

Gems & Jewels of India.....Socio Political Study Within Historical Context

*Kanwal Khalid**

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*Necklace from Indus, made of Gold, Agate, Jasper,
Steatite and Green Stone, 2600 to 1900 BC*

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Abstract

Political status of a nation can be measured through the ornaments used by them. It also indicates the aesthetics and the civic sense of any particular region in a particular era.

In present context, Subcontinent has been focused and past examples are used to establish the hypothesis of the intended research. Gems and jewels of this land reflect the socio political history. Rise and fall of its glory was followed by the movements of its diamonds and other precious stones.

The riches associated to the Mughals are legendary but the later Mughal rulers could not reestablish their authority. As a result to that the Subcontinent became the mosaic of smaller states that had semi-independent status.

Flow of gems was now directed towards the British and many important jewels were taken to England because it was very easy for the Company employees to convert their profits into precious stones and carry them home to be sold.

Indian Princes, Rajas, Nizams and Nawabs were alienated from the Indian social life. Jewelry houses like Cartier, Christie's, Mauboussin, Van Cleef & Arples all enjoyed the immense wealth and years long commissions that were offered to them by the Rajas and Maharajas of India.

French accepted Indians with respect and their awe-inspiring lifestyles had a tremendous impact on the pre war artistic expressions of Paris.

Introduction

It is a fascinating phenomenon how we can measure the status of a nation through the ornaments used by them. The apparent impression is as if they have no relationship with the evolutionary process but if looked closely, we can co relate them with the rise and fall of any society. It also reflects the aesthetics and the civic sense of any particular region. Their value changes with time, locality and above all with the availability of the resources.

Most of the time history based researches look deeper in the past to get informative inspiration. Then we travel in time to establish the hypothesis of the intended research. Here same methodology is adopted and a look at the times, so old as if unknown, reveals sculpture of voluptuous women who are preserved for thousands of years, for us to appreciate the beauty and aesthetics of ancient human being. It also gives us some indication of the cultural norms of that particular region where it was created. Of the later eras, are the faces of some other women found at different locations. They provide knowledge not only about their religious beliefs but about their ornamentations also, which are almost non-existent. These sculptures are reflection of their times and societies.

(Fig. 1)



Of almost the same time period, representation of women is observed in the Subcontinent and that is the famous figurines of Mehr Garh.



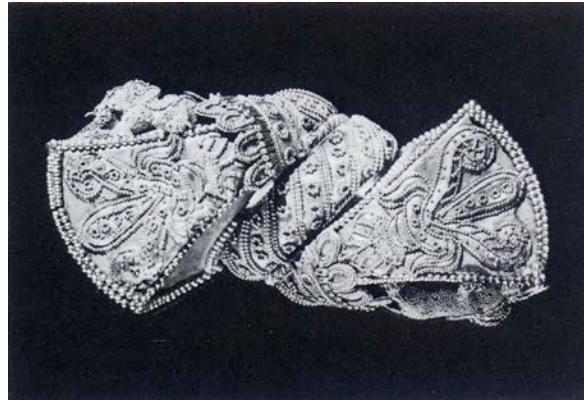
(Fig. 2) Belonging to Neolithic era, these are small sculptures, stylized to such extent that they are touching the boundaries of abstraction. But regardless of their simplified forms, they are bejeweled and decorated in a very interesting manner. Elaborate headdresses and garlands around their shoulder and neck, give us the idea that the concept of decoration through jewelry has always been prevailing in this region but was lacking in other parts of the world.

From 2500 BC onwards, the stylistic difference does not reduce the importance of decoration for the women and almost all the Indus Valley figurines have this quality predominant regardless of their naïve shape and form. The archeological findings of Kot Digi, Harappa, Mohenjo Daro and many other sites, strengthen this view that the use of jewelry was in abundance here. Most of the jewelry was of silver, gold or base metals, even terracotta has been pressed into service since Harappan times, as earrings and bangles from excavated sites of the period show.¹ Some other archeological evidence proves that they also possessed a good knowledge of the use of various hard stones.² Even in the representation of religious deities this feature was never ignored.

There is not much of physical evidence of the artifacts of Vedic age. But the literary references tell us that in the pastoral society of ancient India, jewels along with large herds of cows, stables of horses and elephants were considered the four principal treasures.³ The Vedic gods and kings were constantly described wearing a large number of ornaments to show their wealth and power. There are visual

references of Mithuna couples and their beauty is enhanced with the use of very stylish ornaments.

