

Visuals of cultural integration; Christmas postage stamps of Sri Lanka

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Abstract – Postage stamps primarily issued by governments as receipts of postal prepayment, are important sources of global material and visual culture. Other than its utilitarian purpose, postage stamps represent the issuing countries, commemorate important occasions, individuals and places, serve as a medium of advertising, propaganda and an important archival entity. Produced by people of a specific community for purposeful communication, a postage stamp is inherent of symbolic visual content, therefore can be viewed as an artefact of the culture that it was produced in. With regard to the density of cultural information they hold, postage stamps are recognized as a tangible movable cultural heritage item by UNESCO. When looking at philatelic practices of Sri Lanka, Christmas marks a notable commemoration. Christmas is celebrated religiously by over 2 billion Christians in Sri Lanka, as well as culturally by many non-Christians. Complementing the National Christmas celebrations, Sri Lankan government issues a Christmas postage stamp, annually. Since its inauguration in 1980, there have been a total of 36 issues of Christmas stamps, making it one of the longest continuing sequels of commemorative stamps in Sri Lanka. In this study 5 issues of Christmas postage stamps representing five decades were analysed to learn how the information intrinsic to culture is inscribed within them. At the end of the study it was found that Christmas postage stamps of Sri Lanka are planned as carriers of material as well as conceptual elements of Christian culture, while offering miniature visuals of cultural integration in the island to the audiences.

Keywords: Culture, artefacts, postage stamps, Sri Lankan postage stamps, christmas postage stamps

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I. Introduction

Stamps bear symbols, as a part of a communication system between the issuing authority and the audiences (Reid, 1984). Postage stamps provide a means of communication between the issuing authority and the *users across geographical borders*. Stamps may now be less commonly encountered in daily lives than in the past, but issued as official documents of a country, they are primary sources of global material and visual culture. So this study was carried out; to understand the role of postage stamps as a communication tool, to review how they can be identified as visual texts of culture and to analyse what kind of cultural information they carry. This study focuses on Christmas postage stamps of Sri Lanka, a long continuing annual philatelic issue in Sri Lanka.

I. Literature Review

A. Postage stamps as a visual communication tool

Postage stamps serve three main purposes in communication; utilitarian, representative and commemorative (Scott, 1995; Osmond, 2008). Technically, they are fiscal receipts, attached as evidence of a prepayment for a postal service. Upon use, the postage stamp is cancelled using a postmark stating the date and place of service fulfilment, to avoid re-use of stamps. This utilitarian requirement can be fulfilled by issuing simple postage stamps with insignia of the issuing country, yet they come with a wide array of visuals which are worthy of further research.

Postage stamps represent official cultures and national identities, bearing symbolic messages from governments (Reid, 1984; Altman, 1991; Dobson, 2002; Raento & Brunn, 2005). As much as banknotes, flags and national anthems, a postage stamp is produced by a state itself, and as a part of the official national repertoire it carries ideological meanings to audiences (Andreou, 2017). Stamp imagery transfers 'an idea of the nation', or how the nation or country was supposed to be seen during a certain time period (Kallen, 2002). With this regard postage stamps interpreted as 'paper ambassadors' (Altman, 1991), or 'official representations of a nation' (Kevane, 2008), or as pieces of 'visually imagined communities' (Covington & Brunn, 2006) promote a state sponsored view of the history, culture, and identity of a nation (Hoyo, 2012).

Official commemorations of a state are an appropriate time to promote such a sanctioned version of the ethnic, cultural, social, and historical characteristics of the nation through commemorative stamps, and by doing so, strengthening the individual's loyalty to the community (Hoyo, 2012). Such commemorations are not merely aimed at celebrating, but reminding the citizens about something, and memorising it in a specific way, therefore such narration is shaped by the values, ideologies, experiences, and goals of the authorities organising the celebration (Anderson, 2006; Davis, 1994; Kaplan, 1994; Hoyo 2012). Discussing the role of postage stamps in commemorations and stamp imagery as artefacts of cultural memory, commemorative stamps are interpreted as 'modest monuments' (Osmond, 2008). Although an individual stamp might be seen as insignificant due to their miniature size and short window of contact, collectively postage stamps have an enduring impact, as witnessed by their mass circulation and status as collectibles (Child, 2005; Osmond, 2008; Hoyo 2012). Scott (1995) argued, stamps aggrandize their subject, and consist of 'more concentrated ideological density per square centimetre than many other cultural forms' (Scott, 1995).

