

कहानियाँ Kahaniyan



South Asian Stories trail

Explore personal reflections, research and memories from a collaboration with the local community of Bengali, Indian and Pakistani cultural heritage through these objects.



Kahaniyan means stories in Hindi



Drinking Fountain

Grand Gallery, Level 1

This cast iron drinking fountain was created by Walter MacFarlane's Glasgow-based Saracen Foundry in the 1880s. At the 1851 Great Exhibition, the Indian Pavilion had been extremely popular, raising an interest in Indian design which had a big influence on British art and culture in the decades that followed.

British colonies in turn started using cast iron pieces for railways, lamps, fountains. It's likely that the drinking fountain design was inspired by the culture of one of the British colonies, and the influence of South Asia and Indian artistic styles can be seen in its intricately decorated dome and arches, and design motifs such as flowers, griffins and cranes.

Kohl pot

Patterns of Life gallery, Level 1

Kohl pots have a special place in South Asian homes – every household has them and women use them to adorn themselves. The intricate design on this pot is a reminder of the tree having strong roots, symbolising femininity. In the past, Muslim women and men applied smoky kohl, not only for protective and religious purposes, but also to make their eyes look attractive and mysterious.

mothers making kohl at home. It was applied on the eyes simply using a finger or thin wooden needle. Kohl was especially applied to new-born babies, brides and grooms to protect them from *buri nazar* (evil eye).”

“It was a family affair when we saw our grandmothers and



Scarf from Sindh, Pakistan

Patterns of Life gallery, Level 1

This scarf shows the beautiful mirror and appliqué needlework of the people of Sindh, Pakistan. It is also common in western parts of India, Gujarat and Rajasthan. Carefully cut pieces of cloth are stitched on the base fabric in a geometrically arranged pattern, and mirrors add reflection to the brightly coloured base. Costumes embroidered with such ornaments are used during cultural festivities.

For community members, the scarf evoked fond memories of sitting on a *charpai* bed on a sunny winter afternoon, chatting and sewing their work with beautiful patterns and mirrors. “Every time we display Sindh pieces in our home it takes us back to our childhood tales, our culture and our home.”



Paisley shawl: the buta design

Fashion and Style gallery, Level 1

The Paisley design is one of the most famous textile patterns of Scotland. But for South Asians it is known as the humble *buta* – the most celebrated motif of weavers, which has its origins in the valleys of Kashmir. It is believed to have been inspired by an ancient Zoroastrian (Iranian) design representing life and fertility. “We grew up with this design adorning our garments, shawls, bridal wear, jewellery, and henna tattoos.”

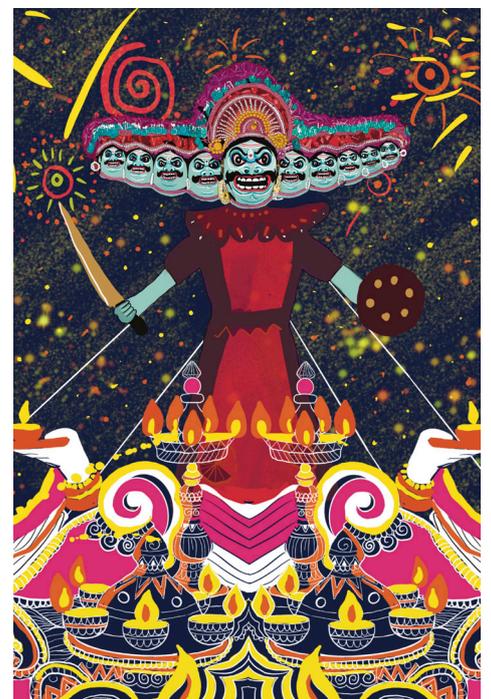
British manufacturers sought to replicate this design in the 19th century. William Moorcroft, an English businessman, brought expertise from Kashmir to support the manufacture of cheaper imitation shawls in Britain, including at factories in Paisley. The design gained popularity all over the world making ‘Paisley’ famous, but today the origins of this design and its skilled craftspeople should be better acknowledged.

Mask of the demon king Ravana

Performance and Lives gallery, Level 3

This stunning mask of the ten-headed demon king Ravana is connected to the festival of Navratri, which is a celebration over nine days during the months of October and November. The festival celebrates the victory of the exiled Lord Rama over the learned but evil demon king Ravana who had kidnapped his wife Sita. His ten heads represent his intelligence.

