

India's Twin Revolution

Upbeat in Reforms & Unsung in Education

By SHEKHAR AIYAR

THE nineties have brought sweeping and exhaustively analysed economic changes to India — liberalisation of the babu-neta raj, greater openness to the world, booming and volatile stockmarkets, and the beginnings of an infotech revolution.

Amidst the clamour, however, some astonishing trends on a hugely important facet of economic development have slipped by almost unnoticed; the performance of different Indian states in enabling their people to read and write. Perhaps an even greater omission from the public sphere has been discussion of why exactly this yardstick of performance is considered economically important.

First and foremost, education is the most valuable consumption good that there is, immeasurably enriching the lives of those it touches. But economists are more interested in education as an investment good, partly because it is easier to measure in this avatar. And they have found that education is an investment par excellence. That is to say, the costs incurred during education are a pittance compared to the consequent increase in one's expected lifetime earnings. This characteristic of education has led economists to coin the unattractive phrase "human capital" to refer to a country's stock of educated workers.

High returns to human capital mean that for an individual, acquiring an education, even a rudimentary one, makes excellent sense. From the point of view of society, the gains are greater still, because the education of a single person confers benefits on the society within which she lives. To take a simple example, if a scientist's creativity is enhanced by intellectual discussion with her colleagues, then this enhanced creativity on her part is an unintended but beneficial side effect of investments in education by her peers.

How the gains from education feed into economic growth is a question that has long exercised some of the finest minds in the social sciences, including the Nobel laureates Kenneth Arrow and Robert Lucas. One typical answer is to note that ever since the "Malthusian era" preceding Britain's industrial revolution, worldwide economic progress has been largely propelled by advances in science and technology. The railways shrunk the world, mechanical engines put it to work, electricity lit it up; enthusiasts claim that the Internet will achieve comparable miracles. Each of these events required basic scientific insight followed by technological and com-

mercial innovation. That is, they required the ability of educated individuals to invent and innovate.

But the evidence shows that nowadays most scientific breakthroughs and technological advances occur overwhelmingly in a handful of already rich countries. Nonetheless, human capital in developing countries plays an indispensable role in imitating products and processes invented in the North. It is by now part of economic folklore how Japan and the Asian Tigers achieved historically unprecedented rates of growth largely through imitation and a skilled workforce to make the new industries commercially viable; it is striking how far superior literacy rates in Japan, South Korea and Taiwan were to India's at midcentury.

It is relatively recently that study after study has attempted to empirically establish the contribution of human capital to economic growth. The evidence is largely positive;

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It is in this context that one should examine India's progress in the educational sphere, which for the most part, makes depressing reading. Our last census was conducted in 1991, and showed that the countrywide literacy rate was 52 per cent. This figure masked enormous regional disparities; while Kerala enjoyed first-world standards of literacy, Bihar lagged far behind at a miserable 38 per cent.

But the latest figures available, which come from NSS sample surveys for the year 1996, tell a remarkable story. The countrywide literacy rate has shot up to 62 per cent, an increase, in five years, that is greater than any decadal progress that has occurred since the genesis of reasonably reliable data. Even more astonishingly, some of the most benighted components of the Hindi heartland are star performers; Rajasthan, for instance, achieved a jump of ten percentage points and Madhya Pradesh of eight. The Northeast is in the vanguard of improved literacy and appears to be snapping at Kerala's heels; literacy rates in Assam, Manipur and Tripura are 73 per cent, 68 per cent and 76 per cent respectively. Himachal Pradesh and Maharashtra log in at 71 per cent. These statistics add up to nothing short of an unsung transformation in literacy.

Of course, there are the usual grounds for skepticism. NSS statisticians of necessity follow a different methodology from the census-wallahs, so one might worry that the two sets of figures are not strictly comparable. More fundamentally, it is not clear that human capital is best measured by aggregate yardsticks like the literacy rate, especially in India, where the requirements for being classified as literate are not particularly onerous. Finally, there is so much that still needs doing, especially in terms of redressing regional and gender inequalities in education, that self-congratulation is decidedly premature. In Bihar and Rajasthan, for example, female literacy in 1996 was less than a third.

But put aside skepticism for a moment. Literacy rates are probably the most useful single measure that we have available to us. And the NSS sample surveys are a more scientific gauge of current conditions than a simple projection from 1991 census figures (which is what the recently released Human Development Report of the UN seems to have used). So there are grounds for guarded optimism, and those with an interest in these matters should await the census of 2001 with bated breath.

IN BRIEF

- Recent NSS surveys show that there have been huge advances in literacy in the nineties
- The Hindi heartland and the Northeast have achieved considerable progress
- This development may be as economically important as liberalisation, although it is largely unsung
- Education enables developing countries to take maximum advantage of a liberal economic order

when one examines a large sample of countries over a period of a few decades, it is found that better educated countries not only enjoy higher levels of per capita income, but also grow faster. Nor is this all. While foreign direct investment, efficient capital markets and an active trade regime may be thought to be independently beneficial to growth, they are found to be disproportionately beneficial in those countries which have large stocks of human capital. This is an important finding, because it shows that economic liberalisation and public action in the so-called social sectors (of the type long advocated by Amartya Sen) are not substitutes but complements; a healthy and well educated workforce is essential to realising the fullest benefits of enhanced economic freedom.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

18 JUL 2000

Talibanisation of textbooks

THE STUDY of history might once again hit the centrestage of Indian politics. And predictably, it is the Sangh parivar which is at the centre of this controversy. As reported in this newspaper, thousands of Rashtriya Swayam Sewak schools are teaching a brand of history, especially where it concerns the Babri masjid demolition and the minorities, which does not always apply either an objective methodology or a factual historical paradigm. Instead, it is loaded with crass communal overtones. Clearly, the sole purpose of this reinterpretation of historical facts is to indoctrinate and poison young minds with a prejudiced vision of the past.

For instance, the textbook curriculum of the Vidya Bharati Akhil Bharatiya Shiksha Sansthan, which is affiliated with the RSS, has claimed that the Babri masjid was not a mosque because Muslims "have never till today offered *namaaz* there". Other fantastic revelations state that from 1528 to 1914, 350,000 "devotees of Lord Ram have laid down their lives to liberate the Ram temple" and that foreigners invaded Sri Ramjanam hoomi not less than 77 times. In terms of the contemporary history of modern India, the textbooks state that November 2, 1990, will be inscribed in black letters "because on that day the then Chief Minister, by ordering the police to shoot unarmed *kar sevaks*, massacred hundreds of them." All this, of course, is complete nonsense — packed with lies and untruths.

The National Steering Committee for Text Book Evaluations has expressed its concern over the use of "blatantly communal" writings in the series "Sanskrit Jnan" in the Vidya Bharati schools. This is a dangerous trend because it tries to compel young minds to deny the pluralist character of Indian society and create a mindset in which minority communities become targets of hate. The RSS should realise that in its great zeal to rewrite history, it often looks like the mirror-image of the Taliban. The fundamentalist outfits in Pakistan and Afghanistan have brainwashed an entire generation of young people through their *madarsas*, with hatred, dogmatism and violence as their *raison d'etre*. The RSS seems to be following in their footsteps.

Young people come to schools with faith and innocence. They believe their textbooks to be the final repository of truth. Hence, no school, run by any institution, private or governmental, should be allowed to use communal or sectarian propaganda. To poison the minds of the young is the equivalent of cultural genocide — you destroy not just an education, but an entire culture. Murli Manohar Joshi's HRD Ministry must move quickly to remove the poison from our schools. And as for the RSS — if Mr Sudarshan does not want to go down in history as the knicker-clad Ayatollah Khomeini of India — it should disown the books and the mindset that produced them. Nobody has the right to turn India into the Taliban's Afghanistan.

