

# FOREWORD

India has always welcomed those who arrive with open eyes and a sincerity of purpose. For centuries, artists, scholars, and seekers have come to this land and been changed by it—absorbed into its complexity, inspired by its beauty, and challenged by its depth. In turn, India has drawn from these encounters to shape new forms of expression, new conversations, and new ideas.

Every region, city, town, and street tells a unique story of the country. Through our art, architecture, design, and craftsmanship, we see stories of culture, of heritage—and above all, of passion. To be born into its traditions is to carry both a profound sense of belonging and an awareness of responsibility—to history, to community, and to self.

Over the years, I have come to understand that the role I hold is not merely ceremonial. It is a bridge—between past and present, between the stories we preserve and the futures we imagine. The weight of that legacy is significant, but it is also a source of inspiration. It calls for reflection, care, and above all, a commitment to serve in ways that are meaningful for our time.

*India: A Journey Within and Without* is a meditation on who we are, and who we might become. The pages that follow are not just a chronicle of places or moments; they are part of a search, one that I believe is shared by many of us who straddle tradition and modernity.

It tells the story of a journey through the landscape of Indian craft, design, and imagination. It reminds us that tradition is not fixed in time, but made dynamic by those who engage with it. I offer this foreword not just as a preface to a book, but as a gesture of solidarity with that journey.

His Highness Maharaja Sawai Padmanabh Singh of Jaipur

## FACING PAGE

The Maharaja of Jaipur wears a white *bandhgala* coat and pajama with a cummerbund, ancestral medals pinned to his chest, and holds an ornate ceremonial sword wrapped in a shawl bearing Jaipur's traditional colors, symbolic of past military victories.

Around his neck rests a diamond-and-emerald necklace, while his pink turban bears a *sarpech*—a paisley-shaped diamond plume with briolette and five-carat solitaire drop.





**RIGHT**  
 The Chhavi Niwas, or Hall of Mirrors and Images, in Jaipur's City Palace was built by Maharaja Sawai Pratap Singh (c. 1778–1803) as a monsoon retreat for music, poetry, and quiet reflection. Distinguished by its refined indigo palette, the room evokes water and divine contemplation. Delicate floral and arabesque motifs, painted in natural pigments with white and gold accents, adorn its vaulted walls, while polished marble floors mirror soft light filtered through latticed windows. The space embodies the *Ganga-Jamuni Tehzeeb*, or composite culture, that flourished in Jaipur—melding Rajasthani fresco technique, Mughal floral design, and European perspective into a seamless aesthetic. Serene yet opulent, the Chhavi Niwas exemplifies Jaipur's mastery of proportion, symmetry, and restraint—a room where color, craft, and atmosphere unite to express the poetic harmony of India's artistic synthesis.

**PAGES 28–29**  
 The Chitrashala, or Hall of Paintings, within the Garh Palace in Bundi, Rajasthan, is a masterpiece of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Rajput mural art. Its open pavilion overlooks a terraced garden, while every wall and ceiling is covered with luminous frescoes painted on white lime plaster. These murals depict scenes from Hindu mythology, especially the *rāsilā* of Krishna, Ragamala musical modes, and episodes of courtly life—hunts, processions, and monsoon revels, rendered in vivid blues, greens, and golds. Bundi painters achieved lyrical grace and intricate landscape detail—lotus ponds, gardens, and rolling hills alive with rhythm and emotion. Distinctive to Bundi are these lush, dreamlike landscapes, where nature becomes a poetic participant in human and divine drama. The Chitrashala embodies the Rajput synthesis of art, poetry, and devotion, transforming architecture into a theater of *rasa*, where color and spirit converge.





**RIGHT**  
An articulated gold perfume flask in the form of a fish, crafted from meticulously fitted scales that allow for fluid, lifelike movement. It rests upon nineteenth-century antique velvet, richly embroidered with gold thread—both from the Amrapali Museum, Jaipur.

