

Faces of Faith: Religious Identity on Picture Postcards of Colonial India

Introduction: Various Religions were a part of the social fabric in the subcontinent during the days of Colonial India. These varied religions were captured on picture postcards by Indian and European postcard publishers of early 20th century. These cards show religion specific imagery from a bygone era.

Aim & Scope of the Exhibit : The primary aim of this research-oriented exhibit is to present a comprehensive and visually engaging narrative of picture postcards from British India and French India that show religion specific human imagery.

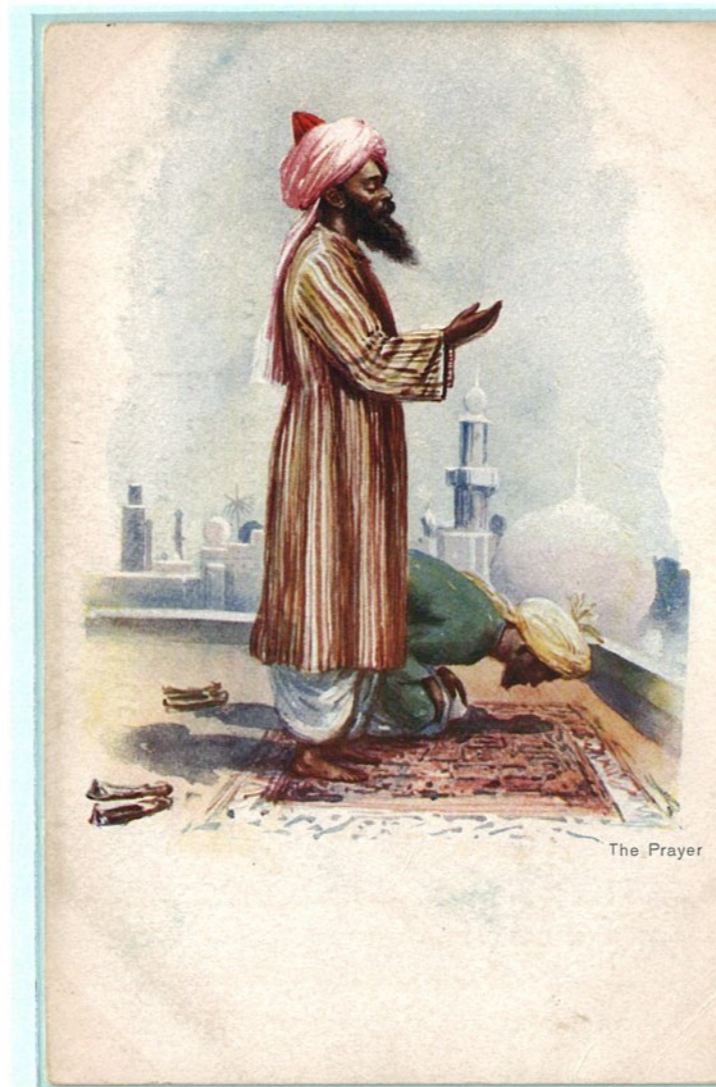
Choice of Materials and Presentation: Being a picture postcard exhibit it uses both postally used and unused picture postcards from 1900 to 1940s. In keeping with the ethos of picture postcard collecting, information about the publisher, printer, and artist is given where available. Postal information is restricted to the year of postal use to merely help trace the card's era of usage. Information related to rates and cancellations are outside the purview of this exhibit. Attempt has been made to not merely state the caption text already on the card but rather delve more into what the cards depict, and also to present deltiological information about the cards. *Information about the printing technique, printer, publisher, artist is in italic.* No modern reproductions are used.

Rarity: Most of these cards are scarce. But Cards where less than 10 Cards are known in collector hands are marked with a Purple flower ❀

Personal Research: Deltiological Personal Research shows the black pencil symbol ✎

Bibliography: "Paper Jewels: Postcards from the Raj" by Omar Khan

	Title and Plan	Pg 1
A	The Hindus were the dominant religious ethnicity in British India.	Pg 2 to 4
B	Muslims were the second largest religious group in British India. They were politically and economically a marginalised minority.	Pg 5
C	The Parsis of Bombay were a distinct Zoroastrian community of Persian descent who were instrumental in economic development.	Pg 6
D	Sikhs were often seen as a martial and farming race by the British while Buddhists were a much smaller group, largely concentrated in certain regions.	Pg 7
E	Christianity's influence in Colonial India especially French & Portuguese India increased due to missionary activity leading to conversions, particularly among lower castes	Pg 8



This is a captivating illustration aptly titled "The Prayer," depicting two Indian Muslims engaged in Salat, the ritual prayer in Islam. The standing figure is shown in the *قيام* (standing) position or possibly the beginning of *الله اكبر* (raising hands to the Great God). The second figure is in *سجود* (prostration), kneeling signifying submission. *Coloured Halftone. Unknown Publisher. Artist: M. V. Dhurandhar. Undivided Back. ❀*



Picture Postcard showing Tulsidas meeting Ram. This card is unique in many ways. Ram is a Hindu God and is mythical. But Tulsidas is a human and a saint-poet from 17th Century. When Britishers first arrived in India in 1608, Tulsidas was in Chitrakoot composing the Ramcharitmanas. Tulsidas claimed that he saw Ram and Lakshman in Chitrakoot when mixing tilak and Ram took the tilak and anointed himself as well as Tulsidas.

His original words which are translated above are:-

चित्रकूट के घाट पर, भई संतन की भीर।
तुलसीदास चंदन घिसें, तिलक देत रघुबीर॥

Artist A. Ghasiram of Nathwara painted this beautiful scene in Pichwai style and SS Brij Basi of Karachi (later in Pakistan) published it in the 1920s as a Photographic printing divided back postcard. ❀

A) The Hindus were the dominant religious ethnicity in British India.

