

NATIONAL SEMINAR ON THE EDUCATION COMMISSION



Revisiting the Commission's Premises, Vision and Impact on Policy Formulation

Concept Paper*

The Context

The report of the Education Commission (1964-66), chaired by Prof. D.S. Kothari, is possibly the last education policy-related document of the Nehruvian era. The very timing of the decision to constitute the Commission lent a special significance and critical perspective to the report. This was the time when the emerging democratic society had gained the initial experience of five-year developmental planning. This was also the time when the agenda of ushering in a scientific age was looked upon as a means to transform the traditional society into a modern one by way of alleviating poverty, minimising inequalities and institutionalising democratic & forward looking education.

At the same time, the immediate backdrop of the Commission was provided by a historic food crisis that called for questioning the very notion of agricultural productivity and the role of science and technology in rural development. The policy makers were also engaged in a public debate on various models of development. Issues relating to land reforms, co-operatives, foreign aid, federal structure of Indian polity, religious and linguistic identities, status of women, caste conflicts and the medium of education were sources of major tensions. These dilemmas and challenges faced by the nation were reflected in the Terms of Reference as well as in the composition of the Commission itself. This is also possibly why the Commission was the first one in the post-independence India to be assigned the task of recommending a national system of education from pre-primary stage to professional and higher education.

A Suggested Analytical Framework

The vision of the Commission was inspired by the Indian freedom struggle against imperialism and embedded deeply in the principles enshrined in the Constitution. In order to decipher the various elements that comprised the Commission's vision and its recommendations, it would be necessary to identify and examine the underlying premises. A study of the Commission's report reveals, among others, the following set of important premises:

- (i) Education is a powerful means of social transformation and nation building;
- (ii) The heritage of the Indian freedom struggle must continue to inspire our children and youth;
- (iii) Education shall promote human, moral and scientific values;
- (iv) The education system must be designed to build a democratic, egalitarian, secular and forward-looking society as envisaged in the Constitution;
- (v) The education system must be rooted in the principles of social justice and equality enshrined in the Constitution;
- (vi) Alleviation of poverty, reduction of inequalities (related to class, caste, religion, region, gender and language), promotion of social harmony and strengthening of national unity shall be the central concerns of education;

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- (vii) Educational goals can be achieved only through a national system of education that is based upon certain critical notions, structures and institutionalized processes;
- (viii) An immediate objective of education should be to increase national productivity (particularly in agriculture) and develop scientific and technological base for this purpose;
- (ix) The State has a Constitutional obligation as well as a key role in educational planning, development and mobilization of resources;
- (x) The national economy needs to be re-prioritized in order to mobilize the necessary resources for achieving the objectives of education;
- (xi) Teachers have a central role in education and, therefore, their status in society, quality of teacher education and teaching environment are matters of critical concern;
- (xii) Language is a means of political, social and cultural empowerment;
- (xiii) Higher education has a key role in nation-building which must be a priority concern of the Government;
- (xiv) A nation-wide system of promoting excellence at all stages of education, combined with accessibility to various sections of society, needs to be institutionalized;
- (xv) Education thrives best in a democratic environment - both inter-institutional and intra-institutional; and
- (xvi) Any form of organization and governance that are not in tune with educational goals must be replaced by a rational alternative.

There is a need to study whether these premises, which formed the essential basis of the Commission's vision and recommendations, continue to influence the development policy in

the country. Since the presentation of the Commission's report to the nation in 1966, the education system has undergone a lot of transformation. It is time now to examine these premises from different perspectives with a view to:

- (a) Placing these premises in the historical, political and socio-economic context of the Commission;
- (b) Studying the consonance, partial divergence and contradiction between the premises and the Commission's recommendations;
- (c) Analyzing the reasons of partial divergence or contradiction, if any;
- (d) Deciphering the rationale for both acceptance and non-acceptance of the Commission's recommendations;
- (e) Reviewing the premises in the context of the neo-liberal economic policies, pursuit of global hegemony, identity conflicts and other contemporary challenges facing the nation; and
- (f) Modifying the premises accordingly in order to define a new framework of resistance and reconstruction and, thereby, move towards a futuristic vision of education.