**BELOW**  
Inside the Amrapali workshop, these pearls are waiting to be set into gold earrings.

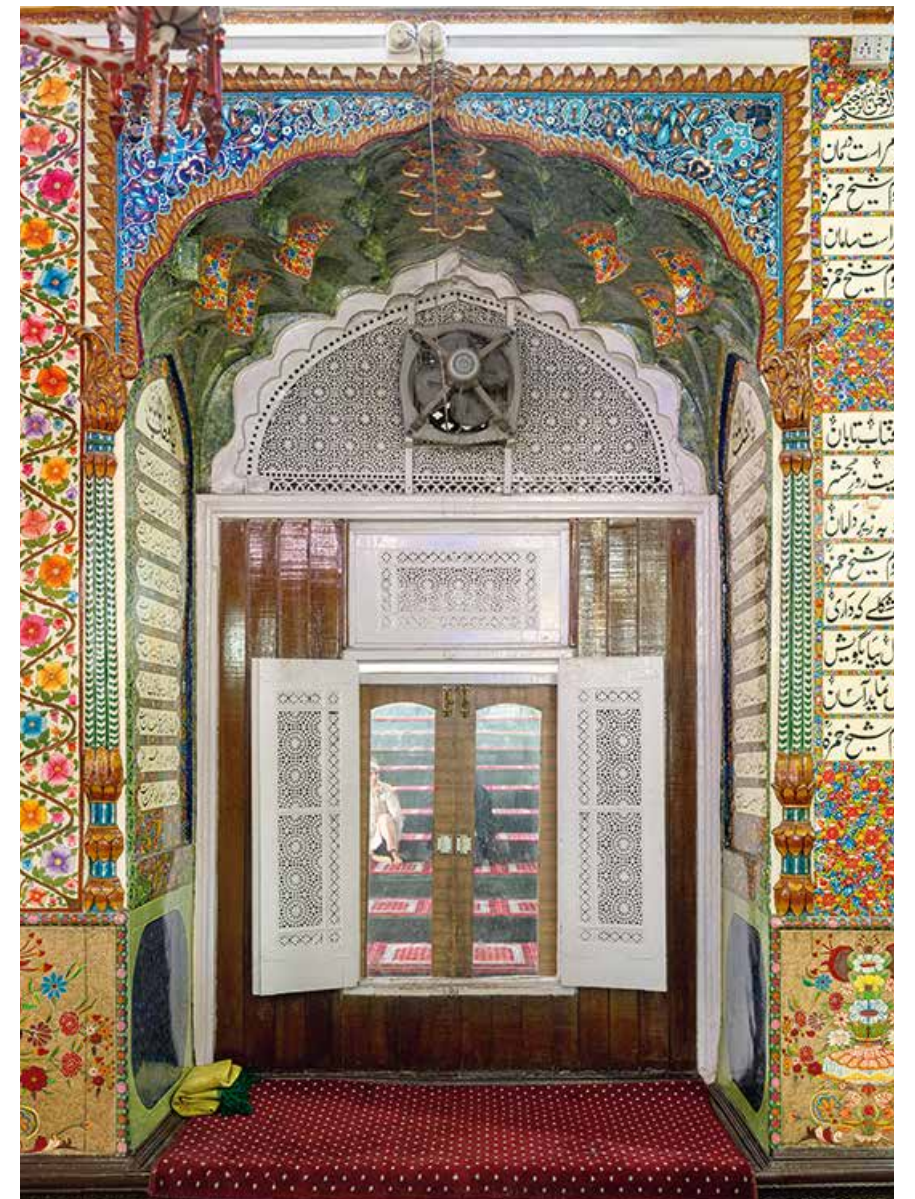
**FACING PAGE**  
A *navratna* necklace by Amrapali, assembled with new and antique elements and accented with Basra pearls. The traditional nine gemstones—ruby, diamond, pearl, red coral, hessonite, blue sapphire, cat's eye, yellow sapphire, and emerald—represent the nine celestial bodies of Indian astrology, arranged in sacred order to bestow protection, health, and prosperity upon the wearer.







FACING PAGE, RIGHT, AND PAGES 260–261  
The interiors of the Hamza Makhdoom shrine in Srinagar feature vibrant *naqashi* painted panels, stained-glass windows, and colored-glass chandeliers, creating a richly chromatic spatial atmosphere of reflected and diffused light, drawing congregants toward visual and spiritual ecstasy.



## Sufi Mystics and Makers

In the fourteenth century, the Valley of Kashmir, ringed by snow-clad mountains and watered by glacial rivers, was already a land of extraordinary beauty and spiritual depth. Here, ancient Buddhist traditions lingered beside Hindu Shaivism, shaping a culture both contemplative and artistic. Into this landscape of tolerance and introspection came the Persian Sufi mystic Mir Sayyid Ali Hamadani (1314–1384), known as Shah-i-Hamadan, or “King of Hamadan.”

