



National Archives of India Library *A Gem among Libraries*

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Abstract

The paper highlights some of the rare collections available in the National Archives of India Library, New Delhi. Some of these, like Gazetteers, Gazettes, Native Newspapers, Travel Accounts are very popular with scholars. It is hoped that more people will make use of the treasures stored in the National Archives for their research and publications.

Keywords

Imperial Record Department, Imperial Gazetteer, India Gazette, Almanacs, Native Newspapers, History of England, Travel Accounts of Foreigners, India's Freedom Movement.

1. Introduction

Rabindranath Tagore perceived libraries as “a place where history comes alive, where the past speaks to the present and where the future is shaped”. These words are very much true for the *National Archives of India Library*, which is a perfect supplement to the millions of unique, primary source materials in the form of records, manuscripts and maps. Although it has been commonly referred to as an adjunct to the National Archives, the library has developed into a rich, research **Resource Centre**, providing a wide range of services to scholars, trainees, government agencies, and other interested users. Access to original documents is allowed to scholars/students who are required to register with the *National Archives of India*.

2. Origin of the National Archives of India Library

The origin of the National Archives of India Library goes back to 1891 when National Archives of India was set up at Calcutta to function as the Imperial Record Department as well as to act as the Central Record Office of the Government of India. At that point of time, Calcutta had only one Library, namely the Calcutta Public Library, which was established in 1836, at the initiative of Mr. J. H. Stoqueler, the Editor of *The Englishman*. It was, however, not a government institution and ran on a proprietary basis.

Dwarkanath Tagore, grandfather of Rabindranath Tagore, was its first Proprietor. With the establishment of the Imperial Record Department, it was felt that a Central Library may also be set up as its adjunct, which could also act as the apex body to different Departmental Libraries. This proposal was accepted, and thousands of Books, Journals, Periodicals and other Government publications were transferred to the Central Library from various Offices. Of these, the most important and interesting collection was of the Library of the Home Department, which contained many books formerly belonging to the libraries of the East India College at Fort William (Calcutta), and the East India Board in London. The use of the library was, however, restricted to the superior officers of the Government.

When Lord Curzon, took over as Governor General of India, he found that both the Imperial Library and Calcutta Public Library were not being used as expected because of limited access and lack of amenities. He, therefore, decided to merge the collection of books at the Calcutta Public Library with that of the Central Library, and established a new Imperial Library (now National Library), which was formally opened to the public on 30th January 1903. Subsequently, a large number of the books and reports of the Central Library were transferred to it, leaving behind duplicate copies. The Central Library, thereafter, became the Library of the Imperial Record Department.

Following the decision to transfer the Imperial Record Department to Delhi in 1911, the books and publications in the Central Library were sorted out and classified into three groups viz: (i) those to be transferred to the Imperial Record Department in New Delhi, (ii) those to be transferred to the Imperial Secretariat Library (later Central Secretariat Library), and (iii) those which were to be disposed of. The transfer of the material to the Imperial Record Department was completed in 1937 and the library settled down in its new home.

3. A rich research Resource Centre.

Over the years, the National Archives of India Library has developed into a rich research Resource Centre, having in its custody over 1.9 lakh publications comprising Rare books,

Reports, Parliamentary Papers and Debates, Monographs, Gazettes, Gazetteers, Almanacs, Travelogues, Native Newspapers and Journals covering a wide variety of subjects like history, politics, culture, demography, archives, economics, social science, gender issues, tribal studies, and environment. Some of these rare documents are discussed below.

(i) *The Imperial Gazetteer*

The Imperial Gazetteer is one of the prized Collections of the Library. This Publication, in three Series, served as a comprehensive information tool for the British administration containing summary and statistical details on geography, history, culture and peoples of India to aid in governing the vast country. The first of these, the *Imperial Gazetteer (India Series)*, is a multivolume publication which was started under the stewardship of Sir W.W. Hunter in 1869, and its first volume was published in 1881. *The Imperial Gazetteer* is divided into 26 volumes and covers the followings:

The geography, history, economy, demography and administration of the Indian Empire. Alphabetically arranged volumes listing places, providing statistics and providing summary information. An Index and Atlas volume. Supplementing *The Imperial Gazetteer* are the *Provincial* and the *District Gazetteers* focussing on information in respect of the Provinces and the Districts. These documents contain information about each Province/District in the country.