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B. Postage stamps as artefacts of culture

The term 'culture' can be identified as some distinct ways of behaviour in a group of people (Jahoda, 2012), or as a collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another (Hofstede, 1954). As summarised by Kroeber & Kluckhohn (1952), culture consists of patterns of behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols *thereby* culture systems could be considered as products of action as well as conditioning elements of further action (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952). Culture is also *identified as* a dynamically changing environment, transformed by the artefacts created by prior generations (Cole & Parker, 2011). An artefact is an aspect of the material world that has been modified *over history* into goal-directed human thought and action. Artefacts are made by humans rather than the result of natural phenomenon; therefore, they are symbolic, purposeful, and intentional (Allen, 2017). An artefact is simultaneously conceptual and material, whether in the *form* of a visual, a word, a ritual, or an artistic creation are involved in preserving and transmitting social inheritance such as ideas, beliefs, norms, conventions, and proclivities (Cole & Parker, 2011). An artefact provides insight into *its creator*, as well as the preferences, styles, work and play of the culture in which it was created. Culture *comprises symbols*, language, values, norms and artefacts. The objective elements of culture are the tangible objects such as architecture, food, manufactured goods, while subjective elements of culture are intangible elements such as social norms, values and religious practices (Triandis et al., 1993, as cited in Keith, 2011). When people in a culture agree on what symbolic elements are important to their culture, those become the core elements of the culture (Wan & Chiu, 2009). Cultural integration is where people from one culture *adapt* to another culture while maintaining their own. This phenomenon aids individuals to survive in a new environment as well as aids organisations in globalisation (Hoyt, 1961; Jeans, 2019).

Being a product made by humans for intentional communication, and inherent of symbolic content, a postage stamp can be identified as a visual 'text'. Cultural semiotics define 'texts' as a subcategory of artefacts that have a function and coded signs in a specific culture (Posner, 2003). Postage stamps have a certain consistency in representational format with its main components being; name of the issuing country, denomination and image. Accordingly, postage stamps can be viewed as texts of semiotic sense with a culturally specific message, partially textual, partially numeric and predominantly graphic, encoded by the issuing authority. The visually dominant and therefore the most meaningful component of a postage stamp, is the pictorial component/ image (Child, 2005; Deans, 2005; Jones, 2001).

Many empirical studies discuss how the imagery on postage stamps portray different aspects of culture. Themes of traditional culture, arts, architecture, aboriginal communities & religion are representations of a particular culture, and visualising such themes on postage stamps is evident. Romanticising elements of Finnish folk culture such as folktales, mythology and language for building Finland's national image (Raento and Brunn 2005), preservation of cultural heritage such as music (Covington & Brunn, 2006), Hollywood cinema (Migliavacca, 2020) through postage stamps for international community has been discussed. Canadian aboriginal heritage was first honoured during the 1950s, with stamps featuring visual cues of Canada's West Coast Indians and Eskimos (Maloney, 2013) as a means of strengthening Canadian sovereignty in the High Arctic. Another study discussed the changing significance of Native Americans as a part of their national iconography to the US government, as reflected on their postage stamps (Goldblatt & Handler, 2017). A study on stamps of late Colonial Hong Kong, examines how the

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colonial officials promoted and preserved Chinese culture through postage stamp imagery and attempted to utilise those tangible forms of Chinese culture to win public support from the 1960s on (Pang, 2022). A study on Gabonese stamps depicting a type of wooden carved pillars in churches discussed the state's effort to assert its place within the Christian world through the specific scenes selected for the stamps (Levin, 2004). Use of Hindu imagery by the Royal Mail on its Christmas stamp for the construction of ethnic identities in Britain (Zavos, 2008), the increased secularisation in Europe's religious landscape as conveyed through postage stamps of central European countries (Reeves, 2015), and Vesak stamps of Sri Lanka as reflective of Buddhist culture (De Silva & Samarawickrama, 2022) has been discussed. A study on the first Olympic stamps introduced to gain financial aid in organising the 1896 Athens Olympics, points out how the visualising of ancient Greek culture and art with symbolic meanings contributed to promoting the Olympic Games at the international level (Özer, 2023).

