

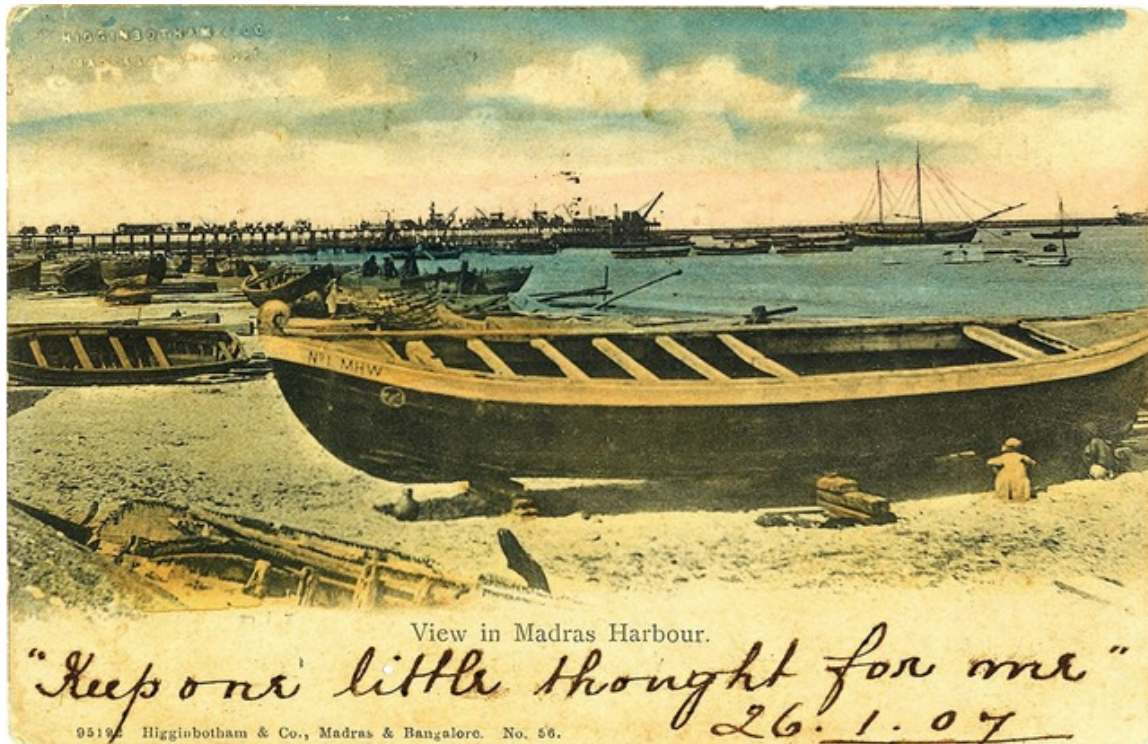
South India Addresses the World: Postcards, Circulation, and Empire

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[<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/tapic/x-7977573.0009.208-00000001/1?subview=detail;view=entry>]

Fig. 1. View in Madras Harbour, published by Higginbotham & Co., Madras and Bangalore, No. 56, from the private collection of Dr Stephen Hughes.

Dated January 26, 1907. Message reads: "Keep one little thought for me."

For anyone who has lived through the recent emergence of the Internet, social media, camera phones, and digital-printing technologies, it is perhaps all too easy to assume that the rapid and large-scale circulation of photographic images is a uniquely twenty-first-century phenomenon. However, photographs have, of course, never been "still" or "silent" (Pinney 1992, 78). A growing body of literature demonstrates that since its invention, in the mid-nineteenth century, photography has always circulated, moving among different spaces, discourses, and material forms (see Strassler 2010, Poole 1997, Edwards 2001). Of the various nineteenth-century photographic innovations, the humble picture postcard was the most widely traveled of them all.

Building on and surpassing the popularity of the *carte de visite* and the cabinet card, the postcard was an innovative medium that combined image and text for the explicit purpose of circulation via the global postal system. By the turn of the twentieth century, the picture postcard was the most widely circulated and affordable mass-produced form of photography. For the first time, postcards offered an efficient means of photo-sharing and social networking over distances spanning the globe.

The scale of postcard success at the beginning of the twentieth century is staggering. According to precise records of the British postal service, more than six billion postcards passed through its postal system between 1902 and 1910 (Gillen and Hall 2009, 2). Although no one has attempted an exact calculation of global production during the peak postcard years, from 1895 to 1915, one scholar has estimated a conservative figure of between 200 and 300 billion were in circulation (Rogan 2005, 2). The enormity and rapid spread of the postcard craze forces us to consider the medium's role in the circulation of photographs as something more than can be confined to the analysis of the images themselves. Indeed, postcard circulation poses both unique problems and opportunities for the history of photography.

Postcard circulation is not just the movement from here to there and back again; it is also a cultural process that transfigures photographs, people, places, ideas, and objects across transnational publics as part of wider "cultures of circulation" (Lee and Li Puma 2002; Gaonkar and Povinelli 2003). Postcards rework and complicate photographic images in numerous ways — material and discursive, mass-reproduction and personal, and visual and textual. When a photographic image is selected, edited, hand-tinted, captioned, inscribed with a brief hand-written message, adorned with a stamp, posted, delivered, and collected as a postcard, it is repeatedly altered in a "circulatory matrix through which new discursive forms, practices and artifacts carry out their routine ideological labor of constituting subjects" (Goankar and Povinelli 2003: 386). As Junge (2018: 170) has recently argued, "[P]ostcards are quintessential travelling objects" that are made to change location along with their value, function, and the practices connected to them as objects. And as they move, they can both accrue and lose value and meaning due to changing ownership, display, and curation in different discursive contexts. Even after the bond between sender and receiver is long gone, many postcards continue to circulate in archives and exhibitions, at flea markets and collector fairs, and as reproduction in books as well as online and through social media.

Building on the recently finished exhibition *From Madras to Bangalore: Picture Postcards as Urban History of Colonial India*, ^{[1],[#N1]} this article will focus on picture postcards from the Indian cities of Chennai (formerly called Madras) and Bengaluru (formerly Bangalore) during the first three decades of the twentieth century to take up the issue of photographic circulation. We have consulted approximately one thousand postcards, the vast majority of which have been sourced from our own private collections. We have resorted to private collecting because there is no archival location or research library that currently holds more than a small number of scattered picture postcards of South India: For most of the twentieth century, archives and research libraries did not consider postcards important enough to systematically collect. Instead, we have assembled our collections over many years from postcard fairs in the United Kingdom, online, family, friends, and antique stores and markets across India. We have found that historical postcards from South India are often easier to find outside of India. For example, there was a high volume of traffic in South Indian postcards that followed the networks of family, friends, and collectors from India to the UK during the early twentieth century. These postcards are continuously surfacing in a thriving and well-organized network of dealers in ephemera, postal history, and postcards. However, postcards certainly continue to be collected and circulated in India as well. We have also consulted multiple private collections of picture postcards in Bengaluru as part of a separate research project between 2015 and 2017. ^{[2],[#N2]}

Our thousand-card sample is by no means comprehensive given the sheer scale of production of South Indian postcards during the early decades of the twentieth century, but it can be considered representative of those still in circulation. Our criteria for selection have been as wide as possible and not limited to a particular subject matter, producer, style, or quality. If it was produced by a company in Madras or Bangalore, depicted something about these cities, or was even mailed from either, we have tried to include it within our remit. This means that in addition to postcard images, we sought out postcard backs because of their messages and postal information. Likewise, we have in some cases also tried to collect more than one "version" of the same postcard because of the different stories they tell.

We use the production histories, postal information, written messages, and even unsent picture postcards to think more broadly about the issue of photographic circulation. Postcards, as the most widely circulated form of photography in the early twentieth century, helped establish networks of materiality, discourse, social relations, and visual tropes that worked as part of colonial cultures of circulation. By examining the circulation of picture postcards of two significant, connected yet distinct cities in colonial South India, we explore the

complex ways in which postcards contributed to the cultures of circulation within South India and the global networks of empire. Postcards, we argue, are still a relatively untapped resource for the history of photography and are of particular relevance for the study of photographic circulation. Picture postcards from the early 1900s offer an immense “social archive” (Volks 2010) through which it is possible to map what happened to photographs when they moved.

In the first part of this paper, we will examine the complex circuits of production behind the picture postcards we consulted in the course of curating the exhibition mentioned above. The role of the postcard as a medium of communication most obviously lends itself to an analysis of the circulation of photographs. However, it is important to recognize that before a message was written, a stamp affixed, and a postal journey instated, the photographic images had already undergone complex circulation in the production process. In the second part of the paper, we will examine the circulation that occurred when postcards were written and mailed.

In separating these two aspects, we are not suggesting any hard-and-fast distinction between production and consumption. Instead, by structuring the paper in this way, we hope to draw out the complex and manifold ways in which the production and the consumption of postcards are themselves part of the larger dynamics of circulation.

Circuits of Production

Despite their historical success, postcards have received much less attention from scholars than has photography. Coinciding with the publication of Malek Alloula’s *The Colonial Harem* (1986), interest in the socio-historic significance of picture postcards began to gain traction. Since then, there has been a gradual increase in scholarship on the medium to the point that there is almost an emergent field coming into its own. Multiple authors have explored this medium’s role in the construction and dissemination of colonial discourse (see Geary and Webb 1998, Patterson 2006, Stevenson 2013, Mathur 2007, Rydell 1998) and the ways in which postcards were tied up with particular socio-spatial imaginaries of modernity (Schor 2010, Stieber 2010, Meikle 2015, Jakle and Sculle 2012).