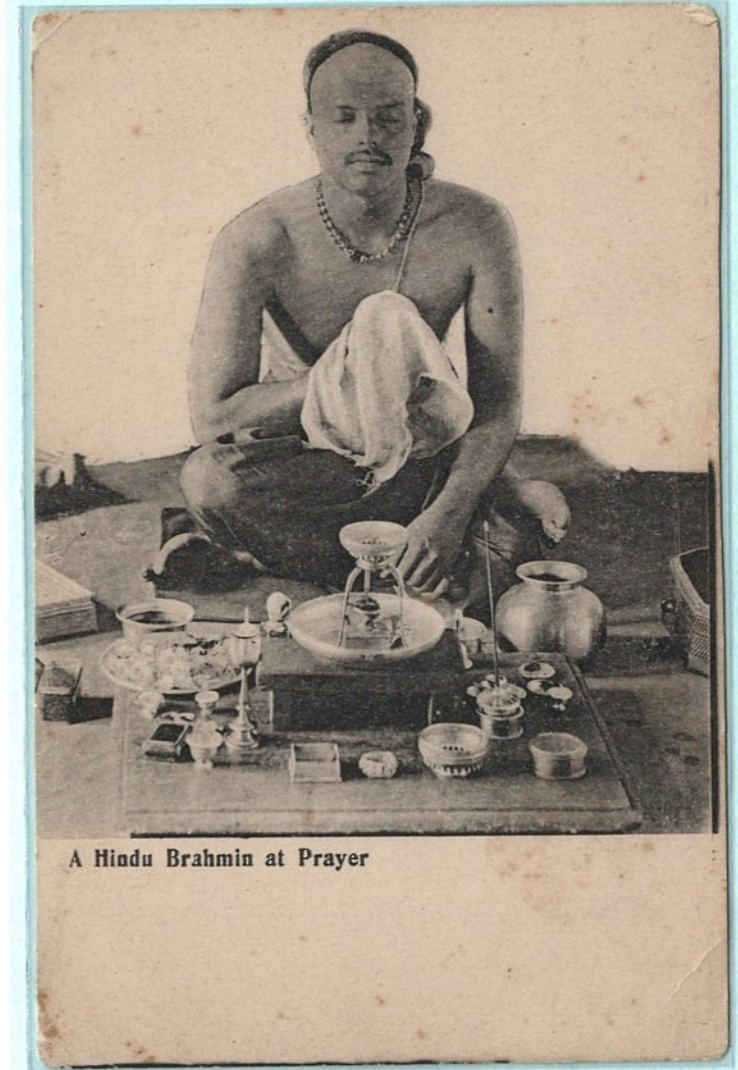


Reading Puran or religious historical book



Worshipping sacred Tulsi Plant

The Phototype Co Bombay.



A Hindu Brahmin at Prayer

In Hindu Dharma a Pandit performs a Yagna (Fire Ceremony) for the Yajmana (the person sponsoring the ritual). Tulsi Pooja (worshipping the Tulsi Plant) at Home is however done without a Pandit (Priest) generally. But in some rich households in Maharashtra there was a practice of a Pandit performing Tulsi Pooja daily with a lamp during the Karthik Maasa Hindu month in the home of a Yajmana. Card on the left shows the Pandit reading from the scriptures and beginning the Pooja. But in the card on the right the Pandit comes and sits to the right and the Yajman is seated on the left. Left Card is Collotype. Unknown Publisher. Card No 136. Divided Back. Used in 1912. Right Card is Collotype. Publisher: The Phototype Co. Undivided Back.



Byragy praying Sun around fire.

A Byragy (or Vairagi) is a Hindu ascetic or renunciant who practices Vairagya (dispassion/detachment) from the material world. They worship fire (Agni) as the divine messenger and purifier, believing it carries their sacrificial offerings to God. Collotype. Unknown Publisher. Divided Back. Printed in Saxony.



A MADRAS SADHU AND FOLLOWERS.

No. 31.

A Sadhu is a holy person in Hinduism. His followers place their belief and faith in him to guide them. Shown here is a Sadhu from Madras. Coloured Halftone. Publisher: D.A.Ahuja, Rangoon. Card No 31. Divided Back.

A Brahmin is traditionally the highest varna (social class) in Hinduism, historically designated as priests, teachers, and custodians of sacred knowledge like the Vedas. They pray to fulfill their duty (dharma) of maintaining cosmic order, achieving spiritual purity, and seeking union with the ultimate reality (Brahman). Prayer often involves daily rituals. Collotype. Publisher: M.G.Shahani & Co, Karachi. Divided Back.

This card was once a part of the Collection of Count A. De Fleurieu - who was a renowned collector British commonwealth ephemera. He used to put this round seal on his collectibles.





Puran Reading in a Temple

The Puranas are ancient Hindu texts containing myths, legends and devotional teachings. They were read in temples by scholars to disseminate religious and moral knowledge. *Coloured Halftone. Unknown Publisher. Undivided Back. Artist: M.V.Dhurandhar.*



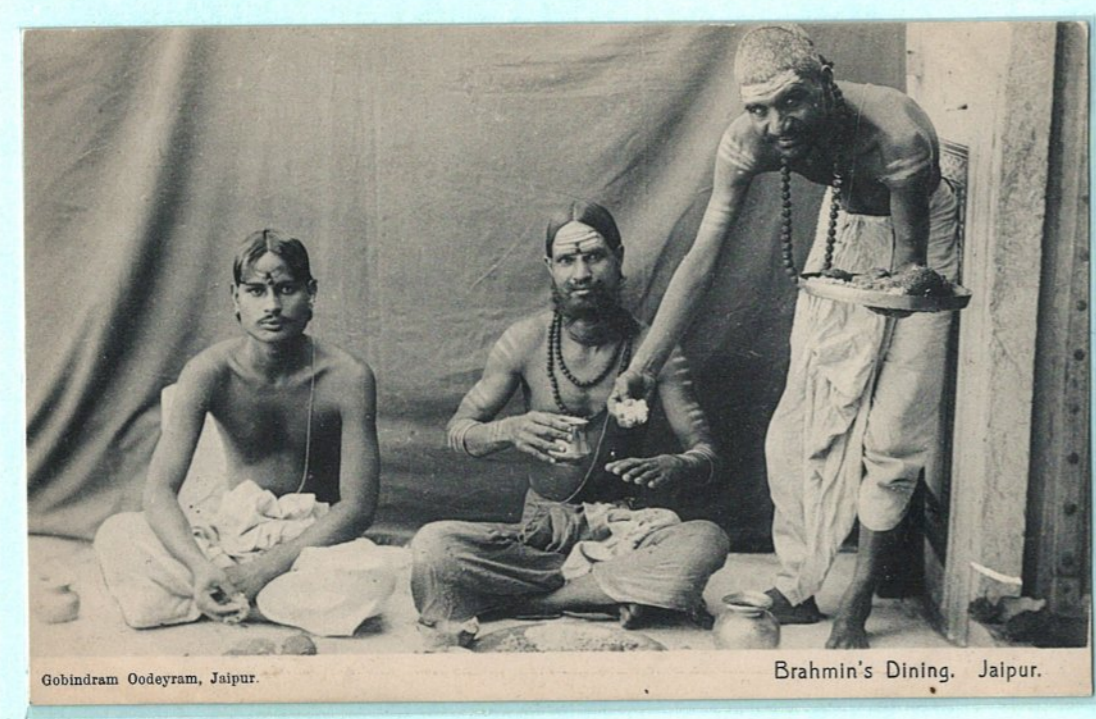
Pangim - INDIA PORTUGUEZA. Hindu.

