

The British Artists in the Court of the Nawabs (Kings) of Oudh, who Made their Life-Size Portraits

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Abstract: From 1722 until 1858, thirteen (13) Nawabs ruled over Awadh and Lucknow, leading opulent lives akin to those of the English rulers. England at that time was full of the World-class artists and it was an artistic era. These well-known artist-painters were either appointed by the Nawabs of Awadh (Lucknow) or travelled to India on their own to make money. The article provides a detailed account of the artists who travelled to Awadh (Lucknow) or other Indian states to collaborate. It includes a detailed account of the Nawabs, who ruled in Awadh (Lucknow), as well as the artists who travelled to India and the Nawabs' courts. The artists in this were Johann Zoffany (1783 to 1789), Duncan Beechey (1828 to 1852), Robert Home (1791-1828), Tilly Kettle (1722 to 1739 and again in 1769 and 1776), and Tilly Kettle, who frequently visited from England. They contributed to the creation of the Nawabs' pictures, which prominently featured the jewellery and clothing they wore. British people brought most of these paintings to England, where they were either displayed in the Lucknow Art Gallery or preserved in museums in London. Many of them were lost in transit to England or destroyed during the time of the revolt.

Keywords: Asaf-Ud-Daula, Beechey, Ghazi-ud-din Haydar Khan, Johann Zoffany, Nawab Mohammad Ali Shah, Shuja-ud-Daula, Tilly Kettle

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Introduction

England experienced a period of artistic era flourishing during the 17th and 18th centuries, particularly in the areas of portraiture and landscape painting. The country has produced many famous artists. In addition to making a significant contribution to British art, Thomas Gainsborough, William Hogarth, Tilly Kettle, Thomas and William Daniell, George Farington, Scottish artist Charles Smith, and John

Zoffany were all acquainted with the Indian princes and kings who ruled over various Indian states. And because there was a great demand in the princely state of India, many artists relocated there in order to earn money.

Material & Method

In this case the material was taken from the websites and from the history books of Lucknow Abdul Halim Sharar (1975). and Yogesh Praveen (1984). and developed into this article chronologically

The Artists who Reached India

It is stated that the artists who were not in court service charged money for each painting as follows: George Farington, John Zoffani, Alexandre Dufay (Casanova), Tilly Kettle, Smith and Thomas and William Daniell are prominent examples, with their works often depicting the Nawabs and their interactions with the British East India Company.

The artist in India worked as a commercial portrait artist or served with the Nawab as Court painter or Royal artist

Here's a more detailed look at some of these artists and their subjects: The charges for the painting were a bust portrait for about £ 30 to 60 (present value £ 17,595.68 and £7,038.27) in 2025 and for a full-length for 120 pounds or present day £14,076.54 in 2025. It is recorded that In India artist John Joffani charged Warren Hastings Rs.15000/- (£30,258.04 present day) for the a painting. Warren Hastings FRS (1732 – 1818) was a British colonial administrator, who served as the first governor of the Presidency of Fort William (Bengal), the head of the Supreme Council of Bengal, and so the first governor-general of Bengal in 1772–1785. In 1785, after 10 years of service, during which he helped extend and regularize the nascent British rule created by Clive of India, Hastings resigned. On return to England, Hastings was impeached in the House of Commons for alleged crimes in India, notably embezzlement, extortion and coercion, and an alleged judicial killing of Maharaja Nandakumar.

The British artists can easily be divided into three main parts:

(i) Those artists who visited India and made landscape paintings, and they were not interested in portrait paintings

Thomas and William Daniell (1769–1837): In the mid-1780s, William Daniell accompanied his uncle, the landscape painter Thomas Daniell, to India as his assistant, returning to London in 1794. During this time, the younger Daniell travelled widely, observing and documenting the natural landscape and sites of interest. This period was formative for Daniell and shaped his future career as a painter and draughtsman of 'exotic' landscapes. They travelled extensively in India and created excellent works of the period—Oriental Scenery (1780-1794). They were known for their extensive travels throughout India, capturing landscapes and scenes of Indian life. Following their on-site drawings, they produced numerous prints that were published in both India and Britain. William Daniel in India did not make any portraits of British officials or Nawabs.

