	0	0	14	8	29	34	72	71	
	Total	15	100%	6%	170	100%	73%	47	100%	20%	

Table 22: Were new teachers appointed to teach the Holy Quran?

Regarding the induction of new teachers for Quran instruction, a significant number of 88 pc of teachers in public schools and 45 pc of teachers in low-fee private schools reported that no new teachers had been appointed

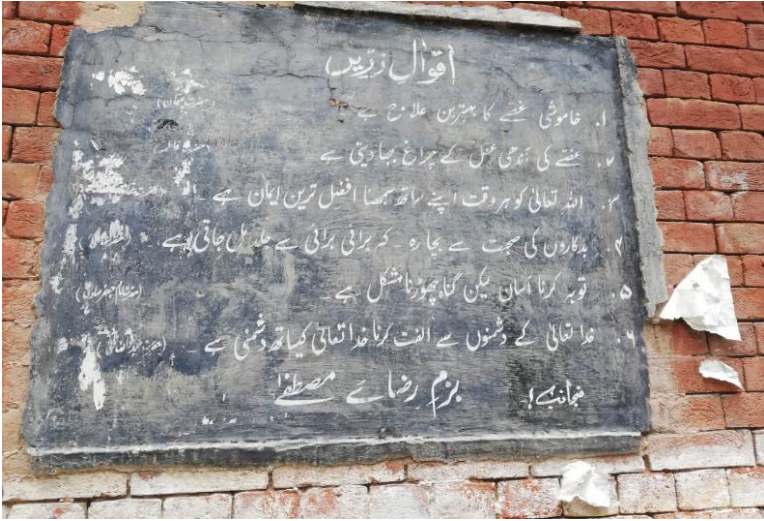
for this purpose. Only 7 pc (n=6) of government school teachers mentioned that temporary arrangements had been made to meet the demand. Private schools showed a similar trend. In Madrassas, however, most teachers were already qualified to teach the Quran, with 71 pc considering the question irrelevant. Some of the private school teachers thought that so long as the parents had no reservations about teaching the Holy Quran at schools; it was just fine. But it is quite likely that once it becomes a practice, the debate on a standard way of teaching the Quran (*i.e. tajwid*) would erupt in public and private schools<sup>lxxv</sup>.

Critics believe that gradually public schools will appoint Madrassa-graduate *moulvis* and *qaris* to teach the heavier Islamic content incorporated in the SNC as it is not possible for an ordinary Islamiyat teacher to teach all that stuff with confidence<sup>lxxvi</sup>. Nevertheless, the then federal ministry and the corresponding ministry in Punjab denied any such plans on cards. *"No such orders were passed by the government at any level. The teaching of Qirat to Muslim students was part of the Islamiyat curriculum and was mandatory to beautifully recite the Holy Quran. The required instruction could be provided by the existing Islamiyat or Religious Studies teachers or the schools could hire anyone they deemed fit. It did not preclude anyone including Madrassa graduates but the decision of who to hire was of the individual schools whether public or private and not of the Federal Government"<sup>170</sup>,* stated the MoFEPT of the PTI regime.

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<sup>lxxv</sup> N. Khalid, Senior Teacher of a Private School in Multan (The respondent requested to keep his/her name anonymous).

<sup>lxxvi</sup> Pervez Hoodbhoy and A.H. Nayyar – the known educationists.



Picture 15: Permanently inscribed message in a registered charity public school, Rawalpindi

صفحہ نمبر	عنوان	سبق	صفحہ نمبر	عنوان	سبق
24	ٲن اٲن ٲر ٲر جو آواز	١٨	4	الف ب ٲي	١
25	آ جي آواز	١٩	5	سنڌي ۽ اردو الف - ب	٢
26	زرد جو آواز	٢٠	6	سنڌي ۽ اردو الف - ب	٣
27	ٲيش جو آواز	٢١	7	حروف مع تصاوير (ب ٲ ٲڪ)	٤
28	ي جو آواز	٢٢	8	حروف مع تصاوير (ع ٲ ٲڪ)	٥
29	س ۽ جو آواز	٢٣	9	حروف مع تصاوير (ح ٲ ٲڪ)	٦
30	ٲي . ٲر . ۽ جو استعمال	٢٤	10	حروف مع تصاوير (ر ٲ ٲڪ)	٧
31	حمسد	٢٥	11	حروف مع تصاوير (ٲ ٲ ٲڪ)	٨
32	الله سائين	٢٦	12	حروف مع تصاوير (ڪ ٲ ٲڪ)	٩
34	اسان جو ٲي سڳو پيٽا الله ٲر ٲر	٢٧	13	حروف مع تصاوير (ان ٲ ٲڪ)	١٠
36	نعت	٢٨	14	حروف مع ٲجل (اڪ مع ٲر مع ٲر)	١١
38	اسان جو گهر	٢٩	15	حروف مع ٲجل (اڪ مع ٲر مع ٲر)	١٢
40	اسان جو وطن	٣٠	16	حروف مع ٲجل (اڪ مع ٲر مع ٲر)	١٣
42	ڳالهه ٲول	٣١	17	حروف مع ٲجل (اڪ مع ٲر مع ٲر)	١٤
43	ٲيٽا (ٲاراٲا ٲول)	٣٢	18	حروف مع ٲجل (اڪ مع ٲر مع ٲر)	١٥
44	ڏينهن جا نالا / رنگن جا نالا	٣٣	19	حروف مع ٲجل (اڪ مع ٲر مع ٲر)	١٦
45	عضون جا نالا	٣٤	20	حروف مع ٲجل (اڪ مع ٲر مع ٲر)	١٧
46	ٲاجهن جا نالا / ميون جا نالا	٣٥	21	حروف مع ٲجل (اڪ مع ٲر مع ٲر)	١٨
47	هڪ کان ٲنجاهه تائين نڪ	٣٦	22	حروف مع ٲجل (اڪ مع ٲر مع ٲر)	١٩
48	ٲسڪو ٲنجاهه کان سو تائين نڪ	٣٧	23	زير جو آواز	٢٠

Picture 16: Book content of a Sindhi school text book

## **Chapter 7**

### **Content Analysis of the Curriculum of Grades VI-VIII**

**W**ith reference to the curriculum of Grades VI-VIII, the corresponding MTBs were not published by the end of 2021. However, a Zero Draft was there which could assist in analysing the substance and spirit of the courses. It is relevant to mention that overall, a lens of civic values, religious and cultural diversity, democracy and human rights was employed to assess how far the proposed curriculum attempted to materialise its stated objectives, competencies and students' learning outcomes (SLOs) as outlined by the SNC's policy preferences.

#### **7.1. Curriculum analysis of Urdu (grade VI-VIII)**

In the proposed Urdu Curriculum, there are 25 broader themes subdivided into 75 topics. Each Grade has been allocated only one topic under the main theme. Under this scheme, 5 themes concern civic values, social responsibility, human rights, ethics and democratic behaviour; 2 themes relate to religio-cultural diversity and tolerance and 2 to gender representation. The rest of the 16 themes relate to nationalism, patriotic values, literature, poetry, economy sports and tourism.

About 20 pc of the topics comprise civic values, whereas religio-cultural diversity and gender representation constitute

a meagre 8 pc each, altogether making up 36 pc of the entire curriculum. The rest of the topics promote Islamic nationalism, patriotism, economy and literature. In this compulsory subject, ideas based on Islamic religious nationalism may cause certain ambiguities or contradictions. In its chapter on fundamental rights, the CoP, Article 22 (1) offers safeguards to minorities in educational institutes. There are even topics that reflect religious bias, even though much of the prejudice has been removed that was part of the curriculum before 2009<sup>lxxvii</sup>.

For example, the topic of Muslim Nationhood specifically relates to *Kbulfa-e-Rashideen*, along with the idea of brotherhood based on the common Islamic faith. Similarly, the essay dedicated to famous Muslim personalities (Item No. 6, pg. 38) portrays the personality of Salahuddin Ayubi. There is nothing wrong with it but it would have been a gesture of inclusivity if a famous non-Muslim personality of the region, serving humanity, had been presented. Nevertheless, the topic illuminating the lives of Sufi saints (Grade VIII) does reflect on the shared religio-cultural history of the region. In addition, where the role of Muslim scientists has been highlighted in contributing to scientific inventions and discoveries, other scientists, innovationists, rationality movements and interventions could have been included to make the chapter holistic.

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<sup>lxxvii</sup> The whole Analysis, here below, has been borrowed from the unpublished work of Zeeba Hashmi that she did for the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) from December 2021 to January 2021. The work was submitted to NCC and MoFEPT against their public call for suggestions.

Incorporating the topic of child protectionism is admirable but the risk of child abuse should have been given a place as Life Skill Based Education (LSBE) is already part of one of the stated objectives of SNC. Rights of women are restricted to education, health, inheritance and economic independence only as sub-themes, whereas, these rights should have been introduced as the equal and inalienable postulate of life including the right to life, dignity, access to justice and the right to vote along with the freedom of making decisions. While looking at the suggested list of Urdu writers and poets, one feels that the works of versatile, linguistically competent, and famous story writers and poets (both men and women) are underrepresented. Including the works of known poets and writers would have been of particular interest to children.

Surprisingly not a single woman literary luminary has been given her deserved space which is absolutely injustice to the tall women literary personalities, as well as children too. Women authors also have, particularly, written poems and stories to generate empathy with fellow citizens belonging to marginalised groups and communities. Ideally, gender sensitisation needs to be incorporated into the textbooks as an integrated value. In compliance with the SNC principles, women's role in non-conventional arenas such as science, technology, economy, agriculture, industry, development, sports, arts and creativity also needs to be highlighted.

For Pakistani heroes, emphasis has been laid on those from the armed forces and law enforcing civil departments, whereas those prominent personalities have been ignored who strove for peace, democracy, equality, civic rights and social justice.

## **7.2. Curriculum analysis of English (grade VI-VIII)**

The SNC's English subject (VI-VIII) outlines 4 key competencies along with social and ethical development as an added one. Broadly, there are 22 themes subdivided into 224 sub-themes in each grade i.e. 63 sub-themes for Grade-VI, 78 for Grade-VII and 83 for Grade VIII. Most of them are tilted towards social development and civic values (55 pc) and civic values. About 18 pc deal with economic development and its subthemes while nationalism and patriotism hold a share of 9 pc, along with 9 pc share of science, technology and media. Only one of them is dedicated to cultural diversity and one to gender equality each having a marginal share of 5 pc.

Certain subthemes, such as education, protection from child abuse and complaint mechanisms deserved a relatively greater space. Repetition of personal ethics, courtesy and other themes could have been eliminated or minimised. While adopting these themes into the textbooks, the developers may leave out important themes and subthemes. The textbook development and teachers' support material provided in Chapter 7 embed tolerance, fairness, gender equity, perseverance and determination with Islamic principles and traditions verily undermining Article 22(1). Personality development traits are an integral part of civic values and education ought to be neutral and universal. In addition, civic values should also be imparted through the heroes of the land be they Muslim, Hindus, Christians (or whatever faith they professed) demonstrating a diverse belief system of the country. The 5 types of texts introduced in the

curriculum are important but teachers and textbook-developers should have been provided clearer guidelines.

The spirit of nationalism and patriotism propelled only through the dominant faith may create a sense of alienation among non-Muslim citizens undertaking compulsory subjects like English. Contrary to the ideal of the equality of citizenship, the tendency may impart a superiority complex among the majority of students. Highlighting the role of Pakistan's minority heroes is important for inclusivity, diversity and equality of citizenship. Under the theme of civic education, state-citizen relation is mentioned but in the passing. Civic and citizenship education must include the responsibility of the state towards its citizens along with educating democratic norms to our young learners. The topic of 'participatory citizenship' inscribes recurrent themes of traffic rules, discipline and forming queues, whereas, how citizens need to act under different governance structures is conspicuously missing.

In the wake of growing extremism, incidents of violence and mob lynching, peace, multi-culturalism, multilingualism and religious plurality particularly need to be promoted. Faith-based discrimination is mentioned only under a subtheme of 'avoiding social evils' while it is one of the major issues and merits more space along with the promotion of interfaith harmony. Painting, art, handicrafts, music, literature, dance, theatre and heritage consciousness, being an integral part of Pakistan's regional identities and cultures, also demand a fair proportion of space.

Young learners need to learn the skills of applying the English language in digital spaces early on. The art of browsing for research, appropriate use of AI, and exchanging ideas should strategically be taught at schools. Currently, content creation is easily acquirable and widely employed skill but children need to know its ethics and conscientiousness too<sup>lxxviii</sup>.

### **7.3. Curriculum analysis of History (Grades V-VIII)**

Technically, History becomes part of the curriculum from Grade V onwards. To sum up, 4 dominant themes are there with 12 standards converted into 7 learning outcomes embedded in 127 concepts. To draw a progressive analysis, themes and subthemes have been looked at through the lens of education, ethno-religious diversity, historical objectivity and their implication in society. A scrupulous observation shows 14 concepts falling under the category of democratic education mainly specified for Grade VIII, whereas, no relevant content was found in Grade VI and VII. Eminent ancient and other empires are introduced in Grade VI. Ironically, the notions of modern-day nation-states, governance and the ideas of rights and responsibilities are left unaddressed. Civic education/values hold a share of 39 pc while the important topics depicting religio-cultural diversity could only secure a minuscule share of 2 pc out of 127 topics in all.

