The Convention States' Arms Imprints on Indian Postal Stationery

By F. M. COWEN

Introduction

The existence of separate postal systems in many of the feudatory states was a source of considerable irritation to the Postmaster Generals of the Indian Imperial Post Office. The state systems were usually much less efficient than the Imperial Post Office. They had a poor or no method of exchanging mails with the central system; there was a complete lack of uniformity between the postal systems of the various states; and, in many states, there was a duplication of effort—both state and British Indian offices existed side by side.

Since the Indian Postmaster Generals had no power to abrogate existing treaties, they often resorted to reasoning with the ruling sovereigns of the states. This brought occasional results but, as a rule, the Indian princes refused to accept any changes that might reduce their powers.

One of the earliest steps * taken by the Government of India to improve the postal situation was the issuance of a circular in 1877, directed to the princes, asking that the postal paper of the feudatory states be approved by the Government so that it would not conflict in design or color with British Indian issues. Unfortunately for the Indian Post Office, this circular suggested to at least one state, Patiala, that it issue its own stamps for its small local service. The state sent in for approval an essay for a postage stamp. Although this design was not rejected, the central government countered with a suggestion that the Imperial service be extended

to the state. This was rejected by the Durban of Patiala who, however, did agree to consider a further proposal that steps be taken to improve the exchange of correspondence between the state and India. Out of these discussions arose the first convention, which was finally executed in October 1, 1884.

By the terms of the convention 1,2,3 each party recognized the franking power within its own territory of the postal paper issued by the other party. Hence the adhesive stamps and postal stationery of Patiala would be recognized throughout British India and vice-versa. In addition, the Government of India agreed to supply Patiala with stamps and stationery current in British India but overprinted with the name of the state. The charge made to the state for this service was the combined cost of the stamp printing (at that time by contract with Messrs. de la Rue, London) plus the freight to India and the cost to the India Central Printing Press, Calcutta for overprinting.

Thus the first "Convention" State came into existence to be followed by Gwalior, Jind, and Nabha in 1885 and Chamba and Faridkot in 1887, of which only Faridkot and Jind had previously issued their own local postal paper. Although other states such as Jaipur, Kashmir and Mysore, toyed with the idea, no further conventions of this type were signed.

History of the Arms Imprints

The purpose of this study is limited to a discussion and illustration of the various dies employed by the India Central Printing

^{*} This story is told by C. Stewart-Wilson and B. Gordon Jones (Ref. 1).

Press (Calcutta) and the Security Press (Nasik) for preparing the casts used to print the state arms of each of the "convention" states below the impressed stamps of Indian envelopes, wrappers and postal cards. Except for the early Patiala issues the practice of an overprint on the impressed stamp plus an imprint of the state arms below the stamp was followed by all of the "convention" states for their postal stationery right down to the final abolishment of their separate postal systems in 1950.

To the author's knowledge, there has never been a correct exposition of the dies used for these arms imprints. Hence he wishes to place on record the results of observations made during the preparation of the India lists for the forthcoming general postal stationery catalogue. The knowledge about these imprints is still far from complete, so the author wishes to apologize for the lack of official data which could answer questions about the preparation, printing and actual dates that each die was pressed into service. Hence the reader must rely upon conjecture and assumption based on a study of limited material and general information already published. Perhaps others will be induced to fill in the gaps of our knowledge about these most interesting and attractive series of postal stationery items.

Chronologically, Patiala was the first "convention" state (October 1, 1884) and its first stationery issues showed only the overprint "Puttialla State", first curved ("Puttialla" to left and "State" to right) around the bust of Queen Victoria (Fig. 1a) and later as a two line horizontal overprint below the bust, but on the impressed stamp (Fig. 1b). These were similar to the overprints placed on Indian adhesive stamps for Patiala.

