

Self-Assessment Report of the Chairperson, ICHR (A Mid-Term Appraisal, June '14- Nov '15)

Introduction

I am presenting here a brief report on my first half term in office as Chairperson of this premier research body for history under the aegis of the Government of India. As one holding a public office, I think it proper to bring to the notice of all concerned a report of this kind after the completion of my term in the office. This can be taken as a mid-term appraisal. It is first of its kind in the ICHR to address to the requirements of public accountability and transparency though we have been sending periodical reports to the Government. We have also been posting all official information, proceedings of various committees of the Council and the reports of the various programs organized by the ICHR on the ICHR website soon after the event is held besides issuing periodical Newsletters which are circulated throughout nation.

I assumed the office of Chairperson on 28 June 2014 and went back home after a brief stay in Delhi. Soon after I fell from a staircase and broke my backbone, which confined me to bed for almost three months. During the period, I attended to important matters online and also watched the statutory meetings on Skype from home. The routine programs and activities were not however hindered.

From October 2014, I could actively associate myself with the Council work. I conducted various review committee meetings on the pending research projects. By that time the earlier Council's term had expired and the reconstitution of the new Council was in the process for another three months. This prevented me from taking major decisions. The new Council was inaugurated on 27 March 2014.

Although the founders of ICHR identified as many objects as 'a' to 'x' leaving only two letters unrepresented of the English alphabet, the ICHR never before has taken up any project on its own worth mentioning to study culture, society, economy, polity, science, technology, art, religion, etc., of ancient and medieval times, which are recognized areas in the Memorandum of Association of the ICHR (1972). The new Council under my Chairmanship in the inaugural session itself had discussed these very important issues and set the ball rolling for improvisation of the present functioning and formulating new research projects for the Council. The new body of members constitutes eminent scholars from various fields of historical research with good academic experience.

This body has shown a good team spirit in designing and formulating research activities and programs. I am assured of their constant support and unstinted cooperation since they joined ICHR in April 2015.

In June, we had to face a critical personnel problem in the office administration due to the repatriation of Dy Director (Accounts) on completion of his deputation term; besides, the post of Dy Director (Admin) had been vacant for past couple of years. While trying to cope with this situation we had to face an unexpected resignation of the Member Secretary. In spite of this personnel problem the ICHR ran smoothly throughout my tenure.

Aims and Objectives I worked towards as Chairperson

- * **To bring awareness among historians to consider alternative tools as well when writing Indian History (other than the Western or Marxist approaches)**

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History writing in India is just about 300 years old and is not exactly reflective of our past. The first generation of history writers in India were European, the second generation was nationalistic and the third generation in the post-Independence era was dominated by Marxists, who use Marxist tools of analysis. India's past needs a sincere revisit to its ancient literary and archaeological sources to write its true history from Indian perspective. I encourage historians and researchers to evolve a methodology to study our remote past from Indian perspective.

- * **Take history to the people**

India, being the oldest continuous civilization and modern largest democracy, should plan to see that the common historical knowledge reaches the doorsteps of every citizen. In fact, India had enjoyed in its past such kind of education reach in attractive art and theatrical forms. After the Second World War, the informative and descriptive historical narratives were replaced by empirical, analytical and theoretical discourses, which would require scientific and non-scientific methodologies. Imparting of historical knowledge to everyone is important as common and minimum education program is not attempted. ICHR may take up publication of children history books (not necessarily text books), preparation of historical documentaries, etc.

India had a great tradition of writing 'kshetra or sthala puranas', brief histories of important places, 'kula puranas', the histories of communities, etc. People's history must reach people. We should train 'barefoot historians' and disseminate historical knowledge to educate common man.

ICHR should also think of offering consultancy services to the corporates, business houses, commercial concerns and can offer tailor-made projects for them, keeping in view the varied needs of each field of commodity production, like textiles, pharmaceuticals, building construction, urban development, tourism, heritage protection, education, town planning, handicrafts, cosmetics, entertainment programs, advertising, art and architecture - the list can go endless.

