

INTRODUCTION: COSMOPOLITAN COLLECTORS

In 1902, Maharani Sunity Devi sat for a formal state photograph at the Lafayette Studios in London. The young Hindu queen of the eastern Indian kingdom of Cooch Behar was richly clothed in the apparel she had worn earlier that year for the coronation of King-Emperor Edward VII. Her self-fashioned style reflected both the aesthetic norms of empire and indigenous courtly Indian traditions of ornamentation. On her head she wore a diamond-encrusted tiara made by a European jeweller, which at that time Indian rulers wore in lieu of formal crowns. She complemented it with a high-collared, white satin gown designed by a French dressmaker, embroidered in gold thread, wrapped around her body like a *sari*. As for jewels, she radiated diamond- and pearl-encrusted bangles, rings and a heavy necklace that combined European and Indic motifs. Most significantly, she displayed prominently the Badge of the Imperial Order of the Crown of India on her chest – an honour given to esteemed Indian women for their service to the colonial Raj.¹

Sunity Devi herself was a woman who bridged various identities – Western and Eastern, metropolitan and regional. She was born into a prominent Hindu family of Calcutta intellectuals, the Sens, who were advocates of women's education, widow remarriage and increasing the age of marital consent for boys and girls. Her father, Keshub Chandra Sen, the leader of the Brahmo Samaj movement, founded by Raja Ram Mohun Roy, was considered to be the Martin Luther of Hinduism. Sen had advocated a dynamic policy of social reform and a 'superstition free' version of Hindu spirituality, which endorsed monogamy, a theistic view of divinity that emphasized a belief in one omniscient and omnipresent God, the eradication of caste distinctions, a critique of vedic ritual, and greater education for women. Sen argued that educated women would make better spouses and mothers, and in 1872 urged the British government to pass legislation, known as the Brahmo Marriage Act, which increased the minimum marital age for girls to fourteen and boys to eighteen.² The Sens were part of a lively circle of scholars, poets, artists and political and religious thinkers, including the family of the Bengali poet and Nobel Laureate, Rabindranath Tagore.

Sunity Devi's state marriage of alliance in 1878 to the Maharaja of Cooch Behar, who counted several members of the English royal family and the British aristocracy as close associates, was in part 'arranged' through the intervention of local British political officials, who sought a Westernized, educated, upper caste Hindu bride from a progressive family for the young ruler they wished to modernize. She would become the first Indian woman to write her autobiography in English,³ travel to Europe⁴ and openly socialize in British high society both in India as well as the metropole.⁵ One of her sons, conceived during her first visit to England in 1887⁶ was named in honour of his godmother, Queen Victoria, and her daughters, daughter-in-law and granddaughter would have lavish courtships in Europe and marry Englishmen at a time when interracial marriages were rare and, in certain places, illicit.

Royal and aristocratic Indian women, like Sunity Devi, were part of an engaged culture of imperial patronage, which reflected hybrid, colonial identities. Just as she lived between the semi-autonomous princely state of Cooch Behar, the British Indian capital of Calcutta and the imperial metropole, so did a number of her contemporaries. At the same time, she, like most Indian courtly women, also inhabited a fourth space: the sequestered interior of the palace zenana. The zenana was the 'female quarters' of the Indic home or palace, where women lived behind *pardab* (literally translated as the 'veil' or 'curtain') within the seclusion of the *antahpura*. It was not only an architectural space, but was also a separate political entity, serving as a distinct female court of governance and authority within the kingdom.

While gender-segregated quarters were not a new concept in South Asia, having references in the *Kamasutra* and Sanskrit epics, the formal institution of the zenana was a Persianate concept which entered medieval India during the thirteenth century with the spread of Islam⁷ and was eventually adopted along with the practice of *pardab* by Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and Buddhist ruling dynasties in the subcontinent.⁸ After the marriages of Mughal Emperor Akbar to Hindu Rajput princesses in the latter half of the sixteenth century, Indo-Islamic ideas of gendered architecture and courtly life were further imitated and adopted by non-Muslim elites⁹ and the subsequent building of zenana palaces became customary in most courtly households as was the adoption of a zenana culture and lifestyle. During the medieval period, zenana women were influential patrons and the creators of an imperial style. The Mughal Empress Nur Jahan famously minted coins in her image, developed architecture and landscape gardening, inspired the production of Persianate ornaments and popularized the use of realism in figure painting which had earlier been decried as an antithesis to both Islam and Hinduism.¹⁰ Similarly, Hindu women from Rajput kingdoms, such as Rani Rudadevi, wife of the Vaghela king Virmasimha of Dandabidesa (*c.*

1458–1511), Minal Devi, mother of Jayasinh Siddhraj (1094–144) and Udayamati, queen of the Solankis, were patrons of step-wells and temples.¹¹

A growing body of scholarship has addressed this history of the zenana and, in particular, the influence of *pardah* women on state governance, law, dynastic politics, cultural and intellectual patronage and religious orthodoxy and reform in both pre-colonial and colonial states. This literature has contested earlier portraits of zenana women as passive objects of colonial or indigenous patriarchy and the perceived political and social limitations of *pardah*. Leslie Peirce and Ruby Lal have written significant works on the medieval Ottoman and Mughal harems, respectively, while Siobhan Lambert-Hurley and Shaharyar Khan have investigated the reigns of the four successive Muslim queens in colonial Bhopal during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹² I have written elsewhere extensively on the political and legal histories of colonial and postcolonial zenanas, especially in Rajputana and Saurashtra, which reveal that *pardah* women were engaged players in indigenous state politics and larger power sharing relationships with external hegemonic forces, colonial and nationalist.¹³ This work extends these earlier findings, which were mainly focused on women's political histories, to address the influence of the zenana in constructing a new colonial aesthetic, which bridged indigenous ornamentation with occidental innovation.

Royal Patronage, Power and Aesthetics in Princely India examines the history of material culture in zenana ateliers, during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as well as the influence of courtly aesthetics on subsequent portraits of colonial India in Hindi and Euro-American cinema. The consumption patterns of zenana women, who were globally connected yet rooted in their local communities, reveal the use of new technologies imported from the West, such as electrical lighting, mechanical clocks and watches, gramophones, jet showers, automobiles and retractable lipsticks. At the same time, such studies expose the continued utilization of traditional, pre-colonial objects historically associated with zenana households (including oil lamps, palanquins, curtained horse carriages and *kankavati* vessels employed for holding powders used in daily worship). Their courts created a transnational concept of display, interfusing aesthetic elements from Asia and Europe, the modern and the pre-colonial, the religious and the secular. Indeed, the 'indigenous' itself would have been diverse in nature, reflecting the variations in courtly households across the Indian sub-continent based on region, religion, ethnicity and local craft production. This book extends arguments that historians have made on the development of a colonial Indian domesticity, which combined elements of the modern and the traditional.¹⁴ As Sanjay Joshi has observed, '“traditional” ideas played a role in the construction of “modern” ideas about religion, community, gender relations, and the nation.'¹⁵

The conquest of Bengal in the mid-eighteenth century by the English East India Company augured the subsequent spread of British imperial power within the subcontinent.¹⁶ By the time of the treaties of 1818, during the wane of the Mughal Empire, the East India Company had emerged as the single paramount power on the Indian subcontinent.¹⁷ With the transition from Company to Crown rule after 1858, the region was split into directly governed British India, which included the politically and economically desirable territories of Bengal and the Presidencies of Bombay and Madras, and the semi-autonomous, 'native' or 'princely' states, which numbered more than 500 semi-autonomous kingdoms and covered two-fifths of the subcontinent and comprised one-fifth of the population.¹⁸

After 1858, Indian princes and zenana women became avid patrons of prominent European architects and builders, chefs, couturiers, jewellers and furniture-makers, among a host of other artisans. They commissioned jewels from Boucheron, Chaumet, Cartier, Harry Winston and Van Cleef & Arpels, who designed pieces that amalgamated Indic motifs and the latest styles in the Edwardian, Art Deco and Art Nouveau traditions. These would have been worn for both state events (imperial *darbars* and viceregal visits) as well as private functions (marriages, birthdays and religious festivals). They created heterodox forms of clothing and dress, as did Sunity Devi's daughter-in-law, Maharani Indira Devi of Cooch Behar (1892–1968), who was the first woman to use French chiffon fabrics for Indian saris. It was a revolutionary fashion choice in her day, for chiffon was still considered lingerie and not outerwear.¹⁹ They employed leading European architects to build palaces, which fused together the grandeur of Versailles, St Peter's Basilica, Mughal cenotaphs and Rajput havelis, creating impressive Anglo-Indian public spaces such as *darbar* halls and ballrooms, while simultaneously maintaining the customs of gender-segregated, *pardah* architecture. They cultivated chefs who revolutionized Indian cuisine, as Christmas pudding and cake, among other European staples, were incorporated into zenana kitchens. At the same time, these kitchens prepared local dishes, which quintessentially represented their regional culinary and cultural histories, as well as adapted cuisines from other parts of the subcontinent in inventive ways. As courtly Indian tables began serving English sausages, Anglo-Indian mulligatawny soup and French pastries, they also prepared traditional, regional favourites, such as Mughal delicacies from Awadh, Rajasthani-styled *shikari* meats and Nepali potatoes.

