

**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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Signature of the supervisor

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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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an overview on the history, the current situation and the design process of postage stamps of Sri Lanka, laying the background for the study. Since postage stamps are products made for purposeful communication and an important source of revenue due to their status as collectibles, the necessity of designing attractive postage stamps is discussed. In order to keep up with the global philatelic market, the Philatelic Bureau of Sri Lanka intends to improve the quality and novelty of their postage stamps, but it is ambiguous what needs to be done. The positioning of the postage stamps as a cultural heritage item by the World Association for the Development of Philately and the vision of the Philatelic Bureau of Sri Lanka attune, providing an entry point for the study; postage stamps as an artefact of culture. Even though Sri Lanka has a long philatelic history, the fact that neither a systematic study discussing the postage stamps as a visual composition, nor any review of feedback from stamp collectors is done, and the timely need of such study is identified. To retain the coherence of the study, it is focused on to the thematic stamps. The longest continuing sequel of thematic stamps of Sri Lanka, is issued commemorating Vesak festival annually. Therefore, this study analyses a sample of 100 Vesak stamps, issued from 1969-2022, to learn how the cultural information is presented through the representational format of a postage stamp using its components; name of the country, denomination, image, colour scheme, shape, size and layout, over time. In addition, the semiotic meaning making of stamps is studied through qualitative data from interviews conducted with officials from the issuing authority, stamp designers and the collectors. The findings 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.

1.1 Background

During 1830's, the British postal rates were high and inconsistent. As a solution, Sir Rowland Hill suggested a flat rate based on the weight, for delivery of mail anywhere within the country, and to evidence the prepayment by a stamp affixed. Implementing this, the first postage stamp of the world 'Penny Black'-featuring the British monarch at the time, Queen Victoria was issued (Reid, 1984). Great Britain eventually put this into effect empire- wide. The earliest records of post in Sri Lanka (formerly known as Ceylon), dates back to 1798 where it was limited to five post offices in maritime districts started by Dutch officials (Oxley, 1996). In 1815, when the British took control of the island, the postal service was reorganized. A Postmaster General was appointed and operating under the name of Ceylon Post and Telecommunications Department, the postal services were gradually extended to major towns in the country. In 1832, for the

first time in Asia a mail coach was inaugurated, run in between Colombo and Kandy (Sri Lanka Post, 2023). The first postage stamps for Ceylon were issued on 1st April 1857, seventeen years after the world's first postage stamp. These depicted a portrait of Queen Victoria in a monochromatic brown, and denomination as 6 pence. Ceylon first joined the Universal Postal Union (UPU) on 1st April 1877, and the first stamps in local denomination of Rupees and Cents were issued on 1st February 1892 (Sri Lanka Post, 2023). In the same year, the first 'Travelling Post Office' in Sri Lanka- a specially adapted railway carriage, where postal workers sorted mail while travelling ready for despatch to towns between Colombo and Peradeniya was launched (Walker, 1990). A breakthrough in the design of stamps for Sri Lanka happened in 1935, with the issuance of pictorial stamps other than profiles of the British monarch. These stamps depicted scenes of Rubber tapping, the Temple of the tooth in Kandy, Paddy fields, Colombo Harbour, Adam's peak, Elephants, and plucking tea (Ranatunga, 2006). In 1948 Sri Lanka gained independence from British as the Dominion of Ceylon. Sri Lanka joined UPU again on 13th July, 1949, yet the name 'Ceylon' was used on stamps, as the English Name of the Country. Stamps bearing the name 'Sri Lanka' were issued for the first time on 22 May 1972, when Sri Lanka became a Republic with a new constitution (Rossiter & Flower, 1986). Today, the Department of Posts, operating with the brand name 'Sri Lanka Post' is the designed operator for postal services in Sri Lanka, and one of the oldest government operated organizations in the country. The Postal Headquarters also known as the General Post Office is located in Colombo and the Sri Lanka Post supports 4738 post offices across the island. The National Postal Museum located within the premises of Postal Headquarters Colombo, is open to public from 6 July 2010. The Philatelic Bureau of Sri Lanka, established under the Department of Posts on 1st of January 1967, is the country's specialized organization for philatelic production. Annually 300 million stamps are required by the network of post offices in the island, and generally 500 000 stamps are issued for every new issue.

To look at the current stamp design process in Sri Lanka, by the end of each year the Philatelic Bureau of Sri Lanka calls proposals for stamp designs from all government agencies and from the public. Once the proposals are reviewed and approved, research on each subject is done and the visual material is collected. The artwork for the stamps is made in few ways; by a small team of designers at the philatelic Bureau or by independent designers/illustrators registered with the Philatelic Bureau, or through stamp design competitions open to the public. First, any specific images needed such as of individuals, historic events, buildings, landscapes, or artefacts, are collected from the related institution. (e.g., requesting the National Museum, for photographs of an artefact). If images that shows the subject in desired perspective and composition is not found, photographers are commissioned to photograph the subject. After the reference images are collected, they are used for creating the image on the stamp as they are, or illustrated. For an illustrated stamp issue, the gathered reference images and the particulars of the subject matter are specified when briefing the illustrator, and often a subject expert reviews the illustrations during development, to ensure that it has been depicted accurately. These artworks, often

received as analogue illustrations, are then composed into the format of a postage stamp by a Graphic designer at Philatelic Bureau. In early stamps, both image and text were hand drawn by the illustrators as a single composition. At present only the image comes as an analogue illustration and the text is added later on the computer.

For postal services around the world, it is more profitable when stamps are bought for keepsake, than for sending mail. The collectors have different reasons for engaging in philately; such as scholars who are interested in history, geography, politics or philately, who are curious about cultures of other countries, who collect stamps for artistic value, and who consider collecting stamps as an investment. World Association for Development of Philately (WADP), the leading organization dedicated to monitoring market trends in philatelic business and encouraging the adoption of best practices envisions it today, in addition to being a work of art, a medium of advertising and promotion, a stamp offers a window into diverse cultures of the world; a calling card from each issuing country (Giroud, 2022). Regarding the density of cultural information that postage stamps can hold, they are recognized as tangible movable cultural heritage items as described in the Convention on Protection and Promotion of Diversity of Cultural Expression (Libera, 2020; UNESCO, 2005).

Accordingly, The Philatelic Bureau of Sri Lanka, prioritize a) Empathy for Customers- offering appealing philatelic products that address market needs and provide lasting value, b) Positive Social Contribution- creating philatelic products that generate knowledge, and awareness, preserve cultural heritage that enhance human values and respect toward each other (Philatelic Bureau, 2022). When looking at stamps issued so far by Sri Lanka, they often showcase history culture and identity of the nation (Refer to section 2.4.2). Archaeological themes include Prehistoric human habitats, ancient coinage, ancient flags and colonial buildings of Sri Lanka. Themes of arts and craftsmanship include; Rock and temple paintings and handicrafts of Sri Lanka series. Indigenous people (Vedda) and their culture are honoured through postage stamps, while Traditional Drummers, dances and masks are featured. Sri Lanka's agriculture and export-based economy is featured on stamps on Ceylon Tea, Gemstones, Coconut Products and Rubber Trade in Sri Lanka. The environmental and biological heritage of the island are showcased through stamp issues on endemic birds, marine life, orchids, wild elephants, mangroves, and National parks of Sri Lanka etc. Stamps are issued marking culturally important destinations of Sri Lanka as declared by UNESCO, and also marking religious and cultural festivals of national importance. Other local and international events seen as of political, historical, social and cultural significance to the Sri Lankan government; such as Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, Universal Franchise, Olympic Games, Dawn of the Millennium, Tsunami 2004, Covid-19 Pandemic are marked through postage stamps. In the world, the historical product of postage stamp is evolving to be more engaging & attractive. Personalized stamps allow users to include a visual of their choice to the stamp design, to be used for mail at special occasions such as wedding. The Philatelic Bureau introduced its personalized stamps in 2019. QR codes are a tech savvy addition to the traditional postage stamps, providing users with a digital media experience such as link to a website, watch a video clip,

listening to music etc. First QR coded stamp in Sri Lanka was launched in 2021. Figure 1.1 illustrates a brief history of the postage stamp of Sri Lanka, in comparison to the history of the postage stamp in the world.

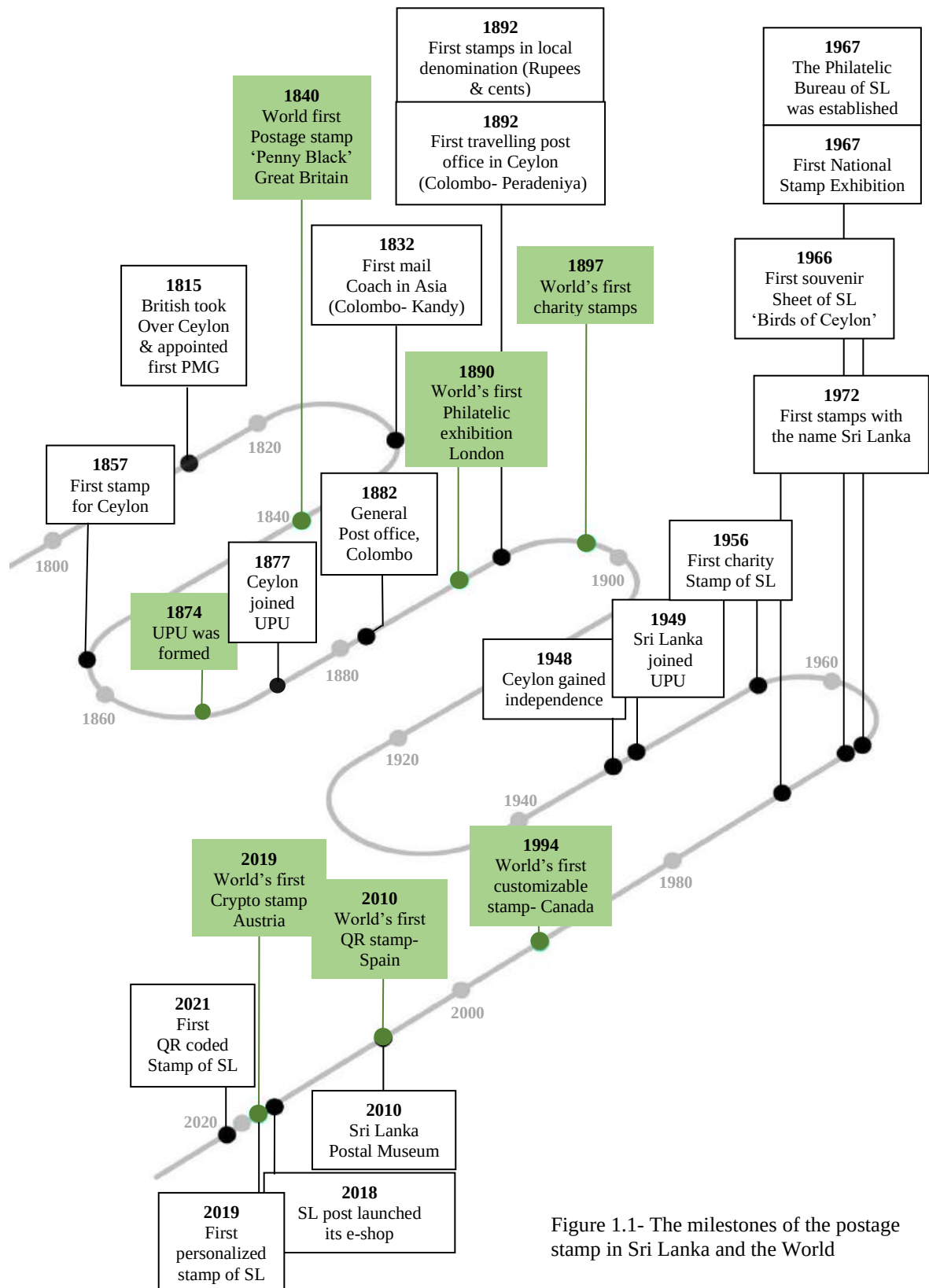


Figure 1.1- The milestones of the postage stamp in Sri Lanka and the World

As the Postal department and Philatelic Bureau of Sri Lanka reflect, they are highly conventional institutes. Working with only a handful of illustrators and their styles for a long time, illustrators and graphic designers working separately from each other and not concurrently on a postage stamp as a single composition, the arbitrariness in stamp design competitions, seems to affect the novelty and creative aspect of the philatelic products over time. To keep up with 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. The positioning of the postage stamps as a cultural heritage item by The World Association for the Development of Philately and UNESCO and the vision of The Philatelic Bureau of Sri Lanka to produce stamps that preserve cultural heritage, attune together, providing an entry point for the study; studying the postage stamps as an artefact of culture. During the long history of philatelic production in Sri Lanka, neither a systematic study analysing postage stamps as a visual composition, nor a review of feedback from stamp users is done. Therefore, time seems fit to study what has been in production and document what is learnt for future work. To retain the coherence of the study, it is focused on the thematic stamps. The longest continuing sequel of thematic stamps of Sri Lanka, is issued commemorating the Vesak festival annually. These stamps are expected to present the essence of the Vesak festival and Buddhism, which are integral parts of Sri Lanka's history, identity and culture, through the representational format of a postage stamp using its components; the name of the country, denomination, image, colour scheme, shape, size, overall composition etc. Therefore, this study analyses a sample of 100 Vesak stamps, issued from 1969-2022 to learn how cultural information is presented in them. 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.

1.2 Research Problem

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 postage stamps as a visual composition, nor a review of feedback from stamp users is done. Therefore, time seems fit to study what has been in production and document what is learnt for 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.

1.3 Aim of the Research

To study and document the evolution of visual composition in postage stamps of Sri Lanka.

1.4 Objectives

1.4.1 To study the variation of visual composition in postage stamps of Sri Lanka

1.4.2 To study the semiotic meaning- making in postage stamps of Sri Lanka.

1.5 Research Questions

1.5.1 How the visual components in postage stamps of Sri Lanka have varied along the timeline

1.5.2 How meanings are made in postage stamps of Sri Lanka, through composition

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study addresses a long-existing research gap for a scientific study on Sri Lankan postage stamps not just on its theme but also in terms of visual composition. The study confirms the role of postage stamps as a communication medium, while highlighting the importance of mindfully designing stamps that suit the global philatelic market, with regard to its significance as a tangible movable cultural heritage item. While raising a framework useful for analysing visual content on any postage stamp, this study on postage stamps of Sri Lanka, presents comprehensive knowledge on variation of each visual component over time, contributing to understand what has been done so far, and what is potential to elevate stamp designs in Sri Lanka. This study cooperates the views of all stakeholders; the stamp issuers, stamp designers, collectors and the general public presents knowledge and recommendations for the authorities regulating stamp design programs, which could be referred to, when planning the visual content on postage stamps.

1.7 Limitations

The study is based on a sample group of stamps issued under one theme (Vesak commemorative stamps), in order to retain its coherence. Since the limited access to physical stamps of the earliest issues, the study was conducted using scanned and printed images of postage stamps, which may lead to a certain degree of inconsistency in visual and tactile data such as texture and colour, when compared to the original physical stamps.

Chapter Two

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter commences presenting the importance of historical research, and the role of postage stamps as a primary source of information. The functions of postage stamp as a communication tool with utilitarian, representative and commemorative purposes, and the relevance of postage stamps in the era of digital communication are discussed. The perception of a postage stamp today, as a calling card from the issuing nation offering a window into its culture, and its status as a tangible movable cultural heritage item is identified. Being a product made by people for intentional communication, a postage stamp can be recognized as a visual ‘text’-a subcategory of artefacts, with a culturally specific message, partially textual, partially numeric and predominantly graphic, encoded by the issuing authority (Posner, 2003). A postage stamp as an artefact, create meaning by somatization through its (1) function and connection to the big picture, (2) style, (3) iconic associations, (4) cultural allusions, (5) connection to the social groups, (6) individual experiences of the people, (7) additional meanings acquired in specific contexts (Siefkes, 2016). Thematic postage stamps are discussed as artefacts of culture, referring to empirical studies discussing the representation of the themes of traditional arts and crafts, folklore, native community, religious/ethnic groups, festivals etc. The longest continuing sequel of thematic stamps of Sri Lanka selected for the study; the Vesak commemorative stamps planned to showcase the Vesak festival and Buddhism as integral parts of Sri Lankan culture, is introduced. The Vesak commemorative stamps issued by other countries of the world are also discussed for a comprehensive understanding. The key components of a postage stamp namely; Name of the Country, Denomination, Imagery, Title of the stamp, Border, and other semiotic meaning making resources on stamps such as the Colour scheme, Style, Typography, Shape, Size and Layout are discussed. How the analysis of the visual content on thematic stamps, can provide an entry point for understanding its context of production, cultural conditions, needs and proclivities shared by a human group of the culture it was produced in, is discussed.

2.1 Learning from the past, with postage stamps as a primary source

The most time-honoured justification for engaging in historical research is that we can look into the past to find answers for the questions we have now (Moore, Monaghan and Hartman, 1997). Berg & Lure (2012) states that historical research methodically captures the complex nuances, individuals, events and ideas of the past that’s been influential in shaping the present (Spilackova, 2012). The aims of conducting historical research have been listed as (i) to reveal the unknown, (ii) to answer the question which are not been answered yet, (iii) to understand past events and their connection to the present, (iv) to document and to assess past activities, achievements of people and

institutions, (v) to contribute to the knowledge on human culture (Berg, 2001). For this study postage stamps are considered as a primary source of information. It was long suggested; that stamps as government- issued official documents shall be used for research purposes as legitimate material (Ekker, 1969), and postage stamps as one of those ‘small things- forgotten’, trivial but collectively archeological evidence (Deets, 1977). All postage stamps, systematically catalogued as official documents issued by the respective states present a rich primary source for historical research (Altman, 1991, Osmond 2008). Further is explained how postage stamps provide data in three levels; first being physical objects made of paper, ink, glue etc. they depict the printing technology and paper manufacturing of the time, secondly stamps provide written records of postal services of the issuing country and on a third level of data, stamps bear symbols as a part of a communication system (Reid, 1984).

2.2 Postage stamps as a communication tool

Postage stamps provide a means of communication, between the issuing authority and the general public who either use them to send mail or who buy them for keepsakes. Postage stamps serve three main purposes in communication; utilitarian purpose, representative purpose and commemorative purpose (Osmond 2008; Scott, 1995).

2.2.1 Utilitarian purpose

Primarily, postage stamps are fiscal receipts, attached as evidence of prepayment for a postal service. To issue stamps a country should have its own postal administration, the capacity to provide mailing services in its geographical territory, and also be part of the international postal network. Universal Postal Union (UPU) the specialized agency with coordinates the worldwide postal system among member countries, have declared that a postage stamp must bear the official name/ identification of the issuing state and the monetary value. When used, a postage stamp is cancelled using a postmark mentioning the date and place of service fulfilment, to avoid the re-use of stamps. An unused postage stamp is of monetary value that can be redeemed by using it at a later time. Even the used postage stamps are given a value, by the collector market. In some occasions, postage stamps are issued solely as commodities for collectors but not of utilitarian value, often of atypical shapes (e.g., oval, irregular,) or unconventional materials (e.g., metal foil, fabric, and ceramic). The utilitarian need can be achieved even with issuing stamps with minimal visuals such as such as a national flag (Osmond, 2008), yet they come with a wide range of visuals which are sources for further research.

2.2.2 Representative purpose

Postage stamps represent official cultures and national identities, bearing messages from the governments (Altman 1991; Dobson, 2002; Raento & Brunn, 2005; Reid, 1984). As same as banknotes, national flags and national anthems, postage stamps of a country are produced by the state itself, and as a part of the national repertoire they carry symbolic meanings to the audiences (Andreou, 2017). In British stamps, the recurrence of the portraits of monarchs is customary, that it has replaced the name of the country itself (Andreou, 2017; Child, 2005). A study on colonial postal communication documented how the British Empire as a working world system was fostered by the imperial penny post and stamps bearing portraits of successive British monarchs (Jeoffery, 2006). A study on postal production of Greece under few governments and regimes, documents how variations in the country's name, cultural objects and images of monarch as presented on stamp and how this 'library of references' was used by different governments to emphasize or downplay certain ideologies, concluding that postage stamp imagery transfers 'an idea of the nation' or how the nation is supposed to be seen during a certain timeframe (Kallen, 2002). Regarding the representation of nation on postage stamps, they were interpreted as 'paper ambassadors' (Altman, 1991), 'portraits of the nation' (Schwarzenbach, 1999), official representations of the nation (Kevane, 2008), and as pieces of 'visually imagined communities' (Covington & Brunn, 2006).

2.2.3 Commemorative Purpose

Official commemoration of a state is not merely aimed at celebrating, but reminding the citizens about something and memorizing it in a specific way. Such narration is shaped by the values, ideologies, experiences and goals of the authorities organizing the celebration (Anderson, 2006; Davis, 1994; Gillis, 1994; Kaplan, 1994; Hoyo, 2012). Official commemorations (e.g., national day celebrations, religious festivals) are an appropriate time to promote a view of the social, cultural and historical characteristics of the nation, and by doing so to reinforce the individual's loyalty to the community and its institutions (Hoyo, 2012). The role of postage stamps in commemoration of individuals and events, regardless of their small size is interpreted as 'modest monuments' (Osmond, 2008). It is argued that postage stamps aggrandize their subject, and consist of 'more ideological density per square centimetre'. (Scott, 1995). Although an individual stamp may not have the immediate presence of a photograph, a movie or a statue, collectively postage stamps have an enduring impact, as witnessed by their mass circulation, their status as collectibles, and being produced at the end of a long and sometimes contested process of planning, creating and campaigning (Child, 2005; Hoyo, 2020; Osmond, 2008).

2.3 Relevance of postage stamps in the era of Digital Communication

Since postage stamps are less encountered in daily lives today, one may feel skeptic about its relevance in today's setting. Despite the preconceived ideas on the significance, scholars have identified them as means of propaganda (Andreou 2017; Hoyo, 2012; Raento & Brunn 2005), and several reasons were pointed out. First, postage stamps are official documents, designed and issued by the governments through dedicated agencies. Second, by covering the geographical territory of the state and beyond, stamps allow governments to reach a global audience. They are compared to political posters in their condensed visual narrative, and to internet ads in their ability to spread that narrative across geographical borders (Modarressi, 2020). Third, due to their miniature size and mundane appearance in people's lives, stamps could carry messages without becoming obvious (Hoyo, 2012), communicating in a capillary way, which can be important in influencing the collective consciousness.

Exemplifying the capacity of visual storytelling that postage stamps hold up to day, a North Macedonian stamp showing a map cutting into Serbia, was criticized as “as an act against territorial integrity and sovereignty of Serbia (Modarressi, 2020). Ukraine satirically marked the destruction of Kerch Bridge with a stamp (Figure 2.1) referring to the movie ‘Titanic’-the supposedly indestructible ship (Kilner, 2022). USA announced an additional stamp to its 2023 stamp program to honour NASA's OSIRIS-REx spacecraft returning from asteroid Bennu (National news, 2023), illustrating the status postage stamps hold as an archival entity, among other media. On the other hand, triggered by the Royal Mail's decision not to issue a stamp marking Brexit in 2019, there have been attempts by the public to design Brexit Stamps (Figure 2.2). Hashtag #BrexitStamps, present a collection of stamp designs capturing public dissent delivered with humour for the impending separation with the rest of Europe (Kheyati, 2019).



Figure 2.1 – Stamp depicting destruction of Kerch Bridge, Ukraine 2022



Figure 2.2 – Brexit stamps designed & shared by the public

With regard to its mass circulation and potential as a public relations tool, postage stamps are used to gain visibility, build awareness and raise funds on modern day issues. In living memory, no epidemic has caused a public health emergency as rapid and global as Covid-19 (Sun et al., 2020). Covid stamps honour doctors, scientists, healthcare workers and volunteers as heroes of combating the pandemic. Some Covid stamps communicate public health measures such as wearing masks, social distancing, hand washing and disinfection. Austria issued a stamp (Figure 2.3) printed similar to toilet paper making fun of the hoarding behaviour during early pandemic lockdowns, and advised 1m distance for social distancing and a phrase meaning ‘Distance that brings us together’ (Steensma & Kyle, 2022). Collectively Covid stamps transfer a feeling of global solidarity; and hope for overcoming the challenge, while some Covid stamps were sold with a surcharge to raise funds (Lefrère et al., 2021). A series of stamps were issued as a UN campaign for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) equality with the intention of using art to improve views of people with postage stamps as a vehicle (UN, 2016). Royal Mail marked 50 years of Pride with a vibrant set of stamps (Figure 2.4) depicting LGBTQ+ community and scenes from Pride events, which are now an annual fixture in cities across the world. As per Royal Mail these stamps reflect how they have to modernized in 2022, with its most inclusive stamp featuring individuals of different ages, sexual orientation, ethnicities as well as differently-abled, with the recent update of the rainbow flag (Mail Online, 2022).

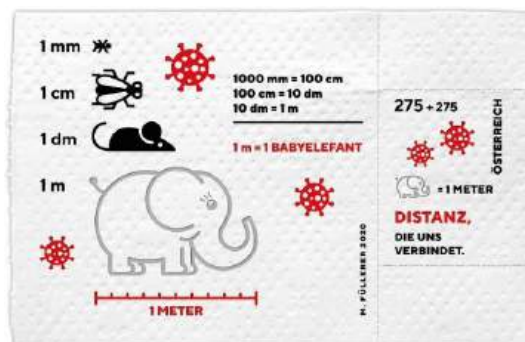


Figure 2.3 – Covid 19 stamp, Austria 2020



Figure 2.4 – ‘50 years of Pride’ stamp, UK 2022

Discussing how postal services have managed to keep the historical product of postage stamp interesting even today, The World Association for Development of Philately (WADP), states that the nearly two decades old philately sector traverse a digital world where technology have threatened its existence, yet created momentum towards its innovation. Advancements in technology lead to better design and production of stamps especially in developing countries. Per market studies, since 2019 online sales of philatelic products, digital collecting and visits to virtual stamp museums has continually risen (Giroud, 2022). While traditional philately and digital philately coexist, postal services are focusing on engaging products. Some postal services facilitate personalized stamps to be used for mail at wedding invitations, corporate anniversaries, advertising products, thank you notes, and even locating a missing person

or a pet (Lee, 2020; Malta Independent, 2005; Österreichischen Post, 2005; Zazzle, 2013). During Olympics 2000, Australia Post issued world's first instant stamps designed using photographs of Australian Gold Medallists taken during medal excitement of each medal win in a prompt and unique way (Philatelic team, 2016a). UK issued a sticker like stamps set (Figure 2.5) featuring fruits, vegetables and accessories such as faces, boots, hats etc. that can be used to create characters, making people actively engage with stamps (Royal mail, 2003). Finnish post issued another interactive stamp (Figure 2.6) as an interesting way to communicate adverse effects of rising temperatures on Finland. These stamps printed with heat reactive ink, when rubbed with a finger, reveal additional visuals of rain in winter, climate refugees and loss of native species (Hitti, 2020b).

