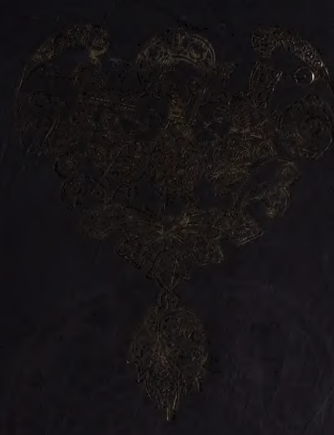


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# Dance of the Peacock

## Jewellery Traditions of India

Usha R Bala Krishnan  
Meera Sushil Kumar

Photography  
Bharath Ramamrutham

India, the 'Golden Country', since time immemorial, lured those in quest of spices, gold and precious gems. The principal trade routes across land and sea in the ancient world all led to India. As a repository of what was once the greatest concentration of mineral wealth on earth, this treasury of the world earned the epithet *sone ki chidia* or 'bird of gold'.

Spanning 5000 years of this glorious legacy, *Dance of the Peacock* takes an ethnographic approach, weaving factual information with the many fascinating stories recounted by ancient travellers to India. The book pays homage to the aesthetics of the patron and the virtuosity of the craftsman. Above all, *Dance of the Peacock* celebrates the human impulse to adorn.

Providing a spectacular visual panorama are the over 500 colour plates, each item of jewellery meticulously photographed to set off its every technical and aesthetic nuance. Accessing collections that have never been documented before the book showcases some of the most outstanding examples of Indian jewellery from all over the world.

*The peacock is the Bird of India, its dance a celebration of life and beauty. Radiant with iridescent colours, the flamboyant bird has inspired jewellers through the ages. In ear ornaments, necklaces and bangles, the peacock repeatedly recurs as a motif in Indian jewellery.*





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Usha R. Bala Krishnan • Meera Sushil Kumar

Photography  
Bharath Ramamrutham

Project Director  
Usha R. Bala Krishnan



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[Note: *Italicised numerals in brackets within the text represent plate numbers.*]



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*the Bird of India, flamboyantly coloured, the harbinger of love and renewal.*

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**Usha Ramamrutham Bala Krishnan**

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**Meera Sushil Kumar**

OUR DESIGNERS



OUR JEWELLERY DESIGNS ARE BORROWED FROM THE TRADITIONAL INDIAN WOMAN.  
AND PRESERVED IN PURE 22 KARAT GOLD.

π  
TANISHQ

PRECIOUS JEWELLERY  
GUARANTEED BY TITAN

*For Arya,  
my most precious jewel.*

USHA R. BALA KRISHNAN

## *Dedication*

*To the Indian craftsman and collector  
whose combined efforts have helped  
preserve a fine legacy.*

MEERA SUSHIL KUMAR





The Bird of Gold

*“Gods, Asuras, Gandharas, Kinnaras began to pour into  
Dwaraka, to Krishna and Valarama.*

*Some descended from the sky, some from their cars –  
and alighting underneath the banyan tree,  
looked on Dwaraka, the matchless.*

*The city was square; – it measured a hundred yojanas, and over all,  
was decked in pearls, rubies, diamonds, and other gems.*

*The city was high, – it was ornamented with gems;  
and it was furnished with cupolas of rubies and diamonds, –  
with emerald pillars, and with court-yard of rubies.*

*It contained endless temples.*

*It had cross-roads decked with sapphires,  
and highways blazing with gems.*

*It blazed like a meridian sun in summer.”<sup>21</sup>*



The story of Indian jewellery goes back over 5000 years to the pre-historic past. It is scattered over vast tracts of land, and nestles amidst silent emblems of human endeavour. But then what is 5000 years for the god-intoxicated Indian who believes that life is only a temporary halt in the eternal cycle of birth and re-birth? Only an ephemeral moment! In every birth, he sought to immortalise his presence by leaving his imprint on earth. Decoration of his physical surroundings and of his self was a consuming pre-occupation. From the clay beneath his feet, he fashioned items for everyday use, toys for his amusement and images for veneration; from the mountains and quarries, he hewed slabs of stone into architectural edifices of great proportions and sculpted them into likenesses of himself and of his environment; from deep within the earth, he extracted imperishable minerals and metals and crafted beautiful pieces to adorn his body. Generation after generation these archetypes of human endeavour passed through time, and were admired, worshipped and worn by man, woman and child. The story of Indian jewellery is woven from these time-worn threads. Silent links in the history of our land.

Indian jewellery defies chronology. In spite of a belief in the transmigration of the soul, the custom of burying worldly possessions with the dead was not prevalent in India. Few pieces of jewellery have been found in the course of archaeological excavations and even fewer have an accepted provenance. Examples from different parts of the country and from each era in history are therefore negligible. The country is vast, the influences many and there has been a continuous movement of people, concepts, designs and even techniques over large areas. If extant examples of jewellery are rare, rarer still are names

1 (page 10)  
A PRINCESS CHOOSING JEWELLERY  
Kangra; c.1800–10  
Opaque watercolour on paper  
Courtesy Sotheby's

2 (page 11)  
KALGI (turban ornament)  
North India; early 20<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection  
*A crest jewel in the form of a gem-set peacock.  
The bird of India dances with outspread feathers  
in celebration of its timeless heritage.*

3  
SARPECH (turban ornament)  
North India; mid-18<sup>th</sup> century  
L: 22 cm  
Christies Images  
*Petals of rubies encircle table-cut diamonds in  
foliate panels suspended with large spinels. Such  
exquisitely crafted jewels were emblems of court  
splendour and were hallmarks of the aesthetic  
vision of patron and craftsman.*





*Maitreya enters the sixth court in Vasantasena's home and looks about: "Well! Here in the sixth court they are working in gold and jewels. The arches set with sapphires look as if they were the home of the rainbow. The jewellers are testing the lapis lazuli, the pearls, the corals, the topazes, the sapphires, the cat's eyes, the rubies, the emeralds, and all the other kinds of gems. Rubies are being set in gold. Golden ornaments are being fashioned. Pearls are being strung on a red cord. Pieces of lapis lazuli are being cleverly polished. Shells are being pierced. Corals are being ground."*<sup>[1]</sup>



4  
**VASANTASENA**  
 Uttar Pradesh, Mathura; Kushan period,  
 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.  
 H: 97 cm W: 75 cm  
 National Museum, New Delhi (2800)

*A sculpture of the beautiful courtesan Vasantasena, heroine of the text Mricchakatika, decked in the jewellery of the period. Literature and the plastic arts together provide an insight into the ornament traditions of ancient India.*

of jewellers, goldsmiths, and designers. Families hold jewellery as private wealth, sometimes worn, but never shown. Throughout history, the easy portability of jewellery has been the one factor that has not just allowed vast quantities to be carried and displayed at will, but also made it the prime target of invaders seeking to loot. Therefore, unlike the plastic arts, it has not been feasible to strictly compartmentalize and segregate jewellery forms on the basis of historic periods, geographical regions or even caste and religion.

Indian jewellery is not merely craft; it is an art, both in design and workmanship. It therefore deserves to be studied as a major art form, on par with architecture, sculpture and painting. The study of Indian jewellery in fact warrants a multi-disciplinary approach. Thus, we are the archaeologist-historian voyaging back in time, tracing references in literature and the plastic arts; perusing the chronicles of kings, travelling along ancient trade routes from the diamond mines of Golconda to the emerald mines of Colombia, and thereon to the royal ateliers and humble workshops. We assume the role of the anthropologist seeking the meaning behind the pieces to learn about people and traditions.



We delve into the meanings of symbols and forms, as well as the social, psychological and spiritual ethos in which these jewels have taken root. We probe the creative mind of the jewellery designer for whom all Creation was an inexhaustible source of inspiration. We humbly sit by the craftsman painstakingly shaping precious metals and gems into timeless jewels. Above all, we are the chroniclers, documenting an art whose terminology, purity of form and distinctive reason for being are fast vanishing even as we write.

In the absence of any documentation of designs, symbolism and terminology, we have had to rely on evidence in sculptures, paintings, photographs, contextual literary references, and discussions with elderly people, jewellers and craftsmen, temple priests and philosophers. Ancient texts and travelogues have proved to be invaluable sources of information in this endeavour. They are first-hand accounts about the locations of the rich mineral resources of India, the demand for them in the west and the trade in these commodities. While it has been necessary to sift fact from fiction, the colourful imagery of life and culture in the past and the descriptions of wealth and pomp of court life all evoke powerful images to complete the picture.

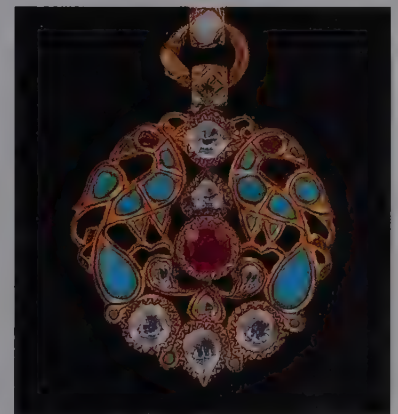
Jewellery in India has drawn upon many facets of the culture of its people, and has in turn been inspiration and solace to wearer and beholder. Sculptors and painters transgressed boundaries between the real, the ideal and the imaginary, profusely embellishing their images with ornaments. To the many classical Indian writers, gold and gemstones were a source of enchanting visual metaphors. Rulers used jewels as statements of power and prestige and as a monetary bulwark to fund wars and buy peace. To the Indian woman, jewellery has been more than the ultimate enhancer of beauty; it was *stridhan* – her security, to be encashed in times of need and distress. Jewellery was also indicative of the wearer's social status. And going beyond their earthly allure, jewels find a place in the realm of the metaphysical. Belief in the prophylactic and apotropaic power of gems was deeply ingrained in the Indian psyche. Thus a jewel often functioned as a medium between the known and the Unknown, between man and God.

Jewellery made of precious gems and gold had an intrinsic value, to be encashed if the need arose. Ornaments were taken apart, the gold melted and stones recycled into new settings in accordance with changing styles or for equitable distribution of family property. As a result, it is primarily amongst the peasants and the wandering tribes of India that “the oldest and most historic forms of ornaments have been preserved” in a purer form. “The chief reason is, that being made of base metal, it has never been worth while to break them up, as would be the case with silver or gold in case of poverty of the owner.”<sup>2</sup> In India, jewellery has always been portable wealth; history has proved just how portable this wealth was. Treasuries and temples were constantly raided in the course of invasions, and large quantities of precious metal and precious stones were carted away by invaders. Upheavals of this kind resulted in the destruction of old jewellery.

Since the bulk of the jewellery was non-denominational, and superstitions and beliefs were common to many parts of the country, ornaments became the one



6



5b

5a & 5b (facing page and detail above)  
TORQUE (neck collar – reverse)  
Benaras; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*This stiff gold neck collar is lavishly decorated with champléve and painted pink enamel on the reverse. The front (plate 5b) is set with diamonds, turquoise, rubies and some synthetic stones, perhaps replacing missing gems.*

6  
NATH (nose ornament)  
Rajasthan; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection, USA

*A striking emblem of marital felicity, this enormous gem-set circlet is no less than 10 cm in diameter and has rubies and diamonds kundan-set in gold.*



7

7  
**BAZUBAND (armbands)**  
 Hyderabad; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 H: 6 cm L: 14 cm  
 Private collection

*Uncut diamonds and Burmese peridots are set in an open cut-work setting in these jewels reputed to have once belonged to a princely family.*

8  
**MAKARAKANTI (necklace)**  
 Tamil Nadu; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 L: 36 cm  
 Private collection

*The ornament gets its name from the curving crocodile (makara) tail shape of the upper pendant. In this piece two gem-studded peacocks flank a large rosette. Forms derived from nature were a never-ending source of inspiration to the Indian craftsman.*

evidence culled from diverse sources, would be a hypothetical exercise to some extent.

From very early times, people moved from place to place for various reasons. Tradesmen and emissaries came to India in search of its fabled wealth. People migrated as a result of marriage alliances, seeking better livelihoods, journeyed on religious pilgrimages, and were compelled to move on expeditions of war and conquest. In this migratory movement, people became prime vehicles for the transmission of culture. As a result, ideas and design influences flowed freely past geographical boundaries. Craftsmen also carried their technology and skills, to cater to this population in flux. Manufacturing techniques too were synthesized. During the long years of dynastic rule, the courts set fashion trends, which found an echo in the tastes of the common people.

Surat and the Malabar Coast are excellent examples of the cross-fertilization that took place in jewellery traditions; they are microcosms of so many other parts of the country. The plurality of these two major gem trading regions, where indigenous inhabitants interacted with foreigners, merchants and migrant communities from other parts of the country, produced jewellery forms which exhibit a mixture of influences, whose individual strains are no longer identifiable. By amalgamating, absorbing and indigenizing the many influences, the Indian jeweller crafted an ornament that was distinctly and uniquely Indian.

The artistic merit of this unbroken tradition has been misunderstood by the uninitiated, who have labelled it 'aesthetic conventionalism'. Suffice here to quote Dr. Ananda Coomaraswamy's thoughts on Indian art: "In this kind of art there is no demand for novelty, because the fundamental needs of humanity are always and everywhere the same. What is required is originality, or vitality. What we mean by 'original' is 'coming from its source within'... the artist can only express what is in him... It makes no difference whether or not the same thing has been expressed a thousand times before. What matters is the intensity of the expression and such work will be original in the same sense that 'the recurrent seasons, sunrise and sunset are ever new'."<sup>3</sup>

In spite of the strong Portuguese, Dutch, French and British presence in different parts of the country from the 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards, very little western influence of prevailing contemporary European styles is evident until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The art deco movement that was popular in Europe at the time contributed a small share of influence, as did other western styles that were introduced by renowned foreign jewellery firms soliciting business in India; but this was confined to the wealthy aristocratic classes with little or no visible mark on the vast jewellery using peoples of India.

constant among all communities, resulting in a pan-Indianness in this art form. Moreover, the plastic arts and literature together testify that the jewellery forms of India in each historical period are so hybridized, that to separate and classify individual currents is difficult. Such a task, even if it were attempted, based on



For the marriage of his daughter Visakha, Treasurer Dhananjaya commissioned the making of a jewel. "On that very day Visakha's father caused five hundred goldsmiths to be summoned and said to them, 'Make for my daughter a great-creeper-parure.' So saying, he gave them a thousand nikkhas of ruddy gold and a sufficient supply of silver, rubies, pearls, coral, and diamonds to go with it... four months passed, and the parure was completed. In the making of this parure, four pint-pots of diamonds were used, eleven pint-pots of pearls, twenty-two pint-pots of coral, twenty-three pint-pots of rubies; with these and other of the seven kinds of jewels the parure was completed. Ordinary threads were not used in the making of this parure; the threadwork was entirely of silver. It was fastened to the head and extended to the feet. In various places seals of gold and dies of silver were attached to hold it in position. There was one seal on the crown of the head, one on the top of each ear, one at the throat, one on each knee, one at each elbow, one at the waist, and one at the small of the back.

In the fabric of this parure the goldsmiths wrought a peacock; in its right wing were five hundred feathers of ruddy gold, and in its left wing five hundred. Its beak was of coral, its eyes were of gems, and likewise its neck and its tail-feathers; the midribs of the feathers were of precious stones and likewise its legs. When it was placed on the crown of Visakha's head, it appeared like a peacock standing on the peak of a mountain and dancing; and the sound of the midribs of the thousand feathers was like the music of the celestial choir or of the five kinds of instruments. Only by going very close could people tell that it was not a real peacock. The materials used in the making of this parure cost nine crores, and a hundred thousand pieces of money were paid for the workmanship."<sup>[ii]</sup>



Jewellery in India was not the exclusive prerogative of women. The jewels of gods and kings rivalled those of women. Three distinct categories of precious jewellery for personal use were made in ancient India. In the first category were items that were made for daily use. Traditionally, no Indian woman, irrespective of status or caste, was without a set of basic daily wear ornaments. Ceremonial jewellery, made to be worn on special occasions, was more opulent. The most magnificent specimens that left many a chronicler speechless, were the jewels of the gods and kings. However, quality of workmanship was not compromised irrespective of the value and size of the ornament or the status of the intended wearer.

The subject of Indian jewellery is vast and complex. This enquiry is only the beginning, whose scope has been limited to gold and precious gems. This journey is not meant to be a geographical sojourn through the different regions of India, nor is it meant to be a strictly chronological and historical analysis. Accurate dating of Indian jewellery is a difficult task, since styles and designs continued unchanged over long periods of time. In assessing the historical, social or religious value of evidence, it is essential to bear in mind that in this field, more than in any other, ‘things heard are not things seen and to see things is to not comprehend them properly’.

It must be noted that the geographical boundaries of the country have expanded and contracted through millennia. The terms ‘India’ and ‘Indian’ have been used in this work to refer to ancient boundaries extending beyond the Hindu Kush in the west, to Burma in the east, and from the Himalayas in the north to the island of Ceylon in the south. Rubies and spinels from Badakshan and Burma, sapphires from Kashmir and precious gems from Ceylon were all traded in the bazaars of ancient India, supplying the many vibrant ateliers with an abundance of gems.

If all these jewels could only speak, what stories they could tell! Of their dark homes within the bowels of the earth; of being wrenched out, traded and transported over great distances to workshops and ateliers to be lovingly fashioned to grace the bodies of gods, men and women. They could tell stories of war, intrigue, love and hatred. Their sojourn in the forbidden precincts of the *zenana* made them privy to heartbreak, to gossip, to lover’s passionate embraces, to the vicissitudes of human life.

So many epithets have been used to describe the wealth that was India. None seems more apt than ‘*Sone ki Chidia*’, the Bird of Gold. For, indeed India has been a bird of gold, soaring above land and sea dispersing her wealth across vast geographical areas for over 5000 years. From the ancient past, her gold, her precious gems and her vast treasure of diamonds have not only appealed to every taste but have been in constant demand. For her jewels alone, this bird of gold has been assaulted and caged in successive periods of history. Her jewelled wings depleted, the bird continues to fly, occasionally soaring and swelling with pride, when one of her beautiful treasures surfaces for all the world to see.

“The peacock calls gently to his mate who tarries,  
and glances once again toward the sky;  
then, leaping from his stage, the earth,  
making a parasol of his unfolded tail,  
to the sound of thunder sweet as loud reverberations of a drum  
he performs his joyful dance.”<sup>4</sup>

*“Metals are (as Plants)  
hidden and buried in the  
bowels of the Earth, which  
have some conformitie in themselves,  
in the forme and manner of their  
production; for that we see and  
discover in them, branches, and as it  
were a bodie, from whence they grow  
and proceede, which are the greater  
veines and the lesse, so as they have a  
knitting in themselves: and it seemes  
properly that these Minerals grow  
like unto Plants, not that they have  
any inward vegetative life, being  
onely proper to Plantes: but they are  
engendered in the bowels of the earth,  
by the vertue and force of the Sunne  
and other Planets, and in long  
continuance of time, they increase  
and multiply after the manner of  
Plants.”<sup>[iii]</sup>*



9b

9a & 9b (facing page and detail above)  
KASU MALAI (necklace of coins)  
Tamil Nadu; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*This necklace of coins extends down to the waist.  
A pan-Indian ornament, the use of coins in  
jewellery constituted a form of savings and  
display of wealth.*





TRADE

## Meadows of Gold and Mines of Jewels



*“India, is the most agreeable  
abode on the earth,  
and the most pleasant  
quarter of the world.*

*Its dust is purer than air,  
and its air purer than purity itself:  
its delightful plains resemble the garden of Paradise,  
and the particles of its earth are  
like rubies and corals.”<sup>21</sup>*

India was a “gem-bearing” country. Deep inside the earth lay a veritable treasure trove of precious stones. Precious metals and minerals lay ensconced in her high mountains. Her innumerable rivers carried gold dust over fertile plains. India was home to the stone that lasts ‘forever’; Pliny’s ‘*adamas*’ was the Indian diamond. The country’s legendary wealth enticed adventure-minded travellers, traders in quest of the finest gems and dealers searching for the one piece that would ensure them untold riches. Trade routes and sources of merchandise were guarded with great secrecy and all kinds of fanciful stories fabricated to deter competitors. However, many of these intrepid travellers maintained detailed journals of their voyages, recording their visits to the mines, their dealings with gem traders, their audience with local rulers and their interaction with the people. These chronicles provide invaluable information of their passage, their impressions on politics, life and people, on the economics of trade, and on mining operations. They are the principal sources in the reconstruction of the story of the Indian gem traffic.

Corroborated with findings from geological studies and archaeological evidence, it is apparent that there was a brisk exchange of a variety of goods between India and Afghanistan, Persia, Soviet Asia, Tibet and Ceylon, as well as within the country itself. Gold, precious gems and semi-precious stones were the principal components of this trade. As caravans meandered across the Khyber and Bolan passes in the north-west frontier and along the foothills of the Himalayas, they stopped at trading posts, exchanging lapis lazuli, turquoise and coral, for carnelian, jasper and a variety of semi-precious hardstones. From the many seaports that lined the extensive eastern and western coastlines of India, ships sailed laden with all kinds of goods to overseas markets, while vessels from faraway lands laid anchor at Indian ports in quest of gems and spices.

In the early pre-Harappan period, the principal Indus cities, most notably Cambay, were important bead production

12

centres. Large deposits of hardstones in the surrounding areas gave rise to a flourishing industry, active even today. Semi-precious stones sourced into the Indus cities from all over India, together with raw lapis lazuli from Afghanistan and turquoise from Soviet Asia and Iran, were processed into beads and exported to countries as far afield as Mesopotamia. Cuneiform texts list lapis as one of the commodities, apart from copper and ivory, coming from “Meluhha” (India).

From time immemorial, Arabia was the principal trading partner of India. While the genesis of the Arab-Indian trade is untraceable, it is well-known that more than 3000 years ago stately galleons loaded with gold, precious stones, ivory, sandalwood and even monkeys from India unloaded their goods in the principal trading ports along



10 (page 20)

MAHARAJA JASWANT SINGH OF MARWAR  
Rajasthan, Jodhpur; c. 1880  
Opaque watercolour on paper  
Image: 32.5 cm x 24.1 cm  
The Brooklyn Museum, Gift of  
Mr. & Mrs. Robert L. Poster (87.234.6)

11 (page 21)

DARIYA-I-NUR DIAMOND (Sea of Light)  
Wt: 175–195 carats  
Photograph courtesy Royal Ontario Museum,  
© ROM

*The Dariya-i-Nur, a pale pink, step-cut, rectangular diamond, is perhaps the most outstandingly beautiful known diamond from the Golconda mines. Its flawlessness and clarity are unmatched. Piercing brilliance and icy hardness are distinctive qualities of Golconda diamonds.*

12

EARRINGS

Pakistan; 1<sup>st</sup>–2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.  
L: 5.7 cm  
Los Angeles County Museum of Art,  
Anonymous Gift (M.85.282 a–b)

*These repousse and cast gold earrings are decorated with minute granulation and are fine examples of the craftsmanship of the period.*

the Arabian coast such as Yemen, Aden and Muza. Sumerian and Phoenician traders participated in the disbursement of this precious cargo to far-flung markets, while Egyptian tradesmen loaded the vessels of the Pharaohs with Indian commodities for Egypt.<sup>2</sup>

### From Distant Ophir

“This Golden Country is like Gold, hard to find and much quarrelled, and needs a wise Myner to bring it out of the Labyrinths of darknesse, and to try and purifie the Myners themselves and their reports.”<sup>3</sup> Ophir, the ‘golden country’, is the earliest Indian port mentioned in ancient texts as the source for gold and precious stones. Its location has been identified as Sauvira, in the Gulf of Cambay north of Bombay.<sup>4</sup> Cities all along the western and eastern coasts acted as entry and exit points for commercial vessels. Names of ports that occur repeatedly in the mercantile context include Cambay (Khambhat or Khambhayat), Broach (Barygaza, Bhrgukaccha, Bharukaccha), Diu, Goa, Calicut, Kaveripattinam (Puhar) and Pulicat (Puleacate).

Ships sailing from the Persian Gulf to India navigated the circuitous route following the Arabian coastline. But in 1015 B.C., King Solomon and King Hiram of Tyre, in a pioneering maritime venture, sent commercial ships directly across the seas to India. They “came to Ophir and set from thence Gold 420. Talents, and brought it to King Solomon ... The Navie also of Hiram, that brought gold from Ophir brought it from Ophir great plenty of Almug trees and precious stones.”<sup>5</sup> From the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C., the Greeks played an important role in the Indian gem trade. The demand for gems in the Persian court and by Greek traders in the many bazaars of India was met by Indian gem dealers who travelled all over the country sourcing gemstones of outstanding quality. By the middle of the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C., a complex network of trade links had been established between north India and gem-rich south India.

The spread of Buddhism and the consequent interaction between Ceylon and India that flourished during the Mauryan dynasty (circa 321–187 B.C.) further encouraged the exchange of precious commodities in the form of gifts and tributes between rulers. This flow reached its zenith a thousand years later under Chola domination in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, when gems and precious stones from Ceylon or ‘Ratnadvipa’ (the Land of Precious Gems) poured into Indian markets and from there to the west. Trade was expanding in every direction, in a complex network of land routes and sea routes carrying people to destinations around the world and dispersing incredible quantities of gold and precious gems over vast geographical areas.

### Changing Equations

The Greeks, Syrians, Jews, Armenians and Arabs – intermediaries and subjects serving under the Roman Empire – continued to function as middle-men in the profitable commerce between Rome and India until around the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. when Emperor Augustus initiated direct trade with India. The dawn of the Christian era brought with it changed equations in mercantile traffic. The discovery of the monsoon winds by Hippalus (circa A.D. 45) obviated the necessity for these trading vessels to follow the Arabian and Persian coast. Sailors opted for the direct sea route, their sailing regulated by the monsoon

*“These creatures are larger than foxes, but are in other respects like the ants of our own country. They dig holes in the earth like other ants. The heap which they throw up consists of gold the purest and brightest in all the world. The mounds are piled up close to each other in regular order like hillocks of gold dust, whereby all the plain is made effulgent. It is difficult, therefore, to look towards the sun and many who have attempted to do this have thereby destroyed their eyesight. The people who are next neighbours to the ants, with a view to plunder these heaps, cross the intervening desert, which is of no great extent, mounted on wagons to which they have yoked their swiftest horses. They arrive at noon, a time when the ants have gone underground, at once seizing the booty make off at full speed. The ants, on learning what has been done, pursue the fugitives, and overtaking them fight with them till they conquer or die, for of all animals they are the most courageous. It hence appears that they understand the worth of gold, and that they will sacrifice their lives rather than part with it.”<sup>[1]</sup>*



13  
CHUDO (bangle)  
Gujarat, Kutch; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*A strikingly simple ivory and gold bangle. Ivory, a prized commodity, was considered symbolic of strength and vigour. Women wearing ivory bangles from wrist to shoulder are a common sight in Gujarat and Rajasthan.*



14

14  
ARMBAND

Pakistan, Gandhara, Sirkap; early Kushan period,  
1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.  
Diam: 7.6 cm  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York,  
Samuel Eilenberg Collection,  
Gift of Samuel Eilenberg, 1987 (1987.142.291)

*This hinged armband made from sheet gold over a lac core is startlingly modern in its extreme simplicity. Such forms are represented on sculptures of the period.*

15  
PLAQUE

Taxila (?); Kushan period, 1<sup>st</sup>–2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.  
H: 3.6 cm W: 4.4 cm  
Courtesy Victoria and Albert Museum,  
London (IS 10-1948)

*The purificatory power of gold is asserted in this repousse gold plaque depicting Hariti and Panchika (Kubera), perhaps worn as an amulet by a child. Hariti, an ancient folk goddess, was believed to protect children from small-pox. Panchika, her consort, was the giver of wealth and guardian of one of the four quarters.*

16  
COINS

North India; Kushan period, 2<sup>nd</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*These gold coins bearing images of Shiva with his vehicle, the bull, and Mitra, the Iranian deity of fire, are pierced to be strung and worn as pendants. Sculptures of this period testify that coins were worn in this manner all over India.*

17 (facing page)  
MAP

Adapted by permission from  
Joseph E. Schwartzberg (ed.),  
*A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> updated and  
enlarged impression, Oxford University Press,  
New York, 1992.

*Western knowledge of trade with India and of the many ports that lined her vast coastline was extensive. According to Pliny ... "Its races and cities are beyond counting ... India forms a third of the entire surface of the earth, and its populations are innumerable." III*

winds that blew towards India from April to October and away from India from October to April. As a result, traders halted for extended periods of time at their ports of call, awaiting the onset of favourable winds. In the interim, they travelled within the region, sourcing goods, interacting with the local populace, exchanging ideas and sharing their own culture and traditions. India's entire western and eastern coastline was dotted with flourishing market towns. Jewellery shops lined the streets of their bazaars, selling precious stones of every hue, size and quality to avid hunters.

The *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* (circa A.D. 60)

is a text that provides a detailed account of trade across the Indian Ocean, by an un-named Greek merchant living in Egypt. It methodically and accurately records the trade with India, listing the many items that were imported into the country and the variety of goods exported to far-flung markets around the world. The text also mentions the many active harbours of vibrant and profitable commerce that functioned as gateways for this trade. The Indus delta was an important port of call, from where goods were carried inland along the rivers. Anchors were dropped at Barugaza (Bharuch or Broach on the Narmada), Barbarikon on the Indus, Mouziris (Cranganore) and Nelcynda (Kottayam); the Chera ports, extending south from Goa, were also hubs of activity, for it was here that the eastern and western trade coalesced. These ports functioned as transit points for precious stones from Ceylon as well as for the export of Indian diamonds from the mines in the vicinity.

From the *Periplus* it is evident that gold and gold bullion was imported from Egypt and Arabia to Barugaza, and Roman gold coins, topaz and coral into the ports of south India. In exchange were exported exceptional quality pearls, ivory, silk and precious stones such as diamonds and sapphires, beryls, lapis lazuli and hardstones of every variety. Roman vessels laid anchor in ports all along the western and eastern coasts of south India, bringing emeralds from Egypt and corals from the Mediterranean. To pay for Rome's unabated obsession for luxury goods from India, including exotic foreign merchandise such as lions, tigers and elephants, the "Romans sent out coined money which never returned to them, not even in the form of Indian money."<sup>6</sup> The balance of trade during this period was clearly in India's favour.

The Roman trade was centred along the coast of south India, an area abundantly rich in gold, diamonds and pearls. Gems flooded the markets of cities such as Madurai,

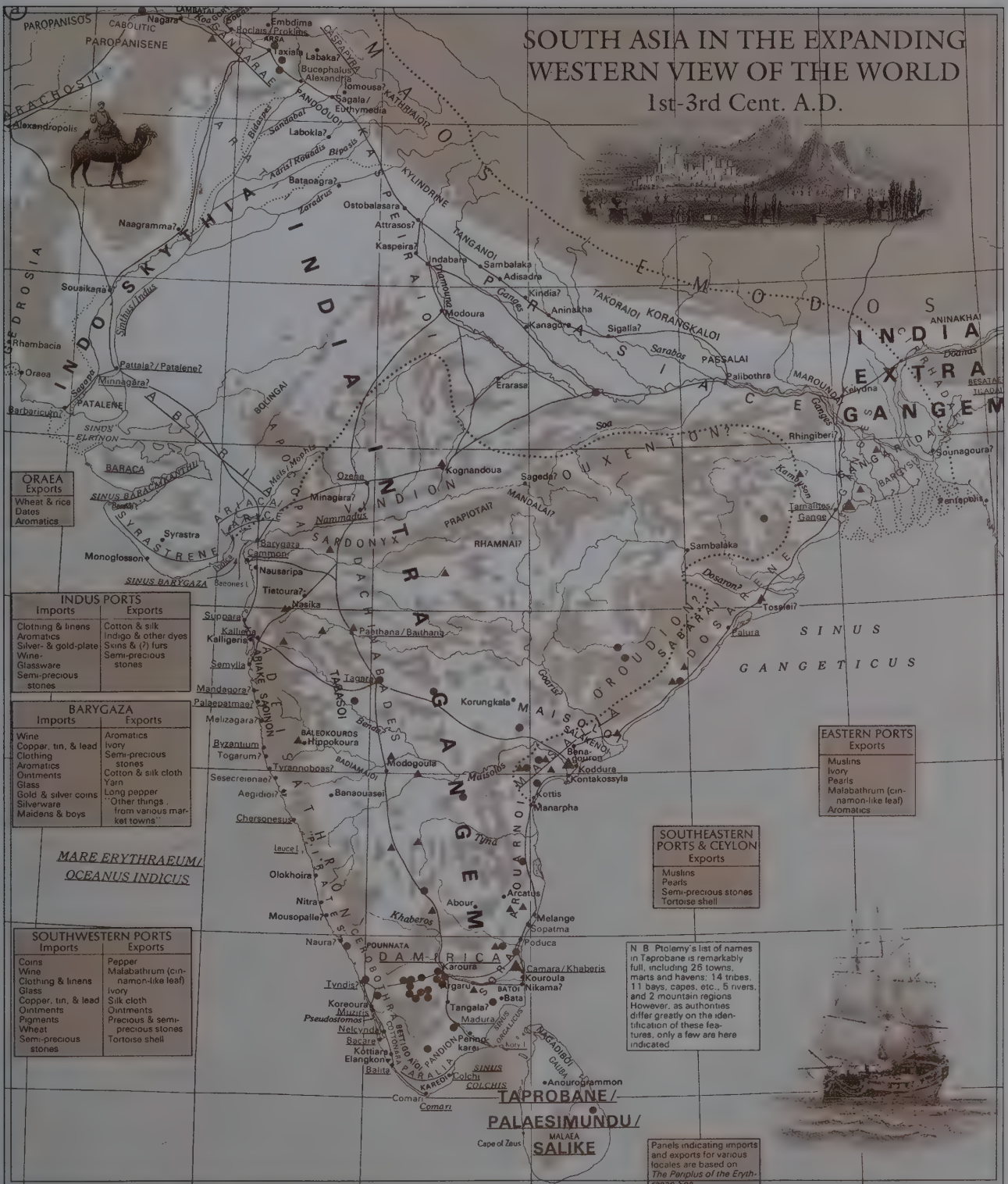


15



16

# SOUTH ASIA IN THE EXPANDING WESTERN VIEW OF THE WORLD 1st-3rd Cent. A.D.



Panel indicating imports and exports for various locales are based on *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*



18

18  
PAVAN SARA (necklace of coins)  
South India, Mangalore; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
L: 30 cm  
Private collection

*The twenty-seven gold coins in this necklace, most bearing the image of Queen Victoria, were collected over a span of 50 years. They depict the queen at different times, as a young girl right to when she is much older. The center coin shows her as Empress of India.*

19  
BEAD

North India; late Gupta period (?), 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> century  
H: 1.5 cm W: 2.5 cm  
Private collection

*Carved gold bead, executed with minute details in deep, almost three-dimensional relief. These enigmatic beads (plates 96, 97a, 97b) stylistically date to the Gupta period, but precise dating and provenance are still under study.*

19



while “the riches of the Puhar shipowners made the kings of faraway lands envious. The most costly merchandise, the rarest foreign produce, poured into the city by sea and caravans. Such was the abundance that, had all the world’s inhabitants been assembled within the city walls, the stocks would have lasted for many years.”<sup>7</sup> At Korkai, Kayal, Argaru (Uraiyur), and Arikamedu (Puduka), merchants sold pearls from the fisheries of the Gulf of Mannar, diamonds from the many mines of south India and precious stones imported from Ceylon. In spite of this free commerce, “the Indians kept their own sources secret, while the Tamils kept secret the Ceylonese origin of a good deal of what they sold to Roman subjects.”<sup>8</sup> Locations of mines were known to few and old myths circulated with conviction. Powerful rulers, who appropriated the largest and best quality stones for themselves, closely monitored mining operations, and access to mines was either forbidden or discouraged.

From the 6<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the Persians gradually took over the lucrative Indian gem trade

from the Romans. The spread of Islam resulted once again in Arab supremacy and their domination of the land and sea trade with the Orient. In this period, “Europe-bound gems travelled the caravan routes,”<sup>9</sup> changing hands in cities like Tabriz enroute, from where middlemen ensured their dispersal all over Europe. Venice was the destination of much of the precious gems of India until the Venetians enacted legislation to regulate this trade. The discovery of the sea route to the east round the Cape of Good Hope by the Portuguese in the 15<sup>th</sup> century marked the entry of other players, notably the Portuguese themselves.

### New Players

“A lucky venture, a lucky venture! Plenty of rubies, plenty of emeralds! You should thank God for having brought you to so rich a country,”<sup>10</sup> was the greeting that welcomed Vasco da Gama, when he dropped anchor in Calicut in 1497. The era of Portuguese intercourse with India was launched – an interaction that brought many a Portuguese merchant in quest of gems. As early as 1502, one “Joao da Nova brought back stones worth four thousand cruzados.”<sup>11</sup> In an effort to sustain their control of the gem trade, incursions into the political realm were inevitable.

In 1509, the Kingdom of Narsinga (Vijayanagar), ruled by Krishna Deva Raya, was a conduit for the precious gem trade conducted by Portuguese merchants. Duarte Barbosa, a Portuguese traveller, struck by the wealth of the city, recorded the immense quantities of precious stones, hyacinths, sapphires and amethysts that were found in the mountains, streams and rivers of the region. Stones were mined and transported via Vijayanagar to Calicut on the Malabar Coast, where they were cut, polished and sold. Diamonds of the ‘Old Mine’ from Deccan and of the ‘New Mine’ from Narsinga, rubies,

sapphires and spinels from Pegu (Burma), the Island of Ceilao (Ceylon) and Balassia (Badakshan), and all kinds of other precious and semi-precious stones were sold in the marts of Calicut.<sup>12</sup> Burmese rubies and spinels from the Mogok mines brought by Chettiar traders to Pulicat, near Madras, began to flood the markets at about this time.

The capture of the island of Goa in 1510 by Afonso de Albuquerque provided a gateway to Portuguese power in India. Although Duarte Barbosa's chronicles (written in 1518, the earliest by a Portuguese) make no mention of Goa as a gem-trading centre, by the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the city emerged as a major port and became the principal centre for diamond trading in India.

Portuguese ships now controlled the seas to India, resulting in an almost monopolistic dominance of the jewel trade, spanning Asia, Europe and the Americas. Portuguese hegemony on both sides of the Atlantic was a major factor contributing to the emergence of Goa as an active and vibrant port trading in precious merchandise. The city was strategically located, in proximity to the principal diamond mines at Bijapur and Golconda. No regulations or taxes governed the buying and selling of precious stones and the finest stones did not have to be sold to the Governor as Indian rulers demanded. Merchants flocked to Rua Direita, the jeweller's street in Goa, to buy diamonds, rubies and other precious stones. The city established itself as a principal centre of exchange, supplying local rulers and the Mughal emperor with the much-coveted Colombian emeralds that were carried to India by the Portuguese via their trade with the Spanish in Spain and in the Philippines.

With the fall of Vijayanagar in 1565 and the decline of Portuguese power in Asia in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, Goa's role as a major trading port also declined. Diamonds, hitherto freely traded, were declared by the Portuguese a monopoly item, only to be exported by the government in Lisbon. Overland trade routes were again reactivated to send precious stones to Europe. All kinds of smuggling replaced free trade. In other parts of the country, the Portuguese were vying with the English, who were battling with the French, who were competing with the Dutch, each to gain an edge in the delicate balance of political and economic power. Precious gems triggered trade wars between the European powers in India. Used for culling political favour, agents and officers of foreign governments vied with each other to ingratiate themselves with the local rulers and the Mughal emperors in Delhi by offering gifts of jewels and gems of outstanding quality to the Imperial Treasury.

From 1526, when Babur established his empire in India, the Mughals had unrivalled access to the best among the treasures of the land. The Mughal emperors were predominant buyers. The governor sent by Shah Jahan to Surat was instructed "to buy all things that are most beautiful, precious, and rare, and send them to the king ..."<sup>13</sup> In an effort to dislodge Portuguese monopoly, Sir Thomas Roe, the English ambassador



20  
KANTHA (necklace)  
Western India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
By permission of the British Library

*A drawing of a spectacular necklace comprising three rows of Golconda diamonds. This jewel is believed to have been made for the Gaekwad of Baroda and is estimated to have cost Rs. 60 lakh.*

21  
BROOCH  
Emerald: mid-late 17<sup>th</sup> century  
Christies Images

*A hexagonal emerald weighing approximately 126 carats re-set in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with diamonds as a brooch. Large emeralds were cut as plaques and carved with symbolic floral and geometric designs in the Mughal period; they were worn in simple settings as brooches or pendants. Drilled on two sides to facilitate fastening, this emerald was probably worn as an armband.*



21







to the court of Jahangir and Shah Jahan, recommended precious gemstones as favourable items of trade since they fetched high prices, were coveted by the emperor and in return obtained concessions and favours from the ruler. Roe went to the extent of recommending the export of “manie great olde stones that are lying useless in the Tower,”<sup>14</sup> referring to the Tower of London. In a letter to Prince Charles dated 30<sup>th</sup> October 1616, Roe refers to India and the court of the Mughals as “one of the greatest theatres of the world.”<sup>15</sup>

By the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, as a result of the political power struggles in India, control of the gem mines and the pearl fisheries had passed through too many hands; production declined and trade fluctuated. The situation worsened drastically from the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The Napoleonic wars in Europe disrupted travel to the east. But more important, the assiduous depletion of the Indian mines and the concurrent discovery of the Brazilian mines in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century led to a gradual decline of the Indo-European diamond trade. “The overall value of the Indian diamonds imported in 1793 was £78,000. In 1795 it was £4,800.”<sup>16</sup> However, the ruby and sapphire mines in Burma and Ceylon continued to be active, together with new finds in Thailand, Kashmir and other areas.

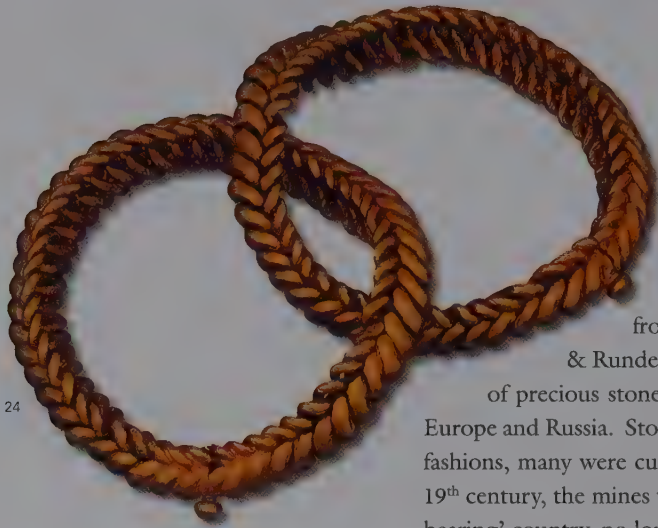
As the power and political influence of the East India Company increased, the trade in precious stones passed into the hands of English agents. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Jewish merchants were the principal traders of precious stones, importing rough diamonds from India and then South America, by paying duties to the East India Company.<sup>17</sup>

22 (facing page)  
**ARRIVAL OF PORTUGUESE EMBASSY IN SHAH JAHAN'S COURT**  
 A folio from the *Badshah Nama* manuscript Mughal; 1645  
 The Royal Collection  
 © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

*Portuguese envoys, bearing trays of jewels as gifts to the Mughal emperor, are visible in the lower left of this painting.*

23  
**MAP**  
 Adapted by permission from Joseph E. Schwartzberg (ed.), *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> updated and enlarged impression, Oxford University Press, New York, 1992.

*Between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, commercial interaction between India and Europe was at a peak. Precious commodities such as gemstones were avidly sought by traders visiting India.*



24

To India, they brought emeralds from South America and corals from the Mediterranean. In England, firms such as Rundell, Bridge & Rundell, royal goldsmiths in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, imported large quantities of precious stones, catering to the demand for high quality stones in England, Europe and Russia. Stones of Indian origin continued to be in demand. With changing fashions, many were cut and re-set into contemporary settings. But by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the mines were exhausted, the fisheries barren; India ceased to be a 'gem-bearing' country, no longer the primary supplier of gemstones to the world.

**HIRANYAGARBHA: THE GOLDEN WOMB**

“In the beginning the Golden Embryo (*Hiranyagarbha*) arose.  
Once he was born, he was the one lord of creation.  
He held in place the earth and this sky.”<sup>18</sup>

For thousands of years, Indians have “dug for gold, prayed for gold, begged for gold, robbed for gold, died for gold, killed for gold, gone mad for gold, and wasted their lives for gold.”<sup>19</sup> Ancient writers, ignorant of the exact sources of many precious commodities, relied on stories provided by travellers and on information forthcoming from local residents. Perhaps through sheer ignorance, coupled with an effort to conceal the exact location of mineral reserves, fantastic tales of adventures to obtain gold and diamonds from inaccessible and dangerous areas were fabricated and sustained over long periods of time. The most famous of these myths relates to the gold-digging ants of India, first related by Herodotus in the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C., who probably based his theory on prevailing legends such as the reference in the *Mahabharata* to the Northern tribes

who sent large quantities of treasures to Yudhishtira, including “lumps of *paipilika* gold, so called because it was collected by ants (*pipilikis*).”<sup>20</sup> The story was also recapitulated by Megasthenes. The *Indika* of Ktesias (398 B.C.) traces the sources of Indian gold to inaccessible mountains, guarded by large and ferocious griffins, “four-footed birds, about as large as wolves, having legs and claws like those of the lion, and covered all over the body with black feathers except only on the breast where they are red.”<sup>21</sup> In order to safeguard their lives and their wealth, miners worked in the dead of night.

It was only many centuries later that the myth was rationalized. The Indians who went in quest of gold on the Tibetan plateau were the Dards who lived along the borders of Kashmir. The ‘gold digging ants’ were neither ants nor large animals, but Tibetan miners, who clothed themselves in animal skin and worked in winter, when the soil was much firmer, building their dwellings in deep pits or subterranean burrows to keep out the winds; the creatures that chased away the thieves were merely huge Tibetan dogs.<sup>22</sup>

The quantity of gold mined in ancient India has long been debated and speculated. Though few verifiable records of ancient mines or evidence of gold workings are available, archaeological evidence and

24  
BANGLES  
Gujarat, Kutch; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

A pair of classically simple gold bangles, crafted in the form of a supple flexible chain.

25  
GAJREDAR BANGRI (bangles)  
Kutch, Gujarat; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

Hollow gold circlets are decorated with lion head terminals and bunched hollow beads (gajre) simulating clusters of pearls.

25





26

literary chronicles, corroborated with geological studies, have established that riverine gold and mines all over the country were the principal sources. The sands of the vast network of rivers criss-crossing the country were auriferous, yielding considerable quantities of the precious ore for local consumption. In the Harappan period, alluvial washings from the Indus rivers, referred to in the *Rig Veda* as *hiranyavartani*, or the golden channels,<sup>23</sup> were an important source. The *Ganga*, as well as the rivers of the Chota Nagpur plateau, carried alluvial gold. These alluvial deposits were exhausted only after long years of exploitation.

The gold mines of south India yielded the purest gold “of the colour of the lotus-filament, soft, smooth, not producing a sound and lustrous.”<sup>24</sup> Gold reserves in the Deccan plateau were copious. The Kolar gold fields have perhaps been the single largest source of Indian gold, active at a very early period and supporting demand over many centuries. Workings of ancient date at Anantapur in Madras, the Hatti mines in Karnataka, as well as other mines in the region of Hyderabad, Mysore and the Madras Presidency have been identified. Gold from south India supplied Mohenjo Daro and Harappa in 2500 B.C. The vast amounts of gold that reached Solomon from Ophir, ‘the golden country’, is believed to have come from these gold-bearing regions of south India.<sup>25</sup> Pliny mentions gold on the Malabar coast (coming from the mines of Mysore),<sup>26</sup> while the *Periplus* mentions the presence of gold mines near the Gangetic delta.<sup>27</sup>

26

## NECKLACE

Kerala, Calicut; c.1850

L: 58 cm

Courtesy Victoria and Albert Museum, London (1805–1852)

*A delicate gold necklace, typical of the Syrian Christian community of Kerala, combines the technique of sheet gold, filigree and granulation.*



27

27  
 'INDIAN BRIOLETTE' DIAMOND  
 Wt: 90.38 carats  
 Cartier Archives Paris, © Cartier

This diamond was acquired by Cartier in 1909 from the renowned dealer Eknayan. Initially it was set with the 126-grain pearl as shown here, but later re-set with two emeralds and the pearl to form a brooch.

Domestic production was supplemented with unquantified imports from Tibet, Burma, Assam and Malaya, gold coins from Rome, Arabian bullion, and gold from Africa. Little gold left the country except by way of tribute and plunder: "In the enumeration of the nations and tribes which paid tribute to the Persian monarch Darius," in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C., "the Indians alone, we are told, paid in gold, all the others paying in silver. The amount of this gold was 360 Euboeic talents = £1,290,000."<sup>28</sup> In 1293, Alau'd-din Khilji's sack of Deogarh yielded a staggering quantity of "15,000 lbs. of pure gold, 175 lbs. of pearls, 50 lbs. of diamonds, and 25,000 lbs. of silver."<sup>29</sup> It is estimated that today more than 9,500 tonnes of gold is held privately in India, which is little more than 8% of all the gold ever mined in the world.<sup>30</sup>

#### FLOWERS THAT GROW UNDERGROUND

"The brilliancy, the colour, and the symmetrical crystal forms of precious stones have in all ages suggested to man some kind of indwelling life, an idea that precious stones are flowers that grow underground."<sup>31</sup>

#### The Gem of Winter

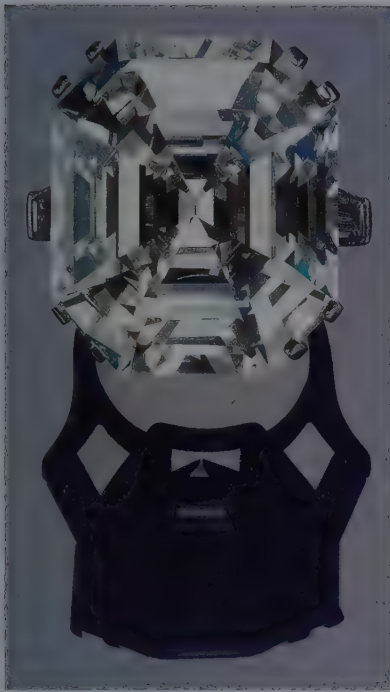
"Its color is that of ice, and as the dew-drop or the drop of water from a mountain stream sparkles in the light of the sun, as the icicle sparkles in winter, and the stars on a cold winter night, so the diamond sparkles, and it combines and contrasts with all known gems."<sup>32</sup>

The diamond is the gem of winter.

Literature and legend universally address the diamond in tones of awe and reverence. Rare and valuable, treasured and desired, this one stone has wrought fortune and ruin on man since aeons past. *Vajra*, or thunderbolt, is the Sanskrit word for diamond. Much of the aura surrounding the diamond stems from its properties of clarity, purity and invincible hardness, which, according to Pliny, "could only be broken after being steeped in the blood of a he-goat."<sup>33</sup> Indians were well-versed with the properties of the stone, and as early as in 250 B.C. used diamond bits as tools for drilling holes in beads and taught the Romans the technique of using the diamond to engrave gems.<sup>34</sup>

For a long time it was debated whether the diamond was known to the Romans and the Greeks. The Greeks used the term *adamas*, or that which is invincible. For, it is "the substance that possesses the greatest value, not only among the precious stones, but of all human possessions, a mineral which for a long time was known to kings only, and to very few of them."<sup>35</sup> It is now accepted that Pliny's *adamas* was indeed the diamond, acquired by the Romans at Mouziris (Cranganore) and Nelycynda (Kottayam),<sup>36</sup> both in the vicinity of Mangalore on the Malabar coast.

For many centuries, India was the sole supplier of diamonds to the ancient world. Several sources were active within the country, but historians are vague about the exact location of mines. In the year 30 B.C., Dionysios Perigetes mentions that the *adamas*, beryl and other semi-precious stones "were found in the river beds of the country lying to the east of Mount Parapamissus (i.e. the Hindu Kush) and Ariana."<sup>37</sup> Ptolemy's 'river of *adamas*', based on second-hand information compiled from traders, has not been conclusively identified, though various theories have been advocated to place its exact



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location “to the Sabarae (near Sambhalpur?), to Cosa (near Betul?) and to the Sank branch of the Brahmani river.”<sup>38</sup>

One of the earliest texts listing diamond mines is Kautiliya’s *Arthashastra*. The text mentions Sabharastra, Tadjamarastra, Kastirarastra, Mount Srikanataka, Mount Manimanta, and Indravana;<sup>39</sup> most of these are difficult to locate accurately in the modern context. The problem of matching ancient names of sites with modern place names, and names as heard and transcribed by people of foreign origin, to whom the language was

new and strange, has resulted in untold confusion. However, later Indian texts on gemmology are fairly consistent in listing eight sources for the diamond: “the Himalayas, Sorparaka, Kalinga, Matanga, Kosala, Saurashtra, Paundra, and the river Venna.”<sup>40</sup> More recent geological studies have established that though some of the places mentioned are mine sites, others were only trading centres. The mention of the Himalayas was probably in a legendary context as a receptacle for all gems; both Sorparaka (Sauvira) and Saurashtra were centres of export; and there is no known evidence of workings at Paundra in ancient Bihar. As far as actual mines are concerned, the *Venna* (Kautiliya’s Sabharastra) was probably located near Nagpur in the Vidarbha; Matanga was the area of the famous Golconda mines located between the rivers *Krishna* and *Godavari*; Kalinga was in proximity to the river *Mahanadi* in Orissa; and Kosala was the Bundelkhand area around Panna.<sup>41</sup>

The *Bṛhat Sambhita*, an encyclopaedia of astrological and other subjects of human interest, even provides details of the quality of stones yielded by each site: “Diamonds got from the banks of the Vena river are of the purest kind; those mined in Kosala have the lustre (whitish yellow) of the Sirisa flower; those of Surastra a reddish lustre; those of Saurpara country are dark in colour; those of the Himalayan regions, slightly reddish or copper coloured; those of Matanga country have pale white colour of the Valla blossoms; those of Kalinga are yellowish; and those of Paundra, black.”<sup>42</sup>

Of the many diamond mines of ancient India, the Golconda mines were undoubtedly the most famous. No less than 23 mines were active in the Kingdom of Golconda and 15 in the Kingdom of Bijapur.<sup>43</sup> Golconda is synonymous with diamonds of the best quality and of the most spectacular weights. Very little early information is forthcoming on these mines, perhaps because they were guarded with great secrecy. Permission to work them was granted selectively by powerful rulers who appropriated the largest and best stones of quality for their own treasury, thereby preventing too many large stones from appearing on the market and exciting the curiosity of greedy merchants and clandestine traders!

For many centuries, few merchants dared to venture into the hinterland to acquire stones from the mines themselves, relying on middlemen to make their purchases. In spite of the 20 per cent premium payable in the market towns, European traders were assured of a phenomenal 300 per cent profit in Europe.<sup>44</sup> The locations of the diamond

“It is in this kingdom that diamonds are got; and I will tell you how. There are certain lofty mountains in those parts... When the rains are over, and the waters from the mountains have ceased to flow, they search the beds of the torrents and find plenty of diamonds... Moreover in those mountains great serpents are rife to a marvelous degree... The serpents are also the most venomous in existence, insomuch that any one going to that region runs fearful peril; for many have been destroyed by these evil reptiles. Now among these mountains there are certain great and deep valleys, to the bottom of which there is no access. Wherefore the men who go in search of the diamonds take with them pieces of flesh, as lean as they can get, and these they cast into the bottom of a valley. Now there are numbers of white eagles that haunt those mountains and feed upon the serpents. When the eagles see the meat thrown down they pounce upon it and carry it up to some rocky hill top where they begin to rend it... The abundance of diamonds down there in the depth of the valleys is astonishing, but nobody can get down... The people go to the nests of those white eagles, of which there are many, and in their dropping find plenty of diamonds which the birds have swallowed in devouring the meat that was cast into the valleys. And, when the eagles themselves are taken, diamonds are found in their stomachs.”<sup>[iii]</sup>

28

## THE EL MANSOUR DIAMOND

Wt: 50.82 carats

Courtesy Sotheby's

This spectacular step-cut diamond of remarkable clarity traces its origin to the Golconda mines.

The term ‘Golconda’ is used in the diamond trade today to describe those rare stones that are exceptionally transparent and colourless. ‘El Mansour’ means ‘The Victorious’ or ‘The Triumphant’, a title usually adopted by rulers in the Islamic world. It perhaps formed a part of Nadir Shah’s booty.





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mines were known only to a few who circulated myths about the origin of the stone. The fascinating story of the inaccessible diamond valleys of Golconda inhabited by deadly snakes narrated by Marco Polo, the Venetian adventurer who travelled in India in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, gives credence to the view that in India “jewel trading, both amateur and professional, must surely have constituted one of the greatest semi-visible, half-clandestine economic activities of the early modern period.”<sup>45</sup>

However, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, mining operations became increasingly transparent, locations were more accessible and foreigners ventured forth on buying trips to mining towns, not only to obtain the best price but also to be able to select the best stones. The story of Indian diamonds from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards is closely aligned to that of Portuguese hegemony in India. “As in so many other aspects of the expansion of Europe, the Portuguese appear to have been the first Europeans to make of it something approximating a modern, intercontinental operation.”<sup>46</sup> Goa, after its conquest by the Portuguese, became the principal trading and embarkation port for westbound gemstones, especially diamonds from India.

Greater accuracy in the identification of locations begins to feature in writings from this period. Garcia ab Horto, a physician staying in Goa, writing in 1565, listed the contemporary source of diamonds, identifying localities near Bisnagar (Vijayanagar) and in the territory of Imadixa (Ahmad Shah) in the Deccan “the industry being a considerable source of revenue to the king, as all stones above 30 mangelis (=150 grs.?) became his property.”<sup>47</sup> The names of Jacques de Coutre, a French soldier turned diamond merchant,

29 (facing page)

TORQUE (necklace)

Western India; 19<sup>th</sup> century

Private collection

*Rose-cut and table-cut Golconda diamonds are framed in petals of smaller stones in a partly open-backed silver setting, the edges grooved to simulate open-claw work (pachchikam).*

30

MAP

Adapted by permission from

Joseph E. Schwartzberg (ed.),

*A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> updated and enlarged impression, Oxford University Press, New York, 1992.

*Locations of diamond mines were shrouded in secrecy. On this map some of the diamond mines mentioned in ancient texts can be located.*



31

TILKARIDAR (briolette-cut diamond)  
Wt: approx. 12.60 carats  
Private collection

Old-cut diamonds, such as this example, are rare. Millennia of history have been destroyed by the 20<sup>th</sup> century inclination to facet diamonds to enhance their brilliance. In this craze, few old-cut diamonds have survived. Only the inherent quality of the stones, implying a Golconda origin, remains to indicate their historic value and antiquity.

who conducted a flourishing business in gemstones, dealing for twenty years, after settling in Goa in 1603,<sup>48</sup> Francisco de Silveira, Fernao Jorge, and the Venetian Bernardo de Nardona are all associated with the diamond trade in India.

Of all these visitors, none is as renowned as Jean-Baptiste Tavernier. A gem and jewellery trader, who travelled in India during the reigns of Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb, Tavernier recorded in his diary, “the diamond is the most precious of all stones, and it is the article of trade to which I am most devoted.”<sup>49</sup> His devotion resulted in the most extensive and unprecedented recording of details with reference to all aspects of the gem and jewellery trade in 17<sup>th</sup> century India. The “terrible picture that was drawn of these mines, situated in barbarous countries to which one could not travel except by the most dangerous routes,”<sup>50</sup> did not deter him, and he visited Golconda several times, primarily to purchase diamonds.

Once mined, stones were often furtively traded by merchants in the market towns. Language was no barrier to trade. Various hand signs were used to effect transactions, following a system known as *hastasamjna*, which is discussed as early as the 6<sup>th</sup> century in a text on gemmology, the *Agastimata*. Tavernier records a typical transaction on one of his purchasing trips: “All passes in complete silence and without anyone speaking. The seller and the buyer sit facing one another, like two tailors, and one of the two opening his waistband the seller takes the right hand of the buyer and covers his own with his waistband, under which in the presence of many other merchants, who occupy themselves sometimes in the same manner, the sale is completed secretly without anyone having cognizance of it. For the seller and buyer talk neither by means of their lips nor their eyes, but only by the hand, which they manage to do in the following manner: When the seller takes the whole hand of the buyer that means 1,000, and as many times as he presses it so many thousands of pagodas or rupees, according to the coin which may be in question. When he takes only five fingers that means 500, and when he takes only one it means 100. In taking only the half up to the middle joint, 50 is meant, and the end of the finger up to the first signifies 10.”<sup>51</sup>

Foreigners in this market had to contend with the wily ways of the native Bania gem merchants. Irrespective of their power, position or even perspicacity, individuals were susceptible to fraud. In an entry dated Monday, 11<sup>th</sup> January, 1731, Wheeler records how the Governor of Madras, George Morton Pitt, was defrauded by a diamond seller named Graupa, who claimed to have a large diamond of extraordinary quality and great value. Graupa gave him a sealed pouch, supposedly containing the diamond, took an advance of 1,300 pagodas, and departed. Graupa had not let the Governor see the diamond since, he claimed, the rightful owner was away. While the Governor awaited the arrival of the owner, he received news of Graupa’s death. Opening the pouch in the presence of witnesses, a “large sandy stone” was revealed!<sup>52</sup>

Individuals of European origin who traded with the East Indies in the 17<sup>th</sup> century nearly always worked as servants of the British East India Company but also engaged in a flourishing private trade. Thomas Pitt, Governor of Fort St. George in Madras from 1698 to 1709, conducted a lucrative personal business in diamonds, consigning ‘bulses’ of stones to his agents for transport to England. Upon their arrival they were cut and sold at handsome profit. In 1751, the first Marquis of Alorna, after three years as Viceroy of India, took with him no less than “4561.85 carats of rough



*“The people (of Guzerat) are the most desperate pirates in existence, and one of their atrocious practices is this. When they have taken a merchant vessel they force the merchants to swallow a stuff called tamarind mixed in sea water, which produces a violent purging. This is done in case the merchants, on seeing their danger, should have swallowed their most valuable stones and pearls. And in this way the pirates secure the whole.”<sup>[iv]</sup>*

diamonds purchased exclusively from one local merchant, Goupala Camotim.”<sup>53</sup> According to the Abbe Carre, a Christian missionary, “Goan traders later in the 17<sup>th</sup> century used to entrust their diamonds to the captains of the English ships who annually put into Goa for provisioning; the following year, the captains would return with payment and then receive a new packet.”<sup>54</sup>

It is very difficult to quantify the exact volume of the gem trade from India in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Since gems were portable and more easily concealed, they “served much the same purpose as paper currency or traveller’s cheques, which naturally had not yet been invented. Jewels provided some of their advantages for the European en route through Asia or returning home with his gains. Stitched into an armpit seam or leg of a baggy trouser, diamonds, pearls or rubies were not so conspicuous to port officials who might otherwise be tempted to inquire how a middle-ranking official managed to amass such a heavy chest of gold coins.”<sup>55</sup>

On arrival in the west, diamonds were re-cut with a greater number of facets than in India, “perhaps because Europeans necessarily paid more for them than Asians, they demanded per karat more brilliance.”<sup>56</sup> In ancient India, diamond crystals were rarely cut, so as to retain their original size and weight, and flaws were only camouflaged with small facets. Thus, the term ‘India cut’ came to mean a diamond in a primitive state not yet given its highest value and beauty.<sup>57</sup> India also gave the world the current term for measuring the weight of diamonds – the carat. Derived from *kirat*, “the name of a small seed that was used in India to weigh diamonds with. This weight was introduced in Europe when precious stones were first brought from the East: it was universally adopted and has always continued in use.”<sup>58</sup>

The Mughal custom of inscribing gemstones was derived from a Timurid practice intended to perpetuate their lineage; the Mughals regarded the receipt of such a gem as a blessing. Inscriptions were added as the stone passed from one generation to the next. Many gems of Indian origin that found their way to Europe were re-cut in the modern technique of faceting to more regular shapes, resulting in a reduction of their size, loss of their original identity and beauty and elimination of inscriptions. Entire histories have been wiped out in the diamond-cutter’s establishment.

Many of the largest and most famous diamonds in the world came from India. Large numbers are still languishing in vaults, hidden from prying eyes, unseen but not unforgotten. Many still adorn the state jewels of monarchs and are dispersed in collections around the world. Most have a chequered history; some have been rent asunder, dismembered into many fine smaller stones. Today only a few of the famed stones are on display for the world to marvel at.

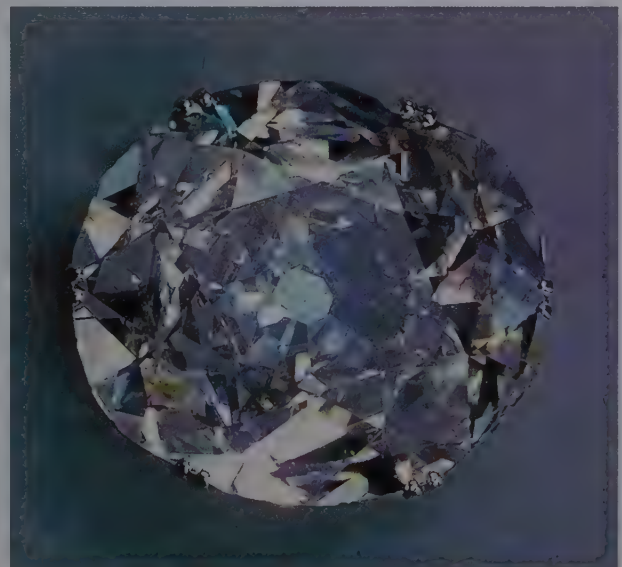
**The Koh-i-Nur.** The most famous and legendary of all diamonds, the Koh-i-Nur (Mountain of Light) is believed to have come from the mines of Golconda (32). The story of the Koh-i-Nur spans the history of the Mughals from Babur to Aurangzeb, and from Nadir Shah to Queen Victoria of England. According to some sources, proven history of the stone commences no earlier

32  
THE KOH-I-NUR DIAMOND  
(Mountain of Light)

Wt: 108.93 carats

Crown copyright; Historic Royal Palaces

*“If a strong man should take five stones, and should cast them, one east, one west, one north and one south, and the last straight up in the air, and if all the space between those points were filled with gold and gems, that would not equal to the value of the Koh-i-Noor.”<sup>[vi]</sup> The legendary gem, originally weighing a phenomenal 787 carats was recut in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, its size and weight drastically reduced as shown below.*





33

33  
BAZUBAND (armband)  
Crown copyright; Historic Royal Palaces

This armband, now set with a large crystal, originally held the Koh-i-Nur diamond. Portraits of Nadir Shah and Ranjit Singh depict them wearing the 'Mountain of Light' simply set in the armband, highlighting its magnificent size.

in the course of his plunder of the region, from whom it passed to Bikramajit, the Raja of Gwalior. Others trace its ownership to the Raja of Malwa in 1300 A.D. However, the earliest historical reference to a large diamond (Babur's Diamond) appears in the *Babur Nama*. A diamond weighing about 8 *mishqals* (186 old carats) was acquired by Humayun from the treasures of Agra, originally the property of Bikramajit, the Raja of Gwalior. These treasures fell to Babur upon the defeat of Ibrahim Lodi, at the battle of Panipat in 1526. Babur's diary of May 1526 mentions a diamond so precious and so renowned, "its reputation is that every appraiser has estimated its value at two and a half days' food for the whole world."<sup>60</sup>

In the *Akbar Nama*, mention of this fabulous stone occurs in connection with Humayun's ill health. Babur was advised to pledge it as thanksgiving for Humayun's recovery, but refused to do so. The stone was carried by Humayun when he fled to Persia, where he offered it to Shah Tahmasp in gratitude for his help and assistance. Shah Tahmasp who did not place much value on it, sent it back to India as a gift to Nizam Shah, ruler of the Deccan (i.e. Burhan Nizam Shah of Ahmadnagar) in 1547. During these movements, the stone was known as Babur's Diamond.

When and how the stone passed back to the Imperial Treasury is not known, since there is no specific mention of it in any of the court histories of the Mughal emperors Akbar and Jahangir. In the subsequent reigns of Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb, there is immense confusion about the precise identity of this stone and its exact weight. Historians like Tavernier and Niccolao Manucci speak of the Mir Jumla diamond, or the 'Great Mogul' that was presented to Shah Jahan. But there is no evidence that this stone was the same as the Koh-i-Nur. Manucci recounts that Mir Jumla gave a present to Shah Jahan of a large uncut diamond weighing a phenomenal 360 carats, further confirming, "I saw this diamond many a time; it was as large as a nut."<sup>61</sup>

than in the writings of Jean-Baptiste Tavernier,<sup>59</sup> who recorded that a diamond weighing 900 *ratis* or 787½ carats was discovered in the Kollur mines in the kingdom of Golconda and was presented to the Emperor Shah Jahan by Mir Jumla in 1656 or 1657. The diamond was seen by Tavernier, when he was invited to view the gems in Aurangzeb's treasury in 1665. Referring to it as the 'Great Mogul', he records that the stone was beautiful and had been cut by the Venetian Hortensio Borgio, and reduced in weight to 319½ *ratis* or 280 carats. However, the many legends and myths associated with this stone date to pre-Mughal times.

Some historians are of the view that the Koh-i-Nur, the 'Great Mogul', and the stone known as 'Babur's Diamond' are one and the same gem. Found in one of the many diamond mines scattered across the Deccan plateau, this stone was appropriated by Alauddin

34



Photo by Wand D. Downey

Swiss Engraving Co.

*Her Majesty Queen Alexandra.*

*Wearing the Koh-i-Nur in her Coronation Crown.*

*9th August, 1902*

According to legend, Muhammad Shah, vanquished by Nadir Shah, concealed the Koh-i-Nur in his turban. This "information was passed to Nadir, who, full of guile as ever, assured the Mughal Emperor that he was restoring his Indian Empire. As a formal transfer of power, Nadir asked Muhammad to exchange turbans, which was a traditional gesture of friendship. The Persian conqueror removed his national headdress of sheepskin, and the Mughal could not refuse to offer his turban. He had not only been outfought but also outwitted by the Persian shepherd! ...on removing the big diamond from its hiding place in the folds of the turban, Nadir spontaneously exclaimed, 'Koh-i-Noor' meaning 'Mountain of Light,' thus naming the stone, perhaps for ever."<sup>[vi]</sup>

34

QUEEN ALEXANDRA WEARING THE CROWN SET WITH THE KOH-I-NUR

Private collection

The Koh-i-Nur diamond was re-set in 1901 in the Imperial Crown of Queen Alexandra, which was made for her coronation as Queen of Great Britain and Empress of India in 1902.

The stone was only heard of again when Nadir Shah sacked the Imperial Treasury in 1739 and gave it the name Koh-i-Nur or Mountain of Light. From here it descended by succession or reward finally to Shah Shuja, who wore it on a bracelet. In the travails that ensued, he fled to Lahore. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the diamond passed to Ranjit Singh of Punjab in return for Shah Shuja's life and freedom, who wore the stone as an armlet set between two smaller diamonds (33) and expressed a wish to bequeath it to the Puri Jagannath Temple. But after his death and the annexation of the Punjab by the British, the stone was presented to Queen Victoria by Sir John Lawrence on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1850. It was exhibited at the Great Exhibition in London in 1851, where it weighed 186.06 English carats. In 1852, Garrard's, the royal goldsmiths, commissioned the largest Dutch diamond cutting firm, M. Coster's, to re-cut the Koh-i-Nur. At a cost of £8,000, the stone was reduced to 106 $\frac{1}{16}$  carats. A favourite stone of Queen Victoria, she wore it as a brooch, in a circlet or sometimes in an Indian ruby necklace,<sup>62</sup> and bequeathed it to her daughter-in-law Queen Alexandra, who wore it at

35

35  
STATE CROWN OF QUEEN ELIZABETH  
Crown copyright; Historic Royal Palaces

*In 1937, the Koh-i-Nur diamond was re-set once again as the centre-piece of the State Crown of Queen Elizabeth (the present Queen Mother), consort of King George VI.*





36

her coronation (34). In 1911, it was set as the centrepiece in the crown of Queen Mary. In 1937, it was transferred to the crown of Elizabeth, the wife of King George VI, where it rests today, among the Crown Jewels in the Tower of London (35).

Since India's independence in 1947, there has been repeated clamour for the return of the stone. Even the Government of Orissa laid claim, since it had been Ranjit Singh's wish that it should go to the Jagannath Temple at Puri. However, none of these demands have been entertained, and it will probably remain where it currently is for a long time, for after all, in the words of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, "Diamonds are for Emperors and India does not need Emperors."<sup>63</sup>

**The Darya-i-Nur.** Weighing approximately 186 carats, the Darya-i-Nur (Sea of Light) (11) is a flawless, light pink, rectangular, step-cut tablet diamond. It is perhaps one of the finest diamonds from the Golconda fields. It has been suggested that this stone was originally part of the Great Table diamond seen by Tavernier in Golconda in 1642, and described by him as "the largest diamond I have seen in India in the possession of merchants" on sale for "500,000 rupees" (£56,250).<sup>64</sup> It is currently in the Iran Treasury, set as an ornament to be worn in a hat. On one of the facets, the stone bears the inscription, in Persian, "The Sultan, Sahib Qiran, Fath Ali Shah, Qajar 1250."<sup>65</sup>

**The Nur-ul-Ain.** A sister stone to the Darya-i-Nur, the Nur-ul-Ain (Light of the Eye) (36) weighs 60 carats. This diamond is flawless and pink in colour, and formed a part of the Great Table diamond described by Tavernier.<sup>66</sup> Perhaps one of the most beautiful diamonds in the world, it is set into a tiara which is part of the Crown Jewels of Iran.

**The Pitt or Regent.** A diamond weighing 410 carats was found in one of the many Golconda mines in 1701 and secreted away. It was sold to a diamond merchant who in turn sold it to Mr. Thomas Pitt, Governor of Fort St. George from 1698 to 1709, who called his acquisition the "greatest jewel in the world."<sup>67</sup> It is rumoured that the diamond originally weighed no less than 410 carats and was subsequently cut into a perfect brilliant weighing 136¾ carats, in addition to a number of smaller stones. Pitt wished the magnificent stone to be sold, and in a letter to his son advised, "The Duke of Florence is more likely to be a chapman than the King of Prussia, but the Kings of France and Spain are better than either. I order you never to part with it under £1,500 a carat."<sup>68</sup> It was only many years after his return to England and after much negotiation that the stone

36  
NUR-UL-AIN DIAMOND (Light of the Eye)

Wt: 60 carats

Photograph courtesy Royal Ontario Museum,  
© ROM

*This tiara made by Harry Winston for the Empress Farah of Iran for her wedding, is set with the Nur-ul-Ain. The stone, a drop-shaped, crystal-clear pink brilliant-cut diamond was, together with the Dariya-i-Nur (plate 11) once part of the single 'Great Table' diamond shown by Aurangzeb to Tavernier.*

37

RING

South India; 19<sup>th</sup> century

Private collection

*Set with nine old-cut Golconda diamonds, whose total weight exceeds 7 carats.*



37



38

38 (detail of plate 10)

MAHARAJA JASWANT SINGH OF MARWAR

*The Maharaja wears several strands of the legendary Colombian emeralds that were once a part of the Jodhpur treasury; their current whereabouts are unknown. Emeralds imported into India found ready buyers among the dynastic courts of India.*

was sold to the Duc d'Orleans, the Regent of France, for 2,000,000 livres.<sup>69</sup> A lot of controversy surrounded his acquisition of the stone, having negotiated the asking price from 200,000 *pagodas* down to 50,000 at the hands of Jamchund, a diamond merchant.<sup>70</sup> The diamond was set into the coronation crown of Louis XV in 1722 and in 1804 in the pommel of Napoleon's sword, and after the fall of the Second Empire passed to the safe custody of the Louvre, where it is now exhibited in the Apollo Gallery

**The Orloff:** This rose-cut stone weighs 194¾ carats. It is said to have been stolen by a French soldier from the Srirangam temple near Tiruchchirappalli, where it served as one of the eyes of an idol. Passing through various hands outside India, it was finally bought by Prince Orloff of Russia for £90,000, who presented it to Catherine II, Empress of Russia in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The diamond was set into the top

of the Russian Imperial Sceptre. Its present whereabouts are not known.

**The Taj-i-Mah:** An oval, Mughal-cut, flawless Golconda diamond, the Taj-i-Mah (Crown of the Moon) weighs 115.06 carats and is currently in the Iran Treasury.

**The Akbar Shah:** Once the property of the Emperor Akbar, this diamond was engraved on two faces with Arabic inscriptions on the instructions of his successor, Jahangir. Presumably set in the Peacock Throne, it disappeared after Nadir Shah's plunder and reappeared in Turkey in 1866 under the name 'Shepherd's Stone'; it retained its original inscriptions and was thereby recognized. It was acquired by George Blogg of the London firm of Blogg and Martin and was recut, the weight being reduced from 116 to 71 carats and the inscriptions destroyed. The stone was sold for 35,000 pounds to the Gaekwad of Baroda in 1867, whose family presumably still owns it. "The Gaekwar of Baroda was interviewed by Mr. Shipley, President of the Gemmological Institute, in fall of 1933 ... He looked at the replica Mr. Shipley had brought and said that the stone might be in his treasury, but that it were rather small and he probably would not have noticed it."<sup>71</sup>

**The Shah:** A bar-shaped 'lasque' diamond, slightly yellow in colour and weighing 88.7 carats, the Shah diamond is engraved with the names of the three rulers to whom it once belonged – Burhan Nizam Shah of Ahmadnagar, Shah Jahan and Fateh Ali Shah, the Shah of Persia. Also part of Nadir Shah's booty, it was presented to the Czar of Russia in 1829–30 and now resides as part of the treasures of the Kremlin's Diamond Fund. It was probably the Shah diamond set with rubies and emeralds around it, that was recorded by Tavernier as the one suspended on one side of the Peacock Throne, in full view of the Emperor.<sup>72</sup>

**The Jahangir:** Weighing approximately 83 carats, the Jahangir diamond bears two inscriptions, the names of Jahangir and Shah Jahan. The property of the Maharaja of Burdwan, it was sold in London in 1954 and acquired by Stavros Niarchos, the Greek shipping tycoon. It was subsequently sold by auction at Sotheby's and bought by an Indian businessman, Mr. C. Patel.