This cross-cultural material culture extended beyond the patronage circles of the court to reach broader, popular audiences. The image of the veiled courtesan or princess, hidden behind the screens and lattices of a lavish palace interior, covered in jewels and silks, has been a reoccurring symbol of the zenana for both Eastern and Western audiences since the medieval age. Epics, plays, historic

chronicles, ballads, songs, travelogues, novels, diaries, memoirs and biographies have attempted to describe the intimacies of this female-centred world to a larger audience. The advent of film in the early twentieth century brought this long-standing interest in the princely *pardahnashin* to viewers outside the palace walls.

Through the medium of film, former princely states have continued to influence postcolonial fashion, tourism and popular culture, some sixty years after the official lapse of monarchy in India with Independence in 1947. The Indian film industry, particularly Bombay cinema houses, has reflected from its origins the use of courtly textiles, jewels and palatial settings for their sets. Movies from the golden era of cinema in the 1940s up through 2008, such as *Raj Nartaki* (1941), *Mughal-e-Azam* (1960), *Pakeezah* (1972), *Umrao Jaan* (1981), *Zubeidaa* (2001), *Umrao Jaan* (2006), *Eklavya* (2007) and most recently *Jodhaa Akbar* (2008), have showcased zenana interiors, clothing and lifestyles, influencing the rise of heritage tourism in India²⁰ and the image of the ideal cinematic heroine for mainstream audiences in South Asia and diasporic locations. Chronicling the lives of aristocratic courtesans or royal wives and daughters, these films are invariably shot in princely locations, such as the former palaces, forts or temple grounds of erstwhile ruling families, and use the original artefacts of regional courts.

Rachel Dwyer and others have argued that this fascination for courtly aesthetics and royal drama expresses a popular nostalgia for a lost Indo-Islamic past.²¹ While this may in part be true, I also suggest that just as historical epics have come to symbolize China's new confidence in a global marketplace,²² these big-budget, opulent palace dramas, particularly those made in the 2000s, not only serve nostalgic purposes but also express a reinvigorated nationalist sentiment, reflecting India's dynamic fiscal growth as a BRICs nation in a post-Cold War economic and geopolitical climate.

Not only have zenana women dazzled the big screen in Hindi cinema, but they have also been the subjects of Anglo-American period piece dramas. The films of Ismail Merchant and James Ivory, such as *Autobiography of a Princess* (1975), *Hullabaloo Over Georgie and Bonnie's Pictures* (1978) and *Heat and Dust* (1982) have recreated tales of princely India, particularly the histories of princesses, queens and zenana households, for a Western viewership. Like the Hindi film industry, most of these movies were shot in the original palaces and estates of erstwhile courtly families, incorporating authentic objects from private collections, thus serving as filmic brochures of Indian lives and locations for anglophone audiences. Many were filmed, produced and released during the tumultuous 1970s, which was a decade of crisis and radical change for the former Indian princes.

Although they had relinquished their executive and administrative duties in 1947 when their states acceded and were integrated into the new nations of India and Pakistan, erstwhile princes still received a constitutionally-granted Privy Purse

(an allowance based on a percentage of the revenue of their former states) and the use of royal titles and privileges, for the first quarter century after Independence. They were seen as constitutional co-architects in the development of the independent, democratic republic. These vestigial monies funded local artisans and patronage systems associated with erstwhile states as well as the upkeep of large properties and salaries for generations of palace retainers and staff. In 1971, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi abolished the Privy Purse and regal privileges, which her father's government had granted²³ and, in 1975, a number of erstwhile princes who had entered electoral politics were jailed as members of the Congress opposition during the Emergency.²⁴ Merchant Ivory's films reflect this embattled history by incorporating documentaries, interviews, investigative reportage and archival footage of erstwhile princes during this period into their fictional narratives.

Both Hindi and anglophone cinema emphasize the material culture of erstwhile princely states and zenana courts in fictionalized revisions and retellings of a romanticized past. Several of these productions serve to document the eclectic objects produced within colonial zenana courts and the cultural practices associated with them. They serve as visual reminders of a colonial cosmopolitanism in part because they have so freely utilized the existing properties, museums and private collections of erstwhile princely families in their original settings.

In particular, this book tracks this developing change in taste relating to the politics of clothing, jewellery and food in zenana courts. How did the contact zone between indigenous South Asian leaders and Euro-American designers, jewellers and craftsmen create new visual products? How did a late imperial style influence concepts of beauty and aesthetic production in both the metropole and the colony? How did women in seclusion, who practised the traditions of *pardah* and the zenana, influence a wider sphere of cultural production and perceptions of visual culture?

Furthermore, how do certain dishes, garments or decorative items become trendsetters as they reflect the broader power relationships between indigenous courts and the British or between rival colonial princely states? What concept of beauty in jewellery or cuisine, for instance, becomes a symbol of 'native' royal power or British imperial authority through the exoticness of ingredients or fabrics used, the employment of foreign chefs or designers, the changing desirability of certain social venues and the shifting educational, political and cultural aspirations of those in power? These are some of the questions this book will attempt to address.

Observing the consumption patterns of zenana women, and their portrayal through film, provides an illuminating and hitherto largely unexplored portrait of an imperial worldview, constructed within a uniquely female world that has relevance up to this day. In particular, they complicate existing narratives on the colonial encounter between Western and non-Western peoples. Colonial depic-

tions of the zenana invariably constructed Indian women as mute, sequestered, sexually voracious and governed by superstitious religious practice. They were seen as without agency or involvement in the public sphere. Such portraits of the zenana fuelled perceptions of a passive, despotic, 'timeless' India in opposition to an active, rationalist, 'modernizing' West, which required the intervention of imperial reform.²⁵ In reality, their living histories question this dominant narrative of the colonial encounter as one-sided and reveal instead a lively dialogue of exchange between colonizer and colonized.

Building upon the work of David Cannadine, Durba Ghosh and Maya Jasanoff, this book argues that there was a vibrant cross-cultural exchange between imperial actors and colonized subjects in India. As Cannadine has noted in relation to class and Ghosh has noted in terms of domesticity and family, the colonial encounter was often a conversation of reciprocal rapport, exchange and influence based on the diversity of particular life histories, which cannot be neatly encapsulated into monolithic paradigms.²⁶ These findings critique the earlier Saidian thesis of an Orientalist binary paradigm, where a hegemonic Europe recreated a distinct and inferior East in its own words and image²⁷ and the work of the *Subaltern Studies* collective, which has emphasized the repressive history of British imperialism and traditional patriarchies on silencing Indian women.²⁸ The social histories of objects associated with the zenana illuminate rather what Eugene Irshick has described as a dialogistic and heteroglot historical moment that was shaped 'by both the weak and the strong, the colonized and the colonizer, from the present and the past.'²⁹ It was neither solely 'European' nor 'indigenous' but revealed multiple paradoxical and ambivalent dialogues in the form of mediations and collaborations, however unequal, between various colonial groups, which cannot be simply essentialized.

In particular, this book furthers arguments introduced innovatively by Maya Jasanoff in *Edge of Empire: Lives, Culture, and Conquest in the East, 1750–1850* on the cosmopolitan nature of colonial collecting and connoisseurship. As Jasanoff notes, instead of a dominant British Empire, which imposed its own cultural markers globally in a unilateral manner, the colonial project accommodated difference. Indeed, there was a steady exchange of goods from East to West and vice versa as well as the creation of new, hybrid products. She suggests that 'the stories of imperial collectors make clear ... how much the process of cultural encounter involved crossing and mixing, as well as separation and division.'³⁰ I suggest that the cultural cross-pollination of princely India thus makes the colonial zenana uniquely cosmopolitan.³¹ 'Mongrel'³² and 'hybrid'³³ institutions, these female courts adopted aspects from different Indic practices, across religious, class, regional and aesthetic lines, as well as from European, American and other non-Indian cultural points of reference.

