

Contribution Of Percy Macqueen Towards The Progress Of Historical Research In Tamil Nadu As Revealed Through The Archival Data

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Abstract

Tamil Nadu Archives occupies a unique place in the Archives administration. The past decades have witnessed a significant increase in Government records. The Government established an independent Record department in 1909 due to the increasing mass of records. Therefore, the Madras Record office was built in the Egmore area of Chennai. After India's Independence, the institution was named Madras State Archives in 1969. It acquired its present name in 1973, following the renaming of Madras State Archives into Tamil Nadu. The temporary appointment of curators failed to fulfil the day-to-day needs of the Tamilnadu Archives in the sphere of administration and historical research. So, the Madras Government wanted to review the contents and conditions of the records. Hence, the Government deputed Percy Macqueen, the Collector of Ramnad, to the Tamil Nadu Archives on special duty for two years to examine Revenue records. Though Percy Macqueen was not an academician, he was highly interested in historical research. He paid particular attention to accumulated materials related to historical events, and his period witnessed the growth of historical research in the Tamilnadu Archives. He rendered valuable service to the research scholar through such critical apparatus as guides to records and preparation of indexes. He knew the needs of the scholars well and guided them properly in location materials. He suggested the allocation of comfortable study places to the scholars.

Introduction

This research article is an attempt to highlight Percy Macqueen's contribution to the progress of historical research in Tamil Nadu archives. Tamil Nadu Archives occupies a unique place in the Archives administration. The Madras presidency had come into the hands of the British East India Company in 1801, and in the past decades, a significant increase in government records had been witnessed. In 1805, Lord William Bentinck, the then Governor of Madras presidency, ordered the centralization and preservation of the secretariat records. A unique establishment with its own office was set up on the north side of Fort Square. Mathiah, the principal native servant in the political and military department, was appointed as the Record keeper. The Government established an independent record department in 1909 due to the increasing mass of records. Therefore, the Madras Record office was built in the Egmore area of Chennai. After India's Independence, the institution was named Madras State Archives in 1969. It acquired its present name in 1973, following the renaming of Madras State Archives into Tamilnadu Archives. The temporary appointment of curators failed to fulfil the Tamilnadu Archives' day-to-day needs in administration and historical research. So, the Madras Government wanted to review the contents and conditions of the records. Hence, the Government deputed Percy Macqueen, the Collector of Ramnad, to the Tamilnadu Archives on special duty for two years to examine Revenue records.

Early Life

Percy Macqueen was born in England in 1883. He completed her higher education at Selwyn College, Cambridge and Trinity College, Dublin. He entered Government service on 5th November 1907. He worked as an assistant collector and Magistrate in Coimbatore from 10th June 1908. He held the same post in Tiruchirappalli, South Kanara and Pollachi. He received military training for one year in September 1918. Later, he was promoted to collector and held the post in Tiruchirappalli and Ramnad districts. On April 12th 1930, he joined as curator in Tamilnadu Archives and held the post until 1935 with some breaks.

Macqueen's works in Tamilnadu Archives

Percy Macqueen paid particular attention to completing the following task. The significant items consisted of

- Writing of index registers to help the research scholars and administrators.
- Consolidating and editing the contents of the index registers.
- Preparation of prefaces and list of reprints and other miscellaneous matters.
- Revision of catalogues and arranging a series of reprints.

The British Government approved his proposals and passed orders to continue the works. His service in the archives witnessed the accumulation of records of the collectorate, other Government offices and private persons.

Consolidation of Collectorate Records

In the Madras Presidency, every collector had preserved their records in the collectorate. The government had taken sufficient steps to centralize the collectorate records before establishing the records in the English Language in 1820 in the archives. Accordingly, most of the records were transferred to the Archives. The collectors were instructed to send their records with exceptional historical and administrative value. In 1927, the Board of Revenue stated in the proceedings that the collectors were empowered to sort out the English records between 1821 and 1835, which had some historical and administrative value. Percy Macqueen objected to the decisions of the board. He sent proposals to the Government to drop the plan of sorting records by collectors by stating that the collectors were not historians and had poor knowledge to justify by collectors by saying that the collectors must take the list of the records to be transferred to the Record office. He informed the Government that the Archives had sufficient space to accommodate the collectorate's records and appealed to the Government to sanction a new establishment to prepare an index. The government accepted Macqueen's proposals and ordered the collectors to transfer the records from 1835 to the record office. Macqueen was ordered to make indexes of copies of records, which were to be transferred to the collectors of each district. Macqueen realized the actual value of the remaining collectorate records. Therefore, he took sufficient steps to transfer the collectorate records from 1836 to 1857 to the Tamilnadu Archives. The government accepted Macqueen's proposals and ordered the districts' collectors to send the records up to 1857 to the archives. He allotted the newly erected block VII to preserve the records.