Note the holy thread across the upper body of the Hindu Brahmin in the above card. The sacred thread is called the Yajnopavita or Janeu. Brahmins wear it as part of the Upanayana ceremony, signifying their spiritual "second birth" and initiation into Vedic study and learning. It is a commitment to a life of discipline and purity of thought, word, and deed, with its three strands symbolizing various concepts. *Collotype. Publisher: Edicao de Christovam Fernandes, Nova Goa. Divided Back.*



A Hindu Priest worshipping

The term Hatti (or Hatri) in Diwali worship refers to a miniature, cottage-like structure that serves as a temporary, sacred abode for Goddess Lakshmi and Lord Ganesha during the main Puja (worship). It is placed at the center of the puja setup and represents a spiritual invitation to the deities. In Vraj (Brij) culture, the ritual is also linked to the playful leela (act) of Lord Krishna, who, as a child, opened a small marketplace (Hat) filled with sweets and toys for the community. *Collotype. Unknown Publisher. Divided Back. Printed in Saxony.*



Gobindram Oodeyram, Jaipur.

Brahmin's Dining. Jaipur.

Feeding Brahmins, known as Brahmana Bhojana or Anna Daanam, is considered a highly meritorious act in Hinduism, performed to gain spiritual merit and fulfill ancestral duties. *Collotype. Publisher: Gobindram Oodeyram. Divided Back.*



Pundit Priest, Kashmir.

A Kashmiri Pandit is a member of the Kashmiri Hindu community and is primarily of the Brahmin caste, native to the Kashmir Valley. They are distinct from other Hindus due to their unique Shaivite traditions (worshipping Shiva primarily). *Collotype. Unknown Publisher. Undivided Back.*

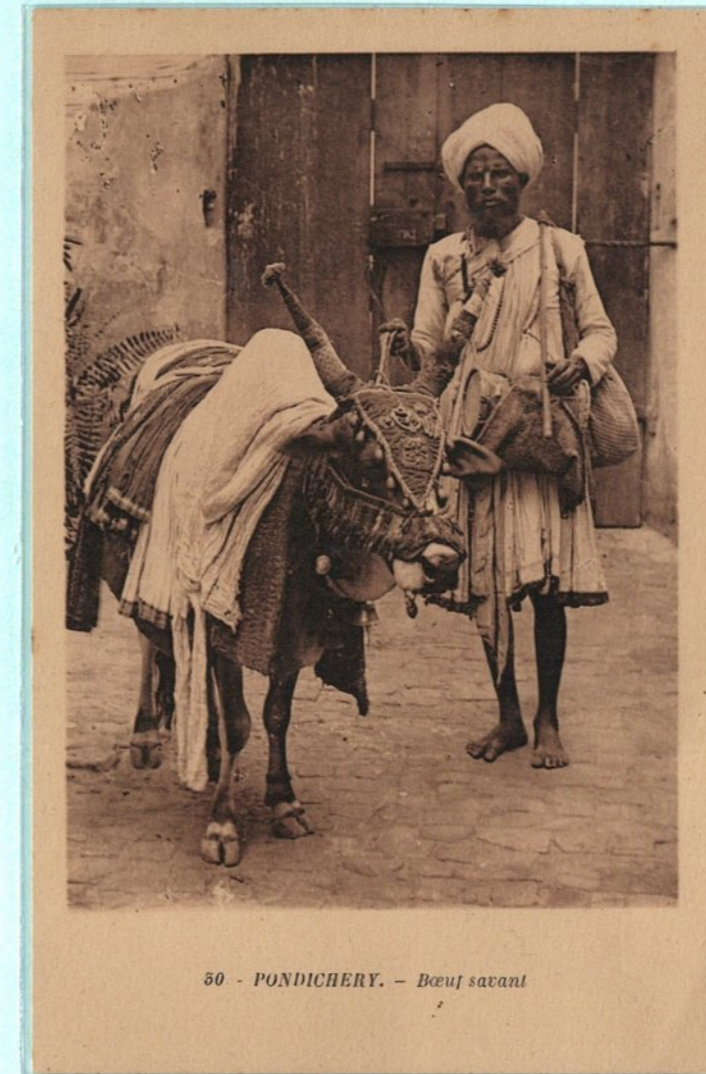


Hindu women typically carry a Pooja Thali (tray or plate) containing items essential for worship, such as flowers, incense sticks (agarbatti), ghee lamp (diya), fruits or sweets (prasad), kumkum (vermilion), and turmeric (haldi). These items are offered to the deity as a mark of respect and devotion during the temple visit

Coloured Halftone. Unknown Publisher. Artist: M.V.Dhurandhar. Undivided Back.

