

Report of the Committee to Review the functioning of the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR), New Delhi

1. Introduction

The Committee, comprising Professor Satish Chandra and Professor Amiya Kumar Bagchi as members, was appointed by the Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, 28th October 2010 with the following terms of reference:

- (i) Review performance of the Indian Council of Historical Research (in the last 5 years) in promoting historical research in terms of its mandate in the MOA and the impediment thereto
- (ii) Review policies and programme of ICHR, regional centres, research projects, seminars/conferences, fellowships, publications and support thereof, especially keeping in mind the relevance of transparency, interdisciplinary nature and research evaluation – standards of research and impact factor in regard to publication by its scholars / researchers, who are recipients of grants from ICHR.
- (iii) Review structure and functioning of the Council, including the Regional Centres of the Council, so that the Council becomes a relevant catalyst towards improving the quality of historical research.
- (iv) Inter-Institutional relationship and opportunities of networking
- (v) Any other matter as decided by the Committee within the realm of historical research.

2. Reviewing the progress of work done by the ICHR during the period 2005-2011, The Committee highlights the following signal achievements:

- (i) Publication of the volumes of *Towards Freedom*. The Bandyopadhyay Committee had especially stressed the stalling of a flagship project of the ICHR, namely, the publication of the volumes recording the progress of India towards freedom from foreign rule in 1947. Altogether eight volumes in physical terms (several of the volumes are in two parts, each one as hefty as the other) edited by Professors Mushirul Hasan, K. N. Panikkar, Amit Kumar Gupta, Arjun Dev, Bimal Prasad and Sumit Sarkar have been published between 2008 and 2010 and a few others are in the pipeline.
- (ii) Resumption of the project on documents of the economic history of India during the colonial period and compilation. It published of volumes on the economic history of the Eastern and Southern regions, and the final volumes of the "*History of Railways*".
- (iii) The remembrance of the Indian revolt of 1857, and publication of volumes commemorating it, including sponsoring the re-publication of six volumes of the revolt in Uttar Pradesh authored by Dr. S. A. A. Rizvi.
- (iv) A steep increase in the number of fellowships awarded, and research projects and seminars funded by the ICHR. It may be noted that in the years 2003-2004 and 2004-05, the numbers of research projects approved were 18 in each year, and the number of fellowships approved were respectively 257 and 287. By contrast, in 2009-10, the numbers of research projects and fellowships approved had grown to 50 and 455 respectively. Table 1 gives a summary picture of the intervening years.
- (v) Resumption of translation of history books into various National languages, a programme which had been languishing for sometime. However, the Committee desired that a fresh look be taken at the books to be translated since they were chosen more than twenty years ago and much water has flown down the Jamuna since then.
- (vi) From 2008 the ICHR has been conducting courses on historiography and research methodology for young scholars. These activities can be further expanded if resources at the disposal of the ICHR are expanded in the ways we have indicated (Appendix I gives the actual levels of expenditure under different heads.)

- (vii) The ICHR has adopted a policy of discontinuing subsidies on all its publications, except for those which would be of value only to specialists and would involve extra cost such as reproductions of many photographs, epigraphic inscriptions, or use of a local language spoken by only a small community, and so on. Practically all the flagship publications mentioned earlier have been published without giving subsidies to the publishers. This has not only saved money but also eliminated a potential source of malpractice.

Table 1 Some major programmes of the ICHR, 2006-07 to 2009-10

	Grants 2006-07 – 2008-09 Averaged	Grants 2009-10	Plus / Minus
Research Projects	49	50	+1
National Fellowships	03	03	0
Senior Academic Fellowships	19	23	+4
Post-Doctoral Fellowships	27	44	+17
Junior Research Fellowships	373	385	+12
Foreign Travel Grant	39	56	+17
Study-cum-Travel Grant	105	95	-10
Publication Subsidy	55	48	-7
Seminar / Conference	83	111	+28

3. New Areas of Study and Research

Some of the new areas which need to be promoted by ICHR are as follows:

- (i) Regional study should be deepened by furthering studies at the district, local and village levels including family studies. Regional history should also include comparative regional studies using studies of neighbouring or

adjacent regions, histories of human developments including health, education and standards of living.

- (ii) There has been a great deal of work in many fields such as study of folk lore (including superstitions such as witchcraft), health and nutrition, and Mentalities of the people in some European countries.

