

The Designed Objekt and Its Imperial Histories: On T.N. Mukharji and the *Art-Manufactures of India*

Tapati Guha-Thakurta

Abstract

This essay locates a late 19th-century category of objects variously named as 'industrial' or 'decorative arts' within the specifically imperial institutional circuit of the World Exhibitions. Taking up a segment of the World Exhibitions of the 1880s, it traces a history which connects the three cities of Calcutta, London and Glasgow and creates a trail of travelling exhibits and museum collections of this most

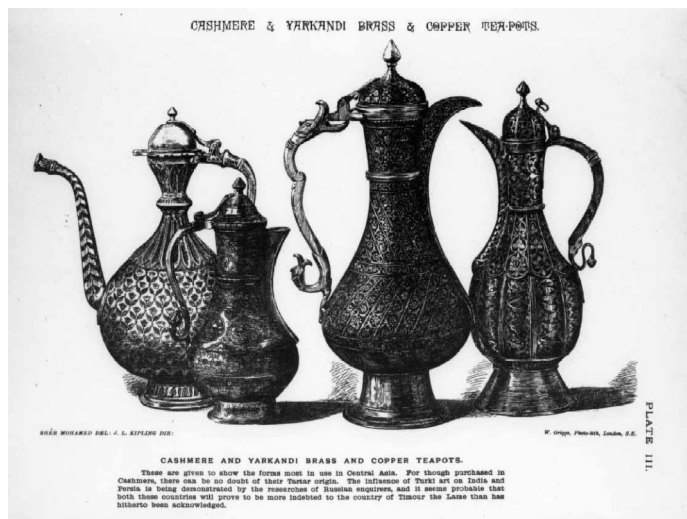
proliferating category of objects. It follows in particular the career of the Bengali exhibition commissioner and museum curator Trailokya Nath (T.N.) Mukharji and the anthology he compiled on the *Art-Manufactures of India* for the Glasgow International Exhibition of 1888 to map a specific network of commissioning, collecting, cataloguing and documenting India's 'art-manufactures'

[1] This essay takes up the category of the designed object of the late 19th century – the 'art-manufactures' – and locates it in a specifically imperial institutional field in which the pedagogy and connoisseurship of design come together with the valorisation of craft traditions and the practices of collecting, exhibiting and presenting decorative art objects. Revisiting the widely studied phenomenon of the World's Fairs, it devotes itself to a specific segment of the serial history of these colonial exhibitions in the decade of the 1880s, which connects the three cities of Calcutta, London and Glasgow and creates a trail of travelling exhibitions and museum collections of this most proliferating category of objects. Various referred to as 'industrial' or 'decorative arts',¹ this genre of products from various Indian states that filled the "Artware Courts" of the Indian Pavilions acquired the particular designation of 'art-manufactures' in a compendium compiled by the Bengal exhibition commissioner and museum curator Trailokya Nath (T.N.) Mukharji on the occasion of the Glasgow International Exhibition of 1888. Moving between the three exhibition venues of Calcutta (1883–1884), London (1886) and Glasgow (1888), the essay uses the career of T.N. Mukharji (1847–1919) to reveal a specific network of commissioning, collecting and cataloguing India's 'art-manufactures'.

[2] Set off against the more elevated category of the 'fine arts' that remained the unshakable monopoly of Western civilisations throughout the 19th century, India's 'art-manufactures' became the hallmark of her alterity, of her different positioning in time and space, where her art remained relegated to the realm of hereditary craft practice and artisanal industries. The 'art-manufactures' came to connote a field of commodity production that was not quite 'art' but not mere 'manufacture' either – the hyphenated category implied the coming together of the artistry of 'art' with the labour and skills of 'manufacture' to create a field of traditional practice, where Indian artisans could offer the lessons of superior design and workmanship to the degraded circuit of modern industrial manufactories. The 'art-manufactures' of his country, which T.N. Mukharji so avidly collected, studied and documented for the colonial state, signified an archetypal imperial genre of objects. Seen as symbols of a pre-industrial 'village India', these objects were nonetheless exemplary products of colonial tutelage, emerging from a large institutional consortium of exhibitions, journals, museums and art schools in late 19th-century India, all of which were geared at restoring to India's 'art industries' its best principles of workmanship and design (Fig. 1). The benefits were to be reaped, as much by British commerce and industrial design as by all the craftsmen who were placed under the care of a new, self-reforming empire (Fig. 2) – an empire that sought to undo its own damage to the country's artisanal economy through an alternative protectionist and conservationist ideology.²

¹ This terminology of the 'industrial arts' and its central importance in the Victorian movement for the reform of industrial design and the Arts and Crafts movement was first investigated in depth in the context of colonial India by Partha Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters: History of European Reactions to Indian Art*, Oxford 1997, 221-251.

² Since the work of Partha Mitter, this topic has been a key focus of two important books – Arindam Datta, *The Bureaucracy of Beauty: Design in the Age of Global Reproducibility*, London and New York 2007, and Abigail McGowan, *Crafting the Nation in Colonial India*, New York 2009.



1 "Cashmere and Yarkandi brass and copper teapots", plate III from *The Journal of Indian Art and Industry* 1 (1886), no. 1 (photograph by the author). This journal was launched in 1886 by the headmaster of the Mayo School of Arts in Lahore, John Lockwood Kipling (1837–1911), and contained extensive text and visual documentation on Indian ornamental art-ware and craftsmen, most of whom worked under the tutelage of the art schools.



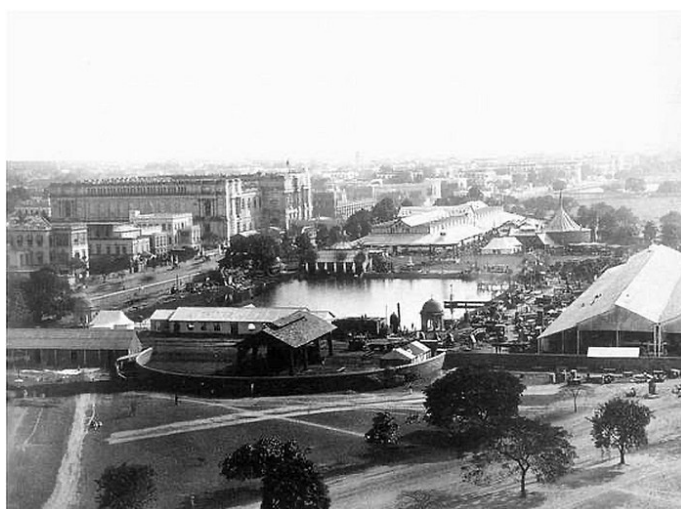
2 From the object to its manufacturing process and its makers – "Group of Damasceners in Gold", photochromo-lithograph, frontispiece of *Damascening on Steel or Iron, as Practised in India*, ed. Colonel Thomas Holbein Hendley, publisher W. Griggs & Sons, London 1892

The exhibitionary chain and complex

[3] The first section of this paper presents a comprehensive overview of the sequence of imperial exhibitions and the connecting flow of exhibits which alternated between the exhibition venues of Calcutta, London and Glasgow. T.N. Mukharji's career within this imperial exhibitionary apparatus provides an important link in this circuit, offering a travel narrative in which the commissioner along with his objects becomes part of this ambit of circulation. The two "second cities of empire" Calcutta and Glasgow had their own "Great Exhibitions" to hold at intervals of a few years of each

other.³ Each fair became the occasion for the largest assemblage and presentations of objects that the cities had held up to that time in what was to become their first imperial exhibitions; each had a transformative impact on the architectural topography, museum collections and public spectatorship of the city.

[4] The Calcutta International Exhibition – Calcutta's own "Great Exhibition", which opened on 4 December 1883 – had spread its halls and pavilions from the new magisterial edifice of the Indian Museum (completed in 1878) out across Chowringhee Road to the open space of Calcutta's Maidan (Fig. 3).