C. Christianity and Christmas stamps of Sri Lanka

Christianity was introduced to India and Sri Lanka, during the 1st century, considering their geographical proximity and commercial ties (Aprem, 2013; Weerakoon, 2011). Christian population in Sri Lanka began to considerably grow with the arrival of Portuguese missionaries during the 15th century, Dutch missionaries during the 17th century and during the early 19th century under British rule (Ministry of Christian affairs, 2003). Christianity has influenced many areas of Sri Lankan social, political and economic development. Christianity brought western education, traditions, political customs such as democracy and integrated bureaucracy, to the island. At present 7.4% of the total population of Sri Lanka follow some form of Christianity and majority of them are Roman Catholics while the rest are predominantly Anglicans, Methodists and other Protestants (Department of Census & statistics Sri Lanka, 2012). Along its long history, Christianity in Sri Lanka can be seen as well integrated with native culture. Early Sinhala adaptations of Christian names such as Karolis (Carolus), Thepanis (Stephens), Jamis (James), Charlis (Charles), Yohanis (Johannes), haramanis (Hermanues), Girigoris (Gregorius), Tamil adaptations of biblical names such as Bastiampillai, Mariampillai, Mariathas, as well as biblical names paired with Sinhala or Tamil counterparts (e.g. Don Stephen Senanayake, Edward Jayakody, Phillip Goonawardena, Martin Wickramasinghe, Shantha Francis, Mary Srikanthi, Clarence Wijewardena, Rebecca Nirmali, Kumar David, Albert Dharmasiri, Noel Somasundaram, Barr Kumarakulasinghe are common in Sri Lankan society (Hussein, 2017; Moonesinghe, 2022).

Permeating into arts, entertainments and literature has largely contributed in fostering elements of Christianity as a part of the island's culture. Sinhalese writing of Christian literature (e.g. works of Fr. Jacome Gonsalvez, such as *Mangala Gitiya*- A collection of hymns to be sung to Oriental melodies, *Dharmōdyānaya*-Stories of the lives of the saints, *Dēva Niti Visanjanaya*- A chanting book) has been done (Ragel, 2015). The play '*Rajathun Kattuwa*' (The Magi) done in Nadagama style- a type of folk drama usually performed outdoors at the night (Paldano, 1996), Passion plays/religious drama started in traditionally Catholic town of Negombo, specially compositions such as *Dukprapti Prasahgaya* (the sermons on the Passion of Jesus) were meant to move the viewers to devotion (Fernandopulle, 1999). Another type of religious play called '*Udakku pass*' performed by puppets, depicts biblical events in folk theatre of Tamils in Northern Sri Lanka (Shanmugalingam, 2012). Christmas carols have been given an indigenous mark by Fr. Marceline Jayakody through carols written in Sinhala, the widely used native language, as well as by using native references (Fernando, 2007).

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For example, the carol 'Seenu Handin Lova Pibidenava' contain verses like "Diya Seera - Kandu peera Vannam Gamanin besa yanava" (Rivers flow through mountains, moving to Vannam tunes), "Dina dina vahikalu baravenava, Mahaweli ganga diya boravenava" (Rain clouds gather and Mahaweli river gets turbulent) , "Araliya mal, WathuSudu mal, Pibidee mal athu baravenava, Me natththal mase" (Frangipani and pinwheel flowers bloom, in this Christmas month), clearly visualising Christmas in a native setting (Fernando, 1996). Carols are composed into folk tunes such as 'Vannam' (e.g. 'Devindu Upanneya Sathuni - Devindu Upannaeya Oho' composed by Fr. Jacome Gonsalvez) and sung with oriental instruments (Fernando, 2007) have amused the Christians and non-Christians alike.

