

## **Pedagogy Of Education And Experiential Learning – A Case Study Of Indology**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

Indology is a branch of knowledge, which involves the study and teaching of ancient India from various perspectives. Teaching this subject to the post graduate students can be a challenging task as in the one way teaching the students might not feel involved in the subject. Hence it is suggested that if there is participative teaching and learning of various subjects of Indology, then the subject might become very interesting and the students will feel connected to the whole process. This paper aims to provide such participative and experiential teaching methods for various subjects of Indology.

**KEYWORDS:** *Indology, sources, Epigraphy, Numismatics, Excavations, Art and Architecture*

Indology is a branch of knowledge, which involves the study and teaching of ancient India from various perspectives. As there is no continuous written history available to study ancient India, Indology primarily studies various sources that provide some information for the proper understanding of the period. These sources are independent streams of studies in their own right. The sources of Indian history are broadly divided into three categories - a) Written Sources, b) Material Sources, c) Oral Sources. (Majumdar.....)

Teaching the above said sources for the post graduate students can be a challenging task as in the one way teaching the students might not feel involved in the subject. They will also not learn the process of the reconstruction of history. Hence while teaching the subjects of Indology, especially at the post graduate level, some experiments can be made and the students can get some experience of actual research with some credits. E.g. the Written Sources giving the information are the numerous religious and secular texts, which have been preserved by various methods and have come down to us. The religious texts are of all the three major religions i.e. Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism. The *Vedas*, the *Agamas* and the *Tipitakas (Tripitakas)* along with many other religio-societal texts provide us valuable information regarding the origin and development of various religious and philosophical systems in ancient India. These texts were written in the then contemporary languages like Sanskrit, Prakrits and Pali. Hence an important prerequisite for this study is the knowledge of these ancient languages. While teaching this part of the syllabus, instead of giving the secondary or tertiary material for reading, the students can be given the original texts along with the translations, so that they get the feel of the subject. Similarly, they get to know how to do the research from original sources and the training is automatically received. Along with the religious literature, the secular literature also provides us with valuable information of the ancient Indian history. The numerous plays, biographies and the poetry actually unfold the day-to-day life of the people in the then contemporary society. The development of various social, economic and religious institutions can also be studied through such texts. Hence while studying the secular literature; individual students can be given the assignment of doing the cultural study of one text. With this they can get first-hand experience of interpreting the text to understand the material culture of that period.

Another very important literary source for such study is available in the accounts of the foreigners, who came to India and recorded their experiences in the form of travelogues. Many such travel accounts are available to us today and much valuable information has been retrieved from it. Many a times it has been proved to be very fruitful to look into our past with the help of a foreigner's perspective. In fact the international trade of India in the early centuries of Christian era with Rome was properly understood only after studying such accounts and the ancient Roman court records. The accounts of the travellers many a times describe the complete route of

their travel. It becomes interesting to locate the various places mentioned in the account and see trace his route on the map. This would help the students in getting more and more involved in the subject matter.

The Material Sources for the study of ancient Indian culture are broadly divided into four categories – a) Inscriptions, b) Coins, c) Sculptural & Architectural remains and d) Excavated remains (Deglurkar 2015: 12). The inscriptions written in various periods by various individuals, including kings and lay people, are found all over India. The discipline, which studies this evidence, is called as ‘Epigraphy’. The basic prerequisite for the study of this discipline is the knowledge of the ancient scripts like Brahmi and Kharoshthi, which were used to write these inscriptions (Bihari 2017: 26). The knowledge of not only the scripts but also of the languages – Prakrits and Sanskrit - in which these inscriptions are written, is necessary for the study of such inscriptions. The inscriptions are found inscribed on rocks, pillars, tanks, walls of monuments, copper plates, wooden planks, bricks, stone, metal and earthen pots, coins etc. Many a times these inscriptions are the official royal charters issued by the king or the donations given for the construction of religious monuments by the lay devotees, the career of a particular king giving the details of his achievements and noble deeds and sometimes the legends written in the memory of a particular warrior, who sacrificed his life protecting his people or village. These records engraved on the imperishable materials have lasted so long and have told us the tales of various events that took place in ancient India. If the inscriptions had not been there, we would not have known numerous important facts about ancient India. The study of this subject involves the learning of the ancient scripts i.e. Brahmi and Kharoshthi. Generally students enjoy learning this subject because of the script. However to make them more involved in the process, they can be given an assignment to design a fresh inscription in Brahmi or Kharoshthi. This would help them understand the process of writing an inscription and they would be able to visualise the same for ancient times.