3 Aerial view of the entire complex of the Calcutta International Exhibition, 1883–1884, stretching across the Calcutta Maidan, in front of the new building of the Indian Museum, 1883. Photograph by Shivshankar Narayan, albumen silver print, 21.5 × 28.3 cm. Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal, ref. no. PH1982:0432:003 (courtesy: CCA, Montreal)

Divided into various international pavilions and with the central Indian pavilion housing all the 'Art-ware Courts' from the states of the country, the exhibition space is said to have been filled with 2,500 exhibitors from India and other parts of the world, and over 100,000 exhibits, "numbers that dwarfed all previous Indian exhibitions". When the exhibition officially closed in the first week of March 1884, it is recorded to have attracted an average of 6,000 visitors a day, with an unprecedented peak of 20,000 visitors on one particular holiday in December, "bringing more people to the exhibition grounds on a single day than some of India's provincial exhibitions had drawn over the entire course of their run".⁴ All these statistics proved that the Calcutta

³ This term was used in a joint project entitled "Second Cities in the Circuits of Empire: Glasgow, Calcutta and the Legacy of the Scottish Enlightenment", undertaken by the University of Glasgow and the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, in 2015–2017. This paper grew out of a presentation at this project's second conference on "Second Cities of Empire: India in Scotland, Scotland in India", held at the University of Glasgow on 12–13 May 2017.

⁴ Peter H. Hoffenberg, "Photography and Architecture at the *Calcutta International Exhibition*", in: *Traces of India: Photography, Architecture and the Politics of Representation*, ed. Maria Antonella Pelizzari, Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal 2003, 176-192: 176.

International Exhibition could rival London's Crystal Palace Exhibition as a spectacle, as a commodity fair and as a mass public event, and that the great apparatus of a world exhibition of commodities and manufactures could be replicated on an equal scale in the metropolises and colonial cities.

[5] A similar prestige of a foundational event surrounded Glasgow's first International Exhibition of Science, Art and Industry held in Kelvingrove Park on the banks of the river Kelvin from May to November 1888. The centrepiece of the spectacle was a huge palatial pavilion with a large central dome and turrets flanked horizontally by oriental-style domes and minarets. The pavilion was designed by Glasgow architect James Sellars, who had won the competition to design the exhibition building, which was nicknamed the "Baghdad by Kelvinside" (Fig. 4).⁵



4 *Perspective View of the Principal Buildings of the Glasgow International Exhibition 1888* at Kelvingrove Park, 1888, by the architect, James Sellars (1843–1888), pen, watercolour and wash on paper, 34,5 × 116 cm. Glasgow Museums, [ID no. 711](#) (courtesy Glasgow City Council, Glasgow Museums)

In front of it stood the massive terracotta fountain, reputed to be the world's largest, made by the British commercial exhibitors Doulton & Co., who also constructed for the exhibition the sumptuously ornamental Indian Pavilion. With products of Scottish firms making up almost two-thirds of the exhibits, the exhibition marked Glasgow's passage over the course of the 19th century from a centre of heavy industry, iron foundries, engineering and ship-building to a trading and manufacturing hub of consumer goods.

[6] To mark the city's long history of trading links with the Indian colony, it was John Muir of the trading firm of James Finlay and Company who chaired the Indian Committee of the exhibition and made possible the setting up of three large Indian Artware Courts. The wealth of hand-crafted 'art-manufactures' of these courts would offset the lavish 'fine arts' display of British and European painting and sculpture and would give 'art' its pride of place side by side with industry and manufacture at this first Scottish world fair. Like the Calcutta International Exhibition of 1883–1884, the Glasgow event, in its sheer number of exhibits and visitors, was rated to be the largest exhibition held till then in the Anglo-imperial world outside the capital of London.

[7] The Calcutta International Exhibition became a one-of-a-kind event in the city. The changing ideological thrust of the British Raj in India would make Delhi, the old Mughal capital and the new

⁵ *International Exhibition of Industry, Science and Art, Glasgow, 1888 – Catalogue of the Fine Arts Section*, exh. cat., Glasgow 1888.

projected capital of the empire, the chosen site of the Imperial Durbars and their accompanying exhibitions of 1902 and 1911 – for which the stage had already been set by the first Delhi Durbar of 1877 to mark Queen Victoria's coronation as the Empress of India.⁶ By contrast, the 1888 event facilitated Glasgow's chain of three more international exhibitions in the early 20th century, in 1901, 1911 and 1938. Like many of the exhibition pavilions of this era, Sellar's magnificent architectural ensemble in wood had been designed as a temporary dismountable structure. But Glasgow's first International Exhibition found its permanent afterlife in the construction, on the same picturesque riverside site, of the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum complex, which was almost entirely funded by the exhibition's earnings from object sales and visitors' admission fees. This permanent complex served as the Palace of Fine Arts for the 1901 International Exhibition in the city.⁷

[8] Among the large collections of 'fine' and 'decorative arts' that moved from the 1888 exhibition to this permanent museum at Kelvingrove were more than 300 items of 'art-manufactures' – among them brass and copper utensils, damascened metal ware, lacquered and inlaid woodwork, enamelled pottery and jewellery, and woven textiles – that were purchased for 700 pounds from the three India Courts that had been assembled here by T.N. Mukharji (Fig. 5).



5 One of the three Indian Artware Courts filled with hand-manufactured objects, human models and architectural structures, Glasgow International Exhibition, 1888 (reprod. from: *An Album of 36 Photographs of the Glasgow International Exhibition*, Glasgow 1888)

⁶ These 'Durbars' (meaning large gatherings at the court of the Mughal emperors and at the later provincial courts of the successor states of the Mughal Empire in India) were consciously developed by the British in India after the rule of the East India Company was replaced by that of the British Crown in 1858. See Bernard Cohn, "Representing Authority in Victorian India", first published in *The Invention of Tradition*, eds. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, Cambridge, 1983, reprinted in Bernard S. Cohn, *An Anthropologist Among the Historians and Other Essays*, Delhi: Oxford University Press 1990, 632-682, and Julie F. Codell, ed., *Power and Resistance: The Delhi Coronation Durbars*, New Delhi: The Alkazi Collection of Photography, 2012.

⁷ *Glasgow International Exhibition, 1901, Official Guide*, Glasgow 1901.

[9] The late 1870s and 1880s marked a new phase in the form and reach of this imperial exhibitionary complex. It took on its full global sway in this period, as it spread itself across Euro-America and the British colonies – producing the grand run of the International Exhibitions of Paris (1878), Melbourne (1879–1880), Amsterdam (1883), Jeypore (1883), Calcutta (1883–1884), London (1886) and Glasgow (1888). Tim Barringer offers an important classification of three periods in this imperial exhibitionary history to broadly conform to the wider changing ideologies of British imperialism.⁸ From the first "didactic moment" when, following the Great Exhibition of 1851, India's decorative and industrial arts became crucial in South Kensington's movement for design reform and pedagogy, we move to the "moment of academic imperialism" of the period from the 1870s to the mid-1880s, when we see a new emphasis on the compilation of detailed scholarly compendiums on India's economic goods, raw produce, botanical specimens and the variety of her 'art-manufactures' that went on show at these exhibitions. J. Forbes Watson's *Classified and Descriptive Catalogue of the Indian Section* for the Vienna Universal Exhibition of 1873, G.C.M. Birdwood's anthology on *The Industrial Arts of India* (1880), initially prepared as a *Handbook to the Indian Court at the Paris International Exhibition* of 1878, George Watt's multi-volume *A Dictionary of Economic Products of India* of 1885, or T.N. Mukharji's own series of handbooks and catalogues of Indian agricultural products, commercial and art-manufactures for exhibitions across Europe, Britain, Australia and India during the 1880s, stand exemplary of this trend. What followed was the final phase from the mid-1880s to the turn of the twentieth century of a popular triumphant British imperialism, when the exposure to the resplendent Indian Courts fuelled a new mass imaginary of the Queen's Indian empire. In Barringer's view, this phase was launched by the Colonial and Indian Exhibition that opened in South Kensington, London, in the summer of 1886, and reached its high point with the completion of Ashton Webb's new building that would become the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1909.⁹