(ii) *India Gazettes, London Gazette and Provincial Gazettes*

Another valuable Collection in the Library are the Gazettes such as the *Calcutta Gazette*, the *India Gazette*, the *London Gazette* and the *Provincial Gazettes*. The 1780s witnessed the birth and the unprecedented advancement of journalism in India and Calcutta, as the capital of British India, naturally took the lead. Though the Portuguese Missionaries had brought the first printing press to Goa as early as 1557, there was no newspaper or journal in India until January 1780 when James Augustus Hicky ventured to bring out his '*Bengal Gazette*' from Calcutta which featured a mix of political and commercial news, advertisements, and social commentary.

Unfortunately, the Gazette created a great deal of controversy due to its strong criticism of the East India Company. Consequently, Hicky had to face legal notices and also imprisonment. Warren Hastings soon closed down his Press in 1782. Two years later in 1784, the '*Calcutta Gazette*' began its publication, which was the brainchild of Francis Gladwin, a pioneering Orientalist and lexicographer, and a Civil Servant who was also the first Professor of Persian at the Fort William College in Calcutta.

Even though it was a private publication, it soon became the sole medium for making public announcements. After a few years, it began publishing Government advertisements for free, in exchange for free distribution across the country. Between the period of 1832 to 1864, the *Calcutta Gazette* became the official publication of both the Government of Bengal and the Government of India, and only of the Government of Bengal after 1864.

In fact, the first forty-eight years of independent publication and free selection and reporting of news gave the Gazette, prestige and historical importance. Historians, research-scholars, continue to pore over the volumes of the *Calcutta Gazette* of this period to cross-check the authenticity of events as well as for testing the veracity of their findings. The library has copies of the Gazette from 1792-1863.

Equally interesting is the *London Gazette* which the library possesses for the period from 1810-1954. *The London Gazette* claims to be the oldest continuously published newspaper in the UK, having been first published on 7th November 1665 as *The Oxford Gazette*. *The London Gazette*, known generally as *The Gazette*, is one of the official journals of the Government of the [United Kingdom](#) containing statutory notices for public information and record.

In addition to the above, there are the *Provincial Gazettes* of various Provinces/States, going back to 1841, and include the Gazettes of Burma, Ceylon, NWFP, Sindh. These Gazettes are kept in the Regional Office of the National Archives, at Bhopal.

(iii) *Vernacular Native Newspapers*

The British Government in India initiated, in 1863, the task of compiling "*Selections from the Vernacular Native Newspapers*" that included translations from native-language newspapers in India. It was intended to provide the British officials with a regular summary of public opinion. It served the colonial government to monitor the sentiments of the Indian population towards the government in their native languages, particularly the nationalist views and their criticism of the government policies.

The colonial government was concerned about the growing power of these local-language publications in inciting public opinion. The need for these Selections grew significantly after the Vernacular Press Act of 1878 that was introduced by Lord Lytton. The Act empowered the Local Governments to censor and control the Indian-language publications. Beginning from 1863, The National archives of India Library has these *Selections* covering the Presidencies of Bombay, Bengal, Madras, U.P. Agra and Oudh, Central Provinces, Burma, N.W.F.P.

Scholars interested in the relationship of the British Government in India and the Native Princely States as well as with the neighbouring countries find the volume on “*Treaties, Engagements and Sanads with States and Neighbouring Countries*” by Sir C. U. Aitchison extremely useful. This Collection, in 14 Volumes originally, was published in 1909. It is a compilation of official documents, including Treaties, Sanads, Engagements, and Proclamations, detailing the interactions between the British Government in India and the various Princely States and the neighbouring countries of Afghanistan, Nepal, Turkistan, Muscat, Baluchistan etc. Significantly, the Collection covers a vast range of topics such as Land transfers, Alliances, Tribute, Trade and Jurisdiction, providing a comprehensive historical record of the political, economic, and social landscape of India during the colonial era.