**The Nassak:** This triangular diamond was acquired by Warren Hastings as part of the British 'Deccan Booty', who gave it to the East India Company. The Company sold the

Nassak to Rundell's. In 1837, when it was consigned to auction, it was bought by the Marquis of Westminster. The stone was re-cut by the Dutch master-cutter J.B. De Yung and reduced in size from approximately 89 carats to 85 carats.<sup>73</sup>

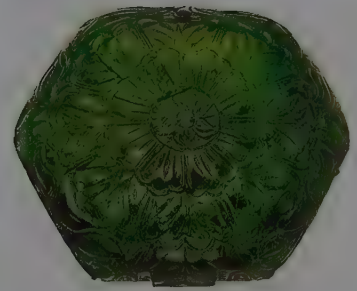
**The Pigot.** The incident of the 47 $\frac{2}{3}$  carat Pigot diamond being sold to the Pasha of Egypt for £30,000 in 1820, after being offered to Napoleon by the firm of Rundell's, is a fascinating tale of bribery and intrigue. Sir George Pigot is reputed to have received the stone from the Nawab of Arcot in return for favours rendered during his tenure as governor of Madras, prior to his return to England in 1766. After his death, his family made several unsuccessful attempts to sell the stone, until finally, a private bill was enacted by Parliament in England in 1800 sanctioning its sale by lottery. While the family received much less than what they had hoped for, the lottery was won by a consortium, which consigned the stone for sale to Christie's on 12<sup>th</sup> May 1802. The stone was purchased for 9,500 guineas by the firm of Parker & Birkett. The firm of Rundell, Bridge & Rundell, (the royal goldsmiths, prior to the appointment of Garrard's) offered it to the Prince of Wales. When he refused, the firm authorised one Philip Liebart to smuggle the stone into France, where it was offered to Napoleon. What follows is a story of subterfuge and cunning in the midst of hostilities between England and France. Napoleon refused, the stone was held in France, and Rundell's, who had acted without consulting Parker & Birkett, were sued and had to make several trips to France before they were able to retrieve the gem which was finally sold to the Pasha of Egypt.<sup>74</sup>

### The Gem of Spring

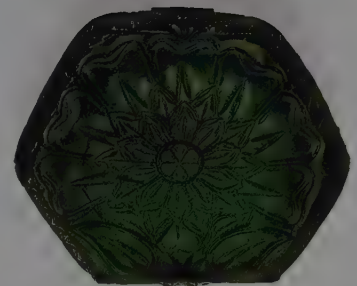
"Those Emeralds that are smooth, and the color of which is like that of the parrot's throat, *acacia sirisa*, the glow-worm's back, new-born grass, *Vallisneria Octandra*, leaves of the water-lily or the peacock's tail are auspicious."<sup>75</sup>

Infused with every hue of green, the much prized emerald is the gem of spring.

Owing to the similarity in their colour, the emerald and the beryl were confused with each other for many centuries. The gem that Kautiliya describes as being the colour of the blue lotus, the *sirisa* flower, of water, of green bamboo and the parrot's wing,<sup>76</sup>



39a



39b

39a &amp; 39b

#### CARVED EMERALD (front and back)

Mughal; mid-17<sup>th</sup> century

Wt: 161.20 carats

Courtesy Sotheby's

*This hexagonal emerald is one among a select number of carved Mughal emeralds known to the world. It may have been worn as a pendant. "In Sufism, an emerald mountain stands for the final level of spiritual aspiration, when man has passed through the blackness of annihilation and emerged in paradise, at last able to view the world as through the eye of God."*<sup>[vii]</sup>

40

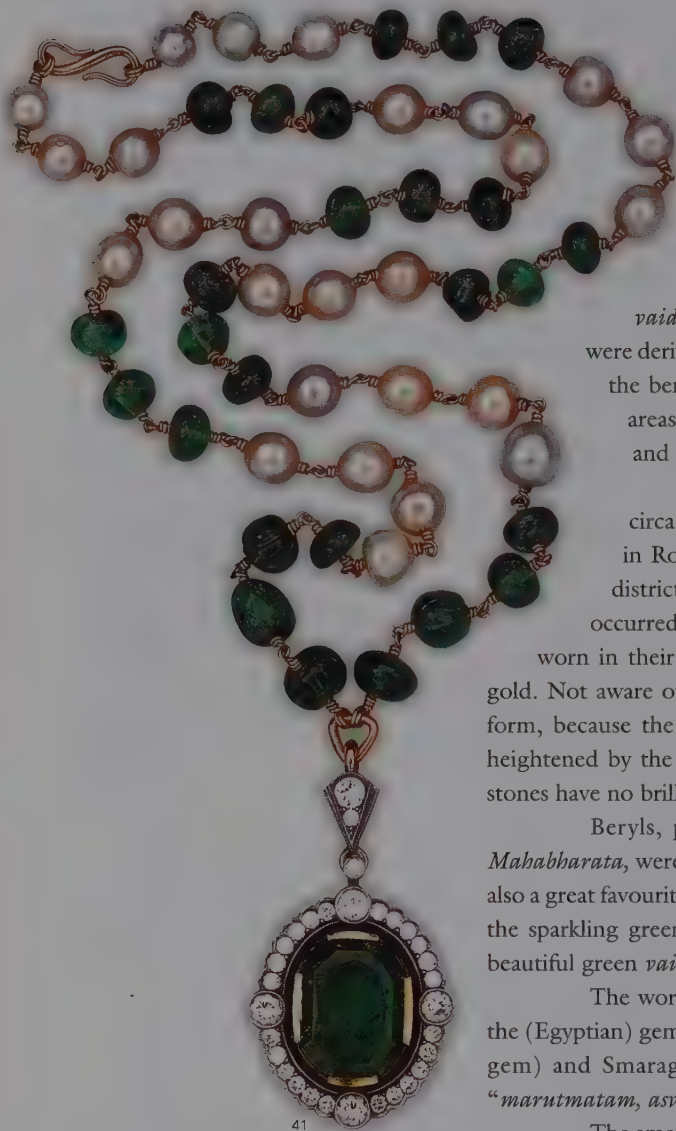
#### BELT BUCKLE

Iran; 19<sup>th</sup> century

Emerald: Wt: approx. 175 carats

Photograph courtesy Royal Ontario Museum, © ROM

*This buckle was worn by Nasir-ud-Din Shah of Persia in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The heart-shaped, 5 cm-long cabuchon emerald of about 175 carats originally formed a part of Nadir Shah's booty from India. A clue to its origin perhaps lies in Sir Thomas Roe's description of Jahangir in November 1616: "On his head he wore a rich turbant with a plume of herne tops, not many but long; on one syde hung a ruby unsest, as big as a walnut; on the other syde a diamond as great; in the middle an emrrald like a hart, much bigger..."*<sup>[viii]</sup>



41

41  
PURA MANI MALAI (necklace)  
Kerala; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

The large emerald in the pendant was re-cut and mounted in a western setting at the turn of the century and is worn on a long string of emerald and pearl beads. In Kerala, it is considered harmful to wear large emeralds close to the neck.

42  
RING  
Colombian emerald: Wt: 38 carats  
3 cm x 3 cm  
Private collection

43 (facing page)  
NECKLACE  
Colombian emerald beads: Wt: 291.59 carats  
Private collection

was known in Sanskrit as *vaidurya* and in Prakrit as *veluriya*.<sup>77</sup> Both *vaidurya*, a term derived from Vidura, or the faraway city, and *veluriya*, were derivations of Belur, the city where the gem was processed, located amidst the beryl mines of Coimbatore.<sup>78</sup> In later additions of the *Mahabharata*, areas in south India, principally the Nilgiri mountains near Coimbatore, and Ceylon are mentioned as sources for the beryl.

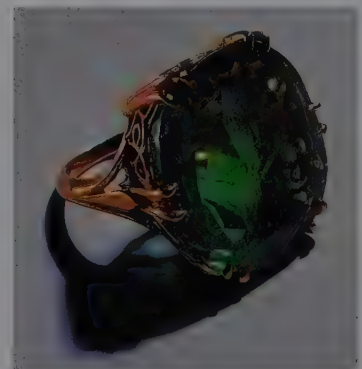
India was the only source for beryls (a fact testified by Pliny circa A.D. 70). They were in great demand in the ancient world, especially in Rome. The large numbers of Roman coins found in the Coimbatore district<sup>79</sup> were possibly used to buy beryls. Beryls, sea-green in colour, occurred in a naturally hexahedral form. The crystals were just polished and worn in their natural elongated form as cylindrical earrings, without being set in gold. Not aware of this, Pliny states that “the lapidaries cut all beryls of a hexagonal form, because the color, which is deadened by a dull uniformity of the surface, is heightened by the reflection from the angles. If they are cut in any other way, these stones have no brilliancy whatever.”<sup>80</sup>

Beryls, pearls and corals, the most frequently mentioned gems in the *Mahabharata*, were strung into ornaments or used to encrust gold articles. “Beryl was also a great favourite for similes, and the poets of the epic never seemed to tire of likening the sparkling green of flower-petals, fresh moss and young shoots of grass with the beautiful green *vaidurya*.”<sup>81</sup>

The word emerald was derived from the Sanskrit word “Marakata meaning the (Egyptian) gem found near desert (maru) and sea-coast (kata), Masaraka (Egyptian gem) and Smaragdos.”<sup>82</sup> The *Amarakosha* gives three other synonyms, namely “*marutmatam, asvagarbhah, and harinmanih*.”<sup>83</sup>

The emerald was not a product of India. The emerald mines of Mount Zebarah in Egypt, known as the Cleopatra mines, were the only known source of emeralds in the ancient world, “active as early as 1650 B.C.”<sup>84</sup> It is believed that right up to the discovery of the South American source, emeralds came to India from Egypt. Quantities mined were small and the demand limited. The discovery of the Muzo mines in Colombia by the Conquistadores resulted in the introduction of gems of immense size and quality from the New World through the Spanish trade into India, Persia, the Ottoman Empire, Egypt and eventually into Europe. Columbus’ discovery of America partitioned the unexplored world between Spain and Portugal. By two Bulls promulgated by Pope Alexander VI on 4<sup>th</sup> May, 1493, “all regions discovered, or to be discovered west of the Atlantic Ocean”<sup>85</sup> were granted to Castile, and an imaginary straight line was drawn from the Arctic to the Antarctic, “so as to divide the Spanish and Portuguese hemispheres.”<sup>86</sup>

As a consequence of this division, emeralds from Colombia travelled east via the Spanish trade routes to Spain’s colonies in the Philippines from where they were passed to









44  
**NECKLACE**

Rajasthan; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*A pendant set with uncut diamonds and enamelled on the reverse is strung on a row of emerald beads.*

45  
**THE TAJ MAHAL EMERALD**

Carved: c.1630–1650  
Colombian emerald: Wt: 141.22 carats  
Private collection

*The motif of the flowering plant, reminiscent of the pietra dura surface of the Taj Mahal, was virtually a logo of the reigns of Jahangir and Shah Jahan. It appears in architecture, in textiles and in jewellery. The flower heads on this stone represent a lotus, a poppy and a combination of the two, an amaranth – an imaginary flower. The emerald was owned by Cartier in the 1920s, who had mounted it as a centre-piece of a necklace or shoulder ornament, the ‘collier Berenice’.*

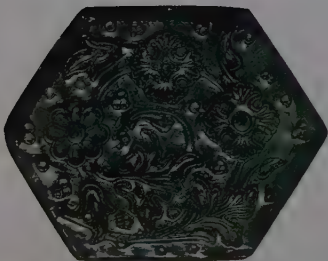
44

Portuguese ships bound for Portugal, and thence to India; alternately, emeralds from Colombia were shipped to Spain to be bought by Portuguese merchants in Lisbon and Castille from where they were carried to India.

Rough gems were cut, carved or engraved by the skilled lapidarists of Gujarat, where the stones were set into magnificent jewels. Emeralds were coveted by the Mughal emperors and large quantities were acquired by them. Though the ‘old’ mine (Egyptian) stones were replaced by those from the ‘new’ (Colombian) mines, Jahangir, who received an emerald as tribute from Adil Khan, approved of the gem: “Although it is from a new mine, it is of such a beautiful colour and delicacy as I have never before seen.”<sup>87</sup> The Mughals carved emeralds in the belief that the inherent potency of the stones could be enhanced by engraving religious verses, words, titles and symbols on them. These were carefully chosen to combine with the inherent qualities of the gem, so that together the talismanic potency of the stone increased. Gems were also engraved only by chosen specialists, and after due consultation with astrologers for a suitable time and date.

*The Taj Mahal Emerald:* A magnificent green stone weighing 141.13 carats, the Taj Mahal Emerald is carved on one side with stylized floral designs typical of the Shah Jahan period (45). The design and the quality of the carving points to the possibility that the emerald was carved during the reign of Shah Jahan. Portraits of Mughal rulers indicate that emeralds were worn as pendants simply mounted in gold or on armbands.

45



### The Gem of Summer

“The colour of the red lotus, of the colour of saffron,  
of the colour of *parijata*-flower and of the colour of the morning sun.”<sup>88</sup>

Hot and fiery, red as the sun, the ruby is the gem of summer.

Rubies, referred to as *manika*, feature in ancient Indian gem treatises. Varieties of the stone classified on the basis of colour and purity are *padmaraga*, or red like the lotus which is the best; *kuruvinda*, an intense red; *nilagandhi*, red with a tint of black or blue; *saugandhika*, a yellowish red; and *jamuniya*, a purplish red.<sup>89</sup>

Ceylon, the Island of Gems, was the principal source of rubies and sapphires from ancient times. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Burma or Pegu became the prime source of rubies, spinels and sapphires. Duarte Barbosa, writing in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, states that in the kingdom of Pegu “there is one exceeding great city which they call Ava inhabited by wealthy merchants where there is much trade in valuable precious stones, rubies and spinels which are found here. Hither gather Moorish, Heathen and Chati merchants from divers lands to purchase them.”<sup>90</sup> The Ava markets were in close proximity to the kingdom of Capelam, modern Mogok, whose mines yielded the best quality rubies and spinels. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Siam (Thailand) supplied fine quality gems.

At one time there was some confusion between rubies and stones called balas rubies or spinels. Spinel and rubies are generally found in the same mine, the spinel being lighter in weight and colour. Spinel also occur in a variety of other colours, the most sought-after being the pinkish red. They are also found in large sizes, and are

*Mohammed of Ghazni captured Bhimnagar (modern Nagarkot) and returned with immense wealth. On his arrival at Ghazna, “he ordered the court-yard of his palace to be covered with a carpet, on which he displayed jewels and unboiled pearls and rubies, shining like sparks, or like wine congealed with ice, and emeralds like fresh sprigs of myrtle, and diamonds in size and weight like pomegranates. Then ambassadors from foreign countries, including the envoy from Taghan Khan, king of Turkistan, assembled to see the wealth which they had never yet even read of in books of the ancients, and which had never been accumulated by kings of Persia or of Rum or even by Karun, who had only to express a wish and god granted it.”*<sup>[ix]</sup>

46



46  
ADDIGAI (necklace)  
Tamil Nadu; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*A typical south Indian necklace form of large, oval, cabuchon Burmese rubies, set singly in a closed setting.  
“For these are Manikas – stones true and good,  
Which my spell brings from Burmah’s steaming grove.  
Such have the colour of the drop of blood  
Shed on the white neck of a wounded dove.”*<sup>[ix]</sup>



therefore often just polished, drilled and used as beads. The balas is a rose coloured spinel, the term “a corruption of *Balakshi*, a popular form of *Badakshi*, because these stones came from the mines on the Upper Oxus, in one of the districts subject to Badakshan.”<sup>91</sup> Ibn Batuta, writing circa 1350, states: “The mountains of Badakshan have given their name to the Badakshi ruby, vulgarly called al-Balakhsh.”<sup>92</sup> But according to Biswas, the term is derived from the Sanskrit *balasuryaka*, the crimson-coloured morning sun. A term also used by Kautiliya to denote a kind of ruby.<sup>93</sup>

**The Timur Spinel:** In the *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, Jahangir records the receipt of a large inscribed ruby (later recognized to be a spinel) set in a turban ornament, from Shah Abbas of Persia, bearing the titles of his ancestor Ulugh Beg and his descendants. To these, Jahangir instructed “Sa’ida the superintendent of the goldsmith’s department engrave in another corner the words ‘Jahangir Shah b. Akbar Shah,’ and the current date.”<sup>94</sup> This spinel was later set into a jewelled recess in the Peacock Throne. The stone is one of the world’s largest spinels, weighing 361 carats, currently in the Royal Collection.

According to accounts, the earlier inscriptions were removed and to the names of Akbar Shah and Jahangir Shah, were added the names Sahib Qiran Sani (Shah Jahan), Alamgir Shah (Aurangzeb), Badshah Ghazi Muhammad Farukh Siyar and Ahmad Shah Dur-i-Duran. The spinel, sometimes referred to as “*Khraj-i-Alam* or Tribute to the World,”<sup>95</sup> was further inscribed under the orders of Nadir Shah at Isfahan. The inscription reads, “This is the ruby from the twenty-five thousand genuine jewels of the King of Kings, the Sultan Sahib Qiran which in the year 1153 (1740) from the jewels of Hindustan reached this place.”<sup>96</sup> The story of this spinel appears to have followed closely that of the Koh-i-Nur, passing to Ranjit Singh of Punjab and then to his son Duleep Singh, and finally acquired by the British after the annexation of the Punjab.

**The Carew Spinel:** A stone of irregular pear shape, the Carew Spinel weighs 133.5 carats (48). Once the property of the Mughal Treasury, it is engraved with the titles of Jahangir, Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb and the dates 1021 (1612–3), 1039 (1629–30) and 1077 (1666).



47 (facing page)  
NECKLACE  
Private collection

*Two rows of polished spinel beads and seed pearls with a spinel and diamond pendant. The total weight of the necklace is a staggering 800 carats.*

48  
CAREW SPINEL  
Mughal; 17<sup>th</sup> century  
4 cm x 2.3 cm  
Courtesy Victoria and Albert Museum,  
London (IM 243-1922)

*Weighing no less than 133.5 carats, this polished pear-shaped spinel is engraved with the titles of Jahangir, Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb.*

49  
SPINELS  
Photograph courtesy Royal Ontario Museum,  
© ROM

*The magnificent spinel gem on the left measures 5.5 cms across and weighs a staggering 500 carats, making it the largest red spinel known; the gem on the right is the fourth largest in the world, weighing 270 carats and bears no less than seven inscriptions, the earliest dating to the reign of Jahangir.*





50

50

## EARRINGS

Andhra Pradesh; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

Clusters of seed pearls strung on fine gold wire were wrought into a variety of ornament forms in this region where pearls were abundantly available.

51 (facing page)

## SAT LADA (seven-strand necklace)

Private collection

Seven strands of perfectly matched, graded Basra pearls comprise this necklace.  
"Know you, perchance,  
how that poor formless wretch –  
The Oyster-gems his shallow moonlit choice?  
Where the shell irks him, or the sea-sand frets,  
There, from some subtle organ, he doth shed  
This lovely lustre on his grief, and gets Peace and  
the world his labour, being dead." [181]

The gem was probably a part of the vast quantities of precious stones plundered by Nadir Shah. It is believed that the stone was gifted by Nadir Shah to one of his many officers. The spinel was subsequently acquired by Charles Alison in Tehran, sometime before 1870, and donated to the Victoria and Albert Museum in London in 1922 by his great-niece Lady Carew. The beautiful large stone is drilled length-wise and a diamond tipped pin inserted through the hole.

## The Gem of Autumn

"The 'dark blue ocean', the peacock's throat,  
the bubbles of blue water and the throat of the mad Kokila,"<sup>97</sup>  
are the colours of the *indranila* or sapphire.

The sapphire is the gem of autumn.

The dusky blue of the autumn sky is reflected in this gem of many mysteries. Loved and feared, many a story lies hidden in its dark and fathomless depths. During the time of the *Periplus*, sapphires were "produced mainly on the Southern Malabar hills."<sup>98</sup> Ceylon, however, was the principal sapphire producing country and it was only in 1881 that the mountain ranges of Kashmir revealed the most valuable deposits of sapphires. Due to its association with the powerful *shani* or Saturn, Indians wear the stone with great caution and it rarely features in traditional Indian jewellery.

## The Ethereal Seed

"At certain seasons do the oysters lie  
With valves wide gaping t'ward the teeming sky  
And seize the falling dews, and pregnant breed  
The shining globules of th' Ethereal seed."<sup>99</sup>

Throughout the history of Indian jewellery, no gem has been as prolifically used as the pearl. Hardly any image in sculpture or painting is represented without a string of pearls or ornaments utilizing pearls. So versatile was the gem that delicate screens woven with pearls to decorate pillars and doorways are described in the *Mahabharata*. According to gem specialists, the pearl has a tendency to shrink in size over long periods of time, as the moisture evaporates: "On account of the high content of organic material, pearl gradually decays and becomes brittle after a long time."<sup>100</sup> In the Vedas, pearls are referred to as *krsana*, the term derived from *krs* or that which becomes emaciated.<sup>101</sup> This is probably why, in spite of the fact that pearls were abundantly available and used in such great quantities, very few ancient pearls have survived.

The antiquity of the exploitation of the pearl fisheries of India is not known. The waters off the coast of south India were the principal source of the gem. Pearls from the Gulf of Mannar in the Tinnevely district and the Persian Gulf were the most valued and sought after in the ancient world. Producing high quality, round and lustrous pearls, these sources were successively exploited by the Arabs, the Persians, the Pandyas, the Cholas, the Portuguese, the Dutch and the English. As early as the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D., the *Periplus* records that the fisheries were "worked by condemned criminals"<sup>102</sup> for the Pandya kings and the produce exported through the seaports of Korkai (Kolkhoi, Colchi) and Kayal. But by the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. it was the busy port of Puhar that controlled much of the pearl trade between India and Rome.





52

52  
**GUTTAPUSAL**  
 (necklace of bunches of pearls)  
 Andhra Pradesh; early 20<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection

*Bunches of small pearls (gutta) pierced as beads (pusal). This ornament form and name originated in areas close to the ancient pearl fisheries along the Coromandel coast.*

“The great prosperity of the fishery may be gathered from the fact that in A.D. 1330, according to Friar Jordanus, no less than 8000 boats were employed in the fisheries of Tinnevely and Ceylon.”<sup>103</sup> Fishing was hard manual labour: “When they are at anker, they cast a rope into the Sea, and at the end of the rope, they make fast a great stone, and then there is readie a man that hath his nose and his eares well stopped, and annointed with Oyle, and a basket about his necke, or under his left arme, then hee goeth downe by the rope to the bottome of the Sea, and as fast as he can he filleth the basket, and when it is full, hee shaketh the rope, and his fellows that are in the Barke hale him up with the Basket.”<sup>104</sup> Once harvested, the oysters were laid out in great piles on the shore and sorted according to size and quality. According to Marco Polo, “the quantities obtained are beyond computation.”<sup>105</sup> Such was the demand for pearls, that the king retained the best and even offered to buy those of excellent quality by paying twice their value.<sup>106</sup>

The demand for pearls in India from ancient times has been insatiable. Most of the domestic produce was appropriated by the local rulers of the pearl-rich regions themselves or exported to other parts of the country. The entire ancient trade in pearls was monopolized by the Indians, who also acquired large quantities of pearls from the fisheries of the Persian Gulf. Though at one time, the pearls of Bahrain were considered inferior to those of Mannar since they had a yellow tint,<sup>107</sup> they were, according to



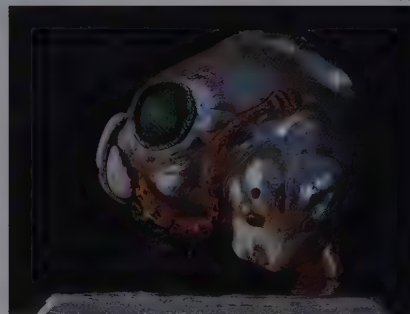
*“When the genial season of the year exercises its influence on the animal, it is said, that yawning, as it were, it opens its shell, and so receives a kind of dew, by means of which it is impregnated; and that at length it gives birth after many struggles, to the burden of its shell in the shape of pearls which vary according to the quality of the dew. If this has been in a perfectly pure state when it flowed into the shell, then the pearl produced, is pure and brilliant, but if it was turbid, then the pearl is of a clouded colour also; if the sky should happen to have been lowering when it was generated the pearl will be of a pallid colour. It is quite evident from these that the quality of the pearl depends much more upon the calm state of heavens, than of the sea, and hence it is that it contacts a cloudy hue, or a limpid appearance, according to the serenity of the sky in the morning.”* [xii]



53a

53b

53c



53a, 53b &amp; 53c

PEARL SHRINE (whole and detail)

Pearl in lingam: Wt: 25 carats

Amethyst: Wt: 105 carats

Private collection

*The natural shape of baroque (irregular) pearls is used to represent the lingam and Nandi in this miniature Shaivite shrine.*

Tavernier, “for the most part sold in India, because the Indians are not so particular as we are.”<sup>108</sup> With the gradual and steady depletion of the fisheries, pearls from Basra poured into the Indian markets. It is indeed ironic that today Basra pearls command a very high premium and are valued above pearls of Indian origin.

As India was once the primary supplier of gems to the world, it is not surprising that every once in a while a fabulous stone of Indian origin appears on the world’s gem markets. While the pedigree of some are recorded, many hold the secret of their origins and the stories of their journeys across the world within themselves.

“Gold, coral, pearls,  
lovely sapphires given by a dark mountain  
– these all come from far separate places, and yet if they are strung  
to make a priceless ornament they stay together.  
Always good men seek the company of the good,  
evil men the company of evil.”<sup>109</sup>



ANCIENT INDIA

## Stars to a Hundred Skies

*“Gold amongst other metals hath beene alwayes held  
the most excellent; and with reason, being the most durable  
and incorruptible of all others; for fire which consumes and  
diminisheth the rest, amends it, and brings it to perfection.*

*Gold which hath often passed through the fire, keepes his colour,  
and is most fine and pure; ... which consumeth all other*

*metals doth not any thing waste gold,  
nor yet hurt it, neither is it eaten, nor groweth old.*

*And although his substance and body bee firme and solid;*

*yet doth it yeeld and bow wonderfully;*

*the Beaters and Drawers of gold know well the force it hath*

*to bee drawne out without breaking...”<sup>1</sup>*



54 (page 54)  
 PRINCESS CHELUVAJAMMANIAVARU  
 OF MYSORE  
 Mysore; c.1900  
 By permission of the British Library (430/41-666)

55 (page 55)  
 KANPATA (ear ornament)  
 West Bengal, Calcutta; c.1870  
 Courtesy Victoria and Albert Museum,  
 London (995-1872)

*Reminiscent of ancient prototypes, this earring combines filigree learnt from the early Greeks and European style 'cut-work'. The paisley form, the birds and the tassels along the edges are all quintessentially Indian. The faceted studs that decorate the ear ornament are popular in different parts of India.*

56  
 DANCING GIRL  
 Indus Valley, Mohenjo-daro; c.2500 B.C.  
 National Museum, New Delhi

*The bronze statuette is adorned with simple ornaments that were the fashion of the period. From the shoulder to the wrist, the girl's left arm is stacked with bangles; a cord necklace with flower-like pendants encircles her neck.*

56



The origin and history of gems and jewellery in India is a vast jigsaw puzzle. Nestling amidst the many sculpted images of gods, kings, men and women which adorn the corridors of ancient temples is information that exists in no other visual format; intricately carved jewels provide the only three-dimensional record of period-specific styles, design influences and crafting techniques. A perfect human form is what the sculptor endeavoured to create; and beauty of form needed to be enhanced by beauty of ornament.

Eloquent clues come from textual references in the Indian classics. The *Vedas*, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, Buddhist and Jain literature, the *Shilappadikaram*, the works of Kalidasa, poetry, drama and fiction in every period furnish graphic descriptions of wealth and grandeur, the love for ornamentation and sometimes the deeper purpose of such ornamentation. But it has not been possible to prepare a catalogue of designs from the descriptions of jewellery in ancient texts, since rare are the instances when details are provided. In the *Ramayana*, for example, Sita is described wearing jewelled butterflies in her hair; in the *Shilappadikaram*, Kannaki's ankle ornaments resemble a wreath of flowers and are filled with precious stones. Such pictorial imagery facilitating visual reconstruction, however, is rare.

What does exist in abundance is a host of texts on gemmology (*ratnashastra*).<sup>2</sup> Texts of this kind (*shastras*) exist for various spheres of knowledge: dance, music, grammar, architecture, painting and even love. These texts were compiled over great lengths of time, incorporating the wisdom of peoples who had practical knowledge, to serve as guidebooks. Absorbing and disseminating *shastric* knowledge played an important role in jewellery making, as it did in every other art form in India. A person had to have a thorough knowledge of the *shastras* in order to call himself an artisan of merit. Some of these texts yield valuable information on the location of mines, list the categories of precious stones, provide classifications based on defects and desirable qualities, pricing, and the qualifications of specialists. Other texts advance mythical and fanciful theories on the origin of gems, adding a fascinating dimension to the overall picture.

Chronicles, journals of foreign travellers, myths and legends are replete with accounts of kings and conquests and legendary treasuries brimming with gems and jewellery. These sources have endured the passing of time as have a multitude of stories passed down from generation to generation through the oral tradition. These tales, many lost, many transformed, offer a deeper understanding of ornaments and how they came to be. All this evidence, used in conjunction with material remains, extant pieces of jewellery and geological studies have facilitated the assembling of this vast jigsaw puzzle.

### On the Banks of the Indus

In spite of the many advanced methods of crafting jewellery, the simple bead, from pre-historic times to the present, has lost none of its versatility or eminence. To this day, the lowly black bead is the most auspicious ornament a mother gives her daughter on her wedding day and is endowed with the most powerful spirit-repelling properties. Its origins in India go back to the 7<sup>th</sup> millennium B.C.

By 3000 B.C., India was a principal production centre for beads in the ancient world. Lapis lazuli, turquoise, coral, carnelian, jasper and a variety of semi-precious hardstones were imported into the Indus valley cities of Harappa, Mohenjo-daro,

Chanhu-daro, Lothal and Kalibangan, where they were cut, shaped and bored and re-exported to destinations beyond India's maritime boundaries (57). In addition to the hardstone variety, excavations have yielded beads made from gold, silver, copper, faience, terracotta and steatite. Shapes and sizes are infinite, including micro-beads, spacers and terminals for necklaces. Remains of bead manufacturing workshops at these sites and the discovery of sophisticated tools such as burins, scrapers, cylindrical drills and micro-drills indicate that the bead maker was equipped to drill holes in coloured stones and engrave and etch designs on beads. The production technique for gold beads, characterized by precision and dexterity, was fairly standard, with thin sheet gold laid over a *lac* core.

Bronze, terracotta and stone statuary of the Indus culture (56), together with representations of the human form on seals, provide evidence of adornment. In this early period of Indian history, simple forms fashioned from shell, stone and clay embellished with faience and hardstones were predominant; beads were bored and strung on cords. Sheet gold and gold wire were twisted into elementary coiled earrings, neck bands, fillets, bangles and waist girdles, many plain and some decorated with delicate surface designs. The many traders who came in quest of precious commodities in this period exchanged not only goods, but also cultural influences. This lively exchange resulted in a cross-fertilization of ideas, whereby new designs were introduced and new concepts synthesized with indigenous styles.

### Words of a Generation

The absence of material remains of the Vedic period between circa 1500–500 B.C. is more than compensated by the many references to treasures and gold in the *Vedas*. The opening hymn of the *Rig Veda* invokes Agni, “the household priest who is the god of the sacrifice, the one who chants and invokes and brings most treasure.”<sup>3</sup> In the same *Veda*, the sun is described as “a golden swing which Varuna has placed for himself in the sky to be an ornament.”<sup>4</sup> Gold, yellow and resplendent, was a symbol of the sun, one of the principal mediums between life on earth and life hereafter: the seers propounded that the giver of gold enjoys eternal life in heaven.

Gods and demons in the early Vedic texts – Rudra, the Maruts, the Aswins and the Asuras – are all described as adorned with golden jewels. ‘*Khadi*’ was a generic term used for ornaments of gold. Classical literature abounds with nomenclature for jewels. Ornament names were derived from the part of the body on which they were worn and their constituent elements. Thus Indian jewels do not go by purely generic names. A necklace is not just a necklace, an earring is not merely an earring. To the generic name are



57  
BEAD NECKLACE  
Indus Valley, Harappa; c.2500 B.C.  
National Museum, New Delhi (49.254/13)

*Beads fashioned from a variety of semi-precious hardstones threaded on a cord constituted one of the simplest early ornament forms.*

58  
EAR ORNAMENT  
North India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private Collection, USA

*Coiled from a single length of gold wire, these ear ornaments reflect the continuity of forms depicted on sculptures from the past.*





59  
MULLAI MOTTU MALAI (necklace)  
Tamil Nadu; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection, USA

*Buds of the fragrant jasmine flower replicated in gold were popular in every period and are worn throughout the country even today.*

often appended words that identify the design, the form, the purpose or the source of design inspiration, or even its religious significance.

The custom of exchanging jewellery at weddings was prevalent in Vedic times. In the *Ramayana*, a long procession of gift bearers accompanied Rama when he went to marry Sita. Many of these trays bore gifts of jewels. Ayodhya, the prosperous capital city of the *Ramayana*, “was filled with merchants and artificers of all kinds; gold, precious stones, and jewels were there found in abundance; every one wore costly garments, bracelets, and necklaces.”<sup>5</sup>

Surprisingly, “despite its encyclopaedic nature encompassing almost every aspect of culture, the *Mahabharata* mentions only a very few gems and gemstones, as well as gem-incrusted articles. This omission is all the more glaring in the face of a large variety of expensive gold articles and a general atmosphere of regal pomp and

finery.”<sup>6</sup> Of the many armlets (*angadas*) that were universally worn, a lone piece was gem-studded.<sup>7</sup> However, later additions to the text more than compensate for the lacunae. There are references to gems and gold used by royalty in the form of ornaments and to embellish vessels, furniture, weapons and even chariots.

By the late 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C., the Persian Empire under Darius extended past Afghanistan, Baluchistan and Gandhara, right up to the Hindu Kush mountains. Direct contact between the Persian court and India and between the Greeks and India increased. Alexander’s invasion (327-326 B.C.) led to the establishment of Greek cities in the north-west Gandhara region. Greek artists who had formed a part of Alexander’s contingent settled here and were catalysts in the induction of new concepts in an already vast repertoire of design and craft. The Greeks were not teaching the unskilled; jewellery manufacture was technically advanced in the region, and craftsmen were already rendering works in microscopic detail. Though Greek influence might have been manifest in actual examples, jewellery depicted on the many contemporary stone and terracotta images of nature gods and goddesses (*yakshas* and *yakshis*) from the Mathura and Patna regions exhibit a range of contemporary styles that are devoid of any foreign influence. Perhaps this age is best described by Curtius Rufus, who wrote, “Gold is carried down by several rivers, whose loitering waters glide with slow and gentle currents. The sea casts upon the shores precious stones and pearls. Nothing has contributed more to the opulence of the natives, for these offscourings of the boiling sea are valued at the price which fashion sets on converted luxuries.”<sup>8</sup>

By this time, the idiom of ornament was so well-established that the *Natyashastra* of Bharata (circa 500 B.C.)<sup>9</sup> – a monumental treatise on theatre and the performing arts, including subjects such as costumes, make-up and ornaments – classifies ornaments into four types: *avedhya* – that which is worn by piercing a part of the body,



60

including ear-ornaments (*kundala*); *bandhaniya* – that which is tied up like girdles (*sroni-sutra*) and armbands (*angada*); *praksepya* – that which is worn like anklets (*nupura*); and *aropya* – that which is put around, for example, chains (*hema-sutra*) and necklaces

(*hara*).<sup>10</sup> Distinct styles within each of these categories become manifest with the increased availability of materials, corroborated in Panini's *Ashtadhyayi* (circa 500 B.C.), a work on Sanskrit grammar, which also contains technical information on metallurgy and mineralogy. From this it is evident that mining operations were carried out on an extensive scale and that miners used all kinds of tools and equipment to extract gems and gold and prepare them for use in everyday life.

60

**HASLI (rigid necklace)**  
Rajasthan, Nagauri area; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*This classically simple ornament made from 24-carat gold weighs 87 grams. Gold wire is wrapped and braided around a rigid gold ring.*

61

**MOTHER GODDESS FIGURINE**  
Mathura; Mauryan period, 3<sup>rd</sup>–2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.  
Courtesy of the Trustees of the Prince of Wales Museum of Western India, Bombay  
(Not to be reproduced without the prior permission of the Trustees.)

*The Mother goddess figure is adorned with an elaborate head-dress, necklaces and a girdle modelled from strips of clay.*



61

#### Testimonies in Terracotta

Megasthenes, the Greek ambassador to the court of Chandragupta Maurya, was struck by the fact that though the lifestyle of the people was simple, “their robes are worked in gold, and ornamented with precious stones, and they wear also flowered garments made of the finest muslin. Attendants walking behind hold up umbrellas over them: for they have a high regard for beauty, and avail themselves of every device to improve their looks.”<sup>11</sup> This imagery of elegance, refinement and ideal feminine beauty is



62

62  
SAT LADA (seven-strand necklace)

Gujarat; c.1754  
Rijksmuseum Foundation, Amsterdam (NM 7061)

Necklaces ranging from a single strand to those that are believed to have been made up of over a thousand strands are repeatedly mentioned in ancient texts. Seven being an auspicious number, this was perhaps the most popular. Hollow gold beads interspersed with pendants and a gem-set pendant in the centre of each row cascade down the chest.

63  
YAKSHI (tree nymph)

Bihar, Didarganj; Mauryan period, 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.  
Polished sandstone  
H: 163 cm W: 49 cm  
Patna Museum, Patna (Arch. 134)

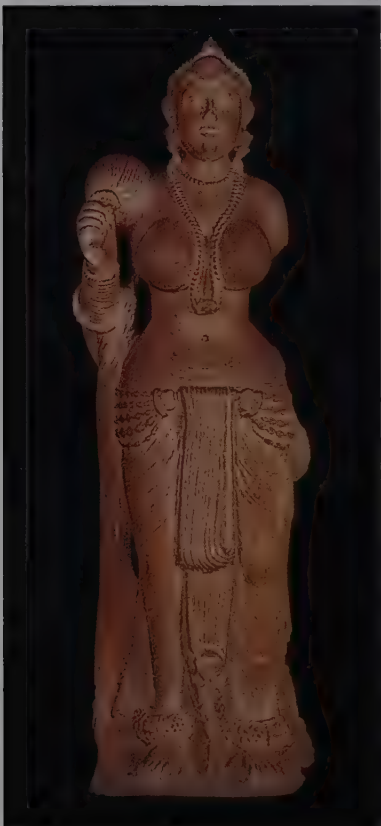
The goddess holding a flywhisk is elegantly bejewelled, wearing a beaded tiara and large spiral earrings, simple necklaces, a five-strand girdle with a lotuses-in-profile clasp and large anklets.

articulated in the many representations of female goddesses in this period (circa 324–187 B.C.) (63). The Mauryan artist used terracotta like photographic film. The exceptional plasticity of the material lent itself to rendering of the minutest ornament details. Thus the figures are a veritable documentation of jewellery designs and crafting techniques of the period. But the same ductility might have sometimes resulted in a temptation to exaggerate.

Mother Goddess terracotta figurines from the Mathura region of Uttar Pradesh are adorned with jewellery shaped from strips and pellets of clay (61). These rudimentary renderings of jewellery forms crystallize more clearly in later periods, with little visible changes in styles. Characteristic features of figurines of this period include elaborate hair-dos. The coiffures were made grander by the use of cloth and flowers, as well as ornaments in the shape of discs. Rows of beads were worn to outline the parting and the forehead. Enormous and elaborate earrings, in pan-shaped and spiral forms frame the rather small faces of these figurines. Neck-hugging torques and the ubiquitous long multi-strand beads hang down the chest and encircle the waist as girdles.

Ornament forms can be discerned in the many names used in the *Arthashastra* of Kautiliya, compiled in the early Mauryan era. The text is not only a compendium on the wealth of the nation, incorporating aspects of the goldsmithing industry, but provides a list of “varieties of strings and net-works for the head, hand, feet and waist.”<sup>12</sup> A necklace of pearls, with one large pearl in the centre, the rest of uniform size, is the *sirsaka*, and a string of uniform-sized pearls is termed the *taralapraticabaddha*; the ‘necklace of the gods’ is made up of no less than one thousand and eight strings and is called the *indracchanda* (moon’s delight), one of five hundred and four strings, the *vijayacchanda* (joy of victory); and thereon in reducing numbers to the single-stringed *ekavali*. The *ekavali* with a gem in the centre is termed *yasti* and when it is interspersed with gold and gems, is known as the *ratnavali*.<sup>13</sup> The names are many, but the descriptions few. However evidence from the plastic arts establishes that the stylistic continuity visible in many ornament forms spanned several centuries.

63





*“When the God of the Mines called his courtiers to bring him all known gems, he found them to be of all colors and tints, and of varying hardnesses, such as the ruby, emerald, sapphire, etc. He took one of each; he crushed them; he compounded them, and said, ‘Let this be something that will combine beauty of all; yet it must be pure, and it must be invincible.’ He spoke: and lo! The diamond was born, pure as the dew-drop and invincible in hardness; but when its ray is resolved in the spectrum, it displays all the colors of the gems from which it was made. ‘Mine,’ said the god ‘must be the gem of the universe; for my queen I will create one that shall be the greatest gem of the sea,’ and for her he created the pearl.”<sup>[1]</sup>*



64

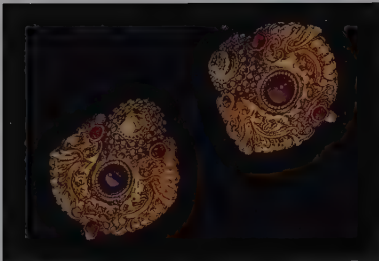
### Documentation of Forms

Further east, across the fertile Gangetic plains, in the region of West Bengal, the sacred and secular terracotta images of the Shunga dynasty (circa 187–75 B.C.) excavated from sites such as Chandraketugarh, Tamluk and Harinarayanpur in West Bengal, and Mahasthangarh in Bangladesh encapsulate some of the finest documentation of early jewellery forms. As a consequence of trade between Gandhara and Bengal, the post-Alexander era witnessed a gradual westward percolation of Greek influence, manifest in the jewellery manufacture of this area.

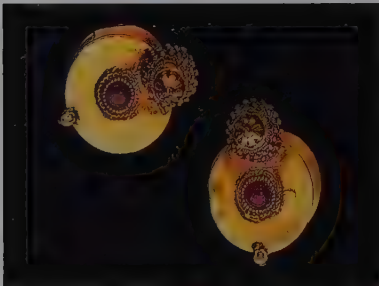
The highly plastic terracotta medium faithfully reflects the prevailing techniques of goldsmithing: the use of dies, the skill of working in sheet gold, repousse, granulation and filigree, gems enclosed in bezel settings, are all distinguishable. Male and female figures are heavily bejewelled (64, 66). There are no marks to distinguish divinity and royalty from the commoner. It is safe to presume that nobility and royalty sported more

64  
PLAQUE PORTRAYING A ROYAL FAMILY  
West Bengal, Chandraketugarh; Shunga period,  
2<sup>nd</sup>–1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.  
Terracotta  
H: 32.5 cm W: 26 cm  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York,  
Purchase, Florence and Herbert Irving Gift, 1992  
(1992.129)

*Ornament forms of the period are clearly discernible in this plaque. Discal ear ornaments with embossed flowers, head ornaments, elaborately worked bangles and anklets, body chains and multi-strand girdles provide detailed visual documentation, compensating for the lack of material evidence.*



65a



65b

65a & 65b  
**EAR ORNAMENTS**

India, various regions; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection, USA

*Gold discal ear jewels from different parts of India.*

66

**YAKSHINI**

West Bengal, Tamluk; Shunga period, c.200 B.C.  
Moulded terracotta plaque  
H: 21.3 cm W: 9.9 cm  
Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (X. 201)

*Tamluk or Tamralipti was an ancient port in West Bengal, part of a geographical area once referred to as Suvarnabhumi (the golden land). Gold, diamonds and pearls were plentifully available and the goldsmith's craft flourished. The plastic terracotta medium recorded, in minutest detail, prevailing ornament forms, designs and manufacturing techniques. The wealth of adornment on this plaque is manifest in the hair pins bearing emblems, beaded hair ornaments (sinthi), large fringed discal earrings, repousse collars (graiveyaka), ornate multi-strand necklaces (kanthi and sitahar), varieties of bangles (kankana) and a beaded and tasseled girdle (mekhala) with squatting figures.*



66

elaborate jewellery than the common people. Perhaps some of the floral decorations on the hair were real flowers. The elaborate turbans of cloth seen in these images are usually embellished with jewelled nets and beaded fillets, together with broad ornaments with round pendants placed along the centre parting, suspended over the forehead. Elaborate hair-nets on the large buns of Shunga women are visually the closest representations of the *makarika* and the *sirsajala* listed in Bharata's *Natyashastra*.

A unique feature of Shunga jewels is the variety of exquisitely delicate hair pins with finials bearing emblems of Shakti that decorate the hair of goddesses (66). These hair pins are in the form of a goad (*ankush*), trident (*trishul*), thunderbolt (*vajra*), flag (*dhvaja*) and axe (*parasu*). Earrings are invariably large and circular, with surface decorations in repoussé and granulation, sometimes embellished with cascading tassels of gold beads or pearls. Flat collar-type necklets of sheet gold, chased and worked in repoussé with floral and geometric designs, with pendants of seed and bud forms along the edge are worn with long necklaces of multiple rows of beads with elaborate pendants. Armbands comprising several rows of beads or flower forms with fringes of beads, pearls and bud-like pendant forms are common. Enormous bangles in a great variety of designs are stacked from wrist to elbow. These were most likely made from sheet gold over

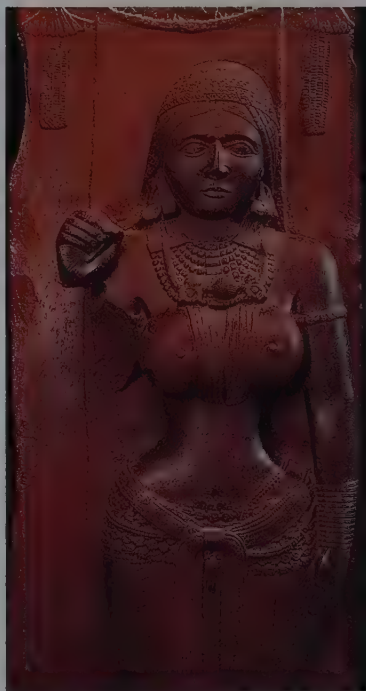


67  
**BAZUBAND** (armlet)  
 West Bengal, Calcutta; c.1880  
 The Los Angeles County Museum of Art,  
 Gift of Mr. & Mrs. Ranjit Roy (M89.110)  
*Made of gold cut-work with faceted studs in a  
 floral pattern, the ornament is completed with  
 cotton tassels and silver wire.*

68  
**PAHUNCHI** (bracelet)  
 Rajasthan; early 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection  
*Three strands of hollow finely worked gold beads  
 filled with lac are strung together. Such bracelets  
 and armbands are visible on ancient terracotta  
 images from the Shunga period in Bengal.*



68



69

**SIRIMA DEVATA**

Bharhut; Shunga period 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.  
Indian Museum, Calcutta

The nymph is heavily bejewelled. Of particular interest are the triratna pendants and bead strung on a simple loop-in-loop chain, which closely relate to the examples depicted in plate 70 below.

70

**CENTER-BEAD AND TWO TRIRATNA-SHAPED NECKLACE PENDANTS**

North India; Shunga period, 185–72 B.C.  
Centre bead: L: 5.7 cm

Pendants: H: 5.7 cm

© The Cleveland Museum of Art, 1997,  
John L. Severance Fund (73.66.68)

A pair of triratna form pendants and central barrel-shaped bead, made from sheet gold with fine granulation on a repousse base. Triratna symbolizes the Buddhist Trinity – the Buddha, the Dharma (doctrine) and the Sangha (order). These pieces are some of the earliest extant items of Indian jewellery.

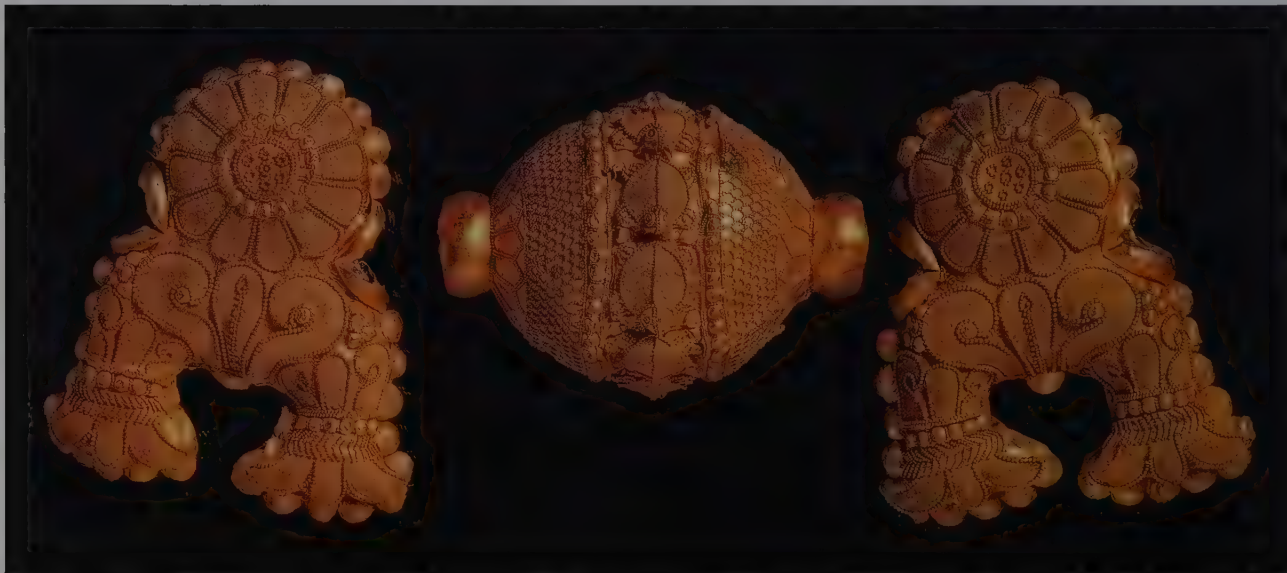
69

a lac core with repousse, chased and granulated designs on the surface. Waist ornaments are of two varieties, those positioned just below the breasts and the more elaborate ones slung low around the hips comprising several rows of cylindrical, barrel-shaped and ribbed beads, with ornate clasps in front. Luxuriant girdles with long tassels draped over the thighs with pendants of finely granulated squatting figures are unique to this period and were influenced by Scythian prototypes. Body chains are strung around the breasts with large round clasps in the centre where the chains cross. These are worn together with chains identified as *channavira*,<sup>14</sup> draped diagonally across one shoulder in the manner of the sacred thread.

Male figures as a rule appear to be much more simply ornamented than their female counterparts. Large turbans and caps devoid of any embellishment adorn their heads. Jewels are restricted to simple earrings, necklets and multi-stringed chains with elaborate clasps that are worn over the right shoulder, probably as the “insignia of a particular dignitary.”<sup>15</sup> The sacred thread (*yagnopavita*) in the form of multiple strings held together with clasps is worn over the left shoulder; and thick bangles of varying sizes are often restricted to only one hand;<sup>16</sup> a simple waist belt completes the ensemble. A veritable catalogue of designs corresponding to references in contemporary literature can be seen on these figures, and attempts to match names to ornament types, though conjectural, are not without substance.

The craftsmen of Bengal were masters at gold work and are, even today, the principal goldsmiths in ateliers around the country. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century,

70



*“The Kshatriyas and Brahmins are clean-handed and unostentatious, pure and simple in life and very frugal. The dress and ornaments of the kings and grandes are very extraordinary. Garlands and tiaras with precious stones are their head-adornments; and their bodies are adorned with rings, bracelets, and necklaces. Wealthy mercantile people have only bracelets. Most of the people go barefoot and shoes are rare. They stain their teeth red or black, wear their hair cut even, bore their ears, have long noses and large eyes; such are they in outward appearance.”<sup>[ii]</sup>*

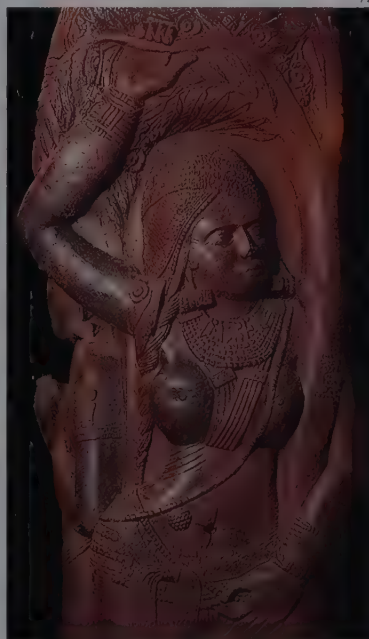


71

two distinct idioms are discernible in the jewellery of Bengal. Drawing upon antecedents of a tradition rooted in the Shunga period, high quality sheet gold work, characterized by extreme lightness, filigree and granulation continue in Bengal jewellery to the present (55, 67). Elaborate gold necklaces (*haras*), repousse-worked earrings (*balas*) and sheet-gold bangles (*kangans*) are prototypes of Shunga jewels. The other style, a product of European influence, catering to the large resident English population and the wealthy zamindars, was characterized by western designs and the use of claw setting for precious gems. In neighbouring Orissa, the crafting of filigree ornaments was perfected to such an extent that the technique has become synonymous with the jewellery of the state.

If the detailing on Mauryan and Shunga terracottas is attributed to the plasticity of the medium, the sculptures of Bharhut (circa 100 B.C.), Sanchi (50 B.C.–25 A.D.) and Amaravati (2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.–3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D.) are testimony to the craftsman's mastery over stone. Royal or otherwise, sculpted figures are almost never unadorned. The sculptor appears to have faithfully reproduced what he saw, his chisel rendering jewellery design details with a high degree of clarity (69, 72).

In spite of the strong Greek presence in the Gandhara region at the time, the designs at Bharhut continue to be traditional and indigenously Indian. Repousse, gem setting, engraving, etching and lapidary skills to carve beads – all techniques with a long antiquity – were used with versatility along with granulation and filigree learned from the Greeks. Hardly any pieces of ancient Indian jewellery have survived; but a rare pair of granulated gold earrings (74a, 74b), the



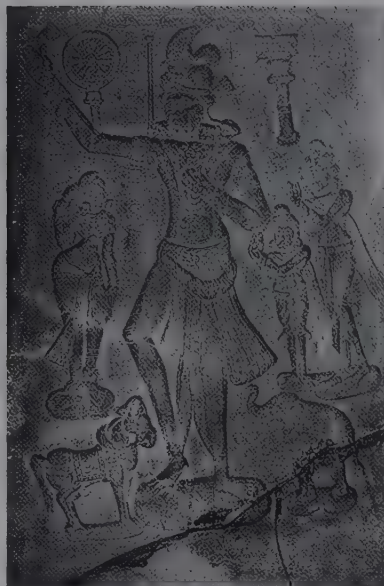
72

71  
FRAGMENT OF A COPING.  
Madhya Pradesh, Bharhut; Shunga period,  
1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.  
National Museum, New Delhi (68.163)\*

*The wish-fulfilling lotus vine (kalpalata) was believed to shower the devout with wine, flowers and jewels. This early stone carving depicts the vine issuing forth a flat collar necklace worked in repousse with semi-circular floral designs and a torsade-style earring, similar to the pair in plates 74a and 74b.*

72  
CHANDRA YAKSHI (tree nymph)  
Bharhut; Shunga period, 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.  
Indian Museum, Calcutta

*Richly adorned with jewels, this tree nymph wears torsade-style earrings similar to the ones depicted in plates 74a and 74b, flat collar necklaces with repousse worked designs, beaded necklaces, rows of plaited chains with metal spacers, amulets on the sacred thread, bangles and girdles – a visual documentation of contemporary forms.*



73

73  
CHAKRAVARTIN MANDHATA

Andhra Pradesh, Jaggayyapeta;  
Satavahana period, 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.  
Photograph courtesy V. K. Rajamani

The central image of the Chakravartin (World Emperor) Mandhata is depicted wearing large ear ornaments that correspond to the Kronos pair (plates 74a, 74b). Such heavy ear ornaments elongated the ear lobes and rested on the shoulder.

74a & 74b  
PRAKARAVAPRA KUNDALA

(ear ornaments – front and back)  
Andhra Pradesh (?); c. 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.

H: 3.4 cm L: 7.9 cm Diam: 3.8 cm

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.  
Gift of The Kronos Collections, 1981 (1981.398.3,4)

These royal earrings with fine gold granulation, known as the Kronos earrings, are very similar to the earrings depicted on the image of Chakravartin Mandhata (plate 73). They irrefutably establish the connection between actual examples and those rendered on sculptures. These torsade-style earrings, made from sheet gold and decorated with minute gold granulation, bear the Buddhist triratna emblems, as well as figures of an elephant and a winged lion. The earrings were excavated in Java in the 1970s and were probably transported by way of the flourishing Southeast Asian trade in this period.

renowned Kronos earrings, are startlingly similar to elaborate ear ornaments worn by images at Bharhut and reliefs surviving from the stupa of Jaggayyapeta in Kalinga, located north of Amaravati (73). Dating from the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C., these sculptures have been described as “purely Hindu” showing “no Hellenistic influence whatsoever.”<sup>17</sup> However, the lion and elephant figures worked with repoussé on the Kronos earrings are covered

with minute gold granulation, in a technique Sir John Marshall refers to as “field grain work”,<sup>18</sup> which is of Hellenistic origin.

Men’s ornaments include gem-set diadems with strings of pearls worn over turbans; neck-hugging torques and long strings of beads, held together with spacers worked from sheet gold and set with gems; simple but elegant earrings simulating forms from nature; beaded bracelets and armlets and even rings for the fingers. Not a single female form is devoid of jewellery. Almost without exception, a forehead ornament, either in the shape of a flower or geometrical form decorated with floral patterns, rests on the forehead; earrings in a great variety of designs, many quite simple, others more complex, are modelled on popular symbols such as the *nandipada*, surmounted with ornate flower designs. Armlets fashioned with rectangular, round and square plaques decorated with designs that include flower motifs are linked together with rows of beads or cords. Necklaces are composed of strings of beads with metal plaques and torques

74a



74b



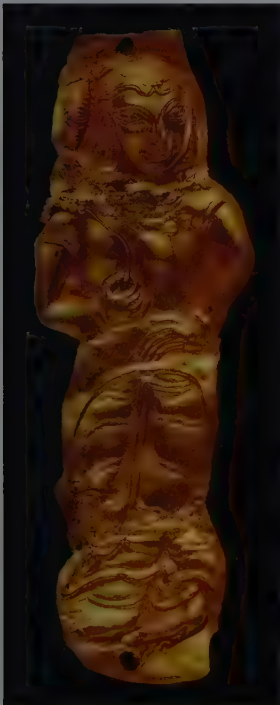
(some quite large) decorated with designs in relief. Girdles are fashioned from multiple rows of beads with plaque spacers. The vast range of jewels includes anklets, rings and elaborate headdresses.

### The Melting Pot

The single largest cache of jewellery in a remarkable state of preservation that survives from ancient India is the approximately 213 items excavated at Taxila, from the city of Sirkap. Today these items are scattered in museums in India and Pakistan. Most of the pieces date to the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D., and are expressions of the extraordinary multi-cultural mix of the population of Gandhara in those early times. The jewellery of Taxila (75–83) provides valuable clues to the many facets of design motifs employed, the transfer of craftsmanship skills and technical manufacturing processes of the period. In design and construction, the jewellery is typically Graeco-Roman, quite different from contemporary Indian jewellery as perceived in the reliefs of Sanchi and Bharhut. Surviving examples include ornaments that exhibit a new idiom in design – a synthesis of foreign prototypes and indigenous models.

Gold was the principal raw material employed. Earrings, necklaces and torques, bangles and bracelets, were made with the help of stone moulds and metal dies. Items were further ornamented with granulation and filigree, both methods learnt from Greek craftsmen. These techniques spread all over India and were used with mastery in combination with indigenous skills. The art of engraving gemstones practised in ancient Greece was also taught to Indian craftsmen by Greek lapidaries settled in India. Another method of decorating and embellishing jewellery in this period was that of incrustation with precious and semi-precious stones, which scholars opine was an indigenous Indian skill.

76



### Proliferation of Styles

By the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D., India was the principal supplier of diamonds and precious gems to the world. Trade with the Romans and the Arabs was at its zenith. The Kushan empire (circa A.D. 50–320) encompassed a very vast area which was a confluence of cultural and intellectual influences, as a result of which a heterogeneous environment of immense sophistication thrived. Under the Kushans, two productive schools of sculpture flourished: one in the north-western region of Gandhara, where the style was distinctly Graeco-Roman, and the other in the Mathura region of northern India, where the style was indigenous, based on earlier Mauryan and



75

### 75 NECKLACE

Taxila, Sirkap; c. 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.  
National Museum, New Delhi

*A lace-like necklace in gold excavated from Taxila provides rare material evidence of the mastery of gold craftsmanship in ancient India.*

### 76 FEMALE FIGURE

Taxila, Sirkap; early Kushan period,  
early 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.

H: 7.8 cm

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York,  
Samuel Eilenberg Collection,  
Gift of Samuel Eilenberg, 1987 (1987.142.309)

*A gold plaque worked in relief; the female figure is finely detailed and includes simple jewellery including a forehead ornament, anklets, bracelets, a torque, a single earring and a brooch. The presence of pierced holes above and below the figure imply that it was either used as a brooch or several such pieces might have been strung to form a necklace.*

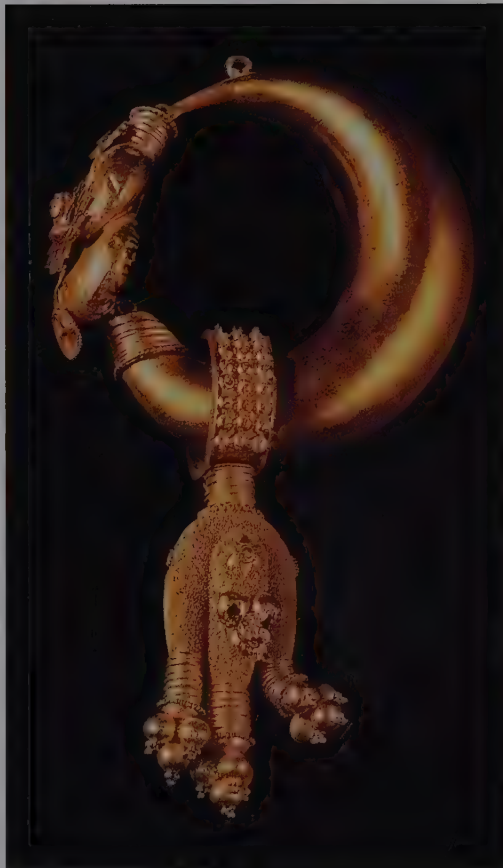


77

77  
EARRING

Taxila (?); c. 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.  
H: 4.4 cm  
Courtesy Victoria and Albert Museum,  
London (IS 16-1948)

*These pendant earrings with a floral top linked with stylized dolphins to a turquoise vase combine the techniques of sheet gold work and granulation. Delicacy and dexterity are the hall-marks of the period.*



78

78  
EAR PENDANT

Taxila, Sirkap; c. 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.  
L: 13 cm W: 6.3 cm  
Courtesy of the Department of Archaeology and  
Museums, Government of Pakistan  
(Inv. No. 8874, SK'29-1241/2)

*An elaborate 'leech-and-pendant' type ear ornament combines thin sheet gold work and fine granulation. The bud pendant is suspended from a crescent form, which is ornamented with a female bust superimposed on a lotus rosette.*



79

79  
EAR PENDANT

Taxila, Sirkap; c. 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.  
L: 8.2 cm Diam: 3.1 cm  
Courtesy of the Department of Archaeology and  
Museums, Government of Pakistan  
(Inv. No. 8969, SK'26-4081/6)

*A gold 'disk and pendant' type ear ornament, the central flower surrounded by concentric bands of beading, scroll and chain-work. The centre of the flower must have once been filled with turquoise paste. The large size is typical of ear ornaments of this period.*



80

80  
ARMLET

Taxila, Bhir Mound; c. 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.  
H: 0.9 cm Diam: 11.8 cm  
Courtesy of the Department of Archaeology and  
Museums, Government of Pakistan  
(Inv. No. 8672, Bm '21-858)

*This tubular gold armlet or bangle is made of thin beaten gold with a lac core. The lion heads are rendered in realistic detail.*





81

**PENDANT WITH THE DEITY HARITI**

Taxila, Sirkap; c. 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.

Gold and carnelian

Diam: 7.3 cm

© The Cleveland Museum of Art, 1997,

Purchase from the J. H. Wade Fund (1953.14)

*The gold medallion worked in repousse and set with carnelian bears an image of Hariti, protector of children. The quality of the repousse work and the manner in which the carnelian is cut to fit into the slots indicate the high quality of craftsmanship. The medallion was probably worn as an amulet by a young child.*

82

**EAR PLUGS**

Taxila; 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.

Diam: 3 cm

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Gift of Samuel Eilenberg, 1987 (1987.142.290ab)

*Repousse worked hamsas (swans) decorate the surface of these gold discal ear plugs. The basic circular design embellished in a variety of techniques is perhaps the most enduring ornament form in India.*

82



83

83

**BRACELET**

Taxila, Sirkap; c. 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.

H: 1.7 cm Diam: 4.8 cm

Courtesy of the Department of Archaeology and

Museums, Government of Pakistan

(Inv. No. 8902, SK'29-1241/5)

*A bracelet with a double 'S' repeat design cut from sheet gold with a beaded border on either side. The leaf cloisons of the clasp are filled with orthoclase felspar; the central gem is missing.*





84

84  
**AMULET CASE**  
 Ahin Post, near Jalalabad, Afghanistan;  
 2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D.  
 L: 12 cm  
 © Trustees of the British Museum,  
 London (1880-29)

*An eight-sided cylindrical hollow gold amulet case set with garnets. Such cases were worn on the sacred thread and are visible on Bodhisattva images of the Gandhara period.*

Shunga prototypes. Working in soft schist, the artist was able to render with precision, clarity and immense detail a veritable album of ornamentation. By recording minute design elements and presenting subtle variations in design between the two regions, the sculptor sought to represent contemporary jewellery fashions.

Throughout the Kushan realm, images of the Buddha are rendered with ascetic simplicity, devoid of jewellery, the elongated ear lobes alone a reminder of the elaborate earrings he must have worn before renunciation. In sharp contrast are the luxuriously bejewelled Bodhisattvas. The reference to gems and jewels in Buddhist philosophical works and their use on images functioned as perceptible metaphors between divine beings and lay people. Jewels were also used as royal insignias. Amulets and gems were endowed with power to ward off demons and “to venture forth without such defenses would be extremely hazardous.”<sup>19</sup> The Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha were the three jewels of Buddhism. Sacred Buddhist chants employ gem imagery and “among the thirty two good omens manifesting themselves when the Buddha became incarnate, bracelets and other ornaments jingled of themselves...”<sup>20</sup> while, at the moment of Enlightenment “... just as in Paradise, mandarava flowers, lotuses and water-lilies of gold and beryl fell from the sky and bestrewed the place of the Sakya sage.”<sup>21</sup>

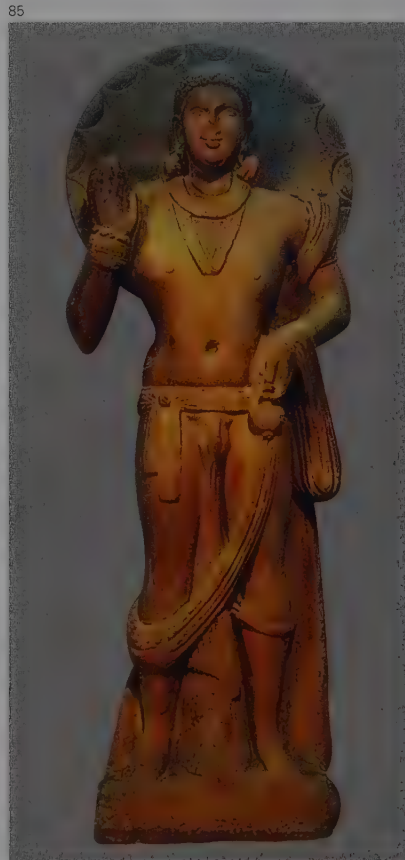
Gandhara art is a valuable point of reference in the history of Indian jewellery. Ornament forms of this period cannot be confined to modern national boundaries.

85  
**BODHISATTVA MAITREYA**  
 Uttar Pradesh, Ahichchatra; 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.  
 Red sandstone  
 H: 66 cm W: 24 cm  
 National Museum, New Delhi (59.530/1)

*This piece reflects the simplicity of the Mathura idiom compared to the more elaborate one of the Gandhara region (plate 86). The figure is adorned with just two necklaces – a flat collar with a central embossed piece and multiple strands of gold chains held together with spacers; large spiral earrings are suspended in elongated ear lobes; a simple sacred thread and two large bangles adorn the right wrist.*

86  
**BODHISATTVA MAITREYA**  
 Gandhara; Kushan period, 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.  
 Indian Museum, Calcutta

*In the classical Gandhara style, the image of the future Buddha is attired in jewels that are typical of the period – a flat collar close to the neck, chains with elaborate animal head terminals and the traditional sacred thread suspended with amulets.*



*“On all parts of her body shone ornaments and trinkets, composed of many jewels and precious stones, yellow and red gold. The pure cup-like pair of her breasts sparkled, encircled by a garland of Kunda flowers in which glittered a string of pearls. She wore strings of pearls made by clever and diligent artists, strung with wonderful strings, a necklace of jewels with a string of Dinaras, and a trembling pair of earrings, touching her shoulders, diffused a brilliancy; but the united beauties and charms of these ornaments were only subservient to the loveliness of her face.” [iii]*



87  
**ANKLETS**  
 South India; c.1850  
 L: 11 cm W: 8 cm  
 Private collection, USA

*Hollow gold anklets decorated with stamped elements and minute granulation. Anklets shown on sculptures ranged from simple forms to heavy and elaborate versions.*

Working under Hellenistic precepts of naturalism, sculptors sought to portray details of garments and jewellery realistically. The pluralism of the region at the time, when the Hellenistic and Scythic world held a great deal of influence, “offer(s) opportunities through comparative analysis to evaluate the subtleties and complex dynamics of cultural transmission, assimilation, and exchange, which occurred over several centuries.”<sup>22</sup>

Though early Gandhara Bodhisattva images are not excessively ornate, they tend to get more so in the late 1<sup>st</sup> century to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.,<sup>23</sup> perhaps a reflection

88  
**EARRINGS**  
 Gandhara; 4<sup>th</sup>–5<sup>th</sup> century A.D.  
 L: 4.8 cm W: 2 cm  
 Asian Art Museum of San Francisco,  
 The Avery Brundage Collection,  
 Gift of the M. J. Engel Memorial Fund  
 (B86 M6 a&b)

*These pendant earrings are fashioned from hollow sheet gold and decorated with granules in a technique that was typical of the period.*



89  
**EARRING**  
 Gandhara (?); 1<sup>st</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D.  
 H: 2.5 cm W: 1 cm D: 2.5 cm  
 Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, VA.  
 The Adolph D. and Wilkins C. William Fund  
 (78.148)

*Fashioned in repoussé from hollow sheet gold and embellished with fine granules, this single earring is in the three-dimensional form of a griffin. The jewel reiterates the many fantastic animal forms visible on sculptures of this period.*



90

**EAR ORNAMENTS**

North India; late Gupta period (?); 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> century  
 Dr. S. Sanford Kornblum and  
 Mrs. Charlene S. Kornblum Collection, USA

*The pair of small ear ornaments on top are carved from gold and relate stylistically to the beads (plates 96, 97a, 97b) which might have once been part of such ear ornaments. The hollow cups of the pair at the bottom once held pearls or gems. The centre of each earring is decorated with a tiny sculpted figure.*

91

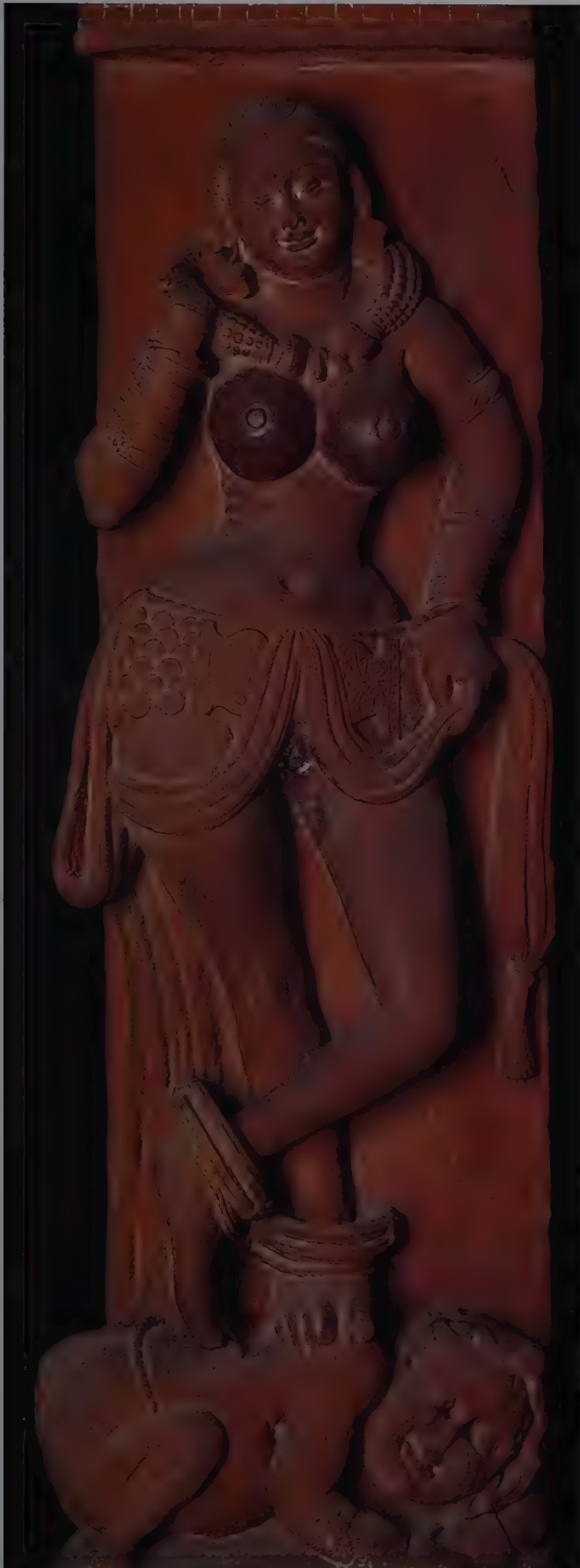
**JAVALI MALA (necklace)**  
 Gujarat, Kutch; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection

*Forms from nature have always been considered auspicious. This particular example is typical to the Bhatia community of Kutch and is worn by a new mother. Gold grains (javali) symbolizing fertility and plenty are strung on a gold chain. Such forms endure among the peasants and tribes of India.*

91

90





92

**92**  
**YAKSHI (tree nymph)**  
Uttar Pradesh, Bhuteshar; early 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D  
Red sandstone  
H: 125 cm W: 31 cm  
Indian Museum, Calcutta

*The variety, size and abundance of jewellery forms of the time are clearly visible on this female figure. The spiral earrings, the multi-strand pearl necklace with large bead terminals, the six-row coin girdle terminating in repousse worked clasps, the bangles, armbands and massive anklets no doubt mirror prevailing styles.*

93

**PART OF A BRACELET**  
Bihar, Bodhgaya; 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D  
Flowers: Diam: 2 cm  
© Trustees of the British Museum,  
London (1892.3-13 15)

*Found in the course of restoration of the Mahabodhi Temple, on the site where the Buddha gained enlightenment. The gold flowers are set with sapphire centres and linked to each other with a conch shaped bead.*



93



94

94  
**VISHNU**  
 Uttar Pradesh, Mathura (?);  
 Gupta period, mid-5<sup>th</sup> century A.D.  
 Red sandstone  
 H: 105 cm W: 68 cm  
 National Museum, New Delhi (E 6)

*The classical elegance of adornment in the period is manifest in the simple rings on elongated ear lobes; two necklaces, a single strand of beads or pearls close to the neck and a multi-strand necklace below were considered adequate; both armbands are identical, a simple circlet embellished with a central vertical motif. The cylindrical crown alone – a statement of Divinity – is quite elaborate: floral scrolls embedded with gems, pearls issuing forth from crocodile mouths and a circular plaque bearing a lion's head emitting a string of pearls.*

95  
**CHAMPAKALI (necklace)**  
 Maharashtra; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection

*Inspired by the golden bud of the michelia champaca, the elements of this necklace are worked in thin sheet gold. Such forms have endured over the ages across regions and communities.*

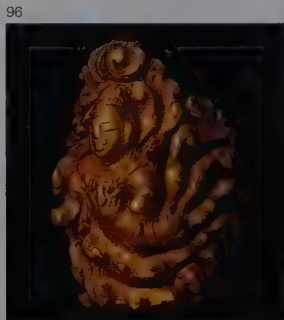
96, 97a & 97b  
**BEADS**  
 Late Gupta (?); 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> century  
 H: 1.5 cm W: 2.5 cm  
 Private collection

*Gold beads carved with a figure of a dancing nymph (apsara) and a grotesque mask (kirtimukha). Such beads perhaps once formed a part of earrings such as those depicted in plate 90.*



95

of the increased wealth and prosperity of the people (86). Head ornaments are elaborate, with networks of pearls and beads, interspersed with stones in bezel settings; turbans are adorned with the *maulimani* ornament,<sup>24</sup> flamboyant jewelled diadems decorated with animal forms and mythical creatures interspersed with scrolling floral motifs. Simple loops and complex sculpted representations of winged lions, birds and animal figures adorn the ears. Torques and flat collars, chased with floral and geometric designs and set with stones hug the neck; long loop-in-loop chains gathered together in animal head terminals hang over the chest; thick cords strung with beads and amulets of various shapes and sizes are worn diagonally across the body. A necklace made of several strands



96



97a



97b

*“The pearls got from Ceylon are multishaped, glossy, swan-white and large; those from the Tamraparni river are white with a slight red tinge, and bright; those from Paraloka (Travancore area) are blackish, white or yellow, mingled with gravel and uneven; those from Surastra are neither too big nor too small, and with the lustre of butter; those from Persia are lustrous, clear, heavy and very valuable; those from the Himalayas are light, broken, curd-like in appearance, large and double-shaped; those from the Northern country are rough, black and white, light, of good size and brilliance; and those from Pandya-varta are like the Neem fruit or coriander seed, trigonal and very tiny.”<sup>[iv]</sup>*



98

of beads joined by clasps fashioned from sheet gold with repousse designs of floral motifs is a common feature. The honeysuckle symbol is used frequently to decorate belt clasps. Hair pins are worn by men and women, the pin heads surmounted with the thunderbolt (*vajra*), or human figures, geometrical shapes, birds, animals and butterflies.

At the other end of the Kushan realm, images from the Mathura region are also adorned with jewellery, albeit in a simpler fashion (85). Buddhist, Jain and Hindu jewellery forms were non-sectarian. Female fashions include hair ornaments in the form of jewelled bands and diadems of pearls comprising beads, gem-set flowers and repousse metal plaques. Hair pins bear symbols and tiny emblems of the sun and moon; three-dimensional earrings in the form of lions with flowing manes are suspended from long ear lobes; heavy necklaces and torques, multiple bangles, large and heavy waist ornaments with ornately worked plaques and clasps displaying auspicious symbols and heavy anklets are some of the constituents of the jewellery in this area.

