
* THE BAZAR CARDS OF INDIA, 1905 - 1912 *

by D. L. SEN.

One of the fascinating groups of Indian Postal Stationery is the BAZAR CARDS, which had a meteoric rise for a brief span of time, making a deep impact on the Indian scene with political overtones, and being trend setters for future generations of Post Cards issued by the P.O.

(By the term BAZAR CARD, I refer to those indigenously manufactured cards by Native printing presses, prepared under firm orders from various Bazar Merchants and used for their publicity, or prepared for general sale to the local public.) As these cards were intended for use through the post, they are, in a sense, an adjunct to Postal Stationery. They were legally permitted through the post after affixing a $\frac{1}{2}$ a. postage stamp - the then inland rate for post cards.

No doubt prior to 1905 privately printed cards were in use through the post all over India, but these are easily distinguishable from the later Bazar Cards by their size and quality. In fact, private cards preceded the P.O. cards. This is evidenced from the press report appearing in the *Times of India* of May 10th 1879 -

"It is a pity that Colonel Frederick Brine of the Engineers has left India. He forced the Government to legalise post-cards, by printing his own cards with a square marked on the address side, for a half anna stamp. He invariably used them himself, and when the Postal authorities told him to stop, he maintained that he should send his letters how he chose, and got all his friends to use them too. The government were fairly beaten. For some time past post-cards have been legally allowed; but they have not come into use, for the simple reason that the supply has not yet been received from England. This might be a valid reason if there were no printing establishments in India. But Colonel Brine proved very much to his own satisfaction that a really pretty postcard could be turned out even at Agra. If he were here he would soon try to set the matter right."

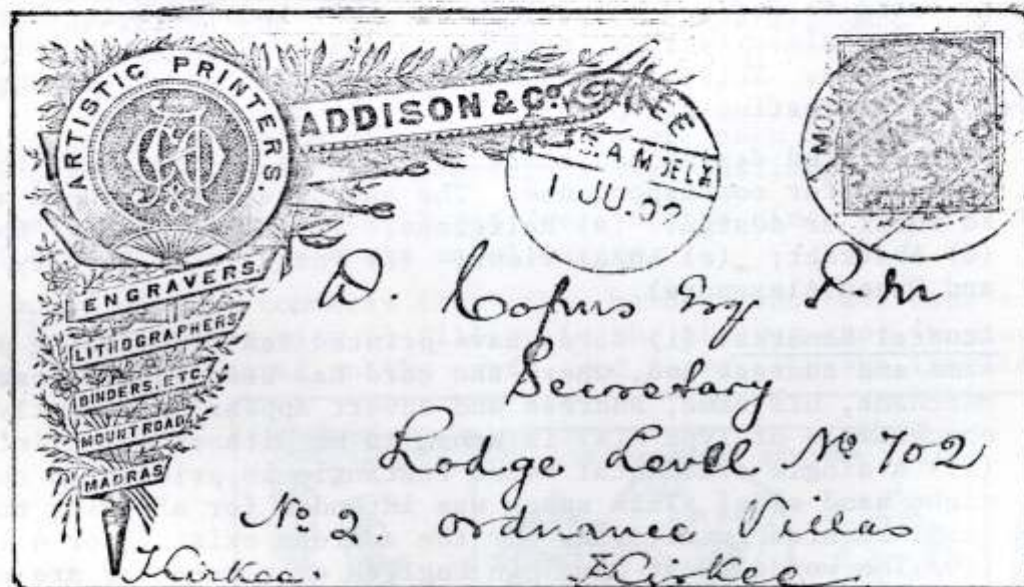
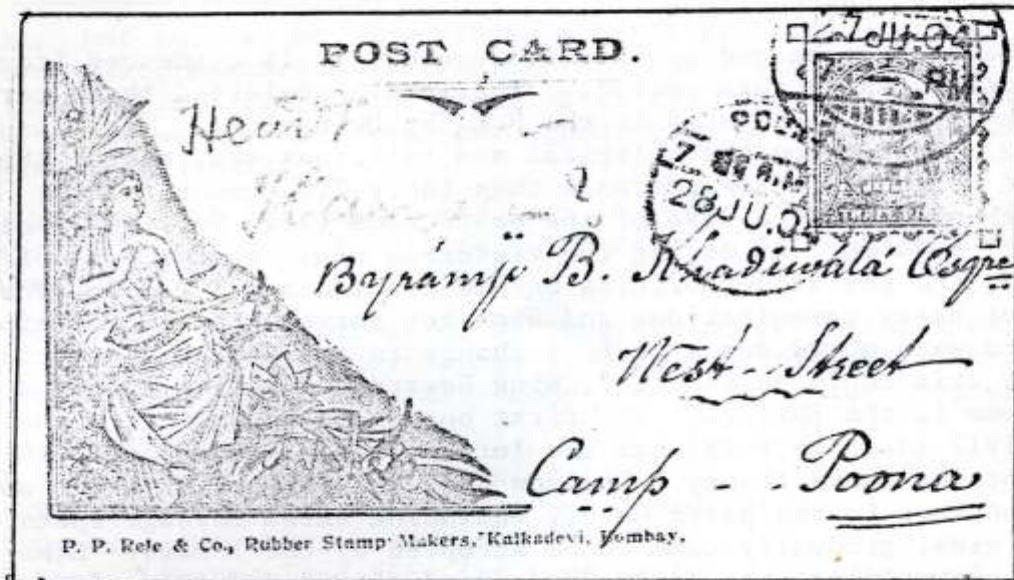
To Col. Frederick Brine may go the singular honour of pioneering such cards in India. Though I have not seen any used examples of that era, the press report does mention that $\frac{1}{2}$ a. stamps had to be affixed to these cards. This rate was subsequently reduced to $\frac{1}{4}$ a. after the introduction of P.O. cards from July 1st. 1879.

