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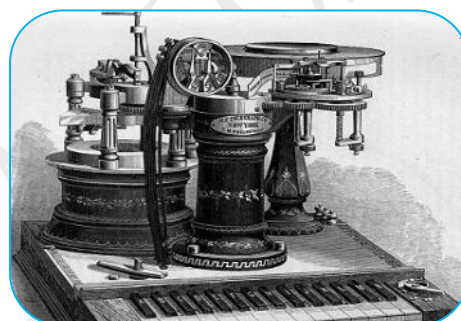


TELEGRAPH SYSTEM IN THE MADRAS PRESIDENCY- A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT:

The modern telegraph system was the legacy of the colonial government in India. The telegraph system was much useful to the both British Administrators and the public because the communication reached in other end in a possible speed. Lord Dalhousie was called the 'Father of Indian Telegraph System. During his period , the first Telegraph Act was passed which regulated the telegraph system in India. Under his rule, the Madras Presidency benefitted much. Various telegraphic lines were installed in different parts of the Madras Presidency.



KEYWORDS: Indian Telegraph, Madras, East India Company, Dalhousie, Telegraph Act.

INTRODUCTION

The Indian Telegraph system was one of the owned organizations in the world. Several proposals for opening of Telegraphic communication between India and London, were put forwarded before the Sepoy mutiny of 1857.¹ None were adopted however, it show sharply pointed the disastrous consequences of medieval communications that much further delay became impossible. India was first linked with the European Telegraphic system by an overland line through connection with both the Russian and the Turukish lines.

In 1831 the line of Serampore

post extended five miles from Calcutta to Chunar was constructed. In 1832 Dr.WShaughnessy, Professor of Chemistry, Calcutta University, obtained permission to construct Telegraph lines between Calcutta and Agra via, Bistopur, Mayapur, Kukrahati and Kedgerie. This was successfully carried out. In 1853 Lord Dalhousie obtained sanction from the Court of Directors of East India Company in London to construct a Telegraph line from Calcutta to Bombay, via, Agra, Peshawar and Bombay to Madras.² In 1854 the first Telegraph Act was introduced and as per this Act the East India company granted the exclusive privilege for the establishment of Electric Telegraphs throughout India.

In the Madras Presidency new

Telegraphic lines were opened in March 1854, connected Fort St. George, Guindy, Mount Road and Poonamalle. The Central Telegraph Office was opened at Broadway in Madras. It was noted that on the opening day one message of not more than sixteen words were allowed to at a free of charge between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. The notification was issued by R.L.Brunion, Deputy Superintendent of Telegraphs Madras. In February 1855 the Telegraph was opened to the Public.³ In 1856 there were nine Telegraphic offices in the Madras Presidency.

A simple Telegraph was made up of four parts. A battery that provided electricity. A Telegraph key for sending signals as dots and dashes, and electromagnetic sounds at the receiving and a wire that connects the sender and receiver.⁴ The Telegraph set was wired so that when the key was pressed down it completed an electric circuit, and the current flows to the sender, it flows through a small electro magnet coil of wire wrapped around an iron core. Telegraph messages were sent by a code in which letters, numbers and punctuation marks were represented by combinations of dots and dashes. The original code used was the Morse code.⁵

The Telegraph Department was directly brought under the imperial Government and there was no local control. The Director General of Telegraph in India was the head of the Telegraph Department and he was also the Director of Bengal Division. The Directors were appointed for Southern and Northern Divisions and the Superintendents were appointed for each circles.⁶

The Madras Presidency embraced four complex Telegraph divisions viz., Madras, Bellary, Malabar and the Ganjam Division. In 1858 Lt. Col. D.G.Robinson was the Director General of the Telegraphs in India. J.T.Blisset was the Director of Southern Division and Mr.G.J.Moberly was the Superintendent of Madras circle. In 1854 the first Telegraph Act was introduced for regulating establishment and management of Electric Telegraphs in India. ⁷ As per the Act the East India Company the exclusive privilege was granted to the establishing Electric Telegram in India. The lines were constructed in the Madras circle. The wires and other equipments were supplied from Europe. The Telegraph lines were supported with Masonry pillars, teak and ironwood posts. These were imported from Ceylon at a heavy cost. Huts were constructed at every dangerous river crossings. Offices were opened on every bank and signals, batteries and stores were supplied in 1858.⁸ Native lascars were appointed for every ten miles to each protective establishment. They were called as line patrols. These persons had to go over to their respective beasts daily, but on breakages of the line occurred the distance traversed was of course greater.

This system was however, found to be very defective, and the main objective in view viz., the rapid restoration of communication during interruptions, were totally defeated. The patrol either would not or could not be done their duty efficiently under existing arrangements. Therefore the whole body of the native line Guards were purchased and supplied by the department.⁹ They were posted at each Telegraph station and at intervals of twenty miles where substantial huts were built for their accommodations. These men were inspected their area twice a week and during interruptions. They were ready to move rapidly on the line a movements notice. They were furnished with tools, wire and all requisites for making a zinc ingot joint. Notice was also given whenever practicable to the artificer in charge of the section of the breakage of the wire. Thus any section of the line with a distance of ten miles could be travelled over an interruption remedied with certainly within twelve hours at the longest so that the value of the line was compromised by prolonged and disgraceful interruptions.¹⁰

The Great southern India Railway Telegraphy was opened to the public in the month of May 1861 and messages were received on their account by the Government Telegraph line.¹¹

The Imperial Government established a signaller's school at Coonoor in Ootacamund under the Superintendence of Sir W.B.O Shaughnessy.¹² This school supplied well qualified signalers for the Telegraph Department. The efficiency of the Madras signalers was appreciated in a great measure.

The sheds for the Electric Telegraph Department at Vetfanam and Meenbusil in the district of Tanjore were completed in August 1860 at a total cost of Rs.1509 and handed over to the Department.¹³ A workshop was established at Bangalore. It was continued to furnish the lines and offices with tools, implements, needful instruments etc. as also the neighboring circles of Hyderabad and Ceylon.

In 1858 the time ball was erected at Madras. In January 1859, the time ball apparatus was re-arranged and repaired and before the end of April 1859 it was put in through working order. A Telegraph class under an experienced Telegraph Master for the instruction of Orphan boys from different sections of population in Madras, was opened in the male orphan Asylum in December 1867.¹⁴ The Principal of the Asylum showed great interest in the class . There was every prospect of it fulfilled the purpose for which it was established.

To conclude, the telegraph system in Madras Presidency helped the existing postal system to

dispatch the communications in a speedy way. Many telegraphic lines were established in the parts of the Madras Presidency. Since the first Telegraph Act of 1854, the establishment and management of Electric Telegraphs in India in general and Madras Presidency in particular got impetus. The latter half of the Nineteenth Century Madras Presidency witnessed a great stride in the development sector of communication because of the innovative techniques employed in the telegraph system.

END NOTES

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