

## **An Analysis of Teaching History at the Under-Graduate Level in**

**Dibrugarh University**

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### **Abstract**

*History is the study of the past, including the study of change and continuity over time. According to historian Peter Stearns, “the past causes the present, and so the future. Sometimes fairly recent history will suffice to explain a major development, but often we need to look further back to identify the causes of change; and only through studying history can we understand what elements of an institution or a society persists despite change.” Studying history not only trains students to place events in historical perspective, it also develops research skills and sharpens students’ analytical thinking. But the subject has been losing its status in Assam as a discipline of study in all the levels of educational system. Very few students opted it as a subject of study due to its less scope in job market. Moreover, the social perception regarding this subject is also negative. People who hear the words history class often think of boring lectures and lists of important dates to remember. In this context it is hoped that a study regarding proper teaching history and the problems associated with this and its findings and suggestions will go a long way in making the teaching of history interesting, inspirational and effective.*

### **1. Introduction:**

The English word ‘history’ is derived from the Greek word *istoria* meaning inquiry, research, exploration or information. In a broad sense, history is a systematic account of the origin and development of humankind, a record of the unique events and movements in its

life. It is the result of the interplay of man with his environment and with his fellowmen.<sup>1</sup> It is one of the most ancient subjects of India and its study was given primary from that period onwards. History in ancient period in India was existed as a branch of religion.<sup>2</sup> Its aim was to instruct the pupils in *Dharma, Artha, Karma* and *Moksha*. During the medieval period history was a popular field of knowledge. It was studied to impart moral instruction. But with the coming of the Europeans, history writing assumed new dimensions reflecting the beliefs, assumptions, prejudices and attitudes of the victors. During the British rule, history formed the part of syllabus for secondary schools. Its content was an examination subject which had no value apart from passing the examination. Its content was not planned with any reference to aims and objectives of teaching history. The history of India was presented as a chronicle of battles between kings. A restatement and reorientation of the aims of education become necessary. Several Commissions laid down aims and objectives of teaching history. Thus the aims and objectives of teaching history have undergone changes with the shift in the philosophical thinking of the time and change in the social and political practices.<sup>3</sup> The teaching history in modern period includes the training in historical evidence; training to develop habits of accuracy in dealing with facts; skill in putting facts together, and insight into casual relations; training in the use of books and the cultivation of a discriminating taste for historical reading were also considered important.<sup>4</sup> Man and time have not been static. Often, there have been changes in man's activities as a result of challenges posed by his environment and his fellow man. These challenges are either between man and his environment or between man and man. The challenges are also enormous. Although, the activities might have happened in the past, they usually left behind relics, traces and marks that become subjects of collection and interpretation. Bards, witch doctors, folk singers, poets etc., who were responsible for preserving and recounting stories of the past activities of any particular person, tribe or society can be regarded as historians as they have been dated back to the earliest human societies. History has been developed as a discipline.

## **2. Objectives of the study:**

This study aims to analyse the present position of teaching history at the undergraduate courses of Dibrugarh University. Moreover, it was an attempt to find out the

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<sup>1</sup> E. Sreedharan, *A Textbook of Historiography*, Orient Black Swan, New Delhi, 2004, p.1

<sup>2</sup> A.L. Basham, *The Indian Sub-continent in Historical perspective*, p.23

<sup>3</sup> R.L. Bhatia, *Contemporary Teaching of History*, Surjeet Publications, Delhi 2002, pp. 41-44

<sup>4</sup> Henry Johnson, *Teaching of History*, New York, Macmillan Company, 1940, p.25

infrastructure facilities and learning resources provided to the history teachers in the teaching-learning process as well as the training courses and research undertaken by them and their professional development. Besides, this study also attempted to find out the challenges faced by the history teachers in teaching history at the college level.

**3. Methodology of the study:** The empirical approach is a part and parcel of this study as it is absolutely dependent on primary data collected under the investigator's direct observations. The area of the present study was confined to the colleges under seven districts of Upper Assam such as Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sivasagar, Jorhat, Golaghat, Dhamaji and North Lakhimpur under the jurisdiction of Dibrugarh University. The population of this study comprises of the teachers and the students of the under-graduate colleges. So the teachers and the students related to history are the population of this study. For the determining of the sample for the study 20 colleges of the area were selected randomly. 40 teachers (2 from each college) and 135 students from the same colleges were selected as sample. In the present study two questionnaires were administered for collecting the necessary information from – History teachers and the students. Moreover, the secondary sources have been gathered from different books, journals, magazines' and newspapers etc.

