National Knowledge Commission: A Milestone in the History of Indian Library Movement

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ABSTRACT

India has tremendous potential resources. It is the need of the hour to make knowledge based developments in almost all fields. Hence, National Knowledge Commission (NKC) was constituted in 2005 as a high level advisory body to the Prime Minister of India, with a mandate to guide policy and generate reforms under the chairmanship of Dr.Sam Pitrada. The NKC has taken steps to review library services and to examine the present standards of public, private, institutional and specialized libraries and other information resources. In this paper, an attempt has been made to present the objectives of NKC and its recommendations to develop the libraries.

Key words: National Knowledge Commission; Objectives; Recommendations.

INTRODUCTION

Today, India needs a knowledge based development in all walks of life in all fields. It has tremendous potential resources. The ability of a nation is to use and create knowledge for their citizens. To meet the global challenges more strongly, we should make knowledge-based developments in all fields. For this purpose, National Knowledge Commission (NKC) was constituted in 2005 as a high level advisory body to the Prime Minister of India, with a mandate to guide policy and generate reforms under the chairmanship of Dr.Sam Pitrada.

The commission had a designated time frame of three years, from 2nd October 2005 to 2nd October 2008. It focused on the transformation of India into a vibrant knowledge-based society. The first annual report (2006) was published in January 2007.

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OBJECTIVES OF NKC

- Build excellence in the educational system to meet the knowledge challenges of the 21st century and increase India's competitive advantage in fields of knowledge

- Promote creation of knowledge in Science and Technology (S&T) Laboratories

- Improve the management of institutions engaged in Intellectual Property Rights (IPR)

- Promote knowledge applications in Agriculture and Industry

- Promote the use of knowledge capabilities in making the government an effective, transparent and accountable service provider to the citizens and promote widespread sharing of knowledge to maximize public benefit.

Based on the above objectives, the commission seeks to develop appropriate institutional frame works to strengthen the educational system in India, promote research and development and facilitate the applications of innovative knowledge in health, agriculture and industry. The

commission concentrates on the following five key areas of the knowledge paradigm:

- Access to knowledge

- Knowledge concepts

- Creation of knowledge

- Knowledge applications and

- Development of better knowledge services

Access to knowledge

Providing access to knowledge is the most fundamental way of increasing opportunities.

Knowledge concepts

It is organized, distributed and transmitted through the educational system such as school education, higher education, professional education and vocational education.

Creation of knowledge

A nation can be developed in two ways. One is to use existing resources and another is to discover new resources. Both activities are involved in the creation of knowledge and protecting the created knowledge.

Knowledge applications

Knowledge can be applied to promote technological change and facilitate reliable and regular flow of information to the industry, agriculture, small and medium scale enterprises.

Delivery of services

Technology provides an opportunity to ensure accountability, transparency and efficiency in government services. E-governance is one of the ways to increase transparency of government functioning.

Libraries as Gateways to Knowledge

Libraries, particularly public libraries, are playing a pivotal role in dissemination of knowledge and are an extremely important element of the foundation of knowledge economy. It is not a building stacked with books. It is a repository and source of information and ideas. It is a place for learning and enquiry and for generation of thoughts and creation of new knowledge. It has the potential power to bridge the gap between the "information poor" and the "information rich" by ensuring the people of all sectors have easy access to knowledge.

The NKC has taken steps to review library services and to examine the present standards of public, private, institutional and specialized libraries and other information resources. They are drawing attention to the following eight priorities:

1. To redefine the objectives of the country's library and information services sector

2. To identify constraints, problems and challenges relating to the sector to recommend changes and reforms to address the problems and challenges to ensure a holistic development of information services in all areas of national activity

3. To take necessary steps to mobilize and upgrade the existing libraries and information systems and services, taking advantage of the latest advances in Information Communication Technology (ICT)

4. To explore possibilities for innovation and initiate new programmes relevant to our national needs, especially to bridge the gap between the 'information rich' and 'information poor' within society

5. To suggest means of raising standards and promoting excellence in library and information science education including re-orientation and training of working professionals

6. To assist in setting up facilities to preserve and give access to indigenous knowledge and the nation's cultural heritage

7. To set up adequate mechanisms to monitor activities for securing the benefits of acquisition and application of knowledge for the people of India

8. To examine any other issues that may be relevant in this context

The Commission's first recommendations on libraries were forwarded to the Hon'ble Prime Minister in December 2006 as highlighted in its First Annual Report (2006).

