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POSTAL REFORMS OF WARREN HASTINGS

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ABSTRACT:-

The development of an efficient communication system was essential for the administration of the British East India Company in India. During the early period of British rule, communication between different regions was slow and unreliable. Recognizing this problem, Warren Hastings, the first Governor-General of Bengal (1773–1785), introduced several reforms to improve the postal system. His postal reforms laid the foundation for an organized and systematic postal service in India. Background of the Postal System before Hastings Before Warren Hastings introduced reforms, the postal system in India was mainly used for official purposes. The system was controlled by local rulers and the East India Company used messengers and runners (known as dak runners) to send official letters. This system was irregular, slow, and lacked proper organization. There was no uniform structure, and the public had limited access to postal services. In 1774, Warren Hastings introduced important reforms to make the postal system more organized and efficient. Establishment of a Regular Postal System Hastings established a more structured postal network across the territories controlled by the East India Company.

Post offices were set up at different locations to ensure better communication. Appointment of a Postmaster General A central authority called the Postmaster General was appointed to supervise the entire postal system. This step helped in maintaining discipline and uniformity in postal operations. Use of Dak Runners The system of dak runners was organized more effectively. These runners carried letters between post stations and ensured that messages were delivered in a fixed time. Postal Service for Public Use One of the most important reforms was that the postal system was opened to the public for the first time. People could send letters by paying a small fee, which also generated revenue for the administration. Regular Postal Routes Hastings introduced fixed postal routes connecting important administrative centers. This greatly improved communication between major cities and government offices. Impact of the Postal Reforms The postal reforms of Warren Hastings significantly improved communication in British India. They helped the government

maintain better control over its territories and allowed faster transmission of official orders. The opening of postal services to the public also encouraged social and commercial communication. These reforms laid the groundwork for the later development of the modern postal system in India during the 19th century.

Keywords :- Post Office, Dak Line, Post Master, Postal Administration, Postal Tickets.

Introduction :-

A century ago the penny postage was established for the first time in England and the memory of Sir Roland Hill is to-day gratefully cherished not only by his countrymen but thousands of admirers all over the world' It was to Hill's careful calculation that we owe a uniform and cheap rate of postage that leaves distance absolutely out of account and the current system of payment before posting by means of a tiny "list of paper just large enough to bear the stamp, and covered at the back with a glutinous wash" was also devised by him. Great as Hill's achievements were, we should not forget that another great Englishman tried to anticipate some of his reforms in India as early as 1774. In the a minute, dated the 17th January (now in the keeping of the Imperial Record Department, New Delhi) Warren Hastings evolved a scheme of postal reforms that deserves more than a passing notice. As in England, privileged persons in India also enjoyed the right of sending their letters free of postage and Hastings complained that "the present Management of the Dauks is attended with many Inconveniencies. Private Letters are exempt from postage and the whole expence of the Establishment falls upon the Company." The total expenditure under this head, according to the Governor (for the rank and dignity of Governor-General had not yet been conferred on him), amounted to Rs. 1,78,796-2-7 excluding "The expence of Houses for the accommodation of the Dawks, of Boats Oil Massal etc.,"

"in Dacca, Midnapore and other Districts in Bengal." Moreover, as Hastings proceeded to point out, "the Establishment is involved in a Labyrinth of Obscurity without Checks and without System. The Delays on the Road are often greater than those of common Cossids of Cowriers without a Possibility of correcting them because it cannot be known by whom they are occasioned. Of these delays the President himself has had occasion for extraordinary Dispatch, he has made use of express cossids and these never failed to exceed the regular Dawks by nearly half the space

of Time employed by the letter for the same Distances”.¹ Warren Hasting was not a man to put up with unnecessary expense and avoidable delay. He at once set to devise a scheme that would at once secure economy and expenditure.

His “plan of a new establishment of Dawks and of general Post Office ”was based on three simple principles:

(1)“That all letters shall Pay Postage, excepting such as are on the Public Service.”

(2)“that private letters should pay a moderate postage and the different parts of the country should e brought under one uniform system.”

(3)“That the Postage on inland Letters shall be paid when put into the Office, at the following Rates :-²

Single Letter for every Hundred Miles 2 annas.

Double Letter in Proportion according to their weight. Obviously Warren Hastings realized the utility and advantage of advance payment of postage. He had, in fact, suggested the same remedy as Hill did six decades later for avoiding delay in delivering and taxing letters and he was also in favour of a cheap and uniform rate. Here, however, Hill’s proposals were more scientific and farreaching than those of Warren Hastings.³ He was not prepared to ignore distance as one of the main factors in transport expenses. Considering the condition of roads in those days we cannot blame Hastings if he suggested that the rate of postage should vary with distance. But he partly anticipated Hill, if not expressly, at least by implication, when in framing his schedule he ignored for all practical purposes all distances less than one hundred miles.