(iv) *Almanacs*

Almanacs are another valuable possession of the library. *Almanacs* in British India served as comprehensive guides, containing practical information on daily life, administrative details, and lists of personnel, while also reflecting European colonial presence by including medical staff, civil servants, and military formation. These publications provided practical advice to European residents, such as gardening tips and postal information, and also offered insights into local conditions and crises, like famines. The library has four fascinating volumes of these *Almanacs*:

Bengal Almanac (1803-54): This was a significant annual publication during the British period, containing Astronomical data, Calendars, and information on British Regulations, Civil and Military matters, Commercial activities, and public institutions in Bengal, that provide a detailed look into the daily life, governance, and society of the era.

Bombay Almanac and Calendar (1836-68): These were historical publications that functioned as a combination of an Annual Calendar, Directory, and Reference book for colonial Bombay (now Mumbai). They were essential resources for both the British and Indian communities living in the city and were published by various Newspaper Presses, such as the *Bombay Gazette* and the *Bombay Times*. These almanacs provided useful data about holidays and festivals, astronomical data, comprehensive lists of local inhabitants and businesses in Bombay, Rosters for British Military and Civil servants in the Bombay Presidency such as the Army List and the Indian Navy List, as well as details on Acts passed by the Legislative Council of India that were relevant to Bombay.

Madras Almanac (1817-58): Served as an official or semi-official publication, providing information on various Departments and Institutions, including the Madras civilians, and detailed day-to-day activities of the Presidency. They also contained yearly reports of various Departments, Records of Public services, and General Directories for the

Madras Presidency. They provided information about the day-to-day activities within the region under British rule.

Asylum Press Almanac (1862-1958): also known as the "*Almanac and Compendium of Intelligence*," was a Directory and Statistical Almanac for Madras and Southern India, published by the *Madras Times* in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Its contents included a compendium of Intelligence and various Directories for the region, providing information such as lists of public officials, addresses, and other useful information of the Area, as well as Information on Demographics, Commerce, and other aspects of life specific to Southern India, including its territories and people.

(v) *Parliamentary History of England*

England is called the mother of Parliament; Cobbett's *Parliamentary History of England* (1688-1785) in the library is an important historical source for understanding the development of the British Parliament, particularly the rise of Constitutional Monarchy and the emergence of modern Political Parties during the 18th century onward. The early volumes were compiled by William Cobbett, a prominent and prolific political writer and polemicist. In 1812, due to financial difficulties, Cobbett sold his interest in the publication to his printer, Thomas Curson Hansard. These volumes were published by Hansard, who eventually gave his name to the Parliamentary records. Since 1909, the official, verbatim record of British Parliamentary Debates has been known as "Hansard". There are two such series, *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates* (1841-91) and *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates relating to Indian Affairs* (1886—1925). There are also volumes on *Parliamentary Debates* (*House of Commons and House of Lords*), *Indian Parliamentary Debates*, *Indian Debates* and *Debates on Indian Affairs*. These volumes contain Questions, Proceedings relating to India, White Papers, Reports of Parliamentary Committees, Reports of Commissioners, Trade and Tariff relating to India. There are also separate series of Legislative Assembly Debates commencing with the Proceedings of the Legislative Council of India (1857-1920), Constituent Assembly Debates as well as Provincial Legislative Council Debates of several States including Bengal, Bombay, Burma and Madras.

(vi) *The India Office List*

With thousands of officers from the Army, Military and civilians serving in India, it was imperative for the British Government to keep a record of their postings and transfers; the library has comprehensive information on these. *The India Office List* published in 1933 was an Annual Directory that provided the names of Individuals who served under the British Administration in India. It served as a reference for the service people from the

U.K who were part of British Army Regiments and performed other administrative roles in South Asia and beyond. It included information about the Officers who served in India and Burma, their rates of pay, pensions etc. Then there was the *Civil List*, which was a comprehensive, periodically published record of gazetted officers in the Indian Civil Service (ICS) and other Government Departments. It served as an official Directory and provided the organizational chart for the entire administrative system across Central and Provincial Governments since 1886. The *India Army List* on the other hand provides the names, rank, postings and service details of Army officers who served in India from 1825 to 1895. There are separate lists for Bombay, Bengal and Madras presidencies.

