

ISSUING THE NATION: POSTAGE STAMPS, STATE LEADERSHIP, AND THEMATIC SHIFTS IN PAKISTAN 1947–2023

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Abstract

This study analyzes the presence of postage stamps as political artifacts in Pakistan. Significantly, the study examines how stamps provide a historically filtered snapshot of Pakistan's leaders along with its evolving national identity from 1947-2023. The paper combines quantitative data regarding the number of stamps produced with qualitative methods involving semiotic analysis. This combination of data allows the paper to elaborate how and why Pakistan's leaders have used stamps to pursue and disseminate specific and various socio-political ideologies. The paper comparatively analyzes stamps issued by post-independence governments to argue that stamps have served propagandistic functions. The paper argues that stamps have served to create and promote a dominant state identity and have served to create a state narrative that has glorified Pakistan's place in the world while evading and reframing Pakistan's place in world history with its present and past failures. Through an analysis of visual signifiers, the study argues that stamps serve as a historical narrative of Pakistan's leaders' diverse attempts (failed and successful) to maintain political legitimacy.

Introduction

Postage stamps serve to maintain and facilitate the commerce of government-approved communication. More importantly, they serve as a government artifact that records Pakistan's official narrative. Since 1947, postage stamps have served as small official documents of Pakistan's national ideologies. Pakistan's leadership and its various extensions has authorized the production of stamps that serve to reflect the country's evolving political dispensations. (Zahedi, 1997).

The twofold function of the postage stamp, standing as both an economic good and a propaganda device, constitutes its power. By correlating stamp generation and political lead periods, this paper seeks to explain the transformation of state concerns, from the need to establish the state identity after the colonial period in the 1940s, to the later decades' religious and nationalist concerns. Postage stamps, as an underdeveloped memory concept in the context of social orders, express what states want to show to the world (Gary, 2008). There is a longitudinal frequency variation of stamps with Islamic and other religious symbols, stamps that commemorate national days, and stamps that express social concerns; these reflect a highly selective framing of social and political realities (Kearns et al., 2019).

Despite being ubiquitous, postage stamps, as historical documents, remain underdeveloped in the context of Pakistan. While other researchers are focused on official state documents or parliamentary records, the stamp relational interface developed by Pakistan Post contains the least data to understand the way state wants to frame its social concerns (Aziz, 1993). Using a complementary research design, this study integrates quantitative data pertaining to stamp production and a qualitative semiotic analysis to examine the relationship between stamps and politics in Pakistan.

During 1947-2023, how many commemorative stamps were issued? What was the focused themes during different head of states? How the postage stamp played the role to deliver government's message to national and international audience? This paper attempts to answer all the above questions.

Philately, like other hobbies, has periods of intense popularity interspersed with periods of almost non-interest. This paper attempts to delineate those sub periods for philately in Pakistan. The sub periods are determined by the regimes that controlled the state, and the stamps and their visual culture during that period. The author has studied the official Pakistani stamps from 1947 to 2023. This research concludes that stamps can convey the state's ideology and its changing priorities. Stamps are not mere tools of communication. They are active participants in the political arena which the state controls. For example, the stamps produced in Pakistan serve to portray a certain image of the state's history. The stamps, for example, glorify the achievements of the successive state administrations, especially that of the current administration. The stamps actively participate in the political culture of Pakistan by glossing over the politically inconvenient event of the separation of East Pakistan in 1971. The author hopes this research will answer the above questions and act as a foundation for future research in other areas of Pakistan's political and visual culture.

Literature Review:

Postage Stamps as the Communicative Tools

Stamp studies or philately traditionally focus on socio-political interpretations via studies of eras, movements, and trends, as well as the impacts of developing technologies. Stamps and philately help develop and build national narratives, national images, and cultural and socio-political ambassadors of a nation (Dobson et al., Burn et al., 2008). Stamps and philately help to constitute politically, culturally, and socially a nation and community. Adopting a semiotic view, a stamp and its image can be interpreted as a multilayered text located in a particular space and time, and contextual. Colors, themes, and codes displayed on stamps all convey meaning. Once these themes and elements are shown, they can no longer be separated; everything comes together and is called a postage stamp. Letters published on the stamp also contribute to the themes, elements, and codes of the stamp, which also connect with the media (Brennan, 2018).

Brunn (2011) argues that postage stamps are state-sponsored communication tools capable of shaping and sustaining a states' identity. Using Russia and Ukraine, he was able to show the gradual alteration of state stamps via the country's political and economic developments, something that was overlooked by other historians. While the present study adopts a similar approach, it goes beyond tracing the political and economic development of the state. It aims to analyze the icons and symbols of the Postal stamps of Pakistan and the relation of these stamps to contemporary themes, designs, society, and culture. The study of the stamps of the ex-U.S. state of Hawaii focuses on the 2002 stamp of Duke Kahanamoku (Gary, 2008). Gary claims that stamps are an underappreciated source of social memory and an unrecognized aid of history. By analyzing the semiotics, origin, and resonance of the Kahanamoku stamp, Gary argues that stamps can articulate extensive frameworks of cultural discourse and place greater significance on the art of commemoration and social discourse than other available media.

Researchers (Kearns et al. 2019) have investigated a series of New Zealand stamps that have been published annually since 1929 to promote children's health and fundraising. Using a critical interpretive case study, the annual series of stamps were found to provide a means to both promote

and financially support health initiatives aimed at children. One stamp depicted a butterfly to symbolize fragility and to promote the idea of protecting and caring for children.