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<sup>lxxviii</sup> Certain ideas have been borrowed from the unpublished work of the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) produced by Zeeba T. Hashmi in January 2021. The observations were submitted to NCC and MoFEPT against their public call for suggestions.

Through the essay on the Indus-Valley Civilisation (Grade VI), the young learners should have been told that it was one of the earlier civilisations of the world. Excavations made in present-day Pakistan discovered 90 pc of all inscriptions from Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa alone, and a small share from Mehrgarh<sup>171</sup>. These cities are known for having sophisticated town planning, sewage and, drainage systems meant for flood protection during the monsoon<sup>172</sup>. Through this unit, students need to be educated on the values of social development, disciplined town planning, social development, hygiene and sanitation. Relevance and the significance of preserving ancient heritage and building a connection between the people of the region and native ancestors need to be highlighted. Unfortunately, the ‘knowledge and skills component of this unit’ has been manoeuvred to *‘justify that as the people of the Indus Valley did not learn the art of warfare, nor did they develop their trade, therefore, they were easily defeated by the Aryans’*. This is almost an immodest manner to justify trade and warfare. Simultaneously, ‘possessing a poorer warfare technology as a justification for defeat and extinction’ is historically incorrect. Kingdoms and empires of the past with an ambitious defence system have also crumbled down for various reasons. Justifying war and weaponry contradicts the values of peace, diplomacy and progressivism desperately desired in the country.

In another example, Hammurabi’s Code has been praised for delivering ‘fairness and justice’ along with inspiring a civilisation comprising social norms, mores and the principles of justice. On the contrary, historical truth goes the other way around. The same Code systematised the exploitation of the weak should not go without a critical note. Students must be

taught that laws can and should be debated and all civilised societies continue evolving better and better laws, and they should. The topics of ‘Aryan, Kushans and Guptas in Grade VI, and Ashoka’s transition from a warrior-king to a preacher for peace and humanity might be great examples to inspire students to the values of peace and tolerance. His pacifism and edicts, hidden in plain sight in the present day’s Khyber Pakhtunkhwa can exemplify the ancient and middle period’s preference for people’s welfare over military pursuits. The messages of peace and welfare can be shared from the deciphered edicts in the corresponding textbooks.

The corresponding ‘*knowledge and skills component*’ stresses Alexander of Macedonia, and his invasion of India. His military conquests are given a greater space, whereas other aspects of arts, philosophy and scientific enquiry are largely ignored. The theme attempts to “*justify that Greeks were democratic, and argues why Plato, Aristotle and Socrates are famous even today*”. However, it is not reflected as a ‘*knowledge goal*’ inserted in this unit. To cultivate young minds, an understanding of the republic, democracy and other concerned socio-political ideas needs to be given due significance. Potential textbook writers, teachers and examiners need to know, how to instil such ideas into the minds of the young learners. The SNC’s proposed curriculum for Grade VII does not accommodate a theme for religious-cultural diversity.

The Khulfa-e-Rashideen’s chapter as part of the “*Dawn of Islam in Grade VI*”, should better focus on Islam’s political significance and how it assimilated with and adopted from other civilisations as did other faiths in the world.

Technically, ‘teaching of Islamic faith’ is an instructional subject that should be part of Islamiyat only. The subject, once again, contradicts Article 22 (1) of the CoP. Exercises or lessons compelling non-Muslims to consider it as examples of “fairness and justice” need to be avoided as they violate the spirit of Article 8 (laws inconsistent with or in derogation of fundamental rights to be void) and Article 21 (safeguard against taxation of any other faith communities).

*The Role of Muslim Religious Leaders during Crisis, Grade VII*, stresses Islamic revivalism while linking it with the freedom struggle of the Muslims of the subcontinent. Pakistan movement was not a religious but a political movement striving for an independent homeland for a major minority group in India i.e. Muslims. The names of the religious leaders in this unit need to be reconsidered. The Islamic revivalist struggle was in response to the objective social realities of the time. Highlighting orthodox Muslim leaders with their ‘specific’ views to present-day Pakistan - already suffering from sectarianism and religious extremism - risks sharpening faith-based division. In the same thread, favouring the ideology of Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi, over the tolerant, multiculturalist and inclusive Akbar the Great is not only a misrepresentation of a great Muslim King but riskier too. Contrarily, Sheikh Sarhindi held rigid, orthodox and sectarian beliefs. Deplorably, his works like Radd-e-Rawafiz somehow justify prejudice against the Shia community – a dangerous trend. As known widely, his letters strictly decried the emergence of Sikhism. Similarly, Shah Waliullah was also an orthodox Muslim who was fiercely critical of celebrating Hindu festivals and was particularly against Marathas. The other Muslim personality promoted in this unit is Syed

Ahmed Shaheed Brelvi who promoted Islamic reformation through Jihad - an idea which is anachronistic and misfit to be promoted in the present day's Pakistan that is already polarised in religious terms.

The *Industrial Revolution Unit, Grade VII* intends the learners to “*justify that Europe took the advantage of scientific knowledge and development to create the biggest economic divide*” and “*Predict the current situation of our region if people of the subcontinent had thought of converting their raw material into finished products during the industrial revolution*”. The first statement might contend that multiple factors enabled the Europeans - though their sci-tech knowledge cannot be undermined - to colonise the disempowered but resource-wealthy nations. In fact, it was the East India Company's wealth and weaponry that helped it take possession of many estates and vast lands across Asia and Africa. The second statement is also speculative, and demeaning to the many revolutionaries and local heroes, who advocated for education and development as an instrument to break the shackles of colonial rule. The ‘*Swadeshi*’ movement began in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century calling for a boycott of imported goods and preferring local products.

The ‘skills component’ under the topic of the *Formation of All India Muslim League (AIML) (Grade VIII)* expects students to ‘*comprehend that the partition of Bengal was the turning point of the Hindu Muslim Unity*’ which is no less than a distorted corollary. In reality, many of the Muslim landed elites were opposed to the partition of Bengal along with Hindus. On the other hand, some Hindus too were in favour of the partition each having their own socio-economic and administrative reasoning behind it. Their positions cannot be

judged exclusively on a nationalistic basis. Attacking Hindu-Muslim unity purely on a communal basis may perpetuate communalism – a tradition that must now be abandoned under the current circumstances of Pakistan which desperately needs unity of its people.

The topic of *Hindu-Muslim Unity from 1912 to 1922 in Grade VIII* seems to reflect a time-defined trend. The issue of Hindu-Muslim unity and growing differences could have better been dealt with by explaining the political causes of harmony and discord between the AIML and the INC. In the *Political Awareness in Subcontinent (1920-1930), Grade VIII*, the ‘skills section’ intends the learners to answer the question of “if the non-cooperation movement of M. K. Gandhi brought back Hindu-Muslim unity’ in the negative”. This is an opinionated question. Led by Gandhi, the Non-cooperation Movement”, simultaneously was one of the biggest proponents of the Khilafat Movement. Students need to know that M.A. Jinnah himself, along with several other leaders of the AIML and INC were not supportive of the Non-cooperation and the Khilafat Movement. In 1930, six years after the Non-cooperation, the Civil Disobedience Movement and Salt March were initiated by Gandhi. Like previous political actions, some Muslim leaders heeded the call while others did not. The events like the Qissa Khwani Massacre of around 200 to 300 Khudai Khidmatgar led by Ghaffar Khan and the Hindu leaders’ support of the Muslim-centric Khilafat Movement reveal that there were many occasions where Muslims and Hindus stood together against the imperial British raj.

Jinnah's strict adherence to the legal and constitutional struggle for Muslim representation in the dominion and Nehru's incessant refusal to address the largest minority's concern along nationalist lines caused political friction from which there was no turning back. In fact, the opposing political and ideological positions of the League and the Congress cannot be concluded that Hindus were against Muslims or the other way round, only on a communal basis. Entering into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this impression now needs to change in our education milieu. Political aspirations may not always reflect individual or communal differences.

Under the title, *New Beginnings: Pakistan after 1947, (Grade VIII)* also needs to quote the Quaid's first address to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan on 11<sup>th</sup> August 1947<sup>173</sup>. The speech illustrates the Quaid's vision for Pakistan in the words "*You are free; you are free to go to your temples; you are free to go to your mosques or any other place of worship in this State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed - that has nothing to do with the business of the State*". He further stressed: "*I think we should keep that in front of us as our ideal, and you will find that in course of time Hindus would cease to be Hindus, and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the State*". Given its significance in terms of unity and progress of Pakistan the speech must not be missed out". Undemocratic and dictatorial rules have harmed Pakistan a lot and there must be a mention of that. Regrettably, there is a big silence on that. Lessons learnt from the separation of East Pakistan also need to be incorporated. Ironically, General Ayub Khan is mentioned three times in the 'knowledge and skills component' but no democratically

elected political leaders or advocates of human, democratic or citizens' rights are mentioned. They deserve to be known by the kids.

#### **7.4. Curriculum analysis of Geography (Grade VI-VIII)**

Geography, in general, helps the learners to make sense of the world around them and be able to explore solutions to the global, regional or local conflicts (including the territorial ones) that affect people at large and the citizens of Pakistan too. The subject also introduces children to the idea of 'global citizenship'. Referring to this subject, UNESCO stresses building cognitive skills and competencies of children along with the promotion of communication skills, humane attitudes, values and behaviours<sup>174</sup>. The Draft Curriculum aspires to develop 'effective inquiry and communications skills, along with helping children 'broaden their perspectives' and acquire 'scientific knowledge of geography' while inculcating a strong sense of "citizenship" (both local and global)<sup>175</sup>. The review in hand has been undertaken, using the lens of civic values, religio-cultural diversity and gender equity. It also scrutinises, whether the aims and objectives stated as part of the 'learning outcome' have been translated into the curriculum. If at all, how and how far?

The curriculum comprises three domains i.e.: (i). Physical Geography with three standards (earth patterns and processes, weather and climate, natural, capital and human resources; (ii). Human Geography with five standards (uses of landforms, settlements, scarcity vs. resources, cultures of settlements, the role of science and technology in development); and (iii). Environmental Geography with

three standards (environmental changes, managing changed environment and patterns of global economic interactions). About 6 Units are assigned to each Grade that are in turn divided into 160 SLOs. Grade VI has 53 SLOs, Grade VII has 46 and Grade VIII holds 61.

A scrupulous assessment suggests that 75 SLOs (nearly 47 pc) incur civic values communicated through the categories of lifestyle and economic diversity, global citizenship, citizen/social responsibility and social development. 13 SLOs out of 53 (24 pc) in Grade VI, 22 SLOs out of 46 (48 pc) in Grade VII while 40 SLOs out of 61 (65 pc) promote civic education and values. Explicitly, no SLOs are found in terms of religious and ethnic identities or gender parity concerning human settlement, human resources and human and economic development metrics. The rest of the 53 pc of SLOs pertain to Physical and Environmental Geography without showing any correlation with human or social activity<sup>176</sup>.

## Chapter 8

### Overall Concerns in the Curriculum (Grades VI-VIII)

Seeing through the prism of civic values, democracy, human rights, equal citizenry, plurality, interfaith harmony and peaceful coexistence - though certain problems have been addressed but many are still out there. The standards defined for the provision of 'knowledge and skills' still sound harbouring serious implications, if the textbook developers and teachers are not properly guided. For instance, justification and glorification of Muhammad bin Qassim's attacks (through knowledge and skills components) somehow entreat minority students to be secondary citizens. The concept not only violates the modern-day principles of the equality of citizenship rather contradicts relevant constitutional provisions and the spirit of equal citizenship. In other ways, instead of assuaging, it may increase anti-minorities prejudice.

Approximately, 58 pc of the curriculum promotes Islamic nationalism, whereas minorities and marginalised groups rarely find representation. Flying in the face of pluralistic Pakistan - as envisioned by the Quaid-e-Azam in his August 11<sup>th</sup> speech - and ethno-nationalism, heroes from other faiths and other nationalities are not acknowledged. In addition, the emergence and evolution of linguistic and cultural nationalism in the subcontinent are inaptly represented. Religious syncretism and how various societies evolved in

history need to be justly embedded in the curriculum. Pretty awkwardly, all topics on ancient civilisations are jam-packed in Grade VI, expecting the young minds to comprehend the idea of multiple societies at one level. Easing it out, the concepts should have been sequenced and spread across secondary and higher secondary levels. The notion of interfaith and inter-communal harmony can also be introduced while introducing ancient civilisations. The causes of World War – I and World – II could have been described a little more realistically in Grade VIII.

An out-of-proportion thrust on Islamic revivalism concerning the struggle against colonialism needs to be cut to the size. Liberation heroes chosen for the curriculum belong to a single school of thought i.e. Islam and Muslim nationhood. Unfortunately, non-Muslim heroes, revolutionaries and freedom fighters favouring the cause of Pakistan, including Sufi leaders are ignored. The curriculum also misses out on minority heroes who endorsed the Pakistan Resolution (1940), joined hands with the Pakistan Movement and served this country in multiple fields of life. To promote unity and inclusion, it is important to make a shift from faith-based nationalism to civic, democratic, inclusive and progressive nationalism. Summing up, religious minorities must be acknowledged as an integral part of Pakistan. The notion of equality will help do away with multiple prejudices often found in our textbooks. The said characteristics, will cast an equalising effect on the learners from both majority and minority communities.

