

Tanzanite Keeps The Blue Wave Moving Across India

By Preeta Agarwal

Ruby, emeralds and blue sapphires are recognized as the three main stones in the gemstone world and can be found at almost every jewelry shop around the globe. But when it comes to Indian jewelry, the preferences in gemstones take a different route. Indian jewelry is mostly full of rubies and emeralds. Not because Indians don't like blue sapphires or because a blue gemstone doesn't suit traditional attire, but mainly due to strong astrological reasons that mar the sales of this gorgeous deep blue beauty.

The Science Behind Blue Sapphires

Astrology has deep roots in the Indian belief system, and certain gemstones work as solutions to astrologically predicted problems. Of all the gemstones that are advised for wearing, blue sapphires – also known as Neelam – have the most extreme effects. The results can be good or bad, depending on the position of Saturn (the ruler of Sapphire) in one's birth chart. One of the strongest and the fastest acting gemstones, blue sapphire is seen as being able to fulfill all the dreams of the wearer but, adversely, can even turn a king into a pauper.

It is recommended to carry out a test run by keeping a blue sapphire under the pillow for a week, and if bad dreams or small incidents happen then the stone is probably not right for that person. Thus, customers are hesitant in buying blue sapphire jewelry leading to less demand and, consequently, supply.

Yellow gold set with uncut diamond chaandbalis (moon shaped earrings) with tanzanite bead drops from The House of Rose.

House of Rose's kundan polki necklace with emeralds and tanzanite tumbled drops crafted in 22K yellow gold.

Tanzanite, diamond and pearl earrings from Ghanasingh Be True.

The Popularity of Tanzanites

The vacuum for a deep blue hue in the gemstone family in India has been filled by tanzanite. Discovered in a four square kilometer area of the Merelani Hills of Tanzania, East Africa in 1967 and promoted by Tiffany & Co., this blue gem was named after the only place in the world where it is found – Tanzania. Although discovered in the late 1960s, gemstone production was held back due to government orders and it is only in the second decade of the 21st century that it has become popular.

Intense geological research has shown Tanzania's geology to be unique and that the chances of it occurring outside the current production area is less than a million to one and that the world's supply of tanzanite will be totally exhausted within the next decade or so. Tanzanite is approximately a third of the price of sapphires.

Tanzanite comes in inky blue to violet shades with purplish overtones and also shows differing tonalities when viewed in different crystal directions due to pleochroism. This deep blue color, availability of large sizes and affordable prices make it the closest possible replacement gemstone to blue sapphires. Thus it has become an overnight success in India among jewelry designers and customers wanting a blue gemstone to match their blue outfits. Because of its international popularity, tanzanite was added as the December birthstone list in 2004.

Leading Indian designer Farah Khan agreed, saying, "Tanzanites are beautiful blue substitutes for sapphires to be used in jewelry; even more so because they do not have

any astrological effects so they work very well with Indian consumers when being paired with diamonds and combinations of other gemstones."

A gemstone that started out as a substitute for blue sapphires, has now created an identity for itself in India. Jewelers across the country now stock various collections featuring tanzanite and in combination with other gemstones, making it one of the most trending gemstones in India and a strong competitor to emeralds and rubies. With a 6.5 mark on the Mohs scale, tanzanite can be carved. Jaipur, India's colored gemstones center, is full of pretty tanzanite carved leaves, flowers and Mughal inspired amulets. Every season provides new mesmerizing renditions of these designs.

Its chameleon personality helps tanzanite look good when set in white as well as rose and yellow gold, and in particular with the gentle rose gold that is also a strong trend in India currently. A multi-use gemstone, tanzanite goes well in combination with most gemstones like pearls, emeralds, rubies, shades of sapphires and other blue gemstones. Farah Khan in particular has paired tanzanite with an entire array of colored gemstones that line the display windows of her Mumbai boutique.

The stunning blue-green chemistry makes emerald and tanzanite combinations one of the fastest sellers – from kundan polki necklaces to large diamond chandeliers and cocktail rings. Pastel shades in pink, green and blue are the new trends in bridal attire in India and when clubbed with this striking blue gemstone jewelry, they add an extra contrast and sparkle to the whole attire.

A peacock necklace with tanzanites and diamond slices created by Bina Goenka.

"Though the properties of blue sapphire make it a 'gem of gems', tanzanites are gaining popularity because of their closeness in shade to more expensive blue sapphires for which they can act as a substitute," commented Sanjay Jagwani of Notandas Jewellers in Mumbai.

The Blue Spectrum

The gamut of blue gemstones is also filled by lighter and more vibrant shades of blue like turquoise, blue topaz, aquamarines and lapis lazuli. These gemstones were previously only used in silver jewelry, but these blue gemstones are now enjoying the company of diamonds. While Ganjam's Turquoise Star necklace and Riverdance collection uses high-quality turquoise and aquamarines giving a new dimension to jewelry design, Farah Khan gives them emphasis by adding small rubies



Traditional-style yellow gold earrings with lapis lazuli created by Amrapali.



or emerald elements, giving a new accent to these watery gemstones. Deep blue and opaque lapis lazuli with its gold shimmer in particular looks very good when paired with yellow gold for Indian motifs like the Amrapali earrings.

While Iolite and kyanite are two more gorgeous deep blue gemstones that could be used in Indian jewelry, their low popularity makes jewelers reluctant to stock them. But they are surely next in line waiting to be discovered and marketed as tanzanite was previously.

Another hot-selling blue gemstone is the Paraiba tourmaline discovered in the 1980s in the Brazilian state of Paraiba. This electric swimming pool blue gemstone has topped all international gemstone charts from bestseller to most expensive gemstone. Its magnificence has slowly started to appeal to Indian jewelers. While very few jewelers are currently bringing Paraiba to India, we hope that soon we will see it gracing traditional Indian motifs. ♦