Hastings did not think of adhesive stamps but he did not suggest tokens of a different kind for the convenience of the general public. Two of his proposed rules provided: “That all Letters shall be stamped with the Day of the Month on which they are delivered int any Chief Office.”⁴ “That for the facility of paying the Postage on Letters small Copper Tickets be immediately struck to be received at the rate of Two Annas each but to pass only at the Post Office.” Apparenty the public were expected to buy these small copper tickets and the letters were to be received at and stamped by the Post office when these tokens were presented. It may be incidentally noted that, introduction of cheap postage, “ the Post office now a heavy Burden may in time become a Source of Revenue to the Company, “ and

the popularity as well as prosperity of the present Postal department bear ample testimony to Hastings's uncommon foresight.⁵

We may conclude by quoting in extenso the specific recommendations of Warren Hastings regarding the proposed Postal establishment which bring the different Postal establishment which would bring the different parts under one uniform and general system:-

That the Dawks be formed into four Division as follows:

1st Division from Calcutta to Ganjam.

2nd Division from Calcutta to Patna.

3rd Division from Patna to Benares, and to such farther Distanced as may be hereafter determined.

4th Division from Calcutta to Decca.⁶

That no dwks be appointed to the Cross Roads (excepting Dinagepoor) as hereafter mentioned but Cossids only occasionally employed by the Provincial Councils and Collectors, to convey the Letters to the nearest stages of the Dawks; the Pay and other charges of these Cossids to be transmitted Monthly to the Post Master General, whose Office will be hereafter described.⁷

3rd. That as the Military Operations in Cooch Beyhar require a constant and regular Correspondence, a Cross post be established between Dinagepoor and Rajemahal and that it remains for future consideration whether it will be necessary to establish a Cross post from Burdwan on the Assembling of the Council at that place.

4th. That two Gurree Wallas, or Time Keepers be appointed with each Munshy for the purpose of determining the arrival of each packet, which shall be written on the outside of the packet, and an Account thereof with the time of the last Dispatch kept by the Munshee.

5th. That a Deputy Post Master be appointed with the following Establishment of Servants at the following Stations, who shall have Charge of all the Stages from the Presidency, on the next Station preceding him to the Place of his Residence, pay the Moonshees Charges dependant on him, take an Account of all Letters received and dispatched, receive and issue Letters, transmit his Account and reports to the Post Master General, and receive his orders.

By Rules.

1. That all Letters shall pay postage, excepting such as are on the Public Service.
2. That the postage on inland Letters shall be paid when put into the Office, at the following Rates:
 - i. Single letters for every Hundred Miles-2 Annas.
 - ii. Double Letter in Proportion according to their weight.⁸
1. That Letters coming by Sea, or from foreign settlements shall pay on Delivery, and be rated at ½ postage.
2. That a Table of postage formed according to the above Rules, be affixed at the Different Offices for the Public Inspection.
3. That the post office in Calcutta shall be open from ten o'clock in the morning till One, for the Delivery of Letters; and from Six till Nine in the Evening for the receipt of Letters.
4. That daily Account of the Number and weight of Letters dispatched, with the Amount of Postage be kept at each Office; that a Monthly Account be transmitted to the post Master General by his Deputies and that a general Abstract of the while Receipts and Disbursements be laid before the Board every month.
5. That the Letters when received into the Offices shall be sorted, and put up in separate Bags for the different Stations, together with a Note of the number in each.
6. That all Letters shall be stamped with the Day of the Months on which they are delivered into any Chief Office.
7. That for the Facility of paying the Postage on Letters small Copper Tickets be immediately struck to be at the rate of Two Annas each but to pass only at the Post Office.”⁹

We do not know whether this recommendation was accepted in toto by the colleagues of the Governor for our records are incomplete but from papers of a subsequent date it appears that a Post Master General was appointed and steps were taken to build and purchase houses for Post Offices in different parts of the Country.

Warren Hastings will be remembered not only for his achievements but also for much more that he tried to achieve.

Conclusion :-

The postal reforms introduced by Warren Hastings played an important role in improving the administrative communication system in British India. Before these reforms, the postal system was mainly used for official purposes and was not properly organized. Communication between different regions was slow and unreliable, which created difficulties in governance and administration. Hastings recognized the importance of an efficient communication network for maintaining control over the vast territories under the East India Company.

Through his reforms, Hastings attempted to systematize and regulate the postal services. He introduced a more organized structure in which postal routes were better defined and managed. The postal service was opened for public use to some extent, which was a significant step toward the development of a modern postal system in India. These reforms helped in faster transmission of official documents, letters, and information between administrative centers. As a result, the efficiency of the colonial administration increased, and coordination between different regions became easier.

Another important outcome of Hastings' postal reforms was the foundation they laid for future developments in the communication system. Later British administrators expanded and improved the system based on the framework created during his tenure. In this way, Hastings' initiatives contributed to the gradual evolution of a structured postal network in India.

In conclusion, the postal reforms of Warren Hastings were a significant administrative measure that strengthened communication and governance during the early phase of British rule in India. Although primarily designed to serve colonial interests, these reforms played a crucial role in shaping the early foundations of India's modern postal system and demonstrated the growing importance of communication in effective administration.

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