



Above: A melange of heritage and contemporary jewellery by Jaipur Gems

From pacheli to pahunchi:

A visual study of traditional Rajasthani hand ornaments

Beautiful symbols of femininity, elaborate hand ornaments in the days of Indian royalty were not only decorative but often showcased stature too. One look at the lady and her jadau kada with polki diamonds, and you could understand her prominence in society! MARWAR takes a look at some of the most elaborate adornments for the wrist in Rajasthani culture.

Text: PREETA AGARWAL



Clockwise from Left: Modern Pacheli from Amrapali's Manish Arora Collection; Gajredaar bangdi from Jewels Emporium; Traditional bangdi from Amrapali; Polki enamel bangles from Sunita Shekhawat; Ruby, emerald and polki diamond pahunchi from Jewels Emporium

Opulent and graceful, hand ornaments in the days of yore had elegant names and came in myriad designs. A centre of craftsmanship and design, Rajasthan's bangles, kadas and kangans were well-known throughout India. Their names present a whole new vocabulary to the modern woman, and their appeal is truly eternal.

Deciphering royal ornaments

Pacheli bangles, also known as Gokhru, are one of the most significant pieces of Rajasthani jewellery. These bangles, which go up to 10cms in outer width, have a series of small projections often embellished with clusters of seed pearls or diamonds. Adorned with meenakari work on the metal, these bangles are magnificent pieces of jewellery by themselves, but usually are worn as a pair with a series of bangles or bracelets between them.

Another favourite is the Gajredaar bangdi, which features clusters of seed pearls simulating bunches of jasmine buds! These bracelets, beautified with intricate enamel work, also have spheres or pearls fixed to the body with threaded wire attached in loops. This particular work is called *moti ke gajre kam*, and cannot be done by mechanised means. With uncut diamonds set in gold, this bracelet is worn with thin glass bangles.

The term kada, which is used very casually today, actually refers to a bangle with two skillfully studded animal heads meeting at the fount, with a small studded screw that can be unscrewed by the wearer. Various animals and birds, most of which symbolise specific qualities, feature on the kada. The most common are peacocks (used for their feminine beauty), elephants (for their strength) and crocodiles (for courage).

Rajasthan is also famous for its two very flexible hand ornaments, the Haathphool and the Pahunchi. Consisting of a series of embellishments such as polki, coloured gemstones and enamel strung together, the flexible Pahunchi also had elaborate silk thread dangles. These bangles look very elegant in their traditional royal pink, turmeric yellow and sindoor red colours, against plainer outfits. Worn only during weddings today, the Haathphool is another elaborate ornament with rings for four fingers, each linked by means of a chain to a medallion resting at the back of the palm. The chains extend further



to meet at a gold bracelet on the wrist, set with diamonds and enameled on the reverse side. Generally round or heart-shaped, the arsi (a ring with a looking mirror in the centre) is fifth in a series of finger rings forming a complete panchagla or haathphool, a five-finger ornament. The ornament bridges the gap between bracelets and finger rings with delicate gold chains, resulting in hands that are completely bejewelled!

Modern avatars

Plain gold pachelis with jaali work and diamond flowers on the top are what is most commonly available, given modern lifestyles and the complex maintenance that some of the more elaborate bangles require. "The modern Indian woman is independent and constantly engaged in one activity or another. Simplified versions of our heritage jewellery suit the changed lifestyle," says Manju Kothari of Entice. In an attempt to contemporise these magnificent bangles, jewellery giant Amrapali has recently collaborated with designer Manish Arora to create bangles that have a pop art feel with bright colours. Though inspired by Indian royalty, traditional pieces have been recreated in 18-carat gold plating with stones and crystals. Though these offer a contemporary look, the creations of Jaipur Gems and Sunita Shekhawat hearken back to traditional days and have an eternal beauty of their own. 🌸



Clockwise from above: Traditional floral jadau bangle from *Sunita Shekhawat*; Diamond-studded pachel bangles from *Entice*; Tiger head kada from *Amrapali's* Manish Arora Collection; Polki, enamel and pearl cuff from *Sunita Shekhawat*; Turquoise pachel bangles from *Amrapali's* Manish Arora Collection