Postage stamps have the unique ability to shape how people think by carrying messages on small, moving objects that transport them from senders to receivers. Stamps provide a way to think about processes at a small scale, such as billboards as a way to raise funds and increase awareness on issues that pertain to the health and wellbeing of children (Anderson et al., 2012). The use, content, design, color, ideology, and movement of a stamp work with each other to send messages to and shape how people think across the world, from individuals and groups to entire nations. There are many different types of power relations with different intensities and distributions, which stamp designs work to position (Anderson and McFarlane, 2011).

In the context of this study, assemblage refers to a variety of different components that have come together in some way to create a unified field of action and debate (Li, 2007). This study will focus on the different components that stamps have to offer and will examine Pakistan's stamps through the lens of deconstructive semiotics and assemblage thinking.

Stamp designers create space for visuals, like artwork and portraits, symbols, and even landscapes, by putting design elements where they would naturally fit text. This aids in their comprehension. These graphics prominently feature symbols and patterns that represent significant people and events. According to Lefrere and Danic (2010) and Gursu et al. (2013), distinctive graphics printed in bright colors and framed with stimulating messages (i.e., slogans) dominate postage stamps. Stamp designs help convey messages regarding the culture of nations and the worldview of their people. In particular, the stamps represent products that identify the nations to the people who reside in them and the people who visit them. In addition, stamps represent commemorative products that celebrate the peoples' festivities, memorialize their heroes, and honor their wars (Jack, 2005; Brunn, 2000). This research aims to analyze Pakistan postage stamps by focusing on their icons. Additionally, it aims to explain the role of assemblage in the overall composition of the stamps, focusing on their effects on the different domains of Pakistan, including its socio-political, economic, and cultural domains.

Pakistan Post has published catalogs with information on stamps, while private catalogs by prominent philatelists include stamps, designer names, and printing techniques. These contributed to the quantitative aspects of research.

In dealing with the literature related to the study of Pakistan's postage stamps, the state archives, and a few official documents, heavily referenced literature, including books, research papers, and semi-structured interviews, are essential for identifying existing research gaps.

Methodology

This study uses a combination of approaches to consider the postage stamps through the lens of graphic design and semiotics. While most of the study is qualitative, a few areas include a focus on quantitative analysis. The combination of approaches focuses on visual and symbolic elements of the stamps.

One of the critical and the first research step is the identification of research sample and tools. The research sample consists of a collection of stamps covering a 75-year span: those published on and after Pakistan's Independence Day, 14 August 1947, until 2023. Purposive sampling is used to select the sample stamps from the entire population of stamps issued after Pakistan's independence. For the research study, the stamps are divided into multiple thematic groups.

Also, the second sampling method uses stamps issued while different heads of Pakistan ruled to assess the country's political situation during different eras.

The selection of postage stamps in the sample is based on the purposive sampling method. As per this method, the sample is selected based on the criteria of inclusion or exclusion for the research sample (Ritchie et al, 2013). The inclusion criteria for the present research sample is that each postage stamp selected represents important events, people, or movements of the particular decades and shows the gradual changes of the decade in accordance with the social, political, and economic changes which followed. Any postage stamp which does not represent the above inclusion criteria will be excluded from the research sample.

Theoretical Framework

As a research tool, interviews of different persons important for this study will be conducted, and the official archives of the government of Pakistan will be accessed and utilized. An overview of the research sample and the research tools used will be provided below:

- Archives at Pakistan Post Master General's Office (Islamabad)
- Archives at Pakistan Security Printing Corporation (Karachi)
- Archives and display Material at State Bank of Pakistan Museum
- Punjab archives at Civil Secretariat Lahore
- Archives at Bahawalpur Museum

For this study, stamps are examined based on visual methodologies. While utilizing visual methodologies, pictorial texts are defined as visual constructs for and interpret specific contextual and temporal socio-political layers. Human relations and most societal functions are rooted and grounded in visual and graphic communication. The way in which visual and graphic communication is constructed as a network of signs and symbols encourages visual communication. This network of signs and symbols encourages communication of meaning, pictorial texts, and other multi-layered constructs of expressive socio-political and contextual communication. The use of typography, color, layout, and other design elements allows visual designers to create and develop pictorial narratives of cultural interpretation and societal way of life. The power of pictorial narratives makes it easy to understand the value and importance of visual design and graphic communication in facilitating social responsibility and positive change.

