

Communication Revolution in an Enthusiastic Society: The Revamp of Postal Organisation and its Role in Nineteenth Century Bengal

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***Abstract:** In the eighteenth century, the communication networks in Bengal were archaic. The province of Bengal was a combination of its thousands of self-sufficient villages. Ordinary people could communicate only with those in their immediate vicinity. Postal communication was not intended for the general public. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, roadways were renovated and railways were introduced. The postal system of the country was thoroughly reformed, and its services were converted into cheaper, more efficient ones and made available to all. Under a hundred years of British rule, the ordinary people of Bengal became more enthusiastic about reading, writing, and communicating with others in distant places. To exchange information, emotions, ideas, and expectations with others, they sent letters in their millions through post offices. They also used the postal service to get printed books and newspapers. This tremendous change in the mental world and behavioural patterns of the Bengalis to expose them and know others by availing of the services of the post office can be called a communication revolution.*

Keywords: Post Office, Reform, Popularity, Correspondence, Communication, Revolution.

Introduction: The postal system in the eighteenth century was irregular, inadequate, expensive, and beyond the aspirations of the common people. This facility was restricted only to the ruling classes, influential aristocrats, and affluent merchants. There was no scope for the common people to avail the communication services provided by the state or private entrepreneurs in mediaeval India. With the expansion of the British Empire all over India, the requirement for more comprehensive transport and communication facilities was felt. The British government initially renovated the communication networks of India in order to maintain a smooth and uninterrupted communication channel throughout all parts of India so that they might be informed about what was happening in distant places away from the capital. Around the mid-nineteenth century, the services offered by post offices were thrown open to all, irrespective of caste, creed, religion, gender, or economic background. When the postal system, with its cheap and uniform services, was made available to all, it produced a far-reaching impact on the society of Bengal. This paper explores the revolutionary change in the thought process of ordinary people in Bengal in order to communicate with others through the fundamentally reformed postal networks in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

In Bengal, references can be traced to the information exchange through written communications, like letters, notices, or royal orders from ancient times. Sher Shah, the Afghan ruler of Bengal and Bihar, reorganised the postal system of the country to a large extent. He utilised the *sarais* as a station for *dak-chauki*. The regularity

and rapidity of the postal system developed by Sher Shah were attested to by all historians (Qanungo, 1921, p.392). In the Mughal period, Akbar established posts throughout his kingdom. Two horses and a set of footmen were stationed at every five *coss* (10 miles approximately). Four thousand runners were on the permanent payroll of the emperor. On extraordinary occasions, some of them could complete a journey of seven hundred *coss* in ten days (Briggs, 1966, pp. 173-4). Peter Mundy, the British merchant who travelled to India in the seventeenth century, has recorded that correspondence was carried in India by private messengers.¹ During the rule of the Bengal *Nawabs*, the maintenance of roads and postal communications was neglected due to anarchy and confusion. In the early part of the eighteenth century, the *zamindars* were required to ensure the safety of the activities of the postal services. They were responsible for any interception or obstacle produced in the way of the despatch of letters within the territorial jurisdiction of their estate. Around the mid-eighteenth century, it would take four days' time to carry mail from Rungpou to Muxadabad.² The postal system in pre-Plassey Bengal was developed only for some limited parts of the country as required by the rulers of the land. The activities of the postal networks became an organisation for the rendering of public services after a period of a hundred years of colonial rule.

The increasing political causes and commercial ambitions of the East India Company prompted them to set up an efficient postal organisation in Bengal. The British rulers arrived in India from a continent where the industrial revolution had already begun its journey (Toynbee, 1956, pp.19-29). Their social behaviour and customs were different from those of the Indians. Their administrative policies for India have always been adopted, keeping in mind the interests of Great Britain. When he seized political power following the battle of Plassey, Robert Clive established a postal system in Bengal that was nothing more than a continuation of the pre-existing postal organisation of *harkaras*, or mounted carriers. He reorganised the system and made provision for a permanent and regular workforce of runners and shifted the responsibility to the local *zamindars* for keeping an adequate strength of runners.³

The administration of Warren Hastings placed the postal networks of Bengal upon a better foundation. The credit for setting up a regular postal system in Bengal goes to him. The posts, which were established mainly for official purposes, were made available for private communications. During his rule, the structure of a regular postal system was laid down, which was brought into effect on March 31st, 1774.⁴ In the same year, a General Post Office was founded in Calcutta, with its subordinate offices spread throughout Bengal. A Postmaster-General was

¹Mundy, Peter (1914). *The Travels of Peter Mundy in Europe and Asia (1608-1667)*, Vol. II., The Hakluyt Society, London, p.368.

²Touche, T.H.D. La (ed) (1910). *The Journals of Major James Rennell*, The Asiatic Society, Calcutta, p.131.