(vii) *East India Register and Directory*

Another comprehensive snapshot of British India in the 19th century can be found in the *East India Register and Directory*, which meticulously provides valuable insights into the Administrative, Military, and Commercial structures of the East India Company and related entities and contains lists of Civil servants, Military officers, Marine establishments and data on births, deaths and marriage of these officers. A vital resource for historians, researchers, these historical documents provide useful information about the complex dynamics of British colonial governance in India.

(viii) *Material on India's Freedom Movement*

For scholars working on the Freedom Movement, the Library holds a significant Collection of proscribed literature, consisting of publications banned by the British government during India's Freedom Movement. This Collection includes Prose, Poetry, Pamphlets, and Posters in various languages including Hindi, English, Urdu, Tamil, Gujarati, Punjabi, Kannada, Bengali. These were written during the Freedom Movement and reflected the strong passions among the freedom fighters which were aimed at arousing patriotic feelings among the public. Some notable examples across different languages include 'Azadi ka Bigul' (Hindi), 'Yug Bani' (Bengali), 'Golibarachi' (Marathi), 'Azadina Geet' (Gujarati), 'Dard-e-Watan' and 'Angrezo ki Bolti Band' (Urdu), 'Bhagat Singh Keerthanamitram' (Tamil) and 'Azadi ki Garaj' (Punjabi). The Library has brought out these poems in six volumes under the titles such as 'Patriotic Poetry banned by the Raj', 'Patriotic writings banned by the Raj', 'Azadi ke Tarane', 'Desh Bhakti Ke Geet', 'Azadi de Goonj' and 'Dharti ki Pukar'. Additionally, there are Collections of banned Urdu short stories and poems namely 'Zanjeerein' and 'Ashob'. There is also a small volume titled 'Short Life Sketch of Bhagat Singh' by Jitendra Nath Sanyal brought out in May 1931, two months after his execution. The book was banned and republished in 1947.

(ix) *Travel Accounts of Foreigners*

Over the centuries, India has been a popular destination for several foreign nationals who have visited the country as travelers, journalists, merchants. Their accounts on Indian Culture, Customs, Religious beliefs, social practices, Geography etc constitute a valuable source material for the study of Indian history. Fahien and Hiuen Tsang are well-known names, but the library has in its custody many more rare and extremely valuable travel accounts from people coming from different parts of the globe. *The Travels of Peter Mundy in Europe and Asia, 1608-1667* is a multi-volume work published by the Hakluyt Society and edited by Richard Carnac Temple. This Publication presents the detailed account of the journey of Peter Mundy, a 17th-century English traveller, merchant, and writer. It chronicles his extensive journeys through Europe and Asia, with a particular focus on his experiences in India during the rule of the East India Company. This Volume includes his Observations, Sketches, and Maps of his time in various regions, providing unique historical insights into the period. The Collection is replete with vivid descriptions of places, cultures, and people and offers valuable information on 17th-century life, trade, and geography, particularly in India.

Another fascinating account can be seen in the volume titled *The Desert Route to India between 1745 and 1751*. It provides the account of Four Travellers by the Great Desert Caravan Route between Aleppo and Basra, for the period: 1745-1751. It has been edited by Douglas Carruthers. It describes the overland journey by Caravan and by river between Aleppo (in modern Syria) and Basra (in modern Iraq), followed by a sea voyage down the Persian Gulf to India. During this period, the route was very crucial, albeit dangerous, shortcut for communication between Europe and India and primarily used by the personnel of the British East India Company. These Collected Journals are considered a significant resource for understanding the East-West communication and about travel during the 18th century, reflecting an era where such journeys were essential for commerce and diplomacy.

Another absorbing volume is *India in the 15th century*, edited by Richard Henry Major and published in 1857. This compilation features the Accounts of four travellers: *Abd-er-Razzak*: An Ambassador from the Persian Court of Shah Rukh, to the *Hindu State of Vijayanagar Empire* in 1442–1443; *Niccolò de' Conti*: An Italian merchant and traveller on his journeys in the East, including India, during the early 15th century. ; Athanasius Nikitin, a Russian merchant from Tver, whose Account details his travels through India between 1466 and 1472 and Hieronimo di Santo Stefano, a Genoese merchant who travelled through India in the late 15th century. India was regarded as a fabled source of riches even before the time of Alexander the Great.

