THE COLOURFUL WORLD OF FLAGS

K.V. Singh
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Illustrations
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NATIONAL BOOK TRUST, INDIA
The Colourful World of Flags

Some of you may marvel to know that flags have a colourful world of their own. You only need to explore it. Flags have a long history. They even have a language through which they transmit information, convey messages and communicate meanings. Flags have different types and shapes. There is a well-defined code for flags which has to be followed for their display.

Some flags fly high over government buildings, business houses, political and social organisations. Some are seen flapping on V.V.I.P’s cars while some sail on ships. Flags have been planted atop mountains too. There are flags even on the moon hoisted by the US and USSR astronauts, as an evidence of their landing on it.

A natural question that wells up in mind is – what is a flag?
Birth of Flags

A flag is not a mere piece of cloth, attached to a staff. It is the symbol of faith, family, dynasty or a country. For this very reason, people throughout history have laid down lives for their flags.

Primitive men lived in small groups of families and clans closely knitted with nature and its objects. The objects they used in day to day were venerated and worshipped. These objects gradually became synonyms in the family or clan and taken as their totems or emblems.

It seems that the totems or emblems were displayed in times of peace and carried to battle fields. To carry the totems, emblems, ensigns and colours, as were later made of lighter materials like hides, barks of trees and finally cloth. And that is how, out of necessity, flags came into existence.
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Fig. 2 Some usage of flags

Fig. 3 Ancient Emblems
With a view to organising themselves, they invented conspicuous objects in the form of flags which they carried with them to the battle fields, so that their soldiers could follow the directions of the flag during an operation of war.

The Egyptians, Assyrians, Greeks, Romans, Indians and the Muslims all followed similar practices. The ancient Persians displayed a vulture on a javelin during war. The Greeks chose an armour piece, while the Romans had an eagle for their standards. The Chinese standards bore figures of dragons, white tigers and snakes. The Indians carried flags bearing the figure of a unicorn and an incense burner during the Indus Valley Civilization.

Ancient and Medieval Flags of India

In the history of India, there are evidences to show the use of flags by the people of the Indus Valley Civilization. There are reasons to believe that the aborigines of India resisted the invading Aryans who intruded wielding their own flags.

The Buddhists used flags at their places of worship, as also for promotion of their religion and faith. The Jains, too, installed dhvajas at their places of worship. According to the Adi-Purana of the Jains, there are many references to kings, who made dhvaja-dana to temples. In fact, according to Jainism, the Pala-dhvaja is an integral part of a Jain shrine.
In 327 B.C., when Alexander invaded India, king Puru's army carried an image of Hercules in front of the army line. The Mauryas and the Guptas adopted the Puranic Garuda-dhāvaṇa as the royal emblem of their dynasties.

Emperor Ashoka, who later embraced Buddhism, erected many dhāvaṇa-stambhas at places of Buddhist importance, with a view to promoting the message of ‘Dharma’. In fact, the Dharma-chakra, which appears on our National Flag, was originally atop the lion capitol of Sarnath, which was built by Emperor Ashoka.

When the Muslims came to India, they brought their own colours, standards, flags etc., which reflected the Islamic traditions. However, one common factor was that both the Hindus and the Muslims derived strength and inspiration in the use of flags from their respective religions. The Rajput rulers of medieval India held the dhāvaṇa as a symbol of royalty. The Ranas of Chittore claimed descent from Surya (the Sun) and hence carried a flag, bearing the figure of their god against a Crimsonfield. It was called ‘Changi’.

Fig. 6 The Mauryan Garuda - dhāvaṇa

Fig. 7 Maharana Pratap’s - “Changi”
During the battle of Haldighati, at one stage Maharana Pratap was heavily surrounded by the Mughals. At that time Mana of Jhala, one of Rana’s chiefs, seized the flag and raised it over his own head and drew after him the brunt of the battle and thus through this stratagem of displaying the Sun-Standard of Mewar (the Changi) over his own head, the Jhala Chief saved the life of Rana Pratap in the battle.

The successors of some of the medieval Rajput rulers, who politically survived till 15th of August, 1971 (the day when the Privy-purse was abolished), as the Indian Princes continued to display their ancestral flags and State Emblems. The Bikaner State flag had two colours, saffron and red, super-imposed with the figure of a kite. The Jodhpur State Standard was known as ‘Panchranga’ (having five colours). It also bore the figure of a kite.

Shahji, the father of Shivaji, wielded the ‘Bhagya-jhanda’. Shivaji, however, had two flags. After assuming the title of ‘Chatrapati’, he adopted the second flag, the Zari-pataka as his symbol of royalty in addition to the Bhagya-jhanda of his father.

The Marathas observed the custom of rewarding their celebrated generals for acts of gallantry by bestowing the Zari-pataka on them.
This Maratha custom seems to have been adopted by them from the Muslims, who used to honour their war-heroes in the manner.

Mahmood of Ghazni, during his attack on India carried a black Abbasid. He bore on it the crescent. Mohammad Ghori, during the two battles that he fought with Prithviraj Chauhan in 1191 A.D. and 1192 A.D. at Tarain, displayed his own flag and banners. Qutub-ud-din Aibak, bore a crescent and a lion on his standard. The flag of Gayas-ud-din Tughlaq had a motif of a fish on his flag. The Tughlaq kings had a separate department for flags, which was called ‘Alam-Khana’.