- * **Public Accountability and Transparency**

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From the time I assumed office, I have been maintaining and publishing Chairperson's Diary as soft copy on our website and also as a periodic Newsletter, which is first of its kind. I also made sure of the posting of all official information,

proceedings of various committees of the Council and the reports of the various programs organized by the ICHR on the ICHR website soon after the event is held.

* **To establish Continuity of Indian Culture and Civilisation from remote past to the historic period**

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I wish that the latest studies on ancient India and Indology should also be given their due space on the academic platform. I addressed many meetings and academic forums on this issue. I proposed to bring out a descriptive bibliography of the studies in this particular field and hold an international seminar inviting major stakeholders to meet on a common platform and discuss the problem threadbare. This would enable us to construct our history as a civilized and cultured community, which has been continuous since time immemorial.

* **To examine the primary historical data to rewrite our ancient and medieval history.**

So far history writing has been based on the translations or secondary sources. ICHR should meet this deficiency by translating our ancient and medieval literary texts - Sanskrit, Prakrit, Pali, Arabic and Persian— to cull out historical data. It is also mooted to impress upon our foreign partners with whom we have signed MoUs to provide us digitized sources of Indian history preserved in their repositories for the benefit of Indian scholars.

New Research Projects

ICHR has identified certain new areas in the ancient, medieval and modern periods of Indian History which have hitherto been paid less attention by the ICHR, for example, history of Indian Science and Technology and Environmental history, covering both ancient and late medieval times.

Based on the suggestions made in the inaugural session of the New Council in March 2015, an expert body consisting of present members is constituted as a 'working group' to consider and formulate proposals for new projects to be undertaken by the Council on its own. The working group, after close examination of the present status of research worldwide and also paying attention to the hitherto neglected areas in Indian history by the previous Councils, has come out with new project proposals. A few are listed below.

- * **History of Indian Science and Technology**
- * **Environmental History of India**

These two projects trace the developments in the respective fields from the ancient to the present as a continuous stream involving the experts across the allied disciplines from sciences and social sciences besides history.

- * **The Indian Princely States**

India under the rule of Indian princes was known as 'Native India' during the British rule. They enjoyed internal autonomy. Some of them were continuing to rule their estates from the times of Delhi Sultanate. In fact, these rulers bearing the brunt of foreign domination facilitated at least some part of India to enjoy freedom from foreign rule. Their contribution to preserve and promote Indian art, music and culture has been immense. What we call 'Indian' today is mostly due to them.

The subject of the Indian Princely States has recently received good attention from Western scholars and a few Indian scholars. Scholars such as Barbara Ramusack, Ian Copland, Thomas R. Metcalf, John McLeod, Manu Bhagawan, Waltraud Ernst, Biswamoy Pati and many others have attempted critical assessment of their role during the British rule. Some others tried to attract the lay readers with spicy tales about the princes and princesses, but they are not serious history books.

There were about 565 princes by the time when the English withdrew from India. Most of them were very insignificant estates. But, almost one-third of India was under their direct rule. Surprisingly, most of them enjoyed respect and reverence of their people till the last and their influence was also felt much on their respective areas in the coming three general elections. Most of the present works concentrated mainly on major states like Mysore, Hyderabad, Baroda and Bhopal. But, the other medium level states like Cooch Bihar, Travancore, etc. were not sufficiently focused. Some of them had survived many vicissitudes braving the rough tides for about a millennium. They strove to preserve, protect and keep alive, though playing at low key, and handed down to us whatever we call it 'Indian' today. Most of the ancient manuscripts can still be traced in the estate libraries. In the post-Independence era, they disappeared unceremoniously and unwept. ICHR is planning to attempt an objective study of the Princely states in this project on the Princely States of India.

* **The History of INA**

In the wake of the recent declassification of INA files by the West Bengal Government, the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, Sri Narendra Modiji, assured the family members of Netaji Subhas Bose that the files with the Government of India are also going to be declassified shortly. Subsequently, ICHR activated its already proposed project on INA. An expert committee is deputed to visit Kolkata to peruse the recently declassified records kept in the Police Museum in Kolkata.

