

Commissions and committees on women's education and Empowerment

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Several commissions and committees have played a crucial role in shaping policies and initiatives related to women's education and empowerment in India. These bodies have addressed issues like access, curriculum, teacher training, and societal attitudes towards women's education. Key examples include the National Committee on Women's Education (1958), Hansa Mehta Committee (1961), and Bhaktavatsalam Committee (1963). These committees focused on expanding educational opportunities for women, advocating for equal access, and suggesting ways to make education more relevant to their needs.

Key Commissions and Committees:

- **National Committee on Women's Education (1958):**

This committee, chaired by Durgabai Deshmukh, was established to assess the existing state of women's education and recommend improvements.

- **Hansa Mehta Committee (1961):**

This committee, led by Hansa Mehta, addressed the issue of curriculum differentiation for boys and girls, advocating for a common curriculum at the primary and secondary levels.

- **Bhaktavatsalam Committee (1963):**

This committee, headed by M. Bhaktavatsalam, focused on identifying the reasons for the lack of public support for women's education, particularly in rural areas, and suggesting ways to improve participation.

- **Kothari Commission (1964-66):**

While not exclusively focused on women, the Kothari Commission's recommendations on education in general had a significant impact on women's education, emphasizing the need for equal access and bridging the gap between men's and women's education.

- **Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) (1974):**

This committee examined the social, economic, and political status of women in India, including their educational status, and made recommendations for their empowerment.

- **National Commission for Women (NCW) (1992):**

The NCW is a statutory body established to protect and promote the interests of women in India. It plays a key role in addressing issues related to women's education and empowerment.

- **Parliamentary Committee on Empowerment of Women (1997):**

This committee reviews and monitors the implementation of various programs and policies related to women's empowerment, including education.

- **National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW) (2010):**

This mission was launched to promote the convergence of various women-related programs and schemes across different ministries and departments, including those related to education.

Key Recommendations and Focus Areas:

- **Increased Access:**

Many committees emphasized the need to increase educational opportunities for girls and women at all levels, from primary to higher education.

- **Curriculum Reform:**

The need for a relevant and gender-sensitive curriculum that addresses the specific needs and interests of girls and women was highlighted.

- **Teacher Training:**

Several committees stressed the importance of training female teachers to work in girls' schools and colleges.

- **Addressing Social Barriers:**

Some committees focused on addressing social and cultural barriers that prevent girls and women from accessing education, such as child marriage, poverty, and lack of awareness.

- **Promoting Women's Empowerment:**

Many committees recognized the link between education and women's overall empowerment, including their economic, social, and political participation.

University Education Commission (1948-49)

University Education Commission (1948-49) was the first Commission on education after Independence. Its major emphasis was on higher education, but it also touched upon the issues related to school education. The Commission was appointed under the chairmanship of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, a great visionary of the modern era. The Radhakrishnan Commission on University Education defined the vital tasks of higher education. The aims of a university should be to produce able citizens who can take up national responsibilities successfully in various fields. The university has to produce able administrators and suitable workers in various occupations and industries. It has to provide leadership in various walks of life in the best interest of the nation.

The Commission recommended that the standard of admission to University courses should correspond to that of the present intermediate examination, i.e., after 12 years of study at school and an intermediate college. It remarked that “our secondary Education remains the weakest link in our educational machinery and needs urgent reforms.”

The Commission stated that the function of school education is to provide a good general education. It further spelled out the elements of good education, which will not only prepare pupils for university work, but at the same time prepare them for practical work to earn his living if he did not proceed to a university. The Commission suggested that the functions of a school and a university should be different. The function of a school should be to provide suitable education to those who join higher education and also to those who do not have the intention of proceeding further. Education of both sets could be combined, whereas some schools could train students for work in the agriculture industry and commerce.

The University Education Commission laid great stress on the introduction of general education throughout school. The Commission wanted the school should diversify its outcomes in such a way that many could effectively participate in real life by taking up jobs or self-employment, and only very few would continue studying beyond school.

