

Certificate Course on Ethno-history

Credits: 16

Introduction

Ethno-history is an interdisciplinary field that blends historical research with anthropological, archaeological, and linguistic methods to reconstruct the histories of communities often excluded from mainstream narratives. In the context of North-East India a region marked by ethnic diversity, rich oral traditions, and complex interactions between indigenous polities, colonial powers, and modern nation-states, ethno-history provides a powerful tool for understanding the past from within the lived experiences of its people.

This programme is designed to train students in the concepts, sources, and methods of ethno-history, while grounding them in the specific cultural, social, and political contexts of North-East India. Through a combination of theoretical study, source analysis, and field-based research, the course prepares students to produce academically rigorous and culturally sensitive historical work that contributes to scholarship as well as heritage preservation.

Programme Objectives:

1. To introduce students to the theoretical foundations, approaches, and methodological tools of ethnohistory.
 2. To familiarise students with the diverse peoples, cultures, and historical processes of North-East India.
 3. To train students in the collection, documentation, and critical analysis of oral traditions, material culture, and other non-traditional historical sources.
 4. To encourage interdisciplinary research drawing on history, anthropology, archaeology, folklore, and linguistics.
 5. To sensitise students to the ethical dimensions of working with indigenous and marginalised communities.
 6. To equip students with the ability to critically evaluate colonial and postcolonial representations of tribal societies.
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Programme Outcomes:

On successful completion of the programme, students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the key concepts, theories, and historiographical debates in ethnohistory.
2. Apply ethnohistorical methods to reconstruct and interpret the histories of communities in North-East India.

3. Critically engage with a wide range of sources, including oral traditions, ethnographic accounts, colonial records, and archaeological evidence.
4. Produce well-structured, evidence-based research outputs that integrate interdisciplinary perspectives.
5. Contribute to the preservation and promotion of intangible cultural heritage in collaboration with local communities.
6. Analyse the historical processes of change, continuity, and identity formation in the region within broader South Asian and transnational contexts.
7. Pursue careers or further research in academia, heritage management, cultural documentation, policy analysis, and related fields.

Paper I: Concepts, Approaches and Sources in Ethnohistory

Unit 1: Introduction to Ethnohistory

- 1.1 Definition and Scope of Ethnohistory
- 1.2 Objectives of Ethnohistory

Unit 2: Development of the Discipline

- 2.1 Historical Development of Ethnohistory
- 2.2 Relation between Anthropology and History

Unit 3: Ethnohistory in the Context of North-East India

- 3.1 Relevance to North-East Indian Studies
 - 3.2 Contributions of Regional Scholarship
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Unit 4: Theoretical Foundations

- 4.1 Historical Anthropology
- 4.2 Ethnohistorical Narrative

Unit 5: Memory, Oral Traditions, and Critique

- 5.1 Oral Traditions and Historical Memory
- 5.2 Postcolonial Critique of Ethnohistory

Unit 6: Archival Sources for Ethnohistory

6.1 Colonial Records

6.2 Post-colonial Records

Unit 7: Oral and Cultural Sources

7.1 Oral Traditions, Myths, and Folklore

7.2 Material Culture and Folkloric Narratives

Unit 8: Archaeology and Visual Sources

8.1 Archaeological Evidence

8.2 Visual and Material Sources

Unit 9: Oral History Methods

9.1 Interview Techniques and Fieldwork Ethics

9.2 Reliability, Memory, and Bias in Oral Sources

Unit 10: Case Studies from North-East India

10.1 Oral History in Practice

10.2 Ethnohistorical Field Studies

Unit 11: Colonial Ethnography and Its Legacy

11.1 British Anthropological Writings in North-East India

11.2 Gazetteers and Census Reports

Unit 12: Critiques of Colonial Knowledge

12.1 Administrative Records and Knowledge Production

12.2 Postcolonial Perspectives on Colonial Sources

Unit 13: Interdisciplinary Methods

- 13.1 Ethnography and History
- 13.2 Linguistics in Ethnohistorical Research
- 13.3 Archaeological Data in Tribal Histories