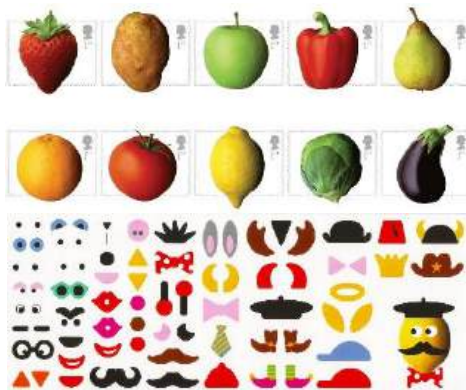


Figure 2.5- Sticker like stamp set that can be used to make characters, UK 2004



Figure 2.6 –Stamps when rubbed, revealing visuals of Climate change, Finland 2018

Israel's flipbook of stamps issued marking 50 years of the International Association of Animated Films, UAE's plant-able stamps containing seeds from the indigenous Ghaf tree (Figure 2.7), France's Halloween stamps that glow in the dark (Figure 2.8), Iceland's stamps featuring its volcano Eyjafjallajökull and containing fine volcanic ash, USA's scratch and sniff stamps featuring popsicles with fruity scents, and Belgium's flavoured stamps featuring its dark chocolates stamps (Beck, 2010; Mudholkar et al., 2021; USPS 2018; Yap, 2014) are some other examples of stamps with interesting sensory experiences.



Figure 2.7 – Stamp featuring 'Ghaf tree' with a plantable seed, UAE 2011



Figure 2.8-Halloween stamp glowing in the dark, France 2001

Many of the recent postage stamps have a feature to link seamlessly to a digital message complementing the way we communicate today. Scannable bar codes on stamps allow users to listen to music, (e.g. Hungary's stamps marking the 200th birth anniversaries of musicians Wagner and Giuseppe Verdi, links to their masterpieces), browse videos (e.g. UK's first Barcoded stamps allow users to watch Shaun the Sheep video over Holidays), browse web pages (e.g. Norway's QR stamps featuring research and innovations at sea, directed to a webpage on each invention), or send a personalized video message (e.g., Australia's video stamps allow users to record and send a 15 second video message with the mail/parcel (BBC, 2022; The Research council of Norway, 2022; Kirk, 2013). In 2019, the Austrian Post issued the world's first cryptographic stamp. The physical stamp contains a key to a Non-Fungible Token (NFT), which is a "digital twin" of the stamp stored in Block chain, and could be acquired and exchanged similar to a paper stamp. The response was immense, every following edition sold out remarkably fast (Strasz, 2023; Swiss Post, 2021). Since NFTs come with public proof of ownership and a record of previous owners it can lead to provenance, where the value of an item is influenced by its philatelic pedigree and the pleasure of acquiring rarities from a good collection (Orsi, 2021).



Figure 2.9- Stamp with QR code that links to a musical masterpiece, Austria 2022



Figure 2.10 – Cryptographic stamp, with a link to a NFT on Block chain, Austria 2020

While maintaining traditional philately and promoting virtual philately, UPU encourages the member countries to cater to the new market of Tech Savvy users & collectors. As the World Association for the Development of Philately (WADP), the organization dedicated for monitoring market trends in philatelic business and encouraging the adoption of best practices see it today, 'Philatelic products are a cultural tie that connects communities. In addition to being a work of art and a medium for advertising and promotion, a stamp offers a window into diverse cultures around the world; a calling card from each issuing country' (Giroud, 2022). In other words, postage stamps designed and issued by different countries offer miniature visuals of the different communities and the respective cultures, presenting curious for the users/collectors. The different subjects and themes visualized on postage stamps are country-specific and closely linked with the purpose of the issue.

2.4 Thematic postage stamps

Themes, appearing on postage stamps are generally determined by administrative officials of the issuing state and the designers (Mallon, 2006). Many countries seek to demonstrate their achievements, unique characteristics, history and culture in their stamps. Stamps issued on Archaeological themes such as Prehistoric human habitats, cave paintings and artefacts (Jenkins, 1977), artefacts from ancient civilizations (UNESCO, 1964; Meharry, 2018; Scaiceanu, 2016), and paleontological stamps illustrating Hominid (Abdi, 2022) and other fossils or reconstructions of prehistoric life (Lipps et al., 2022) are studied as showcasing a country's history, heritage and contribution to knowledge on evolution and human civilization. Stamps are issued on themes of Flora and Fauna on taxonomic basis (Nazari, 2021) or on native species (Hyman, 2021; Nemesio et al., 2013) showcasing a country's biodiversity and environmental heritage, as part of conservation efforts, as well as a part of national or cultural symbolism. Stamps issued on science themes such as Medicine (Rajasoorya, 2020), Chemistry (Krall et al., 2022), Physics (Weber, 1980), Mathematics (Wilson, 2001), Meteorology (Hillger, 1996), Telecommunication (Ross, 1976), Robotics (Kahn, 2020), Energy (CMJ, 2012) and space exploration (Kvasnikov, 1999; Smithsonian, 2005,) are considered to be showcasing achievements in those fields as a part of scientific discourse, communicating science/ tech related public policies, public awareness of science (Yardley, 2015), and archiving those milestones in public memory as achievements of the respective countries as well as achievements of humankind.

Stamps featuring indigenous communities (Gleeson, 2020; Korff, 2021; Goldblatt & Handler, 2017; Dumas, 2023; Klug, 2021), Traditional crafts (Prasad, 2020; Roger, 2021a) Folk dances (Barreiro et al), Folk costumes (Akou, 2012), Traditional cuisine (Bryan, 2017), Folklore (Toth & Hillger, 2017) are issued to honour certain human groups and their culture. Stamps featuring symbols, slogans and iconography relating to a religious doctrine or institution e.g., visuals of pilgrimage, religious events, and religious leaders etc. are produced in both cases when a religion is granted an official /predominant political status and/ or when the history and culture of the nation is shaped by it (Reeves, 2015; Hoyo, 2013). Stamps issued on festivals and holidays such as National Days (Ying, 2014), Christmas, (Cutajar, 1978; Kile & Lera, 2020), Vesak (De Silva & Samarawickrama, 2023; Morel 2020), Woodstock (USPS, 2019), Pride parades (Mail Online, 2022), Lunar New Year (Meredith, 2023a) illustrate those events that governments identify as of national, historical, religious and cultural importance to them, therefore noteworthy and celebratory. Stamps featuring destinations, landmarks, natural and architectural monuments such as National parks (Showstack, 2016), UNESCO world heritage sites (McCarty, 2021), Churches (Levin, 2004), Lighthouses (Forney, 2021), Castles (Kocaili, 2021) are issued honouring those creations, emphasising on conservation/ preservation of those, as well as promoting eco-tourism and religious/ cultural tourism. Stamps on Fine art paintings (Bir, 2011; Jacobs, 1960), Abstract art (Barcio, 2019), Mosaics (Laophil, 2020), Hollywood Cinema (Migliavacca, 2020), Music (Covington & Brunn, 2006; Dobney, 2020), Photography (Amark, 2016; Spira, 1979) Disney movies (Korkis, 2020), Comics (Kleefeld, 2023), Television (Philatelic team, 2016b), Radio (John, 2017), Video games

(Stuart, 2020), showcase each country's notable contributions to the Art, Design and entertainment of the world. Stamps on sports themes including, Olympic Games (British Library, 2010), Football (May 2022), and Cricket (Osmond & Phillips, 2011), are issued to depict support, participation and achievements of each country in the respective sports events. Stamps featuring Aviation, Ships, Trains and railways (Teals, 2015, Sikic 2020, Allen, 1996), Vintage and classic automobiles (Koch, 2022) are issued celebrating innovation and retrospect in those, as well as providing insight into lifestyle decades back. Themes from day-to-day life, such as pet animals (Sun Sentinel, 1998) Frozen desserts for summer (Moreno, 2011), espresso drinks (USPS, 2021), Europe's most popular toy LEGO (Linn's Stamp News, 2021), social media sensations like Doge (Austria Post, 2020), and has made it onto stamps providing collectors with a variety of engaging and relatable themes.

Meanwhile, studies on African postage stamps (Posnansky, 2004; Tirefort 2012) pointed out a trend of issuing collector-specific stamps where the goal of financial gain determined the themes chosen for the stamps. As argued, except for a few public monuments and national heroes, most of the images are chosen to please the foreign collectors who are on the lookout for 'exotic' images, as a result of the issuing authorities being focused on sales rather than showcasing national imagery. This issuing of collector-specific stamps intensified upto the point when Chinese artefacts appeared on African postage stamps. Another study (Libera, 2021) pointed out stamps that have no relationship with the culture and identity of the issuing country such as those featuring Arctic Dogs, Penguins, Polar Bears and Snow sports issued under names of arid and landlocked African countries, hence considered 'abusive issues.

Collectively, many studies agree that, through the themes selected for the postage stamps of a country, it is attempted to showcase their unique characteristics, common history and culture which ties its citizens together, for the eyes of both citizens as well as foreigners. As declared by the UPU "the subjects on postage stamps should be related to identity and culture of the issuing country/ territory and/or should contribute to cultural dissemination (UPU,2017).

2.4.1 Thematic Postage stamps as artefacts of culture

The term ‘culture’ can be defined as some distinct ways of behaviour in a group of people (Jahoda, 2012), or as a collective programming of mind which enables one to distinguish one human group from another (Hofstede, 1954). Culture comprises symbols, language, values, norms and artefacts. It is summarized that culture consists of patterns and behaviours acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiment in artefacts, hence culture systems can be considered as products of action, as well as conditioning elements of further action (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952). Culture is also defined as a dynamic environment transferred by the artefacts created by prior generations (Cole & Parker, 2011). An artefact provide insight into its creator, as well as the preferences, styles, work and play of the culture it was produced in. The objective or tangible elements of culture include architecture, food and manufactured items while subjective or intangible elements of culture include social norms, values, religious practices etc. (Triandis et al., 1993, as cited in Keith, 2011).

Being a product made by a group of humans for intentional and purposeful communication, a postage stamp can be viewed as a ‘visual text’. Cultural semiotics define ‘texts’ as a subcategory of artefacts which have a function and coded signs in a specific culture (Posner, 2003). Accordingly, a postage stamp can be seen as a text of semiotic sense with a culturally specific message; partially textual, partially numeric and predominantly graphic, encoded by the issuing authority. It is recognized that an artefact creates meaning by somatization through its (i) function and connection to the big picture, (ii) style, (iii) iconic associations, (iv) cultural allusions, (v) connection to social groups, (vi) individual experiences of people and (viii) additional meanings made in specific contexts (Siefkes, 2016).

Empirical studies discuss how the imagery on postage stamp portray different aspects of culture. Depicting traditional culture, arts and crafts, architecture, clothing, indigenous communities & religious themes are representations of a particular culture, and visualizing of such themes on postage stamps is evident. A study on Finnish stamps (Figure 2.11) discussed the romanticizing of elements of folk culture such as folktales, mythology and language for the creation of Finland’s national image (Raento & Brunn, 2005). A study on late colonial Hong-Kong explores how the government promoted and preserved elements from Chinese culture in their postage stamps, and how those tangible forms of Chinese culture were utilized by colonial officials as an attempt to win back the popular support from 1960’s on (Pang, 2022). A study on stamps featuring South African Rock art, views them as showcasing the cultural heritage as well as commodified for political agendas and to promote philatelic sales (Jenkins, 2012). Preservation of cultural heritage such as music (Covington & Brunn, 2006), Fine art (Jacobs, 1960) and Hollywood cinema (Migliavacca, 2020) through postage stamps for the international community, has been discussed.



Figure 2.11- Stamp featuring traditional weaving, Finland 1979



Figure 2.12- Stamp featuring Eskimo hunter on Kayak, Canada 1950

Canadian aboriginal heritage was first honoured during the 1950s with stamps featuring Totem pole of Canada's West Coast Indians and an Eskimo hunter on a Kayak (Figure 2.12) also serving as means of strengthening Canada's sovereignty in the High Arctic region (Maloney, 2013). Another study pointed out the changing significance of Native Americans as a part of the national iconography to the USA government as reflected on their stamps, evidenced by a stamp design featuring a native warrior getting rejected at a time when ethnic war was ongoing and featuring a Native American chief on 1922 definitive stamps series (Goldblatt & Handler, 2017). A study on Cypriot stamps discussed the gender roles and stereotypes in its Cypriot culture, evidenced by the depiction of women as to be secondary to men and also by the frequency of stamps depicting each gender (Andreou et al., 2017).

A study on stamps of Central Europe discussed the increased secularization in Europe's religious landscape, evidenced by the decline of stamps depicting formal religious practices while visuals promoting tourism and Christmas remained repetitive (Reeves, 2015). A study discussing the depiction of Islamic religious sites on Jordanian stamps pointed out how the government aims to bolster its relationship with neighbouring Islamic countries in war, win international sympathy and support to administer those sites and ensure Jordan's special stake in any political settlements between neighbouring countries (Sharnoff, 2023). How the use of Hindu imagery by Royal Mail on their Christmas stamps (Figure 2.13) could contribute to the construction of ethnic identities in Britain has been discussed (Zavos, 2008). A study on Gabonese stamps depicting a type of architectural decoration- sculpted pillars in churches, discussed the state's effort to assert its place within the Christian world through the specific scenes selected for the stamps, while a major part of the pillars was composed of masks, musical instruments, and other traditional objects of indigenous Gabonese culture (Levin, 2004).

Architectural trends as seen on Egyptian postage stamps have been discussed (Heba, 2002), while a study on Turkish stamps discussed their Ankara Castle-themed stamps as a site of cultural memory (Kocaili, 2021). Another study discussed the changing politics of Somalia, as reflected in the clothing and textile designs seen on their postage stamps (Akou, 2012).



Figure 2.13- Stamp featuring Hindu interpretation of Madonna & child, UK 2005



Figure 2.14- Stamp featuring a wind blowing god, New Caledonia

A study on stamps of New Caledonia presents the mythology and folklore seen on its meteorological stamps (Figure 2.14) by the juxta-positioning of satellites and natural phenomena alongside weather gods (Toth & Hillger, 2017). A study on the first Olympic stamps issued to gain financial aid for organizing 1896 Athens Olympics, points out how the representation of ancient Greek culture, art and iconography contributed to the rejuvenation of Olympic Games and promoting it at the international level (Ozer, 2023). Regarding the density of cultural information that a postage stamp can hold, they are recognized as ‘tangible movable cultural heritage items’ per definition in the Convention on Protection and Promotion of Diversity of Cultural Expression (UNESCO, 2005).

2.4.2 Thematic postage stamps of Sri Lanka

The Philatelic Bureau of Sri Lanka envisions producing philatelic products that generate knowledge, and awareness and preserve cultural heritage that could aid in enhancing human values and creating respect toward each other (Philatelic Bureau, 2022). Thematic stamps issued so far in the philatelic history of Sri Lanka, include the following. (Refer to Appendix A for the list of postage stamps issued by Sri Lanka from 1948-2022, categorized by theme). A series themed on Ancient Sri Lanka features artefacts from prehistoric human habitats, prehistoric cave paintings, a megalithic burial ground, a chain of cornelian beads, an Iron furnace a urinal carved in stone, metal jewellery from 7-10 Century AD. Another series is on ancient coinage and brass statues of Buddhist and Hindu deities. Rock and temple paintings of Sri Lanka series features frescoes from Degaldoruwa temple, Thiwanka Shrine Polonnaruwa, Galvihara Polonnaruwa and Sigiriya while another series features wooden carvings from Embekke Shrine. Stamps depicting Sri Lankan crafts include; the Kandyan Crown,

Throne and footstool, the Traditional Jewellery and Crafts series featuring Chunam box, *Agasthi* Necklace, Bangle and Hairpin, and Sigiri earring, Handicrafts of Sri Lanka series featuring Brass Lamps, Jewellery box, caparisoned elephant and traditional devil mask, is followed by another series on the same theme featuring *Sesath*/talipot leaf flags, pottery, Woven reed mats and hand woven *Beeralu* lace. Sri Lanka's indigenous people (Vedda) and their culture are honoured through postage stamps and themes of Traditional/ folk culture include; Traditional Drummers of Sri Lanka, Traditional dancers, *Kolam*/play masks of Sri Lanka, and *Sanni* masks/masks used in Traditional Sinhalese Exorcism Ritual.

Stamps are issued on culturally important destinations of Sri Lanka as declared by UNESCO; the ancient city of Polonnaruwa, Dambulla Rock Temple, Sacred city of Anuradhapura, Sacred city of Kandy, Ancient city of Sigiriya and Adam's Peak. Stamps issued on themes of Architecture includes; Ancient Buddhist architecture-The features of a Stupa, Moonstones, Guard stones and Balustrades, *Ambalam* or way-side shelters, colonial buildings of Sri Lanka showcasing those architectural monuments of religious and cultural influences. Several stamps are issued on the theme of tourism. The Series issued on World tourism day 2011 presents ten miniatures of Sri Lankan culture as chosen to frame under the titles; Heritage -Buddhist stupa & the lion paw entrance of Sigiriya, Festive - Kandy Perahera, Essence- four girls of ethnic groups in Sri Lanka, Bliss- a tourist enjoying a spa bath, Scenic- waterfall, Wild- elephants and leopards, Pristine- a sandy beach, Thrills- white water rafting.



Figure 2.15- Stamp featuring traditional woven mats, Sri Lanka 1996



Figure 2.16- Stamp featuring cultural pageant/ Perahera, Sri Lanka 1983

Postage stamps are issued marking major festivals of Sri Lanka. Festivals of religious and ethnic origin such as Vesak, Christmas, Sinhala & Hindu New Year, Thai Pongal, Deepavali, Milad-un-nabi and cultural pageants such as Kandy Esala Perahera, Kataragama Esala Perahera are considered of cultural significance and national importance, therefore commemorated through stamps. Among all thematic issues, annual Vesak commemorative stamps, inaugurated in 1969 and continuing up to date, is notable as the longest continuing sequel of thematic stamps issued by Sri Lanka.

2.4.3 Vesak Commemorative stamps of Sri Lanka and the world

When looking at philatelic practices of Sri Lanka, Vesak Festival marks an important commemoration. Vesak festival has its roots in Buddhism introduced to Sri Lanka during third century BCE, under the patronage of the Buddhist school of India. Since then, Sri Lankan rulers have facilitated the establishment and growth of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Vesak celebrated on the Full moon day in the month of May, is the combined commemoration of the birth, enlightenment and passing away of Buddha. Since the early times, Buddhists have gathered at temples with lowers and other simple offerings on the day of Vesak. Some commit to hold eight vows, listen to *Dhamma* (teachings of Buddha) and to meditate. With the influence of the Dutch, Portuguese and British on the island, by the 1800s Vesak in Sri Lanka had lost its significance as a national level celebration. After gaining independence in 1948, and largely after the Buddhist revival that took place during the late 1900s, Vesak celebrations were reinterpreted as a national festival again. To retain the enthusiasm of Buddhists and also to draw the attention of non- Buddhists secular elements such as large-scale Vesak lanterns, Vesak Greeting cards and Vesak songs were introduced in to the Vesak culture (Peiris, 2022). By 2022, Theravada Buddhism, is recognized Buddhism as the official religion of Sri Lanka by its constitution, and practiced by 82% of the population (Constitution, 2015; Pew Forum, 2015). Vesak in Sri Lanka is celebrated by Buddhists religiously and by non- Buddhists culturally. The day of Vesak, and the following day are declared as public holidays. Propagating the Buddha's message of compassion and being of service to human kind, Vesak is spent with charity work and acts of kindness. Liquor shops and slaughter houses are usually closed during the holidays and food stalls are set up providing free food and drinks to the passers-by. Vesak is also considered as a 'festival of light'. Lighting of oil lamps, Vesak lanterns, decorative light bulbs and pandols happen on the Vesak night and the following week. The ministry of religious and cultural affairs of Sri Lanka, declares a concept related to Buddhism, as the official theme for the Vesak celebrations each year. The government flags Vesak commemoration in a philatelic manner as well. Since its inauguration in 1969, each year a set of Vesak commemorative stamps are issued. Since 2015, in addition to the general Vesak commemorative stamp issue, a stamp depicting the venue of the official State Vesak festival- a location of religious and archaeological importance, is issued. In total 57 Vesak commemorative stamp issues have been done by the Philatelic bureau of Sri Lanka from 1969 to 2023 (Philatelic Bureau, 2014). Artwork for Vesak stamps come from two main sources; either from illustrators working with the Philatelic Bureau, or through stamp design competitions (Salie, 2017). These Vesak commemorative stamps are expected to present the essence of Vesak festival and Buddhism as integral parts of Sri Lanka's history, identity and culture.

The first conference of The World Fellowship of Buddhists held in 1950, formalized the decision to commemorate Vesak across a multitude of Buddhist countries (Olson, 2009). In 2000, The General Assembly of United Nations, by its resolution 54/115 recognized the day of Vesak internationally to acknowledge the contribution of Buddhism as one of the oldest religions in the world has made towards

the spirituality of humans, hence Vesak day is commemorated at its headquarters and other UN offices in different parts of the world (UN, 2000). It is notable that Vesak is a national holiday in many Asian countries and celebrated under different names such as; *Vesak* in Sri Lanka, Malaysia & Singapore, *Waisak* in Indonesia, *Visaka Puja* in Thailand, *Visak Bochea* in Cambodia, *Vixakha Bouxa* in Laos, *Buddha Purnima* in Bangladesh and India, *Buddha Jayanti* in India, South Korea and Nepal, *Saga Dawa* in Tibet and Bhutan, *Bathing Buddha Festival* in China and *Hanamatsuri* meaning Flower Festival in Japan (Dunipace, 2003; Gildow, 2014; Lee, 2006). Vesak is also celebrated in non- Asian countries such as Brazil with the influence of its large Japanese community (Negawa, 2007) and in Canada, USA and Australia by the Buddhist community there (Sri Lanka High Commission, 2016; Whitaker, 2023). In 2017, Sri Lanka hosted the 14th United Nations Day of Vesak themed ‘Buddhist teachings for social justice and sustainable world peace’ with local and foreign delegates. This occasion was marked by issuing a set of 20 stamps depicting Buddhist religious sites/ world heritage sites, located in UN member countries. It is clear that Vesak is celebrated not only as a religious commemoration, but honouring diverse Buddhist communities around the world, reinforcing cultural ties between nations and even promoting religious and cultural tourism (UN, 2022; Whitaker, 2023; Yatno et al., 2020).

In this light, it seems important to see how other countries showcase Vesak festival through their postage stamps. Vesak commemorative stamps have been issued by many Asian countries such as India, Nepal, Thailand, Laos, China, Bhutan, Korea, Vietnam, Mongolia etc. in both cases where Buddhism is given an official/ predominant political status and/or when the history and culture of the nation is shaped by Buddhism. Vesak 1956, completing 2500 years of Buddhism, was commemorated by many countries. India issued a stamp (Figure 2.17) with a stylized illustration of Sacred Bodhi Tree- the ancient *Ficus religiosa* tree in Bodhgaya descending from the Bodhi tree under which Buddha attained enlightenment (Gopal, 1990). Many Bodhi trees around the world including Jaya Sri Maha Bodhi in Sri Lanka- the oldest recorded human planted tree (Guinnesss, 2011), are sites of worship and pilgrimage.



Figure 2.17- Buddha Jayanti stamp featuring Bodhi tree, India 1956



Figure 2.18- Buddha Jayanti stamp, featuring hand of peace, Sri Lanka



Figure 2.19- Stamp featuring Buddha statue in Sokkulum Grotto, Korea 1977

A set of Vesak stamps issued by Burma (Figure 2.20) titled 2500 years Buddhist era, depicted 6th Buddhist Congress, Thatbinnyu Temple in Pagán, Golden Shwedagon Pagoda in Rangoon and Yegu monastery complex where the 6th Buddhist Congress was held (Davis & Martin, 1971). Sri Lanka issued its first charity stamps (Figure 2.18) with a surcharge, on the same occasion of 2500 years of Buddhism. One stamp depicts a traditional brass lamp and *Dharmachakra* (The wheel of Law in Buddhism), and the other stamp depicts hand sign of peace, a lotus and *Makara Thorana*, an architectural decoration seen at the entrance of sacred buildings (Philatelic Bureau, 2014).

For Vesak 1977, Republic of Korea issued a stamp (Figure 2.19) featuring the Buddha statue in Sokkulam Grotto, a national treasure of 8th Century stone carving art of Silla Dynasty (Korea Post, 2006). 1996 Buddha Purnima stamp issued by Mongolia features the World's tallest gold-plated Buddha statue, housed in Migjed Janraisig temple Ulaanbaatar (Stamp Digest, 2018). Vesak stamps issued by Thailand in 2015 features Emerald Buddha, a statue made of a green-coloured semi-precious stone, housed in a temple at Grand palace of Bangkok, and considered a sacred symbol of Thailand. The three stamps (Figure 2.21) feature the Buddha statue in seasonal attire - three sets of decorative clothing made of gold and precious stones for summer, rainy season and winter, ceremoniously changed in a ritual held at the temple three times a year, marking the starting of each season in Thailand (Thailand Post, 2015).



Figure 2.20- Stamp featuring Shwedagon Golden Pagoda, Burma 1956



Figure 2.21- Vesak stamp featuring Emerald Buddha statue in seasonal attires, Thailand 2015

The stamp issued to publicize the first official Vesak Celebration in Philippines depict a Buddha image with the wording ‘wisdom, compassion and non- violence’ (Tak, 2002). Stamps issued by Thailand on Visakhapuja day 1992 depict three life events of Buddha commemorated on Vesak day; birth, enlightenment and passing away of Buddha. Stamps issued on 1998 Visakhapuja Day (Figure 2.22) depict *Jataka* tales- stories on past lives of Buddha as in Buddhist literature and folklore. Four stamps issued for Visakhapuja 2020, depict four of Thailand’s famous *Phra that* or golden shrines embodying Buddha relics. These shrines are golden with pieces of gold foil pasted on them as a sign of offering and respect, by pilgrims around the world (Thailand Post, 2020). The set of stamps issued for Visakhapuja 2021 (Figure 2.23), depicts four species of flowers mentioned in Buddhist literature; garlic pear, lotus, Ceylon Ironwood and Indian Coral tree (Thailand Post, 2021).



