

CONTRIBUTION OF PERCY MACQUEEN TOWARDS THE PROGRESS OF HISTORICAL RESEARCH IN TAMIL NADU ARCHIVES

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ABSTRACT

Tamil Nadu Archives occupies a unique place in Archives administration. The past decades had witnessed a great increase in Government records. The Government established an independent Record department in 1909 due to 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 as Madras state Archives in 1969. It acquired its present name in 1973, following the renaming Madras state Archives into Tamil Nadu.

The temporary appointment of curators failed to fulfill 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 TamilNadu Archives on special duty for a period of two years to examine Revenue records.

Though Percy Macqueen was not an academician he was highly interested in historical research. He paid special attention to accumulated materials related to historical events. His period witnessed the growth of historical research in the Tamilnadu Archives. He rendered valuable service to the research scholar by such critical apparatus as guides to records, preparation of Indexes etc. 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.

Keywords: Curator, Critical apparatus, index register, Catalogue, Extinguished in stack

Introduction

This research article is an attempt to highlight the Contribution of Percy Macqueen towards the progress of historical research in Tamil Nadu archives. Tamil Nadu Archives occupies a

unique place in Archives administration. The Madras presidency had come into the hands of the British East India company in 1801. The past decades had witnessed a great increase in Government records. In 1805 Lord William Bentinck the then Governor of Madras presidency ordered the centralization and preservation of the secretariat records. A special establishment with its own office was setup on the north side of the Fort square. Mathiah, the principal native servant in the political and military department was appointed as Record keeper. The Government established an independent record department in 1909 due to 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 as Madras state Archives in 1969. It acquired its present name in 1973, following the renaming Madras state Archives into TamilNadu Archives.

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Early Life

Percy Macqueen was born in England in 1883. He completed her higher education in 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 Tiruchirapalli, South Kanara and Pollachi. He got military training for one year from September 1918. Later he was promoted to the rank of collector and held the post in Tiruchirapalli and Ramnad districts. On April 12th 1930 he joined as curator in TamilNadu Archives and held the post up to 1935 with some breaks.

Macqueen's works in TamilNadu Archives

Percy Macqueen paid special attention to be completed to following task. The major 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 each and every collectors had preserved their records in the collectorate. The Government had taken sufficient steps to centralize the collectorate records, before the establishment of the record in the English Language up to the period of 1820 to the Archives. Accordingly most of the records were transferred to the Archives. The collectors were instructed to send out their records which had special 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 and 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 stating that the collectors must take the list of the records to be transferred to the Record office. He informed the Government that the Archives has sufficient space to accommodate the collectorate's records and appealed the Government to sanction a new establishment for the preparation of an index to the records. The Government accepted the proposals of Macqueen and ordered the collectors to transfer the records covering the period up to 1835 to the record office. Macqueen was ordered to make indexes of records copies of which were to be transferred to the collectors of each district.

Macqueen realized the real 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 the proposals of Macqueen and ordered the collectors of the Districts to send the records upto 1857 to the archives. He allotted the newly erected block VII for preserving the records.

Accommodate the church records in Tamil Nadu Archives

One of the important contribution of Macqueen was the acquisition of Dutch records from Bombay and Calcutta to the Archives. During his period 121 volumes of Dutch records were transferred from Bombay and Calutta and were catalogued and indexed. He sent circulations to High court and Zillah courts and others 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 prior to 1857. In the mean time Mecqueen paid a visit to the St. Mary church and found a lot of valuable church records. He visited other churches to know the conditions of the records in St. Mary curch fort St. George and other churches to know the conditions of the records in St. Mary church fort St. George and other churches in the Madres presidency. The church records consist of birth marriages and death registers. The records were mostly eroded 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 long standing.

Preservation of Records:

Macqueen took special care to preserve and extend the life of the records. He knew very well about the poor security and life of the records. Therefore he transferred them to the archives. He proposed to Government to save the records from fire. So he appealed the Government to place fire extinguishers in the stacks. The government sanctioned it and passed orders to buy fire extinguishers in the stacks. The government sanctioned it and passed orders to buy fire extinguishers at the cost of 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 then historical, legal and antiquarian interest should be destroyed. Macqueen objected to the proposal and stated that the officer holding the records had no sufficient knowledge especially in the matter of collectorate records. He stated that every document lodged in the Tamilnadu Archives should be assumed as permanent value and destruction of records should be avoided. The Government accepted the proposals of Macqueen and ordered to collectors and other department heads not to destroy any record. Thus he became an expert adviser to the Government in the matter of preservation of records.

Preparation of Critical apparatus

In order to facilitate department as well as historical research. The record office must furnish critical apparatus such as press lists, Indexes, Guides, calendar, reprints etc. In 1891 Pringle started to prepare the press lists which were completed by cms. Schemidt in 1910. The press lists cover the records from 1670 to 1800. In the press list Board of Revenue records were not included. Hentry 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 Government accepted the Hand Book of revenue records to ceded Districts which Comprised Bellary, Anantapur, Cuddapah and Karnool and passed orders to print them. In subsequent years Macqueen prepared guide to the District Records of other 18 Districts. Each and every guide contains introductions, historical sketch, list of reprints, the catalogus and the table of contents. The guides to the records help the scholars and administrators to trace the needed information without wasting precious time.

Miscellaneous works

Though Macqueen was not an academician he was highly interested in historical research. He contributed much to historical research through his encouragement. In order to foster historical research he prepared the guide to the records. When he was a political agent to Pudukottai state in 1925 he wrote one book entitled as “The Pudukottai Portraits”. It gives some valuable information regarding the life of the kings in Pudukottai.

Percy Macqueen was 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 in revenue and Archival matters. His speech was published by the Madras mail on 16th September 1933. Macqueens administrative and intellectual ability attracted the attention of the Indian Government and he was nominated as a member of 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 special attention to accumulated materials related to historical events. His period witnessed the growth of historical research in the Tamilnadu Archives. He rendered valuable service to the research scholar by such critical apparatus as guides to records, preparation of Indexes etc. 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.

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