

177



BENGAL DISTRICT GAZETTEERS

BANKURA

BENGAL DISTRICT GAZETTEERS

BANKURA

By

L. S. S. O'Malley

Indian Civil Service



West Bengal District Gazetteers
Government of West Bengal

Calcutta

1995

BENGAL DISTRICT GAZETTEERS.



BANKURA

The present Gazetteer was first published in 1908 under the series Bengal District Gazetteers. The bibliographical descriptions were : published by Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, Calcutta ; Size : 22 x 14 cm. ; pagination : XI, 189 ; 1 map.

1st Reprint : January, 1995

© Govt. of West Bengal, 1995

Price

Paper Back : Rs.135.00 Hard Cover : Rs.175.00
Foreign \$ 20 Foreign \$ 25

Cover design

Shri K. R. Biswas
Shri Tarapada Pal

Published by Shri K. R. Biswas, I.A.S., State Editor, West Bengal District Gazetteers, Education Department, Government of West Bengal, Bikash Bhavan, North Block, 8th Floor, Salt Lake City, Calcutta 700 091. Printed by Basumati Corporation Limited (A Govt. of West Bengal Undertaking), 166, B. B. Ganguly Street, Calcutta-700 012.

L. S. S. O'Malley
And The Bengal District Gazetteers

“And incidentally, being a fair scholar, a man who got a good second or just scraped a first, he is quietly getting on, whenever he has a spare moment, with the *Gazetteer* describing the history, antiquities, crops, castes, sects, marriage customs, land tenures, soil and occupations of his district”. This is Philip Woodruff writing about a typical District Officer of British India who was invariably a European totally unfamiliar with his charge. One of the means by which he tried to familiarise himself with the place of his work and his new and alien environment was consulting the District Gazetteer. It served him not only as an aid to his administration but also satisfied his intellectual curiosity about an alien land and its people. And what a land! So immensely vast! So immensely various!

The story of this ancient land has been chronicled by our forefathers in the great Epics, the innumerable Puranas and similar other literature. Foreigners have been fascinated by our country from time immemorial and many of those who came here whether as curious travellers or pious pilgrims or ambitious conquerors have left their impressions recorded in travelogues and other accounts. But none of them is a gazetteer in the accepted sense of the term. It was only when the British had settled as rulers that they felt the practical need of making a survey of the area under their administration, for they knew almost next to nothing about this country. This is how writing of Gazetteers, as we know them today, began in India.

The initial efforts at Gazetteer writing were however mostly non-official or at best semi-official. It was in 1866 that the first official Gazetteers for districts in the modern sense were prepared and published by Richard Temple in the Central Provinces. A large number of district manuals and Gazetteers followed in rapid succession. But the efforts of the Provincial Government were uncoordinated. A despatch of 23rd August 1867 from the Secretary of State directed the compilation of a Gazetteer of the territories under British administration.

Sir W. W. Hunter of the I. C. S. was entrusted with the job. In 1871 Hunter's comprehensive plan for the preparation of Gazetteers under Central Authority was accepted by the Government of India. The result was the publication in quick succession in 1881 and 1882 respectively of *The Imperial Gazetteers* and *Indian Empire: Its History, People and Products*. The first edition of the *Imperial Gazetteers* was in 9 volumes. Its second edition was published in 14 volumes in 1885-87 incorporating the census data of 1881. A new revised edition was again issued in 1907-09 in 26 volumes. These Gazetteers covered the entire Indian Empire. Now a Provincial series with the provinces as units and a District series with the districts as units were issued. It was at this stage that Mr. O'Malley came to be involved in the compilation of the series called the *Bengal District Gazetteers*. Of the 38 volumes published in this series 29 are by him, the present volume being one of them.

Lewis Sydney Stewart O'Malley, born in 1874, was the son of Rev. Bryan and Frances O'Malley. Educated at Norwich Grammar School and Hertford College, Oxford, whence he took his B. A. degree, he joined the Indian Civil Service on 1st November, 1898. On arrival in India on 7th December of the same year he was appointed Assistant Magistrate and Collector of Gaya district from 9th December. During 1905-09 he was Superintendent, Gazetteer Revision, Bengal and Census Superintendent, Bengal, during 1909-12. He was one of the Secretaries to the Bengal Government from 1916 to 1921 and retired in 1924. He edited and published 18 volumes of district gazetteers during his tenure as Superintendent, Gazetteer Revision and 6 more volumes as Census Superintendent. By the time (1916) he became Secretary he edited 2 more District Gazetteers of Murshidabad and 24-Parganas. His association with this work continued even after he became a Secretary when three more volumes were edited by him—the last one, that of Faridpur, being published in 1925, a year after his retirement. Thus from his 7th year in the I. C. S. till the day of his retirement Mr. O'Malley was involved in the compilation of Gazetteers. That he did not do his job as a routine matter, just like a bureaucrat pushing his files, is evident from the fact that he kept himself engaged in this kind of work even after his retirement. His post-retirement publications are *Indian Civil Service, 1601-1930 (1931)*, *Indian Caste Customs (1932)*, *India's Social Heritage (1934)* and *Popular Hinduism (1935)*.

Mr. O'Malley died on 10th May 1941. We do not know how he was regarded as a member of the I. C. S.— whether a brilliant or a mediocre officer. But the fact remains that the names of many Britons of the service who were probably considered very brilliant in their days have altogether been forgotten but the name and fame of O'Malley live on. This is because of the fruits of his labour of love—the Bengal District Gazetteers. It is not perhaps an exaggeration to say that in Bengal the name of Mr. O'Malley and the Gazetteers have become almost synonymous.

If good wine needs no bush, nor a good play an epilogue then this reissue of O'Malley's District Gazetteers needs no apology or explanation. His Gazetteers have become historical documents depicting old-world pictures of the districts and giving us a glimpse of the way our ancestors lived. It is a pleasure to read them. We can also profit from them as they give us a perspective for our evaluation of the present—we have changed and are changing everyday at a pace which would have been unthinkable to our forefathers, and for our understanding of this change we have to go back to O'Malley.

Many have encouraged me in my undertaking, chief among them are Shri Satyasadhan Chakraborty, Minister-in-Charge, Higher Education Department and Shri Kanti Biswas, Minister-in-Charge, School Education Department. Shri Tarapada Pal, Shri Tarun Pain, Smt. Subha Som, Shri Dhruvagopal Mukherjee, Shri Sambhunath Mukherjee, Shri Mrityunjoy Das, all of my office, have been of great assistance to me. Shri Timir Kumar Mukherjee and Shri Pratap Singha of Basumati Corporation Limited have taken great pains to ensure the quick publication of the volume and its quality. Shri Gourhari Saha, Librarian, West Bengal Secretariat Library, has also ungrudgingly helped me. Shri Subimal Lahiri, of the Publishing Department, Visva-Bharati, has helped me with his valuable advice. The cover photograph has been supplied by my friend and colleague Shri Amit Kiran Deb, IAS, now Secretary, Tourism Department. To all of them I acknowledge my gratitude and indebtedness.

KUMUD RANJAN BISWAS

The 26th January, 1995,
Salt Lake City,
Calcutta.

State Editor
West Bengal District Gazetteers.