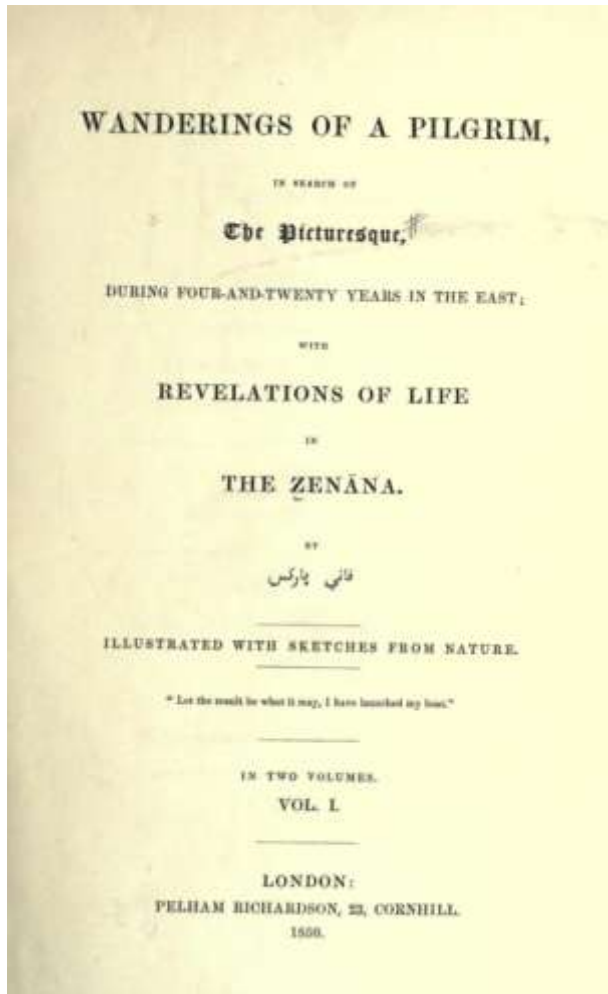


## Fanny Parks (1794 – 1875): her 'Grand Moving Diorama of Hindostan', her Museum, and her Cabinet of Curiosities

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Please note that this case study was first published on [blogs.ucl.ac.uk/eicah](https://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/eicah) in June 2014. For citation advice, visit: <http://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/eicah/usingthewebsite>.



### Introduction

Figure 1. Title page for *Wanderings of a Pilgrim in Search of the Picturesque*, Vol. I (London: Pelham Richardson, 1850). <https://archive.org/details/wanderingsofpilg01parluoft>

On 9 December 1834 an exuberant, rather plump, Englishwoman who had celebrated her fortieth birthday the day before set off up the Jumna river from Allahabad in the Northern Provinces in India in a two-masted pinnacle (sailing boat), the *Seagull*, her only companions the twenty-two-strong Indian male crew. Her husband, the Collector of Customs in Allahabad, would join her for a few days if he could get leave from his employer, the East India Company. Following the *Seagull* was the cook boat containing goods for the voyage: live sheep, goats and chickens; wine and other provisions; servants included a dhobi (washer-man); and the cook boat crew of nine. They travelled from six o'clock in the morning

to seven in the evening, anchoring at night and with armed watchmen on shore. The frequent storms, the contrary current, the treacherous rocks in the river, the uncharted sandbanks and the risk of being plundered by robbers – all combined to make this a hazardous but thrilling journey for a woman who craved excitement to counter the boredom of life for a childless Englishwoman in the Indian mofussil (countryside). Who cared what colonial society thought of this enterprise? Certainly not the indefatigable wanderer, Fanny Parks.

Just over forty-one years later, on 17 February 1876, Fanny's first cousin, Clement Robert Archer Esq, presented a copy of *Wanderings of a Pilgrim in Search of the*

*Picturesque*,<sup>1</sup> Fanny's account of her travels in India, to the India Museum.<sup>2</sup> Clement had been present at her death, aged eighty-one, two months earlier, on 21 December 1875. One month after this first gift another relative, J. Coutts Antrobus Esq of Eaton Hall, Congleton, presented three sculptures to the same museum: two pieces of carved dark grey sandstone, now in the British Museum collection (see one in figure 12 below), which Fanny had obtained from a fisherman living on the banks of the Ganges, and a piece of white carved stone acquired by Fanny in Pooree (now Puri) in 1844.<sup>3</sup> These three sculptures, together with a large and disparate collection of other artefacts – Fanny's cabinet of curiosities – gathered together by Fanny and Charles Parks during their twenty-three years' residence in India, were brought back to England in the *Essex* which left Calcutta at the end of September 1845, and arrived at Folkestone after a stormy – but fast – voyage at the beginning of January 1846.

The cabinet of curiosities and Fanny Parks' published recollections of her travels in India appear to have given her a public legitimacy and authority that she lacked before she went to the sub-continent. As a young woman she was a typical product of her background and upbringing in a military family, 'eminent in beauty as in talent... wounding many a heart', before finding a role for herself: that of traveller, collector and ethnographer.<sup>4</sup> India and her experiences there changed her. 'Whatever the wandering traveller says, he does so from having seen that of which he speaks' was the oriental proverb she quoted in the opening pages of *Wanderings of a Pilgrim*, emphasising the veracity of her enterprise.<sup>5</sup>

Historian Maya Jasanoff argues that collectors 'shared one crucial characteristic: all of them used objects to advertise, hone or shape their social personae. Collecting was a means of self-fashioning'.<sup>6</sup> Fanny's enthusiasms appear in her own account so unfeignedly artless as she gathers people, customs and curiosities to herself on her travels through India that it is hard to see a conscious self-fashioning in her actions, certainly while she was living in India.<sup>7</sup> It was not until she returned to the metropole that her collection lent her authority in an almost exclusively masculine society. This was when she made full use of her Indian adventures: they gave her an entrée to a social world to which she might not otherwise have been admitted and they were the basis on which she formed 'a life independent of her own life'.<sup>8</sup> The objects with which she surrounded herself both validated her and enhanced those experiences.

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<sup>1</sup> Fanny Parks, *Wanderings of a Pilgrim in Search of the Picturesque during four-and-twenty years in the East; with revelations of life in the Zenana*, 2 vols (London: Pelham and Richardson, 1850).

<sup>2</sup> The India Museum closed in 1879 and its collection was shared between The South Kensington Museum (later The Victoria and Albert Museum), Kew Gardens and The British Museum. This copy of the book, with its inscription "Presented by C. Archer, Esq, February 17<sup>th</sup> 1876 to the India Museum" is now in the British Library collection, IOL1947b170.

<sup>3</sup> J. Coutts Antrobus was married to Fanny Swetenham, daughter of Fanny Parks' first cousin Edmund Swetenham who lived for many years at Cloud End in the Himalayan hill station Mussoorie, and who died at Dehra Dun in 1863.

<sup>4</sup> *Blackwood's Lady's Magazine*, January 1852, 196.

<sup>5</sup> Introduction, *Wanderings*, Vol I, vii.

<sup>6</sup> Maya Jasanoff, *Edge of Empire: Conquest and collecting in the East 1750-1850* (London: Fourth Estate, 2005), 7.

<sup>7</sup> 'A friend has made me a present of the most magnificent cow-tails... They are great curiosities, and shall go with my collection to England.' *Wanderings*, I, 238. See also 227, 253.

<sup>8</sup> *Wanderings*, II, 496.

Studies of collecting as a phenomenon, from the age of the ‘cabinet of curiosity’ to the present, have focused overwhelmingly on male collectors – men whose adventures, professional lives and wealth gave them privileged access to exotic plants, animals, artwork and objects. There is a much more detailed understanding of the Company men whose collecting helped to furnish the British country house and later many British museums.<sup>9</sup> This case study, however, illustrates the way in which one Company woman took advantage of her colonial experiences to collect, describe and display Indian material culture.

### Who was Fanny Parks?

Frances Susanna Archer was born on 8 December 1794 in Conwy, North Wales, and baptised there on 22 January 1795. Her father was Captain William Archer, formerly of the 16<sup>th</sup> Lancers, her mother Ann Archer (née Goodhew). She had an older sister, Anne Augustine, who, like Fanny, lived in India. On 25 March 1822, Fanny, twenty-seven years old, talented and beautiful, married twenty-three-year-old Charles Crawford Parks, a Writer in the East India Company.