4. Regional Centres

- (i) Further steps towards decentralization of some of the activities of the ICHR are necessary, bearing in mind, the expansion of the Southern Regional Centre in Bengaluru, and opening of a North-Eastern Regional Centre in Guwahati. The Southern Regional Centre has already made its presence felt by organizing thematic exhibitions, a workshop on historiography and lectures by leading historians on their areas of specialization (see evaluation of the work done at the Southern Regional Centre, and news of Regional Centre Annexure I). The work done at Guwahati, on oral history is particularly significant, since some of the languages of the region acquired a script only in recent centuries. Moreover, a special effort may be made to study and catalogue many stone sculptures and artifacts that are decaying because of the ravages of weather. As in the case of the Southern Regional Centre, the Committee suggests the organization of two-to-three week long workshops on important areas of historiography to which aspirants for PhD and other postgraduate degrees, and college and university teachers could be invited. Such workshops should be organized in collaboration with a university or a leading research centre of the region, so as to attract suitable scholars.

(For programmes of Regional Centres, see Annexure I)

5. Library and Documentation Centre

The Committee desired that the documentation centre of the library should be strengthened further in order to provide topics and abstracts of articles on Indian History from various scholarly journals, and also to prepare a list of the world wide publication of books on Indian History each year. For the time being, these lists may be confined to the English and Indian languages. These documents

should be disseminated widely, and should be made available to scholars, if necessary on payment.

6. Fellowships

There is regional imbalance in Fellowship programmes (See Table 2.)

Table 2 Number of applications, zone-wise, received under various research funding schemes of ICHR and the number of cases approved for financial grant during the year 2009-10

Table 2

S.No.	Name of schemes	South		North		West		East		North-East	
		R	A	R	A	R	A	R	A	R	A
1	Research Projects	04	-	15	11	09	06	05	03	-	-
2	Senior Academic Fellowships	04	01	10	03	02	01	09	02	03	-
3	Post Doctoral Fellowships	-	03	56	20	02	02	07	01	-	-
4	Junior Research Fellowships	69	42	223	92	24	15	30	20	-	-
5	Foreign Travel Grant	15	06	57	24	28	08	34	18	-	-
6	Contingency (Study-cum-Travel) Grant	27	22	132	58	09	05	13	10	-	-
7	Publication Subsidy	16	11	05	03	46	20	10	13	05	01
8	Seminar/Symposia /Conference etc.	33	26	96	53	19	10	27	22	-	-

7. Impediments to the activities of the ICHR

- (i) ICHR is badly understaffed: even of the 126 posts in headquarters sanctioned by the government, 26 posts are lying vacant. Many of these posts had languished on account of the low implementation of programmes between 2000-2005. Government sanction is needed to revive them. At present urgent work has to be often conducted by people retired from the ICHR, working on a part-time basis. In this connection, the Committee would like to point out that the situation has radically changed since the last report submitted by the Staff Inspection Unit (SIU) of the Government of India in 2004. At the time the SIU submitted its report and recommended a reduction of the staff strength of the ICHR, the activities of the ICHR was at a low ebb. As we have mentioned already, since 2005, the activities of the Council have expanded steeply, and if the recommendations in the later part of this report are to be implemented, not only must the existing vacancies be filled and upgraded to meet the academic and technical requirements, but new staff have to be recruited at the headquarters as well as the regional centres. The ICHR should conduct a fresh exercise about the manpower needed in order to carry out the mandated responsibilities.
- (ii) The ICHR staff and fellows are paid lower emoluments than in comparable establishments such as the UGC. This hampers the incentives of existing staff and stays the recruitment of new staff of adequate quality. The Committee has suggested some badly-needed steps to remedy this situation – a practice which we do not favour.
- (iii) The re-designation of many of the senior and middle-level staff in consonance with the need for new skills in the age of electronic technology, and fixing scales of pay to fit the designated job description is highly desirable.
- (iv) For helping in the research into India's history, the ICHR-funded scholars need to visit archives in many countries, in Europe, North America and East and South-East Asia. The costs of travel, residence in the foreign locations and new technologies for accessing the archives will be a multiple of what is

now allotted for those purposes. The MHRD should allot additional funds for allowing the ICHR to develop its potential as the apex body in India sponsoring historical research.

- (v) Further efforts should be made to decentralize the activities of the ICHR, by opening regional Centres in the Western and Eastern regions of India adequately and giving them some financial autonomy for granting funds for small projects. This will help address grievances about the concentration of fellowships and grants in particular states or regions. However, we are not in favour of too many Regional Centres which would weaken the work of the Central Office of the ICHR.