³Clarke, Geoffrey (1921). *The Post Office of India and its Story*, Mayflower Press, London, p.12.

⁴*Ibid*, p.14.

appointed and postage was charged on private letters for the first time.⁵ Regular postal services were established by 1775, connecting Calcutta, Patna, and Benaras with palanquins and bearers to convey people and parcels (Bayly, 1999, p. 58). The postal services of the East India Company became renowned on account of their security, regularity, and efficiency. Hastings made reforms in the postal organisation which provided delivery services for letters at recipients' houses in Calcutta and the suburbs around it.

By 1827, the territory under the East India Company in India had become large. But, there was no general postal system in their territory in India prior to 1837.⁶ From the accounts of Taylor, it has been learnt that five branch mails were sent from Dacca in the 1830s. The five branch mails were from Dacca to Calcutta; from Dacca to Chittagong and Arracan; from Dacca to Mymensing, Jumalpole, and Assam; from Dacca to Sylhet, Chirra Poonjee; and from Dacca to Burrisaul.⁷ The services rendered by the post offices in the Bengal Presidency were inadequate in terms of their revenue as well as their safe and speedy carriage of correspondence. Only the principal towns were connected by postal networks for the conveyance of government letters and parcels. Private people could avail themselves of the postal services only as a privilege.⁸

With the expansion of British influence all over India, the requirement for a more comprehensive postal service was felt. Prior to 1837, postal communication in the districts was entrusted to *zamindars* with large estates, and their duties and responsibilities were outlined in Bengal Regulation No. XX of 1817. The Company Government received exclusive rights to postal services within its territories under Act XVII of 1837. The East India Company government had closely controlled postal services since 1836, suppressing unlicensed "native dawks". A financial reason was behind this decision since they needed to maximise revenues from postage duty and stamps (Bayly, 1999, p.319). All the private postal services, barring a few licensees, were banned. The postal services from private operators ended when the post office was thrown open to all and the delivery of an ordinary letter was offered at a nominal rate of $\frac{1}{2}$ anna for all parts of India by the enactment of a further Act XVII of 1854.⁹

The reforms of Governor General, Lord Dalhousie, brought a new era in the development of transport and communications in India. He carried out praiseworthy reforms in the postal system of the country. The previous postal system was corrupt, ineffective, and involved a lot of delays and difficulties in its

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶*Ibid.*, p.16.

⁷Taylor, James (1840). *A Sketch of the Topography & Statistics of Dacca*, Military Orphan Press, Calcutta, p.89.

⁸Clarke, Geoffrey, *op. cit.*, p.16.

⁹Cooper, Jal (1942). *Stamps of India*, Western Printers & Publishers, Bombay, pp.6-8.

delivery of services. There was no uniform postal rate. The charges on the letters were realised in cash from the receivers, which were usually in excess. Dalhousie appointed a commission in 1850 to recommend reforms in the matter of efficiency in postal services (Chhabra, 1971, p.225). The Commissioners consulted and examined both government officials and private individuals. The opinions of the Post-Master Generals of Bengal, North-West Provinces, and Bombay; Post Masters of all Presidencies; Madras Chamber of Commerce; Calcutta Trade Association; and influential private persons from Calcutta, Murshidabad, Benaras, Mirzapur, and Agra were considered. All of the consulted persons, barring a very few from the Post Masters, unanimously expressed their opinion that the existing rates of postage were far too high, which prevented the public, especially the poorer classes, from writing letters and sending communications.¹⁰ Mr. Tayler, the Post Master General of Bengal, was of the opinion that “the present rates of inland postage undoubtedly prevent the public from writing letters which they would write if the rates were lower.” The Commissioners submitted a joint report on the result of their enquiries into the Post Office of India and on the means which they considered practicable of rendering it more efficient and more extensively conducive to the public than it was before the submission of their report of enquiry on May 1st, 1851. Their major recommendations were: (a) a uniform half-*anna* rate of inland postage on letters not exceeding a $\frac{1}{4}$ *tolah* in weight; (b) compulsory use of stamps in all cases of prepayment; (c) reorganisation of Post Office establishments; (d) simplification in the process of receiving and delivering letters; (e) more extended use of accelerators and an increase in the number of delivery personnel; (f) an increase in the number of receiving houses; (g) establishment of sorting offices; (h) extension and improvement of the district *dawks*. The Commissioners had also prepared a draft of an Act for carrying out the proposals made in the Report and also a Code of Subsidiary Rules.¹¹ The proposal of the Commission was accepted and a uniform rate of half an *anna* for a letter weighing up to half a *tola* was introduced. It was decided that the charges would be realised from the senders in postage stamps rather than in cash (Chhabra, 1971, p.225). The half-*anna* postage stamp would carry a letter from one part of the country to another part. Before the reforms of Dalhousie, it had cost a rupee to send a letter from Calcutta to Bombay (Spear, 1978, p.217).