(ii) Those who went to India only up to Calcutta or joined the services of other

Nawabs & Maharajas of South India and other parts and made portraits of officials but did not come to Awadh

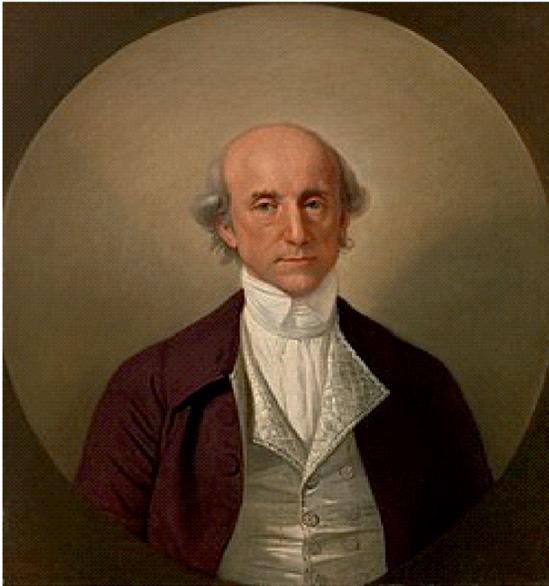


Fig. 1: Hastings painted by Johann Zoffany 1783–1784 for which he paid Rs.15000/- present day £30,258.04

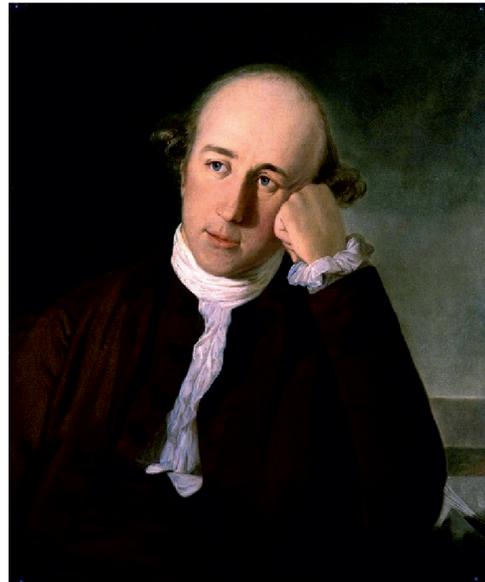


Fig. 2: Warren Hastings by Tilly Kettle in ca 1769 and he also Painted the other British officials in India and Nawab Sujaudaila.



Fig. 3: The trial of Warren Hastings in Westminster Hall, 1788

George Farington in India (1785-1788) : The first artist to reach Bengal Nawab court, The earlier artist George Farington reached Murshidabad in Bengal (1785-1788) and painted, in which the court of Nawab of Murshidabad Maubarak ud –daula in his court is shown with the British Resident, Sir John Hadley. It is said the original copy was lost but a duplicate copy was made by some unknown Indian artist. This painting is housed at the Victoria & Albert Museum, London.



Fig. 4: A scene in the court of Nawab Murshidabad of Bengal.
Artist- Farington

- iii. They particularly came to the Nawabs of Awadh, who employed these artists either as independent artist or visiting artist, who live for some time take their wages and then go or as court painters or royal artists to make their portraits or those of the family or are in the service of the Nawabs..

Tilly Kettle (1735-1786) : Tilly Kettle was a portrait painter and the *first prominent English portrait painter to operate in India*.. Kettle, a London portrait painter visited India, in the late 1760s. He painted portraits of both British officials and Indian Nawabs, including the Nawab of Arcot, He was in India in between 1769 and 1776 painted a series of defining portraits of princely rulers and East India Company officials based in and around Madras and Calcutta. In Awadh he made portraits of Schujaudaula, Prince Jawan Bakhtarar, and many.

