

Making History Relevant In 21st Century: An Indian Perspective

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Abstract

The general perception among the students, teachers, guardians and all stakeholders is that History is a non-utility subject, and that it is irrelevant in respect to providing career opportunities in general, and job prospects in particular. It has been felt that while the yardstick for giving a judgment on the aspect of 'Relevance' of a subject in the market-oriented world of the 21st century largely depends on its potential towards providing pecuniary benefits, but there are other attributes which can be considered as benchmarks for determining the utility aspect of a subject. And the most striking of them is the role of the subject in presenting a platform for providing 'Competency-based Learning', which has assumed a significant dimension after the declaration of the National Education Policy 2020. The paper takes into account the indicators of quality education and examines them in the light of teaching History at the senior secondary level, where a key component is activity-based learning targeted towards development of the spirit of inquiry, and it thus establishes the relevance of the subject in the 21st century.

(Key words: Relevance, Utility, NEP 2020, Quality Education, Competency, Skill, Activity, Interdisciplinary, Stratigraphy, Critical Thinking)

The National Education Policy 2020 which took birth after a long spell of 34 years after the declaration of the National Policy on Education 1986, draws the attention of academia by emphasising the need of reformulating the existing education system in the line of competency-based education in order to close the gap in the achievement of learning outcomes (NEP 2020, P.12). The rationale behind this insistence may be more clearly understood from the vision of the Policy, which states that the National Education Policy envisions an education system which has its roots in Indian ethos and traditions and makes direct contribution towards transforming India, which is Bharat.

It calls primarily for providing high-quality education to all, targeting sustainability, equity and a vibrant knowledge society with the much-desired goal of making India a global knowledge superpower. The Policy invites the attention of the academia to the fact that the objectives of the curriculum and pedagogy of our institutions must be to develop among the students a deep sense of respect towards the Fundamental Duties and Constitutional Values, such that they can internalise a bonding with their country, and become consciously aware of their upcoming roles and responsibilities in a changing world. "The vision of the Policy is to instil among the learners a deep-rooted pride in

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being Indian, not only in thought, but also in spirit, intellect, and deeds as well to develop knowledge, skills, values and dispositions that support responsible commitment to human rights, sustainable development and living, and global well-being, thereby reflecting a truly global citizen”.

With the backdrop mentioned above as reference, the paper attempts to decode the meaning of competency-based learning in history at the Higher Secondary Stage.

What do we mean by ‘Competency’?

Competency is a set of skills, abilities, knowledge that helps an individual perform a given task in real life (CBSE, Acad-34/2020). While elaborating the meaning and significance of competency-based education, Ojha (2021, p.141) recommends that learners need to understand the purpose and usage of a ‘concept’. She stresses the importance of the real-life application of a ‘concept’ taught in the classroom. In addition, she informs that the ultimate goal of learning is not achieving mastery over the content as content is only the medium used to develop competency. The idea further gets extended through her proposal of engaging children in such pedagogical processes which will prepare them in demonstrating competencies like creativity, critical thinking, community skills, etc., in their daily lives.

The vision of NEP 2020 and the pressing need of competency-based education no doubt raise a few questions like why does an education system look for global standards? What is the need of preparing young minds for Global Citizenship? Why do we need to restructure an education system?

Scott (2015, p.2) argues for such questions by stating that preparing students for work, citizenship and life in the 21st century is daunting. Factors like globalisation, new technologies, migration, internal competition, changing markets and

transnational environmental and political challenges all drive the acquisition of skills and knowledge needed by students to survive and succeed in the 21st century.

The above-mentioned issues demand an outcome-based education system that prepares young learners for the future. The more the world is evolving with new situations, the more competencies will be obligated.

At this backdrop, what is the relevance of learning history in the 21st century? Can history make children future ready? The authors strongly believe that history has the innate potential to prepare children for the life. Let us see how?

The Draft Learning Outcomes for Higher Secondary Stage prepared by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (2020, p.142-143) in the line of the features of Competency Based Education, throws light on the following curricular expectations from the students at the Higher Secondary Stage.

- As the first principle of studying history at this stage, the curriculum expects the students to develop an understanding of how historians write history. Thus, to start with, they are expected to appreciate the way historians follow the trails that lead to the past by way of selecting, assembling and then reading their sources critically. Secondly, as a part of this process, they are expected to figure out what different types of sources can reveal and what they cannot. Finally, they are expected to acquire an overall understanding of how the historians analyse different types of sources, the various problems and difficulties they encounter while interpreting each type of source, and at the end, the way they draw a larger picture of the past by connecting different events and processes.
- Secondly, having gone through the process of studying history through a thematic approach, the students are

expected to have a capacity of relating and comparing developments in different situations, understanding connections between similar processes located in different time periods, and finding out the contributions of various methods of social inquiry which feed into historical investigations. In addition, the students are also expected to have an idea of the specific debates that surround each theme even as they acquire a sense of the wider historical processes, which connect them.

