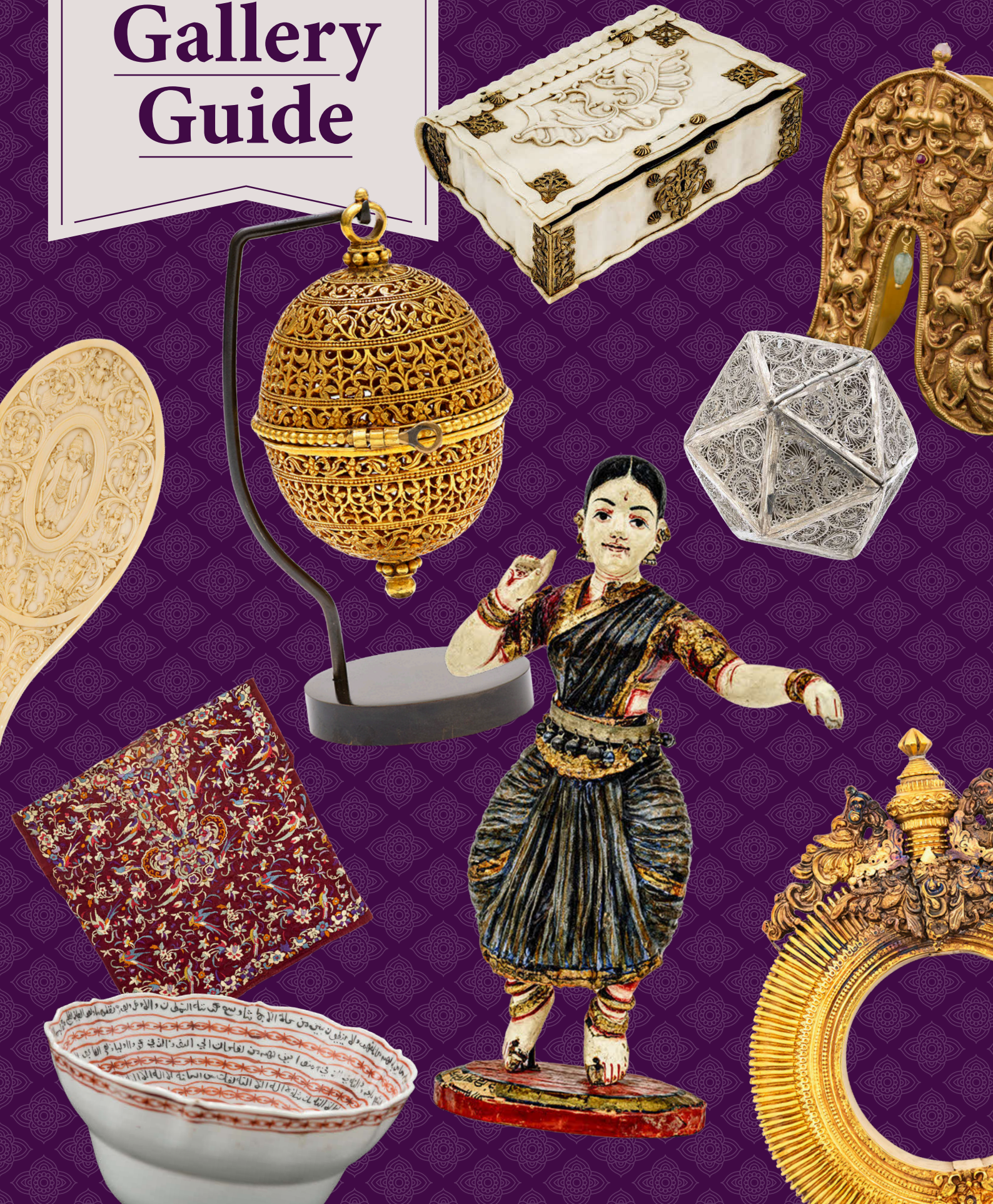


New Artefact Gallery Guide



INDIAN
HERITAGE
CENTRE

இந்திய
மரபுடைமை
நிலையம்





CURATOR'S *Foreword*

At the Indian Heritage Centre (IHC), our permanent exhibition, *Indians in Singapore: Past to Present*, showcases the history and heritage of Singapore's Indian and South Asian communities. As we mark a decade since the Centre's opening and commemorate Singapore's 60th year of independence in 2025, we are proud to present IHC's first major artefact rotation within the permanent exhibition. In line with SG60, this rotation introduces 60 artefacts from IHC's collection, many of which are displayed for the first time. Unfolding in two phases, the first 30 artefacts were installed in March 2025 across the *Early Contact: Interactions between South and Southeast Asia* and *Roots and Routes: Origins and Migration* galleries on Level 4. The full rotation will be completed by September 2025.



