

ANALYSING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF NATIONAL KNOWLEDGE COMMISSION

Tanu Shivnani

Research Scholar

Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi.

Received Feb. 15, 2017

Accepted March 14, 2017

ABSTRACT: *This paper attempts to analyse the recommendations given by national knowledge commission in order to improve the sad state of affairs of education in our country. In order to make education inclusive and available to last person, few progressive recommendations were proposed but they are not free from problems. In this light, the paper has critically examined it.*

KEY WORDS: *knowledge, innovation, Intellectual property rights, panchayat, translation, language, network*

INTRODUCTION

“Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.” - William B. Yeats

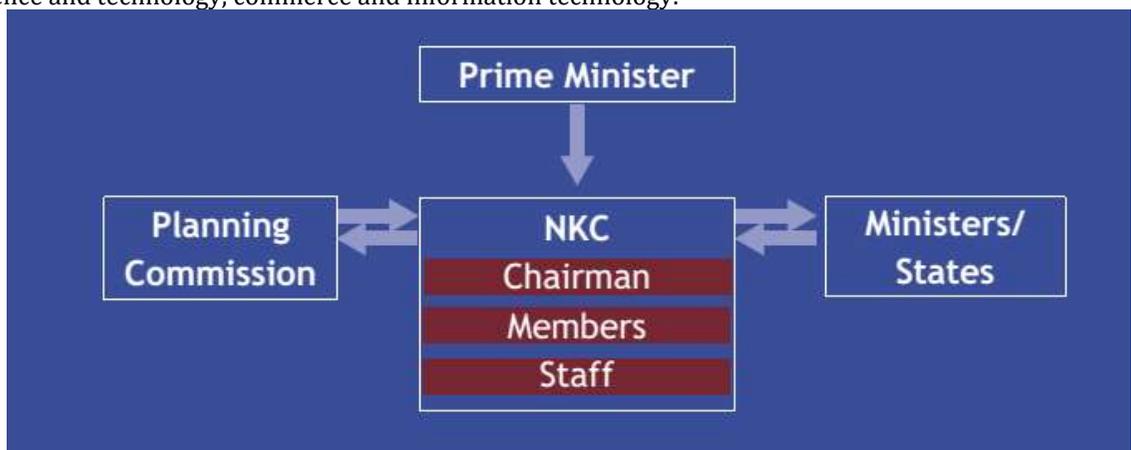
The 21st century has been acknowledged as “knowledge century”. Information, innovation, education, research, learning are required to survive in a competitive environment. National Knowledge commission is an Indian think tank formed on 13th June, 2005 by then Prime Minister of India, Dr. Manmohan Singh. It was given a time frame of three years to achieve its objectives.

It is formed with the view to empower and increase human capability of its citizens through knowledge. It is also pointed out that India has major demographic advantage with largest pool of youngsters in the world. India needs to harness its tremendous potential.

Although various commissions have come up with its recommendation from time to time, this commission came in early 2000s with the aim to have a knowledge based society through improving existing systems and creating new avenues of knowledge.

ORGANISATION AND MEMBERS

It is a six member committee including the chairman where members work on a part time basis without remuneration. Members can seek assistance from technical support staff. Planning commission handles its budgetary and planning decisions. National Steering group is headed by ministers of HRD, agriculture, Science and technology, commerce and information technology.



