



Postcard Stories

2025

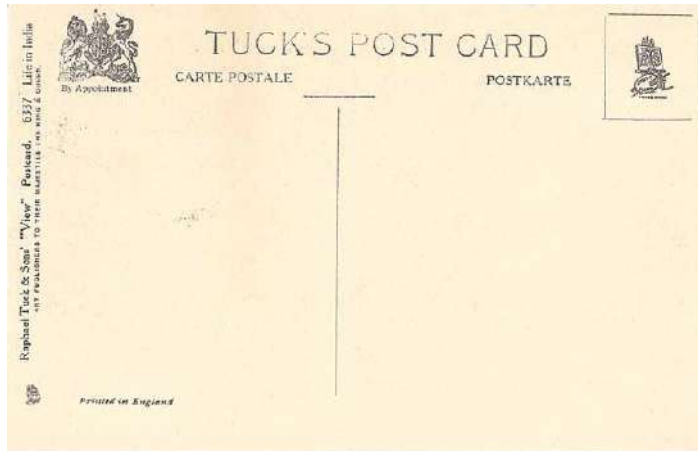
Postcard Stories



'India - Giving out the day's rice' (Recto of postcard)

In this postcard, the lady of the house stands in the doorway, supervising the doling out of rice, perhaps for a meal for workers on the property.

Source: Wikimedia Commons



Verso of postcard

Cover image: 'Miss Gowharjan of Calcutta'

Gowharjan, later popularly known as Gauhar Jaan, was born as Eileen Angelina Yeoward, an Armenian Christian who later converted to Islam. She (1873-1930) was a highly successful musician with an outstanding repertoire. In 1902, hers was the first Indian voice to ever be recorded. She went on to cut close to 600 records, the most successful female musician of her time. Proficient in classical Hindustani vocal music, Dhrupad, Bengali Kirtan as well as Rabindra Sangeet, she was also a trained *kathak* dancer.

Courtesy: Projit Bihari Mukharji, New Delhi



Centre for Women's Development Studies
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Sources: Holidays <https://documents.doptirculars.nic.in>
Moon phases: <https://www.timeanddate.com>

Postcard Stories

In July 1879, the Post Office of India introduced a 1/4 anna correspondence card by which a message could be sent from one part of the country to another. It was 'a huge success with the local population within India' and by 1883, 26 million such cards were sold annually (Mathur, 2018: 26). The history of the picture postcard corresponds roughly to the ready availability of the photograph in different formats worldwide, including the colonies. Photographic collotypes or halftone images were often coloured and re-photographed to form a postcard, and Germany and Austria, being pioneers in lithographic production, were significant manufacturers. Though Indian subjects were portrayed in early picture postcards, these became available in India only in 1896. Once introduced, it quickly became a part of colonial life as well as of the emerging tourism industry. Omar Khan has observed that though men were associated with the production of these popular cards, postcard collection was a hobby dominated by women. It is hardly surprising then, that Indian women became subjects of the postcard's oftentimes Orientalist gaze.

As with photographs, collectors, historians and aficionados of the printed visual have been dating postcards. They had quite a lot to go by in terms of printed information on the card, arrangement and lettering of the word 'postcard' as well as existing postal regulations and the development of the postcard industry. For instance, those with undivided backs were available prior to 1907, the white-border style on the image side (recto) came into vogue after 1916, and in the post-World War II period, the chrome-style took over. Many carried in small print the names of manufacturers as well as country of origin, making it easier to locate provenance and period.

Postcards are categorised as ephemera; yet, for those interested in new data sources as clues to the past, they are valuable sources of information on the colonial period, and, like photographs, tell many stories. Social anthropologist Christopher Pinney, who has used the photographic visual with rare dexterity to understand certain facets of Indian society, writes that the postcard became 'a resounding defense of the colonial spirit in picture form'. The images provided colonial families back home an idea of India; for Indian collectors or users too, there could also have been an

element of curiosity, of surprise. For researchers, postcard images provide valuable insights into the history of visual representation of roles, ways of life and that of the country's many peoples and sub-cultures.

