

PREFACE

From the earliest times, man has sought to acquire knowledge of his immediate environment, partly in order to survive but also partly because of his innate curiosity. In course of time, this led him to undertake a study of his own country and record his impressions in various tangible forms. He did not rest there, but went on to acquire and preserve information about other countries as well. Travellers' accounts that describe geographical features and various aspects of social, political and economic life of lands and peoples became a recognised form of literature quite early in history. Soon, such accounts were organised in what may be called Gazetteers or Geographical Dictionaries. Today, their scope has been expanded further so as to cover the physical features and the history of a country as well as social, political and economic life of the people inhabiting it.

We know that Scylax in the sixth century before Christ and some two hundred years later, Megasthenes had written accounts of India, though they now exist only in fragments quoted by other authors. Kautilya's (Cāṇakya) *Arthaśāstra* provides invaluable geographical and statistical information about India in the Mauryan age. Fa-Hien and Hiuen Tsang and later Ibn Batūta have also left valuable records of their impressions about the country and the people. The earliest known work that approximates to a gazetteer or geographical dictionary is, however, the work of Stephen of Byzantium in the sixth century after Christ. The Domesday Book compiled for William the Conqueror is also an interesting anticipation of the modern gazetteer. Nor must we forget Albērūnī's *Indica* which is a model of careful observation and scientific analysis.

None of these works can however be regarded as gazetteers in the modern sense, though *Āin-i-Akbarī* compiled by Abul-Faḍl satisfies the test of objectivity and careful study and research. W. W. Hunter, the Editor of the first two editions of *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, stated that he had as models before him the *Āin-i-Akbarī* and the Military Survey of Egypt conducted by France in the first quarter of the 19th century. He describes the *Āin-i-Akbarī* as "a masterpiece of administrative detail" and the Military Survey as a "brilliant effort of organised research". Though these earlier attempts have won admiration from scholars throughout the world, the distinction of being the first full-fledged and modern gazetteer should perhaps go to the *Geographisch*

statistisches Handwörterbuch, published in 1817 by the German geographer, Johann G.H. Hassel.

The growth of gazetteer literature in Europe was a part of the new intellectual awakening that followed the Renaissance and the Industrial Revolution. Europeans not only spread to far corners of the world, but also developed a new curiosity into all spheres of experience. For the British who came to India, this desire for knowledge was reinforced by the requirements of the political situation. They were aliens totally unfamiliar with local conditions and yet they had to administer large areas of the country over which they had established their dominion. Exigencies of administration compelled them to undertake the preparation of surveys—general, military, revenue and statistical—in different parts of the country under official and semi-official auspices. The accounts of observant foreign travellers further enriched the stock of information collected through these sources.

Of the vast literature which thus grew up, mention need only be made of Col. Mackenzie's *Surveys*, Logan's *Malabar*, Buchanan's *A Journey from Madras through the countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar* and volumes on the Statistical Survey of India. Soon there began to appear regular gazetteers by private authors. Walter Hamilton's *East India Gazetteer* was first published in 1815. Edward Thornton published his *Gazetteer of the Territories under the Government of the East India Company* in 1854. Till the publication of the first edition of *The Imperial Gazetteer of India* in 1881 Thornton's was the best known work on India for both the specialist and the general reader.

In addition to these general accounts, the preparation of *District Statistical Accounts* was taken in hand even before the Indian Revolt of 1857. It was however in 1866 that Richard Temple in the Central Provinces took the lead in preparing and publishing official gazetteers for districts in the accepted sense of the term. A large number of District Manuals and Gazetteers followed in rapid succession, but the efforts of the Provincial Governments were uncoordinated and therefore not fully satisfactory. In 1871, the Government of India accepted W.W. Hunter's comprehensive plan for the preparation of the Gazetteers under central authority.

Hunter has given an account of the way in which he set about his task. As one reads his Preface, one is struck by the similarity of the problems which the editor of a Gazetteer of India faces today. Editors for different provincial gazetteers had their own ideas about the way the work should be done. Those who wrote the District Gazetteers were at times more concerned with local

matters than national problems. A happy blend of the scholar and the administrator enabled Hunter to overcome all difficulties and the first edition of *The Imperial Gazetteer of India* was published in 1881 in nine volumes. The companion volume, *The Indian Empire : Its History, People and Products*, appeared in 1882. The fresh data available after the Census of 1881 and the rapid changes occurring in the life of the country led to the issue of a second edition of *The Imperial Gazetteer* in 1885-1887, in fourteen volumes.

The Imperial Gazetteer was immediately accepted as an authoritative and comprehensive study of India in all the richness of her life and culture. In fact, it was generally agreed that perhaps no other country could boast of such a thorough and exhaustive account of the country and its people. In spite of all its virtues, it became outdated and in many respects unsatisfactory by the beginning of the present century. Lord Curzon has been criticised for many of his political acts, but no one can deny that he made the Indian Government alive to the need of encouraging intellectual and cultural activities. Mainly due to his interest and inspiration, the new revised edition of the Gazetteer was issued in 1907-1909 in 26 volumes. The first four volumes were revised version of Hunter's *The Indian Empire*. The next twenty constituted the alphabetical series and the last two the Index and the Atlas.