However, much of the pre-existing literature on cosmopolitanism has focused on eighteenth-century India, whereas I suggest such arguments can be extended to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as well. The heady cultural hybridity of early Company rule has been well documented. East India Company officials maintained interracial households with native women, adopted Indic forms of dress, religion, dining and architecture and conducted their duties bilingually in Indian vernaculars as William Dalrymple has revealed in his richly researched *White Mughals*.³⁴ There was a lively exchange of intellectual ideas, technologies and aesthetic practices between Europeans and Indians as reflected in the patronage patterns of elite Indians.³⁵ As Tillman Nechtman has written of the Nabobinas, the wives and daughters of eighteenth-century East India Company officials, European demands for novel luxury goods resulted in a fascination with Indian diamonds, in the forms of necklaces, rings, bracelets and even nose rings (*naths*), thus intertwining global and local histories in new forms of production and ideas of beauty and taste.³⁶

Most scholars have asserted that the transition to Crown rule after 1858 augured in a period of cultural, racial and religious polarization in colonial India. The trauma of the 1857 Mutiny, which has often been described as the first war of Indian Independence, and the subsequent arrival of large numbers of Englishwomen with the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 led to more limited social interactions between Indians and Britons in a whole range of settings – from the Anglo-Indian dining table to the shuttered, bungalow bedroom.³⁷ The crude stereotype of the narrow minded, uptight *memsahib*, immortalized in the pages of Kipling, Forster and Scott, has come to symbolize this schism between Indians and Europeans during the high noon of the Raj.

Much of this earlier understanding of nineteenth- and twentieth-century racial, cultural and aesthetic separation is based on British Indian sources. Scholars of modern South Asia have, until more recently, largely sidelined the multifarious histories of princely India. Research on the princely states,³⁸ particularly that conducted in the last decade,³⁹ reveals in contrast a history of negotiation and contact, however conflicted, between Europeans and Indians, and provides alternate accounts of both indigenous resistance and partnership with British paramourcy. I argue that the princely states continued to witness a spirited cross-cultural exchange during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During the 1857 revolt, certain princely states, such as Gwalior, Hyderabad, Patiala, Rampur and Rewa, were allies to the British, highlighting the vital role of indigenous leadership in Britain's policy of 'indirect rule'.⁴⁰ Queen Victoria made a subsequent proclamation to protect the rights, religions, privileges and traditions of the princes, and they were thereafter 'accorded a permanent position as part of the British Empire'.⁴¹ Under the Raj, the British implemented a policy of indirect rule over the princely states through the

treaty system, which remained in place until Independence in 1947. Indirect rule enabled traditional rulers to continue to have jurisdiction over state governance, taxation, revenue collection, criminal and judicial law and the governance and funding of educational, cultural and religious institutions⁴² although they could not embark on foreign policy initiatives with international powers.⁴³ Indian courts, and their satellites, remained key patrons of local industries, craft circles and artisans, schools of literature, painting, music, dance, enamelling, jewellery and textiles, as well as the developing arts of film and photography. During this period, the British realized that they had to woo their princely allies if they wished to protect and strengthen the symbiotic relationship required for indirect rule, creating a system of gifting honours to Indian dignitaries, such as gun salutes, knighthoods and titles, in a similar manner to that with which it favoured its own aristocracy and gentry in England.⁴⁴

British administrators encouraged Indian princes to adopt Western styles of education, law and administrative reform in the governing of their states, while simultaneously encouraging the continued practice of certain (pre-colonial), 'traditional' customs. Indian aristocratic courts thus increasingly had more (rather than less) contact with European and colonial influences. For instance, in several courtly households, it was foreign women who further hybridized the cultural life of the zenana. Unmarried or widowed European women were employed as governesses, doctors, maids, cooks and female companions and in some instances married into the ruling family, bringing with them Western education, medicine, cuisine, language and attitudes to love, marriage and domesticity. In addition, the changing map of colonial India, which connected the princely states and British India under the larger rubric of paramountcy, facilitated intermarriages and cross-regional relationships between different princely states, which previously may have had limited contact, enabling not only an East–West cultural hybridity but also a dynamic interregional exchange. The Delhi *darbars* of 1877, 1903 and 1911 became convening points not only for native rulers and their British overlords, but also for regional princely families and communities from diverse religious, caste or regional backgrounds to meet from across the whole of India. The material culture of these courts became representative of authority, sexuality, tradition and the idea of the 'indigenous' during the high noon of the Raj, providing contrasting evidence to the standard narrative of the post-eighteenth century decline of cultural and aesthetic cosmopolitanism in colonial India.

While an interest in the history of princely India is growing as well as that of *pardah* women, there are few accounts of the patronage and consumption patterns of zenana ateliers. Amin Jaffer's *Made for Maharajas: A Design Diary of Princely India*⁴⁵ while an encyclopaedic work on the material culture of Indian princely courts, does not address in depth the role of women or the zenana.

Aimed at a non-academic readership, *Made for Maharajas* is a colourful coffee-table book with some stunning illustrations, rather than a scholarly monograph that engages with the theoretical questions of this uniquely transnational, cosmopolitan, late imperial world. Daud Ali's *Courtly Culture and Political Life in Early Medieval India*⁴⁶ provides a vibrant portrait of medieval courtly India, with an emphasis on royal aesthetics, ornamentation and etiquette, and references a plethora of Sanskrit literary texts. It does not, however, engage with the historical realities of the colonial period or the nature of imperial collecting in royal Indian households. Jasanoff's *Edge of Empire*, as mentioned earlier, is a groundbreaking history on imperial collecting, by both Europeans and indigenous patrons during the early colonial period to which this work is indebted. However, her findings do not focus on courtly cultures and princely India during the nineteenth or twentieth centuries or the role of women. Similarly, E. M. Collingham provides a lively history of pre-colonial and colonial cuisine in South Asia in her book *Curry: A Tale of Cooks and Conquerors*.⁴⁷ However, this book, while giving a detailed account of the cultural history of food in the Indian subcontinent, does not engage specifically with princely Indian kitchens or zenana cooks.

As these works attest, there is a growing interest in princely India, imperial collecting and South Asian culinary history. However, none of them cover the broader cultural history of aesthetics in colonial princely zenanas and the hybrid worlds they created. This is one of the unique contributions of this book.

British Imperialism and Patterns of Courtly Consumption, Collecting and Patronage

From the start, British imperial rule in the subcontinent was motivated by the spectre of trade and profit with the establishment of the East India Company in 1600. By 1619, the Company had received a charter to trade in India by Emperor Jahangir. It would be in large part economic motivations, which would lead to its involvement in militaristic campaigns during the eighteenth century, when it acquired the *diwani* or right to revenue collection in Bengal after 1765, and captured southern trade markets after the defeat of Mysore in the 1790s.⁴⁸ During the nineteenth century, it successfully vanquished the remnants of the Maratha Confederacy and from the 1810s onwards, expanded British power with its centralized military forces which overawed native rulers, thus inaugurating the period of 'indirect rule'.⁴⁹ These commercial interests would only grow stronger in the nineteenth century as the British demand for Indian goods (particularly textiles) grew, while British-made products were increasingly funnelled back to its prize colony.

With the transition from Company to Crown Rule after the Munity in 1857, the new Raj employed the technological marvels of the Industrial Revolution, such as the steamship, railway, telegraph and the opening of the Suez Canal, to allow for swifter, fluid transport of objects and peoples between Europe and Asia and across British India. This was a transnational exchange not only of material products and technologies, but also cultural, intellectual and aesthetic sensibilities that interwove 'traditional' regional identities with 'modern' ideas of a global, imperial subjectivity.

British imperialism brought new technologies to India, such as ginning mills for textiles, salt works for distilling salt, machinery for quarrying stone used in building, railways that connected diverse parts of the subcontinent leading to an emergent 'idea' of a consolidated India and printing presses, which influenced the development of print capitalism and nationalism with the growth of both Indian English and vernacular Indian literatures. Modern megalopolises, such as Calcutta and Delhi, enabled regional princes to meet for imperial *darbars* and steamship technology enabled princes to engage in the wider world of European travel and cultural exposure.⁵⁰

Such innovations would have a wide influence on the lives of zenana women and most Indians, regardless of location or socio-economic background. Canning allowed for the introduction of tinned foods which affected colonial Indian cuisine; mass produced calico and silk screened fabrics changed the nature of the textiles utilized for Indian dress; new venues for the commissioning and sale of decorative objects, from jewellery to furniture, such as international auction houses and firms, influenced aesthetic choices and the acquisition and distribution of wealth; and hitherto foreign methods of building for both public and private spaces altered patterns of domestic, family life and public assembly.

