

Perspective plan for the second half of the term as Chairman, ICHR, New Delhi (Jan, 2016-June 2017)

Prof. Y Sudershan Rao

Introduction

I have already presented my report on the first half of my term in office (June 2014- Dec 2014) as Chairman. The research activities and program planning gained momentum with the assumption of the new council towards the end of March 2015. A full-fledged meeting of the General Council was held in September, which had taken stock of the situation and constituted various committees to take up different activities of the Council. A Working Group was constituted from among the new members of the Council. Prof R S Agrawal, Dr (Ms) Nandita Krishna, Dr Michel Danino, Dr M D Srinivas, Dr Saradindu Mukherji and Dr (Ms) Meenakshi Jain formed the Working Group to work out new proposals for major projects. They have ably worked out new research projects for ICHR on such areas of Indian history, hitherto being ignored. The new projects are proposed on subjects like Ancient Indian Science & Technology, Environmental History of India, Princely States etc. Thus, the first half prepared the necessary ground to launch new programs and projects. Unlike the previous projects taken up by the earlier Councils, the newly proposed projects have been prescribed specific time-line and expenditures are estimated. I am sure that the second half would see concrete steps being taken to move us forward. This perspective plan may give a bird's eye-view of the working of new projects and various other schemes and programs.

New Academic Programs

A) ICHR Seminars and Workshops:

ICHR sanctions financial grants to various academic institutions, research centres and professional organisations to conduct seminars, symposia, workshops, panel discussions etc, on regular basis calling for proposals three times a year. ICHR also conducts major seminars on its own at its academic center in India and also through its regional centers. We have planned for major

seminars on some issues of current relevance to be conducted during the ensuing year. Some such major seminars are cited below.

i) National Seminar on “Antiquity, Continuity and Development of Civilisation and Culture in Bharat up to first millennium B C”:

Theme: The land south of *Meru* (the Himalayan range) was traditionally known as Bharat, of which the land south of the Vindhya Range was known as *Dakshinapath* as an integral part of it. Ancient literature describes the country as a single well defined geographical unit from the Himalayas in north to the Indian Ocean in south. It is generally agreed that the culture and civilization of Bharat was continuous without a break.

Archaeologically, our civilization can be dated back to five thousand years before the present, though recent researches are pushing it further by perhaps another two thousand years. The relics of its early civilization, amazingly mature, were amply found in the Indus valley from *Harappa* down to *Mohenjodaro* during the early 1920s. Subsequently, many concrete evidences have been found showing that the civilization was widespread beyond the Indus valley. One of the most recent large sites is *Rakhighari* in what is now Harayana and called *Kurukshetra* in ancient times. Many sites are also found containing the remnants of mature civilization parallel to this in the southwest, in what is now Sindh and Gujarat.

The proposed seminar is intended to present the findings of recent research in history and its allied disciplines and discuss their relevance to update Indian history in respect of its remote past. These researches will be examined to fine-tune or update our present understanding of the antiquity, continuity and development of our ancient culture and civilization up to the beginnings of the historical period.

The seminar aims at a serious debate on the following major topics and attempts to synthesise these considerations for arriving at a consensus for further exploration.

- Introduction: The current theories and understandings of India's remote past.
- Geological researches – The changing courses of rivers with special reference to the *Sarasvati River*.
- Archaeoastronomy and Anthropology – Chronology, dating and migrations.
- Archaeological researches – Pre and proto historic cultural phases.
- Linguistics, literature and philosophy.
- Conclusion: Updating the ancient past and bridging the gaps.

Experts from various allied disciplines besides history who are working in India and abroad will be invited to present the papers and participate in the discussion. The proceedings of the seminar will be brought out in a book form after the seminar.

ii) Workshop-cum-Training course for three weeks on Epigraphy.

Tens of thousands of inscriptions in India remain unread or unpublished, depriving us from a substantial authentic source for the country's history. One reason for this state of affairs is that very few competent young scholars are currently attracted to the field, as a result of which the number of inscriptions coming into publication continues to decrease. Another reason is the declining standard of professional competence in the field.

In this context, ICHR has drawn an action plan to revive the discipline, beginning with a three-week Workshop-cum-Training on Epigraphy & Numismatics to be conducted in Delhi from July 4 to 24.

Mr Michel Danino, Member of ICHR is the Member-in-charge of this program.

iii) Workshop cum Training Course on " Indian Art and Architecture ":

Like archaeology, Indian art history also suffers from several inadequacies. Though our nation has a rich art tradition based on several sashtras like *Vastu, Silpa, Natya, and Sangeeta*, teachers and historians in this field are dwindling fast. We can hardly find students and scholars in this field in the modern scenario. Therefore the Council is organizing a 21-day Workshop cum Training Course for the benefit of young scholars opting for various art courses and research attached to centres of higher learning and research in these fields who are interested to pursue research. The course will be organized either in November or December this year at New Delhi.