Accommodate the church records in Tamilnadu Archives

One of Macqueen's vital contributions was the acquisition of Dutch records from Bombay and Calcutta for the archives. During his period, 121 volumes of Dutch records were transferred from Bombay and Calcutta and were catalogued and indexed. He sent circulations to the High Court and Zillah courts and other heads of departments, including the sheriff's offices, to furnish particulars about the records under their custody. He insisted that they should transfer all their records before 1857. In the meantime, Macqueen paid a visit to the St. Mary church and found a lot of valuable church records. He visited other churches to learn the conditions of the records in St. Mary Church for St. George and other churches in the Madras presidency. The church records consist of birth, marriage, and death registers. The records were eroded mainly by insects and climate changes. Macqueen sent proposals to the government to accommodate the records in Tamilnadu Archives, where facilities were available to repair them for a long time.

Preservation of Records

Macqueen took special care to preserve and extend the life of the records. He knew very well about their poor security and life. Therefore, he transferred them to the archives. He proposed to the government those records be saved from fire. So, he appealed to the government to place fire extinguishers in the stacks. The government sanctioned it and passed orders to buy fire extinguishers for Rs.150/-each. In 1933, the Indian Historical Records Commission issued a pamphlet advocating the destruction of unwanted records. It advocated that all documents

other than historical, legal and antiquarian interest should be destroyed. Macqueen objected to the proposal and stated that the officer holding the records had insufficient knowledge, especially regarding collectorate records. He noted that every document lodged in the Tamilnadu Archives should be assumed to have permanent value and that the destruction of records should be avoided. The government accepted Macqueen's proposals and ordered collectors and other department heads not to destroy any records. Thus, he became an expert adviser to the Government in the matter of preservation of records.

Preparation of Critical apparatus

To facilitate department as well as historical research. The record office must furnish critical apparatus such as press lists, Indexes, Guides, calendars, and reprints. In 1891, Pringle started to prepare the press lists, which CMS completed—Schmidt in 1910. The press lists cover the records from 1670 to 1800. In the press list, the Board of Revenue records were not included. Henry Dodwell prepared the calendar of the Madras Records, which covered the period from 1704 to 1765, comprising 75 volumes. In 1930, Macqueen started to prepare the Guide to Records of the Districts, covering the period from the beginning to the end of 1835. In 1932, the government accepted the handbook of revenue records to ceded districts, which included Bellary, Anantapur, Cuddapah, and Kurnool, and passed orders to print them. In subsequent years, Macqueen prepared a guide to the district records of 18 other districts. Every guide contains introductions, historical sketches, a list of reprints, a catalogue and a table of contents. The guides to the records help scholars and administrators trace the needed information without wasting precious time.

Miscellaneous works

Though Macqueen was not an academician, he was highly interested in historical research and contributed much to it through his encouragement. To foster historical research, he prepared a guide to the records. When he was a political agent to Pudukkottai state in 1925, he wrote "The Pudukkottai Portraits." It gives some valuable information regarding the lives of the kings in Pudukkottai. Percy Macqueen was a multilinguist. He knew most of the Dravidian languages. He was well-versed in Malayalam and Tamil. He was a great orator and delivered good speeches on revenue and Archival matters. His speech was published by the Madras mail on 16th September 1933. Macqueen's administrative and intellectual ability attracted the attention of the Indian government, and he was nominated for the legislative assembly in 1932. The Madras Government permitted him to continue the curatorship and even allowed him to take one peon to Delhi at the cost of the Government. This gave another pride and honour to the Tamilnadu archives.

Conclusion

Though Percy Macqueen was not an academician, he was highly interested in historical research. He paid particular attention to accumulated materials related to historical events, and his period witnessed the growth of historical research in the Tamilnadu Archives. He rendered valuable service to the research scholar through such critical apparatuses as guides to records and the preparation of indexes. He knew the scholars' needs well and guided them properly in finding materials. He suggested the allocation of comfortable study places to the scholars.

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