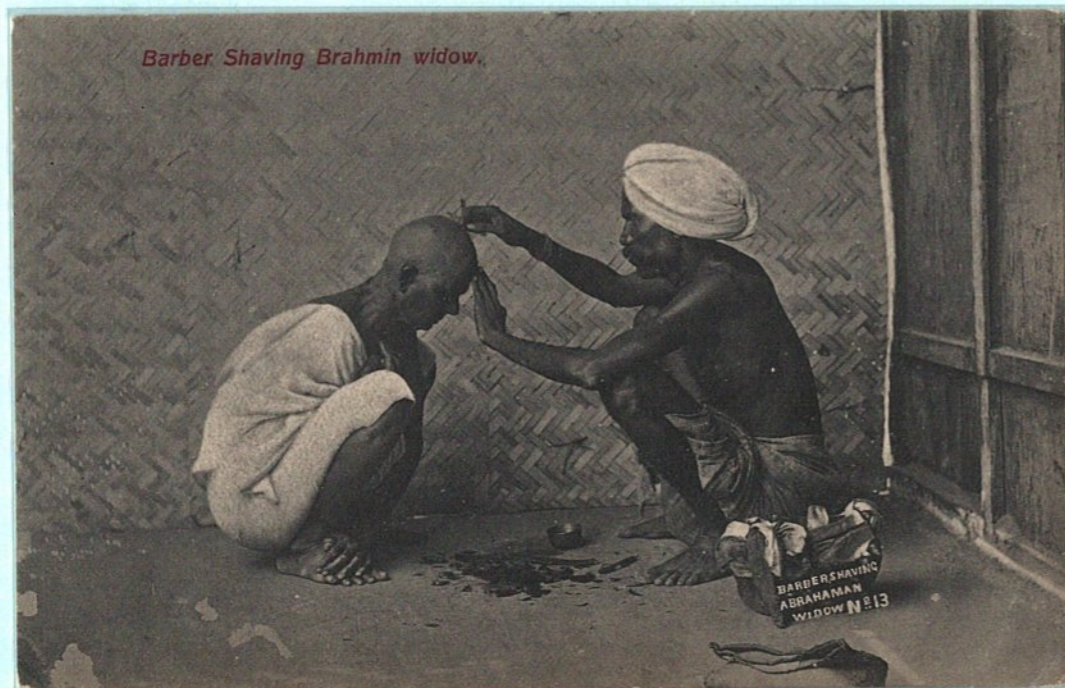


Collotype. Part of Booklet as Perforation visible on top. Publisher: Saeed Bros. Printed in Germany. Divided Back.



South Indian mendicants who lead these decorated bulls engage in Bhikshatana (religious mendicancy), seeking alms on behalf of the sacred bull as a spiritual act of devotion to Shiva. As Shiva is associated with Basava or Nandi (his mount)

Collotype with Sepiatoning. Publisher: Librairie Papeterie RP Babilonne, Pondicherry. Card No 30



The inhumane practice of tonsuring (shaving the head) among some Brahmin widows was enforced as a symbol of renunciation and permanent detachment from worldly life and beauty after their husband's death. Collotype. Publisher: The Phototype Co. Divided Back. Card No 13. Printed in Luxemburg.

Women worship the Tulsi plant (Holy Basil) as an earthly manifestation of Goddess Lakshmi (the deity of wealth and prosperity) and the beloved consort of Lord Vishnu, seeking spiritual well-being and domestic fortune. Collotype. Publisher: D. Macropolo and Co. Divided Back. Printed in Germany.

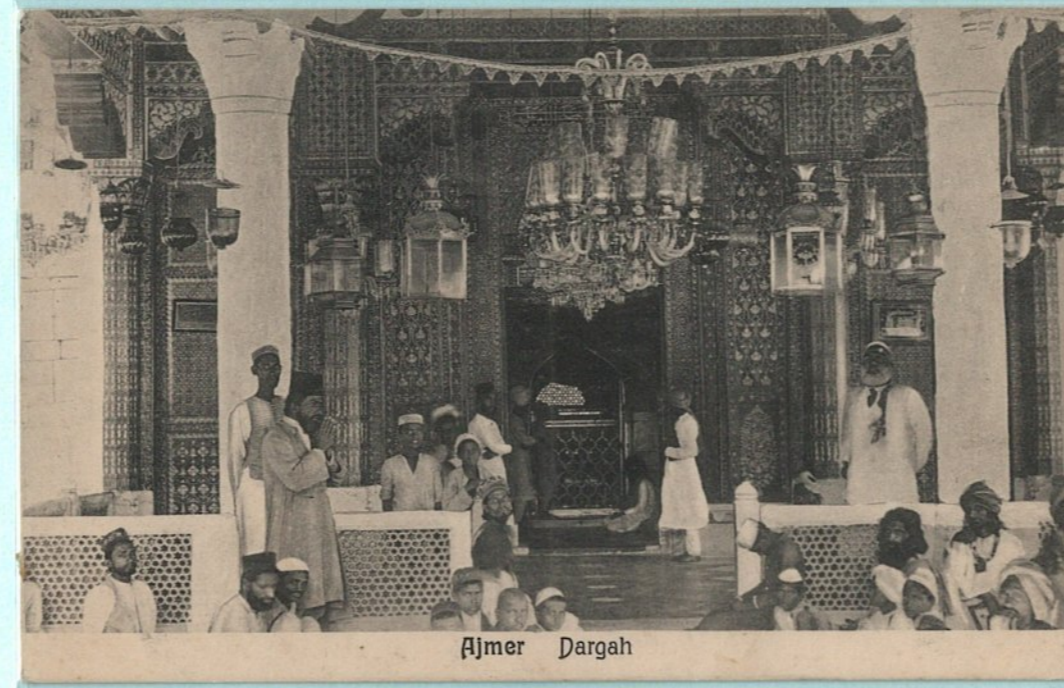


B) Muslims were the second largest religious group in British India. They were politically and economically a marginalised minority.

