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Stamp of Despair: Philately On Wane

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Stamp of despair

By [Komal Gautham](#) & J Jackson

For 69-year-old P S Seshadri, philately has been part and parcel of his life. The Chennai-based retired mechanical engineer has been collecting stamps since his school days in Vellore. But after 54 years of buying, trading and borrowing, he stopped collecting Indian stamps last year.

As the price of the stamps has skyrocketed in the past few years, it's not just him but a number of philatelists across the country said they were being forced to give up the hobby. In [Tamil Nadu](#), of the 14,097 philatelist accounts with the postal department, 2,700 have become dormant over the years. India Post, which is trying to earn revenue with the sale of stamps has, despite the popularity of email, increased the rates of stamps released per year by six-fold in the past decade. The number of issues released per year has also tripled.

"I have stopped my Indian collection of stamps in the past one year because I just cannot afford it," says Seshadri. "Till three years ago, stamps of denomination of ₹5 were issued based on the present postage rate. Now, they are minting stamps at higher denomination from ₹10 to ₹100, which is not affordable for a retired person like me." A similar reason also forced [Naseer Ahmed](#), 52, from Coimbatore to put away his 45-year-old collection of commemorative, definitive issue and miniature stamps from 1947 till 2016. "Earlier when a stamp was released, we could purchase one or two of them. But now the postal department sells only an entire sheetlet. Also, several stamps of face value ₹25 come in a package with assortments and we are asked to pay ₹250 for it," says Naseer.

Sources in the postal department say the higher charge was to promote stamp collection as an investment. But philatelists say the charge is no value for money as there is no improvement in quality of printing. "Earlier in a year, I would spend only around ₹200-₹500 for stamps. Now, it costs more than ₹25,000 for all the sheetlets and issues," said [R Kasinath](#), a philatelist, adding that supply too is erratic. "The Children's Day stamp released in November 2017 was not available until February 2018," he points out. The hike in rates can be attributed to the increase in the cost of operation, said [Mahesh Parekh](#), committee member of South India Philatelist Association. "The department has not increased the postage stamp rates for several years. Though genuine collectors are affected we need to create awareness among them," he said.

While high costs keep away older people, it the poor supply that is irking younger collectors. "I have stopped buying Indian stamps and only collect thematic ones from other countries. What is the point of releasing a new stamp if it is not available? Our friends from other countries keep asking us for these stamps and we feel ashamed to say that our country does not have stocks," says Som Ghatak, a software professional from Bengaluru. Spelling mistakes are another cause of exasperation. Recently, the Goann Tiatr, Pondicherry Jubilee and coconut research miniature sheets were printed with errors. And sometimes, you don't always get what is promised. A ₹100 value coffee stamp was claimed to smell of coffee, but wasn't so.

Chief postmaster general, Tamil Nadu circle, M Sampath denies promoting stamps as an investment. "We agree that the rates and number of issues have increased. But we have not received any complaints from philatelists. We will definitely look into the supply issue," he said, adding that the department holds workshops and exhibitions across the state to instil interest among children.

With inputs from Yogesh Kabirdoss