

India Registration—History

Dr. Akshay Y. Kantharia

CHAPTER I

GENERAL REGISTRATION

Today, the postal service has become an integrated part of communication. Due to its day to day need, most of us know the "Registration" system of letters available at all Post Offices.

But this registration service has passed from many phases to become more and more effective and easier as is today. It would be interesting to know that in India, before 1850, no extra fee was charged for registering the letter as well as no compensation was given. In those days it was a tradition to register all the letters to avoid loss or mis-delivery and to keep track of every letter.

The regulations published by Calcutta General Post Office 21st April 1828, and mentioned by Mr. D. Hammond Giles, in his 'Companion to the Handstruck Postage Stamps of India' gives us very interesting information about registration system in India in the early days.

"It being a standing Rule of the General Post Office that the names of the senders of letters as well as those of persons to whom they are directed are to be regularly registered with the view of assisting to trace letters which may have failed in reaching their destinations. The officiating Post Master General requests that all persons, in sending their letters to the post, will have the goodness to put their name on the paper or book which accompanies them; where books are used, the name being entered on the First Sheet, or on the cover will be sufficient. The caution is given, with a view to prevent the necessity which frequently now exists of returning letters to the senders by which it occasionally happens that they miss the post for that day."

Thus in those days all the letters were registered without taking any extra charge. Since, it cost nothing extra, the public used to register all the sundry letters which increased considerable work for the Post Office.

This compelled the Post Office to start taking extra charge for registering a letter.

Mr. R.S. Nuttall mentions in his "Handbook of Indian Philately" (India Study Circle, Dec. 1977) that—

On 27th December 1850 came the following announcement:—

"Notice is hereby given, that under instructions from the Government, the present detailed and indiscriminate Registry of covers and packets passing through the Post Office in Bengal will be discontinued from 1st proximo. A special Reigstry of letters on payment of Fee of EIGHT ANNAS will be introduced from the date above mentioned."

In 1854, the registration Fee was reduced from EIGHT ANNAS to FOUR ANNAS since it was felt that the EIGHT ANNAS registration fee was very high. New rules for registration were issued in Post Office Manual, 1854-58 as follows:

Under Rule 1:— Registration was applicable to all descriptions of letters—without distinction—and also to packets of Books—

"Any Post Master, Deputy Receiver or other Officer must Register any letter tendered for Registration, but must demand a Registry Fee of 4 ANNAS, writing distinctly on the Front "Registered Letter."

Rule 24:— The Fee must in all cases be paid in money—For guidance of staff. The Registration fee must be paid before a receipt is given.

Stamping Rule No. 2— states that the receipt will then be stamped with the dated office seal—(Fig 1). "At the time of delivery the usual official receipt must be obtained, signed, signed by the Addressee".

Receipt for a Registered Article.

Received a registered article No. 957 Ad Addressed to Shamoo Chak
 (Name) [Signature] Receiving Officer.

Date stamp of [Circular Stamp]
 office of posting.

REGISTRATION MAKES THE TRANSMISSION OF A LETTER MORE SECURE BUT THE POST OFFICE IS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR LOSS UNLESS THE LETTER BE ALSO INSURED. Currency notes or a part of a Currency note MUST BE REGISTERED. Coin, jewel, &c., MUST BE INSURED. Postage and registration fee (2 annas) must be prepaid in stamps. Sender should write his name and address in lower left-hand corner of envelope. Acknowledgment of delivery of a registered letter or parcel can be obtained by sender on prepayment of 1 anna in stamps, or an attested copy of addressee's receipt can be obtained at any time within six months on payment of 3 annas.

Fig. 1

Thus in India, a regular Registration system, as we know it today, came into existence in 1854.

After 1854, with the passage of time many changes took place in Registration System i.e. Reducing the registration fee, modifications in registration post marks, cancellations, slips etc.

The registration fee was again reduced from FOUR ANNAS to TWO ANNAS from 1st August 1881, (R.S. Nuttall—Page No. 18).

THE BLUE CROSS SYSTEM

By 1882, Indian Postal authorities introduced an interesting system. The Post Master or the receiving Officer of registered letter was directed to mark a blue cross on front and back of the cover with the help of blue crayon pencil. But there are some examples in my collection showing the use of blue ink pen, black ink pen and even black pencil marking this blue cross.

It is worth mentioning here that during Edwardian period this system was not strictly followed and majority of registered covers show the absence of this blue cross. By 1912-13 (early period of K.G.V rule) this system seems to have disappeared. Only the stationery registered covers were printed showing blue cross.

STATIONERY—REGISTERED COVERS

A revolutionary chapter in the history of Indian Registration System was added with the introduction of stationery registered covers in 1866 (Manik Jain Encyclopedia). In the beginning the registered covers were made available to the public in two sizes. Modifications in sizes were made during K.G.V and K.G.VI period.

These registered covers were covering registration fees only and not the normal postage. The details about stationery registered covers is out of scope of this article.

Special Registration envelopes issued by Post Office (Date/Year of issue not known) were sold as follows:

Size 132 x 82 mm	2 as.—2 p.
Size 254 x 105 mm	2 as.—8 p.

The cost of registration being two annas and the stationery charge was included, however, this did not include postage charge as it would vary with weight of the letter. Uniform postage charge was included in the cost of registered envelope issued by the Post Offices some time during 1912.

