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What do you think the fundamental role of education is? And is 'nation building' a part? Is ensuring national literacy the job of the government?

Nation building is not an essential part of education because number of education initiatives exists that are transnational or that are not at national level so we cannot say that those are any less initiative but building a sense of individual and collective is a big part of education. So, whether a country or multiple countries or a region like the EU for instance are building a sense of collective which is transnational they do; education does impart a sense of several different identities on to students. And I would say it is not an essential part of education but it is well recognized practice within education.

Yes, this is job of government as article 25A of our constitution which guarantees every child between the age of 5 to 15 a right to free and compulsory education is a good thing.

what about the bureaucratic hurdles in providing education?

In Pakistan like any other developing country and Pakistan being also a high population developing country there are several, dozens of implementation challenges, of which an inefficient bureaucracy is one of the main one and as you look at countering these challenges weather it the capacity of teachers or the broken assessment and examination system that is only promoting road memorization or its missing facilitates or it is an outdated curriculum, these are all some of the very big challenges of which bureaucratic inefficiencies is one and any kind of education reform program which does not also have a plan for successful implementation is, in my opinion, incomplete.

Before I ask you what is single national curriculum, what is your motivation to say yes to challenging thing?

I grew up in Pakistan, I went to United States for my higher education, I did my undergraduate, masters and doctorate from the US. I was there for 15 years but not one day out of those 15 years I feel that I did not want to return to Pakistan. My brothers have also returned to Pakistan after finishing their higher education. And we come from a patriotic family, so, I believe that this country has given me a lot, I have accomplished a lot at an individual level because I grew up here and I felt it was

responsibility to return and try and give back. So, when I returned my first project was to setup the School of Education at LUMS which had very successful launch and is doing well. They say opportunity knocks but you have to be listening. So, I was in a right place at the right time, so, when the opportunity opened up I felt this it was a calling and it would have pain or perhaps unethical to say no when you have such an opportunity to impact, when you have the training to have the impact from some of the best universities and instructors of around the world and then to sort of say no would have been, would have hit at my affiliation with the collective, which is Pakistan.

In your opinion, is the motive and idea of the government behind SNC what is its scope and how do you think that it can be the right thing to do at this stage?

Single National Curriculum is a name of a large scale education reforms exercise. They include reforms agenda of four parts; improving the core standards of education at every learning level, improving the quality of textbooks available to our children, improving the capacity of teachers who are supposed to teach this curriculum and reforming the assessment system which is currently based on rote memorization and taking it towards a concept based learning. So, the goal of this initiative, this project, is to take a comprehensive and holistic view of education reforms and to start with that we switch the foundational piece for all of this work and the foundational piece is to identify the target, what is the destination we want to end up at which is setting of the core standards by subject and grade and learning level that we require every child in Pakistan to come up to. The next three parts of it, this is the easiest part because here you are setting an aspiration, it also quite difficult but compared to other parts this is easier. The rest of it where you have to align the rest of the sector according to these learning standards in true letter and spirit that is to intervene much harder but Pakistan is not the only country in the world with these challenges and with the will of civil society and political parties across different political ideologies I think it is very possible that over the next 8 – 10 years we can have this holistic education reform come to flourishing and give some real results.

Bringing private schools to them to SNC is actually downgrading them, rather improving the standards of the public schools, what do you think do you think this?

So the question was that private sector was already providing good quality education, what was the rationale behind bringing their standards down and not bringing up the standards of the low performing schools. Yes, that is what generally people are talking about. I just want to have your take on this. The government would have brought the standards down of good quality schools if it has restricted private schools that you cannot teach above these learning levels or these learning standards. If they have said that you can only teach a counting up to 1,000 to second graders and counting up to 10,000 to third graders because that is the level public sector is at. Instead, what the government did was, they said you have to teach at least counting up to 1,000 to this level at least counting to this number by the higher grade level. So, when you say at least, it means you can teach up to the million if you have a good school, smart children, good teachers, it's a minimum standard. And this idea of having core curriculum or a minimum standard is very well recognized idea around the world.

So, the 'at least' part is the backbone of this reform which has been taken up around the world, it's not like that the course standard topic is, you know, an alien idea or something. Now, this is what it would have been look alike if the government have brought the standards down, firstly, if it had not set a floor and it had set a ceiling that you cannot teach 1,001 above 1,000, that would have been bringing down. Secondly, what could have been happened that if the government had said that these are the standards and exams will be taken this year on these standards and the state will be conducting the exams. The exams system is not something that the government has gotten into yet. For instance, the elite schools were worried that they have to teach Islamiyat and General Knowledge in Urdu, plus government would have said that at the end of the year, the second grader will be examined on the second level Urdu standards and the third grader will be tested on the third level Urdu standards and the fifth grader will be tested on the basis of fifth level Urdu and Islamiyat standards. There is no such thing. In fact, second, third, fourth, and fifth graders are being examined on their schools' level by their teachers. Additionally, Punjab Education Commission has removed the of the examination of fifth and eighth grade, which was the practice in the past. So, if the government had gone beyond that we have introduced a minimum standard and we will be testing on these standards instantaneously then you are expecting something unreasonable. All I am saying that this is something that has been, I think the government could have, may be, communicated this better that these are the procedures that we would not be following and these are the steps that we will be following.