Perhaps, during the Sultanate period, the custom of granting standards to Amirs, Khans and others started in India, which was a new custom for Indians. This practice of granting standards to war-heroes was followed more vigorously by the Mughals. The modern practice of presentation of colours to the armed forces by the President of India in recognition of their distinguished services, is very much akin to that old practice.

The royal standard of the Mughals was called the Alam, which was moss-green and gold. Against the green field was a rising Sun, partially eclipsed by the body of a crouching lion, facing the hoist of the flag.
As per the Mughal custom, the royal standard was displayed to the right of the throne. During an encampment, the royal standard was to be displayed at the entrance of the royal tent. We have similar flag regulations these days regarding the display of our National Flag, which are laid down in the Flag Code of India.

Displaying of flags, standards, banners, etc., in processions was a common custom throughout the medieval period. Whenever the emperor went out, five flags were carried along with the ‘Qur’ (a collection of flags, insignias etc.) wrapped in red cloth bags. Emperor Shahjahan, however, was accompanied by 19—20 elephants carrying the royal standard. Following the elephants were 9 horses, adorned and fully saddled. Behind them were two horsemen, announcing the arrival of the monarch.

These flag insignias, standards and allied objects were displayed on days of festivity also. It was more or less a similar practice what we follow these days on the occasion of Republic Day. The only difference is that these days we do it with modern weapons and in a modern way, however, the spirit behind the practice is the same—a display of achievements and our military might.

**Puranic and Epic Flags**

The Puranic name for flag is ‘Dhvaja’. A ‘Dhvaja’ is a symbol of an army or of a king carried on a staff. The term Dhvaja in strict sense implies three things, namely ‘Pataka’, the piece of cloth that floats in the air; the ‘Ketu’, the crest or design made on the Pataka, and the ‘Yasti’, the pole or staff that carries the Pataka or the Dhvaja.

Many scholars use the terms Dhvaja and Pataka as synonymous. However, there is a difference between the two. The most important
difference is that the former invariably carries an insignia, whereas the latter does not. The Dhvaja is rectangular in shape, while the Pataka is triangular. In the Epics, the Patakas are described to have been used by the charioteers, elephant-riders and the cavalry men.

Lord Indra was the principal god during the Vedic period of Indian history. He had a flag for himself, called Indra-dhvaja. According to a description in the Mahabharata, the Indra-dhvaja was shiny dark blue.
Fig. 14 Lord Vishnu with his Garuda-dhvaja

The Puranic gods like Vishnu and Shiva, too, had their flags. Lord Vishnu wielded the famous Garuda-dhvaja (eagle), whereas the Vrishabh-dhvaja (bull) belonged to Lord Shiva.

Fig. 15 Lord Shiva with his Vrishabh-dhvaja

During the epic days, it was an established custom for kings/warriors to adopt personal flags, which they adopted according to their family, faith, military exploits and qualifications.
Rama, the prince of Ayodhya adopted his family flag as his personal flag. It bore the figure of ‘Surya’, their Kuladevata (family deity) against a saffron field. Prince Bharata, the younger brother of Rama, had adopted a ‘Kovidara-dhvaja’ (a beautiful supernatural tree).

The demon king Ravana had two flags, one for his kingdom and the other as his personal flag, which bore a human skull on it and was called Kapala-dhvaja (human skull). A Kapala is associated with Lord Siva. Ravana adopted the Kapala as the motif for his personal flag to invoke the Lord’s blessings.
was a good musician and a Veena player, who had mastered all the Vedas, too. He, therefore, adopted the Veena as the emblem of his empire to denote his wisdom and wealth.

His son, Meghanada however, adopted ‘Simha’ (lion) for his flag and it was known as Mrigraja-ketu. The other warriors of Ravana, Prahasta and Kambhanan had a snake and the ‘Shesh-naga’ as the symbols on their respective flags.

The details of the flags used by the Pandavas during the battle of Kurukshetra, have been given in the Shanti-parva and those of the Kauravas in the Drona-parva of the Mahabharata.

Yudhishthira, the eldest of the Pandavas, bore a pair of ‘Mridangas’, called ‘Nanda’ and ‘Up-Nanda’ on his standard. Bheema, the second of the Pandavas carried a ‘Simha-dhvaja’. Arjun, the hero of Kurukshetra adopted the famous Kapi-dhvaja. It bore the figure of the divine Vanara (monkey) Hanuman bearing a ferocious profile. Nakul, the fourth Pandava had a Sarabha (a mythical animal) on his standard. Sahdeva, the youngest of the Pandavas carried a Hamsa-dhvaja (Swan). Abhimanyu, the son of Subhadra and Arjuna chose Saranga (a bird) for his flag. And, the famous Garuda-dhvaja belonged to the omnipotent Krishna, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu.

Fig. 18 A scene from an epic war
Bheeshma, the eldest among the Mahabharata warriors, had the Tala-dhvaja. It had the figure of a Tala-tree and a cluster of five stars around it.

Dronacharya, the preceptor of the Kauravas and the Pandavas adopted a Vedika (altar) covered with the deer skin atopped with a ‘Kamandalu’ and ‘Dhanush’ (bow).

Duryodhana, the Kaurava prince exhibited a Sarpa-dhvaja (serpent) at his chariot. As per the ancient scriptures, snake is the embodiment of strength. Karna, the great but ill-fated archer displayed the Hastikashyamahar-ketu (elephant chain) on his chariot. According to certain scriptures, he had the figure of the Sun on his flag.

