

INDIA REFUGEE RELIEF 1971-1973 THE PRESS-OVERPRINTED ISSUES

by Nicholas Follansbee

The several articles that have been written on the press-overprinted issues, the most important of which is the June 1977 article by Yogesh Kumar published in *Ind Dak*, all appeared within the same decade of the '70s in which the subject stamps were issued. In the thirty or more years since their publication, several more genuine machine-printed overprints have been discovered, and also a plague of forgeries or, more correctly, fantasies has hit the market creating much confusion and a modest loss to their victims. The various catalogue listings of these overprints all contain at least one variety that does not exist genuine but only as a fantasy. A new article is clearly needed. This will probably not be the last word on the subject, but it should bring readers up to date on current knowledge about these machine overprinted stamps and hopefully serve as a basis for further investigation.

Background

The circumstances which required the issuing of these stamps have been fully described by others; here is just enough information to orient the reader who is unfamiliar with them. Prior to 1971, Pakistan consisted of two widely separated parts: the area that is Pakistan as we know it today, adjacent to the western border of India, and the densely populated Bengali region called East Pakistan then and which is now the independent nation of Bangladesh. During the summer of 1971, Bengali aspirations for an increased role in Pakistani politics, long suppressed by West Pakistan, developed into a movement for independence. West Pakistan reacted with brutal military repression which sent nearly 12 million Bengalis fleeing over the Indian border.

To finance humane accommodation of this huge influx of refugees, India added surcharges to various taxes and also instituted a temporary postal tax of 5 paises per item, with postcards and newspapers exempted as well as all mail from Jammu & Kashmir during the first several months of the tax. The postal tax was in effect from 15 November 1971 until 31 March 1973.

A special Refugee Relief postal tax definitive was ordered, as well as a Refugee Relief "Service" (Official Mail) issue, but these could not be immediately produced. In the interim, the State Printing Shops at Nasik overprinted the 5 paises Family Planning definitive and 5 paises "Service" stamp. However, quantities sufficient to immediately supply the vast Indian postal system could not be produced. State and District postmasters were therefore authorized to locally overprint part of their stock of 5 paises stamps for Refugee Relief. Usually this was done with handstamps. There are several hundred different of

these handstamped local overprints, and they present one of the greatest challenges in modern philately - one too big to further address in this article. Occasionally stamps are even found with manuscript overprints. In a relatively few cases, stamps were overprinted typographically or on small hand presses, and it is these which shall now be discussed.

The Nasik "All-India" Overprints



Public Issue



Service Issue

Vast quantities were produced for distribution throughout India, the exceptions being Jammu-Kashmir which was exempt from the tax during its first several months, and probably all of Mysore (soon to be Karnataka) State where the Bangalore Overprint on the Family Planning definitive was in general use.

The "Public Issue" (on Family Planning Definitive)

The overprint seems to always be perfectly oriented so that the Hindi words read horizontally and the English vertically. Occasionally one finds partial impressions resulting from the press being out of adjustment. Inverts are not found, but apparent double overprints are not uncommon, especially mint. The second impression is usually faint, even "ghostly," but is nevertheless well defined - not smeared or slurred. It is usually directly right of the properly inked impression, but not always. On one block in my collection it is shifted down 1.6 mm as well as to the right. A few used singles have a second impression to the left and nearly as dark as the main impression. A triple impression has the additional overprints placed left and right of the main impression. The impression to the left is fairly dark, while the one to the right is faint. Triples are nearly always unused; I know of one used. A quadruple impression block is known. The actual cause of these multiple impressions has not been diagnosed, but it is not likely that any are from sheets that actually passed through the press more than once. Some maladjustment of the press may have caused some sort of bounced impression.

The Bangalore overprint may have been error-free. Stanley Gibbons lists a "double overprint, one inverted" but I have not seen it, and since there is a fake or fantasy overprint that closely resembles the Bangalore I have reservations about this listing and hope that the item on which it is based can be expertized and the listing either confirmed or deleted.

The "Bangalore Overprint" on Service



The overprint found on service stamps is not the same as that found on Family Planning. The font is very slightly smaller and different stamps can show as much as 1 mm variation in the lengths of the words. The baseline of each word is adhered to inconsistently. The impression is rough. Though listed by both Scott and Stanley Gibbons, I am convinced these stamps are completely bogus.