This Christian- indigenous cultural dialog can be observed across a multitude of visual representations. Pioneer artist David Paynter created Christian art with an indigenous outlook. The paintings depict Christ and the biblical incidents in terms of Sri Lanka and its people. In Paynter's take on the nativity; 'Madonna Con Bambino' Mary is depicted as a dark-skinned native woman and all figures are wearing traditional Sri Lankan clothes, jewellery and hairstyles. In the work 'The Crucifixion' in Trinity Chapel Kandy, a beardless dark-skinned Christ not looking any different from a native of the island, is set on the cross, in the gloom of a mangrove swamp (Roar Media, 2016). The influence of Christian art in Buddhist temple paintings, especially in maritime areas is evident. Depiction of angels with wings and cherubic faces, holding a musical instrument or a garland, resembling its Christian counterparts, can be seen above the head of Buddha in several temples, including Mirissa Samudragiri Vihara, Pelmadulla Purana Vihara & Yakandawala Purana Vihara (Urugodawatte, 2020). Inculturation has enabled the Church to transform from global standards to local cultural variations. For example, the architecture of St. Philip Neri's Church Katukurunda, resembles *Paththirippuwa* (an octagonal verandah) of the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic in Kandy. A pair of *Punkalasa* (a round vase filled with lotus) and a highly ornate semi-circular moonstone at the entrance recall the entrance of an ancient Sri Lankan monastery. The lotus symbolises the spiritual awakening in Buddhism and Hinduism.

As it is in many other countries, Christmas is a public holiday in Sri Lanka (Public Holidays Global, 2021) and celebrated religiously by Christians as well as culturally by non-Christians (Newport, 2008). Propagating the message of peace and service for human kind, philanthropic activities happen. Churches, media and other organisations arrange charity drives to orphanages, elders' homes etc. to benefit those in need. Streets and public places are decorated. People attend midnight mass and invite both Christian and non-Christian friends and family to their homes, to share the festivities with. Many of the non-Christian population have embraced secular aspects of Christmas, such as Christmas shopping, decorations, gift giving and partying. Complementing the national Christmas celebrations, the Sri Lankan government issues a commemorative stamp annually (Daily News, 2021). Generally artwork by artists registered at the Philatelic Bureau are used for the stamps, but in recent years an island wide competition is held and the winning creation is used for the Christmas stamps (Justin, 2021; Ryhanna, 2017). By the end of the literature review it was clear that the literature on postage stamps of Sri Lanka, is limited to a handful of studies discussing stamps only by certain themes. Despite the long philatelic history of Sri Lanka, and Christmas stamps being one of the longest continuing sequels of thematic stamps, no systematic study on Christmas stamps is done. Christmas stamps being a definite fixture in the annual stamp program, it is beneficial to study early Christmas stamps of Sri Lanka so that what is learnt could be applied in future work.

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II. Methods

Selection of the Sample - Since its inauguration in 1980, there have been a total of 36 issues of Christmas stamps issued from 1980- 2023. The sample of this study consists of 5 issues of Christmas stamps, representing *each* decade.

Selection of Methods - Visual content on the sample of stamps is analysed using observational data from interviews with a focus group made of officials from the Philatelic Bureau of Sri Lanka, stamp designers, collectors and the general public. The observations are made under two sections; visual representation & analysis as an artefact. The three step method of iconographic approach used in interpretation of meaning in visual representations is used. a) At the primary or natural stage, everything that the image portrays is viewed as a whole and an immediate meaning is brought in. b) At secondary or conventional stage, based on the subject of the image, actions or facts presented *are understood* using prior knowledge of conventional meaning. c) At a tertiary or intrinsic stage, the image is interpreted under a historical or philosophical point of view, looking for social and cultural interrelations that might broaden the meaning (Panofsky, 1955). We have adopted that as an artefact, postage stamps create meaning by somatization through (1) function & connection to the big picture, (2) style, (3) iconic associations, (4) cultural allusions, (5) connection to social groups, (6) individual experiences of the people, (7) additional meanings acquired in specific contexts (Siefkes, 2016). However in the current study individual experiences of people and additional meanings *are excluded*.

