

AN ACCOUNT OF BAHAWALPUR'S STAMPS THROUGH COLONIAL TIMES AND AFTER

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Abstract:

Bahawalpur's stamps have a rich and varied history, seeing much evolution, first during the British Raj, then in the brief period that it existed as an independent state, and finally after it became a part of Pakistan. This study is confined to the same period. The aim is to evaluate on the basis of recent evidence how the stamps of Bahawalpur served purposes pertinent to those of the Raj and the Amir, and how the issuance of new stamps is interlocked with other historical developments. Aside from this, certain characteristics of the stamps will also be examined and an inferential account will be drawn.

Background:

Philatelists and historians have devoted considerable time and effort to uncovering and collating the history of the postal stamps of British India. They have been the source of study for generations and their history is well documented. However, the stamps of Bahawalpur have not seen similar levels of interest and exploration. As a result, recent investigations have uncovered an abundance of evidence that allows us to re-examine the postal stamps of the state and their significance.

Bahawalpur, and consequently its stamps are a unique part of the postal history of the sub-continent and merit equal attention. Primarily, because the state of Bahawalpur is an exception in many respects from the other states that comprised British India. It had a large population reported to be close to 11.5 million as if the 2017 census- this number includes in it the population of all those areas that were part of the state of Bahawalpur, not just those that fall under the current district. Geographically it is distinct in that it does not have a system of natural irrigation, being part of the Thar desert.

However, and this is relevant for the assessment of its postal evolution, it also shared a special relation with British. Faced, with external threats such as from the Sikhs, the Amir decided to enter into an alliance with the British in 1833. The state provided the British assistance in the First Afghan War and Second Sikh War in the form of passage and troops. Much of the later insistence on being allowed to have his own postage system, as well as some of the stamps themselves are predicated on the Amir's faith in this alliance.

Research Methodology

For the subject that the paper is tackling there is not much information available either on the internet or in any tabulated form. Most books tackle the stamps in use by the Indian Post, cancelled by them and used for purposes outside the state. However, as this study is limited to the postal stamps of Bahawalpur, not including revenue stamps, but strictly for postal purposes, the information collected has been primarily from a few sources that work specifically in this area.

A significant addition to the literature on Bahawalpur's postal stamps, "The Amirate of Bahawalpur: Postal History & Stamps (1932-1949)", by Dr. Captain U.A.G. Isani and Syed Abid Hussain, contains a detailed account of how Bahawalpur's postal system was shaped over the years, and how new evidence fits into, and shapes the understanding of the stamps that were already known to be in use. Moreover, it contains a wide array of stamps and cancellations from the British era, and is one of the most comprehensive accounts of the state of Bahawalpur's postal evolution.

Another book that deals with the same topic is "The God Given Kingdom of Bahawalpur". Referenced at times in the former, this book written by Ron Wood, contains, much like the former, information about colonial Bahawalpur and about the postage stamps that are part of its history. Relying primarily on these two books for this paper, the stamps of the times in question are shown and analysed systematically to show what the most recent evidence bears on our understanding of the postal system of Bahawalpur.

Stamps that Precede those Issued to Mark the Centenary of the Alliance with Britain

In order to better understand the significance of the 1933 stamp series, it is imperative to look at the stamps that came before, as well as to expand upon why the latter existed in the form they existed. With regards to the stamps themselves, how they were cancelled, what function they served, who approved them, who manned, operated and directed postal operations are also relevant inquiries.

"The Amirate of Bahawalpur" gives a brief history of the time period. A state post system was set up in 1866 that managed delivery. It was manned by employees of the Indian Post. The state of Bahawalpur had to pay an annual subscription fees and had to follow the rules put in place by the British Governor-General. These rules mandated that the Raj would have oversight over the state's postal services and there would be free carriage of state mail within Bahawalpur. These rules changed over the course of time such as when subscription fees was reduced between the late 19th and early 20th Centuries. Another way of exerting control over the state postal system was by having the employees from the Indian Post man the offices within Bahawalpur. This resulted in close to no autonomy for the state system. As for the stamps themselves, there is also evidence that shows the cancellations of the stamps and how they resembled the cancellations used by the Indian Post from 1900 onwards.

