

An Analytical Study on Burma Gazetteers

Nu Nu Yi¹

Abstract

Gazetteers are the most often used geographical sources. Although etymologically a gazetteer means a geographical dictionary, it enfolds many more subject-matters than more geography. This paper is attempted to describe the role of gazetteers as a historical and cultural importance and to identify a complete picture of the administration, the economic and social condition of the people. These gazetteers are useful and authoritative work about Myanmar and its people. This paper finds out tremendous amount of information about various aspects provided in these Gazetteers. Finally, this paper finds out that librarian should not discard these old edition of gazetteers because their value for historical information will continue to be significant for many reference questions.

Key words: gazetteers, geographical sources, geographical dictionary, historical information

Introduction

Nowadays, there is increasing demand for geographical information. Geographical information can be located in variety of information sources. Each has its usefulness. Among these sources, gazetteers are the most often used geographical reference sources.

A Gazetteer is a geographical dictionary of places arranged alphabetically. It serves as a finding list for geographical places like town, cities, oceans, rivers, lakes, mountains, etc. , giving indication about location (usually in the form of exact latitude and longitude) and a brief description, such as pronunciation, population, area, historical and socio-economic information, etc.

Although etymologically a gazetteer means a geographical dictionary, it enfolds many more subject-matters than more geography. It presents in a schematic

¹Nu Nu Yi, Lecturer, Department of Library and Information Studies< Yadanabon University

manner a factual, objective and well-documented account of different facet of peoples' life and indicates the trend of socio-economic and cultural developments that take place in a region. It is a mirror of society in its past and present and projection of its future. In short, it is a storehouse of valuable and worth-knowing information relating to a country as a district or as a state. It is a dependable source of information for the administrators and research-workers, for the readers at large, and the explorers and tourists seeking knowledge of people and place. Recent editions describe places as it is now and old editions give historical information about it. It is highly valuable document embodying early records and accounts as a source book today.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The main aim in undertaking this paper is to identify these gazetteers as highly valuable documents embodying early records.

The objectives of the study are

- To identify different facets of people's life and to indicate the trend of socio-economic and cultural development that took place in region
- To offer a comprehensive view about the region for which the gazetteer is written
- To know the role of gazetteers as a historical and cultural importance
- To find out which gazetteers were published in the British Period.

Scope of the Study

This Study analyses four Burma Gazetteers published under the British Colonial period. They are British Burma Gazetteers Vol. I (1880) & Vol. II (1879), Imperial Gazetteer of India (1881), Report and Gazetteer of Burma, Native and British (1883) and Gazetteer of Upper Burma and the Shan State.

Method of the Study

In this study, the required data were collected through literature survey. So, the necessary information was collected from various documentary sources, such as books, periodicals, and various online e-resources.

Gazetteers

A gazetteer is a repository of an authentic information and research material collected from the field and other reliable sources, such as government records, census, reports, statistical hand books, libraries, archives and museums etc. It offers a comprehensive view of life about the region for gazetteer is written. The gazetteer has a role to educate the people for better citizenship and good governance. It is a storehouse of knowledge which serves the people with a motto ' Know the country, know the people'.

It is an important reference tool because they provide information an geographical place names. Some gazetteers simply give precise information about a location such as latitude and longitude; others describe the locations and give information about population, climate, economy and notable tourist attraction.

There are two types of gazetteers: locational and descriptive. Locational gazetteers usually provide information precisely, locating the feature, either by atlas page and grid index or by even more precise latitude and longitude and the earth's surface. Descriptive gazetteers may provide some or all of the preceding information and then describe the place. Such a description may include such features as brief history commodity producing, population and altitude. Almost every atlas includes a gazetteer as an appendix, used to locate the place names in that volume. Therein lies its limitations. Atlas gazetteers are useful for locating major towns, cities, administrative divisions, and physical features.

The primary purpose for the majority of geographical sources is to locate places. The sources tell something about a location, or show how to get there. Another general characteristic of geographical sources is that they deal with a time period, either current or historical. Although currency is also important, historical information is also critical to a reference question.

Locational questions can be grouped into three categories current events, recreation, and business. Current events are one of the strangest reasons for maintaining up-to-date geographical sources. Recreation has become an important part of many lives, and travel is now command than it was in the past. As a result, a larger segment of the population is interested in information not only a local state but also cities and regions all over the world. Business is related to travel literature. The particular type

of travel requires more information on cities and detailed information regarding subjects such as hotels and restaurants.

The whole of the gazetteer work is to plan as a single coordinated unit, with a uniformity of form, contents and standard, but providing room for variations and additions to meet the local or special need. The decision has laid the gazetteer on a uniform pattern and given it a clear orientation and purposive value. Types of geographical sources include maps, atlases, gazetteers, travel literature, and general sources.

