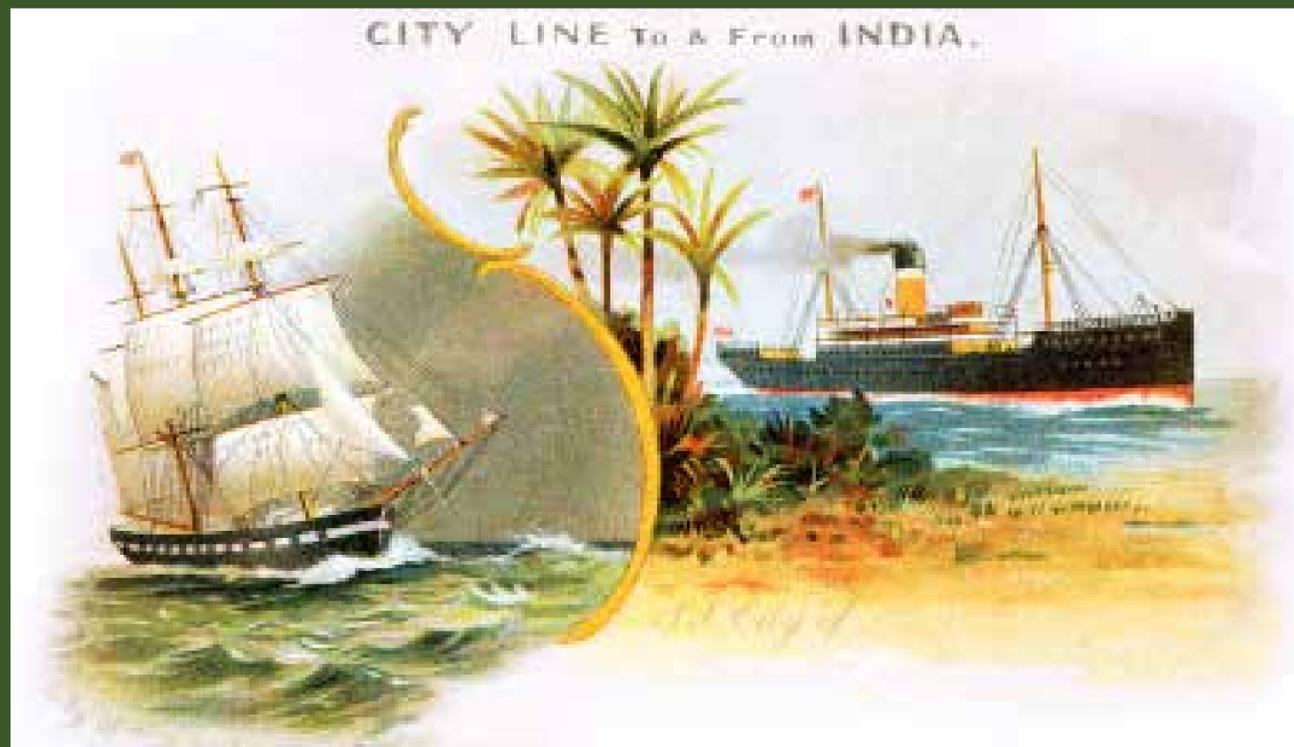


Preface

The Spark



There were many reasons for the appearance of the picture postcard in the 1890s. These included the invention of photography—photographs were common by the 1870s, and the mass-produced Kodak camera came out in the 1880s and greatly democratized the form. There were more liberal international postal regulations, and printing technologies like rapid press lithography were being exploited by small workshops and artisans in European and Indian cities. The growth of shipping and railway lines exemplified by cards like *City Line To & From India* (Figure 1) contributed to a fertile tourist market. Postcards as a messaging system were literally built on an iron communications network. At the same time, the spark that proved the concept came from advertising. It was business and marketing that helped underwrite the initially rather high costs for printing postcards.

The very first postcards of the subcontinent are, as far as I can tell, the three *India* (Figures 2, 3, 4) and *Ceylon* (Figure 5) postcards published by the Singer Manufacturing Co. in 1892. Strictly speaking, they were advertising cards, made for the World Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. Nusserwanji Merwanji Patel, the Singer country agent in India, Burmah and Ceylon for 35 years⁴ and his employees wearing traditional Parsi green and purple hats are possibly shown in these cards. The World Columbian Exposition marked the first official exposure of America to India in other ways too: Swami Vivekananda explained Hinduism in a series of historic lectures, and the painter Raja Ravi Varma won a Gold Medal (in a few years he would become its first major postcard publisher). Why do I consider them postcards? They are the right size, call themselves postcards, and are sold as such today; what they exemplified was the art of putting an image on the front of a paper card the thickness of a few sheets of paper to sell something.