Singapore's Indian and South Asian communities are deeply diverse, shaped by waves of migration over the past two centuries. With ancestral roots across the Indian subcontinent, these communities form a vibrant mosaic of languages, customs and faiths—including Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism and Jainism.

From pre-colonial maritime exchanges to colonial and post-colonial migration for employment opportunities, these communities brought with them their attire, languages, religious practices, rites of passage and festivals. Over time, these traditions have adapted to Singapore's multicultural context, contributing to the formation of a distinct Singaporean Indian identity.

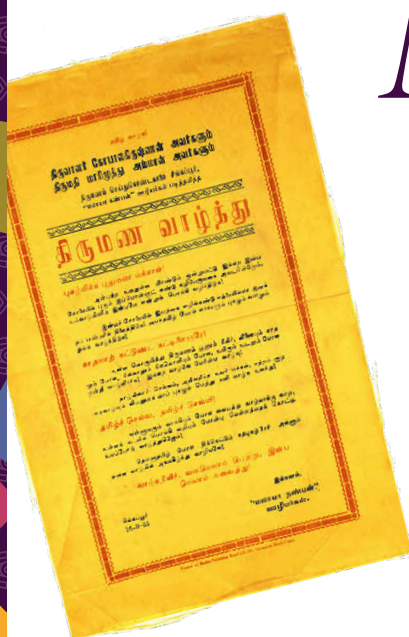
The newly showcased artefacts illuminate the historical maritime routes and cross-cultural exchanges that once connected South Asia and Southeast Asia. They serve as a prelude to the broader history of the Indian and South Asian diaspora in Singapore, reminding us that the community's presence here is linked to much older trajectories of movement, exchange and settlement. These artefacts also exemplify the community's rich tangible and intangible cultural heritage that continues to enrich our multicultural landscape. In curating this rotation, we have sought to reflect this diversity by including objects from various sub-ethnic groups. Through this effort, we hope to foster a deeper and more inclusive understanding of Indian and South Asian heritage, recognising that this remains an ongoing journey. We strive to articulate the dynamic and multifaceted nature of identity in multicultural Singapore weaving these narratives seamlessly within the Singapore Story.





PRESENTING OUR

NEW Artefacts





- 1 This rare and unusual gilt-covered bronze figure depicts the dancing form of Ardhanarishvara, “The Lord Whose Half is Woman,” where Shiva and Parvati appear as an androgynous, sixteen-armed deity. The iconography symbolises the conjoined male and female forms of Shiva and Parvati, representing the interconnectedness of all apparent opposites. The earliest known depictions of Ardhanarishvara in Indian iconography date back to the Kushan period (c. 1st–3rd century CE). In Nepal, where syncretic forms of Hindu and Buddhist art emerged, Ardhanarishvara took on this distinctive form as a dynamic, dancing figure.



Dancing Ardhanarishvara
(Nrtyardhanarishvara)
17th – 18th century
Gilt copper alloy
Nepal

