



Life Sketch of a Scholar Par Excellence: Benjamin Rice and his Scholastic Contributions to Kannada Literature

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Abstract : Benjamin Lewis Rice was a scholar whose contributions to Karnataka & Kannada Literature stand unparallel in History. He was a renowned educationist, epigraphist and historian. His precious scholastic contributions supported the enrichment of Kannada language, literature, archaeology and history .As a British official, B.L. Rice engaged himself in research over Karnataka's past, through the study of its antiquity. In this manner his contribution is extremely outstanding.. This paper examines the scholastic contributions of Rice to Kannada literature & its impact on other scholars towards enriching Kannada literature.

Keywords: Lewis rice, kannada literature , scholastic contributions , impact on kannada epigraphy

Introduction -Benjamin Lewis Rice was a scholar whose contributions to Karnataka & Kannada Literature stand unparallel in History. He was a renowned educationist, epigraphist and historian. His precious scholastic contributions supported the enrichment of Kannada language, literature, archaeology and history

Early Life - Lewis Rice was born in Bangalore on 17th July 1837. His father, Benjamin Holt Rice, was an agent of the London Missionary Society. The family had linkages to Kannada literature as his younger brother, Edward Peter Rice was engaged in Kannada Literary activities. At ten, Lewis Rice went to England for higher studies & obtained B.A. Degree in Harrow University. After his return to Bangalore in 1860 , he was selected and appointed as Head master of the Central School which later developed into Central College, These years between 1860 to 1865 were so fruitful because he experienced the need of research into Kannada Language & literature during these formative years of his service. . In 1865 he was appointed as Inspector of School in Mysore and Coorg divisions .

His interest in educational upliftment made him the Director of Public Instruction in the Mysore State. He held this post twice till 1868-69 & 1873-83. He was also appointed as Secretary to the Education Department of the Mysore Government from 1883-90 and finally he served as the Director of Archaeological Research in Mysore from 1890-1906, besides serving in 1882-83 as Secretary to the Commission on Education of which Sir W.W. Hunter was president. He finally retired from official duty on 1st July 1906 at the age of 69. This is the brief profile of Rice in Mysore state.(B.L. Rice -Encyclopedia Britannica 2014).

Official Achievements-

When he was a School inspector he undertook extensive tours all round the Mysore division. It was during these official tours he started taking interest in stone inscriptions found in remote areas, Kannada and Sanskrit palm leaf manuscripts. During his tours as inspector, he came across hundreds of ancient stone inscriptions, language and



script of which was very different from the one in vogue. With the help of assistants, he edited, translated, and transliterated thousands of inscriptions. He is credited with finding nine-thousand inscriptions. A variety of stone inscriptions including hero stones became his obsession as he started collecting information from local scholars. (B.L. Rice -Encyclopedia Britannica 2014).

Edition of Mysore gazetteer- He took interlinking from history, antiquities, education and literature of Karnataka region. This led to the edition of 'Mysore and Coorg Gazetteer' in 1877-78 in 3 volumes. The first volume exclusively dealt with Mysore in general, the second volume gave district wise information and the third volume dealt with Coorg (Kodagu) region.

These Gazetteers contain information on the physical features, flora and fauna, ethnology, history, religion, Language and literature, art, administration etc. The Gazetteers are in English and therefore people from other parts also could know about the land. They were acclaimed as the most objective and comprehensively informative. Therefore could be the best model for gazetteers of the other states. Jyotsna Kamat –B L Rice- father of Karnataka epigraphy, Kamat's potpourri 2014).

Mysore Inscriptions

In 1879, Rice brought out a volume called "Mysore Inscriptions" containing translations of all the photographed inscriptions collected by Major Dixon and of some other collected by himself

Reports on Coorg Region

In 1884, he prepared reports on the history of education in Coorg (1832-82) and future plans. In 1868 Mysore Government sanctioned Lewis Rice's "Hobli School Scheme" for the establishment of Hobli Schools to bring education within reach of the mass of the people. Under this provision a school was to be sanctioned for every hobli where people desired to have a school and in earnest of their desire agreed to provide a school house. (Karnataka Itihassa academy – Articles on BL Rice 2001).