Sindhiraj Jayadratha, brother-in-law of Duryodhana had a boar on his standard. Salya, the maternal-uncle of the Pandavas bore the image of the plough (Sita).

Certain customs and rituals were associated with flags. The warriors mounted their ‘dhvajas’ on their chariots prior to marching to the battlefield. Arjuna, before entering the battle arena, first performed a ritual. He circumambulated his chariot, ‘Nandighosh’, and then wearing a hand-armour raised his Kapi-dhvaja.

Raising of their flag, before marching to the battlefield was an established custom amongst the warriors of the epic age. Arjuna, fighting on behalf of Virata’s son, Uttara, against the Kauravas, flew off prince Uttara’s Simha-dhvaja and hoisted his own Kapi-dhvaja before facing the Kaurava forces. Maybe he did so to fight under his own flag or to reveal the presence of the Pandavas in the Virat camp, as the one-year-period of their exile incognito was then just over.

In the epics, the warriors are described to have been involved in destroying the flags of their adversaries. Arjuna, in his final encounter with Karna, first destroyed his dhvaja and then killed him. Similarly, Rama is also said to have destroyed Ravana’s flag to disgrace him, before slaying the demon king.
**Parts of a Modern Flag**

A modern flag has two ends—the one nearest to the flagmast is called ‘hoist’ and the one farthest from the staff is known as ‘fly’. A flagmast is the pole on which a flag is hoisted or displayed. The term flagmast, flagpole and flagstaff mean the same. The rope by which the flag is hoisted is known as the guy-line or the halyard.

The tallest flagmast in India is at the Fort St. George, Madras (now Chennai). It is 45.7 metres tall and is made of teakwood. In 1687, the then Governor of the Madras Presidency Mr. Yale, first hoisted the Union Jack on it. The flagstaff on which the Indian tricolour—Tiranga now flutters, was moved to its present position in the 1770's.

**The Language of Flags**

Flags have a language of their own, which they speak through their variant display. Different flags when displayed mean differently. A flag when exhibited in a particular manner has a certain meaning. For example, a flag flown beneath a black ball at sea means that the vessel is in distress and needs immediate help.
In olden days, flags had an important function on the battlefield. Guidon, a flag used by the charging troops aided them in the crush of fighting during a war to locate their leader or the king and also the direction of own troops.

This is the Rashtrapati Bhawan, the official home of the President of India. Do you see the Tiranga flying on its dome? No, it is not flying over the building. What does that mean? When Tiranga is not seen flying on the dome of the Rashtrapati Bhawan means that the Rashtrapati is away and not in the Bhawan. As he would return and enter the main gate of the mansion, the National Flag is flown again on the building to mean that the President is now in the Rashtrapati Bhawan.
Flags also have important role on ships. Besides their ensign and the national flag, ships have yet another type of flags. These are known as alphabetical and numerical flags. There is a flag for each alphabet and number (0 to 9). These are used to pass messages.

Certain alphabetical flags have different meanings when flown on their own. The flag 'Papa' (for the letter ‘P’), popularly known as Blue Peter when hoisted alone, means the ship is about to sail.

Fig. 22 The check-flag mean end of the race

In car races, too, flags play important role. Through signalling flags, the race officials convey information to the speeding car drivers. The participants watch for flag signals to receive messages as they zoom past the pits because they cannot afford to stop and receive messages. When the black and white check-flag is shown, it pronounces the end of the race.
One can identify the nationality of a ship simply looking at her ensign (flag). Likewise, when a ship sails past another ship at sea, the two salute or greet each other by dipping their respective ensigns. This is an old custom of saluting by ships at sea.

Fig. 23 Here are a few more flags associated with car rallies

Fig. 24 A ship wearing the Indian National Flag
National-flags are normally flown full-mast, but on a certain occasion they are seen flown half-mast. When a National Flag is flown at half-mast, it means death of a national leader or of a person of great prominence. National-flags are flown at half-mast as a mark of respect to the departed soul. By half-mast is meant hauling down the flag to one half the distance between the top and the guy-line and in the absence of the guy-line, half of the flag-mast.

During international summits, discussions, conferences and talks between representatives of two countries, the mini National Flags of both the countries are placed on the conference table on respective sides to denote their nationality.
Unicolour Flags

Flags are usually designed in more than one colour, but there are unicolour flags also such as white, red, green, yellow and black flags. A white flag in war-time means truce, surrender or peace. During siege battles, as a sign of surrender the vanquished troops would show a white flag to stop fighting. However, the Chinese regard white as the colour of mourning.

The colour red denotes danger or warning. On a rifle range when firing is in progress red flags are planted around the range area. Thus through the display of red flags they foretell of the danger around. Similarly, ships and army vehicles carrying explosives are also required to display a red flag as a caution signal. When you see a red flag on a swimming pool, it implies that the pool is closed for swimming. Contrary to the common belief, the Chinese consider red as a colour of joy.

As per road rules, vehicles, carrying projecting loads like iron bars, etc., are to display a red-flag on the protruding load during day time and a red light at night as a warning. A green flag means safety and all-clear. A railway guard shows a green flag to steam off the train. On a swimming pool, a green flag signifies that the pool is open for swimming.
Fig. 28 A Red flag on a swimming pool means the pool is closed for swimming

Fig. 29 The Black flag of sea pirates
A yellow flag stands for sickness and unhygiene. For this reason yellow flags are planted in and around areas affected with epidemics. Similarly, in large camps and gatherings the latrines and toilet-areas are to be marked with yellow flags for convenient recognition.