8. Expansion of Higher Education.

- (i) According to a UGC Report 2009-10, regarding the needs of higher education during the Eleventh Five Year Plan,

“Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh has asked the UGC to make a presentation on the vision for higher education under the Eleventh Plan. The UGC made the presentation, which was followed by a stimulating discussion for over two hours. The UGC highlighted the issues confronting higher education in the Country: low enrolment rates (GER), inter-regional disparities, inequitable access to different social groups, quality of higher education, problem of qualified faculty and, above all, under financing of the higher education.

Following the presentation, Prime Minister announced several major policy-decisions on the same day, chiefly for the expansion of the institutional capacity in higher education including setting up of 30 Central Universities during the Eleventh Plan. Out of these, 15 universities were to be set up in those states which did not have a central university. Prime Minister also announced setting up of model colleges in each of 374 districts where the enrolment rate was lower than the national average. Announcement also included scholarships to cover 2% of undergraduate/post graduate students.

Furthermore, Prime Minister also advised the UGC to work closely with the Planning Commission and MHRD to develop the strategy for higher education under the Eleventh Plan”(University Grants Commission: *Higher Education in India: Strategies and Schemes during Eleventh Plan*, p.ii).

- (ii) The Committee noted that in view of the rapid expansion of Higher Education, as visualized by the Government of India, there would be great need of strengthening the research needs of Universities by adding to the Fellowships and other academic programmes. The ICHR should prepare a note and discuss with Government regarding the projected expansion, and the administrative and academic needs to cope with it. The larger demands arising from expansion of higher education and the activities of international collaboration suggested by us will have to be met in order to keep-up the standards, which the Government and the academic communities expect of the ICHR. The Committee, therefore, strongly recommends that the infrastructure of the ICHR should be expanded so that they accommodate the new demands made on it. There are three possibilities that can be explored for quick implementation.
- (iii) The ICHR is badly cramped in its 35 Ferozeshah Road premises. The best solution would be for the ICSSR, which has spacious premises in the Institutional Area, and other occupants, such as Hamdard University and JNU with hardly any functional need in the Ferozeshah Road premises to vacate it and the ICHR to restructure the whole building. This would also help in the proper maintenance of the building which suffers due to multiplicity of occupants. We have been told, this requires the permission of MHRD, which is the rightful owners of the land.
 - a) The rooms or buildings occupied by ICSSR and other organizations at the premises of 35 Feroze Shah Road should be vacated and the ICHR should be given exclusive possession of the said premises
 - b) Pending the expansion of the possession by ICHR, a building should be erected on the parking slot of 35,

Ferozeshah Road so that more space can be found for the Library which is badly cramped and for a proper auditorium.

- c) If the ICHR cannot be given exclusive possession of the premises at 35, Ferozeshah Road, a plot of land should be allotted by the Government of India to the ICHR near the centre of New Delhi so that it remains easily accessible to scholars from the universities located in and near Delhi, as also to scholars visiting from other parts of India and abroad.

9. International and Foreign programmes

- (i) As regards inter-institutional collaboration within India, the ICHR has already made progress by entering into long-term research collaboration with universities and research institutions. Such collaboration can be further to mutual academic benefit.
- (ii) Collaboration with countries of South East Asia, South Asia, West Asia and Central Asia is particularly necessary because India has played a nodal function in the communication and exchange of trade, finance, languages and culture throughout the last five millennia at least. The ICHR, in collaboration with similar bodies like ICSSR, ICPR, ICCR and UGC, NGO, etc. can play a major role in facilitating future interchanges of this kind by organizing international seminars and promotion of joint research programmes. There are cultural exchange programmes with several countries, some of which work well but some don't, mainly because the other side remains inactive. There is also a problem arising from the fact that these programmes work under protocols between the Government of India and the governments of the countries concerned. The Committee recommends that the ICHR should be given the autonomy to enter into collaboration agreements including exchange of scholars with genuine academic institutions abroad. The Committee feels that the financial and infrastructure resources of ICHR need to be strengthened further for it to be able to carry out this demanded function.

- (iii) Comparative studies as well in-depth studies by Indian scholars will require the ability of the scholars in collaboration with foreign scholars to access archives in metropolitan countries. This will require an increase in the funding of the ICHR by the government.