Surprisingly enough the ‘skill sets and competencies’ against the History Curriculum are not defined. NCC and the

proponents of SNC and/or NCP need to learn from UNESCO's prototype NCF which defines 6 competency areas i.e. technology, communication, analysis and synthesis, creative thinking, problem-solving and working with others<sup>177</sup>. Historical political differences between the AIML and the Indian National Congress (INC) should not be exclusively played up as religious differences. The fact is, it was the Indian Muslims' struggle against British colonialism and their apprehensions against the very likely majoritarian rule once the country was liberated from imperial control. Students need to be acquainted with the indigenous religious and cultural identities to impart to all groups and ethnicities a sense of belonging and solidarity within their homeland. An erudition as well as a social milieu need to be cultivated to not render anybody feeling estranged or alienated within his or her homeland. An overwhelming curricular tendency of highlighting lost Muslim glory now needs a change, creating a space for modern ideas and ideologies.

The mention of women's role as leaders and entrepreneurs is almost negligible. Many a successful woman can be cited with reference to their political participation, independent decision-making, and their contribution to social development. New knowledge and skills governing the 21st century need to be awarded their rightful space and importance as part of the historical process. Contemporary times demand students to be introduced to scientific and technological innovations along with the principles of human rights, freedom of thought, and freedom of religion and conscience.

Pakistan is a disaster-prone country and only a mention of the causes of the natural calamities (Grade VI) is not enough. Manmade as well as climate-change triggers both need to be explained. Subsequent infrastructural damage and the loss of life, livestock and livelihood also need some mention at least. The topic of ‘Plains and Rivers’ (Grade VIII) speaks of SLOs about the pattern of human settlement but the ‘knowledge and skills component’ completely ignores it because the textbook developers and teachers may ignore it unless categorical instructions are inscribed there. Similarly, the SLOs of the topic of Water Supply (Grade VII) are not stated under ‘Knowledge and Skills’. What is stated as part of SLOs i.e. ‘understanding similarities and differences between different regions of the world to understand consumption and distribution patterns’, fails to relate it with global citizenship values. The idea of transforming sewage into bio-gas is there but recycling energy, renewable energy and resource conservation is completely missing.

Once again under the subject of Agriculture (Grade VII), the disconnect between SLOs and the ‘knowledge and skills’ component continues. The latter intends to explain, ‘the role of international loans in enhancing agricultural productivity’ but there is no mention of that in the ‘learning objectives’ of the unit. Though, it is more relevant under ‘finance and economy’, but agricultural intersectionality could have been brought with other social factors such as economic disparity between the feudal and the landless farmers, gender disparity, and politics around farming. Under the present circumstances, Pakistan’s vulnerability to climate change and its effects on human settlement, life and livelihood as well as demography should have also been mentioned in the

‘knowledge and Skill’ component of Climate Change (Grade VII). Under the topic of Minerals and Power (Grade VII), economic progress, resource consumption, and revenue generation are underscored. In fact, they need to be covered under the scope of ‘human geography’ while discussing demographics to demonstrate the link between human lifestyles and commerce. Its SLOs describe ‘economic activities related to natural, capital and human resources’ and understand the basic role of the ‘global economic system and interdependence with the global economy’ but fail to impart corresponding information on human demography and resource management.

In Grade VIII, under the topic of Oceans and Seas, the SLOs speak of “investigating geographical, climatic, political, cultural, and economic aspects of places using geographic representations and geospatial technologies”, while the same is conspicuously missing in the ‘knowledge and skills’ component. Introducing the concept of Cultural and Geo-Political Intersection in Grade VI was important to build a proper context. Similarly, sequential knowledge should have been provided under the cultural and political aspects of geography in the previous Grades to save this SLO from appearing disjointed. ‘Environmental Pollution’ (Grade VIII) undermines the effects of pollution and its effects on health exceeding into a massive problem. Similarly, the smog issue, soil, water, and river pollution should have been related. Also, there should have been a mention of the political economy of industrialisation and industrial pollution along with their impact on human life.

Under the subject of ‘Transport and its Importance (Grade VIII)’, the significance of regional cooperation for trade and commerce should have been emphasised to benefit the people of the region. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Silk Route find a place under the respective Knowledge and Skills component but SLOs simply ignore them. Unit 6 i.e. Social and Economic Development (Grade VIII) is heavily tilted towards the macro-economic terminologies but Social Development is overlooked. The inclusion of indices such as Economic Development Indexes (EDI) and Human Development Index (HDI) in the Knowledge and Skills component is, perhaps, advanced for this level and thus needs to be removed.

### **8.1. Suggestions to include new themes**

Being mindful of the global context and circumstances of Pakistan and the region, a few more themes and topics are suggested to be incorporated in the Curriculum of Grades VI-VIII and, where relevant in Grades I-V as well. An important need to incorporate Population Studies and Demographics is felt at this level, inclusive of changes in human behaviour and appearance according to their location and geography. Settlement patterns, migration, adaptation and associated concepts and concerns also need to be explained here. Without interactive activities, lessons around geography become unexciting. Writing geography books demands unique skills to illustrate picturesque plains and plateaus and what lies beneath. Characterisation and storytelling may also help in this regard. The topic on Human Settlements must include information on types of populations, along with an introduction to the idea of

nomadic settlements that keep moving from one area to another for various reasons (e.g. the Gujjar tribes move down from high pastures to lower plains during winters and can be mostly seen in urban upper or central Punjab. A foundational knowledge about the Seven Continents and the diversified civilisations also needs to be extended to the students at the formative level. The subject will open up children to comprehend the versatile land and geographies around the globe. Similarly, students' orientation to religio-cultural diversity and multiple lifestyles is important and needs inclusion under People and Society. The point is to teach students about human interplay with their environment, cultures and ecology.

Though, the idea of Human Resources has been brought to be discussed at several places in the curriculum but needs appropriate interpretation too. Although, women are making substantial contributors in all fields of social sciences, along with economics and social development, but their representation remains restricted all across that needs to be balanced out. Along with imparting language skills, a key purpose of teaching Urdu and English should be to develop literary sense amongst students rather than using them as a means for some other purposes. Interesting and eminent pieces of poetry and prose need to be supplemented at all Grades.

Pakistan is a multi-cultural, multi-lingual and multi-religious country. Why ignore or undermine this fact in the curriculum? The young learners must learn and admire the beauty and diversity of their country. They should have a sense of, and respect for one another's language, culture, faith

or any other denomination. The very consciousness will inculcate the values of peace, empathy and equality in their minds. The subject must not be treated as a sub-theme for it deserves to be taught as a stand-alone theme in connection with geo-cultural dynamics, a characteristic rather defining feature of Pakistan.

The suggested activities against SLOs should have been more open to discussions with learners while maintaining focus on finding solutions to the problems. One of the most important gaps, identified is the insufficient guidelines for the textbook writers and teachers, particularly concerning ethno-religious and cultural diversity. Clear guidelines need to be provided to the potential textbook writers and teachers. Instructions on assessments and pedagogical frameworks are insufficient. The subject of Geography needs to integrate Human Geography in all of its units as, presently, it is inclined more towards economic and climatic change effects. The SLOs around Geography should also address neighbouring countries with whom our plains and mountain ranges are connected. This may shed light on the environment and development, and contribute to building regional peace.

## **8.2. Political assertion and judicial scrutiny of teaching the Holy Quran**

The MoFEPT and spokespersons of SNC kept asserting the inclusion of Islamic content in the curriculum as envisaged in the Compulsory Teaching of the Holy Quran Act (2017). The same was amended and sharpened by the PTI Government in April (2021), prescribing the teaching recitation of (*nazira*) Holy Quran with proper accent (*tajwid*) and then with translation (ba-tarjuma) to all Muslim students from Grade I

to Grade XIII<sup>178</sup>. Punjab and KP provinces also followed the suit; enacted in accord and assumed the compulsion. Only Sindh and Balochistan did not adopt it as it is.

Side by side, the National Assembly passed a resolution for using elaborate entitlement of the Holy Personages in all the textbooks, and SNC's MTBs also adopted the norm. Earlier in August 2020, the Senate passed the 'Compulsory Teaching of Arabic Language Bill 2020' which was introduced as a private member bill by PML-N's Senator Javed Abbasi. Seeing the religious trends gaining ground, Majlis Wahdat-ul-Muslimeen (MWM) insisted that *all masalik* (sects and schools of thought) should have equal representation in SNC. "*The incidence of Karbala (martyrdom of Imam-e-Hussain and his family) should particularly become a part of the syllabus as no sect had any reservation on this*". Along with Sunni saints, *Auliya* Allah (religious saints) of Shia orientation should also be represented in the SNC<sup>lxxxix</sup>. Much to the experts' surprise things that deal with such a specific and specialised subject like education are put forth by those possessing no knowledge, art or experience of curriculum development – eventually end up with regressive pedagogical content.

While speaking at the Convocation of Minhaj-ul-Quran, a private Islamic University, Prime Minister Imran Khan's advisor on political communication<sup>lxxx</sup> said that "*the syllabus of educational institutions must nurture students' mindset in line with the Islamic code of life and ethics*". Besides lauding the University's

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<sup>lxxxix</sup> KII with Mujahid Gardezi, Divisional Head of Majlis Wahdat ul Muslimeen, Multan.

<sup>lxxx</sup> Dr Shahbaz Gill.

role in this regard, he reiterated that “*through Rehmatul-lil-Alameen Authority (RAA), the government was engaging Islamic scholars around the world to oversee the syllabus being taught to students in educational institutions*”<sup>179</sup>. Chairing a review meeting of the RAA, the then Prime Minister Imran Khan, advised the young children’s character to be built in light of the life (seerat) of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) by using modern methodologies. He said the State of Madina was an example of the principles and ethics of Islam that protected human rights in a society. The Coalition Government (February 2024 to date) maintained the same policy with a similar zeal and advised the RAA to introduce a supplementary course of ethics to inculcate Islamic values among young students.

Right-wing lobby aggressively backed the ministries and the education bureaucracy to not only maintain, rather increase, the Islamic content in non-Islamic subjects too. The trend, they argued, aptly reflected the provisions in the CoP, Article 31 (1) and 2 (a, b, c)<sup>180</sup> and promoted the noble Islamic values and those opposing it were driven by vested interests, waging false propaganda and disinforming the nation<sup>181</sup>. Not the larger masses, it was just a small number of English-speaking elites, afflicted by the inferiority-complex from the West, who were opposing SNC<sup>182</sup>, they stressed. Undermining their other reservations, Madrassa representatives enthusiastically endorsed SNC for its claims of abolishing class education and stressing Islamic studies. Making the *nazjra* Quran compulsory won their admiration in particular. For Instance, M. Taimoor, a teacher of Arabic Grammar and exegesis

(*tafseer*)<sup>lxxxix</sup> highlighted the importance of maintaining a balance between religious and secular studies. SNC was worth admiring for it was going to strike a balance between the two, he believed. Maulana Abd-ul-Hanan Haidari asserted that “teaching Nazira Quran was a must, the type of schooling or class didn’t matter. The compulsion would at least produce a generation properly knowing *Namaṣ*, Quran and *Kalma Shareef*<sup>lxxxixii</sup>”.



Picture 17: From the office of EDO, Layyah

In response to a public interest litigation (Altamash Saeed versus The Government of Punjab), made in December 2020, the PCTB chairman and Secretary (School Education, Punjab) ordered that all public and private school books and supplementary material required a review and approval to identify and eradicate any indecent material from the next academic year (2021-2022 onwards). It was an easy out for the bureaucracy without thinking through the consequences.

<sup>lxxxix</sup> Teacher of Arabic Grammar, Arabic Literature, Tafseer and Philosophy at Dar-ul-Uloom-e-Islami, Islamabad.

<sup>lxxxixii</sup> KII with Maulana Abd-ul-Hanan Haidari, Jamia Khair-ul-Moeed, Multan.

Thus, where the Amendment Act (2020) authorised Mutahida Ulema Board (MUB) to examine Islamiyat's textbooks, the Department's response to this appeal made the matters even worse. Under this excuse, the Board's mandate was now expanded to review all teaching stuff of all subjects.

The politicians and the bureaucracy in Punjab both ceded the space to the MUB. A space once surrendered always becomes hard to reclaim. Instead of the education bureaucracy doing its job and halting the decline, the politically costly legal fights were left to civil society activists and vulnerable communities<sup>183</sup>. So much so that in the Punjab province, Islamic material in the Islamiyat and even in Social Sciences was examined and approved by the (MUB). Nevertheless, in KP no NOC was desired from the MUB as the task of monitoring the syllabus from an Islamic perspective was assigned to the subject specialists<sup>184</sup>.

But the story didn't end there. Upon the direction of the High Court in late 2021, the Session Judges of Punjab began monitoring the teaching of the Holy Quran in public and private schools in person. The School Education Department (SED), notified almost all schools that, 'with the Punjab High Court's order (3.11.2021)<sup>185</sup>, the Judicial Officers were nominated to inspect educational institutions - including public, private and *deeni madaris* - as to whether the Holy Quran was being taught as a separate and compulsory subject in schools or not. Also, to counter-verify the situation, the Executive District Officers (EDOs - Education) and the Assistant Education Officers (AEOs) were nominated by the Secretary of Education to accompany

and coordinate with the Judicial Officers at the time of inspection’.

