



## MUGHAL TO MILLENNIAL: IJS SIGNATURE USHERS IN DESIGN REVOLUTION

By Angela Han

**With a booming middle-class and an increase in domestic consumption of gold and diamonds, ancient handcrafting skills have fused with technology in India to produce demi-fine jewellery that meets millennials' demands. ANGELA HAN talks to skilled veterans and contemporary designers at the center of India's jewellery design revolution.**

Jewellery design is in the midst of a revolution in India. With a booming middle-class and an increase in domestic consumption of gold and diamonds, the industry is ripe for innovation and expansion.

Last month, the [12th India International Jewellery Show's \(IJS\) Signature](#) event in Mumbai featured 750 exhibitors across 1,400 booths to create a platform for local jewellery designers and manufacturers. The boutique trade show attracted more than 12,500 visitors across four days and showcased India's finest designers across all segments, including bridal, religious and demi-fine jewellery.



**India was the largest manufacturer and exporter of gems for more than 2,000 years. Today India accounts for 90 per cent of global polished diamond manufacturing by value and remains the world's fourth largest jewellery supplier in the world.**



With a strong focus on promoting local design and manufacturing, the Gem and Jewellery Export Promotion Council (GJEPC) launched the 'Brand India' initiative in order to place India amongst the likes of Italy and France when it comes to value in provenance.

GJEPC chairman Pramod Kumar Agrawal celebrated India's gem and jewellery heritage, highlighting the importance of this industry. He noted, "Our gem and jewellery industry has a history of more than 5,000 years. We have a tradition of passing this skill from one generation to another and have the advantage of highly skilled artisans when catering to global markets."

**Powerful legacy, bright future**

India's gem and jewellery manufacturing industry remains one of the oldest in the world, with a legacy going back to the Bronze Age. From the famous Golconda diamonds, such as the Kohinoor and Hope, to Kashmiri sapphires, India was the largest manufacturer and exporter of gems for more than 2,000 years.

Today India accounts for 90 per cent of global polished diamond manufacturing by value and remains the world's fourth largest jewellery supplier with a combined export and domestic market valued at US\$75 billion dollars, which is forecast to reach US\$100 billion by 2025. With a booming middle-class, India currently represents 29 per cent of global jewellery consumption, with its local market consumption estimated to be around US\$13 billion.

Chairman Agrawal explained that gem and jewellery exports will continue to grow, as it currently accounted for US\$42 billion annually, contributing seven per cent of GDP and 15 per cent to India's total merchandise exports.

The sector employs more than 4.6 million workers, which is anticipated to grow to 8.2 million by 2022. Initiatives are in place to continue expanding the industry via vocational training institutes dedicated to gem and jewellery manufacturing all around the country.

Leading up to the show, the GJEPC signed an MoU with Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation, agreeing to invest US\$2.09 billion to build India's largest jewellery park on a 25-acre site in Mumbai. The project is set to attract over 3 million extra jobs and strengthen the value of Brand India across the gem and jewellery sector. The development is anticipated to further stimulate tourism and local spending.

» [Read more: 2018 India International Jewellery Show shines in tough times](#)

#### Initiating inspiration: turning the wheels of revolution

In terms of local industry support, designers and suppliers were quick to mention the GJEPC's active role in creating new policies and initiatives.

Respected veteran jeweller Anand Shah highlights, "India is a huge jewellery hub, and our industry – be it the GJEPC or GJC [the All India Gem and Jewellery Domestic Council] – works in tandem with the government to review policies on a regular basis. In fact, very soon, a comprehensive gold policy will be released to help the industry move forward."

Currently the GJEPC is working with the government to introduce policy support for a gold monetisation scheme, which would enable individuals, trusts and mutual funds to deposit gold with banks and earn interest.

Priyanshu Shah, executive director of A-Star a supplier of demi-fine jewellery, agrees that there is plenty of support from local industry bodies, including the GJEPC.

"The GJEPC organises regular competitions for designers and artisans to inspire higher levels of art, creativity and innovation by honouring the best talent in jewellery design. It also arranges seminars and workshops by renowned international designers, which provides local designers with the opportunity to understand and engage with international jewellery trends," says Shah.

Milan Chokshi, the GJEPC's convenor of marketing and business development and executive director of fine jewellery company Moksh, listed programs at the recent show that served to encourage young and upcoming designers.

"The GJEPC has several initiatives that would help [them] learn and achieve success in the international market. At this recent IJS Signature show, we had the Artisan Design Awards, the Design Inspiration Seminars and the launch of Aatman, our trend book," Chokshi said.

