

Continental Journey of a Cursed Diamond- The KOH-I-NOOR

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Abstract: *The article revolves around the story of the infamous or so called cursed diamond Koh-i-Noor. How the diamond once again came into limelight recently and how the myth regarding the diamond came into existence. From its origin to its final resting place in the London Tower in Britain, during this continental journey diamond went into the possession of numerous Dynasties and kingdoms. Moreover the stardom of diamond was same as it is today, every powerful empire of the time rests claims on diamond. As it went in the hands of different empire, its curse further penetrate into the minds of people. Despite of Britain's stand that the question of Koh-i-Noor is non-negotiable, many countries claim the legal possession of the diamond which by their name obviously didn't exist at that time.*

Keywords: Koh-i-noor, Babur, Ahmad Shah Durrani, William Dalrymple, Anita Anand, Cursed diamond, Faiz Ahmed Faiza, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto

The demise of the longest reigning (70 years on the throne) British monarch, Queen Elizabeth II in September 2022 and just after one month Rishi Sunak, an Indian origin man elected as Prime Minister of United Kingdom, once again triggered debate about the ill-fated Kohinoor diamond. The diamond again made it to the top trends on social media, as Indians wanting it to return home especially after Rishi's office takeover. In reply to that an article was published in Indianexpress, titled 'British took Kohinoor by force, but so did the Indians: William Dalrymple explains complex history of diamond', mentioned that William Dalrymple, famous historian stated that, Indians claim that Shah Shuja Durrani gave the diamond to Maharaja of Lahore. But Shah Shujah's autobiography clearly mentions that his son was tortured by Maharaja Ranjit Singh before he took away the diamond. So, if the Indian case rests on the claim that the British took it by force, so did the Indians too. Indeed the more beautiful and famous the diamond is, the more interesting its journey was. It came into possession of numerous rulers and dynasties like Kakatiyas, Alauddin Khilji, Babur, Shah Jahan, Nadir Shah, Ahmad Shah Durrani (founder of Afghan empire), Maharaja Ranjit Singh and finally, it passed into the hands of British Monarch.

"He who own this diamond will own the world, but will also receive all its misfortune. Only God or a woman can wear it with impunity"- The curse of Kohinoor

Kohinoor means 'the mountain of light' is one of the largest cut diamond in the world with astounding size - originally 186 carats (today 105.6, 21.12 g). As far as the origin is concerned there are numerous theories regarding that, According to Theo Metcalfe, a civil servant working in East India Company then, wrote in his report that as per traditions the diamond was extracted during the life time of Lord Krishna. But the most accepted view among the historian is that, it was found on the bank of river Krishna in the Kollur mines of Golconda located in Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh between 1100-1300 AD. According to one legend, it was mined during the period of the Kakatiya dynasty, and placed in the Bhadrakali Temple in Warangal. The area was very popular during 17th and 18th century because of its fine quality diamonds until the

reserves were found in Brazil. Famous diamonds like Noor-un-Ain, Orlov Agra Diamond, Ahmedabad Diamond and Broly of India were also found in the same area.



The first ever written record of the diamond was given by Zahirudin Mohammed Babur (1483-1530), founder of the Mughal Empire and the descendant of the Mongol emperor Genghis Khan (c. 1162/67-1227) to whom it was believed that the diamond was likely acquired as a spoil of war. While writing his autobiography in 1526- 'Baburnama' where he stated that "the diamond is worth half of the daily expense of the whole world". There was an alternative view regarding the statement that Babur was talking about another precious gem and it was actually his son and successor, who received the Koh-i-Noor as a gift from Raja of Gwalior (then a state in central India) after victory at the First Battle of Panipat in 1526. Whichever of these versions of events is correct, the result is the same, the Mughal royal family was in possession of the stone. The second time it was mentioned by Shah-i-Jahan in 1626, when he commissioned his famous Peacock Throne. It took 7 years to complete the throne and it is

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believed that the throne was four times worth the expenses of the TajMahal. Among the wide variety of stones and gems erected in the throne, the most precious gems were Red Timur Ruby and Kohinoor. Mughals prefer colored gems more, therefore Ruby acquires special place in the heart of the emperor. But on the other hand Kohinoor has its own value as it was engraved as the eye of peacock in the 'Peacock Throne'. When looking at the Mughal treasury, Abu'l-Fazlibn Mubarak, the grand vizier to Akbar, noted that red spinel and Burmese rubies had become the most desirable jewels by the nobility.