One of the rare and oldest pieces of jewelry of the Vedic period is a pair of royal earrings made of Granulated gold. This first century BC ornament is an evidence of the high standard of the craftsmanship of that time period. **(Fig. 3)**



An interesting comparison can be made between India and another advance civilization of the same era and that is the Greeks. Their gods and goddesses also reflect the trends and styles of that period but the use of decorative ornaments is almost non-existent. It reflects two aspects, one the non-availability of these colored rocks and second personal desire of people, because although the stones were available in the Subcontinent but much of the gold was imported by the Indians to satisfy their insatiable appetite for it.

Representation of Buddha, which was supposed to be simple, could not escape the trends and the status of *Bodhisattva* had all the ornamentation that was prevailing at that time.

A 4th century literary references of Indian wealth survives from the invasion of Alexander when the folk verses of the time mentions the gems, silks and spices imported from India.

*“Foremost of all among the glittering race,
Far India is the diamond’s native place.”⁴*

As an exchange to these treasures, Indians were receiving, among other things, coins of gold and silver, which were pierced and used as ornaments also.⁵ They were much sought after for their high quality as a metal but never for their designs and aesthetics.

The most important feature of the Indian jewelry was its diamonds. Since ancient times Sanskrit word *Ratna* is used in old chronicles, that means 'Bestowed' because it was thought that these treasures are given to the humans by the gods without any effort of the man. They were declared special gifts that were bestowed upon to a few chosen ones. Since Ruby, Sapphire and Emeralds were stated as hard gems so they were called *Maharatnas*.⁶

At the beginning of the Christian era South India became the center of gem mining and trade⁷ and for almost two thousand years, this was the world's sole supplier of diamonds. The adamantine riches of Borneo, Brazil, Africa and Russia were as yet unknown.⁸ Indian mines held some of the oldest and the largest reserves such as the great central Deccan plateau. Even the countries around i.e. Nepal, Sri Lanka, Burma and Afghanistan, produced gems of high quality. All this contributed to the riches of an already very rich India. This wealth in gems led to the import of gold. Although India had its own gold reserves but they were never enough to fulfill the demands of its population, for Hindus regarded gold as sacred and they were reluctant to set the stones bestowed by the gods in any other material.

The gold objects rarely survive in their original form because of their inherent quality that they can be reused regardless of how many times they were melted. A total of two hundred and thirteen ornaments were excavated at Gandhara sites.⁹ Many coins, armlets, bracelets, necklaces, rings and an ancient plaque of religious nature, survived. A very rare example, are gold earrings of Taxila, made of granulated technique, which is the decoration of the gold surface with very fine granules that could be seen as minute as dust. Some of the more elaborately made necklaces found in Taxila indicate the beginning of *Kundan* work, which was later patronized by the Mughals.¹⁰ **(Fig. 4)**



The art of gems and jewelry reached its climax during the Gupta age. *Ratna- Pariksha* or the examination of the jewels was among the sixty-four branches of knowledge in Vatsyayana's *Kamasutra*.¹¹ In the cave paintings of Ajanta, Elora, Bagh and Badami there are numerous figures both male and female that show the trend. Since the iconography of these caves is practically the dictionary of features, costumes, architecture and lifestyle of India of that era, so their intense use of jewelery cannot be ignored.

(Fig. 5)



Jewelry made of pearls seems to have been very popular in this period and the names of the necklaces were given according to the number of pearls and strings. Necklaces composed of sixty-four pearl strings were called *ardha-hara* and those with fifty-four were called *rasami-kalapa*, and so on.