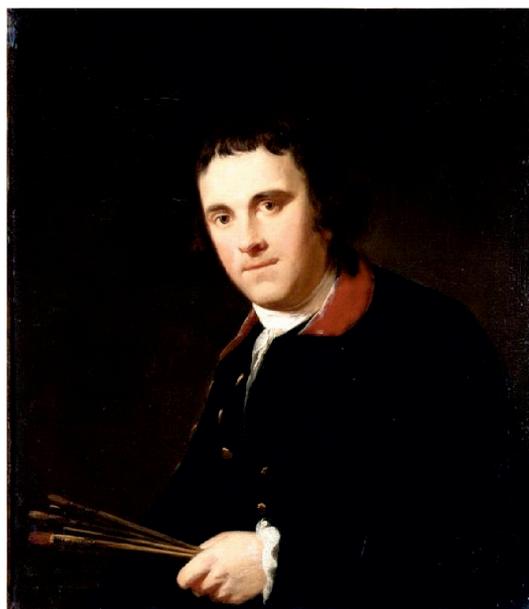


Fig. 5: Tilly Kettle self portrait made in 1762 when he was in India. He mostly painted Nawab Sujaudaiila Nawab of Awadh

Charles Smith (1749–1824) was a Scottish artist living in England and worked initially as a painter of portraits but later also painted mythological and whimsical subjects. He came to India in 1783 through Tilly Kettle and in India he met John Macpherson, the then governor-general of India, who introduced him to the Nawab of Awadh at Faizabad at that period Awadh, in particular, was a hub of artistic activity. He further went to Delhi, where he painted the the Prince Bakhtawar son of Mughal emperor, Shah Alam II. It is presumed that at Delhi he painted some portraits of the king.



Fig. 6: Charles Smith self portraits by pencil sketch

Johann Zoffany (1733 - 1810): Two artists came to India: William Hodge and Johann Zoffany. Hodges did not make much headway but Johann Zoffany was an Anglo-German artist, spent the years 1783 to 1789 in India and quickly established a reputation for himself in the court of Oudh. It seems that he was not a court artist. He charged for the paintings whatsoever he painted for the Nawab and other officials. He painted portraits as well as landscapes. In a portrait including the Governor-General of Bengal, Warren Hastings; and his family, etc.; the Nawab of Awadh, Shujaudaula and his family and Asaf-ud-Daula; in a landscape he painted St John's Church, Calcutta, Lal Baagh Fort of Dacca, etc. Not only this, but he also made the next copy of 'The Last Supper.' Which had been made by Leonardo da Vinci in 1503. An interesting and horrifying story is also connected with the artist: while returning to England, the ship wrecked, and there was no food to eat. The survivor on the lifeboat held a lottery in which the loser was to be eaten. So Zoffani became the living cannibal. The lovable artist who ate a sailor By Philip Hensher, 06 March 2012.

French artist Alexandre Benoît Jean Dufay (known as Casanova) (1770-1844): An artist visited India in 1834. He had almost all the portraits of Napoleon Bonaparte's marriage scene and his own portraits. He only made one painting of a scene. This painting was a highly significant expression of cultural diplomacy. Between India and England... It was a huge painting, this huge painting depicts King Nasir al-Din Haider proceeding in state to meet the then British Resident, Colonel John



Fig. 7: Johann Zoffany self-portrait with a skull and an hourglass. The hour shows time and the human skull shows a man. Possibly, he wanted to say that a time came when I had to eat a man (see text)

Low. This painting was sent to the king of England along with other gifts. The gifts contained the extraordinary group of gifts which, in addition to this painting, also included a magnificent sword, 26 manuscripts from the Lucknow royal library, jewel-encrusted furniture, hookahs, various textiles, items of jewellery, and two pairs of horses and elephants.