Nestle's Swiss Milk 20th Punjab Infantry (Figure 6) celebrates the 20th Punjab Infantry, a successful British Indian Army regiment on the North-West Frontier. Note how nicely the soldiers sweep up and in from the background, with the rifleman on his knees aiming just to the left of the viewer.

Figure 1. *City Line To & From India*. City Line, c. 1904. Lithograph, Divided back, 14 x 9.15 cm.*

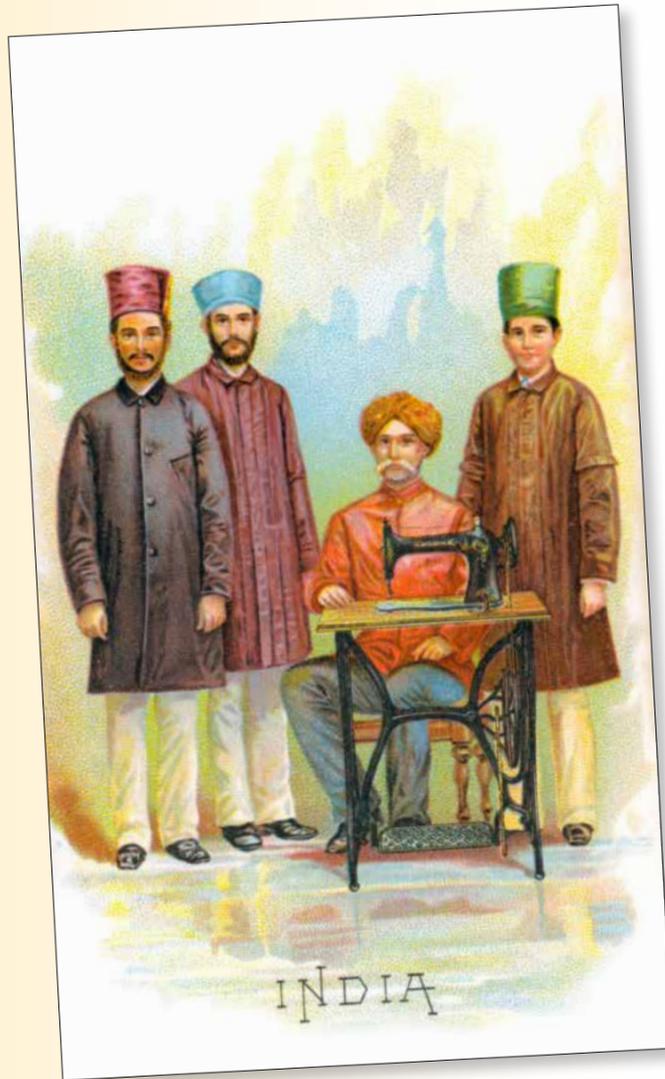


Figure 2. *India.* The Singer Manufacturing Co., 1892. Lithograph, Undivided back, 13.4 x 7.95 cm.

[Verso] "An Extensive Empire of the British Crown, consisting of the Great Southern Peninsula of southern Asia, and a narrow strip along the east side of the Bay of Bengal. It is bounded north by the Himalaya mountains, west by a mountain range, east by parallel offshoots from the opposite extremity of the Himalayas, and on the other side by the Indian Ocean. The surface of the country is extremely diversified. It has the highest mountain peak (Mt. Everest) in the world, the Ganges River - wonderful for its annual inundations of the Gangetic plain. There is great diversity of race and language; in Upper India the inhabitants are of the Indo-European stock, with a language and roots to the Sanscrit. The religions are Mohammedanism and Brahmanism. The Aboriginal races have no literature. The governing races are of the Arabic, Brahmanical and Persian stock. Under British rule India is making rapid strides in modern civilization. Our picture represents the Singer Manufacturing Company's native employees in their usual costume. The Singer Sewing Machine has been a factor in helping people of India toward a better civilization for nearly twenty years, and thousands of them are in use."