Figure 2.22- Vesak stamp featuring *Jataka* tales from Buddhist literature, Thailand 1998



Figure 2.23- Vesak stamp ft. flowers in Buddhist Literature, Thailand 2021

Furthermore, it is notable that some joint postal issues, and stamps issued on diplomatic relations between countries, feature elements from Buddhism; as a cultural tie that connects those countries. 2014 Lao- Thai joint issue (Figure 2.24) commemorating Friendship Bridge built between Thailand and Laos, depict Buddha image procession festival held in Nonkhai, Thailand and Luang castle procession festival held in Ventiane, Laos, two Buddhist festivals held in the respective cities (Zimmermann, 2023). 2002 Pakistan stamp honouring Pakistan- Japan relations (Figure 2.25), feature two Buddha images recognized as world heritages; *Ghandhara* style Schist stone Fasting Buddha statue in Lahore Museum Pakistan and Amida Buddha statue housed in Byodoin temple in Japan (Siddiqui, 2002). Another notable issue is Bhutan's first animated NFT stamp series featuring 12 noble deeds of Buddha (Bhutan Post, 2022).



Figure 2.24- Lao- Thai joint stamp depict two Buddhist festivals held in Ventiane, Laos and Nonkhai Thailand.

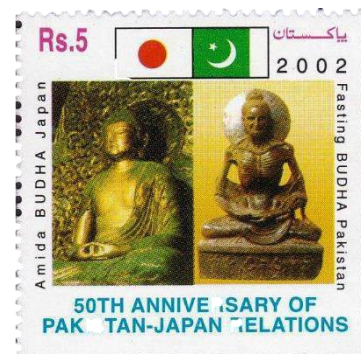


Figure 2.25- Stamp on ‘Pakistan- Japan Relations’ depict two iconic Buddha statues from the two countries. Pakistan, 2002

It is evident that, collectively Vesak commemorative stamps and other Buddhist themed stamps issued by different countries showcase Buddhist literature, monuments, sites of pilgrimage, Buddhist art and artefacts as a part of history, culture and identity of those countries. It appears that those are viewed by governments as subjects noteworthy to local as well as global audiences, and as contributing to the religious, political, social and cultural narrative, delivered through the representational format of postage stamps.

2.5 Visual components of a postage stamp

Postage stamps demonstrate a certain consistency in representational format and visual composition. The essential components that a postage stamp shall feature to be valid are; the name of the issuing state and the monetary value (UPU, 2017). In general, the components of a postage stamps include; name of the issuing state, denomination, image and the title of the stamp (Figure 2.26).



Figure 2.26- Components of a postage stamp

2.5.1 Name of the Country

Generally, a name of a country is included on a postage stamp, to denote that the postage stamp is issued by that country. Almost all the states issue stamps bearing their name, except for Great Britain, where the name is replaced with an icon of the reigning monarch. As per directions by UPU, the name of the state is mentioned in Latin script. Many states use their common name in the English language, while some use their name in native languages on the postage stamps. e.g., The Swiss Federation uses its name in Latin form, '*Confoederatio Helvetica*' whenever it is inconvenient or inappropriate to use one or all four of its official languages. The name '*Helvetia*' that appears on stamps and coins, is an abbreviated form of the full name (Schelbert, 2014).

Some states have issued postage stamps under two or more names as the official names of those states have been changed over time. Persia's first stamps were issued with its name related to the ancient Persian Empire, but in 1935 with the influence of Persian ambassador to Germany at the time, the name of the country was changed as 'Iran'- as in the 'Aryan blood' in Nazi racial theories, and stamps printed since then bear the new name (Migliavacca, 1986). Since Siam was the only Southeast Asian country to withstand European colonization, in 1939 the name of the country was

changed to 'Thailand' - meaning 'the land of free people' in Thai. After the World War II this name was changed back to Siam to disassociate from wartime connections with Japan and lasted until 1949 when it was changed back to 'Thailand' once again, as seen on postage stamps issued in the respective time periods (Cavendish, 2014). Sri Lanka's first postage stamps issued in 1857 under British rule bore the name 'Ceylon' (Rossiter & Flower, 1986) and the island being a dominion, stamps issued from 1948- 1972 bore both the names 'Ceylon' and 'Sri Lanka', and sometimes another variant 'Shri Lanka'. The current name 'Sri Lanka' in three languages Sinhala, Tamil and English as appearing on postage stamps today, was settled in 1972 when the island became a republic. The name of 'Republic of the Congo, (Figure 2.27) was changed to 'Zaire' in 1971 by its the dictator, when names of many cities, rivers and people were changed from Western names to African names, and reverted at the end of his rule (Frenay, 1991). Some other notable name changes of countries as seen on their postage stamps include; British Honduras to Belize, Rhodesia to Zimbabwe, Cambodia to Kampuchea and back, Burma to Myanmar and Malaya to Malaysia (Miller, 2005).



Figure 2.27- Two stamps issued by the same country in 1966 & 1977 under the names Republic of Congo and Zaire



Figure 2.28- Stamp issued in 1980 by 'Eelam', a nonexistent independent state in Northern Sri Lanka

Since the first production of postage stamps in 1840, they have been issued by over 780 states, of which only about one third still exist. The remainder of states have existed only temporarily and perished, and the names on their stamps serve as evidence of their existence, to the world (Konecny, 2014). Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Tierra del Fuego and Zanzibar are such states that has been disintegrated or united with other countries, but have postage stamps with their names still circulating in philatelic market (Cochrane, 2016; Dubro, 2012; Klamar et al., 2018; Snider, 2018). Demonstrating how official the name of a state on its postage stamps is considered, some non-existent states have issued postage stamps, as an attempt to legitimize their existence, in the eyes of their citizens and the world. 'Republic of South Maluku', a secessionist republic that claimed a few islands of eastern Indonesia, (Stott, 2017) as well as 'Eelam', (Figure 2.28) an independent state proposed by Tamil Diaspora in Northern and Eastern Sri Lanka (Stokke, 2006) are such states, with philatelic evidence.

2.5.2 Denomination

The fundamental purpose of a postage stamp is to indicate the monetary value of prepayment. The widely used form of denomination is a number followed by a currency symbol. Many early stamps show the denomination in words, but as per regulation of UPU, Arabic numerals are used on postage stamps to ease the usage in foreign countries (UPU, 2017). Semi postal stamps/ charity stamps are denominated with two numbers with a '+' sign in between, whereas the first number indicate the actual value of stamp and the second number indicate an additional value collected. The additional value is noted by the purchaser as a voluntary contribution to a designated cause. Some causes supported by European semi postal include health, literacy programs, national sports development etc. while United States semi postal benefit research on breast cancer, create awareness on Alzheimer's Disease etc. (Congressional Research, 2018). A make-up stamp is a stamp issued to make up the value of postage when postage rates are increased, but stamps are not yet available in the new denomination and no combination of existing denominations sum up that value. In 2014, Canada issued a make-up stamp denominated 22¢ to allow the use of existing 63¢ stamps when the postal rate was increased to 85¢, and it depicted a Monarch butterfly to complement the existing definitive stamp issue themed insects, which did not have a stamp on that value (Canadian Stamp News, 2014).



Figure 2.29- Semi postal stamp, issued to raise funds for Covid 19 Pandemic, Switzerland 2020



Figure 2.30- Non denominated 'forever' stamp, USA 2011

In some cases, non- numerical denominations are seen on stamps. Letter 'P' printed over a maple leaf as seen in Canadian stamps stands for 'Permanent' meaning that the stamp is always accepted at the current domestic postal rate (Canada post, 2023). Similarly Czech stamps are marked "A", "E", and "Z" for domestic mail, international mail to European countries and international mail to non-European countries respectively (Ceska Posta, 2022). In 2007 USA introduced a non-denominated stamp, called the Forever Stamp. As the name suggests, Forever Stamps (Figure 2.30) can be used to mail a letter weighing an ounce, regardless of when the stamps are purchased or how prices may change in the future, and by attaching additional postage for international mail (USPS, 2023). Forever stamps depict themes of national pride, natural beauty and contemporary America (Gilbreath, 2022).

2.5.3 Image

Scholars whose respective studies are based on postage stamps agree that the visually dominant and therefore the most meaningful component in those small compositions is the image (Deans, 2005; Dobson, 2005; Jones, 2001; Penrose & Cumming, 2011, Sexty 2000). It is established that these images publicize complex messages about nation, culture and are ‘semiotically dense’ and able to perform multiple functions while being presented in a tiny space (Child, 2005). Several studies analysing the postage stamps from different standpoints, have reflected on what is depicted through its pictorial component. Images such as national flags, emblems, rulers’ profiles or national symbols on postage stamps, are presented a part of official doctrine (Andreou, 2017, Hoyo, 2013; Osmond, 2008). Maps on stamps are regarded as “carto-semiotic models” illustrating geographic and political changes in the countries and continents (Konecny et al., 2014). Visuals such as traditional motifs, arts and crafts, folk dances, traditional clothing, native communities and indigenous medicine etc., define and promoting the cultural heritage (Andreou, 2018; Raento, 2006), as well as present aesthetic snippets from exotic cultures to the global philatelic market (Posnansky, 2004; Tirefort, 2012). Images of flora and fauna species are viewed as disseminating knowledge as a part of conservation efforts (Kay 2020; Nemésio et al., 2013), and suggested as effective teaching aids (Nazari, 2021). Collectively postage stamps of a country present a visual library of images that governments choose to frame, as what falls within its political, cultural and social consensus.

The images on postage stamps are produced using diverse visual material such as manual illustrations, digital illustrations, photographs, block prints, screenshots from games and movies, GIS maps, micrographs, X-ray images, satellite images etc. and using image processing software (Elston & Kemp, 2023; Gran, 2012; Hahn, 2020; Hansen, 2023; Hitti, 2020b; Kilner, 2022; Konecny et al., 2014; Praestholm, 1989). Some stamp issues such as historical issues, require very specific images of events, people, objects, buildings and landscapes etc. Such images are collected from related organizations. E.g., Australian War Memorial, provides much of the imagery that is reproduced on the country's military themed stamp issues (Australia post, 2016). The Landsat series of satellites have images the Earth for 40 years, and provided images for USA’s 2012 ‘Earthscapes’ series (Figure 2.31) illustrating the diversity and dynamism of Earth's surface (Gran, 2012). For stamp issues depicting fine art/ traditional art etc., photographs of the artwork come from art galleries or museums. Sometimes individual photographers are commissioned or commercial image libraries (e.g., Getty Images, Oceanwide Images, and Shutterstock) are used. Some other issues, such as botanical issues require fewer specific images as long as the accurate species is shown. In such cases, the visual material is selected to have the perspective and composition best suit the design. For an illustrated stamp issue, the gathered reference photographs and the particulars of the subject matter are specified when briefing the illustrator, and often a subject expert reviews the illustrations during development, to ensure that it has been depicted well.



Figure 2.31- 'Earthscapes' stamps designed using satellite images from Landsat 7, USA 2012



Figure 2.32- Stamp with Holographic visual of an atom, UK 2001

Working in the confines of a small space, stamp designers have layered visuals on top of each other, using techniques like scratch off areas, holograms, printing with heat reactive ink etc. to create engaging imagery. Netherlands' Valentine's Day surprise stamps and (Irish times, 1997) and New Caledonia' baby gender reveal stamps come with scratch off panels, revealing hidden quotes (Caledoscope, 2017). UK stamp on the Centenary of Nobel Prize (Figure 2.32) shows a hologram of a boron atom, where the electrons 'spin' along the atomic orbitals, when the stamp is tilted. UK Stamps featuring the 'Transformers' movie characters reveal each character's logos and names under UV light (Morris, 2022).

2.5.4 Title of the Stamp

Many stamps mention the title or the subject of the postage stamp in words, as a part of the main imagery or as a separate text (Miller, 2021). This is often done using letters of smaller font size, and the text is placed often along an edge of the stamp, horizontally or vertically, making sure the main imagery is more dominant. A title may be absent on postage stamps with self-explanatory visuals, but a title is obvious on some issues such as stamps commemorating occasions, stamps portraying individuals, stamps showing landmarks, destinations, monuments and architecture, stamps on traditional arts and crafts, flora and fauna, and other country-specific themes and subjects of exotic nature. Often the title is in the English language, as it is intended to reach an international audience. Some Flora and fauna stamps show the scientific name of the species (Latin), since it is the internationally accepted nomenclature since a plant, tree or an animal may be referred by various names in different parts of the world (ICZN, 2000). Including a title improves the dissemination of knowledge on what is represented in the stamp, helps call public attention, and useful for scholars and collectors. In addition, stamps may also have inscriptions on the outer margin, usually the year of issue.

2.5.5 Perforation

Generally, postage stamps come with a perforated border, a technical practice to easily separate them from each other (Reid, 1984; Hossain, 2013). The rows of holes punched into the stamp paper, are called perforations. Many stamp catalogues include the perforation measurement for every perforated stamp. Perforation measurements are taken by counting the number of holes within a 2cm space (Baadke, 2021), generally done using a perforation gauge. Some stamps have syncopated perforations; larger holes of different shapes or imperforate areas at regular intervals among the small round holes (Figure 2.33). Great Britain's 36 pence definitive issued in 1993, with oval holes among vertical perforations making the stamp harder to counterfeit, and coil stamps of Netherlands missing a few perforation holes intentionally to retain the strength of the stamps (Baadke, 2021) are such instances.



Figure 2.33- Stamp with syncopated perforations



Figure 2.34- self-adhesive coil stamps with die cut edges

The earliest stamps did not have a perforated border, they were printed and separated using scissors. Production of self-adhesive stamps in the past few decades has changed the traditional perforations. Instead of perforations most self-adhesive stamps have wavy die-cut edges resembling perforation teeth. Stamps with straight edges on two or more sides can be from a coil of stamps (Figure 2.34) or a booklet of stamps. Although it is a technical detail, a perforated border has become a part of the visual identity of a postage stamp. Demonstrating how the perforation style can enhance meaning and add visual interest, Covid stamps issued by Austrian Post (Figure 2.3) were printed and perforated similarly to a toilet paper roll, to satirically remind the hoarding behaviour during the early pandemic (Steensma & Kyle, 2022). As the designers of Finnish climate change stamps (Figure 2.5) reflect that the jagged edges when paired with dramatic colour gradients on the stamp, create a sense of urgency (Hitti, 2020b).

2.5.6 Barcode

Barcodes and QR (Quick Response) codes are introduced as a means of digitization of traditional paper stamps, catering for the tech-savvy users. A barcode is a machine-readable image containing information specific to the labelled item. Visually a barcode is a printed series of parallel bars or lines with varying width, typically black on a white background. A QR code is type of matrix like barcode made of a pattern of small squares. QR codes or two-dimensional matrix codes can hold more information in a small space compared to a traditional barcode (Britannica, 2023; Gregersen, 2023).

Barcodes and QR codes on physical postage stamps enable added security features and experiences for customers such as to listen to music, browse videos, browse web pages or even link to a digital wallet. Hungary's stamps marking the 200th birth anniversaries of musicians Wagner and Giuseppe Verdi, links to the masterpieces of the composers (Figure 2.9). Norway's barcoded stamps featuring research and innovations at sea, directs to a webpage on each invention. UK's stamps on "Transformers" allow fans to watch a clip from the original Transformers TV series. Crypto stamps contain an identifier used to save the stamp on an Ether wallet on Block chain (Austria Post, 2022; BBC, 2022; The Research council of Norway, 2022; Morris, 2022). Alongside entertainment and education, barcodes make mail more traceable as it travels through the postal system.



Figure 2.35- 'Algae paper stamp' using a barcode as its main image, Italy 2020



Figure 2.36- Winter Olympics stamp with a QR code that links to official website, Russia 2012

The barcode is placed to stand out or to merge with other visuals on the stamp, as long as it is readable with a smartphone. Sometimes barcodes are redesigned, in a way that harmonizes with other visuals on the stamp, rather than their typical black and white appearance. On Italian stamps made of algae paper (Figure 2.35) the barcode which directs to a web page on its manufacturing process, is reworked to be aesthetically pleasing and readable and used as the main visual (Hitti, 2020a). Russia's first QR coded stamp (Figure 2.36) is composed in a way that the logo of the Sochi Olympic Winter Games 2014, smoothly integrates into the QR code linking to the official Olympic website.

2.6 Graphic Design in favour of postage stamp design.

A postage stamp can be identified as a small-scale composition of graphical and textual elements. Even though designing a stamp is a long and sometimes contested procedure, there is little study done on the design process. Reflecting on their stamp design process, Australian post explains, for each stamp issue the subject is understood with initial research, and the ways to translate the subject visually onto the stamps is ideated. The stamps already produced on the theme are reviewed so that they are not repeated. And then visual material is gathered and artwork is done. The artwork is then composed on to the format of a postage stamp, including the other elements such as the name of the country, denomination, title of the stamp etc. (Australia post, 2016).

Discussing the design process of Finland's Valentines' Day 2018 stamp, the designer describes how semiotic resources such as image, colour, typography and overall composition were used to generate meaning and mood of the design. These semiotic resources were seen as operating in two ways; connotation- references to the resource being used in a different context, and experiential metaphor- based on individual experiences of things. These semiotic resources interacting with each other on a single composition generate 'intertwined' overall meanings, identified as 'multimodal meaning making' in postage stamps (Raappana-Luiro, 2022).

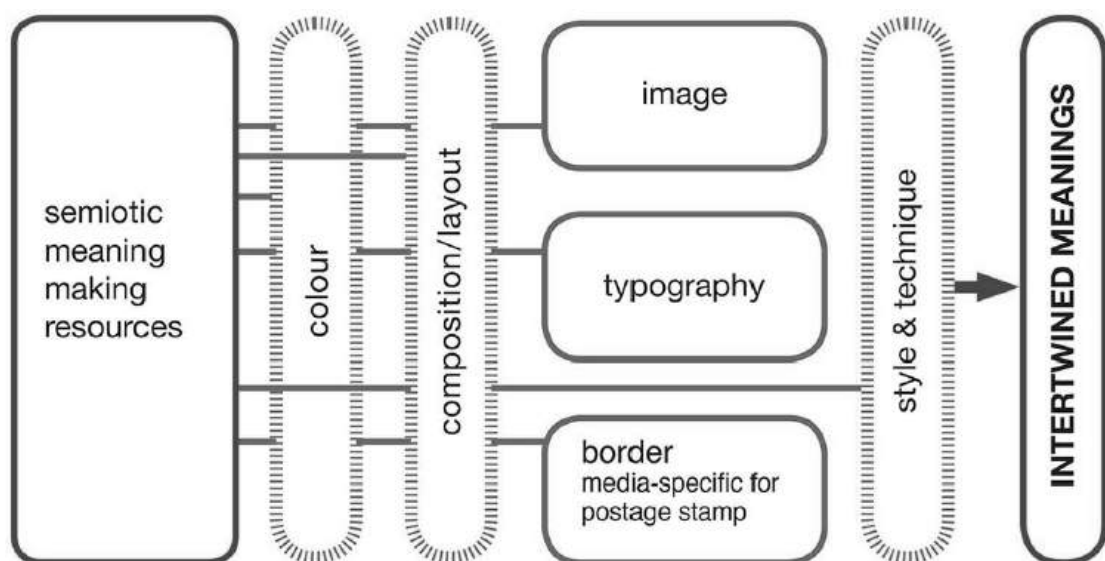


Figure 2.37- Multimodal meaning making in postage stamps ((Raappana-Luiro, 2022)

During the stamp design process, the original work of the artist was made fit to a business context, rather than a merely artistic one. Compared to the original artwork, on the stamps use of visual resources are more monitored, and the meanings were planned to be more unambiguous (Raappana- Luiro, 2022).



Figure 2.38- stamp issue commemorating 50 Years of Television, Australia 2006

In an issue consisting of several stamps, each stamp has to function individually as well, since people may encounter only a single stamp. Therefore, the visuals are supposed to be self-evident and provide context as well. Sometimes a layered approach is used in presenting the extended story. 2006 Australian stamps commemorating 50 Years of Television (Figure 2.38), uses such a layered approach. Each stamp has two pictorial elements and a title flagging a TV program from each decade. At a more subtle level, the shape of the pictorial zone suggests a television screen and the lines across becoming clear suggest the advancement in broadcasting technology and picture quality. The title of the issue and year of each program make the individual stamps meaningful when seen in isolation. When the five stamps are considered together, they show not only different eras, different genres of program, and represent Australia's two public and three commercial television broadcasters (Philatelic team, 2016b).

2.6.1 Iconography

Iconography is the way of identifying, describing, sorting and interpreting signs symbols and subject data (Britannica, 2014). The iconographic approach is used in interpreting meaning in human artefacts such as painting, poetry, and literature etc. in addition to stamp design (Brunn, 2000; Straten, 1994). Panofsky (1955) suggested a three-step method of iconographic approach which is helpful in understanding and interpretation of meaning in visual representations. (i) At the primary or natural stage, an image is viewed for the first time as a whole, and an immediate meaning is brought in by associating it with day today experiences. (ii) At a secondary or conventional stage, manifesting the subject of the image, the actions or facts presented is understood, using prior knowledge of concepts and conventional meaning. (iii) At a tertiary or intrinsic stage, asking whether the represented images convey an underlying significance, it is attempted to interpret the visual from a historical or philosophical point of view, looking for any social cultural interrelations that may widen the meaning.

Several studies provide insight into understanding the iconography in stamp visuals. A study describing visual cues in Duke Kahanamoku stamp (Figure 2.39), mentions how a specific photograph taken at the peak of the Olympian's performance was used for the stamp in order to present an active and youthful image. With the perspective and the stance of the subject, it is implied as Kahanamoku symbolically towering above the headland and the surfers in the background suggest his contribution in popularizing the Polynesian sport (Osmond, 2008).

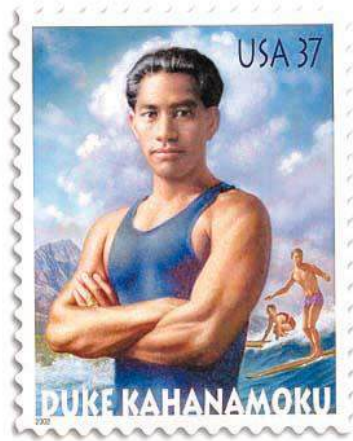


Figure 2.39- Duke Kahanamoku commemorative stamp, USA



Figure 2.40- Four stamps from the definitive issue USA, 1922

Discussing the 1922 definitive issue of USA (Figure 2.40), Goldblatt and Handler (2017) elaborates how the first twelve stamps of the series show distinguished US individuals shown as representatives of the nation with their names, and how the next stamp titled 'American Indian' is similar yet different. At a glance it features a person, yet named not by a family name but an ethnicity, even though this portrait of an American Indian is made using a photograph of the Lakota chief Hollow Horn Bear (1850-1913). The stamps following the American Indian stamp in the series depict non-human entities such as the statue of liberty, Golden Gate Bridge, Niagara Falls, Arlington amphitheatre, Lincoln memorial etc. It is pointed out that by opting to change the name Hollow Horn Bear to American Indian, paired with placing his stamp next to the non-human icons within the series, the officials attempted to portray the Lakota chief as symbolic of 'primitive dwellers of the land' unlike the preceding distinguished white individuals, and the native culture in USA is now a thing of the past (Goldblatt & Handler, 2017).

The imagery on stamps, when circulated in different contexts, can convey additional meanings than they are originally planned to. Many studies performed in a cross-cultural context, documented the different ways that images are read in East and West of the World as a result of diverse social, cultural, gender and religious backgrounds (Alexander, 2014; Chu, 2003, Endrody, 2016; Huer, 2000) evidenced by the differences in visual perception, comprehension of symbols and the knowledge about images of their own culture and of another culture.

2.6.2 Style

Style refers to a particular way in which something is done, created, or presented. (Fernie, 1995). Studies on visual representation in both art and design, style is acknowledged as a significant semiotic resource (Nodelman, 1990; Siefkes & Arieli, 2018). When the stylistic analysis is used for historical studies, an artefact is treated as made in a collective style as in a time period, a region, a tribe etc., where its production history locates it in a social unit (Stejskal, 2021). Such analysis of the style may aid in scribing an artefact to the context it was produced in and/ or to recognize a common pedigree of stylistically related artefacts (Davis, 1996; Neer, 2010). In such applications, style is considered as ‘idiomatic or diagnostic of ethnicity’ where ethnicity translates as the fact of being a part of a group of people sharing a common cultural background (Sackett, 1990; Stejskal, 2021). On aesthetics and objectivity in visual representation, Piggot (1978) states that the manner of representation cannot be disassociated from its purpose and requirements of the society in which the given visual representation gains currency.



Figure 2.41- 1630 Dutch vanitas (top) and Valentine's Day stamp, Finland 2018 (bottom)



Figure 2.42- Christmas stamps featuring nativity in stained glass art, UK 2020

In Finland's Valentine's Day 2018 stamp (Figure 2.41) the style is inspired from the designer's fascination towards historicism and melancholy, from Dutch Vanitas of the 1600s' and from natural history illustrations by Earnest Haeckel in early 1900s. The designer's personal style fostered in a fine art context, was adopted to tally with the goals of the post office through changes in colours and composition, transforming the overall mood of the stamp design from an ambiguous melancholy to a mystical fantasy (Raappana- Luiro, 2019). UK's 2020 Christmas stamps (Figure 2.42) features scenes of nativity in the form of stained glass, an art form traditionally used to illustrate the narratives of the Bible. The scenes are extracted from windows of six Anglican churches across the country, covering a range of eras, styles and techniques (McCarty, 2020). Fiji 2023 stamps on Chinese Lunar New Year (Figure 2.24) depict the year of the rabbit in a style mimicking traditional Chinese art of paper cut (Xinhua, 2023).

2.6.3 Colour Scheme

What humans perceive as colour is light waves reflected off a surface (Bleicher, 2005). Even before people consciously attend to something, its colour captures attention subconsciously (Kawasaki et al., 2012). The earliest stamps show a limited palette of one or two colours described by nomenclature such as ‘green’, ‘blue’, ‘black’, ‘carmine’, ‘orange’ and ‘vermillion’ or combined with another colour /adjective such as in ‘grey green’, ‘burnt orange’, ‘chalky blue’ (Denman, 2022). Colours are used on postage stamps as a coding system, where different denominations of same stamp design are printed in different colours, as postal clerks could distinguish stamps more quickly by colour than having to read the value (Wong, 2022). Multi-coloured stamps appeared with the development of technology now account for the majority of modern stamps, although monochromatic designs are still in production.

Colours are of semiotic sense. Studies show that much of the adult colour response is resulting from cultural colour conditioning (Crozier, 1999; Rider, 2009); where connotations are made based on the way colours are used within a given culture. Traditional and religious symbolism is an important factor in culturally-conditioned colour preference (Fehrman & Fehrman, 2004). In Western cultures red evokes danger, urgency and passion. When paired with green, the colour scheme becomes festive, the traditional colours of Christmas. In China red is related with luck and happiness, one reason it is used in New Year celebrations and in Eastern Bloc countries, red can still evoke meanings of communism (Elliot & Maier, 2012; Eriksen, 2020). Many of the stamps issued by different countries commemorating Chinese New Year (Figure 2.43) symbolically contains red colour (Dunne, 2019; Philatelic team, 2022).