A number of companies as well as photo studios such as Bourne and Shepherd in Calcutta, Higginbotham and Co in Madras, Moorli Dhur & Sons in Ambala and so on were producing postcards depicting occupational groups with 'appropriate material objects' (Pinney 1997:57). Or, as our image for November shows (the native *ayah* with her charge, the White male child), appropriate role-playing. The colonial camera focused on women at work, at festivals, life cycle rituals and as individuals. While the latter were clearly posed, others might have been based on on site photographs.

If postcard-collecting was popular among colonial women, in independent India, collection is less gender-specific: this calendar would not have been possible without the amazing support and generosity of Delhi-based Sangeeta and Ratnesh Mathur, avid collectors of India's print history, including maps, early photographs, match box and trade labels and of course, postcards. Their extensive collection - *Saraswati by Ganga* - is soon to be housed on the banks of the Ganga, 75 kilometres outside the Capital (<http://www.sarganga.org>). Projit Bihari Mukharji was equally generous, taking off from his busy schedule at Ashoka University and international travel, to source appropriate images. Rekha Wazir kindly allowed us to reuse a couple that had featured in CWDS' *Re-presenting Indian Women 1875-1947* and Ritika Lall-Kapur pitched in with information on the Bhotia lady. We are very grateful to our donors, none of whom was given much notice or time.

Malavika Karlekar

References:

- Khan, Omar, *Paper Jewels: Postcards from the Raj*, Ahmedabad: Mapin Publishing, 2018
- Pinney, Christopher, *Camera Indica – The Social Life of Indian Photographs*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997
- Mathur, Sangeeta and Ratnesh, *Picturesque India – A Journey in Early Picture Postcards (1896-1947)*, New Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2018.



An Indian Beauty.

Oriental Post Card.

6, COLLOOTOLA STREET.



A. Zaman,



Calcutta.

‘An Indian Beauty’

An early pre-1907 picture postcard where the verso could be used for the sender's message. The image on the left side of the recto is clearly of a studio photograph. The bejewelled subject could have been a performer and is possibly wearing a long-sleeved blouse, long skirt and an *odhni* (long scarf) that is draped across her shoulders.

Courtesy: Collection of Saraswati by Ganga

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			☾ 1 New Year's Day	2	3	4
5	6 Guru Gobind Singh's Birthday	☾ 7	8	9	10	11
12	13	○ 14 Makar Sankranti Magha Bihu/ Pongal/ Hazrat Ali's Birthday	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	☾ 22	23	24	25
26 Republic Day	27	28	● 29	30	31	

January 2025

December						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

February						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	



'The Spinning Wheel'

A woman from Kashmir spins on a traditional wooden *charkha*, very similar to the one used later by Gandhiji during India's national movement. He popularised home-spinning as a part of self-reliance.

Undivided back, unused. Printed in Germany

Courtesy: Collection of Saraswati by Ganga

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
						1
2	3	4	●	5	6	7
Sri Panchami/ Basant Panchami						8
9	10	11	○	12	13	14
			Guru Ravi Das's Birthday			15
16	17	18	19	●	20	21
			Shivaji Jayanti			22
23	24	25	26	27	●	28
Birthday of Swamy Dayananda Saraswati			Maha Shivaratri			

January

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

March

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
30	31					1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29

February 2025



*Gangor Festival at Koraber, mewar Rowatji in the centre
(Dancing Girls with wooden Godders Gangor).*

‘Gangor festival at Koraber, Mewar Rowatji in the centre (Dancing girls with wooden Goddesr (sic) Gangor’