Figure 3. *India.* The Singer Manufacturing Co., 1892. Lithograph, Undivided back, 13.4 x 8 cm, 5 9/32 x 3 5/32 in.
[Verso] Same as Figure 2.

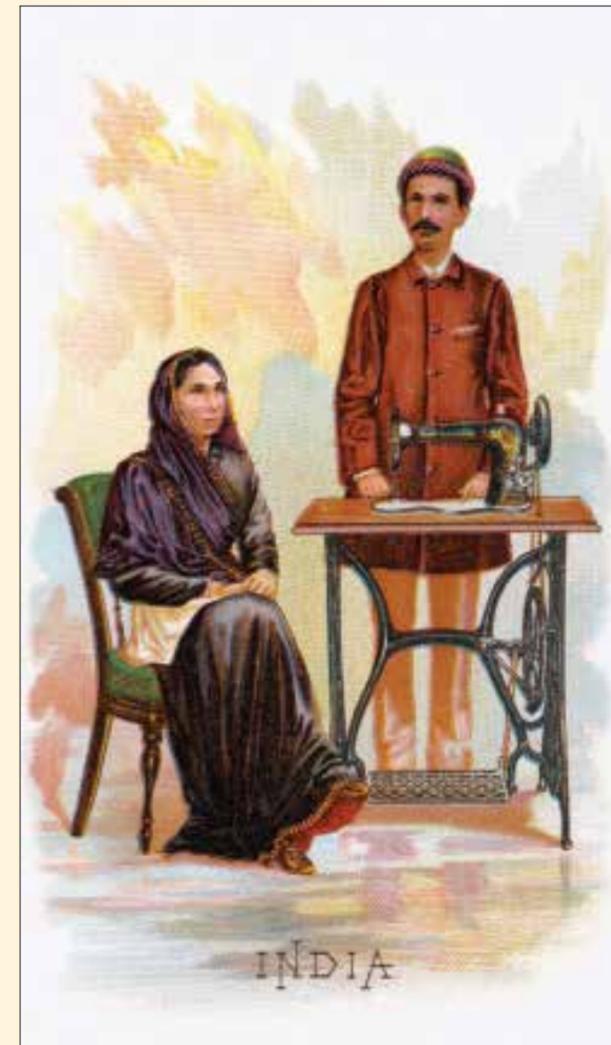


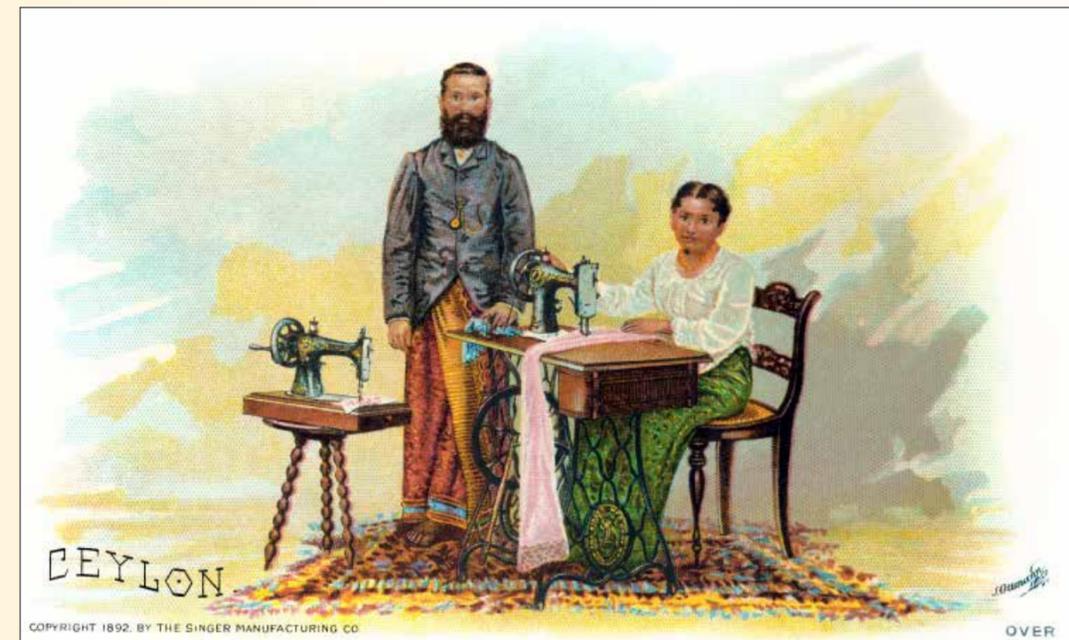
Figure 4. *India.* The Singer Manufacturing Co., 1892(?). Lithograph, Undivided back, 13.5 x 9 cm.

