

BREAKTHROUGH SCIENCE SOCIETY

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Statement

Like many other concerned citizens, scientists and researchers across the country, we are deeply dismayed to learn that the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) has issued an advisory to the IITs and other institutes of national importance instructing them to initiate “Sanskrit Cells” for introducing courses in Sanskrit.

The MHRD Committee headed by Shri N Gopaldaswamy, a former Chief Election Commissioner, recommends this step “in order to facilitate study of Science and Technology in Sanskrit literature and inter disciplinary study of various modern subjects and its corresponding subjects in Sanskrit literature.” The MHRD document* titled ‘Vision and Road Map for the Development of Sanskrit – Ten Year Perspective Plan’ further claims, “There are hundreds of works like *Siddhanta Shiromani*, *Vriksha Ayurveda*, *Upavana Vinoda*, *Mayamatam*, etc., to name a few, which are of great relevance in the context of research and innovation.”

Modern science and technology are products of the collective endeavour of the whole of mankind to understand the laws of nature and to use these for enrichment of human life. In different stages of history, different societies have contributed to building our understanding of nature, and these have been subsumed in what is known as ‘modern science and technology’. Each generation incrementally builds upon the knowledge created by the preceding generations, discarding wrong ideas and creating new ones. The objective of the education system is to equip students with the latest and the most refined knowledge about the working of nature, obtained through the rigorous scientific method of observation, experimentation, theory-building, and objective testing of theories. Teaching a mixture of old and new scientific texts in the name of a so-called ‘inter-disciplinary’ study might lead to a truncated, confused and erroneous understanding.

Considerable and commendable research has been done in unearthing the concepts concerning science and technology in Sanskrit literature by experts and historians. The world scientific community has well acknowledged the genuine contributions to science and technology in the ancient and medieval texts from the region of the Indian subcontinent. We are not opposed to further research on the development of science in ancient India. Rather, we think it is certainly worthwhile and of historical value. But this task should be left to Sanskrit scholars and trained historians as has been done so far. Moreover, many important works are available in Pali, Prakrit, and other ancient languages. Therefore there is no reason to confine attention only to Sanskrit in historiographical studies.

Any attempt to force such activities on untrained faculty and students of IITs, IISc and other research and teaching institutions will be counter-productive as it will interfere with their mandate to teach and to carry-out advanced research. Moreover, since the correct ideas of the time have already been integrated into modern science and the wrong ideas have been abandoned, study of science in ancient India cannot contribute to the advancement of science and technology today. It is only of value in understanding the history of development of human knowledge.

This is not the first time such an effort is being made. During the tenure of NDA-1, the MHRD had issued a notice in July 2000 to around 40 institutions, including the IITs and IISc, asking them to consider introducing Sanskrit courses. Since then several IITs have taken steps to introduce courses in Sanskrit. However, no contribution to advancement of modern science and technology has resulted from such steps.

The committee* which prepared this report consists of 13 members—none of whom were picked for being a scientist of eminence. Is it proper that such a committee makes sweeping recommendations to scientific and technological institutes of advanced learning on what and how they should teach? The governing bodies of the research institutions concerned should be consulted following the democratic process before such a decision is made by the MHRD.

Therefore, we urge all well-meaning people to protest against directives such as these, which are aimed at infiltration of communal and obscurantist ideas, and infringe upon autonomous functioning of the science and technology institutions in India. The institutions of higher learning and scientific research should be allowed to focus on the present and the future, offer solutions to current problems and contribute meaningfully to advancing science and technology without interference from government or any other outside agencies.

Dhruba Mukhopadhyay
President

* http://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/Report-CVRM.pdf