Secondary Education Commission (1952-53)

The concerns of education articulated during the freedom struggle were revisited by the National Commissions – the Secondary Education Commission (1952- 53), and the Education Commission (1964-66). Both Commissions elaborated on the themes emerging out of Mahatma Gandhi’s educational philosophy in the changed socio-political context with a focus on national developments (NCF, 2005, p.3). A separate education commission was appointed under the chairmanship of Dr. Lakshmanaswami Mudaliyar in 1952 to address the issues related to school education. The Commission Report (1952) had envisaged schools to play a crucial role in developing democratic citizenship, emphasizing that “democracy is based on faith and in the dignity and worth of every single “individual”, where the innate worthiness cannot be eclipsed either by economic or racial or social consideration (SEC, 1952, p.20).”

It stated “citizenship in a democracy involves many intellectual, social and moral qualities ... a democratic citizen should have the understanding and the intellectual integrity to sift truth from falsehood, facts from propaganda and to reject the dangerous appeal of fanaticism and prejudice (SEC, 1952, p. 19). It also calls for education opportunities that would translate into practice a passion for social justice.”

The Secondary Education Commission presented its report in 1953, which had recommendations on almost all aspects of secondary education. The major Recommendations of the Commission were: □ installation of a higher secondary system; □ diversified courses; □ three-language formula; □ emphasis on education and vocational guidance; □ improvement in methods of teaching, textbooks, and system of examination; And □ an improvement in building and equipment.

The Commission introduced the policy of developing a three-year national system of secondary education (after eight years of elementary education).

The recommendation of splitting the intermediate stage into two parts, one year going to the school and the other to the university, turned out to be retrograde - the eleven-year higher

secondary course introduced specialisation too early (after class VIII) and made vocationalisation difficult (Naik, 1969).

Though the major recommendations of the Commission were related to secondary education, it indicated the importance of elementary education. The Education Commission (1964-66), drawing on Nehru's Mission and articulating most of his key themes, the Kothari Commission (1964-66) was set up under the Chairmanship of Dr. D. S. Kothari to formulate a coherent education policy for India. The Commission was most comprehensive, it reviewed almost all aspects of the education system without limiting itself to any one particular aspect, unlike the Commissions that came before and after it. Two of the unique features of the Report are:

i) its comprehensive approach to educational reconstruction; and ii) its attempt to project a blueprint of a national system of education for India. According to the Commission, education was intended to increase productivity, develop social and national unity, consolidate democracy, modernise the country, and develop social, moral, and spiritual values. The crucial role of education in national development appears in all its vividness throughout in the report, appropriately titled "Education and National Development". The Commission identified the three important facets that would bring about the desired educational resolution, they are: □ internal transformation to relate it to the life needs and aspirations of the nation; □ qualitative improvement so that the standards achieved are adequate and become internationally comparable; and expansion of educational facilities broadly based on manpower needs with emphasis on equalisation of education opportunities. It suggested the restructuring of education into a uniform pattern of 10+2+3. It adopted a "manpower approach" to the enrolment issue and declared that the principal purpose of higher education was to cater to the needs of industrial and other sectors, even as it acknowledged its role in promoting social transformation. The Commission sought to reorient the educational system to the masses to help people come into their own. It sought to end the dichotomy between work and education to make the products good workers as well as educated individuals. It recommended a minimum of 10 years of common curriculum for building citizenship in a democracy and for linking the "work of knowledge" with the "world of work". In this concept, diversified courses would be introduced only at the +2 stage. Major recommendations of the Commission included emphasis on Science and Mathematics, introduction of work experience as an integral part of school curriculum, introduction of a common school system, educational structure with 12 years of schooling, free text-books at primary stage, provision of mid-day meals, promotion of education of handicapped and special measures for ensuring equality of educational opportunities (regional, tribal and gender imbalances to be addressed), establishment of school complexes, neighbourhood school, three language formula etc. (two of its major recommendations for democratising school education have been discussed in detail later in this Unit). The Commission emphasized the need for alternative channels of education to eradicate illiteracy and provide adult education. By laying more focus on Mathematics and Science, rather than Social Science or Arts, the Commission reinforced the notion that India's development needs are better met by scientists than social scientists. For improving the quality of education, the

Commission focused on institutional planning for improving standards nationwide, promotion of a new work ethic, improved teaching and learning materials and methods of teaching and evaluation, and selective development of schools.