6 JUN 2000

UGC considering change in HOD rotation system

DEVIRUPA MITRA
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, April 30. — The University Grants Commission is considering a proposal to change the present system of rotation of headship of departments in universities and colleges among faculty members.

The UGC chairperson, Mr Hari Gautam, told **The Statesman** that the matter had been in circulation for the "past three to four months." It had been put on the agenda of previous meetings of the commission, but had been deferred," he stated.

The practice of rotating the Head of the Department started during the last decade when it was felt that the control of the department should not be in the hands of one person. It was also a way of infusing "new

blood".

However, in 1990, the Gnanam Committee submitted its report to the UGC on "Towards Educational Management" which opined that the system of rotation of headship was "not successful". It had, in fact, recommended that the automatic and mandatory rotation of HODs should be abolished.

The report of the committee had suggested that the HOD should be appointed by the Vice-Chancellor in consultation with the concerned dean and professors of the department. It had added that there should be no bar on the same person being the HOD for another successive term.

Based on the committee report, the commission had framed the following guidelines to be put up for discussion:

— Heads of the department shall be appointed by the vice-chancellor in consultation with the concerned department and professor of the department.

— Heads of department should be appointed through direct recruitment from among the faculty members of the department. The selection committee may be constituted by the vice-chancellor with him/her as one the member.

— The headship should be rotated among the professors of the department or senior readers of the department only and it should not go below till the level of lecturer.

The UGC chairperson, however, contended that a decision on this matter would be taken only after extensive discussions with vice-chancellors and

teachers. "We are in the process of calling a national seminar where this would be discussed," said Mr Gautam.

According to the UGC, one of the hurdles faced by the rotation system was that even lecturers were made HOD in the presence of professors and senior faculty member.

The president of the Federation of Central Universities Teachers Association, Professor Kapil Kumar, claimed that the present system had shown its mettle, and there was no need to return to a permanent headship.

He said in the overwhelming majority of central universities, there are rules in place which prevent a person below the rank of reader being appointed as HOD.

It was also felt that the earli-

er system of one person being the HOD till retirement would lead to an "unhealthy" environment.

"Sometimes a dominant HOD may try to scuttle the development of other disciplines in the department to its detriment," said the Head of Delhi University's Botany department, Professor K R Shivanna.

The Fedcuta president asserted that any attempt to "change the present system would be strongly contested," adding that the framing of rules for the post of headship was an internal matter of the universities.

The UGC chairperson disagreed that the move to "evaluate the merits and demerits of the system" would interfere with autonomy, asserting that it was very much within the purview of the commission.

THE STATESMAN

1 MAY 2000

The quality of education in South Asia

School enrolment rates are very misleading indicators of the progress of education in India, argues Basudeb Guha-Khasnobis

Physical capital and labour are not the only factors, which promote the growth of per capita income of a country. It is now fairly well established that a third factor, broadly termed as "human capital" is equally important for growth. To put it in a simple fashion, human capital is nothing but the quality of the population, in particular, the working population. Quality, in the present context, it would mean how skilled, trained, efficient and productive the country's labour force is.

The level of education in a society is often taken as a measure of the quality of the population, and hence that of human capital. Changes in school enrolment rates, both at the primary as well as the secondary levels are taken as indicators of the progress of literacy and education (and hence, the accumulation of human capital) in a society. The purpose of this article is to argue that school enrolment rates are very misleading indicators of the progress of education in India in particular and South Asia in general.

It is common to infer from a rise in enrolment rates that the level of human capital is also rising. In India, school enrolment rate has risen steadily from 0.11 to 0.69 between 1960 and 1995. But a look at certain related numbers, will tell that we cannot afford to rest on our laurels. In fact, far from it, if one were to compare these numbers with, say, East Asia and the OECD countries.

First, the pupil to teacher ratio in primary schools in South Asia (data are available for India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka only) has

risen during the same period from 37 to 44. In India alone, the rate has risen from 46 to 60. In East Asia, the same ratio fell from 35 to 26. It means that at present, there is a primary teacher for every 26 pupil in East Asia, whereas in South Asia, at least 44 pupils are assigned to a single teacher. The South Asian average could be even worse but for the progress made by Sri Lanka, where the ratio has fallen from 31 to 28

during 1960-95. In India, with more than double the number of pupils per teacher compared to East Asia, the quality of the education imparted to them has to suffer. Obviously, there are not enough primary school teachers available in the country. The amount spent on a pupil in primary school is \$154 (PPP adjusted 1985 international dollars) in South Asia, 494 in East Asia and a massive 2699 in OECD countries. This expenditure as a percentage of per capita GDP has fallen only in South Asia and risen elsewhere.

The discrepancies in the secondary schooling data are less acute, but they are still very large. For example, the ratio of secondary spending per pupil to per capita GDP has fallen in South Asia from 0.36 to 0.12, while it has increased in OECD countries from 0.13 to 0.20.

The accompanying Table presents

Region	Year	Primary Teacher Salary	Ratio to per capita GDP	Primary Repeater Rate	Primary Drop-Out Rate
East Asia/Pacific	1960	3624	2.9	-	-
	1970	5502	2.7	0	6
	1980	9737	2.4	4	10
	1990	10665	2.9	4	13
South Asia	1960	2521	4.1	-	-
	1970	3313	3.6	21	-
	1980	2723	2.0	14	80
	1990	3507	2.5	9	44
O.E.C.D.	1960	10428	1.9	-	-
	1970	19887	2.3	5	7
	1980	24765	2.4	4	2
	1990	26820	2.2	3	-

some statistics that partially explain the causes behind the inadequacy, particularly the high pupil-teacher ratios, of primary and secondary schooling in South Asia as well as some of the direct consequences. The causes include low salaries in absolute terms and in relation to the rest of the economy. The consequences can be broadly divided into two categories. The first is the consequence of high pupil-teacher ratios reflected in high repeater rates. The second is the consequence of low national spending on primary education, which contributes directly and indirectly to high dropout rates.

The third column in the Table shows the comparative salaries of primary school teachers (again, in PPP adjusted 1985 dollars). Between 1960 and 1990 East Asia raised it threefold, while OECD

from 1.9 to 2.2 in OECD countries. Thus, in OECD countries, primary school teachers have been progressively better off between 1960-90 than the average person. In South Asia, the ratio has fallen substantially from 4.1 to 2.5. Clearly, the causes behind the inadequate provision of primary education in South Asia are abysmally low salaries, which is one of the direct consequence of the low government spending in this category.

Some of the negative effects of low spending and high pupil-teacher ratios are apparent from the Table. The repeater rate in primary schools is the highest in South Asia. It is three times the rate in OECD countries and twice that of East Asia. The high pupil-teacher ratio deprives students of individual or special attention. It is only reasonable to guess that repeating by at

least some of the students could have been avoided if such attention were available. Repeater rates not only indicate poor training, they also imply waste of resources. Dropout rates are also the highest in this region. Dropout rates are particularly significant, because they measure 'net enrolment' rates, which should be taken as the true indicator of the progress of literacy. For example, if the enrolment rate is 0.69, with a dropout rate of 0.44, the net enrolment rate is only 0.30. This is the figure that matters for the progress of literacy or the accumulation of human capital.

Two factors cause such high dropout rates. First, the high pupil-teacher ratios make schools an uninspiring experience for children. Second, many children, particularly in rural South Asia, have to forgo work (hence, income) to go to school. Unless such losses are at least partially compensated, it is simply impossible for these children to attend school. The current low spending on schooling makes such compensation impossible.