[Verso] "INDIA, the land of adventure, of princely wealth and abject poverty, is inhabited by many different tribes, now rapidly becoming civilized under British rule. The women are tall and slender; gentle, timid, loving creatures, painfully desirous of education, which was denied to them until mission schools had been established. Hindoo girls are often betrothed during infancy and are married at the age of twelve. They have dark skins and regular features, a bright, intelligent expression, and fine, straight, black hair. Their usual dress consists of loose, gauze trousers, with a short frock of some bright-colored silk or muslin girded by a wide sash. Ears, neck, hands and feet are loaded with ornaments, sometimes of great value. The chief office of The Singer Manufacturing Co. in India is in Bombay, having more than fifty subordinate offices scattered all over the Empire. The same liberal system of selling is maintained here as elsewhere, and the increasing use of the sewing machine in a country whose inhabitants are so intensely conservative, is one of the strongest indications of the silent change caused in the habits of people through western intercourse. Expert Sewing-Machine Repairs Also sewing-machine oil of absolute purity and the best NEEDLES and PARTS for all machines at Singer Stores. Singer Stores in Every City. See Singer Store in YOUR City."

BELOW

Figure 5. *Ceylon.* The Singer Manufacturing Co., 1892. Lithograph, Undivided back, 13.5 x 9 cm, 5 1/2 x 3 37/64 in.

[Verso] "There is a picturesque island in the Indian Ocean, separated from Peninsular India by the Gulf of Manaar. It is 271 miles long by 187 wide, is a Crown colony of Great Britain and entirely independent of British India. Its capital city is Colombo. The dominant race is the Singhalese, who are genuine Buddhists and very tenacious of their castes. There are also many natives of Arabic descent, besides the Portuguese, Dutch and English. Our photo, taken on the spot, represents the Singer Manufacturing Company's employees in their national costume. The Company have offices in all the principal cities, and sell a large number of machines."





ABOVE

Figure 6. *Nestlé's Swiss Milk 20th Punjab Infantry*. Byla (Sponsor), Paris, c. 1900. Lithograph.

The 20th Punjab had just fought during the massive North West Frontier uprisings of 1897–98 on the border with Afghanistan and had been present at the conquest of the Khyber Pass in 1878. Another postcard advertising Nestlé's Condensed Milk postmarked Dec. 21, 1900 in the Author's Collection features the 3rd Madras Light Cavalry. Although Nestlé website claims its marketing relationship with India began in 1912, cards like this are evidence to the contrary.²

Figure 7. *India Postcard [verso]*. Art Institute Orell Fussli, Zurich, Switzerland for West End Watch Co. Bombay and Calcutta. 1905. Lithograph, Divided back, 14 x 8.95 cm.

