

SPLENDOURS OF THE  
SUBCONTINENT





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A PRINCE'S TOUR OF INDIA 1875-6







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## INTRODUCTION







Fig. 1 Invitation to the reception of the Prince of Wales at the Guildhall, London, 19 May 1876.

In June 1876 the upper galleries of the India Museum at South Kensington were transformed into what was described as ‘a scene from the Arabian Nights’.<sup>1</sup> Albert Edward, Prince of Wales (1841–1910), had only just returned to Britain from his four-month tour of the Indian subcontinent and, eager to share his experiences, arranged for all of his sumptuous gifts to be exhibited for the wider public to enjoy. Row upon row of cabinets glittered with opulent jewellery, gold and silverware, arms and armour, furniture and textiles.

The gifts, which came from many regions of modern-day India, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka, are tangible reminders of the encounters and connections that the Prince of Wales made with the Indian rulers. The Prince hosted six receptions in Bombay, Madras, Calcutta, Delhi, Lahore and Agra, where he followed Indian ceremonial customs to welcome his guests. Visits to the royal courts of Baroda, Benares, Kashmir, Gwalior, Jaipur and Indore gave the Prince opportunities to see courtly performances, to hear Indian music and to visit historical palaces. The Prince also went hunting at many of these courts, as well as in Ceylon and Nepal. By the end of the trip Sir William Howard Russell (1820–1907), writer of the official tour diary, noted that since arriving in India the Prince had ‘travelled nearly 7,600 miles by land and 2,300 miles by sea, knows more Chiefs than all the Viceroys and Governors together’, adding, with a touch of hyperbole, that he had ‘seen more of the country in the time than any living man’.<sup>2</sup>

The subsequent display of these gifts at ten venues in Britain, Paris and Copenhagen also played an instrumental role in the narrative of British and Indian design and their intertwined histories. Given the extensive journey undertaken by the Prince, the collection of gifts provided an intriguing snapshot of the spectacular range of Indian craftsmanship. Recognising the merits of the collection, the Prince of Wales lent it to be exhibited at a further nine venues after the initial display at South Kensington. For two years the collection was shown at the Bethnal Green Museum before being sent to Paris, where it formed most of the British Indian display for the International



Exhibition of 1878. From Paris the gifts travelled on to Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen, York, Nottingham, Copenhagen and Penzance; it was estimated that over two million people saw the collection in Britain alone.<sup>3</sup>

### Rationale for the tour

The royal tour played an integral role in the meticulously planned educational programme developed by Queen Victoria (1819–1901) and Prince Albert (1819–61) for the Prince of Wales. They felt that travel, coupled with intensive tuition, would encourage the Prince to take an avid interest in the wider world. Although the Prince was less academically inclined than his younger brothers, he enjoyed travelling and collecting objects from tours, and, like his father, he developed a taste for displaying these souvenirs. By October 1875, Albert Edward had already undertaken major tours to Canada and the United States (1860), and to Egypt and the Middle East (1862). Both tours had been devised to provide the Prince with the opportunity to learn about the culture, history and religions of these countries as well as to establish diplomatic links.<sup>4</sup>

Prince Albert wanted the Prince of Wales, as heir apparent, to visit India and he discussed the idea of a tour with Lord Charles Canning (1812–62), then Viceroy and Governor-General of India.<sup>5</sup> The British East India Company had ruled over parts of India until 1857, when Indian sepoys employed in the Company's armies revolted. This led the British Crown to assume rule in 1858, following the Government of India Act. A tour of India would allow the Prince of Wales to learn more about a country he would eventually rule and to establish a personal and visible link between the two countries.

However, the prospect of a tour diminished due to concerns over the Prince's health and this, coupled with news of the assassination of Richard Bourke, 6th Earl of Mayo and Viceroy of India (1822–72), raised questions over whether the Prince should make the trip at all. Early in 1875, however, the Prince revisited the idea, expressing his continuing desire to visit India. The Queen recorded in her journal that it made her 'anxious', but her anxieties appear to have been assuaged by meetings with the Prime Minister, Benjamin



Disraeli (1804–81), and Lord Salisbury (1830–1903), Secretary of State for India, who were both in favour of the trip.<sup>6</sup>

Lord Northbrook (1826–1904), Viceroy of India, also supported the proposal for the Prince's tour. A significant portion of India remained independent of the Crown and was ruled over by Indian rulers, many of whose lineages had been established for centuries. These rulers had supported the British against the so-called 'Indian Mutiny' (1857), and from the perspective of Lord Northbrook a tour would acknowledge their loyalty to the British Crown.

