

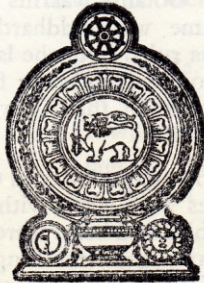
SRI LANKA

Stamp

Bulletin No. 48

Special Issue

VESAK



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STAMP BULLETIN NO. 48

The Ministry of Posts and
Telecommunications,
Duke Street,
Colombo 1,
Sri Lanka (Ceylon),
76-05-07.

The Posts & Telecommunications Department of Sri Lanka, will issue on the 7th of May, 1976, a set of six stamps to commemorate the 2600th Birth Anniversary of Prince Siddhartha (later, Gotama the Buddha) which falls on the full-moon day of Vesak (May - June) 1976.

The Buddha, the founder of Buddhism which is professed by the majority of the population of Sri Lanka and by over one-fifth of the population of the whole world, lived in North India over 2500 years ago. Gotama was his family name and his personal name was Siddhartha. His father, king Suddhodana ruled over the land of the Sakyas at Kapilavastu on the Nepalese frontier of India. Mahamaya, princess of the Koliyas, was Suddhodana's queen.

On the full-moon day of May in 623-624 B.C. when in India the trees were laden with leaf, flower and fruit and man, bird and beast were in joyous mood, Queen Mahamaya was travelling in State from Kapilavastu to Devadaha her parental home, according to the custom of the times, to give birth to her child. But that was not to be, for halfway between the two cities, in the Lumbini Grove, under the shade of a flowering Sal tree she brought forth a son. The full-moon day of May 1976 marks the 2600th anniversary of this event.

Lumbini or Rummindai, the name by which it is now known, is 100 miles north of Benares and within sight of the snow-capped Himalayas. At this memorable spot where Prince Siddhartha, the future Buddha was born, Emperor Asoka, 316 years

after the event, erected a mighty stone pillar to mark the holy spot. In the inscription engraved on the pillar there are the following words: "Hida Budhe jate Sakyamuniti"—Here was born the Buddha, the Sage of the Sakyas. This pillar is still to be seen.

Since the introduction of Buddhism to the country by the missionaries of Emperor Asoka in the 3rd century B.C., the Buddhists have been celebrating in great splendour the birth of their Master which falls on the Vesak full-moon day. The stories connected with the birth of Prince Siddhartha must have been painted from very early times as painting was an ancient art practised in Sri Lanka as an aid to religious edification. Not only were the walls of palaces and shrines decorated with paintings; there were also painted cloths which were carried in religious processions, or used by religious preachers to lend point to the sacred stories which they used to narrate. The materials on which the paintings were drawn being not so durable as stone, there are comparatively few remains today of an art which at one time was widespread.

From the third century B.C. to the thirteenth century, during the creative period of Sinhalese civilization, we find many examples of the pictorial art in Sri Lanka. The centuries that followed saw the jungle tide enveloping the cities and shrines of the previous age. The old school of painting disappears and what takes its place is a folk art of which the merit is its pleasing colour schemes and decorative designs. There was a revival of art during the time of King Kirti Sri Rajasingha of the 18th century and the present set of stamps is from a painting of this period.

The stamps depict the story of the nativity of Prince Siddhartha from the conception to the birth in six panels taken from an eighteenth century wall-painting in a temple known as Dambawa

Vihara in the District of Matale in the Central Province of Sri Lanka. The image house bearing the paintings is a square structure raised on pillars (tampita vihara) and is said to have been founded during the reign of King Kirti Sri Rajasingha. The paintings are supposed to be the work of the Nilagama family of Sittaras (Painters). These paintings, however, are very different from those done elsewhere by the Nilagama Sittaras. Here are found one of the finest series of paintings representing the life of Prince Siddhartha. Although the colour scheme is very much the same as elsewhere the compositions are somewhat different. They are done in the usual technique of the Kandyan paintings, but there are certain details in the composition and also in the subject matter which make these pictures refreshingly uncommon. They stand out as a significant departure from the normal Kandyan style. These paintings have been executed on the inner surface of the walls of the temple.

According to the traditional accounts Prince Siddhartha, the future Buddha was conceived in a dream in the womb of queen Mahamaya, the chief queen of King Suddhodana of Kapilavastu. When the queen became aware of the conception it was immediately brought to the notice of the king who promptly consulted the astrologers. The astrologers predicted the birth of an illustrious and virtuous child to Her Majesty. Thereafter the King and Queen led a virtuous life performing meritorious deeds. When the day of confinement was drawing near, the Queen expressed her wish to visit her kith and kin for which the King readily consented and made all arrangements for the purpose. But halfway on her journey, in a grove at a place called Lumbini the pangs of childbirth came upon her quite unexpectedly and there she gave birth to a son who was later named Siddhartha.

The following are the details:—

Stamp No. 1: Prince Siddhartha who has descended from heaven enters the womb of the sleeping queen in the form of an elephant, white in colour.

- Stamp No. 2:** The King consults the astrologers.
- Stamp No. 3:** The King entertains the astrologers with royal victuals.
- Stamp No. 4:** The Queen seated in a palanquin is taken in royal procession to her parents.
- Stamp No. 5:** The Royal Officials, flag bearers, musicians and drummer-cum-dancers in the royal procession.
- Stamp No. 6:** The queen gives birth to a son in the grove of Lumbini. The queen stands behind the curtain with her attendants.

(By courtesy of the Department of Archaeology
Sri Lanka)

Technical Details

- Denominations* : Rs. 5/-, Rs. 2/25, Rs. 2/-,
Re. 1/50, 10 cts., and 05 cts.
- Designer* : P. Wanigatunga.
- Colours* : Magenta, Yellow, Cyan, Black
and Special Blue.
- Format* : Horizontal.
- Date of Issue* : 1976-05-07.
- Size* : 28.5 mm. x 48 mm.
(Perforation to perforation).
- Printers* : Toppan Printing Co., Ltd.,
Japan.
- Printing process* : Offset.
- Sheet composition* : 100 stamps per sheet.
- Paper* : One side coated paper—
104.7 g/m².
- Gum* : Special adhesive suitable for
tropical climate.

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