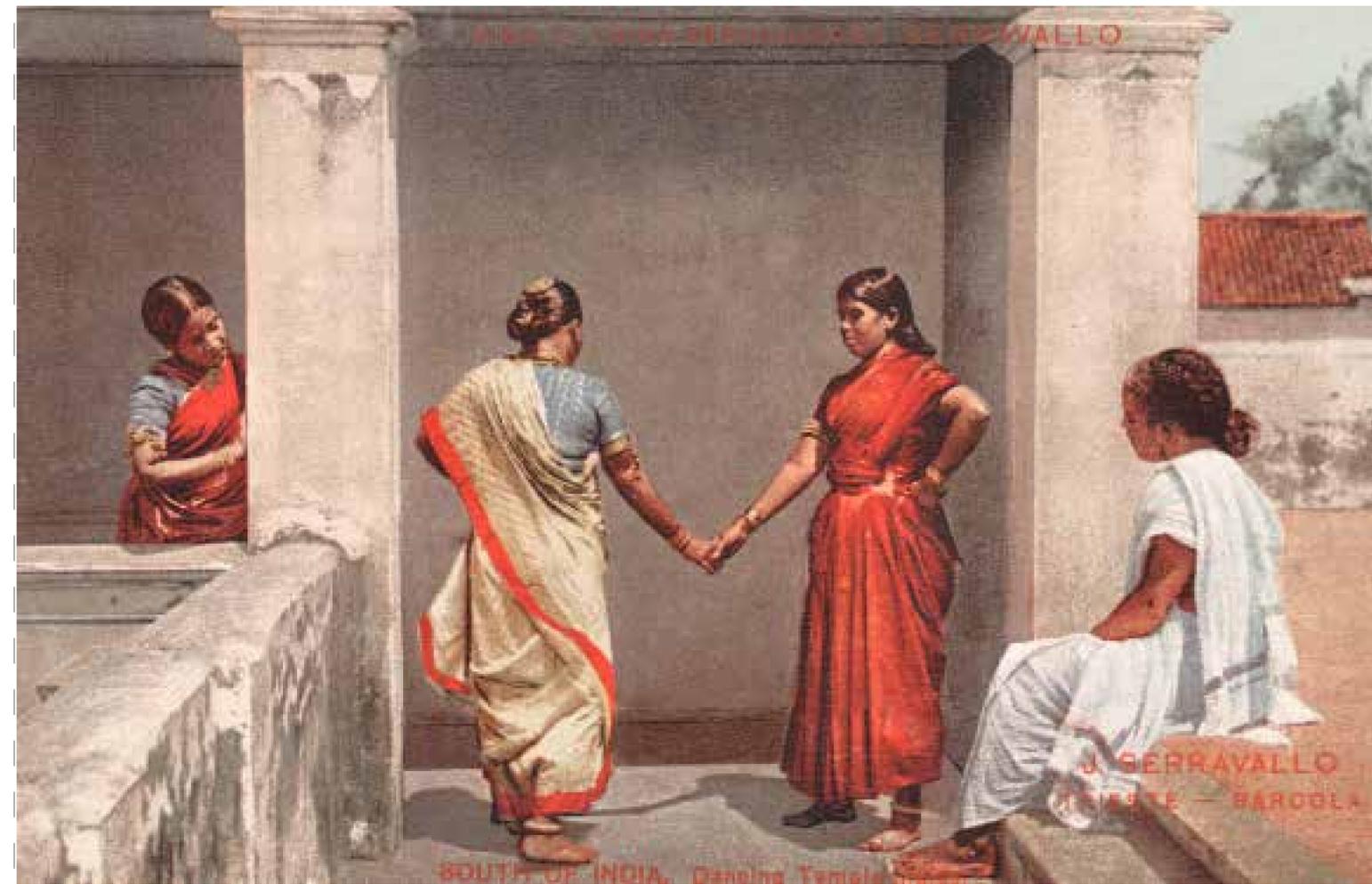


Figure 8. *SOUTH OF INDIA Dancing Temples*. J. Serravallo, Trieste, c. 1900. Lithograph, Undivided back, 13.8 x 8.85 cm.

Another engaging military-themed *India Postcard* (Figure 7) shows a soldier charging in the foreground. It was sponsored by the West End Watch Co. in Bombay and Calcutta, and printed by a lithographer in Switzerland.³

An evocative postcard with thick colour regions that give it texture is *SOUTH OF INDIA Dancing Temples* (Figure 8). The sponsoring firm J. Serravallo of Trieste in the Austro-Hungarian Empire (now part of Italy) was a supplier of “Bark and Iron Wine.”

Postcards crossed cultures like electric wires around 1900. Sponsored advertising cards like these were typically done in limited print runs, and are often found after many years of searching online, combing through dozens of postcard shows all over the world. I estimate that cards like these were printed in runs of a few hundred to a few thousand. Only a small percentage of that output has survived, sometimes perhaps only one or two cards out of the two thousand that were printed. For me, the survivors have the patina of an original painting.

