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Understanding the Concept-Note on District Gazetteers through Kuar Lachman Singh's Memoir

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Abstract

This article seeks to understand the concept and significance of District Gazetteers through a critical reading of Kuar Lachman Singh's Memoir, treating it as a precursor to and parallel source for colonial and post-colonial gazetteer writing in India. District Gazetteers have traditionally functioned as comprehensive administrative documents, combining geography, history, economy, society, customs, and local knowledge to present an "official" account of a region. By engaging with Kuar Lachman Singh's memoir, the article highlights how indigenous narratives often anticipated many of these gazetteer concerns, though from a lived, experiential, and insider's perspective rather than a purely bureaucratic one. The memoir offers rich descriptions of local power structures, agrarian relations, caste dynamics, everyday social practices, and the moral world of rural society, thereby complementing and sometimes contesting the colonial gaze embedded in official gazetteers. This study argues that memoirs like that of Kuar Lachman Singh help recover vernacular voices and subjective experiences that remain marginal in standardized district records. By placing the memoir alongside the gazetteer tradition, the article underscores the need to read District Gazetteers not merely as neutral repositories of facts but as historically situated texts shaped by power, purpose, and perspective. Such a comparative approach enriches our understanding of regional history and knowledge production in colonial India.

Keywords

District Gazetteers, British imperialism, Memoir, East India Company, Northern-Western Provinces, British India.

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The idea of compilation of 'District Gazetteers'¹ was conceived in the beginning of Crown's rule during the colonial British imperialism.² It has its roots in its first phase but the term became popular after the works of Mr. Edwin Thomas Atkinson, an officer of Bengal Civil Services (BCS) during the last quadruple of the nineteenth century. Before coming to Kuar Lachman Singh and his *Historical and Statistical Memoir of Zila Bulandshahar*, it is necessary to have an idea of establishment of the Company's rule in the region.

After the success of Lord Wellesley's plan regarding the Ganga-Yamuna Doab and Delhi in 1803 and getting the authority transferred from the Sindhia ruler of Gwalior to the Company,³ the East India Company, tried to strengthen the control over the territories by capturing the geographical area on the basis of its military strength.⁴ The Company had to fight a number of battles within each of the districts because the local leaders were not ready to accept the foreigner's rule neither over their dominions nor on their respective areas of influence.⁵ The Holkar factor was also one of the major factors responsible for it.⁶ Jaswant Rao Holkar, even after the Surjianjangaon treaty⁷ between the Sindhias and Company, was trying to destroy Company's strength and establish his influence and control over the areas which had been even so far in history under the Maratha control headed by the the Peshwas of Pune and hence, a historian observes it as the resultant Maratha effect on the area under the study.

During the period of 1803-07 the armed resistance given by Nawab Dunde Khan Lalhani and his son Ranmast Khan,⁸ the Adhabhariya Rajput heroes of Kamauna⁹ (now a village in the district of Bulandshahar in U.P.) in 1807, is clearly witnessed. A continuous chain has been observed witnessing the struggle in the form of battles in whole of territories mentioned above. Saharanpur,¹⁰ Shamli,¹¹ Jhabreda,¹² Kamauna,¹³ Ganaura¹⁴ and a number of the others were the places which had been proved the

tough centres to take arms against the East India Company's forces. Prior to that, Aligarh,¹⁵ Malagarh,¹⁶ Shahdara,¹⁷ Jeetgarh¹⁸ were the main centres to resist the Company.

Madho Rao Phalkia¹⁹ headed thousands of cavalry in which Jivan Mal, his brother Signimal Tyagi²⁰ from the Tyagi Riyasat family of Asaura²¹ (now in Hapur) and their tribesmen of Khindaura, Dasna and other villages remained slain on the battlefield fought at Jeetgarh²² in 1803.

Both the brothers were unmarried or without issues and their third brother Hulas Rai had no issue after whose death his issueless widow Rani Roop Kaur²³ adopted his husband's cousin's younger son named Debi Singh²⁴ in late sixties of the 19th century C.E. Ganga Bisan Chaudhary of Khindaura, in the Battle of Delhi (actually fought at Jeetgarh) lost a number of his family members including both of his sons and two of his brothers; and many nephews along with close relatives and companions.

