

# Bamra State

By Christer Brunström

With India's fascinating history comes a fantastic philatelic legacy which provides collectors with a variety of interesting areas for study and collecting. Christer Brunström informs us of one such area, and explains how Bamra added to this philatelic treasure trove and tells us what to keep a wary eye out for.

Today's Odisha State (previously known as Orissa) in the eastern part of India was home to a number of feudatory states until 1948. Bamra State was one of those states and released postage stamps from 1888 until they were discontinued at the end of 1894.

### Legend has it

Bamra (sometimes known as Bamanda) State was founded way back in 1545 when, according to legend, native tribesmen stole a member of the royal family of Patna and proclaimed him Raja of Bamra. It is a fact that the rulers of Bamra State were frequently subordinated to the much more important Patna maharajas.

The Princely State of Bamra had an area of 5149 square kilometres and, according to the 1901 census, the state had a population of some 120,000 people. They belonged to various ethnic groups and were mainly engaged in agricultural activities. Bamra is heavily forested and produces a lot of timber. Another rather exotic local product is lac, which is used as a natural dye. Iron ore has also been found in the state.

The capital city is Deogarh (also known as Debagarh). This is where we find the palace of the royal family. Since 1997, the Raja of Bamra is Nitish Ganga Deb, who is

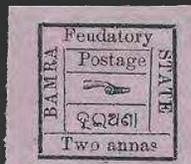


Fig 2 The 2a. 1890 capital 'P' in 'Postage' stamp



Fig 3 An 8a. 1891-93 small 'p' in 'postage' stamp



Fig 4 A ¼a. 1890 forgery. State name appears to read 'BAMHA'

Fig 1 A reprint of a ¼a. 1888 Bamra imperforate stamp

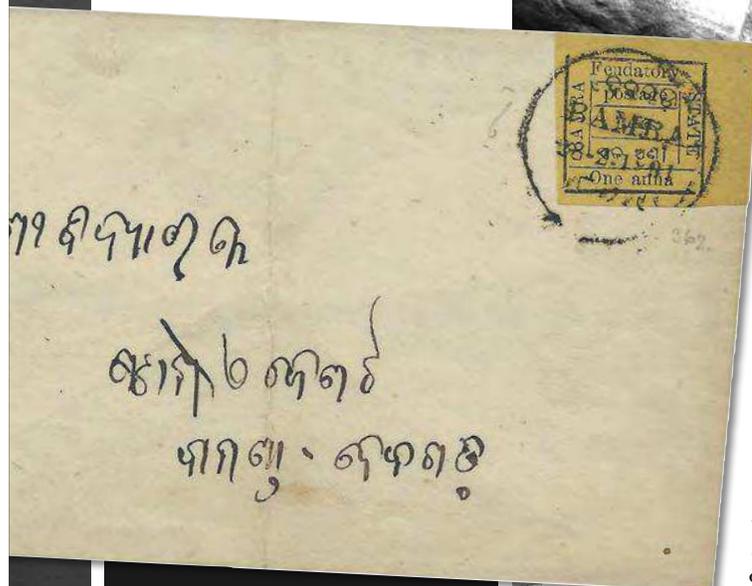
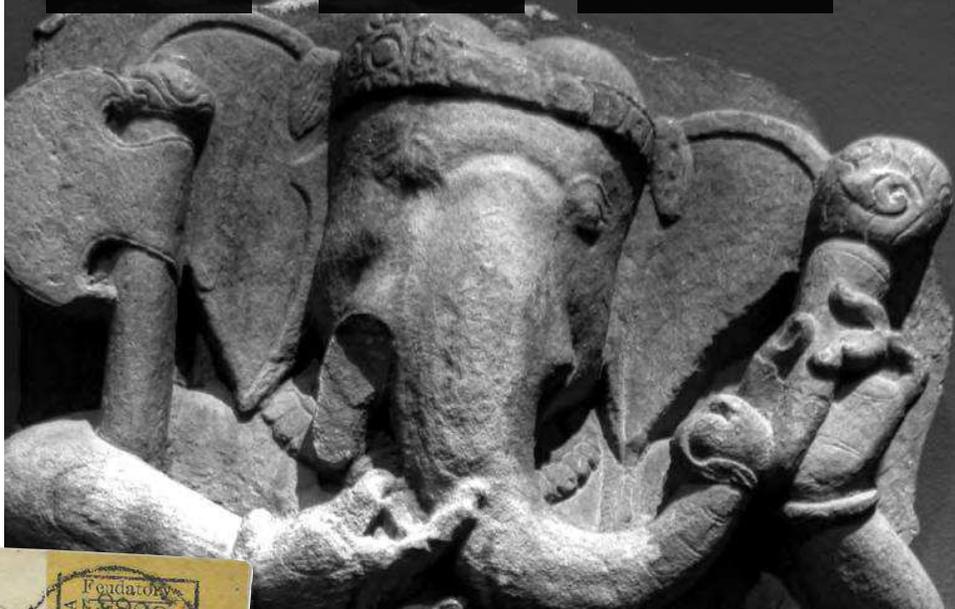
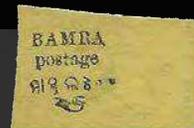


