

# A Temple Jewellery-A Rich Heritage of India

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## **Abstract**

Temple jewellery is inspired with spiritual idols “Gods and Goddesses” from the temples in south India, these are sculpted from gold and silver with precious gems stones like ruby, emerald and sapphire and now a days jewellers are using embossing, engraving, filigree works to emphasize the beauty of jewellery pieces and make them look heavier. Necklaces, studs, earrings, rings, bangles, headgear and waist belt with new innovative designs. To begin with, these temple jewellery were made only for the purpose of adorning the spiritual statues in temple. With the passage of time, however, dancers who attracted audiences at the temple with their religious programmes began to wear Temple jewellery for imitating the idols’ jewellery style. Temple jewellery has evolved into a fashionable style with historic sentiments and royal treasure for consumers Temple jewellery has been a fashion style with historic sentiments and royal treasure of consumers in recent years. Numerous influences other than regional sources are a common phenomenon and one of the principal landmarks of innovative adaptation was introduced when goldsmiths began creating gem studded ornaments using variety of coloured gem stones in cabochon form.

**Keywords:**

## **Introduction**

Temple jewellery is most beautiful art among other types of jewellery. It adds value to the cultural heritage of the South India. Temple jewellery was designed centuries ago by master craftsmen of Tamil Nadu to bedeck the icons of the Gods and Goddesses in temples. These designs were evolved at the behest of the royalty who then reigned over the land. They wished to lavish on their favourite deities ‘ornaments of the most unique designs, studded with precious stones in a variety of hues and shades. With time, these ornaments came to grace the personae of Deva-

dasis- the temple dancers, who considered themselves the consorts of the presiding deities. When dance ceased to be the forte' of the Devadasis and came to be practised by others as well, it was brought out of the precincts of the temple and was performed elsewhere. Bharatanatyam dancers, in particular, continued to patronise the same designs of ornaments as worn by the Devadasis, and temple jewellery, thus, became a kind of 'official jewellery' for these dancers. -, so temple jewellery is inspired with gods and goddesses from the temples in South India, these are sculpted from gold and silver along with precious gems stones like ruby, emerald and sapphire, and now a days it is in fashion. This jewellery style now includes embossing, engraving, filigree work and kundwork also. Today, however, the eye catching designs and the ethnic look of these ornaments have made them popular not just among the dancers, but amongst all cross sections of the society.

### **Type of Jewellery**

Earrings and necklaces dominate temple jewellery collections, whereas bangles and rings are few and far between. The pendants are mostly strung on tassels and the traditional necklace designs 'Magari malas, the 'Poothall' from Kerala and the "Savadi' necklace designs from Ceylon are very popular. Besides, the entire range of jewellery required for the Bharatanatyam dancers, from the conventional the traditional 'Vankies' (armlet) and the necklaces 'Mangalmala' and 'Thalasomala' are available in their collection.

According to Indianbijou (2015), the jewellery offered in the various temples of South India include the chains of coins (Kasinasara), Kadagas (bracelets), Kankanas (wristlets), Jjejeranki (Armlets), Tali (Mangala-sutra), Kirita-Mukntas (headgear) and 'Mukhakirithi' (masks). The earrings come in a variety of designs like the Karnapatra', Chandra-Bottu, 'Abhaya', 'Nagarmatalhod', 'Varadahastas', 'Padtnapithas', 'Jhumkia' and the 'Danglers'.

The ornamental variety available in the neckpieces is the most versatile and they are derived mostly from nature. Gold chains too underwent a change of face, having been made into yard long lengths, that could be worn as a long thread, flowing to the knees or wrapped in circles around the neck. Even as adaptations kept pace with design innovations, the goldsmiths experimented with substitutions that became customary. The colourful blue green of the peacock soon outshone the sober butterfly, as the emerald, ruby forms of the blue avian began to adorn earrings, bracelets and medallions of the 'Chandrahaar'. The jewellery is also put to in-

novative uses like for example the jewellery hairclip and hair accessories. A golden cap is known as The `Conical kullah`, of the Mughal court and was introduced in the Nayaka period. The crown was called "Mughal Mudi" in the Mughal tradition. A golden jeweled turban is the `Ratna-churmmandu` and `Gandaberunda Padaka` pendant also very popular in south India. "

### Designs and Motifs

The designs are predominantly based on various idols, animal and flower motifs but variations have been introduced in the traditional styles. The popularity of these designs knows no geographic barriers, for they are quite a craze even among the foreigners, who visit these parts. Some designs are inspired by Shivlinga, Nandi, Lord Sundaresvara, goddess Meenakashi, Laxmi and nine planets. The also use Navratan as an auspicious symbol of jewellery. Indian deities have also figured regularly as symbols. South Indian bridal necklace, thali, has various motifs like nandipada (foot prints of bull), Lakshmi pendant or aragukulishan (summit of a temple). All these signify auspiciousness and prosperity. Gajalakshmi, Dashavata, Siva family, Venugopal, Garudasinavishnu, Kaliyakrishna are among the popular symbols which have been used in ornaments. These are related to Saivism and Vaishnavism sect of Hinduism.

The serpent is the personification of the primeval waters which symbolise terrestrial life and the life force which motivates birth and rebirth. Motifs of peacock and fish are commonly adopted by goldsmiths in ornaments of head, neck, ears and nose. Peacock represents immortality, beauty, besides signifying love. It is also considered an auspicious bird because it happens to be the vehicle of Goddess Saraswati and Lord Kartikeya.