In observing the artefacts designed, bought and produced for the zenana, I extend Arjun Appadurai's arguments in *The Social Life of Things* that commodities have meanings, which 'human actors encode with significance' and which in turn 'illuminate their human social context'. Objects in space were historically not inanimate and solely valued for their material worth, but acquired worth based on 'human transactions, attributions and motivations'.⁵¹ Appadurai's thesis revises the classic anthropological construct of circulation and exchange by challenging the traditional opposition of gift and commodity proposed by earlier scholars such as Durkheim, Mauss, Malinowski and Levi Strauss.⁵² In this manner, a diamond necklace, a spiced Christmas pudding or a chiffon sari, were not prized solely for their physical or material properties – such as weight, taste, colour or texture – but for their symbolic significance on political, psychological, religious, ceremonial and aesthetic planes. As Igor Kopytoff suggests, objects have biographies which 'reveal a tangled mass of aesthetic, historical, and even political judgments'⁵³ that have far-reaching consequences. The same item can

be seen as gift, talisman, artwork, heirloom, ancestral legacy, ritual sacra and memento based on its reception by different audiences.⁵⁴

Part of this emphasis on visual signifiers in regal ornamentation and cosmopolitanism was due to the nature of kingship and royal spectacle. As Norbert Elias has written of the Sun King, Louis XIV of France, each part of the prince's bodily adornment as well as the splendour of his court reflected his majesty as an absolutist, divinely ordained monarch. Thus, the consecrated body of Louis XIV, observed in the rituals for dress and toilette in the morning *Levée* ceremony, served as a metaphor and mirror for the vitality of the Crown and the health of the body politic.⁵⁵ Indian rulers, both Muslim and Hindu, similarly used such visual indicators to reflect royal authority, by projecting themselves and outfitting their courts in the style of warrior-heroes or deities. Central to this idea of public display was the Hindu concept of *darshan* or 'beholding' the divine, where kings and their female consorts were believed to be incarnate manifestations of gods or as ruling on their behalf. As the ruler was a living reflection of a transcendent sacred power, he or she was an object of worship and obeisance by his subjects (*praja*) through the act of seeing (*darshan*).⁵⁶ In beholding the king through *darshan*, the subject as worshipper received various propitious benefits in return, including the gifting of boons and blessings, by perceiving and receiving his divine power.⁵⁷

Thus at every moment, the ruler starred in a public spectacle, whether seeing petitioners during a *darbar*, riding in procession on an elephant or going out on a royal hunt. As Joanne Punzo Waghorne notes, it was such 'rituals that kept the royal body politic compelling for its subjects. Such spectacles put an aesthetic experience with strong religious colour at the core of public power'; a power, she argues, that continues to have relevance long after the lapse of the princely states and the end of British colonial rule.⁵⁸

The use of royal regalia – magnificent jewellery, turbans, robes, shoes, swords, daggers, thrones, canopies, fans and staffs – created a carefully constructed tableaux between the rulers and their subjects, rulers and their fellow princes, and rulers and imperial powers such as the Mughal emperor or British viceroy.⁵⁹ During the Mughal period, ornamental objects represented incorporation into the body of the *padshah*. Subordinates offered the monarch *nazar* (gold coins), while the emperor presented *khilat* in response (often in the form of clothes, weapons, horses or elephants). *Khilat*, deriving from the Persian for a cast-off garment, came to refer to 'robes of honour' in the sixteenth century. As a special sign of merit the ruler would remove his own robe and present it to his vassal in reward for acts of loyalty, merit or courage, thereby incorporating him into the royal body politic.

Similarly, the jewelled turban had manifold political and mystical properties in the Mughal court, parallel to the significance of crowns in medieval Europe.

The turban often included an elaborate *kalgi* (aigrette of peacock or heron feathers with an attached jewel), strings of gems, bands of gold and silver (the *sarpech* and *sarband*) and the *sirha*, a diadem of pearls. As jewels in the Hindu tradition referred in cosmographic terms to the elements of the earth, the wearer, Hindu or Muslim, harnessed the collective powers of the earth and ether when adorning such a jewelled headdress.⁶⁰

Alongside this vibrant Indo-Persian cultural mixing in the symbols and accoutrements of Indic kingship, there was also a growing patronage of foreign-made, European goods from the eighteenth century onwards. This was not unusual as princely courts had historically been connected to global trade routes and consumed avidly rare commodities from outside their state boundaries. As Chris Bayly observes, the introduction of such novelties in the court was a fundamental aspect of kingship as 'it bespoke of vast and varied realms, connections with far-off kings'⁶¹ and through such objects, the alliance and integration of other states under its cultural imperium. Nawab Asaf ud-Daula, who created a 'melting pot' of cultures in Lucknow during the 1770s, is one Indian ruler who had such impulses. He funded Persian Shiite religious scholarship and festivals, patronized the literary and aesthetic traditions of Mughal India and engaged Europeans in a host of positions from architects to cooks thereby collecting objects and items from occidental producers.⁶²

During this period, several Indian monarchs also modelled themselves on the Ottoman Emperor, whose rising position in Europe saw the growing introduction of Louis Quinze furniture, Meissen silver, English velvet and gloves into Eastern courts.⁶³ After 1780, there was a wholesale Westernization of the Indian princely states:

What was happening in Istanbul, as in contemporary Indian courts, was a substantial shift in material culture, as the object and furniture replaced the classic line of formal Islamic art as the pattern for living space. The embellishment of the inside of buildings with a profusion of objects, tapestries, and furniture became the order of the day in India, reaching its apogee in the cluttered Malik Palace of Calcutta, with its crowd of Carrara marble statues, and the Salar Jang Palace in Hyderabad, where grandfather clocks jostled with huge French chaise longues. It was through this shift in aristocratic taste that English fabrics and English clothing styles first gained a foothold in the Indian market.⁶⁴

Princes, such as the Maharaja of Tanjore, Serfoji II, reflected this cosmopolitan collecting sensibility. During the early nineteenth century, he purchased objects of European natural science and commissioned natural history and botanical paintings, musical instruments, portraits and sculpture in the European style. At the same time, he supported traditional Hindu forms of medicine, with a goal to serving as the intermediary for a cross-cultural discourse on philosophies of

science. He encouraged the translation of European scientific works into Indian vernaculars and Indian works from one Indian language into another.⁶⁵

The Crystal Palace Exhibition of London in 1851 and the Paris exhibitions of 1855 and 1867 further reflected the widening aesthetic ambit of empire by showcasing Indian-made goods for a British consumer public as well as Western goods for an Indian clientele. As Carol Breckenridge has observed, the material culture of royal India was the highpoint at the Crystal Palace Exhibition of 1851, with the display of palanquins, elephant trappings, thrones, crowns, sceptres and vestments. The exhibition included the crown of the Raja of Awadh, the court costumes of the Raja of Bundi, the ivory throne of the Raja of Travancore and a plethora of shawls, saddles, parasols and carpets.⁶⁶

Indians began eating with knife and fork at tables on china dinnerware, spoke the Queen's English, wore trousers and jacket and played 'the gentlemanly game' of cricket. The English simultaneously decorated their drawing rooms with brass and wooden lamps, screens, tables, bric-a-brac and 'trophies' from India, hung Indian print fabrics on their furniture and walls, wore Indian shawls, and showcased the Indian regalia of deposed princes used by members of the British royalty in their homes. However, this exchange of objects and aesthetic tastes was not a straightforward one and did not permeate all sections of society. As Carol Breckenridge argues, while the decades following the Crystal Palace Exhibition 'revealed and facilitated the desire of colonizer and colonized to mutually encompass each other' this was done 'without conflating the differences between them. In mapping the other onto the familiar everyday world, the foundation was laid for the formation of a bi-cultural ruling class, whose distance from the masses in both England and in India was established through distinctions in taste.'⁶⁷

Alongside this transnational flow of objects between Britain and its prize colony and the creation of bi-cultural, if stratified, societies, Indian consumers continued to support indigenous Indian arts and aesthetic traditions in late colonial India. In upper-class Gujarati households for instance during the 1890s, English dhotis, French satin saris, pocket watches, bats and balls for games, children's toys, locks, carpentry tools, sewing machines, scissors, paper, china tea cups and saucers, eggbeaters, spoons, castor oil, kerosene lamps and matchsticks were all utilized in the domestic space.⁶⁸ At the same time, these same homes continued using indigenous Indian household items, such as rugs and cushions for sitting on the floor and brass and copper vessels for holding liquids and grains alongside European easy chairs, table clocks, musical boxes and Western glass and china.⁶⁹

Likewise, when Maharani Brijraj Kumari, a princess of Jodhpur, arrived as a bride in 1943 at the Ajitnivas Palace in Dhrangadhra, she inherited a formal drawing room which housed the curios and collectibles of her mothers-in-

law. The collection had its origins in the 1910s and 1920s and was an unusual amalgamation of products locally produced in Kathiawar as well as those manufactured in Europe and East Asia. It included an Austrian porcelain doll, European Christmas tree ornaments, nineteenth-century Venetian glass pitchers and drinking glasses, ceramic vases and elephants from Perugia, Chinese silver miniature junks and figurines, a Japanese wooden tray of a cat and an elaborate set of red, lacquer furniture from Burma. Locally produced artefacts such as Kathiawari silver *chopat* (chess game) pieces and miniature replicas of silver cannons, carriages, buffaloes and Krishna and Radha figures were placed side by side with these foreign goods.⁷⁰