Revenue stamps had been in use in Bahawalpur since as early as 1876. These stamps often had their purpose printed on them. An 1880 issue, for instance mentioned that it was for court fees i.e, for fiscal purposes. These stamps, will be important to understand how, and why the later stamps that were ordered by the Amir represented a greater expansion of the powers of the state of Bahawalpur over the postal system working within the state. Further, these stamps and other issues were overprinted "Sarkari", and therefore it is evident that they were issued at the behest of the British government in India. Again, this will become relevant later on.

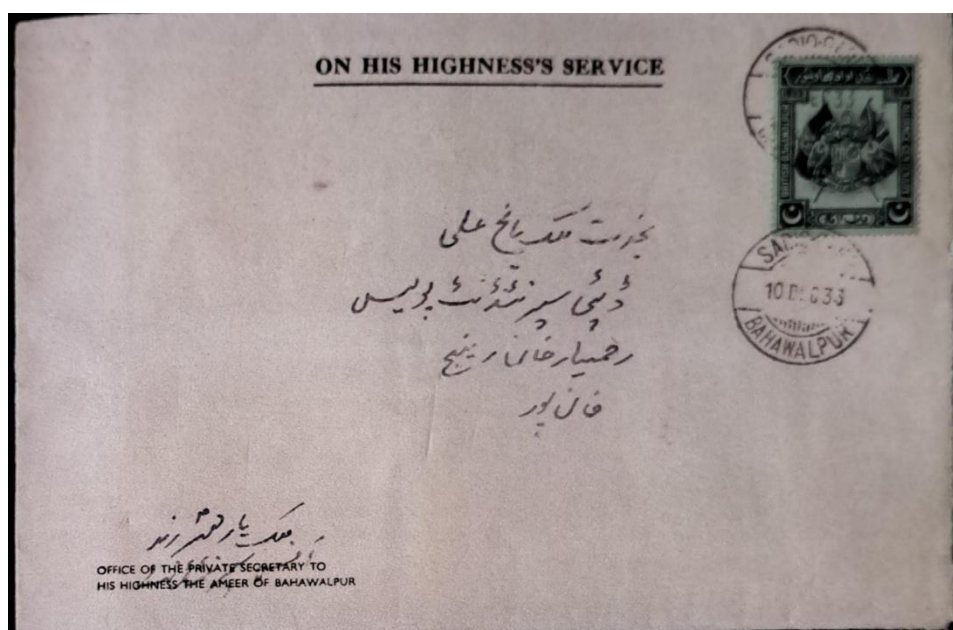
The 1933 Alliance Stamp

The Amir had been hoping for British permission to have Bahawalpur's own postal office. In anticipation of this, despite previous refusals, he had a stamp printed to mark the centenary of the entry of Bahawalpur into a subsidiary alliance with the British. The stamp was a 1 anna stamp, printed in limited numbers. The Amir was denied permission to open a postal system for Bahawalpur, however the stamp came to be used later on.

The stamp was printed on the 3rd of February of the same year. The technical details are as follows: Perforation is 14, it is printed on a 10×10 sheet and the gum attached to it is of a brown streaky sort. The stamp itself is of a black and green texture. It depicts the coat of arms of the Imperial state as well as the flags of Bahawalpur and Britain. The printing was done by the Thomas De La Rue company in Britain. What makes the stamp particularly interesting for investigation was the lack for purpose put upon it. It could indicate that it was for postal purposes. However, a previous issue of 1926-1933, as the book mentions, indicates usage of those stamps for both Fiscal and Postage purposes. It could mean that the Alliance stamp had multiple purposes and that the central government was aware of, and approved of stamps that could be used for both purposes. The Thomas De La Rue company, not possibly acting against the orders of the government decided not to print any purpose.