Ultimately after a continuous series of battles and armed resistance given by local Indian people at different places, the Memoir remained successful to establish its administrative control over the region of Delhi and Agra in the first decade of 19th century C.E.²⁵

But the enmity toward the foreigners was not ended in the Indian native camp. And, it is evident that in the Bareilly(1816)²⁶ and Hathras(1817),²⁷ after a long gap of some more than one decade, the enmity aroused against the Company. The armed resistance at Hathras was presented by local Indian hero named Raja Dayaram²⁸ while at Bareilly the hero of 1816 was one Mufti Muhammad Evaz Khan.²⁹

These were not the last armed resistances the East India Company had faced but still there was something more to be added in the list. That time the area covered by the Khubbarh Gujars was to be listed. Kalyan singh and Vijay Singh Gujar, and Kalu Gujar and few more were giving the challenges.³⁰

It is a matter of a fact that until the end of the third decade of 19th century or more correctly until the end of the first quarter of that century the Company had to face local Indian peoples' armed resistances.

But with the end of the third decade those seem to their end in 1833, an Act of the British Parliament was passed to constitute a new

province or Presidency in Company's dominions with its capital at Agra. The provisions made in this Act responsible to create a new 'Agra Province'³¹ made it possible to appoint the Governor. Thus, in 1834 Sir C.T. Metcalf assumed the charge of the first 'Governor of Agra Presidency'³² on 14th November, 1834. He worked on this post till 30 March, 1835. He was succeeded by Mr. W. Blunt who assumed the charge on 20th March, 1835 and worked till 1st December, 1835.³³ Mr. A. Ross succeeded him on 1st December and worked till 1st June 1836.³⁴

As a matter of fact, the Agra Presidency was one of the six Northern-Western Provinces of British India. It was the one of the eight separate administrative units into which the British India was divided in first half of the 19th century. It covered a total of 9479 square miles. 3660 square miles was covered by it which has a population about 45,00,000 at that time. Both the figures are of the time about 1835.

Having been come into its existence on 14th November, 1836, the Agra Presidency was established on 1st June, 1834; when the "Ceded and Conquered Provinces of Agra Presidency" was recognized as the North-Western Provinces of India. The "Ceded and Conquered Provinces" made under the Government of India Act 1833 had the geographical area which, now, is identified that of the portions of the following state presently:

- Uttar Pradesh,
- Uttarakhand,
- Rajasthan,
- Madhya Pradesh,
- Himachal Pradesh,
- Haryana, and
- Delhi.

In 1835, it was rescheduled and recognized by the another Act of the British Parliament under the Provisions made in Statute 5 and 6, (William IV, cap. 52) that resulted into its new name of the "North-Western Provinces of India" which, that time had to be administered by a Lieutenant-Governor.

The provisional establishment of the Lieutenant-Governor of the North-Western Provinces was made effective. It came into influence with effect from 1836 and soon the title was merged with the "Chief

Commissioner of Oudh." Thus, it was renamed and finally in 1877, it became as follows:

"Lieutenant Governor of North-Western Provinces and Chief Commissioner of Oudh."

As a matter of historical fact, in the meantime, particularly on 23rd June 1868, a resolution was made regarding the history-writing of the N.W. Provinces. For originality sake, it is being reproduced as such as follows:³⁵

No. 2799.

RESOLUTION.

GENERAL DEPARTMENT.

Dated Allahabad, the 23rd June, 1868.

Resolution by the Hon'ble the Lieutenant-Governor of the North-Western Provinces, regarding the compilation of "Gazetteers," or Historical and Statistical Memoirs for the several Districts of the North-Western Provinces.

READ—

Letters from the Government of India, Home Department, dated the 30th May, 1867, and 31st March, 1868, calling attention to the compilation of the "Central Provinces Gazetteer," and desiring that "steps may be taken to initiate a similar work for the North-Western Provinces."

Ordered, that the following Minute be recorded :—

IN 1844 Mr. Thomason laid down a plan for the preparation of an historical and statistical report for every district in these Provinces. The orders are preserved in Appendix XXIV. of the "Directions to Collectors." The instructions are so full and practical, that in now reviving the plan with reference to the foregoing despatch, I cannot do better than extract them in full :—

"1st.—It is very desirable to collect together all the statistical information which has been acquired during the late settlement, to throw it into a convenient form, and publish it for general information. The object of the undertaking is strictly practical. It should form an official history of each district, and contain all that will enable the public officers of Government to understand the peculiarities of the district, and conduct its administration.

