

Nine Stone Wonder



You can also buy sets of loose stones and have them set yourself. Remember the 4C's - cut, colour, clarity and carat weight - when making a selection

The lovely rainbow jewels of the *navaratna* transcend aesthetics and come alive with a purpose of their own.

Words Daleena Samara | **Photographs** Rasika Surasena



Navaratna ring in non-traditional setting

“These gems have life in them: their colours speak, say what words fail of,” wrote the 19th-century poet George Eliot.

I discovered the significance of the *navaratna* decades after my mother gave me a

piece featuring the nine beautiful stones. The flamboyant starburst-shaped pendant, with its ruby heart and eight satellites, sat in my jewellery box for years, was never worn and was eventually given away. It was only later that I learned its true value.

Few gem settings speak louder than the nine stones of the *navaratna*. Meaning 'nine gems' in Sanskrit, the *navaratna* is a piece of jewellery with a combination of precious stones believed to connect the wearer to the benevolent vibes of the planets in our solar system.

The brilliant medley of ruby, diamond, pearl, red coral, hessonite, blue sapphire, yellow sapphire, cats-eye and emerald is based on Vedic astrology, the study of the influence of the cosmos on life on earth, practised across the region since ancient times. It reflects the *navagraha*, the nine celestial bodies understood to affect destiny: the sun, moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, Saturn, Rahu and Ketu.

The latter two are ascending and descending nodes of the moon respectively and not actual planets. Their origins are linked to the Hindu legend of the great churning of the ocean by the gods and the demons to extract the elixir of life. The story goes that the gods and demons collaborated to churn the ocean and produce the elixir - a holy grail of immortality. But the gods did not wish to share the potion with the demons. One demon, however, assumed the guise of a god and secured some of it, but was found out just as he took the first few sips. He was decapitated but because he had tasted the drink he remained immortal, with his head as Rahu and his body as Ketu. Vedic astrology states that Ketu is like Mars and Rahu like Saturn.

To believers, the configurations of the planets at our time of birth affect us throughout life. According to Vedic astrology, each planet emits a unique energy that impacts all that it touches. These energies have different qualities and even colours that reach us through space. Rahu, Ketu and Saturn in particular are seen as potential troublemakers who need appeasing during the periods they dominate astrological charts. Many of life's problems are attributed to their movements in tandem with the other planets.

So people draw up astrological charts to serve as general roadmaps of destiny, providing information on fortunate periods and times of possible failure caused by

the movements of the planets. A talisman like the *navaratna* provides balance and protection during inauspicious periods, and so is a common jewellery item in Buddhist and Hindu societies.

Meaning 'nine gems' in Sanskrit, the navaratna is a piece of jewellery with a combination of precious stones believed to connect the wearer to the benevolent vibes of the planets in our solar system

So powerful is belief in the *navaratna* that it has royal recognition in Thailand. Queen Sirikit of Thailand's gorgeous *navaratna* necklace, the 'Queen Sirikit Navaratna', is well known, as is the *navaratna* clasp adorning one of her belts. The Ancient and Auspicious Order of the Nine Gems is one of the highest honorary orders bestowed by the king of Thailand upon senior members of the royal family and high-ranking Buddhist officials who have rendered outstanding service to the kingdom.

The setting of the stones in a *navaratna* is significant: despite the many modern variations, only some designs are potent, particularly the circular setting with a ruby at its heart, encircled by a pearl, red coral, diamond, emerald, yellow sapphire, garnet, topaz and cats eye, which follows the Hindu *navagraha*. *Navagraha* shrines, dedicated to the nine planets, can be found in most temples and are usually worshipped first before worshipping other deities.

The stones of the *navaratna* are positioned so that the yellow sapphire faces north, the emerald northeast, the diamond east, the pearl southeast, the coral south, the hessonite southwest, the blue sapphire west, and the cats-eye northwest. The ruby, representing the sun, is always at the centre. This perfect arrangement is believed to offset imbalances caused by the movement of the planets. Only flawless high-quality gemstones of the right proportion are used; Vedic astrologers warn that flawed stones are inauspicious and may aggravate misfortune. So if you are looking to buy a *navaratna* for protection, make sure the stones are set correctly and of good quality.

So what does each stone signify?



Navaratna stones in traditional arrangement with ruby, representing the sun, at the centre; yellow sapphire facing north; emerald northeast; diamond east; pearl southeast; red coral south; hessonite southwest; blue sapphire west, and cats-eye northwest (Zam Gems)

1 Ruby

For the sun, energises professional success, character and confidence, and assures completion of projects and general all-round good luck. Protects the heart and circulation, and aids digestion. Ruby substitutes include the red spinel, garnet or rubellite.

2 Yellow Sapphire

For Jupiter, justice, government, leadership, wealth and fortune. Aids circulation and pancreatic health. Yellow topaz or heliodor are acceptable substitutes.

3 Emerald

For Mercury, influences the intellect, communications - especially speech - and humour. The peridot is a substitute.

4 Diamond

For Venus, is associated with beauty, harmony and protection against diseases of the skeletal and reproduction systems. It's said to protect and give strength to overcome problems. Alternatives are white sapphire or zircon.

5 Pearl

For the moon, affects the mind, emotions and psyche. Influences mental health, circulation and digestion. Substitutes are white or blue moonstone.

6 Red Coral

For Mars, governs physical strength, courage and initiative, which is why it is often worn by people in the military forces. Carnelian or red agate can also be used.

7 Hessonite

For Rahu, removes fear, and promotes clarity and spiritual growth. Promotes bone health and blood circulation. Lapis lazuli can stand in for this stone.

8 Blue Sapphire

For Saturn, supports good health, prosperity and fame. It promotes gall bladder, digestive and throat health. The lolite or amethyst can be used as a substitute.

9 Cat's-eye

For Ketu, promotes courage, pleasure, prosperity, and protection from enemies, and turns the mind towards spirituality. Supports heart health and mental clarity.

Of course there's more to this nine-stone wonder jewel than is written here. Take a look at one of them when you next pass by a jewellery store and let the stones and their colours speak more than all these words can tell.