More picture postcards were produced for India than for any other part of the British Empire outside of Britain, yet this vast popular archive has not fared well in histories of global media. They have been commonly viewed as trivial scraps of old-fashioned colonial nostalgia. Compared to the high market value museum collections and scholarly attention paid to historical photography of India, postcards have to a very large extent been neglected as photography’s degraded, ephemeral poor cousin. There are, perhaps, good reasons for this, starting with the fact that there is a very well-established and rich scholarship on the history of photography in India (Pinney stands out from the rest) that has rightfully taken center stage.

Cameras first went on sale in India in January 1840 (just several months after the announcement of the invention of photography in Europe). After this, photography was quick to spread to all major cities across the subcontinent, and by 1856 photographic societies had been established in Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta (Pinney 2008: 9–11). By the time picture postcards were gaining popularity and global reach, at the turn of the twentieth century, photographic technologies had vastly improved. With the development of smaller, lighter cameras, the shift to dry gelatin plates that were more portable, and the shortening of exposure times, photographers could move through a city with much greater ease in their search for that perfect picture-postcard view (Nead 2004: 65).

The thriving business of studios, photographers, and photographic practices provided infrastructure that enabled the postcard trade in India to take off in the early 1900s. The quantity of surviving postcards from Madras and Bangalore that still circulate in the international market suggests that they were a profitable medium for local photographic studios to expand their business beyond portraits. In a relatively small geographical areas within these two cities, we have discovered that there were some thirty-five studios producing picture postcards in the early decades of the twentieth century. One of the most prolific was the German-run studio *Wiele & Klein*, in Madras (figure 2), and later *Wiele’s Studio* in Bangalore (figure 3), which produced postcards in both locations. Among other notable studios in Madras were *Nicholas & Co.*, *W. A. Foreshaw*, *Klein & Peryerl*, and *Doss & Brothers*; in Bangalore, *Doveton’s Studio*, *The Picture House*, *Gentle & Co.*, and *C. G. Brown* were prominent postcard producers.



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Fig. 2. Madras Harbour as Seen From the Lighthouse, published by Wiele & Klein, Madras, from the private collection of Dr Stephen Hughes.



[<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/topic/x-7977573.0009.208-00000003/1?subview=detail;view=entry>]

Fig. 3. Cubbon Park, published by Wiele's Studio, Bangalore, from the private collection of Dr Emily Stevenson.

Message reads: "Just here for a few days holiday. I am high up in the hills and the climate is almost like Scotland only we have sun at midday. Trust you are well and your wife and son in good form. I have many great pals here so I am having a good time."

The production of postcards entailed complex business and trade networks that linked Madras and Bangalore. Several of the big studios had branches in both cities the two most important in British South India. As the larger of the two, Madras was usually the first location for studios, which then expanded to Bangalore, where they would be likely to find good business from the British military cantonment residents. This was the case for Wiele & Klein and Del Tufo & Co.

In addition to photographic studios, there were larger companies that produced postcards, most likely by hiring “freelance” photographers or purchasing rights to reproduce photographs from local studios. The bookstore Higginbotham & Co. and the department store Spencer’s & Co. were dominant players in the postcard markets of Bangalore and Madras, again linking the two cities into a common postcard-production and -consumption industry. Many European visitors and residents of the two cities would have purchased and mailed their postcards from these outlets, as indicated by postmarks and the presence of the stores in multiple postcards themselves. On one of Mount Road, Madras, that was produced by Higginbotham & Co., the sender has marked the location of the store where he purchased the card with a small cross (figure 4). A postcard of South Parade, Bangalore, produced by Spencer’s & Co., shows the store itself as something of a focal point, its signage clearly visible (figure 5). Higginbotham’s alone produced between five hundred and six hundred postcards over the course of three decades.



[<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/topic/x-7977573.0009.208-00000004/1?subview=detail;view=entry>]

Fig. 4. Mount Road, Madras, published by Higginbotham & Co., Madras and Bangalore, from the private collection of Dr Stephen P. Hughes.

Message Reads: “X marks the shop were I bought this card.”.



[<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/topic/x-7977573-0009.208-00000005/1?subview=detail;view=entry>]

Fig. 5. South Parade, Bangalore, published by Spencer's & Co., Madras, from the private collection of Dr Emily Stevenson.

Message Reads: "Much love to all."

This figure gives some sense of the considerable scale of the South Indian postcard business at the time. There was a thriving market that was sustained by a steady demand for many different views and attracted multiple producers operating together within a confined geographic area. These studios and department stores were generally concentrated in the central streets in the European shopping districts of each city — Mount Road in Madras and South Parade in Bangalore.

Most of the studios and department stores were located in close proximity to one another and had various kinds of connections with employees working for their rivals. For example, one of the sons from the family running Nicholas & Co. in Madras married into the family that was running Higginbotham & Co. bookstore and promptly took over its most prolific postcard production. This happened at about the same time as one of his brothers moved Nicholas & Co. out of Madras to the west coast in what is now Kerala. Moreover, European photographers from these studios often belonged to the same elite clubs, such as the Freemasons. [3],[#N3]. With so many personal connections and working in close proximity, the postcard companies were well aware of what the others were producing. They often shadowed each other in producing the same "repertoire" of postcard views of each city, such as British colonial monuments, streets, temples, churches, mosques, and gardens. Such was this overlap that we can well imagine that photographers would have been meeting and sharing with one another as they moved throughout the cities while socializing, taking photos, and attending family gatherings. Consequently, even before the picture postcard was printed, the business of seeking out and developing images for them in Bangalore and Madras was tied up with and constitutive of social networks that were crucial to the production of imaginaries of empire. These imaginaries were predicated on moving through and living in particular spaces and social circles of the colonial city.

It is important to note, however, that the postcard business in Madras and Bangalore was not just a European affair. Indian photographers played an instrumental role in postcard production and photography, at all levels and in both cities, as apprentices, photographers, and studio owners. In Bangalore, the Indian family-run studio S. Mahadeo & Son (which began with a branch in Belgaum and continues today in Bengaluru under the name of G. G. Welling) was a prominent producer of postcards across South India (figure 6). Yet numerous,

smaller Indian-run studios were also at work producing postcards in Madras and Bangalore, such as T. Mamundy Pillai & Sons, Maruthi & Co. T. Manchayya, and D. P. Sarathee & Bros. in Bangalore and Ratna & Co., R. Shaikahmed Saib & Co. (figure 7), and Venkiah Brothers in Madras.



[<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/topic/x-7977573.0009.208-00000006/1?subview=detail;view=entry>]

Fig. 6. Cavalry Road, Bangalore, published by S. Mahadeo & Son, Belgaum. From the private collection of Dr Emily Stevenson.



[<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/topic/x-7977573.0009.208-00000007/1?subview=detail;view=entry>]

*Fig. 7. Uncaptioned street scene in Bangalore, published by R. Shaikahmed Saib & Co., Madras.
From the private collection of Dr Stephen P. Hughes.*

Moreover, in European-run studios, Indian photographers and apprentices were employed, meaning that even if a postcard was attributed to a European studio, an Indian photographer could very likely have taken the picture on its front. In 1902, for example, Wiele's Studio in Bangalore, listed as "first rate photographers, enlargements and paintings," employed four assistants: P. Subrahmania Sastry, T. A. Annadorai Pillai, Narainaswamy, and Cecil Doveton (Thacker's Indian Directory 1902: 777) [4],[#N4]. The Indian photographers involved in the production of these South Indian postcards would have brought some of their own sensibilities to the task, but they were also taking part in a trade that was at that time oriented toward Europeans living, working, and traveling in India.

As Pinney has highlighted, drawing distinctions between Indian and European photography in the context of British India is "fraught with difficulties" (1997: 95). This applies equally to picture-postcard photography and the numerous stages of production that went in to creating a picture postcard after the initial "photographic event" (Pinney 2003: 10). With both Indian and European photographers and companies working together in producing very similar postcards of south India during the early decades of the 20th century, it becomes difficult for us now to assume that there was a clearly delineated colonizer/colonized distinction at work in their production.

The life of a postcard from South India started as a picture taken by one of the many photographers working for photo studios or department stores. Taking topographical shots on location in the cities was not always the most prestigious of tasks for photographic studios. According to the account of one studio proprietor in Bangalore, up to the 1960s and 1970s, when postcards remained in common usage, this was work that could be done by an apprentice because it was not nearly as demanding as were studio portraits, for which there was an expectant, immediate customer and only one chance to get it right. If postcard photographs did not turn out well, they could always be redone at a later point. However, many of the early postcards from Madras and Bangalore were also shot in the controlled studio environment, where photographic subjects could be posed in a manner that reenacted city scenes, activities, and situations (figure 8). Once a local firm had selected its photographs, the majority of them were sent to Europe to be produced as postcards in a typical print run that has been estimated at three thousand during the "golden age" of postcards (MacDougall 2006: 196).



[<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/topic/x-7977573.0009.208-00000008/1?subview=detail;view=entry>]

Fig. 8. A Street Scene, Madras, published by Wiele & Klein, Madras, from the private collection of Dr Emily Stevenson.

Message reads: "Will write next mail, trust you are all well. With love from Aggie."

In the late 1800s, Germany was the world leader in the photomechanical printing processes that enabled the mass-reproduction of images for postcards. To start with, postcards were produced using the already existing printing technologies and not on photosensitive paper. They were printed as lithographs (invented in 1798) alongside the more recent technologies of collotypes (invented in 1856) and half-tone prints, which became widely used in the 1880s (Khan 2018: 52). Until 1905, Germany dominated with three quarters of the postcard-printing market given its superior printing presses and, as noted by Junge, in 1901 alone it printed more than twenty million postcards (2018: 180).