Robert Home (1752–1834) was a British oil portrait painter who travelled to the Indian subcontinent in 1791 and moved to Lucknow. During his travels he also painted historic scenes and landscapes. He was a widely travelled artist. In November 1792, he visited Mahabalipuram in January/February 1793 and the two paintings he painted as a result, titled *Ruins of Mahabalipuram*, are now in the collection of The Asiatic Society, Kolkata. In 1795 Home arrived in Calcutta (Kolkata) and continued his work there as an established artist. He was for some time Secretary of the Society and the first Library-in-Charge (1804) and donated his small but valuable art collection. His *Select Views in Mysore, the Country of Tippoo Sultan* was published in London and Madras in 1794, and in Calcutta he made 215 watercolours of Indian mammals, birds and reptiles, some of which he also worked up as oils. In 1791 he moved to Lucknow, and must have made the portraits of Nawab Wazir Ali (1797-1798; **Nawab Sadat Ali Khan (1798-1814; and Nawab Ghazi-ud-Din Haider (1814-1827), who appointed him as his royal artist.** In 1827, he travelled to Kanpur, where he died in 1834.

George Duncan Beechey (1798–1852): During the reign of Nasir-ud-din Haidar, a British artist, George Duncan Beechey arrived in India in 1828 and was appointed in the year 1830 as a court artist

cum comptroller of the palace of the King of Awadh. He was very close to the king. George Beechey was married to the king's daughter, Hussaina Begum, in 1832. He had two sons and one daughter. After retirement he continued to paint portraits of both Indian and British subjects, which he sent to London for exhibition. He died on 6th December 1852, in Lucknow, at the age of 54. His portrait of whom—under the name of “Hinda”—created quite a sensation in London (Ursula Low, (1852-1858). Beechey's presence as an artist was also ascertained in 1845 by Hoffmeister, (1848), and Shah (2024) when he visited the royal studio at the time of king Amjad Ali Shah, the 4th king of Lucknow (Awadh). And, Beechey being a state servant, he could not put his name or signature below in all the portraits of the Kings and other portraits he made. There is no record in the history of the Nawab of Awadh of Mr. Beechey, the royal artist.



Fig. 8: Robert Home self portrait 1810, when he was in India



Fig. 9: Duncan Beechey (1798–1852), who spent his entire life in India and passed away in 1852, Self portrait in 1832..

The history of Awadh and the British artists: In the ancient period, Awadh (Oudh) was known as Ayodhya and used to be the kingdom of Lord Rama of the Hindus in India. During the Mogul period, it became a state (Suba) under the Mogul empire. There was a temple of Rama in the city of Ayodhya; the Mogul emperor changed its name to Faizabad. When the Britishers arrived, the chief of the state was Ghazi-ud-Din Haider (1814–1827), who declared its independence from the Mogul emperor. Akbar Shah II, with the support of the British East India Company, raised his own flag and coat of arms. The capital city was Faizabad. As the Mogul declined, everything came into the hands of the British, and they made it a state, joining a few more regions under the name of United Provinces (U.P.). In independent India, recently, the present administration again changed the name of the city to Ayodhya, and the capital had already shifted from Faizabad to Lucknow during the Nawab's administration. For a total of 136 years, from 1722 to 1858, 13 Nawabs ruled over Awadh. After that, the command of Awadh came into the hands of the British. The British artists who came to India worked in the service of the Nawab or as freelance artists and earned money.

The Nawab of Awadh and the Britishers position in India: The Nawab of Awadh or Lucknow, ruled a lavish life from 1814- 1856 After John Zoffani in the year 1830 during the reign of Ghazi-ud-Din, a significant cultural exchange occurred, marked by the appointment of British artists to the royal court. Initially, Robert Home (1752-1834) served as court artist until his retirement in 1828, followed by George Duncan Beechey (1798-1852), who succeeded him in the position.