On 23 March 1875, the Prince's intention to travel to India was publicly announced in *The Times* newspaper, which reported that 'the greatest necessity, after all, in the government of a vast and various Empire like that of England is mutual intelligence, mutual respect, a sense of unity, and increasing sympathy. The growth of all these will be promoted by the PRINCE'S visit; and it is not impossible both countries may hereafter look back upon the event as a new starting point in their strange and momentous destiny'.<sup>7</sup>

Fig. 2 Map showing the route taken by the Prince of Wales, from the diary of William Howard Russell, 1877. RCIN IO54593



## PERFUME HOLDER

Enamelled by Hira Singh, Jaipur, c.1870–5

RCIN 11423.a–c

Gold, enamel, diamonds and pearls

15.6 × 20.3 cm (open); 14.4 × 20.3 cm (closed)

EXHIBITED: London 1982; Cardiff 1998; London 2002

LITERATURE: Cardiff 1998, cat. no. 164

This perfume holder was a gift from Ram Singh II, Maharaja of Jaipur. When pressure is applied to the rod beneath the tray, the 'leaves' of the perfume holder open to reveal a yellow enamelled cup and cover. The feet of the tray are in the form of elephant-like animals with curled up trunks that rest on green enamelled circular feet with *kundan*-set diamonds.

The circular tray is enamelled with eight oval medallions depicting hunting scenes, the Chandra Mahal and Amber Fort, and floral designs similar to the salver (RCIN 11469, pp. 108–9). Thomas Holbein Hendley recorded that this perfume holder was enamelled by Hira Singh and that it cost 10,000 rupees to produce.<sup>1</sup> The enamelled holder underwent five firings and took five years to complete.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hendley and Jacob 1886, Appendix.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.









## PERFUME HOLDER

Possibly Madras and Orissa, c.1870–5

RCIN 28692

Gold, silver, wood and rubies

27.0 × 19.0 × 15.5 cm

This perfume holder was presented to the Prince of Wales by Jashwant Singh II, Maharaja of Jodhpur (1838–95). The Prince first met the Maharaja at the Madras Racecourse on 15 December, and later at Calcutta, where the Maharaja was made a Knight Commander of the Order of the Star of India on New Year's Day 1876 (fig. 10).

The bud-shaped holder opens up when the finial is pressed to reveal five perfume holders held by silver filigree brackets. The openwork floral designs on the outside 'leaves' of the bud, the gold bottles and the

silver filigree suggest that it was produced in different parts of India and later brought together. The gold scrolling foliage on the outer 'leaves', the ruby-inlaid perfume bottles and the fluted base are similar in style to metalwork from Madras, and the interior silver filigree work is similar to that produced in Orissa.<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Watt 1903, pp. 37–8; Dehejia et al. p. 81.



## PERFUME HOLDER

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Probably western India, c.1870–5

RCIN 11479.a–b

Gold, rubies, diamonds and emeralds

9.0 × 12.0 × 10.0 cm

MARKS: encircled inside the tray base is the inscription  
'WANKANER' and 'RAJ SHAHIB BANESHUNGJEE'

This perfume holder was presented by Banesinhji Jaswantsinghji, Raj Sahib of Wankaner (1842–81), and was probably designed to store solid perfume. The inscription in Gujarati on the lower tray is obscured from view by the upper tray and bottle, indicating that they were made separately and then attached together at a later date, probably to make a more impressive gift. The screws holding both the trays together unscrew anticlockwise. This is unusual in Indian metalwork and implies this perfume holder was assembled by a non-Indian craftsman possibly working in Bombay, where this gift was presented.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Birdwood 1884, p. 175.





## FOUR PERFUME HOLDERS



Kapurthala, c.1870–5

RCIN 11317.1–4

Gold

13.1 × 8.2 × 5.3 cm each

EXHIBITED: Bradford 1991; London 1999

LITERATURE: Bradford 1991, cat. no. 80; London 1999, cat. no. 202

The Prince of Wales met Kharak Singh (1850–77), Raja of Kapurthala, during the reception he held for the rulers of Punjab in Lahore on 18 January 1876. Here the Raja presented him with this set of four perfume holders, cast as seated lions with articulated tongues.