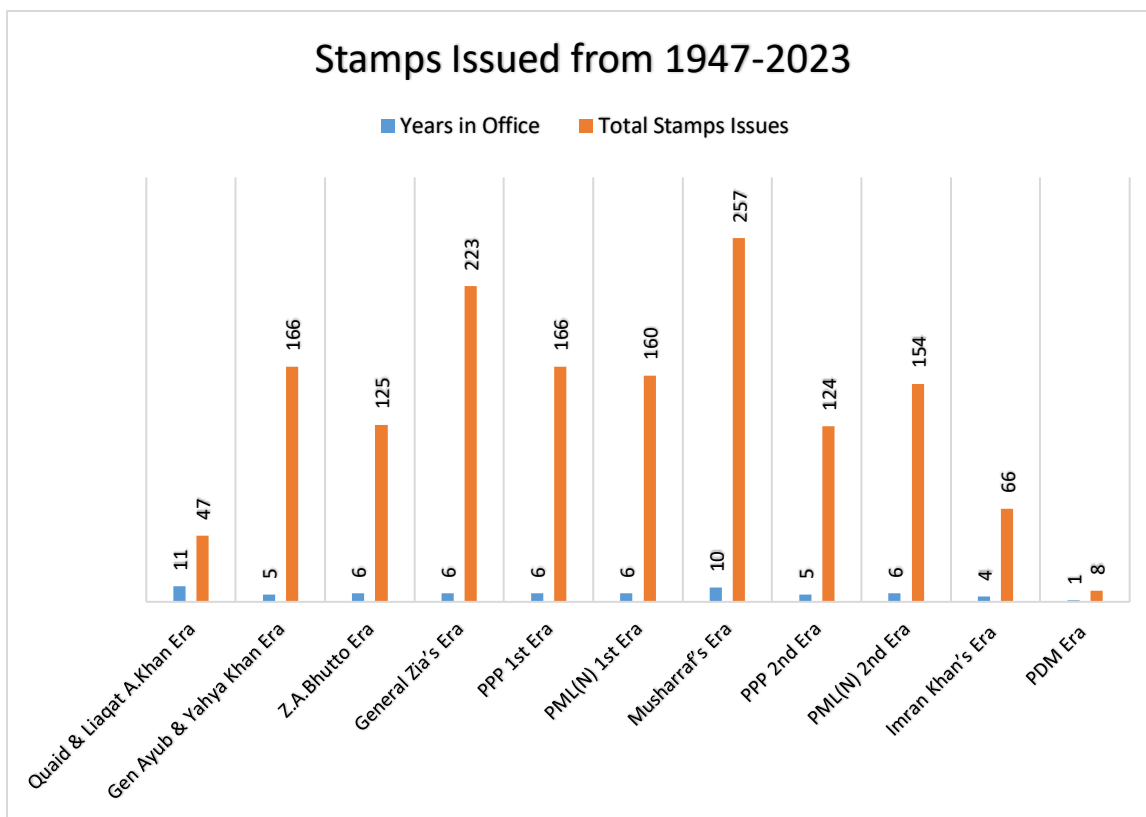
The social and historical influences of a society and culture inform visual communication and graphic design. Most scholars and practitioners of visual communication and design appreciate and acknowledge that meanings of visual signs and symbols, and graphic representations, are contextually and culturally bound. This also indicates that a single symbol or graphic representation can have different meanings and implications in different contexts and cultures.

Structuralism examines the structures and systems that control language and culture. Used as a framework, structuralism provides a means for understanding how various elements of design and communication are ordered and systematized. It helps us understand how Pakistani stamps design and systematize cultural, historical, and geographical elements and explain the influence of diverse styles and practices over time. It helps us understand how structuralism elucidates the systems and structures of culture, society, and language, as well as the visual communication expressed through stamps.

Structuralism describes how different elements of visual communication are ordered and integrated. It explores how images, colors, and other design elements and their arrangement relate to the meaning they convey within a cultural context.

Results and Discussion:

This section presents a visual semiotic analysis of the Pakistani postage stamps from 1947 to 2023 to explain how they function as political and ideological instruments of the state. The quantitative overview of stamp production from 1947 to 2023 reveals distinct patterns in state priorities across different political regimes. As illustrated in Graph 1, there are significant fluctuation in the number of stamps issued, reflecting the varying focus on national commemorative events during different eras (Brunn & Toops, 2024). Following Childs (2021), I argue that stamps operate as tools of “philatelic statecraft” through which postcolonial states project legitimacy, manage memory, and conduct soft power at the scale of everyday circulation.



Graph1: showing number of stamps issued during various Political Eras'. Data collected by researcher.¹

¹ The Data was collected from various sources including, official postage stamp catalogues published Pakistan security Printing press and Punjab archives department)

1947–1957: The Formative Years and Nationalism

Postage stamps in Pakistan have a fascinating history that reflects the country's journey from its formation in 1947 to the present day. This journey includes witnessing an eventful course of history, culminating in the formation of two independent states and the end of British rule in 1947. Then known as British India, the Subcontinent was divided into two sovereign states, and one of these states was Pakistan, which appeared on the world map on August 14, 1947. (Sharma, 2020; Khan, 2020)

After the formation of Pakistan, Indian stamps continued to be used in the newly established state. Initially, Pakistani authorities believed they could use these stamps without a surcharge, but this assumption proved incorrect. Negotiations involving the British Government were conducted between India and Pakistan. India was requested to overprint existing stamps, while Pakistan was asked to accept the overprinted Indian stamps from a specified date. These first few stamp designs and sheets used in official independent Pakistan hold unique symbolic and historical elements as they hold a collage of three different individual nation's identities: Britain, India, and the newly formed Pakistan. These lithographic stamps carry the image of King George, with a decorative frame in monotone. The head of the British King on this stamp is the symbol of the sovereignty of Great Britain and its rule over this part of the world. 'India Postage' was written under the King's image, and the stamp's denomination is half Anna. Moreover, on top of this, the name of Pakistan is printed in black ink. These postage stamps were called the Nasik over prints.