The reforms recommended by the Commissioners were based on the principle that the post offices would have to be maintained “for the benefit of the people of India and not for the purposes of swelling the revenues.”¹² But, Strong reported that a tax called the Zamindari *Dak* Cess was introduced by the colonial government in 1862 for the maintenance of *dak* runners and for the conveyance of papers and postal

¹⁰Courtney, W., Forbes, H., and Beadon, Cecil (1851). *Report of the Commissioners for Post Office Enquiry with Appendixes*, Military Orphan Press, Calcutta, pp.17-23.

¹¹*Ibid*, pp.17, 124-5.

¹²Clarke, Geoffrey, *op. cit.*, p.22.

articles between the head-quarters of *Thanas* and the District and Sub-divisional offices.¹³ The reforms executed by Lord Dalhousie in the postal system of the country were undoubtedly a remarkable chapter of Indian history. In consideration of the commissioners' recommendations, numerous new postal establishments were erected in the Bengal Presidency. In Bengal, the number of head post offices, subordinate post offices, and receiving houses were 82, 75, and 13 respectively in 1854-55, whereas the number in 1861-62 became 66, 176, and 13 respectively. A large number of subordinate post offices were opened across Bengal.¹⁴ The post offices of Bengal have made rapid strides since 1861-62. At the end of the nineteenth century, they spread their branches almost everywhere in the province. It was reported that 144 post offices were in the Midnapore district, having 744 miles of postal communication in 1911.¹⁵ In Burdwan district, there were 183 post offices and 656 miles of postal communication in 1908-09.¹⁶ The ordinary public of Dacca district also enjoyed a fairly complete postal service. In 1911, there were 256 post offices of various grades.¹⁷ The initiative of Lord Dalhousie in carrying out the reforms suggested by Post Office Commissioners opened up a new horizon for the glorious journey of the post offices not only in Bengal but also all over India. Post offices in Bengal became the most important people's organisation in India among all the organisations developed in modern times. In a society dominated by the caste system and religious divides, the postal organisation offered services to all and most successfully carried out its functions across the country.

The British rulers also introduced telegraphic communication in India. In Bengal, the construction work of a 30-mile telegraph line between Calcutta and Diamond Harbour started on November 5th, 1850, and by October the next year, the distance was successfully covered.¹⁸ The telegraph line from Dacca to Chittagong was commenced in December 1858, and completed at the end of the following year.¹⁹ But telegraphic communication was never developed for ordinary people in the nineteenth century.

The standard of a country's transport and communication systems play a major role not only in the field of economic progress but also determines the cultural advancement of that particular country. During the rule of Lord Dalhousie, the

¹³Strong, F. W. (1912). *Eastern Bengal District Gazetteers: Dinajpur*, Pioneer Press, Allahabad, p.94.

¹⁴Letter No. 2019, From G. Paton, Director General of the Post Office of India to E.C. Bayley, Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, Letter No. 2019, Camp Nynee Tal, 13th October 1862 in *Annual Report of the Operations of the Post Office of India, for the Year 1861-62*, Government Report, para.4, p.2.

¹⁵O'Malley, L.S.S. (1911). *Bengal District Gazetteers (hereinafter BDG in short): Midnapore*, Bengal Secretariat Book Depot (hereinafter BSBD in short), Calcutta, p.133.

¹⁶Peterson, J.C.K. (1910). *BDG: Burdwan*, BSBD, Calcutta, p.143.

¹⁷Allen, B.C. (1912). *Eastern BDG: Dacca*, Pioneer Press, Allahabad, p.135.

¹⁸Shridharani, Krishnalal (1953). *Story of the Indian Telegraphs: A Century of Progress*, Govt. of India Press, New Delhi, p.4.

¹⁹Hunter, W.W. (1875). *A Statistical Account of Bengal*, Vol. V., Trubner & Co., London, p.108.

Public Works Department took into its hand the construction and repair work of roads, canals, bridges, and other public utility works. The hopes of Bentinck were fulfilled during the viceroyalty of Dalhousie when the main artery of traffic, the Grand Trunk Road from Calcutta, was completed with its bridge-works, with the exception of the great bridge over the river Soane, beyond Delhi and extending up to Peshawar (Spear, 1978, p.216; Arnold, 1865, p.253). Earlier, Calcutta was connected with England by steamships. On December 9th, 1825, the first steamer from England reached Calcutta.²⁰ Later, in 1847, the English East India Company started a steamer service from Calcutta to Assam (Barua, 1994, p.76). But the history of transport and communication in Bengal took a glorious turn in February 1855 when Lord Dalhousie officially opened the 121-mile railway from Calcutta to Raniganj.²¹ The following table shows the distances over which the mails were conveyed throughout Bengal by railway, mail cart, horses, runners, and boats in 1860-61 and 1861-62.