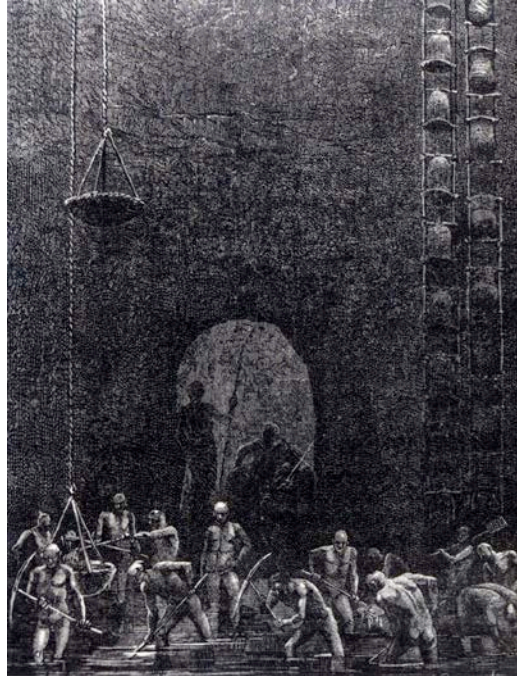
The necklace, belts, earrings and bracelets used in the representational form of the Hindu god Vishnu, are similar to those worn by the Indian kings. It is a proof that practically all these representations of gods and deities and their costumes and adornments were undoubtedly modeled, of the royalty and nobility of the day.¹² These images provide another dimension of the Indian society that

many of the ornaments that we see in ancient sculptures and paintings are still in use and they have recognizable equivalents in Indian society even today.

History of Indian gems and jewels is the history of India. The rise and fall of its glory was followed by the movements of its diamonds and other precious stones. So in a way it is correct that these stones chose their owners and the superstitions associated to these glittering rocks are justified. These were not worn solely as for aesthetics but they conferred power and health on their owner. Most of the time they were associated with cosmic beings, assigned to the stars and planets. Some of the stones' 'planets' and the ruling deities are: Ruby was to represent *Surya*, the Sun; Pearl was *Chandra*, Moon; Oral was *Mangala*, Mars; Emerald was *Budha*, Mercury; Diamond was *Shukra*, Venus; Topaz was *Brihaspati*, Jupiter; Sapphire was *Shani*, Saturn; Zircon was the Moon in its ascending node i.e. *Rahu*; the Cat's-eye was the moon in its descending node i.e. *Ketu*.¹³

All the rocks had individual powers but when put together they were to give the owner an immense amount of energy and strength. So the most powerful of all was an assortment of jewels that was *Navaratna*. **(Fig. 6)** There was never an Indian court either a small or a large one that did not have astrologers who were there to guide the monarchs. They advised about not only the buying of the stones but also decided, for the owner, the auspicious times to wear them as well.

Story associated to the acquisition of these rocks is very intriguing indeed. Marco Polo describes that the valleys in which the diamonds lay, were infested with snakes and the white eagles were used to retrieve them from these depths. In a way he is referring to the Hindu mythological concept of the sacred snakes *Nagas* as the guardians of all the treasures of the earth and the eagle god *Garuda* who is the perpetual enemy of the *Nagas*. Meat was thrown amongst the snakes in diamond fields that were later on swooped by the white eagles and with that the diamonds, embedded in the flesh, also came out and the diamond seekers would get the pieces of meat and retrieve the stones.¹⁴ A later sketch of the early 1860s shows the laborious quest for diamonds as witnessed by the French traveler, Loui Rousselet, at the Panna mines in eastern India. **(Fig. 7)**



World famous Venetian merchant Marco Polo quotes an interesting observation when he visited the gem bearing kingdom of Maabar (perhaps modern day Tanjore). He writes, *“You may take it for a fact that (the king) too 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..... He also wears..... bracelets of gold studded with precious stones and pearls of great size and value...anklets adorned with costly pearls and gems.....on his toes splendid pearls and other jewels, so that it is a marvelous 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 jewelry he wears.”*¹⁵

We do not have much visual evidence about the artefacts of the early Muslim era in India but a few literary references do provide a glimpse of the life enjoyed by the Muslim kings. While giving a detail account about Ghaznavide Dynasty, famous historian Abu al Fazal

Baqhi narrates, “*Ghaznavide kings built huge palaces and the court had grand throne with sculptures in four corners to hold the heavy crown with their hands. The rulers were famous for elaborate functions in both cities i.e. Ghazni and Lahore. The food was served in a grand manner. The kings wore dresses of intricate thread work, loaded with gold.*”¹⁶

The riches of the Subcontinent were legendary all over. In the later periods, the travelers of 15th, 16th and 17th century were dazzled by the amount of jewelry worn by the locals and as a result to that, India attracted traders from all around the world that included Portuguese, French, Dutch and finally the British. An Italian visitor of Vijaynagar in the early 1500s, Ludovico de Verthema, observed that even the king’s horse wore a city’s value in jewels, while in the diamond-rich kingdom of Bijapur, he saw the ruler’s servants wearing gems on their shoes. The message seemed clear. If rubies and diamond could be spared for horses’ harnesses and servant’s shoes, what jewels of untold magnificence must be reserved for the kings themselves?¹⁷