INSTRUCTIONS ABOUT REGISTRATION RULES ON REGISTERED LETTER RECEIPTS

The receipts of registered letters which were given to the senders of registered letters were sometimes printed with the instructions for the public regarding the rules of registration. Such examples are illustrated below in Figures 1,2,3, 4, and 4a.

Front & back side of a registered letter receipt of 1887, shows very interesting instructions for public regarding registration system of letters.(Fig. 1 & Fig. 2).

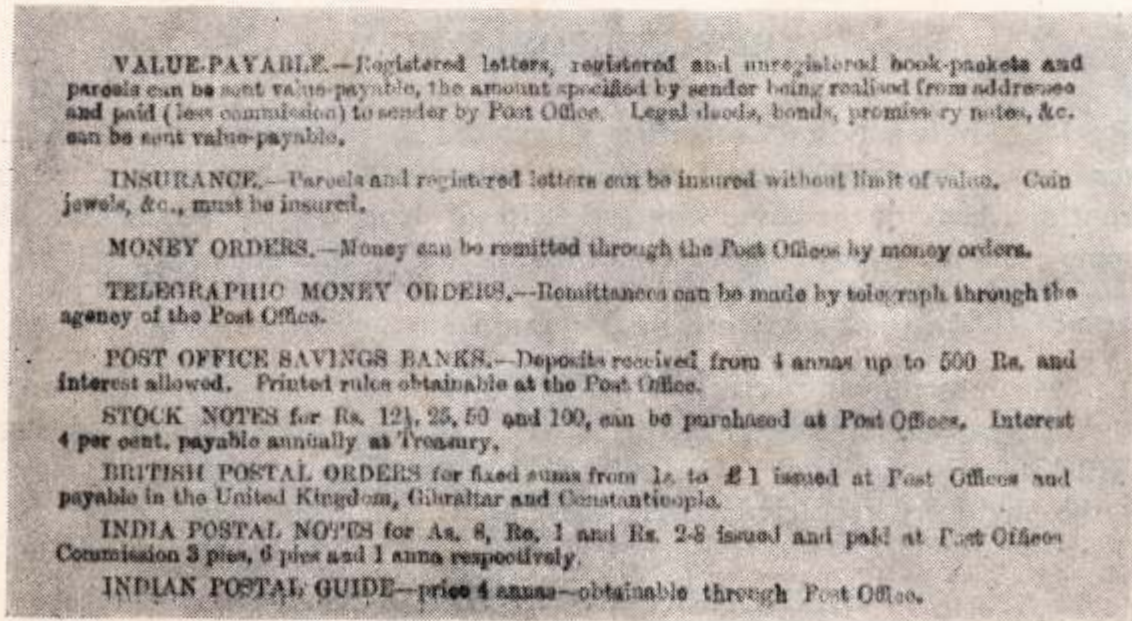


Fig. 2

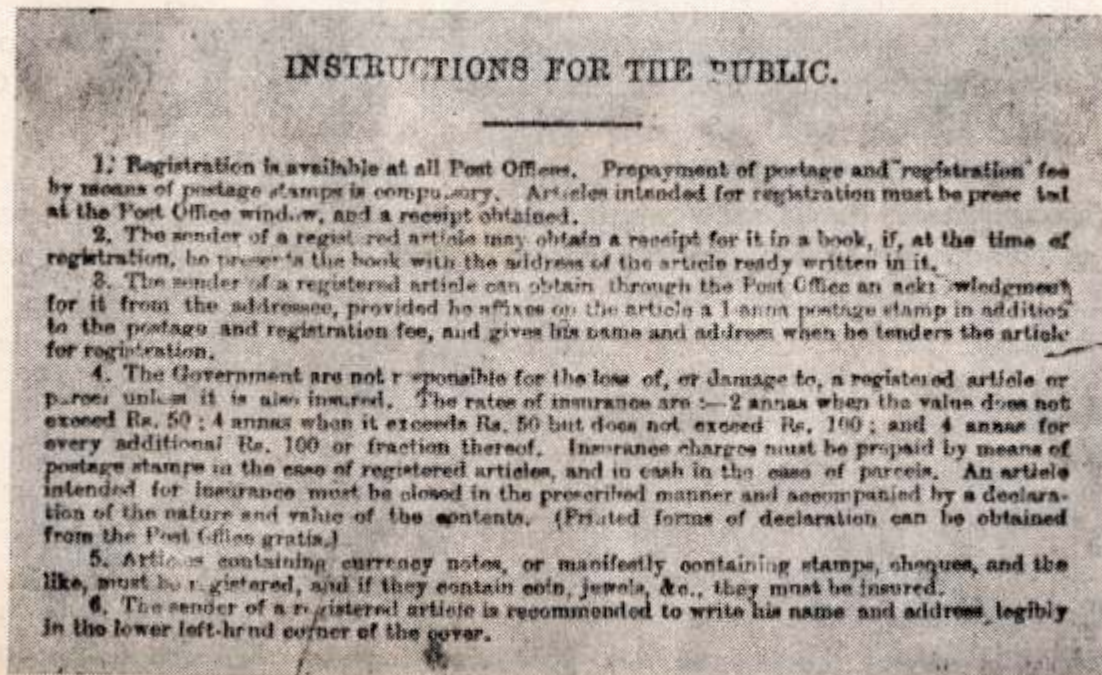


Fig. 3

A back side of registration receipt, 1884 shows 'Instructions for Public' regarding Registration Rules. (Fig. 3)

No. **47**

(Receipt)

Received a ~~Registered~~ Registered letter
addressed to *Kellan Mal Dyadha Prasad*
payable at *Dyccabad* Post Office.