"2nd.—There should be a separate volume for each district as at present constituted.

"3rd.—Each volume should consist of three parts—the narrative, the tabular, and the geographical.

"4th.—The narrative portion should comprise in the first place a general account of the whole district—its position, features, capabilities, history before our acquisition of the country and since as far as can be known, when it assumed its present limits, what changes have occurred in the judicial, magisterial, or revenue jurisdictions. Lists of judges, collectors and magistrates, with dates of assuming charge; dates of introduction of special

measures, *e. g.*, special commission under Regulation I., 1821, Maafee deputy collectors' commission under III., 1828; dates on which changes of system took effect, such as cessation of powers of provincial courts, conferment of criminal powers on sessions judges, &c.

“ 5th.—Local division should be stated,—pergunnahs, tehseels, thannahs, moonsiffes. These may conveniently be tabulated in the body of the narrative, and should show the pergunnahs, &c., geographically arranged from N. W. to S. E., and the area, jumma, population of each.

“ 6th.—From generals the account should proceed to details, pergunnah by pergunnah, arranged in the order in which they stand in the table.

“ 7th.—The fiscal history of each pergunnah should be given—former assessments as contrasted with the present. A correct jumma wasilbakee, from the commencement of our rule to the present time, would be most curious, if it could be given. This should be according to the fuslee year up to 1840-41, and after that the commercial year. There should also be a note of all sums remitted as irrecoverable from first to last, with mention of the year for which and in which remitted.

“ 8th.—The tenures should be described and classed as accurately as may be, and all peculiarities of the agricultural population shown,—their tribe or caste, early history, present state, rank, and character.

“ 9th.—The chief towns should be mentioned—their size, products, rise, former state, present state, probable prospects.

“ 10th.—Any remarkable suits or proceedings should be noticed,—the dissolution of old farms or talookas; the fall of old influential families, or the rise of new ones; effects of the special commission; general effect of revenue and judicial system, whenever observable, as transferring property from one class of men to another.

“ 11th.—The fullest particulars should be given regarding the last settlement,—when commenced, by whom conducted; when completed, and on what principle: how it has subsequently worked. Settlement reports should be printed entire in an appendix.

“ 12th.—Statistical information should be given regarding education, the number of schools and scholars, the subjects taught, and emoluments of teachers.

“ 13th.—Means of improvement,—rivers capable of being turned to account for purposes of irrigation or navigation, markets which might be

opened by new roads, tanks, reservoirs, bunds which might be formed, drainage where required.

“ 14th.—All the authorities on which the statements are based should be carefully given, whether books, official records, or personal observation.* ”

The idea conveyed in the above orders was but imperfectly realized. Memoirs of the kind contemplated have been prepared and published only for the districts in the margin.

Goorgaon.	Allygarh.	Futtehpore.	Memoirs of the kind contemplated have been prepared and published only for the districts in the margin.
Budaon.	Cawnpore.	Goruckpore.	

Another settlement has now come round, and the opportunity is suitable for fully carrying into effect the views sketched out by Mr. Thomason.

Ample materials are at hand, and the work can at once be taken up for the permanently-settled districts, and for those in which the new settlement has been concluded. Where the settlement is yet in progress, or in prospect, it will be better to defer commencement until the settlement has been completed, but it will not be necessary to wait until the settlement has been confirmed by Government.

For the districts in which reports were prepared under the orders of 1844, it will be necessary to embody information upon subsequent events, and generally to complete and improve the work.

For the rest, the compiler will have the reports of the former and present settlements, and such papers as the published narratives of events in 1857-58, census reports, papers regarding famines, the volume of “ Selections from the Revenue Records of the North-Western Provinces in 1818,” published by the Foreign Department in 1866, and such like.

The effects of the mutiny year and of subsequent proceedings upon property, and upon any classes of the community chiefly affected thereby for better or for worse, should be clearly brought out. All leading events materially touching the people, or the administration of any department, such as famines, floods, extensive hail-storms, epidemics, should be traced. Curious and important information might also be obtained as to the course of prices-current from very early times to the present.