Recommendations

The working group analyzed that in order to achieve the goal of creating a knowledge society, we must help the people of India to overcome 'information poverty'. In the information and electronic era, libraries in India need to make a paradigm shift from their present strategy of collection or acquisition of knowledge to a strategy of knowledge access. Libraries and librarians have to recognize their social functions and their critical role in creating a knowledge society. The library and information sector is committed to support the creation of a knowledge society by providing equitable, high- quality, cost-effective access to information and knowledge resources and services to meet the informational, educational, recreational and cultural needs of the community.

Keeping this in mind, the NKC made the following recommendations for the development of the libraries:

Set up a National Commission on Libraries

There is a need for a permanent, independent and financially autonomous statutory body to address the entire library related concerns and measures.

Prepare a National Census of all Libraries

A national census of all libraries should be prepared by undertaking a nation-wide survey. Based on this, a survey of user needs and reading habits should be periodic at the national level as part of the National Sample Survey.

Revamp Library and Information Science Education, Training and Research Facilities

The proposed Mission on Libraries must assess, as soon as possible, the manpower requirements of the country in the area of library and information science management and take necessary steps to meet the country's requirement through library and information science education and training. The government should establish a well-equipped institute for advanced training and research in library and information science in the name of "Indian Institute of Library and Information Science" for providing necessary quality services.

Re-assess Staffing of Libraries

In the changing context, it is necessary to assess the manpower requirements for different types of libraries and departments of library and information science and to analyze the job descriptions, qualifications, designations, pay scales, career advancement and service conditions.

Set up a Central Library Fund

A specified percentage of the central and state education budgets must be earmarked for libraries. In addition, a Central Library Fund should be instituted for upgrading existing libraries. This fund should be administered by the National Mission on Libraries.

Modernize Library Management

Libraries should be so organized and the staff so trained that they become relevant to user communities in every respect. A proposed outline for this modernization includes a model Library Charter, a list of services to be performed by libraries and proposals for a library network and a National Repository for Bibliographic Records.

Encourage Greater Community Participation in Library Management

It is necessary to involve different stakeholders and user groups in the managerial decision making process of libraries. Public libraries must be run by local self-government through committees. Libraries should integrate with all other knowledge-based activities in a local area to develop a community-based information system. In rural areas, the responsibility for village libraries and community knowledge centres must lie with the Panchayats.

Promote Information Communication Technology (ICT)

The catalogues of all libraries should be put on local, state and national websites, with necessary linkages. This will enable networking of different types of libraries and setting up of a National Repository of Bibliographic Records and a centralized collaborative virtual enquiry handling system using the latest ICT. Libraries should be encouraged to create more digital resources by digitizing relevant reading materials in different languages subject to copyright regulations. For this purpose, it is recommended to use free and open-source software.

Facilitate Donation and Maintenance of Private Collections

There are numerous rich, private and personal collections in India which need to be identified, documented and preserved for posterity. The proposed National Mission may set up a Committee on Private and Personal Collections.

Encourage Public/Private Partnerships in Development of Library and Information Services

Philanthropic organizations, industrial houses and other private agencies should be encouraged, through fiscal incentives to develop existing libraries or set up new libraries with ICT infrastructure to provide better library and information services.

CONCLUSION

NKC has historical importance in the history of Indian Libraries' movement. The *Chairman, Prof. Sam Pitroda released the Commission's Second Annual Report to the nation in Jan 2008.* The second report includes recommendations on portals, health information network, legal education, medical education, management education, open and distance education, open educational resources, innovation, intellectual property rights (IPRs), legal framework for public funded research and traditional health systems.

The Government extended the term period for another six months to April 2009. We hope that the recommendations on library and information services will be highly appreciated and may give social recognition to the information professionals in the forthcoming generations.

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