First, none have been seen on cover and the only "used" example I have seen has an indecipherable cancel. Official mail seen from Mysore State (over fifty pieces in the author's holding) either bears a Family Planning Bangalore overprint stamp or one of the Nasik "All-India" service stamps for payment of the RRT.

Mint stamps are very common, usually are some sort of error (double, inverted, on reverse, etc.) and tend to come in lots with other bogus overprint types (which will be discussed later).

The New Delhi Overprint



These are fairly plentiful used but seldom encountered mint. The mint block shown is rare. They seem to have not been issued outside of the city of New Delhi. Most were used after November 1971.

Inverted overprints are found mint and used (scarcer). I agree with the SG pricing of the invert at about the price of the normal mint. A double overprint with one inverted also exists. This overprint is not found on service stamps.

The Jaipur Overprint



The overprint consisting of two lines of Hindi over "REFUGEE RELIEF" was produced and mainly used from Jaipur, Rajasthan State. It is rather poorly printed so that letters are often partial or absent, but these failures are inconsistent. Position 71 often has "RELIEF" omitted, but this may be a make-ready problem rather than a typesetting error. The alignment of the four lines of text (upper two Hindi) varies radically. Any one of the top three lines may start more to the left than the others. Split overprints are known where "REFUGEE / RELIEF" is at the top of the stamp and the two lines of Hindi are at the bottom.

The earliest recorded usage is 16 November 1971 - it is likely the stamps were available on the first day of the tax (15th).

I have accumulated 84 used examples of Jaipur compared to 291 of New Delhi and 261 of Rajasthan. I believe that used it is undercatalogued relative to these others, but mint I concur with the Stanley Gibbons (2003) value relationships for these three.

The Rajasthan Overprint





These stamps were not supposed to be used for any purpose other than paying the postal tax which was 5 paisa per piece regardless of weight or destination. Therefore, used multiples should not exist, but, in fact, they do and are not so rare as one would think.

Nasik overprinted stamps were available for philatelic first day covers on 15 November 1971. A very few first day commercial usages are known, but in general November '71 usages appear to be quite scarce. Based on admittedly a small sample of only about 125 stamps, usages from December '71 are very common, and this remained so throughout most of 1972, diminishing because of the issuance of the photogravure Refugee Relief stamps which first appeared December 12th, 1971.

The Service Issue

These stamps are almost error-free. However, one double overprint has been discovered. The impressions are horizontally juxtaposed 1.5 - 1.6 mm and seem to be of equal density. This may actually be a case where a sheet passed through the press twice, but this is not certain. If anyone knows of another example, I hope they will report



The Bangalore Overprint



The large city of Bangalore was the postal administrative center for the State of Mysore (Karnataka) and became the production and distribution center for the most widely used of the local overprints. Most mail from places in Karnataka used the Bangalore-overprinted RRT stamps. No usages of this overprint have been reported from outside of Mysore state. The overprint is found on the 5 paisa Family Planning Definitive.

Usages are known from the first day of the tax - 15 November 1971. The overprint was used throughout the tax period. Occasionally one sees used multiples (incorrect usage). Used singles are very common and are, in my opinion overpriced in Stanley Gibbons at one pound.

On the other hand, mint examples are difficult to find, despite the modest valuations given in the major catalogues. Mint multiples must be quite rare; despite efforts to procure some, my collection has no mint multiples at the time of writing. Until some are found it will probably not be possible to determine if overprinting was done from more than one setting.

Showing different alignments of the two words



"Refugee" is 12.1 mm long and "Relief" is 9 mm. The "R"s are 2.5 mm high and the height of the whole overprint is 7.1 mm. These measurements appear to be very consistent. However, one can find considerable variation in the alignments of the two words, from the "R" of "Relief" being well to the left of the "R" above, to the "R" being almost directly beneath the "f". The extremes are relatively scarce. It is apparent that more than ten subjects were typeset - perhaps all 100 positions in the sheet, or maybe 25 or 50 subjects were set up and reproduced to make the plate. Of these possibilities, I suspect all 100 positions were typeset very carefully. There is one variety where there is a diagonal break across the tops of the final "e"s in "Refugee" but sorting through over 850 stamps I was only able to find three examples.