The Great Mughals and their Aftermath

The riches associated to the Mughals are legendary. Their courts were famous for resources, which were employed with great aesthetics in architecture, textiles, vessels, miniature paintings, manuscripts and of course the jewelry. The great Mughals epitomized the saying that the glory of a prince is made tangible by his buildings, his library and his jewels.¹⁸

Their memoirs are full of details about their treasures and in particular about the precious stones. The king himself generously praised the military-men who conquered diamond rich fields. One such example is Ibrahim Khan’s victory of the province Khukra (Bihar) in 1616 with its alluvial diamond deposits.¹⁹

William Hawkins, an Englishman, during his stay in Agra in 1609-11, estimated the value and quantity of Jahangir’s treasures. According to him, Jahangir had 82 pounds of diamonds, 660 pounds of pearls, 275 pounds of emeralds and 110 pounds of rubies. These were just the loose stones in one treasury of Agra. It did not include the ornaments and other gold objects of everyday use that were studded

with diamonds. For the gold and silver, William settled for 55000 pounds and 110,000 pounds successively.²⁰

There was also a tradition of handing down the diamonds from father to son and on one such occasion, it is mentioned by Jahangir, “*On this day I made a present to my son Shah Jahan of a ruby of one color, of the value of 125,000 rupees, with two pearls. This is the ruby which was given to my father at the time of my birth by Hazrat Maryam-Makani, mother of his majesty Akbar, by way of present when my face was shown, and was for many years in his Sarpich (turban ornament). After him I also happily wore it in my Sarpich.*”²¹

Shah Jahan surpassed Jahangir in his love for valuable stones and the display was evident not only on the dresses and jewels but his preference for Pietra Dura technique in his architecture, marks a clear evidence of his obsession with the precious and semi precious rocks.

Although the historical evidence regarding the number of precious stones owned by the Mughals, is staggering but most of the kings wore them in a very tasteful manner, as it appears in miniature paintings. Akbar is usually seen with a simple pearl string and later on Jahangir and Shah Jahan, although lived more luxurious lives, wore very delicate and beautiful jewelry that most of the times consisted of a turban ornament, some strings around the neck, *bazuband* and rings that never gave impression of overly bejeweled, an impression that will be observed in the later centuries.

Making of the Jewelry

Many individuals were involved in the making of the jewels but due to its sacred value in Hindu religion, the profession was most of the time adopted by the *Brahmins*. *Ain-i-Akbari* contains the description of Hindu goldsmiths. The inlayer or *Zar Nishan* was given pride of place in the list. The enameller or *Minakar*, worked with gold and silver and this appears to be the earliest known reference to enameling in India. The *Charmkar* was of particular interest that incrustated granulations of gold and silver like poppy seeds on ornaments and vessels.²²

Another style of decorating the gem was with *Kadhai* or carving. The local *Karigars* mastered it and we see lots of specimens especially in Emeralds, a stone not available in India and was imported from Portugal.

The technique, which is essentially Indian, is the setting of stones by means of *Kundan Kari*. This was a method of permanent fixture with pure gold that insured that the stones would not part from the material it was fixed in, the only technique of setting gems into gold during Mughal period until claw settings were introduced in the 19th century via Western jewelry.

Diamonds had the names and inscriptions of the monarchs engraved on them. This kind of engraving was extremely difficult and sensitive technique mastered by the Mughal lapidaries. Such stones were often used as simple pendants, in *bazubands* and they were handed on dynastic succession.