Unit 14: Ethics and Responsibilities of Ethnohistorians

- 14.1 Working with Indigenous Communities
 - 14.2 Intellectual Property Rights and Cultural Heritage
 - 14.3 Ethical Issues in Publication and Dissemination
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Paper II: Ethnohistory of North-East India: Peoples and Cultures

Unit 1: Peopling of North-East India

- 1.1 Migration Theories
- 1.2 Settlement Patterns

Unit 2: Ethnolinguistic and Archaeological Foundations

- 2.1 Ethnolinguistic Classifications
 - 2.2 Archaeological Evidence of Early Cultures
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Unit 3: Sources for Ethnohistory

- 3.1 Pre-Colonial Chronicles and Buranjis
- 3.2 Folk Narratives and Genealogies

Unit 4: Colonial and Missionary Accounts

- 4.1 Colonial Ethnography
 - 4.2 Missionary Writings and Records
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Unit 5: Tribal Societies of the Brahmaputra Valley (I)

- 5.1 Bodo-Kachari Groups
- 5.2 Mishing Communities

Unit 6: Tribal Societies of the Brahmaputra Valley (II)

6.1 Tiwa Histories

6.2 Ahom–Tribal Interactions

Unit 7: Hill Societies of the Eastern Himalayas

7.1 Naga Polities and Inter-tribal Relations

7.2 Arunachal Tribes: Apatani and Adi

Unit 8: Hill Societies of the Patkai Range

8.1 Nyishi and Monpa Communities

8.2 Cross-border Cultural Exchanges

Unit 9: Khasi-Jaintia Societies

9.1 Khasi-Jaintia Political Systems

9.2 Oral Traditions and Institutions

Unit 10: Garo Society and Culture

10.1 Social Structure and Kinship

10.2 Matriliney and Gender Roles

Unit 11: Tribal Resistance in North-East India

11.1 Anti-Colonial Uprisings in the Hills and Valleys

11.2 Role of Tribal Chiefs and Councils

Unit 12: Accommodation and Integration

12.1 Colonial Incorporation

12.2 Post-Colonial Political Processes

Unit 13: Religious Beliefs and Practices

- 13.1 Indigenous Faiths and Animism
- 13.2 Conversion to Christianity and Other Religions
- 13.3 Syncretic Traditions and Cultural Adaptations

Unit 14: Economy and Material Culture

- 14.1 Traditional Agriculture and Land Use
 - 14.2 Craft Traditions and Trade Networks
 - 14.3 Impact of Modernisation and Development Projects
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Paper III: Contemporary Issues and Applied Ethnohistory in North-East India

Unit 1: Ethnohistory and Identity Formation (I)

- 1.1 Ethnic Revivalism and Assertion Movements.

Unit 2: Ethnohistory and Identity Formation (II)

- 2.1 Historical Memory in Politics
 - 2.2 Ethnohistory and Cultural Nationalism
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Unit 3: Borders and Cross-border Linkages (I)

- 3.1 Ethnic Groups Across International Borders (Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, China)

Unit 4: Borders and Cross-border Linkages (II)

- 4.1 Migration, Refugees, and Statelessness
 - 4.2 Cultural and Economic Exchanges
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Unit 5: Oral Traditions in Contemporary Context (I)

- 5.1 Preservation and Documentation Initiatives

Unit 6: Oral Traditions in Contemporary Context (II)

- 6.1 Transmission in the Digital Age
 - 6.2 Folklore as a Tool of Identity Politics
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Unit 7: Tribal Customary Laws and Governance (I)

- 7.1 Village Councils and Traditional Authorities
- 7.2 Conflict Resolution Mechanisms

Unit 8: Tribal Customary Laws and Governance (II)

- 8.1 Customary Law vs. State Law
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Unit 9: Ethnohistory and Development (I)

- 9.1 Development Policies and Indigenous Rights

Unit 10: Ethnohistory and Development (II)

- 10.1 Resource Conflicts and Land Alienation
 - 10.2 Sustainable Development through Indigenous Knowledge
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Unit 11: Gender in Ethnohistorical Perspective (I)

- 11.1 Women's Roles in Tribal Societies
- 11.2 Gendered Narratives in Oral History