(Add in the case of a prepaid parcel)

with rupees (in words) _____


as detailed below:—

	If a parcel		If a money order	
Weight in rates	No.		Value	Rs. As.
Postage prepaid	Rs.	As.	Commission	" "

Registration envelopes purchasable at Post Office are strongly recommended for enclosing currency notes, &c., sent registered by post.

Small size ... 2 as. 2 p. each.
 Large ,, ... 2 as. 8 p. ,,

Price covers registration fee, but not postage.



Prasadasthan
Branch Postmaster

Fig. 4
 (Courtesy: Shri A.K. Bayanwala)

An interesting Receipt of Registered letter of 1887 (Fig. 4) shows the advertisement, printed on a piece of paper and affixed on Receipt, regarding prices of small and large sized Registration envelopes purchasable at post office.

Another Registration Receipt of 1898, as illustrated in Figure 4a shows rules existing for Registration in those days.

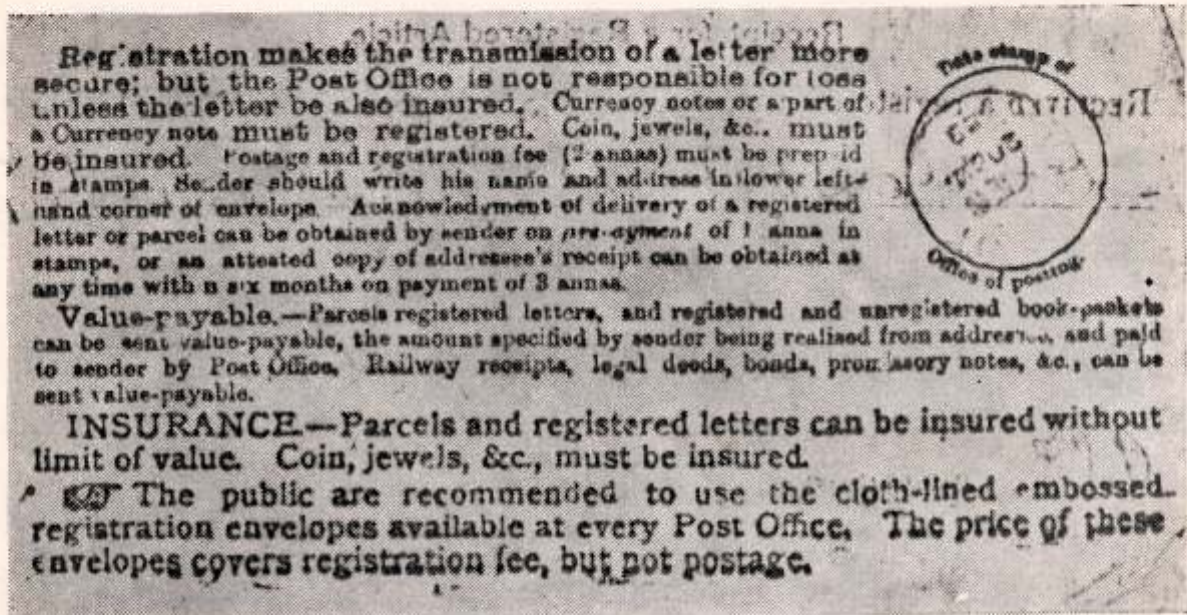


Fig. 4a

“PAID IN MONEY” SYSTEM

As per the rule 24 of the Post Office Manual, 1854-58 “the Registration Fee must be paid in cash.”

And, according to Mr. R.S. Nuttall, this paid in cash rule was abolished in 1859 and the registration Fee began to appear in adhesive stamps.



Fig. 5

(Courtesy: Shri N.K. Jhaveri, Ahmedabad)

But I have come across an interesting registered cover dated 30 November 1855 and posted from AHMEDNUGGUR to JAULNAH showing the registration fee was not paid in cash but it was in the form of Lithograph FOUR ANNAS stamp by affixing it on the cover. (Fig. 5)

The cover does not show any registration number which suggests the AHMED-NUGGUR Post Office had not started a registered Journal.

But this cover puts a question before us whether the paid cash rule was abolished in 1855 or in 1859 (According to Nuttall). The possibility of clerical error cannot be denied.

CHARGES FOR FOREIGN/OVERSEAS REGISTRATION

Colonel D.R. Martin, in his book 'Overseas Letter Postage from India' 1854-1876 has given very good information about the charges for Foreign/Overseas registration 1857-1876, which is given below:

- * 1st July 1857. Registration at 4 annas was introduced for letters to the United Kingdom and places on the Sea Route thereto. It had to be paid in cash.
- * 1st February 1859. The Gazettes state that Fees for Registered Letters and for Late Letters will in future be prepaid in stamps both for Inland Letters and for Letters to Great Britain.
- * 1st February 1860. Registration at 4 as. was extended to Hong Kong and "any other places, where there may be a British P.O.". A list of June 1861 indicates that this elastic phrase did not include the Treaty Ports in China, though it covered Reunion as well as Mauritius, the Australian Colonies, Labuan and Ceylon.
- * June 1860. Letters sent paid to destination via the United Kingdom to British Colonies in America and West Africa and to eastern seaports of the U.S.A. could be registered for 8 as.
- * 1st July 1860. Letters to Europe via France could be registered at "Double-postage".
- * June 1861 shows the letter rate for a $\frac{1}{4}$ oz. letter via France and double this amount for registration; similarly the Postal¹ Guide of June 1879 states that the charge was "double the ordinary postage, no separate Registration fee being levied." Neither statement is quite conclusive but fortunately the British Postal Guides (e.g. that for January 1864, etc.) are definite. "The Registration fee is not a fixed sum but is in all cases equal to the postage."
- * June 1861. The list shows that letters could be Registered to 69 Ports or countries. Letters via Southampton could be Registered to Belgium and Brunswick but not to the rest of Europe.
- * 10 October 1862 (P.O. Pro.) It was ordered that the fee for registration was not to be paid in stamps until "mail in London on 1 January 1863." This also applied to "any place in India, the United Kingdom and the Colonies". But prepayment in stamps had already been ordered in February 1859 for registration of Inland

Letters and Letters to Great Britain. What happened? Had the 1859 order been cancelled? Or did the October 1862 order merely restate the present position regarding letters to Great Britain and further apply it to the Colonies?

- * December 1863. Registration to Italy for mail carried on the Packets between Alexandria and Ancona was available at 8 as. Previously it was only possible on letters to Italy sent via the U.K.
- * November 1866. Registration to America and West Africa was much as in 1860, except that there was none to Ascension and that registration was available for letters throughout the U.S.A. including California and Oregon at 8 as. plus 1a. 8p. per $\frac{1}{2}$ oz.
- * 1 June 1875. i.e. just before the U.P.U. was formed, the Registration rates were broadly:

4 as. to the U.K., Malta and Gibraltar and to most places East of Suez, French Packets, mainly those where British Paekets did not call. It also applied whether by British or French Packet. Europe via Brindisi and Italy, or via Brindisi through Germany, had been decreased to 4 as. with no addition for Russia, 8 as. registration was charged on letters to America, Western Africa and Europe via Trieste. The extra 1a. 8p. per $\frac{1}{2}$ oz (of Nov. 1866) in the U.S.A. had also disappeared.

“Double Postage” for registration applied to some places East of Suez by French Packets, mainly those where British Packets did not call. It also applied to places in Europe or the Mediterranean served by Brindisi through the French P.O. Modane (including Poland) or via the French P.O. at Alexandria.

- * 1 July 1876. Both India and all French Colonies joined the Union, and the 4 as. rate applied to Registration to all Union countries; the system of “Double postage” accordingly ceased.

CERTIFICATE OF POSTING

One may be surprised to see a mentioning of “Certificate of Posting” in an article which is to deal with Registration History!

Well, there are some reasons for which I could not stop myself from making a comment on this “Mini/Semi Registration” system.

The registration system was introduced for those people who wanted to be assured of delivery of a letter to proper person, for which they were given a ‘Receipt for that Registered article. Now there were also some people who either could not afford to register a letter or did not want to be assured of delivery of their article. At the same time they wanted a proof of posting a letter as an evidence. In this sense “Certificate of Posting” can be considered a Mini or Semi Registration System, since it fulfils nearly half of the purpose of Registration.

Postal authority started ‘Certificate of Posting’ system from 1st April 1879 some-time after the introduction of “Regular Registration System.”

I give photographs of two such interesting ‘certificate of posting’ of 1893 period, very late examples of this sytem, on the facing page.

No. 567 of 1893

To

Messrs King King & Co.

Bankers and Agents,

Bombay



No. 89 of 1893

To

Messrs King, King & Co

Merchants & Bankers

Bombay

From
the Juma'gadh
blwan Office

901
99



Both the certificates were issued by 'Junagadh' City. On 13th September 1893 and 2nd March 1893 respectively. The half anna stamp shows that the fee for "Certificate of Posting" was half anna in 1893.

Since its inception the fees for "Certificate of posting" from 1879 to 1947 have been changed on various occasions as shown below:

From 1.4.1879	Letters	—	½ anna for each letter
„ May 1897	Letters, unregd. parcels, unregd. VP Book packetsf	—	½ anna per 6 articles
„ 5.2.1906	Letter, postcards, book packets Regd. Newspapers	—	¼ anna per 3 articles
„ 1.4.1931	Parcels, V.P. Book packets	—	¼ anna per six articles
„ 1.4.1931	All unregd. articles	—	½ anna per 3 articles

In later period printed certificate of posting were introduced by postal authorities as illustrated in Figures 6 and 7.