In spite of the challenges faced by a newly formed state, the importance of the mail service in Pakistan was highlighted by the establishment of the Office of Postmaster General in Lahore on August 15, 1947. During this period, the Postage stamps were Pakistan's principal means of constructing its emerging Nationalism. The Postage stamps were also used to create a positive Pakistan and Post-Colonial image. The inaugural series of 1948 included stamps of the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, Karachi Airport and Lahore Fort. These stamps filled the gap between national construction and cultural continuity. A notable achievement was the "Independence Commemorative" stamp designed by A. R. Rehman Chughtai, or Musawar-i-Mashriq. With his design of an inverted crescent and floral decorations, he fused Islamic mysticism and spirituality into the stamp. Although the official date of independence remains debatable, these stamps declared the official date of the independence of Pakistan as 15 August 1947.



Figure 1, Selection of Postage Stamps of Pakistan issues during 1947 till 1957

Industrial Revolution & Military Strength (1958 to 1971)

From 1958 till 1971 Era Pakistan's government was majorly under the military leadership prominently by Ayub Khan & Yahya Khan and the focus was to show Pakistan as rapidly developing nation mainly in showing achievements of armed forces on postage stamps and also the projection of Industrial revolution could be easily traced on the postage stamps of that era. Postage stamps projected a newly emerging modern state's identity and dynamic strength in culture, sports and economy. Pakistan Railways' stamp, celebrating the Centenary of its Service in 1961, and other stamps portrayed the developing modern state of Pakistan.

The 1965 war began a new era in commemorative stamp design. From stamps featured Ayub Khan's portrait and the Army, the Navy and the Air Force were included. Prior to this, no other design had featured military personnel or post-conflict relations with India. As Rose (2022) notes, such visual repetition naturalizes state power by aligning national identity with institutional authority. The stamps of this era visualized Pakistan as a developing, technologically capable nation while consolidating military visibility in civilian visual culture.



Figure 2, Selection of Postage Stamps of Pakistan issues during 1958 till 1970

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's Era "Leading the Islamic World" & Domestic Politics (1971-1977)

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, one of the prime ministers of Pakistan, was the founder-chairman of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), one of the main political parties in the country. He was an enigmatic leader who was sentenced to death during the martial law regime of General Zia-ul-Haq in April 1979. Assuming power after 1971 war, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's populist government focused on economic nationalization, agrarian reform. Loosing half of your country though not shown on Pakistan's stamps directly but indirectly as stamp designs began to exclude the Bengali language. By 1973, stamps excluded Bengali and featured only Urdu and English, an erasure that aligns with Stoler's (2022) argument about archives producing "dis-ease" by omitting rupture. At first stamps highlighted both culture and industry and then they started to honor the military and started to ignore instances of national defeat. This era could be categorized as Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's era as he served as President of Pakistan (1971-1973) and then Prime Minister (1973- 1977). He used stamps to mark the 1973 Constitution as a defining achievement, presenting it as stability after a decade of turmoil. The April 1973 POW stamp is key. It showed Pakistani prisoners in India with a melancholic tone, no optimism. By highlighting their plight, Bhutto blamed Yahya Khan and the military for 1971, while casting himself as Pakistan's savior. It shifted blame to India for their detention, but was aimed mainly at domestic audiences. Postal evidence supports the view that a propaganda campaign was underway as soon as the army surrendered. This was a desperate measure to address internal political disputes and to regain a fast-disappearing moral stance abroad.

In mid-1973, a philatelic scheme was launched. It eventually failed to achieve its desired goal, but the stamps, postal stationery, postal markings, and picture postcards of the time remain as documents of contemporary political history. (Zarif 2025)

The 1975 Lahore Islamic Summit stamp, with flags of Muslim-majority countries and the Arabic quote "Doubtless, all Muslims are brothers," marked a deliberate turn toward Islamic framing (Flood, 2020). Using Arabic signaled a deliberate Islamic framing and this can be seen as transition to Islamic Identity through postage stamps. Bhutto's larger than life, authoritative portrait on the postage stamp reflected his image as a leader of the Muslim world, not just Pakistan. This was a major departure from earlier secular themes. It started the trend toward Islamisation in state symbolism via stamps.