Unit 12: Gender in Ethnohistorical Perspective (II)

- 12.1 Impact of Social Change on Gender Relations
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Unit 13: Cultural Heritage and Tourism

- 13.1 Heritage Sites and Festivals
- 13.2 Cultural Commodification and Tourism
- 13.3 Community-led Heritage Management

Unit 14: Future Directions in Ethnohistorical Research

14.1 Digital Archives and GIS Mapping

14.2 Collaborative Research with Indigenous Scholars

14.3 Policy Advocacy and Applied Ethnohistory

Practical Paper: Fieldwork and Project in Ethnohistory

Credits: 4 **Marks:** 100

Suggested Project Questions / Topics

1. Oral Tradition Documentation

- Record, transcribe, and translate a folk tale, myth, or legend from a North-East Indian tribal community. Analyse its historical content and cultural significance.

2. Genealogical Reconstruction

- Prepare a genealogy of a selected clan or family in a tribal society. Use oral accounts and written sources to trace migration patterns and lineage continuity.

3. Study of a Traditional Institution

- Document the functioning of a village council, youth dormitory, or religious institution and assess its role in preserving customary law and identity.

4. Material Culture and Historical Memory

- Select an artefact (traditional tool, ornament, musical instrument, textile) and trace its historical evolution, production techniques, and symbolic meaning in the community.

5. Colonial Records Analysis

- Use a gazetteer, census report, or missionary journal from the colonial period to reconstruct socio-cultural changes in a chosen community. Compare with present-day observations.

6. Cross-border Cultural Linkages

- Study a community with kinship ties across the India–Myanmar, India–Bangladesh, or India–Bhutan border. Document cultural continuities and changes.

7. Customary Law and Conflict Resolution

- Investigate a case (recent or remembered) where traditional laws were used to resolve disputes. Examine how these laws coexist with the formal legal system.

8. Religious Change/Cultural changes/Continuity in a Community

- Conduct a case study on the transformation of religious beliefs in a tribal group (e.g., shift from animism to Christianity) and document oral testimonies about the process.

9. Mapping Historical Settlements

- Create a settlement map of a tribal village using oral histories and available archival data. Highlight historical migration routes, sacred sites, and economic zones.

10. Festival as Historical Source

- Document a community festival (rituals, performances, oral recitations) and analyse its embedded historical narratives and social meanings.

Assessment Components (50 Marks)

- **Fieldwork Execution & Data Collection:** 50 marks
- **Analysis & Interpretation:** 20 marks
- **Presentation (written report + visuals/maps):** 20 marks
- **Viva voce / oral defence:** 10 marks

Core Readings

1. Baruah, Sanjib. *India Against Itself: Assam and the Politics of Nationality*. Oxford University Press, 1999.
2. Elwin, Verrier. *The Nagas in the Nineteenth Century*. Oxford University Press, 1969.
3. Mills, J.P. *The Ao Nagas*. Macmillan, 1926.
4. Guha, Amalendu. *Medieval and Early Colonial Assam: Society, Polity, Economy*. Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, 1991.
5. Blackburn, Stuart. *Oral History of the Apatani of Arunachal Pradesh*. Brill, 2003.
6. Gait, Edward A. *A History of Assam*. Thacker, Spink & Co., 1906.
7. Pariat, Esther Syiemlieh. *The Khasi of Meghalaya: A Socio-Cultural History*. Regency Publications, 2011.
8. Hazarika, Sanjoy. *Strangers of the Mist*. Penguin, 1994.
9. Trigger, Bruce G. *A History of Archaeological Thought*. Cambridge University Press, 2006.
10. Vansina, Jan. *Oral Tradition as History*. University of Wisconsin Press, 1985.
11. White, Hayden. *Metahistory*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973.
12. Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Routledge, 1972.
13. Roy, S. *Aspects of Tribal Life in North-East India*. Spectrum, 1995.
14. Chaudhuri, Sarit K. and Sucheta Sen Chaudhuri (eds.). *Fieldwork in North-East India*. Mittal Publications, 2010.
15. Choudhury, P.C. *The History of Civilisation of the People of Assam to the Twelfth Century A.D.* Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Assam, 1959.