It is clear that high family incomes are positively associated with high schooling levels. Obviously, the causality between the two can run both ways. That is, on the one hand, only countries with high income levels can afford more years of schooling for their children. On the other, high average years of schooling in a country improves the quality of the labour force, raises GDP and ultimately raises family income levels. Thus, to eradicate poverty, there is no substitute for higher levels of schooling.

The author is professor at ICRIER

Development and goal-setting — I

By Nirupam Bajpai & Jeffrey D. Sachs

WHILE PRESENTING the Union Budget for 2000-01, the Finance Minister, Mr. Yashwant Sinha, said, "I propose to put India on a sustained, equitable and job creating growth path of 7 to 8 per cent a year to banish the scourge of poverty from our land within a decade. The next 10 years will be India's decade of development." We concur that India has a chance for a tremendous breakthrough in economic development during this decade. The political system is more than ever in consensus about the basic direction of reforms. The current Government enjoys a strong electoral mandate. A decade of opening of the economy has produced new dynamism, most dramatically in the information technology (IT) sector but in others as well. The world is waking up to India's crucial role as the largest democracy and as a dynamic economy, if still a low-income one on average. The new technologies (especially IT and biotechnology) give new opportunities for economic and social development.

All of these positive realities suggest that the Prime Minister should announce specific national goals of development. These will help to galvanise public opinion in support of the objectives of development, provide a gauge against which to judge the progress of policies, and help the world community to appreciate the efforts under way, and support them through increased foreign investment. The goals would be akin to the "New Deal" announced in the 1930s in the United States: a rallying cry for the public, and a political base for the reforms.

In this regard, we suggest at least two broad goals that the government of India may like to set for itself: First, by the year 2010, the per capita income of India would be doubled. Income doubling within a decade requires annual growth in per capita income of 7 per cent. Second, by 2010, there would be universalisation of education until Class VIII, with a special effort for girls and disadvantaged groups. Additional targets could well be set regarding health conditions and access to basic services, such as sanitation, clean water, power, and so on, particularly in rural India.

With regard to education, the U. S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton, announced

national goals along these lines in his State of The Union Address on January 27, 2000. Since the U.S. is often portrayed as a free-market society with very limited Government in the domestic sphere, it might be supposed that the Government would shy away from specific domestic goals as smacking too much of "central planning". To the contrary, the President's speech offers a big vision of American society in the 21st century. The address is filled with goals relating to education, public health, commitments to eliminate child poverty, widespread use of the Internet, more resources for science and technology, and disease control, and so on. It sets broad goals, and ex-

other policies, all with a clear focus on inclusion of girls and other traditionally disadvantaged groups. The economic and social returns from such an initiative would be huge.

(2) Aggressive public health campaign to address major infectious diseases (pneumonia, diarrheal diseases, malaria) and especially the incipient AIDS epidemic, which now threatens India.

(3) Enhanced family planning policies, to limit the growth of India's population to below current projection (e.g. the U.N. forecast of 1.5 billion population by 2050).

(4) Completion of economic reform agenda. There are several remaining pri-

Physical infrastructure for data transmission within India (e.g. optic fibre cables) remains underdeveloped despite some recent progress.

(8) Strengthening of economic, cultural, financial, investment, scientific ties with overseas Indian communities. The Indian diaspora, in the U.S., Europe, Africa, and Asia, constitutes a vital economic and cultural treasure for India. Non-resident Indians can play a critical role in trade, finance, technology transfer, business competition, and culture. The NRIs from the Silicon Valley, for example, should be mobilised to help India reap the enormous benefits of the on-going IT revolution.

(9) Strengthening science and technology in India's development Policies. India can become one of the centres for global science. This is especially important since India faces a range of challenges (in health, environment, agriculture, and power) where the technologies of the U.S., Europe, and Japan, are not appropriate, at least not without further R&D. The Government of India should therefore sponsor high-level science councils, pay greater attention to University-industry links in technology, and provide much greater funding for science institutes in public health, environment, and agriculture.

(10) Major commitment to higher education. India's universities should serve as a core to a knowledge-based development strategy. The IITs are already world class, and must be nurtured further. A dynamic university sector, built on private and public institutions, and much deeper links with U.S., European, and Asian universities outside of India should be fostered. With regard to the international linkages, there can be encouragement of partnership programmes between Indian and foreign universities, as well as student and faculty exchanges, and use of IT for distance learning. Also, the Government should foster closer university-business relations, and should create tax incentives for charitable contributions.

(The writers are respectively, Director of the India Program at the Center for International Development (CID), Harvard University, and the Director of CID and Galen L. Stone Professor of International Trade at Harvard University.)

India needs a revolution in education aimed, finally, at literacy for all.

plains how they can be met. In many places, it literally calls on the individual States to meet certain performance standards as in education, reflecting the fact that the U.S. like India has a federal structure in which the Central Government may set goals, while the implementation rests mainly with the states.

In the Indian context, comparably bold but achievable goals should be enunciated. India too needs a revolution in education, aimed — finally — at literacy for all, and a high-level of school attendance for all children in its vast and differentiated society. And as Mr. Clinton enunciated goals in health, technology, economics and other areas, so too are comparable goals necessary, and achievable, in the Indian context. To make the first decade of the 21st century a true "decade of development" will require a broad-based programme of economic and social actions. These actions will have to be broad-based, requiring new approaches and legislative reforms in many areas of public policy. We summarise ten main areas of reform as follows:

(1) Universal literacy, based on national goals, backed by coordinated actions of the Central and State Governments. Universal literacy could be achieved through creative mobilisation of new IT approaches, better school attendance, and

priorities of economic reform, including, reduction of fiscal deficits, export promotion and improved infrastructure.

(5) Political decentralisation. Efficiency and dynamism will require the transfer of more power to States and local governments, and more democratisation at the local level. Dynamic metropolitan areas (built around major cities) will constitute the main engines of growth for India in the coming decades. These urban areas will need taxation and regulatory powers to be effective in supporting the business and social environment.

(6) Enhanced global role for India. India should assert a greater leadership role in various venues, including the G-20, future international summits between developed and developing countries, the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, World Trade Organisation, and the World Health Organisation. Being the world's largest democracy, and a leader of the interests of developing nations, it is essential that India play a significant role in the functioning of, and deliberations at, these international organisations.

(7) Commitment to IT backbone. India should sponsor programmes and reforms to encourage universal telephony and Internet access in all villages in India, as part of the national campaigns in literacy, health, and economic development.

THE HINDU

10 MAY 2000

Pay through the nose at Jadavpur varsity

SUNANDO SARKAR

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, May 16. — Studying in universities may never be the same in West Bengal if a set of proposals made by a Jadavpur University-constituted committee meet with the authorities' approval.

Documents with **The Statesman** indicate that JU is on its way to becoming the first university in the state to ask students to bear a significant part of their educational expenses.

And the jump proposed by the committee is quite steep: students, on an average, may have to shell out at least 10 times the amount they are paying now to do their under-graduate or post-graduate studies.

The committee — to look into ways to "rationalise" the fee-structure — was set up in March this year. The report it has prepared, a copy of which is with **The Statesman**, is now awaiting discussion by the JU executive council, the university's highest decision-making body.

If the executive council ratifies the committee's decision — which, officials say, is the likely outcome — the tuition fees for under-graduate arts, science and engineering students will jump to Rs 200 from the present figure of about Rs 20.

