PASSPORT- AN IRREFUTABLE DOCUMENT OF IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT
Passports serve very important purposes, as they are the primary form of international travel document and also qualify as legal proof of a person’s identity and Indian citizenship. Although the security features of passports have been highly developed, still forged passports are counted among the most serious security threats globally. Fake passports can be hard to spot unless one should know the secret signs that show the travel document to be genuine. This article can be useful to know what signs show a passport to be genuine or fake.

INTRODUCTION
A passport is a travel document and is being used as a proof of statehood or citizenship. An Indian passport is issued by order of the President of India to Indian citizens for the purpose of international travel. It enables the bearer to travel internationally and serves as proof of Indian citizenship as per the Passport Act (1967).

The following classes of passports issued under the Passport Act are¹:

1. Official Passport
   It is issued to individuals representing the Indian Government on official business. It is a “Type S” passport, where ‘S’ stands for Service. It has off white cover.

2. Diplomatic Passport
   It is issued to Indian diplomats, top ranking government officials and diplomatic couriers. It is a “Type D” passport, where D stands for Diplomatic. It has maroon cover.

3. Ordinary Passport
   It is issued to citizens of India for ordinary travel such as vacations and business trips. It is a “Type P” passport, where P stands for Personal. It has navy blue cover.
Other types of passports issued in India are:

- **Person of Indian Origin (PIO)**
  A Person of Indian Origin (PIO) means a foreign citizen (except a national of Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, China, Iran, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Nepal) with a grey cover.

- **Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI)**
  The Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) is an immigration status permitting a foreign citizen of Indian origin to live and work in the Republic of India indefinitely. It has a sky blue cover.

- **Emergency Passport**
  Emergency certificate is a one-way travel document that authorizes an Indian citizen to enter India in an emergency. It has a white cover.

**PASSPORT FRAUD**
Passport fraud is an illegal means by which an individual gains citizenship in another country by forging a passport or falsifying other legal documents to obtain a passport. Passport fraud crimes include:

1. Issuance by a counselling officer without authority.
2. False use of passport.
4. Safe conduct violation.
5. Fraudulent obtaining visas and other entry documents.
There are numerous ways to forge a passport to gain entry into another country, such as:

- A forger may steal passport of other person, then erase and reprint information on the same passport.
- A passport forger might also obtain a passport with a pre-printed number but no biographical information from a corrupt government official from embassy.
- A passport forger may also obtain a valid passport by using fraudulent name and other information.
- A passport forger could steal a valid passport of someone and assumes that person’s identity.

**CONSEQUENCES OF PASSPORT FORGERY**

Passport forgery is a serious offence that can cause penalties of imprisonment and heavy fines. In addition to charges for forgery, one can also be charged with other offences such as identity theft and fraud for using the passport to travel, as identification, or to apply for visas and other documents.

Passports are always including more and more sophisticated security features in their designs in order to ward off potential counterfeitters, fraudsters and impostors. Although the security features of Indian passports have been highly developed now, but still forged passports are counted among the most serious security threats globally. In most cases, detecting a forged passport is relatively easy but in some cases it can be challenging.

**ROLE OF FORENSIC DOCUMENT EXAMINER IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM**

A forensic document examiner refers to a person who studies all the aspects of a document to determine its authenticity, origin, handwriting, photocopies, inks and papers and helps in solving white collar crimes. The alarming rate at which crime is increasing all over the India is a matter of deep concern. To be practical, crime and criminals can never be completely eradicated completely from the society, hence the need of a Forensic Scientist is a necessity in all cities, states and countries. In order to ensure correct justice to be passed, Forensic Scientist plays major role. They look all the parameters of crimes scene with a scientific mind and analyze pieces of evidence to help the legal system.

Forensic document examination is a complex matter requiring various areas of expertise to identify document forgeries of all kinds. Counterfeiting and forgery of value and security documents occurs on a large scale. The threats posed by fraudsters are now as broad as they are serious. To prevent the creation of fake passports, the key is to design a passport that is very difficult to copy, produce and personalize. This can be achieved by multiplying effects: combining tactile and optical features, different technologies and using material and inks which are not available in the public domain.

**SECURITY FEATURES OF INDIAN PASSPORT**

The security features of passport are viewed under different light source such as ultraviolet light, transmitted light, and oblique light and with the . These are given as below:
1. **Physical appearance of Indian passport**-
   The ordinary passport has navy blue cover with golden coloured printing. The Emblem of India is emblazoned in the centre of the front cover. The standard passport contains 36 pages.

   The Bio-data page contains the following information (Figure 1):
   - Type of passport
   - Passport number
   - Name of the holder with details
   - Nationality
   - Place of issue
   - Date of issue
   - Date of expiry
   - Signature of passport holder
   - Machine readable Zone at the end of the Bio-data page
   - Letter Screen Image

   The Demographic page at the end of the passport book contains the following information:
   - Name of the father or legal guardian
   - Name of the mother
   - Name of spouse
   - Address
   - Old passport number
   - File number
   - Barcode

2. **Barcode**-
   Barcodes are the symbols that can be scanned electronically using laser or camera based systems. Barcodes present in Indian passport gives all the information of the passport owner, after being scanned (Figure 2).