When Gwalior was negotiating for an overprint on adhesive stamps and postal stationery, prior to the execution of its convention with the Imperial Post Office (July 1, 1885), it requested that its overprint consist of the arms of the state (sun flanked by two cobras). The area available for such an overprint was felt to be too small by authorities at the India (Government) Central Printing Press (Calcutta), which was in charge of the overprinting work for the "convention" states. As a compromise it

was agreed that adhesive stamps of Gwalior would be overprinted with a two line overprint consisting of a top line above the Queen's head of the Hindi word for "Gwalior" and the same in English below the bust. The stationery, on the other hand, would receive this same overprint on the impressed stamp plus an imprint of the state arms below the stamp.

This compromise of the Gwalior suggestion was adopted by all the other "convention" states including Patiala.

The dies employed for producing the casts or electrotypes were probably prepared at Calcutta and, later, Nasik by the Government of India. The Calcutta casts or electrotypes were employed by the India Central Printing Press (Calcutta) to place the arms imprint on Indian postal stationery, most of which was produced by Messrs. de la Rue, London, with the exception of a few locally printed postal cards. With the opening of the Security Press, Nasik, in late 1925, all printing work of this nature was gradually transferred to the new plant, and an entirely new set of arms dies was engraved and used on Nasik printed Indian postal stationery.

Since some of the arms dies had long terms of service, their casts being used for the imprinting of relatively large numbers of items, and since multiple forms were probably employed to print sheets of postal cards, a large number of casts must have been prepared. The onerous task of identifying all of these minor types by their flaws would be of little value philatelically, and probably impossible practically. However, such a job was tried on two arms types of Jind and some dozens of varieties were identified.⁵ Needless to say, the present article is only concerned with the identification by enlargement and comparison of the individual dies used to produce these printing casts.

One final note should be injected at this point before proceeding with the arms story chronologically by states. Every issued arms imprint is associated with one or more types of overprint. The overprints except for Gwalior were similar to those used on Patiala stationery before arms imprints were introduced. Where employed, the curved type (Fig. 1a) was soon superseded by the horizontal type (Fig. 1b) with little change over the years except for new spellings or small

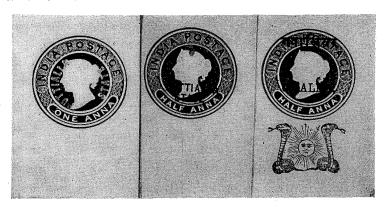


Fig. 1. (Left) a. Patiala. The curved overprint. (Center) b. Patiala. The horizontal overprint without arms imprint. (Right) c. Gwalior. The first Hindi-English overprint employed by Gwalior combined with arms type I imprint below the stamp. The first issued example of the overprint-arms combination.

Photos by Boutrelle

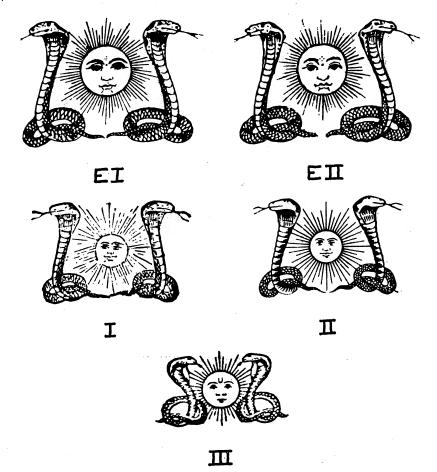


Fig. 2. Gwalior. The die types of the arms imprints. El, Ell—essay dies; I-III—issued dies. Magnified 2 diameters.

changes in the type fonts used. Gwalior first employed the overprint shown in Fig. 1c. Later this was modified to a two line overprint below the bust with "Gwalior" in English (1st line) and Hindi (2nd line). In the 1940's Chamba, Jind, Nabha and Patiala introduced a one line (state name only in English) overprint which was also followed through on the adhesive stamps.

Official stationery for these states usually employed a three line overprint, the additional line being the word "Service". Here again Gwalior was an exception with a two line overprint—one being "Gwalior", the

other "Service", both in Hindi.

The early printings of the overprints were usually in black, red, or blue; whereas the arms imprints were in the color of the impressed stamp with a few exceptions. Soon thereafter this two color printing job was replaced by printings with both the overprint and arms imprint in black.