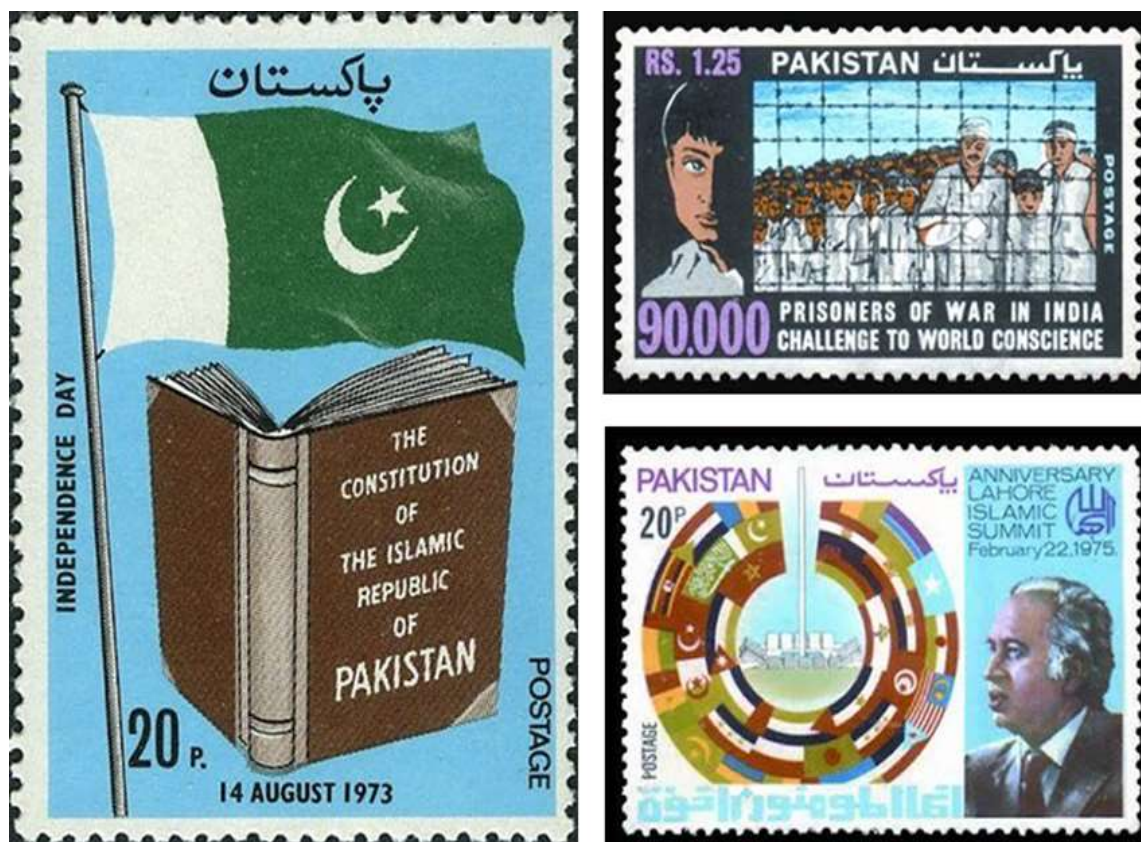


Figure 3, Selection of Postage Stamps of Pakistan issues during 1971 till 1977

General Zia's Era "Validation through Religious Symbols" 1977 to 1988

The execution of Pakistan's first democratically elected leader on 4th April 1979, was a momentous occasion, but received scant coverage as it was sanctioned by Zia-ul-Haq, the Martial Law Administrator. It was also not the subject of a postal stamp. In fact, the general ordered stamps to divert the public's attention. A prominent stamp showed the Quran illuminating the globe. This was issued in February 1979 and designed by Adil Salahuddin. It was a deliberate and repetitive distraction shift from a focus on the country to a focus on Islam. This emphatically shows the disposition of Zia; it also shows where he was taking the country as he moved the country toward a more Islamic country and the country would be revived along religious lines. The 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan brought U.S., Western, and Muslim-world aid to Pakistan. Stamps reflected this new alignment using it in geopolitical context.

During Zia's rule the postage stamps were used to push his religious agenda. Despite disliking free expression, he was politically shrewd with postage. The March 1981 stamp is an example heavy use of Islamic imagery and Arabic, which was rare on Pakistan's stamps outside Urdu/English. Mosques dominated the designs, showing ideological consistency but also a lack of creative variety under the regime and use religious motifs to legitimize his rule amid the Afghan jihad context.

Instead of only Islamisation, the state used stamps to gain public sympathy for Afghan refugees. The March 1981 stamp shows an Afghan girl in distress to build local support. It's notable for

featuring a non-Pakistani rare for Pakistan stamps. This humanized the refugees and served a political purpose. The stamp was part of a broader campaign to create goodwill for Afghans, especially in Pakistan's western border areas. Postal design became a tool to shape public opinion. Zia's regime used the 1981 refugee stamp to generate sympathy for Afghans and legitimize Pakistan's role, making postage a tool of wartime propaganda.

1984 Elections Postage Stamp is another example of Controlled Elections as Propaganda as these elections held under severe restrictions on political parties. The opposition boycotted, his supporters won with low turnout, and a 1984 stamp claimed an "overwhelming mandate by the people" to frame it as democratic. This stamp spoke to two kind of audiences; first being International audience with the English tagline said "Overwhelming mandate by the people".

The second audience was national thus the tagline was domesticated and Urdu text used "Istehkaam" means stability, "Pakistan", and "Nizam-e-Islam" means Islamic policy to legitimize his Islamic agenda. The stamp ignored the boycott and low turnout. Instead, it censored dissent and pushed a partial, state-approved version of events. This backfired, fueling the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy. Thus 1984 postage stamp used sell controlled elections as popular legitimacy at home and abroad, while pushing Islamisation and hiding political repression. This dual address censored dissent and sold controlled elections as legitimacy, demonstrating how stamps censor and produce official memory (Stoler, 2022).



Figure 4, Selection of Postage Stamps of Pakistan issues during 1977 till 1988

Pakistan People's Party Era (Post Zulfikar Ali Bhutto) 1988-1990, 1994-1996, 2008-2012

Characterized by revolving-door democracy. Pakistan Peoples Party's (PPP) Benazir Bhutto and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz's (PML-N) Nawaz Sharif alternated in power. Benazir Bhutto expanded nationwide vaccination programs and advanced women's representation in governance. Benazir Bhutto was the world's first elected Muslim woman Prime Minister. The daughter of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, she became prime minister at 35 years of age in 1988. She herself was a stamp collector and showed keen interest in postage stamps.