Arriving in Calcutta in November 1822 after a non-stop sea journey of five-and-a-half months, Fanny and Charles rented a house in Chowringhee. Charles attended Fort William College and worked as assistant to the Collector of Sea Customs, Calcutta while waiting for a more permanent and better-paid position up country. Fanny learnt how to run a house with a multitude of servants, enjoyed riding her Arab horse on the Maidan at dusk after the heat of the day, took lessons in Hindi and Sanskrit, and started to explore the intricacies of Indian culture. She also became ‘very anxious to visit a *zenāna*’, and to witness the lives of the high-class Indian women kept in seclusion behind its closed doors.<sup>10</sup>

Figure 2. ‘A Bengalee Woman’, *Wanderings of a Pilgrim in Search of the Picturesque*, Vol. I (London: Pelham Richardson, 1850). <https://archive.org/stream/wanderingsofpilg01parluoft#page/60/mode/2up>

Charles Parks has been described as ‘a mild

<sup>9</sup> See Sarah Longair and Cam Sharp-Jones, ‘The Attar Casket of Tipu Sultan’, *The East India Company at Home, 1757-1857*, <http://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/eicah/the-attar-casket-of-tipu-sultan/> (2013).

<sup>10</sup> *Wanderings*, I, 59.

and conscientious official' whose wife 'was plainly too much for him'.<sup>11</sup> Fanny was thirty-five years old in 1830 when they moved to the mofussil, to Cawnpore, where Charles had the post of Acting Collector of Customs. Childless, with servants aplenty (in 1831 Fanny calculated that they had fifty-seven, and needed an additional fourteen in the hot months), there was little to occupy such a spirited and adventurous woman in Cawnpore's limited social setting.<sup>12</sup>

Fanny's restlessness found a temporary cure in travel, preferably on horseback: 'Roaming about with a good tent and a good Arab [horse], one might be happy for ever in India,' she wrote in her journal in 1838. 'Oh! the pleasure of vagabondizing over India!'<sup>13</sup> Fanny Eden, sister of Governor-General Lord Auckland, commented acidly that '[Mrs Parkes] has a husband who always goes mad in the cold season, so she says it is due to herself to leave him and travel about... she informed us she was an independent woman and was going to travel to Simla by herself – which sounded very independent indeed.'<sup>14</sup> Fanny herself never mentioned Charles's reaction to the weather, hot or cold; from remarks in her journal, it's clear that it was Fanny who suffered most from the heat – and boredom.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, in September 1832, Charles was appointed Collector of Customs at Allahabad, a permanent posting. Fanny, temporarily back from her travels, enthused about the place which was an enormous improvement on Cawnpore. There were 'dinner-parties more than enough; balls occasionally; a book society; some five or six billiard-tables, a pack of dogs...and (how could I have forgotten!) fourteen spinsters!'<sup>16</sup> What's more, there were officers aplenty to ride with, even if she and her horse ended up in quicksand or she was inadvertently dunked in the river, adventures she related with great gusto in her journal.<sup>17</sup> She was clearly a woman whose company young officers sought, in spite of Fanny Eden's barbed opinion that she had 'once been a beauty' but was now 'abundantly fat and lively'.<sup>18</sup>

But the dinner parties of Allahabad were not enough for Fanny, and for the rest of her time in India she travelled frequently and extensively. In August 1835 she went to Fatighar where she met – and became friends with – the Baiza Bai, ex-Queen of Gwalior, returning to Allahabad in October. By July 1836 once again she was finding life 'weary and heavy... one's mind and body feel equally enervated'.<sup>19</sup> In September 1836 she was invited to accompany Sir Henry Fane's party and to act as interpreter for the Baiza Bai in Benares, then carried on to Calcutta and did not return to Allahabad until March 1837. By August 1837 she was bored again ('nothing to relate in the monotony of an Indian life at home...I... must go to the hills to recruit my weary frame') and in September she started preparing for a march 'up the country', leaving in December

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<sup>11</sup> Narindar Saroop, *Gardner of Gardner's Horse: 2<sup>nd</sup> lancers: Indian Army* (New Delhi: Palit and Palit, 1983), 144.

<sup>12</sup> *Wanderings*, I, 209-10.

<sup>13</sup> And, she forbore to add, many servants. *Wanderings*, II, 191-2.

<sup>14</sup> Fanny Eden in Janet Dunbar, *Tigers, Durbars and Kings: Fanny Eden's Indian Journals 1837 – 1838* (London: John Murray, 1988), 106.

<sup>15</sup> 'Nothing is going forward, stupid as possible, shut up all day, languid and weary...' *Wanderings*, I, 303.

<sup>16</sup> *Wanderings*, I, 238.

<sup>17</sup> *Wanderings*, I, 247

<sup>18</sup> *Tigers, Durbars and Kings*, 106.

<sup>19</sup> *Wanderings*, II, 57.

1837.<sup>20</sup> Lord Auckland and his sisters, Emily and Fanny Eden, were en route up country too, stopping in Allahabad in early December. Fanny was introduced to the sisters, then became something of a camp follower, shadowing the Auckland camp wherever it went on its leisurely progress, her presence irritating the Edens and prompting a satirical account by (the very thin) Fanny Eden in one of her letters home:

How odd of me not to have told you that the very first person I saw at the very first ball at Meerut was Mrs Parkes. How she got there nobody knows and nobody will ever know. The day after we got here they got up a morning review for us – blew up mines and took a fort, and not only a fort but Mrs Parkes, for as the smoke blew off she was discovered riding. If she were not so fat I should say she was something supernatural. My spirit is broke about her. I dare say we shall find her settled in our home at Simla and shall not have strength to turn her out.<sup>21</sup>

Fanny Eden's comments may have been underpinned by a certain amount of envy of her namesake's apparent freedom from the claustrophobic demands that were her lot as the Governor-General's sister as well as the frustrations of the provincialism of the British in India with whom she was obliged to socialise.<sup>22</sup>

In September 1838, while Fanny was travelling in the Himalayan foothills, she received word from Charles that her father had died the previous May.<sup>23</sup> She returned to Allahabad immediately and sailed by the next available ship from Calcutta, arriving in England in May 1839. England, to Fanny, 'looked so wretchedly mean, especially the houses',<sup>24</sup> while Fanny, to her mother – who had not seen her daughter for seventeen years – had changed completely: 'My child, I should never have known you, – you look so anxious, so careworn.'<sup>25</sup> Another sign of how different England was from India – and how much India had changed Fanny – was revealed to her when she visited a horticultural show in Plymouth: 'I went to the place alone, and the people expressed their surprise at my having done so – how absurd! as if I were to be a prisoner unless some lady should accompany me – wah! wah! I shall never be tamed, I trust, to the ideas of propriety of civilized Lady Log.'<sup>26</sup> It is ironic that it was precisely by travelling to India, where Britons believed women to enjoy few rights, that Fanny was to enjoy exceptional freedom of movement.

Her mother died in December 1841 and Fanny remained in Europe until early 1843 when she heard that Charles was ill in Cape Town and went to look after him; they had been apart for four years. They returned to India, and finally to Allahabad, by December 1844. As Charles' health did not improve, he applied to go to England on furlough and

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<sup>20</sup> *Wanderings*, II, 124.

<sup>21</sup> *Tigers, Durbars and Kings*, 133. Fanny Parks' account of this episode is rather different: 'I like playing at soldiers, and it gave me an excellent idea of an attack, without the horror of the reality... The sun was high and very hot, -- we rode home as fast as our horses could carry us...' (*Wanderings* II, 196).

<sup>22</sup> 'There are moments when a feeling of desperation comes over me to think I must dream this dream so distinct from all my past life, for five years...' Fanny Eden, quoted in Dunbar, Introduction, *Tigers, Durbars and Kings*, 4.

<sup>23</sup> For an 1840 map of the India see: <http://www.geographicus.com/P/AntiqueMap/India-black-1840>.

<sup>24</sup> *Wanderings*, II, 330.

<sup>25</sup> *Wanderings*, II, 331.

<sup>26</sup> *Wanderings*, II, 334.



they left India nine months later, in September 1845. They would never return. Charles did not recover from the illness that brought him back to England. He died in 1854 while Fanny lived on for another twenty years. She died, aged eighty-one, in 1875 of 'shingles and exhaustion' at her home in Cornwall Terrace, Regent's Park.<sup>27</sup> She was buried in Kensal Green cemetery where she shares a grave with her husband See figure 3).<sup>28</sup>



Figure 3. Fanny and Charles Parks' grave, The General Cemetery of All Souls, Kensal Green.  
Image courtesy of Joanna Goldsworthy.

