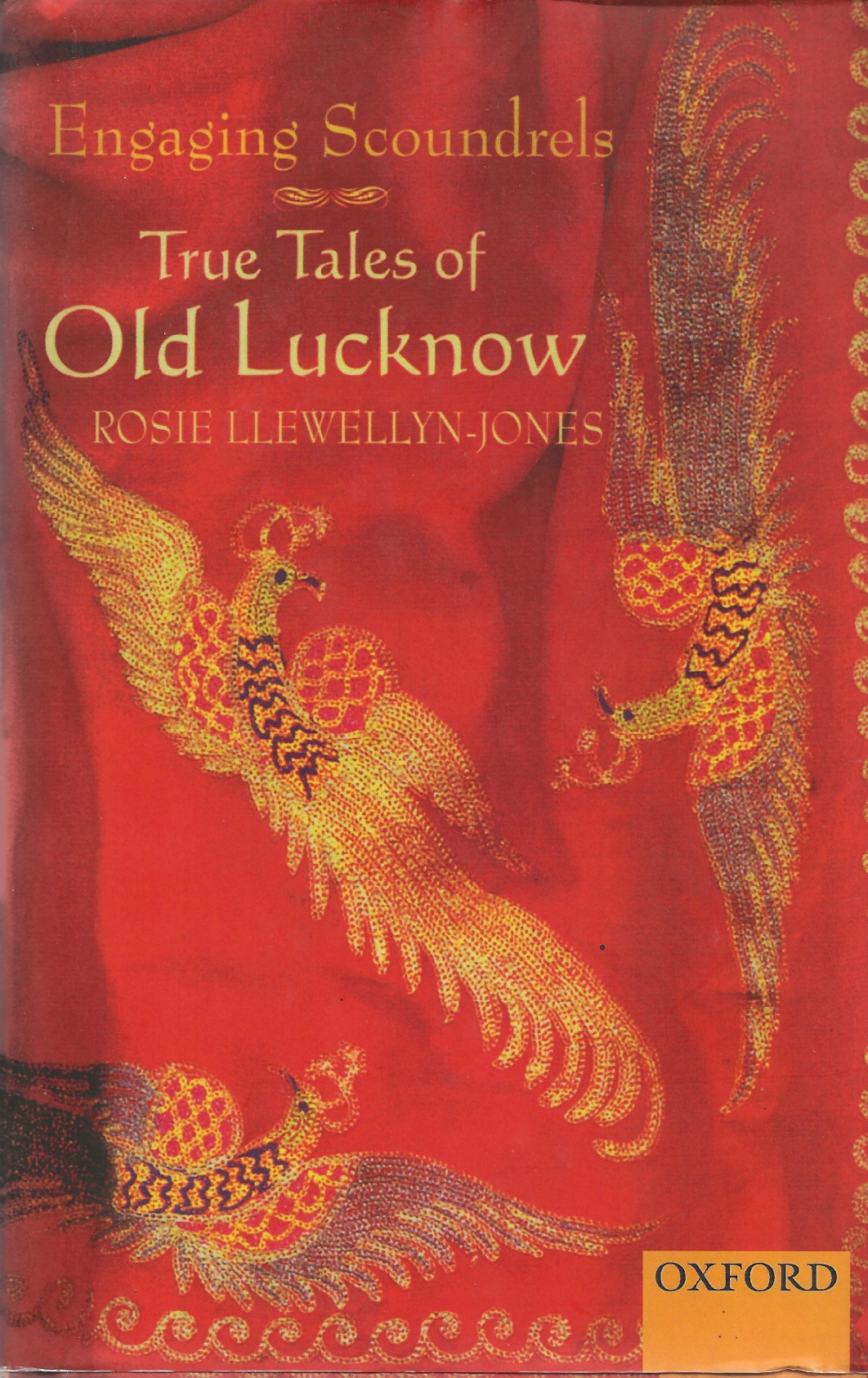


Engaging Scoundrels



True Tales of
Old Lucknow

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OXFORD

Barbary goats and '2 Ramghur Hill dogs'. The aviary had an 'uncommon collection of birds', including flamingoes.¹⁸