III. Analysis

A. Case study 1 – Christmas 1983

Figure 1
Christmas 1983a



Figure 2
Christmas 1983b



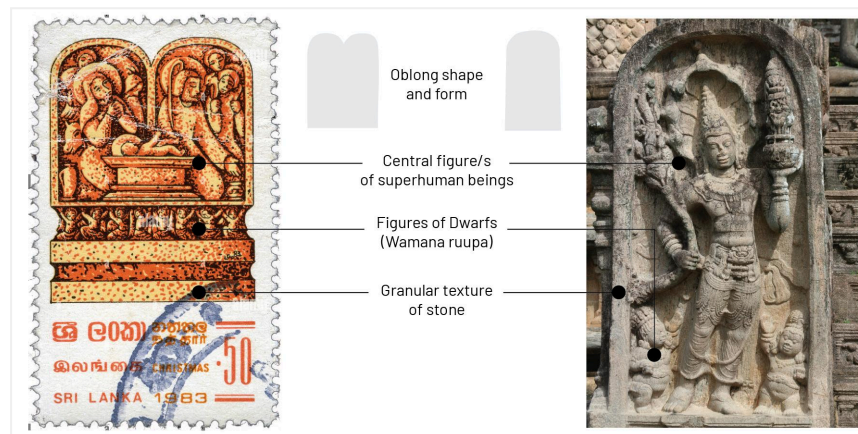
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Visual representation- 1983 Christmas stamps (Fig.1 and Fig.2) depict an illustration of nativity. The holy family, shepherd and barn animals can be seen. The style, form and texture of the illustration, mimics a guard stone- a carved slab of stone seen at the entrance of sacred buildings in Sri Lanka. The 2 stamps of the issue depict the same illustration but in different colour schemes.

Figure 3
Visual comparison between Christmas 1983 stamp & guard stone in Ratnaprasadaya, Anuradhapura Sri Lanka



Analysis as an artefact

Table 1
Analysis of 1983 Christmas stamps as an artefact

Function & connection to the big picture	Issued to mark the International religious commemoration Christmas. Issued to mark Christmas 1983, as a commemoration of national importance to the Sri Lankan government and the public. Visualise the birth of Jesus, the major incident of Christmas.
Style	The style, visual texture, form, and composition of the illustrations in 1983 Christmas stamps mimics a guard stone-carved oblong slab of stone often seen at the entrance of sacred buildings in Sri Lanka (Fig. 3).
Iconic Associations	Nativity scene- The birth of Jesus. Guardstone- The sacred / guardian of the sacred.
Cultural allusions	Guard stones are placed at the entrance of sacred buildings in Sri Lanka (De Silva, 1977; Wijesekara, 1990). They are symbolic of 'the sacred' or a 'guardian of the sacred', often depicting a superhuman character in Buddhist and Hindu literature (Bankadaranayake, 1974; Daniel, 2017; Hewavissenthi, 2012). The mid-section of the illustrations contain a set of smaller figures of <i>Wamana rupa</i> , who are allied to serve and protect the sacred or valuables (Hewavissenthi, 2012). In 1983 Christmas stamps, nativity and the holy family- the sacred in Christian culture, is presented in a novel yet relatable way by framing it through a guardstone-a tangible form of representing 'the sacred' within Sri Lankan culture.
Connection to social groups	The visual of nativity relates with the Sri Lankan and global Christians as the iconic moment of the birth of Jesus. By the stylistic reference to a Guardstone-a part of architectural heritage of Sri Lanka, the depicted scene is presented as a part of Sri Lankan cultural heritage, to audiences.

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B. Case study 2- Christmas 1985

Figure 4

Christmas 1985a

Figure 5

Christmas 1985b



Visual representation-1985 Christmas stamps (Fig.4 & Fig.5) depict realistic illustrations of two statues of Madonna & child, housed in two famous catholic shrines in Sri Lanka, namely the shrine of Our Lady in Matara and The shrine of Our Lady in Madhu, respectively. The background in the stamp 1985a (Fig.4) presents ocean and coconut tree hill, an iconic landscape in Matara, and the background in stamp 1985b (Fig. 5) depict flora and fauna of the dry zone/ city of Madhu.