* The tabular and geographical instructions have been omitted, and also those for the preparation of mouzawar lists. Some of the latter proved of much use after the destruction of records in 1857; but they are too bulky for the work.

It is a 14 point guide-line to be followed in writing of District Gazetteers. Mentioning about it in his work, Kuar Lachman Singh writes that “the idea conveyed in the above orders was but imperfectly realized. Memoirs of the kind contemplated have been prepared and published only for Goorgaon (Gurgaon), Budaon

(Badaun), Allygurh (Aligarh), Cawnpore (Kanpur), Futtehpor (Fatehpur) and Goruckpor (Gorakhpur)". Giving an idea, he remarks:³⁶

Preface

"On receipt of Resolution, date 23rd June, 1868, of the Hon'ble, the Lieutenant-Governor Lieutenant-Governor of North-Western Provinces, regarding the compilation of a the Gazetteer or Historical and Statistical Memoirs of each district of these Provinces, Mr. C.A. Daniell, who then officiated as Magistrate and Collector of Bulandshahar, divided the work as regarded his district among his subordinate officers."

The Kaur, at that time, was a subordinate officer to the officiating Magistrate and Collector Mr. C.A. Daniell. He further writes:³⁷

"The portion of the work originally allotted to me the chapter on the Antiquities of the District."

Being an obedient and faithful servant, he started his work and thus, he was the first involved in the work assigned. Having the impression of his dutifulness, Mr. Daniell added some other points to be compiled by the Kuar. On this addition, Kuar adds:³⁸

"On receipt of a subsequent Circular (No. 6A., dated 8th July, 1868), I was desired to give an account of the places of pilgrimage with notes of the objects of adoration or pilgrimage, dates of fairs and their locality, and tribes and peculiar sects, with notes of their habits, & C."

The Kuar was doing well but he was also feeling some set backs as the officers in Government service were transferred to other places. Though it was not a new phenomenon because it was purely a routine work for those serving in Government services, yet the Kuar seems to be some disappointed. His state of mind seems to be same as is mentioned above and is evident from his own words which are as follows:³⁹

"Before the officers with whom I was associated in the work could commence their respective labours, they were removed to other appointments; but the circumstance of my remaining here enabled me to undertake and carry to completion that portion which it had been arranged I should undertake, and gave me the opportunity also of entering upon and finishing the other portions of the work."

It seems that the team of the officers was really working on the work assigned to them representatively and a motivation was being

felt by all the team members. Their transfers caused a disturbance greatly to the Kuar who was very much involved in the project with all his capacity. Even then, it was he, who tried his best to produce the *Historical and Statistical Memoir of Zila Bulandshahr*. Pointing out the difficulties, he remarks:⁴⁰

"The difficulties I had to contend with were various. There were no official records prior to 1857 to refer to, neither had I access to any good library of reference; besides which my leisure hours were limited and the language in which I wrote was not my mother-tongue"

Taking grant on the basis of language being English as non-mother-tongue, the Kuar wants a great excuse when he writes:⁴¹

"If the Memoir is therefore defective, I trust the reasons I have advanced will be a sufficient excuse."

Regarding this, he further adds:⁴²

"To elegance of style I make no pretension, and I trust my shortcomings in that respect will be overlooked."

Though Kuar Lachman Singh did not leave any stone unturned while dealing with the local heroes and heroines of Indian Revolution of 1857, yet there seems a sense towards his countrymen in his inner subconsciousness. It is evident in a paragraph that follows:⁴³

"I am aware that some portions of the compilation will not interest the English reader; yet I have allowed them to stand, in the hope that they may prove interesting to my countrymen, for whose use I hope to translate the Memoir into the Vernacular."

As far as the Memoir is concerned, Kuar Lachman Singh (Raja Lachman Singh *alias* Chaudhary Lachman Singh) was among the first authors whether Indian or English or European to produce a Memoir. Its title is *"Historical and Statistical Memoir of Zila Bulandshahr."* It was published by the Order of the Hon'ble, Lieutenant-Governor of North-Western Provinces and was printed at North-Western Provinces' Government Press, Allahabad in 1874. Though at the end of the 'Preface', it bears "Bulandshahar, 3rd September, 1872."⁴⁴

It is clear that Kuar Lachman Singh had compiled his work in 1872 and on the said date of 3rd September, 1872; he had submitted it to the press for publication. In whole of the then NWP, he seems to stand first among all the officers posted in the districts whether European

or Indian to compile this great memoir- *The Historical and Statistical Memoir of Zila Bulandshahar*.

