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PRESS RELEASE

When Indian Flowers Bloomed in Distant Lands: Masterworks of Trade Textiles 1250 -1850

Get swept into a fascinating world of 700 years ago, when Indian cloth was the beating heart that fuelled east-west trade. Sailboats crammed with cargoes of cotton cloth journeyed from Indian ports to far-flung markets and returned with goods in demand back home.

The extraordinary phenomenon of “trade cloths” is played out at the exhibition ***When Indian Flowers Bloomed in Distant Lands: Masterworks of Trade Textiles 1250 - 1850*** at Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu (CSMVS). As the title suggests, the show presents rare textiles that sailed centuries ago to foreign lands - lands with tastes, cultures and customs entirely different from our own. In time, these Indian textiles became proud and prized parts of their own regional histories. Since these cloths were destined for export, such examples have not survived in India. The exhibition is brought together by CSMVS in collaboration with founders Praful and Shilpa Shah of the TAPI Collection. It aims to ensure that the story and historical legacy of India’s remarkable textiles will not be forgotten in their home country.

Dominating the display are the exquisite, large-size flowering-tree chintz palampores produced on the Coromandel Coast that captivated Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries, but only until one's gaze falls on the stunning 5- and 6-metre-long heirloom cloths from the islands of Indonesia. These cloths date from as early as the 13th to 16th centuries, before the European trading companies arrived on the scene to discover that it was Indian cloth - not bullion - that was the secret currency needed to procure the much sought-after spices. If ‘chintzes’ or ‘calicoes’ found fame in Europe for the outstanding technique of dyeing washable, bright patterns, it was the double-ikat silk patolas from Gujarat that cast a spell on the rajas and sultans of Southeast Asia.

Visitors will also have a chance to view rare fragments excavated in Fustat, near present-day Cairo in Egypt, as well as prestigious ‘sarasa’ remnants of pouches and wrappers used in tea ceremonies by *daimyos* or feudal lords of Japan. Do not leave without checking out the stellar Kashmir shawls that were once such objects of desire

among European nobility that Napoleon's first wife Empress Josephine owned no less than 60 of them.

The popularity and soaring demand for Indian textiles in the west had profound consequences as, by the 19th century, mills in Europe had found ways to produce imitations of Indian patterned cloths, eventually leading to the mechanization of textile production. In so doing, Indian textiles helped sow the seeds of the Industrial Revolution.

When Indian Flowers Bloomed in Distant Lands: Masterworks of Trade Textiles 1250 -1850 in the TAPI Collection celebrates the successful completion of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu's centenary, (formerly known as the Prince of Wales Museum), making it an experience no Mumbaikar can afford to miss. The show is open at the Coomaraswamy Hall, CSMVS from February 3rd to March 15th, 2023.

Please contact us for more information, images, and to coordinate editorial stories, interviews, and listings: csmvsmumbai@gmail.com | csmvs.in

- Divya Pawathinal (Assistant Curator)

Notes to the Editor:

About the TAPI Collection

Founded by the husband-and-wife duo Praful and Shilpa Shah, 'TAPI' (Textiles and Art of the People of India) is a private collection named after the river Tapi in Surat, their ancestral home.

Thematic exhibitions from the TAPI Collection have been held at national and international museums over the past twenty years (The V&A Museum London, the Art Institute Chicago, the National Museum, New Delhi, the CSMVS, Mumbai, the L.D. Museum, Ahmedabad and the Birla Academy of Art, Kolkata).

About the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya (CSMVS)

The CSMVS Museum, is a premier museum and cultural institution of India. It is a not-for-profit organisation opened to the public in 1922 and is governed by a Board of Trustees. Designed by George Wittet, a British architect in 1909, the museum building is a Grade I Heritage Structure and is a fine example of the Indo Saracenic style of architecture. The Museum houses a 70,000-strong multicultural collection of artefacts from Asia and Europe.