

**Report
of the
Review Committee
on
Indian Council of Philosophical Research (ICPR)**

Submitted By

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Preliminaries

The present Review Committee, constituted by the Government of India, (Notification No.F.7-42/ICPR/2010-U.5 dated 28th October, 2010) was given the responsibility of reviewing the functioning of Indian Council of Philosophical Research (ICPR) during the last five years. The terms of reference of the Committee are as follows:

- (i) Review performance of the Council (in the last 5 years) in promoting research in philosophy in terms of its mandate in its MoA and the impediments thereto;
- (ii) Review policies and programmes of ICPR, regional centres, research projects, seminar/conferences, fellowships, publications and support thereof and promotion of international collaborations, 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 ICPR;

- (iii) Review structure and functioning of the Council, including the regional centre(s) of the Council, so that the Council becomes a relevant catalyst towards improving the quality of research in philosophy;
- (iv) Inter-institutional relationships and opportunities of networking;
- (v) Any other matter as decided by the Committee within the realm of research in philosophy.

The Council's Memorandum of Association specifies the following functions:

- "To review the progress of research in philosophy from time to time;
- "To sponsor or assist projects or programmes of research in philosophy;
- "To give financial support to institutions and organizations engaged in the conduct of research in philosophy;
- "To provide technical assistance or guidance for the formulation of research projects and programmes in

philosophy, by individuals or institution, and/or organize and support institutional or the other arrangements for training in research methodology;

- “To indicate periodically areas in and topics on which research in philosophy should be promoted and to adopt special measures for the development of research in neglected or developing areas in philosophy;
- “To co-ordinate research activities in philosophy and to encourage programme of interdisciplinary research;
- “To organize, sponsor and assist seminars, special courses, study circles, working groups/parties, and conferences for promoting research in philosophy, and to establish institutes for the same purpose;
- “To give grants for publication of digests, journals, periodicals and scholarly works devoted to research in philosophy and also to undertake their publication;
- “To institute and administer fellowships, scholarships and awards for research in philosophy by students, teachers and others;
- “To develop and support documentation services, including maintenance and supply of data,

preparation of an inventory of current research in philosophy and compilation of a national register of philosophers;

- “To promote collaborations in research between Indian philosophers and philosophical institutions and those from other countries;
- “To take special steps to develop a group of talented young philosophers and to encourage research by young philosophers working in Universities and other institutions;
- “To advise the Government of India on all such matters pertaining to teaching and research in philosophy as may be referred to it by the Government of India from time to time;
- “To enter into collaboration on mutually agreed terms, with other institutions, organizations and agencies for the promotion of research in philosophy;
- “To promote teachings research in philosophy;
- “Generally to take all such measures as may be found necessary from time to time to promote research in philosophy; and

- “To create academic, administrative, technical, ministerial and other posts in the Council and to make appointments, thereto in accordance with the provisions of the Rules and Regulations.

Note: The word ‘philosophy’, as used here, should be interpreted very broadly to include all branches of philosophy (Indian, Eastern and western) and all philosophical aspects of Humanities, social Sciences, Natural sciences and Mathematics.” **(See Annexure I)**

I

Meetings of the Review Committee

The first meeting of the Review Committee was held on 15th November 2010 to discuss the procedure to be followed by the Committee for its work. It was decided that the Committee should meet the Chairman and the Member Secretary of the Council in the first instance and that then meet the entire Council. Professor Rajeev Bhargava offered to visit the Lucknow Centre of the Council and the Council’s library located in the Centre. It was also decided to visit the office of the Council (Darshan Bhavan, 36, Tughlakabad Institutional Area, M. B Road, New Delhi-

110062) to look at the records connected with its various academic programmes.

The meeting with the Chairman and the Member Secretary of the Council took place on 27th November 2010 in the office of the Chairman. (A copy of a summary report of the meeting is at **Annexure II**). Thereafter on 23rd December the Review Committee met the members of the Council. The Chairman and the Member Secretary were also present at this meeting. (A copy of a summary report on the meeting is at **Annexure III**). Meanwhile Professor Rajeev Bhargava visited the Lucknow Centre of the Council on 16th December 2010. The Committee next met the Member Secretary in the Council's office on 24th January 2011 to discuss with him the seminar programme of the Council. This was followed by a series of meetings of the Committee at Professor Mrinal Miri's residence (A copy of a summary report on these meetings is at **Annexure IV**). On 25th February 2011 the Review Committee had a meeting with the Committee, also set up by Government of India, to review the functioning of the Indian Council of Social science Research (ICSSR) primarily to compare notes and

explore possibilities of coordinated interdisciplinary research.