Readers should keep the above general facts in mind as this article is not concerned with the various overprints per se, but only with the arms imprints.

Gwalior (Table A; Figs. 1, 2)

TABLE A

Distinguishing Characteristics of the Arms Imprint Dies Employed for Gwalior State

(See Fig. 2)

Characteristics Die Type ΕI Essay (Calcutta). (1) Dimensions: 26 x 16 mm. (2) Seventy-six Unequal rays. (3) Five small dots between and above eyebrows. (4) Tails of cobras almost touch. E II Essay (Calcutta). (1) Dimensions: 26 x 16 mm. ()2 Sixty-seven unequal rays. (3) Four small dots between and above eyebrows. (4) Tails of cobras 1 mm. apart. (5) Facial features differ from E I, especially mouth and nose. (6) Crosshatch shading on back loops of tails closer lined than E I. Ι Issued (Calcutta). (1) Dimensions: 21 x 13 mm. (2) Fifty-seven unequal rays. IIIssued (Nasik). (1) Dimensions: 20 x 13 mm. (2) Forty-eight unequal rays. (3) Rays touch sun circle which is even and strong. (4) Shading of forward portion of the cobras different from I, especially noticeable at bottom of outer loop of left cobra. (5) Die carefully made, printing usually clear and sharp. Symmetry preserved. Issued (Nasik). III(1) Dimensions: 17 x 10 mm. (2) Sun circle larger, cobras smaller and facing each other.

Gwalior was the largest of the Central Indian native states with an area of 26,357 square miles and a population of 3,523,070 (1931). Its postal system was well organized along the lines of the Imperial Post

Office and handled an impressive volume of mail. During the "pre-convention" negotiations its request for state arms on its postal paper resulted in the engraving of at least two essay dies (E I, E II), very similar in

appearance but differing in detail. These two dies differ from the issued die, type I, in dimension—they are larger—and minor details.

On July 1, 1885, the convention between Gwalior and India went into effect and the first stationery showed arms type I imprinted below the impressed stamp in the color of the

stamp with the two line Hindi-English overprint on the stamp in black. An example of this grandfather of the overprint-arms imprint type is shown in Fig. 1c. Casts taken from this die were used from 1885 till about 1929, the entire period of Calcutta printings, giving it the longest service record of any of the arms dies used by the "conven-

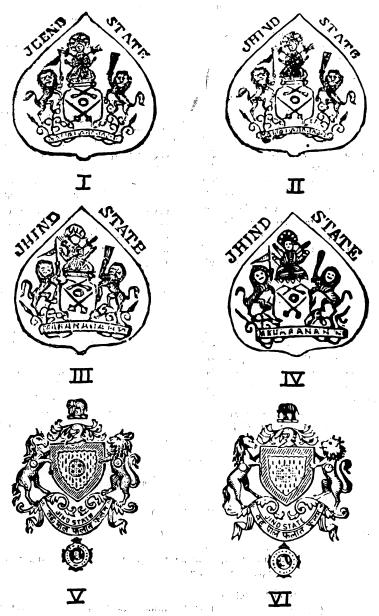


Fig. 3. Jind. The die types of the arms imprints. All are issued dies magnified 2 diameters.

tion" states.

When the printing operations were transferred to the Security Press, Nasik, a new die (type II) was prepared and used until about 1942, when it was superseded by the small die, type III.

Jind (Table B; Fig. 3)

Jind (also spelled Jeend or Jhind), a small Cis-Sutlej Sikh state, had an area of 1,259 square miles and a population of 324,676 (1931). Prior to the execution of its convention (July 1, 1885) it had a primitive postal system which issued its own crude stamps and stationery. Its first "convention" stationery issued showed both the influence of Patiala and Gwalior. Like Gwalior it requested and received a special arms imprint (type I), but instead of a horizontal overprint, the first stationery issues show the curved overprint characteristic of Patiala. To avoid confusion it should be noted that unlike Patiala, where the overprint on adhesive stamps and stationery was the same, the Jind overprint on stationery was the reverse of that on its adhesives. In the former, "Jhind" appears at the right and "State" at the left; the reverse is true with the adhesives.

