



## **Postal communication development during British Period 1774-1874**

Vandana Kumari, Ph.D, History,L.N.M.U. Darbhanga

### **Abstract**

Communication is as old as creation. Everything communicated, Everyone communicated. Howls, smoke,symbols,drawings,sounds,drums,colours,objects,animals,birds were all medium to communicate message. Of all these the current generation can only easily imagine the pigeons carrying messages. The pen on paper travel along with several generations that emerges tumbling one after another. . The media that helped carry them changed with the evolution of technology, runners, horses, camels, cycles, vans, motorbikes, trains, boats, planes. Yet, the romance contained in them still exists and finds expression in every Indian even today. In the early days, there were no post offices, but there was a sort of postal system and people used to communicate with each other either by sending messages by word of mouth or in writing on stone, skin, wood, leaf, cloth etc. through a courier. Direct communication was long ago realized with the help of sign language and speech, but when people began to spread out, a kind of indirect communication was needed.Thus came into being the concept of ‘messenger’. Later, this idea evolved into a system of postal service connecting the whole world in a communication network.In India the early history of the postal system up to 1854 can be divided into three parts – First-Ancient (Indus valley civilization to Gupta period), Second-Medieval (Under the Muslim rule and the Mughals)and Third –(Under the East India Company). During the medieval period, various kinds of communication were developed to protect the state and develop commerce and private exchange of information. The East India Company opened its first post office in 1727 in the white residential area in Calcutta and shifted it to the court house building in the old court house street in 1762 but this post office was later merged with Calcutta GPO, and it is oldest Post office in India and is still in use. Through this paper I want to explore the history of communication process from 1773-1874 which later took the form postal communication.

Keywords: Messenger, GPO, Gupta Period, Postal Communication

---



## **Introduction:**

The Postal System of India, like that of other countries, has its origin in the necessity of maintaining communication throughout the various parts of a great Empire in order that the Emperor might be kept continuously informed of what was taking place and might be able to keep in constant touch with the officers in charge of Provinces at a distance from the Capital. When Ibn Batuta was traveling in India in the middle of the fourteenth century he found an organized system of couriers established throughout the country governed at that time by the great Mohamed Bin Tughlak. The System seems to have been very similar to that which existed in the Roman Empire, and is thus described:

*“There are in Hindustan two kinds of couriers, horse and foot; these they generally term ‘El Wolak.’ The horse-couriers, which are generally part of the Sultan’s cavalry, are stationed at a distance of every four miles. As to the foot-couriers there will be far at the distance of every mile occupying stations which they call ‘El Davah’ and making on the whole three miles.”*

he British do not appear to have found any established system of communication when they began to extend their dominion in India, and in the beginning of the eighteenth century it was a matter of no small difficulty to send a letter more than a distance of one hundred miles. A regular postal system was first introduced by Lord Clive in 1766, and the *zamindars* or landholders along the various routes were held responsible for the supply of runners to carry the mails. For this service a deduction was made in their rents in proportion to the number of runners supplied. The order recorded in the Minutes of Consultations of the 24<sup>th</sup> March is as follows:-

### **Clive Post**

It was Robert Clive, who started a postal system on a bigger scale in India to cater to the company’s need. He made the *zamindars* or and landlords supply dark runners for various routes. In return, a deduction in rent was allowed to them which were proportionate to the no. of messengers supplied. This system paved the way for the *Zamindari Dawk* in Bengal Presidency. Clive came up with a detailed scheme for documentation transmission and accountability for packets widely known as Clive’s Post it stipulates on the duties of the post master and his subordinates.



## WARREN HASTINGS steps in –

Under the administrative of **Warren Hastings** the Post Office in India was placed on a better footing and steps were taken to make the posts which were established for official purpose more generally available for private communications. In January, 1774, the details of a regular system were laid down, which was brought into force on the 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1774. A Postmaster-General was appointed and postage was charged for the first time on private letters. The lowest rate of letter postage was two *annas* per hundred miles, and copper tickets of the value of two *annas*, to be used solely for postal purposes, were specially struck for public convenience. His plan became effective on 31<sup>st</sup> March 1774.