Teacher Status

The Commission emphasized that the most urgent need was to upgrade the remuneration of teachers substantially, particularly at the school level. It is recommended that the government should lay down minimum scales of pay for teachers and assist States and Union territories to adopt equivalent or higher scales.

Teacher Education

The Commission urged that the professional preparation of teachers was the key to qualitative improvement of education and recommended measures like: □ qualitative improvement in teacher education programmes; □ introduction of new courses for headmasters/teacher educators, and educational administrators; and □ expansion of teacher education institutions and recommendations of the training facilities.

National Knowledge Commission (2009)

To encounter the educational challenges in the 21st century, the National Knowledge Commission (NKC) was appointed. It is not exactly an education commission as its role was to propose the framework for quality, access, and equity in higher education. NKC is one of the important recent initiatives for improving the quality of education.

The National Knowledge Commission (NKC) was constituted in June 2005 by the Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh, under the Chairmanship of Mr. Sam Pitroda, to prepare a blueprint for reform of our knowledge-related institutions and infrastructure, which would enable India to meet the challenges of the future. NKC has submitted recommendations on areas such as Right to Education, libraries, language, translation, portals, and knowledge networks. Some of its recommendations are:

1. The need for a central legislation affirming the Right to Education. The legislation should also lay down minimum standards of quality in school education, and for it to be effective, the responsibility of the Government at different levels must be recognised and made justifiable.
2. The teaching of English as a language should be introduced, along with the first language (either mother tongue or the regional language) of the child, starting from Class I. Further, NKC has also focused on the need to reform the pedagogy of English language teaching and the use of all available media to supplement traditional teaching methods.
3. Changes in the school system which would encourage decentralisation, local autonomy in the management of schools, and flexibility in the disbursement of funds.

4. To improve quality and generate accountability, improve school infrastructure and revamp school inspection with a greater role for local stakeholders and greater transparency in the system.

5. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to be made more accessible to teachers, students, and the administration.

6. The need for reforms in the curriculum and examination systems by moving away from rote learning to a critical understanding of concepts, and finally, faculty improvement.

NKC suggested that the primary responsibility for school education is with the State Governments, and, therefore, States needed to be consulted for policy formulation. NKC also recommends that both pre-service and in-service teachers' education programmes be subject to the same regulatory authority and with adequate monitoring of the training provided by private organisations.

National Policy on Education (1968)

Arising out of the recommendations of the Kothari Commission, the National Policy of 1968 marked a significant step in the history of Independent India. It aimed to promote national progress, a sense of common citizenship and culture, and to strengthen national Integration. It laid stress on the need for a radical reconstruction of the education system to improve its quality at all stages and gave much greater attention to Science and Technology, the cultivation of moral values, and a closer relation between education and the life of the people. The NPE-1968 very briefly indicated that strenuous efforts should be made for the early fulfillment of the Directive Principle under Article 45 of the Constitution, seeking to provide free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14. It is suggested that suitable programmes should be developed to reduce the prevailing 'wastage' and 'stagnation' in schools, and to ensure that every child who is enrolled in school and completes the prescribed course. The Policy also emphasized enrichment of curricula and improvement of textbooks and teaching methods. It advocated the strengthening of Science education at the school level and the stepping up of scholarship schemes for the backward sections of society. Though NPE-1968 was a good effort in suggesting ways forward, it could not be implemented successfully in the absence of a detailed implementation strategy, assignment of specified responsibility, and lack of financial and organisational support. The next significant move was the formulation of the NPE 1986.

National Policy on Education (1986)

The Government of India reviewed the prevailing education system in 1985, and the policy was articulated in the document "Challenge of Education: A Policy Perspective". The new education policy was intended to prepare India for the 21st century. The policy emphasized the need for change in the following words- "Education in India stands at a crossroads today, neither normal linear expansion nor the existing pace and nature of improvement can meet the needs of the situation."