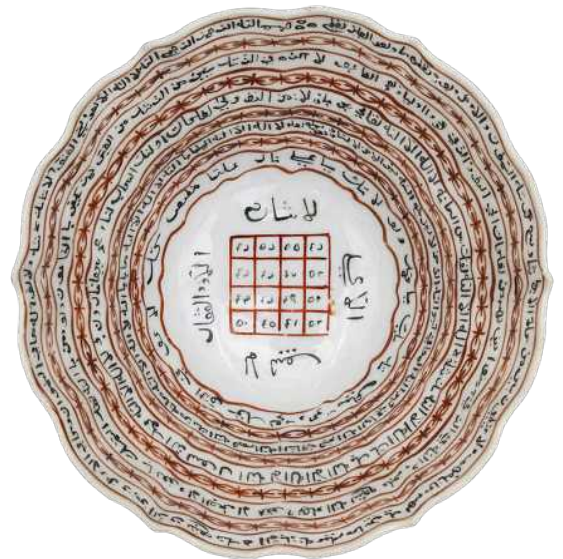
Collection of Indian Heritage Centre



Showcase

Islamic Interactions

- 1 Known as “healing bowls” in Islamic tradition, these vessels are adorned with Quranic verses inked in black and intricate red lacquer patterns, and were often filled with water for drinking. At their center lies a mystical magic square, a geometric arrangement believed to hold astrological and spiritual qualities, imparting healing properties to those who drank from them. Their design reflects a fusion of Chinese porcelain forms, such as round- or foliate-rimmed bowls and platters, with Persian-inspired lacquerwork and calligraphy. Originating in the 16th century, this type of porcelain became a popular export under the Qing dynasty by the 18th century, travelling to Persia and the Muslim courts of India and Indonesia.



Islamic Healing Bowl
18th century
Porcelain
China, India

Collection of Indian Heritage Centre

Showcase

Islamic Interactions



Icosahedron
18th century
Silver
India

Collection of Indian Heritage Centre

- 2 This rare box takes the form of an icosahedron—a 20-sided polyhedron that appears across various scientific and mathematical contexts, particularly within Islamic science and art. As a Platonic solid, it is celebrated for its perfect symmetry and mathematical precision. In the Islamic world, the icosahedron was used both in games—as a rare form of dice—and incorporated into artistic and decorative designs.

This example features twenty triangular sides, each crafted from exceptionally fine solid silver filigree. In gaming, the icosahedron functioned as a rare type of die, composed of 20 equilateral triangular faces meeting five to a corner.





Showcase

Christianity and Trade Interactions

- 1 This rare, finely hand-drawn wall hanging originates from Masulipatnam, a historic port city along the Bay of Bengal renowned for its exceptional kalamkari textiles. Kalamkari is a traditional art form involving freehand painting with a bamboo pen (qalam) and resist-dyeing cotton fabric using natural vegetable dyes. Inspired by Persian carpet designs, this textile features a central medallion, four corner medallions, and a richly decorated field framed by multiple borders. At the heart of the design is an intricate pattern of lotus blossoms, enhanced with fine lines of applied gold that create a shimmering effect. Masulipatnam's kalamkari textiles were crafted for various purposes, including clothing, bedspreads, tapestries and wall hangings, and often blended Indian, Persian and European influences in their motifs.



Kalamkari Hanging
circa 1800
Cotton
Masulipatnam, South India
Collection of Indian Heritage Centre

Showcase

Christianity and Trade Interactions

- ② This ivory comb depicts Lakshmi, the Hindu goddess of wealth, seated and holding two leafy fronds. The diamond- patterned and beaded borders are typical of ivory combs produced in Sri Lanka during this period. Several examples of these combs were handcrafted and produced in multiples to meet the demand from European collectors, particularly those in Dutch and Portuguese circles.

Comb with Goddess Lakshmi
17th - 18th century
Ivory
Sri Lanka

Collection of Indian Heritage Centre



- ③ This ivory Bible box, featuring a carved central angel motif on its lid and silver-gilt mounts, is crafted in the shape of a book, complete with a ribbed spine and shaped sides. Made by regional artisans for the wives of Dutch colonial officials in South India, Sri Lanka, and Southeast Asia, such elegant Bible boxes—typically fashioned from calamander wood, ivory, tortoiseshell, or silver—were designed to hold personal Bibles and often accompanied Dutch women as part of their retinues.

Bible Box
Late 18th century
Ivory and Silver
Sri Lanka

Collection of Indian Heritage Centre



Showcase

Christianity and Trade Interactions

- 4 This sewing box was crafted in Vizagapatnam, an important centre for luxury production along India's Coromandel Coast. From the 17th to 19th centuries, artisans—particularly from the Kamsali community—produced fine furniture, cabinets, writing boxes and accessory pieces for European markets, collectively known as "Vizagapatams." Crafted to meet the demands of Dutch and British East India Company trade networks, this box reflects the fusion of Indian craftsmanship with colonial tastes. Styled like a house, it is painted with architectural and landscaping details on all sides, evoking the appearance of a Calcutta House. The interior reveals a neatly compartmentalised workbox, designed to store sewing accessories, combining artistry with function.