The menagerie accompanied Asaf-ud-daula to his new palace in the Daulat Khana, and it was enlarged by successive Nawabs, and subsequently moved across the Gomti to a *ramna* or park, where visitors found rhinoceroses chained to the trees, and tigers rattling away at the wooden bars of their cages. The main building contained four covered verandahs shading the cages and dens of other animals. Somewhere, roaming about in the park was a wild man, the 'junglee admeé'. A visiting chaplain, the Reverend William Tennant noted that some of the Cabul sheep here were 'painted in different colours to gratify the fantastic taste of the natives, a practice which they follow with their bullocks and horses'. It was an age when rare animals were collected both as curiosities and as living symbols which enhanced their owner's image by showing that he was literally 'a man of the world' with his exotic creatures, brought with such labour and expense from foreign countries. Nasir-ud-dīn Haider was the proud owner of a herd of English cattle, whose unexpected appearance at the Dilkusha park 'when viewed beneath the shade of the tamarinds and banians of a tropical clime [render them] objects of deep and peculiar interest'.¹⁹ The presentation of unusual animals as gifts to other rulers was popular too. The first giraffes in England in the 1830s had caused a sensation, almost equalled by Nasir-ud-din Haider's gifts to William IV and Queen Adelaide, which included a female rhinoceros, that legend has transposed into a Unicorn. The animals were presented by the King to London Zoo.²⁰ Less exotic animals were kept not only by the Nawabs, but by their courtiers too. A visitor in 1842 remarked on the tigers and bears in iron cages under the domes of the Chattar Manzil palace 'or in the arcades bizarrely painted' and as late as the 1970s two cages built into an elaborate semi-circular gateway on the Sitapur road could still be seen, which had once housed a pair of tigers.²¹ Today's Lucknow Zoo, established in a former Nawabi garden, the Banarsi Bagh, is not a direct descendant of the royal menagerie and parks, but has a more interesting pedigree than most of its visitors probably realise.

Saadat Ali Khan, the brother of Asaf-ud-daula had spent twenty years away from Lucknow before succeeding to the *masnad* (throne) in January 1798.²² His enforced, though by no means unpleasant stay in Calcutta and Benares had allowed him to pick up many western ways and he understood and wrote English, though he found its pronunciation difficult. Before his departure for Lucknow he got an English tailor to

have wished to go. His successor Muhammad Ali Shah was often confined to his bed through illness, and Amjad Ali Shah, as we have seen, was not a gregarious man in European company. Although there were clearly formal contacts and dinners between Wajid Ali Shah and William Sleeman, the good-tempered humour of the earlier days had gone. At the end of another finger-wagging session by Sleeman, the King must have been only too glad to retire to the zenana to be entertained by his numerous wives, dancers and musicians. Perhaps he was amused by the royal mimics, who would re-enact the events of the day, dressing up in crinolines and Company uniforms to imitate the English officials and their wives, in exaggerated mime.⁸³

And so the days passed by pleasantly enough. The growing storm of annexation and revolt seemed no more than a distant rumble of monsoon thunder across the Gomti, echoing through the stables and the parks, making the elephants shift uneasily and the pigeons fall silent. There were many reasons why the annexation in 1856 was so unpopular among the people it was designed to liberate. The Company found it hard to understand that the inhabitants of Awadh might prefer to be ruled by their own Kings, with all their faults, rather than the sober Chief Commissioner, James Outram. Is it true to say that the Nawabs had lost all sense of reality among their gilded palaces and theatrical gardens? Not really, for the obligations of the Nawabs, self-created successors of the Emperors, towards their subjects, were largely met. What often seemed to the Company ridiculous extravagance and meaningless ceremony was seen in quite a different light by the people of Lucknow. There was a general disbelief at the time of annexation that the Nawabs, who had clearly demonstrated their friendship to the English in adopting so many of their ways should be deprived of their country. Perversely, the more anglicised the Nawabs seemed, the more they were disliked by the English, who mocked their well-meaning attempts to flatter the unwanted guests in Awadh. Perhaps the strongest image which remains at the end is that of the rhinoceros in the park, chained to a tree, an incomprehensibly exotic animal, but one that could only wander in a circle prescribed by its masters.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Two good studies are Richard Barnett's *North India between Empires: Awadh, the Mughals, and the British*, published by the University of California Press 1980, and Michael Fisher's *A Clash of Cultures: Awadh, the British and the Mughals*, published by Manohar, New Delhi 1987.