The first arms type shows the spelling "Jeend". But in 1886, at the State's request that the spelling be changed, the second arms type (II) was issued with the inscription "Jhind". A comparison of types I and II indicates that die II was prepared from I by removing the offensive spelling and engraving the new. Casts from die II were used until about 1890 when type III came into use. One interesting "error" of this period is known. In 1893 (?) some British Indian postal cards (½ anna, re-

drawn Br. India arms) issued in 1890 were overprinted by mistake or design with arms type I in black. Since this variety appeared some years after type I had been superseded, it can only be surmised that its production came about either as a result of accidental or purposeful replacement of a damaged or lost cast from the printing forms made up with type II arms casts, or the accidental or purposeful temporary use of an obsolete form made up of type I casts (it is believed that the states' overprints were applied to uncut sheets of 16 postal cards). The above card "error" is known legitimately used during the "nineties" period and there is no doubt of its authenticity.

Type III is similar to type II but both the state name in the upper right and left sides and the details of the arms within the "inverted heart" are enlarged, so that the latter fills up the area within the "heart."

Type IV evidently came into use when the death of the Maharajah resulted in his replacement by a Maharanee (female). Not only is the die of IV different from III in many details, but the word in the ribbon is now MAHARANANN instead of MAHARAJAHN. The first date of use of this new die was about 1910. Its existence has not previously been reported, to the author's knowledge, although it bears striking differences to its predecessor.

About 1912, an entirely revamped cast of arms appeared as type V. Its use extended from the replacement of type IV until printing was undertaken by the Security Press (Nasik). As a result of this shift, the Nasik die (VI) was engraved and casts from it imprinted the stationery of Jind from about 1928 until the separate postal service was closed on April 1, 1950.

TABLE B

Distinguishing Characteristics of the Arms Imprint Dies Employed for Jind State

(See Fig. 3)

Die Type

Characteristics

Issued (Calcutta).

(1) Immediately recognized by word JEEND at the left and above the "inverted heart."

II

Issued (Calcutta).

(1) Spelling now JHIND, otherwise identical and probably derived from Die I.

III

Issued (Calcutta).

- (1) The words JHIND and STATE immediately above the "inverted heart" measure 7½ mm. and 6¾ mm. respectively. In Die II they measure 6 mm. and 5¾ mm.
- (2) The letters are 11/2 mm. high instead of 1 mm. high as in II.
- (3) The arms within the "inverted heart" are larger and fill the space more completely than in II. Note the size of the panel containing the word MAHARAJAHN and the much longer tail of the lion at left.

IV

Issued (Calcutta).

- (1) Similar to type III but background more solid and many other differences.
- (2) The "idol" seems to float above the arms as contrasted to III.
- (3) The headdress contains colorless dots. In III it is a series of lines.
- (4) The lion faces are caricatures; the tail of the left lion is cut short.
- (5) The panel now contains the word MAHARANANN.

v

Issued (Calcutta).

- (1) New arms quite different from types I-IV.
- (2) Elephant shaded by dots and tail points down.

VI

Issued (Nasik).

- (1) Very similar to V and close examination necessary.
- (2) Elephant shaded by vertical lines and tail is slender and points to lower right.
- (3) Horse and lion shaded by short lines originating from outline rather than crosshatching and brown lines as in type V.
- (4) JIND STATE, above ribbon, larger with S of STATE directly below point of shield. In type V, T of STATE is directly below point of shield.
- (5) Lower left and right portions of the ribbons are wider. The medallion is completely redrawn.

Nabha (Table C: Fig. 4)

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Nabha, one of the smallest of the Cis-Sutlej Sikh states, had an area of 928 square miles and a population of 287,574 (1931). With the execution of its convention on July 1, 1885, it issued stationery very similar to that of Jind. However, in the case of this state, its curved overprint on stationery was the same as that on the adhesives. Arms type I accompanied this overprint which was later replaced by the conventional two line horizontal overprint. During the life of this die one interesting error was produced. About 1898, the British Indian 1/4 anna postal card (redrawn Br. India arms) was overprinted for Nabha State official use and the setting contained at least one example of an inverted arms cast. Hence the well-known inverted arms came into existence. This is the only

reported example of such an error from any of the "convention" states.