Major's book *India in the 15th century* is the sole surviving account of overland journeys, before the fifteenth century. It is possible to assess their validity and where possible, matching ancient to modern place names. The book has a lengthy introduction that discusses the various travellers who visited India down the ages from the time of Alexander to the date of this book and even mentions the Tales of Sindbad in it. *The volume* is a valuable historical resource because it offers multiple perspectives on India from the viewpoint of non-European travellers. Some other travelogues which would also be of interest to researchers are: *The Voyage of Sir James Lancaster to the East Indies (1601-04)* ; *Peter Flories, his voyage to the East Indies (1611-15)*; *A new Account of East India and Persia by John Fryer (1672-81)*.

(x) *Rare Pamphlets, Articles and Reports*

Another unique Collection is a series of Pamphlets, containing rare and informative Articles, Reports, Notes prepared by Experts and Organisations on a wide variety of subjects including Education, History, Agriculture, Medicine, Economics, Railways, Religion etc covering the period 1851-1929. Some of the important Pamphlets are *Rabies and Anti Rabies Treatment in India (1914)*; *Pukhto or Pushto Manual for use by Surveyors (1896)*; *Notes on Etymologies of Hindi rural words (1904)*; *Review of Forest Administration in several provinces of British India (1873-77)*, *Khana: a handbook of resources in India (1870)*. The last-mentioned work by Colonel G.T. Haly is particularly useful as it offers a comprehensive guide to India's natural and economic resources. The book covers a wide range of topics, including mineral deposits, agricultural products, and industrial potentials. Haly's work provides detailed information and insights into the utilization and management of India's resources, reflecting both their current state and future prospects.

Another unique Series, perhaps one of its kind anywhere are 21 volumes of *in extenso publication* of the Correspondence between the Court of Directors in London and Fort William Council in India between 1784-1800. Edited by an eminent historian, each volume contains a comprehensive introduction, copious notes, select bibliography and an exhaustive index with illustrations making it an extremely valuable source of administrative history. Among the illustrious names who have worked on these volumes are Prof B. B. Misra, Prof Bisheshwar Prasad, Prof C.H. Philips, Dr K K Datta, Prof Parthasarathy Gupta, Prof Amba Prasad, Dr Raghubir Sinh.

Old and rare books are always a prized Collection, and the library has a fascinating Collection of rare historical works which would be of interest to any serious scholar. One of the most prized books is *The Life of Dom John De Castro, the Fourth Viceroy of India*, going back to 1664. The volume captures his voyages to the East-Indies, discoveries and conquests there, the form of Government, Commerce, topography of all India and China.

Authored by Jacinto Freire de Andrada, in Portuguese, it was translated into English. Another fascinating work is *Interesting historical events relative to the provinces of Bengal and the Empire of Indostan* by J.Z. Holwell (1766). It is a comprehensive work divided into three parts. The first part provides an in-depth look at Bengal's political, cultural, and economic history, particularly focusing on the rise of the British East India Company. The second part delves into the pivotal events leading up to the Battle of Plassey in 1757, where the British defeated Nawab Siraj-ud-Daula, resulting in shifting of power in Bengal.

The third part explores the consequences of the British victory, detailing the political and social changes in Bengal and the broader Mughal Empire under British influence. Holwell was a British Surgeon and an employee of the East India Company, serving briefly as the Governor of Bengal in 1760. He is famous for his works on British colonial experiences in India. Some other works of interest are: *Great Mutiny of India 1857* by Christopher Hibbert (1878); *Studies Manual of the History of India* by Taylor Meadows (1870); *History of the Indian Mutiny* by G . W, Forrest (1893), who was the First Officer-In charge of the Imperial Record Department, (later the National Archives of India); *Histories of Non –Cooperation and Khilafat Movements* (1925), by P. C. Bamford, who was Deputy Director Intelligence Department. This book is based on Intelligence Reports about the activities of the '*sedition leaders*', their methods of operation. It throws light about the mass response they received and their influence over the people.