## The Bishopmark -

The Bishopmark was named after Henry Bishop, the then PMG in England who introduced this tiny stamp impression. It showed the date and month impressed on all postal articles. For the first time, this Bishopmark was introduced on 17<sup>th</sup> January, 1774 at Calcutta post office. It was supplied to Bombay and Madras post offices subsequently. The Bishopmarks, the rarest hand struck stamps are one of the most treasured items of Indian philatelic collections. The earliest on record in India is one on a private letter sent in 1775 from Calcutta to Dacca, stamped ‘Calcutta’ and postpaid 3 annas’ in addition to the Bishopmark ‘2 Feb’.

**In 1780** For the first time Hickey’s Bengal Gazette, the weekly newspaper, circulated free of postage charges.

**In 1781** Lord Warren Hastings set up a system of ‘**Banghy Post**’ for consigning heavy parcels and packets, fixing a weight limit for the bearer at 18 lb – 12 oz in 1781. Parcel post was called *Banghydawk* for a long time, *Banghy* is derived from the Hindi word **Bahangi** (a bamboo stick) with strings attached at either ends known as *cowdy* or *kavadi* in southern India,



**In November, 1784**, revised regulations for the Post Office were laid down which took effect in the province of Bengal from December, of that year. In 1785 Madras followed suit upon proposals made by Mr. J.P. Burlton, a junior civilian in Government service. He suggested the adoption of a regular postal system on the lines of Bengal, under which all letters except those on the public service should pay postage. In 1786 Mr. Archibald Campbell was made Postmaster-General, Madras, and arrangements were made for fortnightly services to Calcutta and Bombay.

A regular postal system based on the lines of Bengal system was introduced in Madras in 1785 where in private Letters had to bear postage. On 1<sup>st</sup> June 1786, the GPO at Madras came into existence and, within a short period, mail arrangements were made fortnightly services from Madras to Calcutta and from Madras to Bombay.

**In 1784** Banghy Post (Parcel Post) introduced in Calcutta GPO in 2<sup>nd</sup> December.

**In 1786** 1<sup>st</sup> June, Madras GPO opened the Grand Post office developed at the Madras presidency. Madras GPO established under Sir Archibald Chambell and opened to public in June. The fortnightly mail service introduced from Madras to Calcutta and Bombay.

Regular weekly mail service introduced from Bengal to Bombay. Introduction of Franking was done by the Governor General of India on 8<sup>th</sup> September.

**In 1790** for the first time the mail service dispatched twice a week started.

**In 1793** Zamindari Dak maintained the runner lines from this year.

**In 1794** Bombay GPO opened

**In 1796** A twice weekly mail from Bombay and weekly mail from Bombay and East India Company's factory at Surat was established on 8<sup>th</sup>

July.



## **LORD WELLESELY-**

In 1798 Lord Wellesley arrived in India inspired by Imperial projects which were destined to change the map of the country. In 1799 Tippoo, Sultan of Mysore, was defeated and slain at Seringapatam, and the Carnatic or south-eastern portion of India ruled by the Nawab of Arcot, as well as the principality of Tanjore, were placed under British rule. These territories constitute the greater part of the present Madras Presidency. In 1801 the whole of the track between the Ganges and Jumna, known as the Doab, with Rohilkhand, were obtained by purchase for the NawabVizir of Oudh. In 1803, after the second Maratha War, Orissa was forfeited to the British and Berar to the Nizam of Hyderabad. In 1815 the Himalayan States were taken from the Nepalese, in 1817 the *Pindaris*(which was latter declared as criminal tribe and de-notified) were crushed in Central India and in 1818, after the third Maratha War, the Bombay Presidency was formed. Assam was annexed in 1826, and Bharatpur taken in 1827.

**In 1798** The postal notice published regarding the dispatch of valuables under indemnification in case of loss or accident.

**In 1830** Bullock cart Mail service between Pune and Panwell for Bhanghy post (Parcel) introduced.

**In 1833** Postal cess Levied on *zamindars* under the Regulation IX for expenditure on district post

In 1834 Railway Mail Service with a network of 701 post offices established across India.

