Philately-a cargo of knowledge

On 18th February, 1911, a two seater bi-plane with a French Pilot Henri Pequet took off from the polo ground in Allahabad for Naini to deliver letters. It was the start of the air mail service.

Indian Postal Department replicated this historic event by taking letters in a helicopter this time from Bumrauli Airport to Naini on 12th February, 2011, on which date a set of four stamps of Rs.5/- each were also released by his excellency the Governor of U.P. at Allahabad to commemorate the centenary of the first airmail service.

La Poste in France is also issuing a stamp of Henri Pequet on 18th February, 2011 to honour him for his unique feat.

I take opportunity on this festive occasion, to introduce you to the brief history of stamp collection.

Stamp collecting is one of the most popular hobbies in the world. The study and collection of the postage and revenue stamps is known as "Philately".

An English school master and a civil servant Sir Rowland Hill campaigned for comprehensive reform of the postal system. He was the first person to conceive of an idea of issuing stamps.

The first official adhesive stamp of one penny denomination featuring the portrait of **Queen Victoria** was issued and released on 06.05.1840 in Great Britain and Ireland. This stamp universally came to be referred to as **'Penny Black.'** It was the first ever stamp known to be issued in the world. It was immediately followed by a two pence postage stamp with blue Victoria portrait on 08.05.1840. In 11 months from May 1840, some 68 million Penny Blacks were printed. Both these stamps became so popular that people bought them not only for postal use but for collection for their design and value as souvenirs. Thus,

commencing an era of stamp collecting as a hobby.

The success of the above two British stamps by 1860 propelled several nations to adopt usage of postage stamps.

The first adhesive postage stamp in USA was issued in 1847 featuring the statesman Benjamin Franklin and the first President of America George Washington.

Usually postage stamps carry pictures of monarchs/presidents or the heads of the nations. Portraits of living persons are ordinarily not used though not forbidden. Mahatma Gandhi is the most widely used personality on stamps. About 80 countries of the world have so far brought out 240 stamps depicting 'Bapu'.

It is not officially known as to who was the first Stamp collector in the World but Dr. John Edward Gray is acknowledged to be the first person to start collecting stamps. He bought postage stamps on the date of their issue and kept them as memento. However, it was not before 1860 that people started collecting stamps systematically.

A French Geography teacher during the course of lessons instructed his students to stick stamps of various nations on an Atlas. This started the practice of sticking stamps in stamp albums.

In 1956, the first association of Stamp Collectors “Omnibus club” was founded in U.S.A. It was followed by the “Stamp Association” in 1966. Presently, the American Topical Association, Pennsylvania is one of the most specialized organization of stamps collectors. It publishes the “American Philatelist”, a monthly journal. However, monthly 'Advertiser' is reported to be the first stamp magazine which appeared on 12 December 1862 in Liverpool, U.K.

One cent stamp **“Demerara”** issued on 4th April 1856 by British Guiana has long been considered as the world's rarest and the most valuable stamp. There is no second copy of it. It was sold for $935,000 at a auction in New York in the year 1980.

In India, postage stamps were first issued on 1st July 1852 by Sir Bartle Frere, the then Chief Commissioner of Sindh under the Bombay Presidency. The stamps were embossed pieces of paper with a circular design in red white or blue of half Ana (3 paisa) denomination and came to be known as **"Scinde Dawka"**. They were issued in sheets containing 64 stamps with 8 rows and 8 columns. They were used in the province of Sindh as well as on the Karachi Bombay route. These stamps were recalled in September, 1854.

After about 13 years of use of stamps in England, the British Government extended their use in India also. In 1853, the first design was prepared in the Calcutta Mint under the guidance and supervision of Sir Henry Thruillier, then Deputy Surveyor General of India at Calcutta. The stamps were issued in July, 1854. The printing of stamps in Calcutta mint ceased in 1855 and was assigned to Thomas De La Rue & Company at London. In 1925, the Indian Security Press at Nasik was setup and since then Indian Postal Stamps are being printed there.

The collection of stamps also started an era of Philately exhibitions worldwide. The 1st Philately Exhibition was held in London in 1890. An Indian, Mr. Garth was awarded Gold Medal for his valuable collection.

After independence, the first Indian Stamp of 3 ½ Anas denomination was issued on 21st November, 1947 depicting the National flag. In India, four types of stamps are issued. The definitive stamps for regular common use which are continuously printed. The commemorative stamps are printed in a particular number and issued only once to commemorate a particular event. The revenue stamps are issued for the purpose of collection of revenue whereas service stamps are meant for use by government departments. Generally, stamp collectors collect commemorative and definitive stamps.

The National Stamp Museum was setup in 1968 at New Delhi.

The Indian Postal Department has also played a pivotal role in promoting the hobby of collecting stamps in the country. It organized the first International Stamps Exhibition in the country in the year 1954 and thereafter at the national level in the year 1970. Since then practically every year

philately exhibitions are being held throughout the country.

In U.P., the first State level philately exhibition was organized at Lucknow in 1971 which was given the name “UPEX-71.

These exhibitions were followed by Indepex-73, Asiana-77, Impex-86 and various district level philately Exhibitions such as MTPEX-76 at Meerut CHAMPEX 2006 at Champaran, Bihar and SIMPEX 2006 at Shimla.

After a long gap Indipex 2011, world philately exhibition was inaugurated by the President of India at New Delhi on 12th February, 2011 which continued till 18th February, 2011.

The collection of stamps is not a mere hobby. It is a treasure both in terms of money and knowledge. Indian postal has contributed invaluably in projecting the nation's history, art & culture, wildlife, achievements etc. through postage stamps. Every stamp is full of information and tells a story of its own.

Please discover the joy collecting stamps and get accquainted with the rich and varied cultural heritage of the word and the pride of India.

Pankaj Mithal

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On the centenary of the first air mail service

(The writer is a philatelist and a member of Allahabad Philately who had participated in MTPEX-76)