**4. Analysis and interpretation of Data:** This section deals with the analysis and interpretation of data collected through personal interview and administration of questionnaires' which were meant for both the teachers and the students of the under-graduate level of Dibrugarh University. On a careful analysis of both the primary and secondary data the following has been found.

**4.1 Scholastic Achievement of students:** Here, an attempt has been made to study the comparative result of last four years of B.A. Final year of history major. The star(\*) mark in the table indicates the first batch of semester system in undergraduate level under the Dibrugarh University. The following table reveals the actual picture.

**Results of B.A. Final Year (2011-2014)**

	2011			2012			2013			2014		
	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total
Total students appeared in History Major	201	132	133	224	188	412	301	249	550	239	283	522

No. of students passed	157	106	263	162	135	297	238	202	440	135	132	267
Pass %	78.97%			72.08%			81.81%			51.15%		
No. of students secured first class	17			39			51			170		

(Source: Statistician, D.U.)

It is very clear from the above table that the number of students who have opted history as their major course increased. In 2011 pass percentage was 78.97% with 17 first class; while in 2012 there were 39 first class with a pass percentage of 72.08%. The year 2013 is important for both the reasons because pass percentage increased to 81.81% and 51 students secured first class. But the most significant aspect needs to be noticed from the above table is that the result of 2014. This was the first batch passed out under the semester system. If we observed the result of the table it is found that the number of first class is 170 but the percentage of pass lowered down to 51.15%.

**4.2 History Syllabus of Dibrugarh University T.D.C. Course:** This part focuses on the existing history curriculum, especially the Bachelor of Arts (History). This subject is mostly of theoretical value which has less practical implications. Thus, the degree curriculum of History needs radical reformations due to the growing demands of society. The objectives of this curriculum are to acquaint the students with the heritage of the nation and of the world. Further, it enriches the students with the socio-cultural and economic background of the north-eastern region. Moreover, specializations are offered to enable the students to acquire special knowledge on certain branches of study, to orient the students in research methodology and higher research and to make them up to the mark in the context of present world affairs. The syllabus of history of Dibrugarh University as follows:

**Course Structure (The B.A. Three Year Degree Major Course in the Semester System):**

First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth Semester	Sixth Semester
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Semester	Semester	Semester	Semester		
Course: I Introduction to History and its Sources	Course: II Early and Medical Assam up to 1826	Course: III Modern Assam : 1826- 1947	Course: V History of Ancient India (From the earliest times to 1200 A.D.)	Course: VII History of Modern India (From 1757- 1947 A.D.)	Course: XI History of Ecology and Environment in India
		Course: IV Social and Economic History of Assam	Course: VI History of Medieval India (From 1200-1750 A.D.	Course: VIII History of Europe (1453- 1815)	Course: XII Women in Indian History
				Course: IX History of Europe: 1815- 1945	Course: XIII World Revolutions
				Course: X Tourism in North-East India: Historical Dimensions	Course: XIV History of Science and Technology in India

In preparing the curriculum, importance was given on diagnosis needs, formulation of objectives, selection of the subject matter, selection of learning experience, interrelationships of subjects, training for leisure relation with community life and evaluation. Learning experiences at degree level depend mostly on outings or educational tours that are arranged in a year. These tours provide more entertainment than knowledge which cannot bring the desired change in behavior or personality. Personality development should be integrated with teaching-learning in all subject areas. Projects in history should provide the

knowledge of ancient cultures, civilization, living habits etc. where they could be incorporated to give the political scenario of that age. Political, cultural, and socio-economic conditions of the past in History subject will give a base to learn literature and languages etc. Interrelationships of different subject areas will give various learning experiences that affect the personality of the learner. Free time could be spent in visiting historical monuments, planetariums, archaeological museums etc. where the periods, incidents, rulers and reigns are recorded and reported in the projects given as study. Research skills are to be improved in doing such leisure-time activities.