Table I: A Comparison of conveyance of mails in Bengal between 1860-61 and 1861-62²²

Presidency	Year	Railway	Mail Cart and on Horseback	Runners and Boats	Total
		Miles	Miles	Miles	Miles
Bengal	1860-61	248 ¹ / ₂	411	11,592	12,251 ¹ / ₂
Bengal	1861-62	358 ¹ / ₂	300	11,482	12,140 ¹ / ₂

It is found from the above tabular data that the railway was gradually taking the burden of carriage of mail bags. Before 1863, the mail bags were carried in the guard's van of the railway carriage if the weight was small, but when the mail was heavy, a separate railway compartment was used in charge of a mail guard. Later, railway mail service became the most important artery of the Travelling Post Office.²³ The British needed access to the vast labour force represented by the *harkaras* in order to establish new routes for the regular transmission of personnel. These *harkaras* were taught the skills of running and survival in hostile geographical tracts by their families or fellow caste members (Bayly, 1999, pp.60-3). The colonial government appointed the Indians in the postal organisation mainly

²⁰Stock, Eugene (1899). *The History of the Church Missionary Society: Its Environment, its Men and its Work*, Vol. I., Church Missionary Society, London, p.297.

²¹Khosla, G.S. (1988). *A History of Indian Railways*, Government of India, New Delhi, p.22.

²² Letter No.1621, From G. Paton, Director-General of the Post Office in India, to W. Grey, Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, Dated Calcutta, 8th October, 1861, Annual Report of the Operations of the Post Office of India, for 1860-61. *East India: Statement exhibiting the Moral and Material Progress and Condition of India, During the Year 1860-61*, Part I., Her Majesty's Stationery Office, London, 1862, para.6, p.25; Letter No. 2019, From G. Paton, *op. cit.*, para.6, p.2.

²³Clarke, Geoffrey, *op. cit.*, p.58.

as vernacular clerks and as *mutsuddees*, runners, bearers, coachmen, syces, boatmen, and other manual workers. At the end of the official year 1860–61, the staff of officers, clerks, and others in the postal department in the Bengal Presidency were as follows:

Table II: Officials in Postal Organisation in the Bengal Presidency in 1860-61²⁴

Post	Number
Director-General of the Post Office	1
Postmasters-General	1
Inspecting Postmasters	10
Postmasters and Deputy Postmasters	260
Clerks (English)	334
Clerks (Vernacular)	32
Postmen and other servants of the Post Office	703
Road, Establishment, consisting of superintendent, overseers, mutsuddees, runners, bearers, coachmen, syces, boatmen, and others	3460
Bullock Train	347
Total	5148

The postal runners were largely recruited from India's "less civilised races," who had discharged their duties by facing wild beasts and wandering criminals and travelling thousands of miles with the mail bags and with the utmost honesty.²⁵ Many postal officials made outstanding contributions to the development of postal services in British India. In recognition of his excellent performance, Dinabandhu Mitra, the author of *Nil Darpan*, was honoured with the title Rai Bahadur (Ghosh, 1998, p.2). The renovation of roadways and the introduction of new means of transportation like steamer services and transport and communication by railways created a wider opportunity for ordinary people to develop physical communication with people living in far-off places. Personal communication among individuals developed into a social relationship and a new society in Bengal where the common people became used to writing personal letters and availing services offered by post offices.

From the beginning of the nineteenth century, Calcutta became the epicentre of administrative, commercial, and intellectual activities in India. The significant contributions of the British rulers were the installation of a number of printing presses and the production of printed books for the public. Though hand-written *punthis* were available in Bengal, they were beyond the reach of ordinary people because of their paucity and high cost. These *punthis* were not produced for

²⁴ Letter No.1621, From G. Paton, *op. cit.*, para.48, p.32.

²⁵Clarke, Geoffrey, *op. cit.*, p.5.

commercial purposes. There was no concept of textbooks in Bengal. We can find the names of eleven printing workshops in Calcutta from where printing services were offered in the years 1825–26 (Ghosh, 1362 B.S., p.153). The availability of brand new printed books to the common people opened up the field of knowledge for them. It was beyond the Bengalis' imagination in previous centuries that books could be a commodity or that men could make a living by printing and selling books. The average person could procure and read a *punthi* only in their dreams (Biswas, 2000, p.14). In Bengal, thousands of printed Bengali books were produced for sale around the mid-nineteenth century.²⁶ In the eighteenth century, paper was manually made in Bengal. The quality of this paper was of an inferior grade. The superior-grade paper, imported from Europe, was more expensive and its supply was irregular. The Mission Press of Serampore set up its own paper mill in 1809–10. On account of an accident, the missionaries imported and installed machinery driven by a steam engine around 1820, which ran till 1865. Between the years from 1820 to 1865, Serampore became the only source of machine-made local supply of paper other than imported and native handmade paper (Priolkar, 1958, p.70). Later, in 1867, the Royal Paper Mill was set up at Bally, which began to manufacture paper of modern varieties according to the European method.²⁷ The availability of inexpensive printed books and machine-made durable writing paper instilled in ordinary Bengalis a desire to read and write. The reading and writing habits of the Bengalis motivated them to send letters by post not only to their friends and relatives but also to those who were commercially connected to them.