The consequences followed. In Chiniot two of the local private schools were sealed by the respective Session Judge for not teaching the Holy Quran (*naẓīra*) while in Nankana Sahib orders were passed against the principals of three schools for not paying sufficient attention to the teaching of the Holy Quran as a separate subject. Also, they criticised their students for keeping some *paras* in their school bags – compromising the respect of the Holy Quran. As ordered by the Chief Justice, (Punjab), the District and Session Judges were deputed to visit as many tehsils of the district as possible to oversee compulsory Quranic education (*naẓīra and tarjuma*) in the public and private schools. The EDOs (Education) then began issuing directives to schools, saying, “*Either impart compulsory Quranic education or face the consequences*”. Emulating the practice, the AEOs (Education) fast-paced their visits to schools, almost in every district, to ensure that the order was being complied with. Reportedly, wherever, a school found not teaching the Holy Quran, was given a warning of closure or was immediately handed a ‘show cause notice’. Owners of the private schools were also issued a show-cause notice and warned of cancellation of their registration for failing to act upon the order<sup>186</sup>.

Private schools’ associations were distressed over the situation as despite agreeing and attempting to teach the Holy Quran, they struggled with practical difficulties such as finding a teacher, setting up the timetable and adjusting it with a host of other subjects. On top of that, EDOs and AEOs were dispatching notices to schools advising them “to

*be alert as the Judges were going to ask three questions: how many days in a week, did they teach the Holy Quran? Which Para/Chapter children were now at? Show your certificate of registration (in case of private schools)”.*

Multiple teachers from the private and public schools in the select districts shared numerous associated problems. Sharing his experience, one of the SSTs (Subject Specialist Teachers) from a GBHS<sup>lxxxiii</sup> from Multan said, *“We made thorough preparation when the Lower Court’s judge was supposed to visit our school. He was highly satisfied with our progress in teaching the Holy Quran regularly. But from the day after, we closed the chapter as it was not possible to continue the process due to the several practical barriers”.* In the words of another teacher from Khanewal, *“You need not worry. Several such instructions kept coming in our schools in the past. Here goes a year or so; everything will boil down to business as usual<sup>lxxxiv</sup>”.*

A couple of teachers GGSS and GGPS were apprehensive of teaching the Holy Quran for some other reasons. Keeping it in their regular bags with other books might cause someone to raise his/her eyebrows. Ablution (making *wuzu*) every single time to handle the Holy Quran was not possible if the tap water was insufficient or simply not available in the schools. For girls, they argued, it was not manageable in routine as they naturally go through their menstrual cycles for several days a month. Reading the Holy Quran with *tajwid* (exact Arabic accent) is another challenge that teachers face.

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<sup>lxxxiii</sup> Name deliberately kept anonymous.

<sup>lxxxiv</sup> Name of the schools and the teacher are deliberately kept confidential.

Perhaps, none of the native Pakistani languages uses glottal sounds like velo-glottal, labio-glottal, paleo-glottal, pharyngeal and some velar and palato-velar sounds like *zuaad, suaad, qaaf, ghain, ain, haa, kbaa etc.* Therefore, for an ordinary child, it is difficult to produce and pronounce those sounds. The debate already exists in the clerical circles of Pakistan. Institutionalising it in schools might widen its scope and cause bigger controversies.

### **8.3. The role and influence of the Mutahida Ulema Board**

The PCTB formed a Textbook Review Committee (TRC) of the Mutahida Ulema Board (MUB) to review books of all subjects - including those of social sciences, science and mathematics. Reportedly, the MUB's Textbook Review Committee issued a directive to the SNC Publishers to remove the words 'interest' and 'markup' from the books of mathematics as they were un-Islamic. Reportedly, the religious scholars, who were members of the MUB's TRC, also directed the publishers not to print any diagrams or sketches in the textbooks of biology unveiling the human body even if it was meant to educate kids<sup>187</sup>.

In KP, unlike Punjab, although MUB is not authorised to review the textbooks the subject specialists themselves examine their respective subjects from the Islamic point of view. Representatives of the Textbook Publishing Associations rightly raised the question of PCTB hiring highly paid subject specialists, if they were not capable of doing their job and ulema were needed to examine their work. However, the PCTB spokesperson insisted that the Ulema Board was mandated to review all the SNC models

and recommended books under the PCTB Act. It even warned that action could be taken against those publishers who failed to secure NOC from the PCTB. There was no harm, the Board asserted, in MUB being authorised to review Islamic and social science subjects as they were going to review only the religious material that was part of any textbook<sup>188</sup>.

The PCTB evolved from the Punjab Curriculum Authority in 2012 to its present shape through the PCTB (Amendment) Act 2020. Earlier the religious clerics had no role in selecting and developing the content of the textbooks. Unfortunately, the role of MUB was also inserted in the same Act of 2020 under section 2(A) stating that *“any textbook or curriculum on religion with contents or matter related to Islam including Islamiyat, History, Pakistan Studies, Urdu, Literature or any other subject material related to religion shall not be published before taking prior approval from the MUB. The PCTB shall be bound to take such approval from MUB in Punjab”*. In June 2020, a few weeks after the above legislation, the Governor of Punjab advised Universities to make studying the Holy Quran compulsory at higher levels too. No mention of an alternative to the non-Muslim students.

Now MUB has become powerful enough to influence the process as well as the content of the school curricula. They are the ones (not the educationists) who decide what is hateful or intolerant material and what is not. Maulana Tahir Ashrafi, the head of MUB claims that they have *“so far cleared 307 books from possible extremist content”<sup>189</sup>*.

Admiring the decree of compulsory teaching of *naẓīra* Quran at all grades and for all degrees, Governor Ghulam Sarwar (2018-2022) tweeted it to be '*a dream coming true as learning Quran guaranteed our progress*'. Also, the Speaker Punjab Assembly<sup>lxxxv</sup> Chaudhary Parvez Ilahi (2018 to 2022) reiterated that '*religious content in all books and all schools across board shall be scrutinised by the MUB*'. '*The legislation (of compulsory Quranic education) closed the doors of sharr (conflict) forever*', he asserted. The *Tabaffuz-e-Bunyad-e-Islam* Act - Punjab (2020)<sup>190</sup>, authorises MUB and Director General Public Relations to examine and not to allow the arrival or publication of any national or international books critical of Islam, politics or history to protect 'national interest'. Consequently, in 2020, the PCTB banned around 100 books, alleging they contained anti-religious or anti-national material. In the words of Aysha Jalal, the known historian, "*our textbooks are the best example of the nexus between power and bigotry*". With this backdrop, how is it possible to prevent our curriculum and syllabi from regressive influences now and in future<sup>191</sup>?

To cultivate the Madrassa-like environment further in schools, the Chief Minister of Punjab, Usman Buzdar (2018-2022) advised the education authorities of Punjab, to arrange recitation of the Holy Quran and Durood Sharif before the national anthem to invoke Allah's blessings and keep children safe. Obeying the advice, the Secretary of Education, notified all schools to comply<sup>192</sup>. Things did not stop here. There was a ripple effect. In response to certain schools' submissions to recite the Holy Quran and Durood Sharif desired a priori rituals say *wuzū*, wearing a cap or dupatta etc. The Punjab's

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<sup>lxxxv</sup> Chaudhary Parvez Ilahi, PML (Q), Pakistan.

former Minister for School Education, Dr Murad Raas (2018-2023), suggested a way out. He advised both public and private schools to make *dupatta* and caps as an essential part of their uniform<sup>193</sup>. One must ask a question, if it is not the *madrasisation* of public and private schools, what else could it be?

Perhaps under the growing influence, direct or indirect, Deputy District Education Officer, Chakwal, issued a notification (December 2021) to strike off and/or transfer all girls studying in the government's co-education schools (VI-VIII) to the exclusively girls' schools. But immediately after, the District Education Authority revoked it saying the notification was issued without prior permission<sup>194</sup>. Yet another similar concern erupted in January 2021. The Directorate of Public Instruction (DPI) came up with a checklist including a clause for private colleges to file an affidavit not to offer co-education. The clause somehow turned into news for all the private colleges to submit the same. On the contrary, the Higher Education Department of the province clarified saying, '*it had not notified any such conditionality for private colleges.*' But this is sure that the checklist, as per media reports, did contain such a requirement though it was never implemented<sup>195</sup>.

With the ensuing Arabic and Quranic education, the cramming tendency is highly likely to go up. In advanced levels, the emergence of *masalik* and *firqa*-oriented tensions is just a matter of time. One must not forget that *maslaki* and *firqawarana* differences (sects and schools of thought), as happened in the Zia regime (1977-1988) might occur again. Ultimately, it is the teachers who have to teach the religious

content, not the ulema involved in developing it. What non-Muslim students are going to be taught, instead, at the advanced levels is yet not clear.

The question arises, as to why the MUB has been bestowed with the role of reviewing textbooks other than Islamiyat. Their influence must remain in their own arena, if at all. How can certain fundamental notions of economics be removed from Mathematics or Economics or any other concept of sciences or social sciences? How can biology be taught without illustrating the guts and organs in the dissected human body? The same ulema found faults even with the books of mathematics. Don't they know that Pakistan's economic engine runs with the fuel of debt and the country pays millions of dollars in interest every single year? Don't they have their own bank accounts, and don't they receive interest? Don't they buy and sell land or property making a colossal number of profits? In fact, they are trying to manoeuvre people through the space that the state of Pakistan has created for the far-right groups operating under multiple hues and colours.

NCC Director Maryam Chughtai (2019-2022), defends the teaching of the Holy Quran at schools. *"There is nothing wrong in studying Islam at school as they study it back home, anyway,"* she argues. But she fails to defend religious content spotted in social science subjects and certain bits even in sciences. *"These are just the MTBs requiring some change"*, she responds unconvincingly. While extending her support to the teaching of faith at schools, she forgets that families vary in their faith orientation as well as in the degree of their religiosity. Also, they can pick and choose a day and time to study Islam. In

schools, on the other hand, it becomes a disciplinary matter. In addition, securing marks becomes the primary motive to study it, not the faith itself.

Rather than acknowledging the State's failure to ensure universal schooling, the then Federal Minister for EPT (Shafqat Mahmood) admired Madrassas for providing food and shelter to the millions of poor and destitute children. By pledging that *dars-e-nizami* shall remain intact – the very system that implanted fundamentalist tendencies in our society – SNC repeated the same old folly. So long as the ultra-conservative tendencies and imitational logic rule over, dealing with Madrassas to embrace board exams will not bring their students to par with the students of the public and private schools. Sweeping the problem under the rug is utterly naïve or plain duplicity. Simply speaking, the Madrassas' worldview stands apart from the public schools (however conservative) as known by the Minister himself. If the PTI Government was sincere by any measure, it might have discouraged *dars-e-nizami* and opened up an equal number of public schools. Otherwise, the situation will keep reflecting the old satire, '*parhay Farsi baichey taeil*' (lofty ideals devoid of practical utility). Frozen in the Stone Age, their approach abhors critical and contemporary thoughts and empiricism<sup>196</sup>.

'Higher the religiosity, lower the acceptability of diversity and plurality', is a fact amply demonstrated across the country that our educational architects refuse to accept. Due to the same reasons, the degree of tolerance dwindles as move from private to public schools and then to Madrassas. Packing excessive religiosity in schooling risks Madrassa-like

ambience in public schools<sup>197</sup>. Observing the excessive Islamic and patriotic content in education, one is convinced that the state of Pakistan is not interested in promoting objective, scientific and critical education. This vital institution is merely employed as a tool to achieve preconceived religio-political ends<sup>198</sup>.

## Chapter 9

### The More It Changes, the More It Remains the Same

Throughout PTI's regime (2018-2022), the SNC was vehemently pushed forward by the then Prime Minister, the Minister for Federal Education and Professional Training<sup>199</sup>, NCC and the Minister for School Education and Literacy (Punjab<sup>lxxxvi</sup> and KP<sup>lxxxvii</sup>). Simultaneously, it was fiercely criticised by civil society, independent educationists, the provincial governments of Sindh and Balochistan, and private textbook publishers as elaborated in the previous chapters. Against all odds, the SNC (and its MTBs Grade I to Grade VIII), was somehow adopted by Punjab, KP and Balochistan, except Sindh that did so but only partially. Grade VIX – XII textbooks were prepared in 2024 while the same for Grade XII curriculum was supposed to be completed and enforced in public schools sometime in 2025<sup>200</sup>.

The incumbent Interim Government (April 2022 to February 2024) expressed its intention to refine the implementation of SNC while emphasising quality enhancement, inclusivity and minimising provincial disparity. The interim Minister for Federal Education and Professional Training, Rana Tanveer Hussain (April 2022 to August 2023) almost immediately

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<sup>lxxxvi</sup> Dr. Murad Ras.