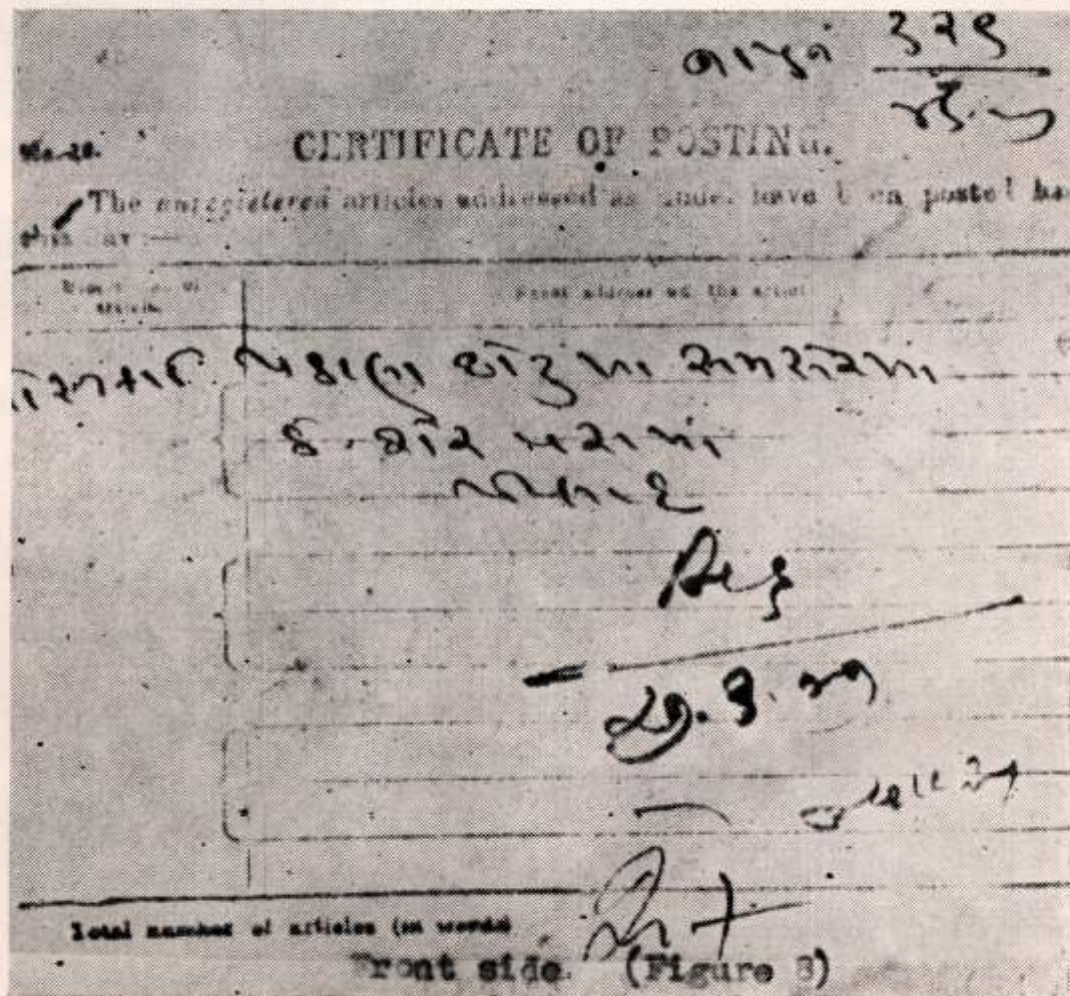


Fig. 6

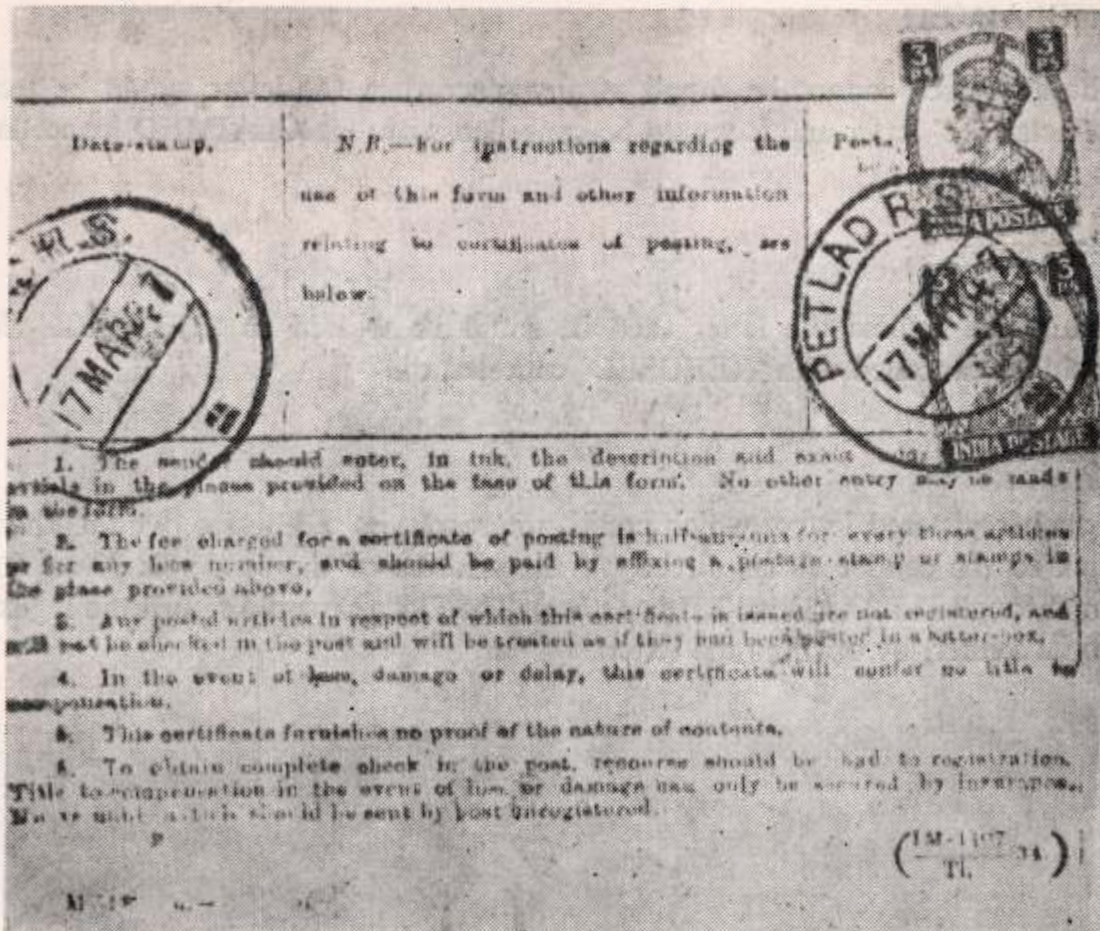


Fig. 7

REDIRECTED, UNCLAIMED & REFUSED “REGISTERED LETTERS”

I have briefly discussed about these formalities here because of an interesting reason. Normally a question of “refusing a letter” will arise in case of registered article only. Because mostly the postman would not wait and ask the addressee whether he/she is interested in receiving the un-registered letter or not. He would simply drop the letter at appropriate addressee’s house.

But when the letter is a registered article, then the question of “Personal handing over the letter” would arise. And if the addressee refuses the article then the article will be treated as ‘Refused’ article. From this point of view, I have included this interesting formalities of Postal System here.