In 1851 – Introduction of the camel *Dak* in Sind province by colonel Hult , First electric telegraph between Calcutta and diamond harbors started.

In 1852 Sir Batle Frere the British East India Company's administrator of the province of Sind introduced the SindaDawk stamp.

In 1853 – The Railway Train inaugurated in Bombay on 16<sup>th</sup> April, On 9<sup>th</sup> Sept. Lord Dalhousie imposed on the Railway companies (a then private organization) to carry both letter and parcel mails.



In 1854 present system on registration of letters and parcels introduced by the Act of 1854. There is introduction of the regular sea mail service for running a Fort nightly communication service between Britain, India and China. Another important event is the introduction of post office Act XVII. The stamp was introduced for the whole India.

In 1855 – Four presidency circles established. A new design for stamps, with queen Victoria in an oval vignette inside a rectangular frame with words East India Postage inscribed was introduced. The postal administration of Sind province amalgamated with the Imperial posts on 1<sup>st</sup> May. In Nov, The Calcutta Mint stopped printing postage stamps and Clive Thomas De La Rue & company took over (1855-1926).

There was a growing need for the opening of more post offices in India. The East India Company has its own post offices numbering 700 during 1854-55, and they were located in strategically important places like military routes. The post offices of the period aimed at catering to the military, industrial and commercial needs of the East India Company. The following table will show the no. of post offices and receiving houses that existed in India during 1855-56.

**Table -1**

**Post offices and receiving houses in India in 1855-56**

| S.N. | Name of the presidency     | Post office | Receiving houses |
|------|----------------------------|-------------|------------------|
| 1.   | Bengal                     | 157         | 13               |
| 2.   | Bombay                     | 107         | 12               |
| 3.   | Madras                     | 130         | 20               |
| 4.   | North-west Provinces (NWP) | 251         | 10               |

**In 1856** the Postal circles in India divided into 40 divisions, each under one inspecting Postmaster on 1<sup>st</sup> May. Three Field Post offices opened- The first at Bushehr (Iran) in



December, the second at Mohammerah (Iran) in March and the third at Kharagpur in June. Field Post Offices were later recognized as Army Postal Service (APS). All Receiving Offices made Post Offices on 12<sup>th</sup> August. India's first Postal stationery, the circular 1½ and 1 *anna* envelope, designed and embossed by M/S De La Rue & Co., London, on thin grayish blue woven paper, issued on 29<sup>th</sup> November.

**In 1857** the Sepoy Mutiny: The post office witnessed arson and loot. India went through turbulent times. Inland Letter Card, designed and embossed by Thomas De La Rue & Co. Ltd. Issued on 15<sup>th</sup> September.

**In 1858** queen Victoria's proclamation.

**In 1859** the first Mail Steamer Service introduced in India between Calcutta and Port Blair on the 28<sup>th</sup> May.

**In 1860- Postal Manual Published** special Telegraph Stamps introduced to send messages, prepaid by Post, to the nearest Telegraph office in places where there were none.

**In 1861** postal Account separated from the Civil Audit and handed over to the Compiler of Post Office Accounts.

**In 1862** British Burma Postal Circle created on the 1<sup>st</sup> May. On 11<sup>th</sup> January: first stamps of Argentine Republic.

**In 1863 – Railway sorting starts** lower rates set for steamer mail to Europe at 6 *annas* 8p for a ½ ounce letter. The same was set for inland mail as well. Sorting section established between Allahabad and Kanpur.

**In 1864** Rail Mail Service introduced. Departmental Post Offices opened for management of District Post of Bombay Circle.

Georges Herpin gave the name 'Philately' to the hobby of stamp collecting. Earlier, the hobby was called '**Timbromania**' or '**Timbrology**'.

**In 1865** Indian stamps printed on paper watermarked with an elephant's head. Branch Postmasters and delivery peons introduced in India for rural postal delivery work.