As far as the title of the work is concerned, the term of the 'District Gazetteer' firstly was used by H.R. Nevill, I.C.S. in 1903 when this officer had prepared the series of the *District Gazetteers*. The title of each of the *District Gazetteer* was fashioned by him in such an appropriate style and manner that the name of the district having column was the starting followed by 'A Gazetteer, being Volume Number (in Roman) of the District Gazetteers of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh'. For example, *The District Gazetteer of Meerut and Muzaffarnagar* have there titles as follows:

Meerut : A Gazetteer being Volume IV of the District Gazetteers of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh.

Muzaffarnagar : A Gazetteer being Volume III of the District Gazetteers of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh.

Similarly for Meerut:

In the 'Preface'⁴⁵ of the former Mr. H.R. Nevill mentions:

PREFACE.

THE old Gazetteer of Muzaffarnagar was prepared by Mr. E. T. Atkinson, I.C.S., who was very largely assisted by Mr. A. Cadell, I.C.S., and in a minor degree by Mr. G. R. C. Williams, I.C.S. The present volume is an entire reconstruction of the old Gazetteer, from which it differs not only in its general arrangement, but also in the addition of a large amount of fresh material, chiefly obtained from the Settlement Report of Mr. J. O. Miller, I.C.S. The correction of the figures and statistics of Mr. Atkinson's work was carried out by Mr. A. A. Hussanally, I.C.S., while I am also largely indebted to Mr. L. H. Turner, I.C.S., for notes on the various towns and villages. Of the history the ancient and mediæval portion is from the pen of Mr. R. Burn, I.C.S., while the remainder has been practically untouched with the exception of the family history of the Barha Saiyids. Only a small proportion of the bulk of the old volume has been retained, as it has been found necessary, in the light of more modern information, to re-write that part of the work which is comprised in the first four Chapters and the Directory.

NAINI TAL : }
September 1903. }

H. R. N.

As a matter of fact, the style of the Gazetteers above mentioned was not of the first work of its type. Actually, prior to H.R. Nevill ICS, the work was assigned to Mr. Edwin Thomas Atkinson, an officer of the Bengal Civil Services (BCS) cadre. Mr. E.T. Atkinson adopted the style of the title of the work assigned to him as given below:

Statistical, Descriptive and Historical Account of the North-Western Provinces of India, Volume Number (in Roman), Meerut Division, followed by the Part Number (in Roman).

For example, Atkinson's work on Meerut District bears the title as follows:

Statistical, Descriptive and Historical Account of the North-Western Provinces, Volume III, Meerut Division, Part II.

Mr. Atkinson submitted his work to Govt. Press in 1875 which had been published in 1876.

Thus, Mr. E.T. Atkinson, Mr. H.R. Nevill and Mrs. Esha Basanti Joshi are the first three to compile the Gazetteers on Meerut. The latter's work has an easier style in title. For example, her work on Meerut can be looked upon as follows; *Uttar Pradesh District Gazetteers : Meerut.*

It is clearly visible that during the beginning of the third quadruple of the 19th century, the matter was titled in the name of N.W.P. while the revised form was published in the first decade of the 20th century bearing the names of 'The United Provinces of Agra and Oudh' replacing the old one of N.W.P.

After India's independence, once again, during the second decade of the later half of the 20th century Mrs. E.B. Joshi started publishing the more revised editions bearing the name of 'Uttar Pradesh' replacing previous name of 'The United Provinces of Agra and Oudh'. There was formed a thirteen member board to look after and enrich the project of *Uttar Pradesh District Gazetteers* having Prof. Radha Kamal Mukerjee, the then Director of the J.K. Institute of Sociology and Human Relations, Lucknow University, Lucknow as its 'Chairman'. Mrs. E.B. Joshi, IAS, the then Commission-cum-State Editor, Department of District Gazetteers, U.P., Lucknow was 'Secretary and Convener of the Board. It is on the next page:⁴⁶

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17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*
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21. **Ibid.**, 211-13, 221-22.
22. There stands a Pillar-Inscription at the very place now in the campus of the Golf Course, Noida, U.P.
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29. *Ibid.*
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