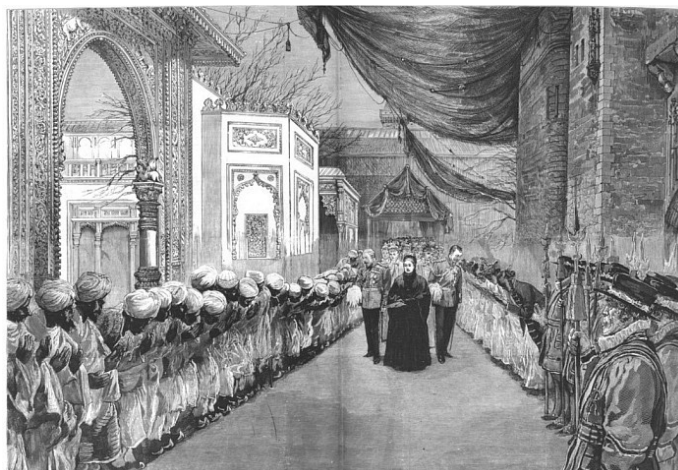
[10] Like its Calcutta counterpart that preceded it and the Glasgow one that followed, the Colonial and Indian Exhibition of 1886 was again billed as the biggest exhibition to have been held so far in London, surpassing all the ones that had gone before, not just in the numbers of exhibitors, exhibits and persons that it brought into its ambit but also in its imperial flamboyance. No other exhibition till then had so directly displayed on the external frontage of its building the vast territorial map of Britain's colonial possessions across the two hemispheres of the world; none other had given Britain's most prized possession of the Indian empire and its bounty of procured and commissioned objects such a definitive place in an exhibition, making the contributions from the other colonies – Canada, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand – small supplements to the Indian pavilions.¹⁰ India's status as the 'jewel' in the British crown had already been dramatically proclaimed by the display of the Kohinoor diamond in the Crystal Palace in 1851, with the Queen

⁸ Tim Barringer, "The South Kensington Museum and the Colonial Project", in: *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture and the Museum*, eds. Tim Barringer and Tom Flynn, London/New York 1998, 11-27: 12.

⁹ Barringer (1998), 21-25.

¹⁰ Saloni Mathur, "To Visit the Queen: On Display at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition of 1886", in: *India by Design: Colonial History and Cultural Display*, Berkeley 2007, 52-29: 52-54.

and not the East India Company acting as its official exhibitor.¹¹ In 1886, at South Kensington, that status found a greater ceremonial endorsement in the opening royal pageant that passed through a vestibule lined with life-sized clay models of various ethnic groups of Indian soldiery (Fig. 6) and converged in the glass-domed circular Royal Albert Hall, where, following the singing of the first verse of the English national anthem, the second verse was sung before an audience of over 10,000 in Sanskrit in a translation by Professor Max Mueller.¹²



6 The Queen Empress as the key symbol of the new phase of the British Empire – the royal procession at the opening ceremony of the Colonial and Indian Exhibition in London in 1886 (reprod. from: Robert Wilson, *The Life and Times of Queen Victoria*, vol. 4, London 1900)

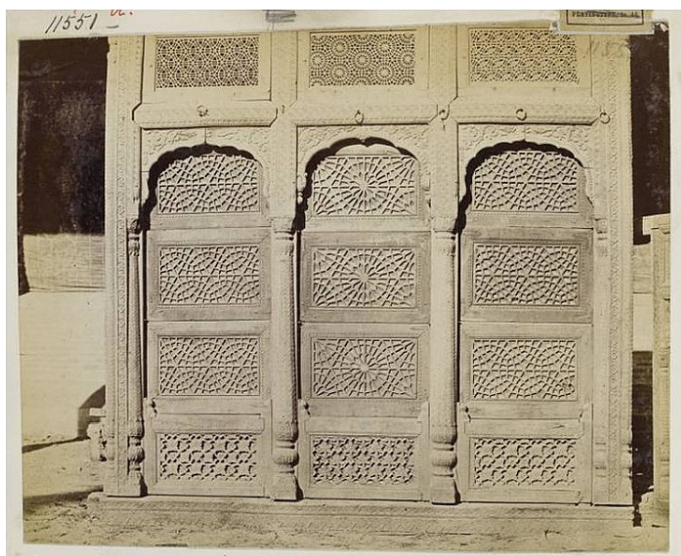
[11] Let us also consider at this point the thick flow of Indian art, craft and architectural objects into the South Kensington Museum over the prior years that would set the context for the central place of the Indian pavilions in the spectacle of empire. Regalia and luxury goods from India's princely courts that had been a major attraction at the Crystal Palace exhibition – especially those that had exemplified the best of traditional Indian design – had come into the short-lived Museum of Ornamental Art that was set up in 1852 at Marlborough House, under the initiative of Henry Cole, as the repository of the vast left-over of unsold exhibition items.¹³ Subsequently, it was at Henry Cole's relocated museum at South Kensington, driven by his relentless pursuit of a reformed pedagogy of design to boost British manufacture and commerce, that the collection of Indian decorative arts grew providentially. This is where Cole systematically amassed select art-ware from Indian Courts at world's fairs across Europe. This is also where the main collection of the East India Company's India Museum was transferred, when the museum at Leadenhall Street was disbanded at the end of the 1870s. Henry Cole's 1874 *Catalogue of the Objects of Indian Art Exhibited in the South Kensington Museum* was supplemented by George Birdwood's 1880s

¹¹ See, on this theme, Lara Kriegel, "Narrating the Subcontinent in 1851: India at the Crystal Palace", in: *The Great Exhibition of 1851: New Interdisciplinary Essays*, ed. Louise Purbrick, Manchester 2001, 146-178.

¹² *Colonial and Indian Exhibition, 1886. Empire of India. Special Catalogue of Exhibits by the Government of India and Private Exhibitors*, London 1886. See also Mathur (2007), 56-57.

¹³ Lara Kriegel, *Grand Designs: Labour, Empire and the Museum in Victorian England*, Durham 2007, 130-137.

compendium on *The Industrial Arts of India*, as he oversaw as Art Referee this amalgamation of the Indian collections in a new gallery within a vacant building of the South Kensington Museum complex. A further huge cache of Indian objects came into the museum in 1883 from the collecting tour of Caspar Purdon Clarke of the museum, who was sent by the India Office to scour the country for the best of ornamental art-ware – "specimens of pottery, metal-work, papier-mâché, lacquerware, inlaid sandal wood and ivory, embroideries, printed cottons", etc. The best of Purdon Clarke's acquisitions were said to have been large architectural structures, including full wooden painted and carved house-fronts from Northern and Western India, that came to be built into the great Architectural Courts of the South Kensington Museum (Fig. 7).¹⁴



7 Carved wooden door and front facade of a merchant's house in Lahore, of the late 18th century – from the Caspar Purdon Clarke acquisitions of 1883, South Kensington Museum Indian Series. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, acc. no. [IS.432-1883](#) (courtesy: V&A Archive, London)

[12] As a part of a pan-European museum scheme of acquiring full-scale replicas of grand art and archaeological monuments from around the globe, a gigantic plaster cast had already been installed here of the eastern gateway of the Sanchi Stupa (made on site, transported in parts all the way from Sanchi to be reassembled in London). In a photograph of 1872, we see the gateway installed amidst other architectural facades from India, 33 feet high, looming towards the sky-light of the arched ceiling, dwarfing the other cast of a corbelled pillar from the Diwani-i-Khas building of Fatehpur Sikri and rivalling in its antiquity and artistry the casts of famous Western objects like the Trajan column from Imperial Rome or Michelangelo's David from Renaissance Florence in the adjoining courts (Fig. 8).