Rajasthan is a large state bordering Pakistan whose largest city is Jaipur. The overprint is similar to the Jaipur overprint but without the two lines of Hindi. Though produced in Jaipur, the overprint was more widely used and therefore was given the name of the state rather than a more specific locale.

More often than not, the Rajasthan overprint stamps bear an additional handstamped overprint in Hindi, either black or purple. Actually, mint Rajasthan overprints are as likely to not have the additional handstamp, but most used stamps do. My present accumulation has 19 used without the handstamp and 242 with.

The earliest recorded use is 17 November 1971.

The setting includes at positions 11-15 the error, "RELIEF" over "REFUGEE". The repetition of the error suggests a "step and repeat" process duplicating the typesetting occurred, but there are, in fact, differences in the alignment of the words at each position so this cannot be the case.

I have a pair with "REFUGEE" only (and without the Hindi handstamp). I suspect this is not a typesetting error. Perhaps this pair came from the bottom row of the sheet and the gum side of turned up selvage caught the lower part of the overprint. The great rarity of this issue (I have only encountered one example, used) is the inverted "REFUGEE / RELIEF" (with black-violet additional handstamp in Hindi). Stanley Gibbons lists this error but does not price it, nor do they indicate whether it is mint or used. This stamp is rare enough to justify a census.



"REFUGEE RELIEF" Inverted

The Jabalpur Overprint

This closely resembles the Bangalore Overprint but the "r" of "relief" is lower case instead of capital. The Jabalpur is far scarcer than the Bangalore, especially unused of which only a very few examples have turned up. It apparently was used only from the city of Jabalpur. The overprint is always on Family Planning, but these were occasionally used to pay the RRT on official mail.



The earliest recorded date of use is 18 November 1971.

I have managed to accumulate one mint, two covers and 29 used, so it is obviously much scarcer than the types previously discussed and surely undervalued in SG.

The Goa Overprint



Goa is a small Union Territory which formerly was part of Portuguese India and is located on India's west coast midway between Bombay (Mumbai) and Mangalore. The main town is Panaji, but stamps (overprint on Family Planning) are also found cancelled from a few other nearby towns (I have Marsao, Ponda and Sanguem) and occasionally one was used from Bombay, having no doubt migrated. Mint are rarities - the block may be unique. Covers are also seldom seen. My accumulation of used singles numbers 32, so this is probably about as scarce as Jabalpur's overprint.

One variety is known where the final "F" is broken and looks like a "t".

The Goa Overprint on Service Issue

The service stamps were overprinted from the same plate used for the public issue. A very few are known mint. In fact, I know only one example. I have found used to be a little more available than the Goa on Family Planning and probably should be valued at 75% of that of the public stamp.



Short "f" in Relief



The Alwar Overprint



Alwar, a town in Rajasthan State, produced one of the more elusive overprints. The setting was carefully made with near-perfect uniformity of alignment of the four lines and of the letters within the words. From the known examples it appears use was not widespread and was limited to January-March, 1972. No mint examples have been reported. Alwar is not priced in Stanley Gibbons (2003). My having 11 used and three covers suggests it is about three times scarcer than Goa or Jabalpur.

The Neemuch Overprint on Service Issue

Neemuch is a town in Madhya Pradesh State near the Rajasthan border. The overprint was completely unrecorded before January 2009 when the five examples shown here were discovered in an accumulation of over 20,000 Refugee Relief stamps. Letter alignments vary enough to show these are from different positions in a setting. There was a shortage of capital "R"s so that usually the "R" of "Refugee" is upright while the "R" in "Relief" is italic.



"R" in Relief is dropped down.

Inverted Overprint



"R" in "Relief" is not italic

Unidentified Overprints on Service Issues

These are fairly recent discoveries. Two examples of the small "REFUGEE / RELIEF" overprint were found by the exhibitor around 2006 and two more were found in the same large accumulation which yielded the five Neemuch overprinted stamps in January 2009. "CHACH..." can be deciphered on one of the cancels - probably a small place in Madhya Pradesh State where there are several whose first five letters match. The same large accumulation contained the two stamps with a two-line overprint in Hindi which exhibit slightly different type styles and sizes but which might nevertheless be from the same setting (?). The hope is that more examples turn up having decipherable cancels.