- Finally, the students are also expected to understand the utility of different pedagogical tools and techniques such as maps, timelines, flow-charts, pictorial illustrations, numbering of figures, citations, colour coding different activities and use of proper terms and concepts that are innate to delineating history and use them appropriately.

In addition, the Cognitive Development Theory proposed by Jean Piaget which has been discussed vividly by Black and Pope (2008) indicates that children after 12 years of age enter into the Formal Operational Stage and start looking at things critically due to the complex mental abilities. Hence, if we look from the point of view of this theory, the curricular expectations affirmed by the NCERT are aligned with the mental ability of the young learners studying at the Higher Secondary Stage.

We shall now see how history can act as a catalyst to the needs of the 21st century by referring to some instances from the history textbooks of Class XII prepared by NCERT. The authors reiterate that, at this

level the learning of history has to be critical and should not be taken for granted by promoting rote learning. The justification stands robust, keeping the curricular expectations in mind. Hence, the teaching-learning environment should be created in such a way that the learners get ample scope to develop aptitude and skills along with the content knowledge for the subject with the help of various pedagogical initiatives. Given below are two activities for teachers, who are the bridge between learners and competency-based education. These activities may help teachers to plan their lessons as per the curricular expectations mentioned earlier.

Activity 1

Reading the Sources Critically

According to Hitchcock (2011, p.1), there are certain key features, which are— clarifying meaning, analysing arguments, evaluating evidence, judging whether a conclusion follows, and drawing warranted conclusions. Who is an ideal “critical thinker”? She is open and fair-minded, a keen observer who keeps searching for evidence, has the right kind of knack for being properly informed, is attentive and tolerant to the opinions and reasons put forth by others, applies her mind for duly proportioning belief to the evidence, and is never averse towards considering alternatives and revise beliefs.

In the light of the above, it is worthwhile to reflect upon the Historical Thinking Chart created by the Stanford History Education Group, which is about proposing some significant questions to be asked while interpreting a source as mentioned below.

HISTORICAL THINKING CHART

Historical Reading Skills	Questions	Students should be able to...	Prompts
Sourcing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who wrote this? • What is the author's perspective? • When was it written? • Where was it written? • Why was it written? • Is it reliable? Why? Why not? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the author's position on the historical event. • Identify and evaluate the author's purpose in producing the document. • Hypothesize what the author will say before reading the document. • Evaluate the source's trust worthiness by considering genre, audience, and purpose. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The author probably believes... • I think the audience is... • Based on the source Information, think the author might... • I do/don't trust this document because...
Contextualization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When and where was the document created? • What was different then? What was the same? • How might the circumstances in which the document was created affect its content? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand how context/ background Information influences the content of the document. • Recognize that documents are products of particular points in time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on the background Information, I understand this document differently because... • The author might have been influenced by _____ (historical context)... • This documents might not give me the whole picture because...
Corroboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do other documents say? • Do the documents agree? If not, Why? • What are other possible documents? • What documents are most reliable? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish what is probable by comparing documents to each other. • Recognize disparities between accounts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The author agrees/ disagrees with • These document all agree /disagree about... • Another document to consider might be...
Close Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What claims does the author make? • What evidence does the author use? • What language (words, phrases, images, symbols) does the author use to persuade the document's audience? • How does the document's language Indicate the author's perspective? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the author's claims about an event. • Evaluate the evidence and reasoning the author uses to support claims. • Evaluate author's word choice; understand that language is used deliberately. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think the author chose these words in order to... • The author is trying to convince me... • The author claims • The evidence used to support the author's claim is...

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(<https://sites.google.com/site/btrgrad/curriculum-planning/content-specific/history-social-studies/stanford-history-education-group?tmpl=%2Fsystem%2Fapp%2Ftemplates%2Fprint%2F&showPrintDialog=1>)

From the above-mentioned premises, it is clear that the presence of primary sources in the NCERT textbooks has ample scope to train young learners to evaluate sources like the professional historians. Simultaneously, proper approach towards the evaluation of

sources may prepare learners to look into different sources critically. Let us see a source from the NCERT textbook of Class XII, Themes in Indian History-Part II (P.160), with a closer look to understand its utility in a time dominated by Science and Technology.

