



Traditional Jewellery of India

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AIR-INDIA

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Text and Compilation of Jewellery
by

SHAKUNTHALA JAGANNATHAN

The art of adornment goes back to primitive man who used, for decoration, flowers and beads, carved wood, shell, bone and stone. The material used changed in time to ivory, copper and semi-precious stones and then to silver, gold and precious stones, but our rich tribal heritage can be seen in the flower motif which is basic to Indian jewellery designs even today.

Indian jewellery is as old as Indian civilisation itself. The ruins of the Indus Valley civilisation, going back to 5000 years, have yielded examples of beaded jewellery. In the sculptures at Bharhut, Sanchi and Amaravati and the paintings at Ajanta can be seen the wide range of jewellery worn by man and woman, by king and commoner. The temples of South India, Bengal, Orissa and Central India present a veritable cornucopia of the jeweller's art.

Greek visitors to ancient India marvelled at the elaborate Indian jewels of the time. The epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, and the Arthashastra, a text 19 centuries old, mention the intricate arts of the jewellers of yore. The Silappadikaram, an ancient Tamil classic, talks of a society dealing in gold, pearls and precious stones. Paus, a Portuguese chronicler, writes of the Vijayanagar empire where visitors were dazzled by the jewellery worn.

Jewellery in ancient times was not only an adornment, but each stone was endowed with a mystical quality and used as a protection against evil forces. The *navaratna* or nine gems, each sacred to a planet, are worn in a particular order for the same reason to this day. The *maniratra*, called the serpent stone, was used as a talisman to protect the wearer. *Rudraksha* and *Tulsi* seeds and sandalwood beads are worn even today during Hindu worship.

The advent of Moghul rule further embellished Indian jewellery. The synthesis of Hindu and Muslim forms and patterns resulted in a great outburst of ornamentation, elegant and exquisite, and of a lush extravagance never seen before. Although traces of enamelling have been found in ancient Taxila, this art reached its zenith only under the Moghuls, when even the unseen reverse side of each jewel was covered with intricate enamel work (*minakari*).

Jewellery later became a means of putting by savings, like a bank today, and of providing financial security to women who sold it in times of need.

The Indian love of gold may have been a means of acquiring wealth. But the Indian love of jewellery is, really a love of the beautiful and the aesthetic, of man's aspirations to reach perfection in form, design and colour. Repetition, symmetry and orderly progression in design are typical of the Indian belief in order, or *Rita*, in the cosmic universe.

Air India hopes to preserve some of our traditional jewellery for posterity through this year's calendar. Since only 12 pieces could be selected, only ornaments of gold and precious stones have been shown and the whole range of silver and folk jewellery left out of the study.

We present this collection as a homage to the art of jewellery in India, to our ancestors who conceived these jewels, to the artists who designed them and to the skilled artisans who fashioned them, and preserved, through millennia, this priceless art, our precious heritage.



SARPECH: This *Sarpech* from Rajasthan is of uncut diamonds and elongated emerald drops. It is topped by a paisley crest. Elaborate Jaipur enamel work covers the reverse of the ornament, not seen here.

On the wall-paintings at Ajanta may be seen similar head ornaments worn as tiaras by women 2000 years ago. However the *Sarpech* or *Shirpe*, meaning an adornment for the head, developed, in medieval India, as an ornament worn on princely turbans. It reached perfection in the courts of the Moghuls and the princes of Rajasthan. Moghul queens also wore a similar jewel, but by and large it developed as a predominantly male turban ornament.

The use of uncut stones in ornaments was popularised in the north by Moghul emperors who admired precious stones in their pristine and pure form. Enamelling reached its pinnacle of perfection in Jaipur. Maharaja Man Singh having brought five Sikh enamel workers from Lahore to his capital in the 16th century to develop this art.

Ornament Courtesy: Directorate of Tourism, Govt. of Andhra Pradesh.



KADA: In this pair of *Kadas* (*Karas* or bracelets) from Varanasi (Banaras), the inner side of each *Kada* is covered with floral designs of pink enamel, a specialty of Varanasi which is quite rare. On the outer side are uncut diamonds with the ends of each *Kada* ornamented by elephants with intertwined trunks.

Bangles and bracelets of different types were worn in the north such as the *bangdi*, *churi*, *naugari*, *pahunchi*, *kangan*, *gaira*, *bariana*, *patri*, *dasband* and *kada*. The *Jehangiri*, a stone-studded bracelet of Emperor Jehangir's court, was possibly designed by his queen, Nur Jehan herself.