Source:NKC

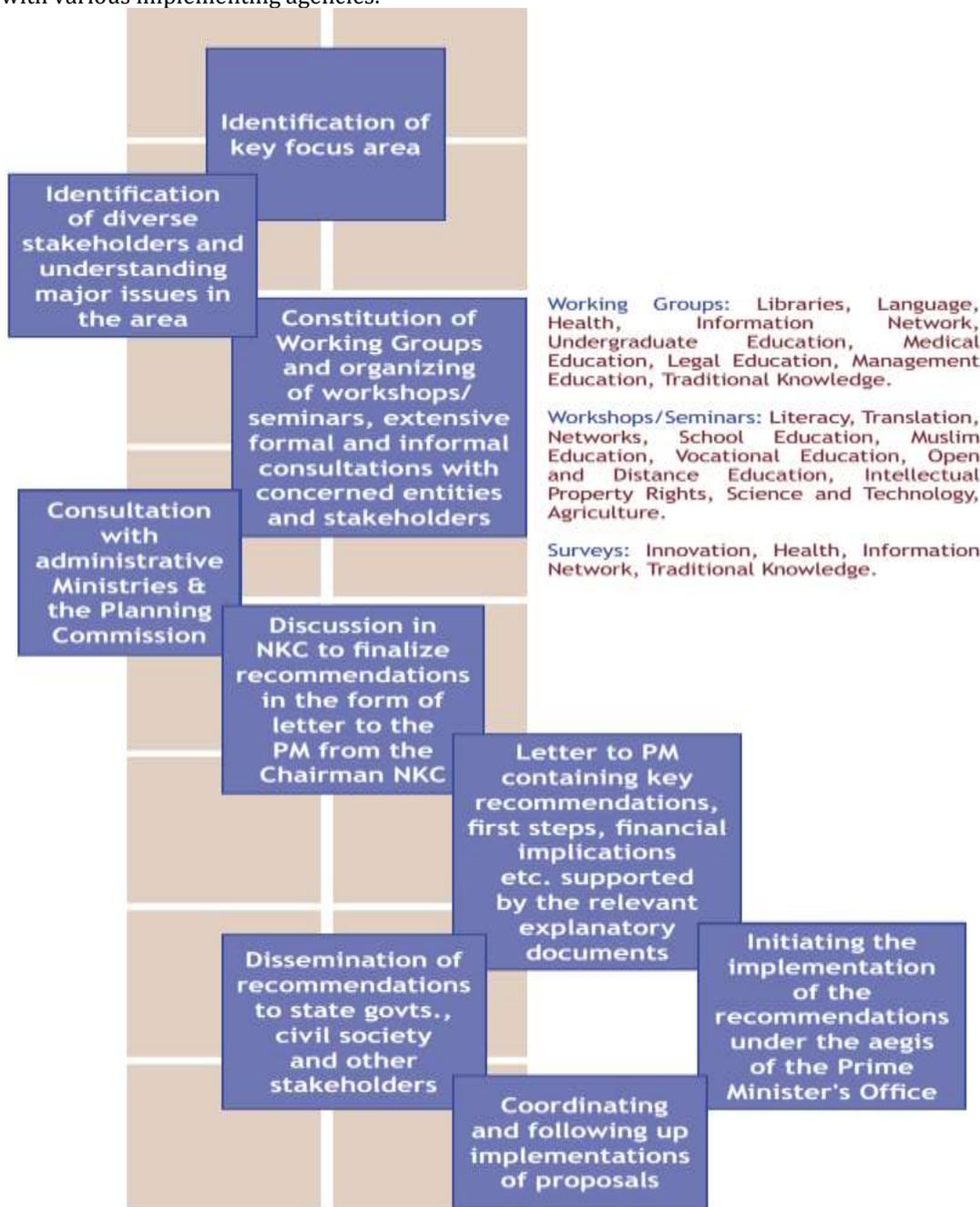
The members include Sam Pitroda, PM Bhargava, Ashok Ganguly, Jayati Ghosh, Deepak Nayyar and Nandan Nilekani.

METHODOLOGY

Methodology followed is to identify key focus areas and stakeholders in that area are identified. Since government already is working on certain focus areas they propose some innovative solutions on the same problems.

Working groups of specialists are formed who meet frequently to draft the report by considering a diverse opinion. They keep holding informal meeting, seminars and discussions with the stakeholders. After holding discussions with ministries and planning commission they finalise the recommendations which are sent to the Prime Minister. These recommendations are then disseminated to state governments,

stakeholders etc. The recommendations are initiated under the aegis of Prime Minister's Office. And there is follow up with various implementing agencies.



Source: NKC

II. CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The report is often set to have been on the lines of imperialist mindset. The report is criticised not only on its recommendation but to as far as its members are concerned. The criticism has been briefly mentioned below:

First, the stress on English as medium of instruction and compulsory language has been there since Macaulay's times. Britishers criticised regional language in the name of modernisation but present members are considering it as an essential prerequisite to bridge inequality. (Srinivasa,2008)

Some of the minority languages are already on the verge of extinction or have already been extinct due to various socio-economic and political pressures. (Srinivasa, 2008(Annamalai, 2003)).They should aim at survival of minority languages which have been subdued by regional languages. In a country where there

are 400 different languages, there is always a debate in the context of national language. After partition some have claimed Hindi to be an official language while others have claimed Urdu to be the official language. In the midst of the debate Gandhi proposed the use of Hindustani which is a mix of Hindi and Urdu to be the national language. The debate still flourishes in recent times as members of RSS promote Hindi over other languages (like Tamil, Telugu, Bengali etc. including English). (Kumar, 2013) points out that the role of regional languages has been minimised in the name of modernisation which our elites carried in mind. He points out that though our member were Indian but in the mind they were still following the west and have emphasised on English as a language. Srinivasa points out that instead of opting for some regional language as link between centre and state we have opted for some alien language, English, as bridging the link. This has led to denial of education in minority language to their generations. He feels that in the mindset we are still following the policy of Macaulay.