Handstamped



Machine Printed



Cancle: Devlali Airport, Nasik



These two with Hindi-only overprints resemble a common fantasy whose top line is 11.3 mm long whereas these genuine measure 12.3-12.7 mm and have taller and heavier letters.

Two Local Overprints from Nasik

Determining whether an overprint is a well-struck handstamp or roughly printed on a small press can be difficult. Applications that are even and struck with enough pressure to cause ink ridging around the outsides of letters and lines suggest press-printing. The four-line overprint below is known in purple as a handstamp, but the example in black may have been overprinted on a press. In the case of the two-line overprint, the near-perfect vertical or horizontal orientation of all examples studied seems to indicate mechanical application. There is also a good deal of ink ridging around the letters.



Cancles: Nasik & Bombay

The four-line overprint is recorded as handstamped only, while the two-line overprint is previously unrecorded

Two-Line Nasik Local Overprint



Nasik-type used nearly 600 miles away at Sunabeda, Koraput District, Orissa State.

One theory is that while the All-India Overprint was done on the high-speed modern presses at Security Press, Nasik, some older presses which were incapable of producing the common overprint were employed to expand production by producing the local types. With no shortage of cheap labor and an acute demand for stamps, such an expedient makes sense.

Incidental distribution of some of the cruder type along with the All-India type might account for the usage from Sunabeda.

Yogesh Kumar (Ind Dak June 1977) wrote: "I have also received information that one machine overprint was also used in Orissa. But I did not get the opportunity to see it." It is conceivable that he refers to this overprint.

Fantasies

The following overprints are completely bogus. They are almost always mint and most types are only known as "errors". The first type has already been discussed: the "Bangalore" on service. The list of "errors" is probably not complete.

		On Family Planning	On Service
A	Refugee Relief		Normal Inverted Inverted, split Double Double, on sideways
B	REFUGEE RELIEF	Verticle Verticle, split Double	Inverted Double Double, one inverted Diagonal On reverse
C	Refugee Relief		Sideways Inverted Inverted, split Double Double, one sideways
D	REFUGEE RELIEF		Inverted, split Double
E	Refugee Relief	Inverted	Inverted Double Sideways
F	गरुडार्थी सहायता		Diagonal Double Double, one sideways

Fantasy Type B on Family Planning has been seen on covers which show signs of having been philatelically prepared. However, this at least dates the fantasies to the time of the actual use of RRT stamps. There is a passing reference to forgeries in the article by Yogesh Kumar (Ind Dak June 1977) which are probably these six types.

Yogesh Kumar in his article refers to a "Trivandrum" overprint, single-lined and covering two stamps. This is surely the hand-stamped overprint known more famously from Ernakulam (both places on the coast of Kerala). One good reason why he may have thought it press-printed is that the strength of impression is generally even along its length whereas handstamps from simple hand-held devices are often distorted, especially when large. I believe this Trivandrum/Ernakulam overprint may have been "machine assisted" in that the handstamp may have had a base and guides plus means of self-inking (rather like the numbering devices we see in many offices). There are other overprints classified as handstamped which were applied with such machines. One of the common Calcutta overprints was applied fifteen stamps at a time and surely was done with such a device rather than a simple handstamp. But these are not "press-overprinted" as the term is generally used, and therefore they are outside of the scope of this article.

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To summarize, there are ten different genuine press-printed overprints found on Family Planning (counting Rajasthan with and without additional handstamp as one), eight of which are listed in Stanley Gibbons. The two unlisted are the Nasik local types. There are five genuine overprints found on Service. Nasik "All-India" and Goa are listed in SG along with the bogus "Bangalore." The unlisted types are Neemuch and two whose location has not been determined (I am counting the two slightly different Hindi-only overprints as one). Will other press-overprinted Refugee Relief stamps be discovered? In the last ten years I have probably examined 40,000 or more RRT stamps used from all over India and these fifteen are what I have found. But India is a vast country full of surprises. Readers are asked to report their finds.