Figure 2.43- Symbolic use of red color on Chinese New Year stamps issued by Fiji 2023 (left) and Australia 2022 (right)



Figure 2.44- Queen Elizabeth II definitive stamps changing color to ‘regal purple’, to mark the longest reign, UK 2015

Purple has long been associated with royalty, luxury and sophistication, because of the expensive Tyrian purple dye historically used to produce purple coloured cloth. Postage stamps have featured the monarchy in a purple setting many times, including the UK’s Queen Elizabeth definitive stamp (Figure 2.44) being switched to a regal purple from its usual red, to mark the longest reign ever in British history (Elston, 2015). Muslims and Celts Share green as their Sacred colour (Singh, 2006), and stamps issued by different countries around the globe to mark Eid al-Fitr and Eid al- Adha, official Islamic holidays, contain the symbolic green colour (Huff Post, 2013; NZ Post, 2022).

2.6.4 Typography

Studies in typography long established that typefaces carry connotative meaning (attitudes and emotions) in addition to the denotative meaning (factual information) (Tannenbaum et al., 1964) and pointed out three meta-functions of type. Ideational meta-function (presenting ideas to reinforce the message graphically), Interpersonal meta-function (graphically communicating the writers' emotion) and Textual meta-function (giving the text structure, hierarchy and organisation (Stöckl, 2005; van Leeuwen, 2006). Under the umbrella term 'anatomy', axes, weight, contrast, serif and other characteristics which contributes to the 'personality' of a typeface has been discussed (Mickiewicz, 2005; Lupton, 2010; Cullen, 2012, Strizver, 2013). Empirical studies show that the perception of typography vary with gender, cultural allusions and historical use (Mickiewicz & Moeller, 2004; Cullen, 2012; Bringhurst, 2012; Ganon, 2018). Culture is responsible for writing systems, styles, typographic form and output. Therefore, specific typographic approaches reflect the contextual, cultural demand for such applications and needs and proclivities of people within a culture (Gondval; 2014, Snodgrass, 2018). Although stamps are predominantly pictorial, typographic approaches can evoke historical and cultural meanings. 1997 US Kwanza stamps celebrating African-American culture use the typefaces Neuland and Lithos, and US stamp marking 150th anniversary of Emancipation Proclamation features the phrase, "Henceforward Shall Be Free", (Figure 2.45) where typography in both cases resemble block type seen in ephemera of tobacco industry of 1850s-1930s and in posters of civil war, both involving African-Americans (Giampietro, 2004).

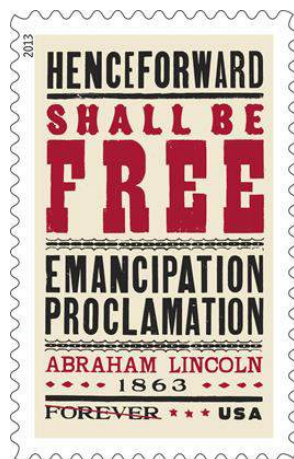


Figure 2.45- Stamp resembling woodcut type of posters, USA 2013



Figure 2.46- Vintage inspired decorative lettering on stamps, USA 2015

USA Forever stamp series, 'Summer Harvest' (Figure 2.46), aimed at communicating the country's renewed interest in organic and locally sourced food, uses decorative lettering similar to those seen on vintage food labels and crates to bring back nostalgia (Heller, 2015). In 2020 UK stamps celebrating retro video games, the title of the game is mentioned in the actual typeface used in those games showcasing how they evolved with technology, from clunky and pixelated to clean and smooth (Hahn, 2020).

2.6.5 Size and Shape

As per UPU convention manual “postage stamps and postal impressions could be of any shape provided that, each of the vertical and horizontal dimensions are not less than 15mm and not more than 50mm” (UPU, 2020). Generally, postage stamps are of rectangular or square shapes, as it is an efficient way to align stamps on printing paper, and many countries use only a limited set of dimensions, to simplify the automated machinery used in the production of stamps.

Triangular stamps issued by Tannu Tuva during 1926-1936 were sought after by the collectors (Green, 1998). Stamps in hexagonal shapes include India’s Giant tortoise stamp 2008 and several stamps featuring bees and honeycombs (Dash, 2010; Schevaun, 2018). 1991 Canada kite stamps series featuring kites, came in four different geometric shapes that resemble the shape of each kite. In 1999, Isle of Man issued a circular stamp resembling a CD (compact disc), honouring the band Bee Gees (Nowlan, 2000) and Austria issued a circular polyurethane soccer ball stamp to mark 2008 Euro soccer tournament. Botswana’s Diamond shaped stamps depict scenes from its diamond industry – mining, machinery and jewellery, which account for a substantial portion of the country’s economy its socio-economic transformation (Dube, 2023).



Figure 2.47- Puzzle piece shaped stamp, UK 2009



Figure 2.48- Water drop shaped stamp, South Africa 2013



Figure 2.49- Banana shaped stamp, Tonga 1969

Other freeform organic shapes have been used for postage stamps in a way that enhances meaning and adds visual interest. Valentine’s Day has been marked with heart-shaped stamps issued by Hong-Kong in 2011, by Thailand in 2013 and by France many times. A water drop shape was chosen for South African stamps marking the World Water Day (Figure 2.47). Evolutionary Biologist Charles’ Darwin was honoured with a set of stamps shaped like jigsaw puzzle pieces (Figure 2.47) and during Covid-19 pandemic Austria issued miniature face mask shaped stamps (Steensma & Kyle, 2022). Trinidad & Tobago issued three stamps in the shape of drink bottles, marking the 175th anniversary of the Angostura distillery. Tonga Post issued banana shaped definitive stamps (Figure 2.49) from 1969 to 1985, banana being a staple food of Tonganese culture (Perry, 2008). Hungary’s 2013 Christmas issue features a Christmas tree, a shooting star and an angel in the shapes of Gingerbread cookies, a traditional delicacy in Christmas culture (Magyar Posta, 2013).

2.6.6 Layout

A well-designed stamp is seen as requiring the creative effort in mindfully attuning several requirements; indicating the monetary value of prepayment and the country or origin, as well as strategic presentation of the subject in a meaningful and attractive manner, essentially within a small space (Child, 2005; Scott, 1995). Layout is a process of planning out the journey of the viewer across the visual presentation, in this case, a postage stamp. Gestalt psychology often referenced when understanding how humans perceive visual information (Tversky, 2011; Vezzanni et al., 2012), suggest that visual components in a presentation such as images and text are not seen separately but as a whole picture. Therefore, the way those components are arranged concerning proximity, similarity and symmetry etc. can influence the viewer's experience (Leborg, 2006) and application of Gestalt principles could improve the effectiveness of the presentation (Moore & Fitz, 1993). It can be done by developing dominance with main components and practising restraint with others, establishing a hierarchy within the images and text presented to make it clear what is to be seen first, second and so on. Compared to layouts with ample breathing space/white space, cluttered layouts are harder to navigate. Well composed or well-laid out information do not need much cognitive effort to process, leaving more brain power for learning (Cook, 2006; Lidwell et al., 2010; Murchie & Diomedes, 2020).

Using a grid can aid the laying out process. The rule of Thirds (Smith, 1979), a derivation of the Golden Ratio (Carlson, 2023) is one of the well-known rules of composition; where components are strategically placed at intersection points to enhance the ease of information processing by drawing attention to the important visual components making it more salient and aesthetically pleasing to the viewer (Gooch et al, 2001; Kolishka & Klive, 2023; Meech, 2004, Peterson, 2011). Using a grid can also ease the design process and decision making on sizing and placement of the components, as well as keep text and images aligned with each other (Lupton & Phillips, 2008). At the same time, empirical studies exploring the long-used design principles revealed that designers today are referring to those design principles as rules of thumb, provided that those principles are; heuristic- aid in making design decisions faster and contingent- their applications depend on the local conditions. Designers tend to feel the need to 'break the rules' occasionally for added attention/ interest to a design (Kimball, 2013).

In addition to the need for an effectively communicating and aesthetically pleasing outcome, the layout on postage stamps is influenced by several other historical, political, social and cultural factors. Definitive Stamps of UK, known as Everyday stamps, follows a minimalist layout that has not changed since the design was introduced in 1967, featuring the head of the Queen Elizabeth II in the centre facing left as per tradition. The tradition is to alternate the facing direction between successive monarchs but since the current monarch King Charles III decided that it is not appropriate for it seems the king is looking away from the address/contents when the stamp is placed on an envelope, the new definitive stamps continue with a portrait of

the king looking left (Hardman, 2023; Richardson, 2011). 2017 forever stamp featuring Echeveria- a native succulent plant, took a circular shape and the text on the stamp was aligned in a circular path along the edge of the stamp complementing the shape of the subject featured (USPS, 2017) and making the overall layout harmonized. On the Irish stamp issued marking Dublin as a UNESCO City of Literature (Figure 2.50), instead of the usual way of using an image and text, designers chose to use only the words from a piece of literature. As they reflect, the design is unconventional and avoid the visual clichés. A 200-word story capturing the essence of Dublin is printed on a fluorescent yellow background (Frearson, 2013). UK stamps celebrating Beano comic magazine (Figure 2.51), follows the layout of a comic strip, and features illustrated scenes from the British comic Dennis the menace (BBC, 2021). An unconventional postage stamp from recent years is a tiny eight-page book issued by Dutch Post marking the 75th Dutch Boekenweek (book week), taking the postage stamps out of the two- dimensional flat layout (Etherington, 2010).

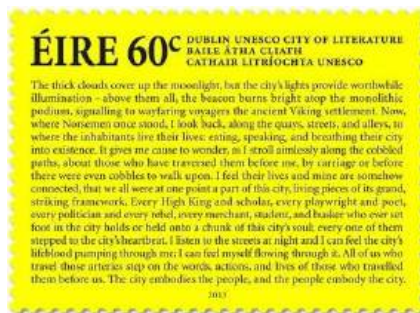


Figure 2.50- Dublin UNESCO City of Literature stamp, Ireland 2013



Figure 2.51- Beano comic commemorative stamp, UK 2021

2.7 Summary of the Literature Review

This literature review sought to find an entry point for studying postage stamps by reviewing previous studies, and to identify any understudied areas. Postage stamps planned designed and issued as official documents of a state, are important sources of global material and visual culture. In addition to their utilitarian function as receipts of postal prepayment, several studies discuss how postage stamps functions as representative of official cultures and national identities, as a mode of commemorating noteworthy occasions, places and individuals, as a medium for advertising and propaganda and as an unparalleled archival entity even in the era of digital communication. Produced by people of a specific community for intentional communication, a postage stamp can be viewed as an artefact; a visual text with a culturally specific message, partially textual and predominantly graphic, encoded by the issuing authority. The visual components of a postage stamp; name of the country, denomination, image, title of the stamp and other semiotic resources such as style, colours, typography, shape, size and layout interplay generating intertwined meanings, identified as ‘multimodal meaning making in postage stamps. The meanings made in a postage stamp can be discussed similar to the way that an artefact creates meaning through (i) its function and connection to the big picture, (ii) style, (iii) iconic associations, (iv) cultural allusions, (v) connection to social groups, (vi) individual experiences of people, (vii) additional meanings made in specific contexts.

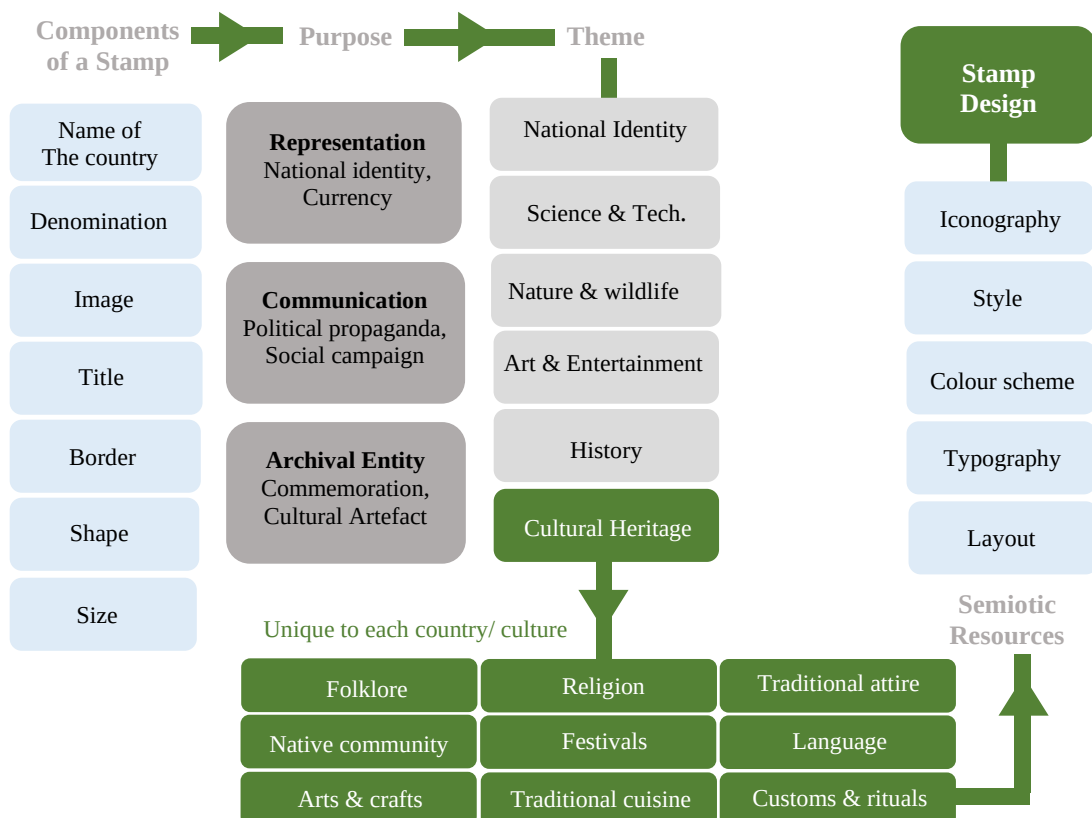


Figure 2.52- Summary of the Literature Review

The subjects and themes that appear on postage stamps are closely linked with the purpose of the issue. It is evident that countries/ governments seek to showcase their achievements, unique characteristics, history and culture through their postage stamps. Many empirical studies discussed different aspects of culture such as folklore, native community, traditional arts and crafts, ethnic groups, symbols, language, customs and rituals, festivals, are unique to each country/ culture, as communicated through postage stamp imagery. Regarding this, postage stamps are recognized as tangible movable cultural heritage items by the World Association for the Development of Philately and by UNESCO. It is evident that analysis of visual content in thematic stamps can provide an access point to understand its creator, cultural conditions, way of life, needs, preferences, styles and proclivities unique to that human group. This understanding of literature provided an entry point to study the postage stamps of Sri Lanka; to study them as artefacts of culture.

Meanwhile, a few gaps in the literature were identified. The studies on postage stamps are heavily based on the dominant image component of the stamps hence there is a lack of studies treating postage stamps as a whole visual composition. The literature also indicated a lack of research involving the users of postage stamps. It was notable that literature focusing on Sri Lankan postage stamps is limited to a handful of studies discussing stamps only by their theme and solely based on the image component. Despite the long history of philatelic production in Sri Lanka, neither a systematic study analysing the visual content on its postage stamps, nor a review of feedback from stamp users/collectors is done. By the end of the literature survey, it was clear that there is a timely need to study and document the variation of the visual composition in postage stamps of Sri Lanka over time, so that it becomes visible what has been in production and what is learnt could be applied in future work.

Chapter Three

METHODOLOGY

This chapter discusses the scientific methods adopted to conduct the study. First, the methodological approaches used by scholars to study postage stamps, and secondly the methods selected for the current study are discussed. Based on historical research as a method, this study documents the evolution of visual composition of postage stamps of Sri Lanka. To retain the coherence of the study, it is focused on thematic stamps. When looking at philatelic practices of Sri Lanka, Vesak commemorative stamps can be identified as the longest-continuing sequel of thematic stamps. Since its inauguration in 1969, a total of 57 Vesak commemorative issues have been done by the Philatelic Bureau of Sri Lanka. Based on convenience sampling, a sample of 28 Vesak commemorative issues accounting for a total of 100 individual Vesak stamps issued from 1969-2022 encompassing over 50% of the total no. of Vesak stamps, are selected for this study. Scanned images of the sample of stamps obtained with the permission of the Philatelic Bureau are used as material for the study. The visual content on the sample of postage stamps is analysed in two phases. A macro analysis of the variation of the visual component on the Vesak stamps followed by a micro analysis of the semiotic meaning-making of the Vesak stamps. In the first phase, the variation of each visual component on the sample of stamps namely; the Name of the country, Denomination, Image, Colour scheme, Typography, Title, Border, Shape, Size and Layout are studied through observational data. In the second phase, semiotic meaning-making in the sample of stamps through their function and connection to the world, style, iconic associations, cultural allusions, individual experiences of people, connection to social groups and additional meanings made are discussed through observational data and qualitative data from interviews with the focus groups. The focus groups consisted of individuals from the issuing authority, stamp designers, scholars on postage stamps/ culture of Sri Lanka, stamp collectors and the general public.

3.1 Selection of Methods

Historical analysis is a widely used method for studying postage stamps in order to understand the processes and events happened during a specific time period. A combination of historical analysis and content analysis is beneficial for more rigorous research. Visual content analysis is often used in studying a multitude of visual representations and in the case of postage stamps, content analysis can be useful in a few ways; to identify any thematic groups appearing in a collection of stamps, to study stamps issued in a certain time frame or a thematic group from the postal collection of a country, and to compare stamps of a certain thematic group issued by several countries. A notable trend in scholarly studies on stamps is a combination of content analysis at macro level and semiotic analysis at micro level for more comprehensive

study (Raento & Brunn, 2005; Andreou, 2017; Scott, 1995). Semiotic analysis can be identified as the signs of a specific culture, to understand and interpret; the signs, meaning of signs, interactions between signs and sign systems. Signs are found in many forms including hand gestures, written texts and visual texts (images). Analysis of signs on postage stamps involve any verbal and non-verbal elements seen on stamps (Andreou et al., 2016). This study looks at postage stamps as a 'visual text', with a culturally specific message, predominantly graphic. It is adopted postage stamps being artefacts generate meaning by somatization through; (i) their function and connection to the world, (ii) style, (iii) iconic associations, (iv) cultural allusions, (v) connection to social groups, (vi) individual experiences of people, (vii) additional meanings made in specific contexts. For reading postage stamp visuals, the three-step method of iconographic approach suggested by Panofsky (1955) for the interpretation of meaning in visual representations is used. (i) At the primary or natural stage, everything that the image portrays is viewed as a whole and an immediate meaning is brought in. (ii) At secondary or conventional stage, based on the subject of the image, actions or facts presented is understood using prior knowledge of conventional meaning. (iii) At a tertiary or intrinsic stage, it is attempted to interpret the visual from a historical or philosophical point of view, looking for any social cultural interrelations that may widen the meaning (Panofsky, 1955).

Since this study aims to document the evolution of visual composition of postage stamps; the analysis shall be comprehensive in temporal as well as special sense therefore should include stamps from a considerable period of time, and an adequate no. of individual stamps. It seems beneficial to look at the corpus of postage stamps and to focus on a selected/ recurring theme to retain the coherence of the study and more in-depth research (Refer section 3.2.1). Since this study aims to address the lack of research that consider designers and users of postage stamps, it is beneficial to in cooperate views of all stake holders; issuing authority, stamp designers, collectors and the general public. Such an approach would be far-reaching and comprehensive than searching for answers using only one perspective. Accordingly, a mixed method of historical research, visual content analysis and Semiotic analysis is adopted, for comprehensive research.

3.2 Data collection

First, to gain an overview of the total amount of thematic stamps issued by Sri Lanka, catalogues ‘Postage stamps of Sri Lanka’ volume I, II and III published by the Department of Posts Sri Lanka, featuring postal issues from 1857 to 2014, were referred. The rest of the postal issues were referred from the archives of the Philatelic Bureau. This study considered only the stamps issued by the Democratic Republic of Sri Lanka, since gaining independence from British Empire in 1948. Refer Appendix A for the total list of postage stamps issued by Sri Lanka from 1948 – 2023 categorized by theme. Since this study aims to document an evolution, a distinguishable category of stamps which include stamps spanning over a considerable period of time, and an adequate no. of individual stamps was looked for. As observed from the catalogues issued by the Department of Posts and confirmed by the officials of the Philatelic Bureau, the annual Vesak commemorative stamps are identified as the longest continuing sequel of thematic stamps. The longest continuing sequel was selected for this study as it provides a feasible number of individual units needed to perform a historical study or study any evolution. Therefore, scanned images of the total number of Vesak commemorative stamps issued from 1969 - 2023 are obtained from the archives of the Philatelic Bureau, with their permission.

3.2.1 Selection of the Sample

Table 3.1 illustrates the full list of Vesak commemorative stamps issued since its inauguration in 1969 up to 2023. From 1969 – 2014 Vesak commemorative stamps are issued in a set of 02, 03 or 04 stamps each year. Year 2006 marking 2550 years of Buddhist Era is a special case where 50 stamps were issued in a single issue. From 2015 onwards, in addition to an annual Vesak commemorative issue consisting of 03 stamps, a special issue of 01 stamp marking the State Vesak Festival, is issued. Year 2017 when Sri Lanka hosted United Nations Vesak celebrations, is also marked with a special issue of 20 stamps, in addition to the general Vesak commemorative issue. As per Table 3.1, a total of 57 postal issues, accounting for a total of 248 individual stamps are issued so far, commemorating Vesak festival.

Considering the restraints that may occur in employing the large number of total Vesak stamps in the study, a sample is selected, based on the method of convenience sampling. As shown in Table 3.1, five stamp issues representing each decade are selected for the study by selecting alternating years. The stamp issues in 2006 and 2017, with significantly high no. individual stamps were included in the sample by selecting 20% of the total stamps from each issue. The final sample was comprised of 28 Vesak commemorative issues accounting for a total of 100 individual stamps. This sample which represents 28 out of the 57 Vesak commemorative issues, encompass 50% of the total number of Vesak commemorative stamp issues, done so far.

Decade	Year & the No. of Vesak related stamp issues done	No. of individual Vesak stamps in each issue	Stamp issues selected for the study	No. of individual stamps selected for the study
1969- 1979	1969 (01) 1976 (01) 1978- 01 1979- 01	03 06 02 03	1969 1976 1978 1979	03 06 02 03
1980- 1989	1980- 01 1981- 01 1982- 01 1983- 01 1984- 01 1985- 01 1986- 01 1987- 01 1988- 01 1989- 01	02 03 04 04 04 04 04 04 02 04	1981 1983 1985 1987 1989	03 04 04 04 04
1990- 1999	1990- 01 1991- 01 1992- 01 1993- 01 1994- 01 1995- 01 1996- 01 1997- 01 1998- 01 1999- 01	04 04 04 04 04 04 04 04 04 04	1990 1992 1994 1996 1998	04 04 04 04 04
2000- 2009	2000- 01 2001- 01 2002- 01 2003- 01 2004- 01 2005- 01 2006- 01 2007- 01 2008- 01 2009- 01	04 04 04 04 04 04 50 04 04 02	2000 2002 2004 2006 2009	04 04 04 10 02
2010- 2019	2010- 01 2011- 01 2012- 01 2013- 01 2014- 01 2015- 02 2016- 02 2017- 03 2018- 02 2019- 02	04 04 02 04 04 03+ 01 03+ 01 03+ 01+ 20 03+ 01 03 + 01	 2012 2014 2016 2017 2018	 02 04 04 04 03
2020- 2029	2020- 02 2021- 02 2022- 02	03+ 01 03+ 01 03+ 01	2020 2022	03 03
Total	Total No. of Vesak related stamp issues done 57	Total No. of individual Vesak related stamps 248	Total No. of stamp issues selected for the study 28	Total No. of individual stamps selected 100

Table 3.1- Sample of Vesak stamps selected out of the total no. of Vesak stamps issued by Sri Lanka

Considering the inaccessibility to the physical postage stamps, the following visual material prepared regarding the sample, are used as the primary data source in the study.

- 1) Scanned digital images of the sample of Vesak stamps, collected with the permission of The Philatelic Bureau.
- 2) Colour printed enlargements of the sample of Vesak stamps, in A3 paper size.

3.3 Variables of the study

The dependent and independent variables of the study are determined as follows.

Independent variable- Postage stamp, identified as a physical printed label, primarily issued for postal prepayment, by an organization authorized to provide postal services, essentially depicting the official name/ identification of the issuing authority, and the monetary value.

Dependent variables- The visual components that constitutes a postage stamp namely; the (a) Name of the country (b) Denomination (c) Image (d) Colour scheme (e) Typography (f) Title (g) border (h) Shape (h) size and (j) Layout

3.4 Limitations

Since the limited access to physical stamps of the earliest issues, the study was conducted using scanned and printed images of postage stamps which may have led to inconsistencies in visual and tactile data such as texture and colour, when compared to the original physical stamps. The study is based on a sample group of stamps issued only under one theme (Vesak commemorative stamps), in order to retain its coherence. However, the research design can be applied for postage stamps of other themes as well.

3.5 Methods of Analysis

The visual content on the sample of stamps is analysed in two phases. In Phase 1, the variation of each visual component on the sample of Vesak stamps namely; Name of the country, Denomination, Image, Colour scheme, Typography, Title, Border, Shape, Size and Layout are studied through observational data (Refer section 3.5.1). In phase 2, semiotic meaning making in the sample of Vesak stamps through their function and connection to the world, style, iconic associations, cultural allusions, connection to social groups, individual experiences of people and additional meanings made in specific contexts is studied through observational data, and qualitative data from the interviews with the focus groups (Refer section 3.5.2).