Is there miscommunication about the SNC?

Miscommunication is something that shows the wrong information, government did not say that the exams will be on these standards from the next year, oh! Sorry, that was a miscommunication. Government announced some minimum standards over and over again, ministers in KP, Punjab, and Federal; where these reforms are being implemented they said over and over again that these are the minimum standards. There was no assessment policy, so if those things were, you know, propaganda were spread around it that they are bringing the quality of education down then that propaganda does not stand in the face of facts because these are minimum standards. Yes, their implementation could have been better, there could have been things that could have been done better. But in a country like Pakistan with such a scale of the problems, it takes time to get things into the field and get them right, and government is very open to making the amendments.

Do you see any weaknesses of SNC?

Yeah, I mean, I think that the SNC needs to bring in more people to express their opinion because when the SNC was being made a lot of people participated but when it got realised a lot more people wanted to participate, so, I think that is definitely a learning that we can add more voices into the fold and secondly, the SNC, currently has been designed for up till fifth grade and there has been overloading. So, if we are going to certain amendments to it, I would like to move some of the content, all of which is now required into elective content because you want to give some more space to child and to school to add on to more personalized content, conceptualized content, contextualized content. So, critique of overloading I think is a relevant one and critique that has come around religion is not a critique of a curriculum document, it's not a critique of the standards so, it no standard in a Science curriculum that is talking about any kind of religious education. One set of textbook and the government has approved thousands of text books as, you know, across provinces as good textbooks they have NOCs. One set of textbooks has in some subject has content on religious personalities in Urdu and English, which is not religious instruction that teaches you the religious practices, which we call worships. It is just that if you teach about crusades you do not become Christian, you learn about Asoka you do not become Buddhist, so, if you learn about Prophet or a Caliph you do not necessarily become that religion, you do not convert to that religion. But even so, that critique on the textbooks and those textbooks can be looked at again also that if there is something that can be done. But I think the main concern is that we need more voices included, even more voices included some overloading of content needs to be reduced.

It has been said that SNC will equalizing all social classes, so, how do you see that?

I think socioeconomic disparity exists in every society. But in Pakistan this disparity exists to a very large extent and it can definitely be reduced, I think the SNC reforms can bring a more people closer to a better education than we are currently providing. I do not know how equalization is that easy or even possible in the most developed societies we have.

How do you think that government intervention was really needed in all this?

Well, I mean the government intervention for the last several decades have led to a very broken system, so, the question is not of government intervention, state health infrastructure and education infrastructure, it is like, if the state decided to fix its hospitals you won't call it an intervention. Or even, forget states' hospitals, let's say; the state set minimum standards for medical college across the country and said that whether you are a public or private or whatever medical college you cannot skip the subject of anatomy, you cannot skip surgery you have to teach these. So that would not be a; why would state intervention be needed. The state takes ownership of its education institution and the lack of an intervention in an intervention too.

Do you think that use of Urdu language in the curriculum is a very good idea in the long run? Given that we want our students to participate in international conferences and international platforms. The policy is that half the subjects are in English and the other half are in Urdu or in the regional language. So, this question which was spread as another kind of propaganda that the Prime Minister is against English just does not hold in the face of facts because the SNC that he launched, launched half the subjects in English. So, just to say that he is against English is not based upon facts.

And the question of long term, the curriculum for sixth to twelve grade has not been released yet. And plan for that is to keep a very high priority on English, so, to assume that, people have been saying that all schools have turned into Urdu medium schools, is not correct. Schools have turned into a bilingual school, which is you and I are. If I started speaking in English or Urdu or a mix of both, you would understand. So, bilingual school is representation of who we are and many of our kids a multilingual. There is nothing wrong with making schools bilingual.

Will SNC be implemented in the madrassahs too?

Madaris have been asked to get registered. Multiple governments have tried to do and have not succeeded. But this government is making a push for it that not only do they have to register but they also have to follow the curriculum of a regular public school and if they want to teach additional content of religious nature, that is fine. It is the same things that you say to an elite private school that you have to meet a minimum standard it cannot be that you are a Madrasa student and you cannot count upto 1,000 to a certain grade level above that it is fine. Mr. Muraad Ras also tweeted this that no one is exempt from this. So, this is for public, private and Madaris.

How are you planning when SNC launch in the whole country particularly in the rural areas where there are a lot of ghost schools? Are you planning to upgrade the abilities of the teachers as well and have an eye on the ghost schools?

Yes, like I said that this is a four prompt reform process and in that the capacity building of teachers is a whole domain, so, yes we plan to do that and how we plan to do that is by bringing in a lot of education technology initiatives to use resources in the classrooms. It will not fix every single classroom because many of our classrooms do not have the facilities or even electricity or internet but it will bring more teachers in the code of being able to deliver the quality education.

There has been lot of criticism on SNC, how do you cope to that? And what is your message for the people who criticize?

No, I appreciate that criticism. I try to listen for what they are saying rather than how they are saying it or who is saying it and I have learnt a lot from that criticism and many time the packaging may be rough but the message is good and I would like my critics to continue what they are doing.

Perfect! Thank you very much Ma'am.

