

BENJAMIN LEWIS RICE (1837-1927)-

Benjamin Lewis Rice was born at Bangalore on the 17th July 1837. His father Benjamin Holt Rice was a Christian Missionary and was incidentally appointed Bishop. After completing the primary education in Bangalore, Benjamin Rice went to England for higher studies in 1848 and obtained B.A. degree and later came back to Bangalore in 1860. He was subsequently appointed principal of the central high school. In 1865 he was made the Inspector of schools for Mysore state and Coorg. After his retirement on 1st July 1890 till his age of 69 Rice rendered meritorious service to the Mysore state. He worked in several capacities as Director of public instruction, chief officers census, Police Department, Director of Archaeological Research etc. Even while in service till his retirement his literary contributions are remarkable. He edited fourteen volumes of *Epigraphia Carnatica*; four volumes of gazetteers (including two revised editions in 1898), editing of five great Kannada classics of old poets; seven works on inscriptions, census reports etc. He also published more than twenty-eight research papers in various periodicals. He had the credit of discovering Roman coins near Bangalore Air port in 1891.

It is true that a plan of preparing Gazetteer of Mysore in 8 volumes one for each district of the state, was first formulated in 1867. Accordingly two volumes relating to Mysore and Kolar compiled by H. Wellesly and B. Krishniengar were published. The other volumes owing to some reason could not be prepared. In 1871 Lewis Rice then Director of public instruction in Mysore and Coorg, was entrusted with the task of compiling the Gazetteer on a uniform pattern. But information necessarily to be entered in the Gazetteer were not systematically available in the Government offices. Yet Lewis Rice devised his own methods to collect information as systematically as possible. W.W. Hunter the editor of imperial gazetteer of India during his visit to Bangalore in 1874 on seeing the work being carried out by Rice was all appreciation for it and suggested him to prepare Gazetteer for the entire state and also for each district. Rice agreed to the suggestion. He was successful in bringing out the Mysore and Coorg Gazetteers, in three volumes in 1886-1887. The first volume exclusively deals with Mysore; the second gives district-wise information and the third is concerned with Coorg (Kodagu). These Gazetteers contain information on the physical feature and other geographical aspects of the land, economic and administrative matters etc. Besides they contain the history, religion, current arts of the land etc. As a result one

can get a good historical account and also various aspects of the land; administrative, economic, social etc. These Gazetteers are in English and therefore people from other States also could know about the land. They were acclaimed as the most objective and comprehensively informative and therefore could be the best model for Gazetteers of the other States. The Central Government then had also planned to prepare Imperial Gazetteers for the Country. Rice's Gazetteers were extensively used in their preparation. Twenty years later these Gazetteers were again revised by Rice and brought out more usefully. They were acclaimed as of high standard and merit. The Calcutta Review appreciates them as containing : " A mine of information about the country, Evidently written 'con a move' it shows great care and research, knowledged of language and literature of the country and thorough appreciation of the subject in hand". It is worthy of note in this context that although being exceedingly busy in preparing the volumes of Epigraphia Carnatica, he did undertaken this monumental work because of his love for the land, the language and the people abundantly obvious in his exemplary remarks on the land.

His poineering, splendid, versatile and fruitful work of various kinds for the Department in the latter part of his life (53-69 of his age), has no doubt earned a lasting place of honour in the academic world for him and gratitude of the people of Karnataka. One finds absolutely no exaggeration in the cryptic and precise description of his personality by L.D. Barnett: "A man of untiring industry, wide learning and earnest devotion to the pursuit of truth, he has rendered exceedingly great services to the cause of knowledge by the stimulus which he has given to Historical and literary studies in South India'.

**Some expert opinion about Mysore and Coorg Gazetteers
by Benjamin Lewis Rice**

1877 : Mysore and Coorg, A Gazetteer compiled for the Govt. of India in *three volumes* with maps and illustrations

“ Models of administrative research”

- *Sir. W.W. Hunter in preface to Imperial Gazetteer.*

“Mr Rice has done his work well. He combines comprehensive grasp of his entire subject with the faculty of lucid exposition, and also a careful attention to details”.

- *Academy.*

“A mine of information about the country evidently written cornamor, it shows great care and research. Great knowledge of the language and literature of the country, and a thorough appreciation of the subject in hand”

- *Calcutta Review*

1897 Mysore a Gazetteer compiled for Government, revised edition in two volumes with maps and illustrations.

“A work of great magnitude and research very carefully prepared and edited”.

- *Annual address by the Dewan (Sir. K. Sheshadri Iyer)
to Representative Assembly 1898.*

“A second edition of Rice’s admirable Gazetteer. The first edition was published more than twenty years ago, and the immense progress made by the State in the interval fully justifies bringing the work upto date”.

- *Pioneer.*

“Complete without being diffused and accurate without being dry”.

- *Madras Mail*

"Mr Rice has shown how interesting a work of this sort can be made". – "It is highly instructive work and so readable that if once taken up one is quite fascinated by its contents".- "In order to bring the work up-to date a great deal has been required of the author as he indicates in the preface. Both volumes are provided with excellent maps.

- *Glaxo Herald*

"As a repertory of all available knowledge about Mysore, admirably written and arranged, it is inestimable merit under the highest authority".

- *Scotsman.*

"Brought up to date not without considerable labour for indeed there is much to be added and changed. Mysore was given back to native rule in 1881 and it is worthwhile to note Mr. Rice's opinion on the relations between the Imperial Government and the State"

- *Spectator.*

"The name of the author is sufficient guarantee for its excellence and accuracy"

- *Athenaeum.*

"Another proof (the further evidence was required) that good work gets found out. Mr. Rice himself remarks that when he first published his book, he little thought that he would be called on to issue a second edition. But during twenty years his account of Mysore has served as a guide not only to the administrative staff but also the British investors who have sent their capital to the Gold fields and coffee plantations of that State. It is difficult indeed to name a subject of interest whether from the official, the antiquarian, or the industrial point of view which does not find patient and thorough treatment in his volumes"

- *The Times.*



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- *Calcutta Review*

“In 1873, I was further appointed to compile the Gazetteers of Mysore and Coorg. In 1877, Gazetteer of Mysore and Coorg was published as the first edition of mine, which met with a most favourable reception from all quarters.”

- *Biographical Notes by B.L. Rice, 1923*