A black flag denotes death, mourning or resentment. Long ago, a black flag was to be flown on prisons after an execution. In earlier days, sea pirates would sail a black flag bearing a white skull and two cross bones to awe the crew of other ships.

In modern times, employees sport mini black flags on their person to express their resentment against their management.

Flags of World Organisations

There are flags that tell us about certain eminent world organisations like the U.N.O., Red Cross and the Scouts. This is the flag of the United Nations Organisation, which works for the world peace. It shows in the centre a map of the world circled by olive branches, the ancient sign of peace.
Here is the flag of the Red Cross, an organisation that helps people in distress both during peace and war-times. In a refugee camp or in any other festive camp, where you notice a tent with the sign of the Red Cross it means medical aid is available there. When you observe a car or a scooter bearing the sign of the Red Cross, it suggests that the vehicle belongs to a doctor.

The flag of the Red Cross Organisation is unique, because it has its three variances. In most countries of the world the Red Cross flag bears its traditional symbol the Red Cross on a white background. But, in Muslim countries a Red Crescent is used instead.

Iran, however, uses an altogether different symbol for the Red Cross Organisation. She shows on the flag a red-lion wielding a sword and the sun rising from behind the lion.
Have you ever seen a scout saluting? He salutes with his three fingers denoting the three promises that he makes the day he joins the scouts. There are three branches of the lily flower on the flag of the scouts symbolising the three promises.
This is the flag of the Olympic Games. It has five equal circles in red, green, blue, yellow and black colours, representing the five continents of the world. The circles are linked together in a chain. A chain is an ancient symbol of unity.

The National Flag of a country represents the whole of nation, as such it is the symbol of its honour. It also represents its country’s ideals, philosophy, history, culture and its aspirations. For this reason, when an athlete wins a gold medal at Olympics or Asian Games, the National Flag of his/her country is hoisted in the first place as a mark of honour.
Different Types of Flags

Flags are of different types, shapes and sizes and are named accordingly. Some of the names are: standard, guidon, banner, pennant, ensign, burgee, and colours.

A standard is a distinctive personal flag of a King or Queen or President of a State. It is flown on their official residence, on their cars and on any other vessel like train and aircraft when they travel by it. In olden days, it used to be of a very large size and meant mostly to be stationary and was seldom carried. In the course of time, the term chiefly referred to cavalry flags.
Until the August 15, 1971, the President of India also had a personal flag. It consisted of four equal bands, diagonally opposite ones being of the same colour, brownish red and dark blue. In the lower left red quadrant, there was a pair of scales denoting equality and justice. In the second red there was an elephant symbolising strength, the third had a lotus bowl signifying plentifullness and in the top fourth quadrant stood the Ashoka emblem denoting the Unity of India.

On August 15, 1971, when the privilege of the Privy purse was abolished, the President of India ceased to fly his personal flag. Ever since he flies the National Flag—Tiranga.

Originally, **banners** were rectangular in shape bearing the emblem of a king or army. Currently, they refer even to the flags of commercial houses, political organisations and institutions.

A **pennant** is a long tapering flag that ends in a point. It is specially flown at the mast-head of a naval vessel in commission. At the time of decommissioning a naval ship, it is removed observing naval customs, traditions and honour.

An **ensign** is the flag flown at the stern (rear side) of a ship by most Navies of the world. Some countries have adopted their National Flag as their ensign. The Indian Navy’s flag is called the White Ensign, whereas the Indian Merchant Navy flies the Red Ensign. Certain Airforces of the world, too have ensign.
Burgee is a small triangular swallow-tailed flag. While on road you must have noticed cars of senior armed and police forces officers flying small flags on the bonnet of their car, these flags are known as 'burgee'. Guidon is a medium-size flag used in old days by cavalries. These flags are forked at their free-end. Guidon was originally carried by the guide ahead of a marching column in early days. The word 'Guidon' is of Italian origin.
Certain Terms Associated with Flags

Certain terms that are associated with flags and are defined here. While reading newspapers or magazines one often comes across the term flag-march. Do you know what does the term mean? It means a march by armed forces through the streets of a tension torn town or city to show their presence to warn people against violence.

Flag-day: Flag-day is the day when funds are raised by donations through sale of paper flags, for the benefit of Armed Forces personnel. In our country, 5th December is observed as the Flag-day.

Breaking the flag: To open up a flag tied at the top of the flag-mast by pulling its halyard and to let it flutter in the air is called breaking the flag. In fact, on August 15 every year the Prime Minister breaks the flag at the Red Fort on the occasion of Independence Day.

Striking the flag: However, lowering down flag as a gesture of surrender is known as striking the flag. On August 15, 1947, the last British Viceroy and Governor General of India Lord Louis Mountbatten himself lowered the Union Jack from the central dome of the Legislative Council (now the Parliament House), before Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of free-India, hoisted the Tiranga in its place. The lowering of the Union Jack by Lord Louis Mountbatten on the occasion of India's Independence is a typical example of striking the flag ceremony.

Flag-truce: Flag-truce means displaying or carrying of a white flag to an enemy as a sign of surrender.
Dipping the flag: *Dipping the flag* means lowering a flag at sea and then instantly raising it again. It is in this manner that ships salute each other while crossing at sea.