(1) REDIRECTED

When the postman finds that the addressee has gone to some other place leaving his new address then he will treat the registered letter as ‘REDIRECTED’ and the P.O. would cancel the letter with ‘REDIRECTED’ cancellation or in manuscript and send the article at the new address.

(2) UNCLAIMED

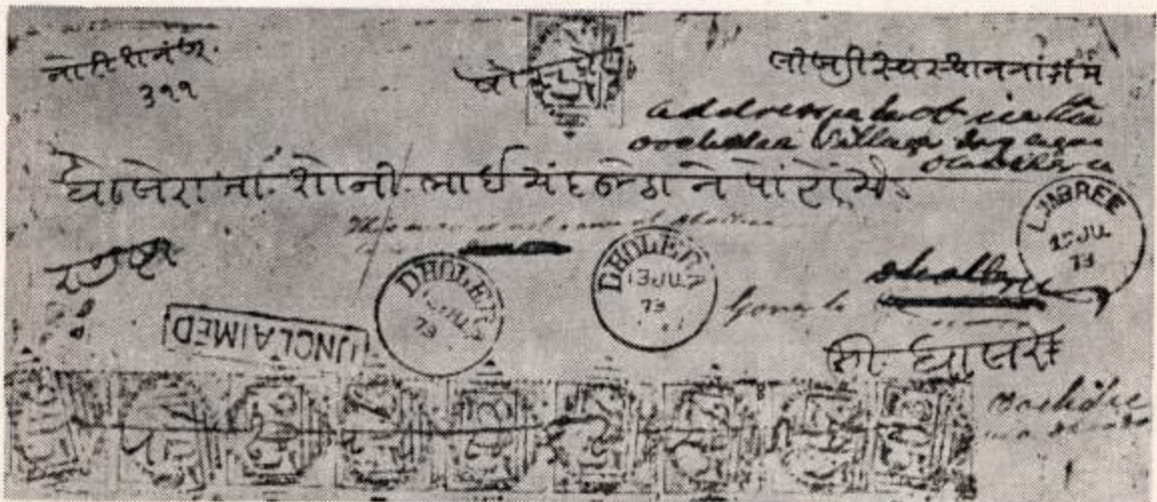
If the addressee cannot be found at any place then the letter would be treated as an 'Unclaimed' letter and it would be cancelled with 'UNCLAIMED' cancellation or with manuscript.

(3) REFUSED

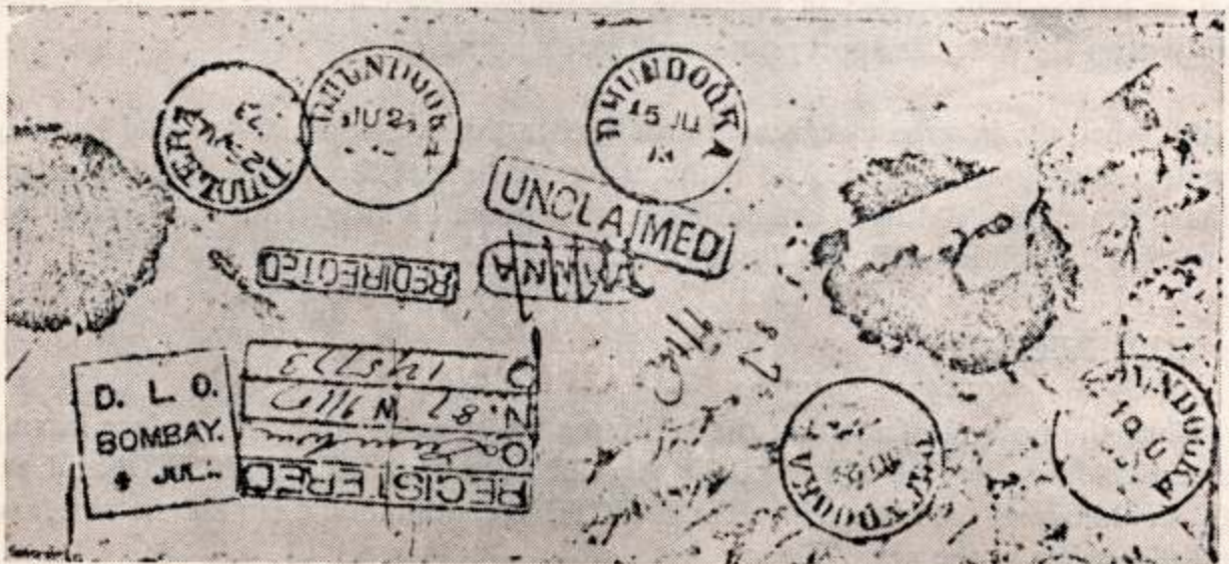
If addressee refuses the letter then it would be treated as 'REFUSED' letter and would be cancelled with 'REFUSED' cancellation.