With the disruption of WWI, the previously dominant German printers went out of business, the global demand for postcards dropped off significantly (Rogan 2005: 6–7), and by the 1920s, at least for South Indian postcards, Italian companies became the main foreign printers. Thus, it was common for a picture-postcard photograph of Madras or Bangalore to have completed a transnational circuit even before being purchased and posted — traveling from a local photographer's studio in India to a printing press in Europe and back again. Consequently, the production of picture postcards in the early twentieth century involved complex "local and

multi-national networks that cannot be reduced to the relationship between colony and metropolis” (Junge 2018: 171).

Once the printed postcards made their way back to South India, they sometimes underwent more embellishment in the form of hand-tinting. According to the family history of Doveton’s Studio, which was established in the early 1900s in Bangalore and subsequently moved to the nearby hill station of Kodaikanal, the photographer’s wife was deeply involved in running the studio and would often color images by hand as late as the 1940s. These hand-tinted postcards could be either partially or fully rendered in color, and some publishers produced both black-and-white and color versions of the same photograph to cater to different tastes (figures 9 and 10).



[<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/topic/x-7977573.0009.208-0000009/1?subview=detail;view=entry>]

Fig. 9. Proud Father, no. 72, published by Higginbotham & Co., Madras and Bangalore. From the private collection of Dr Stephen P. Hughes.



[<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/topic/x-7977573.0009.208-00000010/1?subview=detail;view=entry>]

Fig. 10. Proud Father, no. 72a, published by Higginbotham & Co., Madras and Bangalore. From the private collection of Dr Stephen P. Hughes.

Not all postcards, however, were sent from south India to Europe for production. At the beginning of the 20th century Eastman Kodak began selling photosensitive paper preprinted with the design of a postcard back. This meant that instead of sending photographs abroad to be printed on lithographic or collotype presses, they could be printed much faster in small batches in local darkrooms directly onto postcard backs. From about 1910, some of the smaller studios in south India started to produce what were at the time known globally as “real photo postcards” (Sante 2009), even whilst the larger postcard companies continued to get their products printed in Europe. This development encouraged smaller photographic studios into the postcard market and allowed them to produce a more personalized output. For example, amateur photographers could even get their own photographs produced as postcards with ease thanks to Kodak’s No. 3A folding pocket camera (released in 1902), which took postcard-size photographic film (Khan 2018: 52). “Real photo postcards” enabled both amateurs and professional studios to produce a greater variety of postcard views in small print runs of usually no more than one hundred (Bogdan and Weseloh 2006). This allowed photographic studios to quickly produce personalized postcards for their local clientele. And this production model permitted amateur photographers to become both producer and consumer of their own postcards. For example, Annie Reynolds, who was living in Madras between 1912 and 1916, appears in numerous “real photo postcards” whose images

were evidently taken by her husband. Annie even added her own touch of creativity by hand-tinting these family postcards with watercolors, even if she feely admitted in the messages that they did not always turn out so well (figure 11). In this instance, postcard production transformed a photochemical industrial object into something like a homemade, handcrafted family project.



[<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/topic/x-7977573.0009.208-0000011/1?subview=detail;view=entry>]

Fig. 11. Annie Reynolds on the veranda with hand watercolour tinting. From the private collection of Dr Stephen P. Hughes.

Even before they were sold and posted, the multiple stages that went into creating a postcard created a kind of circulation that linked local South Indian networks and global circuits that incorporated the work of European and Indian photographers and apprentices, German, British and Italian printers, photographers' wives and extended families, and department- and bookstores. As a medium that involved so many processes, places, and individuals, it is fair to ask this question: At what point does production end and consumption begin? When postcards are written, mailed, and collected, this question is even further complicated.

Consumption as Circulation

The notion of circulation as it is used in business and commerce is generally associated with distribution and promotional activities. Simply put, this is a business strategy about getting your products and awareness about them to the widest possible markets or potential customers. In this sense, the South Indian companies selling postcards would have been involved, to some extent, in trying to increase the circulation of their products through displays, advertising, and making them available in multiple outlets such as bookstores, stationers, hotels, and department stores (figure 12). However, as should be obvious by now, in this article we are talking about the notion of circulation in a different manner. In this section, we explore how the consumption/usage of postcards can be considered to be a form of circulation.



[<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/topic/x-7977573.0009.208-0000012/1?subview=detail;view=entry>]

Fig. 12. Bullock Cart, India, published by K. Lall & Co., Agra Cantonment. From the private collection of Dr Emily Stevenson.

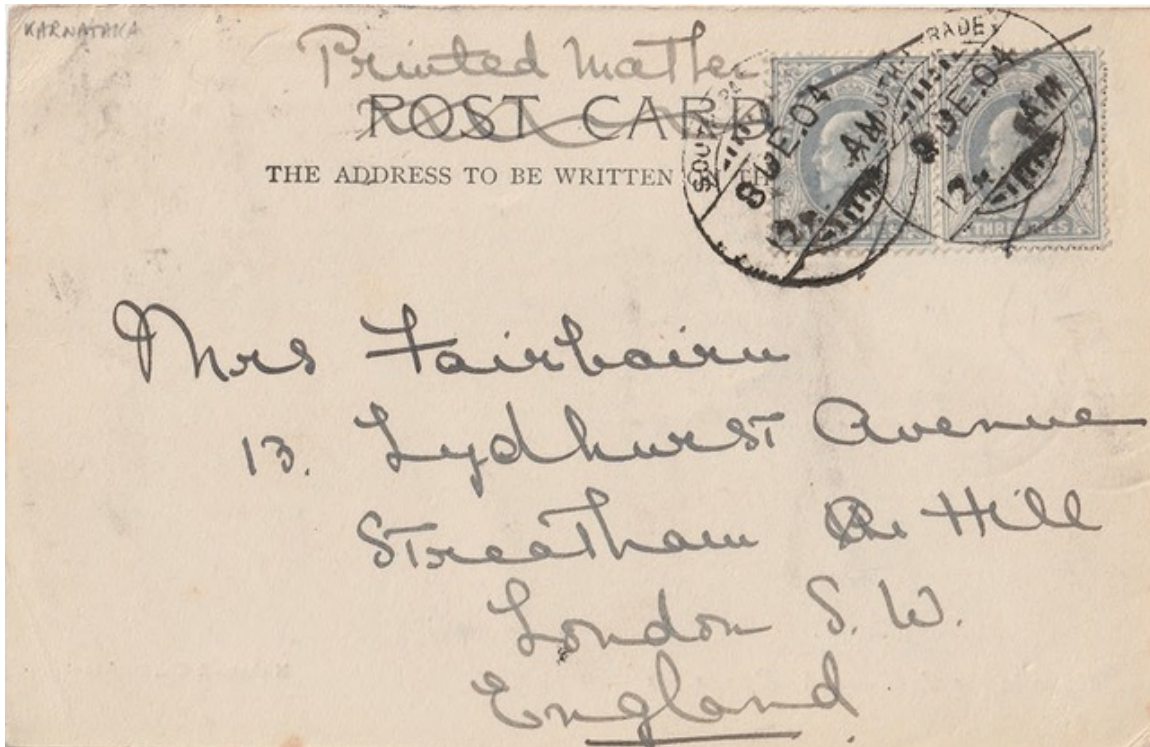
Unlike other commodities, ones that get eaten, burned, or otherwise converted to waste when consumed, when people used postcards, they did so in a manner that sent them into other kinds of circulation across a changeable field of social value. Once official production was complete and picture postcards were sold to customers, they were meant to be written on for the purpose of sending a message via the postal system or collected as a souvenir. This form of consumption was not the end of the story; it was the start of a new cycle of circulation that in some ways continues to this day.



[<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/topic/x-7977573.0009.208-0000013/1?subview=detail;view=entry>]

Fig. 13. View in the Laul Bagh, Bangalore, published by Nicholas & Co., Madras. From the private collection of Dr Emily Stevenson.

Sent from Bangalore to London on December 8, 1904.



[<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/topic/x-7977573.0009.208-0000014/1?subview=detail;view=entry>]

Fig. 14. Reverse of figure 13.



[<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/topic/x-7977573.0009.208-0000015/1?subview=detail;view=entry>]

Fig. 15. Sunset on the Adyar, Madras, published by Spencer's & Co., Madras. From the private collection of Dr Emily Stevenson.

Sent from Madras to Edinburgh on October 10, 1907.



[<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/topic/x-7977573.0009.208-0000016/1?subview=detail;view=entry>]

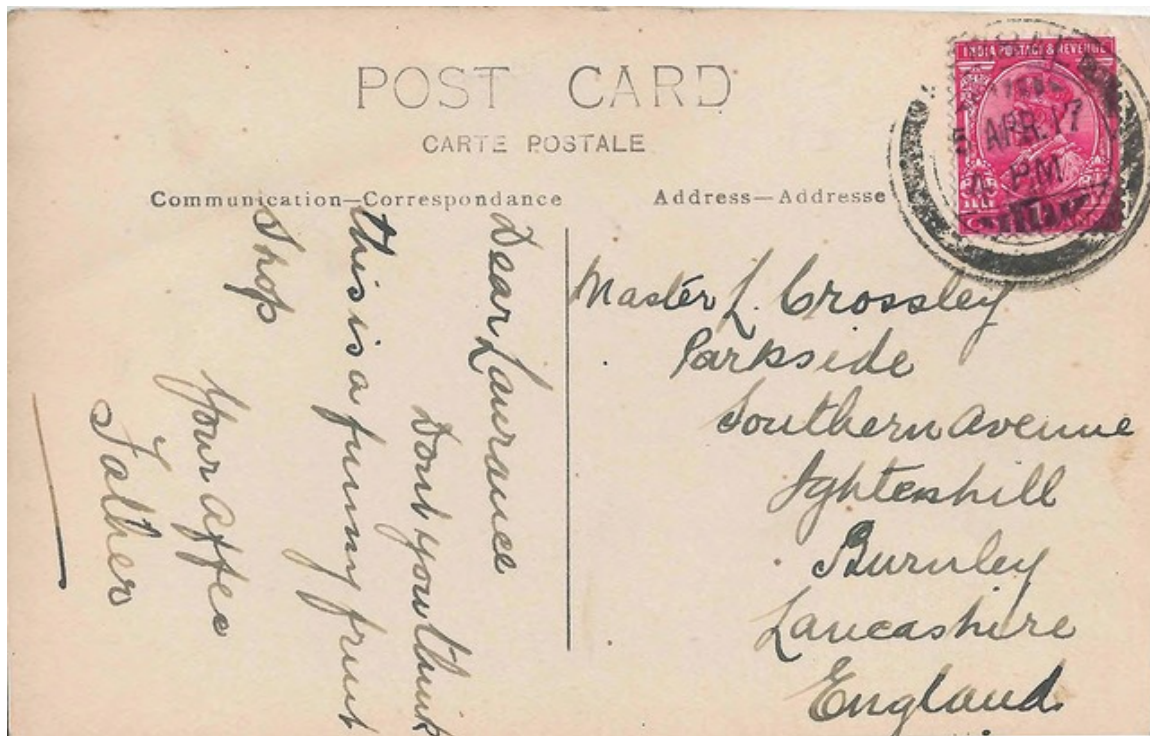
Fig. 16. Reverse of figure 15.