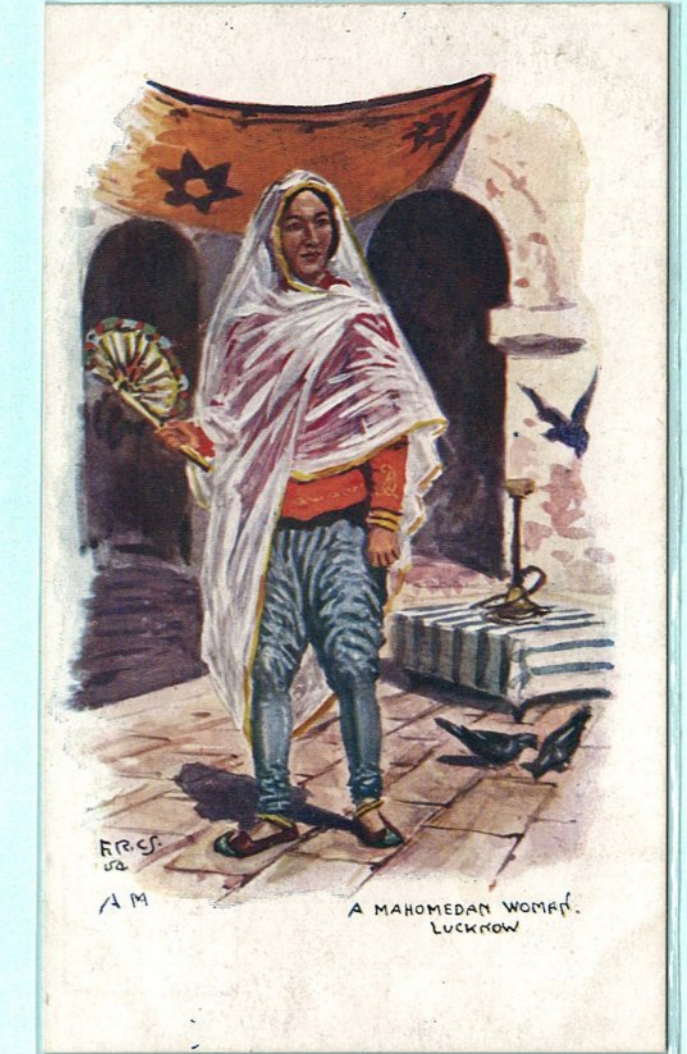
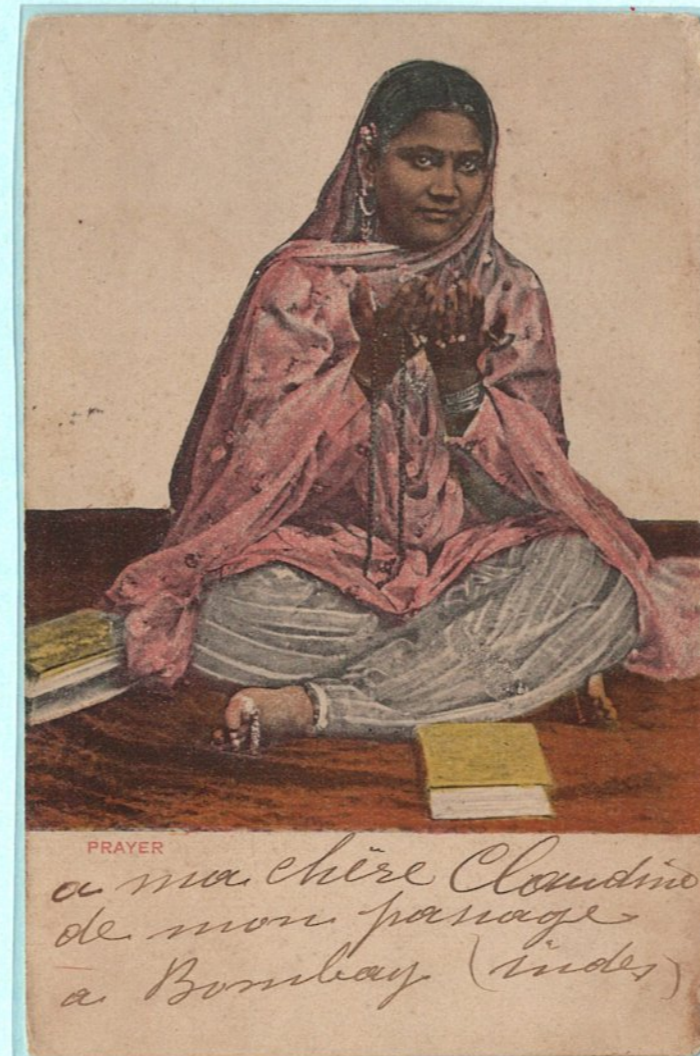


The term Mullan is an honorific title derived from the Arabic word mawla (master/guardian) and signifies a Muslim cleric, scholar, or mosque leader in regions like the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) of India. The NWFP during the British Raj was a Muslim majority region. *Real Photo Picture Post Card. Publisher: Mela Ram & Sons. Divided Back.*

The word Mussulman (also spelled Musulman) is primarily used in South and Central Asia, that is an equivalent for Muslim. It refers to a follower of Islam, a monotheistic religion, derived from the Arabic word Muslim meaning "one who submits to God". *Coloured Halftone. Unknown Publisher. Undivided Back.*



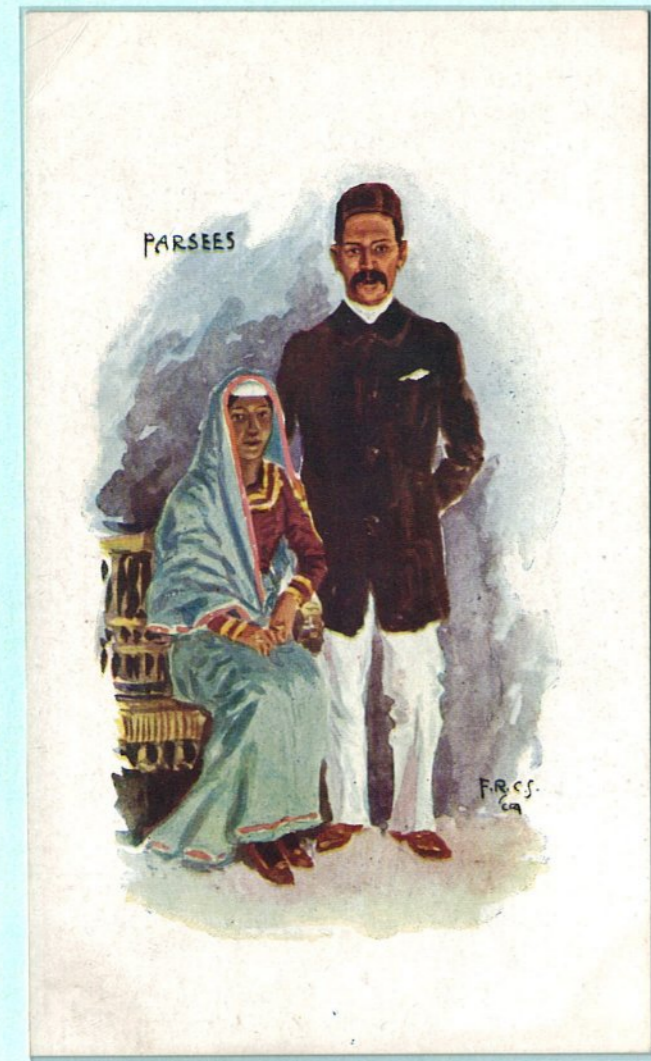
People visit Ajmer Dargah to pay homage to the revered Muslim Sufi saint Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti and seeking blessings, wish fulfillment, and spiritual solace. *Collotype. Publisher: The Phototype Co. Divided Back. Printed in Luxemburg.*