<sup>lxxxvii</sup> Shahram Tarakai.

after assuming power spelt out his government's reservations with the word "single", (not necessarily with the approach or its substance). In his words, the word "single", "*had sparked confusion and excluded the diversity of education, a core element of Pakistan's rich cultural heritage. We were ready to get on track*". Renaming it as the NCP, he of introducing standard textbooks, teachers training and examinations reforms. "*It was PML-N's Government (2013 to 2018) that had sought to build a consensus on the minimum standards for all public and private schools, and religious seminaries and the NCF was also the same government's product*", he argued. "*The historic Compulsory Teaching of Holy Quran Act (2017) was also passed by their previous government*", he swanked about<sup>201</sup>. Based on research findings and international best practices the NCP, he reiterated, would strike continuous updates to improve quality and content<sup>202</sup>. Equivocating, Madad Ali Sindhi, the interim Minister for Education (Sindh) believed that there was a need to revise SNC that undermined the diversity of cultures and languages, and provincial preferences of education.

Contrary to the expectations the provincial governments, reluctantly or otherwise, accepted the SNC (now called NCP) with a bit of tinkering here and there even after the PTI's supremo (Imran Khan) lost the no-confidence move on April 8, 2022<sup>203</sup>.

Like several other regimes in the past who never meant it, the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Shahbaz Sharif (during the interim period and post-February 2022 elections), declared imposing a 4 four-year emergency, boosting education, ensuring skills enhancement, removing discrepancies and enrolling 26.2 million OOSCs<sup>204</sup>. None of the objectives, was

perhaps, achieved in letter and spirit. He did speak of the proposed curriculum's imperfection and the need for organising a national summit to agree on the curriculum and improve it. From time to time, he keeps stressing about improving the literacy ratio and aligning education with contemporary economic and technological demands and challenges<sup>205</sup>. Expediting the construction of Danish Schools, teachers' training, digital training hubs, girls' education, mid-day meals, reducing drop-outs, school renovations and the provision of modern teaching-learning devices have also been part of his intermittent statements about quality education<sup>206</sup>.

Addressing the problem of bringing OSC back to school, the Sindh Government pronounced a half-baked idea of establishing 3,000 non-formal education centres across the province (with about 100 centres in each district) in 2024 that will offer vocational education along with conventional instructions<sup>207</sup>.

The Minister for FEPT, Dr Khalid Maqbool Siddiqi (February 2022 onwards), acknowledged the SNC's imperfections and expressed a desire to refine the curriculum once again without a formal plan. He stressed unity amongst provinces while stating that unless the provincial and federal governments worked in unison, the current challenges of education could not be resolved. He also outlined the prioritising of quality education, infrastructure, and teachers' training<sup>208</sup> along with the need to update existing policy to replace the 'outdated' 2009 framework within two months which could never see the light of day. However, he did

endorse NCP's aspirations to standardise educational content across the country<sup>209</sup>.

Though they claim to offer quality education to vulnerable and marginalised children but Danish Schools as promoted by Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif create another anomaly as an island of excellence amongst the hundreds of thousands of low-quality public schools. Recently he inaugurated a new school in the Kurri area (Rawalpindi) costing over Rs.5 billion.

In January 2022, the same school was established in Azad Jammu and Kashmir and there are plans to set up the same in Neelum Valley as well as in Gilgit Baltistan, Balochistan, and the formerly tribal districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The Schools offer free books, meals, and boarding facilities<sup>210</sup> to the distinguished students of the underprivileged communities. With relatively a better infrastructure and appointing trained and competent teachers, the schools, reportedly, impart contemporary skills including STEM<sup>211</sup>. Nevertheless, the new initiative's management structure is yet not clear. No idea, whether they are going to be administered by the Punjab Danish Schools Authority or a new system will be evolved within each province is yet not known<sup>212</sup>.

In the views of the Minister for School Education (Punjab), Sikandar Hayat Khan (February 2022 onwards), the GoPj undertook 'Sarkari Schools, Mayari Schools', and the 'Literate Punjab' initiatives. *The provincial government*, he argued, 'was strengthening teachers' training programme, modernising the curriculum, integrating technology into the classrooms, enhancing the literacy ratio, the quality of education, equitable access for all students, vocational

*training as well as transmitting skill development to prepare the youth for the job market and was committed to increasing public investment in education infrastructure. We are also keen on improving literacy and non-formal education, including adult literacy,* he asserted. But all such claims rarely go beyond political statements. However, addressing the contemporary demands, the SED (Punjab) introduced new subject groups i.e. Agriculture, Information Technology, Fashion Designing, and Health Sciences at the matriculation level within the same curriculum framework. Khalid Naeem Wattoo, Secretary (SED) believed there was no need to recruit new teachers as the existing teachers might be trained to teach the new subject<sup>213</sup>.

Reportedly, the Communication and Works Department (CWD) and Building Department have been done away with to give way to the School Management Council (SMC) within the province whose annual budget has been jacked up from Rs. 400,000 to Rs. 4,000,000 Million to discourage corruption and save money. They are, now, supposed to build school infrastructure or missing facilities as well with an economical cost. Engineers were contracted in multiple Tehsils. The school headmaster and the council chairman were supposed to oversee the process. Where 1,000 rooms were usually constructed through CWD, the SMC may construct about 4,000 rooms within the same amount of funding from the World Bank.

At the same time, the GoPj declared a School Reorganisation and Teachers Rationalisation Programme, sometimes known as Punjab School Reorganisation Programme (PSRP). For about 52,484 schools in the province, around 118,000 more teachers are required. About 20,000 excess teachers in certain

urban schools were redeployed in rural schools where the student-teacher ratio was inadequate. Reportedly, ‘Foundation learning accelerated courses in English, Math, and Science, were kicked off with 6,000 camps already established. To ensure sustainability and effectiveness, the Punjab Examination Commission (PEC), PCTB, and Quaid-e-Azam Training Institute (QATI) introduced additional certification for the English Language. To strike impactful changes, and respect merit and expertise, the top 100 professionals from the education industry were involved in promoting Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TAVET)<sup>214</sup>.

According to the Minister for School Education (Punjab), Rana Sikandar Hayat (2024-), *“Testing the practical skills through pre-service assessments and corresponding training was also important for just having a degree did not make good teachers. Language certifications (written and spoken) were also believed to be crucial for it had become a barrier towards a better career for most of the young professionals. Bunyad Foundation, he added, was going to be engaged for that. An MOU with the Deputy Speaker, (U.S Assembly) was to be signed where 3,000 Pakistani students and 500 teachers will converse periodically with 3,000 American students and 500 teachers to hone their communication skills and technological comprehension in the English language. Simultaneously, the teachers will acquire monitoring and curriculum reform knowledge too. In addition, the School Meal Program was also introduced at the primary school level, by piloting it from poorer districts like Muzaffargarh, Layyah, and D. G. Khan, subsequently to be expanded to all districts in a phased manner”*, declared the said Minister for Education (Punjab)<sup>215</sup>. The Minister for Education (Punjab), also takes pride in having participated, presenting PML-N’s vision for education and

learning, issues and analyses, and expertise and insights in the Education World Forum (London), where education ministers and secretaries from 124 countries gathered<sup>216</sup>. But how much of all such claims have been realised on the ground is not yet clear.

For the last one and a half decades, successive governments have fallen to the romance of constituting ‘authorities’. An ICT Education Authority was set up in November 2024. *The Federal Directorate of Education (FDE), Private Educational Institutions Regulatory Authority (PEIRA), Basic Education Community Schools (BECS), and National Commission for Human Development (NCHD) were brought under the administrative control of the authority. As stated, its purpose was to enhance governance, transparency and accountability, monitoring as well as design and implement multiple frameworks, and standards for uniform curriculum, textbooks, and teacher training and assessment to improve the functioning of all educational institutions along with managing school transportation. Also, the Authority was supposed to foster research, innovation and excellence along with promoting equity, and inclusivity. The public-private partnership was meant to improve service delivery. The authority was also meant to ensure the provision of efficient and effective youth services and provide students with finances.* The plan of establishing the Islamabad Education Authority Fund (IEAF), comprising donors' grants and a federal government's budget, along with revenue generation by the authority also accompanied<sup>217</sup>. Similar authorities are being set up in other provinces too. But all such political statements and plans should be taken with a pinch of salt.

## 9.1. New bottle, old wine

Undermined soon but within a few weeks of stepping into his office, Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif issued time-bound directives to the ministries of Finance, Health, Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety, BISP, National Vocational Technical Training Commission (NAVITTC), State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), and Security and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) to facilitate quality education. The MoFEPT was tasked to develop consensus amongst provinces for shared policy, planning, curriculum and funding. He also allocated Rs 25 billion to bring OOSC back to school of which transparent and accountable spending is yet to be seen. The national education budget was given a meagre rise from 1.5 pc in the fiscal year 2023-2024 to 1.7 pc in 2024-2025 with a commitment to raise it to 4 pc by 2029. But will this bare minimum raise be realised by the target year remains uncertain<sup>218</sup>. Throughout history, Pakistan's education budget has rarely exceeded 2.5 pc of the GDP. On top of that inefficient, ineffective and inequitable management of the very budget exacerbates the issue in every single arena of public education.

The political economy of education has rarely been considered to set its priorities right. Supply-side priorities have been far more skewed than demand-side concerns. Post 18<sup>th</sup> amendment each province has introduced multiple reforms in education. Yet the desired outcomes could not be secured. The reason once again is inadequate and inefficient implementation of reforms and lop-sided priorities. Volatile politics and unstable governments also translate into an educational crisis. Feudalist patronage in Sindh, Balochistan and parts of South Punjab also proves inimical to the quality and continuity of education, mainly of girls.

Despite tongue-in-cheek criticism of the PTIs proposed curriculum and offering MTBs, the caretaking government followed by the elected coalition government (February 2024 to date), continued with the same approach. Having adopted the curriculum of Grades I-VIII, the NCC embarked on preparing the MTBs for Grades IX to XII to be adopted in 2024-2025. The NCC Director Maryam Chughtai (2019-2022) appreciated the continuity of the process while Secretary Waseem Ajmal termed the summit a “*great success*”, stressing that the “*first time in the country’s history, a core curriculum from grades 1-12 and Early Years has been signed off by subject experts from all provinces*”<sup>219</sup>.

## **9.2. Much ado without mettle**

Right from her early weeks of assuming power (2024), the PML-N’s Chief Minister (Punjab), Maryam Nawaz Sharif<sup>220</sup>, expressed her intent to improve the quality of public schooling time and again. Poised on foreign funding, much of that is devoid of systematic and step-by-step plans coupled with assured financing. About four months into her position of power, she announced 32,298 computer tablets to teachers, establishing 1000 IT and science labs in elementary schools with USD100 million through ADB’s assistance along with the Google certification scheme for 300,000 public school students<sup>221</sup>. ‘*Overlooking poverty and gender inequality, SNC was bound to fail in resolving issues in education*’, she commented. Under their NCP plan, her government was committed to solving a range of education problems, she alluded. Nonetheless, it befits here to mention in the words of Rana Liaqat (an educationist), that new facilities might be good but the upgradation of the science and IT laboratories

already established was essential. The previous government, he argued of the PTI, he argued, had also introduced ‘Tech groups’ for matriculation students and provided labs to schools, which were no longer operational, depriving the students of practical knowledge and skills<sup>222</sup>.

Since April 2024, Secretary of the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, Mohyuddin Wani has been stressing school reforms including infrastructural improvement and modernisation of school facilities. Known for implementing similar reforms in Gilgit-Baltistan, he boasts of digitising and modernising education while aligning it with NCP as ‘envisioned’ by the new Prime Minister and the Chief Minister, of Punjab. Drawing on examples of global shift, the Secretary recurrently and vociferously claimed to integrate technological skills such as ‘coding’ and ‘digital literacy’ with the existing system of education<sup>223</sup>.

Eulogising technological advancement, he spoke of exposing teachers to modern coaching tools and techniques as part of a broader education reform agenda to cut down inequalities and eliminate conventional techniques by providing equal access to quality education across the country, especially in underprivileged and underserved areas. “*The measure will not only prepare our younger generation for the international digital economy but is quite likely to bridge the educational gap between Pakistan and other countries. Creativity, critical thinking and problem-solving skills (the central elements of NCP) would come along*”, he believed<sup>224</sup>. Enhancing STEM capabilities across the whole country was also been part of his claims and to demonstrate their aim for innovation, the Ministry involved students and teachers in organising STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and

Mathematics) Fair 2024 to extend hands-on science and technology experiences<sup>225</sup>. But all he ended up was improving a few select schools in multiple sectors of Islamabad.

The Education Minister (Punjab), Rana Sikandar Hayat claimed that *“underscoring ‘Computer Science First’, it is Google that launched their Gemini project intending to provide free training to the students of Grades IV-VIII. The Ministry of IT and Telecom (MoITT) and Tech Valley - Pakistan collaborated with Google to implement the programme. The first phase of the programme was implemented with 13 Telecom Foundation Schools across the country. The enterprise was intended to teach codification skills through gamification techniques including core computer science concepts, project creation and collaboration. Lesson plans, tutorials, scratch platforms and resources were supposed to be used by the regular teachers. The curriculum included animations, interactive artwork, storytelling and designing video games. In addition to 1,000 teachers receiving L-1 certification, Cloud IDs were supposed to be provided to 50,000 students and Google was supposed to conduct the examination. The teachers were supposed to be certified for the next five years anywhere in the world. Also, Google collaborated with the National Vocational and Technical Training Commission (NAVTTTC), through the Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority (TEVTA) and the Prime Minister’s Youth Skill Development Programme (PMYSDP). Inter-tech and metric-tech programs, as well as science tracks, were planned to be part of the programme. Afternoon skill programmes were to be started to attract those students who quit after matriculation. In partnership with Allied (an Australian company), Google set up a Chrome plant in Pakistan, meant to reduce the cost of an i5 processor from 250,000 rupees to around 80,000 rupees. Punjab’s first Free IT City was (reportedly) established at the Army Public School (Lahore), where modern IT courses were offered for free which covered topics like*

*Amazon, Graphics, and Corel-DRAW*<sup>226</sup>. Financial support for the 'school census' and 'reorganisation of the public schools' was requested from the Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office (FCDO), (U.K). and the World Bank (WB) and, reportedly, the GoPj secured about 670 billion rupees from the said donor for the above-mentioned activities<sup>227</sup>. As a result, whatever limited progress was made, was through direct or indirect international assistance. A couple of the donors are mentioned above. The moment these projects ended, much of that could not hold ground.