About 1900 arms type II replaced type I. Because of its close similarity to the latter it is often confused with it. Identification is important because, in some cases, the same Indian stationery items are known with both types of imprint. This new die continued in use until printing operations were transferred to Nasik about 1929.

The first Nasik type die (type III) differs enough from its Calcutta predecessors to make identification easy. When it was replaced in the early 1940's a new coat of arms was adopted by Nabha and this was reflected in arms type IV which remained in use until the postal service was closed in April, 1950.



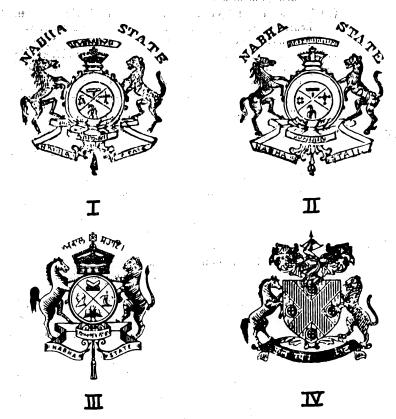


Fig. 4. Nabha. The four issued die types of the arms imprints. Magnified 2 diameters.

TABLE C

Distinguishing Characteristics of the Arms Imprint Dies Employed for Nabha State

(See Fig. 4)

Die Type

Characteristics

Ι

Issued (Calcutta).

(1) The curved label at the top is wide (in contrast to type II) and the sides are angled making the bottom shorter than the top.

(2) Horse shaded by vertically curved broken lines; lower right leg does not touch ribbon.

- (3) Lower left ribbon, portion containing NABHA, is folded under.
- (4) The field is divided into quarters by two intersecting diagonals. Issued (Calcutta).

II

- (1) The curved label at top is slightly narrower and the sides are vertical top and bottom of equal length.
- (2) Horse shaded by strong straight lines; the tiger is also shaded by stronger lines than in I.
- (3) Lower left ribbon, portion containing NABHA, is folded over; lower right ribbon is wider and STATE is larger.

III

Issued (Nasik).

- (1) Same general type of arms but completely revamped.
- (2) Crown much larger than I and II.

IV

Issued (Nasik).

(1) Completely new arms.

Patiala (Table D; Fig. 5)

Patiala (also spelled Puttialla or Puttiala), the largest of the Cis-Sutlej Sikh states of Northwest India, had an area of 5,942 square miles and a population of 1,625,520 (1931). The pioneer role played by this first "convention" state and its early overprints have already been discussed. The request of Gwalior for an arms overprint or imprint did not pass unnoticed by this state. The essay (type E I) is evidence that planning was in progress before the first issued arms type (I) of 1885. The interesting thing about this essay is the original idea of dispensing with the overprint entirely and, instead, to incorporate the state name in the

arms design which would appear below the impressed stamp. The influence of this suggestion on the early Jind and Nabha types is apparent although they did not abandon the overprint.

Unsatisfaction with type I probably resulted in a similar but new die (type II) about 1903. This continued in use until replaced by the Nasik die (type III) about 1929. Type III superficially appears to be a copy of types I and II, but some important differences make this die easy to distinguish. It continued in use until the state postal system was absorbed by that of India in 1950.

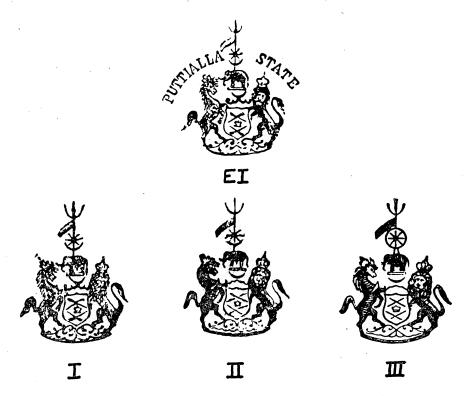


Fig. 5. Patiala. The die types of the arms imprints. El—essay die; I-III—issued dies. Magnified 2 diameters.