[<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/topic/x-7977573.0009.208-00000017/1?subview=detail;view=entry>]

Fig. 17. Fruit Seller Bangalore, publisher unknown. From the private collection of Dr Stephen P. Hughes.

Sent from unknown location to Lancashire on April 5, 1917.



[<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/topic/x-7977573.0009.208-00000018/1?subview=detail;view=entry>]

Fig. 18. Reverse of figure 17.

Dropped into a letterbox and out of sight, postcards became entangled in complex local and global networks as they circulated photographic images on a hitherto unseen scale via the postal system. In the early 1900s, most of the postcards of Madras and Bangalore were sent via the personal networks of British residents of South India to numerous towns and cities in the United Kingdom [51][#N51](figures 13 and 14, 15 and 16, and 17 and 18). With new contracts for passage through the Suez Canal at the end of the nineteenth century, picture postcards took just over two weeks to travel to the Great Britain (Hunter 1908: 431). However, there were also large numbers of other Europeans living and working in colonial South India. Among the postcards we consulted, there was a considerable range of other international destinations, such as South Africa, Canada, the United States, Belgium, Germany, Austria, Italy, France, the Netherlands, Australia, Java, French Indochina, and Latvia (figures 19 and 20, 21 and 22, and 23 and 24). Postcards of Bangalore and Madras thus carved out global connections that reflected and expanded beyond the British Empire.



[<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/topic/x-7977573.0009.208-00000019/1?subview=detail;view=entry>]

Fig. 19. Indian Women Students' Hostel, Madras, publisher unknown. From the private collection of Dr Stephen P. Hughes.

Sent from Melbourne to Pietermaritzburg on July 22, 1905. Message reads: "The head of this hostel is a Melb[university] Uni graduate and she is supported by the Australian Christian Unions. The hostel is for Indian girl students whose homes are not in Madras."



[<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/topic/x-7977573.0009.208-00000020/1?subview=detail;view=entry>]

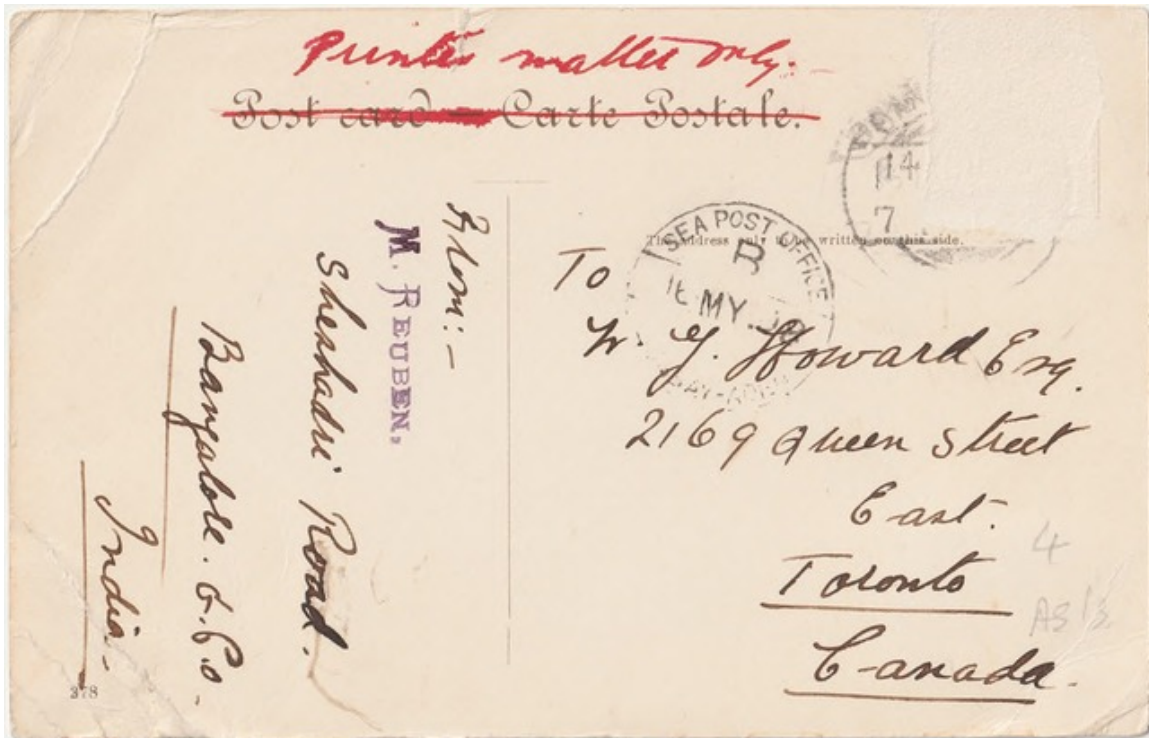
Fig. 20. Reverse of figure 19.



[<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/topic/x-7977573.0009.208-0000021/1?subview=detail;view=entry>]

*Fig. 21. Muthia Lamma Goddess, Bangalore, publisher unknown.
From the private collection of Dr Emily Stevenson.*

Sent from Bangalore to Toronto.



[<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/topic/x-7977573.0009.208-00000022/1?subview=detail;view=entry>]

Fig. 22. Reverse of figure 21.



[<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/topic/x-7977573.0009.208-00000023/1?subview=detail;view=entry>]

Fig. 23. A Jutka, Madras, publisher unknown. From the private collection of Dr Stephen P. Hughes.

Sent from Lahore to Bergerac on September 7, 1905.



[<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/tapic/x-7977573.0009.208-00000024/1?subview=detail;view=entry>]

Fig. 24. Reverse of figure 23.

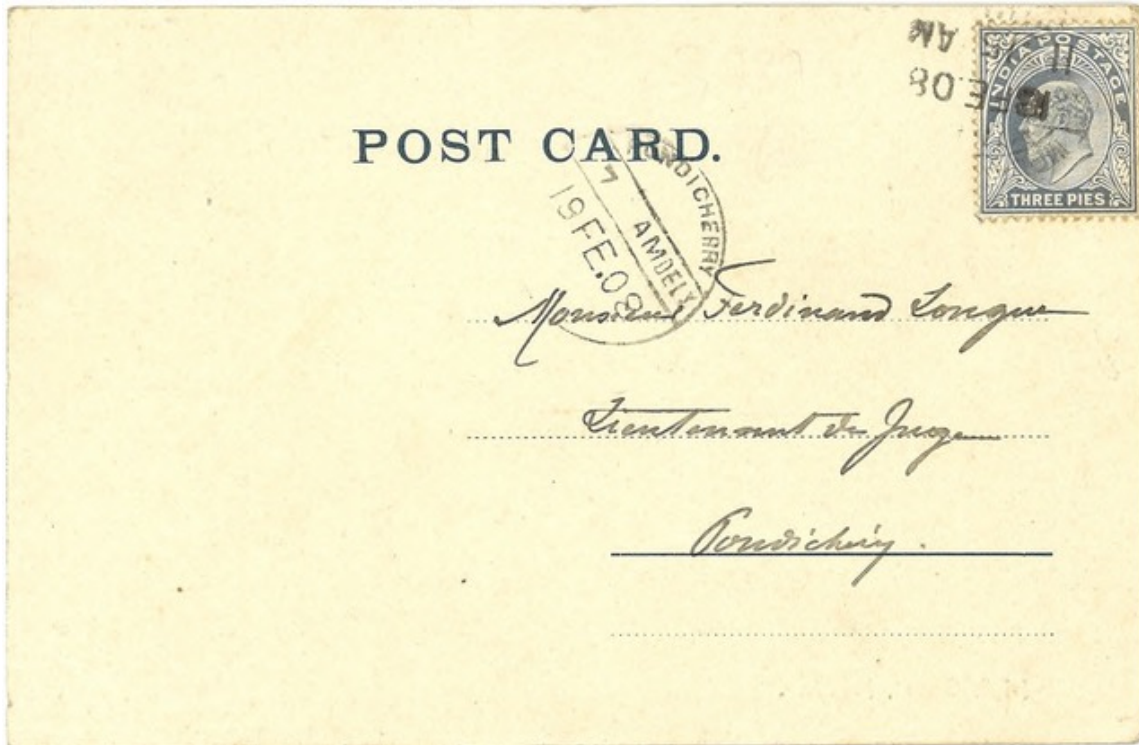
Within India, picture postcards of Bangalore and Madras were also linked in networks across the subcontinent to places such as Bombay, Pondicherry, Calcutta, Poona, Kirkee, Karachi, and the Nilgiris (figures 25 and 26). Postcards also moved within Madras and Bangalore cities themselves. In these local contexts, postcards offered a quick, inexpensive way of sending basic and short messages, which could be mailed in the morning and arrive on the same day. In one example, the sender wrote to apologize for not being able to make it for tea on the day the card was sent.