**4.3 Methods & strategies used Teachers in Teaching-learning process:** Method is a link between aims and objectives and results and values. It should always be in accordance with the requirements of the age of students, their stages of education and their physical environments. It should be flexible and workable. Its success is judged by its results in items of pupils' growth and development. A successful teacher is familiar with all the methods of teaching but selects the one that suits him best at a particular time and place, for directing the learning process.

The objective of higher education is to provide comprehensive knowledge of the subjects. Keeping this in view the following teaching methods are used in teaching history in under graduate level. The lecture-cum-discussion method is commonly used in higher studies. Group-discussions and weekly seminars are organized. Library reading is used as supplementary technique for classroom lectures. Orientation in research is generated by organizing and conducting research projects. Project work is carried out by the students for practical activities. Assignments are given for assimilating the classroom learning.

**4.4 Methods followed by the teachers in teaching history:**

Methods	No. of Teachers	% of Teachers
Note dictation method	26	65%
Discussion method	31	77.5%
Lecture method	40	100%
Source method	25	62.5%
Project method	13	32.5%

From the above table it was found that all the teachers follow the lecture method (100%). Majority of the teachers (77.5%) follow the discussion method. The number of teachers following the project method was only (32.5%). From the study it is clear that all the teachers adopt more than one method in teaching history. Another important aspect of this study is that they follow source method in their teaching. They use primary sources to generate students' interest, stimulate critical thinking, and invigorate classroom discussion. Teaching under-graduates with primary sources is an effort to solve the problem of the knowledge gap. Actually we must teach subjects, not prerequisites. We get distracted by teaching the 'required courses'. Everyone knows that 90% or more students in a freshmen history class don't want to be there. This translates into dumping down the lessons more than necessary. In our history classes, for example, we talk about historiography from the first day of class. Teachers must know that their students to have a true, deep exposure to the study of History.

There is no single method of teaching history which could be recommended for all topics and all situations, but there are many delightful roads of learning. Whatever procedure if followed, the teacher should aim at vitalizing of the different facets of human story in varied colour. He can move forwards and backwards in time, he can fly into space and present a global picture of the story of humanity. It is only by a creative approach to teaching that the child would discover the present and get a peep into the future. Provision should be made for an analytical, comparative and lively study of trends and tendencies instead of chronological piling up of facts and figures. Let the students discover the key that will open many doors of knowledge about the past and provide sheer delight of learning.

**4.5 Learning Resources & Infrastructural facilities:** Classroom furnishings and their arrangements have a direct bearing upon on the students' learning. Satisfactory outcomes can be expected from any classroom situations, only when adequate and comfortable working facilities are provided. With a pleasant social climate, a history room is a learning laboratory in which great emphasis is laid on student activity and student participation in classroom procedures. History library provides a variety of material for instructional work, guidance to teachers for curriculum construction and selection of good books help the students in reading and help adults in the locality through counseling and guiding. It lays the foundation for free enquiry and intellectual development. The following table indicates the availability of infrastructure in the colleges under Dibrugarh University.

#### 4.6 Availability of Learning Resources in the Colleges

Total Colleges(20)	History classroom	History Library	History Museum	ICT	Teaching aids
No. of Colleges	20	13	3	4	20
% of Colleges	100%	65%	15%	20%	100%

There are teaching-learning resources in all the colleges with some variations. These include maps, globes, charts, models, pictures etc. Through all the colleges have teaching aids but their uses vary from college to college. The number college teachers using ICT in their teaching is only 20%. Only 15% colleges have their small museum in their colleges with some locally available historical remains. 65% colleges have their own history classroom. Not a single history department where e-facility is available. Due to this, students have to move to the library. A few colleges also have their departmental publications (journals).

**4.7 Qualifications of Different teachers:** The quality of the teacher to a large extent depends on the quality of teachers' education received by him or her. It is well known that to become a lecturer or Assistant professor in colleges of the under-graduate level in India require a P.G. Degree (M.A., M.Sc., or M.Com) with certain requisite norms bound by U.G.C., AICTE, NCTE etc. now a day a person who would like to become assistant professor must clear NET or SET as bounded by the UGC. But these are only the minimum requirements. In spite of these a teacher must always upgrade his professional qualifications with researches and new methodologies of teaching and learning. Here, in the following table an effort has been made to present the qualifications acquired by the teachers of the colleges under study.