(Fig. 8)



Akbar's specialist gem engraver Mawlana Ibrahim, whose family came from Yazd, inscribed the spinals as *Lal-i-Jalali* in a play on words deriving from the emperor's array of names. This can be understood both as 'spinal of Jalal' or 'glorious spinal'.²³

From 15th century onwards, the lucrative market of India attracted craftsmen from all around the world. They were coming here to find some patronage from the local rulers and public but most of the time they faced lots of resistance and were treated as outsiders. In fact it was not until 1910-1920 that some princes were sufficiently impressed by European creations to decide to transform their legendary adornments.²⁴

Types of Jewelry

Ornaments were divided mainly in two types. One with Hindu motifs and iconography and the other had the secular designs on them. Most of the jewelry produced and used in the urban setup had the secular style but much of the ornaments belonging to the rural areas or away from major cultural centers of India had the depiction of religious motifs. Folk jewelry offers adornment for the human body from head to toe.²⁵

Wearing of the jewelry involved particular mannerism and different types were worn by males and females. These ornaments were of innumerable styles but a few main types that were documented by Abu al Fazal, are mentioned here.

The most important were the headgears that included *Sarpach*, *Kalghi*, *Jigha* and *Sarpati*. *Sarpati* was also associated with women and they were three of types. One was plain, the other one had a pendent in the middle and the third style contained ringlets, which were basically an imitation of a hairstyle, which was in vogue in those days. It is conceivable that this hair ornament is a jeweled stylization of the ringlets. **(Fig. 9)**



Apart from *Sarpati*, there was an extensive use of other hair ornaments such as *Sispul*. Their usage was observed as early as in the Yakshis of Khajuraho temples. These *Sispuls* contain motifs of lotus, birds, coiled serpents with a crescent moon beneath, representing the moon deity and the disc as the sun god. Another *Sispul*, symbolizes the sun god *Surya* and god *Vishnu* at the center, lying on the serpent *Ananta* whose multiple heads fan out over him. His consorts *Shridevi* and *Bhudavi* are on either sides.

Tikka and *Jhumar* were the other two decorations used for hair. *Mang* was also worn on the parting of the hair. *Karanphul* (ear flowers) were worn covering the whole ear, and then there were earrings of different styles. *Bali* was a circlet with a pearl worn through the ear. Apart from the secular designs, motifs of religious nature were also made for ears.

N. B. Divatia, in his 1929 article writes, “The *Nath* (in the form of a circular gold wire threaded with a ruby between two pearls, or other gem stones), though clearly commonplace by the time Abu al Fazl compiled his list, seems to be a foreign interloper. It does not appear in the sculpture or the painting of the pre Islamic period and there is no word for it in Sanskrit literature. Most scholars presume, that it arrived with the Muslim incursions of the twelfth century onwards.”²⁶

Among the arm ornaments *Bazuband* or Armlet was a favorite of Mughals and later rulers as well. *Kadha* another type of armlet and bracelet were also used. Wristlet was popular among the provincial areas and they existed even in the times of Ajanta where men and women are painted wearing them.

Many of the ornaments were styled in such a manner that they could be worn both ways and most of the times they had *Kundan Kari* at one side and *Minakari* on the other.

(Fig. 10)



Different types of rings were in vogue and they served different purposes as well. There were thumb rings with mirrors called *Aarsi*, rings with seals and decorative rings. Some depicted animal and bird forms also.

Necklaces of many styles were in fashion and some of them are popular even today. The use of Hindu religious motifs is observed and the concept and philosophy of infinity shown in the form of snake eating its tail is also depicted.

Since ancient times anklets were worn in India and most of the sculptures are adorned with them. In fact much of their designs retained the old styles through later centuries. **(Fig. 11)** Usually silver was used to wear on the feet and it was against the basic mannerism to wear diamonds around ankles because of their sacred value.

Although European influence was not appreciated by the local population but we do see jewels with European influences that was going to change the Indian market in the later centuries.

Invasion of Nadir Shah

The riches of India were the main incentive for the invaders and the big disaster came from a Muslim Afghan, Nadir Shah Durrani, who plundered Delhi *Darbar* and took away the main treasures of Mughals in 1739. Traditions narrate that 70 camels traveled back to Afghanistan, laden only with the gems and jewels that included *Koh-i-Noor*, *Draya-i-Noor*, *Akbar Shah*, the *Shah* and the world famous *Takht-e-Taus* (Peacock throne). Unfortunately most of these jewels were divided in such manner that they are lost in the mist of time except for a very few.

But some jewels resurfaced and their route was very interesting as they went from Mughal treasury to Afghanistan, Persia and Russia. Then many of them found their way back to India, falling in the hands of British. Indeed gods were favoring this nation and much of the treasures were 'bestowed upon' them.