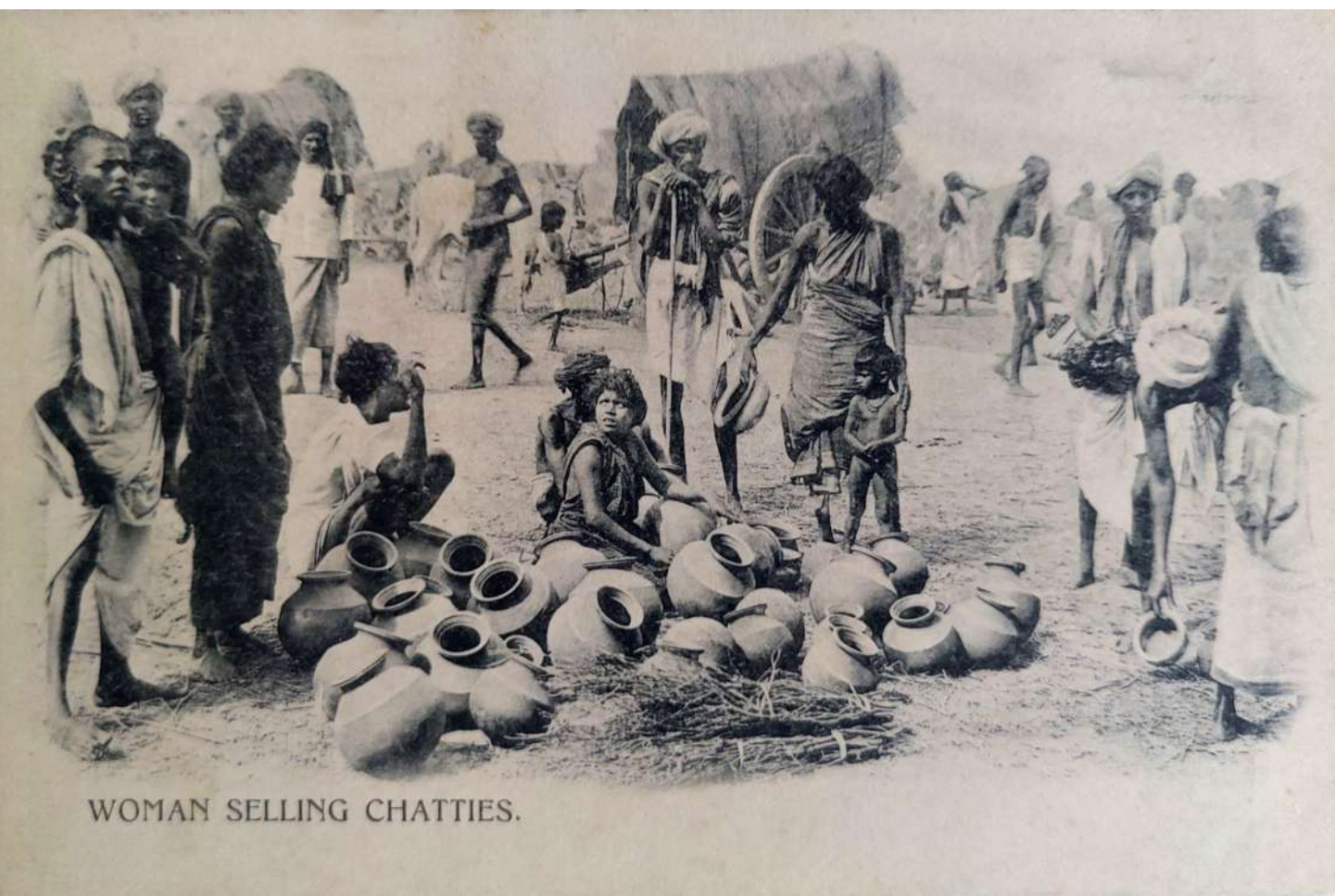
An important festival in Rajasthan and other parts of north India, Gangaur celebrates spring and the time of harvest as well as the goddess Gauri (Parvati), the consort of Shiva, during the Hindu month of Chaitra (March–April). In this postcard in the present day Udaipur region, a feudatory chieftain or *jagirdar* – Rowatji (Rawatji) - watches women dance in a circle around a wooden image of the goddess.

