


The 1929 Air Mail stamps of India

A study of constant errors and varieties.

Introduction

India was an important mid-way stop for trade in the British Empire between Europe and Australasia and with the commencement of air travel the Indian authorities wished to produce distinctive stamps and postal stationery exclusively for the services by Air Mail. India was the first country in Asia to release a set of stamps, six issues, 3, 4, 6, 8, 12 annas on 4th Nov. 1929 and 2 annas on 20th Dec. 1929. Printed by lithography, format 12 x 12 = 144 stamps per sheet, Watermark multi star sideways; star pointing right  as seen from back, Perforation gauge=14. **The final design of the stamp was approved by His Majesty King George V.**

Printing of Stamps and Initiative attempts

- In 1926 The Security Printing Press, India at Nasik was established.
- On 13th January 1927, Suggestions were made for distinctive Air Mail stamps.
- In April 1927, The Press was instructed to produce designs, various attempts were made without success.

UPU Conference for Air Mail Stamps at The Hague in September, 1927

The delegates at the conference decided that there was no point in issuing special Air Mail stamps and the British Post office concurred. Following the inauguration of the Cairo - Karachi air service in 1927, The Department of Posts had become interested in Air Mail stamps. The ideas from the conference had a further impact on the Department and the Director Gen. started working on Air Mail stamps. Col. George H. Willis, Master at Nasik Press then prepared a summary on 25 April, 1928 and played a key role in the printing of stamps.

Drawing Competition

A draft was prepared by Col. Willis for the competition on 26 April, 1928 and sent to the Director General of Posts and Telegraphs, In May and June 3 letters were exchanged and the competition was advertised with the deadline for submission of the designs by 1st Sept. 1928. The very first entry was submitted by renowned philatelist Stephen H Smith. A total of 77 participants submitted designs. G. Grant submitted 2 entries and he was the winner with Entry No. 38 LUCK AT LAST (Nom de plume) but he failed with No. 66 BEST TRY.

The Aim of the exhibit

This exhibit shows the history of the Air Mail stamps printed in India; Information on Stamp design competition; Artist Sketches; Postal Notices; Known Errors; First Day; First Flight; Zeppelin Mails; Perfins and some rare Destinations and Uses Abroad. The focus is mainly on the constant errors with spectacular flaws.



Treatment

For the identification of the errors, the exhibit is organised by reference to the numbering system known as Dave Types from the reference book, which the exhibitor has published based on personal research, which has been difficult as no complete sheets are known. The best of 225 errors listed in the book are shown with an emphasis on the varieties used on cover and an identification of the sheet position of the error and both watermark varieties. The exhibit is not restricted to the errors listed in the book, but it also includes some recent discoveries. The definition of constant error is 5 or more examples recorded. The structure of the exhibit is 7 Chapters, 6 showing denominations 3, 4, 6, 8, 12, 2 annas stamps and covers, Chapter 7 is for Postal Stationery.

- Rare items in the exhibit are highlighted with a double border.

Kuwait Overprint

Later in 1933-34, 4 stamps from the set - 2, 3, 4, 6 annas were overprinted 'KUWAIT' at Nasik. Since the study is based on errors, and there is no special significance to the overprints they are dealt with alongside the normal stamps in each of the relevant chapters. There are many errors with and without Kuwait overprint.

- The watermark position is shown using graphic. The star Pointing  Right as seen from the back is normal watermark and  Left is a watermark variety shown accordingly in this exhibit.

References

- The 1929 Air Mail Stamps of India – Book | By Dipak, Priti and Markand Dave FRPSL
- The 1929 Air Mail Stamps of India – The Drawing Competition | Article
(London Philatelist September, 2017, Vol : 126/No. 1448, By Dipak & Markand Dave FRPSL)