### Temple Jewellery Designs



Figures :1  
Peacock motif

Figures :2  
Laxmi Pendant

Figures :3  
Ganesha Pendant

Figures :3  
Elephant motif necklace

Fish motif has been used in necklaces, jhoomkas and ear ornaments of Mughal jewellery. Fish represents the incarnation of Lord Vishnu- the Matsya Avatar It is also one of the Astamangalas (eight of auspicious symbols) signifying abundance since a fish breeds rapidly. Fish stands for happiness in Buddhism and Jainism.

Lion stands for strength, courage and sovereignty; elephant represents strength, sovereignty, wealth, visibility, gentleness and calmness. Elephants have been considered, in mythology, as rain clouds walking on earth, and hence, have been associated with fertility. Makar (crocodile) signifies life force and powers of water. Parrot signifies love according to mythology, Lord Kamadeva's chariot is drawn by parrots. Mythical bird gandabherunda (two heads and body) has also been depicted in the South Indian jewellery. Kirtimukha (lion faced) motif has also been used in pendants and tiger claw necklaces since it is considered to bring glory. It is also a manifestation of the terrifying aspect of Siva. Besides the above stated symbols and motifs, there have been various other objects which have been used as motifs but are not as popular as the others. For example, mango fruit as a motif is used in mangmalai (necklace), which is typical of South Indian jewellery. It is a part of bridal as well as temple jewellery. Mango is believed to be the symbol of fertility.

### **Process**

Temple jewellery is done by skilled artisan and jewellers. The preciousness and purity required in crafting it as well as the time required to market the final product of the jewellery may sometimes even take a year. They are un-cut diamond and polished stones, precious and semi-precious stones specially in red green colour. The Gem stones are also used in jewellery. Temple Jewellery ornaments are considerably lighter in weight than those of the past, owing to the many variations in designs, these jewellery pieces are crafted by master craftsmen in Vadassery, a tiny hamlet in the southern tip of Tamil Nadu, bordering adjoining Kerala. It is a very closed community and they do not like to share the secrets of the craft with outsiders, despite inducements from the Central Government in the form of offers for special training schemes of industrial sheds etc. The craft is passed on over generations from father to son and so on. The youth of this community continues to practise the craft on a part time basis, even if they are highly qualified and employed elsewhere. It is entirely a manufacturer's market and very lucrative, owing to the high level of popularity gained by these designs. Also, the craft being a highly labour intensive one, the making of a simple piece involves the efforts of atleast ten men

over a period of about fifteen days; the temple jewellery craftsmen, in particular seem to be doing well for themselves in the present times, as the labour charges are almost equal to the cost of the materials.

According to Khatib Hasina (2019), the process started with making dyes and moulds of motifs like temple tops, god idols, leaves and so on. Gold and silver rods were rolled into flatter pieces, and then cut into strips and bent into the desired shape to make the mould. Gold foils were made with beaten metal and molten gold or in shape of dye to fill in the mould, depending on the specifications of the final piece. Khatib Hasina also mentioned that, "A lot of jewellers were using silver as the base in making of temple jewellery, which was then coated with a gold foil. Once whole design was set, it was set for soldering. At last final product was covered with a layer of gold foil to keep the lustre of the piece intact."

As simple as it may appear, crafting temple jewellery is a really sophisticated technique that requires a lot of concentration and a delicate touch. An individual item could take anywhere from a few days to several months to complete, depending on its complexity.

Rayachoti S.R. (2005) also stated that, this style of jewellery was called Vadasari after a place near Nagercoil, where the Pattans and Asaris (goldsmiths and jewellers) honed the technique. The craftsmen used Cabochons (cushion-shaped) rubies. The rubies used, were procured from Burma with whom India traded extensively in those days." The best Temple Jewellery was made in Nagercoil or by craftsmen from Nagercoil. It was originally made in gold and encrusted with rubies, uncut diamonds and sometimes, even emeralds." She also said, the quality of the gold was of importance, as pure gold is known to foster the wellbeing of the wearer. These pieces were not just meant as ornamentation, but had deeper significance." Thus the Temple jewellery is in very much demand as it represents the peace protection and royalty. It is available in market with modern and innovative designs. Jewellers are blending it with Kundan Meena jewellery and contemporary diamond design.

## **Conclusion**

Now a days very few percent of temple jewellery clientele are dancers. The sellers enjoy a virtual monopoly in the realm and have contributed significantly to promoting these ornaments amongst the locals and tourists alike. The temple jewellery, as seen today, is similar to the temple jewellery of yore only in terms of the design. While in the past, it was made

of gold and silver and encrusted with precious stones like kemp, rubies and emeralds. The close setting technique became a heritage and till today, the best variations of this jewellery finds its basis among the traditional makers. as necklaces bejewelled with pearl studded bows, butterflies and peacocks made attractive trinkets. Today, this jewellery is made in silver and plated in gold. The stones are also not of the precious kind but merely of the artificially manufactured sort. Now a days these eye catching designs and the ethnic look of these ornaments have made them popular not just among the dancers, but amongst all cross sections of the society. "However, the supply of temple jewellery does not quite meet the increasing demand and despite, numerous demands, exports are also not quite possible, as this craft is practised only by a few hundred jewellers," Temple jewellery is also available in Madras and Tamilnadu in new styles which are gaining acceptance of tourists too.

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