Prof Rahman Ali, one of our members will be incharge of this course.

iv) Regular Workshops on "Research Methods in History" are conducted at various universities for the benefit of students of history.

B) Publications:

ICHR publishes periodical journals, proceedings of the seminars, monographs besides subsidizing the publications of books of the scholars, doctoral theses etc.

i) "*Itihas*" Journal in Hindi: ICHR has been regularly publishing a historical journal in English *Indian Historical Journal (IHJ)* which has grown to international standard.

This year, ICHR has planned for a periodical historical journal, *Itihas*, in Hindi. Prof Sachidanda Sahai is serving as its Chief Editor and Prof Iswar Sharan Viswakarma is its working Editor. The first issue is expected in June this year.

- ii) A Monograph on “Indian Education”: It is also proposed to come out with a scholarly work on an important issue of ‘Education system’. The ICHR intends to deal the subject from a historical perspective. Since a great amount of epigraphical data is available in India on the ancient education system which has continued as late as colonial period, it has proposed to invite scholars, both traditional and modern, to write on various aspects of education.

C) Research Projects:

The ICHR has been pursuing the old projects indefinitely since decades. In almost recent decades, no new projects worth mentioning were envisaged.

The Working Group of this Council proposed new projects to be undertaken by the ICHR. These proposals were presented to the 81st General Council Meeting on 23 Sept 2015. The Council approved these projects and resolved to take necessary steps to finalise the themes and work-plans and also to form the research teams to execute these projects. The detailed proposals with Budget estimates were presented in the 82nd Meeting of the Council on 29th March 2016. Subsequently, the following new proposals have been launched.

- i) A major national project on the “Historical Encyclopedia of Villages and Towns in India”.

India’s continuity of civilization and culture from unknown times has left with us a very rich heritage in both tangible and intangible ways. We are also fortunate to inherit their sense of history as they have preserved and transmitted their unbroken collective memory down the generations through a number of oral, folk and art forms. Most of the ancient habitats are still alive with their successors with increased number and space around. Every inch of place in India is said to have its own remarkable place either in history or spirituality. Therefore, Indians hold every piece of land in India in a very high esteem. The project endeavours to give peoples’ true history to them without disturbing their cultural ethos.

Our ancients recorded the religious, spiritual, social, historical and cultural significance of a *kshetra* or *sthala* as *puranas*. The life and works of a great saint/king/devotee are also available to us in *puranas* or folk ballads. Great events are also recorded to our delight and shape our psyche and conduct. They looked at history as a necessary means to correct and guide an individual to become a good citizen and thus qualify for spiritual pursuits. History was made to address the society through its constituents.

In modern times, the present generations are gradually delinking themselves from their cultural heritage for so many reasons. But, our historians should not ignore their responsibility to collect, preserve and

transmit this knowledge of history for the generations to come. Therefore, ICHR proposes to undertake a major project to prepare a historical encyclopedia of villages and towns in India.

The project is intended to collect the information of each village and town so that their profiles could be placed on web-based encyclopedia for reference. As this is a massive nation-wide endeavor, the students of history will be taken as apprentices as 'bare-foot historians' and will be encouraged to collect information of the villages or khsetras around them and write their brief reports. These 'bare-foot historians' will be paid some remuneration so that they can earn while learning. These reports will be perused and edited by the subject experts and put up to a uniform pattern for web publication.

ii) Project for Translation of foreign language sources of India.

Our present research on India is mostly restricted to the sources available in English. During its colonial period, many European powers had their trade contacts with India. These foreign visitors carried with them many original literary sources from India. Some of them left us their memoirs which speak volumes about the contemporary socio-political life in India. Such material should be brought to the doorsteps of our scholars.

The ICHR has taken up this translation project and initiated the scheme by starting some important French works on India. The expert committee identified some French Works which have not been translated into English so far among them were (a) Anquetil-Duperron's *Inde en rapport avec l'Europe* published in 1798; (b) Pierre de Sonnerat's *Voyage aux Indes Orientales et a la Chine*, published in 1782; (c) *Le Gentil, Histoire De L'Academie Royale Des Sciences* (Three volumes, relevant portions).

Professor Chitra Kirshnan, Professor & Head Dept. of French and other Foreign Languages, University of Madras, Chepauk, Chennai, has kindly accepted to translate Duperron's work.

Dr (Ms) Meenakshi Jain, Member ICHR, is Member-in-charge of this program.

iii) Project on Environmental History of India

The study of environmental history relates to the impact of the environment on society and political events, and their historical perspective, which is a new topic covering the strong environmental, historical, socio-cultural and ethical basis of India. It is an interdisciplinary approach combining aspects of history, archaeology, forestry, paleo-ecology, ecology, ethnography, sociology and botany. It is also the story of human exploitation of the natural world. It is about the impact of agriculture on soil and landscape, the history of forests, the effects of hunting and grazing; but also about the environmental impact of mining, transportation, urbanisation and industrialisation.