The publication and distribution of newspapers and periodicals in society was a new chapter in the history of Bengal. In the mid-nineteenth century, the spread of western education, better communication facilities, the availability of good quality paper, and the supply of printed books in the market generated a new social space in Bengal. Between the years 1780 and 1818, nine English newspapers and periodicals were published from Calcutta. The most renowned among them were the Bengal Gazette, India Gazette, Bengal Journal, The Calcutta Chronicle, The Calcutta Gazette, Calcutta Courier, and Bengal Hurkaru. Besides newspapers and periodicals published in English, several numbers of them, like *Samachar Darpan*, *Sambad Kaumudi*, *Samachar Chandrika*, *Bangadoot*, *Sambad Prabhakar*, *Jnananweshan*, *Sambad Bhaskar*, *Bengal Spectator*, *Tattwabodhini*, and *Someprakash*, were published in Bengali from 1818 to 1858 (Chattapadhyay, 2000, p.18). Newspaper circulation was rare in rural areas in the 1840s, but by the seventies of the nineteenth century, it could be found in nearly every village (Bayly, 1999, p.335). These newspapers and periodicals contained valuable information

²⁶James Long published a catalogue of 1,400 books in 1855. Long, James (1855). *A Descriptive Catalogue of Bengali Works, containing a classified list of Fourteen Hundred Bengali Books and Pamphlets*, Sanders, and Co., Calcutta, pp.1-106.

²⁷Hunter, W.W., *op. cit.* (Vol. III., 1876), p.372; Sur, Atul (1385 B.S.). *Bangla Mudraner Dusho Bachhar* (in Bengali), Jijnansa, Calcutta, p.30.

about Bengal's contemporary society and people. The information published in the newspapers and periodicals created a huge awareness among the people of the province. If we go through them, we will find that a change had developed in the minds of the Bengalis, and they had become eager to communicate with others in order to express their economic, social, and religious perceptions. They sent hundreds of letters to the editors of these newspapers and periodicals, expressing their own views on different topics of society. The services offered by post offices helped them a lot in their efforts. The postal department's statistics back up the observation, revealing that vernacular letters accounted for 55.37 percent of all correspondence in the country in 1892-93.²⁸ The incorporation of Western education and the establishment of modern institutions by foreign rulers in Bengal altered the Bengalis' mental world. Other important factors which contributed to the increasing use of postal services were the emergence of Calcutta as the centre of British administration and affluent society; the evolution of the middle class; and lifting restrictions on elementary education from the lower classes.

In the early nineteenth century, the regular postal services were confined to a few main lines between important towns. District collectors were entrusted with managing their own local post offices. After 1854, when the postal infrastructure was brought into an imperial department under a single Director-General, its activities were widely extended. The actual business, like maintenance of accounts; receiving, sorting, and dispatching of letters; personnel management, etc., were done by post offices, which were divided into head, sub, and branch offices. The branch offices were opened for the purpose of rendering services in villages and at places where there was no need for sub-offices. In the history of postal communication in India, the branch post offices have always played a pioneering role. It had extended its services in remote areas by putting its charges on a schoolmaster, a shopkeeper, or any other resident of the locality who had sufficient knowledge to keep accounts. In this way, the great organisation reached almost to the doorsteps of the remote villagers of Bengal in the 6th decade of the nineteenth century.²⁹

The low-cost postal communication via post offices proved to be a grace to Indians. The cheap postal rates attracted the Indians to use postal services a lot. The pan-Indian uniform postal charges popularised the postal services all over the country. The government considered the postal service a necessity for the public and not a source of income for the government. The expenditures of the imperial government on the Head of Post Offices in Bengal in the years 1874-75 and 1875-76 were amounting to Rs.22,48,464.00 and Rs.23,25,295.00, whereas receipts for the years

²⁸Hamilton, Ivie G.J. (1910). *An Outline of Postal History and Practice with a History of the Post Office in India*, Thacker, Spink and Co., Calcutta, p.197.

²⁹Clarke, Geoffrey, *op. cit.*, pp.1-4.

