



Silver Tea ware, Silver Gilded, Repoussé, Lucknow, c.a. 1870-90

Starting from the 17th Century, rare and exquisite silver pieces were created in both the Portuguese and British colonies, but the surge in demand for silver produced in India primarily occurred in the latter half of the 19th Century, particularly in British colonies.¹ Indian silver is characterised by its exceptional quality and variety, with each region showcasing its own unique styles, themes, and forms. Common items include salvers, trays, jugs, ewers, cups, beakers, boxes, vases, tea caddies, goblets, scroll holders, and particularly tea ware and bowls. These objects were often designed for Western purposes—such as calling card cases and tea services—resulting in recognisable forms adorned with strikingly exotic motifs. As noted by Vidya Dehejia, “These Indian workshops adapted ‘native’ ornamental styles to Western forms to create a unique hybrid.”²

Lucknow, located in Northern India, has a long and rich tradition of silversmithing that dates back to the 10th century, significantly influenced by Islamic culture.³ From 1858 onwards, there was a marked increase in the production of Indian-style silver objects shaped specifically in European styles, with exceptional craftsmanship evident in pieces created between 1860 and 1920.⁴

¹Pushkin's, *Indian Silver – History & Silversmiths*, Pushkin's (London), accessed August 26, 2025, <https://pushkins.com/indian-silver-full-article>

²Shax Riegler, “Indian Silver for the Raj,” *The Magazine ANTIQUES*, February 1, 2009 (October 2008 issue), in *Delight in Design: Indian Silver for the Raj* exhibition at Columbia University, accessed August 26, 2025, *The Magazine ANTIQUES*.

³Harish K. Patel and Veronica J. McDavid, “Lucknow,” *Indian Silver during the Raj: Lucknow, Silver from India 1850–1920* (blog), accessed August 26, 2025, *Silver from India 1850–1920*

⁴Vidya Dehejia, *Delight in Design: Indian Silver for the Raj* (Ahmedabad: Mapin Publishing, 2008).

Lucknow silver features three notable motifs: the jungle, showcasing groves of date palms along with various animals like dogs, bears, deer, and birds; decorative coriander leaves and flowers; and hunting scenes involving lions, tigers, and horses.⁵ After 1900, silversmiths in Lucknow began to draw inspiration from other regions of India, such as Kutch, Madras, Calcutta, and Kashmir. Nevertheless, the distinctive makers' marks typically incised on the bases of this hybrid silverware serve to confirm their origin from Lucknow.⁶

This particular object under discussion features a beautifully bulbous body that tapers subtly towards the top, culminating in a flat, attachable lid. Its overall globular form is reminiscent of exquisite tea ware or perhaps a luxurious storage pot, indicative of its utilitarian yet decorative nature. Crafted from solid silver or a high-quality silver plating, the item not only showcases durability but also reflects fine craftsmanship. Employing the technique of repoussé, the surface of the container is adorned with intricate raised reliefs that have been meticulously formed by hammering from the reverse side, resulting in a tactile and visually engaging design.

The body is segmented into several decorative panels, each one narrating a rich tapestry of flora and fauna, with artistically rendered motifs that include flowering trees, delicate vines and lush foliage interspersed among various animals. Among the featured fauna are elephants, deer, rabbits, tigers and dogs, each delicately integrated into the composition.

Fish motifs, artistically rendered and arranged around the upper band of the container, serve both decorative and functional purposes as they also function as sculpted feet, providing stability and a

⁵Stephen Markel, *Mughal and Early Modern Metalware from South Asia at LACMA: An Online Scholarly Catalogue* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2020), accessed August, 26, 2025, <https://archive.org/details/mughal-metalware>.

⁶Vidya Dehejia, *Delight in Design: Indian Silver for the Raj*.

touch of whimsy to the piece. Some panels feature huts, which evoke a sense of rural or pastoral life unique to the region.

Notably, the artefact is crowned with a richly detailed finial in the form of a standing elephant, a motif that is reminiscent of other exquisite teapots or water pitchers acquired from Lucknow, exemplifying the region's distinct artistry. (an image has been attached)
This exquisite water pitcher has been recorded by Vidya Dehejia in her book, under the section, *Lucknow: The Jungle and the Hunt*, with the Image no. 77.



Additionally, the row of fish, which can be observed in the decorative band, symbolises the lineage of the Nawabs of Oudh and pays homage to the traditional designs favoured by local Oudh silversmiths. This distinctive fish pattern is corroborated by its frequent appearance in border decorations, reinforcing the piece's provenance from Lucknow. (an image has been attached)⁷



The presence of huts, trees and elephants in the design is further testament to the artistic inspirations drawn from similar teapots from Lucknow that echo these themes. (an image has been attached)⁸ The tree present at the centre is exactly reflected in the object under presentation.



⁷Shax Riegler, "Indian Silver for the Raj," *The Magazine ANTIQUES*, February 1, 2009 (October 2008 issue), in *Delight in Design: Indian Silver for the Raj* exhibition at Columbia University, accessed August 26, 2025, *The Magazine ANTIQUES*.

⁸Harish K. Patel and Veronica J. McDavid, "Lucknow," *Indian Silver during the Raj: Lucknow, Silver from India 1850–1920* (blog), accessed August 26, 2025, *Silver from India 1850–1920*.

Elevating the container are three meticulously sculpted legs designed in the shape of fish, adding an ornate touch while also imbuing the piece with symbolic significance, thereby enhancing its overall aesthetic appeal and cultural richness.

Therefore, all the admiration directed towards the other silver artefacts of Lucknow enhances the authenticity and intrinsic value of this remarkable piece.