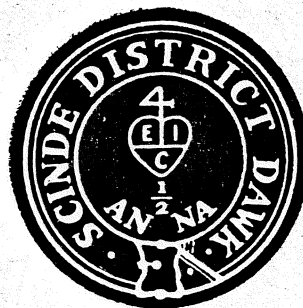


Asia's First Stamps**The Scinde Dawks**

By D. E. Wadia



"Frankly, the stamps of India do not really appeal to me, but as I am about to start collecting the Empire issues, I will have to include them in my collection simply for the sake of completeness."

These words were addressed to me by a young American as we were leaving the hall after I had concluded a talk on Indian stamps at one of the meetings of the Bombay philatelic friends.

"Can it be", I inquired, "that anything which I have just said has prejudiced you?"

"Certainly not", my friend replied, "but you did confirm my conviction that the stamps of India are nothing to boast about".

"Please do not be so misled", I pleaded. "I only gave a very brief review of my country's stamps, and made no mention of the most fascinating aspects of the Indian Classics".

"What stamps do you include in the Classics?" he asked with, I thought, a glimmer of interest.

"Well, the Lithographed Stamps of 1854-55, and one can safely include in that category the three stamps of the Scinde District Dawk of 1852".

"It is a matter of opinion," he re-

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joined. "Personally, I see nothing particularly fascinating in the Scinde Dawk, or for that matter, in any of the other early Indian stamps. Besides being dull and prosaic, they are extremely expensive, and it passes my comprehension why you find them of such great interest".

In trying to convey my sense of conviction, I expounded at great length, but my friend remained entirely unmoved.

"Come and have a cup of tea with me at my home next Sunday?" I suggested, and, I am glad to say, he accepted.

So, the following Sunday we had tea and after the meal my wife, who realized what the topic of the evening would be, departed for a better occupation.

"You have quite a few albums", said my friend, pointing to the book case in which I keep my collection.

"Too few, alas!" said I.

"What do they contain?"

"Stamps of India".

"Not exclusively surely? I have always thought that all Indian stamps issued to date could be displayed in a few pages of an album!"

"Would you care to see one?" I queried, and, drawing out my first album, I displayed the opening page.

"Well, considering that you find the Scinde Dawks drab and unattractive, you seem to be a long time turning the pages!" I remarked.

"I must say", he volunteered, "I admire the way in which you have arranged the display. It is apparent

that you have made a close study of these stamps. I find the enlarged illustration particularly attractive; it brings out the details so clearly, and the appropriate annotations make interesting reading. But tell me, why have you mounted each of these stamps on a paper pad?"

"These stamps are of an extremely brittle nature, and with even slight rough handling, they are liable to crack. The cushion, or pad, protects the wafer — that is the nomenclature by which these stamps are philatelically known. This red wafer you see here, for example, is so brittle that an uncracked copy, in fine condition, is a great rarity. Three such undamaged copies came on the market recently, and each one realized from 125 to 150 pounds in used condition".

"Your red wafer seems to be a fine specimen too. I wonder what you value it at?"

"It is" I agreed, "a good copy, but not a perfect one. You will observe that there is a slight break at the edge of it. It is however, an 800 rupee piece, and the only one in my collection!"

"Costly item, is it not?" he pondered, "I wonder whether anyone has an unused red wafer?"

"An unused copy does not appear to exist anywhere in the world. Ever heard of Alfred H. Caspary?" he nodded assent and I continued: "that noted American philatelist, now dead, was a connoisseur of great classic rarities, and his collection contained some of the world's best and rarest stamps; money, to him, was no object, and he acquired, at one time or another, almost everything he wanted — everything that is to say, except an unused copy of the red Scinde Dawk, though he hunted for it for over half a century!"

"A Bombay stamp dealer once openly said that he had a standing offer from Caspary of \$5000 for an **unused** red wafer! That dealer, in the hope of earning such a rich reward, is said to have taken a trip to Karachi and the adjoining districts in search of this stamp, but returned empty-

handed and considerably lighter in pocket!"

My friend looked somewhat astonished at this and asked, "Do you think anyone will ever succeed?"

"Well, as you know, nothing is impossible in philately. We hear and read about great finds; so far as Indian stamps are concerned, moreover, some such finds have been made in places where you and I would, ordinarily, not dare to tread. There is nothing we Indians love and cherish so much as anything connected with our forefathers, our family business or its correspondence. It is usual with us to keep letters with their envelopes intact; some business men, too, keep unused stamps in a file for future use. Who knows? Some lucky man or woman may, one day, thus stumble across an unused red wafer!"