Stamps during this time period mostly marked events like SAARC summit stamp 1988, 4th SAF games Islamabad 1989, 17th martyrdom anniversary of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto 1996 stamp, and in general commemorative stamps on human right, UNESCO, and anniversaries of education Institutes etc.

Issuance of certain stamps under the premier ship of Benazir Bhutto showed her priorities as head of states. Like the Bhutto's 1989 Rehabilitation Stamp issued in April 4, 1989, exactly 10 years after his death, it framed him as a martyr killed unjustly, not a legal execution. It reflected public

distrust of Zia and growing acceptance of Bhutto's legacy as democracy and free speech returned and this signaled a major social shift from Zia's suppression to democratic rehabilitation of Bhutto's image. Another series of commemorative stamps issued under direct order from PB Benazir was the freedom fighter series 1990 postage stamps by Saeed Akhtar. She was assassinated in December 2007 after returning to Pakistan following eight years in exile. On June 21, 2008, two stamps and a souvenir sheet were issued to commemorate her 55th Birthday. Other commemorations include her receipt of the U.N. Human Rights Prize in December 2008 and the first anniversary of her assassination on December 27, 2008.



Figure 5, Selection of Postage Stamps of Pakistan issues during PPP Government

Pakistan Muslim League's (Nawaz) Era 1991- 1993, 1997-1999, 2013-2017

Neither PPP nor PML-N held power long, so unlike Bhutto or Zia, they ran no major social-issue propaganda through stamps. Although civilian governments did not last long, no single elected PM of Pakistan ever completed his/her tenure. But nonexistence of a single large political party made Pakistan Muslim League (N) and Pakistan People's Party being the ones changing roles. Other than the usual commemorative postage stamps that marked events, Nawaz Government focused on depicting their own achievements, especially building of Motorway, bridges and solar plants and spearheaded the privatization and deregulation of the economy. Like Benazir initiated the freedom fighter series Nawaz government issues stamp commemorating the historical accomplishment of Sher Shah Suri completing of grand trunk road, along with another postage stamp showing the opening of Lahore Islamabad motorway, another achievement that happened during Nawaz government was the success of nuclear tests. Though this was initiated during Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's governance but the results came out much later. That day of Nuclear tests is still celebrated in Pakistan as 'Youm-e- Takbeer' day 28th may 1999 postage stamp was issued celebrating the said achievement. Under Nawaz Sharif, stamps celebrated infrastructural achievements as Childs (2021) argues, such stamps brand the state through development and technological sovereignty rather than through overt ideology.



Figure 6, Selection of Postage Stamps of Pakistan issues during PML(N)'s Government

Musharraf's Era 1999 to 2008 (Pictorial Influx)

Musharraf was a more liberal autocrat than Zia, so things like restrictions on civil society and a push for a conservative religious agenda were not as widespread. Nevertheless, some events from his presidency happened to be given a lot of stamps. Deregulated the telecommunications and media sectors, instituted local government devolution to empower grassroots administration, and saw significant GDP growth.

One of these events was the disastrous earthquake which struck Pakistan in October of 2005. One of the deadliest earthquakes in Pakistan's history, and like others, an immediate response was that a stamp was printed that same month for people to make a donation and/or otherwise assist the refugees. One good thing was that it was due to help the victims. During Musharraf era the focus from design aesthetics shifted towards photographic usage and one observes weak layouts in comparison to most of the early postage stamps.

Though Musharraf came to power by a military coup but on face he formed a collaboration with Pakistan Muslim league (Q), a party formed when Muslim league divided into two groups one was called Nawaz and the other party named it as Quaid and used stamps to rebrand themselves ahead of 2007 elections. The Oct 30, 2006 stamp showed the letter that led Quaid-e-Azam to join the Muslim League. By naming itself PML-Q and using Quaid's imagery, the party tried to claim direct lineage to Pakistan's founder. The 2006 stamp featuring the letter inviting Quaid-e-Azam to join the Muslim League was issued by PML-Q to borrow legitimacy from the founder as Musharraf's popularity declined (Brunn & Toops, 2024). Stamps here functioned as tools of political rebranding. 257 commemoratives were issued during Musharraf's rule comprising of famous personalities, government achievements, anniversary national milestones etc. Aesthetic quality shifted toward photographic realism and weaker layouts.



Figure 7, Selection of Postage Stamps of Pakistan issues during Musharraf's Era

Imran Khan's Era 2018 to 2022

Imran Khan, former cricketer and anthropologist, got his life long victory in 2018 General Elections with his party Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf winning the maximum number of seats. Although he was active in politics for two decades, this was the first instance of him being able to form the government. Khan attempted to display his ideology with the stamps while in power for three and half years. During PTI's tenure, 66 stamps were issued with emphasis on the 'Million Tree Tsunami' and 'Green Pakistan' projects, aligning philately with environmental governance. Most notably, the Kashmir issue became a direct stamp subject. More stamps were issued to commemorate educational institutions, various national personalities, and Khan's philanthropic project, the Shaukat Khanum Cancer Hospital.

Imran Khan's government made Kashmir issue a direct stamp subject in 2018. The stamps used actual photos of Jammu Kashmir civilians facing alleged Indian force brutality. Such intense, real images on stamps were unusual. Stamps used photographs of civilians and a political map asserting Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan as part of Pakistan, directly countering India's claims (Brunn & Toops, 2024). The map stamp asserted Azad Kashmir & Gilgit Baltistan as part of Pakistan, matching Pakistan's official/international maps, directly countering India's version. This marks a shift toward using stamps for real-time geopolitical contestation and international advocacy.