1874-75 and 1875-76 were to the tune of Rs.15,69,507.00 and Rs.15,94,796.00.³⁰ It was reported that the postal charges after 1856 became 16 times cheaper than they were three years before. Then, at the same cost of sending a letter from Peshawar to Karachi, a letter could be sent to England (Chattapadhyay, 2000, p.96). The feature of the new postal system was cheaper services at the door-step of the public. Due to the popularity of the postal services among the Indians, they began to use them with ardent zeal. For the government, post offices have become a good source of earnings. In the Bengal Presidency, the number of correspondences through post offices in one year prior to the introduction of the half-*anna* postage in 1854-55 was 46,07,316, whereas the number was increased to 58,90,380 in 1854-55 and to 90,54,810 in 1860-61 (Arnold, 1865, p.263). The cheap and convenient postal services proved advantageous for the natives of India. Due to the popularity of the postal services among Indians, post offices became a good means of communication.

In the mid-nineteenth century, India's postal system was restructured both in principle and in its functions. Beginning in the 1860s, the general public of Bengal began to establish communication with others through the medium of post offices. The colonial authorities revamped the old postal structure and made it modern, nearby, and affordable for all. Postal services became attractive to the ordinary people of Bengal, irrespective of caste, creed, and religion. Uniform postal charges throughout India, irrespective of distances, prompted ordinary men and women to write millions of letters to their relatives, friends, and related people. The senders of letters from Bengal were not concentrated in any particular region, but people from all Bengal districts began to communicate with each other, which can be understood from the following table:

Table III: Postal Statistics of letters in Bengal Districts in 1861-62, 1865-66, and 1870-71³¹

Name of the District	Year: 1861-62		Year: 1865-66		Year: 1870-71	
	Letters received	Letters despatched	Letters received	Letters despatched	Letters received	Letters despatched
24 Parganas	249166	240537	269354	264312	437515	Not found
Nadiya	10055	11848	8277	11246	333963	Not found
Jessor	76898	145368	40294	72280	127503	Not found
Midnapur	68920	69144	87199	87990	139078	Not found

³⁰Minute by the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal dated 5th January, 1877. *Administration of Bengal 1875-76* (1877), p.44.

³¹Hunter, W.W., *op. cit.*, (1875) Vol. I., p.221; Vol. II., pp.130, 317; Vol. V., pp.138, 237, 353, 474; (1876) Vol. III., pp.186, 410; Vol. IV., pp.168, 300, 420; Vol. VI., pp.223, 342, 440; Vol. VII., pp.125, 343, 434; Vol. VIII., pp.116, 301; Vol. IX., pp.230, 365; Vol. X., pp.195, 319, 440; Jack, J.C. (1918). *BDG: Bakarganj*, BSBD, Calcutta, p.106.

Hugli (including Howrah)	190523	157412	209111	206316	284348	Not found
Bardwan	116985	122077	140604	173155	280657	Not found
Bankura	32003	33111	37692	37638	77038	Not found
Birbhum	27065	25237	54783	73091	71190	Not found
Dacca	183769	360682	222605	298885	317223	Not found
Faridpur	49575	59780	46445	55489	87352	Not found
Bakarganj	67903	57290	75305	76372	173803	Not found
Maimansinh	65000	59991	76807	78710	140027	Not found
Chittagong	88347	82498	94330	131276	120558	Not found
Noakhali	35232	35790	40762	65951	77196	Not found
Tipperah	51117	49870	59552	57970	101102	Not found
Maldah	58194	55035	42481	43356	102653	Not found
Rangpur	85722	75862	72925	89843	186141	Not found
Dinajpur	52111	57391	80407	86954	143381	Not found
Rajshahi	91303	55220	111516	85152	142073	Not found
Bogra	20744	26190	33696	33545	57591	Not found
Murshidabad	49804	39757	35320	33656	61340	Not found
Pabna	55496	49888	61660	53779	132845	Not found
Darjiling	65488	63115	95447	89711	117236	Not found
Jalpaiguri	12374	14644	86096	53238	89404	Not found
State of Kuch Behar	14722	12876	79442	76895	77920	Not found

From the above tabular data, it can be observed that people from all Bengal districts were writing and receiving a large number of letters to and from others in the seventies of the nineteenth century. The people of Bengal came out of their small world and learnt to communicate with others living at a distance.

The post offices would carry not only letters, but they would also carry a large number of books and newspapers. According to Section 2(i) of the Indian Post Office Act, 1898, the expression “postal articles” includes “a letter, postcard, newspaper, book, pattern or sample packet, parcel and every article or thing transmissible by post.”³² From the early nineteenth century, the ordinary people of Bengal started to read printed books and newspapers of their choice. In its February 27, 1819, issue, the *Samachar Darpan* reported that a country that did not carry out printing works could not be called a “civilized nation.” The same issue of the *Samachar Darpan* also reported that in the past, a limited number of people got books in their possession and got education, while the vast majority of the masses remained in darkness. Around the end of the second decade of the nineteenth

³²*Post Office Manual: Containing Special Supplementary Rules and Regulations*, Vol. V., Superintendent Government Printing, India, Calcutta, p.6.

century, people of all classes began to procure printed books, and an estimated 10,000 books were printed in Bengal over the last ten years. These books had been distributed among different people. The person who bought a book tried to get another one, and in this way, knowledge was spreading in this country.³³ In this case, post offices became a good means for getting books and newspapers from distant places. From the following table, we can get ample testimony of that.