(4) D.L.O.

All such registered letters which could not reach its addressee would then be sent back to the sender either directly if the address of the sender is given on the cover or through D.L.O. (Dead Letter Office). The D.L.O. would return the registered letter to its sender, by opening the letter.



Above: Fig. 8 (Front); Below: Fig. 9 (Back)



In early days, to treat such 'REFUSED', 'UNCLAIMED' and 'REDIRECTED' registered letters instructional Post Marks or Manuscripts were used. I illustrate here two such early registered covers showing 'REDIRECTED', 'UNCLAIMED', 'REFUSED' and D.L.O. Post Marks. (Figures 8, 9, and 10)

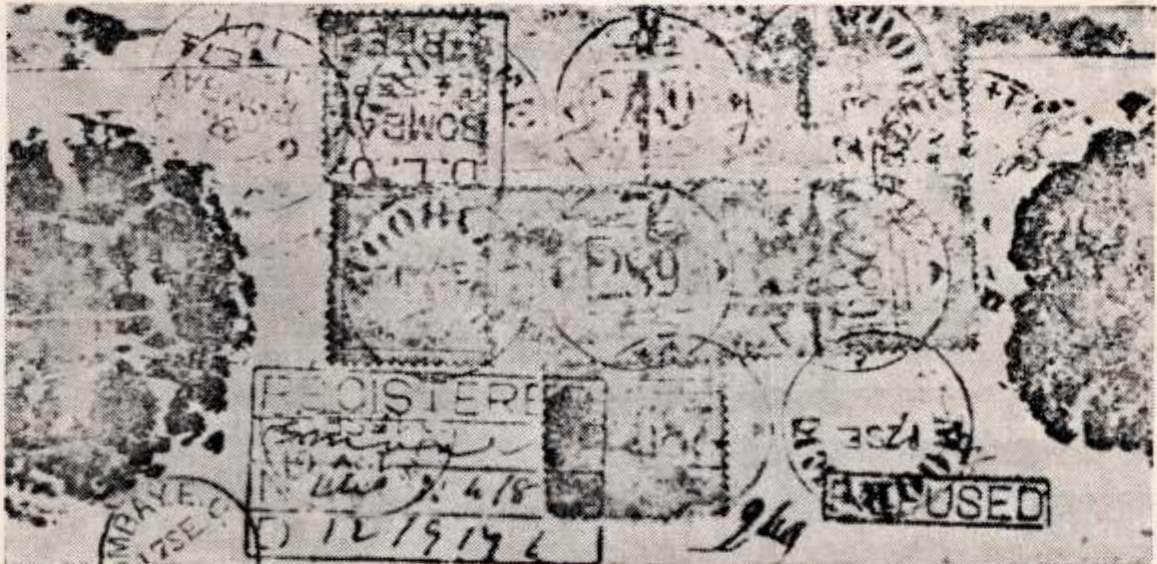


Fig. 10

But in later period special printed UNCLAIMED/REFUSED slips or labels were introduced, as illustrated below in Figure 11.