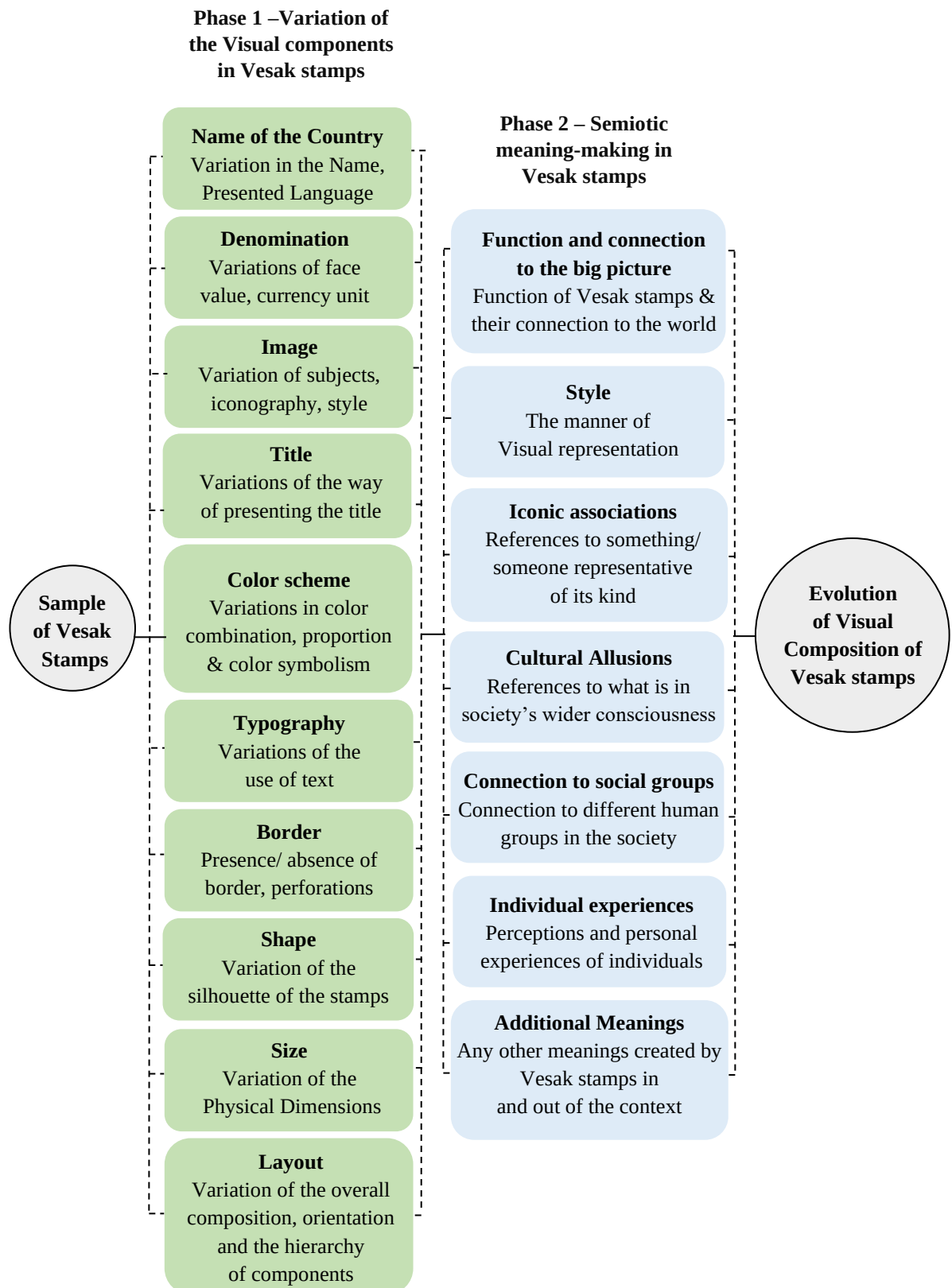


Figure 3.2- Framework for visual content analysis

3.5.1 Method of Analysis; Phase 1- Variation of Visual Components in Vesak stamps

As the first phase, variation of each visual component on the sample of stamps namely; Name of the country, Denomination, Image, Colour scheme, Typography, Title, Border, Shape, Size and Layout are studied through observational data. Table 3.4 to Table 3.13, presents the criteria followed in observing those variations.

a) Name of the Country

1. The 'Name of the country' translates as 'the official name/ symbol/ phrase of identification of the issuing state'.
2. From the scanned images of the sample of stamps, Name of the country is cropped including a part of the nearest border, in order to provide an idea of the placement of the Name of the Country. E.g.

3. Cropped images displaying the Name of the country are placed adjacent to each other, in chronological order, to make observations.

Table 3.2- Method of analysing the variation of the name of the country, in postage stamps

(b) Denomination

1. 'Denomination' translates as the value of prepayment shown on the stamp.
2. From the scanned images of the sample of stamps, Denomination is cropped including a part of the nearest border, in order to provide an idea of the placement of the Denomination. E.g.

3. The cropped images of denominations, are placed adjacent to each other, in chronological order, to make observations.

Table 3.3- Method of analysing the variation of denomination, in postage stamps

(c) Image

1. 'Image' translates as the dominant pictorial component on the stamp.
2. The scanned images of the sample of stamps, are placed adjacent to each other in chronological order, to make observations.

Table 3.4- Method of analysing the variation of image, in postage stamps

(d) Title of the stamp

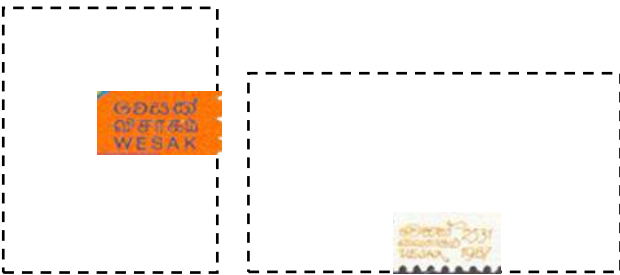
1. 'Title of the stamp' translates as a text explaining the subject of the stamp.
 2. From the scanned images of the sample of stamps, Title of the stamp is cropped with a part of the nearest border, to provide an idea of the placement of the Title.
E.g.
- 
3. The cropped images of titles are placed adjacent to each other, in chronological order, to make observations.

Table 3.5- Method of analysing the variation of Title, in postage stamps

(e) Colour scheme

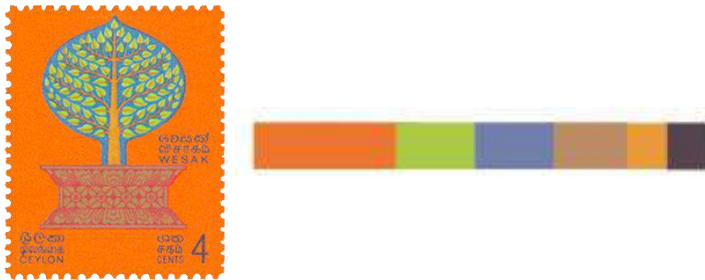
1. 'Colour scheme' translates as the set of colours seen on the stamp.
 2. The colours as seen on the scanned images of the stamps are extracted (using colour picker tool of Adobe illustrator), and documented on a colour bar showing individual colours as well as colour proportions.
E. g.
- 
3. Only six major colours seen on each stamp were picked for the study.
 4. The colour bars for the sample of stamps are placed adjacent to each other, in chronological order, to make observations.

Table 3.6- Method of analysing the variation of colour scheme, in postage stamps

(f) Typography

1. 'Typography' translates as the use of type, as seen on the stamp.		
2. The textual elements (Name of the country, Denomination and the title) as seen on the images of the stamps, are cropped and grouped as relating to each stamp.		
E. g.	Stamp 1	Stamp 2
		
3. The groups of typographic elements for each stamp, are placed adjacent to each other, in chronological order, to make observations.		

Table 3.7- Method of analysing the variation of typography, in postage stamps

(g) Border

1. 'Border' translates to the presence of white space along the perforated/ non perforated edge of the stamp. 'Perforations' translates to the presence of holes punched on to the stamps as a method of separation.
2. Scanned images of the sample of stamps, are placed adjacent to each other, in chronological order, to make observations.

Table 3.8- Method of analysing the variation of border, in postage stamps

(h) Shape

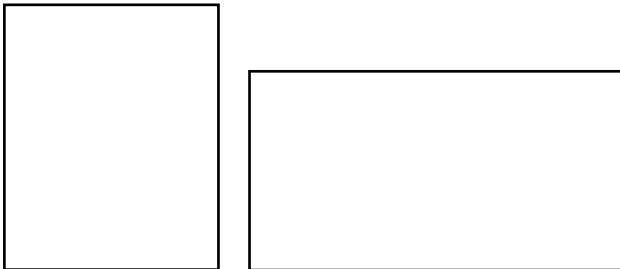
1. 'Shape' translates as the silhouette of the stamp.
2. Using the scanned images of the sample of stamps, the silhouettes of the stamps are traced in the form of vector diagrams.
E.g.

3. The silhouettes of the stamps are placed adjacent to each other, in chronological order, to make observations.

Table 3.9- Method of analysing the variation of shape, in postage stamps

(i) Size

1. 'Size' translates as the physical dimensions of the stamp.
2. Using dimensions of the stamps as mentioned in stamp catalogues and e commerce platform of The Philatelic Bureau, the silhouettes of the stamps are illustrated in 1:1 scale, in the form of vector diagrams.
3. The actual size vector diagrams of the stamps are placed adjacent to each other, in chronological order, to make observations.

Table 3.10- Method of analysing the variation of size, in postage stamps

(j) Layout

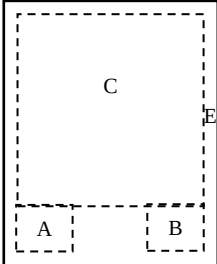
1. 'Layout' translates as the placement of the components on the stamp.
2. Using the scanned images of the sample of stamps, the silhouette of each stamp and how the components are laid out within each silhouette are marked, in the form of single line vector diagram illustrated in 1:1 scale E.g.
 A-Name of the country B-Denomination C-Image D-Title of the stamp E-Border
3. The vector diagrams showing the layout of the stamps are placed adjacent to each other, in chronological order, to make observations.

Table 3.11- Method of analysing the variation of layout, in postage stamps

3.5.2 Method of Analysis; Phase 2- Semiotic meaning- making in Vesak stamps.

In the second phase, adopting how a visual text create meaning (Siefkes, 2016), semiotic meaning- making in the sample of Vesak stamps through (i) their function and connection to the world, (ii) style, (iii) iconic associations, (iv) cultural allusions, (v) connection to social groups, (vi) individual experiences of people and (vii) additional meanings made in specific contexts are studied through observational data, and qualitative data from the interviews conducted with focus groups. Two focus groups were used for the study, with each focus group consisting of 5 individuals; 1 official from the issuing authority/stamp designer, 1 scholar who study postage stamps/ culture of Sri Lanka, 1 collector and 2 individuals representing general public. The interviewees are provided with scanned images and colour printed enlargements of the images of the sample of stamps, in A3 paper size, for easy observation. Responses to open ended questions were recorded, transcribed, and the qualitative data was coded using the deductive method. This data is integrated into the analysis, validating the observations made by the researcher, while improving the objectivity of the study.

Chapter Four

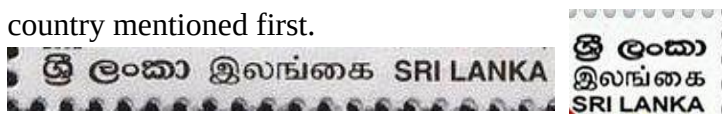
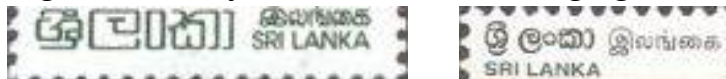
ANALYSIS

This chapter presents the visual content analysis of the sample of stamps. The analysis was conducted in two phases, whereas the first phase examines the variation of each visual component along with the time, resulting in comprehensive understanding on the evolution the visual composition of Vesak stamps of Sri Lanka. The second phase examines the semiotic meaning making of the stamps; through their function and connection to the world, style, iconic associations, cultural allusions, connection to social groups, individual experiences of people and additional meanings made in specific contexts as studied through observational data, and qualitative data from the interviews with focus groups. The focus groups consisting of individuals from the issuing authority, stamp designers, scholars on postage stamps/ culture of Sri Lanka, stamp collectors and the general public, added a contextual layer to the visual analysis and validated the observational data. By the end of the Visual content analysis, comprehensive knowledge on the variation of each visual component is gained. It is notable that significant changes in the visual composition of Vesak stamps occurred when stamps changed from being fully hand-drawn to being digitally composed. A few repetitive tendencies in the visual composition of Vesak stamps such as; affinity towards a certain style and a colour scheme following Buddhist monastic paintings of Sri Lanka, repetitions in subjects selected for the image, all Vesak stamps being only in rectangular shapes, and in a common size used for both portrait and landscape layouts repetitively used for the last two decades time, certain digital fonts being repeatedly used as a design choice and/ or being easier to replicate compared to hand drawn letters, are seen as contributing to a monotony in the Vesak stamps. Considering those areas simultaneously as areas with potential for experimentation and development, several recommendations for stamp designers/ stamp issuing authorities, as well as recommendations for further research, is presented by the end of the analysis. The findings of the study present knowledge and possible implications for visual communication designers and the authorities regulating stamp design programs, which could be referred to when planning the visual content on postage stamps. In addition, the framework used for the analysis in this study can be adopted for further research on stamps issued on other themes, contributing to the literature on postage stamps, a historical yet evolving medium of visual communication.

4.1 Analysis; Phase 1-Variation of Visual components in Vesak stamps

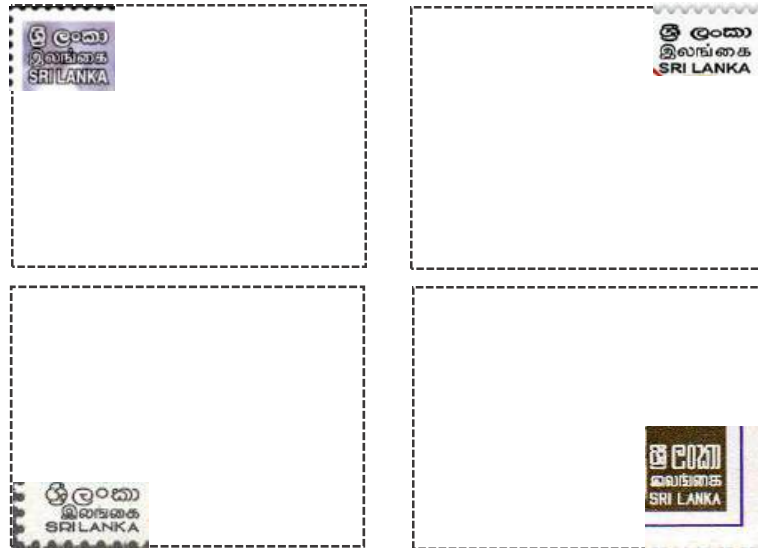
This section presents the variation of each visual components on the sample of Vesak stamps over time, as observed during the visual content analysis (Refer section 3.5.1).

4.1.1 Variation of Name of the Country

Component – Name of the Country
Definition – Official name/ symbol/ phrase of identification of the issuing state.
Source- Observations
a) Name of the country is shown in words, in the three languages; Sinhala, Tamil & English, the official languages used in Sri Lanka. e.g., Stamp 1976a with the Name ‘Sri Lanka’ in Sinhala, Tamil & English. 
b) The name ‘Ceylon’ (used in pre independence era before 1948) is still used as the English name on the first Vesak stamps 1969, and the name ‘Sri Lanka’ is used as the English name on Vesak stamps issued afterwards. e.g., Stamps 1969a (left) with the name ‘Ceylon’ and 1983a (right) with the name ‘Sri Lanka’ 
c) Name of the country in Sinhala language is given priority, by creating hierarchy through; the order, variations in font, and/or alignment. e.g., Generally, the name of the country is mentioned in the order- Sinhala, Tamil and English. Stamps 2002a (left) & 2022a (right) with the Sinhala Name of the country mentioned first.  e.g., Stamps 1978a (left) & 1987a (right) with Sinhala Name of the country mentioned in a font size larger than the Name in other languages.  e.g., Stamps 1979a (left) and 1998a (right) with the Sinhala Name of the country aligned differently to the names in other languages. 

d) The name of the country is placed either in one of the corners or along an edge of the stamp.

e.g., Stamps 2016b, 2022a, 1987a and 1978a showing the Name of county, in top left, top right, bottom left and bottom right corners, respectively.



e.g., Stamps 2018a (left) and 1979a (right) showing the Name of the country along the top and bottom edges respectively.



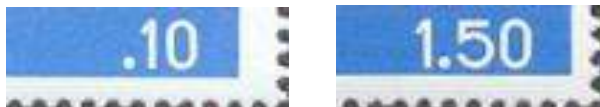
e) Generally, the Name of the country is placed horizontally maximizing readability from left to right (Sinistrodextral reading).

e.g., Stamps 1979a (left) and 1989a (centre) with the name of the country mentioned horizontally and stamp 1994a (right) where the Name of the country is mentioned vertically.



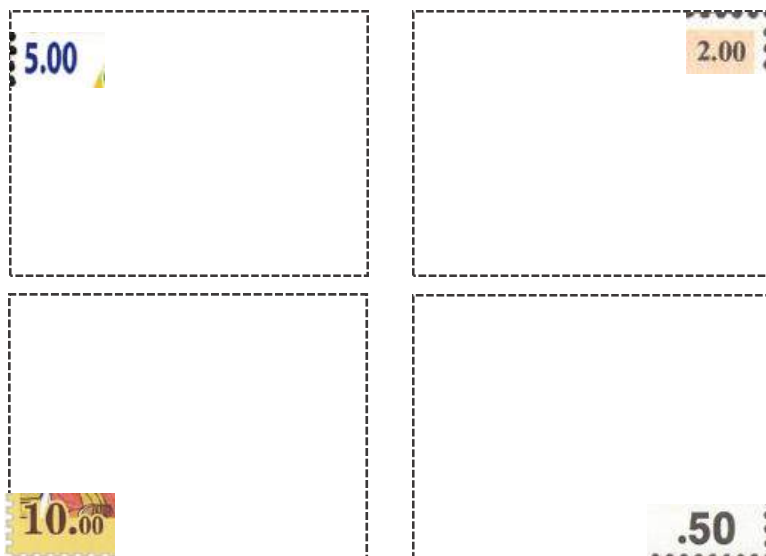
Table 4.1 – Variation of Name of the country on Vesak stamps

4.1.2 Variation of Denomination

Component- Denomination
Definition- The value of prepayment shown on the stamp
Source- Observations
a) The value of the stamp is mentioned using Arabic numerals and the currency system of Sri Lanka, Rupees and Cents (100 cents= 1 Rupee). e.g., Stamps 1976b (left) & 1976c (right) of values 10 cents, and 1 Rupee and 50 cents, respectively. 
b) The unit of currency is stated only in 1969- the first Vesak stamps, and thereafter denomination is shown using only the numerical value. e.g., Stamps 1969b (left) mentioning 6 cents and 1976a (right) mentioning 5 cents as the value of the stamp. 
c) A Vesak stamp issue contain individual stamps in different denominations, usually of postage values for domestic postcards, domestic letter post and domestic registered post. e.g., Stamps 2020a, 2020b & 2020c depicting the values Rs. 10, Rs. 15 and Rs. 45 respectively; the domestic postal rates for postcards, letters and registered post as per year 2020.  It is notable that Vesak stamps are not issued in the postage values complementing for international mail.

d) Generally, Denomination is placed at one of the corners of the stamp.

e.g., Stamps 2012a, 1994b, 2018a and 1987a showing the Denomination, on top left, top right, bottom left and bottom right corners, respectively.



e) Many Vesak stamps depict the Denomination in a font significantly larger and/or bolder than the other textual elements on the stamp, making sure the Denomination is visible and prominent.

e.g., Stamps 1983a (left) and 1987d (right) stating the Denomination in a larger font size, and a bolder font than the other textual elements on the stamp.



Table 4.2 – Variation of Denomination on Vesak stamps

4.1.3 Variation of Image

Component- Image
Definition- The dominant pictorial component on the stamp
Source- Observations
a) As observed in the sample, the image component on Vesak stamps depict; i) Buddhist symbols Bodhi tree- 2 Buddha rays- 1 Buddhist flag-1 ii) Buddhist arts and crafts Rock and temple paintings- 38 Other artefacts from Sri Lanka- 1 Artefacts from other countries- 4 iii) Buddhist literature Life events of Buddha-5 Historical events- 6 <i>Jathaka</i> tales- 3 Publications- 1 iv) Vesak festival- 7 v) Monuments and archaeological sites Religious sites in Sri Lanka- 10 Religious sites in other countries- 4 vi) Buddhist society <i>Theri</i> (female Buddhist monks)- 4 Rituals and practices- 9 vii) Concepts/ ideology from Buddhism <i>Paramitha</i> (The perfect virtues)- 4 Figure 4.1 shows the spatial variation (within the individual stamps of an issue) and temporal variation (along the timeline) of the subject, in Vesak stamp imagery.

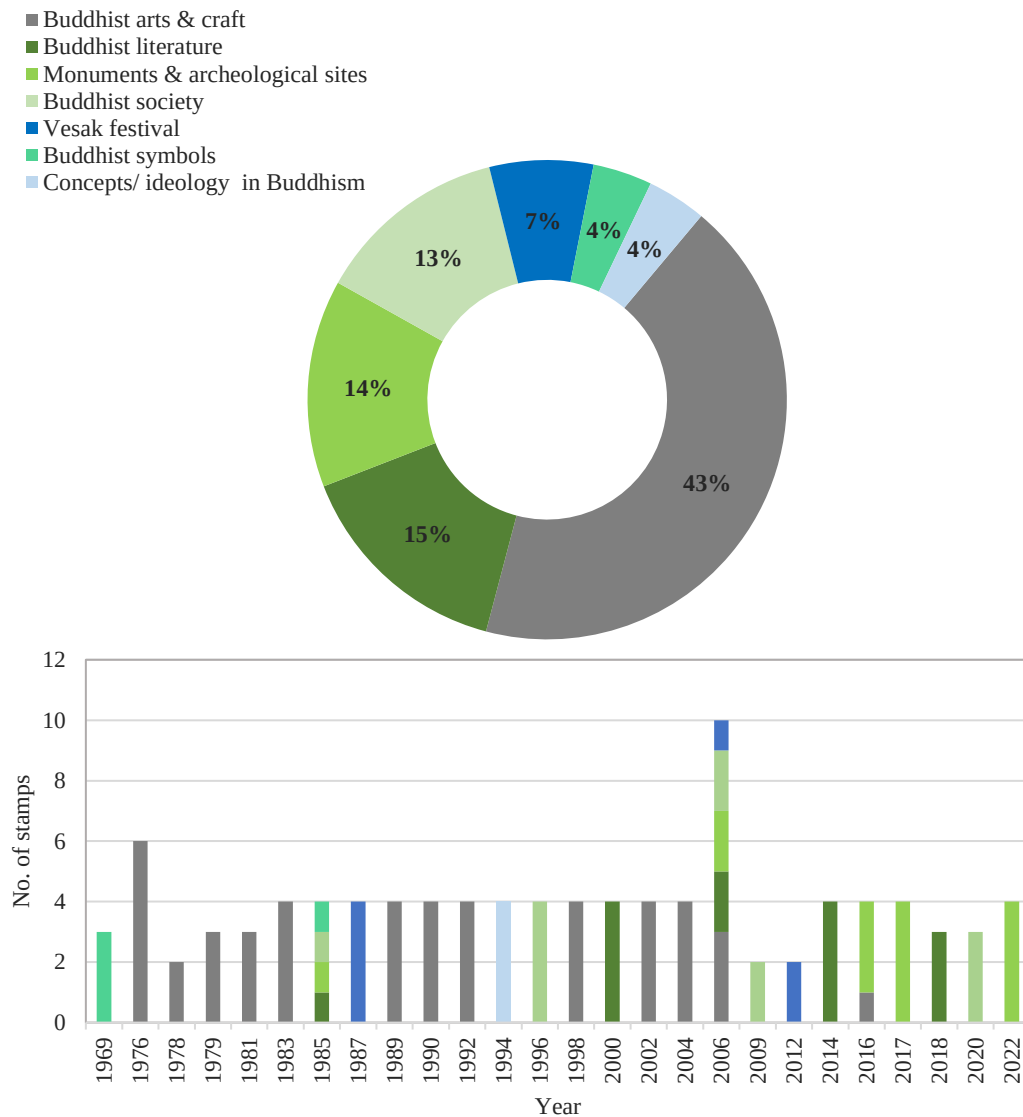


Figure 4.1- Variation of the subjects represented, in the image component on Vesak stamps

b) The majority of the Vesak stamps depict imagery of religious art, with a significant bias towards Rock and temple paintings of Sri Lanka.

According to Figure 4.1 showing the spatial and temporal variation of subjects in Vesak stamp imagery, 43% of the total Vesak stamps depict subjects of religious art and craft. It is observed that the major portion of the art depicted, are Rock and temple paintings of Sri Lanka. Monuments and Sites of religious and archaeological importance is notable as a relatively recent and continuing subject.

At the same time, it is observed that ‘Vesak festival’ or the Vesak day celebrations is a relatively less represented subject on Vesak stamps. As seen in the years 1985 and 2006, in some cases individual stamps of the same issue depict different subjects of different subthemes.

d) The image component on Vesak stamps is made using two types of visual materials;

i) Photographs,

e.g., Bas-relief panel depicting life events of Buddha from Borobudur temple, Indonesia (left) and stamp 1978a (right) depicting a photograph of the panel No. 59- renunciation.



ii) Illustrations

e.g., Octagonal Vesak lanterns (left) and stamp 1987b (right) depicting a realistic illustration of octagonal Vesak lanterns



e.g., Bodhi tree/Sacred fig tree (*figus religiosa*) (left) and stamp 1969a (right) depicting a styled illustration of the tree.



Figure 4.2 shows the spatial variation (within the individual stamps of an issue) and temporal variation (along the timeline) of the visual material used for Vesak stamps.

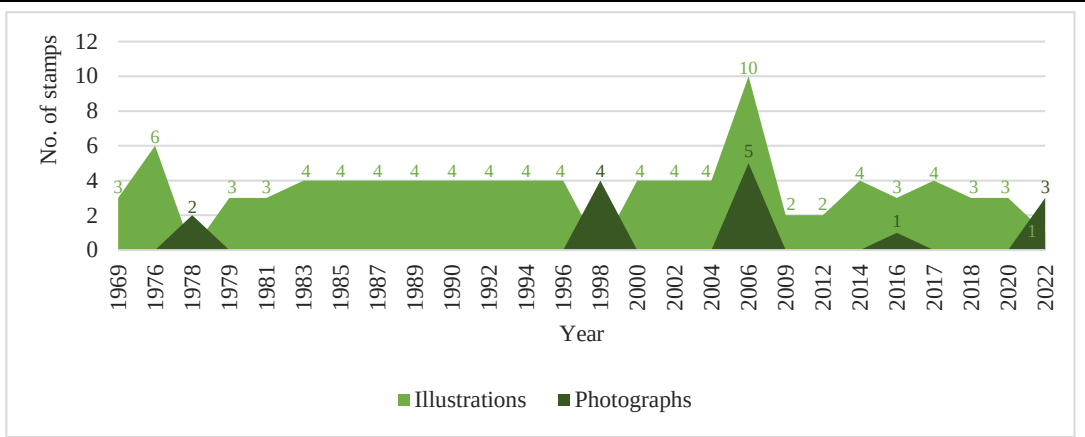


Figure 4.2- Visual material used for the image component in Vesak stamps

e) The images on the Vesak stamps, show a significant bias towards illustrations, among other types of visual material.