The size of pre-1905 private cards in use was generally 121 x 74 mm., in conformity with the size of P.O. cards then in vogue. Two examples of these cards are illustrated overleaf. One side was for the message and the other for the address. On the address side usually some design was printed, along with the name and address of a firm (who ordered the cards) and the name of the printers. The quality of paper and printing was generally of a superior standard than the Bazar Cards which followed.

(The post card was a cheap medium of communication as well as for advertisement ($\frac{1}{4}$ a. as against $\frac{1}{2}$ a. for envelopes). The rather small size of these cards created constraint on the user. So the wily Bazar Merchants, with their inherent ingenuity to improvise, evolved a larger size of card 138 x 89 mm. (average), assuming these would go through the post at the usual rate of $\frac{1}{4}$ a. And so they did.) Some went a step further by incorporating additional space for the message on the address side - a trend setter for the modern post cards. Others moonlighted on the post card theme by

simply cutting out plain sheets of thin card of similar size, without any printed text or design.

It is not clear how this particular size of 138 x 89 mm. evolved and why not a larger jumbo size. Possibly this was adopted from the British U.P.U post cards of equivalent size which were in use since 1880 exclusively for foreign correspondence. Though India also had U.P.U. cards since 1884 (Jain No.P-4) the size was smaller - 122 x 87 mm. The other contributing factor may be the Picture Post Cards (view cards) of these times, which were quite popular and were of similar size.



The salient feature of Bazar Cards is the inconsistency in paper and printing, generally of poor quality. No quality control was in evidence, but there have been exceptions to this rule, and some pretty cards have turned up.

Analysing the background of their popularity during 1905 - 1912, one has to refer back to history and the socio-economic conditions then prevalent. The National awakening was on the upsurge. The Indian National Congress - a political body which was formed in 1885 - had gained momentum from 1905 onwards. Be Indian - Buy Indian (Swadeshi) became the popular credo with the native gentry, though Mahatma Gandhi had not yet emerged on the Indian political scene, he being then in South Africa.