Another defining feature of the stamp was that it was at the time it was printed, not carrying the "Sarkari" overprint. This would have given it legal sanction to be used just as any other stamp, and its absence seems to be evidence of how firstly, the Amir acting on his own decided to order a commemorative stamp, and secondly, that the lack of mention it finds in major catalogues implies relative obscurity. It can only be found in a Wilson Wong collection as being cancelled on 14 August 1933. If however, it was not commonly in use, how then could any postal cover which bore it be accounted for? A provisional theory, but one that seems likely as mentioned by Isani and Hussain, is that it could be telling of post offices that can be described as "Extra Departmental". As the British allowed Franchise offices later, it lends further credence to this explanation. It could be allowed for army cantonments and other areas under government supervision.

The stamps did see limited usage for official purposes as shown below:



This letter, dated 10 December 1933, was sent by the Private Secretary from his office to the Nawab of Bahawalpur. It shows how even earlier times saw the use of these stamps not long after they were issued.

One detail that is worth mentioning is that the 1 anna Baggage Camel Issue, another stamp, part of the design set ordered by the Amir that can be attested for, along with the 1 anna Alliance stamp were later overprinted "Sarkari". This was after the 1945 issues failed to meet demand and presumably because of the hassle of, and expense of issuing new stamps. This brought these stamps into use such as can be seen in the following two cases from 25th March and 17th July from 1947. About the overprinting, this was done in Lahore and not in London as was done for other stamps. This was due to the limitations placed by the Second World War and its aftermath. The previously mentioned lack of overprint in 1933 confirms that this part of the stamp was not handled by the De La Rue company. Instead it was completed in the subcontinent in 1945. This is the final rendition of the 1933 Alliance stamp.

1945 Stamp Issues

On 1st January 1945, the centre allowed Bahawalpur to establish its own postal service system. This was after Sir Richard Crofton, the Prime Minister, met with the Governor General to persuade him. The Amir, already having prepared for this time decided to act immediately.

The details of the agreement were as follows. The state was allowed to use its stamps for official mail carried within the state. For mail moving outside however, the Nawab was still forced to use the stamps of India. Below one can see the issued stamps of the 1945 series. Owing to the large number only a few are shown that are of the greatest significance.

As can be seen these stamps do showcase the Sarkari overprint. The overprinting done in 1945 was distinctive from previous overprints. Prior to this only the Urdu work "Sarkari" featured on the stamps, but now "Service" was also added. This was just the English translation of the former and was meant to ensure more people understood it most likely. These stamps bearing both words can be seen below:



Both words (Sarkari and Service) are clearly visible and the crescent also features on this stamp. The stamp is also distinguishable from certain others as the Nawab is not on it.

The Regular Series of 1945 and Changing Practices

1945 was also significant because it featured another series of stamps, official ones of the state of Bahawalpur. This series figured 2 stamps and both of them like the ones mentioned above had both a "Service" and "Sarkari" overprint. They also had the purpose of use mentioned, this being a clear departure from past precedent. Another way these stamps were different was their size. The new size was smaller than some of the stamps from before. The stamps depicted the Amir of Bahawalpur, in Princely attire and as a result, marks a step forward in Bahawalpur and the subcontinent move towards gaining autonomy from the British.

The stamps are seen here (as can be seen on the plates, the printing is done by the Thomas De La Rue company, based in London):



As can be seen above, the regular series shows the Nawab, in what can be clearly seen as royal wear. This shows his increasing independence and rising status and gives a good insight into the changing system of India, both postal and otherwise.



The above stamps are on a plate, and show that the printing is done by the Thomas De La Rue company.