Fig 5 An interesting and not easy to find Bamra 1891 1a. cover

deeply involved in local affairs despite having no political power. He is also the president of Bamanda Cricket Club and is married and has a daughter.

His predecessor, Raja Basu Deb Sudhal Deo, became the state's ruler in 1869. He had four wives, eight sons and 11 daughters. He has been described as a fairly able ruler of his state. It was during his reign that postage stamps were introduced in 1888. Raja Sudhal Deo passed away in 1903.

The Indian princely states were graded in importance according to the number of gun salutes. Sadly, the State of Bamra does not figure on this list.

### Collecting

The latest edition of the SG British Empire catalogue lists 40 different stamps for Bamra. For those who would prefer a more simplified collection we can easily lower that number to some 20 basic stamps. Serious collectors of Bamra need to be very good at distinguishing between colour shades such as bistre-yellow and orange-yellow, certainly not an easy task. All of Bamra's stamps were printed in black on coloured paper.

Collectors who only seek mint stamps with unblemished gum will be bitterly disappointed as all Bamra stamps were released without gum.

In 1888, Bamra issued its first set of six values printed locally in Deogarh. The

Base photo credit: shidairyproduct. The Hindu god, Ganesha

imperforate stamps had a very simple design with two lines in English, the third line with the denomination in the Odia (previously spelt Oriya) language and finally an ornament which is supposed to depict an elephant's trunk holding a stick.

The elephant plays an important role in India because of traditional religious beliefs. One of the more popular Hindu gods is Ganesha, who has an elephant's head and a big belly. He is the god of prosperity and is an essential deity when it comes to starting a new business or enterprise. Ganesha is also the protector of knowledge and writers (hopefully also of philatelic writers).

This is a tricky set which is far from common, with later reprints of the first issue more frequently encountered than the originals. In the reprints the fourth character in the Odia script is quite different from the original. Shown here in Fig 1 is the 1/4a. reprint; the original is extremely scarce.

In 1890, there was a new design which included the same 1888 design elements. The state's name is now given as 'Bamra Feudatory State' and the denomination has been added in English (possibly for the benefit of stamp collectors).

There were basically seven values from 1/4a. to 1r. In the first printings the word Postage had a capital 'P' (Fig 2). The 1891-93 printings had postage with small 'p' (Fig 3).

There are several other varieties involving missing or incorrect letters.

There are also cases of inverted letters. One wonders if the workers at the Jagannata Ballabh Press in Deogarh were unfamiliar with the English language.

There were as many as ten different settings of the stamps. The central ornament exists in four different sizes and in different positions. This certainly is a vast field of specialisation, but I suppose most collectors just try to assemble a basic set.

As always, forgeries exist. Shown here in Fig 4 is an old-time forgery of the Capital 'P' Postage 1890 1/4a. stamp. The name of the state appears to be BAMHA.

Finding postal history items is far from easy but covers do exist from the 1890-95 period and they certainly add a lot of interest to a Bamra collection (Fig 5).

### Postal stationery

Bamra issued two items of postal stationery. The first one was a stamped 1/2a. envelope where the stamp basically repeats the design of the 1890 issue (Fig 6). It was probably released in 1891. Then there was a 1/4a. postcard in 1894 where the stamp included a rather sketchy portrait of Raja Sudhal Deb.

Bamra was a stamp country for just seven years, from 1 January 1895 Indian stamps were used in the state. The Bamra postage stamps were only valid locally and Indian stamps had to be used on mail to other destinations. In fact, in many of the Indian states there were two parallel postal systems—a local one and the imperial Indian post office.

Bamra and its postage stamps returned to the philatelic limelight in 2010 when India issued a set of stamps and a souvenir sheet publicising the INDIPEX 2011 exhibition. A Bamra postage stamp and a revenue stamp are depicted on one of the stamps and on the souvenir sheet. Strangely enough the postage stamps appear to be perforated (Fig 7). All Bamra postage stamps were imperforate.



Fig 6 A cut out square 1/2a. stamp from an 1891 stamped envelope



Fig 7 The 2010 stamp which publicised INDIPEX 2011 which appears to show a perforated 1r. stamp

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