The Bazar Merchants, who seldom had any political loyalty then and even now - their allegiance being only to Lakshmi (Goddess of wealth) - cashed in on the prevailing National sentiments. Precisely which particular merchant started the craze is lost in the confused history of those times. However, it came to pass that these Bazar Cards made their debut without much fanfare, emblazoned with the Merchant's advertisement and the Printer's name. Some of the cards had various printed designs, the popular group being various Gods and Goddesses from Hindu mythology, which no doubt gave an aura of religious sanctity, so popular among the locals. The native printers even started manufacturing these (without any advertisement) for direct sale to the public..

These cards became an instant success, as is evidenced from the wide postal usage during this period. The locals preferred these cards to those issued by the P.O. (printed in the U.K. by De La Rue). The reason is easy to guess. Apart from the political and religious sentiments, the Bazar Cards had more space for correspondence than their P.O. counterparts. Even during the reign of KEVII the size of the post cards (Jain No.P-16) remained the same (121 x 74 mm.) as during the Victorian era. As the sale of post cards dwindled, the postal authorities became alarmed and I suspect that as a result of hasty consultations and a market survey, the shortcomings of the post card were noted and a radical change in the format contemplated. By the time this could be effected, King Edward had passed away and King George V had come to the throne.. The first post card appearing in the new regime around 1912 (Jain No.P-19) had the format of the Bazar card. This does tend to support my above theory. The new postcard, with equivalent space for correspondence to the Bazar Cards, including extra message space on the address side, gradually came to be accepted by the locals. Like the proverbial old soldier, the Bazar Cards gradually faded away after 1912. World War I (1914 - 1918) was also a contributory factor.

There being no defined parameters for the study of Bazar Cards, I have attempted to classify them in three main groups or types, with their attendant sub-types. This, I hope, would encompass the whole range of this primitive but interesting group.

TYPE 1: With printed design and space for address on one side; the reverse intended for correspondence. The sub-types are grouped according to motif or design: (a) Religious; (b) Flowers; (c) Ships; (d) Abstract; (e) Local views; (f) Portrait of Royalty (KEVII and Queen Alexandra).

General Remarks: (i) Cards have printed text comprising printer's name and address and, where the card has been commissioned by a Merchant, his name, address and advert appear prominently. Only one example of Type 1(a) is known to me without any printed text. (ii) A single ornamental boxed rectangle is printed on the upper right hand side. This space was intended for affixing the stamp. (iii) Printed guide lines for the address exist (3 or 4 lines). (iv) The words "Post Card" in English or vernacular are normally seen, though in some cases these do not appear. (v) The printed text is known in the following languages - English, Hindi, Gujrati, or bi-lingual. (vi) The majority of cards are known to be printed in Bombay. Other places noted are Poona, Ahmedabad, Bangalore and Madras. (vii) The quality of card varies considerably in thickness, texture and shade. (viii) The printing generally is rather poor, tending to smudge.

TYPE 2: Blank cards with printed text. The following sub-types are suggested: (a) One face entirely reserved for address; (b) Space for extra correspondence provided on address side.

General Remarks: As for Type 1 (i) to (viii) with the following

addition - (ix) Double ornamental boxed rectangle is known on some cards for affixing two stamps. The reason for this is not clear, since 1/2a. was the lowest denomination in the postage stamp series. It does appear that a thoughtful printer provided this additional space should the card be sent by Registered post, when an additional stamp for registration would be required.

TYPE 3: Blank cards without any printed text or design, or space for stamp. No sub-types suggested.

General Remarks: Only (vii) under Type 1 would apply.

Though not seen by me, I would expect the printing of these cards from other places also, besides those indicated. Also, similarly printed text in other Indian languages should exist other than those enumerated. After all, these cards were widely used throughout the Indian sub-continent during those brief years.

The printing of the design and text in Types 1 and 2 was carried out by letterpress in single colour tone. The colours met with are black, red, brown, green and blue.