Kadas could be hollow, solid, or filled with lac. The ends of the *Kada* were of different designs such as two parrots, twin elephants etc. Stone-set *Kadas* are often covered with enamel on one side, the method used usually being the *champlévé*. The goldsmith carves out the design after which the enamel is painted or brushed into the hollows. It is then fixed in place by fire, a very difficult art.



VANKI: The *Vanki*, or armband of South India shown here, is inlaid with rose-cut diamonds, cabochon rubies and emeralds. An effect of coiled snakes is seen in the gold work on either side in the lower part of the *Vanki*. Two parrots lead up to the top of the *Vanki* from which drops a typical lotus-motif pendant.

Different types of armlets called the *bajuband* or *bazuband* are worn in different parts of India. However the *Vanki* of South India is unique because of its inverted-V-shaped design. From old paintings and sculptures, it appears that its origin can be traced to Naga or snake worship. Some of the earliest *Vankis* can be seen on figures of Lord Krishna as a child, the more ancient figures in wood and stone having a hooded cobra crowning the ornament. The connection between Ananta the snake, on whom lies Vishnu, whose avatar or incarnation was Krishna, is evident.

The shape of the *Vanki* is such that it fits over the arm without any strain or pressure.



LINGA PADAKKA MUTHU MALAI: In this *Linga Padakka Muthu Malai* (a garland of pearls with a *Linga* pendant) from Tamil Nadu, rows of pearls end in a pendant in which the *Linga*, the symbol of *Shiva*, is shaped out of an emerald and set in an elaborate encrusted base supported by two bejewelled peacocks with their rich plumes swinging upward. The lower pendant has the usual lotus motif.

It was believed in ancient India that flawless pearls prevented misfortune and were therefore favourites with kings. South India has been famous for its pearls, and pearl necklaces with elaborate pendants were seen in plenty in the medieval courts of Vijayanagar and Thanjavur.

Sometimes the pendant enclosed a scroll of sacred words worn as an amulet to ward off evil. Figures of the family deity were often engraved in gold and encrusted with stones in the pendant.



NATH: This exquisite *Nath*, or nose-ring from Maharashtra, is of diamonds set in flower-shaped clusters of pearls, the jewel being further embellished by a single ruby bead.

Nose ornaments have been of different types. There are the single stone and the clove-shaped *Laung* worn on one side of the nose, the jewel worn through the cartilage in the centre of the nose, the *Balak*, and *Naths* of various shapes and designs. One of the most elegant, however, is the *Nath* of Maharashtra.

Rarely does one see any reference to nose jewellery in the ancient Hindu texts from which it appears that it could have been brought into the country by Muslims in the 9th or 10th century A.D.

In the last few centuries, however, the nose ornament has become part of the bride's trousseau, and in fact a married woman could not be without it. The blessing for a bride often was, "May your *Nath* be ever present" (i.e. may you never be a widow).



ODDIYANAM: This gold *Oddiyanam* or waist ornament of South India is encrusted with rose-cut diamonds, emeralds and cabochon rubies. Peacocks, flowers, buds and leaves intermingle in riotous profusion, but in perfect symmetry.

Although the purpose of the *Oddiyanam* was supposedly to hold up the saree, actually, like the binding of feet in the Far East, it served the additional purpose of keeping the waist slim, as the breath was drawn in before the belt-clasp was fastened. The slim waists of older women even after several childbirths was believed to be the result of the use of this ornament.

The tight belt around the waist further accentuated the hips of the wearer as, in Dravidian culture, large hips were a sign of beauty in a woman. Examples of pinched waists and heavy hips can be seen in sculptures in the temples of the South to this day.

Ornament Courtesy: Ms. Anita Ratnam Rangraj.



KARANPHOOL JHUMKA: This old *Karanphool Jhumka* is from Rajasthan (*Karanphool* meaning a flower for the ear). It is set with uncut diamonds, pearls and cabochon rubies. Two strands of pearls are taken around the ear to support the weight of the jewel. The projection at the rear is also for the purpose of attaching it to the hair to minimise the weight on the ear.

In older times, to make room for more ornaments, the ear was pierced in four places — the lobe, the inner ear, the outer part of the middle of the ear and the top of the ear.

The most popular jewel for the ear in the north has been the *Karanphool*, with the flower motif in the centre of the ornament. The *Jhumka* in the shape of a bell has also been separately worn. It was only during the Moghul period, however, that the *Karanphool Jhumka* evolved as a single jewel for the ear, each region having its own special embellishment added to the basic design.