(xi) *Janak Dulari collection of Magazines and Journals*

One Collection which stands out for its unique nature is the *Janak Dulari Collection* comprising around 300 magazines and journals going back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It was the brainchild of late Shri Annapurnanad, a resident of Varanasi. This collection of magazines was given to the National Archives by his wife Smt. Janak Dulari. These journals are primarily in Hindi with a few being in Sanskrit and Urdu. A unique characteristic of this Collection is the wide variety of subjects and issues covered in the articles, as well as the high level of awareness and candor expressed therein. The titles of the journals themselves indicate their flavor. *Naari, Agrasar, Achoot, Janmat, Rashtrapati, Asha, Hans, Tapobhoomi, Hunter*, are titles which evoke one's interest. Apart from the strong presence of articles on the Freedom Movement one can find articles and features on issues like social ills, women emancipation, tourism, world history, culture and even food recipes. The journal, *Janmat* for example features pictures of some unsung heroes of the Freedom Movement like Manmanthnath Gupta, Sachindranath Bakshi, Manmohan Gupta and Shivendranath Sanyal. Bismil's favorite poem *Sarfarosh ki Tamanna* made famous by the film '*Shaheed*' as well as Ashfaqullah Khan's pet verse called *Maut* are also reproduced here. Adding to this are poignant articles recounting the beliefs, philosophy and patriotic deeds of the several heroes. Similarly, the *Rashtrapati* of

September 1937, published in Sitapur, carries a feature which has been debated for decades and is relevant even today. It is titled '*Vandematram aur Muslim Sanskriti*' and highlights the various problems confronting the Congress led ministries in the post-election scenario in 1937. Another journal *Agrasar*, published from Delhi in July 1938, carries an article by the well-known revolutionary Viren Chattopadhyay. Rabindranath Tagore's '*Ekla Chalo Re*' has also been reproduced along with its summary in Hindi. Another Daily *Lokmat* dated 25 February 1930, edited by Dr D. P. Mishra carries a message by Motilal Nehru in his own handwriting lauding the vision of the Paper and hoping that "*Lokmat, kabliyat aur himmat se desh ki khidmat karega..*" There is also a column by Bipin Chandra Pal on *Mahatma Gandhi aur Gambhir Rajniti* as well as a news feature on the *Khalsa College Bomb* case in which five students were arrested. It is interesting to note that several leading lights were associated with these magazines in some or other capacity. Among them were Munshi Premchand, D. P. Mishra, Benarasidas Chaturvedi, Subhadra Kumari Chauhan, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Mira Behn and Madame Cama.

(xii) *Reports of Commissions and Committees*

The library also possesses Reports of several important Committees and Commissions appointed by the Government of India from time to time. Amongst the important reports are *Indigo Commission Report of 1860*, *Komagatamaru Committee Enquiry Report of 1914*, *Report on Indian Constitutional Reforms 1924*, *Burma Crime Enquiry Report 1923*, *Report of the Prison Discipline Committee 1836-38* and *Bombay Akbari Commission report 1885* among others. This last Commission was established to investigate and report on the "Akbari" system, a historical term for the system of excise or taxation on alcoholic beverages.

Another significant Collection which provides rich information for study of history, culture, and traditions of the people are the variety of Journals in the Library such as *Calcutta Review (1944-57)*; *Asiatic Research (1788-1839)*; *Bengal Past and Present (1907 onward)*; *Indian Antiquary (1873-74 and 1943-44)*; *Epigraphica Indica (1897-1975)*. Adding to the material described above are *the Annual Register of Great Britain*, from 1877 to 1988. It deals with the history, politics, literature and events in England and the British Colonies. Quite similarly, the *Indian Annual Register (1919-47)*, deals with the social, cultural, industrial, educational and other public activities in India. The *Times of India Directory (1865-1983)*, contains information on India's population, commerce, trade and provides bibliographical details about important persons. *Thacker's India Directory (1885-1957)*, on the other hand, contains information about persons and events specially related to Calcutta.