¹⁴ Barringer (1998), 23.



8 Installation of the casts of the Sanchi gateway and the corbelled pillar from Fatehpur Sikri in the Architectural Courts of the South Kensington Museum, London, in 1872 (courtesy: V&A Archive, London)

[13] The South Kensington Museum had emerged by the 1880s as a heterotopic site of world civilisations, where visitors like Moncure Daniel Conway could make their imagined "pilgrimage across the earth" by winding through plaster cast monuments, architectural simulacra and artefacts from all over the world. As he wandered through the Indian Section that opened on 7th May 1880, making his way through ancient Buddhist gateways and Buddha heads, medieval courtly regalia, village dioramas and showcases of ornamental artware, he wrote that "there was no university in the world where one could learn so much about India". The Indian galleries could offer visitors like him a "spiritual biography" of India's civilisational past, even as it could serve for others as a "giant three-dimensional mail order catalogue for Indian manufactures".¹⁵ The node of Britain's design reform movement, and of the British government's Department of Science and Art that controlled a centralised network of art and design schools throughout Britain, South Kensington with its expanding museum collections had also developed as the main locus of the material archive of the Empire. It provided therefore the most natural venue for the grand spectacle of the Colonial and Indian Exhibition of 1886 and the choice repository of many of the travelling exhibits that went on display.

[14] In the colonial capital of Calcutta, in the same years, the city's first International Exhibition took its position within a comparable imperial knowledge complex and vast material archive that had grown around the nodal institution of the Indian Museum. This earliest and largest museum of the Indian empire had been designed to hold an encyclopaedic compilation of the country's collectible objects – where all of India could be configured through a spectrum of objects representing her flora and fauna, her fossils and minerals, her cultures and customs, and her

¹⁵ Cited in Kriegel (2007), 192-193.

antiquities and arts.¹⁶ The transference of the mixed museum collections from the Asiatic Society (where the Indian Museum began) into the newly completed building designed by Walter Granville in the mid-1870s was followed by the parallel shift of the Government School of Art from its earlier precincts in Garanhata in north Calcutta to its new building that was an extension of the Indian Museum's architectural complex. This integrated spatial unit of the museum and the art school in Calcutta at the crossing of Chowringhee and Park Street would now emerge as the centralised hub of all the Surveys of India, the scientific agencies of an empire that was assiduously transforming itself into a "knowledge-state".¹⁷ Its galleries and grounds came to host the object collections and offices of the Geological, Zoological, Botanical, Archaeological and Anthropological Surveys, whose red buildings still surround and occupy the rear precincts of the main white museum building (Fig. 9).



9 The Geological and Fossils Gallery from the 1870s that continues to occupy the same room at the entrance of the Indian Museum, Calcutta (photograph by the author)

Calcutta's spatial axis of power and knowledge ran along Park Street onto Chowringhee Street – from the offices of the older Survey of India, the central engineering agency, set up in 1813 under the first Surveyor-General, Colin Mackenzie, past the precincts of the Asiatic Society into this concentrated hub of the Indian Museum, the Art School and the Geological, Botanical, Zoological and Archaeological Survey Offices – with the Maidan then connecting this knowledge hub with the seat of the governmental authority at Tank Square and the military power at Fort William.

[15] The hosting of the Calcutta International Exhibition (1883–1884) on the grounds and front expanse of the Indian Museum would lead to a marked expansion in the departments and collections of the museum. This was the time of a growing thrust towards disciplinary

¹⁶ Tapati Guha-Thakurta, "The Museum in the Colony: Collecting, Classifying, Displaying", in: Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Postcolonial India*, Columbia 2004, 43-82.

¹⁷ This spatial conglomerate of the Calcutta School of Art, the Indian Museum and the Surveys had its parallel in the making of a similar institutional complex in London's South Kensington in the same years, as described in Kriegel (2007), 170-190.

specialisations within the Indian Museum, with a move away from the earlier preponderance of natural history, geology and zoology towards archaeology and the industrial arts. The museum's first Archaeological Gallery had just been instituted in 1878, with the transference and re-assembly within the museum of the remnants of the red sandstone railing pillar and gateway of the Bharhut Stupa. The immediate aftermath of the International Exhibition saw the formation of a new Economic and Art Section within the museum under the curatorship of T.N. Mukharji, which would absorb the collections of the old Economic Museum of the Bengal government and acquire a substantial body of the architectural ensembles and exhibits from the Artware Courts following the dismantling of the temporary pavilions. There was a specific attempt by Mukharji to select for this new Economic and Art Section of the museum a corpus of artistic and decorative crafts, as against mere economic produce and commercial manufactures. Proposals were also afloat for amalgamating this new Art Section of the Indian Museum with the adjoining Calcutta School of Art and its Art Gallery with the intention of creating in Calcutta a South Kensington-style nodal centre of design and the decorative arts, where the museum and art school together would serve their function as "a storehouse of tradition and a forum of visual instruction" on the artistic wealth of India.¹⁸

The spectacle of the Indian Artware Courts

[16] It is within this particular sequence of the world exhibitions, running from Calcutta to London and Glasgow during the 1880s, that the Indian Artware Courts can be seen to acquire its distinctive form and heightened visibility. The Indian Court of the 1851 Great Exhibition had consisted of triumphant displays of conquest and commerce, flaunting the looted wealth of the annexed royal courts alongside the bounty of the agricultural, botanical and mineral produce of the country as the prized resources for British trade and industry.¹⁹ This unabashed celebration of India's monarchical opulence and raw natural resources would give way in the subsequent decades to a revisioning of India as a lost haven of traditional artistic skills, artisanal guilds and village industries. If the Great Exhibition had rendered the manufactured commodity into the new fetishised object of gaze and desire, the Indian hand-crafted object would give a new gloss to the meaning of manufacture. By showing the superiority of the work of the human hand and mind over that of the machine, it would give back to the term 'manufacture' the "true etymological meaning" that the West had forfeited.²⁰ As the century progressed, Indian exhibition commissioners developed a new concentrated focus on the category of 'art-manufactures' as the prime pedagogic and artistic objects of these displays – developing for these elaborate orders and classifications, region by region, genre by genre, material by material, within the new setting of the Artware Courts.

¹⁸ Guha-Thakurta (2004), 50-51.

¹⁹ Excellently analysed in Kriegel (2001), 86-125.

²⁰ George C.M. Birdwood, *The Industrial Arts of India*, reprint, London 1971 [first published London 1880], 131.

[17] This shift in priorities from India's agricultural and natural resources to her artistic wealth is mapped within T.N. Mukharji's own administrative career as a Bengal civil servant. During these years, he moves from the Exhibition Branch of the Central Revenue and Agricultural Department to the charge of the Economic and Art Section of the Indian Museum and becomes the main commissioner of Indian craft exhibits for the Calcutta, London and Glasgow exhibitions. From preparing his detailed catalogues of Indian minerals, raw materials, agricultural implements, botanic collections of plants and seeds for the Economic and Commercial Sections of various world's fairs, he graduated to a specialised connoisseurship of the category he termed 'art-manufactures', of which he took pride in searching out and selecting articles of the "best and purest workmanship", on which he produced his definitive compendium in 1888 to introduce this full field of traditional hand-manufacture to the visitors of the Glasgow International Exhibition. The *Art-Manufactures of India* stands testimony to the depth of Mukharji's expertise and knowledge of the field, to his detailed documentation of materials and techniques involved in each of the crafts, and to the labours of the travels he undertook to all parts of the country to search out the finest hand-manufactures and their production histories. "The patient preserving industry" that went into the making of these objects, that he hoped would attract both the commercial interest and artistic appreciation of the British public, seems to have been reciprocated in the patience and perseverance of his own study of these manufactures.²¹

[18] T.N. Mukharji's compendium takes its place beside the voluminous official catalogues of the Calcutta International Exhibition of 1883–1884 and the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition in London. In these, we find the most extensive textual descriptions of these Artware Courts, with their dense accumulation of exhibits, classifying the individual items and detailing their origins in the various British and Indian principalities.²² We see how each of the exhibitions became an occasion for an encyclopaedic exercise of documenting and classifying objects, by way of region and state, by way of material, processes and prices, and by way of names of specific manufacturers and donors.