Sewing Box
19th century
Ivory, Metal and Wood
Vizagapatnam, South India

Collection of Indian Heritage Centre

- 5 This miniature chess set and table were crafted in Vizagapatnam, an important centre for luxury production along India's Coromandel Coast. The octagonal tabletop, made of sandalwood, is richly overlaid with intricately pierced ivory and features a central chequerboard of alternating ivory and horn plaques. The sides are embellished with ivory fretwork medallions engraved with Hindu deities, their details enhanced with black lac. The chess set itself consists of finely carved ivory pieces, with one side stained red. Made for the European market in the 18th and 19th centuries, this object reflects the fusion of Indian craftsmanship with colonial tastes.



Chess Set
1870
Ivory, Horn and Sandalwood
Vizagapatnam, South India

Collection of Indian Heritage Centre

Showcase

Christianity and Trade Interactions

- 6 This rare, intricately crafted egg-shaped gold container was designed to hold a bezoar stone, renowned for its magico-medicinal properties. Derived from the Persian word *pad-zhar*, meaning "antidote," bezoar stones were extracted from the digestive systems of animals like sheep and deer. Believed to treat ailments such as epilepsy or act as antidotes to poison, bezoar stones were highly coveted until the 18th century. Often worth more than their weight in gold, they were housed in finely crafted gold or silver cases. The container itself is elegantly adorned with animal and bird motifs against a delicate floral background, showcasing exceptional craftsmanship.

Bezoar Stone Container
Late 17th century
Gold
Goa, West India

Collection of Indian Heritage Centre



- 7 Goa played a central role in the Portuguese trade network, serving as a key entrepôt for exotic luxury goods destined for the European market, including coco de mer (Seychelles nuts), bezoar stones, and rhinoceros horns—highly valued for their purported medicinal and protective properties. Coco de mer, believed to cure ailments and counteract poisons, was particularly prized. This rare Indo-Portuguese nut vessel, crafted from half of a double nut (*Iodoicea maldivica*) and adorned with repoussé silver mounts, reflects a blend of European and South Asian craftsmanship. Its eagle finial, ornate base and pea hen-shaped spout showcase the colonial silverwork influences of Spain, Portugal and beyond.

Indo-Portuguese Nut Vessel
1750
Coco-de-mer and Silver Goa,
West India

Collection of Indian Heritage Centre





Open Display *Mannequins*

- ① These mannequins showcase the rich and diverse fashion heritage of Singapore's Indian and South Asian communities. From the traditional Kanjivaram saree to the *kurta* and *dhoti* set paired with a turban, the display highlights the variety of costumes worn by different sub-ethnic groups during weddings and festive occasions. The child mannequin is dressed in a contemporary *pattu* (silk) Punjabi suit that incorporates elements of the *lehenga choli*, symbolising a fusion of traditions.

1. Male Mannequin wearing the Traditional Kurta Top and Dhoti Pant with the Pagri (Turban)
2. Female Mannequin wearing the Traditional Kanjivaram Saree
3. Child Mannequin wearing a Contemporary *Pattu* (Silk) Punjabi *Lehenga* (Blouse and Skirt) Suit





Showcase

Rites of Passage

- 1 The *jhabalu* is a smock-like garment traditionally worn by Parsi children for ceremonial occasions, particularly before their initiation ceremony (*navjote*). Made from a single piece of silk or satin, it is delicately embroidered with white or cream silk thread, often featuring Chinese-inspired motifs. *Jhabalus* were typically worn with loose, Chinese-style embroidered pyjamas known as *ijar*. In the 19th century, embroidered textiles imported from Canton became highly prized among the Parsis of Gujarat, reflecting the community's strong trading ties with China. Over time, this led to the development of a distinctive Parsi tradition of Chinese-style embroidery on ceremonial silk garments.