One new feature of the new edition of the Gazetteer was that in addition to the India volumes, a Provincial series with the Provinces as units and a District Gazetteer series with the Districts as units were also issued. The developments in the then British India had their effect on the princely States and led to the publication of important works like *The Travancore State Manual*, *The Cochin State Manual* and *The Mysore Gazetteer*. After the colossal effort involved in preparing the volumes, no fresh survey was undertaken for many decades and supplementary statistical volumes alone were issued from time to time. The Curzon-inspired edition of the Gazetteer, most of it produced over 50 years back, has thus continued till today to be the only handy reference book available to administrators, scholars and the public on all matters relating to life in India.

The life of a people never stands still. Any account of a country, and a gazetteer is no exception, must therefore be revised from time to time. Apart from any other reasons, this is necessary so that its statistical and other information reflects existing conditions correctly. The lapse of half a century would have by itself provided sufficient reason for undertaking a further revision of *The Imperial Gazetteers*, but in addition, these fifty years

have seen revolutionary changes in India and outside. The great empires which in the first decade of the century seemed as permanent as the hills, no longer exist. Asia is free and Africa is emerging as a major force in world affairs. Colonialism has almost disappeared from the face of the earth. Science and technology are transforming old economic and social institutions and posing new challenges to man's deepest beliefs and faith.

Against this background of a changing world, the whole fabric of Indian life has changed almost out of recognition. The national struggles which ultimately led to the achievement of Independence, the Industrial developments since the first World War, the enormous expansion in education and the spread of democratic and egalitarian ideals have led to vast changes in the mental and moral attitude of the people. These demand radical revisions in our account of the social and political life of the country, but even the description of the land and its configuration and climate have to be rewritten in the light of the enormous expansion in our knowledge about the physical characteristics of the earth. As such, even the chapters on geology written by some of the most competent experts of the time require to be revised and brought up to date.

The changes mentioned above relate to questions of fact, but perhaps of even greater importance is the question of a new approach. The earlier India Gazetteers were written primarily for the use of British administrators and the outlook was often coloured by the imperialist interests of Britain. The Gazetteers today have an even more important role, for under modern Indian conditions, the administrators are not a few hand-picked men of proven ability but an entire people. In 1869, Hunter had written to the Viceroy of the day, "Nothing, nothing is more costly to a Government than ignorance." This is a truth which applies with equal, even greater force, to the civilians of today. Administration even fifty years ago was mainly a question of maintaining law and order. Today, it touches every aspect of life and there is real risk that administrators may lose themselves in the vast expanse of the bureaucratic machinery which has developed as a result of the ever increasing responsibilities of Government.

The need for revising the Gazetteers was widely felt after the achievement of Independence, but the credit for taking the first step goes to Bombay which started the work of revision in 1949 and published a volume on Poona in 1954. West Bengal issued District Census Handbooks in 1953 with lengthy introductions furnishing information that is normally included in Gazetteers. Bihār began the work in 1952 and published two District

Gazetteers on Gaya and Hazāribāgh in 1957. Madras began in 1954 and brought out the volume on Tanjore in 1957. Rājasthān and Uttar Pradesh entered the field in 1953 and 1957 respectively and since then most State Governments have set up machinery for the revision of the District Gazetteers.

The lead taken by the State Governments deserves the highest praise but there was a risk that uncoordinated and independent efforts by the different States may lead to results not commensurate with the effort. The Gazetteers are most useful when they follow a uniform pattern so that users from different parts of the country or outside can find out the information they seek without undue waste of time and energy. Accordingly, a central scheme for revision of the gazetteers was taken in hand and the late Maulānā Abul Kalām Āzād reported this to Parliament in April 1951. Discussions at various levels were followed by a conference of representatives of the State Governments and of the various Ministries of the Government of India in July 1955. The Conference expressed itself in the following terms : "The Gazetteers were conceived and devised to meet a particular and limited need under the British regime, but they are nevertheless a storehouse of authentic information in a convenient form and of great value for the general public and particularly for those concerned with administration." The hope which Hunter expressed in 1876 that the Gazetteers would constitute "a monument of the administration under which it may be composed, more profitable than the conquest of a new Province" has thus been amply fulfilled.