[19] We also have a rare visual testimony of the Artware Courts that were set up on the Calcutta Maidan in the winter of 1883–1884 in a series of commissioned photographs taken by a Bombay photographer, Shivshankar Narayan, who is said to have set up his photographic business on the premises of the Sir J.J. School of Art and worked under the Archaeological Survey of India.²³ These photographic images are staged as meticulously as the ensemble of objects and the architectural simulacra, each offering a different order of detailing of individual objects and their designs, each also capturing the collective impact of the full tableaux. In one of the most resplendent examples – the Central Indian Court – a carved stone screen from Gwalior jostles for attention with a cast of a Mauryan pillar from Sanchi, a spread of furniture, textiles, ornamental crafts, framed paintings

²¹ T.N. Mukharji, *Art-Manufactures of India, Specially Compiled for the Glasgow International Exhibition, 1888*, reprint, New Delhi 2000 [first published Calcutta 1888], 8.

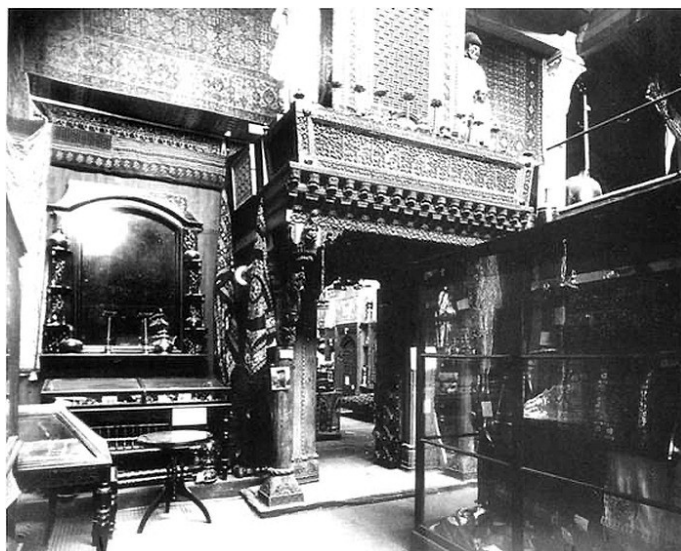
²² See *Official Report of the Calcutta International Exhibition, 1883–84, Compiled under the Orders of the Executive Committee* (1885), vols. 1 and 2, and *Colonial and Indian Exhibition, 1886. Empire of India. Special Catalogue of Exhibits by the Government of India and Private Exhibitors*, London 1886.

²³ Hoffenberg (2003), 185-186.

and photographs of the region's architecture, and even a human exhibit of a liveried attendant (Figs. 10, 11). While the catalogues and handbooks overwhelm the reader with a bewildering surfeit of manufactures and their information, the photographic folios carry a more seductive invitation to immerse oneself in the density of the displays, to search out individual items from the massed assemblage and look more and more closely at their minuteness of forms and details.



10 The Central Indian Court at the Calcutta International Exhibition, 1883–1884. Photograph by Shivshankar Narayan, between Dec. 1883 and July 1884, albumen silver print, 22.1 × 28.2 cm. Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal, ref. no. PH1982:0432:013 (courtesy: CCA, Montreal)



11 The Bombay Artware Court at the Calcutta International Exhibition, 1883–1884, with an entire carved wooden house-front from Baroda incorporated in the display. Photograph by Shivshankar Narayan, between Dec. 1883 and July 1884, albumen silver print, 22.8 × 28.0 cm. Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal, ref. no. PH1982:0432:012 (courtesy: CCA, Montreal)

[20] Let me use these photographs of two typical Indian Artware Courts to pursue the careers of two particular categories of travelling exhibits – the architectural and the human model – that became central to the ontology of representation of these exhibitions. These two categories of objects pushed in different ways at the edge of the concept of 'art-manufactures', stretching its scope to include structures and figures that would not quite have the value of commercial commodities, but carried the same qualities of the elaborate hand-crafted object. They took on their prime function as items of display, introducing the elements of architectural backdrops, stage props and human performances to these courts. Between them, these architectural and human exhibits alternated between the real and the simulated, the original and the copy, between the life-size replica and the miniaturised model, all of which had their place in the heterotopic space of these international exhibitions. They must have also posed as some of the most difficult objects for long distance travel and circulation as well as for museum acquisition.

[21] The massive plaster-cast of the eastern gateway of the Sanchi Stupa in the Architectural Courts of the South Kensington Museum provides the most important instance of the arduous labours of such transportations (see Fig. 8). In one of the most elaborate cast-making operations of the period, a cargo containing 28 tons of plaster of Paris and gelatin was shipped from London to Calcutta and moved across land by bullock cart to the site, where over four months Indian artisans worked under British guidance to produce a perfect facsimile of the eastern gateway in around 50 parts. Packed in the tins in which they were molded, the many parts of the Sanchi gateway were then shipped back to England, where the pieces were reassembled to make up the whole edifice. And it was from this master replica that further copies of the gateway were molded at the South Kensington Museum for exhibitions in Paris and Berlin. The replicating cast of the great gateway of Sanchi becomes the period's best example of the traveling monument, as it moves between museum and exhibition sites in London, and between London and other continental venues.²⁴ Supervising the entire project on site at Sanchi was Lt. Henry Hardy Cole of the Royal Engineers, son of Sir Henry Cole, Superintendent of the South Kensington Museum. Trained in London in different techniques of plaster-cast modelling, Cole was then functioning in India as a key agent in the procuring of drawings, photographs and casts of Indian architecture for his father's museum, preceding his own appointment in 1880 to a new office of the Curator of Ancient Monuments in India.

[22] Such phenomenal movements of materials, objects and skills to and from the interiors of India to the imperial metropolis would evolve during this decade into a vast organisational regime around the institution of these international exhibitions. Entire carved wooden house-fronts from the streets of cities like Ahmedabad, Kathiawad and Baroda would make their way into the Artware Courts of the Calcutta International Exhibition and thereafter into the gallery of the new Art Section of the Indian Museum (see Figs. 11, 12) – while some objects travelled all the way to

²⁴ Discussed in Tapati Guha-Thakurta, "The Production and Reproduction of a Monument: The Many Lives of the Sanchi Stupa", in: *South Asian Studies* 29 (2013), no. 1, 77-109: 85-87.

the South Kensington Museum as a part of Caspar Purdon Clarke's purchases from his collecting expedition.²⁵