The British Raj

Later Mughal rulers could not reestablish their authority. As a result to that Subcontinent became the mosaic of smaller states that had semi-independent status. One out of many international political powers, to tighten its grip on the local rulers, was the British and in the end through clever schemes and political maneuvers', they were able to enjoy all the riches of India. Initially, it was East India Company who exploited the weaknesses of the local rulers. Their role in the disintegration of the society was very effective and this power play led to, not only political supremacy, but it was very fruitful for the employees of the company also who were more then willing to receive the bribery and payments from those *Nawabs* and *Rajas*, who were

trying to gain favors and support of the army provided by the East India Company.

The rulers of the states adopted the same mannerism that was observed in the Mughal courts but now the directors of the Company shared a large portion. One such example is Bengal and in the Murshadabad miniature of the ruling Nawab, Ali Verdi Khan, holds out a turban jewel to his grandson and designated successor, Siraj ad-Daula, in conscious imitation of the Mughals. Interesting part is that the jewel is identical to that given to Admiral Watson in 1757 by Mir Jaafar, the Nawab who ousted Siraj ad-Daula with British help.²⁷

(Fig. 12, 13)





Now the flow of gems was towards the British traders and many important jewels were taken to England because it was very easy for the company employees to convert their profits into precious stones and carry them home. Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, thousands of bales, or packages, of rough diamonds were shipped out of India every year, a seemingly exhaustible flow of stones that revolutionized jewelry design in Europe. Regent was perhaps the most famous diamond of this era, which was also called Pitt, named after an employee of the Company who acquired this huge Golconda stone weighing 410 carats. In 1717, it was bought by the Duke of Orleans for 135,000 pounds.

There were legal and illegal methods adopted by the employees of the company. This was the era when the word 'loot' became familiar to English speakers. It came from Hindi verb '*lutna*', meaning 'to rob' or 'to plunder'.

By the end of the 18th century most of the main states of India were under the political pressure of the Company and in the 19th century, the few who were posing some threat and showing signs of resistance, also gave in. Bengal, Hyderabad, Deccan, Mysore and finally Punjab. The fall of Lahore added two of the most famous stones of the world to the treasures of Queen Victoria, the Timur Ruby and *Koh-i-Noor*.

*"In 1852 Prince Albert ordered the diamond to be re cut by the Dutch firm of the Costar. After 38 days, an entirely new and a very much smaller diamond reappeared_____ a shallow over brilliant of only 105.60 metric carats. Many, including Prince Albert, were disappointed at the outcome."*²⁸ (Fig. 14)



The Princely States of India

East India Company was abolished in 1858 and the British crown took over. Although larger areas of the Subcontinent were under British control but the locals were also given political status. As a result to that there were more than four hundred princes who were either the descendents of the nobles or they were the ones who had supported the

East India Company and now they were picked up from their humble origins and awarded the states and other social privileges. They also inherited the family treasures or they were rewarded by the British with treasures of older families. Soon we see the photographs of overly dressed and much overly bejeweled newborn *Ashrafia* that was ready to show off their riches in a very crude manner. The level of sophistication and the mannerism involved in the use of these treasures was lost because they belonged to lower class and were elevated by the new masters to serve their purpose. **(Fig. 15)**



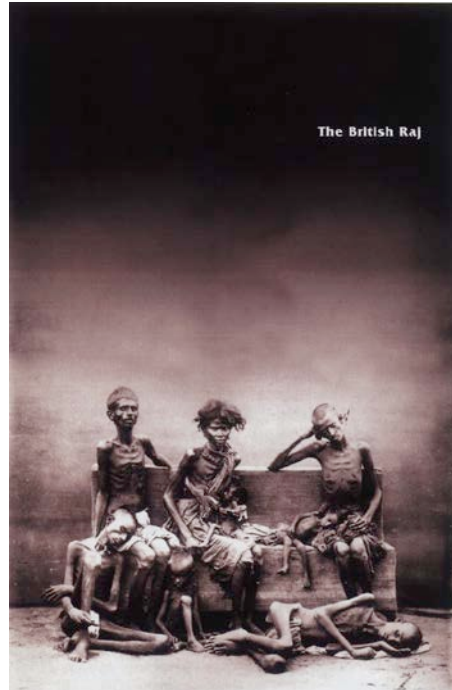
The state of Baroda was one of the most powerful Maratha states that had emerged after the decline of the Mughals but their rulers '*Gaekwars*' were of extremely humble origin. The word '*Gaekwar*' means cowherd. After the mutiny, state was awarded the maximum status of twenty-one guns. Just one example of Baroda jewels is a pearl necklace of seven strands, which was recorded in 1909, worth 500,000 pounds.²⁹