A 1935 visit to an unnamed Indian princely state covered by a *Harper's Bazaar* correspondent described a similarly heterogeneous interior décor. While the rooms of the ancestral palace reflected an oriental opulence (walls hung with 'cloth of gold,' table services of lapis lazuli and gold and huge darbar halls), they were simultaneously outfitted with state of the art, modern European amenities. These included Frigidaire iceboxes, cold Evian water, a morning Photostat of the world news, tennis courts, swimming pools, polo fields and zoos.⁷¹

Not only were Asian and European items being displayed side by side to illustrate cross-cultural imperial subjectivities in colonial Indian homes and palaces, but the new political institutions of the Raj also introduced hybridized forms of public ceremonial as well as decorative objects associated with such functions. The institution of the Darbar, where members of the British administration officially met native princes, was perhaps the most telling public display of the Raj's incorporation of the symbols of indigenous leadership and courtly aesthetics. Such grand occasions reflected the theatricality of imperial power and the relationship between the Crown and its subsidiary allies, which both emulated and imitated the pageantry of Mughal and European royal spectacle. In such settings, appropriate etiquette and deportment were essential elements of political dialogue and exchange. Seating placements, ceremonial dress and stylized modes of speech between Indian royals and British proconsuls were all of great consequence. The 1877 Delhi Darbar, where Viceroy Lytton officially declared Queen Victoria Kaiser-i-Hind or Empress of India was expressive of this trend of visual ornamentation, replete with both Anglo-Saxon and Indic symbols of kingship. At the Imperial Assemblage, ninety leading Indian princes were presented with large banners and coats of arms in the European style. Crests were shield-shaped with various European heraldic motifs reflecting mythological dynastic histories and connection to Mughal and, particularly, English rule. The banners, Roman style of silk and five foot by five foot, were presented as a substitution for the Mughal exchange of *nazar* (gold coins) and *peshkash* (precious objects) for *khilats* (robes of honour), which had marked British *durbars* previously.⁷² While

the gifting of such ritual objects had earlier reflected political and ceremonial incorporation for the Mughals, it now symbolized subordination for the British.

In addition, the Crown devised a system of gifting honours to Indian dignitaries. Royal Indian women, such as wives and other female relatives of Indian rulers, were included in this process of 'ornamentation' and were awarded the Order of the Crown of India for meritorious acts of service, as Sunity Devi proudly displayed in her 1902 portrait.⁷³ The Order was first inaugurated in January 1878, a year after Queen Victoria's assumption of the title of Empress of India. This honour, like the Order of the Star of India and the Order of the Indian Empire, revealed the British monarchy's desire to more closely associate itself with its Indian subjects, particularly indigenous rulers. Unlike the aforementioned merits, the Crown of India was exclusively reserved for women, Indian or British. These women were chosen for their 'distinguished service of benefit to India' and included the wives and daughters of Indian rulers, European princesses of the blood, members of the British aristocracy and the wives of viceroys, governor-generals and other high-ranking officials among its recipients. It was ordinarily presented to women for acts of distinguished service, such as charitable or social work produced over a long period.⁷⁴

The Decoration or Badge was composed of Queen Victoria's Royal and Imperial Cipher, 'V. R. & I' (Victoria *Regina et Imperatrix*), in diamonds, pearls and turquoises. The cipher was further encircled by a border of pearls and surmounted by an Imperial Crown set with jewels and enamelling. It was attached to a light blue watered riband, edged with white, of 1½ inches in width, and once worn, tied in a bow.⁷⁵

While the jewel was intrinsically valuable as was the ritual and political meaning of the honour, its presentation ceremony was equally significant. The Darbar festivities for the awarding of the Order of the Crown of India to Indian courtly women was particularly striking as it accommodated the use of *pardah* as one of several pre-colonial customary practices observed. When the Maharani of Mysore was presented with the honour in 1878, close attention was paid to retaining traditional practices, such as garlanding courtiers, gifting *attar* (scent) of rose and *paan* (betel nut) to the assemblage, and presenting *khilats*, alongside the introduction of British ceremonial activities, which included observing state troops and firing gun salutes.⁷⁶ Throughout the function, the Maharani sat behind a *pardah* screen near Colonel P. D. Henderson, the British Resident to Mysore. Fifty years later in 1928 when the Senior Maharani of Gwalior was similarly honoured, many of these same aesthetic elements were retained, including the gifting of *attar* and *paan*,⁷⁷ while the honouree received her award in the public Darbar hall, sitting in a *pardah* compartment beside the British Resident.⁷⁸

These venues for the presentation of colonial honours not only reflected the evolving nature of objects found in zenana courts, but also new material

and social practices relating to royal procession, entertainment, dining, modes of education and dress. By examining the artefacts designed for and found in zenanas, we gain a greater sense of the movement of material objects across the British Empire as well as the evolving political, religious and aesthetic sensibilities associated with the transport of such objects.

Inside the Zenana: Gendered Spaces and Architectural Design

The colonial palaces of the Indian princes during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries would most dramatically display this bicultural collecting sensibility on a grand scale. These monuments rivalled their European contemporaries, sometimes outshining them. Under the Raj, the princes exchanged their traditional forms of enclosed and fortified palace complexes for Westernized buildings, which had elaborate facades and were far from the city centre of their state capitals. Just as they had incorporated aspects of Mughal imperial architecture during the pre-colonial period, Indian princes adopted aspects of British Indian display. Many European-educated courtly Indian men and women now wanted palaces, which accommodated their more modern lifestyles such as dining at table, entertaining European guests and playing billiards and tennis as evidenced in the 1935 *Harpur's Bazaar* article. At the same time, these newer palaces still had to maintain aspects of customary practice such as gender-segregated living spaces for men and women, with strict divisions between public entertainment areas and the zenanas where women still practiced *pardah*. Traditional palaces remained mainly for ceremonial use, such as coronations and marriages, while modern palatial residences became *de rigueur* for daily living.⁷⁹

The decades following the establishment of the Raj in the late nineteenth century saw a boom in the building of European-styled palaces. These buildings borrowed architectural aspects both from India and Europe, from the baroque to the baronial. The palace of Maharaja Jayajirao Scindia of Gwalior (r. 1843–86) was built in the style of the Italianate Renaissance just in time for the royal visit of Prince Albert Edward of Wales in 1875–6. The British architect commissioned for the project, Sir Michael Filose, was told to study the great palaces of Europe in great detail from the materials, furniture, carpets, pictures and plumbing used and to recreate them in Gwalior, with no expenses spared.⁸⁰ A renaissance style was also employed in the palace at Cooch Behar, which was built in 1887. It had a dome modelled on that of St. Peter's in Rome and a darbar hall fashioned in the style of Raphael.⁸¹

In 1878, Maharaja Sayajirao III of Baroda (r. 1874–1939) began work on what would become his new Indo-Saracenic palace of Laxmi Vilas. It was built on a 700-acre park and was considered at the time the most expensive building for a private residence constructed during the nineteenth century. Employing

two British architects, Major Charles Mant of the Royal Engineers and Robert Fellowes Chisholm, who had earlier been a director of the Madras School of Art, it incorporated a hybrid late imperial style, fusing together Mughal, Rajput and various European architectural motifs alongside a Western floor plan. The interiors of the palace were a mixture of marble columns from Carrara, Venetian mosaic floors, stained glass windows from Germany and mouldings from England, while the sandstone came from the neighbouring kingdom of Dhrangadhra. The grounds of the palace were also of British design by William Goldring, who had earlier trained at the Kew gardens. In many ways, this new style reflected the roles of Indian princely men and women in identifying themselves as simultaneously traditional leaders and modern Western dynasts.⁸² As Giles Tilottson suggests, ‘it was an officially sanctioned imperial style with a veneer of Indian identity, so a ruler might expect it to resonate better with his subjects as well as with his imperial masters.’⁸³

Alongside this Indian residence, the Maharaja also bought two properties in England including Aldworth, an estate in Haslemere, Surrey for £30,000 and Russells, in Watford, Hertfordshire, for approximately £20,000. The high-end retailer Harrods of London outfitted the second home for an additional £2,600. Altogether, including the charges of architects, solicitors and others, the expenses came to £70,000, a sizeable sum at the time.⁸⁴