Qualifications of teachers	Total no. of teachers(40)	% of teachers
M.A.	16	40%
M.A. with Ph. D	13	32.5%
M.A. with M. Phil	08	20%
M.A. with B.Ed. L.L.B. etc.	03	7.5%

From the table it is clear that 40% teachers are simple M.A. So far as the professional developments of these teachers are concerned they are not conscious about this. 32.5% teachers have done their Ph. D while 20% teachers have M. Phil degree. Another 7.5% teachers have other professional degrees like B. Ed. and L.L.B. As we know that higher education means research, therefore, all the teachers who are teaching in the colleges should do research and also to improve their teaching methodology.

**4.8 Challenges faced by the teachers in teaching History:** The teachers were asked about the challenges faced by them in teaching history and majority of them find out the following:

1. All of them welcome the implementation of semester system and also the new syllabus. But the main problem is that they faced a lot of problem due to the unavailability of textbooks. Lack of textbooks for some of the newly introduced courses for which both the teachers and students facing problems. Most of them viewed that unavailability of textbooks is one of the major obstacles of studying history.
2. Another major problem faced by the teachers in teaching history is the lack of awareness towards the importance of this subject.
3. Negative attitude of people towards this subject.
4. Lack of enough learning resources.
5. Misconceptions towards this subject.

**4.9 Selection of History for their Higher Education:** Students were asked to give responses on the reasons for the selection of history for their higher education.

Selection of history for higher education

Responses	No of students	% of students
Parental encouragement	14	10.37%
Teachers encouragement	12	8.89%
Both parental and teachers encouragement	8	5.93%
Spontaneous love for the subject	30	22.22%
By observing the achievement of outgoing students	4	2.96%
Due to their personal choice	61	45.19%
It is easier than the other subjects	6	4.44%

The above study revealed that 45.19% students opted history for higher education because of their personal choice. 22.22% students have selected history because of their

spontaneous love for the subject 10.37% and 8.89% students' opted history due to the parental encouragement and teachers' encouragement respectively. It is also seen that some of the students selected it as it is easier than other subjects and for some of them the achievement of outgoing students motivate to opt it. However, it is seen that majority of the student like history and they opted it because of their love for this subject.

**4.10 Teachers' good qualities as observed and evaluated by the students:** According to Lord Bryce, "The teacher of history must have the power of realizing the dead past in a living present, must in fact have a touch of imagination, as well as a vastly larger amount of positive knowledge." The role of a history teacher is that of a successful guide and a teacher. For playing this role he must be wide awake, an active, enlightened and well informed person. He must listen to news broadcasts, telecasts, read current events, attend lectures and discussions, study and analysis reports and editorials, participate in college and community relations etc. The teacher's job is not to indoctrinate but to equip students to make decisions based on sound and objective knowledge. Students are asked to rate the qualities of teachers by giving number 1 to 10 on the following areas-

1. Presentation is unique
2. Can attract for the subject
3. Explain the concept very clearly
4. Clarifies the concepts by using different historical maps.
5. Very cooperative and friendly

Thus, in the study it is found that students of 16 colleges have given their history teacher above average score that means more than 5 and 6. The students of 4 colleges have given less than 5. It indicates that all the teachers do not possess certain qualities as mentioned.

#### **5. Major Findings of the Study:**

- ❖ So far as the results of TDC major in History is concerned the number of first classes increased tremendously in 2014 in comparison to the last four years. But the pass percentage lowered down to 51.15%.
- ❖ Present history syllabus in degree curriculum is bulky and gives a chronological order of historical events, without focusing on cultural aspects, thereby resulting in lack of interest among the students. Moreover, mere listening to lectures and

reading the subject matter is the only learning process which will be often boring to them.

