

**VISUAL COMPOSITION; EVOLUTION OF THEMATIC
POSTAGE STAMPS AS CULTURAL ARTEFACTS,
REFERENCE TO VESAK STAMPS OF SRI LANKA.**

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Declaration of the candidate and the supervisor

I hereby declare that this thesis is my work and it does not incorporate any material previously submitted for a Degree or Diploma in any other University or any Institute of Higher Education, without acknowledgement. To the best of my knowledge and belief, it does not contain any material previously published or authored by another individual except when acknowledgements are made in the text. I retain the right to utilize this content in whole or part in future work such as articles or books.

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Date

Dedication

I dedicate this piece of work to all researchers,
who walk through a phase of darkness, to bring something into light.

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Abstract

Postage stamps are official documents issued by governments as a part of a communication system, the postal service of the country. Whether attached to an envelope as evidence of postal prepayment, or acquired as a collectable item, postage stamps are primary sources of global material and visual culture. Being a product made by a group of people for intentional communication, a postage stamp can be viewed as an artefact of the culture it was produced. As the World Association for the Development of Philately sees it today, in addition to being a piece of art, and a medium for advertising and promotion, a stamp offers a window into diverse cultures across the world; a calling card from each country. Postage stamps bought, collected and discussed by an estimated 30 million collectors worldwide, are important as revenue raisers. To meet the demands of the global philatelic market, the Philatelic Bureau of Sri Lanka intends to improve the quality and novelty of their stamps, but it is ambiguous what needs to be done. During the long history of philatelic production in Sri Lanka, neither a systematic study analysing the postage stamps as a graphical composition, nor a review of feedback from users/stamp collectors is done. Therefore, time seems fit to reflect on what has been in production, and apply what is learnt, in future work. Based on historical research as a method, this study documents the variations in visual composition on the postage stamps of Sri Lanka, over time. To retain the coherence of the study, it is focused on thematic stamps. The longest continuing sequel of thematic stamps of Sri Lanka is issued commemorating Vesak festival annually. A sample of 28 Vesak commemorative issues accounting for a 100 individual Vesak stamps, issued from 1969-2022 are considered for this study. The visual content on the sample of stamps is analysed in two phases. First, the variation of each visual component on the stamps namely; Name of the country, Denomination, Image, Colour scheme, Typography, Title, Border, Shape, Size and Layout are studied through observational data. Secondly, semiotic meaning-making of the stamps through their function & connection to the world, style, iconic associations, cultural allusions, connection to the social groups, individual experiences of people and additional meanings made in specific contexts are discussed through observational data and qualitative data from interviews with the focus groups made of individuals from the issuing authority, stamp designers, collectors and the general public, incorporating the views of all stakeholders into the study. The findings would present knowledge for visual communication designers and the authorities regulating stamp design programs, which could be referred to when planning the visual content on postage stamps.

Key Words

Visual composition, Postage Stamp, Philately, Historical Research, Culture, Artefact

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List of Abbreviations

CSL- Sri Lanka Catalogue
 SC – Scott Catalogue
 SL- Sri Lanka
 NASA- National Aeronautics and Space Administration
 NFT- Non Fungible Token
 UN- United Nations Organization
 UNESCO- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
 UPU- Universal Postal Union
 USPS-United States Postal Service
 WADP-World Association for Development of Philately

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