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Silver-Clad Indian Table

India, probably Bengal Presidency, 19th century

Wood, silver

71cm high, 68cm diameter

Stock no.: A5634

This round table from India is a marriage of indigenous Indian silver cladding and European furniture tastes. Chasing, the technique of working sheets of soft metal over hard wood, had been applied to furniture in India since the Mughal period (1526-1707). Thrones, footstools, and even beds were intricately clad with silver and gold. Recollections from visitors to Indian courts confirm this. Charles Pridham found that the eighteenth-century throne of the Kings of Kandy (Sri Lanka) was made of 'wood, entirely covered with a thin gold sheeting.'¹ A guest of the Maharaja of Patiala in the 1930s, Rosita Forbes, marvelled at being given a 'bed plated in gold'.²

When European colonisers arrived, finding that Indians mostly sat on low stools or the floor, they commissioned chairs. They provided local craftsmen with models of European furniture in popular styles of the day, including Regency, Neoclassical, and in this case, Rococo. The Indian furniture was then clad in silver and gold according to local tradition. Examples of fine tables like this one are, however, rare.

The wooden frame, often teak (*Tectona grandis*), is covered with sections of silver sheet about 1mm thick, and affixed to the body with nails. The sheet metal was first hammered to shape from the back, then fine detail chased onto the front, in a process called repoussé.

The ledge of the table is ornamented with alternating roses and fleurs-de-lys, which are both common

European heraldic symbols. The feet of the table are three lions' heads. Silver chased furniture was frequently worked with insignia, whether Indian royal insignia or British heraldic symbols during colonial times. Though it changed frequently, the East India Company at one point had as its crest the fleur-de-lys, lion, and rose. A throne chair in the collection of the V&A (accession no. [IS.10 to C-1983](#)) made in the Bengal Presidency, has similar rococo motifs. It has been attributed to Baudh due to the peacocks on the chair's back, which form the cipher of the Royal House of Baudh.

[1] Pridham, Charles. *An...Acount of Ceylon...*, 1849, cited in Jaffer, Amin. *Furniture from British India and Ceylon: A Catalogue of the Collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Peabody Essex Museum*. 1st ed. London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 2001. p. 226.

[2] Forbes, R., *India of the Princes*. London: 1939. 127, cited in Jaffer, *op.cit.* p, 226.