
 * INDIAN BOYCOTT LABELS *

by D. L. SEN.

A chance acquisition of a group of 'Boycott Labels' aroused my curiosity to research more into these interesting items.

Basically, two main groups are observed:

1. BOYCOTT BRITISH GOODS or FOREIGN GOODS;
2. PATRONISE INDIAN GOODS or BUY SWADESHI.

These main groups can be further sub-divided into three sub-groups format-wise:

1. Small;
2. Medium;
3. Large Rectangular.

All labels were printed in unicolour, the range of shades/colour varying from label to label. The various colour ranges noted are: Green, Brown, Magenta, Red, Purple, Blue, Vermilion, Orange, Sepia, Grey and Black.

Colour mutation from Brown to Grey is possibly due to poor quality ink used in the printing process. The two labels with different flag motif have, however, been printed in multicolour (Types 7 & 8).

The paper on which the labels were printed varies in texture from thin to medium, soft wove - all unsurfaced local Bazar Papers. The printing was typeset in lithography and, though primitive in process, the end product was clear and remarkably well produced.

The labels were mostly perforated, some rather crudely, conforming to Perf.10 or 11, only three labels (Types 1A, 4 & 6) having been noted to have been issued imperforate. In the absence of full sheets, I am unable to conjecture the number of labels per sheet.



Type 1A.
 Deep violet; Imperf.



Type 1.
 Red brown, Lake brown; Perf.



Type 2.
 Black; Rouletted.



Type 3.
 Brown, Grey, Olive, Yellow green;
 perf.



Type 4.
 Vermilion, Reddish Vermilion;
 Imperf.



Type 5.
 Green, Purple; Perf.



Type 7: Multicolour.
Red/green/black on white; Perf.



Type 6.
Brown; Imperf.



Type 8: Multicolour.
Red/green/black on white; Perf.



Type 9.
Mauve; Perf.

Type 10.
Mauve; Perf.



Type A.
Sepia, Mauve, Brown,
Olive, Yellow green.
Perf.



Type 11.
Bright blue; Perf.



Type B.
Orange brown; Perf.



Type C.
Reddish brown; Perf.



Type D.
Blue; Perf. (Enlarged x2.5)

Four basic language texts have been incorporated in these labels - English, Hindi, Gularati and Urdu, in various permutations and combinations as can be observed in the illustrations shown.

Due to the seditious nature of the 'Boycott' labels prevailing then, no records apparently were kept by the Congress Party. This was probably to avoid back-tracking by the Raj to the printing source.

The basic parameters of research from written records are sadly missing. It is therefore not possible at this stage to identify the printers, their location, dates of printing, numbers printed and issued, retail outlets and the values at which these labels were sold. The only clues available are the following snippets:-

1. A reference to these labels in the September 1930 issue of the P.J.I. made by Mr. E. Franklin DeSouza, who mentions about the use of these labels on local mail;
2. A notification by the Director General of Post & Telegraph on 28th May 1936 prohibiting the use of these labels on Mail;
3. In the recorded history of Congress, a resolution was passed in December 1929 for PURNA SWARAJ - TOTAL FREEDOM, with 26th January 1930 to be celebrated as Independence Day;
4. The Congress Session held in Lucknow in April 1936.

From the above evidence, I can only guess that these labels were initially printed and issued around December 1929 - January 1930. The printing and sale continued for the next six years through clandestine retail outlets and the money accrued was credited to the Congress Fund.

These labels were used on local mail along with Postal adhesive stamps or Printed Postal Stationery like any other Charity labels. The Boycott label Type 5, with a circular band round Gandhiji's portrait and the logo 'Lucknow Congress' was probably issued around March/April 1936, during the Lucknow Congress Session and had a very short life span, as the P & T edict of 28th May 1936 put a firm stop on the use of these labels on Postal Mail. The Type 5 label is known in a tête-bêche pair.

Labels Type A, B, C & D appeared thereafter and continued probably until the 1942 'Quit India' movement.

The mystery as to who originated these labels is still unresolved, again due to lack of any written record, but, from known historical background, I could guess the following sequence of events.

During Gandhiji's early political career in South Africa, he had developed a close friendship with, amongst others, Irish Political Leaders and the I.R.A. movement. The I.R.A. had issued many labels during the nineteenth century as well as in 1916. These labels were called 'Sinn-Fein' labels and were made ostensibly to collect funds for the I.R.A. and some of which were stuck on Postal Mail. Gandhiji's exposure to these was data stored in his memory. Thus, when he was at the helm of affairs in the Indian political scene from 1920 onwards, the idea of issuing similar labels in India re-emerged. It was probably during the 1929 Congress meeting that he mooted the idea of Boycott Labels to serve a dual purpose of Political propoganda and also augmenting the Congress funds.

All this probably sounds like a mystery novel or a 'who-done-it', though it is not intended to be so. More material evidence is required to support or reject my guesses.

Though these labels are just Cinderella material, they did have Postal overtones. The Circular of the Director General, Post and Telegraph prohibiting their use on Postal articles is clear evidence pointing to this.

Over half a century has elapsed since the issue of these labels. The political scene in India has radically changed. India still celebrates 26th January, not as Independence Day but as Republic Day.

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POSTAL NOTICE.

Prohibited Articles.

No article will be transmitted by post bearing thereon labels or stamped impressions, or photographs, or writings—

- (i) conveying any exhortation to "Boycott British goods" or any other class of goods, or to carry out any other form of boycott,
- (ii) embodying portraits of any prominent leader of the Civil Disobedience Movement, or containing the words "Swatantra Bharat" (*separate India*) or similar words in furtherance of the Civil Disobedience Movement,
- (iii) containing other matter manifestly and specifically intended to further Civil Disobedience Movement.

2. Any such articles found in the course of transmission by post will be sent to the Dead Letter Office for disposal.

3. These orders do not apply to articles bearing "Slogans" of an unobjectionable character such as "Buy Swadeshi goods" or "Support home industries" or similar devices adopted for business purposes.

NEW DELHI

28th May 1936

G. V. BEWOOD,

Director-General of Posts and Telegraphs.

NGIPPA-511-633-17301

These labels have now acquired a classical status and collectors of India avidly seek them, especially those used on Postal Envelopes/Cards which managed to pass through Postal scrutiny in those turbulent times.

Collaboration with other collectors is sought, to fill in many of the missing links with any material evidence, as well as any new types of labels not recorded in the above illustrations.

Perhaps some collectors in the U.K. could assist by checking up records in the India Office Library in London for the period 1929 to 1942 pertinent to the issue of these labels.

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'THE SACRED COW ISSUES OF BUNDI' by R. J. Benns.

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