Precisely, International Financial Assistance (IFA), despite being significant in the education reform history of Pakistan, follows donors' priorities or at the most creates islands of excellence (while deepening the disparity further) but may not structurally transform the system and failed to eliminate chronic disparities and layers upon layers of anomalies<sup>228</sup>. The present effort and pompous claims of improving the infrastructure, quality, access and modernisation of education (including the provision of IT and other teaching-learning facilities) eventually met the same fate. Such experimentation and borrowed claims of education reforms and revolutions are nothing new for Pakistan.

Despite mega claims, massive funding and huge programmes launched with the assistance of DfID, EU, WB, and USAID, in the previous decade, progress around Education for All (EFA) and MDGs remained slow and limited. Gross and Net Enrolment Ratios (GER and NER) remained below or far below set targets, lower than the global average and even lower than the South Asian average. Disparities in terms of gender, rural-urban, urban-suburban, rich-poor and between

regions and districts remain persistently drastic. Pakistan's National Education Policy (2009) was also poised to increase its literacy rate to 86% by 2015. By up-scaling ongoing programmes of education and non-formal literacy, it set its goal for Universal Primary Education (UPE) along with achieving 'zero-drop-out-rates'. All that proved a distant dream. As assessed by the Economic Survey of Pakistan (2016-2017), the literacy rate was estimated to be 58% (even falling 2 percentage points from 60 pc in 2015). And according to the Education Statistics of Pakistan (2023-2024), as mentioned earlier too, Pakistan's literacy ratio still hangs around 62 pc.

On nearly all education indicators, Punjab has been performing relatively better than other provinces. Back in 2015, its GER was around 70 pc. DFID's data revealed that an increase of only 6 pc was recorded despite four years of financial assistance from 2011 to 2015. The agency reported that the primary-level completion rate in Punjab in 2014 was about 78 pc, a very low figure by international standards. In 2017, students' attendance at primary school increased to 92 pc. Despite some progress, the drop-out rate still remained higher. Some 13-16 pc of children were still out of school in the province<sup>229</sup>. Under the Education Voucher Scheme in Punjab (2006-2015) about 200,000 children in slum areas were enabled to attend private schools with the support of USA and Columbia University<sup>230</sup>. In the same province about 1300 Union Councils had no girls' high schools, and the current status is yet not clear.

Even official data painted a dismal picture of primary and secondary education in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa. Household Education Survey of 25 districts (2016-17), approximately put 1.8 million children (5-16 years of age) out-of-school. Since 2012, literacy stagnated at 53 pc. This means almost half the adults remained non-literate. NER and GER in the province, at the primary level, plummeted by 1 pc from 49 pc to 48 pc and from 63 pc to 62 pc respectively between 2015-16 and 2014-15<sup>231</sup>, despite millions of dollars of foreign funding.

Balochistan scored even worse, where the literacy rate barely stood at 56 pc, till 2017, counting those too who could only read and write their names. Women's literacy ratio remained as low as 23 pc, perhaps, the lowest in the world. 'With the existing pace of growth, Balochistan cannot achieve Education MDGs<sup>lxxxviii</sup> even in the next century'<sup>232</sup>, was believed about seven years ago. Post-primary drop-out remained glaringly high i.e. 60 pc. In 2017, the Gender Parity Index (GPI) as calculated by the Economic Survey of Pakistan placed Balochistan at 0.35 i.e. lower than Punjab (0.69), Sindh (0.61) and KP (0.49). Lagging behind on all counts of education Balochistan has been facing and still faces the challenges of equity, quality as well as rural-urban and ethnic divide. Similarly, the statistics for Sindh also were and still are disappointing, even under foreign education assistance. Its' NER at the primary level (I-V Grade) sat at 61.6 pc; at the middle level (VI-VIII Grade) at 35.7 pc and the tertiary level (IX-XII Grade) at 23.1 pc<sup>233</sup> back in 2017.

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<sup>lxxxviii</sup> Education Emergency Report - Pakistan, British Council (2014)

Overall NER stagnated at 48 pc by the middle of the last decade.

Sustainable Development Goal-4 prescribes state parties to *“ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”*. Under the current state of education, Pakistan is less likely to achieve SDG’s Education Goals and Targets. Responding to this Goal there are 10 targets comprising specific and measurable objectives addressing significant aspects of education along with key markers of progress. Unfortunately, Pakistan’s progress around them is disappointingly slow. Given multifaceted objectives, Pakistan is required to adopt new methodologies and assessment methods, as well as considerable improvement in the national reporting system, data accumulation and analysis. Engaging all stakeholders including the parliament, civil society, private sector and academia, a participatory framework is required to achieve the SDG’s Education Goals and Targets. A kind of SDG 4 technical working group and path tracking mechanisms has been developed by the KP’s Elementary and Secondary Education Department while Punjab, Sindh and Balochistan need to devise one. The School Education Department (Punjab) has gathered data on most of the indicators while the other three provinces need to align their data collection system with the SDG 4 indicators. The poor and patchy inter-departmental coordination needs to be improved to organise reliable data<sup>234</sup>. Precisely, aligning provincial budgetary allocation, and other plans and objectives with SDG Goal-4 and corresponding targets and indicators alone can help achieve desired outcome by 2030.

### **9.3. Enhancing quality and control or privatisation?**

Since 2004 privatisation of public schools and outsourcing of education is on its way across Pakistan, however, its pace is faster in Punjab. So far about. With the advent of the PMLN-led coalition government (2024-), the process has been kicked off once again. Despite criticism and queries put up from various quarters, the GoPj insists that it is not privatising schools or education so to speak rather reorganising the sector to improve management and efficiency along with striking teacher-student and infrastructure rationalisation. According to the Minister for Education (Punjab), Rana Sikandar Hayat (2024-), *“There are thousands of schools without students or teachers, or the teacher-student ratio is imbalanced or they are not functioning for one or another reason. It means there is something seriously wrong that needs fixing. Such schools need some sort of outsourcing or reorganisation through the Public Schools Reorganisation Programme (PSRP). So far over 13,377 schools have been outsourced. The School Education Department is supposed to monitor such schools and extend them a per-child subsidy. Parents need not to pay even a single penny. A fresh graduate man or woman enthusiastic to work in the education sector may apply and adopt a school. Such schools have also been handed over to interested individuals, celebrities, and known NGOs including Akehwat, Muslim Hands, Idara Taleem-o-Agahi (ITA) and The Citizens Foundation (TCF) etc. The measure is helping to minimise the teachers' demand, maximise employment and increase bringing OOSC back to schools”*<sup>235</sup>.

*“Each school adopted may generate 10-15 jobs, approximately 200,000 in total, including the young professionals looking for jobs. If the provincial GoPj tries to run all these schools itself, it will need an additional 100 billion rupees, at least, which is quite an arduous job. With this approach, we have saved billions of rupees. For instance, the*

*GoPj spends Rs 400 Billion to educate 10 Million children while it is going to spend Rs 40 Billion to educate 35,000 PEF and PIEMA children. We have addressed about half the problem of teachers shortage by outsourcing thousands of schools. This is an excellent model. Simultaneously the need for upgrading primary schools to elementary ones has also been addressed. The private sector, taking over a primary school, can easily upgrade it to the elementary (Grade VIII) level as the same teachers can teach the same students moving to the next grades. To upgrade a school, on the contrary, the government has to go through tedious procedures and allocation of additional funds”, supplements the Minister<sup>236</sup>.*

No denying the fact that there has always been the need for monitoring and management efficiency along with along with teacher-students rationalisation and rationalisation of expenditures, but how and how far the measure needs to go begs critical questions. The teacher-students ratio is slanted more at the primary level than at the secondary or higher secondary level. Approximately, there are 40 pc single-teacher primary schools in Balochistan while the same ratio stands around 20 pc in Sindh, which needs rationalisation. To reduce expenses and enhance efficiency, as goes the claim, the GoPj merged the PCTB, Punjab Examination Commission (PEC) and Quaid-i-Azam Academy for Educational Development (QAED) into one body in June 2024. A 5 members committee, overseeing the process, identified duplication of roles and proposed the integration strategy. Now the three-in-one department is headed by the Chief Minister as Chairperson, the Minister for School Education as Vice Chairperson, and the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) overseeing 3 Managing Directors (MDs). A new method of selecting CEOs, DEOs, and DDEOs has

also been devised. Nevertheless, the staff, thus laid off, is concerned about the effectiveness of the merger and improvement in the quality of education and complains about the lack of consultation<sup>237</sup>.

There has been a tendency, for a long, but the newly incumbent government (since February 2024), the government of Punjab in particular, is rapidly handing over public schools to not-for-profit and for-profit entities, individuals and groups arguing for better administration and quality education. Apprehensive of losing their jobs, the move, however, has been contended by the education management employees and teachers. Business interests will gradually override the education interests, they argue.

In early 2024, the Chief Minister (Maryam Nawaz) went a step further and advised the Provincial Minister for School Education, Rana Sikandar Hayat, and the Secretary, of Education, to hand over above 13000 non-performing public schools to the select NGOs within three months. Provisions of Tetra-pack flavoured milk up to class 5 were also complemented to boost enrolment. To oversee the performance of 136 non-performing schools, partnership with the private sector and identification of 'donors' to construct missing facilities, computer labs, libraries and transport was encouraged. The teachers' rationalisation process was supposed to be completed within three months. Plans to contact 'donors' for missing facilities in government schools and review proposals for partnership with NGOs were put up.

<b>Number of schools and Madrassas</b>		
<b>Level of Schools</b>	<b>Number of Schools</b>	<b>Enrolment of Children</b>
Total Primary Schools	136,687	206,4582
Total Secondary Schools	51,033	8,282,131
Total High Schools	39,389	413,563
Total Higher Secondary Schools	7,072	2,331,326
Religious Seminaries/Madrassas	64,417	334,692
Non-Formal Schools	25,106	—
Education Foundation Schools	10,087	—
Functional Higher Secondary Schools	7,648	—
<b>Total Teachers</b>	<b>2,139,631</b>	—

*Table 23: Number of schools and Madrassas<sup>lxxxix</sup>*

Whatever the reasoning, it is very clear that by privatising or outsourcing schools, the government is absolving itself from its fundamental responsibility of imparting free-of-charge education at least from age 5 to 16 as envisaged in Article 25 A. Outsourcing and privatisation measures are not to improve enrolment, equity, inclusion and quality education but to minimise the cost. It is the state's folly that a high-tech and market-driven workforce can be produced in this manner. No private entity is going to take care of children's needs for sports, computer labs, libraries, and Laboratories. Repair and maintenance of the infrastructure will suffer even

<sup>lxxxix</sup> Source: Education Statistics of Pakistan (2022-23)

more. Over time, privatisation and commercialisation trends will overpower the process even further. This piecemeal and unsystematic approach is never going to help. A fragmented system of education will be fragmented even further. Meant to liberate marginalised communities, drive social change, and ensure access to resources, opportunities, and economic growth, commercialised education may confine that only to the privileged classes. Multiple types and categories of schools are already there; now PEF and PIEMA initiatives further ensure that the GoP lacks a cohesive policy framework for quality education. Likewise, a uniform and standard system of assessment is missing within and between public and private categories of schools.

“While scrolling through my X feed, a video posted by Shehzad Roy, a renowned singer-turned-social worker, caught my attention and instantly became the highlight of my day. The short clip featured two contrasting scenes. Initially, it portrayed the frenzy surrounding admissions to top prestigious schools, with an ironic moment where a pregnant woman’s concern about her unborn child’s schooling was met with the response: “You’re too late for those schools.” This scene sheds light on the intense competition and demand for admission to elite private institutions in the country, where parents feel left behind even before their child is born. However, the narrative takes a turn as Roy then introduces Aleena, a student from a public school who secured second place in a chess competition against students from elite private schools. The powerful juxtaposition conveyed a resounding message: with proper resources and support, children from public schools can excel and outperform their privileged counterparts any day . . . The path forward demands a collective awakening, a recognition that the potential for

greatness lies within every child regardless of the school they attended. It is time for us to channel our resources and energy into uplifting public schools, providing them with the funding, infrastructure and support they so desperately need. It is time for us to shatter the stereotypes that have held us back for far too long and celebrate the achievements of students from all walks of life. Only then can we hope to build a future where education is not a privilege reserved for a select few, but a fundamental right accessible to all<sup>238</sup>. Faaiz Gillani (18 May 2024).