Nawab Saadat Khan (1722-1739) (Faizabad): The first Nawab of Lucknow Nawab Saadat Ali Khan Being appointed Subedar in 1722 Saadat Khan laid the foundation of Awadh dynasty of the Shia Nawabs of Iranian lineage based first at Faizabad and later at Lucknow.

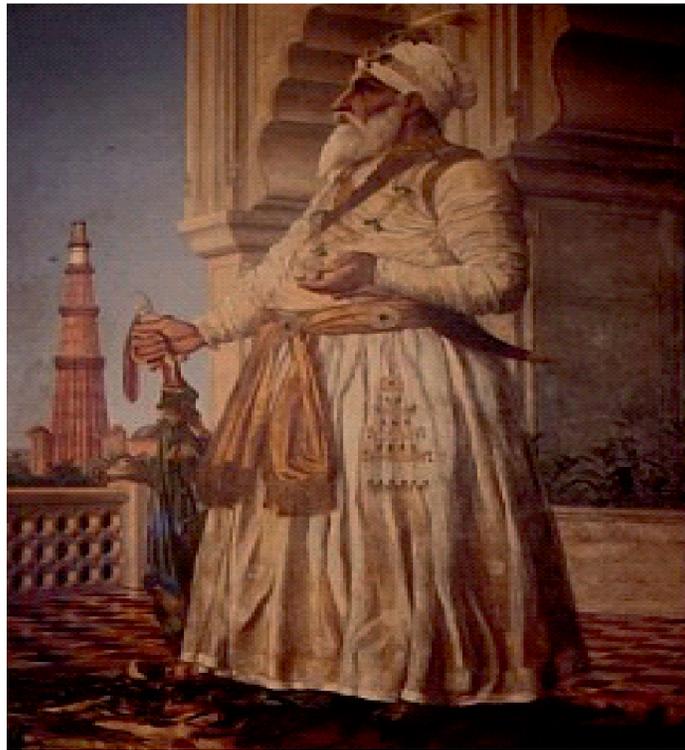


Fig. 10: Nawab Saadat Khan (1722-1739) at Faizabad Painter Joahnn Zoffani

Saadat Khan was succeeded by his son-in-law, Safdar Jung, who set up his military headquarters at Faizabad. His rule of fifteen years (1739–1754) saw no peace, as he was constantly engaged in struggle against the Bangash Nawabs of Farrukhabad. Safdar Jung had to leave the Delhi court due to conspiracies. He returned to Awadh in 1753, but died within a year at Rugar ghat, near Sultanpur, in 1754. His mausoleum, which is one of the finest pieces of the architecture of the period, is in New Delhi.

Shuja-ud-Daula (Faizabad): Safdar Jung was succeeded by his son, Shuja-ud-Daula, who stayed mostly at Faizabad but was always eager to extend his dominion up to Bihar. He made several efforts to this end by supporting Shah Alam II, and subsequently Mir Kasim but was defeated in the battle by the English at Buxar in 1764. The defeat compelled him to enter into a treaty with the East India Company. The agreement not only paved the way for British advent on the soils of Awadh but also their gradual ascendancy to real power. Shuja-Ud-Daula died early in January 1775 and was laid at his mausoleum at Gulab-Bari, Faizabad. Tilly Kettle and Smith were his main artists.



Fig. 11: ‘Suja-ud-Daula, Nawab of Awadh, with Four Sons, General Barker and Military Officers’, oil on canvas. The painting is signed by Tilly Kettle, dated 1772



Fig. 12: Pencil sketch of seven son of Shuja ud-Daula - Tilly Kettle.