In the twentieth century, Indian royal architecture adopted elements of the Art Deco and Machinist fashions. In Jodhpur, Umaid Bhawan Palace was constructed in a high Deco style under the direction of British architect Henry Vaughan Lanchester in 1929–42 for Maharaja Umaid Singh (r. 1918–47), incorporating Hindu and Buddhist style techniques, assisted by local artisans and carpenters during the Second World War.⁸⁵ The Art Deco influence is further pronounced in the interior designs and murals of Polish artist Stephan Norblin, who also collaborated on the New Palace in Morvi (1931).⁸⁶ In Indore, the Oxford-educated Maharaja Yeshwant Rao Holkar (r. 1926–48), who was keen on the avant-garde, commissioned Eckart Muthesius to build a palace for him and his female relations in a contemporary style.⁸⁷ Most of the furniture and furnishings were also made in a similar style, from tubular chairs to light fixtures of then fashionable materials such as chrome, lacquer and tinted glass by German manufacturers. Yeshwant Rao Holkar also bought three versions of *Birds in Space* by Constantin Brancusi to be displayed in the Manik Bagh palace. His wife and fellow collector, Maharani Sanyogita Raje was deeply involved in designing the smallest details of her apartments. The Maharani’s bedroom was outfitted by Georges Djo-Bourgeois with carpets by Ivan da Silva Bruhns in the most modern style of sleek lines and chrome furnishings. Her writing room was finished in colours of silver and grey with a metal secretaire and chair by

Louis Sognot and Charlotte Alix based on a model they exhibited at the Salon D'Automne in 1930.⁸⁸

As these incidences reveal, not only were zenana women and princes engaging with British-based architects and designers, but their eclectic taste ranged farther afield to incorporate Renaissance, Baroque, Machinist and Art Deco styles, serving as patrons to English, French, German, Italian and Polish designers. Not only were their homes representative of new and far-ranging tastes, but so was that most conspicuous (and transportable) of decorative objects: the jewel.

Jewels and Jewellers: Changing Producers and Decorative Styles, 1858– 1960

Princess Brinda of Kapurthala, daughter-in-law of the Maharaja, had every woman green with envy. Her collection of jewels would make Tiffany and Cartier turn in their vaults. Emeralds the size of walnuts hung from her ears and diamond necklaces by the yard circled her throat.

Vanity Fair, 1936⁸⁹

At the height of the British Raj, during the second half of the nineteenth century, a steady flow of European jewellery, which combined Western and Indian elements, was being sent to India for its elite consumers, often to be worn for coronations, imperial darbars and viceregal visits. Indian princes were particularly receptive to European jewellers and eager to reset their ancestral gems in the latest Western styles. The first commissions by princes for foreign jewellers were made during the virgin trips of the royal families of Bahawalpur, Cooch Behar and Patiala to England and the Continent during the 1880s.⁹⁰ Soon, Indian princes became regular clients of European couture houses.⁹¹ They were most feted in France and were also well received in Switzerland, Italy and Germany where they were treated often on 'par in essence ... with the surviving crowned heads of Europe', in contrast to their reception in Britain, where they were often reminded of their subordinate position in the imperial hierarchy.⁹² Parisian jewellers, outfitters, portrait painters, hoteliers and purveyors of luxury goods responded favourably towards the Indian princes as if to compensate for the loss of their own royalty. Three Indian dynastic families, from the states of Baroda, Indore and Kapurthala, eventually bought residential properties in France.⁹³

Maharaja Sayajirao of Baroda in 1911 purchased jewellery from Chaumet and Boucheron for the engagement of his daughter, Indira Devi (1882–1968) to Maharaja Madho Rao Scindia of Gwalior (r. 1886–1925). Indira herself picked out the jewels.⁹⁴ His wife Chinnabai of Baroda, a spirited and adventurous woman, was also a great patron of European and Indian jewellers. She was known as a crack shot while being a 'tactful opponent' of *pardah*, even though

she practised it when at home in Baroda, and was a passionate advocate of women's education. Chimnabai was fond of jewels and gems, while her husband Sayajirao was more abstemious by nature. She allegedly bought jewellery that had earlier belonged to Russian grand dukes after the Revolution, mostly large emeralds.⁹⁵ She was particularly adept at outsmarting top European jewellers in her knowledge of diamonds; a skill, which even amazed her husband.⁹⁶

During her trips to Europe, Chimnabai moved around freely and comfortably out of *pardah* and began to frequent the ateliers of Cartier, whom she invited to Baroda in 1911.⁹⁷ Not only did she patronize European jewellers, but was careful to keep an Indian craftsman with her at all times, taking Baroda's senior court jeweller with her on her travels abroad to advise her on purchases from European firms.⁹⁸ The Reverend Weeden described Chimnabai as a woman of exquisite taste and looks during a visit to Baroda:

The Maharani is of middle height, but carries her head so proudly and yet so gracefully that she appears taller than she really is. Her carefully kept and abundant hair is hidden by a sari of white silk shot with gold, which falls over the perfect outline of her exquisite figure and is gathered between the knees, showing the ankles circled with pearls and the small bare feet, which are as beautifully kept as her hands. She has two features which distinguish her beyond all other women: her magnificent teeth, revealed within the firm mouth by her rare and charming smile, and her arms, which are the most comely in the world. It was not till I had been with her for some time that I noticed the collar of emeralds as large as pigeons' eggs round her neck, and the chain of priceless pearls that falls from her shoulders to the waist.⁹⁹

Chimnabai's decision to bring indigenous jewellers on her foreign trips was based on a keen awareness of the Indian gem trade itself. An American visitor to Jaipur in 1933 was amazed by one Ganeshi Lal, a local gem dealer, who had been collecting royal jewels for generations. Among his extraordinary stones were an emerald of ninety-three carats valued at \$300,000 and a seventy-eight carat sapphire. As the commentator noted,

There are handfuls of lesser gems, star sapphires, star rubies, zircons, alexandrites, cat's-eyes, diamonds and always pearls, pearls, pearls. When you make some average purchase, Ganeshi Lal will drop enough first-water moonstones into your palms to make up a tail coat stud-and-links set.¹⁰⁰

Princely patrons, such as Chimnabai, wed Indian stones and knowledge of gemology with European jewellery and settings.

The ensuing jewels commissioned by zenana women and Indian princes in Europe correlated with a pre-war appreciation for Western jewellery and fashion design. This new style 'revelled in a pick-and-mix appropriation of designs and inspiration from any number of societies situated beyond the Bosphorus, weaving them together in a style that came loosely to be termed "Persian"'. These

design motifs were an Asian *mélange*, which saw differences between Hindus and Muslims, Arabs and Persians, Turks and Indians, sultans and maharajas, and ancient and modern brushed aside in the creation of a colourful fantasy world, which would ever after be known as the land of a 'thousand and one nights'.¹⁰¹

A piece illustrative of this style was an early aigrette made by Boucheron for the royal family of the Francophile Sikh kingdom of Kapurthala. The ruler and his family spoke French and regularly visited Paris, where they maintained a residence. The aigrette included ribbons, bows and garlands reminiscent of Louis XVI as well as a 'gentle, spray-like droop' of a traditional *jigba*. At first the cataloguer at Boucheron could not classify the piece, mistaking it for a corsage, and labelled it in the company's file book upside down.¹⁰² Such elaborate Darbar jewels for public ceremonial reflected the continued importance of royal spectacle for Indian rulers, amended to incorporate Western modernist elements and tastes.