An American card distills the perfect poise between East and West that a sophisticated advertising card can contain. *Footwear of Nations 10 Designs – No. 4*

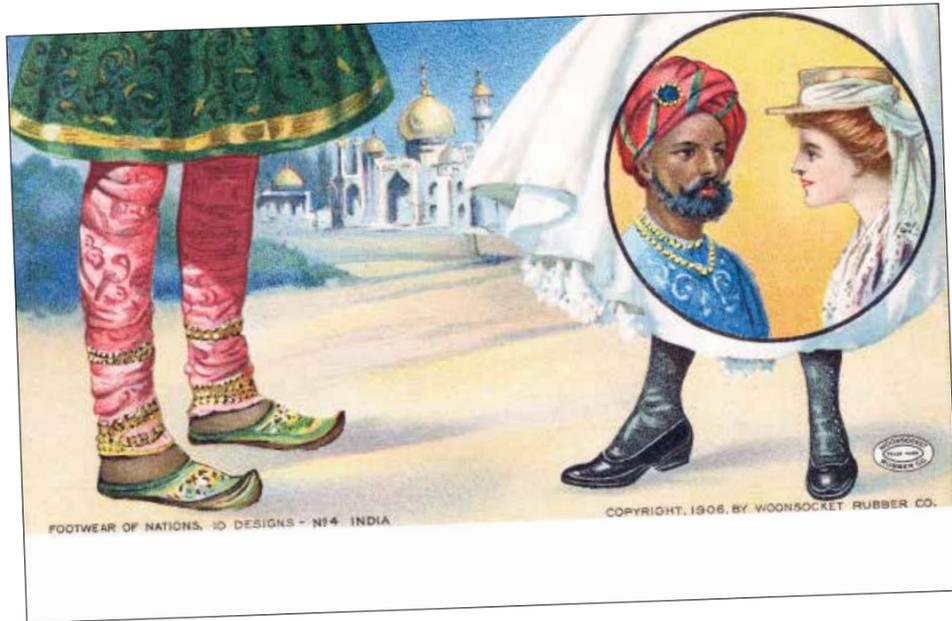


Figure 9. *Footwear of Nations 10 Designs – No. 4 India.* Woonsocket Rubber Co., Rhode Island (US), 1906. Lithograph, Undivided back, 13.95 x 8.9 cm.



Figure 10. *British Indien. Indes anglaises. Indias inglesas. Empire of British India and Ceylon [overstamped].* Unknown Publisher (Printed in Bavaria). Embossed lithograph, Divided back, 14 x 9.1 cm, 5 1/2 x 3 37/64 in.

India (Figure 9) shows rubber shoes facing off with Mughal footwear. In the distance is a palace. The woman’s dress flutters. Something unknown passes between them. Rubber soles may be better than handcrafted ones, but wish to be associated with traditional wealth and power. Does she convince?

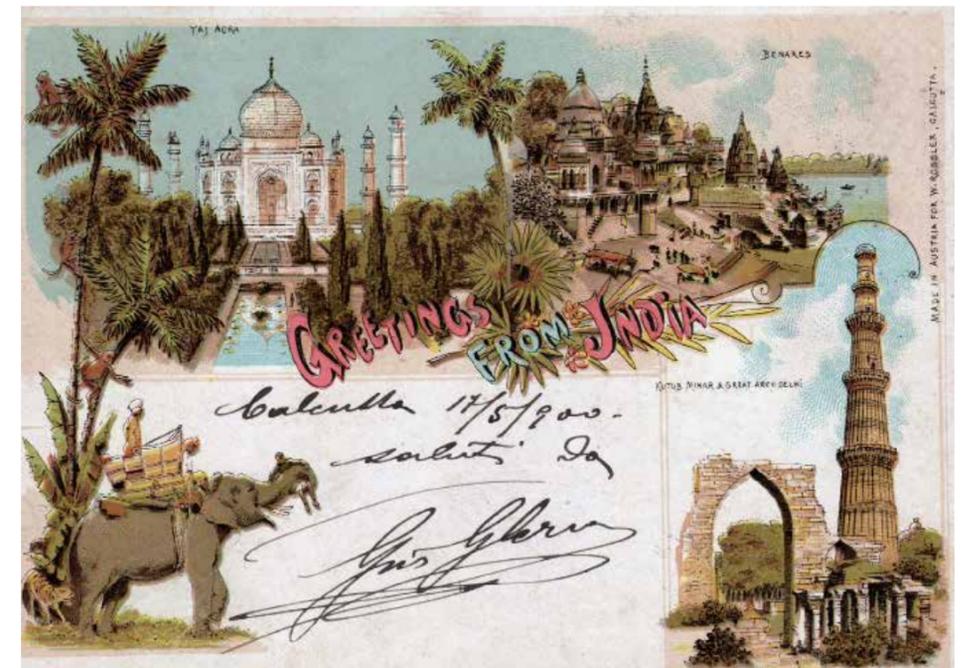
Another early type of commercial card was an advertisement for place. The first widely popular postcard type from about 1895 were postcards from hotels in the German-speaking Alps featuring the phrase “Gruss Aus [Greetings from . . .]” on the front (see *Ceylon*, Figure 5, for two such cards from Ceylonese hotels). The phrase spread to towns and city postcards. “Greetings from” postcards are said to have been a big part of what ‘launched’ the postcard industry.⁴ They offered higher and consistent production volumes compared to one-off advertising cards, permitting some of the