During eighteenth century the wealth in the Mughal Empire attracts the attention of many central Asian rulers. In 1738 Nadir Shah Durrani (1698-1747), founder of the Afsharid dynasty, overthrew the Safavid dynasty of Persia. He launched a full-scale invasion of India in 1739 and his army began a systematic looting of the wealth of the city (Delhi) and the treasury of the Mughal Empire. Nearly 10,000 wagons of loot, along with millions of rupees were carried away by Nader Shah back to Afghanistan along with the imperial Peacock Throne. It is said that 700 elephants, 4000 camels and 12000 horses were needed to carry away the entire war booty. By this time the diamond was not named as Kohinoor. It was Nader Shah who described the diamond as *Koh-i-Noor*-Mountain of Light and the name stuck ever since then. Nadir Shah's financial advisor wrote in his book '*Tarikh-I Alam-ara-I- Nadiri*' that Kohinoor was present in the peacock throne when the throne was acquired as a war booty. Further he mentioned that Nadir Shah engraved the diamond in his armband. For next 70 years it remained in present day Afghanistan.

Later on after the death of Nadir Shah this precious stone went into the hands of his foremost general Ahmad Shah Durrani who is also known as Ahmed Shah Abdali (c. 1722-1772) founder of the Durani Dynasty in Afghanistan. William Dalrymple and Anita Anand in their book '*KOH-I-NOOR, The History of the World's Most Infamous Diamond*' articulated that, Shah Rukh Shah the grandson of Nadir Shah, faced gruesome torture and a jug of molten lead was poured into his crown to find out that where the diamond hidden, as shown in the famous web series 'Game of Thrones.' Moreover the Afghani queen Wafa Begum and wife of Shuja Shah ruler of Durrani dynasty defines the value of the diamond as "*If a powerful man threw four stones in four different direction East, West, North, South and fifth up into the air and the spaces between them was filled with gold, all would not equal the value of koh-i-noor*".

In the following years Durani's eventually lost their grip on power, and in 1809 Shah Shujah Durrani (1785-1842) was dethroned and obliged to flee to Lahore when he gave the diamond in his bracelet then as a gift to the ruler of the Punjab, and the founder Sikh empire, Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780-1839) who is famously known as *Sher-i-Punjab* and he wore it on his bicep in an armband. Jewelers of Amritsar describes that the value of the diamond as "far beyond all computation". Hence by 1813 the fabled Kohinoor diamond

came back on the land of Hindustan, under the treasury of Sikh empire.

The first half of the nineteenth century in India marked as the dominance of British Expansionist policy on account of this in 1849 after the Second Anglo-Sikh War, East India Company ended the rule of Sikh empire. Following the end of war, Treaty of Lahore was signed and as per the third provision of treaty, "*The Gem called the Koh-i-Noor, which was taken from Shah Shooja-ool-Moolk by Maharaja Ranjeet Singh, shall be surrendered by the Maharajah of Lahore to the Queen of England*". After the voyage of approximately 10,000 miles the gem became the special possession of Queen Victoria. Due to its stardom in the year 1851 it was decided to exhibit it at Hyde Park in London and the common people of Britain got the opportunity to see the world famous diamond, reaction was penned in *The Times* (13 June, 1851) as, "*After all the work which has been made about that celebrated diamond our readers will be rather surprised to hear that many people find a difficulty in bringing themselves to believe, from its external appearance that it is anything but a piece of common glass.*" On account of this in 1853 Prince Albert took decision of re-cutting and re-polishing of the gem so that it will become more bright and luminous. But because of this process it loses its forty percent of weight (186 carats – 105.6 carats). Because of its famous curse it was decided that the queen will be the one who wear it, over the next years it became the part of Royal Jewels and worn by Queen Alexandra, Queen Mary, Queen Angela Marguerite, Queen Elizabeth II and now by Queen Consort. Today the diamond rests in the same crown at the Tower of London in the Jewels House of Waterloo Barracks. It's been 173 years that the British royal's has the possession of Koh-i-Noor.

Today India along with Pakistan and Afghanistan claims the ownership of diamond. In the year 2016 a petition was filed in Lahore high court, as well as in Supreme Court of India to demand the return of Koh-i-noor. However, the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto got an answer from the Prime Minister of United Kingdom Callaghan as, 'I need not remind you of the various hands through which the stone has passed over the past two centuries, nor that explicit provision for its transfer to the British crown was made in the peace treaty with the Maharajah of Lahore in 1849. I could not advise her Majesty that it should be surrendered.' Also in 2000 Taliban spokesperson, Faiz Ahmad Faiz want Queen to return the diamond and call it as Afghanistan's legitimate property and demanded for it to be handed over to the regime. Nevertheless British Government rejects these claims, and has stated since the end of the British rule that the status of the diamond is non-negotiable.

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