Jhabalu (Tunic),
worn by Parsi children
Late 19th century – early 20th century
Silk
Gujarat, West India
Collection of Indian Heritage Centre

Showcase

Rites of Passage

- 2 This congratulatory wedding message for S Gopalakrishnan and Marimuthu Ammal was printed on satin by Malaya Nanban Press. Amongst Indian communities, it was a common tradition to print wedding invitations and congratulatory wishes on textiles, reflecting the cultural importance of cloth in social and ceremonial life. S Gopalakrishnan was a prominent violinist and Carnatic singer who arrived in Singapore in 1939. Active in the local Indian classical music scene, he performed at temples and festivals alongside veterans such as Pandit M Ramalingam and M V Gurusamy, and taught violin at the Singapore Malayalee Association from the 1970s to 2000s.



Congratulatory Wishes for the
Wedding of S Gopalakrishnan and
Marimuthu Ammal by Malaya Nanban Press
16 September 1951
Satin
Singapore

Collection of Indian Heritage Centre
Gift of Mrs Marimuthu Gopalakrishnan

- 3 Chettiar homes in Tamil Nadu and Singapore often feature objects that reflect the community's experiences across Southeast Asia. Among these were items made from Burma teak and domestic utensils crafted from enamel and lacquer. This group of lacquerware—comprising a box, vessels, and containers—is representative of Burmese products collected by the Chettiar community. Such pieces were likely part of the dowry presented to a Chettiar bride. The lacquerware items bear inscriptions in Burmese, along with the Chettiar family's initials, highlighting their personal and cultural significance.



Burmese Lacquerware
Early 20th century
Lacquer
Chettinad, South India and Burma
(Myanmar)

Collection of Indian Heritage Centre

Showcase

Rites of Passage

- 4 The *Wadhawa Ni Thali* is a gift tray traditionally used during Gujarati wedding ceremonies such as *Ponkvu* or *Mandap Muhurat*. Presented when the groom's and bride's families formally welcome each other, the thali is carefully arranged with gifts like dry fruits, sweets, coconut, betel leaves and nuts, coins, jewellery, clothes, perfumes and money envelopes. It represents auspiciousness, blessings and goodwill, marking the start of a harmonious bond between the two families.



Wadhawa Ni Thali (Gift Tray)
20th century
Copper Alloy
Singapore

Collection of Indian Heritage Centre
Gift of Mrs Salma Moiz

- 5 The *changala vatta*, also known as the Greek lamp, is used to light larger lamps during special occasions in Malayalee Hindu households, particularly weddings. Moreover, the lamp is also one of the items in the *ashtamangalyam* set. The *ashtamangalyam*, deriving its name from the Malayalam language where *ashta* signifies "eight" and *mangalyam* means "that which gives happiness," is a set of eight items that symbolises auspiciousness and prosperity, widely found in Malayalee Hindu households.



Changala Vatta (Traditional Oil Lamp)
20th century
Brass

Kerala, South India and Singapore

Collection of Indian Heritage Centre
Gift of Ms Vatsala Mohandas

Showcase

Rites of Passage

- 6 This is a *mehendi applicator*, once used to create intricate *mehendi* designs — a practice deeply rooted in the traditions of Singapore's Indian and Malay communities. *Mehendi* is made from henna, a natural dye derived from the *lawsonia inermis* plant. Commonly applied during weddings and festivals such as Deepavali and Hari Raya Puasa, *mehendi* has also gained popularity in recent years as a contemporary form of body art.



Mehendi Applicator
Early - mid-20th century
Metal and Plastic
Singapore

Collection of Indian Heritage Centre
Gift of Mrs Salma Moiz

- 7 This rare ivory hand mirror is a fine example of luxury craftsmanship, likely created for ceremonial or dowry purposes rather than everyday use. The handle is intricately carved with delicate floral motifs and intertwining branches, and the reverse side of the mirror features an elaborate depiction of the *Dashavatara*, or the ten avatars of Vishnu. At the center, a standing Vishnu is enclosed within an oval frame, surrounded by the ten incarnations carved in anti-clockwise sequence. Rich in symbolism, the mirror blends artistic detail with spiritual iconography, reflecting both aesthetic and devotional value.