II

The Structure of the Council

The Council has the following structure:

❖ The Council and under it:

- The Governing Body;
- The Research Project committee;
- The Finance Committee; and
- Any other Committee that may be constituted by the council for carrying out its business and for achieving its objectives.

The Council

Academically the most important segments of the composition of the Council are:

- Twelve members nominated by the Government of India who will be distinguished philosophers or teachers of philosophy in the University departments, affiliated colleges and schools, or

other persons who have made an outstanding contribution to philosophy;

- Four persons of outstanding merit in the field of philosophy or from amongst those as have rendered distinguished service to the cause of philosophy through their scholarship, research or original contributions, to be co-opted by the Council.

It will be worth considering by the Government if the Government is the best agency for nominating twelve academic members of the Council. The MoA is silent about the method to be followed by the Government and criteria to be adopted in its selection procedure.

From the discussions with members of the Council it was evident that the nomination of the four co-opted members is left to the discretion of the Chairman. [This seems at variance with the information gathered at the meeting with Chairman and the Member Secretary on 27th November, 2010, see Annexure II] While, in principle, this procedure need not lead to inappropriate nominations, it is regrettable that the Council has not

taken its responsibility on this very important matter seriously.

Governing Body

An important provision in respect of the constitution of the Governing Body is at 29(b) of the MoA of ICPR. The clause says that the Governing Body will include “not less than 3 or more than 8 members appointed by the Council at the Annual General Meeting”.

The idea behind this provision seems to be that the Governing Body should be in a position to induct members who, in its opinion, are eminent scholars in different areas of philosophy and other related disciplines – scholars who the Council thinks will be able to contribute substantially towards efforts at achieving its objectives.

From the discussions with the members of the Council the fact emerged that the practice has been to authorize the Chairman to nominate members to the Governing Body on the Council’s behalf. Once again it is regrettable that the Council has not taken its

responsibility in this respect with the seriousness that it deserves.

Research Project Committee (RPC)

The clause 52(b) of the MoA says that the RPC will include “not less than five or more than nine members appointed by the Council at the Annual General Meeting (no more than three of these members may be persons who are not members of the Council).” **Once again it is observed that the practice has been to authorize the Chairman to nominate members to the RPC on the Council’s behalf.**

Thus, in the most crucial matters relating to the composition of the important authorities of the Council, the Council seems to have abdicated its powers to the discretion of the Chairman. While, as mentioned above, this in itself need not lead to erroneous selections, the possibility of error is high, particularly in cases where the Chairman herself/himself may not be from the discipline of philosophy.

III

Academic Programmes of the Council

The Council has the following on-going academic programmes:

- Seminars
- Fellowships
- National Lectures

Seminars

The Committee looked at the seminar proposals, approved by the Council, in the light of the Council's 16 point directive about application for financial assistance for holding seminars and the actual organization and conduct of seminars. (A copy of this ICPR document can be seen at **Annexure V**)

The Committee observed that several of the proposals which were approved by the Council should not have been entertained at all because they did not satisfy several of the criteria laid down by the Council.

Examples: Seminars with the following titles;

- National seminar on “Philosophy and Religion” (By Dr. Emmanuel Uppamthadathi, Dean of Studies, Suvidya College, Bangalore, 2008-09)
- Seminar on “Value Embedded in Indian Culture and their Relevance in Present time” (by Dr. Debika Saha & Dr. Jyotish Basak, Department of Philosophy, North Bengal University, Darjeeling, 2008-09)
- National seminar on “Metaphysics: Methods and Perspectives” (by Dr. Aditya Kumar Mohanty, Centre of Advance study in Philosophy, Utkal university, bhubaneswar, 2008-09)
- National Seminar on “Perspectives in Social and Political Philosophy” (by Dr. Saurvpran Goswami, Department of Philosophy, Gauhati University, 2008-09)
- Seminar on “The Freedom of Man and his attitude towards Environment” (by Dr. Indu Pandey Khanduri, Department of Philosophy, Garhwal University, 2008-09)
- Nationa Seminar on “ Philosophical Foundation of Human Development and Social Exclusion” (By Dr. D.

