



**A FINE KUTCH SILVER TEAPOT WITH RAISED FLORAL AND SWIRLING VINE DECORATION**

**Possibly Bhuj, Kutch, Western India, ca. 1870 - 1890.**

REGISTERED ANTIQUITY - NON-EXPORTABLE ITEM.

This silver teapot was produced in the 19th century, Kutch, colonial India. Repoussé and chasing techniques were used to shape this teapot. Repoussé gave rise to the flora in low relief while chasing carved the depths. The elongated neck, dome top with a finial, an elaborate handle, and an elegant spout, makes the teapot monumental.

This teapot might have belonged to a larger tea service set, with a milk jug and a sugar cup. Such sets were much desired and used at the end of the 19th century in India as well as Europe. English and Dutch material cultures from the 19th century show traces of similar objects. The joy of conquer paired with the delight of consuming the 'Oriental', was at its peak in the second half of 19th century. This silver teapot is a product of that desire. The Custom of tea drinking has been a part of British culture, which gave birth to tea set of teapot, milk jug, and sugar cup made in silverware. On ceremonial or celebratory occasions, silver teapots were to illuminate the cheerful spirit of the morning or afternoon tea. Europeans or Indians of Anglicised taste had an eye for silverware of this kind; in fact, they commissioned many of such silver pots in a variety of shape, subjects and style.

Ornamental raised foliage runs through the entire visible surface of the teapot. An inverted S-shaped handle holds the pot with the upper end curling inward and the tail end turning outward. The curved spout terminates gracefully with a V-cut opening. Insulators in the handle are to prevent any heat flow when a tea is poured, keeping it suitable for holding and serving. A dome-shaped hinged lid is attached to the top, upon which a polished ball-shaped finial is mounted. The dome is covered in worked foliage. The end of the dome is encircled with upward acanthus leaves followed by a silver convex ring. This ring of the lid matches the upward facing ring attached to the neck. Right below the neck opening is another row of downward acanthus leaves.

The base of the pot is spherical with a circular stand, like most teapots but the neck is unusually elongated. At the center of the pot exterior, a shield-shaped medallion protrudes, which is left unmarked. Such medallions were often engraved with the name of the patron in many other similar pieces or sets. In contemporary visual culture, similar shapes also held coats of arms. The interplay of oxidised black low areas and shining silvery highlight areas enhances the brilliance of silver, making it look further lustrous.

The Victoria and Albert Museum in London has many similar pieces and sets. A particularly notable set made by Oomarsee Mawjee is available to view online, resembles the technique and appearance of foliage of this piece, though the forms and details vary a little. The British Museum has a large collection of silverware made by the same silversmith from Bhuj, as well as many detailed drawings of this silverware, which illustrate the preparatory drawing phase in the process of making these silver pots.

Vidya Dahejia, in *Delight in design: Indian silver for the Raj*, referred to similar silverware from 1880-90, made in Kutch. Kutch became a significant centre in India for decorated silverware during the second half of the 19th century, alongside Kashmir, Lucknow, and Calcutta.<sup>1</sup> The craft of silverware and its trade particularly flourished in Kutch during the reign of Mirza Raja Sawai Khengarji Bahadur.<sup>2</sup> The elaborate foliage in view typically resembles the Kutch style, particularly of famous Oomarsee Mawjee and the less-known Raghavji Mawjee.

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<sup>1</sup> Dehejia, Vidya. *Delight in Design: Indian Silver for the Raj*. Ahmedabad: Mapin Publishing, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.josephcohenantiques.com/collections/kutch-silver>

The high silver content and minimal portion of other metals helped retain the malleability of silver. Once the basic form of the pot was brought into shape after preliminary repoussé of the foliage, black wax and resin were poured inside the hollow spaces.<sup>3</sup> This mixture creates a semi- hard core, which allows chasing without perforation and also provides support for the fine-tuning of the repoussé work. After completion, the filling material was melted down.

The silver sourced from Bombay, Mecca, or Zanzibar, worked by artisans of Kutch, rendered Mughal foliage, and an unmarked medallion of European shape make this artefact a product of the global confluence of culture.<sup>4</sup> A handle with insulators, a hinged lid, and a long spout make this pot ideal for serving tea. This teapot blends the boundaries between art, everyday objects, design, and aesthetics. The rhythmic curling foliage entraps the viewer's gaze, holding it within the web of the swirling foliage of this artefact. Yet this is not just a mere ornate teapot of visual delight but an artefact of history, culture, consumption, and craftsmanship.

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<sup>3</sup> Object Description, Accession Number :- IS.162, 163 and 164-2007, <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O140165/teapot-mawji-oomersi/>

<sup>4</sup> Wynyard R.T. Wilkinson, Indian Silver 1858-1947, 1999: The Chameleon Press Ltd., 68