Courtesy: Collection of Saraswati by Ganga

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
30 Chaitra Sukladi/ Gudi Padava/ Ugadi/ Cheti Chand	31 Idu'l Fitr					1
2	3	4	5	☾ 6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13 Holika Dahan	○ 14 Holi Dolyatra	15
16	17 Id-ul-Zuha (Bakrid)	18	19	20	21	☾ 22
23	24	25	26	27	28 Jamat-UI-Vida	● 29

March 2025

February							April						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1			1	2	3	4	5
2	3	4	5	6	7	8	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
9	10	11	12	13	14	15	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
16	17	18	19	20	21	22	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
23	24	25	26	27	28		27	28	29	30			



WOMAN SELLING CHATTIES.

‘Women selling Chatties’

Possibly based on a photograph, this postcard is of an open market place somewhere perhaps in central India or in the United Provinces. Women of the potter caste are selling clay pots. Interestingly, while the making of the pots would have been the work of men, marketplace activities involved women.

Undivided back, unused

Courtesy: Collection of Saraswati by Ganga

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Ram Navami				Mahavir Jayanti		
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
Vaisakhi/ Vishu	Meshadi (Tamil New Year's Day)	Vaisakhadi(Bengal)/ Bahag Bihu (Assam)			Good Friday	
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
Easter Sunday						
27	28	29	30	31		

April 2025

March							May						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
30	31					1					1	2	3
2	3	4	5	6	7	8	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
9	10	11	12	13	14	15	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
16	17	18	19	20	21	22	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
23	24	25	26	27	28	29	25	26	27	28	29	30	31



Adjusting Ear Ring

‘Adjusting Ear ring’

The woman is possibly a *tamasha* artiste or a courtesan in the Bombay Presidency. The round *thali* with betel leaves and condiments to the right might suggest the latter. She is getting ready for her role as entertainer, either of patrons or an audience.

Divided back, unused,
Photo Company, Bombay.
Printed in Luxembourg

Courtesy: Collection of Saraswati by
Ganga

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1	2	3
☾ 4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	○ 12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	☾ 20	21	22	23	24
25	26	● 27	28	29	30	31

May 2025

April							June							
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	
			1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6	7	8	9	10	11	12	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	
13	14	15	16	17	18	19	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	
20	21	22	23	24	25	26	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	
27	28	29	30				29	30						



‘Women grinding corn – Jaipur’

The two women pose, sitting across each other, while using the grinding stone (*chakki*), an important household implement. The flour would spill out of the sides and be collected and stored. Though mechanised milling has largely overtaken this arduous task, the *chakki* is still used in parts of the country. Printed by Gobind Ram and Oodey Ram, Jaipur, well known Indian picture postcards makers in the 1920s

Divided back, unused

Courtesy: Collection of Saraswati by Ganga

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

June 2025

May							July						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2	3			1	2	3	4	5
4	5	6	7	8	9	10	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
18	19	20	21	22	23	24	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
25	26	27	28	29	30	31	27	28	29	30	31		

Coimbatour

L'Ecole anglaise.
De Engelsche school.



Sports in a Missionary School, Coimbatore

As Christian missionaries were important residents of the colonies, their work among the 'natives' was conveyed through formal reports, informal diaries and journals as well as photos such as this one. Establishing and running educational institutions was a significant part of missionary activity. Apart from pedagogy, sports and physical education were stressed as these were regarded as vital for all round growth of the child.

Courtesy: Rekha Wazir, New Delhi

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Muharram						
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

June

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

August

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
31					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

July 2025



'Nautch Girl'

As *nautch* or *natch* girls – professional women dancers of north India – held an important place in the popular colonial imagination, there are countless picture postcards of them. Here the dancer poses with a *sarangi* player to her right while the *dholi* to her left plays the *dholak*. The skulls caps indicate that they are Muslims as in all likelihood, is the *nautch* girl. It is a modest outdoor setting, and the performers are simply dressed. Hence, either the threesome posed especially for the camera while they rehearsed at home or were in fact part of a small local or itinerant group of performers.