Fig. 13: A portrait of Shuja ud-Daula and his ten sons. Tilly Kettle

First Nawab of Lucknow Asaf-Ud-Daula : In 1775 he moved from Faizabad to Lucknow. He is said to be the builder of Lucknow. He constructed the famous buildings of Lucknow. Like Deewan e khas (a hall of private meetings of the royals), Rumi Darwaza, Asfi Masjid, Bara Imambara, the Bhul Bhulaiya, with 489 identical doorways, which make one feel lost, and many monuments. and increased the Chowk area to accommodate more people and newcomers to Lucknow. He was a very generous king. One thing for which Asaf-ud-Daula is prominently known is his immensely kind and charitable nature. Every day, in the morning, he routinely offered alms to destitute and desolate people. He is quite famous for distributing muskmelons to the poor with alms placed inside. This act of putting alms in muskmelons drew a saying to his name, which goes as:

‘Jisko na de maula, usko de Asaf ud dauala’

(One who is forsaken by God is bestowed by Asaf-ud-Daula.)

The artist who used to work for him was Johann Zoffani.



Fig. 14: Young Nawab Asufu daula by Zoffani 1780



Fig. 15: Prince Jawan Bakhtawar, the eldest son of the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II, who visited Lucknow in 1784 to meet Asufudala. It is a watercolour and gouache on card, with a seated figure dressed in white with a green in white with a green waist sash and turban, holding a sheathed sword.- Artist- Smith.



Fig. 16: Asaf al-Daula, Nawab of Awadh, c.1784, black, white and red chalk on brown paper, Johann Zoffany (1733–1810)



Fig. 17: Nawab Asufudaula.. Painted by “John Zoffany in 1784



Fig. 18: Nawab Asaf-ud-Daula at the Imambara smoking Hukka and listening to the sermons of the priest during Muharram. Painted by Zoffani..

- ii. **Nawab Wazir Ali (1797-1798):** He was an adopted son of Nawab Asufudaula. His tenure was only an year.



Fig. 19: Nawab Wazir Ali possibly by Robert Home

- iii. **Nawab Sadat Ali Khan (1798-1814):** Sadat Ali Khan was the brother of Asufudaula. Though a miser, he was nevertheless an enthusiastic builder and he commissioned many palaces, including Dilkusha, Hayat Baksh Kothi, and Farhat Baksh Kothi (as well as Lal Baradari). He also constructed Chhatar Manzil, Kothi Dil Aram, Munawar Baksh, Khursid Manzil and the Chaupar Stables, abandoning the Mughal style by adopting European Innovations in architecture. It seems he was not interested in entertaining the British Artists.
- iv. **Nawab Ghazi-ud-Din Haider (1814-1827):** Ghazi-ud-din Haider became Nawab in 1814. He broke the frayed ties between the defunct Mughal empire and Awadh and declared it an independent state in 1819. He was now called King, but for all formal and ceremonial purposes, the Resident was deemed his equal. The Resident even had an edge over the king; he could threaten and bully while the King could only sulk and occasionally protest. Robert Home came to Lucknow in the year 1791 and was appointed as a court painter of Nawab Ghazi-ud-Din Haider (1769–1827). In 1827, he travelled to Kanpur, where he died in 1834. The Nawab built two houses in the Moti Mahal complex, Mubarak Manzil and Shah Manzil. He got built for his European wife



Fig. 20: Nawab Sadat Ali Khan by possibly by Robert Home

a house named Vilayati Bagh in European style. Near it was constructed Qadam Rasul, which supposedly bears the footprints of Muhammed on black stone. Owing to his religious fervency, he also constructed a holy mausoleum, Shahnajaf, the replica of Ali's burial place at Najaf in Iraq. He was buried there on his death in 1827. Later, his three begums were also buried at Shah Najaf Imambara.