larger presses in Germany and Austria to be financed. They helped drive down printing costs. “Gruss Aus” cards gave tourists an easy way to tell friends and relatives what they were up to, and lure the next wave of travellers – viral marketing at its best. The earliest Indian “Gruss Aus” card I have been able to date so far is *Greetings from South India* (Figure 11), published by an obscure German firm in 1896.⁵ Probably the earliest from an Indian publisher is *Greetings from India* (Figure 12) by W. Rossler in Kolkata, probably in 1897 (see *Introduction*). It seems to have been so rare, I only found it twice in 15 years of searching.



Figure 11. *Greetings from South India.* Carl Bohm, Germany, c. 1896. Lithograph, Undivided back, 14 x 9.2 cm.

Figure 12. *Greetings from India.* W. Rossler, Kolkata, c. 1897. Lithograph, Undivided back, 12.2 x 8.75 cm. Postmarked May 19, 1900, Sea Post Office, Kolkata. Addressed to “Signorina Olga Prochioles, Via Sorento 21.32. III fl [floor?], Trieste, Austria. [Recto] “Calcutta, 17/5/1900 Saluts [Greetings] Gus Glery [sp?]”



The large white blocks on the front of this and *Greetings from India* by D. Macropolo in Calcutta (Figure 13) invite the sender to say something. It was so easy to send a postcard, there was very little to write compared to a letter. A critic lamented in 1910 that “like a heaven-sent relief, the souvenir postal card has come to the man of few ideas and a torpid vocabulary . . . It represented one general gasp of relief ‘See it for yourself; I can’t describe it’ – and there was no question of its success.”⁶

A specific Indian “Gruss Aus” variation that became popular was *Salaams from India* (Figure 14) by H.A. Mirza in Delhi. I prefer the understated, nicely designed map composition *Greetings from Jubbulpore [Jabalpur]* (Figure 15) which includes the postcard’s likely destination – the British Isles. Postcards forged connections between places, and it may be this more than anything else that drives my attention to them and makes me imagine that in a world where distances were so vast, and people had seen so little of other places, they were extraordinary.