Illustrations are used for 85% of all Vesak stamps while only 15 % of Vesak stamps are made with photographs (Figure 4.2). Use of photographs is scarce in the earliest stamps but seen more frequently in the recent stamp issues. It was noticed that, for some stamps both illustrations and photographs are used as visual material.

f) Majority of Vesak stamps show one dominant image but there are instances where more than one image is used.

e.g., Stamp 2006c (left) shows an illustration of Buddhist monks on ola leaves, and a monochromatic sketch of Aluvihara temple, Matale, the venue the first writing of Dhamma took place. Stamp 2016d (right) shows a perspective photograph of an ancient wooden box, and close-up photographs of the paintings on the wooden box.



g) In the majority of Vesak stamps, the pictorial zone is in parallelogram shapes, except for few cases.

e.g., Stamps 1981a (left) shows a pictorial zone in the shape of a rectangle, and 2000a (right) shows a pictorial zone in the shape of a Bo leaf.



h) In the Vesak stamp imagery, few types of representations can be observed.

i) Literal representation – Using an image of the actual subject/story.

e.g., A realistic illustration of a Vesak lantern used to represent Vesak lanterns in stamp 1987a stamp (left) and a photograph of Sankapala Vihara used to represent Sankapala Vihara in stamp 2022c (right).



ii) Symbolic representation- Using symbols to depict the subject/story

e.g., In stamps 1999a, 1999b 1999c, symbolic illustrations are used to depict major events commemorated in Vesak; the birth of Buddha (by seven lotuses), enlightenment (by Bodhi tree & Dhamma chakra) and passing away of Buddha (by a blown-out lamp).



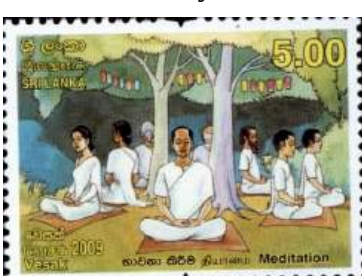
iii) Substitutional representation- Using an alternative image that could convey the subject/ story.

e.g., Illustrations of rock paintings at Dambulla Raja Maha Vihara are used in stamps 2002b (left) and 2002d (right) to represent life events of Buddha; birth and renunciation.



Table 4.3 – Variation of Image on Vesak stamps

4.1.4 Variation of Title

Component- Title
Definition- The text mentioning the subject of the stamp
Source- Observations
a) Title of the stamp is mentioned in three languages; Sinhala, Tamil and English, the official languages used in Sri Lanka. e.g., Stamps 1987a (left) and 2009a (right) mentioning the title as ‘Vesak’ in Sinhala, Tamil and English languages.  
b) Title in English is given priority, when it is mentioned only in one language. e.g., Stamps 2004a (left) & 2012b (right) mentioning the titles only in English.  
c) There are occasions where a title other than ‘Vesak’ is used. Such as in; i) When a Vesak stamp depict an artefact or a venue, the name of the artefact/ venue is mentioned as the title. e.g., Stamp 1978a (left) mention ‘Rock carvings- Borobudur’ and Vesak stamp 2016d (right) mention ‘Paintings of an ancient wooden Box, Naigala Raja Maha Vihara- Weeraketiya’ as their titles.  
ii) A title additional to the ‘Vesak’, is added explaining the image. e.g., Stamp 2004a (left) mention ‘Octagonal lanterns and Vesak stamp 1987b (right) mention ‘Meditation’ additionally to the title ‘Vesak’.  

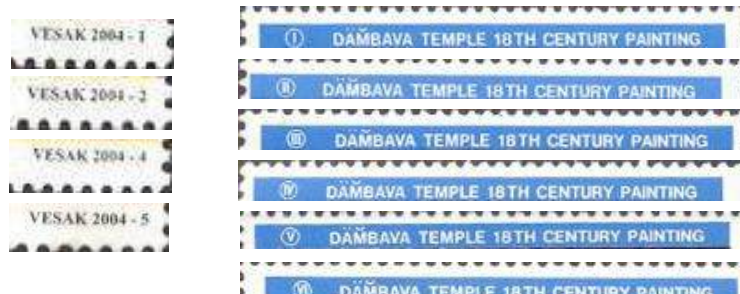
d) In some cases, a logo is used to state the theme Vesak, instead of using the title ‘Vesak’ in text.

e.g., Stamps 2006a, 2016a, 2017c and 2022c depicting logos stating ‘2550 Buddha Jayanti’, ‘Vesak 2562’, ‘United Nations Day of Vesak’ and ‘Vesak 2566’ instead of the title ‘Vesak’ in text.



e) In some cases, the stamps of the series are numbered as a part of the titling

e.g., Stamps 2004a to 2004d (left) numbered using Hindu- Arabic numbers and stamps 1976a to 1976e numbered using Roman numbers (left).



c) Title is often placed along one of the edges of the stamp.

e.g., Stamps 1998a, 1990a, 1979a and 1987a showing the title along the left, top, right and bottom edges of the stamp, respectively.

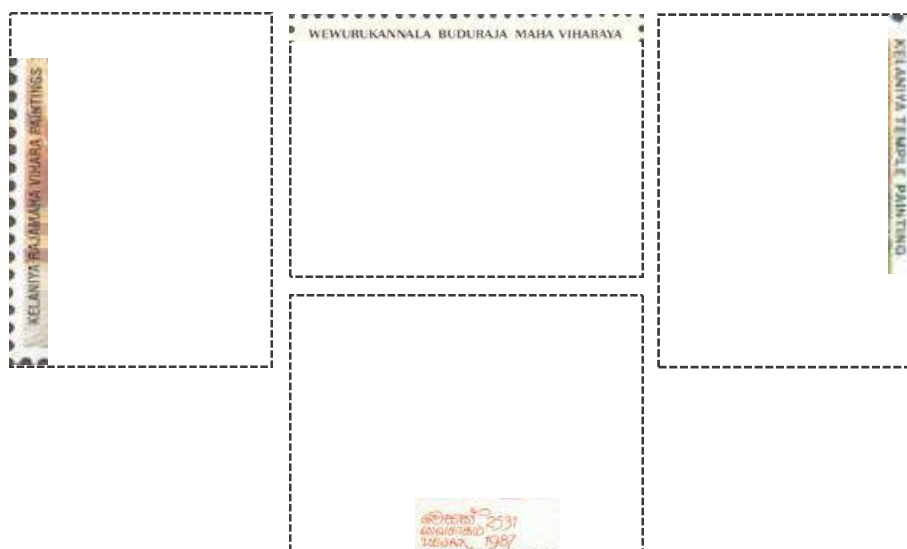


Table 4.4 – Variation of Title on Vesak stamps

4.1.5 Variation of Colour Scheme

Component- Colour Scheme

Definition- The set of colours seen on the stamp

Source- Observations

Figure 4.3 shows the spatial variation (within the individual stamps of an issue) and temporal variation (along the timeline) of the colour scheme, on Vesak stamps.

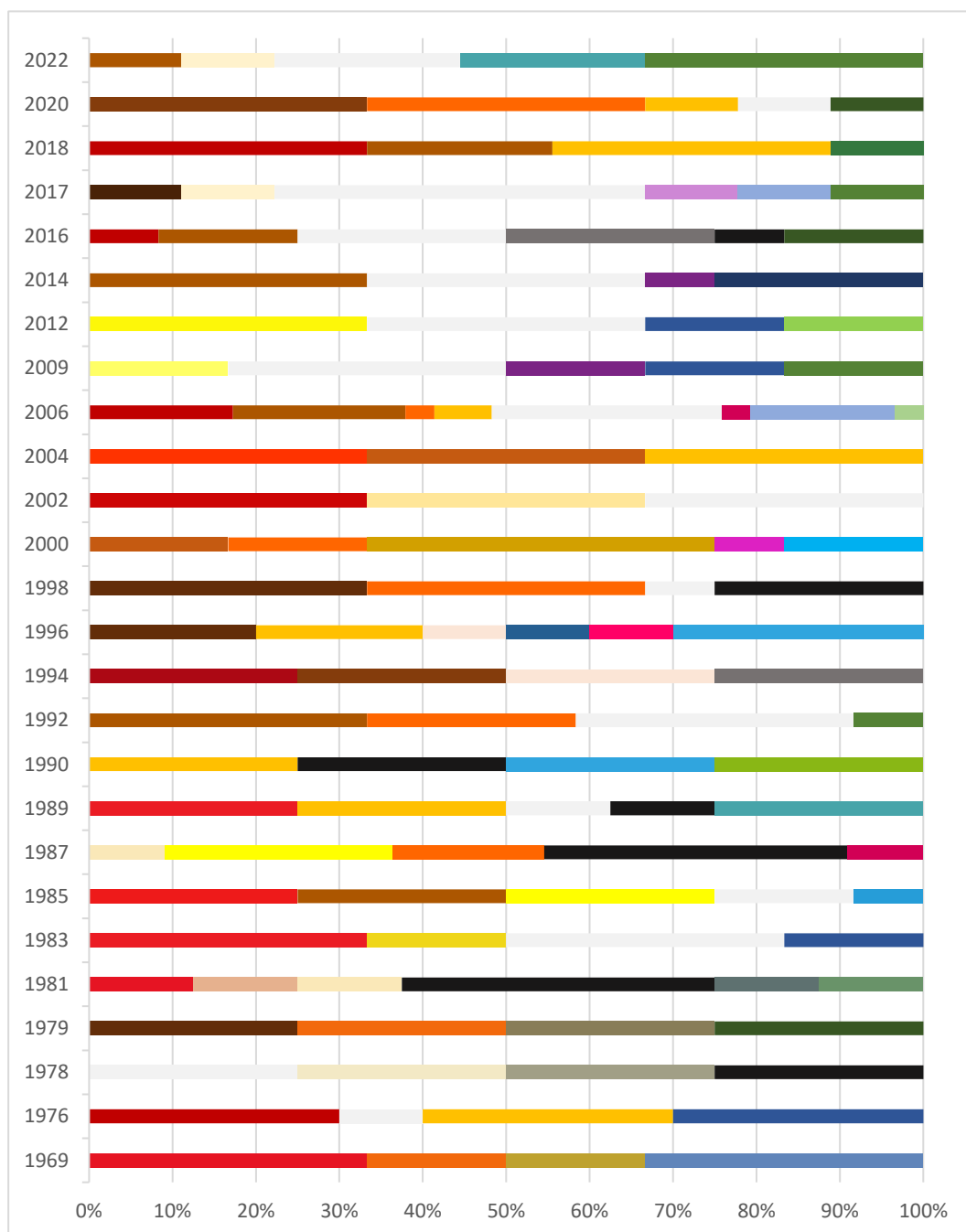


Figure 4.3- Variation of colours on Vesak stamps

a) The colour use in the Vesak stamps shows a repetition towards a set of non-vibrant muted colours. The following key colour groups were seen among the top six colours on more than 50% of the sample of Vesak stamps.

- i) Red, Vermillion, Crimson
- ii) Brown, sienna
- iii) Orange, Burnt orange
- iv) Yellow, Ochre
- v) Dark Green
- vi) Blue, Dark Blue, Indigo

b) This affinity towards certain colours can be attributed to the fact that nearly half of the Vesak stamps (46%) depict, either temple paintings of Sri Lanka, or illustrations inspired from the temple paintings.

e.g., 18th century Kandyan style paintings from Dambava temple, Matale (left) and stamp 1976e made using the painting of the Birth of Buddha.



e.g., 18th century Paintings of Bodhi trees from Dambulla Rock temple (left) and Shailabimbarama Temple Dodanduwa (middle) and stylized illustrations on stamp 1969c (right) with strong similarities in colour scheme.



c) Majority of Vesak stamps are polychromatic, except for few instances where monochromatic colours are used.

e.g., Stamps 1985b, 1985d (left) in polychromatic colours and 1981a, 1981c (right) in monochromatic colour scheme.



d) Colour symbolism can be seen on Vesak stamps.

e. g. Stamps 1969b (left) 1999a (right) using the six colours (blue, yellow, red, white, orange and a spectrum of those colours) in concentric circles, to symbolically represent Buddha; referring to Buddha rays emanated from Buddha's body at the enlightenment as per Buddhist literature.



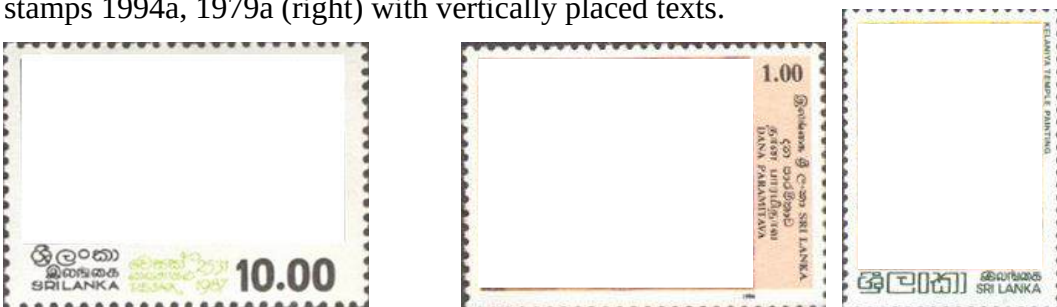
e) Colour coding has been used to differentiate between stamps of the same image, but of different denominations.

e.g., Vesak stamps 1969a (left) & 1969c (right) of values 4 cents and 35 cents have same image but different background colours orange and vermillion.



Table 4.5 – Variation of Colour Scheme on Vesak stamps

4.1.6 Variation of Typography

Component- Typography
Definition- The use of textual and numerical elements on the stamps (termed as type/typeface/letter/ lettering/characters/ font)
Source- Observations
a) The main textual elements seen on Vesak stamps are Name of the country, Denomination and the Title of the stamp. e.g., Vesak stamp 1978a depicting the Name of the country, Title of the stampsand the Denomination, in text. 
b) Some other use of text on Vesak stamps include; additional titles/details explaining the image and showing the year of issue. e.g., Vesak stamps 1981a (left), 1985d (middle) showing an additional title/text explaining the image, and Vesak stamp 2000a (right) showing the year of the issue. 
c) Generally, text is placed horizontally maximizing readability from left to right (Sinistro-dextral reading) but there are cases that text is placed vertically. e.g., Vesak stamp 1987d (left) with all of the texts placed vertically, and Vesak stamps 1994a, 1979a (right) with vertically placed texts. 

d) Textual elements are placed around the corners and edges of the stamps; making space for the main image.

e.g., Vesak stamps 1969b (left), 1981a (middle) and 2002a (right) showing texts around the edges and corners of the stamps.



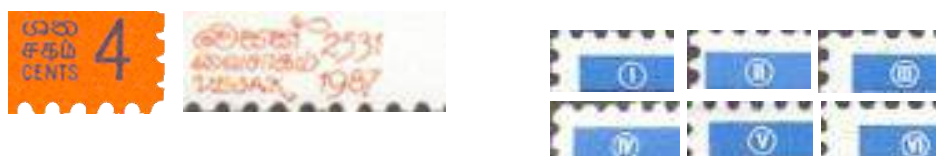
e) Multilingual script is seen on Vesak stamps.

e.g., Vesak stamp 1979a mentioning the Name of the Country in three languages; Sinhala, Tamil and English (left), Vesak stamp 1987a mentioning title in the three languages (middle) and Vesak stamp 1981b mentioning additional detail in the three languages (right). Multilingual script is essentially used for the Name of the country. (Refer section 4.1.1 and section 4.1.4).



f) Arabic numerals are used for Denomination and other numerical elements on Vesak stamps except in one case where Roman numeral are used.

e.g., Arabic numerals used; on Vesak stamps 1969a to show the denomination (left) and on 1987a as a part of the title (middle). Roman numerals are used on Vesak stamps 1976a – 1976d to number the individual stamps of the series (left).



g) Two significant categories of typefaces can be seen on Vesak stamps;

i) Hand-drawn typefaces- Hand drawn as a part of the illustration, when the whole stamp is hand drawn as a single composition.

e.g., Vesak stamps 1981a , 1987d, 1985d,1979a showing the Name of the country in hand drawn letters.



ii) Digital typefaces- Used when adding the textual elements of the stamp, digitally using a computer.

e.g., Vesak stamps 2000a, 2017c, 1998a and 1996c showing the Name of the country in digital fonts.



h) Visual variation of lettering on Vesak stamps can be observed as;

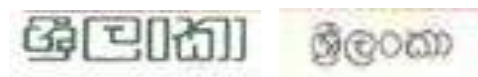
e.g., Different hand styles; Cursive hand seen on stamp 1987a (left) and Geometric hand seen on stamp 1989a (right).



e.g., Letters with different weight distribution around the axis; letters of low contrast as seen on stamp 1979c (left), and letters of high contrast as seen on stamp 1981a (right).



e.g. Rectilinear letters seen on stamp 1979a (left) & and Curvilinear letters, seen on stamp 1989a (right).



e.g., Letters of different width; Condensed letters as seen on stamp 1969c (left) and Wide letters as seen on stamp 1983a (right).



e.g., Letters of different weight; Thin letters as seen on stamp 2014a (left) and Bold letters, as seen on stamp 1987c (right).



j) In a majority of stamps a variety of typefaces are used on each stamp, to show different textual elements, creating visual hierarchy between them.

e.g., Vesak stamp 1987a with; Name of the country in mono-linear lettering, the Title in cursive lettering and the Denomination in bold lettering, all hand drawn.



e.g., Stamps 1987d & 1983a showing the Denomination in bolder, and larger lettering than the rest of the text on the stamp.



k) Typography in individual stamps of the same issue is observed to be similar.

e.g., Typography on individual stamps 1983a, 1983b, 1983c and 1983d from 1983 Vesak stamp issue is very similar.



l) Hand drawn letters seen on stamps are rarely repeated (as a design choice and/or being hard to replicate) but, digital fonts are repeatedly used (as a design choice and/ or being easy to replicate).

e.g., Hand drawn lettering seen on stamps 1969b, 1976a, 1979a, 1981a, 1987a (left to right) are not found on any other Vesak stamp issues. While,

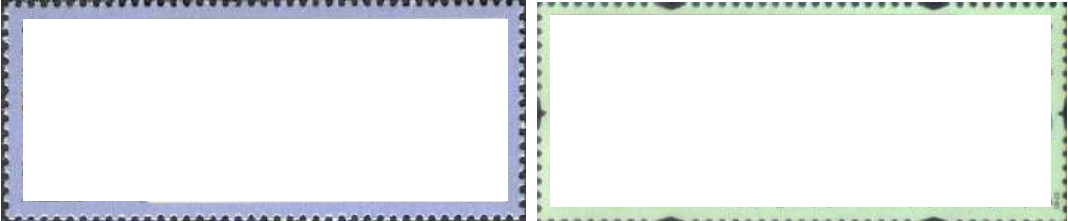
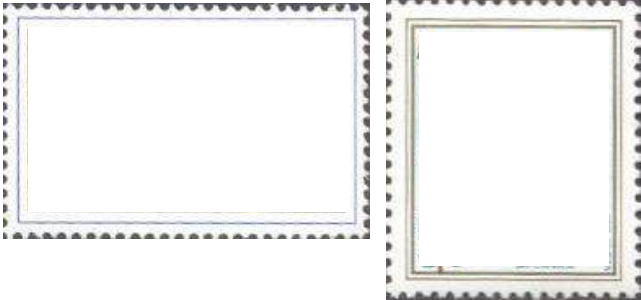


e.g., Digital fonts seen on stamps 2000a, 2006j, 2012a, 2016c, 2020c (left to right) can be seen repeatedly on consecutive Vesak stamp issues.

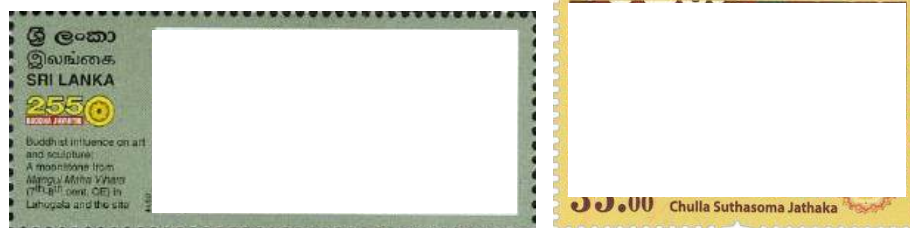


Table 4.6 – Variation of Typography on Vesak stamps

4.1.7 Variation of Border

Component- Border
Definition- The zone between the image and the edges of the stamp.
Source- Observations
a) All Vesak stamps are perforated. Some show syncopated perforations. e.g., Stamps 2006a (left) with normal perforations and 2017c (right) with syncopated perforations. 
b) Most of the Vesak stamps have a border of white space between the image and the edges of the stamp as a way to frame the image, but there are borderless stamps as well. e.g., Stamp 1969a (left) with no border, and stamp 1981c having a white border. 
c) In some cases, other frames additional/ different to the conventional white border is used. e.g., Stamps 1978a (left) and 1981d (right), with single- line and double-line frames around the image, additionally to the white border. 

e.g., Stamps 2006j (left) and 2018c (right) showing coloured frames around the image instead of white border.



d) In the majority of stamps textual elements are placed on the white border and /or on frames surrounding the image.

e.g., In stamp 1990b (left) the Name of the Country, Denomination, Year of the issue and the Title are shown on the white border, and in stamp 2017c (right) Name of the country, Denomination, Title, additional text explaining the image and a logo, is shown on the frame surrounding the image.



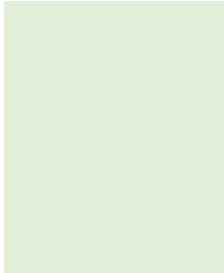
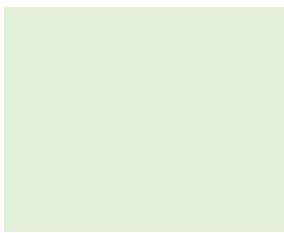
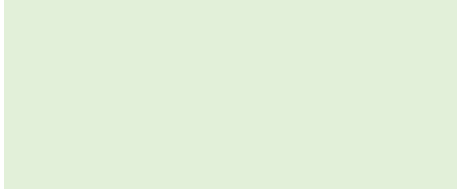
e) Most of the stamps have borders/ frames of parallelogram shapes but asymmetric borders/frames can also be seen.

e.g., Stamps 2004e with only horizontal borders, (left) complementing the continuous horizontal layout of Buddhist monastic art, and stamp 2000a (right) with a frame in the shape of a leaf from Bodhi tree, a Buddhist symbol.



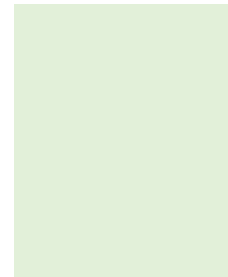
Table 4.7 – Variation of Border on Vesak stamps

4.1.8 Variation of Shape

Component- Shape	
Definition- The silhouette of the stamp	
Scale- 1:1	
Source- Observations	
a) All Vesak stamps of Sri Lanka are only of rectangular shapes, with different proportions. e.g., 1976a, 1978a, 1981a, 1990c and 2006j (top to bottom) produced in rectangular shapes, of different proportions.	
	
	
	
	
	

b) Individual stamps of the same Vesak stamp issue, are of the same shape.

e.g., Stamp 1981a, 1981b and 1981c (left to right) of 1981 Vesak issue, are of the same shape.



c) It is notable that majority of the stamps that depict temple paintings are of long rectangular shapes (greater in length than the height), complementing the layout of the paintings drawn in continuous horizontal sections.

e.g., Stamps 1976a, 1990c, 2004c (top to bottom) depicting temple paintings of Sri Lanka are made in long rectangular shapes.

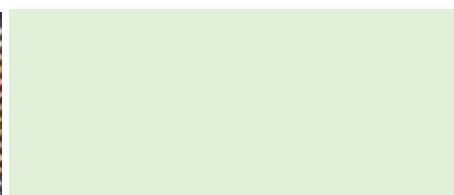
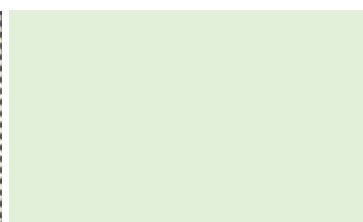


Table 4.8 – Variation of Shape in Vesak stamps

4.1.9 Variation of Size

Component- Size																																																			
Definition- The physical dimensions of the stamp																																																			
Scale- 1:1																																																			
Source- Observations																																																			
a) The vertical and horizontal dimensions in Vesak stamps of Sri Lanka range from 24.5mm- 60mm, in accordance with the UPU guideline that each vertical/ horizontal dimension should not be less than 15mm or more than 60mm. e.g., Stamps 1985c measuring 25mm x 29mm (left), 1990c measuring 42mm x 30mm (middle) and 2006j measuring 60mm x 25mm (right). Scale= 1:1 																																																			
b) The most common size that Vesak stamps are produced in can be identified as 41x 30 mm, which is used interchangeably for both portrait and landscape layouts. e.g., Stamps 2002b measuring 41mm x 30 with a horizontal layout (top) and 2020a measuring 30 mm x 41 mm with a vertical layout (bottom). <table><tr><th>Size (mm)</th><th>No. of stamps</th><th>Total</th></tr><tr><td>25x 29</td><td>3</td><td>3</td></tr><tr><td>25.5 x 36</td><td>3</td><td>3</td></tr><tr><td>29 x 36</td><td>3</td><td>3</td></tr><tr><td>29.9 x 29.5</td><td>4</td><td>4</td></tr><tr><td>29.9 x 40.5</td><td>4</td><td>4</td></tr><tr><td>30 x 40</td><td>4</td><td>4</td></tr><tr><td>30 x 41</td><td>4+4+4+4+3</td><td>19</td></tr><tr><td>32 x 40</td><td>4</td><td>4</td></tr><tr><td>39 x 24.5</td><td>2</td><td>2</td></tr><tr><td>40.6 x 29.8</td><td>4+4</td><td>8</td></tr><tr><td>40.8 x 29.8</td><td>4</td><td>4</td></tr><tr><td>41 x 30</td><td>2+2+3+3+3</td><td>13</td></tr><tr><td>42 x 30</td><td>4+4</td><td>8</td></tr><tr><td>48 x 28.5</td><td>6</td><td>6</td></tr><tr><td>60x 25</td><td>4+10+4</td><td>14</td></tr><tr><td>60X 30</td><td>1+1</td><td>2</td></tr></table> 	Size (mm)	No. of stamps	Total	25x 29	3	3	25.5 x 36	3	3	29 x 36	3	3	29.9 x 29.5	4	4	29.9 x 40.5	4	4	30 x 40	4	4	30 x 41	4+4+4+4+3	19	32 x 40	4	4	39 x 24.5	2	2	40.6 x 29.8	4+4	8	40.8 x 29.8	4	4	41 x 30	2+2+3+3+3	13	42 x 30	4+4	8	48 x 28.5	6	6	60x 25	4+10+4	14	60X 30	1+1	2
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60X 30	1+1	2																																																	

c) Smallest Vesak stamp measures as 25mm x 29mm, while the largest Vesak stamp measures as 60mm x 30mm.e.g., comparison of stamp 2016d, issued in the largest size (left) and stamp 1985d issued in the smallest size (right)



f) It is hard to notice any pattern in the sizes of early stamps, but within the last two decades time, a uniformity in the use of sizes can be noticed.

e.g., For General Vesak stamps 2009b (left), 2020b (right) the most recurring size of 41x 30 mm, is used interchangeably for both vertical and horizontal layouts.



e.g., Special Vesak issues; Vesak 2006-2550 years of Buddhism (left), and Vesak 2017- United Nations Day of Vesak (right) consists of 50 and 20 individual stamps, measuring 60mm x25mm each.



e.g., Stamps issued making the venue of State Vesak festival; 2016d (left) and 2022d (right) are issued in the same size 60mm x 30mm.