<sup>27</sup> 21 December 1875 at 7 Cornwall Terrace, Marylebone, London, in the presence of Clement R. Archer, first cousin. Death Certificate, General Register of Deaths, England.

<sup>28</sup> Grave No 5975, The General Cemetery of All Souls, Kensal Green, London.

## Wanderings of a Pilgrim in Search of the Picturesque



Figure 4. "The Camels were being branded for the Public Service and the Spider came to be marked also", *Wanderings of a Pilgrim in Search of the Picturesque*, Vol. I (London: Pelham Richardson, 1850).

Fanny represents herself as a large spider holding a book titled 'The Pilgrim'; books hanging from three camels' necks are titled 'Luard', 'Princes and People' and, interestingly, 'Afghanistan'. <https://archive.org/stream/wanderingsofpilg01parluoft#page/n13/mode/2up/search/camels>

Fanny and Charles settled first in St Leonards-on-Sea in Sussex on their return from India in 1845. The town, which had been farmland as recently as the 1820s, was developed as a seaside resort by James Burton, and it seems that Fanny and Charles were living in a seaside villa.<sup>29</sup> Fanny constructed her account of her travels in India by using her journals and the long letters she had written to her mother, finishing her tale with a revealing 'Farewell':

And now the pilgrim resigns her staff and plucks the scallop-shell from her hat, – her wanderings are ended – she has quitted the East, perhaps for ever: – surrounded... by the curiosities, the monsters, and the idols that accompanied her from India... the pleasure she derives from her sketches, and the sad sea waves, her constant companions, form for her a life independent of *her own life*.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> *Wanderings*, II, 496. For seaside British communities of returned 'Indians' later in the century see Elizabeth Buettner, *Empire Families: Britons and Late Imperial India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), Chapter 5.

<sup>30</sup> *Wanderings*, II, 496.

Fanny had 'collected an empire' for herself that liberated her from the constraints of life in the metropole, and through the exotic objects she had acquired she gained an independence – 'a life independent of her own life' – that opened a new world for her.<sup>31</sup> Her detailed and valuable knowledge of another culture and her understanding of its social world – particularly that of the zenana, a world closed to men – gave her status in a metropolitan, masculine, society. Her collection, initially a jumble of 'the curiosities, the monsters, and the idols' she describes and that she acquired haphazardly, as the fancy took her, now assumed an importance as a discrete entity, allowing those British men and women who saw it to visualise their empire.<sup>32</sup>

*Wanderings of a Pilgrim* was published in a handsome two-volume edition in 1850, price £2 12 s 6d, illustrated throughout with Fanny's own sketches and paintings. The contemporary reviews of the book ranged from generous to ecstatic – 'Fresh, intelligent, and minutely interesting' (*The Court Journal*)<sup>33</sup>; 'This... is a very splendid, very attractive work' (*The Asiatic and Colonial Quarterly Journal*);<sup>34</sup> 'The tone of bold and careless frankness in which this interesting and instructive work is written, is singularly attractive' (*The English Review*);<sup>35</sup> '...one of the most beautiful monuments of genius, taste, feeling... without parade, ostentation, or intrusive aims at vulgar popularity...' (*Blackwood's Lady's Magazine*)<sup>36</sup> – to violently critical: 'The flippancy and levity... with which she refers to her own faith, savour more of the cock-pit than the boudoir... in future editions... we trust to see every thing undeniable indecent or profane carefully expunged from the work.' (*Calcutta Review*)<sup>37</sup>

Nowadays, however, it is Fanny Parks herself and other writers at that time who are grist for the mill of critics of colonialism, these critics using accounts such as *Wanderings of a Pilgrim in Search of the Picturesque* as examples of the way in which the British portrayed their colonial subjects.<sup>38</sup> But a focus on Fanny Parks as an avid collector of Indian material culture is a reminder that some men and women within the Company's ambit also engaged enthusiastically with multiple aspects of Indian society, seeking out meaningful ways of communicating with indigenous peoples and entering with enthusiasm into the Indian Ocean World even in the nineteenth century. Fanny shared her love for India with others through the journals and letters which were to be published as *Wanderings of a Pilgrim*; she painted and drew vivid scenes which were reproduced in her book; and she created a visual journey for the public with her 'Grand Moving Diorama of Hindostan'.

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<sup>31</sup> Jasanoff, 5.

<sup>32</sup> Maya Jasanoff, 'Collections of Empire: Objects, Conquests and Imperial Self-fashioning', in *Past and Present* No 184, 109-135 (August 2004), 112.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in *Grand Moving Diorama of Hindostan* (London, 1851), 72.

<sup>34</sup> *Grand Moving Diorama of Hindostan*, 72.

<sup>35</sup> *Grand Moving Diorama*, 72.

<sup>36</sup> *Blackwood's Lady's Magazine*, January 1852, 195.

<sup>37</sup> *Calcutta Review*, 15:30 (1851), 476-77.

<sup>38</sup> See, for instance, Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); K.N. Panikkar, 'History as a Site of Struggle', *The Hindu*, 15 August 2007.



## The 'Grand Moving Diorama of Hindostan'

In 1851, the year of The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations, Fanny instigated and funded the construction of a 'Grand Moving Diorama of Hindostan' which was staged at the Asiatic Gallery in the Baker Street Bazaar.<sup>39</sup> India, Britain's 'jewel in the crown', featured centre-stage at the Great Exhibition, the East India Company itself having been one of the most enthusiastic supporters of the enterprise from its inception. They saw the exhibition as an opportunity to astonish visitors with the exquisitely crafted riches from Britain's Eastern Empire.<sup>40</sup> They also saw it as a way of promoting a new self-image through the collecting and display of objects from the sub-continent.<sup>41</sup>

The Grand Moving Diorama of Hindostan offered not objects but vistas, visual evocations of the landscapes of India, specifically those seen from India's most sacred river, the Ganges. As such, it gave a context to the Great Exhibition's display of astonishing objects made in India. The description that survives makes it clear that Fanny's diorama was no run-of-the-mill affair and was modelled on the moving dioramas invented by Daguerre, the first of which was brought to England in 1823. Panoramas and dioramas were a popular attraction in the first half of the nineteenth century. While panoramas were essentially very large, realistic, paintings of a scene, dioramas, which also used painted backdrops, introduced a three-dimensional element to the viewing experience. Daguerre's diorama (see figure 5), first shown in Paris in 1822, was brought to London in 1823 and erected in a special building constructed in Regent's Park at a cost of £10,000.<sup>42</sup>

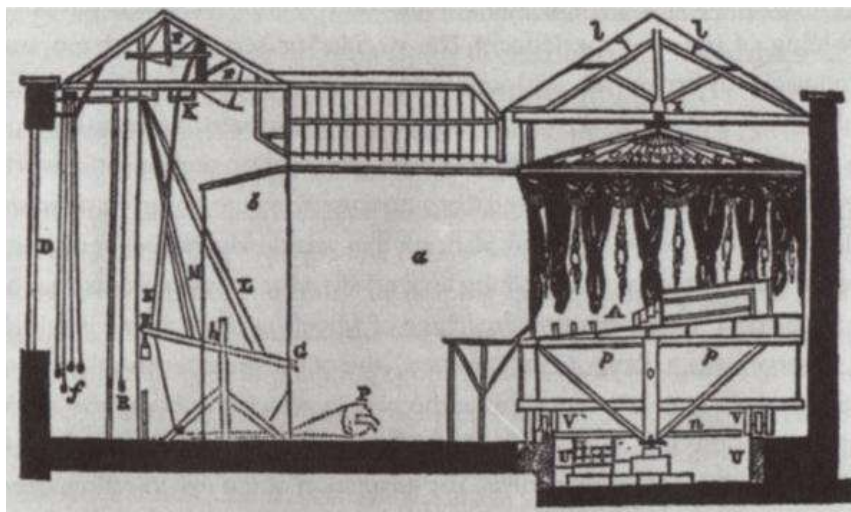


Figure 5. Patent image of the London Diorama, 1823.  
[http://cultureandcommunication.org/deadmedia/index.php/Daguerre's\\_Diorama](http://cultureandcommunication.org/deadmedia/index.php/Daguerre's_Diorama)

<sup>39</sup> *Grand Moving Diorama of Hindostan, displaying the scenery of the Hoogly, the Bhagirathi, and the Ganges, from Fort William, Bengal, to Gangoutri, in the Himalaya* (London: 1851). This handsome illustrated 64-page booklet was available to purchase, price one shilling, and contained short essays on each scene of the diorama.