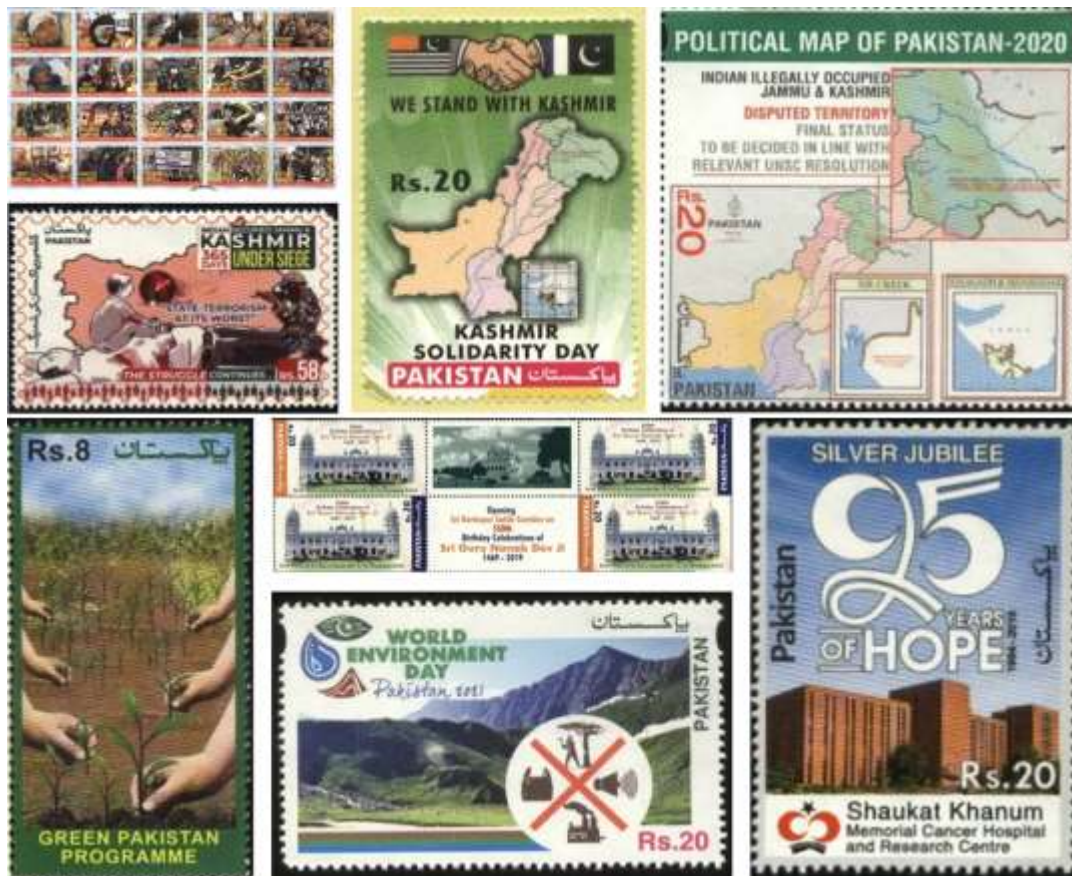


Figure 8, Selection of Postage Stamps of Pakistan issues during PTI's Government

Table showing the number of commemorative stamps Issues per year in Pakistan under various head of states and Political and Military rulers from 1947 till 1952. (Data Collected by researcher)

Sr.	Year	Number of stamps Issued	Governor General and President	Prime Minister
1	1947	0	Quaidie Muhammad Jinnah -Azam Ali	Liaqat Ali Khan
2	1948	4	Khawaja Nazimmuddin	Liaqat Ali Khan
3	1949	3	Khawaja Nazimmuddin	Liaqat Ali Khan
4	1950	0	Khawaja Nazimmuddin	Liaqat Ali Khan
5	1951	9	Khawaja Nazimmuddin	Khawaja Nazimuddin
6	1952	2	Ghulam Muhammad	Khawaja Nazimuddin



7	1953	0	Ghulam Muhammad	Muhammad Ali Bogra
8	1954	8	Ghulam Muhammad	Muhammad Ali Bogra
9	1955	8	Major General Iskander Mirza	Muhammad Ali Bogra
10	1956	5	Major General Iskander Mirza	Ch. Muhammad Ali
11	1957	8	Major General Iskander Mirza	Hussain Shaheed Suharwardi and Ibrahim Ismail Chaundigar
12	1958	6	Field Marshal Ayub Khan	Malik Feroz Khan Noon
13	1959	2	Field Marshal Ayub Khan	None
14	1960	16	Field Marshal Ayub Khan	None
15	1961	9	Field Marshal Ayub Khan	None
16	1962	14	Field Marshal Ayub Khan	None
17	1963	11	Field Marshal Ayub Khan	None
18	1964	9	Field Marshal Ayub Khan	None
19	1965	9	Field Marshal Ayub Khan	None
20	1966	10	Field Marshal Ayub Khan	None
21	1967	16	Field Marshal Ayub Khan	None
22	1968	12	Field Marshal Ayub Khan	None
23	1969	18	Field Marshal Ayub Khan	None
24	1970	18	General Agha Muhammad Yahya Khan	None
25	1971	16	General Agha Muhammad Yahya Khan	Noor-ul Amin
26	1972	19	Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto	None
27	1973	24	Fazal Ellahi Chaudhry	Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto

28	1974	16	Fazal Chaudhry	Ellahi	Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto
29	1975	19	Fazal Chaudhry	Ellahi	Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto
30	1976	32	Fazal Chaudhry	Ellahi	Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto
31	1977	15	Fazal Chaudhry	Ellahi	Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto
32	1978	18	General Zia-ul-Haq		None
33	1979	23	General Zia-ul-Haq		None
34	1980	12	General Zia-ul-Haq		None
35	1981	29	General Zia-ul-Haq		None
36	1982	13	General Zia-ul-Haq		None
37	1983	31	General Zia-ul-Haq		None
38	1984	29	General Zia-ul-Haq		None
39	1985	23	General Zia-ul-Haq		Muhammad Khan Junejo
40	1986	15	General Zia-ul-Haq		Muhammad Khan Junejo
41	1987	30	General Zia-ul-Haq		Muhammad Khan Junejo
42	1988	21	General Zia-ul-Haq		Muhammad Khan Junejo and Benazir Bhutto
43	1989	29	Ghulam Ishaq Khan		Benazir Bhutto
44	1990	41	Ghulam Ishaq Khan		Benazir Bhutto and Gulam Mustafa Khan Jatoyi (care taker)
45	1991	24	Ghulam Ishaq Khan		Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif
46	1992	37	Ghulam Ishaq Khan		Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif
47	1993	18	Ghulam Ishaq Khan		Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif and Mr Moin Quraishi (care taker)

48	1994	24	Farooq Ahmed Khan Leghari	Benazir Bhutto
49	1995	41	Farooq Ahmed Khan Leghari	Benazir Bhutto
50	1996	10	Farooq Ahmed Khan Leghari	Benazir Bhutto
51	1997	21	Farooq Ahmed Khan Leghari	Malik Miraj Khalid (care Taker) and Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif
52	1998	25	Muhammad Rafiq Tarar	Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif
53	1999	35	Muhammad Rafiq Tarar	Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif
54	2000	24	Muhammad Rafiq Tarar	None
55	2001	32	General Musharaf Pervaiz	None
56	2002	21	General Musharaf Pervaiz	Mir Zafrullah Khan Jamali
57	2003	50	General Musharaf Pervaiz	Mir Zafrullah Khan Jamali
58	2004	51	General Musharaf Pervaiz	Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain
59	2005	34	General Musharaf Pervaiz	Shaukat Aziz
60	2006	36	General Musharaf Pervaiz	Shaukat Aziz
61	2007	9	General Musharaf Pervaiz	Shaukat Aziz and Muhammad Mian Suoomro (care taker)
62	2008	6	Asif Ali Zardari	Syed Yousaf Raza Gillani
63	2009	18	Asif Ali Zardari	Syed Yousaf Raza Gillani
64	2010	17	Asif Ali Zardari	Syed Yousaf Raza Gillani
65	2011	33	Asif Ali Zardari	Syed Yousaf Raza Gillani
66	2012	50	Asif Ali Zardari	Syed Yousaf Raza Gillani and Raja Pervaiz Ashraf

67	2013	26	Mamnoon Hussain	Raja Pervaiz Ashraf and Mir Hazar Khan Khoso (Care Taker) and Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif
68	2014	23	Mamnoon Hussain	Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif
69	2015	18	Mamnoon Hussain	Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif
70	2016	28	Mamnoon Hussain	Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif
71	2017	24	Mamnoon Hussain	Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif and Shahid Khaqan Abbasi
72	2018	35	Mamnoon Hussain	Justice Nasir-ul Milk (care taker) and Imran Khan
73	2019	18	Dr. Arif Alvi	Imran Khan
74	2020	22	Dr. Arif Alvi	Imran Khan
75	2021	14	Dr. Arif Alvi	Imran Khan
76	2022	12	Dr. Arif Alvi	Miyan Muhammad Sheehbaz Sharif
77	2023	8	Dr. Arif Alvi	Miyan Muhammad Sheehbaz Sharif
Total commemorative Stamps Issued from 1947-2023		1,496		

The data suggest that Pakistani stamps consistently portray state success while omitting failure. There is no stamp on the 1971 separation, but there is a “Release prisoners of war in India” stamp. This selective commemoration confirms that stamps are instruments of politics that curate what is remembered and what is forgotten (Stoler, 2022; Rajagopal, 2023).

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that postage stamps in Pakistan from 1947 to 2023 functioned not as neutral commemorative objects, but as active instruments of state ideology, national identity, and geopolitical strategy. Through visual semiotic analysis, distinct patterns emerge: early nation-building and Islamic symbolism under civilian rule, militarization and industrial modernity during Ayub and Yahya, Islamization and wartime propaganda under Zia, and personalized legitimacy and infrastructural projection under civilian and hybrid regimes. The quantitative fluctuations in stamp production further reveal how regimes used philatelic output to amplify achievements while silencing ruptures, such as the 1971 secession. In this way, stamps operated as “micro-archives” of official memory, selectively documenting success and projecting desired futures while erasing contestation. This research contributes to material culture and visual politics by positioning

Pakistani stamps as sites where sovereignty, religion, and development were negotiated at everyday scale. Future research could extend this framework to digital postage, diaspora stamps, and comparative analysis with India and Bangladesh to further understand how postcolonial states use small media to manage large narratives.

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