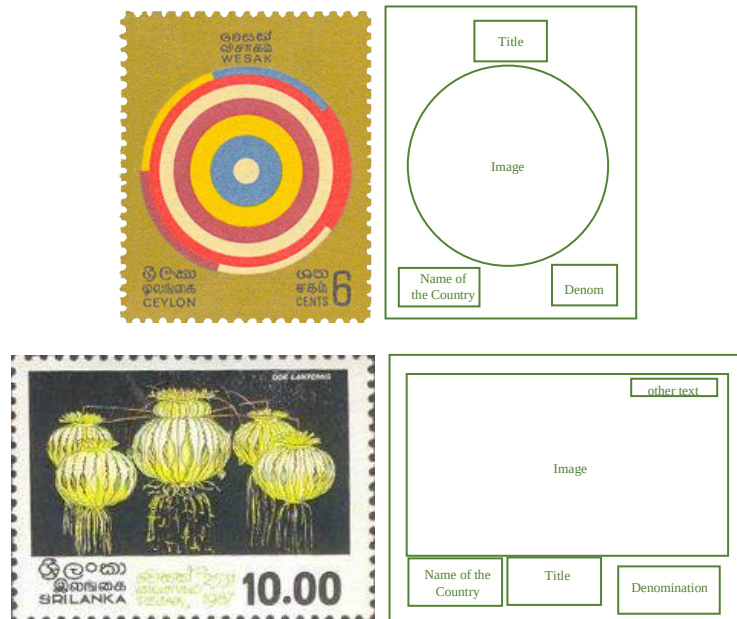
Table 4.9 – Variation of Size in Vesak stamps

4.1.10 Variation of Layout

Component- Layout
Definition- The placement of the components on the stamp
Source- Observations
a) Vesak Stamps come in horizontal and vertical layouts (distinguished based on the orientation of the image). e.g., Stamp 1990a of horizontal layout (left) and stamp 1969c vertical layout (right)  
b) Image (or the pictorial component) occupying a larger portion of the total surface area of the stamp, can be identified as the most dominant visual component of the Vesak stamps (scale=1.5:1). e.g., Stamps 1981a (top) and 1987c (bottom) showing the image covering the most of the surface area of the stamp.  Image other text Name of the Country Denom  Image other text Name of the Country Title Denomination

c) Textual elements such as are laid out towards the edges of the stamp, making space for the image.

e.g., Stamps 1969b (top) and 1987d (bottom) composed with the image in the middle and texts around the edges of the stamps.



d) Individual stamps of the same Vesak issue follow a similar layout with changes made based on the image.

e.g., Stamps 1981a, 1981b and 1981c from the 1981 Vesak stamp issue (top) following a similar layout (bottom).



e) Visual order of the components/ priority given to certain elements has changed over time.

i) In earliest stamps, no fixed order of components is seen.

e.g., In stamp 1969a (left) the visual order runs as the Image, Title, Name of the country and Denomination, while in 1981b (right) the visual order runs as Image, Name of the country, Denomination, Title, and additional details.



ii) Later, and as seen on the majority of stamps, the order of visual components has been set as; the Image, Name of the country, Denomination, Title, additional titles, and year of the issue.

e.g., Stamps 1998a (left) and 1987d (right) composed in the order; the Image, Name of the country, Denomination, Title, additional title.



f) Majority of Vesak stamps can be seen as well laid out but a few cases of visual clutter are observed.

e.g., In stamps 1998a, 1985c, 1994b (left to right) text is not readable due to overlapping with image.



Table 4.10 – Variation of Layout in Vesak stamps

4.2 Analysis; Phase 2 - Semiotic meaning making in Vesak stamps

This section presents the semiotic meaning making in Vesak stamps, as identified during the visual content analysis of the sample of stamps. It was adopted that a postage stamp as an artefact and a visual text generate meaning through its; (1) function and connection to the big picture, (2) style, (3) iconic associations, (4) cultural allusions, (5) connections to social groups, (6) individual experiences of people and (7) additional meanings acquired in specific context, is discussed using observational data and qualitative data from interviews with focus groups (Refer section 3.5.2)

4.2.1 Function and connection to the big picture.

Attribute- Function and connection to the big picture
Definition- Function of Vesak stamps of Sri Lanka and its connection the world
Source- Observations, experts review
a) Issued to mark the International Buddhist religious commemoration Vesak, celebrated on the Full Moon Day of Vesak.
b) Communicates religion Buddhism and Vesak festival as a part of the history, identity and culture of Sri Lanka. e.g. Stamps 2000b (right) depicting the historic event of planting Jaya Sri Maha Bodhi-the oldest recorded human-planted tree (Guinness, 2011) and 1985b (left) depicting people in national costumes of Sri Lanka celebrating Vesak.
c) Issued to publicize Vesak as a commemoration of national importance recognized by the Sri Lankan government. e.g., stamp 2022d titled 'State Vesak festival' issued in addition to the general Vesak stamp issue.

d) Issued to be a part of United Nation's Vesak celebrations, underlining the religious and cultural ties between UN member countries.

e.g., Stamps 2017b, 2017c from the UN Day of Vesak 2017 series, depicting Borobudur in Indonesia and Horyu-Ji temple in Japan, respectively.



e) Issued showcasing art, artefacts, architecture and monuments of religious, aesthetic and archaeological value, from Sri Lanka.

e. g. Stamps 2002a (left) 2006j depicting paintings from Dambulla rock Temple, and Moonstone from Magul Maha Vihara, Lahugala.



f) Issued to showcase artefacts from other countries of the world.

e.g., Stamps 1981a, 1981b, 1981c depicting Buddhist artefacts; Bas relief from Sanchi- India, Silk painting of *Bodisatva* from Central Asia, *Bodisatva* figurine from Museum of Paris.



g) Issued annually and continuously underlining the political status given to Buddhism as a religion by the constitution of Sri Lanka.

e.g., Vesak stamps were first issued in 1969, then 1976, and again in 1978 and continued annually from 1978 up to date, making them the longest continuing series of thematic stamps in Sri Lanka.

e.g. From 2015 onwards, a special stamp marking the venue of State Vesak Festival, is issued, in addition to the annual Vesak stamp issue.

h) Aimed at communicating ideologies and concepts in Buddhism to audiences.
e.g Stamps 1994a (left) depicting *Dana Paramitha* (Noble virtue of giving) and 2009b (right) depicting meditation.



Table 4.11 – Function of Vesak stamps and their connection to the world

4.2.2 Style

Attribute- Style

Definition- The manner of visual representations on Vesak stamps

Source- Observations, experts review

Visual representation seen on Vesak stamps are mainly of two kinds; realistic and stylized.

a) Realistic representations

Photographs, photo manipulations and realistic illustrations are used on Vesak stamps; as the most immediate and accurate ways of representing tangible artefacts, architecture and monuments (Refer section 4.1.3c).

e.g., Stamp 1978a depicting Bas-relief panel from Borobudur (top) using a photograph, and stamp 1987c depicting Octagonal Vesak lanterns (bottom) using a realistic illustration.



b) Stylized representations

Stylized illustrations are used on Vesak stamps to represent events from Buddhist literature, historical events, Buddhist ideologies and other conceptual artefacts. Different illustration styles that can be identified are;

i) Style mimicking Buddhist monastic paintings

Majority of illustrated Vesak stamps carry stylistic references to Buddhist monastic painting of Sri Lanka, notably in two occasions; when an existing painting is re-illustrated, and when a new subject is illustrated following the same style. The stylistic similarities can be seen through;

Colour scheme- Use of a set of significant non-vibrant muted colours; Red, Crimson, Vermillion, Yellow, Ochre, Orange, Burnt orange, Sienna, Dark blue, Indigo, Dark Green (Refer section 4.1.5).

Nature of figures- Two dimensional flat abstract figures, Outlined

Layout- composed in continuous horizontal stripes

e.g., 18th century Kandyan style paintings from Dambava temple (left) and stamp 1976e (right) made with an illustration of the scene of the Birth of Buddha, redrawn in the same style.



e.g., 18th century Painting of Bodhi tree from Shailabimbarama, Dodanduwa (left) & illustrations on stamp 1969c (right) with strong similarities in style.



The intentions behind mimicking of Buddhist Monastic painting style can be viewed in two perspectives;

- When used to re-illustrate an existing painting- aimed at presenting the original painting in an accurate way.
- When used to illustrate a new subject following the same style- aimed at communicating using a style that compliments the visual language of the existing religious art- a visual medium that gains currency in the Sri Lankan community

ii) Other styles- comic style, flat graphic style, monochromatic sketches

In some Vesak stamps subjects are represented in artist's/designers' personal styles, as a design choice. Other styles seen include, monochromatic sketches, flat graphics and comic style illustrations.

e.g., Stamp 2000d (left) with comic style visuals, the designer being a comic artist, and stamp 2012a (left) stamp with graphics by a digital designer.



e.g., Stamps 2017a and 2017b from 2017 United Nations Vesak issue of 50 stamps designed by different designers and the coherence is maintained by collectively using a monochromatic sketch style, to depict each subject.



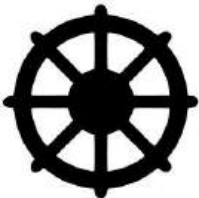
d) All individual stamps in Vesak stamps issue, are created in one visual style.

e.g., Stamps 1987, 1987b, 1987c and 1987d (left to right) of 1987 Vesak stamp issue, depicting Vesak lanterns using realistic illustrations of same style.



Table 4.12 – Semiotic meaning making through style, in Vesak postage stamps

4.2.3 Iconic associations

Attribute- Iconic Associations
Definition- Presence of significant individuals or things representative of its kind, on Vesak stamps
Source- Observations, experts review
a) Vesak stamps present a number of Buddhist Religious icons, such as; International Buddhist flag- Comprises of vertical bands of six colours (blue, yellow, red, white, orange and a spectrum of those colours) and Accepted by The world Fellowship of Buddhists 1950 as a universal symbol of Buddhism. e.g., International Buddhist flag (left) and International Buddhist flag as depicted on stamp 1985d (right).   Dharmachakra- A symbol found in Buddhism and Hinduism. The word ‘Dharma’ is of Sanskrit origin meaning “what is established or firm”. Dharmachakra on Vesak stamps is symbolic of Buddha Dharma (the way that the world is established, as preached by Buddha in his teachings). e.g., Dharmachakra symbol (left) stamp 1999b depicting Dharmachakra.   Bodhi tree (<i>Ficus religiosa</i>)- Bodhi tree or Sacred Fig tree, under which Buddha is believed to have attained the Enlightenment, is considered as an object of worship and pilgrimage across Buddhists communities. e.g., <i>Ficus religiosa</i> tree (left) and stamps 1969a (middle) with an illustration of Bo tree and 2000a(right) with a pictorial zone in the shape of a Bodhi leaf.   

b) Vesak stamps depict several iconic incidents in the history of Sri Lanka. such as,

Planting of Jaya Sri Maha Bodi in Sri Lanka- Jaya Sri Maha Bodhi, is recognized by the Guinness as the oldest known human planted tree. Jaya Sri Maha Bodhi, a sapling from the ancient *Ficus religiosa* tree in Bodhgaya in India sent to Sri Lanka by Buddhist school in India in 236BC, and planted in a dedicated garden in Anuradhapura is considered as a pivotal incident in establishing Buddhism in Sri Lanka.

Writing of Dhamma on Ola leaves at Aluvihare Temple- The incident of Writing *Dhamma* on Ola leaves for the first time, at Aluvihare Matale, Sri Lanka is considered as iconic incident which has contributed largely to the sustenance of Buddhism in Sri Lanka.

e.g., Stamp 2006c (left) depicting the writing of Dhamma on Ola leaves for the first time at Aluvihara temple in Matale, and stamp 2000d (right) depicting planting of Jaya Sri Maha Bodhi in Anuradhapura, and as pivotal incidents in Buddhism in Sri Lanka.



c) Vesak stamps feature iconic works of art, artefacts and architectural monuments of religious, artistic and archaeological value.

e.g., Moonstone from Magul Maha Vihara, Lahugala, considered as one of the best examples of carved moonstones found in Sri Lanka (left) and Vesak stamp 2006j (right) featuring it.



e.g One Pillar Pagoda of Vietnam (left) world renowned for its iconic architecture, and stamp 2017d (right) featuring it.



Table 4.13 –Semiotic meaning making through icons, in Vesak stamps

4.2.4 Cultural allusions

Attribute- Cultural allusions
Definition- Presence of references to what is in society's wider consciousness
Source- Observations, experts review
a) All aspects of culture; Symbols, Language, Norms, values, rituals, artefacts are visualized on Vesak stamps. i) Symbols- A range of religious symbols and non- religious symbols are seen on Vesak stamps. e.g., Stamps 1985d (left) depicting the International Buddhist flag- the universal Buddhist religious symbol, and 1976a (right) depicting 5 cents denomination in Arabic numerals-the widely used number system. ii) Language- Information on Vesak stamps are presented in languages used by local and global audiences. e.g., Stamps 1987a (left) mentioning the name of the country and 2009a (right) mentioning the title in Sinhala, Tamil and English languages. iii) Norms-A range of religious and social norms is publicized through Vesak stamp. e.g., stamps 2009a (left) depicting 'Visiting the Temple on Poya day' and 2012c (right) depicts, 'taking care of the sick', respectively.

iv) Values- Vesak stamps depict Buddhist cultural values which are concurrently considered values in human culture. e.g., Stamps 1994a (left) 7 2020a depicting the ‘Virtue of Giving’ and ‘mental well-being.’



v) Rituals- Stamp 1985b (left), 2006h (right) depicting ‘Religious activities on Vesak full moon day’ and ‘Ritual performances for the Tooth Relic.’



vi) Artefacts- Vesak stamps showcase a variety of both Tangible artefacts of culture. e.g., stamp 1987a (left) 1987c (right) presenting tangible artefacts ‘Bas-relief panels from Borobudur’ and ‘Star lanterns’, respectively.

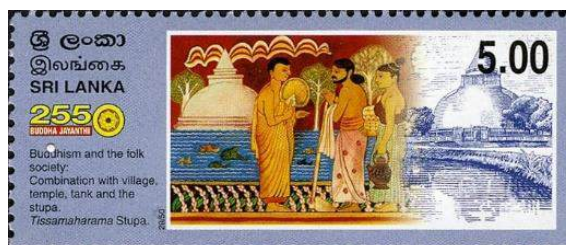


e.g Stamps 2016a (left) & 2020c (right) depicting intangible artefacts; *Jathaka* story (life stories of Buddha from Buddhist literature, and ‘Indigenous medicine’, respectively.

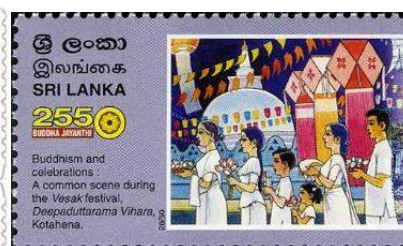
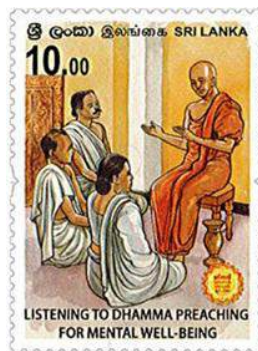


b) Social systems such as ‘Tank - Stupa- Village- temple concept’, Matriarchic Buddhist society can be seen on Vesak stamps.

e.g., Village settlement in Sri Lanka (left), and stamp 2006f (right) on ‘Tank- Stupa- Village-Temple concept’ - where people settle around irrigation for their livelihood of agriculture, and in close association with village temple as a part of the daily life.



e.g., Scene from a Buddhist temple in Anuradhapura Sri Lanka (left) stamps 1979a, 2020a (middle) 2006e (right) depicting the Matriarchic Buddhist society by placing the women in prominent positions in the visual narratives.



c) Visuals of cultural integration can be seen on Vesak stamps

e.g., Karahampitya Subhodharama temple in Dehiwala, Sri Lanka, built in early 1800, with the influence of British Colonial architecture, and stamp 2006g depicting the iconic facade of the temple.



Table 4.14 – Cultural allusions seen in Vesak stamps

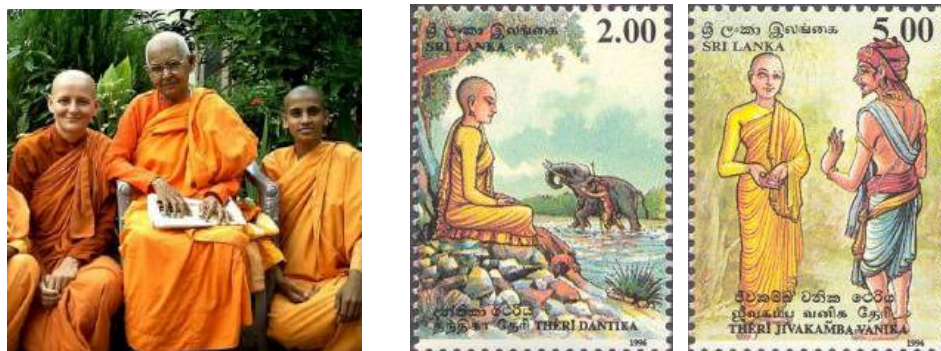
4.2.5 Connection to social groups

Attribute- Connection to social groups
Definition- Relationship of the content seen on Vesak stamps, to different human groups in the society
Source- Observations, experts review
a) The visual content on Vesak stamps relates with different groups of the human society such as; Global Buddhist community- Vesak stamps primarily issued to mark the international religious commemoration Vesak, celebrated on the full moon day of May, relate to the members of the religious group ‘Buddhists’ irrespective of geographical boundaries through; a common purpose (combined commemoration of the Birth, Enlightenment and Passing away of their religious leader Buddha), and common iconography (International Buddhist flag, Bodhi tree etc.) United nations member countries - Through the United Nations Day of Vesak stamps, Vesak festival and Buddhism is marked as a cultural tie that connect the United Nations Member countries. e.g., United Nations Vesak day celebrations (left) and stamp 2017c issued commemorating United Nations Day of Vesak 2017. Sri Lankan folk community- Subjects relating to folk community of Sri Lanka; traditional art (Rock and temple paintings, traditional dances) crafts (Stone carvings, Vesak lanterns), customs and rituals (<i>Perahera</i>, Rituals for Tooth Relic), traditional attire and social systems (Tank- Stupa- Village – Temple concept based around agriculture and Buddhist temple, matriarchic society), on Vesak stamps. e.g., Traditional drummers of Sri Lanka (left) and Perahera-cultural pageant as depicted on stamp 1976e (right.)

Other Buddhist schools- (Buddhist school of India, Buddhist school of Central Asia)- e.g Bas-relief panel from Sanchi India, and Silk painting from Central Asia as depicted on stamps 1981a (left) and 1981b (right) imply of the Buddhist schools and their unique religious art in those geographical areas.



Women- Women and matriarchy (Refer section 4.2.4b) are featured on Vesak stamp visuals. e.g., *Theri-Buddhist nuns* (left) Stamps 1996b and 1996c featuring nuns from Buddhist literature.



Other ethnic/religious groups

e.g., Brahmins of India (left) as represented on stamp 1995d (right)

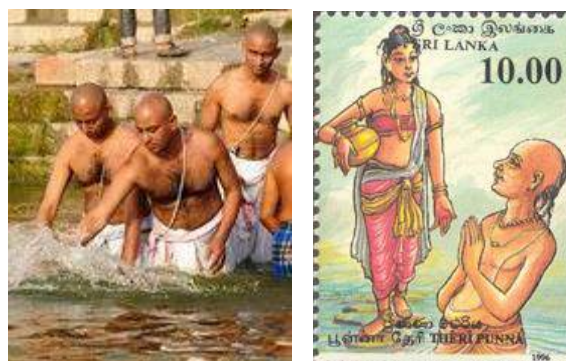


Table 4.15 –Connection of Vesak stamps to social groups

4.2.6 Individual experiences of People

Attribute- Individual experiences of People
Definition- The personal experiences of the individuals about the content seen on Vesak stamps
Source- Observations, experts review
a) The individual experiences on the design and production of Vesak stamps; i) according to the issuing authority Vesak stamps are primarily aimed at communicating the Vesak festival as an important religious and cultural commemoration of Sri Lanka. Up to early 2000, the Philatelic Bureau have selected the subjects to be communicated in Vesak stamps, where the subjects are selected essentially considering the potential of visually representing those subjects in the format of a postage stamp. Currently the subjects are based on a theme predefined by the Ministry of Buddhism and cultural affairs, to be communicated throughout the annual Vesak celebrations, including Vesak stamps, but not necessarily optimal for a visual representation on a postage stamp. ii) according to stamp designers Majority of stamp designers reflected that, designing stamps are important projects in their creative career. Designers also implied two cases where they were not satisfied about the final stamp designs. ○ In some Vesak stamps issues, having to work on pre-selected themes which lacks creative freedom. ○ Despite the fact that Vesak commemorative stamps are an annual fixture, in some years stamp design process have been rushed, due to lack of prior planning and the outcome was not up to the designers' satisfaction. iii) according to stamp collectors Collectors agree upon the fact that Vesak stamps are a product with great potential for collectors looking for curios from other cultures of the world. It is highlighted that the overall visual appeal of a philatelic product as a determining factor when purchasing/acquiring for the collections. Majority of stamps collectors reflected that, compared to the products in the global philatelic market, Sri Lanka lacks innovative and competitive philatelic products. Several areas which were pointed out as causing some less appealing nature in Vesak stamps are; ○ Novelty in the selection of subjects- It was implied that the subjects featured on Vesak stamp has been long associated with temple paintings, and temples of Sri Lanka, even though Vesak festival is multifaceted.

- Clarity of the representations on the stamps- Implied that some Vesak stamps are cluttered and subjects are not clearly visible or pleasing.
e.g., Stamp 2004c with highly saturated analogous colours is seen as a case where subjects/narrative cannot be identified clearly (left). Stamp 2022b depicting an aerial photograph of Budugala Rajamaha Vihara, is seen as not communicating any religious/ historic significance of the temple but a generic visual of the location.



b) The visual content on Vesak stamps relates with peoples personal and past experiences, as in many other visual representations.

e.g., Buddha rays on stamp 1969b (right), related to childhood experience of making a *Buduras Mala* /Buddha ray decoration-a popular retro Vesak decoration where a cardboard wheel printed with blue, yellow, red, white and orange circles (left) is mounted behind the head of a Buddha statue and spun using a toy motor.



e.g., Some individuals see the trend of depicting Buddhist temples of a certain geographical area in recent Vesak stamps, as a preference of a political regime that governed Sri Lanka during the time, and biased to where the state Vesak festival is held, irrespective of other significant venues of religious/archaeological importance to be represented on a postage stamp. e.g., Sandagiri stupa and Bodhi tree, both from the same temple in Southern Sri Lanka, as depicted in two closely issued stamps 2016c (left) and 2022a (right).



c) It was revealed that majority of participants do not perceive Vesak stamps as a memorable aspect of Vesak, but rather a ‘distant item’ of Vesak.

e.g., 60% of the participants did not mention Vesak stamps in their first few (4) responses when asked to name a few things that relates with Vesak. Only 30% of the participants immediately mentioned Vesak stamps as related to Vesak.

Aspects mentioned as relating to Vesak (in the order of frequency) include;

- 1)The birth, enlightenment and passing away of Buddha
- 2)Religious observances
- 3)Vesak decorations (Vesak lanterns, pandols, light decorations)
- 4)Dansal / free food stalls
- 5)Night tours to enjoy Vesak festivities
- 6)Two-day vacation (Catching up with family and friends, unwinding from work)
- 7)Vesak Celebrations in Colombo (Vesak zones, large scale government sponsored Vesak events and decorations)
- 8)Charity events (Blood donations, alms giving etc)
- 9)Month of May (Changes in environment, Breezy weather)
- 10)Community engagement (in organizing Dansal, charity events and Vesak decorations in public areas,)
- 11)Traditional/ Nostalgic Vesak Celebrations (Oil lamps, *Gok kola* decors, Vesak greeting cards)
- 12)Vesak *Bakthi Gee*
- 13)Vesak/ Buddhist devotional songs (Iconic Buddhist devotional songs by classical vocalists Mohideen Baig, W.D Amaradeva, Edward Jayakody, Sunil Edirisnghe, T.M Jayaratne etc.)
- 14)Pop up stores selling Vesak decorations
- 15)Vesak stamps
- 16)Vesak Celebrations in other countries (Sri Lankan expats celebrating from their respective locations)

Two reasons why Vesak stamps do not have such immediacy in communicating Vesak, were pointed out;

- Today the physical postage stamps do not often come in contact with the public, when compared to other media of communicating Vesak (e.g., Television, social media and other digital media, Visual merchandising at shops etc.) highlighting that there is no prompt way for the general public to see the Vesak stamp issue of the year.
- People’s perceptions and experiences of Vesak have been changed largely over time, and the visual representations on Vesak stamps do not necessarily compliment those new aspects of Vesak.

Table 4.16 – Individual experiences of people on Vesak stamps

4.2.7 Additional Meanings

Attribute- Additional meanings
Definition- Any additional meanings conveyed in Vesak Stamps
Source- Observations, experts review
a) Vesak stamps issued in May 2020, a time where the global Covid pandemic was ongoing, communicate ways for well- being, in solidarity with the ongoing global health and humanitarian challenge. e.g., Stamps 2020a, 2020b and 2020c issued in May 2020 show people listening to Dhamma preaching for mental well-being, a scene of preparing indigenous medicine and nursing the sick, as ways to maintain well- being during the pandemic.