Post-graduate arts and science students will have to pay a similar amount every month

PROPOSALS OF THE COMMITTEE

- Monthly tuition fee for UG and PG Arts — Rs 200
- Monthly tuition fee for UG and PG Science — Rs 200 (evening course to cost Rs 400 for employed students)
- Monthly tuition fee for UG Engineering — Rs 200 (evening course to cost Rs 400 for all students)
- Monthly tuition fee for PG Engineering — 300
- Session charge — Rs 50
- Monthly lab charge for UG Engineering — Rs 100 (Rs 200 for evening students)
- Monthly lab charge for UG and PG Science — Rs 50 (Rs 100 for employed students)
- One-time admission fee — Rs 500
- Examination fee for every semester — Rs 100

and post-graduate engineering students will have to pay Rs 300.

And, for the first time, a distinction has been made between employed and unemployed students: under-graduate and post-graduate Science students who opt for the evening course and are employed will have to pay Rs 400 every month instead of Rs 200.

Besides this steep one-time hike, students will have to pay anything between Rs 1,250 and Rs 2,450 more — depending on their subject — every year on account of session fees and examination and admission charges if the council goes ahead with the committee's proposals.

But 15 per cent of students — whose monthly income is less than Rs 4,000 — will get full scholarship and 10 per cent will get half-scholarship.

Though senior officials insist on record that the hike is just a "proposal", they feel that the university — hamstrung by decreasing grants from the state government for teaching and research — may have to go along with the proposals if it wants to maintain the quality of education it imparts.

The university spent Rs 45.5 crore in the last financial year; Rs 37 crore alone went to meeting employees' salary. And its earnings from students' fees and consultancy fees from the industry came to only Rs 42 lakh, university records available with **The Statesman** reveal.

The state government's grants for research and other educational purposes, however, came down marginally from Rs 2.52 crore in 1998-99 to Rs 2.34 crore in the last financial year despite an all-round increase in

costs. And it has also expressed its inability to foot the bill for JU's evening courses, officials say.

Faced with this situation of "steadily-declining" government grants, the only way out for JU — according to the committee's confidential report — is to "raise its own resources if it is to maintain a high standard of education and research".

Most students of the Science and Engineering faculties and teachers, however, have expressed their displeasure against the decision to "burden" students. "University education does not belong to the private sector. How can the state government wash its hands off the matter?" the Faculty of Engineering and Technological Students' Union has asked.

The Jadavpur University Teachers' Association is sore on another point: it feels that the authorities want to bypass them. "Both JUTA members on the committee did not attend any meeting because of their ongoing agitation. Shouldn't the authorities consult teachers before taking this very important decision?" Mr Tarun Naskar, JUTA general secretary, has asked.

Mr Rajat Bandyopadhyay, university registrar, however, insisted that teachers would not be bypassed. "The final decision will be taken after consulting everyone, including non-teaching staff," he said.

THE STATESMAN

17 MAY 2000

India among nations having maximum female illiteracy

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, May 23

FOUR SOUTH Asian countries - Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Nepal - account for the largest number of out-of-school girls and illiterate women. This fact was brought to light here by UNESCO's representative in India, Prof. Moegiadi, today.

Addressing a national workshop on "State Policies on Incentive Schemes in Primary Schools and their Contribution to Girls' Participation", jointly organised by NCERT and UNESCO, he said, "Though progress has been made, we are all aware that according to the 1991 census of India, we have 50.2 per cent literacy, and now,

according to the latest information we have, 64 per cent literacy rate. It is estimated that in near future, it can be 70-80 percent."

He said it is a worldwide trend to invest more resources to educate children, at least till basic education and primary and elementary education levels. That is why many countries in the world give education top priority and give special attention in the national development plan as part of the overall national strategy. He said some researches had revealed that educating girls and women brings a lot of benefits, increase family income and result in late marriages.

Early marriages disturb the school environment and also disturb retention of children in

school, he said.

Prof. Moegiadi said that after a discussion with NCERT, UNESCO has agreed to give at least four incentives - mid-day meals, free uniform, free testbooks and attendance scholarship - for girls, and see the impact of these independent variables on enrolments, not only to attract girls but also to retain them in schools till they reach the graduation stage.

The girl's participation at the primary stage is known to be low and has been of concern of the policy makers and educational administrators, who have been always looking forward for related information so that the same is utilized to help in resolving the stated problems.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

24 MAY 2000

REDEFINING HITLER

5/8 Gujarat textbooks glorify fascism 7/4

CHILDREN all over India are taught the virtues of democracy and the dangers of fascism and Nazism — except those in Gujarat, thanks to NCERT and the Gujarat State Education Board. Their history textbooks glorify ideologies which generate strong national pride and efficient administration. The textbooks are silent on the violent treatment of minorities and ethnic cleansing they advocated. Hitler is described as a nationalist who lent dignity and prestige to the German government. The holocaust is described merely as opposition to the Jewish people. The RSS has always admired Hitler so much so that their ideologue Golwalkar advocated copying Hitler's policy towards Jews in India with reference to non-Hindus to create a strong Hindu "rashtra". It is not surprising then that an opportunity has been grasped to influence textbooks. The Sangh Parivar has defined fascism as an ideology to be admired and emulated.

With an RSS apparatchik as HRD minister in Gujarat the circumstance are right to put into action a long term aim — to change history taught in schools. Apart from the redefinition of fascism, Nazism and secularism, the RSS aims to wipe out the negative image of the Sangh, particularly its non-cooperation in the freedom struggle and Nathuram Godse's links with their organisation. These are the two millstones around its neck that the RSS would like to shed. Another change is to deny the role of Mughal rule in the evolution of the country. Muslim rulers are referred to as temple-razing barbarians, the religious tolerance epitomised by Akbar, or the sophistication of culture is entirely forgotten. Rajput rulers are glorified as patriots and their treachery ignored. Changing textbooks is one part of the RSS's attack on history. The harassment of well-reputed academics who do not share their world view, as seen in the "Towards Freedom" controversy, is another prong of the same strategy. The RSS want to brainwash children. If this dangerous trend is not checked quickly and reversed, the next generation may consider Hitler a freedom fighter and the Mahatma, a coward.

THE STATESMAN

: 9 APR 2000

ICHR issue takes the RS by storm

Opposition prevents Joshi from launching a counter-attack HRD Minister misleads Elders, distorts facts: ICHR ex-chief

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, March 3

THE CONTROVERSIAL Indian Council for Historical Research (ICHR) issue created a storm in the Rajya Sabha today when Left and Congress members co-ordinated among themselves to prevent Minister for Human Resource Development Murli Manohar Joshi launching a counter-attack on the question of withdrawal of two volumes from the publication.

The listed question was obviously long awaited in both camps as members trooped into the House long before the Rajya Sabha met in the morning. Dr Joshi was seen coming into the House with bulky volumes, which he stacked neatly on his table. The question, put up jointly by the CPI's Gurudas Dasgupta and CPI-M's Nilotpal Basu, was: Had the two volumes by Sumit Sarkar and K.N. Panikkar in the "Towards Freedom" series been withheld by ICHR?

Also, the Leftist elders wanted to know if the publisher had been asked to return the typescript without intimating the authors for perusal and review. All related details were sought. The Minister laid a short statement on the table of the House confirming "temporary" withholding of the typescripts to ensure that lapses and drawbacks found in the case of an earlier volume are not repeated. Dr Joshi said an agreement existed between ICHR and the publisher by which the copyright and all legal responsibilities rest with the former. On December 20, the Council decided that all volumes in

the series would have to be vetted first.

