

*Memoirs of a Bengal Civilian has 12 ratings and 3 reviews. Marcus said: Fabulous! A fascinating account of how an ordinary, average Englishman lived in.*

Paperback John Beames was a civil servant in the British Raj. As a middle to upper ranking officer of the Crown he was responsible for administration and the exercise of British government in various parts of the jewel of the Empire. Bengal Civilian is his story, it tracks from an introduction to his own family background in the middle classes of Britain through to his senior administrative roles across India. Along the way, Bengal Civilian covers a fascinating range of day to day activities that no doubt are extremely useful for a historian and add a little colour to the facts of British India. It is only a little colour though as this is a stern and literal account from what was clearly a very determined and difficult man. The preface to the book asks that readers wade through the tough opening chapters that detail the Beames family history before getting onto the more entertaining elements of the narrative. It is true that the Beames background is not given the same affection as a modern tv series treats genealogy but it is not quite as true to say that things get much easier going. I try to leave out the I in my reviews but this book took me months to get through and at times it was a chore, delving through descriptions of magistrate functions and the like but there are two real positives - the insight into the relationship between the administrator and the people, and the gems that pop up occasionally about Indian sub-continent culture. Beames was not a man of romance. The idealistic people who sought spiritual enlightenment in the East are a world away from the practical and no-nonsense Bengal Civilian. His relationship with the Indian people is in this light and he provides frank and honest accounts of those he met, showing disdain quite frequently for his own out of touch superiors and also the exploitative Maharaja caste. At the time of the Raj, Indian power was severely waning. The great Empires were long of the past and the huge sub-continent was united only in name by the British. Beames provides a great insight into the differences between the various peoples, tribes, and cultures as he travels to new postings. Some posts Beames holds in mighty affection but others especially those with tropical conditions he has a significant aversion to. The recent history to Beames of the Sepoy mutiny colours a lot of the relationships but Beames is astute enough to recognise the differences between the types of peoples he meets and the reader should be able to pick out details still recognisable now. Some of the gems are sparkling - the religious festival worshipping a spoilt Brahmin and the exploitation that many were subjected to by landholders is a first hand account that shows real life and the harsh conditions most had to endure. The relationship between the British and the mountainous kingdoms of Bhutan and Nepal they left independent are evident between the lines but what Beames brings is the practicality of supporting a British army regiment marching through his district in a time of food shortages. Bengal Civilian is the detail behind the Raj. It is the everyday story of the British, the various Indians, and the closing generations of an Empire that controlled most of the world. It is not an overtly fun account but this is some of the appeal in that it is gritty and real. As a snapshot in time it is a useful addition to the historical account though I suspect most who have held administrative or representative roles may also have had an equal or more entertaining life story to retell.

**Chapter 2 : Memoirs of a Bengal Civilian: The Lively Narrative o () by John Beames**

*LibraryThing Review User Review - DramMan - LibraryThing. A very readable memoir of a civilian member of the Indian Civil Service, in the years immediately following the Mutiny.*

He was the eldest son of Rev. This affinity with languages served him well in India and permitted him to excel in his early examinations in Calcutta. From December , he was employed in the Bengal Presidency, becoming a permanent Collector in and a Commissioner in He thrice officiated as a Member of the Board of Revenue. He was a District Officer and Collector of several districts in Bengal, and the Commissioner of Chittagong until he retired in In his autobiography, which was not published until , he describes himself as "an obscure person" an average, ordinary, middle-class Englishman". These dealt with the question of retaining Arabic element in the official form of Hindustani. To the Journal of the Bengal Asiatic Society, Beames contributed essays on Chand Bardoï and other old Hindi authors and studies on the antiquities and history of Odisha In , he published a pioneering volume Bengali Grammar, and after his retirement, he wrote for the Imperial and Asiatic Quarterly Review. His reputation rightly rests on his Comparative Grammar of the Aryan Languages of India, published in separate volumes in , and He proceeded to serve as the Collector of Balasore and Cuttack, became an important interlocutor of local linguistic and cultural aspirations. And yet, Beames remains foremost in his interventions for the survival of the Odia language. He made outstanding contributions for regional formations in Eastern India. Role in the survival of the Odia language[ edit ] The Odia Bengali language conflict had basically an economic origin[ citation needed ]. Language hegemony was deployed by sections of the Bengali colonial administration for the exercise of power by cornering government jobs. One of the earlier manifestations by resistance to the colonial administration in Odisha was the assertion of linguistic and cultural identity. In fact, Mitra argued that Odisha was doomed to remain backward so long as it had a separate language. Bhattacharya claimed that Odia was not a separate and original form of language and was a mere corruption of Bengali. John Beames represents perhaps the best face of British colonialism in Odisha. Educated, enlightened and well-meaning, he adapted to the land and its culture. While his contributions in the field of administration would be forgotten, his linguistic and cultural legacy remains historic. Beames empathised with the local culture and aspirations and made decisive interventions in the comparative study of languages. His support of the cause of Odia was timely. It contributed vitally to community formation in Odisha during the 19th century. Beames, who stayed for a considerable time in Odisha and worked for the survival of Odia language, said on the topic: The Bengalis assert that Oriya is merely a dialect of Bengali, and has no claim to be considered an independent language, and they mix up this assertion with a second to the effect that if it is not, it ought to be, mainly because they wish it was, and secondarily because the population of Orissa is so small as compared with that of Bengal that they think it useless to keep up a separate language and written character for so small a province. If Oriya is to be suppressed because it is only spoken by a few millions of people, it might also be urged that Dutch, or Danish, or Portuguese, should be obliterated also. Basque should also be stamped out, and the same argument would apply to Romaic or Modern Greek, and would justify the Russians in trying to eradicate Polish, or the Austrians in annihilating Czech. Moreover, it is far beyond the power of the handful of English and Bengalis to stamp out the mother-tongue of all these millions, and it may be added that any forcible measures of repression would be entirely foreign and repugnant to the spirit of our policy. The result of teaching Bengali in our schools, to the exclusion of the local vernacular, would only be that the small proportion of Oriya boys who attend those schools would know the former in addition to the latter, that they would learn to despise their mother-tongue, and that a gap would be created between the mass of the peasantry and the small body of educated persons. Odisha had just recovered from a severe famine in when he arrived in Balasore in He learnt Odia and wrote on its language, literature, temple iconography, fortresses and folklore. He identified with local sentiments for the preservation and promotion of the Odia language. He wrote on the poetry of DinaKhrushna Das and pioneered comparative folk culture studies with the publication of his folklore of Odisha. Controversy[ edit ] John Beames was not known for his progressive views. A staunch representative

of reactionary Anglo-Indian opinion, he sincerely believed that officers of a certain rank, not higher than District Magistrate and Collector, and belonging to the native population, should not be given salaries on par with salaries given to British officials in the ICS. This he clearly stated in a deposition to the Aitchison Committee which looked into the possibility of equalising the salaries of all officials, British and Indian, in the ICS at the time of the Ilbert Bill controversy in Beames was a die-hard conservative who also allowed his personal preferences to colour his judgements and interactions with his Indian juniors in the ICS. For example, while deposing before the Aitchison Committee, he insisted that one of his junior colleague in ICS, Brajendranath De , esq.

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### Chapter 7 : John Beames - Wikipedia

*Memoirs of a Bengal Civilian ISBN: Format: pp demi pb Place: India. Author Biography. John Beames was born on 21 June , the day Queen Victoria came to the throne, in the Royal Naval Hospital, Greenwich.*

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