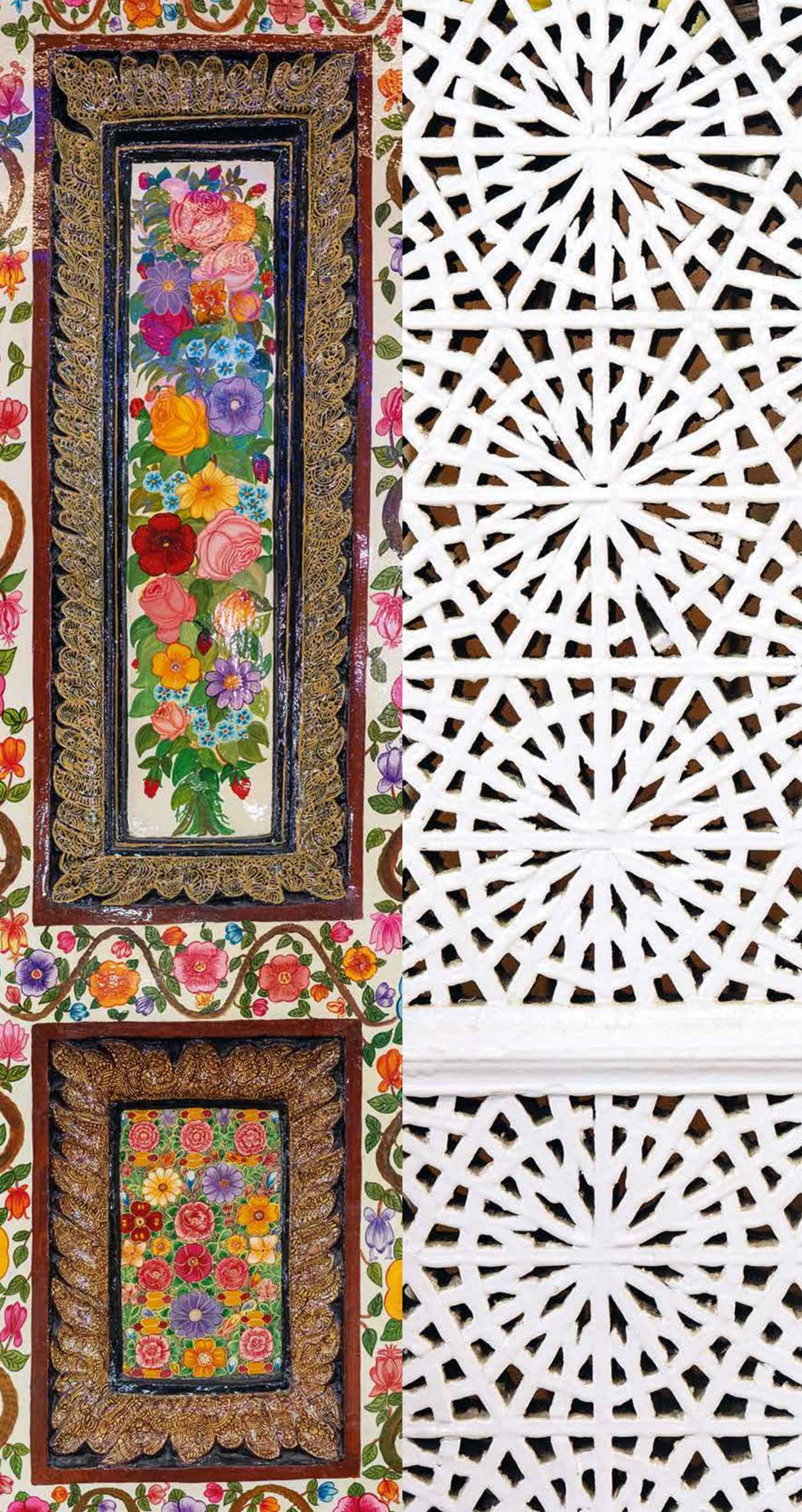
Arriving around 1372 CE during the reign of Sultan Shihab-ud-Din, Hamadani travelled with nearly seven hundred disciples—not only scholars and theologians but also master artisans skilled in weaving, metalworking, wood carving, calligraphy, and architecture. They settled in Kashmir, introducing refined Persian techniques that soon merged with indigenous craft traditions. The Valley’s famed carpet weaving, shawl embroidery, papier-mâché (*kar-e-qalamdani*), wood carving, and metal inlay all trace their lineage to this migration.

The Khanqah-e-Moula, Hamadani’s shrine on the banks of the Jhelum River in Srinagar, remains a symbol of this synthesis: a timber structure adorned with carved brackets, painted panels, and radiant papier-mâché ornament—Persian elegance interpreted through Kashmiri craftsmanship.

Hamadani’s Sufi message emphasized unity, compassion, and divine love, ideas that harmonized with Kashmir’s existing metaphysical traditions. His teachings found resonance among both Hindus and Buddhists, bridging faiths through the belief that creation itself is an expression of the divine.

Through this encounter of Persian spirituality and Kashmiri artistry, the Valley became not just a place of scenic beauty but a cradle of cultural synthesis, where faith inspired form, and craft became a medium of devotion. Kashmir’s luminous arts—woven, carved, and painted—remain living embodiments of that inclusive Sufi vision.