A young community member commented: “In the end the bad guy is killed (Ravana) and people from the village light up the path with oil lamps to help Rama and Sita safely get back home.” This is why people in India and South Asia celebrate Diwali, the festival of lights, at the end of Navratri.



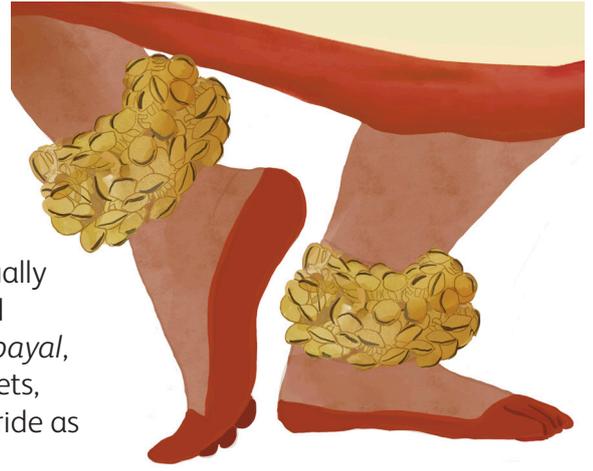
Dance anklets

Performance and Lives gallery, Level 3

South Asian women have worn *ghungroos* (anklets with bells) for centuries, making them an integral part of South Asian culture. The jingling 'chum chum' sound served as a reminder that there was a woman in the house. It was also a way for wives to attract their husbands.



Ghungroos are considered sacred to every Indian classical dancer, who would worship them before tying them to their legs for a performance. A child or a novice dancer may start with 50 bells and will gradually add more as they mature and progress in their ability. Silver *payal*, a sleeker version of these anklets, are gifted by a groom to his bride as a symbol of union and love.

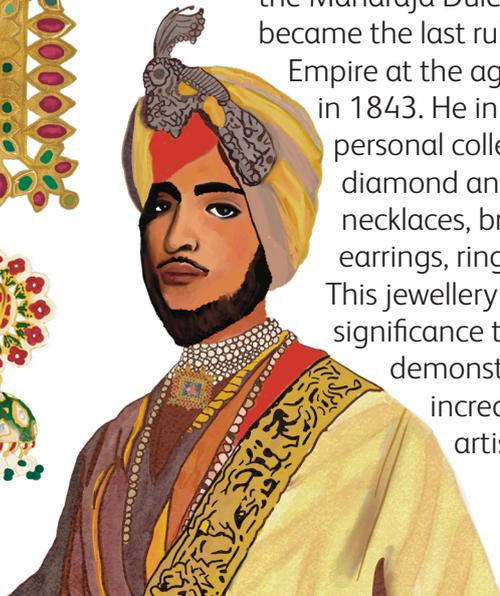


Maharaja Duleep Singh jewellery

Artistic Legacies gallery, Level 5

This jewellery once belonged to the Maharaja Duleep Singh who became the last ruler of the Sikh Empire at the age of five years in 1843. He inherited a large personal collection of rare diamond and emerald necklaces, bracelets, earrings, rings, and tiaras. This jewellery is of special significance to all Indians, demonstrating the incredible skills of the artisans who created

them, but is also a reminder of the British rule and colonisation of India, and the wars, miseries and exploitation that came with them. Duleep Singh was taken away from his mother and brought to Britain when he was 16 years old under the wings of the British Raj, who stripped him of his Sikh and Indian identity.



Poster of Yama – the sinner's punishment

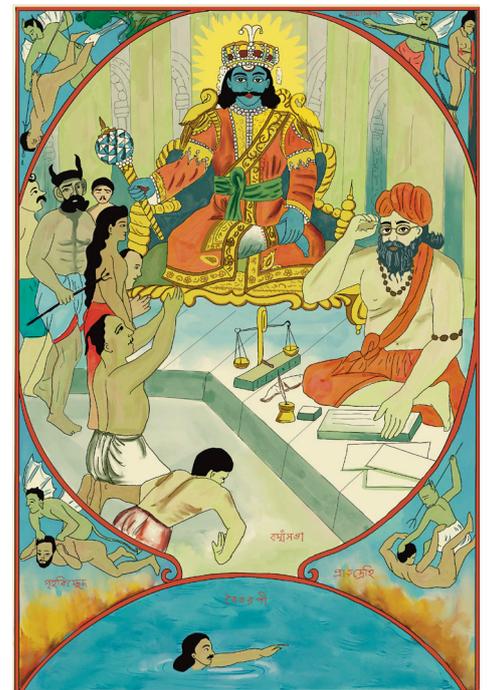
Inspired by Nature gallery, Level 5

This 19th-century poster of Yama, the Hindu Lord of Death, has a caption in Bengali which translates as *The Sinner's Punishment*, or, *In Jompuri*, meaning in Death's Palace.