Pulla Rao, Department of Economics, Andhra University, 2008-09)

- National Seminar on “The Culture and Philosophy of Science in India” (By Prof. Makarand Pranjape, Centre for English Studies, JNU, 2008-09)
- Workshop on “Indian Philosophy and Social Concern” (by Dr. Sharada Subramanian, Sri Sathya Sai University, Anantpur, 2008-09)
- National Seminar on “Morality and Law: An interdisciplinary Dialogue” (by Prof. Narendra Singh, Department of Philosophy, University of Allahabad, 2008-09)
- Workshop on “Philosophy of Aesthetics” (By Dr. K. Sankarnarayanan, Director, K J Somaiya Centre for Buddhist Studies, Mumbai, 2008-09)

Such examples can be multiplied. A mere look at the titles of the proposed seminars cited above should have been sufficient to set these proposals aside as they are much too general in scope and fail to satisfy the most important criterion laid down by the Council: “The theme must be chosen carefully. The theme should be

specific so that pointed and fruitful discussion can take place in the seminar”.

The Committee however looked carefully at the proposals themselves across the last four or five years and was firmly of the view that a substantial number of these should not have been approved. [The following (Annexure VI) are random examples of proposals that are simplistic, framed carelessly and totally lacking in focus:]

- “The contemporary scenario of environmental crisis has attracted the attention of moral philosophers to review the notion of freedom of man in terms of actions those are [sic] detrimental to environment as a whole. The conscious man, being the only rational being in the entire cosmos, has the freedom to choose the action. The nature as whole has its own course of Rules to direct the functioning the entire cosmos and it determines the physical nature of environment. Since human being is only rational creatures thus he can think, he can choose and act accordingly, this constitute the crux of his freedom”;

- “Excepting a miniscule minority, which also justifies its support for selfishness and throws open lively discourses, mainstream philosophy is aware of its social responsibility. Starting with very early Greek and very early Indian and Chinese philosophy, our discipline has displayed remarkable concern for society. Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Yajnavalkya, Janak, Manu, Prashara, Buddha, Confucius all were socially motivated. Machiavelli and Kautilya, Hobbes and M. N. Roy, Marx and Gandhi, Green and Aurobindo have made distinct contribution to understanding social reality. Even abstract thinkers like Spinoza and Kant had their substantive political views. All are aware of political theorization coupled with activism of Bertrand Russell. Therefore it is not necessary to be apologetic that philosophers are less social than others in their thought and behavior”;
- “Almost every phenomenon of communal conflict presuppose[sic] a plurality of intolerant persons along with their dogmatic commitments to specific beliefs. Prima facie it appears to be something that instantly irrupts [sic] amidst a large number of people – out of

fanatic stimulus. Nevertheless, provided one analyzes sufficiently in depth, it is a phenomenon of interpersonal nature produced by a number of persons among which almost each individual is imbalanced or inharmonious in his core of being”.

It is astonishing that such proposals devoid of any philosophical content and intelligence - and replete with linguistic howlers - should have found favour with the ICPR.

Also some proposals did not have a list of possible participants. In quite a few cases, the list of participants did not seem to include names of scholars who can be acknowledged as leaders in the area of research in which the proposals can be located. The Committee further observed that at least in two cases the Seminar Committee had a member present in the meeting which considered and approved a proposal made by this member. (Annexure VII). (Curiously, in one of these cases, while one of the names mentioned in the minutes of the Seminar Committee, is not a signatory to the minutes, another person whose name

is not mentioned as present at the meeting is a signatory to the minutes. This person's proposal was also approved by the very same committee). (Annexure VIII). In one case seminar funding was granted for four seminars to the same person, once in 2007-08, once in 2008-09 and twice in the same financial year, 2009-10 (Annexure IX) [Curiously enough, the seminars funded in 2007-08 and 2008-09 had very similar titles: "Nature of Metaphysics" and "Metaphysics: Methods and Perspectives" respectively (Annexure X)]. These could of course have been designed in such a way that the outcome of the earlier had important philosophical bearing on the later seminar; but the proposals do not mention any such design or connection. Besides, is it academically sound to fund seminars on the same theme or very similar themes to the same person in successive years without any evaluation of the outcome of the earlier seminar?

Most of the seminar reports are far too general in nature and it is impossible to discern, from the reports, if the seminars broke new grounds or suggested new directions of research. One can cite numerous

examples of such unhelpful reporting. Take the following:

“The three sessions during the seminar were dedicated to Dr. H. Jana and Dr. A.B. Khorana and Dr. Kripa Thakur who were considered to be the founding fathers of the concept of hypnotherapy in India. Distinguished philosophers and the medical professionals contributed their papers and participated in the meaningful discussions and enriched the theme of the seminar. The seminar concluded with the words of philosophical wisdom by Mr. A. P. Singh (senior Vice President, HR, Reliance Industries Ltd., Vadodara)”. (This is part of the report on a seminar on “Hypnotherapy: A Psycho-Philosophical Perspective...” by Prof. Nitin J Vyas, M.S. University of Baroda, Vadodara, 2008-09) **(Annexure XI)**

Some reports simply list the papers presented without any critical reflection on them. There are of course exceptions to this.