Hand Mirror decorated
with the *Dashavatara*
(Ten Avatars of Lord Vishnu)
19th century
Ivory
South India

Collection of Indian Heritage Centre

- 8 This 19th century palm-leaf manuscript set from Bengal serves as a detailed manual for marriage ceremonies, offering valuable insights into the matrimonial customs and traditions of the time. Rooted in the tradition of the *Gṛhya-sūtras*—ancient Sanskrit manuals prescribing the ten domestic sacraments (*Daśa Saṃskārāḥ*)—the text outlines the rites one is expected to perform in accordance with Vedic traditions. Among the key ceremonies described is *Kanyādāna*, in which the father formally offers his daughter's hand to the groom, affirming the sacred union. The manuscripts also record the presentation of lavish gifts, such as fine textiles and ornamental accessories, as part of the nuptial proceedings.



Set of Bengali Manuscripts
on Ten Marriage Rituals
19th century
Palm Leaf
Bengal, East India

Collection of Indian Heritage Centre



- 1 This poster was designed for the Pongal Festival celebrations organised by the Tamil workers part of the Pongal Festival Committee at Keppel Bay. The celebrations were held at the Telok Blangah Community Centre on 22 January 1967. Pongal is a traditional harvest festival celebrated by the Tamil community to give thanks to the Sun God, Mother Nature, and farm animals such as cattle. Pongal blends agricultural rituals with cultural and social festivities, highlighting the connection between nature, community and everyday life among the Tamils.

**Pongal Festival Poster
by Tamil Workers at
Keppel Bay Paper
22 January 1967
Singapore**

*Collection of Indian
Heritage Centre
Gift of Mrs Malai Arasi d/o
Srinivasan and
Mr V Kalaichelvan*



- 2 This souvenir magazine was published to commemorate the Deepavali festival celebrations organised by the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) at the DBS Auditorium on 2 November 1978. Deepavali, also known as the "Festival of Lights," falls in the month of Aippasi in the Tamil calendar. The festival symbolises the triumph of light over darkness and good over evil. While Deepavali is mainly celebrated by Hindus, it is also observed by Sikhs and Jains worldwide. In Singapore, Deepavali was officially gazetted as a public holiday in 1929.



Deepavali Festival Souvenir Magazine from the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA)
2 November 1978
Paper
Singapore

Collection of Indian Heritage Centre
Gift of Mrs Rathi Karthigesu

- 3 This souvenir magazine was published in commemoration of the Navaratri festival celebrations held at the Sri Vadapathira Kalamman Temple on 11 October 1969. Navaratri, meaning "nine nights" (*nava* for "nine" and *ratri* for "nights"), celebrates the goddess Shakti in her many forms. During the festival, Hindu temples across Singapore often host classical dance performances, devotional music recitals, and other cultural programmes. These performances serve both to honour the deities and to showcase the community's artistic talents.

Navaratri Festival Programme
Souvenir Magazine from Sri
Vadapathira Kalamman Temple
11 October 1969
Paper
Singapore

Collection of Indian Heritage Centre
Gift of Mrs Rathi Karthigesu





New Showcase

Bomma Golu

- ① **Bomma Golu** (Court of Dolls) is a vibrant display of dolls and figurines arranged during the Hindu festival of Navaratri. Navaratri, meaning “nine nights” (nava for “nine” and ratri for “nights”), celebrates the goddess Shakti in her many forms. In Singapore, this tradition lives on in homes and Hindu temples, with dolls displayed on the Golu Padi—an odd-numbered staircase of three, five, seven or nine tiers. The top tiers feature deities, followed by saints and royalty, and scenes from everyday life on the lower levels.



Navaratri Festival **Bomma Golu** (Court of Dolls)
20th century
Terracotta
Tamil Nadu, South India
Collection of Indian Heritage Centre



Showcase

Dress and Identity

- ① This rare and finely crafted set of wooden sculptures depicts a lively musical troupe consisting of a bagpipe player, a drummer, a cymbals player and five other wind instrument players, accompanied by a single female dancer. The figures exemplify the highly decorative and naturalistic style of South Indian woodcarving traditions during the 19th century, when artisans captured scenes of daily life and occupations through paintings and sculptures, predating the widespread use of photography. This set offers a vivid glimpse into the vibrant social and cultural life of the time, symbolising the fusion of local traditions with global influences in colonial South India.



