

# TEARS of the gods

When it comes to jewellery, there's nothing like the quiet and understated elegance and luxury of pearls

— *Indira Laul*

**AT ONE TIME**, pearls were more precious than diamonds. Their allure goes a long way back. According to the ancient Romans, pearls were the frozen tears of gods. The Greeks attributed pearls to lightning strikes at sea. And, until the seventh century, scholars believed that pearls were solidified dewdrops, captured by clams. Many people still believe that pearls are formed from a single grain of sand.

Pearl jewellery is symbolic at many levels. A pearl ring often connotes a pre-nuptial vow between lovers who promise to stay true to each other. Some fathers have known to have given it to their daughters as a sign of their trust in them. Pearls, therefore, represented purity and virtue. Pearl rings are also presented to a wife from her husband on the event of their 30th wedding anniversary, when many couples re-pledge their marriage vows.

A pearl ring is also worn as an engagement ring by young couples and later replaced with a diamond. The pearl is then worn on the right hand, or set aside as a gift for the firstborn daughter.

Diana Vreeland, *Vogue's* editor-in-chief in the 1960s and once the last word in style, said that there was nothing that equalled the luxury of pearls. And, indeed, nothing can beat the elegance and luxury of a string of pearls worn with panache. They have graced the necks, wrists, heads and fingers of such notables as Coco Chanel, Jacqueline Kennedy-Onassis, Elizabeth Taylor, Marilyn Monroe and Princess Diana, all of whom loved pearls.

When you think about it, it's quite amazing how pearls are formed. They are the only gemstones that are created in the animal world; this happens when a minute microbe or foreign body enters the oyster shell. A defence mechanism swings into action and the oyster secretes a substance called 'nacre', which it proceeds to cover the offending irritant entirely, until a smooth, even pearl is formed. This is how natural pearls are formed. They are very rare and are, therefore, very valuable and expensive.

Cultured pearls are made when the irritant is introduced into the oyster's shell in the lab, then re-planted into the sea, so that it can continue living there and produce a pearl. The procedure of cultivating oysters for pearl harvesting was first developed in Japan by Kokichi Mikimoto in the late 19th century.

Jewellers will tell you that the ideal pearl is one that is perfectly spherical in shape. The rounder the pearl, the more valuable it is and

the heavier its price. Pearls, however, can also come in other shapes, like teardrops and pearls. These pearls may not be round, but their symmetry is still considered beautiful. Baroque pearls are irregularly-shaped pearls, also beautiful, but the least valuable among pearls.

Pearls go well with almost any dress. A choker or a single strand of opera-length cultured pearls could make the difference between the ordinary and the stylish. When it comes to pearl choices, there are plenty to choose from—it all depends on what you want. There are Tahitian pearls, Akoya pearls and Freshwater pearls.

If you're looking to buying a pearl necklace and wondering what length you should opt for, here are a few suggestions. Your choice will be largely influenced by when you want to wear it and at what time of day.

The 'Collar' or 'Dog Collar' necklace generally comprises two to three strands, 12 to 13 inches in length and is popular with a formal or casual look, complimenting any style of collar that it is worn with. The 'Choker' is a little longer, it is 14

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A magnificent five-strand natural pearl necklace sold for Rs 43.82 lakh at Saffronart, the world's largest online fine art auction house. It has now made an indelible mark as a premium platform for jewellery sales in India and internationally, with the conclusion of its fourth online auction of jewellery.

to 16 inches long, and is worn as a single strand and a little looser and lower on the neck than the 'Collar'. It is well suited for both evening and casual wear and works with any neckline.

About 17 to 19 inches long is the popular 'Princess' length. It has a classic look and its size is ideal, as it will work anytime, anywhere. The 'Matinee' length, which is 20 to 24 inches long, is good for business or casual wear.

The 'Opera' length is strictly evening wear. It is 30 to 36 inches long and doubles up to make a two-strand necklace. The 'Rope' necklace is 36 to 48 inches long, but you can double or triple

it, or wear it stylishly to suit the current trend of wearing an open back outfit and having the pearls hang on the back.

Pearls have a special place in designers' repertoire as well. Jewellery designers continually draw inspiration from the natural beauty of the world, as well as from haute couture, to create trendy new designs that work for any personality.

Japan's Kokichi Mikimoto is famous for creating the world's first cultured pearl. Since then, Mikimoto has been dedicated to creating the finest quality cultured pearls. He founded the world's first store specialising in pearl jewellery in Tokyo's Ginza district. The Mikimoto



Pearl Store, a two-storeyed Western-style building made of white stone, was a unique establishment, offering Kokichi's keen sense of contemporary fashion in the form of beautiful, high-quality pearls.

The BoBijou signature line (UK) is renowned for its exclusive contemporary jewellery, made with authentic high-quality cultured pearls, gemstones and finished with silver or gold. Every piece of BoBijou's jewellery is handcrafted by a highly talented team of Scottish and French designers in Europe, from natural gems sourced directly from leading environment-friendly pearl growers and gemstone miners to ensure superior quality.