TABLE D

Distinguishing Characteristics of the Arms Imprint Dies Employed for Patiala State

(See Fig. 5)

Die Type

Characteristics

ΕI

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Essay (Calcutta).

(1) Very similar to Die I but the words PUTTIALLA STATE at the upper right and left distinguish it.

Issued (Calcutta).

(1) Without words PUTTIALLA STATE.

(2) Elephant's tail points down.

- (3) Crescent under base of elephant touches top of shield.
- (4) The curved line at the bottom is touched in several places by the scalloped line immediately above.

II

Issued (Calcutta).

- (1) Similar to type I.
- (2) Elephant's tail curves out.
- (3) Crescent does not touch shield.

 Crest on horse different from type I.
- (4) The curved line at the bottom is thicker and does not touch the scalloped line immediately above.
- (5) The crossed "rifles" in the shield are thin lines without thick endings at one end.
- (6) The "vine-like" design at bottom differs from Dies I and III.

III

Issued (Nasik).

- (1) The six-pointed device above the elephant is enclosed in a full circle; the circle is attached to the elephant by a double line.
- (2) The curved line at the bottom is now a double line; the top part does not touch the scalloped line.
- (3) The entire design is much better executed and usually shows as a clear print.

Chamba (Table E; Fig. 6)

Chamba, small Himalayan state located southeast of Kashmir, had an area of 3,216 square miles and a population of 146,870 (1931). Along with Faridkot it became a "convention" state in January, 1887, and adopted the by then standardized horizontal two line English overprint plus arms below the stamp current on Jind, Nabha and Patiala stationery.

The study of the arms types of this state is made more difficult by the very simplicity of the state coat of arms—a sun face surrounded by rays. However, in the author's experience all five types can be classified at sight once familiarity is achieved. In cases of doubt the proper type can be determined by a count of the number of rays surrounding the sun face. Even if one or two rays are missed due to faulty counting or poor

printing, assignment is still possible.

During the course of this study the author was struck by the close similarity of the suns in enlargements of Chamba type I (Fig. 6) and Gwalior type I (Fig. 2). A close check of the two revealed beyond a shadow of doubt that the former was derived from a cast of the latter by the removal of the two cobras surrounding the sun. This altered cast constituted the basis for a secondary die from which casts or electrotypes were prepared for printing Chamba type I. Figure 6 also shows Gwalior type I with the approximate areas removed covered by diagonal lines. It can be surmised that the Calcutta press was burdened with work in late 1886 and stumbled on this time-saving idea. It is certainly the only known case of the arms of one state serving for those of another.

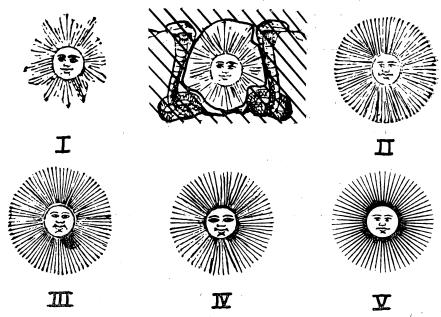


Fig. 6. Chamba. The die types of the arms imprints. For comparison the upper left example is that of Gwalior type I with suitable areas lined out to show approximate cutting done to convert this type to Chamba type I. Magnified 2 diameters.

The fact that Chamba type I was in use for only a short period (1887-1888) further emphasizes its provisional nature. It was replaced by type II. The "starred" rays of type I make it easy to separate from the other types.

Arms type III has evidently been recognized for some years but considerable confusion has resulted because German and English cataloguers have described it as having "two rings around the sun's face." The enlargement should dispel this notion which was based on a superficial study of this type. The "two rings" idea is probably due to the thicker sun circle and the even inner ending of the rays which do not touch the sun circle but leave a rather even spacing around it (as compared to type II).