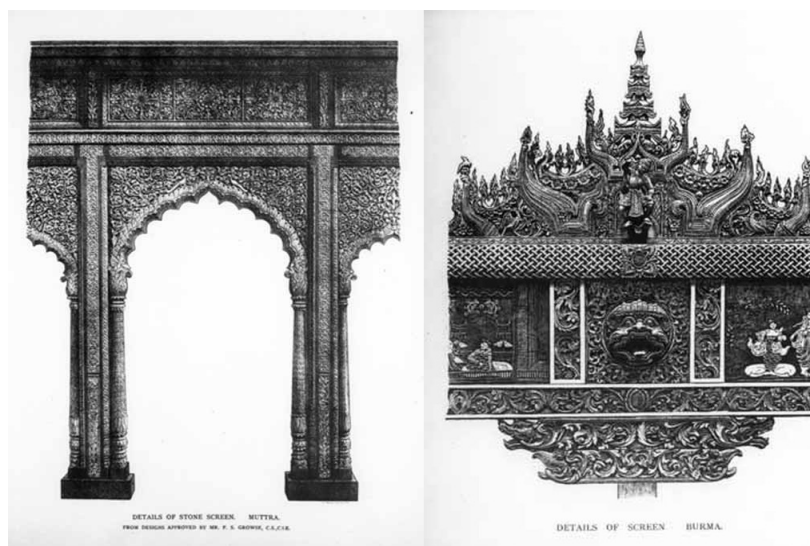
12 Wooden carved house-front of Kathiawad, Gujarat, that went on display in one of the Artware Courts of the Calcutta International Exhibition of 1883–1884, and thereafter came into the Art Section of the Indian Museum, Calcutta (photograph by the author)

[23] At the same time, the exhibitions generated a demand for a particular variety of architectural ensembles – mainly ornamental gateways and folding screens – that were usually commissioned by Indian rulers from the traditional craftsmen of their states, through the intermediary coordinating authority of the colonial administrators, exhibition commissioners, and the art schools.²⁶ Traditional Indian architecture offered itself as an invaluable repository both of the grandeur of ornamental design, and of the country's living artisanal skills in stone masonry or in wood and metal carving. Across the art schools of colonial India, architectural samples were what was most avidly collected, copied and sourced for a repertoire of ornamental patterns which could be disseminated as printed folios of design, and transferred to other craft objects, whether it be enameled pottery, woven carpets or lacquered woodwork. From these old specimens also

²⁵ A trained architect and Superintendent of the Indian Section of the Paris International Exhibition of 1878, Caspar Purdon Clarke (1846–1911) was deputed to go on a collecting tour of India in 1883 to procure art and craft objects and architectural specimens for the South Kensington Museum, with a sum of 2,000 pounds given by the museum's funds and another 3,000 pounds from the India Office. Referred to in Barringer (1998), 22-23.

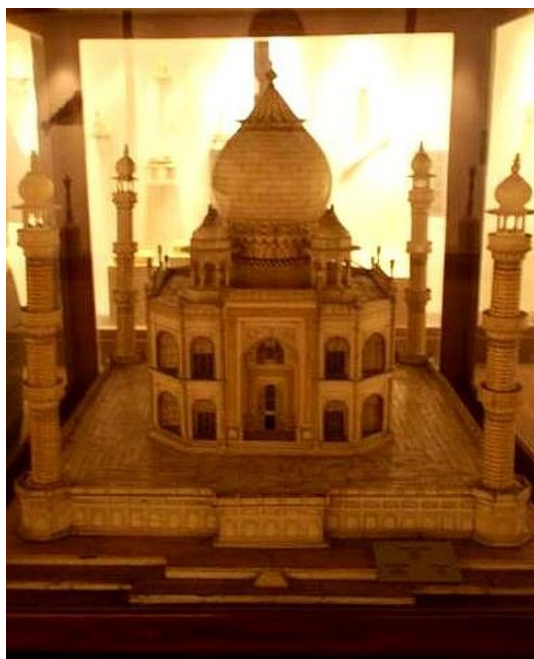
²⁶ We have detailed studies of the making of one such travelling gateway, the Gwalior Gateway, that moved from the Calcutta International Exhibition to the Colonial and Indian Exhibition in London and went into the collections of South Kensington, and one such ornamental wooden carved screen, made by a Lahore art school master-craftsman, Ram Singh, which remains in the collection of the school. See Deborah Swallow, "Colonial Architecture and Official Patronage of the Indian Artisan: The Case of a Gateway from Gwalior in the Victoria & Albert Museum", and Naazish Ata-Ullah, "Stylistic Hybridity and Colonial Art and Design Education: A Wooden Carved Screen by Ram Singh", in: *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture and the Museum*, eds. Tim Barringer and Tom Flynn, London/New York 1998, 52-67 and 68-81.

emerged a new genre of architectural fabrications that were made specifically for exhibitions – ornamental gateways, decorative screens, large and small replicas of monuments, made out of durable and non-durable material (ranging from wood and stone to plaster of Paris and papier-mâché). As they moved from the workshop floors and art school classrooms into the venues of international exhibitions and museum collections, these specially commissioned exhibits also came to be avidly documented in the pages of publications like *The Journal of Indian Art* (Figs. 13a-b).



13a-b Illustrations of carved ornamental screens from a) Muttra (Mathura) and b) Burma, made for the Calcutta International Exhibition of 1882–1883, in: *The Journal of Indian Art* 1 (1886) (reprod. from: Internet Archive, <https://archive.org>)

[24] The decorative screen, in trellised stone and marble or in carved wood, and the miniaturised replica in wood, marble or soapstone or sandstone became the most abundant and widely travelling genre of the exhibition fabrications of these years. While the former took the liberty of free blends of styles and motifs, the latter acquired the pride of the perfect and authentic copy, testing the skills of painstaking workmanship of their makers. Juxtaposed with large architectural facades and standing screens, these miniature recreations of temples, mausoleums and mosques – the Madurai temple, the Taj Mahal, Sher Shah’s tomb at Sasaram, Bihar or the Golden Temple of Amritsar – could be inserted into the Artware courts as showcased displays and offer themselves as collectible objects (Fig. 14). These miniature models worked best at converting the archaeological monument into a portable and purchasable 'art-manufacture' – copies of the displayed model could be ordered for purchase. Unlike the laboriously produced and transported casts of the Sanchi or Gwalior gateways, that the Victoria & Albert Museum later destroyed when the Architectural Courts and their plaster casts went out of fashion, the smaller architectural screens and models better held on to their place in the decorative arts sections of museums.



14 Ivory model of the Taj Mahal, commissioned from a Murshidabad craftsman, made for the Delhi Durbar Exhibition of 1902, that is now part of the Art Section of the India Museum, Calcutta (photograph by the author)

[25] In turning from the architectural to the different kinds of human exhibits that became the staple of these exhibitions, we find a similar juxtaposition of the real and the simulated, the life-size and the miniature model. From London's Crystal Palace exhibition of 1851 to the Colonial and Indian Exhibition of 1886, what is said to have drawn visitors in largest numbers to the Indian pavilions were life-size human models, especially of Indian craftsmen at work. For the exhibition commissioners and the new design reformists, such physical embodiments of the labours and expertise of India's traditional workmanship provided the best lessons on why "the hand crafting of the object by the skilled and creative individual provides an alternative and superior form of work to that of the division of labour under mechanised industrial capitalism".²⁷ For the mass viewers, they also provided the best live examples of the pre-modern 'races' and tribes, castes and occupations of the colony. Thus we see the *Illustrated London News* in 1851 advertising in advance, as a prime attraction of the exhibition, 65 near life-size clay figures of different trades and castes made by Krishnanagar clay modellers that became part of one end of the Indian pavilion in the Crystal Palace.²⁸

[26] As the sequence of exhibitions progressed, travelling entourages of craftsmen and performers became an integral extension of the recreated spaces and clay modelled tableaux of Indian villages, towns and bazaars— the living humans on view offset by the life-size painted clay replicas of human figures and by the miniaturised doll-like specimens of craftsmen that were often inserted into the showcases of the products they crafted. In the Colonial and Indian Exhibition of 1886, visitors would have experienced the full effects of this interplay of India's living

²⁷ Tim Barringer, *Men at Work: Art and Labour in Victorian Britain*, New Haven 2005, 261.

