

SHEET-MARGIN INSCRIPTIONS AND MARKINGS

It had been mentioned earlier in this volume (page 5) that in the first official issue of postage stamps in 1854, the sheet-margins contained decorative border designs, and also carried instructions for post office officials to assist them in the sale of stamps.

Stamps-sheets of the subsequent Queen Victoria Series ('East India Postage') of the period 1855-65, printed on unwatermarked paper, also carried instructional text in Roman capitals. For example, the half-anna sheet, printed in sheets of 320 stamps and arranged in 4 panes of 80 stamps each, had the text—

'One half-sheet containing 160 stamps—five rupees'
on the top and bottom of the sheet ;

'Whole sheet containing 320 stamps—ten rupees'
along the left-hand margin ; and

'One quarter sheet containing 80 stamps—two rupees eight annas'
repeated on the margin in between the upper and lower panes.

The right-hand margin did not have any inscription. The sheets, in addition, had the number of the printing plate recorded at one corner.

The inscriptions continued to be nearly the same on stamp-sheets in the next series printed on the special 'Elephant's head' watermarked paper—first introduced in 1865. The only changes made were that the word 'One' preceding 'half' in the top line was omitted, in the bottom line the word 'Whole' was preceded by the article 'The'. The right-hand margin carried the same text as the left-hand one, but instead of an instructional text, the margins in between upper and lower panes carried two parallel ornamental designs to prevent use of this strip for counterfeiting. In 1873, the inscription at bottom of sheets was so placed as to read from the right to the left, and this practice was followed in all later printings.

'Gutter margins'

Sheet-margins of the later Queen Victoria issues ('India Postage') of the period 1882-1900 did not, however, carry any inscription. The stamps were now printed in sheets of 240, arranged in two panes of 120 (10 × 12) stamps each. The strip of paper of a full-size stamp between the two panes was initially perforated with two rows of large holes to prevent its use in printing forged specimens. This was done for all the denominations, except the 12a. issue, which had parallel coloured bars, in the same colour as the stamp, printed on this strip. It is because of these bars that such margins have come to be referred to as 'gutter margins'—resembling, as they do, the street-side gutters for drainage purposes !

From 1887 onwards, 'gutter margins' were incorporated in sheets of all denominations. Sheets of the ½a. and 1a. denominations are, however, known either with a double row of large 'dots', or with lines and coloured bars on strips in between panes. The Rs. 2, Rs. 3 and Rs. 5 stamps, first issued in 1895, were printed in sheets of 96, divided into 8 panes of 12 stamps each, with 'gutter margins'.

In the Edward VII issues, the strip of paper in between panes of all the denominations had the 'gutters', except the one-rupees issue, which had two rows of perforated holes instead.

The rupee issues of King George V, as also the anna/pie denominations printed upto 1933-34 in sheets of 256, had 'gutter margins'. But, sheets of the lower denominations printed subsequently in sheets of 320 were without panes, or 'gutters'.

While sheets of the rupee denominations of King George VI had 'gutter margins', these were absent from those of the lower denominations.

In the post-Independence period, only the Rs. 10 denominations in different official series of stamps issued upto 1979 were printed in panes, with 'gutter margins'.

Only two commemorative issues viz., the six stamps in the 'Saints and Poets' series of 1952 and the Railway Centenary issue of 1953 were printed in two panes of 80 stamps each, having 'gutter margins' in between.

'Jubilee lines'

It was in 1887 that the 'Jubilee line' was first added to all stamp-printing plates to protect their edges from wear. In the printed sheets it appeared as a thick border line, in the same colour as the stamp, around the printed area. The line was continuous in the earlier issues, but in later issues it had breaks in it. Sheets of the one-rupee issue of Queen Victoria, printed in green and carmine, had two 'Jubilee lines'—the inner being in carmine, and the outer in green.

The 'Jubilee line' is to be found in all issues of Edward VII, George V and George VI printed by typography. Sheets of George V (with 'Multiple Star' Wmk.), as also those of George VI, printed by off-set lithography, did not have the line. In instances where a particular stamp had been printed both by typography and lithography, it is, therefore, easy to distinguish the two types by the presence or absence of the 'Jubilee line'.

In issues of the post-Independence period, the 'Jubilee line' is present in all issues printed by typography—definitives, official issues as also commemoratives, but is absent from those printed by off-set lithography, or by the photogravure process.

Colour controls

In the printing of bi-colour stamps, to ensure proper registration of the two colours, markings are made on the sheet margins. These take the form of two rectangular boxes—a smaller rectangle in one colour inset within a larger hollow rectangle in the other colour. As the 'boxes' are placed between two adjacent panes of the four-pane printing-sheets, in the issue-sheets, which are obtained by halving the larger sheets, only one half of the 'control-box' is visible.