<sup>40</sup> Lara Kriegel, 'Narrating the sub-continent in 1851: India at the Crystal Palace' in Louise Purbrick (ed), *The Great Exhibition of 1851: New Interdisciplinary Essays* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 149-50.

<sup>41</sup> Jasanoff, 'Collections of Empire', 122.

<sup>42</sup> Helmut and Alison Gernsheim, *L.J.M. Daguerre: The History of the Diorama and the Daguerreotype* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1956), 21.

The Daguerre diorama depended on clever lighting effects and a revolving auditorium that moved the sizeable audience (the Regent's Park diorama accommodated two hundred people; the original diorama in Paris could hold an audience of 350) from one scene to another. The enormous painted scenes (twenty-two metres wide by fourteen metres high), ingeniously lit with a system of screens and shutters and worked with pulleys and counterweights, were so convincing that few in the audience thought they were looking at a painting. Some dioramas had sound effects and songs, some a piano accompaniment, but the strongest impression was that of brilliant illusion caused by the subtly changing lighting.<sup>43</sup> Much was made of the fact that this was a form of armchair travel, the *Journal de Paris* of 22 July 1822 urging Parisians 'who like pleasure without fatigue to make the journey to Switzerland and to England without leaving the capital'.<sup>44</sup>

The success of Daguerre's diorama led to a mass of imitators and variations on the original idea (amongst them inventions with names such as Hydorama and Uranorama<sup>45</sup>), but even as late as 1851 a London guide book was still of the opinion that the original diorama was 'decidedly superior, both to the Panorama and the Cosmorama, in the fidelity with which the objects are depicted, and in the completeness of the illusion... and it is difficult for the spectator to persuade himself that he is only contemplating a work of art'.<sup>46</sup>

Fanny's 'Grand Moving Diorama' came in on the tail end of the craze but was nevertheless a success, in part due to astute marketing and publicity by Fanny and her collaborators. In a move that would endear her to philanthropic societies and educational reformers, *Blackwood's Lady's Magazine* reported that 'In the spirit of true liberality, Mrs. Park admits daily fifty or sixty children (gratis) from the National and Parochial schools of London; for the enlightenment of these young students in religion and useful learning'.<sup>47</sup> This largesse by Fanny may account for the florid prose of the same magazine's appreciation of Fanny's diorama:

The DIORAMA OF HINDOSTAN (where its immortalised originator is herself a frequent visitor), constructed in the splendid galleries recently annexed, at her own proper cost, to the Baker Street Bazaar, is confessedly the most extraordinary exhibition that has appeared in the present century... The painting is in the highest finish of body colour, realising the most exquisite atmospherical effects, and frequently affecting the senses by its sublime and almost incomprehensible truthfulness... In the course of less than two delightful hours, the spectator traces the river Ganges from Fort William, Calcutta, through Barrackpore, Benares, Mirzapur, Allahabad, and Hurdwar, to its source in the Himalaya mountains... There, at length... the mystical fount is seen to flow; the spirit of solitude fills the dread eminence, and a mysterious, unaccountable dread steals over the mind of the audience, in the presence of night descending on a scene, whose awful features may best be conceived from their effect on the nerves, as the curtain terminates the exhibition, and the breathless silence of

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<sup>43</sup> The booklet accompanying the "Diorama of the Ganges" mounted at the Portland Gallery in 1850 credits a pianist, Herr Adolph. *An Illustrated description of the Diorama of the Ganges* (London: Portland Gallery, 1850).

<sup>44</sup> Quoted in Gernsheim, 17.

<sup>45</sup> Gernsheim, 41.

<sup>46</sup> *London as it is to-day: Where to go and what to see* (London: H.G. Clarke & Co, 1851), 267.

<sup>47</sup> *Blackwood's Lady's Magazine*, January 1852, 198-9.

intense and gazing admiration.... The spectacle, now within reach of even the humbler classes, is, in fact, a boon to our population... we may now set foot on the banks of the Hooghly... through the instrumentality of one single, high-born, highly-gifted, persevering, and amiable woman, whose labours, '*non sibi sed aliis*,' have provided one of the more purely intellectual and heart-touching gratifications ever yet offered for the enlightenment, the entertainment, and, we might add, the honour of her nation.<sup>48</sup>

The 'Grand Moving Diorama of Hindostan' was sufficiently popular for it to be exhibited in Hull in 1853, although the transport of the equipment from London to Hull would have been a challenging exercise. An additional attraction to London visitors to the diorama was the promise that they would be 'allowed to inspect THE MUSEUM' – in other words, Fanny's Cabinet of Curiosities.<sup>49</sup>

### The Cabinet of Curiosities

The cabinet of curiosities first appeared in continental Europe in the mid-sixteenth century, largely collected by the nobility, Frances Bacon writing that they were 'in a small compass, a model of universal nature made private'.<sup>50</sup> They were essentially collections of artefacts, of anything that took the collector's fancy, in what Tony Bennett has described as the 'jumbled incongruity' that was in time supplanted and surpassed by the museum.<sup>51</sup> In Germany they were called *wunderkammer*, in Italy *stanzino*, and there were collections in Russia. Britain was 'notably absent' from early lists of universal cabinets, although the royal gardeners, father and son John and John Tradescant, gathered together a collection of objects in the first half of the seventeenth century that was to become the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford.<sup>52</sup> The first cabinets were literally that – a cabinet, in which small objects could be displayed. Later, as the collection grew, the display space was a specially designed room, until a collection became so big that it was impossible to show it in a single space. Sir Hans Sloane (1660 – 1753), for instance, collected over one hundred thousand objects and these were to form the basis of the British Museum collection.<sup>53</sup>

Tony Bennett extends Michel Foucault's exploration of power and knowledge relations seen in the confined spaces of the asylum, the clinic and the prison to include the cabinets of curiosity that were essentially under private ownership and had restricted access to the privileged few. With public displays such as that of the Great Exhibition of 1851, the dioramas, and the panoramas of the first half of the nineteenth century, these restricted spaces were opened up to the public.<sup>54</sup> In this way, Fanny's own Cabinet of Curiosities (or her Museum as she now termed it) was, after an initial period of

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<sup>48</sup> Blackwood's, 198-9.

<sup>49</sup> *Grand Moving Diorama*, title page.

<sup>50</sup> Quoted in Arthur MacGregor, *Curiosity and Enlightenment: Collectors and Collections from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century*, (London: Yale UP, 2007), 11.

<sup>51</sup> Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, theory, politics* (London: Routledge, 1995), 2.

<sup>52</sup> MacGregor, 17.

<sup>53</sup> Arthur MacGregor, 'The cabinet of curiosities in seventeenth century Britain' in Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor (editors), *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe* (London: House of Stratus, 2001), 201-15.

<sup>54</sup> Bennett, 73.

confinement in her own home to be seen by the few, made available to visitors to the Grand Moving Diorama of Hindostan and seen by the many.

Fanny's approach to collecting curiosities was unsystematic, driven more by an eclectic inquisitiveness, an enthusiastic grasping of the moment, than by the wish to build a well-organised group of objects illustrating defined aspects of Indian culture, as can be seen from the purchase of objects described below. Gavin Lucas has noted that, 'One of the most striking aspects of much early collecting is the lack of distinction among objects; curiosities formed a generic group, where items such as fossils, butterflies, tribal weapons, and antiquities might all jostle side by side in a collector's cabinet' but adds that, 'In a sense, the "fieldwork", if one can use the term, of early modern collectors largely involved visiting other collections and dealers, rather than travelling to the source of such curiosities', which was not true of Fanny who was usually to be found 'travelling to the source'.<sup>55</sup>

These souvenirs of her time in India became more important to Fanny on her return to England. They represented a lived experience, and could be organised for her own private satisfaction, or for public view. Susan Stewart, in exploring the meaning of the souvenir, points to the way in which it 'speaks to a context of origin through a language of longing... it is not an object arising out of need or use value; [but]... out of the necessarily insatiable demands of nostalgia.'<sup>56</sup> Fanny's nostalgic needs were met not only by her curiosities, but by her writing about them, by sharing her longing through the medium of her published journals, and reliving the events through her 'Grand Moving Diorama of Hindostan'.