A seminar on “Human Development and Social Exclusion” can be justified only on the ground that there would be considerable philosophical input both in

the papers presented and in the deliberations. The evidence placed before the Committee points to the contrary. (Annexure XII)

The most important piece of information that the Committee has gathered is that the seminar reports are not placed before the Council for its consideration and observations. As a result there is no formal evaluation of the contributions of the seminar to philosophical research as such. Also it seems quite clear that the planning of seminars does not include any serious thinking about the publication of their output. Most of the seminars therefore have little impact on philosophical research. They seem to be an exercise in and for themselves.

Fellowships

The Council has a substantial programme of Fellowship grants. There are following categories of fellowship:

- Junior Research Fellowship,
- General Fellowship,

- Senior Fellowship,
- National Fellowship.

There is no method of tracking the progress of work in relation to any of these fellowships. The outcome of the programme, if there is one, is invisible. Most of the reports submitted by the General and Senior Fellows are not considered for publication, presumably because they are not worthy of such consideration. The evaluation of periodic reports – such as there is – is incredibly uninformative. In some cases they consist just of one word, “ok”. (Annexure XIII) There is no ongoing, well planned programme for the benefit of Junior Research Fellows.

It seems to the Committee that most of the malaise afflicting the Council spring from the fact that it has not so far undertaken a review of the state of philosophical research in the country. In the absence of such a review, it is but natural that the Council is unable to take a focused and purposeful approach to its academic responsibilities.

IV

Interdisciplinary Research & Cultural Exchange Programme

The Council has a special responsibility to promote interdisciplinary research. In view of the fact that in recent years disciplinary boundaries both in the natural and human sciences and in the humanities have lost their rigid character and much path-breaking research has taken place in areas where disciplines have come together in a creative union, this particular responsibility of ICPR assumes enormous significance. **Unfortunately, there has been no effort within the Council to formulate any credible programme for interdisciplinary research in which philosophy might play a pivotal role. Nor has there been any effort at conceiving any collaborative enterprise in this respect with the two other Research Councils (ICSSR and ICHR). The Seminars organized by the Council which have been claimed as interdisciplinary exercises (e.g. “National Integration and Indian Identity”, “Regional Identities and Identity Violence”, “Philosophical Foundation of Human Development and Social Exclusion”) have little or no**

interdisciplinary content. They were at best fairly modest journalistic exercises. The Council's lack of focus and concern in this respect is a matter of utmost seriousness in our view.

The Council has an Indo-French Cultural Exchange Programme under which it sends philosophers from India to France and receives, in turn, philosophers from France. The Committee sought information on the programme from the Council on the following points: (a) The recipients of ICPR grants (under this programme) in the last five years (b) the method of selecting the grantees, (c) reports of the recipients of the grantees, (d) review, if any, of the programme by the Council. (**Annexure XIV**)

The information received from the Council had nothing on (b) and (d). (**Annexure XV**). However, the Council's website (visited on 12th May 2011) contains the following information: "Under this programme, ICPR sends, every year, one scholar for one month to Paris to carry out some research work there. This entitles the scholars to submit and [sic] effective work plan on some French Philosopher/Philosophy or Indian Philosophy having some

influence on French Philosophy or vice-versa. Normally scholars who are familiar with this programme, approach the council and the matter is decided by the Research Project Committee or the Chairman who nominates the Scholar to go to Paris for the research work”. (**Annexure XVI**)

It is quite surprising that a decision on an important academic matter is once again left to the wisdom of the Chairman.

V

Publications

The Council has a publication programme. Under this programme, it publishes a quarterly journal entitled, *Journal of Indian Council of Philosophical Research*. This is a refereed journal and has a fairly wide readership. It also publishes books. **While some of the books published recently have undoubted philosophical significance, it is a matter of mystery how books like the following could have been published by the Council; *Mystery and Excellence of the Human Body, Nala and Damayanti, Parvati's Tapasya, The Crucifixion, Joan of Arc, Uniting Men* – all either edited or authored by Kireet Joshi. These books, as the titles suggest, are completely devoid of any philosophical content and significance.**

VI

The Lucknow Centre of ICPR and the Council's Library

Prof. Rajeev Bhargava visited the Lucknow centre of the ICPR on 16 December 2010. He spent about 2 hours at the centre and its library. The centre is located in a new building and has a staff of 23 persons. The building was neat and well-organized. But it appeared forlorn. There were no visitors during the time he was there

The Library is extremely well stocked, with important national and international philosophy journals since 1983. It subscribes to 108 philosophy journals and spends about Rs.24 lakhs on them. In addition, about Rs.10-12 lakhs are spent annually on acquiring new books. **This is a quite substantial sum of money. The method of acquiring books in the library leaves much to be desired. Members of the library committee appear to have been constituted arbitrarily. There were some very expensive books on business management acquired on the recommendation of a member who is neither a trained philosopher nor a social scientist. The website continued to throw up different results on**

different computers. Clearly, the library was woefully under-utilized.

