



Navratna choker from Amrapali

Navratna

—truly ‘universal’

Navratna jewellery represents a true amalgamation of Mughal and Rajput sensibilities, and retains a special place in the hearts of Marwaris. From the 16th to the 21st century, it has come a long way in terms of style and prominence.

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From being set typically in jadau to its more contemporary avatar in multiple and singular prong settings, navratna jewellery has become a staple design from India’s jewel capital, Jaipur. Its history and astrological significance only highlight its breathtaking beauty.

Of the myriad architectural, cultural and artistic assimilations after the Mughal invasion of India in the 16th century, navratna perhaps stands out as an especially timeless example. During that era, Rajasthan gained Mughal attention for its wealth and beauty. Just like Mughal princes who united with Rajasthani princesses in marriage, Mughal style of jewellery settings like meenakari, jadau and kundan too merged with the Indian idea of navratna.

Beauty in meaning

Navratna (literally meaning nine gems) is an arrangement of nine precious

stones in a single piece of jewellery. Hindu mythology, and Indian culture in general, attach a lot of importance to the number nine or *nav*—navgraha, Navratri, navdanya and navratna are simply a few of the many significant ways in which the number features in literature and the calendar. Navratna is, therefore, considered very auspicious for the wearer. The nine gemstones represent the nine planets, and wearing such jewellery is said to ward off negative influences.

The traditional arrangement comprises ruby (*manek*) in the centre surrounded by eight precious gemstones: diamond (*heera*), pearl (*moti*), coral (*moonga*), hessonite (*gomedh*), blue sapphire (*neelam*), cat’s eye (*lehsuniya*), yellow sapphire (*pukhraj*) and emerald (*panna*).

Statement jewellery

Initially, navratna jewellery was worn mostly as a talisman in either pendants

or rings. Gradually, influenced by the Mughal penchant for the arrangement, craftsmen and princesses alike took notice of its beauty. Kundan-meena necklaces and chokers, with nine gems as the hero, became coveted pieces in every royal household. Artisans would source gems of the largest and best quality to design magnificent pieces. In fact, scholars write that Akbar, one the greatest kings of all time, was deeply fond of the navratna design and owned many jewels, swords and daggers studded with the nine precious stones. Even his court had nine distinguished courtiers as his closest advisers, popularly known as the ‘nine gems of Akbar’!

Times changed and empires turned into democracies, yet navratna jewellery held on to its fame, both among jewellers and admirers. The specific order and arrangement of the nine gemstones remained intact due to the spiritual values attached. Soon it served



Above: The Navratnakalgi from Jaipur’s famous Jewels Emporium
Below: Navratna earrings designed by Sunita Shekhawat

the multiple purpose of a beautiful and elaborate piece of jewellery, a talisman and a fashion statement. Its beauty lies not only in its colour and design, but also in the fact that it complements all skin tones and garments.

Patron designers

Some of the most famous traditional jewellers of Rajasthan are the biggest patrons of the navratna. *Amrapali Jewels*, the internationally renowned jewellery brand that takes great pride in its heritage designs, is known to have created some of the most resplendent navratna pieces. From rich and chunky chokers in keeping with the guidelines of navratna to multilayered necklaces and abstract pendants that form its contemporary collection, *Amrapali*

houses them all. “What adds to their popularity is their cultural significance in our country, as they represent the navgraha or the nine planets, according to Indian astrology. We believe this group of stones is free from all impurities, has auspicious powers and is looked upon as a bringer of good luck, and therefore is also given to new brides,” explains Rajiv Arora of *Amrapali*.

The seventh and the eighth generations of the Bohra family currently head *Jewels Emporium*, one of the oldest jewellers of Jaipur, who started their company in 1841. They house some of the finest heirloom jewellery in their showroom situated in the heart of Jaipur. Famous for elaborately jeweled sets, *Jewels*

Emporium specialises in designing pieces that are light in weight and minimalist in design, keeping the modern customer in mind. Their navratnakalgi, which can be worn separately as two pendants, is a very appealing piece, both in terms of looks and functionality.

Ace jewellery designer from Jaipur, Sunita Shekhawat, designs her signature jewellery under the label *Midas*. Famous for designing exclusive high-end bridal jewellery in kundan-meena, jadau, polki diamonds and precious gemstones, she specialises in designing for royalty and celebrities. Inspired by traditional Indian jewellery, her pieces are crafted using some of the most intricate techniques, and have a bold, multi-coloured design language. Navratna, one of her favourite concepts, can be seen in many of her pieces, including jhumki earrings, large cocktail rings and necklaces. “Rajasthan is all about colours, and as Jaipur gives us easy access to beautiful gemstones, I use a lot of them in my jewellery, with navratna being one of my personal favorites! The three-row



contemporary navratna necklace has received a very good response from our customers, and we plan to make more of such contemporary versions,” says Shekhawat.

Many attempts to modernise the navratna have been seen in the recent past in both the world of jewellery and décor. Whether for its astrological significance or for its sheer magnificence, navratna aesthetics are here to stay. 🌸

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