From 1911 onwards, Cartier, with its lengthening list of Indian clients, ensured that its Oriental Jewellery collection had more recognizable Indian influences than Persian ones. Smooth, cabochon-cut stones replaced the conventionally heavily faceted stones of European jewellery, and were often set in the red, green and white enamel work of the Jaipuri style.¹⁰³ In 1911, the Sikh Maharaja of Patiala, Bhupinder Singh had a traditional forehead ornament made for his wife, which was unusual as it incorporated the use of platinum, much in vogue with European jewellers, but only beginning to gain appeal with Indian clients, who historically preferred gold (seen to be more auspicious) for the setting of precious stones.¹⁰⁴ Later in 1935, he had another pair of earrings commissioned for his wife, which combined new European jewellery trends with Indic ones. He also had a pair of ruby and diamond 'chandelier-style' earrings made in Indian stylized settings in platinum rather than enamelled or filigreed gold as well as a ruby, diamond and pearl tasselled necklace which was inspired by the Art Deco movement but had a north Indian *buta* motif with a traditional silk-cord tie.¹⁰⁵

After India's Independence in 1947, the wife of Maharaja Sayajirao of Baroda's grandson Maharaja Pratapsinhrao of Baroda, Sita Devi, became an avid collector of jewellery.¹⁰⁶ From the late 1940s to the 1960s, she gave thousands of stones from the family vault to be set by the New York and Paris branches of Van Cleef and Arpels.¹⁰⁷ Famously, she is known to have sold a pair of emerald and diamond anklets to Harry Winston in 1953. Later, the jeweller reconfigured them into a necklace for the Duchess of Windsor, the former Mrs Wallis Simpson, who wore it to a New York party where Sita Devi was also present. Allegedly, the princess had quipped to guests admiring the jewels that they had looked as good when worn on her feet as on the duchess's throat! It is no surprise that the duchess soon after returned the necklace and Harry Winston had to find another buyer.¹⁰⁸

Similarly, in 1928 Maharaja Bhupinder Singh of Patiala had his jewels reset by the Parisian jeweller Bucheron. Allegedly, Bhupinder Singh brought six iron chests of precious stones, which included sapphires, rubies and pearls as well as over 7,000 diamonds and more than 14,000 emeralds to Europe. While certain traditional objects such as *bazubands* (armlets) and *sarpeches* (turban ornaments) were designed, there was a fair amount of objects, including necklaces, earrings and *naths* (nose rings), which while having 'clear Indian references' were in the Art Deco style.¹⁰⁹ Many of these pieces would have been purchased for the women of the Patiala zenana. One ornate *nath* had a string of pearls and diamonds encrusted in platinum.¹¹⁰ Another dramatic ruby necklace had more than fourteen strands of rubies alongside diamonds and pearls in an intricate geometric design then much in vogue.¹¹¹ Another two necklaces designed in 1935 by Cartier comprised 834 diamonds, 1,159 pearls and 355 rubies and 85 emeralds (1,117.25 carats) and 1,369 diamonds (124.48 carats).¹¹²

These opulent pieces would have been worn for both European and indigenous audiences at coronations, royal weddings, viceregal visits and most significantly, all-India-level *darbars*, where they would be seen by British dignitaries as well as fellow princes, who were competing with each other for ascendancy within the imperial hierarchy. At the same time, they would also have been used for more intimate domestic occasions such as birthdays of the ruler and his family, minor weddings of family relations and for everyday wear in the court, with the ever-present knowledge that they were on display for the eyes of state ministers, the indigenous aristocracy and the many retainers associated with the zenana.

Not only did colonialism engender the construction of hybrid products and zenana women as transnational consumers and patrons, but these objects – from gems, jewels and fine cloth – also represented moveable wealth at a time when wealth was not easily transportable. During the colonial period, there were several disputes between zenana women, patriarchal male elites and British administrators over what constituted personal wealth and what defined state or *darbar* property. Most Hindu women, as part of their marriage settlements, received their own *stridhana* (literally translated as 'women's wealth'), which they brought with them to their new home as brides. *Stridhana* consisted of many personal items, but most importantly jewellery.

In 1931, the Nizam of Hyderabad married his two sons, the heir apparent Azam Jah and his younger brother, to the daughter and niece of the last Caliph of Turkey. The girls had grown up in Nice, France, were well educated in the modern Western style, being fluent in English, French, German and Turkish, had musical and artistic leanings, and were related to one of the oldest Muslim dynasties. All together, it was a background, which appealed strongly to the Nizam.¹¹³ Not only would the matrimonial alliances connect the then wealthiest

Islamic kingdom in the world to the spiritual and temporal leader of the Sunnis, but also serve as an important symbolic link between Europe and India, as Turkey was seen at that time as a Europeanized state.¹¹⁴ As part of the marriage settlements, both women were given dowries and trousseaus in a manner not dissimilar to *stridhana*. The elder princess Durrushwar received a dowry of £25,000 together with a trousseau of £2,000,¹¹⁵ much of which was in the form of jewellery, as well as separate living establishments in Hyderabad and permission to bring her French maids and valets from Nice.¹¹⁶

In addition to receiving private wealth at the time of marriage, courtly women invariably wore state jewels, which were collected over several generations by successive rulers and their courts, for both formal and private functions. Over time an individual bride's *stridhana* might also become part of the state's official collection (especially if her son succeeded the throne and she gifted her personal items to him). For this reason, there was always a blurry line between the personal objects of a woman's private possession and those belonging to the kingdom's treasury. Residents of the *zenana* were accused of stealing or hiding goods nominally belonging to the state as occurred in the Dholpur jewellery dispute of 1913, when the dowager Maharani was charged with appropriating and concealing Darbar property by her brother-in-law, the new Maharaj Rana. This (often indistinct) division between private and public property was hotly debated within the colonial *zenana*, and studying it furthers our understanding of women's agency, property law and gender relations in colonial India.¹¹⁷

Additionally, *pardah* dress and protocol allowed for the greater concealment of jewels and other valuable goods. In 1937, the Maharani of Baria was investigated for smuggling undeclared diamonds into a British port. The Baria royal party had requested and received an elaborate reception. When their ship, the *S. S. Nakunda* arrived on 5 July 1937,

a special *Purdah* gangway was connected with one of the lower decks of the steamer and two *Purdah* motor cars were allowed to draw up at the foot of this gangway. These arrangements were made by His Highness' agents (Thomas Cook & Sons) in order to facilitate the landing of the ladies of His Highness' party.¹¹⁸

According to customary practice, unrelated men, Indian or European, would not have been able to see or touch women travelling in *pardah* as vividly described in this scene of disembarkation. Forcing the women to show themselves would have been tantamount to an act of violation, creating major diplomatic rifts between Baria and the colonial customs officials. Knowing the expected protocol, the Maharani had cleverly concealed the diamonds in her attaché bag, which was hidden behind her legs in the *pardah* compartment. In moments such as these, *pardah* provided *zenana* women unexpected subversive agency to elude the surveillance and censure of imperial officialdom. It further signifies

how such women were able to move valuable goods across regional and national borders through the use of *pardah* dress and forms of conveyance.

Cross-Cultural Flows in Clothing and Ornamentation: Changing Concepts of Display and the Body

In the colonial context, dress, like jewellery, marked the social and political status of the wearer. Popular British attitudes premised the superiority of all things European, including garments, in part owing to the belief that the highly structured dress of the occident reflected moral rectitude in contrast to the loose, unstitched Indian clothing of the morally lax and lazy colonized peoples.¹¹⁹ For some Indian princes, wearing European stylized dress expressed their sense of modernity and pro-British sentiments.

Sunity Devi's costume which she wore for the coronation of Edward VII in 1902 was designed for her by a French milliner although she normally used the London dressmaker Madame Oliver Holmes.¹²⁰ Indian princes and zenana ladies were keen patrons of European tailors and couturiers. Whether in *pardah* or semi-*pardah*, Indian princesses began wearing Western garments and adding them to their wedding trousseaus. The Muslim regnant queen, Begum Sultan Jahan of Bhopal (r. 1901–26), invariably wore European clothes under her full-length *burkha*.¹²¹ Sunity Devi's daughters were equally comfortable in European and Indian dress, as they 'danced through the ball-rooms of London and Calcutta in the smartest Parisian toilettes, and were as much at home in the Park or at a gala night at the Opera as in their own country'.¹²²

Royal Indian women commissioned some of the most celebrated fashion designers of their day as well. Indira Devi of Cooch Behar ordered more than 100 shoes from Salvatore Ferragamo, including one pair ornamented with pearls and diamonds from the Cooch Behar treasury. Ferragamo noted, that he made one set of shoes in green velvet with a spiral of pearls running up the heels and a second pair in black velvet with a diamond buckle.¹²³ The Australian-born Maharani of Pudukkottai (1894–1967) Molly Fink, and Rani Sita Devi of Kapurthala (1915–2002) commissioned clothes from the leading French couture houses, including Callot Soeurs, Jean Patou, Madeleine Vionnet, Jeanne Paquin, Elsa Schiaparelli, Edward Molyneux, Coco Chanel and Jeanne Lavin.¹²⁴ Rani Sita Devi in particular worked with the choicest chiffon materials of the period¹²⁵ and commissioned a silver fox coat from Mainbocher, an American couturier who designed the wedding dress worn by Wallis Simpson in 1937 for her marriage to the Duke of Windsor.¹²⁶

Indira Devi was the first woman to use chiffon for her saris. She designed fashionable patterns with the French textile maker Monsieur Erigua as well as the Paris based firm Sarees Inc. which specialized in using the latest European

fabrics for the Indian market.¹²⁷ Her signature look, a floral collared chiffon sari coupled with a string of pearls, has become the iconic image for sophisticated Indian women worldwide. The use of 'racy' material such as chiffon delighted Indira Devi who thought it novel to wear 'underpants as saris'.¹²⁸ She coupled stunning, light chiffons with traditional heavy gold or silver thread borders.¹²⁹

Some royal women, such as Maharani Sanyogita Raje of Indore, wife of Yeshwant Rao Holkar, had formal photographs taken with the photographer Man Ray dressed both in saris and Western clothing¹³⁰ and they entertained in India and Europe equally comfortable in both forms of attire. Maharaja Tukoji Rao Holkar had purses of gold and enamel handles made in the latest Art Deco styles for the women of his zenana to complement their new dress styles.¹³¹

In this manner, clothing, alongside jewels and architecture, reflected the adoption of new social practices for Indian courtly men and women as they navigated their political relationships with the colonial state and growing identity as global citizens. The incorporation of foreign materials, design styles and craftsmen as well as the maintenance of pre-existing aesthetic forms (whether traditional modes of dress, gendered architectural spaces or ritual forms of ornamentation integral to indigenous kingly display) fostered hybrid products emblematic of this age of fusion sensibilities. As this book argues, this was a time when rigid definitions of East and West, foreign and familiar, ancient and modern blended in richly complex ways.