The Seminar, Expectations and Objectives

It is in this perspective that the National University of Educational Planning and Administration (NUEPA), proposes to organize a two-day "**National Seminar on the Education Commission: Revisiting the Commission's Premises, Vision and Impact on Policy Formulation**" in November 2006, which is also the centenary year of Prof. D.S. Kothari, the Chairperson of the Commission. The seminar is being organized as a tribute to Prof. D.S. Kothari. About 100 participants including academics, policy-makers, planners and practitioners will be drawn from all over India. The seminar may adopt various modes of presentation and discussion, including plenary and parallel sessions, and panel discussions.

The seminar is expected to give us an opportunity to rethink “the basic idea of change” as envisaged by the Commission, modify the basic premises and the recommendations wherever necessary and move on to build a new framework of resistance and reconstruction in order to meet the contemporary challenges. While undertaking this exercise, we would gain by reviewing the policy and programmatic documents of the intervening four decades, analyzing the impact of the global economic order and examining the prevailing policy discourse.

The specific objectives of the seminar are as follows:

1. To undertake a critical review of the key recommendations of the Education Commission (1964-66) in terms of its underlying premises, vision and impact on policy formulation during the past four decades;
2. Given the Constitutional obligations and principles, to examine the relevance of major concerns and recommendations of the Commission in the context of emerging global economic order and the need to respond to the developmental challenges ahead; and
3. To provide a platform to rethink “the basic idea of change” as envisaged by the Commission and to initiate a national debate on its continuing relevance and the need to evolve a new framework for policy formulation for the future.

Scope and Themes of the Seminar

The seminar will look at the Commission’s recommendations covering all stages and aspects of education – from pre-primary to professional and higher education – and their implications for national development and contemporary challenges. The attempt is to take an integral view rather than to fragment or compartmentalize our understanding in terms of various stages or functional aspects. For instance, a paper on ‘curriculum, pedagogy and knowledge’ may deal with this aspect at all stages of education, even though the

Commission’s Report may have dealt with this matter in different chapters. Wherever necessary, the seminar will deal with philosophical, political, socio-economic, cultural, curricular or pedagogical dimensions of the Commission’s concerns and recommendations. The seminar will cover the following broad themes:

1. Perspectives, Goals and Values

- 1.1 Commission’s perspectives on society, education and national development
- 1.2 Goals of education
- 1.3 Values and education
- 1.4 Lessons learnt from historical policy discourses

2. Equality and Social Justice

- 2.1 Equality and social justice in education
- 2.2 Access to and selection in education and the notion of talent in education
- 2.3 Regional imbalances in educational development
- 2.4 Education of the backward sections of the society (SC, ST and minorities)
- 2.5 Inclusive education (focusing at all levels of education)
- 2.6 Gender and education

3. Curriculum, Pedagogy and Knowledge

- 3.1 The vision of the Commission for development of : (i) science; (ii) mathematics; (iii) social science; and (iv) humanities
- 3.2 Relationship between productive work and education
- 3.3 Curriculum
- 3.4 Teacher education
- 3.5 Language and education

4. Planning and Governance

- 4.1 Organization and governance of education

- 4.2 Centre-state partnership in educational development
- 4.3 The vision of participatory development of education: role of the government, corporate sector and civil society
- 4.4 Decentralization and public participation in educational planning
- 4.5 Autonomy of educational institutions

5. Resources and National Economy

- 5.1 Financing of education
- 5.2 Mobilization of resources for education

**6. Research and Development :
The Education Commission's Perception
of Knowledge**

**7. Contemporary Concerns and Future
Challenges**

- 7.1 The vision of institutionalizing new ideas and the Education Commission
- 7.2 The Commission's vision of institutionalizing new ideas with focus on curricular transformation, pre-primary education and its linkage with school education, vocational education, adult education, privatization of education, research in education, and agriculture education

The exact dates of the proposed seminar will be announced shortly.