Ornament Courtesy: Kanjimmull & Sons, Scindia House, Janpath, New Delhi.



JADANAGAM: The *Jadanagam* of South India, or, literally, the hair-serpent, is worn by brides to decorate braided hair. The *rakkadi* at the back of the head in the shape of the sun, symbolic of brilliance and power, is followed by the crescent moon, evocative of calm and peace. The third piece is the fragrant *nazhambu* flower (screw-pine).

Then comes the ruby and diamond-studded many-headed divine cobra, Ananta, below whom are seen three rows of the cobra's coils. From here the jewellery for the braided hair starts. Designed in the form of flowers and buds, it consists of separate pieces interlaced to form a single ornament. Towards the end of the braid it bursts out into 3 silk tassels held together by encrusted bells.

This bridal jewel was also adopted by Deavadasi, or temple dancers, who considered themselves the brides of the temple deity. This tradition has continued to this day when we see Bharat Natyam dancers wearing the *Jadanagam* or, where it is not available, a substitute woven out of flowers.



SHINKA: This ancient *Shinka* from Gujarat has peacocks linked by a series of heavy gold chains. The peacock, a symbol of beauty and grace, is here shown encrusted with sapphires, emeralds and rubies. Turquoise stones are set in the central pieces. Little golden bells, with clusters of pearls hanging from them, enhance the beauty of the jewel.

The *Shinka* is an unusual hair jewel of Gujarat. Although popular with certain communities, it is quite rare, the more common hair jewel being the *Damani* worn on the brow in front of the hair-line.

The *Shinka*, however, is worn on the hair itself and, as it is a heavy ornament, it is held in place by the unusual method of gold hooks attached to the hair. At weddings and on festive occasions the newly-married daughters-in-law of the family wear it.

CHANDRAHAAR: This unusual ornament from Bengal, the *Chandrahaar* (meaning a garland of moons), comprises a series of chains made up of minute gold balls held in criss-cross gold wire, leading down to an elaborate filigree pendant with a floral motif. The clasps on either side are, again, smaller filigree flowers.

Bengal has always been famous for its unique gold jewellery with its delicate work and gold filigree which achieve great heights of perfection.

The *Chandrahaar* is a hip ornament adding grace to the wearer. It is believed that it was worn by Sita, of the epic Ramayana at her wedding, and has excited the imagination of poets. Sculptors have carved elaborate versions of this jewel on figures in the temples of Orissa.

Ornament Courtesy: Tribhovandas Bhimji Zaveri, Zaveri Bazaar, Bombay 400 002.



HATHPHOOL: This *Hathphool* (or flowers for the hand), also sometimes called the *Ranchangala* (or jewel for the five fingers), is from Rajasthan. It consists of a *Kundan*-set flower-encrusted bracelet with stone-set chains leading to another flower on the back of the palm and similar chains connecting it to the five rings on the five fingers, each ring with a different flower motif. The reverse of the jewel is covered with enamel designs. On the left thumb is an *ars* or mirror, for last-minute preening by the wearer!

The setting of stones known as *Kundan* is achieved by little pits being carved out in the front of the ornament of the size of the stone being used. Precious stones are set in these hollows and kept in place by a band of the purest gold.

The reverse of this ornament is covered with intricate enamelling of different colours.

The hands of the wearer are decorated with *mehendi* or henna designs, an essential decoration for a bride of the north, itself a work of art.

Ornament Courtesy: Kanjimmull & Sons, Scindia House, Janpath, New Delhi.



PAIZEB: This unusual *Paizeb* (or *Pakzab*) is from Hyderabad. As the name implies, it is an adornment for the feet. Loose chain links between the uncut diamonds set in gold in *Kundan* settings, make the anklet lie flat on the foot fitting closely over the ankle. There are stone drops on the lower edge of the *Paizeb* in place of tinkling bells.

In the *Kundan* art of setting stones, even gems of little value achieve a rich effect by skillful incrustations.

The feet of the wearer are covered with *mehendi* or henna designs, as part of bridal decor.

A wide variety of anklets were worn in the different parts of India. The *pavai*, *gaira*, *sankia*, *chanjar*, *zanjiri*, *golusu* and *kaagpu* are some examples.

Most anklets of Hindu women were, however, made of silver, as gold was considered a sacred metal, not to be worn on the feet except as a decoration for icons in temples, or by royalty.