Report on the Mysore Census, 1884

As the chief officer of census 1881, he submitted a good statistical analysis report on the Mysore census in 1884. For some time he was in charge of the police Department also. In recognition of his meritorious and efficient service in any field he was conferred with the title C.I.E. (Companion of Indian Empire) in 1884. Recognizing his praiseworthy service in the education field, the University of Madras conferred on him honorary D.Litt. Director of Archaeological Researches in Mysore, his contributions were considerable. (Jyotsna Kamat –B L Rice- father of Karnataka epigraphy, Kamat's potpourri 2014).

Scholastic Contributions

1. His prestigious twelve volumes of "Epigraphia Carnatica" containing in all 8869 inscriptions actually surveyed in different parts of the state including Coorg and edited them in these volumes. (B.L. Rice- Asian educational service Journal 2001).
2. In 1886, he published volume of Coorg Inscriptions (E.C. Vol. I).



3. In 1889, he published the volume of Shravanabelgola Inscriptions (E.C. Vol. II), consisting 144 Jaina Inscriptions collected at Shravanabelgola.
4. Afterwards he published "Epigraphia Carnatica" series successively (E.C. vol.III in 1894, IV in 1898, V in 1902, VI in 1901, VII in 1902, VIII in 1904, IX in 1904, X in 1905, XI in 1903, and XII in 1904). In 1909 Rice issued volume entitled "Mysore and Coorg from the Inscriptions" Summing up the historical and other information contained in the above volumes. (B.L. Rice- Asian educational service Journal 2001).
5. Rice started a new series of scholarly research edition called Bibliotheca Carnatica where he edited and published important classical Kanarese works on grammar and poetry. This included Karnataka Bhasa Bhusana of Nagavarma II in 1884, Karnataka Sabdanushasana of Bhattakalanka deva in 1890, Pampa Ramayana of Nagachandra in 1892, Pampa Bharata or Vikramarjuna Vijaya of Pampa in 1898 and under the guidance of Lewis Rice, K.B. Pathak edited Kavirajamarga of Nripatunga or Srivijaya in 1898.
6. Other works are 'Catalogue of Sanskrit manuscripts in Mysore and Coorg' (1884); European tombs and monuments in Mysore (1906), the inscriptions (1900); Amarakosha (1881), Find of Roman coins near Bangalore (1891),
7. A portion of Mysore and Coorg supplied to the Imperial Gazetteer of India (1908) and

above all more than forty five articles on Karnataka history. Epigraphy, literature, art and culture contributed to the journals of Indian antiquary, Royal Asiatic Society, Epigraphia Indica and other commemorative volumes. (Karnataka Itihassa academy - Articles on BL Rice 2001).

Impact on other scholars – A host of Kannada scholars were impressed by the works of Rice, took interest in Historical a research & enriched the Kannada literature all through 19th & 20th centuries.

1. Desai P B
2. Gai G S
3. Gopal B R
4. Kundanagaar K G
5. Kalburgi M M
6. Krishna M H
7. Lakshminarayana N
8. Narasimhachar R.
9. Narasimhamurthy A V
10. Panchamukhi R S
11. Ritti R S
12. Saletore S A
13. Srikantha shastry S
14. Vasudevacharaya

Kannada language & literature could blossom to its new heights because of the work of these scholars & several others. The Kannada scholarly world enriched through antiquity finding & epigraph researches undertaken.



Conclusion

Rice was instrumental in undertaking pioneering work in historical aspects. His interest in antiquities of Karnataka region was not only splendid but they paved way for other scholars to continue the path of rice towards scholastic works. Kannada Literature was enriched by his research & Kannada world could become more research oriented by other such scholars who treated Rice as their Master.

References

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5. Kannada articles on B.L. Rice 2010