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# His hobby spreads message of road safety

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Chennai: The Indian tiger, Gandhiji and the Queen of Britain. These are some of the stamps, M S Mohammed Noorullah used to watch his father, an employee with the postal department, has collected. With access to stamps across the world, he would curiously observe his father hastily rip a stamp from an envelope and paste it in a notebook. At 16, Noorullah inherited his father's stamp collection and reluctantly retained it.

But soon, he lost interest and his father's collection was left gathering dust. Little did he know that 15 years later the philatelist in him would be revived.

Noorullah joined the highways department and eventually moved to the highway research station. In 1979, he was introduced to the world of stamps by a colleague.

"He told me about a stamp club in Chennai and I immediately joined the South India Philatelist Association," he says. At the club, he saw that collecting stamps adhering to certain themes was quite a rage.

That was when he came across a few stamps on cars and road signs. "It was a combination of road safety, my job and philately, something that piqued my interest," he says.

But starting a stamp collection on such an obscure topic proved to be difficult. "I had to buy stamps from exhibitions and even trade with other philatelists," he says. However, Noorullah persisted and over 20 years has collected over 200 stamps. "I collect a maximum of two stamps a year," he says.

Neatly arranged, his stamps stand out like colourful, miniature pieces of art. But for him, they are more than just bits of paper.

"My collection tells a story. I have covered rules from the importance of zebra crossings and lane discipline to the consequences of drunk driving and driving without a helmet," he states. He also collects envelopes and first day covers, where envelopes with particular messages are sent out on a particular day.

From Turkey and Thailand to Spain and Saudi Arabia , his collection includes stamps from over a 100 countries .

However, he appreciates the simple ones the most. "The simple ones spread the most important messages," he says, displaying a Tanzanian stamp with a broken goblet with two men taking away a body on a stretcher. His only grouse is that India hasn't issued a stamp on the topic yet.

"It's funny considering the country is notorious for not following road rules," he says.

Noorullah feels children are yet to take the hobby seriously . "Some children think philately is about pasting stickers onto sheets of paper, like how I used to," he states.

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