Fanny appears to have begun collecting her curiosities in 1830, eight years after her arrival in India. She and Charles were by then living in the mofussil, in Cawnpore, a large station 'on a bleak, dreary, sandy, dusty, treeless plain, cut into ravines by torrents of rain' and unbearably hot.<sup>57</sup> The first item she acquired was a lathi, a large, heavy weapon made from bamboo, banded with iron, that had been confiscated from a man who had killed two others with it. Fanny reports that she took it 'as a curiosity', an impulse that seems to have motivated many of her object acquisitions.<sup>58</sup> Not long afterwards, in October 1830, she was given a set of Thugs' dice by the acting magistrate in Cawnpore, the Thugs having been arrested and executed for the murder of thirty-five travellers (see figure 6).<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Gavin Lucas, "Fieldwork and Collecting" in *The Oxford Handbook of Material Culture Studies*, ed Dan Hicks and Mary C. Beaudry (Oxford: OUP, 2010), 231-2.

<sup>56</sup> Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narrative of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), 135.

<sup>57</sup> *Wanderings*, I, 121.

<sup>58</sup> *Wanderings*, I, 132.

<sup>59</sup> The Thugs operated in gangs, strangling their victims. *Wanderings*, I, 151.





Figure 6. 'The Thugs Dice', *Wanderings of a Pilgrim in Search of the Picturesque*, Vol. I (London: Pelham Richardson, 1850).  
<https://archive.org/stream/wanderingsofpilg01parluoft#page/n223/>

Her last purchase, bought in Cape Town in 1845 when she and Charles were on their way back to England, having left India for good, was a 'kaross [cloak] of eighteen heads' for which she paid four pounds. 'It is very large and handsome,' Fanny wrote, adding that: 'With the exception of the kaross the Kafir is entirely unincumbered with clothing.'<sup>60</sup>

<sup>60</sup> *Wanderings*, II, 487.

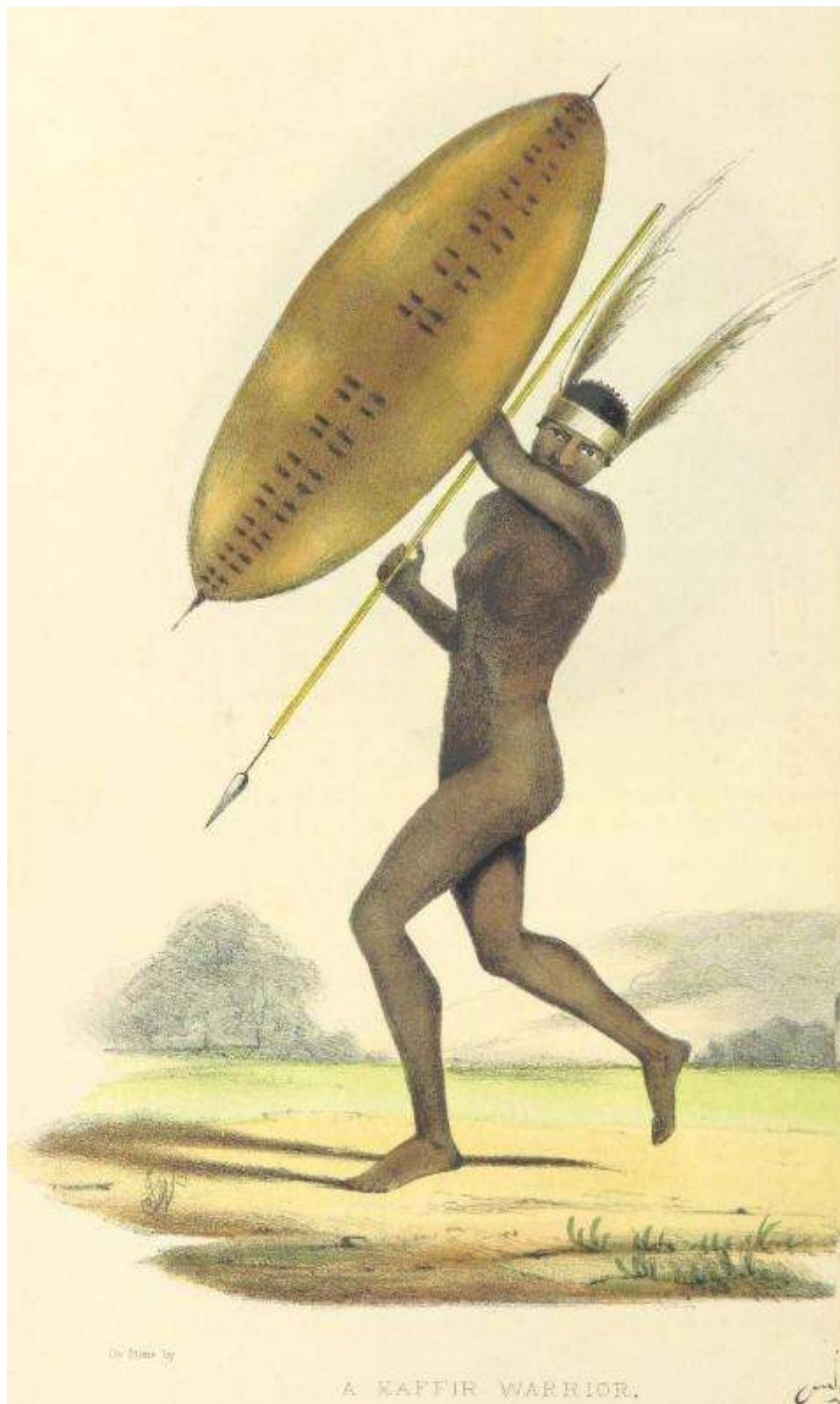


Figure 7. 'A Kaffir Warrior', *Wanderings of a Pilgrim in Search of the Picturesque*, Vol. II (London: Pelham Richardson, 1850).

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Most of her acquisitions, however, were made in Allahabad between the years 1831 and 1845, the great fair (now called the Kumbh Mela, although Fanny's term for it is Bura Mela) held annually on the banks of the Ganges at its confluence with the Jumna being

the site of enthusiastic commercial activity as well as intense religious worship – and where Fanny acquired many of her curiosities. This location, which even today is to Hindus one of the most sacred sites of their most sacred river, reaches a peak of religious significance every twelve years and is celebrated with a Maha Kumbh Mela which millions of pilgrims attend.<sup>61</sup>

On 2 February 1832 Fanny writes that she ‘went to the Bura Mela, the great annual fair on the sands of the Ganges, and purchased bows and arrows, some curious Indian ornaments, and a few fine pearls’.<sup>62</sup> But her ethnographic interest lies more broadly than curious objects, writing in the same paragraph about one of the *fakirs* (holy men) at the fair:

On the sands were a number of devotees, of whom the most holy person had made a vow, that for fourteen years he would spend every night up to his neck in the Ganges; nine years he has kept his vow: at sunset he enters the river, is taken out at sunrise, rubbed into warmth, and placed by a fire; he... is apparently about thirty years of age, very fat and jovial, and does not appear to suffer in the slightest degree from his penance.<sup>63</sup>

One year later, in January 1833, Fanny is once again at the fair, exclaiming at the area taken up by the booths, both for commercial and sacred purposes, and how it ‘attracts merchants from all parts of India... Very good diamonds, pearls, coral, shawls, cloth, woollens, China, furs, &c., are to be purchased.’<sup>64</sup> She relates an amusing story against herself, of how she bought a ‘remarkably fine’ pink coral necklace at this fair; and how some years later a friend of hers, a Mahratta lady, seeing her wearing the beads, exclaimed: ‘I am astonished a mem sahiba should wear coral; we only decorate our horses with it.’ Fanny immediately gave her necklace to her horse.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> The 2013 Maha Kumbh Mela attracted 100 million pilgrims to Allahabad over a two-month period, thirty million of whom are reputed to have entered the holy water on one day, February 10<sup>th</sup> 2013.

<sup>62</sup> *Wanderings*, I, 227.

<sup>63</sup> *Wanderings*, I, 227.

<sup>64</sup> *Wanderings*, I, 253.

<sup>65</sup> *Wanderings*, I, 254.