"Well, I'll be darned!" he exclaimed. "Imagine an used copy bringing 150 pounds! What then must a pair cost, I wonder?"

"The red wafers do not exist in pairs. Each stamp was individually embossed as a **round disk**, unlike the white and blue stamps which were embossed on a sheet of paper. The peculiarity of the red wafer is that, to date, it has not been found on its original cover. The finest copy that one is ever likely to come across was the property of the late Col. Rose Hutchinson of Bournemouth. This particular wafer realized 135 pounds in a London auction."

"Another very fine copy was sold in a London auction for 150 pounds. A third fine specimen realized 145 pounds. This stamp is, then, as you will readily appreciate, India's first-rate rarity, philatelically speaking, of course!"

"Tell me, why did that Bombay dealer proceed to Karachi when Bombay is the Mecca of philately?"

"One does not go to a tailor to buy a pair of shoes!" was my rejoinder. "He went to Karachi because Scinde Dawks, the red, white and blue, were issued for circulation only in Karachi and its neighboring districts. You

will remember that his mission was to acquire an **unused** copy of the red stamp; he thought, naturally enough, that the place of its origin was the best place in which to search".

My friend persisted, "Quite so, but why was Karachi chosen as the only place for circulation of these stamps?"

"Well, that's quite an interesting story in itself and is illustrative of bureaucracy, even in those far off days. These half anna stamps, in three colors, red, white, blue, were first issued to the public on July 1, 1852: they were, therefore, the first postage stamps issued in Asia. The gentleman whose hand was behind this issue was Sir Bartle Frere, Commissioner — and a very able Commissioner, too, if all accounts are true — of the Province of Sindh. It was his intention that these stamps should circulate only in his province."

"How very interesting. Incidentally, was the value restricted to a half anna only?"

"Yes, only the half anna was produced and issued".

"Then why the three different colors?"

"From a systematic study of Scinde Dawks, it appears that the intention was to issue them in red. The issued stamps were, however, so brittle that they soon cracked and disintegrated. The red, therefore, was withdrawn after a very short existence. The white followed, but did not prove very satisfactory as, because of its color, it was quite indistinguishable when affixed on white envelopes. Finally, the stamp was embossed in blue, and that is why we have these pretty stamps in three colors."

"Are the white and blue available in pairs and blocks?"

"Very few pairs are available. As I told you before, these two categories were embossed on a sheet of paper, though just how many to a sheet is not now known. In those days, the envelopes generally used by the public were very small by modern standards, and one stamp was sufficient to carry the letter through the postal transit."

"To date, no used block is known

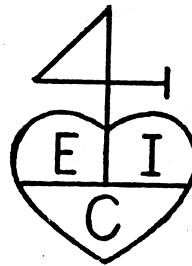
to exist though the late Mr. Chunilal D. Desai of Bombay had a unique block of 14, half anna white, unused, which is now in the magnificent collection of Mr. R. A. Dubash, a noted philatelist of Bombay."

"Were these printed in India?"

"Definitely not. For many years, just where they were printed was not known, but it has now been established that they were printed by De La Rue & Co. in England".

"Just a moment more before we turn the page; please explain the significance of the design."

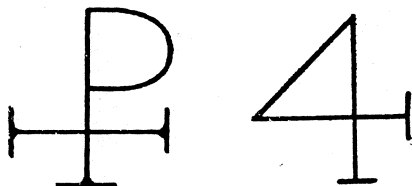
"Of course, with pleasure. For many years the central design in the Scinde Dawk stamps had been a puzzle to collectors. Hausburg, one of the best known authorities on the Early Stamps of India, was the first philatelic writer to throw some light on this mysterious design. He described it briefly as 'East India Company's Merchants' Mark, which the British had used from the time of Charles II'. Later researchers of Indian stamps did not approve of this explanation, which was propounded probably because this particular mark was placed by the East India Company on their property. The authentic and complete explanation of the origin and significance of the design was offered in 1928 by the late Major Rybot of the Indian Army. I will show you my annotation and illustrations on the subject. See this drawing marked "1"?"



"Yes", he said, "it is the enlarged sketch of the central design we are talking about."

