

Gandhi is 'stamp-ed' all over his collection

Mahatma Gandhi sure has a variety of fans. Take a look at Abhijeet Biswas' collection of stamps, postcards, envelopes and other philately material and you'll know what a big admirer of Bapu he is.

All of 20, Abhijeet hails from Chhattisgarh but is currently living here to pursue his degree in hotel management from the Pusa Institute. And although he loves dishing out various culinary delights, his true love remains the same - fishing for philatelic stuff related to Gandhi.

'I was always fascinated by stamps. At the age of four, I started collecting different kinds of stamps I could lay my hands on. But it was only at the age of 12 that I took it up seriously,' he says.

But why Gandhi? 'Because I like him and look up to him,' he said trying to put his fascination for the father of the nation in words.

But when you see India's first stamp issued back in 1948 or stamps from countries like the US or Japan on Gandhi in his collection, you know it's much more than just a simple liking.

'Philately is not just about collecting stamps,' he said.

His collection contains postcards, inland letters, brochures related to the stamp, first day covers and special covers - the last two being sheets with information inscribed on them about a stamp and put out the day the stamp is issued.

While getting some stamps - especially the ones issued more than five decades ago - is not easy, Abhijeet can go to great lengths to secure them. At times, he has to dish out a hefty sum to buy some rare stamps from dealers.

One such stamp is the se-tenant format, which is actually a twin stamp. So while you have Gandhi on Dandi March in one stamp, the other one has his Salt Satyagraha -- but both are part of the same picture.

For a student it's not always easy to shell out a large amount of money but Abhijeet has spent as much as Rs.30,000 for his collection.

A very rare stamp that might have been worth Rs.10 at its time and is no longer available with the postal department for usage might be as expensive as Rs.5,000 if bought from dealers who buy such stamps in bulk.

Other than India, more than 80 countries have issued stamps on Mahatma Gandhi but the one to lead the league was the US.

Issued in 1961, the American stamp has the inscription 'Champion of Liberty' inscribed beneath Gandhi's face. Abhijeet also showed others from Japan, Russia, South Africa and Hungary.

Did you also know that India was the first country to use the airmail postcard? 'Here it is. It was issued in 1911,' he said.

With the exception of one, Abhijeet has all the philatelic material related to Gandhi in India.

'In 1948, a service stamp was issued which could be used only by the president and the prime minister and was worth Rs.10. I haven't been able to get my hands on that one but will eventually,' he said with determination.

He even has the only two stamps issued on Kasturba Gandhi, Gandhi's wife, in 1964 and 1996. And if that is not enough, he also has Cinderella, a term for fake stamps from around the world which have never been issued officially by the postal department.

'My aim is to collect all the stamps from around the world issued on Gandhi,' said Abhijeet.

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