



2018-2021 at a Glance



Shri Narendra Modi
Hon'ble Prime Minister of India

January 1st 2021; will mark the completion of my three year-term as President, Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR). While there are still some days to go, I am taking this opportunity to share a summary of some New Initiatives at the ICCR during the last three years.

Thanks to the guidance of Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji and also the support and co-operation of the Ministry, particularly the Minister for External Affairs Shri S. Jaishankar Ji as well as administration of the ICCR, most of these initiatives are now adding to our efforts for further building on India's enormous global goodwill and soft influence, popularly known as Soft Power Potential.

Presumably, for the first time the highest level of Government leadership comprehensively reviewed the working of ICCR. Hon'ble Prime Minister Chaired a Meeting held on 13th July 2020 which was, among others; attended by Hon.ble External Affairs Minister and Hon'ble Culture Minister, where a presentation on ICCR- Past, Present and Future was made.

During the last three years, with the help of ICCR Officials, we could focus mainly on three things. Firstly, it was about attempting Systemic Changes, secondly; working for Enrichment of Activity Profile and thirdly it was also about acquiring New Dimensions through New Initiatives to the institutional profile of the ICCR.

Vinay Sahasrabuddhe
President, ICCR

Details of what has been attempted and achieved

Systemic Changes

Re-articulation of ICCR' Vision and Mission: Draft of a New Vision and Mission Document for ICCR was prepared and circulated about a year-and-a-half ago. Recently, this draft was adopted at the Governing Body meeting held in the month of November 2020.

Review and modification of the Constitution of ICCR: ICCR was established in 1950 when the concepts like Soft Power or Track-2 Diplomacy were not in vogue. Global conditions for Cultural Diplomacy too have undergone huge changes.

In view of this, it was essential to undertake a thorough review of the Constitution of ICCR. A Committee has been set up to undertake this review and suggest modifications

Introducing the Concept of Three Year Country Specific Plans for Cultural Relationship: At the Annual Conference of Heads of Missions (HOMs) in 2018; we have mooted the idea of preparing the Three Year Country Specific Plan for India's Cultural Relations with the respective country. HOMs have responded positively to this idea. Later, at a first-of-its kind meeting between ICCR Office bearers and Territorial Heads of MEA, held on January 2; 2019 this idea was

discussed further. With this plan, ICCR will be able to have a more structured, result oriented programs and projects undertaken. Consultative Meetings like this will go a long way to have greater commonality of approach in setting up the agenda of the ICCR.

Re-Demarcation of Responsibilities of Apex Level Officers: In view of the fact that ICCR Mission, at the functional level; covers mainly three areas viz. General Administration, Academic Activities and Cultural Programmes; re-demarcation of functional responsibilities has been done amongst the three Deputy Director Generals (DDGs).

Right Sizing of Regional Centres of ICCR: ICCR has 19 Regional Centres at various cities within the country. They were established mainly to take care of foreign students studying under ICCR Scholarships at those places. However, in view of the changes in the number of foreign students, workload at many of these centres is substantially reduced. Hence, right sizing of these centres was essential in order to save resources. This process has now been almost completed.

Introduction of New Policies in key areas: In the following functional areas, New Policy Approaches have been adopted formally

- New Gift Policy – Formulated with a view to promoting traditional Indian artisans and their exquisite art.
- Policy to Employ Local Teachers for Yoga, Classical Dances, Music or Indian Languages (Not just Hindi and Sanskrit but also any of the recognized Indian Languages) mainly from NRI's abroad has now been adopted in order to recognize global talent and also save resources.
- Policy to Explore the Possibility of running Indian Cultural Centres abroad on Public Private Partnership Basis, opening yet another window for the participation of NRI communities has now also been adopted.

Systemic Changes for Greater Transparency and Accountability in Award of Scholarships: Every year, ICCR awards close to 3000 Scholarships to foreign students. A slew of reforms are now introduced to make the Award of Scholarships more transparent with a flawless mechanism for accountability. Making Selection of Host Institutions

more transparent, Ensuring Direct Transfer of Scholarship Amount to Bank Accounts (DBT) and Introducing an annual Understanding India Course for all the Scholarship Recipient are some of these key reforms.