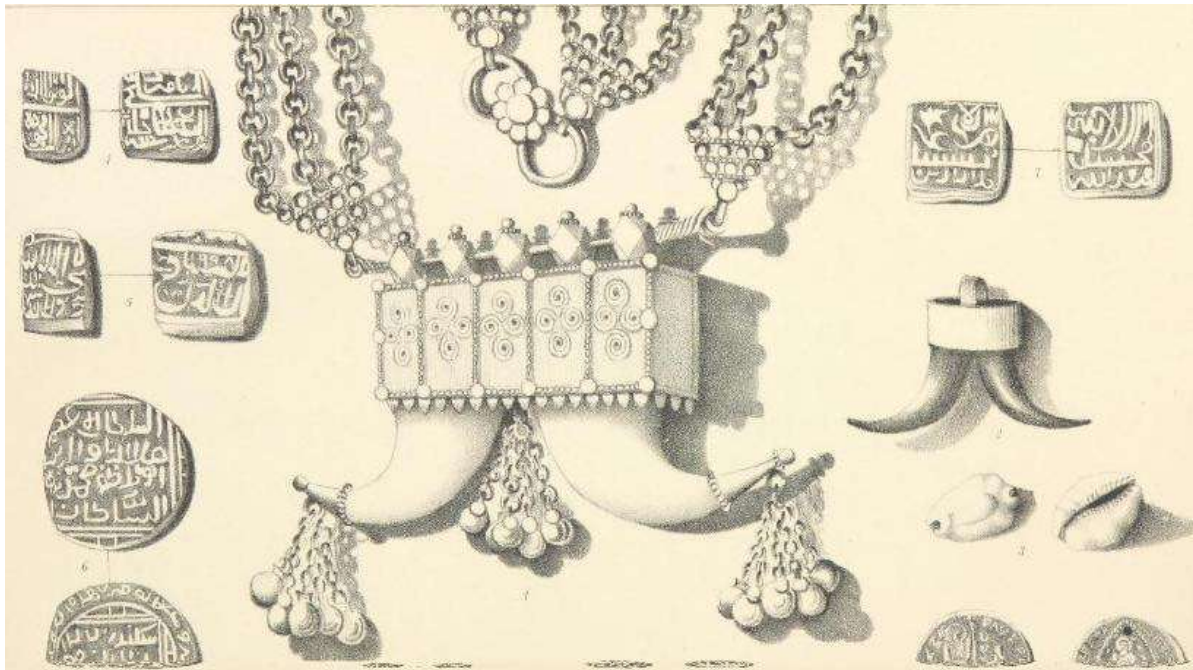


Figure 8. 'Superstitions of the Natives', *Wanderings of a Pilgrim in Search of the Picturesque*, Vol. II (London: Pelham Richardson, 1850).

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The fair took place over a period of two months, offering many opportunities for finding curiosities. Amongst other things, she bought 'a Persian writing-case, and a book beautifully illuminated, and written in Persian and Arabic: the Moguls beguile me of my rupees' as well as two musical instruments and other 'curious things; Hindoo ornaments, idols, china', she reflected.<sup>66</sup>

It was at this fair that Fanny bought her most splendid and beloved curiosity, a huge white marble statue of Gunesu weighing some three hundredweight, painted and gilded. Growing wise to the ways of the merchants, she 'sent a Rajput to the owner, and, after much delay and bargaining, became the possessor... The man had scruples with regard to allowing me to purchase the idol, but sold it willingly to the Rajput.'<sup>67</sup> Fanny relates that 'Although a *pukka Hindu*, Ganesh has crossed the *Kala Pani* or Black Waters, as they call the ocean, and has accompanied me to England. There he sits before me in all his Hindu state and peculiar style of beauty – my inspiration – my penates.'<sup>68</sup>

<sup>66</sup> *Wanderings*, I, 261, 262.

<sup>67</sup> *Wanderings*, I, 262.

<sup>68</sup> *Wanderings*, I, xi.



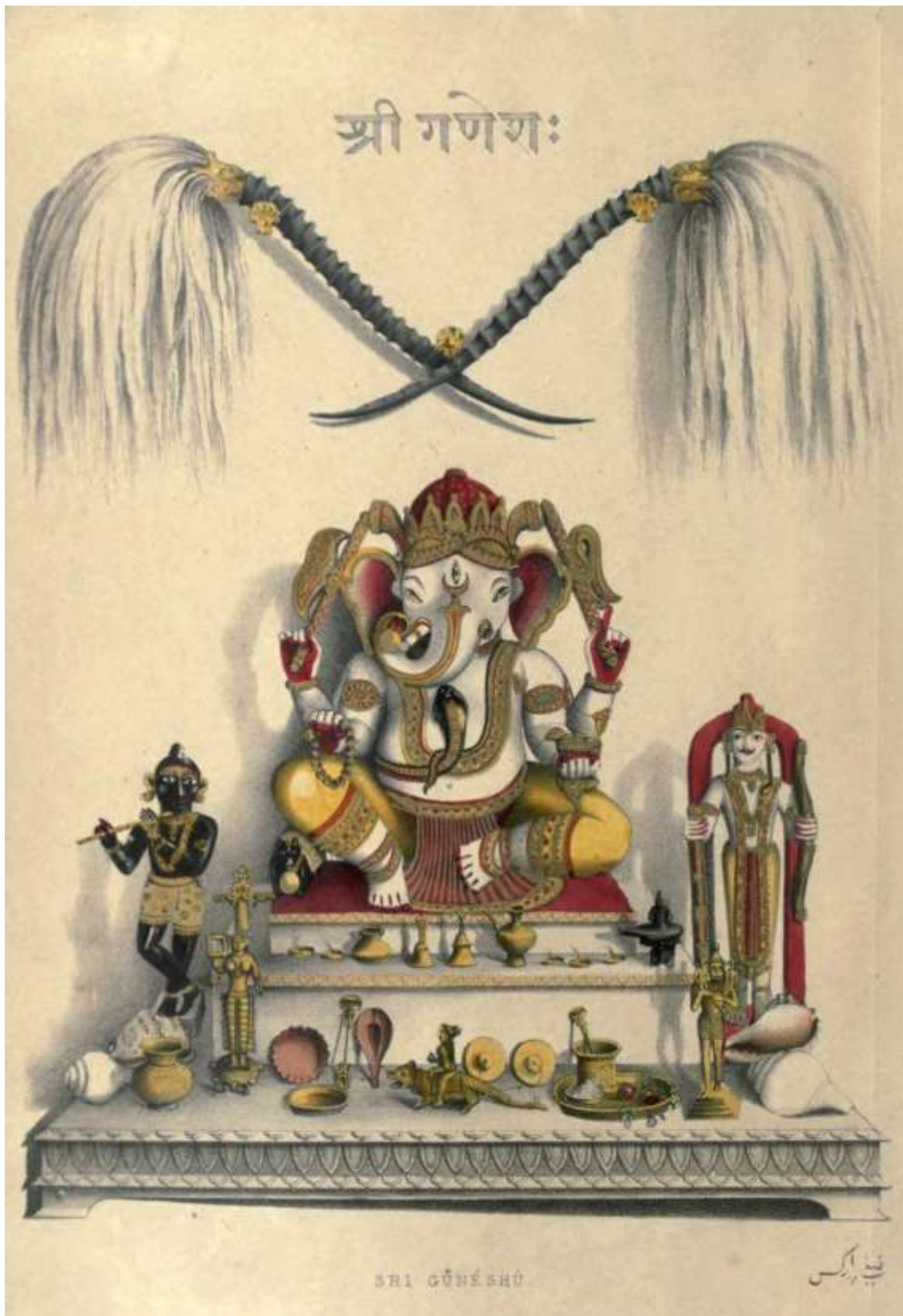


Figure 9. Frontispiece illustrating Fanny Park's collection of objects from the subcontinent. *Wanderings of a Pilgrim in Search of the Picturesque*, Vol. I (London: Pelham Richardson, 1850).

<https://archive.org/stream/wanderingsofpilg01parluoft#page/n5/mode/2up>

Fanny clearly gained a reputation for collecting curiosities and frequently describes objects she has been given. In May 1832 she writes that a friend gave her 'a pair of the most magnificent cow-tails, of the yak or cow of Thibet', adding that 'They are great curiosities, and shall go with my collection to England'.<sup>69</sup> These cow-tails feature in the frontispiece illustration to *Wanderings of a Pilgrim*, at its centre the huge marble Ganesh, and featuring the rarest and most interesting items from her museum – from the white marble statue of Ram to the 'brazen image of Gunga' represented by a woman sitting on an alligator (see figure 9). This idol is, according to Fanny, rare and valuable. 'Victory to Gunga-jee!'<sup>70</sup>

Another 'great curiosity' sent to her by a friend was 'a common dark brown-red shawl, worn by low caste women at Hissar. It is worked all over in large flowers, in orange silk; the centre of the flower contains a circular bit of looking-glass about an inch and a half in diameter... The appearance of the dress as the light falls on the looking-glass is most strange and odd... in what an extraordinary manner the light must be caught on all those reflecting circles of glass!'<sup>71</sup> Including this 'low caste' item in her collection shows that Fanny's interest in textiles extended beyond luxury items and demonstrates her wide-ranging interest in Indian culture. One can only imagine how astonished she would have been to see skirts of this mirrored material being worn by young European women in the 1960s.