*Aatman - Inspirations 2020* is a book compiled by trend analyst Paola de Luca in conjunction with the GJEPC and was one of two milestone publications launched at the show to help support and inspire designers. It was launched at the Design Inspiration seminars at the show, while Nirupa Bhatt, managing director of GIA India and Middle East, presided over the launch of the *Designers Of India* book, by India's Women's Jewellery Association.

Anand Shah reaffirms the importance of remaining connected to the larger industry as creatives to ensure they are in touch with the people. "No designer can work in isolation. We all have to keep our ears to the ground and understand the consumer psychographics, which keeps changing and evolving with every fashion cycle."

In relation to the changing local consumer and increase in spending power, A-star's Shah explained to *Jeweller* about the gradual evolution of local design. "As more Indian women join the workforce and are financially empowered, self-purchase is on the rise," he said.



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Pramod Agrawal, chairman GJEPC



**“As a result, jewellery is no longer confined to festive or special occasions, but has taken on the role of every day adornment. This has created a growing need for minimalistic, lightweight designs.”**

Chokshi agrees that there is a growing demand in simpler designs locally. “With the increased penetration of fashion and luxury imagery due to social media and smartphones, there is a convergence of trends globally. Additionally, the younger Indian is more exposed to a globalised Western aesthetic, which may lend itself to simpler forms – which are omnipresent.”

#### **Going global: Something old and something new**

Harshad Ajoomal, exhibitor and owner of luxury jewellery brand H.Ajoomal, has launched a separate jewellery range to cater to the growing international interest in his designs. “I feel a lot more has to be done to change the mindset of the consumers and buyers in our target export markets, educating them that India is not a simple mass-manufacturing country only, but also has a strong design heritage [and] that we can cater to the modern international consumer.”

Sharing her idea of what simplicity means for the modern consumer, award-winning Indian designer Pallavi Foley told *Jeweller*, “The demand for simpler designs is growing, but only when they are rooted in truth and real stories. It makes me immensely happy to see people celebrate each other’s cultures through design.”

**A-Star’s Shah believes in the potential for local design to go global, saying, “Indian jewellery designers and manufacturers have a deep rooted knowledge of jewellery, which is part of our heritage. When we merge this know how with our growing Western sensibilities, we are able to portray a confluence of East and West in our jewellery designs. When we leverage our aesthetics with cost-effective manufacturing, our designs definitely get an audience in the global market.”**

Simple is always in demand – particularly for the modern consumer, as Sonali Shah Sheth, head designer of jewellery brand Sphere, believes. “I think the most important reason why simple designs connect with the consumer much more today is because life has become so complex, people are looking to declutter and increase focus. Also, simple things often look much more sophisticated. But simple things are, in fact, much more complex to make!”

**When asked about what his Australian clients look for, A-Star’s Shah said: “We see definite receptiveness from the Australian buyers. We believe they are looking for commercially viable products that are in the low and mid-price points.”**

Ajoomal believes that the time is now for locals to start making changes to their designs, while keeping their heritage alive. “We have to take into account international trends without losing our Indian roots while creating contemporary pieces,” he says.

Zaabel’s designer and co-owner, Sooryia Tharayil, discusses the nature of translating the grandeur of traditional designs to a simpler form. “The discerning millennial demands differentiation from designers. The size of the design canvas might be smaller, with the emphasis on wearable pieces of jewellery. Conceptual designing can be quite complicated and challenging.”

Tharayil believes in the importance of retaining local craftsmanship, as the demand for demi-fine jewellery will only grow. “We need to strike a balance between contemporary designing and indigenous craftsmanship. The global market was besotted with minimalism for the past decade, but we are seeing a shift towards a preference for feminine and delicate designs.”

From the elaborate designs and handcrafting skills obtained during the Mughal rule, to diverse, simplified interpretations – and reinterpretations – of its design today through technology, the local Indian jewellery industry is ushering in a design revolution and offering a point of manufacturing difference in the larger global market.

The GJEPC’S IJS’s flagship gem and jewellery show will be held from **9 - 13 August 2019**. Visit **GJEPC** for more info.

*Angela Han attended the fair courtesy of GJEPC as an accredited media representative.*



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Harshad Ajoomal, owner H.Ajoomal



**“... simple designs connect with consumers more today because life has become so complex; people are looking to declutter and increase focus.”**

Sonali Sheth, head designer Sphere





*Maksha*

**MILAN CHOKSHI**  
MANAGING DIRECTOR

*"With increased penetration of fashion and luxury imagery due to social media through smartphones - there's a convergence of global trends. Additionally, the younger Indian is more exposed to a globalised western aesthetic which may lend it self to simpler forms - which are omnipresent"*



**Above:** A unique melange of fine Japanese Keshi pearls with sparkling fine diamonds, various precious coloured stones overlay pearls in an intricate mesh. Shapes and forms intertwine into smooth sinuous lines with fluid, graceful shapes.