Themes in Indian History - Part II

Source 9

Declining a Royal Gift

This excerpt from a sufi text describes the proceedings at Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya's hospice in 1313:

I (the author, Amir Hasan Sijzi) had the good fortune of kissing his (Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya's) feet... At this time a local ruler had sent him the deed of ownership to two gardens and much land, along with the provisions and tools for their maintenance. The ruler had also made it clear that he was relinquishing all his rights to both the gardens and land. The master ... had not accepted that gift. Instead, he had lamented: "What have I to do with gardens and fields and lands?... None of... our spiritual masters had engaged in such activity."

Then he told an appropriate story: "... Sultan Ghiyasuddin, who at that time was still known as Ulugh Khan, came to visit Shaikh Fariduddin (and) offered some money and ownership deeds for four villages to the Shaikh, the money being for the benefit of the dervishes (sufis), and the land for his use. Smiling, Shaikh al Islam (Fariduddin) said: 'Give me the money. I will dispense it to the dervishes. But as for those land deeds, keep them. There are many who long for them. Give them away to such persons.'

Considering the curricular expectations in mind if we look into the source, we can see that not only it is supplying content knowledge, but also it is leading toward methodological understanding of the source. The gift envisaged here pertains to gardens and land, which are immovable properties. The story brings out the difference envisaged between the approaches of handling the movable and the immovable properties. As

far as the issue of the immovable properties are concerned, the legal scenario at this stage assumes quite a significant importance. The teacher concerned in the classroom, thus may initiate a discussion by raising questions as under, contextualizing the legal implications along with the Curricular expectations and prompts by replicating the above said HISTORICAL THINKING CHART.

Historical Reading Skills	Questions	Students should be able to ...	Prompts
Sourcing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who wrote this? What was the purpose behind writing it? When was it written? Where was it written? How was it written? What is the degree of reliability of the source? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify the stand taken by the author about the historical event concerned Hypothesize the objective of the author behind writing the text and test them following the Inquiry based approach Fix the event in time and space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The author was perhaps of the opinion... The reason behind declining the gift was perhaps... On the basis of the source, I feel that the author might have... I do/don't believe in the text because...

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess the nature of resources available to the author for writing • Take a stand on the trustworthiness of the document based on the socio-cultural scenario of the time and space concerned 	
Contextualization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What were the basic tenets of the law of land during the early 14th century? • What was the value of real estate in comparison with movable property at the time of writing the text vis-à-vis the present-day scenario? • Was any apprehension about the hazards of maintenance of the properties a sort of a latent reason behind denial of the gift? • Why did the context of the approach taken by the spiritual masters turn out to be an important consideration in decision making? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acquire the basic knowledge about legal scenario and proceedings at the time of writing the text • Make a judgment in the matter in her/his own way • Make an assessment about the resources available for maintenance and upkeep of the properties and the complications, if any, of the related legal issues • Identify the reasons behind giving a high degree of importance to the spiritual masters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I shall take a stock of knowing about the evolution of law during the 14th century... • I need to frame an opinion regarding the take of the then society about the movable and immovable properties... • It is crucial for me to know about the problems faced in respect of maintenance and legal matters pertaining to a real estate during the 14th century... • I think the spiritual masters left a lasting impression...
Corroboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the views expressed by other related documents? • How can I get access to other documents? • Are any related documents available in the Internet? • If any other document exists, then how does its degree of reliability compare with the given document? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove bias as far as practicable • Get a scope to analyse the issues of disagreement, if any • Make a meaningful result-oriented survey of the Open Education Resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is agreement/disagreement of the author on the following points... • The contents of all available documents are consistent about... • Some other possible documents can be...

<p>Close Reading</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are categorically the claims of the author? • What is the nature of evidences used by the author? • Does the language used by the author indicative of any kind of bias? • Has the author used any kind of lingo (words, phrases, idioms, images, symbols, etc) to bring home his point to the audience faced by him? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify with exactitude the claims made by the author • Make her/his own judgment based on the evidences • Make an assessment about the influence of the language used, in particular, towards convincing the reader of his times as well as that for the posterity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The claims made by the author are... • The evidences given in support of Claims 1,2,3 are ... • The evidence given in support of Claim 4 is not convincing because... • It seems that the author used the words, for the purpose of...
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If such questions are initiated in the classroom, the learners get a feel of the work of professional historians with a sense of respect towards the discipline—history. Most importantly, this mental exercise also instils the value of appreciating the role of evidences in our daily lives. In this context we shift our attention to ‘Spirit of Inquiry’. It is inter alia enshrined in the Constitution of India (Article 51A) as a fundamental duty of a citizen. One of the existing practices of most of our classroom situations is that, the learners receive extensive support to develop writing skills, but very seldom it encourages instilling of questioning skills. Hence, the cited source and the suggested activity should be taken as one of the instruments to carry a sense of responsibility toward our fundamental duties.