Flag-bearer: *Flag-bearer* is one who carries a flag. During athletic meets the athlete who carries the contingent flag ahead of the contingent is known as the flag-bearer/man.

The Evolution of our National Flag

The family-tree of our National Flag—Tiranga is very old and colourful. During the freedom struggle of India, the first flag raised for independence was by Bahadur Shah Zafar in 1857. The Emperor adopted a flag with 'lotus' and 'chapatis' as its symbols on a green and gold background.

**Fig. 45 Dipping the flag ceremony**

**Fig. 46 Bahadur Shah Zafar’s flag of revolt-1857**
In 1905, sister Nivedita designed a square flag with a red background. It had a hundred and eight jyotis all along its border and vajra (the celebrated weapon of Lord Indra) in yellow at the centre of the flag’s field with Vande on the left and Mataram on the right of it in the Bengali script.

The first tricolour wielded during our struggle for freedom was the Calcutta-flag of 1906. The flag had three equal bands of green, yellow and red with eight half open lotuses on the green, the legend ‘Vande Mataram’ in blue on the yellow and the Sun and Moon
in white on the red band. This flag was hoisted for the first time at what is now known as Parsi Bagan Square, on August 7, 1906.

A variant of the Calcutta-flag that was raised in foreign lands during our struggle for freedom was the flag displayed by Madame Bhikaiji Rustom Cama, on August 22, 1907 at Stuttgart, Germany. Like the Calcutta-flag, Madame Cama’s flag, too had three equal bands of dark green, golden and red showing eight half open lotuses in a row on the top green band with the legend ‘Vande Mataram’ in Devanagari in white on the middle golden band and the bottom red band had two symbols, the Sun and the Moon.

![Madame Cama's Flag - 1907](image)

![Home Rule Flag](image)

In 1917, the leaders of the Home Rule League, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Dr. Mrs. Annie Besant designed a new flag for the...
freedom struggle. The Home Rule Flag comprised five red and four green horizontal stripes arranged alternatively, with seven stars denoting the *saptarishi* configuration. On the left upper quadrant, towards the hoist of the flag had the Union Jack and on the upper right quadrant, towards the flag’s fly (free-end) there was a crescent and a star.

Gandhi ji’s first flag came in 1921. It had three equal bands of white, green and red in the order with a large *Charkha* in the centre as its device. Since the three colours represented different Indian communities, the flag attracted criticism, therefore, it was transformed in 1931. The new flag, too had three colours—saffron, white and green in the order with a mini *Charkha* in the centre in the middle of white band. However, the 1931 flag was free from any communal interpretations.

![Fig. 51 The 1921 Indian National Congress (INC) Flag](image)

![Fig. 52 The 1931 flag adopted by the INC](image)

Finally, when on June 3, 1947, the British Government announced to liberate India on August 15, 1947, the Constituent Assembly set up an Ad-hoc Flag Committee to design a flag for free-India. Accordingly, the present tricolour—Tiranga was adopted on July 22, 1947.
Our National Flag has three equal bands. We call it Tiranga, because it has three prominent colours. In fact, it has four colours. The saffron (officially called India-saffron) in the top band signifies courage, sacrifice and selflessness, the white of the centre band symbolises purity and the green (officially called India-green) in the bottom band stands for growth and prosperity. The fourth colour blue is used for the Ashoka Chakra with 24 spokes placed in the centre of the white middle band. The blue of the Ashoka Chakra denotes the boundless progress of the country as the blue of the sky above and the blue of the sea which is fathomless. The 24 spokes of the chakra signify continuous progress of the nation.

### Standard Sizes of our National Flag

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The Flag Code—India

A National Flag is like a holy relic. Therefore, it is the fundamental duty of every citizen to respect his National Flag with due courtesy. National-flags are hoisted at the Sun-rise and lowered at the Sun-set. We must stand to attention on both occasions as a mark of respect to our flag. With a view to familiarising and for general guidance, the relevant instructions and codes of the 'Flag Code – India' are enumerated as follows:

1. Correct Display of the National Flag

1.1 Wherever the National Flag is flown, it should occupy the position of honour and be distinctly placed.

1.2 Where the practice is to fly the National Flag on any public building, it shall be flown on that building on all days, including Sundays and holidays. It shall be flown from Sun-rise to Sun-set irrespective of weather conditions. The Flag may be flown on such a building at night also, but this should be only on very special occasions. One such occasion was the 40th anniversary of Independence held in August 1987, when 40,000 National Flags were flown in Delhi day and night.

1.3 The National Flag shall always be hoisted briskly and lowered slowly and ceremoniously. When the hoisting and the lowering of the Flag is accompanied by appropriate bugle calls, the hoisting and lowering should be simultaneous with the bugle calls.
1.4 When the National Flag is displayed from a staff projecting horizontally or at an angle from a windowsill, balcony, or front of a building, the saffron band shall be at the farther end of the staff.

1.5 When the National Flag is displayed flat and horizontal on a wall, the saffron band shall be uppermost and when displayed vertically, the saffron band shall be to the right with reference to the Flag, i.e., it may be to the right of a person facing it.

1.6 When displayed over the middle of a street, running east-west or north-south, the National Flag shall be suspended vertically with the saffron to the north, or to the east as the case may be.

1.7 When the National Flag is displayed on a speaker’s platform, it shall be flown on a staff on the speaker’s right as he faces the audience or flat against the wall above and behind the speaker.