## CUP AND SAUCER

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Possibly enamelled by Ghuma Singh, Jaipur, c.1870–5

RCIN 11424.a–c

Gold, enamel and diamond

10.2 × 14.7 × 14.7 cm (overall)

EXHIBITED: London 2001

This covered cup and saucer was presented by Maharaja Ram Singh II of Jaipur. It is likely to have been enamelled by Ghuma Singh, who is recorded to have made a similar covered cup and saucer found in the collection of the Albert Hall Museum, in Jaipur, in 1895.<sup>1</sup>

Although intended as a Western drinking vessel, it follows the same form as covered cups and salvers traditionally used as perfume holders in India. This adaptation reflected the demand from the European market for Jaipur enamelling; in the 1880s a third of annual sales of Jaipur enamelled wares were made for Europeans.<sup>2</sup> From the early twentieth century onwards, covered cups and saucers were often accompanied by similarly enamelled spoons.

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<sup>1</sup> Hendley 1895, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Hendley and Jacob 1886, p. 7.





## PAIR OF ROSEWATER SPRINKLERS

Cutch, c.1870–5  
RCIN 11475.1–2  
Gold  
28.2 × 6.7 × 5.4 cm each

The Prince of Wales met Pragmalji II, Rao of Cutch (1832–75), at Bombay, in November 1875. Here he was presented with this pair of rosewater sprinklers in the form of cranes holding a fish in their beaks. The fish have a bouquet of flowers issuing from their mouths, which have been perforated with holes to allow for the rosewater to be sprinkled.

The strange iconography of the sprinkler may be linked with the legend of the two rival goldsmiths, Gangu and Nandu, working in the court of Anhilpur Patan, in modern-day Gujarat. The legend recalls that both goldsmiths were invited to take part in a contest of

skill by the Solanki ruler, Jayasimha Siddharaja (c.1094–1143). Gangu produced a gold fish, which could float and move in water. In response, Nandu produced a crane that pecked at the fish causing it to drown and thus won the contest. However, Nandu later incurred the wrath of the ruler and was banished from Patan, taking refuge in Cutch, where this tale inspired later metalworkers in the state.<sup>1</sup>

Silver versions of these sprinklers in other collections suggest that this pair, made from gold, were produced as unique presentation pieces for the tour.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> JIA 1894.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.





## PAIR OF ROSEWATER SPRINKLERS

Nahan Foundry, Nahan, c.1873–6

RCIN II212.1–2

Silver

37.0 × 10.7 cm each

MARKS: on the base of each, inscribed 'FROM NAHAN FOUNDRY'

EXHIBITED: London 1982; Bradford 1991

LITERATURE: Bradford 1991, cat. no. 81

Shamsher Prakash, Raja of Nahan (1856–98), presented this pair of silver rosewater sprinklers when he met the Prince in Calcutta in December 1875. The Raja of Nahan established the Nahan Foundry in c.1873, where these sprinklers were made. Managed by Frederick Robert Jones, an Austrian engineer, the foundry predominantly produced industrial items such as sugar-cane crushers and railings.

The bulbous body of the sprinkler is decorated with eight embossed and chased European baroque-style medallions. One of the medallions has been left blank, where a presentation inscription may have

been intended to be added. Although catalogued as 'automatic' in the *Indian Art at Marlborough House* catalogue, it doesn't appear to have a pump mechanism. A number of the Prince's gifts were recorded as having signs of being produced in haste, as 'everything has to be made to order in India; nothing is kept ready made', and this perhaps explains the missing mechanism.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *ILN*, 1 July 1876.





## BOTTLE AND SALVER

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Jaipur, c.1870–5

RCIN 11427.a–c

Gold, enamel, diamonds and ruby

Bottle 21.6 × 9.8 × 9.8 cm; salver 5.9 × 18.8 cm

EXHIBITED: London 1982

Presented to the Prince of Wales by Ram Singh II, Maharaja of Jaipur, this enamelled bottle and salver are of exceptional quality. They were illustrated in the review of the Prince's gifts, where they were described as displaying 'an exquisite example' of Jaipur enamelling.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *ILN*, 12 August 1876.





## PAIR OF BOTTLES

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Kashmir, c.1870–5  
RCIN II446.1–2  
Gold  
28.2 × 11.2 cm each

The surface of these bottles, presented by Ranbir Singh, Maharaja of Kashmir (1830–35), is engraved with stylised poppy flowers and overhanging cypress trees. This design became known as ‘shawl patterning’ in reference to the famed Kashmir shawls, which feature similar motifs.

From 1887, increasing numbers of European visitors chose to spend their summers in Kashmir rather than Simla, and the silversmiths began to use ‘shawl’ patterning to embellish tea caddies, cigarette cases, trophies, beakers and tea sets for these new customers.<sup>1</sup> In Britain, the Birmingham-based firm Elkington and Co. sold Kashmir-inspired silverware and electroplates of copperwares from Kashmir.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dehejia et al. 2008, p. 153.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 154.