Bodhisattvas often wear more than one necklace, comprising a flat wide repousse collar decorated with floral motifs worked in relief, edged with beads,

98  
KOLHAPURI SAJ (necklace)  
Maharashtra; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*A gold necklace comprising a series of stamped emblems symbolizing the ten incarnations of Vishnu (the Preserver). The necklace is worn for luck, happiness, fertility and health.*



99

99  
**DIADEM**  
 Kashmir (?); 9<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup> century  
 H: 5.4 cm L: 30.2 cm  
 The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.  
 Gift of the Kronos Collection, 1988 (1988.395)

*Inspired by Greek craftsmanship, this jewel, worked in repoussé, bears figures of mythical beings (kinnaris); it is set with a single garnet and fringed with concave discs and a single leaf-shaped one in the centre. The piece is a lone testimony to the craftsmanship of the period.*

long bead necklaces or several rows of loop-in-loop chains ending in animal-faced terminals. Sometimes several long chains with amulet pendants (84) are looped over one shoulder, flowing across the chest in the style of the sacred thread (*yagnopavita*). “In real life these amulets contain *dharani*, or various magical spells that supposedly protect the owner from evil forces.”<sup>25</sup> A vast array of armlets set with gems and worked in elaborate detail and bangles complete the attire. How much of all this was real and how much fantasy? The few surviving items so closely correspond to their sculpted counterparts, that scepticism is unwarranted.

### Classical Simplicity

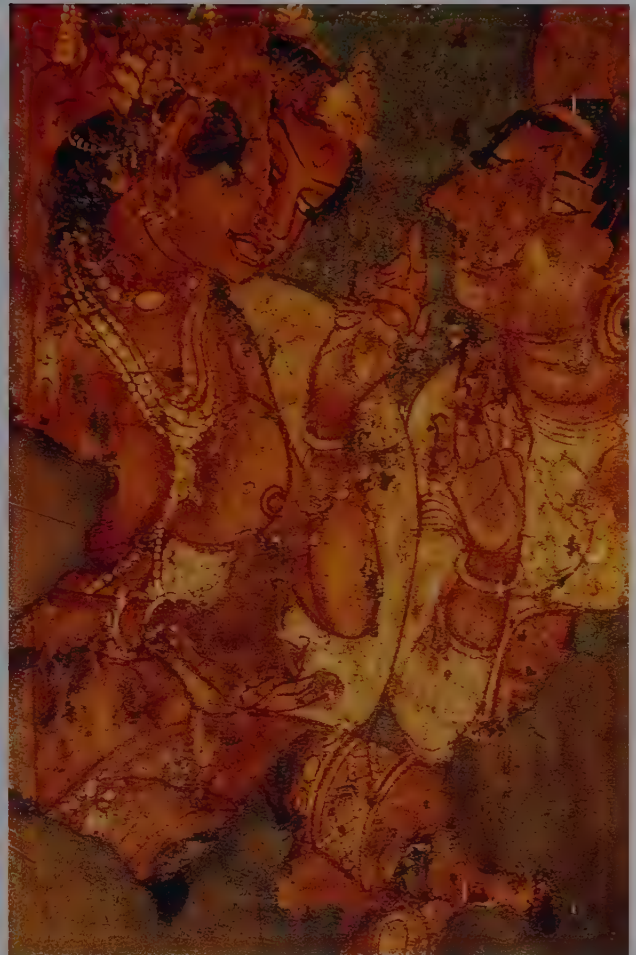
From the elaborately bejewelled Bodhisattvas of Gandhara to the more simply decorated images of Mathura, the transition to the classical simplicity and elegance of the Gupta period (circa A.D. 320–600) is marked (94). In spite of the continuity in jewellery designs, sculptures are no longer weighed down with quantity. Head gear is much more delicate and gem-studded plaques continue to adorn turbans; divinities sport crowns worked in repoussé with animal and floral motifs; necklaces are perfectly proportioned and one or two are considered adequate; bangles and arm bands are limited to the minimum. Literary evidence from the Gupta period is abundant, lending credence to the discrimination of the visual artist. The intellectual renaissance of the time is expressed in the *Brhat Samhita* of Varahamihira, who sought to dispel prevailing myths and misconceptions about mines, categories of gems and their qualities. The ideal of female beauty, described in lyrical tones by contemporary writers like Kalidasa, is echoed in the plastic arts of the period. These works abound with references to jewellery made from flowers and vines and ornaments fashioned from gold and set with precious gems.

The rich imagery of literary renderings is echoed in contemporary epigraphical records. “In the Bilsad Stone Pillar inscription of Kumaragupta I, dated in the year A.D. 415–416, a staircase has been compared to the necklace of pearls of the kind of *kuberachchanda* ... The Maliya Copper Grant of Maharaja Dharasena II, dated in the





100



101

year A.D. 571–572, also refers to the jewels in the locks of hair at the top of the heads of his enemies and such a jewel is given the name of *chudamani* or *chudaratna*.<sup>226</sup>

### Panorama of Life

The cave paintings of Ajanta document the panorama of life over a span of several centuries (100, 101). The paintings, the earliest dating to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, continue right through to the 6<sup>th</sup> century. They are a compendium of contemporary styles and an unparalleled documentation of design, facilitating a study of the evolution of forms and fashions. The paintings clearly demonstrate that the predilection for very heavy and elaborate ornaments of the early periods gave way to the delicate stylish elegance of the western Chalukyan and later Gupta idioms. The murals illustrate scenes from the life of Buddha and stories from the *Jatakas* and depict jewellery forms in colour, providing an unprecedented glimpse of metals and gems used.

The fashion of head ornaments composed of rows of beads and jewels, with gem-set pendants worn along the parting line of the hair continues from earlier times. Crested tiaras and elaborate crown-like ornaments in a variety of designs are evident. Earrings of simple gold circlets in a variety of sizes are preferred, sometimes enhanced by the addition of clusters of pearls, fringes and tassels of pearls and beads, or suspended with gem-studded pendant drops. The ancient disc and crescent forms continue, sometimes plain but often decorated with designs in relief and accentuated with gems set in floral patterns. The cylindrical ear ornaments of Ajanta have their origin in the custom of wearing palm-leaf scrolls to elongate the ear-lobes, and it is likely that splendid six-sided beryl prisms were “polished in their original shape and worn by ladies as ‘cylindrii’ in their ears”<sup>227</sup> in this period. Beryls were used in much of the encrusted jewellery including

100 &amp; 101

### MAHAJANAKA JATAKA

Ajanta; 5<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

Photograph courtesy Benoy K. Behl

*The profuse use of pearls and the lace-like quality of jewellery forms are manifest in the mural paintings of Ajanta. The use of colour in these paintings provides an insight into the materials used in jewellery of the period. Pearls and gems set in gold are evident in the elegant tiaras, multi-strand necklaces, bracelets and elaborate girdles.*



*“A pearl-necklace consisting of 1008 strings and four cubits long, is used as an ornament for Gods and is termed Inducchanda (or Moon’s Pleasure); one half of the above (504 strings and 2 cubits long) is termed Viyayacchanda (or Desire of Victory); one of 108 strings and 2 cubits long is called Hara (or Necklace); one of 81, Devacchanda (or God’s Pleasure); one of 64 strings, Ardha-hara or (Half Necklace); one of 54, Rasmikalapa (or Mass of Rays); one of 32, Guccha (or Bunch); one of 20, Ardha-guccha (or Half-bunch); one of 16, Manavaka (or Pupil); one of 12, Ardhamanavaka (or Semi-Pupil); one of 8, Mandara, one of 5 strings Haraphalaka (or Necklace-Slab). A necklace containing 27 pearls and of one cubit’s length is called Naksatramala (or Wreath of Stars); the same is called Manisopana (or Gem-stairs) if it has other gems or gold beads inserted; it is called Catukara (or Coaxer), when it has a central gem set in gold. Ekavali (or Single-Stringed) containing any number of pearls, measures one cubit and is devoid of other gems; but when it is adorned with a gem in the middle, it is designated as a Yasti (or Stick) by ornament-experts.”<sup>[v]</sup>*

Buddhist relic caskets. In Asvaghosa’s *Buddhacharita*, the baby Buddha is described lying “on a couch with a gorgeous canopy, feet of beryl and framework with gold, and round him the Yaksa lords stood reverently on guard with golden lotuses in their hand.”<sup>28</sup>

The range and variety of neck ornaments at Ajanta are unprecedented. A stylistic evolution of necklaces from the earlier period to the later phases is clearly discernible.<sup>29</sup> While the early phases are characterized by single and multi-strand necklaces of beads and pearls interspersed with spacers of various forms, in the later paintings, necklaces are lavishly bejewelled with lace-like filigree settings and open trellis work designs with festoons of pearls; strings of pearls are fashioned into a great variety of designs by twisting several strands, incorporating spacers, plaques and gem embellished pendants. Pearls are used in incredible quantities. In fact, few jewels are featured without pearls. Armlets and bangles range from simple coiled bands to elaborate repousse worked gem set examples, with fringes of pearls. Girdles of sheet gold with gem-set plaques and multiple strands of beads and pearls with elaborate clasps encircle the waist of most women and are worn by kings and princes as well. Tubular anklets with jewel-set terminals and simple toe rings complete the repertoire of Ajanta ornaments.<sup>30</sup>

From the post-Gupta era, jewellery forms on sculpture tend to become more stereotypical and stylized, a certain standardization replacing the representation of real jewellery. The continuity of Ajanta and the later Gupta period is discernible in jewellery designs of modern-day Maharashtra. The predilection for light sheet gold ornaments and the predominant use of pearls are characteristic of this region (98). Neighbouring Gujarat, juxtaposed between Mughal-inspired Rajasthan and the distinctly different south, exhibits immense variety in different areas (62). The region around Surat is perhaps the most varied. From ancient times, Surat functioned as an important port, drawing peoples from all over the world and from every part of the country. *Kundan*-set forms with embossed gold backs in a great variety of styles occur. In the northern areas, the princely tradition of enamel continues. But it is perhaps among the rural population of Gujarat and Rajasthan that ancient designs have most enduringly survived in ornaments made from silver.

More than any other period in Indian history, the Gupta period documented the wealth and quality of court life. Valuable texts on gemmology and mineralogy from this era are available. The feminine ideal of beauty as expressed in Chalukyan idioms in design and jewellery forms spread to far-flung areas, discernible in Pallava and Chola sculptures in south India. By the 7<sup>th</sup> century Pala-Sena era, the rendering of jewellery in the arts had begun to reflect a distinct stylization (102). Some of the earlier ornament forms such as girdles and hair ornaments became a rarity, but much of the ancient jeweller’s repertoire was echoed in contemporary styles of the time.

A chronological survey of ancient Indian history, addressing those periods that have made major contributions to the study of Indian jewellery, indicates that from one period to another, forms repeat themselves with minor variations. Simplicity gives way to elaboration and in turn to elegance and then again to excessive ornamentation. The pendulum swings back and forth, defying precise documentation of period-specific styles. Stereotypical forms recur in an unbroken continuity, and therefore there is a sense of familiarity in Indian ornaments. Nothing comes as a surprise. Every conceivable design combination and artistic creation seems to have been expressed before.

102 (facing page)

TARA

Bihar, Kurkihar; mid-9<sup>th</sup> century

Bronze

H: 32 cm W: 22 cm

Patna Museum, Patna (Arch 9795)

*Though still quite simple, the stylization of jewellery forms is quite evident in this period. Flat collar-type necklaces, floral earrings and elaborate armlets occur repeatedly in sculpture after sculpture.*



SOUTH INDIA

## The Golden Land



*“India, including Ceylon and the kingdoms of Arakan and Pegu on the eastern side of the Bay of Bengal, was the homeland of jewels, including diamonds, rubies, sapphires, jacinths, emeralds, and though they were not gem stones themselves, pearls.”*<sup>1</sup>

*It is hardly surprising then,  
that inhabitants of these regions  
from kings to peasants decorated themselves  
with as much jewellery as they could afford  
and that precious stones ranked with precious metals as treasure.”*<sup>1</sup>

103 (page 80)  
 H.H. SRI KRISHNA RAJA WODEYAR  
 BAHADUR IV AND PRINCE KANTIRAVA  
 NARASIMHARAJA WODEYAR OF MYSORE  
 Mysore; 1895  
 By permission of the British Library  
 (430/41(59)-B9901)

104 (page 81)  
 PADAKKAM (pendant)  
 South India; 20<sup>th</sup> century  
 H: 12 cms W: 10.5 cms  
 Private collection, USA  
 Set with diamonds, rubies and emeralds, each  
 gem has been meticulously carved to form the  
 image of Krishna seated on a lotus flanked by his  
 two consorts Rukmini and Satyabhama.

105  
 NECKLACE  
 Mysore; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection  
 Uncut diamonds and rubies closed-set in gold in  
 flower shaped pendant units form this necklace,  
 which is only a section of the large one seen in  
 the portrait (plate 103).

Swept by the waves of three mighty oceans – the Arabian Sea, the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal, the shores of India’s southern-most tip are sacred to the worshippers of the virgin Goddess Kanya Kumari. Eulogised by the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* (circa A.D. 60)<sup>2</sup>, her temple stands where she can see the setting sun and rising moon simultaneously. Devotees throng here to purify their soul, bathing in the sacred waters. It is said that for centuries, a mystical, magical stone, a magnificent diamond, adorned the delicately chiselled nose of the icon, and like a beacon, guided ships safely to harbour.

South India was the repository of much of the mineral wealth of ancient India. Kautiliya in the *Arthashastra* (4<sup>th</sup> century B.C.) declares that the trade route across Dakshinapatha, the south, is the ‘superior route’ for it is rich in mines and abounds in “diamonds, rubies, pearls, and gold.”<sup>3</sup> Dakshinapatha was the source of the raw material, which Aryavarta, the north, drew upon to create exquisite ornaments. Geological evidence of the rich mineral resources of south India reiterates the authenticity of the elaborate descriptions of beryls, pearls, diamonds, and sapphires (*vaidurya*, *mukta*, *vajra* and *indranila*) in the *Mahabharata* and the *kravana* pearls mentioned in the *Vedas*. This abundant natural wealth lured a steady stream of treasure-seekers from the Roman empire, Arabia, China, Portugal and other countries to the lush groves and navigable waterways of the western Malabar coast and the wealthy capitals of the eastern Coromandel coast.

The poets of the Tamil Sangam sang about the wealth and beauty of the land and the people of the south. The great port cities were the “emporium of foreign trade,”<sup>4</sup>

105



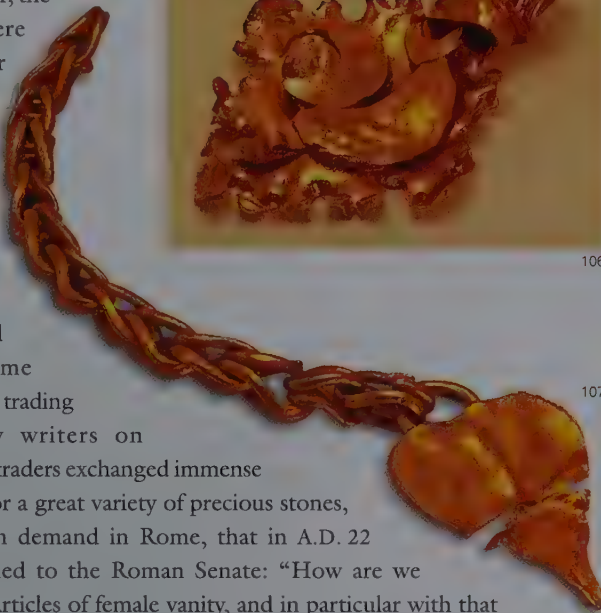
home to wealthy Greeks and seamen from distant shores. In the bazaars, costly merchandise from faraway lands were traded, while in Puhar, the wealthy river port, “there were special streets for merchants of coral, sandalwood, myrrh, jewelry, faultless pearls, pure gold and precious gems.”<sup>5</sup> Cannanore, Musiri, Nelcynda, Puhar, Nagapattinam, Korkai, Argaru and Arikamedu are only some among the many ports and trading centres mentioned by writers on mercantile traffic. Roman traders exchanged immense quantities of gold coins for a great variety of precious stones, for which there was such demand in Rome, that in A.D. 22 Emperor Tiberius appealed to the Roman Senate: “How are we to deal with the peculiar articles of female vanity, and in particular with that rage for jewels and precious trinkets which drain the empire of its wealth (gold) and sends in exchange for baubles the money of the Commonwealth to foreign nations?”<sup>6</sup>

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D., the town of Madurai was one of the principal gem bazaars of the south. The *Shilappaddikaram* vividly documents the quantity and the outstanding quality of gems available in the gem markets: “Kovalan then entered the jeweler’s special street that no enemy had ever plundered. There shining diamonds were sold, without flaw or stain or crow’s-foot, or any fault an expert could detect. The diamonds had the hues of the four castes: (white, red, yellow, and black). Cloudless green emeralds, perfect in form and luster, could be purchased. The rubies called red lotuses (*padmam*), the sapphires (*nilam*), the pearls (*bindu*), the crystals (*sphatika*) – all seemed of stainless perfection. A cat’s eye (*pushpa-raga*), mounted on gold, cast glances that were just like a real cat’s. Attractive gold sardonyx shone like the sun, onyx seemed



106

106  
**PENDANT**  
South India, Nilgiri Hills;  
probably second half of 1<sup>st</sup> millennium A.D.  
Diam: 2.5 cm  
© Trustees of the British Museum, London  
(1886.5-15.3)  
*Crescent moon shapes of sheet gold are attached to a plate with scalloped edges. Such complex, finely worked articles of gold jewellery provide a glimpse of the craftsmanship and repertoire of the period. Such forms were worn as pendants and were later adapted as talis.*



107

107  
**PENDANT AND CHAIN**  
South India, Nilgiri Hills;  
c. second half of 1<sup>st</sup> millennium A.D.  
L: 6.3 cm  
© Trustees of the British Museum, London  
(1886.5-15.15)  
*The pipal leaf form was very popular in jewellery design, used in practically every type of ornament. It can often be seen resting on the shoulders of bronze goddesses in south India.*

108  
**PENDANT**  
South India, Nilgiri Hills; probably  
second half of 1<sup>st</sup> millennium A.D.  
H: 1.3 cm  
© Trustees of the British Museum, London  
(1886.5-15.2)  
*A minute gold pendant or tali, its finely worked details are testimony to the quality of workmanship in this early period.*

109  
**BULLA (pendant)**  
South India, Nilgiri Hills;  
end of 1<sup>st</sup> millennium B.C.(?)  
Diam: 3.2 cm  
© Trustees of the British Museum,  
London (1923.7-21.1)  
*The use of coins in jewellery is common in south India. In this early example, the coin form is replicated in gold and decorated with a crescent and granulation typical of the jewellery of this region even today. The technique of granulation had permeated well into the south in this period.*

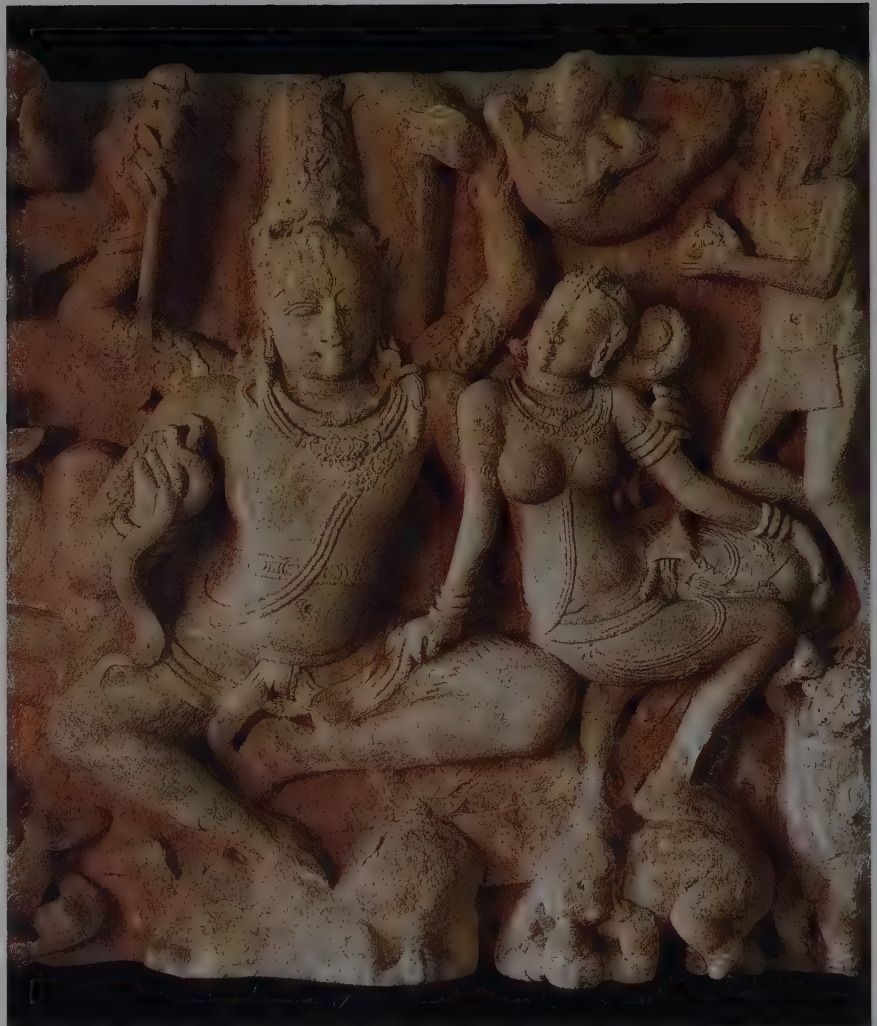
110  
**PENDANT**  
South India, Nilgiri Hills;  
end of 1<sup>st</sup> millennium B.C.(?)  
Diam: 2 cm  
© Trustees of the British Museum,  
London (1886.5-15.6)  
*The flower form made from thin sheet gold beaten into relief and decorated with granules and pellets was perhaps once part of a much larger ornament. The form and decoration are reminiscent of the jewellery of Taxila.*

108

109

110





111  
**UMA-MAHESHVARA**  
 Aihole; Chalukyan period, 7<sup>th</sup> century  
 Courtesy of the Trustees of the Prince of Wales  
 Museum of Western India, Bombay.  
 (Not to be reproduced without prior permission  
 of the Trustees.)

*Popular jewellery forms of the period –  
 multi-strand necklaces with repousse and  
 gem-set centers, three-dimensional earrings  
 and hair ornaments – are faithfully reproduced  
 by the sculptor.*

112  
**VISHNU**  
 Tamil Nadu; Pallava period, 7<sup>th</sup> century  
 H: 160 cm W: 74 cm  
 National Museum, New Delhi (61.1157)  
*Jewellery styles depicted on this sculpture  
 reiterate the fashion of the period.*

112



111

made of solid night, the two-colored opals and the five lucky gems that come from the same mines showed all the colors of sunset. There were also heaps of white and pink pearls, and some of more subtle orient. None showed the defects that wind, sand, rocks, or sea water may cause. There were also branches of red coral, not twisted or with stones embedded in them. In the broad street of the goldsmiths tiny flags marked the kind of gold sold in each shop: natural gold, green gold resembling parrot's wings, and fine gold from Jambunada.<sup>97</sup>

The ancient dynasties of the south amassed immense wealth and lavished it with unrivalled profligacy on themselves. What is more, they brought the spoils of war in the form of gold, gems and jewels to enrich their chosen temples. The Pallavas (circa A.D. 600–850) built their temples in Kancheepuram and Mamallapuram, meticulously recording many details of contemporary life. Images of man and god sculpted in metal and stone were integral to the architecture and design of these ancient temples. A closer look at the ornaments worn by these figures reveals the style of the era (112). Portrait sculptures of kings are shown wearing majestic crowns (*kirita*) in long cylindrical or conical shapes set with gems and pearls, which are reserved only for divinities in other parts of India. In contrast, Shiva is portrayed in striking simplicity with a simple gem-set band holding his coiled tresses (*jatamakuta*) in place; the simple hair coiffures of women are enhanced by gem-set ribbon bands. Ear ornaments are rare in Pallava sculptures; where they appear, they are simple bead drops. The elegant *kanthi* is a flat necklet, sometimes plain, or decorated with repousse patterns and gems, or made up of a series of tiny mangoes or flower bud forms. Armlets range from a single strand of beads to the



elaborate *makara keyura*, with ornate clasps set with jewels and delicate spikes rising over crocodile (*makara*) heads.<sup>8</sup>

The incessant wars with the Chalukyas, the Pallavas' neighbours in the north-west, resulted in a positive influence on the work of artisans. Design elements of Chalukya-Rashtrakuta ornaments (111) are discernible in jewellery depicted on Pallava and Chola sculptures. Striking examples of these influences are the addition of pendant pearl tassels to necklaces and the otherwise plain, waist-band (*udarabandha*), the use of lion-head images in bracelet designs and on crowns, and the elaborate multi-strand pearl sacred threads (*yagnopavita*).

**Offerings in Gold**

The Cholas (circa 850–1150) acquired their wealth through military conquests and held a monopoly over the gold mines and pearl fisheries in their dominions, as well as the gems of Ceylon. Chola kings and queens commissioned bronze sculptors to make festive icons (*utsava murthis*) for the temples they built. During the annual temple festivals (*brahmotsavams*), these icons were taken out in procession and showered with offerings, including flowers made from gold (113). "One hundred and sixty-five sacred gold flowers (*tirupporpu*) consisting of eight hundred and twenty-five *karanju* of gold, – each sacred gold flower consisting of five *karanju* of gold" were offered to the Goddess Umaparamesvari, the consort of our lord Adavallar Dakshina-Meru-Vitankar."<sup>9</sup>

The goddess in India was always invoked with flowers (*pushpanjali*). The act of worship as enumerated in the *Gandharva Tantra* states that flowers function "as a vehicle to convey the devotee's life-breath into an outside image."<sup>10</sup> The inanimate thereby becomes animate. As a result of the belief that a giver of gold will receive manifold returns of long life, health, wealth and even release from the cycle of birth and death (*moksha*), temple treasuries benefited copiously from the generosity of those seeking to appease the gods.

The Rajarajeshvaram Temple at Thanjavur was the beneficiary of countless ornaments presented by Rajaraja I, the great Chola king, who ascended the throne in A.D. 985. His son Rajendra too, crowned emperor in A.D. 1016, augmented the temple treasury with his munificence. The inscriptions on the walls of this temple are unique in the realm of Indian history, providing invaluable information. Never before had such detailed records listing jewels presented by royal treasuries and the bounty of military campaigns been kept in any single temple.



113

**UTSAVA MURTHI** (processional idol)  
The deity from a temple in Kumbakonam is resplendent with flowers and an array of jewels – elaborate hair ornaments, gem-set gold ear coverings and layer upon layer of necklaces. The ornaments, donated by generous devotees and kings, date back many hundreds of years. The abundance of Burmese rubies is testimony to the vibrant trade with Burma.

114  
**KANGAN** (bangle)  
South India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection, USA  
Decorated with Shiva lingams and Nandi bulls, this gold ornament was worn as a bangle or armet by Shaivites.



114

115 & 117

**DANCING APSARAS (nymphs)**

Thanjavur, Brihadeshvara temple; c. 10<sup>th</sup> century  
Photograph courtesy V. K. Rajamani

*These fresco paintings are rendered on the inner walls of the sanctum of the temple constructed by the great Chola king Rajaraja I. They provide the only colour documentation of the elaborate jewels worn during the period. The penchant for pearls is clearly evident.*



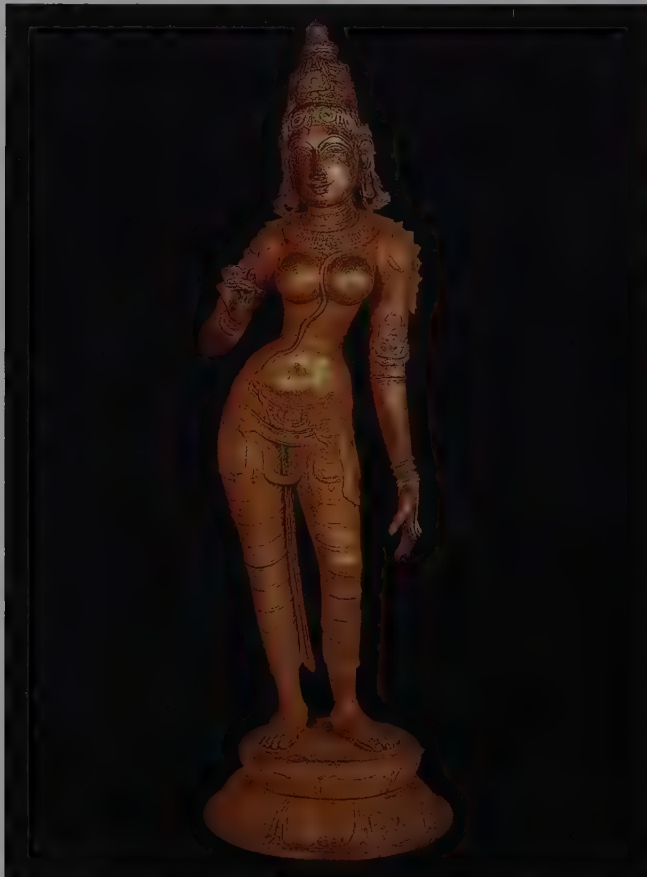
116

**SIVAKAMI**

Thanjavur, Brihadeshvara temple; c. 10<sup>th</sup> century  
Photograph courtesy V. K. Rajamani

*An epitome of refined elegance, the goddess is adorned with sculpted earrings in her elongated ear lobes, the ubiquitous tali high around her neck, several flat collar-type necklets, an elaborate makara keyura armband and simple bangles. Heavy jewels on one part of the body are off-set by simpler pieces on other parts.*

116



115

117

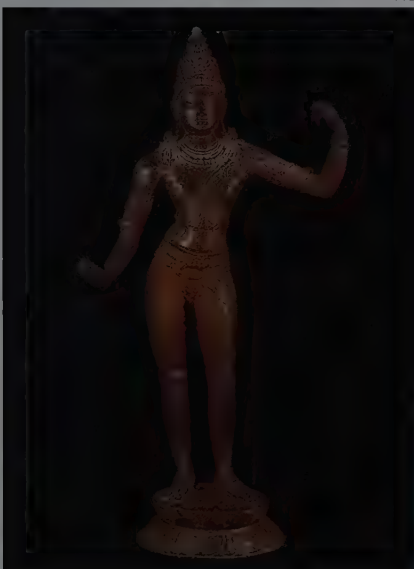


*“If a description of the boxes of jewels were attempted, there is no breast in which it could be contained, nor any heart that could appreciate its value. There were five hundred mans of precious stones, and every piece was equal in size to the disc of the setting sun. The diamonds were of such a colour that the sun will have to stare hard for ages before the like of them is made in the factories of the rocks. The pearls glistened so brilliantly that the brow of the clouds will have to perspire for years before such pearls again reach the treasury of the sea. For generations the mines will have to drink blood in the stream of the sun before rubies such as these are produced. The emeralds were of water so fine, that if the blue sky broke itself into fragments, none of its fragments would equal them. Every diamond sparkled brightly; it seemed as if it was a drop fallen from the sun. As to the other stones, their lustre eludes description just as water escapes out of a vessel.”<sup>[1]</sup>*

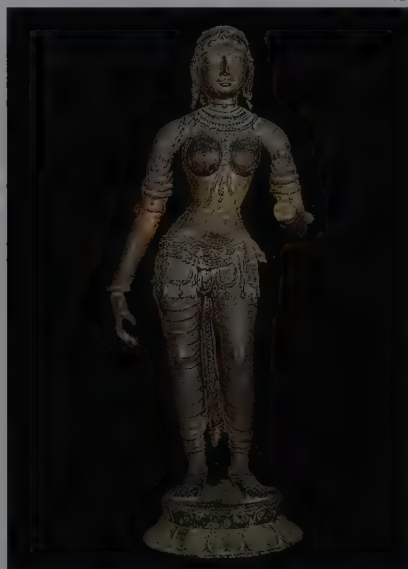


118

Rajaraja I assumed the title ‘Mummudichola’, or “the one who wears three crowns”, in commemoration of his conquest of the Chola, Pandya and Chera kingdoms. By annexing Pandinadu (Madurai) and Malainadu (Kerala) and extending their control over Ratnadvipa (Ceylon), the Cholas controlled not only every important trading port in south India, but the gold mines, the pearl fisheries, the diamond mines and the gem production of Ceylon as well. While these large reserves were partially used to fund their forays and conquests, the kings retained much for themselves and their queens, in addition to which generous quantities were gifted to adorn their temple deities. For example, a single diadem (*tiruppattam*) weighing no less than a staggering 981¼ *kalanjus* or four and a half kilograms (one *kalanju* = 4.50 grams) was gifted by Rajaraja to his favourite deity, Dakshina Meru Vitankar. It was made from gold obtained during his campaigns against the Cheras.<sup>11</sup> The Chola monopoly of the pearl fisheries off the Gulf of Mannar, ensured such an unlimited supply, that Rajaraja showered vast quantities ‘as flowers at the feet of the Lord.’



119



120

118  
KANTASARAM (necklace)  
South India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*A series of ruby-set gold units are strung on a cord with a pendant in the centre and fringed with rubies in this necklace that is traditionally worn high around the neck.*

119 & 120  
RAMA AND SITA  
Vadakkupayanur, South India; early 11<sup>th</sup> century  
Government Museum, Madras  
Photograph courtesy V. K. Rajamani

*Icons such as this set dating to the Chola period provide valuable references in the study of jewellery designs and fashions. Such representations were undoubtedly copies of actual pieces gifted by royalty to temple deities.*



*“One sacred garland (tiru-malai), (containing) eighty-six karanju and a half, four manjadi and one twentieth of gold. Five hundred and five diamonds, set (into it), viz.: eighty pure diamonds (tuyana), two hundred and ninety diamonds with smooth edges, fifty-three flat diamonds with smooth edges, four pandasaram, five flat diamonds (sappadi); fifteen square diamonds (savakkam) and fifty-eight round diamonds (urulai), – including such as had spots, cracks, red dots, black dots, and marks as of burning, – weighed two karanju and three manjadi, nine tenths and one twentieth. One hundred and ten large and small rubies, viz., twenty halahalam of superior quality, thirty halahalam, six bluish rubies, thirty-three smooth rubies, twenty unpolished rubies, and one sattam, – including such as had cavities, cuts, holes, white specks, flaws, and such as still adhered to the ore, – weighed five karanju, one half and one eighth. Ninety-four strung pearls, – including polished pearls, small pearls, nimbolam, payittam, ambunudu, (pearls) of brilliant water and of red water, such as had been polished while still adhering to the shell, (and pearls with) lines, stains, red dots and white specks, – weighed nine karanju and (one) manjadi, corresponding to a value of one thousand kasu.”<sup>[ii]</sup>*



121b

In order to maintain detailed inventories of these immense assets, a Department of Jewels formed part of the palace and temple administration. It was headed by a *mularatna-bhandarattar*, or chief treasurer, who was paid by grants of land. Appraisers of jewels kept records of all the treasures gifted to the temples. Their work involved the detailed computation of the composition of the jewel, recording the number of pearls and other precious stones, their quality, the weight and even the condition of the ornament. Working under royal patronage, jewellers employed exclusively by the temple were commissioned to produce a never-ending supply of ornaments for the king, his court and the temples. These jewellers, called “*kankani-tat-tan*”,<sup>12</sup> were paid by the king with shares of the produce of land.

Two moveable bronze Shiva images gifted by Rajaraja to the Rajarajeshvaram temple in Thanjavur lent their names to weights used for weighing gold and jewels – *dakshina meru vitankar* was a standard weight for jewels and the weight for gold was

121a &amp; 121b (facing page and reverse above)

MAKARA KANTI (necklace)

Tamil Nadu; early 19<sup>th</sup> century

L: 36 cm

Private collection

*Peacock-shaped elements studded with rubies are fashioned as repeats to form this necklace. The large pendant is adorned with adorsed peacocks flanking a central rosette, all set with Burmese cabuchon rubies diamonds and emeralds. The gold reverse is finely etched and three gold plaited cords pass through loops holding the individual elements together.*



122

122  
VISIRIMURUGU (fan-shaped earrings)  
South India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

Fan-shaped earrings in gold set with rubies like these were worn in the scapha of the ear.

123  
A SELECTION OF JEWELS  
South India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
By permission of the British Library (5421)

A variety of ruby and diamond set ear and hair ornaments commonly worn are recorded in this early photograph.

124  
UMA-MAHESHWARA  
Penugonda, Anantapur Dt.;  
Nolamba, A.D. 900-1000  
Government Museum, Madras (65-2) 37  
Photograph courtesy V. K. Rajamani

The changing tastes and fashions in jewellery are evident in these sculptures of this period. The elaborate lace-like necklaces and armbands were gem-set and worked in immense detail.

called *adavallan*. These weights, made of stone, were preserved at the shrine in the temple. Terms such as *kalanju*, *manjadi* and *kunri* were used to indicate the weights of ornaments inclusive of their *lac* core. The *kalanju* was a brass weight equal to about 67 grains troy or approximately 4.50 grams, while *manjadi* were the seeds of *Abrus precatorius*, each tiny red seed weighing exactly the same: 1 *kalanju* = 20 *manjadi*, 1 *manjadi* = 2 *kunri*, 1 *kunri* = 5 *ma*, 1 *ma* = 4 *kani*<sup>13</sup> and the total value of the gold was calculated in *kasus*.



123

The repertoire of the

Chola jewellers was extensive and the names of no less than sixty-five different kinds of ornaments have been identified. The many bronze images of gods and goddesses gifted to the temples, together with portrait sculptures of kings and queens in these shrines, showcase the great variety of jewels made and gifted to the temples. To present an offering devoid of decoration was antithetical to the Indian idea “that only things covered with ornaments are beautiful”; to do so would affront the divine and “bring to the donor disaster.”<sup>14</sup> The bronze images are fashionably elegant; a fine aesthetic balance is maintained whereby grand jewellery on one part of the body is off-set by simpler pieces on others.

The standard type of neck ornaments shown are a flat collar, the *karai* or *tiruk-karai*. These necklets were made from sheet gold worked in repoussé and embellished with gems. Pearls, beads, or gold drops in flower bud forms were suspended along the lower edge. The tassel that tied the necklace around the neck usually bore a pipal leaf-shaped pendant that can be seen lying whimsically upon the left or right shoulder of bronze images of the period. Female deities almost always wear the auspicious marriage necklace with a cup-shaped disc (*tali bottu*) on a simple wire or chain of beads high around their neck. Multi-stringed cascading necklaces made of chains of gold and pearls range from the single-strand necklace (*ekavali*), to the seven-strand ones (*saptasari*); other varieties include several gold chains held with clasps at the ends

124



(*kantha-tudar*); diamonds, rubies and sapphires strung on a gold ring (*kantha-nan*) and the simple chain (*kanthika*). Bracelets are of infinite variety, from the basic bangle (*valayil*), to those set with gems or corals (*ratna-katakam* or *pavala-katakam*), and armlets made from gold and set with many gems (*pottu*, *sri bahu-valayam*, or *tiru-kai-karai*); earrings of pearls (*muttin-mattirai*), gold rings (*tiru-kambi*) and ear ornaments shaped like a crocodile (*tiru-makaram*), outnumber the ubiquitous round ear studs set with precious stones (*thodu*). Images are adorned with elaborate gem-set crowns (*makutas* and *sri mudu*) as well as diadems (*tiruppattam*).

Elaborate waist bands (*tiruppattigai*) made of gold flowers set with diamonds and other precious stones, with lace-like fringes of pearls along the lower edge, held in place with large demon-face clasps seen primarily on male figures, and with crocodile clasps for female figures, make their appearance in the Chola period. Even the unobtrusive toe rings (*tiru-kal-modiram*) are not omitted in the detailed rendering of jewellery on sculptures of the period (116, 119, 120).

Very few pieces from this vast stockpile survive today. Were the inscriptions and the jewels depicted on sculptures merely flights of imagination perpetuated by royal sanction? Or were they faithful renderings of temple inventories? Travellers in the region corroborate the wealth of the local kings, and when Marco Polo, the Venetian traveller spent several months in south India in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century, Maabar (the term he used to refer to the Pandya and Hoysala kingdoms) and Ceylon were still producing “most of the pearls and gems that are to be found in the world.”<sup>15</sup> Amazed at the wealth of the country and prosperity of its people, Marco Polo’s diaries are replete with vivid descriptions of the kings of the region – the variety of the clothes that they wore, the abundance of jewels they adorned themselves with and their court life.



125

125  
DAGGER  
South India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection, USA

*The gold hilted dagger bears a sculpted figure of a swan (hamsa) on top with finely worked details.*

126  
NECKLACE  
South India; early 20<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*A ruby and diamond fan-shaped pendant fringed with gold beads is strung on a gold-link chain referred to as 'the pocket-watch chain' (geddiyara sangili).*



126







127 (facing page)  
**GOWRISHANKARAM** (necklace)  
 Tamil Nadu, Chettinad; 18<sup>th</sup> century  
 L: 40 cm  
 Private collection

*In lieu of the traditional necklace of large rudraksha beads, this rare example is composed of five rows of small ones completely encased in gold. The pendant is a miniature Shiva shrine. The dancing Nataraja on the rear clasp appears upside down, but when worn assumes the upright tandava posture.*

128  
**VANKI** (arm ornament)  
 Tamil Nadu; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection

*This gold arm ornament, worked in repoussé in detailed relief bears the image of Krishna, popular in the jewels of India.*

129  
**DHANDA KADA** (bangle)  
 Tamil Nadu; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Diam: 11 cm  
 Courtesy Musée Barbier-Mueller,  
 Geneva (2504-115)

*The repoussé worked gold bangle depicts the eight forms of the Goddess Lakshmi (Ashtalakshmi). Such bangles were usually given to men in recognition of valour and achievement in the arts.*

130  
**RUDRAKSHA MALAI** (necklace)  
 South India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Courtesy Musée Barbier-Mueller,  
 Geneva (2504-109)

*A pendant with an image of Nataraja, enclosed within a shrine of cabuchon rubies and diamonds. A simpler variation of the magnificent gowrishankaram (plate 127), it functions as a portable shrine.*



129

128

130

131



## The Invaders Arrive

From the 14<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the hitherto isolated south became the target of Muslim incursions from the north. Drawn by rumours of untold wealth, Alauddin Khilji orchestrated several military campaigns and appropriated treasuries accumulated over many generations. “Having seen” with his own eyes “the vast collection of gems – like the ocean, as it were – in the treasury of Alauddin, the true emperor of the Kali age”,<sup>16</sup> Khilji’s court poet, Amir Khusrau, recorded the surrender of Laddar Deo (Pratapa Rudra II) of Warangal to Malik Kafur, Khilji’s general, in 1310. The passage eloquently enumerates the magnificent contents of the treasury so acquired:

“The boxes were full of valuables and gems, the excellence of which drove the onlookers mad. Every emerald (*zabarjad*) sparkled in the light of the sun, or, rather, the sun reflected back the light of the emerald. The rubies (*yaqut*) dazzled the eye of the sun and if a ray from them had fallen on a lamp of fire, the lamp would have burst into flames. The ‘Cat’s eye’ (*ainul hirrat*) was such that a lion after seeing it would have looked with contempt at the sun; and the ‘Cock’s eye’ (*ainud dik*) were so brilliant that the ‘Cat’s eye’ was afraid to look at it. The lustre of the rubies (*la’l*) illuminated the darkness of the night and the mine, as you might light one lamp from another. The emeralds had a fineness of water that could eclipse the lawn of paradise. The diamonds (*ilmas*) would have penetrated into an iron heart like an arrow of

steel, and yet owing to their delicate nature would have been shattered by the stroke of a hammer. The other stones were such that the sun blushed to look at them. As for the pearls, you would not find the like of them, even if you kept diving into the sea through all eternity.”<sup>17</sup>

Malik Kafur led innumerable invasions to the Deccan, including a successful campaign to Madurai in 1311, looting and plundering treasury after treasury and transporting generations of wealth back to Delhi. What survived was melted and used to fund the defence, while large quantities are rumoured to have been hidden away.

The depletion was so thorough that the overly ornate Hoysala (12<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> century) sculptures at Belur and Halebid, replete with highly stylized jewels drawn from the Chola, Chera and Vijayanagar idioms, appear to be only nostalgic recreations of the immense wealth that once was (133). By decorating the images with every conceivable manner of jewellery and ornament, patron, artist and viewer appeared to be calling upon the munificence of the Divine to bring back some, if not all of the wealth of the vanquished land.

Though treasuries had been looted and riches carted away, the mines of the ‘Daquem’



132

131 (facing page)  
GUTTAPUSAL (necklace)  
Andhra Pradesh; 18<sup>th</sup> century  
L: 26 cm  
Private collection

The term *gutta* means bunches of small fish; *pusal* are beads. Set with cabuchon rubies, emeralds and diamonds, the gold necklace is fringed with bunches of small pearls. The ornament originated in areas close to the ancient pearls fisheries along the Coromandel coast.

132  
DAGGER  
South India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection, USA

The gold hilt, worked from sheet gold and filled with lac, bears a finely worked handle with a dragon form on top.

133  
HUNTRESS  
Mysore; Hoysala, 12<sup>th</sup> century  
H: 137 cm W: 49 cm  
National Museum, New Delhi (2/5/1249)

The continuity of ancient forms, as in the large discal earrings and the tendency towards elaboration and over ornamentation are clearly evident in this sculpture.



133



134

134

**PADAKKAM**Tamil Nadu; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*Rubies from Burma and diamonds from Golconda combine in this pendant with two adorsed peacocks with a fan-shaped pendant below.*

135

**THE PAGODA JEWELS**Captain Linnaeus Tripe; c.1858  
Christies Images

*The splendour of the jewels of the Madurai temple, including crowns, hair ornaments and necklaces fashioned from pearls and set with precious gems are recorded in this early photograph.*

136

**TIRUMALA NAYAK AND HIS QUEEN**Tamil Nadu, Thanjavur; 17<sup>th</sup> century  
H: 18 cm  
Srirangam Temple Museum,  
Photograph courtesy V. K. Rajamani

*Jewellery forms rendered in these portrait images of the Nayak king and his consort provide valuable documentation of contemporary fashions and styles.*

137

**JADAI NAGAM (hair ornament)**Tamil Nadu; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Courtesy Musee Barbier-Mueller,  
Geneva (2504-106)

*Fashioned from sheet gold, worked in repoussé and filled with lac, each individual unit is sized to form a long tapering ornament when strung together on a cord. The image of the yali is the predominant motif on each piece. Surmounted with the figure of Krishna dancing on a coiled serpent, the entire jewel is minutely worked and set with cabuchon rubies.*

(Deccan) as well as those in the vicinity of the kingdom continued to yield, and kings continued to appropriate the best for themselves. By capturing the “circle of earth belonging to the Hoysala family”, and wearing it as “an ornament to his arm”,<sup>18</sup> Bukka established the Vijayanagar kingdom in 1344. A new chapter in the prosperity and wealth of south India had begun. The affluence and pomp of court life in the great city of ‘Bisnagna’ (Vijayanagar) reached its zenith under Krishna Deva Raya, who ascended the throne in 1509. The King went on campaigns of war, transporting the entire city of Vijayanagar, and setting up large camps where “there were craftsmen, also working in their streets, so that you saw made there golden jewels and gewgaws”, and where “all kinds of rubies and diamonds

and pearls, with every other kind of precious stone”<sup>19</sup> were on sale. The kingdom of Vijayanagar was described by Garcias ab Horto, a Portuguese physician, as the “world’s centre of diamants, both for the most and for the best... This soil is so diamantine, that where you have digged and taken them now, in two yeeres space you may dig and find

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others.”<sup>20</sup> He claimed to have seen a diamond “as big as a small Hens Egge in Bisnager”, which formed part of the headdress of the Raya’s horse. As late as the 16<sup>th</sup> century, sculptures indicate that Chola influence in jewellery designs continued to predominate, with only minor evolutionary variations.

Visitors and gem merchants who thronged the city to acquire diamonds and precious gems have left colourful accounts of bejewelled monarchs and women wearing so much jewellery, that they required help just to walk. Witnessing a festival in Vijayanagar sometime in 1520-1522, Domingos Paes recorded:

“They have very rich and fine silk cloths; on the head they wear high caps which they call *collaes*, and on these caps they wear flowers made of large pearls; collars on the neck with jewels of gold very richly set with many emeralds and diamonds and rubies and pearls; and besides this many strings of pearls, and others for shoulder-belts; on the lower part of the arms many bracelets, with half of the upper arm all bare, having armlets in the same way all of precious stones, which girdles hang in order one below the other, almost as far down as half the thigh; besides these belts they have other jewels, and many strings of pearls round the ankles, for they wear very rich anklets even of greater value than the rest... Who is he that could tell of the costliness and the value of what each of these women carries on her person? So great is the weight of the bracelets and gold and jewels carried by them that many of them cannot support them, and women accompanying them assist them by supporting their arms.”<sup>21</sup>

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Every succeeding Raya monarch established a treasury, which was sealed on his death and opened only when there was immense need, so that at any juncture, the king always had an abundant stockpile of wealth.<sup>22</sup> Some of this unquantifiable wealth of the Vijayanagars gifted by Krishnadeva Raya and his queen still survives in the temples and government treasuries of the region. Records in the temple of Lord Venkateshwara at Tirupati dating to 1513 mention the gift of a golden cow, studded with precious gems (*ratnabhenu*) and gem-studded chariots with horses and elephants. Also recorded is a decoration for the doorway, “a golden torana, made of nine kinds of gems with makara motifs (*navaratna prabhavali-makara torana*), given to the Tirupati temple on February 17, 1521.”<sup>23</sup> When the kingdom fell in 1565, the aggregate of treasures that fell into the hands of the Deccani Sultans was beyond imagination.

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**MANGA MALAI (necklace)**  
Tamil Nadu; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*A simpler variation of the classical gem-studded mango necklace (plates 229, 230), the antiquity of this design is manifest in ancient Chola bronze images of goddesses.*

139  
**DEVADASIS (temple dancers)**  
Tamil Nadu; early 20<sup>th</sup> century  
Photographer unknown  
Private collection

*A group of temple dancers dressed in all their finery and laden with jewels.*

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*“Madhavi ... adorned her tiny feet, their soles dyed red, with well-chosen rings on each of her slender toes. She loaded her ankles with jewelry made of small bells, rings, chains, and hollow anklets. She elaborately ornamented her shapely thighs, fastened round her hips a girdle of thirty rows of pearls set on blue silk and embroidered with figures and flowers. Armlets studded with pearls, and bangles made of carved precious stones, embraced her arms. Priceless bracelets on which rare stones were set among sparkling diamonds, shone over the fine down on her wrists. Above and below the bracelets she wore slender circlets, too: some of fine gold, others of the nine auspicious gems, still others of coral beads and one of pearls. Her rosy fingers, delicate as kantal flowers, disappeared under ornaments shaped like fish-jaws, and under rings of dark rubies and flawless diamonds. Her frail throat was adorned with a chain of gold, exquisitely wrought, and with a garland. She wore also an ornament of precious stones, held by a loop, which covered the nape of her neck and her shoulders, as well as earrings of emeralds and diamonds. Shell-like jewels called shidevi, toyyakam and pullakam were woven into her black dresses.”<sup>[iii]</sup>*

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MAKARA KANTI (necklace)

South India; 19<sup>th</sup> century

Private collection

A double strand of overlapping discs stamped from sheet gold is suspended with a cabuchon ruby and diamond set pendant. Ornaments such as this were worn only on ceremonial occasions.

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**COMB**

Tamil Nadu; early 20<sup>th</sup> century  
H: 8.9 cm W: 7.2 cm  
Courtesy Musee Barbier-Mueller,  
Geneva (2504-117)

*The theme of Krishna and the gopis is rendered in almost three-dimensional repousse in gold. The jewel becomes a story-board of myths and legends.*

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**KRISHNA PLAYING THE FLUTE**

Thanjavur; 18<sup>th</sup> century  
Photograph courtesy V. K. Rajamani

*The jewels depicted on images of gods and goddesses in this period are corroborated by surviving ornaments in temple and private collections.*

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**KRISHNA AND GOPIS**

Mattancheri Palace, Cochin, Kerala; 18<sup>th</sup> century  
Photograph courtesy V. K. Rajamani

*Few examples of jewels from this period survive. Paintings such as this depict the fashions of the time – large discal earrings worn on elongated ear lobes, flat collar type necklaces set with gems, strings of pearls with gem-set spacers are all discernible. Contemporary jewels of the region exhibit a continuity with these forms.*

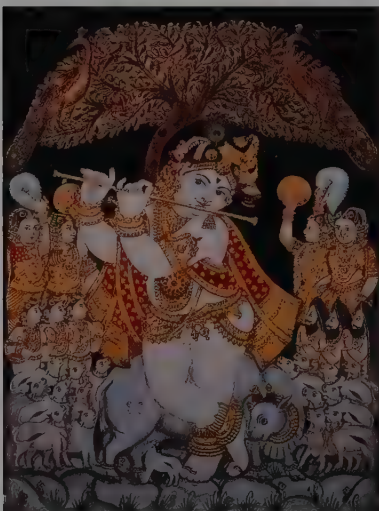
144

**NECKLET AND BANGLE**

South India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Courtesy Musee Barbier-Mueller,  
Geneva (2504-135)

*Rendered in sheet gold with a lac core, both ornaments are finely etched and bear terminals in the form of two open-mouthed makara (crocodile) faces holding aloft a ball bearing the image of a grotesque mask (kirtimukha).*

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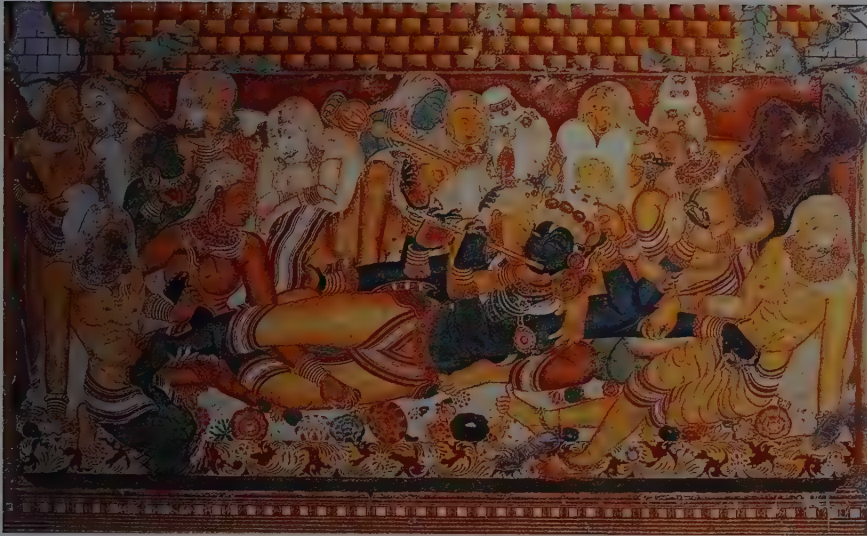


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The kings of the Nayak dynasty which emerged at this time at Madurai immortalised contemporary jewellery forms in the many royal portraits of themselves and their queens (136). The unique headdresses of the Nayak kings, in particular Tirumala Nayak (1623-1659), are adorned with the customary rows of pearls and gem set ornaments. Elaborate flower garlands vie with gem-set necklaces (*addigai*) and long rows of pearls interspersed with spacers (*mohappus*). The quintessential marriage emblem (*tali*) is worn on a thick gold cord (*karai*), typical in design to the Andhra *tali bottu*, indicating the “ethnic origins of the Nayaks.”<sup>24</sup> As in the Thanjavur courts of the Chola kings, pearls are abundantly used in the ornaments of the Madurai Nayaks. Earrings range from simple rings with four large beads<sup>25</sup> to round floral forms with suspended bells (*jimkis*), complex animal forms and elaborate pendant drops.

The Wodeyars of Mysore played an important role in the history of south India from the time of their inception in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. In the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, their kingdom fell prey to the dynastic aspirations of Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan, who sought to recreate the glory of the Mughal empire in south India. In 1799, the Wodeyars were reinstated to the throne of Mysore after the fall of Tipu Sultan. In every respect, the Maharajas of Mysore aspired to emulate the wealth and pomp of the Vijayanagar kings. The fabulous Krishnaraja *mudi* (crown) given to the Melukote temple near Mysore by Sri Krishnaraja Wodeyar III, the Maharaja of Mysore (1799–1868), is reputed to weigh 3 kilos and studded with rubies, diamonds and emeralds.<sup>26</sup> By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the wealth of the Mysore Maharajas was second only to that of the Nizam of Hyderabad.





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145  
MALLIGAI ARUMBU MALAI  
(jasmine bud necklace)  
Tamil Nadu; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
L: 92 cm

Courtesy of the Freer Gallery of Art,  
Smithsonian Institution, Washington D. C. (1990.4)

*A necklace made of 104 hollow gold stylized versions of spiky jasmine buds (jasminium nitideum), each 7 cm long. The beauty and heady perfume of such flowers inspired much jewellery design.*

146 (facing page)  
MALLIGAI ARUMBU MALAI  
(jasmine bud necklace)  
Tamil Nadu; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
L: 82.5 cm  
Courtesy Musee Barbier-Mueller,  
Geneva (2504-104)

*Stylized buds of the Arabian jasmine (jasminium sambac), each fashioned from sheet gold and set with a ruby are strung to form this necklace which weighs 348 grams. The antiquity of design inspirations for such ornaments is echoed in ancient texts such as the Shilappadikaram: "Kovalan was wearing a garland of jasmine buds, their hearts forced open by the bees."<sup>101</sup>*

how the land was replete with foreigners, natives, Moors, Arabs, Persians, Chettis, Gujaratis, and Deccanis, who made the region their home along with their families.<sup>28</sup> Such heterogeneity encouraged the preservation of indigenous identities, and at the same time created distinctive design idioms, manifest in the ornaments of the Syrian Christians, the Maplas, the Nairs, and the Namboodris.

Very little is known of the early jewellery traditions of Kerala. Ornaments depicted on the many wooden sculptures on temple walls and on bronze images of deities are not very different from their counterparts in the Chola, Vijayanagar, and Nayak country. But, in the later periods, throughout the south, there is an apparent tussle between the real and the ideal. Working within prescribed norms, the artist was more liberal with his imagination. Still faithfully copying prototypes in use, there was a tendency to excessively decorate sculptures with every conceivable jewel, probably as an expression of the sculptor's mastery of the medium, the affluence of his times and perhaps the political environment which made such expressions of luxury possible.

Despite the continuous invasions from the north, there was very little infiltration of Mughal cultural influence into the south. Mughal domination did not extend beyond the Deccan and foreign powers were principally preoccupied with the acquisition of wealth. However, the Madurai Nayaks with their Andhra ancestry and the Thanjavur Marathas came under the political influence of the Deccani Sultans. Haider Ali and Tipu Sultan held sway over Mysore and organised their courts very much on the lines of their Mughal counterparts. Mughal influence in the arts and crafts percolated southwards only in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, but remained confined to court manufactured jewellery. In the Setupati mural paintings in the Ramalinga Vilasam palace at Ramnad,<sup>29</sup> (149) the king at court is shown wearing a turban with a typically Mughal turban ornament (*kalgi*);

Along the western seaboard, the Malabar coast had from time immemorial witnessed the most hectic maritime activity related to the jewellery trade. The Zamorin of Calicut, fiercely proud and exceptionally rich, held sway over this area. When Vasco da Gama landed in Calicut in 1497, he was received by the Zamorin attired with a "Tyre on his head set with Stones and wrought with Gold, clothed with Silke, having many golden Clasps on the Breast. On his Eares hung Jewels of great value: his Toes and Fingers, with Rings and Gemmes made a glorious splendour."<sup>27</sup> The arrival of the Portuguese changed the character of the gem trade in south India. The Malabar coast, historically an area of vibrant maritime activity, became a melting pot of different racial streams. Writing on his travels in Malabar in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, Duarte Barbosa describes





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DAGGER

Mysore; 18<sup>th</sup> century

Reproduced by permission of the Trustees of the Wallace Collection, London (OA 1387)

*This jewelled dagger belonged to Tipu Sultan. The court conventions and fashions of the Mughals were echoed in his court.*

148  
SERFOJI II (1798–1832) AND  
SHIVAJI II (1833–1855)

Tamil Nadu, Thanjavur; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Photograph courtesy V. K. Rajamani

*The Mughal influence on the jewellery styles of the south Indian courts is clearly manifest in this painting. The king and his heir are seen wearing jewels that are both from north and south India.*

but when the king is listening to a religious discourse he is in traditional south Indian attire and jewels. In a particularly decorative mural depicting a hunting scene,<sup>30</sup> the king wears, on the little finger of his right hand, a unique bird-shaped hawking ring, reminiscent of the 'hawking ring of Tipu Sultan' (150).

#### Distinctive Idioms

The south is a vast geographical area, each ancient kingdom sharing common borders with the other, and in the course of history, sometimes united under a single ruler. This resulted in cross-fertilisation of styles and the emergence of pan-south Indian designs. In Kerala for example, the southern most areas share



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many commonalities with Tamil Nadu; central Kerala, the region around Calicut, the ancient territory of the Zamorin, is distinctively different, with unique patterns, and a synthesis of design elements and manufacturing techniques. Filigree, granulation and sheet gold work (*nakashu velai*) predominate. Areas to the north again have much in common with Tamil Nadu and the adjoining areas of Karnataka. Similarly, Hyderabad and the princely states exhibit forms derived from the Mughal tradition, while the native Andhra idiom is based purely on indigenous sources, amalgams of an ancient Pallava-Chola-Chalukya heritage. Although each area produced its own style of jewellery, many forms crossed boundaries and became universal designs.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh generated a unique genre of ornament, distinctly south Indian, whose genesis was firmly rooted in the past. Styles evolved, elaboration gave way to simplicity, and conventional models to distinct idioms. Modelled on traditional sources of inspiration, designs and forms underwent subtle changes along with their names. The language of the classics gave way to everyday colloquial terms, but an adherence to purity of form and design rendered each category unique.

More than in any other part of the country, jewellery in the south did not evolve in response to changing fashions. It was quite acceptable, until recently, to wear only pieces handed down from grandmothers and great-grandmothers. Old designs

*“The king ... goes stark naked, except for a handsome loin-cloth with a fringe all round it set with precious stones – rubies, sapphires, emeralds, and other brilliant gems – so that this scrap of cloth is worth a fortune. Slung round his neck is a cord of fine silk which hangs down a full pace in front of him, and strung on this necklace are 104 beads, consisting of large and beautiful pearls and rubies of immense value. ... He also wears, in three places on his arm bracelets of gold studded with precious stones and pearls of great size and value. In like manner he wears, in three places on his legs, three anklets adorned with costly pearls and gems. Let me tell you further that this same king wears on his toes splendid pearls and other jewels, so that it is a marvellous sight to behold. What need of more words? Suffice it that he wears in all so many gems and pearls that their price exceeds that of a fine city. Indeed no one could compute the total cost of all the jewellery he wears. And it is no wonder he wears so many, considering that all these pearls and gems are found in his own kingdom.”<sup>[v]</sup>*



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149  
HUNTING SCENE

Ramalinga Vilasam, Ramnad; 18<sup>th</sup> century  
Photograph courtesy V. K. Rajamani

*This mural painting documents the court life of the rulers of this region. Jewellery forms in this period were no different from styles that are commonly seen even today. The hunter is wearing a hawking ring in the form of a bird, similar to the one shown in plate 150.*

150  
HAWKING RING

Watercolour and pencil  
William Burgess; c.1870  
British Architectural Library, RIBA, London

*A drawing of a hawking ring reputed to have once belonged to Tipu Sultan. The ring was in the collection of Henry Cornwallis Neville, prior to being stolen in 1951. The drawing by architect and designer William Burgess shows a Devanagari inscription on the breast of the bird, which includes the word 'Maharaja.' The ring was most likely made in the Nayak workshops and was perhaps acquired by Tipu during one of his numerous campaigns against neighbouring rulers.<sup>[vi]</sup>*



repeatedly recur from one generation to another. The jewels of south India tend to be more conservative and traditional. Perhaps a reflection of the nature of the people – shy, withdrawn and extremely devout, there is neither the immense variety nor the ostentation of north Indian gem-set enamel jewellery.

To the south Indian goldsmith (*tattan* or *achary*), nature was a never-ending source of inspiration. Individual pieces of jewellery took not only their designs from nature, but also their names – for example, the mango necklace (*manga malai*), which is composed of a series of gem-set mango-shaped units. Motifs drawn from temple architecture and sculpture were incorporated into jewellery design. Many south Indian ornaments were narrative in character. In their rich symbolism and iconic character, forms and designs were closely associated with the many myths and legends associated with the lives of the many gods and goddesses.

The images of Krishna dancing on the snake Kaliya, or stealing the clothes of bathing village damsels are depicted on hair ornaments (137, 141). These renditions celebrate the many legends associated with the life of Krishna. As symbols of wealth and prosperity, renderings of the goddess Lakshmi are repeatedly encountered (129); Shiva and Parvati, seated on their vehicle, the bull Rishabha, are representative of the power and energy of the Lord as Dissolver; Nataraja dancing the cosmic *tandava* dance, keeping in perpetual motion the cycle of birth and rebirth is another timeless motif. All these were rendered in distinctive techniques on a canvas of gold and gems. These jewels reiterated man's subservience to God.



151b

151a & 151b (facing page and reverse above)  
KOKKE THATHI (necklace)  
Karnataka, Coorg; 18<sup>th</sup> century  
Pendant: H: 10 cm W: 10 cm  
Private collection

*The crescent-moon shaped gold pendant set with cabuchon rubies and worked in fine relief on the reverse is surmounted by a cobra head; the ornament is part of the marriage jewels worn by Coorgi brides.*

152  
COMB  
South India; 20<sup>th</sup> century  
Courtesy Musee Barbier-Mueller,  
Geneva (2504-124)

*Worked in repoussé from thick sheet gold, this functional ornament bears a design of the grotesque mask (kirtimukha) flanked by birds and mythical beasts.*



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**PADAKKAM (pendant)**

South India; 18<sup>th</sup> century  
Dr. S. Sanford Kornblum and  
Mrs. Charlene S. Kornblum Collection

*A large, intricately worked gem-set makara (crocodile form) pendant strung on three strands of navaratna beads.*



154

**NECKLACE**

Tamil Nadu; early 20<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*Closed-set diamonds in a western inspired lace-like design were fashionable among the elite classes at the turn of the century. "The Hindus classed diamonds according to the four castes. The Brahmin diamond gave power, friends, riches and good luck; the Kshatriya diamond prevented the approach of old age; the Vaisya stone brought success, and the Sudra, all manner of good fortune." [viii]*

155 (facing page)

**VALAIPPINAL (filigree necklace)**

Kerala, Calicut; c.1850  
Outer circumference: 78.5 cm  
Courtesy Victoria and Albert Museum,  
London (IS 1'24-1852)

*This necklace is fashioned from gold wire with stamped florets and applied decoration articulated to simulate lacework.*

156 (facing page)

**JADAI NAGAM (hair ornament)**

Tamil Nadu; 18<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*Gold set with cabuchon rubies, diamonds and emeralds, edged with pearls. Fashioned in the unit system of construction, eighteen graded pieces, strung on three flat gold mesh cords, taper to a fish with a tassel at the bottom.*

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155

Gold, handled by the jeweller with technical skill and a faultless sense of design and perspective, continued to be the principal medium most favoured in jewellery manufacture. Diamonds, freely available, were the single most important gem used in jewellery, closed-set into boxed units. Even today, the south Indian woman's fastidiousness in demanding diamonds of the most perfect and flawless variety places a premium on such stones; the price of diamonds in the south is higher than in any other part of the country. Second in preference are rubies, which became the most sought after in gem-set south Indian jewellery during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when rubies flowed from the mines of Burma to the bazaars of the Coromandel coast. Chettiar merchants settled in Burma conducted a lucrative trade in these stones.

In spite of the availability of all categories of gems, south Indian jewellery tends to be monochromatic. Gold predominates; the lavish mix of colours, combining rubies, emeralds, diamonds and sapphires, so much a part of the enamel tradition of north India, is absent. Sapphires and emeralds are sparingly used. But the deficiency of colour is more than compensated for by the detail of the repousse work or in the embossed and engraved designs rendered on the back of gem-set pieces.

Some south Indian ornaments provide a rare glimpse of their maker and their patron. Initials of the owner and the craftsman, together with the weight of the gold, are sometimes inscribed on the back of the jewel. As the craftsman gained dexterity over his medium, his forms grew less and less imitative, introducing just that element of originality that sets the jewellery of the south in a genre of its own, sometimes difficult to comprehend by those not familiar with the culture and traditions of the region.

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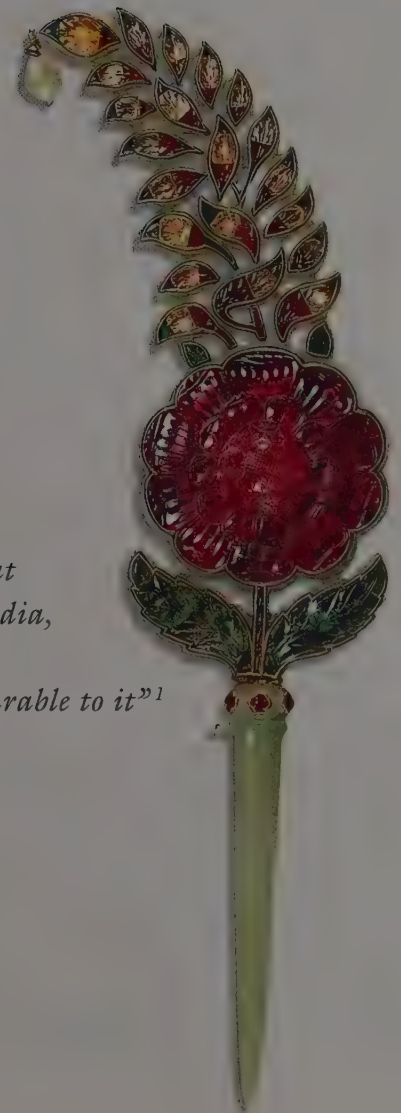
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صاحبقران شاه جهان و پسران  
شاه جهان و پسران شاه جهان

THE MUGHALS  
Imperial Connoisseurs

*“If it is asserted that  
Paradise is in India,  
Be not surprised because  
Paradise itself is not comparable to it”<sup>1</sup>*



157 (page 110)

**SHAH JAHAN ENTHRONED**Inscribed: 'amal-i-abu'l Hasan-al-Masshadi  
Nadir-al-Zaman'Mughal; 17<sup>th</sup> century

7.7 x 6 cms

Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore (W.668, fol. 45)

158 (page 111)

**KALGI (turban ornament)**Mughal; 18<sup>th</sup> century

L: 19.7 cm

Courtesy Victoria and Albert Museum,  
London (IS 02569)

*Indian expertise in carving gems is evident in this jade turban ornament. In addition to the jade, which is carved in low relief on the back, the centre and each petal of the rosette and the leaves are set with finely carved gems.*

159

**BAZUBAND (armlet-reverse)**Jaipur; 19<sup>th</sup> century

Private collection

*The rectangular central piece is flanked by trefoils attached at an angle, facilitating comfort to the wearer. The scrolling foliage pattern enamelled in opaque white and translucent red on the reverse, resembles a miniature carpet.*

160 (facing page)

**SPINEL NECKLACE**Spinel beads: Mughal; early 17<sup>th</sup> century

L: 38.5 cm

Christies Images

*The eleven spinel beads together weigh 877.23 carats. Spinel was favoured by the Mughal emperors, who wore them uncut as polished beads. Three beads are engraved with the names of Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan.*

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**A**pril, 1526: Zahir Ad-Din Muhammad Babur had just vanquished Ibrahim Lodi at Panipat. Almost immediately, he dispatched his son Humayun to take possession of the treasures at Agra with specific instructions to seek and acquire a famous diamond believed to weigh 8 *mishqals*. The Treasury was pillaged, the officials questioned, but the diamond could not be found. Faced with dire consequences, a servant finally pointed towards the royal *zenana*. When Humayun entered the women's quarters, "the female members of Ibrahim Lodi's family were weeping, so he assured them their honour would be safe in his hands and that he would treat them according to their high station. It was then that Ibrahim Lodi's mother went silently into a room and emerged with a gold box, which, with trembling hands, she handed to the young prince. Humayun opened the box and took out the diamond."<sup>2</sup> According to legend, it was the Koh-i-Nur! The Mughal tryst with the jewels of India had begun.

Every subsequent generation of Mughal emperors augmented the treasury by appropriating the wealth of the Indian states through dauntless military conquests. Less than a century later, the Mughal gem coffers had swelled to such an extent that chroniclers were often compelled to give up a futile attempt at numbers and resort to weights in their accounts. William Hawkins' list of Jahangir's treasury of unmounted stones recorded circa 1611 reads: "Inprimis, Of Diamantes 1.1/2. Battman, these be rough, of all sorts and sizes, great and small: but no lesse then 2.1/2. Caratts. The Battman is fifty five pound waight, which maketh eightie two pounds 1/2. weight English. Of Ballace Rubies little and great, good and bad, there are single two thousand pieces. Of Pearle of all sorts, there are twelve Battmans. Of Rubies of all sorts there are two Battmans. Of Emeraudes of all sorts, five Battmans."<sup>3</sup>

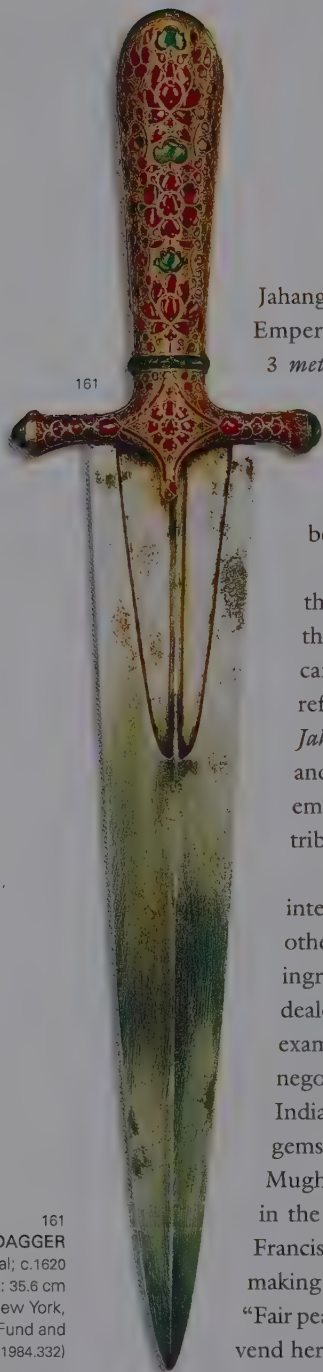
Keeping in mind that the battman was an old Turkish weight equivalent to 55 English pounds, in modern terms the above list would read – diamonds: 37.5 kilos, or 187,500 carats; pearls: 300 kilos, or 1.5 million carats; rubies: 50 kilos, or 250,000 carats; emeralds: 125 kilos, that is, 625,000 carats!

In addition, the imperial treasury included items as diverse as one thousand saddles of gold and silver, over two thousand swords and blades with scabbards and hilts embellished with precious gems; thrones in silver and gold, drinking cups carved entirely from balas rubies and emeralds; over two thousand jewelled brooches for the hair, and an infinite number of chains of pearls, diamonds, rubies and emeralds, the total quantity known only to the Keeper of the Treasury.<sup>4</sup>

What further amazes is that quality was never sacrificed to numbers. Hawkins categorically states that no diamond "less than two and a half caratts" was officially included in the royal treasury. Imperial decree stated that the emperor was to have the first refusal on all transactions in gemstones above five carats. In spite of the predominantly surreptitious methods employed in the gem trade, where deals were conducted in private, and at considerable personal risk, the emperor's eyes and ears rarely missed the opportunity of a great acquisition.

*“There was a Diamant  
cutter of my acquaintance,  
that was sent for to cut a  
Diamant of three Mettegals and a  
halfe, who demanded a small foule  
Diamant to make powder,  
wherewith to cut the other Diamant.  
They brought him a Chest, as he said,  
of three spannes long, and a spanne  
and halfe broad, and a spanne and  
halfe deepe, full of Diamants of all  
sizes and sorts: yet could he find  
never any one for his purpose, but  
one of five Rotties, which was not  
very foule neither.”<sup>[1]</sup>*





161  
DAGGER  
Mughal; c.1620  
L: 35.6 cm

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York,  
Purchase, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund and  
The Vincent Astor Foundation Gift (1984.332)

One of the earliest extant examples of Mughal goldsmithing, the dagger, thumb ring (plate 166) and spoon (plate 167) are all undoubtedly from the imperial workshops of Akbar and Jahangir. The chased and engraved gold hilt of this straight-bladed dagger is inlaid with rubies, emeralds and green glass.

162  
BAZUBAND (armlet)  
Mughal; 17<sup>th</sup> century  
Christies Images

The single spinel flanked by baroque pearls weighs 79.55 carats and is inscribed 'Shah Jahangir bin Akbar Shah, 1010 AH' (1601 A.D.). Portraits of Mughal emperors often depict them wearing such elegantly simple jewels. Uncut and devoid of a complex gold setting, large gems were highly prized. They were inscribed to establish ownership and were handed down from generation to generation.

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Jahangir's favourite jeweller Hiranand had a narrow escape when the Emperor came to know that he had acquired a large diamond of 3 *mettegals* and had not offered it to the king. Guessing the reason for the peremptory summons to court, the shrewd Bania pre-empted imperial wrath by reminding Jahangir of an earlier promise to visit his home. Now, said the wily jeweller, was the appropriate time, since he had a "faire Present to bestow upon his Majestie."<sup>5</sup>

In addition to the imperial decree that stipulated that the king had to be offered the best of the mined gems, agents for the emperor had standing orders to buy good stones when they came on the market in the principal gem centres. There are many references to gems acquired in Goa and Gujarat in the *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*; traders seeking concessions offered the best imported gems and jewels to the king; gifts were sent by foreign potentates to the emperor; and vast amounts were presented by subjects as annual tributes and as expressions of loyalty.