"Quite so; now please listen to this annotation; this was taken from

one of the old issues of the Philatelic Journal of India: 'Traders and shippers of olden times ascribed the terrors and perils of the sea to the wrath and fury of the Evil One. To counteract these devilish onslaughts, they employed all sorts of religious or magical means, and invariably placed their ships and merchandise under the protection of God and His Saints. One of the means devised to this end was the use of the Merchants' Mark, which, in essence, is a



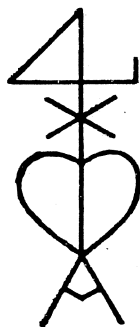
very ancient Christian sign composed of an "X" (cross) and a "P", the first letter of the name of Christ in Greek. From this sign is derived the Mystic Sign of Four, which is to be found at the head of every genuine Merchants' Mark."

"How very interesting," exclaimed my American friend.

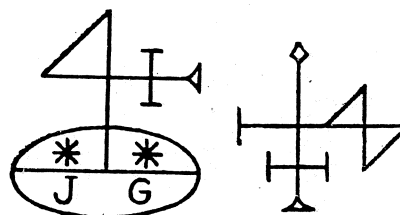
"The rest of the mark is composed of intricate arrangements of letters and initials".

"Like, for example, the 'E. I. C.' as in the Scinde Dawk stamps?"

"Yes — the words stand for 'East India Company'. I will show you some such marks which Major Rybot has provided. See this? Here you find the



Mystic Sign of Four at the top with the holy "X" below it. The design is



Jehan Gramon,
1511

J. Gymnicam,
1575

further extended to draw in an "M" and below it the 'A'. These initials are for Andrew Myller of Edinburgh, 1507. Apparently that gentleman stamped his wares with his own personal mark and sealed his letters with it.

"Major Rybot further reported that the wool merchants of the Low Countries in Medieval times spread the vogue of merchants' marks, and the traders of all other marine countries of Northern Europe followed the fashion. He also reported that the early printers used them and, to substantiate his statement, illustrated the examples that I have shown here.

"The significance is" he interposed, "now clear. The Mystic Sign of Four symbolizes protection against all dangers and mishaps."

"Yes", I replied, "and that is why, we might conclude that Sir Bartle Frere chose this alternative to the head of Queen Victoria as the central design of the first postage stamp of India. The rest of the design is simple. Beneath the 'protective symbolism' is the ½ anna value and the whole is surrounded by a garter with the words 'Scinde District Dawk.' A dawk, of course, is a postal service."

"Another question, if you don't mind," said my friend. "I notice that the blue stamp is embossed on two different papers — a white paper as well as a gray."

"You are perfectly right. You may have observed, too, that the white paper varies in thickness and here, for example, this particular blue stamp shows a clear thin blue line on its right margin: this suggests that each stamp was probably surround-

ed by a blue separation line to indicate where separation by cutting was to be done. This peculiarity, however, does not appear to have been uniformly applied, for, on some pairs there is no trace of the separation line."

"You will remember that I mentioned a block of 14 white unused stamps? I wish I had one in my collection. One day, I will, however, show you that block when we meet its present owner. I have a photograph of it though," and I drew out my book from the nearby case. "It can be seen from this block that embossing was not uniform, and was made by hand punching; this resulted not only in a zig-zag alignment, but also in an unequal margin between each stamp. It is obvious, isn't it?"

"I don't . . . " he replied still studying the photograph.

"You seem to be fascinated with this block?" I observed.

"On the contrary, quite frankly," replied my American friend rather apologetically. "It is such a tattered block, folded, as I see it, at three places, and, as you can hardly deny, with six stamps having centers punched through by what we know as embossing. What is more, two of the perfect stamps have a prominent crease running across their body! Why, I wonder, do you class this block as unique?"

"It is unique, by all counts, for first, no other large block of Scinde Dawks is known to exist anywhere in the world. This fact alone ranks it as a highly prized item in the collection of its present owner; second, because it is a block of great rarity in India, and, by now, you know that a block of 14 stamps is much more valuable, because it is rarer, than 14 individual copies. You can clearly see that there are only four perfect stamps. Suppose they were away from the block, the remaining piece, though still acceptable, would then lose much of its value and rarity! That is why it is unique, and, it might interest you to know that the present owner acquired it for

1,600 rupees, that is to say, 12,800 times the original price for the four stamps!"

"I confess, I am a mere dilettante!"

"You will soon be a connoisseur, I assure you. Well, there remains a point or two before we proceed further. One day, I am sure, you will be tempted to acquire these stamps, and I would like very much to tell you how you should tackle such a possible purchase."

"I will be grateful."

"In those early days when these stamps were issued, there was no philatelist of the modern tastes to collect them. The postal official had not, moreover, realized how costly these labels would be in times to come. They, thus, treated these brittle stamps with scant regard, with little or no attention as to whether they were cut into, torn, stained or otherwise injured. Some went to the length of cutting them around the circumference. I will show you a round disk in white. See?"