A Churidar pyjama is a type of tight-fitting trouser from the Indian subcontinent, commonly worn by Muslim women with a tunic called a kameez or kurta. *Coloured Halftone. Unknown Publisher. Artist: FRCS. Undivided Back.*

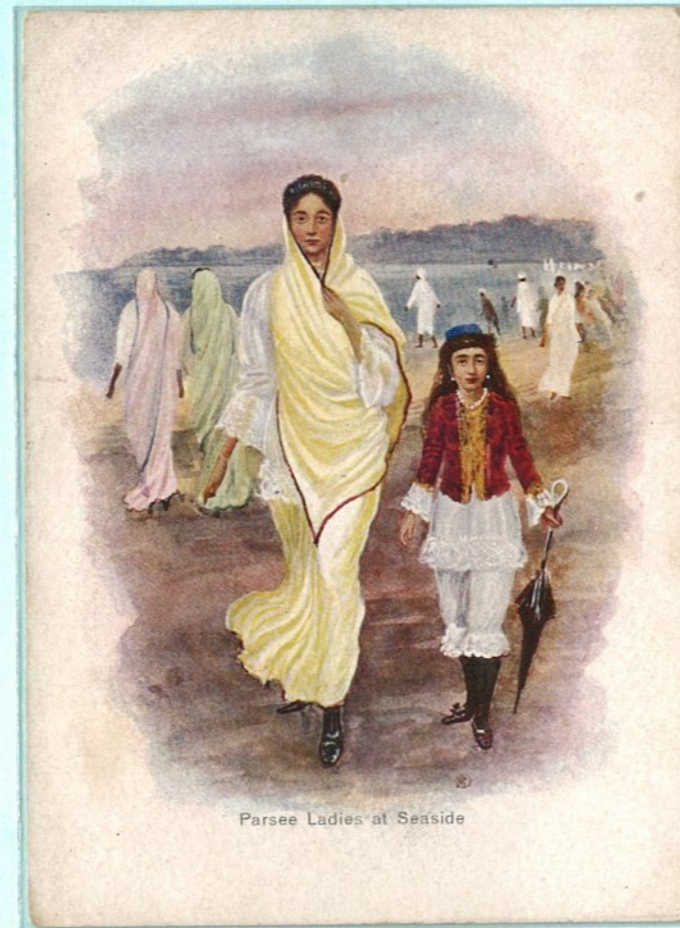
Muslims raise their hands upward during prayer (Salah) primarily at the beginning and specific transitions to proclaim Takbir (saying "Allahu Akbar," meaning "God is the Greatest"). This gesture symbolises submitting to God. *Coloured Collotype. Unknown Publisher. Used n 1904. **

C) The Parsis of Bombay were a distinct Zoroastrian community of Persian descent who were instrumental in economic development.



Coloured Halftone. Unknown Publisher. Artist: FRCS. Undivided Back.

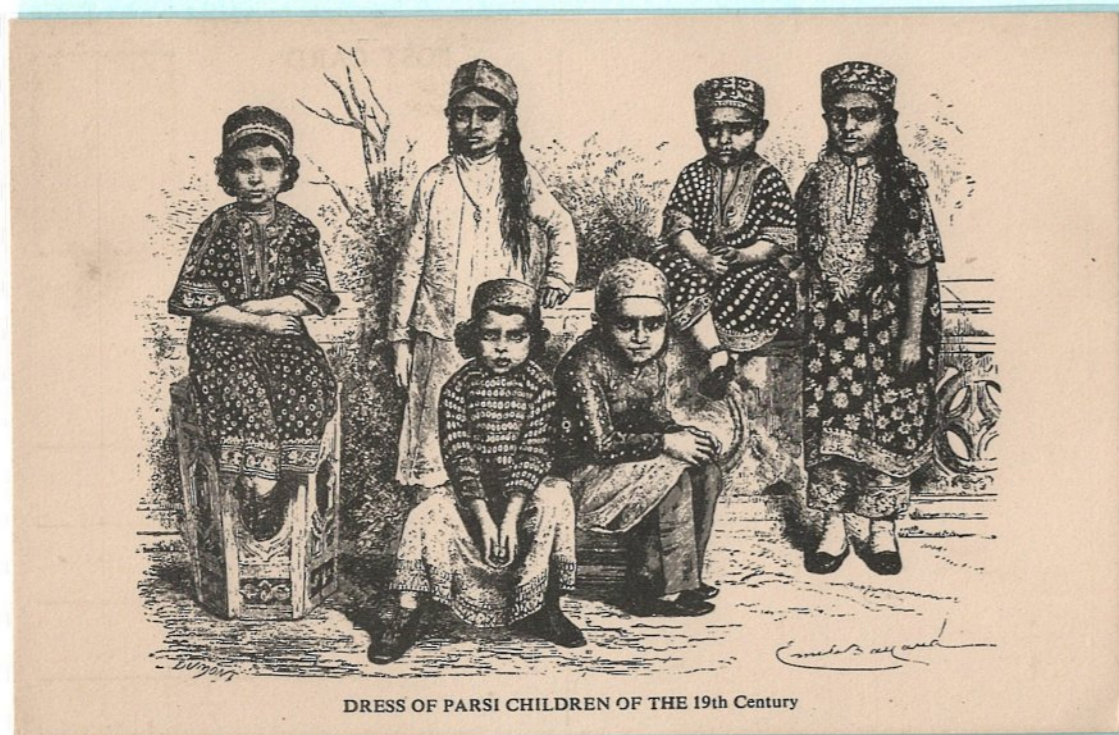
The Parsi couple's traditional attire in early 20th-century India consisted of the man wearing a long coat (jama), trousers, and a distinctive turban (pheta), while the woman wore a Chinese-embroidered silk sari (Gara) draped over a Victorian-style blouse (often covering the midriff) with a cotton vest (sadra) and sacred thread (kusti) worn underneath by both. While a young girl could wear wide, loose trousers (ijor) and a tunic on the top.