Mughal India in the 17<sup>th</sup> century was a focal point of international trade and commerce. European powers vied with each other to gain an economic and a political foothold in the country by ingratiating themselves with the emperor. Ambassadors, traders, gem dealers and the simply curious swarmed to India. Sir Thomas Roe, for example, was sent by King James to the court of Jahangir in 1614 to negotiate trading facilities and permission to establish factories. Though India was one of the principal suppliers of diamonds and other fine gemstones to the world, there was a ready market for gems in the Mughal courts and the English and Portuguese, principal protagonists in the war of gems, never lost an opportunity to outdo one another. Francis Fettiplace, one of the Agra factors of the East India Company, making recommendations to his principals, in a letter dated 1616, advised: "Fair pearls, ballace rubies, and emeralds of extraordinary great sizes would vend here to the King in infinite quantities."<sup>6</sup>

The imperial coffers were further augmented with the obligatory *nazrana* – gifts offered to the ruler and his family for the honour of royal audience. Nobles and vassals seized upon the custom of *nazrana* as a perfect opportunity to express their loyalties and seek royal favour. They vied with each other in the size and

“Yesterday was the King's birthday and the solemnitie of his weighing to which I went, and was carryed into a very large and beautiful garden; the square within all water; on the sides floures and trees; in the midst a pinnacle, where was prepared the scales, being hung in large tressels, and a crosse beam plated on with gold thinne, the scales of massie gold, the borders set with small stones, rubies and turkey (i.e. turquoises), the chaines of gold large and massie, but strengthened with silke cords... Suddenly hee entered into the scales, sate like a woman on his legges and there was put in against him many bagges to fit his weight, which were changed sixe times and they say was silver,... After with gold and jewels, and precious stones, but I saw none; it being in bags...”<sup>[ii]</sup>



163  
PENDANT  
Emerald: Mughal; 17<sup>th</sup> century  
H: 3.8 cm W: 3.7 cm  
Private collection

The Mughals had a passion for large Colombian emeralds. This emerald, carved with a motif of flowering plants, weighs over 100 carats. The emerald and the cabuchon ruby have been re-set by a French firm of jewellers in the early 1920s in a typically European design.

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value of the *pesbkash*, almost always gems, gem-studded items and gold. Such court customs could be taken to blatant extremes. In a display of favour towards his eldest son Parviz, Jahangir issued a decree (*firman*) that anyone desirous of “intimating his attachment” to the Emperor should make a present of some value. Subsequent to the decree, the *nazrana* in “gold, jewels, horses and elephants” gifted by loyal subjects to Shahzada Parviz amounted to the value of two hundred lakhs of rupees.<sup>7</sup>

Loyalties to a Mughal emperor were best substantiated in the currency of gems and precious metals. Returning from the ports of Cambay and Surat, Muqarrab Khan placed before Jahangir “jewels and jewelled things, and vessels of gold and silver”<sup>8</sup> which along with items as diverse as Arab horses and Abyssinian slaves, took two and a half months to lay before his majesty. Jahangir’s royal reaction: “most of them were pleasing to me.”<sup>9</sup> Adil Khan, the ruler of Bijapur, made tributary payments to the emperor Shah Jahan of gems and jewelled ornaments, gold and silver objects and elephants caparisoned with silver trappings valued at forty lakhs of rupees.<sup>10</sup> Panju, a *zamindar* of Khandesh, hard pressed by the royal forces, saw his safety in gracefully presenting to Jahangir the diamond mine in his possession. Pleased that the stones from it were “superior in kind and beauty to all other kinds of diamonds, and much esteemed by jewellers,”<sup>11</sup> the emperor appointed a superintendent to manage the mine.

سیم نمودند ملامرور در منزل بابا حسن هم بزمی و خوشحالی که ست و اگر شکستهای او پسندیده افتاد







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164 (facing page)  
**EMPEROR JAHANGIR WEIGHS PRINCE KHURRAM (later Shah Jahan)**  
 From a manuscript of the *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri* Mughal; c.1610–1615  
 Opaque watercolour on paper  
 Miniature: 28.4 cm x 12.8 cm  
 © Trustees of the British Museum, London (1948.10-9069)

*The Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri records: "... in this year, which was the commencement of my son Khurram's sixteenth lunar year, ... I gave an order that they should weigh him according to the prescribed rule, against gold, silver, and other metals ..."*<sup>11</sup>

165  
**PENDANT (front and reverse)**  
 Mughal; 18<sup>th</sup> century  
 H: 3.7 cm W: 3 cm  
 © Trustees of the British Museum, London (OA+14178)

*The continuity of 16<sup>th</sup> century jewel setting is manifest in this piece; the bird is rendered in relief, with rubies and green glass set mosaic-like into chased depressions, the gold in between engraved with flowers and foliage. The reverse is enamelled in red and green on a white ground.*

166  
**THUMB RING**  
 Mughal; c.1625  
 H: 3.7 cm Diam: 3 cm  
 Courtesy Victoria and Albert Museum, London (IM 207-1920)

*Set with rubies and emeralds individually cut to design requirement, the inside of the ring is enamelled in opaque white, blue, pale green and black, illustrating European design influence, a break from the traditional Mughal palette of vibrant greens, reds and blues.*

167  
**CEREMONIAL SPOON**  
 Mughal; late 16<sup>th</sup>–early 17<sup>th</sup> century  
 L: 18.6 cm  
 Courtesy Victoria and Albert Museum, London (IM 173-1910)

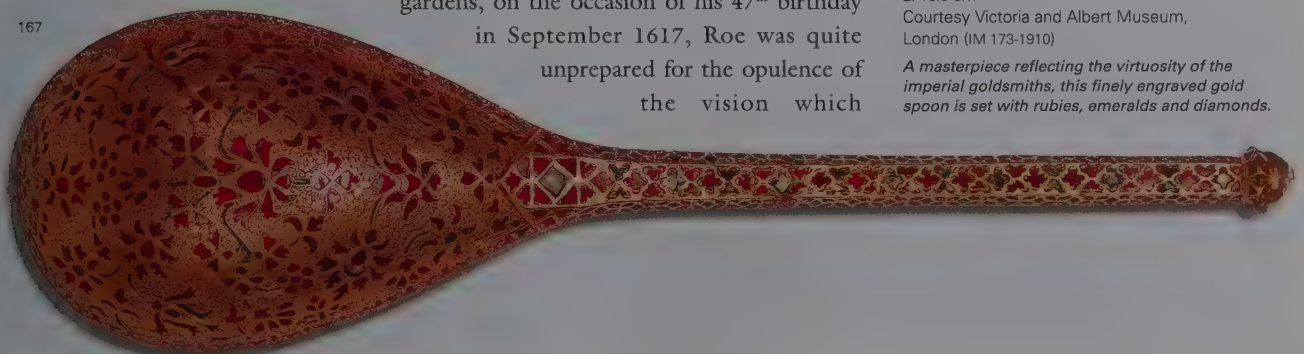
*A masterpiece reflecting the virtuosity of the imperial goldsmiths, this finely engraved gold spoon is set with rubies, emeralds and diamonds.*

A peculiar Mughal decree allowing the state to appropriate the jewels and riches of a nobleman once he died further swelled the royal coffers, while simultaneously weakening the power base of ambitious courtiers. Even the women of the harem were not exempt from this rule, the king seizing, as Manucci informs us, "all the wealth of the defunct."<sup>12</sup> Such norms prevailed even during the golden period of Akbar's rule. Father Monserrate, a Jesuit priest at his court, records that the emperor derived much revenue from the hoarded fortunes of the great nobles, which by law and custom all came to the king on their owner's death.<sup>13</sup> A frugal and sparing monarch, not above personally supervising large sums for disbursement to the army, Akbar's treasury in just gold and silver coins was estimated by De Laet at the equivalent of nearly two hundred million rupees.<sup>14</sup>

Akbar's personal tastes, judging from illustrated manuscripts, veered towards elegant simplicity. Dramatically different, his son Jahangir's jewelled magnificence never failed to awe. The emperor's indulgent opulence frequently surfaces in Sir Thomas Roe's reminiscences of his Mughal tenure. The mesmerizing grandeur of a ruler – whose entourage included attendants carrying maces of gold set with jewels, horse furniture studded with gems, a gold plated palanquin with fringes of pearls a foot deep and a border of rubies and emeralds, and a gold foot stool set with precious stones – was repeatedly recorded in the minutest of details by the diplomat, who maintained detailed accounts of his travels in India and his visits to the Mughal courts.

Awaiting the arrival of Jahangir in the royal gardens, on the occasion of his 47<sup>th</sup> birthday in September 1617, Roe was quite unprepared for the opulence of the vision which

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**PANCH LADA** (five-strand necklace)  
 North India; late 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection

*A classical necklace of five rows of small enameled floral units with a diamond clasp. In a Deccani portrait dating to 1585-90, Ibrahim Adil Shah of Bijapur wears a strikingly similar necklace.<sup>[16]</sup>*

169  
**DASTI** (bracelet)  
 Hyderabad; late 18<sup>th</sup> century  
 L: 19 cm  
 C. L. Bharany Collection, New Delhi  
*A diamond bracelet weighing no less than 180 grams; the reverse is finely enameled with green on gold.*

170 (facing page)  
**HASLI** (rigid neck collar)  
 North India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection  
*Mughal aesthetics ranged from excessive opulence to classical simplicity. This hasli, set with white sapphires (pukhraj), is cleverly wrought with geometric repeats tapering towards the end in the form of the traditional rigid collar necklaces.*

appeared: The king walked in "...clothed, or rather laden, with diamonds, rubies, pearles, and other precious vanities, so great, so glorious: his sword, target, throne to rest on correspondent; his head, necke, breast, armes, above the elbowes, at the wrists, his fingers every one with at least two or three rings, fettered with chaines, or dyalled diamonds, rubies as great as walnuts (some greater), and pearles such as mine eyes were amazed at."<sup>15</sup> Awestruck, the ambassador acknowledged, "In jewells hee is the treasury of the world."<sup>16</sup>

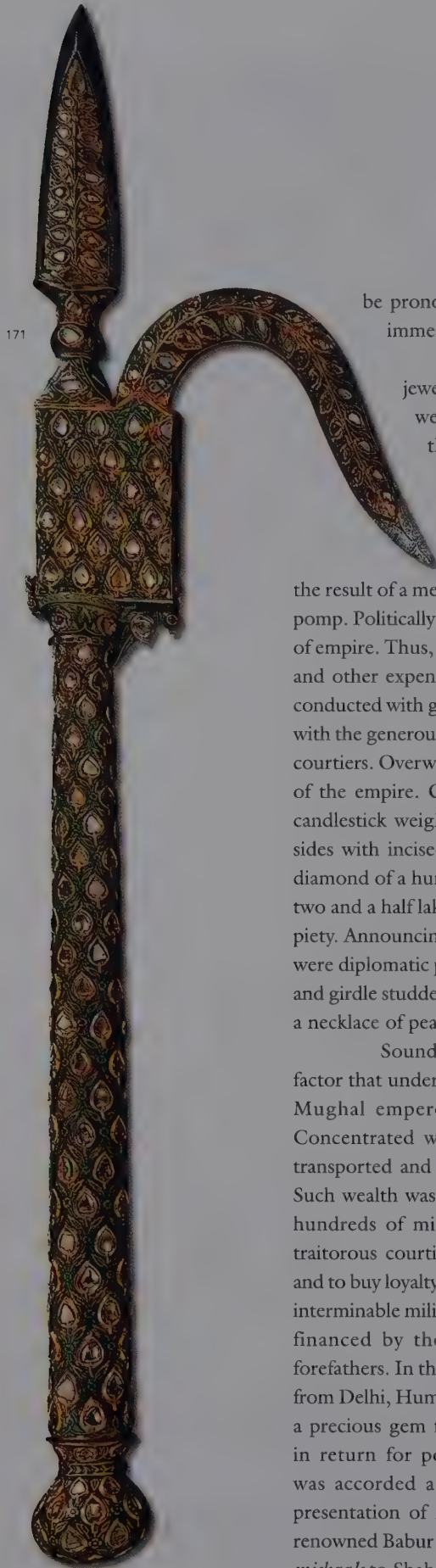
Jahangir perceived himself as the centre of the world and flamboyantly portrayed his bejewelled image throughout the realm. Jacques de Couttre, a Flemish jewel merchant, on a visit to the Mughal court in 1619, struck by the large quantity of jewels worn by the emperor, was convinced that the wealth of the Mughals was much more than the combined wealth of all the monarchs of Europe. Jahangir was heavily bejewelled and covered with so many gems "from all parts of the world that he looked like an idol."<sup>17</sup> Such inestimable wealth that represented just one day's jewelled splendour, was generally not repeated all year round.

Even at its most austere, the magnificence of the Mughal court was awesome. Emperor Aurangzeb was famed for his zealous, almost fanatical aversion to ostentation. However, he was not averse to wearing the emblems of his power and glory. Escorted to the forty-pillared hall of audience (*Diwan-i-Khas*) to pay his respects to Aurangzeb, Francois Bernier, the French physician wrote: "Never did I witness a more extraordinary scene. The King appeared seated upon his throne, at the end of the great hall, the Am Khas, in the most magnificent attire. His vest was of white and delicately flowered satin, with silk and gold embroidery of the finest textures. The turban, of gold cloth had an aigrette whose base was composed of diamonds of an extraordinary size and value, besides an Oriental Topaz, which may

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be pronounced unparalleled, exhibiting a lustre like the sun. A necklace of immense pearls, suspended from his neck, reached to the stomach ...”<sup>18</sup>

The throne Bernier was referring to was Shah Jahan’s famous jewelled peacock throne (*Takht-i-Taus*). Defining imperial status yet further, were six more thrones covered, according to Tavernier, “with diamonds, the others with rubies, emeralds, or pearls.”<sup>19</sup> The traveller deliberately refrains from further details “not forgetting that one may become disgusted with the most beautiful things when they are too often before the eyes.”<sup>20</sup>

Dynastic love of display aside, Mughal splendour was not the result of a mere desire to acquire. There was shrewd common sense behind imperial pomp. Politically expedient, such displays of enormous wealth were effective expressions of empire. Thus, ceremonies such as weighing the emperor against gold, precious gems and other expensive articles from the treasury on his solar and lunar birthdays were conducted with great ‘solemnitie’ (164). Lavish court conventions of this type concluded with the generous distribution of “small artificial fruits made of gold and silver”<sup>21</sup> among courtiers. Overwhelming Mughal munificence reiterated the material power and might of the empire. Gifts such as Shah Jahan’s humble offering to Medina of an amber candlestick weighing 700 *tolas* “covered with a network of gold, ornamented on all sides with incised floral designs and studded with various gems,”<sup>22</sup> including a rare diamond of a hundred *ratis* (the total categorically stated in the *Shah Nama* as costing two and a half lakh rupees),<sup>23</sup> were as much expressions of material strength as spiritual piety. Announcing the message of Mughal might beyond the boundaries of the empire were diplomatic presentations, like the one to the Qaisar of Rum consisting of a dagger and girdle studded with diamonds and rubies and a necklace of pearls worth one lakh of rupees.<sup>24</sup>

Sound economics was the principal factor that underlay the insatiable passion of the Mughal emperors for precious gemstones. Concentrated wealth, loose gems were easily transported and encashed on long expeditions. Such wealth was used to pay an army stationed hundreds of miles from the capital, to bribe traitorous courtiers of neighbouring kingdoms and to buy loyalty. Much of Emperor Aurangzeb’s interminable military forays into the Deccan were financed by the accumulated wealth of his forefathers. In the 1530s, during his years of exile from Delhi, Humayun, it is said, exchanged many a precious gem from a small pouch he carried, in return for political asylum. The monarch was accorded a warm welcome in Persia on presentation of 250 Badakshan rubies and the renowned Babur diamond weighing six and a half *mishqals* to Shah Tahmasp.<sup>25</sup>



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*“The treasury at Agra (alone had) 750 pounds (1,702,500 carats) of pearls, 275 pounds (624,250 carats) of emeralds, 5,000 gems from Cathay, corals, topazes and other less precious stones in almost infinite number, 200 daggers, 1,000 gold studded saddles with jewels, two gold thrones; three silver thrones, 100 silver chairs, 5 golden chairs, 200 most precious mirrors, 100,000 pounds of precious silver plates and utensils, 50,000 pounds of gold plate, wrought gold and silver, Chinese vessels, worked necklaces, cups, discs, candlebra, tubs of uncut diamonds, gold images of elephants, golden bridles, porcelain vessels.”<sup>[v]</sup>*



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171 (facing page)  
ANKUSH (elephant goad)  
North India; late 19<sup>th</sup> century  
H: 43 cm  
Private collection

*A fine example of royal opulence, this elephant goad was perhaps used during state processions. Rows of flat diamonds are set in a green enamel ground.*

172 (facing page)  
SWORD HILT  
North India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Courtesy of the Trustees of the  
Victoria and Albert Museum, London (IS 24-1888)

*The sword is surmounted with a gold hilt kundan-set with diamonds, cabuchon rubies, emeralds and carved emeralds; a tiger head embellishes the curved handle.*

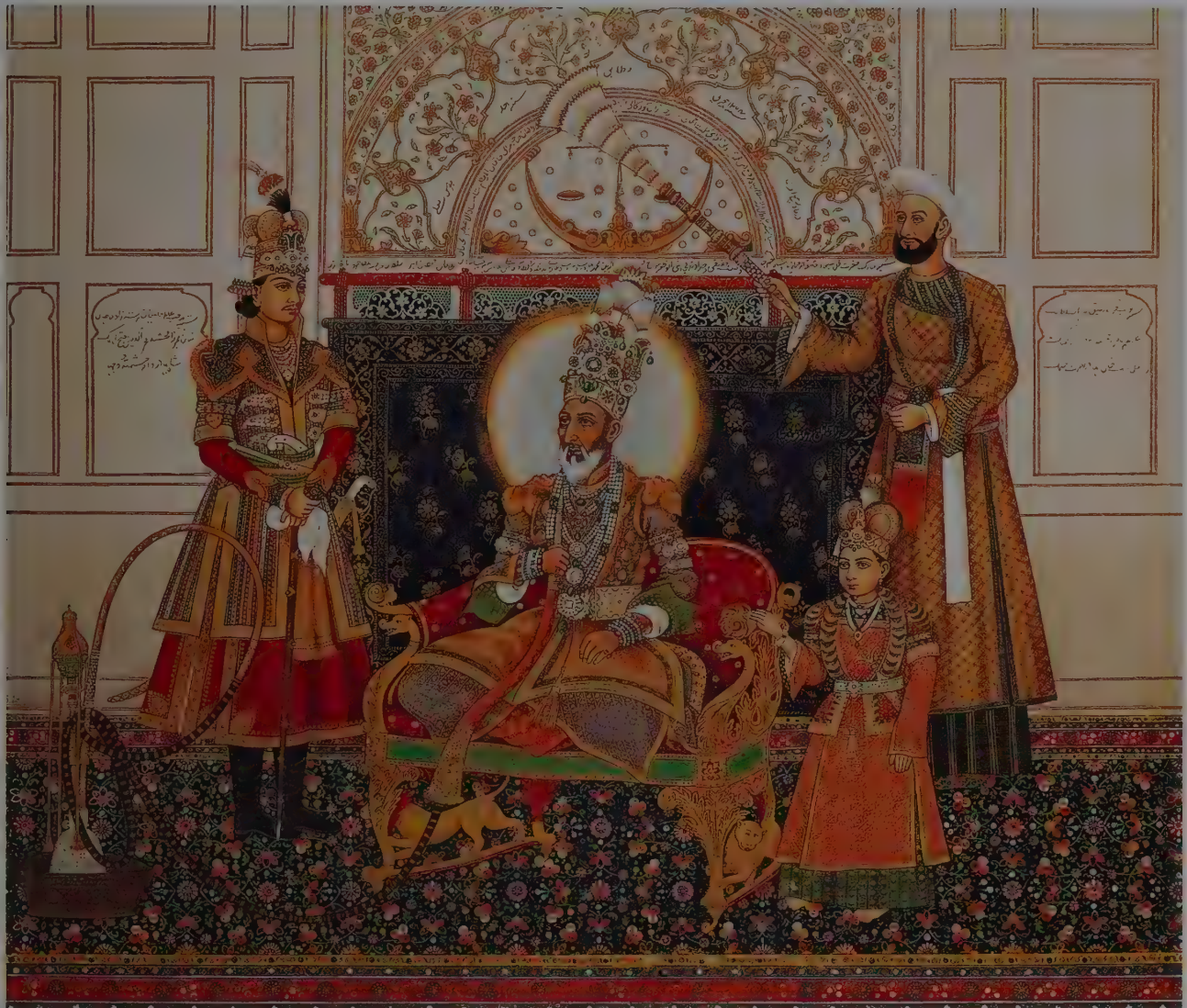
173  
HOOKAH BASE  
North India, 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Spink and Sons, London

*Mughal aesthetics elevated the common 'hubble-bubble' to a jewelled work of art; this piece is kundan-set with gems on enamelled gold.*

To facilitate administration of the vast treasures that accrued and for maintenance of records, the colossal Imperial Treasury was divided into a Treasury of Precious Stones, a Treasury of Goldware and a Treasury of Inlaid Jewellery. Under Shah Jahan, there were no fewer than seven treasure forts located throughout the Mughal realm, at Delhi, Gwalior, Mewar, Ranthambor, Lahore, Asirgarh and Agra. However, long years of futile warfare, anarchy in the provinces, the rising power of the Marathas and the political manoeuvrings of foreign powers led to a gradual loss of control. Large amounts from the treasury had been squandered on war. By the 18<sup>th</sup> century Mughal India was in shambles and the Mughal empire bankrupt.

Ironically, no account of the empire adequately conveys its unimaginable wealth as the chilling record of its plunder by the Persian invader Nadir Shah in 1739. Palace, treasury and city were stripped bare ruthlessly by the marauding troops. “A hundred labourers,” it is said, “were occupied for fifteen days in melting down and casting into ingots the gold and silver which was not already in the form of coins in order to facilitate transport. Two ingots pierced together through the middle and tied together with a heavy cord constituted one camel load; five thousand chests were filled





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with gold rupees and eight thousand with silver rupees. There was also an inconceivable number of other chests filled with diamonds, pearls and other jewels.”<sup>26</sup>

In an attempt to quantify the booty plundered from the Imperial Treasury, Sir James Frazer compiled a list:

“Jewels from the Emperor and Omrahs (Nobles) valued at	250 million rupees
Utencils and handles of weapons set with jewels, with the Peacock Throne and nine other thrones set with precious stones	90 million rupees
Money coined in Gold and Silver rupees	250 million rupees
Gold and silver plate which were melted down and coined	50 million rupees
Fine clothes and rich stuff of all kind	20 million rupees
Household furniture, and other valuable Commodities	30 million rupees
Warlike weapons like canons etc.	10 million rupees
Total:	700 million rupees
circa: A.D 1739”	<sup>27</sup>

In modern terms, seven billion, three hundred and ninety-two million pounds sterling – the greatest plunder in history.

174 (facing page)  
KANTHA (necklace)  
Private collection

A double string of polished emerald beads assembled over a period of time, totally weighing approximately 1000 carats.

175  
EMPEROR BAHADUR SHAH II  
Mughal; dated May–June 1838  
Opaque watercolour on paper  
30.8 cm x 36.8 cm  
Courtesy of the Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, Loan from private collection

‘Exalted King of Kings, Emperor and Son of Emperor, Sultan and Son of Sultan, Possessed of Glories and Victories...’ are some of the titles inscribed on this portrait of Bahadur Shah II, the last Mughal emperor, flanked by his two sons. By this time the renowned imperial treasury was empty and the emperor devoid of power. His plumed gold crown was bought by Queen Victoria for 500 pounds after the Mutiny of 1857.<sup>vii</sup>





*On the occasion of birthdays and New Year, the chief ladies of the court, as well as dancing and singing women attend the celebrations, bringing valuable presents as offering. The ladies are honored in return with robes and jewels. "At the time when they say good-bye their hands are filled with kichari, which is, in its literal meaning, a mixed dish made up of several kinds of vegetables. As to this, it must be remarked that the kichari of these queens and princes is not of that sort, but on the contrary, a mixture of gold and silver coin, with all kinds of precious stones and pearls, large and small."*<sup>[vii]</sup>

### Hallmarks of Artistry

As committed aesthetes, Mughal emperors consciously channelled some of the enormous wealth of the empire for the encouragement of the arts! Akbar took a keen interest in the organisation of the court ateliers (*karkhanas*), personally inspecting much of their output, rejecting that which did not meet with his standards of perfection. Jahangir, and especially Shah Jahan, assumed the role of artistic directors; every item crafted for royal use or under royal commission had to meet the exacting standards of their keen and discerning eye.

The artist-craftsmen of the Mughal court formed a part of the inner coterie of the royal household. They travelled along with the emperor on his numerous campaigns and accompanied him on his hunts and pleasure trips to various parts of the country. While the painter was prevailed upon to record details of life and images that caught the emperor's fancy, the jeweller sought to recreate, in metal and enamel, visions of the heavenly landscapes and beautiful flora that enthralled his patron. Craftsmen were invited from the four corners of the empire and from other countries including Iran, Turkey, Venice and England to execute orders in the imperial workshops. Ralph Fitch, the English merchant who travelled the width of the empire all the way up to Bengal between 1583 and 1591, records leaving his ship companion "William Leades the Jeweller in service with the King Zelabdim Echebar in Fatepore, who did entertayne him verie well, and gave him an House and five Slaves, an Horse, and every day sixe S.S. (shillings) in money."<sup>28</sup>

An astute connoisseur, Shah Jahan's expertise in gems matched his love for them. A love that manifested itself early in his life. His father Jahangir once desired a pair to a recently acquired pearl. The 22-year-old Shah Jahan, then still Prince Khurram, recalled seeing a similar one in an old turban ornament that had belonged to his grandfather Akbar. Retrieved from the Treasury, the pearl was found to be a perfect match, "not differing in weight even by a trifle, so much so that the jewellers were astonished at the matter. It agreed in value, shape, lustre, and brilliance; one might say they had been shed from the same mould."<sup>29</sup>

Age did not dim the passion. Manucci, the Venetian, records that Shah Jahan's love for gems, bordering on the obsessive, "surpassed all his vices."<sup>30</sup> Aurangzeb's audacious request to borrow some of Shah Jahan's personal jewels for his coronation, as he did not envision his imprisoned father having much use for them, so enraged the dethroned emperor that, according to Tavernier, "for some days he was like a madman, and he even nearly died. In the excess of his passion he frequently called for a pestle and mortar, saying that he would pound up all his precious stones and pearls, so that Aurangzeb might never possess them."<sup>31</sup>

More than in any other period of Indian history, under Shah Jahan's patronage, there was an affiliation in design between the grandest architectural monument and the



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176 (facing page)  
SARPECH (turban ornament)  
North India; 18<sup>th</sup> century  
H: 15 cm L: 27 cm  
Courtesy Sotheby's

*This majestic gold, diamond, emerald and ruby sarpech, with polychrome enamel on the reverse, once belonged to the Maharajas of Patiala. The pivoting birds on either side of the central plume are carved from emeralds.*

177  
NUPUR (anklets)  
Rajasthan; early 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*A fine example of Mughal aesthetic detailing adapted to traditional Indian shape, the single row of diamonds verge towards large floral motifs with emerald centres. Broad bands of intricate green enamelling (partajikam) decorate the outer surface.*



*“On his head he wore a rich turbant with a plume of herne tops, not many but long; on one syde hung a ruby unsett, as bigg as a walnut; on the other syde a diamond as great; in the middle an emvalld like a hart, much bigger. His shash was wreathed about with a chayne of great pearle, rubyes, and diamonds drild. About his neck hee carried a chaine of most excellent pearle, three double so great (I never saw); at his elbowes, armletts set with diamonds; and on his wrists three rowes of several sorts. His hands bare but almost on every finger a ring...” [viii]*



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smallest decorative object, reflecting his passionate love for fine gems and keen eye for design. Motifs were borrowed freely from one medium to another, with adaptations in size and scale. Lapis lazuli, carnelian, mother of pearl, and nephrite jade, pietra-dura'd into the flawless white marble walls of the Taj Mahal, gave rise to the popular description of the mausoleum as a jewel box 'built by titans and finished by jewellers'. After a visit to the monument, Helen Blavatsky wrote: "Every leaf, every petal is a separate emerald, amethyst, pearl or topaz; at times you can count as many as a hundred of them for one single bunch of flowers, and there are hundreds of such bunches all over the panels and perforated marble screens."<sup>32</sup>

Amongst the great variety of decorative arts, a distinct style of jewellery produced in the *karkhanas* combined Mughal finesse with a legendary love of the sumptuous. *Minakari*, or enamelling, a unique combination of gems, enamel pigments and precious metals, became a quintessential symbol of the Mughal vision of 'Paradise on Earth'. Conforming to Islamic precepts, this Paradise was a celestial garden with all manner of trees, a riot of flowers and colours of every imaginable hue (178). The motifs consisted primarily of flowers, plants, scrolling vines and animal forms. Though an established craft, enamelling had not come into its own in the early Mughal period. It was Shah Jahan's aesthetic vision that transformed enamelling into a sophisticated art form which embellished a range of items from jewellery to imperial thrones. Borrowing from his two major passions, architecture and fine gems, Shah Jahan took the motifs

178 (facing page)  
TORQUE (reverse)  
North India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*The reverse of a gold enamelled necklace for a man, decorated with a veritable garden of motifs.*

179  
KADA (bracelets)  
Rajasthan; late 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*The shape of this pair of enamelled gold and diamond set bracelets is unusual in the kundan-minakari tradition. They were perhaps inspired by the wide ivory bangles worn by Rajasthani women.*

180  
PENDANT  
North India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*This enamelled pendant is set with diamonds, foiled emeralds and rubies. The central emerald is inscribed 'Jalaludin Shah'.*



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181  
KADA (bangles)  
North India; 18<sup>th</sup> century  
Christies Images

Terminating in traditional makara-head finials, the bangles are a design board of motifs and a colour palette of enamels. Little dots of opaque white enamel framing the cabuchon rubies are unusual.

182  
BALA (earrings – front and reverse)  
North India; mid-19<sup>th</sup> century  
H: 12 cm W: 5.5 cm  
Private collection

A pair of double-sided (do rukha) crescent moon-shaped earrings, kundan-set with diamonds on one side and foiled rubies on the other.

183a & 183b  
NECKLACE (front and reverse)  
North India; early 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

Set with table and rose-cut diamonds, the necklace is fringed with a border of graded Basra pearls. The reverse is densely enamelled with stylized flowers in red, light blue, green and yellow.

from one and colours from the other, to inspire an art form which thereafter was completely identified with Mughal aesthetics.

The technique of enamelling was not indigenous to the subcontinent. The exact date of its entry into India cannot be pinpointed and has been long debated. There are no references to enamelling in the early Indian texts. Based on its similarity

to the technique of glazed tiling, a visible feature of Sultanate architecture, art historians surmise that it was probably introduced to India around the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Through the Punjab, in those days the gateway to India on the land routes, enamelling spread to the rest of India. The first known reference to enamelling is in the

16<sup>th</sup> century annals of Akbar's reign in Abul Fazl's cryptic description in the *Ain-i-Akbari*: "The Minakar or enameller works on cups, flagons, rings and other articles with gold and silver. He polishes his delicate enamels separately on various colours, sets them in their suitable place and puts them to fire. This is done several times."<sup>33</sup>

The somewhat casual nature of Abul Fazl's description has encouraged art historians to conjecture that the technique was by then well-established in the repertoire of the Indian craftsman's decorative skills, even though it was not as old as some of the others, such as granulation (*charm-kari*), known to Indian goldsmiths since the early Mauryan period. Moreover, the *minakar's* compensation for every *tola* of gold he worked on was a mere sixteen *dams*, two thirds of a rupee, a fraction of what other specialist craftsmen were paid. It is more than likely that, in a court as committed to the encouragement of all art forms as Akbar's, the sheer novelty value of a new artistic skill would have undoubtedly commanded a far higher remuneration.

The *Shah Nama* makes repeated references to enamelled objects. These objects were highly-prized, and were clearly intended for the privileged few. Particularly pleased

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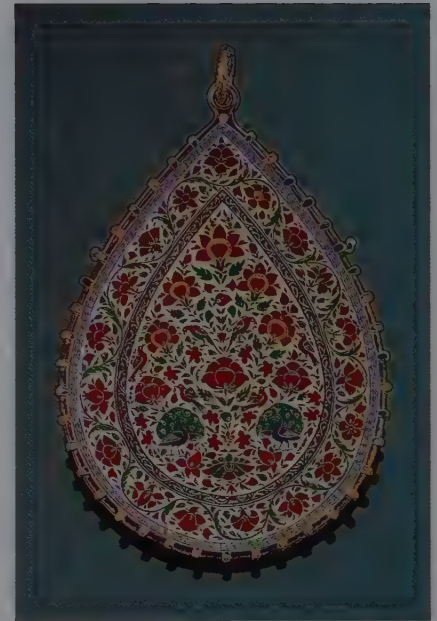
183a

183b





184a



184b

184a & 184b  
**PENDANT (front and reverse)**  
 North India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 H: 13 cm W: 11 cm  
 Christies Images

*This large pendant, richly enamelled and set with diamonds, might have been used as a head ornament (tikka) for an elephant. On ceremonial occasions, the regalia of elephants and horses often rivalled that of the aristocracy.*

185  
**NUPUR (anklet)**  
 North India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection

*Gold units set with diamonds assembled to form a flexible anklet, later adapted to be worn as a necklace; this jewel is believed to have once belonged to the Nizam of Hyderabad.*

186 (facing page)  
**CHAURI (flywhisk)**  
 North India; early 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 H: 27.5 cm  
 Christies Images

*A gold enamelled flywhisk set with diamonds reflects the lavish splendour of accoutrements that were part of state regalia.*

with a recent display of valour by his son Aurangzeb, imperial largesse to the young prince on his 15<sup>th</sup> birthday as recorded in the *Shah Nama* included two Qibchaq horses, one with a jewelled saddle, the other with an enamelled one.<sup>34</sup> Swords and shields with enamelled apertunances were also singular marks of honour. The imperial annal also records the emperor's first ascension on an enamelled throne constructed in the course of nine months for the sum of five lakhs of rupees, "whereupon the attendant courtiers joyously proclaimed their congratulations and benedictions."<sup>35</sup>

However, if any single instance confirms the excellence of and demand for the art of enamelling in Shah Jahan's time, it is the royal librarian's record of a golden screen. This magnificent object with enamelled inscriptions and cupolas was specially crafted to place around the tomb of Mumtaz Mahal, the emperor's beloved queen, on her second death anniversary.<sup>36</sup>

Lifestyles in the Mughal courts as well as in the personal lives of the emperors encouraged the decorative arts. Court ateliers now fashioned accoutrements, which, in addition to being purely functional, reflected Mughal aesthetics and flamboyance.

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*“It is related by Tod, the author of the ‘Annals of Rajasthan’ (Rajputana) that, when Akbar besieged Chitor, no fewer than 70 1/4 mans weight (170 pounds) of gold bangles or anklets were found on the slain, all the men who wore them having been of noble blood or knights. The appalling slaughter is commemorated by the fact that the number 70 1/4 is accursed, which is daily brought to mind even now, because Rajputana bankers always write these figures on their hundis, or bills of exchange, thereby bringing the curse of the sack of Chitor on anyone who misuses or forges them.” [ix]*



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Jahangir, in the *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, refers to the skilled craftsmen who fashioned his swords as ‘*ustads*’, according them the same high esteem as that conferred on his favourite artists. Particularly struck by the beauty of one sword hilt, he records in his memoirs: “Of all the gems of great price that are in the treasury I consider it the most precious. On Thursday I girded it auspiciously and with joy round my waist, and the masters who in their completion had exercised great skill and taken great pains were rewarded. Ustad Puran with the gift of an elephant, a dress of honour, and a golden bracelet for the wrist ...”<sup>37</sup>

If and when Muslim religious injunction to ‘be not guilty of excess’ occasioned minor pangs of conscience, they were probably stilled with the comforting justification that items like turban ornaments, jewelled swords and gem studded saddles were really symbols of state. As for objects like the eight chains, each containing 400 beads of “rich pearl, ballace rubyes, diamonds, rubyes, emeralds, lignum aloes, eshem (jade) and corall”<sup>38</sup> which Jahangir turned over daily during his prayers in the early hours of dawn – they simply helped a monarch keep count on his *tasbeeh*, a rosary befitting his status.

Jewelled objects such as pen and ink stands also figured in court conventions as symbols of rank and were awarded to courtiers appointed to important posts. Receipt of a bejewelled turban ornament (*kalgi*) and the robe of honour (*khilat*) signalled singular royal favour. Judging from the frequency with which these are mentioned in the *Shah Nama*, these *kalgis* (191) were especially popular during the reign of Shah Jahan as expressions of imperial approval.

For all its Arabian night splendour, the fabled ‘treasury of the world’ was not just about jewels and precious metals. State inventories included an astonishing number of elegant vessels of porcelain and coloured glass, textiles of the finest quality and libraries of important books and manuscripts. If the glory of princes is reflected, as the saying goes, in their buildings, their libraries, and their jewels, the Mughals left history in no doubt about their stature.

187 (facing page)

WRITING SET

Mughal; c.1700

L: 20.9 cm W: 8.8 cm

Courtesy Victoria and Albert Museum, London (IS 02549)

*Fashioned from white nephrite jade and embellished with diamonds, rubies and emeralds set in gold, the box contains a matching set of writing instruments.*

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CHAUPAD (game pieces)

North India; 19<sup>th</sup> century

Private collection

*Chaupad, an ancient and popular Indian game, was a favourite pastime of the aristocracy. These small units are made from gold and are richly enamelled.*



*“In the course of years many valuable gems had come into the Imperial jewel-house, each one of which might serve as an ear-drop for Venus, or would adorn the girdle of the Sun. Upon the accession of the Emperor, it occurred to his mind that, in the opinion of far-seeing men, the acquisition of such rare jewels and the keeping of such wonderful brilliants can only render one service, that of adorning the throne of empire. They ought therefore, to be put to such a use, that beholders might share in and benefit by their splendour, and that Majesty might shine with increased brilliancy.”* [x]

### THE PEACOCK THRONE (TAKHT-I-TAUS)

The most famous jewelled object in history, Shah Jahan’s *Takht-i-Taus* was the crowning example of an emperor’s passion for gems and a dynastic love of display. In 1628, in the first year of his accession, Shah Jahan ordered the fabrication of a jewelled throne using the vast quantities of gems in the treasury. It took seven years and one lakh *tolas* (1,150 kilos) of gold to complete this unique monarchical seat, immortalized in history as the Peacock Throne.

Abdul Hamid Lahori, the court historian, describes its splendour in the *Badshah Nama*. Three jewelled steps led up to the Emperor’s seat, surrounded on eleven sides with jewelled planks serving as railings. Of these, the most splendid panel was the middle one on which the Emperor rested his arm while reclining. “It cost 10 lakhs of rupees, its central ruby alone being worth one lakh. This ruby had been presented by Shah Abbas I, the Persian King to Jahangir...”<sup>39</sup> Besides Lahori’s eyewitness accounts of the throne, those of Francois Bernier, the French physician at Aurangzeb’s court, and of the gem dealer and traveller Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, are extensive and detailed.

Both viewed the throne on different occasions. Bernier, during a visit to the court of Aurangzeb in 1662, viewed it from a distance; Tavernier, who saw it in November 1665 on Aurangzeb’s birthday, describes it as resembling in “form and size one of our camp beds; that is to say it is about 6 feet long and 4 feet wide.”<sup>40</sup> A singularly prosaic use of simile! About the lavish use of gems on the throne he says: “The feet and the bars... are covered with gold inlaid and enriched with numerous diamonds, rubies and emeralds.”<sup>41</sup> A large balas ruby “cut en cabuchon”<sup>42</sup> with four table-cut emeralds around it formed a cross in the middle of each bar. Similar crosses were set at regular intervals along the length of these bars. The jeweller-merchant even managed to count the larger rubies on the throne. “There are about 108, all cabuchons, the least of which weighs 100 carats, but there are some which weigh apparently 200 and more. As for the emeralds, there are plenty of good colour, but they have many flaws; the largest may weigh about 60 carats and the least 30 carats. I counted about 116; thus there are more emeralds than rubies.”<sup>43</sup>



189 (facing page)  
EMPEROR SHAH JAHAN ON  
THE PEACOCK THRONE  
Page from a *Badshah Nama* manuscript  
Mughal; dated 16<sup>th</sup> January, 1640  
Opaque watercolour and gold on paper  
36.9 cm x 24.6 cm  
San Diego Museum of Art,  
Edwin Binney III Collection

*Artists’ renderings of the Peacock Throne are all that we have to rely on to visualize the most famous imperial seat in history.*

190  
KATAR (dagger)  
Jaipur; late 19<sup>th</sup> century  
L: 44 cm  
Courtesy Sotheby’s

*Mughal portraits often depict the Emperor and his courtiers wearing a katar tucked into the folds of the waist-band. Gem-set and richly enamelled examples of this kind were prized possessions.*



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191  
KALGI (turban ornament)  
North India, early 18<sup>th</sup> century  
H: 16.8 cm W: 5.8 cm  
Courtesy of the Trustees of the  
Victoria and Albert Museum, London  
(IM 240-1923)

*Fashioned from gold and set with rubies, diamonds, emeralds and beryls on both the front and the back, such floral spray motifs were also profusely used in textiles of the period.*

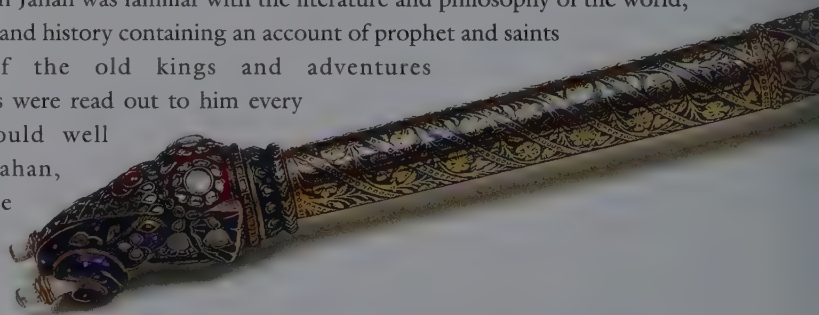
Diamonds filled the empty spaces between the coloured stones. Twelve columns around the base supported a canopy, the underside of which was gem-studded. Perched above this was the leit motif of the throne, a peacock “with elevated tail made of blue sapphires and other coloured stones, the body of gold inlaid with precious stones having a large ruby in front of the breast, whence hangs a pear-shaped pearl of 50 carats or thereabouts.”<sup>44</sup> The rows of beautiful and excellent quality pearls, each weighing between six and ten carats were, in Tavernier’s estimation, the richest feature of the throne. The Frenchman also describes a jewel consisting of a diamond of about “80 to 90 carats weight with rubies and emeralds round it,”<sup>45</sup> so hung as to be in full view of the emperor when he sat himself upon it.

Eyewitness accounts differ with regard to details. Illustrated manuscripts from the period are also subject to artistic rendition, making it harder for historians to draw accurate conclusions. Posterity will never ascertain whether two peacocks decorated the canopy or one. Were there twelve pillars or eleven; six massive feet supporting them or four? But all accounts unanimously declare this imperial seat as the most magnificent ever made or imagined.

Some of the conflicts would ease if it is borne in mind that the throne was a composite of different parts. Its frame, jewelled panels and pillars were dismantled and stored, reassembled only for important state occasions such as the anniversary of the royal coronation. It can therefore be conjectured that, apart from the throne’s basic structure, some of the decorative appendages such as the peacocks and bouquets above the canopy would have been assembled in different ways for different occasions. The search for historical accuracy sometimes ignores this element of variability.

Who designed this legendary masterpiece? Bernier gives the honours to a Frenchman named ‘La Grange’, who made his fortune at the Mughal court after having defrauded several European princes with false gems. This is believed to be a reference to Austin of Bordeaux, a French jeweller-merchant in Shah Jahan’s court. However, it is highly unlikely, as the historian Abdul Aziz points out with irrefutable logic, that the Emperor would entrust the design of a throne studded with the single largest collection of important gems in history to someone whose expertise lay in the area of synthetic stones.<sup>46</sup> Lahori’s account of the throne frequently mentions Bebadal Khan. However, as superintendent of the department of goldsmiths, he probably only supervised the construction of the throne.

The most likely contender is the emperor Shah Jahan himself. An extremely learned man, Shah Jahan was familiar with the literature and philosophy of the world; “works on moral and history containing an account of prophet and saints and events of the old kings and adventures of the past rulers were read out to him every night.”<sup>47</sup> It could well be that Shah Jahan, inspired by these accounts, used the large quantities of gemstones in his





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treasury to re-create the famous throne of Solomon, prophet king and ideal ruler of Islamic thinking.

According to legend, Solomon's throne was made of ivory and set with topaz and pearls, chrysolite and other gems; around the throne were arranged four golden palm trees, with branches studded with red topaz and green emerald; two golden peacocks, and two golden eagles, surmounted the trees opposite each other.<sup>48</sup> "In Islamic mythology, the peacock was the original guardian of the Gates of Paradise and it ate the devil, who then, inside the bird, entered Paradise and schemed the fall of Adam and Eve. In Persian mythology, two peacocks facing each other on either side of the Tree of Life symbolize man's dual nature of good and evil."<sup>49</sup>

There are references to Shah Jahan's detailed instructions during the construction of the throne; his expertise in gems and architectural design is well-documented. In view of this, it is more than probable that Shah Jahan himself gave the broad outlines to the design. The Peacock Throne was ultimately an expression of his own vision and taste.

Finally, seven long years after the first jewel was selected for it, on the 20<sup>th</sup> of March, 1635, at the New Year's feast celebrating his eighth year of ascension, Shah Jahan climbed three jewelled steps and sat for the first time on the Peacock Throne. It was precisely one century and four years later that Shah Jahan's descendant, Muhammad Shah, in an ultimate gesture of subjugation, personally handed over this icon of Mughal wealth and artistry to the Persian conqueror Nadir Shah. History's most famous imperial seat was unceremoniously reduced merely to its value in metal and gems and clubbed with other articles from the royal treasury.

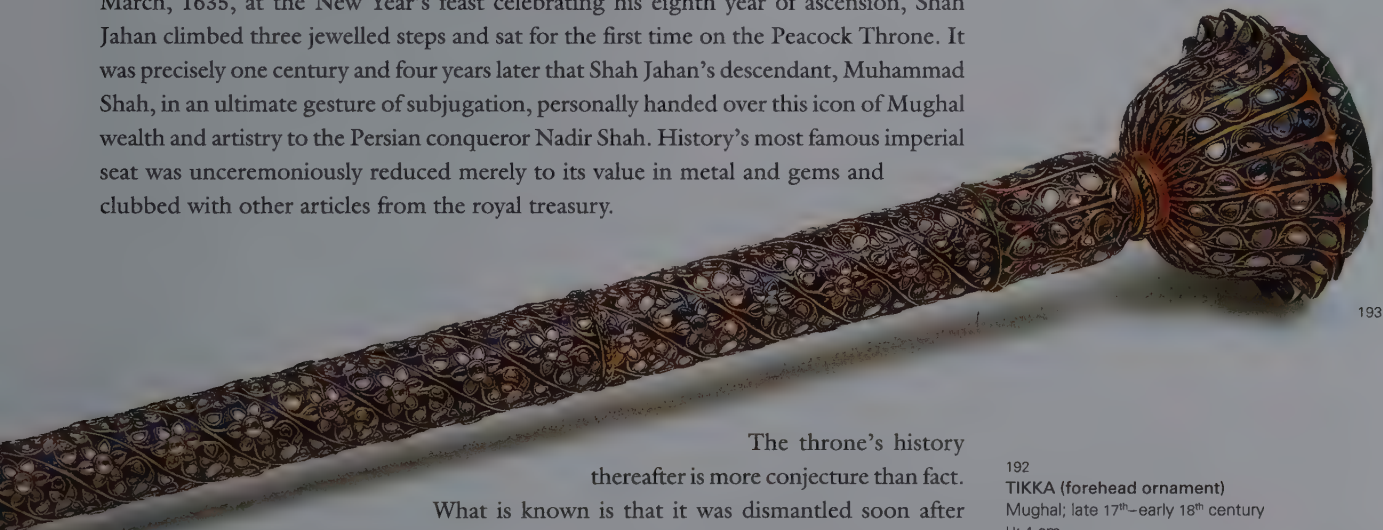
The throne's history thereafter is more conjecture than fact.

What is known is that it was dismantled soon after Nadir Shah's death, and pieces of this legendary seat were probably divided among marauding rebels who barely understood its material value, were indifferent to its aesthetic content, and totally unconcerned with its historic worth. And yet, the legend remains; perhaps in prophetic fulfillment of Bebadal Khan's verse recited the first time the Emperor ascended his bejewelled seat:

"That which was your throne majestic as heaven  
was the ornament of your justice over the world,

Thou wilt last as long as God exists,  
For substance is ever accompanied by its Shadow."<sup>50</sup>

*"How auspicious is the  
Imperial throne,  
Which has been made ready  
by Divine help. On the day when  
Heaven was completing it,  
It first melted the gold of the Sun.  
By the order of the Supervisor,  
the enamel of heaven  
Was altogether exhausted in  
enamelling it.  
What is the use of gold or of jewels  
but to decorate this throne,  
It was the reason for existence of  
ocean and mine.  
On account of its ruby which is  
beyond the limitation of value,  
The heart of the red-lipped beloved  
one is uneasy.  
Crown with jewel on its head, and  
ring, with jewel in its eye!  
Waited for long (in the hope that  
they) might be set in its leg.  
The World has become so short of gold  
on account of its use (in the throne)  
That the purse of the earth was empty  
of treasure.  
If the sky should succeed in reaching  
its foot,  
It would offer to it the Sun and the  
Moon as a gift when first seeing its  
face. (As presents given to the bride  
on unveiling her face)..."<sup>[xi]</sup>*



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192  
TIKKA (forehead ornament)  
Mughal; late 17<sup>th</sup>–early 18<sup>th</sup> century  
H: 4 cm  
Christies Images

*A jewel in the form of a bird with a pearl for its body, its outstretched wings set with calibre-cut rubies and table-cut diamonds in gold.*

193  
CHAMAR (whiskholder)  
North India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Courtesy Victoria and Albert Museum,  
London (IM 255-1927)

*This majestic whiskholder with an elephant-head finial is encrusted with diamonds, kundan-set in gold, on a predominantly blue enamel ground.*



FEMININE ORNAMENT

## The Impulse to Adorn

*“O Woman, you are not merely the  
handiwork of God, but also of men;  
these are ever endowing you with beauty from their hearts.*

*Poets are weaving for you a web  
with threads of golden imagery;  
painters are giving your form ever new immortality.*

*The sea gives its pearls, the mines their gold,  
the summer gardens their flowers to deck you,  
to cover you, to make you more precious.*

*The desire of men’s hearts has shed its glory over your youth.*

*You are one-half woman and one-half dream.”<sup>1</sup>*



The Indian woman is rarely seen without jewellery, even if it is just a pair of *lac* bangles, in keeping with the “iconography of physical appeal.”<sup>2</sup> Inextricably knit up with the wearer, perceived almost as an extension of her, ornaments indicated much more than the obvious messages of marital status, rank and wealth. To the perceptive, they spoke of her moods, her desires, and offered glimpses of her intimate self.

The idiom of ornament was used extensively and evocatively in Indian literature and the visual arts. In Asvaghosa’s *Buddhacharita*, the excitement of women eager to snatch a glimpse of Prince Siddhartha is echoed by their ornaments:

“...the noise of their girdles, and the jingling of their anklets  
as they rushed to the windows resounded on the staircases  
and roofs of mansions frightening the flocks of birds  
which lived in the house...

Having reached there, they were restlessly swaying about  
in the windows crowded together in the mutual press,  
with their earrings polished by the continual collision  
and their ornaments all jingling.”<sup>3</sup>

The absence of ornaments is no less telling. Hearing of Siddhartha’s renunciation, the same women choose to express their dejection by remaining unadorned:

“Their feet were unstained by red and undecked by anklets;  
their faces without earrings with the ears left to their native simplicity.

The loins of these ladies were no more circled by a girdle  
nor their bosoms were any more adorned with the pearls  
of the necklaces as if they had been robbed.”<sup>4</sup>

The langorous heroine decking herself with ornaments in anticipation of her lover’s arrival has been a favourite theme with artists and writers of the *shringara* tradition.

Radha’s friends in the well-known love poem *Padavali* urge her to go to Krishna, letting her jewels echo her inner longings:

“Now throw away your shyness,  
let your girdle tinkle merrily and go ahead  
to meet your Lord...

...March, and let the jingle of your bangles  
proclaim your approach to your Lord.”<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, as the *vipralabdha nayika*, the rejected heroine, Radha discards her jewels in a mixture of anger and despair:

“Shatter my bangles of shell,  
take of my fine array,  
And break my necklace of fine pearls,  
If my dear will forsake me,  
what is the use of jewels?  
Cast them all in the waves  
of the Jamuna.”<sup>6</sup>

194 (page 138)

PRINCESS VICTORIA GOURAMMA  
OF COORG (1819–1901)Line-engraving by R. Graves after F. Winterhalter  
London; c.1835

By permission of the British Library

195 (page 139)

.KARNAPHUL JHUMKA (ear ornaments)  
Rajasthan; late 19<sup>th</sup> century

Private collection

A variant of the ancient kundala, these flower form  
gold earrings, set with diamonds and pearls,  
are embellished with miniature versions  
suspended from the roundel, which when worn,  
dangle at the cheek.

“The diamond is to the pearl as the sun  
is to the moon, and we might well call one the  
‘king-gem’ and the other the ‘queen-gem.’  
The diamond, like a knight of old, – brilliant  
and resistant, is the emblem of fearlessness and  
invincibility; the pearl, like a lady of old, –  
pure and fair to look upon, is the emblem of  
modesty and purity. Therefore, it does not seem  
unfitting that the diamond should be presented  
as a token to the pearl, and that pearls should go  
with the diamond.”<sup>11</sup>

196

A LADY BEING OFFERED WINE  
BY A CONFIDANTEDeccan, from a Golconda workshop; 17<sup>th</sup> century  
Courtesy of the Trustees of the Prince of Wales  
Museum of Western India, Bombay (5240)(Not to be reproduced without prior permission  
of the Trustees.)

197a &amp; 197b

ARIYA (rigid neck collar – front and reverse)  
Rajasthan, Bikaner; 19<sup>th</sup> century

Private collection

The ariya, literally meaning ‘wealthy’, is worn high  
around the neck. The gold, diamond and blue  
enamel curved form is fringed with graded gem-  
set triangles and pearls that form a spreading  
network of dangles.

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*The women in the Great City of Bisnagna (Vijayanagar):*  
 "...wear white garments of very thin cotton, or silk of bright colours, five yards long: one part of which is girt round them below, and the other part they throw over one shoulder and across their breasts in such a way that one arm and shoulder remains uncovered, as with a scarf (reguacho). They wear leather shoes well embroidered in silk; their heads are uncovered and the hair is tightly gathered into a becoming knot on the top of the head, and in their hair they put many scented flowers. In the side of one of the nostrils they make a small hole, through which they put a fine gold wire with a pearl, sapphire or ruby pendant. They have their ears bored as well, and in them they wear earrings set with many jewels; on their necks they wear necklaces of gold and jewels and very fine coral beads, and bracelets of gold and precious stones and many good coral beads are fitted to their arms."<sup>[ii]</sup>



197a



197b



198

198  
MANG TIKKA (forehead ornament)  
North India; late 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*Diamonds and pearls set in gold; such jewels were worn along the parting of the hair and hung over the forehead.*



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199  
TALI (marriage necklace)  
Kerala; c.1850  
L: 30 cm  
Courtesy Victoria and Albert Museum,  
London (03061 IS)

*Variations of the gold tali are innumerable across south India, reflecting regional design influences as well as religious and sectarian affiliations. The gopuram (temple spire) forms surmounting each hollow boss are typical of ornaments from Kerala.*

200

200  
NATH (nose ornament)  
South India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

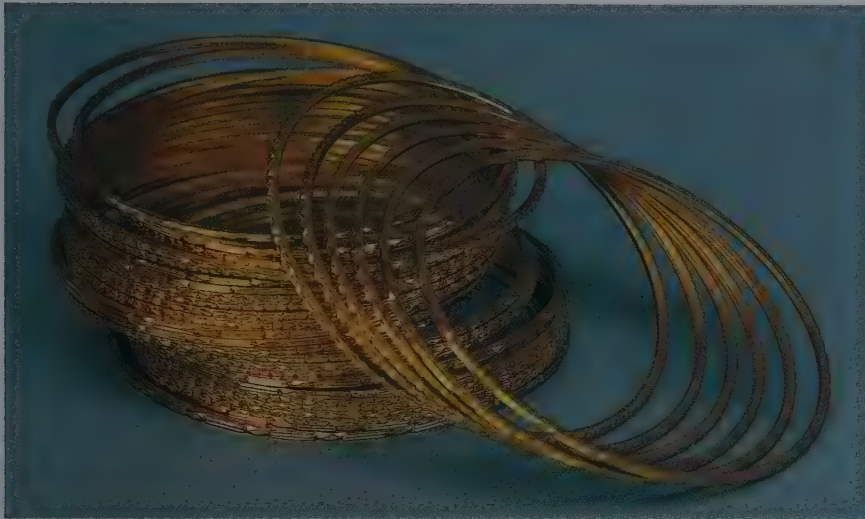
*Uncut diamonds, rubies and emeralds, the reverse chased in sheet gold.*



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The unusual emphasis on feminine adornment in Indian society went beyond its allure. Ornaments functioned as auspicious symbols of marital status. To be devoid of ornaments signalled widowhood or formal renunciation of worldly life. "A wife gaily adorned her whole house is embellished; but if she be destitute of ornament, all will be deprived of decoration,"<sup>77</sup> says Manu the lawgiver. While the

prescribed set of ornaments associated with marriage varies in different parts of India and among different communities, the *tikka*, *nath*, *tiru-mangalyam* or *mangalasutra*, *kankana*, and *bichhua* were all considered to be representative of marital felicity, *saubhaghya*. Traditionally, every bride was given a set of jewels. The basic prerequisite were a pair of earrings, a chain, a necklace, and bangles. Rich or poor, this minimum did not vary. Ornaments beyond the prescribed set tended to be larger, more handsome and distinct, depending on the affluence of the family.



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According to the *Atharvaveda*, concluding the marriage ceremonies, the bride's father gives her away with the utterance: "I give away this girl adorned with gold ornaments to you..."<sup>8</sup> Such social and cultural norms associated with jewellery were rooted in considerations of a purely pragmatic nature. According to the *Manusmriti*,



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the oldest Hindu treatise on social law, a woman's jewels are her *stridhan*, the only property legally and irrevocably hers. The law book therefore enjoined the obligatory gift of certain jewels as bridal dowry.

As their only insurance in a male-oriented, unsupportive social structure, and against the vicissitudes of time and old age, a woman tended to hold on to as much as possible and in earlier times safeguard it on her person. Women weighed down with ornaments are still not an uncommon sight in rural India, nor is the scene of a woman negotiating the price of a piece of jewellery with the local moneylender to tide over difficult times.

The role of jewellery as a financial instrument among many communities is deeply entrenched in a centuries-old pattern of family ties and relationships. Marriage between first cousins was encouraged amongst the Chettiars of south India to ensure the retention of wealth within the family. As symbols of wealth and status, the use of ornaments in India through the ages was unparalleled.

Niccolao Manucci, the Italian physician at Aurangzeb's court, recounts his difficulties when trying to feel the pulse of ornament-laden women in the Mughal *zenana*: "At their wrists are very rich bracelets, or bands of pearls, which usually go round nine or twelve times. In this way they often have the place for feeling the pulse so covered up that I found it difficult to put my hand upon it... In addition they are girdled with a sort of waist belt of gold two fingers wide, covered all over with great stones. At the ends of the strings which tie up their drawers there are bunches of pearls made up of fifteen strings five fingers in length. Round the bottom of their legs are valuable metal rings or strings of costly pearls."<sup>9</sup>

Interestingly, almost two millennia earlier, Bharata's *Natyashastra*, a treatise on the dramatic arts written circa 500 B.C., listed an array of ornaments for women

201  
KANKANA (bangles)  
South India; 20<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

A set of thirty-two hand-wrought gold bangles; wearing at least one is mandatory for a married woman.

202  
BICHHUA (toe rings)  
Gujarat; 18<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

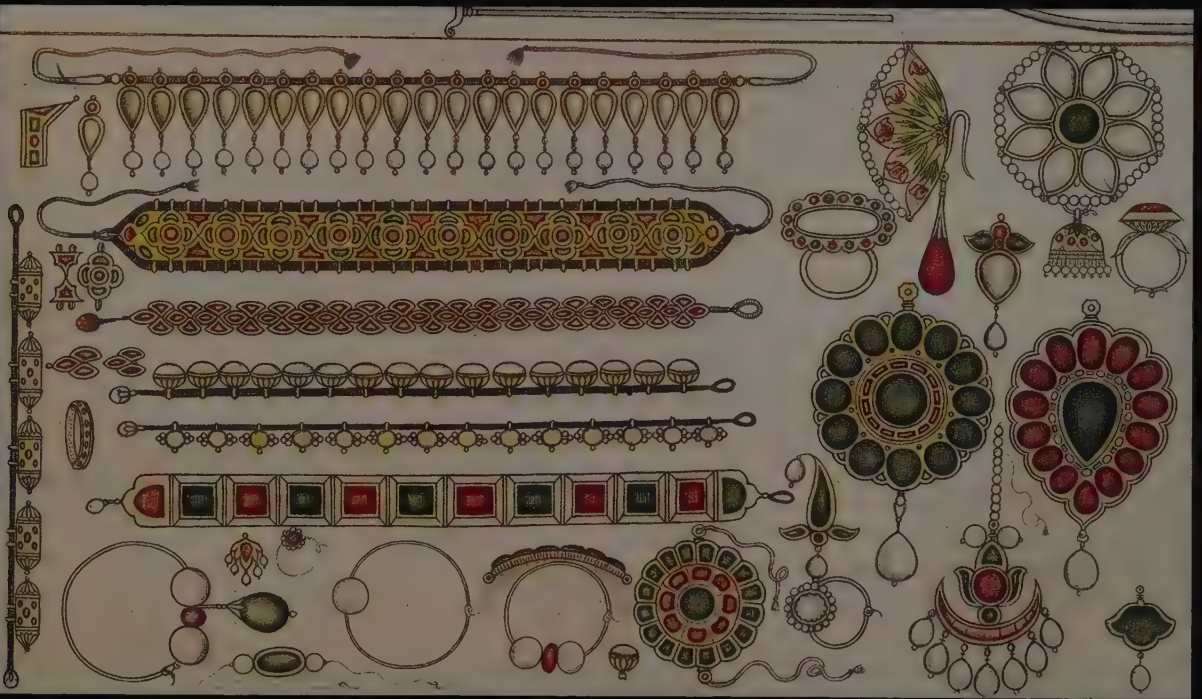
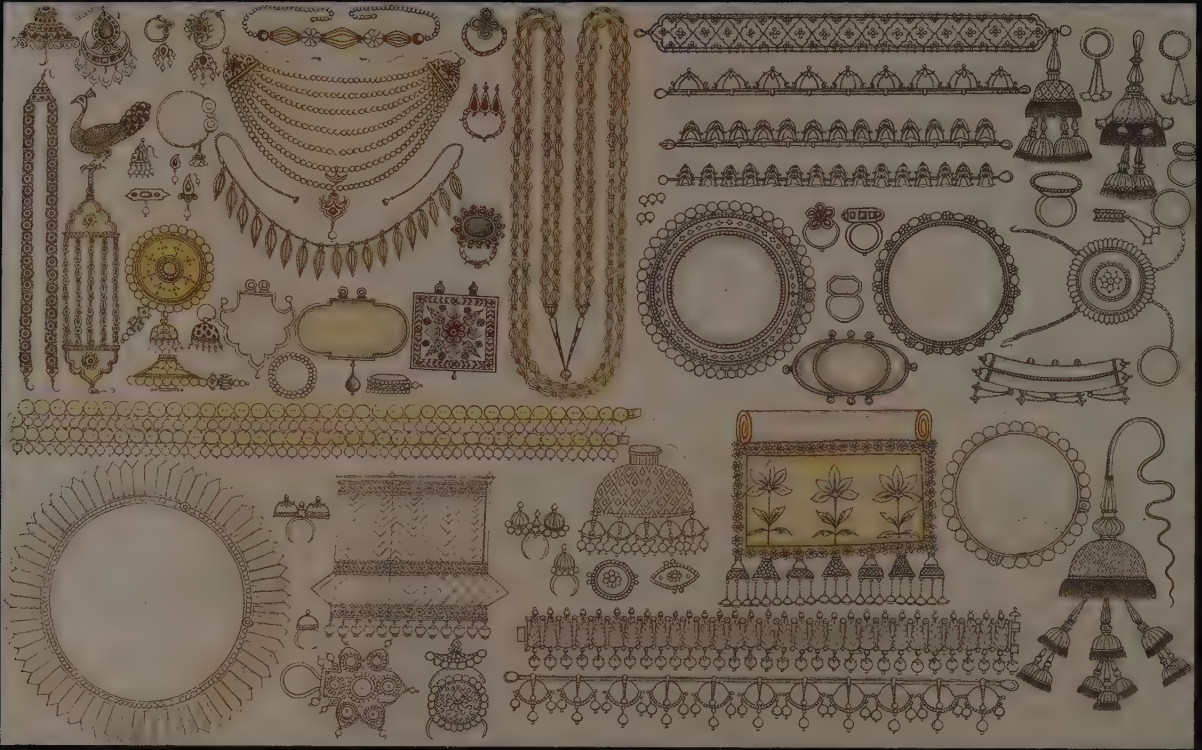
Set with rubies and emeralds in gold; the flat bottom fashioned from silver; it was the prerogative of those of royal blood to wear gold on their feet.

203  
DETAIL OF PLATE 263

In this detail of a wall painting the amazing variety of arm ornaments is evident.

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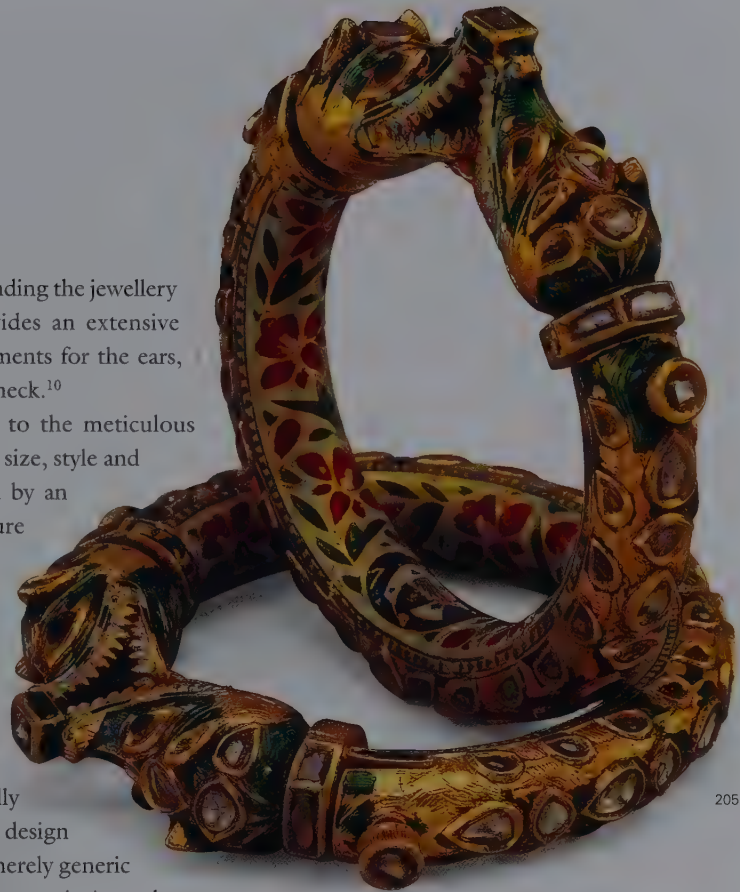


remarkably similar to Manucci's description. Recommending the jewellery appropriate to women's costumes, the author provides an extensive categorisation of jewellery including varieties of ornaments for the ears, forehead, forearm, upper arm, waist, feet, fingers and neck.<sup>10</sup>

In no other culture do we find a parallel to the meticulous classification of gems and jewellery according to shape, size, style and design as enumerated in ancient India. Accompanied by an extensive lexicon of specific terms, this unique feature indicates the importance of jewellery in Indian tradition – an importance going far beyond bodily adornment. Over the centuries much of the terminology changed, but essential types, their usage and designs reveal a remarkable continuity in conventions established early in Indian history.

In the absence of extant specimens, a thorough study of the earlier terminology is especially informative about design styles, usage and sources of design inspiration. Traditional Indian jewellery did not go by merely generic terms. A necklace, for example, was not just a *har*. The semantic appendage to the generic term was a cryptic description of it. The earlier use of the term *ekavali*, for instance, immediately denoted a single strand of pearls. With a gem in the centre it became a *yasti*. Interspersed with gold and gems the necklace was given a special name, *ratnavali*. The lingua franca of Indian jewellery is based on etymological derivations of the design, material or purpose of the ornament and is understood by craftsmen and clients. Many of the classical terms are now obsolete, and have been replaced by more colloquial terminology.

Some of the earlier types of adornment, such as girdles and ornaments for the hair like the *chudamani* (206), are also now part of jewellery history. But prevailing styles in earrings, necklaces, bangles and bracelets echo an ancient lineage in their shapes, motifs, and even the techniques of embellishment. The jewels enclosing the wrists of aristocratic ladies depicted in Shunga period terracottas (64, 66) are precursors of the *gajredar bangris* (207) and *pahunchis* (208) of later date. Stylistic continuity is also visible in necklaces and earrings. The *phalakahar*, described in Kautiliya's *Arthashastra* as a multiple strand necklace of gold beads with five



205

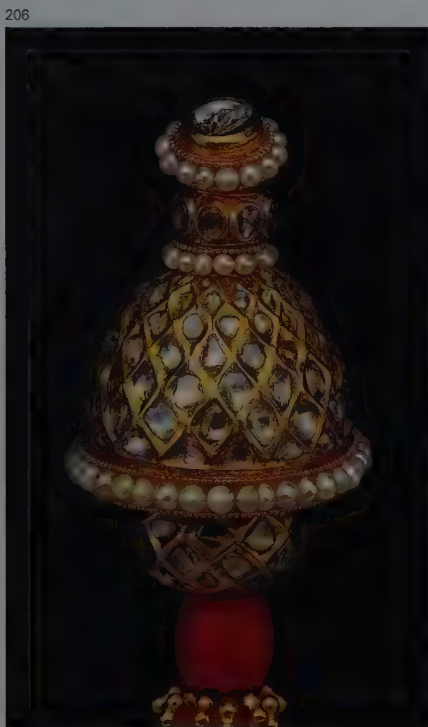
204 (facing page)  
THE GENTIL ALBUM  
Faizabad, Oudh; 1774  
Watercolour  
37 x 53.5 cm  
Courtesy Victoria and Albert Museum,  
London (IS 25-1980 f.33 and 48)

In 1774, Shuja 'ud Daula, the Nawab of Faizabad, commissioned Jean Baptiste Gentil, a French adventurer and traveller, to compile an album of paintings that illustrate prevailing jewellery designs.

205  
KADA (bangles)  
North India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection  
Enamelled gem-set gold bangles with  
crocodile-head (makara) terminals.

206  
CHUDAMANI (head ornament)  
North India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

The chudamani was once a popular hair ornament worn towards the back of the head, often hidden by the veil. This piece is set with graded table-cut diamonds in gold.



206



207

**GAJREDAR BANGRI (bangles)**  
Rajasthan, Bikaner; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Outer diam: 8.2 cms  
Private collection

*Clusters of seed pearls simulate bunched jasmine buds. The monochromatic effect of the pearl mesh and rosette of diamonds set in gold, is a perfect foil for the polychrome enamelling on the borders and inner surface.*

or seven gemmed spacers<sup>11</sup> is still popular with Indian women, in almost the same composition as depicted on the sculpted figures at Bharhut and Sanchi as well as in the paintings of Ajanta.

Unique jewellery forms are an intrinsic aspect of Indian culture. On the top of her head, the woman wore elaborate jewels that covered the parting of her hair, and hung down over her forehead; her long sinuous plait was encased in sheets of gold, engraved and worked in repousse, set with precious stones; her ears were rarely left bare, since to do so was considered most inauspicious. A single necklace rarely sufficed; from collars clasped high around the throat, magnificent gems, and chains cascaded down to her waist in a rich variety of designs. Slender wrists were clasped with gold, elegant peacocks and curving *makaras* adorned her arms; gold sheets worked in repousse and gem set with dancing swans and gay parrots, and frowning *kirtimukha* clasps hugged her waist. From the crown of the head to the tips of the toes, jewellery whose inspiration lay in prototypes from nature, was conceived and crafted to decorate, enhance and protect.

Underlying this unbroken aesthetic tradition is the fundamental continuity in the attitudes of the feminine wearer. Her love for the beautiful and overriding concern for security perpetuated a unique jewellery tradition reflected in the many forms and styles that evolved.

**PAHUNCHI (bracelets)**  
North India; late 19<sup>th</sup> century  
L: 15 cms  
Private collection

*Each gold floral unit is set with uncut diamonds; the reverse is polychrome enamelled.*

**DAUNI (head ornament)**  
North India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*Small gold units set with white sapphires are strung together to form this elaborate jewel.*

**ORNAMENTS**

By permission of the British Library  
*A selection of ornaments illustrated in a late 19<sup>th</sup> century drawing.*

**JADAI-HU (hair ornament)**  
South India, Mangalore; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
L: 48 cms  
Private collection

*A classical gold ornament for the head and braid; the ensemble is composed of sun, moon, flower, fish and demon forms, all worked in repousse.*

208

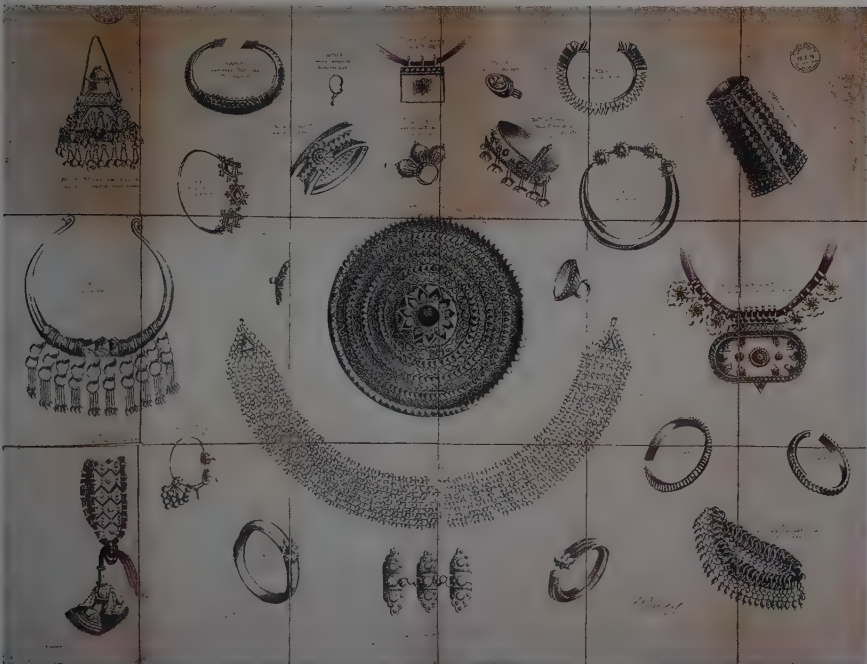




209



210



211





## GARLANDS OF FELICITY

To the women of India, jewellery has always been auspicious. There is no more poignant picture than that of an Indian woman divesting herself of all her jewels on the death of her husband. In a moving ceremony, her bangles are broken and the marriage tokens stripped from around her neck before the dead body of her husband is taken away. Ornaments once loved for their beauty, acquired for their value, used as protectors against evil and as symbols of health, wealth and happiness, are now shunned. On the other hand, a woman predeceasing her husband is considered very fortunate. Her body is decked in bridal finery, adorned with all her ornaments, and she is revered as an icon of the perfect wife.

The antiquity of the convention of tying a *tiru-mangalyam* or a *mangalasutra*, the auspicious emblem or cord, on the wedding day is indeterminable. There is no mention of marriage tokens in the list of ceremonies prescribed in the *Grihya Sutras* (texts containing rules prescribing the rites for a householder). The custom appears to have become popular only after the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D.<sup>12</sup> Prior to this, *kankana-bandhana*, the tying of a yellow protective cord around the wrist of bride and groom, signalled the commitment to marriage. Perhaps the use of such emblems is more to do with convention than religion. Both men and women in ancient India wore the *yagnopavita*, sacred thread, as a mark of their initiation into studentship. When the custom went out of practice for women, the sacred thread was adapted to the *tiru-mangalyam* to sanctify a woman's married status and accord her social recognition. The *yagnopavita* cord is composed of

214



213

212 (facing page)

KALI-TIRU (marriage necklace)

South India, Chettinad; 18<sup>th</sup> century

Private collection

In its traditional form, the two-row gold marriage necklace of the Natukottai Chettiars is strung with pendants, each 10 to 15 cms long, tubular beads and other elements.

213

TALI (marriage necklace)

South India, Madurai; 19<sup>th</sup> century

Courtesy Victoria and Albert Museum, London (1869-1883 IS)

A necklace with pendants of auspicious fruit and vegetable forms and cylindrical cases, intended to house sacred mantras, all fashioned from sheet gold. A derivation of the ancient ashtamangala-mala, the necklace with eight auspicious symbols was intended to ward off evil.

214

TALI (marriage necklace elements)

Tamil Nadu; early 19<sup>th</sup> century

Private collection

This necklace is today only a quarter of the length of the original. Each solid gold bead is minutely carved in three-dimensional relief, with images of gods, birds and mythical creatures.



215

215  
PERIYA TALI (marriage necklace)  
Tamil Nadu; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

The periya or big tali in gold, studded with cabuchon rubies, was made for the wife on her husband's auspicious sixtieth birthday.

216  
TALI (marriage necklace)  
Tamil Nadu; 20<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

The Vaishnava affiliation of the wearer of this gold tali is evident in the presence of the vertical Vaishnava caste mark superimposed in diamonds on the tali; it is further reiterated by the conch and wheel symbols on either side of the seated image of Goddess Lakshmi.

217  
TALI (marriage necklace)  
South India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum,  
Smithsonian Institution/Art Resource, New York  
(1953-178-100)

An ornament of gold flowers set with rubies with a crescent moon pendant and an elaborate clasp.

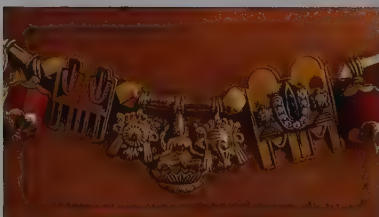
218  
TINMANIYA (necklace of three gems)  
Rajasthan; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
H: 10 cm L: 6.5 cm  
Private collection

White sapphires (pukhraj), rubies and emeralds set in gold, the reverse enamelled.

219  
PU-TALI (floral necklace)  
Kerala; late 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

A very light sheet gold necklace of identical stamped units with floral motifs.

216



three threads, each of nine strands of well-twisted yellow cotton. The three cords were tied together by a knot called *brahmagranthi*, symbolizing Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. In south India, the *tiru-mangalyam* cord is similarly made, and tied with three knots around the neck of the bride, invoking the blessings of the Trinity. Forms derived from nature were suspended on these cords, functioning as symbols of the alliance between man and woman.

To these were added other emblems which were associated with amuletic, curative, protective and procreative properties.