British Burma Gazetteer (1879, 1880)

In Myanmar, the history of Burma Gazetteers dated from the British colonial period. After the British had occupied the lower Myanmar, they tried to know about their colony. So, they compiled the "British Burma Gazetteer". It was published in two volumes by the Government Printing Press, Yangon in 1880 and 1879. Volume II was published in 1879 before volume I. It was compiled by Major Ralph Separman. Volume I include the whole British Burma ranging from location, physical geography to the politics, administration, economic and social conditions. In volume II, the names of the cities, towns, village tracts, rivers, mountains and arranged alphabetically A to Z, describing location, history, population, professions, revenues, etc.²

Report and Gazetteer of Burma, Native and British (1883)

Since 1880, the relation of British and Myanmar had become worse. So, the British Government prepared for the Third War. As a result of this war preparation, in 1883, Major Douglas MacNeill was assigned to compile " Report and Gazetteer of Burma, Native and British ". It was published by GNO Publishers in Simla. It is an important source to trade Myanmar history. It comprises three parts. Part I is history to the Second Anglo-Myanmar War. Part II is about British Burma, describing less account. It describes maps, plans, etc. Part III is the essence of this gazetteer. This gazetteer supported the British to occupy the Upper Myanmar.³

²Major Ralpa Separman, *British Burma Gazetteer* (Rangoon: Govt. Printing, 1879), 2v.

³ Major Douglas MacNeill, *Report and Gazetteer of Burma, Native and British* (Simla: GNO Publishers, 1883).

Gazetteer of Upper Burma and Shan States

In 1900, J.G. Scotte and J.P. Hardiman compiled "Gazetteer of Upper Burma and the Shan States". It was published in 5 volumes: Part I, Volume I & II and Part II, Volume I to III by the Superintendent Government Printing in Yangon. Part I, Volume I describes the history of Upper Myanmar from the regions of King Mindon and King Thibaw. It also includes the causes led to the Third Anglo-Myanmar War and annexation of Upper Myanmar. It includes the Shan States and the Tai, the Kachin Hills and the Chingpaw, the Chin Hills and the Chin Tribes. In part I, Volume II, religion and its semblances, palace customs and Myanmar under native rule, archaeology, geology and economic mineralogy, forest and other vegetation, agriculture and industrial arts, revenue administration, past and present; population and trade, the government and administration under the Myanmar Kings and towns, are expressed. Part II, Volume I to III were published in 1901. In these three volumes, village tracts, rivers, streams, etc. of the whole Upper Myanmar are arranged alphabetically A to Z.⁴

Burma Gazetteers: District Gazetteers

After the British had occupied the whole country of Myanmar, district gazetteers were compiled in the year 1912. The year 1912 was the year most published Burma Gazetteers for various districts. They were mostly published in two volumes, Volume A and Volume B. In 1924, B Volumes were published to fulfill the requirements of A Volumes. But, B Volumes of some district gazetteers were not published and as well A Volumes. There were about 42 district gazetteers. They were compiled in harmony with the uniform pattern. According to this pattern, A Volumes mostly consist of 13 chapters relating to geography, geology, flora, fauna, climate, history, archaeology, people (language, culture, religion, social life, etc.), agriculture and irrigation, industries, trade and commerce, communications, economic trend, general revenue administration, local self-government, law and order and justice, education, health, minor articles and places of interests besides many other vital matters. B volumes provides statistical data, including town and village census tables, administrative subdivisions, distribution of urban population, police strength and

⁴ J.G. Scott and J.P., Hardiman, *Gazetteer of Upper Burma and the Shan States* (Rangoon: Govt. Printing, 1900).

distribution, agricultural statistics, crop outturns, trade, roads, etc. These districts gazetteers were rare reference sources before the year 1962 after the postwar. During the year 1959-1963, A volumes were reprinted by the Government Printing.

Thus, all records give a clear picture of the year's their operations. The statements which accompany public records are accurate and reliable. This is because they are produced by the government and they are peculiarly its resources. They deal with organizational, procedural, and policy matter, and with social and economic sphere. They are preserved "as the sources and the evidence of the past" obviously for research use.

The British prepared these voluminous works for their benefits not for Myanmar. Although the British Rules were not effective to Myanmar, these public records have been very useful due to their historical value. It can be said that such records in their entirety reflect not only the growth and functioning of a government, but also the development of a nation.⁵

Conclusion

In conclusion, these old series of gazetteers were compiled by the British primarily. They are useful and authoritative work about Myanmar and its people. Although they are old edition, until now they play a significant role in various fields of research, such as history, geography, social sciences, etc.

Generally speaking geographical sources vary extensively. Libraries will require a greater complexity of geographical sources for its users. They may require several word atlases as weak as selected ration atlases; maps and gazetteer to supplement its collection. Nowadays, geographical sources are available in electronic forms, such as CD-RONs or DVDs, online resources, etc. Due to its invaluable historical information, these gazetteers have been digitized into electronic form to fulfill the information needs of the researches.

Finally, this paper will find out that librarians should not discard these old edition of gazetteers because their value for historical and geographical information will continue to be significant for many reference question. Obviously a gazetteer is a

⁵ T.R.Schllenber, *Modern Archves : Principles and Techniques* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), 9.

repository of authentic information and research material from the other reliable sources, such as Government records, Census Reports, Statistical handbook, etc.

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my sincere thanks to Dr. Aye Kyaw, Rector of Yadanabon University, Dr. Khin Ma Ma Tin, Pro Rector of Yadanabon University, Dr. Myinzu Min, Pro Rector of Yadanabon University for their permission to submit this article. I am grateful Dr. Sanda Oo, Professor and Head of the Department of Library and Information Studies, Yadanabon University, for her encouragement and permission to present this paper.

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