Once it was agreed that the India Gazetteers should be revised and brought up to date, two alternatives offered themselves. The first was to use the existing gazetteers and make only such changes as were inescapable. The other was to plan the work entirely anew on the basis of the new knowledge and the new needs of the day. The ultimate decision was a twofold plan under which the Central Government would be responsible for the India volumes, while the State Governments would undertake the revision or new compilation of District Gazetteers according to necessity. The old "Indian Empire" volumes were to be revised, rewritten and amplified so as to deal with important developments during the present century and exclude such portions as are no longer necessary or useful. The alphabetical volumes of the series were not to be re-issued, but there was to be instead a comprehensive all-India index of the District Gazetteers. The District Gazetteers were to be the responsibility of the State Governments who would revise and bring up to date gazetteers where they exist and arrange for the compilation and publication of gazetteers for

districts which at present have none. The preparation of the State Gazetteers on the model of the old provincial gazetteers was to be considered after the work on the District Gazetteers was completed. The whole of the Gazetteer work was to be "planned as a single co-ordinated unit, with a uniformity of form, content and standard, but providing room for variations and additions to meet local or special needs."

Following the decisions of the Conference, an Expert Committee drew up a detailed plan in November 1955 and the revision of the Gazetteers was included among the Central Schemes for the Second Five Year Plan. The Central Gazetteers Unit was constituted in January, 1958, to co-ordinate the work of the State Units as well as to undertake the preparation of the Central volumes. To aid and advise the Central Unit, a Central Advisory Board was constituted in February 1958, and held meetings in March and September that year to consider and approve plans for the India volumes. As the absence of a General Editor was interfering with the progress of the work, the Central Advisory Board was reconstituted in August 1959 with Shri Humayun Kabir as Chairman and given a more direct responsibility for the execution of the plan. The reconstituted Central Advisory Board whose composition is given elsewhere considered and approved the plan and the list of contributors for the first volume in September 1959. It had been originally proposed that it should be published by the end of 1960, but the Board decided that, since the gazetteers are revised only after long periods, publication should be deferred in order to incorporate the results of the Decennial Census in March 1961. In the meantime, the Board continued with its work on the second volume, and the plan and the list of contributors were approved at its meetings held in January and April 1961.

Without a thorough revision of the District Gazetteers, the picture painted by the India Gazetteers would necessarily remain sketchy and at times inadequate. It is gratifying to note that all the State Governments and Union Territories excepting Jammu and Kashmir have adopted the scheme and taken up the work in earnest. It is expected that the Government of Jammu and Kashmir will also begin the work during the current year. The results achieved so far have been uneven as different State Governments entered the picture at different times. The work is however gathering momentum everywhere. Conferences of the State Editors who have met from time to time to evolve an agreed plan and exchange ideas have helped to resolve difficulties and expedite the work. Thirty-six Gazetteers have already been published, and

thirty-six more have been approved and are awaiting publication. Since the total number of District Gazetteers will be over three hundred, the major part of the work still remains to be done. It will be our endeavour to complete the project before the end of the Third Plan, but it would be better to exceed the time limit by even a year than complete the work in a hasty and shoddy fashion.

The revised version of *The Imperial Gazetteer of India* for which the Government of India have assumed the responsibility is entitled *The Gazetteer of India : Indian Union*. It will be published in four volumes, viz. Vol. I : *Country and People*, Vol. II : *History and Culture*, Vol. III : *Economic Structure and Activities* and Vol. IV : *Administration and Public Welfare*. Each chapter and where necessary a section of a chapter, will be contributed by a specialist in his own field, but the overall responsibility for compilation will be the responsibility of the Central Gazetteers Unit.

The new Gazetteers are intended to educate not only the administrators but the people in whose hands power ultimately rests. They must be true to facts but at the same time reflect the thoughts, ideals and aspirations of independent India. In a country like India, it is essential that members of each constituent community should learn to know and respect the life and culture of the many other constituent units. The Gazetteers must, from their very nature, provide all with the knowledge of this rich variety and at the same time bring out the basic similarities underlying the outward differences. Social, economic and political inequalities have been the causes of India's misfortunes in the past. Nationwide poverty, illhealth and ignorance can be eradicated only through national planning guided by the principles of secularism, democracy and socialism. The gazetteers can educate the public in these regards and also play an important role in reconciling local patriotism with love and loyalty for India and the world.

The gazetteer must from the nature of the case be a co-operative effort of many scholars, administrators and compilers. I should like to make special mention of Maulānā Abul Kalām Āzād under whose leadership the work began and of Shri Balwantrai Mehta who helped greatly in securing the cooperation of the State Governments. Dr. S. B. Chaudhuri was engaged in the work of planning from the outset and Dr. Bhabani Bhattacharya has acted as a reader and literary editor for the present volume. Shri A. K. Ghosh, I.C.S., has been in overall charge of the project and the Editors and their colleagues in the Central Gazetteers Unit have worked hard for the success of the scheme. Our thanks are also due to the Publications

Division of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting who are publishing it for us.

Last but not least, I am personally grateful to the members of the Central Advisory Board and the distinguished contributors without whose advice, help and cooperation this work could not have been accomplished.

New Delhi,
31 December, 1964

Humayun Kabir