This newly evolved *Ashrafia* wanted to display their loyalty to the crown and what occasion was better than the 1875-6 visit of Prince of Wales, Edward. The locals laden him with treasures beyond his imagination and his reciprocal gifts were nothing as compared to the two ships loaded with the presents, that he went back with. The jewels alone were astonishing _____ three trunks full of emerald, diamond, ruby and pearl necklaces, brooches, and bracelets and from the landlord of Oudh, a splendid golden crown of diamonds and pearls hung with emerald drops.³⁰

But these generosities had to be paid back by the Crown because in return there was a promise to protect and patronize this extremely unruly class. From here started the so-called process of taming the locals and teaching them British education along with British morality through European tutors. They took over the young heirs and introduced them to a life that has nothing to do with India, resulting in a class who has no love or compassion for their subjects and the sole purpose of their lives was to spend maximum time and money in Europe.

These princes, *Rajas*, *Nizams* and *Nawabs* were alienated from Indian life and the problems of the local population was no concern of theirs. All the resources of their states were consumed by them for personal luxuries and extravagant shopping sprees. Public welfare projects, that used to be the aim of many previous rulers of India, were no priority to them. The miseries and the misfortunes inflicted upon the locals were unmatched in the history of the country. At one end were the British and on the other were the new breed of the rulers. The outcome was very logical and predictable.

(Fig. 16)



Another trend was observed that after the 1857 war, the rulers of the states, once assured of their safety, started venturing into buying new treasures from the international market. Gradually, in a reversal of almost two hundred years history, the riches began to flow back to India. Diamonds from Brazil, South Africa, treasures from the collection of the France's exiled empress, from the last Sultan of Ottoman Empire and the Tsars of Russia were also acquired and added to Indian collections.³¹

The Imperial or Jacob diamond was mined in South Africa in 1880s. An international gem dealer, Alexander Malcolm Jacob was asked to sell it. His price was 46 lac rupees in 1891 and the *Nizam* of Hyderabad bought it by paying 23 lac rupees as advance money. Later on due to political and legal complications, the *Nizam* did not pay anymore but the Imperial diamond was added to the treasures of

Hyderabad. This diamond deal brought a lot of bad publicity for the *Nizam* and he lost his interest. When all the matters were settled and the *Nizam* got the possession of the diamond, it was just shelved in some dark corner of his treasury and till this day, there is no hearing of this hideous example of the insensitivity of an individual who spent the state revenue in such a reckless manner.

Another example of the British generosity, for showing loyalty during mutiny, was the state of Kapurthala and a later descendent, Jagjit Singh enjoyed the reputation of being a big spend thrift. In 1916, the *New York Times* reported that a royal mail steamship, carrying some of Jagjit Singh's jewels, had sunk in the Mediterranean. The lost jewels were said to be the result of a four million dollar spending spree by him in New York.³²

This trend soon became unacceptable to the British Raj and they tried to put a stop to it especially in the five years of Lord Curzon's stay in India. It was a period detested by the local rulers because he tried to steer them towards their native culture and society. But he was unable to turn the tide and no matter how discouraging the government was, the rulers of these states managed to get out in the world. Nothing could escape their sense of so called modernization and naturally the jewels they had inherited also changed shapes and forms. They started resetting the stone in a completely European manner and the main beneficiaries were the Jewelers of England, France and America. Some of the oldest houses of jewelry sprang up in those days and they profited both by selling and buying the stones but much of the business came when they were asked to recut and restyle the mounds of stones produced by both the male and female members of Indian ruling families.

Jewelry houses like Cartier, Christie's, Mauboussin, Van Cleef & Arples all enjoyed the immense wealth and years long commissions that were offered to them. The Indian family of diamonds expanded and Gems from South Africa and Brazil were added to this array of glitter.

(Fig. 17)



European stylists convinced the locals to use silver colored metals for the bases of their stones because Indians had a centuries old dislike for silver as it was meant for the servants and the poor. But now the consolation came in the shape of Platinum. This offered the same scope and color but it was so expensive that it satisfied the Indian clients who believed that all that had a high price, qualified to be part of their treasures.