Not satisfied with this, the Left and the Congress benches alternatively demanded more specific information and tabling of the facts. The Minister was prevented from going ahead with his replies to the supplementaries. This led to

Amit Sengupta
New Delhi, March 3

DRD Minister Murli Manohar Joshi mislead the Rajya Sabha on the "Towards Freedom" series controversy. "Yes," says former ICHR chairman Prof S Settar. "He has

Thus spake the Minister

THE ICHR had been debating the "deteriorating quality" of publications in the "Towards Freedom" series long before the present controversy over withdrawal of two volumes erupted. Disclosing this, Human Resource Development Minister M.M. Joshi told the Rajya Sabha on Friday that former ICHR chairman S.Settar himself had acknowledged that the quality of some of the volumes was a cause for concern to objective scholars. Dr Settar faulted the two volumes for being repetitive, containing much irrelevant material, and relying too much on intelligence agency reports as source material, the Minister said. According to him, Dr Settar had written to series general editor Prof S.Gopal in February 1999 on the "efforts to convince me that subsequent volumes should be scrutinised by an Expert Committee before being sent to the Press". Dr Joshi pointed out that this was the remark of a chairman appointed by the previous government who could not be accused of "saffronisation".

HTC, New Delhi

the Chairman, Mr Kishan Kant, suggesting a detailed discussion on the subject at a later date. Though the Minister consented to this, the Chairman suggested he wrap up his answer to the supplementary. As Dr Joshi began rattling off the number of documents against each issue mentioned in the contentious volume Gandhi-46, role of Communist Party 144), Manmohan Singh interrupted him. A stand-off between the two senior members ensued when both demanded the right to speak. When the Chairman tried to end Question Hour, the Opposition loudly protested.

not only put words in my mouth but he has given a completely false and biased picture of the volumes under question," he told *The Hindustan Times* on telephone from Dharwar.

Prof Settar has refuted Mr Joshi's contention that he, as Chairman of the Council from 1996 to 1999, had reservations regarding the academic quality of the volumes edited by eminent historians, under the editorship of Prof S. Gopal.

"Mr Joshi has distorted my letter to Gopal. I hold Gopal and the scholarship of the series historians in great esteem. My letter has been quoted out of context by the

Minister," he said.

Prof Settar said he had only asked Prof Gopal to check out "if there is any substance to the allegations and the possibility of improving the volumes". "I had total faith in Gopal's capability as well as on other historians editing the various volumes. And I never sought a review," he said.

Prof Settar said that of the 10 volumes, five were cleared during his three-year tenure. Two were published (edited by Prof P S Gupta and Prof Basudev Chatterjee), two were sent to the Press and the fifth was sent to Prof Vimal Prasad for a final look before being sent to the Press. "There was never any reservation regarding their academic merit. The Minister has misquoted me. His allegations and those made by the present ICHR chairman are baseless," he said.

Certain people with "a single ideology", who are closet supporters of the BJP, are running down the series for their ulterior motives, he contended. Even the 41st executive body meeting of the Council, held in 1997, had only sought to "streamline and expedite" the work. "There was never any resolution passed to review the old volumes retrospectively," he said.

The series is not an interpretative study, hence there is no question of a thematic bias, he said. It is a compilation of documents for other historians to interpret. "Finally, its merit must be decided by the academic world. And this can only happen after the volumes are published, not by an organised witch-hunt based on lies and fabrication of truth," he said.

History in its true colours

The red-rag-and-bull tale has assumed interesting new hues in India today. Saffron makes some see red, just as saffronites see red in red. There may be other colours in the fray too, but these are the primaries, battling for control of our culture. If one considers oneself a politically conscious citizen, it seems almost impossible to exist now without pledging allegiance to one or other colour, which is indeed a sorry state of affairs. It is all very laudable to be political, to stand up for one's ideologies — whatever they may be — but to be tarred for life with a single brush also means, rather dangerously, that we must sacrifice our right to keep our critical faculties intact.

It means that we do not just go with a particular politics — red/left or saffron/right — but that we agree to politicize our readings of cultural phenomena. We, therefore, pre-decide the stance that we will adopt, know for certain whom we shall be protesting against, and feel complacent in our radicality. If the stance happens to be anti-establishment, so much more our radicality — and our complacency. Somewhere along the way, we have lost the ability to be clear-eyed, blinded perhaps by the dazzle of the flag we choose to hold aloft.

The Indian Council of Historical Research controversy — by no means resolved yet — is a more-than-timely warning of the dangers inherent to the politicizing of history and culture. Even as one signed all the signature campaigns, marched all the marches to Parliament Street in New Delhi, voiced righteous indignation against the blatant high-handedness of the authorities — in absolute sincerity, I may add — one was led to wonder about the sheer dangerousness of the politics of flag-colours.

Had the historians been of the right, and accused of producing saffronized texts, would we not have, unblinkingly, applauded the withdrawal of their volumes from the press? Would we not have patted ourselves on the back for saving our children from inheriting an account of history that was severely skewed? Is not this danger — of leaning either left or right, of losing one's ability to see it whole — then worth worrying about?

Some weeks ago, I was e-mailed an article downloaded from *The Guardian* website, a horrifying account of saffronized history textbooks for schools in Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh. Expectedly, one lamented the future of academic thought in the country, and expressed frustration at what seemed to be an unstoppable saffron tide threatening to overwhelm any counter-moves to sort out our past and present in a more holistic fashion.

The ICHR business that erupted soon after — following closely on the heels of Deepa Mehta's *Water* experience at Varanasi, and the unbelievably rightwing reactions to young couples celebrating Valentine's Day in Kanpur and other small towns — added to one's general conviction that the yellow-orange brigade's not-so-subtle attempts at "straightening" out our culture were beginning to bear fruit. And there was — and is — no doubt at all that it merits our most vehement, and vocal, protests. Recent developments at the ICHR, even before the headline-hitting Sumit Sarkar/K.N. Pannikar volumes attracted national attention, fully justify the contention that the

The ICHR controversy illustrates how the freedom and clarity of the critical faculty could be caught up in reductive political binaries, writes **Brinda Bose**

party at the helm of our nation is making hay while the sun, and political power, shine on it.

A three-member panel was constituted in January 1999 by the human resources and development ministry to review the functioning of the organization, and its terms of reference specifically mentioned various ICHR projects, including *Towards Freedom*, which Sarkar and Pannikar wrote for. Given that the ICHR has been embroiled in controversy ever since the HRD minister, Murlu Manohar Joshi — famous for his hardline Hindutva leanings — sardine-packed the ICHR board with rightwing historians and appointed B.R. Grover — the "Babri Masjid was originally a temple" man — as its chairperson, the withdrawal of volumes by well-known left historians was almost to be expected.

The manner in which the procedure was conducted was, like so many other right-wing moves we have seen recently, completely hamhanded. Perhaps it is because sophistication is anathema to saffronism that obvious opportunities for protest are constantly being thrown up by the *sangh parivar*, and for this the non-rightists must be truly thankful.

Had the move to silence a leftist history been more subtly planned, it is likely that Sarkar and Pannikar would have been left to wage lone, frustrating battles against the commissioning body — a sce-

itics. There is no apolitical history-writing.

We know that by now, but there is a sense that a secular history may be distinguished from a blatantly non-secular one. Both have their politics, but for those who cannot possibly condone the non-secular, the choice then becomes pre-determined or non-existent. When the scenario is then further complicated by questions of academic freedom (of course), as well as questions about the not-inconsiderable powers of the establishment, the waters are so muddied that it is a wonder that we can sight the problem at all, let alone entertain the (im)possibility of being clear-eyed about it.

This is certainly not the first time in Indian history-writing that perceptions of the party in power have conflicted with the historians' perspectives. Twenty five years ago, to celebrate the silver jubilee of India's independence, the then Congress government entrusted a few chosen historians with the task of writing the nation's history, which was buried in a time capsule below the Red Fort in Delhi. When news of alleged distortions in the account began to float around, the opposition demanded the removal of the casket, and the government was finally forced to acquiesce.