[<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/tapic/x-7977573.0009.208-00000025/1?subview=detail;view=entry>]

Fig. 25. High Court, Madras, published by Del Tufo & Co., S. India. From the private collection of Dr Stephen P. Hughes.

Sent from unknown location in India to Pondicherry on February 18, 1918.



[<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/topic/x-7977573.0009.208-00000026/1?subview=detail;view=entry>]

Fig. 26. Reverse of figure 25.

Postcards of these two cities traveled anywhere from a just a few miles up to several thousand. They maintained relationships through their unique combination of image and text that could variously reinforce stereotypical, colonial understandings of India, unsettle the photograph's claim to authenticity and objectivity, or provide mundane information about the life of the sender.

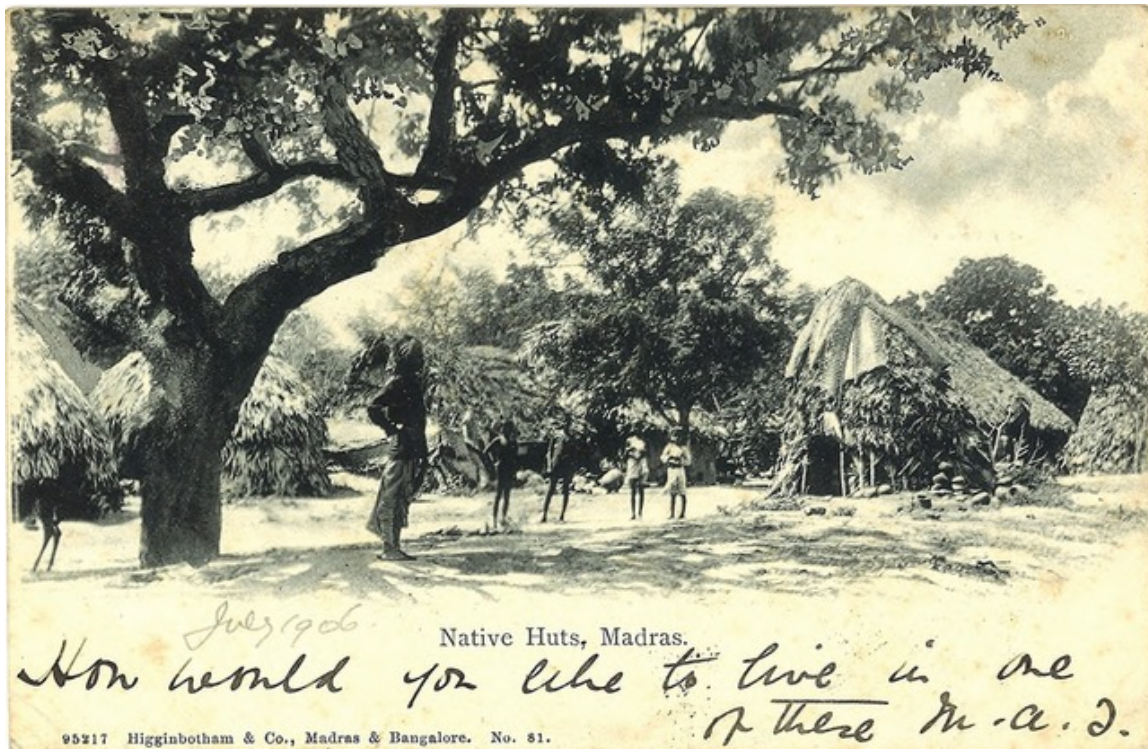
Whereas the production of postcards involved European and Indian photographers, assistants, and enterprisers, their consumption was overwhelmingly European. This is immediately apparent by the rarity with which one sees picture postcards captioned in vernacular Indian languages (figure 27 is an unusual example of a bilingual postcard captioned in English and Tamil) and from the messages and addresses on the reverse of the postcards. In this sense, postcards were undeniably part of a larger circulation of material objects and ephemera — letters, missionary magazines, *Punch*, and novels and poetry of the time, for example, as well as official photography projects such as *The People of India*.



[<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/topic/x-7977573.0009.208-00000027/1?subview=detail;view=entry>]

Fig. 27. Madras High Court [captioned in English and Tamil], publisher unknown. From the private collection of Dr Stephen P. Hughes.

Picture postcards from the British Indian period were, of course, a colonial medium directly implicated in wider discourses of Othering, hierarchy, and power. The messages written on many picture postcards of Madras and Bangalore reinforce the stereotypes of Indian people and spaces that their captioned images indicate. For instance, one postcard was inscribed on the front with a message that reinforced the hierarchical implications of the caption “native huts” that accompanied the image (figure 28). In writing “How would you like to live in one of these” the sender implies a sense of abhorrence at the idea of living in such “native huts,” linking the writer and the recipient into a contemporary colonial discourse that established them as subjects at the pinnacle of a civilizational ladder.



[<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/topic/x-7977573.0009.208-00000028/1?subview=detail;view=entry>]

Fig. 28. Native Huts, Madras, published by Higginbotham & Co., Madras & Bangalore. From the private collection of Dr Stephen P. Hughes.

Dated July 1906. Message reads: "How would you like to live in one of these. m.a.j."

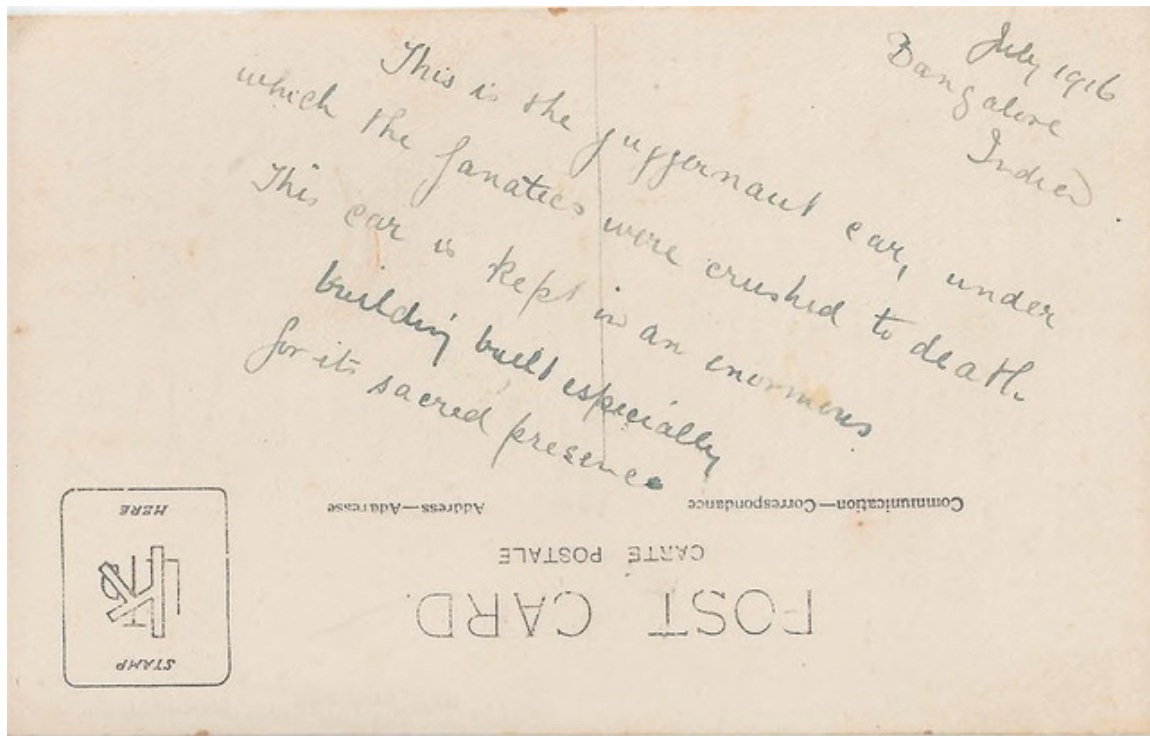
Even when postcard captions weren't as heavily loaded with value judgments, handwritten messages that conveyed negative assumptions about life in India could still be added by the sender. For example, the handwritten message on a postcard showing a Hindu temple car in Bangalore provides information that, though incorrect, would have worked to establish a sense of Hindu practice as exotic, irrational, and dangerous for the uninformed recipient (figures 29 and 30). The sender writes: "This is the juggernaut car, under which the fanatics were crushed to death." The use of the past tense is also interesting, suggesting a sense of the "civilizing mission" of colonialism.



[<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/topic/x-7977573.0009.208-00000029/1?subview=detail;view=entry>]

Fig. 29. Decorated Car, published by Doveton's Studio, Bangalore. From the private collection of Dr Stephen P. Hughes.

Dated July 1916. Message reads: "This is the juggernaut car, under which the fanatics were crushed to death. The car is kept in an enormous building built especially for its sacred presence."