10. Administrative Functioning

- (i) The Committee felt that the duties of the administration and academic staff need to be spelt out clearly bearing in mind that academic staff was not merely to pursue files but was expected to be abreast of the development of the Historical Sciences, and should also have the opportunity to contribute to its growth.
- (ii) The Committee noted the need of bringing Fellowships as well as staff emoluments, retirement and health benefits, etc., at par with the University Grants Commission, ICSSR, etc. In this context, the question of payment of 60% arrears to the staff as per the 6th Pay Commission award was also noted. In order to attract people of the right qualifications and quality, the emoluments at all levels need to be increased substantially. This is true of Fellows, who would expect compensation comparable to that available in universities, but also of senior staff at the ICHR, who need to be academics of the right quality, because much of the judgment about what to send to expert committees for assessment rests with them. Justice demands that the pay of those members of the staff who received 60 per cent of their arrears at the time of the last revision of pay should get the rest immediately.
- (iii) A point was made that individuals file complaints to the Government and Courts regarding grievances, and that sometimes ICHR is asked to submit original files to Government which are often not returned. The Committee noted that bearing the RTI Act in mind, the Grievances Cell of ICHR, which was set up in 2009 should be strengthened, if necessary, by attaching a lawyer to it. The Cell should not only work expeditiously but in a transparent manner.

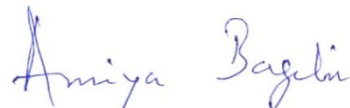
11. Structure of the ICHR

- (i) It is the strong view of the Committee that the structure of the ICHR should be altered in two directions: first, only half of the members of the Council should retire at the middle end of the appointed term and half the number of members should join the Council in place of retiring members.
- (ii) Some members should be appointed on the Council as representatives of the academic communities other than the nominees of the Government. For instance, the Indian History Congress should send a representative to the Council.
- (iii) In order to ensure that the Chairman is an esteemed scholar in the field of historical sciences, it would be desirable to appoint a Research Committee to draw up a panel of names for submission to the Government. This would be in line with the appointment of Vice-Chancellor of Central Universities, and bodies such as the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.

At the end we would like to thank officials of the ICHR for their co-operation, and making detailed presentation on the academic, financial and administration aspects of the Council.



(Satish Chandra)



(Amiya Kumar Bagchi)

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Annexure 1 Regional Centres

Report on the Southern Regional Centre of Indian Council of Historical Research at Bangalore

Professor Amiya Kumar Bagchi who visited the Southern Regional Centre was greatly impressed by the amount and variety of work that the Southern Regional Centre, Bangalore of ICHR had been able to accomplish during the few years of its existence. The work done displays not only the industry of Dr. S. K. Aruni, Dy. Director of the Centre and his co-workers but also the imagination with which they have carried out the work. Some of the most notable pieces of work carried out by them include organizing an eighteen-day workshop on historiography, publishing lectures on important subject by noted historians and organizing exhibitions on many aspects of India, particularly south Indian history which are imaginative, and displays of paintings of pre-colonial and colonial periods, and photographic representations of architecture and sculpture. The Centre has also put all the epigraphs relating to south India on CD ROM and many important books also on CD ROM for the use of scholars. This is a remarkable achievement for the centre which is not equipped with an expert in electronic documentation.

Professor Bagchi's impression was that Dr. S. K. Aruni and his co-workers are stretched beyond their full capacity with the current spate of folio work and ICHR should make provision for somebody to assist Dr. Aruni and his co-workers in the work. The assistants should be equipped with additional personnel in the shape of properly trained social scientists with an interest in history and exposure to the retrieval of qualitative and quantitative data.

Based on the above, the Committee's suggestions are to be seen as pointers for building up on the strong foundation laid for each:

- i. Workshops should be conducted for specialized areas of historiography, rather the whole field of historiography as such, which is too comprehensive an area for especially young scholars and researchers.

For example workshops can be conducted on the history of labour or the history of the colonial peasantry, the history of financial systems and their changes

- during the colonial and pre-colonial periods or the history of various aspects of human development such as education, health, longevity and issues of gender.
- ii. Study of distant and local records, family history, etc,.
 - iii. Attempts should be made to build up data bases for long term changes in various aspects of social, political, economic and human development. For unearthing and arranging archival materials relating to all the areas of interest external experts should be invited to advise the centre as to how to go about building up the data bases.
 - iv. Lectures by eminent historians should be organized for a day leaving room for interaction between the lecturers and the audience who would be invited from Universities, colleges and research centers in the region.
 - v. In all cases of seminars, university departments and research centers should be approached as active collaborators so that researchers can be properly informed and participate in seminars relating to their own subjects.
 - vi. Exhibitions should be organized also on the daily life of ordinary people especially during the colonial period, and if possible, in the selected segments in the pre-colonial period also.