In March 1832 the Parks' close friend Colonel Gardner stayed with the couple in Allahabad, much to their delight. While there, he taught them how to use an Indian bow and arrow. 'Archery, as practised in India, is very different from that in England,' Fanny tells us. 'The arm is raised over the head, and the bow drawn in that manner: native bowmen throw up the elbow and depress the right hand in a most extraordinary style... A very fine bow has been given to me, which was one of the presents made by Runjeet Singh to Lord Wm. Bentinck... when strung, it resembles the outline of a well-formed upper lip, Cupid's bow.' Fanny adds that she 'could not resist going continually into the verandah, to take a shot at the targets, in spite of the heat.'<sup>72</sup> This bow was undoubtedly one of the curiosities brought back to England, its origins adding lustre to the gift. Ownership of the bow, the narrative discourse of its acquisition, and the nostalgic memories it evoked, were more important to her than the object itself.<sup>73</sup>

Fanny's reputation as a collector brought visitors to her door, one being a German-Jewish convert to Christianity, Mr Wolff, who was keen to see her collection of Hindu idols.<sup>74</sup> Fanny had by this time been in India for eleven years and her knowledge of Hindu culture, the language and the rituals, had increased enormously since her arrival in the country. She would no longer feel, as she had early on in her residence in Calcutta, that she was 'much disgusted' by rituals such as the Churuk Pooja in which men swung from hooks pierced through their skin (even if she admitted that she was also 'greatly interested' by the sight) (see figure 10).<sup>75</sup> Her energetic pursuit of information had led

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<sup>69</sup> *Wanderings*, I, 238.

<sup>70</sup> *Wanderings*, I, 265.

<sup>71</sup> *Wanderings*, I, 239-40.

<sup>72</sup> *Wanderings*, I, 234-5.

<sup>73</sup> Stewart, *On Longing*, 136.

<sup>74</sup> *Wanderings*, I, 271.

<sup>75</sup> *Wanderings*, I, 26-8.

her to become an expert – albeit an undisciplined one – in anything that took her interest. This expertise would give her cultural leverage when she returned to the metropole, and is an example of one of the ways in which British women came to benefit from empire.

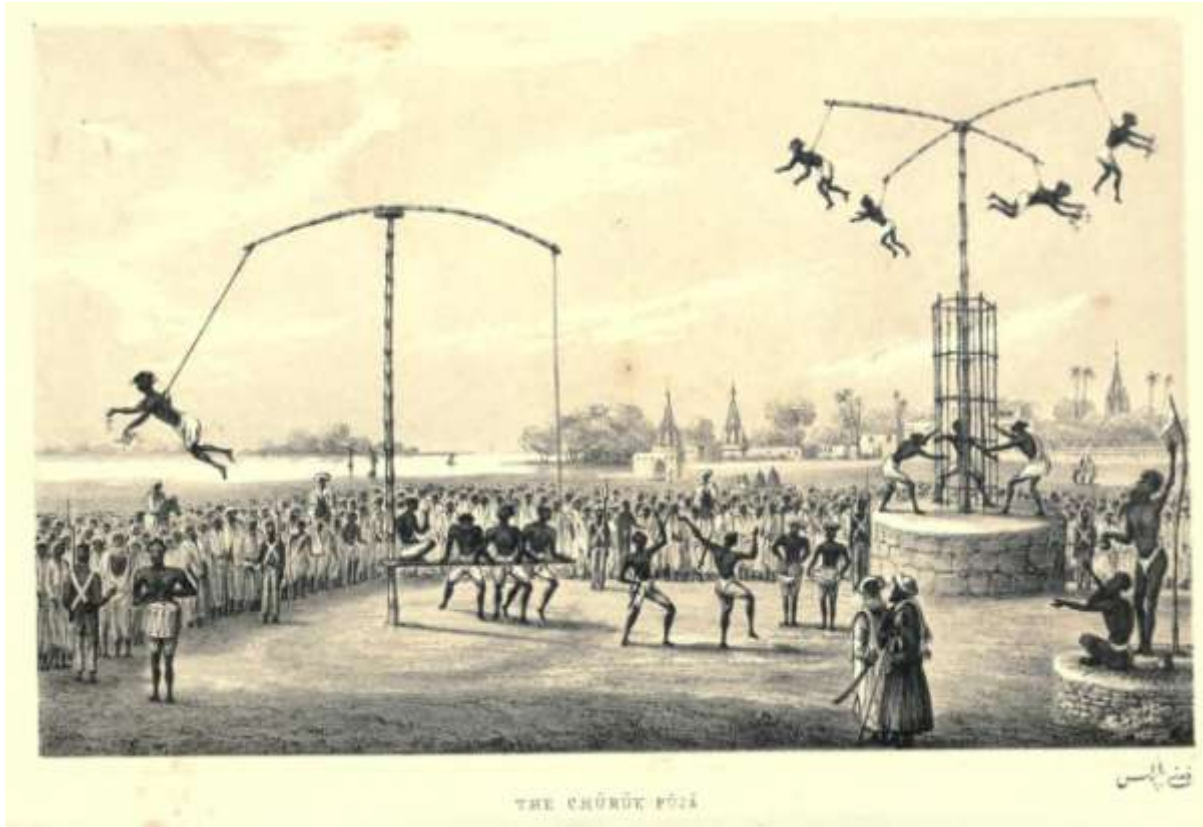


Figure 10. 'The Churuk Puja', *Wanderings of a Pilgrim in Search of the Picturesque*, Vol. I (London: Pelham Richardson, 1850).  
<https://archive.org/stream/wanderingsofpilg01parluoft#page/n77/mode/2up/>

One of the sculptures given to the India Museum on Fanny's death was a piece of white stone on which a figure had been carved.<sup>76</sup> Fanny's account of the circumstances in which she acquired it is very typical of her all-embracing enthusiasm. In March 1844 she and Charles were on their way back to India from Cape Town where Charles had been recuperating from some unspecified illness. The ship had dropped anchor off Pooree (now Puri) and Fanny had, as always, grasped the opportunity to go ashore. 'A carved stone was presented to me, brought from the ruins of a city of great extent, about forty miles from Pooree; its name has escaped my memory, but it appeared from the account I received to be full of curiosities; few persons, however, had ventured to visit the ruined city, deterred by the probability of taking a fever, in consequence of the malaria produced by the thick jangal by which it is surrounded. The stone is white, and upon it is carved the figure of some remarkable personage, above which is an emblem of Mahadēo.' She adds, demonstrating the jackdaw tendencies in her collecting, 'A very fine tiger's skin was also added to my collection. I carried off my prizes with great delight,

<sup>76</sup> V&A file MA/1/1108 India Museum Donations and Loans 1870 – 1879 N.F. Part II, item 11993 (original number 366).

and they now adorn my museum.’<sup>77</sup> It was this museum of curious objects that visitors entered after viewing the diorama.

The palimpsest of all these objects is clear, and even though their whereabouts today is unknown, Fanny’s brilliantly evoked images bring them vividly to the mind’s eye. But it is the curiosities that do have a known resting place in today’s metropole, albeit on the confined shelves of a museum’s basement, that are freighted with particular meaning. These are the two pieces of carved black stone that were presented to the India Museum on Fanny’s death and which are now in the British Museum collection (see one piece in figure 12).<sup>78</sup>



Figure 11. Image frame. Lower sections of an image-frame of Visnu in two parts showing attendant figures: (a) with a standing woman holding a musical instrument, and (b) with a standing woman holding a fly whisk; hand of Visnu above. Carved in dark grey sandstone. Twelfth century. Accession number 1880.35.39.a-b. (c) Trustees of the British Museum.

<sup>77</sup> *Wanderings*, II, 385.

<sup>78</sup> British Museum item registration number 1880:3539.a-b.





