

AMIR M O H T A S H E M I



South Indian Carved Box

Possibly Mysore, India, 19th century

Wood

19cm high, 32.5cm wide, 43.5cm long

Stock no.: A5611

A richly carved wooden box with of scenes of Hindu mythology concerning the life of the god Krishna, animals, and floral motifs with strong architectural elements of South Indian temples. A monogram reading as "SPB" on a raised plaque rests on the lid which is covered in scrollwork. Whilst the back of the box is decorated with a full panel of relief-work flowers, vines and leaves, a squirrel and bird, the other three sides focus on mythology. Each of these sides is split into three panels, each with a separate scene from Krishna's life.

On the front, the middle panel shows Krishna surrounded by his wives, flanked by two attendants standing near pillars in the palace. The panel to the left show Balkrishna or young Krishna in the Makhanchor or butter-thief scene, where his mother Yashoda catches him eating freshly churned butter from a pot. They are surrounded by flowers and tendrils. The panel to the right shows him as Govardhan, playing the flute amongst the cows. The central panel on the right side of the box shows the scene of Krishna stealing the gopis' clothes and hiding in a tree while they appeal to him to give them back. The panel to its right is Yashoda feeding the child Krishna. And the panel to the right shows the demoness Putana, sent by Krishna's uncle to kill Krishna, being drained off her life when she tried to poison the baby Krishna by breastfeeding him, only to fail and be killed instead. On the left side of the box, the central panel appears to depict Krishna atop the snake Kaliya's head while his wives beg Krishna for his mercy. The panel to the right shows a seated Krishna with the hood of sheshnag above him, possibly to highlight the link between Krishna and Vishnu. The third panel shows a seated Krishna within a room with an arch above him, while an attendant holds a peacock by his side.

The lid of the box is tiered with floral carving across the border of each level. The architectural elements on this box are highlighted once again through the appearance of niches reminiscent of deva koshtas that are central on a raised tiered-section in the style of a temple gopuram. Above the niche on the front of the box is the carved face of a god with a carved arching headdress design. The spaces above the other three niches do not have the face of a god but has the carved arched design above it. When the lid is placed on the box, these central raised sections line up with the central section of each panel of the box, enhancing the architectural theme and giving it a stronger temple design appearance. Three large sandalwood models of temples, carved in the same distinctive style with vegetal motifs and Hindu Gods, are housed in the collection of the Victoria & Albert Museum (accession no. [IM.6-1926](#)). They were collected by the British engineer John Alfred Jones during his time working in the Madras Presidency in South India.