In Tamil Nadu, the *tiru-mangalyam* is also known simply as *tali*. The term *tali* refers to a species of palm tree, or a grove of palms. Though literary evidence is neither consistent nor conclusive on the origin of the term, even today among the

Gonds, Savaras, and Munda tribes, the bridegroom ties a string with a palm leaf around the bride's neck.<sup>13</sup> In early Sangam literature, any ornament tied around the neck whose purpose was not purely decorative was referred to as a *tali*. There are references to various kinds of *tali* worn by men, women and children. A necklace strung with the emblems of Vishnu was known as the *aimpadai-tali*. Variations such as *amai-tali* (bearing the emblem of a tortoise), *tali-kolundu* (with a bunch of flower buds), *variven-tali* (with ribbed cowry shells), *sin-mani-tali* (made of small beads) and *manicka-tali* (jewelled) are all mentioned in ancient literature.<sup>14</sup> Tiger's claws or tiger's teeth worn as emblems of courage and as trophies of victory were referred to as *pulippal-tali*. It is from the basic 'M' form of two tiger's claws placed adjacent to each other, their tips curving out, that the modern stylized forms of the *tali* tokens perhaps derive their shape. Images and symbols corresponding to caste, community and religious sect are rendered on the front or reverse of this basic form.

The *tali* of the Brahmins is the simplest; a Shaivite Brahmin *tali*

217



*In the Raghuvamsa, Kalidasa describes the pregnant queen - "Unable to carry on her person all her ornaments on account of the feebleness of her limbs, she put off most of them; and her countenance became as pale as the Lodra flower; consequently she resembled the night, during the small hours of the morning, with only a few lingering stars, and with the lovely crescent of the moon grown pale upon the approach of the day."* <sup>[iii]</sup>



218



219



220

220  
NAGAPADA TALI (cobra-head necklace)  
Kerala; late 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

Green glass simulates emeralds in this gold necklace worn by Nair women in Kerala.

221  
TALI (marriage necklace)  
Kerala; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection, USA

Carved cylindrical gold tubes, each a receptacle for a mantra, form the traditional marriage necklace of Nair women. The gopuram (temple spire) form is typical of Kerala jewellery. The marriage emblem is the gem-studded leaf form in the centre.

222 (facing page)  
NAGAPADA TALI (cobra-head necklace)  
Kerala; 18<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

Stylized cobra heads set with uncut diamonds and rubies form this rare gold necklace of royal provenance. A gopuram (temple spire) form surmounts each cobra head.

bears representations of the *lingam* or the three horizontal lines of the caste mark; Vaishnava Brahmin tokens have three vertical lines of the Vaishnava caste mark or the conch and wheel symbols of Vishnu together with non-denominational emblems like the *tulsi* or basil plant, the sun and moon or the *kalpavriksha*, the wish-fulfilling tree. The more elaborate ones are gem-set and decorated with design details beyond those prescribed. But the *tali* forms of the non-

Brahmins are complex stylized emblems and veritable works of art. Generally known as *Pillayar tali* and categorized as *periya tali* (215) or big *tali* and *chinna tali* or small *tali*, the stylized form of Lord Ganesha (*Pillayar*) is superimposed on to the basic 'M' shape together with elements like the *bottu*, a representation of the female breast, symbolising motherhood. The Kongu Velalars, a community hailing from Kongu Nadu – the regions of Coimbatore, Salem and Tiruchchirappalli – wear a *tali* that bears a representation of an animal deity superimposed on to the basic form. Much of the original meaning of these forms is now lost, and tales are all that are left to create a hypothesis.

Of the many different forms of marriage necklaces and tokens, none is more splendid than the *kali-tiru* (auspicious neck ornament) of the Nattukottai Chettiars of Chettinad in Tamil Nadu (212). The ornament is unique to this merchant community, who are believed to have originally come from the flourishing ancient sea port of Puhar (Kaveripattinam). Their patron deity is Lord Shiva, and their most important shrine the Nataraja temple at Chidambaram in south India. The necklace is a magnificent ornament, made up of two rows of horizontal beads, interspersed with elaborate pendant pieces and an ornate *tali* pendant in the centre. The traditional 'M' shaped centrepiece of the necklace features a miniature replica of the temple at Chidambaram worked in repousse.

221









223 (facing page)  
**NECKLACE**  
 North India; early 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection

*A kundan necklace set with table and rose-cut diamonds; the reverse is polychrome enamelled. The floral motifs and the enamelling epitomize the Mughal aesthetic tradition. Magnificent ornaments such as these were made under commission for wealthy patrons.*

224  
**RANI JINDAN SINGH**  
 by George Richmond, R.A. (1809–1896)  
 45 x 61.3 cm  
 Christies Images

*The bejewelled Rani Jindan Singh, mother of Duleep Singh, was the power behind the throne of Punjab until it was annexed by the British in 1849.*

225  
**NECKLACE**  
 North India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection

*Kundan set diamond units embellished with pearls, in flower and peacock motifs, are strung to form this necklace.*

224

225





226

226  
HASLI (rigid necklace)  
North India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

A variation of the hasli, this one set with the nine auspicious gems (navaratna) in gold.

227  
KANTHLA (necklace)  
Rajasthan; late 19<sup>th</sup> century  
centre pendant: H: 4.5 cm, L: 24 cm  
National Museum, New Delhi (07.204)

227



within this temple, Shiva and his consort Parvati are depicted seated on their vehicle, the bull. The claw-like pieces ranged on either side are embellished with artistic details typical of the architecture of Chettinad. They are believed to be stylized simulations of crab claws and shell forms, derived from the shells that the Chettians wore as jewellery when they were still a simple sea-faring coastal community. The *kali-tiru* is an emblem of their religion, a proclamation of their early simple origins, an example of fine craftsmanship, and in its sheer size and weight, a statement of the wealth and prosperity of the Chettians. Individual examples vary in size and weight and are worn only on the wedding day and again on the auspicious occasion

of the 60<sup>th</sup> birthday of the husband. For everyday use, a smaller variation is used (420).

The *kali-tiru* has now become a fashion statement. Taken out of its original context, it is casually worn by women all over India as just an elaborate necklace. Nevertheless, throughout south India, the sanctity of the *tiru-mangalyam* remains unaltered. The custom of wearing a *tali* has permeated other religious denominations as well. Among the Syrian Christians of Kerala, for example, the wedding ring has been replaced by a *tali* in the form of a cross; converted Christians superimpose the cross on the traditional *tali* form.





228a

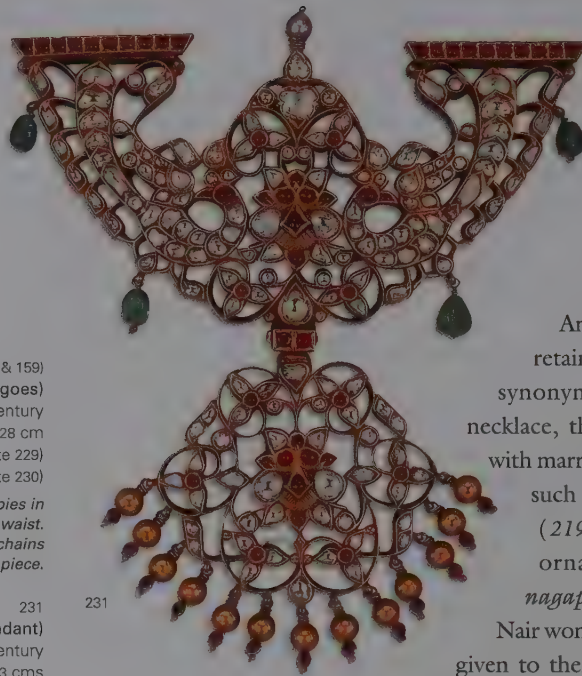
228a & 228b  
HASLI (rigid necklace – front and reverse)  
Rajasthan; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection  
*Gold enamelled in opaque blue set with diamonds; the reverse is in polychrome enamel.*



228b







229 & 230 (pages 158 & 159)

MANGA MALAI (necklace of mangoes)

Tamil Nadu; 19<sup>th</sup> century

L: 28 cm

Jugal Kishore Kadel Collection, Madras (plate 229)

Private collection (plate 230)

Gold encrusted with Burmese cabuchon rubies in mango-shaped units extend down to the waist. The mangoes are held in sequence by flat chains that pass through loops behind each piece.

231

PADAKKAM (pendant)

South India; 19<sup>th</sup> century

H: 15 cms W: 13 cms

Private collection

232

CHAMPAKALI (necklace)

North India; 19<sup>th</sup> century

Private collection

Pendants shaped like champa flower buds.

233a & 233b

GULUBAND (necklace – front and reverse)

North India; 19<sup>th</sup> century

Private collection

Among the Nairs of Kerala, the term *tali* retains its ancient connotation and is used synonymously with ‘*mala*’, referring to a necklace, there being no necessary connection with marriage. Varieties include neck ornaments such as *arumpumani*, *kumitali* and *pu-tali* (219). The oldest and most famous ornament of the Nair women is the *nagapada tali* or the cobra hood necklace. Nair women believe that the *nagapada tali* was given to them by the gods to instil in them the virtues of patience and calmness. The diamond

*nagapada tali* (222) is of royal origin since diamonds were the preserve of the aristocracy. Each cobra hood form is surmounted by a miniature replica of a temple *gopuram* typical in Kerala jewellery. The commonly used *nagapada tali* is usually composed of pieces of green glass (220) simulating emeralds, cut in the shape of snake hoods, and embellished with rubies or diamonds. Nowhere in India is the snake adapted into jewellery forms as much as in Kerala. The extensive forest cover in the area and the consequent presence of snakes probably resulted in their veneration. Since a snake never attacks unless provoked,

232





233a

233b





234

234  
GAJJE ADDIGAI (necklace)  
South India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

The bell-like forms edging this gold ornament set with rubies are akin to the anklet-bells worn by elephants (gajje). The necklace is also referred to as shilangu (anklet) addigai.

235  
KANTASARAM (necklace)  
Kerala; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
L: 22 cms  
Jugal Kishore Kadel Collection, Madras  
Gold set with cabuchon rubies in crescent moon units, strung on either side of a diamond and ruby pendant.

236  
A LADY  
By Raja Ravi Varma  
Oil on canvas  
48.5 x 32.5 cm  
Courtesy Sotheby's  
A traditionally dressed and ornamented lady from Kerala.

237  
NECKLACE OF COINS  
Andhra Pradesh; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection  
A typical Muslim ornament in the area, each gold coin is stamped with a male face.

238  
MOHAPPU SANGILI (necklace)  
Tamil Nadu; early 20<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection  
A popular ornament in South India, usually of three to five strands of gold chains, this piece has ruby and emerald beads interspersed with pearls. The gold gem-set centre-piece (mohappu) is worn just below the right collar bone, so that it is clearly visible over the edge of the sari.

it is endowed with qualities of serenity and of contentment, together with good luck, prosperity, fertility, progeny and good harvest.

The variety and range of neck ornaments among the various regions of India is vast. Often hidden within the voluminous folds of the sari, tiny elements peek out, providing a tantalizing glimpse of

the whole. Among the many kinds of ornaments that were popular in the Chola period and are mentioned in temple inscriptions, the *karai* or *tiruk-karai*, a golden neck collar, the *ekavali*, a single strand of pearls, corals and gemstones; the *kantha-tudar*, a necklace of chains with elaborate clasps at the end; the *kantha-nan*, a jewelled necklace set with rubies, emeralds, sapphires and diamonds, the simple golden chain or *kanthika* occur with repeated frequency. None of these terms survive, and forms have undergone evolutionary changes.

Forms from nature constitute the principal elements of design – flowers, buds, fruits and leaves. The *manga malai* (229, 230), literally a necklace of mangoes, is uniquely south Indian and its antiquity can be traced to the Chola period or even earlier. In Hindu mythology, the mango is a wish-fulfilling tree and a symbol of love. Individual mango-shaped pendants set with gems, usually cabuchon rubies, with flowerhead intersections and elaborate fan-shaped pendants (*padakkams*) are strung together to form the fabulous *manga malai*. In its most traditional form, the necklace extends down to the waist, but most surviving examples are less than half the original length, having been broken up for equitable distribution of wealth among daughters and sons.

The *kasu malai*, *kanchanamala*, or *rupaiya bar*, a garland of coins, is the most striking example of ornaments serving as instruments of savings (242, 243a, 243b).



235



236



237



238

239

HASLI (rigid necklace)  
North India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*Florets of rose-cut diamonds on an opaque blue enamel ground terminating in bunches of seed pearls create a soft, lace-like effect in this jewel perhaps meant for a young girl. Ornaments for children were no less splendid than those made for men, women and the gods.*

240

HASLI (rigid necklace)  
North India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*This version of the hasli is set in gold with rubies and emeralds and fringed with a row of inverted crescent moon units.*

241 (facing page)

NECKLACE

Western India; late 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*The claw-like silver setting (pachchikam) encases uncut semi-precious stones in a western design.*



239

240









242  
KASU MALAI (necklace of coins)  
South India; late 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*A variation of the kasu malai, this example is made with gold coins specially stamped with images of the gods Ram, Sita and Hanuman on one side and the inscription 'Sri Ram, jaya Ram, jaya jaya Ram' on the reverse.*

243a & 243b  
NISKA (necklace of coins – front and reverse)  
North India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*As statements of wealth, necklaces of coins trace their antiquity to the Mahabharata. While gold coins are set into one side of this necklace, the reverse comprises kundan-set units of rubies and emeralds encircled with pearls.*

242

The antiquity of the jewel can be traced to the *Rig Veda*, where the term *niska* might be the earliest reference to this type of ornament. *Niska* probably refers to some form of monetary exchange and is used in connection with a garland of coins made of both gold and silver. The *Mahabharata* too mentions it as “an ornament for both men and women; a round piece of gold, tied at the neck in a string or chain, at times several such pieces strung into a necklet.”<sup>15</sup>

From its description, the *niska* (243a, 243b) was evidently the forerunner of the popular *kasu malai* or *rupaiya har* worn even today all over India. The ornament probably became popular during the period of Roman trade, when Roman gold coins were used to pay for gems. The coins that came from other European trading partners too were similarly employed. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it became very fashionable to string English guineas in this manner. At around this time, coins bearing images of the various Hindu gods and goddesses were specially struck from dies, to be worn in this fashion (242). The purity of the gold and the intrinsic value of the gold coin made this ornament a popular instrument of savings.

*“Once in the woods when  
Krisna did sport  
With Radha, seeking  
pleasures sweet,  
And shouts of joy did issue forth,  
As oft when lustful lovers meet,  
When she did take the active role,  
Her necklace studded with dark gems  
Did wildly shake thus to and fro,  
Says Keshava, as it were the sun  
Had taken Saturn on his lap  
And joyfully him he had swayed  
In swing of black silk – so did flash  
Those dark gems with each move she  
made.” [iv]*



243a



243b



244

244

## A VELLALAR WOMAN

Tamil Nadu, Madurai; contemporary

The abstract thandatti ear jewels are a favourite with women of this community.

245

SURYAKANTHI KATHOLA  
(sunflower earring)Kerala; 19<sup>th</sup> century

Outer diam: 16 cm

Courtesy Musee Barbier-Mueller, Geneva  
(2504-126 a & b)

These enormous gold solar symbols were worn suspended over the ears, and were intended to harness the powerful energies of the sun.

246

## DIJHAHARU (ear studs)

Kashmir; 19<sup>th</sup> century

Private collection

The gold and turquoise pendants of earrings worn by Kashmiri Pandit Brahmin women; the forms correspond to the mystical wegu figure traced on the ground at the birth of a child.

247

## BALE JHABBEDAR (ear ornaments)

North India; late 19<sup>th</sup> century

Private collection

Gold enamelled earrings set with diamonds; the crescent and fish-shaped pendants are fringed with pearls.

248

## KOPPU (ear studs)

Kerala; 19<sup>th</sup> century

Private collection, USA

Sheet gold stamped in relief with an image of goddess Lakshmi in the centre.

## SHAFTS OF THE SUN

Early sculptures demonstrate that ear ornaments were an important constituent of Indian female attire. Three basic shapes are seen: the discal, the amphora and the reel type.<sup>16</sup> From the ubiquitous simple flower heads worn like buttons on the ear lobes and the round spiked forms manifesting solar symbolism (245), to large and elaborate pendant forms (247), the range and variety of ear ornaments in India is unparalleled anywhere else in the world. In the rural areas particularly, an extraordinary range and variety of forms and designs are still seen. More sophisticated and complex styles developed over the centuries: the *karnaphul* (ear flower), the *pipal pathi* (pipal leaf), *bali* (circlet with a pearl), *champakali* (jasmine bud, worn on the shell of the ear) are only a few of the infinite number of forms in evidence even today in different regions of the country.

Until fairly recently, the ears of both male and female child were pierced. To the married woman, the ear ornament is auspicious; bare ear lobes signalled widowhood. Additionally a woman's wealth was conspicuously visible and the ear ornament became a statement of her status and power; elongated ear-lobes were considered a sign of beauty and wealth – the longer the lobe, the greater a woman's wealth. By appending ornaments to almost every part of the ear, the woman also ensured a continuous state of mental and physical well-being. Recent studies have identified the ear as a microcosm of the entire body – “the point of vision in acupuncture is situated in the centre of the lobe.”<sup>17</sup>

245



*“The Nairi and their Wives use for a braverie to make great holes in their Eares, and so big and wide, that it is incredible, holding this opinion, that the greater the holes bee, the more Noble they esteeme themselves. I had leave of one of them to measure the circumference of one of them with a threed, and within that circumference I put my arme up to the shoulder, clothed as it was, so that in effect they are monstrous great. Thus they doe make them when they be little, for then they open the eare, and hand a piece of gold or lead thereat, and within the opening, in the hole they put a certaine leaf that they have for that purpose, which maketh the hole so great.”<sup>[v]</sup>*



246

247

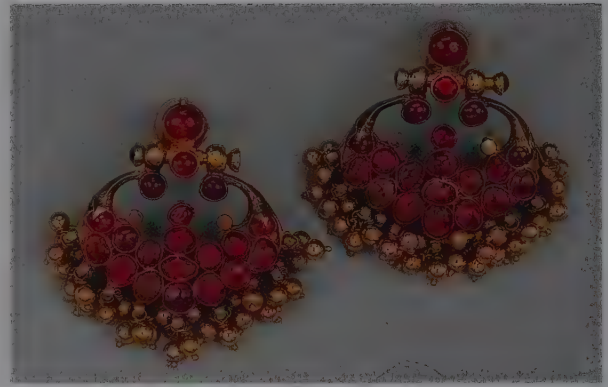


248





249  
**KARNAPHUL JHUMKA** (ear ornaments)  
 South India; late 19<sup>th</sup>–early 20<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection



250  
**VISIRIMURUGU** (fan-shaped earrings)  
 South India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection

Such earrings were worn in the scapha of the ear.

251  
**EARRINGS**  
 Deccan; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Los Angeles County Museum of Art, purchased  
 with funds provided by Christian Humann and  
 Wallace Thompson (M.86.49 a&b)  
*Elephant forms set with rubies and sapphires.*

252  
**KATHIJA** (earrings)  
 Kerala, Cochin; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 H: 7 cm  
 Private collection

253 & 254  
**EAR STUDS AND JIMKI** (ear ornaments)  
 South India; early 20<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection

255  
**NAGAVADURA** (ear ornaments)  
 Tamil Nadu, Vellore; c.1880  
 H: 2.8 cm  
 Courtesy Victoria and Albert Museum,  
 London (1939-1883 IS)

Stylized gold cobras with applied stamped motifs,  
 wires and granulation.

256  
**A SYRIAN CHRISTIAN WOMAN**  
 Kerala

She wears the kunuk, gold hoop, in the helix.

257  
**EAR PENDANT**  
 South India; c.1885  
 H: 9.5 cm W: 2.6 cm  
 Courtesy Victoria and Albert Museum,  
 London (153-1886 IS)

Foreign travellers were fascinated by the sight of elongated ear lobes and have recorded their astonishment. Travelling in Kerala, Edward Terry commented on this practice among ‘gentile’ women: “The flaps or nether part of their ears are bored, when they are young, which hole daily stretched and made wider by things kept in it for that purpose, at last becomes so large, that it will hold a Ring (I dare boldly say, as large as a little saucer) made hollow on the sides for the flesh to rest in.”<sup>18</sup> Amusing stories of ear holes the size of large eggs and plates, through which many a bold individual attempted to pass his arms, abound.

In south India, the leaves of the date palm were tightly rolled into cylinders, their thickness gradually increased, until the desired length of the hole was achieved. The dried leaves expanded when wet, resulting in a gentle and gradual dilation. Sticks from the branches of the *neem* tree were similarly used, harnessing the natural anaesthetic and antibiotic properties of *neem*. The process of dilation commenced when a girl-child was merely a few days old, culminating when the desired length had been attained. The practice was not restricted to the lower castes, and Thurston narrates how young Maravan princesses in Madurai used to hang on to their ears when they ran races in the garden, “lest the heavy ornaments should rend asunder the filamentous ear lobes.”<sup>19</sup>



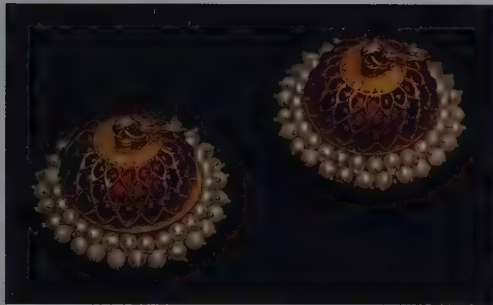


252

253



255



254



256

257





258a



258b

258a & 258b  
KOPPU (ear studs)  
South India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection, USA

*These clove-shaped gold ornaments were worn in the helix of the ear.*

259  
THANDATTI (ear ornaments)  
South India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Photograph courtesy John Bigelow Taylor

*All three forms of the enigmatic gold thandatti are represented here – the pambadam or nagapadam on the top, the mudichu in the middle and the thandatti below.*

The simple daily wear *thodu* or *toda* of south India is usually in a flower head form; suspended tassels or *jimki* (254) take the form of bells with flower tops. Perhaps the most enigmatic south Indian ear jewels are the abstract, geometric *yantra* forms of the *thandatti*. Various names known as *mudichu*, *thandatti*, *pambadam* and *nagapadam* (259), they are worn exclusively by women of the Velalar Nadar class in Tamil Nadu and neighbouring Kerala, in areas around Madurai, Ramanathapuram, Tirunelvely and Kanyakumari. The basic form juxtaposing squares, rectangles and triangles is constant, different names identifying variations in design details. The simplest is referred to as the *mudichu* or just a knot; the *thandatti* is in a step pyramid form; while the one bearing a minuscule snake face is termed the *pambadam* or *nagapadam*.

While the origin of both the form and name of the *thandatti* are now lost, common belief attributes them to a stylized version of the snake earring worn by Lord Shiva, when as Nataraja he danced the *tandava*, the cosmic dance of creation. Etymological analysis of the terms perhaps offers some interesting solutions to the vexing problem of the origin of these startlingly abstract and contemporary forms. *Mudichu* is fairly simple, the name a mere translation of the knotted form of the jewel. *Thandatti* = *thand* + *atti* – the stem of the sandalwood or strychnine tree – originating from the custom of wearing pieces of wood to stretch the ear-lobes. These earrings, however, are not common all over south India. Similarly, the *olai thodu*, simply known as *olai*, derives its name from the form of the *panam-olai*, leaves of the date palm rolled and placed in the ear lobes to elongate the lobes. Sometimes these earrings can be enormously large, but fashioned from thin sheet gold over a *lac* core, they tend to be fairly light.



259



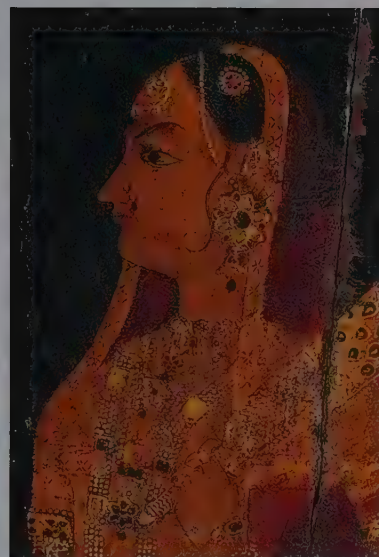


260



261

262



263

260

**EARRINGS**

Gujarat, Kutch; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection, USA

*Gold earrings ornamented with granulated and stamped units.*

261

**KOPPU (ear studs)**

South India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection, USA

*Sheet gold clove-shaped studs with floral heads worn on the helix of the ear.*

262

**KARNAPHUL JHUMKA (ear ornaments)**

North India; early 20<sup>th</sup> century  
H: 9 cms W: 119.70 gms  
Private collection

*Gold set with white sapphires and fringed with seed pearls.*

263

**A BEJEWELLED PRINCESS**

Rajasthan; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Courtesy of the Mehrangarh Fort Museum Trust, Jodhpur

*"A bodice soaked in cooling water, play-bracelets made of lotus stems, ear ornaments of acacia flowers, pearl necklaces of jasmine: these and their bodies wet with sandalpaste are the magic used by fawn-eyed damsels, which needs nor spell nor magic circle to resurrect the god of love."<sup>101</sup>*



264

264  
AKOTA (ear ornament)  
Gujarat; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

Gold set with diamonds, rubies and pearls worn in elongated ear lobes

In Kerala, women dilated their ear lobes by inserting, large, heavy, leaden rings. Ear ornaments known as the *takka* or *toda* were then inserted. The cordon of the ear lobe fits into the groove on the barrel of the earring. These simple, round disc-shaped ornaments are probably a derivation of the ancient *tatankachakra* found in archaeological sites all over the country. Fashioned from a variety of materials, these jewels ranged from simple small studs to large discs of varying thickness. They were staple forms of adornment for rich and poor. Those that were crafted in sheet gold ranged from the elegantly simple to elaborately worked repousse pieces. Sculptures scattered in all parts of the country stand testimony to the fact that these discal forms have come down in an unbroken continuity.

265  
AKOTA (ear ornaments)  
Gujarat; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection, USA

Gold stamped units embellished with granulation worn in elongated ear lobes.

One more area to safeguard and display one's wealth without much fear of loss or theft, the Indian woman's bejewelled ear offers a sight that prompted the exclamation: "European ladies are content with one appendage to each ear, while the females of Hindustan think it impossible to have too many."<sup>20</sup>

265



## SEDUCTIVE CLUSTERS

Amongst the many jewels with which the Indian woman adorns herself, the nose ornament (*nath*) is perhaps the most seductive. Ornaments for the nose take on a variety of shapes ranging from tiny jewelled studs resting on the curve of the nostril, to large gold hoops that encircle the cheek with graceful pendant pearls dangling provocatively just above the upper lip.

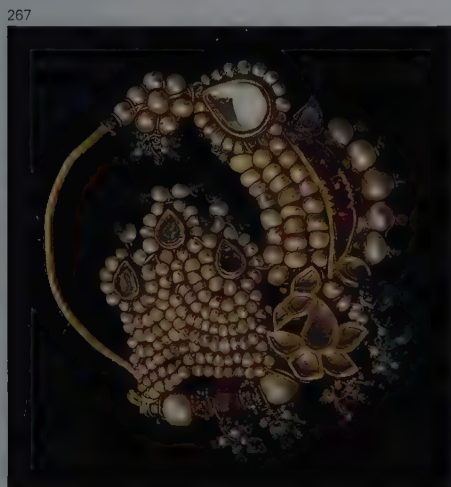
As one of the symbols of *saubhagya* (marital felicity), the nose ornament crossed regional and communal boundaries, and wearing a *nath* became mandatory for married women. In Maharashtra in particular the *nath* became an elaborate and popular jewel, with pearls ingeniously clustered into auspicious fish and mango shapes (267). The Tamil term *mukkuththi* (268), or the pierced nose, was the generic term used to refer to a nose stud. Women in the south usually pierce the right nostril. It was also customary until quite recently to wear nose studs on both nostrils; the delicate pendant form *bulak* set with gems and pearls was suspended from the septum.

The length and position of nose ornaments often came in the way of comfortable eating, prompting the Abbe Dubois, a Christian Missionary who lived in south India in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to observe in amazement: “The right nostril and the division between the two nostrils are sometimes weighted with an ornament that hangs down as far as the under lip. When the wearers are at meals, they are obliged to hold up this pendant with one hand, while feeding themselves with the other. At first this strange



266  
A LADY  
By Raja Ravi Varma  
Late 19<sup>th</sup> century  
National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi

267  
NATH (nose-ring)  
Maharashtra (?); 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection, USA  
Gold set with white sapphires and  
a meshwork of pearls.

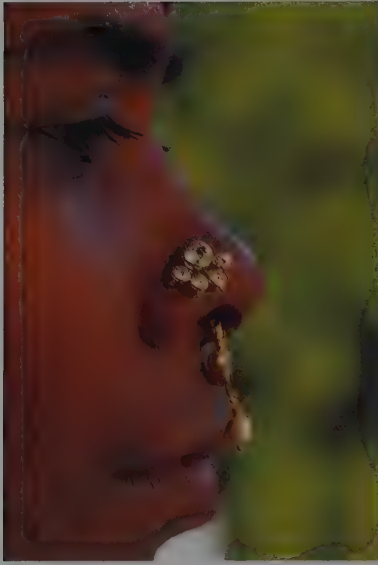


ornament, which varies with different castes, has a hideous effect in the eyes of Europeans, but after a time, when one becomes accustomed to it, gradually seems less unbecoming, and at last one ends by thinking it quite an ornament to the face.”<sup>21</sup>

Historians believe that the *nath* was introduced to India around the 8<sup>th</sup> century during the Arab invasion of Sind. The Indian custom of boring the septum of the nose, still prevailing in the interior areas of the country which are less exposed to urban influence, is distinctly Arabic. The term

267

266



268

268  
WOMAN WEARING NOSE JEWELS  
Tamil Nadu

The woman wears a traditional south Indian gold nose stud (mukkuththi) with an attachment of diamonds (besari), together with a septum nose ring (bulak).

269

BULAK (septum nose-ring)

Gujarat, Kutch; 19<sup>th</sup> century

Private collection, USA

"The bulak is a nasal trinket, flat in form not unlike that article of furniture called a footman, and has at its narrowest part a couple of eyes. It is appended to the middle of the septum or central cartilage of the nose, by means of a gold screw passed through an orifice in it. The ornament lays flat on the upper lip..."<sup>21</sup>

270

BULAK (septum nose-ring)

Himachal Pradesh; 19<sup>th</sup> century

Private collection, USA

Gold ornamented with stamped parrots and flower heads

271

MUKKUTHTHI (nose ornament)

South India; early 20<sup>th</sup> century

Private collection

Gold set with coloured glass

272

NATH (nose-ring)

Rajasthan; early 20<sup>th</sup> century

Diam: 5.6 cm

National Museum, New Delhi (n.89.1044)

A turn-of-the-century design, the typically Indian gold jewel incorporates western setting. The pear-shaped emerald is claw set with diamond brilliants surrounding it; two large faceted diamond beads and an unfaceted polished emerald drop complete the jewel.

*nath* possibly comes from the Prakrit word *natha*, meaning a rope passed through the nose of a draft animal. The Hindi word *naath* also means lord, master and husband, which explains, or at least adds to the *nath*'s significance as a symbol of marriage. The far less romantic but unmistakable connection here is that the one wearing the *nath* was now owned by her *naath*, to whom she owed absolute obedience. Sanskrit words coined later to denote the nose ring were *nasamuktaphal*, deriving from the pearl (*muktaphal*) characteristically dangling from the circular gold wire that is passed through the nostril, and the more literal *nasabhushana*, or nose (*nasa*) ornament (*bhushana*).

Earliest visual representations of the ornament occur in south India in a mural depicting a party of women musicians on the walls of the 14<sup>th</sup> century Tiruvambadi shrine at Trivandrum. The earliest European reference to the jewel is by Duarte Barbosa, who, in his description of the women of Vijayanagar writes that: "In the side of one of the nostrils they make a small hole, through which they put a fine gold wire with a pearl, sapphire or ruby pendant."<sup>22</sup> Its frequent renderings in art and literature indicate the *nath*'s growing popularity among Indian women. By the 16<sup>th</sup> century, wearing a *nath* was firmly entrenched convention. In the *Ain-i-Akbari* the author mentions four different types in his account of the *shringara* of Indian women – *besar* (nose bangle), *phuli* (a flower shaped nose stud), *laung* (a clove-shaped nose ornament) and the *nath* (a golden circllet with a ruby between two pearls, or other jewels).<sup>23</sup>

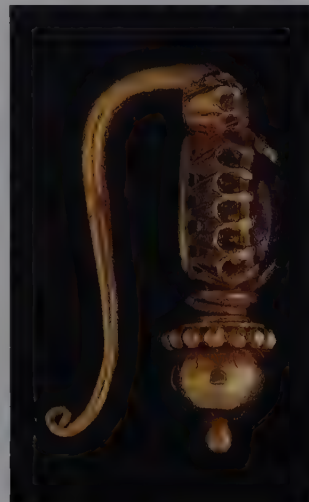
Wearing a nose ring acquired a variety of interesting connotations in different communities, apart from its indication of marital status. It was considered a mark of



269



270



271



272



273



274

beauty in south India, and many mothers-in-law to-be make it a condition to the selection of a bride for their sons! In some Muslim families, the nose of a child was pierced and a small *nathni* (nose ring) inserted in the name of a renowned saint. Amongst prostitutes, the ceremonial removal of the *nath* is symbolic of the loss of virginity.

The amazing range of styles and sizes of *naths* that are seen on special festive occasions testify the nose ornament's immense popularity not so far back in time. An integral part of traditional bridal jewellery, many aristocratic families have a special *nath* brought out at weddings to be worn by the bride. This is now perhaps the only occasion on which today's urban woman wears the *nath*, evoking its powerful seductive charm.



276



275

273  
NATH (nose-ring)  
Maharashtra; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
National Museum, New Delhi (n.89.975)

*Polished emerald beads, pearls and diamonds strung on gold wire.*

274  
NATH (nose-ring)  
South India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection, USA  
*A stylized peacock form set with gems in gold.*

275  
A PEASANT WOMAN  
Rajasthan  
*The traditional nose ring of plain beaten sheet gold has a stark, modernistic appearance.*

276  
BALU (nose-ring)  
Himachal Pradesh; early 20<sup>th</sup> century  
Diam: 10 cm  
National Museum, New Delhi (87.1168)  
*Set with white sapphires and semi-precious stones, this large gold nose ring is equipped with a chain to hook into the hair to support its weight.*



277a

### CROWNING GLORY

Elaborate coiffeur has been the hallmark of women through every era in Indian history. The ritual of a weekly oil bath and the preference for long black tresses still survives in India. Oiled, combed and plaited, the hair is adorned with garlands of jasmine buds that bloom in the hair, radiating their heady perfume in a mesmeric spell of seduction.

According to mythology, the three strands of a woman's plait are intended to symbolize the confluence of India's three most venerated rivers – the Ganga, the Yamuna and the Saraswati or the Trinity, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva; yet another legend states that one strand represents the father's house, one the in-laws' and the third is the woman who unites the two.<sup>24</sup> Classical literature is replete with analogies of the swinging, lithe, snake-like form of a long plait. Chandi Dasa, the poet, describes Radha's hair:

“Like stilled lightning fair face  
I saw her by the river.  
Her hair dressed with jasmine,  
Plaited like a coiled snake.”<sup>25</sup>

As a symbol of fertility, the snake form has been incorporated into many ornaments in south India, the *jadai-nagam* being the most distinct. Ornaments like the *jadai-nagam*, *rakodi* and the *thalaisaman* are believed to harness the potent energies resident in the *sirasachakra* located on top of the head. Such ornaments were crafted from sheet gold or set with gems using the unit system of construction and strung to take the shape of the plait. Design motifs usually comprise flowers such as the fragrant *thayam-pu*, *kewra* or the screwpine and *mullai-pu*, *mogra* or jasmine – all commonly worn on the hair and also favoured by snakes, who reside in their vicinity.

The *jadai-nagam* (277b) is a composite jewel made up of several elements. Right on top is the *nagar*, a large cobra-head form, under whose spread canopy the Lord Krishna is often rendered dancing in victory over Kaliya, the snake that he vanquished.

277a & 277b (detail above and facing page)  
JADAI-NAGAM (hair ornament)  
Tamil Nadu; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
L: 60 cm  
Private collection

From the large cobra head (*nagar*) on top, this hair ornament, set with rubies, emeralds and diamonds and edged with emerald beads, tapers to a tassel (*kunjalam*) tied to prevent the plait from unravelling. Design motifs include flowers and animal forms like the peacocks depicted here. The reverse is finely etched, simulating snake scales.

278 (left)  
PUCHOOTAL (flower for the hair)  
Tamil Nadu; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
H: 5 cms  
Private collection

A girl in the seventh month of pregnancy is adorned with flowers, symbolizing fertility. Flower forms simulated in gold and set with gems were often specially made for the occasion by the affluent classes.

278 (right)  
NAGAR (snake hair ornament)  
South India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
H: 9 cm  
Private collection

Gold worked in repousse, chased and filled with lac, constitutes this ornament for the hair. Krishna and his cow are flanked by dancing nymphs under a multi-headed cobra.







279

279  
**NAGAR** (hair ornament)  
 Mysore; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 H: 6.5 cm W: 4.5 cm  
 Private collection

*Gold set with diamonds and rubies, edged with pearls. In this variation of the traditional Krishna theme, an image of Lakshmi stands under the cobra hoods.*



280

280  
**RAKODI** (head ornament)  
 South India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection

*The rakodi is a round gold ornament set with rubies and diamonds and worn on the top of the head, to simulate a halo.*



281

281  
**BORLA** (forehead ornament)  
 Rajasthan; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection

*A gold jewel with a convex face, set with diamonds and pearls. The poet Bana describes the pendant worn by women on the forehead as "dancing upon her forehead and kissing her hair parting." [viii]*

282  
**TALASAMAN** (head ornaments)  
 South India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection

*The gold and gem-set strip worn along the parting of the hair is flanked on either side by sun and moon forms. Such jewels were perhaps worn to deflect evil thoughts directed at the wearer.*



282



Below this is the long *jadai* in the shape of a tapering plait, ending in a *kunjalam* or tassel tied at the lower end, which prevents the plait from unravelling. Other pieces in the form of a *veni* or garland of flowers, the sun and moon shapes are sometimes interspersed within this basic arrangement. While flowers are the most popular design motifs for the *jadai*, others include such popular south Indian design motifs drawn from nature such as the *yali* (a composite creature), the *kirtimukha* (the grotesque mask), the *hamsa* (swan) or the *mayil* (peacock).

The *rakodi* (280), a round ornament worn on the top of the head, has its origins in the large halo that used to decorate the heads of metal images of deities, also referred to as the *sirasachakra*. In the Gupta and Vakataka periods, the halo became elaborate, with lotus petal decorations, visible from the front in sculptures in the north as well as the Deccan. By the Pallava period, the *sirasachakra* became quite small, and was confined to the rear of the head. Clearly visible in bronze images of the Chola and Vijayanagar dynasty, the *sirasachakra* evolved into the *rakodi*.

Jewels such as the *chutti* or *talaisaman* (282) were worn along the parting of the hair together with emblems of the sun and moon on either side. Such ornaments were simplifications of the elaborate crowns worn by deities, and were purely decorative. In other parts of India a variety of forehead ornaments were once popular. Abu'l Fazl, in his list of ornaments worn by Indian women, describes the *sis-phul*, an ornament for the head resembling a marigold; *mang*, worn along the parting of the hair; *kotbiladar*, comprising five bands and a long central drop; and *sekrak*, strings of pearls hung from the forehead and veiling the face.<sup>26</sup> Head ornaments are a category of Indian jewels that are fast vanishing, the first to fall prey to the goldsmith's melting crucible. They are now popular largely as part of bridal attire and the traditional ornamentation of classical dancers.

283



284

283

**HAIR ORNAMENT**

North India, possibly Oudh; mid-19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Courtesy Victoria and Albert Museum,  
 London (03209 IS)

Gold set with rubies, emeralds and diamonds and with strings of pearls and red glass beads, this unusual ornament is a combination of the *jhumar*, usually worn on the side of the head, and the *dauni*, framing the face. The two long jewelled coils might be stylizations of ringlets.

284

**CHOTI (braid tassel)**

Rajasthan; 19<sup>th</sup> century

L: 58 cm

National Museum, New Delhi (87.1157)

Gem-set and enamelled in gold, the tassel secures the end of the braid.



285

285  
**PACHELI** (bangles)  
 Varanasi; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection  
*Enameled gold, set with diamonds.*

286  
**HAVALLA KATTU** (coral bangles)  
 South India, Mangalore; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection  
*Barrel-shaped havalla or coral beads are interspersed with gold flowers in this traditional jewel. Corals came from fisheries off the Malabar coast, Ceylon and from the Mediterranean sea. It was an important item of Indo-Roman trade.*

287a & 287b  
**DASTI** (bracelet – front and reverse)  
 North India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection  
*The front is kundan-set with diamonds and the reverse is richly enamelled with floral motifs on a white ground.*

288  
**BRACELET**  
 South India; early 20<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection  
*Stamped gold flowers and ruby-set pieces are linked to form this supple piece.*

289  
**VANKI** (rigid armllets)  
 South India, Mangalore; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection  
*Rigid twisted and wrapped gold wire in a v-shaped form that permits size adjustments.*

### CIRCLES OF LIGHT

“Bangle-sellers are we who bear  
 Our shining loads to the temple fair...  
 Who will buy these delicate, bright  
 Rainbow-tinted circles of light?  
 Lustrous tokens of radiant lives  
 For happy daughters and happy wives.”<sup>27</sup>

One of the oldest art objects in India, the bronze statuette of a dancing girl excavated at Mohenjo Daro (56) epitomizes the antiquity and the universality of wrist ornaments in India. She stands in the nude with one arm at her hip, the other arm completely weighed down with a collection of bangles. From then on the variety and shape of wrist ornaments spanned the gamut of nature’s materials and human creativity.

More than any other single jewellery form in India, the bangle has been crafted from the widest variety of materials. Ancient fragments testify that bangles were made from terracotta, stone, shell, copper, bronze, gold, silver and almost any material that lent itself

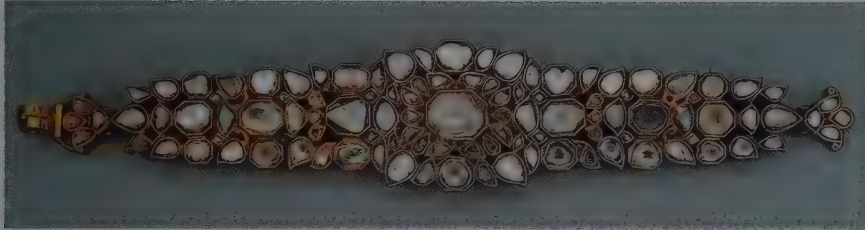
to craftsmanship. *Lac* and glass bangles in a plethora of colours are a common sight in India. From simple plain circlets of metal, to ones decorated with etched and repousse designs, to fabulous examples with bird and animal-head terminals and studded with gems, these circlets symbolize the potent energies of the sun.

To the Indian woman, ornaments for the wrist have always been significant emblems of marriage. “As soon as a bride of the Khonds of Gumsur enters the bridegroom’s house, she has two enormous bracelets, or rather handcuffs, of brass, each weighing from twenty to thirty pounds, attached to each wrist, to prevent her from running away home. On the third day they are removed, as it is supposed that by then she has become reconciled to her fate.”<sup>28</sup> Even when changing bangles, a woman never allows her arm to be completely bare. A simple string or even the end of her sari is wrapped around the arm, until the new set is worn. Abu’l Fazl classified bangles on the basis of popular prevailing shapes: *kangan* (bracelet); *gajrah* (a bracelet made of gold and pearls); *jawe* (in the form of five golden barley corns strung on silk); *chur* (a bracelet worn above the wrist); *bahu* (like the *chur* but smaller); and *churin* (a little thinner than the ordinary bracelet).<sup>29</sup>



286

*“The women of these Heathen are beautiful and slender, with well-shaped figures; they are both fair and dark. Their dress is as long as that of their husbands, they wear silken bodices with tight sleeves, cut low at the back, and other long garments called chandes which they throw over themselves like cloaks when they go out. On their heads they wear nought but their own hair well-dressed on the top of it. They always go bare foot, and on their legs they wear very thick anklets of gold and silver with great plenty of rings on their fingers and toes, and they have holes bored in their ears wide enough for an egg to pass through, in which they wear thick gold and silver earrings.”* [ix]



287a



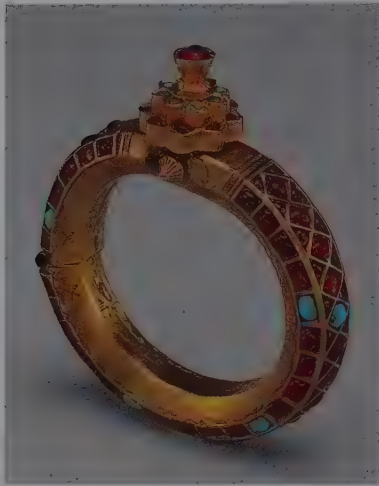
287b



288



289



290

290  
**KADA (bangle)**  
 Rajasthan; late 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection

*Gold set with rubies and turquoise; the animal head terminals usually seen on such bangles are replaced here with a tiered flower form.*



291

292

291  
**BAZUBAND (armbands)**  
 Jaipur; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, VA.  
 The Nasli and Alice Heeramaneck Collection,  
 Gift of Paul Mellon (68.8.143.1/2)

*An unusual combination of gold set with a topaz and enameled on the reverse.*

*"A Topaz beautiful as the Sana flower, transparent and smooth is sacred. By wearing this gem, a person who has no child may be blessed with one; and a poor man acquire riches."<sup>[4]</sup>*

292  
**BALAI (bangles)**  
 South India, Coorg; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection

*A variety of traditional Coorgi gold bangles, the pahunchi (top) embellished with clove of garlic units; jodi kadga, a pair of linked gold bands; and pim balai, a wide gold bangle.*



*“During the time I dwelt in Cambaietta, I saw very marvellous things: there were an infinite number of Artificers that made Bracelets called Mannii, or bracelets of Elephants teeth, of divers colours, for the women of the Gentiles, which have their armes full decked with them. And in this occupation there are spent every yeere many thousands of crownes: the reason where of is this, that when there dieth any whatsoever of their kindred, then in signe and token of mourning and sorrow, they breake all their bracelets from their armes, and presently they goe and buy new againe, because that they had rather bee without their meat then without their bracelets.”* <sup>[xi]</sup>



293

294



295



293

**BAZUBAND (armbands)**  
North India; early 20<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*Gold, set with rubies and diamonds, in an open trellis design; the ornament is gently curved to fit around the upper arm.*

294

**NAGOTHTHU (armband)**  
South India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*A trellis work front piece worked in gold, set with rubies, diamonds and emeralds, is fitted on to a flat gold band.*

295

**PATLI (bangles)**  
South India; c.1870  
H: 6.4 cm Diam: 4.5 cm  
Courtesy Victoria and Albert Museum, London (1014 & a-1872)

*Gold and gilt metal, set with rubies, are combined in the peacocks and flowers set on plain gold hoops.*



296

KADA (bangle)  
Rajasthan; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

Enamelled gold and ivory, set with seed pearls

297

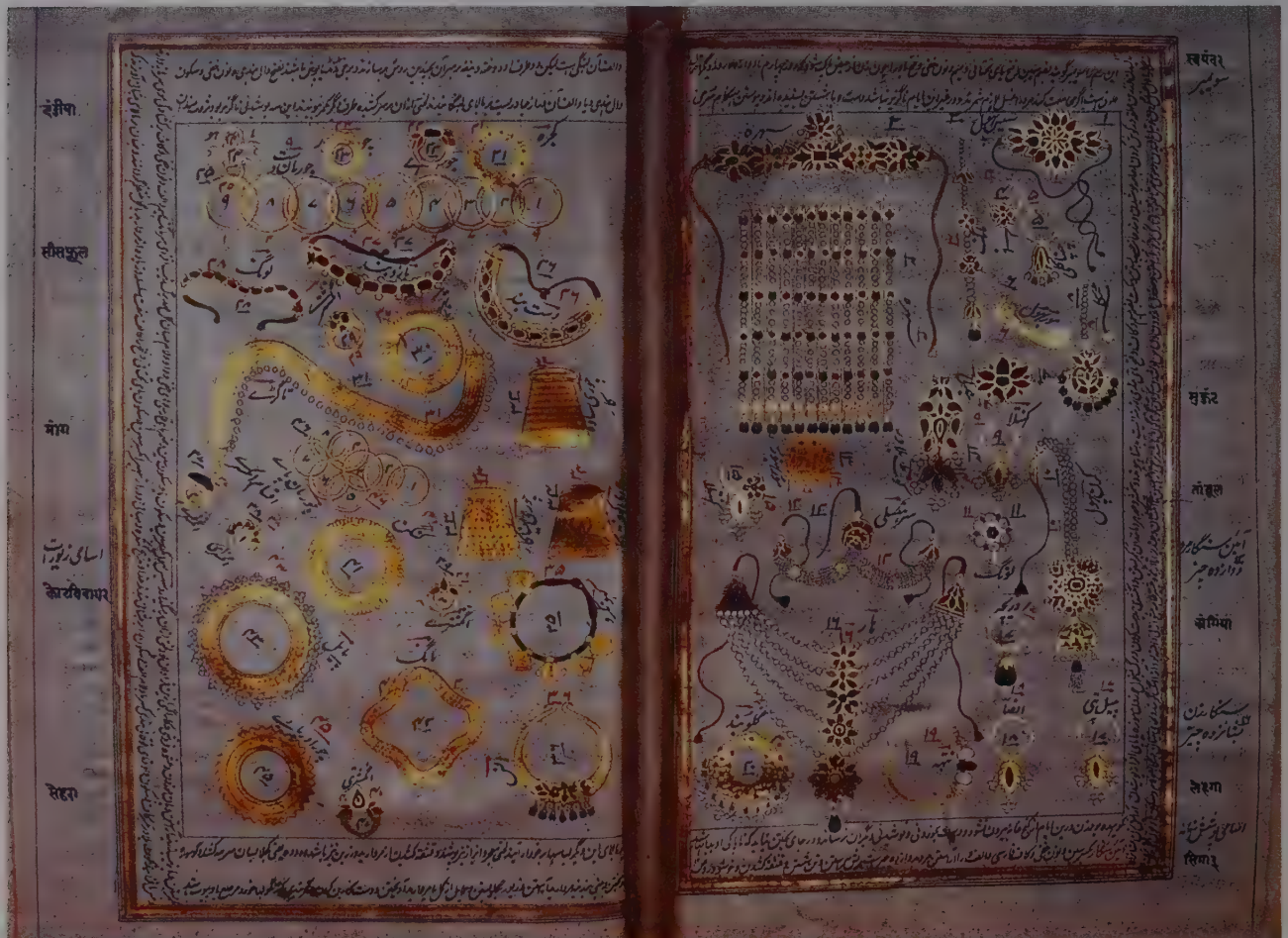
ILLUSTRATED PAGES FROM AN  
AIN-I-AKBARI MANUSCRIPT

Mughal; c. 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Watercolour on paper  
National Jewish and University Library,  
Jerusalem (Yahudah, Ms. Ar. 1063)

Precious ornaments typical of the time are documented in this manuscript. An illustrated Ain-i-Akbari dating to 1621 portrays a more delicate and elegant set of jewels, a reflection of an earlier, more refined aesthetic.

296

297

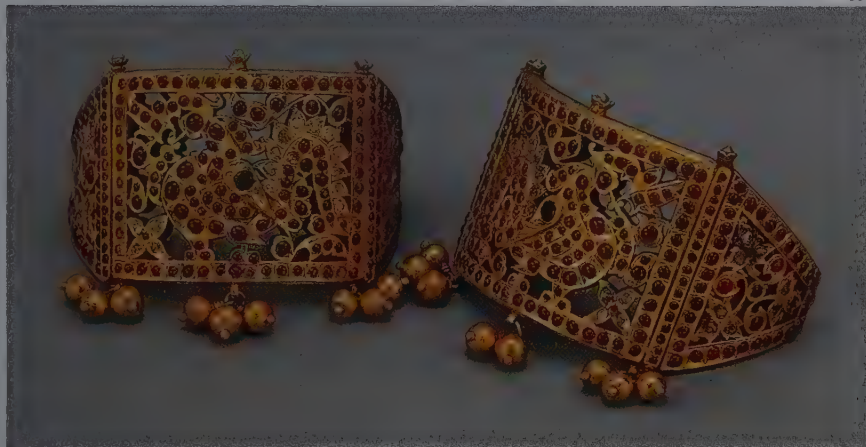




298



299



300



301

298

**VANKI (rigid armlet)**  
South India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*Gold openwork trellis design, set with rubies and diamonds.*

299

**VANKI (rigid armlet)**  
South India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Dr. S. Sanford Kornblum and Mrs. Charlene S. Kornblum collection

*Sheet gold worked in almost three-dimensional relief with flora and fauna motifs, backed with a plain sheet of gold and filled with lac.*

300

**NAGOTHTHU (armbands)**  
South India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
H: 5 cms  
National Museum, New Delhi (97.112/1-2)

*Rubies closed-set in gold in the kundala velai technique.*

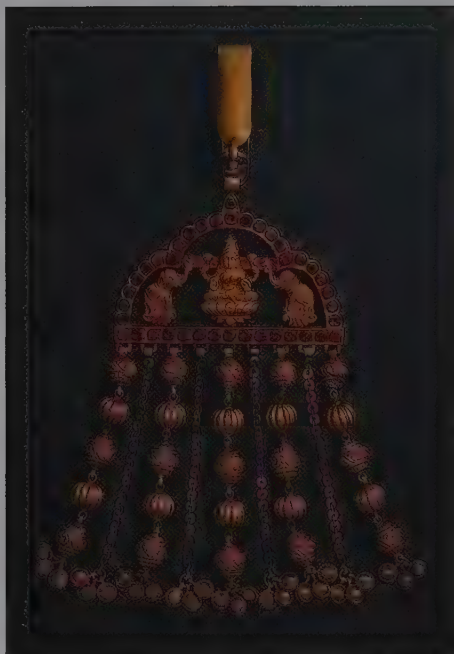
301

**KADA (bangle)**  
North India; late 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*This enameled ornament has been modified in recent times by the addition of gem-set units on to the outer surface.*

These seven types of bangles are often worn together. The order in which a woman wears wrist ornaments is usually an indication of her regional origins. Ornaments for the upper arm take a variety of forms; from the most simple circlet of metal or a single amulet strung on a cord, to the elaborate gem-set *bazus* of Mughal India and *vankis* of south India. "Some are purple and gold-flecked grey,

For her who has journeyed  
through life midway.  
Whose hands have cherished,  
whose love has blest  
And cradled fair sons  
on her faithful breast..."<sup>30</sup>



**GIRDLES OF GRACE**

The waist belt served a dual purpose; it held the lower garment in place and was yet another embellishment to the feminine form. Its presence is evident in almost every male and female image through Indian history. The girdle is referred to by many names. Asvaghosa refers to it as *mekhla*, *rasana*, *kanchi*, and *kanaka kanchi*. In the *Natyashastra* of Bharata, a girdle of a single string of beads is *kanchi*; of eight

strings is *mekhla*; of sixteen strings, a *rasana*, and with twenty-five strings, the *kalapa*; a net of pearls strung around the waist is the *mautika jala*.<sup>31</sup> In Chola inscriptions, girdles are named *kachcholam* in the form of a snake, the *kalavam*, a multi-stringed girdle with pearls, corals, lapis lazuli and other precious stones; and the elaborate gem-studded sacred girdle, *tirup-pattigai*.<sup>32</sup> Today, girdles, known by the colloquial terms *oddiyanam* or *kamar patta*, are out of fashion and hardly ever worn.

302  
KEY-CHAIN

South India; early 20<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*The keys of the household are suspended in this gold and ruby key-chain. Tucked into the sari at the waist, silver versions are popular even today.*

303  
ODDIYANAM (rigid waist belt)

South India; early 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*This gold belt of royal provenance is set with Burmese cabuchon rubies, emeralds and diamonds*







304

304  
**ODDIYANAM (rigid waist belt)**  
 South India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection

*The concept of a central motif (mohappu) was borrowed from the monograms of European nobility. This gold belt has a floral motif set with diamonds; many others incorporate the initials of the wearer.*

305  
**ODDIYANAM (rigid waist belt)**  
 Kerala; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection

*This gold belt, fringed with gajje beads, has an openwork repousse panel with a central floral motif encircled with rubies. It was reputedly once the property of the Kollengode Raja.*

306 (top)  
**ODDIYANAM (rigid waist belt)**  
 South India; early 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection

*This gold belt, fringed with gajje beads, bears a central motif of the seated goddess Gajalakshmi.*

306 (bottom)  
**ARAPATTA (flexible waist belt)**  
 South India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection

*This belt, weighing no less than half a kilo, is in the form of individual etched swastika motifs linked to each other by interlocking chains on either side.*



305



306



307

307  
**NELLI** (v-shaped ring)  
 Tamil Nadu; early 20<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection

*Diamonds, rubies and emeralds set in gold in a miniature v-form.*



308

308  
**TWO DANCERS**  
 Kotah School; c.1730-1740  
 40.3 x 27 cms  
 Kind courtesy of Maharao Brijraj Singh of Kotah,  
 Chairman, Board of Trustees and the Trustees of  
 Rao Madho Singh Trust Museum, Kotah

*Putting a mirrored thumb ring (arsi) to practical use, one of the bejewelled dancers examines her reflection while making adjustments to the ornament (borla) on her forehead.*

309  
**ARSI** (thumb ring)  
 North India; early 20<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection

*Kundan-set diamonds frame the mirror in this article of feminine vanity.*

310  
**SEAL RING**  
 South India (?); 18<sup>th</sup> century  
 Courtesy Victoria and Albert Museum,  
 London (03226 IS)

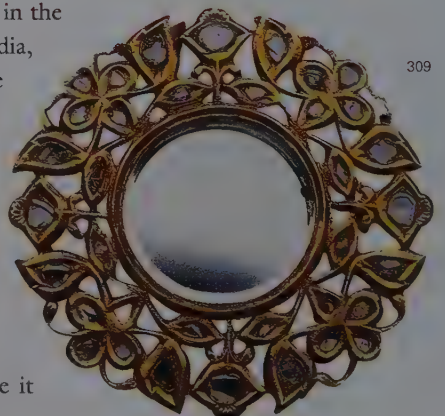
*Hindu and Islamic elements combine in this unusual seal ring of chased gold. Cobras support a bezel set with a carved Colombian emerald engraved with a quotation from Sa'di's Golestan: "O Nightingale bring us the tidings of Spring." (wall)*

311  
**HAATH PHUL** (flower-jewel for hand)  
 North India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection

*Worn by brides, this elaborate ornament with four finger rings, each linked by chains to a medallion and then a bracelet is made of gold set with diamonds, the reverse in polychrome enamel.*

## RINGS OF HARMONY

The simple ring was not ignored in the vast array of larger ornament forms. In India, finger rings are an important part of the physio-metaphysical value of jewellery; the finger functions as a medium between the physical body and the spiritual body. The middle finger of the left hand is referred to as the sun finger. This finger is believed to attract and absorb the energies of the sun, which are then transferred to the body. It is recommended that a ring should normally not be worn on this finger, since it amounts to weighing down the flow of energy.



309

“At one side in a wyndow  
 were his two principal wives,  
 whose curiositye made them  
 breake little holes in a grate of reede  
 that hung before yt to gaze on mee.  
 I saw first their fingers, and after  
 laying their faces close nowe one eye,  
 now a nother; sometyme I could  
 discerne the full proportion. They  
 were indifferently white, black hayre  
 smoothed up; but if I had had no  
 other light, ther diamonds and  
 pearles had sufficed to show them:  
 when I looked up they retyred and  
 were so merry, that I supposed they  
 laughed at me.”<sup>[xiii]</sup>



310

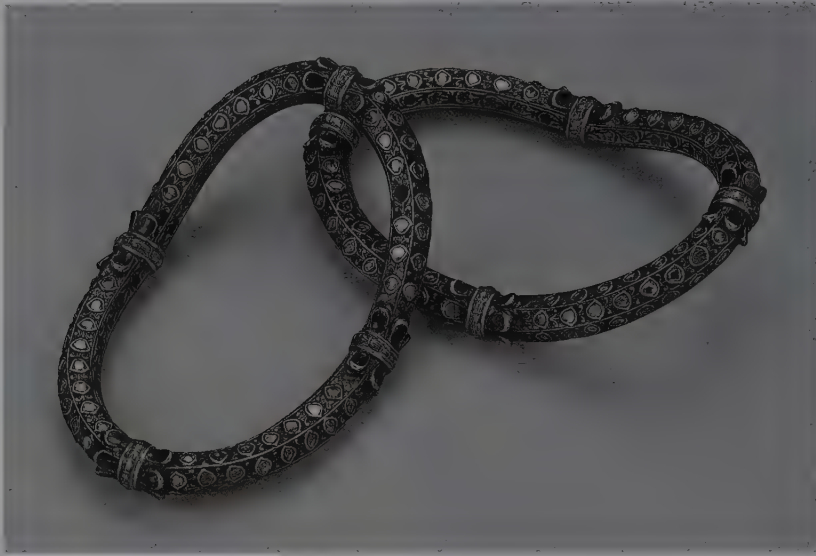
In this context, it is directly connected to the heart.<sup>33</sup> *Pavitra* rings or *navaratna* rings combining the nine planetary stones were designed as prophylactic jewels, to keep all the planets and their influence on humans in harmony, and have been worn by men and women through the ages.

Describing the women of Aurangzeb’s *zenana*, the physician Manucci’s sharp eyes did not miss their bejewelled fingers:

“On their fingers are rich rings, and on the right thumb there is always a ring, where, in place of a stone, there is mounted a little round mirror, having pearls around it. This mirror they use to look at themselves, an act of which they are very fond, at any and every moment.”<sup>34</sup> Clearly, the physician, like most travellers to India, was awed not just by the sheer amounts of jewellery worn, but fascinated by their variety and array. The mirrored ring Manucci refers to above is the *arsi* (309), a particular feminine conceit of the times. Generally round or heart-shaped, the *arsi* is fifth in a series of finger rings forming a *panchangla*, or *haath phul*, a five-finger ornament (311). The ornament literally bridges the gap between bracelet and finger rings with delicate gold chains.

311





312

312  
SA-GHOSA KATAKA (anklets)  
North India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

Diamond chips set in enameled silver gilt make up these rigid and hollow anklets that contain small metal spheres which tinkle with movement. "In Rajputana, it has been said that women are given foot bells, chains, and tinkling anklets, not only to frighten snakes away when they move outside at night, but in order that their husbands may know where they are when they cannot be seen." (xiv)

313  
NUPUR (anklets)  
North India; early 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

Individual gold units set with diamonds and enameled on the reverse are strung together to form this jewel.

313



## TINKLING TREADS

Few Hindus are not conversant with Lakshmana's statement in the *Ramayana*, when asked if he recognized the jewels recovered in the forest as belonging to his brother's wife Sita. Lakshmana replied that he recognized neither the armlets nor the earrings; only the anklets were familiar to him, since his gaze, with reverence

appropriate to the times, never strayed above Sita's feet.

The earliest references to anklets are in Buddhist texts. In the *Therigatha*, one of the nuns is described as wearing an anklet.<sup>35</sup> Earlier to this, the *Rig Veda* does describe an ornament that could be interpreted as a ring for the feet, *patsu khadayoh*.<sup>36</sup> By the time of the *Natyashastra*, the anklet was definitely an established tradition in Indian *shringara*, judging from the various types listed by Bharata.<sup>37</sup> He mentions the *kinkinika* as an anklet with small bells attached to it, still popular with Indian women; the *ratna jalaka*, an elaborate jewelled (*ratna*) net (*jalaka*) which stretched from toe to ankle, partially covering the foot (silver versions of this ornament are still worn by Coorgi brides). The *sa-ghosa kataka* is probably a hollow ring-like anklet with a pleasant jingling sound (#312). Describing anklets, the *Amarakosha* lists eight synonyms for the ornament, each term implying a stylistic variation to the generic *nupura*.<sup>38</sup>

The literary compositions of Kalidasa, Sudraka and their contemporaries are filled with lyrical similes extolling the charm and beauty of the anklet, especially when worn by women. Completely capturing poetic imagination, Kalidasa in the *Malavikagnimitram* eulogizes the hidden promise of fulfilment in the music of a woman's anklets, referring to the ancient belief that the Ashoka tree was believed to flower if



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struck by the foot of a young maiden.<sup>39</sup> The etymology of the term *nupura* is connected to *antah pura*, the female apartments in a palace. The ornament which announces (*navati*) the presence of the women therein by its sound is the *nupura*.<sup>40</sup>

Amongst tribal women, long tubular bands of brass encircle the ankle all the way up to the calf to protect them against snake bites while walking through long grass. Alarmingly large productions of rigid silver are still the norm in rural India. Strictly speaking, golden anklets are forbidden to Hindus. Since the metal symbolizes Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, it is considered sacrilegious to wear it on one's feet. Royalty, however, were exempt, and breathtakingly beautiful gem-studded creations were worn by them and the aristocracy.

“One needs to be an Indian woman, born and bred in the great tradition, to realize the sense of power that such jewels as earrings and anklets lend their wearers; she knows the full delight of swinging jewels touching her cheek at every step, and the fascination of the tinkling bells upon her anklets.”<sup>41</sup>

314  
NUPUR (anklets)  
North India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection  
*Diamonds set in gold and bordered with Basra pearls on the upper edge.*

315  
LADY WITH A BIRD IN HAND  
Deccan, Bijapur; early 17<sup>th</sup> century  
Opaque watercolour on paper  
44 x 32 cm  
Reproduced by kind permission of the Trustees of the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (MS. 11A, No. 31)



315



FOR GODS AND MEN

## Proclamations of Power



*“The child who is decked with prince’s robes  
and who has jewelled chains round his neck  
loses all pleasure in his play;  
his dress hampers him at every step.  
In fear that it may be frayed, or stained with dust  
he keeps himself from the world,  
and is afraid even to move.*

*Mother, it is no gain, thy bondage of finery,  
if it keeps one shut off from the healthful dust of the earth,  
if it rob one of the right of entrance  
to the great fair of common human life.”<sup>1</sup>*



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316 (page 194)

**A YOUNG PRINCE**

Photograph by Lala Deen Dayal

Deccan, Hyderabad; c.1890

26.4 x 20 cm

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts,  
New Delhi

317 (page 195)

**TURRA (turban ornament)**North India; 19<sup>th</sup> century

Courtesy Sotheby's

This diamond-set gold parrot with red and green enamel is worn with the tapering stem tucked into the turban folds, and the pearl and emerald tassel hanging over one side of the forehead.

318

**MUKUT (crown)**Hyderabad; mid-19<sup>th</sup> century

H: 4 cm Wt: 33 grams

Private collection

This tiny gold crown once decorated a miniature icon in a family shrine. The fan-shaped section is set with rubies on one side and diamonds on the other and can be swivelled around to match the deity's attire for the day.

319

**KIRITAM (crown)**Tamil Nadu; 19<sup>th</sup> century

Courtesy Musee Barbier-Mueller,

Geneva (2504-122)

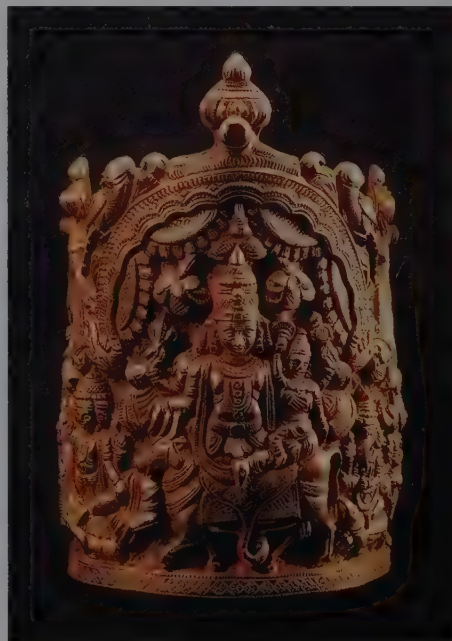
Worked in almost three-dimensional relief, this gold repousse crown once adorned a temple deity. Shiva and his consort Parvati are represented seated on Rishabha, the bull.

Whether god, king, or mere mortal, jewellery, until not too far back in time, was an important aspect of male attire in Indian culture. Men wore jewellery primarily for protective and propitiatory purposes. As social hierarchies evolved, ornaments also settled into the vast language of visual symbols, telling the viewer much about the wearer – his rank in society, his sectarian affiliations, his religious loyalties. Designs and styles crystallized from specific functions. The surprisingly modernistic looking *ayigalu* pendant with a concaved centre evolved from the need to house the sacred *lingam*, indicating the Shaivite loyalties of the wearer (320). Scalloped *Vishnupada* pendants confirmed the owner's Vaishnava leanings.

The gods too favoured bodily adornment, and many an endearing myth is woven around their love of it. The *Matsya Purana* states that, captivated by the celestial gem *kaustubha* as it emerged from the cosmic waters, Lord Vishnu appropriated it for himself and wore it on his breast. Hinduism's most sacred pond, the Manikarnika Kund in Benaras, owes its sanctity to Lord Shiva's earrings. Moved by Vishnu's single-minded devotion, Shiva trembled with delight and his jewelled earrings, *manikarnika*, fell into the pool. Hindus believe that last rites performed on the adjoining Manikarnika Ghat ensures the soul's liberation from the cycle of birth and death.

Decorating the image of deity with jewellery is integral to Hindu ritual. The daily *puja* in a Hindu temple involves sixteen offerings (*upachara*) to the deity. *Abharanani*, the offering of ornaments and gems, is the ninth *upachara*. The beauty of the deity adorned with jewels is not "intended for the aesthetic enjoyment of the secular beholder."<sup>2</sup> The image of a god or goddess was intended to present the divine in human form; but the aspects of the divine, their omnipresence and glory, had all to be recreated in the form of bodily adornment. A jewel was first and foremost a gift of god intended for god. Man only in his role as a servant of god wore it. Even today, a new ornament is

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first offered to the deity at home or in the family temple before it is worn.

Temple jewellery is carefully co-ordinated for *shringara*, the beautification of the deity. The phenomenal collections of Srinathji at Nathdwara, Gopalji Mandir in Benaras, and the priceless one of Lord Venkateshwara at Tirupati immediately come to mind. Astrological guidelines regarding the colours and gems appropriate to the days of the week and scriptural injunctions regarding specific *shringara* for festival days are adhered to closely in the process of selection. On such occasions, the usual accoutrements of the deity are replaced by exquisitely embellished ones appropriate to the occasion. Conch shells that are used to bathe the idol,



320  
AYIGALU (pendant)  
South India; c.1850  
H: 10.2 cm W: 11.5 cm  
Private collection

*A portable shrine, the carved rock crystal case encrusted with rubies and emeralds houses a Shiva lingam. A rock crystal bull (Nandi) sits on top of the hinged lid.*

320





321

321  
VEL (spear)  
Tamil Nadu; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
H: 10 cm  
Private collection

This gold spear encrusted with rubies and diamonds was gifted to the deity Murugan or Kartikeya by a grateful devotee whose initials are inscribed on the back.

322  
BODHISATTVA  
Gandhara; c. 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.  
Grey Schist  
Indian Museum, Calcutta  
Reproduced by permission of the Trustees

323 (facing page)  
NECKLACE  
North India, Benaras(?); c. 1900  
Private collection

Each gold medallion is a miniature painting, illustrating an event from the life of Krishna. The reverse is finely enamelled with floral motifs.

ceremonial umbrellas (*chattris*), and vessels for offerings (*bhoga*), embellished with precious stones and gold work, transcend mere function to reflect the celestial glory of their user. Since jewellery belonging to temples escaped the demands of changing fashion, some of the most authentic extant specimens of classical Indian jewellery lie with temple trusts. Unfortunately, few, if any, are accessible to scholars. Zealously safeguarded for fear of undue publicity and theft, only rare and fleeting glimpses of these jewels are possible during a hurried *darshan* (offering of prayers).

For both these celestial regents and their more earthly counterparts, the grammar in ornaments had already settled into conventional types as early as the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Listing them according to their place on the male physiognomy, Bharata in the *Natyashastra* recommends a crest jewel (*chudamani*) and crown (*mukuta*) for the head; earring (*kundala*), ear pendant (*mochaka*) and ear-top (*kila*); strings of pearls (*muktavali*), a snake-shaped ornament (*harsaka*); a golden chain for the neck (*sutra*); a three-stringed strand of pearls (*trisara*) reaching the navel, as body adornment. Bharata's list also clearly differentiates ornaments for the wrist (*ruchika* and *culika*) from those for the forearm (*hastavi*, *valaya*) and the upper arm (*keyura*, *angada*).<sup>3</sup> Allowing for artistic variations, sculptural evidence amply corroborates these early stylistic norms. Careful details chiselled on a variety of ornament types visible on sculpted male figures in almost every period in Indian history imply the artist's painstaking attempts to represent prevailing styles. Apart from a diadem of pearls indicating their princely status, Gandhara figures of Bodhisattvas dating to the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D. usually support stiff torques, characteristic heavy loop-in-loop chains with figural terminals, strands of shoulder pearls, the trademark armlet strap, as well as armlets and bracelets (322). The presence of elaborate jewellery is, in fact, an essential iconographical feature that serves to distinguish images of Bodhisattvas from the starkly simple ones of the Enlightened One. The unmistakable implication here seems

322







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324

325



327



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Some idea of the quantity of jewels presented by Rajaraja in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, to the Lord of Rajarajeshvaram, can be gathered by scrutinising just two inscriptions in the Rajarajeshvaram temple at Thanjavur. The gifts of ornaments mentioned include one diadem, fifteen girdles, eight gem studded necklaces, sixteen pearl bracelets (*muttu valaigal*), five *srichhandas*, one crown (*sri mudi*), a garland in gold (*tirumalai*) and a parasol (*tirup-purakkudai*). A further forty seven items of jewellery are also recorded that include a *pasa malai*, marriage badge (*tali*), armband (*bahu-valayam*), a jewelled armband (*ratna-valaiyal*), arm rings (*tiruk-kaikkarai*), *ratnakatakam*, coral bracelets, girdles, pearl *uruttus*, ruby *uruttus*, diamond *uruttus*, a special type of ornament known as *sonagach-chidukku*, rings with precious stones (*ratna*), nine-gemmed rings (*navaratna modiram*), *srichhandam*, *prishthakandigai*, sandals and others. The total weight of these ornaments added up to 2,373 *kalanjus* (over ten kilograms) valued at 4,056 *kasus*. In addition, thirteen ornaments presented by Kundavai, elder sister to Rajaraja, weighed 1,135 *kalanjus* (five kilograms) and contained no less than 3,950 diamonds, 727 rubies and 2,657 pearls, of the total value of 11,820 *kasus*.<sup>[1]</sup>

324-329

UTSAVA MURTHI (processional image)  
Kapaleswar Temple, Madras

The bronze image of Shiva is adorned with flowers and jewels for the temple festival. Only on such occasions can one catch a glimpse of the wealth and variety of jewels gifted by devout patrons. Jewels in temple collections are perhaps the only valuable references of ancient forms, techniques and the prevailing political, social and cultural ethos.

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**KANGAN** (wrist ornaments)  
Sind; 18<sup>th</sup> century  
Courtesy Spink and Sons, London

*A pair of large gold and enamelled arm ornaments, set with cabuchon rubies, emeralds and pearls, has dragon-head terminals.*



331

**BAZUBAND** (armband)  
North India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
W: 4.5 cm L: 7 cm  
Private collection

*Petals of rose-cut diamonds set in gold encircle a foiled crystal centre-piece.*

332a & 332b

**HASLI** (rigid necklace – front and reverse)  
Rajasthan, Bikaner; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*A gold necklace with diamonds on a blue enamel ground with a row of large pearls along the outer edge. The name of this uniquely Indian form is derived from the collar bone (hansuli) on which such ornaments rest. Variations of this basic type are common all over north India.*

to be that ornamentation of the body is an integral part of this life, as discarding such accoutrements is a natural aspect of the act of renunciation.

Ornaments worn by men, sometimes the absence of them, spoke a complex language of metaphors. Elongated ear lobes, a visible feature in Buddhist and Jain sculpture, indicated a prior use of heavy earrings, and thereby the aristocratic lineage of the figure. Going by the evidence of sculpture, the tradition in men's jewellery gained momentum over the centuries.

Even allowing for leanings towards the ornate in Pala and Hoysala art, the abundance of ornaments, especially in the latter, reflects a societal love of jewellery. Ornament-laden gods and goddesses at Belur and Halebid indicate the increasing significance of jewels as symbols of heavenly glory and earthly power.

The lexicon of jewellery designs derived from changing shapes and forms in sculptures of different periods helps in the dating as well as identification of the sculpture. Earrings especially offer valuable clues.<sup>4</sup> One has only to look at the earrings on the lobes of Harihara images (divinity in its double aspect as Shiva and Vishnu) to recognize which side represents Hari and which Hara. The lotus-like floral stems entwined around one earlobe immediately identify divinity's creative aspect as Vishnu, while the severe bone-shaped one dangling from the other signals in no uncertain manner divinity in its aspect of dissolution and destruction – Shiva. Similarly, Shiva's striking discal earrings showing a woman playing the *vina* and another in dancing stance reiterate the wearer's role as Lord of music and dance.<sup>5</sup>

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332a



332b

333  
**BAZUBAND (armband)**  
 North India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection

Narrow interlocking vertical gold units set with diamond chips are joined with a thick rope of cotton threads on either side, ending in an elaborate tassel of gold threads and glass beads.

334  
**A VILLAGE HEADMAN**  
 Rajasthan

Among the many rural communities scattered across India, ornament forms have endured the passage of time.



333

From all accounts, ear ornaments were almost mandatory for men through the ages. Abul Fazl in the *Ain-i-Akbari* mentions gold earrings as one amongst the twelve recommended adornments of Hindustani men; others included in the list are an ornament for the turban, a ring and a sword. In Jahangir's reign, the practice of wearing a *bali* (loop) with a single pearl or a ruby between two pearls was exceedingly fashionable for men. It originated when the emperor had his ears pierced and wore *balis* as a sign that he was an 'ear-bored' slave of the Sufi saint Khwaja Muinuddin, whose blessings,

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he believed, had saved him from a critical illness: "On this the twelfth Shahriwar... I (Jahangir) made holes in my ears and drew into each a shining pearl."<sup>6</sup>

A classic example of the continuity of design traditions in Indian jewellery, these pearl *balis* of 'Jahangir fashion' were probably variations on an earlier theme. There are references to a very similar ornament termed *trikantaka* in Banabhatta's meticulous descriptions of male attire in his 7<sup>th</sup> century literary work, *Harshacharita*.<sup>7</sup> From this narrative it appears that wearing a different style of earring in each ear lobe was not uncommon. *Balis* of rock crystal, bangles of white sapphire, and jewelled diadems and armlets were not unusual in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. In one of the most striking word pictures of the text, the dazzling shafts



of light from king Harsha's armlets (*keyura*) are likened to Vishnu's arms.<sup>8</sup>

Knowledge of gems was an important element of state economics. Kautiliya, in his 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. *Arthashastra*, considered mines and all products that were derived from them of supreme importance to the nation and society for, according to him, "the treasury has its source in the mines; from the treasury the army comes into being. With the treasury and the army, the earth is obtained with the treasury as its ornament."<sup>9</sup> In the *Kadambari*, Banabhatta includes *ratnapariksha* (science of gems) as part of the educational curriculum of the young prince Chandrapida. Going even further back in time into the warp of myth and legend, it is said that Rishabha, the first Jain Tirthankara taught the science of gems to his son Bahubali.