The fact is that there is hardly any difference in the quality and approach of PEF and PEIMA schools to low-fee private schools. Whosoever pays the fee (the government or the parents) does not make any difference. Due to underperformance, PEIMA itself cancelled the contracts of about 533 schools in June 2023. It means the performance improvement claims are not well-founded. Teachers' salaries in fully privatised PEF schools are quite low. The performance of outsourced school teachers is quite likely to come down as time goes by. Some of the PEF and PEIMA school recipients separately run their private schools. In other words, this is yet another business venture for them. Teachers' Union (Punjab) and Grand Teachers Alliance (GTA) have been vehemently critical of the move fearing their jobs' security, demoralisation and early retirement. The quality of teaching is more of a concern than cost, they argue<sup>239</sup>.

<b>PEF Schools</b>	<b>Voucher</b>
Primary Schools	550
Elementary Schools	600
Secondary Arts	900
Secondary Science	1100
Higher Secondary Arts Classes	1200
Higher Secondary Science Classes	1500
<b>PEIMA Schools</b>	<b>Voucher</b>
Individual Schools – Primary	650
Individual Schools - Elementary	700
Institutional/Organisational Schools - Primary	815
Institutional/Organisational Schools – Elementary	880
Schools left with the Govt. of Punjab – after outsourcing to PEF/PEIMA	52,484 – 25,000 = 27,484

*Table 24: PEF and PEIMA schools in Punjab*

<b>Level of Schools</b>	<b>Number of Schools</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Public Schools – Three Levels	176,184	49.3 %
Private Schools – Three Levels	137, 234	38.4 %
Share of Private Schools at Middle Level	87,829	64%
Share of Private Schools at H. Secondary level	78,223	57%
Madrassas (Religious Seminaries)	43,603	12 %
All Types: Public, Private, Other Schools	357,024	100%
Public School Teachers	889,888	(42 %)
Private Schools Teachers	1,249,746	(58 %)
Madrassa Teachers	No Idea	No Idea

*Table 25: Schools privatised and/or outsourced through PEF and PEIMA and the amount of voucher*

<b>Punjab Education Foundation (PEF) schools</b>	
Number of Schools with PEF	13,377
Target of PEF Schools by 2025	25,000
Children Enrolled with PEF Schools	2,954,578
Teachers at PEF Schools	114,816
Teachers average qualification at PEF Schools	Intermediate
<b>Punjab Education Initiative Management Authority (PEIMA) schools</b>	
Total Number of Schools with PEIMA	4,276
Children Enrolled with PEIMA Schools	619,238
Teachers with PEIMA Schools	20,847

*Table 26: PEF and PEIMA schools*

In late (October 2024), the GoPj arranged competence and training needs assessment (TNA) exercises for the on-the-job public school teachers in the province. Suspecting it as a move to further privatisation and dismissal (teachers' rationalisation in official terms), teachers' unions slated it across the province. Quality education activists took it to be the step to hone the knowledge and skills of the primary, secondary and higher secondary school teachers. Nonetheless, they too thought that while the privatisation move was on, its timing propped up suspicion among teachers. Teachers' unions on the other hand rejected it summarily. Locking many test centres in defiance, they took to the streets. Grand Teachers Alliance, Punjab Teachers Union, Educators' Association, Primary Middle Secondary Teachers Association, and SCS Teachers Union, opposed the test, vowing to not participate despite the official warning of

dismissing those not showing up. It is a pretext to terminate 40,000 teachers, they argue. *‘For having taught between 10 to 25 years and possessing advanced qualifications, the test was unnecessary and insulting. If such tests were necessary for teachers, what it was not the same for other professionals?’* Under the garb of TNA, they alleged, *the government was going to facilitate ‘blue-eyed’ NGOs and private entities while offering valuable school land and assets worth billions of rupees’*. So much so that the teachers’ union threatened a long march against the chief minister<sup>240</sup>.

Gathering from across the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province primary school teachers were up in protest in early November 2024, demanding their upgradation from BPS-12 to BPS-14 of various cadres, supposedly benefitting about 51,736 teachers. *“Cabinet division, they argued, rolled that decision back in January 2023, but it was revoked by the PML-N’s government on the excuse of the shortage of funds, and legal and administrative anomalies as pointed out by the finance department”*. In August 2024, the provincial cabinet reversed the PFI’s government’s decision to upgrade over 130,000 positions of schoolteachers in the province, they complained.



Picture 18: Teacher Teaching Students<sup>xc</sup>

Azizullah, the president of the All Primary Teachers Association (KP) said that “thousands of teachers were taking part in the protest. The teachers in fact intended an overnight sit-in in but the Minister for Elementary and Secondary Education Department, Shahram Khan Tarakai (2024-) forced the DEOs not to allow that. *“The finance department’s claim that primary school teachers upgradation would cost Rs.30 Billion per annum was unfounded as they had calculated the annual cost of the move to be around Rs 8 to 9 Billion”*, he stressed. Their negotiations with the education department and district administration remained inconclusive. Reportedly, the

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<sup>xc</sup> Courtesy Daily Dawn. 12 Oct. 2024. ©Dawn

provincial Education Department somehow agreed but the Finance Department was reluctant. Around 25,000 primary schools across the province remained on strike for the whole week. *“If the demands were not met, they would march towards the provincial assembly building and stage a sit-in there. They would not succumb to the pressure of lodging FIR against them by the provincial government”*, they warned<sup>241</sup>.



*Picture 19: Primary school teachers from across KP stage a sit-in near Jinnah Park in Peshawar ©Daily Dawn*

To sum up, public school education is in serious crisis all over the country. Despite tall claims of the provincial governments, the quality of education is on the decline – save for a few exceptions. There is a long-standing stand-off between teachers and the management. On the other hand, teachers are also not giving their best to the sector. Outsourcing and privatisation are also unlikely to elicit anticipated benefits. Without a sincere effort by the provincial governments to assume education as their constitutional responsibility, the situation may turn from bad to worse.

#### **9.4. New promises, renewed failures**

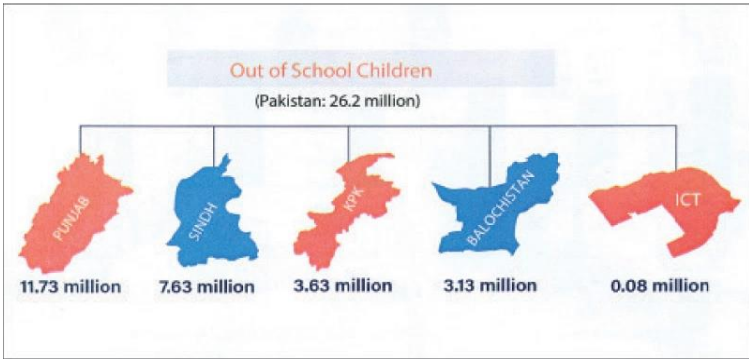
The change of hands in power in February 2024, five years down the road, brought nothing new save renaming SNC into NCP and throwing around eloquent pronouncements as usual. The number of the OOSC, the ever-increasing strength of madrassa-going children, the dilapidated infrastructure in the sector, the persisting problem of ghost schools and ghost teachers, the teachers and the students absenteeism, the paucity of schools comparing their need, inequity and gender inequality, the lack of teaching aid and required facilities and most importantly the meagre budgetary allocation did not show any remarkable progress over the last couple of decades. Facing multiple inadequacies and deficit amenities, hundreds of thousands of schools, mainly in rural areas, are getting closed across the country. Clad in new costumes, the NCP (like SNC) is unlikely to be effectively implemented until the sector's vital problems are resolved. Under baseless claims and empty political statements, public schools will continue struggling with insufficient development and growth opportunities widening the gap between privileged and underprivileged classes more than ever before.

Over 3,500 schools remain non-functional in Balochistan marred by a shortage of teachers and other vital services. Since February 2024 (when the new government took oath to office), about 542 schools were shut down bringing the total number to 3,694 across all 35 districts. About 15,096 government schools in the province held 48,841 teachers with a deficit of around 16,000 staff – of which the majority

of them were the teaching staff. Pishin, Khuzdar, and Kalat districts hold the highest number of non-functional schools. Reportedly, the government was planning to recruit 9,496 teachers to fill the vacant positions<sup>242</sup>, but of late no news was heard.

Covering 313,418 schools, 54,870,964 students through 2,139,631 teachers an eminent report was published by the Pakistan Institute of Education (PIE) in January 2024 termed as Education Statistics Pakistan (2021-2022). The report illustrated a harrowing picture of the state of education. From elementary to intermediate level, there were 227,506 schools, accommodating 42,576,130 students with about 1,625,747 teachers across all levels. There were a total of 313,418 public and private schools – including 2,088 other public categories – across all levels in the school education system. In total, there were 313,418 public and private schools altogether including 2,088 charities but government schools across the whole country. The number of OOSC hovered around 26.21 million constituting about 39 pc of the total school-going-age-children. Though the percentage fell from 44 pc in 2016-17 to 39 pc in 2021-22 but it is still exorbitant.

Province-wise, around 11.73 million children were out of school in Punjab, 3.63 million in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 3.13 million from Balochistan and 7.63 million from Sindh while 0.08 million children were absent from schools even in Islamabad's Capital Territory. Fraught with resource deficit, missing facilities, inadequate pupil-teacher ratio, gender inequity, unavailability and inaccessibility of schooling, there would hardly be any problem that the sector would not be afflicted with.



Picture 20: Pakistan education statistics (2021-2022), 2024<sup>xci</sup>

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<sup>xci</sup> Source: Pakistan Institute of Education (PIE).

The status of vital facilities across Pakistan						
Category	Access to Potable Water <sup>i</sup>	Toilets in Primary Schools	Electricity in Schools	Boundary Walls in Schools	Out-of-School Children	Overall School Count
<b>Punjab</b>	High access	99% with access	Nearly universal	High access	11.73 million	227,506 institutions
<b>Sindh</b>	61 % of primary schools	57% with access	38 % of schools	59 % of schools	7.63 million	Data included in the total count
<b>KP</b>	High Access	93 % with access	High Access	High Access		
<b>Balochistan</b>	23 % of primary schools	33 % with access	15 % of schools	39 % of schools	3.13 million	
<b>AJK</b>	31 % of primary schools	42 % with access	21 % of schools	31 % of schools		
<b>Gilgit Baltistan</b>	63 % of primary schools	72 % with access	44 % of schools	61 % of schools		
<b>ICT</b>	High Access	High Access	Universal access	High Access		NA

Table 27: The status of vital facilities across Pakistan

<b>Pakistan Education Statistics (2021-2022)</b>	
<b>Literacy Rate<sup>i</sup></b>	<b>Overall:</b> 59% <b>Male:</b> 70% <b>Female:</b> 46%
<b>Enrolment Rates</b>	<b>Primary School (Ages 5-9):</b> 77% overall <b>Secondary School (Ages 10-14):</b> 50% overall <b>Tertiary Education:</b> Less than 10% overall
<b>Dropout Rate</b>	<b>Primary Level:</b> Approximately 44% of students drop out before completing primary education <sup>i</sup>
<b>Gender Disparity<sup>i</sup></b>	<b>Primary School Enrolment :</b> 60% boys vs. 54% girls <b>Secondary School Enrolment :</b> Larger gap, with girls significantly underrepresented in rural areas
<b>School Infrastructure</b>	<b>Basic Facilities:</b> 40% of schools lack safe drinking water <b>Electricity:</b> 30% of schools lack electricity, particularly in rural regions
<b>Student-Teacher Ratio<sup>i</sup></b>	<b>Primary School Level:</b> Average 37:1 <b>Secondary School Level:</b> Varies widely, with overcrowding common in urban schools
<b>Education Budget<sup>i</sup></b>	<b>Annual Allocation:</b> Around 1.7% of GDP, below the UNESCO-recommended 4-6%
<b>ICT Access<sup>i</sup></b>	<b>Internet Access in Schools:</b> Only 54% of schools have internet access
<b>Special Education</b>	<b>Students with Disabilities:</b> Less than 5% have access to inclusive educational resources, due to limited infrastructure and trained support

*Table 28: Pakistan education statistics (2021-2022), report. published 2024*

<b>Indicators and key deficiencies of in the public education system</b>	
<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Key Deficiencies</b>
<b>Access to Education</b>	Urban-rural enrollment gap persists. Girls face greater barriers to education, especially in rural areas. Limited school options in rural regions.
<b>Literacy Rates</b>	The national literacy rate is below global standards. Significant gender and rural-urban literacy disparities.
<b>Quality of Education</b>	Learning outcomes are low, with an emphasis on rote learning. High dropout rates, especially in secondary education.
<b>Infrastructure</b>	Many schools lack basic facilities like water and sanitation. Overcrowded classrooms in urban areas affect learning conditions.
<b>Teacher Quality</b>	Limited teacher training and professional development. Teacher absenteeism is an ongoing issue, particularly in rural areas.
<b>Curriculum and Reforms</b>	Single National Curriculum (SNC) aims to unify standards but faces adaptation challenges. Slow shift from rote learning to analytical skills in classrooms.
<b>Technological Access</b>	The digital divide impacts rural areas significantly. Limited access to IT resources affects digital literacy, especially in remote regions.
<b>Inclusive Education</b>	Insufficient support for students with disabilities. Limited implementation of inclusive education policies in schools.
<b>Funding</b>	Education funding is below the recommended levels. Dependence on donor funding for infrastructure and resources.
<b>Policy Recommendations</b>	Increase education budget. Improve teacher training and accountability. Strengthen monitoring to ensure policy implementation.

