



Carriers of Communication: A History of the Anchal Postal Legacy of Travancore and Cochin

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15680088>

ARTICLE INFO

Article History

Received 15 Jul, 2024
Revised 24 Sep, 2024
Accepted 19 Dec, 2024
Available Online 30 Dec, 2024

ARTICLE ID

CLIO0202001

KEYWORDS

Anchal, Postal System,
Communication, Messenger, Mail

ABSTRACT

The evolution of the postal system has played a pivotal role in shaping the communication infrastructure of human civilization. The Anchal Postal System was the unique and efficient postal service of the princely states of Travancore and Cochin before India's independence. It began in 1729 under Marthanda Varma, initially for official communication, and later extended to the public. Anchal runners, Anchal Pillars and distinctive uniforms made it a trusted system preferred over the British postal service. Over time, the system introduced innovations like express letters, money orders, and savings banks. Eventually, Anchal merged with the Indian postal system in 1951, and today, the Kerala Postal Circle continues its legacy.



INTRODUCTION

No other system has played a vital a role in the growth of human civilization as the written letter. Across the globe, including in India, postal services have come to be recognized as the most extensive means of communication. The evolution of postal system is a fascinating journey that traces the development of human expression and interaction over time. From the earliest days of human existence people sought ways to convey messages whether through signals, pictorial representation or the rhythmic beating of drums. Over time these primitive methods gradually evolved into more sophisticated forms of communication.

A Postal System is a global system that facilitates the delivery of written papers, usually sealed in envelopes, as well as small packages holding various goods. Any item dispatched via a Postal System is referred to as 'post' or 'mail'. The practice of transmitting information through written records originated with the advent of writing. At the outset, this communication pattern was largely uniform around the globe. Subsequently, this facilitated the development of distinct postal systems. India had distinct postal systems spanning from the Maurya era to the reign of the Mughal Emperors. However, it gained momentum throughout the entire nation only under British governance. Travancore and Cochin, princely realms located in Kerala, were an exception to the general rule. Their Postal department, called Anchal, was distinct and one-of-a-kind. This occurred before to India's attainment of independence and the establishment of Kerala as an independent state. In the early phase, Anchal exclusively handled government records. Subsequently, the service became accessible to the general public. Anchal functioned as an autonomous entity and rivalled the postal service of the British East India Company. The Anchal runners play a crucial role in the carrying of parcels. The innovations and changes implemented by the Anchal Postal System played a significant role in defining the current structure of the Kerala Postal Circle..

History of Anchal Postal System

Anchal was the postal system that existed in Travancore and Cochin kingdoms. Some experts believe Munroe coined the term Anchal from the Greek word 'Angelos,' which means Angel or Messenger. Chikka Devaraja Wodeyar II of Mysore used the term 'Anche'. Other experts believe Anchal was derived from the Urdu term 'Ungel,' which means message. The word Ungel has been inscribed on several antique Travancore records as well as on the wooden fronts of Anchal office buildings. Anizham Tirunal Marthanda Varma established the Anchal department in Travancore in 1729. Raja Rama Varma and his successors later made improvements to the existing Anchal. T.K. Velupillai's Travancore State Manual and Shangunny Menon's History of Travancore both have useful information about Anchal. A copper plate award demonstrates the reward paid to the Edappally Anchal Master by Karthika Tirunal Maharaja for relaying the news of Tipu Sultan's fall in 1790.

In its first stage, the Travancore Anchal had limited responsibilities, primarily focused on relaying royal decrees and facilitating official correspondence among government officials. In addition, it was required to convey flowers, fruits, vegetables, and several miscellaneous items to the temple of Sri Padmanabha Swamy, the god worshipped by the royal family of Travancore. Subsequently, the department became accessible to the general public. The postman from Anchal was named Anchal Pillai. He was wearing a khaki shirt and shorts as part of his uniform. In addition, he possessed a wooden staff of two feet in length, adorned with attached bells. He also wore a khaki hat with a red lining. The Anchal post boxes were constructed using cast iron and were referred to as 'Anchal Pillars' due to their hexagonal design, which resembled the pillars found in temples. The letterbox displayed the 'Shanka', which is the official insignia of Travancore. Letter boxes were strategically positioned in public

areas to ensure maximum accessibility. The Anchal letterboxes were colored green, while the letterboxes of the Indian Postal department were colored red. The letter boxes were securely fastened, and the date of clearance was intended to be indicated on the box. The residents of Travancore were well-acquainted with the Anchal service and consistently favored it over the British Postal System due to its significantly lower rates.