Analysis as an artefact

Table 2

Analysis of 1985 Christmas stamps as an artefact

Function & connection to the big picture	Issued to mark the international religious commemoration of Christmas. Issued to mark Christmas 1985, as a commemoration of national importance to the Sri Lankan government and the public. Depict Madonna & Child; a symbol of worship and devotion for Christians. Depict two famous statues of religious & archeological value, housed in Sri Lanka.
Style	Realistic Illustrations; of 17 th century Portuguese polychrome sculptures made using wood, gesso, paint and gold foil (Mendoza, 2020).
Iconic Associations	Madonna & child - Symbolic of love and salvation in Christian world The statue of our Lady of Matara- Religious icon housed in southern Sri Lanka, Coconut tree hill-Iconic landscape of Matara, Sri Lanka Fishing boats- The community of Matara, Sri Lanka The statue of our Lady of Madu- Religious icon housed in northern Sri Lanka. Cassia flowers, elephant, python, peacock, deer- Dry zone flora and fauna of Sri Lanka seen in the city of Madhu
Cultural allusions	1985 Christmas stamps (Fig.4 & Fig.5) depict two different representations of the well-known Christian image, Madonna and child (Lim, 2022). The statue in the stamp 1985a (Fig.4), is housed in The Shrine of Our Lady in Matara, in Southern Sri Lanka. The statue, belonging to Portuguese who occupied the maritime areas during the early 17th century, was first found in a wooden crate in the sea by fishermen of Weligama. During a Cholera epidemic, the statue was taken in procession

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	<p>around Matara and since then it has been considered as of miraculous nature by the locals (Meegama, 1979, De Silva, 2022). In its history, the statue has been lost and recovered from the sea three times; on the way to, and on the way back from a restorer/sculptor in Belgium during the early 1900s (De Silva, 2022) and during the 2004 tsunami (Bodhingamuwa, 2005). Publicity about the healings attributed to the statue drew people of all faiths to the shrine, especially on the feast of the nativity on September 8th (Abeyawardene, 2004; De Silva, 2022).</p> <p>The statue in the stamp 1985b (Fig.5), is housed in The Shrine of Our Lady of Madhu, in Mannar in Northern Sri Lanka. The statue believed to have come from Goa, India was with Tamil Catholics in Mantai, Sri Lanka. Dutch invasions in 1670, led them to flee to a safer locale while a group of Catholics from Jaffna too migrated to Wannu forests. These two communities met in Madhu, and built a new Shrine to install the statue (Devarajah, 2001). The church promotes pilgrimage and unity between people of all ethnicities including Buddhists, Hindus & Muslims. The area around the church is declared a forest sanctuary. Madhu pilgrimage is an annual trip for many Sri Lankans, especially on the feast of the Assumption on August 15th (Gamage, 2001; Perera, 2008).</p>
<p>Connection to social groups</p>	<p>The two statues link with two Christian communities in Sri Lanka; Sinhala Catholics of South and Tamil Catholics of the North. The statues, as works of iconic Portuguese religious sculptural style and as works of Christian art, relate with the global Christian community.</p>

C. Case study 3 - Christmas 1992

Figure 6
Christmas 1992a

Figure 7
Christmas 1992b



Visual representation- Stamp 1992a (Fig.6) shows an illustration of the holy family; Infant Jesus, Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph. Stamp 1992b (Fig.7) shows an illustration of a family attending the church. A comet/Christmas star and a similar colour scheme is seen on both stamps.

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Analysis as an artefact

Table 3

Analysis of 1992 Christmas stamps as an artefact

Function & connection to the big picture	Issued to mark the International religious commemoration Christmas. Issued to mark Christmas 1992, as a commemoration of national importance to the Sri Lankan government. Visualise the Holy Family (Infant Jesus, Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph); a symbol of devotion to god in Christian community.
Style	Stylized illustrations
Iconic Associations	Holy family- Devotion to god, Religious family life Comet/ Christmas star- The Birth of Jesus Osariya, Sarong & shirt - National attire of Sri Lankans
Cultural allusions	1992 Christmas stamps (Fig.6 & Fig. 7) depict two events closely linked with Christmas; the birth of Jesus and a family attending church on Christmas day. In Fig.7, the attire of the family attending the church resembles formal attire of Sri Lankans. It is in practice to dress up in best clothing when attending the church mass. The Christmas star/ Star of Bethlehem, signifying the birth of Jesus is seen on both stamps. Astronomers have attempted to link this star to a comet, supernova or a conjugation of planets, which happened that day (Live Science, 2020).
Connection to social groups	The use of national attire in Fig.7 immediately relates Christmas with the Sri Lankan community irrespective of the religion, on a broader level. The visuals of Holy Family and Christmas star connect with a global audience as universal Christian imagery.