Courtesy: Collection of Saraswati by Ganga

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
☾ 31					☾ 1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	☉ 9 Raksha Bandhan
10	11	12	13	14	15 Independence Day Parsi New Year's day/ Nauraj Janmashtami (Smarta)	☾ 16 Janmashtami
17	18	19	20	21	22	● 23
24	25	26	27 Vinayaka Chaturthi/ Ganesh Chaturthi	28	29	30

August 2025

July						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

September						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1	2	3	4	5 Milad-un-Nabi or Id-e-Milad (Birthday of Prophet Mohammad <small>Onam or Thiru Onam Day</small>	6
○ 7	8	9	10	11	12	13
● 14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21 ●	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29 <small>Dussehra (Saptami)</small>	30 ● <small>Dussehra (Mahashtami)</small>				

September 2025

August

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
31					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

October

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	



‘A Bhutia Lady’

With origins in Tibet, the Bhutias form a major part of the population of Bhutan. A gentrified Bhutia lady had clearly posed for this coloured picture postcard. She wears the *honju* (long blouse) and skirt (*chhua*) and traditional jewellery.

Courtesy: Collection of Saraswati by Ganga

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1	2	3	4
			Dussehra (Mahanavmi)	Dussehra Mahatma Gandhi's Birthday		
5	6	○	7	8	10	11
		Maharshi Valmiki's Birthday			Karaka Chaturdasi (Karwa Chouth)	
12	●	13	14	15	16	18
19	20	●	21	22	23	24
	Diwali (Deepavali) Naraka Chaturdasi		Govardhan Puja	Bhai Duj		25
26	27	28	●	29	30	31
		Pratihara Sashthi / Surya Sashthi (Chhat Puja)				

October 2025

September							November						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
		1	2	3	4	5	6						1
7	8	9	10	11	12	13	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
28	29	30					23	24	25	26	27	28	29



THE "AYAH".

'The Ayah'

Based on a painting done by Anglo-Indian artist Fred Rogers, it represents a favourite member of the colonial household staff, the children's *ayah*.

Here, she holds her charge, a blonde-haired little boy, while he stands on a ledge. An opening to the right and the style of the supporting bracket would suggest that they were visiting an old monument. The child in a sailor's suit, very popular in the early part of the 20th century. The woman's dress – *odhni* (long scarf), *ghagra* (full skirt), anklets and *jooties* (closed footwear) would suggest that she is from north India.

Courtesy: Projit Bihari Mukharji,
New Delhi

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
30						1
2	3	4	○5	6	7	8
9	10	11	●Guru Nanak's Birthday12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	●20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	●28	29
Guru Teg Bahadur's Martyrdom Day						

November 2025

October							December							
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	
				1	2	3	4		1	2	3	4	5	6
5	6	7	8	9	10	11		7	8	9	10	11	12	13
12	13	14	15	16	17	18		14	15	16	17	18	19	20
19	20	21	22	23	24	25		21	22	23	24	25	26	27
26	27	28	29	30	31			28	29	30	31			



'Hindu woman riding bicycle'

The draping and design on the sari border would suggest that the woman was photographed in an urban area in Bombay Presidency. It would not be at all surprising if she belonged to Pandita Ramabai's Mukti Sadan founded at the end of the 19th century in Poona (Pune). The Sadan taught the women to be self-reliant and economically strong while breaking taboos on feminine mobility and visibility.

*Courtesy: Collection of Saraswati
by Ganga*

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1	2	3	4	○ 5	6
7	8	9	10	11	● 12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	● 20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
			Christmas Eve	Christmas Day		
● 28	29	30	31			

December 2025

November						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
30						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29

January						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31



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