Second, in the post liberalisation period government had devoted lesser share of GDP to higher education. Government has considered elementary education as merit good and higher education as private good. Per student expenditure has witnessed negative growth. In most states, state governments have stopped expanding the list of aided institutions, this has led to commercialisation of education especially in fields of technical and management education. (Srivastava, 2007)

It is also pointed out that Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and western Maharashtra are few states which have maximum number of private institutes. (Srivastava, 2007(Mehta, 2004))A lop sided trend is often observed in the enrolment of higher education, with 5.8% of the bottom four deciles and 86.1% of top four deciles (on the basis of per capita consumption) have been enrolled. Therefore there is need for public sector to step in order to provide equitable access to education (esp. higher education).

Third, it is often criticised that NKC had estimated the enrolment rate in higher education to be 7 percent. However Selected Educational Statistics(MHRD) have reported gross enrolment ratio (including B.Ed.) of 9.7 percent in 2006-07, UGC doesn't incorporate distance learning and private unaided education. In 2003-04, NSS 60th round results estimate 15.02 percent gross enrolment ratio in post higher secondary education. In 2001, Census which includes college and vocational education(including ITI) have estimate gross enrolment ratio to be 15.6 percent in 2006-07.Census estimate include public and private, certificate and diploma holders and formal and informal education. He feels that NKC has not considered financial constraints in expansion of enrolment in education. (Srivastava, 2007)

Commission has therefore set a wrong target to double the enrolment rate from 7 percent to 15 percent while as per MHRD (GER is 10%) it will only raise the enrolment rates by 50 percent. (Tialk, 2007)

Fourth, NKC proposes establishment of 1500 new universities but it is not clearly mentioned whether these will be private or public and domestic or foreign. The idea that new universities will be constructed by restructuring existing institutes has already been mentioned by many commissions including CABE (Srivastava, 2007).It is pointed out that conversion of cluster of affiliated colleges into university to fulfil its target of 1500 universities by 2015 in order to raise the enrolment ratio is not a viable solution. It is pointed out that only 4 percent increase in enrolment has been witnessed in government and private aided colleges compared to 77 percent in private unaided colleges. They must look into the matters of governance, ownership, location etc.

UGC states that 10 mn account for nearly 10% gross enrolment ratio. Therefore in order to achieve 15% ,22mn enrolment would suffice. But drawing a parallel between 10 mn enrolment and 350 universities versus 40 mn enrolment and 1500 universities may lead to a conclusion that many universities operate at less than standard size. Some of the universities have a size as low as 40 or even less while enrolment in others may vary from 85 to around 5000.

It is also pointed out that if we strengthen small universities into larger ones it would be academically and financially viable without the need for 1500 universities. It is often argued taht large universities can help to reap economies of scale in terms of efficient use of physical, financial and human resources. They can have better libraries, classrooms, attract better faculties from within and abroad. (Tilak, 2007)

Fifth, the idea of creation of 50 national universities is opaque on the grounds whether it will be public or private institutes. Although it proposes 50 new national universities but it seems to be inclined towards private universities unlike education commission which proposed formation of new public universities. (Tilak, 2007)(Srivastava, 2007)

While NKC feels that 50 national universities will be “exemplars of excellence” in terms of best teachers, best students, no affiliated colleges and rest of the universities will have modifications for namesake whereas UGC suggested uplifting the quality of average universities with the intention to reduce the quality gap. (Joseph, 2007)

Sixth, the recommendation of land grant to private sector with the view to generate income is also raising questions on equity and access. The suggestion of use of land of public universities for commercial purpose will seriously impede development of universities in long run. (Srivastava, 2007)

The idea of providing land by the government and finances by private sector in terms of indirect subsidisation has no justification to autonomy in fees, admission criteria and their functioning. The use of land for commercial purpose implies either sale or renting land which brings benefit to private sector. Ultimately they would use the land for commercial purposes yields higher returns than educational purposes. The suggestion that private firm should engage in generating alumni funds brings us to the conclusion that recommendations given by NKC are pro private. Already engineering, management and medical colleges are privatised now commission proposes privatisation of university education (Tilak, 2007).