D. Case study 4- Christmas 2008

Figure 8
Christmas 2008a



Figure 9
Christmas 2008b



Visual representation- Stamp 2008a (Fig.8) depicts a scene of nativity. The Holy family, angels and the Christmas star are seen. In addition, a white dove and four children of different ethnic groups, namely Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim and Burgher which are the main four ethnicities in Sri Lanka can be seen. Stamp 2008b (Fig.9) depicts St. Mary's cathedral, located in Galle, Sri Lanka.

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Analysis as an artefact

Table 4

Analysis of 2008 Christmas stamps as an artefact

Function & connection to the big picture	<p>Issued to mark the International religious commemoration Christmas. Issued to mark Christmas 2008, as a commemoration of national importance to the Sri Lankan government & the public.</p> <p>Visualises a scene of Nativity (the birth of Jesus), the major incident commemorated in Christmas.</p> <p>Showcase St. Mary's Cathedral, Galle; a location of religious, architectural and archeological importance in Sri Lanka.</p>
Style	<p>In Fig. 8, is a children's artwork selected from an island-wide competition. Illustration in Fig.9 is realistic, to best depict the cathedral.</p>
Iconic Associations	<p>Nativity scene- The birth of Jesus, Christmas star - The birth of Jesus, Four children of different ethnicities- Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim & Burgher; the main ethnic groups in Sri Lanka, White dove- Peace, St. Mary's Cathedral in Galle- The location of the State Christmas Festival in 2008.</p>
Cultural allusions	<p>The stamps (Fig.8 & Fig.9) were issued in 2008, a time when the civil war in Sri Lanka was at its peak, rooted in ethnic conflict of Sri Lanka. As in Fig.8 children of all ethnicities hand in hand celebrating the birth of Jesus under the white dove, can generate a visual of unity. Peace, a core value in Christianity, is visualised as seen by Sri Lankans- harmony between ethnic groups. Fig.9, shows St. Mary's cathedral, an icon of the Diocese of Galle, and a landmark of Galle city. The State Christmas Festival 2008 was held at this venue of religious and archeological importance.</p>
Connection to social groups	<p>Visuals of children of different ethnicities, immediately connect with people of Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim & Burgher ethnicities, the main ethnic groups in Sri Lanka. The visuals of Nativity and Christmas star connect with a global audience as universal Christian imagery.</p>

E. Case study 5- Christmas 2018

Figure 10
Christmas 2018a



Figure 11
Christmas 2018b



Visual representation - 2018 Christmas stamps depict The Nativity (Fig.10) and The Holy Family (Fig. 11), with stylistic references to indigenous painting styles seen in Sri Lanka (Fig.12).

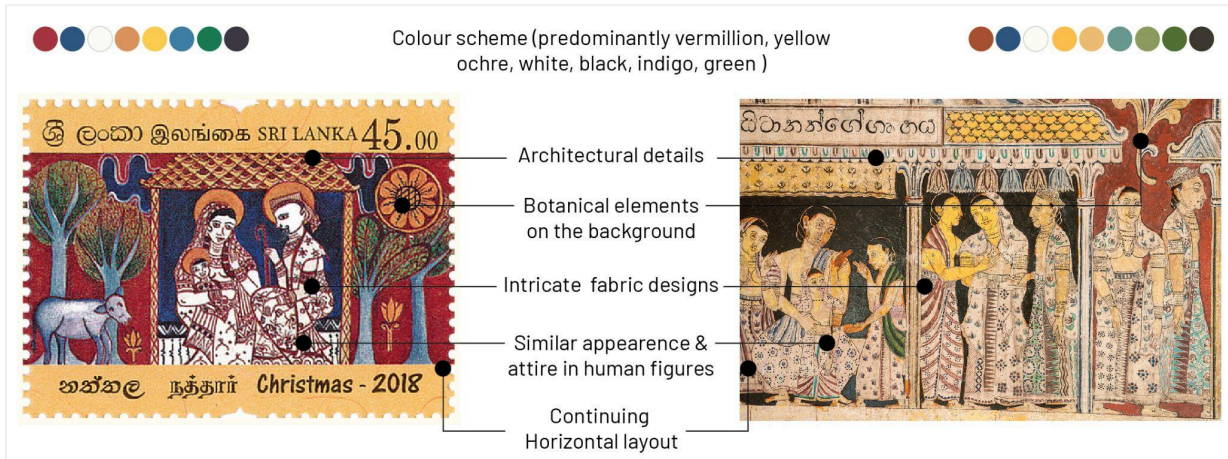
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Figure 12