   ![Barcode on demographic page](image)

3. **Machine Readable Zone (MRZ)**-
   The machine readable zone at the bottom of identity page in passport contains characters which are encoded in Optical Character Recognition format. The machine readable passports have greater protection against fraudulent practices and tempering. The Indian passports have a standardised machine readable zone. The presence of any characters that does not match this font exactly could indicate that the passport may be counterfeit or fake (Figure 3).

   ![Machine Readable Zone](image)

4. **Security Fibres**-
   The security fibres used for binding of passport booklets are the single or multicolour sewing threads made from cotton or synthetic fibres. These fibres
appear randomly across the paper and are UV fluorescent (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Security fibres visible under UV light

5. Micro printing-
Micro printing involves extremely small text, which is generally small enough to be indiscernible to the naked eyes. Micro printing is present as “GOVERNMENT OF INDIA” and “BHARAT SARKAR” in Hindi subsequently on biographical page. All the printed lines on the Visa pages of the passport are also printed as “VISA PAGE” and “VISA PRASTHA” in Hindi on remaining pages (Figure 5a & 5b).

Figure 5a: Micro printing on Biographical page

Figure 5b: Micro printing on Visa pages

6. Binding Thread-
The stitching of pages of passport booklet is done with the security thread with a set pattern by using reverse stitching machine that is known as Saddle Stitching. The binding thread shows fluorescence when exposed to Ultraviolet Light (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Security thread under Ultraviolet light

7. HAUV Laminated Film-
HAUV means Heat Activated Ultra Violet Laminated Film, a type of sheet with visible security features that is affixed to the bio-data page in order to protect data eateries against falsification or alteration. HAUV Laminated Film is laminated at 100° Celsius to 180° Celsius. The laminating film gives fluorescence when exposed to Ultraviolet Light and the micro printing
shows “GOVERNMENT OF INDIA” in reddish fluorescence and “BHARAT SARKAR” in greenish fluorescence (Figure 7).

8. **Gothic Numbering**-
   The passport number has 8 digit alphanumeric, laser-perforated conical of passport booklet through the half back part of the passport. The conicals decreases in size of the perforated holes in the successive pages of the passport booklet. The passport perforation by laser enhances security (Figure 8).

9. **Guilloche Design**-
   A Guilloche design is a pattern of computer-generated fine lines that forms a unique image. The Guilloches provides very high degree of security and it is impossible for forgers to copy the passport. The Guilloche design gives fluorescence when exposed under Ultraviolet light (Figure 9).

10. **Page Numbering**-
    The passports are available with pages that are numbered consecutively at the bottom throughout the booklet. These numbers are incorporated within both visible and invisible design. When illuminated with ultraviolet light, the invisible page number appears (Figure 10).

11. **Letter Screen Image (LSI)**-
    The Letter Screen Image is the shadow image of the passport holder, consisting of personal data such as name, address,
date of birth and file number embedded in tiny fonts. The LSI passport booklet series was launched by Ministry of External Affairs in April 2013. The details on Letter Screen Image can be viewed with the help of high resolution magnifying lens (Figure 11).

12. Watermark-
A watermark is a design formed in the paper, typically using a tonal gradation that is visible when held up to the light or can be viewed under transmitted light. Watermark cannot be photocopied or scanned. This helps thwarts those who would attempt to forge a passport (Figure 12).

13. Fluorescent Ink-
The background text on the passport is printed with the fluorescent ink. This ink gives greenish fluorescence under Ultraviolet light (Figure 13).

14. Passport Cover Page-
The cover page of passport when viewed under Ultraviolet light, it shows Ashoka Chakra in greenish fluorescence (Figure 14).
15. **Type**-
Special font and font size is also a staple security feature of modern passports. Some passport pages also include font that is so small and is not even visible with naked eye. Type is difficult security feature to replicate as they include deliberate errors\(^4\) (Figure 15).

![Figure 15: Printed portion on first and last page of Passport](image)

**DISCUSSIONS**
The threat of illegal document forgery exists and will always exist. Forged passports are counted among the most serious security threat globally. In most cases, detecting a forged passport is relatively easy but in few cases, it can be challenging. The Passport issuing authorities are using combination of security features in order to make it difficult or impossible to produce counterfeit or forged passports. This is done by combining tactile and optical features, different technologies, and using material and inks within a complex design. To prevent forgery of passport, all security elements have to be closely interlocked and integrated. The Ministry of External Affairs has plans to issue chip enabled e-passports to Indian citizens, with advanced security features including a small silicon chip on the back cover of the passport. The personal particulars of the applicants would be digitally signed and stored in the chip. This will prevent any type of tampering in the passport and will improve the quality of travel documents, facilitate quicker and smoother processing at immigration checkpoints and considerably reduce the scope of forgery of passports.

**CITATIONS**
1. THE PASSPORT ACT, 1967  
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2. [http://www.legalmatch.com](http://www.legalmatch.com)
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