The poster shows the dead soul's predicament in hell and a central panel with Yama (Jomraj) as a *rishi* or saint like figure, sitting in judgement on his throne. The other panels show how sinners will be

punished, according to the sin they have committed. The sinners need to go through the apt punishment for them to be reincarnated according to their deeds. The belief in reincarnation is shared by Hindus, Jains and Buddhists.

For a European audience, the Yama poster echoes descriptions of Hell and Purgatory in the Old Testament.



Hindu Goddess Durga

Traditions in Sculpture gallery, Level 5

This elegant bronze figure of Devi (goddess) Durga is seen slaying the buffalo demon Mahishasura. In Sanskrit, Durga means the inaccessible or impassable. The other half of Shiva, a principal deity in Hinduism, Devi represents not only the combined powers of the three Goddesses Lakshmi, Kali, and Sarasvati but also the divine feminine energy known as *shakti*, which she uses against



the negative forces of evil and wickedness.

The festival of Durga, known as Dusshera, is celebrated by Hindus wherever they live. Massive alluring idols of the deity are carved and painted by expert sculptors showing her standing erect riding her lion, holding the long spear ready to slay the demon.

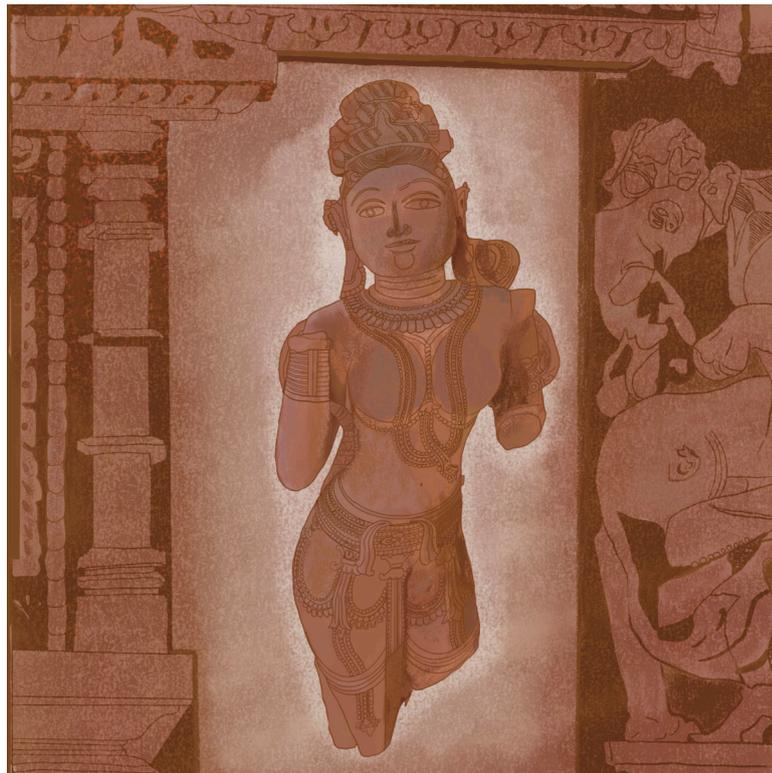
Surasundari stone sculpture

Traditions in Sculpture gallery, Level 5

This stone carving is a Surasundari – a beautiful spirit being called Yakshini – from the temple of Khajuraho in Madhya Pradesh, in central India. It is believed that those who pray to these spirits receive favours or rewards, for example good fortune in business, agriculture or love-life.

The stone-carving tradition in India is one of the richest in the world, with skills handed down from father to son.

The carvings on the Khajuraho temples were influenced by the ancient Sanskrit text on health and wellbeing, the *Kamasutra*. Only ten percent of the carvings are erotic in nature, and the rest show daily activities or teach on healthy living as described in the text.



This trail has been curated and written by members of the South Asian community organisation Networking Key Services (NKS), with support from National Museums Scotland staff and the Nancie Massey Charitable Trust.