PAGES 298-299 AND FACING PAGE  
In the dining room of the Figueiredo Mansion, a grand carved dining table of teak and rosewood once hosted gatherings of up to fifty guests beneath chandeliers of filigreed Belgian glass. The space, illuminated by their warm shimmer, retains its eighteenth-century porcelain service—an orange-and-gold sixty-piece china set commissioned from the East India Company for a family wedding—displayed in its original cabinet.

ABOVE  
Nearby, the Green Bedroom reveals another hand-painted faux-marble wall in soft jade tones edged with rose banding, an eighteenth-century technique used to evoke depth and opulence without imported stone. High ceilings aid ventilation in Goa's humid climate, while antiques gathered over four centuries—Chinese porcelain,

Mozambican wood carvings, European furniture—speak to the family's global reach. Together, these rooms embody the mansion's enduring synthesis of Indian artistry and European refinement, preserved through generations of the same lineage.

Acknowledgments

This book was born of journeys, questions, and a longing to understand the soul of a civilization—journeys both inward and outward. Along the way, I have been guided, hosted, challenged, and inspired by individuals whose generosity of spirit and depth of knowledge have shaped every page.

I am deeply honored to have received the encouragement and hospitality of H.H. Maharaja Sawai Padmanabh Singh of Jaipur, Shriji Huzur Dr. Lakshyaraj Singh Mewar of Udaipur, Yuvraj Shri Manavendra Pratap Singh of Alwar, Raja Shri Yadavendra Singh of Samode, and H.H. Maharana Sri Siddharajsinhji Dhirendrasinhji of Lunawada, Gujarat. My warm thanks also to H.H. Rajkumari Gauravi Kumari of Jaipur, H.H. Maharani Nina Kumari of Lunawada, and Maharajkumari Saheb Shri Mrinalini Kumari, whose grace and insight continue to inspire.

Beyond palaces and institutions, this book was equally shaped by friendships—by those who opened doors, shared knowledge, and guided me through landscapes both familiar and unknown.

My sincere thanks to Shri Samvit Sarabhai, Janab Salim Wazir, Shri Karan Singh Vaid, Dr. Mayank Gupta, Shri Ashwani Sharma Kukki, and Shri J.P. Sharma.

I am particularly grateful to Shri Nand Kishore Chaudhary and Shri Yogesh Chaudhary of Jaipur Rugs, whose friendship, vision, and shared commitment to craft continue to inspire both my creative and commercial journeys; to Shri Tarang Arora of Amrapali Jewels, whose generosity opened the doors to his museum and workshops and the extraordinary world of Indian jewelry traditions; and to Ms. Barbara Miolini, whose remarkable hospitality and trust allowed me to photograph the distinctive spaces she has created in Jaipur.

I am equally grateful to Shrimati Jaya Jaitly, a tireless champion of Indian craft and a cherished family friend; Shri Vijay Kumar Dhar, Shrimati Kiran Amla, Janab Asaf Ali, Dr. Javid Ahmad Wani, Janab Burhan ud din Khateeb, and Janab Syed Fazal Kashani, whose guidance, knowledge, and generosity were instrumental in shaping my journeys through Kashmir—a landscape where history, artistry, and memory exist in extraordinary, delicate balance.

My thanks also to H.E. Carlos José de Pinho e Melo Pereira Marques, whose friendship and generosity of spirit opened doors to the churches, houses, and layered histories of Goa; and to Dom Pedro Figueiredo de Albuquerque de Oliveira Novais, Dona Sharmila Bragança, and Dom Ashley Bragança Pereira, whose warmth and hospitality revealed yet another facet of India’s extraordinary cultural tapestry.

With special appreciation for the master artisans Shri Vankar Shamji Vishram Valji and Janab Sufiyan Ismail Khatri, whose knowledge, discipline, and generosity embody the living traditions celebrated in these pages.

My profound thanks to Ambroise Tézenas, whose extraordinary eye, sensitivity, and intuitive understanding of atmosphere transformed these journeys into images of remarkable depth and poetry.

I am deeply grateful to Suzanne Tise-Isoré, Editorial Director at Éditions Flammarion, Styles & Design collection, whose intelligence, insight, and steady encouragement were instrumental in shaping this project over the years. My thanks also to Karine Huguenaud, Senior Editor, for her sensitive insights and deep knowledge of art history, and to Bernard Lagacé, Graphic Designer, for his openness and exceptional creative talent.

Finally, my deepest gratitude to my many friends and family; to my loving wife Cécile Ojalvo D’Ascoli; to our extraordinary team at Talianna Studio; and to Shri Manoj Singh, my steadfast companion on countless journeys, whose loyalty, patience, and good humor have carried me safely across India’s roads, landscapes, and improbable adventures.

This book is, above all, a reflection of the generosity, knowledge, and artistry I have been privileged to encounter—a reminder that culture lives not in objects alone, but in people, relationships, and the enduring intelligence of the human hand.

