



DEWAN BAHADUR DR. L. K. ANANTHAKRISHNA IYER

OBITUARY NOTICE.

Dewan Bahadur Dr. L. K. Ananthakrishna Iyer.
(1861-1937.)

THE news of the death of Dewan Bahadur Dr. L. K. Ananthakrishna Iyer, which sad event occurred on February 25, 1937, was received by his numerous friends and admirers with great sorrow. To the last moment, he was apparently in the enjoyment of excellent health and spirit and those that met him at the Indian Science Congress Session in Hyderabad, could hardly have imagined that his end was so near.

Dr. Ananthakrishna Iyer was a great pioneer in the younger branches of biological sciences, namely, Anthropology and Ethnology, and his indefatigable industry and remarkable activity in field work and in his study have been the admiration of all who knew him intimately. The results of his labours, besides diffusing general knowledge of the customs and manners of the different groups and communities of South Indian people have created a general interest in the science itself, which has made a rapid progress under his inspiring example and guidance. His life comprehended well-nigh forty years of ethnographical research. The brief bibliography of his more important works given at the end of the sketch represents a record of honourable and distinguished achievement. We stand too near the period during which Dr. Iyer laboured to be able to assess the real value of his accomplished work. But we have no doubt that as Anthropological studies progress in India, his contributions will be regarded as the great foundation on which the superstructure has to be built.

Dr. Ananthakrishna Iyer born of an orthodox Hindu family in Palghat, received his early education in the local schools. From his early boyhood, he had shown considerable zeal and intelligence in his studies which were noticed by his school teachers. After a distinguished career in the local English schools from which he matriculated, he proceeded to Calicut for completing his undergraduate course. At Kerala Vidyasala, he came under the notice of Mr. Barrow, the Principal of the College, with whom he was later destined to work as a colleague in the Palghat College. Dr. Ananthakrishna Iyer obtained his B.A. degree of the Madras University, in science, and during his studies in the Madras Christian College, he cultivated the friendship of Dr. William Miller, a missionary Principal, who was known alike for his piety and public zeal, and whose contributions to the spread of higher education in India could hardly be surpassed.

Dr. Ananthakrishna Iyer's official career ranged over a very wide field and although he shifted from one appointment to another he had the power and capacity to enrich his experience. He had, therefore, opportunities of coming into intimate contact with numerous people who were his colleagues or superior officers and from his early days he developed habits of close and critical observation of men and manners. This experience formed the foundation of his later interest in anthropological researches. Dr. Ananthakrishna Iyer was a man slow in forming his opinions and had a very large measure of scientific scepticism which accounts for the great rigour with which he applied the scientific methods to his studies and for the great precision and clearness of his descriptions.

After a distinguished career as science teacher at the Ernakulam College, Dr. Ananthakrishna Iyer in whom the Government of Cochin had recognised some of the lineaments of the future anthropologist appointed him to investigate the cultural and racial problems of the different communities inhabiting that small but extremely interesting State. Dr. Ananthakrishna Iyer immediately found himself in his element and addressed himself to his task with his characteristic energy and enthusiasm. Though he was not provided with all the equipments necessary for his investigation, still this deficiency was amply supplied by his insight and his perseverance, and the results that he has accomplished under such circumstances have received the great approbation from his European colleagues and friends. In 1908, his first contribution on the "Cochin Tribes and Castes" was issued by the Government and later was followed by a second volume. The publication of these two sumptuous volumes elicited the warmest encomiums from Dr. John Beddoe and M. Bougle who were impressed at once by the painstaking industry of the author and the care with which a great mass of facts had been sifted and recorded in true scientific spirit.

On the conclusion of his anthropological studies, Dr. Ananthakrishna Iyer was deputed to organise a Zoological Garden and Museum for the Cochin State and although he was entirely new to this branch of knowledge, still his capacity for acquisition of fresh knowledge and his power of utilising it were responsible for the creation of an exceedingly interesting Institute in Trichur, whose popularity and educational value in the collection and arrangement of the exhibits attracted the notice of the Government as well as of the foreign visitors to the State. By 1913, the reputation of Dr. Ananthakrishna Iyer as a first-rate anthropologist was established and his place among the leaders of science was secured. In 1916, the University of Madras appointed Dr. Ananthakrishna Iyer as Reader to deliver a series of lectures in Ethnology.

During the eight years from 1912-20, Dr. Iyer was engaged in further studies on the peoples of Cochin. The original plan was to complete the Cochin survey in three volumes, the last one being devoted to an Anthropometric enquiry. This was interrupted by an independent investigation on the Syrian Christians of Malabar, Cochin and Travancore. The monograph bearing the same name was published by the Cochin Government Press in 1924 after Dr. Iyer's retirement from the State.

In 1921, Dr. Ananthakrishna Iyer was invited by the University of Calcutta to accept the post of Lecturer in Ethnology to conduct Post-graduate work in the subject and also to organise the Anthropological and Ethnological Department. He remained the Head of the Department and the Chairman of the Board of Studies in Anthropology till his retirement in 1932. Even here his activities were never confined to one place or locality: after the lectures of the usual sessions he took the students to backward tracts to train them in field-work and practical investigations.