By and large, the interesting designs are those listed under Type 1(a). A fascinating array of Hindu mythology is depicted, replete with various Gods and Goddesses. Those generally come across in these cards are:

- (1) Lakshmi (Goddess of wealth);
- (2) Saraswati (Goddess of learning);
- (3) Shiva and Parvati (Hindu God and Goddess);
- (4) Ganesha (Elephant head God);
- (5) Rama, Lakshman and Sita (of Ramayana);
- (6) Hanuman (Monkey God);
- (7) Dattatriya or Trimurti (three-headed divine trinity);
- (8) Kartika on eagle (son of Shiva and Parvati);
- (9) Kali (Goddess of destruction of evil);
- (10) Krishna (Author of Bhagvad Gita).

Strangely, no Muslim religious motifs are seen on these cards, despite the fact that some of the native printers were Muslims.

Unused examples of Types 1 and 2 are scarce since very few survived, and used examples of Type 3 are equally rare.

I would welcome comments from other members who have done some study on Bazar Cards, with a view to filling in the missing gaps in places of printing, languages noted on the cards, and dates of usage (earliest and latest).

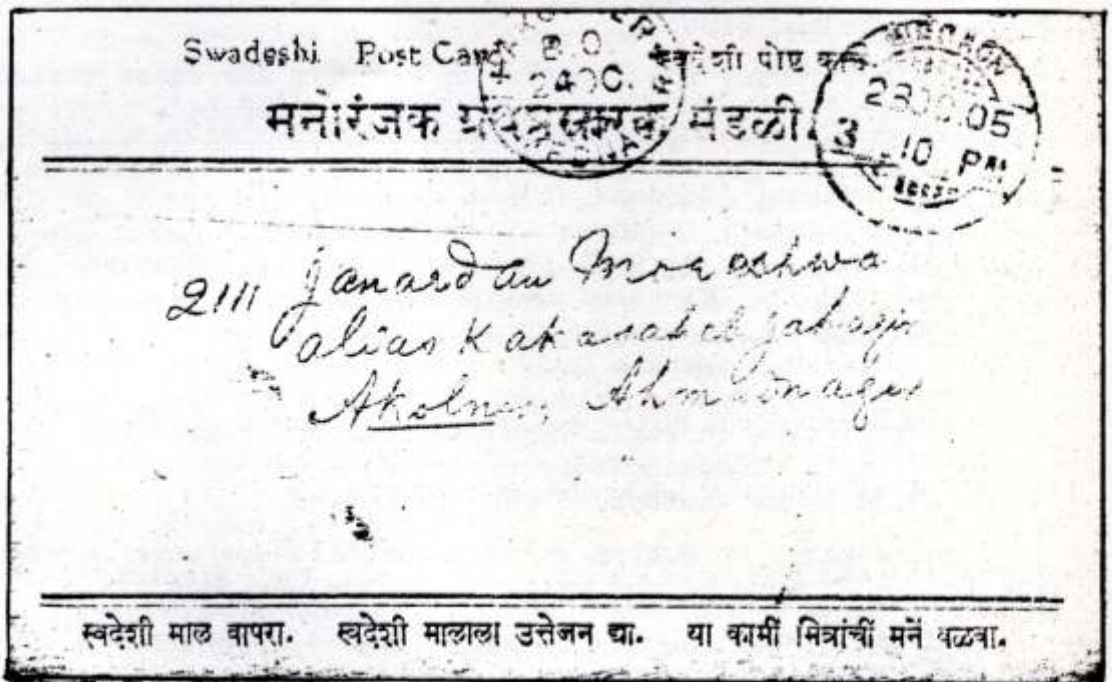
Type 1(a)
Hanuman and
Garuda motif



Type 1(a)
Hindi text
Goddess
Lakshmi
Motif



Type 2(a)
Bi-lingual
text



Type 2(b)
Bi-lingual
text