Sources

A book of this interdisciplinary nature, which lies at the crossroads of imperial and postcolonial history, studies of material culture, visual arts and film, and theories of women, gender and domesticity, utilizes a wide range of sources. These materials cross the broad spectrum from nineteenth-century government records to twenty-first-century feature films.

It relies on indigenous princely state archives as well as official government records from the colonial Raj. These include indigenous archives maintained by erstwhile courtly households, both in English and local vernaculars, of art, jewellery and clothing collections, state registers and courtly finances. British government records include the R/2 Residencies' Reports, R/1 Political Department Reports and Political and Secret Files (L/PS) of the India Office Records at the British Library, which unearthed a plethora of material. These included transcriptions of interviews and meetings; letters and political correspondence between Indian princes, zenana women and British political administrators, business houses and manufacturers; inventory lists regarding the transfer of objects during marriages of state; property and jewellery disputes during royal successions; and customs duties for items transferred into India or Europe during

the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While these were government records, and thus coloured with the inherent political and cultural biases of the period in which they were collated, I have tried as much as possible to access directly the voices of zenana women through their own letters, speeches and interview transcriptions imbedded within these political documents.

It also accesses a wide variety of sources, such as oral histories, autobiographies and ethnographies of zenana women, which have earlier often been sidelined by mainstream historians, who have seen such materials as 'feminine' forms of 'memory' and 'fiction' in contrast to official records deemed proper 'history'.¹³² These include published (and unpublished) diaries, letters, speeches, cookbooks, design manuals, state menus, newspaper articles, feature pieces from women's fashion and travel magazines and film journals from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They also include memoirs, biographies and travelogues by members of the zenana courts as well as colonial visitors to princely households of the same period which provide detailed, often unofficial accounts of palace life and living, as it relates to the material history of the zenana. Postcolonial, twentieth- and twenty-first-century oral histories of those who have lived in the zenana and were engaged in royal patronage further provide living, vibrant narratives of collecting lives often missing from the written or material archive.

In addition, it includes a variety of materials relating to the history of objects. Among these are historic examples of period-piece jewellery, textiles, garments, furniture, decorative objectives, automobiles, gardens, estates and palaces from the eighteenth through to the twentieth centuries. Alongside these objects, this book utilizes a number of films, both in Hindi-Urdu and English, which depict zenana residences and interior spaces as well as courtly lifestyles of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Schemata of the Book

As in all intellectual projects, the writing of this book was an evolving process. Originally, it was conceived as a historical overview to the material culture of the princely states with individual chapters on architecture, cuisine, fashion, jewellery and interior design. However, it became evident through the process of extended research that such an approach was too broad in scope for a book of this nature. Instead, I have focused this discussion on a more in-depth study of particular case histories, patrons and thematic issues, which address the key arguments of this book.

Chapter 1 examines a contentious jewellery dispute in the princely state of Dholpur, which commenced in 1913 and remained unresolved for the following two decades. It explores several salient points relating to princely patronage systems, imperial collecting trends, women's right to property and late colonial

attitudes towards law. The chapter centres on the Dholpur Darbar's accusation that the dowager Maharani of Dholpur, born a princess of the Sikh kingdom of Nabha, stole dynastic jewels, which she in turn alleged were part of her private wealth (*stridhana*). In addition to raising fundamental questions relating to private versus public property in colonial India and the influence of zenana women's family connections in dynastic politics, the case reveals the hybrid collecting ambitions of an early twentieth-century Maharani, which spanned various historical periods (colonial and pre-colonial), regions and national contexts. Her collection included antique coins, jewels, clothing, textiles, *objets d'art*, household linens, clocks and watches of European and Indian design. The Dholpur dispute suggests that regional princely courts enjoyed a wide-ranging aesthetic appreciation that bridged oriental and occidental sensibilities and tastes, and exposes the role of courtly women as owners, designers and custodians of such collections.

Chapter 2 addresses the influence of changing colonial geography and technology on engendering hybrid forms of courtly cuisine during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Ceremonial functions, such as coronations, royal darbars (for visiting viceroys or members of the British royal family) and politically motivated *shikar* (hunting) parties as well as new cultural practices, such as the observation of Christmas in Indian princely households, introduced Anglo-Indian cuisine to princely kitchens. At the same time, these kitchens continued cooking local dishes for 'private' functions such as marriages, birthdays of courtly members, pregnancy rituals or holy days on the Hindu, Muslim, Sikh or Buddhist sacred calendar. Indo-Persian dishes were served at Muslim courts, such as Hyderabad or Bhopal, Rajput cookery in the Rajasthani states, and Tibeto-Burmese cuisine laid out at the banquets of the Buddhist Chakma chiefs in eastern Bengal. In addition to continuing to serve local cuisines, these courts also began incorporating regional cuisines from different states and areas of the subcontinent in their feasting rituals. Thus individual princely states, and their zenana kitchens, became identified with certain dishes or menus, as did particular cooks and zenana women who were patrons of these culinary trends as well as trendsetters in inaugurating fusion dishes. The latter half of the chapter examines postcolonial cookbooks by erstwhile zenana women on royal cuisine and the various historical tensions inherent in the preservation and recreation of local culinary histories for Indian and global consumers.

Chapter 3 investigates the influence of zenana aesthetics on the development of Hindi cinema. While the princely states officially lapsed with India's Independence in 1947, they remained prominent within the public sphere and cultural life of the postcolonial republic, most prominently through film. Courtly aesthetics in the forms of nautch dance, music and royal costumes affected the development of Bollywood cinema in the early twentieth century

and have continued to influence Indian film from its golden era to the first decade of the twenty-first century. In large part, these films depict the women of the zenana in two ways; as courtesans (*tawa'ifs*) or royal wives, star the leading film actresses of their day, and are produced by prominent Bollywood film directors. This chapter will examine how zenana aesthetics has been depicted in Indian cinema and will conclude with a larger critique of its influence on Indian popular culture, fashion and contemporary heritage tourism.

Moving from Hindi to Western cinema, Chapter 4 examines European filmic interpretations of princely India. While the work of James Ivory and Ismail Merchant have become synonymous with the Anglo-European period piece drama, several of their early films focused on India and princely Indian sites, utilizing the original palaces, estates and decorative objects of ex-princes, and were scripted by the Booker prize-winning novelist, Ruth Pravar Jhabvala, who herself married an Indian and lived in New Delhi. This chapter will investigate the ways in which these Merchant/Ivory/Jhabvala collaborations have portrayed princely India and branded zenana women as postcolonial heroines yet with the continued gloss of the orientalized glamour of the Raj for Anglo-phone audiences worldwide.

The Epilogue links this imperial history to contemporary twenty-first century perceptions of courtly Indian women and collecting. It focuses on the Victoria and Albert Museum's exhibition, 'Maharaja: The Splendour of India's Royal Courts' which opened in London in October 2009. The exhibition covers the 'heyday' of the Indian princes from 1700 to 1947. The enormous popularity of the show and its representative collection of pieces from museums and private trusts in India, Europe and the Middle East suggests the continued fascination for zenana aesthetics in a millennial present.

Studying such histories of the zenana demonstrates the cosmopolitanism of Indian courtly women during the height of Empire and provides a richer portrait of domestic life in colonial India as well as female homosocial spaces generally. These were products, and women, who crossed the boundaries of India and Britain, Europe and Asia and antiquity and the modern. The making of goods for zenana ateliers highlights a relationship between various colonial and postcolonial actors: craftsmen from Britain, the Continent, the United States of America and East Asia, princely Indian men and women from various different religious, ethnic and regional backgrounds, local Indian artisans, who served these indigenous courts, and later Indian and American film directors and producers who recreated these sequestered worlds for mainstream popular audiences.