Figure 12. 'Three Satis and a Mandap near Ghazipur. *Wanderings of a Pilgrim in Search of the Picturesque*, Vol. II (London: Pelham Richardson, 1850).  
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Fanny's description of these is lacking hard information but it is her account of how she acquired them and her comments on the place, the people, and the culture in which she found them that is especially revealing about the coloniser and the colonised. Fanny and Charles are taking the slow boat upriver to Allahabad from Calcutta in November 1844 rather than travelling the more rigorous overland dak route. This journey gives ample opportunity for exploration. Fanny writes:

Lugaoed at Barragh, a small village on the right bank: climbed the cliff in the evening; a fisherman who resided there showed me two sati mounds on the top of it, – the one built of stone sacred to a Brahmān, the other of mud in honour of a Kyiatt. A *kalsā* is the ornament on top of a dome; there were two of stone, without any points on the satī mound of the Brahmān; and two of mud, decorated with points, and one small image, on that of the Kyiatt.

I gave a small present to the people, and took away one of the *kalsās* of mud as a curiosity: a number of broken idols in black stone had been dug up, and placed on the satī mound of the Brahman, – I was anxious to have two of them, and determined to ask the fisherman to give them to me. The old man told me with great pride that one of his family had been a sati, and that the Brahmāns complained greatly they were not allowed to burn the widows, as such disconsolate damsels were ready and willing to be grilled.....

The Brahmānī ducks are calling to one another from the opposite banks of the river... The wind is down, there is a soft and brilliant moonlight, – the weather is

really charming, and the moonlight nights delicious; from the high bank by the satīs one can see the stream of the Ganges below, glittering in its beams....

Ten P.M.; I have just returned from the satī mound, accompanied by the old fisherman, who brought with him two of the idols of black stone from the Brahmān's mound... the old man gave them to me the moment I asked for them; I gave him a present afterwards, therefore he did not sell his gods; but he requested to be allowed to bring them to the boats during the darkness of the night. He and his family are now the sole inhabitants of a little hamlet of five houses... his four brothers... are dead, and their houses, which are in ruins, are close to the mounds; the old man lives in the centre, with one young son and two daughters, and keeps his dwelling of mud in comfortable condition. They tell me fowls and *chakor* (the red-legged partridge) are abundant there; I was unable to procure the latter.<sup>79</sup>

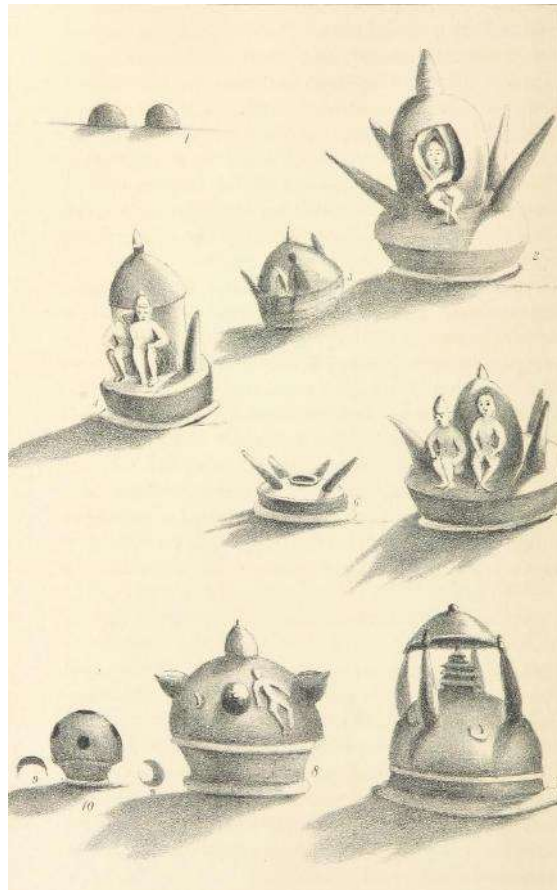


Figure 13. 'Kulsas', *Wanderings of a Pilgrim in Search of the Picturesque*, Vol. II (London: Pelham Richardson, 1850).

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I can picture Fanny, a rather stout lady now, not quite fifty years old, her head covered by an embroidered Indian shawl, her voluminous skirts hindering her progress as she puffs her way up the steep river bank to investigate the sati mounds. The old fisherman is thunderstruck by this vision of British colonialism, and even more so when she starts

<sup>79</sup> *Wanderings*, II, 417-8.

speaking to him in heavily accented Hindi. He has trouble understanding her as his first language is a local dialect, but nevertheless she charms him with her enthusiasm for the place. Though he is at first reluctant to answer her stream of questions about those women who brought honour to the family by becoming satī – she is an outsider, and a foreigner – to his surprise he finds himself talking to this strange woman who somehow reminds him of his long-dead bossy aunt. And when she says she wants to buy those broken pieces of stone that have been lying around for so long no one can remember where they came from or what they were for, he finds himself telling her he will bring them to her boat after dark. There are so many pieces, no one will notice and, in any case, he doesn't want word to get around that he has money to spare now. He thinks the foreign woman must be a bit mad. What would she want broken stone for? What use can she find for the kulsā? Does she plan to put herself on the fire? Pre-dawn next morning he goes down to the water for his morning pūjā and watches the strange woman's boat as it unties its lines and makes its way slowly up Mother Ganga. He wonders if he will ever see her again.

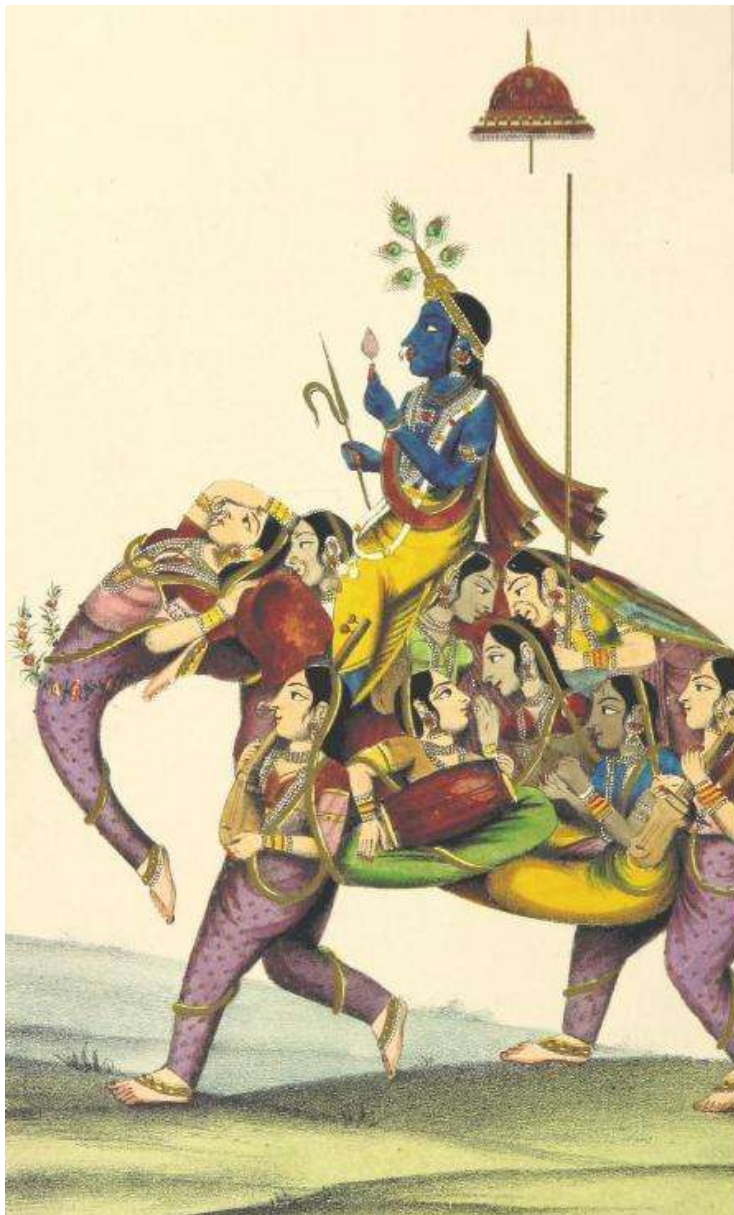


Figure 14, 'Kaniyajee and the Gopees', *Wanderings of a Pilgrim in Search of the Picturesque*, Vol. II (London: Pelham Richardson, 1850).  
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