1.8 When used on occasions like the unveiling of a statue, the National Flag shall be displayed distinctly and separately.
Note: The National Flag shall not be used as a covering for the statue or monument.

1.9 When the National Flag is carried in a procession or a parade, it shall be either on the marching right, that is the Flag’s own right, or if there is a line of other flags, in front of the centre of the line.

1.10 When the National Flag is displayed alone on a motor car, it shall be flown from a staff which should be affixed firmly to the car in middle front of the bonnet.

2. Incorrect Display of the National Flag

2.1 A damaged or dishevelled National Flag must not be displayed.

2.2 The Flag must not be dipped in a salute to any person or thing.

2.3 No other flag or bunting shall be placed higher than or above or side by side with the National Flag; nor shall any object, including flowers or garlands, or emblem be placed or above the flagmast from which the National Flag is flown.

2.4 The National Flag must not be used as a festoon, rosette or bunting or in any other manner for decoration; nor shall other coloured pieces of cloth be so arranged as to give the appearance of the National Flag.

2.5 The National Flag must not be used to cover a speaker’s desk nor should it be draped over a speaker’s platform.

2.6 The National Flag must not be displayed with the ‘saffron’ down.
2.7 The National Flag must not be allowed to touch the ground or floor or trail in water.

2.8 The National Flag must not be displayed or fastened in any manner as may damage it.

3.0 Misuse of the National Flag

3.1 The National Flag must not be used as a drapery in any form whatsoever except in State/military funerals.

3.2 The National Flag must not be draped over the hood, top, sides or back of a vehicle or a train or a boat.

3.3 The National Flag must not be used or stored in such a manner as may damage or soil it.

3.4 When the National Flag is in a damaged or soiled condition, it may not be cast aside or disrespectfully disposed of, but shall be destroyed as a whole in private, preferably by burning or by any other method consistent with the dignity of the Flag. The other proper way to destroy the National Flag could be immersion into the Ganga or buried with due respect.

3.5 The National Flag must not be used as a covering for a building.

3.6 The National Flag must not be used as a portion of a costume or uniform of any description. It shall not be embroidered upon cushions or handkerchiefs or printed on napkins or boxes.

3.7 Lettering of any kind shall not be put upon the National Flag.

3.8 The National Flag must not be used in any form of advertisement nor shall an advertising sign be fastened to the pole from which the Flag is flown.

3.9 The National Flag must not be used as a receptacle for receiving, delivering, holding or carrying anything.

4. Display on National Days or on Special Occasions

4.1 The display of the National Flag is unrestricted throughout the country on the following occasions. However, there is a move to relax the code.

i) Republic Day—during the period from the commencement to the close of the celebrations, until Beating of Retreat ceremony on January 29 at Vijay Chowk, Delhi;

ii) National Week—April 6 to April 13—in memory of martyrs of Jallianwala Bagh;

iii) Independence Day—August 15;
iv) Mahatma Gandhi's birthday—viz., October 2, and

v) Any other particular day of national rejoicing as may be specified by the Government of India.

4.2 The display of the National Flag shall be unrestricted in a State on the anniversary of the formation of that State.

4.3 The Government of India may authorise the unrestricted display of the National Flag on any specified day in any local area on account of local celebrations.

5. Salute to the National Flag

5.1 During the ceremony of hoisting or lowering the National Flag or when the Flag is passing in a parade or in a review, all persons present should face the Flag and stand at attention. Those present in uniform should render the appropriate salute. When the Flag is in a moving column, persons present will stand at attention or salute as the Flag passes them. A dignitary may take the salute without a head dress.

6. Display with Flags of Other Nations and of the United Nations

Fig.60 National flag with flags of foreign countries. The National flag is in extreme left of the onlooker

6.1 When displayed in a straight line with Flags of other countries, the National Flag shall be on the extreme right; (i.e.) if an observer were to stand in the centre of the row of the flags facing the audience, the National Flag should be to his extreme right.

6.2 Flags of foreign countries shall proceed as from the National Flag in alphabetical order on the basis of English versions of the names of the countries concerned. It would be permissible in
such a case to begin and also to end the row of flags with the National Flag and also to include the National Flag in the normal countrywise alphabetical order. The National Flag shall be hoisted first and lowered last.

6.2 In case flags are to be flown in an open circle, i.e., in an arc or a semi-circle, the same procedure shall be adopted, as is indicated in the preceding paragraphs. In case flags are to be flown in a closed, i.e., complete circle, the National Flag shall mark the beginning of the circle and the flags of other countries should not proceed in a clockwise manner until the last flag is placed next to the National Flag. It is not necessary to use separate National-flags to mark the beginning and the end of the circle of flags. The National Flag shall also be included in its alphabetical order in such a closed circle.

When the National Flag is displayed against a wall with another flag from crossed staffs, the National Flag shall be on the right (i.e.) the flag’s own right, and its staff shall be in front of the staff of the other flag.

6.3 When the United Nation’s flag is flown along with the National Flag, it can be displayed on either side of the National Flags. The general practice is to fly the National Flag on the extreme right with reference to the direction which it is facing (i.e., extreme left of an observer facing the masts flying the flags).

6.4 When the National Flag is flown with flags of other countries, the flag masts shall be of equal size. International usage forbids the display of the
flag of one nation above that of another nation in time of peace.

6.5 The National Flag shall not be flown from a single masthead simultaneously with any other flag or flags. There shall be separate mastheads for different flags.