Ornament Courtesy: Tribhovandas Bhimji Zaveri, Zaveri Bazaar, Bombay 400 002.

Photographer: AJIT PATEL

Sarees Courtesy: Handloom House, D. Naorji Road, Bombay 400 001.

Concept and Design: AIR-INDIA Art Studio, Bombay.

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Bangles and bracelets of different types were worn in the north such as the *bangdi*, *churi*, *naugari*, *pahunchi*, *kangan*, *gaira*, *bartana*, *patri*, *dastband* and *kada*. The *Jehangiri*, a stone-studded bracelet of Emperor Jehangir's court, was possibly designed by his queen, Nur Jehan



VANKI: The *Vanki*, or armlet of South India shown here, is inlaid with rose-cut diamonds, cabochon rubies and emeralds. An effect of coiled snakes is seen in the gold work on either side in the lower part of the *Vanki*. Two parrots lead up to the top of the *Vanki* from which drops a typical lotus-motif pendant.

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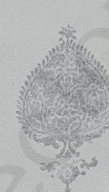
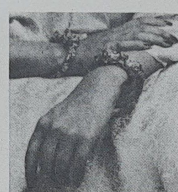
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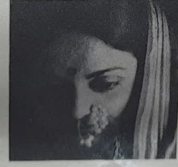
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It was believed in ancient India that flawless pearls prevented misfortune and were therefore favourites with kings. South India has been famous for its pearls, and pearl necklaces with elaborate pendants were seen in plenty in the medieval courts of Vijayanagar and Thanjavur.

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Sometimes the pendant enclosed a scroll of sacred words worn as an amulet to ward off evil. Figures of the family deity were often engraved in gold and encrusted with stones in the pendant.



KARANPHOOL JHUMKA: This old *Karanphool Jhumka* is from Rajasthan (*Karanphool* meaning a flower for the ear). It is set with uncut diamonds, pearls and cabochon rubies. Two strands of pearls are taken around the ear to support the weight of the jewel. The projection at the rear is also for the purpose of attaching it to the hair to minimise the weight on the ear.

In olden times, to make room for more ornaments, the ear was pierced in four places — the lobe, the inner ear, the outer part of the middle of the ear and the top of the ear.

The most popular jewel for the ear in the north has been the *Karanphool*, with the flower motif in the centre of the ornament. The *Jhumka* in the shape of a bell has also been separately worn. It was only during the Moghul period, however, that the *Karanphool Jhumka* evolved as a single jewel for the ear, each region having its own special embellishment added to the basic design.

Ornament Courtesy: Kanjimmull & Sons, Scindia House, Janpath, New Delhi.



CHANDRAHAAR: This unusual ornament from Bengal, the *Chandrahaar* (meaning a garland of moons), comprises of a series of chains made up of minute gold balls held in criss-cross gold wire, leading down to an elaborate filigree pendant with a floral motif. The clasps on either side are, again, smaller filigree flowers.

Bengal has always been famous for its unique gold jewellery with its delicate work and gold filigree which achieve great heights of perfection.

The *Chandrahaar* is a hip ornament adding grace to the wearer. It is believed that it was worn by Sita, of the epic Ramayana, at her wedding, and has excited the imagination of poets. Sculptors have carved elaborate versions of this jewel on figures in the temples of Orissa.

Ornament Courtesy: Tribhovandas Bhimji Zaveri, Zaveri Bazaar, Bombay 400 002.

NATH: This exquisite *Nath*, or nose-ring from Maharashtra, is of diamonds set in flower-shaped clusters of pearls, the jewel being further embellished by a single ruby bead.

Nose ornaments have been of different types. There are the single stone and the clove-shaped *Laung* worn on one side of the nose, the jewel worn through the cartilage in the centre of the nose, the *Bulak*, and *Naths* of various shapes and designs. One of the most elegant, however, is the *Nath* of Maharashtra.

Rarely does one see any reference to nose jewellery in the ancient Hindu texts from which it appears that it could have been brought into the country by Muslims in the 9th or 10th century A.D.

In the last few centuries, however, the nose ornament has become part of the bride's trousseau, and in fact a married woman could not be without it. The blessing for a bride often was, "May your *Nath* be ever present" (i.e. may you never be a widow).