*Table 29: Indicators and key deficiencies in the public education system*

The report demonstrates poorer learning outcomes of the students in Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and in the National Achievement Test (NAT) in the year 2021-2022. At the primary level, the teacher-pupil ratio makes up 39, which means there is one instructor for 39 students on average and the pupil-school ratio across the country is about 162. The report said that the overall survival rates up to Grade V in the country was 77 pc.

The results from key assessments conducted by the National Assessment Wing (NAW), specifically the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and the National Achievement Test (NAT) pointed out the urgent need to improve the learning outcomes of the students. Dwindling attention span and decreased capacity to memorise, frequently reported these days, also obstruct their scientific learning and logical analysis. Student meditative habits and optimum use of the internet and IT may enhance their learning abilities. The official report is an eye-opener for the ministers, education management and policymakers to prioritise and reform education in every single respect<sup>243</sup>.

## **Chapter 10**

### **Diversity, Inclusion and Minority Rights**

**I**mbued in the notion of Islam and homogenous nationhood, the self-contained ideology permeates every nook and corner of the education system – irrespective of the socio-cultural, religious and linguistic diversity enculturating Pakistan. The monolithic nation-building project that it is averse to withdraw from, is inherently exclusionary and otherising, at times leading to racism and prejudice. Though SNC and NCP have attempted to sublimise the ideological undercurrents in social science subjects, but where the tradition has been shrunk in one arena, it has simultaneously been sprawled and overblown in certain other arenas. Inculcating faith and patriotism through SNC and NCP is like pouring the old wine into the new bottle – failing to understand that modern nationalism flourishes with inclusion, diversity and equitable development.

Minorities' population is estimated to stand at around 3.61 pc (Hindus: 2.17 pc; Christians: 1.37 pc; Ahmadiyya: 0.07 pc; and Zoroastrians + Bahais + Sikhs + Buddhists: 0.04 pc) in the 2023 Census<sup>244</sup>. Despite being overwhelmed by the numbers or percentages, we need to understand that diversity and inclusion play a vital role in nation-building rather than undermining and undercounting. Religion is but the people's jurisdiction, not of the state. Let children believe and practice whatever they or their parents wish them to. Not a

majoritarian singular faith – but esteemed values like democracy, equality of citizenship, human rights, economic development, social justice, and prosperity that may serve as a binding force and steer the country forward. Unfortunately, SNC and SNC-born MTBs fail to promote these values – contrary to the voluminous speeches made by the ministers and the representatives of SNC. NCP did try to strike certain changes and could not make much of the stride.

Through SNC, the PTI Government has, nevertheless, corrected a historical wrong by substituting Ethics or Islamiyat with the teachings of their own faith to minority kids. It is worth admiring that Christians, Hindus, Zoroastrians, Sikhs, Bahais, Buddhists, Kalasha and Hazara<sup>xcii</sup> children are now going to study a course devised by their own experts. Not yet clear, how far the textbooks are developed to the satisfaction of the respective communities. Erstwhile they were compelled to study either Islamiyat or Islamic ethics under the garb of Ethics. They are no longer bound to sit in the Islamiyat's or Ethics' class for they are not going to be examined in it. The government, however, needs to recruit enough number of teachers from the above-mentioned faith communities to materialise the plan. Also, several other steps need to be taken, like the provision of equal respect and enabling the school environment because ensuring rights and

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<sup>xcii</sup> Featuring uniquely, Hazara is a small community originating from Hazarajat (Afghanistan) and believed to be an offshoot of ancient Mongoloid mixed stock of people. Concentrated in Quetta and Islamabad, they speak Hazargi language (a Persian variety) and almost all of them follow a Shi'ite tradition of Islam. They are not necessarily a religious minority but in ethnolinguistic terms, they might be defined as a minority in limited sense of the term.

equality is a larger act than a couple of symbolic gestures of acknowledging the existence of other faiths.

### **10.1. Extending rights by one hand and confiscating by another**

A nation's progress hinges on the character and capacity of whom Martin Luther King termed as "creative dedicated minority"<sup>245</sup>. In this very context, it is pertinent to mention what Article 22 (1) of the CoP states: "*No person attending any educational institution shall be required to receive religious instruction, or take part in any religious ceremony, or attend religious worship, if such instruction, ceremony or worship relates to a religion other than his own*". In the same vein, Article 20 (1) of the CoP guarantees that, "*every citizen shall have the right to freely profess, practice and propagate his religion*"<sup>246</sup>.

Affirming the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and being a signatory of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) too, Pakistan is obliged to comply with UDHR's Article 26 (2) stating that, "*Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance, and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and according to Article 26(3), "Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education<sup>xciii</sup> that shall be given to their children*"<sup>247</sup>. In the words of Article 18 of the ICCPR, "*Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to*

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<sup>xciii</sup> Save an education of violence and extremism.

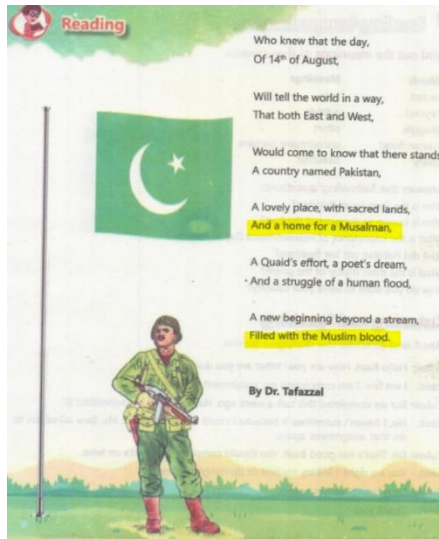
*manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching; and “No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice”.*

Despite acknowledging minority children’s right not to study Islamiyat, it is amply demonstrated in the previous section that they are, albeit through compulsory social science subjects and teachers’ interpretations. There were certain elements who criticised for illustrating Christians, Hindus, Sikhs or Parsis observing their faith within their own places of worship in a course book designed for elementary classes<sup>248</sup>. Faith education should be left to parents. Ideally, ‘the textbooks need to be secular as they are meant to resolve human problems, worldly needs and mundane issues of life, livelihood and general social relations apart from an aspiration to understand and make use of natural phenomena and forces. *“If Islam or Christianity or any other faith, so to speak, is taught at schools, it may create the semblance of a religious seminary<sup>xvii</sup>”*, argues the Priest of a Cathedral Church in Multan.

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<sup>xvii</sup> KII with the priest Naeem Javaid of Cathedral of Virgin Mary, Multan.

<sup>xcv</sup>There is more than one way to violate constitutional provisions. Whereas the current transformative stream of curriculum, extends minority-communities their right to study their own faith texts or teachings instead of Islamiyat or Ethics, in many a case, it either sustains or intensifies Islamic studies as part of the social science subjects. English, Urdu, Pakistan Studies, Social Studies, General Knowledge and other such subjects categorically instruct students about the faith of Islam. The subject of Urdu Language and Literature, in particular, seems to be a kind of supplementary Islamiyat. So much so, a statement, Islamic maxim or examples are sprinkled here and there in the margins of physical science subjects as well. While in the compulsory subjects, even if the topic is not religious, examples resort



Picture 21: Source: English 6, PCTB Lahore, March 2024

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<sup>xcv</sup> (With thank to Kashif Hameed for identifying the problem and sharing the image).

back to Islamic principles or Islamic history. Under the situation, how is it possible for a non-Muslim student to skip her class or avoid studying Islamic content as part of other subjects? Obviously, she has to sit in exams and get through. What else could it be called if not alternative coercion – a clear violation of Article 22 (1) of the CoP and the provisions of UDHR and Minority Rights Declaration, proscribing direct or indirect persuasion or instruction of the dominant faith to those who profess a faith other than Islam.

Clearly while maintaining Islamic lessons built in, in social studies, SNC or NCP compels all minority students to not only study but also commemorate and reproduce the same in exams. To some of the critics, the central government, by superimposing SNC or NCP, not only intends to infiltrate its agenda of re-Islamisation, as evident by its several other acts and attitudes but rather the perennial agenda of nationalism, patriotism and its myopic worldview too – all through the vehicle of the syllabi<sup>249</sup>. In a situation where a public school's environment is already regressive, teachers render it further parochial while preaching or promoting excessive Islamisation. It must also be noted that in 2021, around 70 pc of the blasphemy allegations were made only in the province of Punjab and the rest in the rest of the country. Some of the allegations involved students and teachers too. Therefore, measures as mentioned above, may carry repercussions on religious tolerance, cultural diversity and the rule of law.

Reportedly, PCTB has already failed to implement NCC's decision to teach five minority faiths in place of ethics in 2020-2021. In Punjab, the 18<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment is being violated at least in the case of SNC/NCP as PCTB is

implementing the directives of the Ministry of Federal Education as it is, without asserting its autonomy in the area of education.

Addressing similar concerns Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) and a couple of other Civil Society Organisations have submitted a petition to the Supreme Court of Pakistan – whose verdict is yet to be awaited. Similarly, the landmark judgment made by Justice Tassaduq Hussain Jilani (2014) commands respective governments to implement all constitutional provisions regarding the rights of Non-Muslim minorities. In an appeal submitted to the Apex Court (by HRCP and CSJ), the One-Man Commission (OMC) set up by the Supreme Court, known as the Shoaib Suddle Commission, also sought the exclusion of overtly Islamic topics from the compulsory English, Urdu and General Knowledge subjects. The Commission also found it violating the Article 22 (1) of the CoP<sup>250</sup>. Additionally, in response to a letter written by the Chairman Pakistan Minority Teachers Association (PMTA), Anjum J. Paul, to the Shoaib Suddle Commission, the Chairman of the Commission wrote a letter to the Secretary, MoFEPT (dated 2.2.2022)<sup>xcvi</sup> to explain, ‘why were they awarding extra 50 marks to the Muslim students in return of studying Holy Quran?’ How were they going to accommodate minority students or save them from this structural discrimination under the same parameters? And what, if any, parallel arrangement, had they developed?

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<sup>xcvi</sup> The letter is written to the Secretary Education, MoFEPT, on February 2, 2022 (No. 1/1-2019 -CII-SCN) in response to the letter written to the honourable Chairman OMC Mr, Shoaib Suddle on 26-01-2022 on the Letterhead of Shoaib Suddle Commission.

In a heavily Islamic environment, that the new curriculum was quite likely to generate in schools, minority faith students naturally perceived themselves to be alien as if they were in the wrong place with a wrong mindset with an inappropriate worldview. A democratic, plural, diversified and secular social aura, already too thin in our schools, will turn even thinner. Where there is already a strong tendency to preach or influence minority students or teachers to embrace Islam, enriching the Islamic milieu is further discarding them in the margins like odd ones.

Ironically, a politically manipulated position was adopted by the National Commission for Minorities (NCM). Being naïve and possessing non-statutory status, the Commission, distanced itself from the OMC which recommended the GoP to remove Islamic content from all the compulsory subjects save Islamiyat. As stated by Chairman NCM, Chela Ram Kewlani, *“the Commission did not agree with the OMC’s recommendation of shifting the entire Islamic content from compulsory subjects like English, Urdu, General Knowledge and Social Studies to Islamiyat. It was rather a means to create interfaith harmony,”*. In other words, to NCM, the newly introduced composition and content of SNC (including the heavily tilted SNC towards Islam) was perfectly fine with them. *“We endorse SNC unanimously,”* argued the members of MRC. On the other hand, ‘the Minority Panel of the OMC suggested to move religious content from social science subjects to Islamiyat alone. The Chairman NCM, however, insisted that the Commission was the only legitimate forum to accept or not to accept a position adopted by the OMC because it was the

collective body representing Hindus, Sikhs, Christians, Parsis and Kalashas of the country<sup>251</sup>.

The handpicked and non-statutory status of the commission and the insidious influence of the executive members speak volumes about this self-defeating position. Dominated by Muslim members of the councils and other ministries<sup>xcvii</sup>, the MRC fails to comprehend the problems of the minority communities and their children being educated and socialised in a Muslim-majority country. It is less a problem of faith, and more of promoting diversity, plurality and inclusion to inculcate equal citizenship and civic solidarity.

Created without any statutory provisions unlike the National Commission on Human Rights (NCHR)<sup>252</sup>, National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) and National Commission on Child Rights (NCRC), the NCM has become a toothless body scared of putting forth their own rights even as enshrined in the Constitution of Pakistan.

Of late, NCC Director Maryam Chughtai (2019-2022) seemed agreeing with multiple problems identified by the independent critics and educationists including excessive religiosity, discrimination against minorities, gender biases, grammatical mistakes, extended exercises and poor quality of model textbook publications<sup>253</sup>. Given contradictory

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<sup>xcvii</sup> Official Members of the MRC: Chairman of the CII, The secretary of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, A representative from the Ministry of Interior, A representative from the Ministry of Law and Justice, A representative from the Ministry of Human Rights, A representative from the MoFEPT. Non-official Members of MRC: One representative from each minority community i.e. Hindu, Christian, Sikh, Parsi and Kalasha.

statements issued from a range of official corners, as demonstrated in several sections of this book, nothing seems trust worthy. Slogan mongering and tall statements are and have been common with every new administrative and political set up in the arena of education. Currently, there are no signs of improvement in public education on any count.

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