6.6. On occasions specified by the Government, such as the visit of a foreign dignitary, the general public may wave the National Flag made of paper and the paper flag of the other country. After use, they shall be disposed of in a proper manner preferably by burning in private.

6.7 With permission of the Government, the National Flag and the flags of other countries may be
displayed on occasions such as cultural shows, exhibitions, musical concerts, film festivals, etc., sponsored by the diplomatic or consular representative of foreign governments.

6.8 A foreigner or a foreign firm/institution may fly the National Flag of India along with the flag of his/her country on the Indian National days or his/her own country’s national days, in accordance with the procedure indicated above.

7. Rules for Official Display of the National Flag

7.1 Public Buildings

i) Normally, the National Flag should be flown only on important public buildings such as High Courts, Secretariat Commissioner’s Offices, Collectorates, Jails and offices of the District Boards, Municipalities, Zilla Parishads and Departmental/Public Sector Undertakings.

ii) In frontier areas, the National Flag may be flown on the international borders, custom-posts, check-posts, outposts, and at other special places where the flying of the Flag takes on special significance. In addition, it may be flown on camp sites of border patrols, airports, lighthouses facing international waters.

7.2 Official Residences

i) The National Flag should be flown on the official residences of President, Vice-President, Governors and Lieutenant Governors when they are at Headquarters and on the building in which they stay during their visits to places outside the Headquarters. The Flag flown on the official residence should, however, be brought down as soon as the dignitary leaves the Headquarters and it should be re-hoisted on that building as he enters the main gate of the building on return to the Headquarters. When the dignitary is on a visit to place outside the Headquarters, the Flag should be hoisted on the building in which he stays as he enters the main gate of that building and it should be brought down as soon as he leaves that place. On the National days the Flag should, however, be flown from Sun-rise to Sun-set on such official residences irrespective of whether the dignitary is at Headquarters or not.

ii) The National Flag should be flown on the residences at the Headquarters of the Heads of Missions/Posts abroad in the countries where it is the custom for diplomatic and consular representatives to fly their National-flags over their official residences. They may also, in similar
circumstances, fly the Flag on their offices where they are separate from residences.

7.3 Institutions

i) When the President, the Vice-President or the Prime Minister visits an institution, the National Flag may be flown by the institution as a mark of respect.

ii) On the occasion of the visit to India by foreign dignitaries, namely, President, Vice-President, Emperor/King or Heir Prince and the Prime Minister, the National Flag may be flown along with the Flag of the foreign country concerned in accordance with the rules by such private institutions as are according reception to the visiting foreign dignitaries and on such public buildings as the foreign dignitaries intend to visit on the day of visit to the institution.

8. Display of National Flag on Motor Cars

8.1 The privilege of flying the National Flag on motor cars is limited to the—

i) President;

ii) Vice-President;

iii) Governors and Lieutenant Governors;

iv) Heads of Indian Missions abroad in the countries to which they are accredited;

v) Prime Minister and other Cabinet Ministers; Ministers of State and Deputy Ministers of the Union; Chief Minister and other Cabinet Ministers, Ministers of State and Deputy Ministers of States; Ministers of State and Deputy Ministers of Union Territories;

vi) Speaker of the Lok Sabha; Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha; Deputy Speaker of the Lok Sabha; Chairman of Legislative Councils in States, Speakers of Legislative Assemblies in States and Union Territories; Deputy Chairman of Legislative Councils in States; Deputy Speakers of Legislative Assemblies in States and Union Territories;

vii) Chief Justice of India; Judges of Supreme Court; Chief Justice of High Courts. (The case on the entitlement of the High Court Judges is pending).

The dignitaries mentioned may fly the National Flag on their cars, whenever they consider it necessary or advisable.
8.2 When a foreign dignitary travels in a car provided by Government, the National Flag will be flown on the right side of the car and the Flag of the foreign dignitaries will be flown on the left side of the car.

9. **Display of the National Flag on Trains**

9.1 When the President travels by special train within the country, the National Flag is flown from the driver’s cab on the side facing the platform of the station from where the train departs. The Flag is flown only when the special train is stationary or when coming into the station where it is going to halt.

10. **Display of the National Flag on Aircrafts**

10.1 The National Flag is flown on the aircraft carrying the President, Vice-President or the Prime Minister on a visit to a foreign country. Alongside the National Flag, the flag of the country visited should also be flown but, when the aircraft lands in countries en route, the National Flag of the countries touched would be flown instead, as a gesture of courtesy and goodwill.

10.2 When the President goes on tour within India, the National Flag is displayed on the side by which the President will embark the aircraft or disembark from it.

11. **Half-masting of the National Flag**

11.1 In the event of the death of the following dignitaries, the National Flag shall be half-masted.

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**Fig. 64 Half-mast on a stationary flag mast**
at the places indicated against each on the day of
the death of the dignitary—

\[ \text{Dignitary} \quad \text{Place or Places} \]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{President} & \quad \text{Throughout India} \\
\text{Vice-President} & \quad \text{Through all} \\
\text{Prime Minister} & \quad \text{State Capitals} \\
\text{Speaker of the Lok Sabha} & \quad \text{Throughout the State} \\
\text{Chief Justice of India} & \quad \text{or concerned Union} \\
\text{Union Cabinet Minister} & \quad \text{Territory} \\
\text{Minister of State or Deputy} & \quad \text{Capital of the concerned} \\
\text{Minister of the Union} & \quad \text{State} \\
\text{Governor} & \quad \text{Chief Minister of a State} \\
\text{Lt. Governor} & \quad \text{Chief Minister of a Union} \\
\text{Chief Minister of a State} & \quad \text{Cabinet Minister in a State} \\
\end{align*} \]

\[ \text{Note: 'Delhi' means the areas under the jurisdiction} \]
\[ \text{of the Delhi Municipal Corporation, the New Delhi} \]
\[ \text{Municipal Committee and the Delhi Cantonment Board.} \]

11.2 If the intimation of the death of any dignitary is
received in the afternoon, the National-flags shall
be half-masted on the following day also at the
place or places indicated above, provided the
funeral has not taken place before sunrise on that
day.