Seventh, no distinction can be made between public aided private institutions and public unaided private institutions. Although judicially mentioned but institutions registered with non profit motive can only generate enough revenue to cover their costs but are siphoning out profits by manipulating their books of accounts. They have been charging high capitation fees and other charges. Only quarter of institutions are committed to educational excellence. They adhere to malpractices like manipulating results, admission procedures and salaries to get maximum profits. If NKC wants private participation then it should be transparent and unambiguous (Srivastava,2007)(Anandkrishnan,2006).

Eighth, NKC has suggested formation of IRAHE which will grant degree, decide entry, monitor standards and resolve disputes while maintaining the role of UGC to a funding institution needs to be analysed critically. It is pointed out that organisations like UGC, MCI etc have their regulatory organs appointed through political interference which leads to erosion of their credibility but the question still remains that what is the guarantee that IRAHE will be an independent body free from outside interference.(Anandkrishnan, 2007)

UGC and other regulatory bodies were set up with same intentions but due to limited funding and lack of autonomy had turned into defunct bodies. Therefore what is the assurance that IRAHE will not meet the same fate as UGC.(Tilak, 2007)

However, UGC doesn't approve of IRAHE and indirectly declares itself as apex organisation for regulating higher education.

Ninth, the notion of commission that there are barriers to entry is countered when we see state legislatures granting recognition to various private universities. Issue of certain standards which need to be maintained by these universities is also brought to question. (Srivastava, 2007) It is suggested that NAAC can handle the prerequisites required for certification matter of universities and periodically monitor the quality. This body can act as assistance to UGC and state legislatures in recognising universities and granting degrees. With the rigid curricular structure and outdated teaching; there is a need for defining, organising and improving the quality through assessment and accreditation. It grants monopoly to NAAC by ignoring other accreditation agencies like NBA and others (Anandkrishnan, 2006)

Tenth, although the commission suggest that 1% of GDP should be devoted to higher education even that will not be enough to meet the needs of public funded universities. But on the contrary (Tilak, 2007) and (Joseph, 2007) suggest that if 1.5 percent of GDP is devoted to higher education then there is no need for private and foreign sector participation.

Eleventh, the suggestion that fee should be raised so that it can cover 20 percent of the expenses should be renewed. Internationally fees covers 15 percent of total expenses but in Indian case as pointed out by CABE (Srivastava, 2007) total fees covers 15 percent of recurring costs while tuition fees covers 2 to 3 percent of costs. It is also suggested that higher fees should be charged from well off students while scholarships can be offered to the needy. It also suggested that courses where market rate of return is high, students can draw loans but banks are reluctant to give loans to without collateral and assessing the financial status in India is also very difficult.

Suggestion of philanthropic contribution is encouraged. They should not be penalised for raising additional revenue.

Twelfth, NKC rightly emphasises the role of college education in higher education but they should not overlook the alliance between college system and management. Most of them are publicly funded and privately managed and some of them are privately funded and privately managed.

Thirteenth, the idea of central and state board of undergraduate education to monitor exams and curriculum and examining body for those institutions which chose to be a part of it has already been criticised by certain states on the pretext that it violates academic autonomy in terms of formulating

curriculum and forging links with other institutes (by standardising curriculum and examining body)(Srivastava, 2007). They are ignoring the fact that this process will lead to rigidity in curriculum, rote learning and increase in tuitions (Anandkrishnan, 2006).

NKC's suggestion to deal with the problem of centralised process by further establishing centralised bodies is not the remedy to the problem but worsens the problem. Instead they should focus on decentralisation which would facilitate greater academic diversification while UGC's suggestion of small universities affiliated to 50 colleges from maximum 3 districts seems more feasible. (Joseph, 2007)

Fourteenth, NKC has suggested the multidimensional indicator which can be used to give appropriate scores to gender, regional origin, income, social origin etc. This lacks clarity with regard to acting substitute or complement to reservation based system (Srivastava, 2007). In my view, it should act as a substitute to reservation based system as it already incorporates points to reservation in backward classes.

Fifteenth, there is lack of clarity and vision with respect to needs blind based policy's implementation, if it will be for public sector or private sector. Since the fees of private sector institutes is very high in comparison to the public sector there would be need for government intervention (Srivastava, 2007).

Sixteenth, as Kothari Commission rightly points out that only an autonomous university free from political pressure and externally imposed ideas can develop independent thinking and build a free society. In central universities and institutions like IITs and IIMs etc. there are 2 to 3 persons from national bureaucracy apart from outside academic and professional experts whereas in state funded universities governance varies across states. In majority of the states there is political interference in appointment of governing boards. In private institutions, people of high repute organisations are part of governing board while other private institutions established by family members have docile members in their governing board. It is found that gap between our universities and foreign universities is widened as we tend to ignore the presence of nobel laureates as faulty, presence of foreign students and foreign faculty etc.

