Fly whisk - Chowry or fly whisker ('Chamer')

Object: Fly whisk
Place of origin: Calcutta (made)
Date: ca. 1855 (made)
Artist/Maker: Unknown
Materials and Techniques: Yak's tail, silver handle
Museum number: 2491(IS)
Gallery location: In Storage

Public access description
Ceremonial fly whisks are emblems of royalty across the Indian subcontinent, regardless of the religious allegiance of the ruler, and are also used to indicate divinity. Thus, early Hindu and Jain sculptures often include attendants holding fly whisks next to the deity. Chauri - a plume of yak tail hair in an elaborate holder - are the most frequently used and depicted emblems of royalty. This example has a tail from a yak that would have been native to the Tibetan plateau, set in an opulent silver holder. The fly whisk was originally acquired by the Indian Museum in London in 1855, probably from the Paris exhibition of that year, and may have been made specifically as an exhibition piece. The brief accession record made by the Indian Museum gives its place of origin as Calcutta. The fly whisk was transferred to the South Kensington Museum in 1879.

Descriptive line
Yak's tail with chased and engraved silver handle, Calcutta, India, c. 1850

Physical description
A yak's tail is mounted on a silver handle that is cast, chased and engraved Ca. 1855.

Dimensions
Height: 108 cm, Width: 40 cm

Museum number
2491(IS)

Object history note
Possibly acquired from the Exposition Universelle, Paris in 1855.

The hair or wool from tail of a yak that would have been from the Tibetan plateau is set in a handle. It is a fly whisk, representing a symbol of importance of the person over whom it was held. Chamer, Bengali for chowry, is also used during worship of a deity or shrine. The word 'chamer' is derived from 'chamri gai' meaning yak.

URL
http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O15459/chowry-or-fly-whisker-chamer-fly-whisk-unknown/