Post-Emergency, the then Janata government banned a book, *Ancient India*, written by contemporary Marxist historian R.S. Sharma. More recently, the left government in Kerala had commissioned historian Sreedhara Menon to write a history of the freedom movement in the state, but Menon opted out when he became unhappy with the stipulation that it be written in consultation with a panel set up by the government.

The ICHR row, then, may be seen as part of the same trajectory, in which the ruling BJP has made a last-ditch effort to scuttle what it perceives as a left-wing project, presumably in order to replace it with its own version of India's independence movement. While any "ization" is contemptible in writing up history, the saffronizing tendency is particularly alarming in its present context as it is also the colour of the party in power at the Centre.

Even so, it is time, perhaps, to grapple with a question that is more fundamentally troublesome than that of specific interventions into academic projects by political parties, serious though such issues are. This question is to do with how we are going to go about trying to preserve our academic freedom, when it is always under threat of politicization from one side or the other.

It is also to do with how we are going to manage to preserve our critical faculties, so that despite our inherent political sympathies — for most of us do, eventually, lean either right or left at least marginally — we are able to recognize such political manoeuvres for what they are and reorient our reception of the material that emerges after such scuffling.

It may also be worth our while to start pondering an even larger question: is the choice that we have for writing — and reading — our history doomed to the binary opposition of saffron and red? Our history, after all, flows into our present and future. If we sacrifice clarity of vision for allegiance to a political colour, we shall soon have no history at all that will be worth recording.

It is time to grapple with the question of how we preserve our academic freedom when it is always under threat of politicization from one side or another

nario not unfamiliar to academics of all disciplines — instead of spending endless hours on Star News and in university seminar rooms reiterating their commitment to stop the saffronization of history at all costs, and being — surely — gratified at the pavlovian response of their audiences.

However, subtlety does not figure in the *parivar*'s dictionary, and so Sarkar's and Pannikar's volumes were summarily recalled after they had gone to press. Without so much as a courtesy-notification to the authors, the ICHR wrote to Oxford University Press (the publishers) to "temporarily withhold" their publication and return the manuscripts for "perusal" by the council. Considering, moreover, the credentials — or rather, the lack of them — of the members of the panel constituted to review the volumes, it was clear that the intentions of the council were far from academic.

Though it is not yet time to put this particular case into retrospect (surely neither the radical left nor the militant right will

give up the fight easily), the lessons to be learnt from it may perhaps belie the ease with which we have begun to slip into supporting a particular "side" in such a confrontation. The peculiar problem with the writing — or the re-writing — of our history is the basic fact that religion has got messily tied up with pol-

ICHR denies move to scrap project

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, March 15. — The Indian Council of Historical Research today denied any move to “permanently withdraw” the controversial “Towards Freedom” project.

The council claimed that the withdrawal was temporary to “peruse” the manuscripts of the volumes still to be published.

The council had decided to send the manuscripts of these volumes to a review committee in last June. The volumes are being edited by Prof KN Panikkar and Prof. Sumit Sarkar.

“When the first volume under the project was published, it was severely criticised for both technical and academic flaws. Hence we decided to review the remaining manuscripts before publication to check and remove errors if there are any”,

said the ICHR chairman, Prof. BR Grover.

“However, the editors of the volumes concerned are yet to return the manuscripts to the council and until we obtain it, the review cannot be done”, the chairman added.

The council also said the review committee appointed by the Centre, headed by Mr AK Ray, was a constitutional requirement for the periodical survey of the functioning of ICHR.

“The committee appointed by the Centre will review the administrative, academic and financial functions of the council. It is not to go into the content matter of the books published or under publication by the council”, said Prof. MGS Narayanan, member, ICHR.

“They (editors) confused the Centre’s committee with the one appointed by the council for reviewing the manuscripts”,

Prof. Narayanan added.

On being asked whether the decision of the council to send a letter to the publishers — Oxford University Press — asking them to temporarily withhold the publication of the volumes by Mr Panikkar and Mr Sarkar was academically right, the council replied it was “absolutely right, technically”.

“We even have the right to demand the type-script from OUP for perusal by the committee since ICHR has its copyrights and has been controlling the finances of this project”, said Prof. Khan, member, ICHR.

On the alleged mistakes in the volumes, Prof. Khan said they were not only academic but also technical in nature.

“The council is in fact anxious to publish the volumes edited by Mr Panikkar and Mr Sarkar”, he added.

Teachers injured in lathi-charge

TEACHERS:

(Continued from Page 1)

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, March 27. — On a day that saw Calcuttans fuming under the double onslaught of the sun and protest-choked roads, two teachers were sent to hospital by police for demanding — among other things — introduction of English from class I and timely payment of pension to retired teachers.

At least 20 others, including several women, belonging to the West Bengal Primary Teachers' Association were injured in the lathi-charge as police tried to prevent them from marching from Esplanade to the Assembly.

The teachers' demands included supply of books to stu-

dents on time and regular supply of uniform.

Teachers dispersed around 5 p.m., more than two hours after the lathi-charge, after they were allowed to submit a deputation to Mr Asim Dasgupta, state finance minister.

But police denied later that they had beaten up the protesting teachers. "One teacher was injured after he fell on the divider while trying to escape the lathi-charge," Mr Nazrul Islam, Deputy Commissioner (Headquarters), said.

In the Assembly, Mr Asim Dasgupta said he had asked the police commissioner to inquire into the matter and submit a report immediately.



One of the teachers lathicharged on Monday. — The Statesman

■ See TEACHERS: page 3

The minister said he would discuss with the Chief Minister and the education minister about the teachers' grievances. The state will also make arrangements for the treatment of the injured teachers, he added.

Earlier, the Congress MLAs demanded that they would not allow the members to carry on with the discussion on the general budget unless the Minister made a statement on the incident.

Mr Dasgupta said he was willing to meet the delegation of the agitating primary teachers.

The teachers later came and discussed their problems with the finance minister after which he made his statement.

Roadblocks: More than 150 BJP supporters blocked Gobinda Khatik Road near Tangra for more than three hours from 11.40 a.m. They were protesting against police "atrocities" on rag-pickers and vagrants after a dispute over an under-construction building.

About 60 of their allies belonging to the Trinamul Congress blocked the Chiriamore crossing at the junction of BT Road and Dum Dum Road around 10 this morning. They too were protesting against "atrocities", this by local CPI-M cadres. They, however, lifted their blockade in five minutes.

The Congress was not far behind its political opponents in taxing the public. Its activists, however, claimed that they were protesting against the unfair taxation on LPG consumers.

There were two separate blockades: one at the Beadon Street-Rabindra Sarani crossing for 30 minutes from 10.15 a.m. and another for the same time, but from 11.10 a.m., at Gopalnagar.

Panel attacks attempts to 'saffronise' education

419-13
29/3
S. B. Chavan & C. V. Reddy

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 28. The standing committee on Human Resource Development Ministry, currently in session here, has taken serious note of attempts to "saffronise" academic institutions and rewrite textbooks with members saying that the liberal character of the education system, guaranteed in the Constitution, is under siege.

Much to the discomfiture of the BJP members in the committee, pointed references have been made by the Congress(I) and Left members to the Vajpayee Government's "saffronisation" drive which, according to them, is reflected in the reconstitution of the Indian Council of Historical Research, the decision to withdraw two volumes of the *Towards Freedom Project* and the appointment of a known RSS sympathiser as a Government nominee on the NCERT's advisory bodies.

The committee was miffed that the annual report of the Ministry, in its section on the ICHR's *Towards Freedom Project*, was silent on the decision to withdraw Prof. K. N. Panikkar and Prof. Sumit Sarkar's volumes even as it mentioned that three volumes were sent to the press for publication. Members alleged that this was an attempt to suppress facts and the Ministry was asked to "update" the report as also give reasons for withholding full information.