- ❖ It is found that all the teachers follow the lecture method. Majority of the teachers follow the discussion method. But the number of teachers who follow the project method is less. From the study it is clear that all the teachers adopt more than one method in teaching history. Another important aspect of this study is that they follow source method in their teaching. The use primary sources engage students' interest, stimulate critical thinking, and invigorate classroom discussion. The lecture-cum-discussion method is commonly used in higher studies. Group-discussions and weekly seminars are organized.
- ❖ All the teachers are Post-graduate in History. So far as the professional developments of these teachers are concerned they are not conscious about this. A few teachers possess the other degrees like B.Ed. and L.L.B. As we know that higher education means research, therefore, all the teachers who are teaching in the colleges should do research and also to improve their teaching methodology.
- ❖ The teachers were asked about the challenges faced by them in teaching history. All of them welcome the implementation of semester system and also the new syllabus. But the main problem is that they faced a lot of problem due to the unavailability of textbooks. Unavailability of textbooks for newly introduced courses creating problems to both the teachers and students. Most of them viewed that unavailability of textbooks is one of the major obstacles of studying history.
- ❖ Another major problem faced by the teachers in teaching history is the lack of awareness towards the importance of this subject. Negative attitude of people towards this subject; lack of enough teaching aids and misconceptions towards this subject etc. are some other challenges.
- ❖ The teachers were asked to give Suggestions for improving performance and achievements of students in history. The responses were as follows:- Projects, assignments should be given regularly; regular class test should be conducted; encourage students to participate in the discussion of lesson; encourage students to prepare historical maps, timelines for better conception of time and space. The

teachers feel that they should try to make history lesson lively by correlating it with our day to day life.

- ❖ The above study revealed that most of the students adopted history for higher education because of their personal choice. The number of students who opt history due to the parental encouragement and teachers' encouragement is less. It is also seen that some of the students selected it as it is easier than other subjects and for some of them the achievement of outgoing students motivate to opt it. However, it is seen that majority of the student like history and they opted history because of their love for this subject.
- ❖ There are teaching-learning resources in all the colleges with some variations. These include maps, globes, charts, models, pictures etc. Through all the colleges have teaching aids but their uses vary from college to college. The number college teachers using ICT in their teaching is only 20%. Only 15% colleges have their small museum in their colleges with some locally available historical remains. 65% colleges have their own history library though the number of books is not enough. All the colleges have their own history classroom. There is not a single history department where e-facility is available. For this students have to move to the library. A few colleges also have their department publications(journals)

#### **6. Suggestions for improvement:**

In the light of the findings of the present study the investigator has given some suggestions for improving the condition of the subject History at the Under-graduate level.

- ❖ Importance should be given on availability of enough amount of learning resources in colleges.
- ❖ History teachers should take the initiate to remove the misconceptions and negative attitude of people towards the subject.
- ❖ Modern teaching methods should be practiced other than the traditional methods. Participatory teaching, audio-visual aids, invited lecture programme, colloquia, student counseling etc. should be adopted.
- ❖ Colleges should organize historical field trips frequently.
- ❖ Various co-curricular activities such as essay competition, debate competition should be organized on the topics of history.
- ❖ Workshops, seminars, conferences etc. should be organized.

- ❖ Orientation in research should be generated by organizing and conducting research projects.

## **7. Conclusion:**

Today, students study history in order to learn about and understand the world they live in and the forces, movements, and events that have shaped it. They do this by working with sources as a way of developing specific skills. The skills of the historian and the curricula have an ethical purpose as there is a combination between history and citizenship. Students are not just learning about the past, but also the attitudes of democratic and tolerant citizenship. This shift has implied huge changes both in curricula, which are required to give more space to recent history, and in teaching methods. A major aspect of these changes is the development of critical thinking, seen as a transferable skill. The ability to process information and make reasonable judgments is crucial in the profile of an active citizenship.

The process of change, both in content and in methodology, has had very positive consequences for history teachers. They have become real professionals. History teachers need to be organized into associations and involved in the reform of history education. Professional teaching methods reached the classroom with the introduction of new curricula, new textbooks, and teacher retraining. Professional teaching depends on the quality of training and the relative weight given to knowledge-based (content) and to skills-based (methods) history teaching. The recognition of the importance of teacher training has been the basis for the development of teachers' associations in the different countries, which are now linked through internet, Facebook etc. Information travels quickly within the group of active teachers that are involved in education reform. Teaching History at the under-graduate level provides teachers with the opportunity to prepare the students for advanced studies in history and education. Graduates of the program are endorsed for professional certification. The curriculum must aim to promote graduate-level historical scholarship. It also supports and encourages the development of a wide range of historical knowledge, including a global perspective. It is also essential to expand the scholar/teacher's skills in the complex process of teaching history. Moreover, practicing teachers need to be expanding their strategies for teaching history from a multicultural, gender-balanced perspective.

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