Table 4.17 –Additional meanings conveyed in Vesak stamps

4.3 Discussion

4.3.1 Summary- Variation of visual composition in Vesak stamps of Sri Lanka.

The key findings of the visual content analysis of Vesak stamps can be summarized below. The name of the country as mentioned on Vesak stamps has changed, reflecting the political changes that happened along the timeline in Sri Lanka. The island gaining independence from British colonizers in 1948 as the 'Dominion of Ceylon' and became a sovereign state- the Republic of Sri Lanka in 1972. is evident on 1969 Vesak stamps bearing the name 'Ceylon' and 1976 Vesak stamps and all Vesak stamps issued afterwards bearing the name 'Sri Lanka'. It is in practice to show the name of the country in three languages Sinhala, English and Tamil, the three widely used languages in Sri Lanka, at all times.

Denomination or the value of the stamps is shown using the currency unit of Sri Lanka, Rupees and Cents. It is in practice to show the Denomination prominently by giving it better visibility among other components on the stamp through scaling, understandably postal prepayment being an essential purpose of a postage stamp. Individual stamps in a Vesak stamp issue are of different denominations, usually of postage values for domestic postcards, domestic letter post and domestic registered post. However, it is notable that Vesak stamps are not issued in the postage values complementing for international mail.

Image component on Vesak stamps, offers a range of visuals; such as Buddhist symbols, Buddhist arts and crafts, Buddhist literature, Life events of Buddha, Historical events of religious importance, Vesak festival, religious artefacts, monuments and archaeological sites from Sri Lanka and other countries, Buddhist society, Rituals/ practices and Concepts/ ideology from Buddhism. The majority of the stamps depict imagery of religious art with a significant bias towards temple paintings of Sri Lanka. Meanwhile, Vesak decorations can be identified as the least seen type of imagery on Vesak stamps. To look at the visual style in Vesak stamps, the visual representations are of two kinds; realistic and stylized. Photographs and realistic illustrations are used on Vesak stamps; as the most immediate and accurate ways of representing tangible artefacts, architecture and monuments. Stylized illustrations are used on Vesak stamps to represent events from Buddhist literature, historical events, Buddhist ideologies and other conceptual artefacts.

A significant style that can be noticed is illustrations mimicking Buddhist monastic paintings. The intentions behind mimicking this style can be understood in two perspectives.

- When used to re- illustrate an existing painting- aimed at presenting the original painting in an accurate way.
- When used to illustrate a new subject following the same style- aimed at communicating using a style that compliments the visual language of the existing religious art- a visual medium that gains currency in the Sri Lankan community.

In a few Vesak stamps artist's/designers' personal styles, monochromatic sketches, flat graphic style, and comic style used as a design choice.

A significant group of non-vibrant muted colours; Red, Crimson, Vermillion, Yellow, Ochre, Orange, Burnt orange, Sienna, Dark blue, Indigo, Dark Green are repeatedly seen on Vesak stamps. Those colour groups were seen on more than 50% of the sample of Vesak stamps. This affinity towards certain colours can be attributed to the fact that nearly half of the Vesak stamps (46%) depict, either temple paintings of Sri Lanka, or illustrations inspired from the temple paintings.

Multilingual script (Sinhala, Tamil & English) is seen on Vesak stamps. Two significant categories of typefaces can be seen on Vesak stamps;

- Hand-drawn typefaces- Hand drawn as a part of the illustration, when the whole stamp is hand drawn as a single composition.
- Digital typefaces- Used when adding the textual elements of the stamp, digitally using a computer.

The significant changes in typography on Vesak stamps have occurred when stamps changed from being fully hand drawn to being digitally composed. Hand drawn letters on hand drawn stamps are rarely replicated (as a design choice and/or being hard to replicate) but, the digital fonts on digitally composed stamps are being replicated often (as a design choice and/ or being easier to replicate). In early stamps, Visual variations of lettering such as; Different hand styles (Cursive hand & Geometric hand), Letters with different weight distribution around the axis (low contrast & high contrast), Letters of different geometry (Rectilinear & Curvilinear), Letters of different width (Condensed & Wide), Letters of different weight (Thin & Bold) are used to show different textual elements, creating visual hierarchy between them. However, along the timeline, the diversity of type is observed to become lesser and a repetition in type is observed, evidenced by both of the instances;

- When one typeface is used for all the text on an individual stamp,
- When the same set of type is used in Vesak stamps issued in consecutive years.

It is highlighted that all Vesak stamps issued by Sri Lanka are only rectangular shapes, of different dimensions. The dimensions of the Vesak stamps follow the sizing guide by UPU, (that each vertical/ horizontal dimension should not be less than 15 mm or exceed 60 mm). The most common size that Vesak stamps are produced in is 41x30 mm, which is used interchangeably for both portrait and landscape layouts. The sizes of early hand-drawn stamps have varied largely, resulting in different proportions, contributing to a variety of shapes. In contrast in the stamps issued within the last two decades, a uniformity in the use of sizes and shapes can be noticed. Either driven by technical restrictions or as a design choice showing no notable diversifying/ experimentation with size and shape, despite the size and shape being highly impactful elements in any visual presentation.

There is no observable pattern in the order of the components in earliest Vesak stamps and later the order of the components has been consistent as; the Image, Name of the country, Denomination, Title, additional titles, and year of the issue. Majority of Vesak stamps can be seen as well laid out but a few cases of visual clutter resulting from text overlapping with image is noticed.

Component	Observations
Image	Visual material - Highly based on illustrations, when there is other visual material that could be used to create the image.
	Colours - affinity towards a set of non-vibrant muted colours (Red, Crimson, Vermillion, Yellow, Ochre, Orange, burnt orange, Sienna, Dark blue, Indigo, Dark Green) found among top 6 colours on more than 50% of Vesak stamps.
	Style – Mimicking Buddhist monastic art of Sri Lanka. Nearly half of the Vesak stamps (46%) depict, either photographs/ illustrations of existing temple paintings, or other subjects illustrated using the style of temple paintings.
	Subjects - The subjects featured on Vesak stamps, are heavily biased toward Rock and temple paintings of Sri Lanka, among other visuals of Buddhist culture and Vesak culture.
Typography	Technology - Humanistic typefaces on hand drawn stamps have generated a sense of novelty and variety in each stamp issue, where digital typefaces on digitally composed stamps generate a sense of uniformity.
	Type Diversity – Hand drawn letters are rarely replicated (as a design choice and/or being hard to replicate) but, the digital fonts are being reused (as a design choice and/ or being easier to replicate). Along the timeline, the diversity of type used on Vesak stamps is observed to lessen and a repetition is seen, in both cases where; (i) a single typeface is used for all the text on an individual stamp, (ii) the same set of typefaces is used in Vesak stamps issued in consecutive years.
Shape	All Vesak stamps issued by Sri Lanka are only of rectangular shapes, either driven by technical restrictions, and/ or as a design choice.
Size	The most common size that Vesak stamps are produced in is 41x 30 mm, which is used interchangeably for both portrait and landscape layouts, and been repetitively used for the last two decades time.

Table 4.18 – Repetitive tendencies seen in the visual composition of Vesak stamps of Sri Lanka

4.3.2 Summary- Semiotic meaning-making in Vesak stamps of Sri Lanka

The study confirmed how postage stamps as a visual text, create meaning in different levels through its; (1) function and connection to the big picture, (2) style, (3) iconic associations, (4) cultural allusions, (5) connections to social groups, (6) individual experiences of people and (7) additional meanings acquired in an out of the context. The functions of Vesak stamps and their connection to the world were seen as; marking the international Buddhist Religious commemoration of Vesak, publicizing Buddhism and Vesak festival as a part of the history, identity and culture of Sri Lanka, strengthening religious and cultural ties between countries where Buddhism is practiced, showcasing artefacts and monuments of religious, aesthetic and archaeological value from Sri Lanka and the world as well as and transferring Concepts and Buddhist ideology to the audiences.

Stylistic approaches are used in Vesak stamps in a meaningful manner. Photographs, photo manipulations and realistic illustrations to depict tangible artefacts and architecture as the most immediate and accurate manner of representing those subjects whereas stylized illustrations are used to depict events from Buddhist literature, historical events, Buddhist ideologies and other conceptual artefacts. However, it was revealed that the repetitive use of the style of temple paintings can make people overlook the subjects presented in the stamps because at a glance the image is perceived as an already seen mundane visual. On the other hand, a few recent stamps done in different styles such as flat graphics, and comic style have also received comments such as ‘overpowering the subject’, ‘not so Vesak looking’, presumably due to the long association of Vesak stamps with a certain traditional style.

The use of icons to make meanings in Vesak stamps is powerful. Buddhist Religious icons such as the international Buddhist flag, Dhamma Charkra, Bodhi tree, Iconic incidents of religious and historical importance as well as iconic works of art, crafts & architecture of religious and archaeological value both from Sri Lanka and the other parts of the world are depicted in Vesak stamps. It was reflected that the use of these icons, in other words choosing of significant individuals, events or things representative of its kind in the stamp visuals aids in following purposes;

- Aids in presenting complex narratives withing the confines of the small space of a postage stamp.
- Aids in transcending language, cultural and geographical barriers between audiences in different parts of the word and communicate through visual cues.
- Aids in creating a sense of unity and solidarity among Buddhist communities from different parts of the world through the use of universal Buddhist icons.

Presenting cultural allusions or references to what is in society's wider consciousness is evident in Vesak stamps. All aspects of culture; symbols, language, norms, values, rituals, artefacts are visualized on Vesak stamps. The visual content on Vesak stamps

relates with different groups human society such as Global Buddhist community, Sri Lankan folk community, Other Buddhist schools, Women, Other ethnic/religious groups, and marginalized groups, to make different meanings.

As for many other visual representations, the past and current experiences of the individuals play an important role in meanings made through Vesak stamps. It is notable that in public perceptions, Vesak stamps do not instantaneously relate with Vesak festival, but rather a ‘distant’ commemorative tool of Vesak. The reason why the Vesak stamps seem to be somewhat ‘distant’ in communicating Vesak, were attributed to two factors;

- Today the physical postage stamps do not often come in contact with the public, when compared to mass media, social media and other media of communicating Vesak, highlighting that there is no prompt way for the general public to see the Vesak stamp issue of the year.
- People’s perceptions and experiences of Vesak have been changed largely over time, and the visual representations on Vesak stamps do not necessarily compliment those new aspects of Vesak.

Other aspects mentioned as relating to Vesak (in the order of frequency) include; 1)The birth, enlightenment and passing away of Buddha 2)Religious observances, 3)Vesak decorations (Vesak lanterns, pandols, light decorations), 4)Dansal / free food stalls , 5)Night tours to enjoy Vesak festivities, 6)Two-day vacation (Catching up with family and friends, unwinding from work), 7)Vesak Celebrations in Colombo (Vesak zones, Large scale government sponsored Vesak events and decorations), 8)Charity events (Blood donations, alms giving etc), 9)Month of May (Changes in environment, Breezy weather), 10)Community engagement (in organizing Dansal, charity events and Vesak decorations in public areas etc.), 11) Traditional/ Nostalgic Vesak Celebrations (Oil lamps, Gok kola decors, Vesak greeting cards), 12)Vesak Bakthi Gee , 13)Vesak/ Buddhist devotional songs (Iconic Buddhist devotional songs by classical vocalists Mohideen Baig, W.D Amaradeva, Edward Jayakody, Sunil Edirisnghe, T.M Jayaratne etc.), 14)Pop up stores selling Vesak decorations 15)Vesak stamps 16)Vesak Celebrations in other countries (Sri Lankan expats celebrating from their respective locations) where many of these aspects are undeniable parts of Vesak culture but not represented in Vesak stamps studied.

It was also evident that Vesak stamps can be designed to carry additional meanings such as in the case of Vesak stamps issued during Covid pandemic was designed in solidarity with the ongoing global health and humanitarian challenge.

All kinds of meaning-making in Vesak stamps should directly or indirectly contribute to the primary purpose of Vesak stamps; commemorating and archiving Vesak in public memory. A few factors seen as interfering with this purpose are summarized below.

Function and connection to the big picture.	Reaching target audience- i) Although Vesak stamps are targeted at communicating to an international audience (marking an international religious commemoration, reinforcing religious and cultural ties between countries, transferring ideology and concepts in Buddhism to global audiences etc) all Vesak stamps are issued only in values used for the domestic mail. ii) Vesak stamps are seen as somewhat ‘distant’ item of Vesak, since physical postage stamps are not often met in daily lives today, and there is a lack of a prompt way for general public to come across the Vesak stamp of the year.
Style	Repetitive styles- The repetitive use of the style of temple paintings can make people overlook the subjects presented in the stamps as at a glance the image is perceived as an already seen mundane visual. New styles- A Few recent stamps done in different styles such as flat graphics, and comic style received comments such as ‘overpowering the subject’, ‘not so Vesak looking’, presumably due to the long association of Vesak stamps with a certain traditional style.
Individual experiences of people	Relatability- People’s perceptions and experiences of Vesak have been updated over time, but the visual representations on Vesak stamps do not necessarily compliment those new aspects of Vesak. Dansal / free food stalls, Night tours to enjoy Vesak festivities, Vesak decorations in Colombo, Charity events such as Blood donations, alms giving etc, Changes in environment in the month of May, Community engagement in Vesak related events, Traditional/ Nostalgic Vesak Celebrations, Vesak/ Buddhist devotional songs, Pop up stores selling Vesak decorations and Sri Lankans celebrating Vesak from other countries were mentioned as experiences of Vesak but clearly under-represented in Vesak stamps.

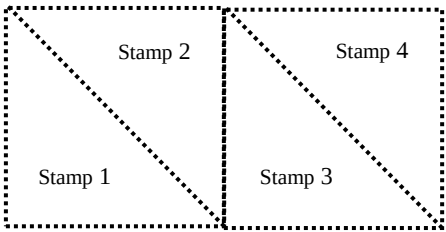
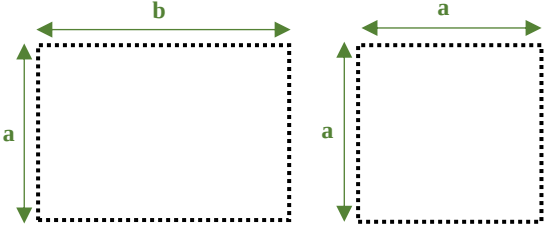
Table 4.19 –Factors interfering with meaning- making in Vesak stamps

4.4 Recommendations

Based on the repetitive tendencies seen in visual composition in Vesak stamps (Figure 4.18) and the factors interfering with meaning- making in Vesak stamps (Table 4.19) as an attempt to present knowledge that would aid in making informed design choices for better philatelic products, the following recommendations can be made.

4.4.1 Recommendations for Stamp Designers/Stamp Issuing Authorities

Component	Recommendations	Factors to be considered
Subject	i) Featuring other subjects of interest related to Vesak (e.g., Featuring other popular elements of Vesak such as Vesak decorations, Flowers used in Buddhist practices, Vesak music, How younger generations see Vesak etc.) ii) Selection of concepts/ ideologies from Buddhism which are relatable the whole world and current affairs. (e.g., sustainability, peace, social responsibility, equality etc.)	Has to align with the intentions of the government. Has to meet the social, political, religious and ethical conditions. Has to be powerful enough to communicate Vesak to local and global audiences alike.
Image	i)Use of other types of visual material (e.g photographs, prints, scanned images) ii)Use of other visual styles (e.g flat graphic style, comic style, abstract paintings, contemporary art styles etc.)	Style/ manner of representation should complement the subject and the visual narrative.
Typography	i) To create uniqueness and diversity- Use of unique typefaces (e.g., Use of Hand drawn lettering extracted from early stamps, Lettering by hand whenever a manual illustration is done for a stamp. ii)To build consistency- Use of a dedicated set of typefaces (e.g., Using an existing typeface with visual variants, introducing a dedicated typeface to be used on Postage stamps of Sri Lanka.	Typeface could be multiscript; Sinhala, English & Tamil, to be used in multilingual texts. Typeface could contain a family of fonts, to be used to create visual hierarchy.

Shape	i) Creating stamps in basic shapes that are already in production and used for other thematic stamps. e.g., Square, Round, Triangular ii) Using the current easy-to-produce rectangular shapes creatively; by laying out the stamps in a tessellated manner.  iii) Using the shape to compliment the image (e.g Stamps featuring octagonal Vesak lanterns issued in octagonal shape)	Technical restraints, Optimum use of printing surface
Size	Scaling the dimensions to create rectangles of different proportions, leading to a variety in shapes. e.g., Scaling the dimensions to make a square shape, instead of Rectangle. 	UPU's guide for the size of postage stamps; that each vertical/horizontal dimension should not be less than 15mm or more than 60mm.
User engagement	i) Incorporating other Audio / Visual features in to the stamps e.g., Using a QR Code on Vesak stamps to watch a video on Vesak lanterns, Using QR code on Vesak stamps to view an animated Buddhist story/concept ii) Incorporating other sensory/ exploratory features in to the stamps e.g., Scratch off stamps revealing Buddhist scripts, Stamps featuring Glow- in the-dark Vesak decorations, Scented stamps featuring flowers from Buddhist literature.	Time and cost for production of other audio-visual resources (cinematic videos, animations etc.) The visual on the physical stamp must be interesting and impactful to get the user to engage (to scan the QR code/ scratch off/ sniff etc.)

Design process	i) Opening up Vesak stamp designing to public, primarily to gather visual interpretations of Vesak, from the public ii) Proposing a set of subjects (ideal for visual presentation on a stamp) for Vesak stamps each year, other than working on subjects selected by the Ministry, (not essentially selected considering the visual presentation aspect) iii) Stamp artist/ illustrator (who are involved in making the artwork for the image component) and graphic designer at the philatelic bureau (who are involved in adding other elements, and composing the stamps) working more closely and collaboratively, treating the stamp as a single composition and making informed design decisions.	Making sure that the selected visuals; align with the intentions of the issuer, meet the social, political, religious and ethical conditions, and also powerful enough to communicate Vesak to local and global audiences alike. Making sure the subjects are ideal for visual presentations, as well as meet the social, political, religious and ethical conditions Making sure both the stamp artist/ illustrator and the graphic designer work towards a common goal.
Promotion	i) Issuing Vesak stamps in denominations used for international mail ii) While using mass media to officially communicate the launch of stamps, optimizing the use of social media for; a) Communicating the launch of new stamps(e.g, Facebook posts, reels) b) Virtual exhibiting of stamps (e.g., Instagram highlights for each theme and carousel posts for each set of stamps)	Other denominations that the individual stamps of the series are issued in Social media strategy and content plan.

	c) To create engagement and user generated content (e.g., flagging photos under the hashtag of #vesakstamps #digitalphilately) d) To promote collection. (e.g., social media campaigns, promotional videos, dedicated Hashtags, giveaways)	
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Table 4.20 –Recommendations for designers/ stamp issuing authority of Sri Lanka

4.4.2 Recommendations for further research

By the end of this study, to recommend a few areas that further research could be conducted are;

Typography in Postage stamps- Since a postage stamp is composed of both visual and textual elements, by the end of this study it was clear the letters on a postage stamp are as significant and impactful as the image.

Perspectives of users of postage stamps - Government’s plan to communicate diverse messages through the medium of Postage stamps, and how users decode those messages are yet to be discovered.

Visual representations on other thematic stamps-The framework used for the visual analysis in this study is applicable for a corpus of stamps of a different theme as well, and to study how those postage stamps communicate as a whole composition (A different approach than most of the studies on postage stamps based only on the image component).

As concluding remarks, the knowledge gained at the end of this research contributes to the body of knowledge on postage stamps as form of visual communication, in a few ways. Primarily it addresses a long existing research gap for a scientific study on Sri Lankan postage stamps, in terms of visual composition. While raising a framework useful for analysing the visual content on any postage stamp, this study specifically analysed the variation of visual composition in Vesak postage stamps of Sri Lanka. The comprehensive knowledge gained on variation of each visual component over time, contribute to understand what has been done in the Sri Lankan context so far, and what is potential, to elevate stamp designs. The knowledge and recommendations presented for the designers and authorities regulating stamp design programs, could be referred to, when planning the visual content on postage stamps. The study confirmed the role of a postage stamp as a communication tool and its significance as a tangible movable cultural heritage item, hence the importance of mindfully designing stamps which suit the global philatelic market is highlighted. Collectively it contributes to the literature on postage stamps; a historical yet evolving form of visual communication.

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Appendix A- Postage stamps issued by Sri Lanka (from 1948- 2023) according to thematic categories.

Thematic categories			No. of stamp issues
Administration	Independence	////	9
	Parliament	////	8
	Administrative bodies	////	10
	Development projects/ policies	//// //// //// //// //// ////	35
	Military	//// ////	13
Economy	Agriculture	//// ////	12
	Ceylon tea	////	4
	Rubber	///	3
	Coconut	//	2
	Gemstones	///	3
	Other industries and exports	////	5
	Corporate organizations	//// //// //// //// //// ///	29
	Professionals' organizations	//// ////	12
Science & Technology	Meteorology	/	1
	Medicine	//	2
	Chemistry	//	2
	Information technology	///	3
	Energy	/	1
Transport	Transport	//	2
	Railway	////	7
	Aviation	///	3
	Shipping	/	1
	Classic cars	/	1
Communication	Post & philately	//// //// //// //// //// //// //// //// /	41
	Telecommunication	//// //// /	11
	Television	/	1
	Radio	//	2
	Newspaper	/	1
Health		//// //// //// //// //// ///	28
Education	Schools	//// //// //// //// //// //// //// //// //// //// //// //// //// //// //	72
	Universities	//// //// //// /	16
	Pirivena Education	//// //	7
	Vocational Education	////	5
	Mahapola scholarship	//// /	6
Environment	Conservation	//// //// /	11
	Climate change	//	2
	Flora & Fauna	//// //// //// //// //// ////	38
	Landscapes & Destinations, National parks	//// ////	15

Tourism		//// //	7
International Affairs	British Royal/ Commonwealth	///	3
	SAARC	//// /	6
	United Nations	//// //	7
	Non-aligned Nations	//	2
	Diplomatic Relations	//// //// ////	15
Individuals	Political figures	//// //// //// //// //// //// //// //// //// //// //// ////	60
	Religious figures	//// //// //// //// //// //// //// //// /	41
	National heroes	//// //// //// /	16
	Scholars, artists, scientists, sportsmen	//// //// //// //// //// //// //// //// //// //// //// //// //// //// ////	75
	Famous tuskers	///	3
Social themes	Refugees	/	1
	Indigenous people	///	4
	Human rights	///	3
	Universal franchise	/	1
	Labour	//// ///	8
	Women	//	2
	Youth	//// ///	9
	Children	//// //// //	12
	Elderly	/	1
	Differently abled	///	4
	Anti- Drugs	//	2
	Anti- corruption	/	1
	Peace	///	4
	Population , housing & family plan	//// /	6
	Girl Guilds and Boy scouts	//// //// //	12
	Non- profit organizations	//// //// ////	15
Religion & ethnicity	Buddhist religious & cultural institutions	//// //// //// //// //// ////	30
	Christian religious & cultural institutions	//// //// //// //// //// //	27
	Muslim religious & cultural institutions	//// /	6
	Hindu religious & cultural institutions	//	2
	Malay religious & cultural institutions	//	2
	Moor religious & cultural institutions	//	2
	Historical events	//// //// //// //// //// //// /	36
Traditional culture	Traditional art	/	1
	Traditional crafts	////	5
	Traditional masks & rituals	//	2
	Indigenous medicine	///	3
	Folklore	///	3

Monuments	UNESCO World heritage sites	//	2
	Buddhist Architecture	//	2
	Colonial Buildings	//	2
	Lighthouses	//	2
	Bridges	/	1
	Ambalama	/	1
	Lotus tower	/	1
Archeology	Prehistoric sites/artefacts	///	3
	Dept. of Archeology	///	3
	National Museum	///	3
	Rock and temple paintings	/	1
	Embekke wooden carvings	//	2
	Ancient flags	/	1
	Ancient coinage	/	1
	Ancient Sri Lanka	////	5
Maps	Maps	//	2
Sports	Sri Lankan sports	/	1
	Cricket	/////	10
	National School games	///	3
	Mahaweli games	//	2
	Asian / South Asian Games	///	1
	Beach games	/	1
	Volleyball	/	1
	Golf	/	1
	Tennis	/	1
	Rugby	/	1
	Olympic	/////	8
Festivals	Vesak	/////	47
	State Vesak Festival	/////	9
	Christmas		
	Sinhala & Tamil New Year	////	4
	Poson Perahera	/	1
	Deepavali	//	2
	Thai Pongal	/	1
	Milad Un Nabi	/////	5
	Esala Perahera	///// /	6
Arts & entertainment	Arts	/	1
	Cinema	//	2
	Paintings	//	2
	Literature	///// /	6
Other	Dawn of Millennium	/	1
	Astronomy and space	////	4
	Tsunami	/	1

Appendix B-Questionnaire

1. Please introduce yourself, especially your background and connection with postage stamps
2. What do you think of postage stamps design and production of Sri Lanka in general?
3. Name a few things that comes to your mind with ‘Vesak’
4. What is your experience/ insights on Vesak postage stamps of Sri Lanka?
5. I am going to show you enlarged printouts of a 100 selected Vesak stamps of Sri Lanka issued from 1969- 2022. We can look at photographs on the computer screen as well. Please share your knowledge and insights on each stamp. You may talk about,
 - i) Function of the Vesak stamps and its connection to the world.
 - ii) The components of the stamp
 - iii) Subjects represented in the stamp
 - iv) Style or the manner of Representation
 - v) Icons present in the stamp
 - vi) Cultural allusions
 - vii) Connections to social groups
 - viii) Your personal idea on the stamp
 - ix) Any other meanings

Appendix C- The sample of stamps used for the study

scale 1:1



1969a

1969b

1969c



1976a

1976b

1976c



1976d

1976e

1976f



1978a

1978b



1979a

1979b

1979c



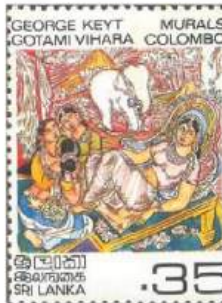
1981a



1981b



1981c



1983a



1983b



1983c



1983d



1985a



1985b



1985c



1985d



1987a



1987b



1987c



1987d



1989a



1989b



1989c



1989d



1990a

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1996d



1998a

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1996a

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1996c

1996d



2002a

2002b

2002c

2002d



2004a

2004b



2004c

2004d



2006a

2006b



2006c

2006d



2006e



2006f



2006g



2006h



2006i



2006j



2009a



2009b



2012a



2012b



2014a

2014b

2014c

2014d



2016a

2016b

2016c



2016d



2017a



2017b



2017c



2017d



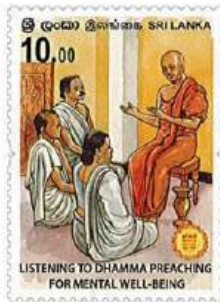
2018a



2018b



2018c



2020a



2020b



2020c



2022a



2022b



2022c