**ANAND SHAH.**

**ANAND SHAH**  
OWNER & MASTER JEWELLER

*"I try to maintain the Indian aesthetics with a modern spin. In India, it is rare to find fine jewellery combined with alternative material. I keep evolving with each collection of mine to cater to the new generation, who like some surprises in my creations."*



**Above:** Shah's work is greatly inspired by nature, with collections focusing on 3-dimensional organic forms. He is renowned for his experimental use of alternative materials like wood, oil paints, and glass with 22k gold to lend a contemporary slant.



**PALLAVI FOLEY**

**PALLAVI FOLEY  
OWNER & DESIGNER**

*"All eggs look the same, until you come up close and see the different scripts. Unity in diversity is the message these prayer eggs harness."*

*"What humbles me is that [clients] don't necessarily buy the prayer egg of their faith; they buy the prayer that most resonates with them."*



HAIL MARY

**Above:** 'The Wear your Prayer' collection comes in 15 prayers from 15 different faiths. Inspired by her late grandfather who told her that faith could move mountains, Foley chose the egg as a symbol of life to wear everyday for strength and peace.



**sphere**

**SONALI SHETH  
DESIGNER**

*"I think the millennial consumer is a lot more informed and a lot more open to new ideas and experiments. We design collections based on particular themes that tend to evoke emotions and instantly connect with the mindset of the consumer. Our forms and patterns are more universal and lightweight so they perfectly complement today's globalised clothing options."*



**Above:** Sphere has taken over 20 years to develop its own signature identity through its designs. By constantly trying to experiment with new advancements in machines and tools while fusing them with old techniques like hand-enamelling, Sphere produces texturally rich jewellery embedded with stories and local inspiration.



**Asian Star**  
Perfection from within

**PRIYANSHU SHAH**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

*"Millennials identify jewellery as a fashion accessory that will flatter their day-to-day wear and complement their personality. Understanding these needs, we have tailored our designs to incorporate more contemporary styles, slim fit lighter products which can be layered and stacked to create a more individual look."*



**Above:** Illusion-set stones cater to export demands for low-cost jewellery with a big look. Affordable labour and use of smaller sized diamonds make this collection a popular choice with the overseas market, including Australia.



**E AJOOMAL**  
Fine Jewellery

**HARSHAD AJOMAL**  
OWNER & DESIGNER

*"[Our jewellery design style] is more international, but with my Indian heritage you see a sense of traditional period art seep through from the Mughal era. We use traditional techniques in modern shapes with wearable resort colours suited to international clients. My pieces are bought and worn by collectors all over the world, including Australia."*





**Above:** H.Ajoomal's aim is to create pieces for clients who care less about jewellery as a form of decoration or adornment, but for those who are looking to wear artwork that complements their personality and overall identity.



## MISHO

**SUHANI PAREKH**  
FOUNDER & CREATIVE DIRECTOR

*"I feel I have overcome a massive barrier in the way of aesthetics, fashion and jewellery are perceived in our country. My approach to design is experimental and unconventional."*

**Quote from Forbes India**



**Above:** Award-winning designer Suhani Parekh's designs have been worn by the likes of Beyonce to Kendall Jenner. Currently she is working with Hollywood's Rihanna on a design collaboration project with Misho. Educated in fine arts and history from London, Parekh's designs are inspired by architecture and contemporary art from her travels.

*"We've always believed in having jewellery to be versatile and fun since the beginning. Our collections can be worn casually or formally. We've always taken little elements from palaces, murals and architecture and used in the most modern refined way. Each of our pieces have a little reference to history."*



Syna

DHARMESH &  
NAMRATA KOTHARI  
OWNERS & DESIGNERS



**Above:** Capturing India's rich heritage, Syna's founders fuse colours, textures and ancient handcrafting techniques to create pieces that poignantly express their cultural background and spiritual beliefs. Syna's approach is to transform old complex arrangements and revive them in a way that is wearable for the modern consumer.



Z A A B E L

HINA ISRAR & SOORYIA THARAYIL  
FOUNDERS & DESIGNERS

*"We have retained the craftsmanship of the mogul era such as enameling, filigree and gemstone inlay but moved beyond whimsical designing. There is an emphasis on designing wearable pieces which are contemporary and conceptual. People need to feel a connection with the design as opposed to being pulled by the romanticism and grandeur inherent in the designs of the Mughal era. 40-50% of our work is still handcrafted and set."*



**Above:** Zaabel's recent collection focuses on contemporary and bohemian designs, handmade in gold with precious gemstones.



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Angela Han has worked in all segments of the luxury and jewellery industry, with over a decade of experience from retail to supply.

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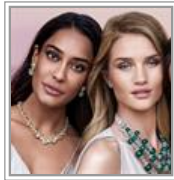
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