Mr. Eduardo Faleiro, a member of the Rajya

Sabha and a former Union Minister, was outspoken during the discussions. He gave details of "distortions" and "anti-minorities' bias" in textbooks in circulation in the BJP-ruled States, particularly Gujarat. A social studies textbook for ninth standard calls Muslims, Christians and Parsees "foreigners".

"The same text also selectively denigrates the Catholic priesthood of the middle ages which may be legitimate but becomes suspicious when similar criticism is not accorded to the Brahmin religious hierarchy", Mr. Faleiro pointed out in a written submission to the committee.

The committee was also told of instances of "glorifying" fascism and Nazism in certain textbooks. In a class X book on social studies, there were approving references to the "achievements" of Nazism and Hitler's "efficient" governance, the committee was informed. Members expressed concern that such reading material should be freely available, and even taught in some schools.

There was also criticism of the *Discussion Document* prepared by the NCERT as a prelude to revising the school curriculum. It was stated that there was attempt to give a "communal" twist to the curriculum in the garb of propagating "national pride" and "value-based" education. Mr. Faleiro, in a note, criticised "mindless glorification of the past" and attempts to develop a "communal outlook".

Several non-BJP members raised the issue

of the appointment of Dr. K. G. Rastogi on certain NCERT panels including a selection committee. They pointed out that he was a "well known RSS sympathiser" and in his autobiography which has a preface by Mr. K. S. Sudarshan, the new RSS chief, he had described in graphic details how he organised a raid on a Muslim locality during the Partition riots and shot dead a Muslim woman ostensibly to rescue her from an angry mob.

There is a move to follow up on a letter which a large number of Rajya Sabha members jointly wrote to the Prime Minister last December protesting Dr. Rastogi's appointment and demanding his removal. "It is a serious issue and we are going to press it", an MP said.

The committee, meanwhile, expressed unhappiness over the reduced allocation for the social sector in the latest Budget. Significant cuts have been made in science education, with the allocation for science laboratories dropping from Rs. 24.85 crores in 1999-2000 to Rs 10 crores in the current Budget. "Similar decline has taken place in other areas of education and the social sector and we are not satisfied with the explanation", a member said.

The 42-member committee, chaired by Mr. S.B. Chavan, would have its last sitting tomorrow and is expected to draft its report before Parliament resumes on April 17 after a recess.

College fee hike likely in 2000-2001

NEW DELHI, Feb. 15. — The much-awaited scheme of the BJP-led government to hike college fees across the country is likely to take off during the academic session for 2000-2001.

The government had been pressing for a hike in college fees even during its earlier 13-month tenure. Sources said the Human Resource Development minister, Mr Murli Manohar Joshi, has been "contemplating increasing the fees for colleges and universities as he is of the view that higher education in the country is highly subsidised". The move was being thought of after the decision to raise salaries of college and university teachers, consequent to the recommendations of the Fifth Pay Commission in 1998.

Official sources said the minister was of the opinion that the "students should also bear a part of the expense at the higher education level". — SNS

THE STATESMAN
16 FEB 2000

ICHR decision independent: BJP

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, FEB. 17. The BJP today claimed that the Government had nothing to do with the withdrawal from the Oxford University Press two volumes of the book, "Towards Freedom", edited by Dr. Sumit Sarkar and Dr. K. N. Panikkar by the Indian Council of Historical Research.

At a press conference, the party spokesperson, Mr. M. Venkaiah Naidu, said the ICHR had acted in its own wisdom. He said he had been told that the two volumes had "reduced Mahatma Gandhi's role in the freedom struggle to a footnote while the role of the Left had been highlighted." The indication was that this feedback to the BJP was from the ICHR chairman, Mr. B. R. Grover. Mr. Naidu said that earlier another volume of the project edited by Mr. P. N. Chopra "was withdrawn from the market owing to inaccuracies."

PTI reports:

The Union Minister for Human Resource Development, Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi, denied that the two volumes had been withdrawn by the ICHR at the instigation of his Ministry.

THE HINDU
18 FEB 2000

HRD Ministry denies role

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, February 16

WITH HRD Ministry sources today denying that the Ministry had anything to do with the decision of the ICHR to "temporarily" withdraw the work of publication of two volumes of the *Towards Freedom* project, there has been considerable heartburn and outrage in academic circles over the ICHR's decision.

In a Press statement issued by the organisation Sahmat, several historians and intellectuals including Prof Ravinder Kumar, Prof R.S. Sharma, Prof Irfan Habib (who have all been formerly chairmen of ICHR), Prof K.M. Shrimali and Prof D.N. Jha have severely criticised ICHR's decision.

It had been reported in *The Hindustan Times* on Tuesday that the ICHR, in a letter, written by Mr P.K.V. Kaimal, Dy Director (Publishing), ICHR, had requested the Oxford University Press (OUP) to temporarily withhold work of publication of the *Towards*

Freedom-1940 volume edited by Prof K.N. Panikkar and *Towards Freedom-1946* volume edited by Prof Sumit Sarkar. The volumes are part of the *Towards Freedom* series of ICHR which focus on the national movement in the decade preceding independence.

The letter had also requested OUP to return the typescripts of these volumes for perusal of the council/review committee. It

Withdrawal of history books

added that the ICHR's decision regarding publication of these volumes would be communicated to OUP "thereafter". Both Prof Panikkar and Prof Sarkar stated that they learnt of this decision only through a letter written by OUP to them, informing them of the ICHR decision. They expressed shock and sadness that after so much of hard work, things had come to this pass.

When contacted, Mr Manzar Khan, Managing Director of OUP, India, said that if the volumes were not published eventually, it would cause a financial loss to OUP. "In that case, we will request ICHR to compensate our loss," he said. "OUP has always published works of academic value and we hope that these works which have high academic value get published," he said. *The Hindustan Times* repeatedly tried to contact ICHR Chairman Prof B.R. Grover but he was unavailable for comment. ICHR staff said that only the chairman was authorised to comment on the matter.

Meanwhile, Sahmat has described the withdrawal of these volumes "as part of the plan to spread a distorted and fictitious history of the national movement". This viewpoint was also stated by both Prof Panikkar and Prof Sarkar. The Press statement also stated that all students of the National Movement had been eagerly looking forward to the volumes on such a crucial period.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

17 FEB 2000

Bid to 'doctor' ICHR minutes

APD-12 By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, FEB.17. Sources in the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR) alleged today that attempts were being made to 'doctor' the minutes of the Council meeting held in December last year at which the 'Towards Freedom Project' was discussed but no decision was taken to suspend the publication of the two volumes which were already in the press.

They charged there was now a bid to tamper with the minutes to suggest that a decision was indeed taken to write to the Oxford University Press (OUP) to stop printing Prof. Sumit Sarkar and Prof. K.N. Panikkar's volumes and return the 'typescripts' to the ICHR. The issue was discussed, it was stated, but the discussion remained inconclusive and nothing was firmed up. The charge coincided with the Human Resource Development Minister, Dr. Murali Manohar Joshi's statement to a news agency that his Ministry had nothing to do with the decision. The ICHR, he said, was an autonomous body and had acted on its own.

Prof. Panikkar has meanwhile written to the OUP asking it not to return the manuscripts to the ICHR without first talking to Prof. S. Gopal, general editor of the 'Towards Freedom Project', as he had approved the volumes for publication. The OUP, he has said, should also ask the ICHR to give specific reasons why it was withdrawing the volumes. He has also pointed out that the issue is not between the

OUP and the ICHR alone, but also authors' rights. Prof. Sarkar, too, has written to the OUP.