**In 1866** the Post Office Act XIV introduced reforms to correct deficiencies and abuse. Introduction of Branch Post Office by Sir H.P.A.B. Riddell, eventually replaced the



*Zamindari* Post and mail lines. Post offices opened Non-Refundable Contribution (N.R.C) to the Government for extending postal benefits to villagers. Jammu and Kashmir issued their own stamps. Post Bag system for collection of correspondence from the Post Offices by the parties on payment. Central Provinces Postal Circle created. Fees levied on letters delivered by the Thannah Post Offices under the *Zamindari Dak*, which authorized the Postmen to get 'bakshish' from the receiver.

**In 1867 – First field Post Office organized** the Field Post Office organized to accompany the Expeditionary Force to Abyssinia in September. the post of Sub-Inspector (now Mail Overseer) created. Mobile Post Offices introduced. A weekly foreign mail service started between Bombay and Britain.

**In 1868 – Sea PO between Bombay and Port said bunched post office Act XIV introduced** Introduction of Sea Sorting between Bombay and Suez. All paid letters and newspapers being sorted by an establishment on board the steamer for immediate dispatch. Calcutta GPO constructed.

**In 1869** urgent European mail carried overland via Egypt at the Isthmus of Suez. Registration of letters containing coins or currency made compulsory w.e.f. 1<sup>st</sup> April. The complaints against the Post offices allowed free transmission of post for the public. Punjab and Sind Postal Circle bifurcated on 1<sup>st</sup> April. Tonga Dak introduced between Khangaon and Nawdoor in April. Hyderabad (Deccan) issued their own stamps.

**In 1870** bicycle Runners introduced in India attained an average speed of 7 mbh. On 11<sup>th</sup> November, Frontier Railway Traveling Post Office established at Allahabad under the control of Mr. John Dillon. District Savings Banks established in districts.

**In 1871** field Postal Officers employed in India during Lushai Hill Campaign (1871-77). A concession granted to proprietors of registered newspapers, magazines, journals, etc. from 1<sup>st</sup> October. Almost every town/village possessing minimum population of 5000 provided with a Post Office or a Receiving House.

**In 1872** Dead Letter Office, now Retuned Letter Office (RLO) opened at Nagpur.

**In 1873 – Embossed envelopes are put on sale** Overland Parcel Post between India and the UK introduced in March. Security Fund for the Post Office employees was established in





April. Dead Letter Office opened at Lucknow. Assam Postal Circle created on 1<sup>st</sup> April. Embossed envelopes with half and one anna denomination issued for sale on 1<sup>st</sup> July. The Post Office issued stamps for cancellation/obliteration on postal articles. First India women employed as Post woman at Sahiwal in Shahpur.

**In 1874** the name of the General Postal Union changed the Universal Post Union. World Post Day celebrated each year on 9<sup>th</sup> October, the anniversary of its establishment.

### **Conclusion:**

There were also indigenous agencies which catered to the postal needs and requirements of the people even during the company's regime. Under the provisions of the post office act of 1837, the conveyance of letters became the exclusive right of the East India Company within its territory.

Since the general post office was not in a position to cater to the needs of the people settled in the company jurisdiction, the district post office was introduced the imperial post was run by the English East India company in important towns where it had the exclusive right of conveying letters. The district post, on the other assumed responsibility for communication between police and revenue stations in the remotest part of the district, and was maintained purely for conveying official correspondence.



### **Reference:**

1. Dr K. Ramchandran N, Indian postal History, page 61 'Expansion of postal Network'.
2. DeogawankaSangeeta file://H:\ips\History of postal communication.htm
3. Melville Manmohan, file://H:\ips\Indian postal services, htm.
4. ^ India Post- Actual staff strength official Indian Post website
5. ([http://www.Indiapost strength. htm.gov.in/ actual](http://www.Indiapoststrength.htm.gov.in/actual))
6. MohiniLalMajumdar, Early History and Growth of postal system in India, page-93, 'Postal development in India'.
7. Royal Engineers Museum British Army Postal Services History
8. [www.http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postage\\_stamps\\_and\\_postal\\_history\\_of\\_the\\_Indian\\_states](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postage_stamps_and_postal_history_of_the_Indian_states)'
9. [www.indiapost.gov.in](http://www.indiapost.gov.in) official website of the Department of Posts, India, DakBhawan, New Delhi-110 001