Visual comparison between Christmas 2018 stamp & painting from Shailabimbaramaya, Dodanduwa, Sri Lanka



Analysis as an artefact

Table 5

Analysis of 2018 Christmas stamps as an artefact

Function & connection to the big picture	Issued to mark the International religious commemoration Christmas. Issued to mark Christmas 1983, as a commemoration of national importance to the Sri Lankan government. Visualise the scene of Nativity, the major incident of Christmas.
Style	Style and composition of the illustrations on 2018 Christmas stamps show stylistic references to indigenous religious art; specifically the Southern school temple paintings of Sri Lanka.
Iconic Associations	Nativity scene- The birth of Jesus Holy family- Devotion, Religious family life
Cultural allusions	Wall paintings seen at Buddhist temples of Sri Lanka are aimed at visually communicating ideas and messages in Buddhist philosophy, through wall murals. Generally Jathaka stories of Buddha's life stories are the subjects of paintings. In those, figures are artistically and symbolically developed based on the natural forms and composed in a horizontal panel (Chutiwongs, et al, 1993). A few distinct styles of temple paintings are seen in different parts of the country, and Southern school art style is seen mostly at Buddhist temples in maritime Sri Lanka (Bandaranayake & Jayasinghe, 2006); the areas once captive of Portuguese, Dutch and British, from whom the Christianity in Sri Lanka emanated. The illustrations on Fig.10 & Fig.11 mimics key features of southern school art style (Fig. 12) as an attempt to represent the globally known Christian imagery; The Nativity and The Holy Family, in a novel but relatable way, hence seeking inspiration from the indigenous religious art of the island.
Connection to social groups	The visuals of Nativity and Holy Family relate with the Sri Lankan and global Christians as religious icons. By the stylistic reference to temple paintings- a form of religious art of the island, the depicted scene is presented as a part of Sri Lankan cultural heritage, to audiences.

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Discussion

The imagery on Christmas stamps of Sri Lanka, depict elements of Christian culture such as symbols (e.g. Christmas star, Nativity), language (e.g. Sinhala, Tamil and English), norms (e.g. attending the Christmas mass), values (e.g. Devotion) and artefacts (e.g. Marian statues).

The imagery on Christmas stamps of Sri Lanka, depict elements of native Sri Lankan culture such as symbols (E.g. lotus, white dove of peace), language (E.g. Sinhala, Tamil and English), norms (e.g. wearing Kandyan saree to important events), values (e.g. unity between ethnic groups) and artefacts (e.g. guardstone, temple paintings).

The image selected for Christmas stamps promote the Christian – indigenous cross cultural dialog by;

- Showcasing locally housed artefacts/ works of Christian art, of religious, artistic and archeological value to Christian community in Sri Lanka, as well as to the global Christian community (e.g. famous Marian statues housed in Sri Lanka).
- Inclusion of visuals of native community in the scenes presented in stamp imagery (e.g.: people of different ethnicities, local attire)
- Global Christian imagery such as, The Nativity and The Holy Family, are presented in a novel yet relatable way by using, stylistic references from indigenous religious arts and crafts (eg; Buddhist monastic architecture, Temple paintings)

While Christmas postage stamps are primarily planned to mark the international religious commemoration of Christmas, while carrying the ideological meanings and values in Christianity to the audiences, it is fair to conclude that, through the visuals and styles selected for Christmas stamp designs of Sri Lanka, cultural integration is attempted, presenting those respective subjects as a part of Sri Lankan cultural heritage, to global audiences. The ways that audiences perceive and understand such visual messages, are further to be explored.

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