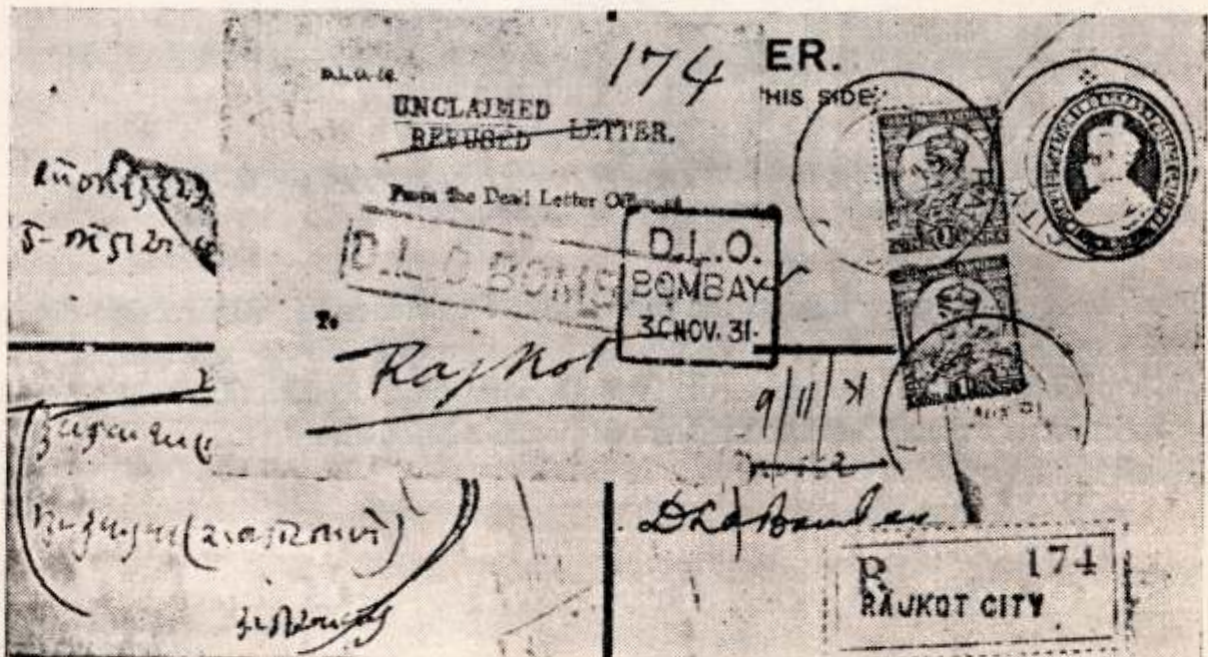


Fig. 11

A stationery registered cover of K.G.V shows a printed label of UNCLAIMED/REFUSED matter.

REDIRECTION CHARGES DUE SLIPS

In my study of Early India Cancellation there were some covers of Victorian Era, showing half Anna postage due markings. The Half Anna postage due marks are usually found on 'redirected' covers, which suggests that the Half Anna postage due charge was applied as redirection fees. Because, normal postage due charge should always be at least one anna (i.e. double than normal) or more, since the minimum postage for cover was $\frac{1}{2}$ anna in India during 1854 to 1921.

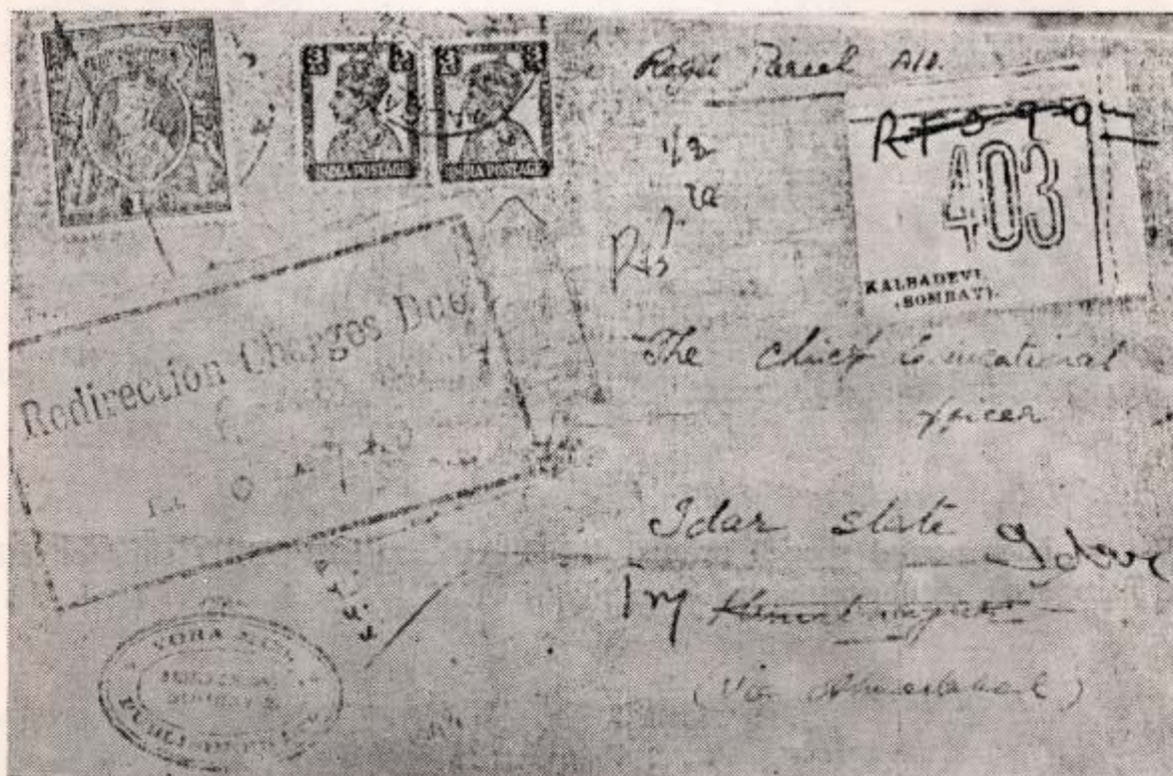


Fig. 12

An interesting Registered A.D. parcel wrapper dt. 1944 shows "Redirection Charges Due" slip (Rs-0.As-9 Ps. 0).

The above discussion suggests the possibility of existence of "Redirection charges system" in India from very early days. But an example shown in Figure 12 of a wrapper of Registered A.D. parcel dt. 1944 showing pink 'Redirection charges due' slip confirms the existence of such system in postal administration.

[To be continued]