The principal goal of environmental history is to deepen our understanding of how humans have been affected by the natural environment in the past, and also how the environment has influenced historical events. This is called the bilateral approach of environmental history.

The expert committee has resolved to bring out a 7-8 volume set on the environmental history of India. The project work has already been initiated.

Prof Ranjan Chakrabarti, VC of Vidyasagar University is the project Director and Dr (Ms) Nanditha Krishna, Member ICHR, is the Member-in-charge of the Project.

iv) Project on the history of Indian Science and Technology:

It has been proposed to take up a project on the history of Indian science and technology from the earliest times to the beginnings of colonial rule in India. The project covers the origin and development of various disciplines in India as gleaned from literature and other sources. The ICHR is working on this theme to come out with a workable plan soon.

Dr M D Srinivas, Member ICHR, is the member-in-charge of this project.

v) Project on Modern India: Politics and Demography 1881-2001

This project intends to deal with the changing society and politics of India in a tumultuous period of its history. It takes up the district of Khulna (undivided Bengal) and Lahore (undivided Punjab) over a period from 1881-2001.

It probes as to how demography shapes the course of politics, society and culture on the basis of the Reports on decennial census operations. It asks new questions and re-examines much of the received wisdom on the subject bearing on our colonial experiences, freedom of movement and the partition and its consequences. This research is being based on both conventional and non-conventional sources.

Professor Jayanta Kumar Ray, National Research Fellow of GOI, is the Project Director. Dr Saradindu Mukherji, Member ICHR, is the Member-in-charge of the project.

D Fellowships: ICHR Gurukul Fellowship

ICHR has instituted an innovative scheme known as ICHR Gurukul Fellowship in its 82nd meeting, held 29.3.2016 from the current year 2016-17. The fellowship is awarded to a senior scholar (preferably having doctoral degree or equivalent work in the field) to work under a "Guru", who is selected by the Council for his outstanding scholarship and contribution in specialized areas of historical studies based on traditional

knowledge systems. The areas are generally related to history of Indian Art, Architecture, Epigraphy, Numismatics, Fine arts, Medical systems, Indian Science, Technology, Philosophy, etc.

Under this scheme, ICHR would sanction 2 fellowships every year with a tenure of 2 years each to work with a Guru. During his fellowship with Guru, he will have an advantage of learning the intricacies of his specialization. The fellow will receive a monthly fellowship and yearly contingency grant on par with Post-Doctoral Fellow of ICHR.

The "Guru" will be awarded a honorarium of Rs.20,000/- per month during the tenure-ship of a fellow with a contingency annual grant of Rs.20,000-. At the end of the term, the Gurukul fellow has to submit a detailed report of the work done in association with his "Guru" which will be evaluated by the experts in the field.

A Search-cum-selection Committee constituted by the Council will process the selection of "Guru" and the 'fellowship' will be awarded by the Selection Committee constituted for this purpose in consultation with "Guru".

E . ICHR Vision 2022 Document:

ICHR is founded in the year 1972. It is heading to Golden Jubilee in 2022. Keeping in view of this, a vision document is being worked out by the Council. The Council owes to report to the taxpayer what it had done during these eventful years. A critical survey of its policies, programs, research, publications is felt necessary by all the concerned. There is also a dire need to review the structure of the Council and propose necessary administrative reforms to improve the functioning of the Council. Therefore, necessary steps are being taken to review the functioning of ICHR through a sub-committee of the Council.

These schemes are expected to be completed in a fixed time frame, most probably in one to three years as the case may be. Well-defined themes and work plans are prepared by the respective expert committees and the theme proposals are fine-tuned in the Workshops of invited specialists and investigators of the projects. Advisory committees are constituted to each special project to periodically monitor the execution of the project and suggest mid-way corrections or improvements. Every project is assigned to one expert member from the Council to supervise and monitor the constant progress of the project. I am beholden to every member of the Council for extending their utmost

cooperation in all our endeavors and sparing much of their valuable time for the Council's work.

I am grateful to Smt Smriti Z Irani, the Hon'ble Minister, for her kind encouragement and guidance. The officers and the staff of the Department of HRD, Government of India have been of constant help to the Council in many ways.

I shall be failing in my duty, if I do not express my debt to the officers and staff of the Council who bore the brunt of all the hard work involved in getting things done smoothly.

I earnestly hope that we WILL be comfortably placed in all our innovative efforts at the end of the current year (2016-17).

JAI HIND

Prof. Y Sudershan Rao
Chairman
Indian Council of Historical Research,
New Delhi-1
D/- 26-06-2016