2. See, *A Fatal Friendship: The Nawabs, the British and the City of Lucknow*, by the author, published by OUP, Delhi 1985, for an overview of the relations between the Residents and the Nawabs.
3. Robert Home's designs for the coronation, and the Nawab's boats are in his sketch books at the Victoria & Albert Museum, London.
4. See, *A Very Ingenious Man: Claude Martin in Early Colonial India*, by the author, published by OUP, Delhi 1992, for a description of the Nawab's army.
5. Ghazi-ud-din Haider to the British Resident, 3 October 1823, no. 12, Foreign Political Consultations, National Archives, New Delhi.
6. *The Asiatic Annual Register, or, a View of the History of Hindustan, and of the Politics, Commerce and Literature of Asia, for the Year 1807*, London 1808, p. 176.
7. Untitled painting of Wajid Ali Shah and female attendants in the State Museum & Library, Banarsi Bagh, Lucknow. Ref. no. 59.97.
8. 18 January 1828, no. 17, Political Consultations, Oriental and India Office Collections (OIOC) at the British Library (BL), London.
9. Fisher, op. cit., p. 261.
10. Sharar, Abdul Halim, *Lucknow: The Last Phase of an Oriental Culture*, translated by E.S. Harcourt and Fakhir Hussain, London 1975.
11. The Nawab's Household Accounts 1777-83 (Warren Hastings' Papers), Add 29,093, BL.
12. Johnson, Daniel, *Sketches of Field Sports as Followed by the Natives of India*, London 1822, p. 175.
13. Johnson, op. cit., p. 183.
14. Madan, Captain Charles, *Two Private Letters to a Gentleman in England from His Son Who Accompanied Earl Cornwallis on His Expedition to Lucknow in the Year 1787*, Peterborough 1788, p. 42, BL.
15. Johnson, op. cit., p. 192.
16. Tennant, Reverend William, *Indian Recreations*, 3 vols, London 1804 ii, p. 413.
17. Madan, op. cit., p. 43.
18. *The Asiatic Annual Register for the Year 1800*, London 1801, p. 98.
19. Roberts, Emma, *Scenes and Characteristics of Hindostan with Sketches of Anglo-Indian Society*, vol. I, London 1835, p. 350.
20. Beechey, Dr G.D.S., *The Eighth Child or George Duncan Beechey, Portrait Painter 1797-1852: Royal Portrait Painter to the Last Four Kings of Oudh*, London 1994.
21. Fayer, Dr Joseph, *Recollections of My Life*, Edinburgh 1900, p. 89. The tigers belonged to the Nawab Moosun-ud-daula, a cousin of Wajid Ali Shah.
22. Saadat Ali Khan replaced his nephew Wazir Ali, whose short reign lasted only four months, from September 1797 to January 1798, when he was deposed by the Governor General. Fearing unrest, the Company brought Saadat Ali Khan from Calcutta in a palanquin, disguised as an Englishman. See, *A Tour Through the Upper Provinces of Hindostan*, by Augusta Deare, published London 1823, p. 102.

to England, where they imagined they would get a fairer hearing. Company policy in Awadh was to block direct communication between the ruling Nawabs, and the British royal family. Similar restrictions had been placed on the Mughal Emperors in Delhi.³⁸ The Company insisted on channelling all such correspondence through the Governor General in Calcutta, who decided whether it would be forwarded to London or returned with no explanation. These controls were also applied to gifts, which led to embarrassing situations where the Nawabs had to 'smuggle out' presents for the British royal family to evade the Company's clutches. Ghazi-uddin Haider managed to get some presents to London for the King, including a pair of 'embroidered Lucknavi slippers', but Nasir-ud-din Haider was not so lucky. His carefully chosen presents for William IV and Queen Adelaide, sent with permission from both the Lucknow Resident and the Governor General himself, and accompanied by Mr Friell and Colonel Dubois were confiscated by Company officials on their arrival in England. Of the vast number of gifts, the shawls, horse saddles, chairs, books including an illustrated *Gulistan* and *Ajeb-ul-Nucklau*, a gold bedstead and many jewels, the royal couple were only allowed to accept two horses, two elephants and the rhinoceros, which all went to London Zoo. The Queen was said to have been mortified at not receiving a valuable diamond necklace which mysteriously 'disappeared' on its way back to Lucknow, with the remainder of the confiscated gifts.³⁹

The Nawabs were also deliberately isolated within India, from fellow Indian notables. Prince Mirza Ali Kaddar (Qadr) of Benares wrote formally to the Governor General in 1837 requesting a letter of introduction to Nawab Nasir-ud-din Haider, but was told that his request 'cannot be complied with'.⁴⁰ Not only did the Company forbid overt communication between certain Indians in their own country, it also introduced the notorious 'Black Act' of 1836 which placed restrictions on their movements outside India. 'No native of India "lascars" (that is, mariners) excepted, shall quit the territories under British rule, without an order from Government.'⁴¹ Understandably this caused protests, particularly from Calcutta. Clearly it took courage and persistence to seek a higher ruling from London, and only a burning sense of injustice, coupled with sufficient funds, led a few people to England. It was less easy to restrict the movements of Indians once they managed to get to England, for the Company had no jurisdiction over them there. They were made welcome, as we have seen, and found, perhaps to their surprise, that the Company was by no means popular, nor even powerful, in its own country.

In 1814 the death of Saadat Ali Khan, the sixth Nawab of Awadh, had