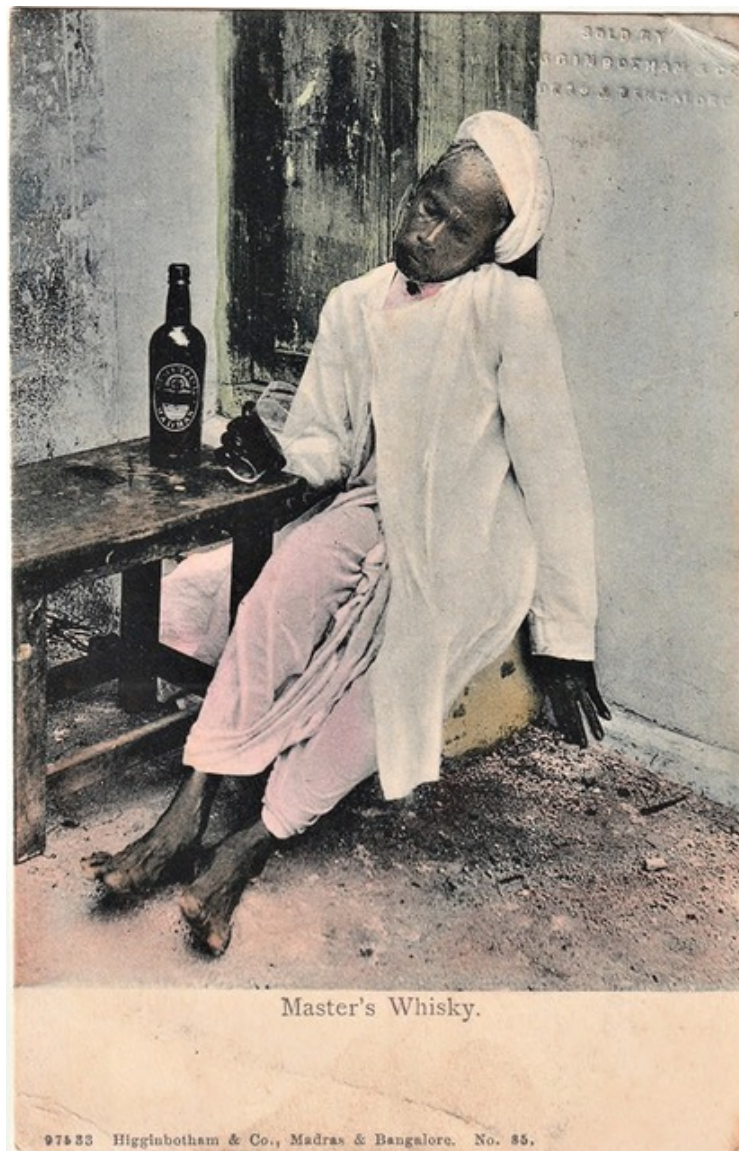
[<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/topic/x-7977573.0009.208-00000030/1?subview=detail;view=entry>]

Fig. 30. Reverse of figure 29.

Such postcards worked to disseminate colonial discourse on India in a powerful way, not only because of the sheer scale of postcard traffic but also because of the claim to authenticity and objectivity they could make. Although photography's claims to objectively, "truthfully" recording the world have been successfully undermined and challenged in more recent decades, during the early 1900s it was lauded as an indexical medium that could not lie, making it a crucial tool of colonial documentation (Pinney 2008: 3). With the postcard, the presumed indexical quality of the image could be joined with a unique, personal message from a known individual who could offer a "firsthand" account to corroborate or even contest what was shown on the front. Through the combination of image and text in this way, the postcard had in some cases the potential to become an even more authoritative representation of Madras or Bangalore.

When written and mailed, postcards linked sender and receiver, but also linked both into global circulations of colonial media and their associated discourse. This is particularly apparent in a series of postcards produced by Higginbotham & Co. The postcards (some black-and-white, some hand-tinted) stage scenes in which Indian servants have assumed the domestic habits of their "masters" in a way that offers a kind of parallel to Homi Bhabha's theorization of mimicry in the colonial context (1994). As with Bhabha's formulation, what the mimicry in these postcards indicates is both the hierarchical relationships at the heart of European life in colonial India and the anxieties of Europeans around subversion of this hierarchy. In this case, the line between mimicry and mockery is particularly hazy. Not only is there a clear racialized mockery implicit within the postcards as the viewer is invited to find humor in the incongruous image of a "native" adopting "civilized" habits, but there is also a sense that the European "master" is being mocked for his indulgences and potential impotency within the domestic household.

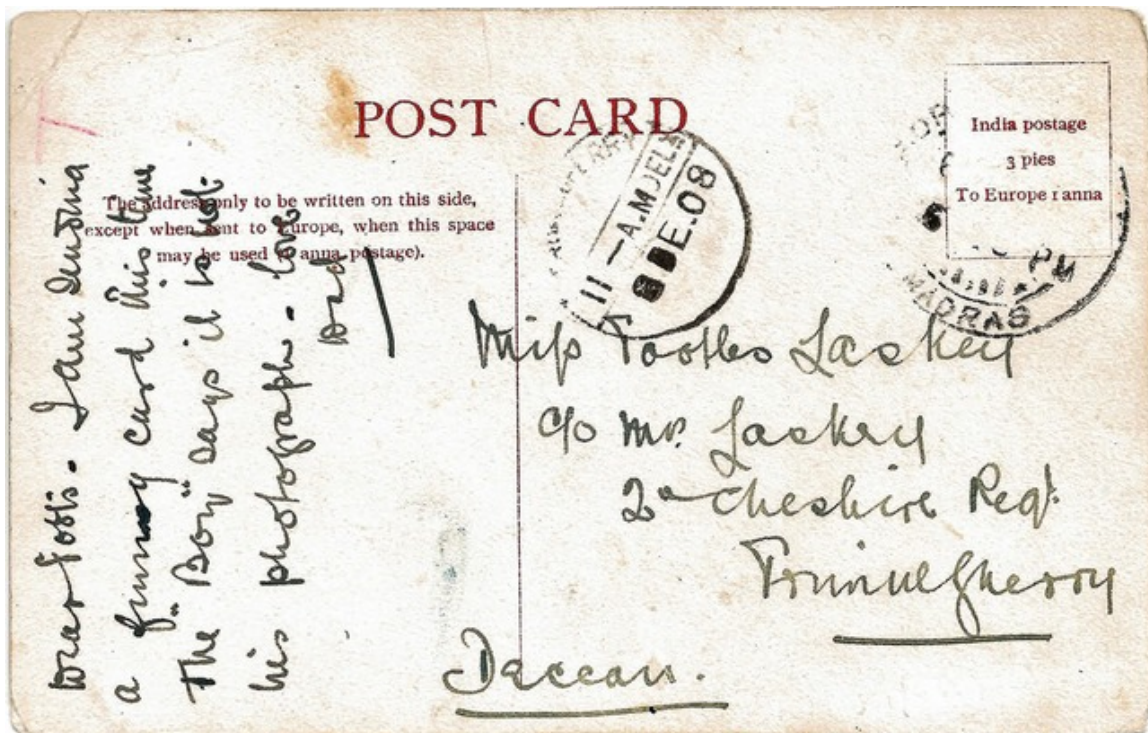
On the reverse of one such postcard (figures 31 and 32), the sender writes from Madras to his daughter, Tootles, in Trimulgherry (in the Deccan, India): "I am sending a funny card this time. The 'boy' says it is not his photograph, love Dad." In this case the postcard was an attempted joke that allowed the "master" to confront his own domestic servant (whom he called "boy") about the possibility of stealing alcohol and getting drunk. And in return he got a denial of the pictured scenario that made it into the message to his daughter. In another postcard from the same series, the sender takes pains to assure the recipient that the liberties depicted on the front of the card would never be permitted in their household.



[<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/topic/x-7977573.0009.208-00000031/1?subview=detail;view=entry>]

Fig. 31. Master's Whisky, published by Higginbotham & Co., Madras and Bangalore. From the private collection of Dr Stephen P. Hughes.

Sent from Madras to Trimulgherry in 1908. Message reads: "Dear Tootles, I am sending this funny card this time. The 'boy' says it is not his photograph, love Dad."



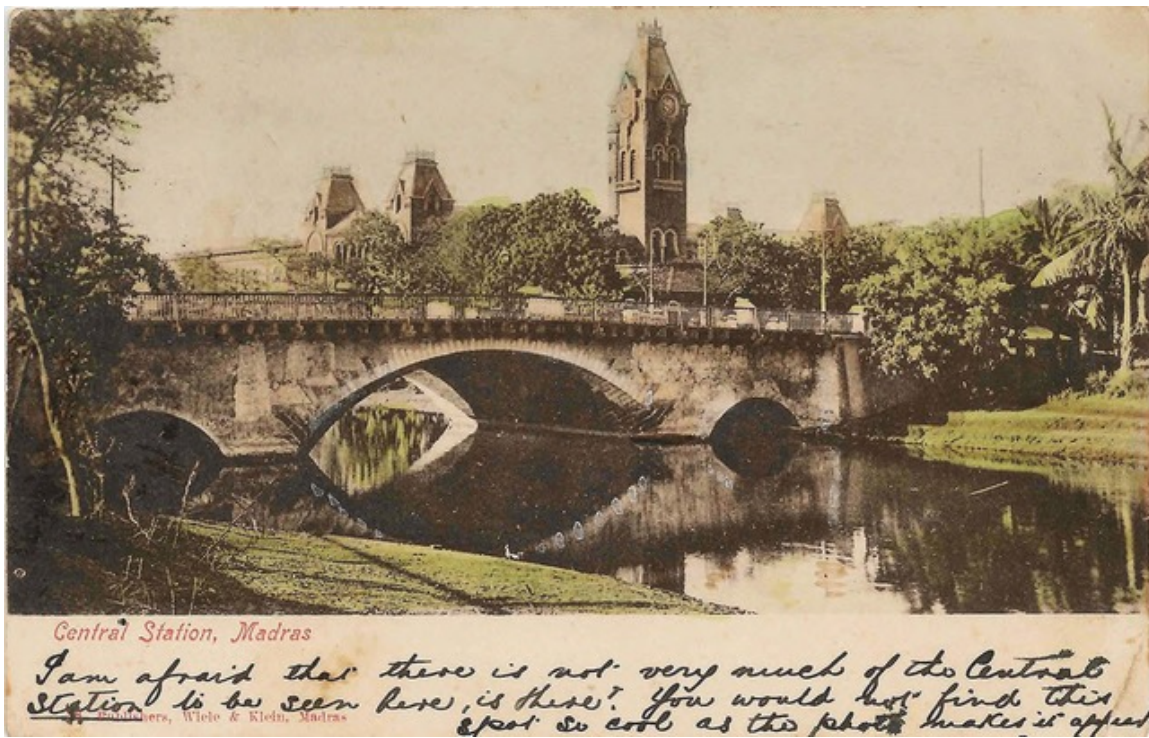
[<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/topic/x-7977573.0009.208-00000032/1?subview=detail;view=entry>]

Fig. 32. Reverse of figure 31.