"What a dreadful zig-zag cut!" exclaimed my friend.

"Pity, is it not? In this cut-to-shape condition, this stamp is neither rare nor valuable. Now look at this one — it is slightly cut into and is, therefore, an imperfect stamp. Take this blue copy as an example — a fine copy but the margins all around are not even and though it is rare enough, its value is lessened and I have hardly any pride of ownership. Now, this one — do you like it?"

"It has an appearance of perfection as I see it."

"I too gathered the same impression once when I first purchased it from a dealer. A stamp looks all right when mounted, but hold it up to the light and its imperfections are then fully revealed. How do you find it now?"

"It is thinned at this spot!"

"Thinning or slimming is popular with modern ladies, but when a stamp is thinned, it is intensely unpopular with stamp collectors. And now, do you notice this?"

"A tiny hole — .?"

"A 'pin hole', as we call it, not

discernible when a stamp is mounted. Though a tiny defect, it affects the value of the stamp."

"But tell me," asked the novice; "do not dealers generally reveal these defects when they sell these stamps?"

"An honest one does, but you can not be too particular when making a purchase."

"Oh indeed!"

"This white Scinde Dawk is pen-cancelled. What a perfect specimen it appears! The seller might say to you — 'Boy, a pen-cancellation on a Scinde Dawk! How many examples will you come across? It's a bargain, friend, a bargain not likely to be repeated.' One hundred rupees brought this stamp to me. What would you do, I wonder, if you were to acquire it from me?"

"Hold it against a light, of course?"

"Please do".

"A thinned spot —"

"There you are! So you see how disappointing it would be to discover that a 'rarity' you have acquired at some considerable cost is practically worthless owing to its inferior state. One day, I will have to sell these, and imagine how bitterly chagrined I am going to be that my calculations of reasonable returns will prove baseless. I, however, learned this bitter truth much later in my philatelic career. I now always keep a magnifying glass in my pocket — you do not know when a stamp will turn up, and then, there are such a multitude of defects to look for. A beginner may too easily be led astray if he is not well equipped —"

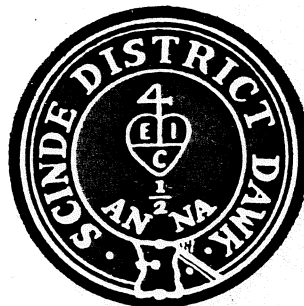
"I quite agree — show me the seller who can now cheat me!"

"I am happy — so much for this page; let us now turn to the next."

"Ah! Another page of Scinde Dawks!" exclaimed my friend.

"Yes, but before we proceed further, I am going to cover the heading at the top of the page. Now, you see, there are two rows of Scinde Dawks — a row on the left of the page, and another one on the right. Which stamps do you find superior?"

"Those on the left, of course. Can



Genuine Stamp



Forged Stamp

there be any doubt?"

"Why?"

"Well, they are brighter in color, lightly canceled, and . . . but, my word!"

"What is the matter?"

"You have an UNUSED Red-Wafer! And you said it did not exist?"

I exposed the reading of the page to full view.

"Oh, the left-hand side stamps are all forgeries. How very cleverly executed!"

"You think so? Well, to begin with, let me tell you that you have not followed sufficiently closely my description of the Red-Wafer. Did I not say that it always was a round disk without any margin?"

"Quite so — I clean forgot. This one has a margin all round and is cut square. But look at the white copy and the blue one, too. Who could detect that they are both forged?"

"A novice might not, but specialists and advanced philatelists can

distinguish such forgeries at a glance."

"Explain, please."

"Take this magnifying glass and study the word 'DAWK' on the right hand bottom corner of the stamp. Look at the letter 'K'. Now study the word 'ANNA' above it, and observe the last 'A' of the word. Do you get it?"

"Yes."

"Now study the formation of those letters both on the forged stamps and the genuine ones on the right of the page. Do you notice any difference?"

"I do."

"Can you describe it?"

"Of couses, I may not be correct, but I notice the last 'A' of ANNA is almost exactly above 'K' of DAWK on the genuine stamps. Am I right?"

"Very nearly so. I would say that the right leg of the 'A' is exactly above the perpendicular leg of the 'K' in DAWK. Please study the same formation on the forgeries and tell me what you see."

"The difference is striking; in the forged stamps the letter 'A' is far to the left of 'K'. That's something I shall remember always. I am sure, however, these dissimilarities are disclosed in philatelic books?"