The indulgent excesses to which this initially pragmatic principle was susceptible were manifest in the dynastic courts of India. Extending the meaning of personal adornment to its absolute limits, daggers, swords, quivers, even saddles of royal mounts



335

**EMPEROR JAHANGIR**

Mughal; c.1615

10.8 x 5.4 cm

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, Nasli and Alice Heeramaneck Collection (L.69.24.272)

*Jahangir set court fashion for earrings by drawing a shining pearl into each ear in fulfillment of a vow, in 1614–15. This portrait depicts him wearing large pearls in his ear.*

336

**TA'ZIM (anklet)**Rajasthan; 19<sup>th</sup> century

Private collection

*Flexible chain anklets such as these with diamonds set in gold were presented as a sign of royal favour and gratitude, and therefore called ta'zim or honour.*

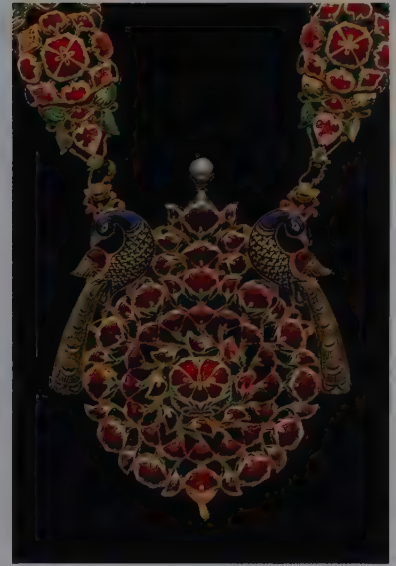
336







338



337 (b)

337a & 337b (facing page and reverse above)  
**PATRIHAR (necklace)**  
 Jaipur; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection

*A gold necklace (har) with two side panels (patri) set with large rose-cut diamonds epitomizes the delicate quality achieved in the closed set kundan style. The reverse, shown above, is delicately enamelled.*

338  
**H.H. AJIT SINHJI, MAHARAJA OF  
 DHRANGADHRA (1872–1911)**  
 Photograph by Lala Deen Dayal  
 Courtesy Air India Collection

*Few royal jewels are available for study. The patrihar worn by the Maharaja is identical to the one shown in plate 337a.*

339  
**MARDANA KADA (anklets)**  
 Rajasthan; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Diam: 9 cms  
 National Museum, New Delhi  
 (96.240/1-2)

*Diamonds set in gold enamelled in blue; a geometric motif in white and red on the inner side.*



339



340  
H.H. SIR YADVENDER SINGH,  
MAHARAJA OF PATIALA (1913–74)  
Photograph by Lala Deen Dayal  
Courtesy Air India Collection

341  
A DIAMOND NECKLACE  
Courtesy Cartier Archives, Paris  
*This diamond necklace was made for the Maharaja  
of Patiala in the 1920s by Cartier.*

342  
KANTHA (necklace)  
By permission of the British Library  
(Photo: 1000/5479)  
*Seven rows of diamond beads, all of Golconda  
origin, made for the Gaekwad of Baroda.*





343

**NECKLACE**

Rajasthan; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*A central roundel and rectangular side units of a necklace of rubies set in gold on a green enamel ground. The sun motif, insignia of the Kachhawa dynasty of Rajasthan, suggests that this ornament may have once been the property of the Jaipur royal family.*

344

**BAZUBAND (armband)**

Rajasthan; 18<sup>th</sup> century  
W: 14 cms  
Private collection

*Set with white sapphires in gold on a blue ground, the jewelled straps on either side of the centrepiece, in lieu of the usual strands of pearls or silk threads, are an unusual feature.*

were made in precious metals and studded with gems. Descriptions of the emperors by travellers to the Mughal courts provide striking examples of the use of jewellery as a statement of imperial power.

Judging from portraits and travel diaries, it was the Maharajas of post-Mughal India, who crossed every conceivable boundary in their opulent, almost vulgar use and display of jewellery. Describing the attire of Bhupinder Singh of Patiala and his son Yadavender Singh, a courtier records: "Several strings of pearls festooned his silken turban, which was crowned with a delicate diadem. Around his neck he wore a great collar of diamonds set in platinum along with four or five other massive and beautifully set necklaces of diamonds and emeralds. Another necklace with exquisite diamonds hung from his waist, with more diamonds on bracelets round his arms and wrists. He also wore diamond buttons on his *achkan* and around his waist was a gold lame scarf held in place by the clasp of a single emerald, about four inches by two and a half. Also at his waist was a sword in jewelled scabbard, its hilt sparkling with gems."<sup>10</sup>

Indian love of ornamentation was by no means a royal prerogative. Travelling through Vijayanagar in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the ambassador from Samarkand noticed that "all the inhabitants of this country, both those of exalted rank and of an inferior class, down to the inhabitants of the bazaar, wear pearls or rings adorned with precious stones, in their ears, on their necks, on their arms..."<sup>11</sup> In the neighbouring kingdom of Bijapur, a few decades later, Ludovica de Varthema, an Italian, was amazed at the number of the king's servants who wore "...on the insteps of their shoes, rubies and diamonds and other jewels."<sup>12</sup> Thomas Holbein Hendley, in his 19<sup>th</sup> century encyclopaedic work,

344





345

*Indian Jewellery*, describes almost every type of ornament worn by virtually every class and community in India. The *baleora*, for instance (345), was typical to Jain and Hindu men of the mercantile class. It was a necklace of plaited chains of gold held together at intervals by jewelled clasps, with a pendant, *dhuk-dhuki*, a term derived from the slight rising and falling of the pendant as it rested on the pulse just below the adam's apple. A popular ornament even in Mughal times, the gift of an emerald *dhuk-dhuki* to Raja Rai Singh Rathor, and a diamond one to Prince Muhammad Mu-azzam is recorded in the *Ain-i-Akbari*;<sup>13</sup> one more example of the unbroken continuity in styles in Indian jewellery traditions.

Substantially ornamented male figures of assuredly non-royal status are observed in sculptures from Bharhut and Sanchi. Close fitting torques along with longer necklaces of multiple strands of beads, armlets and wristlets are invariably seen adorning figures of *yakshas* (temple guardians) on pillars and brackets. Shunga terracottas from Bengal testify to the widespread influence of the tradition. Male figures from Chandraketugarh are depicted wearing the classic men's torque (probably Panini's *graivaka*), and a three-stringed strand of pearls (the *Natyashastra's trisara*). Arm ornaments clearly took pride of place, judging from the size and sheer numbers massed and tiered on the left arm. The figures are also adorned with a variety of ear ornaments and girdles. Almost all of these forms find parallels in women's ornaments, except for the *mukut* (crown) and the *kalgi* (turban jewel), primarily male ornaments signifying sovereignty and power.

346a



346b





348a



348b

345

**BALEORA (necklace)**

Jaipur; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection, USA

*Seven gold chains interspersed with gem-set spacers and a pendant, commonly worn by men of the merchant community in Rajasthan.*

346a & 346b

**KADA (anklet – front and back)**

Rajasthan; late 18<sup>th</sup> century  
Diam: 10 cm  
National Museum, New Delhi (87.1167/2)

*Kundan set diamonds on a translucent blue enamel ground; a meshwork of seed pearls on top.*

347

**MAKARAKANTI (necklace)**

Tamil Nadu; early 19<sup>th</sup> century  
L: 48 cm  
Private collection, USA

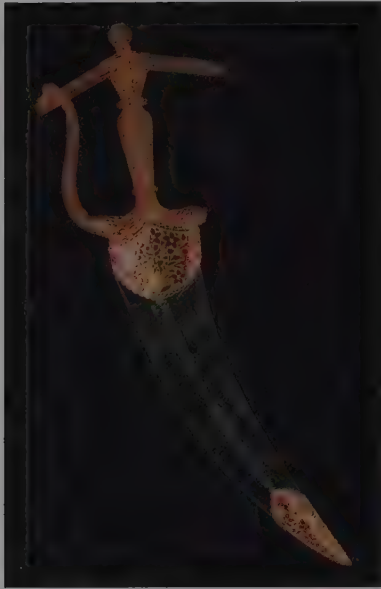
*Gold necklace set with rubies, diamonds, emeralds and pendant pearls; the reverse of the pendant is engraved and inscribed with the name of the former owner.*

348a & 348b

**BELT BUCKLE (front and reverse)**

Jaipur; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*Gold set with cabuchon rubies and enamelled on the reverse.*



349



351a



349  
**DAGGER**

Vijayanagar; 18<sup>th</sup> century  
Wallace Collection, London (OA 1409)

*The gold hilt is chased and engraved, set with rubies and emeralds, and enamelled in green and red.*

350  
**MAHARAJA MADHO SINGH OF JAIPUR**  
(r.1760–1778)

Jaipur; c.1765  
Courtesy Sotheby's

351a & 351b (reverse above and facing page)  
**TORQUE (neck collar)**  
Benaras; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
National Museum, New Delhi (96.234)

*This broad, close fitting gold necklace set with white sapphires combines Indian motifs with foreign elements to produce a lace effect (jali kam).*







352a

352a & 352b

**TORQUE (front and reverse)**

Benaras; late 19<sup>th</sup> century

Courtesy Roopchand Jewellers, New Delhi

*Large white sapphires are set in gold in this neck collar lavishly enamelled on the reverse. Men in India, regardless of social standing, adorned themselves with jewels whose flamboyance vied with those worn by women.*



352b

## DIVINITY MANIFEST

The *mukut* or crown (Sanskrit – *kirita*), recommended by Bharata for gods and kings, was the Indian insignia of royalty. Styles ranged from a diadem of pearls with a pendant centre, visible on sculptures of royal figures as far back as the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C., to elaborate jewelled caps seen in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century portraits of Indian royalty.

In south India, crown-like ornaments are seen on early Pallava sculptures of divinities, kings and princes, while in sculptures in north India, the crown was the sole prerogative of the gods; ordinary men sported cloth turbans embellished with jewels. Different kinds of crowns are identified by different names in the south, each term design-specific. The *kiritam* is long and vertical; the *makutam* resembles an inverted pot; the *vairamudi*, simulating hair coiffeur, is completely encrusted with diamonds; the *jatamakutam* and *karpadam* are fashioned like the long locks of Shiva coiled over his head, decorated with the crescent moon and the image of Ganga, studded with gems.

As crowning symbols of other-worldly power, some of the best *mukuts* are to be seen in temple collections in south India, gifted by devout and wealthy patrons. Offering a *mukut* to deity symbolized the donor's devotional surrender to the higher power on whose head the crown rested; for in the ultimate scheme of things, He was the true Prajapati (lord of the subjects).

The grandeur of such ornaments is illustrated in just one of the many inscriptions listing jewels gifted by Rajaraja Chola in the temple in Thanjavur: "One sacred crown (*sri-mudi*), made of gold taken from the treasury of the lord, containing thirty-eight *karanju* and three quarters, four *manjadi* and one *kunri* of gold. One hundred and twenty-four crystals (*palingu*) set into it, weighed one *karanju*, nine *manjadi* and one *kunri*. Seventy-one diamond crystals (*palikku-vayiram*) weighed three *manjadi* and one *kunri*. Thirty-two *potti* weighed seven *manjadi* and one *kunri*. The *pinju* weighed one *karanju* and a half. Three hundred and thirty-four strung pearls of brilliant water and of red water, taken from the pearls, which the lord Sri-Rajarajadeva had poured out



353

353  
UTSAVA MURTHI (processional image)  
Tamil Nadu

*The deity is adorned with a tall gem-studded gold crown.*

354  
KIRITAM (crown)  
Tamil Nadu; 18<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection, USA

*A gold crown with attached ear coverings set with rubies, diamonds and emeralds, made for a temple deity.*

355  
SARPATTI (turban ornament)  
North India, Uttar Pradesh; mid-19<sup>th</sup> century  
C. L. Bharany Collection, New Delhi

*A miniature version of the more elaborate turban ornaments, this example in gold, set with white sapphires and foiled emeralds, was specially fashioned for a young prince.*

354



355





356

356  
TURBAN AND JEWELLERY BELONGING TO  
THE GAEKWAD OF BARODA  
By permission of the British Library  
(Photo: 1000/5480)

357  
MUGHAL EMPEROR FARRUKH SIYAR  
IN A PALANQUIN  
Rajasthan, Kota; c.1720  
Opaque watercolour and gold on paper  
27.4 x 28.8 cm  
Kind courtesy of Maharao Brijraj Singh of Kotah,  
Chairman, Board of Trustees and the Trustees of  
Rao Madho Singh Trust Museum, Kota

358  
KALGI AND SARPATTI (turban ornament)  
Bengal; c.1755  
Kalgi: H: 16.9 cm  
Sarpatti: W: 10.6 cm  
Courtesy Victoria and Albert Museum,  
London (IS 3-1982)

*These enamelled gold and gem-set turban jewels were presented by Mir Jaffar, the Nawab of Bengal, to Admiral Charles Watson, after the Battle of Plassey in 1757. The large sapphire in the centre of the kalgi is an unusual addition.*

359  
SARPECH (turban ornament)  
North India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

as flowers at the sacred feet and with which he had worshipped the feet of the god – round pearls, roundish pearls, polished pearls, small pearls, *payittam*, *nimbolam*, *ambumudu*, crude pearls, twin pearls, *sappatii* and *sakkattu*, weighed seven *karanju*. Altogether, the crown weighed forty-nine *karanju* and a half, corresponding to a value of eighty-six *kasu*.<sup>14</sup>

Entire festivals were organized around these jewelled-statements of the power of the divine; many still continue, particularly in south India. The festival of Vairamudi at Melukote near Mysore centres around the ceremonial placing of the dome-shaped *vairamudi*, a crown studded with diamonds, on the head of Challuvanarayana

Swamy, the principle deity of the temple.<sup>15</sup> In the south, tiered *mukuts* were fashioned to simulate the *shikhara*, architecturally the head of the temple.

In north India, *mukuts* in Vaishnava temples are often crafted in the shape of Lord Krishna's venerated peacock feather (*mor-mukut*). The idol of Balgopal in the Gopalji temple in Benaras is adorned with jewelled versions of the *mor-mukut* to match the attire of the day. On Baisakhi, the festival of spring in the month of February, for instance, the tiny image of Balgopal is adorned with a *mukut* of yellow sapphires to match the shades of yellow of his attire appropriate to the occasion.

Indian rulers wore the *mukut* as an unequivocal symbol of earthly power. As a mark of royalty, the crown owes its origin to divine sanction – it is the emblem of God that differentiates between the lay and the divine, between the ruler and the ruled. Though Mughal portraits generally show the rulers wearing jewel embellished turbans, occasionally illustrated manuscripts of the period depict a crown hovering just above the imperial head. Similar to the aesthetic convention of painting haloes behind the monarch to emphasize spiritual superiority, the *mukut* indicated the exalted status of the subject.

Later versions of the Indian crown show distinct foreign influences, incorporating western shapes with traditional turban ornaments. One of the most beautiful examples of this hybrid composite of *kalgi*, *sarpatti* and *mukut* was the *rajpat* of the state of Rewah. It was completely covered with foiled diamonds and emeralds; a row of unusually large oval Basra pearls were suspended from little diamond caps at the bottom. Seven crescent-shaped turban ornaments set with diamonds converged towards the central jewelled plume offset by a large foiled square ruby. A large blue sapphire carved with the image of Vishnu Chaturbhuj dominated the centre – an unusual choice of stone for state headgear, considering the general superstition of misfortune associated with this gem. Thomas Holbein Hendley in his book *Indian Jewellery* records the displeasure of the subjects of Rewah at the choice, convinced that the gem's unusually large size would only intensify its maleficent properties.<sup>16</sup> The whereabouts of this spectacular crown are today unknown.



357

### CRESTS OF HONOUR

The *kalgi* (Persian: *jigha* – crest; Hindi: *sarpech*), a turban ornament (358), was worn exclusively by the emperor, his family and entourage. It was the ultimate symbol

of royalty, or royal favour, similar to the European orders; presentation of a *kalgi* indicated signal imperial approval. *The Institutes of Timur* states that besides the customary belt, sword and horse, a warrior who distinguished himself was to be rewarded with a jewelled heron's feather.<sup>17</sup> Shaped like a plume, the *kalgi* was a jewelled brooch with a large pearl or gemstone usually dangling from its curved tip. This elaborate creation evolved from the earlier Mughal practice of pinning a heron's feather (*kalgi*) to the front of the turban. Attaching a pearl to the end of this plume so that it curved backwards in a graceful arc was *de rigeur* in Jahangir's reign. A style introduced by the emperor himself, it is a visible feature in most miniature portraits of him.

During Shah Jahan's reign, the simple pearl'd plume of Timurian descent underwent a radical transformation into an elaborate gem-studded creation incorporating some of the treasury's finest jewels. Despatching Prince Aurangzeb for an arduous expedition to the Deccan, the emperor conferred on him a special *sarpech* composed of a ruby and two pearls, which the court biographer Inayat Khan records was worth "one lakh and fifty thousand rupees."<sup>18</sup> There are innumerable references in the *Shah Nama* to expensively jewelled and enamelled *jighas* that were ceremonially presented to family and courtiers in recognition of services rendered.



358



359

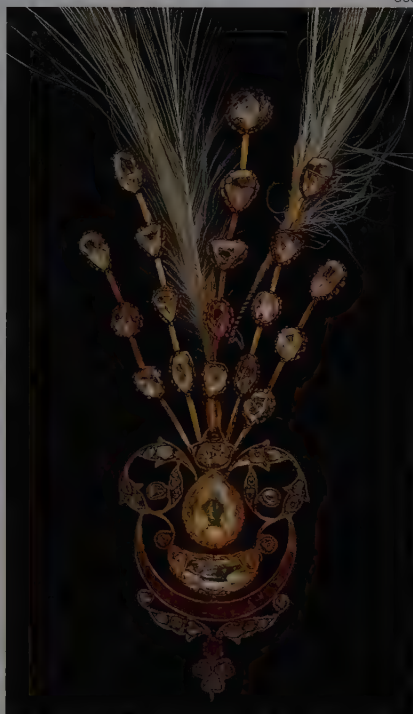




361

362

363



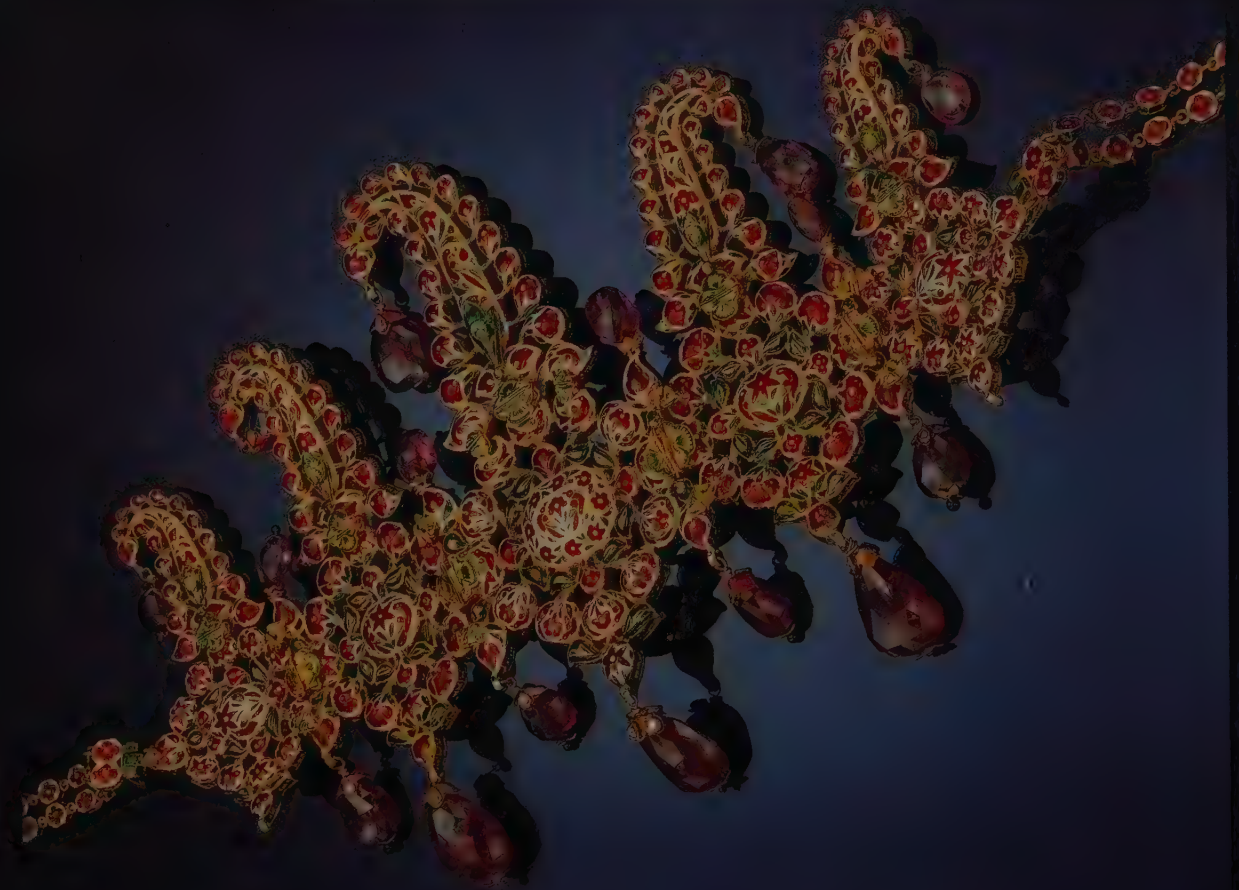
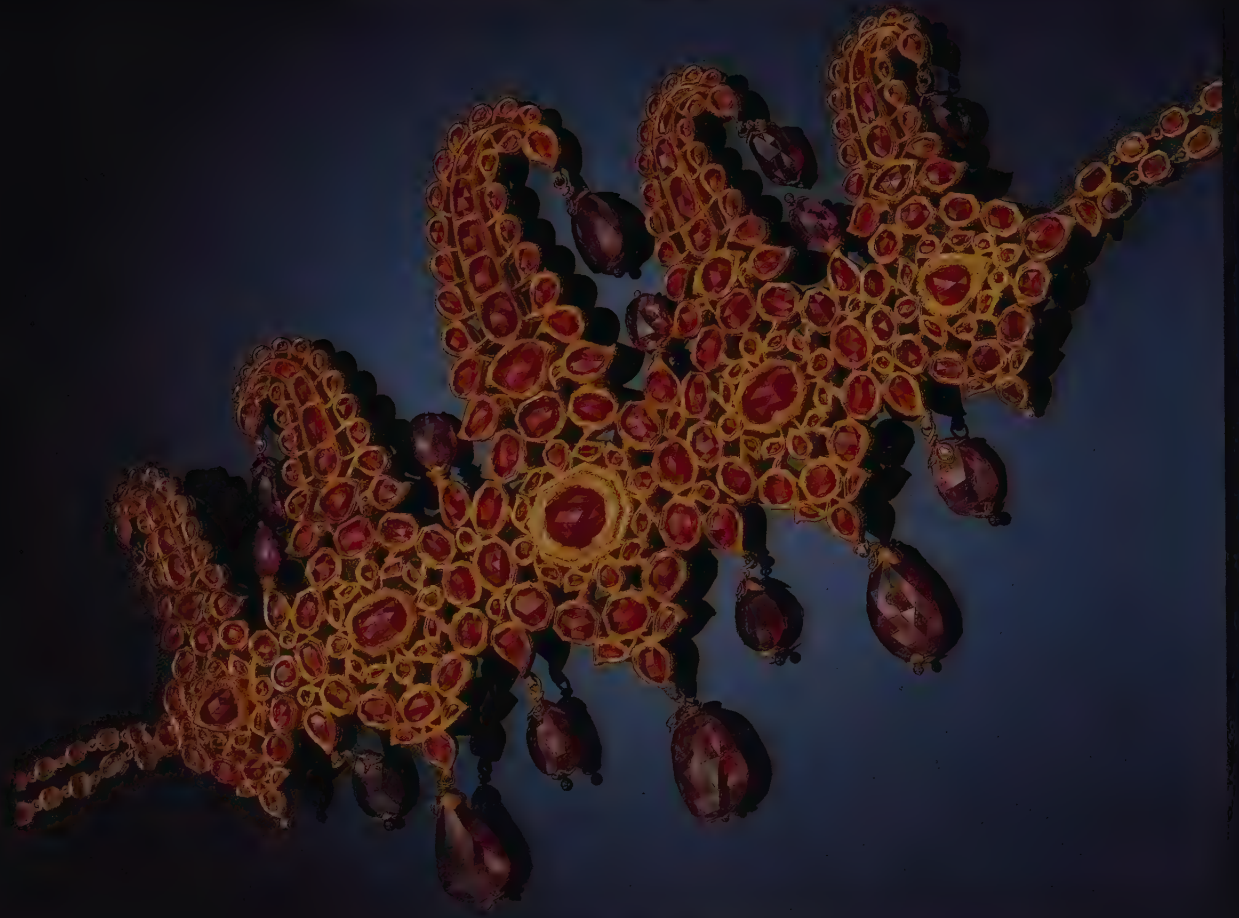
360 (facing page)  
**PORTRAIT OF SHAH JAHAN AS A PRINCE**  
 Mughal; c.1616–1617  
 Opaque watercolour on paper  
 20.6 x 11.5 cm  
 Courtesy Victoria and Albert Museum,  
 London (IM 14-1925)

*The young prince is seen in this portrait admiring an aigrette of European design. Shah Jahan's aesthetics transformed the heron's feather into the extravagantly jewelled kalgi.*

361  
**PAGE FROM AN ALBUM OF DRAWINGS**  
 SHOWING TWO JEWELLED AIGRETTES  
 Workshop of Arnold Lulls; c.1610  
 Pencil, pen and ink, wash, body colour and gold  
 on paper  
 Courtesy Victoria and Albert Museum,  
 London (D6-1896)

362  
**KALGI (turban ornament)**  
 North India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection  
*Diamond sprays take the place of heron's feathers in this kalgi, which displays western design elements. It originally belonged to the royal family of a small state in eastern India, and has been adapted to be worn as a pendant.*

363  
**KALGI (turban ornament)**  
 North India; early 20<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection  
*Diamonds and rubies in a western setting in gold. This design of the traditional kalgi is clearly influenced by the European aigrette.*





It is not unlikely that the European aigrette was inspired by this Mughal ornament for the turban. Aigrettes of assuredly Indian origin, complete with feather tucked behind, are occasionally observed in European portraits of the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. These must have reached European courts by way of western merchant ships. Aigrettes designed by Arnold Lulls, the Dutch jeweller to the court of King James I, feature the characteristic flat-bottomed stem (*tana*), functionally important in the Indian *kalgi* to tuck the ornament into the turban folds (361). Only later, as aigrettes came into their own, was this oriental stem replaced by a practical pin which could also be used on hats.

In a classic case of cross-cultural influences, European aigrettes in turn influenced *kalgi* styles. Foreign 'rareties' reached the Mughal court as gifts from European royalty through their diplomatic emissaries. Traveller-merchants, especially jewellers like Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, also carried merchandise for trade. Foreign craftsmen were also employed at the Mughal court. Keeping in mind the dynastic love for aesthetic experimentation, one can easily visualize the Mughal emperors, as committed aesthetes, encouraging hybrid jewellery forms in their ateliers.

Over the next two centuries, *kalgis* became grander and still grander, rivalling the splendour of many a European crown. Escorted into the hall of audience, the *Diwan-i-Khas*, Bernier's attention was riveted by one such *kalgi* worn by Aurangzeb, "whose base was composed of diamonds of an extraordinary size and value, besides an Oriental Topaz, which may be pronounced unparalleled, exhibiting a lustre like the Sun."<sup>19</sup> A convention adopted by provincial rulers consciously aping Mughal court conventions, *kalgi* styles also developed a host of regional variations. The single jewelled plume soon developed two side attachments at the bottom, which increased to four and even six, forming an elaborate strip, the *sarpatti* (359). Even the solitary upward crescent multiplied from one, to three, to five (*panch kalangi*) (364a, 364b).



365

364a & 364b (facing page – front and reverse)  
**PANCH KALANGI** (turban ornament)  
 Mughal; late 18<sup>th</sup>–early 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 L: 28 cms  
 Courtesy Sotheby's

*Gold set with faceted rubies and spinel drops, the reverse is polychrome enamelled on a white ground. Turban ornaments set entirely with rubies are very rare. This example, with five vertical plumes (panch kalangi), is believed to have been in the collection of the Maharaja of Patiala.*

365  
**PORTRAIT OF A SIKH RULER**  
 Punjab Hills; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Courtesy Sotheby's

*The ruler is richly adorned with emerald and pearl strands around his neck, a large aigrette secured to the front of his turban, and a magnificent kalgi and sarpatti.*

366  
**KALGI AND SARPATTI** (turban ornament)  
 North India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection

*The ornament is set in gold with navaratna gems (nine auspicious stones). Velvet-lined wooden boxes were specially crafted in the shape of the jewel itself, providing a secure home befitting its beauty. Very few of these survive today, since they do not fit in bank lockers. Jewels today are piled together in shoe boxes, biscuit and chocolate tins, rolled up in handkerchiefs or even in pieces of old cloth!*

366



## FOR THE BROW OF A GREAT PRINCE

A Cartier creation for the Maharajah of Kapurthala, who is known for his excellent taste. One of the most enlightened of Hindu princes, he spends a part of each year in Paris. He is such an admirer of French architecture that he had a French architect go to India to build him a Louis XVI palace

The Maharajah, like most of the other Indian potentates, has faith in the increasing value of pearls and precious stones and regularly devotes a portion of his annual income to increasing his collection. The Hindu princes look upon gems as a permanent investment to pass from generation to generation



Queen Marie of Roumania has all the feminine love for beautiful jewels. Accordingly, when, on the occasion of her recent sojourn in Paris, she heard of the magnificent emerald head ornament which Cartier had made for the Maharajah of Kapurthala, she expressed a desire to see it and paid a special visit to the rue de la Paix, in the midst of her busiest shopping period, to view it. This head ornament, here illustrated, in actual size, consists of fifteen emeralds of the most marvelous color and of unusual shape. The one cut as a half-moon is especially well adapted to sustain the pear-shaped emerald that crowns it. Although Messrs. Cartier created the ornament, they refuse to state its value. They did say, however, they would not care to duplicate it for half a million dollars

THE SUEZ ADVERTISMENT

367

367  
TURBAN ORNAMENT  
Courtesy Cartier Archives, Paris  
© Cartier

Made for Maharaja Jagatjit Singh of Kapurthala in 1926 by Cartier, this turban ornament is set with 19 Colombian emeralds of various shapes and rose cut diamonds and pearls. The central hexagonal emerald weighs 177.40 carats and the others together weigh 254.84 carats.

Early twentieth-century versions are markedly westernized (363). Many, in fact, were made by western jewellers incorporating art deco designs with Indian gems. Hearing of a magnificent specimen executed by Cartier for the Maharaja of Kapurthala with his unique collection of emeralds, Queen Marie of Romania made a special trip to the jeweller's Rue de la Paix showroom to view it (367). When questioned about its worth, Cartier, like most jewellers, wont to be evasive without undermining the significance of a commission, stated that they would not be able to duplicate the Kapurthala *kalgī* for half a million dollars. This was in 1926!

Ironically, the growing popularity of this ultimate symbol of Mughal sovereignty signalled its dynastic disintegration. Towards the end of his reign, Aurangzeb was forced to issue a decree that “no *amir* to whom a *sarpech* of jewellery was granted should wear it except on Sunday.”<sup>20</sup> But the general malaise and rising anarchy in the empire was reflected in the indiscriminate wearing and gifting of *kalgīs* in the provincial courts, provoking a contemporary historian's mournful comment that “the *jigha* and *sarpech* were no longer regulated by the rank and dignity of the recipient.”<sup>21</sup>

### Images of Loyalty

During Jahangir's reign, the practice of wearing a miniature portrait of the emperor set in a jewelled frame on the turban made tentative inroads into Mughal court conventions. This jewelled miniature was called *shast*, a Persian term derived from the practice of hooking it into the folds of the turban to fix it in place. This ornament was definitely of foreign origin, considering Islamic attitudes towards figural representation; but its popularity was unequivocally Jahangiri, considering the emperor's love of paintings.

An incident related to the *shast* is narrated in particular detail in Sir Thomas Roe's memoirs. During his audiences with the emperor Jahangir, Roe, as part of his

“Reside in my eyes, O!  
 Darling son of Nanda!  
 Your form is captivating,  
 as are your cloud hued complexion  
 and wide eyes!  
 You have the peacock crest,  
 ear-ornaments shaped like the  
 crocodile and the crimson mark  
 on your forehead  
 With your lips you play the flute  
 and give nectar like music,  
 On your chest shines the  
 chrysanthemum garland,  
 Your waist is radiant with the  
 girdle of tiny bells,  
 and your feet sound sweet with  
 the jingling of the anklets.  
 You are the Lord of Meera,  
 you bestow bliss on saints,  
 O! Protector of cows! You  
 affectionately look after your  
 devotees.”<sup>[ii]</sup>

court dress, would have pinned on his hat a jewelled portrait of his sovereign Queen Elizabeth I, an English convention especially favoured by her. Bearing in mind the emperor’s keen eye for painting, it is equally certain that he would have noticed and remarked on it. From understanding the ornament’s significance to introducing it into his own court was then simply a matter of time for this well-known innovator of fashion trends. But when the Mughal monarch expressly desired a miniature portrait of the diplomat’s wife, Roe stoically resisted imperial cajoling, even at the risk of imperial wrath!<sup>22</sup>

At a practical level, the convention of *shasts* was ideally suited to the Mughal hierarchical set-up. Visible proof of the link between sovereign and courtier, it reconfirmed the latter’s status in the inner circles of power. Even so, the tradition was speedily abolished in the first year of Shah Jahan’s reign to appease an affronted clergy who viewed the practice as a categorical violation of the fundamental Muslim injunction against figural representation. The fact that these portraits were pinned on the turban simply added insult to religious injury. Touching the forehead to the ground (*sijdah*) was reserved for divinity. Placing a portrait of anyone – even of exalted imperial status – on this part of the body was nothing short of sacrilegious, so the convention soon went the way of the earlier practice of doing *sijdah* to the sovereign. Most *shasts* must have been destroyed around the time as a measure of compliance to a law heavily underscoring religious sentiment. The general practice of refashioning unused ornaments would have done away with any remaining specimens.

Evidence of the tradition of *shasts* in history lies solely in scattered references in court chronicles and miniature paintings of court life of the period, some of which show noblemen wearing a portrait ornament on their turban. A few centuries down the line, the tradition was resurrected among Indian Maharajas, who occasionally wore a jewelled portrait of their sovereign on their turban. This time it was a British monarch!

## ARCHER’S ACCESSORIES

Archery was a sport and favourite pastime of rulers and nobility in Mughal India. In portraits, Mughal emperors and princes are sometimes shown sporting a thumb ring of unusual shape on the right hand. Several more hang suspended from a sash worn around the waist. These archer’s thumb rings, *zihgir* in Persian, were worn during archery (368, 369). Such rings were neither uniquely Indian nor exclusively Mughal. They are believed to have originated in China and come to India via Turkey and Persia.

368



369



368

### ARCHER’S THUMB RING

Mughal; mid-17<sup>th</sup> century  
 The Brooklyn Museum, on loan from  
 The Guennol Collection, L77.33.3.

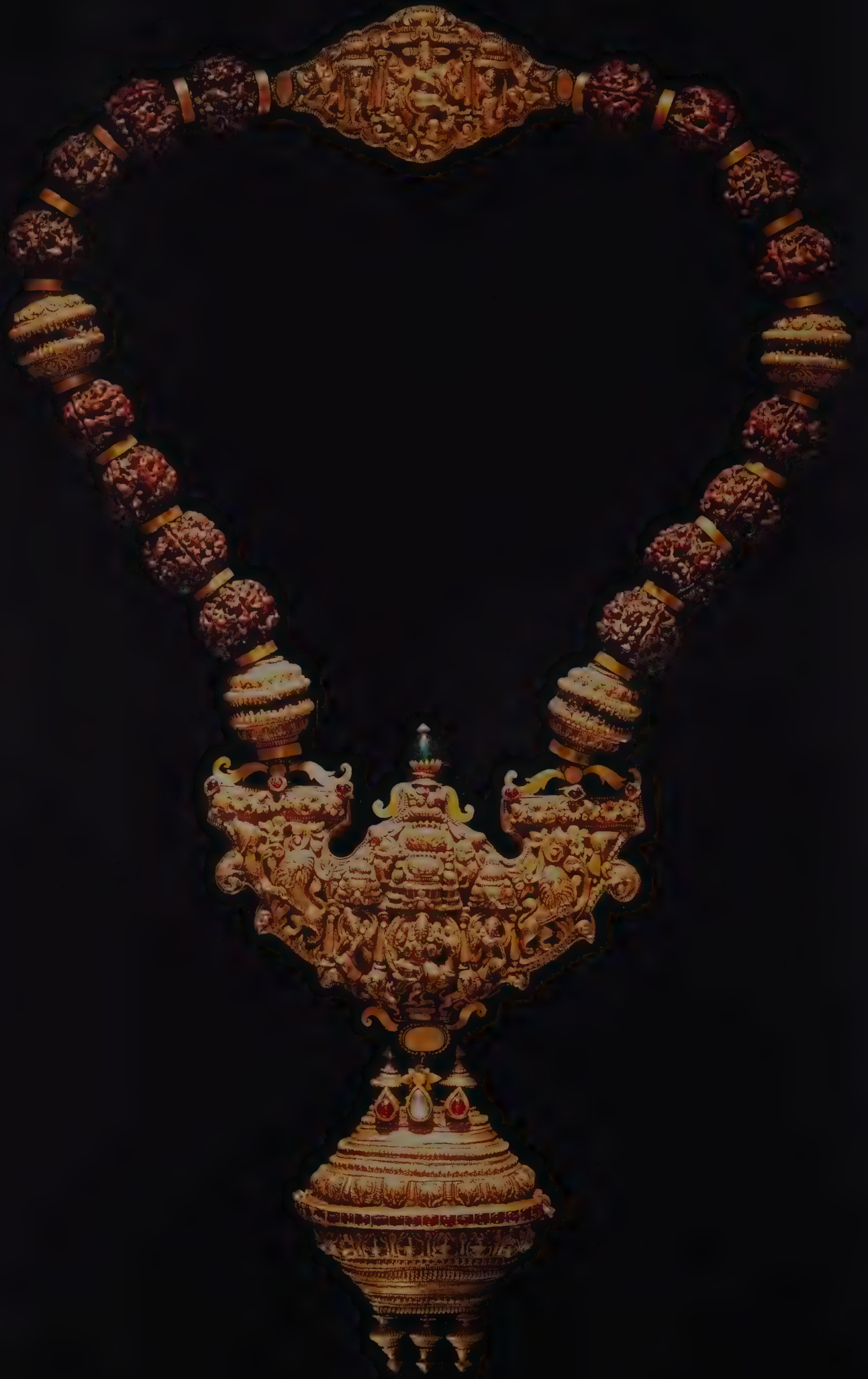
White nephrite inlaid with carved rubies and emeralds set in gold; the ruby at the centre carved in the form of a closed peony. The ring is believed to have been made for Shah Jahan.

369

### ARCHER’S THUMB RING

Mughal; late 18<sup>th</sup> century  
 H: 3.9 cm W: 3 cm  
 Courtesy Victoria and Albert Museum,  
 London (02528 IS)

Blue enamelled gold set with diamonds; a floral design on the inside.





370b

The form of the rings is quite different from normal finger-rings. Fashioned to be worn only on the thumb, they were intended to provide a firm anchor for the drawn back bow-string, to enhance the flight of the arrow and to protect the thumb from the impact of the sudden release of the string. Different from ordinary rings, they taper into a sloping, broad v-shape at one end. During archery, they were worn with the v-shaped point turned towards the wrist; the drawn back string was hitched behind this point, the fingers holding it in place; by loosening the hold on the ring, the string was released from its support with a momentum which catapulted the arrow towards its target at a considerable speed. Wearing the ring in any other way could result in injury to the thumb or the ring itself flying off the finger with the full force of the released bow-string.

Bearing in mind their utilitarian objective, rings actually used during archery were fashioned from a single piece of jade. Most rings were plain, sometimes inscribed with the name and regnal year of the emperor. A hardstone, jade could sustain the pressure of the drawn back bow-string, and was treasured by the Mughal rulers partly due to its rarity, and partly due to a Timurid ancestry when the material was coveted and carved. Jade was also regarded as a symbol of imperial sovereignty and believed to be endowed with apotropaic powers to prolong life and assure immortality. Both varieties of jade – jadeite and nephrite – were imported from Khotan in Afghanistan and carved in the workshops of Cambay.

Archer's thumb rings served a functional as well as decorative purpose. In most of the portraits where the ring is featured, the ruler is shown wearing the ring, not in the manner intended for its actual use, but with the tapering edge pointing up towards the tip of the thumb, instead of down, towards the wrist.<sup>23</sup> Such rings, no doubt gem-encrusted, were perhaps used only on ceremonial occasions as part of the attire. The gem-stones on such rings would not have been able to withstand the pressure of the released string without loosening from the settings.

The more elaborate ceremonial rings, made of jade inlaid with gold and precious stones, or made from gold encrusted with gems, were engraved with scrolling designs of flowers and leaves and set with fine gold wire, diamonds, rubies and emeralds. Decorative elements inspired from nature and incorporated into functional forms, a characteristic feature of the Mughal decorative arts, is manifest in these miniature jewelled beauties.

370a & 370b (facing page and reverse above)  
GOWRISHANKARAM (necklace)  
South India, Chettinad; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Courtesy Musee Barbier-Mueller,  
Geneva (2504-102)

Rudraksha beads interspersed with gold rings, four beads encased in gold and a repousse worked gold pendant and clasp is the most traditional form of this ornament. The hollow pendant, filled with lac, is backed with a silver plate inscribed with the initials of the owner or maker and the quantity of gold and silver used in the ornament.

371  
GOWRISHANKARAM (necklace)  
Tamil Nadu; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection, USA

*Few variations of the traditional rudraksha bead gowrishankaram are extant. In this example, the traditional gold repousse pendant is suspended on a necklace of gold flower forms attached to a thick black cord. The reverse bears an inscription recording the name of the donor, the deity, the temple it was gifted to and the date of the gift.*



*“In his ears he had rich jewels of diamonds, sapphires and pearls, two of the latter being as large as walnuts. His arms, from the elbows to the wrists were covered with golden bracelets, set with numberless precious stones of great value, and his legs from the knees to the ankles, were similarly adorned. His fingers and toes had numerous rings, and on one his great toes he wore a ruby of great size and wonderful brilliancy. One of his diamonds was bigger than a large bean. All these were greatly surpassed by his girdle of gold and jewels, which was altogether inestimable, and was so brilliant that it dazzled the eyes of the beholders.”<sup>[iii]</sup>*

## PORTABLE SHRINES

The custom of men adorning themselves with jewellery is relatively limited in south India. A prerogative of royalty, men from other classes are rarely seen adorned with jewels, with the exception of *kaddukans* (ear studs), perhaps a *navaratna* ring, the *yagnopavita* thread with amulets or a simple locket-amulet strung around the neck. Men of royal birth were entitled to wear gold anklets, and in the *Shilappadikaram*, Madhavi, “was asked to dance for the ruling monarch and saw on his ankle the heavy circlet that only victorious kings may wear.”<sup>24</sup> While royal male jewellery in south India was in keeping with its counterparts in other areas of the country, the one exception was the *gowrishankaram* (370a, 371).

In sheer size and magnificence, the *gowrishankaram* is the male counterpart to the *kali-tiru*, the marriage necklace of Chettiar women. Worn by men only, the ornament derives its name from Gowri, another name for Parvati, the consort of Shiva, and Shankara, another name for Shiva. The ornament is specific to male members of the Nattukottai Chettiar community and the *dikshitaras* (priests) of the renowned Shiva temple at Chidambaram; other devout Shaivites wear it as an expression of their faith.

The *gowrishankaram* is a necklace of *rudraksha* beads with a gold repousse pendant with an amulet box suspended below. Another repousse worked end piece rests on the rear of the neck. *Rudraksha* – *rudra* = Shiva and *aksha* = eyes – are seeds of the fruit of the *Elaeocarpus angustifolius*, known in India as the *rudraksha* tree and believed to be dear to Shiva. Endowed with medicinal and amuletic properties, the beads are used as rosaries all over India.

The pendants in these ornaments tend to be quite majestic, rendered in three-dimensional relief employing the repousse technique known as *nakashu velai*. The craftsman uses sheet gold as a canvas to recreate the celestial abode of Shiva. The central figures are most commonly those of Shiva and Parvati seated on their vehicle (*vahana*) Rishabha (the bull). A plethora of motifs of animals, mythical creatures, prancing lions, nymphs, flowers, and scrolling vines and creepers are crowded around them on the small surface in high relief. Here, the impression is one of detail upon detail combining to result in an effect of extreme ornateness. There is an apparent desire to fill every inch of available space with decorative details. The hollow amulet box below the pendant houses the special twin-bead *rudraksha* – called the *gowri-shankar* – symbolising the union of Parvati and Shiva. The *gowrishankaram* is worn on most auspicious religious functions. In the many layers of symbolism that is inherent in the jewel, it functions as a portable shrine, consecrating the potent energies of the male and female aspects of Creation.

The jewel in India is an expression of power and wealth. In the realm beyond the earthly, it is “the materialisation of the secret correspondences that exist between man, the small universe and the great universe which surrounds him and of which he is a part.”<sup>25</sup> It is a symbol with a meaning and a function beyond mere adornment.

“Rise, O lord!

Be a lion, great-gifted!

O my lord, rise! Crush the unfaithful,

As lions do; as elephants, the self-respecting conquerors.

It is not jewels make a king:

A king makes and unmakes jewels.”<sup>26</sup>





SYMBOLS

## A Rosary of Wishing-Jewels

*“You know, I suppose that there are spirits in stones –  
colour demons that mesmerise you;  
pay them respect enough and they’ll speak to you –  
they will begin to move, to twinkle, to gesticulate,  
sometimes even they come out,  
only beware that you conjure them back again.  
Every jewel you set must have its colour-scheme,  
every jewel must be treated as  
a painter would treat his picture.”<sup>1</sup>*





373 (b)

372 (page 228)  
**MAHARAJA GANGA SINGH OF BIKANER  
 WITH HIS CHILDREN**  
 By permission of Weidenfeld and Nicolson,  
 London

373a (page 229) & 373b  
**PADAKKAM (pendant –  
 front and reverse above)**  
 Mysore; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Courtesy Sotheby's

A double-headed eagle pendant in gold set with diamonds, emeralds and rubies, is shown on the preceding page. The reverse (above) is plain except for a central repoussé medallion depicting the goddess Lakshmi. The double-headed eagle is the insignia of the Mysore royal family, and this pendant is believed to have once been in the collection of Sri Krishna Raja Wodeyar, the Maharaja of Mysore.

374 (facing page)  
**TALI (marriage necklace)  
 & HAIR ORNAMENTS**  
 South India; early 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Courtesy Sotheby's

Oblong gold lac-filled repoussé pendants depicting the goddess Lakshmi and demon face motifs, with alternate crescent and palmette-shaped terminals; the large central boss-shaped tali emblem surmounted with an image of the goddess Gajalakshmi flanked by elephants is inscribed: "Captured from a Singh Sindan, at the Battle of Sabraon on the 10<sup>th</sup> of February 1845, by Robert Henry Hastings of the 59<sup>th</sup> Native Infantry."<sup>11</sup> The two hair ornaments set with cabuchon rubies symbolize the sun and the moon.

Integral to the Indian 'way of life', jewellery was worn by men, women and children, and served a purpose beyond the gratification of the visual senses. In its design, its motifs, and the very act of wearing, jewellery expresses the essence of Indian spirituality and emits metaphorical signals in a code that is immediately comprehensible to the initiated. In a country that is historically ancient, geographically vast and culturally diverse, jewellery has perhaps been one of the great unifying factors. Meanings and forms, symbols and expressions that form part of the language of ornament, flow freely past barriers of caste and religion.

As in other human cultures of the world, in India too, jewellery was the earliest art form fashioned by man. The skin and bones of hunted animals was intended not solely to clothe, but as a form of adornment symbolizing valour and courage. The tooth of the tiger that man killed hung around his neck to signify his triumph over the beast, and thereby ensured him a position within the community. In the course of time, jewellery communicated messages of love, hate, power, hierarchy, aggression, pride, birth, virginity, maleness, femaleness, marriage, widowhood and so on. Magic and powers of healing, good and bad luck came to be associated with gem stones and jewellery forms. Jewels functioned as a barometer of the wealth and status of the individual. The royals wore many magnificent ornaments as emblems of their rank. Specific forms such as head fillets and crowns were exclusively identified as signs of authority and omnipotence, their use limited to those who governed. More than any other material product, gold and jewels became associated with the four aspects of life that most intimately concerned mankind – power, wealth, religion and health.

In classical Indian literature, individual items of jewellery were integral to the development of a plot or served as links in the story line. In the *Ramayana*, for example, on Sita's wedding day, her father King Janaka presented her with the head ornament (*chudamani*) that he himself had received from Kubera, the God of Wealth. The jewel became a symbol of herself, which she later sent to Rama, through Hanuman, to confirm their meeting. The story of Shakuntala and Dushyanta revolves around a signet ring, its loss causing Dushyanta to lose his memory, and its reappearance resulting in total recall. In the *Shilappadikaram*, it is the golden anklet, and in the *Manimekkalai*, it is the jewelled girdle which plays a key role. In the *Mahabharata*, in the famous gambling session between the Pandavas and Kauravas at Hastinapur, the first loss that Yudhisthira suffered was a pearl, and then many more ornaments and gems, until the final loss of the kingdom.

### The Incorruptible Metal

Irrespective of social standing or wealth, gold is coveted and worn by all in India. Even amongst the poor, who usually wear ornaments of silver, brass and bronze, a pair of simple earrings, a bangle, an amulet or the marriage *tali* of gold is mandatory. As a symbol of the goddess Lakshmi, who is said to preside over the "jewels and precious metals in the womb of the earth,"<sup>12</sup> gold personifies wealth.

The ancients referred to gold by many names. The *Amarakosha*, for example, lists no less than eighteen synonyms for gold;<sup>3</sup> *suvarnam*, that which has a beautiful colour, and *hiranyam*, that which is deer coloured, were the most frequently used terms. The Sanskrit word for semen is also *hiranyam*. By inference therefore, gold was





375

375  
DUNDU (bangle)  
South India, Mangalore; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

The classically simple gold bangle is fastened with an elegant flower screw.

376a & 376b  
NAVARATNA PENDANT (front and reverse)  
North India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

Such pendants set with the nine auspicious gems (navaratna) were worn as armbands and were intended to protect the wearer from negative planetary influences. The reverse is enamelled.

376a



376b



synonymous with life, and wearing some gold at all times was believed to ensure long life. Endowed with the properties of *tejas* or energy, *varchas* or brilliance and *satyam* or truth, the metal was an important prerequisite in the ritualistic context of Hindu religion.

Gold proffered as offering (*dakshina*) could obtain for the giver *amritatvam*, “the state of durability and security in which one is free from death.”<sup>4</sup> The purificatory potency of gold is enumerated in the *Dhārma Shastras*, which state that penance could be performed by ‘eating’ gold.<sup>5</sup> Texts prescribing rituals provide that “a man who regularly performs his *agnihotra* (rituals) may, when his wife comes to die, remain a widower and perform that rite by having a golden effigy of his wife or one made of *kusa*

grass. Here gold – which is regarded as a symbol of life – takes the place of a person who is no longer alive.”<sup>6</sup>

Specific ornaments came to be associated with rituals in India. Rosaries (*japa malas*) made of *rudraksha* beads (the seeds from the fruit of the *Elaeocarpus angustifolius* tree) and those strung with the nine planetary gems (*navaratna malas*) were used for the repetition of *mantras*. The wearing of the *gowrishankaram* necklace (404) was obligatory in the performance of rituals among followers of Shiva in Tamil Nadu. The *pavitri*, a purificatory ring made of *kusa* grass or of gold set with the nine planetary gems, was compulsorily worn by men when performing rituals. In the *Harshacharita*, Rajyavardhana “wore a *pavitri* in place of an earring inlaid with a sapphire. It seems that on account of grief at the demise of his father, Prabhakaravardhana, he gave up wearing precious ornaments but for the performance of ritual he wore ordinary ear ornaments purified by the recitation of Vedic hymns.”<sup>7</sup>

### The Rites of Passage

In each of the sacraments (*samskaras*) that mark the stages in an individual's journey through life, there are specific ceremonies to invoke the blessings of the gods. The ceremonial wearing of a prescribed ornament played an integral role in these rites of passage. The presence or absence of the ornament is essential either as a statement of entry into the stage of life or as an emblem marking the transition from one stage to the next. The origin of such prescriptions lay in the belief that every person goes through uncertain times as he travels through life, when he requires the aid of something powerful to deflect the negative vibrations of the planets and his environment, and above all, to counteract the evil eye.

In the sixth or seventh month of a woman's first pregnancy, the expectant mother undergoes the *simantonnayana* rite or the parting of her hair. She is bedecked with jewels and special charms and lockets to protect her and the unborn child. In south India, protective bangles (*valai kappu*) made of gold intended to "set positive power in motion"<sup>8</sup> are placed on her arms. Black beads and elephant hair, specially recommended for their evil-repelling qualities, are often incorporated into these bangles.

The *Sankhayana Grihya Sutra* prescribes that seven days after the birth of a child, a gold spoon should be used to feed the infant a mixture of butter, honey, milk, curds and water. A tiny piece of gold is tied around the right hand to confer intelligence and longevity. Bangles of gold, silver and copper are placed on the small arm, while a simple black thread, the *arai shalangai* or *aranal sangili* (378, 380b), with amuletic leaf-shaped pendants and lockets, is tied around the waist. Among many communities, the dried umbilical cord of the new born child is encased in one of these lockets, thereby re-establishing a lifeline with the mother in the early months after birth.



377



378

377  
TWO YOUNG PRINCES DRESSED IN CEREMONIAL ATTIRE  
Hyderabad; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

Amongst royalty, the onus of power and wealth was exhibited even on the very young.

378  
ARAI SHALANGAI (cache-sexe ornament)  
Kerala; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

A waist ornament with bells on either side fashioned from hollow sheet gold; the form of the centre pendant identifies the wearer as a male-child.



379

**BEAD CHAINS**

South India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*Black-glass beads strung on fine gold wire are believed to be the most basic and potent tools to ward off evil-spirits.*

380a & 380b

**ALA-ILAI-ARAI-SANGILI**

(cache-sexe ornament – front and reverse)

Kerala; early 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*The term for the jewel translates: 'banyan leaf lower waist bell chain'. In this example of royal provenance, intended for a girl child, the pendant, in the shape of a banyan leaf, is set with uncut diamonds, the reverse finely worked in repoussé with a Tree of Life motif; the bell-shaped units on either side are encrusted with cabuchon rubies. The sacred banyan tree is associated with longevity, prosperity and good health.*

379

Nothing less than a gold spoon is prescribed to feed a young child with rice for the first time, in the *annaprasana* ceremony; the girl child in particular is adorned with special ornaments commemorating the weaning process (381). Around this time, within the first twelve months of a child's birth, the *karnavedha* or ear-piercing ceremony is performed. The practice of piercing the ears of both male and female, was intended to denote entry into this world and as protection against disease. The ceremony itself was a late addition to the prescribed list of Hindu sacraments, with religious sanctions attached to non-compliance. Devala, a mediaeval *Smṛti* writer says, "All the accumulated merits disappear at the sight of a Brahmana, through whose ear-lobes do not pass the rays of the Sun."<sup>9</sup> The simple single-stone ear-studs (*kadukkan*) worn by men of the south, was intended to illuminate their path on the arduous journey through life.

The entry of a young male into the period of learning and instruction in the *Vedas* is consecrated in the *upanayanam* or sacred thread ceremony. In ancient India,

*“The lotus stalks between her  
breasts, are bright as chains  
of pearls;  
The lily buds beside her ear  
perform the part of earrings.  
What colour rubies to her parted  
hair would give  
is furnished by  
the phoenix flower:  
Such precious jewellery  
does autumn give;  
the girl who guards the rice.”<sup>[ii]</sup>*



380a



380b



381

381  
SHORUNNA MALAI (necklace)  
Kerala; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

Shor (rice) and unna (feeding) necklace, in a western inspired open-work trellis design, set with diamonds and an emerald; this piece is of royal provenance and adorns the child to mark the first feeding of rice.

382  
PAMBADAM (earrings)  
Tamil Nadu; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection, USA  
Geometric forms juxtaposed and embellished with an abstract bird or serpent face, made from sheet gold and filled with lac; these earrings are enigmatic emblems, whose source of design inspiration is no longer known.

often decorate the sacred thread. While the divine and royal wore a gold *yagnopavita*, the common man wore one fashioned from cotton threads. Among royalty, the *yagnopavita* was in the form of several gold chains, and its presence is conspicuous in early Indian sculptures. When the period of study was completed, the individual was given two earrings, forbidden during the period of studentship, fashioned from perforated pellets of sandalwood or of *badari* wood overlaid with gold,<sup>10</sup> embodying long life, wealth and success.

If *upanayana* is the most important ritual in the life of a male, *vivaha* or marriage is the principle sacrament for a woman. On this occasion, a woman received her *stridhan*, mostly in the form of gold and jewels – her personal property to use in times of need. Numerous ceremonies associated with the wearing of ornaments are performed, both for men and women, in the course of the many rituals related to marriage. The functions commence with the tying of golden coloured threads around the wrists of the bride and groom, and end with the placing of toe-rings on the feet of the bride. But of the many ornaments associated with a woman's married status, the *tiru-mangalyam*, or the *mangalasutra*, the auspicious marriage necklace, is undoubtedly the most important. It is also the only ornament that an unmarried woman is not permitted to wear.

When the Indian reaches the twilight of his life, the ancient texts recommend simplicity and austerity, in preparation for the journey to rebirth. Ornaments take the form of *rudraksha* and *tulsi* beads, or simple items made of gold. Finally, in the funeral ceremonies (*antyesti samskara*), little pieces of gold are placed “on all seven openings of the head of a deceased person.”<sup>11</sup> Gold, which heralded new life, now transports the departed soul. The *Vedas* regarded gold as equivalent to *prana*, the vital breath.

382



both men and women went through the rites and were invested with the sacred thread (*yagnopavita*), which consisted of one or more sets of three cotton cords, tied together by a knot called the *brahmagranthi*, symbolic of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. Amulets housing written *mantras*, plaques with inscriptions and elaborate terminals



*“Metals are our Mothers  
hidden treasures, by mens  
covetousnesse often occasions  
of her violent ravishments, and no  
better to her than a Viperous Issue,  
or as Wormes, or Colike passions in  
her entrals. In themselves, and in  
divine Ordinance, they are many  
wayes profitable for medicine  
against diseases, armour against  
enemies, ornaments for peace,  
engines for Warre, Instruments for  
daily labour, utensils for daily food,  
and in money – employment they are  
All things. Of all Metals Gold  
hath preeminence, as likest the  
Sun in purity of substance,  
glory of splendour, powerful  
attraction, longest endurance  
(in despite of Age and Fire)  
most operative influence, and of  
base Idolators most adored.” [iii]*



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Since gold is *prana*, by this rite, the vital breath which has left the body, is put into it again. The indestructible and therefore immortal metal facilitates the passage of the soul from this life to the life hereafter. Some Hindus even place a tiny bit of pure gold on the tongue of the deceased in symbolic purification of the body for its last journey and as payment to Yama's attendant for ferrying the departed soul to the other world.

383

A YOUNG BRIDE  
Deccan; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Silver bromide print  
Private collection

*Ornaments for women were designed to be worn on practically every part of the body. The young bejewelled bride is adorned in jewels that form part of her stridhan.*

### The Evil Eye

The form and function of amuletic jewellery arose from the primal need to protect the self against the harmful effects of the many evil spirits and the 'evil eye'. Amulets are believed to confer certain qualities on the wearer; they deflect danger, protect from evil and even have the power to attract good. In Kalidasa's famous play *Shakuntalam*, Shakuntala's son is given an amulet containing a rare herb called *aparajita* by the Sage Maricha at the time of his birth. Touched by anyone other than the mother and father, it turns into a poisonous snake. In the *Buddhacharita*, the newborn baby Siddhartha was presented with "strings of jewels, filled with magic herbs."<sup>12</sup>

The most basic amulet in India is the bead, whose antiquity dates to the pre-Harappan period. The large number of beads in animal and bird forms, including the elephant, monkey, bull, ram, and lion, excavated at Taxila, were perhaps intended to be used as amulets. The preponderance of beads in the form of lions, a symbol of the Buddha, was probably intended to bestow the strength of a lion upon the wearer.<sup>13</sup> The steatite seals of the Indus valley culture too might have served the purpose of amulets. They incorporate a multiplicity of symbols and were designed to be worn. Steatite ring stones found in areas extending from Gandhara to Bihar during the Mauryan period

384  
BAGH NAKSH (tiger's claw necklace)  
North India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*The tiger is the vehicle of Shakti (female energy); tiger's claws such as these set in gold and embellished with gems and enamel work, were worn to impart strength and courage to the wearer.*

384



bear intricate details of female mother goddess figures and symbols. Locketts and amulets made in the form of boxes to hold sacred inscriptions or as pendant plaques are sometimes inscribed with the names and images of gods and goddesses to invoke their blessings. Set with gemstones designed to harness the energies of the cosmos, these amulets were made only after due scrutiny of a person's birth chart and then tailored to specific individual purposes.

Amuletic powers were also attributed to designs and shapes. Based on a doctrine of similars, the properties of an object were believed to transfer to another fashioned in its image. This resulted in the association of gold and gems with qualities like immortality, life, and purity. Thus, jewellery with fish motifs became amuletic symbols of fertility, and auspicious emblems such as the lotus (*padma*), the trident (*trishul*) and the wheel (*chakra*) are observed on sculptural images from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.

Through history, amulets have been fashioned from organic and inorganic materials. A particular flower worn in the hair is an organic amulet, while a gem stone set into a ring is inorganic. Primitive tribes living in the remote areas of India even now fashion their body ornaments from a wide variety of organic materials. They paint their body with pigments in complex patterns; they string bone, shells, flowers, leaves and seeds and use them as adornment; they weave stalks of grass into wreaths to tie around their wrists and necks. In this sense, anything and everything could function as a spirit-scaring jewel, invested with life-protecting qualities. Many of these organic forms have been transposed into gold, and the power of the jewel was often enhanced by incorporating organic elements such as the *rudraksha* (387a, 387b) and *tulsi* beads, tiger claws (384), elephant hair, ivory, bird feathers, beetle wings, and other plant and animal forms.

Symbols rooted in everyday life, whose meanings formed a part of the colloquial language of the people, were repeatedly employed in design. Seeds portraying fertility and regeneration, flowers symbolizing beauty and perfection of form, geometric



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385  
JO MALA (bead necklace)  
South India, Coorg; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
L: 124.5 cm  
Private collection

*Hollow lac-filled gold beads strung on a black cord, finished with a gold-capped tassel (kuchi). Gold was considered the incorruptible and immortal metal.*

386  
BAZUBAND (armlet)  
Rajasthan; 18<sup>th</sup> century  
H: 3.2 cm W: 6.5 cm  
National Museum, New Delhi (n.63.1053)

*By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, religious themes had become popular subjects for the enameller. Reminiscent of miniature paintings of the time, this gold enamelled amulet depicts Krishna and Radha, the embodiment of love.*

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387a & 387b

PENDANT

South India; late 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Courtesy Gazdar's, Bombay

*A hollow gold pendant set with cabuchon rubies encases a rudraksha seed, sacred to Hindus. Devotees believe that the bead is "the tear of rage which fell from Rudra's (Shiva) eye as he beheld the effrontery of mankind."* [iv]

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BAZUBAND (armband)

Hyderabad; late 18<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*A mystical diagram (yantra) carved on the surface of the foiled emerald set in gold; engravings of auspicious symbols and inscriptions were believed to enhance the potency of the stone.*

389

PULI-NAGAM MALAI (necklace)

Kerala; early 20<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*Tiger (puli) claws (nagam) simulated in green glass set in gold form a potent amuletic necklace. Claws or even simulated ones were believed to impart the strength of the animal to the wearer.*

390

MALAI (necklace)

South India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection, USA

*Gold necklace with carved projections simulating seeds or grains, symbols of fertility and abundance.*



387a



387b

388



388

*“Pearls, pearls, here are my  
pearls!  
Pearls, pearls, ye people, buy  
my pearls!  
Pearls beaded on a string of  
knowledge;  
Bhakti alone can buy these pearls.  
Not to wear on your ears and nose,  
Not to hold in your greedy hands,  
Nor has the price an end in sight;  
Vittal of Purandar is the name of  
these pearls.”<sup>[v]</sup>*



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diagrams (*yantras*) invoking magical powers and protection against evil spirits, (388) and birds, animals and fantastic creatures were used as “symbols of the omnipresent powers of nature and imagination that are used as defenders and guardians of religious faith.”<sup>14</sup> While many of these forms have survived unchanged, others have undergone subtle changes, their forms so stylized that their source of inspiration is no longer discernible; only their original intent remains intact. Thus, in the Indian way of things, a jewel was not a mere ornament. The constituent elements like gold and gems elevated it to a metaphysical realm.

### Metaphors of Nature

Jewellery forms, designs and terminology contributed in many respects to the mystical allure of ornaments. *Kundala, ratnakundala, sitahar, kanchanmala, mohanmala, kinkini, tiru-makaram, srichhandam* – these names roll off the tongue like beautiful poetry; rich in imagery, evoking visions of beautiful flowers, the bounty of nature, sweet scents and tinkling music. Not only was the form drawn from nature, but all that was inherent in the form was then ascribed to the finished ornament: its beauty, its delicacy, its fragrance, its strength and power, its ability to deflect danger, give courage, convey valour and provide protection. A necklace simulating jasmine buds was intended to impart



390



391

391  
JIGHA (turban ornament)

Jaipur; early 19<sup>th</sup> century  
H: 12 cm W: 13 cm  
Courtesy Victoria and Albert Museum,  
London (IM 241-1923)

*Enamelled on gold, a peacock dances amidst a background of flowers and foliage; the shape, size and peacock motif of the jewel suggest that it perhaps once adorned an idol of Krishna.*

392  
SHARA PORI MALAI (necklace)

Kerala; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*Puffed rice (shara pori) is simulated in the gold pieces. Such ornaments, symbolic of fertility and prosperity, were given by the king to a bearer of happy tidings.*

393  
CHAMPAKALI (necklace)

Rajasthan; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*Buds of the champa flower are rendered in enamel on gold and embellished with uncut diamonds.*

394 (facing page)  
VANKI (rigid armlet)

Tamil Nadu; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*In this gold ornament set with cabuchon rubies, adorsed peacocks flank a diamond-set flower. The peacock is the vehicle of the God Kartikeya.*

392



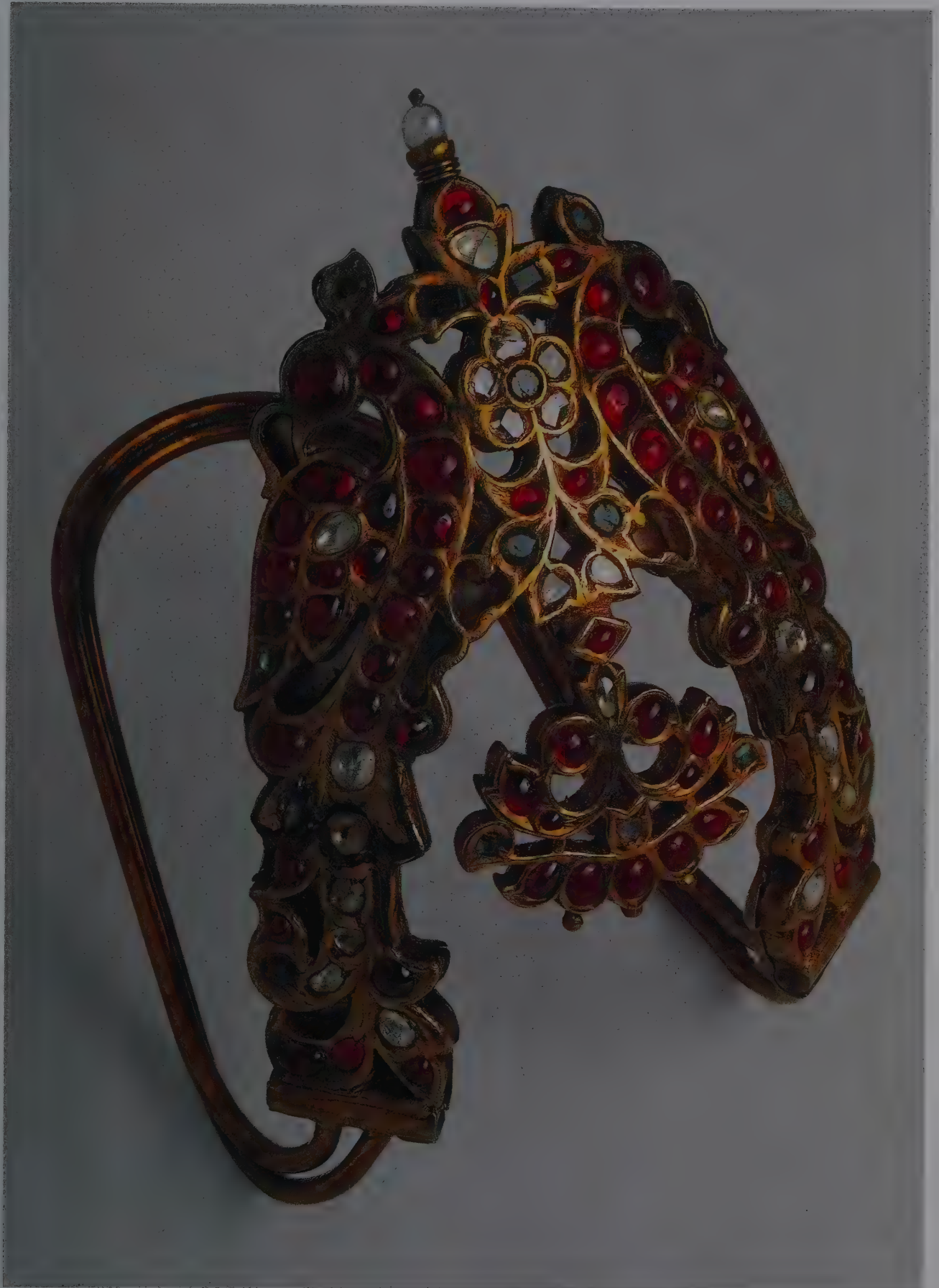
its delicate beauty, heady perfume and implicit sexuality to the wearer (393). Far from being a purely decorative piece of body adornment, the jewel assumed superhuman responsibilities as a mediator between the human and the unknown. Similarly, the lotus, its delicate pink blossoms floating on the many temple ponds of India, was the cradle of the universe and the subject of many poetic metaphors. “Growing in the mud, and yet so clean, the lotus is a symbol of purity: lotus-pool, with leaves and flowers in bud, widely opened, and again dying down, is an image of the ebb and flow of human life (*samsara*).”<sup>15</sup>

Flora and fauna are an inseparable aspect of Indian jewellery design. Even ordinary everyday foods like the mango, garlic pod, the jack fruit, wheat, ears of corn, grains of millet, pounded rice, clove, pepper, the seed of the gooseberry, rice, rice husk, grains and pulses are all found in jewellery designs, incorporated to propitiate deities for food and sustenance (392).

The leaves of the banyan and *pipal* tree were frequently employed as jewellery motifs. The banyan tree symbolizes the Trinity – Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. The tree was specially sacred to women as a symbol of fertility; a single leaf forms the central pendant of a baby girl’s waist cord (*aranal sangili*) to provide protection to the private parts. The full name of the jewel, *ala-ilai-arai-sangili*, indicates the banyan leaf as the design source (380a, 380b). The image of a baby Krishna cradled on a banyan leaf is repeatedly seen in the plastic arts. Similarly, the pipal leaf form derives from the *aswatta* or *pipal* tree, also sacred to Hindus (395). The motif’s antiquity can be traced to early Indus sites. It rests elegantly on many a shoulder of a Chola period bronze deity.

393







395

395  
PENDANT

Gujarat, Kutch; early 20<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

Indians revere the pipal as the Tree of Life and Enlightenment. "Under this tree, it is believed, no business can be done, because every moving leaf is a witness when lies are told, and without lies trade cannot be carried out." [vi]

396  
HALDILI (amulet)

Benaras; c.1950-60  
Private collection

The magical properties of nephrite jade and the peacock emblem combine in this amulet.

397  
NAGAR (pendant)

Tamil Nadu; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

A hair ornament in the form of a coiled cobra, an emblem of fortitude and tranquility, is set with diamonds and rubies.

The use of mythical winged creatures and aquatic animals in three-dimensional jewellery forms dates to the early monuments of Bharhut and Sanchi. Such images were also used to decorate belt buckles, necklace pendants, as terminals and in bracelets. The use of the composite creature (*yali*), demon face (*kirtimukha*) and crocodile (*makara*) forms are quintessential elements of jewellery design particularly in south India. Incorporated from designs in sculpture and architectural friezes, they make repeated appearances. Other popular animal motifs include the peacock, the bull, the elephant, the lion, the parrot, the snake and the royal double-headed eagle and the goose or swan, regarded as an epiphany of god.

The love for nature and colour made purely geometrical designs rare. The preference was undoubtedly for the soft and gentle curvature of floral motifs. Nature provided Indian jewellery not only with names, but a sketchbook of designs and a palette of colours as well. The love for colour as seen in nature is reflected in the use of colours in enamelling, the juxtaposition of diamonds, rubies, emeralds and sapphires and in the simulation of colour in the profuse floral decorations of monochromatic gold ornaments. In the *minakari* tradition, even the metaphors for enamel shades were borrowed from the vocabulary of gems, which in turn drew its inspiration from nature. Like the ruby, enamel reds aspired to the deep crimson of *khoon-e-kabouter* (pigeon's blood); the ideal shade of enamel green was, as with emeralds, *tote ka par* (parrot's wing); *gardan-e-taus* (the peacock's neck) simulated the lustrous blue of a sapphire.

The root cause of employing so much of nature to adorn is perhaps the importance of fertility – agricultural and human – and the basic need to keep the cycle of life in perpetual motion. Of the many elements of nature employed as fertility motifs, the snake is perhaps not only universal, but also the most enduring and potent. In Kerala, "people believe in the existence inside the earth of a precious stone called *manikkakkallu*. These stones are supposed to have been made out of the gold, which has existed in many parts of the earth from time immemorial. Certain serpents of divine nature have been blowing for ages on these treasures of gold, some of which dwindle

396



397







398



399



400

398  
KADA (bangles)  
Gujarat, Kutch; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*These gold bangles with finely etched surface designs, culminate in a pair of peacock terminals, each holding a serpent in its beak. The peacock is believed to be a killer of serpents.*

399  
KADA (bangles)  
Gujarat, Kutch; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*Two intertwined gold serpents, their bodies worked with distinctive scale patterns, hold aloft a celestial jewel. The snake is a potent symbol in Hinduism. Sexual energy (kundalini), the serpent power, is believed to lie coiled at the base of the spine.*

400  
KADA (bangles)  
Rajasthan; early 20<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*Courage and valour, traits of the lion, made it a popular motif. The heaviness of traditional kadas, reflected in the solid gold lion-head terminals, is juxtaposed with western style spreading floral motifs in hollowed cutwork gold set with tiny diamonds.*



401

401  
KADA (bangle)  
Jaipur; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

Four pairs of crocodile heads, instead of the usual single pair, curve towards each other, in this gem-set, enamelled gold ornament. "Shaped like sea-monsters (makara), the earrings of Visnu represent the two methods of knowledge, intellectual-knowledge (Sankhya) and intuitive-perception (Yoga)." [vii]

402  
KADA (bangle)  
Benaras; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

Gem-set enamelled gold bangles with elephant-head terminals; the elephant symbolizes strength, and is associated with the goddess Lakshmi.

403 (facing page)  
NECKLACE

Rajasthan, Udaipur; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
National Museum, New Delhi (96.233B)

This diamond set necklace is enamelled with solar symbols. The sun represents creation; it is the source of light, knowledge, energy and life. "All that exists was born from the sun. Of what is and has been and is to be, and what moves or remains still, the sun alone is the source and the end." [viii]

into a small stone of resplendent beauty and brightness called *manikkam*. The moment their work is finished, the serpents are transformed into winged serpents, and fly up into the air with the stones in their mouths."<sup>16</sup> The combination of the cobra-head symbolism with the green colour of emeralds in the Kerala *nagapada tali* (220) probably originated in an old myth that a serpent can be blinded by an emerald.

Worship and propitiation of the elements such as the sun, the moon and the planets were absorbed into jewellery design. The crescent moon, an emblem of the Mother Goddess, Shakti, symbolized female power. The moon controls the tides, the seasons, the rains and the

floods and therefore life itself. The moon symbolism was closely allied to the need to prolong the span of human life (412). Similarly the supreme solar motif, the sun, a symbol of male strength, was among the most popular forms used for ornaments and for decoration. The circular form of earrings is a direct association of solar symbolism, and denotes knowledge and the life force.

Ornaments function as a canvas for the narration of myths and legends. Using the highly effective repousse technique, the craftsman was able to transform a thin sheet of gold into a canvas, rendering in great detail, minute elements of a storyboard. This is especially evident in the magnificent *nakashu-velai* jewellery of south India, which renders in gold, myths and legends associated with the many deities of the Hindu pantheon. The principal characters are set amidst a rich design of foliage, scrolling vines and flower motifs (405).

Extending this principle to votive offerings, goldsmiths can be seen working outside temples, beating out likenesses of the human body or individual parts like a foot, a hand, or eyes from sheet gold. These are offered by the devotee to the deity of the temple in thanksgiving for the cure of disease or to ensure good health. Devotion to a personal god facilitated constant communion with the Supreme Being. In this scheme of things, gold ornaments served as portable shrines. A simple pendant with an image of a god or goddess, or even just the feet of the Lord, small pendant boxes housing miniature replicas of the *lingam*, the elaborate necklaces with painted enamel figures of Sri Nathji from Rajasthan (407), and the magnificent *gowrishankaram* necklaces of south India, all functioned as portable shrines.

