

## Treasures of a different kind - collectors' passion

Their treasure troves have been painstakingly collected over the years, sometimes embarrassing family members as they rummaged through garbage, or ran behind the postman or even bribed their friends with chocolates to part with their share. But their collection of stamps, historical documents and even match boxes has been worth every effort.

The collection of stamps, coins, newspapers, documents, lenses, watches and several other things was on display at an exhibition in Ahmedabad, and their proud owners were only too happy to recall how a casual interest soon turned into an all consuming passion for them.

Shantilal Parmar, 40, is a serious collector of empty matchboxes. His treasure includes 15,000 matchboxes carrying the picture of Nescafe's bright red mug of coffee. He also has 300 match boxes with a horsehead on the cover and hundreds of others with different pictures, including Bollywood stars and satellites of India.

For Parmar, his hobby is his passion and love. He recalls that his wife soon got fed up of him and felt very embarrassed as he would stop on the road to pick up empty matchboxes whenever he spotted one. His children felt the same way too, till they witnessed a philately exhibition and then they started supporting him. Parmar says his collection has increased and his daughter plans to help him go international by displaying his rare collection on the net.

Stamp collectors had different stories and backgrounds. However, common to all of them was their passion and craze.

Vijay Navlakha, 57, recalls how it all began for him.

'We used to buy chocolates with five paise or so when I was a child and studying in Class 5. One chocolate introduced a stamp in its wrapper. It attracted me and so I just stored it. Soon it became my passion and I started collecting more and more of it with my small pocket money or even money that I found lying on the roads, or anywhere. It was all meant for my chocolates carrying stamps.

'One day I found that my other friends and cousins had preserved some of the stamps, so I offered to barter the stamps with them and they readily agreed. Sometimes they would exchange it with chocolates and sometimes with stamps.

'Gradually, my possession bulged and I realised it was my first love. After 40 years of having started this hobby, today I feel proud and very happy. I wish more and more youngsters adopt this as a hobby since it gives you knowledge of various areas. It is also a good source of income. For me it was everything, a stress buster to my lifesaver. Once I even tried to commit suicide when I was upset in my business and deeply depressed. However, my stamp collection saved my life and I busied myself in stamp exhibition work, which also fetched good money for me in that critical period,' Navlakha told IANS.

Tapan Dhang, a collector from Kolkata, had rare documents, original manuscripts and stamps to showcase. He also has original newspapers of Mahatma Gandhi's journey, from becoming a national leader to the day when he was assassinated.

Deepak Dave, 65, a stamp collector of repute from Nadiad, has a booming business in shares trading. He remembers how as a child he would run after the postman to see which houses he would deliver the letters to, and later request the recipients to give him the stamps on their letter.

'At that time I used to spend Rs.5 a month but today youngsters can start with Rs.500 a month to develop and cherish this hobby, which is full of fun and thrill. Indian stamps are in demand both within the country and outside; if traded with passion and style it can fetch handsome money as well. Some of the stamps bring lakhs of rupees for the collectors,' Dave told IANS.

There was also Madhukar Jhingan, 68, who edits the only web weekly on stamp collection called stampsofindia.com and deals in the trading of stamps on an international level.

The four-day exhibition was organised by the Gujarat Philatelists' Association and India Post.

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