The coins minted at various periods of time provide another very important source for the reconstruction of the ancient Indian history. The discipline, which studies this source, is called as ‘Numismatics’. The evidence gathered from this source helps us in the reconstruction of the political history. The ruling authority issues the coins. The ruler of a particular region in a particular period could be known after studying his coin. Like Epigraphy, for the study of the numismatic data, one has to have the knowledge of Brahmi, Kharoshthi and sometimes Greek scripts. This particular source of Indian history has been used immensely for the reconstruction of the political history and rule of various dynasties. On the coins of a few dynasties we also find the date of the issuing of the coin. This in turn has helped in determining the genealogy of that particular dynasty. In fact the genealogy of the Indo – Greek rulers has been based almost entirely on the numismatic evidence. The metals used to issue these coins also tell us about the economic condition of that particular period and also the advances made in the field of metallurgy. The various deities shown on the coins indicate the popularity of those deities in that particular period. To make students more involved in the subject, they can be given the task of designing their own coins. This experiment has proved very useful as they design the coins with a lot of creativity. In this way they get some extra expertise on the symbols, scripts, languages, political history etc. Another experiment can be to give them an artificially created hoard of mixed coins. The students can be told to prepare a descriptive catalogue of the hoard as if they have found it accidentally. The detailed catalogue making exercise helps them in knowing a lot about the different types of coins issued in different time frames and geographical regions. This would in fact help them in future when they actually go to the field use their expertise.

The next source of the study of India’s past is the abundant sculptural and architectural material scattered all over the country. The images and sculptures lying above or under the ground are records of wonderful craftsmanship and works of art. The various structural and rock – cut monuments standing in partial or complete condition also join hands with the sculptures in telling the fascinating tales of the wonder that was India!

The ancient Indian art and architecture was created with the patronage of some rich patrons. The inscriptions on the seats of the images and sculptures and on the walls and pillars of these structural as well as rock – cut monuments narrate the stories of these donations, but unfortunately the names of the artists are not mentioned anywhere. Beautiful sculptures narrating the tales from the life of various deities of various religions are found on the railings of the stupa, walls of the caves and temples. Such sculptures help us in understanding the day-to-day life of the common man. The dress patterns, ornaments, hairstyles etc of men and women show us the then contemporary patterns and styles.

Images of various deities belonging to the religious pantheons can be identified with the help of their attributes and vehicles. The discipline, which studies such images, is called as ‘Iconography’. The knowledge of this discipline is necessary to understand the art of ancient India. The only prerequisite for the study of this discipline is the background of the basic tenets of the religions in India. Then only the images would be identified in the proper way. This background also helps in understanding the ancient Indian architectural remains like *stupas*, *viharas*, temples etc. As a practical exercise the students can be given a monument to study in detail. A group of students can be assigned to study one particular monument in detail. Then they can get an experience of documenting a monument, describing and identifying the images etc. This knowledge is must for a student of Indology in the longer run.

The other material evidences are unearthed from various ancient habitation sites through archaeological excavations (Reddy 2015: 6). The systematic and scientific excavations carried out at various places have unravelled the mysteries of many ancient riddles. Excavations carried out at such places tell us lot regarding the material culture of the people. The material gathered through the excavations includes the pottery, stone and metal implements, ornaments, skeletons and bones of humans and animals, grains etc and many other things. This information regarding the daily life of ordinary people is very valuable to understand their lifestyle. The students can be told to undertake a mock excavation. Different artificially created habitation mounds can be excavated with the proper techniques of excavation and the students can get a hands-on experience of conducting an archaeological excavation. This experiment has proved to be very popular among the students.

The last type of evidence is the Oral Tradition. The knowledge that has come down to us through the oral tradition has proved very valuable to retrieve the lost texts. The sacred texts of these religions have been transmitted to us in this way. Similarly, the myths and traditions of the tribal communities have also been preserved and transmitted orally through generations. To make this study more participative, the students can be told to go to nearby villages in groups and make a survey with meeting the villagers and asking questions. They can also document different local oral traditions and try to connect them with the other historical events. This will make them understand the real nature of the research done by various scholars for a long time. The experience of working in the field will also enrich their lives.

After studying such variety of sources the history with first-hand experience, the students will remember them for ever and spread the knowledge with their friends and acquaintances. It becomes the job of an Indologist to go thoroughly through these sources and make proper interpretations. After getting such experiential learning, studying all the sources and reconstructing the history, the students would realise how incredible India was and still is!

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