World War II Commemorative

Bahawalpur troops had fought in the Second World War in Burma, Italy, and elsewhere along with the allies against the Germans and Japanese. After victory was achieved, the Amir ordered a ½ anna stamp to celebrate the occasion. It showed the flags of the allied countries that had fought against the Axis powers. Because it was a commemorative there was only a single stamp. Its paper was unwatermarked and perforation was 14. Concerning this stamp we have a letter from Solicitor Simmons to the Nawab that showed orders placed for 150000 stamps do be commissioned. While it included 25000 that were to be sent to the High Commissioner, in reality 50000 were sent. The cause for this discrepancy is not known. The Victory stamp is shown below:



Here, the “Victory” in the middle and the flags of various representative countries like the United States, shows that this stamp specifically celebrates the allied victory and efforts in the Second World War.

1947 Overprints on the stamps of Imperial India

A few years after 1945, the Indian sub-continent was partitioned into the Dominions of India and Pakistan, there came the issue of the stockpile of stamps that were printed in the name of the King i.e representative of British rule over India, which rendered them unfit for further production. However, it was decided that the existing prints of the stamps would be used. This caused an issue of what they would be overprinted with?

It was believed that authority to overprint stamps of a different state, in this case of British India belonged to the successor state of Pakistan. However, this explanation suffers on one account. The state of Bahawalpur had the authority to overprint those stamps as Bahawalpur acceded to Pakistan on 3rd October, while it gained its independence along with the rest of the subcontinent on the 15th of August of the same year. This meant it was an independent state that had the authority to do as it pleased. This is also highlighted by the fact that all "PAKISTAN" overprints are assumed as such by authors like Ron Wood, due to mentions only being made of overprints in Gazettes of the time, not of which sort.

1948 Definitive Stamp Series

As mentioned before, Bahawalpur acceded to the Pakistan on 3rd of October 1947. The Amir no longer the head of state but still retaining considerable powers had the state of Bahawalpur issue a series of 14 stamps in April 1948. The lower values such as the 3 pies, ½ anna, 9 pies, 1 anna and 1 ½ anna stamps like many preceding ones that have been discussed portrayed the Amir in his Princely clothing. The next five in ascending order, had pictures of historical buildings. Among them were the 2, 4, 6, 8, and 12 annas stamps. The next three which were the 1, 2, 5 rupees stamps had the Amir in Military uniform on them. The highest value stamp issued in this series, that of 10 rupees had pictures of 3 generations of Bahawalpur's rulers.

For clarification they are shown below:



This is the Nawab shown on the 3 Pies Stamp. It is imprinted in black and blue.



A letter utilising the same 3 anna Black pie stamp. It is dated 5 October 1948. Another important facet of these stamps is that in different places the same stamps can be seen in different colours. The earliest known usage of said stamps that differ in colour from the above is from 11th May 1948. This would imply that they were printed soon after the original ones were released. They are shown below as well:



The changes were only for the 1 rupee stamps. More and more, the stamps show the Nawab in a more emphatic and authoritative posture highlighting him in his own capacity.

Conclusion and Final Remarks

The stamps of British India through till Bahawalpur's becoming a part of India are evidence of the changing realities of the sub-continent. Beyond their design and overprinting whether at Lahore, or by the De La Rue Company, and the intricacy that went into their development, they are also a microcosm of the wider region in which they were used. For instance, the fact that Imperial stamps could not be overprinted by Bahawalpur without New Delhi's permission as well as the fact that Bahawalpur, despite its wealth and size could not form its own postal system attests to British dominion. Another curious fact concerning the stamps is what the intention of the one ordering the issue was and how it manifested itself. The alliance stamp, issued at a time when Britain still controlled the postal system, shows the coat of arms of Britain and the flags of Britain along with that of Bahawalpur, displaying Bahawalpur's subservience to New Delhi. However, later stamps show the Amir, in his princely garb or in military uniform showing the waning of British influence and gradual rise of the Amir's power.

Therefore the study of stamps becomes important not just in understanding the postal development through Bahawalpur's long history, but its relationship with the rest of India and later on Pakistan, and tangentially also sheds light on the subcontinent's politics. Even a cursory glimpse of the stamps spread across time will convey as much, and so stamps form an indispensable lens through which to view not only the postal but total history of the state.

References:

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