Wooden Sculptures of a
Musical and Dance Troupe
Late 19th century
Wood
South India

Collection of Indian Heritage Centre

Showcase

Dress and Identity

- 2 This exquisitely crafted gold bangle features a ribbed outer surface and a smoothly finished inner circumference. A pair of finely sculpted peacocks flank the screw closure, which is shaped like a spire, resembling the tower of a South Indian temple. The peacock, a common motif in traditional Indian jewellery, hold a special place in Indian mythology and culture. The majestic bird symbolises beauty, opulence and wisdom, with its presence representing the illumination of the subconscious by knowledge. It is also associated with the bloom of love, making peacock-themed jewellery an essential part of an Indian bride's trousseau.



Bangle with Peacock Motifs
19th century
Gold
South India

Collection of Indian Heritage Centre

- 3 This embroidered textile from the Swat region of northern Pakistan exemplifies the community's rich tradition of needlework, where everyday objects were transformed into expressions of artistry and identity. Worked on black or white cotton, the embroidery features bold geometric motifs such as triangles, diamonds, chevrons and medallions, all meticulously stitched using vivid pink silk floss thread. The striking use of pink against a dark background is a hallmark of Swati embroidery, symbolising vibrancy, resilience and cultural pride in a mountainous region often isolated from major trade routes.



Swati Embroidered Cloth
20th century
Khadi
Swat Valley, Pakistan

Collection of Indian Heritage Centre



Showcase

Religion and Identity

- 1 The term *Prabhavali* (prabha meaning "light" and *vali* meaning "circle") refers to an ornate, arch-like structure often seen behind deities in Hindu temples and homes across India. Serving as the primary backdrop to an idol, the prabhavali represents the divine aura of the main deity. It enhances the figure's presence, imbuing it with a powerful sense of divinity and sanctity.

*Prabhavali, an Ornamental
Arch placed behind Deities
in Temples
20th century
Gold
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
On loan from Saigon Chettiars'
Temple Trust Pte Ltd*



- 2 Lord Krishna, the 8th incarnation of Vishnu, is a significant deity in Hinduism and is considered one of the most revered and beloved figures in Indian mythology and spirituality. Krishna is often depicted holding a flute and adorned with a peacock feather on his head. The flute is more than just an instrument; it is believed to symbolise divine love and cosmic harmony.

*Lord Krishna's Flute
20th century
Gold
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
On loan from Saigon Chettiars'
Temple Trust Pte Ltd*





- ① These necklaces are part of a collection of deity jewellery and accessories loaned by the Saigon Chettiars' Temple Trust Pte Ltd to the Indian Heritage Centre. The collection was originally donated by the Saigon Nattukottai Nagarthar Chettiar community to the Sri Thendayuthapani Temple, which was established nearly 200 years ago in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

Set of Temple Jewellery
consisting of
a Gold Necklace,
a Kasumalai
(Coin Necklace) and
a Gowrishankaram
(Rudraksha Seed
Necklace)
20th century
Gold, Rubies,
Emeralds, Diamonds and
Rudraksha Seeds
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

*On loan from
Saigon Chettiars' Temple
Trust Pte Ltd*





NEXT BATCH OF

NEW Artefacts

Following the display of the first 30 new artefacts in Galleries 1 and 2 earlier this year, the next phase of IHC's 10th anniversary artefact refresh will roll out in September 2025. This second rotation will spotlight new additions across Galleries 3 to 5 on Level 3, completing our refresh of 60 objects for this milestone year.

Featuring more pieces from the National Collection and other rare collections, the upcoming display will continue to offer fresh perspectives on the Indian community's rich cultural heritage in Singapore and the region. For more details, visit www.indianheritage.org.sg.

Stay Connected with us:

Address

5 Campbell Lane,
Singapore 209924
Contact: 6291 1601

Website

indianheritage.org.sg

Email

nhb_ihc@nhb.gov.sg

 [indianheritagecentre](https://www.facebook.com/indianheritagecentre)

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Opening Hours

Tuesdays – Sundays:
10am – 6pm

Closed on Mondays*

Free Entry Every Day
for Singaporeans and PRs

*Last admission to the galleries
is half an hour before closing.*

** Closed on public holidays
that fall on a Monday
unless otherwise stated.*



INDIAN
HERITAGE
CENTRE

இந்திய
மரபுடைமை
நிலையம்

CELEBRATING
10
YEARS