A motif seen repeatedly on pendants and necklaces is the *vishnupada* (footprints of Vishnu).

402







404

404  
**GOWRISHANKARAM** (pendant – detail)  
 South India, Chettinad; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Courtesy Musee Barbier-Mueller,  
 Geneva (2504-102)

*Sheet gold worked in the repousse technique becomes a veritable canvas for the narration of myths and legends. Kartikeya (son of Shiva) is seated on his vehicle, the peacock, flanked by his two consorts and rearing lions.*



405

405  
**MALAI** (necklace)  
 Tamil Nadu; early 20<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection

*The Krishna legend inspired popular design motifs such as this, where he is flanked by two damsels. Depictions of the god in his many facets are rendered in gold repousse on pendants, combs, hair ornaments and waist belts.*

406  
**PORTABLE SHRINE**  
 South India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection, USA

*A miniature gold repousse shrine encrusted with cabuchon rubies, in the form of a Shiva lingam set into a yoni base, crowned with a cobra. Portable shrines such as this one were expressions of devotion to a personal god and were carried on pilgrimages and journeys.*

407 (facing page)  
**KANTHLA** (necklace)  
 Rajasthan; 18<sup>th</sup> century  
 National Museum, New Delhi (89.987)

*Devotion to Sri Nathji of Nathdwara is expressed in this diamond set gold necklace. Usually worn by a head priest, each plaque bears a painted portrait of the deity.*

The use of footprints to symbolize a deity was an ancient practice in Buddhist, Jain and Hindu art; such symbols are observed in sculpture as far back as the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. Auspicious signs specific to the deity impressed on the sole identified the divine subject. The continuing tradition in footprint motifs related to deities in the arts also owes to the Indian religio-cultural tradition of touching the feet of a revered person as a mark of respect. In Hindu physiognomy, the forehead is regarded as the most sacred part of the body, housing the psychic seat of enlightenment (*sahasra chakra*), while the feet, even metaphysically, are the lowliest. Touching one's forehead to another's feet is thus the ultimate gesture of respect. The *vishnupada* pendants commonly found include some or all of the symbols associated with Vishnu enamelled on the sole – the sun, bow, lotus, conch, swastika, moon, banner and mace. Since these pendants were popular commemoratives of the pilgrimage to the Nathdwara temple, devotees sometimes strung entire necklaces with them.

### A Celestial Shield

Indian mythology attributes the origin of gems to the slaying of the demon Bala. Gems, it is believed, were born from the various parts of his dismembered body. Diamond from the bones, pearl from the teeth, ruby from the blood, emerald from the bile and sapphire from the eyes.<sup>17</sup>

But the more rational *Brhat Sambhita* credits the many varieties of gems

406







408a

408b



*“The diversitie of metals, which the Creator hath shut up in the closets and concavities of the earth, is such, and so great, that man drawes profit and commoditie from every one of them. Some serve for curing of diseases, others for armes and for defence against the enemies, some are for ornament and beautifying of our persons and houses, and others are fit to make vessels and Iron-workes, with divers fashions of instruments, which the industrie of man hath found out and put in practice. But above all the uses of metals, which be simple and naturall, the communication and commerce of men hath found out one, which is the use of money, the which (as the Philosopher saith) is the measure of all things. And although naturally, and of it selfe, it bee but one onely thing, yet in value and estimation we may say, that it is all things.”*<sup>[ix]</sup>

to the inherent nature of the earth. This inherent power is attributed to the fact that “metals and precious stones usually lie with their seeds deep down in the earth and require continuous moisture and a mild heat. This they obtain through a reflection of the sun and the other stars in the manifold movement of the heavens... Therefore, also, the metals and precious stones are nearest related to the planets and the stars, since these influence them most potently and produce their peculiar qualities...”<sup>18</sup>

It is commonly believed that since gold and gemstones are products of nature, they are imbued with the power to cure diseases and counteract the effect of planetary influences. By combining the inherent symbolism of gold with the potent power of gems, ornaments became powerful instruments, capable of combating the unknown. From time immemorial, Indians believed that gems are invested with the ability to direct man’s destiny and character. Gazing with awe at their fathomless depths, humans have been alternately wonder-struck and apprehensive, associating the potent qualities of gems with the power to control destiny.

Individual gems were endowed with intrinsic powers. Of all the gemstones, the sapphire was the most powerful. As a symbol of purity and chastity, the talismanic qualities of the sapphire, in the Hindu sphere of thought, were closely allied to its association with Saturn, the planet of darkness and turbulence. In India, the sapphire has always been worn with tremendous caution, and only after due consultation with an astrologer, who has determined the suitability of the powerful gem by taking into account the planetary configurations in the natal chart of the wearer, the size of the stone and its quality. Coral, for example was believed to have a beneficial effect on those affected by the planet Mars (*mangal*) in their horoscopes. Stones were believed to even change colour, indicating impending disaster or bad luck. Worn close to the body, in settings which ensured that the back of the stone was in contact with the wearer’s skin, the stone responded to subtle changes in body temperature. The stone thereby acted as a kind of thermometer – monitoring and indicating physical health.

If individual gems were powerful, used in combination they became cogent entities. Hindu astrological treatises identify seven planets and the ascending and descending nodes of the moon. To each of these is assigned a specific deity who works in conjunction with the planets to keep the universe in a state of perfect harmony, and whose working therefore has a direct effect on human life.

Ornaments fashioned in accordance with the nine-gem (*navaratna*) organization became powerful objects in their own right, and a symbiotic relationship was instituted between man, the planets



408a & 408b  
HAR (necklace – front and reverse)  
Mughal; c. 18<sup>th</sup> century  
National Museum, New Delhi (64.142)

*The configuration of navaratna gems was adapted to particular ornament forms. The ruby, the symbol of the sun, is usually placed in the centre, for it is believed that from it power flows to the eight other stones.*

409  
PENDANT  
North India; early 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*Navaratna, the nine planetary gems, are usually set in a square in a prescribed format, with the ruby, symbolizing the sun, in the centre. Combining the influence of all the celestial bodies in one amulet, the jewel thus functions as a cogent medium effecting harmony between man and the planets that are believed to control his destiny.*



410

410  
 NAVARATNA MALAI (necklace of nine gems)  
 Tamil Nadu; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection

Each gold flower form is set with the nine auspicious planetary gems (navaratna), making this a necklace that goes beyond the purely decorative. Gems are believed to have the ability to direct man's destiny and character.

and their reigning deities. Ceasing to be mere ornaments, such jewels functioned as mediums between human and Divine, the known and the unknown.

In the Indian sphere of thought, the planets and their nine ruling gems are identified as follows: sun = ruby (*manikkam*); moon = pearl (*mukta*); mars = coral (*pavala*); mercury = emerald (*marakata*); jupiter = topaz (*pusparagam*); venus = diamond (*vajra*); saturn = sapphire (*nila*); ascending node = zircon (*gomethagam*); descending node = cat's eye (*vaiduryam*). *Navaratna* jewels were commonly made in the form of rings, pendants, bangles and even necklaces. Ancient texts provide detailed instructions on the arrangement of the nine gemstones. Placement of the stones was equally important, and followed a prescribed code laid down in the *Navaratnashastra*. It was believed efficacious to place the gem associated with the deity within the area of his terrestrial control.

### Healing Powers

Precious stones were also used for their medicinal and therapeutic properties, both as a prophylactic as well as medicine in the treatment of illnesses. In India, practitioners of traditional medicine believe that disease can be cured by wearing precious stones, by prayer and if all else fails, by medicine, in that order.

Ayurveda, a branch of ancient Indian life science, makes extensive use of gem and gold therapy. The healing powers of metals and precious stones are activated in a variety of ways. The gem is placed on the afflicted area or worn in such a manner that it is in contact with the body, or so that light can pass through the stone to the person's body. Water stored overnight in vessels made of gold, silver or copper is believed to have curative and prophylactic powers.

Ancient texts even talk of stones being powdered and consumed to effect an immediate and lasting cure. Pearls were powdered and eaten as a calcium supplement. It is common practice in south India to place a gold chain around the neck of a person afflicted with typhoid, jaundice or mumps. The gold is believed to draw out the virus in the system, facilitating an early recovery. Sometimes, the mere presence of a particular gem in the home, or in close proximity to the ill person, is believed to effect a cure.

"Born of the wind, the atmosphere, the lightning, and the light, may this pearl shell, born of gold, protect us from straits! ... With the shell (we conquer) disease and poverty; with the shell, too, the Sadanvas. The shell is our universal remedy; the



*“After having read in learned books of this peculiarity of the emeralds, I tested it by my own experiment and found the statements exact. It chanced that I had in my possession a fine emerald of the zababi variety, and with this I decided to make the experiment on the eyes of a viper. Therefore, having made a bargain with a snake-charmer to procure me some vipers, as soon as I received them I selected one and placed it in a vessel. This being done, I took a stick of wood, attached to the end a piece of wax, and embedded my emerald in this. I then brought the emerald near to the viper's eyes. The reptile was strong and vigorous, and even raised its head out of the vessel, but as soon as I approached the emerald to its eyes, I heard a slight crepitation and saw that the eyes were protruding and dissolving into a humor. After this the viper was dazed and confused; I had expected that it would spring from the vessel, but it moved uneasily hither and thither, without knowing which way to turn; all its agility was lost, and its restless movements soon ceased.”<sup>[x]</sup>*

411



411  
PATRIHAR (necklace)  
North India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
L: 31 cm  
Private collection

*A long gold necklace with side panels (patri) set with the nine auspicious gemstones (navaratna). Ornaments combining the inherent qualities of gold with the potent power of gems were worn to combat the vicissitudes of life.*



412

412  
TIKKA (forehead ornament)

Surat; c.1740–49

Rijksmuseum Foundation, Amsterdam (NM 7060)

*The elegant form of the crescent-moon, an auspicious symbol for both Hindus and Muslims, lent itself to many an ornament.*

413

BELT BUCKLE

North India; 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century

H: 8.2 cm L: 19.2 cm

Asian Art Museum of San Francisco,

The Avery Brundage Collection (B62J28)

*A carved nephrite belt buckle encrusted with gem stones and kundan-set in gold. To the Mughals, jade was a symbol of imperial sovereignty, endowed with the apotropaic powers to prolong life and confer immortality.*

pearl shall protect us from straits! ... The bone of the gods turned into pearl; that, animated, dwells in the waters. That do I fasten upon thee unto life, luster, strength, longevity, unto a life lasting a hundred autumns. May the amulet of pearl protect thee!”<sup>19</sup> This hymn from the *Atharva Veda* records the presentation of a pearl amulet to a Brahmin youth, and most eloquently reiterates the qualities of the pearl as a symbol of purity and perfection.

Ayurveda also uses oxidized and purified precious stones and metals in medicines. Called *bhasmas*, these substances go deep into the body and can help in the healing of deep-seated illness or in rejuvenation.<sup>20</sup> Under the Ayurvedic system, each individual body is made of *doshas* (body type), namely *vata*, *pitta* and *kapha*, that constitute the inherent aspects of the system, regulating body, *mind* and intellect.<sup>21</sup> By wearing the right gemstone, or combination of stones, one or more trait can be activated or sublimated. For example, the agate alleviates fear and aids in spiritual awakening, the pearl has a calming effect, and helps in purifying the blood.<sup>22</sup> Enhancement of *vata* could be achieved by wearing lapis lazuli set in gold, an opal ring on the right index finger, a pearl on the right ring finger, a topaz on the right index finger, and so on. The diamond, when taken internally after due treatment, was said to ensure long life, endurance and beauty. Ancient Hindu physicians considered the emerald to be a good laxative. A “cold and sweet”<sup>23</sup> gem, it was used to cure dysentery, diminish the secretion of bile, and stimulate the appetite; similarly, the ruby was used as a valuable remedy for flatulence and biliousness.

### Sustaining Energy Flows

*Marma Chikitsa*, a branch of Ayurveda, prescribes the stimulation of vital and receptive points in the human body known as the *marma* or *varma* points. These points are life-sustaining centres where muscles, bones, nerves and joints coalesce. The wearing of ornaments on certain specific parts of the body is intended to stimulate the *marma* points. Nose rings, earrings, rings on the toes, finger rings and even ornaments

413



worn across the central parting of the hair and across the forehead are intended to stimulate the *marma* points and keep the body and mind in a state of continuous fitness and well-being. The toe ring, worn primarily by women, is believed to enhance qualities of timidity and shyness and aid in control of anger. Finger rings ensure a healthy heart, strong lungs, good will power, an active brain and a calm disposition. The gold chain placed around the waist of a child is believed to constantly stimulate the point which ensures the prevention of polio.

Of all the parts of the body, the ones that appear to be most important are the ears. It is believed that the ears are a microcosm of the whole body. The practice of making several holes along the cartilage of the ear and the suspension of many small ear ornaments is directly related to the maintenance of physical and mental health, by the stimulation of vital *marma* life points.<sup>24</sup>

According to prevailing belief, jewellery was designed to be worn on all the joints and pressure points of the human body. This was intended to enhance the flow of energy. The symbolic and spiritual properties of the jewels and their designs kept the body and mind in a state of perfect balance and harmony. Such ideas were in keeping with a primitive belief that “a ring on the arm or the finger served the purpose of keeping the soul and the body together.”<sup>25</sup> Therefore, each item was painstakingly crafted in perfect proportion to sit comfortably on that part of the body for which it was intended.

Each of the seven points of power or *chakras* in the human body is activated by the wearing of a special jewel, crafted for that purpose. The subtle pressure of the jewel together with the gems set therein on the *chakra* energize one of the senses as well. It has been established that “certain precious stones, ...have a vibration naturally corresponding with the vibration rates of some of the higher emotions. To carry one on the person is somewhat like having with you a tiny tuning-fork which is continually sounding a pure musical note.”<sup>26</sup>

In this context, the *sahasra chakra*, located on top of the head, represents bliss, combining truth, consciousness and peace; the *ajna chakra* positioned between the eyebrows, activates the mind; the *visuddha chakra* in the throat activates hearing; the *anahata chakra* in the vicinity of the heart is linked to the sense of touch; *manipura chakra* in the navel is related to sight; the *svadhishtana chakra* below the navel activates taste, and the *muladhara chakra* located in the base of the spine is connected to the sense of smell. All seven are further connected by vital energies located in such strategic areas such as the ears, the nose, the arms, the fingers and the toes. Thus, every effort was made through a combination of body and adornment to establish a bond between wearer and viewer, and between wearer and the Divine.

Together with the belief in amulets, the faith in a plethora of symbols drawn from nature, and the constant efforts to deflect the evil eye, much of the use, form, design and location of Indian jewellery is directly or indirectly related to the need to live healthy, trouble-free lives. Thus, in the Indian way of life, the Omnipresent Being was worshipped every day in every way.



414

414  
HALDILI (amulet)  
North India; early 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

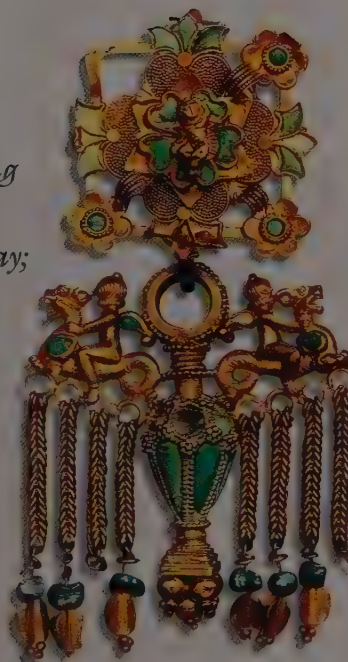
A jade plaque-amulet with a Tree of Life motif flanked by two birds bowing in veneration rendered in kundan-set diamonds, emeralds and rubies. To the Muslims the motif represents everlasting life; to the Hindus the tree supports the Universe and preserves life.



CRAFT

## The Unknown Goldsmith

*“If a gem  
that is worthy of a golden setting  
is set instead in tin,  
it cries not neither does it run away;  
but it brings the jeweler to blame.”<sup>1</sup>*



The atelier – a single small room, hot, humid and poorly ventilated. Here, men sit amidst burning furnaces and heating crucibles, surrounded by the gentle tap-tap of stones being set, gold being cut, wires being drawn and pipes being blown. This is the workshop and the humble abode of the Indian jeweller. Handmade and painstakingly crafted, each ornament is the culmination of a creative process combining artistic genius, technical prowess and manual dexterity, made with an attention to detail that could only be the product of love and dedication.

The Indian jewel was created by an unknown craftsman, who was also a master of metallurgy. What he crafted was not valued merely for its size or the quality of the gems he used. He seemed to possess supernatural powers in his deft handling of the medium, imparting a sense of illusion, *maya*, to the object. This quality is expressed in the *Shilappadikaram*: “In one of the rooms of Mashattuvan’s stately house stood a large couch. Its legs, studded with precious stones, were made with such art that they were thought to be the work of Maya, the craftsman of the geni.”<sup>2</sup>

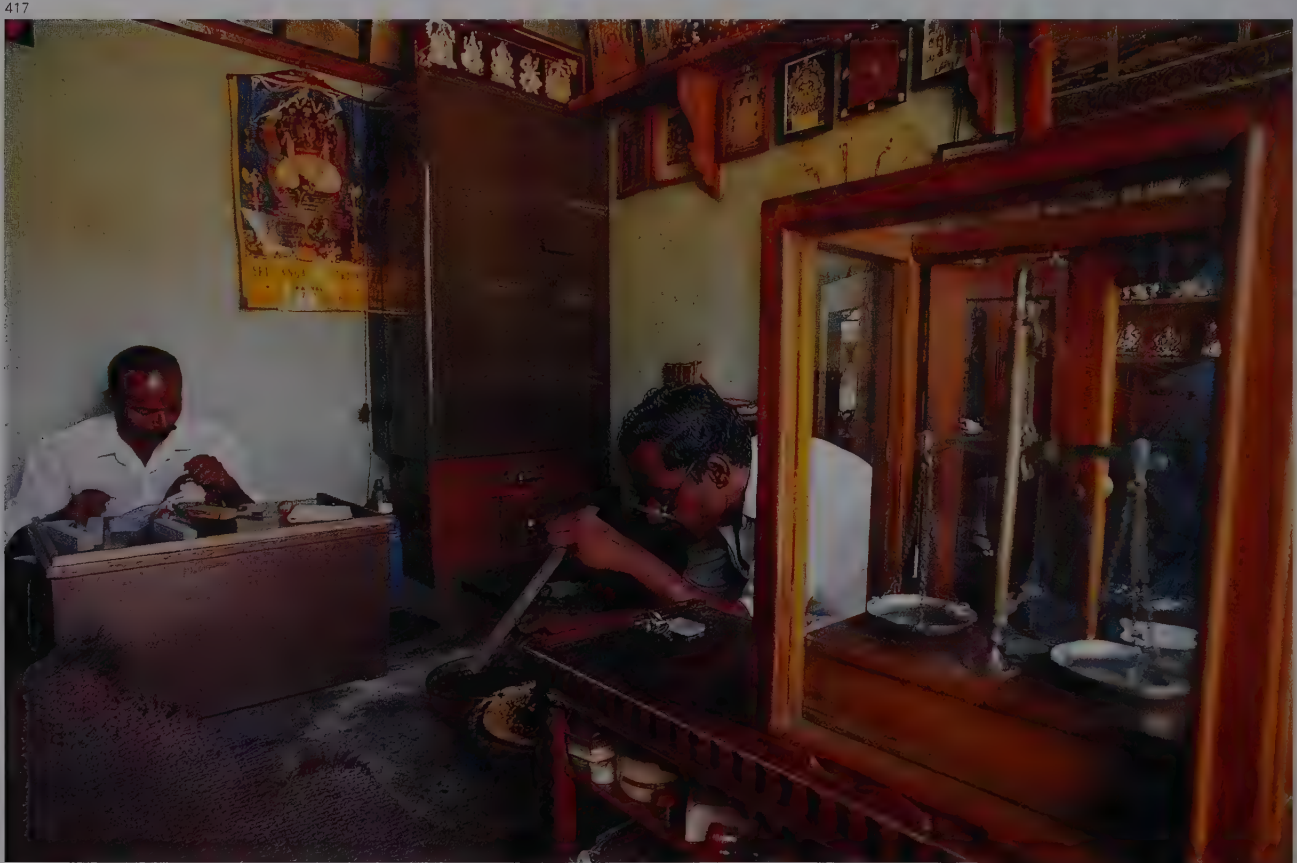
The goldsmith, or *sonar* as he is popularly known in the north, and *thattan*, *achary* or *tattasari*, as he is known in the south, belongs to a separate caste, whose position in the social hierarchy is relatively low. Traditionally, he worshipped his own idols, married within his community and passed his technical expertise as well as his

415 (page 256)  
**H.H. VENKAT RAMAN SINGH,  
 MAHARAJA OF REWAH**  
 c.1880-90  
 By permission of the British Library  
 ( Photo 209 (17))

416 (page 257)  
**EAR PENDANT**  
 Taxila, Sirkap; c. 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.  
 H: 11.10 cm  
 Courtesy Department of Archaeology and  
 Museums, Government of Pakistan

*A hallmark of ancient Indian craftsmanship, the ear pendant combines sheet gold work, granulation, chain work and incrustation. Flower and bud forms are decorated with rearing lions and winged angels. The cloisons are filled with turquoise paste.*

417  
**GOLDSMITH'S WORKSHOP**  
 South India, Tamil Nadu



trade down to his son. By virtue of his extraordinary skill, he had the privilege, perhaps more than any other section of the lower castes, of interacting with men and women from the upper castes, had access to the *zenana*, and was trusted with handling incalculable amounts of wealth.

References to goldsmiths and their functions and duties abound in texts through the ages. The *Yajurveda* refers to bead-makers as *manikara*, and the goldsmith as *hiranyakara*.<sup>3</sup> Asvaghosha calls them *svarna kara*, *svarna karmara* and *ratna karmatya*. “Perhaps the first indicated an ordinary goldsmith and the second a specialist,”<sup>4</sup> while the third was probably the gem-setter. But the name *suvaranakara*, meaning ‘one who worked in gold’, was most common.

With the large supply of gold and gems at their disposal, kings established ateliers (*kharkhane*), whose sole task was to create jewels for the ruler. The *Arthashastra* pronounces that workshops for gold (*akhsashala*) were to be established by the state and supervised by the goldsmith (*sauvarnikah*), who was also an employee of the state. Private goldsmiths worked under the supervision of the *sauvarnikah*.<sup>5</sup> State run workshops produced items for the general public, but in the imperial set up, goldsmiths were part of the court organization.

While workshops in the court and market place were common, the tradition of the family jeweller is perhaps unique to India. Until recently, the jeweller would come to the house of the client, carrying his work-table and all his tools, and execute his commission under supervision. Since women were not free to go out often, this arrangement allowed ladies of the household to gather and spend time together; furthermore, an eagle-eye was kept on the jeweller, ensuring that there was no theft of gold and that gemstones were not switched with those of inferior quality. The jeweller built up generations of trust working with one family, and as the craft passed from father to son, so did his clientele. Since so much of Indian jewellery was worn for superstitious reasons and for its apotropaic powers, craftsmen always paid the closest attention to detail and workmanship. This was based on a belief that the wrath of the unknown, which the jewel was meant to deflect, could also befall the maker if due attention and care were not accorded to technical details.

Since gold was a prized commodity, every effort was made to minimize loss. The gold workshop was well-organized and meticulously supervised. The entry and exit of unauthorized people was strictly regulated. Tools and unfinished articles could not be carried out of the workshop. The *Arthashastra* even stipulates that “artisans doing the work of setting in gold, bead-making,



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418  
THE KUNDANSAZ (gemsetter) AT WORK  
Benaras

419  
TALI (marriage necklace elements)  
South India, Chettinad; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*The magnificent kali-tiru worn by Chettiar women on their wedding day is substituted by these simpler, but no less exquisitely crafted, pieces for everyday wear.*

419





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**KANTI (necklace)**  
Maharashtra; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

Seven rows of faceted gold beads form this classical ornament for the neck. The *kantha-tuda* and *kanthika* mentioned in ancient inscriptions were most likely the predecessors of this elegantly simple necklace.

421

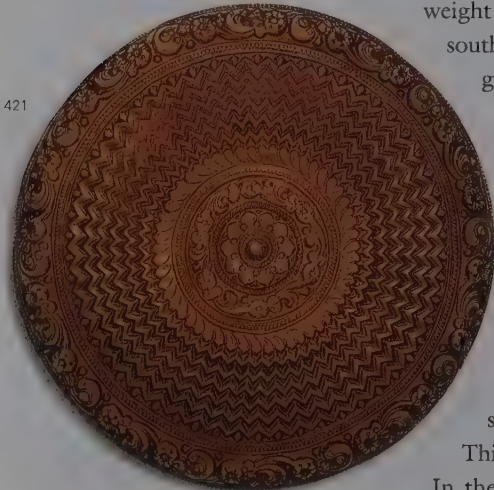
**THODA (ear stud)**  
Kerala; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

Worn on elongated earlobes, this light *thoda* or *thodu* measuring no less than 9 cms in diameter, is made from sheet gold worked in repousse with geometric and floral designs.

422 (facing page)  
**NECKLACE**

Rajasthan; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

Large pieces of green and red foiled glass are embellished with birds and flowers formed with gold wire, enamelled and set with gems.



421

plating and gilding and ornamental gold, and blowers, servants and dust-washers, shall enter and leave after their garments, hands and private parts are searched.”<sup>6</sup> The superintendent of the workshop closely monitored the workers to prevent pilferage. He was advised to watch out for strategies such as a “sudden movement of the hand, the weights, the fire, the wooden anvil, the tool-box, the receptacle, the peacock’s feather, the thread, garment, talk, the head, the lap, the fly, attention to one’s person, the bellows-skin, the water-platter, and the fire-pan, – these he should know as the means of pilfering.”<sup>7</sup> Gold dust was meticulously collected and weighed to reduce the amount from the total weight of the finished ornament. A caste of gold-separators, called *Jalagadugu*,<sup>8</sup> in the south and *Niyariya*<sup>9</sup> in the north, collected the sweepings, ashes and refuse from outside goldsmiths shops and painstakingly sifted the gold.

The absence of a system of hallmarks coupled with the practice of alloying gold with other metals to render it stronger led to cheating. Hence it became standard practice for jewellers to test the purity of gold on a touchstone before accepting old ornaments to be recycled into new pieces. The metal or ornament to be melted is rubbed on a soft black touchstone called *kasauti*. The purity is established by comparing the streak thus produced with a streak of standard gold.

Goldsmiths were conversant with the various properties of gold and the method of mixing various metals to obtain different hues, colours and strengths. They could classify gems and were adept at cutting and piercing stones. This is borne out in various ancient texts, including those by Kautiliya and Patanjali. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century literary work, the *Shilappadikaram*, there is a reference to the





423  
HARA (necklace)  
Rajasthan, Bikaner; 20<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

424  
JEWELLED BOX  
South India; 18<sup>th</sup> century  
National Museum, New Delhi (65.65/1)

425  
DAGGER AND SCABBARD  
Western India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Reproduced by permission of the  
Trustees of the Wallace Collection, London  
(OA 1419)

The pommel is carved from rock crystal in the form of a ram's head, inlaid with gold and square-cut rubies, to resemble a bridle; the eyes are of cat's eye. The scabbard is possibly European. Rock crystal has been described by Pliny as: "While a stone to the touch, it seems like water to the eye."<sup>11</sup> The technique of working in this material was mastered by the Indian goldsmith.

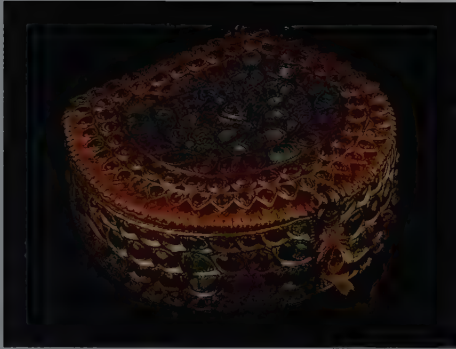


423

categorization of diamonds into four 'castes' on the basis of the colour of the stone, and a listing of the different kinds of flaws in a stone, namely "*kakapada*, *kalanka*, *bindu* and *rekha*."<sup>10</sup> Indian texts on gemmology recognize many categories of diamonds, based on their characteristic properties. "Good diamonds were supposed to be *ujjala* or bright, *adosa* or flawless, *amala varitara* or free from impurities and transparent like water. Rainbow like colour, *ambudendradhanuh*, was a desirable property."<sup>11</sup>

The beginnings of such technical expertise were most likely gained in the flourishing markets of the gem-trading centres of south India, where special streets were inhabited by dealers selling gold and varieties of gems, and jewellers crafting items of adornment. The first references to the qualifications of a gem specialist are in the 6<sup>th</sup> century text, the *Agastimata*, where he is called a *mandalika*. The *Rayanaparikkha*, dating to 1315, reiterates the credentials of the gem appraiser, an expert who determines the value of the gem and functions as an intermediary between the seller and buyer.<sup>12</sup>

The 11<sup>th</sup> century inscriptions in the Rajarajeshvaram temple at Thanjavur detail the classifications adopted by gem experts. Pearls were graded on the basis of quality and shape, to include round pearls (*vattam*), polished pearls (*oppu muttu*), small pearls (*pala muttu*), pearls of red water (*sivanda neer*), pearls of brilliant water (*kulirnda neer*), pearls with lines (*varai*), pearls with red dots (*kuru*), pearls with wrinkles (*tirangal*) and twin pearls (*irrattai muttu*). Diamonds and rubies are similarly classified; with smooth edges (*matta tarai vayiram*), flat and smooth edged diamonds (*matta tarai sappatti vayiram*), spotted diamonds (*porivu*), red-spotted diamonds (*rakta-bindu*), pure diamonds (*tooya vayiram*) and round diamonds (*urulai vayiram*); a smooth ruby (*komalam*), bluish ruby (*neela-gandhi*), unpolished ruby (*talam*), ruby with flaws (*trasam*), and so on.<sup>13</sup>



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The technical expertise available and the manner in which such details were inscribed in stone for posterity are truly remarkable.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Duarte Barbosa refers to the Malabar region as the centre of the gem trade. The best craftsmen, skilled in handling gold and gems, gathered here to cater to the trade. Rubies were imported from Pegu (Burma), where “they know how to clean but not how to polish them, and they therefore convey them to other countries, especially to Paleacate, Narsinga, Calicut and the whole of Malabar, where there are excellent craftsmen who cut and mount them.”<sup>14</sup> They had devised their own methods for distinguishing between rubies from different mines. The ones from Pegu were the finest, called *numpucllo*, the ones from Ceilao (Ceylon) were called *maneca* and spinels were referred to as *carapuch*. To test the quality of the rubies, “the Indians put them on the tongue; those which are finest and hardest are held to be the best. To test their transparency they fix them with wax on a very sharp point and looking towards the sun they can find any blemish however slight.”<sup>15</sup>

Jewel merchants were organized into guilds. In the city of Vijayanagar in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, for example, tradesmen of the various guilds were located in the market. They enjoyed such complete freedom in their trade, that all manner of precious stones were brought and sold openly in the markets. “The Ainnurruvar, often styled the Five Hundred Svamis of Ayyavolepura (Aihole), were the most celebrated of the medieval south Indian merchant guilds... Among the countries they visited were Chera, Chola, Pandya, Maleya, Magadha, Kausala, Saurashtra, Dhanushtra, Kurumba, Kambhoja, Gaulla, Lata, Barvvara, Parasa (Persia), and Nepala. They traversed land-routes and water-routes, penetrating all the countries of the six continents. They traded in elephants, bloodstock, sapphires, moonstones, pearls, rubies, diamonds, lapiz lazuli, onyx, topaz, carbuncles, emeralds and other precious articles; ...they paid the sunka regularly and filled the royal treasury with gold and jewels.”<sup>16</sup>

The crafting of jewellery was a product of teamwork, involving a variety of specialist skills. The designer (*naqash; chitera*); the goldsmith (*sonar*); the engraver (*gharaiwala, khodnaker*); the enameller (*minakar*); the gem setter (*kundansaz*); and the stringer (*patua*). All these skills were nurtured within the caste. This combination of skills necessitated a degree of aesthetic conventionalism. Working with familiar stereotypes, each specialist was able to execute his task and pass the unit on for the next process in a well-orchestrated sequence of team work. Individualism in this scenario would have only bred aesthetic chaos. The whole emphasis on the solo act was, in fact, foreign to Indian aesthetics, particularly in the plastic and decorative arts.

Traditionally, since craftsmen worked within a guild system, each specialist contributed his particular skills towards creating a thing of beauty. That is what mattered and personal identity was effaced to the objective, though not personal commitment. If anything, the latter intensified in proportion to the former in the quasi-religious

“As regards the water of the stones, it is to be remarked that instead of, as in Europe, where we employ daylight for the examination of stones in the rough (brutes), and, so, carefully judge of their water and any flaws which they may contain, the Indians use the night; and in a hole which they excavate in a wall, one foot square, they place a lamp with a large wick, by the light of which they judge of the water and the cleanness of the stone, holding it between their fingers. The water which they term ‘celestial’ is the worst of all... (but) the never-failing test for correctly ascertaining the water is afforded by conveying the stone under a leafy tree, and in the green shadow one can easily detect if it is blue.”<sup>[ii]</sup>



425



426

426  
PAHUNCHI (bracelets – reverse and front)  
North India; c.1900  
Private collection

*Kundan-set white sapphires with embossed sheet gold work on the reverse. Individual units are strung together to render flexibility to the ornament.*

427  
BAZUBAND (armband)  
Rajasthan; c.1900  
Private collection

*Kundan-set foiled diamonds on the front, the reverse in embossed sheet gold.*

427



atmosphere of the Indian crafts, where the craftsmen worshipped their tools, as many of them still do, before the day's work. Being a family based profession, areas of specialization were nurtured within the family. When they moved from one atelier to the other, or migrated to other parts of the country, the entire family moved, ensuring minimum disruption in the work force.

As members of the lowest strata of society, craftsmen and people directly or indirectly connected with handling precious gems remained anonymous; but there were rare exceptions. Jewellers were permanently employed by temple administrations during the Chola period, to execute commissions of jewels for the temple deities. The Mughal emperors established workshops or *karkhanas* within the precincts of the court each supervised by a master craftsman of repute. In Jahangir's court, mention is made of goldsmiths and inlayers. The names of Puran, Kalyan and Hunarmand are credited with manufacturing ornaments, jewellery and thrones of exceptional quality. The design and manufacture of the Peacock Throne is attributed to one Austin Bordeaux, who was given the title of Hunarmand or skilful, in recognition of his skills. Hortensio Borgio

was credited with first cleaving the Koh-i-Nur diamond; "Bebadal Khan, the Darogha of Goldsmiths' workshop in Shah Jahan's time was a celebrated lapidary, a great calligraphist and also an author of some respectable verse."<sup>17</sup> Ram Singh Malam, who worked for Rao Lakhpatji, the ruler of Kutch (1741–60), was a multi-dimensional craftsman. He lived in Europe for 18 years and on his return extended his skill in areas ranging from architecture to glass making, jewellery and enamelling.<sup>18</sup> Many members of the goldsmith caste were also painters of repute.<sup>19</sup> Jewellery designers were versatile, crossing boundaries and extending their proficiency to other areas. As early as in the 8<sup>th</sup> century,



*“Sulaiman was a jauhari by birth and profession. His ancestors had for three generations studied the art of pleasing Mughal royal taste. Today, there was trepidation in Sulaiman’s heart. Thrice before the ear pendants had been sent back by Her Royal Highness - Mallika-e-Alam, Mumtaz Mahal. The combination of jewels was not right, the edging of the stone setting was not fine enough. The piece he brought today was sure to please - Insha Allah. The enamelled casket was sent to the royal Zenana. Bejewelled fingers lifted the ornaments – the ladies-in-waiting gasped with envy. Fit for a queen, the ornament was the result of the finest craftsmanship and exquisite designing. The golden glow set off the prism-like glitter of diamonds and the passionate red of rubies. The Mughal symbol of the crescent moon curved just right round the shell pink ear lobe. Minute care had fashioned the motif of the fish – set in rubies on one side and diamonds on the other. Naughty pearls danced mischievously as the Mallika-e-Alam turned her face in the mirror. She smiled. She would wear it at Kushbroz tomorrow. Sulaiman’s care was rewarded ...”<sup>[iii]</sup>*

428

an inscription in the Virupaksha temple at Pattadakal near Bijapur “records that the royal architect who planned that edifice, used to design the palace jewellery”;<sup>20</sup> earlier, an inscription on the hand of a Yaksha figure of the Satavahana period dating to the early 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. records that the sculptor of the image was the goldsmith Kanhadasa.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when Portugal controlled the gem trade in India, Goa was home to goldsmiths and jewellers from different parts of the country and world. They gathered on the Rua Direita to work with the best stones that came out of the mines of India and to meet the demand for exceptional quality jewels in the country and abroad. Indian goldsmiths travelled to Lisbon, and “Raulu Xatim, the son of a Goan goldsmith, actually stayed on in Lisbon between 1518 and 1520”<sup>21</sup> perhaps to undergo training and gain knowledge of the kind of items sought after in Portugal. Business flourished, fuelled by high demand within the country and overseas. Together with foreign dealers, goldsmiths from Portugal also settled in the city, executing commissions for the governors and viceroys. Between 1622 and 1628, Domingo Nunes, a Portuguese jeweller living in Goa, “carried out several commissions for Dom Francisco da Gama, the viceroy.

428

## NECKLACE

North India; 18<sup>th</sup> century

Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution/Art Resource, New York (1931-6-56)

*Moonstones, tourmalines, sapphires and aventurines are inlaid with diamonds, rubies and emeralds, and strung with emerald and sapphire beads on two strands of small pearls.*

429

## DESIGN CATALOGUE

South India; early 19<sup>th</sup> century

Private collection

A page from a catalogue showing a variety of kasu malai (coin necklace) designs. These catalogues, printed by jewellers, included weight and cost details, facilitating easy placement of orders.

430

## DESIGN CATALOGUE

South India; early 19<sup>th</sup> century

Private collection

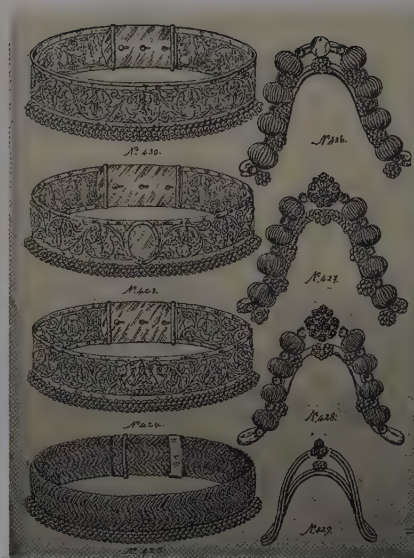
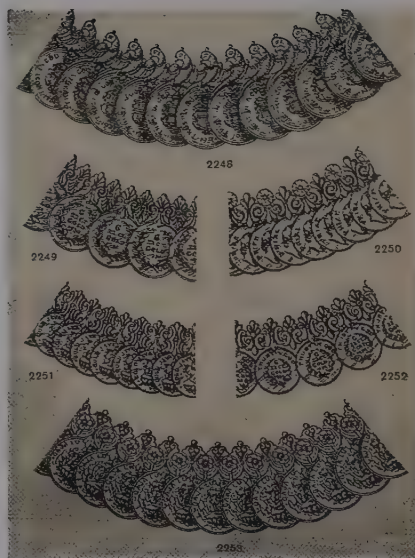
The catalogue page shows a variety of arm ornaments. Few such catalogues have survived and they provide a valuable documentation of prevalent styles.

431

## HIP FLASK

Rajasthan; 19<sup>th</sup> century

Private collection



431



These include gold filigree boxes for bezoars and jewellery in gold, rock crystal, and gemstones.”<sup>22</sup> The number of jewellers and dealers were many, catering to a never-slackening demand. According to the Madras Census Report, 1881, “in Madras, an exceedingly poor country, there is one male goldsmith to every 408 of the total population; in England, a very rich country, there is only one goldsmith to every 1,200 inhabitants.”<sup>23</sup>

For the most part, jewellers executed pieces only when they received specific commissions. They were well versed in the vast terminology of ornaments and designs. Clients provided the craftsman with gold and gems; ornaments had only to be mentioned by name to be reproduced faithfully. Large items were not stocked for ready purchase. But the late 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a change.

Perhaps due to declining royal patronage and growing western influence, more and more jewellery houses were set up in the major cities. None maintained records, and few can recall the names of their great designers and setters. They functioned as workshops, executing orders from printed catalogues or fulfilling commissions for individual clients. But the services of the home jeweller continued till recent times. The many jewellers catalogues that were printed at about this time featuring a large variety of designs, with details of weight and price, are valuable documents of design (429, 430). An illustrated catalogue, ‘*namuna-i-zewarat,*’ published in Bombay in 1898, contains almost 500 designs of ornaments popular in different parts of the country. Customers could select and order items depending on their budget. By the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, ‘mail-order’ jewellery was a flourishing business.

### Legacy of Craftsmanship

An idea of the precise nature of early craftsmanship methods is based on a few surviving examples and evidence manifest in workshops found in the course of excavation of ancient sites. Each region developed its own specialization and evolved new methods by absorbing and combining from different sources. The earliest jewellers were undoubtedly the bead-makers, whose skills date to the pre-Harappan period. Beads were



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**432**  
**A JEWELLERY WORKSHOP**  
 South India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 By permission of the British Library

**433**  
**BRACELET**  
 Taxila, Sirkap; c. 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.  
 National Museum, New Delhi

*The legacy of ancient craftsmanship is exemplified in this finely-worked sheet gold bracelet in the form of fishes.*

**434**  
**JEWELLERY MOULD**  
 Taxila; c. 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.  
 National Museum, New Delhi

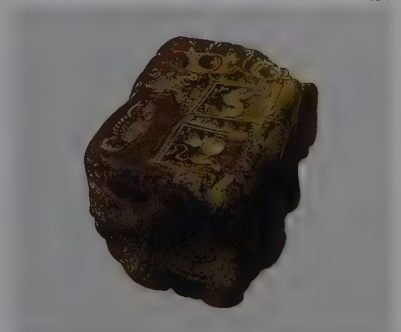
made from semi-precious stones, steatite, faience, terracotta and other materials, and even exported to distant destinations. Steatite beads, glazed and polished, carved with trefoil motifs, were abundant in the Harappan sites. Gold imported from south India into the Indus cities was beaten into thin sheets and worked in a variety of techniques. Though John Marshall believed that the practice of filling hollow pieces with a *lac* core was of Greek origin,<sup>24</sup> there is evidence to suggest that *lac* occurs even in the jewellery of the Indus valley. Few Indian gem-set jewels were made without a *lac* centre. (*Lac*, a natural resin secreted by an insect, is produced exclusively in India.)

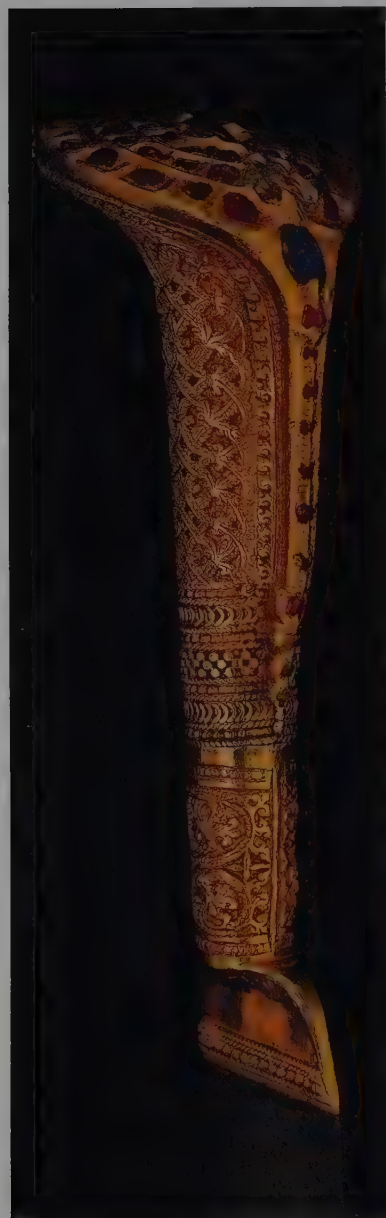
By the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D., the entire jewellery manufacturing industry was in an advanced stage of excellence. Craftsmen were adept at extricating impurities and melting gold, beating it into sheets, forming it into shapes by soldering component pieces, casting from moulds, and decorating the finished product by engraving, repousse, granulation, filigree and inlay. The influx of Greek craftsmen to India in the post-Alexander era introduced new techniques. These influences combined with the jewellers' indigenous skills to produce some of the most spectacular surviving items of ancient Indian craftsmanship. To the local skill of incrustation, Greek craftsmen introduced granulation and filigree, whose origins can be traced to the Sumerians. Dating to the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D., the Taxila gold hoard provides comprehensive evidence that the craftsman's knowledge of goldsmithing and metallurgy was in an advanced state.

433



434





435  
**DAGGER HANDLE**  
 South India; 18<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection

*Repoussé gold with applied stamped elements worked in minute details in a complex network of patterns set with rubies, emeralds and diamonds.*



436 437

436  
**PADAKKAM (pendants)**  
 Tamil Nadu; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection

*Closed set, but simulating kundala velai, with diamonds, rubies and emeralds, the gently curved form of the pendants adds a lifelike quality to the peacock and floral motifs.*



437  
**KUZHI MINNA MALAI (necklace)**  
 Kerala; early 20<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection

*Stamped gold units with applied filigree and faceted granules are linked together. The term for the ornament derives from the cups (kuzhi) that shine (minna).*



“Lacke by the Malabares,  
 Bengalers, and Decaniins, is  
 called Assii, by the Moores  
 Lac; ... The manner how it is made is  
 thus ... there are certaine very great  
 Pismires with wings, which fly up the  
 trees that are there like Plum trees,  
 and such other trees, out of which  
 trees comes a certaine gumme, which  
 the Pismires sucke up, and then they  
 make the Lac round about the  
 brances of the trees, as Bees make  
 Hony and Waxe, and when it is full,  
 the owners of the trees come, and  
 breaking off the branches lay them to  
 drie, and being drie the branches  
 shrinke out, and the Lac remaineth  
 behind like a Reed: sometimes the  
 Wood breaketh within them, but the  
 lesse Wood it hath within it the better  
 it is: the peeces and crummes that  
 fall upon the ground, they melt them  
 together, but that is not so good, for it  
 hath filth and earth within it: it  
 happeneth oftentimes that they finde  
 the Pismires wings within the raw  
 Lac. When the Lac is raw, as it  
 commeth from the Tree, it is a darke  
 red colour, but being refined and  
 censed, they make it of all colours in  
 India.”<sup>[iv]</sup>



438

The Taxila jewellery employed moulds and dies to form the structure of the jewel. Stone moulds of two types were used. Solid pieces were cast by pouring molten metal into hollow moulds and sheet gold was worked by taking impressions off one-piece moulds (434). Copper and bronze dies were employed for the heavier pieces. Once complete, entire surfaces were covered with minute granules of gold in what is known as “field grain work”,<sup>25</sup> or filigree, whereby fine wires, plain, twisted or plaited, were soldered on to the surface of the finished jewel in decorative patterns. In addition to these techniques, two types of incrustation were used to decorate and embellish jewellery surfaces. Precious and semi-precious stones were enclosed in cloisons formed by thin metal strips, the edges turned in to hold the stone securely in place, the compartments positioned close to each other covering the entire surface, or alternatively randomly scattered in cloisons.

Designs and manufacturing techniques travelled the trade routes from one region to the other. With a vast and ancient repertoire at his fingertips, the jeweller continued to produce beautiful pieces of jewellery. Since fashions were fairly constant over several centuries, with only subtle variations, the Indian craftsman grew imaginative. While flora and fauna remained the core of his inspiration, he ceased to be merely imitative. Fantastic forms emerged, decorative details grew even more complex, and ornaments became veritable icons. He sometimes borrowed from other disciplines and even combined more than one technique to achieve the best possible result. Even the *cire perdue* or lost wax process was used in some parts of India, such as Rajasthan, to fashion anklets and bracelets.

438

## ARMLET &amp; PENDANTS

Jaipur; 19<sup>th</sup> century

Private collection

Illustrating the stages of monochrome *partajikam*, the two pendants with chasings in the gold surface, are ready for filling in of the enamel colour. The centre-piece is complete, with fine gold lines scrolling across the unicolour enamel ground.



439a

**GARDEN OF PARADISE**

Before the introduction of claw setting in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, virtually all Indian jewellery was *kundan*-set, a quintessentially Indian technique, wherein layers of narrow ribbons of pure gold (*kundan*) form a solid wedge around the gemstone. Mughal jewellery was a unique combination of *kundan*-set gems and enamel pigments. Traditional Mughal-style jewellery is still made in this manner, unchanged for centuries.

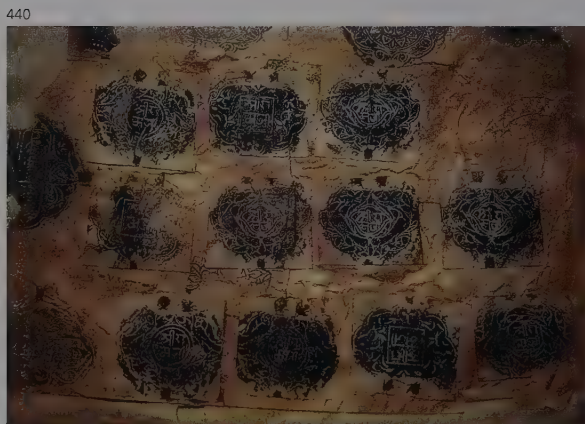
To turn over a piece of enamelled jewellery is to enter a private garden. The uninitiated often wonder at the extent of effort and workmanship expended on the reverse, enjoyed by none but the wearer. It began with pure pragmatics. Initially enamel was used behind the ornament to protect the gold from wearing away due to constant contact with the skin. This utilitarian benefit contributed largely to its widespread popularity. The *champleve* technique of engraving the metal as practised in India is particularly advantageous in this respect.

Traditional jewellery manufacture, a product of well-orchestrated teamwork, commences at the designer's (*chitera*) low work desk. He works with designs (*khakas*), generally rubbings of finished pieces (440), yellowed parchments that are jealously guarded. Into these he incorporates design details specific to the shapes and sizes of the gems to be studded, and more importantly, to the whims and fancies of the client. The basic design-style is, however, determined by the place of manufacture. Over the years, production

439a & 439b  
 HASLI (rigid necklace – front and reverse)  
 Bikaner; 20<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection

Illustrating contemporary craftsmanship, the front is *kundan*-set with diamond; the reverse is enamelled.

440  
 KHAKAS (designs)  
 An old rubbing showing designs rendered by a *chitera* (designer)



440



439b

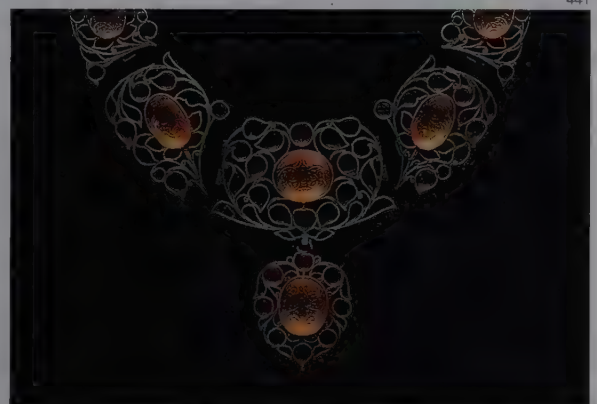
centres developed signature styles in their choice of motifs, colour combinations, design arrangement, and technical particularities.

The goldsmith (*sonar*) meticulously crafts the metal mould (*ghat*), on the basis of the drawing (441), bearing in mind the stones that have to be accommodated. An ornament is generally made up of a number of such hollow units that are soldered together after enamelling. At this stage, the mould is sent back to the designer for outlining the details of the design to be enamelled on its surface. Burnishing the entire surface with a piece of agate to emphasize the design lines, he then sends this mould to the engraver (*gharaiwala*) for carving out (*khudai*) the areas marked for filling with enamel colours.

Once the design and colour scheme for the ornament to be enamelled are decided, the enameller (*minakar*) chips off a small quantity of the required colour from a glassy chunk and pulverizes it to granular consistency. Washed to remove impurities, the enamel is finely powdered and mixed with water to make a paste. It is now ready for application. The enameller applies minuscule amounts of one colour with a small spatula to the grooves already engraved into the base plate of the ornament. The piece is placed in a pre-heated kiln to fuse in the colour. Thin coats of enamel are built up layer by layer, in this manner, to the level of the metal surface for each colour. Since enamel colours have different melting points, they are fired in order of hardness. The process of heating and cooling are equally critical, to prevent cracking and to achieve the desired translucency.

441  
GHAT (metal mould)

The first stage in ornament making, hollow metal moulded units are ready to be filled with lac and embedded with gems.



441

442, 443, 444

**THE ENAMELLER'S WORKSHOP**

*The enameller's workspace and tools; enamel colour being ground with a pestle in a mortar; the powdered colours being filled into the grooved gold surface.*



445

**KANTHLA (necklace – reverse)**

Jaipur; mid-18<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*Enamellers sourced many of their design motifs from nature. Translucency of colour and linear grace impart a lifelike quality to these early enamelled gold plaques.*

442

443

446

**PENDANT (reverse)**

Lucknow, Rampur; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*White and green enamel in a floral design on an opaque blue enamel ground (lajvardi) decorate the reverse of the pendant and two side units of a necklace.*



447

**PAHUNCHI (bracelet – reverse)**

Mughal, Hyderabad; 18<sup>th</sup> century  
National Museum, New Delhi (57.33/5)

*A white enamel ground (safed chalwan), with floral motifs rendered in fine gold lines, this bracelet illustrates early partajikam.*

448

**ROUNDEL (reverse)**

Rajasthan; 18<sup>th</sup> century  
National Museum, New Delhi (57.105/9)

444

449

**NECKLACE (reverse)**

Jaipur; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*After enamelling and gem-setting, the individual units are soldered or strung together to form the finished ornament.*

450

**PENDANT (reverse)**

Lucknow; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*Forsaking the traditional palette of primary colours, enamellers in the Lucknow area experimented with the use of just two or three colours; this gold pendant is rendered in the deep blues and greens typical of silver enamel work.*

451

**PENDANT (reverse)**

Benaras; c.1980  
Private collection

*The continuity of the different enamelling techniques is evident in this example of contemporary, monochrome partajikam.*





445



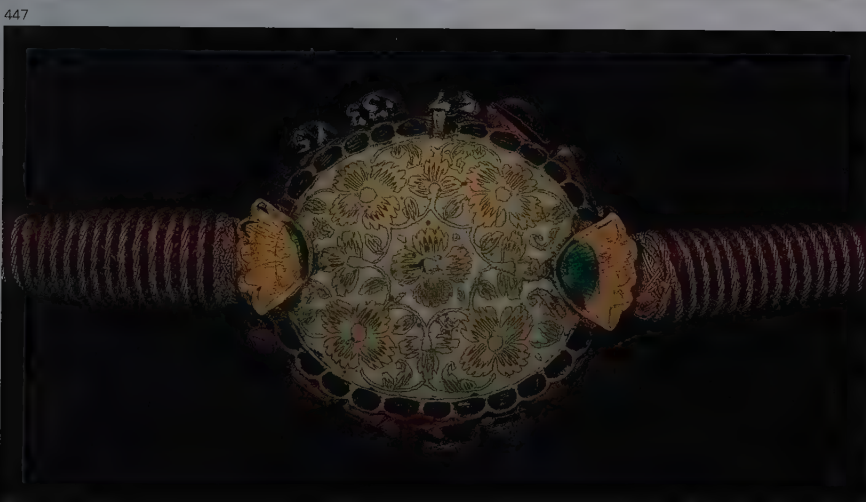
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449



446



447



450



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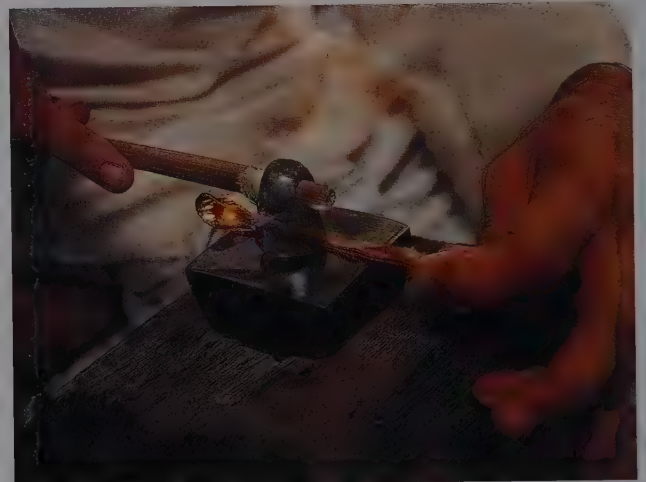
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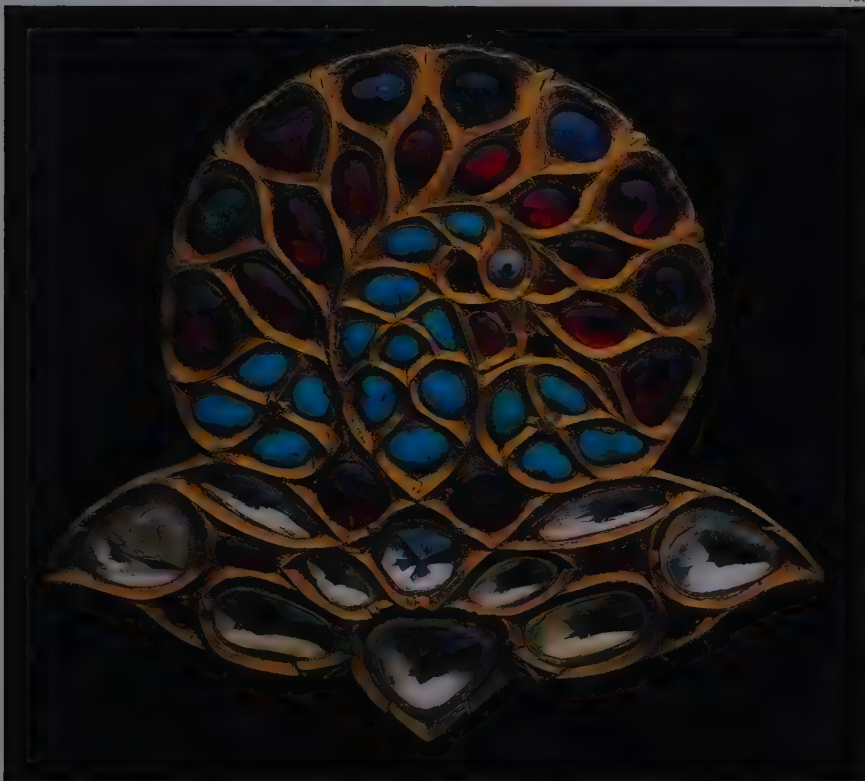


457



458

459



460

452-457, 458  
**KUNDAN SETTING**

*An ornament unit fixed on to a shellac stick to facilitate setting of gems. The gem-setter at work. Gem stones are individually set into place. Strips of gold ribbon are beaten until the required malleability is achieved. The gold strips are cleaned and burnished with an agate stone. Lengths of purified gold ribbon, ready to be used for kundan setting. Reflective foil, joban, is used behind gem stones to enhance their brilliance.*

459  
**PENDANT**  
Benaras; c.1970  
Private collection

460  
**KALGI (turban ornament)**  
Mughal; 18<sup>th</sup> century  
H: 12 cm W: 3.6 cm  
Courtesy Victoria and Albert Museum,  
London (IM 44-1922)

*As a variation, enamellers sometimes applied a translucent layer of colour over the design engraved in low relief on the gold ground; similar to the western technique of basse taille, this type of enamelling is called boond tila.*



461

461  
KARNAPHUL JHUMKA (ear ornaments)  
Benaras; early 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection  
*Pink enamel (gulabi mina), hallmark of the Benaras tradition, enhance the flower form of these ornaments.*

462  
PANCH KALANGI (turban ornament – reverse)  
Benaras; c.1850  
Private collection

463  
SWORD HILT AND SCABBARD  
Benaras; early 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection  
*Champleved leaves of green enamel frame and highlight the painted pink enamel lotuses on this example of the craft that is distinctive of Benaras.*

Only after the enamelling has been completed does the ornament reach the hands of the gem-setter (*kundansaz*). At this stage, the piece is firmly fixed into place on a small wooden handle (*bini*) with resin or shellac to prevent movement when pressure is exerted while setting. Each stone is then set into place, the gem-setter expertly compressing narrow ribbons of pure gold (*kundan*), layer upon layer, to form a solid wedge around each gemstone. This technique allows the gem-setter to camouflage irregularities in gems or highlight them in such a manner as to define their unusual appeal. No welding is required as pure gold is malleable in a cold state.

Since purity is essential to the malleability of the metal, many gem-setters prefer to make their own material in accordance with their own standards. Lengths of gold wire are beaten and then immersed in a solution; they are then heated to anneal and purify the metal till the temper (*lachak*) of the gold ribbon signals the metal's pristine purity. In fact, in the Indian idiom, the process of *kundan* making – repeated exposure to fire refines gold into *kundan* – is used as a metaphor to describe sterling character strengthened by the test of tribulations.

*Kundan*-set gemstones are almost always backed with reflective foil (*dank*, *joban*) made of thinly beaten silver or gold sheet. Integral to traditional jewellery, this foil is necessary to maximize the brilliance of the gems, since no light enters the stone except from above. Furthermore, since Mughal-style jewellery is generally set with flat, minimally faceted rose-cut stones and cabuchons, the use of foil adds depth and a measure of refraction to the stones. Foil also aids in achieving colour uniformity in an ornament without the considerable expense involved in selecting naturally matched gemstones. Understood and accepted for its purpose, the incorporation of foil is not considered a fraudulent practice. The value of Mughal jewellery is, in any case, determined as much by its delicate enamelling and gorgeous design setting, as by the intrinsic worth of the gemstones used. Most connoisseurs will compromise on the latter rather than the former.

The last in the production sequence, the stringer's (*patua*'s) skill gives final shape to the soft curves of Indian jewellery difficult to achieve by metal links. Indian jewellery is made up of a number of individual units which have to be threaded together and embellished with beads and pearls to complete the design. The stringer's tools are fairly simple; the magic is in his experienced fingers which wind (*ainthna*), braid (*gundhna*), knot (*ganth bandhna*) and net (*jal banana*) the yarn, pearls and beads in a plethora of combinations, giving the final touch to nature's jewels and the enameller and gem-setter's skills.

### Ateliers of Enamelling

The major centres for enamelling were Jaipur, Alwar, Delhi and Benaras. Of these, George Watt acknowledged the superior "depth and transparency"<sup>26</sup> of Jaipur enamelling. Curiously, Hyderabad is conspicuously absent from lists of production centres. The enamel from this area was called "*thapakam*" amongst tradesmen, a nomenclature which denotes the technique of stamping as against engraving the areas to be filled in with enamel colours. This method was not appropriate to gold and the end product had a somewhat crude, opaque enamel finish, a far cry from the refined translucence achieved





462

463





464

464  
PENDANTPunjab Hills, Kangra; c. 19<sup>th</sup> century  
2.8 cm x 2.9 cmVirginia Museum of Fine Arts, The Nasli and Alice  
Heeramaneck Collection, Gift of Paul Mellon  
(68.8.161)*Figures of Rama, Sita, Lakshmana and Hanuman  
form the theme of this enameled gold plaque that  
functions as an amulet.*

465

## KADA (bangle)

Benaras; 18<sup>th</sup> century

National Museum, New Delhi (58.7/b)

*Table-cut diamonds set on the outer surface of this  
bangle are complemented on the inner surface by  
painted pink lotuses characteristic of the Benaras  
pink (gulabi) enamelling tradition.*

by the craftsmen in the other major centres. Today Bikaner joins the select list of centres renowned for producing Mughal-style jewellery.

Jaipur, already an enamelling centre in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, emerged with unrivalled artistic vigour. Art historians believe that the Jaipur staff of honour, the earliest known existing enameled object in India, was made by enamellers brought by Maharaja Man Singh from Lahore in 1560 to set up a manufactory in Amber. The royal archives record the names of four enamellers – Zorawar, Jawahir, Sookha and

Bhairun. Some of their direct descendants are still involved in the profession, a few among them rated as master enamellers. The Jaipur staff of honour, a veritable design lexicon of Indian enamel motifs, is unfortunately not available, locked away somewhere in the cavernous royal treasury of Jaipur, inaccessible to scholar, art lover, and wondering tourist alike.

Despite the city's distance from the Mughal seat of power, the craftsmen of Benaras were exposed to new developments and skills through interaction with travelling Persian and Turkish tradesmen and pilgrims. The city's jewellery making and gem cutting skills were specially energized in the 17<sup>th</sup> century when Jahangir shifted his administrative headquarters from Jaunpur to Benaras. By the end of the century, the city had made the craft very much its own.

When the seat of Oudh was established in 1750, it was but natural that Benaras, which lay within Oudh territory, became atelier to the most splendid court in north India, renowned for its encouragement to performing and decorative arts. The art of painted enamelling on jewellery, distinctive to this city, was introduced during this period. The art was inspired by the beauty of painted Isfahan ware brought to the Lucknow court by Persian tradesmen. One Kaiser Agha, a merchant from Kabul, is credited with teaching the skill to the Benaras enamellers.<sup>27</sup>

465



*“They are tawny men, almost white, and fat. The more part of them are great merchants, and they deal in precious stones, seed pearls and corals, and other valuable goods, such as gold and silver, either coined or to be coined. This is their principal trade, and they follow it because they can raise or lower the prices of such things many times; they are rich and respected; ... They have wide holes in their ears, into which an egg would fit, which are filled with gold with many precious stones, they wear many rings on their fingers, they are girt about with girdles of gold and jewellery and ever carry in their breasts great pouches in which they keep scales and weights of their gold and silver coins and precious stones ... They are given to usury, so much so that one brother will not lend to another a ceutil, without making a profit thereby.”<sup>[v]</sup>*



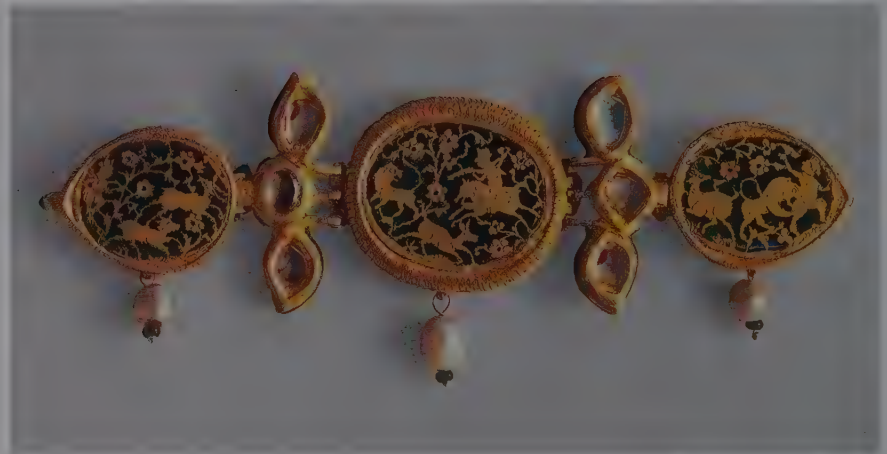
466a



466b

466a & 466b  
**NECKLACE AND EARRINGS**  
 (reverse and front)  
 Gujarat; 18<sup>th</sup> century  
 Courtesy Jugal Kishore Kadel Collection, Madras

*Though its origins are unknown, the technique of pachchikam illustrated in these ornaments seems to have had its roots in European design. Uncut diamonds and emeralds are encased in silver in the traditional manner, but the edges of the encasement are grooved to simulate an open-claw setting. The reverse is sheet gold, finely etched with floral motifs and the signs of the zodiac.*



467

467  
SARPATTI (turban ornament)  
Rajasthan, Pratapgarh; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Los Angeles County Museum of Art,  
Purchased with funds provided by  
Anonymous Donors (AC1995.16.2)

*A hunting-scene is rendered with the delicateness of lace in gold and gold foil over green glass in this example of thewa work.*

468 (facing page)  
NECKLACE  
Rajasthan, Pratapgarh  
Late 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

Almost all jewellery from Benaras is in some shade of pink (462, 463), from which the tradition derives its name *gulabi*. *Gulab* also denotes a rose and earlier craftsmen mixed a little ‘oil of roses’ to the enamel paste to bind the colour. Except for the painted areas, the Benarasi enameller follows the same *champleve* technique and sequences as his Jaipur counterpart. However, once the colours are fused in, the Benarasi enameller paints in the motifs. The raised, slightly convexed white ground (*safed chalwan*) ubiquitous in enamels from Benaras, is the enameller’s canvas.

The repertoire of enamel motifs increased with growing demand. As craftsmen gained dexterity and confidence, they experimented with more complex forms. Geometric shapes of Muslim tradition were now interwoven with the oft-seen acanthus, lotus and other flowers, birds and animal forms of Hindu aesthetics. Not surprisingly, religious themes soon found their way into the designs of the enamellers. Images of deity, even favourite verses from scriptures engraved and enamelled on pendants and armbands were exceedingly popular by the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Occasionally, one comes across remarkable specimens where the enameller, constantly challenging his own skill, has engraved an entire pageant from Hindu mythology on to a piece of jewellery – a miniature painting in metal (464, 386).

It was the Indian jeweller, who having learnt the art from his Persian counterpart, perfected his skills and raised enamelling to an art form without parallel. The motifs, the colours, and the manner in which enamelling was rendered on the backs of jewels are all uniquely Indian.

### LACE OF GOLD

In the last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, goldsmiths in Pratapgarh, a small principality in Rajasthan, reversed the use of materials in enamel work and created a similar, though monochromatic, effect with gold leaf seemingly etched on glass (467, 468). The technique of *thewa*, which means setting, is also referred to as Pratapgarh enamel or quasi-enamel.

This technique is currently practised only by the male members of an extended family in the area. It was introduced, according to these craftsmen, in 1767, by their ancestor Nathuni Sonewalla, a goldsmith at the court of Maharawat Samant Singh. In this type of work sheets of pure gold are fixed in a bed of resin and the entire design is pierced. Carefully removed from the resin, the finished gold leaf, *thewa ki patti*, is placed on a coloured glass base and heated on an open crucible for fusing. Whatever the motifs, the miniature scale of *thewa* work requires extraordinary dexterity and patience.

As is the case with enamelling, the cooling process in *thewa* work is critical. Rapid cooling may shatter the glass, so it is allowed to cool naturally. Individual units are then fitted into bezels. Geometrical forms – ovals, squares and circles – are the





469

general norm. At this stage, each unit is backed with highly burnished, pure silver foil. This ensures colour uniformity of the base glass and also increases its brilliance.

Many 19<sup>th</sup> century Pratapgarrh pieces are set in elaborately filigreed gold rims in a distinctly European style called *canetille*, after a contemporary European type of embroidery. Contrary to earlier assumptions about their European manufacture, these gold settings were in all probability made in India by goldsmiths who were, by then, as a community, fairly conversant with European styles, and adept at copying them when required to do so by both their western and Indian clientele.<sup>28</sup>

#### SKILLS OF THE SOUTH

Jewellery manufacturing techniques in south India correspond more or less with those in other parts of the country, with minor procedural variations. The *lac*-filled, sheet gold method was referred to as *izhacha-velai* or *kundala-velai* (469); diametrically opposite to this method was the closed setting *kall-velai*, wherein gem stones were closely encased in boxes of gold, without the use of *lac* (472); the third was the repousse sheet gold technique, *nakashu-velai* (484), often enhanced with gem stones.

The *izhacha-velai* or *kundala-velai* is almost identical to the north Indian *kundan* tradition. Until the open claw and collet settings came into vogue in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, gemstones were always mounted in closed settings preventing the passage of light through the stones. (Jewellers took advantage of this, camouflaging poor quality



470



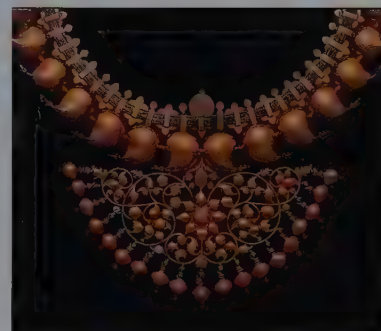
471



472



473a



473b

469  
NAGAR (hair ornament)  
Mysore; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*Closed and kundan-setting combine in this gold jewel, set with rubies and diamonds, depicting a standing goddess Lakshmi beneath a snake-head canopy.*

470  
PENDANT (reverse)  
Rajasthan; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*The Tree of Life is embossed on the gold back of a gem-set pendant.*

471  
PENDANT (reverse)  
Tamil Nadu; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*The double-headed eagle motif of this pendant set with gems is finely etched on the reverse, simulating the feathers and other details of the bird. The gentle curvature of the jewel ensures comfort and lends dimension to the bird form.*

472  
NALU KALL ADDIGAI (necklace)  
Tamil Nadu; mid-20<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*The kall-velai (closed setting) repertoire of south Indian craftsmen is manifest in this traditional piece comprising individual gold squares, each set with four diamonds (nalu kall), strung together on a gold cord, with a fan-shaped pendant.*

473a & 473b  
MANGA MALAI (necklace of mangoes – front and reverse)  
Tamil Nadu; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*Gold set with rubies, diamonds and emeralds. Such large ornaments were always made in the kundala velai (lac-filled sheet gold) technique. Each gold mango unit is rendered three-dimensionally, the back finished to a polished smoothness to ensure comfort to the wearer. The mangoes are strung together on a flexible gold-plated cord.*

stones by placing coloured foils beneath the gems to enhance their colour.) Gems were embedded in wax within the framework of the jewel. The spaces around the stones were moulded with ductile gold to form a narrow bezel. Areas between the stones were then embellished with finely etched designs. The backs were not enamelled but covered with a plain gold plate, often engraved or embossed with floral designs (471).

In the *kall-velai* technique, the gem stones are closely encased in gold, preventing the passage of light through the stones. The idea is that the prismatic effect of light trapped and reflected within the stones enhances the colour and qualities of the gems, the lone exception being when stones are used for amuletic or prophylactic purposes. In this instance, it is mandatory that the back of the stones are left open, to allow the penetration of light through the stone and into the wearer's body as it were. The antiquity of this kind of closed setting is unknown, but it is the most popular method of setting precious gems all over the south and is employed in the manufacture of diamond set ear studs and gem-set necklaces and pendants.

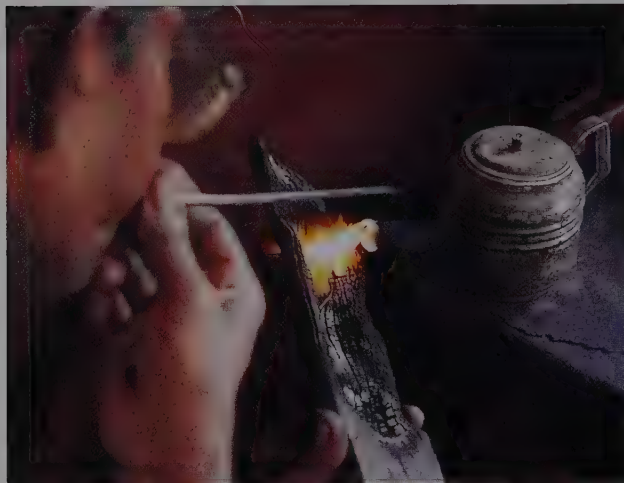
The process commences with the rendering of the design on paper. Once the design is approved, the diamonds or stones are laid out in wax corresponding to the final design of the ornament. This enables the client to visualize the finished product, and also facilitates the correct placement of stones of varying sizes, colour and shapes. The stones are individually cleaned with nitric acid to remove any dust, residue of wax, and marks resulting from handling; individual gold units (*umsbam*) corresponding to the final form of the ornament are made from solid gold and holes are drilled to accommodate the stones, ensuring that the circumference of the holes are kept slightly smaller than that of the stones; the blank unit is firmly fixed onto a stick (*undi*) with a resin coated upper surface, to prevent movement and enable the piece to be held comfortably during



474



475



476



477



478



479

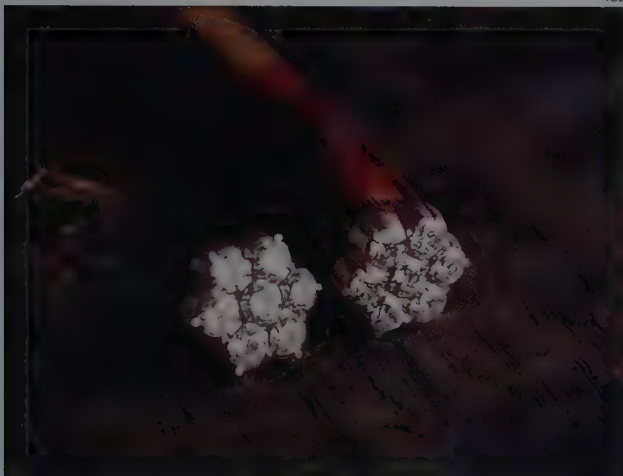




480



481



482



483

setting; each stone is individually dropped into the holes, and gently tapped in, till it is flush with the surface; if necessary, the diameter of the hole is gradually enlarged with a sharp tool to accommodate the stone; once this is done, the gold around the stone is gently pushed around the edge of the stone, to form a thin bezel and hold it firmly in place. Tiny sharp instruments are used to facet, etch or engrave a delicate design around the stone and in the blank areas in-between.

Once the setting process is complete, the ornament is removed from the shellac stick. Finishing touches are rendered, like rounding the edges, forming them into petal shapes, joining the component pieces, and so on. The tools are continuously sharpened on a wet stone throughout the setting process to maintain the required sharpness. Even the polishing is executed in several stages, by rubbing the completed jewel on a bunch of threads coated with a chemically constituted polish, *vadi*. A finishing polish of a very fine red-coloured powder known as *rousse*, is finely applied to enhance the sheen of the gold and the brilliance of the stones.

The surface of the ornament is rarely completely flat. Depth is achieved by raising and lowering the level of the stones on the horizontal plane, while a gentle curvature to the body of the jewel ensures that it rests comfortably on the body and at the same time allows the stones to capture the subtle nuances of natural or artificial light. These closed-set jewels are made to be worn at all times. The stones are secure, and not likely to drop out, the backs always smooth and rounded, ensuring maximum comfort to the wearer. In this kind of setting, ornaments are not hollow and no *lac* is used. As a rule therefore, they tend to be much heavier and employ more gold. This has been the most favoured method of setting gemstones in south India for over two hundred years.