Un-named Cultural Centres are now Swami Vivekananda Cultural Centres: A policy decision was taken to name all un-named ICCR Centers abroad as Swami Vivekananda Cultural Centre (SVCC), as a tribute to the spiritual leader who was also modern India's first spiritual ambassador.

Building Capacities of ICCR Directors abroad: A new initiative was carried out by ICCR for training the newly selected directors of Indian Cultural Centres abroad to equip them with diplomatic protocols, administrative and financial system. The Foreign Service Institute facilitated the training programme.

Setting Up of Advisory Panels for all Regional Centres of the ICCR: ICCR has 19 Regional Centres at places like Jammu, Varanasi, Mumbai, Pune, Kolkata, Bengaluru, Chennai etc. There has been a provision of Regional Advisory Committees for all these centres to facilitate a bridge building between the foreign students and the local arts and culture fraternity. However, these bodies were not constituted for a long time. Now, after a gap of several years, Advisory Panels were set up for almost all 19 ICCR Regional Centres at various places all over India. A day-long Orientation Program was held for all these members on April 4, 2019 at the ICCR, HQ

More inclusive approach in Selection of Artistes to be sent abroad: Systemic Reforms are being introduced in the selection of artistes firstly for empanelment and later for giving an opportunity to present their art talent abroad, while ensuring greater regional as well as social representation. A set of new guidelines for sending troupes abroad has now been adopted.

Standardising Academic Programmes at ICCR Centres Abroad: At many Centres of ICCR abroad, formal/informal Courses in Yoga, Indian Classical Music/Dances and some Indian languages are routinely held. An attempt is being made to have these courses more structured and standardised to make them a more serious academic programme. Yoga Courses at all Centres are now standardized.

Enrichment of Activity Profile

Launch of UTIKS Platform (Universalisation of Traditional Indian Knowledge Systems) : An innovative initiative of ICCR under which online educational/training courses will be offered on various aspects of Indian culture. There will be a wide ranging variety of topics that UTIKS will cover, including Rangoli, Mehendi, Ramayan, Culinary and Cuisine Traditions, Flora and Fauna in India, Indian Freedom Struggle etc.

Showcasing the success of Democracy and Democratic Governance in India: Democracy being an inseparable part of Indian Culture, a series of Delivering Democracy Seminars was conducted at key opinion-making centres of the world. In all, 7 such Seminars were held where the success of Indian democracy was discussed at length, focusing mainly on governance, and economy and social justice. These Seminars were held at places like Huston, New Jersey and Washington DC (USA) Berlin (Germany) Canberra (Australia), London (UK), and Dubai (UAE)

Leveraging Cultural Relationship for Economic and Strategic Relationships: On the formal suggestion made by the ICCR, NITI Aayog organized two brain storming sessions on “Centrality of Cultural Relationship for greater vibrancy in Diplomatic, Economic and Strategic International Relations” The two sessions chaired by NITI-Aayog's Vice Chairman Shri Rajiv Kumar was held on May 23, 2019 and earlier on November 29, 2018. Representatives of over half-a-dozen departments participated in them.

Evolving Understanding about the Multi-dimensionality of Yoga: Post establishment of 21st June as International Yoga Day, evolving sound understanding about Yoga as a body of knowledge with multiple dimensions, discussing Yoga academically was very important. Considering this, ICCR has started conducting an International Seminar/Conference on Yoga/ Yoga Studies, every year at some key academic centre. The first two International Seminars were held at New York, USA and London, UK in June 2018 and June 2019 respectively. Representatives from over 20 countries participated in them. Due to Covid-19, the Third International Seminar couldn't be held.

Indian Traditional Art and Artisans on ICCR Agenda :

- For the first time, on Rakhi Purnima, Rakhis made of Bamboo and prepared by tribal artisans from Melghat, were distributed to foreign associates of ICCR at various centres abroad. This is going to be a permanent feature of annual activities of the ICCR.
- Again, for the first time, ICCR organized an International Webinar on the theme 'Weaving Relations; Textile Tradition' involving traditional weavers and textile artistes from 12 countries, to mark the 150th Birth Anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. The Seminar was held in collaboration with the UP Institute of Design (UPID).
- Special mementos of ICCR, signifying India's rich cultural artwork were designed and got prepared by artisans. These mementos have the insignia of ICCR, built within. These mementos are used by the ICCR as a positive gesture towards its visiting dignitaries. First edition of such memento created in bronze by award winning artisan from Saharanpur, Dilshad Khan; was presented to the Hon.ble President of India.