Activity 2: Puzzle

Let us take the example of the connection between History and Archaeology through the study of Indus Valley Civilization as presented in the Textbook of History of Class XII—Themes in Indian History- Part I (p.20,21). It inter alia talks about the excavation work undertaken under the stewardship of John

Marshall (JM), the then Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and his successor R.E.M. Wheeler (REMW). It has been mentioned that Wheeler had observed an apparent lacuna in the study conducted by John Marshall.

Before launching the plan of excavation, one has to make a hypothetical assessment regarding the location of the artefacts and the relics, and it is understood that it is unlikely that these would have followed a geometric order. JM had in a way assumed that the relics would be available in horizontal layers which was not the case. It is stated that JM had undertaken the process of digging a mound mechanically along the uniform horizontal lines, and thus in the process many artefacts which actually were located on strata, basically inclined to the horizon at some angle, got lost. So, REMW went ahead with the method of ‘Stratigraphy’. The students generally have problems in grasping the concept of ‘Stratigraphy’, and the ‘Chalk and Talk’ method alone cannot make the desired impact. It needs to be supplemented with some activity.

In order to make learners understand the ‘concept’ of Stratigraphy the teacher may follow the approach given below.

Step-1: Draw the following figure on the board.

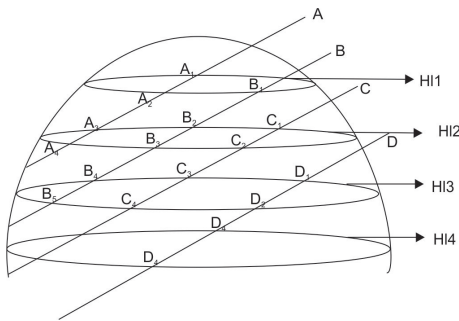


Figure 1 : (Representative diagram of a mound along with horizontal layers and strata)

Step- 2: Explain the following points to the class

- I- The hemispherical shaped structure represents a mound.
 - II- HL1, HL2, HL3 and HL4 are horizontal layers.
 - III- A, B, C, D are Stratigraphic layers (shown parallel to each other as a matter of convenience).
 - IV- Excavation should have ideally been done along A, B, C, D...
 - V- Instead, it was done along HL1, HL2, HL3, HL4...
 - VI- As a consequence – B1 got mixed with A1, A2.
 - VII-(C1, C2); (B2, B3) ;(A3, A4) got mixed. And similar cases occurred in layers HL3, HL4.
- A typical combination of artefacts should have been A1, A2, A3, A4. But we only got A1, A2. A3, A4 got lost.

Now, to check the learning outcome of the explained ‘concept’ the teacher may enter into Step-3.

Step-3: Distribute the print copies/e-copies of the following figures among the students. Post distribution, make them listen to the following instructions carefully

31	32	33	34	35	36
25	26	27	28	29	30
19	20	21	22	23	24
13	14	15	16	17	18
7	8	9	10	11	12
1	2	3	4	5	6

Figure 2 : (6x6 Square with numbers from 1 to 36)

31	32	33	34	35	36	①
25	26	27	28	29	30	①
19	20	21	22	23	24	①
13	14	15	16	17	18	①
7	8	9	10	11	12	①
1	2	3	4	5	6	①

Figure 3 : (6x6 Square intercepted by horizontal lines. Difference between consecutive numbers= 1)

31	32	33	34	35	36
25	26	27	28	29	30
19	20	21	22	23	24
13	14	15	16	17	18
7	8	9	10	11	12
1	2	3	4	5	6

⑥ ⑥ ⑥ ⑥ ⑥ ⑥

Figure 4 : (6x6 Square intercepted by vertical lines. Difference between consecutive numbers= 6)

31	32	33	34	35	36	⑦
25	26	27	28	29	30	⑦
19	20	21	22	23	24	⑦
13	14	15	16	17	18	⑦
7	8	9	10	11	12	⑦
1	2	3	4	5	6	⑦

