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## **The sword that Mallya bought**

Now that Vijay Mallya has retrieved and repatriated the Sword of Tipu Sultan, perhaps it might spur other rich individuals to make a similar bid for other Indian treasures scattered – or salted away -- across the world. There are some pretty useful baubles out there, particularly in the diamonds category. As a matter of fact, about half of the top ten largest stones are of Indian origin.

For starters there is the Kohinoor, which, if not the largest (The Great Mogul was much bigger) is certainly the most famous of Indian diamonds. It is said to have weighed 186 carats when it was first discovered in the 14th century. By the time it passed through many hands and was spirited away by the Brits, it had been cut down to 108 carats. It's now part of the British crown jewels.

Then there is the Regent, which weighed more than 410 carats when discovered by a slave near Golconda in the 18th century. The bauble was once owned by William Pitt, the English Prime Minister, who sold it to the Duke of Orleans, the regent of France (hence The Regent). Louis XV wore it at his coronation and it adorned the hat of Marie Antoinette. After the French revolution, it was owned by Napoleon Bonaparte who set it in the hilt of his sword. It is now on display in the Louvre.

The Blue Hope is the smaller among the 'large' diamonds but has few peers for sheer mystique. The 44-carat stone is believed to carry a curse. Many of its owners have died in misery. It was once owned by Louis XIV. Stolen during the French Revolution, it showed up again in 1830 and was bought

by Henry Philip Hope of London (hence Hope Diamond). It now resides at the Smithsonian Museum in Washington.

Then there is the Sancy Diamond, a 55-carat pale yellow stone that fluoresces yellow and pink. It was found in India, passed through French and English Kings, was bought by a Bombay merchant in the 19th century but lost to America's Lady Astor (who had it on her wedding tiara) before it was retrieved by the French. Current resting place: The Louvre.

Incidentally, one of the reasons why many of the largest stones in history are of Indian origin, a scholar at the Smithsonian Museum told me, was that India pretty much held the monopoly on diamond mining till Brazil stumbled across its cache. Then diamonds began to be discovered in Africa in larger quantities even as the Indian discoveries petered out.

The weight of famous diamonds shifted sharply towards South Africa after the discovery in of the Cullinan, which was over 3100 carats and weighed just under a kilo in the rough. It was cut into nine major stones and 96 smaller stones. The biggest chunk piece, the Star of Africa, has 74 facets, weighs 530 carats, and is considered the largest cut diamond in the world. It is also part of the British Crown Jewels, but we can let the South African worry about that.

There are plenty of other Indian gee-gaws, not to speak of the Peacock Throne, a kursi royale inlaid with a mere 26,733 precious stones that was carted away from Delhi by Nadir Shah and deposited in Iran. There is also the Cartier necklace, which was recently on display in New York. Commissioned by the Maharaja of Patiala in 1928, it was laid with 2930 diamonds and weighed almost a thousand carats.

Clearly we need a few more Vijay Mallyas and a lot more than Rs 1.5 crore.