

1947 INDIAN NATIONAL FLAG 'COMMA' VARIETY by Ashish Talwar

Independent India proudly displayed its Indian National Flag on the first stamp that was issued after 15th August 1947. It was released 97 days later, on 21st November 1947 and became the first stamp of the Jai Hind set of three. The stamp was printed on multiple star watermark paper in a format of 96 (8 x 12) stamps to a sheet.

Within weeks of the issue of this stamp, a prominent positional variety was noticed by philatelists in the position of R6/6. Specialists of Independent Indian like late Dr. S. P. Gupta went on to call it the 'Comma' variety while Stanley Gibbons chose to list it as the 'Teardrop' variety (fig. 1). The popularity of the issue led to philatelists creating and retaining the stamp in various forms like this large block on paper with the Comma variety stamp cancelled by day of issue cds (fig. 2).



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Independent India's first issue was printed on watermarked paper and inverted watermark stamps are also recorded. This also led to the creation of a 'double' variety which remains very scarce with both the inverted watermark and the Comma on the same stamp. Figure 3 displays this 'double' variety.



Since the discovery of the Comma variety, it has been consistently found in the position of R6/6. As a collector of the Jai Hind issues, I have possessed and seen over a dozen complete sheets. The large size of the sheet has led to a very low survival rate in sheet form. Each sheet that I had seen possessed the variety in the recorded position. Therefore, it was baffling when I recently purchased a sheet which did not have the Comma variety not just in the R6/6 position but any position! The National Flag stamp was a commemorative issue with a print run of over 2 million stamps. Therefore, there is only one 'sensible' explanation about the missing Comma. Multiple plates had to be used to complete such a large print run and hence either the variety was found in the initial print run and then corrected or the reverse happened. Given the relative scarcity of the variety, it is likely that the

former is true. Whatever be the case, the sheet shown in figure 4 is far more interesting than the ones which have the Comma variety stamp.



With the discovery of this missing Comma sheet, all those who are lucky enough to possess complete sheets of the National Flag issue should check for the Comma variety – or lack of it.