Seventeenth, there is financial crunch in the system such that various state universities are running correspondence programmes and self financing programmes. They are resorting to a ban on new recruitment of teachers by taking inexperienced and junior adhoc staff. Due to insufficient funds their faculty has lost the zeal to initiate new programmes. Therefore a predictable funding should be in place instead of changing year to year funding.

Eighteenth, also, uni disciplinary universities for health, law, IT etc tend to ignore the role of humanities and social science.

Nineteenth, recently the trend to confer research laboratories as universities has negatively interfered with the research programmes of universities (Anandkrishnan, 2006).

Twentieth, recommendations like 1.5 percent of GDP should be devoted to higher education has already been proposed by CABE committee. Similarly allocation of 6 percent of GDP to education had already been proposed by Education commission way back in 1966. Also the fees should cover 15 percent of expenses was already stated by Justice Punnaya committee report. While CABE had imposed an upper limit of 20% to ensure equity in society but NKC had proposed 20 percent as a lower limit without an upper bound. The suggestion to increase the allocation of GDP to higher education suggests that government alone can finance higher education without the need to bring in private and foreign sector. (Tilak, 2007)

Twenty first, the assumption that increase in number of private institutions will lead to rising student enrolment is the most flawed assumption as can be seen from cases of US, Uruguay and other countries. (Tilak, 2007)

Twenty second, it is often said that NKC was formed with charmed circle of chairman. Those in commission who did not agree with the recommendations were kept in dark whereas the process of UGC has been transparent and participatory. NKC focuses on expansion and excellence at the expense of inclusion and equity. NKC focuses on participation of private and foreign sector and maximum cost recovery from students with little emphasis on scholarship for needy people whereas UGC focuses on establishment of new institutions in backward, rural and remote areas where gross enrolment ratio is very small. It focuses on special assistance to underprivileged sections like SC, ST, OBC, women, children etc. They have emphasised on greater public funding and ruled out the need to further enhance the fees. UGC relies on public funding as its source of finance whereas NKC relies on private sector, public private partnership and foreign sources.

CONCLUSION

The recommendation of the committee is pro private and needs to be reconsidered seriously. The private sector is driven by profit motive and therefore would charge high fees and manipulate its books of accounts and therefore objective of equality will not be fulfilled. Also there is a lot of corruption in public sector so relying completely on it will also not be correct. There should be a right mix of public and private

partnership. The colleges like Loyola, St. Stephens etc which are capable of excellence should be granted autonomy. It has been pointed out that there is shortage of funds by UGC because of which it is not able to perform its functions effectively so there still raises the question that with setting up of IRAHE, how the problem of funds would be solved, given that it is autonomous body free from interference of various ministries. The commercial use of surplus land should be prohibited in universities. There is an underlying assumption by the commission that with the privatization there will be improvement in competition and quality but there is a lot of ambiguity in this relation. The implicit assumption that privatization will lead to rise in enrolment rates needs to be questioned as majority of the enrolment in private sector comes from higher income or middle income section leaving very little capacity to ensure enrolment of poor sections. They have treated education as any other commodity where private interference will bring in more competition and better results but need of the hour is review the decision as education is not a commodity and a right balance between state and private sector, taking the best of both worlds, is needed to ensure that benefits of education are reaped by all sections of society without creating inequality.

References

1. National Knowledge Commission: Report to the Nation 2006, <http://www.aicte-india.org/downloads/nkc.pdf>
2. UGC: A Brief Report of the National Conference on Development of Higher Education, October 10-11, 2007, New Delhi
3. Srinivasa Rao, S. (2008). India's Language Debates and Education of Linguistic Minorities. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 43(36), 63-69.
4. Anandakrishnan, M. (2007). Critique of Knowledge Commission. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 42(7557-560).
5. Joseph, T. (2007). Commission versus Commission in Higher Education. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 42(50), 20-23.
6. Tilak, J. (2007). Knowledge Commission and Higher Education. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 42(8), 630-633.
7. Agarwal, P. (2007). From Kothari Commission to Pitroda Commission. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 42(7), 554-557.
8. Srivastava, R. (2007). Meeting Social Goals or Neoliberal Reform? *Economic and Political Weekly*, 42(10), 812-815.
9. Kumar, Arun. (2013): "Indian Economy since Independence: Persisting Colonial Disruption", New Delhi: Vision Books
10. Education and National Development: Report of Education Commission 1964-66, Kothari Commission Report.
11. The Committee to Advise on Renovation and Rejuvenation of Higher Education, Yashpal Committee Report.