Table IV: Postal Statistics of Books and Newspapers received in Bengal Districts in 1861-62, 1865-66, and 1870-71³⁴

Name of the District	Books received			Newspapers received		
	1861-62	1865-66	1870-71	1861-62	1865-66	1870-71
24 Parganas	1419	2164	5201	24265	25639	32881
Nadiya	-	-	2810	378	108	11159
Jessor	1151	161	1310	6960	4250	9430
Midnapur	2393	1364	4151	7515	9126	11559
Hugli (including Howrah)	345	609	3421	16456	16846	16368
Bardwan	2663	809	2597	11410	14377	15549
Bankura	43	758	1883	3838	4169	6147
Birbhum	1003	639	655	2636	5875	4261
Dacca	2273	2295	4357	23854	22977	28050
Faridpur	547	746	1297	5893	5602	3754
Bakarganj	869	1143	2477	6699	7866	15177
Maimansinh	1652	514	2936	6541	7997	9279
Chittagong	1069	1304	2918	7342	13858	16958
Noakhali	70	-	788	1603	3904	9586
Tipperah	789	1231	2352	6214	8121	9812
Maldah	-	566	752	3820	4427	4849
Rangpur	1163	1143	2637	8287	8031	7994
Dinajpur	252	524	2029	7898	7748	9543
Rajshahi	364	485	2083	9271	9458	11519
Bogra	791	695	828	1939	4315	4655
Murshidabad	351	271	245	5190	4094	5314
Pabna	-	-	1056	8922	4938	6299

³³Bandyopadhyay, Brajendranath (ed). (1339 B.S.). *Sambadpatre Sekaler Katha 1818-1830* (in Bengali), Vol. I., Bangiya Sahitya Parishad Mandir, Calcutta, p.52.

³⁴Hunter, W.W., *op. cit.*, Vol. I., p.221; Vol. II., pp.130, 317; Vol. V., pp.138, 237, 353, 474; Vol. III., pp.186, 410; Vol. IV., pp.168, 300, 420; Vol. VI., pp.223, 342, 440; Vol. VII., pp.125, 343, 434; Vol. VIII., pp.116, 301; Vol. IX., pp.230, 365; Vol. X., pp.195, 319, 440; Jack, J.C., *op. cit.*, p.106.

Darjiling	1610	2728	4580	31125	22955	24852
Jalpaiguri	147	516	1684	2430	12909	8718
State of Kuch Behar	70	239	302	1894	8234	5540

The data from the above table shows that people from all parts of Bengal were eager to acquire knowledge and get information about what was happening in India and outside India. People residing far away from Calcutta had been collecting printed books by post, and their demand was increasing day by day. In the 1870s, they were subscribing to thousands of newspapers and were getting delivery by post. The Bengal postal system, which was not intended for ordinary people prior to the Plassey episode, was gradually developed by colonial authorities after capturing political power in Bengal for various reasons. This development process began at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Lord Dalhousie's regime fundamentally redesigned the country's postal system. After the reformation of Dalhousie, the post offices of Bengal as well as other parts of British India became people's organisations. The British government did not even take into account a revenue deficit in this respect.

Until the first half of the nineteenth century, the services offered by postal organisations were limited. For many reasons, ordinary people could not avail themselves of the postal services. But the main reasons were the absence of post offices close to residences and their high charges. After the reforms of Dalhousie, these difficulties were removed. Ordinary people became enthusiastic about reading and writing and were eager to know what was happening around them. They became desirous of reading printed books to acquire knowledge. They were keen on reading newspapers to get current information about their country and abroad. They became smart enough to write their own views by sending letters to newspaper editors. They were also writing millions of personal, official, and business letters. Their awareness was further testified by the fact that people residing in all parts of Bengal sent thousands of written memorandums to the census authorities asking for their aspirations from the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and their weight during the census of 1911 was one and a half maunds.³⁵ But the major part of their communication with others was established through millions of letters and newspapers, and the post offices of Bengal in this matter played an epochal role. With the development of the mental world of the ordinary Bengalis, they began to exchange interpersonal communication extensively and with great enthusiasm. This phenomenon, occurring in the latter half of the nineteenth century in Bengal, can be called a communication revolution.³⁶

³⁵O'Malley, L.S.S. (1913). *Census of India 1911*, Vol. V., Bengal, Bihar and Orissa and Sikkim, Part I. Report, Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, Calcutta, p.440.