India in the Eyes of the World: Reviewing references to India in the Text-Books of different countries: Since July 2020, ICCR has embarked upon a new project of reviewing the references to India in the text books of various countries with the help of Indian Missions abroad. So far, review of over 60 countries is almost complete. Analysis of the contents of textbooks is very educative and revealing too, providing inputs for an actionable agenda for perception-correction about India.

New Dimensions through New Initiatives

Pt. Deendayal Upadhyay Memorial Oration: A new annual feature was added in the year 2018. In observance of the World Culture Day of May 21, ICCR has instituted this Annual Oration on any of the subjects pertaining to India's cultural influence/ soft power.

The following are the details of the three orations held :

- 2018 1st Oration: Smt. Sushma Swaraj on 'Soft Power Diplomacy; Strength of India'
- 2019 2nd Oration: Justice R.C Lahoti on 'Sanskrit – An Instrument for Promotion of India's Soft Power'
- 2020 3rd Oration: Dr. Antonio Morandi, Italy (2020) on 'Ayurveda and Its Relevance Today'.

Tribute to Atal Ji: Remembering the Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the first ex-ICCR President who rose to become the Prime Minister two portraits were inaugurated.

- On Atalji's first death anniversary, (August 16, 2019): Hon'ble Vice President of India Shri M Venkaiah Naidu unveiled the life size portrait of Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee at the Ravindranath Tagore Centre of ICCR at Kolkata.
- On Atalji's second death anniversary, (August 16, 2020): Hon'ble President of India Shri Ram Nath Kovind unveiled the portrait of Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee at the ICCR HQ, New Delhi.

Proposed International Conference on Buddhist Studies and Intl. Award for Eminent Buddhist Scholar: Currently, ICCR is conducting an annual conference/seminar on Indology and also awarding a scholar Indologist of international eminence, every year. From 2021-22, we propose to organize an International Conference on Buddhist Studies and also honour an international scholar every year.

Formation of Associations of Alumni of Indian Institutions (AAIL) at different cities abroad: In order to build upon the goodwill that we have earned through Scholarships awarded to foreign students, it has now been decided to promote the formation of Association of Alumni of Indian Institutions at various cities abroad where Alumni of Indian Institutions stay in a good number. Attempts will be made to incentivise the participation of such alumni in these associations.

Some recent National Conferences and International Seminars

- **International Youth Seminar to mark the 550th Birth Anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev Ji :** An International Youth Seminar was organised on the teachings of the founder of Sikhism and the religion's contribution in universal well being on November 6, 2019. About 40 international Sikh youth and representatives from 12 countries (USA, UK, Canada, Italy, Australia, Thailand, Singapore etc) and 20 young people from India participated in the seminar followed by a three day takht darshan Yatra to three taints namely Patna Sahib (Patna, Bihar), Golden Temple (Amritsar, Punjab), Hazur Saheb (Nanded, Maharashtra)
- **Destination India Conference:** A first of its kind National Conference on "Making India Global Education-Destination: Opportunities and Challenges" organized by ICCR, jointly with Savitribai Phule Pune University and Symbiosis International University, Pune. In this conference we have been able to evolve a comprehensive agenda for making India a Global Education Hub and happily, the Ministry of Education too has taken serious cognizance of our recommendations.
- **Tilak Seminar:** A daylong International Seminar (webinar) was organized jointly with ICSSR, Deccan Education Society and IGNCIA on August 1, Lokmanya Tilak's 100th death anniversary. Home Minister Amit Shah inaugurated this Webinar on Lokmanya Tilak: Swaraj to Atmanirbhar Bharat, while noted economist and journalist and writer Shri S. Gurumurthi delivered the valedictory address.