Coloured Halftone. Unknown Publisher. Artist: M.V.Dhurandhar. Undivided Back.



Parsis worship Ahura Mazda (Wise Lord), and perform rituals—often in a Fire Temple (Agiary). Above is a Parsee Priest. Coloured Collotype. Unknown Publisher. Divided Back. Printed in Germany.



DRESS OF PARSII CHILDREN OF THE 19th Century

The cap worn by Parsi children (and adults) is generally called a Topi (a generic term for a cap in India) or, specifically for religious purposes, a Prayer Cap or Skullcap. It is often a round, embroidered cap made of materials like velvet, silk, or cotton. The head covering is considered essential in Zoroastrian tradition to protect the head (especially the crown area) and maintain the spiritual power of prayer

Collotype. Unknown Publisher. Divided Back. Engraving Artist: Edward Goodall



Collotype. Unknown Publisher. Undivided Back. Used in 1905.

D) Sikhs were often seen as a martial and farming race by the British while Buddhists were a much smaller group, largely concentrated in certain regions.



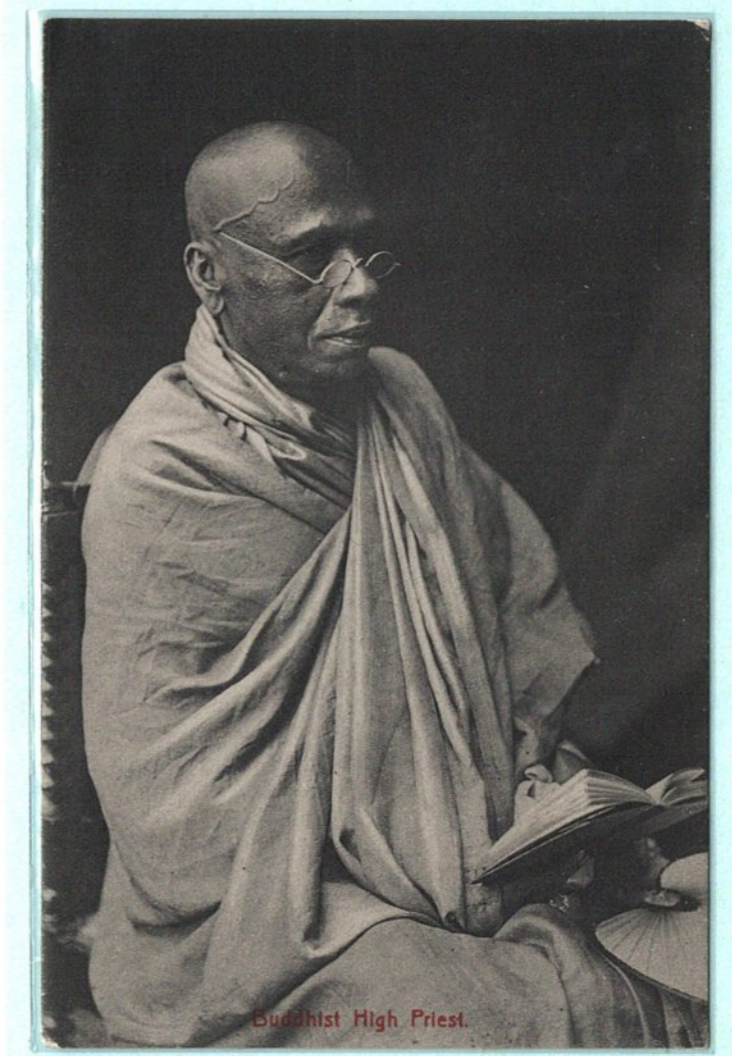
The main reason Sikh women (and men) keep long hair is due to the religious commandment of Kesh which signifies respecting God's creation and maintaining a natural, simple form. It also serves as a visible symbol of spiritual of identity. Shown above is real vintage photograph and NOT a picture postcard. It shows long haired Sikh women from Punjab's agrarian belt overlooking a Gurudwara (Sikh Place of worship). The Photo is coated with silver halide coating which was a coating on picture postcards and photographs to increase their life.



Blue-dressed Akali Sikhs are known as Nihangs. They are a distinctive and historical armed warrior order within Sikhism, renowned for their martial skills. The publisher description wrongly describes them as Fakirs (mendicants). This is factually incorrect and shows how card publishers too made mistakes understanding Indian religious identity. *Coloured Collotype. Publisher: Raphael Tuck and Sons. Part of Oilette Native Life in India Series. Card No 9311. Artisit Unknown. Printed in England.*



9th Tashi Lama (also known as Panchen Lama) was the second highest Lama in Buddhism after Dalai Lama. He was Pro-China , Anti-British / Anti-India. He is 3rd from left sitting row. It is strange that a British Indian publisher published a postcard on him. *Collotype. Publisher: D.Macropolo and Co. Printed in Germany. Card No TB1780.*



A Buddhist High Priest from the neighbouring British colony of Ceylon. *Collotype. Publisher: Plate & Co. Divided Back.*