Rich Indians visited England frequently but they were treated as merely subjects of the Crown. Seeing the negative attitude of the British population, many members of this luxury loving class made France their second resort before the First World War. At least three royal families _____ Baroda, Indore and Kapurthala _____ bought residential properties in France, and many others came to Paris and made it their base as to visit London, rather than vice versa.

The French accepted them with their awe-inspiring lifestyles, which played an instrumental role in the formation of the pre war artistic expressions of Paris. On the other hand mature artists of Europe started showing reaction to the distortion of the aboriginal arts in the name of modernization. They disliked how the arts, dresses and jewels were baptized in European manner and a movement was initiated to accept Indian jewelry in its native design forms. It became the trend of the elite and creative people of Europe to be seen wearing ornaments and dresses in the style of the Indians. Many jewelry pieces were designed that were of the same manner that was purely Indian.

Art Nouveau

Artists and social reformers fought to retain the originality of the Indian arts and they protested against the pollution of something so pure. This resulted in a very interesting movement in the art world christened as Art Nouveau. Under this movement it was manifested that the local arts of different regions must be given due place on the basis of the aesthetics of their own and there is no need to add European elements to legitimize their artistic value in the western world. Arts of Japan, Africa and other regions were put in this category but the most instrumental in the formation and presentation of the typical Art Nouveau specimens were from India.

At the end of the 19th century, rapid changes were taking place at all levels of human intercourse. In the art world, this was the spirit that was captured by Art Nouveau, a dissident movement that stood in opposition to the rigid academic climate of the day. Redolent with optimism and renewal, Art Nouveau, was embraced by artists who hoped to point the way to new century. Like a bushfire, it swept through Europe and the United States in the 1890s.

This was the movement that not only influenced the arts but the local lifestyles of the Europeans were also affected. It added oriental dimensions to music, drama, painting, sculpture and graphic design of Paris, a concept that was very new in those days. Posters, ads, tapestries and dresses were made with the application of Indian flora and fauna and the oriental line, color and form became very popular.

(Fig. 18)



One major factor in the formation of the Art Nouveau movement was the presence of Indian rulers in Paris who had large villas and houses and continued to enjoy the best of the both worlds.

Interesting characters sprung up in the Indian society in the early 20th century and one of them is the *Maharani* of Baroda, Sita Devi, whose love for gems and jewels was legendary. But she lacked in the basic mannerism while using the *Ratnas* to adorn her feet. In 1956, a necklace, made with the same *Ratnas*, was bought by the Duchess of Windsor, unknowingly. Once she realized that the stones were worn by Sita Devi around her feet, the necklace was immediately returned.

But these luxury times were over when independence was given to India. Much of the wealth was nationalized and it became very difficult for the smaller rulers to hide their riches from the government. Most smuggled them out of India but some of them were bought by the

state. The price paid was extremely meager. One example is jewel collection of Hyderabad that was worth Rs 1500 crore but the government paid Rs 218 crore only. Later on much of it was returned to the government in the form of the wealth tax.

The gems and jewels of the Subcontinent traveled in time but the direction of their flow was determined by the political situations of the country. These gifts of gods held an attraction to the humanity since ancient times but this attraction was never felt as strong as it was felt in India. People have been living and breathing jewelry for thousands of years. Although the high price has controlled the desire to buy the pure but the inhabitants of India still love to adorn themselves with loads of jewels, may be imitation of the originals. It has become part of the genetic system of the population of mainly three main countries of the region i.e. India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Endnotes

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 - ⁴ Katherine Prior, Jhon Adamson, *Maharaja's Jewels* (India: MAPIN Publishing Pvt. Ltd, Ahmadabad, Reprinted 2004), 18
 - ⁵ M. L. Nigam, *Indian Jewelry*, 18
 - ⁶ *Ibid*, 88
 - ⁷ *Ibid*, 88.
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 - ¹⁰ *Ibid*, 14.
 - ¹¹ *Ibid*. 20
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- ²⁰ Katherine Prior, Jhon Adamson, *Maharaja's Jewels*, 37
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- ²⁸ Katherine Prior, Jhon Adamson, *Maharaja's Jewels*, 71
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- ³⁰ *Ibid*, 178.
- ³¹ *Indian Princes and Parisian Jewelers*, 15
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