In 965 M.E. (1789-1790), the Anchal offices in the state were divided into two sections. One section included the area from Thovala to Varkala, while the other covered the area from Quilon to Parur. Every division was supervised by a Melvicharippu or Superintendent. The team additionally included of a clerk, a daffadar, and a peon. In 989 M.E. (1813-14), a Royal Proclamation mandated that the judicial institutions in the state use the Anchal service to send all communications to the petitioners, plaintiffs, and defendants. In 993 M.E. (1817-18), a Royal Proclamation allowed the landed aristocracy of the State to submit written grievances to the Huzur office through the Anchal without any charge. The Anchal institution in Travancore was incorporated into the Huzur Rayasam Department (correspondence) in 1844 A.D. The personnel of the Anchal establishment at that particular period comprised of 1 Melvicharippukar, 2 Sekharippus, 2 clerks, 1 cashier, 2 peons, 47 Anchal Pillamars, and 170 Anchal runners. In addition to serving as a General Superintendent, the Melvicharippukar seemed to possess some form of authoritative power in imposing penalties on runners who failed to maintain the required speed. The Sekharippus were responsible for disbursing remuneration to the personnel. Viruthikars (landed gentry) were also employed at significant stations. During that period, delivery personnel were only available in Trivandrum, the capital city. At that time, there were a total of 46 Anchal stations.

The services of Anchal were opened to government employees and petitioners in 1024 M.E. (1848-1849). Free carriage of the private correspondence of government employees and the petitions of the populace. The authorization to mail private correspondence was extended for the initial time in 1036 M.E. (1860-61). Each letter that was dispatched was accompanied by a unique receipt, while nominal registers of covers that were posted were maintained concurrently. The year concurrently witnessed the introduction of the Express Letter system and the first differentiation between letter and Bhanggi (parcel) mail. Posters on letters, packets, and shipments were regulated in 1037 M.E. (1861-62), and rural delivery, or Nadacooly, was implemented.

Several new branch offices were opened the following year. Letter registration was adopted for the first time in 1041 M.E. (1865-66). Transportation was a major role in the expansion of the Anchal Postal System. Anchal relied on boats, trains, and even bullock carts to keep things running smoothly. A boat transit from Trivandrum to Shornur was laid in 1044 M.E. (1868-69), primarily for public transportation and the transportation of big packages. Its headquarters were in Trivandrum's Huzur Cutcherry, and its commanding officer was the Anchal superintendent. There were ten transportation agency stations in 1888. Six of these were in Travancore, three in Cochin, and one in the Malabar district. The railway was introduced into Travancore by extending South Indian Railway lines from Tirunelveli to Quilon. The next line ran from Quilon to Trivandrum, with an extension from Trivandrum Beach to Thambanoor. Anchal also operated a mail service from Trivandrum to Shencotta. The Cochin Shornur Railway line was critical to Cochin Anchal's mail operations.

In 1047 M.E. (1871-72), the state's key Anchal offices received dated hand stamps. The next year, clocks were distributed to key Anchal offices throughout the state. The introduction of paper for correspondence in 1049 M.E. (1873-74) replaced cadjan leaves. Sorting offices, as well as a number of delivery peons, were constructed in 1875 for the

distribution of mail on a vast scale. An experienced officer from the British Indian Postal Department was appointed head of the Anchal department in 1881. New Anchal rules were enacted in 1882, allowing for improved communication. A technique for obtaining acknowledgement receipts was also implemented.

The Madras government took steps to provide the required water-mark paper imprinted with Travancore stamps. However, because the Madras Government's supply of adhesive stamps was insufficient, the Government of Travancore began issuing their own stamps. During 1061 M.E. (1886 A.D.), the labels were printed in the Huzur Cutcherry's Stamp Office. The following year, the government negotiated with Mr. Alexander Cowan and Sons in England to make stamp paper for government use, and the stamps were printed on paper specially made for the purpose. The stamps were created in the Stamp Manufactory and then delivered to the Central Stamp Depot.

They were then sent to the various branches and local depots for sale. Authorized merchants were selling the stamps. The first Anchal Regulation was passed in 1064 M.E. (1888–89), and sticky Anchal stamps were introduced for the first time. Embellished envelopes were introduced for general usage in 1065 M.E. 1066 M.E. (1890–91) saw the introduction of reply cards. The Madras government proposed combining the Anchal with the British Postal System in 1892. The amalgamation was not implemented because it would have caused significant disruption to the state. In 1070 M.E. (1894–95), a Dead Letter office was founded.