The OUP declined to comment saying that they were still looking into it. However, sources said that they were not happy at the turn of events, as the withdrawal of the volumes at this stage would result in considerable loss to the OUP. Technically, the OUP could do very little if the ICHR wanted it to stop publication because "contractually" the ICHR was the "employer". The OUP had been simply hired to print the volumes. Meanwhile, the ICHR chairman, Mr. B.R. Grover, circulated 'facts' about the 'Towards Freedom Project' alleging among other things that the two volumes were sent to the press between August 1998 and June 1999 "bypassing" the committee set up by the HRD Ministry to review the project. The "factsheet" from which the BJP spokesman also quoted at his daily media briefing said: "Interestingly enough the same Leftist historians when they were in power reviewed Dr. (P.N.) Chopra's volume even after its publication and withdrew the copies from the market." Prof. Sarkar said if the committee had indeed been bypassed then what was "the ICHR doing between August 1998 and January 2000?" "Why have they woken up suddenly?"

Prof. Panikkar said he had a letter from the previous chairman of ICHR, Mr. S. Settur — incidentally not a 'Leftist' — informing him that his manuscript was being sent for publication. "Are they saying that their own chairman acted unauthorisedly?" he asked.

THE HINDU
18 FEB 2000

H.D. 1
20/2

Historians ask ICHR to apologise

History & Culture

By Our Staff Reporter

NEW DELHI, FEB. 19. Prominent historians of the country today demanded an unconditional public apology from the Indian Council for Historical Research (ICHR) for its attack on the academic integrity of the late Prof. Partha Sarathi Gupta, editor of a couple of volumes of the Council's 'Towards Freedom' project. They dubbed it as part of the ongoing effort to doctor history to suit the Hindutva agenda.

Among the historians who made the demand include Prof. K. N. Panikkar and Prof. Sumit Sarkar whose works on the same project were recently recalled from the publishers, purportedly for "perusal of the Council/Review Committee."

Referring to their own bitter experience, Prof. Panikkar said the ICHR Chairman, Mr. B. R. Grover, either tender a public apology or resign from office for his "irresponsible statements".

Addressing a press conference, the historians questioned unwarranted defamation of a historian "who is not even alive to defend

himself'. In the interview, the ICHR official had said Prof. Gupta's book was full of howlers. "When asked to point them out, he said it had reduced Gandhi to a footnote and did not have an index and a list of contents," Prof. Panikkar said.

Countering each allegation 'point-by-point' — with some help from Prof. Gupta's historian wife, Prof. Narayani Gupta of Jamia Millia Islamia — Prof. Panikkar said 'Towards Freedom: Documents on the Movement for Independence in India (1943-44)' "has a detailed list of contents". "If there is no index, it is because it would require a separate volume by itself. As for mention of Gandhi, there is a chapter that runs into 50 pages besides 105 documents relating to him. It is inconceivable that a volume dealing with the freedom struggle should make no mention of Gandhi." About his and Prof. Sarkar's volumes, Prof. Panikkar said there was no truth in Mr. Grover's contention that they had sent the volumes to the publishers without ICHR's knowledge.

THE HINDU

20 FEB 2000

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But surely we can do without this historical sparring

THE writing of history is quite distinct from the writing of myth and fable. It is a well-recognised discipline dating back to the days of Herodotus and Thucydides. While there is room for a fair degree of subjective interpretation in historical research, in the final analysis its credibility is based on the authenticity of its source material and its faithful adherence to the basic tenets of historiography. It is therefore disturbing in the extreme to witness the increasing politicisation that has come to mark the teaching and writing of history in the country today. The latest episode concerns the withdrawal of two volumes in the 'Towards Freedom' series edited by Professor Sumit Sarkar and Professor K.N. Panikkar respectively, by the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR), even as they were in the process of being printed.

The ostensible reason for this move was that the volumes were given in without "authorisation", a fact that the two historians deny. Sarkar and Panikkar argue that their volumes were edited and cleared by the 'Towards Freedom' series editor, Professor S. Gopal. Clearly, the ICHR had erred and erred badly in its handling of the entire issue. By its own admission, the historians had handed in their manuscripts between August 1998 and June 1999. Why then did the august body have to wait so long before it sought the typescripts from the publisher? Besides, the fact that it did not think it necessary to inform the authors about this move only goes to fan suspicions that it was something of an undercover operation. A national body that seeks to oversee the

writing of history in the country should surely have conducted itself with more accountability and transparency than the ICHR seems to have done. If the ICHR is indeed not acting as an extension counter of the Ministry of Human Resource Development (HRD), as it maintains and the HRD minister insists, then it should have ensured that it does not stand revealed to the world like a ham-handed Inspector Clouseau.

What is at stake here is the very principle of academic autonomy and intellectual freedom. Very likely, Sarkar and Panikkar hold views that are diametrically opposed to those held by the current political dispensation. But if they are to be challenged, it must be done strictly within the framework of academic discourse, through credible scholastic work, through the citing of authentic sources, in short through employing the tried and tested instruments of historiography. To stymie their efforts in this crass fashion only exposes important institutions like the ICHR to charges of political sycophancy and worse. The ICHR chairperson, Dr B.R. Grover, may recall the controversy that accompanied his appointment some months ago. By not following the rules and courtesies expected of public institutions like the one he is presiding over, he has only helped the case of his detractors who accuse him of partisanship. He must now ensure that the two volumes in question see the light of day immediately. The writing of history cannot, must not, be held hostage to political expediency. This is not just an academic issue, it is a democratic one.

INDIAN EXPRESS

21 FEB 2000

HD-1
23/2

ICHR white paper soon

S. Settar
Cult

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, FEB. 22. The Chairman of the Indian Council for Historical Research (ICHR), Prof. B.R. Grover, announced today that a white paper on the "Towards Freedom" project would be published shortly in view of the controversies it had spawned since its inception in the early Seventies.

The white paper would include all relevant documents relating to the objectives of the project, its "changing guidelines, shifting deadlines and mounting expenditure", he said, pointing out that there had been inordinate delays in completing it.

At one point, "in disgust" the Government had decided to wind up the project, but it was "salvaged" following his intervention as then director and acting chairman of ICHR, Prof. Grover said.

He defended the ICHR decision to withdraw the volumes by Prof. Sumit Sarkar and Prof. K.N. Panikkar, saying that it had been decided to review all manuscripts in view of the "adverse" reaction to earlier volumes.

During the Council meetings on August 31 and September 1, 1998, it was decided to constitute a committee to "streamline" publication of the remaining volumes before they were printed. However, a three-member committee which was set up was "never convened by the then chairman, Prof.

S. Settar". Another committee had now been set up for this purpose. It comprised Prof. Satish Mittal, former head of the History Department, Kurukshetra University, Prof. Hari Om, head of the History Department, Jammu University, and Prof. A.R. Khan, former head of the History Department, Himachal University.

Prof. Grover said the committee should not be confused with the one set up by the Human Resource Development Ministry for a "periodic review" of the functioning and work of ICHR.

He contended that the ICHR, which was the copyright holder and which was "controlling the finances of the project", had "every right — legal and moral — to satisfy itself that the volumes published under its seal of authority" were upto the mark, and conformed to the original guidelines.

One of these was that the documents should be arranged in a chronological order, and not thematically as had been done after the guidelines were changed by Prof. Irfan Habib when he was ICHR chairman.

Meanwhile, the BJP-led National Democratic Teachers' Front has accused "Marxist academics" of "distorting" history and supported the move to recall the volumes by Prof. Sarkar and Prof. Panikkar.

THE HINDU
23 FEB 2000