These messages play with the postcards' attempt at humor, and simultaneously indicate a very real sense of anxiety around domestic insubordination. Yet these postcards, many of which traveled from colony to metropolis, performed another rhetorical task: a form of what we might call a "humble brag." By referencing "master-servant" relationships, these postcards affirmed to the recipients the senders' elevated social status, since many Europeans in India would not have been able to employ servants "back home." Such postcards contributed to the transfiguration of Europeans in India, in relation both to Indian servants and to Europeans in the metropolis, through the conflation of complex discourses on domestic, racialized hierarchy, shifting social status, and colonial anxiety.

Alongside these postcard messages opening up complicated colonial social relationships in Madras and Bangalore, written messages conveyed the senders' personal take that went beyond the images and their printed captions. Sometimes messages worked to undermine the photograph or caption's claim to indexicality and truth. Other messages would point out the artifice of studio photography or call out the inaccuracy of the formal, printed, and "official-like" captions. Such postcards make clear that, when the medium gives the sender space to write her own story, the boundary between production and consumption is never fixed. Postcards are a medium that is inherently a fluid and composite mix of the mass produced and the personal/private. When written messages are added to a postcard, its meaning, aesthetic, networks, and form are altered. This is never more apparent than with messages that complicate or challenge the image and caption.

In a picture postcard of Central Station, in Madras (figure 33), the sender offers a critique of the photographic composition and notes that the soft light and picturesque scene belie the true weather conditions of the city: "I am afraid that there is not much of the Central Station to be seen here, is there? You would not find this spot so cool as the photo makes it appear." A picturesque image is, once inscribed and put into motion, complicated by the addition of personal opinion. Through this, the sender produces an image-object that is simultaneously mass reproduced and unique, that simultaneously links sender and recipient into a larger culture of circulation and reaffirms their personal, one-to-one relationship.



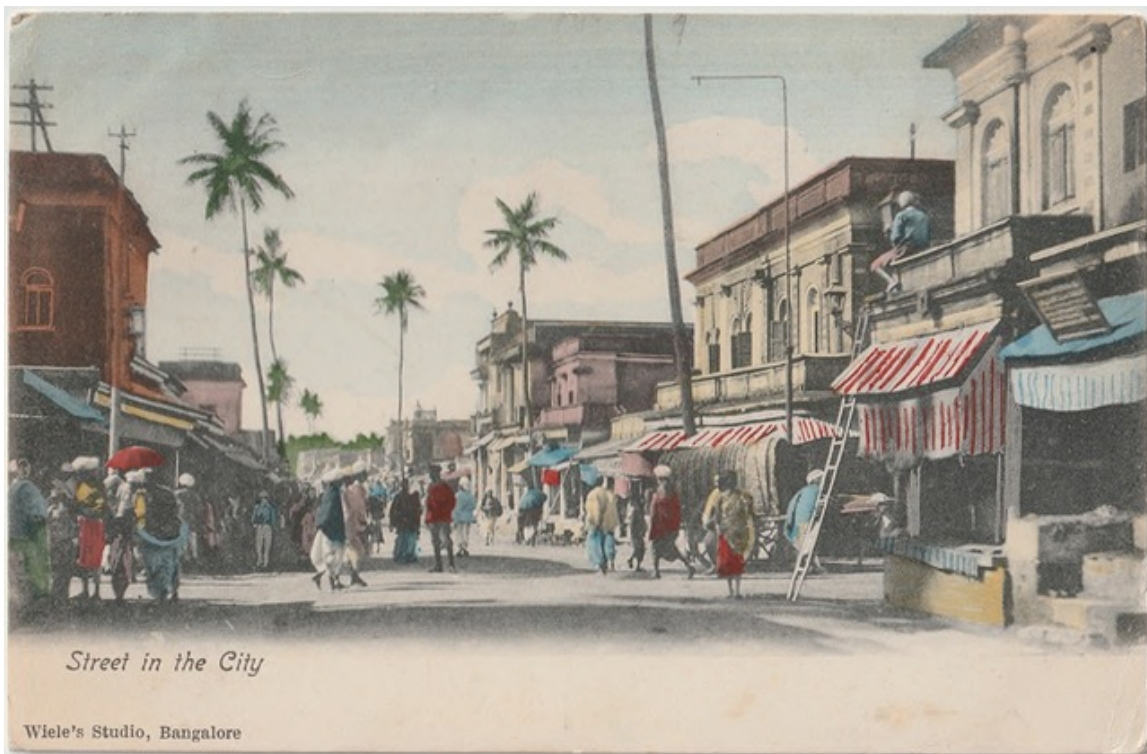
[<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/topic/x-7977573.0009.208-00000033/1?subview=detail;view=entry>]

Fig. 33. Central Station, Madras, published by Wiele & Kleine, Madras. From the private collection of Dr Stephen P. Hughes.

Message reads: "I am afraid that there is not much of Central Station to be seen here, is there? You would not find this spot so cool as the photo makes it appear."

The meanings established through the marriage of image and caption on a postcard certainly contributed to both the construction and dissemination of colonial understandings of India and empire at the time. When written and posted these, meanings could be either reinforced or challenged. However, postcards also worked to maintain relationships over time and space. Letter writing had always been crucial to social relations, especially in the context of colonialism and the dispersal of subjects across the British Empire. With picture postcards something new was possible — a rapid, brief, informal, publicly viewable and illustrated mode of communication. It is therefore unsurprising, given the brevity of messages, concerns over privacy, and the fact that they were regularly sent in accompaniment with letters, that many picture postcards of Madras and Bangalore bear decidedly banal messages that make no reference to the image on the front.

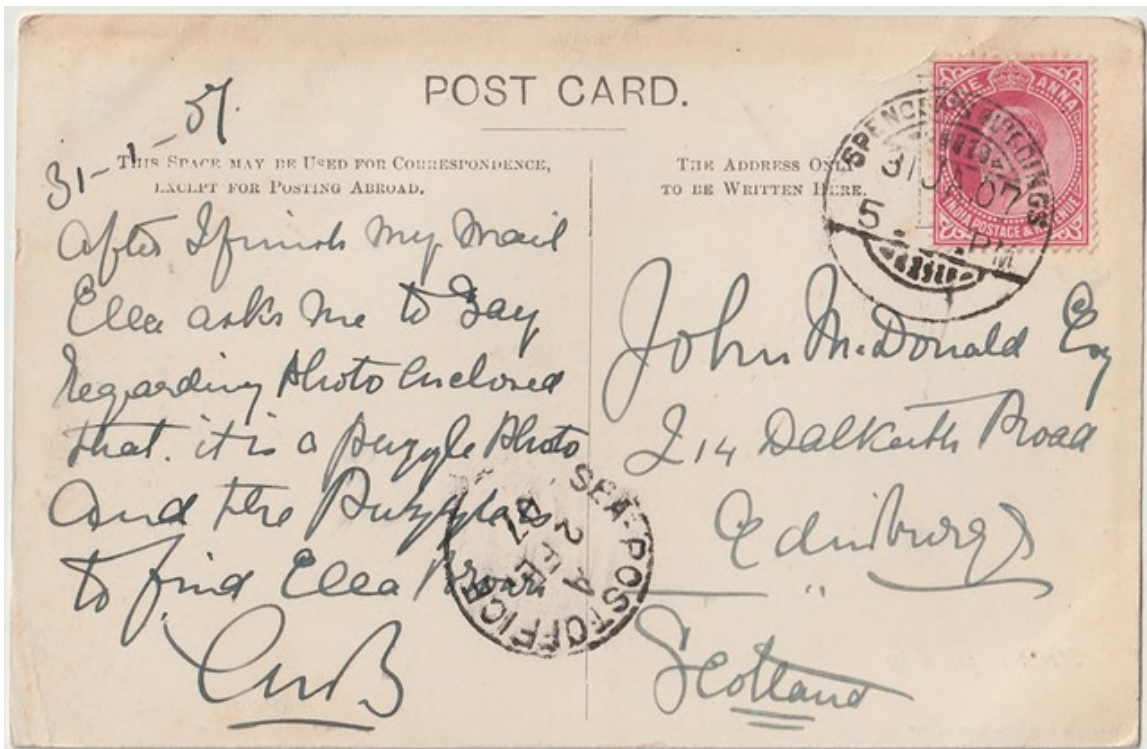
Countless postcards offer comments on the weather, health, and travel plans, providing us with brief snapshots into the daily life of European residents in the two cities. On the reverse of a picture postcard of a street in Bangalore (generically captioned "Street Scene" and therefore denied any specificity), Mr. Brown, who was manager of the Connemara Hotel in Madras, makes no mention of the image. Instead he writes: "After I finish my mail Ella asks me to say regarding photo enclosed [in addition to the picture postcard] that it is a puzzle photo and the puzzle is to find Ella!" (figures 34 and 35)



[<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/topic/x-7977573.0009.208-00000034/1?subview=detail;view=entry>]

Fig. 34. Street in the City, published by Wiele's Studio, Bangalore. From the private collection of Dr Emily Stevenson.