²⁸ Cited in Kriegel (2007), 112-115.

trades and castes with their clay replicas. There are vivid descriptions from contemporary and later writers of an enclosure of 34 working craftsmen brought from India:

*[...] weavers of gold brocade and kinkhab, tapestry and carpets, an ivory miniature painter, copper and silver smiths, a seal engraver, a dyer, a calico printer, a trinket maker, a goldsmith, stone carvers, a clay figure maker from Lucknow, a potter [who was allegedly 102 years old], and woodcarvers, [who] were all daily to be seen at work as they would be in India.*²⁹

[27] Also brought over with this group were two men who were bullock-drivers by occupation, who took visitors on a Durbar carriage ride outside the Indian pavilion, and seven men identified as "Bombay servants", who served Indian tea and refreshments at an outdoor cafe of the exhibition. These performing subjects had their counterparts in a large spread of life-size clay figures that were modelled in Krishnanagar. Some of these were placed among rows of native shops in the Indian Bazaar, others, representing the different ethnic groups of Indian soldiers in the British army, were placed along the main vestibule through which the royal procession passed on the opening day (see Fig. 6), and yet others were made to illustrate the different aboriginal tribes of the country and were interspersed among the raw products and manufactures that came from the areas of their habitation. The blurring of boundaries between real persons and models and the rendering of both into exhibits is given a new dimension in the account that T.N. Mukharji provides on the making of such ethnological figures. He describes how, for the first time at the Calcutta International Exhibition, members of these tribes whom he calls "typical specimens" were brought for display from their hill and jungle abodes to the exhibition venue, and then made to pose for their figures to be reproduced in clay by the most expert clay-modeller of Krishnanagar, Jadunath Pal, under the supervision of the exhibition commissioner, George Watt.³⁰

[28] Both the travelling group of native artisans and these clay models were exemplary products of colonial tutelage and pedagogy, their authenticity carefully produced through new institutions of training and discipline. In Saloni Mathuri's account, we get to know that 31 of the 34 craftspersons who were brought to the exhibition were inmates of the Central Jail of Agra, and had been recruited by the jail superintendent, John William Tyler, who had been directly entrusted with the task by the shipping company Henry S. King and Company that was to transport the group to London.³¹ The search for the most skilled workmen in different craft forms could be diverted from the traditional settings of princely courts and villages to the new reformist venue of the prison and its technical school, where inmates were imparted training and livelihood skills in different forms of manufactures. We cannot think of more apposite subjects of colonial governmentality than these prison inmates who were herded and shipped across from Bombay to London, accompanied by superintendent Tyler, with a bonded stipulation of their return to the prison within six months, and who received an advance wage to perform the identity of the

²⁹ Frank Cundall, *Reminiscences of the Colonial and Indian Exhibition*, London 1886, 28-29.

³⁰ Mukharji (2000 [1888]), 62-63.

³¹ Mathur (2007), 59-66.

master craftsmen at the exhibition and sell their products as examples of the timeless hereditary traditions of Indian craftsmanship.

[29] Unlike these products of the Agra Jail and Technical School, the Krishnanagar clay modellers whose human models inhabited the same exhibitionary spaces could be placed within a more traditional line of heredity and workmanship. The master modeller, Jadunath Pal, along with four others of his close kin, were said to be only the few practitioners of merit left in this district town about sixty miles north of Calcutta of this indigenous practice of sculpting human and divine figures in unfired alluvial clay. Thriving since the eighteenth century under the patronage of Raja Krishnachandra of Nadia, the art of modelling clay at Krishnanagar was reputed to have developed its home-grown skills of realist representation, diversifying from the central practice of idol-making into the making of life-like painted human figures and of a variety of miniature models of everyday objects, fruits and vegetables.³² However, it also becomes clear that the kind of ethnological clay models, that Jadunath Pal and his kin were being commissioned to make for the international exhibitions, were a distinct product of the training that these clay modellers had acquired at the Calcutta School of Art. This is where their inherited skills came to be cultivated and geared towards the needs of exhibition displays and were awarded medals and certificates by the exhibition organisers.

[30] In his section on "Clay models" in the *Art Manufactures of India*, T.N. Mukharji describes at length the different kinds of the clay model exhibits at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition in London, 1886, and at the Glasgow International Exhibition in 1888, ranging from the mythological to the ethnological, from the 17 life-size models of aboriginal tribes made by the master modeller Jadunath Pal to a variety of miniaturised tableaux, which were the forte of modellers like Rakhil Das Pal or Nibaran Pal, of scenes stretching from hook-swinging or the festival of Durga to Thuggee and Sati, to tea gardens, indigo plantations and factories, a collector's court and a technical school (Fig. 15).³³

³² An early, seminal historical and ethnographic study of the clay modelers of Krishnanagar is Sudhir Chakravarty, *Krishnanagarer Mritshilpi o Mritshipla Samaj*, Calcutta 1985. See also, Moumita Sen, *Enframing Kumortuli. A Study in Space, Practice and Images* (unpublished M.Phil. dissertation, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta [CSSSC], 2011).

³³ Mukharji (2000 [1888]), 59-75.



15 Diorama of an indigo factory made by Rakhal Das Pal for the Colonial and Indian Exhibition in London, 1886. Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, Economic Botany Collection, [inv. no. 182.1886](#) (courtesy Board of Trustees of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew)

All of India's life and customs, trades and occupations, costumes and headgear, species of fish and snakes, or fruits and vegetable, could be rendered into a world of miniature models, with the material shifting from clay to plaster of Paris, and models made at the Lucknow, Jaipur and Bombay Schools of Art competing in price and finesse with those produced at Krishnanagar. Unlike the massive archaeological exhibits that moved from exhibition venues to museum collections, the large human-size clay models that came to be deposited in museums have not withstood well the test of time. Made of ephemeral unfired clay, they were intended to be temporary exhibits, with prices advertised for copies that could be ordered from the government of India. The miniature models, however, that were sold and circulated more widely at the exhibitions, seem to have found a longer life as museum objects – with one of the best preserved and restored collections of these models now displayed in the country's only surviving 'industrial art' museum, the Bhau Daji Lad Museum in Mumbai.

T.N. Mukharji: 'native expert', ethnographer and interlocutor³⁴

[31] Caught between his multiple roles as art-manufacturer, human exhibit and native ethnographer, the clay modeller found his own gaze continuously refracted through a colonial mirror and returned on his own people and spaces. In the exhibitions at Calcutta, London and Glasgow, he provides a curious foil to the figure of Trailokyanath Mukharji, the colonial civil servant, native expert and scholar, through whom his skills and products would be showcased for the Western viewer.³⁵ The relationship between the clay-modeller and his local subjects, on the

³⁴ In the context of the colonial exhibitions for which he commissioned, collected and catalogued objects, T.N. Mukharji has featured in two main studies: in Mathur (2007), 67-69, and in Supriya Chaudhuri, "Exhibiting India: Colonial Subjects, Imperial Objects and the Lives of Commodities", in: *Commodities and Culture in the Colonial World*, ed. Supriya Chaudhuri et al., London 2018, 58-73.

³⁵ While a figure like T.N. Mukharji is referred to by Peter Hoffenberg in his essay on the Calcutta International Exhibition as a reminder of "[...] the important and active role that South Asians played in

one hand, and between him and the Indian exhibition commissioner, on the other hand, would often be played out on terms that would never quite fit the representational frames of colonial ethnography. T.N. Mukharji's textual detailing of the careers and works of these clay modellers, like his recounting of his encounters with them in the "strange country" that was England, would occasionally let slip small traces of a different engagement.³⁶ In ending this essay, let me briefly bring T.N. Mukharji in his role as exhibition commissioner face to face with the objects he placed on display and the human exhibits he encountered from his own country and culture.