JADANAGAM: The *Jadanagam* of South India, or, literally, the hair-serpent, is worn by brides to decorate braided hair. The *rakkadi* at the back of the head in the shape of the sun, symbolic of brilliance and power, is followed by the crescent moon, evocative of calm and peace. The third piece is the fragrant *thazhambu* flower (screw-pine).

Then comes the ruby and diamond-studded many-headed divine cobra, Ananta, below whom are seen three rows of the cobra's coils. From here the jewellery for the braided hair starts. Designed in the form of flowers and buds, it consists of separate pieces interlaced to form a supple ornament. Towards the end of the braid it bursts out into 3 silk tassels held together by encrusted bells.

This bridal jewel was also adopted by Devadasis, or temple dancers, who considered themselves the brides of the temple deity. This tradition has continued to this day when we see Bharat Natyam dancers wearing the *Jadanagam* or, where it is not available, a substitute woven out of flowers.



HATHPHOOL: This *Hathphool* (or flowers for the hand), also sometimes called the *Panchangala* (or jewel for the five fingers), is from Rajasthan. It consists of a *Kundan*-set flower-encrusted bracelet with stone-set chains leading to another flower on the back of the palm and similar chains connecting it to the five fingers on the five fingers, each ring with a different flower motif. The reverse of the jewel is covered with enamel designs. On the left thumb is an *arsi* or mirror, for last-minute preening by the wearer!

The setting of stones known as *Kundan* is achieved by little pits being carved out in the front of the ornament of the size of the stones being used. Precious stones are set in these hollows and kept in place by a band of the purest gold.

The reverse of this ornament is covered with intricate enamelling of different colours.

The hands of the wearer are decorated with *mehendi* or henna designs, an essential decoration for a bride of the north, itself a work of art.

Ornament Courtesy: Kanjimmull & Sons, Scindia House, Janpath, New Delhi.

ODDIYANAM: This gold *Oddiyanam* or waist ornament of South India is encrusted with rose-cut diamonds, emeralds and cabochon rubies. Peacocks, flowers, buds and leaves intermingle in riotous profusion, but in perfect symmetry.

Although the purpose of the *Oddiyanam* was supposedly to hold up the saree, actually, like the binding of feet in the Far East, it served the additional purpose of keeping the waist slim, as the breath was drawn in before the belt-clasp was fastened. The slim waists of older women even after several childbirths was believed to be the result of the use of this ornament.

The tight belt around the waist further accentuated the hips of the wearer as, in Dravidian culture, large hips were a sign of beauty in a woman. Examples of pinched waists and heavy hips can be seen in sculptures in the temples of the South to this day.

Ornament Courtesy: Ms. Anita Ratnam Rangraj.



SHINKA: This ancient *Shinka* from Gujarat has peacocks linked by a series of heavy gold chains. The peacock, a symbol of beauty and grace, is here shown encrusted with sapphires, emeralds and rubies. Turquoise stones are set in the central pieces. Little golden bells, with clusters of pearls hanging from them, enhance the beauty of the jewel.

The *Shinka* is an unusual hair jewel of Gujarat. Although popular with certain communities, it is quite rare, the more common hair jewel being the *Damani* worn on the brow in front of the hair-line.

The *Shinka*, however, is worn on the hair itself and, as it is a heavy ornament, it is held in place by the unusual method of gold hooks attached to the hair. At weddings and on festive occasions the newly-married daughters-in-law of the family wear it.



PAIZEB: This unusual *Paizeb* (or *Pahzeb*) is from Hyderabad. As the name implies, it is an adornment for the feet. Loose chain links between the uncut diamonds set in gold in *Kundan* settings, make the anklet lie flat on the foot fitting closely over the ankle. There are stone drops on the lower edge of the *Paizeb* in place of tinkling bells.

In the *Kundan* art of setting stones, even gems of little value achieve a rich effect by skilful incrustations.

The feet of the wearer are covered with *mehendi* or henna designs, as part of bridal decor.

A wide variety of anklets were worn in the different parts of India. The *payal*, *gajra*, *sankia*, *chanjar*, *zanjiri*, *golusu* and *kaappu* are some examples.

Most anklets of Hindu women were, however, made of silver, as gold was considered a sacred metal, not to be worn on the feet except as a decoration for icons in temples, or by royalty.

Ornament Courtesy: Tribhovandas Bhimji Zaveri, Zaveri Bazaar, Bombay 400 002.

Photographer: AJIT PATEL

Sarees Courtesy: Handloom House, D. Naoroji Road, Bombay 400 001.

Concept and Design: AIR-INDIA Art Studio, Bombay.