The 1986 policy acknowledged the achievement of policy goals set by the 1968 policy, like setting up a school within a kilometre and adoption of a common education structure; it, however, stated that increased financial and organisational support was necessary to address problems of access and quality.

The policy was intended to raise educational standards and increase access to education. At the same time, it would safeguard the values of secularism, socialist equality, which have been promoted since Independence. The government also proposed to seek financial support from the private sector to complement government funds. The Central Government also declared that it would accept a wider responsibility to enforce the national and integrative character of education to maintain quality and standards. The States, however, retained a significant particularly in the curriculum.

NPE 1986 proposed a national system of education based on the accepted structure of 10+2+3. Regarding the further break-up of the first 10 years, it suggested an elementary system comprising 5 years of primary and 3 years of upper primary education, followed by 2 years of high school. It is suggested that the +2 stage be accepted as part of school education throughout the country. The national system implied that up to a given level, all students, irrespective of caste, creed, location, or sex, have access to education of a comparable quality. The Policy reiterated the need to take effective measures for the implementation of the common school system recommended in the 1968 Policy.

The setting up of Navodaya Vidyalayas was another landmark in the history of education in general and elementary education in particular.

In its fourth section, there is an emphasis on opportunities for elementary education for girls and removing the problems in this regard. It has also been suggested that primary schools be opened in remote areas, including ashram or residential schools in tribal regions. The policy emphasized on inclusion of motor handicapped children in normal schools and the arrangement of special schools at district headquarters.

In Section Five, issues related to elementary education were specially addressed.

It was proposed that:

- Access, Enrolment, and Retention of all children up to the age of 14 years in the schools.
- Quality improvement of education by improving the school environment, child-centered and activity-centered teaching methodology, continuous evaluation throughout the year, removal of all kinds of physical punishment, continuing the practice of not failing the students in any class at the elementary level, and arranging the essential facilities in primary schools.
- Arranging non-formal education for children who left school, are between, or are residing at places without schools.
- Regarding teachers and teacher education, the policy suggested that District Institutes of Education and Training (DIET) need to be established with the capability to organise pre-service and in-service courses for elementary school teachers and non-formal and adult education. It is recommended that when DIETs get established, sub-standard institutions should be phased out, selected Secondary Teacher Education Institutes should be upgraded to

complement the work of the State Councils of Educational Research and Training (SCERT). The National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) should be provided the necessary resources and capability to accredit institutions of teacher education and to provide guidance regarding curricula and methods. Networking arrangements should be created between institutions of teacher education and university departments of education. □ The NPE and POA elaborately discussed the concept of language development and emphasised the adoption of regional languages as the medium of instruction at the university stage. Mother tongue should be the medium of instruction at the school stage. Recommendations relating to language practice were as follows: - three language formulas, improvements in the linguistic competencies of students at different stages of education; - provision of facilities for the study of English and other foreign languages; and - development of the Hindi language as a link language etc.

The Programme of Action (PoA) in this Policy proposed Operation Blackboard to improve the human and physical resources available in primary schools. The key legacies of the 1986 policy were the promotion of privatisation and the continued emphasis on secularism and Science. The NPE, 1986, also advocated developing consciousness about the environment. The Policy had some important features like a common school curriculum, minimum levels of learning, value education, role of media and education technology, work experience, emphasis on teaching of Mathematics and Science, Sports and Physical Education, and education for international understanding.

The Government constituted a review committee under the chairmanship of Acharya Rammurthy was appointed in 1989 to review the progress and effectiveness of NPE 1986. The Report of the Rammurthy Committee, put up in 1990, was named “Towards an Enlightened and Humane Society”. The Committee recommended that even the private schools should be converted into common schools to remove social, economic, regional, and gender disparities. It suggested that there must be some concrete programmes for SCs, Tribes, Women, and educationally backward minorities. It further suggested that there should be adequate funds to improve the basic structure and quality of primary education. Primary education must be in the mother tongue, and the aid to schools providing education in other media should be stopped. The recommendation of the Committee provided a base to develop a new programme of action, the revised Programme of Action, 1992.