From the evidence of the actual items imprinted with arms type III it appears that this die was in use in the 1914-1915 period. It is known on both Edward VII and George V stationery, but used copies of the former are dated in the above period. Since this was after the ascent of George V to the throne and after certain stationery items with his portrait had been issued in British India, it can be assumed that, as an economy, sur-

plus Edwards were so overprinted and imprinted along with George V stationery. The same Edward VII and George V items are known with the type II imprint. This along with the fact that the earlier Victorias and later George V issues also received the type II imprint is the justification for dating type III as a temporary die falling within the type II period which continued until printing operations were transferred to Nasik about 1929.

There is one other puzzling aspect with regard to die III. It is known imprinted on a George V ½ anna India postal card issued in 1923—this same card was also issued with the die II imprint. The German specialist, Walter Beckhaus, recently reported this situation.⁶

Type IV is a mystery die. The author has seen and heard of only one example showing its use. The overprinted item is an unused ½ anna gray George V postal card first issued in India in 1912. Since the overprint seems genuine in all respects, the example is being accepted as a short-lived type issued at about the same time as those items with the type III imprint. Of course it may be an essay and firm proof is needed.

(Continued From Page 34)

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to express his appreciation to the editor of THE COLLECTORS CLUB PHILATELIST who arranged for publication of the photo-enlarging types, thereby easing the lot of the author during the study.

Thanks are also due to Mr. L. H. Scisco, who confirmed the identification of many of the dies with material in his own collection.

References

Extensive data used in this article was obtained from Ref. 1, an excellent study, which unfortunately ignored postal stationery in its detailed exposition of the "convention" states

adhesives. Most of the statistics were obtained from Ref. 7.

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- 4. Ibid, p. 225.
- 5. Stanley Gibbons Monthly Journal, IV, 197-199 (1894).
- 6. W. Beckhaus, Die Ganzsache, 30, nr. 5, 39-40 (October 1956).
- 7. "Encyclopaedia Britannica", 14th Edition.

Type V replaced type II for the Nasik printings and remained in use until the suspension of the separate Chamba state postal service on April 1, 1950.

Faridkot (Fig. 7)

Faridkot, the smallest of the Cis-Sutlej Sikh states, had an area of 642 square miles and a population of 124,912 at the time its postal service was absorbed by that of British India in March, 1901.

Like Jind it had a primitive stamp-issuing postal system which was reorganized with the commencement of its convention in January, 1887. During its short life as a "convention" state only one arm type was employed by Calcutta to imprint its postal stationery.



I

Fig. 7. Faridkot. The lone die type of this state. Magnified 2 diameters.

TABLE E

Distinguishing Characteristics of the Arms Imprint Dies Employed for Chamba State

(See Fig. 6)

Die Type

Characteristics

Ι

Issued (Calcutta).

(1) Fifty-seven unequal rays

(2) Rays touch sun circle.

(3) Rays between 7 and 9 o'clock slope downward at wrong angle. Issued (Calcutta).

II

(1) Seventy-six rays, equal in length.

(2) Rays generally do not touch sun circle.

(3) Eyes seem to look left.

(4) Facial expression (eyebrows, eyes, nose, mouth) differ from types III, IV.

III

Issued (Calcutta).

(1) Eighty rays, equal in length.

(2) Rays clearly do not touch sun circle.

(3) Sun circle stronger than in type II.

(4) Facial expression quite different from types II and IV, especially noticeable in formation of eyes and mouth.

(5) Eyes seem to be crossed.

IV

Issued (?) (Calcutta).

(1) Seventy rays, equal in length.

(2) Inner end of rays forms the sun circle.

(3) Facial expression different from type III with larger eyes which seem to look straight ahead.

v

Issued (Nasik).

(1) Sixty-four rays, equal in length.

(2) Rays touch sun circle which is strong and even.

(3) Facial expression quite different from other types.

(4) Die carefully made, printing usually very clear and sharp. Symmetry carefully preserved.

(Continued on Page 51)