* **Journal of Itihas**

The Council has started a new Journal in Hindi from this year. Earlier, ICHR was publishing a journal with the same name with translations of select papers published in our English Journal, IHR. Some numbers came up now and then and stopped. That is revived now as a regular Journal to facilitate historical research in Hindi.

* **The History of ICHR**

ICHR is heading to golden jubilee in 2021-22. Therefore, it is proposed to write an objective history of ICHR on its achievements and shortcomings. This general survey

on its various aspects like administration, academic research, publications and extension activities would give us a clear picture to what extent its aims and objectives are addressed. This assessment of its working would allow us to plan its further strengthening and to make amendments for its fast and healthy growth.

A committee is constituted with Council members who are actively working for the collection of data. Surprisingly, the office records are so scattered and untraceable that the organization which pleads for preservation of data at all levels to benefit future researchers has itself neglected to preserve its records properly or developing an archive within itself. To trace history of its forty years existence is becoming a herculean task for the committee.

A timeline, detailed work plan and budget estimates are being prepared to complete these projects within three years. They are to be launched from early next year. The resource persons were contacted and the concepts are being sharpened with well-defined scope. The respective monitoring committees are expected to meet in the last week of December 2015. The project out-lines will be placed on the ICHR website and suggestions of other scholars are invited to improve upon these schemes, for the first time keeping them open for discussion.

Old and Pending Research Projects

The new Council carries over a heavy backlog breaking its bones. Almost all of its current major projects are old by decades. Each pending project has survived its general editors or coordinators by generations. The amounts spent on these projects are not traceable because no specific grants or time-lines were fixed when they were launched. However, the present committee constituted for writing history of ICHR intends to work on these details. A few of such projects are listed below.

* **Towards Freedom Project:**

It seems that the ICHR was born for this project only. So, in a way, it is older than the ICHR. Many editors, coordinators and writers have worked on this project in succeeding generations from great-grandfathers to the present. Three volumes are still in the pipeline. The project is perhaps taking as much time as the struggle for freedom had taken!

* **Translation Project:**

This project of translating some select books into various Indian vernaculars is also as old as the ICHR. Selection of books for translation was done arbitrarily and to promote a particular school of thought in general and the books authored by late Prof. R S Sarma, Prof. Romila Thapar and D.D. Kosambi are some examples of the selections.

* **Dictionary of Administrative Terms in Ancient and Medieval Literatures:**

This has been running for decades and in the review committee, which I convened a few months ago, the coordinators who have been working on this for several years were contacted to check on their progress and to see if they had fixed a time-frame. They expressed their inability to complete the project in a fixed time-

frame even after so many decades. Prof. Shrimali, the coordinator for North Indian inscriptions, is still struggling with this project after decades. The sub-project of a dictionary of Persian terms looked after by Prof. Irfan Habib and Prof. Shireen Moosvi hasn't even started after decades of its announcement!

We separated the part of South India from this project as an independent one under Prof. Y. Subbarayalu where major work is done in Tamil inscriptions and new coordinators are appointed for Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam with a time-frame for completion of this project on South Indian Inscriptions.

Other projects are also sailing in the same boat. I have been holding periodical reviews and taking steps to hasten the process. Since we have spent lots of money on these projects over the years, we cannot abruptly close them but to persuade either the present coordinators to attend to work or make alternative arrangements to complete them. This step can be taken in the next review meetings of these old projects. I think, nowhere in the world, one can find such a pathetic situation in any research organization. It appears 'Intellectual feudalism' has been at large.

Foreign collaborations

* **Japan :**

Consequent on the visit of Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, Sri Narendra Modiji, to Japan, ICHR has signed an MoU with Japan. We are jointly holding a seminar in January next in New Delhi.

* **Russia:**

ICHR has renewed its MoU with Russia for mutual exchange of scholars and joint research programs in the first quarter of this year.