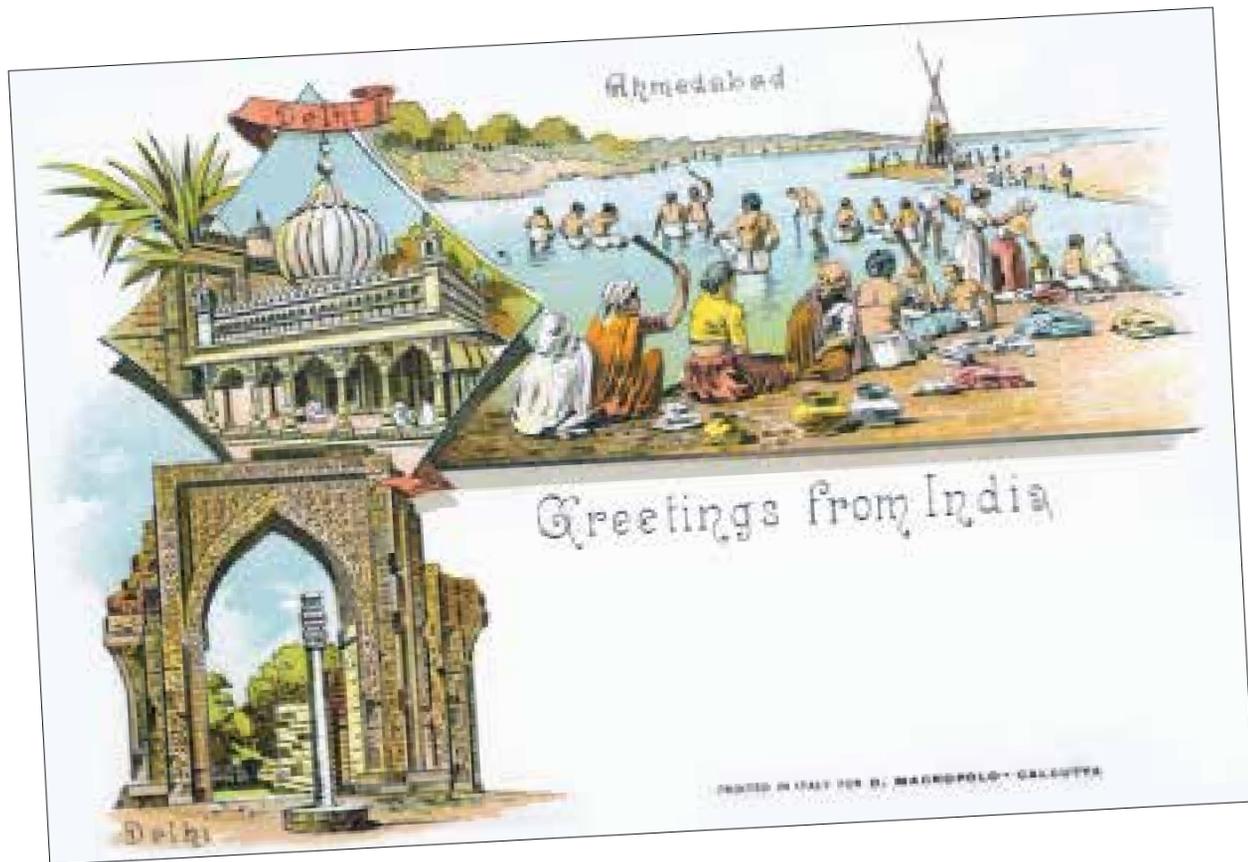
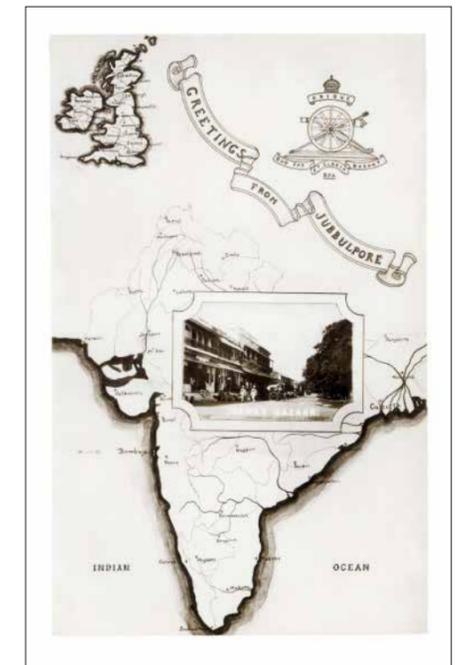


Figure 13. *Greetings from India*. D. Macropolo, Calcutta, c. 1900. Lithograph, Undivided back, 13.95 x 9.2 cm.



LEFT

Figure 14. *Sallans [Salaams] from India*. H.A. Mirza & Sons, Delhi, c. 1905. Embossed real photo postcard, Divided back, 13.8 x 8.85 cm.

Figure 15. *Greetings from Jubbulpore*. c. 1905. Real photo postcard, Divided back, 13.9 x 8.8 cm.

Notes

1. Report of the proceedings at the presentation of an address to R.M. Patell, Esquire, J.P., agent for India, Burmah, and Ceylon, of the Singer Manufacturing Company, on his retirement, p. 11-12, Smithsonian Institution.
2. Nestle, founded in 1867, claims that its relationship with India started in 1912. *Nestle*, accessed November 25, 2016, <https://www.nestle.in/aboutus/allaboutnestle>.
3. Art Institute, Orell Fussli in Zurich, Switzerland.
4. Frank Stafford, *The Early History of Postcards*, p.
5. The basis for this claim is a card where the font and set-up are dated to 1896 and attributed to Carl Bohm in “Haiti’s First Postcard” by Peter C. Jeannopoulos in *Postcard Collector*, January 1999, Vol. 17, No. 1, p. 91.
6. “Upon the Threatened Extinction of the Art of Letter Writing” in *American Magazine*, Vol. 70, (June 1910): pp. 172-75, accessed November 25, 2016 Postcardy.com/article1910.html.