11.3 On the day of the funeral of a dignitary mentioned
above the National-flags shall be half-masted at
the place where the funeral takes place.

11.4 If State mourning is to be observed on the death
of any dignitary, the National Flag shall be half-
masted throughout the period of the mourning
throughout India in the case of the Union
dignitaries and throughout the State or Union
Territory concerned in the case of a State or Union
Territory dignitary.

11.5 Half-masting of the National Flag and, where
necessary, observance of State mourning on the
death of foreign dignitaries will be governed by
special instructions which will be issued from the
Ministry of Home Affairs in individual cases.

11.6 Notwithstanding the above provisions in the
event of a half-mast day coinciding with a
National-day, the flags shall not be flown at half-
mast except over the building where the body of
the deceased is lying until such time as it has been removed and that the Flag shall also be raised to the full-mast position after the body has been removed.

11.7 If mourning were to be observed in a parade or procession where a National Flag is carried, two streamers of black crepe are attached to the spearhead, allowing the streamers to fall naturally. The use of black crepe in such a manner can be only by order of Government.

11.8 When flown at half-mast, the National Flag is to be hoisted to the peak for an instant, then lowered to the half-mast position, but before lowering the Flag for the day, it is to be raised again to the peak.

11.9 On occasions of State and Military funerals, the National Flag is draped over the bier or coffin with the saffron towards the head of the bier or coffin. The Flag shall not be lowered into the grave or burnt on the pyre.

11.10 In the event of death of either the Head of the State or Head of the Government of a foreign country, the Indian Mission accredited to that country may fly the National Flag at half-mast even if that event falls on a National-day. In the event of death of any other dignitary of that country, the National Flag should not be flown at half-mast by the Missions except when the local practice or protocol (which should be ascertained from the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps, where necessary) require that the National Flag of a Foreign Mission in that country should also be flown at half-mast.

12. General

12.1 The above provisions are not applicable to Defence installations, who have their own rules for the display of the National Flag.

12.2 The use of the National Flag or any colourable imitation thereof for the purpose of any trade, business, calling or profession or in the title or
any patent or in any trademark or design without
the prior permission of the Central Government
is an offence under the Emblems and Names

12.3 Whoever in any public place or in any other place
within public view burns, mutilates, defaces,
defiles, disfigures, destroys, tramples upon or
otherwise brings into contempt (whether by
words, either spoken or written or by acts) the
National Flag or any part thereof, is liable to be
punished under the Prevention of Insults to

13. Use of the National Flag in Educational
Institutions, Sports, Camps, etc.

13.1 The National Flag may be hoisted in schools,
colleges, sports, camps, scout camps, etc. on
special occasions and also inspire patriotic feeling
and respect for the National Flag. Model
instructions for hoisting, saluting and giving
pledges for the National Flag are as follows:

13.2 Directions for Hoisting the Flag

i) The school will assemble in an open square
formation with the pupils forming the three sides
and the flagstaff at the centre of the fourth side.
The Headmaster, the pupil leader and the person
unfurling the National Flag (if other than the
Headmaster) will stand three paces behind the
flagstaff.

ii) The pupils will fall according to classes and in
squad of ten (or other number according to
strength). These squads will be arranged one
behind the other. The pupil leader of the class will
stand to the right of the first row of his class and
the form master will stand three paces behind the
last row of his class, towards the middle. The
classes will be arranged along the square in the
order or seniority with the seniormost class at the
right end.

iii) The distance between each row should be at
least one pace (30 inches); and the space between
Form and Form should be the same.

iv) When each Form or Class is ready, the Class
leader will step forward and salute the selected
school pupil leader. As soon as all the Forms are
ready, the school pupil leader will step up to the
Headmaster and salute him. The Headmaster will
return the salute. Then, the Flag will be unfurled.
The school pupil leader may assist.

The School pupil leader in charge of the parade
(or Assembly) will call the parade to attention, just
before the unfurling, and he will call them to the salute when the flag flies out. The parade will keep at the salute for a brief interval, and then on the command “order”, the parade will come to the ‘attention’ position.

v) The Flag salutation will be followed by the National Anthem (Jana-Gana-Mana). The parade will be kept at attention during this part of the function.

vi) On all occasions when the pledge is taken, the pledge will follow the National Anthem. When taking the pledge, the Assembly will stand to attention and the Headmaster will administer the pledge ceremoniously and the Assembly will repeat it after him.

13.3 Giving the Pledge to the Flag

In pledging allegiance to the National Flag, the practice to be adopted in schools is as follows—

Standing with folded hands, all repeat together the following pledge:

“I ............ pledge allegiance to the National Flag and to the Sovereign Democratic Republic for which it stands.”