It appears that between 1985-1990, when Prof. Roop Rekha Verma was the Director, the Centre flourished and the library was used extensively. However, since then it has not been in good shape. This is particularly so after the whole Centre moved out of Butler Place. The idea of having a philosophy centre in a non-metropolitan town is good. However adequate use of the facility of the centre as well as the library will not be made, unless there is a young, energetic Director of the centre who is very good in philosophy and is able to draw in bright young people from Lucknow and other Indian universities. Unless it is headed and supported by a group of committed scholars who can mobilize philosophers and interested scholars from all over India to come and stay in Lucknow, the tax payers' money is being wasted. The Lucknow Centre can become the hub of intellectual life of the city. At the moment either such a vibrant intellectual life is non-existent in Lucknow or else there is no one with a vision to capitalize on it.

VII

Recommendations

A

- **The Council must immediately undertake a serious critical review of the status of philosophy teaching and research in the country. In the absence of a credible review, it will not be possible for the Council to fulfill the responsibilities that it is charged with.**

- **The Council does not have any credible mechanism for monitoring its research promotional programmes such as the Fellowship Programme and Seminars, Conferences etc. The Council must constitute credible monitoring committees consisting of serious scholars as members for this purpose. The reports of these monitoring committees must be considered and acted upon by the Council.**

- **The government should consider taking steps towards making the selection process of the**

Chairman and the members of the Council transparent and credible. The setting up of a collegium of eminent academicians for this purpose may be an effective first step.

- **Distinguished philosophers of Indian origin – (some of whom might have retained their Indian citizenship) - who hold senior teaching positions in European and American universities must be considered for nomination as members of the Council. Many of them visit India for fairly extended periods every year. The Council can schedule its meetings to coincide with these visits. In any event, with modern modes of electronic and tele-communication available, the Council will be able to take such members on board even without requiring their physical presence. We have no doubt at all that the participation of such scholars in the Council's deliberations will make an enormous difference to the quality of its performance.**

- **The Council must take its responsibility of co-opting members to the Council and nominating members to the Governing Body and the Research Projects Committee with utmost seriousness. During the period of review, the members of the Council simply passed on this responsibility to the wisdom of the Chairman.**

B

An Earnest Suggestion

It will be clear from the observations above that in the opinion of the Review Committee the performance of the Indian council of Philosophical Research in the last five years or so has been extremely disappointing. Part of the reason for this must of course lie in the fact that the quality of philosophy teaching both at the undergraduate and the postgraduate level is very poor; consequently philosophical research is woefully inadequate. One would have expected that the Council would appreciate the seriousness of this basic issue and invest some of its energy in addressing it. Unfortunately, this has not

happened. And this must count as a significant failure of the Council. However, it is the Review Committee's view that there may be another, perhaps even more serious, reason for the poor state of philosophy in the country; and this is the almost complete isolation of philosophy from all other academic disciplines. This isolation has led to philosophy's loss of moorings in the intellectual environment of our times. This was not the case in the rich intellectual past of the country. It is clear that the most important part of philosophy's responsibility is to bring itself to bear upon our understanding of the human condition of our times – beginning with our own nation and its specific predicaments. This, in our opinion, philosophy can best do now only in the company of disciplines whose creative intellectual labour has made a substantial difference to our understanding of ourselves – disciplines moreover which stand to gain enormously from engagement with genuine philosophical concerns. These are disciplines such as history, literature and literary studies, political thought, linguistics and anthropology. In this connection we think particularly of the achievements of Indian literature –both in English and many of our own

languages. Philosophy's rejuvenation may well begin with its coming into close interactive proximity with our literature and the other disciplines we have mentioned. The Government may therefore consider setting up a Council for the promotion of research in **humanities** which will include philosophy, history, literature and literary studies, linguistics, political thought and anthropology. The Indian Council of Philosophical Research will then merge into such a Council once it is set up. We are aware that such a step will require much deeper thought than we have been able to afford. **But we do recommend very strongly that the Government take initiative towards such a step.**

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