474-482  
WORKSHOP OF GOLDSMITH SRI SASI REKHA  
Madras

*Illustrating the various stages in the manufacture of a traditional closed-set jewel: "A hollow, scooped out in the middle of the mud floor (of a room or verandah), does duty for the fireplace, while, close by, there is raised a miniature embankment, semi-circular in shape, with a hole in the middle of the base for the insertion of the bellows. Crucibles of clay or cow-dung, baked hard in the sun, tongs and hammers, potsherds of charcoal, dirty tins of water, and little packets of sal-ammoniac, resin, or other similar substances all lie scattered about the floor in picturesque confusion. Sitting, or rather crouching on their haunches, are a couple of the Panchala workmen. One of them is blowing a pan of charcoal into flame through an iron tube some eighteen inches long by one in diameter, and stirring up the loose charcoal. Another is hammering at a piece of silver wire on a little anvil before him. With his miserable tools the Hindu goldsmith turns out work that well might, and often deservedly does, rank with the greatest triumphs of the jeweller's art."* [vi]

483  
THODU (ear studs)  
Tamil Nadu; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*Closed-set with Golconda diamonds, the earrings are fastened with a conical shaped screw which turns anti-clockwise in 'the Oriental turn'. Screw heads of ornaments made in south India turn in the opposite direction to those of European design.*



*Nakashu-velai*, corresponding to the western term “micro repoussage”<sup>29</sup> is much older and was undoubtedly one of the principal ways in which sheet gold was handled for the making of ornaments. The technique enabled the jeweller to shape gold into fabulous forms and decorate it with complex designs; it even facilitated the incorporation of gemstones. Also, in a country where gold was precious and expensive, and where demand far outstripped supply, sheet gold work kept the ornaments light and enabled a little gold to go far.

Describing a throne in the court of Vijayanagar, Domingo Paes, a Portuguese who travelled in India between 1520–22, describes a golden throne decorated with sheet gold worked in the technique of *nakashu-velai* (repousse). “It is four-sided, and flat, with a round top and a hollow in the middle for the seat ... and in the spaces between the cloths (*soajes*) it has plates of gold with many rubies and seed-pearls, and pearls underneath; and round the sides it is all full of golden images of personages, and upon these is much work in gold, with many precious stones.”<sup>30</sup> But much before the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Asvaghosa mentions the process in detail in the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.<sup>31</sup>

The south Indian goldsmith was extraordinarily skilled in working in sheet gold. He adopted the technique from the large-sized brass repousse work which ornamented temple doors, columns, lamps and flagstuffs. This brass work was in a scale proportionate to architectural dimensions. The same work was done in a scaled-down version for making jewellery on large sheets of gold to cover the stone images of gods. A gold ornamental armour, a decorative body suit, moulded with intricate detailing, was called *kavacham* (486). In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, jewellery was produced in Madras by the firm of P. Orr & Sons, by decorating western forms with images of gods and goddesses in this technique (488, 489).

Due to the preponderance of images of gods and goddesses in jewels executed in this manner, the term *sami* or *swami*, a generic term for god, was used to identify this genre of jewellery decoration. In this method, an image or design is rendered in sheet gold, either by stamping, working in repousse or moulding; decorative details are then executed on the surface with fine etching and engraving tools. A thin sheet of gold of high purity is beaten to the desired thinness, cut in the required outline of the jewel, and laid over thick wax. The outline of the design is drawn, and using soft-headed tools and gentle punches, the background is depressed; this results in the design coming into relief. The punching continues, the sheet gold alternately placed right side up or reverse side up; the sheet is annealed in order to facilitate working.

Once the desired relief has been achieved, the finer decorative details for the piece are chased, etched and engraved. So as to heighten the



485

484 (facing page)  
NECKLACE  
Tamil Nadu; 20<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection, USA

*The skill of the goldsmith continues undimmed by the passage of time or lack of patronage. Detail upon detail crowd the surface of this necklace, in a form that is typical of Nepal, depicting gods, goddesses, nymphs, animals and an abundance of flora.*

485  
METAL DIE AND PENDANT  
Tamil Nadu, Chettinad; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*The object below is the metal die; the completed pendant was fashioned from sheet gold laid over the mould and beaten to bring out the details. Individual small pieces like this sometimes form part of large ornaments.*

486  
KAVACHAM (coverings)  
Tamil Nadu; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Courtesy Musée Barbier-Mueller, Geneva (2504-127 A&B)

*Body coverings worked from sheet gold incorporating minute details of apparel and jewellery forms, were made to decorate images of deities. Such casings offer valuable clues to prevailing styles of dress and ornament.*



486



487

487  
**JADAI-NAGAM (hair ornament)**  
 Tamil Nadu; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection

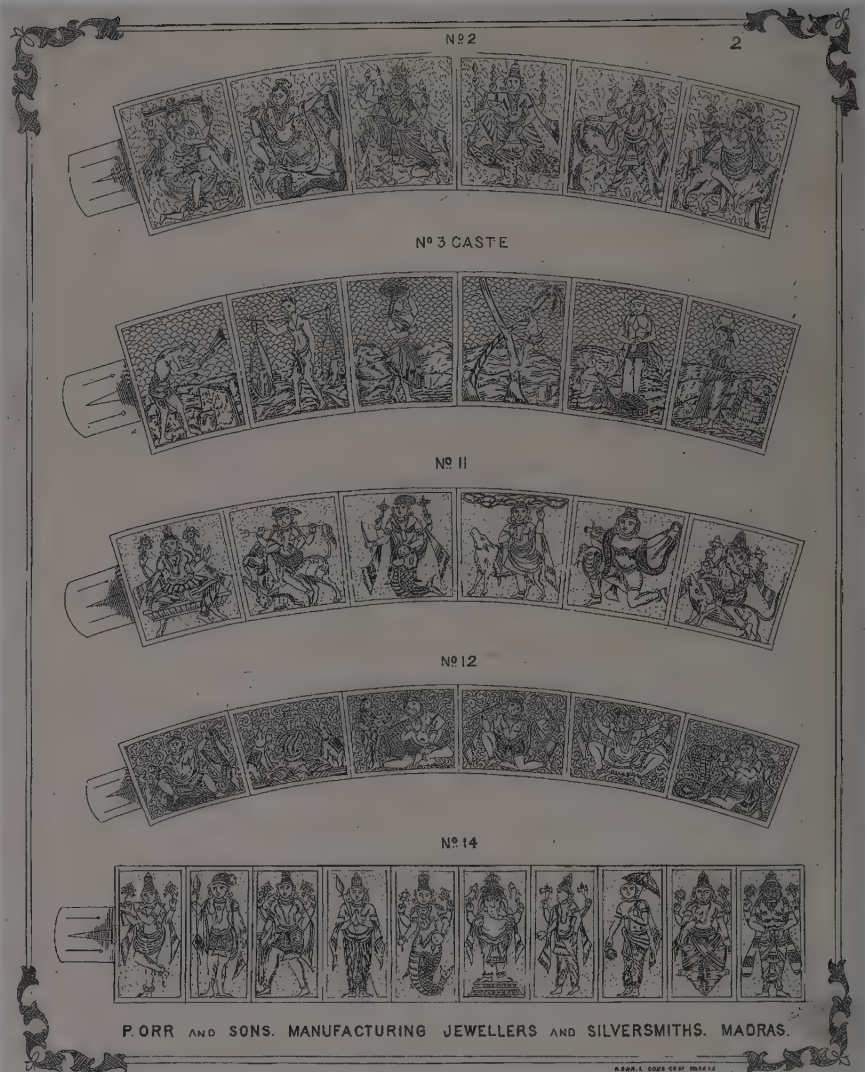
*A sheet gold repousse worked hair ornament executed in the unit system of construction, ending in gold worked tassels; the units are strung together on a cotton cord passing through loops on the reverse.*

488  
**'SWAMI' BRACELET DESIGNS**  
 Madras; late 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Published by P. Orr & Sons  
 Private collection

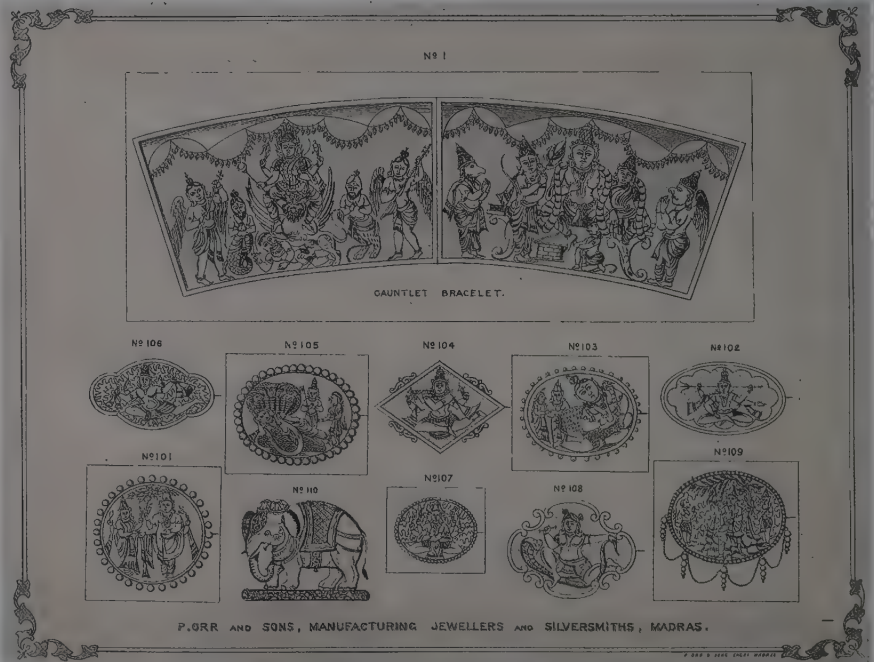
*Hinged medallions depicting Hindu deities and 'caste/native occupations'. The design catalogue provides a price list for these items executed in 22 carat gold. From top to bottom, the prices are: Rs. 290, Rs. 290, Rs. 250, Rs. 210 and Rs. 335.*

489  
**'SWAMI' BROOCH AND BRACELET DESIGNS**  
 Madras; late 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Published by P. Orr & Sons  
 Private collection

*Illustrations of 22 carat gold items for potential buyers; the prices quoted vary from Rs. 45 to Rs. 70, depending on size and detail.*



488



489



490

contrast between the ground and the areas in relief, the background is either left plain or finely beaten to create a matte contrast. Sometimes openings are left for gems, and fine wires are soldered on to complete design details. The completed repousse sheet is filled with *lac* to retain the form of the sheet gold work and a plain plate of gold or silver is fixed to the back. Individual components of large ornaments, using the time-saving unit system of construction,<sup>32</sup> as in the long hair ornaments, were made in this manner and then assembled (487).

The repousse technique employs a very small quantity of metal, beaten to paper thinness and then worked in such detail and opulence that it manages to convey an impression of weight and solidity, so that every design detail stands out in almost three-dimensional relief. Gods, humans and animal figures are set amidst dense foliage and scrolling cartouches, with petalled borders along the edges. The technique provided the jeweller with a canvas which he liberally utilized to tell a story. Religious myths, legends and folklore became popular subjects.

Sometime in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the south Indian jeweller devised a unique method of setting stones, referred to as the *a jour* method (490). Striking a balance between the gold-encased closed setting and the western technique of claw setting, the jeweller set gemstones in carved, hollow gold units by means of minuscule claws. Three aspects of traditional south Indian jewellery manufacture were thereby maintained. The open back made the ornament lighter and allowed light to penetrate through the modern faceted stones; the gold hollow units provided a semblance of the encased boxes of traditional closed setting, and the tiny claws ensured that the stones were held firmly in place. "The *a jour* was an extension of the Mogul and southern Indian techniques of setting table-cut stones into floral frames. But whereas Mogul pieces had enamelled backs, and southern Indian pieces had engraved backs, *a jour* pieces have no backs at all, resembling leaded glass."<sup>33</sup>

The unknown craftsman has left his hallmark of originality and vitality on Indian jewellery traditions. It is said, "by their consummate skill and thorough knowledge and appreciation of the conventional decoration of surface, they contrive to give to the least possible weight of metal, and to gems, commercially absolutely valueless, the highest possible artistic value, never, even in their excessive elaboration of detail, violating the fundamental principles of ornamental design, nor failing to please, even though it be by an effect of barbaric richness and superfluity."<sup>34</sup>

490

**PEACOCK BELT**Singapore; 19<sup>th</sup> century

Edmond Chin collection.

Photograph courtesy Asian Civilization Museum, National Heritage Board, Singapore

*Made by an Indian firm working in the region, the waist belt is crafted in the a jour technique. The central peacock is set with an old-cut diamond of about 5 carats, and can be detached and worn as a brooch or pendant.*



EPILOGUE

## The Scattering of a Legacy



*“For every luxury,  
every rare and beautiful production  
of nature to which man has  
attached a high price,  
every delight that can charm his senses,  
every splendour that can gratify his vanity;  
for perfection in plants, flowers, perfumes,  
animals, birds, insects, gems, pearls,  
we turn to the East.”<sup>1</sup>*

Jewels are links with the past. For in these small objects of beauty is consecrated the chronicle of a culture, of human life, of love and wealth. In jewels are enshrined the pride of power and the sovereignty of kingdoms. The jewels of India, from the ubiquitous little bead to splendid gem-set ornaments, have played a pivotal role in the many events of India's long history.

If very few jewels have survived intact in India, even less is known of Indian jewels in collections overseas. Though the commerce in precious stones has been well documented, there is little documentation of ornaments that were made in India and exported, or even of the many jewels that were brought into India from England, Portugal, Holland and other European centres. Foreign emissaries to the Mughal courts vied with each other to hold the attention of the monarch with 'jewells sett to sell'. Recommendations were made by agents to their principals to send forth beautiful items to capture the fancy of local rulers; there are many references in travel diaries and court chronicles to jewels from Europe being imported into Cambay and Surat. In turn, many a visitor to India is known to have received Indian-made jewellery as gifts from kings, or acquired it as a memento of his visit, as gifts for the family or just as curiosities to show fellow countrymen. Perhaps many such items are languishing in church, royal and private collections around the world, principally in Europe, unseen and unidentified, their importance unrecognized.

Ancient chronicles record the exchange of gem-set jewels between the kings of India and rulers of other countries. The *Mahavamsa* states, "the king of Sri Lanka, Devanampiya Tissa (247–207 B.C.) sent to Emperor Asoka various presents including sapphires, lapis lazuli, rubies and eight varieties of pearls which 'rose miraculously from the earth and the sea respectively'."<sup>22</sup> The Zamorin of Calicut sent many splendid gifts of jewels to the Queen of Portugal.

Humayun in exile offered the legendary Koh-i-Nur diamond to Shah Tahmasp as an expression of gratitude for his hospitality; and Jahangir sent innumerable gifts to his contemporaries in Persia and in return records the receipt of a large inscribed ruby set in a *jigha* or turban ornament, from Shah Abbas of Persia.

The 1587 inventory of Queen Elizabeth I of England lists a rock-crystal bangle "sett with sparckes of Rubies powdered and little sparckes of saphiers made hoopewise called Persia worke."<sup>23</sup> Reputed to have been sent as a gift by Emperor Akbar, it is one of the few surviving early Indian jewels recorded in an European collection. It is rumoured that the renowned wealth of the

491 (page 290)  
H.H. MADHO SINGH II, MAHARAJA OF JAIPUR  
(1880–1922)  
Photograph by Lala Deen Dayal  
Courtesy Air India Collection

492 (page 291)  
KALGI (turban ornament)  
Western India; late 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*Diamonds, rubies and pearls in platinum claw setting combine with Indian design elements in this turban ornament that can also be worn as a brooch. A single large baroque pearl forms the body of the swan, with nine carved rubies serving as the petals of a lotus.*

493  
EAR ORNAMENTS  
North India; late 19<sup>th</sup>–early 20<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*Kundan-set pear-shaped diamonds terminate in large emerald beads, in these turn-of-the-century ornaments. Catering to the demands of their affluent clientele, Indian craftsmen fused traditional techniques with western designs and forms.*

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*“The Pearles are sold by sives which are made of (mettell driven into thin plate) for that purpose, whereof the holes are round. There are many sorts of sives, the first hath small holes, and the Pearles that passe through them are at one price: the next sive hath greater holes, and the Pearles that fall through it are at a higher price, and so forth (at the least) seaven or eight sives. The small stuff that serve for no Pearles, they call Alioffar, and are sold by the ounce, and used by Potticaries and Physitions, and to that end many of them are carried into Potingall, and Venice, and are very good cheape. To give the Pearles a faire colour, in India they use rice beaten a little with salt, wherewith they rub them, and then they become as faire and cleare as christall, and so continue.”<sup>[1]</sup>*

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494  
MAKARI MALAI (necklace)  
Tamil Nadu, Chettinad; late 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*Traditionally worn by men on their wedding day, this necklace with diamonds, cabuchon rubies and emeralds closed-set in gold has no less than 536 diamonds. Few such ornaments survive today, partly because men no longer wear such ostentatious jewels, but more so because old pieces have been broken up and remade.*



495  
**BAZUBAND** (armlet – centre-piece)  
 Mughal; c.1650–1700,  
 with later European additions  
 The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York,  
 Gift of George Blumenthal

*Gold encrusted with rubies, emeralds and colourless sapphires; the original centre-piece was converted to a brooch by Cartier in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when diamond insets, pearls and two black beads were added.*

496  
**THE GOOD SHEPHERD**  
 Goa (?); c.1600

Reproduced by permission of the Trustees of the Wallace Collection, London (S 50)

*Closely related to the whistle (plate 502), this rock-crystal Christian icon embellished with gold and gems is presumably of Indo-Portuguese workmanship. Indian craftsmen in Goa were commissioned to make such pieces to cater to the demand in Portugal.*

497  
**PART OF A WRITING SET**  
 North India; early 20<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection

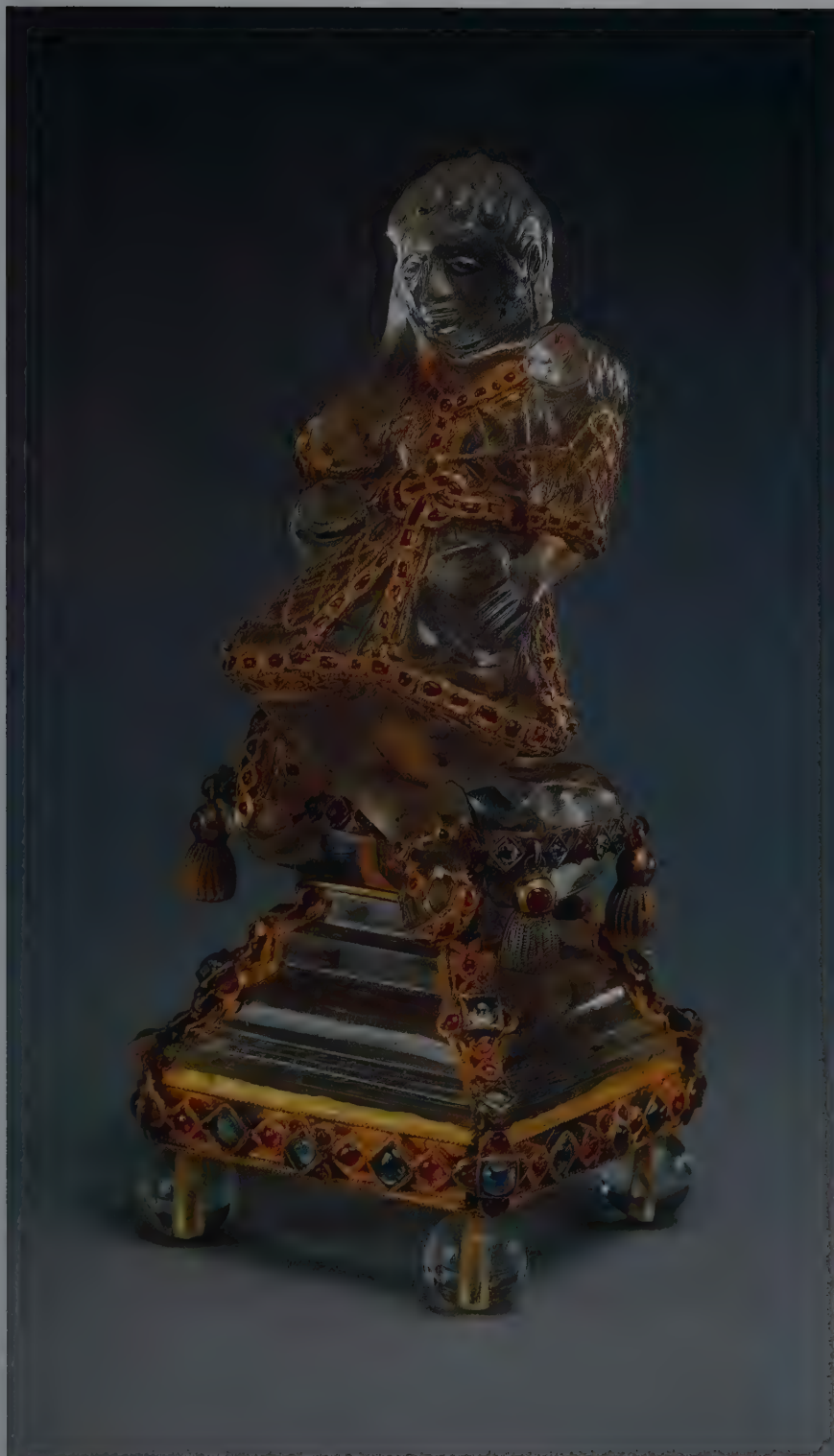
Mughal treasury was envied by so many, that Queen Elizabeth I expressed her willingness to become Akbar's concubine, in return for a share of the gems therein!<sup>4</sup> Jewels of Indian origin once graced the treasuries of many a European monarch, and especially those who were principal trading partners with India.

Merchants and agents of European powers as well as senior operatives of the East India Company procured souvenirs of Indian workmanship in exchange for novelties from their own country. Portuguese travellers returned to Lisbon with gifts of chains, necklaces and jewels as presents for their family and for their king. One Prester John is reputed to have sent a magnificent crown of gold and silver to the king of Portugal in 1487.<sup>5</sup> Dom Afonso de Albuquerque gifted a gold necklace set with thirty-five large rubies and no less than approximately one hundred and eighty rubies on the pendant,<sup>6</sup> to King Manuel in 1511. The 1522 inventory of the dowry of Princess Beatriz, daughter of King Manuel, records many fabulous jewels set with precious stones, all of Indian origin. One of these was a magnificent Indian necklace made up of eleven pieces, each set with thirty-five rubies and seventy-four pearls. Each of the eighteen pendants suspended along the edge contained one hundred and forty-five small rubies surrounded by eight pearls, and the large central pendant bore a large ruby and thirty-eight pearls hanging from it. The total weight of this magnificent ornament was almost two hundred and seventy-six grams.<sup>7</sup> The inventory includes numerous other equally impressive necklaces and bracelets, including one set with rubies and diamonds with *makara*-head terminals.<sup>8</sup> The Marquis of Alorna, Portuguese viceroy in India, returned to Lisbon in 1751, with a splendid collection of Indian-made jewels. His inventory lists rings, pendants, cutlery and other jewelled objects. Gems and jewels sent to Lisbon in this manner are unquantifiable and their present whereabouts unknown. Similarly, inventories of the Prague Collections of Emperor Rudolf II, compiled in 1619 and 1621, record the entry of various objects including jewels of Indian origin into the collection.

To most of these European monarchs, India was a faraway, exotic and mystical land. When Indian objects including jewels arrived in Europe in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, they were viewed with wonder for their fabulous gems and carefully preserved for their distinctness in 'cabinets of curiosities.' The cabinet of William V (1748–1806), the Stadholder in The Hague, received a collection of 'Surat curiosities' comprising thirty-three items of Indian jewellery in 1754 (498–500). The collection had been meticulously put together in Surat over a period of time, before being gifted to the Stadholder by Julius Valentijn Stein van Gollenesse, director-general of the Dutch East India Company between 1750–1755.<sup>9</sup> An inventory of 1760 lists the jewels by their contemporary Gujarati names, providing a valuable documentation of forms, techniques and nomenclature in the Surat area in this period. Made of sheet gold over a *lac* core, the majority of the items, with few exceptions in silver, are set with rubies, emeralds, diamonds and pearls. The absence of Mughal influence is marked, since none of the items are enamelled; however, in keeping with a tradition that is common to south India and the Malabar coast, the *kundan* setting of the stones is deeply defined, minute granules of gold are used to enhance surface ornamentation and the backs are decorated with floral patterns.

*The Duchess of Windsor is reputed to have bought an Indian emerald drop necklace from Harry Winston, in 1957. "Soon afterwards, she wore it at a grand reception to which the Maharanee of Baroda had also been invited. The Maharanee instantly recognised the necklace, with its fine stones, as having been made from a pair of Indian anklets recently sold from the Baroda collection. 'My dear', she announced to a companion, in a rather loud voice, 'have you seen, she is wearing the beads I used to have on my feet!' The Duchess returned the necklace to Winston the following day."<sup>[ii]</sup>*

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499

500





498  
**'BAAJA BAANTH'** (armbands)  
 Gujarat; early 18<sup>th</sup> century  
 Rijksmuseum Foundation, Amsterdam (NM 7121)  
*Gold ornaments for the arm, made in Gujarat, which were a part of the Stadholder's collection.*

499  
**'SCHESFUL'** (hair ornament)  
 Gujarat; early 18<sup>th</sup> century  
 Rijksmuseum Foundation, Amsterdam (NM 7056)  
*Gifted as part of the collection of 'Surat curiosities' to the Stadholder in The Hague, the gold hair flower disc, ornamented with fine pearls, red and green stones is listed phonetically in an inventory under its original Gujarati term.*

500  
**'JAAL'** (ear ornaments)  
 Gujarat; early 18<sup>th</sup> century  
 Rijksmuseum Foundation, Amsterdam (NM 7057)  
*Sheet gold set with rubies, diamonds and pearls and encrusted with minute gold granules; this ornament formed part of the collection of 'Surat curiosities' gifted to the Stadholder in The Hague.*

501  
**'NATIVE LADY OF UMRITSUR'**  
 By Van Ruith  
 Amritsar; 1880s  
 Oil on canvas  
 181 x 99.5 cms  
 Courtesy Victoria and Albert Museum, London (IS 45-1886)  
*The woman wears a full set of ornaments for the head, ear, nose, neck, arm, hand, ankle and foot – a documentary record of the jewellery and costume of the region and period.*



502

502  
WHISTLE  
Goa (?); c.1600  
W: 10.5 cm  
Rijksmuseum Foundation, Amsterdam  
(RBK 17524)

*This rock-crystal whistle, set with cabuchon rubies and sapphires in lozenge-shaped gold collets, is probably of Indo-Portuguese workmanship, made in Goa for export. "There is intriguingly, a rare documentary reference to a whistle made in rock crystal, gold and gems which, in March 1628, was part of the cargo on board the Portuguese ship the Bom Jesus do Monte Calvario, leaving Goa bound for Lisbon."*<sup>10</sup>

Such 'curiosities' also fetched a good price in European markets. Portuguese goldsmiths who lived and worked in Goa in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century catered to this export market. Combining Indian techniques with western specifications, these charming trinkets fuse gold, rock-crystal (502) and gems, primarily rubies set in lozenge-shaped gold collets. They throw light on the workmanship of this period.

Indian Maharajas were generous with their gifts to the reigning English monarch and gifted many a splendid gem and jewel as pledges of allegiance or just to win favour. King George III and Queen Charlotte received manifold gifts from Indian rulers during their long reign from 1760–1820. Many of these items were sold after their death to Rundell, Bridge & Rundell, the court jewellers, who recycled the stones into new settings. Notable among the gems were a large round diamond, presented by the Nizam Ali Cawn, and two large almond-shaped diamond drops presented by the Nawab of Arcot to Queen Charlotte.<sup>10</sup> The round diamond and the Arcot drops were subsequently set into a tiara by the Paris firm of Lacloue and were bought by Harry Winston in 1959, who used the three famous stones for rings.<sup>11</sup>

The fashion for Indian jewellery was popularized by Queen Victoria, who had a taste for them but wore them for political reasons as well. When the Queen presented a collection of Indian jewellery to her daughter-in-law, Princess Alexandra, on the occasion of her marriage to Albert Edward, the Prince of Wales, in 1863, the gifts "established gem-set and enamelled Indian jewellery as a fashionable as well as an aesthetic commodity,



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## KING EDWARD VII AND QUEEN ALEXANDRA

Punjab; c.1902

Opaque watercolour on paper

25 x 19.5 cm

National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi (2336)

*In this portrait, the King-Emperor and Queen-Empress of India are attired in Indian clothes and decked in an array of traditional ornaments.*

503

at once more ornamental and less barbaric than items such as tiger's claw trinkets."<sup>12</sup> However, from one generation to another and even within the long reign of Queen Victoria itself, jewels were broken up; stones recycled and new stones combined with old ones to make up new pieces. This process, not peculiarly Indian, was quite universal. Thus, while stones might be of Indian origin, even among the European nobility, very few ornaments of Indian workmanship have survived.

Not to be outdone by 'mere' Maharajas, representatives of the English Crown in India amassed vast quantities of wealth in gems and jewels, which they sent back to England. These Nabobs, a term described by Lord Macaulay as people "of neither opulent or ancient families sent to the East at an early age and who returned with large fortunes which they exhibited insolently and spent extravagantly," transferred their money home in the form of gemstones and pearls.<sup>13</sup> Robert Clive, perhaps the most venerable of all nabobs, and his son Edward Clive, assembled a collection of Indian art, including gem-set items acquired as booty and presents from local rulers during their stay in India. Robert Clive, especially, is reputed to have acquired many fabulous gems in India. In 1766 he even deputed an individual named Motte, "to purchase diamonds at Sambhalpur on the Mahanadi."<sup>14</sup> In 1767, Clive left India carrying "a million for himself, two diamond drops worth twelve thousand for the Queen, a scimitar, dagger and other matters covered with brilliants for the King."<sup>15</sup>

504

**EAR ORNAMENTS**

Emeralds: early 17<sup>th</sup> century  
Christies Images

*The quality of these Colombian emeralds and the carving of a four-petalled flower at the bottom and strands of the sycamore tree around the gem imply a Mughal origin. The emeralds, reputed to have once belonged to Robert Clive, have been reset in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, to suspend from a Belle Epoque diamond ribbon bow, bell and cupola surmount.*

505

**TIGER-HEAD FINIAL**

Mysore; c.1787–1793  
National Trust Photographic Library

506

**HUMA BIRD**

Mysore; c.1787–1793  
The Royal Collection  
© Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II  
(3D 140186 RCIN)

*Two surviving components of Tipu Sultan's gem-set gold throne. The majestic seat "was to be supported on four tigers of wood, also covered with gold; and on an iron stay, curving over from the hinder part of the platform, was to be fixed, the Homai, or phoenix; also covered with gold, and set with jewels." But fate denied Tipu the honour of sitting on this magnificent throne. It "was sold, unbroken, to Gen. Gent, of the Madras establishment, for 5000 sultaunies, or about 2,5000 l.<sup>sterling</sup>", after the fall of Srirangapattinam in 1799.*



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It was during Edward Clives' tenure as Governor of Madras (1798–1803) that important items of 'Tipu memorabilia' were procured. After the fall of Tipu Sultan in 1799, his vast treasury was ransacked and divided among the soldiers, who subsequently auctioned them to realize their monetary worth. Even Tipu's throne was not spared; it was broken up and individual parts auctioned off. But under instructions from the Governor-General Lord Mornington, the "most significant contents of Tipu's palace" were sought to be saved; fragments of the throne made in Mysore, including two tiger-head finials and the golden huma bird from the canopy (505, 506) were purchased on behalf of the King of England. Lord Mornington gifted Lord and Lady Clive one of these tiger head finials. The Clive collection, housed at Powis Castle, provides valuable insights on the opulence and aesthetics of the period.

From time to time, items purloined at Srirangapattinam appear on the international market, sold with scant regard for their historic importance. A large sapphire from Tipu's sword hilt subsequently set in a ring, sold at Christies on 9<sup>th</sup> June 1892; his four-row pearl necklace was given by Sir John Floyd – in charge of the army – to his daughter Julia, wife of Sir Robert Peel, twice Prime Minister to Queen Victoria. This was sold by Christies on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1917. More recently, in October 1997, two enamelled bangles set with rubies and diamonds, with tiger-head terminals and a pair of carved emerald drops (504) were sold by Christies in London.

The Clives were not the only nabobs of British India. Sir Robert Cowan, during his tenure as Governor of Bombay in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, acquired fabulous

504





*“The Emerauldes which the Indians call Pache (Malayalam ‘pacca’, from the green colour), and the Arabians Samarrut (Zamorrud (Arab), when the European names – smaraude, smaragd, emeraude, emerald), there are non throughout al India, yet it is reported yt some have been found there, but (veric) few and not often: but they are much brought together from Cairo in Egypt, and are likewise called Orientall: they are much esteemed in India, because there are but few of them. There are many also brought out of ye Spanish Indies, and carryed into the lande of Pegu, where they are much worne, and esteemed of, whereby many Venetians (that have travelled thether with Emerauldes and bartered them for Rubies) are become very rich, because among them men had rather have Emeralds than Rubies.”<sup>[v]</sup>*





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diamonds, which came to be known as the Down diamonds. They were reset several times over the years.<sup>16</sup>

The acquisition of Indian jewels by the English was not the sole prerogative of individuals. In 1849, after the annexation of the Punjab, the magnificent treasury of Ranjit Singh fell into the hands of the English Crown. Among the items acquired was the famous Koh-i-Nur diamond. In the aftermath of the Mutiny of 1857, the remnants of the Mughal treasury in Delhi and many provincial treasuries were looted; in the auction held by the Calcutta firm Hamilton & Co., jewels were acquired by English residents in India and found their way back to England. These items periodically come up for sale in the international market.

The Great Mogul emerald, once set into a ring for the Duchess of Windsor, sold at Sotheby's 1987 sale of the jewels of the Duchess for US\$1.3 million. The 19.77 carat emerald was mounted by Cartier and presented by Edward VIII as Wallis Simpson's engagement ring. This emerald was originally said to be "as large as a bird's egg" and "belonged to the Grand Mogul."<sup>17</sup> "It is unlikely that the Duke ever bought jewels with a view to investment, but if the Great Mogul's 1936 price of £10,000 is multiplied by 25 to allow for the period's deflation, the gem can be considered to have appreciated about 500 percent."<sup>18</sup>

Looting of Indian treasuries did not commence with the English. Through successive periods of Indian history, the treasuries accumulated by generation after generation of native rulers were the target of invaders, who carried off everything they could lay their hands on. Of these, perhaps the most famous is Nadir Shah's loot of the Imperial Mughal treasury, after his sack of Delhi in 1739. The entire hoard was carted off to Iran, and formed the bulk of the Crown Jewels of Iran. Few items of jewellery remain intact, since almost all that Nadir Shah acquired was barbarically melted down and

507  
EMERALDS  
Colombia  
Private collection

*The Indian fascination for Colombian emeralds continued well into the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, many of these stones, hitherto left in their natural state, were re-cut with facets. These pear-shaped emeralds were collected over a period of time to achieve size gradations and match depth of colour. The two large ones in the centre are believed to have originally belonged to the Nizam of Hyderabad.*

508 (facing page)  
BALEORA (necklace)  
Jaipur, mid-19<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*The influence of western design is manifest in this necklace of emeralds and diamonds set in gold, a variation of the traditional baleora.*







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converted to gold bricks and bags of gems to facilitate transport. The Iran Treasury acquired from India included emeralds in quantity, quality and size unknown elsewhere; thousands of diamonds, many over “20 carats in weight” and six exceeding “100 carats”,<sup>19</sup> rubies, some more than “10 carats in weight” and red spinels, “hundred in excess of 20 carats, a score or more greater than 100 carats”, and a solitary “polished pebble of 500 carats”,<sup>20</sup> and finally an unquantifiable number of pearls of Indian origin.

Most of the stones were removed from their original settings and reset in accordance with reigning fashions, while countless were sold to fund wars; many pieces were gifted to the Turkish Sultans, other neighbouring rulers and in particular, the Russian Tsars, and are today held in the State Hermitage in St. Petersburg.

By the year 1850, it seemed India had given all that she could give and there was little left. But Europe, yearning for a change, turned again to the exotic Orient in



511

509 (facing page)

**THE GREAT GLOBE**

Iran; c.1874–75

Diam: approx. 45 cm

Photograph courtesy Royal Ontario Museum

© ROM

*“The oceans, seas, and large lakes are composed of emeralds; the land masses are generally of rubies or red spinels; but Iran, Britain, France and part of southeast Asia are made up of diamonds, and Africa south of the Sahara and part of Egypt are of blue sapphires.”<sup>[vi]</sup> Studded with more than 51,000 gems that were part of Nadir Shah’s plunder of India in 1739, and fashioned from 75 pounds of gold, the globe is part of The Crown Jewels of Iran.*

510

**MAHARAJA SHER SINGH**

By August Theodor Schoefft (1809–1888)

Christies Images

511

**KALGI (turban ornament)**

North India; c.1930

Private collection

*Though made in India, this ornament is modelled on the western aigrette in design, material and method of manufacture. The non-Indian spray of flowers is set in platinum with diamonds in openwork claws.*



512

512  
BUTTONS

North India; early 20<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*A set of ruby and diamond buttons – for the long coat (sherwani) and for each sleeve. The calibre rubies are set in a western style in the form of the ancient Hindu auspicious swastika motif.*

513  
PARURE

Bombay; early 20<sup>th</sup> century  
Private collection

*Gold set with diamonds and emeralds; this kind of art-deco design was fashionable amongst the aristocracy in the period. "The imitations of European work are, perhaps, the least successful, for the workmen, whilst copying foreign models, have preserved the meretricious characteristics of Indian work, its minuteness and multiplicity of detail. The result, though pretty enough in a popular sense, is incongruous, for the solidity and smooth finish of the original is wanting, while the want of character and motive in the design remains."*<sup>[vii]</sup>



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the late 19<sup>th</sup> century for something refreshingly different. Paris, of course, was the great trendsetter of 18<sup>th</sup> century fashions on the continent. This trend continued into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when English jewellers vied with their Parisian counterparts to introduce new designs and refine setting techniques. In the 1860s, multi-strand bead necklaces that were very fashionable in Paris were known as 'colliers indiens,' reminiscent of their Indian models.

It was the exhibitions at the Crystal Palace in London in 1851 and the ones in Paris in 1855 and 1867 that marked the turning point, introducing Europeans to the many facets of Indian design culture. They showcased a variety of items specifically made for the occasion by versatile craftsmen from different parts of India and displayed the magnificence of Indian gems. The riot of colour in Indian enamel excited the monochrome visual senses of European sensibilities. The exhibitions drew mixed responses, but opened



514  
NECKLACE  
North India; c.1930  
Private collection

*Each diamond-set floral unit of this necklace rests on a tiny spring, 'en tremblant', so that, when worn, the units dance gently with the slightest movement.*

515  
EAR STUDS  
Cartier; c.1920  
Courtesy Cartier's Historical Collection  
© Cartier

*A pair of ear studs of Indian design and workmanship, with rubies, diamonds, emeralds and pearls set in gold – made to cater to the craze for Indian looking jewellery in Europe.*

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the eyes of Europe to the tremendous calibre of Indian craftsmanship and to the continued availability of high quality gems for jewellery manufacture.

This renewed fascination with Indian gems and jewellery resulted in a cross-fertilization of jewellery designs, forms and techniques. The almost incessant flow of novelties from Europe, the influence of a multi-cultural environment and the arrival of foreign craftsmen who set up workshops in Indian cities and who were even given employment in the imperial workshops, had its bearing on design and decoration. Items made in the Indian style became fashionable and were crafted under special commission for export. A classic example of this kind of cross-cultural influence is the European aigrette and the Indian *kalgi* (511). Many traditional Indian designs inspired western jewellery forms and colour sensibilities. The *sarpech* design, for example, was adapted to pins, brooches and epaulettes; the Indian tassel was adapted to form pendants to necklaces and sautoirs (517); carved Indian beads were used in western forms; the mango, and the peacock, together with plants and leaves were only some of the many motifs adapted and incorporated into the western idiom.

A number of Indian techniques influenced the west in this period. This influence manifested itself predominantly in two areas – one, in which the technique was adapted and used by western jewellers in the manufacture of items for their local clientele, such as enamelling and the juxtaposition of many-coloured stones on a single palette; and the other, wherein Indian design concepts were employed on western jewellery forms, manifest in the 'swami' style of jewellery manufactured by P. Orr & Sons of Madras.

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516  
TURBAN ORNAMENT

Rendering by Charles Jacqureau of Cartier, Paris;  
c.1925

Courtesy Cartier Archives  
© Collection Grollier-Jacqureau

*Combining the sarpech, sarpatti and turra, this creation inspired by Cartier's interaction with the Indian Maharajas, was rendered by one of the firm's most brilliant designers, but never executed.*

517  
TASSEL NECKLACE

Cartier, New York; 1925

Courtesy Cartier's Historical Collection  
© Cartier

*Made by Cartier, under commission, emeralds, pearls and diamonds are set in platinum, with a detachable pendant in the form of a polygonal carved emerald of 86.71 carats, bearing an image of the Hindu deities Shiva and Parvati. Emeralds were mostly carved with floral designs, and this example with Hindu deities is unusual.*

*A long pearl and emerald bead tassel, modelled on an Indian hair ornament, is suspended below the pendant.*

518 (facing page)

COLLIER HINDOU ('Hindu' necklace)

Cartier, Paris; 1936

Courtesy Cartier's Historical Collection,  
© Cartier

*This 'bib-like' necklace made for Honourable Mrs. Daisy Fellowes was based on a design commissioned by the Maharaja of Patna in 1935. Set with diamonds, carved emeralds, rubies and sapphires, it originally had an Indian-style fastening cord. The inclusion of so many sapphires in this piece was a deviation from the Patna necklace.*

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519

519  
**BAZUBAND** (armband)  
 Cartier, Paris; 1922  
 Courtesy Cartier's Historical Collection  
 © Cartier

*The earliest recorded upper-arm ornament made by Cartier. The ornament, a typically Indian jewel adapted to a western design, was commissioned by Sir Dhunjibhoy Bomanji of Bombay, a Parsi millionaire and philanthropist, who supplied the 859 diamonds totally weighing 94.11 carats that are set in platinum.*

520  
**'SWAMI' LOCKET DESIGNS**  
 Madras; late 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Published by P. Orr & Sons  
 Private collection

Catering to a predominantly European clientele in India, images of Hindu gods and goddesses as well as secular Indian images were rendered in the repoussé technique on items such as lockets, pendants, necklaces, bracelets and functional objects like teapots and trays. Indian craftsmen, in their turn, drew inspiration from the west in designs, the use of platinum in place of gold and in the open setting of gems.

Among the many European firms that turned to the East for inspiration in this period, the name of Cartier is undoubtedly the most renowned. Catering to a clientele spread across three continents, Cartier hunted for the best stones from far corners of the world and designed matchless jewels. Cartier's association with India dates to the 1870s and 1880s, when ornaments of Indian origin are listed in their archives: "1872, Indian earrings of gold and turquoise; 1879, a five-strand pearl necklace with six small enamelled Indian plaques; 1884, two three-rope necklaces with Indian gold coins and Indian enamelled buttons."<sup>21</sup> But the real challenge came when Pierre Cartier created under commission an "Indian-style necklace, comprising seventy-one pearls, twelve cabochon rubies and ninety-four cabochon emeralds,"<sup>22</sup> for Queen Alexandra. For Cartier, this commission marked their entry into the hallowed precincts of the world of Indian jewellery and Indian Maharajas.

Cartier's Indian business was handled by Jacques Cartier from London. He visited India for the first time in 1911, coinciding his visit with the Delhi Durbar celebrating the coronation of George V in that year. Efforts to meet and do business with the Indian Maharajas met with instant success as they succumbed to the lure of Cartier. Entranced by European craftsmanship and the use of platinum, many of the most wealthy Indian potentates handed over their family heirlooms to be reset in the



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P. ORR AND SONS, MANUFACTURING JEWELLERS AND SILVERSMITHS, MADRAS.



521  
**DURBAR MALAI** (necklace)  
 South India, Chettinad; late 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection

*Inspired by western design, this lace-like necklace set with diamonds in gold was worn by royalty on state occasions.*

522  
**BUTTONS**  
 South India; early 20<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection

*Combining western techniques and an Indian flower form, these coat (achkan) buttons are set with rubies and diamonds in platinum.*

new western idiom (519). But Cartier handled the magnitude of this trust with characteristic deference, and accorded due reverence to a tradition that was hundreds of years old. Privileged to see, study and handle such immeasurable quantities of Indian gems set in the classical Indian manner, the use of engraved emeralds, Indian designs and the technical skill of juxtaposing a riot of colours through the versatile *champleve* enamel technique, the firm was inspired to evolve and create an entirely new genre of jewels for the Maharajas, as well as for their clientele in other parts of the world. Cartier amalgamated the bold colours of Indian enamel with the art-deco styles created by their designers; they also drew upon centuries-old classical Indian design motifs and forms, adapting and incorporating them into the western design idiom to produce jewellery and objects that were a breath of fresh air for Europe.

To the Maharajas of India, their association with Cartier represented the establishment of a kinship with European royalty. From 1614, when Sir Thomas Roe first presented his credentials to Emperor Jahangir, the Maharajas had vied with one another to inculcate themselves in the 'British manner.' They studied at Eton and Harrow, at Oxford and Cambridge; they holidayed on the continent, maintained homes in London and made every effort to model themselves and their lifestyles on European royalty.

Cartier's most noted clients in India were the Maharajas of Kapurthala, Patiala, and Nawanagar, the Gaekwad of Baroda, and the Nizam of Hyderabad. While the Gaekwad of Baroda and the Maharaja of Patiala handed over their prized heirlooms to be reset in platinum, others ordered individual items, or bought from ready-stock.



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523  
**H.H. SIR PRABHU NARAYAN SINGH BAHADUR**  
**MAHARAJA OF BENARAS (1855–1931)**  
 By permission of the British Library (Photo 99/43)



524

524  
**TURRA (turban ornament)**  
 Benaras; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection

*A brilliantly plumaged gold parrot enamelled and set with diamonds carries a multi-strand pearl tassel from its beak. The tassel inspired European jewellery firms such as Cartier, who adapted it to pendants and brooches.*

525  
**PENDANT**  
 South India; late 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection



526  
**MUHAMMED KHAN V**  
**NAWAB OF BAHAWALPUR (1883–1907)**  
 By Clare Burton  
 Oil on canvas  
 Courtesy Sotheby's

*The theft of an emerald from the Bahawalpur State Treasury was reported in the Civilian and Military Gazette of Lahore, dated 23<sup>rd</sup> February, 1938. "The loss of an emerald worth Rs. 5 lakhs (or nearly £37,000) from the collection of His Highness the Nawab of Bahawalpur will remind many of the fact that His Highness possesses some of the finest emeralds in the world."* [viii]

527  
**ANKUSH (elephant goad)**  
 Jaipur; c.1870  
 L: 54.5 cm  
 Courtesy Victoria and Albert Museum,  
 London (IS 02693)



526

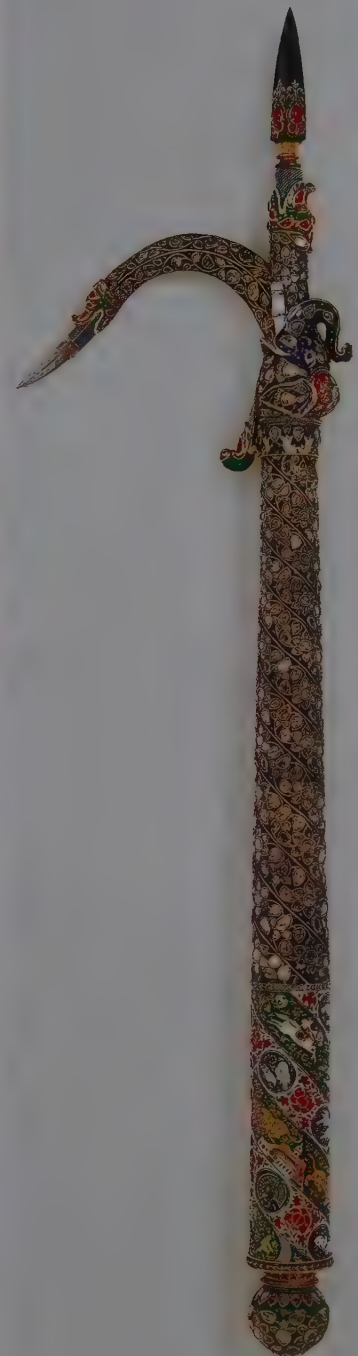
For them, Cartier created items that were either purely Parisian, or developed new designs by combining European craftsmanship with traditional Indian motifs.

Some of Cartier's historical productions for Indian royalty included the resetting in platinum of the jewellery of Sayaji Rao III, the Gaekwad of Baroda. They designed a turban ornament for Maharaja Jagatjit Singh of Kapurthala in 1926 – "a pagoda-style tiara"<sup>23</sup> mounted with 19 emeralds of various shapes, the central hexagonal stone weighing 177.40 carats, including round rose-cut diamonds and pearls (367). In 1925, the firm remodelled the crown jewels of the Maharaja of Patiala, Sir Bhupindra Singh. "Casket after casket of jewels"<sup>24</sup> integrated Indian forms and art-deco elements. The final collection included two magnificent diamond necklaces, diamond collars, pearl and ruby bead necklaces, arm bands and bracelets, belts, buttons, rings, earrings and several other pieces of reset jewellery.

For the Maharaja of Nawanagar they made a necklace of six ropes of pearls with a pendant of an engraved emerald of 62.93 carats. The Maharaja's daughter recalls that "a black servant was employed at the palace at Jamnagar to wear the pearls on his velvety skin and so preserve their natural lustre."<sup>25</sup> But it was the Nawanagar emeralds that excited Cartier. In the words of Jacques Cartier, the emerald collection was "unequalled in the world, if not in quantity then certainly in quality."<sup>26</sup> They were reset into a state necklace comprising seventeen rectangular emeralds, other magnificent neck ornaments, two turban ornaments, one set with a 56-carat stone and the other a 39-carat one and several more jewels.

Other French firms, such as Chaumet, Boucheron, Van Cleef & Arpels and Chopard, and several English jewellers such as Rundell, Bridge & Rundell and Garrards,

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528  
**H.H. SAYAJI RAO II GAEKWAD  
 MAHARAJA OF BARODA**  
 Carte de Visite  
 Private collection  
*The Maharaja wearing the famous Baroda  
 Golconda diamond necklace (plate 529).*



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529  
**KANTHA (necklace)**  
 Western India; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 By permission of the British Library  
 (Photo 1000/5485)  
*A necklace comprising five rows of large rose and  
 table-cut Golconda diamonds, the property of the  
 Gaekwads of Baroda. Reputed to have cost Rs. 40  
 lakh, its present whereabouts are unknown.*



530  
**HEAD ORNAMENT**  
 Rajasthan; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection  
*A forehead ornament for women in gold set with  
 uncut diamonds. The slight curvature of the top  
 piece allowed for ease of wear, the pendant  
 hanging low over the centre of the forehead.*



### *Where Have All These Jewels Gone?*

With their monopoly of the gem producing mines and the right to retain the best for themselves, combined with the treasuries that they usurped from their neighbours, the Maharajas of India were custodians of no less than 5000 years of wealth. The large amounts that were carried away during various periods of history did not constitute more than a small proportion of what they inherited. An account of the treasuries of the many princely states of India is the stuff of legends. The quality and quantity of state jewellery was sometimes in inverse proportion to the size of the principality. Even a sampling of this vast cache is overwhelming:

A seven-strand pearl necklace and a necklace of diamonds the size of chandelier drops with the 128-carat Star of the South as the centrepiece, in the possession of the house of Baroda;

Also in the Baroda treasury, the Empress Eugene diamond weighing 51 carats, and the English Dresden weighing 76.5 carats;

The legendary pearl carpet of Baroda, now part of the Seethadevi Holding in Paris, entirely threaded with seed pearls and studded with rosettes of diamonds, rubies and emeralds. "When spread out in the sun it seemed suffused with a general irridiscent pearly bloom as grateful to the eyes as were the exquisite forms of its arabesques"<sup>27</sup>;

The Jonker diamonds V, VII, XI and XII and a superb three-strand pearl necklace owned by the Maharaja of Indore;

The Maharaja of Dharanghadra's turban ornament with pearls, diamonds and a 160-carat emerald;

The Cartier commission for the Maharaja of Kapurthala, including a crown studded with 3,000 perfectly matched diamonds and the famous Topaz belt buckle;

The Cartier-made coronation jewellery of the Maharaja of Patiala, including the eight items made by Boucheron comprising armbands, necklaces with emeralds and diamonds, sarpech with diamonds and emerald drops and gem set belts;

The Nawanager emeralds and the coloured diamond ceremonial necklace;

The necklace of nine rows of perfectly matched pearls, each as large as a thrush's egg, of the Maharaja of Dholpur;

An emerald and ruby necklace made for the ruler of Patna by Cartier;

The Mysore heritage of a necklace studded with 160 diamonds and 27 cabuchon rubies; a seven strand pearl necklace with diamonds, rubies and emeralds, gold belts and the famous gold and diamond royal *tiru-mangalyam*;

A seven-strand necklace of pearls and rubies belonging to the Gwalior Scindias;

Ornaments of pearls and diamonds of the Maharaja of Kolhapur;

The Maharaja of Kashmir's ornaments and gems including emeralds weighing 250 to 125 carats each;

In the Jaipur royal family, the large Jaipur emerald weighing 522 carats, and two others weighing 75 and 84 carats; an emerald necklace with carved beads weighing 732 carats, a necklet with 278 rubies and 258 diamonds, a necklace of spinel rubies as large as the bantam hen's egg, three bangles with 92 emeralds and 105 diamonds, a pair of gold anklets with 364 diamonds, one tiara of gold with 1527 diamonds, one head ornament studded with 330 diamonds and numerous other gem set jewels.<sup>28</sup>

Hendley describes pearls "as large as good-sized marbles" belonging to the Maharaja of Jaipur, which were pierced at right angles to be worn as a single or double strand. "When used as a single thread two of the openings were filled up temporarily with small seed pearls."<sup>29</sup>

The prince of Nepal's claim to this august league was a string of diamonds three metres long!<sup>30</sup>



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531  
**PENDANT**  
 North India; 20<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection

*Set in an art-deco style using a faceted Colombian emerald in the centre, with diamonds in platinum; such items were popular among the Indian aristocracy in the early part of this century. This piece is believed to have been made by a Parisian firm for a royal client.*



532

532  
**GULUBAND (necklace)**  
 North India; late 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection

*Designed for a young child, this necklace is set with table-cut diamonds, a large faceted one at the centre and graded blue sapphire drops along the edge.*

533  
**SHOE ACCESSORIES**  
 North India; early 20<sup>th</sup> century  
 Private collection

*A gold trellis work accessory, designed to rest on the upper rim of a shoe.*

534  
**JIGHA (turban ornament)**  
 North India; early 20<sup>th</sup> century  
 Christies Images

*Reminiscent of the European aigrette, this gold turban ornament set with rubies, emeralds and diamonds is fitted with a pin at the back in lieu of the traditional long tapering stem (tana) which could be tucked into the folds of the turban. The ornament can be worn as a hat pin or a brooch.*

and other designers of jewellery were inspired and lured by the paradise of Indian gems. They executed orders for Indian royalty and in turn introduced Indian inspired jewellery to their western clientele.

The Nizams of Hyderabad, Mahboob Ali Pasha and his son Osman Ali Pasha, were reputedly the wealthiest among the many Indian rulers. Like most Indian potentates, they too shared a partiality for the emerald. Touring India with her brother the governor general, Emily Eden wrote home about a young prince “with eyes as big as saucers, and emeralds bigger than his eyes.”<sup>31</sup> The Nizam is believed to have purchased ten flawless square emeralds, “each the size of a flat egg” for 100,000 pounds, from a Persian jeweller at the Delhi Durbar of 1911.<sup>32</sup> Also in the possession of the Nizam was the Jacob Diamond, weighing 162 carats, which he used as a paperweight. The acquisition of the remnants of the Nizam’s legendary jewels by the Government of India has been mired in controversy and legal delays. After many years of battle in the courts, the matter, it appeared, was finally settled in the mid-1990s. The magnificent collection was to be housed in the National Museum, New Delhi, so that mere mortals might have a glimpse of the glory of the past. But entangled in bureaucratic problems the collection remains out of reach of many eager scholars and the simply curious, while a specially made gallery patiently awaits their arrival!

A question often asked is: how did the Indian Maharajas pay for this considerably expensive indulgence? The following extract from a 19<sup>th</sup> century travelogue describes one ingenious method adopted by the Gaekwad of Baroda: “Just about this time the royal treasury seemed on the point of being wholly exhausted by the recent expenditure, especially of the recent purchase of the ‘Star of the South’ and other diamonds... The king looked about for other means of replenishing it without imposing new taxes on the people, and the plan that suggested itself to him proved as efficacious as it was original. The corruption of the officials of every class is so thoroughly established in the principalities





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of India that it is all but openly recognised... It occurred to the Guicowar that the enormous sums thus received by these functionaries might be considered as having been taken in fraud of the royal revenue. He therefore distributed amongst all his *karkboos* the following proclamation: 'His highness has seen with regret that corruption has found its way into various departments of his administration... He counsels all those officials who have allowed themselves to be corrupted to bring into the royal treasury the sums received in this way for the last ten years...' The veiled threat worked, and at the end of the fortnight, the Gaekwad laughingly recounted, 'there had been remitted into the treasury more than 27 lakhs of sicca rupees.'<sup>33</sup>

The jewels of the courts of India, once worn as symbols of pride and power, are no longer worn nor shown; they are perhaps lying in dark vaults, hidden away from the predatory hands of officials in the post-Independence decades; some pieces have been lost; many have been sold to meet expenses in post-dynastic India, but most of them have been secreted away, across the seas.

The untold quantities of gems that the earth has yielded in the 5000 years of India's recorded history have dazzled the world. Tragically, she did not have the prudence to retain this wealth. Today, all that is left are precious photographs and royal portraits. Only through a magnifying glass can we peer at jewels adorning necks, turbans, arms, waists and feet, to picture what was but no longer remains – A Paradise Lost!

“The gorgeous East with richest hand,  
Showers on her kings barbaric pearls and gold;  
but all is barbarism still;  
and we gladly permit the pageant to disappear  
like a dream that is dreamed.”<sup>34</sup>



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## NOTES

## INTRODUCTION

*The Bird of Gold*

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## FOR GODS AND MEN

*Proclamations of Power*

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## SYMBOLS

## A Rosary of Wishing-Jewels

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 [ii] Daniel H. H. Ingalls, *Vidyakara's "Subhasitaratnakosa", An Anthology of Sanskrit Court Poetry* (Madhusila), no. 287, p. 140  
 [iii] Samuel Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas His Pilgrimes*, Vol. 1, p. 95  
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 [v] Kristin Joyce and Shellei Addison, *Pearls - Ornament And Obsession*, p. 219. Writers and poets have employed gold and gems as allegorical devices, and as symbols in religious instruction. Purandaradasa, in his poem 'Pearls', equated pearls with the Divine, to invoke devotion.  
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## The Unknown Goldsmith

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## EPILOGUE

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- 1 Madame De Barrera, *Gems and Jewels*, p. 9
- 2 Arun Kumar Biswas, *Minerals and Metals in Ancient India*, Vol. 1, p. 286
- 3 Diana Scarisbrick, *Ancestral Jewels*, p. 14
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- [viii] Abdul Aziz, *The Imperial Treasury of The Indian Mughals*, pp. 312-313

## GLOSSARY

- ab-e-lehr:** gold base engraved with wave motifs covered by transparent enamel
- a jour:** method of setting stones in carved, hollow gold units with tiny claws
- achari, hiranyakara, sauvarnikah, sonar, suvaranakara, svarna kara, tattan, tattasari:** goldsmith
- abharanani:** offering of ornaments and gems
- adamas:** Pliny's word for the Indian diamond
- adavallan:** weight for gold in ancient South India
- addigai:** gem-set necklace
- adosa:** term for flawless diamonds
- aimpadai-tali:** necklace strung with the emblems of Vishnu
- ainud dik:** cock's eye
- ainul hirrat:** cat's eye
- akhsashala:** workshop for gold
- akota:** ear ornament
- ala-ilai-arai-sangili:** cache-sexe ornament
- amai-tali:** necklace bearing the tortoise emblem
- amala varitara:** term for diamond, free from impurities and transparent like water
- ambudendradhanuh:** term for diamond of rainbow-like colour
- angada:** armllet
- ankush:** elephant god, also hair pin made in this form, symbolic of Shakti
- arai shalanga:** cache-sexe ornament
- aranal sangili:** protective thread with amuletic lockets tied round a baby's waist
- arapatta:** flexible waist belt
- ariya:** rigid neck collar
- aropya:** ornament that is put around, like neck chains and necklaces
- arsi:** thumb ring set with a mirror
- ashwatta, pipal:** *Ficus religiosa*
- avedhya:** ornament worn by piercing a part of the body
- ayigalu:** a portable shrine housing a Shiva lingam
- bagh naksh:** tiger claw necklace
- bahu valayam:** bracelet
- Balakshi, Badakshi:** from which the word balas, the rose coloured spinel, is derived
- balasuryaka:** ruby the colour of the crimson-coloured morning sun
- bale jhabbedar:** ear ornaments
- baleora:** necklace of plaited chains of gold held together at intervals by jewelled spacers
- bali, bala:** earring
- balu:** nose ring
- bandhaniya:** ornaments worn by tying up, like girdles and armbands
- bazu, bazuband:** armband worn on the upper arm
- bhoga:** food offerings to the deity
- besar:** nose ring
- bichhua:** toe-ring
- bindu:** pearl
- borla:** forehead ornament
- bottu:** representation of the female breast
- bulak:** nose ornament suspended from the septum
- bulla:** pendant
- carapuch:** term for spinels
- chakra:** wheel form
- chamar:** whiskholder
- champakali:** a necklace simulating buds of the *Michelia champaca*
- champleve:** technique of enamelling
- channavira:** chains draped diagonally across the chest over one shoulder
- charm-kari:** enamelling
- chattris:** ceremonial umbrella
- chauri:** flywhisk
- chudamani, chudaratna:** hair ornament worn on top of the head
- chaupad:** ancient board game
- chuda:** bangle
- chur, churin:** bracelet
- chutti:** ornament worn along the parting of the hair
- dakshina-meru-vitankar:** image of Shiva, whose name then came into use as standard weight for jewels in ancient south India
- dank, joban:** reflective foil of silver or gold
- darshan:** viewing the deity and offering prayers
- dasti:** bracelet
- dauni:** head ornament
- dhanda kada:** bangle
- dharani:** magical spell
- dhuk-dhuki:** pendant
- dhvaja:** flag, hair pin made in this form, symbolic of Shakti
- dijhaharu:** ear studs
- dundu:** bangle
- durbar malai:** necklace
- ekavali:** single-stringed necklace
- gajje:** bells
- gajje addigai:** bell necklace
- gajrah:** bracelet of gold and pearls
- gajre:** hollow beads
- gajredar bangri:** bangle with clusters of beads
- gardan-e-taus:** term used to describe enamel colour like the blue-green of the peacock's neck
- gharaiwala, khodnaker:** engraver
- ghat:** metal mould
- gomethagam:** zircon
- gopuram:** temple spire
- gowrishankaram:** necklace of *rudraksha* beads with gold repousse pendant with an amulet box suspended below
- graivaka, graiveyaka:** man's torque
- gulabi:** the pink enamel of Benaras
- guluband:** necklace
- guttapusal:** necklace made of bunches of pearls
- haldili:** prophylactic amulet
- hamsa:** swan, goose, gander
- hansuli:** collar bone
- har, hara:** necklace
- harsaka:** snake-shaped ornament
- hasli:** a rigid necklace
- hastasamjna:** hand signs used by gem merchants to effect transactions
- hastavi, valaya:** ornaments for the forearm
- haath phul, panchangala:** five-finger ornament
- havalla kattu:** coral bangles
- hema-sutra:** neck chains
- hiranyam:** gold
- hiranyavartini:** golden channels
- hookah:** hubble-bubble
- ilmas:** diamond
- indracchanda:** necklace of one thousand and eight strings
- indranila:** sapphire
- izhacha-velai, kundala-velai:** lac filled sheet gold method of craftsmanship
- jadai, jadai-hu, jadai-nagam:** hair/plait ornament
- Jalagadugu:** caste of gold separators
- jamuniya:** term describing purplish-red rubies
- japa mala:** rosary
- jatamakutam, karpadam:** crown simulating Shiva's coiled locks
- javali mala:** necklace simulating grains
- jawe:** bangle in form of golden barleycorns strung on silk
- jigha:** jewelled turban ornament
- jimki:** bell-shaped earrings with flower tops
- jodi kadga:** bangle of linked gold bands
- jo mala:** bead necklace
- kachcholam:** girdle in the form of a snake
- kada:** bangle
- kaddukan:** ear stud
- kakapada, kalanka, bindu, rekha:** different kinds of flaws in stones
- kalanju:** brass weight-measure for gold = 4.5 grams
- kalapa:** girdle of twenty-five strings
- kalavam:** multi-stringed girdle of assorted gems



- kalgi**: turban ornament simulating a heron's feather
- kanpata**: ear ornament
- kali-tiru**: auspicious marriage necklace of Nattukottai Chettiar women
- kall-velai**: technique in which gem stones are closely encased in gold boxes
- kalpavriksha**: wish-fulfilling tree
- kamar patta**: girdle
- kanchanamala**: necklace of coins
- kanchi, kanaka kanchi**: girdle of a single strand of beads
- kangan**: bangle, bracelet
- kani**: weight for gold
- kankana**: an auspicious thread worn on the wrist
- kankani-tat-tan**: jewellers without parallel employed exclusively by the temple, under royal patronage
- kantha, kanthla**: necklace
- kantha-nan**: necklace of diamonds, rubies and sapphires strung on a gold ring
- kantasaram**: necklace
- kantha-tudar**: necklace of several gold chains held with elaborate clasps
- kanthi, kanthika**: a simple chain with faceted beads or a flat necklet, sometimes plain or decorated with repousse patterns, or in the form of a series of tiny mangoes or flower bud forms.
- karai, tiruk-karai**: thick gold neck cord
- karanjū**: weight-measure of gold
- karkhana**: workshop, atelier
- karkhanjat**: craftsman
- karnaphul, karnaphul jhumka**: ear ornament in the form of flower-heads
- kasauti**: touchstone
- kasu**: weight for gold
- kasu malai**: necklace of coins
- katar**: dagger
- kathija**: earring
- kaustubha**: celestial gem
- kavacham**: gold or silver body coverings for deities
- keyura, angada**: ornaments for the upper arm
- khadi**: a generic term used for gold ornaments
- khakas**: design-rubbings of finished pieces
- khilat**: robe of honour
- khooṅ-e-kabouter**: term used to describe deep crimson enamel colour like pigeon's blood
- khudai**: carving out of areas marked for filling with enamel colours
- kila**: ear top
- kinkini, kinkinika**: anklet with small bells
- kirat**: a small seed that was used in India to weigh diamonds with; from which the word carat is derived
- kirita**: crowns in long, cylindrical or conical forms set with gems, reserved only for divinities
- kiritam**: long, vertical crown
- kirtimukha**: a fierce leonine animal mask used as a motif in jewellery
- kokke thathi**: necklace
- kolhapuri saj**: necklace with stamped auspicious emblems
- koppu**: ear studs
- kotbiladar**: head ornament of five bands and a long central drop
- krsana**: pearls, derived from the word *krs* – that which becomes emaciated
- kumitali**: an emblem in a marriage necklace
- kundala**: ear ornament
- kundan**: layers of narrow ribbons of pure gold
- kundansaz**: gem setter
- kunjalām, kuchi**: tassel
- kunri**: weight for gold
- kuruvinda**: describing rubies as intense red
- kuzhi minna malai**: necklace
- lac**: shellac, lacquer
- lachak**: temper of the gold ribbon in *kundan* work
- lajvardi**: opaque blue enamel, the colour of lapis lazuli
- lal zamin**: chased and engraved gold base with translucent red enamel
- laung**: clove-shaped nose ornament
- lingam**: phallic symbol
- ma**: weight for gold
- makara**: mythological sea monster often combining a crocodile's body with other animal elements; a motif used in jewellery
- makara keyura**: elaborate armband
- makarakanti, makari malai**: necklace with a pendant in the form of curving crocodile tails
- makaramukha**: crocodile mouth, terminals
- makarika**: hair net
- makutam**: crown like an inverted pot
- malai**: necklace
- malligai arumbu malai**: necklace of jasmine buds
- man**: weight-measure
- mandalika**: gem specialist
- mandarava**: flowers
- maneca**: term for rubies from Ceylon
- mang, mang tikka**: head ornament worn along the parting of the hair
- manga malai**: necklace of mango forms
- mangal**: Mars
- mangalasutra**: auspicious marriage cord
- manicka-tali**: necklace of jewels
- manika, manikkam**: ruby
- manikara**: bead-makers
- manikarnika**: jewelled earrings
- manjadi**: seeds of *Abrus precatorius*, used to weigh gold
- marakata, masaraka, smaragdos, marutmatam, asvagarbhah, harinmanih**: synonyms for the emerald
- mardana kada**: anklet for men
- marma, varma**: vital receptive points of the human body
- maulimani**: turban ornament
- mautika jala**: net of pearls strung around the waist
- mayil**: peacock
- mekhla**: girdle of eight strings
- mettegaḷ**: weight-measure for diamond
- minaka**: enameller
- minakari**: enamelling
- mishqal**: ancient weight-measure for diamonds
- mochaka**: ear pendant
- mohanmala**: necklace
- mohappu**: gem-set spacer
- mohappu sangili**: necklace of gems with a gem-set spacer
- mor-mukut**: crown in the shape of Krishna's peacock feather
- mukkuththi**: nose ornament
- mukta**: pearl
- muktavali**: strings of pearls
- mukut, mukuta, mukutam**: crown
- mula-ratna-bhandarattar**: chief treasurer of palace or temple
- mullai-pu**: mogra or jasmine
- mullai mottu malai**: necklace of jasmine buds
- mutin-mattirai**: pearl earrings
- nagapada tali**: cobra-hood necklace worn by Nair women in Kerala
- nagar**: cobra-head form
- nagavadura**: ear ornament
- nagoththu**: armband
- nakashu velai, sami, swami work**: repousse technique of south India
- nal kall addigai**: necklace with units of four stones each
- nandipada**: auspicious symbol
- naqash, chittera**: designer
- nasabhusana**: nose ornament
- nasamuktaphal**: gold nose ring with suspended pearl
- nath**: nose ornament
- nathni**: small nose-ring
- navaratna**: the nine auspicious gems representing the Indian planetary system
- navaratna malai**: necklace of nine auspicious gems
- navaratna prabhavali**: an aureole made for divinity set with the nine auspicious gems
- nazrana**: gift offered to the ruler for the honour of royal audience
- nelli**: v-shaped ring
- neem**: margosa, *Azadirachta indica*
- nilagandhi**: describing rubies as red with a tint of black or blue
- nilam**: sapphires
- nil zamin**: chased and engraved gold base with translucent blue enamel
- niska**: necklace of coins
- Niyariya**: caste of gold separators

**numpuola**: term for rubies from Pegu (Burma)  
**nupur, nupura**: anklet  
**oddiyanam**: rigid waist belt  
**olai thodu**: earrings whose form is derived from the rolled leaves of the date palm  
**pacheli**: bangle  
**pachchikam**: pinched silver work  
**padakkam**: elaborate fan-shaped pendant  
**padmam, padmaraga**: term describing rubies, the colour of the lotus  
**pahunchi**: bracelet, bangle  
**paiplika, pipilikis**: ants  
**pambadam**: earring  
**panam-olai**: leaves of the date palm  
**panch kalangi**: a *sarpech* with five vertical projections  
**panchangla, haath phul**: five-finger ornament  
**panch lada**: five-strand necklace  
**parasu**: axe, hair pin made in this form, symbolic of Shakti  
**partajikam**: fine chased gold work under a unicolour enamel ground  
**parure**: set of jewels  
**patli**: bangle  
**patri**: side panels  
**patrihar**: necklace  
**patsu khadayoh**: rigid ring-like anklet  
**patua**: stringer  
**pavala**: coral  
**pavala-katakam**: coral bangle/bracelet  
**pavan sara**: necklace of coins  
**pavitra**: ring set with the nine auspicious gems  
**pavitri**: purificatory ring made of grass or gold set with nine planetary gems  
**periya tali, Pillayar tali**: necklace with stylised Ganesha form  
**peshkash**: present offered to the ruler  
**phalakahar**: multiple-strand necklace of gold beads with five or seven gemmed spacers  
**phuli**: flower-shaped nose stud  
**pim bala**: wide gold bangle  
**pipal pathi**: pipal leaf earrings  
**pottu**: armband  
**prakaravapra kundala**: ear ornaments  
**praksepya**: ornaments like anklets  
**prana**: the vital breath = gold in the Vedas  
**puchootal**: flower shaped ornament for the hair  
**puja**: religious ritual  
**pukhraj**: yellow sapphire  
**puli-nagam malai**: tiger-claw necklace  
**pulippal-tali**: necklace of tiger's claws or teeth  
**pura mani malai**: necklace of green beads  
**pushpa-raga**: cat's eye  
**pusparagam**: topaz  
**pu-tali**: necklace with flower motifs  
**rajpat**: royal head gear  
**rakodi**: round ornament worn on top of the head  
**rasana**: girdle of sixteen strings  
**rati**: weight-measure for diamond  
**ratna jalaka**: jewelled net covering toes and foot up to the ankle  
**ratna karmatya**: gem setter  
**ratnadhenu**: golden cow studded with precious gems  
**ratna-katakam**: bangle/bracelets set with precious gems  
**ratnakundala**: earrings set with precious gems  
**ratnavali**: single strand necklace of gold and gems  
**ruchika, culika**: ornaments for the wrist  
**rudraksha**: seeds from the fruit of *Elaeocarpus angustifolius*  
**rudraksha malai**: necklace of *Elaeocarpus angustifolius* seeds  
**rupaiya har**: necklace of coins  
**sabz zamin**: chased and engraved gold base with green enamel  
**safed chalwan**: chased and engraved gold base with opaque white enamel predominant  
**sa-ghosa kataka**: hollow ring-like anklet  
**samskaras**: sacraments  
**sangili**: chain  
**saptasari**: seven-strand pearl-gold necklace  
**sarpatti**: turban ornament

**sarpech**: turban ornament  
**sai lada**: seven-strand necklace  
**saubhaghya**: marital felicity  
**saugandhika**: term describing rubies of yellowish-red colour  
**sauvarnikah**: goldsmith  
**sekras**: strings of pearls hung from the forehead like a veil  
**Shakti**: female energy  
**Shani**: Saturn  
**shara pari malai**: necklace simulating puffed rice  
**shast**: jewelled portrait miniature used as a turban ornament  
**shastras**: ancient texts on various spheres of knowledge  
**shidevi, toyyakam, pullakam**: shell-like hair ornaments  
**shilangu addigai**: anklet-like necklace  
**shorunna malai**: necklace  
**shringara**: ritual of beautification  
**sin-mani-tali**: necklace made of small beads  
**sirasachakra, sahasrachakra**: energy centre located on top of the head  
**sirsajala**: hair net  
**sirsaka**: a necklace of pearls with one large pearl in the centre and the rest of uniform size  
**sis-phul**: head ornament in marigold form  
**sitahar**: necklace  
**sphatika**: crystal  
**sri bahu-valalyam**: armband  
**sri mudi**: crown  
**srichhandam**: neck ornament  
**sroni-sutra**: girdle  
**stridhan**: jewellery given to bride as her security  
**suryakanthi kathola**: sunflower earring  
**sutra**: golden chain  
**suvarnam**: gold  
**svarna karmara**: specialist goldsmith  
**swami**: term for god, used to denote repousse jewellery with a preponderance of images of deities  
**swastika**: auspicious symbol  
**talaisaman**: ornament worn along the parting of the hair  
**tali**: south Indian marriage necklace, hung with a variety of symbolic pendants  
**tali bottu**: cup-shaped disc worn on a wire or chain, high on the neck  
**tali-kolundu**: necklace with a bunch of flower buds  
**tandava**: Shiva's cosmic dance  
**thappakam**: technique of stamping areas to be filled in with enamel colours  
**taralaprati-baddha**: string of uniform-sized pearls  
**tasbih**: rosary  
**tatankachakra**: flower head/disc-shaped earring form found in archaeological sites  
**ta'zim**: anklet  
**thandatti, mudichu, pambadam, nagapadam**: earrings with juxtaposed geometric forms  
**thattan**: goldsmith  
**thayam-pu, kewra**: screwpinne  
**thewa**: technique of quasi enamelling  
**todu/thodu, toda, takka**: ear studs in a flower head form  
**tikka**: forehead ornament  
**tilkaridar**: briolette-cut diamond  
**tinmaniya**: necklace set with three gems  
**tiru-ka-karai**: armband  
**tiru-kal-modiram**: toe rings  
**tiru-kambi**: gold rings  
**tiruk-karai**: flat collar neck ornament  
**tiru-makaram**: ear ornaments shaped like a crocodile  
**tiru-mangalyam**: auspicious marriage cord  
**tiruppattam**: diadem  
**tirup-pattigai**: gem-studded waist band  
**tirupporpu**: sacred gold flowers (votive)  
**tola**: weight of gold = 10 gm  
**torana**: decoration for the doorway  
**tote ka par**: term used to describe green enamel colour like a parrot's wing  
**trikantaka**: ear ornament  
**triratna**: symbolises the Buddhist Trinity – the Buddha, the Dharma (doctrine) and the Sangha (order).

**trisara:** three-stringed necklace of pearls  
**trishula:** trident, hair pin made in this form, symbolic of Shakti  
**tulsi:** holy basil  
**turra:** a turban ornament with a tassle of pearls, worn at the side of the turban  
**udarabandha:** waist band  
**ujjala:** to describe bright diamonds  
**umsham:** individual gold units  
**undi:** shellac stick  
**upachara:** offerings to the deity  
**utsava murthi:** processional image  
**vadi, rousse:** polish  
**vaidurya, veluriya:** beryl  
**vaiduryam:** cat's eye  
**vairamudi:** crown encrusted with diamonds  
**vajra:** diamond, thunderbolt, hair pin made in this form, symbolic of Shakti  
**valai-kappu:** protective bangles  
**valaippinal:** filigree necklace  
**valayil:** bangle

**vanki:** rigid armlet  
**variven-tali:** necklace with ribbed cowry shells  
**vel:** spear  
**veni:** garland of flowers  
**vijayacchanda:** necklace of five hundred and four strings  
**Vishnupada:** pendant with Vishnu footprint motif  
**visirimurugu:** fan-shaped earrings  
**wegu:** figure traced on the ground at the birth of a child in Kashmir  
**yagnopavita:** sacred thread  
**yaksha, yakshi:** male and female spirits presiding over the powers of nature  
**yali:** composite half lion-half elephant form  
**yantra:** auspicious geometric design  
**yaqut:** ruby  
**yastri:** single-strand necklace with a gem in the centre  
**zabarjad:** emerald  
**zamindar:** landowner  
**zenana:** women's quarters  
**zihgir:** archer's thumb rings

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