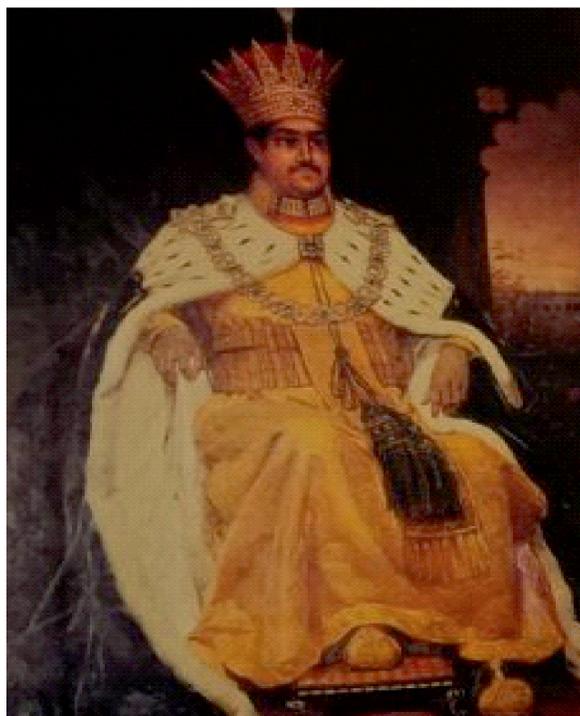


Fig. 21. Nawab Ghazi-ud-Din Haider artist Robert Home was working as the Royal Artist

- v. **Nasir-ud-din Haidar 1827–1837 King of Awadh:** Nasir-ud-Din Haider ascended the throne on October 20, 1827, at the tender age of 25. His reign was marked by a fascination with women, wine, astrology, and astronomy. He had built an observatory in Lucknow, which was at par with the Greenwich observatory to England; his astronomer was an Englishman named Wilcox. He was inclined to the European style of living so he employed George Beechey as the royal artist and as Comptroller of the King's Household. Not only this, but he even employed European barber, gardener, and librarian, and he had five Englishmen as his English tutors. He also had an English wife, Emma, daughter of George Hopkins Walters, an army officer. Emma was given the palace name Mukhadara Alia. In English meaning 'Noble destiny' or 'Great destiny' She knew Persian and Hindustani and encouraged her husband to practice his English. He was poisoned in his palace, on 7/8 July 1837. The British Government had already designated his successor previously. In his palace there were numbers of beautiful ladies. One was Hussainee; she was stunningly beautiful, graceful and lovely. The king named her as 'Tajmahal.' An English lady writes about her; the extract is as under; "The present king's wives were most superbly dressed and looked like creatures of the Arabian Nights.... One was so beautiful ... I never saw anyone so lovely, either black or white. Her features were perfect and such eyes and eyelashes I had never beheld before... She was so graceful and fawn-like. Her dress was gold and scarlet brocade, and her hair was literally strewn with pearls, which hung down upon her neck in long single strings... On her forehead she wore a small gold circlet... Her earrings were immense gold rings with pearls increasing in size. The beautiful creature is the envy of all the other wives and is the favourite at present of both the king and his mother." George Duncan Beechey made a portrait of her.



Fig. 22: The king Nasuruddin is seen wearing a crown and in European dress. On his left his English wife and on the right, the Resident of Lucknow, Mr. Low and standing, the artist Beechey. There is a group of Indian ministers standing behind the queen On the left are two dancing girls and two musicians standing on the right. Artist- Robert Home possibly 1828-29



Fig. 23: An early portrait of King Nawab Nasir-ud-Din Haidar Shah, Awadh in Lucknow (1827 -1837) Artist -George Becchey as he joined the King in 1830



Fig. 24: Another portrait of Nasir-ud-Din Haidar Shah, Artist - Duncan Beechey. some where 1832



Fig. 25: Hussainee or Tajmahal. The most beautiful lady in the palace and one of the wives of the king —Artist Beechey



Fig: 26: This painting was made by French artist Alexandre Benoît Jean Dufay (known as Casanova) in the year 1834. King Nasir al-Din Haider proceeding in state to meet the then British Resident, Colonel John Low. The scene takes place in front of the King’s gleaming white palace, ‘Farahat Bux’ on the banks of the River Gomti. The British Residency seen just beyond a drawbridge and peeping through openings in the trees are the golden domes and minarets of the tombs of old Lucknow.