[32] Intercepting the rich testimony of his visit to the 1886 exhibition in the imperial metropolis³⁷ with his detailed survey of the 'art-manufactures' of his country, what continuously emerges are the tensions of Mukharji's own positioning as loyal government servant and as an educated and enlightened 'native' within the imperial exhibitionary apparatus and its institutions of knowledge-production. It is through a new sensitivity of both observing and being observed by those he calls the "natives of England", of both being exhibitor and becoming exhibit in the Indian pavilions, that he both returns his anthropologising gaze on English men and women and grapples with his own subjectivity as a "native" of India. This is a subjectivity that threatens to dissolve the boundaries between him and the peoples and objects on display and creates a new hiatus between him and his colonial peers and colleagues. What Mukharji therefore does, is to strategically turn around the colonial term "native" as one that may now "command respect" – as a word that, in bringing together all the 'races', religions and castes of his countrymen, has "a miraculous effect in India". This becomes a crucial manoeuvre, a colonial elite's way of converting a racially-tainted term into one of a new national identity, not without a small sense of self-irony.

*What a world of meaning [...] does that word "native" contain in it? Like one of those magic words of old, it is performing wonders in all parts of the land, wherever its true significance is understood. For Sir, we are all "natives". We were never "natives" before [...but] we are all "natives" now [...]. Fair or dark, we in India are all "natives". The Kashmiri is a native, the Madrasi is a native; the Muhammadan is a native, the Hindu is a native; the Brahman is a native, the Sudra is a native; the prince is a native, the peasant is a native. I am native, thou art native, he is native. Sir, we are all natives.*³⁸

studying, documenting and representing the commercial wealth and architectural and artistic heritage of India", and the way their contributions were made both in India and England (186), Mukharji's more complex subjectivity is revealed in Saloni Mathur's account of his visit to the Colonial and Indian Exhibition in London (Mathur [2007], 67-69). A fuller analysis of Trailokyanath Mukharji's agency and career, especially the way he tried to reconcile his professional life as a colonial civil servant and exhibition commissioner with his parallel creative life as a writer of Bengali literary fiction, remains to be undertaken.

³⁶ This is subtly pointed out by Supriya Chaudhuri in some parts of the descriptions in Mukharji's *Art-Manufactures of India*, see Chaudhuri (2018), 70.

³⁷ T.N. Mukharji, *A Visit to Europe*, with a preface by N.N. Ghose, 3rd edition Calcutta 1902 [first published Calcutta 1889].

³⁸ Mukharji (1902), 131-132.

[33] Through many such passages, the address to a rhetorical "Sir" becomes Mukharji's half-mocking gesture of obeisance to the colonial master to whom we owe a new empowered and unified sense of being "native". At the same time, he struggles to gain for himself and his countrymen of diverse ethnicity, education, occupation and religion that European equivalence of mastery of knowledge over their own land – a mastery of knowledge that alone was seen to be the salvation and the way forward in delivering themselves from the subjugation to a new empowered state of being "native".

*The European knows more of our mountains and rivers than we do; he knows more about the seas that gird our land on three sides; [...] he knows more about the capabilities of our land; in everything he knows more than we do of our own country. Then he knows better how to use that knowledge for the benefit of man. We do not know these things; hence we are "natives". And necessarily the only way of getting over being a "native" is by our being equal to the European. I say again that our people have that high order of intellectuality which if rightly directed will enable them to equal if not surpass the Europeans.*³⁹

[34] It is in this deeply ambivalent mode of both self-congratulation and self-deprecation of their status of being "natives" that this Indian exhibition commissioner and expert of the country's 'art-manufactures' reinforces the hierarchy of knowledges that elevates his own "intellectuality" above the alternative knowledge of materials, practices and production processes of the many artisan groups he was studying and documenting – even as he wishes to hold these all together as emanating from his own ilk, as belonging to his own national kith and kin. In the process, he continually secures his own vantage position vis-à-vis the "native exhibits" (human and material) that he was assembling under his paternal care and guardianship, and keeps his own tight handle over the refraction of gazes, in the exhibition pavilions he toured, between the viewer and the viewed, the connoisseur and the maker. We also see how the labour and expertise that went into the making of the 'art-manufactures' he promoted is replicated in T.N. Mukharji's own intellectual labours of compiling a definitive anthology on these manufacturing forms, skills and processes.

[35] Encased in his protective tutelage, the craft practices and practitioners of his country that he surveyed and documented spoke to him as much of the improving mission of colonial art administration as of the living traditions of a nation that lay waiting to be studied and recovered by those of his class and education. T.N. Mukharji's *Art-Manufactures of India*, in the segmented body of 'native' knowledges and spectacular object worlds it had brought into being, can be seen here as standing at the cusp of an early moment of transition from imperial to national custodianship. The decade of the 1880s that marked a high tide in the scale and opulence of these international exhibitions and the peak of T.N. Mukharji's career in imperial administration was also the time of the first stirring of an organised nationalism in British India and the founding of the Indian National Congress. It is important to situate both the author's travelogue, *A Visit to Europe*, and his compendium on the *Art-Manufactures of India* (the best-known and most widely cited of his many scholarly exhibition handbooks) within the period's nascent undercurrents of a national self-realisation – and to consider how they together presage a subtle shift from the

³⁹ Mukharji (1902), 131-132.

structures of imperial paternalism and pedagogy to the new forms of nationalist protection and promotion of this rediscovered domain of the country's handicrafts.⁴⁰ While it stands in line with George C.M. Birdwood's compendium *The Industrial Arts of India* (1880) and enlarges its scope to a greater variety of traditional manufactures produced over a larger territorial stretch, the *Art-Manufactures of India* can be also seen as an opening into the coming era of a more militant Swadeshi nationalism with its valorised "cult of the craftsman" and its new affective claims on the moral universe of crafts.⁴¹

⁴⁰ This transition at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries to a new wave of Orientalist and Swadeshi championship of the nation's handicrafts and rural arts has been partially dealt with in my book, *The Making of a New 'Indian' Art: Artists, Aesthetics and Nationalism in Bengal*, Cambridge, UK 1992, especially with reference to the writings of Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy (1897-1967), and has been more fully explored in Abigail McGowan's book, *Crafting the Nation in Colonial India* (2009), where she pursues the centrality of the ideals of craftsmanship in Gandhian nationalism since the 1920s and in the ideology of the post-Independence nation-state.

⁴¹ Mathur (2007), 49-51.

Acknowledgements

My thanks to Sandipan Mitra for helping me access the image of the indigo factory modelled in clay by Rakhal Das Pal (Fig. 15).

About the Author

Tapati Guha-Thakurta is currently an Honorary Professor of History at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta (CSSSC) and was its director from 2012 to 2017. She has written widely on the art and cultural history of modern India, and has held several visiting fellowships abroad. Her three main books are *The Making of a New 'Indian' Art: Artists, Aesthetics and Nationalism in Bengal, c. 1850–1920* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992); *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Postcolonial India* (New York City: Columbia University Press, and Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2004); and *In the Name of the Goddess: The Durga Pujas of Contemporary Kolkata* (Delhi: Primus Books, 2015). She is also the author of some exhibition monographs – among them, *Visual Worlds of Modern Bengal* (Calcutta: Seagull, 2002); *The Aesthetics of the Popular Print* (Birla Academy of Art and Culture, Calcutta, 2006); and *The City in the Archive: Calcutta's Visual Histories* (CSSSC, Calcutta, 2011) – and has co-edited three anthologies of essays – *Theorising the Present: Essays for Partha Chatterjee* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011); *New Cultural Histories of India: Materiality and Practices* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013); and *How Secular is Art? On the Politics of Art, History and Religion in South Asia* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

Special Issue

Buket Altinoba, Alexandra Karentzos and Miriam Oesterreich, eds., 'Gesamtkunstwerk' World's Fair. Revisioning International Exhibitions, in: *RIHA Journal* 0300-0312 (31 May 2024), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11588/riha.2024.2>.

License

The text of this article is provided under the terms of the Creative Commons License CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0.