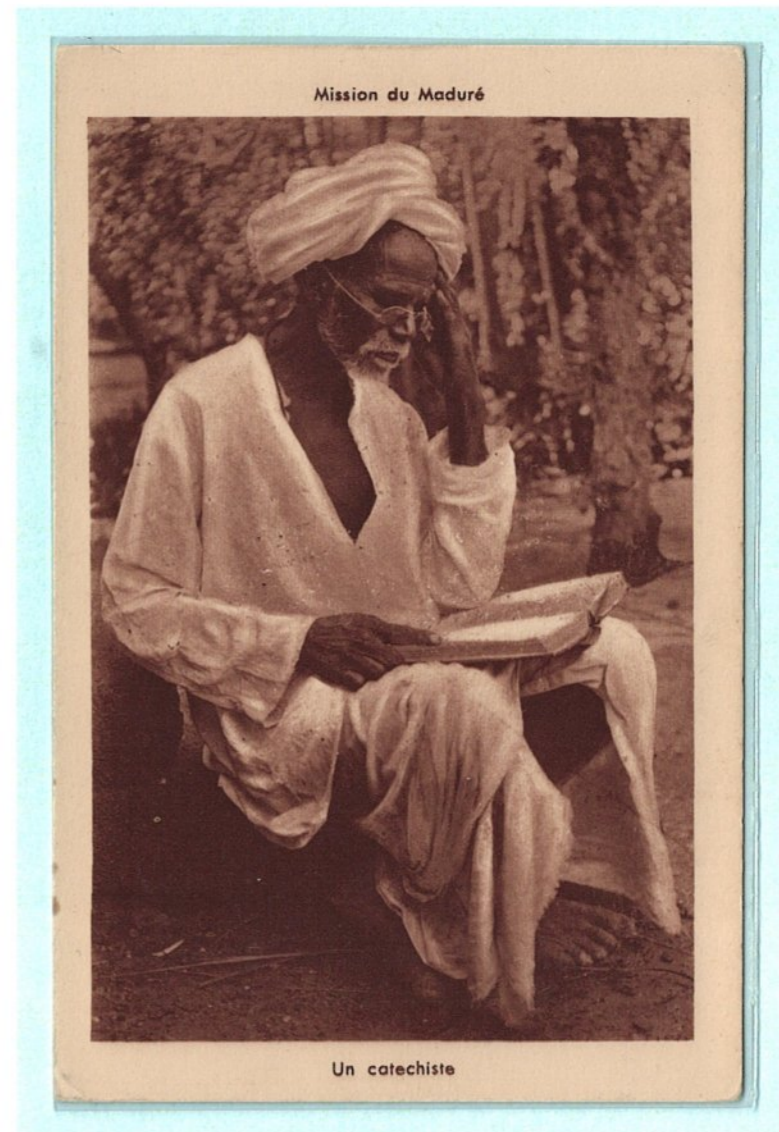
E) Christianity's influence in Colonial India especially French & Portuguese India increased due to missionary activity leading to conversions, particularly among lower castes.



A Converted Christian Boy guiding lower caste natives. Evangelical message by the publisher reads "Triumph of Faith". Collotype. Publisher: Missions of the Jesuit Fathers (They published postcards as well as evangelical propaganda). Card No 22. Divided Back. ❀



A Father from the French Capuchins holding the first born native child born to a converted christian family in Batta, Rajputana Agency. Collotype. Publisher: Sacred Heart Mission Rajputana. Divided Back.

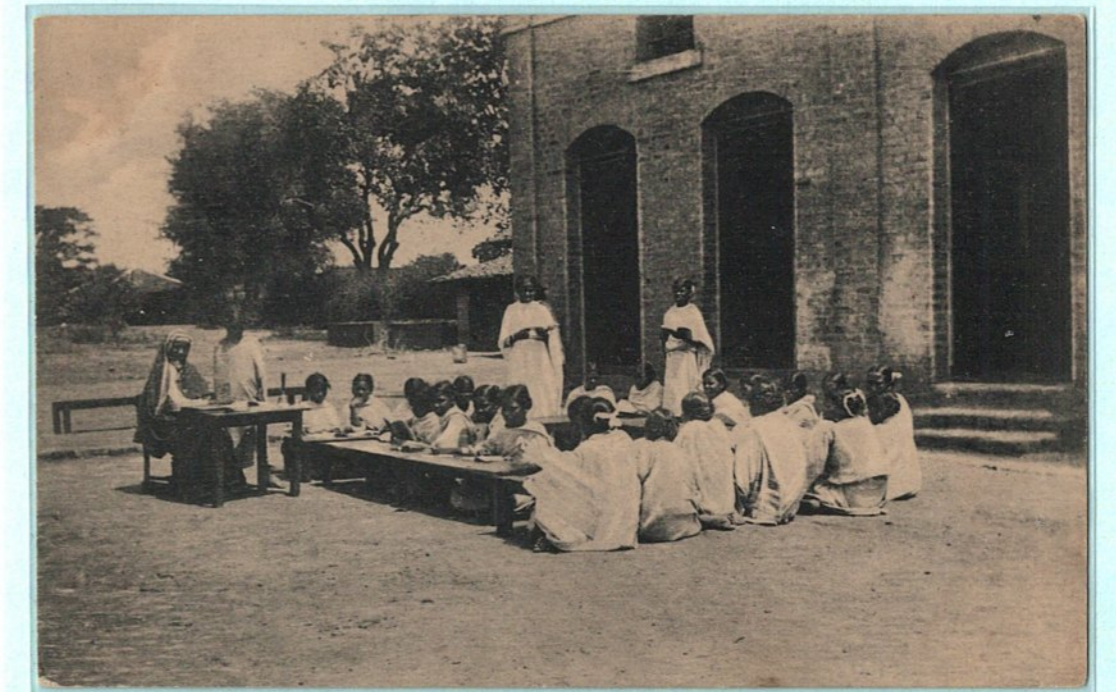


A convert reading the Bible. Collotype with Sepiatoning. Publisher: Madurai Procuratorate Mission. Divided Back. Printed in France.



Collotype. Publisher: Sacred Heart Mission, Rajputana Agency. Divided Back. Card No 8

Christian Mission Presses published postcards to generate financial support from their home countries. They served as a form of visual propaganda to demonstrate the positive 'civilizing' impact and need for evangelical missions like convert locals to the order as shown on the left and starting schools as shown on the right. The cards were used to recruit new missionaries and maintain enthusiasm for the imperial religious project. Ultimately, they helped legitimise the missions' presence in the colony by showcasing their humanitarian efforts in education and show the success of the missions. 📖



Collotype. Publisher: Madurai Procuratorate Mission. Divided Back.