Nawab Mohammad Ali Shah (1837-1842 : Muhammad Ali Shah was 63 years of age when he ascended the throne. He was an experienced man and had seen the glorious days of his father. He started to economize and set right the administrative machinery. He built the Husainabad (Chhota) Imambara in 1838 and created the Husainabad Endowment Fund to support it. Jama Masjid, which

is the most beautiful and a main mosque of Lucknow too, is credited to him. Muhammad Ali Shah had resolved to make Lucknow into a veritable Babylon. He started building in the neighborhood of the present Clock Tower. an edifice similar to Babylon's minaret or floating garden and named it Satkhanda, but it reached only its fifth story in 1842 when Muhammad Ali Shah died so the building remain half built.

Royal Studio of Husainabad: He also built the famous Royal Studio or the Hussainabad Picture Gallery, as it is now called. Robert Home held the position of Royal artist, in the court of the King, Muhammad Ali Shah, who built this royal studio under the supervision of Robert Home. When Robert Home retired, Duncan Beechey served as a royal artist from the year 1830 up to his retirement in 1850. This Picture gallery is now a tourist attraction, where life-size portraits of Lucknow Nawabs made by these famous European and British artists are lodged. This Hussainabad Picture Gallery serves as a testimony to the European and British artists, which became a cultural legacy of the city of Lucknow.



Fig. 27: Muhammad Ali Shah (1837-1842) reigned only for 5 years was an old person Painted possibly by Robert Home

Amjad Ali Shah: Though his tenure was brief, only five years, Amjad Ali Shah's reign, like his father's, had a lasting impact on the city of Lucknow. A stalwart adherent to the traditions of his house, he indulged in architectural Endeavour's, leaving an indelible mark on the city's landscape. Amjad

Ali Shah's penchant for resplendent attire is well-documented, as the British and Europeans started coming to India. He was wearing with four costly chains encircling his neck and a magnificent osprey surmounting his crown, ablaze with jewels. The king wore pearls, rubies, and emeralds glittering upon it, and a magnificent crown. A diamond clasp fastened the bird of paradise that waved above his brow. A gorgeous robe of gold brocade, strings of pearls and rubies about his neck, diamond earrings, a sash of the most exquisite Delhi work, trousers of gold tissue, and peaked shoes bordered with gold completed the splendid appearance, in which the corpulent scion of royalty, leaning on the arm of the sharp and lean but no less superbly attired His jewellery has also been described by Dr. Hoffmeister when he met him and also treated him and diagnosed his cancer. Dr. Hoffmeister was addressed by the king as 'Hakim Sahib'; while leaving him, the king presented him a huge illuminated folio volume, the cover of which was adorned with beautiful arabesques painted on a gold ground h Amjad Ali Shah succumbed to cancer in , 1847, at the age of 47, leaving behind a legacy that continues to inspire (Hoffmeister,1848&, Shah 2024).



Fig. 28: Amjad Ali Shah 1842 1847 met Dr. Hoffmeister and his court artist Duncan Beechey

The last king of Awadh Nawab Wajid Ali Shah (1842-1857) was the last Nawab King of Awadh, with a promise of grandeur and cultural resurgence. His subjects adored him, and he reciprocated with a passion for music, drama, and literature, penning 50 books under the pseudonym “Akhtar.” Awadh flourished in trade, industry, and Urdu literature during his reign, as he built the magnificent Kaiser Bagh, a testament to his artistic inclinations. However, in the year 1856 his rule was over and the Britishers took the reins of Avadh and he was exiled to Calcutta with his kingship. His pension of a lakh of rupees per month was fixed. He passed away at the age of 67 in Calcutta, leaving behind his cultural legacy. His story serves as a fascinating chapter in the annals of Indian history, a testament to the region’s rich cultural heritage. In Lucknow, Duncan Beechey served as court artist. Until his retirement 1850..



Fig. 29: Last king Nawab Wajid Ali Shah 1847-1856

Artist- Beechey

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