Sent from Madras to Edinburgh on January 31, 1907. Message reads: "After I finish my mail Ella asks me to say regarding photo enclosed that it is a puzzle photo and the puzzle is to find Ella!"



[<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/topic/x-7977573.0009.208-00000035/1?subview=detail;view=entry>]

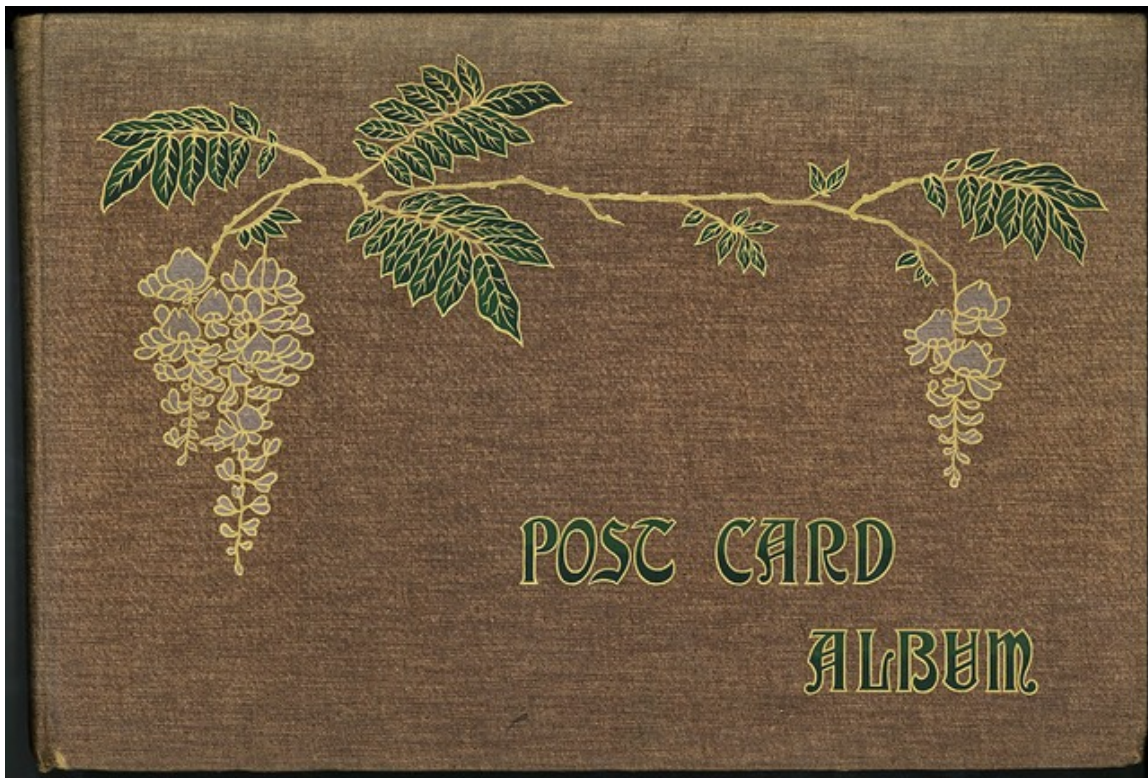
Fig. 35. Reverse of figure 34.

This postcard therefore became something else in addition to a mass-reproduced and orientaling image of Bangalore. It became a personal message, linked with a letter and a photograph as part of a visual and material expression of a social relationship between individuals in Madras, where the postcard was mailed, and Edinburgh, its destination. When postcards are inscribed and mailed, the presupposed meanings of their captioned images, the social work that they do, and their material form are changed.

At times, for instance with the “masters” series discussed above, handwritten messages seem to align with the intended meaning of the commercial producer of the postcard, yet at other times a disjuncture emerges. Postcards, with their composite nature and their hazy boundary between their production and their consumption, therefore, encapsulate media studies’ recognition that the producer never wholly determines the intended meaning and use of a medium. Postcards are a medium that asks the sender and the recipient to respond to, add to, or complement the photographic image through acts of writing and collecting. In this manner, postcards played a particularly salient role in shaping the interpretative communities of empire. Not only did postcards disseminate photographic images, but they also actively cultivated their annotation and reconfiguration.

The dual work of the postcard as both a mass-reproduced medium that enabled the European consumption of Madras and Bangalore and a personal medium of communication is perhaps most clearly expressed in the postcard album. During the “golden age” of postcards, people were not only seized by the craze of sending and receiving postcards but many also became avid collectors, arranging postcards carefully into an embossed album, commonly by location or theme.

May Reynolds was one such collector. As a teenager, she lovingly curated postcards received from her aunt Annie Reynolds, who, we mentioned earlier, had hand-tinted family photographs as postcards. As well as the postcards that depict Annie herself, the album (figure 36) contains ones from Madras, Bangalore, and South Indian hill stations. Annie sent most of these postcards to convey a sense of the place in which she lived, the sights she saw, and the travels she undertook. Annie also purposefully selected postcards knowing that they were being collected by May and often made comments about the growing collection: “I don’t think you have one like this” or “How many postcards have you got in your collection?” Annie even purchased postcards that had nothing to do with her own experiences in South India because she wanted to add something exotic, unusual, or new to May’s collection. Among them were postcard images of places such as Japan, Cairo, and Port Said and animals such as tigers, giraffes, and elephants. In 1916, during the war, Annie even sent a postcard from Germany writing, “Although this is a German postcard, I thought you might like it as well as an Indian one for it is very quaint.”



[<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/topic/x-7977573.0009.208-00000036/1?subview=detail;view=entry>]

Fig. 36. Front cover of May Reynolds' postcard album. From the private collection of Dr Stephen P. Hughes.

The album can therefore be read in multiple ways: as a way of organizing collectible objects from around the world; as a loving memento of a close familial relationship sustained over time and space; or as part of the material and discursive circulations of colonialism that were enabled by the unequal power dynamics that allowed May to curate her own catalog of Indian “native types” and “scenes.” All these readings of the album as a curatorial project coexist and, in many ways, work together to stitch postcards into the broader cultures of circulation.

Of the postcards from South India that we consulted for this project, the majority were not sent through the mail. Nonetheless, these blank postcards were saved, collected, stored, and moved from South India to various other locations at some point over the twentieth century. It is important to note that though we have stressed the communicative aspects of postcards as messages, large numbers were purchased, gifted, and exchanged as collectible objects without ever having been written on or mailed. In fact, most of the historical postcards that are still circulating via commercial dealers in the United Kingdom and India are unsent cards that have been sourced and dispersed from personal collections, such as that of May Reynolds, the teenager discussed above.

As postcard collecting grew as a popular pastime, along with the growth in their production and sales from the beginning of the 1900s, numerous clubs and journals grew to support the hobby in Europe and North America (Rogan 2005: 5). Much of this collecting effort went well beyond personal-correspondence postcards sent to the collector and was more about acquiring objects as a visual token of exotic or familiar places, typical or famous people, and events near and far. Active collectors shared, swapped, and compared their postcards with others, but eventually the postcards were tucked away in boxes, drawers, chests in attics, and lofts, where they lay forgotten for decades at a time.

Unsent cards do not bear the physical inscriptions of personal messages, but the fact that they have survived and found their way into the present means that they have continued to travel and forge new connections and connotations.

Conclusion

Postcard images are often privileged in analysis, but in this paper we have approached postcards as two-sided objects whose images are contextualized, complicated, and placed in wider cultures of circulation. By examining the production and consumption of South Indian postcards from the perspective of their circulation, this paper has highlighted their movement, through the scale and significance of the medium, as a conduit for the circulation of photographs in the early twentieth century. However, we have also sought to demonstrate that postcards did more than simply allow photographs to move. They were a “constitutive act” (Lee and Li Puma 2002: 192) that “energise[d] and innervate[d] new forms of social life and action” (Goankar and Povinelli 2003: 386). They complicated divisions between producer and consumer; carved out global and local networks; linked dispersed families, friends, and industries; and transfigured photographs in both public and private ways. As an innovative medium that enabled people to unite photographic image and text in a material object to be sent over time and space, the postcard opened photographic images to be reworked in cultures of circulation. Perhaps, more than other printed photographic media, postcards offer insight into the shifting and movable layers that constitute the social life and agency of photographs.

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Emily Stevenson holds a PhD in Anthropology from SOAS, University of London. Her research sits between historical and visual anthropology, and focuses on the ongoing social lives of British Indian postcards in south India.

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1. The exhibition was held at the Brunei Gallery, SOAS, University of London, from 12 July until 23 September 2018 and was supported by the Economic and Social Research Council. A digital version of the exhibition continues to run on the Instagram account *soaspostcard*.[♣][\[#N1-ptr1\]](#)
2. This research project was conducted by Emily Stevenson for her PhD thesis, entitled “Picture Postcard Bengaluru: The Visual and Material Past in India’s Silicon Valley.” This work was supported by the Economic and Social Research Council (grant number 1348570), and the Christopher Davis Award.[♣][\[#N2-ptr1\]](#)
3. In Bangalore, for example, Wiele’s Studio, Doveton’s Studio, Del Tufo & Co., and Gentle & Co. were all represented in the cantonment’s Freemason’s lodge (United Grand Lodge of England Membership Registers 1751–1921: n.p.), while proprietors of Wiele’s Studio, Doveton’s Studio, and Orr & Barton, along with the prolific amateur photographer Fred Goodwill, were connected to the Mythic Society (*Mythic Society* 1913: 5–8).[♣][\[#N3-ptr1\]](#)
4. A number of these apprentices went on to set up their own successful photographic studios and produced postcards themselves.[♣][\[#N4-ptr1\]](#)
5. It is notable that we have found only a very small number of postcards from passing tourists.[♣][\[#N5-ptr1\]](#)

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