While printing of stamps in three or more colours, corresponding to each pattern to take a particular colour in the printing plate, a small circular 'dot' (which may take the form of a 'Star' sometimes) is placed on the plate-margin so that with each colour impression, a 'dot' or a 'Star' in the same colour appears on the margin of the printed sheet. It thus becomes easy to check even during the printing process, if the sheets are receiving each of the colour impressions in the proper sequence or not, and introduce necessary rectifications.

The 'colour controls' (often enclosed within a coloured frame) were first introduced with the 'Air India' issue of 8th June, 1973, and have since been used on many commemorative issues. Presumably, as a measure of extra precaution, on a couple of issues (viz., Nos. 568 and 569), in addition to the usual 'Star' sequence, four parallel lines in the same colour-combination were inserted on the sheet-margins. But, this practice was not followed in the later issues. In the check-list for commemorative stamps given on pages 138-145 in this volume, issues for which multi-colour controls were used have been marked with asterisks.

As a normal printed sheet consists of four panes, each finally forming an issue-sheet, and the 'colour controls' are incorporated in the narrow vertical inter-space between pairs of panes, in the issue-sheets the 'colour-controls' may be found to appear in four different positions viz., at top-right, top-left, bottom-right, or at bottom-left.

In view of the novelty of the 'colour-controls' (or 'traffic-lights', as these are loosely called), and also because of the fact that these are to be found once only in a sheet, many collectors take considerable pains to obtain specimens of stamps with such markings alongside. Some even go farther, and try to assemble four specimens of each issue from different positional sheets so as to obtain stamps having the 'colour controls' in all the four positions mentioned above.

Since the 'colour-controls' indicate only the base colours used in the printing of a particular stamp, and not the actual colours, these do not in any way help in describing the stamp better. So, to take unnecessary trouble, or to spend extra amounts for obtaining used/mint specimens with 'colour controls', or to attempt to build up a collection of singles or blocks with positional 'colour-controls' serves no other purpose than to turn an otherwise pleasurable pursuit into a formidable task !

Printers' name

Though all Indian stamps were being printed at the India Security Press at Nasik since 1926, but for 75 commemorative stamps issued in the period Dec. '59—Nov. '65, which had the printers' name indicated on each stamp, no other issues carried the name. A departure from this practice was made in the Fourth Definitive Series issued in the period 1965-75. All denominations in this Series, except the 3p, 6p and 8p issues (which had been issued prior to the taking of the decision, and were short-lived), had '*India Security Press, Nasik Road*' printed on one of the sheet-margins. The inscription was followed by a code number consisting of a letter and numerals. The letters stood for particular denominations viz., 'X' for 2p., 'T' for 4p., 'A' for 5p., 'B' for 10p., and so on upto 'N' for Rs. 10, and the numerals were meant to record the number of sheets printed—a unit indicating 1,00,000 (?)

This practice was continued for all subsequent series of stamps, though the introduction of new denominations forced the use of the same letter for different denominations, sometimes even in the same Definitive Series !

Apparently, computers were brought in at Nasik in early 1985 for the counting of printed sheets. While in the earlier issues the printers' name and alphabet-code appeared to be type-set, indicating that these were printed at the same stage as the stamps-design, in the later issues the numerals were in digital type, which meant that these were put in by computers at a later stage. In these printings, the location of the press was spelt as '*Nashik Road*', instead of the earlier form '*Nasik Road*'.

Messages for the public

A further change in the printers' name was effected with the introduction of a new gumming process in Aug.-Sept., 1985. Till that time, the gum used on Indian stamps was either gum-Arabic, or some similar type derived from vegetable sources. In that year, a new synthetic gum was introduced for the first time. Since the gum required proper moistening for good adhesiveness, stamp-sheets with this gum carried on one of the margins the instruction for the public '*New gumming—wet well and press*', in addition to the usual alphabetic-code and the name of the printers, which read as '*I.S.P. Nashik-Road*'.

Issues in the Seventh Definitive Series (1986—), which have started coming out, have the same marginal inscription as the earlier series viz., '*New gumming..... etc.*', but set up in two lines—in Hindi on top and in English below it.

It should be mentioned, though the practice of recording messages for the public on sheet margins of definitive issues started in August 1985 with the introduction of the new synthetic gum, it had been introduced in commemorative issues 10 years earlier i.e., about the time the printer's name was first incorporated in sheet margins. In the period Dec. '75—Aug. '76, sheets of ten commemorative issues (viz., Nos. 526, 528, 530, 531, 532, 534, 535, 536, 537 and 551) carried the slogan '*PIN code for fast mail*'—exhorting the public to make it a point to use the identification numbers for post offices on their letters for quick handling of mail.

Then again, with a view to publicizing the 'India 80' Stamp Exhibition held in New Delhi, in the period July '79—Jan. '80, the margins of eight commemorative issues (viz., Nos. 654, 658—661, 667, 669, and 670) carried the inscription '*I.S.P. Nasik Road, India International Stamp Exhibition 1980, Jan. 25—Feb. 3, 1980*'. The colour-controls, wherever used, appeared on the same margin.