Figure- 5 : (6x6 Square intercepted by diagonal lines. Difference between consecutive numbers= 7)

①	31	32	33	34	35	36	⑦
①	25	26	27	28	29	30	⑦
①	19	20	21	22	23	24	⑦
①	13	14	15	16	17	18	⑦
①	7	8	9	10	11	12	⑦
①	1	2	3	4	5	6	⑦

⑥ ⑥ ⑥ ⑥ ⑥ ⑥

Figure 6 : (Merging horizontal, vertical and diagonal interceptions)

- The 6*6 square of Figure 2 has been given as a LEGEND to trace the artefacts.
- One will be able to trace the artefact provided one goes along the line which passes through that sequence of numbers where the common difference is 7. Which are the lines?

Step-4: Ask the students to present their findings and make a careful observation of Figures 3, 4, 5 and 6.

Expected Learning Outcomes

1. A comparison of the horizontal (common difference=1) [Figure 3]; vertical line (common difference=6) [Figure 4]; diagonal line (common difference= 7) [Figure 5] will establish that the diagonal lines are those which are required. Considering this square as section through a mound, students can be facilitated to draw analogy between horizontal excavation, vertical excavation and stratigraphic excavation respectively with the horizontal, vertical and the diagonal lines. Figure 6 presents an overall pictorial summary of the processes undertaken.
2. Number System, Sequence, Series and their connection with Geometry and extending all these to the study of history happen to be the hallmark of this approach. While riding the vehicle of this significant connection one can undertake a journey towards further interdisciplinary projects.
3. The learners were made to think about the shortcomings in the approach of John Marshall, and how it was set right by R.E.M. Wheeler. It brings them into their first tryst with the field of 'Archaeology'. They understand the role of Archaeology as a significant part of historical understanding.

The above-mentioned activities will assist teachers to plan their classroom activities keeping the curricular expectations in mind. However, keeping the available resources/ challenges in mind, teachers may plan their own pedagogical practices that will bring competencies to the lives of young learners.

Utility of History as a Discipline

Let us sum up the findings from the point of view of History as a discipline; in order words, let us seek an answer to the question —Why a learner would study History? And the answer on the basis of our study is manifold —

- It develops the thinking faculty in a student.
- It develops the skill of questioning and a spirit of inquiry.
- It has the inbuilt capacity of engaging a student in multiple facets of learning by making them aware of the 'processes' behind a historical event.
- It equips her with the technique of following the method of scientific inquiry in order to look into the events and processes of the 'past'. In this context, Keyser, Rogiers and Truyen (1998) argues that, "although the past is an inspiration source for film, literature or television, the youngsters probably won't be confronted with history in their future professional life. Nevertheless, we are convinced that the basic principles of the historical research method can be of great importance for the general development of young people. The problem-oriented gathering, arrangement, analysis, interpretation, and evaluation of information are indispensable skills to orient oneself in the complex world of today and tomorrow."

Further, going a step ahead, the authors have visualised the whole scenario from the perspective of evolution from industrial to information society. This inevitable transformation from industrial to information society has created new possibilities for

transaction of history in the classroom and today's teacher should be prepared to reap the benefit out of it. It has to be kept in mind that the education system currently faces the challenge of preparing individuals for the information society in which one of the most important objectives is to 'handle information'. Here, history education can play a crucial role. Our society today is very significantly controlled by news media and the phenomenon of information explosion. It has created the dire need for citizens to be critical in respect of handling information, no matter how it is presented and whatever be the source. The situation calls for a paradigm shift in the aims related to the historical use of source materials and it is important that this transferability be duly internalized by students, teachers and all concerned.

Concluding Remarks

The Cambridge English Dictionary provides multiple meanings of the word 'Utility'. Some of which are – useful, advantageous, beneficial, constructive, and salutary. To conclude let us sum up the paper by justifying

the relevance of learning history in the 21st century in the light of these meanings.

- It is useful as it has the capability of developing the competency-based skills in a learner.
- It is advantageous as it opens the gate for adopting an interdisciplinary approach.
- It is beneficial as it inculcates the spirit of inquiry in a learner which she can make use of while studying other subjects.
- It is constructive because it provides a new perspective to the learner about the cardinal traits of learning which are the ability to listen to; to read; to write and speak about a subject of critical importance properly.
- It is salutary for its capability of establishing meaningful linkages with the past and archaeology.
- So, we find that all the above meanings are commensurate with the perspectives provided by the authors about learning the subject which is a testimony to the potential of 'History as a discipline' to carry forward the futuristic targets of NEP 2020.

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