Several village offices were established in various locations in 1073 M.E. (1897–98), overseen by local school masters. In 1074 M.E., letter cards were first introduced (1898–99). The Nadacooly system was dismantled the next year. Travancore implemented the Money Order system in 1077 M.E. (1801–02). The money order form allowed the payee to communicate with the remitter in any way. Under the British Indian Postal System, this right was prohibited. The "Anchal Hundi" money order system was in use. The department's Hundi branch handles revenue, government revenue remittance, state life insurance, pension payments, and car tax hundies, in addition to dealing with inland and overseas hundies. The image of Maharaja Sri Mulam Tirunal replaced the Shankha (couchshell) design on the stamps during the year 1078 M.E. (1802–03). There were 179 letterboxes and 150 Anchal offices in 1079 M.E. (1903–04). In 1081 M.E., anchal wraps were outlawed (1905–06). Government institutions were granted the use of Service Anchal stamps.

The Anchal department launched a savings bank in 1088 M.E. (1912–13). All funds received at the Anchal office are under the control of the savings bank, Anchal Master. A clerk works in offices only to handle savings bank transactions. Before the office closes, the Anchal master must get the daily report. He is also in charge of the passbook entries. Every book, record, and piece of paper pertaining to savings bank accounts was kept up-to-date. In 1095 M.E., the state was split into eight Anchal divisions (1919–20). Each of these divisions included a number of rural letterboxes and Anchal offices. At the close of the year, there were 307 letter boxes and 225 Anchal offices overall. In the years that followed, major Travancore tourist destinations as well as pictorial stamps featuring the Maharaja's face appeared. During 1120 M.E. (1944–1945), the state had 377 Anchal offices in total.

On June 28, 1949, the Maharaja of Travancore issued a Royal Proclamation demonetizing Travancore currency and making Indian currency lawful throughout the state as of June 30, 1949. On the same day, the Travancore Anchal regulations were also changed. The Anchal postage rates were converted from Travancore money to Indian currency and set equal to those in Cochin on July 1, 1949. The union of Travancore and Cochin's native states resulted in the creation of the United Kingdom of Travancore and Cochin, also known as Thiru-Kochi,

on July 1, 1949. As a result, the Anchal stamps of Travancore's sovereign state, which were expressed in Travancore currency, became obsolete. On April 1, 1951, Travancore Anchal amalgamated into the Indian Posts and Telegraph. Finally, Travancore's independent state's Anchal service came to an end.

On July 1, 1961, the Kerala Postal and Telegraph Circle was established. Kerala postal circle was promoted into a major circle on February 25, 1965. Kerala was also the site of the Post and Telegraph circles' functional split in 1974. In light of this, the Kerala Postal Circle was established on September 1st, 1974. Kerala State, the Union Territory of Lakshadweep, Mahi, and Pondicherry are all included in the Kerala Postal Circle. At the moment, Kerala is divided into 14 districts. Kerala has 5058 post offices in total, dispersed throughout the state. Every post office has a special pin number. The Chief Postmaster General is responsible for overseeing the Kerala Postal System. Kerala Postal Circle's headquarters are in Trivandrum, Kerala's capital city. From Anchal to the current Kerala Postal Circle, the department has assisted people in communicating messages even to the most remote areas of the state, conquering all obstacles along the way.

CONCLUSION

A postal system allows users to transmit letters or parcels across the country or around the world. Messages may be conveyed to any part of the world in seconds in this modern period, thanks to the internet and other technical advances. Though this poses a severe challenge to traditional postal service, the postal system still has the benefit of sending parcels and written papers to even the most remote and isolated locations where technology has yet to reach. Anchal is one of the finest educational institutes in Kerala history. It had its own distinct organization, and the way it handled letters was unthinkable. The Anchal Postal System sheds light on the ways employed to utilize transportation facilities for postal communication. There were even separate sorting offices and a stamp department. Anchal was identified as a threat to the efficiency and competence of the British Indian Postal System. Anchal demonstrates not only the administrative efficiency of the Princely States of Travancore and Cochin but also how efficiently it bridged the rural-urban divide. Following independence, it amalgamated with the Indian Post and Telegraph to establish the Kerala Postal Circle. The Anchal Postal System, which originally competed with the British Postal System, currently competes among India's 22 postal circles and ranks first in postal delivery. Thus, Anchal is the backbone of the contemporary Kerala postal circle in every sense.

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