³⁶In nineteenth century Bengal, a changed social structure emerged with a change of its psychology, ideology, beliefs and valuations due to many factors. Establishment and extension of modern, cheap, and faster postal services, and its use by thousands of common people was a revolution. Dr. Sorokin, the eminent sociological

The eagerness of the common people of Bengal to communicate with others by using the services of the post offices nearby had been increasing throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century. In the fiscal year 1870–71, the number of letters received and delivered from post offices in Bakarganj, Birbhum, Burdwan, Hooghly (including Howrah), and Midnapore was reported to be 1,73,803; 71,190; 2,80,657; 2,84,348; and 1,39,078. In comparison, the number of letters received and delivered from post offices in the same districts was: 22,93,226; 6,23,350; 22,30,000; 11,36,018 (excluding Howrah); and 14,97,756 in the first decade of the 20th century. In other districts of Bengal, people showed a similar enthusiasm for communicating with others through post offices. In addition to letters, the increased demand for newspapers through post offices shot up sharply in the early 20th century. Not only letters and newspapers, but huge quantities of postcards were delivered to the common men of Bengal at the beginning of the 20th century. In the first decade of the 20th century, post offices from the districts of Birbhum, Burdwan, Hooghly, Midnapore, and Nadia delivered post cards numbering 11,14,858; 39,60,000; 20,93,260; 20,12,530; and 1,09,300 successively. The districts of Bankura, Chittagong, Dinajpur, Howrah, Jessore, Khulna, Malda, and Rangpur delivered letters, post cards, newspapers, parcels, and packets by the millions.³⁷ At the end of the nineteenth century, the ordinary people of Bengal got used to communicating with others through the services offered by post offices, and the overall people-to-people communication through post offices became revolutionary. In the early decades of the 20th century, the post offices became a part and parcel of the daily lives of the educated Bengalis.

Conclusion:

In eighteenth-century Bengal, there was no vernacular newspaper to get information about the outside world. Because there were no printed books, ordinary people's knowledge was confined. Since the early nineteenth century, Western

theorist defines: "Revolution is a change in the behaviour of the people on the one hand and their psychology, ideology, beliefs and valuations on the other. Revolution represents the deformation of the social structure of society. Revolution means the change of fundamental social processes." Sorokin, Pitirim A. (1925). *The Sociology of Revolution*, J. B. Lippincott Company, Philadelphia, p.11.

³⁷Jack, J.C., *op. cit.*, p.106; O'Malley, L.S.S. (1910). *BDG: Birbhum*, BSBD, Calcutta, p.82; Peterson, J.C.K., *op. cit.*, p.143; O'Malley, L.S.S. and Chakravarti, Monmohan (1912). *BDG: Hooghly*, BSBD, Calcutta, p.204; O'Malley, L.S.S., *op. cit. (Midnapore)*, p.133; Garrett, J.H.E. (1910). *BDG: Nadia*, BSBD, Calcutta, p.103; O'Malley, L.S.S. (1908). *BDG: Bankura*, BSBD, Calcutta, p.122; O'Malley, L.S.S. (1908). *Eastern BDG: Chittagong*, BSBD, Calcutta, p.133; Strong, F.W. (1912). *Eastern BDG: Dinajpur*, Pioneer Press, Allahabad, p.94; O'Malley, L.S.S. and Chakravarti, Monmohan (1909). *BDG: Howrah*, BSBD, Calcutta, p.127; O'Malley, L.S.S. (1912). *BDG: Jessore*, BSBD, Calcutta, p.110; O'Malley, L.S.S. (1908). *BDG: Khulna*, BSBD, Calcutta, p.133; Lambourn, G.E. (1918). *BDG: Malda*, BSBD, Calcutta, p.77; Vas, J.A. (1911). *Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteers: Rangpur*, Pioneer Press, Allahabad, p.99.

education has been introduced in Bengal. The Christian missionaries began to spread education not only to urban aristocrats but also to the ordinary public. Newspapers and periodicals in the vernacular were circulated across the province. Roadways were renovated, and railway transport was introduced. The country's existing postal systems were completely revamped and converted into ones that were cheaper, faster, and more efficient. Printed books, vernacular newspapers, and Western education opened up a kingdom of knowledge before the Bengalis. They became enthusiastic about writing prayers, petitions, and memoranda to the government about their aspirations. At the same time, they began to write letters to the newspaper editors, expressing their views on the burning issues of society. However, the most extensive exposure for ordinary Bengalis occurred in the field of personal communication with others. In the eighteenth century, the ordinary public of Bengal lived in a small world, communicating with others only by sending a message or meeting personally. From the latter half of the nineteenth century on, they sent and received millions of letters and postcards, besides books and newspapers, through the post office. This shift in the ordinary Bengali's mental world towards communicating with others through a newly renovated postal organisation resulted in a communication revolution in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

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