"They are indeed —"

"Will not, then, the forgers concerned be extra careful?"

"Even then they cannot escape the scrutiny of seasoned philatelists," I assured him, and added — "Besides what I mentioned about the 'K' and 'A', there are other differentiating features between a genuine Scinde Dawk and a forged one. These, to the best of my knowledge, have not been emphasized by the previous or present investigators. Will you please examine this blue stamp under the magnifying glass? You notice that the wordings, the garter, the central design and the value are all in white relief from the solid blue background. This bicolored vista, if I may call it so, thus reveals the details quite distinctly. Not so the white and red stamps which were embossed in one color on white to bluish wove paper and on vermillion wafers, respectively." I paused for a moment as the

novice was following my instructions while examining each of the three stamps under the magnifying glass.

"The details in the enlarged illustration of the genuine stamp as well as its faked counterpart that you see on this page were drawn by me on the actual photographs," I continued. "You will see that there are some striking differences between the two".

"For example?"

"Note the general disposition of the wordings in the garter. Don't you find them dissimilar?"

"Indeed I do —"

"Describe, please?"

My friend remained busy for nearly a minute before he replied: "The 'S' of SCINDE is more or less above the 'A' of ANNA in the genuine stamp; not so in the faked copy where the 'A' is too much to the right of the 'S'. Is that not so?"

"That's right — please go on".

"The perpendicular leg of '4' in the central design is exactly above the perpendicular bar of the first 'T' of DISTRICT in the forged copy. It is not so in the genuine stamp where it stands **between** the 'S' and 'T'. What about my reading?"

"Good. Now concentrate on the central design and mark the alignment of 'E. I. C.' — the comparative lengths and slopes of the three cross-bars of the 'E' in relation to its perpendicular bar. Got them?"

"You bet I did. What a great deal of difference between the two! And, poor forger, the 'E. I. C.' are all with serifs in the forgery!"

"And then, what about the holy cross (4)?"

"Is there any doubt?"

"None, I agree. Now, do you notice the minute folds in the lower right corner of the garter in the genuine stamp? They are, no doubt, too insignificant, but nevertheless, quite visible under the magnifying glass."

"I see them clearly."

"Do you find them in the forged copy?"

"None at all!"

"Now what, I wonder, have you to say about the rim and tongue of the

buckle?"

It was gratifying to see the young American enthusiast shifting the glass from one stamp to the other.

"Can there be any doubt?" he exclaimed. "I shall not forget this. But say, what a wonderful job the cancellations on the forgeries are, especially on the blue!"

"When a man is out to cheat, he naturally takes considerable pains in the execution of his plans".

"Are there many such forgeries?"

"As many as you want."

"Who produces them, and how do they manage to sell?"

"Forgers have always the stamp collector in view. They are men of patience and persistence; fortunately, however, there has not so far been any such thing as a perfect forgery. And yet, mark you, his trickery has succeeded in deceiving the beginners."

"Bombay is notorious for forged Scinde Dawks which, now-a-days, are openly sold at about a rupee per copy. A number of unwary collectors have been duped in the past and even today a beginner may easily be swindled."

"What, then, is the remedy for a beginner?"

"No reasonable collector should dream of buying an unpedigreed rare stamp without first obtaining a certificate of genuineness from the Expert Committee of either the Royal Philatelic Society or the British Philatelic Association", I replied.

"I'll bet the forger won't catch me now! But please tell me, why did you include these counterfeited stamps in your fine collection?"

"It is admissible to display a few examples provided they are very cleverly forged," I replied. "Look at this one in blue; it is a dangerous forgery — so skillfully executed that a leading stamp dealer of Bombay had to examine it under a powerful glass before he announced it as a fake."

"No doubt it was the work of an ingenious forger," agreed my American friend.

"The late Mr. C. D. Desai, of whom

I spoke to you earlier, had as many as 21 forged Scinde Dawks in his collection. They, together with 29 forgeries of the first issues of India, were sold in auction in one lot which realized 24 pounds against auctioneer's valuation of 12 pounds! So, you see?"

He smiled and nodded in agreement.

"Well, I think I have told you all about Sir Bartle Frere's stamps of the Scinde Districts, and before it gets too late, let us turn a few more pages for a quick review of the Indian Classics of 1854-55".

"No, I should prefer to stop for the present. I don't want simply to glance through your collection. I want to study it with you as we did with the Wafers. Suppose we meet next Sunday, but at my place?"

"Fine, and I will bring with me the same album."

"Goodbye, then, until next Sunday."