* **UK (AHRC):**

ICHR has renewed its MoU with UK (AHRC) identifying new areas to work on jointly with restatement of facts. A workshop was organized in New Delhi with 40 delegates from both sides to discuss themes on Rapid Urbanization and Preservation of Heritage. The workshop has identified certain areas to offer joint projects with Indian and British investigators. The process of selection and approval of 4 projects under the scheme has been completed and the projects start working from November 2015. They will be completed by March 2016.

* **Germany:**

ICHR has active collaboration with Germany and five of our scholars visited Germany under Academic Exchange Program. Earlier, we hosted the visit of their scholars to India. A couple of months ago, a German scholar visited India and ICHR organized her lecture tour in India besides organizing a workshop on 'Heritage - Rapid Urbanization' at Osmania University, Hyderabad.

The ICHR has also been collaborating with other countries like Turkey, France, etc. in various academic programs.

Lecture Series

ICHR holds lecture series periodically at Delhi and other major cities besides at its Regional Centers at Guwahati and Bengaluru.

It celebrates every year the 'Foundation Day' (27 March) and the 'National Education Day' (11 November).

- For the National Education Day celebrations of the year 2014, we invited a Philosopher-Historian from Belgium, Prof. Balagangadhara, who spoke on Historiography. http://ichr.ac.in/snb_lec.pdf
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- For this year's (2015) Foundation Day we had invited Padmabhushan, Dr. David Frawley (Sri Vamadeva Sastry), an Indologist from US, to deliver a lecture on historical material from Rig Vedic literature. http://ichr.ac.in/foundation_day.pdf.

Federation of Professional History Associations and Centers of Research

From the time ICHR has been established, no attempt was made to study the organizational problems being faced by professional history organizations and autonomous research centers in India and their contributions to the cause of history writing. I feel a workshop should be organized by the ICHR by inviting the official representatives of major associations and research centers to discuss the problems confronting them in their pursuits. It might be considered to set up a Federation under the aegis of ICHR to bring all genuine organizations under one umbrella.

Delegation of powers and functions to Regional Centers

Earlier Review Committees for ICHR appointed by the Government had already suggested that the ICHR should establish Regional Centers in the country to address to the needs of various regions and organize research activities and take up region-specific seminars and research projects. This would also facilitate the scholars and students of that region to have an access with this National body through the regional centers. Because of the modern networking system, they can have link access to the Central Library and Documentation Centre at the headquarters. The regional fellowships, and individual regional studies could be monitored by these centers. Now we have two functioning centers at Bengaluru for the South, Guwahati for the Northeast and a not-so-active one at Mumbai. On our request, the Deccan College, Pune has offered accommodation on their campus to shift the Western center to Pune. The Srinagar center has been pending so far. Through the persuasion of our new Council members, we got invitation from the Jammu National University offering space for opening our Northern Center. We also got an offer from

the Kasi Vidya Peeth to open our Eastern Center. The request for opening Central region at Osmania University, Hyderabad, is pending for approval. When all these centers come up, the ICHR can take up more extension activities to reach all parts of India and address the common man. The recent Council has approved to delegate functional power to these Regional Centers. This would help ICHR to go to the doorsteps of people.

Addresses in Seminars and Conferences:

During the period of my tenure, I visited several places over the length and breadth of our country and spoke as chief guest or key speaker in various national and international workshops and conferences on diverse areas of historical studies like Indian historiography, Indian philosophy of history, Indian culture and various other broad and micro topics related to history. My effort all the time has been to draw the attention of the audience to Indian perspectives on various issues confronting the modern world. In about 500 days in office, I spoke on various platforms numbering not less than 80 occasions. All these events are noted in my Diary, which I am publishing on web periodically, and also in ICHR Newsletter.

Conclusion

The new Council has stepped in with new ideas and programs. We have to prioritize our new plans and also judiciously monitor the old but ongoing plans. We are sure that the Government would offer necessary support to the ICHR in all its academic programs and provide necessary administrative support for the smooth functioning of this prestigious organization. The Chairperson and the Council are being extended unstinted support by the staff and scholars. Their hard work and good wishes contributed greatly to the smooth functioning of the ICHR.

Jai Hind