In 1924, the Government of Mysore appointed him Officer-in-charge of Ethnographic Survey, which he used to carry on during his long vacation. His work in Mysore comprehended a critical survey of 104 tribes and castes published in four superb volumes, most beautifully edited and illustrated. These four volumes to which prefaces and introductions were contributed by European savants such as Baron von Eickstedt, Dr. Marett and others, will always remain a monumental contribution to the descriptive science of South Indian Anthropology, and should provide the basis for future anthropologists for further investigations. In the first volume which was curiously published last, he adopted a more extended canvas and discussed in great detail the ethnology of Mysore in the South Indian setting. It might be regarded as one of the finest and most exhaustive treatises on South Indian Ethnology.

Early in 1934, Dr. Ananthakrishna Iyer received invitations to lecture at a number of Universities in Europe. He spent about five months out of India, during which he visited Naples, Rome and Florence in Italy, and delivered addresses on South Indian ethnographic and anthropologic topics which were universally admired and appreciated. Some of the topics that he dealt with like "Black Magic in India", "Primitive Culture in Southern India" were characterised by remarkable scholarship and wide researches, and in appreciation of his distinguished service to the science of Anthropology, the University of Firenze awarded to him the University Medal. In Paris, he addressed the Members and Fellows of the Anthropological Institute and School of Indology under the Presidency of Dr. Sylvain Levy, and immediately after this he was invited to Oxford to give at the Pitt-Rivers

Museum a lecture on South Indian Culture. He toured widely both in Austria and in Germany and in every place he visited he was welcomed by the Learned Societies with great enthusiasm and was earnestly solicited to address the various Institutions on the different cultural and racial aspects of South Indian Anthropology. Of course, his reputation as the distinguished author of some of the great works of Indian Anthropology had already preceded him and his numerous friends who had known him through his works were greatly rejoiced at meeting him. Dr. Ananthakrishna Iyer was elected Vice-President of the Section of General Ethnology and Sociology at the International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences held in London in 1934. His long record of contributions to Anthropology and Ethnology was recognised by the Comité d'Organization, and he was elected unanimously to the Comité D'Honneur of the Congress. His contribution on "The Agricultural Basis of Religion in India" was received at the Congress with great appreciation. After a successful continental tour, he returned to India in August 1934. Soon after his return to India, he was deputed by the Chief Commissioner of Coorg to undertake the ethnographic survey of that interesting State, and he was supported in his labours by Dr. Cipriani. He had completed his work before February 1936 and the monographs are now ready for publication.

In recognition of his great achievements, the President of France honoured him by electing him to the distinction of the Officer D'Academie. The Government of India conferred on him the title of Dewan Bahadur. The University of Breslau awarded him the Honorary Doctorate of Medicine and Surgery (the Faculty of Medicine controlling the Department of Anthropology and Ethnology in the continental Universities).

It is difficult adequately to sum up within the limits of this brief memoir Dewan Bahadur Dr. Ananthakrishna Iyer's work on Indian Ethnology. The influence of his writings on European Anthropologists seems to have been considerable. The Director of the Anthropological Institute and Ethnographical Museum of Breslau, Baron von Eickstedt, in a communication dated September 23rd, 1930, expressed the general opinion of the European Anthropologists on Dr. Iyer's works in these terms:—

"All are unanimous in that India possesses in you one of the most careful, active, and assiduous scholars of which Ethnology can boast of in any culture or country. Accordingly one finds your name mentioned with appreciation in English, German, Austrian and Italian works. The great text-book of Father W. Schmidt—who first started the connections between the Mundari and Monkhmer peoples—is full of the results of your research work and full of your instructive pictures from Southern India. • This is the

recognition of the fact that since long your works are considered to be a real storehouse of cultural and historical knowledge and are highly appreciated. We, therefore, not only honour you, but venerate you as the father of Indian Ethnology. . . . Should there be any scholar really interested in civilisation, history and cultural future of his country, who should not know and respect your name, the name of the father of Indian Ethnology? Your admirable assiduity, your useful activity, your sound judgment and extensive knowledge are rendering you an ornament to every university, which may be so lucky as to have you in the ranks of her Professors."

The vast output of his scientific investigations and reports was all during the last thirty-six years of his life, and a large part of it done after his retirement from the full term of official service in the Cochin State, a year or two before he attained his sixtieth year. So great a capacity and zeal for a type of work which necessitated frequent travel mostly in out-of-the-way places and a dislocation of his ordinary habits of life is not easily matched.

Dr. Ananthakrishna Iyer's efforts to popularise the subject of Anthropology in the Indian Universities is an important contribution to the progress of scientific education in this country.

When the Indian Academy of Sciences and the National Institute of Sciences of India were founded, Dr. Ananthakrishna Iyer was elected a Fellow of both these Institutions and he acted as President of the Anthropological Section of the Indian Science Congress on five distinct occasions. Dr. Ananthakrishna Iyer will always be remembered by his numerous friends for his great geniality, stern rectitude of character, simple habits of life, unostentatious and unassuming manners. His scholarship was as wide as his powers of exposition were remarkable. He was happy in his domestic life, and his sons have already earned a great reputation in the respective fields of their activity. Dr. Ananthakrishna Iyer had the most lovable gift of making friends and retaining them. He never offended anyone nor made a single enemy in his long and honourable life.

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